

**Interview with Martin Erik Andersen, conducted on July 6, 2009.
By Lone Schubert.**

I have arranged to meet Martin Erik Andersen in a workshop setting in order to talk about his upcoming exhibition entitled, "more give me more give me more. this your doorstep" that is about to be presented at Horsens Kunstmuseum.

L: You've assembled part of the work here inside a large old factory hall. It's a most impressive sight: a thick silicone plate that is intermittently perforated by a meticulous ornamentation, hanging vertically on a supporting stand of steel reinforcement. Would you offer a few words about what it is we are standing in front of?

M: Well, it's certainly a composite entity that is not in any way unambiguous or unequivocal. For this reason, you can actually take hold of it from many different angles. That being said, a central point of departure has been the Ardabil Carpet, one of a pair of renowned classical Persian carpets that were completed around 1540. The Ardabil Carpet stands as the source model for the pictorial aspect of the construction, which is some kind of transliteration, reproduction or displacement of the ornamental into a meeting with contemporary art.

The ornament from the carpet has been cut out manually, then modeled and cast in silicone. It is important for me to point out that the cut-out section is an interpretation and not merely a straightforward mechanical line: here, every single ornamental element has been cut out with a scroll saw, following the contours in a photographic printout of the carpet, in a scale of 1:1. Each and every partial element consists of a minimum of 14 curved incisions. I've made attempts to calculate the situation and have arrived by and by at the realization that there are approximately 120,000 partial elements that have been manually formed, copied and deciphered from the carpet. So, what we have here is a very expansive and rather complicated jigsaw puzzle, which, in terms of its production time (when it comes to the work involved), curiously enough, roughly mimes or, in any event, pays its respects to the original carpet's production time.

Another formal and central jumping-off point (and something you might say that the jigsaw puzzle is a kind of interspace within) is a choice to translate the carpet's original mobility, either a state of being rolled up or being folded, into stationary modular entities and a condition of being piled up. In a brutally matter-of-fact way, the ornamental space is being set into the modular way of thinking - a structural space that I regard as a fundamental condition in our own culture, the rationalized production logic that pervades all of our sociality: a logic that is being interpreted constantly in our architecture and maybe even more severely in art - for example, in minimalism.

In the present piece, there is a certain troublesome awkwardness that is put into play when we try to distinguish between what is bearing what[m1]. What the viewer encounters initially are the modules and the bearing grid. In a classical aesthetic construction like the Ardabil Carpet, the bearing structure (that is to say, the weaving and the underlying circular geometry in the patterns) is generally dimmed and drawn away from view. In the present work, however, the situation is reversed: you see a complicated grid-module division before you see the ornament and the figurative imagery. The ornament does not emerge until you move up very close - you've actually got to stand so close to the structure that you cannot take it all in at one glance and only then might it occur to you that you are standing in front of an oriental ornament. It is a stratification of the meeting between modular thinking and ornamental thinking that consolidates and crystallizes into an awkwardly inverted space.

L: And the space is constituted thusly by this 5 x 15 meter large carpet you are speaking about?

M: Right, and also by the meeting with the modules and a branching and bifurcated detailing of a number of other elements that have been assembled, with the result that the construction measures 4.5 meters in height and 15 meters in length. The prototype, the original carpet, is 5.5 meters in width and 10.5 meters in length. The modular dimensions have been deduced on the basis of different rationales or processes that emerged while working with the interpretation of the carpet. There is an overall division of the carpet's proportions into 25 individual panels, a division that scales down the carpet's monumentality into tangibly wieldable sections. To me, the tangibly wieldable is not merely a pragmatic issue; it also involves an insistence on what is generally mobile and provisional in the artistic. The relocatable points simultaneously back in toward the processual and forward and outward into the potential - and renders the artwork an open place.

Each of the 25 panels then supports a further subdivision into a grid consisting of somewhere between 16 and 24 smaller and more irregular parts. This subdivision is a remnant left behind by the process of photographing the original carpet. Today, the Ardabil Carpet is permanently on exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, where it lays horizontally inside a showcase that is illuminated rather faintly. The museum's official photograph was not sufficiently detailed for us to be able to use it in making the cutting, so I traveled to London with a photographer.

We took about 780 individual pictures of the carpet, which were subsequently rectified for perspective displacements, digitally, and then pieced together into one overall registration of the

carpet. After doing this, I chose to let the photographs' semi-random croppings appear as a grid which, I imagine, comes to constitute a kind of rationally processual ornament spread across the entire surface, manifesting itself as a digital trail of the photographic perspective displacements. This can also be regarded as a dialogue with the distinctive element in the Ardabil Carpet, which is that the weavers, in their own time, were actually working with foreshortening the perspective in the carpet's pictorial construction. This can be spotted in a particularly lucid way in the two hanging lamps found on the carpet's central medallion, where one of the lamps is noticeably smaller than the other.

L: The source model is a Persian carpet that is supposed to lie horizontally. However, your carpet is hanging vertically. Neon tubes have been mounted on the back side of the piece. Homemade swatches of knitted fabric have been cast right into the silicone plates. A few more knittings are tossed loosely across the steel construction and there's also a record player, with a record that has been pressed especially for the purpose . . .

