

Rock in Rose's Space

By Jan Sneum

The band has left the stage. The audience ceased its applause. The clearing-up begins. A set list is stuck to the floor with black duct tape next to the lead singer's microphone stand. The paper shows signs of rapid revision made with a blue biro and now that the gig has ended it has also been soiled with footprints and beer. The set list has become trash; a last residue of the music that was. The rest of us go 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 paraphernalia of rock - its appearance, myths and stories. Her work does not deal with the music as such; the starting-point is more often the moment just before or after the gig and the venue devoid of sound. It is not the musicians themselves that interests Eken rather its the traces they leave behind.

The transformation occurs when Rose Eken picks up the set list. On white silk, she meticulous hand stitches all the characters from the paper. All signs of use and all the traces of text. The tiny handwritten scrap of paper or A4 sheet listing the songs performed are in Eken's embroideries amplified into a visual expression that transforms the note - the scrap piece of paper - 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 stitching, and the subsistence of the set list is 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 understanding of the process and the work that lies behind. A set list is generally written in a hurry in the backstage room just before the gig starts 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 really 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 for Eken to immortalise the artistry in her work.

Stitch by stitch, the piece gradually takes shape through thousands of repetitions – and repetition is an important element in both music and in Eken's artistic practice. Her concern with reiteration has also resulted in the creation of miniature models of numerous venues and rock instruments both as individual works as well as 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 – Eken's depiction is far removed from that of "Hard Rock Café". The instruments are executed in miniature but they are not "copies" rather her manner of working undoubtedly involve careful selection and interpretation and not everything is included. Eken's love of rock gear is clearly evident in her work which may consist of anything from ceramic versions of guitar pedals to a miniature model of a backstage room with its filled ashtrays, lines of coke and empty beer bottles or perhaps copies of specific instruments with iconic adaptations or customised logos. Her series of 100 miniature drum kits ('Untitled (100 Drummkits)', 2009) or 100 electric guitars ('Editions of You', 2008) are all identifiable as instruments, which have been played by celebrated musicians, but the goal is not the recognition of the instruments or rock-star in themselves, but rather to accentuate the rhythm and repetition and all the minor variations that arise from multiplicity. The goal is to create a pattern - make a underlying beat just as it is in rock music, in its sound and its traditions, and just as it is for the musician who can enjoy playing the same song, night after night, with the discrepancy that arise from the different venues, the audience and general enthusiasm.

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 that she transpose into the world of rock and art. Through the models and miniatures the world of rock can be controlled, processed and equipped exactly as the artist wishes – just as the child playing with the toys in her dolls house aim to maintain the enormity of the world at a manageable level.

As a male observer of Eken's work, a surprisingly feminine dimension is added to the world of rock. Indeed, for me, the encounter with Eken's world of rock inspires the same surprising joy as I felt when the singer Nico many years ago in a hotel in Copenhagen verbally tried to 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 also see reflected in Rose Eken's practice, and in her very tactile and intimate interpretation of the images of rock.

Jan Sneum is music journalist and producer at DR (The Danish Broadcasting Corporation) and manager of P3 Live.