

TOBY MILLER

The Myth of a Political Vision: Sanné Mestrom

Spacement Gallery, Melbourne

2 November 2004 - 20 November

If, as Donald Kuspit has recently claimed, the cube as sculptural object has exhausted its artistic and intellectual appeal, then one may be surprised to note its recent appearance and critical vitality in Sanné Mestrom's latest exhibition "The Myth of a Political Vision" at Spacement Gallery.¹ This is, of course, if one notices its appearance at all, as Mestrom's exhibition does not turn in any simple way around a traditional re-staging of the Minimalist cube. Rather, it is in the form of two small stereoscopic viewing devices, hand built by the artist and placed on shoulder high white plinths in the centre of the gallery, that Kuspit's "tired emblem of modernist purity and autonomy" finds itself smuggled back into the gallery.

Mestrom's stereoscopes are not the only place in the exhibition where the articulation of a cube-like form can be found. Here our attention is turned away from the centre of the gallery and redirected towards its walls, where on each of the surfaces facing the stereoscopic devices Mestrom has hung what appear to be two pairs of identical pencil and water-colour paintings, each composed of a delicate pattern of transparent rectangular planes, squares and shards. Viewed up close the initial mirror-like quality possessed by the paintings slowly yields to the subtle realisation of their aspectual differences. In fact, it is only after coming to terms with the practical function of the stereoscopic devices that the particular logic of Mestrom's abstraction begins to make sense; Mestrom's practice of producing two nearly identical images placed side by side allows, by viewing the works through the stereoscopic viewfinder, for the production of a three dimensional image.

Of course, it has already become a question that cannot simply be reduced to concerns limited exclusively around painting, and it has been my aim thus far to advance the strong grounds suggesting that the stereoscopic devices bear as much on the central significance of the exhibition as does anything else within it that is accomplished in paint. Furthermore, it is a recognition of this nature which allows for the generation of theoretical tropes the like of which are to be found in the exhibition catalogue. That is, we are informed that the significance of the exhibition lies in the way the stereoscope "reflects an impression of a shifting view of the world (or a shifting world-view) - a view that cannot be mapped out in 2D code, but exists in the 3D world of lived experience."²

¹ Donald Kuspit, "Anish Kapoor", *Artforum* XLIII, No. 1, September 2004, p. 268.

² "The Myth of a Political Vision" (exhib. cat.) Spacement Gallery, Melbourne, 2004.



Sanné Mestrom, *The Spy Plane and the Mounting Tension* 2004, Stereographic installation, Watercolor on paper, mirror and aluminum viewing device, plinth, 140cm x 110cm each (left and right), Image courtesy of the artist.

However, that such claims as those advanced in the catalogue are linked to a becoming phenomenological of the two-dimensional images within the "lived experience" of the gallery may strike one as an insufficient support for the type of political inflection the title of the exhibition appears to want it to carry. More pointedly, it fails to properly grasp what I take to be the actual discovery of the work: that of a registration of the passage from traditional modes of aesthetic production to one of institutional critique. Putting this in more concrete terms, what interests me here, and what is not adequately captured by the catalogue author's remarks, is the passage the exhibition marks between painted square, sculptural cube and the white cube of the gallery itself. A passage brokered by the displacement of two-dimensional painting into the three-dimensionality of the stereoscopic image.

On this point, one other aspect requires further remarking. That Mestrom's painting are presented on paper seems to me a particularly noteworthy dimension of her practice, as theoretical claims such as the one I have briefly tried to sketch above traditionally rely upon the physicality of a painting's canvas support as a way of brokering a discussion of paintings' transition into the sculptural. It is here that the claim that the two dimensional images become part of the "lived experience" of the gallery seems to me to most miss its mark as what feels like a more accurate description is that the stereoscopic illusion displaces the gallery space altogether and it is thus through the operation of this dispositif (apparatus), that the passage into the architectural is completed.

Here one can begin to mark the depth of continuity "The Myth of a Political Vision" maintains with Mestrom's previously exhibited works, most notably her orthographic wall texts presented at Conical Gallery last year.³ And yet while the concerns and motives raised by Mestrom in this and other previous exhibitions may not yet equate to the manner of political argument proposed by "The Myth of a Political Vision" exhibition catalogue, they do allow us to imagine a political edge to Mestrom's practice that does not rest with simply rehearsing the arguments of a now well-worn critique of vision.



Sanné Mestrom, *The Spy Plane and the Mounting Tension* 2004 (Detail), Stereographic installation, Watercolour on paper, 140cm x 110cm, Image courtesy of the artist.

³ See Kristen Rann, "At the Foot of Justice", (exhib. cat.) Conical Contemporary Art Space, 2004.