

# OVERGADEN.

Nine Danish musicians have each composed a soundtrack for Rose Eken’s new video installation which playfully portrays the icons of rock history.

ESSAY

## Out of Sync

By Maria Kjær Thomsen

*It is said that children do not distinguish between living and inanimate objects; I believe they do. A child im-*  
*parts a doll or tin soldier with magi-*  
*cal life-breath. The artist animates*  
*his work as the child his toys.*

Patti Smith

To be ‘out of sync’ is a fascinat-  
ing concept – and a slightly irritat-  
ing phenomenon – that arises when  
pictures and sound are not play-  
ing simultaneously, thereby creat-  
ing discord between our two direc-  
tional senses: hearing and vision.  
But even when things do not quite  
fit together, we usually manage to  
make coherent meaning from them  
anyway, with the help of the human  
poetic talent for gathering together  
loose ends and creating stories out  
of the dissonance. With Rose Eken,  
this ‘out of sync’ concept forms  
both a constructive and a thematic  
linchpin in her new rock’n’roll video  
*Because The Night (Belongs to Us)*  
from 2010, in which fiction and re-  
ality, artifice and authenticity meet  
in a strange amalgam of the wider  
reality and the intimate fantasy, be-  
tween raw masculine guitar energy  
and a more feminine dolls-house  
universe.

*Could you say something about the*  
*significance of gender in relation to*  
*creating art?*

I don’t consider myself a female art-  
ist. It’s only lately that I have been  
able to regard myself as a female  
at all. I don’t think I hold any sex.  
I think I have both masculine and  
feminine rhythms in my work. In the  
same sense, I don’t think Mick Jag-  
ger is just a masculine performer.

To accompany this ‘music video’,  
Rose Eken has invited nine differ-  
ent Danish composers to create  
their separate versions of a sound-  
track and at the overall level the  
exhibition thus become an explora-  
tion of the different worlds that can

be created by sound and images in  
conjunction.

*So you feel that the people from*  
*whom you can learn something*  
*come from the rock’n’roll scene?*

Yes, in the sixties it was Jim Morris-  
on and Bob Dylan, now it’s the Roll-  
ing Stones. There was also Smokey  
Robinson, and I can still get excited  
about Humphrey Bogart. I like peo-  
ple who are bigger than me. I’m not  
interested in meeting a bunch of  
writers who I don’t think are bigger  
than life. I’m not a fame fucker, but I  
am a hero worshipper. I have always  
been in love with heroes, that’s  
what seduced me into art.

Rose Eken’s approximately seven-  
minute long film – projected on  
three walls – is structured as a col-  
lage. It all starts at a billiard ta-  
ble, and this is also, where it ends:  
at a billiard table in an empty bar.  
The theme is introduced right from  
the first shot. Some of the billiard  
tables are real, while others are  
Eken’s own miniature models made  
from card and tape. This is easy  
to see if you look closely, but the  
viewer nonetheless makes agile at-  
tempts to get the construct (the  
cardboard balls) to harmonise with  
the real balls, as it has all been ed-  
ited together in a continuous se-  
quence. Like an ouroboros that  
devours its own tail and thereby  
continually repeats the process, the  
video applies its own rhythm and  
frame to a rather classic tale that  
also seems to repeat itself ad in-  
finitum – the story of the fetishised  
rock star, showered with success on  
stage, and the backstage life in ho-  
tels and bars with cigarettes, wom-  
en, booze, drugs and death. Both  
aspects are present in Eken’s video,  
rise and fall being, as we know, two  
sides of the same coin in the life of  
a legend.

*Would you find anyone in America*  
*now who you think influences you*  
*a lot?*

It’s mostly dead people.

