

Elin Kromann: "Hvirfla" (2011)
By Eva May

In the video "Hvirfla" (2011), Elin Kromann continues her investigations of the sculptural possibilities of the video medium, which she has been developing in several works during the last years. Here, as in the video work "Another Domestic Wonder" from 2010, she investigates water in its different states, as well as its double spatial possibilities – as volume and as plane (mirror / window).

Depending on minimal displacements of one's perspective, one can describe a still surface of water as either smooth as a mirror or clear as glass. That it is both at the same time is Kromann's starting point in this project. The paradoxical relationship between mass, transparency and surface is common to the water and the video image, which are the two 'materials' she uses in this work.

"Another Domestic Wonder" documented the transformation of water from the frozen to the fluid state, with its possibilities for reflections, which could open up the space of the video image to both the non-diegetic space and the exhibition space. Here it is the liquid water's play with the surface of the image, which is investigated. As other of Kromann's video works, "Hvirfla" is constructed as a mini narrative, which goes through different states of the material, and deals with its various sculptural possibilities in interaction with the space and surface of the video image.

In the first part of the film, the whole image is taken up by the fizzing surface of the water as the tub is filled. Its turbulence and the many reflections, bubbles and waves prevent us from seeing clearly under the surface. In the middle sequence the water is still. Only tiny distortions of the drain plug, which is in the middle of the image, alert our attention to ripples on the water's surface. At the end the plug is pulled, and the water whirls more and more energetically out of the tub.

Water, like glass and mirrors, has been a fascination for many sculptors, at least since minimalism, because of the paradoxical and sudden changes of their apparent volume and surface, and their sensitivity towards the position of the spectator in relation to them. The American artist Robert Smithson published in 1968 an essay, "Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan," with photographic documentations of temporary works consisting of mirrors placed different locations in the desert. In the text he writes that he sees the mirror and the reflection as two different things, the first being a static object and the second a temporal phenomenon.

Something similar can be said of water, whose effects can change in a split second, not just by the spectator's movement or shifting of the object, but also by a minimal displacement, a ripple, a shift in the angle of light, which changes the surface from transparent to reflecting, for example. With his camera Smithson mimes the position of the spectator in order to document the contingency of the reflection and its dependence on it. Kromann inserts herself and the camera into this position and uses it as a form-giving aspect in the work. The camera becomes a tool, and the interaction between the two surfaces, the moving one of the water and the static one of the image, creates a temporal sculpture. This happens because the two surfaces are parallel; the image is filled entirely by water, and the latter's alternation between translucence, reflection and apparent massivity changes the spectator's perception of the depth of the image.