

SVIT Prague

Although titles have only a short life and after a while they become just a tattoo on the shoulder of an institution, which there is no point in removing, just like it is useless to present oneself with, the name SVIT echoes a desire to maintain the intensity of the present in a constant state. The gallery originated with the vision of a small institution for artist and curator projects, which, however, did not want to have an ephemeral relationship to the artist exhibiting, but, on the contrary, it wanted to create a point of intersection, where both approaches will meet. The gallery did not want to be developed as a map of the contemporary art scene. Artists represented by the gallery are not there because of the fact that they are representing a certain position or direction of art and would cover that way a marked spot on the map of gallery coverage. It also did not want to be built as a capsule for preserving a category, a direction, a generation or a school. I will not even mention the vulgar motivations of the economic yielding of interest of an artist who secures the vitality of the gallery. And it also wanted to avoid the curator fluctuation of artists who hastily alternate curator concepts and are “centrifuged” to all other galleries in Prague, the country and the world in a strange need to continuously maintain the alternating, which is supposed to guarantee the freshness of the gallery’s menu. And although it has not, thanks to its basically dialectic interest to simultaneously represent and support artists and create an opinion, withstood a certain hybrid form that we have been trying to shake off since the 1990s, SVIT has a certain central moment embedded in itself which homogenizes the relatively heterogeneous elements of a private and commercial gallery with a gallery for the manifestation of a thought. The fact that SVIT has intentionally focused on the interconnection of national and international scenes from the beginning, is a sort of natural approach of both of its representatives – Zuzana Blochová and Michal Mánek. As a result of their natural flow, both on the local scene as well as abroad, the gallery has brought together a community of artists that is levitating it somewhere beyond its utilitarian function and enables it to comprehensibly speak in public space.

Edith Jeřábková

Habima Fuchs

On Monday, October 14th, 2013 at 11:40 a.m. I entered these works in the Google search:

„poem white tower blue water bird and belly“

The first poem that came out from this entry was this one:

From: Evening, 1912

The vines are in flower,
And I'm twenty this evening.

André Theuriet

Love A snake, it coils
Bewitching the heart.
Day after day, coos
A dove on the white sill.

A bright flash in frost,
Drowsy night-scented stock...
Yet, sure and secret,
It's far from peace and joy.

It knows how to weep sweetly
In the violin's yearning prayer;
And is fearfully divined
In a stranger's smile.
Anna Andrejevna Achmatovová

Jiří Kovanda

Andrew Gilbert

Andrew Gilbert has built a Universe, set in the vast landscape of the British Empire of the 19th century. Through a complex system of symbols, characters and associations the realm of Andrew Emperor of Africa is a deeply personal inner space. Gilbert works almost every day on his drawings with an output of work described often as "extremely obsessive or manic". It should be noted that like a medieval monk Gilbert works in silence, kneeling on the floor, facing Jerusalem. This is also how Gilbert drew as a child.

This Imperial landscape is however not mere fantasist escapism. Gilbert, born 1980 in Edinburgh,

Scotland, describes his work as a "genuine, uncensored psychological response to the contemporary climate, where the promotion of mediocrity is as violent a campaign as the Colonial invasions and occupations of the Crusades and of the European military powers". His drawings also frequently incorporate contemporary characters in to the 19th century and the military campaigns of today are in the work of Gilbert compared to the Crusades and the British invasions of South Africa, Sudan and Afghanistan, to name a few. Frequently appearing historical characters are generally those who led resistance movements against Western powers - Shaka Zulu, The Mahdi or Saddam Hussein. But equally Gilbert identifies with

figures such as General Gordon of Khartoum, Emil Nolde or Michael Caine (Colonel Bromhead) in the film ZULU. In other words, he does not deny his origins as a North European Artist. From this fusion, Gilbert has created his alter Ego, as a bloody dictator (who incidentally also believes he is the Messiah or at least a prophet) - between Napoleon, Queen Victoria and Shaka Zulu called Andrew Emperor of Africa. Gilbert often refers to this character as a product of the malaria ridden mind of a British Officer deserted at his out post - unaware that the sun has long set upon the British Empire. Again it should be noted that a real Scottish Major General Andrew Gilbert existed in the 19th century. He served in the Sudan and South Africa where he was killed fighting in the Boer War.

