

Spiraling Smoke 2. 2017-2018  
Mixed media on panels

# SPIRALING SMOKE

SOL KJØK

I met SOL KJØK in May 2017 at her loft in Brooklyn when I became one of her artists in residence. Her studio is the size of two tennis courts, and you can see both the Empire State and Chrysler buildings through a pair of factory windows. Acrobatic swings, harnesses and platforms dangle from 20ft ceilings. A full-sized tipi sits off-centre in the space where a Shaman performs drum journeys. World-class physicists, artists, academics and eccentrics regularly pass through. Her world is an inspiring, cross-pollinating place of collaboration and interaction. From the roof you overlook one of the most polluted pockets of America's post-industrial wasteland – a mad dystopian scene set against one of the most inspiring skylines in the world.

Like Sol's other spaces, *The Mothership* and *The Last Frontier*, women dominate in number and leadership. She invites friends to nude-model for her: an exchange of intimacy in her dream studio. To draw another human is to meditate on and depict the shadows and brightness that arise. Sol directs her subjects to gaze far ahead and place full attention on their body as they manage challenging airborne positions. Their faces mutate into an ethereal homogeneity. I think of Reich's 'You are wherever your thoughts are'. Her figures, though in movement, are shells, without clothing or sense of identity – somewhat futuristic and humanoid. I imagine should they look at me – perhaps with a smile – that the fourth wall would be broken. They would need a

spark of life to be switched on. The machines are off, but the substance they are floating in keeps moving. Is it liquid, air or silicone, perhaps? The colours seem more synthetic than natural.

One of the men is African American yet, like the others in the painting, his skin is as white as paper. His lips and nipples, red against the white, appear almost decorative. Spiralling braids echoing the spirals of the bodies add orange accents. The translucent skin might be the only physical membrane, yet the contours imply strong muscle and bone underneath. Their physicality doesn't belong to this world; they float in a strangely shallow realm where gravity seemingly ceases to exist.

The marks are deliberate and worked: a highly developed drawing and painting technique is at hand here. No spontaneous gestures are evident, although the composition as a whole implies the presence of something greater holding it all fluidly together.

Born in Norway and adopted in New York, Sol has lived in Paris, Colombia, Vienna and employs five languages at her command. She has Masters degrees in Painting, Art History and Literature. Her earlier works depict similarly interconnected masses of human bodies, albeit arranged in circular formations with more expressive faces. The new work evidences a significant shift for the artist.

In KJØK's library, the titles speak to a new world emerging – signalling that we are in a point in history where humankind will either flourish or become extinct. Contemporary Science is lining up





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with Eastern Mysticism to understand consciousness and the ultimate nature of reality. Historian Yuval Noah Harari suggests that a new religion might be emerging: 'Dataism'. The human species seen as a single data processing system where people are the chips – an information flow. Categories of human emotion don't have intrinsic value unless they can be shared. Experiences within us that are not shared have no meaning. In Harari's future, the output of this data processing is the creation of an Internet-of-all-things, where everything is connected, linked and bridged. Once digital, we become immortal. The concept of Individualism will seem strange in this fundamentally shared system, and it would make no sense to copy or destroy versions of ourselves.

When I look at the paintings I think of Burning Man-type parties attended by tech CEOs – an intelligent sexuality and playfulness. Misfits and geeks who have found a freedom of expression outside of mass popular culture yet have created some of the most powerful institutions mankind has perhaps ever seen – Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple.

Some of our respected thinkers foresee a future where a small number of elites upgrade themselves through biotechnology and genetic engineering, leaving the masses behind and creating a godlike species where super-intelligent robots consider the rest of humanity to be superfluous.

Sol talks of lyrics in connection with her works, which say 'in every lifetime we meet the same circle of souls, to say thank you or sorry', an idea that implies that resolution is stronger than tension if we let go of trying to control – and perhaps that free will exists after all. It's a compelling idea. For me, Sol's paintings and the process by which she paints is deeply social, political, feminist, intellectual, anti-fashionable and radical. Are those knowing, vacant eyes issuing a warning – or are they the gatekeepers to the greatest show the World has ever seen?

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