

Kunstnernes Hus [Norwegian for "Artists' House"] is pleased to invite the public to the opening of its two major spring exhibits: joint shows by Else Marie Hagen and Stein Rønning. Working with photography and photographic installations, Hagen and Rønning will each be featured in a separate skylit gallery. These exhibitions are the most significant presentation of the artists' work in Oslo to date, and the first time they are shown together. Both have developed a concise and consistent visual language that discusses fundamental properties of the photographic medium today.

Often referred to as "artists' artists", Rønning and Hagen are central players in a recent trend in contemporary art that emphasizes the very tactility and materiality of the media used. In many ways, both artists create images that highlight their intrinsic nature as images. Seen as a window to the world, photography cannot be separated from its reality effect, but Rønning and Hagen place obstacles in the way that trip up the viewer. Through various means, they direct the viewer's attention to the photographic surface to invoke the photo as a material presence in an active encounter with the spectator. In our image-saturated times where photography is at once everywhere and superfluous, the artists take concise stands. In many ways, Rønning's and Hagen's pictures are self-explanatory: they are images about seeing and about being present in the act of seeing.

Else Marie Hagen's works often seem to be visual enigmas where the interplay between surface/depth and illusion/reality is set in motion. The images are presented to the viewer like a Chinese box that keeps revealing new layers of surface, until we are finally left with our own experience in the encounter with the photograph. The *Vokabular* [Vocabulary] exhibit springs from an investigation into photography's flexible relationship to reality and the way in which it opens itself up to the viewer's interpretation through its visual language. By addressing notions such as the image's mood and charge, Hagen brings to light how our contemplation is influenced by collective and personal experiences and by the context in which they appear. In subtle and sophisticated ways, the artist examines a set of photographic means that she twists and turns, e.g. by staging pairs of opposites such as light/dark and solid/liquid. This can be seen in works such as *Av, på, av* [Switch on switch off] of 2013, where a light source is switched on and off in an empty room. The varying degrees of light and dark make for a photo that is simultaneously prosaic and charged, calling attention to our own role as spectators.

Else Marie Hagen (born 1963) recently participated in the curated group show *Vi lever på en stjerne* [We Are Living on a Star] at Henie Onstad Art Center. Other exhibits over the past decade include venues such as Kunstnerforbundet; Galleri K; G44 Centre for Contemporary Photography in Toronto; Carnegie Art Award and the Vigeland Museum. Hagen's work has been acquired by The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design; Bergen Art Museum; Preus Museum and Northern Norway Art Museum.

The exhibitions are sponsored by Arts Council Norway; The Norwegian Visual Artists' Association's Vederlagsfond; the City of Oslo and The Norwegian Fund for Sound and Image.