

## SWIRLING: THE DRAWINGS OF SOL KJØK



Sol Kjøk has traveled a long way from the series of drawings in *Fleshlots*, 1997 to the stream of drawings in *Swirling*, 1999-2001. In the former, an animated female nude is isolated in a cage – the somewhat small wooden panel on which she is rendered. Emphatically darkened, a face or a breast stands out from the rest of her body, conveying her will power or voluptuousness, often both. Sometimes she crouches like a sprinter, sometimes she tumbles heels over head, sometimes she bends over in what seems like rapturous excitement – Kjøk's maenad wants to break out of her cage. In *Swirling* she does, linking up with other bodies, those of men as well as other women, in a rhapsodic continuity. Her figures are as flexible and restless as they were before, but they are now cosmic bodies in an intimate empyrean. They float and merge in a Dantesque limbo of libidinous space, casually overlapping and interlocking, as though thrown together by ecstatic chance. As the different faces show, this is a heaven in which individuality is not lost, and that sometimes becomes so tangible we seem able to touch it. The meticulous detail and dense shading of many of the faces shows that even in heaven we need not lose our identity and substance – need not become passionless shadows of ourselves, however ephemeral our bodies may seem.

The body consciousness evident in Kjøk's drawings has a Northern Romantic intensity to it. Kjøk is Norwegian, and the mixture of stark realism and sublime space – the irrational tumble of rationally described figures, nude and floating in infinite space – can't help but remind one of Gustav Vigeland's grand figurative sculpture, particularly the installation in Frogner Park, Oslo. Liberated from its clothing – which must be of special importance in a cold climate – the Northern body remembers that it is alive and erotic. Kjøk's *Fleshlots* is an allegory of woman's struggle for liberation, emotional as well as sexual, and *Swirling* is an allegory of sexual and emotional liberation for both men and women – the freedom, ultimately of self-expression, that so much Scandinavian literature fought for. Kjøk's female nude is not the relaxed, passive odalisque we often find in the Mediterranean world of Matisse, but a determined heroine, searching for happiness and intimacy she is not sure exists, except at odd relational moments.

Indeed, Kjøk's *Swirling* is about that difficult relationship called love, as she herself acknowledges. What seems more to the point than the momentary perverse intimacies that occur in the encounter between some of the figures, is the way their hands reach out to one another, sometimes in a way reminiscent of the way God reaches out to Adam on Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. Touch is important, and touch is not only between bodies, but between persons. Tenderness counts as much as lust, perhaps more; Freud thought that it was impossible for most men to integrate them. In *Swirling* Kjøk suggests that it is possible, in fact necessary, if love is to endure – if heaven is to be found.

*Swirling* is not only an emotional breakthrough for Kjøk, but an aesthetic one. It is not only the figures that form a continuum, but the drawings. *Swirling* is one huge drawing spreading over many sheets. The lines of one link up with those of the next, seemingly by accident – as accidental as the intimacies, erotic and emotional, between the figures. Kjøk's lines are more fluid than those in *Fleshlots*, and also more terse. There has been no loss in tension, and a gain in delicacy and refinement. Certain passages of *Swirling* are sheer linear ecstasy – Kjøk seems to delight in the act of drawing itself, not simply in describing the figure. She has become a master draughtsperson, as well as a careful observer of the human body – particularly woman's body – in all its emotional vicissitudes.

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