

SEDIMENT AND TRANSCENDENCE

Form, surface and decoration in Lone Skov Madsen's ceramic works

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Generally speaking, ceramic decoration has to do with adding to a form a layer of meaning which it does not bring about on its own accord. If you do decorate, then, and you do so just as soon as you approach the work with color, glazing or ornamentation in mind, then it's because you want to tell about something in particular, which the form in itself is not able to express. Colors, lines, ornamentation and texture are necessary for accomplishing this. There is a tradition for this, and the history of ceramics has a lot to say, especially about the interplay between form and decoration. It's actually quite a lot that has been communicated in decorated form throughout the times, and the decorated ceramic article has been given its own space in the history of art, precisely due to this peculiar and difficult phenomenon.

So that the decoration should not seem pasted on, superficial and therefore inconsequential, the ceramist must conceive of the form in an underplayed fashion, in such a way that it is not until we attain the resultant harmony with the decoration that the form comes into its consummate manifestation. A complicated form is often impossible to deal with on that level - a simple form is easier. Ceramists, therefore, usually choose relatively simple forms to decorate on. Lone Skov Madsen also does this - but far from all the time.

A characteristic feature of Lone Skov Madsen's approach is her consistent way of working up the surfaces. This applies to the platters, covered by an almost nature-like filigree. This applies to the vases, where the very technique which has been employed for building up the work deposits ornamental traces in the surface. Or, as in the project entitled "20,623 Black Points on White Containers" from 1997, this approach can manifest itself as an examination of the optical phenomena that revoke our customary notions about the objects' boundaries. Most people are familiar with Vaserey's remarkable op-art paintings which seem to either bulge out from or be sucked into the wall behind them. Or Bridget Riley's flickering images, which make the viewer unsure of where the actual surface is situated. - A rather hovering but strongly suggestion-inducing experience. In the aforementioned project, many of the spots of glaze were distributed over half a dozen vases in white clay. The vases appeared as weightless and metaphysical objects of a kind, where the very method of decoration utilized made it impossible for the viewer's eye to fathom the form and fall to rest on any firm optical ground.

Lone Skov Madsen's ways of finishing within the domain of decoration have absolutely everything to do with nature - but mostly with the nature of the clay and the ceramic material. Certain surfaces are called to mind, surfaces that we know about from conches and from microscopies of the very smallest aquatic creatures. But there are also cliffs, stones and other

mineral sediments on the list of associations. Everything, though, has been implemented with such a dry and insistent objectivity that you do not get, as you so often do with modern ceramics, the sensation that it is just a matter of copying nature. There is more at stake here. In Lone Skov Madsen's ornamentation, the surface is not only representing itself, but also just as much creates a possibility for absorption and transcendence.

In an interview made a few years ago, the painter Per Kirkeby said that one of modernism's great crimes was to deprive the ornamental of the possibility for intimacy and zeal. I completely agree with him. Now perhaps there are limits to how directly ornamental a work by Lone Skov Madsen is. In any event, it is not ornamental in a Bindsbøllian sense, with figures that swim around on the surfaces and amuse one another. Neither is it in a classical sense, with accumulations of figurations that monotonously chatter along in complete accord. It's rather another kind of ornamentalism - maybe even a new ornamentalism, where the monotony is absolutely present - but never the predictability.

Total uniformity dulls the sight, and one would quickly lose interest in encircling the form or the wholeness if the decorative figurations were identical and placed on the object with a constant uniform distance between them. But it is precisely the small differences on Lone Skov Madsen's works that make us interested in them - interested enough to go in depth with them, so to speak!

The forms in Lone Skov Madsen's world are issued in what are frequently very extended series. There is a clear connection between the consistency that she establishes in her investigations of surfaces, material and ornamentalism and the efforts that carry the exploration of form systems. It is the repetitions and the variations in the sequences that absorb her interest. What we have here is a cool and rational approach, which - almost against expectations - emanates utterly sensual and palpably interesting results.

In the beginning, the forms were distinct. There were simple curved platters and serene statue-like vase forms - almost traditional. In recent years, the forms touch upon the somewhat oblique. For example, there is the series "Miniatures", from 1998 - 2000, where the forms, on the other hand, are often tightened up by the many points of glaze which also imbue them with their own steadfast insistence. We know of such an analogous strategy in sculptor Tony Cragg's attempts with "harmonizations" of form juxtapositions effected through the aid of uniform surface treatments.

Lately, Lone Skov Madsen has resumed her work with platters. These are works where this, her chosen constancy of form, must often fight for its own existence. The platters are being assaulted by all kinds of structures. By modeled and glazed and dramatic texturalities that we haven't been seeing in her works since the middle of the nineties. The lumps, the blotches and the excesses of glaze from that time were, then, merely dispatched away for provisional safekeeping somewhere in her vast reservoir of

experiences with texture. The Morandi-like silence that, for several years, has been predominant in her works, is now disturbed by an almost volcanic activity.

In spite of the changes in Lone Skov Madsen's contribution as a ceramist, it is nonetheless easy to point out the constant values: the entirely deliberate intercourse with form and material - and the utterly poetic and meditative open ornamentalism.

SEDIMENT OG TRANSCENDENS

Form, overflade og dekoration i Lone Skov Madsens keramiske arbejder

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I almindelighed handler dekoration af keramik om at tilføje en form et lag af betydning, som denne ikke tilvejebringer af sig selv. Dekorerer man altså, og det gør man jo så snart, man nærmer sig værket med farve, glasur eller ornamentik i sinde, så er det fordi man ønsker at fortælle noget særligt, som formen ikke i sig selv formår at udtrykke. Der må nødvendigvis farver, linier, ornamenter og stoflighed til.

