

The Whole World

A text about Erik Lemcke's sculptures

The development of visual art after the Second World War has taught us that something must be wrong when a particular work gives the viewer peace of mind and physical well-being. Yet these are exactly the feelings one experiences when standing before Erik Lemcke's sculptures. One notes, with some surprise, that the elegant, rounded and harmonious forms have an almost meditative effect that feels distinctly un-Western.

Since Romanticism, disharmony, division and doubt have been the driving forces of Western art, and with artists such as Egon Schiele, the German Expressionists and the Italian Futurists, aggression, the pathological and 'the ugly' entered the scene. For better and for worse, since it is undeniable that fantastic works of art have been created by these manic, tormented and self-assertive artists.

Art, Darwin and Oedipus

This development has, however, also meant that art writers and art historians have often equated renewal with rebellion, as though every single generation of artists has its own Oedipal struggle against the previous generation. Artists who have gone their own way and concentrated on a quiet, steady self-development, without regard for the trends of the day, have had a very hard time within this almost Darwinian explanatory model. If one's aim is an art without sharp edges or any form of aggression, one is often suspected of being a holistic dreamer whose works are of no interest to anyone but sect members dressed in orange. It must also be said that the art created by, for example, self-appointed art therapists is often utterly uninteresting and, to put it plainly, of little artistic value. A sweet blue dolphin in the lower right-hand corner does not make a painting any better. However idealistic one may be, if the work does not meet certain compositional and coloristic criteria, good intentions fall flat. That is when we have landed in mere decoration.

Dynamic equilibrium

Where harmony in a work is achieved through dynamic equilibrium, however, the situation is quite different. In such cases, one clearly sees and feels how balance is achieved by combining two or more opposing forces within a single artistic gesture. In this approach, based on synthesis, we are not dealing with a dead and visually impoverished balance, but with vibrating, mutually influencing currents of energy that call to mind, more than anything, the yin-and-yang principle that plays such a significant role in Eastern thought.

It is this positive form of balance that rests over Erik Lemcke's works – a balance the eye notices first. Looking at one of his sculptures, one immediately notices that there are no sharp edges. Whether it is a work in granite, wood, bronze or marble, the forms are always rounded. Rounded and resolved. A sense of well-being spreads through the whole body within a fraction of a second. We relax, take pleasure, and perhaps begin to wonder why these sculptures have such a positive effect on our psyche. On closer inspection, one finds that the soft yet resilient forms resemble organic phenomena found in nature, both microscopic and macroscopic: flower buds, fruits, plant

stems, drops of water, or the currents of energy found in the movement of the wind as it catches a pile of leaves and carries them dancing through the air in beautiful elliptical circles. Movements as natural as breathing, or the atomic processes that underlie everything from the structure of solid matter to the particles that, invisibly to the eye, bind the whole universe together.

Holism

One of the means by which Erik Lemcke demonstrates this is his use, in his sculptures, of the so-called Möbius lines. These lines, which one can construct oneself with a strip of paper, turn around their own axis in an endless path and thus become a symbol of the forces of the universe. It is by no means coincidental that Erik Lemcke uses the Möbius line in his art. Working from Rudolf Steiner's view of the human being, there is for him no separation between art and life. Everything hangs together in a holistic unity – an outlook that owes much to Goethe, whom every schoolchild otherwise mostly associates with 'The Sorrows of Young Werther'. As a scientist, Goethe stood in strong opposition to Isaac Newton's deterministic and mechanical world view, which formed the basis of Western science until Albert Einstein and our own Niels Bohr revolutionised atomic physics. Goethe was, in fact, a kind of 'proto-holist' who saw light and darkness, matter and energy, and the world's phenomena in general as mutually dependent on one another – a viewpoint echoed in many of the ideas used today by ecologists, therapists and political grassroots movements in current debate. Erik Lemcke applies these ideas in his own life with great consistency, and it is evident that through his art, too, he wishes to show that there is another path, another practice, than material enrichment and the egotistical career race.

The materials

As I have touched on before, this does not in itself make Erik Lemcke a good artist. He has become one solely because he has laboured with his materials with a stubborn, but truly also pleasurable, eagerness to keep improving.

As a viewer, one sees and senses this masterful feel for material immediately. Bronze, with its reflective colours and illusion of weightlessness, can, if entirely polished, easily become TOO neat. Erik Lemcke avoids this by allowing the bronze, in chosen places, to remain 'impure', so that black patches of varying size and shape provide a visual counterpoint to the brilliant golden colours. This gives the sculpture a more rustic character, with a highly varied play of colour.

In the granite works, the elegant and organic forms are matched by the stone's substantial weight – a weight that brings to mind Romanesque church art or Heerup's magical granite statuettes. Like Heerup, Erik Lemcke also thinks of the stone as an ensouled being, one that must be entered into and understood from within. He likewise manages to exploit to perfection the granite's almost impressionistic range of red, blue, grey and black colours.

With his marble works, Erik Lemcke plays on the unavoidable associations with Greek and Roman art. Unlike, for example, Thorvaldsen, he does not use the now very rare, pure white marble. Instead, he uses a type with black markings. Here too, he considers the tactile effects of the surface and refrains from polishing the stone completely smooth. The rough, matte surface gives a more varied light than the perfect, but also somewhat cold, exterior of highly polished marble.

Regardless of which material Erik Lemcke works with, it is thus always the organic and emotional qualities that interest him. Purely formalist sculpture holds no appeal for him. The pleasant sensation we feel in both body and mind when looking at his sculptures helps to break down the barriers between low and high art, between an art created for a small circle of intellectuals and the great mass of ordinary art-loving people. It is clear that, with his sculptures, Erik Lemcke hopes to kindle in us the spark that makes us reflect on the outer world's connection to our own, often divided, inner self – and perhaps even make us better people. In this sense, Erik Lemcke is something as rare as a good old-fashioned humanist. And we cannot have too many of those, given the way the world looks today.

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