

At the Alma Löv Museum in Sweden in 2002 the Icelandic artist Margrét H. Blöndal presented an exhibition involving a house within a house, rubber balls, rings, trees outside and a text within. That text begins, "I hope that the babybirds will be able to sculpt their way through their solitude because socializing can be good." This seems nicely to encapsulate all the ease and difficulty, all of the chance and choice of her work.

The above is something that Margrét H. Blöndal says in, and as part of, one of her works. There are many things that might be said about her work, few of which are easy to say. Of those that are easy to say a number are classificatory. Her work, for instance, is composed of drawings and sculptures. That said, this distinction is less clear than it might at first seem. Her drawings often employ olive oil which tends to encircle her figures with a sort of translucent halo. "I am drawn," she has said, "to how the colors become sculptural when I dip the brush into the oil before it is put on the paper." Just as her drawings have something sculptural in their coloration, her sculptures have something draughtsman-like, and so it should come as no surprise that she has described her three-dimensional work as less sculptures than "drawings into the space."

This is not the end of the things that are easy to say, although it nearly is. Neither the drawings into space nor those on paper have ideal perspectives. The drawings into space have no front, back or sides, as might a Moses by Michelangelo. And the drawings on paper have no designated direction. The ones you will see on the walls are hung in a direction that may (or may not) seem the most suggestive or intuitive, but they are not dictated by the artist. The point of view is up to you.

If that, in a simple sense, is what Margrét H. Blöndal's works are, what then are they about? Here is where the babybirds begin to sculpt their way through the solitude, where things become more difficult to say. Asked to explain something of her work in Virginia in 2007 she said, "I'm not interested in building monuments that will stay forever as monuments. I'm more interested in this thing that just passes." If we look at her works, and take her at her word, it is easy to see that what her works are and what they are about meet in a simple idea with a complicated name: transience. Many a sculpture is made for the ages, is made as a monument, and our culture of course possesses sculptures that are thousands—and in some cases tens of thousands—of years old. But this time-defying monumentality is not what we find in her work. We find, instead, in the gentle fall of bright string, the shifting drape of dark fabric, mysterious demarcations on floor and wall. We see, in short the opposite of such monumentality: we see things that just pass.

What then of the meaning of these transient things, these things that pass? What story, for instance, do they tell? Here is where things become truly difficult, as Blöndal's work is — even on the relatively rare occasions when it is figural, when it represents a bird or a bush — is resistant to narrative. I might say that a drawing of hers represents magical reindeer antlers, red with fire and blood, or that it represents the fragility of life or the flow of rivers or the path from the phenomenal to the noumenal. I might say it means the crackling of fire and the sharp smell of pine trees when you are very young. I might say anything I like, but this saying is a very personal affair, and one which is difficult to correlate with the perceptions of others and the real or imagined intentions of the artist.

There is, however, a story that transience itself tells, and which is beauty. Transience is of course a fundamental part of our experience of the world and makes for much of the beauty we find in it. We are moved by not only the striking order and harmony of things, but by their fragility, by the unimaginable touch of time that will sooner or later take them from us. For this reason, transience is of the essence of art, and of the essence of Blöndal's work.

The Alma Löv Museum text that begins with the sculpting of solitude continues with a Lena and a Lindgren, swimming seals and natural springs. It ends: "what about the emergency button. who pushed it. I was ready to enter as the naked lady completely immersed by the darkness." That, on its own, is something of a poem, and something of a story – but one without clear connection and one without delineated beginning, middle and end. It is as enigmatic as lightly knotted orange cord pierced by wooden pegs, as pink fabric hanging from a polyhedron. As for an ending that will make sense of all that went before it, there is none. We will never know who pushed the emergency button or why. And if the naked lady enters she will be immersed in a darkness into which we will never see. What we are left with is what we find along the way, the passing things which leave us free to see magic antlers, the flow of rivers, the phenomenal and the noumenal, the play of color, light, shade, form; which leaves us free to see all that we have and all that we will.

Leland de la Durantaye

Margrét H. Blöndal (born in 1970) lives in Reykjavik, Iceland. She studied at the Icelandic College of Arts and Crafts and completed her studies at Rutgers University New Jersey, USA. Solo exhibitions have been held at i8 Gallery, Reykjavik (with Silvia Bächli), at Nicolas Krupp, Basel and at the Municipal Museum of Reykjavik. She has been included in numerous group exhibitions in such spaces as Kunsthalle Wien, the National Gallery of Iceland and her work has been shown at Manifesta 7.

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