

Munan Øvrelid - Fugl far tall, øyne hånd, stein vann vind Trøndelag Senter for Samtidskunst 4. – 24. juni 2015

Munan Øvrelid's exhibition "Bird Father Numbers, Eye Hand, Stone Water Wind" deals with seeing and perceiving through registration, imprint and material, in a span of techniques from mathematics to painting, from photography to sound and graphics. There are graphs and compositions outside of human control and perspective, objective mathematics, unique relations and naturalistic paintings. There is something unknown, but fundamental, which can not be grasped, only experienced in the moment.

In the work "Waterfall Mountain Rock Sea Wind, Seydisfjordur May-July 2014", Øvrelid has let the natural forces create sound and image through three copper plates. One was lowered off a cliff in strong wind, one placed into a waterfall and the third in the waves of the ocean, letting the water's tide drag it out to sea. Movements between the metal and water, wind, rocks and mountains have engraved lines and made compositions in the sensitive surface of the plates, which in turn have been used to print graphic images. The vibrations of the plates were recorded by contact microphones. Sound and wind strength was measured at the locations and the data is given colours from rocks, soil and plants found at the site.

In the installation "Birds, Father and Mathematics, Balbakken October 2012 - April 2013", birds and weather were registered throughout the winter by the artist's father, a retired mathematician who has moved to his cabin and taken up birdwatching, in addition to his complex variables. For seven months the activities and life around a specific tree in the garden form the basis for a three-dimensional graph made from steel, a series of ink drawings, a photograph, woodcut prints from the tree trunk and graphic prints from plates placed on the ground under the tree. By translating the number of birds into time, and by giving each species of birds a particular colour, the data is reintroduced into a material world again in lively encounters between colour, water and paper. The number of birds and their corresponding songs and calls are the basis for a sound piece consisting of seven compositions created using different logical systems in collaboration with the artist Marcellus L.

The works in the exhibition are different in nature and create a curious scale of observations and registrations, where man only plays one of the parts. Mathematics can show us relations we would otherwise not perceive or understand, but here the knowledge is dissolved by use of its own structures or by translating it into materials which go beyond recognition and categorization, and perhaps to come closer to that which really is. Some processes start with numbers or end with numbers via direct imprints of material meeting the forces of nature. Pigment dissolves in water that lifts the colour upwards as it is sucked into the paper, wind and water throw metal against rocks. The prints are made without rational distance, they are direct registrations of weather, growth, wind and wildlife. Since there is no active subject who directs their creation is the composition of the image random? Or, is there will and purpose in the characteristics of the materials and in the forces of nature? Are there fundamental structures behind what we perceive and within things?

There are no laws or rational answer that can explain the meaning behind everything, and perhaps the closest we get to a rational answer is the lack of an answer. Perhaps the constant changes are the fundamental ways of the world. But as the waterfall flows and gushes down the hillside, always changing, never being the same, we still perceive it as a fixed entity. In antiquity Zeno concluded that movement in itself is an illusion, for if one cuts time into pieces, you cannot move between the smallest parts for among them there is no time left to move in. Henry Bergson turned this argument around and claimed that all this line of reasoning tells us is that movement cannot be measured and also not divided into points.

According to Bergson realism and idealism both go too far, it is a mistake to reduce matter to the perception which we have of it. A mistake also to make of it a thing able to produce in us perceptions, but in itself of different nature than they. Matter, in his view, is an aggregate of images. The object exists in itself, and the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: it is an image, but a self-existing image.

"Hand, Cat, Hand, Butterfly" consists of three paintings and a sound installation. Hands have been stroking cats and painting butterflies. Through a nuanced and detailed painting process we are brought up close to images of butterflies with patterns of eyes on their wings. Simultaneously we hear the sounds of two cats purring and the deep beating of their hearts, and it is as if something behind the butterflies is looking at us. The ambiguous images are both butterflies and faces at the same time, they oscillate between painting and being, between object in the world and in our perception, between attraction and repulsion. Even if we understand how the optical illusion appears, it creates a feeling of a double presence. Ambiguity is contradictory and therefore seems to be an impossibility, but maybe the truth is that everything is multiple at once and that there is an unlimited opening? What is this gaze that looks? Is it ourselves we see in the eyes, in the pattern on wings, on butterflies, in paint? And at the same time is there something ungraspable in the painting seeing itself through us, through our eyes and through our consciousness? And perhaps this, paradoxically, is our own perception, interacting in the outer world.

Things are unique in the moment, as they rise up from an unfathomable depth towards our perception and knowledge, whilst we attempt to measure them. It takes the oceans streams 500 years to go around the earth and the wind drags the air around the globe in 18 months. Carbon we have once breathed out is now part of a tree in the south where our migratory birds like to be in the winter. The water in the waterfall has fallen to the ground as rain in different areas and it has been parts of clouds, bodies and organisms. The world is in our consciousness and in our language, but we, our consciousness and languages are also part of the world.

Randi Nygård 2015