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IF I KNOW ANYTHING AT ALL IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

NOTES ON MAKING

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INTRODUCTION

Last few months I was trying to answer questions about what is sculpture for me; what its purpose and meaning, if there is any; wherever my assumption that one needs to study the reality to understand the fundamental points and volumes was right or not.

One could argue that contemporary art scene does not need old school classical sculpture approach, because there is technology doing the practical work so the creator can concentrate on discourse. On the downside it lacks eye- mind- hand communication and spacial thinking as well as creative possibilities of material in action.

Bernini gave an excellent advice to the young Nicodemus Tessin, which I find a good approach to making creative work: “You need to draw using your eye, that is, imprint everything in your mind <...>. Put one thought after the other down on paper, judge them, consider their errors against ancient and modern works, make modelini in clay, always preserve that idea even in the most elaborately worked things, and contemplate many prints in order to see variations of the idea.”¹

How the method of working influenced the final result; how well the initial idea is preserved in the final variations; where it stands and how does it connects in the context of contemporary art scene and society are questions for exploration.

¹ Dickerson, C. D., Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Anthony Sigel, and Ian Wardropper. *Bernini: sculpting in clay*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012, 65

BACKGROUND

I got interested in model based sculpture during my freshmen year in Gothenburg University School of Design and Crafts under one week course with Britt Ignell Karlrand. Course was aimed at the group work and communication, where the several rotating teams of 3-4 people were supposed to model real size sitting figure. My patience ran out on the third day, and I started my own figure.

Lessons I learned were not the ones that the course coordinator aimed at but it was invaluable to me. At that initial stage I learned I was metaphorically blind. I thought I could see the shape, but I couldn't. I realized the interest for human body, the problem of not being able to reach my goal and with time, the potential ways of studying. It was the year later, at the exchange term in Tokyo Zokei University where I realized how deeply shape blind I was. The nice thing about studying human body is how it only gets more interesting with time.

Initially it was a challenge, with all complexity it brings, a tool to learn to see the things as they are. Coming to study human body made me more honest with my work. As there are rules about volumes, balance, proportions and so on which make up human body shape, the study is an active see-do -redo process. It made me realize that I almost never get it right and that it feels great. It felt as if I could do it forever. All I need it to look closely, visualize and as one of Zokei professors said: "think from within". It took me a while until I started to get a grip of what it means, but life is about a journey anyway.

It's something with ability to visualize the shape in your mind, to know how it feels from inside what makes it count. Any sculptural objects integrity and credibility rests upon the inner comprehension.

PRESTUDY

It was second time I got on the exchange at Tokyo Zokei University, this time at advanced level, sculpture faculty. Studies lasted from April 2015 until end of January 2016.

First half of my day always started with real size model studies in clay and the rest of the day was for wood, stone and fiber reinforced plastic works. The end of my exchange studies in mid-November to January I was working on modeling and researching methods for open plaster forms for clay pressing.





Plaster molds, about 185cm



It was followed by ceramic material testing, the color, the structure, the way the clay is put in the plaster and so on. Questions like, how does it changes after firing, what clay shrinkage does to sculpture, what things becomes more apparent than others, how color influences shape, is there anything I would like to work with, and so on started popping up. Questions about the base, how is it going to stand, the balance, the connection of the different parts of the sculpture were equally important.



Mixed clay, stoneware, camphor base, 175cm high



Clay tests, terracotta, green stoneware clay, white stoneware with porslin, about 60cm high, the third sculpture about 45 cm high

ON LEARNING TO SEE

While trying to understand the advice to “think from within” from several years ago, I came to few different points in my work. I realized how much I relayed on surface and superficial understanding of the human form. Those moments when you see others trying on models pose, and moving body here or there searching for the balance or gravity points didn’t seem so pointless anymore. I always relayed on the eyes and imagination and then thought to myself: “Volume up!” As if it was a concert.

With some later research I found out the importance of negative space and how you create it, the way the air moves through the form, where the space begins and ends and so on. Those three-dimensional mysteries hold you awake at night.

Herbert George in his book “The Elements of Sculpture” listed 14 elements of three-dimensional language: material, place, surface, edge, texture, color, scale, mass, center of gravity, volume, space, movement, light and memory.¹ His Shadow as a volume sculptures made me think about the importance and weight of light as well as about this sculptural tension thing. It seems that all these elements have multiply meanings. For example, you could think about the color as a shape or a memory and some people would even hear the sound as in synesthesia.

