

Alexander Steig

ROCHADE

Alexander Steig is an artist and curator.

He writes about the work *The King of Norway* at Grorud metro station.

Iceland has not had a king since its independence from Denmark in 1944. Do the Icelandic people miss their monarch? There are 47 sovereign states in Europe, with two queens and six kings (as well as several noble families without political influence). We are not dealing with despots, but the constitutional representatives of their countries. Nevertheless, the constitutional monarchy, which does not assess the competence of the persons it employs, seems old-fashioned as a form of state. Most of the royal houses have a major presence in the tabloids. From the point of view of parliamentary democracy, these representations remind one of anti-modern theatre and the rituals of folklore. Whether they are innocent or deliberate remains an open question.

The Icelandic conceptual artist Hlynur Hallsson has placed a hidden monument to the Norwegian kings in the east of Oslo, spray-canning trilingual fragments of inconsequential anecdotes and key events in Norwegian history in a metro-station (Grorud stasjon) in English (as *lingua franca*), Norwegian (the local language) and Polish (contextual). The succinct sentences provide information about Olav V's international education. That the Danish-Norwegian king lost Denmark-Norway to Sweden. Or how, as the scion of a dynasty, Harald V met elected foreign representatives. One learns that the regents of the old Europe networked internationally and that they were in some ways not only rulers of their countries, but were also (and still are?) the 'first Europeans.'

Hlynur Hallsson draws these fragments of text from the media environment – newspapers and other sources – which he searches for on the Internet. In doing so, he combines them thematically in terms of language and colour in such a way that the piece could be formally reminiscent of a poem beyond understanding. Since 2002, the artist has realized more than 20 of these text projects in Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Japan, Croatia, Sweden and the USA. The hyper-authenticity of the capitals, their colour classification, and their location-related arrangement, paired with the way their respective semantic features and absurdities are treated, can also be read as a contribution to political/concrete poetry. Here in Oslo, the artist has represented well-known figures and events as a laconic commentary addressing both Norwegians and visitors to their capital. He reflects on the relaxed attitude in which people regard contemporary monarchies, whose members make considerable efforts to appear just like everyone else, as well as a certain tragedy and involuntary comedy that constantly gains fresh nourishment from their over-presence in the media. The piece draws attention to this widespread attention, while the pomp and glory of monarchy are rendered redundant when presented as graffiti. The three slogans are not a revolutionary appeal against feudal structures. They seem interchangeable with the host of similar headlines about the throne and the crown. Their variety suggests a potential rocade, a manoeuvre by the artist, a *modus operandi* that fosters uncomplicated multilayered interpretations of politics and society.



The King of Norway, Grorud Metro Station