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REVIEW

DOCTORAL THESIS (IN THE FIELD OF ART, IN THE DISCIPLINE: FINE ARTS AND CONSERVATION OF WORKS OF ART) - COMPLETED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF PHD. MAGDALENA GRZYBOWSKA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR (THE FACULTY OF SCULPTURE AND ART MEDIATION) AS WELL AS THE WORK OF MA. JASMIN SCHAITL. REVIEW PREPARED DUE TO THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION, INITIATED ON 09.11.2023 AT THE BOARD OF ARTISTIC DISCIPLINE OF THE EUGENIUSZ GEPPER ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN IN WROCLAW.

PRINCIPAL OF THE REVIEW: THE EUGENIUSZ GEPPER ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN IN WROCLAW (Resolution No. 8/2023, Council of Artistic Discipline dated 23.11.2023). THE ORDER WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ALL REQUIRED DOCUMENTS, MATERIALS AND DOCUMENTATION, INCLUDING: THE DISSERTATION OF MA. JASMIN SCHAITL

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE DOCTORAL STUDENT

Ms. Jasmin Schaitl was born in 1987 in Vienna. From 2006 to 2012 she studied at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (diploma - Prof. Putz-Plecko), in 2009 she led a six-month art project in Nicaragua (founder of the student initiative for art and social projects, supported by the University of Applied Arts Vienna), in 2015 she participated in the SODA (Solo/Dance/Authorship) program at the University of the Arts Berlin (Universitat der Kunste Berlin). In 2020-2022, J. Schaitl worked as a researcher at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna (supported by the Austrian Science Found - FWF) within the framework of the DEMEDARTS (Dementia.Empathy.Education.Art) project. In 2021-2022,

together with Charlotta Ruth, she created the project *Withdrawing the Performer*, which had the characteristics of an art and research project and referred to participatory practices. In her work, she focuses mainly on performance activities although she expands them including object, drawing, video, installation, creating multi-faceted, experiential situations. With a relevant artistic, teaching and organizational track record, the Candidate, in 2020, received - expressed from the Council of the Art Discipline - the approval of the Individual Research Plan, which also included the dissertation topic.

EVALUATION OF PAST ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS

MA. JASMIN SCHAITL

"A visiting mind can literally make it impossible to see anything interesting or important, and even thwart us from seeing something that is our privilege, because we are constantly lurking for a moment better than the previous one, for a better view, a better experience¹."

Ms. Schaitl's artistic output goes far beyond the requirements for those seeking a doctoral degree. It is not just the variety and quantity of her work, but also its coherence and maturity. Ms. Jasmin is an artist distinguished by an above-average awareness and, unusually, her work stems from a grounded attitude towards the world. The Candidate's portfolio (2017-2023) includes about 20 solo works and 5 in collaboration with Matej Frank. Each of them creates a meditative, often interactive, story that invites the viewer to stop and be in the here and now. Particularly noteworthy are the works in which aluminum wire becomes the visual leitmotif. It is, of course, not the material - the building block of the form - but the meaning it carries. The works *Reciprocity* (2021) and *Sharing Moments* (2023), *With a line 2, Titled: with a line #01* refer to three essential elements that construct the content of her works, namely line, memory and the haptic sense. Aluminum wire is a flexible material easily moldable in the hands. Its densities create a tissue of spatial drawing, and its noncommittal nature emboldens anyone, including the viewer, to „braid." A small piece of wire becomes a kind of visual note, a memory, just like a line put up in an automatic way on a scrap of paper. Schaitl experiments with forms arising from various

¹ J. Kabat-Zinn, *The healing power of mindfulness. A New Way of Being*. Published by Czarna Owca, Warszawa 2020, p. 146

