

BOOK OF SWELLS

The work of Sol Kjøk refutes masculinity and femininity as conflicting ends of one spectrum. Her reconstruction of gender challenges this bi-polarised ideology. Identity and individuality are subservient to the greater union of body, mind and spirit. There is no doubt that these are sexual figures. However, the sometimes contorted physiognomy and physicality of the figures speaks of the sublime; a rapture wherein strength, tenderness, vigour and tempestuous urgency portray the essence of the human state. In them we see a reaction to the initial separation of the sexes and subsequent efforts to unite male and female forces. By combining both the linear and the intuitive qualities of the individual psyche, Kjøk unites the polar forces, which bring about creation and growth, and removes the reductive aspect of good and evil in favour of the eternal being.

In Kjøk's work, the physical is taken to a state of tension that can only be relieved by a full understanding of the spirit's interaction with the body. Working with figures that have been physically challenged in her studio, Kjøk realises heightened states of awareness that allow tenderness and strength to become well met bed fellows.

The scale of the work, and its presentation that sometimes includes performative/interactive aspects, bring the viewer into a process of growth. Following the lines occupies our conscious minds with a demanding, repetitive task. In this almost meditative trance, we see the figures perform a theurgical dialectic to gain a practical understanding of their essence so they can put this knowledge into practice with self-transformation and unity. And yet, interwoven with this physicality we see a braid become a ribbon of simplicity and interruption. These plaits appear to act as threads of outside interaction, taking the bodies out of their solipsism; bringing them a route to outside manifestation, where the sublime nature

of being is given physical presence outside of the whole.

From a distance, lines coalesce into works wherein the interactions of the musculature of the bodies give perfect union to the human physical form. The mesomorphic structures taper to relatively narrow and low waists. The bones and muscles of the head are prominent; the features of the face clearly defined and emotive of their sensitised state. The figures are not passive, even in extreme moments of tenderness there is a power of heightened awareness; these are figures of the moment and of the now. Arms and legs are developed and even the digits of the hand are muscled with prominent veins lacing each form. On close inspection, the image becomes more abstracted. Individual lines appear and through their careful positioning and colouration we begin to see the characters as a sum total of their abstracted construction. The single lines merge to form a complex human form, that is repeated to create an almost fractal knot work of human shapes, entangled and challenging the viewer to understand their beginning and their final aspect in terms of the entirety rather than the individual.

At times, a lone figure will emerge from the entanglement as an image of chosen separation. The figure acts in a comforting or supporting role, placed to ensure a form of common good. While the braid evokes the thread of nature that interweaves us all, the solitary individual may stand for our human need for identity. By their very nature and references, Kjøk's images represent eternal life within many different cultures, past and present. They embody the cycle of life, death and rebirth, and through their highly conscious symbolic archetypes the works demonstrate a keen awareness of the inherited structure of the psyche which dates back to humankind's beginnings.

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