Saksumdal Tempel

Kulp opp ned (*Pool Upside Down*)
Mercedes Mühleisen

Performance Saturday 17.10.2026 at 6:00 PM

Kulp opp ned is an installation and a performance created for Saksumdal Tempel.

It all began with a leak. I was in Saksumdal in March. The rotting spring snow covered the ground, and it was cold. I had just arrived from Oslo and was standing with Tarald in a dark cellar. He was turning a large pipe to reconnect the water, which had been shut off throughout the winter. And then it simply exploded. The water blew us backwards so that I lost my cap and glasses. It sprayed out of the sinks, out of pipes in the walls, and the water formed big puddles on the floors. We were soaked to the bone. The water was brown and smelled of iron. Iron and bog.

All this unruly water pushing up from the ground made me think of ghosts. Ghosts are also a form of leak. They are a sign that time is leaking and that the past is seeping into the present. I decided to make a room for ghosts in Saksumdal Tempel.

Among all ghosts, it was the *utburd* I was thinking of. The *utburd* is the revenant of a child who was left out in the forest to die. In the legends, they cry or sing in the forest on late autumn evenings, or sneak in to their mother's room at night to drink her milk while she sleeps. The *utburds* are usually small, but it is said that they climb onto the backs of people walking in the forest and press them down through the forest floor to the underworld. There are stories about them all over Norway.

The tales of the *utburds* flourished at the same time as the death penalty was introduced in the 1600s for women who gave birth in secret or abandoned children in the forest. Village rumors could be enough to get someone convicted. At the same time, having children outside of marriage was criminalized. State and church, in other words, contributed strongly to the infanticides taking place. The merciless treatment of women convicted of infanticide speaks of fear of, and extreme control over, female sexuality. That same control appears today as well, only in other forms.

So, back to the water. This summer I went to a pool every day and wrote. That was where the idea for the work came from. I began thinking about how I could make accumulations of water, or pools, in ceramics, and place them around the temple, bringing them to the ghosts. The pools are connected to a mythological idea from the Bronze Age, which also resonates in folk poetry: that the realm of the dead, or the underworld, lies on the other side of the water’s surface in pools, lakes, and bogs. The water’s skin becomes both a boundary and an entrance to another world. The reflection in the water is an opening toward the realm of the dead, a world that resembles ours, only turned upside down.

The pools also have something circular about them. We all come from an inner pool, where we lie and float in amniotic fluid. The pool is a first room. It is then also natural to imagine the last room, the room of death, as another, larger pool. A pool we return to when we are done living. People have thought about this, and whispered about it, throughout the centuries.

We gather in Saksumdal Tempel at sundown to meet the *utburds* at the pools. The performance starts at 6:00 PM and lasts about 20 minutes. Bring warm clothes. Afterwards, soup and something to drink will be served.

Bio

Mercedes Mühleisen (b. 1983 in Austria) lives in Maridalen outside Oslo and graduated from Oslo National Academy of the Arts in 2010. She works primarily with video installations and performance, and has previously shown work at, among others, Fotogalleriet, Oslo; Sandefjord Kunstforening, Sandefjord; Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter; Kunsthall Oslo, Oslo; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; and Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo.

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