transformations of the aluminum "thread." However, this is not the creation of a form subordinated to aesthetic convention, but rather the creation of an entity linked to the record of memory. In the work *Reciprocity* (2021) viewers, entering the exhibition space, are invited to contemplate and recall positive memories through simultaneous reminding and wire braiding. Thoughts are given a material form that remains in the gallery, the wire object is marked with a "tag" with a date or keyword. These small "handworks" accompany the larger wire form created by the artist. The whole is tied together by an audio recording - a voice - explaining the process of remembering and the brain's neuroplastic capabilities. The situation from Klamovka Altan Gallery is then transposed and presented at Blansko City Gallery. Schaitl not only "neatly" solves the problem of the new exhibition space, but also reveals further possibilities for interpreting the work, consistent with the idea of neuroplasticity. The aforementioned realizations are characterized by a meticulously executed concept as well as a balanced, aesthetically refined form. The accompanying, extensive documentation and the artist's website encourage one to explore the content behind the minimalist, synthetic representation. Analyzing Schaitl's work, it is impossible to ignore the performative nature of her works. On the one hand projects such as: *The Touch can Tell* (2020), titled: *with a line #01, with a line #02 - listening to touch, present/presence (body)* (2018,2019), *Invisible Labour* (2021, 2023), *speak (volumes)* (2017), *re-fade* (2013, 2016), *untitled with thread #01* (2016, 2018) one can speak of performance in its most established sense, while on the other hand, works such as: *The Touch of Zhor* (2023), *present/presence (earth)* (2018,2019), *MOMENT (Full Moon Project)* (2019-2021), *volume #02* (2018), *sleeping drawings* (2018) refer directly to the "corporeality-presence" of the artist. In the film frame, Schaitl's hands can be seen; the form created from the thread refers to the performer's body position; the marks on the paper are imprints of the sleeping body of the artist and her partner. So, in fact, all works included in the portfolio (selected works from 2017-2023) the matter of art becomes Schaitl herself. The simplicity of the performer's gesture, concentration, and economy of visual means give the works a contemplative character. The portfolio, complemented by the text of the dissertation, becomes a convincing testimony to Jasmin's spiritual and creative journey.

DOCTORAL THESIS - EVALUATION

"Are we able to be where we are, wherever that is? To be in the face of what is happening? Now.

If so, we may find that we already feel great about it, better than we could have expected. Perhaps, in the end, we feel best simply when we hole up at home ... that is, inside ourselves, regardless of the circumstances, where we happen to be, wherever that is²."

PAST OR FUTURE

The present blurs drowning in the fog of individual reasons.

Unlamented losses experienced from today's perspective invite a visit to the days of months and years ago, the tangle of anxiety and hope becomes a time machine, transports to an undefined future.

REFLECTIONS ON THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

The mind wanders away from mindfulness being here and now. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, a program created by J. Kabat-Zinn (1979) uses "being here and now" as a tool to promote healing, both in terms of achieving mental and physical well-being.

Modern times are not conducive to "stopping," rather, they incite a gallop. Slowing down, which is associated with a decrease in productivity, rarely meets understanding. Taking into account the structure of the autonomic nervous system, its two parts antagonistic to each other: sympathetic and parasympathetic, one can venture to say, that modern man definitely functions more often in the excitation of the sympathetic system. The predominance of the sympathetic system has far-reaching consequences, it is increasingly difficult to achieve a state of relaxation, which is essential for recovery and healing. The constant influx of impulses stimulates the nervous system. It's not just tasks in the area of work or personal life. The sounds of the city, advertising, social media, create a tissue of constant stimulation forcing the brain to analyze. The autonomic nervous system operates independently of a person's will, but this is not the same as the absence of any influence on the stimulation of, for example, its parasympathetic part. To understand how this is possible it would be necessary to study in more detail the structure and functions of the central nervous system, but the issue is complicated and is

² J. Kabat-Zinn, *The healing power of mindfulness. A New Way of Being*. Published by Czarna Owca, Warszawa 2020, p. 147

not the main point of this review. To illustrate the problem, one could look at the mechanism by which emotions, such as fear, arise. The sound of a snapping branch in the forest reaches the amygdala³ in two ways. By a shorter route: from the thalamus to the amygdala directly (low route) and by a longer route: from the thalamus, through the cortex to the amygdala (high route)⁴. The consistency of both pathways has adaptive value and must have been evolutionarily preferential. The low pathway guarantees rapid transmission of the impulse which results in immediate preparation of the organism for possible impending danger (stimulation of the sympathetic system). Recognition of the stimulus, which is done at the level of the new cortex, requires more time; in the case of a real threat, this delayed interpretation could end tragically. In survival logic, it is more advantageous to be ready for a snake attack and make a mistake than to react too late. When making an attempt to reconstruct an event in the forest, one can feel arousal at the somatic level. One can just as easily imagine the fear that arises in such a situation. The connections that exist between the autonomic and central nervous systems and the involvement of the neocortex in the creation of emotions and the stimulation of the sympathetic/parasympathetic nervous system provides a viable basis for the effective use of "mental exercises" to activate the required branch of the nervous system. Visualizations and meditations have been widely used in supportive therapy for a variety of somatic diseases⁵. Stimulation of the parasympathetic part not only introduces a state of relaxation, but, above all, creates conditions for the activation of the body's self-repair mechanisms. If visualizations, relaxations, meditations are used in regulating the nervous system, then perhaps art could also appear in the repertoire of supporting healing methods.

