

MILLEKALSMOSE

SPIRIT FAMILY

By Richard Vine,
the managing editor of Art in America magazine and the author of *New China, New Art*.

In her installation *Tribe*, Danish artist Mille Kalsmose addresses one of the most universal of all artistic themes—the family. The sculptural objects, gathered into five groups, are sized to evoke individuals of various heights and ages standing, rod-straight, like parents and children at a reunion. But the highly stylized figures—composed of steel stands that bracket sheets of wood, silk, or pigskin—evoke more than just living individuals. They also conjure up a whole genealogy of departed kin, now present as spirits. Indeed, many of the elements bear a formal resemblance to the ancestral tablets found in traditional Chinese temples and homes. The fact that these flat forms lack inscribed names only broadens their associative power. They could commemorate any of our progenitors, and they seem—simultaneously, hauntingly—to await the time when they may serve as funereal markers for those who view them today.

Such an association of family members with mortality, of living flesh with visiting spirits, is no doubt prompted by Kalsmose's personal history. Some years ago, her mother committed suicide, and the artist is now in the process of being legally adopted by another woman. In 2013 she collaborated with Spanish photographer Alberto García-Alix to create the installation *Searching for a Mother*, which invited viewers to insert their heads into dangling photo-lined cubicles, thus entering directly into scenes depicting Kalsmose's relationship with her new parent.

In China, *Tribes* reminds us, such individual abandonment is nearly inconceivable. Each steel-rod figure is an integral part of its group; each group stands in balanced, meaningful rapport with the other ensembles. The work is almost a schema for Confucian fealty. The Great Sage saw the nuclear family, with children—having been given all, including life itself, by their parents—tied to their mother and father with lifelong bonds of love, obligation, and respect. This intimate interpersonal dynamic was then the model, on an ever-increasing social scale, for the mutual care between citizens and local officials, local officials and provincial governors, provincial governors and ministers, ministers and the distant but ever attentive emperor.

In East Asia, any name inscribed on *Tribe's* hanging silk (that most "oriental" of all possible fabrics, synonymous with fine garments and time-honored Chinese painting) would take the form of family-name-first. In that way, for millennia, individuals have been assured at birth—and reminded with every introduction and every conversation throughout their lifetime—that they belong, first and last, to a social entity that precedes and embraces and outlives them. How different from the Western convention of naming, in WHICH ONE IS identified first as an isolate being—Robert, Mary, Lisa, John—whose personal identity is only secondarily, almost as an afterthought, attached to a family name.

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撰文：理查德·怀恩，《美国艺术》杂志主编，《中国当代艺术》一书作者。

在装置系列《部族》中，丹麦艺术家米乐·卡尔斯默瑟阐述了最为普世的艺术主题之一——家庭。雕塑模样的物体集成五组，尺寸各异，令人想起不同身高和年龄的个人笔直地站着，就像父母和子女聚在一起。然而，这些风格鲜明的形象——在钢质底座上架起木头、丝绢和猪皮拼装而成——令人想到的不仅是活生生的人，它们还将整个宗谱上的已故血亲召回，以魂灵的状态存在。确实，此中的诸多元素与传统的中式祠堂和家宅里的祖先牌位有着形式上的相似。这些平面上没有题下名字，这恰恰放大了它们引人联想的能力。它们可以纪念任何人的先祖，同时似乎还阴魂不散地等待着时机成为它们今天的观众日后的随葬标识。

家人与亡故、生者与还魂的联想无疑来源于卡尔斯默瑟的个人过往。若干年前，她的母亲自杀身亡，艺术家现在被另一位女性合法收养。2013年，她与西班牙摄影艺术家阿尔贝托·加西亚-阿利克斯共同创作了装置《找个妈妈》，作品邀请观者将脑袋探到布满照片的悬置方室，直接走进展现卡尔斯默瑟与她新妈妈的关系的一幕幕场景中。

《部族》系列令我们想到，在中国，抛下一个人踽踽独行是很难想象的。每一个金属杆人形都是那一组完整的一部分；每一组都与其他组融洽地伫立着，平稳而有意义。这件作品几乎概括了儒家的忠。圣人孔子看到核心家庭的子女——由双亲赐予生命及一切所需——与父母一生都以爱、义务和尊敬维系。这一人与人之间的相处之道在当时是典型，随量级不断增长，适用于百姓与地方吏、地方吏与州官、州官与大臣、大臣与高高在上却时时体察的帝王。

在东亚，题在《部族》作品中的丝帛（所有织物中最“东方”的一种，是上等衣物和中国古画的代名词）上的姓名都是姓在前名在后。数千年来，这种形式认定了——在有生之年的每次介绍和对话时还会提醒——人们从一出生就彻头彻尾地属于一个自己出生前已有、去世后仍在且一辈子摒弃不了的社会实体。这与西方的命名习俗截然不同；后者首先以独立的生命来辨别个人——罗伯特、玛丽、丽莎、约翰——之后，他们的个人身份才被冠以家族的姓氏，如同一个追加的念头。