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Deeping Our Perceptions of the Present Sculpture by Kristján Guðmundsson and Sam Jinks

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Much advanced art today appears bent on moving from the past into the future in one swift glance, as if the present never existed. The problem is less about getting to the future than our ability to get into the present. Much of the art being produced today is timeless, not in the Classical sense, but in its avoidance of time. I would attribute some of this deterrence to the impact of advanced information technologies, which has replaced our sense of time with ultra-speed and Nano-second deliveries. This may further suggest a loss of time is related to memory, as memory, in fact, is related to our sensory apparatus. Formerly, the presence of time was immediately felt within the course of history. This was before we ignored the possible disappearance of a sense of time.

I would like to discuss the sculpture of two formidable and highly sensate artists, Kristján Guðmundsson and Sam Jinks, in relation to some of these thoughts. Their works – as disparate as they might appear– are, in a sense, timely. Their timeliness or awareness of time as a sensory component in their respective works recalls the human condition from two distinct angles of vision. Each artist functions in ways quite different from what I have just described. Their works offer an alternative to removing us from present reality. They are relevant to the extent that their sculpture brings a sense of time back into art. Guðmundsson and Jinks point toward lingering traces, the affects of selfhood, as sensory levels of intelligence and experience are being obfuscated and challenged in a competing conformist-oriented culture.

The poetic and conceptual graphite and paper works of Guðmundsson are timely to the extent that they exist very much within the present tense, even if we, as viewers, have failed to understand the present in which we live. Whereas Guðmundsson, the Icelandic artist, presents us with visual and material facts, Sam Jinks gives us exact

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representational models of human figuration. Their ways of thinking about art shift the normative position by which we perceive the human condition. In each case, we are asked to confront ourselves in relation to the changes that the new world order has revealed. They intuitively represent new realities present in the world today, but without losing contact with the present tense. They are mature, self-motivated artists that should not be taken for granted or overlooked. Their points of departure in their work are important to understand and as we come to terms with the issues of the world that are affecting us today.

Stones and Trees, graphite and paper -- these are indigenous to Reykjavik, the place where Guðmundsson lives and works, where he has been conceptually intertwined with materials for several decades. For him, ideas and their physical manifestations are united through art, not separate from one another (as was often the case in early American conceptualism). The focus of his art is to expand the idea of drawing into a larger context. To grasp this depends on how far the mind is willing to go in coming to terms with what is fundamental about drawing. What is drawing exactly in the terms that Guðmundsson proposes? In an essay by Gunnar Arnason, the Nordic writer describes an early installation from 1973 by Guðmundsson in which the artist specifically attends to the weight of the paper used in a series of drawings involving ripples on a pond. The weight of the paper is compared equally to the weight of the stones thrown into the water creating the ripples observed and drawn by the artist.

Arnason describes an inert correspondence between the paper and the stones in terms as a “correlation between the representation [of the drawing] and its material embodiment.” This kind of conceptual thinking reflects the kind of ontological and physical presences one might discover in the arctic regions like Iceland. The human condition veers outside the urban context where feeling the passage of time is restored. Yet, ironically, it connects to another means of production, that is, how graphite slabs in the environment become implements for drawing, and how trees are planted and grown to make paper.

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In *Drawing 8* (1988 – 1990), a large slab of graphite is poised in relation to two enormous, weight-laden rolls of paper in a manner as Classical as the façade of the Parthenon. Speaking of Athens, Guðmundsson's *Olympic Drawing – Javelin Throw Men* (2012) presents four strips of graphite on the wall with a javelin leaning beside them, another reminiscence of Classicism, which suggests an iconic sense of ritual in drawing as a performance, as a fact of human existence, involving energy, precision, time, and acute observation.

Sam Jinks is a younger artist who sees the world through a different pair of eyes, a difference reflection as to how the world turns. His statement on the human condition functions as a representation on two levels: the desire for intimacy and the notion of figurative transmutations through the surreality of dreams. This is expressed in the artist's representations of the human figure (both young and elderly) in silicon, resin, pigment, and human hair. He emerges from a school of Australian figurative artists, such as Ron Mueck and Patricia Piccinini, who have both gained international attention. In *Untitled* (2012), frogs surround a baby; and later, there are two babies with frogs. What is the difference? The first is an isolated portrait in three-dimensions, while the second shows the intimacy of two babies sleeping together. Another large, more discomfoting work, *Unsettled Dogs* (2012), has an adult couple, sleeping nude. They are facing one another, not with human heads, but with the heads of dogs.

Jinks' figures are generally smaller than life-size, which is essential to how we relate to them. The mitigated scale conjures a more severe representation that is not a simple likeness, but a matter of fact confrontation with art in the tradition of how the figure represents a manner of living. *Shade* (2011) shows a young woman holding her right gown close to her body. *Woman and Child* (2010) bypasses a generation, showing an elderly woman holding an infant. The intimacy suggested in these sculptural portraits is about living in the present and about sensory time.

What impresses me about Jinks is not only the human likeness of modeling the figure through the application of silicone and human hair, but the way he gives attention

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to someone close to him, yet removed from our reality: yet we sense the connection and the relationship of the moment that exists in relation to them. His figures exist in a scale smaller than life-size, yet they capture the feeling of existence. They represent the human figure in a way that simulates, yet reflects life. At the same time, they empathize with the human condition as an existential paradigm? Jinks' work is as far removed from Madame Tussaud as it is from the sixteenth century sculptor Bernini. His sculptures offer another reality. He works in the present tense, focusing on incidents he has seen and the dreams that incite him to work from the perspective of his imagination.

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