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Memento Metropolis in Stockholm
The Exhibition

The spaces where Pontus Hultén, Ulf Linde and Carlo Derkert created the glory days of the Modern Museum were originally the drill halls of the navy. From these modest halls, impulses from Stockholm reached out to the entire art world during the 1960s and 70s. For Stockholm’s year as the Cultural Capital of Europe 1998, a new art museum has been built and opened at the same location. The spaces on the main floor of the new museum are solemnly museum, suited for showing the museum’s collections of twentieth century art. But in what kinds of spaces shall the art of the new century be developed and shown? One possibility for such a space is Kulturfabriken (The Culture Factory) at Liljeholmen. The factory consists of anonymous sheet metal buildings from the 1970s, which were originally built to house the bottling facilities of Vin & Sprit, the state-owned wine and liquor monopoly. In spaces like these anything possible can happen, in contrast to the traditional museum where sequences of spaces are given. Museum architecture and the new art’s need for adequate space are in conflict with each other. Art seeks openness, architecture limits it. In the Culture Factory is Memento Metropolis, an exhibition arranged according to the art’s own requirements. The large spaces without columns and the tall ceiling heights have been fully exploited. The building has been subjected to interventions in the floor and walls. Here the art of the future
can be exhibited – in a manner similar to the Modern Museum during the 1960s and 70s.

Stockholm’s version of Memento Metropolis is shown in four rooms totaling 3 000 m2. The exhibition is arranged so that it forms a closed ring. The beginning and the end coincide. Memento Metropolis 96 in Copenhagen was located in an exciting historic industrial building. In Stockholm the exhibition is placed in a spatial neuter. The architectural frame has been removed.

The organization of the exhibition departs consciously from spaces that refer to ”museum”. It is instead formed as a large three-dimensional collage. The exhibited works are liberated from the rectangular form of the building and create an independent structure. They are placed in the dark, and emerge through the lighting. Individual works are shown in the exhibition, not categories of art, chronologies or techniques. There is no overall exhibition design. The works hang from cables, lean against stands, create walls, have been built or placed in structures/pavilions. This reinforces the distinctive character of the individual works. That the works are separated by spaces rather than walls creates the possibility for the art to meet the observer, and vice versa. The visitor searches out the artworks in the darkened halls, there is no given path to follow. While seeking out new works he or she can glance back at those that were just seen. Couplings, selection and sequence are decided by the observer. The possibility of repeating a visit or changing direction is open.

Memento Metropolis is conceived as a narrative, not a textbook. The narrative can be retold, changed and supplemented by the visitor. It is about the City, that remarkable construction of knowledge and experiences. The city as a manifestation of man’s memory of the past and his longing for progress and development. In the metropolis
dreams are born, which are realized or shattered. The city is a breeding ground for extremes and for a longing for the new, where the fall and rebirth of Utopias are played out.

New works replace some of the pieces that were shown in Copenhagen and Antwerp. Ola Billgren’s five paintings Pompejansk interiör I-V (Pompeian Interior I-V) depicts an atrium in Pompeii, the Roman metropolis that met its fate in the year 79, becoming a conserved memory in the ashes of Vesuvius. All of Christer Strömholm’s photographs in the exhibition summarize the essence of the city, while his abstract ima-ges draw attention to our sensual experiences.

Created especially for Memento Metropolis in Stockholm is: Preben Fjederholt’s Berlin/Berlin and Scandinavia/Europe. In the latter, Stockholm is connected by a river to Europe’s large cities, which often lie at the shores of the great rivers. Jan Håfström’s threatening Holiday Inn/ Sarajevo, which is reminiscent of provisional buildings in vulnerable cities and of inhabitants in need. The sandbag becomes an emblem for the vulnerable situation. Christian Partos’ Spårjus II (Light Tracer II) – where light projectiles recklessly chase each other in their tracks. The work associates to the flow of information, speed, and light, staged with a great deal of humor. The sound contributes unexpectedly to the experience. Johan Scott’s Utan Titel (Stockholmssvit) (Untitled[StockholmSuite]) – a drama in color where the paint seems to want to leave the surface and set itself free. Lars Tunbjörk’s images of people from Vårby Gård confront the observer with his or her own conceptions about the Other. Anne Thulin’s Letters from the Edge, three six-meter-high pilasters clad with waxed newspapers. The overlapped, layered, unreadable newspapers become an ”art of forgetfulness.” Between antiquity and the 18th century ”mnemonics” was a science and a form of art. Today it is an art to ”sift” through all the impressions, and to
"forget" has become an essential quality. Through the art of forgetfulness we can endure all meaningless newspaper reading and media noise that we both are subjected to and subject ourselves to.

