

A STUDY

IN IMPOSSIBLE

OBJECTS

BY SARAH GIERSING

UNDERSØGELSE

AF UMULIGE

OBJEKTER

AF SARAH GIERSING

In Danish we use the expression “Now the penny drops” when an unexpected realization takes place. The expression comes from the time when we used to speak in coin-operated telephones and had to insert money to get in contact with one’s interlocutor. When I look at Jakob Hunosøe’s photos, I am reminded of this expression. At first, I am confused about what exactly it is I am looking at but suddenly my understanding falls into place.

At first glance the photographs in this book seem straightforward. They are all simple compositions, unsentimental, trimmed down to a minimum, and depicting one or more objects in some room or other. They are not objects photographed using perfect studio exposure, neither are they private effects in someone’s home, but ordinary articles for everyday use placed in a room with natural light barely distinguishable from a neat tidy office. Small tableaus of everyday items so familiar that they could be used as emojis; table lamp, plastic bucket, a writing pad or a ball. The arrangements constitute quiet patterns

---

På dansk bruger vi udtrykket ”Nu faldt ti-øren!”, når en pludselig erkendelse finder sted. Udtrykket stammer fra dengang, vi talte i mønttelefon, og man skulle indkaste penge for at opnå kontakt med sin samtalepartner. At betragte Jakob Hunosøes fotografier minder mig om den gamle vending. Først er jeg forvirret over, hvad jeg egentlig ser, men med ét falder min forståelse på plads – blot for at åbne et nyt rum for undren.

Ved første øjekast kan fotografierne i denne bog synes ligetil. Det er enkle kompositioner, nøgternt beskåret uden meget luft omkring, der alle forestiller en eller flere ting i et eller andet rum. Ikke produkter optaget i perfekt studiebelysning, og heller ikke private ejendele i nogens hjem, men almindelige brugsgenstande opstillet i et naturligt oplyst rum, der til forveksling ligner et ryddeligt kontor. Små tableauer af hverdagsting så velkendte, at de kunne bruges som emojis. Bordlamper, plastikspande, en skriveblok eller en bold. Opstillingerne danner rolige mønstre af lys og skygge, farverne er afstemte, og bil-

of light and shadow, the colors are harmonized, and the numerous slanting and straight lines of the images converge in geometrical harmony. It is perfect, gently and rigidly defined. A kind of modern still life. Still life is a genre that is characteristic of paintings which have for centuries been deployed to depict arrangements of motionless subjects that set the scene for contemplation. In its early history, still life often had a symbolic and moral content. In the present day, still life is to a greater extent employed to explore our faculty of seeing and the relationship between the image or the photo and real life. It is also within this latter sphere that Hunosøe’s photos operate. At first, they seem easily accessible but the moment one looks more closely at them, one realizes that the images challenge our perceptions.

*Three coloring pencils* from 2015 displays three crayons that are placed at right-angles towards one another on a surface that looks like a wooden table or a boarded floor. At first glance it appears that the pink-colored, the blue-col-

---

ledernes mange buede, skrå og lige linjer samler sig i geometrisk harmoni. Det er formfuldendt, stilfærdigt og stramt. En art moderne stilleben. Stilleben er en klassisk billedkunstnerisk genre, der gennem århundreder er blevet anvendt til at gengive opstillinger af ubevægelige motiver, der lægger op til kontemplation. Hvor fortidens stilleben ofte havde et symbolsk og moralsk indhold, anvendes stilleben i dag i højere grad til at udforske vores synssans og forholdet mellem billede og virkelighed. Det er også dette sidste felt, Hunosøes billeder opererer i. De er umiddelbart lette at gå til, men så snart man ser nærmere efter, opdager man, at de sætter vores opfattelsesevne på en udfordrende opgave.