*Anybody alive?*



Rose Eken, *Music is the Healing Force of the Universe*, 2010

Dylan. You can’t reject Dylan. But  
Dylan seduced me when he had a  
fantastic lifestyle. I’ll always love  
Dylan all my life, but Dylan was a  
big thing for me when he was BOB  
DYLAN. Now he’s whatever he is,  
but when he was there and had  
America in the grip of his fist, then  
I got so excited about him. As far as  
anybody living.

Each sequence in the video deals  
with a specific star, legend or story  
from our common musical histo-  
ry: a scene from Prince’s film *Pur-  
ple Rain*, a shot of bassist Sid Vi-  
cious, of Elvis’s weeping fans, or of  
John Lennon and Yoko Ono in bed  
in their hotel room, surrounded by  
journalists. But these familiar clips  
are shown only in brief glimpses,  
and are edited together with flocks  
of howling fans in front of hotels,  
and with slow-motion recordings of  
Eken’s own empty interiors in dolls-  
house size, thereby leaving room  
for private connotations of the indi-  
vidual viewer, and for the individ-  
ual’s own way of concluding the tale.

As American singer-songwriter  
Patti Smith says in her recently-  
published autobiography *Just Kids*:  
“The Chelsea was like a doll’s house  
in The Twilight Zone, with a hun-  
dred rooms, each a small universe”.  
And this is also how Eken’s minia-  
ture models are structured: like tiny  
universes which, while they may be  
empty of people, nonetheless in-  
spire connotations and stories in  
the mind of the observer. Hotels  
and bars, after all, simply exude  
life and forbidden feelings. The ho-  
tel is in many ways the epitome of  
the ‘place of transgression’, of the  
forbidden and the erotic, perhaps  
even the violent and deadly. And  
it is precisely these associations  
of the hotel with both the familiar  
and the potentially dangerous that

exert such a fascination, and have  
inspired thriller writers, photogra-  
phers, musicians and artists over  
the years. The rooms of a hotel are  
built to frame life as it is lived, but  
removed from the domestic con-  
text, which is why the structure  
of a hotel, almost in itself, invites  
us to step outside of our normal  
ways and habits. Smith’s biogra-  
phy includes a whole chapter on  
the Chelsea Hotel, and rock history  
is steeped in decadent hotel myths  
and violent, deadly hotel dramas – it  
was for example at the Chelsea Ho-  
tel that Nancy, the young girlfriend  
of Sid Vicious, met her end.

Rose Eken’s models portray pre-  
cisely these evocative interiors (of  
the kind that musicians on tour  
usually encounter): dirty back-  
stage rooms, trashed hotel bed-  
rooms, sleazy bars, vast, dark con-  
cert stages, hotel bathrooms and  
long corridors. But they thematise  
these energies and stories *in ab-*  
*sentia*; they are there, just beneath  
the surface – in the observer’s own  
mind. By modelling and shaping  
the setting of these stories in dolls-  
house format, on a scale that is en-  
tirely out of sync, they are given  
an extra dimension of something  
twisted, naive, crazy; as when the  
proportions of the TV and the hotel  
bed do not quite match in scale, and  
the plants, the toilet bowl or the  
carpet pattern seem especially pe-  
culiar and out of proportion.

*You don’t take yourself seriously?*

Ultimately, I don’t take anything  
seriously – yet I can take everything  
seriously. I am too much of a cynic  
to take anything seriously. If I’m in  
a good, pure, relaxed state, I might  
well look at some of my stuff and  
think, “Ah, this is a load of shit”.  
Mick Jagger listens to his albums

and says they’re shit. Bob Dylan lis-  
tens to his albums and says they’re  
shit. It hurts me to read an inter-  
view where Bob Dylan says he hates  
Nashville Skyline . But I know how  
I feel. The best work for me is the  
‘work in progress’.

