

# OVERGADEN.

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25 NOVEMBER, 5-8PM

**Balancing intuitive play and analytical precision, Lone Haugaard Madsen's sculptural improvisations point to the process and conditions of artistic decision-making.**

ESSAY

## Medium and Mode.

### On the artistic practice of Lone Haugaard Madsen

By Christoph Bruckner

In the past, criticism of a teleological and hierarchical art historiography has mainly comprised a critique of its canonical aspect; a criticism of which the art market has long made economic use. The geographical and gender-specific extensions of the usually white, male and heterosexual *heroic tale*, or its replacement by parallel and peripheral art histories, also collaterally attacked a specific model of art historiography. A model which is closely linked to the concept of the historical avant-gardes that one movement is always replaced by another - or in brief, that everybody does something different from those who went before.

Despite the fact that our pluralistic presence has yet not completely overcome the more or less broad style concept supporting this model, recent artistic practice has proved to be diverse. Fed by various sources, these strategies manage to exist beyond notions of style and movement. As *modes*, no longer tied to their primary media, they even survive radical paradigmatic shifts. One of the earliest examples, marking the awareness of these artistic modes and their potential, is a claim made by the artist Joseph Kosuth that all art after Duchamp is - in nature - conceptual, since art can only exist conceptually.<sup>1</sup> Kosuth's claim could also be applied to contextual or performative modes, meaning that all art after the appearance of contextual art is contextual, since art can only exist in context. Yet not all art can be termed contextual. Moreover, although not all art after performance art is performative, painting, sculpture and graphic can be performative, even if they don't engage performative art's primary medium, the body.

The detachment of the mode from its medium and their dialectical interrelations seems to be a key element in Lone Haugaard Madsen's artistic practice. She mainly works with sculpture and painting, but her work could perhaps best be described as contextual, conceptual and performative, rather than employing medial terms such as sculpture and painting.

#### Grammar

Lone Haugaard Madsen's early works share significant elements with the contextual art that arose in the 1990s, such as the ambivalent status of objects. These early works included artistic research, display structures and furniture, which were used in order to critically question institutional environ-

ments through formally reduced interventions. Her graduation work from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, for instance, focused on the office which was her work place at the time.

Even now, after Haugaard Madsen has traded in the office for the studio, traces of the earlier contextual strategies can still be found in her *post-post-studio practice*. Although her objects have moved away from plainly operating within the context of art, developing a rather autonomous status, there are still elements of a superordinate grammar inscribed upon them - but a grammar that no longer relies on the premises of art alone. The fact that Haugaard Madsen makes use of functional elements as material for her sculptures, thereby referencing the functional aspect of relatively autonomous sculptural works, merely seems to be the most obvious connection between the two consecutive working methods. She always refers to the studio in a contextual manner, by using elements that constitute this context - such as tables, carpets or her working clothes - in her paintings and sculptures. Her objects are furthermore usually shown in groups or sets of works, so that the objects themselves form the context of other objects. In this way, they appear to distance themselves from the surrounding art context, which is ironically referred to in the artist's occasional use of wall signifiers within some installations. She doesn't think about sculpture in terms of its spatial surroundings, but rather seems to conceive of sculpture through other sculptures surrounding it.

By using the leftovers and refuse of fellow artists, Lone Haugaard Madsen integrates her social environment, inscribing it as yet another contextual layer in her work, and thereby overcomes contextual art's fixation on institutional conditions. This approach succeeds in particular because it meets a vast semantic field, which in turn makes it particularly easy for artists nowadays to trigger automatisms that activate aesthetic codes.<sup>2</sup> From a sociological perspective, this economical approach to creating art in precarious times seems perfectly understandable. But since the use of leftovers and refuse does not usually draw attention to its monetary value, the economic aspects of Haugaard Madsen's work are also partially concealed.

#### What happened to contextual art?

By focusing on art and social theoretical issues, the contextual art of the 1990s replaced the "merely unconquerable object-related discourse of the 1980s".<sup>3</sup> Yet Lone Haugaard Madsen's work suggests that the heritage of contextual practices is entirely compatible with contemporary object-related discourses. Accordingly, historiography which to a large extent has not

yet confronted this heritage would best be advised to include these object-related discourses in future extensive summaries. The contextual remains mainly as mode, while aspects of style and media seem to be subordinate.

Some of the various concepts that Haugaard Madsen has used while shifting her practice towards studio-based art production can still be found in her work - for example inscribed in some of her abstract paintings, which she works on until there is no paint left. Here, the circumstances formed the matter. Although these paintings do not share many of the formal and aesthetic traits of so-called conceptual strategies - rather anticipating the expressive gestures of high modernist abstraction - they are more than simple containers stuffed with various modes. Employing these different modes works well, because Haugaard Madsen's approach never ignores the inherent medial specificities. Although she uses a vast range of media, she carefully conserves their grammar. Her recurrent usage of materials and techniques that are closely linked to traditional sculpture - such as plaster and casting - can be read as an acknowledgment of sculptural discourses and conventions. Furthermore she hasn't altered the colours of the materials, and therefore they appear in their pre-set, usually low-key hues, which in turn highlights the strong chromatic elements that are included in Haugaard Madsen's work.

