

Nordic Resort – an artist-in-residence programme

Artist-in-residencies have a long and established history, especially within the visual arts, where they more or less can be traced back to the rich renaissance patrons of the arts having artists living and working for longer periods as part of their households.

Artist-in-residencies as we know them today are still more common in the area of visual arts, and often consist of a longer or shorter grant period coupled to an atelier space, sometimes also to a living space and some material resources for the artistic production. The Nifca residence program at Sveaborg in Finland have been a strong and viable example of such an artist-in residence program in the realm of visual arts, also fostering new expressions and meeting points between artists and the audience. (Another example could be the huge complex of international residencies taking place at Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris, founded in 1965.

When it comes to the performing arts it is hard to find an equally strong tradition of artist-in-residencies. Mainly due to the fact that performing arts are seen as collaborative and collective art forms, that would either require the hosting of a group of artists, or a possibility to work with local artists, as well as often extensive production facilities: all of which make artist-in – residencies in the performing arts much harder to organize in fruitful ways and also way more expensive if they are considered.

Since artist-in residencies have developed in the direction of international exchange there is also the issue of language, which makes it harder to organize artist-in residencies when it comes to highly language-dependent art forms such as the theatre. This is also one of the reasons why more or less permanent artist-in residencies are much more common in the world of dance. Dancers and choreographers working in different countries, with different companies and in different languages are the rule rather than the exception. Here, and as the area of dance has developed an infrastructure of festivals and venues with no companies of their own, artist-in residencies have become a quite common way of developing new choreographies, and are in almost all cases coupled to the creation and premiere of a new production or at least a presentation of a work-in progress.

A research oriented artist-in-residence program

The last five or six years have, however, spurred a new kind of artist-in-residencies, both in the performing and visual arts. These are residencies of a more exploratory and research oriented kind, such as the residencies at ZKM in Karlsruhe, a museum dealing with contemporary digital arts in Germany or the residencies at the PACT Zollverein venue in Essen in the same country.

NordScen's initiative to start the artist-in residence program Nordic Resort should be seen in the light of this quite recent development, as should the incentives and design of the program. This more general development is of course also related to the recent and controversial issue of and discussion concerning knowledge production in the artistic area: of practice based research in the performing arts. This discussion is of course as much dependent of development in the academic area, and to education in the arts, as to the more general issue of artistic development in a time when producing institutions perceive they have less and less opportunity to create the time and space for doing such work on their own.

With Nordic Resort NordScen, with Louise Beck as the original designer of the project, wanted to develop a research-oriented artist-in-residence program in a Nordic context. The research orientation of the programme should be understood as a possibility for artists in the performing arts to investigate issues and/or working methods intrinsic to or possibly beneficial to their work but without the necessity of producing any immediate artistic results in terms of for example a new performance. The perspective should rather be long-term, about developing artistic knowledge and reflective practice in the area of performing arts. Of course the artist's own work should benefit from a residence but an very important part of the research-orientation is also about encouraging the artists rather to communicate their thoughts and findings to the residence environment and to other performing artists through some kind of documentation and reflection.

To be an artist-in-residence as part of Nordic Resort has thus been about investing time in reflection and exploration into one's own practices, and into articulating and communicating the outcomes, apart from establishing links to the creative practices in other Nordic countries. Residents have been urged and inspired to develop and articulate new knowledge in the area of performing art's practice. The methods for doing this have been open for experimentation as well, but range from more reflective processes in regard to current and previous practice to more experimental exploration of new ideas, ways of expression and working methods.

Even if the research orientation of Nordic Resort has been clearly stated, and the collaborative partners have been well established Nordic academies in the field of performing arts, it has nevertheless been important that research and knowledge production during the residencies shouldn't equal conventional academic research. Not at least because of the need to develop forms for knowledge production independent of the academic conventions associated with for example the writing of a thesis.

