

THE GIFT

Alone once more, I opened my last present. It was wrapped in so many layers of paper that at first I thought there was nothing else, just colored papers laid one on top of the other. But when I came to the little silver box, it opened up to reveal a marvel. I had been offered a miracle in the form of a gift: a pendant set in enamel, on which was painted in miniature an eye of blue – blazing blue, almost turquoise, of gemlike brilliance, the pupil as though bedewed with the merest hint of moistness. I closed the palm of my hand over the treasure and let the blue of her eyes bring back the Queen's entire face, her face as I knew it...

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Chantal Thomas
Farewell, my queen
Translated by Moïshe Black
Touchstone, New York 2003

Text: Päivi Ernkvist

Translation: William Jewson

We should also like to thank Dana Pack AB and Sepidar Hosseini

GUSTAVSBERGS KONSTHALL

PAROUSIA – A new body for the figurine

5 JUNE – 19 SEPTEMBER 2010

Sari Liimatta
Byggstudio

Curator: Päivi Ernkvist
www.figurine-dialogue.com

The 18th century was the true, golden age of figurine manufacturing. Figurines brought people together in that they made superb gifts while, as table decorations, they encouraged educated conversation. Their role was to delight and to seduce. They frequently depicted a scene in the manner of a miniature theatre, a bucolic poem, an idealized painting, a porcelain minuet. The communicative, social dimension was the very heart of the figurine and it beats just as strongly today wherever it appears on the contemporary art scene.

The exhibition *PAROUSIA – A new body for the figurine* is devoted to an art object that has long since been transformed into a worn and hackneyed stereotype. Woken now from a deep slumber it has proved itself to be remarkably communicative, having come back to life in a new context. The exhibition presents some highly personal and extremely sensitive interpretations of the figurine in Sari Liimatta's intimate ornamental sculptures in which reality and fantasy elide. In this exhibition we have departed from the usual format in which there is a close focus on the works of art with space around them to make room for their energy and range of action. Instead we have embedded Sari Liimatta's works, surrounding them with a shell: packaging that acts as a go-between with many ramifications. The stage on which the figurines perform gains new meaning in the glass-fronted boxes and the Mundi-cabinet designed by Byggstudio - graphic designers Hanna Nilsson and Sofia Østerhus. In collaboration with curator Päivi Ernkvist they have created a space for reflection on their own field of operation too, visual communication.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN PÄIVI ERNKVIST AND BYGGSTUDIO:

In this exhibition with Sari Liimatta you allude to a distant cousin of the figurine, the 'Wunderkammer' or cabinet of curiosities which displayed striking objects from all over the world. You call your new creation a Mundi-cabinet. Why is that?

"This refers to the world that it houses – a microcosmos. At the same time it is an expression of the approach to the world that we maintain at Byggstudio; what we, as designers, see in the world around us and are interested in investigating."

Tell us about your thoughts and the process from 'Wunderkammer' to your Mundi-cabinet.

"Perhaps we are motivated by a fascination with the Wunder or wonder. What was formerly considered wondrous is no longer seen as remarkable and exclusive. Rather, it is familiar objects in our everyday lives that raise questions, objects that everyone can collect. Our Mundi-cabinet is like a filing cabinet, a systematization and presentation of a creative process."

You have also thought about the significance and role of the gift. Tell us about that.

"The gift is one of the identities of the figurine. The packaging is the figurine's home. Our display cases illustrate this: the stylistic parameters of the gift – an expression of delight, caring, fawning, exclusivity. The gift is a memento, a symbol, gratitude, a declaration of love, tie of friendship, bribe. The dramaturgy of the gift: protective wrapping, opening, layers to be worked through, emotional moods – surprise, expectation, nervousness, disappointment, delight, relief. The dramaturgy can be created with a label, a bow, silk ribbon, paper, boxes, card, expanded polystyrene, cellophane, tape, etc."

The displays are an interpretation and a narrative of these different aspects?

"Formerly, figurines undertook a journey, carefully treated at every stage. From the simple transport packaging to an exclusive gift box. The displays are hybrids that expose the figurines and the gift's anatomy. The gift is the house/home/upbringing of the figurine."

Hanna Nilsson, b. 1979. Based in Stockholm.
Visual Communication, Danish Design School, Copenhagen
Graphic Design and Illustration, Konstfack, Stockholm

Sofia Østerhus, b. 1979. Based in Oslo and Stockholm.
Visual Communication, Danish Design School, Copenhagen
Visual Communication, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Oslo

www.byggstudio.com

SARI LIIMATTA

Sari Liimatta makes ornamental sculptures using beads, stones, crystals and genuine and paste jewellery. She combines these ornamental materials with domestic items; a toy she has found somewhere, for example, combining the innumerable beads with pins. A new body and new patterns emerge. She builds up what she terms an outer shell, a narrative that acts as a sort of protective coating. These animal sculptures, figurines, jewels, amulets invite us to join a contemporary and yet primordial scene.

Can one claim that Sari Liimatta works in the contemporary tradition of jewellery and figurines? Certainly – for her style and the way in which she combines materials are extremely daring while her emotional language rather takes the form of an atavistic tradition of fables and shamans in which animals are inspirited beings with a remarkable communicative force.

In our industrialized culture, in which animals are often reduced to providing raw materials for finished products, Sari Liimatta's affectionate commitment preserves the souls of the animals, their identities, their integrity; and in doing so they may well be helping to save our own souls.

Sari Liimatta, b. 1977.

Based in Lappeenranta, Finland.

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www.sariliimatta.net