The foundations of this Glorious Empire can be found in the early work of Gilbert produced during his studies of Fine Art at Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Edinburgh (from 1997 - 2002). For example, a constant symbol in the oeuvre of Gilbert is the Pineapple. Already as a student Gilbert (in 1998 aged 18) founded his own Pineapple Juice Company - called Cresswells. He produced works of art that sought to combine Advertising, Nationalist Propaganda and Sacred Objects. Crucially one must stress the humor and irony deployed by the artist, often using brutal absurdism to parody themes of Nationalism and the contemporary worship of the object. The Pineapple in Gilbert's mind bore a visual resemblance to the Zulu Military headdress and the Exotic costumes of Josephine Baker. Also the sacred Pineapple represented the Virgin Mary while the carrot came to represent the male messiah or Jesus Christ. In a short text it is not possible to describe the full range of symbols in Gilbert's work. However a crucial point is Gilbert's fascination with the iconoclasm of the Reformation, in other words the castration of Religious objects, which perversely identifies a fear of that object and confirmation of its power. So Gilbert as a student created his own Altars, combining Christian with African Fetish imagery and contemporary disposable culture which also became fused with War Propaganda. If worshipping a nail covered sculpture from Benin is primitive, then surely is worshipping a nail covered naked man on a cross also not? Again, if a Zulu war costume is primitive, then is not also the 19th century European uniform with its feathers and animal fur - designed to cause a psychological reaction not equally

primitive? Is killing a human with a spear different to killing civilians with state of the art modern weapons? Such questions form a subtext to the Colonial landscape created by Gilbert.

While a student in Edinburgh, he studied 'Primitivism in Modern Art' under Professor Elizabeth Cowling. Since his teenage years Gilbert has been obsessed by the German Expressionist artists of Die Brücke (a perceived spiritual connection to these artist was one of his main motivations to moving to Berlin aged 22) and generally in the European representation of the Primitive or Exotic. Again a crucial point is that while Gilbert identifies with the romantic ideal of primitive purity, he also parodies this with vicious humor - he states "there is something absurd about Ernst Ludwig Kirchner fantasizing about living in primitive huts while checking his emails every 5 minutes" His childhood obsession with military history (which had already caused Gilbert to create an association between the so called Primitive people of the South African Zulu Empire with the Scottish Highland Rebellion of 1745. Both armies faced the technological superiority of the British Empire armed with bull skin shields and were violently defeated. It should be noted that during childhood Gilbert drew these campaigns in the form of vegetable and fruit people. Gilbert's relation to fruit and vegetable is again to complicated too describe in a short text and demands a full study.

At the centre of this obsession is a very important part of Gilbert's work, as he walks a line between humor and ironical comment and a genuine religious response to fruit. Furthermore, as the rational mind can classify and segregate different types of fruit, the Victorian mind sought to classify and conquer the 'Primitive' nations. These peoples were studied and exhibited on the same level as animals. And to connect this final point back to Gilbert's obsession with military history and to the contemporary climate - the propaganda that reduces ones enemy to the level of primitive or lower level of human, was used to promote ethnic cleansing throughout the centuries, just as again today, firstly advertising and popular media reduce the nations own people to a lower level and secondly the contemporary demonization of the Exotic Other continues to justify the occupation of foreign lands, exactly as was the case during the Crusades. In other words the propaganda of Vezelay in 1095 connects to the propaganda of today and the Reformation connects absolutely to the contemporary slave mentality of the masses who worship microwaves full of potatoes as entertainment.

In Gilbert's mind, only the Holy Broccoli can smash this Imperial Occupation of the Human Soul and liberate the Potatoe from the Potatoe Chip view of the world. Does one want the whole divine experience in the form of the whole carrot? or does one remain a slave, happy to nibble on the chopped carrot - the host - given out by the intercessor, the priest (dressed in an absurd white phallic costume).