Laboriously, object by object Eken  
constructs her miniatures in card,  
tape and plasticine. In total twenty  
models are used in the video, and  
each room is a complete diorama of  
an interior, with all that that implies  
of filled ashtrays, musical instru-  
ments, messages waiting at the ho-  
tel reception desk, trashed rooms,  
teenage bedrooms with idol posters  
and museums with framed platinum  
records. Nothing has been omitted –  
even the trashy and broken. Be-  
cause it all forms part of the tale of  
life, death, rock legends, greatness,  
decadence and decay that Eken re-  
veals in *Because The Night (Belongs*  
*to Us)*. Even though, it is all just a  
construct, a strange illusion.

*Do you think you are really a phony?*

I’m like a chameleon – I’m not a  
phony, I’m like a chameleon. I can  
fall into the rhythm of almost any  
situation as it calls for me. If I’m  
supposed to be a motherfucker, I  
can be a motherfucker. If I’m sup-  
posed to be a sissy or a pansy, I’ll  
be that, too. I’ll be a sexpot, I’ll be a  
waif. It doesn’t mean I’m phony, it  
just means I’m flexible. I can marry  
the moment.

*The interview is taken from the very*  
*first interview with Patti Smith from*  
*1975. Reprinted in Victor Bockris:*  
*Patti Smith – An Unauthorized Biog-*  
*raphy, Fourth Estate 1998.*

*Maria Kjær Thomsen holds an MA in Modern*  
*Literature and works as an art critic, writer*  
*and editor.*



Rose Eken, *Because the Night (Belongs to Us)* (still), 2010



Rock in Rose's Space

By Jan Sneum

The band has left the stage. The audience ceased its applause. The clearing-up begins. Back on the stage, the set list is stuck to the floor with black duct tape beside the lead singer's microphone stand. The paper shows signs of rapid revision made with biro, and now, after the gig has ended, it also bears the marks of shoe soles and beer. The set list has become trash – a last residue of the music that was. The rest of us have gone home, but for artist Rose Eken, this “imprint” of the concert is the beginning of an artistic process.

Rose Eken's artistic universe is centred on the trappings of rock, the way it is presented, and its myths and stories. The works do not deal with the music as such; the starting-point is often the time before or after the concert, and the space without sound. It is not the musicians themselves that interests Eken rather it is the traces they leave behind.

The transformation begins when Rose Eken picks up the used set list. On white silk, she meticulously stitches all the characters from the paper. All signs of use, and all

traces of text. In her embroideries the tiny handwritten scrap of paper or the original A4 sheet listing the songs played is enlarged into a visual expression that transforms the note, which was otherwise on its way to the bin, into an aesthetic and artistic world where it obtains a poetic and spatial beauty. In this manner, the ephemeral and worthless becomes immortalised by way of white silk and elaborate embroidery, and the subsistence of the set list expanded far beyond the usual “sex, drugs and rock'n'roll”.

The transformation is not only due to the change in size and material; the magic also lies in the spectator's perception of the process and the work that lies behind it. A set list is generally written down in a hurry in the dressing room just before the gig, whereas a piece of embroidery requires tens of thousands of stitches and many hours of concentrated work. Looking at Eken's embroideries is like watching a band playing well; together with the immediate experience of the artistic expression, we also feel her respect for the musicians' hard work with their material prior to the concert. It takes time to create musical artistry, just as it takes time to immortalise the artistry in Eken's work.

Stitch by stitch, the work gradually takes shape through thousands of repetitions and repetition is an important element in both music

and in Rose Eken's artistic practice. Eken's interest in repetition has also resulted in the creation of miniature models of rock instruments – both works in their own right, and components of larger installations of still images and films. The intention is not to create models of famous musicians' instruments, like an expression of simple fandom – Rose Eken's expression is far removed from that of Hard Rock Café. In her world, the instruments are often carried out in miniature, but the working process involves selection and interpretation, and not everything is included. They are not 'copies'. Eken's love of rock gear is clearly evident in her models, which may consist of anything from ceramic versions of guitar pedals to a model of a backstage room with its filled ashtrays, and empty beer bottles or models of specific instruments with famous rock logos. The series of 100 small drum kits or 100 electric guitars are all identifiable as instruments, which have been played by famous musicians, but the goal is not the recognition in itself, but rather the rhythm of repetition and the variations in multiplicity. The goal is pattern and rhythm, just as it is in rock music, in its sound and traditions, and just as it is for a musician who can enjoy playing the same songs, night after night, with the discrepancy that arise from the venue, the audience and general enthusiasm.



