

Jan. 1, 2025

From: Erik Waterkotte, Associate Professor of Print Media,
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To: the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław

Re: Dissertation Review of Maja Dokudowicz's 2024 Dissertation: Anatomy of Fragment,
Fragment as Creative Process

The Doctoral thesis/dissertation entitled *Anatomy of Fragment, Fragment as Creative Process* was submitted to the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław in 2024 by Maja Dokudowicz. Ms. Dokudowicz, born on Jan. 11, 1990, has specialized in the field of Art within the discipline of Fine Arts and Art Conservation for this dissertation.

Accepting the invitation from Ms. Dokudowicz's supervisor, Professor Anna Janusz-Strzyż, to serve as an external reviewer for this dissertation, I am providing here my assessment of the artistic, theoretical, and conceptual merits of Maja Dokudowicz's doctoral thesis and dissertation, *Anatomy of Fragment, Fragment as Creative Process*. I would like to acknowledge that my assessment is based primarily on the received digital documentation and may differ from an in-person evaluation. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to see some of Maja Dokudowicz's works in-person, in the 2023 spring (when I was a visiting professor at ASP Wrocław), thus providing me with a physical reference for the artwork found in this dissertation.

In my review of Maja Dokudowicz's dissertation I found a very successful and original production, made up of a complex art practice, integrating past and present technologies (from print to papermaking), presented as part of an exceptional concept of the *fragment* as art object and format. From the artwork produced, to the writing and compellation of the thesis, all of Ms. Dokudowicz's materials and works are well crafted and presented professionally. As a practicing artist and Professor of Print Media, I am inspired by what Maja Dokudowicz has presented here, from her research and thesis on the *fragment* to her unique processing of Kozo fibers generating distinctive substrates for her haunting artworks, monoprints, and installations. In addition to a compelling doctoral thesis, Ms. Dokudowicz presents a remarkable exhibition record, a successful teaching resume, and several outstanding community contributions to the field of printmaking. Of note, in 2023 she won a Prize at The 9th NBC MESHTECH Tokyo International Screen Print Biennial, she co-founded Print Card Wrocław (an annual international print exchange with more than 500 artists from 30 different countries, and 5 continents,

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participating) and she is co-founder/co-owner of Mis*Print, a printmaking, bindery, and papermaking studio (a first of its kind in Wrocław, Poland). Based on the materials presented, I could not agree more with what Professor Anna Janusz-Strzyż wrote in her opinion that, "Maja Dokudowicz is a person capable of titanic work." Ms. Dokudowicz doctoral studies and dissertation are clearly a titanic work, impressive in their scope and extremely well presented. Her doctoral thesis, *Anatomy of Fragment, Fragment as Creative Process*, is at a particularly high level and most certainly deserving of an honorable distinction.

Maja Dokudowicz's 2024 doctoral thesis: *Anatomy of Fragment, Fragment as Creative Process* begins with a thoughtful examination of the etymology, theory, and history of the *fragment*. In her wonderfully titled first chapter, *Brutal Delicacy*, she establishes the theory of the fragment as not just a *piece* but a complicated, poetic object unto itself. In her study of Piranesi's *Vedute di Roma* series Ms. Dokudowicz cites the multi-dimensional quality of the artist's use of fragments, "Piranesi's works are a graphic manifestation of various forces— the force of time...the force of nature, and the incredible power of the fragment. In his case, the fragment becomes a testimony to the passing of time while ostentatiously persisting...the fragment was, for Piranesi, an artistic tool—a simultaneous look at the past and the future." Following her reference to Piranesi, Ms. Dokudowicz details the symbolic power of the fragment as related to revolution and social change.

In her second chapter, *Fragment Collectors*, Ms. Dokudowicz leads us through the beginnings of Modern collage with Kurt Schwitters, Gestalt explorations of figure-ground with Jan Berdyszak, and into the sublime and dark matters of Cornelia Parker's installations. It is a succinct, insightful chapter that provides important ground for Dokudowicz's case for the *fragment* as both an academic thesis and an artistic practice. In the final lines of the chapter, Dokudowicz details the fragment as an object of both physical and psychological properties, "in the case of a fragment, we are always dealing with an absence or with something that may be incomplete, with something lost or found, with a hint of nostalgia or utopia. While on the one hand, it is disturbing to encounter them (they are not elegant in the

