

In conversation with Susanne Kathlen Mader.

"I always try to draw the eye to places that are normally not seen. A lot of things are otherwise not perceived in that sense. Corners are overlooked as well as details on the ceiling or what happens below eye level. It seldom happens that someone sits down or rolls around on the floor like children. That would bring a completely different experience."

Berlin, 29-01-2021

In your current exhibition at Bærum Kunsthall, you have proceeded somewhat differently than in other projects. You started the construction virtually unprepared without any sketches. Can you describe how this process took place?

You're right, this time I allowed myself the luxury of deciding spontaneously on the spot what to create. I rarely have such a great opportunity. When it comes to art-in-public projects, you have to convince a jury with a concrete, elaborate design. Of course, this can also be changed and adapted, which I usually do. For the current project I improvised, which corresponds to my actual working method. I get involved with the given format and then work it out in an intuitive process.

In this case you started with four sculptures that you brought to Kunsthall Bærum. What role do the sculptures play in the installation?

Actually, they play the main role. At first, because they were already finished. I couldn't change anything about them. I chose the sculptures the way I thought was best in this space also in connection with each other [...]. I then placed the sculptures in a way that they formed focal points and engaged the space in combination with the painted compositions. They are arranged so that visitors have to move around the space in order to see the entire artwork. From the floor to the ceiling and throughout the room, there is a perpetual flow, where you can always discover something new in every round.

I always try to draw the eye to places that are normally not seen. A lot of things are otherwise not perceived in that sense. Corners are overlooked as well as details on the ceiling or what happens below eye level. It seldom happens that someone sits down or rolls around on the floor like children. That would bring a completely different experience.

The steel sculptures belong to your younger repertoire, even though you have worked three-dimensionally before. They consist of partly bent, welded metal rods. What effect do these free compositions have in space?

The sculptures are all relatively small, approximately about one metre. They build centres opening up the wall or hang from the ceiling drawing lines in the air. These three-dimensional drawings, through which the gaze wanders, engage the space in a completely different way than any two-dimensional painting on the wall would be able to. Depending on the perspective, the sculptures change a lot. But the sculptures will always be experienced simultaneously with the painting. I have positioned four sculptures in different places in the room. One sculpture stands on the painted floor with one foot on a natural stone from my garden.

How does an installation in an art space differ from a project for a public building such as a school?

A gallery or exhibition space has only one function, to house the art for a certain time. In this respect, I have much more freedom to create than in a public space, where I have to behave within a framework. In a public space I have to work with regard to security, the external conditions and the function of the space. Art never plays the main role there. It is only a background composition and must not interfere with daily use of the architecture. As a matter of principle, installations in public spaces should also be resistant to wear and tear as far as possible. In a gallery, it's all about the Art. The visitors have chosen to come there and can decide how long they stay. An exhibition is also only temporary and therein lies the attraction.

How would you describe the exhibition space at Kunsthall Bærum?

I really like the space because it's high and airy, relatively bright, a bit industrial and worn in a quaint way. This floor that has peeled away and where the colours of the different layers of paint reappear and parting lines and cracks become visible. I made use of such traces, which were created by the building method or the construction of the room. It is actually like a large canvas.

The space is the starting point and when I work the way I do here, everything plays into it. That's why it makes much more sense to improvise. Among other things, I discover details on site that are very important for the balance of the whole.

How do you manage to create a balance from the combination of painting and three-dimensional sculptures?

The combination of media requires a withdrawal, because you can't keep adding something. It's like cooking, when you keep adding more and more spices and the taste suffers in the end. If I add sculpture, it means I can get by with less painting. Otherwise, the different media would compete with each other. The process of making is incredibly exciting for me. It's something where I challenge myself and see where I can find something that sounds together.

Your installation invites continuous movement in the space and feels both dynamic and light. I therefore see an analogy with dance. Could one say that you are creating a choreography?

It's an interesting analogy and you could perhaps put it that way. There is something very special about architectural space because the format is so much bigger than a human body. Thus, one will never be able to capture everything at once. Instead, you have to move around in the room, turn, look up and down. Eventually, the complete image will be composed of many sequences that are then brought together in memory. Finally, since memory is not very reliable, something like movement in perception is created again. The question is: How do we hold on to an impression or what sticks in the memory? Our own experience or the momentary situation will always co-determine our experience, our interpretation. At last, there is a free variation of the Art experience, because the complete work cannot be grasped at once. You have no control over the work. The moment you enter it, it already changes.

That's what I meant by choreography, because you create an impression of high tension with your installation from which a sensual lightness emerges. Ultimately, your art sets the audience in motion and thus makes them an active part in the Art experience.

It has something to do with your own body. If a drawing or a painting is much larger than the range that one's own body can grasp, the effect is completely different than if everything is nicely arranged on a small format. It is very interesting for me to feel this effect physically while I build my installation. Creating a tension that is good for the space means questioning how long you can stretch a line before the tension drops. There is always a maximum point and that is also where I go with the colour. The composition opens up the space by means of contrasts, such as complementary, warm, cold, quantity contrasts, etc. This process has to be very precise, it has to be exactly the chosen colour or tone, otherwise it doesn't work. The lines and shapes organise the space and create rhythm. The colours, for their part, create the dynamics, like a net that stretches out. If I make a mistake or reverse something, everything falls apart. The result is then no longer art [laughs].

Andrea Elia Kragerud