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Review of Nataliya Zuban doctoral dissertation entitled: "The transition between industrial and natural landscape within the realm of abstract ceramics", prepared in connection with the doctoral dissertation in the field of art in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation, initiated by the Faculty of Ceramics and Glass, Academy of Art and Design Eugeniusz Geppert in Wrocław.

Ms. Nataliya Zuban was born on January 31, 1992 in Opishna, Ukraine. She studied at the Lviv National Academy of Art in Lviv, Ukraine, where in 2015 she obtained a master's degree.

Her artistic achievements to date are impressive and cover the entire spectrum of activity in the field of art. She has participated in artistic residencies three times in China, South Korea, and Germany. In addition, she is a double scholarship holder — she received a presidential scholarship in Ukraine and a ministerial scholarship in Poland. She has also received three artistic grants — two in Ukraine and one in the Netherlands. She participated in 11 symposia and workshops, 9 international competitions and 17 collective exhibitions. He also has curatorial and organizational experience in the implementation of ceramic workshops and contemporary porcelain exhibitions in Ukraine. In 2020, her individual exhibition took place in Wrocław. Her works can be found in the collections of museums and galleries in China, South Korea, France, Spain, Ukraine, Poland, Germany, Turkey, and Lithuania. To the above achievements, one can add participation in the international ceramics conference in 2021 and participation in 8 compact and 15 internet publications. I am convinced that the abovementioned rich artistic output would certainly have been even more extensive, had it not been for the Covid-19 pandemic, which in the past two years made it impossible to carry out a large part of the planned exhibitions, workshops, and artistic residencies. Taking also into account the active participation of the doctoral student in teaching during doctoral studies, I can say that Ms. Nataliya Zuban is a person strongly involved in the broadly understood activity in the field of art.

As in the case of Ms. Zuban's artistic achievements mentioned above, her doctoral dissertation is a rich and committed study of a creative concept. The doctoral student describes the phenomenon of abandoned post-industrial objects very reliably, at a high linguistic level. Fascinated by their unusual, non-obvious beauty and individualized character, which was shaped in the process of degradation — in her observations, she goes beyond the context of architectural utility. Nataliya Zuban draws attention to the plastic and visual qualities of eroded buildings. She searches for and rediscovers the colour, form, texture, and texture of objects in which — with the passage of time, the influence of atmospheric factors or degrading human activities, sometimes even vandalism — new layers of architectural palimpsest are revealed. She carefully looks at the changing form and condition of buildings and thoroughly analyses the transformations of abandoned buildings and post-industrial structures which are subjected to material destruction and disintegration. She notices the historical and cultural heritage in them and commemorates them, retaining the process of their decay in the form of a commemorating artifact. Despite the universal nature of the topic, the author does not avoid "personal" themes, emphasizing the relationship with her close surroundings — post-industrial objects of Ukraine. The concept of Nataliya Zuban's work is not only interesting to me, but also familiar in its own way, due to the topic of similar ideological topics — for several years, while working on my postdoctoral degree, I had studied the issue of post-industrial artifacts as creative inspiration, based on the remains of a ceramics factory in Mirostowice and its visual heritage:

For almost 25 years, Ceramic Factory of Mirostowice has been absorbing the forest. Nature takes over the old factory, obliterating the traces of its long-gone splendour. In an unequal struggle, the forest absorbs halls, kilns, mills, larger and smaller abandoned elements. Once useful, today they are only mementoes of themselves. The artifacts created by me are a record of the memory of the passing time, they are reflections taken from real forms, saved / recovered from the rubble of the Ceramic Factory, supplemented with artifacts recalling the previous epoch. They are a form of a note, tokens from the past. It is a petrified spirit — miniature Pompeii, whose everyday life froze in burnt clay. (Handzlik)

The PhD student, analogically, notices that the clay matter gives almost unlimited possibilities for creative writing. Plastic mass, which is a part of nature, extracted from it, after fixing in the shape we want, allows us to create a parabola between nature and human products. It is a metaphorical link between the past and the present. It has the potential of becoming a commemoration.

As a part of her doctoral thesis, Ms. Nataliya Zuban presents a collection of four series of carefully refined ceramic objects.