M: Obviously, it is my general register of materials that I am drawing on here, resulting in a work with something transpersonally structural that intervenes in a physically intimate space. This register delves all the way down to how a personal body meets a personal bodily situation, like sitting down and starting up a record player and turning over an LP disc. You would be capable of getting involved in the situation in different ways: making a visual reading of the tracks in the cutting, where personal bodies have interpreted every single millimeter of the entire ornament or apprehending this as a universal architectural situation, where half of the light comes from the exhibition space and half of the light emanates from the work itself, and where the fact that the carpet is positioned erect serves to turn it into a kind of partition wall that establishes its own space of difference.

A room, as we understand it in the West, is generally defined by the fact that there are four walls surrounding a subject. The construction we have here forms a room between the anterior and the posterior, a room that is detached and standing freely. For me, it's a kind of corridor on the wrong side, a room divided in half, a minus-room - or to stick with the suggestion of the title, maybe a kind of doorstep.

Halvings, doublings, things turned upside down, mirrorings and those kinds of things are, in my view, basic devices for generating internal self-sustaining regions of meaning. The ornament inside the silicone is, incidentally, laterally reversed with respect to the ornament in the carpet. And the contour, which bounds and demarcates the drawing in the weaving, is now, in the

silicone, of course, precisely that which has been removed in our cutting. Silicone as a substance is a molding[m2] material that is suitable for casting. Within the context of a sculptural discourse, this activates a whole chain of problems concerning the relationship between positive and negative space, between original and copy, between work and implement and between the conveyance of space and representation.

The textiles, the knitted and the palpable surfaces are, accordingly, other ways of creating space where the body is more directly involved. The body must be brought into and must converge with the situation - as I envision this - in certain subsections of the register I have been speaking about. The body must simultaneously be clothed in and undressed by the situation. The knittings and sheepskin here are, as a matter of fact, what all of us are packed into. So, to me, this is a way of transposing the body inside, by means of a non-architectural avenue. The soundtrack on the LP partly establishes an acoustic, spatial and fluid boundary around the work while, at the same time, it supplies the situation with temporal extension which, for me, renders the situation habitable. And when the LP is transported home (it is, in fact, a gift!), the work's imaginary habitability overflows into very real dwellings, at home with the record players that are still to be found here and there.

L: The prototype, that is to say the Ardabil Carpet, has absorbed your interest for quite some time. What is it that's so fascinating about this very carpet?

M: There are some interesting and rather messy stories in it. Among other things, there is, in fact, not only one Ardabil Carpet: there are actually two! The carpets' original function and placement are matters of dispute. The notion currently ascribed to the carpets concerning their original placement, which holds that they were lying parallel alongside each other and filling out a circular area all the way to its edge seems almost just as absurd to me as something I could have concocted myself.

The one carpet's historical and formal qualities as well as its reception-history in the West are interesting. It has been canonized as being absolutely one of the most important carpets in the world. At the same time, it happens to be one of the oldest existing specimens. It was purchased for the Victoria & Albert Museum in the 1890s on the initiative of William Morris, and was subsequently canonized by the Arts and Crafts movement, which Morris himself co-founded. In this way, the Ardabil Carpet has become an integral part of the Western cultural legacy and part of our museological history.

The carpet is situated in the cross field between being one of the finest expressions of Islamic culture and, on the basis of its extraordinary status in the Arts and Crafts movement, being an

early critical protagonist in the protest against the onslaught of industrialization.

To me, there is also a fine and fancy loop when we consider the twin carpets' reception in the West: the first of the carpets, as has been mentioned, was purchased for Victoria & Albert, while the other was not offered for sale in the West until about twenty years later. However, since the first of the two carpets had already become canonized as the world's finest carpet, matters were handled a little quietly when number two turned up. And as a matter of fact, Victoria & Albert eventually did purchase parts of the second carpet, such as the whole outer ornamental border, for purposes of making reparations on the first carpet.

Now, I've had a chance to take a very thorough look at both of these carpets and if either one of them is supposed to be an original artifact then I have no doubt whatsoever, not even for a moment, that the restorers have actually repaired the copy by cutting the original into shreds. Accordingly, when I cut, clip, trim and move elements around in my carpet, I'm actually building further on a proud European tradition surrounding the entire complex of problems related to the discrepancy between the copy and the original.

But as has been mentioned, the carpet in itself, or rather the carpets in themselves, certainly stand as the very finest in Islamic art - one could say that in a cultural historic respect, they correspond to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. I have worked with the carpet before but I started up the current project around the same time as the crisis around the Mohammed cartoon-illustrations flared up. And, of course, in this connection, I have pondered and ruminated and I have come up with some general considerations about ways to act constructively with respect to some of the cultural encounters we are standing amidst - encounters that, as likely as not, are potentially and realistically deeply conflictual in essence.

Fundamentally, I naturally harbor an understanding for the fact that there are people who might feel the urge to mock or piss on Mohammed or God or Jesus or whomever it may be. But on the other hand, if we, as an aggregate society, are characterized by this proclivity as being our most saliently distinctive profile, that is to say, if it is precisely this that we need to lean up against in order to re-affirm ourselves, then we really do have a problem, not only with respect to others but, to a great extent, with ourselves. It's all too narrow and trivial. It's all too abject and much too shortsighted.

To some degree, I regard the work here as my constructive bid into this web of problematics, as my attempt to discover a territory where the very finest example of the Islamic tradition converges with that which I myself happen to be working with, generally - visual art that takes its mark in post-structuralist contemporary art from the 1960s and after this period - accordingly

establishing a possibly impossible meeting: a meeting that is neither conflictual nor topical but is rather, on the contrary, intricate and composite, involving, constructive and universal; a meeting where the Western and Islamic traditions are being spent and squandered to an equal degree.