Jasanský – Polák

The artistic duo of Lukáš Jasanský and Martin Polák has played central role in Czech art of the past twenty years, contributing fundamentally to redefining the position of photography within contemporary Czech art. Since the late 1980s, their work has been characterized by an intuitive intelligence and stubborn determination. By applying conceptual tools to the art of photography in order to deconstruct and question unspectacular and ordinary circumstances, Jasanský and Polák have created some of the most lucid and artful commentaries on various phenomena of Czech life. As more than one observer has noted, the extraordinary nature of Jasanský and Polák is rooted in their dual nature. Their work, which for more than a quarter century has been made exclusively by both together, is in fact a never-ending dialog in the style of comedy duos, skillfully covered by a cloak of seemingly passive reality, thus lending their works a kind of Dadaist guilefulness.

Pavel Vančát

Jiří Kovanda

Adorno and Kovanda on materialism

Adorno: Talent, perhaps, is nothing more than fortunately sublimated anger – the ability to transform those energies that can lead to destruction of rebellious objects, to a form of concentrated and enduring contemplation.

Kovanda: I agree. One needs to transform that anger at the object reality around us to a certain idle temper, which will enable us to transform and control the things around us. I just don't agree on the point that it has to be a specific talent, which is exclusive – everyone has this ability. It's a universal human ability.

Adorno: Is it possible to register some traits of aggression on the face of such a person who is immersed into thoughts and detached from practical objects?

Kovanda: I don't think so. An artist always looks a little stupid when experiencing these inner battles, but I'm not sure this can be considered as traits of aggression. He/she has a calm face because it's not a daily occurrence. As I have already mentioned, anyone can have these abilities, it is not exclusive – that sounds rather elitist.

Adorno: Doesn't a person who is creating something perceive himself, in his affect, as going wild, as "working madly"?

Kovanda: I don't think that a working person should perceive himself in this way. That's too much of a romanticising view of this situation. With respect to creative work, it is necessary to be free of furious inner battles; otherwise one is being controlled and cannot create freely.

Adorno: But isn't such fury needed in order for a person to free himself from this prejudice? Isn't that what he's pacifying gotten through the defiance of what he's destroying?

Kovanda: That's something else. It's a battle after a battle, a getting through defiance after getting through another defiance, it can be an endless battle. His initial impulse to liberation was probably also fury, but one will not get far with rage, it must be transformed to a more powerful force.

Zbyněk Baladrán

Marek Meduna

Operationist

He is not satisfied with an object, with a drawing, with text, with an action – he's not satisfied with anything. Everything can always be done differently. And it is so interesting – from far away as well as close up.

The viewer feels lost, the viewer is found, the viewer is surprised. He changes to a visitor. He changes to a reader. He changes to an exegete. He changes to a comedian. He changes to a viewer. But: there will be an operation. We will take various topics from life and from books and we will draw them according to a schedule. We will take a text and enter it into a drawing. What will we get a hold of – the diagonal, repetition, inside, outside, raster, detective, backside and front side, the ceiling, or the chair.

And then: we organize our things. Then we mix them up. Then we look at the colours. The pictures and the prototypes do not let us sleep. We remake what we find. It is as if we find what we remade. We are lost. We make an indication. We overlook the whole and we go look at a detail. We look over the detail and we go look at the whole. The gallery has windows. The gallery doesn't have windows. There are also doors. Or a hole in the wall.

We listen to music and we read. We go to the theatre. We also read articles on the Internet. We write. We also look at paintings. We talk to friends.

We limit ourselves. And then we think it over again. There's always something going on somewhere and elsewhere nothing changes. And it's nice. Very nice. And it's smart.

Very smart.

But there is always something that can be different. And there is something else we need to try. Verify it? So many possibilities.

So once again. There will be an operation. With a pencil. With colour. With a wire. With a ribbon. With a croissant. With a thread. With a theatre figure. With an illustration. With a carton. With a word. With a letter. What do legends describe?

Marek Pokorný

Markus Selg

The artist and filmmaker Markus Selg condenses subjects and motifs of cultural history and existential meaning. In the process he picks up lines of tradition that can not be located in an obvious way in the course of a pluralistic Neo- Modernism. Repeatedly Selgs art is about archetypal contexts of meaning, about a pantheistic world panorama, about creation and death, as well as existential spaces where the human being and his development are in the focus of interest.

