

Extract from the article “Arts and Politics in Norway – an Uncomplete Introduction”, by Evelyn Holm, *Mare Articum* nr. 2 / 2002, p. 14-21:

Andrea Lange: Adhan Corner

One condition in contemporary political art is that of seeking outside of the institutional limits to communicate with the part of the public that normally not are visiting art exhibitions. By the Way Gallery of Contemporary Art is situated at the corner of one of the streets carrying most traffic in the centre of Bergen, the second largest city of Norway. The exhibitions are made in five windows towards the street, and are as such probably one of the best visited galleries of the city. The obvious possibilities created by this situation has inspired a lot of artists to focus on the aspects of dialogue, although there have been examples of works that more or less use the space as just another wall to hang the art. One outstanding example, which manages to use both the actual spot and the situating in Bergen, connecting it as well with structures in national and local legislation, was Andrea Lange's “Adhan Corner” (2001). The five windows were covered with wooden plates, and five times a day, according to the official Muslim prayer times, the gallery was made into a temporary mosque by transferring the Muslim summons to pray from two loud speakers installed on the walls. At the same time anyone who wanted it was invited to hang posters or to tag on the plates. Andrea Lange had two points of departure for this work; the newly affirmation of the county governor of Oslo that sanction from the municipality is not necessary for summoning to prayer through loudspeakers, and the City of Bergen's prohibition of hanging up posters in the city. The affirmation from the county governor resulted from an evaluation towards the Criminal Code, the International Convention of Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention of Human Rights, and was initiated from a request from the before mentioned Norwegian Right Wing party. An attempt to stop any religious group from expressing their belief in their traditional manner, obviously has its elements of racism and fear of cultural differences. The prohibition of hanging up posters as well carries a social unbalance, since there is no problem for those with enough income, i.e. the business companies with their promotion posters of any kind, to buy themselves freedom of speech, by renting space for their publicity campaigns. Thus different cultural practices were invited to mingle in this questioning of democratic consistency. The exhibition got a

lot of attention since some of the neighbours made protests against the “sound pollution” of the prayers, and also representatives from some Muslim groups protested against the use of their traditional summon to prayer (in this case recorded from Mekka) outside a Muslim context; to their opinion such a use was considered as blasphemy. The questioning thus expand to also include the ability of tolerance of religious groups and individuals and, accordingly, the freedom of art, since the prayer in this context of being part of an artwork, should be protected by the law of intellectual property. Read as this, in connection with the audience response, the work consist of several layers, that together creates a complicated pattern of the possibilities of freedom of speech, including the freedom of the artist, in a complex society. As such, Andrea Lange’s work can conclude this essay, suggesting again the close connection between political art and the struggle for artistic freedom as a vital influence at the Norwegian contemporary art scene.

E. Holm