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Evaluation of the doctoral dissertation of Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk drawn up in connection with a doctoral degree conferment procedure in the field of art, in the discipline of fine art, initiated at the Faculty of Painting of the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław

The doctoral dissertation entitled *Chroma haze - subjective perception of colour* by Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk includes several dozen works made in various techniques: oil on canvas, marker and fineliner on paper, as well as linocut. The self-commentary to the dissertation is an extensive text divided into four chapters.

In the introduction to the descriptive part, the doctoral student presents the genesis and main characteristics of her work - she considers colour to be the most important component which builds the artistic expressiveness of her works. According to Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk, the role of colour in the art of painting cannot be overestimated, since a variety of colours, directly affecting emotions, is the most universal "language" of painting - read in the subconscious and universally understood all over the world.

She points out that the language of painting is close to our visual perception of the world. She believes that colour is the artist's most important gift and tool, and colour vision is the first impulse in painting, preceding the figurative and semantic form. It is colour that puts the artist into a trance and fuels their vitality, it is colour that intensifies the hardships of everyday existence, but also makes it possible to grasp the pace of life and unwind, to straighten out its distorted perspectives and to eliminate the overwhelming sense of emptiness.

It is significant that the author devoted so much attention in her work to the issue of colour, its perception, impact on the mind and its meaning in painting. The very title of her doctoral dissertation, *Chroma haze - a subjective perception of colour*, proves that colour is for the artist a primary means of expression. An important part of the text is devoted to aspects of the theory of vision - from the structure of the eye and an explanation of the physical and biological properties of the organ of sight, through the various aspects of vision, to the most important colour theories developed by such artists as Philipp Otto von Runge, Wassily Kandinsky and Johannes Itten.

Moreover, at the end of her reflections in the self-commentary chapter "A Dictionary of Colours", the author describes her own palette and her experience concerning particular colours and their mixtures. I think that this chapter - full of insights into the nature of individual pigments, the substantial paint value, as well as differences in colour perception and expression between oil paints and ink markers - is a very important and interesting testimony to the artist's painting experience.

Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk shows a certain "oversensitivity" in her perception of the complexity of the world. It is manifested in the desire to perceive and understand the smallest details of the environment. The artist's analytical mind absorbs knowledge in a total manner, which inevitably leads to a sense of insufficiency and frustration. It is a kind of horror vacui, which makes her see the

world as fragmented: each detail is composed of many other details, and each of them is distant from the other and worth scrutinizing, understanding and re-synthesising with the remaining details. Perceived in this way, reality must be in a state of perpetual disintegration, and the only way to put it in order is through creativity. It is colour that becomes the binder for Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk. When you squint your eyes a bit - the artist tells us - details disappear, shapes become blurred, and reality appears as a feast or a whirl of colours. A slight change in the manner of looking thwarts the terror of detail and incessant analysis. Only such a view of the world allows us to see it as a harmonious composition.

Apart from colour, the other important foundation binding things into a whole is for Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk the creation of narration. In the section entitled "Inspirations" the author mentions the artists who have had the greatest influence on her work. These are Frida Kahlo, Jean Michael Basqiat and Henri Rousseau - painters who focus in their work precisely on creating and telling stories.

The author of *Chroma haze* spins tales and legends out of everyday themes, rooted in nature and at the same time abounding in cultural contexts. She collects bits and pieces of shattered everyday reality and blends them into archetypal representations to create a narrative about the eternal presence of evil in a world of chaos. What are these stories about? About the world dying? That we are lonely, lost and our fate is a game of coincidence?

In Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk's paintings, the thing that gives order to reality is a terrifying and unchangeable fate. It turns out to be the bond which prevents our image of the world from falling apart. The premonition of inevitable fate reconciles developed consciousness with primitive emotions. Despite the dazzling colourful wealth in these paintings, it is impossible to escape a kind of dark foreboding of mourning and despair. Undoubtedly, an important part of this work is the process of coming to terms with death. *Chroma haze* is a kind of memento mori, addressed to the entire living world, including the human, animal and plant species. This world turns out to be fragile and lost in a soulless universe. "And the planets are raging, and laughing..."

The author's admiration for Frida Kahlo's work extends to the entire folk culture and art of Mexico, in which death is not only the continuation of life, but its essence. From a Eurocentric perspective, mourning here is done backwards, through play. Death is not deadly, but on the contrary, full of vitality and joy of life. Many of Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk's paintings feature characters as peculiar as devils, demons and human skeletons, with Santa Muerte at the forefront. Dressed in festive clothes, amidst multi-coloured decorations, they sit down at the table as good friends.

Here, another important aspect of Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk's work is revealed, one that seems to accompany all of her themes. It is humour and a certain - this time ironic - wink. *Humdrum II*, for instance, is a reference to old representations of the memento mori motif. The centre of this image is a hellish sack, the traditional means of transporting human bodies to hell. Above it, the overworked, yet smiling and relaxed skeletons have taken a break and are chatting happily. The problem is, however, that there are no bodies in the sack, which is filled with exotic plants. On that day, as Ms Parfieniuk writes, death took a day off.

