Diana*

To learn that Sophie Jung was first trained as a photographer before shifting to installation, sculpture and performance could strike one as a surprise, for her practice has so much to do with the unruliness of things. Where photography catches and captures (or at least tries to), Sophie's work strives for release; the emancipation of things from ordering systems such as language, value and usefulness. In "Reifiction"(*), Sophie Jung showcases for the first time, alongside a set of sculptures and installations, a range of early photographic works. Given how well-versed Sophie Jung is in double entendre and semiotic sabotage, one might wonder what this move entails. What did she learn about her practice by looking at the photographs? Or what is she hoping to learn?

Sophie Jung works with the abandoned and the left behind. Her sculptures and installations are always composed from an assemblage of found objects that she collects without a necessary preconceived idea of what she is going to do with them. That is the *hoarder-gatherer* phase. At the core of this process is an interest for the discarded, the thing that no longer has meaning nor usage. Where this is usually considered negatively, Sophie Jung sees this lack of sense and absence of interest as potential for things to harness sprawling readings and conflicting stories. Hence the title of the exhibition – a sculpture in the form of an assemblage of words; reification and fiction – could be read as a statement in itself.

The photographs featured in "Reifiction" were shot fifteen years ago, when Sophie Jung studied analogue photography in the vein of Bernd and Hilla Becher's work at the Folkwang in Essen. You could look at them as studies. More specifically studies on light, composition and perspective. Although they seem to deny the idea of a subject, they still hold the promise of a narrative. Sophie speaks about them as "sets primed for action" – past or upcoming.
She remembers how one of her classmates at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie – where she studied afterwards – had noticed that all of them were focused on niches and corners (an impression reinforced in the exhibition as they are literally displayed in a niche). One could go on and develop a whole theory about the politics of the corner (maybe starting with Martin Kippenberger's *Martin, Into the Corner, You Should Be Ashamed of Yourself*, 1992; or even further back, Diana's grotto).

For Sophie Jung, corners are forgotten spaces where dust gathers and objects go to rest and plot their revenge. In that respect, it is not eccentric to argue that her photographs laid the ground for her sculptural practice, to claim that the two stem from the same attitude towards and perspective onto things, one that cares for the forgotten and the marginalised. In that sense, you might say the photographs could only reappear now, after a ten-year-plus hiatus from sunlight, as they needed to be forgotten by Sophie for her to look at them again and give them new meaning. It is not surprising Sophie Jung returns to things she had previously turned her back on. In "Reifiction", the photographs are also shown with glass sheets on top of them, except that the sheets only partially cover the photographs. It's as if they wanted to cover something else, another portion of the image, what could be and not only what is.

Coming from another deeper and bigger niche, a sculpture protrudes in the space. It is composed of four elements: a worn-down jet from a funfair ride; a bunch of pine tree branches from an overheated forest; Elsa's castle from the *Frozen* universe; and another toy jet, Obi-Wan Kenobi's starfighter. The noses of the two aircrafts – which have in common the ability to fly in space – seem to be holding the castle and blocking it at once.

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The wooden sticks, placed in the funfair jet cockpit in a way that makes them point at anyone who enters the gallery, like cannons, convey the idea that the castle is either under siege or defended by its surrounding vessels. As always in Sophie Jung's work, the sculpture is generative of multiple stories and (re)definitions, breaking away from a simplistic dialectical reading. In this case, the shared foundations of any stories associated with the jets-castle-sticks work would be made of – not necessarily overtly – violent relationships and intricate power structures, which, by way of children's toys, makes it even more unsettling.

Other works in the exhibition formally echo elements of the jet piece: rusty nails protecting a tower made of a sink stand topped by a small TV monitor displaying a video mixing Cindy Crawford exercising and a text piece by Sophie in the form of subtitles mirrors the menacing wooden sticks; the pattern of the Missoni jacket, whose pocket carries a picture of Sophie undergoing surgery – taken by the surgeon without consent – resembles the motifs of the *Frozen* castle façade. Beyond the formal artillery developed in the exhibition, there is something to say about the use of camouflage strategies and defence mechanisms to conceal certain things, to protect them.

Because gaze and language (which work hand-in-hand) have been weaponized to fix meaning and annihilate anything fluid and unstable, it is necessary to hide from them. In her performances, Sophie Jung uses language against itself, exhausting meaning, forcing the tongue to slip. In the visual realm, as much as Sophie Jung puts on a show, as much as she displays, she works towards concealment. As such, that she put her camera aside to work directly with found objects and give them agency isn't insignificant. The question now is: could it be dangerous to be looking at Sophie Jung's pieces? Do we run the risk of turning into prey when gazing at her works?

Cédric Fauq

(*)There's something missing here, a reference we need to track down. For example, the meaning of the title *reifiction*. Rei appears to be a nonsense homophone for 'reh', the German for deer: Jung is based in Basel and posted a picture showing a statue of a stag when announcing the exhibition on Instagram. The title would then translate to deer fiction, or to follow the image, a stag story (Hirsch-fiction). But *reifiction* also sounds like reification, a term meaning: to treat an abstraction or idea as a concrete, material thing, to ossify meaning, a form of violent captivity Jung reverses in her practice – turning concrete things, found-objects into a plurlity of fleeing narratives. Reification also means to treat a person as an object, for example the commodification of the worker, or to reduce them to type; to treat an object as if it were a person (see fetishism); to act as if social relationships were immovable forces, as in relations between classes, or the sexes. Jung may then be suggesting a fiction about reification, or reification as a fiction.
This kind of unlikely connection, between deer and reification, is typical of the artist's work.