The first to be presented is the set called "Parts". It is the most sculptural collection — light plays an important role in it, which shapes individual objects equally with the structure. The forms seem to be the most monumental (in the context of the other cycles).

Although the works (except for one object) are actually larger than those presented in the other series, the impression of their format does not result from their physical size. It is a kind of dormant power in the form given to them by the author. They give the impression of elements of once powerful buildings, of whose memory they became the guardians after the destruction of the structure for inexorable time. Thus, they almost fit into the context of the historical museum collection presenting the remains of ancient or medieval buildings — "inselbergs", stone fragments.

The title of the second series of works — "Surfaces" — suggests a different form. It is lighter, more fragile and decorative. It gives the impression of apparent randomness. I don't feel any formal consistency in the cycle. It is rather a story about polychrome discoveries in old buildings, where wall decorations of different character have been preserved in fragments. The most intriguing thing about it is the randomness of the colour of the surface, which appears in some of the works.

Being accustomed that natural factors wash out the colours, and most architectural remnants adopt a neutral colour of plaster or mortar in various shades of grey or beige — when we see an incidental colour in such a space, we naturally become emotionally animated. The leftover in some places colourful spots are eye-catching and inspire imagining the whole building in its original form. It is more interesting as; for some reason, attempts at copying and colouring the old, black and white films and photographs are continuous and constantly improved. As if we were genetically incapable of coming to terms with the lack of colour in the surrounding space, but above all as if we were unable to contain our natural curiosity leading to checking whether the proposed monochrome message shows the same world as the one in which we exist at the moment.

From this point of view, Ms Zuban's work could not be complete without the above thread as a complementary artistic story about abandoned post-industrial buildings.

With the third "collection", Zuban introduces us to the intriguing world of transforming human products into forms re-appropriated by nature. As in a well-constructed novel, the plot is skilfully developed, and we read the engaging story with increasing commitment. Watching nature gradually absorb the places we abandoned — once so important — is absolutely fascinating. The

multitude of emotions aroused by entering the post-industrial space of post-industrial buildings and watching it change in front of our eyes, a seemingly powerful architectural structure, is extraordinary.

Such unusual, most organic of all the groups of objects proposed by the PhD student are those entitled "Found objects". Vibrating, naturalistic, "biologically" rich, they illustrate the quiet power of nature, which calmly, slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, adapts what a human has torn from her womb. In these works, both the colour and the texture imitating the tissue of an undefined lichen are not only visually attractive, but also testify to a perfectly developed technological recipe giving the intended effect of the concrete surface absorbed by time and nature. Nataliya Zuban managed to create beautiful, paradoxically subtle ceramic forms illustrating the above issue.

The final of the artistic work is the fourth group of objects, which are the culmination of the establishment. The concept of telling the idea of a transition between the industrial and the natural landscape through a ceramic medium has been aptly artfully summarized.

For the average viewer, the presented works are an image of an eroded building material, evoking at first glance the illusion of a partially damaged but still permanent form. Only after a closer look at the objects, it becomes clear that these forms are a kind of fragile — as the author herself calls them — "blown eggs". The perceptible disturbance of the surface in the form of irregular holes formed in the process of shaping and fixing, makes us aware of their extraordinary fragility. It is hidden under the apparent durability of objects caused by the shape, structure and colour. This is the essence of the phenomenon of interpenetration of the worlds of a man and nature, which is the basis of the entire doctoral dissertation.

Undoubtedly, Ms. Zuban's actions are an attempt to show, through her own creative experience, the unwavering power of abstract art. Nevertheless, looking at the presented works, I have an overwhelming impression that it is only partially abstract and objectless art.

By imitating the creations of nature shaped by the erosion of man-made objects, she rather refers to the imitation of forms. The author draws attention to abstraction more in the way of thinking, in the concept of creating a parabola between ceramic objects and the architectural heritage of industrial objects. In distant echoes, it brings to mind the work of "matter painters" — Tapies or Burri. Who, through a particular "approach" to matter, fragment and destruction, show the world as real as it is abstract. Ephemeral and durable at the same time. Therefore, one can risk a thesis that Ms Zuban's works are realistic in their own way — they correlate and imitate.

