

Standing - Morphing - Floating

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Luise Unger “immerses herself in air”¹ just as other people plunge into some kind of involvement. So it is not surprising that her work involves a sort of floating. At first sight the sculptures of the past ten years seem like structures that have pupated in a silver-grey web. They have paused in this process of becoming and linger for a moment. Tranquillity emanates from them. They seem sensually soft and airily delicate. One would like to touch them gently as if they were sensitive creatures. However this tranquillity is fleeting - only a “transitional phenomenon”. During prolonged observation the eye follows the inner movement of these sculptures. Several layers of bodiless sheathing are interwoven, hinting at possible forms as in a process of *Morphing*. The gaze seems to penetrate the interior of an organism, directed towards the microcosm of cellular growth. Biomorphic forms converge like cells before the moment of procreation; boundaries become blurred and fade away, and new ones come into existence through detachment and isolation (*Spin, Heliko*). In other works these are layerings of anthropomorphic sheaths whose flowing forms touch on incarnation (*Schattenkörper, Träumer, Cor*). Unger speaks of “a minimal awareness and a vague memory of her own procreation without being able to explain that”.

The fact that the inner movement of this sculpture becomes visible at all is due to the special nature of its surface. This serves “as an indication of what is concealed”. The silver-grey web, which just now seemed so soft and vulnerable, is actually made of tough stainless-steel wire. Do these impressions and characteristics only apparently contradict one another? Unger herself makes this loosely-meshed web, deploying a time-consuming crochet technique without seams. This is highly

permeable to light, air, and sight, and in direct sunlight becomes increasingly palpable. The nature of this surface allows it to become a spiritual filter and mediator of what is in the air. Its permeability makes perceptible the accumulation of layers of sheaths, leading to a visual instability of optical stimuli.² The eye has no choice but to feel its way to and fro between the outer sheath and the inner forms as if investigating a nucleus. This reciprocal interpenetration of outside and inside may express what Unger calls “a yearning to be able to grasp something unfathomable”. In some of these sculptures chimeras of colour, formed by the impact of heat on the wire, also dance on the surface. The material rigour of the stainless-steel diminishes and the webs seem like soap-bubbles which, contrary to expectation, do not burst (*Agalma, Panta Rhei, Ephemer*).

The playful and associative aspect of Unger's work does not assert itself; it remains discrete, revealing itself most clearly through the choice of names: *Unkulunkulum, Hornicht, Atavaka, Dunkler und Dunklin, Galiola, HumptyDumpty* ... These titles have to be spoken aloud if their onomatopoeic poetry is to be grasped. Perhaps they even conceal impish wit in conjunction with the elemental. At any rate the verbal sounds seem a phonetic recreation of the sculpture's inner movement.

Before Luise Unger decided to limit herself to thin stainless-steel wire as the starting-point for her work, she employed a combination of materials: wood, cotton, hemp, wax, and various metals. In that earlier phase of creativity the wire- web was only used in a few works (*Dauern, Undula, Flügel*) - and then always in the form of industrially manufactured mesh. The sculpture from that phase has in common the deployment of black paint. These are geometrical forms whose silhouettes are clearly delineated. Their interiors consist of hollow areas while the exterior surface is akin to smooth damp skin stretched over mysterious areas of unevenness. These sculptures confront the observer with deep black shadows as if from some memory of an unfamiliar time or ancient epoch (*12 Türme, Die Säumerin*). In their darkness they draw all the light to themselves and, thus charged with

energy, they float, albeit only minimally. However, impermeable as the surface is, the energy within can scarcely unfold productively. An oppressive encapsulation and a painful “transition from continuity to discontinuity” become apparent. Only the threads and strips that detach themselves from some of the sculptures and dangle playfully above the floor convey the impression of keeping alive a memory of continuity and wholeness.

As previously mentioned, three wire-web works were created during Unger's black sculpture phase. Prominent here is her first work *Dauern*, which dates from 1987 when she was at the Academy. The web is extremely closely meshed and through this fine ash penetrates sporadically. Unger structured the web as 25 similarly-sized pipes, transformed through irregularities and individually varied on the surface. In the following year she made a start on *Undula* with the wire-web indicating a wave-like movement which seems to become flatter by way of 21 variations from above to below. Continuous cords thread through both works, emphasising their serial character and incidentally making possible a floating hanging. The idea of a series is continued in more recent works utilising crocheted wire-web (including *Ja und Nein*). In these sculptures Unger seems to be implementing variations on a potentially endless *Morphing* within which primordial biological forms, such as cells, can be enfolded.

The serial technique becomes even more apparent if the interwoven wire sculptures of the past 20 years are seen as a series. A strategy of variation seems to be proclaimed as Unger's artistic method. As the years pass she increasingly renounces choice of a true form for her sculpture. Instead she resorts to ever new variations of bio- and anthropomorphic forms. Unger thus switches emphasis from selection to combination.³ She thereby draws on a virtual archive of possible forms which can be viewed as the real location of her artistic subjectivity. It is not surprising that her virtual archive consists of such bio- and anthropomorphic forms. Unger grew up on a farm and from an early age has been familiar with birth and growth in nature. The ethical

dimension of her approach also becomes unmistakable in this archive.

Nevertheless today's observer will not encounter *Morphing* in Unger's sculpture unless he or she is aware of mass dissemination of our communication culture with screensavers implementing programmed Morphing of geometrical and biological forms. The source and destination of these self-transforming forms are also no longer identifiable in Unger's variations. However in her sculpture the Morphing takes place in real three-dimensional space and real time - i.e. is evoked solely by optical stimuli at work in the brain - rather than in electronic animation. Within our communication culture of screensavers' mass-*morphing* Unger's artistic method is disturbingly contemporary. Her variations of bio- and anthropomorphic forms float motionlessly in space while prompting our brains to bring about their transformation.

¹ Quotations whose source is not mentioned derive from recordings of conversations with Luise Unger

² Pöppel, Ernst (2006): *Kunstaufzug*; in: *Der Rahmen, Ein Blick des Gehirns auf unser selbst*; Munich, Vienna, p. 183-213

³ Groys, Boris (2008): *Auf der Suche nach der stehenden Zeit*; in: *Die Kunst des Denkens*; Hamburg, p. 130-149.