L: And does this meeting perpetuate the tradition of the carpet?

M: Certainly, it's a meeting which, in any event, takes the carpet into serious consideration as a source model, accordingly a meeting that respects the carpet 100%, while at the same time, the carpet is being translated and transformed into an otherness. In one way, the carpet is there. But at the same time, it's not there at all! It has been totally transformed and it is 100% present. The crisis that followed in the wake of the appearance of the "Mohammed drawings" in a Danish newspaper might well have served as a motivating factor here, but whenever I go about making something, I never do so on the basis of a single motivating factor. I get started making something when there are many motivating factors. And I would be very reluctant about having my reasons for moving into action misinterpreted as a finished code or key that can unlock the art work, with the consequence that its many meanings could be summed up just like that and said to work out according to some single-valued correspondence.

There is more complexity going on in the world than any motivating impetuses could ever encompass. Everything I do is a part of a general processual way of conceiving, where I'm thinking just as much on the basis of a material and spatial experience as I am thinking on the basis of language and sociality. I perceive my own praxis as some kind of re-shaping organic dynamics, into which I can openly and unabashedly chuck different blocks of meaning and structures. This is a method that fortunately continues to generate more complexity than my motivating factors ever could.

L: When I come to think of it, it might not be on the mark to say that meaning, as such, is the bearing element in your works. Instead, there appear to be a lot of fragments of meaning lying about; these could also be symbols or spaces for establishing meaning. But there doesn't appear to be one unifying meaning.

M: I do suppose, after all, that the levels of meaning are important bearing elements in what I'm making: it's just that they are not situated outside the work. They dwell, locally and internally, inside the work, where a great many layers of meaning are seated - both local and transverse layers of meaning which, in point of fact, are actually bearing elements. They lie there inside the things. In this way, they are actually more load bearing than what we experience, for example, in conventional conceptual art, if I may take the liberty of being so brazen to

declare this. However, it's not a linguistic point they are bearing forth but on the contrary, a number of explanation-related problems, where I assign priorities to certain nuances that are situated on the fringe of our common frames of understanding.

No, I'm not pursuing a line of reasoning or cultivating a level of meaning that is situated outside of what I'm working with. Accordingly, I am not carrying around some adequate story that can be told afterward or before - and especially not before - that can unlock the situation and which would incite others to say that it was precisely this that it was all about. Because what I believe, generally speaking, is that then you might as well tell your story and well, that's all there is to it! On the other hand, when it comes to method, I guess that I'm constantly looking to discover explanation problems related to my own conceptual apparatus. Visual art, as I am working with it, is a self-sustaining space for cognitive realization, a space that also oversteps and transgresses itself.

I am always trying to get the conception of the meaning, the language and the materiality to slip and slide out from and into each other and to bear each other in every which way. The upshot here is that a meaning can just as well bear a welding as a welding can bear a meaning. To me, the meaning and the material register are intertwined. Sometimes they switch places, but they are never situated outside; they are always lying inside the work. Carrying this further, I also believe I can say that this applies to the two main blocks between which I have presently set up a meeting: the ornamental and the minimal. Strictly speaking, these are two very different kinds of space, both of which constitute, and to a significant degree, interpretations of social regions of signification without necessarily having to bear or convey language. So when you stand in front of one of Robert Morris's grid structures or minimal structures, there is not much meaning-language you can place outside the work without being rebuffed by the structure because it is essentially a repudiation of subjectivity, of language, of body and of situation. But at the same time, it is so very deeply anchored in its own time and social situation as an attempt to envision structure both into and out from the aesthetic dimension. Perhaps the same thing can be said about the ornamental space. Of course, in this case, there are signs inside the space: there are signs of flowers, of urns and vases, etcetera. However, in itself, the ornamental space is simply the bearer of the fluid transporting systematics, which all at once amalgamate into a whole but which simultaneously always clutch beyond themselves. An ornament always points toward the other side of the spot where it leaves off. There is a mathematical structure lying underneath that never ends.

This is also what is happening in the confrontation with Robert Morris's work: there's certainly a structure lying behind the piece, or maybe alongside of it. The effect elicited here is that

the work continues beyond itself. Actually, I find it interesting to reflect on the fact that these two formally and historically different aesthetic and cultural spaces are overlapping. What I am physically doing here, in an entirely concrete manner, is superimposing them on top of each other so that they become inseparable. Here, you will not be able to separate the minimal structure from the ornament. And what cannot be unequivocally determined here is whether it is the structure that bears the ornament or whether the situation is reversed. It has all become interlaced - in any event, that's how it is for me.

L: Both forms make use of visual art's potentials in a different way than, for example, naturalistic painting: it goes without saying that the prohibition of image-making is a salient characteristic that stamps Islamic culture. Couldn't it also be said that Robert Morris is operating similarly on the basis of some form of prohibition against images?

M: Certainly, and both ornamental art and Robert Morris's works are borne by the transpersonal, by the programmatic mandate that this is not supposed to be a matter of subjective expression. That is to say, the work should constitute an attempt to formulate oneself visually without formulating oneself privately and without resorting to psychology. Consequently, both ornamental art and Morris's work, as cultural expressions, are overstepping the bounds of the prevalent conceptions regarding subjective expression that people have been nurturing in Europe for the past 150 years.

