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Review of the doctoral thesis of Mr. Karol Krukowski MA

in connection with the doctoral proceedings in the field of the arts, in the discipline fine arts and art conservation, initiated by the Council for the Artistic Discipline of The Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław

Title: ***The Pillory. Photography as a leading structural element of a picture book***

Supervisor: **prof. ASP dr hab. Maja Wolińska**

Karol Krukowski was born on May 27th, 1980. In 2002 he graduated from the Higher School of Photography "AFA" in Wrocław with a BA degree. In 2006 he graduated from the Faculty of Art at the University of Zielona Góra with an MA degree in painting in the field of photography. Then, in 2007, his education was supplemented with a qualifying course in pedagogy at the Faculty of Artistic Education of the University of Arts in Poznań. In 2012 he passed the exam for the rank of appointed teacher. The next stage of his educational path was a PhD with English as the language of instruction at the Faculty of Graphics and Media Art of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, which he commenced in 2019.

Artistic achievements

The doctoral student chose photography as his main area of artistic activity. He lists receiving the scholarship of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in 2011 and scholarships of the Marshal of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship obtained in 2007 and 2013 (preparation of photographs for a picture book entitled „The Servant's Diary” [*Dziennik Sług*] based on the novel “Journeys of Gulliver” by Jonathan Swift) as his most important achievements. Works from the series "Gulliver Portrait and other pictures from the Servant's Diary" [*Portret Gullivera i inne obrazy z Dziennika Sług*] were included in 2013 in the art collection of the Lower Silesian Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts. He was also a finalist in the Photographic Publication of the Year competition in 2013 (project entitled “Broken – Dreams” [*Rozbite – marzenie*]).

In addition, selected artistic realisations from 2002-2016 have been indicated: (“Passage” [*Przejście*] /ESK 2016 Program Mosty, Wrocław, 2015; "Gulliver Portrait and other pictures from the Servant's Diary" [*Portret Gullivera i inne obrazy z Dziennika Sług*], BWA Wrocław/Galeria Dizajn, 2012; “Broken – Dreams” [*Rozbite – Marzenie*], BWA Wrocław/Galeria Dizajn, 2012; “Citizens” [*Mieszkańcy*], Teatr Polski, Wrocław, 2006; “The Invisible Map of Wrocław” [*Niewidzialna Mapa Wrocławia*], BWA Wrocław/Galerie Sztuki Współczesnej 2004; Galeria Raster, Warszawa, 2005; CSW Łaźnia, Gdańsk, 2005; BWA, Bydgoszcz, 2006; Galeria Pauza, Kraków 2006; “Armchair” [*Fotel*], BWA Wrocław/Galeria Dizajn, 2002). The attached documentation lacks information on the individual or collective nature of the listed exhibitions.

Didactic achievements

Since 2004 Karol Krukowski has been working as a photography teacher and lecturer. According to the attached documentation, he has gained practical teaching experience while holding classes in many educational centres: Center Of Creative Attitudes [*Ośrodek Postaw Twórczych*] in Wrocław (2003-2008); The Jan Cybis Art High School [*Zespół Państwowych Placówek Kształcenia Plastycznego im. Jana Cybisa*] in Opole (2004-2008); Regional Center Of Education [*Regionalny Ośrodek Edukacji*] in Wrocław (2008-2014); School Complex No. 15 [*Technikum Fotograficzne Nr 15*] in Wrocław (2008-2014); Higher Study of Photography AFA [*Wyższe Studium Fotografii AFA*] in Wrocław (2010-2013); International Forum

of Photography KWADRAT [*Międzynarodowe Forum Fotografii KWADRAT*] in Wrocław (2010-2013); Lower Silesian School [*Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa*] in Wrocław (2015-2019); Author's Artistic and Academic High School [*Autorskie Licea Artystyczne i Akademickie*] in Wrocław (since 2015 till present time).

