

Taking Time as an Act of Resistance: Margret Wibmer's "Time Out" at Amsterdam's Oude Kerk

Intense spiritual aspirations and the powerful hierarchal structures implicit in church architecture have always found form in the convergence of the vertical and horizontal; one naturally looks towards the ceiling upon entering, and in the most exemplary constructions, is awed. Suddenly, one finds oneself *within*, drawn close and safely interior. One is allowed to disappear a little. In modern art historical discussion, the convention of hanging artworks on walls of exhibition spaces, our similarly vertical orientation, and the dated, but still relevant thesis of horizontality in painting in Rosalind Krauss' treatment of Jackson Pollock's action paintings were the primary ways that this interplay of axes has been addressed. However, Margret Wibmer's performative work "Time Out" in Amsterdam's Oude Kerk acts on yet another plane of horizontality; that is, it plays with a shift in spatial relations, and also breaks form in relation to ground. It shifts subjectivity by simple means of changing perspective and orientation - allowing viewers to be on the ground looking up at the ceiling and, in other moments, to stand above bodies at rest as they merge and disappear into the ground. The special convergence of axes here involves the encounter of a forward rush of movement with the arresting halt of time. Wibmer breaks open further new questions through this convergence: How is horizontality *becoming*? Where does the form go? What does the invitation to lie flat on a sacred space (or any public place) involve? What is its relationship to time? How does it work as a gentle act of resistance?

Margret Wibmer's performance "Time Out" is an invitation to break form in public and before an audience. Visitors to the Oude Kerk (Old Church), one of Amsterdam's oldest standing buildings, enter the church and lift their eyes, craning their necks to look up at the ceiling, perhaps hoping to gather within themselves some kind of immensity, or perhaps just to orient themselves within the walls. This first pause (more follow) in a series of prescribed but unacknowledged behavioral patterns of church visitors is significant, because it contains the figure within the church architecture. Wibmer's intervention is uncomplicated: visitors are invited to wear a robe-like garment covering their clothes, and choose a place in the church to lie down for as long as they wish.

This unusual behavior is only made possible by a shift in the social agreement: Wibmer's invitation as an artist sets the conditions to allow an ambiguous "ritual" to occur in this church, and the act itself allows for heightened auditory-visual spatial perceptions. The garment, designed and individually hand-crafted by Wibmer, signifies a transition into another mode and works as a protective medium between the wearer, the space and any onlookers. The process of taking time begins with dressing, and the robe must be carefully adjusted to fit the wearer's body. A separate headpiece and belt should be fitted to the body and worn, while the length of the robe can be adjusted to suit the height of the person.

Wibmer's earlier photographs, installations and performances should also be considered in light of this work, as they too address the relationship between the body and objects, and question the fundamental assumption that objects belong to us and not the opposite. In particular, one recalls the photography series "The Girl and Her Object," and the performative installation, "The Holding." In the total environment Wibmer fabricated in "The Holding," viewers' behavior was controlled by the artificial and

imposed parameters of the environment, altering their perception of sound, space, other people, and themselves within the space. Facilitating this perceptual shift, they wore custom-made garments and performed specific actions. In "Time Out," viewers change clothes, adopt the "uniform", and become agents of the work; just as in the other works, we begin to consider that, indeed, the clothes wear us. The uniform, celebrated in some cultures and abhorred in others, brings people together; it unifies, and of course, sets them against each other in war. The double-edge of the uniform is that it is both socially constructive and brutally oppressive. It builds teams but it also helps us identify our opponents. Variation within the way the uniform is worn also indicates subsets, the wish for individuation, small subversive acts or hidden codes. Who amongst us are most willing to shed the familiar skin of suits and ties, blouses, jeans or boots (all uniforms themselves) and try an alien skin, immediately altering conceptions of self and identity? Wibmer identifies some who are eager to participate - older men and young children - and this touches on the topic of self-confidence and self-image - how willing is one to alter his outward appearance? Together with the unusual invitation to lie down in a public space, the re-shaping of identity is included within the artist's proposition. The dark, one-size-fits-all robes, constructed and sewn from technologically advanced fabrics, also offer a subtle commentary on the shift to industrial production and the move from hand-made and human-centered work to machine-centered production. "Off the Wall," a work from 1998-2000, addresses this transition through the material of the suit; it is restrictive, impermeable, and yet it can stretch, is flexible, and adaptable to the body as it grows or shrinks over time. The rubber suit, like the machinery of industrial production, is not controlled by, but controls its users. "Time Out" does not work with exactly the same dynamics of control, but it does suggest gentle forms of resistance to an all-consuming and ever-accelerating mode of capitalist production.

