

THE SCULPTOR VADIM KOSMATSCHOF DIETER RONTE

Kosmatschof, a resident of Germany since 1983, has achieved considerable acclaim through his participation in a number of major international exhibitions, such as the 1978 Venice Biennale where he took part in the show on unofficial Soviet art. Certainly the traces of his origins remain legible. The discerning will be aware of the constructive element in Suprematism (until banned by Stalin), the aspect of playfulness, and, on a more fundamental level, the departure from the pure realism of Petersburg impressionism which lie in contrast to the Socialist Realism of late post-revolutionary art in Russia.

Kosmatschof is not involved in an inherent conflict about realism, nor is he a fanatical proponent of abstraction. Rather, one might call him a pragmatic realist, a poetic dreamer, an engineer enamoured of challenges.

For the art itself, for the understanding and reading of the individual works, any national predisposition is of secondary importance, the Russian characteristics having no defining quality. Instead, the decisive element is rooted in the artist's individuality; the striving for art (*Kunstwollen*) is given precedence over the pleasure of playful construction, the subjective defamiliarisation of known static, as well as, energised components. In the works of Kosmatschof we are confronted with a rare kind of freedom available only to art. Whether *Kugelstoßer*, *Rotor*, *Diagonale* or *Dreieck*, whether *Hand*, or *Waage*, *Zündholz*, *Cottbus* or *Blitz*, *Kopf* or *Klepsydra*; in every case seemingly familiar technological elements gain a renewed freedom that leaves narrative behind. Far from opening itself to facile or immediate interpretation, the work calls for a more considered reading. The artist's multifaceted options need to be contemplated, felt, and experienced from all angles, and the sculptures' prescribed movements impose their own peculiar chronology on the process of viewing them. Apart from the free, autonomous positions he assumes as a painter or draughtsman, the artist is equally and unabashedly fascinated by the idea of the commission. He seeks involvement with decisive social, substantive, or architectonic positions which require a correspondingly specific work of art, whose critical virulence is entirely dependent on its actual environment, on the here and now. This particular type of involvement has become rare as it does not so much imply compliance but, rather a kind of projection seeking to impose a new dominance of the art work from within. Kosmatschof has no reservations about lending a voice, a new resonance, to this primacy of the artefact. Whilst making it legible in a language which is comprehensible to those inhabiting these places, he, at the same time, visibly reflects the context of the surroundings.

With this end in mind, the simplest expedient often lies in a dazzling garishness, a kind of fast-food aesthetics that quickly becomes outdated, a process that necessarily extends to the product itself.

With Kosmatschof, on the other hand, it is of little consequence if the work has been conceived in the 1970's or the 1990's; its topicality remains undiminished due to its ties with the individual site. As this relationship is continuously recharged the work acquires a dimension of near timelessness.

One might say that the artist operates with several intersecting layers of production. Though subscribing to the concept of art's autonomy, he demonstrates that this autonomy may be integrated without being compromised. This line of argument is supported by Kosmatschof's choice of materials which, whilst avoiding the use of the term eternal, seem to guarantee durability. In striving for future radiance he averts the patina of the present.

He knows that the exactitude of his expression in itself yields a certain energy. In this way, considerations of craftsmanship regain their relevance for art: having been regarded pejoratively as a criterion for the quality of art ever since the Renaissance. Kosmatschof's work is distinguished by the desire to unify endeavor, idea and craftsmanship, whether executed by himself or others.

Nevertheless, this does not reduce the artist simply to the role of a craftsman in the traditional sense. On the contrary, in his striving for art (Kunstwollen) the primacy of invention is not called into question.

It is the inventio that matters, not the fecit; - the concept, the primary concept, the originality of the prima idea, which only then manifests itself in the art work for the future. High spirits, irony, or playful elements need not be negated to this end, because Kosmatschof feels very much at home in his almost Baroque minimalism based on technological principles.

Serenity, literature, erudition, and knowledge are all inscribed into these works and further enhance their potential. On a formal level the various choices evidence the development of this artist's oeuvre and show the basically indelible mark of this individual biography. However, in the final reading, these choices convey the firm conviction that art, even when it is highly localised, can only be of consequence provided it finds a truly international form of expression, provided its language is itself global.