*Three coloring pencils* fra 2015 viser tre farveblyanter placeret retvinklet mod hinanden på en overflade, der ligner et plankebord eller trægulv. Umiddelbart ser det ud som, at den rosa, den blå og den røde blyant er lagt ned for at danne tre sider i et kvadrat. En skygge, den blå blyant kaster, udgør en fjerde sidelængde. Men hvordan kan den blå blyant kaste en skygge, som er parallel til den

ored and the red-colored pencil make up three sides of a square. A shade that the blue-colored pencil throws a shadow on, constitutes a fourth side. But how is it possible that the blue-colored pencil throws a shadow that is parallel to the pink-colored pencil which it meets in the corner of the square? It is only possible because it is not lying down at all. On closer inspection one realizes that it must have been set on end and photographed from a clearly defined angle so that it appears as if it is positioned like the other pencils – only it has been photographed at that particular time of the day when the sunlight makes the shadow fall at a 90 degrees angle. This is an optical trick resembling the Dutch painter M.C. Escher's endless staircases or brain teaser patterns. In the field of mathematics, this is appropriately named an impossible object; a type of optical illusion. It consists of a two-dimensional figure that our visual perception cannot instantly interpret and transform into a three-dimensional object. This is due to the fact that the construction contains contradictions with which we do not have empirical experience.

---

rosa blyant, som den møder i kvadratets hjørne? Det kan den, fordi den slet ikke ligger ned. Ser man nærmere efter, opdager man, at den må være stillet på højkant og fotografet fra en helt bestemt vinkel, så det ligner, at den ligger som de andre – vel at mærke på netop det tidspunkt på dagen, hvor sollyset får skyggen til at falde med 90 graders vinkel. Det er et optisk trick, der minder om den hollandske billedkunstner M.C. Eschers uendelige trapper eller hjernevridende mønstre. Indenfor matematikken kalder man det et umuligt objekt: en todimensionel figur, som vores visuelle perception ikke kan tolke og omdanne til et muligt tredimensionelt objekt, fordi konstruktionen indeholder selvmodsigelser, vi ikke har empirisk erfaring med.

Mange af Hunosøes fotografier præsenterer os for sådanne umulige objekter. De viser hverdagsting, der fremstår anderledes end vi er vant til. Nogle gange snyder de vores syn og får os til at tro, vi iagttager noget, der bryder naturens love. En hoppebold balancerer på kanten af en plastikkop, en skrivebloks linjer

Many of Hunosøe's photos present such impossible figures to us. They display everyday items in a different way to what we are accustomed to. Occasionally, they deceive our vision and make us believe that we are seeing something that defies the laws of nature. A space hopper is balancing on the edge of a plastic cup and the lines of a writing pad flood the edge of the paper. At other times a grouping takes us by surprise so that the familiar objects appear peculiar. A big stone has a spout and a handle made of porcelain. A thermos, a Margrethe bowl, a household funnel, a tennis ball, a cup of plastic, and a disposable lighter are placed side by side and appear to be exactly the same height. It can take some time before the penny drops and the connection becomes obvious when observing these photographs. However, the laconic titles of the artistic works usually disclose the deception of the image. The writing pad with the flooding lines appears to be a sketchbook with sewing thread carefully placed over it. The stone with the nozzle appears to be both a stone and a teapot, the two objects are merely placed closely together and have been photographed sideways. And

---

flyder ud over papirets kant. Andre gange overrasker en sammenstilling os, så de velkendte genstande optræder som sære. En stor sten har tud, låg og hank af porcelæn. En termokande, en margretheskål, en husholdningstrægt, en tennisbold, en plastikkop og en engangslighter står ved siden af hinanden og ser præcis lige høje ud. Når man iagttager disse billeder, kan der gå lidt tid, før ti-øren falder og sammenhængen går op for én. Men værkernes lakoniske titler afslører som regel billedeets bedrag. Skriveblokken med de udflydende linjer viser sig at være en tegneblok med sytråd forsigtigt lagt henover. Stenen med tud viser sig at være både en sten og en tekande, de to står bare tæt op ad hinanden og er fotografet fra siden. Og de seks ting, der forvirrede vores opfattelse af skala, er *Objects of various size on table*, simpelthen placeret på et bord, men med forskellig afstand til kameraet, så de ser ud til at have samme størrelse. Hunosøe manipulerer med virkeligheden og vores opfattelse af den, men billedeerne er helt frie for digitale tricks. Tværtimod har fotografen møjsommeligt arrangeret tingene på en måde, der vil forvirre de fleste, der kender genstandene.

the six objects that bewildered our perception of scale are simply placed on a table at different distances from the camera, so that it looks as if they are the same size. This photo is titled *Objects of various size on table*. Hunosøe manipulates reality and our perception of it, but the images are completely free from digital tricks. On the contrary, the photographer has laboriously arranged the objects in a way that will confuse most people who are familiar with them.