Newly added is also Hugh Ferriss’ illustrations from The Metropolis of Tomorrow from 1929, which form a concretion of absurd architectural Utopia.

Some of the works from Memento Metropolis in Copenhagen are shown in a new way. Johannes Kattrupp’s Fundne ting (Found Objects) are presented in Stockholm only as shadow images, acquiring an almost photographic dimension. Martin Kippenberger was inspired by The Raft of the Medusa, Gericault’s large painting from 1818/1819, and created several related works. Untitled/The Raft of the Medusa (1996) is one of them. The image was created after Memento Metropolis in Copenhagen and develops the dialogue between the artist’s installation The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s Amerika and The Raft of the Medusa. In Stockholm The Happy End of Franz Kafka’s Amerika is arranged by Johannes Wohnseifer, Kippenberger’s assistant. The work has a magnetism where the more one observes the work the more difficult it is to remove oneself from it. The observer senses the presence of a variety of absent individuals who hold employment interviews with each other. Palle Nielsen’s prints are illuminated for less than one second in a specially built construction. The method of presentation builds upon the images’ own frozen moments. The images are etched on the retina. Fifty of Kathy Prendergast’s City Drawings are shown in a specially constructed fragment of a labyrinth, along with two other works. The French artist Sarkis has in Stockholm reworked the interior of his little kiosk, Leidschatz Cities. In the interior, forty signs now hang with the names of cities that are burning. All cities are burning. They consume energy like the sun. Old ideas burn and are
replaced with new ones. The city and the passions of its inhabitants are burning.

A photograph and a film clip root Memento Metropolis in Stockholm 1998. Michael Perlmutter’s photograph of Sergels Torg represents the city’s inner room. César Galindo’s clip from the film Stockholmania visualizes Stockholm’s typical open-water room, here Riddarfjärden.

The Library at the entrance to the exhibition is a wall completely covered with books, whose backside of discarded offset plates constitute ”the unwritten page”.

In Alexandria of the Ptolemies, information was preserved in the library on scrolls. Since Gutenberg, it is preserved in the form of printed books. Various forms of information storage have developed continually. The Swedish Patent and Registration Office in Stockholm today uses the same advanced computers as the European Patent Office in Brussels. The technology of collecting as much information as possible on the smallest surface continues uninterrupted. For this reason the Patent Office in Stockholm dispensed with their punched cards and microfilm in the spring of 1997. This was the last mechanical method of storage where information could be seen materially in its physical form and comprehended in its numerical scope. Two chain conveyors in the exhibition document this milestone. They also visualize in a discomforting way the registration that takes place in our society.

The Patent and Registration Office as an institution embodies ”the longing for the new”. Enormous stockpiles of both registered and refused inventions exist at patent offices throughout the world. Patents for man’s benefit and survival or for his destruction.

The Stockholm theme of Uppfinnarnas katedral (The Inventor’s Cathedral), is man’s striving to repair defective body functions, to replace organs with others from living creatures or with technological innovations. Here there is a desire to defy
mortality and oppose the body’s annihilation. Spare parts prolong and complement body parts and organs. Development is moving towards a situation where the body itself becomes a perpetuo mobile, an eternal machine. In the exhibition there is an illuminated human brain placed in a steel pipe – without commentary.

Art is experienced in most of the cases through ”the exhibition”. This is an exhibition that allows the observer to wander in the exhibited work. The observer is given the possibility to receive impressions with all the senses. He or she can choose how the exhibited work shall be observed. The speed and rhythm in which it shall be seen. The possibility to observe a work once again. To take part in an exhibition is not to observe representations, but to meet a work’s materiality. To see the original itself. The exhibition Memento Metropolis is highly interactive, if regarded as media. The visitor does not sit like a member of the audience in an auditorium. He or she has stepped in through the proscenium and is an actor on the stage, in the middle of events, deciding when the curtain rises and when it falls.

Christian Skeel and Morten Skriver’s Marshall II is a work that goes so far that it affects the visitor physically. The piece consists of eight columns each built up of three loudspeakers stacked on top of one another. A column at the end registers the proximity and movement patterns of the visitor within the zone of the work. The experience for those standing outside consists of sound (noise). On the other hand, those who enter the zone literally become physically shaken.

At the baptismal font man is touched by water, in other rites fire is the element man confronts. Skeel & Skriver shake up the visitor with sound that arises through the visitor’s own movements. A concretion – an exhibition within the exhibition.