

Alternative waters

Aud Bækkelund's work often makes me think of haiku, short poems where various verbal images are put together, with new, surprising images as a result. The essence of haiku is *kiru* (cutting). Depending on which word that perform the cutting and which position it has in the verse, it can interrupt the flow of thought or alter the images created in the poem. A haiku, if it affects you, can open up for increased awareness, an attention for the unknown.

Bækkelund employs materials such as used erasers, disassembled kitchen floors, pencil stubs, cord remnants, twigs of fruit trees, rulers, wire and fabric residues to compose installations, images and objects. Assembling, reworking and title; collectively these hint at the complex ties we have with things that surround us. We recognise the things we normally use, as we have seen them, after all, before. It was, however, in a different context and in an environment loaded with stories – often very personal. Who does not remember sheets of paper with stubborn pencil marks after hard dealings with the eraser? Or the gorgeous summer dress that inexorably became too small, too worn?

Our part of the world is strewn with stuff. In just a few hundred years, we have created a true abundance of objects, items for use and decoration, technical components and other useful matters. The time we live in can be compared to a fast train that rattles off with open freight wagons where increasingly larger parts of the load fall off. Moreover, we cannot escape the fact that everything created, everything we produce and use, is made of something, a material the planet offers and which is extracted, processed and put into circulation. Already in prehistoric times, resource management was a hard-won knowledge. Many still remember a time when everything was consumed long past the worn-out stage and further transformed into something new and usable. To remake a shirt or a worn sheet into a summer dress, rinse plastic bags and iron the paper bags for reuse, fix fishing nets and splicing ropes – these were prosaic tasks. It also offered some control over the endless consumption of life; things were put to work and prepared for the mission of keeping the business (us, life) going.

The same sober and practical approach also characterises Bækkelund's work. However, here is a pondering eye looking. A gaze that may be related to the child's playful assessment of life's objects – everything can be something completely different. For the child it is usually things close by that transform into wide worlds populated by known and unknown beings. In children's pockets, one can find sparkling stones, nuts and sticks, feathers, and glass polished by waves and sand. Treasures from life on a voyage. A large stone covered with moss can become a map of parallel worlds, a place with rivers and lakes, mountains and plains, but without the map's identification and delimitation.

In the world of Bækkelund, the practical – the speech of things – is connected with the ingenious. Abstract thoughts, often formulated in imaginative titles, form mental spaces where the prosaic things get completely new roles. They get a poetic loop side, a sense of humour. The titles cut and chop – like *kiru* – and open up for a flow of free associations.

In the work *Seasonal Migration* Bækkelund takes us on a journey from island to island, a wondrous world shaped by worn linoleum, plywood and creatures that appear to be derived from vast deeps or equally deep forests. Travel is clearly present, in both this and the other works in the exhibition. The textile work *Voyage* takes us through the chart of a journey. In this case, a GPS registered figure showing a sailboat's movements from coordinate to coordinate. An embroidered thread draws the gaze along a calm line that extends throughout the length of the fabric. The journey itself, however, took place in a current present, and a continuous response to weather and wind. The boat, says Bækkelund, can take us in all directions. Time is both regular and flexible on board; it can be both fast and slow. In sewing, time takes the place it wants. It is a meditative activity, she adds.

The art of navigating is one of the great arts, one that has brought people out on long journeys into the unknown. Short trips as well, between unpredictable shallow reefs, in and out of good harbours. The metaphorical journey, as we know it from the odysseys of mythology, takes a life to accomplish. It winds away on an infinitely large sea and is full of digressions and detours. The voyage also collects a lot of cargo along the way – stories, memories, things are hoarded, and a life's archive is built.

The installation *Everyday Logic* is constructed by the exhausted and usable, the able and the scrapped, things that we hold between our hands and that become part of our lives for a while. Long-term usage as well as needs shape all these things. They have been tools and aids, extensions of the body where it has not been capable. The work *Reference System for Practice* is similarly composed of the broken and useless, where the function of the yardstick – where it divides rooms and lengths into tiny and regulated units – is transformed into a useless tangle, and a kind of chaos ornament. I do not see the ornament as purely decorative, it also signals surplus: what is added to the basic and necessary. The ornament, understood as excess energy, goes back to prehistoric times. Even among the most ancient of human creation, traces of geometric figures are rhythmically distributed. Man, as we know it, has obviously long loved rhythms, shapes and patterns. For Bækkelund, the ornament – if we can call it that – carries content. In the work *Reference System for Practice*, we can sense the collapse of the order of the ruler. The function, which we still clearly can depict, is here transformed into decorative embellishment, abstract characters in a coded language.

In *Everyday Logic*, on the other hand, the structural tower materialises as naked form. One is stacked on top of the other, screwed and fastened, apparently without ornamental attachments. The purpose is clearly defined: The tower must appear standing up and recognised as a construction. It is a platform for the eye, an attempt to rise above the earthly horizon. Bækkelund constructs the tower of time, of usage, of rhythm. A framework battling with gravity, balancing from tilt point to tilt point.

Rhythm, movement, migration and speed, entropy, degradation – in all of this, gravity comes in as an underlying current, insistent, present. The frieze in *Seasonal Migration* offers a score for the gaze: a journey between fixed fields, where the hanging yarn emphasise the gravity we are all subjected to. Gravity is crushing if we end up in deep enough water, and if we were not used to the pressure, the air's weight would smash our bodies. The gravity, which holds the atmosphere around our roaring globe, grinds everything slowly into small, small pieces. Still, it is from what crumbles and breaks down that new forms of life are emerging. With Bækkelund things get a little pause, they perform in other stories on the road through the mills of the time. In addition, maybe things themselves recognise that everything is perishable, that one can both skin and function change along the way and that the stories are many and none is true.

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