

Form and Surface

Gabriella Fekete started her artistic career through a desire to probe deeper into things. She entered a classical, academic course in sculpture. The human figure soon became not just her model, but the measure and determination of her work.

It is not the individual that occupies the central place in her earlier models and torsos. The artist searches for the form and understanding of the human body. Her work refers to Lehmbrock, Barlach and Marcks.

Gabriella Fekete's interest turned increasingly towards the free body from the mid-1970s, but so scarcely were these works formed, they were more like indications or signs. The stiffness of the torsos disappeared, becoming instead a rigid series of figures. Man is the offspring of mechanical mass-production, lacking in individuality, and still isolated although within a group. The artist depicts the apparant paradox of character losing its identity, creating an unnatural identity of equality.

In order to obtain the precise interpretation of isolation, the artist moved on to wrapping her sculptures up. Man was bound hand and foot, and depicted as the essence of immobility. The dependencies of variations. The sign-like limbs and faces disappeared beneath a layer of sticking plaster. The group doesn't stand together out of free choice, but its members stand chained and pressed against each other. They stand like lifeless and timeless mummies. The artist's work from this period embodies the symbols of social structures.

Time-table belongs to her creative period of social criticism. Faceless human heads stand at the end of parallel running iron tracks, with iron numbers placed at the beginning and the end, indicating numbered people, bleak National-Socialist machinery and the literary utopias of totalitarian systems.

It would seem as if the political commentary offered by Gabriella Fekete's work has already been overtaken by history, especially in the light of the past two years in Eastern Europe. But does all of this not confirm the dependency of the artist's imagination on social structures and particular human failings?

This sign-like, formal language was a strong characteristic of her work at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Her work produced for public commissions at that time was reminiscent of ancient dolmens and mystical, mythical stones. A relationship to letters appears in their forms and colours. They generate memories of human marks

bereft of intelligence, that have faded like ancient times. Plaster, the material used, crumbles, and in contrast to Menhiren or Stonehenge, post-industrial society disappears without a trace.

Gabriella Fekete searches even further for the original in her work, however. At the beginning of the 1980s, she moved away from three-dimensional forms, and instead set her signs onto large, relief-like surfaces, that were later stood upright. These works also referred to a pre-calendar period, serving as archetypes of the signs found in South American cultic sites or the cave drawings discovered in France and Spain. The artist cuts the viewer short and brings him or her to a standstill, to linger before the work and unravel its symbols. The large panels virtually force even technocrats to stop, rise up and meditate.

Her career entered a new phase in the mid 1980s; works generated from the theme of flatness and area, or positive and negative, that was reflected her earlier work, but was in fact more of an indication of the future. Unknowingly she developed the compromise between man and art, while her most important goal remained the discovery of new expressive forms. This was just as a painful process for Gabriella Fekete as it was for her audience.

As an artist she unceasingly searches for possibilities of transgressing the boundaries of sculpture, balancing bravely between traditions and the breaking apart that takes place with traditions. As an artist she naturally demands feed-back from the public, and this is a very difficult trial for her, if there is no success then she pays the penalty. She is consistently advancing along the road of progress and can neither adapt, nor accomodate, nor posseses any regard for anyone else. This often causes problems for the viewer, who expects art to be "understandable" and "beautiful". They expect that the artist wants to communicate with them in an what would be for them a comprehensible language.

This kind of reproach not only concerns Gabriella Fekete, but affects many other contemporary artists as well. But this thesis can also be turned the other way: those who are not open to the new, who seek only a reinforcement of their own expectations, or who are not prepared to try and understand different thoughts and languages, will never question themselves, never examine their relations with other people and will never be able to aquire any new experiences. The endless doubts and the ongoing, relentless battle with oneself is a noticeable feature

of Gabriella Fekete's work, it is this that makes the public more sensitive, generating a fertile debate, without which any development in art would be impossible.

In the course of an ongoing conversation with the artist, the process of inquiry in her works repeatedly bring up the principles of thesis and antithesis, foreground and background. Gabriella Fekete often inserts a sentence explaining what she wanted, merely in order to put the question "and why not?" immediately afterwards.

Form carries an enormous amount of meaning for Gabriella Fekete. Today the outside appearance of her work rarely recalls anything but objects formed by nature or the human hand. While the human body was her model earlier, and her later work drew parallels with ancient, cultic stones, today very few references of that kind can be found in her work.

