

A Report from the Land of Tenderness

Reflections upon the sculptural art of Bente Kluge - Roman Gajewski, Gdańsk, 2021

The artist's thoughts inhabit various worlds all of which harbour artistic maturity, a consciousness of self, and a sense of direction. It appears that Bente Kluge does not pierce the tissue of reality, she has no intention of editing it, or negotiating its contradicting interests; nor does she feel the need to moralize, to manifest criticism concerning the world or to settle accounts with it; since, she is composed of culture, and it is culture that she wants to touch. As a mother, a wife, a citizen and a dreamer she would surely like to change a lot in this world, but she will not attempt to reach the limits of what is possible or impossible, reasonable or unreasonable, fair or unfair as she is not a person determined to destroy the order of the world. In any case, it is not her vocation to resolve its problems with the use of art. Important Issues are marching right under our windows, yet the artist wants to decide herself what matters to her as a creator of art, leaving reality and its shame behind.

Well, the burdens of life leave little space to elevated states as the harsh and repetitive everyday does not incite artistic activity; thus, the artist expects that art shall rise liberated from compromises made between triviality and hard facts of life. Therefore, she tends to cover it with shapes conceived in her imagination which is capable of so much more.

She observes reality from within her dreams, distancing herself from dystopian visions and disappointment. She does not look into dark mirrors, or fall in love with her own pessimism. She does not evoke negative emotions in order to feel relieved. She does not reflect upon the relation between sweetness and bitterness, pleasure and pain, bliss and despair; even if they naturally blend to colour our lives. She prefers art that is closer to one's skin than to one's guts, she feels no need to examine neither hers nor anyone else's twists.

To Bente Kluge the image of art close to her seems more like a porcelain teacup than a war club. We will not find exclamation marks in it, but a fair number of question marks, dashes, and many suspension points. The artist stands firmly behind the of art that is benevolent; she supports the world where poetic forms of existence are the force that give life its meaning. She possesses a poetic quality thanks to which everything seems sublime and bearable. However, she is able to distance herself from her creation and refrain from turning sentiment into banality. After spending some time with her sculptures one can forget about the existence of milk bars, the butcher's and unpaid bills. Even death can be erased. The artist creates sur-reality, perhaps a kind of side-reality, a convention enabling her to establish her own regulations extending the scope of perception by means of unconfined visions. This convention is somehow close to theatre, such theatre to which the laws of physics do not apply. There are bodies, many bodies - very often multiplied - yet they do not have any assigned weight. There is also a considerable potential for transcendent shifts of attention. Presented characters appear out of

thin air, they perform what they do, and the artist supports their performance; they can swing, fly with their wings in the air, row in that boat or the other, they can ride a horse. And there is no certainty about who is telling whose story. The artist employs human figures, sometimes animals, and accompanying forms - always embodying their unique sense of beauty. Within the spatial plan she usually presents herself as a theatre-lover with no theatre, who creates conventional sets on a conventional stage so that she can fill it with figures whose very existence is to testify to the beating heart of life, the bliss of being, motion, the beauty of light and colour.

Bente Kluge - strengthened by the liberating force of art - finds herself in a unique agreement between what is deeply personal and what is broadly collective. This remark appears to explain the fact of her artwork being dominated by a longing for harmony, balance and security.

The artist works through many canons of contemporary sculpture - she utilizes various materials initiating transformational cycles, as if she was constantly losing and regaining herself by relocating her own existence from one artwork to another. She is a transmigrating soul who is bothered by the borders between specialities, the impossibility to test different materials and her own technical skills. Thus, she creates polyphonic, hybrid, wavy works capable of being entangled in various meanings, referring often to their authoress. By complementing an unreal entity with one that is real she enters the dialectic of the visible and the invisible with great respect for metaphysical indeterminateness. She very much needs to be certain of what she makes, but at the same time she feeds herself upon a subtle ambiguity which arises from the mystery of art. Thus, one needs to come to terms with the fact that not everything one could discern shall be revealed, and not everything one could learn will be made known.

Spacetime

Finiteness is often the reason why creative people cast violent nature aside, entering the domain of art as it can overpower fleeting time. Art seems a reliable way to withhold the gallop of time. Bente Kluge presents to us a somewhat extended screen of a world, this world has no clear beginning or definite end. It is easy to get lost in it; however, if you do not know where you are, but you know where you are heading, you will not be lost here.

History happens in cycles, and Bente Kluge seems to believe in the circling time. Interpreting it in various manners she drifts freely, ready to cross all borders and converse with different possibilities stemming from what was then and what is now. This timeless window of art, opens up in order to undo time so that it could meander and, in accord with its own theory of relativity, fold around itself. In that sense her art is the art of non-places.

The past and the present..., the artist switches time on and off like a lamp. She has, however, no ambition to anticipate the future. She chooses to summon wandering souls of the past - human

moments caught within the whirl of time, within performed history; lines of human beings, each of whom remains a unique encounter of entity and non-entity, a symbol of lasting over transience.

Escaping rational patterns, being present here, among contemporary forms as well as there, among the past ones, proves how multidimensional her perspective of culture is.

