

Veronika Veit shows us objects of everyday use, things that all viewers are familiar with from their own daily experience. She generally stays with the familiar and the intimate in her choice of topics, but then subjects it to subtle estrangements in her sculptures, installations and photographs. The artist combines what she finds with what she has created herself, often what appear to be ready-made objects, from a variety of materials. Veit thus poses the question of the relationship between the portrayal and the illusion of reality.

As a concept, this artistic attitude derives fundamentally from the early 20th century. Between 1913 and 1917, Marcel Duchamp redefined the status of the art object for himself and therefore for the entire history of art. Duchamp's revolutionary expansion of this concept bestows on normal everyday objects the status of individual works of art and leads to the ready-made objects becoming museum pieces. American and European post-war modernism finally surmounted the connotations of triviality, shabbiness and ugliness associated with the ready-made, simple objects of everyday use are no longer perceived per se as inferior or uninteresting as a mode of artistic expression. This development is exemplified in the work of three artists who each pursue completely different ends. Claes Oldenburg transforms found objects into their artistic opposites (hard materials are exchanged for soft ones, small objects are greatly magnified and so on), whereby he has the differing facets of the same object confront each other – theses and antitheses become complementary.¹ Joseph Beuys achieves the symbolic and spiritual charging of everyday objects whose reawakened transforming and healing properties are designed to affect the viewer.² And Robert Gober is interested in the social and societal expression displayed by the typical objects of everyday use which he combines with provocative motifs.³

Veronika Veit's works proclaim the essence of things in a surprisingly novel way. First of all, the artist achieves a detachment from the original functional context of the object. A suitable medium for isolation proves to be colour. Veit's red »Teppich« (p. 20) and her red and grey »Teppichroller« (p. 26) from 1999 depict ironically the typical ceremonial red of carpets. Due to its isolation from its normal context, the concentrated presence of a three-dimensional form can develop and so can be experienced with great clarity. Veit's »Formwertkapsel« (p. 19f.) made of Styrofoam (1999) appears as an object without function, whose aesthetic value comes to the fore as opposed to a possible useful function (as protective coating). The emphasis on form also stands for a denial of the functionalizing of the object through industrial standardization. In this case a particular significance arises from the form and not merely from the material.⁴ Veronika Veit's movable »Heizroller« (p. 21) from 1999 produces an uneasiness such as that caused by Meret Oppenheims Pelztasse.⁵ From between the uneven, gaping heating elements, an unidentifiable mass oozes out of the top. At the same time, the colour of Heizroller awakens associations with food: the surface of the heating elements remind one of white bread while the amorphous mass looks like melted cheese.

A disturbing effect is caused also by Veit's »Blaues Handtuch« (p. 56) from 2005. The laws of physics notwithstanding, the towel wraps itself around the drain and creates a bulging and malleable shape in lumpy relief. Towel and metal plate have coalesced to a bizarre unit, the trivial has become threatening and the irrelevant, sinister.

Veronika Veit's illumination of the independent life of inanimate objects suggests that the essence of human existence is revealed with more clarity in the daily use of these objects than in specific fundamental life-style and career choices.⁶ In Veit's case, the things that one only supposes are secondary become the actual sculptural subject matter – whereby the absent human remains the decisive point of reference for each individual object. In addition to the basic artefact, therefore, an imaginary user appears – in this respect, the works of art can also be understood as snapshots. Veit's sculptures, installations and photographs signify the turning back of human dominance. Useful objects designed and manufactured by humans become independent, reproduce elements, expand or move on: they become autonomous. In Veit's work, the influence of the thing on humankind is indicated, an influence which is often completely ignored in the representation of the thing itself.

A human being is able to freely shape the surrounding environment, minimize needs or bow to strict aesthetic principles. However, a life situation must needs be equipped with a certain number of objects (products of civilized development) forced upon one by elementary biological needs (sleeping, eating): One cannot live □ without daily objects, one is unavoidably dependent on things. Veit's stylized »Wasseranschluß« (p. 60) from 2003 is one of those indispensable objects the quiet power of which gives assurance of the unforeseeable.

Veronika Veit's photographs show details from staged interiors in which diverse apparatus have abandoned their normal activity. Her photographic work »Mechaniker« (p. 38) from 2004 shows a mechanic who is just about to repair a broken escalator with a pair of pliers. Veronika Veit's mechanic has to beware of malicious technology. The surging handrail of the escalator has already hidden the head of the workman and is threatening to become a Laocoonian noose.

In Veit's »Küche« (p. 36) from 2003, an open fridge door gives us a glimpse of yellow droplet-shaped forms which have spread through the interior of the fridge like growths. The functionless computer monitors and the desk in »Bureau« (2003) (p. 40) are also similarly overgrown, eerie blue-green globules (are they viruses?) have taken over the office.

In all the artist's works the underestimated power of everyday things is manifest. The indwelling effect of the objects is drawn from Veit's narrative energy, when she splits human civilization into minuscule denominations. Here, the original character of the object becomes the nucleus of a process of transformation during which the human being is subjugated to the world of things. In Veronika Veit's work, the independent and at the same time liberated objects of daily use have conquered human life for themselves. They take over areas and spaces which their owners have not consciously bestowed on them. The artist has achieved in making the secret life of things, the imminent triumph of the humble object, malleably visible.

1 See particularly Oldenburg's works ›Soft Washstand (Ghost Version)‹, 1965, Museum Ludwig, Cologne and ›Soft Drainpipe‹. ›Blue (Cool) Version‹, 1967, Tate Modern, London.

2 See for instance the edition ›Silberbesen und Besen ohne Haare‹, 1972.

3 See Gober's basket with a pipe running through it: ›Untitled‹, 1992, Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco and the sink ›Untitled‹, 1998-99, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

4 The question of materiality is examined in detail in: Monika Wagner, *Das Material der Kunst. Eine andere Geschichte der Moderne*. Munich, 2001.

5 Meret Oppenheim, ›Objet‹, 1935-36, New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

6 A comparable assumption can be found in the works of Botho Strauß, for instance in: Botho Strauß, *Wohnen Dämmern Lügen*. Munich, 1994.

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