

Material Reverberation

Notes on Anders Holen's *Stimulus* at Entrée 19.03. – 16.04, 2016

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The potential agency of things is a recurring topic in Anders Holen's artistic practice. His works appear as familiar, yet strange objects that point to their creation simultaneously as they reveal their own ability to create, thus blurring the dichotomy between object and subject. The installation exhibited at Entrée alludes to a sort of utility, as if the displayed items are tools for further production.

Shiny silver and copper sculptures in the shape of eggplants, ice cream cones, artichokes, as well as cocktail glasses and ladles whose content has solidified mid splash, are displayed on glass tables and containers in the exhibition. Parts have been carved away from the objects, leaving them with stamp-like protuberances on their flat, even surfaces. They might be thought of as highly complex and aestheticized potato stamps, but the seriousness of both the sculptures and their clinical display absorbs this banality, and thereby rids the exhibition of any nostalgia regarding potato printing. Instead the objects raise questions on semiotics, and whether we are witnessing the actual work, or if they are in fact agents for constructing new artworks.

The abstract symbols protruding from these objects also appear in brightly colored patterns incorporated into crude pieces of solid wood mounted on the walls. Repetition of the symbols – as if one has made the other – creates a significant relationship between the works: as an object and its referent. The sculptures are inanimate, but through their causal agency they seem to exude an inherent potential; *it* drew its mark on something else. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure believed that a sign is dyadic, meaning it only consists of two parts; the form of the sign and its meaning. When looking at Holen's work, one suspects that it holds a narrative, something to be decrypted and understood if one can just manage to place it in the right categories. Meaning eludes us and the work appears as a riddle where the objects become less familiar and more mysterious.

The symbols themselves do not appear to be decipherable. One might think of them as originals and their copies, but that does not entirely make sense either, as they have distinct physical attributes and characteristics. The natural marks in the wooden surface are as much a pattern as the artificial symbols, and in any case it seems unlikely that the glossy sculptures

actually made the relief in the wooden surface, because they seem too pristine and too artificial. They can be thought of as agents, but they are also just another sign. With lots of questions and few answers, the viewer is turned into a kind of archaeologist, as if one is presented with artifacts from an excavation site. The works have inherent qualities resembling tools, but without an obvious purpose, this triggers an investigative approach among spectators, who attempt to make sense of it all.

When taking the exhibition title *Stimulus* into account, these scientific connotations seem to be well-grounded. The recurring symbols found in Holen's work actually derive from a study¹ on cognitive recognition, meticulously developed for the sole purpose of being perceived as 'non-objects', i.e. as completely abstract signs.

So if the meaning of the sign eludes us, what remains in Holen's work is how it exposes our inherent need to classify and categorize signs and symbols. Instead of looking for what the artworks mean, I start to look at what they *do*. Thus the actual works bring to mind, not the idea on which they are based, but their inherent potential to make art themselves.

Conceptual art has been described as when "the idea becomes a machine that makes the art." This particular phrasing and the image it conjures fascinate me, and I think the notion of "a machine that makes the art" can also apply to Anders Holen's work: only in this case it is in fact the artwork that becomes the machine. It exists in a semiotic chain of indexical signs with no clear start or finish, one object points to another which points to yet another. Maybe they are not mere signs, but instruments for acknowledging both the *it* and the *self* as participants.

Anders Holen (b. 1986) lives and works in Oslo, he has a degree from Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Since graduating in 2010 he has been featured in exhibitions both national and international, such as: *Aid for an Impending Quagmire* – Helper, New York; *Words Arent The Thing* - Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius; *Lopsided Upthrust* - BOA, Oslo; and *Young Pioneers*, Kunsthall Oslo, Oslo. He was also one of the founding members of Tidens Krav, an artist-run gallery in downtown Oslo.

¹ Potter, Mary C. and Judith F. Kroll, "Recognizing words, pictures, and concepts: A comparison of lexical, object, and reality decisions", *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, Volume 23, Issue 1, February 1984, Pages 39-66