

Ian Kiaer

MARCELLE ALIX

Broadly speaking, Ian Kiaer's methodology evokes the intricate process of placing heterogeneous elements in a plane within an accurate perspective (or at least a desired one). In other words, despite its sculptural guise, his work avails itself of a concept historically attached to painting. Not many individual positions so epitomize the expanded nature

Ian Kiaer, *a. r. salle des études* (a. r. study room) (detail), 2013, paper, Plexiglas, rubber, aluminum, video projection (black-and-white, silent, 60 minutes), dimensions variable.



of artistic practice today as Kiaer's, in which voids convey content as much as forms do. Scattered around the exhibition space, his fragmentary objects paradoxically sparked the notion of a whole as he immersed the viewer in scenarios built on clustered arrays of references. Along with painting, these include the history of utopian projects, such as those undertaken by visionary intellectuals and architects, among them Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in eighteenth-century France and Konstantin Melnikov in twentieth-century Russia, with which Kiaer has long been fascinated.

In Kiaer's work, there is a connection between painting and the architectural duality of inside and outside, since the practice of painting so insistently poses the question of what happens when an artwork transcends the solitude of the studio and steps out into the world and toward its public. I wonder if, at the start of Kiaer's career, this was the crux of his turn toward disseminating both found and handmade objects in the exhibition space, therefore emphasizing the idea of a void waiting to be filled by the viewer, who composes a narrative thread out of the scattered elements that would have once been captives of the picture plane.

Kiaer's recent exhibition was a recontextualization of works from his first institutional show in France, held at the Centre international d'art et du paysage de l'île de Vassivière in the spring of 2013. The concept of specificity was equally at stake on both occasions. In Vassivière, the artist sought to avoid confronting massive spaces with equally huge tridimensional works. Instead, he kept a very low formal profile with transparent and weightless inflatable pieces that could

hardly compete with the vastness of the architecture (designed by Aldo Rossi and Xavier Fabre). About half the works from Vassivière were also shown in Paris, where the space was much smaller and the scale of the art became visibly overwhelming. They competed with the gallery space, leaving hardly any room for the viewer. With the change in the ways the work would be perceived in Paris as opposed to Vassivière, Kiaer demonstrated the expanded sense of specificity that derives from reflections on his studio work, with different formal and narrative readings depending on the objects' relation to the space in which they are shown.

In contrast, for *a. r. salle des études* (a. r. study room) (all works 2013), Kiaer installed a number of small objects in an unobtrusive arrangement. Geometrical pieces of various materials lay scattered here and there. Next to a rubber ring resting on the floor stood a Plexiglas screen leaning against a dull-colored wall, creating an utterly unspectacular juxtaposition. An abstract architectural model stood next to a black sphere that evoked Ledoux and the spherical House for the Guards of the Farms that the architect had planned for Mauperthuis, near Paris. A minuscule model figure stood next to the sphere, as if to stress Ledoux's limitless ambition. On a wall at the far end of the room could be seen a small projection of CCTV footage of the same sphere floating on rough water, a trembling and decidedly austere image that successfully encapsulated the formal and narrative potential of the work while enriching the playful game of divergent scales that prevailed in the show.

—Javier Hontoria