

## Systems Thinking in the Air

The works of art by Sol Kjøk and Peter Max-Jakobsen resonate strongly with me because I see them as intuitive visual expressions of a new conception of life, which has been emerging in science over the last thirty years and has been the central subject of my research and writing over those three decades. At the forefront of contemporary science, the universe is no longer seen as a machine composed of elementary building blocks. We have discovered that the material world, ultimately, is a network of inseparable patterns of relationships. I have called this new science “the systems view of life” because it involves a new kind of thinking known as “systems thinking.” It means thinking in terms of relationships, patterns, and context.

The intertwined floating bodies depicted by the artists are powerful symbolic manifestations of the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence of all life. Their nakedness places them at the basic biological level of life. At the same time, their body language and facial expressions are highly emotional. This, again, is consistent with the systems view of life, which holds that all living systems are cognitive systems, and that emotions are at the very center of cognition and consciousness.

Both artists state that their work “is fundamentally about love, both of the romantic sort and the much vaster kind that is the glue that holds our world together.” I am reminded here of the notion of “the biology of love” by Humberto Maturana, one of the main architects of the new scientific conception of life, who defines love as “the domain of those behaviors and body dispositions through which another arises as a legitimate other in coexistence with oneself.”

The systems view of life sees evolution no longer as a competitive struggle for existence, but rather as a cooperative dance in which creativity and the constant emergence of novelty are the driving forces. To me this is another strong theme of IN THE AIR’s dynamic floating bodies. Having been active in the counter culture of the 1960s, I cannot help but being reminded of our celebrated anti-war slogan “Make love, not war.”

And finally, I feel that the awareness of fundamental interdependence, which we find at the center of Kjøk’s and Max-Jakobsen’s art as well as at the center of the systems view of life, is spiritual awareness. When we look at the world around us, we find that we are not thrown into chaos and randomness but are part of a great order, a grand symphony of life. Every molecule in our body was once a part of previous bodies — living or nonliving — and will be a part of future bodies. In this sense, our body will not die but will live on, again and again, because life lives on. This may be the deepest meaning of the works shown in this stunning exhibition.

Fritjof Capra, 2016