

The Quest: An Approach to Drawings by Tamara Ralis

If one is only familiar with the sculpture-objects that Tamara Ralis has been making for many years out of a porcelain mass and alabaster, one might receive an incomplete impression. These works have a pervasively magical quality. Transparency, clarity, luminosity and peace are concepts that might be associated with them. At first glance, the sculpture-objects seem to be the work of an artist who is at one with herself, transmitting to chaotic surroundings a reference point from which to regard the world. If one closes one's eyes to the barely perceptible disturbances that jeopardize the artworks' apparent equilibrium, one might mistakenly conclude that the artist feels in harmony with herself and the world, confident about her actions, and guided by a center which she has already found.

The quest for the focus – of human activity in general and of her own actions in particular – is a leitmotif in Tamara Ralis' artistic work. Trained as an actress, she is (consciously or unconsciously) aware of the central question of Kleist's marionette theater: Why is the actor, and thus, ultimately, the human being per se, incapable of acting in harmony with nature and himself? Kleist's answer: Because he has forgotten the ability to let his own center guide his movements. Marionettes and animals never lost this innate ability, but human beings must learn it anew. It might be justifiable to interpret the entire artistic oeuvre of Tamara Ralis in this light. As an actress, poet and visual artist – she is none of these exclusively, but unites all three within herself – she continuously focuses her efforts on the search for this center of gravity.

It is within this context that one can best interpret her drawings. They do not take shape according to a preconceived notion. Instead, they arise spontaneously, almost unconsciously or haphazardly. Each drawing manifests the artistic impulse of its particular moment. The sketches thus stand in diametrical opposition to the objects, whose realization requires foresight and meticulous planning. The drawings emerge authentically, in the spur of the moment, from a personal center of gravity. Their thematic spectrum is correspondingly broad. Viewing the entire collection of sculpture-objects, one has the impres-

sion of a self-contained body of work; the drawings, conversely, are a conglomerate of disparate facets. Although the content of some drawings seems weighty or laden with symbolism, these are juxtaposed with other sketches that seem to tell stories: mournful tales alternate with humorous ones; personally subjective, enigmatic contents in some, clear and direct narratives in others. Amidst this diversity of content and intent, certain recurrent motifs can be discerned: heads, stars, seekers, and a perpetual striving to come to terms with the universe. The dominant impression remains one of contradiction. It is precisely this contradiction which causes the creative restlessness in Tamara Ralis' drawings. Whenever an artist searches the world in a quest for the magical, mines the situations of personal life, and invents humorous or surreal ways to overcome the essential problems of human existence: fertile tension must surely ensue.

Tamara Ralis' drawings thus play a double role. On the one hand, they assist the artist in her search for that inner gravitational center from which all true activity proceeds, supporting her process of self-discovery and serving as a kind of virtual quarry from which she derives the ideas for her sculpture-objects. On the other hand, the drawings are independent artworks in their own right. Taken together, they form an autonomous, diverse and contradictory complex, and mirror – perhaps more than any of her other work – her personality.

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