

# *The Death of the Chemist: Installation*

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By Anna Ulrikke Andersen  
Original title: Kjemikerens død  
Installation, 23-26 May 2016  
Gamle Kjem, Gløshaugen, NTNU  
Kunstarken, Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts/NTNU

*The 28-year-old chemist Christian Wilhelm Norberg-Schulz (1896-1926) was working at the Norwegian Technical University of Trondheim on a dark February night, when he decided to do up in the attic to fetch snow from the roof to be used in an experiment. Nearsighted, without his glasses and in the dark, the chemist tripped and fell through a glass construction, crashing into the floor below. He was rushed to St. Olav's Hospital, but having fractured his skull, the young and promising chemist died the next morning, leaving his pregnant wife Lalla behind.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, the Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) never met his father.<sup>2</sup>*

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When I visited *Gamle Kjem* (1910) 2 February 2016, snow had fallen in the night. White and thick, it covered the building and the square before it. I set up my camera and filmed the scene, counting the minutes of the take. Silently, I waited in the cold weather.

I thought about the accident that had taken place 90 years prior, causing the death of the 28-year-old chemist. I thought about those left behind. A pregnant wife and a son who never met his father. Christian Norberg-Schulz was born 23 May, months later.

With caretaker Stig Pallesen, I visited the building, recording our conversation with radio-mics. We wander through hallways, staircases, attics and offices, uncertain as to exactly where the chemist died, 90 years prior.

When I returned to *Gamle Kjem* (1910), time had passed. The snow was gone, replaced by green grass and blooming trees and flowers. With me, I had the film *The Death of the Chemist* (2016) that was to be installed in the building.<sup>3</sup>

Between 2 February and 23 May 2016, I returned to London, edited the film, planned and organised the installation, before coming back to Trondheim.

In the same time span, the chemist's pregnant wife Lalla buried her husband, moved to Oslo and gave birth to a son.

The installation would bring the history of the chemist's death back into the building and move into that very staircase where Stig Pallesen and I, months earlier, had concluded the accident most likely would have taken place. Bringing attention to the time that had passed from the death of the father until the birth of the son, I chose the ninetieth anniversary of Christian Norberg-Schulz's birthday as the date the installation would be opened: 23 May 2016. Three days later, on 26 May 2016, I would turn 28 myself.

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*12:00 23 May 2016 Gamle Kjemii, Gløshaugen.*

The installation opened at 12:00, with coffee and a short talk. The audience consisted of artists from Trondheim, university staff based in the building and students from the university. They explored the installation and talked to me about the project and the building. One staff member, who had worked there for decades, wondered if I would return and do a project about the professor who had hanged himself in the attic. [Fig 1-2]

*18:00 23 May 2016 Kunstarken, the Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts / NTNU.*

I gave a talk discussing my project, the installation and related questions. Wearing a Campari-coloured dress,

I asked what it means to be at a site where something had happened and the fragmentary nature of archival research. The talk ended with the reading of *Les Fenêtres IV* (1927) by Rilke, and we toasted with white wine.<sup>4</sup> I answered questions from the audience, and we watched *Livet finner sted* (1992), before continuing the discussion over wine.<sup>5</sup> [Fig 3-4]

*24 – 25 May 2016 Gamle Kjemii, Gløshaugen.*

I sat by the installation while it was open between 12:00 – 16:00. I talked to people who came by to watch the work. When no one was there, I watched the film again. Watching the film in the space sounds from the recording blended with the sounds from the building: doors opening, people walking in stairs on their way to classes, libraries, lecture halls and reading rooms. [Fig 5-7]

*26 May 2016 06:05 – 06:10 Værnes, Trondheim Airport.*

I wanted to leave Trondheim on the day and time that I was born 28 years prior and stayed at a hotel close to the airport. I woke up early and checked in. The airport was empty, few people were flying. I sat in my seat at 06:05. The flight would take off just before 06:10, stopping in Oslo before continuing to Heathrow, London. I looked out the window, ready for take-off and travel, and I thought about how someone had told me that the airport was built on the site of a former cemetery. [Fig 8-9]



[Fig 1-2]



[Fig 3-4]



[Fig 5]



[Fig 6-7]



[Fig 8-9]

- 1 "En trist ulykke ved Den tekniske Høiskole", in *Aftenposten morgen*, 3 February 1926, and "Ulykke paa Høiskolen" in *Dagsposten*, 3 February 1926.
- 2 The first paragraph from this text and the film *The Death of the Chemist* (2016) is to be published in the forthcoming issue of *InForma*.
- 3 *The Death of the Chemist* (2016), directed by Anna Ulrikke Andersen.
- 4 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Les Fenêtres, dix poèmes de Rainer Maria Rilke, illustrés d'eaux-fortes de Baladine* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1927).
- 5 *Livet finner sted* (1992) directed by Sven-Erik Helgesen.

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Thanks to Stig Pallesen, Raymond Sterten, Kunstarken, Trondheim Academy of Fine Arts/NTNU, Katja Jarem, Martine Andersen, Jane Rendell, Claire Thomson and the Bartlett Film+Place+Architecture Doctoral Network. With the kind support of the Bartlett Doctoral Research Project Fund, Stenseth Grimsrud Arkitekter AS and Trondheim Kommune.