

Stano Filko RED EXILE

Curated by Søren Grammel & Jan Verwoert

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One path to truth leads through the senses: For Stano Filko the power of the colour red makes you feel how bodies may understand the world: the red way, en rose, on fire, in a hot-tempered manner and visceral key. But what now, if the body is displaced, in exile, out of sync with its surroundings? This is what the work coming out of Filko's New York years speaks of. Arriving in Manhattan, in 1982, after fleeing the ČSSR the year before, he absorbs the urban energy psychophysically. Filko gets body-checked by USA where money talks, and sets rules for art: "Show me. Don't tell me. Where is the beef?" Filko responds, work gets fleshy, pink, red, big, and loud. In turn he wants to know from New York: "I show you. Now tell me: Where is the love?"

Rolling with the punches, Filko filters the big city energy charge through his colour philosophy. But how much can red take before it burns up? "Bullshit", he scrawls across the painting Angel Boy. Who could that be but himself? He grew up in the country, and knows how to shovel dung from a barn. So a clunky red shovel goes on the face of the painting, and a bucket on its rear side. Memories of home haunt him. He builds a wall from canvasses, paints it front pink, red, and eggshell, and graffitiies the name Ludovít Štúr in huge green and pink letters across its back, and signs it with a pulsing heart. It's 1984, and Filko's love goes out to the philologist Štúr who, 100 years prior, had fought for the recognition of Slovakian as its own language: a meditation on liberation, perhaps. Meanwhile, Filko envisions part two to a conceptual coup. Under the sign of Happsoc I, Filko and Alex Mlynárčik had declared all life in Bratislava a piece of art for 7 days in May 1965. Now Filko paints Happsoc 2. It's big, red, angry, and clouded with stormy brush strokes under which names of many Western cities are scrawled. Warning: Happsoc is back in town, and looking for you. You ready for next level Socialism? The one where it actually happens?

RED EXILE looks at a moment in Filko's work that might be one of the most impolite, troubled and rough in his biography. Yes, the overarching cosmology of his art allows him to triangulate his position in exile. Big City talks body. In Filko's system, the colour code for that mode of address is red. So life happens in the key of red. The system works but it's switched to overload, control is slipping, the pressure is on, physically channeled by Filko via his own body (no venus on the mountain top, this is on him, down in Manhattan avenues). Not too many accounts of Filko's biography go into detail when it comes to this period. It sits uneasily in the narrative of great resolve that the portrait of the artist as a master builder of conceptual systems tends to tell. RED EXILE relates

to this unease. It wants to give a sense of what happened when, cosmologically, conceptually, viscerally, and artistically, the ride got rocky, and it may have taken some heavy wrestling to hold the world of the work together.

RED EXILE seeks to neither isolate Filko's New York work from his overall artistic cosmology, nor simply integrate it. While it puts a set of strong red pieces from the New York days at the heart of the show, it gently surrounds them with a series of earlier and later pieces evoking the system of colour-Chakras the artist was compiling throughout his life. In terms of its volume and force the red work tells of trouble. The Chakra-work is rich with a sense of relaxed resolve. These moods clash. But the clash may bring out some of the grit that will go on to give an edge to Filko's art once he's back in Brastislava, and some peace returns to his cosmos. On the path of artistic spiritual learning, a sense of grit may metabolise into sudden signs of humour. In his studio building on the hill outside town build a rain-pipe from pipes with different colours corresponding to an ascending cosmic sequence, from body, via cosmos to ego death and transcendence. Video footage shows the artist, grinning, drop a ball in the top of the pipes, and hear it rattle and roll down. RED EXILE reconstructs this situation, as the pipes span the room, ready for the ball's downward roll: a reminder that, to seek truth, does not have to mean you must climb up Jacob's ladder, but it can also mean you get in touch with the ground, the "hot sand" Sufi poets speaks of or, as Filko has it, a world experienced, in exile, in the colour red.

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