

SPACESHIFT and PLUNGE

In 1987 Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller exhibited in Galleri Specta in Århus a joint project which they called SOUL. The project consisted of a painting and a sculpture which entered into a rational rotation which stood for itself. The project in the exhibition space represented only its own space.

In 1988 and 1989 Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller continue their work with this space, which is divided up in pairs in the following way: HAT/ULTRAMARIN WITH 4 HOLES, »EYES« – SNOWMAN/SCOTTISH CHECK – BARREL/MIST.

These three works are likewise entitled SOUL. The two categories of paintings and sculptures function as complementary sizes. Also these works are placed in the exhibition space, so that each pair function as a unit, and thus represent their own space. There is no question of installations in space, as no beginning or ending can be read in the works.

A description of the formal efforts to occupy oneself with painting and sculpture as complementary sizes.

How is the connection between painting and sculpture? What does the space of the three works look like?

HAT/ULTRAMARIN WITH FOUR HOLES, »EYES«: The hat is a model of a particular hat. It refers to a photograph of physicist Niels Bohr, where he is wearing such a hat. In this work the hat is made a little bit bigger than a real hat. The crown of the hat has a large and deep impression, which hints at the softness of the felt of the hat. This impression is a shade stronger than what one normally sees in a hat. The painting contains the same degree of exaggeration. The four holes »the eyes« are placed in the middle of the paintings blue field. But there is nothing centripetal about them. The four holes / »eyes« are directed each in their own direction. This is really emphasised if one regards the holes as »eyes«. In spite of the beholder's own eyes' effort to concentrate on a fixed point he has to accept the paintings »scattered glance«. No coordinated whole exists. The connection between the painting and the sculpture is emphasised by the position of the hat at the side of the painting on the wall at the level of the eye in the blue field.

There is a mutual reference between the pressure of the hand in the crown of the hat and the paintings 4 holes/ »eyes«. The hat (Niels Bohrs) is a local phenomenon with a large effect. It is the plunge from local space into universal space, which can be understood both as two

separate worlds and as two worlds that merge into each other. This work is SPACE.

In the work SNOWMAN/SCOTTISH CHECK it is TIME, which is underlined and emphasised through rapid space shift and plunge between painting and sculpture. The SNOWMAN is composed of three round forms, whose surface is slightly uneven. The snowmans nose is long, pointed and smooth and has the form of a cone. The sculpture stands in tarnished silver. It is placed on the floor outside the Scottish check painting. This painting is made up by horizontal and vertical lines of colour, which give an effect of depth through the lines going under and over each other. Picture-wise the horizontal and vertical lines bind together the surface and the »under-surface«. It is a structure space whose inner and outer space come together at the points where the colour lines cut each other. These can be regarded as melting points of different tracks of time. The Scottish checked painting points immediately to the Scottish highlands. Both snowman and Scottish check contain the same crystalline structure. The crystalline structure is present both in the Scottish highland hills and in the snowmans ice crystals. The phenomenon snowman is – in spite of its sculptural form in the work – of a fleeting character to which the silver colour refers. In the change from substance to non-substance the snowman disappears in the picture and lays itself as a veil of rime. The transparent lines of colour that have the character of a veil are moreover a reference to Italian renaissance painting, where employment with the worlds of ideas and phenomena are changing all the time.

BARREL/MIST. The barrel is smooth and painted white. The barrel is turned inside out; the bands of the barrel show negatively, that is to say that the barrels normal outside is turned inwards. This sculpture is placed next to the painting, which is a large field of foggy mist. In this painting we are made aware of the foggy space's nothingness. The visible/invisible become two complementary sizes, as both are contained in the work as a whole and in the works individual parts. The barrel is placed upside down and contains all and nothing.

Through the SOUL works Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller work to explore the relationship between ABSENCE/PRESENCE and ILLUSION/REALITY at every level. Each work offers a different twist to space and time change. The world is no longer stable and firmly connected, but moveable and transient, and held together by weak and changeable connections. There-

by a capability of movement is created in the works themselves. It ends with HAT, SNOWMAN and BARREL end up as fictions, and ULTRAMARIN WITH 4 HOLES/»EYES«, SCOTTISH CHECK and MIST becoming fields of reality.

In the paintings the changes of space are more clearly seen because of the two-dimensional character of the works. The quick change springs more clearly to the eyes. On the other hand the sculptures have the changes in themselves. The three-dimensional works »hold« the fiction. Against which the two-dimensional works open up for other realities of space.

»Fictions think, and pictures think, but they do not change into ideas before they stop and reflect, reason; ideas and their structures point at best to that place, where something just eludes them, the symbolism pointing to what is still unsymbolised«.

Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møllers occupation with these changes of space is a further development of their earlier works.

Mogens Møllers startingpoint is Minimal Art in the 1960's, which led up to the break with modernism's closed space. Form and content are dissolved and sculpture is without a centre. In the 1970's he used figuration to point out the mechanisms of information society. A critical relationship to society was shown in the sculpture, which always emphasized many-sidedness. In the 1980's the figurative sculptures create ambiguity and streams of associations.

As far as Dorte Dahlin is concerned there is a movement from »the Wild painting« from the beginning of the 1980's to the employment of Chinese parrallel – perspective and the western renaissance-space.

The wild painting's surface sign which drove round in a labyrinthine space, ends in the middle of the 1980's by being chopped up into alternate horizontal spaces, which remove the surface signs and thereby open up for the picture space. The depth of the picture space reappears, but not as a whole with *one* centre. The picture space is first divided up into horizontal space changes and then in both horizontal and vertical space-changes. Where the old chinese space-creation and the western renaissance-spaces central-perspective meet there is established – inside the same picture-field and at one time – both the eastern and the western world-picture.

How the moment hits the Greek brothers Cleobis and Biton.

In 1988 Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller are in Greece, where they are confronted by the antique worlds absence and presence. In Delphi they suddenly find themselves in a timelessness, where Cleobis and Biton, two marble figures from the archaic period in Greek art, stand before them in all their presence/absence. The marble figures are 2,16 meters high and are dated about 600 years B.C. Mogens Møller and Dorte Dahlin are confronted with the Greeks' idea of the world.

In order to reach perfection the Greeks sought through the art to cross the boundary between the world of the gods and the world of men. A bringing together of absence and presence, which complement each other, but which also mutually exclude each other. Particular in Greek mythology the separation between the world of men and the world of gods was emphasized. There was not given any notion to men of coming into closer contact with the gods. The course of the lives of men depended on the gods, because these ruled over fate. It was the consciousness of the frailty of existence that dominated the Greek's world of thought.

Therefore it was a question for men to create a »here and now« moment of life. The Meaning of THE MOMENT OF LIFE can be seen, amongst others, in the Greek legend of Cleobis and Biton, as told by Herodot.

The legend tells of the two brothers, who without the help of a team of oxen, drew their mother, the priestess Kydippe's carriage up to the top of a hill, where the goddess Heras' temple was. After the exhausting, but successful tour they lay down to sleep. From this sleep they never awoke. Hera had given them the best gift a human can get, namely the unconscious trance. In this trance the happy moment is maintained and they do not awake again to human consciousness of painful life.

The eye of the Egyptian King Osiris.

Osiris was the first Egyptian King who was murdered and therefore had to descend into the underworld. He was thus separated from the Egyptian sun-theology. Through him death became something present and something which the Egyptians took to themselves. In the underworld Osiris was in an unconscious trance, until his son Horus descended to him and gave him his one eye. This had the result that the soul of Osiris was set in motion – and with that was made immortal. Osiris – the eye of the soul – thus represents the complementarity between life and death. He includes with his soul the whole universe. Osiris is equal to the eye, which becomes the symbol for truth, order, justice and chaos.

In contrast to the Greek brothers Cleobis and Biton, who were kept at a point between absence and presence, Osiris' living soul overcomes both absence and presence. Both in the Egyptian world and the Greek world it was a question of complementarity between life and death; between mental conditions and physical condition. The same became valid when Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam stood in front of the sculpture of the founder of the Buddhism in Japan, the Buddha prince Shotoku. The sculpture is monumental in all its simplicity: is BEING passing volatile and concrete. Life's transitoriness resulted in the value of the moment both in the Greek religion and in Japanese Buddhism being stressed. Thereby the obtrusiveness of the concrete was removed.

Botticelli's transparent and beautiful world of ideas and Leonardo da Vinci's research of the world of phenomena.

The antique worlds interest in the relationship between presence and absence – and the interest in the renaissance of investigating this relationship – is through Botticelli's and Leonardo's work recognized in Mogens Møller and Dorte Dahlin's SOUL-works.

In Botticelli's art a transparent veil is seen. This veil separates the world of ideas from the world of phenomena, so that the ordinary world ends by disappearing in the timelessness of ideas. An example of this is the veil which separates heaven and earth in his painting »Primavera« (Spring), from the close of the 1400's. Leonardo on the other hand takes his starting point from the visible world. Through a long series of experiments the constant changeableness of reality is shown. The classical world of ideas is contrasted with changeable nature's world of phenomena. An example of this is the thorough research of grass and its negative appearance in his painting »The Annunciation« from 1492/5.

Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller have seen both paintings in Florence.