There should be the tension and the relaxation points in object as when we talked about how the air moves through the form. In theory I realize the complexity, but in reality it comes more naturally. For example the space between the chin and breast bone is crucial for so many things. I always get stuck there in the beginning, searching for the good place, like creating a special niche for space. Another negative space I think about is when working with the back, there is something about that, that the back should be whole. I think much about the volume and how the negative space will jump off it instead of creating a niche like in the previous example.

While researching on thinking from within the body sculpture I found the inner space concept both physical and mental. “Min kropp innehåller alla möjligheter. Vad jag arbetar mot är en total identifikation av allt liv med min kontaktpunkt med yttvärlden, min kropp... En av mina uppgifter är att återskänka både kroppen och konsten deras immanens.”² Writes Antony Gormley in his sketchbook from 1984. Directness of the body as container and a connector. Later in his works he explores and describes the inner space as “objectless, dimensionless, limitless and endless.”³ Where in my current work I concentrate on the state of mind in now. Presence and time are the aspects I wanted to feel in the work.

1 Herbert George. *The elements of sculpture: a viewer's guide*. Phaidon Press Limited, 2014

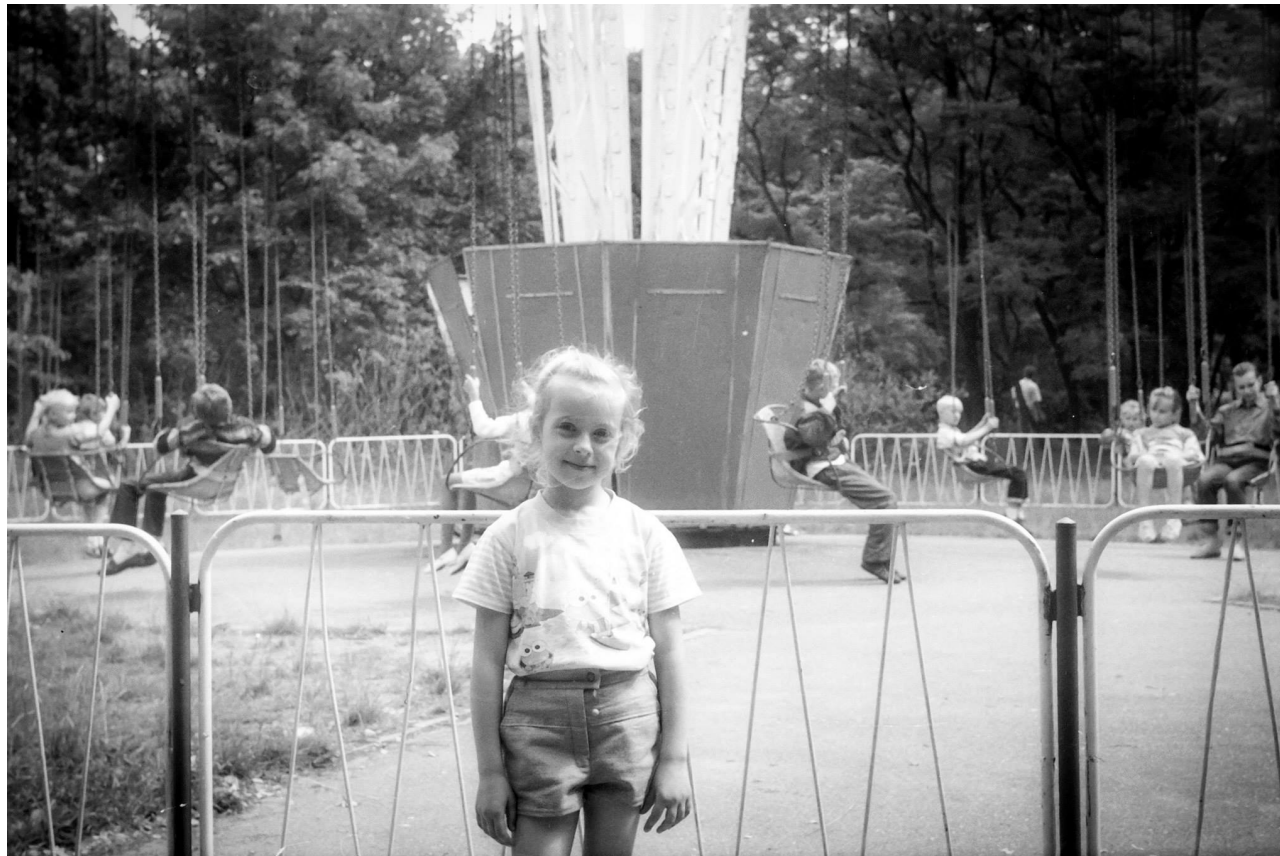
2 Lewis Biggs, *Antony Gormley*, Tate Galery Publications, 1993, 22

3 Antony Gormley, TED talks, *Sculpted space, within and without*, 2012

PROCESS

Current work is inspired by an honest and calm photograph of me taken when I was eight. Looking at the picture I suddenly realized that all that calmness and kindness that is so hard worked for today as an adult was once a very natural thing. The lost art of being in the moment.

