

Nina Backman: *Silence Meal*



When we silence our words, something potent rises that has no chance of getting to the surface otherwise. When we do it together around a shared meal, the experience is magnified and unexpected. Jaanika Peerna, Artist

Silence Meal is a performative dining experience hosted by Finnish artist Nina Backman. The meal follows a specific framework, officially opening when the artist sits down. Attending to the rituals of a meal in a way that is free of verbal distraction, the communality of silence brings with it an intensity unique to the occasion. In removing the spoken word, guests are left free to explore a myriad of sensory experiences that can be both physical, emotional, spiritual or cultural in nature. The *Silence Meal* presents its guests with an opportunity to observe what emerges in place of unspoken interaction. Each meal, being a unique constellation can be documented in a variety of ways; film, photography and sound.

The hallmarks of silence weave through Backman's art, it is integral to her artistic process. Her work encompasses installation, performance and visual art. For Backman, silence brings together different but related elements within a conceptual framework, in turn creating new dialogues. These set out to invite critical reflection, to expose layers otherwise unnoticed, to challenge perceptions as yet outside our realm of experience.

The *Silence Meal* is a site specific performance and has taken place in gallery space, on stage, outside, or privately. With each performance being uniquely affected by its surroundings. First conceived as part of the HIAP Residency Programme in 2013, Silence Meals have now taken place in Berlin, Brussels, Shanghai, Paris, Iceland, Norway and Finland. The work has received international acclaim in Europe with the most recent performance being hosted at Flagey Studios for their supporters as part of their Arvo Pärt weekend. Taking advantage of the unique sound environment at Flagey, the artist created a 7" vinyl recording and collage. This will be gifted to the guests who attended the performance.

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Nina Backman

Performance Artist, Curator

Born in Helsinki in 1971, Nina Backman, originally studied Stage and Performance Design in Liverpool, UK. She lives and works in Berlin, exhibiting internationally. Her work occupies a space between stage design, installation and performance. She has worked within a wide spectrum of creative disciplines: film, theatre, photography and design. Her pieces confront the viewer questioning life concepts, identities and values. Silence is integral to her artistic practice, it brings together related elements within a conceptual frame to create new dialogues. These invite critical reflection, to expose layers otherwise unnoticed, to challenge perceptions of our 'normal' experience.

First conceived as part of the HIAP Residency Programme in 2013, *Silence Meals* have now taken place in Berlin, Finland, Germany, Norway, Iceland and Shanghai. Nina Backman is the founder of the Silence Project.

The Silence Project is a Nordic Contemporary exhibition programme that uses a multidisciplinary approach to examine how our experience of silence and space has shaped culture as well as our own individual identities. In a time of mega-cities the availability of free space and silence is diminishing and consequently becoming a luxury.

The *Silence Project* brings together a myriad of reflections set against different backdrops. Although each presentation is unique owing to the specific materials and mediums used, certain features remain constant. These include:

1. Art exhibition with international artists exploring their personal interpretation to silence in a way that is organic in both process and form.
2. Seminar: *Silence as Everyman's right?* A dialogue between different domains inviting reflection on commonalities.
3. A performative *Silence Meal*.

Thus, it is through the lens of an interdisciplinary attitude that the *Silence Project* sets out to challenge the boundaries that separate different fields and thereby create a space within which common factors can be identified.

Furthermore, such an approach extends through to a cultural dialogue and exchange with links being sought between Nordic, European and international platforms.



Silence Meal – Flagey Studios, Brussels, 2018