

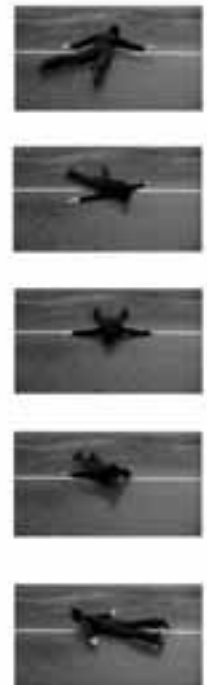
Eva Labotkin (*1982 in Tartu, lives in Tallinn) has made a number of pieces involving her own body to reclaim or occupy space, to become part of the environment, or to test the division between privacy and public. In her works *Break* and *Circle on Yellow Cross* (both 2009) she lies on her stomach on the street, all dressed in black with a hooded shirt covering her head. Her body is angled in such a way that it relates to the street's marks, continuing the lines, interrupting or completing them. For the duration of the performance which is now only accessible through the resulting photos, the body is set free from speaking, communicating, acting. Its new purpose is to be part of a composition of lines, to relate to the environment, to be a texture in relation to another texture. The action is also related to the act of hiding, of camouflage, of wishing to blend in. Yet, instead of disappearing into the asphalt, the figure becomes all the more visible in its characteristics that are unmistakably human, sticking out like a sore thumb.

Another series playing with the body and its relation to its surroundings are the sleeping pieces. These videos show Eva Labotkin sleeping in public spaces: on monuments, playgrounds, in the lobby of a skyscraper in London, on rocks. The pieces are created during the day, without getting permission and without announcing them, filmed with an inconspicuous small digital camera. During sleep, body and mind separate to a certain extent with the mind drifting off into the unconscious, into dreams and a zone of uncontrollability while the body remains, like a shell. Unable to speak or react, it gets closer to being an object that is subjected to the power and responsibility of others. Labotkin plays with this allusion to the sculptural, finding places to sleep where her body seems like a natural addition to the pre-existent structures, for example on a gigantic lion's foot. But instead of disappearing, the sleeper is totally exposed and the action of sleeping can also be read as a comment on the surroundings, its meanings, rules and conventions. The lion for instance traditionally symbolizes power, sovereignty and has served as a heraldic animal for many countries and regions. By falling asleep on the monument, Labotkin undermines this power gesture and treats the statue as a support for her head, ignoring its majesty and any intimidating effect it might have.

For *Acts of Refusal* Eva Labotkin has traveled to Stockholm with the intent of falling asleep at IKEA. The company's mission is to "furnish the world" and it seems to get closer to its goal from year to year, creating a global style of furnishing one's house: in 2011, its products have been sold in over 40 countries and the print run of the 2012 edition of the IKEA catalog will be 208 million.¹ There is not an IKEA in Estonia (yet) but some Estonians travel to Sweden or Finland to shop there. Traveling to Stockholm in order to fall asleep parallels the image of sleeping on a lion: it is a gesture of oversleeping the hype, not participating, refusing to take part and questioning its significance. The action blends private and public sphere, interlocking the use of the furniture in one's home and the purpose of the show room, reaching a moment of total absurdity where nothing seems to function as it should. The shared space and its objects, structures and propositions become a playground and test field for Labotkin. Sleeping here is not an image for retreat – on the contrary, it is a provocation, directed to the viewer, interrupting a pre-existent order and stepping over codes of behaviour.

Kathrin Meyer

¹ In 1994 it was disclosed that Ikea's founder Ingvar Kamprad has been part of an extreme right wing group but that did not damage the company's success in any way. See Daniel Birnbaum, "Ikea at the End of Metaphysics," in: *frieze*, no. 31, November – December 1996, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/ikea_at_the_end_of_metaphysics/, last accessed August 19, 2011.



Break, 2009
Performance, photos



Falling Asleep on the Lion, 2009
Video still

Falling Asleep in IKEA bed, 2011
Video still



Touched Tower, 2009
Video stills