

Claus Rasmussen and the World of Standards

In Claus Rasmussen's debut solo show at Galerie Cinzia Friedlaender, 1:33.3, the young Danish artist investigates the standardization of space in everyday life, particularly the spaces we confine our bodies to.

With the dominance of mass produced and pre-manufactured goods, measures, rules, and a set of well-defined production standards have become the foundation of trade and a free market economy. Pre-fabricated garments, furniture or even houses are easily and cost-effectively produced - mostly by machines - and consumed en masse. Rasmussen confronts the accompanying hegemony of standards and the often problematic relation between these standards and the individual consumer: why exactly do these products possess a mass appeal? Do we actually need standards by which we can measure and evaluate our lives? Or is it that some choices should just be made for us, and standards simply expose a basic need for simplifying things?

In his installation "The History of the White Shirt", Rasmussen addresses the iconic value of one of the most standardized and neutral garments. Worn by anyone from service staff to CEO, the white shirt follows a set of strictly defined production rules like, for example, the position of the pocket and buttons. However, Rasmussen also hints at both the organic sources on the one hand and the object's labor value on the other by showing the rest of the fabric used to make the shirt. In doing so, the artist also calls forth both the product's cultural and manufacturing history - a chronology in which standards and labor part ways.

A Marxist reading of the piece would suggest that in regards to labor, the white shirt becomes a commodity. A tailored shirt gains its value due to the labor invested in its production. Furthermore, bespoke tailoring is made to measure and does not subject the body to a universal sizing system. In addition, in terms of labor, spare time is a luxury. As if echoing the commodity of time, Rasmussen's shirt rotates 360° in 60 seconds and exposes the duality in the nature of standards: the metric of a given product represents not only the status quo of the consumer, but also his aspirations. Conforming to standard becomes a class marker in and of itself.

The appeal of mass-produced goods is also linked to their affordability. When houses, cars, and new wardrobes purchased each season become accessible to an increasingly wider audience, a regulated standard of living is born. Rasmussen confronts not only the fixed standards of living that govern social space, but also the moral and behavioral standards that go into shaping and defining class. The pre-fabricated house, for example, is not only a standard as a product, but also as a social achievement. Such houses dominate the landscapes of suburbs the world over and have come to be imbued with norms of payment, mortgages, and procreation. The number of rooms and standardized kitchen with just enough space for default appliances shape family interactions and consumption habits.

However, Rasmussen also approaches standardization issues with a healthy dose of irony. The standard pair of white socks loses its value and innate comfort level as soon as one of the socks is lost. His model of a pre-fabricated house is done on a non-standard sale of 1 to 33.3 - the ratio of a standard sugar cube to a standard building brick.

Text by Hili Perlson