L: Well, couldn't we also raise the point that, in a way, both are expressions of a democratic way of thinking?

M: I think so. We're standing on safe ground when we say that classical sculpture is hierarchical and that it always bears forth the power in one way or another. And we could also agree that the decorative or ornamental bears something that is more fluid and undefined. The ornament or pattern can just as well be situated on the edge of a pedestal as it can on a dress.

The ornamental consists of broadly heaped visual accumulation that becomes distributed horizontally and fluidly - constantly reproduced and exchanged, collectively and industrially. This, in my opinion, is what is so intriguing about both the classically ornamental and the kitschy interpretations of whatever is circulating now - that they are still so fluidly cultural. The ornamental moves its way across such enormous geographical areas and leaps in history while, at the same time, it is also the bearer of physical experiences: people have been busy deciphering and interpreting every single millimeter of the designs, over and over again.

The carpets have been created and re-interpreted by physically existing human beings who have culturally and historically entered into dialogue with each other across different times and different locations. Inscribing myself concretely in the ornamental and arriving at a place where I am overstepping myself and my own time and my own achievement - and in a purely physical sense, there have actually been many people making this piece - is an ambition in this work. We have been many cutting and casting and there have been a number of younger artists involved who have really invested themselves into the project. It has, for me, been a way of opening up my work so that it moves beyond my own situation and limitations - concretely setting it forth before a small sized local public.

L: Surely this poses a parallel to the way the Persian carpets were created: there have been many people busy weaving but this hasn't made the carpet any less valuable.

M: No, it hasn't. Its cultural value is not seated in the personal expression. It is seated in a kind of collective way of thinking and exchange, which carries its value both in its breadth and in its precision.

L: What I experience is that it can be difficult to attach words to your art works. Do you think this might be so because they stretch the artistic potentials all the way to their fullest extent and that, consequently, they have to do with a meeting between space, meaning, body, words, sound and maybe much more - and maybe also because the body, specifically, constitutes such a crucial part of the work?

M: Yes, and, of course, this is intentional or, you could say, it's a way of working. I harbor a notion that visual art ought to satisfy the requirement of being a self-sustaining situation. What I mean to say here is that it should not have to be supported and borne forth by the words that I or anybody else would attach to it. It's an attempt to create a total situation, which also involves those aspects of our existence that are detached from language. Generally, I believe that our way of acting and being in the world constitutes a kind of grid. We possess one very coarse and very functional grid that is called language, be it Danish, Russian or Farsi, and this casts a net of certain coarse patterns across the world, across reality and across our sociality - it's a grid that can sometimes also operate destructively with respect to our sociality. What I believe is that visual art is invested with a certain potential by virtue of its being a smaller grid-section that has the capacity to capture certain nuances and convergences between displacements and sudden shifts in meaning, which language is simply incapable of ensnaring on the first go round. After all

is said and done, this is visual art's proper undertaking all the time. Visual art is capable of capturing certain subtle distinctions about which our primarily language-oriented sociality can be stirred into conflict, nuances through which this sociality simply cannot figure out how to maneuver.

Maybe this isn't something that is happening so much right now but it can be something that pans out over the course of 50 or 100 years: our linguistically based sociality and ways of thinking can go astray and become too flaccid or too goal-oriented due to different causes that are deeply seated in our societal development. It could well be the case that our set of values has become bound up with a language that does not correspond constructively with our reality any longer. I can spot some really dangerous perspectives when I ruminate about whether our set of values and our language are going to be successful in figuring out how to maneuver within reality as it appears to be taking shape right now - and I would add that it's right here that visual art possesses its very own vital potentials, if and when visual art will start taking the risks, if and when visual art will dare to maneuver its way 100% into those areas within which language cannot figure out how to penetrate and maneuver, even though the access roads might appear to be dead ends and even though heading this way might feel totally ridiculous. We cannot know beforehand whether a detour will come to reveal itself at some point in time as being the absolutely necessary short cut. And our social elasticity depends, in any event, on our having the largest possible number of accesses and openings to whatever we do not understand. I believe that visual art's obligation is situated precisely in the intermediate spaces that language cannot figure out how to maneuver within - in venturing boldly to skip the lowest common denominator and leap to the greatest - even if our accounts and calculations fall to bits and pieces.

And, of course, this is why my works might be difficult to apprehend when you try to grab hold of them with language and a conventional understanding. The satisfaction we enjoy upon being able to proclaim "we understand this!" actually has to do with a process of satisfying ourselves about the validity of our frames of language-based understanding. In my opinion, this certainly has nothing at all to do with visual art's appointed undertaking. Visual art's obligation is to move our conceptual frames, to shift and relocate our frames of understanding - and also to make us see that there are intermediate regions, nuances or interspaces that do mean something even if we cannot take hold of them linguistically because our functional language is always necessarily limited to being a grid that is all too coarse-meshed. If my work can be said to possess a critical edge, this presumably refers to its capacity to stand as a critique voiced on behalf of the body and on behalf of the nuances in the materials -

supposedly also because I believe I can see both the body and these fine nuances being erased in a kind of fictional over-exposure that is happening in our pleasure- and consumer-oriented culture. Never before have there been so many pictures and fictions circulating around the intimate as there are today: this hyper-circulation is hollowing out and rubbing out our genuine access to the intimate. The access is obstructed and crammed with Coca-Cola ads, pornography and reality shows. Of course, we could also choose to celebrate this. To some degree, I'm also doing so myself - there is of course an ecstasy experienced in this process of effacement. But we've got to stay awake when we choose to proceed in this way - because it might not be all that safe.

