

ROOM NO 6

Kristians Fukss

Plato and Mickey Mouse – indeed a philosophically and artistically fortunate combination. One might, of course, ask: in what sense is it fortunate? Let's set aside the “philosophical” aspect for a moment and address the “artistic”. The image of Mickey Mouse first appears in Kristians Fuks' art in his solo exhibition *Volken*, held in 2019 at the Ojārs Vācietis Museum. The subsequent trajectory of this character in Fuks' artistic practice is described by the artist himself as “using a playful approach to address serious matters...” A playful approach can save an author resolved to grapple with such a seasoned combatant as Plato (Πλάτων) – the philosopher named Aristocles (Ἀριστοκλῆς) according to tradition, whose other name familiar to us all means «broad» which, again following tradition, is linked to the robust physique sculpted by Plato's martial arts practice. In the context of Platonism, this sounds almost like an oxymoron, but the contradiction inherent in this thinker's name characterizes his entire philosophy and its subsequent influence.

It is possible to be playful and yet maintain seriousness in two ways. The third way would, of course, be Socratic irony, which – as far as we can see in Plato's early dialogues and given that in the later ones, it does not explicitly appear at all – is expressed from power positions, hence we might need to retain this meaning of the term and abstain from using it here.

The first seriousness regards Plato: Kristians Fuks has invited Plato to his room number six for a serious conversation about the meaning of life and virtues. But what does “taking Plato seriously” entail within the context of contemporary Latvia? It might mean dedicating a lecture or two to Plato in aesthetics, ethics, epistemology, ontology, or your basic philosophy course, or maybe composing an entry for the National Encyclopedia about him (which already exists). A mathematician, perhaps, might add: bestowing an eidetic aura upon a theorem that has neither been formulated nor proven. The second is the critical seriousness, which might prompt one to embark on a quest for critical theories. However, let's keep in mind that Kristians Fuks' Mickey Mouse is a visual – not a literary – character. And being an art character, it sidesteps the verbal entanglements of unambiguity – to the extent that unambiguity is at all possible. Moreover, an art character may not obey even the intentions of its own author, as it becomes independent upon entering the public space of the exhibition and changes, over time, its trajectories of meanings.

What do the three different poses of Mickey Mouse (or the three Mickey Mice) signify? Could they mean that the three levels are not as distinct as knowledge, opinion, and ignorance in Plato's epistemology, not as distinct as true being, appearance, and non-being in his ontology? Indeed, the three parts of the soul are united in a two-horse chariot, led by reason or intellect; much like a

charioteer commands and steers two horses, one of which is “upright and has clean limbs; he carries his neck high, has an aquiline nose, is white in color, and has dark eyes; he is a friend of honor joined with temperance and modesty, guided only by the word of command and by reason”, while the other is “crooked, heavy, ill put together, his neck is short and thick, his nose flat [...]” (Phaedrus, 253d). The literary image of the charioteer and the chariot is powerful enough to be steered in a direction other than Plato intended. But let’s leave reason to hold the reins for now. Concerning his own life and its meaning, Kristians Fuks categorizes virtue into three forms: intellectual ability, scoutism, and artistic endeavor. Only the artistic endeavor – disregarding the recommendations in Plato’s Laws (802b-c) – exhibits independence akin to horses breaking free from the reins of the charioteer. How fortunate that it is so!

The light of the lantern might invite the audience to recall Plato’s cave, lure them through Alain Robbe-Grillet’s labyrinth of repetitions, or lead them to relate to the lamplighter on a distant planet visited by the Little Prince, or make them dream about it as a guiding light on the way to Narnia...

Kristians Fukss asks: “In a world ruled by virtue, wouldn’t scouting knots adorn the walls instead of decorative panels?” And gives his answer in Room no. 6.

Curated by Astrīda Riņķe

Works in collections: VV Foundation



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