

# KÜNSTLERHAUS BETHANIEN

Anna Júlía Friðbjörnsdóttir

*I will keep close to you*

08.04. – 30.04.2023

*I will keep close to you* is an exploration of explicit and implicit communication. Playing with the International Code of Signals, Anna Júlía Friðbjörnsdóttir's multidimensional pieces render our attempts to connect and communicate with one another while creating a space for the ambiguity, byproducts, and miscommunications that subsequently arise. The International Code of Signals is used by vessels worldwide for navigational communication, often in situations of emergencies or rescues. Created out of an international agreement, the signals allow for the transmission of important messages through morse code. By depicting the signals as a visual transmission, Friðbjörnsdóttir's pieces evoke the variability of communication amidst the attempt to be understood.

While communication is the central theme of the exhibition, the repeated use of copper centers humanity's use of natural elements towards this elemental desire for connection. Copper facilitates movement, allowing for currents of electricity, heat, and information, and is even classified as a transition metal among the elements of the periodic table. Its antiseptic nature allows copper a particular closeness to the human body through its use in medical procedures and hospital equipment. The use of copper brings up considerations towards the physicality of communication while underlining the potential for connection and transmission. Meanwhile, the reliance on copper in the exhibition also reflects a worldwide reliance as more and more of a finite resource is mined for renewable energy. As such, the desire for communication cannot be disassociated from its linguistic materiality, nor its material consequences.

*I Will keep close to you* is composed of four signals: FO, XL, FA, and GT1. “FO (*I will keep close to you*)” greets the viewer as they walk up the stairs into the exhibition space on the upper floor of Künstlerhaus Bethanien. The signal flickers through an early 20<sup>th</sup> century globe light in short and long beats, its tempo matching the steadiness of a heartbeat. The use of a light not only shines a light on the building's own history as a light factory, but light is additionally played with as a navigational tool, drawing viewers in from the ground floor. “XL (*Visibility is decreasing*)” is formed by a series of engraved copper plates displayed on the wall as units of the morse code and is accompanied by a newspaper that features prints of the copper plate engravings. The newspaper is a byproduct of the signal, a media transmission depicting a few different combinations of the plates, suggesting the endless possibilities but never showing the totality. A subsequent transformation that is both apart from and a part of the signal.

The idea of transformations and byproducts is also explored in “*FA (Will you give me my position)*”, a copper pipe that opens up into a trail of smoke as it threads through the exhibition space, turning physicality into the ephemeral, the concrete melting into the gaseous. The signal is punched into the copper tube, reminiscent of a method used in telegram transmissions, while smoke seeps through these holes, similarly a derivative of the signal that seeks to find oneself. Finally, “*GT1 (Look out for rocket line)*” is composed of a continuous copper wire with knots interspersed. The knots also visually depict the morse code, but unlike the print plate signal, this signal is shown vertically rather than horizontally, playing not only with the orientation of oneself but the orientation of language as well.

Text by Marina Manoukian

*Visibility is decreasing  
Look out for rocket line  
Will you give me my position  
I will keep close to you*

Anna Júlía Friðbjörnsdóttir (b. Reykjavík, Iceland 1973) studied in Reykjavík, London and Manchester. Her work has been shown widely in Iceland and numerous group exhibitions in Scandinavia, the UK, Germany, Switzerland and Argentina. Her exhibition *Last Season* at Gallery Gudmundsdóttir, Berlin in 2022 was her first solo presentation outside Iceland.

Anna Julia is a grantee of the Icelandic Art Center. The exhibition is supported by the Icelandic Visual Arts Fund.