L: And obviously it is right here that things become difficult because that which has become more absent along the way is the body . . .

M: I try to work with certain things where I force myself into some of the nuances I can see vanishing: consequently forcing us into some of the fields that language cannot grab hold of but which the body might be able to seize. Supposedly, the body can still apprehend about 90% more than language can. And to be sure, there are aspects of the working process here that I neither can nor want to conceptualize.

L: There is, in fact, a lot of body in the present piece, both body and materiality.

M: Indeed, there is a whole lot of physical body and time that has been put into it - you could say that, in this piece, there is - perhaps - the labor of ten people concentrated into two years of body.

L: Seldom today do we experience that the real and specific physical body has been invested into anything. Perhaps this is another reason that we are lacking in the capacity to experience and perceive with the body.

M: I fully agree. But may I add here that I also believe that this obviously doesn't apply to everybody: there are, of course, many people who will give up right away because they feel they lack the requisite frame of understanding, experiencing a flush of panic when confronted with potential meaning or a sudden onslaught of laziness - but nonetheless I believe that if visual art works with the nuances and invests time in the nuances that our language and its appurtenant sociality have more or less given up on, there will then emerge a possibility for certain intersecting doublings, which can give a stimulating push to our shared space of possibilities. If the insistence on a spatially concrete situation

is made intensely enough, then I still believe that the human individual can be moved, even though he or she may not be able to formulate the situation conceptually. It may not necessarily always be a matter of dramatic spurts, but after the macro-values have become eroded, new values may emerge from the diminutive landslides. And I sincerely believe that it is art's duty to enter in and become engaged and keep working with this.

L: Across the great cultural divides . . .

M: Precisely, and I suppose that, to a marked degree, there is a certain special complex of problems we are facing right now, at a moment when the geographic borders are being dissolved: there are certain cognitive systems that are located somewhere they haven't been previously, geographically speaking. We are compelled to take up a cultural stance with respect to certain cultural patterns and certain modes of being in the world that we simply did not have to take any position on a hundred years ago because they were 5,000 kilometers away. Today, these same cultural patterns are 10 meters away from us. We're talking about our neighbor, who happens to be dreaming about something that is completely different from what we are dreaming about. We're talking about our neighbors who just might have a basically different frame of understanding than we have ourselves. We're simply going to have to congregate in new places. There isn't any Denmark we can have "given back" to us, just like that. No, we threw that out in the trashcan a long time ago, while we were staring at the TV and chomping on popcorn. If we cannot figure out how to mobilize ourselves and open up our values, then we are not going to have anything but mindless conflicts for the next two centuries or however long they're going to last. We are really going to have to figure out how we can become open to what we are standing immediately face-to-face with and, at the same time, how we can become more open to ourselves - not only for the sake of the others but really also for our own good. We have become foreigners ourselves: our cultural and social language has become impoverished and retrospective; our civil society is being destroyed - it is being thoroughly and fundamentally defined by the advertising executives and entertainment moguls, who are busy boiling down our common existence and reality to consumption and pseudo-pleasures. Where are our basic values and visions? What is it that we are giving each other and those who will follow after us? We really need to try borrowing anything we can from anywhere else than our own resources. I think we ought to regard the meetings that we have more or less been forced into making as a gift - as a chance to proceed further. This is what I am trying to do here. I am trying to conceive of this meeting here, between the ornamental and the minimalist spaces, as a small local gift, as a demonstration which affirms

that new potential spaces are always arising and emerging, as supplemental additions to reality. Visual art has to be committed to making the world more flexible. It's not supposed to make it smaller. It's supposed to widen our potential opportunities for spotting connections and correlations and meanings between structures, materials and spaces: interconnections within which our language and our sociality cannot figure out how to operate.

L: And, with this work, you are creating a space for doing this?

M: Yes, you might say so. In any event, it constitutes my own attempt to accomplish this. Of course, the intention is that it will make a social impact. I know well that such a piece is not going to be everybody's cup of tea. And it doesn't have to be - if it fails, this is not a shortcoming of the work: the work is for real[m3].

L: It's apparent that you're trying to allure the viewer into the work. One becomes allured by the transparency here, by the fact that the back side of the work shines through and stimulates our sense of curiosity with its grid structure, while the record player stands there and cries out to be turned on and the sheepskin arouses our desire to sit down on it . . .

M: I certainly hope that it's going to be difficult to avoid confronting the work when you encounter it physically; I hope that it is sufficiently odd, sufficiently self-sustaining and sufficiently insistent. I hope that it's going to move the folks who come to stand in front of the work and maybe, at the very least, to call forth a few question marks. Question marks are, by God, the first things that need to pop up everywhere, around and about. If anything is going to be moved and altered, then question marks are going to have to be placed beside everything one is carrying with him/her as he or she enters into the encounter. As far as I am concerned, it amounts to an attempt, in some way, to both confirm and deny a situation, for there is a whole lot about this piece that is profoundly accommodating: there are materials and registers that involve pure generosity, that five-year old girls will also be able to enjoy.

In principle, I think that there is a very expansive level of obligingness and openness in that which is for everybody. And then again, there is supposedly also a conceptual level that's almost for nobody. But it can be opened up - if in no other way, then in the form of removals and transfers. Therefore, if people are going to be able to handle their own fascination, then they're going to have to handle, all by themselves, some of the difference-gaps they are standing in front of. I am trying to work in a bilateral way with this and to make something the viewer can hang on to . . .

