



POWER PLANT

STELLA GEPPERT

ANTONIA LOW

TINA MARIA NIELSEN



CONTEXTUAL DIALOGUE

Henrik Broch-Lips, artistic director Kunsthall NORD

The exhibition POWER PLANT is the result of close collaboration between Stella Geppert, Antonia Low and Tina Maria Nielsen. The three experienced visual artists have created works based on Kunsthall NORD's location in a former coal-fired power plant after they have been on several research tours in Aalborg to investigate the physical and symbolic properties of local energy production. They have used the studies as both actual method and metaphorical basis for their own artistic production.

The title POWER PLANT refers directly to Kunsthall NORD's former function as a transformer station. The exhibition highlights historical, functional contexts and relates artistically to the local and global aspects of the industrial age. Several of the works appear as a form of memorials that challenge our perception of the role of the body in the industrial, craft-based era as well as in the present technological, digitally controlled era.

Stella Geppert, Antonia Low and Tina Maria Nielsen, all use sculptural practices, installations and objects in combination with various ready-mades that currently include coal and residues from energy production.

Common to the practice of the three artists is producing



the works special locational and in contextual framework.

For several months, they have worked together for the exhibition at The Danish Art Workshops (SVK) in Copenhagen, and the establishment of the exhibition in Aalborg took place in close cooperation with Kunsthall NORD's artistic staff. The results can now be experienced in POWER PLANT.

I would personally like to thank the three artists, the text-writer Lisa Rosendahl, the staff and the volunteers of Kunsthall NORD for an exceedingly inspiring and fantastic cooperation.

A special thanks to Statens Kunstfond, Statens Værksteder for Kunst and Nordjyllandsværket without whose financial and collaborative support, a such international and very site-specific exhibition would have been impossible to initiate and realize.







POWER PLANT

by Lisa Rosendahl

In the exhibition *Power Plant* the artists Stella Geppert, Antonia Low and Tina Maria Nielsen, have taken the history and materiality of the Kunsthal NORD, located in a former power station, as their starting point. Although each artist is approaching the site from the specific angle of their individual practice, they have several areas of interest in common. The enquiry into the physical and symbolic properties of energy production is one such

shared endeavor, appearing as a central methodology and concern of the exhibition. Incorporating traces of this industrial process into their works both concretely and metaphorically, the artists' exploration of the given site seems to be extending in two directions simultaneously: into the past through their excavations of the former uses of the building, and into the future through the transformation of their findings into new propositions.

In many of the works, the relationship between the human body and the world is being reassessed and





represented. The artists' different acts of translation and transformation both question and commemorate the role of the body within the industrial paradigm. In this process, a sense of double loss is articulated: of the handmade world with its direct relationship between body and material that disappeared in the modernity process, as well as of the current shift from the perceived stability of industrial welfare society into something seemingly more fragmented and unstable. The changed function of the exhibition site from decommissioned power plant into art gallery is itself indicative of this transition, which is recognized by the artists and resonates throughout their works.

In Tina Maria Niensens series of photographs of technical instruments left in the closed Blok 2 at Nordjyllandsværket, the processes of change on a poetic form. The analogue instruments portrayed in the photographs were used by the power plant to measure levels of pressure and flows of heat, oil, water and smoke. The procedures registered by the instruments were operated manually—by employees pushing buttons, turning knobs and raising levers—and monitored from a control room. At contemporary power stations, these tasks are performed by computers.

When they closed Blok 2 in the 1990s, the measuring instruments were stopped and left hanging on the walls of the control room. Over time, their ink has bled across the paper, forming patches of intense color in



unexpected places. Although Nielsen's photographs capture the interrupted apparatuses in a straight forward documentary manner, they exude a sense of melancholy. Soaked through with red and indigo fluids, the control instruments have been overflowed by unplanned and unpredictable processes, making them appear as monuments to a time of transition.

This sense of a "before" and "after" is continued in Nielsen's installation *Mind and Matter*, consisting of casts of worker's helmets left over in the building, placed on top of softly undulating landscapes of waste materials resulting from the coal burning process. In an adjacent room hangs a delicate mobile, constructed out of thin lengths of metal calibrated by a butterfly at one end and a small piece of coal at the other. Another measuring instrument of sorts, the mobile turns gracefully around itself, its sways and swivels generated by fluctuations in the room temperature and ventilation, as well as the subtle changes in airflow caused by the audience moving through the space. Together, Nielsen's three works evoke the sense of a missing presence: the workers that once used to occupy the space causing its machines to move have since long left the building, and the coal used to fire its engines has irrevocably been turned into ashes.

