

The review of the doctoral thesis of mgr. Nataliya Zuban entitled: 'The transition between industrial and natural landscape within the realm of abstract ceramics'. In the area of art, in discipline performing arts and art conservation, started in the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław.

Ms. Nataliya Zuban was born in 1992 in Połtawa, Ukraine. She studied from 2009 to 2015 in Lvov Academy of Fine Arts, where she was awarded Master's degree. A list from her documents shows that the doctoral student is a very active person. Her works are in the art collections in Spain, Turkey, South Korea, Germany, China, Lithuania and Ukraine. Individual exhibitions are not her domain, but rather participation in contests, conferences, workshops and ceramic symposiums. The amount of activities is impressive, I am not going to list them here, but suffice to say that she was appreciated by the International Academy of Ceramics (IAC) and received their membership in 2019. Three cycles of works, presented in the documentation, 'forest', 'urban impression' and 'by touch' express artistic maturity. They confirm discipline of work, excellent understanding of ceramic material and perfect technique. The fourth cycle 'industrial archeology' comprises motifs, which were developed in the doctoral thesis. In these works, the author is focused on examining matter and the form itself seems to be less important for her.

The assessment of the doctoral thesis:

Inspiration for this doctoral thesis is influence of industrial landscape, but rather post-industrial because it is about neglected and deteriorating buildings from the recent past. A ruin is a very interesting and trendy topic in culture because of many symbolic and semantic meanings. It embodies unity expressed in conflict of different orders. In philosophical order a ruin is a picture of passing and irreversibility of time. In esthetical order a ruin provides specific experience implying a question about beauty and ugliness. In historiosophical order a ruin has a character of catastrophic predictions concerning culture and civilization. Permanent ruins of Chernobyl and Fukushima are terrifying monuments of catastrophe. My feeling is that in the first chapter the author did not use theoretical potential fully, which the topic of ruins has.

She focuses mainly on an esthetic aspect and only touches slightly potential possibilities, just signaling individual leads such as revitalization of industrial areas or Industrial Archeology, not going further. She does not elaborate on possible reflections about contemporaneity and various levels of meaning of ruin in culture. The author is mainly interested in the aspect of industrial heritage from the perspective of her own experiences and artistic activity. Taking post-humanistic perspective and taking over to nature, which 'forms new values' is the base for inspiration for research work of the doctoral student.

*'Abandoned architecture, which is not, in any way, regained, transformed, preserved or disciplined by a human being, undergoes the process of appropriation by nature and its form and shape change due to impact on 'former human structure' of changeable weather conditions and chemical processes. [...] In this context ruinisation of architectural work is caused by repeated intrusion of nature into the order of cultural presentation.'*¹

In the second chapter the author cites approaches of three artists Irina Razumovskaya, Enric Mestre and Sara Jeffries, who had a huge influence on her and influenced her work. The examples are aptly chosen and approaches of the artists are interesting, but an attempt could have been made to look at art from a wider perspective. In the theme of ruins, I think of interesting interpretations and interferences in architecture such as the work 'Stairway' by Monika Sosnowska or the work 'Rockaway!' by Katerina Grosse. The scale of those activities is also completely different.

The third chapter of the theoretical work explains the ways of human perception, especially the perception of abstract art. We are familiarized with theoretical assumptions of the project and author's expectations with regard to a viewer. Theoretical foundations are clearly presented but their interpretation seems to me too unilateral, especially in respect of neuroscience and perception of reality. Since we agree that perception is created in our brains, then the conviction that our worlds are the same is dramatically untrue. Theoretical foundations for the artist's work are strong. The doctoral student says 'I try to create conditions for a viewer, which can become a starting point'. This strong belief in viewer's engagement and assumption that he/she participates actively in 'proper' (as the author had planned) reading her work seems to me too optimistic. Especially in the area of identification of textures, because it assumes first remembering and then recognizing what is seen.

