

Pause, not Paradise

By Mikkel Bogh

In the last few years, Sophia Kalkau's work with visual art has been circling around the relationship between picture, object, space and narrative. With a number of works that have introduced a special poetic-minimalist sensibility into the saliently spatially oriented art of the present day, she has made a contribution to marking out a precise and nonetheless open field for sculptural investigations. Her sculptures and prop-like objects with their frequently white surfaces, often finished to a point of perfection, emanate a serenity and morphological simplicity which cannot be mistaken. However, this aspect of the work is far from autocratic: with her delicate and precise installations, she manages to let multifarious objects and images unfold in a kind of reciprocal dialogue that also brings the surrounding space into play and as an ensemble, these objects and images generate subtly articulated and dreamlike worlds, where the narrative and the pause, the physical presence of the articles and the hush of the intervals are braided together.

Though luminously white and light in weight, these sculptural constructions and bodies never attain the unadulterated purity that they promise at first glance. Their sharp delimitation in relation to the surrounding world certainly signals the existence of an autonomous space that plays according to its own rules and seems to float above the more familiar space around which our bodies move in the here and now; in this way, they construct depicted and representation-conveying spaces. However, the game into which they enter with other bodies and buildings and elements that surround them holds them firmly in place. They bring about changes in the surroundings and they are themselves receptive to such changes: they are unstable, dependent on the surroundings and in a certain way, mutating. And this can come to be rather complicated when the articles are combined, when different kinds of spaces are brought into contact with each other, when spatial courses are broken, interrupted and terminated by walls, corners and edges and when the entire complex is secured as an aggregate in the art work's unique chignon, in its fragile synthesis, in its hapax. Sophia Kalkau's sculptures are *mélange*-places.

Luminously white and light in weight, like hovering images, like backlit pictures, but also matte, local, immovable. With Sophia Kalkau's sculptures, we have moved past the time-honored schism between the pure and the impure, so often delineated as diametrical opposites and employed as notions for two incompatible conceptual modes and sensibilities that always demand that we make up our mind and choose one side for the other. Her works situate themselves just as far away from classicism's straight lines and chilly geometric spirit and just as remotely from the Baroque-Romantic's complicated and interminably folded unseizability; her work's aesthetic sphere of action might sooner be characterized as a temperate region, inside of which one discovers features from both extremes, a region that is founded on a both-and principle rather than on a logical and exclusive either-or. On the formal level, her works could be characterized as collocations of dissociated spatial elements within one and the same figure or as figures within

which several different kinds of order and several different structures exist alongside one another. Uniting, binding together and combining – these are, of course, fundamental procedures in all creative thought and intellectual activity, and they similarly take place in complex social and cultural processes. What is important, though, is to keep in mind that these occurrences of merging and reciprocal approach do not come into being through the vehicle of simple addition. More than this, they have the capacity to generate new meaning, thanks to an elementary human faculty of picture formation, that is to say, on account of the picture's capacity to propagate meaning above and beyond different experiential areas, because it simultaneously restrains this meaning in a kind of neutral and fictional condition, elevated above that which has been experienced concretely. But whereas many of the pictures that we form and with which we surround ourselves in our culture can be said to possess a preservative and stabilizing function, the pictorial aspect in Sophia Kalkau's sculptures is aimed at keeping the processes open and alive and through this, that which has been experienced intimately is rendered universal, formal, transportable and accessible. Luminously white and light in weight, but not necessarily pure in the sense of being cleansed of all irrelevant worldly noise. Luminously white and light in weight: that is to say, first and foremost: anonymous, rich in possibilities, polysemantic. Like pictures.

Several characteristics of Sophia Kalkau's art works tempt one to use terms like purity, autonomy, abstract geometry and formal linearity, terms that correspond to certain reductive tendencies in modernist art. In their typically matte white surfaces and in their precisely delimited contours, one can spot a volition to keep the work closed up around its own little space. In doing so, however, one would be completely missing their expressive potential; one would be mistaking entirely their localized, ventilated and fundamentally mutating character; one would be discounting their evident and positive openness and their poetically investigative character, which does not rule out beforehand the opposing tendencies' peaceful co-existence and which gives preference to the never concluded and dynamic interplay. And what will presumably come to light is that even there, the information they communicate will be too unaddressed and freely floating to be able to neutralize their out-and-out foreignness, which simply does not fit whatsoever into the familiar ideological oppositions, such as that which exists between the poetics of commitment and the poetics of abstraction. One might thus try to envision an entirely different kind of – plastically expressed, in this case – sensibility that always penetrates its way deeper down into the substance than any analysis of the ideological substance would ever be in a position to apprehend: down there, where the forms have still not detached themselves from their dynamic source and have not yet found a place for themselves in the universe of fixed values.

Sculpture as a game. A game between spaces, a game between places and non-places. Games of places and spaces. Here, 'game' designates something moveable and changeable: an activity. It is also indicative of the possibility of a playin bound by rules. In either case, it is something that transpires in time; it is an open situation with unpredictable outcomes, and maybe without any outcomes at all. And nonetheless, Sophia Kalkau's works possess a markedly static appearance, neither statuesque nor massive, but rather fixated, in the manner of tableaux or temporary constellations. Here, the game takes place between, on the one side, the sculpture's way of

setting a conditional circumstance, a figure, into the world, at this very place which it creates - as it sets, and on the other side, the neutralization of the concretely present world that the sculpture brings about in its capacity of being fiction and dream-like image. Places are occupied and marked out within the space, but we are simultaneously dealing with a sort of non-places, utopias and constructions that lift them themselves up over the place, up into a more homeless and unfathomable space.

Utopia is the conception of a place that does not yet exist, an other place, measured against which reality's imperfections can stand out in relief. In this sense, utopia represents the possibility of change. In its perverted form, utopia involves a pure escape into a dreamed and perfect world that no longer accommodates the multiplicity and changeability of the factual and lived-in world. On the other hand, when it enters in a game with the local here-and-now, utopia is purely and simply a function of human beings' imaginative capacity, of the human capability to think beyond that which is factually right at hand, beyond the situation, beyond the temporal and spatial context. The modernistic sculptural work is utopian to the extent that it lays claim to a complete sense of independence with respect to the surrounding culture; it encloses a space that yearns to be neutral, unaffected and self-sufficient, elevated above time and space. In Sophia Kalkau's sculptures, the utopian and the neutral play an entirely different role. Here, the utopian, expressed directly within the art works' whiteness, occupies a place that is centrally positioned between sensual multiplicity and pure abstract conceptions or forms, manifesting itself as a figure that conjoins the substance and the forms. Thanks to the utopian, a changeable, moveable and fluid world can be transposed into figures that render this world conceivable rather than merely amorphously perceptible. What is so special about these works, is that, at the same time they never relinquish their connection to experience, that they are constantly insisting on their anchoring within a surrounding space and on their dependency on a mobile and bodily participating viewer. As neutral figures, erected with the greatest precision and placed inside the space before a viewer, they establish the connection between that which is and that which could be: they indicate a route between the intimate experience and thought's free, anonymous and ego-less game. Utopian, but not impossible; neutral, but not indifferent. Their space is embossed with the mark of ideality, but this is an incomplete and provisional ideality, an ideality with complications, an ideality that casts its sidelong glance at the way of the world. Spaces after spaces, spaces upon spaces, spaces within spaces; walls, corners and edges, transitions, entrances and egresses, projections, curvatures and hollowings. Not devoid of rules, but independent of any over-ordering system. No simple geometry can describe these spatial variations and mutations. However, we can follow them, step by step. Sometimes soaring.

Translated by Dan A. Marmorstein