

THE LAB Gallery is pleased to present, **THE GRAND SCHEME**, new work by Dublin based artist **VERA KLUTE** including kinetic sculptures, a 5m high video projection, tapestry and drawing. Themes are inspired by everyday life and utilize familiar objects and imagery. The artist looks at how we perceive the outside world and our place in it, and sees the individual as displaced in its own habitat. Like a natural scientist the artist is attempting to make sense of an often absurd everyday life with its cycles, routines and habits. This exhibition marks a welcome return to the LAB for Klute, who was invited to hold her first solo exhibition here in 2006.

Sheena Barrett, Arts Officer Dublin City Council and Curator, the LAB

The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. If you try it, you will be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning yourself.

A few years ago, I wrote a short essay on Vera Klute's work and imagined then that her workspace might resemble something from a Leonara Carrington novel. Precisely, I was thinking of Uncle Ubracio's spacious ground floor apartment in Carrington's novella "Little Francis'. Here Carrington describes a room filled with 'half constructed constructions and wholly demolished bicycles'. Where the walls were lined with bookshelves that held books, spare tyres, bottles of oil, chipped figureheads, spanners, wheels, hammers, reels of threads and, strewn amidst the heterogeneous scene of half-starved cockroaches were strings of artificial onions, spinning wheels, ladies' corsets of complicated patterns and a great many cogwheels. For surely it would be in a room such as this, piled high with odd and ends - a mechanics haven - that I imagined Klute tinkering away, laboriously engineering her wonderful grotesquery - turning bodies (fabricated out of plaster or latex), into machines; disconnecting limbs to perform a range of functions - from a water spouting ear, to a disembodied hand that endlessly stirs the coffee spoon it holds. Klute's work then seemed to me, to be about an existential pragmatism - a desire to take things apart, to look inside and see how things work, only to reconstruct again, assemble in new configurations and set in motion - to see how things

behave. Her 'enquiry' into the human condition unveiling, on one level, a simplicity at our core - the self as predictable, determined, limited, habitual. The human body expressed as machine or cyborg, gave to her mischievous inventions, a sci-fi twist, enabling her artworks to literally take on a 'life of their own'. An arm became a snake-like creature crawling across the territory of eight juxtaposed plasma screens, and the inner workings of the human body revealed through a set of 'transparent' X-Ray-like images, sees a colon 'replaced' by a string of sausages; the lungs by two slabs of liver; the brain a cauliflower, the heart a kidney and, in-between funnels, tubing and pipes connecting the disconnected body parts. Surreal humour and light-hearted trickery employed to embrace an undercurrent anxiety. For this is the space of the Unheimlich - the slippery space between dreaming and waking. Klute's technological and fabricated fantasy somehow ironically mirroring a view of controlled reality that Donna Haraway, who introduced us to the idea of cyborg culture, would suggest, 'our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert'.

So I was not surprised when recently entering Vera Klute's studio to be met by a wall of waving arms. Arms coming from everywhere, slipping and sliding as severed limbs. Swooshing back and forth - their papery constructions flapping in the sun-lit room. How lovely they seemed orchestrated as a metachronal rhythm, to perform like a Mexican wave. One group of arms sequentially following the next, - rising, falling, and then repeating the movement on cue. Sculpted out of paper, hinged at the joints by nails, these arms were modular variations - each a tad different to the

next. Individually cut and then folded from a pattern using computer animation techniques, they are finally brought to life (as a kinetic sculpture) by a dc motor used in model making. Klute's dexterous use of materials and her skills as a maker underlie the simplicity of this delightful assemblage. For one imagines the 'missing bodies' have been swallowed by the studio wall - giving an unnaturalised wholeness to the swaying arms. Do they not perform as a group in synch, ushering us in - the 'kindly' gesture transferring agency onto these disembodied limbs? The gentle breeze aroused by them somehow resonates (for me) with Ryan Gander's remarkable, *The Invisible Pull*, installed on the ground floor of the Fridericianum at dOCUMENTA (13) (Gander's room remained all but empty, as rigged air conditioning whipped up a soft breeze that he used to guide visitors through the galleries). But behind the immediate humour and inviting gestures of Klute's playful sculpture exists a ripple of unsettlement in an image of individuals readily merging into a mass.