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classical sense), on the other hand, both the sublime and the fragment are indefinite and uncertain, thanks to which they open up the human imagination." In the dissertation's third chapter, *On the Need of Fragment in Printmaking*, Dokudowicz characterizes the processes and traditions of printmaking in terms of a familiar binary. What is successfully argued in this chapter is not just "the Need of Fragment in Printmaking" but rather Printmaking as Fragment. While this may be a minor discrepancy (possibly due to language structures between Polish and English (with this reviewer being an English speaker)), I believe it is worth noting because Dokudowicz has already successfully established the possibility of Printmaking as Fragment in her first two chapters by presenting the relevance of the fragment in Art History and Art Theory. With that in mind, what stood out most in this chapter was the unique insight Ms. Dokudowicz makes on the necessary invention and imagination of printmaking. For instance, in her citation of Felix Jabrzyński's invention of the ceratoryt process, Dokudowicz writes, "constant tracing, experiencing, discovering – this is what the printmaking process is for me. What is fascinating about it is the search, bringing a multiplicity that motivates constant exploration." This is an astute, inspiring thought and illustrates what I see as Dokudowicz's expansive way of thinking about printmaking as a medium and a critical methodology. I wish this chapter would have delved more into this idea but Dokudowicz may have felt compelled to cover the familiar ground of printmaking's binary modalities for readers less familiar with print's history. Either way, throughout this chapter, Dokudowicz clearly makes the case that printmaking is a working of fragments and pieces that support and illuminate one another, as when she writes "'A fragment is an act of imagination(...)", which sensitizes us to the inadequacy of the whole. It does not provide us with the full story. It witnesses it and contributes to its exploration and perhaps even its creation."

In her dissertation's final chapter, *Infinite Fragments*, Dokudowicz presents her concept of the *fragment* as related to her artistic practice and three bodies of artwork: *Infinite Fragments*, *Fragmented Self*, and *Proof of Absence*; all under the exhibition title, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*. The artwork documented is clearly derived of/from the historic and theoretical research described in the first 3

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chapters but there is also much more. As Dokudowicz writes, "these explorations allowed me to explore the fragment from different perspectives as a source of inspiration and exploration." Indeed, as cited in the work's main title, these abstractions of graphic and surface are both sublime and socially conscious. As seen in the work, fragments float on paper as well as in air, fragments stare back at us, and fragments hold portraits that are fraying before our eyes. It is the fraying that seems to best display this "brutal delicacy" or "brutal tenderness" that Dokudowicz continues to circle back to. "For me, a fragment is always a subversive act of duration, the part that resists passing. It is that which has not turned to dust, which has not gone completely into oblivion." Dokudowicz describes how the concept and format of the fragment, along with anthropology and social history, have been a part of her creative work since her undergraduate studies. This is not a surprise as the depth and focus of her dissertation clearly show (as Professor Anna Janusz-Strzyż identified) an "inclination to penetrate the subject in depth and detailed analysis..." I am in very strong agreement with Professor, Anna Janusz-Strzyż's opinion that the gravity and rigor of Dokudowicz's research and artistic practice is profound "...bearing fruit in the form of a doctoral work at a very high level." This is an outstanding dissertation, worthy of honors, with significant potential for publication by an art theory publisher like Routledge or Bloomsbury. Dokudowicz writes in her conclusion, "by examining the fragments, at first etymologically and then as *brutal tenderness*, *sehnsucht* (nostalgic longing), and *strenght*, I demonstrated that they carry very diverse messages. I show many parallels between the typical dichotomies of fragments, such as multiplicity and unity, past and future, finite and infinite, with the dualistic (in nature) medium of printmaking. Their analysis has shaped my way of thinking about printmaking as creating presence through absence." Indeed, this dissertation is an important work, an original examination of the fragment not just as poetic art object but as a contemporary graphic dialectics, particular of print and papermaking but also collage.

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Along with her successful teaching record, her exhibition achievements, her community impact in the field, and her papermaking manual, Maja Dokudowicz's doctoral materials are exemplary and well above average expectations. Her dissertation, *Anatomy of Fragment, Fragment as Creative Process*, is compelling, original, and well-researched. Her thesis successfully puts forth the *fragment* as an essential but inherently unassuming form of modern, abstract, and postmodern Art and Art Theory. Dokudowicz is a strong writer who clearly keeps the reader in mind. She is insightful and structured but also thoughtful with her language, quotes and citations, making her dissertation a pleasure to read.

Following my analysis of her dissertation, her creative output, and her professional practice in the field of art, I strongly recommend Maja Dokudowicz be awarded the title of Doctor in the field of art, in the discipline of fine arts and arts conservation, with honors. Dokudowicz's dissertation and creative output is of a particularly high level should be awarded an honorable distinction.

I welcome any questions regarding my assessment of Maja Dokudowicz's dissertation review and thank Professor Anna Janusz-Strzyż for the opportunity to review such a stunning submission for PhD.

Sincerely,



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