In order to stress this – but also in order to inspire high standards in the residence work, NordScen commissioned the writing of a manifesto for Nordic Resort to Lene Kobbernagel, Danish drama researcher engaged in the question of practice based research in the performing arts. The manifesto was written in a poetic, rather than academic, style, and is in itself reformulating and exploring how conventional scientific concepts of problem and method could translate into challenging artistic work and reflection on artistic practice.

Manifesto for Nordic Resort

by Lene Kobbernagel (commissioned by NordScen)

The unknown

Go on a voyage of discovery among creative processes. Explore what makes artistic creation possible. Use your freedom to focus your gaze on the unknown.

Exploration rather than results

Seek, strive, search. But not to find something predetermined. Seek because you are driven by the good question. Know not what you seek, but how you seek. Be aware of many ways of searching. Be conscious of how you navigate through the multitude of impulses and ideas. Let the exploration be a voyage into unknown regions.

A disturbing question is your launching-pad

The starting-point is the good question. Let the question burn itself into your consciousness. Let it disturb you. Let it demand answers you don't have. Seek the answer, and know that it creates disorder in your thoughts. Force yourself to think differently about your process.

Problems are fuel

In the search for answers, problems arise. View the problems as the sources of new questions. Keep the driving force of the exploration going by formulating the problems as questions. Let the questions give direction to the exploration. Regard any frustration that arises as a sign that you are at a new and unknown crossroads.

Feel for the words

We always know more than we are able to talk about. We contain oceans of tacit knowledge. Strive to uncover your tacit knowledge. Immerse yourself in reflection over your actions. Know that the intention is not to fully uncover your actions. Know that in your striving to put into words you gain new insight.

Toggle!

Toggle between reflection and action. Know that words can ascribe essential meaning to action. They provide clarity, direction and focus. Know that in your toggling you acquire understanding and in the same motion you leave new points unclarified.

Seeing yourself

Be aware of your own blindness. Know that you cannot see yourself. Distance your own gaze. Try to reflect yourself in the encounter with the gazes of others. See in those other gazes the opportunity to be aware of your own patterns of thinking and acting. Know that you can only change them the instant you can see them.

Change is development

Know that you understand your actions through the attempt to change them. The changes you put behind you can be called development

Nordic art academies

A handful of Nordic schools in the performing arts, all well established and part of their respective national educational system, were chosen as collaborative partners in the project of developing Nordic Resort. The choice of educational institutions was done for several reasons.

First there was the idea of a research-oriented programme. The discussion on artistic or practice-based research in relation to education also in the arts have been on the agenda for the schools for several years by now, even if different national academic cultures and funding

structures still look quite different even in the Nordic countries, with Finland well in advance offering PhD education in the performing arts, Sweden starting to do so and Norway, Denmark and Iceland taking the first steps in this direction.

There was thus a shared interest in creating extended possibilities investigating ways of creating space and opportunities for more research and knowledge producing oriented ways of working. Other reasons were more practical, as it was considered easier to make a not production oriented process work in an educational setting than in an ordinary performing arts institution, while the educational setting still offered the potentially necessary possibilities for the artist to have space, people to work with and some production facilities.

Another positive aspect is that the Nordic art school in the performing arts have a functioning network with regular meetings between the deans, which further facilitated the collaboration as well as exchanges of experiences in relation to the residencies.

-
- The Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance (Statens Teaterskole & Moderne Dans) in Copenhagen
 - University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre – (Dramatiska Institutet) in Stockholm
 - School of Theatre at Gothenburg University (Teaterhögskolan i Göteborg)
 - Iceland Academy of the Arts (Listaháskóli Íslands)
 - Theatre Academy of Finland (Helsinki/Tampere)
 - Norwegian Theatre Academy (Akademi for Scenekunst) in Fredriksstad
 - The National Academy of Dramatic Art at Oslo National College of the Arts

Participating institutions in 2006

Practical setup

Seven art schools have been participating as hosting institutions during the first residence period autumn 2005 and spring 2006, two in Sweden, one in Iceland, two in Norway and one in Denmark and Finland respectively all of which have continued to be hosting institutions for the residence period 06/07, the last before the closing down of NordScen.

