

# Åsil Bøthun

Ian Damerell



Åsil Bøthun re-invents the so-called ordinary "everyday" object through a series of interventions and subversions.

Her interventions rest on the fact that "meaning" of an art work can no longer be anchored. The construction of meaning of an art piece is a variable that requires interaction in order to be complete. Her works are not easily read: they interweave layers of different and opposing references into complex comments. Although the sources of her objects are easily traced to the

art world itself (read Duchamp and his "Ready-mades"), she couples this connection to further references based on so-called "reality" (the real world).

So how do we "understand" these works? I believe that she invites us into a world where "clarity" is deceiving -



need to make up our own minds and it is not easy. "Obvious" objects that defy seemingly narrative, bring you to consider how she "copied" them so well; i.e. the craftsmanship involved. But this, too, is a subversive action: firstly, it's a comment on mimesis, secondly, it presents craft as a "fetish" - there is a manic side to the desire for detail and thirdly, the "real thing" is no longer necessary or interesting in this context. Walter Benjamin's "aura" is definitely absent.

Finding scientifically sound definitions for art is virtually impossible. Åsil Bøthun subverts the Ready-made's main attribute - that of being "found" and not altered or re-made. Consequently, we loose our grip on art history - and this intention opens up for e.g. a feminist rewriting of it. This is in keeping with her earlier "attacks" on painting.

After achieving international recognition and a second prize at the Videox Experimental Film & Video Festival in Zurich with her video of a woman "trapped" in an oppressive bourgeois world and reduced to spitting out flowers, she has remained faithful to her "absurd" and melancholic world. In my mind, Åsil Bøthun's isolated and desolate objects from artist studios or pre-exhibition galleries still have a feminist connotation - not the least by her genuine concern for forgotten, neglected and "unimportant" spaces in our world.

Her latest works develop beyond the "Home Front". At the Vigeland Museum in Oslo, she connects the monumental and gargantuan work of this Norwegian artist to the contemporary fitness-fetish and body-manipulation machines of our narcissistic society. This, in turn, refers the artworks in the museum yet again to the Germanic focus on health and fitness from the 1930's and 1940's while introducing issues such as hard-core body fixation and body-as-machine cultures from our present-day. The banality of the cheap materials used to make her objects and the heavy melancholy of their dislocation are incisive weapons in the museum's space.

When Nietzsche declared that man imposes meanings that suit his taste - we see suddenly how "the coming of superman" is possible in the interaction between her pieces and Vigeland's. We find ourselves in a spiral of signifiers yet again. Should her "empty" objects provoke us into "reassessing" the familiar or is the banality spreading?