

Kirstine Aarkrog

Instruments

20 November - 31 December 2021

Instruments presents a survey of six sculptures by Copenhagen-based artist Kirstine Aarkrog (b. 1986, Denmark) produced over the past ten years. The word “instrument” is traditionally used to refer to either a tool for precision work, or a device used to produce musical sound. In other words, it denotes an object whose material properties prompt a specific type of human behaviour upon interaction. Interested in the potential consequences of our encounters with objects, with each sculpture Aarkrog adopts a different approach to the complex relationship between an object’s form, its apparent function and our emotional response to these two factors.

When asked about the way that function and emotion interact in these works, the artist replied with the following: ‘I do not work with emotions. But it is clear that all actions, even potential actions, are associated with emotions.’ ***Du må ikke forlade mig [“Don’t leave me”] (2013-2021)*** is a work that explores the emotional effect of action as well as one’s inability to act. Here we see a heavy sheet of unbrushed steel, approximately the height and width of a human body. Whilst the impenetrable density of the flat steel surface acts as an obstacle, the small hole cut into the center of the metal draws attention to its three-dimensional quality and allows the viewer to relate to it in bodily terms. The artist describes the work as a exploration of whether it's possible for two humans to connect despite all barriers, material or otherwise.

In a work like ***Attend (2013)***, Aarkrog takes this idea of human understanding as it relates to functional form and further abstracts it. The work consists of a single-pitch brass instrument, designed by the artist and custom-made in silver by smiths working along the Germany-Czech Republic border. The instrument’s looping form means that if “played”, air leaves the lungs and simultaneously hits the back of the user’s head, encasing them in a vibrating feedback loop until their lungs empty. In its relation to the form and volume of the user’s body, as well as its hyper-reflective polished surface, this sculpture facilitates a strange and distorted recognition of self that requires active participation from the viewer in order to be fully realised. The effect is absurd, just as it also seems to speak to some kind of essential truth about self-recognition.

For works like ***Untitled (2012-2019)*** and ***Instructions for use: Place the object on your head... (2013-2019)*** Aarkrog’s use of an unglazed and therefore permeable material enhances this potential for ambiguous recognition - the viewer’s subjectivity is encouraged to move freely throughout the surfaces. These two objects, whose purpose according to the artist is to be worn on top of the head to allow the user to be clipped into various apparatuses, are displayed hanging flat against the wall like two minimalist ceramic masks. In this way, as the orientation of the objects is altered, an opportunity arises for form to rebel against function according to the subjectivity of the viewer’s perspective. Through an act of recognition, the viewer can prescribe meaning to the sculpture and in doing so, determine their own emotional response to the shape observed.

Whilst many of the sculptures in this exhibition draw attention to the ways in which function and its formal expression can influence human action, Aarkrog also emphasises the possibility of this process’s reversal. We are susceptible to cues from our environment and our behaviour is often regulated by formal restraints imposed by design. Yet at the same time, our subjectivity provides the opportunity for greater agency, as we may actively direct our perception in a way that helps us better recognise ourselves and the people around us.

KIRSTINE AARKROG

Born 1986 Copenhagen, Denmark
Lives and works in Copenhagen, Denmark

EDUCATION

2006 - 2013: MFA, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Denmark
2009 - 2010: Tromsø Academy of Contemporary Art, Tromsø University, Tromsø, Norway
2002 - 2005: Vocational and educational training qualification for tailors, Denmark

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021

Instruments @ OTP Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark
Risø @ Simian, Copenhagen, Denmark

2019

Мир @ 2103, Copenhagen, Denmark

2018

Stagger @ OK Corral, Copenhagen, Denmark

2017

Saturn @ du.al, Svendborg, Denmark

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2019

Mellemting Mellem Ting @ Den Frie Udstillingsbygning, Copenhagen, Denmark
Idios @ Ringsted Galleriet, Ringsted, Denmark

2018

Blue Room (duo exhibition with Silas Inoue) @ 18th Street Arts Center, Los Angeles, USA

2017

Ang3l_ (duo exhibition with Louise Rosendal) @ Den Nordiske Ambassade, Copenhagen, Denmark

2016

Nyt Kapitel @ Museumsbygningen, Copenhagen, Denmark