

## Death of a Housewife

There is a certain kind of sincerity present when an artistic work is looked through the lens of an artist. So as Oscar asks me to dedicate some words to his forthcoming exhibition I am immediately interested. I am reading Paul de Man these days who claims autobiography is fiction and even if the occupation with Sophie Taeuber-Arp is only biographical, while writing this text I am pondering why and how autobiography is still at stake.

After her unexpected death due to carbon monoxide poisoning caused by an incorrectly handled stove, the official police report stated the artist's occupation as 'housewife'. Not only was the artist, as I read later, an integral part of the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich (the Swiss artist association where she also taught to support herself and her husband) but also had solo shows throughout her career.

The title Oscar chose therefore, which I only after this story understand, is full of implications. It is stuffed with a subtle sense for irony and distinct usage of multiple layers of meaning. Or more precisely it plays with the associations and assumptions of the reader/viewer only then to subvert them. This very moment I want to describe as a frisky mimicry, a playful battle of representation vs. referentiality, along which the whole show unfolds.

The small exhibition room is transformed into an installative setting which relies on, and uses, the existing infrastructure of the space. Through interventionist gestures of adding things or taking them away the space becomes a "montage", coded through processes of spatial adaptations and their symbolic implications creating a private, vernacular, domestic sphere. The aesthetic here is entrusted with traditional techniques of craftsmanship and therefore carries a sense of nostalgia and remembrance of a holistic, analogue world and its means of production.

The window, for example, is made from antique blown glass and divided into two planes. While on the left side there is a panel depicting a bouquet garni painted by the artist, on the right side one finds a sculpture in a sculpture courtyard. The sculpture is a translation of a motif that was used across Sophie Taeuber Arp's practice, but can be conflated with many indigenous motifs. In that sense the whole window becomes the iris of the space respectively the emblematic locus of the show. The narrative tension of the exhibition though, is created through a relatively small but highly effective gesture: a forged Damascus steel and horn knife extends out of the left wall piercing the space, creating friction and producing a state of alertness in the viewer. The knife is accompanied by casts of common chopping boards which add another layer of artifice, a proposed dramatic reenactment of the space. Leaning against walls and raised floorboards, three very wilful objects protrude into the small space evoking the feel of an attic. Redirecting the gaze from the floor to ceiling, the spectator is offered a second reading of their being. Uniquely stylised heads with bristles conjure associations to bulky, children's potato carvings and headpieces of medieval armour. With their utterly charming goofy, comic glass eyes they look at the spectator and earn every little chuckle from the audience. They advance the idea of a vivified scenery and are able to engage in the play of mimicry to the highest degree. Like the window, each of them paraphrases a sculpture by Sophie Taeuber-Arp from her series of 'dada heads'. But as much as these eclectic and whimsical brooms are amusing us, they also enact the very irony and troubled content from which they manifest; a misreading of biography. As an artistically staged phantasma "Death of a Housewife" performs this misguided confusion, understanding it as a chance to reorganize and reevaluate supposed ideas of gender and culture as well as their signifiers.

The issue of autobiography comes back to mind while revisiting the struggle between representation and referentiality. Autobiography is fiction, but what we see or read is always determined by self-constitution or autobiography. The latter also lets us see either a sculpture garden or an Indigenous motif, an attic or a kitchen, a domestic scenography or physical manifestation of all things suppressed.

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