Tradition as solid ground

Consequently, Bente Kluge operates the figure of continuity, not abscission. She consorts with sculpture through its history; and perhaps this is why her artworks seem to remind us that we are living among immortal myths, surrounded by magic and the prestige of cultural achievements which pump eternity into our veins. Heritage is the co-creative capital to the artist, something she can rely on. So, when melancholy aesthetic happens to peer through, it is surely linked with history. Bente Kluge perceives the world as composed of singular, interlinked elements which, like wooden blocks, can be arranged in layers to form any new palimpsest construct. It appears that Bente Kluge is one of those artists who fear the disintegration of reality into incongruous elements, losing stability, and dispersion of values. Thus, artistic tradition remains to her a solid ground which she does not intend to step off.

Bente Kluge - being firmly embedded in the postmodern spirit - follows the track of changeable cultural circumstances, producing from the repository of postmodern props only that what is interesting and inspiring to her. Immersed into this l a c k i n g world, she naturally becomes an ally of constantly revived past; an artist of echo which, to her, has not finished reverberating. She is a pancultural artist who tackles various conventions and aesthetics, an artist who believes in the limitlessness of art, and in the supernatural communion of spirits. And it is not the case of her longing for the old days, or not entirely following the pulse of today - it is more about the cultural dialogue taking place beyond all ticking clocks. The artist does not turn culture into an archaeological dig negating contemporary times. Thus, we shall not feel the lingering scent of naphthalene, since it was never about the archaeology of a soul sold to the past.

Fingerprints

The art of Bente Kluge appears to be filled with personal, intimate references - sometimes realized, more often concealed, hardly whispering out of the depths of their biography. It seems true that art remains a metaphysical discipline where all elements compose our image in a given place as well as an image of the place within ourselves. Is it, however, possible to discern within the artist's recent artwork the presence of unknown, elusive motifs and values? or notice some rare characteristics, tokens of distinctness which the artist has adopted to Polish conditions? Does she reveal to us any of what she owes to her Norwegian origins? One must see by oneself.

The concept of infinity, an open space inviting any exchange of ideas, has long been imprinted in European culture. Sadly, such assertion will not take us any nearer to places where the underground streams of the Norwegian soul run; no national universe is going to unfold. We shall not learn if our minds project similar visions, similar sympathetic codes, or even if we contain the necessity to express locality, familiarity. Nowadays one cannot dispute the fact that there is some universal European outlook. So, the imagination can be Norwegian, Polish or European - but maybe also global, worldwide? Perhaps it is simply human?

For the sake of order, one must add that the nationality of art has no bearing upon its quality as talent, being stateless, does not hold a passport.

A happy tale

By rejecting critical realism as the basis for her art the artist has defined herself as a dreamer located on the margins of reality, as a utopist *per definitione*. One who, by means of art, includes everyone into the community of beautiful spirits. And one who - as all committed idealists do - will not bear to be persuaded that in our rational, disillusioned world utopia is an unjustified aberration, a hollow myth, a statistic error, an entry to be crossed out.

Bente Kluge arranges this small portion of the world which she has invented and colonized; she does it according to her own rules, diligently, with no rush or outside pressure, a bit like a garden that one would cultivate to watch it grow. This way she refuses to be stripped of metaphysics; to change a happy tale into a sad one. She would probably like to embrace the whole world with soft kindness that not always prevails, but remains present. Surely, she would agree that utopia is essential to the multidimensionality and fullness of life; that if not for beautiful utopias our civilization would be on the line...

Does our existence long for consolation? It certainly does, but what with? With w o n d e r for example - with matter of ethereal life. Let us admit that our earthly existence lacks wonder, perhaps also g e n t l e n e s s - so wrongly considered a weakness. This is enough - it does not have to be idyllic for this world to be filled with beauty. We need illusion as a romantic experience; we need to rise above some matters and be amazed with the very existence of others. A world without unicorns is inconceivable.

Where do colourful birds come from?

Or rather, where do colourful birds such as Bente Kluge come from, since it cannot be the cold far north. Colours have always had their motherlands, certain geographical zones with their unique climates, flora, fauna and intensity of sunlight which naturally influences our perception of colour. However, since culture stopped reflecting only the reality that is visible, since artists started

discovering different hues within themselves, learned to colour their longing and free souls to their own liking - everything has changed.

Apparently, Bente Kluge has never intended to become grey with mundaneness. Early in her career she concluded that form is not enough, she felt that she needed to extend the palette of sensations and feelings, concur sadness, melancholy, and liberate herself from default landscapes - days lacking sunlight, long nights - by supplying shapes and structures with colour. This way she seems to have retrieved her second soul. Intense hues - vibrant, and glowing - incorporated in her sculptures, exist nearly on equal terms with forms; and thus, the artist's distinct aura, her own trademark can be recognized.

There we have it - an island of time above reality, liberated from the fate of being invisible; a world of ephemeral beings settled outside noisy disagreements and pretence; embodied beauty of existence embracing scraps of soul with a whole lot of consideration for people and for our world - though, it is not paradise. The land of tenderness created by Bente Kluge contributes to what we nowadays know as wellbeing, yet it does not simply make one happy. This romantic *locus amoenus* is worth exploring and immersing oneself in. Let us admire the beauty of this place, its serene kindness, let us feel its overwhelming peacefulness. What is more, let us see the wisdom, consequence and patience of the authoress. Patience - since who is further from being barbaric than a patient person...