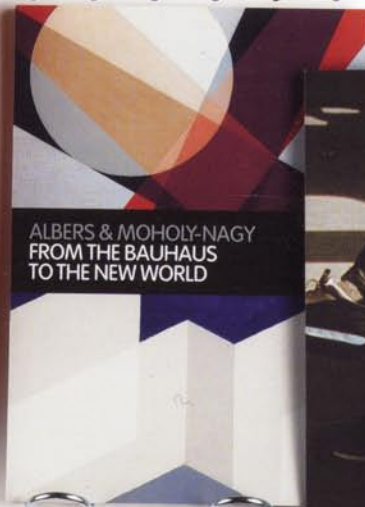


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STANDARD (OSLO), Norway

The bare white walls of the gallery appeared untouched, still patiently awaiting the arrival of the art works. It was only when you stepped back outside the gallery that Knut Henrik Henriksen's installation, *Scale of Proportions Which Makes the Bad Difficult and the Good Easy* (2006), became visible. Here the abnormally bisected windows indicated that the artist had in fact lowered the height of the gallery space by installing a false ceiling made from polystyrene panels. The effect was even more noticeable at night, when the space between the original ceiling and the new one was illuminated.

In some senses Henriksen's intervention, by initially appearing to present nothing, pursues an art-historical dialogue that dates back to 1958, when Yves Klein first exhibited an empty gallery space at Galerie Iris Clerf in Paris. Klein's now-legendary project testified to the transformative power of the gallery - to the institutional 'magic' involved when an object becomes an art object. Two years later, in 1960, when Arman filled Clerf's gallery with his *Le Plein* (Full), which consisted of heaps of found garbage pressing against the door (thus preventing anyone from entering), the gallery and its contents - the pedestal and the art work, so to speak - were rendered indivisible. And for the first time the viewer had to observe the art work from beyond the confines of the exhibition space. Henriksen's work likewise prompts consideration of the function of the gallery, questioning whether it acts as something other than a transparent window for aesthetic experience. But does he add anything to this story?

Scale of Proportions finds its point of departure in Le Corbusier. According to the French architect, the ideal height for a ceiling is 2.26 metres - a statistic he derived from the

mathematical calculus of the Golden Section. Yet clearly the very notion of an ideal ceiling height is absurd, given that there is no standard height for human beings. This disparity between the 'ideal' and the real is clearly exposed when the viewer enters the gallery, for as visitors walk around Henriksen's space they are articulating their own true heights against Le Corbusier's model one. In a way, then, the viewer is the fulfilment of the work, the material of Henriksen's criticism and the appropriation of Corbusier's Utopian vision. Any attempt to define the human experience by means of a standard is, Henriksen seems to imply, both ineffectual and futile, since it will always be undermined by individual experience. Thus *Scale of Proportions* succeeds in standing out among the pantheon of works addressing issues of 'empty spaces' for its employment of the viewer as the actual point of intervention.

But what is now absurd, or at least problematic, might have been otherwise when Le Corbusier presented his model of ideal height to Albert Einstein in 1942. The physicist approved of Le Corbusier's concept, but, as the exhibition's press release laconically states, he 'didn't necessarily foresee how heroic ideas might not automatically translate into heroic design'. By referring to this incident, Henriksen points to the Utopian content of High Modernism - the belief that architectural or artistic design could make the world better for all of us - within the parameters of his own work. Through this historic double exposure Henriksen locates his work within a larger story of 20th-century art. The faith in all-embracing Utopias has now been replaced by micro-Utopias and local interventions (his use of polystyrene, bought from a DIY store in a working-class area of Berlin, underlines this specificity).

While Henriksen's exhibition functions successfully on its own, it also needs to be construed in relation to the history of STANDARD (OSLO). As the name of the venue intimates, each artist commissioned to create a piece for the gallery is obliged to consider the notion of the 'standard' in the works they display. A recent example would be Matias Faldbakken's *See You on the Front Page of the Last Newspaper Those Motherfuckers Ever Print* (2005). This counterfeit newspaper - which contains private, idiosyncratic texts and of which only one copy was printed - stands in stark contrast to regular (or standard) newspapers, which act as daily channels of information for vast audiences. As the latest chapter in the gallery's exploration of the standard, *Scale of Proportions*, alternating successfully between individual experience and abstract concepts, is far-reaching in its simplicity: Henriksen, it seems, has just as much in common with Michel de Montaigne as with Klein. If the exhibitions at STANDARD (OSLO) can be seen as inscribing a grammar of spatial awareness, then *Scale of Proportions* is undoubtedly the most exacting and effective instalment so far.

Kjetil Roed



Knut Henrik Henriksen



Michele O'Marah, Tim Jackson and David Jones
Faustus's Children
2006
Video still

Sister, Los Angeles, USA

In an episode of the cult TV series *The Twilight Zone*, entitled 'Queen of the Nile' (1964), a curious but cynical journalist interviews a youthful-faced actress regarding her recent portrayal of Cleopatra. Suspicious of his interlocutor, the journalist probes his subject on a topic she avoids: her uncanny resemblance to an actress who has previously played the same role. Of course, these actresses are discovered to be one and the same, and our inquisitive stringer is left dead and bloodless, nutrition for the eternal queen.

Michele O'Marah's recent show at Sister featured her new video, *Faustus's Children* (2006), created in collaboration with David Jones (script and sound) and Tim Jackson (special effects), which was projected in a small back room. Getting to the video was thus a matter of shuffling through the set design, redeployed in the gallery: a single living-room complete with couch, fireplace, side-tables and walls adorned with decoy ducks and garish, almost narcotic wallpaper. The openness of this cinematic artifice is not without effect. In fact, it expresses O'Marah's signature style of video-making, one that does not hide its low-tech, hand-crafted illusion. The wallpaper appeared to be made of construction paper, and the décor was little more than a generic painting-by-numbers domestic interior. In *Faustus's Children* this simplicity remains what it is: a mere backdrop →

Knut Henrik Henriksen
Scale of Proportions Which Makes the Bad Difficult and the Good Easy
2006
Wood, styrofoam
Dimensions variable

Michele O'Marah