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L: Aren't you speaking here about the whole formal aesthetic aspect?

M: Of course, and then there's something that fastens itself to language, since there are a number of collisions and a number of meetings which, under ordinary circumstances, would not come to fruition but which are here being forced together- so that it becomes compulsory for oneself to make the connections that can serve to explain one's own fascination, that is, if it's there already.

L: Can you offer a few examples of this?

M: Sure, I'll try. Basically, it can certainly involve a meeting between the front side and the back side, that is to say the meeting between a mass of chaotic iron, which bears an aesthetically ornamental facade, or it might have to do with a somewhat unsightly wire, leading from a neon tube, that meets the silicone. It could be the meeting between the knitted swatches that have been cast right into the silicone and the knitted fabrics that are strewn around the work or it might involve the sound as it meets the space.

There are loads of things that would fall apart if they didn't have a formal aesthetic precision. They are being held together by certain specific small differences and choices, like the subtle differences in shade and tint when we compare the hue of a neon tube and the hue of the painted steel. As a matter of fact, this difference can cause one kind of tube to converge with another kind of tube - and accordingly, the steel is a formal rod, as is the neon tube: with a subtle difference in the colors' shades and tints, the two entities meet within an intermediate space - with the consequence that the iron pipe can actually interchange with a neon tube.

I'm actually devoting a lot of effort into making investigations examining where the boundaries lie in the formally aesthetic: there is more precision going on than one might immediately be inclined to believe. There isn't anything here that has not been carefully chosen.

L: There is also the meeting between the hard iron support stand on the posterior side and the very soft and ornamentally embellished silicone facade. In our dialogue, you have just brought us a bit closer to the aspects in the work that have to do with mobility, change, transition and movement. And obviously, in a perfectly literal sense, the Ardabil Carpet has been transported from northern Iran to London. Now it has come to Denmark and moved right into your artistic world, where it has been transformed once again into silicone. In other words, there are many levels of

movement involved in all of these patterns floating around on the carpet . . .

M: All of this also has to do with the meaning grid - it has to do with my attempt to consolidate many different kinds of spaces into one single space. This can only be accomplished when the rooms have some kind of openness. You cannot have two identical spaces that have the same intention. They cannot be superimposed or placed on top of each other when they take up the same volume. So if you want to stack spaces on top of each other, then it is necessary that the spaces embody some kind of open or fluid, transparent or schematic character. When I slap some Iranian Sufi music on top of minimal art, it might appear to be an absurd gesture at first glance. But from my point of view, the whole arithmetic works out, precisely because the respective spaces are situated so far away from each other and because there is an outstanding account to be settled between ornament and structure. And when you place even more spaces on top of these two, what arises are even more subsections, with room for more outstanding accounts to be settled: outstanding accounts that I believe can mobilize my own process in the first place, but taking a wider view, can also serve to mobilize all other processes. They are also, as a matter of fact, objective dimensions: when I take a minimalist structure and superimpose it on top of an ornamental structure, it's not just something I am hitting upon or dreaming up - what we have here are two concrete systems that exist beforehand, which I am slapping on top of each other. And because it happens to be artistically logical in the present situation, what comes into being is a local third system. So, when we get right down to it, there is really a chance to move meaning systems around. And this, I also believe, is part and parcel of art's social obligation: superimposing or placing spaces and systems on top of each other, to say it simply . . . and generating new cognitive spaces of possibility. I suppose this is really what I mean when I talk about mobility: the fact that you can keep your work open for schematic systems, which are in turn being held open for other systems, within a constant potential bifurcation. In this way, I envision it as something transpersonal that is really and truly open to everybody.

L: I understand, and surely this applies as well to people from other cultures, for example, to people from the Islamic culture.

M: Absolutely. And come to think of it, it is being held open especially, in an entirely pragmatically physical sense, for the people who are coming in to look at the work. If somebody comes from Baghdad, then this person is quite simply carrying with him or her another grid than what somebody else who has completed a European or American program of art education would be entering in

with - someplace or other in his or her experiential luggage, there would very likely be a minimalist grid. But here, these two will meet on an equal footing - even though they might be equally befuddled. What has been my point of departure, in any event, is that both systems are being respected and that both of them are being activated, so that a third system will emerge. It's going to be imperative for all of us to keep our cultural systems open and schematic if we have to be able to move. Everything else is petrification.

L: . . . because you are conveying the ornament, that is to say the decorative, into our art institutions, although we have a marked tendency to regard the ornament and the decorative as being less valuable than the unique work of art.

M: Right, but you might say that there's some kind of inversion going on here inasmuch as decorative art, within our culture, is generally served up as something inferior, most likely on account of its collective character. Of course, this a situation I enjoy turning upside down - so that the decorative can actually switch over into a register of meaning which, in terms of complexity, can easily match the subjective individualism that ordinarily ranks highest in our cultural sphere.

L: Indeed, we refer to decorative art, quite precisely, as "handicraft" because it has to do with the hand and the body, as contrasted with art that revolves around thinking, the intellectual and the verbal.