ARTISTIC AND THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITIES OF JASMIN SCHAITL

The therapeutic impact of art and creative activities has become the basis for the development of the field of art therapy. One can speak of art therapy both as an adjunct to the treatment of, for example, mental illness, but also more broadly in a developmental context. In such a view, art therapy does not usually cross the walls of a hospital or other therapeutic institution. Instead, it is extremely interesting to create a para-therapeutic situation in a gallery and invite the viewer to experience it. This is the path that Ms.

³ Amygdala - a part of a limbic system, has a primary role in the processing of memory, decision-making and emotional responses (including fear, anxiety and aggression).

⁴ See: J. Le Doux, The emotional brain, Published by Media Rodzina, 2020, chapter 6

⁵ The Simonton Method (cancer patients), Gupta Program (ME, CFS, long covid patients)

Schaitl's doctoral thought seems to follow. She turns to memory, through which it is possible to recall positive memories from the past and implement them in the present.

"Mental Journey" is linked to a performative and participatory activity that takes into account the sense of touch. Doctoral thesis consists of two extensive chapters. In the first, the artist, first and foremost, evokes concepts derived from a variety of scientific fields that can broaden the perception of the artistic practice she undertakes⁶. Noteworthy is the review and attempt to integrate various theoretical concepts (chapter one), which are intended to help understand the relationship occurring between touch - feeling, remembering - forgetting, attentiveness and the "therapeutic" potential of artistic activities. This kind of task comes with an insufficiency due to the lack of opportunity to think more deeply about the selected concepts. As a result, the reader is confronted with a text consisting of fragments of theory, which can give the impression of a lack of methodological rigor. However, this is not a reproach, but only a consideration of whether the first chapter could have been composed differently, or whether it is necessary to cite so many concepts to "illustrate" the problem posed, despite its complexity. The second chapter is also a kind of overview, but deals with artistic activities⁷. Here Schaitl emphasizes the relationship between theory and practice - she analyzes works (mainly her own) that take into account participation or collaboration. Schaitl emphasizes the importance of processuality and the touch, which becomes the "main character" that constructs artistic experience. The second chapter raises no formal objections. In addition to the portfolio and the theoretical part of the dissertation, a handbook *Hands on. A Handbook of Performative Practices for Training the Mind* was published. It is the starting point of Ms. Schaitl's doctoral exhibition. The book includes: table of contents, how to approach this book, essential information, tangible practices (with hands, with the

⁶ The artist cites the research of Martin Grunwald (German psychologist, founder and head of the Haptic Laboratory in Leipzig, author of books e.g. *Human Haptic Perception*, 2008), Douwe Draaisma (Dutch psychologist, author of books e.g. *Why life goes faster when we age*, Copenhagen, 2008), Meik Wiking (founder of the world's first Happiness Research Institute, Copenhagen, 2013), Jon Kabat-Zinn (author of the mindfulness-based stress reduction method MBSR, 1979), Richard J. Davidson (American psychologist, psychiatrist, neuroscientist author of the concept of emotional style, founder of the Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA). She stops at the concept of episodic and semantic memory by Endel Tulving (Canadian psychologist, memory researcher, author of scientific books e.g. *Organization of Memory*, 1972). At the end of the chapter, Schaitl also describes his experience with meditation, and refers to the problem of Mind Wandering. The final pages are, so to speak, an introduction to chapter two, and are noteworthy for relating the theoretical concepts to his own practice and work, e.g. *reciprocity*.

⁷ The artist evokes the work of Lygia Clark and Christian Boltanski, Charlotte Ruth (in the context of participation), Joanna Rajkowska and, above all, analyzes her own work by evoking various performative actions.

