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Hush

....is almost no word at all. It is one of the juxtapositions of letters which is both graphic and in utterance appears with a resistance that is almost physically detectable. As such, it is not difficult to say, but it grates on the ear with its three consonants against its single vowel, and the angry dial tone of the ssshhs glides over in a faint lisp. Even so the word is almost palpably beautiful in its associative-sonorous connection between and twilight – one cannot avoid thinking of the old imperative, “Hush” at the same time that “dusk” also registers in the unconscious.

There is something similarly quiet and down-played about Sophia Kalkau’s sculptures, which all seem to have their own hush with them – even though they in no way find themselves in twilight or act mysteriously. Their hush is there by virtue of a constant alternation between the tangibility of the solid geometrical forms (skittle, sphere, cube, pipe) and a unique uncertainty somewhere between the form and its surface. Her sculptures function by means of a distinctive reticence, which opens the geometry – in a concept which provides space for an aesthetic fragility in the otherwise robust sculptural body.

It can seem paradoxical to assert of a sculptor that her work is not completely tangible; and to say that there is a disquiet in the form could likewise be taken as an insult. But in relation to everyone who, like Sophia Kalkau works with the delimitations of sculpture and its surroundings, it is, in any case, the most suitable choice of words. Kalkau’s sculptures are not things, but appearances. In contrast to radical minimalism’s fixation on the closed, the intrinsic form of the sculpture (a space, a location and a functional content for every component of the object) Kalkau announces a certain fruitful uncertainty in the sculptural form.

There is an ambiguity or obfuscation built into even the most stringent of her works. Slowly at first, initially almost imperceptibly, one becomes *in doubt* when confronted with her objects. Their immediate clarity and pure formal logic is gradually replaced as one’s gaze travels around, by an ambivalence. It is a contemporary version of the particular immanent restlessness, which animates an Egyptian monumental sculpture of a pharaoh, or an Archaic Greek male sculpture, a *kouros*: these are figures which occupy space, first with calm and gravity, but subsequently – when one’s gaze has briefly rested on them – the gravity yields to dizziness before the closed mass of the form. One inhabits the same space as the sculpture and inevitably measures one’s own body against it, but reaches a point where one’s consciousness can no longer maintain the pure weight of the sculpture. One is compelled to shift focus to the figure’s surface, its outline rather than its mass. It does not turn into an image, it remains a sculptural body – but nonetheless it is as if even the heaviest and most sluggish sculpture is eternally bound to a lightness which seems to accompany the relationship between surface and depth, form and space.

Once these sculptures have caught the eye in this fashion, there is no way back. One is drawn into an exchange with the sculpture's surface, its edge against the surrounding world; the experience of surface fits intimately together with the experience of space, and constitutes a contrast to the orientation based on corporeal fixed points, with which we would otherwise initiate any encounter with sculpture. We need, in other words, a deeper phenomenological anchoring in relation to the sculpture and strive to attain a banal and sensory-based contact. What we first search for is the stability of material; we can (by means of the gaze and hand) touch the form and, in the first instance, content ourselves with a certain degree of sensory identification – is it stone, glass, wood, steel, clay or plaster? This identification produces momentary calm and clarification, even if we have no knowledge of anything other than the most basic properties of the material – is it mineral, organic, industrial, cold or hot, veined or smooth? But with Kalkau the form is consciously imbued with an element of uncertainty, which reduces the tempo of the sensual appropriation of it. One meets visual resistance and the unequivocal identification is problematised. The 'minimalist' white surface Kalkau often prefers becomes a cover over a form which does not fulfil the promises of a standard decoding – and quite a thin cover at that: the ovoid of plaster turns out to be made of wood, the object reveals itself as having been turned carefully on a lathe by the artist, not industrially produced. And the hard, smooth coat of lacquer, which, like the form, gives one the expectation that one's gaze will completely glance off it, is, on closer examination organic like an eggshell – with a delicate-sensory roughness in the surface, which Kalkau has created by abrading the lacquer with sandpaper after spraying.

All these elements are parts of a finely calculated play with the relationship between surface, form and space, as perception apprehends them and processes them in order to understand them. It is a condition of uncertainty which retains the gaze and the body between visuality, vision and reality. But before we fix on this sculptor as the calculating Kalkau, we need to take an even closer look; this is not a case of a banal post-post-Modern game with existential and sculptural building blocks, but, on the contrary, a laborious quest. Kalkau, in extremely classic fashion, is investigating a restlessness in the sculptural form, which is far older than late minimalism's 1960s analytical stratagems. The artist's work has not been naively conceived in the white clinic of Modernism. This is ancient and first-order stuff-of-the-mind and of sculpture.

At the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek's exhibition "From Hexa to the Vase" (2007) the museum was, with its eternal meeting of ancient and modern, the perfectly natural setting for Kalkau's sculptures. The exhibition became a staging of the fundamental elements of sculpture in itself, and Kalkau's objects had found their natural habitat in the museum's collections, works of art and general ambience.

In Kalkau's art the sculptural form is an appearance, a slow coming into being before our eyes. These objects have their very own temporality, which is not easily reduced to form alone. It is in

this that her anti-minimalism consists – without any programme, manifesto or drum-roll
cocksureness. It is a clear-eyed resistance in the work itself, a gainsaying of the intrinsic,
autonomous work, but never in a preaching or postulating manner. Kalkau never falls victim to
over-confidence, even if there is nothing insecure in her works, no trembling hands, neither
artistically nor on behalf of the challenging sculptural form. In the geometrically tense formation
of figures with their ambiguous surfaces, which constitutes her work until now, there is an opening
for a sense of the diversity in the world's and the work's morphology. Her sculptures incite and
invite, but always keep their distance from any closed, bombastic expression. Vases, ovals, tablets,
pipes and mirrors collect and assimilate, comment and contradict. They have sufficient strength to
form clear after-images around the sculpture's form. Kalkau lets history be history, the work
remain a work – and doubt be fertile.

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(slightly edited version of a text for the exhibition "From Hexa to the Vase", Ny Carlsberg
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