

SWETLANA HEGER: *Smoke (Liberté Toujours)*

The exhibition, *Smoke (Liberté Toujours)*, has been exclusively produced for the inauguration of the new Kalmar Art Museum, which was designed by the architects, Tham & Videgård Hansson. Heger's exhibition, housed on the second floor, initially appears to be an observation of the sociological history of the smoking of tobacco. The issues concerning the smoking of tobacco are clear, from a medical perspective. Major restrictions on tobacco advertising have been implemented and the prohibition of smoking in more and more places in the world. Changes occur concurrently, as medical findings concerning the negative consequences of smoking have become ever increasingly, more explicit. Heger's exhibition however, does not deal with the medical issues but rather the sociological aspects of the smoking of tobacco.

During the greater part of the twentieth century, the smoking of tobacco represented status, independence and autonomy. Positive attributes which smoking still hold in many parts of the world. Status, which still manifests itself, present in many varying contexts, such as in advertising campaigns, glamorous fashion magazines and not least, in the production machinations of Hollywood. Actors such as James Dean and Humphrey Bogart became male role models, smoking icons for whole generations.

The exhibition consists of a series of photographs, size: 72 x 124 cm. A specially designed cubic construction – a smoke-room made of glass, dimensions: 380 x 380 x 250 cm stands in the centre of the hall. It is divided diagonally by a wall, creating two separate smoke-rooms, one for women and one for men. During the time of the exhibition, many of the visitors to Kalmar Art Museum, made use of the smoke-room for a quick puff, fascinated by the unexpected opportunity of being allowed to smoke indoors, in an exhibition hall, within a museum. The glass smoke-room created in itself a juxtaposed free zone for smokers and at the same time, an encaged space where smokers publicly paraded their addiction for the general public. The smoke itself and consequent aroma contributed to the overall experience of the exhibition.

The photographs are exclusively portraits of women, smoking. 720 photographs depicting women smoking – famous women (models, actresses and other female personalities) and the not so famous (anonymous images taken from blogg pages from the Internet for example). A small number of the images were photographed by Heger herself. The style of the images varies: some are taken in studios, others snapshots, old as young, indoors as outdoors. The one codifying element is that all the women delineate something with their cigarettes. What do these women represent, symbolise? It is not just about the inhaling as such, but in which way, the poses assumed during the act of smoking. How do these women relate to their perception of the world?

The modern tobacco industry came into being at the end of the nineteenth century as it became possible to manufacture cigarettes industrially. Mass production enabled the decrease in production costs, in turn effecting mass consumption of the smoking of tobacco, which had previously been reserved for the upper classes. The smoking of tobacco became a movement of the masses, an expression for individualism and the procreative individual's social status within the world. The smoking of tobacco was however, for a very long time, reserved only for men. Marketing and advertising have to a greater extent focused on its association with manliness as for example in 'Marlboro Man', by Philip Morris, where the lonesome cowboy,

who, besides masculinity, symbolises independence and autonomy, reinforcing the idea of the freedom of the wide expanses and (all be it self-proclaimed) the ideal of the American Dream.

The choice of brand also forms an integral part, in this demonstration of tobacco status. Whilst the smoking in itself can be perceived as a desire to fit into a social context (from the community spirit witnessed in the smoke-room and the actual consuming of the cigarette as a means of promoting communication), the choice of brand in itself denotes individual status and the social group to which the smoker belongs. It expresses distinction, detachment and import in relation to others: values that may, however, be appropriated and modified by time. Gauloises, the French cigarette brand, whose slogan 'Liberté Toujours' (eternal freedom) and which furthermore, is also included in the title of the exhibition, symbolised, for example the resistance against the Vichy regime during World War Two. After the war, its meaning was transformed into a symbol for French intellectuals including such icons as Picasso, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, all of whom were portrayed, smoking Gauloises.

Very few women smoked in the beginning of the twentieth century, as it was not considered appropriate. Legislation even existed: for example, a woman was arrested in New York in 1922 for smoking in public. The tobacco companies, not surprisingly, wanted to see a change in public attitudes. The potential target group could in so doing double in size. It was not however until the end of the 1920's that the time was considered right for the tobacco companies to have a go and try to effect change in public opinion, by directing advertising campaigns particularly towards women. One of the campaigns, which made a great breakthrough, was the American Tobacco Company 1928, when it launched a campaign for it's brand 'Lucky Strike', with the following slogan: "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet". The company's strategy involved the association with the smoking of tobacco as something, which could aid women in keeping their figure, thus gaining control over their weight. A slimmer life was healthier, and one should therefore choose a cigarette instead of something sweet. The company hired Edward Bernays (1891–1995) to help them. He was a leading figure in the area of PR and the development of methods designed to influence public attitudes (Joseph Goebbels apparently used his methods in staging the Third Reich's propaganda machine). Bernays employed psychoanalytical theories from Sigmund Freud, his uncle, in order to develop methods in how to conduct opinion control/influence of the masses. One of the methods used, was to leak 'impartial' scientific information to the press; in the work with Lucky Strike this involved information which would prove that it was healthier to be slim and that one should therefore avoid sweet things. As a consequence, the relationship between smoking, fashion and the female role model were firmly established.

