

## On Kit Kjølhede Laursen

The re-contextualising of objects and the re-appropriation of ideas have become commonplace in mainstream contemporary art. The dominance of craft based work has given way to the more modern, flexible, abstract, 'idea'.

The gap between craft and contemporary art is ever increasing in the main, and with it, the extrapolation of the void between traditional forms of expression/practice and the contemporary mode of artist as developer.

One contemporary Danish artist, Kit Kjølhede Laursen, makes a broad spectrum of work utilising many mediums however there are specific examples within her practice which ask more specific, paradoxical questions of art as language and communication. With a unique approach which re-poses an idea, at times within mediums heavily associated with traditional craft based practices, embroidery and painting for example, Kit Kjølhede Laursen is not looking for any solutions or answers, quite the opposite, she chooses to pose further questions. The strength of the idea is paramount to her practice. These ideas are not born out of any particular medium, yet are appropriated to the subject through specific, at times, traditional ways of working. This detachment of idea from medium often sets the content of her work against or in opposition to its processes.

By using examples from two of her many projects to date, I seek to address the importance of the 'idea' in her working practice and how in this case it is intrinsically linked to the philosophy of language.

During a solo exhibition at Galleri 1900 in Copenhagen entitled 'LoveMePlease' I am confronted by a small 10cm x 30cm framed, embroidered work that reads "LoveMePlease".



The gold thread in which it is executed, along with the font used, are heavily associated with embroidered passages from the Gospel. The somewhat stark double meaning achieved by coupling this specific text to such a traditional medium leave one slightly at a distance to their often very private nature/content. Yet this very humorous (and I believe, somewhat lonely) encounter creates a space within which every viewer is free to create, associate and interpret. This subtle unfolding, this opening out, this metaphysical spaciousness, questions us; as opposed to revealing/pointing to any answers. By re-appropriating the text, and media based, often speed orientated slogans/spam and imbedding them in the time-consuming process of embroidery, a traditional, historical practice, she is not just re-contextualising spam emailing or re-appropriating ones stereotyped understanding of embroidered biblical passages, but in much the same way as Donald Judd forced us to re-see the physical space around a work of art, Kit Kjølhede Laursen makes us re-question the metaphysical space in which the

work hangs. The quiet, white, contemplative gallery space, so often the catalyst for many ready-made or found artworks, didn't seem to legitimise or redefine what I was seeing, on this occasion. I felt however that the work was redefining the space; as if the works had somehow always existed, or at least the implicit theme of the works; it was the space around the work that suddenly came under question.

The Second example I'd like to draw on is very different from the first in execution yet does relate to the piece mentioned above by questioning our use, knowledge and understanding of language as signifier. The second work I am referring to I encountered in Kit Kjølhede Laursen's studio. It is a cleverly manipulated photograph which depicts a well know view of Copenhagen's S-Train station, 'Vesterport'.



The context in which the station sits is clearly shown and one can make out the name 'Vesterport Station' as the sign's letters curve away from us. However in place of the well recognised white 'S' on its red hexagonal background which is used to alert us to an S-train stations location, the artist has replaced this 'S' with an 'Ø' another Danish letter. A re-appropriation of a sign, a rather humorous manipulation of signage often found within the oeuvre of graffiti.

The letter's function comes into question. Consider a letter's physical/pictorial outlook alone as its function; the 'S' doesn't suggest any actual connection to the physicality of train travel neither does the letter 'Ø'. Consider then the vast associations within language one attributes to particular letters. For instance one reflects meaning upon the 'Ø' outside of its linguistic restraint, for example at the time of writing this piece Denmark is building up to an election and every party uses a specifically chosen letter as its sign in order to simplify the voting process and 'Ø' is associated with the Enhedslisten party, which in turn is associated with the liberal, left or red-green! As we already know an 'S' is used to highlight the location of an S-Train station. If one takes a letter, in the case either 'S' or 'Ø', as a sign alone we need to understand what it signifies. The white letter, whatever it

may be 'S' or 'Ø', on a red hexagon above Vesterport Station does not alter our acknowledgement of the place itself. So although the sign has changed what it signifies/the signified remains the same. This can be easily proved by imagining that one has never been to Denmark before and never come across an S-train or S-train station, if the sign were 'Ø' you would simply associate this sign with public transport and not the 'S' in use today.

By drawing connections between contemporary art practice and the philosophy of language we can start to more clearly see the void between the real and these tools/devices in which we use to address or comment upon reality. To use Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as a source we can better understand this relationship between signs and signifiers:

'In language of everyday life it very often happens that the same word signifies in two different ways – and therefore belongs to two different symbols – or that two words, which signify in different ways, are apparently applied in the same way in the proposition.'<sup>1</sup>

Language is made up of complex propositions, which in turn may be reduced to the meaning of its simple components. The simple propositions he refers to as atoms and the more complex, molecules. When the simple propositions or atomic propositions are true they can be described as atomic facts. If we consider these atomic facts as referring directly to reality and its concrete nature, it becomes apparent that the communicative devices we use in both language and art whilst allowing us to refer to the real are in fact somewhat at a distance from reality or truth within itself. Wittgenstein's remark in *Philosophical Investigations* 'Don't think, but look!' highlights the need for us to be present to something and not necessarily apply meaning to it. Think of language as orbital, it circulates reality yet it never comes into direct contact with it, as it is created out of the real it cannot become or penetrate the concrete nature of things, it merely is a device we use to refer to reality. In the case of Kit Kjølhede Laursen's works and indeed many contemporary pieces we must not search to explain and solve anything but simply experience and describe its nature.

In order then for us to penetrate reality, the concrete, carnal truth, we must do away with language and meaning altogether. Do away with thinking and simply look, feel and absorb. Can a truly successful work of art become atomic fact, so concretely a thing within itself it becomes synonymous with nature and truly real?

Philip Gurrey on Kit Kjølhede Laursen 2011

---

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, *the world consists of facts not things*, Avrum Stroll, Oneworld Publications 2002.