M: Sure and to me, it has also been a way of establishing a territory for myself where an extremely large amount of handicraft is put inside, as well as extremely large intervals of time - where lots and lots of body is being re-invested in the artistic. I do think that it is a problem that the physical body is in the process of vanishing as a tool in the establishment of the artistic. I think that what I am witnessing is a widespread contact anxiety everywhere I look - all the way around me. And when we say goodbye to the body, we are saying goodbye to our most delicately fine-tuned and most directly on-line awareness of the material realm: the body is our most direct tool for converting signification layers that contain the fundamental questions of our existence. This is a problem because the fictions from the logic of consumerism are standing in a queue, on top of each other, in order to take over and hollow out reality. In my view, whenever the body enters into direct fictionless dialogue with the material sphere, what almost always automatically emerges, quite simply, is a utopian potential. I do not pretend to say that this is easy. Quite the contrary. The fictions have certainly become embedded within us in every way.

Nor do I believe that you can just dig a hole in the earth and say, "look" (in such an event, it would have to be an intense hole). You've also got to enter into a transforming dialogue with the problems.

L: And it's there that visual art has its special potential, which no other language has . . .

M: And it's there from where visual art is going to have to draw its legitimacy. It cannot collect it from the purely political realm, from the purely journalistic or the purely social. It's also going to have to gather its elementary substance from its own self-sustaining interpretation of reality and I don't think that it can do this without investing the body in the transpersonal. Looking at it from the outside, this could be perceived as an asocial and closed-off aspect of the visually artistic. But from my point of view, it is nonetheless the only genuine way of making contact and affecting the foundation underneath, which binds us together.

L: But this demands something of the viewer, because the body is relatively absent in our society and our sociality.

M: Well, this certainly does not diminish the urgency of the obligation.

L: You've also got sound in the piece.

M: Yes, I do. Sound may be somewhat immaterial, but as has been mentioned before, I regard it in the present context as something spatially interchangeable and delimiting, as an element that gives the situation a temporal extension and therefore also as a protagonist, after all, in the interplay with the body. Specifically speaking, the soundtrack here constitutes an attempt to transliterate and transpose two different musical levels into each other. The starting point is sampled Iranian Sufi music (which happens to be loosely connected to the carpet, in a cultural sense) that has been processed through a digital treatment in such a way that the one side of the LP takes on a rather industrial character: the music has been slowed down in its speed and several filters have been placed into the mix, with the result that what we have here is a digital translation of acoustic music which in itself possesses an ornamental character. To me, this engenders an open parallel to what it is that has happened to the carpet in the transport from woven yarn to digital photographic registration - transferred manually into silicone.

Inasmuch as the sound has been transferred onto a vinyl LP, there is also a kind of transforming dialogue with certain consumer- and distribution-related registers.

L: But it is an analogue sound and you've got to walk over there yourself and put the record on the turntable. So you are compelled to bring your body into motion if you want to have the sound as part of the experience.

M: This is also essential to me and it's a way of resuscitating a number of questions and carrying them back into this genre-category that happens to be situated between the low cultural and the highbrow cultural inasmuch as an LP disc, in this connection, also poses a question to the sculpture category: What kind of a thing is a record, anyway? Of course, it's a spatial object and it's a part of an installation, but here it also becomes a consumer object, which the situation gives off. The LP can supposedly also be played in other situations than the one right here. It can be re-located and brought home to your living room: people are welcome to take the record away with them when they leave. So it is some kind of exposed peg or handle that connects to a social situation that is specifically different from the art situation.

I am really fond of the idea that the work emits something, that the work gives presents from its domain. I like the idea that there is a kind of surplus capacity in the situation, which physically surrenders something from itself.

There is, of course, a certain salient loop about the gift - it both takes and gives. Gifts always fashion a kind of contract, a contract implying a sense of community. Here, you can take the LP home with you in an entirely concrete sense. This amounts to some kind of hook on which to attach the body and the specific person. So, to me, the music itself is of somewhat secondary importance, as it were. What interests me primarily is the situation, which is partly spatially generative and social and partly stands as a parallel space, an elucidation of the underlying surplus aspect in the artistic. Incidentally, I am still busy making some ceramic bowls that will most likely come to be positioned alongside the record player, standing accordingly as empty articles into which something can be filled - this time around, the work is also going to have to beg a little bit.

L: Then, of course, there is the issue of the title. Surely, we are often looking for meaning in the title of a work and you've chosen to call this exhibition "more give me more give me more. this your doorstep". Now, "this your doorstep" can certainly take on many different meanings: both in the concrete sense, as the marking of a transitional doorstep situated between spaces, and

also in a religious connection. Would you say a little more about this and also comment on the first part of the title?

M: Well, the first part of the title is obviously a kind of circularity, insofar as it starts with "more" and closes with "more". I think of this as a small local ornament in itself, which is trying to grab hold of the situation here by virtue of its intrinsic character as ornament, which is always a closed entity. But there is also something that is circulating both within itself and outside and around itself - it has the potential to spread out into infinitude because it has been built upon an underlying geometrical structure. As a rule, oriental ornamentation is constructed upon overlapping circles. And it can be said that the ornamental border on a carpet is a capricious form of artificial clip, where the ornament, as such, simply continues on the other side. To me, this clip corresponds to the relationship between artistic process and artwork. This is one of the aspects of "more give me more give me more".