The all in all two residence periods have been open for Nordic as well as Baltic artists as well as for academics wanting to explore a combination of theoretical and practical work.

The applying artists have, apart from a CV, been asked to submit a project description as well as a description of their working methods. The project description should cover both aspects of purpose and content as well as documentation. A specification of practical requirements in terms of space, technical equipment and/or for example actor and dance students to work with was also needed. The applicants has also been asked to specify in which academy they would like to do their residence, as well as why – this in order to better make a match between the artist and the school.

NordScen has functioned as the facilitator: launching the application and doing the first selection of applicants as well as facilitating the discussion concerning practical details during the residence. The finally selected artists in residence have received a grant of 900 Euro per month for the residence periods ranging from one to four months. The possibility for both the artist and the school to make a decision on a suitable time period means that the number of residencies hasn't been fixed in relation to the budget allocated to the project, but has been able to adapt during the selection process, although the ambition has been that each school should be the host of at least one residence. A smaller sum of money has also been allocated to each project in order to cover extraordinary expenses of the kind that cannot be covered by the hosting school.

65 projects have been applied for in each call, and a total of seven projects and nine artists were selected for the residence period 2005/06, while a total of seven projects and eight artists have been selected for the residence period 2006/07.

Nordic Resort residencies 05/06

Mateusz Herczka and **Staffan Eek** (Sweden). Mateusz Herczka is a dramaturgist, programmer and stage artist who has worked for a long time with the choreographer and dancer Staffan Eek. Their residency, at the Iceland Academy of the Arts in Reykjavík, was devoted to the scenic exploration/translation of the behaviour of electromechanical objects.

Ellen Spens (Sweden). Ellen Spens is an actress and stage artist and have used her residency at the Danish National School of Theatre in Copenhagen in order to enhance and develop theatrical narratives that takes its point of departure in things and objects and their relationships and encounters with the actor.

Tale Dolven(Norway). Tale Dolven is a dancer and choreographer living in Belgium, and during her residency at the Danish National School of Theatre department of Dance in Copenhagen she has explored movement and stillness in a solo work with its point of departure in model sketches by the Austrian painter Egon Schiele.

Henrik Vestergaard Pedersen (Denmark). Henrik Vestergaard Pedersen is a performance artist and have explored the science of theatre in practice in what he calls "ambient space" during his residency at the Norwegian Theatre Academy in Frederikstad.

Anuzis Vytautas and **Velta Anuziene** (Lithuania). Anuzis Vytautas and Velta Anuziene are actors and have used their residencies at The National Academy for Dramatic Arts in Oslo exploring the Norwegian acting tradition and training in relation to their own experience.

Elin Høyland (Norway). Elin Høyland is performance artist and cultural producer, and have spent her residency at The Theatre Academy in Helsinki studying Finnish performance art in relation to her own work combining multimedia idioms with theatrical ones in a "postrealist" theatre.

Lars Henning (Denmark). Lars Henning is an actor and director who has spent an extended period working with the combination of text and intensified physicality. During his residency at The Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg he has carried out an in-depth investigation of the relationship between text and bodily expression, based on Yat Malmgren's theories of movement and character analysis.

Nordic Resort residencies 06/07

Barbro Smeds (Sverige) is a dramatist whose work to great extent been based on collaborative work with coreographers and actors. During her residence at The Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance in Copenhagen she will explore how dramatic agents are born and developed in action and writing.

Christine Fentz (Danmark) is a dramaturge/instructor who will use her residence at the Academy of Music and Drama, Gothenburg University in order to investigate the borderlands between performance and lecture as a possible political, personal and artistic forum for debate and discussion..

