

Suzanne Wallinga UNBORN

In the United States and Japan it is already quite normal: having a 3D-print made of your unborn child. By way of combining a diverse range of scanning techniques and 3D-printing, you can have a representation of your foetus developing in the belly that can serve as the cornerstone of your baby shower, *gender reveal party*. It will apparently increase the joy of the parents around their unborn child's life. 3D babies: a token of love. You can choose whether you would like a life-size print, or a hand-sized keychain model – one to always have on you wherever you are (...). Naturally, colour can be adjusted at will. It is merely a question of time before we follow suite here in Holland, convert en masse to this new pregnancy souvenir.

This near perverse new form of representation – in which the inward is literally turned inside out – ironically reminded me of Marcel Broodthaers and the recurrent theme of the mussel in his work. The mussel was the perfect form for Broodthaers because it is capable of creating its own shell, and is thus completely autonomous (“the mould of the mussel is the mussel itself”). The mussel's shell functions as a mould; even when empty it contains its own negative. A most poetic, but also very productive thought in which the relation between two concepts, between material and meaning, can come about. Space that is materialized through sculpture, writes Timotheus Verheulen (“I don't know anything about sculpture”) is not a *tabula rasa*, an empty container. It is always already occupied by any number of realities: rules of gravity, moisture, dust, but also discourses about art, social relations, money problems, memories and so on. Sculpture comes into being in the coming together of time and space. The space between objects as much as the space between different meanings. Mussel and mould.

Seven lies (2012) by Lithuanian artist Zilvinas Landzbergas consists of a group of ornaments cast in plaster and other visual fragments from a mythological world. We see Roman, Renaissance-esque or nineteenth century replicas of portraits and architectonic details. Portraits of men

and women who resemble the gods and goddesses – but whom at a second glance appear to be friends and family of the artist. The act of assembling the various casts reveals a process of fragmentation and transformation, and appears to exhibit similarities with the operating of our memory. Landzbergas says about this:

I have a general interest in the portrait genre as a phenomenon. It functions as a code in our culture; throughout Western culture you see fragmented people, both in the past and in the present; sculptural busts, faces in magazines, talking heads on TV. This fragmentation is a bit strange when you consider that these visual idioms have become normal over the years. Plaster, like memory, recasts forms. With no colour and with just one material, it's very reminiscent of the anaemic world of science and rationalistic research. It's a bit like vanished images, or images from a remembered past – like fragments of broken myths, mixed together into one homogeneous mould.

Landzbergas, alludes – both by reclassifying everyday objects, and referencing the ambivalence between various historical periods – to possibilities, as a result of which a certain ‘new’ period comes into being. This new period is described by João Ribas in his essay *What To Do With The Contemporary* by citing Frederic Jameson, according to whom there has come into being, in our experience of the contemporary, a specific relationship to time. Time is no longer a mere signification of a temporal discourse: “The contemporary is a time experienced as a new temporality, a present that makes demands on the past and the future.” Landzbergas' spatial collages do not merely point at a past or future, his work is situated in ‘a historical past’ as Ribas typifies this experience of time in contemporary art. From the specific properties of often ‘poor’ materials, Landzbergas construes situations in which spectators become subject of a spectacle, a play in which the actors are absent and the materials and objects lead the play. The spectator is given herein enough suggestions to create his or her own narrative and in doing so is made a constituent of the piece.

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Kiaer's sculptures, drawings and installations escape language and demand a direct experience from the spectator. His practice investigates how certain theories concerning man's relationship to his natural and technological environment can serve as the focal points of poetic works, notwithstanding their theoretical base. For this purpose, the artist makes use of found objects and materials – plastic, rubber foam, discarded Perspex plates, paper in standard format etc. These materials are combined by Kiaer with, amongst others, ink, acrylics and collage. A characteristic of his work is the fine balance between that which is provisional or is conscientious, whereby the elementary material ensures a well-balanced relationship with the space and the position of the spectator. Ian Kiaer uses waste as propositions for how to perceive objects in space, in which value and form are put into question. Each one of Kiaer's works seems to consist of the least assuming materials, remnants that serve as bearers of marginal reminders of "confused thoughts that are, if they persist, separated from the time when they were formed to then act through a combusted meaning of themselves."

