

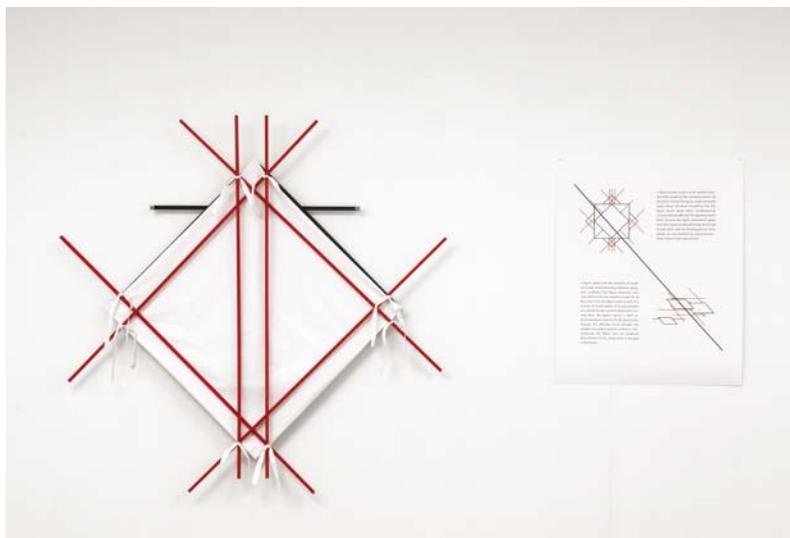
# HEART OF THE MATTER

Getting through the many layers of Falke Pisano's work

TO ENGAGE WITH FALKE PISANO'S publication *Figures of Speech* (2010, edited by Will Holder) is a bit like eating an artichoke. You deal with one leaf at a time, slowly uncovering hidden but logically organised layers slightly different from the previous ones. Your eating can only be done with a certain amount of patience, and you are advised not to start on an empty stomach (this is no filler). If you follow the advice, and add the right accoutrements, it is delicious.

*Figures of Speech* is an intriguing account of the Berlin-based artist's extensive body of work of the same title. Over a period of five years the project developed in stages involving texts written by the artist, performances based on the texts, images and objects based on the texts, and then performances and texts referring back to the images and objects, etc. New contexts and ideas added fresh oxygen to what at first glance might seem like an exercise in formalist self-referentiality. Upon closer inspection it becomes clear that this seeming auto-reflexivity is not a narcissistic pirouette but consists of carefully considered feedback loops where each new round does something different.

The texts come across as semiopaque exercises of logic, logics based on stipulations that take as their starting point 'the object as performative site' – Pisano's major concern. How can



'Context', 'collaboration', 'subjectivity' and 'agency', typically thought of as key words within social practice-type work, are part of Pisano's flux. In *Figures of Speech* she shows that these terms are not exclusive to that immaterially inclined field, which is marked by a desire for transparency, but remain

words **MARIA LIND**

a static thing be the locus of action? Real action? How can an artwork be a speech act? Can a sculpture be turned into a conversation? Her own objects, often made of textile and with a touch of the handmade, are vaguely reminiscent of abstract works by the classical avant-garde, from Tatlin and Malevich to Anni and Josef Albers. Images of the work, as well as images as the work, appear now and then in Will Holder's strict and yet quirky publication design. (When did you last read a diagonally printed text, in small font?) As a reader you are taken on a ride that requires concentration: one thing morphs – albeit in controlled ways – into the next and, before you know it, returns in yet another guise.

relevant within other traditions as well. Including object-based ones. Her take is to embed the key words in a discourse that is hermetic rather than lucid, thereby subjecting them to her own careful perception, description, deconstruction and, eventually, reconstruction.

In addition to offering excellent brain gymnastics, in which the tension between complex yet elastic ideas and firm form, between material and immaterial manifestations of art, is particularly thrilling, the publication is an example of the potential of a good old piece of printed matter. And it is around here that something unique happens with this surprisingly performative project, bound to its pages as it is. Despite its hopelessly analogue nature, or perhaps thanks to that very feature, the rhetoric of the publication encourages you as a reader to – like the artist and her editor – do some serious and detailed work. Not unlike what an artichoke requires.

Falke Pisano, *Figures of Speech* (Figure 1), 2009, wood, fabric, paint, 129 x 120 x 9 cm, and *Figures of Speech* (Figure 1), 2009, inkjet print on archival acid free paper, 76 x 61 cm. Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London