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## Glacier

The straightforward naturalism and theatrical quality of Aleksander Konstantinov's new work might surprise admirers of his rational minimalist graphics. Yet, Konstantinov has worked with mimetic likeness before and, in a certain sense, could even be called a naturalist. The subjects of his mimetic representation were always the products of culture: bureaucratic tables, targets, grids from the woodcuts of the Nuremberg School or Morandi's prints. Even with all their formal restraint, one could always observe in his works an intertextual play with ambiguous senses, straightforward and hidden quotations and references. The ironic strategy of this game involved the advancement of ordinary and banal objects of culture to a metaphysical level or, in his "architectural" works, a hypertrophied exaggeration of the small and nearly invisible to a monumental scale.

Such strategies seem inapplicable to nature. Unlike culture, nature as such does not give grounds for ironic commentary. As they say, don't mess with Mother Nature. The glacier as a geological phenomenon, as a flow of water that moves imperceptibly from an infinitely distant past, seems to be a subject more suitable for philosophical speculation and metaphorical pathos than for playful interpretations. Then again, this is true only while nature is regarded in its own context, in the context of the universe. In the context of profane contemporary culture, nature becomes first of all the object of consumer expansion and exploitation. A mountain at a ski resort does not represent a geologic event as much as thing with value for the consumer, a tourist attraction. Natural phenomena are transformed into things, into commodities or commercial brands.

Konstantinov's "Glacier" comes into existence in this field of actual culture. He has not changed the strategy of his game, he has only transformed the sign of multiplication-transcendence into the sign of division-debasement. An object of a metaphysical or hyper-scale level becomes ordinary and banal, the majestic natural poetry of a glacier is transformed into its plastic imitation. When I speak of banality, I do not refer to the artistic qualities of Konstantinov's work, but to its cultural status. In the context of a ski resort the "glacier" functions as an advertising banner. This object belongs not so much to the alpine landscape, as to the tourist industry that exploits this landscape. In this case, Konstantinov's usual materials – plastic and tape – acquire a special meaning. In none of his previous works were the commonplace and ephemeral character of the material in such dramatic conflict with the essence of the depicted object. The eternal mass of ice is turned into a thin and temporary film. One can read a tragic metaphor into the irony of such a substitution.



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Konstantinov emphasizes the conceptual vector of his artistic gesture by the title of the work, “Glacier.” Such tautological titles are usually only given to objects that are obviously spurious or false. This is a typical strategy of branding in mass culture: pastry products, theme restaurants, or hotels in Las Vegas are named in this way. At the same time, the title engages us in a classical semantic discourse that began with Magritte. What we see is a glacier, but this is “not-a-glacier.”

This “not-a-glacier” quality is most distinctly seen in twilight when light comes from the inside and the structure of the frame is visible. In this moment the object changes genre, shifting into the domain of architecture. It becomes a building (“not-a-building”), and behind the façade one imagines a warm and cozy interior. It was for good reason that a passersby inquired, according to the artist, about what was being built, a swimming pool or a fitness-center. The artist himself considers the “Glacier” his first non-architectural project. However, in a certain sense it is the artist’s first “architectural” project. Up to this point Konstantinov used architecture either as a background, as a basis for his graphic installations on the building facade, or as a cultural archetype, reproducing a constant image of an abstract “house-as-such.” In either case, he worked with what existed in architecture. With his turn to natural phenomena, he has decisively moved to the creation of a specific new form. The “Glacier,” with its broken structure, glass curtain wall and the irregular construction of the frame, could easily claim to be a radical project in the context of newest tendencies in architecture.

At the same time, the shift from culture to nature is marked by a change in the artist’s formal language. There is a transition from monochrome graphics to painting, from definite lines to the freedom of the stroke, from order, structure, and rhythm to organic uncertainty. This new plastic language, applied to equally new spatial form, makes Konstantinov’s artistic statement incredibly powerful and convincing.

Richard Serra said about his monumental work “Shift” (1972) that it was “a way to measure oneself in front of the immeasurability of the earth.” About Konstantinov’s work, one can say that it is proof of the incommensurability of contemporary culture with the immeasurability of nature.

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