



BANKS VIOLETTE

ab-sense of value

Bank Violette's Untitled installation at the Whitney (2005) represents the skeleton of a burnt out church consisting of beams covered in salt spotlight in a dark room and accompanied by an unobtrusive soundscape.

Violette explains that the concept was based on a series of arson attacks on churches in Norway by heavy metal kids: 'They actually liked the way that the churches looked when burnt. One band even took a picture of the result and put it on an album cover, which led to a criminal conviction' (Violette 2005). What attracts Violette to this Norwegian phenomenon is the fact that Norwegian youth are reacting against the decline of the relevance of the church in their culture. Historically the church has played an important role in Norwegian culture. The dominant political party are the Christian Democrats indicating the strong link between church and politics in that nation.

For Violette the spate of church burnings reflects a sense of deep disappointment: 'They had grown up in that Christian culture only to discover that the church was ultimately as impotent in Norway as it is in the rest of Europe. There was an interview with some of the people involved in the arson and they were angry because the church had no power any more' (Violette 2005).

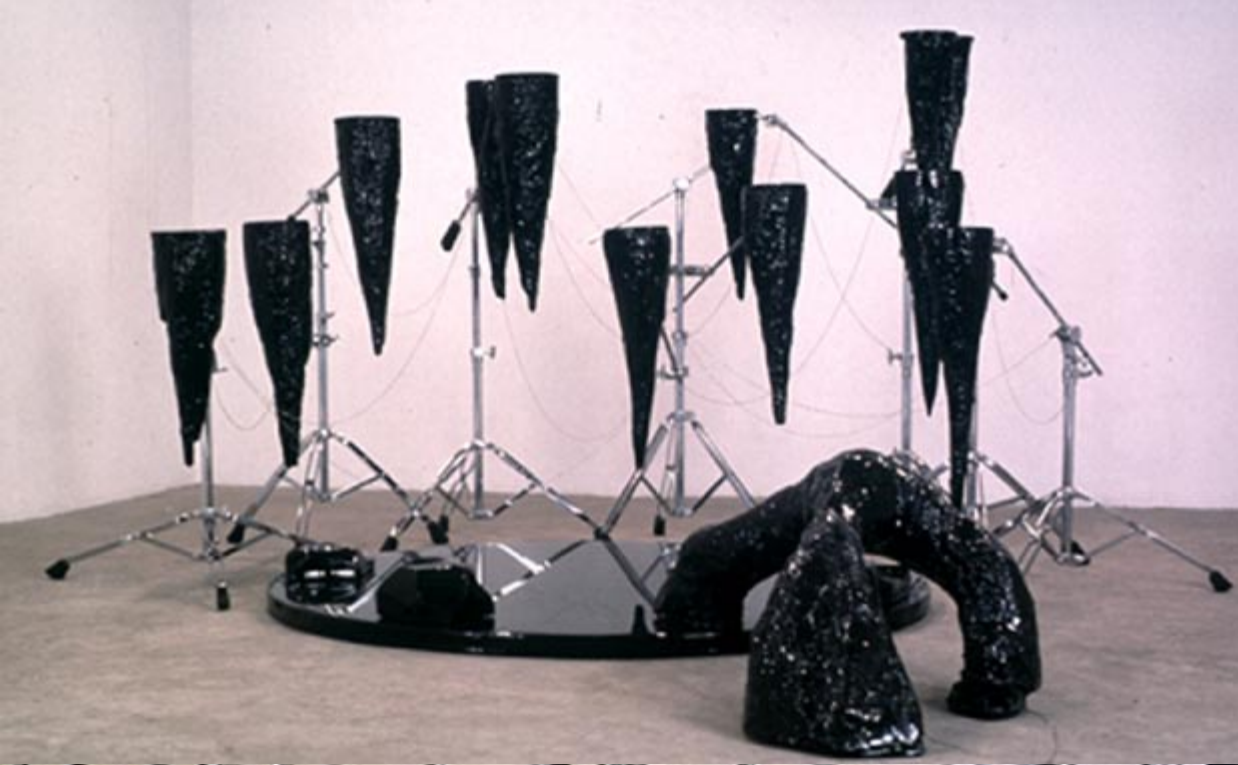


The material used for the installation is salt chosen due to its glistening, crystalline qualities and because it is corrosive. Violette explains:

For me it expressed 'sympathy for the devil' meaning sympathy for those people in Norway. And the way it glistens also signifies the 'Cold North'. It is also a dynamic substance, it takes moisture out of the air. In fact it took so much moisture out of the air that the Whitney's climate control system broke down. They called me one day to tell me the installation was 'melting'. I went over there and they were working frantically to repair the system. The effect of the salt 'melting' was just like ice melting which was perfect for the Cold North reference. (Violette 2005)

Violette's choice of salt is also due to the fact that when the Whitney commissioned the work Violette knew that they would have a Robert Smithson survey exhibition on at the same time as his installation. Violette notes that salt has played a big role in Smithson's works. 'I was born in Ithaca, New York and Smithson made his first work there with Cornell University. Upstate New York is an impoverished area and salt mining is a big industry in Ithaca and Smithson did his Cayuga Salt Mine Project there' (Violette 2005).

Another element of Violette's attraction to the 'Cold North' lies in a certain affiliation for German Romanticism especially Caspar David Friedrich although he notes that J. M. Turner's *Tintern Abbey*, 1794, would be a more proximate source for the Whitney installation. But his work is far from being an homage, instead he treats Romanticism as 'an appropri-



tional source' or 'readymade'. Which is to say Romanticism becomes one more semantic layer underlying the black style Violette is developing.

TOP Banks Violette, and fucking gone (partial reconstruction - 7.22.95) 2002, Team gallery New York. Drum hardware, polystyrene, polyester, epoxy, plywood, sterling silver chain and hand-cast pewter 54 x 138 x 118 inches BOTTOM detail.