

An Introduction to the exhibition VOYEURISM showing works of art by Roland Reiter

Theme

The mystery of the human Eros and its eternal attraction has been one of art's central issues. The artist Roland Reiter confronts this theme in his work, exploring the phenomenon of voyeurism.

He covers what is uncovered by others, and in his exhibition, he conceals his sculptures, because it is not them that are essential to his work, but the play with the audience's curiosity. He hides his life-sized sculptures behind a translucent glass panel, so the imagination of the individual observer is inspired. The sculptures are not coming to the fore in their own right, but they are part of an installation.

Maybe it is this bizarre play of hide and seek that is the key to understanding voyeurism – a theme that has kept coming up in art, but that has still not lost its relevance. For centuries, artists have been dealing with the phenomenon that other peoples' sexuality or nudity inspires lust, joy or satisfaction.

Roland Reiter interprets, and critically examines such central aspects as introspection, the question whether the observer is or is not turning into a voyeur, and the mental and physical reaction of the observer.

The artist's work is based on the presumption that voyeurism is closely linked to exhibitionism. Both aspects can become manifest in one and the same person by switching from an active target of desire into a passive one or vice versa.

The original desire of the voyeur is autoerotic and narcissistic – aiming at her or his own body. In the autoerotic examination of the body both the active and the passive aspect are present - the person is the observer as well as the observed. This constellation is the origin of both active voyeurism, and passive exhibitionism. Voyeurism evolves by transcending the limits of erotic narcissism, whereas exhibitionism adheres to the narcissist object. In fact, active and passive desire keep co-existing.

This illustrates that the voyeur makes her/himself the hidden observer, so s/he can control her/his object from a distance, but it also shows that s/he exposes her/himself to the constant danger of being caught.

It is this moment of tension that the artist is trying to capture by contrasting a human observer and a plastic sculpture, and he experiments

with the audience's reaction and the actions arising thereof. The artist's object of observation is the artistic staging of concealed nudity, and the audience's curiosity rather than nudity as a human phenomenon. What is irritating is the fact that the pure definition of nudity as a state of being completely unclothed does not have a major significance when it comes to capturing representations that evoke nudity by artistic means like concealing or abstracting, and that refrain from showing a lot of naked skin.

Intention

For the artist Roland Reiter, the starting point in his work was introspection. His own reflection in the mirror inspired him to represent this kind of togetherness in his work. At first he confronted himself with his own reflection, and later he went on to confronting himself with another, fictitious person.

For this purpose, he uses life-sized sculptures that represent his reflection in the mirror. The difference is that by now, the sculpture replaces the artist's reflection, so a role reversal is taking place.

The artist transfers his emotions and sensations into the sculpture and thereby makes it come to life. He tries to empathize with the still untreated shell of his sculpture, and adds to it distinct gestures, a certain posture and facial expression – so the sculpture finally reflects his own emotions.

All this imparts to the sculpture an individual personality and character that not only arise from its facial expression, its outer appearance or its gestures. The sculpture's effect on the audience, and its aura also play an important role.

From this point onward, one cannot talk about introspection anymore because the artist has created a new, individual being inspired by his own reflection. His introspection has turned into voyeurism because the object of observation is not a life-less sculpture anymore, but it has been given a personality of its own. By now, it is two different characters facing each other – unlike the earlier situation when the sculpture did not have its own personality yet.

An important part of the installation is the translucent glass panel that surrounds the sculpture. Even though the panel is a medium in its own right, it is forming an inseparable unity with the sculpture because neither

of both elements can exist devoid of the other without seriously affecting the artist's intention.

The imaginary room arising from the combination of the two elements is part of an intimate situation that can be altered and disturbed only by the outside – that is to say by the observer and his tools, be it gazes, mirrors or cameras. The panel surrounding the sculpture does not only protect it from the gazes of strangers, but it also displays the picture of an individual silhouette, which gives the observer the chance to anticipate what is behind the panel. This inspires the observer's imagination, and the situation develops a dynamic of its own that is supposed to encourage the observer to act. The decision whether an action takes place or not is left to the individual observer, as is the decision of how far this action of discovering the anticipated goes.

The observer is now taking over the role of the voyeur, but s/he also has to be aware that he s/he is becoming the object of others because her/his actions can be watched by other visitors of the exhibition. This effect is created by the installation of video cameras that capture the visitors' actions. The camera-shots are then displayed in a later section of the exhibition, which is a detached room that is equipped with three monitors displaying different situations from the main exhibition room. Hence, every visitor can watch how s/he acted a few minutes ago. This scenario is taken even further by filming the situation in the detached room, and displaying this video in the final section of the exhibition, so the visitor is confronted again with the earlier situation in a public space. The contrast between public space and detached room is raising the question whether a fusion has taken place or not – whether the observer is settling for the silhouette of a body or if s/he goes one step further, entering into the private sphere of the sculpture.

If s/he does so, s/he kind of unclothes her/himself, and is exposed to the other observers' looks. In this manner, the exhibition's scenario results in a continued reversal of roles.