Out of the opportunities of electronic image processing and the seemingly endless archive of the internet Selg develops prints on paper and canvas - a digital form of painting without brushes and colour that treats and transforms found material in a complex way. His exhibitions condense pictures, sculptures, stage-like structures and fixtures, light, photography and film into the form of a Gesamtkunstwerk.

Markus Selgs works result from a tension between the dealing with real materials that constitute pictures, sculptures and installations, as well as immaterial mediums like computer and film. Distinctive is his equal weight interest in the potential of the archaic, in the spiritual emanation of ethnological artifacts as well as in the contemporary digital options to reproduce surfaces and materials and to question the original and the authentic.

During the last years Markus Selg also carried out his presentations outside of the art business. In 2012 he created the stage setting for the opera *Auf Kolonos* (On Kolonos), directed by Laurent Chetouane at Staatstheater Karlsruhe. At the same time he produced several narrative and symbolic films that are closely linked to the location where they originated: *Schicksal* (Destiny) stems from the wintery seclusion of the Czech mountains, *Storråda* (The Proud One) is an historical parable that takes place at the Lofoten district in Norway. His recent first feature film *Das ewige Antlitz* (The Eternal Face) is penetrated by certain landscapes in the south of Germany and the

magical atmosphere of Prague.

Thomas Groetz

Lenka Vítková

Lenka Vítková presents herself in galleries alternately with paintings and texts. Although she keeps both forms of her work separate, they are mutually parallel with respect to the basic processes. Since paintings are being presented this time, let us point out the emphasis placed on the potential of the painting symbol, whether it concerns in specific cases, for example, the boundary between the symbol represented and the painting gesture, or the balance between the physical motive and graphical element. The basic means of expression of Lenka Vítková is a “fragment”. A fragment of a speech or a piece of some object enlance an unspoken reality, which gives them an immanent expression. It is transmitted outside of a current experience; it activates the memory tendency to incorporate hypothetical possibilities of a sensual and semantic closure. The art of Lenka Vítková is the ability to cut off such a part without leaving the remains to be crippled but with the potential of openness and inconclusiveness. When the artwork is endowed with this expressive entasis, its reception comes close to a *déjà vu* – an intensive feeling of something already seen and experienced. The responsibility of an artist is to remain on this boundary, in the zone of contemplative subversive practice.

Jiří Ptáček

Monika Zawadzki

Black matter. A geometric object whose volume renders it excessively present and determines our own feeling of presence in the space we share with it. Its reduced form, incomprehensible to begin with yet somehow familiar, arouses a need to interact and enquire, to interact with something that is known and which, regardless of the distinctly aestheticised form that resides in the purity of its shape, can often be surprisingly personal.

A first encounter with the work of the Polish artist Monika Zawadzki (1977) – and here I speak from personal experience – can be confusing, especially when the encounter takes place within the context of an exhibition devoted to several artists. This is because the construction and total mastery

of the space in which Zawadski operates is an important aspect of her work. Questions relating to the relationship between individual elements and “entities”, their hierarchy and position, are crucial for the artist, not only in relation to the exhibition space, but also and especially to the shared space – the space of being, the space of existence, the space of perpetual pervasion and movement.

The absolute reduction of the colour spectrum to black or, as is the case in the artist’s later work, to transparent colour, i.e. a kind of colourlessness, can on the one hand be perceived as an element of graphic design, a discipline the artist studied at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. On the other hand however, it can be perceived as a completely pivotal form of creative language. Universal colour is for Zawadzki a method by which to create a kind of universe, a world in which everything relates to everything else and the importance of individual elements is subjugated to a sequence of equal substances, hybrid forms and existences, where even ostensible oppositions can be complementary units.

At first sight Monika Zawadzki’s world can seem austere, black and white. However, it is precisely due to this formal reduction that the artist is able, by means of symbols and archetypes, to highlight seemingly transparent connections, equality and links that are simply fundamental to existence.

Markéta Stará

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