

Lucy Skaer
La Chasse

17 February – 1 April 2018

Textbook

**SALZBURGER
KUNSTVEREIN**

Lucy Skaer. *La Chasse*

The exhibition *La Chasse* is the first large-scale solo exhibition by British artist Lucy Skaer (*1975 in Cambridge, GB) in Austria. The artwork for this exhibition has been commissioned by the Salzburger Kunstverein in partnership with the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. This Salzburg exhibition is a permutation of the initial Berlin exhibition.

Lucy Skaer draws on preexisting imagery, both her own and others', to make combinations of sculpture, film, and print. Form, meaning, and value are traced in her work through various states of formal and allegorical existence, governed by usage, trade, memory, and mass production. The tension between systems of representation and first-hand experience is also central to her work. Skaer is interested in how different forms of meaning can be shifted and made to associate or disassociate themselves from objects, and how complexity can be conveyed to the senses through an immediate experience. Much of her work is reminiscent of an abstract syntax or a code that changes its meaning with each recombination of the available sculptural vocabulary.

In this exhibition, there is a perpetual, curious familiarity to many of the forms within Skaer's work, whether the repetition of wood panel shapes or the simple but clear inclusion of rabbit forms onto these forms in the large, white prints hanging on one wall. There is a sense of déjà vu throughout the exhibition as one discovers or re-discovers altered forms that play upon memory or upon previously

realised forms. This tendency towards a staged (but still resonant) déjà vu is most obvious with the three, central, tree-shaped sculptures that one encounters immediately upon arriving in the gallery. At first glance, these almost totemic forms have seemed to have bursted into reality from memory or even some antiquated animation¹, as if conjured into form simply out of some arcane will. This sense of dislocation and conjoined familiarity is one of the key aspects of how Skaer's work continually resides outside of language while in the same moment retaining and expressing a natural kinship with us simply as visitors into their surrounding space.

Much of the recent work that comprises this exhibition formally falls under the title *La Chasse* (2017). Here, the artist continues her scrutiny of the conventional classification of objects and production methods in critical exchange with art historical motifs. Skaer aims to unite leitmotifs that have long accompanied her work with forms into one large-scale sculptural tableau. She draws from her own oeuvre, de-abstracting and reworking her existing sculptures to become representations of animals in a medieval hunting scene. The scenes that we might or might not immediately discern are actually drawn from the *Livre de la Chasse*, a medieval manuscript with miniature illuminations on Renaissance hunting techniques written between 1331–91. Skaer chose a selection of motifs from the illustrations and refolded them back into three dimensional space as quasi-abstract sculptures. A forest

¹ Seamus Kealy joked with Lucy that these three forms appear to have been minted out of an old Roadrunner cartoon. They appear like the background landscape behind the main sequences, such as forms of trees.

scene is made from several 'fitches' sculpted in aluminum, and a grid of cast terracotta lozenges mirrors the geometric backgrounds in the illuminations. These patterns traditionally suggest a space beyond the earthly realm, a gesture that sits in line with the metaphysical reflections prevalent in much of Skaer's work and serve as abstract keys for the new sculptures. The artist explores the mutable meanings of these works and playfully critiques their language of desire, their status as definitive works of art, and their potential for self-reproduction.

Other remnants from the Berlin exhibition, appearing here also as kinds of outcasts, are slices of slate which were previously inserted into the KW Institute exhibition walls like skirting boards. Likewise, synthetically-grown quartz stones prop up selected sculptures in this exhibition, again at play with meaning as they are with form. As a whole these alterations, placements and sculptural gestures are, like much of everything in life, unfinished business.

Lucy Skaer also includes a cluster of single offset prints which are pulled directly from the plates from the headline pages of *The Guardian* (UK) newspaper. Here, contemporary meaning as usually pumped out in journalistic language in order to represent our world in grand gestures is flattened and tranquilized into shapes that fold into the "game of moving things" that Skaer perpetuates. Each image depicts, actually, the cover story of the tragic Grenfell tower fire, from June 2017, in London. The image of this burning tower—iconic, monumental, appalling, miserable, frightful—is partly obscured in the prints while still discernible enough to recognise its origin.

Like the once-living animals referenced from many hundred years ago in the *La Chasse* sculptures, the original physical reality and horror of the Grenfell incident also flips and mutates and disappears and re-appears in the chain of uncountable representations that it is discernible within. For Skaer, this artwork, like the sculpture, remarks more upon this process of abstraction, disappearance and re-appearance of an original instance or life-form through its many significations and utterances. There is, on the one hand, a kind of tracing of this path of an original (here something intense, whether a living and breathing animal, or the unimaginable and indecipherable horror of the London tragedy) through many copies and references and copies of references. On the other hand, there is an utterance of pathos and empathy and almost a cosmological sigh of acceptance before the effects of the passage of time upon everything in its wake. Emerging from this tracing and utterance are physical manifestations that we call sculptures or prints, that are, if immediately nothing else, beautifully pregnant with emotion.

Skaer would not comfortably sit with an insistence that materials or artworks as finite things or are simply things in themselves. One might conjecture on this notion as a philosopher might, thus asserting a perception or reality counter to (or uncomfortable with) empiricist readings of objects and form. Instead Skaer recognises every physical manifestation as only one latent version amongst many others. In this way, her sculptures function more like idiosyncratic processes, which insert themselves into a pre-existing chain of material conversions and symbolically charged transformations. Meaning is thus pulled alongside

these transformations and is continually in flux. This exhibition is therefore akin to a movable forest of conflicting fragments and uncertain symbols that are actively at play with mutable traces of animal forms that had represented long-ago living creatures as well as other formal and playful repetitions throughout the work. Altogether *La Chasse* is an open encounter for visitors, where a series of gestures in physical form place us in a curious scenario of ongoing, self-generating meaning, contemplation and expression.

Text by Séamus Kealy, Director, Salzburger Kunstverein
and Anna Gritz, Curator, KW Institute, Berlin

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Opening hours exhibition: Tue–Sun 12 – 7 pm

Opening hours Café Cult: Mon–Fri 11 am – 11 pm