Since the beginning of his teaching career he has combined teaching with artistic practice. He has been a promoter of diplomas, a curator of exhibitions, an organiser of plein-air and events, and an animator of culture. Since 2019, a large part of his professional practice has been carried out online, where, he runs an original educational channel called "Karol on photography", provides remote consultations and publishes educational videos, among other services

Evaluation of the doctoral thesis

This review is based on documentation presented in digital form, a bilingual dissertation in printed and digital form, and a printed book publication. The submitted documentation prepared by Mr. Krukowski is complete and exhaustive. The starting point of the dissertation is the assumption of the concept of photographic and literary work. The issues addressed here concern a relatively new phenomenon in artistic photography, called *a picture book*. The term covers the issue of co-existence of visual and literary contents in one common work. The doctoral student bases his analysis of the issue on source materials and his own work, looking for answers to questions concerning the construction of narration and the medium of photography as a tool for the dialogue. His research covers both the aspects of photographic technology as well as those of an aesthetic and philosophical nature, and it also invokes many theoretical and practical notions.

The doctoral dissertation is a study of theoretical assumptions of the presented work, a description of subsequent activities and the result of completed research – the result of many years of photographic activity and 3 years of doctoral studies. The paper length is 75 pages, including illustrations. The structure of the dissertation consists of an introduction and 14 parts of varied length and character – implicitly referred to as chapters. In the subsequent parts of the paper, the doctoral student describes his achievements in the period before the commencement of his PhD studies. There he draws attention to his inspirations, the type of topics undertaken and the issues of interest to him. The dissertation is crowned with a list of illustrations (26 items) and bibliography (34 items – Polish and foreign publications in the field of e.g. theory and history, philosophy, children's literature, fiction and references to own and co-created works).

The paper is mainly devoted to the relation between the coexistence of text and image in the *picture book* form. In the introduction to the theoretical description, the doctoral student presented brief assumptions of the work, indicating his interest in photography as a tool for dialogue and indicating his interest in the chosen form of artwork. Next, the author presented artistic projects completed so far, which, according to him, constituted the basis for the undertaken doctoral dissertation topic. This description shows that since the beginning of his creative work, he has shown interest in the relation between literary fiction and social aspects. He quoted the project entitled "Gulliver Portrait and other pictures from the Servant's Diary" [*Portret Gullivera i inne obrazy z Dziennika Sługi*] (2012) as an example of previous activities created in this vein. Later he presented his intentions and artistic plans for the development of a project based on the close combination of photographic image and text and the inclusion of this analysis by means of photography, pointing out to the phenomenon of *genius loci* which had interested him for a long time. He made such an attempt in an interesting project entitled "The Invisible Map of Wrocław" [*Niewidzialna Mapa Wrocławia*] (2006) or "The Passage" [*Przejście*], devoted to places in the city he lived of varying fame. What is important in these types of activities is empathy and an approach to places and people in a way that cannot be fully explained in a rational manner – with a large dose of empathy and a desire to learn. This important characteristic of the artist is undoubtedly present in the doctoral student's attitude. Each of the previous works described, defining the city as an area of artistic practice, helped him to realise the artistic project which is the object of this evaluation.

The work on the doctoral thesis project was sparked by the interest in the convention known as *the picture books*, especially in the books of this type directed at children. The formula of this type of publication means that its content should be concise and comprehensible. The doctoral student is looking for a new form of narration, where the story is carried out in parallel through two channels and the two parts are combined into one story. He mentioned the writer Iwona Chmielewska as his main inspiration: she is the author of children's books based on a similar approach, under which the text and illustration coexist as complementary rather than repetitive content.

In the subsequent parts of the dissertation, the doctoral student indicated other important inspirations and impulses that had impacted his creative attitude. These include the book by Stefan Symotiuk entitled "Philosophy and Genius Loci" [*Filozofia i Genius Loci*], which he recalled after many years, and meetings with the scientist Ph.D. Paweł Duma, which gradually guided the doctoral student towards choosing the topic of his planned artistic work. His knowledge of the region, the history of places and curiosity about the world undoubtedly helped him find the topic and led him, literally, to the pillory of Wrocław. There is a popular saying that "the most important thing is to be in the right place at the right time". This place turned out to be the old town square in Wrocław, and the question formulated by the doctoral student: "You've been standing here for five centuries, so what will you tell me?" was addressed at the pillory that is well known to all the inhabitants of Wrocław. By describing the object itself as a separate place, he decided to refer to its *genius loci*. The very idea of erecting pillories in the centres of medieval cities is the essence of a ludic spectacle inscribed in the history of suffering, humiliation and violence of people towards others. Presumably, this kind of public spectacle would also find supporters nowadays. Undoubtedly, this stone witness to history is saturated with pain and suffering. As its power of impact has waned with the passing of the years, it has become a landscape element and a tourist attraction. Although its name unambiguously defines its purpose, it has become somewhat transparent – few people realise its meaning and function, and many focus only on its decorative qualities.

