

INSIGHTFUL COMMENTATOR

The human figure has acquired a privileged position in the arts. From the very beginning the artist could examine the human condition, comment on the current socio-political situation, act in the service of propaganda or simply externalize their own concerns and observations through it. He could express both what is universal and individual. Jacek Świągulski uses the opportunities offered by the silhouette of a man – the power of expression, the drama inherent in the physical and its metaphorical potential. These aspects, supported by the bold use of colour and simplification of form, become a tool of analysis of what the eye does not always register – the inner world of aspirations, dilemmas, conflicts and fulfillments. His canvases are inhabited by personifications of mental states – from entangled and deformed to smooth and harmonious – they bring us closer to moments of intense self-consciousness or oblivion.

In his painting the Łódź artist often presents ephemeral moments, the importance of which, we usually fail to notice, focusing on the goals we have to achieve, gazing into the future, forever anticipating. Meanwhile, the most important takes place here and now, simply on biological or even cellular level, but also in subsequent seconds, minutes, hours, that we could celebrate, if we could appreciate for a moment, what we have or who we are. The works from the years 2009-2010 presented at the exhibition "Chatting" seemed to illustrate this attitude. The artist focused on the issue of interpersonal relations, visualizing the atmosphere of casual conversation, full of blunders, misunderstandings, but also – thanks to divided canvases – he revealed the layers of loneliness present in the moments of being together. "Together is the New Alone" one might say, using the title of the popular album by Don McCostello, filled with glitch-ambience full of emotion. The album as such could serve as a soundtrack to a few paintings and its title would work well as the motto of the whole exhibition. There is something in the silhouettes on the canvases, which reminds us that being focused on ourselves, own experiences and aspirations, being attentive to merely own thoughts and words makes us forget to listen to others. How many times we were having a conversation, during which everyone imposed their own narrative, ignoring what the other side was saying. After all the fundamental theses presented in "The Art of Loving" by Erich Fromm have not changed so far. We still observe the largest deficiencies in the exchange of feelings or just empathy. Despite the constant failure on the emotional field, we still devote most of the time to other matters (temporal goods in particular), other than improving our relationships with others.

The loneliness of modern man prevailed as well in the works created in 2011, shown in the Nova Gallery in Łódź, at the exhibition "Black-and-white-and-red". Conventionally treated silhouettes of women on the background composed of large sheets of newspapers and heads marked by the newsprint, were like a comment to numbness of information accumulation, a multitude of messages abolishing or reinforcing each other. Heads without facial features, divided into fields filled with expressive brush strokes, appeared to be bandaged, dumb, blind and cheated. So it was largely an image of a man lost "between words", intellectually led by a stream of media reports and subsequent paragraphs of intricate translations, interpretations, different commentaries to understanding reality. In this context, the simplified and unsaid silhouettes lead us to search for some hidden meanings, heart of the matter in accordance with the principle: "less is more". And indeed this phrase fits perfectly into the entire work of Jacek Świągulski.

The top means of expression used in the arsenal of the artist are moderation and above all the sense of colour. We never get too much having contact with the works. We are rather doomed, as in an elegant restaurant, to a bit of healthy insufficiency. The cultural treatment of the recipient, with respect to their potential intellect and sensibility, does not exclude the existence of the commercial aspects of painting. In this case, it even appears to support them. The works from the cycle "Conversations" or even more "All Around" could create the proper atmosphere in all kinds of spaces, both private and office ones. The colour layer of the latter cycle, the most recent in chronological order, brings immediate satisfaction through accurate and at the same time non-obvious combinations of colour. Vague shapes, simple components, anonymous human figures in an undefined space suggested by abstract devices, build an allusive tone of these canvases. As in previous cycles mimicry gives way to synthetic, almost sketchy forms; sketchy to such an extent that they begin to lose their materiality. They gain ethereal quality and gracefully fill the canvas (e.g. "The Everyday Lightness of Being", "On the Ellipse of Intimacy").

The cycle "Beach" emerging slowly in the years 2010-2016 proves undoubtedly that Jacek Świągulski does not intend his works to hold pre-designated positions merely. The blunt approach to human organicity is accompanied here by highlighting the presentation on the flat surface of the canvas, which is refreshing for the style of the artist. The focal point of presentations are briefly captured human figures (as usual with Świągulski), but this time far deformed and emerging from the stretcher in the form of a properly molded polyurethane foam. Identification and location in space of the swollen, covered with blisters barebones is possible through some objects melted into the foam, some attributes of sunbathers – goggles or sunglasses. The result is a multi-layered reflection on the aesthetic and ontological aspects of our physicality. These dissolving bodies are not only to comment on the peculiar rituals of staying on the beach, but also to reveal the gap between the advertising iconography of a tanned, holiday body and the actual experience of diverse physicality of holidaymakers. A certain dose of ecological caution can be also felt subcutaneously in the era of increasingly risky sunbathing. Hopefully "Beach" is not only a stepping stone in the stylistic development of the artist and will have its continuation or at least a partial impact on his further work.

In fact, in each of his painting cycles Jacek Świągulski looks at a human in a forgiving, good-natured manner. He does not mock excessively, though undoubtedly makes you create the self-critical distance. The artist does not moralize, but provokes reflection as if the images were the affirmation of life with its all complexities, alternating moods, light and dark sides. Philosophy, which the artist represents emphasizes the fact that a man can be repeatedly wrong, before reaching a moment of truth; has the right to wander until finding the right path – the journey itself is most valuable. When Jacek Świągulski goes beyond an impartial comment and allows himself to criticism (e.g. "Heads" or "Beach") it is always a constructive and favourable one, which is so rare today, in the times of the common belief in ineffectiveness of such an attitude. For the same reason, however, the attitude is precious. It gives the painting a unique, warm aura.

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