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At a certain moment I found myself standing beside Lee, Ian Kiaer's assistant, as we looked quizzically onto a pile of material that we had spread as best as possible, in accordance with the artist's instructions, across the floor of the bathhouse of A Tale of a Tub. Had we done it right? It seemed as if the work could come together in manifold ways and through various compositions. *Tooth House, cleft* (2015) consists of a series of fragile elements that play with scale, material, and encounter. The work functions as a structure through which thoughts can acquire form. Here, the work is being done by UV lights contained inside moulds of plastic bags full of cast concrete, a piece of transparent plastic through which air is being blown, and a ventilator. The title refers to the Magical Architecture of architect Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965), in which a chain of anthropomorphic forms would lead to a (more) universal experience of our inhabited space. A connection between these spatial collages and a specific 'thinker': scientist, architect, writer or historian, who concerns himself with formulations of radical conceptions for the relations and interactions between

mankind and her natural and technological environments comes about by way of the titles of the sculptural installations.

Kiesler designed amongst others, a house in the shape of a tooth. The various elements of *Tooth House, cleft* refer to the ceiling, windows and floor, but aren't a direct representation of Kiesler's architectural models: the spatial dimensions of the work as we know it are put to the test in our most direct experience.

Tooth House, cleft is the last of a series of works about the Kiesler's Tooth House. The work contains a reference to the future, in which Kiaer would concern himself with the Surrealist and later anti-Surrealist, Wolfgang Paalen (1905–1959), who had fled Austria right before the Second World War to settle with his wife Alice Rahon, herself an artist, in Mexico. One element of *Tooth House, cleft* doesn't stand upright, as it had in previous works from the same series, but has fallen on to the floor, like some kind of a floppy phallus. Here, Kiaer gives expression to the fascination of Wolfgang Paalen for the totem as well as his feministic views.

Paalen was an intellectual of great influence within the artistic milieu of the forties and fifties, when he published the magazine *DYN* (derived of the Greek κατά τὸ δυνατόν, which means as much as 'that which is possible'), as a result of this and other reasons his influence reached all the way to New York, Paris and London. In an essay about shape and meaning Paalen once wrote:

There is a widespread error which claims that the image cannot be more than a matter of memory. If as is currently and erroneously supposed, the symbolic value of an image must depend on the possibility of identifying it with an existing entity – even if that entity be a dream – art would be reduced to the role of a translator. But the function of the pictorial image is not merely the prolongation of the remembrance of a perceived entity or the organization of the visual debris scattered in memory. The true value of the image, through which artistic activity is connected with human development, lies in the capacity to project a new realization which does

not have to be referred for its meaning to an object already existing.

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The image can by means of projection induce a new idea of reality. Mussel and mould. After the exhibition at A Tale of a Tub, Kiaer himself made way for Mexico in order to follow Paalen's footsteps.

The most mysterious artist that I have worked with is without a doubt the French artist Maurice Blaussyld. Blaussyld's oeuvre is concerned with an ideal, concealed world, unbeknown to us, that he tries to conjure up with means both sober and precise. All of his works are an attempt to shape emptiness in the form of a transmuted materiality. His works are characterized by a 'movement at rest', of which Jan Hoet once wrote:

The works of Maurice Blaussyld live but stand still. They have in their movement found the moment in which a reckoning occurs. (...) In that momentariness the work becomes absolute yet remains alive. While I write this, in the here and now, I find Maurice Blaussyld (to be) the world's greatest artist.

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Through the work, the artist wishes to make tangible the absolute void. His work can be interpreted as time condensed into matter, in which the past, present and future coincide seamlessly. In this sense, time should no longer be interpreted as something subjective, derivative, or spatial, but as an original dimension that resides at the base of human and cosmic existence. For this, Blaussyld understands mankind or any object, as dynamic data, not as a solid unit with an identity.

