

FOREWORD

Writing about Tove Storch's work is amazing and amazingly difficult at once. I have had the pleasure, and challenge, before. In 2020, as an art critic at the *Information* newspaper, I reviewed the artist's solo show at Galleri Nils Stærk in Copenhagen. Finding the right words to do justice to Storch's sublime aesthetic remains a wonderful but also demanding task. However, as we know, the hardest things are often the most important.

So it is with this book. Storch's work deserves a publication of its own, collecting and communicating her artistic practice and development, while also examining her art through the lens of feminist theory. Storch's persistent investigations of sculpture and the properties of materials are well documented, her work in sculpture as feminist object less so.

The occasion for this publication is a series of events featuring Storch's work at a number of Danish art institutions: Art Hub Copenhagen (AHC), the publisher of this book; Gammel Strand; the Louisiana Channel; and Glas – Museum of Glass Art.

In early 2023, an external jury selected Storch for AHC's *Artistic Practice* programme aimed at professional, established artists who have exhibited mainly in Denmark and are seen to have great international potential. The jury statement reads,

"Tove Storch's work is a proposal for the relevance of sculpture in the 21st century. Continually exploring aesthetic possibilities, her works are stringent sculptures, composed of numerous artistic experiments with materials situating bodily experience at the root of spatial and sensory matters. Storch's work has links to dance, pop music and feminism, as preverbal knowledge captured in a sculptural moment."

Over the past year, Storch has been working on her most extensive solo exhibition to date, *Slumping*, which opened in February 2024 at Gammel Strand in Copenhagen. In that connection and as part of *Artistic Practice*, the Louisiana Channel tracked the artist over two months, documenting the creation of five new large-scale sculptures for the exhibition. The result is a generous film portrait.¹

The film portrays Storch's fantastic curiosity about physics, space and movement, and her frustration and struggle with physical order. Relating her never-ending eagerness to challenge it, the artist works with the greatest precision and systematicity to push the properties of materials to the limit in apparent battles with gravity.

The interview also offers a glimpse at Storch's acquaintance with a new material in connection with the installation of a site-specific work in a window at Gammel Strand: a pair of glass breasts, produced at Glas – Museum of Glass Art, protruding towards Thorvaldsens Museum (with its monumental, masculine sculptures) across the canal.

This is the first time Storch is showing a work in glass. The work, however, is merely a prelude to her next major solo show, opening later this year at Glas. There, Storch will truly test her mettle, casting the molten material as part of a new partnership between AHC and Glas, which over four years will introduce four artists to the material and introduce Glas's visitors to some of the most interesting artists working today.

Such cross-institutional collaborations are of great value to the art scene, fostering ideal opportunities for art to find new spaces, languages, materials, and places

to grow. AHC extends its gratitude for the partnership, now and in the future, to Gammel Strand, the Louisiana Channel and to Glas – Museum of Glass Art. Sincere thanks, as well, to Karina Lykkesborg, who has skillfully managed the *Artistic Practice* programme for AHC, and not least to Bikubenfonden for their generous support for this publication.

In early autumn 2020, biking through the city to Copenhagen's Northwest neighbourhood, where Storch's gallery, Nils Stærk, is located, I could sense something new in the air, a small shift underway in the persistently working artist. Storch had never before engaged with exhibition titles, but there on the invitation were the two words, *Apple Romance*. In a bittersweet yet tender, even juicy whisper, the words added a light extra coating to her sculptures' layered surfaces of textile, metal and plaster in tones of peach, rose and aubergine. My subsequent review read,

"As a viewer, you have to curb your desire to analyse and avoid taking away the obvious reading: pink, soft plaster and fabrics = curvaceous femininity. Cold, hard metal = hardcore masculinity. Domestic, traditional femininity across from industrial, traditional masculinity. In fact, metal, plaster and fabrics are all industrially made materials today. Liquid plaster and strong silk fibres are every bit as muscular as aluminium. But we are used to attribute qualities to materials based on how they feel against our skin, or to our eyes. And sadly, we still perceive those values through the lenses of old gender roles."²

1 The film can be viewed at channel.louisiana.dk

2 *Dagbladet Information*, 8 September 2020.

Storch has always been concerned with the interrelations of materials. How they work together or resist one another. How they fill a room and what forces they bring to bear. How they stretch, strain, collapse and yield. In contrast-rich and sensuously saturated works, she is constantly seeking new solutions to articulate sculpture and the meanings inherent in it.

Out of deceptively minimalist investigations of materials, a narrative language is emerging with increasing clarity in Storch's work. Most recently, in her solo exhibition *Slumping*, it is a language of the physical body, in particular the feminine, fully present body. As the exhibition title underscores, this is a language of the body as acquiescent, collapsing, curvaceous and at rest. In that yielding, a traditionally secret language of the female body is released. The language of menstruation, abortion, desire, pregnancy, exhaustion, lack of desire and surrender, but also resistance.

This book gathers three texts on Storch's work and thought. The first is a conversation between Storch and curator Stine Hebert, who have known each other for more than 20 years as friends and colleagues, creator and communicator. Hebert and Storch take us back to the start of their friendship, when they were both still students, and into the "backroom" that any artist maintains throughout their working life, a room of conversations informing and developing their artistic practice. In this singular space, the many intermediate steps of the work are revealed, the connections between individual works conspicuously laid bare and personal reflections on being an artist candidly discussed. In the text, Storch discusses the courage to speak out about sexuality and gender. And about the personal paradox of always thinking in systems and math, while harboring an old dream to be a wild and chaotic artistic soul.

The second text in this book is by Lauren Elkin, author of *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (2023). In her beautiful, kaleidoscopic essay, Elkin discusses the empowering role of fabric in Storch's art, the bed as a vessel for our bodies and dreams, Storch's first encounters with sculpture, the links to Louise Bourgeois's pregnancy gouaches and the sculptural legacy of the Neoclassical Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, and the question of who is really entitled to sculpt the body.

Finally, this book also comprises a republishing of *Apple Romance – Quest for an alternative theory of gravity* by curator and art critic Paola Paleari. A poetic text, which fascinatingly weaves together Storch's work and Newton's law of universal gravitation.

Thank you for holding this book in your hands. Thank you to the writers, Stine Hebert, Lauren Elkin and Paola Paleari. Last, but not least, a heartfelt thanks to Tove Storch for her never-ending struggle with the status quo of physics and her beautiful language of resistance describing the infinite experiences of the female body.

Stine Nørgaard Lykkebo
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PET NAMES

STINE HEBERT:

Before coming here today, I decided to work out how long we've known each other. I got the catalogue from *Formskrift* off the shelf, because we got to know each other in connection with that project. A group of art students was matched with a group of university students who were going to write a piece about their work. We ended up doing a book and an exhibition. That's 22 years ago. Isn't that crazy?

TOVE STORCH:

Incredible!

SH:

That project was a really unique experience. Now don't start crying. We haven't even started talking yet. It was the first time, as a young art-history student, that I had to write a piece about a living artist. Everything I had written before was about historical works.

TS:

It was about me.

SH:

Yes, I also remember very clearly that it was the first time anyone would be writing about your work. We almost drove each other crazy in the process. But now we've navigated a 22-year friendship starting from there. That's not too bad.

TS:

Indeed.

SH:

It was a long and winding road to get to know each other better and write a piece we could both live with. We took a class together at the university, we read Foucault together and we discussed the critique of power. It's fun to think that the reason we found each other was because of our size and scale in terms of the space. We were entering a very masculine space, right? The discussion about sculpture at the time was dominated by the notion of a male artist operating in a certain way. It was alienating, and we were young, both in our early twenties. But we also had in common that we had roughly the same physical stature. So, we mirrored something familiar in each other, which created a safer road to solving that notorious assignment.

TS:

Another small body with a big vision was standing there.

SH:

Yes, exactly. It's fun to start the conversation there, when you were making your first ambitious sculptures while you were still at the Academy. You actually gave yourself an insane assignment. Can you talk about what you were doing?

TS:

Yes, I was making this playhouse that was like an office building but with rounded corners, so it became a cute

and kid-friendly version of the vision for the future represented by the standard house and the nuclear family of a classic playhouse. It was a comment on the architecture of the early aughts, which had very typical features to visualise a forward-looking and innovative business strategy. It was also a bit of a teasing comment on the whole idea about what the good life is. What do adults want kids to be able to do? It was something I had clearly been feeling myself: adults' visions and concerns about me, who had elected to study art.

SH:

What were those visions and concerns?

