

The liberating method – Signe Guttormsen's artistic practice

A recurring approach in Signe Guttormsen's practice is a processing of conditions for art production in her work with materiality, form and location. This does not imply that there exists an exhaustive set of pre-formulated conditions that can be processed one by one. Quite the contrary. The conditions are diverse and the possibilities endless. Guttormsen is an analysing artist; based on a conceptual work notion, she soberly examines the conditions of a given material, from concrete observations of colour, process and surface to far more comprehensive building-integrated art projects.

Guttormsen's artistic career began in the 1980s, primarily working within the photographic medium, focusing on the staged photograph; in different hotel rooms with the artist herself as the leading actress; of cars and brake marks on runways; drains in bathrooms; and in other anonymous locations. But the idea of motif quickly paved the way into viewing the medium as material and process. The image was created by emulsion poured directly onto the surface with visible traces of the time during which the image was illuminated. The artistic act of highlighting traces slowly took over, and the motivation for even having a motif vanished. In *Standard* (1995), the photographs came into being without the use of a camera; the yellowy, greenish and black photos assumed their form through the poured on emulsion and surroundings drawn onto the shiny lacquer surface of the image. The work series is thus about photography and the process of creation, both aspects remaining visible and leaving the work in a constant dynamic situation. Thus, the work appears as the actions that created the work. At the same time, the actions are closely related to the photograph, as they originate from the same elements, all of which are co-creators in the formation of the photographic image, such as time, light, material and process. Throughout the 1990s, Guttormsen began to use the action-based method on several different materials and worked with painting, as seen in the series *Left-Right* (1997-1998). Here, the curved multiplex plate is a negotiable material, the colour a tool for creating the essence of the work, which is not found in the motif, but in the processes by which the work comes to exist. Guttormsen worked with a minimal expression in two colours; one on the right side, another on the left, in an attempt to create a concentrated space on the curved plate, appearing more like a small object than an actual painting.

Guttormsen is neither a photographer, a painter, nor a sculptor. She is driven by a more general artistic motivation. In the series *Am Falschen Ort* (2005-2006), the founder of postcolonial studies, Edward Said, and his ideas (as introduced in his work *Out of Place*) about always being on the wrong side of power, of privileges and of the writing of history have her pose the question whether it is even possible to separate the different aspects of time on the image surface by imagining a pre-state of an image, while viewing the actual work. Large wood surfaces with traces of running acrylic paint is cut into pieces and put together in new formations, creating notions of new spaces on the surface and

encapsulating several times. Again, the focus is on the process, this time the process of being several places at one time; not the wrong place, nor the right, but finding a path from the outermost layer to the bottom one, attesting to a time before the final work. In *The End of the World* (2006), the paintings' surface is entirely broken. Guttormsen cuts and breaks the works. In this large-scale work, the boundaries of time, narrative and place are softened in favour of a focus on coherence and context, which seems equally relevant in the case of Guttormsen's building- and site-integrated art, which she has worked with intensively over the past 10 years.

What is interesting is how Guttormsen's work with image surface and spaces are not approached as each other's opposites. On the contrary, in fact, the photograph, painting and space all outline conditions for further processing. Everything becomes a material that is up for negotiation and processing. Overall, it can be said that Guttormsen has developed a method that is not limiting in relation to artistic medium, space, action and dialogue with the viewer/user. Rather, it expands. The newest building-integrated work is a proposal for a new service building at the Malmö Hospital. The title is *Time, Eternity and the Moment* (2019) and is based on the wheel as a symbol of time and that which keeps everything going, exactly like the service building with all its laundry, waste sorting and robot-controlled laboratories. Guttormsen's work will be placed in the centre of the building, in an atrium courtyard. A replica of a 1000-year-old Byzantine water wheel in Syria will occupy the atrium courtyard, slowly rotating and reminding us of the importance of the moment opposed to the constant demands of increased efficiency of everyday life. The wooden buckets covered in metal do not carry water, but light, which is softly reflected in the room, emphasizing the function of the atrium courtyard as a space of light.

Regardless of whether Signe Guttormsen's starting point is an image surface or a building-integrated project, it is the same analysing approach she puts forth. She examines the given framework of her material and processes external circumstances, whether it be the liquid emulsion of the photograph, light or time or the function, use and history of a building. In this sense, Guttormsen's artistic approach functions as a method of liberation that can be moved across common notions of the artistic medium, space and architecture, as she – regardless of where she is and what she works with – creates situations that all originate from the conditions of a given material.

Charlotte Præstegaard Schwartz, 2019