In her art Vera Klute has drawn on the personal and near to hand - the everyday cycle of life and of death, exploring systems of human behavioural patterns and bodily functions to puzzle out a meaning or purpose of life. Fragmented bodies and anthropomorphism give figuration to humans being displaced in their own habitat. She has described herself as a natural scientist and one has to imagine her peering down microscopes or using other optical devices to scrutinize anatomical workings or the fleshy surfaces of skin, or perhaps, like David Attenborough looking at gorillas, observing nature from some seemingly safe distance. Klute's interests having lain more in observing the nature of things (societal behavioural patterns or biological functioning) rather than necessarily getting bound up in the inner psychology of identity formation. Her observations are certainly enhanced by an intuitive imagination for the far-fetched,

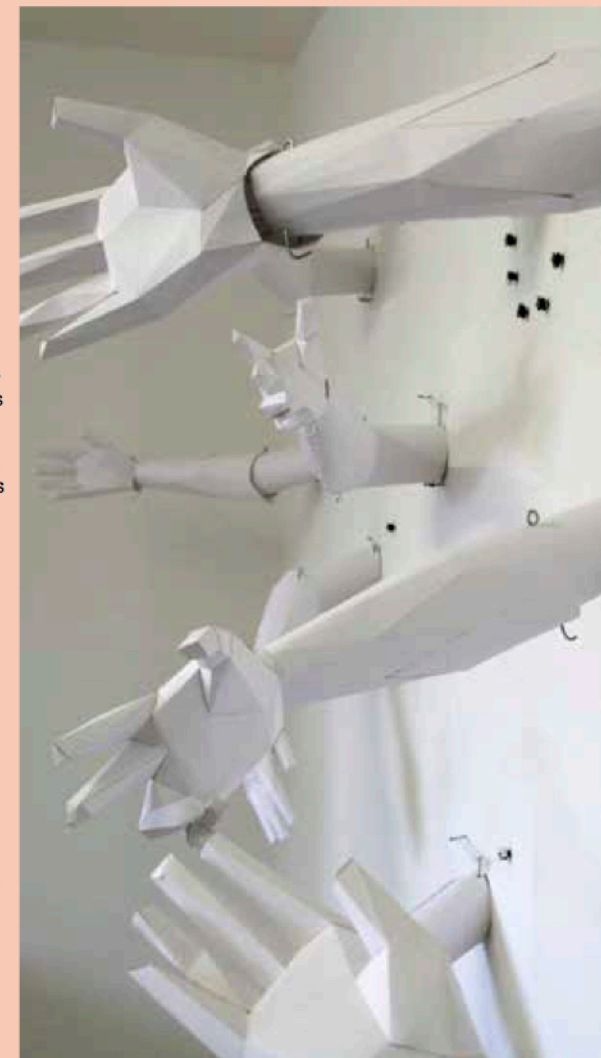
relishing in dark-edged humour that extracts fun from the perversities and absurdities of modern man - not perceived by her as unified or whole - but rather torn, mutilated or metamorphosised - the body in pieces. This is the arena of Mary Shelley, whose delineation of darkness gave us a way to look at the world, or the Brothers' Quay - the London twin animators - whose stop action films are minimal, dark and surreal and often involve inanimate objects coming to life. A continuing concern in the human condition remains central to Klute's new work (at the LAB, Dublin) but she takes a turn of the kaildescope, extending her attention to themes of identity - group identity and group cohesion, more specifically. And becoming a mother has inevitably played its part.

A pair of wax sculptures will surely form a discussion point for the exhibition. One, a bust of a mother and child; the other is of a mother with her four grown up children. Life-like yet disquietingly strange, they are as bizarre as they are amazing. The fleshy quality of skin texture and realness of their faces is undercut by the hairless scalps, the severed necks and, above all, the oddity of their interdependence. For these figures are literally stuck to each other. Parasitical, they seem distorted and displaced, as if they have been dislodged from an architecture that might make them whole. And yet, they seem remarkably self-contained, paradoxically unified - the raw intimacy of their humanity portrayed in their faces - a tenderness within the mother's gaze (a self-portrait of the artist with her child) and, the other family, smiling, laughing. The self-other relation is clearly at home here, for these people literally belong together. As we move around the sculpture we notice another tiny head is starting to emerge from the back of the mother's neck, - just an ear, so far (another child in waiting) - and the baby daughter, positioned almost level with her mother, seemingly claiming her place as

equal. A new psychological dimension seems to penetrate Klute's work. No longer can we consider her view as detached or observational; she is clearly (in this work) directly involved.

The degree of shaping an identity, of becoming individual suggests that the group, rather than being a distortion and simplification of people's individuality, might reflect the true nature of humanity - the 'we' being a more useful and valid expression than the 'I'. In looking at these works I found myself following a pathway to Lacanian psychoanalysis for some further explanation to the thinking they aroused. Lacan's well-known maxim being 'man's desire is the desire of the other'. This desire according to Lacan, is a desire for recognition and is linked to the desire for what we believe the (m)other wants - the mother or motherer, being the first other in our life. The helpless infant, in order to gain some autonomy, must first identify the mother's desire, and then pick a position in response to it, in order to carve out a place for his/her own desire - for the development of subjectivity. According to Lacanian theory, there remains a gap (or split) between what we unconsciously desire or want and what our conscious selves (our ego) might want - this is because we have had to find a path to our own desires by asking 'what the other wants'. This gap or sense of alienation is symbolically melded through Lacan's infamous 'mirror stage', where the infant recognises its image in the mirror - often while hearing the words "look - that's you!" But the apparent wholeness of the mirror image is the site of a necessary alienation, for it is a case of mistaken identity. For how can we learn who we 'truly' are in the gaze of anyone else; even the mirror on the wall is a reflection, and deceives by reversing right and left. Lacan's insights point to an innate anxiety or a source of insecurity that results in a lifelong course of searching outward instead of inward for identity - for the reassurance that we are more intact than we feel.