A ruin has a tendency to disintegration and fragmentation. The fourth chapter refers to fragments of destroyed industrial structures. Fragments of disintegrating architecture inspire to experiment with ceramic matter. The author describes in detail the methods which allowed her to gain desired textures and colours. The whole of her work is based on desire to reach peculiar mimicry. The obtained colours and textures are very close to natural surfaces of various elements of decay. In my opinion, the description of these experiments is the most interesting and valuable part of theoretical work.

¹ Ruinologie. Kontekstualizacje pozostałości architektury. UAM 2018 Małgorzata Nieszczerewska str. 26

The fifth chapter presents in descriptions and photographs collections of created ceramic objects.

The doctoral thesis directs to light to peripheries of our attention. Post-industrial buildings in centres and on the outskirts of cities. We have spectacular examples of revitalization such as Stary Browar in Poznań, which was considered the best shopping center in the world. It combines commercial functions with functions of an art gallery. We have examples of neglected buildings of top architecture such as a factory in Luboń near Poznań designed by Hans Poelzig, the author of Four Domes Hall in Wrocław or the Grand Theatre in Berlin, which there is still hope for. There are also many other buildings, which are decayed to such an extent, that they can only be an example of desired and fashionable process nowadays of returning landscape to nature.

Assessment of practical work:

The doctoral student used fully possibilities of the Technological Experiment Laboratory run by prof. Bożena Sacharczuk. The completed programme of doctoral research has innovative solutions, both workshop and technological ones. Original usage of available ceramic materials gave interesting effects. Four series of works were created, which illustrate this interesting technological experiment.

I am not sure whether the presentation of these objects amid decaying architecture, is a good idea. Although it shows how well these works fulfill the surrounding of ruin, they can be really regarded as fragments, decaying architectural elements, but their aggressive setting weakens interaction of their colours and textures.

The doctoral student overshadowed on purpose the issues of form by focusing on experiments with colour and texture. Despite this, a few objects from 'Parts' series have interesting shapes which resemble natural stones. Black and grey, sand-blast, refractory clay looks very noble, its matt surface reflects light softly.

The series 'Surfaces' is like in contrast, it seems to be too colourful and shiny. Flat elements with incidental shapes seem to be taken out of the context, they are interesting as experience with glaze, colour and texture, but they move away from the topic of ruin because it is difficult to find in them effects of decaying architecture.

Forms of 'Found Objects' present a very interesting and successful experiment with surface. They successfully imitate surfaces covered with lichens and moss. They illustrate dehumanized beauty of return to nature the elements created by humans.

The fourth series, objects from coloured china are similar to bricks in colour, but their shape is very different from the geometry of a brick, chaotic, shapeless, non-harmonious, so it is just like a ruin.

The author achieved the desired goal by her actions. Research work combined with experiments with ceramic technology has led to interesting results, a collection of very different works has been created. They reflect the character of a ruin not only visually in individual elements but also the collection as a whole is close to its ambivalence depicting parallel destruction and creation, disappearing and decay and creation of new values and

meanings from remains. A construction emerges from this process, a bit visible and invisible, present and absent. Summing up her work, the doctoral student expresses some lack and places achieved effects as a beginning of a new bigger project. This is a very conscious approach. I am sure, that knowledge and experience gained during this realization guarantee further artistic development at a high level.

After getting acquainted with rich artistic resume and the content of the doctoral thesis entitled 'The transition between industrial and natural landscape within the realm of abstract ceramics' of mgr. Nataliya Zuban, I rate them very highly. The presented theoretical and practical work is very interesting. The descriptive part could be more extensive, but it is a valuable completion of practical work and proves knowledge and skills of the doctoral student sufficiently. Particular attention should be paid to original, innovative technological solutions, their effects confirm fully the ability to run independent artistic and research work. I wholeheartedly request the doctoral committee to allow for public defense of the thesis and the Artistic Discipline Council of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław to confer the degree of doctor to mgr. Nataliya Zuban.

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