

RETURNS - INTERNAL LANDSCAPE

It seems striking that language – while constantly evolving and intimidating in its richness – is a relatively inaccurate tool when it comes to expressing emotional states. Aimed at narration, cause-and-effect relationships and Darwinistic practicality, it forces anyone attempting to verbalize (down to the slightest detail) the colour of personal exaltation to seek refuge in the infinite world of metaphors and comparisons. The matter is further complicated by the fact that dictionaries are fraught with pitfalls of elementary concepts whose implied meaning evokes among the audience connotations with disparate experiences.

In the light of these considerations, the use of the word *returns* in the title of Jacek Świągulski's exhibition appears to be a deliberate decision signalling an invitation for the spectators to embark on a contemplative journey through the outskirts of their own memories. The offer has taken on a peculiar but surprisingly effective form because the impulse to conduct the self-analysis is in this case landscape painting – a genre commonly associated with skin-deep impressions – redefined by Świągulski's hand and treated as a medium for universal symbols.

While discussing the scenery in Świągulski's paintings, it is impossible not to refer to them as separate landscapes. Created in spaces unspoiled by civilization they rarely confront the audience with images of nature *per se*, hinting instead at the inspiration behind each work only through their figurative details and titles. For the artist, the experience of contact with nature is a starting point, a medium stripped of the egocentric connotations by the human creator to provide a space for bold experiments at the interface of composition and colour theory. On Świągulski's canvas, bucolic landscapes transform into tumultuous arenas where shapes and colours struggle for dominance while powerful brushstrokes and pronounced textures suggest that their author perceives nature primarily as an element: wild, untamed and dangerous. In most pieces, earth dominates the space superseding the sky as if annexing heaven and ordering its dwellers to abandon their dreams of sacrum. However, its weary face is run-down by the endless cycle of birth and death – the surface cracks filled with semi-dried blood are a stark reminder of the perpetual process. A wild bird looming in the distance is unaware of its impending doom, a lost abstract being brought to life only for its innocence to highlight the world's indifference.

Świągulski does not stop at making his initial diagnosis of the world around us. On the contrary, his model of the environment while reduced to the essential minimum is expanded by the addition of the author's commentary, a clearly outlined human mark on the hostile virgin territory. With his analytical eye, he scrutinizes the existing space, fixing his gaze on every object, every contour, every intersection of lines capable of giving him a thrill laced with melancholy. It is an expression of a tribute to nature and a readiness to reconcile with it – perpetuated in the most human way possible as it is dictated by the artist's emotional perception. It also manifests a longing for snapshots from the past (which somewhat explains the dehumanized atmosphere of the paintings reducing humanity to the observer's "I") as well as an attempt to spot their reflections in the present. An identical process occurs in the mind of the artist's audience. The universality which the presented works owe to their contents being anchored firmly between truth and confabulation provokes the spectators to search for crumbs of their own identity in them. The landscape painted by Świągulski is in fact a psychological sketch, a record of fleeting exhilaration built from fragments of the

experiences of our ancestors, our descendants as well as our own: the outline of a forest path evoking the memory of childhood trips to the country, a sun-scorched clearing associated with one's first love, a shady grove symbolizing an urgent need to be at peace and focus on the inner self.

Can the language issues mentioned at the start serve as an argument justifying a sensitive man's decision to pick up painting? While it remains a question for the artists, there is no doubt that sagacity and inquisitiveness drove Świągulski to spin a tale about the spiritual dimension which is best not distorted with articulated speech.

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