TS:

The whole thing grew out of discussions I had with my family and my parents' social circle throughout my time at the Academy. Classic things about how studying art isn't a secure path in life. How could I know if it was right for me? And how could I know that I had what it takes? We had a lot of family get-togethers that were about that, at least as I remember it. But those talks were paradoxical, because I was never praised for anything in my life more than my drawings. It made me think, as it still does, how the values assigned to a child's qualities suddenly change and become worthless when they enter adulthood: it's great that you're drawing, but there comes a time when you have to stop. That's societal prioritising. So, I thought it was interesting to say, "Okay, kids, it's a lie that we want you to play house." Or, "Okay, society wants reproduction, but what society really wants you to do is grow up and go to work. So here's an office building you can climb on." I thought that would be a more honest way of equipping

playgrounds, since otherwise it's a charade.

SH:

But the interrogation you're describing didn't only take place in the private sphere, did it? As I recall, you experienced a touch of it in your professional life as well? You had an art practice that was read as being very formal at a time when that might not have been the popular expression for an artist to have.

TS:

In a way, this early project was my attempt to do what you're supposed to do. That is, deliver a tangible and legible social critique. I saw many of the other artists having discussion meetings, talking things through, forming groups, communities, gathering knowledge related to other worlds which could be used elsewhere, as well. I was never able to do that.

SH:

What interested you?

TS:

I was interested in trying out ideas in real life. When I had a plan I wanted to execute, I just started building!

SH:

What did you build?

TS:

I can barely remember. What did I build?

SH:

I remember you built a big cone that I stored in my attic space for a while.

TS:

That's right. It was a kind of machine that could switch between plane and volume. I just wanted to get it out in the world. It consisted of an inflatable ball inside a large horizontally hanging cone, hooked up to two vacuum cleaners. One blew and one sucked, making the form alternately three-dimensional and two-dimensional. The cone was painted to look three-dimensional, with light and shade accentuating the form.

The whole thing was about seeing it from the side change from flat to voluminous and back, as if it were breathing. I figured out how to do that kind of thing. And if I didn't have access to the right workshops, or money to make a piece in the right materials, I just made it in cardboard. And made it work. That's basically what I'm still doing.

SH:

Back then, there was perhaps a touch more slapstick to your aesthetic expression, but your interest in not hiding, but showcasing, the construction of your sculptures has continued. I specifically remember how for years it bothered you that your work was contextualised as being in the tradition of the American Minimalists.

TS:

American men.

SH:

Yes, white American men who made geometric boxes in reaction to emotional Abstract Expressionism. Many who have written about your work since have placed you in that tradition, as well.

TS:

Yes, I've often been asked to respond to my work's immediate formal likeness to the Minimalists. In the world of art, you have to know what space you're operating in. You have to know what traditions you're playing up against and you have to make sure not to repeat a work that someone else has already made. It's about always doing things in a new way. I find that kind of strange, actually. If you accept the premise that art, or more specifically sculpture, unfolds in a field where materials are explored, then it's basically the same materials that are always in play. The world is made of the same elements, and you'll always encounter some of the same problems, about geometry and basic shapes. Like, what does it mean to be a three-dimensional object and not a flat image?

I didn't start at the Academy because I had seen a lot of art shows. I was interested in art because I had started drawing and creating at a very young age. All kinds of expressionist things. It's a wildly exciting point to go from child to teen, and to professional. You either say goodbye to the child or you're able to save it. In 2017, I did a big exhibition at Viborg Kunsthall, where I unpacked the old moving boxes my parents had kept

with all my drawings from my childhood and teens. The drawings were basically just moved from the closed cardboard boxes to bigger transparent boxes. They kept their horizontal position, only they were lifted slightly apart, as if air were blown between the papers in the huge piles. None of the drawings were selected because they were particularly interesting or better than the rest. But the sheer volume of them, and all the experience and intensity they contained, was orchestrated as something almost sacred. Lying on shelves of silk stretched on a rectangular frame, they became a series of minimal sculptures, filled to the brim with meaning.

I've always been asked to pit my work against history. The conversation never begins from the time I was 20 years old, or 16 or 10. But what have I actually experienced and created in my life? Creativity starts from zero every time.

SH:

Your works are often untitled, though lately there has been a shift. As an exception, you titled your 2020 solo exhibition at Nils Stærk *Apple Romance*.

TS:

Yes, that title came out of a text that Paola Paleari wrote for my show, where she set out to describe gravity. Not as a practical or measurable thing but as something romantic. That collaboration really inspired me to have the courage to call my works by the pet names I was giving them in secret. And in general to dare use pictorial language and symbols. For a long time, I've tried not to lock my works into figurative imagery. I've tried to keep them abstract and open, because I feel free when something is several things at once. But at the time,

some very distinct images were beginning to appear. Iconic feminist images, like the classic vulva motif. That happened by mistake. I hadn't figured out how strong the casting mould had to be to not collapse. I was going to cast some plates, but the cavities I poured plaster into splayed out to the sides, becoming rhomboidal, and then the next layers settled like arches around the rhomboid.

SH:

So you ended up with labia.

TS:

I suddenly had an image of labia on a flat plane. I had built a horizontal painting from a spatial collapse.

SH:

But that was also your divorce show. Can we call it that?

TS:

Sure.

SH:

The show included more than vulva shapes. A bed was located in a very dominant spot. I was struck by the pink shades of silk stretched across the open, inviting bed. What expression were you going for there?

TS:

I guess I was thinking, "Fuck it, let it all just spill over the edge." So, all the things I would normally cut off or

keep bottled up were all over the place. And I gave it the wildest folds, like waves rolling in.

That sculpture is actually a continuation of a bunch of paintings and drawing-sculptures I did alongside the show at Viborg Kunsthall. All the horizontal, stretched layers are really paintings placed one on top of the other. You can't see them, but I know they're there. It was a piece for shouting all my secrets into, which I can just put a cork in at the end, so no one else can hear them. Something is encapsulated in that piece, even if it may not look like it, but I think the tension is there, also for the viewer. Everything spills over the edges and oozes out the cracks anyway.

SH:

When we were at Gammel Strand and saw *Slumping* together, you told me that you always operate in a space of paranoia. Collapse is imminent. What you have orchestrated no engineer has worked out in advance. This is an interest you've long had. In particular, I'm thinking about the silk boxes you sewed for your exhibition at Overgaden in 2008, where the production aspect, the fact that the boxes were hand-sewn, was quite evident, with no attempt at camouflage. But it seems to me that you've now reached an extreme of that investigation.

TS:

Thinking in systems is my brain's default mode. I'm constantly finding patterns and rhythms, and predicting what's going to happen. In my imagination, a small repair crew is always at work, adding extra pillars to bridges or removing unnecessary ones, rearranging bathroom tiles to make the lines match up, planning shorter routes through the city, optimising and analysing.

It's useless work, and a habit I've often tried to break. I've actually been a bit ashamed about it, because I don't think it's the right way to be creative, certainly not feminine and creative. I also think that's why my work resembles Minimalism, and why I think it's a problem that it does. Order is understood as me being orderly, when, in fact, order is my tool for managing a lot of unpredictable and uncontrollable things that come very close to paranoia and anxiety. I think I'm beginning to accept that this is my creative energy, and this is what it looks like when it's given free rein. Then, I can use it to understand the vibrating point between stasis and movement.

SH:

You're showing that now at full force. Not because your aesthetic expression has radically changed, but what underlies your work is much more evident now, I think. A huge outpouring of energy. It's impossible to forget one's body when moving among your works.

TS:

A body with feelings.

SH:

Yes. The specific images your works take on, I think, are becoming more and more pronounced. In particular, I'm thinking about the glass piece you made for *Slumping*, with the two bulging windowpanes. The piece is installed in the window at body height. It's like walking into a bosom. If you did, you'd be looking at the sculptor Thorvaldsen's Museum across the canal, a building filled with monumental, white plaster models of perfect bodies. The glass piece, the breasts, almost droops over

that view. Which is a pretty wild image. I'm guessing you wouldn't have done that 20 years ago?

TS:

No, I wouldn't have dared. Now that the building has breasts, and you look at the world outside through their distortion, you're suddenly situated inside a body. The arch is the brain or skeleton, the ship is the fluid-filled organs, the bed is the heart and love, while the eggs scattered on the floor are like really, really small children.

SH:

There's a distinct erotic pictorial language to your work now.

TS:

Yes. A lot has happened in the years we've known each other. I ride in the slipstream of people 10-20 years younger than me. They've really helped me by having the courage to speak up and change the way sexuality and gender are discussed. When I was young, we didn't really talk about those things. It's only in recent years that I've started talking openly with my friends about sex. Without shame. That's a huge change in my life and my art. In fact, the space of art and the erotic space have always been pretty much the same for me. Forces of nature are at play, everything is heightened, your senses are fine-tuned. A hyper-awareness and presence is at play that I hope will be activated in those who see my work.

