

Fantastic Fragility

... and how it is difficult to move on

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I want to explore an art of fierce delicacy and passionate fragility.

– Carl Andre, A Statement of Need and Intent¹

But he stays by the window, remembering. They had laughed. They had leaned on each other and laughed until the tears had come, while everything else – the cold, and where he'd go in it – was outside, for a while anyway.

– Raymond Carver, Everything Stuck to Him²

As we go through our daily lives, we are usually focused on our immediate concerns: our tasks, our worries, our plans. We work, we meet, we move, we talk, we read. The mundane serves as a veneer to make us feel safe. Only when the everyday is fractured, we are made aware of the fragility of life. Accidents happen. The unexpected happens. Are we ever prepared?

I say we are not. We might try to prepare ourselves for disaster (though most of us avoid even the thought of it), but we can neither prevent nor plan for a shift in our psyche after a profound incident. «One might easily suppose that nothing had happened», Rainer Maria Rilke cautions aspiring poet Franz Xaver Kappus in a letter, «but we have altered the way a house alters when a guest enters it.»³ The construction of our inner being is so intricate and delicate that the outside world inevitably shapes it.

We are fragile beings and in this fragility we find beauty. The fragility of emotions, of creativity, of relationships. Everything seems to hang on tiny threads, able to be destroyed in an instant, or hover in the mysterious space between collapse and stability. Most of the time we live in this «in-between». The tension between fragility and strength keeps us standing so we can face the world. We need strength for dignity. Strength to move on, even though it is difficult.

The works by Esther Mathis, Lucy Marthaler, and Felix Schregenberger are placed in this seemingly mystic space between both strength and delicateness. They anticipate and risk possible collapse, while simultaneously demonstrating tenacious strength. Mathis and Schregenberger's pieces challenge the physical limits of objects; whereas, Marthaler confronts herself and the viewer with the limits of body and mind.

Mathis's test-glasses (it all comes in waves. breathe. 2013) hang on the brink of falling to pieces, only delicately held by tiny threads amidst a gentle breeze. Will the glasses collide? Will they break? The metal dust in Mathis's piece, 17mm (2013), appears to perfectly hold its position. If we were to move the jar, would the work be destroyed?

Schregenberger makes a rock, weighing almost a ton, levitate by placing it on thin steel cables (joking with G, 2013). Will the steel cables bear the tension and the weight? The work evokes a sense of wonder and anxiety akin to Richard Serra's Corner Prop (1969). Is it stable? And if so, how does it remain stable?

Through her use of a big flokati rug, Marthaler transforms, in Ich Murmeltier (2013), the gallery space into a warm, comfortable place reminiscent of a home. As Gaston Bachelard writes, «the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace».⁴ Marthaler feels safe in her dreams, yet wants to break out of the house. We sense her pain as she attempts to face reality. With a sense of self-irony and «poetic eroticism»,⁵ also present in many of Eva Hesse's pieces from the 1960s, Marthaler exposes her fears of leaving her fantasies.

«Things are not all as graspable and sayable as on the whole we are led to believe,» Rilke writes in his first letter to Kappus, «most events are unsayable, occur in a space that no word has ever penetrated, and most unsayable of all are works of art, mysterious existences whose life endures alongside ours, which passes away.»⁶ Art can express the unutterable through spaces full of wonder, curiosity and the fantastic. Mathis makes us marvel at a rainbow inside the gallery (and you think you know what it is now, 2013) and two arms of metal dust reaching towards each other – barely touching (17mm, 2013). In Schregenberger's joking with G, the rock seems to challenge gravity. It is as logic – defying as the inconceivable ideas and thoughts that children come up with. It is adult in its execution, yet childlike in its motivation.

Fantastic Fragility ... and how it is difficult to move on invites you into the richness of dreams and worlds inside creators. Mathis, Marthaler, and Schregenberger's works embrace fragility and celebrate the fantastic. Harsh realities face all of us outside; but now we are inside, for a while anyway.

1 Andre, Carl. *Cuts: texts 1959–2004*. Cambridge: MIT Press. 2005. Print.

2 Carver, Raymond. «Everything Stuck to Him.» *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. London: Vintage-Random House UK Ltd. 2009. Print.

3 Rilke, Rainer Maria. «Borgeby gård, Flädje, Sweden, 12 August 1904.» *Letters to a Young Poet*. Trans. Charlie Louth. New York: Penguin. 2011. Print.

4 Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*.

Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press. 1969. Print.

5 Danto, Arthur C. «All About Eva.» *The Nation*. 17 July 2006. Print.

6 Rilke, Rainer Maria. «Paris, 17 February 1903.» *Letters to a Young Poet*. Trans. Charlie Louth. New York: Penguin. 2011. Print.