

Spaces of Light and Colour

by Nanet Mathiasen

Nanet Mathiasen is an architect who wrote a Ph.D. about Nordic Light. As part of her research for this article, she spent a day at the museum observing the movement of daylight along 'Gaden', as the continuous corridor through the Bornholm Art Museum is called. And this was before Ruth Campau's work, *Sunset Boulevard*, was hung over it. She then returned and saw Gaden and the work as a whole.

All daylight comes from the Sun, and the first materials to be illuminated by the rays of the Sun are the particles (air molecules, steam, dust) in the atmosphere, from where they are refracted and dispersed. It is particularly the short-wave rays – the violet/blue segment of the spectrum – that refract, which is why we experience the sky as blue as we stand on the surface of the Earth.

Because the rays of the Sun are dispersed across the sky, we get additional sources of daylight: direct sunlight from the Sun and indirect sunlight from the firmament. At the same time, light reflects off all the surfaces, creating a third source of light: reflection. All three sources of daylight are present in an interior, either all three at the same time or in pairs: the cloudy sky together with reflected light, or the blue sky together with reflected light. It is these sources of daylight with which *Sunset Boulevard* interacts in the site-specific work at the Bornholm Art Museum.

Depending on whether it is the low Sun of winter or the high Sun of summer that is illuminating the corridor, the space is coloured in different ways. At high noon (1 pm daylight savings time), the Sun is due south and illuminates the entire length of the museum's long corridor. At the summer solstice, the Sun in Gudhjem is roughly 58.5° above the horizon, which allows sunlight all the way into the bottom of the museum's tall corridor at midday, 12 noon. At the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, the Sun culminates at 35° above the horizon, so the sunlight doesn't reach quite as far into the space.

It is between these two solar altitudes that Ruth Campau's work can be experienced, as it was hung up at the vernal (spring) equinox and will be hanging through the summer solstice to the autumnal equinox. This means that the work will interact with the highest altitudes of the Sun in Denmark.

Ruth Campau's work describes the site's light. Not by reflecting or mimicking the unique quality of Bornholm's light; rather, by directly interacting with it. The interplay of light and artwork is an essential feature of the work, and without light the work doesn't "exist".

The work changes depending on the altitude of the Sun and the amount of sunlight, direct and indirect, that is illuminating the space. The intensity of the sunlight enhances the colourful billowing lengths of film. The direction of the sunlight positions the reflections from the coloured films at specific locations in the space. The colours and intensity of the light are in focus and attract great attention. By contrast, a cloudy sky is less intense, and the diffuse light is evenly dispersed down through the space. When the diffuse light illuminates the coloured lengths of film, it takes on the colour of the film as it continues its journey down into the space. The diffuse light colours the airspace and spreads across the surfaces within the space as a glazed layer of colour. It affects the space with great delicacy – but with hugely poetic impact.

In so doing, the work emphasises how light is dispersed through a space. It is not only a question of how the sunlight's rays of light illuminate the space but also of how the diffuse, bright indirect sunlight disperses itself throughout the space – in the air and on the surfaces. Ruth Campau paints not just with *pigment* on transparent lengths of film, but now also with *light* on the surfaces within the space. In so doing, she describes how light moves through the space, and when the work interacts with the diffuse indirect sunlight, it emphasises the softness of the light and its ability to permeate every nook and cranny of a room. The work interacts with the ambient light and describes how it affects the architectural space.