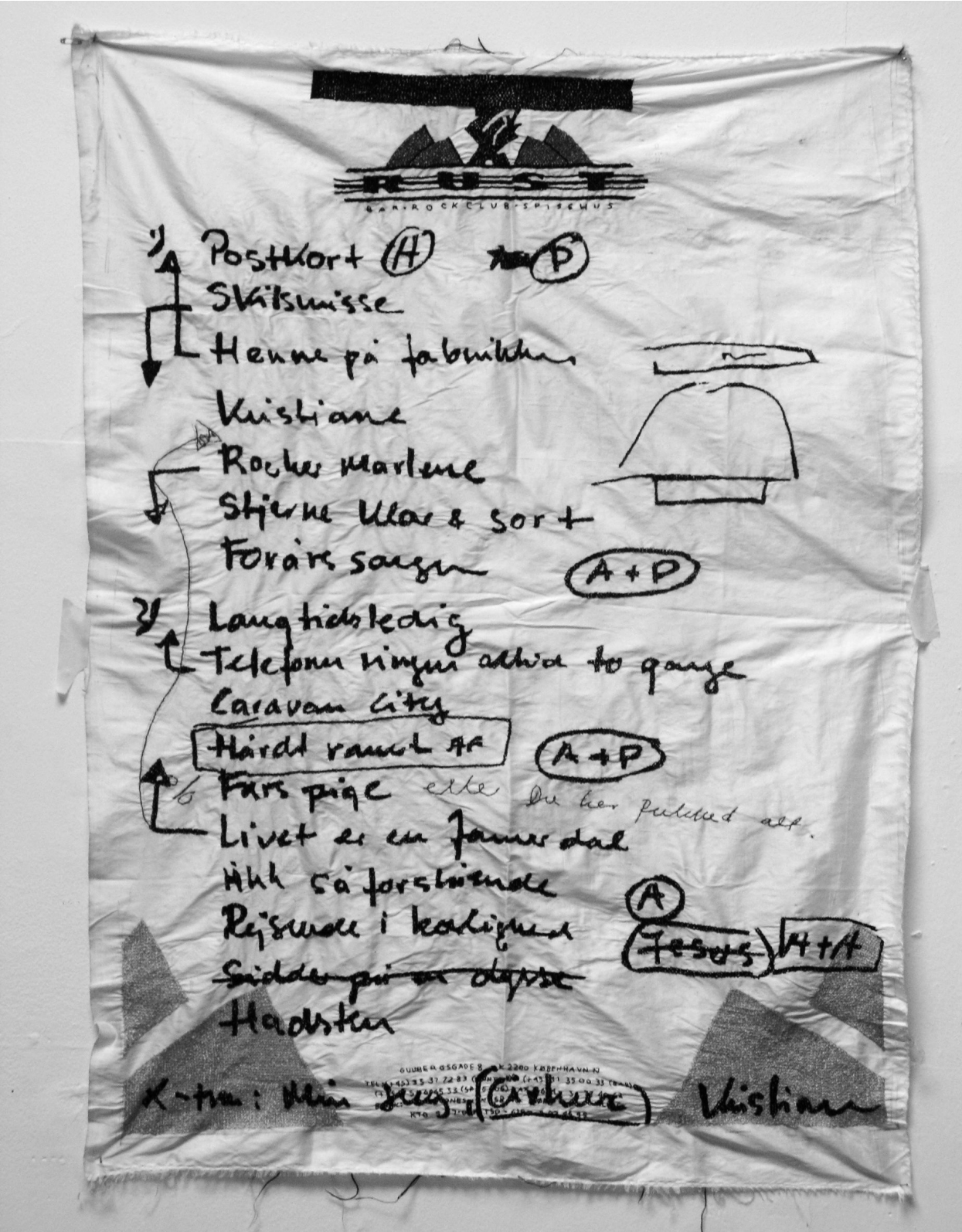
Rose Eken, *Because the Night (Belongs to Us)* (still), 2010