SH:

You've titled your exhibition at Gammel Strand *Slumping*. We discussed the title before you picked it. That choice of word has a lot of different meanings.

TS:

I knew that I wanted to do a show about releasing the tension and letting things drop. Relaxing and letting the chips fall where they may. In my early efforts at developing the glass piece for the show, I learned that the technique is called slumping. When the glass becomes hot and soft and malleable, it slumps.

SH:

It seems to me that you've been interested in the method of slumping for quite a while. I recall the piece you exhibited at Kirkhoff Contemporary in 2007, shortly after you graduated from the Academy. It rests on a bed of nails-like construction of metal rods draped in a gold silk blanket. That was an early case of slumping.

TS:

It was. It's the same thing, really. Something wants up. And something wants down. Nature wants to grow. Trees want to grow. Grass and bushes want to grow. And people make things grow. Things that want down slump, and the ambition to build runs counter to that. I try to work with the limp form and the sagging movement, to go with it.

SH:

Yes. But slumping means other things, as well.

TS:

Slumping means a landslide, a fall, a lazy movement. And there's a heap of sexual connotations, too. Wait, I'll get my screenshot of the dictionary ... "A period when a person goes without the expected amount of sex or dating." That's what it means. Damn! It's part of our life force, our instinct for life, to want and yearn. To be needy. I thought a lot about whether I could make a title that embraced ambiguous meanings, that didn't just have a positive connotation but was also raw.

SH:

It also speaks to the fact that we aren't always in performance mode. A great deal of our life is spent at home and is dictated by our caregiving responsibilities. A lot of your work takes place at home at the kitchen table, while an interchange occurs that reverberates and manifests in the giant sculptures now occupying Gammel Strand.

TS:

I'm interested in addressing and revealing the work's production conditions. I can be as concentrated cutting cardboard as I am slicing onions, and my thoughts about how my hands work in one space or the other are often entangled. So, interruptions are a condition, and how do I use that? Making this show, I seem to have realised that structuring is essential, both in my private life and in how I realise my work in spite of it. I can tell

people are disappointed that I'm not an intuitive artist.

SH:

What does that mean?

TS:

That someone is working intuitively with the material, and doing it really freely and creatively. Somehow, being so structured isn't truly creative.

SH:

You have too much control?

TS:

Yes. Everyone really wants me to run wild and let go. I can feel it.

SH:

But you've never been wilder than you are now.

TS:

No, that's right. I double my power by planning and structuring, so I become a machine. That's actually an extremely traditional approach in terms of craft and as a working woman structuring both her work and home life. All the classic female crafts – knitting and weaving – are made up of tiny steps and repetition. Tiny little steps, tiny little lifts of my tired arms, my sore lower back. That's how I learned that to make something really, really big, I have to start by dividing it up. That's particularly evident in my metal piece. My arch. My big arch. It's just one

thing at a time. It's so quiet. You know, there's no doubt about what it can do, all the power that's in it. But at the same time it's so still.

SH:

But there's also something about how the performance can only be executed if there has been a pause beforehand as a counterpoint. This interchange is crucial.

TS:

True. And the negative readings of slumping – limp, drooping, sloppy, lazy – I really like those, too.

SH:

It seems to me that you animate them and turn the hierarchy of values upside down a bit when you question whether we always have to be so efficient and productive.

TS:

For years, I've been trying to do as little as possible, so I can deal. I spend a really, really long time working out the easiest way to do something.

SH:

The question then is, *is* it the easiest way?

TS:

It is for me. Then it kind of gets its own life and becomes my method. Casting in a textile mould is the perfect

way to make this beautiful ship shape. If I had to spend 100,000 years making a casting mould out of 3D-printed parts – fuck, what a hassle. Now it takes me half a day.

SH:

Is there a political statement in turning things upside down? In terms of saying, I can perform even when I'm hibernating or taking a break? That everything is so connected that the two things can't be separated and are interdependent?

TS:

Yes. What's useful, what has value and what's normal? Those are all values we feel when we're little, and we risk passing them on to our own children if we don't realise that the portals to great inventions – efficiency, precision, joy or whatever we're looking for – can be very different. So, I like to push the boundaries of the categories we divide things into: what's creativity, when does childhood end, when do you get to access something? I can easily spend six months gathering my strength. I wait and wait and wait. I may know what I have to do, but I can't pull myself together or I'm not ready. Then, ten days later, I do it. That's both a bit annoying but also defining of what I do. Of course, I think about how power circulates and how I can control it to feel good or be able to show how something feels for me.

SH:

There's an almost childlike fascination with elements we maybe only allow ourselves to really observe curiously when we're kids.

TS:

But then there's molecules and chemistry and astrophysics. I just want to be somewhere in between. It's not real knowledge, it's not real facts, what I work out. The universe is much more complex, and it isn't flat but curved. It doesn't really compute. I don't know if the feeling of letting your body expand during labour, the feeling that what's happening to you is better explained by my casting a massive ship in soap and suspending it, but perhaps it adds an experience to the chorus of many others. All the parameters I set up are about remaining at a certain level of understanding. It's like agreeing to play a certain game. That is, I allow myself to be interested and ignorant at the same time.

SH:

You've built another playhouse.

GRANITE AND RAINBOW, GRAVITY AND GRACE:
ON TOVE STORCH'S SLUMPING

LAUREN ELKIN

Tove Storch's work has long explored tensions between materials—hard and soft, opaque and transparent, textured and smooth, industrial and bodily, gravity and lift. What Virginia Woolf referred to as granite and rainbow: the “granite” of the built world, of fact, of reality, meets and mingles with the “rainbow” of dream, of imagination, of creativity.¹

Because of her affinity for straight lines, for geometry, for exploring shape and volume—the “granite” part, let's say—Storch has often been viewed as a Minimalist. But she is actually an artist of the body, of bodily emotion, bodily knowledge; an artist of the affects, of love, nostalgia, anxiety, paranoia. Her aesthetic preoccupations often involve experimenting with physics, that branch of knowledge where science and the body sometimes clash. She must work with the laws of physics to create the images she wants to explore. Part poet, part architect; part granite, part rainbow. These are the forces informing and supporting *Slumping*, her most recent show at Gammel Strand—but to appreciate this new work, we need to look back to the beginning, to the aesthetic problems Storch faced when she was starting out as an artist, and whose solutions directly inform the shape of the current show.

Storch began her career as a painter, studying at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, but, she says, when the two of us speak by phone, the paintings didn't work. For an artist interested in form and

1 Virginia Woolf, “The New Biography” (1927), in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 4, 1925–1928, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), 473.

depth and movement, the two-dimensional space didn't offer enough possibilities. Trying to find a way out of this medium into another, she removed the canvas from the frame and started rolling the cloth, stacking it, adding bits of color. (These stacks will return, later, at another moment of searching.)

Moving into the sculpture department, Storch felt hemmed-in there, too; at this time a rigid sense of medium reigned, and those who wished to break out of categories and work across forms were discouraged from doing so. She continued to work with cloth, making what she calls "little teddy bears that had no use, just waste material, neither sculpture nor painting." Textiles were, from this very early moment, a way out of whatever artistic category Storch felt confined to.

Storch then traveled to Vienna and enrolled at the Akademie der bildenden Künste (Academy of Fine Arts), where her work became more explicitly concerned with structure. After art school, she worked for an architect's studio, building models, where she learned a great deal about structure and engineering. Storch had become interested in playhouses, building two before her departure for Vienna and one while living there: miniature modernist buildings for children to climb and explore. One sits today in the playground at the Akademie der bildenden Künste. From a formal perspective, this early work inaugurates the importance that not only structure would play for Storch but *containers* in particular. Part of the inside of the playhouse is exposed, painted warm orange on the inside—parents can see their children through windows covered with netting—but part of it is closed off, painted gray, allowing children to enjoy moments by themselves or with each other, in front of the observing parent but concealed from them. Containers, after all, may be limiting, but they also offer us private spaces in which to play and develop and work out

answers to our questions. Still, this period also made Storch feel as if she were caught between two disciplines; as far as the architects were concerned, she was making art, whereas for the artists, it was architecture.

