

MODIFICATIONS 2010

In 2010 the Aarhus Art Building takes the first step in the implementation of a whole new strategy, where each year the exhibition program will be planned on the basis of an overall theme. The chosen theme must be challenging and topical and lend a voice to central issues in the world of art right now. In 2010 the theme is *Modifications*.

Modifications is a reference to the Danish artist Asger Jorn's exhibition of the same name in Paris 50 years ago, where he presented a series of kitsch-paintings on top of which he had painted his own additions. With the exhibition Jorn attempted to once and for all dispel the notion of art as something sublime and autonomous. The members of the international artist group Situationist International, which Jorn along with the French theorist Guy Debord had founded a few years earlier, held a firm belief in the revolutionary potential of the artistic process. Art was seen as a possible way out of the meaningless and empty pseudo-society

that the members of the group referred to as the 'Society of the Spectacle'. Although the group ended up dissolving itself rather than art as such, contemporary art in many ways still stands on a similar bastion: between destruction and construction – or between partial displacement and pure action, one might also say. This state of the art, so to speak, within contemporary art, plus its historical source, forms the basis for the theme *Modifications*. It is the intention of the 2010 exhibition program to shed new light on the issue and to raise the question of whether art presents a way out of the all-encompassing grip of the Society of the Spectacle. A question that is just as relevant today as it was 50 years ago.

Jaakko Niemelä

GRID – MODELS OF UNEXPECTED

6. FEB – 17. MAR 2010



MOTIVATION AND PROCESS

Jaakko Niemelä was born in 1959 and is a graduate of the Art School of Kankaanpää in Finland. His works have been obtained by several major art museums and although he is a frequent guest at solo and group exhibitions around the world, this is his first solo exhibition in Denmark.

In his earlier works, Niemelä has concentrated on themes such as childhood and imagination with a special focus on the educational mechanisms of society. He has included games and toys in his artistic production and turned the attention towards the systems that create and mold the individual in its earliest stages. At later

stages his focus on structures has resulted in more violent installations where themes like war and destructions have been the turning points. While Niemelä's works at first glimpse seem to center around abstract issues like space, time and decay, he states that personal and emotional sources of inspiration also form the basis of this exhibition.

The intuitive sense of space that Niemelä seeks to give visitors is an extension of his work process that is also marked by impulsiveness and spontaneity. Gradually he became more interested in the notion of the breakdown of works of art than in their creation – two processes that don't necessarily have to be contrary. He started

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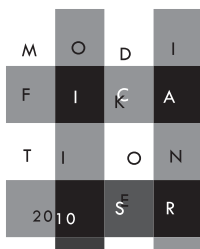
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destroying his works, taking things away from them and splitting them apart, but he found that he was still following too many aesthetic considerations, and only when he limited his own rational deliberations and pursued a more direct destruction of the works he was satisfied.

WHEN THE SPACE ITSELF IS THE WORK

In his spectacular installations Niemelä explores the notion of basic structures that seem to penetrate all aspects of human self-expression and thinking.

In a wider sense the creation of a society can be seen as a collection of patterns designed to discipline and administer our behavior. Likewise it is natural for us to organize the world in categories by arranging boundaries and distinctions in complex thought patterns.

In its concrete shape this impulse manifests itself in the very notion of space as the framework around human activity. Space is the solid fundament that draws the line between inner and outer, between the familiar and the foreign. In the same way, the notion of time and the division of time into days and weeks, into work and leisure, forms a more abstract pattern to systematize our behavior.

Both these notions are treated at *Grid – Models of Unexpected*, where traditional notions of time and space are explored. The coherence and

inner harmony of space are blurred in Niemelä's works where light and shadows create odd patterns across the stringent lines that dominate the exhibition halls. Niemelä furnishes the exhibition hall with light and shadows so that these elements gain the same weight as the more solid building materials of the architecture. At other times he is concerned with a more direct breakdown of the constructions – sheets fall from the ceiling or walls crumble and suggest that the basic structures we normally take for granted are actually dynamic, perishable and changing.

At the same time the works seem to exist in a frozen vacuum of time, so that it becomes difficult to decide if one is a witness to destroying or creating processes – if the surrounding space is in ruins, is finished or if it's only coming into existence.

Niemelä's miniature buildings and the bird's eye perspective they offer could possibly invite a feeling of omnipotence seen in relation to the overwhelming impressions passed on by the modified halls. Niemelä often creates models of the exhibition halls and the museums where he will be presenting an exhibition. The use of these models in the exhibition itself means that one suddenly finds oneself in a complex double role. Where the space at other times is hard to capture it is now possible to not only assess the

space one is standing in but the whole building. At the same time the space-within-space-effect opens up for a self-observing dimension. The very building in which one stands can be seen from the outside, and suddenly one is transformed into the onlooker as well as the one being looked at. The consciousness of one's own presence in the space is a characteristic feature of installation art and demands that one steps into the work of art in order to experience it. Therefore reflections on notions like light, temperature, visual angle and physical presence also suddenly become relevant when one is placed in the middle of the work.

FAITH

In this installation, a shower of ceiling sheets have been frozen in their fall and open up for a blinding light forcing its way down in a corner of the exhibition hall. The whole roof construction leans dramatically towards the opening and leads, along with the perspective-creating lines in the ceiling sheets, the visitor's attention towards the opening.

The work presents a tension between the marked architectural symmetry and the more uncontrolled, chaotic impression. This is naturally most obvious in the gap itself, where the ceiling is broken, but also in the shadows thrown by the same square ceiling sheets creat-

ing a series of asymmetric patterns on the floor and walls.

BALANCE

A red laser is reflected in the web-like structure of the ceiling that is lit up and sends a series of trembling waves through the exhibition space and along the walls. The geometrical structure of the exhibition hall is broken by the laser that intertwines light and shadow in ripples floating through the hall. A rushing sound underlines the vibrations of the light as an undercurrent in the room. The laser reflections function as an extension of and a contrast to the room itself and add a fleeting and flickering dimension to the smooth surfaces.

MODEL OF AN IMAGINARY STRUCTURE

Based on the Aarhus Art Building Niemelä constructed the model in the center of the exhibition hall where a rotating shadow rises several meters into the air. The model is built of thin, laser-cut sticks that because of the rotation project a series of kaleidoscopic shadow images on its own skeleton-like construction as well as on the walls where an illusion of gaining and losing speed is created. This very physical model stands in a sharp contrast to its own immaterial silhouette unfolding in space in an almost three-dimensional way.