

TOVE STORCH

Moiré and Illusion

Helle Brøns examines the work of young Danish artist Tove Storch, whose subdued, yet acute investigations of perception and presence represent an everyday formalism located between image and sculpture.

The wall of Tove Storch's studio sports a handful of lines attached to the surface with pins. These thinly drawn lines are actually paper cut-outs covered on both sides in sellotape. They are quite modest as preliminary studies go, yet they indicate some of the dominant contours of her work. Their appearance is delicate and "home-made" yet they literally underline their own presence. This duality – a presence at once underplayed and insistent – is characteristic of Storch's work. Many of her pieces centre on the meeting between the virtual modelling process that takes place in the digital world and the objects of the physical world outside the computer. The simplest of lines inevitably becomes a direction in theoretic, virtual space. There is a fundamental difference between these virtual lines, existing between context and physicality, and those drawn with pencil on paper. Storch herself says that "a line in theory is nothing, while a line in reality has width". Thus the little lines on the wall of her studio can be considered the result of a translation of the line from virtual to physical reality, where it becomes bound to its physical matter. The all-too-concrete attempt at cutting it free of its sheet of paper, getting it out into the room and encapsulating it in a transparent sellotape-space is the equivalent of taking a theoretic thought and spelling – or rather cutting - it out. This is in fact the recurring theme of Storch's work: abstract ideas of spatial modes of expression and the transformations they undergo during their translation into concrete form.

Kolibri

The intention behind these initial lines is merely to emphasize the starting points of Storch's work as fundamental considerations of representation, illusion and spatiality, which statement is subsequently tested in various ways by the works themselves.

Thus her piece *Kolibri* – Hummingbird – which was one of her contributions to *Exit* – the 2007 graduate show of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen – unites a delicate, fragile expression with almost scientifically formal investigations of optic and perceptual phenomena. Two pictures of a hummingbird are stuck to a piece of sheeting; a positive image on one side, and its inverted negative on the other. The sheeting is spun around at high speed to optically unite the two images, making them almost cancel out one another through their complementarity. The image vibrates before us like – well – like a hummingbird. It exists only through the rapid motion flickering back and forth between dissolution and creation. The work possesses an almost immaterial character despite its simple mechanical construction; the hummingbird appears to float freely in the air like a mirage, a hologrammatic occurrence somewhere between image and sculpture.

The work's inherent duality of motion and stillness capture the evanescent nature of the hummingbird while functioning as a formal approach to test and challenge the norms of sculpture. Thus its mimetic representation; the formal dimension and conceptual aspects of the work, are closely linked. Although this piece is both discreet and quite simple, it spans opposites such as presence and absence, positive and negative images, mechanics and poetry, sculpture and image.

Soft-spoken Illusions

Storch's work is often constructed around such confrontations between oppositional image-forms. *UT (Yellow Volume)* initially appears to be a yellow tube placed in a corner. However it soon becomes clear that this yellow cylinder is really an image projected onto a flat, white piece of sheeting. Since the sheeting is leaning against the wall, the projector has also been placed on blocks to obtain the same angle. What initially appears to have real, tangible volume turns out to be a flat image, while the actual, material setup establishing the image turns out to be the sculptural object.

This entire illusion is as easily unveiled as it is effective, leaving the actual construction openly displayed in all its simplicity. This sculpture is simultaneously a specific object in space and an object that is not present.

The initial impact is due to a *trompe-l'oeil* effect – the ability of the work to trick the eye. This however, is not in itself the point of the work, but rather a way to raise questions on the nature of representation, spatiality and perception through the interplay of material and illusory volumes.

When observing the work, its shifting perspective is a key element of the experience: Focus shifts from illusory form to material construction and changes into a form of attention vis-à-vis one's own perception and the sensation of seeing oneself sensing – a subject that has also formed an important part of the artist Olafur Eliasson's work. Storch's work is not overwhelming in terms of scale, materials or installational complexity – properly speaking, some of her

works do not even qualify as sculptures in space in the ordinary sense. Their strength lies partly at the conceptual level and partly in their simplicity of expression. Unlike many contemporary pieces their power does not lie in a thoroughly designed look or a hi-tech finish, but rather in a certain frailty and authenticity underlying every illusion. This soft-spoken quality is what emphasizes the fact that the purpose of these illusions is not to trick the eye in the classical sense of *trompe l'oeil*, but rather to examine and sharpen the gaze of the viewer vis-à-vis various pictorial modes of appearance.

Playing on Form – as well as Downplaying it

In another, related work *UT (Hung Paper)* a piece of paper featuring a print of an elongated, cylindrical shape hangs on a metal frame. Whereas the yellow cylinder was projected into space, this one is picked out of its matrix to be positioned in physical space in an altogether more tangible manner. There is something helpless and a little comical about the way in which the soft, metallic cylinder has achieved a physical presence, but at the price of becoming soft as boiled spaghetti apparently starting to melt at the ends. These “dead pan” objects manage somehow play down a profundity arising in their consciously misunderstood translations between virtual and physical form in space.

