

Broom, Broom Maneuvers for the Creation of Pure Immediacy // Nora Sdun

In her art, Stella Geppert uses the common, indeed the wearily familiar, in unusual, stubbornly estranged ways. She balances: space, space as frame, the body, movement. Here, movement is a fully-grown, two-headed Push-Me-Pull-You. What we have before us is the result of a ritualistic, industrious activity, magnificently busy, prominently nervous that has unfolded during the making of the exhibition. A ritual that reminds us of notions of purity in art—ancient, pseudo-intellectual babble brought into the world by, shall we say, Winkelmann—a characteristic from which art has shaken itself free. It has been quite a while since art had to satisfy the criterion of purity. However, these once binding claims are not easily forgotten; especially when the advertising industry hawks drivel on purity for every pore of the skin, and the co-inventor has a name like “Winkel”... And so it is considered downright slovenly to welcome guests to an exhibition with dirty floors and dusty corners, although art is allowed to be “dirty.” One therefore sweeps the exhibition space. For Stella Geppert the convention of purity, like the modification of pure art into a sweeping ritual, becomes sometimes awkward or malicious through her making one simple shift in proportion: the broomstick is unusually long.

The effect is that the space appears to annoy the person sweeping. The broomstick gets caught on the ceiling. It is as if the space wants to constantly point to itself as a special space; a space that is always cleaned with particular care, a vain gallery space that is in the position to transform something into art that in other circumstances would not be recognized as such. And another appalling fact becomes obvious—the price of a carefully cleaned floor is a messed-up ceiling. (There is no danger to the ceiling lights, they have been removed and stored on another floor.)

Which would you prefer, dirt on the ceiling or dirt on the floor? Although it is rather unusual, probably dirt on the ceiling, as long as it doesn't drift down. Or, if only for pragmatic reasons, dirt on the ceiling is less obvious. Only in grand buildings and churches do we look at the ceiling to marvel at some frescos or stucco works, colorful mud formations that one really wouldn't want on the floor, if only because of the danger of tripping. By way of grand buildings and churches, one moves from cleaning scenarios back into the galleries, where well-versed visitors immediately look at everything even the ceiling. For one now looks to the art exhibition as one once sought stately grandeur and religious edification. The gallery space holds out the promise that something is to be found within. And Stella Geppert draws together the historical development of ritual and space with the seldom considered displacement activities of the contemporary artist.

What's more, the artist plays tricks with a well-known artistic problem. Geppert's work is concerned with the loss of immediacy that, once lost, cannot be regained despite the will's every effort. Even Hegel verified this and he is right once again—which is why many generations of artists have thought up the most unbelievable ruses in order to restore a mystifying moment of immediacy for the artist and the viewer. Such ruses include painting with the left hand for a change when one is right-handed, painting in the dark, dripping paint, or other methods of chance.

With this broom the artist achieves what Hegel ruled out. The fastidious effort of the will to clean the floor of the exhibition space conjures an immediate, freehand drawing onto the ceiling.

For along with a Karl-Valentinesque action of sweeping using a tool that is not appropriate for the dimensions of the room, it is also concerned with a graphic documentation of the sweeping movement made by the tip of the broom on the ceiling.

Documentation, in the sense of a comprehensible reproduction of the sweeping, is the wrong word. Rather, we are dealing with a parody, with an untidy scrawl that in no way reproduces the systematic act of sweeping, but nevertheless records it simultaneously as the process runs its course. It is actually closer to the Push-Me-Pull-You in the Dr. Doolittle novel than the broom that the Goetheian magician's apprentice sends to get water. The Push-Me-Pull-You has two heads and is therefore in constant conflict—one head wants to clean the other head wants to draw. Both are only possible simultaneously in a space with the appropriate ceiling height.

Stella Geppert performs an ironic maneuver to create pure immediacy. There it is again, that word purity.

It is particularly fine that while the floor below is absolutely cleaned, that is, made pure, on the ceiling above, pure (i.e. absolute) immediacy reigns. The artist neither scribbles willfully on the ceiling, nor does she seek to place Hygieia,

a goddess of purity and cleanliness, or a Mary, on a throne of clouds or some such thing. Instead, she concentrates on cleaning the floor, and her tool, like all brooms, sweeps reliably throughout. Only the broom handle catches, brakes, jams, slips, indeed draws, on the ceiling.

The refuse remains on the floor; it is not transported with a vacuum cleaner from floor to ceiling and pompously displayed there. On the ceiling of the room is only a drawing, a drawing that only a social sculpture could leave behind.

The Ante-Chamber Exposing a Leading Actor

Lobbying and antichambre, that is, the bowing and scraping in the ante-chamber of an aristocrat or minister to achieve one's ends, are in effect synonymous. The words have been in the world for different lengths of time, thus they are bound to their respective world languages. Both modes of behavior play out in the outer offices of power. The lobby as a waiting room which doubles as a rehearsal stage. Of course, these rehearsal stages or foyers could be furnished with those black and silver stackable chairs, for example. The work of the lobbyist is always framed by the furnishings of the person who lays down the rules of the game. That is one of the odious details one remembers in dreams, in government buildings, school halls, service centers, and other places. Naturally, museums and art galleries are also included.

In this case, the character of the waiting lobbyist in an ante-chamber has evidently been turned into furniture.

Although they are still identifiable as chairs, they are chewed-up, rearranged, and altogether disheveled. They are chewed-up, atomized, and somehow disheveled, although they are still identifiable as chairs. The back rests have transformed themselves into the seats; the flat surfaces have slumped into each other like tired warriors. In order to maintain some semblance of form, their typical designer-waists have moved to their bottoms. Really, a scene right out of a bizarre dream.

A mini-exkursus on sitting is absolutely necessary so as to avoid jumping too quickly to fatalistic conclusions and getting pulled down into little whirlpools regarding artists as self-promoting lobbyists who process gallery furniture into junk in spurts of well-dosed vindictiveness. Originally reserved for kings, office furniture eventually became a guarantee against continual protests marches. "The I seats itself," claimed Fichte and Nietzsche drew a little chair in the margin of his edition of Fichte's work. Descartes managed to achieve proof of the existence of God only after he recognized himself in a rocking chair. Beckett, consistent with his thought, tied up his naked hero with straps to his rocking chair. In another Beckett play, a character who cannot sit is pushed around in a wheelchair; a strange, nasty variation on the "Master and Slave" relationship set out by Hegel. That unholy theory is, above all else, the product of a cultural history of sitting, whose intricately twisted posture allowed an equally intricately twisted way of thinking a better seat at the table. A society takes it place. And so for a few hundred years thinking presupposes bodily immobility. (And whoever claims they think while engaging in sports is lying. For philosophizing while in motion is particularly rare, though the aforementioned Nietzsche insisted on it and, happily, Walter Benjamin had a thing or two to say about those who stroll. The Situationists were said to be great prowlers, although their name sounds suspiciously like sitting. However, all of the above do not currently have a lobby.)

Again Stella Geppert apprehends ritual and space, coupled with the precise probing of the terrain in which artists move, and she exposes a leading actor rarely seen—the seat.