Sara Gebran & Pil Hansen (Danmark) coreographer and researcher/dramaturge who will use their residence at the Dramatic Institute in order to work with the conceptual development and exploration on how to perform Arab artists ways of defining themselves - and be defined by others.

Maija Hirvanen (Finland) is a crossdisciplinary artist who during her residence at Iceland Academy of the Arts in Reykjavik will work on a practical and theoretical framework around the gaze as a metaphor, with a starting point in doors: doors that opens and closes, includes and excludes.

Anna Jankert (Sverige) is an actress and will use her residence at the Theatre Academy in Helsinki in order to document and develop her methods for collecting and building a story telling repertoire.

Eva Sjuve (Sverige) is a digital sound artist who during her residence at the Norwegian Theatre Academy will explore possible new ways of integrating the performing body and the performing environment through new media and advanced technology.

Jens Sethzman (Sverige) is a light designer who during his residence at the Oslo National Academy of the arts will work with the movement, colour and time of light in relation to the composition of space and place.

Residencies in practice

Starting a new residence program is not an easy task, and the first year of residency has obviously functioned as a pilot case, and has shown which kind of planning is needed both from the hosting institutions, resident and a facilitating organization such as NordScen. Some

of these problems have been foreseen, like for example the issue of working space needed for a residence period, but has nevertheless caused more or less problems during the year.

All the participating institutions have issues with space in that students, staff and others also need space in their day-to-day work. This means that rehearsal facilities and offices are very rarely vacant for a longer period of time, and that it often requires an extra effort to fit in a resident artist.

At for example the Danish National School of Theatre, the needs of the resident artists were accommodated through careful planning and scheduling in relation to all the other activities at the school.

At the Iceland Academy of the Arts, resident artists Mateusz Herczka and Staffan Eek were offered an office in the Department of Drama when they visited the academy prior to their residency as part of the mutual preparatory process between residents and hosting institution. When they arrived, however, parts of the academy had been refurbished, and the office had been incorporated into another room, which was busy for other purposes. The academy, like the Danish National School of Theatre, is short on space. The artists managed to find space in the Department of Visual Arts instead. This department is also part of the academy but it is not physically in the same place as the Department of Drama. This meant that the daily connection between the artists and the Department of Drama was not as close as it could have been – the connection instead came to be with the Department of Visual Arts. The later was not altogether a bad thing, since the Department of Drama, according to their dean, would like to host projects that foster a closer relationship to the Department of Visual Arts, but could of course nevertheless be confusing for the residents.

Another issue has been the need for additional funding, which in several cases has caused trouble, even if the possible need for such extra resources had been foreseen.

The solution proposed for these kinds of situations: that the artists should foresee and could apply for a (very limited) sum from NordScen, that was then paid to the artists after the actual expenses had been made, have indeed proved unnecessary complicated. For the residence period of 2006/07 the residence contract instead beforehand approves the hosting institution to pay any additional costs in relation to the artist's project that is deemed necessary and that they cannot provide themselves up to a total sum of 10 000 DKK. They can then invoice Nordscen the actual expenses. This sum is again not very large compared to any kind of ordinary performance production work, and would need adjustment in a possible future artist-in-residence programme which is planned in the Nordic countries.

Another area of concern has been that of accommodation during the residency. All applicants have managed to find accommodation for the duration of their residencies. In most places there are mailing lists of websites available for the purpose of finding housing and professional newsgroups and discussion boards for artists also exist, and these have proved to be helpful. Nevertheless has the task of finding a cheap accommodation in an, to the resident, unknown city, often taken a lot of time and energy.

Experiences and arenas

These initial practical difficulties owes a lot to the fact that the successful planning of a residency, amongst a lot of things, also needs to be based on a hands-on and specific experience on what it means to host an artist with different agenda, timeline and working methods than the students and teachers. A residence program should be seen on a long term basis, which is especially important in the case of a program such as Nordic Resort that aims not only at developing the skill and reflection-in practice of a single artist, but also to contribute to the production of new knowledge, potentially shared by a community of artists in the performing arts. Thus the many possible contact points between the artist and the students and staff – and perhaps artists and audiences in the city in question –has to be carefully sought out and provided for, and attention has to be given to the way of documenting and disseminating reflections and results from the respective project. The former needs special attention since the work of many schools is so tightly scheduled for both students and staff that participation in extracurricular activities is very difficult.

