

Excerpt from review, Weekendavisen, May 9th. 2008.

Sophia Kalkau - Dog and Die, Kunsthallen Brandts

By Mette Sandbye, art critic

A woman, wrapped in red cloth, lies or sits on a painter's table in an empty white room. Only a fraction of her long dark hair shows at the top of the wrapping. This takes place in a series of photos which define the situation as a time sequence. Is this photography, performance, or sculpture? All in one, actually. Such researched encounters between the genres have been of interest to the artist Sophia Kalkau (b. 1960) for some time, but they manifest themselves with great weight and conviction at her new show at Kunsthallen Brandts. Something of a lone rider within the Danish artworld, she is known for her austere minimal white sculptural forms which she arranged on the floor among her other works at a rather grand exhibition at Glyptoteket last year. They looked like plaster, but were made of wood. By exploring simple classical forms, like the cube, sphere, egg, trapezium, prism and cylinder, Kalkau enters into a wide ranging dialogue with sculptural traditions from the ancient Egyptians to minimalist icons like Donald Judd.

Several of these characteristic 'Kalkausian' figures are to be seen at Brandts, but the current show consists mainly of more recent works in which her dedication to photography is evident not as something radically different from the sculptures, but rather as further consequential studies of themes encountered in her sculptures. To Kalkau's already lucid formal investigations, a theatrical and autobiographical aspect is added in a quite natural way – an aspect, which you soon realize has been there all the time, if you are familiar with her works. How come? As could be seen in her works at Charlottenborg exhibition *Danskjävlar* which are included in the new exhibition, she has been occupied with a photographic series in which she uses her own body as a sculptural form, a form which behaves strangely when exposed to different kinds of external influences – dressed in white, playfully interacting with a big wooden egg; or as an elegant caryatid dressed in white, or wearing a white lamp shade or funnel covering her head; or as a red figure that twists and turns like a mermaid or a caterpillar, and wakes up on a table, or as a sleeping form dressed in white lying down, now suddenly quite different from the red figure in motion. But where does the autobiographical element come in? It can be seen in the two new extensive photographic series which she created when she lost her hair while undergoing a cancer treatment, now happily over. In the series "Out of my hair", she has photographed the nape of her neck every day for about a month. We see how her hair, which had been carefully arranged in a bun, gradually disappears until no more than a few wisps of hair are left on the handsome crown. In the series, playfully but ambiguously titled, *Mops*, she tries on three different wigs before losing her hair which is therefore still visible beneath the wigs. The photos also show the nape of the neck in a simple and pure arrangement. Both series eliminate autobiography. Instead, they balance between something passionate and moving, and something which creates a distance and investigates form. Therefore

you lose yourself in the wigs' play of colours, and suddenly find that some appear happy and others sad. The artist, Hanne Wilke, also turned her disease into a photographic performance, but Kalkau has played down the private aspects, and aspects relating to disease to a minimum. Sophia Kalkau makes abstract sculpture that always seems anchored in everyday life. Her earlier sculptures explored classical forms, but here we encounter oversized hairpins and pearl necklaces relating to the fragility and loss of femininity apparent in her photos. On the other hand, the photos are boldly balanced against a pair of Suspended Balls, another ambiguous title. This simple and austere exhibition, complex yet comprehensible, invites various accounts: a feminist reading, which refers to the person behind the artist, an existential meditation on the theme of man's mortality, and an analysis which proceeds through form and medium. Such analysis shows Kalkau in dialogue with a great undergrowth of traditions from classical sculpture to the performance practices of the 1960's. In all its aspects, this is something of a tour de force.