

A writing by Altti Kuusamo about the works produced by Harri Kivi for the Vyborg Library:

## Convex paintings

I

Traditionally, the modern painting has operated inside a square-marked world. Even a circle came rarely into question. The revolution of modern art took place in the frame of a square as well. That is something one tends to forget. Harri Kivi is known for his eclectic miniature worlds portrayed inside a plastic dome. Now the convex is lit with colour – inside the dome itself.

Rich in colour, the six domes take place in the world famous lecture hall of Alvar Aalto's library, under its wood folded ceiling that is acoustically challenging. The domes of Harri Kivi lift their shiny hats to the entire artwork of Alvar Aalto. One can see the straight lines of Aalto's famous round windows take their place at the heads of light-bending shafts in the ceiling of the library hall – while the colourful domes of Kivi instead hang on the long inner wall of the lecture hall during the exhibition. The domes absorb the sunlight reflecting the loaned light back in colours. Functionally they position themselves in 90 degree angle to the round windows at the ceiling of the lending department. Only the lonely round flat light fixture on the ceiling – a curiosity – gets a closer look to the domes of Kivi. This way the round glasses of Aalto meet Kivi's pressed colorful plexiglass.

II

No longer are the domes of Harri Kivi transparent middlemen for the microcosm inside a dome – but opaques – even though they present us thoughts on the depths of the starry sky. They both reflect and hide colours. However, the artist himself won't hide behind his works, but as a well-known verbalist he manages to shed light on his art from many different aspects. It would be well-grounded to describe Kivi's grasp on life and art as postmodern melancholy. Here melancholy doesn't mean depressiveness – on the contrary. Since the renaissance was melancholy no longer seen as a mere state of mind or a disease, but most of all a trait or a state of personality. Today we use the term creativity, but in the time of renaissance they called it melancholy. The renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino perceived that melancholy, in addition to being a disease for "important men", manifests itself in an interesting duality caused by the planet Saturn. Ficino thought, that everyone who is born under the *signum* of Saturn will become marked by this diabolical planet. Platon's poetic passion (*mania, furor poeticus*) and melancholy were seen equal. Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, found melancholy to be "sadness without a reason". Something is lost so early in life that the melancholic is unaware of it. To quote Kivi: "The object of longing has no object". "The longing now poetically aims towards something that doesn't even exist. Already, it's living a life of its own." Nowadays, one assumes both passive and active melancholy to exist; in case of Vincent van Gogh these two types of melancholy fluctuated. Active melancholy manifests itself above all in existential contemplation, meditation about the limits of consciousness, intellectual wit and in understanding of being outside as well as in nostalgic attitude towards the passing of time and the losses it results in. As Kivi states: "Constant knowledge about one's mortality creates an enormous amount of lust for life. Becoming "positively aggressive" also constitutes one of the Kivi's paradoxical guideline, that contains tension typical for positive melancholy. As Kivi states, being "constructively self-discontent" is also important. A state of mind that rises from the realm of saturnic melancholy – towards the forgotten "market towns" of the community. Kivi's domes are most of all both planetary in virtual sense and like small-circled, overgrown saturns.

"The thought is crucial in art", says Kivi. The image-object both gives birth to concepts and is delivered by them when giving birth to material and sensual perception. Concepts travel from the maker to the beholder and from a spectator to another thus finding a new point of concept to the work of art.

III

Since now the plastic dome was like an invisible shield protecting the expression attached to the byzantine tradition thus remaining invisible above the "Karelian Christmas Sky". Here, Kivi is more systematical. The entity is based to a more regular form than before, even though the microcosm of the colours yet open a way for the random to step in.

Simplification and systematical approach along with the micro-level possibilities for variation now become crucial. The aim is to produce accurate fantasies. The focusing meditativity of the domes create another starting point. The powerful geometrical codes of visual arts, such as the round shape and the convex of the dome assign a regular event horizon to the microscopic possibilities of alteration. Kivi talks about the "machine-like climate". A circle is a circle – even in Mars. What keeps changing is the rain of stars of giving meaning.

Even though the volume of the glass-domes are the same, the processing of colour vary inside each dome. And, *mirabile dictu*, also the feeling of every dome's surface is individual. The task for each bubbling colour-climate is to overcome the invisible transparency. The seeing-through creates expectations towards the transcendence: one must overcome the here and now of the colours – their being behind the dome. One must comprehend that colours are metaphorical. We can go round and through when observing the sky and its reflections from outside. The overall effect of the clear and regular shapes and constantly altering reflections of colour result in glittering movement.

When looking at the round windows in the ceiling of Alvar Aalto's library, towards the nature outside the building, the direct sunlight bends underneath a deep shaft, transforming into scattered light. Kivi's domes and the changes in the micro-environment, in turn, are viewed from outside. Instead of "freaks of nature" we take notice to "freaks of culture", how the colour penetrates the light and how the colour arches.

Rightfully does Harri Kivi speak of the chameleon colours. The colouring in glittery and metal is a systematical method creating a broad spectrum of surprises. Using strong visual codes the domes present a switching position of a "clear chameleon". This method brings the surprises according to the alteration of light. Blue dots of light sparkle from the cupola, reflections and tones keep changing when observing a red cobalt dome from different angles.

One of the domes is red as a fire engine but processed little like milk. Kivi says he prefers "half-terroristic alarm colours". Another dome is a kind of mixture of lemon's yellow and duck-egg's green, radically opposite to reflections of dark blue and cobalt violet in some of the domes.

The painting bends itself and light – colourful light keeps transforming and moving based on the position and movement of the spectator. The face in Parmigianino's Self-portrait in a convex mirror and the characters in a mirror in Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini Portrait bend inside a fictive world of an image. Kivi's dome, on the other hand, is actually a convex and therefore the light bends according to an actual position of the spectator. Thus, on the other hand the bubbles bear up the heaven of functionalism – on the other hand they deny this by the total ornament of colours in the sky. It's a question of painting in three dimensions.

All things considered, the domes of Harri Kivi create a tension between clear, probable and definite shapes and sudden, improbable changes. The dome and the universum of colours attached to it is a lid of sky turned upside down. We always watch it from the outside – even if we are under the precise sky fictively attached to it. The convex is a sky in distance, alienated, sky under us. The sky that opens up a view into the microhistory of colour.

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