

SØREN LOSE – RETURN TO TOMORROWLAND

I am tempted to speak of the spirit of the time when I look at the work of Søren Lose: be it photographs, videos, sculptures or installations. Not so much in the traditional sense (the German *Zeitgeist*) as in its literal meaning: of a spirit, understood as presence, soul and shadow of a time broken up into its three natures of present, past and future. Of a time, and thus of history and memory, fundamental points on which rests the whole of the research carried out by the Danish artist with great rigour and precision.

The idea of the 'spirit', of a mysterious and invisible presence, is clearly predominant in the series *NORTHERN Lights* (2006), images derived from an old, anonymous roll of film, unearthed in a flea market. What loom before us are winter scenes from some time ago: chair lifts in operation, wooden chalets buried in snow, skiers making their descent photographed from a distance, expanses of conifer forest accompanied by chromatic variations of pink and aqua green, strange gelatinous and liquid stains that are silhouetted against and spread over the original image, and that have nothing to do with the meteorological reality of snowstorms. It is the spirit of the time, sought, captured and revealed by Søren Lose.

In another of his series, *Home* (1996-2006) the hidden presence of spirits of the time returns in an almost explicit manner. They are 'photographs in series' of houses, buildings, domestic interiors and objects that have been abandoned and emptied of the human presence that once belonged to them. Almost a mapping of places now deserted, and perhaps now lived in and experienced in a different way. It is no accident that the artist has chosen the places of his childhood to document this idea of emptiness and absence, and at the same time the presence of 'spirits of the time'. In fact Søren has gone back to Lolland, an island in the Baltic Sea to the south of Denmark; he has returned to its landscape, its old houses and whatever is still left. Nor is it a coincidence that the entire series covers ten years of work: time within time like wheels within wheels. Looked at carefully, one after the other, 'in series', it is not hard to discover that the object represented is not just the architecture, the furniture, the ruins of a past life. The documentation gives way, in fact, to the narration of new presences that are invisible, but careful not to go unnoticed. It is tempting to think that the architecture in Søren Lose's photographs is capable of turning into a structural element that can give form to time and its spirit. As if it were the home of time. As the title given to the series suggests.

Without doubt architecture is the last piece (along with time, memory and history) that defines and characterizes the work of Søren Lose. And it seems perfect that the encounter of architecture-time-history-memory should have taken place in the city of Istanbul. Last year, in the autumn of 2007, Lose was granted the post of artist-in-residence promoted by the Danish Arts Council. The *Tomorrowland* series was born out of the artist's stay in the Turkish city, for millennia an emblematic place of political, cultural and religious exchanges and conflicts and now a land divided between the old and the new, between East and West, between capitalism and the faith of other religions.

The title chosen by Søren, *Tomorrowland*, reflects his imaginative and paradoxical ability to discover a present that is already past but which can be observed as the possibility of a place in the future. In

Tomorrowland the architecture seems deserted, empty, abandoned, *monumenta* – i.e. to be remembered in some way, for good or ill – in which to foster the spirit of the time. Through the black and white of the photograph the artist softens the encounter with an all too contemporary present and colours the sad beauty of a city: among others, the AKM, the Odakule, the Park Hotel (the only one of which Søren also takes a picture of its interior), the Bulgarian church, one of the many mosques in old Constantinople, the Hagia Sofia, the twin minarets. After all even Orhan Pamuk writes in his *Istanbul* that ‘the city of my childhood was a black-and-white photograph, a dimly lit and grey world’. Søren’s Istanbul is in colour too, but always remains in semi-darkness, as happens with the three light boxes in which the colour fades into the light of evening and dusk.

In one picture we can recognize the building of the AKM, the Atatürk Cultural Centre, in the heart of the city, symbol of republican (utopian) modernity, temple of official culture, reconstructed in glass and steel in the seventies after a fire had devastated the original version. Today the spectre of demolition hovers over it (to permit the construction of a private shopping mall) and it has become the target of contemporary property speculation precisely because of its highly central position in Taksim Square. ‘Burn it or not?’: this was the provocative question with which, Hou Hanru, curator of last year’s 10th Istanbul Biennial of Contemporary Art, had chosen to greet visitors.

Søren portrays it at an angle, thereby leaving the front with the gigantic glass windows for which it is famous in shadow. Also taken at an angle is the picture of the Odakule, the soaring work of architecture that stands out on the skyline of the Turkish city, a profile undergoing continual change, no longer peopled solely with minarets and domes.

In the series *Transitions*, the architectures of the Turkish city are fragments of an ideal photographic diary that can explain the spirit of a time and a history hidden inside buildings, which are observed only from the outside, and emerged from the white of the photo printing. The architecture of Istanbul has not just been photographed by Søren Lose: after the two-dimensionality of the black-and-white picture it regains its volume in *Transmutation* (two pieces on display), a genuine concrete and simplified assemblage, but remote from the Dadaist idea of ‘chance’, a science-fiction ensemble, a surreal condensation of different architectural contexts: an old house, the skeleton of a skyscraper under construction, a 19th-century building and an Ottoman mosque seem to have been forced together for a moment, erasing the empty space of the city’s streets and squares, in a mixture of styles and forms that is not very acceptable from the urbanistic point of view. The technique adopted by the artist is that of rapid prototyping, a complicated and almost futuristic procedure of industrial technology used to construct prototypes (of everything from cars to airplanes) out of digital files. The end result is given concrete form in the elegant fragility of white plaster: a city like Istanbul is turned into a universal prototype of the precariousness and nostalgia of the contemporary world. The spirit of time hovers again, a time that is always more consolatory when it is past, always more dramatic when it is future.

Paola Noé

