

Dr. Sonja Müller

© semons

An Installation by malatsion

The semons company is an enterprise which has dedicated itself to the construction of plants. Using paper patterns, vegetal forms are designed, each single element is numbered and registered. From these elements, individual leaves, blossoms, stems and buds are formed and assembled into prototypes. Every single plant has its roots hidden in a square plant pot of prescribed dimensions, which provides additional support to its fragility.

The individual plants are connected to each other by tubes and are fed from canisters with a mysterious liquid. The setting of a laboratory gradually becomes apparent. Are these tubes or cables? Which kind of energy nourishes the vegetal objects? Does this involve prototypes of new plants designed by the semons company? Or test objects, artificially transformed for research purposes whose outcome we cannot divine? Or even a future fantasy about strange fusions of nature and art?

A science fiction story?

semons is the fictional company of the French artist malatsion. Inspired by reports and images from biotechnology, and troubled by patenting practices for living organisms, she has created an artistic commentary, a work-in-progress which links conceptual thinking with precise artistic handicraft techniques.

For the © semons project, she assumed the role of a researcher. In a long and intensive process, she collected, drew and further developed individual vegetal forms, then assembled them into new, plastic forms in an open-ended experiment.

The next step is the precise craft work: the technical aspects of production and close attention to detail. The creative act lies in the development of the form. malatsion's artistic work is rooted in sculpture, she is interested in the tension between filigree moments and monumentality, often her artificial and artistic traits appear to be threatened by their own fragility. Her sculptural work is determined by experiment and by playing with form. Socio-political aspects of the world we live in and a stronger conceptual approach have dominated her works in recent years. Both aspects of her artistic creativity merge for the first time in the © semons project.

„New“ plant objects, which do not exist in the natural world in this form, are the outcome.

Constructed from steel, plastic, textiles and woodfibre boards, coated with white acrylic paint and identifiable as products of a laboratory by the number code – this produces the “impression of artificiality and coldness, which is inconsistent with the proliferating diversity and opulent forms.” (malatsion)

The installation presents itself in the form of a varied wood with numerous plant objects. The heterogeneity in their diversity of form generates an unlikely contrast to the stark white of their

surface and tends to prompt associations with design objects rather than with a glasshouse. Are they still plants, or architecturally inspired constructions out of living material, which thrives under artificial conditions? Nature as product.

A still work.

This catalogue is an integral part of the installation. The details and drawings help the visitor identify the exhibited objects.

Paper patterns in a 1:1 format show the individual parts of the plant objects. They allow the observer to reconstruct the production process, and they lay bare the technical aspects, turning the plant conclusively into an artificial object.

At the same time, the plants, the prototypes are displayed and presented as in an advertising catalogue. This aestheticisation frees the objects from both tactility and the laboratory setting, allowing completely new, complementary associations: photography austere in form, in which vegetal structures and embellishment enter into a symbiosis.

The photographs invite comparison with those of Karl Blossfeldt who, himself a sculptor, regarded his photographic works less as self-contained oeuvres and rather as documentation. Shot in isolation against a neutral background, often enlarged, deliberately abstracted, they were designed to be used for art education and as an ideal for the decorative art forms of the period – this was a practice which was in no way shunned.

The documentation of the © semons project switches between aestheticisation and science. Yet another apparent contradiction. Graphical details as well as scientific procedure provide a formatic link with the herbarium.

While, however, for a herbarium the individual (real) plants are gathered, dried, pressed, and then used for scientific purposes, malatsion takes the reverse path: the vegetal objects seem to be produced specifically for her herbarium. Scientific purpose precedes the presentation.

Biotechnology, to which the artist makes outright reference, is an interdisciplinary science which deals with the utilization of organisms in technical applications for industry, agriculture or pharmacy. Alongside criticism of man's exploitation of nature, it is the aspects of creative and artistic perspectives which are a matter of concern in this context.

Artistic works are created within our contemporary environment and are steeped in world images, which themselves are continuously influenced by the most recent scientific findings.

Yet drawing parallels from the digital picture world of natural scientists to works of art is too unsatisfactory by far. Juxtapositions of a purely aesthetic-visual nature are mere semblance. It is much more a question of searching beneath the surface for intuitive analogies, for parallel thought structures beyond theory and aesthetics.

Questions about how scientists construct the world and which criteria they thereby make use of, point in this case to the first intimation of how art and science are linked: not when reality is discovered and represented but when it is invented and constructed. However it is also worth considering what permanently separates art and science. It is the freedom of art to conceive plant

objects with creative delight, without having to pay regard to ethical considerations and economic pressure.

In this way, a free pseudo-scientific fantasy emerges. Or art which makes use of the features of science so as to draw parallels and to uncover that which belongs exclusively to art.

semons has conceived the vegetal objects, created the prototypes, presented them for the first time in this exhibition and displayed them in this (advertising) catalogue. But what is being advertised? What purpose is served by the ornamental details in the images? How does form flow back into the cycle of nature and art?

Questions which remain unanswered and which prompt the thought that the whole world is progressively becoming a work of art, an artificial reality. The exact goal that semons is pursuing remains disturbingly undefined.

Dr. Sonja Müller

art historian, Frankfurt am Main

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