While in Vienna, Storch was exposed to 3D drawing, and the potential it offered for working quickly appealed to her. She was inspired by the way the 3D program would, at that time, make round surfaces flat, so she made cardboard models and painted them in color gradients, similar to the way the 3D programs represented the concept of shape. She painted this light and shadow onto the forms she made, in order to describe their shape twice—once on the surface, and once in the air. To some she attached motors so they would rotate. She says that they spun so fast they would go blurry, creating a new kind of shape that could not be determined in advance, that was outside of Storch's control. This, too, she found interesting. Some of the shapes became quite bodily, or even sexual—a big gray mass ended up looking like a sex toy, a comparison which infuriated Storch at the time but delights her now. What she found she really liked about the spinning was the illusion it created; she did one version of the project with a red basket, which when it was still was a knowable object, a red basket, but when it spun became a column of blur, only half there. "I really like this," she tells me, "because it's like when you try and understand something, you have it and you lose it, and you have it and you lose it."

This spinning phase culminated with a piece in 2007 which she sees as a major breakthrough. She used a graphics program to create positive and negative images of a hummingbird, stuck them to a piece of sheeting, and placed them on a rotating motor spinner. Spun around, the two birds became one flickering image—like a film, or an illusion of a bird flying in the gallery. It had its own dream logic, she says. Up until this point,

she goes on, the technical side of her work had tended to predominate, but with this A4-sized bird, the poetic element came back in. Rainbow returned to granite, and with it, aesthetic questions of perception, reality, texture.

Storch continued to develop this relationship between material and illusion in her first gallery show, in 2007, which featured an astonishing piece made of silk and metal that she left untitled. When I first saw a picture of it, I thought it was made of hammered metal, something lightweight, like a thin sheet of copper. But in fact, it is a piece of silk, precariously balanced on a field of metal rods.

This element of surprise is one of the most significant points of departure from Minimalism in Storch's work. We are not witnessing the truth of materials in a forthright way; rather, we are experiencing the way some materials can mimic others. We are seeing transformation, instability; we are seeing ourselves see. A bit like Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit, which teaches us the difference between seeing and perceiving—and how easily we can mis-perceive what we think we see. This piece is much more conceptual in this way, calling attention to what we are doing when we look at art. What is it we need to see? What kind of information do we need, or not need, when we look at a piece? How important is the reality principle? The *trompe l'oeil* aspect doesn't matter, but rather the combination of reality and poetry, granite and rainbow, metal and silk, and the limited information we can glean from these materials with the eye alone. *Just don't open the gallery door*, the artist jokes when we talk about this piece.

During this period, Storch felt more than usually without words, or images; only raw material. So she let the raw material take over, working with lines, shaky, wobbly lines cut out of paper—the raw material of drawing (*Untitled*, 2008). She continued her investigation into

material and visual information, creating a group of gray boxes for her show at Overgaden in 2008. The boxes looked as if they were made of metal, but actually they were created out of wooden frames and then covered in stretched raw thick shiny silk. Storch left the edges exposed on the floor, the stitching rough and uneven. Their raised rectangular shape—something like a podium, or a mattress—would become an important one in her practice.

Storch continued her interest in containers as hiding places, as well as in these indeterminate rectangular shapes, by creating small books with their pages carved out, like something out of a murder mystery or a detective novel: a way to hide something in plain sight, or a commentary on the limits of art theory when faced with the realities of volume and form. The year 2009 also saw a number of boxes—the *Unknown Objects*, as they're subtitled—containing undefinable things covered by a semi-opaque sheet of fabric that both reveals and obscures them.

And soon after, Storch extended this interest in opaque textile to work with silk organza, a material which is very much with her today, and one with which she has, she says, "a love/hate relationship that I can't let go of, and from which I've learned so much." Looking at the *Untitled (blue/blue #1–5)* series of 2011, it's hard to know exactly how they're put together; there are different layers of silk on different planes, so that it's hard to know exactly where the surface lies. And yet they are entirely surface, a suggestion of definition which could, she says, "pop any moment and disappear." Then, too, the silks are of different colors, which means the eye has to do a bit of work to establish what exactly it's seeing. They are so simple but so complicated at the same time.

Throughout the 2010s Storch would continue to investigate contrasting materials, until, in time, there was

a “collapse” and a “spill,” as she puts it, and these obedient, geometric shapes started to give, and to create new shapes beyond geometry—for instance challenging the strength of metal with volume in some astounding pieces in her 2020 show *Apple Romance* show at the Nils Stærk Gallery, which insist so much on their own presence that the metal starts to bend and stretch. Silk overpowers the metal. Rainbow is more forceful than granite. What looks like a metal filing cabinet with rigid metal dividers is filled with plaster and liquid pigment to the point that the metal becomes deformed, creating the most beautiful pink and peach and deep purple images—bodily, female images.

The art critic Paola Paleari has described *Apple Romance* as a “quest for an alternate theory of gravity”: “While I observe the metal plates deforming under the pressure of the liquid plaster, I see [Newton’s] apple rolling uselessly at my feet. An original, sovereign form of energy is at play here; one which seems not to care about the concepts of mass and weight force, and how they are supposed to interact with each other.”² Indeed when I first encountered Storch’s work, I was most struck by her work’s relationship to gravity.

When we meet on Zoom to discuss this, her fingernails are painted a peachy-pink, matching the celebratory flowers beside her, in turn matching the striking shades of pink in the new show, which has just opened that weekend. She tells me about the years she spent vacillating between art and architecture, how they gave her a good foundation in planning and structure, like an engineer, and how she began to depart from them. “I always want to put a little bit of ‘up’ in my work,” she tells me. “To create lift you need structure, and for structure you need math, and that leads you to straight lines.” But her impulse is then to mess with those lines,

2 Paleari’s text was printed on apple-scented paper and handed out at the show.

to make them more organic. There isn’t a single straight line on the human form. Why do we insist on making the built environment a series of straight lines? And at the same time, why does the straight line represent rationality and logic? Maybe the straight line can be an expression of chaos barely contained, and the curved line one of control, or of calm.

An important part of Storch’s practice which she has developed in recent years is a daily improvised dance session in the mornings. It has to do with a physical way of apprehending the world, she tells me, in opposition to theory; it used to just be something she did for fun, but she has begun to take it more seriously. “No one told me you could think through dancing,” she says, “they told me only that you could think through reading. This kind of non-verbal movement is a means of valuing the knowledge of the body.” This embodied knowledge inevitably informs the sculptures; dance lends another dimension to this interplay between gravity and grace. What is more subject to, more defiant of, gravity than the dancer’s body?

The new show is a massive leap forward, at least for those of us looking at Storch’s work from the outside. But, she says, all of this has been “sizzling” away inside of her for quite some time.

Throughout her career, Storch tells me, people have expected her, as an artist, to let go, go wild, and time after time she has demonstrated a need for structure, and planning. The life of a mother-artist, especially, is quite controlled behind the scenes; there are a million small tasks to perform, none of which can be dropped or abandoned. And so for this new show at Gammel Strand, underpinned by her new morning dance routine, she wanted to explore the sensation of letting go. To slump: to relax. To let the body fold, roll onto itself. Or: to take a break, sexually speaking, usually not on purpose.

A release of tension from the body, as after a long day of work and childcare.

There is something absurd in the shape of the fold, and it made Storch want to try out a paradoxical form—a boat made of soap. An absurdity, she says—if it set out to sea it would dissolve, and the ocean would turn to foam. Her soap boat, included in this show, was created by pouring 350 liters of liquid soap onto a piece of thick canvas held up by a very strong metal frame. The soap collects in the material and the canvas sags, creating this boat-like shape; it stains the sides, making it look like a boat made of raw silk. The floral scent of soap drifts out into the gallery. As in *Apple Romance*, the metal frame sags, and Storch anticipated this. It is a technique used by bridge builders, she says, to save material; they work with the weight of it, and the curves it creates. It is easier, she says, than working with straight lines. This ship is not, incidentally, unlike the pregnant body, which stretches and adapts for the period of its matrescence.

With this unsailable (unassailable?) ship we might say that Storch is firmly within what the American writer and art critic Lucy Lippard calls the “eccentric idiom.”³ Because however controlled and precise Storch’s sculptures may be, they have also already contained the key to the undoing of their precision, their apparent immaculateness. A piece which is officially untitled but referred to in the show notes as *Arch* sits in another room, comprised of 600 metal rods laid across supporting metal bars collapsing under their own weight. Just as with the much earlier spinning works, the shape they form is not one Storch has chosen for them, but one they find on their own through submission to gravity. The metal rods are dirty, fraying; they look like leather draped across their

frame. It is a textile work without textiles, which surprises in its replacement of wool or thread with metal on metal. This apparent tactility removes them from the category of the industrial and brings them closer to the bodily.