body, with objects and materials), intangible practices (of the mind, within the present moment, into the future). From the description of how to use the book, it appears that the reader is dealing with a collection of exercises designed to improve or expand the mind's ability. The manual proposes a variety of artistic practices that can be used as tools to develop cognitive abilities, foster creativity and contribute to the maintenance of mental well-being. The reader is invited into a kind of performative experiment, and Schaitl clearly emphasizes the importance of respecting one's boundaries and acting in harmony with oneself. All exercises develop around the sense of touch, memory and line. Their design implies the involvement of specific parts of the body, objects (tangible materials) and memories, imagination and conscious presence. The author refers to psychological resources⁸ by inviting users of the book to recall joyful, pleasant memories in memory, which are then "associated" with sensations in the body, ready-made or manufactured objects (e.g., a wire mold). The manual also includes exercises based only on gentle changes in body position or exploration of the body's surface using hand-touch. The publication was designed and produced with great visual culture and attention to detail. Excellent, simplified drawings, well-chosen font, interesting composition, clear description create a whole characterized by measurable high quality. The content of the book is also a testimony to the author's awareness of the possibility of using creative activities for therapeutic purposes. The exercises proposed by Ms. Schaitl could be successfully incorporated into the scenario of a creativity training or a stress reduction workshop or a workshop designed to broaden access to one's own psychological resources. The content of the exercises is not novel, the variations of the scenarios presented are well-known and used in therapeutic practice. However, the book cannot be regarded as - just - a graphically well-designed publication that has the potential to inspire those working on mental well-being. The manual should be considered in the context of Ms. Jasmin's work and other artistic activities in general. In truth, inviting the viewer to participate in - co-create - the work of art is not a new concept, but concern for the viewer and his mental well-being, acting for his benefit, are not common.

Schaitl convincingly combines in her artistic practice the "production" of her own works with a proposal that includes the viewer in the co-creation of the tissue of the exhibition, whereby, the viewer is not treated by the artist in an instrumental way. As a result of the visitors experience not only a material trace is created, which the artist incorporates into the exhibition. Above all, Schaitl's intention is that the viewer's participation works to his

⁸ See: Conservation of resources theory, S.E. Hobfoll, 1989. Psychological resources - entities that have value in their own right for individuals.

advantage by immersing him in re-experiencing a positive memory and reinforcing it through an "artistic/creative" gesture.

Jasmin Schaitl's doctoral exhibition *Hands on. Practicing Experience. Archives of Memory 2021-2024* took place at Exit Gallery in Wrocław (curators: Magda Grzybowska, Paweł Czeakański).

„HANDS ON. Practicing Experience is a participatory exhibition, inviting visitors to explore guided exercises through visual and written instructions of performative tasks. Visitors can experiment with these exercises in their own tempo, while being in, and spending time in the space. The exhibition invites visitors to re-experience joyful memories of their past through artistic approaches, involving the body and the mind, opening a vast field of experiencing oneself through new perspectives⁹.”

The exhibition consisted of seven partially new realizations: *Intorduction* (full HD with sound, 2024), *Performative Exercise - From Hearing to Listening* (textile print approx 70x100 cm, 2024), *Performative Exercises* (five performative exercises, textile print, each approx 70x100 cm, 2024), *reciprocity* (2021-processed, aluminium sculpture, pressed, 34x15x34 cm, 2022), *documenting states of and in transition* (full HD, with sound, 7 min 55 sec, 2022), *memory archive* (2024 - Exit Gallery, aluminium sculpture, site specific, approx 220x100x100 cm), *materialized memories* (by visitors, from three previous, participatory exhibitions objects on plexiglas panel, each 50x100 cm, 2021, 2022, 2023).

The documentation submitted by the artist reveals the daunting task of arranging the works in the challenging gallery space - space that is a remnant of a brewery. The strong, „aggressive” architecture does not harmonize with the visually delicate matter of the realization, but the exhibition is one of the requirements for obtaining doctoral degree, and it has to be done somewhere. The choice of location is often determined by its accessibility, and perhaps this was also the case. Despite the uncomfortable space, the exhibition gives the impression of legibility and thoughtfulness. The greatest strength of Schaitl's works (from my subjective perspective) is their participatory nature, based on a concern for developing psychological well-being of the viewers. Fortunately in the case of *Hands on (...)* this element was not missing. What is puzzling, however, is the printing of exercises from the *Hands on (...)* manual on fabric. On the one hand, hanging the fabric in the space perhaps fulfilled an arrangement function on the other hand, it introduced

⁹ Text from the leaflet accompanying the exhibition.

additional matter referring to further meanings. What does the change from paper to fabric bring, and is it necessary in the context of this project? This is the only doubt that accompanied me while looking at the documentation of *Hands on (...)*.

CONCLUSION

Having thoroughly examined the extensive material submitted by Ms. Jasmin Schaitl, M.A. - the doctoral thesis prepared under the supervision of Dr. Magdalena Grzybowska, associate professor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Wroclaw, and the documentation of artistic realizations, I conclude that the aforementioned work constitutes a coherent and original artistic achievement. The materials provided indicate a high creative awareness of the artist, which is supported by theoretical knowledge, her own life experience, a thoughtful attitude to the surrounding reality.

I wholeheartedly support the efforts of Ms. Jasmin Schaitl, M.A., to grant her a doctoral degree in the field of art, in the discipline of fine arts and conservation of works of art.

Sonia Rammer