Antonia Low's sculptures *When Work Become Form* are made of steel, one of the strongest and most iconic materials of the industrial age. The starting point for





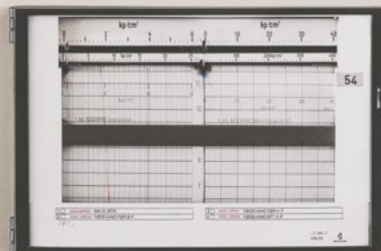
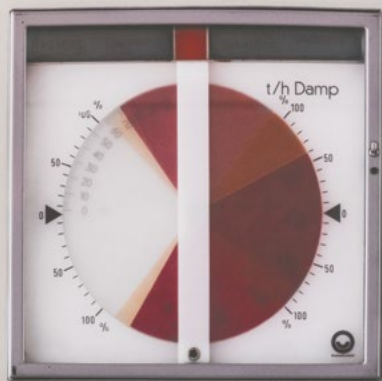
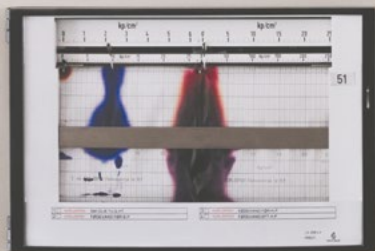
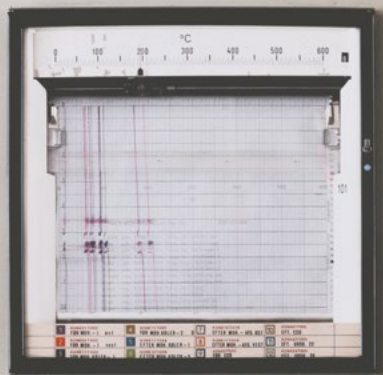


each one of the altogether twenty sculptures is the same, geometric form. The size and thickness of the steel structures have a direct relationship to the physical properties and capabilities of the artist's own body, having been chosen by her to be able to be manipulated without heavy machinery. This 1:1 relationship between body and material is the anti-thesis to industrially scaled production, which continually strives towards minimizing human effort in relation to maximized outcomes and profits.

Using a blowtorch with which to soften the steel, Low has bent and twisted the structures into individual forms using her hands only. The endearingly fragile, humanlike sculptures seem to stretch their limbs inquisitively in different directions, like dancers testing the limits of a new territory or set of circumstances. Indeed, when the artist produced the works she was trying a technique that was new to her, experimenting with the limitations of both the material and her own body in relation to it.

The blackened parts of the sculptures bear some resemblance to Art Nouveau metal work, as well as that movement's predilection for the handmade, anti-industrial and organically twisted. The decorative, unifying harmony generally associated with Art Nouveau, however, is nowhere to be found in Low's work. Instead, her contorted sculptures show traces of distress, the material having been pushed to the maximum of its abilities. It is tempting to read this







difference as an expression of the more than hundred years of social and economic change that have taken place between the end of the 19th century and until today, not least in relation to the concept of labour: whereas the Art Nouveau artists' interest in the handmade occurred at a time when this mode of production was still in use and the world, despite its powerful industrial beginnings, continued to be steeped in tradition and common struggles, our own time is characterized by paradoxically being both mass-produced and individualized. Rather than a united collective, Low's sculptures resemble a fractured community of individuals, trying to make sense of life on the border between standardization and personal pressure.

Hanging from the structures are the working clothes used by the artist in the production process, as well as plastic casts of door handles from another art institution made for a previous exhibition. Through incorporating these traces into the exhibition, Low makes us register the continuum between past and present and how the one resides in the other rather than being clearly separated.

This is yet another indication of a different approach than the ever accelerating cycles of production and consumption dictated by the industrial paradigm, where the traces of how something is made is usually kept at a distance from the experience of its consumption, and



the linear timelines of progress portray the past as inexorably redundant without the possibility of return.

For Stella Geppert, sculptures are primarily understood as consequences of bodily actions and behaviors, produced by social, material and spatial conditions. For the work 2 feet 7 inches Geppert researched the movements of coal miners throughout history and the way their bodies contributed to the industrial production of energy. In collaboration with performers, a series of sculptures and drawings were made that took as their starting point the measurements – 2 feet 7 inches – of one of the earliest known coal mines in the world, as well as a selection of movements encountered by Geppert in her research.