The objects have become smaller, and the process of intensive work in a closed studio has left its impression on her work. Plaster is not used in order for it to stand freely, but is instead dependent upon closed space, as a location. But man still hasn't disappeared from her work, he is a sign left in the work, always the measure of things.

Gabriella Fekete builds up her sculptures in the strictest sense of the word. Plaster is placed in several layers in a circle of seeds made from styro-dust. It grows within this outline to a given size and a given shape, until it has reached what is an ideal size according to the artist. These proportions are gauged in relation to her own body and its surrounding area. Body, space and sculpture are harmonized with each other. In fact *it doesn't* that within it human figures or groups are referred to, as the viewer can only understand their multi-layered nature only after walking around it. Best, movement, time and space are necessary for viewing Gabriella Fekete's work. It is something that cannot be done in a moment, it is always offering newer and different readings, newer and different spatial experiences. It calls for a dialogue, it questions things already gone, and prompts the comparison of know, happening things. The differences in human visual experiences. Everyone goes through a situation in a different way, deciding perhaps in different ways, but here, and now, they are confronted with the decisions of the artist.

It is no accident that Gabriella Fekete insists on setting up her own exhibitions herself. The exhibition space will be part of the artistic conception, and as a result extraordinary, conscious "spatial-installations" are created. Although its appearance seems haphazard, the final composition of the last small shadow effect has always been well considered, striving for the optimum harmony and beauty.

These are perhaps the first impressions one gets after seeing the sculptures, but very soon the objects themselves are demanding the viewer's complete attention. The plaster, as a material, at first seems to a certain extent to be colourless, grey and matt, and

its shape displays a kind of archaic simplicity. However, after a precise scrutiny and examination, the works reveal themselves in their full complexity.

Within the thematic sphere of "plane and area", the artist often places three-dimensional bodies opposite relief-like creations. At times rounded, oblong, soft forms are placed beside a square, at other times angular or hook figured sections respond to each other. Three dimensional, seemingly expanding, rounded, organically formed pieces are juxtaposed against a horizontal work, that gives rise to a strong contrast effect. The artist soils a length of sacking with plaster, but without completely hiding the essence of the material. At the same time the harshness of the texture shows through the plaster, and its edges are frayed. It lies closely pressed to the ground, as if it had been violently uprooted. In contrast to this, the circular part moves, as it were, as if only the smallest impetus would be necessary to roll it from its place. This inner-imaginative movement is perfectly lacking from the flat triangle. There are however possibilities imagineable for the rolling movement that suggest not simply moving away from each other but towards each other as well. The circular part could roll across to the flat area, thus establishing a unity with it.

While one part seems to be growing and moving in the direction of the area, the other part is standing statically and separately. But this has a more exiting surface, that bears within itself all the marks of its creation, displaying its process of production to the spectator, and allowing us to witness the handwriting of the artist.

With the juxtaposition of area and plane, however, we reach another problem of the sculpture associated with genre, that in the present case is represented by three dimensional sculpture or relief. We only have to think of the example of antiques, or Middle Age church portals. Narrative characters, idealistic forms and symbolic figures confront each other. Gabriella Fekete marks out their boundaries exactly, reducing them and disputing their border-lines.

Similarly, in another of her works, two contrasting forms are counterposed. A flat object similar to a boomerang lies on the ground, and on its open side an anchor-shaped pendant is set into the ground. The human body serves as the measurement in these work as well, something that is visible solely in the context of the space around the area. The two pieces continue a dialogue here, in a similar way to works referred to earlier. The contrast of the lying or standing pieces heightens the contrast between the area and the plane, just as much as the different working of the surfaces, and emphasises the blue colour of the section lying in the plane even more.

The sculptor has used colour for a long time. Middle Age church sculptures and reliefs mentioned already were usually coloured in some way. This has been mostly forgotten today, but it is something that is recalled in Gabriella Fekete's work. As a result her

sculptures become more like painting, creating illusion, a work deprived of its materiality. But Gabriella Fekete often seeks to deny this, by scraping off the paint or concealing it under layers of plaster. In this way the colour becomes capable of articulating the dialogue between the artist and the work, showing the conflicts within the creative process, and exposing the viewer to the artist's thought processes.