Bernays also worked on changing the perception of women smoking openly, in public. During the New York City Easter Parade of 1929, he managed to infiltrate the celebrations by the systematic employment of a number of women to smoke publicly in the streets. Since smoking in public was regarded as unacceptable for women, as opposed to men, the action was seen as a declaration for equal rights. Cigarettes were 'torches of freedom', lighting a cigarette became a symbolic action; it proclaimed that woman were also entitled to the same rights as men in on all levels. Bernays made sure that the media were present as the women lit their torches and the event received widespread news coverage, ensuing debate in the whole of the USA. The plan was successful; the cigarette became synonymous with the women's liberation movement and independence. Women ought to be allowed the same civil liberties as men. That the whole thing had been a staged action by the media was not revealed until much later.

World War Two saw the last resistance to women smoking, probably since in general, women were expected to participate more, in areas which previously had been reserved for men. In the women's movement of the sixties, the tobacco moguls saw new possibilities, not just in the targeting of advertising campaigns but also by introducing new products, designed solely for women. In 1968, Philip Morris launched the brand 'Virginia Slims', especially aimed for women with the following slogan, 'You've Come A Long Way Baby'. The aim of the slogan was to relate with the then active women's movement in their fight for independence, self-awareness and autonomy. Marketing strategies were directed towards younger women and young teenage girls, were especially successful. Tobacco smoking had thus, during the period of one century, moved from the domains of the upper classes and men to mass consumption and association with emancipation and independence for women. The onetime symbol for younger women for autonomy had now become a hade trap, dictating class demarcation.

As the negative effects of smoking on health have become ever increasingly apparent, attitudes towards smoking have changed. As more and more campaigns reveal the health hazards of smoking, advertising has also been made more difficult for the tobacco companies. Consequently, the number of smokers has reduced drastically. In so doing a new class delineation has come into being: between those who are able to make informed judgments and those who still smoke. The smoking of tobacco is equated with vice and addiction. In Sweden smokers are generally seen as not very well educated, indicating persons who lack the opportunity of the well educated, to access information. And those who are unable to stop lack the ability of self-control, a weakness in character, which easily develops into a social stigma. Furthermore, the ability to see the consequences of one's behaviour and think ahead is often seen as a mark of human logic and intelligence. The smoking of tobacco may therefore be seen as a juxtaposed symbol for both dependence and independence. Heger addresses, in her project, the dualistic nature of smoking, both as a symbol of freedom and independence, especially from a feminist perspective, whilst at the same time symbolising dependency and enslavement.

In her work, Hegers often explores how the meaning of symbols, during the course of time and according to context, alter, giving her work an ambiguous quality. Her work can be seen as a sort of statement, an objective, impartial account, where the observer is not asked to draw conclusions concerning Heger's personal opinions, but rather finds him/herself in a zone of conflicting, diametrically changing variables. In the series *Playtime*, for example she skilfully played with selected trademarks, using them as sort of ready-mades, appropriating their message in order to create an own trademark.

Another recurrent theme in Heger's work lies in the relationship between surface – how an object appears to be – and the production methods and initial idea which in adherence with requirements, more often than not, remain imperceptible. What an object is, and how it appears, are not necessarily the same. The object, Heger illustrated, in the series of photographs *Animal Farm*, was in the documenting of a number of bronze sculptures of animals, for example, a bear or a giraffe, which were placed in and around the former East Berlin. It appeared, to all intents and purposes, to be apolitical and harmless until it was revealed that the actual amount of bronze was the result of the molten metal retrieved from the demolition of the statue of Stalin during the destalinization process of the DDR.

In Heger's exhibition she pursues a recurrent theme in her work, in dealing with issues such as power, ideology and capitalism, however her work more often than not, shows that capitalism remains the prevailing ideology. Her work remains a demonstration of various aspects of capitalism, including studies in prevailing ideology and the how society is

structured. Ultimately, cigarettes are a product of capitalism, where one may also perceive smoking as a metaphor for the capitalist doctrine, which underlies the very structure of society. Baudrillard maintained that it is not the production of goods in itself which constitutes capitalism but rather the continuous stimulation of craving which constitutes the capitalist mechanism. The cigarette constitutes a craving for a certain lifestyle, whereby the product is exhausted as it is consumed, whilst at the same time creating a continued and in the long term, a more intense craving for the product, due particularly to its addictive substances. The cigarette can have no second-hand value when is consumed. The only thing it has done it to create a new addiction. In her exhibition *Smoke (Liberté Toujours)*, Svetlana Heger, has, based on the sociological aspects of smoking, been able to visualize the structures surrounding the craving, whilst at the same time provide a smoke-room for those who require immediate satisfaction.

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