



On an autumn day in 1942, whilst the prisoners were standing in a line in the inner courtyard of the SS-Strafgefängenenlager Falstad, the Jewish cantor Josef Grabowski from Trondheim was ordered to step forward to sing German songs.

*“It was a rather special atmosphere, because it was moonlight and cold, and I think we all felt a shiver down our spines at that moment. But what really was interesting, was that the Germans, who had always been fond of music, held back and remained calm. [...] When he stopped after having sung all the songs that he had been ordered to sing, there was complete silence for a moment. Then an Alsatian dog started howling. [...] At that the SS-men “woke up.” They started shouting and screaming. Of course someone had to be blamed for this interlude – the 15 minutes of “normality” that they had displayed. [...] Somebody had to be punished, and that somebody was, of course, the Jews. [...] We were then ordered to shake down the leaves off a tree that is still there at Falstad. When all the leaves had been shaken down, we were ordered to take them to a pile on the other side of the yard. We asked if we could fetch a broom or a rake or some other tool. We were then told that that would not be necessary, as we were to use our mouths.”*

This story, recounted by Julius Paltiel in the book *Tidsvitner*, is the starting point for Roddy Bell's installation “The Long Silence”. The work is presented in a container situated in the courtyard where the event took place 67 years ago. In the dark inside of the container, burning oil lamps are hanging on the walls. Attached to each lamp, is a photograph, which is then projected on to the wall from the light of the flame. The photographs display both victims and abusers connected to the history of Falstad as a German prison camp. As we move inside a video projection is activated: a mouth sings Franz Lehar's *Volgalied*. The video is projected on a large fan that sets the air in the room into motion and creates restless and wandering faces. When the song stops, so does the fan and the faces are silent once again.



*“There are stories here. Stories and portraits and ghosts. There is a reverberation within these walls. You may hear their murmuring silences knocking and scratching behind this new paneling and paintwork. It is a place of darkness and light. The darkness has been deep, - darker and deeper than the isolation cells, the cynicism and abuse, the psychotic acts and sadistic events. But light has also penetrated this space. Through acts of kindness, empathy, love even, and now in our time, we have the light of remembrance.”*

- Roddy Bell

“The Long Silence” is an artwork of remembrance and appears as a form of temporary monument to a specific historical event. Simultaneously, it is a meditation on the power of art, its ability to unite people in a common experience, even under extreme conditions.



A video from the installation can be found on YouTube, [link here](#) .

**Roddy Bell**, originally from Scotland, was born in Burma, and has lived in Norway since 1978. He works with a mixture of low and high technological materials and techniques – from pencil drawings and water colours, via primitive wood constructions, sculptures made from recycled material and simple mechanical devices – to photography, video installations and complex multimedia room installations. Nevertheless, his works never emphasize the technical but instead create a kind of quiet poetry.