Here, it is worth recalling the figure of Krystyna Cybińska, an outstanding artist and professor at the Faculty of Ceramics and Glass at the Wrocław Academy of Fine Arts. Stone became one of the

leitmotifs of her art. Her projects referring to the forms of nature in an extremely true way reflect its non-visible essence — strength, primordiality, coldness — Cybińska perfectly illustrates the directness of nature with its tangible power. If a ceramic stone is created, its content is not smoothness or rough texture, but, at best, a fascination with them as visible heralds of the idea of stone — the timelessness of being in silence. In my opinion, the series of doctoral dissertations by Nataliya Zuban refers to this "visible idea of stone".

It also belongs to the trend of ceramics, which I would describe as an "imitator of things", because it meets three categories in the context of imitatio: imitation of natural things, imitation of created things (objects), imitation or depiction of states, concepts, that is generally speaking of an immaterial, incorporeal abstract, "pure idea" — from imagination — combining them all into a coherent artistic statement. With reverence and artistry, constructing forms depicting universal phenomena.

Closing the part devoted to the works themselves, it is worth mentioning the way in which the work is presented. All the works in the series have been photographed in a specific context, placed in post-industrial spaces, fit in with their character without losing their own values. These are forms, on the one hand, complementing the landscape chosen by the author, on the other, their character as artistic works is absolutely independent and I am convinced that they could easily appear in the "clean" space of the gallery, apart from decorations of the degraded architectural environment — without losing anything of their own aesthetic attractiveness. I believe that their content was inscribed in the form created by the author in such a way that "relocation" would not take away the ideological weight. Thus, the concept of Zuban works well in changing spatial contexts, which proves the high level of the work of art.

It should be emphasized especially thorough research work on the technological aspects of the components used, which preceded strictly creative activities. Nataliya Zuban's doctorate is an infrequent, yet intriguing example of insightful and independent research on the possibilities of matter, which are to allow for conscious shaping of matter, obtaining intended and desired visual effects — reaching technological virtuosity through experiment. With her work, the PhD student proves that the matter "listens" to her. The author is highly aware of the medium, very good form shaping skills, and she efficiently moves between the form, texture, surface texture and its colour. This brings to mind the words of the previously mentioned prof. Krystyna Cybińska: *"Craftsmanship is the language of art"*.

In her theoretical work, Natalia Zuban skilfully, reliably and consciously introduces us to the world of individual artistic inspirations. It presents the work and creative attitudes of artists-guides

important to her. However, she does not resort to easy quotations and makes an effort to express her opinion through her own, original reflection. Sincere interest in specific activities in the field of art prompts the PhD student to subjective analysis. In the theoretical work, she presents an in-depth reflection on the psychophysical aspects of the reception of art, referring to iconic scientific studies and authorities in the field of perception and psychology. It tells metaphorically about the disintegration, the transformation of man-made constructions, the process of returning to nature, and thus the ever-reviving cycle of extracting and transforming matter from nature, and then its inevitable return to nature.

Paradoxically, she does not give in to spontaneous action, but precisely constructs the technological foundations of her artistic work. Testing clay in countless forms of various experiments becomes the foundation of the author's works, which are to trigger free strings of thought associations in the recipient.

I have the impression that, as a one in love with the process of technological experiment, the PhD student subjects the viewer to her own experiment. Assuming that our individualized feeling is superimposed on her technological experiment, she is thus examining our individual perception.

Conclusion

Ms. Nataliya Zuban's doctoral thesis entitled: "The transition between industrial and natural landscape within the realm of abstract ceramics" is an original, creative work, of a high artistic level, created with great awareness. Both the theoretical and artistic part create a coherent picture of the knowledge and skills of the doctoral student, predestining her to independent creative work. After analysing her dissertation and creative achievements as well as professional practice in the field of art, I fully recommend her obtaining a doctoral degree in art in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation.

References:

Cybińska, Krystyna

Handzlik, Katarzyna. "Objective artifacts / subjective artifacts" habilitation thesis, Academy of Fine Arts Wrocław 2019.

