

Camilla Løv

Art in the everyday

Powder-white aluminium beams stand in half-ruined arches around a cracked ceramic disk on a hill by a lake surrounded with tall, dark trees. Both industrial and somehow ancient, the sculpture appears to be a monument from another time. The beams speak to the forest; the ceramic to the sky, the ruin to the landscape. Like the picturesque garden follies that punctuate the grounds of England's manor houses, *Broken Thrones* (2020) forms an opening in the landscape, a focus point that rouses its surroundings and draws people in: wedding photos are taken, vigils are held, teenagers gather to drink on graduation day.



Broken Thrones (2020)

In Camilla Løv's practice, art is considered as an element among other elements. Her sculptures are even-footed and talkative, not seeking to surpass the forms and features that make up their surroundings but to bring them into conversation. A dialogue like this is made of absence as well as presence, the void becoming a tension, a lack, or an invitation.

The body is of particular concern: how it moves through the work and where it is stopped; what is seen, obstructed, pressing or held within reach. Mirrors, frames, transparencies, obstructions, steps, platforms, seats and pedestals all engage us not only as viewer but as active participant. In *Social Geometry* and *Neon Winter* (both 2012), square concrete panels in bright, chalky colours combine in hollow boxes, forming respectively a bench and a climbing frame. These are transformative both for their surroundings, in the grounds of the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, and for their visitors, as new interactions, behaviours and relations with the site are brought forward. In this sense Løv's sculptures progress past a stiffly autonomous notion of the art object. They ask to be touched, climbed upon, used as a resting place.

Neon Winter (2012)



Chair by Donald Judd (1991)



This approachability comes from the industrial and the handmade: the hardy, cool concrete of these works' construction recalls municipal playground furniture, promising us that it can bear to be handled, walked upon, that it can take weight. At the same time, the arrangement of the forms, the way the colours meet between the slabs, is evidently careful and humane. They show traces of the processes with which they are made, and make clear the conditions of their construction: they are simply put.

Writing in 1986 in recollection of a failed attempt to fashion a coffee table from one of his artworks, Donald Judd suggested that 'the configuration and the scale of art cannot be transposed into furniture and architecture.' With this text he attempts to pull art away from practical design disciplines on the basis of their relation to function and to the idea: art is art itself, and furniture is only furniture. If art is to be found in furniture, it is only a matter of its 'reasonableness', nothing more. With this reading, the enigmatic and the numinous are left to the preserve of a truer, higher form of art, setting craft and construction aside as utterly straightforward in their aims and execution. His argument supports and (re)forms a structure of disciplinarity that guards the gates at the edges of the artistic field – hardening the line that holds the habitual at bay from 'art' as always more elusive, always further edified.



Vivid (2017)

Løw's work tugs at that line, unravels it, questioning the value in strict disciplinary distinctions and begging for reciprocity between the useful and the beautiful. With allegiance to the familiar dimensions of a day bed or a sofa, works like *Vivid* (2021) seem self-explanatory, offering themselves up for comfort. But is a chair without a body in it always empty? When not 'in use', these works remain sculptural objects in their own right, containing an affinity with constructivist thinking that art and the everyday should be intertwined.

Abstraction in this sense is not a move away from the human, as a shaking off of an old, effusive order of figurative reference, but a move towards an unabashed utility, that speaks to us in plain sensory terms. Works like *Tistler* (2018) are more obscure in their directives than *Vivid*, opening to a more playful set of interactions. Springing up like their namesake plant (tistler are thistles in English) from the grounds of a school, these abstracted flowers form clambering posts and hiding places, adaptable to the motions of the child's imagination. As in the playgrounds Aldo van Eyck designed for children in Amsterdam between 1947 and 1978, in works like *Tistler* we see that the most engaging or creatively stimulating interventions are those that remain open in their affordances, that resist dictations of proper use. They are scaled to the body, they speak to it, but are suggestive rather than authoritative, offering invitations rather than issuing demands.



Tistler (2018)

Besides their formal calls to play, van Eyck's playscapes are also exemplary of an attitude to the city that bit back against the monumental, stilted and spatially segregated urbanisms supported by CIAM in the 1930s and 40s, instead espousing playful, humane and site-specific interventions that fostered community spaces in the post-war city. Løw's public-facing works are nourishing in the same way – political not in that they bear a statement on any topical issue, but transformative in a long-term sense, as spatial agents that become gathering places or support interaction, that move towards developing an engaged and lively public life.



Playground by Aldo van Eyck (1947-78)



Resistance (2020)

While her works speak back to their surroundings, sometimes in ways that are utterly bespoke, Løw's attitude to site relations is not one that rests on the fixity of a single thing in a single place. She is interested also in the modular and the system-oriented, in works that transform to relate to their context, that can stack, array, or scale. All consisting of short, concrete cylinders, variously stacked and spray-painted, *High Rise*, *Informer*, and *Resistance* (2020) show how a single element can be activated across multiple works and different ideas.

Resistance is all tension and impending motion, formed of two cylinders, bright blue at either pole and red where they meet, like bar magnets forced together by sheer gravity. Stacked on a trolley, they seem ready to roll away of their own accord, drawing their surroundings into a palpable force field. *High Rise*, on the other hand, is four cylinders tall and seems comparatively light, climbing into the height of the space: with the lowest cylinder painted white and yellow at the base, and black where it meets the cylinder above, the three raw, unpainted elements stacked on top seem to hover weightless over the gallery floor.

Like *Social Geometry* and *Neon Winter*, these works are simple and self-evident, flexibly composed of repeated elements with limited parameters for variation. In combination, however, they are eminently specific, becoming tools for the translation and renegotiation of place into active space. Their meaning lies in that activating capacity, in a resonance that engages in a physical, precognitive mode: that speaks to you at the level of your body.

Text by Max L Zarzycki

