



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Maja Nilsen is a Norwegian artist, born in 1978 in Klæbu, Norway. Nilsen has an MFA from Trondheim Academy of Fine Art (2003-2005) and a BA from Trondheim and Dublin.

The work of Maja Nilsen is created from memory and imagination, residing somewhere in the tension between autobiographical reference points and poetically immersed dream worlds. She works in a cross/multimedia manner that mostly results in site-specific projects and collages.

Since 2005 Nilsen has been making public works and commissions developed from encounters, conversations and the researching of abandoned or forgotten histories. When working in different places and communities, she incorporates elements of these environments,

About *Underkamre*

Underkamre (2013), decoration at Hokksund Secondary School. The decoration consists of a 5 m long oak glass case containing a large number of collages mounted with pins. The project is grounded in Nilsen's fascination for the natural sciences, in this case entomology. Entomology (from Greek, entomos, "that which is cut in pieces or engraved/segmented") is the scientific study of insect. An entomologist collects and catalogues f.ex. beetles, butterflies and wasps.

For this project Nilsen has worked like an entomologist, but with the collage as technique and paper cutouts as her "insects". She is always collecting and looking for books to find the interesting elements that are to be given new and permanent life in new constellations. Most of the source books are old natural sciences tomes, books meant to enlighten us about natural phenomena, theories, explorers and the development of the Earth. The fact that the collages are gathered from old enlightenment books and commissioned by an institution for learning is therefore an important part of the project.

Insects as theme is intervoven in a wide range of works where among other the concept of metamorphosis has been central. Metamorphosis has roots in both biology, geology, mythology and illusions (magic tricks), and points to transformations; a pervasive physical change that individuals go through in their lifetime. The metamorphosis also alludes to the age of the pupils and the school as institution and incubator, which again can add layers of interpretation

such as existing epistemologies, local histories, tradition or myth into her practice.

Nilsen also concerns herself with historical characters, eras and myths that allow us to see our own time in relief. She is interested in how people live their lives and how we throughout history have tried to understand the world around us. How do we seek explanations of complex issues and phenomena throughout including science, religion and folklore? Her art tends to expose connectivity with the past, present and future existences.

In the last couple of years the importance of telling stories has become a stronger force in her artistic practise, which until now has consisted mainly of sculpture, collage, and site-specific projects.

and understanding to the work. The work plays with the four stages of insect life cycles, where they undergo a complete transformation: egg, larvae, pupae and adult.

The correspondance between micro and macro features prominently in Nilsen's oeuvre. Inspired by baroque *Wunderkammer* (cabinets of curiosities), she constructs staged microcosms where the categories of the objects remain undefined, and where her collages often reside in the liminal spaces between the mythological and the scientific.

The wunderkammer were also a mix of fiction and facts, and formed the basis of today's science museums. They illustrated the many ambiguities and metamorphoses of nature while simultaneously questioning the classification of objects. What is a coral actually? Is a gold-plated coconut nature or art? What does the horn of the unicorn look like?

In contrast to many larger decorations, with this work Nilsen works with many small elements, focusing on details and utilising fragile materials. In this way she invites the viewers to stop and look closer, studying the details out of curiosity, a nice contrast to a long and busy but otherwise empty corridor in a school. The aim is for the work to create new notions of the great unknown, fables about that which is invisible to the eye and everything around us that is still undiscovered. Perhaps it can engender wonder and contribute to new discussions within f.ex. philosophy, research and science...