

INSIDE OUT / Preface

– *about the brushstroke and light that is called forth by the visibility of all things*

by Ruth Campau

I am working with painting in the expanded field, where the work's interaction with the surrounding environment is essential. For this reason, my works often take form as large installations that vanish into thin air when the exhibition is over. In the past 6-8 years, I have also executed a number of *in situ* decoration projects – building-integrated art, implemented in collaboration with architects, as well as site-specific installations of a permanent character. I am delighted that with this book I have been able to grab hold of the chance to gather up these two trails in my artistic praxis. The book should therefore be regarded as a documentation both of my presentations in conventional exhibition venues and my art projects created specifically for the public space.

The handheld aspect

In my practice, the repetition of the brushstroke across the surface of the transparent acrylic panels, which are then mounted and configured in modules, constitutes a recurrent hold – a hold that has appealed to architects and builders. They have spotted an opportunity to call these handheld brushstrokes into play in the architecture in a different way than art is ordinarily contained in architecture (i.e. as an appendix to the finished building). This potential was explored for the first time in conjunction with the construction of the Nordlyset apartment building located in Copenhagen's harbor area, where I "translated" the brushstroke on the acrylic panel over to silkscreen on laminated glass. In this fashion, the painting was transformed into modules that could relatively easily enter into the construction process, on an equal footing with other building components. Here, the painting is, in one sense, functional, insofar as it separates two balconies, and, in another sense, a façade principle, which captures the light and draws it into the apartment. The painting also adds an aesthetic dimension to the building. The handheld brushstrokes render the apartment house human and the colors crystallize around the building like a fragile aura, which is fluttering in the light.

Working with building-integrated art has given rise to new opportunities for expressions and assignments. It has opened up a field between the bound and free arts that I find very interesting. In architectural construction, there are many rules and restrictions that have to be complied with.

Considerations must be given to the function, the maintenance and so on. Not least of all is the consideration that has to be paid to the everyday user who might not have asked for any art in the first place. There is always an edge, a doorstep, to which one has to address her/his efforts and deal with in the best possible way – and preferably without resorting to decoration and consequently losing sight of the art work and the consequential layer of meaning such a work can potentially offer. Another essential difference is that there are several players in the game. It's a team effort and the chemistry that arises among the architect, the artist and the entrepreneur is of vital importance. The collaboration with the producer is also crucial. Without an openness and sensitivity on the part of the producer, the task is impossible – in any event, it is very difficult for the artist when there is a failure to regard the details as being important. However, what emerges in this teamwork, should it be successful, is not only vulnerability but also a great deal of satisfaction, because, in this event, the *Gesamtkunstværk* is greater than the sum of the architecture and the artwork.

Through working with architecture in the public space, I have managed to express my ideas on a large scale as opposed to what typically happens inside the conventional art-exhibition space, where I am alone and without a commissioned assignment. Here, on the other hand, I am free and I am not weighed down by any external production-related constraints or time-related and organizational restrictions. However, working with building-integrated art like the project for the Nordlyset residential complex entails that I have had the chance to influence people's everyday lives – and maybe without their even having an inkling that I am doing so. It's a great responsibility and certain questions arise: What is it that art is supposed to do? What does the passage of time do to a color? What is *zeitgeist*? Where is the boundary between decoration and artwork? What is art and how can I put all of these thoughts into an apartment house? How can I positively influence a building within which people have to grow up, live, love and die? I'll let these questions rest for a moment in order to describe what my ideas and thoughts are concerning the brushstroke, which has served as my fundamental artistic hold for the last few years.

A freezing of presence

I take my mark in the idea that with a concentrated brushstroke, I can convey human presence by translating and freezing it solid onto a surface and also that I know full well that by transforming a liquid substance into a solid substance, I can immortalize the body's movement via a brushstroke. My jumping off point is also the notion of "an infinite painting," where what I am showing is merely a segment of a larger painting and, as such, merely a kind of representative of a human presence. Accordingly, the complex of issues that are prevalent in the very genesis/execution takes on a great deal of importance and the body, motion and time become decisive key factors in my work.

I am trying to bring my movements with the implement (usually, the brush or the broom) to perfection and perform them as identical, mechanical and repeated movements. Out from the same movement and repetition springs change. The accumulation of identical movements with the broom-brush and the concentration that dwells herein come to constitute the picture's actual content. By virtue of the fact that the picture has been built up around identical movement patterns and repetitions, the factor of time becomes important. The stroke must be created in a single moment of presence; the effort does not lend itself to being resumed. Corrections can only be made within a very short span of time (while the acrylic paint is still wet) and the intensified nerve and spirit that are hereby instilled into the work are crucial to the enhanced sensory experience seated in the expression. A solidification of the presence that dwells in one concentrated motion – right here and right now. And it is precisely this presence that is, for me, what is essential. It is right here that the picture elevates itself above the material and searches after a kind of transcendence: a form of being.

