

CODEX POLARIS TEXTS

A collection of texts about books from
Denmark · Finland
Iceland · Norway · Sweden
with Faroe and Åland Islands

Petter Snare
A Stubborn Bird

CODEX ■ POLARIS

A STUBBORN BIRD

The Norwegian art book is a stubborn bird in a publishing landscape which are getting more barren every year. Where the commitment by the general publisher to the fine arts seems to be on a downward slope, the small publishers and self-publishing gets ever more important.

With the experience of starting a commercial gallery, *Teknisk Industri* was started with a mission of providing a platform for artists. The book as an alternative space for art production was an undervalued and under-used opportunity. The commitment was to make books which in its core was specific, democratic, and had a high production value.

To make a real difference in the art scene and for the artist it is imperative that the book is a stand alone project, not connected to, and independent of, an exhibition. The book needs to stand on its own feet, both as a publication, but also as an artistic endeavour. The book should be a show in itself. The art book is providing the artist with a very specific medium – with its own possibilities, but also limitations. With this as a point of departure – the artist book then becomes a very real possibility to explore other artistic practices, a foundation for public support – both financially and otherwise and to mark artistic progress.

The published art book, as opposed to the artist book, needs to be democratic, in the sense that it should be easily accessible, be affordable and can be used by the reader as an everyday object – not to be revered as a valued TK object. The art book should can be read on the bed, during lunch or in an investigative manner. To achieve this, it is imperative that the art book is produced like an industrial product. Offset printed, consistent quality in high print runs. Opening this segment for other than famous artist in blue chip galleries is key, insisting that the book is for everyone – not only for every artist, but also for all kinds of readers.

For *Teknisk Industri* it has been important to stress quality in all aspects of productions, from prepress, to essays and translations to printing and binding. Bringing new voices to an art project, by essayist or short introductions is not only valid as an introduction to art and artist, but also important to keep the artistic cycle alive, getting a broad spectre involved. Some artistic

projects lend themselves to the art book, typical photographers. But every artist should push their limits in making a book, bringing their legacy to a format which is bound, on paper and where they have control over colour, context and size, features which no digital media can provide.

The Norwegian Art council provides support for art book productions. Demand for quality, distribution and making sure that every participant gets paid, make the need for multiple funding, and for not-for-profit publishers apparent. There are very few, if any books, that will actually make enough on sales to make it a viable living.

Even though *Teknisk Industri* is not technically a “not for profit” organization, there are not any salaries or any profit in the production. So keeping the publishing alive demands a long time-span on every production and to keep costs down.

Never the less, over the last ten years and almost 50 books since *Teknisk Industri* first publication in 2008, the Norwegian Art book publishing has come a long way. There are now several publishers, book stores and distribution of all sorts available, making the art book truly democratic – and not just being shelf fodder hidden away from public view.

Petter Snare,
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Petter Snare (Norway) is the director at KODE Art Museums and Composer Homes in Bergen, Norway, one of the leading art museums in the Nordic countries. Snare has two art book publishing companies: *Teknisk Industri*, focusing on artist books, and *Uten Tittel*, publishing catalogues and museum publications. In 2017 he published 18 art books and catalogues. Snare has been the chair and on the board of a number of Norwegian art institutions, including Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen Assembly, Oslo Fine Art Society, the Artists Relief Fund and the Kunstkritikk foundation.