In Klute's new work it is the group - families, gangs, the school class, the football team and,



even the crowd – that she portrays, provoking a comment on how we turn to something outside ourselves (categorize ourselves into groups) to get a greater sense of who we are, with consequences for self-esteem, as well as prejudice, stereotyping and peer conformity. Certainly groups and group behaviour lie at the heart of human society and a shared sense of social identity is necessary for social co-operation, cohesiveness and leadership. But in Klute's art, her use of the crop, of fragmentation, amputation, layering and distortion disturb any sense of wholeness or harmony that might be suggested through group cohesiveness. Instead, her works seem to point to a lack of totality and the potential for what Nietzsche describes as, the individual to be overwhelmed by the tribe. And if he follows the crowds, as Nietzsche reckons, 'he will be singing its praises... but one day he will be its enemy! For he follows it in the belief that his laziness will be at home there – he has not yet learned that the crowd is not lazy enough for him, that it always presses forward, that it does not allow anyone to stand still! And he does so like to stand still!'

A series of drawings based on the classic group photo - the football team, the family and the class photo, present familiar bonding situations. Here each individual in the group is attentively drawn with her characteristic use of a meticulous, elegant and simple line, but they also overlap and merge and sometimes cancel each other out or have their heads cropped. And, in a set of tapestries, street gangs are captured in aggressive mode, and the visceral violence is amplified in the image of a middle-aged woman yelling out. Is it a cry for help or a verbal attack of defense? If these images represent a stereotype, they do so in a way to critique the monolithic categories of identity by suggesting the potential for broken disharmony through dominance or the self becoming invisible or overlooked.

In large-scale projection (*The Grand Scheme*) Klute presents a vivid animated

landscape, vertically ordered and comprising of three distinct scenes. At the bottom is a scene that might represent something from Dante's *Inferno*, with its baked earth and hot fire and a multitude of waving arms, (or are these hands clapping in praise of the opera above?). The top section shows a utopian place, where shooting stars and flying jets enter from time to time. Here the grass is green and the sky is blue. In the middle section we see only the lower legs of a crowd walking the pavement at a slow, steady pace. Beneath them are the hooves of galloping horses. Klute has told me she is inspired by the early Renaissance paintings and the complex organisation of spatial dimensions that enable a narrative to unfold, so that more than one thing can be seen in to be happening in the picture plane at once. And she has also mentioned Pieter Breugel who painted the lives and manners of peasants, giving a window to a world of 16th century village life. Klute's art is itself about giving a window to the way we inhabit the world. Certainly she is a fantastic image-maker with her fondness for the grotesque, the surreal and the strange captured in her wondrous use of many media. In the *Grand Scheme*, her visionary epic is akin to a Gothic allegory, where the path, if ventured, I can only imagine, might lead to infernal labyrinths of punishment, or to the heavens of eternal sunshine. But, then there is the central strip, where we might rather stay, confined in the comfort of simply blending in - of going with the flow and never staying still.

Clíodhna Shaffrey

Curator, Writer and the Director of Temple Bar Gallery and Studios, Dublin



BIOGRAPHY

German-born Vera Klute lives and works in Dublin. Since graduating from IADT in 2006 her work has been shown in many exhibitions worldwide and is part of both private and public collections. Most recently her work has been included in the collection of the National Gallery of Ireland and the National Self-portrait Collection of Ireland. Recent solo exhibitions include the RHA, Dublin and QSS Gallery, Belfast (both 2014), the Butler Gallery, Kilkenny (2011), Wexford Arts Centre (2009) and The LAB, Dublin (2006). She has received the Arts Council Bursary Award (2008, 2009, 2011 and 2013), the K+M Evans Award at the 183rd RHA Annual (2013) and the Emerging Visual Artist Award, Wexford Arts Centre (2009).

THE LAB GALLERY

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ADMISSION FREE Opening hours:
Monday to Friday: 10am to 6pm, Saturday: 10am to 5pm

IMAGE CREDITS:

Cover: *Yell*, Tapestry, 34 x 28 cm, 2014

The Grand Scheme, Video animation, 12 min looped, 2013

Move along, Kinetic sculpture/ installation, dimensions variable, paper, motor, wire, 2014

Growth 2, Wax, polystyrene, 65 x 35 x 35cm, 2014

Interior/Poster: *The Herd 1*, Marker and Chalk on Pastel Paper, 47 x 62 cm, 2014



VERA KLUTE

THE GRAND SCHEME

28th November 2014 - 10th January 2015



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

