

"Each part needs the other"

The sculptural work of Ilona Kálnoky

The sculptor Ilona Kálnoky, born 1968 in Austria, has lived and worked in Berlin since 1994. In 2003, she completed her master's degree in fine arts at the Kunsthochschule Weissensee. Since then, she has quietly and thoughtfully developed an oeuvre with an utterly unique character. In terms of form, her work seduces you through its extraordinary degree of reduction. Ilona Kálnoky returns time and again to positively archetypal forms: the circle, the sphere, the column, the pole. She generally leaves her materials in the form in which she found them. The sparsity of means does not represent an end in itself – it is not strictly asceticism. Rather, it serves to uncover the textural, sensual qualities of her materials. Their qualities define the work's potential form and the scope of artistic intervention. The non-figurative abstraction of Kálnoky's work gives us undistorted insight into an understanding of materials that possesses both deeply physical and deeply emotional qualities.

Ilona Kálnoky's plastic works often bear witness to the stages through which they emerged. The artistic process is incorporated into their outward form. Thus, for instance, the artist will construct a pillar meters high out of disks of plaster, layer for layer, until it reaches the ceiling of the exhibition room. This "column" (2010) tells the tale of how it was made through its very materials. This is similarly true of a tree trunk which the artist has tapered gradually by means of cuts made to its middle, so that it can be jammed, gently arched, between floor and ceiling in the exhibition room ("timber!" 2008). One notices particularly the precarious, apparently preliminary quality of the artist's structures. The objects threaten to crash or break at any moment – and it is precisely this imbalance which elicits the viewer's physical, emotional engagement with the work. In "Wurfrelief" (2008), Kálnoky has whipped wet plaster at a wall, where it sticks and congeals into a gray clump with a halo of splashes, retaining the dynamic of the act of its creation.

Revealing an historical process in the present moment likewise forms an important aspect of a work consisting in a series of photographs and a bronze cast, which documents the gradual deformation of a huge cube of clay as it is dropped onto the floor 28 times (skulptUR, 2008). The sequence of photos relates the impact of the Earth's gravitational attraction upon a malleable substance. One almost imagines he can hear the thump of the clay as it hits the floor. The force belabors the clump of clay until it finally breaks into two pieces. In this latter state, the artist has made a mould of the clay and then cast it in bronze, as if to stave off the process of entropy. Another work with the same title, which is likewise driven by the idea of creating an archaic sculptural moment from the encounter of a malleable material with a force of physics, consists of two clumps of clay poured in an aluminum shell. The artist has pounded the clay into form with her fists (skulptUR III, 2007). In contrast, an arched stainless steel plate, around which Kálnoky has artfully wound fishing line, can be interpreted as the binding of energies stored in the material, which could at any moment release its pent up force (gebogen I + II, 2006). In Kálnoky's most recent series of works, as well – which involve stacked clinker bricks, partially coated with poured paint – the effect of the Earth's gravitational pull as shaping force is tangible (o.T., 2012). In erecting a spatial stele out of the bricks, a moment of overcoming the very force of gravity that is responsible for the path of the dripping paint becomes visible. Similarly, the mass of the bricks is neutralized as it were by the at times contradictory processes to which they are submitted.

The corporal metaphors in Ilona Kálnoky's work frequently appear, as traces of physical contact or of the intervention of some force released or directed by the artist. But these metaphors are also present in the consistency of the materials used, as for instance in the skin-like silicon pool under which an unidentifiable object lies hidden (creep, 2010) or in the little balloon held between the jaws of a clamp. (air, 2011). In her recent, kinetic works, the bodily metaphors appear not only through movement, but on a different artistic level through the noises this movement generates: a large sheet of paper is lifted aloft in slow motion by a string, then lowered again (inhale/exhale, 2012). Two industrial-size elastic bands, stretched taut and affixed to the wall, open up into a diamond-like form through the action of an electric cable winch, then come together again in a jerky motion with a whirring sound (strrr, 2011). Or the complex work made of circular mirrors on lopsided turntables, which scratch one another with an irritating noise and implicate the entire room in their optical distortions and dancing reflections of light (sszzzzz, 2011).

Ilona Kálnoky's works are structured as dialogue. They are based on the encounters of differing materials, among which the surrounding space with its material borders must be counted. The artist concentrates on what are often experiment-like orderings to investigate the effects of a specific contact between two entities. What is important to Ilona Kálnoky are elemental sculptural juxtapositions in space, which, as storage medium for actions and forces, evoke somatic experiences on the part of the viewer.

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