

Harald Klingelhöller

*Snowfall retold*

Dieter Schwarz

11 “He understood that to model the incoherent and vertiginous stuff of which dreams are composed is the most arduous task that anyone can attempt, even if he managed to decipher all the enigmas of a greater or lesser order: even harder than braiding a rope from sand or minting a coin from the faceless wind.” This passage from the story “The Circular Ruins” by Jorge Luis Borges is emblematic of an exhibition in which dreams play an important part. This may come as a surprise in the case of an artist like Harald Klingelhöller, whom no one would suspect of being a surrealist, and whose works assert their presence in real space. The undeniable three-dimensional impact of his pieces is, however, only one factor, considering that each has its own title, and these precise and extended formulations add something of substance, but not in physical terms. This substantial element is the verbal space oscillating between the keen imagination and the dream and it is to be grasped in spoken or written form. The concrete qualities of writing have often been the subject of poetry, while language can be experienced spatially, as the prophet of modernism Stéphane Mallarmé demonstrated in an exemplary way. Whatever their shape, Klingelhöller’s sculptures thus possess a dual character – of a legible verbal and a tangible material nature – and these aspects are on a par with each other: each one needs to be observed and taken into consideration and should

be understood both in accessible space and the realm of the imagination alike. Just as the real space is articulated and structured by a sculpture, so the verbal space of the mind can be differentiated by its title. When a title of a work is formulated as *In the Dreamer’s Dream the Dreamed Wake Up (chain)* the space evoked must be located somewhere out of this world, in the realm of dreams, where waking and dreaming exist side-by-side. Every sculptural construction is an invitation to feel one’s way into this space where another space will open up, be it the accessible or inaccessible interior of a sculptural volume, or be it the interlocking volumes of imagined spaces.

To return to the title cited above: in the exhibition there are two versions on show that could not be more different. One is a linked aluminium chain. The correspondence to the title is that the number of colourless links equals the number of letters in the words; the space between the words is indicated by two black anodised aluminium links. The components of the chain are flat in shape, which means that they are not very functional, but can therefore serve all the more as signs of a real chain, conjuring up the image thereof. Rather than serving to cord off, they circumscribe a designated area within a given space. They structure the space and make clear that placing a sculpture in a space is not a way of occupying it,

but rather, a means to create the space in the first place by dividing it up. A completely undifferentiated space is a fiction: accessible space can only be apprehended when it is partitioned – the counterpart of the title words in the chain. The second version of the title consists of seven copper components with a blunted triangular profile: now it is the measurements of the lengths that correspond to those of the title words. These elements are laid out in a star arrangement on the floor, with each piece balanced on edge with a flat surface facing upwards.

The two versions could not be more at variance; the only thing they have in common is their derivation from the same words. The connection between the title and the respective version can only be read in one direction, however; merely viewing the particular version does not allow the title to be deduced. All that remains is a certain tangible rhythm, linking together the words and the sculpture. It is possible to conceive of other versions; the sentence, the words and the letters are not there in the original, but have been realized in spoken or written manifestations. It follows that there are unlimited ways of rewriting them in other sculptures, in the sense of transcription and transposition. This means a transformation of the substance, whereas a translation tries to hold onto the words in a recognizable form.

Sculpture never simply exists in its own right, but rather, stands for something else to which it refers: this is the conviction on which Klingelhöller bases his practice. It would be possible to grasp this idea directly, if his sculptures were figurative, if the reference were realized in a representational form. As already demonstrated, this is not at all the case; instead of a visual iconic rendering, the relationship is indexical – one thing is connected to another in a material fashion. This might be the length of the words, giving rise to the measurements of the drawers in a cabinet or the size of the stars; it can be the silhouette of a shadow that is cast by a piece of sculpture, or it could be the beats of a sonagram capturing a spoken sentence.

