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artworks_Swetlana Heger

Smoke (Liberté Toujours)

Martin Schibli







During the greater part of the twentieth century, the smoking of tobacco represented status, independence and autonomy, perceived positive attributes which smoking still holds in many parts of the world. Status is still manifested in many varying contexts, including in advertising campaigns, glamorous fashion magazines and in the production machinations of Hollywood. Actors such as James Dean and Humphrey Bogart became male role models, icons for whole generations of smokers. Svetlana Heger's exhibition initially appears to be an observation of the sociological history of the smoking of tobacco. The health issues concerning tobacco smoking are clear, even glaring, from a medical perspective. Major restrictions on tobacco advertising have been implemented, and smoking is being prohibited in more and more places in the world. Changes occur concurrently, as medical findings concerning the negative consequences of smoking have become increasingly evident. Ms. Heger's exhibition, however, does not deal with the medical issues; instead, it tackles the sociological aspects of smoking.

The exhibition consists of a series of photographs. A specially designed cubic construction, a smoking room made of glass, stands in the centre of the hall. It is divided diagonally by a wall, creating two separate smoking rooms, one for women and one for men. During the time of the exhibition, many of the visitors of the Kalmar Konstmuseum made use of the smoking room for a quick puff, enticed by the unexpected opportunity of being allowed to smoke indoors, in an exhibition hall, within a museum. The glass smoking room created in itself a juxtaposed free zone for smokers and at the same time, an encaged space where smokers publicly paraded their addiction to the general public. Both the smoke and the arising aroma contributed to the overall experience of the exhibition.

The photographs are exclusively portraits of smoking

women. These 720 photographs depict famous women, models, actresses and other female personalities. Some images of not-so-famous, anonymous subjects are taken from blog pages on the internet. A small number of portraits were photographed by Ms. Heger herself. The style of the images varies. Some are taken in studios, others are snapshots, featuring the old and the young, both indoors and outdoors. The one unifying element is that all the women express something with their cigarettes. What do these women represent, what does their body language symbolise? It is not just about inhaling, it is about the poses assumed during the act of smoking. How do these women relate to their perception of the world?

The modern tobacco industry came into being at the end of the nineteenth century, when it became possible to manufacture cigarettes industrially. Mass production enabled a decrease in production costs, which then paved the way for the mass consumption of tobacco, which had been previously reserved for the upper classes. The smoking of tobacco became a movement of the masses, an expression of individualism and social status. For a very long time, smoking was reserved only for men. Marketing and advertising have focused on its association with manliness, as with the «*Marlboro Man*» by Philip Morris, where the lonesome cowboy not just symbolises masculinity, but also independence and autonomy. This image reinforced the idea of the freedom of the wide expanses, albeit self-proclaimed, the ideal of the American Dream.

The choice of brand and association forms an integral part in demonstrating status by way of tobacco. While smoking in itself can be perceived as a desire to fit into a social context, from the community spirit witnessed in the smoking room and the actual consuming of the cigarette as a means of promoting communication, the choice of brand denotes individual status and identifies the social group to which the smoker belongs. It expresses distinction, detachment and a specific set of values in relation to others, values that may be appropriated and modified by time. *Gauloises*, the French cigarette brand, whose slogan «*Liberté Toujours (eternal freedom)*» is also included in the title of the exhibition, symbolised the resistance against the Vichy regime during World War II. After the war, its meaning was transformed into a symbol associated with French intellectuals including icons such as Picasso, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir,





all of whom were portrayed smoking *Gauloises*.

Very few women smoked in the beginning of the twentieth century, as it was not considered socially acceptable. Legislation that prevents women from smoking existed and women were arrested in New York in 1922 for smoking in public. Not surprisingly, the tobacco companies wanted to bring about a change in public attitude. The consumer group could double in size. It was not, however, until the end of the 1920s that the time was considered right for the tobacco companies to attempt a change in public opinion, by directing advertising campaigns at women in particular. One of the campaigns, which made a great breakthrough, was when, in 1928, the American Tobacco Company launched a campaign for its brand *Lucky Strike*, with the following slogan: «Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet». The company's strategy involved the association of the smoking of tobacco as something that could help women maintain their figures: a slimmer built was healthier, and one should choose a cigarette over a sweet. The company hired Edward Bernays (1891-1995) to help them. He was a leading figure in the area of PR and the development of methods designed to influence public attitudes. It is a known fact that Joseph Goebbels used his methods in staging the Third Reich's propaganda machine. Bernays employed psychoanalytical theories from Sigmund Freud, his uncle, in order to develop methods in controlling the opinion of, or at least influencing, the masses. One of the methods used was to leak «impartial» scientific information to the press. In the work with *Lucky Strike*, this involved information that proves that it was healthier to be slim, and that one should avoid sweets. As a consequence, the relationship between smoking, fashion and the female role model was firmly established.

