

THE SURROUNDINGS

Jacek Świągulski is one of the most inquisitive and prolific contemporary painters. His intriguingly original technique is supported by mature self-reflection. Hence the title of his latest exhibition, which is also the title of a series of paintings the artist has been working on since 2016 – ambiguous, metaphorical, deeply personal like all his works. Known as a landscapist (sophisticated in terms of colour as well as compositions series called *Returns* begun in 2015), but also as an investigator of the condition of the human form (the expressive *Beach* series 2010-2016), this time he “takes on” genre scenes which are derived from the daily life around us, but are subjected to dematerialisation and sanctification. On his large size canvas and MDF boards he draws human silhouettes in expressive poses, balancing between deformity and stylisation, their bluntness is highlighted by their outlines, which do not always coincide with the spots of broken colour. The subjects of Jacek Świągulski’s paintings are faceless and it is often difficult to determine their sex – making them easier to identify with, while in the depicted relationships and situations one finds resemblance to his own experiences, impressions, emotions. Despite their clear aesthetic and decorative aspects, such figuration and genre scenes constitute a reflection on the human existence, a search for universal truths in one’s personal experiences, belonging in this case to the painter himself as he – more or less consciously – reveals his own private life. The very titles of his works are an introduction to this world of intimacy: *A Family Episode*, *The Awakening*, *The Pink Confession*, which stir one’s imagination and provoke ambiguous interpretations. Apparently, it is precisely the artist’s intention as he additionally makes the background of each genre scene unreal by filling it with lines, circles or leaving a plain, often rough surface because he enjoys experimenting with the texture of the underlying surface as in the diptych *Farewell*. At the same time, he doesn’t hide the fact that rather than the final effect his main focus is the creative process, which is why it keeps getting longer and longer and involves an increasing number of reflections, which in turn translates into technical nuances and subtleties. The starting point, however, is the painting’s composition – the legacy of his education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz – it determines the basic decisions regarding light and space, both equally important in Jacek Świągulski’s works. Also, the colour – always intriguingly broken and tasteful, though in his recent works the artist does not shy away from a reduction to grey and white as in the series *Lyrical Duo* with its surprisingly subtle lines. At times, he limits the palette to white, beige and grey in his triptych *A Grey Memory of the Games*, which due to the large format of the boards allows for a greater expression of the flat area of colour, where a careful eye will find the shapes of the human body, again vivisected. The object of the vivisection is also, or perhaps first and foremost, the artist himself, whose painted tale regarding “all around himself” is about the deepest recesses of his soul and body, as compellingly illustrated by *Head Poetics* – self-portraits in the ambiguous poetics of the previously mentioned genre compositions. Here, the artist does not depict his facial features or hair, limiting himself to a bold outline of the skull, inside which he hints at unsettling protuberances – as if some throbbing force was trying to get out from underneath a fluorescent pink shell. Indeed, what we observe here is a struggle between energy and matter set against a neutral, greenish grey background – the subject seems to reveal to the audience the darker side of his nature, encouraging the spectator to venture a journey to the depths of his soul.

Jacek Świągulski’s paintings escape any clear categorisation, though they can be undoubtedly associated with figurative and Kapist art filtered through the traditions of Constructivism. From the technical point of view, there is a certain compositional logic to these paintings, a conscious process of constructing space with light and an immense expertise in painting, originating from the artist’s sensitivity, but also his knowledge of art history. However, the key to the appreciation of this art is the awareness of the secret of existence, filtered through the sacred and the profane of human life, the poetry of senses and brutality of fate. Jacek Świągulski is ever closer to understanding it, though it is not his objective to capture its ultimate gist. While relying on his intuition and sensitivity, the artist invites us to go on a painting journey which is another stage of experiencing everyday life with its wealth of individual impressions and universal conclusions.

Monika Nowakowska
City Art Gallery in Łódź
translation: Dobrochna Jagiełło