Det er der nu også tradition for, og keramikens historie har meget at fortælle om netop samspillet mellem form og dekoration. Det er ikke småting, der er blevet formidlet i dekoreret form gennem tiden, og den dekorede keramiske genstand har fået sit eget rum i kunsthistorien netop på grund af dette særprægede og vanskelige fænomen.

For at dekorationen ikke skal virke påklistret, overflødig og dermed ligegyldig, må keramikeren tænke formen underspillet, sådan at den først i endelig samklang med dekorationen falder helt på plads. En kompliceret form er ofte umulig at have med at gøre på det plan - en enkel, lidt nemmere. Keramikere vælger derfor almindeligvis relativt simple former at dekorere på. Det gør Lone Skov Madsen også - men langtfra altid.

Et karakteristisk træk ved Lone Skov Madsens indfaldsvinkel til dekoration, er hendes konsekvente bearbejdnings af overflader. Det kan være fade dækket af nærmest naturlignende filigran. Det kan være vaser, hvor selve den teknik, der er benyttet til opbygningen, afsætter ornamentale spor i overfladen. Eller det kan, som i projektet "20.623 sorte punktnedslag på hvide beholdere" fra 1997, være en undersøgelse af de optiske fænomener, der ophæver vore vante forestillinger om objekternes grænser. De fleste kender Vaserelys bemærkelsesværdige op-art malerier, der synes enten at bule ud fra eller suge sig ind i væggen bag dem. Eller Bridget Rileys flimrende billeder, som gør beskueren usikker på, hvor den egentlige overflade befinder sig. - En temmelig svævende, men stærkt suggererende oplevelse. I førnævnte projekt var de mange glasurprikker fordelt over en halv snes vaser i hvidt ler. Vaserne fremstod som en art vægtløse og metafysiske

objekter, hvor selve den anvendte dekorationssmetode gjorde det umuligt for beskuerens øje at begribe formen og falde til ro på fast optisk grund.

Lone Skov Madsens bearbejdningsindendørsdekorationens område har absolut med natur at gøre - men mest med lerets og de keramiske materialers natur. Der er mindelser om overflader, som vi kender fra konkylier og fra mikroskopier af de mindste havdyr. Men der er også klipper, sten og andre mineralske sedimenter på associationslisten. Alt er dog gennemført med så tør og insisterende en saglighed, at man ikke, som det ofte ses i moderne keramik, får fornemmelsen af, at det bare handler om at efterligne natur. Der er noget mere på færde.

I Lone Skov Madsens ornamentik repræsenterer overfladen nemlig ikke bare sig selv, men skaber i ligeså høj grad mulighed for fortabelse og transcendens.

Maleren Per Kirkeby udtalte for et par år siden i et interview, at en af modernismens store forbrydelser havde været, at frakende det ornamentale muligheden for inderlighed. Det er jeg ganske enig med ham i. Nu er der måske grænser for hvor direkte ornamentalt et arbejde af Lone Skov Madsen er. Det er ihvertfald ikke i Bindsbølls forstand, med figurer, der svømmer rundt på fladerne og muntre sig med hinanden. Det er heller ikke i klassisk forstand, med mængder af ens figurationer, der monotont snakker hinanden efter munden.

Det er snarere en anden ornamentik - muligvis endda en ny ornamentik, hvor monotonien så absolut er til stede, - men aldrig forudsigeligheden.

Det helt ensartede sløver øjet, og man ville hurtigt miste interessen for at indkredse form eller helhed, hvor de dekorative figurationer var identiske og placeret med ens mellemrum på objektet. Men netop de små forskelle på Lone Skov Madsens værker, får os til at interessere os for dem - og så at sige gå i dybden med dem.....!

Formerne i Lone Skov Madsens verden udkommer i ofte meget lange serier. Der er en klar forbindelse mellem den konsekvens, hun anlægger i sine undersøgelser af overflader, stof og ornamentik, og de bestræbelser, der bærer udforskningen af formsystemerne. Det er gentagelser og variationer i forløbene, der optager hende.

Der er tale om en cool, rationel indfaldsvinkel, som næsten mod forventning, afgiver yderst sensuelle og taktile interessante resultater

I begyndelsen var formerne klare. Det var enkle buede fade og afklarede statuariske vaseformer - næsten traditionelle. I de senere år tangerer formerne nærmest det lidt skæve, for eksempel i serien "Miniaturer" fra 1998 - 2000, der til gengæld ofte strammes op af de mange glasurpunkter, som også bibringer dem en egen trodsig insisteren. Vi kender en tilsvarende strategi fra billedhuggeren Tony Craggs forsøg med "harmoniseringer" af formsammenstillinger ved hjælp af ensartede overfladebearbejdningsmetoder.

På det seneste, har Lone Skov Madsen genoptaget arbejdet med fade. Det er arbejder, hvor denne hendes valgte formkonstant ofte må kæmpe for sin eksistens. Fadene bliver angrebet af allehånde strukturer: Af modellerede og glaserede og dramatiske stofligheder, som vi ikke har set i hendes værker siden midt i halvfemserne. Klumperne, klatterne og

glasurekscesserne fra dengang var altså blot sendt til midlertidig opbevaring i hendes store reservoir af stoflige erfaringer. Den Morandi-agtige stilhed, der i flere år har været dominerende i hendes arbejder, forstyrres nu af nærmest vulkansk aktivitet.

Trods alle forandringerne i Lone Skov Madsens indsats som keramiker, er det alligevel let at udpege de konstante værdier: Den helt bevidste omgang med form og materiale - og den yderst poetiske og meditativt åbne ornamentik.