Though it is a work of slumping, the work is composed of many points of tension, which allow the material to bend and fold, the concave convex curve of the dancer’s body in movement but vibrating with the body at rest after great exertion (what Lippard calls “the rhythm of postorgasmic calm [...] an eroticism of near-inertia”⁴). The drape or the fold creates new points of connection: new ways for the body to know itself, and new ways for us to view material.

But the final piece in the show extends Storch’s interest in color (she calls it an “obsession”) from those early color gradient experiments. “Colour,” writes the Canadian poet Lisa Robertson, “like a hormone, acts across, embarrasses, seduces. It stimulates the juicy interval in which emotion and sentiment twist.”⁵ It would have been impossible for Robertson to have been looking at some of Tove Storch’s sculpture when she wrote those lines in 2002, but the final piece in *Slumping* exemplifies the kind of wild color Robertson was picturing: a bed which is not a bed that anyone could ever lie in, composed of diaphanous layers of a saturated poppy red that is almost an astonishing pink, the red-pink of outrageous sunsets, springtime lipstick, period blood, naughty lingerie, the pink of Louise Bourgeois’s pregnancy gouaches. There is urgent need fulfilled here, in these sheets pulled taut, then relaxed. (Talk about post-orgasmic calm and the eroticism of near-inertia.) There is kinetic potential in their drape. Sunlight pours into the

3 Lucy Lippard, “Eccentric Abstraction,” in *Changing: essays on art criticism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1971), 99.

4 Ibid., 111.

5 Lisa Robertson, “How to Colour” (2002), in *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2011, 3rd ed.), 129.

room, gathering in their layers, rimming their edges. It's like a bed appearing and disappearing at the same time, abstract and figurative at once.

This bed is a kind of spectral evolution of an earlier bed, a more concrete bed, an actual bed in fact, from *Apple Romance*. That bed had gossamer bedclothes in pink and orange that crashed, wave-like, to the shore (the floor). It was a strikingly messy and unstructured gesture, a leak in a body of work that has tended to discipline and structure.

At Gammel Strand, that formal exuberance has been tamed, but the rainbow has turned up in other surprising, impossible-to-predict places. Where the bright fabric lays obediently down on the ground, Storch has nestled raw eggs, yolks intact, in little vulva-like ceramic dishes. Reminiscent of Sarah Lucas's *oeuvre* (pardon the pun), the eggs are a brilliant, absurd touch, given the fact that they're raw, and need to be changed, and have their own life, maybe even smell to them. In this promise of olfactory presence, in the affect they create—is it curiosity? repulsion, perhaps?—they cross the line between the art and the viewer. These little egg trays—are they vessels, ships?—are again, located somewhere between abstraction and figuration. They remind us of the consequences of sculptural gesture, and the images that result, which are often quite bodily and—without wanting to be too essentialist about it—female.

Between the eggs and the light streaming in, the piece conveys a particularly domestic feeling that's gone a bit wrong: one of waking up in the morning and the sun's coming in and someone's brought you breakfast in bed but they didn't cook it, they just left it on the floor. Capsized domesticity, a hint of spill. Taken together, the draped silk and the raw eggs seem really louche and loose but actually they're quite severely organized, working against the idea that the feminine—for this

piece establishes itself firmly in the domain of feminine codes—has to be messy.

The American artist Sheila Hicks, who has worked intensely with fabric her whole career, has said of her practice that “Textiles had been relegated to a secondary role in our society, to a material that was either functional or decorative, I wanted to give it another status and show what an artist can do with these incredible materials.”⁶ Across *Slumping*, from this gorgeous bed to the canvas soap boat to the leather-like metal rods, Storch has sought to wrench the textile away from the domain of the feminine and the decorative—while simultaneously reclaiming them. She's happy for textile to be recognized as “female,” she says, but she is trying to redefine what “female” work can be. She is expanding the field of the feminine, to include not only messiness and tactility but regulation and precision.

The layers which comprise the bed recall an image that recurs in Storch's work—the stack. Formally speaking, the stacked pieces of silk remind me of a series of structures which Storch made from 2016 onwards, reminiscent of the kinds of filing cabinets architects use to store their enormous plans, in thin but large drawers. In hers, Storch began by placing all the drawings she'd made during her childhood on shelves made of stretched silk, with opaque faces. They were minimalist sculptures, but they were filled with her childhood archive. Other versions of this piece included drawings made more recently, or ink drawings on silk made with Storch's whole body wiping across the fabric. Storch's work is expressive, but it is not—importantly—self-expression. And yet the self is not entirely absent from her work; it is very much present.

6 Monique Lévi-Strauss, “Oral history with Sheila Hicks,” Archives of American Art, Feb. 3–March 11, 2004. Accessed March 15, 2024: www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oralhistory-interview-sheila-hicks-11947#transcript

The way the bed formally echoes these earlier works makes me think of the bed as another kind of container. Each sheet stands in for the years and years of experimenting with artistic forms and processes, invisibly layered beneath the surface, necessary to have laid down to arrive here, at these brightly colored pieces of silk. And together they give the bed a kind of historical inflection—as if our beds were our own archives, the place where all our dreams are held. As the French feminist Michelle Perrot writes, in her history of the bedroom: “The bed—the intimate receptacle of the body—keeps its secrets.”⁷

But there is another piece in the show which I have saved for last, an explicitly feminine form, marvelous in the Surrealist sense, and a figurative departure for Storch. In one of the Gammel Strand windows, Storch has replaced a pane of glass with one that features the shape of a pair of breasts (or “lumps,” as she calls them). The window frame becomes another kind of container, like a picture frame, a gallery, a doorway. In Surrealist art, the female body was shot and painted, in Mary Ann Caws’ words. But here, it is held. It imposes itself on the gallery, but in the most fragile and transparent of ways. A disturbance in the way we usually see the world. I am reminded of the glassblower who created a champagne coupe in homage to Lee Miller’s breasts (an echo of the 18th-century artisan similarly inspired by Marie Antoinette).

These glass breasts are a reference to the technique in glass production called *slumping*, in which a piece of glass is heated and laid onto a mold, into which it is guided by gravity. They invite the visitor to stand in them, and relax, to let their body obey gravity, instead

7 Michelle Perrot, *The Bedroom: An Intimate History*, trans. Lauren Elkin (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2018), 66.

of fighting it so assiduously as we are taught to do, with the help of complicated undergarments. They are a reminder that gravity will ultimately have its way with the human body—gravity, and time.

The breasts are the final stroke in Storch’s immersive, site-specific installation, submitting the building itself to her vision. But where exactly on the building they are placed is a cheeky bit of stagecraft. Directly out the window from these breasts is the warm Italian yellow of the Thorvaldsens Museum across the canal, and behind it Christiansborg Palace, the government building previously familiar to me, a non-Dane, as the setting of the hit Danish television show *Borgen*, about a female prime minister trying to hold down both her office and a family. It is a stroke of genius for this particular show to be held in such close proximity to that museum. Thorvaldsen was born into a working-class family in 1770, went on to study at Storch’s own alma mater, the Royal Danish Academy of Art—his old studio was once part of the Royal Academy’s sculpture department, where Storch worked on her spinning objects—and moved to Italy, where he became a prominent Neo-Classical sculptor, receiving important commissions and accumulating wealthy patrons. When he finally returned to Denmark, he was received as a hero, and given this museum, with its prime real estate in the center of the city.

To juxtapose Neoclassical pomp, the genius of Rome, monumental sculpture, sculpture commemorating war, with the work of Tove Storch, an inheritor of the anti-state power, heretical, feminist accomplishments of the second half of the 20th century, is to receive a quick lesson in the arc of art history. Thorvaldsens’ delightful *Dancing Girl* (1817–22) is Ancient Roman pastiche, but still a fine example of sculpture’s classic concerns, in the delicate modeling of her neck, her gait as she transfers her weight from one foot to the other, the drape of

her dress and her shawl, which billow as she moves. How radically different is Storch's dancing girl—she is not physically present, but her moving body, all gravity and grace, informs each piece. Storch's works do not adopt the heroic contrapposto pose; they slump.

Though working in a Neoclassical vein, Thorvaldsen does not seem to have favored works promoting war, preferring the domain of the arts and sciences (Schiller, Gutenberg, Copernicus), the classical vernacular (gods and goddesses, shepherds), and the Christian sublime. But there are exceptions—a beautifully oxidized bronze sculpture of Hercules, for instance, complete with bearskin and club. Storch's bed is a monument to more personal conflict—of the domestic, of the body—that are *just* as universal, just as heroic, as the usual triumphant bronze celebrations. But it is also a reminder that there are no monuments to femininity in our cities, only to masculinity, masculine power, destruction, male heroism.

