

Alistair Hicks' interview with the artist

Sigrid Viir. Works. Temnikova ja Kasela Galerii, 2012

AH: I don't know Sigrid Viir. I have not interviewed her until now, just looked at her work. She neatly overcomes the first problem of a young artist. She grabs our attention, first of all with a sharp, almost vicious sense of colour that insinuates itself straight into the blood stream, but also by posing the photographs as part of a sculptural installation. This is not just packaging, but is a way of reframing the way we are used to thinking about art works. She is trying to tackle the oldest dilemma of photography: when the shutter closes, it stops time. Today, our concept of a work of art is changing rapidly, against the understanding of art as a single, stilled moment captured by a solitary genius. Sigrid Viir appears to be part of this mutation.

When I said I don't know Sigrid Viir, I slightly lied. I have met her once at a group opening, where she was showing alongside dozens of others. Her work stood out. She stood out. I walked around her installations, which forced you to stand at different angles. Sometimes the structures were very similar to easels. There was a temporary edge to it. They were awkward. How could you live with these? And the world inside the photographs was confused with objects stacked in bizarre ways, filed dysfunctionally, arranged as if the inhabitants of the land within them were very different from us.

I don't know Sigrid Viir. At least, we did not communicate with each other verbally in any meaningful way. It was a gallery opening, after all. Everyone was playing gallery tig and tag. She was particularly good at it. She was dressed in bright colours. She looked as much like a model as an artist. She had a very abrupt hairstyle. I don't normally comment about artists' hair, but it was relevant. She posed, but she was restless. She was not constantly on the move. She was like a caged animal. Still for some time and then pacing off. It was like watching a series of marginally disjointed photographic stills.

Is it a cop out to say I don't know Sigrid Viir? She has been remarkably honest. Her's is a changing world. I don't like it all. The current work puts the viewer on edge. It is as if the shippers and packers have come to move us on. There is a dynamism about her work. One feels it could actually start moving.

There are references to other art. One thinks of Rebecca Horn, or earlier kinetic art. In the colours and her sparing use of shapes, there is more than a whiff of the wunderkind of the moment, Elad Lassry. As I've said, I don't know Sigrid Viir, but while I am looking at her work, I am constantly expecting a surprise.

SV: I do recognize myself and some of my intentions in your writing. They are quite similar to the way you are describing. Sometimes I do feel like a caged animal.

I like your position, "I do not know Sigrid Viir," it suits my work. Sometimes it is very helpful to look at things from a distance, as if seeing them for the first time. For me, non-functionality is similar to looking from a distance. You do not know how to operate or react, so you start inventing. Excessive conviction hinders movement and creates deadlocks. These were also the reasons behind my work, both to forget and to know exactly to what means and how we use the spaces and things one sees in my photographs. I wanted to find something that lay beneath the everyday, something that would reveal how it functions, and so I had to turn it upside down. Maybe all of it has to do with me feeling like a caged animal, sometimes.

AH: Why do you like strange constructions? Is the strangeness a way of showing that the world could be different? Or are you saying that the world is different? There are countless different ways we could re-arrange our lives. Yet, you are very decisive in your choice of colour, which gives the viewer the feeling that you know exactly what you want. Is this fair?

SV: I think it has something to do with noticing. I like to boggle at people. I like noticing details. Seeing something unexpected. Being surprised. I like strange constructions because they are like discoveries, different ways of thinking and acting, and they give me an opportunity to be an inventor of some kind. Constructions are normally used to support or hold something, and once you figure it out, you see more.

Actually, on second thought, it could be that it is not the constructions I like that are strange, but the fact that I like them. So, I think it is a way of showing that the world could be different. For me, there is something magical in bizarre about it. Like the story of a Japanese lady who lived hidden in a wardrobe for a year without the owner knowing about it. How is this possible?

AH: Your work has an element of sculpture in it. Do you feel limited by the medium of photography?

SV: No. I do find photography quite playful. But I do like challenging the limits of photography as well, and mixing it with other mediums. Mixing is so natural today. Photography is like sculpture, in a way. It is a talisman, a fetishized object, a fragment of reality, a monument of what-has-been, something we can carry in our pockets, something we can touch. We can move it around.

I saw Kaido Ole's new paintings. I like them a lot. They are in some way similar to my installations, awkward objects that are made from familiar components. They move differently. They can ignore gravity. Mine can't. In photographs, things move differently to how they move in paintings. In photographs, there will always be something that we are not able to control. Is this the reason why things in photos and in paintings move differently? It seems that there is always a movement in photographs; after the shutter stops, something else will happen.

AH: Do you want the control? Or are you happy that you cannot quite ever stop time, even with the speediest of shutter times?

SV: I do not want to stop time anymore. There is a children's book called "Palle all alone in the world". As a child, I was dreaming that for two or three days (I calculated exactly how many days I would need to get all the things I wanted) I would be the only one who could move around, everybody else would be still. I also remember thinking further, that maybe some of them could actually move with me, because otherwise I would not get everything I wanted.

I always have the feeling that there is another way of doing things and those other versions could be as good as the existing one