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Her performances are full of loose associations, in which a pun, irony or ambiguity of meaning forms a bridge between seemingly unrelated topics, only for her to apparently loose her thread again, chasing another set of connections. She shuffles her ideas around, arranging and rearranging, knowing that they could always be organised differently, to different effect.

Paul Clinton has claimed that this apparent inability to contain her text, is a political stance in which Jung refuses to define her subject, or any position of mastery on or above it (Clinton, 2017, p.23). Her sculptures also foreground the continency of their meaning, one found object placed upon another with the potential to be moved, its current arrangement apparently occasioned by associations arising from the occasion of its exhibition. This certainly seems to be the case with *reifiction*, where references to deer and objectification lead to the myth of Diana after which Diana* gallery is named. Ovid tells us that Diana (goddess of chastity and hunting) was bathing when she discovered that she was being spied upon by the hunter Acteon. Outraged by his attempts to objectify her, she turned him into a stag who was then eaten by his own hounds. He is the reh (hirsch) who tries to reify. But Diana* also cites a specific version of that tale, Pierre Klossowski's *Diana At Her Bath* (1956). Here the myth is not only a meditation on sexual politics, but the non-reifiable nature of language, in which 'Acteon with his quest for truth and his need to communicate is condemned' (Klossowski, 1956, p. 64). See also:*

Diana Complex: while the feminist connotations of Diana's refusal of the male gaze seem obvious now, the myth was not always interpreted that way. In Medieval Europe, the story served as a warning to women to preserve save their virtue until marriage. It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries that Diana became an icon of women's independence. Then her meaning was inverted again in the early 20th century as a way of condemning feminists, accusing them of having a 'Diana Complex' and wanting to destroy all men (Françoise Eaubonne, 1951). But for all its potential feminist uses, the myth of Diana, like theories of the male gaze, risks reifying the gender norms it sets out to criticise. Why would a desiring look at naked women be exclusively male? What about women who desire women? Which is not to deny that women have been defined through men's eyes, but also to caution against oppositional projects which repeat the violence of definition. It is precisely the potential for uprooting gendered roles, which Klossowski explores in his retelling. See also:

Does this exhibition title, referring to the myth, make Jung's show a footnote to Diana, or a footnote to the gallery's own footnote? The asterisk has contradictory uses: a pause in a text, but also a stop; as a footnote it can also extend a piece of writing, lending it substance through the authority of academic citation, or by providing a link to the world beyond the text; but a footnote can also undermine writing, implying the text is secondary to the citation. An asterisk can also signal a proliferation or deferral of meaning. Trans activists, for instance, have taken to using the designation trans* online. Here the asterisk replaces the suffix – trans-woman, trans-man – with an unspecified reference. The asterisk might refer to existing categories of gender but remains open too to what trans might become, beyond the binary. See also:*

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*About Sophie Jung, Pierre Klossowski wrote: ‘she alone has grasped the demon of simulacra, the false coinage of truth, singular and eternal, from which issues the authority of gods and states, fascisms which seek to annihilate others, founded in their definition on the violence of negation’ (Klossowski, 1989, p.56).

*The very structure of *Diana At Her Bath* defers the question of identity. Although Klossowski describes it as an ‘exegesis’ or commentary on Diana, this commentary takes the form of repeated retellings of that myth. The book is both a scholarly analysis aimed at finding the truth of the text, and a fiction, which obfuscates. Amongst the esoteric concerns explored therein, is the problem of how singularity might be expressed in language.

Diana stands in for singularity – as a Roman goddess she is disincarnate, with no given form, and her virginity signals the purity of her being. In order for Acteon to see her, she must take on a recognisable form, which for Diana can only be a substitute or imitation. The form she takes is that of Acteon’s desired woman. That this incarnation is a betrayal of her singularity is emphasized by having a demon preside over her transformation. Klossowski, a translator of Nietzsche, appears to abide by the German philosopher’s assertion that ‘to understand is to express something new in the language of something old and familiar’ (Nietzsche, *Will To Power*, p.479). In order to function language must be repeatable, imitated and have a history of usage. From this Klossowski expands upon ideas of the original and copy. As goddess of the hunt, Diana is the origin of Acteon’s identity as hunter. His quest to catch her is an extension of his desire to grasp the truth of his own identity, but in the process he finds only an imitation – a phantom of his own making. For Klossowski, it is our fantasies which tell us who we are: the picture invents its maker. He goes so far as to depict Diana and Acteon as androgynous mirrors of one another: ‘For sometimes the crescent moon is the diadem crowning the forehead of Artemis, and sometimes it forms the horns that emerge from her hair …’ (Klossowski, 1956, p.12). (Remember Jung does not distinguish ‘reh’ from ‘hirsch’).
Diana the huntress is a copy, devised by her derivative being, the hunter. The copy, Acteon, has invented the original: without the copy the origin would not originate anything at all. But it is only because Acteon is a derivative that he has this function of originating Diana. Diana and Acteon are neither simple opposites, but they are internally differentiated, neither one being primary or secondary in themselves. If Acteon were to grasp his origin, he would destroy himself as copy: upon seeing Diana, the hunter becomes a mute animal, before being destroyed. Neither wholly true unto themselves, unable to contain their own definition, Acteon and Diana stand for a principle of non-reifiability, in which attempts to contain their identity, narrow their distinction to a simple and definition opposition, are bound to fail.
Read another way, Klossowski’s retelling of the myth is that woman has only ever been defined through her relationship to man, as his other – Diana only given form when caught in Acteon’s gaze. Man has sought to control woman, by defining her. But Klossowski’s text suggests not only that this principle of determinate identity is untenable, but that it fails to capture woman in her singularity, in her many possible, not yet articulated incarnations. See also:*

Paul Clinton