I do not recall who took the photograph, so this is where I want to start. The subjectivity of one's memory, well, as everything else in our life.



Concentration shifting from model based human body shape study into search for human inner state of mind expression. Some of the initial aims were to search for a way to escape narrative way of thinking about sculpture. Concentrate on the inner feeling instead of telling a story about a girl and a memory. I want my sculpting skills to evolve from shaping the outside shape into understanding the inside space.

Starting sculpting without having models was different. Using photographs and thinking about the structure and angles was my main help while working. Working with neutral pose with hands relaxed by sides, half step forward, slightly tilted and a bit twisted hips and shoulders around the axis, only slightly tilted head movement. Figures mirror each other in pose. Concentrating on the feeling of being in balance but kind of static.

For the child figure the softness of the upper part was important, relaxed shoulders and waves of t-shirt cloth sets the tone. Slightly unconscious, smiling and closed as if animated eye expression, follows the feeling inwards.

The adult figure has some tension in the shoulder part with lots of detailed texture on the shirt and pants making it a little vibrant and crisp.



First figure about 130cm, second figure about 160cm high



Some of the plaster molds

ON RELEVANCE

The studying of fundamental points and volumes gave me a perspective, a mindset I could use when thinking, looking and working with shapes and materials.

The aim is to sculpt from feeling, relying on the reality but not copying it. It's an acquired set of skills which translates thoughts into reality; the way we do things makes us unique. As in this project if the aim was to sculpt the most realistic image of myself I could as well have done a full body three- dimensional scan and cut the shape out of the plastic foam, which also includes many sets and skills, but the result would be different. What stands in front of me now in form of two real size sculptures are my views on human body and on my own body, on my experience and inexperience, the whole set of worldview and the ability or the lack of therefore to battle the gravity.

The methods of art creation obviously influences end result, that's why it is important to have a choice. In times when conceptualization and digitalization are the tools and often destination itself I want to concentrate on what is most important for me now. Thus in current work the qualities I am looking for calls for subjectivity and materiality.

Up until the starting the plaster mold, I feel responsibility for every detail of the form, but as the mold is made for pressing in the clay, I feel the need to deviate, to have some fun with material. It is so boring to be in control all the time, there should be some magic.

ON EXPECTATIONS AND CURRENT RESULTS

Today was a nice day in wood workshop cutting out wavy forms of massive birch bases glued the day before. It was a first time I could see over the bases laid down on the ground, imagining the possible combinations. These bases are the essential part of the sculpture, as they are going to connect the figures into one work. In the process of making, many things changed and there I was, finally looking at something real.

The sculpture in the beginning made massively in clay, later molded and now in process of pushing different clays into molds, drying and shrinking, changing in color and density, was always something more of vision, something that in the end will become something else. Finding the right expression and connecting pieces into one, working with variations is stimulating.

Yesterdays firing with first sculpture went well, if it was by itself. The usage of melting mosaic glass in high fired reduction kiln resulted into some dramatic expression of carbon trapping and copper getting black and red. What looks interesting on test can look totally different applied on the body shape.

With the fading sense of perspective I feel the need to minimize, find my way back to what was the most important thing. Memory, subjectivity, stillness, looking into yourself.

EXAMINATION



One of the commentaries from the audience at the public discussion was that the older sculpture is caring for the younger one, in a way we as adults should protect our inner child. Here the inner child stands for calmness and feelings of security. It resonated strongly with the initial inspiration picture.

Other interesting input was that the child sculpture by itself is sufficient and that the second sculpture might have needed more work. I might have a chance to test this idea in upcoming group exhibition at Avenyn in summer 2016.

Overall I am very grateful for everybody's involvement in the discussion.

EXHIBITION AT VASAGATAN 33



Working with the exhibition room consisted of repainting all the walls white, hiding heater and so on. It was done in order to get as much of the daylight as possible; at the ceiling on walls I used daylight filtered long lamps to bring some natural diffused light into over wise gloomy room. Shade of light was light blue in order to balance the yellowness of the floor.

Audience at the exhibition opening was very inquiring and the background story as well as the method of creation was important part of the discussions.

Many visitors reacted to structure of cracks and the use of high fired porcelain mix in the real sized sculpture. The choice of massive birch bases in connecting manner was also noted and discussed several times.

LITERATURE

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