While walking around the exhibition in the Skulpturenhalle, it becomes evident that there are referential pairs everywhere – not only links between title and physical construction, but also between the material weight of stars made of lead or copper and the immaterial distance evoked by the title they represent, along with the sculptures and the shadows they project that have been transformed into sheets of metal; these shadowy metal shapes float in the balance, mediating between black and white – light and dark, the prevailing theme of the second half of the exhibition. The two poles of these pairs cannot

- 13 exist without the other: both play their part and neither is negated; this is comparable to the way the prefix “un-” turns the conscious into the unconscious, without the latter losing its presence.

Given that each sculpture is only a version, the shadow of something that already exists, one could ask whether the exhibition presents the second part of an oeuvre that has left the first part behind, as it were, as if we could have seen the primary versions at a prior point in time. The situation would be like that of the two echo installations of hanging rods made of brass or aluminium, which give rise to an acoustic spectrogram. And yet, just as the question is returned in an altered form by the echo, the past that recurs in the versions has changed so much as to have become almost unrecognizable. Is that which returns remembered or imagined? Does it refer to the past or the future? Are the works located in linear time? In Klingenhöller’s critical lingual and sculptural thought there is no division into primary and secondary levels. For instead of providing a definitive solution, he creates possibilities, versions pertaining to the same title, models not for enlargement but in the scale of 1:1. The placement of the sculpture is the trial run for the validity of the model; hence, in the exhibition, many versions can be put to the test.

The placement is effectively the creation of the sculpture, this being neither a fixed welded bolted or glued object, nor a loose conglomeration of individual parts. In *Beside the Brain Death Concept, Repeated* one element leans against the next; this paratactical structure could be extended at random. The contrasting materials depend on each other to create a volume: several layers of paper and individual stones are mounted collectively on a steel construction. The fragile bits of paper have letters from the title statement cut into them, which are however only legible on the surface; the papers come to rest as they hang down to touch the floor, while the stones hold them down with their weight. The shadow versions are kept in boxes made of black metal sheet; at the same time, their weight keeps the walls of the boxes from falling apart. In the hovering versions it becomes especially evident that the pieces complement each other, thus achieving a state of suspension and staying afloat. The fact that the parts of the sculpture constantly have to be brought into relation with each other is indeed metaphorical, standing for their function as signs and the common level at which the words of the title in one version come together.

It is particularly obvious in the suspended versions that the creation of the sculpture correlates with the creation of

space, or to be more precise, with fictive compartmentalized spaces. Each version has its own individually-shaped setting – a circular shape, ellipse, square – as a plateau or a partition, offering a shifting site above or in front of which the shadows or more walls find their position. Each space is subdivided into more spaces, from which imaginary spaces can be derived, where more balanced pairs can be played out, such as black juxtaposed against white shadows and so forth.

The title of the exhibition comes from the sculpture *Snowfall retold (threefold, star-shaped)*. It evokes the idea of the exhibition as a narrative, which is brought to life by the sauntering observant visitor. Just as going around the elliptically-shaped Skulpturenhalle has no beginning nor end, neither does the narrative of the show. In place of an unequivocal unfolding of an act there is the multi-faceted potential of a process. The chain in the central rotunda and the star-shaped work lying in front of it touch on the theme of evening and dream, while *Beside the Brain Death Concept, Repeated* addresses the question of life and death, the ultimate closure. Subsequent works are about loss of the object accomplished by the transposition of title to become sculpture, or in the star-shaped versions about the retreat of water, while in the shadow versions of *Sleep Soundly* and *All Meta-*

*phors will Come True* there is a return to a boundless form of spatiality; finally, virtual spaces take over in the case of the suspended shapes. The cabinets on the walls of the exhibition space conceal phrases in their drawers that allow these connections to be taken a step further. Borges concludes his story with the sentences, "(...) then he understood that death was coming to crown his dotage and deliver him from his toils. He walked toward the flickers of flame. They did not singe his flesh, they fondled him until he was overwhelmed without heat or blaze. Relieved, humiliated, but aghast, he realized that he too was only an apparition, that someone else was dreaming him."