At the same time we sense in these works a resumption of the fundamental formal experiments of the 1960s. For instance they may have some form of kinship to Gerhard Richters *8 Tubes*, which consists of cylindrical tubes painted with illusory tube representations. When hanging from the ceiling the effect is one of the painted and actual volumes cancelling one another out, making the tubes appear strangely flat – almost as if possessed of a negative spatiality, leaving gaps in the air.

The conceptual constructivism of the Californian *Light and Space* movement also appears an obvious reference for Storch. For example James Turrell's attempts to make light appear as physical form, which actually resulted in people trying to lean against his light-walls. In this work as in Storch's, light and space are used as materials in order to investigate human perception and concepts of sculpture.

Roterende Havenisse - Rotating Gnome

Storch reflects her own time, and takes her cue from the world of virtual form. Her work has a certain humorous, informal quality to it, positioning her somewhat away from the rather dry and battle-ready agendas of the 1960s. One example is her work *Roterende Havenisse – Rotating Garden Gnome* – in which a garden gnome is rotated and the resulting contours used as a stencil for paper constructions in physical space. Here the paper sculptures become a form of after-image of the moment outlined by the figure in space – a static representation of the rotation. A video recording of the rotating gnome is projected back onto the paper sculpture, permitting the motive to be reproduced in space and time, virtually and physically, both as an image and sculpturally.

A certain shift arises in the layering of these representations – just as a flickering *moiré*-pattern may arise when a printed photo is based on a previous image-reproduction. This *moiré*-effect is an image-shifting fault, rendering visible the layers of reproductions. In Storch's case these mistranslations and maladjustments between various representational forms constitute the very effect of her work. It also becomes evident that what may initially appear to be pure exercise in form is equally oriented towards concept and perception. The fact that a gnome – that image of low culture and bourgeoisie – is causing these reflections deflates any tendency the work may have to become too dry or self-reflexive.

Shadow Images

The series *Skyggebilleder – Shadow Picture* – consists of a few humble pieces of paper; crumpled, folded, and hung on the wall. Here, however, we are dealing with a form of illusion, for besides the actual shadows thrown by the paper onto itself, there are also illusory shadows reinforcing the real ones. It looks so simple and yet the overall effect is quite confusing. A crumpled sheet of paper has been photographed and printed onto a new piece of paper, which has then been folded in a similar manner. The actual and the illusory shadows exist side by side, but with a slight shift between them preventing a complete overlap. This maladjustment between the shadows, drawing attention to the problem of translating between reality and representation, achieves an extra – unintentional – dimension through the process of reproduction accompanying this text. The photographic reproduction creates a *moiré*-pattern (like the one I previously in a non-literal sense to characterize Storch's work) that quite literally appears as a chequered flicker in the shadows of the image.

The complex effect of this very simple technique appears all the more evident for the humble material of its execution – a kind of conceptual origami, where real and represented spaces fold into one another.

Origami

One simple way of spatializing a plane is to fold a sheet of paper – the leap from here to architectural models is not great, as Storch herself indicates. At the same time folds as such are highly complex. Unlike points, lines or planes, the fold is curved – hence spatial – pr. definition. The exterior may fold in becoming the interior, and similarly the interior

may unfold without breaking surface continuity. The French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze – who built a great deal of his thought around the concept of the fold – thus considers origami the model of all sciences dealing with matter. Storch's *Shadow Pictures* also give the impression of containing entire conceptions of reality, spatial understandings, and systems of representation, all folded into these fragile little paper works.

The classical illusionist theme is also folded into this work, whose ur-form is expressed in the Greek myth of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, who competed to see who could create the most convincing painterly illusion. Zeuxis' painting tricked the birds, who tried to eat his painted grapes. When Zeuxis then confidently went to lift the cover from Parrhasius' canvas, he realized that the cover *was* the painting – and that he himself had been fooled. This myth goes beyond the capacity of art to illude reality, it also describes how Zeuxis' gaze is controlled by his desire for the hidden and his expectations of what a painting can be, what it can represent and how it may be presented. Similarly, Storch's *Shadow Pictures* play on our curiosity to see what lies behind the illusions of her works. To a certain extent she confronts our notions of how space and volume arise, how we perceive them and how much or how little it takes for something to be considered sculptural.

Tove Storch's work is positioned between philosophy and formalism, conceptuality and construction. This ambiguous position ensures cohesion between the parts of her work that focus on the fragile, the hallucinatory, the near-invisible and the more 'hardcore' constructive aspects more reminiscent of architectural models. The constructivist tendency is particularly distinct in contemporary art. There is a renewed interest in a kind of conceptual formalism which – rather than being cool and smooth – has aspects to its nature which are at once humorous and "homemade". Here Storch's particular contribution exists in combination with a great sense of the frailty and evanescence of physical matter.

The fact that things as diverse as Greek myths and films like *Matrix* are relevant points of reference for Storch's work, proves that her project is at once a fundamental, classical investigation of the nature of existence and perception while at the same time continuing to reflect on the various imagerial forms of appearance in a contemporary perspective.

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