In a series of highly personal drawings by Blaussyld, we discern at first instance, an abstract interplay of lines: suggestions of space and distance. At closer inspection the drawings reveal a human figure. We can interpret the appearance of it in two ways. It is the artist himself, although the body is also a universal fact, without any fixed identity subjected to constant change. In the physicality – the materiality – this change is consecrated; that which has been is inextricably bound to that which shall be. The series consists of twenty-four drawings pertaining to the Greek alphabet,

and are installed in such a way as that endless movement between them is possible. The work is influenced, much like other aspects of his oeuvre, by James Joyce's novel, *Finnegan's Wake*, in which the first and last sentences follow on from one another, and therefore deprive the narrative of an ending.

Blaussyld is known for his sparse work output. Some of the drawings, consisting of a few lines, took him three years to complete. He also restages existing works, in which he often makes small adjustments, such as repeatedly executing the same sculpture in a slightly larger size, or filling a sculpture with stones and minerals, so as to charge it, if you will. *Sans titre* (1984–2014) consists of five chests that have the appearance of being carelessly arranged against a wall. Once observed closely, the chests turn out to be unopenable. They do nothing but stand on their own, carrying in their inner emptiness a world that is inaccessible, though it is nevertheless imaginable. Stripped of every form of representation, bereft of temptation, the objects refer exclusively to themselves, to an innermost logic that is enclosed inside the material. His objects stand witness to the continual transformation to which they are subjected, of the places to which they have been, and the sun that has tarnished their wood. The manner in which Blaussyld's objects and materials take in the space remind us that they have always been present, and simultaneously always will be.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze once asserted in a television interview that the letter Z indicates the connection between two different elements, like the lightning that connects heaven and earth. They are connections between elements that aren't always apparent, let alone comprehensible. But precisely because of the connection, an understanding can come about of the separate elements. The mould and her void. In *Autopsy* (2015), for example, we see the body of a small boy, naked and with deep gashes in his skin. Blaussyld presents a photocopy of the dead body without making it macabre. An autopsy involves, after all, digging deeper, investigating the body as material, detached from the individual. By omitting context, the autopsy is presented as an

abstract fact, emotionless, and yet charged.

The Italian artist Dario D’Aronco was inspired by the possibility of bringing the unborn child as sculpture to the world. D’Aronco had his own body scanned in order to process his organs into sculpture. *Unborn* is a 3D–print of an ultrasonic scan and represents the artist’s heart. It leads the viewer astray: are we dealing with a (admittedly abstract) similitude? *Shell* (2016), subsequently, reveals the edges of the torso of the artist, and functions as a shell that contains its own negative. What information is disclosed when the internal is made external? D’Aronco also knows: a literal representation doesn’t leave any room for the imagination. With his work, the artist presents a sensory and simultaneously philosophical inquiry into the space of the body, pointing at what is, what was and what always will be.

- 1 Vermeulen, Thimotheus. ‘Thoughts on the Space of Contemporary Sculpture, or: Stringing Along’. In: Grubinger & Heiser

(ed.). *Sculpture Unlimited 2. Materiality in Times of Immateriality*, Sternberg Press (Berlin), 2015, p. 27.

- 2 Email conversation with the artist, March 2012.
- 3 Ribas, João. ‘What To Do With The Contemporary’ In: *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, Mousse Publishing, 2011, volume 3/10.
- 4 Godfrey, Mark. ‘Ruined Hopes / Hopeful Ruins’. In *Ian Kiaer*. British School at Rome, 2005. Exhibition catalogue, British School in Rome, 2006.
- 5 Paalen, Wolfgang. *Form and Sense*, selection of texts from *DYN*, republished by Skyhorse Publishing in 2013, with an introduction by Martica Sawn.
- 6 ‘Distance and Silence’. In *Maurice Blaussyld*, monograph about the work of the artist, Centre d’Arts plastiques et visuels (Ville de Lille), 2009, p. 11.