#### Performing sculpture

A third important mode, which can also be found in Lone Haugaard Madsen's practice, concerns the term 'performativity'. In the past,

this term has played a major part in many theoretical fields, even giving way to the claims of a performative turn. The theoretical field, including art theory and critique, has involved concepts of presentation, representation, staging or acting by applying these terms to a wide range of contexts.<sup>4</sup> It is no longer a concept of the theatre and performance art alone, but a mode, which exerts a strong influence in almost all artistic genres. Sculptures, in particular, including Lone Haugaard Madsen's spatial works, can be well described on the basis of this concept. Yet this

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approach needs to be seen within the broader perspective of art history, or else it will remain incomplete.

While constantly and intentionally crossing the border of installation art, Haugaard Madsen's sculptural approach is based on several actions, which are as important as the objects on display. These actions combine the numerous objects made out of diverse materials and formed in various shapes and sizes. This combinatory approach is not forced onto the otherwise *autonomous* sculptures, but rather logically prolongs their inherent principles of construction, extending it into the presentation of the objects. These actions, such as leaning, piling, stacking, layering, covering, laying, sewing or hanging, are visibly inscribed in the sculptures. The performative aspect is thus not just a function of the work, but at the same time a function of the spectators. Yet performativity is not just implied by Haugaard Mad-

sen's sculptural installations - she has also made use of this concept by actually performing within part of her installation. In these performances, she uses her voice, simple instruments and small electro-acoustic equipment to improvise short musical pieces. This points straight back to the medial origin of the mode employed in all her work.

Combining different materials and techniques, and emphasising the interrelation of single objects in the context of installed situations and the action-based approach histori-

cally leads towards American Post-Minimalism and some related European artistic practices, perhaps also referencing Arte Povera. In fact, the artist Robert Morris' writings on Post-Minimalism read to some extent like a description of contemporary sculpture.<sup>5</sup> For Morris, the performative is the most important implication, which both breaks with the past and encourages further development. Yet Haugaard Madsen's work not only implies performativity in the individual groups of objects, but also provokes spectators to walk around and constantly renegotiate perspectives and relational aspects of the installations. It was this relational European tradition to which Frank Stella and the Minimalists were opposed, refining the arguments of Abstract Expressionism. Perhaps the present actuality of Post-Minimalism only partly indicates the end of Minimalism's actuality, which has so far lasted for four decades and has highlighted the historical developments both

before and after. Still, in relation to art history's interest in concepts of performativity, Minimalist Art seems to be no more than a "negative centre"<sup>6</sup>, despite the influential controversies concerning the supposed theatricality of minimalist objects.

While encouraging the performative potential of the spectators, Lone Haugaard Madsen extends the demands of Minimalist Art for relationships as "functions of space (...) and the viewer's field of vision"<sup>7</sup>, by reaching back to pre-Minimalist sculptural forms. Her approach not only demonstrates how multiple artistic modes can be applied without ignoring inherent medial and material specificities, but also reveals - in common with many other contemporary art practices - new crossroads in the landscape of art history.

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2. Metzger, Rainer: "Sichtbarkeit und Evidenz. Komplize Komplexität: Zur künstlerischen Arbeit von Heimo Zobernig", in: Wiehager, Renate (ed.): *Heimo Zobernig*, Galerie der Stadt Esslingen am Neckar, Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit 1998, p. 8.

3. Draxler, Helmut: "Arbeit am Kontext. Ein Entwurf über die institutionellen Bedingungen 'technischer Unfälle'", in: Weibel, Peter (ed.): *Kontext Kunst*, DuMont, Cologne 1994, p. 201.

4. Kertscher, Jens and Mersch, Dieter: "Einleitung", in: Kertscher and Mersch (eds.): *Performativität und Praxis*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich 2003, p. 7.

5. Morris, Robert: "Anti Form" and "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects", in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, London 1993, pp. 41-70.

6. The quotation is taken from a text by Stephen Prina. Prina, Stephen: "Negative Center: The Work of Ad Reinhardt", in: *It was the best he could do at the moment*, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam 1992, pp. 78-81.

7. „The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision", in: Morris, Robert: "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2", in: Morris.: *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, London 1993, p. 15.

## ESSAY

### Benches with a Sense of Possibility

By Niklas Lichti

Some years ago, Lone Haugaard Madsen took part in a group show at Overgaden. The work she produced for this exhibition consisted of several benches made out of pressboard. The pressboard was left untreated and the design resembled the average museum bench, reduced to its bare functionality. The benches were almost invisible - or at any rate, as invisible as furniture, architectural or spatial aspects can be in a contemporary art context. Of course, the awareness of environments, functional objects and displays has been growing ever since the 1960s, and has developed a high level of sophistication over the decades. So I guess they weren't invisible after all. In fact, they were referencing institutional conventions; staging props and displaying displays.

