

Sophie Tottie: The Armory Show NY (3–6.3.2016)
Represented by Belenius/Nordenhake

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
che la diritta via era smarrita
—*The Divine Comedy*, Pt. 1 Inferno, Canto I (1-3)

Observe the work of Sophie Tottie, or choose the work of another. She won't know either way; neither will I. Rejoice, criticize, sully or reject. For better or worse, you may have found yourself on American soil, where 'neoliberalism,' 'globalism' and 'democracy' fashionably wear blinders.

If you do zoom in on this Swedish artist's work which, parallel to some transatlantic love affair, made its way across an ocean for you to have a few minutes alone with them amidst the exhibitionist haze of lone objects and faces which also desire your admiration, take into consideration the following: tedium and repetition can be erotic; the question of 'value' will inevitably surface, or even better, if you are equipped to tackle the rapport between 'value' and 'time,' then Tottie may lasso your attention; a human can function as a machine and / or one can form relationships with them for specific ambitions; a once overlooked organic process can serve as ingredient for the sterling; the devil is in the details.

Gambling's not about money [...] gambling's about not facing reality, ignoring the odds. When I have difficulty understanding my position on an artist or work, as has occurred with Tottie's minimalist abstractions, I role-play. In my mental Rolodex, I shuffle between fictional characters from novels and films, ranging from experienced to tragic to insightful, in which I have catalogued at some pivotal point as relevant constellations. I land on Jack Manfred (Clive Owen) from the neo-noir film *Croupier* (1998). Manfred is a struggling writer who receives sadistic pleasure in watching players lose while working as a casino dealer in London. The protagonist reminds its audience of an inherently cruel world (for cruelty seems to never go out of style)—unfair, dictated by a combination of circumstance and chance. And as Levinas remarked, “Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.”¹ As one moves through a world littered with games and distractions, we may find that some are not worth playing or acknowledging. But one may feel lost if suddenly denied the right to play—the freedom to choose between picking up a dealt hand or leaving it face-down and walking away stands to be a lovely conundrum. For those who cannot escape the weight of reality or do not find the numbers in their favor, it is possible to fold. Anyone can purchase a baller's hat from the 'internet' screaming: NO FUCKS GIVEN.

This passive casino worker shuffles the deck, spins the wheel or throws the dice for hours on end; the croupier never gambles but only watches risk takers win or lose. Similar to this silent dealer, I can only omnisciently observe as you move from one level to another via this pastime we call Art. Abstraction expects its viewers to dig deeper for no one's sake but their own; the movement is for the patient—and for those who are not afraid to lose. Tottie admits that, now half-way through her life, she functions on 'total time,' and I suspect that this existential state is a prerequisite for anyone aiming to 'get it.' This is only speculation, but this croupier has time on her side for trial and error.

Tottie balances a trilogy of components (materials / mediums / methods) as means to an exact end. Materials selected by the artist literalize and embed themes into her process, as in *Face Value* (2014), where the artist's usage of EU coins, chain and copper clamps highlights the cyclical nature of economics linked to an unavoidable passing of seconds turning to hours—or to emphasize the coupled eccentricity and diligence required for their existence as in *Oxidopolis I & II* (2014), a lattice-inspired pattern is drawn with iron gall ink which harbors an elaborate history, serving as archival tool for texts ranging from *The Bible* to a con-artist's assortment of counterfeit documents. The *Written Language* series confirms the artist's tenacity for the process at hand; each line is meticulously drawn, creating a layered effect reminiscent of ancient tree-rings and dendrochronology.

Aside: recently on view at Stockholm's Moderna Museet was Tottie's earlier work *We Remain Hard As Stone* (1991). This large-scale piece was comprised of rectangular, seemingly impenetrable blocks of rustic shades resembling alienated urban towers, and there is no designated path for unveiling its essence. Tottie is for the stoic—for those who endure, watch and learn over time how to find the hidden advantage in an unfortunate twist which, at any moment, turns players into kings. In short, just as I have done, you are encouraged to make connections with whatever cards you have at your disposal.

—*Jacquelyn Davis* (3.2016)

1 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh, PA : Duquesne University Press, 1969), 21.