As the argument of the dissertation goes on, we become acquainted with reflections on the nature of the very medium of photography. Karol Krukowski is one of the artists strongly associated with the trend for classical photography. In his dissertation he discusses the definition of the so-called "pure photography" and suggests dividing it into the following conventions: amateur, pictorial, documentary-reporter and staged. The presented division is complemented by short justifications. Moreover, he declares that the photographs for the book entitled "The pillory" were taken in the awareness of and in accordance with the assumptions of three of the indicated conventions: amateur, reporter-documentary and staged. I can do nothing but to accept this declaration - although we can agree with the very classification of types of photographic activities, this declarative division and assigning particular photographs to the indicated conventions seems to me to be a rather subjective gesture and leaves room for discussion.

In realising his project, the doctoral student took into account cooperation with other persons-practitioners and theoreticians, specialists in their respective fields. A valuable element of the dissertation are the interviews introduced into its structure, devoted to issues of interest to the doctoral student. The first interview, on the relation between the image and the text was conducted by Krukowski with Ph.D. Adam Sobota, culture and arts theoretician. The course of the conversation is interesting, the convention of the interview as a free dialogue adds lightness to the content and adds to the credibility of the real interest of the doctoral student in the topic. To a large extent, the conversation is based on the experience and knowledge of the interlocutor, which proves the author's insightful approach to the topic and his openness to interpretation and comments of others in the very process of realization. Moreover, the dissertation is further complemented by a conversation with Krzysztof Solarewicz, or rather an interview of the invited guest conducted by the doctoral student himself. The interlocutor asks the authors questions, the answers to which complement the whole dissertation and illustrate the creative process - the interview is often very detailed and frankly admitting to dilemmas and the ways of solving them. In a few cases individual photographs are analysed, which in my opinion confirms the author's rather subjective attribution of individual pictures to the conventions indicated above, as

well as his declaration of the timelessness of the photographs themselves. However, the personal character of the conversation undoubtedly has a great emotional value and adds to the value of the resulting work. As a particular experience, an attempt can be made to perceive the work of the doctoral student using two separate approaches: separately the text and the photographs. The results of this experience would be interesting, but the assumption of the work does not provide for such a way of reception.

The theoretical dissertation presented for evaluation proves the doctoral student's knowledge and artistic awareness, as well as his knowledge of the medium of photography. The text is written in a clear, editorially correct manner and with a clear layout.

The main artistic work mentioned in this dissertation is a book entitled "The Pillory" [*Pręgierz*], published by the Center for Culture and Art [Ośrodek Kultury i Sztuki] in Wrocław in 500 copies. The book has a stiff binding and a nearly square format. It has 21 pages – 20 foldouts. The text was published in Polish and in English. The work was inspired by personal experiences, and the very choice of place, saturated with the accumulation of human activity, is an area for the realisation of a specific theatre of everyday life. The doctoral student has chosen an object which is a historical element of the urban landscape of contemporary Wrocław for the narrator and the protagonist of the story. It is the pillory, erected in 1492 and located on the Main Square in front of the historic City Hall. In this context, it would be appropriate here to write the Pillory with a capital letter. When looking for a theme for his work, the doctoral student, having analysed his artistic achievements to date, once again turned his attention in the search for inspiration to the city in which he lived. This is a valuable attitude, as it can create an interesting tension: on the one hand, acceptance of the actual state of affairs in the local context, and, at the same time, a nostalgic desire for some other world or some other manifestation of that world, and thus an attempt to rework the "mythology" of Wrocław. Therefore I perceive this publication, despite the declared timelessness of the story and the attempt to capture the spirit of the time and place, as an interesting picture of contemporary Wrocław.