SOUL works are a plunge between the twentieth century, the Greek world, the Egyptian world and the renaissance.

Through reading Tor Nørretranders book »The Invisible« about Niels Bohr and his physics the attention of Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller was drawn to Niels Bohr's quantum mechanics that opens up for a complementary space. A complementary space which does not only work with horizontal and vertical space-change, but which also consists of spaces of apparent unmeasurable sizes. Niels Bohr wrings the classic physical picture of the world out of joint.

In the work of Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller time and space are both in and around them. The transient NOW becomes connected with past and future. Thereby both the continuous and the discontinuous are presented. SOUL balances on the SUBTLE boundary between the concrete and the transient.

The American and the European space.

The American author William S. Burroughs writes in the book »The Western Lands« about the western world's cultural heritage, which he thinks derives from »The Dead Land« – Egypt.

To Burroughs it is essential to the understanding of the western civilization to study »The Dead Land«. In the book he describes the seven souls of Egypt. REN is the secret name. SEKEM is energy, power and light. KHU is the guardian, which is responsible for man. These 3 souls are immortal. BA is the heart. KA is the soul, which is closest connected to man. KHAIBIT is the shadow and the memory. SEKHU is the remains. Burroughs transfers these old souls to our century and states, »The Venusian invasion is a takeover of the souls. Ren is degraded by Hollywood down to John Wayne levels. Sekem works for the Company. The Khus are all transparent fakes. The Bas is rotten with AIDS. The Ka is paralysed. Khaibit sits on you as a nagging wife. Sekhu is poisoned with radiation and contaminants and cancer.«²

When the American artist Barnett Newman in his text from 1948 »The sublime now« rejected beauty, – which he thought that the European inheritance of art was especially clever in supplying – it was because beauty had been degraded to a purely external thing in art. It stretched in Newman's opinion right back to the Greeks' ideal of beauty and continued up to the twentieth century, where it became completely worn down. With his background as an American artist he stated that it was necessary to free oneself from the European inheritance of art. He wished to occupy himself with the sublime, and it was therefore necessary to start by defining absolute space and time. Whether it succeeded or not is a question. As William S. Burroughs expresses it at the end of the 1980's there is something that indicates that the European inheritance of art is not something that can be shaken off.

As the Romanian/French historian of religion Mircea Eliade explains it, the Greeks' ideal of beauty is a purely external thing. The ideal of beauty is only a sublimation of the painful acknowledgement that life is transient and that the moment of life precisely for that reason is sweet-

ened by beauty. The ideal of beauty thus becomes a »veil« for a wish for the sublime.

And as Newman also stated in »The Sublime Now«, Man has a natural longing for the sublime.³ Newmans belief in the sublime had the character of religiosity. With the American artist Ad Reinhardt it was not alone religiosity but a universal historic state which was put to the test. Through his studies of Asiatic art and culture Reinhardt became aware of some conditions of space which develop the more one moves inside them. He drew parallels therefore between western and Asiatic culture.

American artists like Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt were not only out to repudiate the European inheritance of culture, but they wished to remove themselves from the representative side of European art. They sought for an inner space in art which was in constant development instead of the final space which representation hindered from opening out. With Minimal Art in the 1960's the final break with this closed space arrived.

The works of Dorte Dahlin and Mogens Møller enclose the Proto-European story. In addition to this comes their positioning at the cutoff point between Minimal Arts bursting of the closed space and the labyrinthine space of the 1980's. This has developed itself emphatically in the works of spaceshift and plunge.

Vibeke Petersen
Ph.D on Art history

Translated by Esmond Goss

NOTES:

- 1 Per Aage Brandt »Sky og krystal. Træk af en postmoderne erkendelse«, s. 57.
- 2 William S. Burroughs »The Western Lands«, s. 6
- 3 Barnett Newman: The Sublime Now. »Tigers Eye« vol. I no. 6, 1948, pg. 51 f.

LITTERATURE:

Per Aage Brandt »Sky og Krystal. Træk af en postmoderne erkendelse«, Copenhagen 1986.

Stig Brøgger, Else Marie Bukdahl, Hein Heinsen (ed.) »Omkring det Sublime«, København 1985.

William S. Burroughs »The Western Lands«, London 1988.

Mircea Eliade »De religiøse ideers historie«, vol. I-III, Copenhagen 1983.

Roger Lipsey »An Art of Our Own. The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art«, Boston og Shaftesbury, 1988.

Barnett Newman: The Sublime Now. »Tigers Eye« vol I no. 6, 1948.

Tor Nørretranders »Det udelelige. Niels Bohrs aktualitet i fysik, mystik og politik«, Copenhagen 1985 og 1988.