

Disturbing, profound, clarified:

A view on the way to the work of Lars Vilhelmsen and in the meeting with it.

By Charlotte Mosen

Translation by Karen Ay

‘Second Hand’

Lars Vilhelmsen’s artistic practice has a rich and varied history. It has been versatile and exciting and has offered the possibility of seeing things from different and quite unique angles. In this text I have written about a particular aspect of Lars’s practice which has woven together a path to, and a connection with, his past work, which I at times have been involved in.

We share a common interest in a conceptually accentuated working method and it has been some years since we have collaborated. And yet, as has happened before, we are suddenly again connected through each others’ ideas, and I can see that we are both challenging our past outlooks on art production.

Pop Art and the Readymade have evolved the perception of art over time. It has transcended it from the traditional single-piece ‘work of art’ to conceptual art, as well as artworks in series and multiples, many of which are actually produced outside the artists’ physical constraints. In that sense it has been clarified, and an understanding of the artist’s part in connection with bringing an artwork into being has changed at the same rate as the many forms of production.

Since beginning in 1998, Lars has always chosen which role he plays in his art production, sometimes becoming a part of the work itself and at others, creating tableaux using a variety of materials. So, when one understands his methods of creation, the thread behind his more conceptual artworks becomes clear, specifically in his photoworks, where Lars directs the photo process itself in a formalistic photostudy with the assistance of a technician.

The photo is often a preferred medium in Lars’ work, offering a platform for both documentation and actual production of the tableaux he creates, as well as giving potential for mass production of the work. His recent works present themselves as flawless, highly polished, often quite minimal representations of a conceptual idea.

Photography as an artistic expression is a useful vehicle to either represent or ‘re-present’ the world, for example the perceived perfection of a certain lifestyle. The use of photography as a medium therefore can ask the viewer to question exactly their lifestyle and existence by this means of representation or “re-presenting”, and yet there is a distance created between content and expression.

I seek to understand that distance in Lars’ works. The contrast between flora and insignificant, mass produced objects, placed in a sea of black space creates a strange, unsure experience for the viewer. The seductive and beautiful immediate expression of a polished, flawless image versus the content itself, where things are not as they seem, are re-contextualised and become slippery. To me, the work is both disturbing and profound, and it has a clarity about it, as when something suddenly occurs to oneself and the connection is suddenly and immediately made; ‘the penny drops’. It also brings to mind the work of David Lynch and his use of objects as clichés, alternative realities and symbolism. The ‘plants’ floating in the middle of a vast black universe at first glance appear to be mundane and unspectacular but upon further scrutiny become more complex because of their context, which serves to supplement and challenge our thoughts of everyday, quite ordinary objects and occurrences.

He quietly lets himself take a back seat

A strong thread weaving through Lars Vilhelmsen's artistic practice is the recurring theme of travel, and his work has navigated around the subject - as well as the world itself - in a myriad of interesting and unpredictable ways. Those travels, both figurative and literal, have created a multitude of sub-universes, bringing artists and works together and creating pockets of connection and collaboration that were not even imagined at the outset.

Two examples, *The Travelers Box* (2005-2012), in which Lars sent a hollow metal container resembling a suitcase to circulate among artists all over the world, and *Anomalous Zone*, where Lars himself stands in the centre of *The World Map*, a tourist attraction with land set out as an atlas in Klejtrup Lake, Denmark, attest to this.

Currently, Lars' work incorporates more formal and traditional methods and often takes place in North Jutland, where he is based. Being removed from the more concentrated, National art scene of larger cities means that the frame of reference is often perceived as being on the outskirts or on the fringe. One might question whether this creates limitations for his way of art production and development as an artist, however Lars sees no limitation; in fact it could be said that it is an advantage, although there remains a longing to go abroad.

At this point, inspired by the dichotomy of longing to go abroad versus the comfort of being rooted, the conceptual artist Lars Vilhelmsen 'travels home' and goes solo. By letting go of collaboration, which in the past has manifested as a global phenomenon as documented on the Net, he quietly lets the conceptual artist take a backseat, letting the more formal methods of art production push forward.

Recycled objects also play an important role. Found objects, recycled 'everyday' objects such as an empty container and even plants or flowers collected from a cemetery or crime scene find their way into his work. These nod towards mass production but more importantly, they become vehicles to unfold stories of lives lived by the mundane, everyday traces we leave behind.

A key aspect of Vilhelmsen's working method is the fact that he works 'in the moment', very quickly arranging objects to create a tableau and then snaps the shutter. The finished pieces therefore become stories rather than sculptures; lingering too long over an arrangement would defeat the purpose altogether. Once the photograph is taken, the objects go back into circulation, being delivered back to where they were found, or sometimes given away, to continue their travels, leave their traces, perhaps make more stories. One can imagine the artist hiding objects here and there, so that they can have a journey, collecting and leaving traces and stories along the way, and it is this wonderfully imaginative perspective that comes across in the work.

Pictures have their own aesthetic lives

Outside the world of philosophy we don't often use the term 'beautiful art'. Maybe we do not distinguish between what is considered art versus non-art. To a degree, it is personal opinion but even so, when you stand in front of an artwork thinking, 'this is (or is not) art', you have a better basis to decide if you already know something about art, and the personal estimation is made in a thoughtful and insightful way.

The sharp knife in the drawer will understand there are many levels of art, and some work will carry more substance than others. We often distinguish between good and bad art where the idea of 'beautiful art' is synonymous with 'good art'. But what makes an artwork beautiful is the artist's talent to express an idea. The work must be able to move us, to prompt us to imagine, to reflect and see things differently. Aesthetics is one way to accomplish this but also, reaching our senses, pricking our emotions, giving us a different perspective and offering a sense of playfulness are others.

When imagination and aesthetics come together to form an idea, art is beautiful, and this I think, is what Lars's works do. His play with objects which then become translated to pictures have their own aesthetic lives and provide the realization of his ideas. Content and form work in harmony.

The universe of the picture

The universe of the picture has been an influence in Lars's works throughout the past several years. This vehicle has provided him with rich territory to create incredibly beautiful, sensual and visually seductive works. At first glance, the viewer is quite literally seduced by their beauty; objects put together in an almost sub-conscious way, hovering in a rich, seemingly endless black space, as if they are little universes of their own. But then the trap snaps shut! The glossy combined with the spontaneous, re-presented object, is exposed 'such as' – for when you observe more closely, the object itself is no longer glossy, instead referencing the mundane existence of day-to-day living. And yet... they take on an entirely new identity within the contest of this rich, black space. Its character and purpose has changed and there is no longer any logic. The journey into and around the object is at the same time disconcerting and exciting, and challenges me to consider the meaning of the picture more deeply.

The process, the works and the world

There is no doubt that Lars' works are derived from the existential, every day experience and from journeys within and without. The relationship between every day objects, fauna and the illusion of space invites fantasy, but also engages the mind and creates a beautiful mixture. I hope, that Lars continues along this path, openly exploring the many possibilities, in spite of the outside pressure of the daily grind.

Lars Vilhelmsen

www.larsvilhelmsen.com

<http://www.europeanprospects.org/lars-vilhelmsen>

The Travellers Box:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kYEEueqSFs>