The nature of Mr. Karol Krukowski's artistic activity is based on exploring the medium of photography. He deals with relations between the image and the word resulting in a jointly constructed narrative. The power of the photographic image is important because of all the ballast and weight of time it carries in itself. The photography is a witness to history, to the past of people and situations that no longer exist, but also to the present and to the moment in which a given photograph is taken. In visual works, an important aspect and objective is to communicate meanings and complementing the work with the written word leads to new possibilities of impact of the work in the social and cultural space. The author chooses black and white photography as a formal artistic procedure: he decides to consciously resign from using colour. It is by no means due to nostalgia, but it is justified by the wish to make the message timeless, which is not entirely convincing because in many photographs, as I suppose, even after many years it will be possible to determine the time when they were taken with the precision of a decade because of the style of clothes worn by passers-by, elements of street architecture, or the items in the hands of the participants of events. Leaving the images in a range of greys adds other important features of the message than timelessness – for example, the possibility of confronting two different realities. The overlapping of different worlds allows the viewer to see their mutual interfusion, confrontational clash or symbiotic coexistence. Moreover, the doctoral student declared that he had intentionally removed all words and expressions from the photographs selected for publication. I consider this to be a correct and justified decision. However, he decided to leave the word 'souvenirs' repeated in four photographs. I am not convinced by the clarification of this decision, all the more so as the remains of other words are unfortunately noticeable in other photographs: 'churros'; on page 12 and a fragment of the word 'apteka' emerging from behind the pillory in the last photograph. This inconsistency or perhaps oversight fortunately does not completely take away the charm of the whole story.

I positively assess the invitation to cooperate with another artist – the painter Beata Rojek and the discussion with her about a joint project. It is a valuable attitude remaining within the idea of collective work. This cooperation was presented in the thesis in the form of a dialogue between the two artists,

illustrated with sketches and projects. The doctoral student's approach to the subject is also worth appreciating for its economy of means, and the ability to reduce the form. With such a strategy of work, with a highly selected limited number of words and images, the viewer absorbs every word and every fragment of a photograph. A great deal of care on the part of the author is therefore required, and even the slightest mistake, including any editorial ones, can be considered gross. Unfortunately, the author has not avoided this and on page 39 of the book I found a small typo in the word 'niesprawiedliwe' – from the logic of the sentence in Polish version I deduced that it should be 'niesprawiedliwie'.

Observation is a natural manifestation of curiosity about the world and an important stimulus for creative research. Regardless of the applied tool and the degree of skill in using it, the most important thing is the unique and personal message that a particular work is intended to convey. It is important to consciously use the available means of expression based on imagination, so that they do not disturb the reception and result in the conciseness of the message. In the realization of the described project created in the context of a specific space, the doctoral student tried to follow the path of the maximum elimination of means of expression. *"The artist must believe in the great potential of his work to be experienced by its audience. He should avoid panic caused by an overly pessimistic assessment of the sensitivity of the people he wants to influence, since such panic leads to an excessive accumulation of formal means of the work and their excessive amplification. Sensitivity may not be awakened at all, but it can also be drowned out".¹*

Conclusion

The doctoral dissertation, including the practical part, is an example of a creative and, at the same time, reflective discussion of the photographic convention of *the picture book*, an empathetic approach to the issue of genius loci and the result of a comprehensive study of the relation between the word and the image in a work of art. The work on the subject has served the doctoral student for an interesting and original artistic gesture realized on the basis of the attitude of social and historical consciousness. The dissertation, which comprehensively presents the process of work on the publication, raises questions, evokes associations and in this respect deserves recognition.

On the basis of this list of achievements, the works and the presented dissertation, complemented with the resulting conclusions, one can confirm the doctoral student's involvement in defining phenomena in the field of photography and his great knowledge of the craft. The conception of the work and the general theoretical and practical knowledge guarantee independence and thus confirm my belief in the significant contribution of the presented work to the development of the artistic discipline and prove the high competencies of the doctoral student. We are faced with a research result concerning an original creative concept.

I conclude that the artistic and educational activity of Mr. Karol Krukowski meets the necessary requirements of the Act. In view of the above, I hereby apply to the Council of the Artistic Discipline of the Eugeniusz Geper Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Wrocław to confer upon Mr. Karol Krukowski the academic degree of Ph.D. in the field of the arts, in the discipline fine arts and art conservation.



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Łódź, 9.09.2021

¹ Zbigniew Dłubak's Theory of Art, ed. M. Ziółkowska, published by: Archeology of Photography Foundation, Warsaw 2013, p. 146.