There is no single answer to these questions so far that they have to do with the way each school is organised and the personality of each individual artist. In the actual residencies that have taken place, the contact between the artist and school staff and students was handled in a number of ways. Some artists participated in the course work of senior students to get to know them that way and to allow themselves to be known among the students. Other participated in staff meetings where artists were given time to present them selves and to meet school staff. Finally, some managed to have students and staff participate in workshops that the visiting artist arranged together with school staff.

Inspiration and development

Despite the challenges presented by issues in the distribution of responsibilities and the role of the resident artist at the school, all resident artists and participating institutions of the first year of Nordic Resort have managed to make a success of their stays by improvising when necessary.

All the participating academies during the residence 2005/06 also gladly agreed to continue as hosting institutions for the second, and so far last round of Nordic Resort residencies 2006/07, and national theatre institutions like the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm has expressed interest in joining the program. To extend the residencies to theatres and dance institutions as well as theatre academies was one part of the original vision of Nordic Resort
And despite the practical difficulties all the schools have had they have also very much appreciated having resident artists to provide extra inspiration and challenges for staff and students at the school. Many of the schools also express the benefit for them to have the projects as starting points for discussion around issues of knowledge and development in the performing arts, and talks about the example these artists set for the students as explorative and critical/reflective professional role models.

The same enthusiasm is expressed by the resident artists, despite the fact that they have been facing the same practical difficulties. The especially stress the rewarding freedom from the urge to produce results in terms of a new performance, a freedom that during the residence

have been replaced by a demand for investigation and reflection on working processes and artistic understandings.

4 voices from the artists participating in Nordic Resort 05/06

“The difference of the residency from a production process is how you spend your working hours: The work can get the freedom and the time needed to develop further. I had the opportunity to try out doubtful possibilities for the process. Sometimes this led to a better understanding of the material; sometimes it didn’t work; other times it brought the process to unexpected places.”

“The work has mostly consisted of work with me and the objects in the room, often with a video camera as assisting tool. In this investigation I have found myself in a situation where I have many functions to fulfil at the same time: to be the one in the picture and to be the one having the overview.”

”We found that this complementary interplay between the text, its vocalization and a more or less abstract physicality may result in a more *subconsciously* suggestive theatrical language, which to the audience is more open to interpretation and imaginative complicity”

Today I see the work with the installations as examples of how ideas take form in different versions, through different modes of expressions, how one is led astray, leave the material only to rediscover it later one, this time with a new view and new experiences. This makes it possible to regain the work and develop it further.”

From reports by resident artists, 2006

The intention with Nordic Resort, to provide a platform for exploration and knowledge seeking in the realm of performing arts might seem unusual in it’s assumption that knowledge could be sought for and articulated also in this area. In this respect there is a strong relation between the purpose and intent of Nordic Resort and that of Re:Searching: a workshop and symposium on practice based research in the performing arts that took place in Malmö April 2006 as a collaboration between NordScen, the Theatre Academy in Malmö, and the School of Art and Communication at Malmö University (please see chapter 1 for further description)

In both of these project the focus on knowledge production have intended to challenge artists to be ware of and take their understandings seriously. This challenge which, judging from the reports and evaluations from the first Nordic Resort residencies, have been taken up by the participating artists and academies, should also be seen as potentially empowering. Daring to expose one’s ways of understanding and working to critical exploration and inquiry is to say that the work and philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of performing arts matters. Performance is a way of articulating and creating the world and a research-oriented residence program should have as it’s ultimate goal to make it matter more.