Comparing and conflating the processes of material and social production, Geppert's works explore how the human body and mind are situated in-between these two realms. Instructing the performers to embody the sentiment of being in a very narrow space deep underground, rather than accurately reproducing historical gestures, Geppert stages a situation where the actual conditions of the power plant and the imagining of a past experience bleed into each other – for the performers as well as the audience. The resulting sculptures – reminiscent of furrowed lands or turbulent seascapes – are similarly poised between being matter-of-fact evidence of applied physical pressure, and the poetic expression of imaginative, interior

landscapes.

Back in Nordjyllandsværket, an ambiguous creature has appeared. Part human, part tree, the liminal being in Stella Geppert's video *BUSK* appears to have no other purpose than to charge through the building. This alone is a provocation in relation to an architecture once constructed for maximum functionality and productivity. That the tree-clad spectre haunting the industrial complex also displays strong signs of anger and confusion adds further insult to injury – such states of mind are clearly at odds with the cultural narrative and ideology of rationality.

But although borderline creatures such as this one might at first be associated with all that which isn't rational modernity – neither plant nor human, subject or object, they are not easily defined or categorized and carry multiple meanings and functions – hybridity is exactly what modernity has produced. Science and technology have opened the boundaries between nature and culture in previously unprecedented ways. Genetically modified crops, prosthetic limbs and Artificial Intelligence are just some examples of this burgeoning field of uncertainty. Perhaps Geppert's scuttling tree, an oxymoron if ever there was one, is addressing this tangle of stories modernity likes to tell of itself, and the reality it is actually producing.

Seen through the lens of the above-mentioned art



works, the buildings of Kunsthal NORD and Nordjyllandsværket appear to be remnants of a lost civilization, treated by Stella Geppert, Tina Maria Nielsen and Antonia Low as archaeological sites from which to construct new readings of both the past, the present and the future. Resounding through their works in a variety of ways are echoes of the human form—the being that once made itself into the centre of its own universe, but whose creation grew beyond its master, forcing it to eventually face an uncertain destiny.

In the current, fourth, industrial revolution, where the physical, biological and digital is melding together in entirely new ways, the human is likely to once again change beyond recognition. But unlike the monumental industrial structures of the 1900s, of which the power plants in Aalborg are examples, the infrastructures of today are usually kept out of sight. High speed communications cables hidden deep under the seas transmit algorithmically controlled flows of capital and social interaction that nevertheless profoundly affect both our bodies and minds.

In this scenario, to keep insisting on inquiring into the world in an embodied way and from the parameters of a specific location and its particular layers of material and social history, just like these artists do, seems even more necessary. What kind of investigative sites that will remain after them, for the next generation of artists to decode and reinvent, remains to be seen.

