

VERONICA BROVALL

BABBLING ALONG ON THE SUDDEN DESTRUCTION

The confrontation with Veronica Brovall's sculptures is immediate. These imposing works are dominating, tangible and recognisable. Although none of us has ever actually seen such a creature (it hovers between a machine, a plant, something anthropomorphic, or a chance combination of all of them), it is as if we had always known something like this could exist, rooted deep in our subconscious in a mythical past or future, or after some incredible disaster has taken place. Once the sculpture has found its place in our surroundings, it does all it can to slip into our everyday reality. Its expansive volumes oblige the viewer to walk around them and to tolerate their presence. Our inquiring gaze glances off the compact – and often black – mass so that from a distance we have to be content with the overall outline. All the materials used are references to our familiar everyday reality: PVC foam, plastic film, chicken wire, nylon thread, tape, feathers and ventilators. Above all, we know that the disaster took place before we arrived. What we are looking at is the residual vibration and smouldering, and their reshaping into a new reality.

We imagine something colossal, with a brute force that lashes out without restraint and whose only outlet is to implode or to defy the cosmic workings of fate. It is above all a blind energy that drives its own life-force back towards death. Its exterior form may be robust, but the excess energy seems to come from inside. However efficiently the plastic film attracts the gaze and sends it back where it came from, this makes the question of the innards even more intriguing. Here and there, a part of the casing that has been torn open reveals something of the uprooted underside. Other parts of the original sculpture (insofar as our imagination thinks it can deduce its form from this combination of fragments) consist of no more than disintegrated innards. From close up, we see a landscape of details that reveal what vessel of opposing forces held this colossus in an unstable equilibrium. The subterranean energies can be explained on the basis of subconscious sexual urges and the death wish, but equally of the primitive evolutionary instinct found in everything that lives, the ubiquitous energy of nature or simply the overall conditioning of the cosmos.

The way the sculptures are presented suggests a time that babbles slowly onwards, which is only emphasised by the scattered presence of feathers and ventilators. Nevertheless, everything indicates that decomposition has been doing its work and that we are actually witness to the afterlife of this anthropomorphic thing. We can imagine the complete tree, car or sucking man with their full life-force. Everything suggests that a stillness comparable to the present one had previously showed on the surface of the sculpture and that one or other sudden catastrophe had taken place, a consequence of its own recklessness, an unpredictable natural event or the clash of

centrifugal forces within. This turning point reintroduced the transience of time to a colossus that had imagined itself superior to it. Whether it be the speed of car tyres or the eternal growth of trees (both are recurrent themes in Brovall's work), they are both ways of accelerating or decelerating time to escape mortality. Obsession is another way of briefly suspending time: excessive eating, the urge to consume, lust. All beings are sooner or later confronted with their finiteness, because from the very beginning their original concept itself is temporary, as the materials Brovall uses indicate. Even after the catastrophe has struck, the sculpture continues to emanate a latent threat. The remnants draw energy from their regained equilibrium and recycle themselves into a non-existent hybrid being. The sculpture also reminds us that dormant energies that have no outlet present a lasting danger of destruction.

Brovall's sculptures probably contain archetypal aspects of a mythological consciousness that continues to reverberate in Scandinavia while it has faded elsewhere in Europe. Her mythology is primarily contemporary, however. It can be linked specifically to the urge for consumption and for speed, war and ecological disasters. The transposition of the sexual urge to other areas of life, where it is not always recognised as such, turns up all over the place.

There is still room for poetic accents on the debris of turmoil and doom, ones which in the normal course of things would not even have arisen. Mythical figures right themselves like new gods (or phoenixes?) out of the battered colossi. Feathers, fans and wires appear here and there like artificial flowers that herald an opening towards something promising. Lastly, anyone who views the sculpture from close up will begin to appreciate the consistent use of perishable materials. They cannot in themselves really be called aesthetic, and Brovall does not in fact use them from a point of view of technical perfectionism. It is precisely this that gives them their attraction and specific visual idiom. The artist makes use of accessible materials which at the same time link up with the philosophy underlying her work. She immediately draws everyone involved into the bath of her story. In the first place this means herself, who, after months of toil, realises that her work will not escape its transience. In this way, each time the work is installed it is a slightly different version. Then there are the collectors, who thereby opt deliberately for a transitory temporal dimension in their experience of art. And lastly the public, who realise that the object of the aesthetic experience is not eternal, only the attitude that underlies it. The hopeful possibility of recycling does always remain, however. In fact Brovall's sculptures are at some stage of recycling from the very moment you see them.

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