Perhaps more significantly, the works in *Slumping* are not destined to be placed in some future Storchs Museum down the road. Storch doesn't plan to preserve them at all; they were made for the here and now, not to be foisted on posterity. In this sense they share in the ephemerality, for instance, of a dance performance. That is a radical artistic gesture, perhaps a more important one than historical commemoration, certainly a more selfless one. How do we leave our mark? Must we leave a mark in the historical sense? How will they know we've been here? Must they know we've been here? Or will they know simply because they exist, because we carried their bodies into existence, because our bodies knew how to make them? Those who can give birth, who have been marginalized from the centers of power, are the real master creators, the true sculptors of the body.

In her posthumous book *Gravity and Grace* (1947), the

French philosopher and activist Simone Weil writes that “counterbalancing” is a key part of healthy social and political functioning, and that one must use the self as a “lever”: “We lower what we want to lift.” I see this in Storch's boat, its canvas moving up and down at the same time; in the silk layers of her bed, which slump down even as they are lifted up; in the textile-like metal of her arch; in the glass lowered into its mold in order to lift it from the ground. Weil is always weighing up perceived opposites, bringing them into a surprising relation which she calls *grace*. “Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void.”⁸ Weil was writing in a specifically Christian tradition, but I find that her mystical philosophy resonates profoundly with Storch's aesthetic concerns. And not only Storch's; in the art historian Rosalind Krauss' classic 1979 essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” she looks at the work of 1960s artists who sought to “explore the possibilities of architecture plus not-architecture,” names like Sol LeWitt or Richard Serra, and concluded that “whatever the medium employed, the possibility explored in this category is a process of mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience—the abstract conditions of openness and closure—onto the reality of a given space.”⁹ Storch, in a career that has moved between all the major media in the visual arts, finally finds the most freedom—the most grace—in this place between openness and closure.

“If gravity is the work of creation,” Weil's friend Gustave Thibon glosses, “the work of grace consists

8 Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 11.

9 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 287.

of 'decreating' us."¹⁰ I find this simultaneous work of making and unmaking throughout Storch's career, from the spinning bird, to the archives of stacked invisible drawings, to the dishes of raw egg posed around the bed. Storch is working with the raw material of the psyche, but she is—in another Weillian gesture—stripping it of the *I*, working in a vein of personal impersonality.

It puts me in mind of another young Jewish saint, Eva Hesse, in whose tradition we may place Storch with rather more confidence than that of Simone Weil. Gravity is for Hesse, as for Storch, and arguably for Weil, in another register, a co-creator of the sculpture. *Hang-Up* (1965), for instance, has just this lift, this bit of "up" which Storch wants to infuse all her work with, but it is the ultimate coming down of the wire which gives the piece its reach and its impact. To say nothing of the many cords and wires throughout her work, or the suspended pieces, which carve their shape in the air through a specific combination of gravity and grace. There is also the absurdity of a work like *Hang-Up*, or the assorted stacks of test pieces in latex-like sheets of prosciutto or lasagna pasta, or the 30,760 holes filled with plastic tubing in *Accession II* (1969), which, like Storch's arch, seem to lose their industrial hardness to appear soft and yielding.

But where Hesse and Storch part ways is in their feeling for beauty. In an interview given not long before her death in early 1970, Hesse told the art critic Cindy Nemser that, as far as she was concerned, beauty was "the only art sin." She was talking about a sculpture she had made in 1969 for a show at the Jewish Museum called *Plastic Presence*, a draped piece made of fiberglass,

I felt it needed more statement, more work, more completion, and that was a mistake because it left the ugly zone and went to the beauty zone. I didn't mean it to be that. And it became for me—I don't even want to use the word in any interview of mine—decorative. That word or the way I use it or feel about it is the only art sin.¹¹

Hesse was worried about her work becoming decorative, and therefore unimportant. *Beauty*, as she uses it here, reads as *inessential*, *feminine*, *craft-y*—the very opposite of the autonomous work of Modernist art that Hesse was after. I understand her concern; she was a young woman making art in the distinctly sexist art world of 1960s New York, where your innovations might well be claimed by some man and there was nothing you could do about it, where other artists in her age group like Carolee Schneemann or Hannah Wilke were dismissed for making representative work involving the female body (often their own). But in our own time, we have rather more freedom to reclaim beauty; in fact, it increasingly feels like a feminist obligation to refuse the distinction by which beauty is suspect, because "feminine" or "decorative."

In contrast, Storch told me that she wanted these pieces—the bed especially—to be "*so beautiful it makes you want to scream*." Just completely over the top." Weil's schema of gravity and grace makes room for beauty, accords it, indeed, a central value in her theology: "Beauty" she writes, "captivates the flesh in order to obtain permission to pass right to the soul."¹² Storch's work, on the other hand, makes space to recuperate beauty as intensely embodied; as captivating the flesh

10 Gustave Thibon, introduction to *Gravity and Grace*, op. cit., xxii.

11 Interview with Cindy Nemser, in Mignon Nixon, *Eva Hesse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 16–17.

12 *Gravity and Grace*, 148.

in order to sink, or slump, deeper into the body. To capture something of what it means to live in flesh—since we know of no other way to live.

Apple Romance.
Quest for an alternative theory of gravity

I know what gravity is. I learned it in school. I might not be able to recite Isaac Newton's law of universal gravitation, but I do remember the apple that fell on his head.

For a few centuries after 1666 – annus mirabilis – the same apple lorded over everybody's head. That until Albert Einstein came to prove that space and time are not static and absolute, but dynamic and relative. Gravity does not exist; gravity is an illusion.

My high school physics teacher never really managed to fully explain the theory of relativity to his pupils and himself. He had stopped at Newton. And I with him. ("It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry," A.E. wrote in 1949.)

While I observe the metal plates deforming under the pressure of the liquid plaster, I see the apple rolling uselessly at my feet. An original, sovereign form of energy is at play here; one which seems not to care about the concepts of mass and weight force, and how they are supposed to interact with each other. How am I supposed to interact with them? ("The attempt to erase physicality is, for me, highly problematic," T.S. told me in 2020.)

I become aware of the ignorance that has been handed down to me. It's not muscles that make it strong. It's not bars that make it straight. If I really want to penetrate the process at stake beneath the epidermis, I

should consider avoiding the path of least resistance. I can start by googling how gravity has otherwise been explained. Maybe something like "can gravity be romantic" would do.

At the hundredth tab I open in my browser, I lose track of what I have been looking for. I got distracted by reading that the bite (byte?) in the Apple logo is there for scale, so that it cannot be mistaken for a cherry.

What I eventually find exceeds my expectations. Serendipity can still occur in the realm of the algorithm! And surely in the realm of the artist. But of course, the most notable example of serendipity remains Newton being struck by a falling apple. (Thump.)

Light
expansive
(universe dissipates)

↑
MATTER
↓

Gravity
contractive
(universe collapses)

Here is the fundamental formula of the Naturphilosophie by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. In opposition to the Newtonian picture of matter as constituted by inert particles, Schelling argues for it as a constant negotiation between active energies that

engage in opposition to one another. ("Without contradiction, there would be no life, no movement, no progress, a deadly slumber of all forces," F.W.J.S. wrote in 1811.)

Hold on! The apple is proving worth the headache. Gravity, as the physical weight that precedes light as its dark foundation, opposes resistance to nature's free productivity. Gravity grounds the matter and limits its desire to produce indefinitely. By doing so, it saves the universe from dispersing into the shapeless chaos of its own dynamism.

While plaster dust fills the room, my vision clears up. If one force won, the trinket would explode or crumble. It's the combination of the differences that keeps it together.

Now, before I continue in my quest for an alternative theory of gravity. Let me ask you, Sir Newton: how do you fit such a throb in that mechanistic box of yours? You can bolster and prop it, and still, it will deform, react, readjust. It has its own *Potenz*.

Sure, you can stretch it so to make it look smooth and proper. Yet if you look beyond the corners, you can see it overflows. It slips. Which, I would say, is more than just a metaphor: it's an image. ("I have a recurrent mental image of things slipping out of my hands," T.S. told me in 2020.)

Things slip and fall because of gravity. All things, including those with no mass. In the last book he finishes in his lifetime, Shelling highlights the correspondence between

gravity (*Schwerkraft*) as the weight of the matter and melancholy (*Schwermut*) as the weight of the soul.

I wish I learned this in school: melancholy is the world's original condition. The productivity of nature and the creativity of the spirit are governed by the same intrinsic structure. A structure that is hard to lift, hard to carry because it is impregnated, heavy with life. ("In this melancholy is founded the sympathy of man with nature," F.W.J.S. wrote in 1810.)