The other aspect is obviously some kind of critical commentary on our consumer society, comprised of users and abusers and it circulates around our appetite, which is evidently interminable and apparently devouring itself. However, what I envision exactly, and perhaps somewhat naively, is the artistic as a counter-space to our consumer culture, because it really does generate new regions of signification while at the same time it expends our desires. The great majority of our cultural events simply burn our time and energy away and create garbage. However, visual art constitutes a kind of surplus accumulation, which forms and establishes more as it simultaneously consumes itself and uses itself up. In this manner, then, visual art comprises another and higher order because it actually generates value in synchronicity with its conspicuous consumption and misuse of all other values. Visual art always gives more than it takes - in my way of looking at it, in any event.

L: There is also an inscription woven into the carpet.

M: Yes, the inscription reads: "I have no refuge in the world other than this your doorstep. My head has no protection other than this porch way." This is followed by the signature of the weaver, Maksoud of Kashan, who further identifies himself as "the slave of the doorstep", and the year (942 AH, which corresponds to 1536 AD). Opinion holds that this may very well be a couplet penned by Hafez, if it is not instead a paraphrase of one of his ghazals. Hafez was a Persian lyric-mythic Sufi-poet of the 14th century and the carpet, you see, was created as a commissioned assignment for the Safavids, a powerful dynasty in Iran that attained prominence in the 16th century. The dynasty had actually

been established two centuries earlier, around the descendants of a Sufi master.

Although its adherents are rather unpopular today in neo-conservative Islamic society, the Sufi tradition, which really presents a jumble when you try to sort it out, still represents an open, fluid and alternative reading of The Koran: a reading devoid of stonings and condemnation-fatwahs, a reading with a focus on ecstasy and on God as love, a fantastically exquisite trail running serpentine through Islamic culture. The Sufi tradition is still flourishing today, all the way from Morocco to Indonesia. And oddly enough, Hafez is, as much as anyone else, Iran's national poet. The Sufi tradition is a place where we can meet something we absolutely do not understand that is nonetheless parallel with certain metaphysical European traditions. It need not necessarily be The Bible and The Koran that have to be pitted off against each other, historically and symbolically, whenever it's time to carry on a constructive dialogue between East and West.

In the actual quotation, as I read it, there is something that hitches onto you and simultaneously unhitches you. You know this doorstep and you become positioned by it, within a physical transition between spaces. But it is really also a question: What is it you are being placed in between? And why is it inscribed, in this way, on a carpet that, in its own day, was a colossal representation of power, time and prestige? From my perspective, the carpet bears its own powerlessness with this inscription. And to me, after all is said and done, art always has to do with powerlessness: we can only really meet it after we have totally given up.

But you know, now that we're talking about titles - I'm not sure I would have worked with the Ardabil Carpet if it were not carrying this text. So even though I stated earlier that the keys to the meaning were never to be found in our language grid, I am - paradoxically enough - always working with the linguistic aspect and, as a part of this, with the titles, as some kind of visual-artistic material. I don't think I have ever created anything where text is not involved in some way or other and the titles are then, of course, an okay and conventional place for setting something forth. But I do not conceive of this as something that is situated outside, as a key or a code for deciphering an inner meaning. I think of it, rather, as material and elaboration.

L: Now you seem to be saying that there are several transpersonal dimensions in the piece. At the same time, however, I experience your works as being highly personal and sometimes almost excoriatedly personal.

M: To me, it is, of course, a both/and, because if there has to be a body present, then the only single body I can really set into

place there is my own, you see. Then again, my body obviously bears my private life. And even though it might sound pathetic to say so, it's always the case for me that I am working up against a perfectly concrete nothingness. I suppose that for most everybody who works with art, it's a matter of a 100% priority: it's art or nothing. But actually, this can certainly also be completely inconsequential since, when I come to think of it, it's really very seldom that there is any decipherable biographical aspect in what I'm working with. If there is a hat, then it's more or less, in a way, any hat whatsoever.

I think of my body as some kind of general surrogate, as an implement that enters into the work and takes on the mantle of its own idiosyncrasy, if only to move down into some of the details that I believe only the body is capable of accessing. And it is only my own body that I can insert here with 100% assurance, even though it is only there as a kind of cursor for all other possible bodies. When I make use of the body in this way, it is as a kind of guarantee for what is specifically precise rather than as a guarantee for the average.

I feel that when I am putting what you just called my "excoriation" 100% into something, it consequently becomes a layer that tells about the excoriation to other excoriations, which according to this line of thinking, are being generally encountered everywhere. I'm attempting to accomplish this within a kind of structure, a kind of order and system.

I suppose that my private register is something completely different, which is much more chaotic and problematic. If there is a correlation, then I hope it is to be found within some type of inversion from total powerlessness to surplus. The ambition is to generate value out of nothing - to generate a kind of systemization of certain different mental and physical correlations between language and space; some of them horizontal, some of them vertical, some that have to do with clothing, some that have to do with vision, hearing and hands - ergo, a whole lot of different concrete body-related registers within which I happen to be wobbling around. And I am trying to make some re-formulated choices with a specific body and to take seriously all of the slight differences in meaning that this body bumps up against.

When this body of mine senses that the neon tube over there is placed even one centimeter out of its proper position, I take this sensation seriously and nudge the tube into place until this body feels that it's just right. This leads me to believe that it cannot only be this very body's problem, that it's not merely accidental, although I cannot explain right away why this is so. And even though it might have something to do with certain aesthetic or musical clichés, they are also shared collectively, anyway. They are culturally determined, so when I take them seriously I believe I am making contact with something we have in

common, something universal - and that I am moving something
universal one centimeter into place.

translated by DAN A. MARMORSTEIN