Bernays also worked on changing the perception of women smoking openly. During the New York City Easter Parade of 1929, he managed to infiltrate the celebrations by the systematic employment of a number of women to smoke publicly in the streets. Since smoking in public was regarded as unacceptable for women, the action was seen as an act of women's emancipation. Cigarettes were «torches of freedom», and lighting a cigarette became a symbolic action: it proclaimed that women were also entitled to the same rights as men at all levels. Bernays made sure that the media was present as the women marching in the parade

lit their torches; this event received widespread news coverage, ensuing debate in the whole USA. The plan was successful, and the cigarette became synonymous with the women's liberation movement and independence and implied that women ought to be allowed the same civil liberties as men. That the whole thing had been a staged action by the media was not revealed until much later.

World War II saw the last obstacle to women smoking, probably because women were by then generally expected to participate more in areas which had been previously reserved for men. In the women's movement of the sixties, the tobacco moguls saw new commercial possibilities, not just in the direction of advertising campaigns but also in the design of new products exclusively for women. In 1968, Philip Morris launched the brand *Virginia Slims*, especially aimed towards women with the following slogan, «You've Come A Long Way Baby». The aim of the slogan was to target the then-active women's movement in their fight for independence, self-awareness and autonomy. Marketing strategies directed toward younger women and young teenage girls were especially successful. In period of a century tobacco smoking had moved from associations with the upper classes and men to those with mass consumption, and the emancipation and independence of women. The former symbol of autonomy for younger women had now become a trap, dictating class demarcation.

As the negative effects of smoking on health have become increasingly evident, attitudes towards smoking also changed. As a rising number of campaigns reveal the health hazards of smoking. Advertising has become increasingly difficult for tobacco companies. These information campaigns have resulted in the drastic reduction of the number of smokers. In so doing, a new class distinction has come into being between those who are able to make informed judgments, and are able to exercise self-control, and those who deny the health hazard and still smoke. In her project, Ms. Heger addresses the dualistic nature of smoking, both as a symbol of freedom and independence, especially from a feminist perspective, and at the same time, as a symbol of dependency and enslavement.

Ms. Heger often explores how the meaning of symbols can change in the course of time, as well as according to changing





social context, giving her work an ambiguous quality. Her work can be seen as a sort of statement, an objective, impartial account, where the observer is not asked to draw conclusions concerning Ms. Heger's opinions. Instead, the observer finds him/herself in a zone of conflicting, diametrically changing variables. In the series *Playtime*, for example, she skillfully played with selected trademarks, using them as branding, and appropriating their message in order to create an own trademark.

Another recurrent theme in Ms. Heger's work lies in the relationship between the surface – how an object appears to be – and the production methods and initial idea, which, in adherence to requirements, more often than not, remain imperceptible. What an object is, and how it appears, are not necessarily the same. In the series of photographs *Animal Farm*, Ms. Heger documented a number of bronze animal sculptures placed in and around the former East Berlin. It appeared, for all intents and purposes, to be apolitical and harmless until it is revealed that the bronze was molten metal retrieved from the demolition of the statue of Stalin when the GDR was destalinized.

In her exhibitions, Ms. Heger portrays recurring themes, dealing with issues such as power, ideology and capitalism. Her work shows that capitalism remains the prevailing ideology. It is a demonstration of various aspects of capitalism, including studies in prevailing ideology, and how society is structured. Ultimately, cigarettes are a product of capitalism, and one may perceive smoking as a metaphor for the capitalist doctrine that underlies the very structure of society. Baudrillard maintained that it is not the production of goods in itself that constitutes capitalism, but rather the continuous stimulation of craving. The cigarette represents a craving for a certain lifestyle, where the product is exhausted as it is consumed but at the same time, it creates a continued and intensified craving for the product, due to its addictive components. The cigarette can have no additional value when it is consumed, it only creates a new addiction. In her exhibition, *Smoke (Liberté Toujours)*, Ms. Heger, was able to represent structures surrounding the craving based on the sociological aspects of smoking, whilst providing a smoking room for those who crave immediate satisfaction.

The exhibition, *Smoke (Liberté Toujours)*, has been exclusively produced for the inauguration of the new Kalmar Konstmuseum, designed by the architects, Tham & Videgård Hansson. It opened on May 10, 2008.