Hence, that raft of magentas is not light by definition. Accordingly to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Color Wheel, magenta is schön. In his earlier *Temperamentenrose*, which matches colors with associated psychological characteristics, magenta is grouped with violet and red under the melancholic temperament.

For Newton, color is a scientific measurement. For Goethe, it is a subjective experience perceived differently by each viewer. How many shades of magenta can light kindle at once? ("Colors are light's suffering and joy," J.W.G. wrote in 1810.)

The apple is ripe. In no particular order:

gravity;
light;
magenta;
beauty;
melancholy

are its components.

The results achieved by physics in the decades following Schelling's treatises demonstrated their nonsense on a scientific level. His doctrine has longly been marked as ambiguous and unclear. But hey. He saw the world's soul where Newton could only see the world's clock. He borrowed the terms gravity and light and changed them radically. I hope poetic visions are still worth the headache of reading twice.

Bearing this in mind, I would now like to invite you, Sir Newton, and you, Mr. high school teacher, and all of you, dear guests, to take a bite of this apple and chew on its ontological queerness for the space of your visit.

After a few nibbles, you will realize that your apple does not taste like others you have savored before. Or like your neighbor's. It borrows the form of an apple and changes it radically. Swallow it, and all the -isms will drop on somebody else's head. You might find out you like cherries best.

*Paola Paleari, Copenhagen,
March/August 2020*



Sketch in studio, 2000. Photo: Tove Storch



Untitled (Playhouse), 2004, Kindergarden Lulu, Vienna. Photo: Manuel Gorkiewicz



Untitled (Inflatable Cone), 2005. Wood, acrylic, balloon, elastic, 2 vacuum cleaners, timer, 300 x 200 x 150 cm. Photo: Tove Storch



Untitled, 2007. Inkjet on plastic, wood, stones, metal, motor, frequency converter, 80 x 80 x 295 cm. The exhibition space Q, Copenhagen. Photo: Tove Storch



Hummingbird, 2007. Inkjet on paper, lamination on PVC, foamcore, metal, motor, sensor, 52 x 78 x 20 cm. Photo: Anders Sune Berg



Untitled (Floating surface, high), 2007. Silk satin, metal, 45,5 x 150 x 215 cm. Kirkhoff Contemporary Art, Copenhagen. Photo: Anders Sune Berg



Untitled, 2008. Paper, pencil, ball pen, tape, 40 x 60 cm. Photo: Tove Storch



Untitled (Unknown objects III), 2009. Metal, powder coating, cloth, silicone, magnets, 250 x 65 x 130 cm. Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen. Photo: Anders Sune Berg



*Untitled (Metal objects I-VI), 2008. Silk, wood, variable dimensions.
Overgaden – Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, installation view.
Photo: Anders Sune Berg*



Untitled (blue/blue #1-5), 2011. Stainless steel, dyed silk, variable dimensions. Nils Stærk, Copenhagen, installation view. Photo: Anders Sune Berg



Untitled (Archive of drawings made between 1983-2000), 2018. Silk, aluminum, drawings on paper, variable dimensions. Viborg Kunsthall, installation view. Photo: Kurt Nielsen



Untitled, 2016, 66 works on paper, 528 metal parts, 166.4 x 83.8 x 63.5 cm
Photo: Unknown



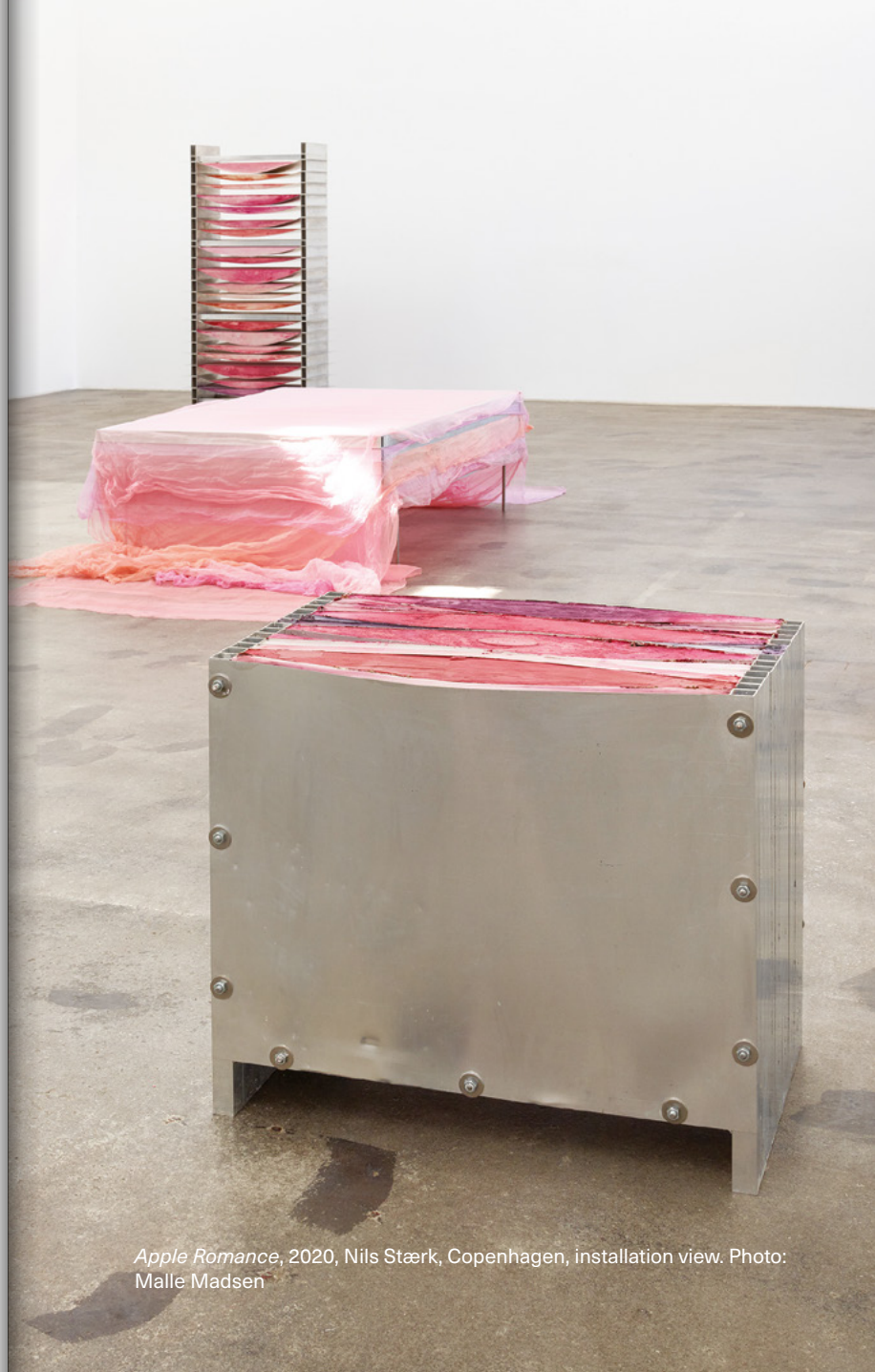
Untitled (Archive of drawings made between 1983-2000), 2018. Silk, aluminum, drawings on paper, variable dimensions. Viborg Kunsthall, installation view. Photo: Kurt Nielsen



Untitled, 2016. Silk, ink, powder coated metal. Two parts, each: 125 x 260 x 100 cm. KØS Museum of Art in Public Space, Køge, detail. Photo: Anders Sune Berg



Sketch, 2008. Photo: Tove Storch



Apple Romance, 2020, Nils Stærk, Copenhagen, installation view. Photo: Malle Madsen