In this work the artist once again increases the contrasts to their ultimate point, while also endeavouring for harmony and balance. The forms are reminiscent of angles that can be lengthened at will. Their tips diverge from each other in direction, while at the same time the movement of the stems radiates a momentum, and the intersection of their meeting points resolves the contrast. The two forms balance each other out, support each other, and stand in a complex of relations despite their many differences. The title – Positive and Negative – similarly refers to the contrast, the principle of “for and against”, but also to the endeavour for congruence and harmony. The artist unequivocally wishes to express with this that the one is not closed off from the other.

Gabriella Fekete draws different sized areas with a fatty pulp on a plastic surface into the works of this thematic sphere, but these are isolated from each other, later producing impressions in plaster. This negative form is then loosely placed beside or added onto the positive section as an extension, as if linked together organically.

The impressions of the plane are placed beside the large positive section or directly laid across it at her discretion. If the surfaces are lying beside one another, the spectator can gradually scan and compare them with each other. Their depth becomes height, and vice versa. The surfaces of the sections are in opposition to each other. The wrapping, which is nothing else but the surrounding area of plastic, is visible here.

The association of positive and negative however, allows the artist to follow the procedure of casting, which in its course creates a negative form, as the casting receives a positive form, the actual work of art. During the process the wrapping is generally destroyed, but its significance is also lost. Gabriella Fekete causes the art objects to be on the same level, which itself is part of the work of art. This theme refers to her earlier work, when she cast torsos from polyester.

The sections are most often separate from each other, but there are works in which they are linked together. The artist ties together the positive and negative sections on the pieces of sacking, with the help of plaster, that once again creates an inseparable unity. The surface clearly shows all the marks and traces of this procedure. The whole working process is documented through the lacerations of the sections and the skilled linkages created by hand.

Plaster is obviously an extremely useful material for the artist. Farlier this material was often used – precisely because of its properties – for the reproduc-

tion or the substitution of the original, as it could be cast over a long period of time like much less finer materials. In the present case – precisely because of its materiality – Gabriella Fekete uses it completely consciously, accentuating its aesthetic qualities. Besides this plaster is not just a material that serves form, but is also disposed with a form of its own.

Working through the problematic sphere of positive and negative Gabriella Fekete seriously questions the boundaries of sculpture. What is sculpture used to represent, what can it and what is it free to represent? Where are its material boundaries, what are its realistic surfaces and what are their relation to area, and to what extent is the working process part of the aesthetic of the art work?

During the summer of 1990, while on a working visit to England the artist consequently delved further into this theme. Her positive and negative sections weren't just linked together but placed alongside each other. By now the join-lines were scarcely visible, seeming like naturally deteriorating fissures. She took several more prints from the negative, thus creating negative-positive-negative sections. These works ensure that Gabriella Fekete is searching further. At the same time her sculpture is also reminiscent of earlier moments during her artistic career.

The traces of the working process – the joins, the pulling apart, the painting, the working over, the casting – all bear witness to the ongoing confrontation between the artist and her sculpture, and at the same time provide the viewer with the chance to enter into the process as well, a process that reflects not only the artist's creative work, but her nature, thoughts and feelings as well.

The surfaces of her sculptures often put one in mind of the traumas, scars, cuts and wrinkles on the human skin. Gabriella Fekete “rubs together” with people, with art, and with her own work. She works hard to make this apparent for others in her prints created in this way.

Gabriella Fekete's dialectical procedure presents further difficulties for the viewer. The artist expects empathy, feeling and fantasy from us, insisting that we should be prepared to approach her work without any preconceptions. The principles of pro- and anti-, of life and mortality are reflected in her art works. Gabriella Fekete is no cheerful artist. Her pleasure in creativity always carries a transitoriness within itself, the certainty of turning into dust – plaster dust. The sculptures' odour of grey melancholy certainly troubles those who expect optimism from her, although this is an organic part of her work.

Her art is never for its own sake, instead man is always placed at its most central point. The viewer has the human right to decide to what extent he or she is prepared to confront the multifaceted nature of the work; whether to be satisfied with an examination of purely sculptural problems, or to engage in a dialogue with Gabriella Fekete, the person.

Ingrid Sommer