

n. 41

Lynn Umlauf

novembre *november* 2001

a cura delle edizioni Roberto Peccolo Livorno

catalogo edito in occasione

della mostra personale di Lynn Umlauf

Agnes Kohlmeyer

*LYNN UMLAUF – PAINTING SENSITIVENESS*

“I feel that I’m suspended in a tall space,  
filled with colored light,  
making a humming movement” L. U.

It is a very nice self-willed picture that appears there before our eyes. If Lynn Umlauf were to express in her own words what she felt, she would be one of her sculptures herself. She is speaking about height, about her suspended condition as a sculpture, and then about light and about music. And she goes even further in her representation. The artist, who was born in Texas in 1942, also remembers her roots in this picture, her homeland, Texas as the wide land of endless horizons. She immediately very clearly makes a connection between her childhood and her work today. In her imagination, she sees a landscape with a grotto in it, and she however especially repeatedly mentions this wide, open space so very full of light.

It seems to me as if in these few words the whole universe of all those things lies that we can find in Lynn Umlauf’s works of art. As if these few fragments of imagination could really give us the key to what we feel and imagine now, when we find ourselves before these works.

It is really the light that continuously dominates. That plays on the surface, that emphasizes the shade, that shines through the delicate wire mesh, there, where it is not impeded by a thick coloured layer of paint, the light, that is reflected and intensified on the hard shiny metal, the light that is put deep into the sculpture’s heart, quite consciously in a quiet and dark surrounding and only from there equally secretly can shine out from its inside, just as was present in the artist’s mind ...

They are pictures, in the form of drawings and sculptures, and both these techniques are in no case to be separated from one another.

The pictures, that were there first, on paper, on an even painted base, which, however, also very soon began to rear up, to become wavy, coarser, more powerful, more spacious and had further layers, also of a material kind, added to them. First pictures that really had the power to lead to the present sculptures. It was the impetuous movement, the distribution of light and shade on it, which also uplifted the drawings from the surface, and made them not only seem but also become three-dimensional. Sculpture-pictures or picture-sculpture, what are they actually? It no longer seems to

have any really important meaning. Today drawings originate at the same time for every sculpture, which are not work sketches, but works quite in their own right. Both categories are looking for the same thing; one is not subordinate to the other, rather, on the contrary, they even complement each other; they look for and strengthen each other and in the end, they want to reach the same goal, that is completion.

They are "twin sisters", as I once wrote, and this twin existence is once again surely meaningful also in view of the artist's biography itself. Art and life are always irretrievably connected to each other. The two sisters drawing and sculptures are always in the search for perfection. That can also take very long, it can also never be reached, in any case, it is, however, usually a tiring, very serious process. Hard work that needs precision and patience, which in Lynn Umlauf's case, however, also wants to take feelings and intuition into account. This is especially important for the artist, who belongs to exactly that generation that dealt very strongly with Minimalism and Concept Art, especially in the United States during the sixties. Since Umlauf is very well aware of her "special attitude", in a certain way, that she has really only shared with few other artists of the same period, and who, despite all efforts to reach increasing purity of shape, has, however, continuously referred to the right amount of feelings. Art had never to be "depersonalised", that was for Umlauf and her friends an important issue.

What was especially important to these artists was also the "doing", and they still define it today with the expression of "making art, where it is also important how one does it". From Lynn Umlauf's words herself one can feel the whole joy and love for the materialness of the works themselves, for the reality and for their being alive, when she speaks for example of a "sandy yellow", or of a "rough red" or even of pastel or acrylic colours that were "worked on with sandpaper". Her whole life, and so also "steps, feelings and thoughts", everything is inside these works.

Now the effort, that I already previously mentioned, and the hard continuous work she goes to cannot so easily be seen on her works. On the contrary, they emanate easiness, optimism and love for life. Love for colours, shape, height and also "the vast".

A game one presumes; a piece of metal bent with genial easiness here, a piece of coloured Plexiglas chosen with delight there, rubber, mesh, coloured paint, thick

layers of paint, delicate lines and interlacements – and the sculpture is set in a corner at a dizzy height, from where it may perhaps want to make contact with us, with the room, with the “rest of the world” via more long connections made of wire or cable. It may perhaps seem easy, but she has usually been through a very long work process, from thinking it out, planning, looking for the materials, evaluating, trying out, rejecting, changing, comparing, carrying out the work all the way through to final completion. And the room always plays an especially important part therein. The works are almost always made for a very particular situation, with their own and each time very particular atmosphere. The history and surroundings of a room always have their meaning and considerably influence the artist in her creation process. The works of art begin to connect their life with that of the room found. And finally everything is, once again, in harmonious relationship: height, width, colour, light and even – music.

Venice, October 2001