

Time Out

Between object and artwork

In so many ways, Lone Skov Madsen and Turi Heisselberg Pedersen's exhibition at the Danish Museum of Art and Design constitutes an opening: an opening toward new forms of artistic expression for the two ceramists, both of whom are well-established luminaries in Danish ceramics. It is an opening toward objects from the museum's own storage rooms, which appear to have lost their power to attract attention and allure a contemporary public. And at the same time, it is an opening toward the viewer, who steps into a form universe that is recognizable albeit transformed.

The two artists have been making a voyage of discovery in the museum's storage rooms and have selected a group of objects that embody the various styles of different historical periods. Their gaze has been open and their sense about the objects' communicative qualities has been operating intuitively.

What we have here is a dialogue, where the chosen objects have been allowed to speak in their own language but where the artistic responses from the ceramists open up to completely new meanings. The original objects from the museum's collection are being brought forth in a wholly new light. They are communicating on other premises than the original ones, which in many instances stipulated that these objects should function as privileged examples of the very finest that a craftsmanship and industrial culture could bear forth. In the course of almost a century and a half of the applied and decorative arts museums' collective history, this role has been played out some time ago – designers now look many other places than toward museums for gaining inspiration and they have a much freer attitude when it comes to the past's hierarchies of taste. This entails that the exhibited objects communicate on pure aesthetic premises to a far greater extent – the viewers want to see something beautiful, inspiring or interesting rather than some exemplary model or ideal. A great many objects have fallen away from view on this account and have slipped through the mesh and wound up in the storage rooms.

Asking two ceramists to move out on an exploratory excursion into this accumulation of objects without any other premises than nurturing inspiration toward dialogue has entailed that completely new aspects of these objects have been rediscovered and thrown into the spotlight. In this meeting without stipulated conditions and in the absence of any expectations about what niche of history the objects are supposed to fit into, their significance and their meaning are emancipated - the line in a lathed table leg, a simple white milk pitcher, a classicist baluster or a modernist drinking glass. Objects like these are transformed and transposed into artistic expressions. New artworks have emerged on the background of the old ones and the result is an exhibition that reveals lines, forms and colors which, in all their simplicity, communicate.

Instead of being bound up with time, as such, the exhibition comes to manifest itself as a playful and universal vocabulary of forms.

With this exhibition, Lone Skov Madsen and Turi Heisselberg Pedersen are challenging their previous way of working and also the formal idiom that has resulted from their efforts. Each one of the artists, in her own way, has created relations that run transverse to time and changing ideals about taste. In doing so, they have been working with art as a universal language consisting of aesthetic and form-related choices that are cognate, notwithstanding the fact that they have been drawn from widely diverse historic preconditions. The upshot of this is that the two artists have moved away from the exclusively individualistic expressive point of departure that characterizes the Western world's art and have entered into dialogue with the entire treasure chest of form that precedes this outlook. In an overall perspective, the exhibition accordingly reflects the tradition of craftsmanship and handicraft that Lone Skov Madsen and Turi Heisselberg Pedersen, as ceramists, have grown out from: objects that bear a close relationship to everyday life's connections, a tradition that harks all the way back to when the medieval potters threw their earthenware pots in order to create items for household use. Throughout the course of the twentieth century, craftsmanship has been developing, step by step, into adopting the same reflexive position as visual art. And just as visual art has persistently and constantly been challenging the idea of what art is, craftsmanship has been challenging its own functionally stipulated frames. What we see at the exhibition is a clear and distinct manifestation of handicraft's current status: functionality is the point of origin, while the artistic interpretation is primary.

With Turi Heisselberg Pedersen, the potter's tradition is almost an artistically fundamental impulse, operating in ensemble with an eye trained on form. Jars, pots, vessels, dishes and bowls in interminable variations have, for a number of years, played through the register of investigating the relationship between form, line and space. Series, repetitions and variations on different themes characterize her works and her formal idiom, which is delicately balanced between geometric stringency and organic sensibility. The surrounding space and the negative space between the works have gradually come to play a more and more important role.

In the current exhibition, she has been making use of the museum's objects as articles whose 'tone' she has distilled. Or else she has addressed her efforts toward offering a reflection on the object's function; this can be seen especially in the smaller works, where recognizable form elements interpenetrate their way into and out between each other in varying series. Or she addresses pure form, as in the larger works that occupy the space directly as abstract, sculptural forms. For Turi Heisselberg Pedersen, the exhibition's relatively bound

point of departure has accordingly opened up for a liberation of a formal idiom that has been germinating for several years.

Lone Skov Madsen has been posing a serious challenge to her previous artistic practice by, among other things, constructing large forms that are poised on the boundary between sculpture and article of furniture. The approach is almost scenographic in the installations where she juxtaposes the museum's objects with her own works and consequently brings forth a new kind of expression based on visual tensions and thematic affinities.

While Turi Heisselberg Pedersen's dialogue with the museum's objects builds on a course of form that is being repeated and transformed, Lone Skov Madsen, in these works, calls the museum's objects into play quite directly. For example, a water jug and drinking glasses from the museum's collection placed alongside her own cactus-like form activate a chain of associations that extend beyond each one of the objects' meanings. In another kind of work, on the other hand, she is letting herself be inspired, as far as form is concerned, by a sculptural form of expression where the original form has been abstracted in a mixture of organic decomposition and crystalline growth.

Regardless of how far the artists go in their interpretation of objects from the Danish Museum of Art and Design's collection, the world of form is a recognizable one. Its point of origin in the historical articles can be spotted quite directly as well in the exhibition. What this implies is that a dialogue has been established. With this, a new perspective on Lone Skov Madsen and Turi Heisselberg Pedersen's artworks opens up, of course. But what is also established, to an equally great degree, is a new view of the museum's objects that are kept in storage. The parallel worlds of form enrich one another mutually. In doing so, they also enrich the viewer who happens to have her/his senses open to how forms communicate across different times and spaces.

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