The format is determined by space and by the materials' dimensions but also by my body's own reach. This is roughly 2.70 m (or 3 meters, with a little bit of good will and a long pole) because I have to be able to drag a broom and its bristles down across the painting's ground surface in one fell swoop. I am often working in large formats because it is precisely a *1:1 experience* with the painting that I wish to conjure up. It is my hope that this bodily relation to the painting can be transmitted further to the viewer as a body-object-space experience where he/she obtains a sense of being inside the painting and thus a part of something greater. That the viewer will grab hold of the emergent presence and seize the non-mechanical expression as a deposition of a human presence, without imposing any additional demands on him or her.

The brushstroke in architecture

Getting back to the previously posed questions about what meaningful architecture is and what zeitgeist and timelessness are: How can I transform art into an architecture where people have to live – people who might not even have thought to ask for an encounter with an artwork during their busy and hectic everyday lives? Well, I don't know. But everything in architecture is produced by some kind of production unit or other, in standard dimensions, by the meter and put into place in expansive modules – efficiently and mechanically, with a crane: in the best instances, having its source in a rational and conscious notion contrived by an architect or a designer but subsequently run through a myriad of different computer programs and machines that fabricate, pack, lift and press. My wish is to add a *human presence* into the architecture – that my handheld brushstroke can testify about the human, for better or worse: the imperfect –

through all the minor mistakes that are disclosed – and the rhythm, which is not static like the machine's. The unpretentious.

Ideally speaking, all the surfaces ought to be unique. But the world, as it is today, simply won't pay for this. Consequently, I've got to try and get as close as possible to the handheld brushstroke. A silk-screen print on a piece of glass will reproduce the handheld stroke even if it is *not* handheld. And what arises here, of course, is a flaw that can torment me, but which I have chosen to accept. The experience of the palpable in a glass plate is something different than what can be sensed on a painted acrylic panel, where the paint spreads out, in all its pastosity, across the smooth surface. Then again, glass can accomplish something else - in contrast to the palpable material, it abstains from calling attention to itself and it doesn't steal the light. It could be said that the silk-screen printed glass with the handheld brushstrokes is situated somewhere between the unique work and the industrial product - it *represents* the brushstroke. And accordingly, we have come right back to the ABC's of painting.

The light and the transparent

The light and the transparent belong together. Through the transparent, we get closer to the light – there is no block. Even the faintest presentiment of palpable paint on an acrylic panel or a glass block sets up a block. For me, this offers a physical and mental liberation. Working with the immaterial via the light and the light's evocation of everything's visible nature is just as important as working with the physical substance. Light sets everything free and intensifies – matter steals and weighs everything down. For purposes of achieving an intensification of the color so that it becomes as synthetic as possible and almost hysterical in its crispness, I formerly chose to make use of the transparent undercoating and the white light emanating from behind – something like a computer screen or when you gaze through a window toward the sun. Light and substance are each other's opposites and consequently, they are both important for bringing about an experience of totality.

Light penetrates the brushstroke on Nordlyset's balcony dividers and casts shadows on the white wall. The shadow becomes human because it discloses the imperfect handheld brushstroke. And the light on "You Too Can Be a Superhero" at the art museum, KUNSTEN, in Aalborg, is constantly changing direction and character because Alvar Alto created an architectural masterpiece with a highly advanced and sophisticated influx of light. My work not only reflects the architecture and the viewer: the light, to a considerable degree, also plays a significant role in the formation of meaning to which the work gives rise at the moment somebody comes into contact with the work. And the light is the rambunctious co-player – even when it boils down to a question

of what interior doors the individual work of art might happen to open inside the viewer.

And that's what I am aiming at: that the artwork ought to represent a tension between body and intellect. The brushstroke is a bodily phenomenon, from where I disengage all thinking. It's almost like breathing. I never get tired of it – it's like walking onto a stage just to perform this very stroke. This is a ritual and meditative way of working insofar as it requires full concentration, necessitating the exclusion of everything else, and I believe that this sense of calm is also conveyed to the viewer.

The work is limitless. The modules and the panels and the strokes can be repeated indefinitely ... and forever. After the strokes have been executed, what emerges is a question about how to stage them into an installation or into a site-specific decoration project – in relation to the space and context within which the work is supposed to appear. Here, as a matter of fact, the faculty of thinking is activated. It governs every step along the way so that I reach the goal, at last, with a work of art, an art work that preferably ought to emit something and ought to lift the viewer onto many different planes: both when it comes to art in the art space and art in the public space. Here, in this book, in any event, you will find some of my suggestions, proposals and bids.

Ruth Campau

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translated by DAN A. MARMORSTEIN