

Sol Kjøk: The Body as Metaphor



Sol Kjøk is a Norwegian artist currently living in Williamsburg in Brooklyn, New York, where she is surrounded by peers who have come from all over the world to be artists. Interestingly, her sharp-eyed, insightful drawing does not belong to a particular culture; it is part of the Western tradition. It seems to profit from broadly accepted international languages of contemporary art, despite the fact that, given Kjøk's acute skills, the work continues the long history of Western figurative art. Her process connects her with current art practice--she begins by staging performances in her studio, where she and others carry out "potentially painful acrobatic exercises, such as walking a tightrope, climbing ropes, or juggling, dribbling, or balancing on balls."

Kjøk shoots photographs for source shots and then cuts them up, rearranging them into collages, which become the basis for her drawings and paintings. The final works are wonderful, sensuous renditions of the human body, the red balls providing moments of visual focus, no matter whether they are small or large. Kjøk often heaps the bodies together, so that legs and arms and heads overlap each other in a cheerful grab bag of forms. Naked bodies, male and female, balance on top of each other, gripping each other in a sensuous, close to sexual fashion. In most of the works, there are strings of red-hued beads, which offer the only note of color in Kjøk's black-and-white compositions; they function as highlights for works that are focused on communicating the mysteries and beauty of the unclothed body.

There is in Kjøk's art an appreciation of the old and the new; she employs the long tradition of figure drawing but is determined, at the same time, to take part in the esthetic of her time. Her series "Strings of Beads" is very much a physical, indeed a sensual, reading of the current art culture, and she is particularly accomplished in rendering the human body as the base of human relations and communication. Her technical ability is remarkable, so much so that she attains an allegorical impact in her art, which speaks to the human condition in a vernacular that willingly respects the dignity of the body. It is also appropriate to comment on the figures' lively energy; these are not mere academic studies, but bodies evidencing a serious reading of life. Nonetheless, a sense of play enlivens the gravitas of the images, so that both historical awareness and contemporary fun results. Kjøk speaks to several worlds at once--hence the high pleasure of her art.

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