

Agnieszka Szostek's work can be traced back to different areas of inspiration. Divergent themes convene in her work. They are independent constructions as well as mimesis of historical visual formulas, of everyday and popular culture. The artworks bear witness to an interest in found shapes, which are isolated from their original context, reduced and defamiliarized. By touching on and connecting completely divergent terms of reference, a synthesis occurs which evokes new meaning.

Szostek's usually geometrical compositions appear to be carefully constructed. Auxiliary lines or dots utilised to arrange and precisely render the picture elements remain visible. Simultaneously, the aspect of imperfection plays a role. Paint runs, the edges of the geometrical shapes blur, lines drawn with a ruler are retraced freehand in acrylic paint, unintentional paint traces are retained. And still, the pictures are deliberate, and reveal the artistic subject that is their focus.

Much of the work oscillates between non-objectivity and a reference to figuration, such as the painting titled "Orange". It features – in front of a yellow background – an orange circle, accentuated by a blue cross in the center. The two-dimensional surface of the circle is given a certain corporeality through a dark shade of blue, which shines through the orange in some areas. The visual impression of this piece as well as its title are ambiguous. They enable the picture to be interpreted as a still life, the portrayal of a fruit in which the blue cross represents the stem end, or as an abstract homage to the color orange, hinting at precursors from art history.

"Gitter" ("Grid") is a similar piece in terms of its multi-layer referentiality. Black rectangles are arranged concentrically around a golden square on a quadratic, white-primed canvas, reminiscent of a shattered supremacist square. The effect is that of an op art picture, in which the rectangles open up illusionistic spatial depth, while also seeming to rotate around the golden surface of the image center. This painting is meant to be hung on the ceiling of a room, a means of presentation which accentuates the figurative point of reference for this piece: an industrial ventilation grille.

For the piece "Homunculus" Szostek adopted the basic composition lines of the anatomic portrayal of a human from the 16th century. Even without knowledge of this template, the anthropomorphic shapes of the painting evoke the image of a human figure. This is highlighted by the compositional symmetry based on a vertical line, which corresponds to the axisymmetric structure of the human body. Only the colouring creates two image layers. The background is glazed in a bright shade of blue. The figure – as well its framing, which it connects to seamlessly – is rendered in a dense red, which seals the surface. The red shape lies above the depth of the blue like a silhouette.

Compositionally, "Homunculus" is comparable to the Four Seasons paintings by Philipp Otto

Runge, equally symmetrically arranged, forgoing complex spatial grading, they too have a frame which thematically complements the principal motif. Freed from details, romantic allegory and symbolism, Szostek's simple shape is designated to become part of a more complex system. The red frame, sharing a line with the canvas on the right and left side, does not confine the depiction. It seems to extend into the space outside of the painting, and suggests an infinite, ornamental repetition of the motif.

The process of adaptation and transformation continues in sculpture. In the installation “Wolke” (“Cloud”) found styrofoam objects, such as those used as packaging material, are shown in a cuboid of transparent acrylic glass. The title underlines essential characteristics of styrofoam, which are accentuated particularly in this installation: its delicate lightness, the composition of shapes out of smaller elements, and its white colouring. The plinth beneath the acrylic cube is a two meter high cylindrical cardboard roll. This form of presentation, which stands opposed to the original banality of the styrofoam objects, causes a literal and metaphorical exaggeration, and as a result auraticization. The focus is shifted from their function to their form. In contrast to their familiar physical appearance, now the analogy to model-sized historical architectural shapes is noticeable: The silhouette of an ancient Egyptian sphinx next to temple-like monumental structures, which possess a simplicity that in turn reveals a link to modern architecture.

The ambiguity of Szostek's work brings up epistemological questions. It visualizes how using different strategies to gain insight leads to different results. If the viewer depends on his sensory perception while observing the work, he reaches a different outcome than if he applies intellectual reasoning. Depending on individual experience, the number of references which arise also varies. The question comes up, whether it is insight that adapts to the objects at hand, or our cognitive capacity that shapes the reality that we perceive.

Agnieszka Szostek's work does not solve this question by claiming to offer insight on the true nature of things. According to Adorno, she couldn't achieve this anyways, as “Art is no more likeness of than insight on an object”, but instead the objectification of experience. In Szostek's work the experience of a reality is mirrored in which the subject, particularly the artistic one, is subjected to a flood of influences that can co-exist on a par.

Despite the often great formal proximity to historical tendencies towards geometrical abstraction, Szostek's work – abstract constructions in the proper sense –, which draws elements out of the figurative world, repudiates slogans such as Theo van Doesburg's “The painting has no significance other than itself” or Frank Stella's “What you see is what you see.”

Interview Agnieszka Szostek, Berthold Reiß

Agnieszka Szostek (A): Have you thought of anything new?

Berthold Reiß (B.): No. something old has occurred to me. At the beginning of modernity there was, in Russian, the “word of its own value”, samovitoe slovo.

A: In Polish, samodzielne słowo - the independent word. I can't actually translate it. It is a contradiction in itself. You probably mean “Firma”.

B.: I didn't relate it to that yet. Is that not rather like: ”it is what it is“?

A.: No, because life is never the same.

B.: But the word means „of its own value” or “independent”.

A.: Nevertheless, it's not $A=A$.

B.: Even theology doesn't get me any further. Leon Trotsky compares the “word of its own value” with the beginning of the Gospel of John.

A.: -?

B.: And in this context he arrives at “formalism”. For John, the word seems absolute, for the communists it is relative.

A.: Both make sense to me.

B.: That's exactly the problem. Because then “Firma“ is absolute and relative: fundamental and economic at the same time.

A.: I don't produce anything. I don't create faith.

B.: You draw using the computer. Nevertheless, I still don't find much perfection.

A.: On the contrary. It's about perfection.

B.: But in very different ways. Why, for example, is the sculpture made from styrofoam, plexiglass, wood and cardboard?

A.: Out of necessity. These elements are perfect for this result.

B.: Would you then, if it was possible, make a sculpture that floats in space or moves as it floats in space?

A.: Yes, I would like to do that. But that is not within my power. It would be boring if perfection was achieved.

B.: One company, in order to produce the impossible?

A.: Exactly. There would be no stone without Sisyphus.

B.: Is that not too heroic? Your poster doesn't only show one hero. I also find it important that this hero is not only modern. From when was that?

A.: From the Renaissance. The two heroes represent the rebirth of a person who is "complete".

B.: The word of its own value or the independent word of modernity were just as complete. Can it be that you relate their rebirth to human beings?

A.: I am not the creator.

B.: You have already said that you don't produce anything - you don't produce faith. Nevertheless, you call your exhibition "Firma".

A.: I sew experience and faith together. I consider both to be important. From this a new story evolves.

B.: Is that why the stories are so diverse? I see archaism, pop-ism and a kind of Aristotelianism and folklore-ism in your art when I think of a title like "Polka".

A.: That is the new undisciplined way of life: A=1.

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