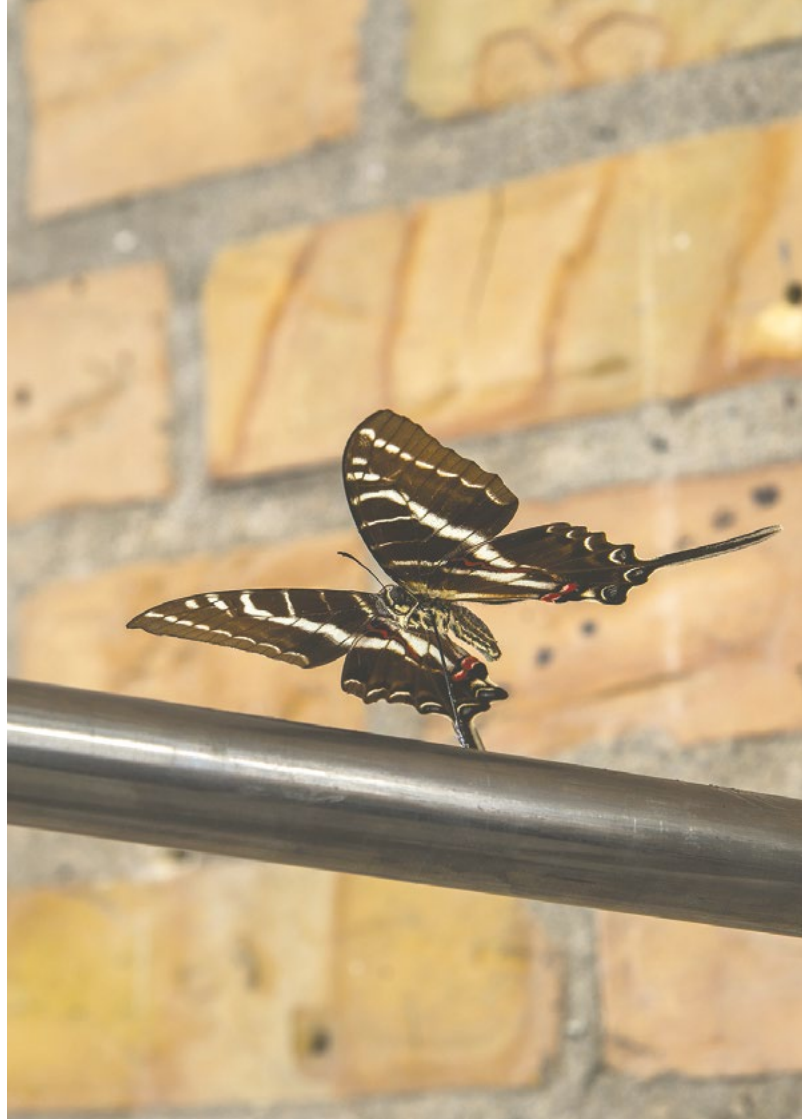




PHOTO OVERVIEW

- Cover: Stella Geppert, Busk, 2018, Full HD Video, 11 min, camera & editing: Per Henriksen.
- 4: Exhibition overview. Works by Stella Geppert and Tina Maria Nielsen (background).
- 6-7: Stella Geppert, Gesture of Exploration #01 / Looking for Coal in a Mountain, 2018, Clay, Fire duration: 4 days, 85 x 85 x 30 cm.
- 9: Stella Geppert, 2 Feet 7 Inches (Archive of Captured Movements), 2018, metal, 380 x 240 x 150 cm.
- 10-11: Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018, steel, wax, lacquer, plastic gum, work clothes, towel, brooch, 19 times approx 170 x 111 x 90 cm.
- 12-13: Tina Maria Nielsen, Kraft Værk, 2018, 20 mm steel pipe, :butterfly, siberian coal, various dimensions, approx 600 x 600 cm.
- 14-15: Tina Maria Nielsen, Kraft Værk, 2018, 20 mm steel pipe, butterfly, siberian coal, various dimensions, approx 600 x 600 cm.
- 16: Stella Geppert, 2 Feet 7 Inches, 2018, Full HD video, 30 min. Camera: Stella Geppert, editing: Ilka Forst
- 18-19: Tina Maria Nielsen, Mind and Matter, 2018, 7 bronze sculptures, slag, fly ash, chemical plaster, chemical salt, various dimensions.
- 21: Stella Geppert, Climbing Up Together, 2018, Clay, Fire duration: 4 days, 50 x 50 x 90 cm.
- 22: Tina Maria Nielsen, Mind and Matter, 2018, 7 bronze sculptures, slag, fly ash, chemical plaster, chemical salt, various dimensions.
- 23: Stella Geppert, Busk, 2018, Full HD Video, 11 min, camera & editing: Per Henriksen + Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018 (background).
- 24: Installation view. Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018 (left) + Tina Maria Nielsen, Blok 2, 2018, 9 inkjet print on 210 g hahnemühle, 95 x 60 cm.
- 26-27: Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018, steel, wax, lacquer, plastic gum, work clothes, towel, brooch, 19 times approx 170 x 111 x 90 cm.
- 28-29: Tina Maria Nielsen, Blok 2, 2018, inkjet prints on 210 g hahnemühle, not framed, 95 x 60 cm.
- 30: Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018, steel, wax, lacquer, plastic gum, work clothes, towel, brooch, 19 times approx 170 x 111 x 90 cm.
- 32: Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018, steel, wax, lacquer, plastic gum, work clothes, towel, brooch, 19 times approx 170 x 111 x 90 cm.
- 35: Antonia Low, When Work Becomes Form, 2018, steel, wax, lacquer, plastic gum, work clothes, towel, brooch, 19 times approx 170 x 111 x 90 cm.
- 37-39: Tina Maria Nielsen, Kraft Værk, 2018, 20 mm steel pipe, butterfly, siberian coal, various dimensions, approx 600 x 600 cm.

Published in connection with the exhibition:

POWER PLANT

Kunsthall NORD

May 5 – June 17 2018

Artists:

Stella Geppert

Antonia Low

Tina Maria Nielsen

Editing: Henrik Broch-Lips

Text: Lisa Rosendahl, Henrik Broch-Lips

Photos: Niels Fabæk, Jesper Olsen

Layout: Caspar Tylak

Print: Akprint.dk

ISBN: 978-87-970104-6-4

Kunsthall NORD

Kjellerups Torv 5

DK-9000 Aalborg

www.kunsthallnord.dk

NORDJYLLANDSVÆRKET A/S

STATENS KUNSTFOND



DANISH
ART WORKSHOPS
STATENS VÆRKSTEDER
FOR KUNST

**KUNSTHAL
NORD
KUNSTHAUS**