You could ascribe all kinds of referential functions to those benches, or simply sit on them and rest for a while. Yet being both furniture and stand-ins left the works in a constant state of ambiguity. But the semiotic exhaustion you could experience through trying to pin down the referential relations of these simple objects might not be the whole story - because what happened to the benches after the exhibition seems just as interesting.

For the past six years they have been part of Overgaden's inventory, and have by now turned grey. Or at least some of them have, while others are red, or maybe blue, and

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some might even have left the exhibition space for good. They have been stored and reused, painted and rearranged on several occasions. They have naturally served as benches, but also as tables or presentation props. The last time

I saw a few of them, they were grey. A musician had used them as stands for a number of small speakers, to amplify his performance. So in a way they created their own career within the institutional context of Overgaden. Released from the initial intentions, it is as if the benches have developed their transformational potential - a sense of possibility. Yet at the same time, they never ceased to comment on the conditions of exhibiting art works - they simply can't help it. And I guess that was the intention from the start.

Not long after the group show at Overgaden, Lone Haugaard Madsen shifted her artistic practice, moving away from research-based investigations of art institutions towards the production of rather abstract sculptures, paintings and objects; works that were almost exclusively produced in the studio. Although she never abandoned her investigative and critical approach to creating art, things had changed. It was now the conditions of art production she was focusing on, whereas before, it had been the conditions of art reception. No longer bound to the semantic field of art institutions alone, the studio and its derivatives - its spatial, historical and social constraints - were adding to the frame.

Just as the benches at Overgaden had met institutional necessities, Haugaard Madsen's later work involved the necessities of studio-based art production. Since then, she has produced a vast number of works, which reflect on the specific conditions of artistic labour. A lot of the material she uses consists of leftovers from fellow artists. Friends and colleagues with whom she shared the studio have supplied her with waste and failures of their own particular studio practices. Other works have related to the studio indexically, such as casts of corners of her working space, or linoprints taken from the walls, replicating its structure. Sculptures made in sizes to exactly fit through the doors of the studio, or amorphous objects made out of carpets that had previously covered the walls of her workshop, indicated the spatial dimensions of the room in which she works. By leaving many of the objects, sculptures and paintings almost unfinished, or scarcely formed, Lone Haugaard Madsen emphasises the process of artistic decision-making.

Recently, Lone Haugaard Madsen has also extended her studio into the institutions that exhibit her work. She has sent unfinished pieces and selected materials from her studio to the galleries and museums and finished the works on the spot, adding materials she found in the storerooms, or leftovers from former shows - sometimes painting over the posters and invitation cards of previous exhibitions.

There is thus a narrative of production woven into the material she employs, adding up to what one might term an *aesthetics of working conditions*. But just as the benches mentioned above had a certain ambiguity about them, which made it

impossible to isolate their comprehensive relational properties, Haugaard Madsen's narrative of production is rather incoherent. I would suggest that it is best described as an essayistic practice; a versatile

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collection of concepts and relations that refuse to be narrowed down to a single subject. These works avoid illustrating semantic one-way tracks, as they don't claim to be objective. They rely on ephemeral hints and connotations, and make use of subtle irony, rather than proposing definitive solutions. It is this - partly - paradoxical narration that opens up for essayistic concepts of authorship; concepts that imply idiosyncratic decisions, subjectivity and taste, while at the same time allowing conditions to shape the perspective. Herein lies the ambiguous

character of the work she has produced in the recent past.

For Overgaden, Lone Haugaard Madsen is creating an installation consisting of new works, which

combine the above-mentioned methods of studio-based production and working in situ. Returning to the site of the group show mentioned above, she might even make use of those dubious benches that have survived for all these years.

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Linocuts:  
Lone Haugaard Madsen, *Logo The Danish Art Workshops*, 2011.  
Lone Haugaard Madsen, *Logo The Danish Art Council*, 2011.

## CV

**Lone Haugaard Madsen** (b. 1974) is educated from The Jutland Art Academy in Aarhus and Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna in the period 1997-2004. She has had several solo exhibitions, including at Grazer Kunstverein, 2010; Kunsthalle Lingen, 2010; Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin, 2009; Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg, 2008, and Grafisches Kabinett, Secession, Vienna, 2006. Her works has also been exhibited at Sammlung Haubrock, Berlin, 2011; Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen, 2011; Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin, 2010; Kunsthalle Wien, 2010, and at Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 2009. In 2011 she was the recipient of the Danish Art Council's 3-year grant. Lone Haugaard Madsen lives in Vienna and Copenhagen.

## GUIDED TOUR

**Thursday 26 January 2012 at 5.30pm** Lone Haugaard Madsen will give an introduction to her work during an informal guided tour of the exhibition.

## UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

**Friday 10 February 2012** Overgaden presents the two solo exhibitions *The Voice of Things* by Ebbe Stub Wittrup and *Gestus* by Jakob Emdal. The last day of the exhibitions is 1 April 2012.

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This exhibition folder can be downloaded from [www.overgaden.org](http://www.overgaden.org)



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