Through her choice of materials and working procedure, Rose Eken manages to interpret the rock world in a curious and particularly feminine manner. Embroidery traditionally belong in the category of women's crafts, and in her many models and miniatures it is the girl's play with the large sprawling dolls' house, which she transposes into the world of rock and art. Through the models and the miniatures, the world of rock can be controlled, processed and equipped exactly as the artist wishes – just as a child playing with the items in a dolls' house aims to maintain the enormity of the world at a manageable level.

a surprisingly feminine dimension is added to the world of rock. Indeed, for me, the encounter with Rose Eken's rock world inspires the same surprising joy as I felt when the singer Nico many years ago in a Copenhagen hotel tried to verbally summarise what the process of recording an album meant to her, and after minutes of reflective silence, simply said: “It's like knitting a sock.” That was when I realised that the approach by men and women to the creative process is most often expressed in wonderfully different ways – something which I certainly see reflected in Eken's works, and in her interpretation of rock imagery.

Jan Sneum is a music journalist and the manager of P3 Live.

As a male observer of Eken's work



Rose Eken, *Set List (Per)*, 2009

CV

**Rose Eken** (b. 1976) studied at Edinburgh College of Art 1997-2001 and graduated from the Royal College of Art in London in 2003. She has had solo exhibitions at Kunsthallen Brandts, Odense, 2010; DUNK!, Copenhagen, 2009 and Sølyst, Jyderup, 2008. Her works have also been shown at Spanien 19C, Aarhus, 2009; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, 2009; The John Jones Project Space, London, 2008; Standpoint Gallery, London, 2008; Flaca, London, 2005 and Zoo Artfair, London, 2004. Upcoming exhibitions include an exhibition with Rob Eagle at Transition Gallery, London. Rose Eken lives in Copenhagen.

CONCERTS & ARTIST CONVERSATION

**Friday 3 September** from 6pm to 6.30pm: Opening concert with Straight from the Harp (rockabilly/electro-blues).

**Thursday 23 September** from 6.30pm to 8pm: Concert with the trio Jacob Dinesen, Mads Hyhne and Kresten Osgood (jazz) as well as Gry Bagoien (acapella/experimentronic).

**Thursday 30 September** at 5pm Rose Eken will discuss her exhibition in conversation with music journalist Jan Sneum.

**Thursday 7 October** from 5pm to 8pm: Concert with Kresten Osgood (jazz), Morten Svenstrup (modern classic/cross-over) and Oliver Hoiness (punk/low-fi).

**Thursday 21 October** from 5pm to 8pm: Concert with Maria Køhnke (alternative emotional pop), Gustaf Ljunggren (experimental) and Mads Mouritz (avantgarde folk).

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

**Friday 12 November** Overgaden presents the exhibitions *There are pockets, she said* by Henriette Heise and *Between Here and Somewhere Else* with Maj Hasager and Helen de Main. The last day of the exhibitions is 16 January 2011.

Rose Eken would like to thank all the musicians, Ermanno Barbani/Von Fressen, Jacob Rathje, Michael Peetz-Schou, Jan Sneum, Maria Kjær Thomsen, The Danish Arts Council's Committee for Visual Arts and Overgaden. Also a warm thanks to family and friends who helped with the project.

Translation: Billy O'Shea.



STATENS  
KUNSTRÅD  
DANISH ARTS COUNCIL

Overgaden is supported by The Danish Arts Council's Committee for Visual Arts