The surrealists from the interwar period were fond of letting objects that usually do not have anything to do with one another come together. In this way, they celebrated beauty in the accidental encounter between an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table. Hunosøe, likewise, leaves nothing to chance. He creates his pictures by carrying out many time-consuming calculations, adjustments and experimental arrangements so that the images appear as optical illusions in front of the camera. He utilizes the illusionist's arsenal of mirrors and the control of the gaze which dislocates the viewer's attention. In a similar way, he

Mellemkrigstidens surrealistiske elskede at lade objekter mødes, der ikke plejer at have noget med hinanden at gøre. De besang således skønheden i det tilfældige møde mellem en paraply og en symaskine på et operationsbord. Hunosøe overlader ikke noget til tilfældighederne. Hans skaber sine billeder ved at foretage flere tidskrævende beregninger, justeringer og forsøg med opstillinger, så motiverne opträder som en optisk illusion foran kameraet. Han bruger tryllekunstnerens arsenal af spejle og blikstyring, der forskyder betragterens opmærksomhed, ligesom han dygtigt spiller på vores forforståelse og forventning til det, vi ser. Resultatet er dog ikke spektakulære scenenumre med teaterrøg og glimmer, men noget nær det modsatte: En tør og saglig dokumentation af nogle indviklede forsøg, der her har fundet sted.

Med et går det op for én, at det man betragter hverken er magi eller noget helt umuligt, men en dokumentation af selve eksperimentet, der skal skabe synsbedrag. Den indledende forvirring fordamper, og hjernen slapper af et øjeblik.

cleverly plays on our preconceptions and expectations of what we see. The result is not stage tricks with theatre smoke and tinsel and glitter, but more or less the opposite. A plain matter-of-fact documentation of some complex experiments that have taken place.

Suddenly one realizes that what one is observing is neither magic, nor something totally impossible, but a documentation of the experiment itself, the purpose of which is to create an optical illusion. The initial puzzlement evaporates, and the brain relaxes for a moment. But then a totally different kind of speculation arises. Why has the photographer used so much energy on this strange experiment? Hunosøe himself has compared his working method with the child's curious investigation of objects in the world around them. It is an approach that involves attempts at making the impossible happen, for example to make a round block fit in the square hole of a shape sorting cube. Perhaps the main purpose of his great work is to create a kind of pause in our daily routine so we

Men så opstår der en helt anden form for grubleri. Hvorfor har fotografen brugt al den energi på dette pudsige forsøg? Hunosøe selv har sammenlignet sin arbejdsmetode med barnets naive udforskning af tingene og verden. En tilgang, der indebærer forsøg på at få det umulige til at gå op, for eksempel at få den runde klods til at passe i puttekassens firkantede hul. Måske er formålet med det store arbejde at skabe en slags pause til at undersøge den velkendte hverdagsverden og vores blik på den. I hvert fald er det sådan, det virker på mig. I mødet med det enkelte fotografi kan jeg henvise mig til min egen undren for en stund. Billederne fascinerer med deres raffinerede blanding af matematisk abstraktion og konkret poesi. De gør opmærksom på, at der altid er noget at udforske og forsøge at regne ud, selv i den mest almindelige hverdag. Vi skal bare åbne øjnene og kigge ordentligt efter. Samtidig henleder billederne vores opmærksomhed på, at øjnene, der ser, også altid er påvirket af en hjerne, der arbejder på højtryk for at finde mening. Så snart ti-øren falder, opstår der nye spørgsmål, man må såge svar på. Det kriglede

can investigate everyday life and our perspective on it. In any case, this is how I am affected by it. In the meeting with the individual photograph, I can devote myself to my own wonder for a moment. The images fascinate with their sophisticated blending of mathematical abstraction and tangible poetry. They draw attention to the fact that there is always something to explore and try to figure out even in the most ordinary moments of everyday life. All we have to do is open our eyes and look closely. At the same time, the pictures direct our attention to the fact that the eye of the beholder is always influenced by a brain that is working flat out to find meaning. As soon as the penny drops, new questions appear that need to be answered. The intricate interplay between our expectations, our gaze and our understanding of the world never stops. Jakob Hunosøe's photos allow us to realize that this is a game we should take the time to enjoy.

---

samspil mellem vores forventninger, vores syn og vores forståelse af verden stopper aldrig. Jakob Hunosøes billeder lader indse, at dette er en leg, vi skal tage os tid til at nyde.