Humdrum, the name of the cycle, which the author claims to be her favourite one and which she plans to develop, in direct translation means banality, monotony and mundaneness. It seems that here, too, the artist shows a sense of humour, portraying features stereotypically associated with our everyday life in a perverse way, like the Beatles who sang in *Strawberry Fields Forever*: "Nothing is real and nothing to get hung about. Living is easy with eyes closed. Misunderstanding all you see". But Ms Parfieniuk's painting, full of occult symbolism, is also an attempt to clothe the world around us in magic and mystery, and thus to give it a dignified meaning. A rooster - which nowadays, being

far away from nature, we hardly ever see alive and in its entirety, but only in the fragmented form of carcasses, breasts and legs - ascends to heaven here, ruffling its blue tail with pride and dignity.

Another important motif in this work, which is worth attention, is the world of wild nature. As in "the Tax Collector" Rousseau's works, there are numerous exotic, imaginary plant thickets and among them exotic animals, as well as domestic cats, stray poultry and long-extinct prehistoric reptiles in these paintings.

A characteristic feature of all man-made works of art is a certain conventionality, a kind of social pact by virtue of which we recognise that even if they are an interpretation of reality, they are not subject to its laws. Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk seems to be constantly reminding us of this pact and testing its limits - that is why in the painting *Humdrum I* we can see a cow and a calf standing in the heat of the sun, their necks cut as evenly as if with a meat knife, and decapitated. The animals live on, they have not died at all. An equally alive skeleton, dressed as a travelling monk, with a solar halo around its skull, is sitting on the cow. The skeleton looks at the sun with its eye sockets, waving its tibia towards it, and suddenly the red-hot sun turns out to be a ball.

The painting *Monkey waiting to be eaten by a tiger*, on the other hand, depicts a scene of eternal hunting. The monkey makes a submissive gesture, as much fearful as mocking, while the tiger, hidden in the foliage, leaps towards it with its mouth open. In this representation, the tiger never catches the mocking monkey.

In another painting, *Wild Frontier*, in a jungle at sunset a green dinosaur grasped a blue bird with its paw. It opened its mouth to devour it. Only this will never happen, because, as Szymborska wrote in her poem *People on the Bridge*, "the point is that nothing happens next".

I would like to dwell on these images for a moment. Following the thought of the Nobel Prize winner, we can consider painting to be a form of rebellion. By means of a trick, such as stopping the frame in a painting, we can refuse to acknowledge our submissiveness to time. Creating motionless images can become, to paraphrase Szymborska, a way to express this objection and impudently believe that it really is so.

Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk's paintings, in my opinion, reveal the creative attitude of a rebel. Their ironic nature stems from her disapproval of the illusion of the hypocritical everyday reality. Resentment against a world full of violence, stupidity, cruelty and hatred, in which the stronger will always hunt the weaker. In which the intelligence of our species has led to the fact that we do not hesitate to inflict suffering on other species on an industrial scale. Painting here becomes an act of ridicule of a world in which, from the very beginning, evil demons hunt us down, and the watchful eye of providence - that stalker who keeps a close watch on whether we are fulfilling our destiny - turns out to be a toy in the paws of a spoilt cat burning with predatory aggression. A world where the only compassionate and understanding instance under whose protection we can escape is holy death.

Conclusion

"Fiction is always some kind of truth", said Olga Tokarczuk in her Nobel speech.

For Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk, painting is an everyday form of resistance and disagreement with the ruthless pace of life, with the horror of the grey everyday reality in which - just like in the film *Groundhog Day* - every morning we wake up to run and get harnessed to the wheel, fed with illusory hope that one day we will be able to break the loop of everyday struggles. The universe created by the author of *Chroma haze* is a melting pot of wild nature, animistic and occult rituals, and Mexican

folk beliefs, in which our everyday life acquires ontological significance. The world depicted in Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk's work captivates us with the author's enormous imagination, virtuosity of drawing, with which she brings out various forms, and the wealth of boldly contrasting colours. The variety of decorations does not obscure the legibility of the metaphor and in no way mitigates the brutality of the world. On the contrary, the message is visually coherent, conscious and involving for the viewer. There is passion, irony and anger in this work.

I wholeheartedly evaluate Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk's doctoral dissertation entitled *Chroma haze - subjective perception of colour* positively and state that her achievements deserve a top mark, as they make a significant contribution to the development of the discipline of fine arts. In view of the above, I hereby propose that Ms Magdalena Parfieniuk be granted a doctoral degree in visual arts, in the discipline of fine arts, in the doctoral degree granting procedure initiated by the Council of the Faculty of Painting of the E. Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław. Moreover, due to its outstanding artistic value, I apply to the Council of the Faculty of Painting of the Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław to award a degree with distinction.

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