Perhaps this is where Wibmer's ongoing fascination with formlessness becomes most apparent. One does not have the feeling of occupying space in her performances - if anything is occupied, it is time, and that time is taken or stolen by the ones who enter the work. Acts of resistance and protest are usually characterized by the question of whether or not the value and ownership of space are truly public and the perceived need to assert oneself politically using one's body. Sit-ins of the late 60's protest movements have shape-shifted to standing lines, marches, and to the more recent long-term, mass occupations of global revolutionary movements. What is it then, to lie down, not as one body in a mass movement, but as a uniformed individual? Doesn't this allow one to stop the machine for a moment, and perceive the workings around her? Wibmer considers the act of "lying down, in a state of alertness," as "an act of resistance," and in this work, she creates a situation where time is prioritized and takes precedence over space, offering an invaluable reversal and an initial step towards formlessness.

In the Oude Kerk performance, people chose a place to lie down on the floor, face up, in a pose similar to *shavasana*, the "corpse pose" in yoga practice. It must be mentioned, that the entire floor of the Oude Kerk is a massive and slightly irregular grid of roughly 2,500 gravestones, housing the skeletons of around 10,000 people. The burial history dates back to 1280, with the most recent burial record dated 1865. People who accepted Wibmer's invitation gravitated towards different areas of the church, and stayed for varying durations, letting personal reasons dictate their choices. Church director Jaqueline Grandejean chose to lie on the grave of Jan van Valckenburch and repeatedly counted to 36 in a meditation, only later finding out that van Valckenburch lived precisely 36 years (1564-1590). Another woman came to lie on the same stone where, just a few weeks before, her late husband's casket had rested during the funeral

ceremony. A young Italian couple was attracted to the project by having been given permission to do something “they could never do in Italy”, and a photographer relished the chance to finally get the shots of the church ceiling without feeling too conspicuous lying on his back in the church. A couple of fashionable Russian curators took pleasure in wearing the robes in combination with their designer sunglasses and gladly posed for the camera. Some tourists took the moment as a unique “Amsterdam experience” while many visitors simply gave into their curiosity. “Time Out” as the title of the work suggests, invites us to interrupt our daily routine and pause for a moment, but it also invites us to form our own reasons for taking time or making it.

Horizontality, achieved every day when we sleep, becomes a socially significant act when it is performed in public, in the daytime, and especially in this church. As the horizontal form becomes absorbed within the great high ceilings of the church, formlessness and time-taking, resist the endless headlong rush of productivity and speed. In “Time Out” at the Oude Kerk, the movement forward is arrested by a striking vertical contrast, and one is compelled to gaze at the ceiling, suddenly pausing of the rush of activity. Horizontality is inextricable from verticality (one is nothing without the other), but because our eyes are in the front of our heads, when we take a horizontal position, looking “forward” actually means looking above (or below). The forward rush is halted, the view is directed to - something higher? Asking again, what merits time out? Time out for what? Time out of the machine, time out of body, time out of identity, time out of work, time out of convention, and in Bob Dylan’s words, “time out of mind”: this is a gentle protest of the tired walking bodies of capitalism. This invitation is only to be taken up on one’s own terms and in one’s own time. It also reworks predictable methods of artistic production by not only offering an experience (drinking tea in the church’s cafe is also an “experience” but that doesn’t give it artistic merit) but by also setting up the conditions for heightened sensitivity to one’s surroundings, for rules and taboos to be broken, and for preconceptions to be tested and adjusted.

Wibmer believes we need this reminder, and creates work with the aim that this act might tip the balance back to a more livable relationship with time. It is a reminder that we need to stop, and that doing so will not, in turn, stop the world from turning. Upon standing up after having lain down on the floor of Ouderkerk, the Italian couple remarked with some humor, “nothing terrible happened. We are still alive.”

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