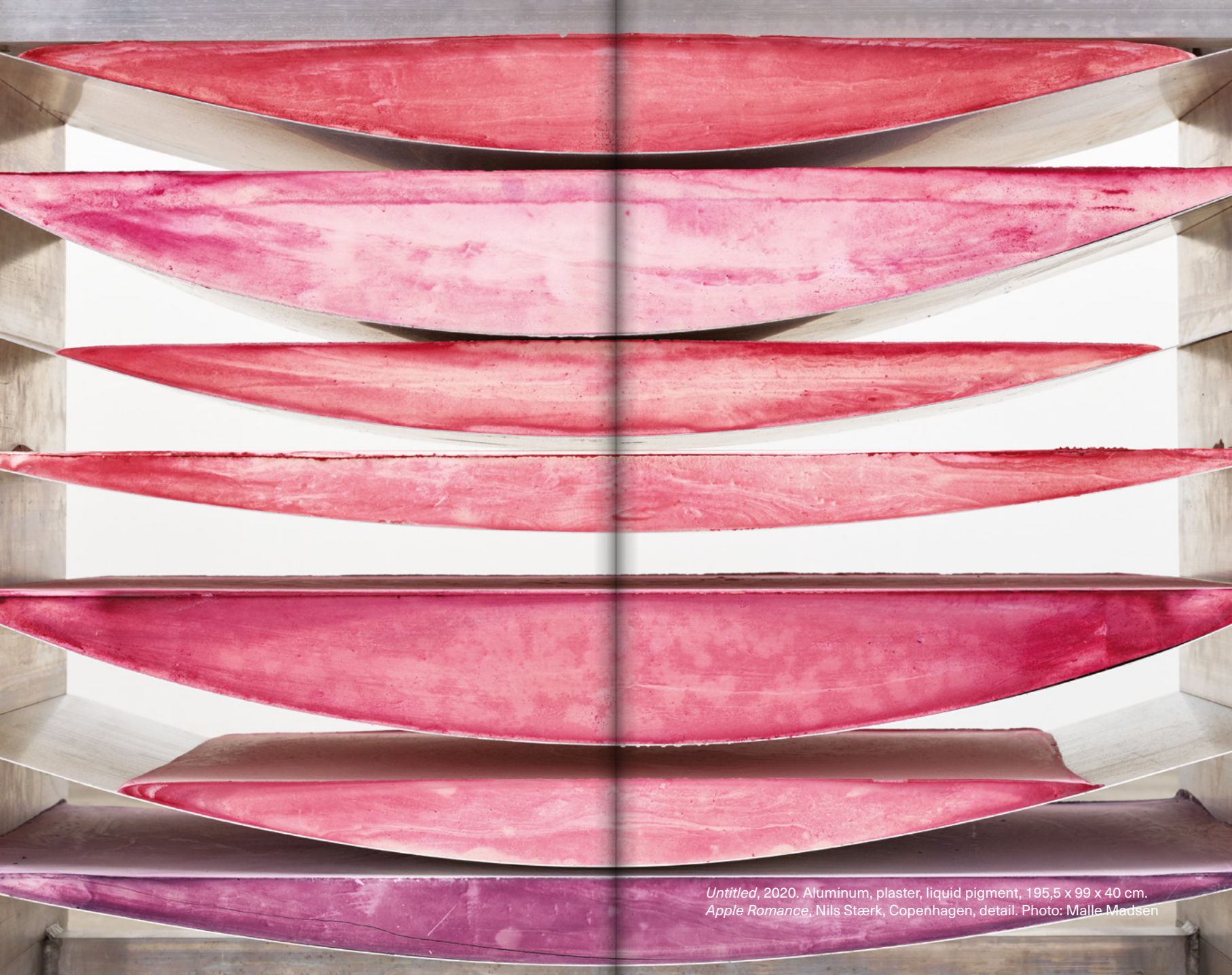
*Untitled, 2020. Aluminum, plaster, liquid pigment, 71,5 x 82,5 x 49 cm.
Apple Romance, Nils Stærk, Copenhagen. Photo: Malle Madsen*



Untitled, 2020. Aluminum, silk, liquid pigment, 55 x 200 x 120 cm. *Apple Romance*, Nils Stærk, Copenhagen. Photo: Malle Madsen



Untitled, 2020. Aluminum, silk, liquid pigment, 55 x 200 x 120 cm. Apple Romance, Nils Stærk, Copenhagen. Photo: Malle Madsen



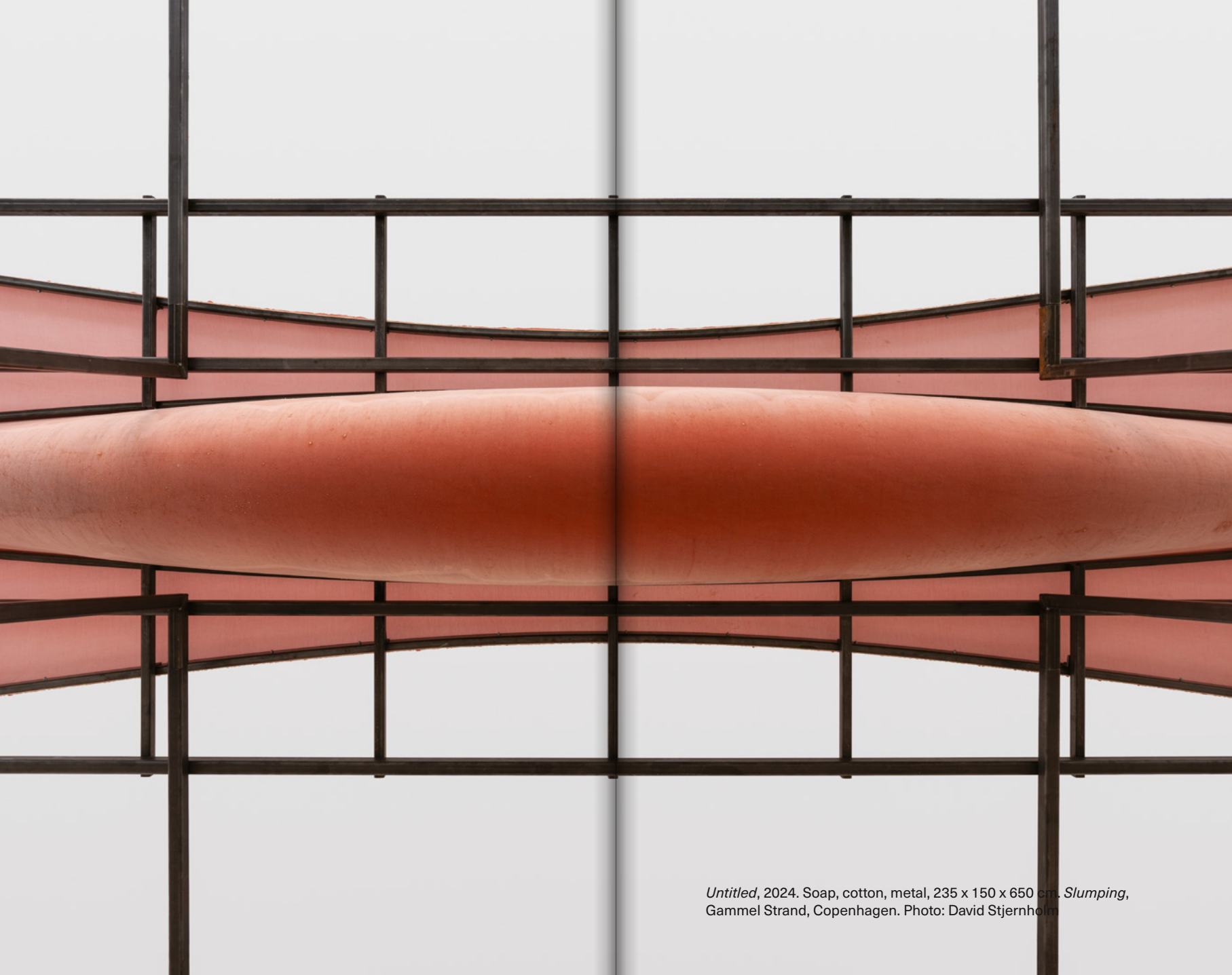
Untitled, 2020. Aluminum, plaster, liquid pigment, 195,5 x 99 x 40 cm.
Apple Romance, Nils Stærk, Copenhagen, detail. Photo: Malle Madsen



Untitled, 2020. Aluminum, plaster, liquid pigment, 195,5 x 99 x 40 cm.
Apple Romance, Nils Stærk, Copenhagen. Photo: Malle Madsen



Untitled, 2024. Soap, cotton, metal, 235 x 150 x 650 cm. *Slumping*,
Gammel Strand, Copenhagen. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Soap, cotton, metal, 235 x 150 x 650 cm. *Slumping*,
Gammel Strand, Copenhagen. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Soap, cotton, metal, 235 x 150 x 650 cm. *Slumping*,
Gammel Strand, Copenhagen. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Metal, 102 x 410 x 465 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen detail. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Metal, 102 x 410 x 465 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, detail. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Metal, 102 x 410 x 465 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, detail. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Silk, acrylic, metal, 370 x 171 x 336 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, detail. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Silk, acrylic, metal, 370 x 171 x 336 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, installation view and detail. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Egg, porcelain, dimensions variable. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, installation view and detail. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Glass, 47 x 30 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, installation view from inside. Photo: David Stjernholm



Untitled, 2024. Glass, 47 x 30 cm. *Slumping*, Gammel Strand, Copenhagen, installation view from outside. Photo: David Stjernholm