

The ever-changing life of monochrome paintings

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Robert URBÁSEK: Monos – Chroma

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From the beginning, this new, spatially pure and very adequate Gallery sets out to produce high quality dramaturgy whilst retaining the diversity of views, which is in principle the brain child of Marián Mudroch, member of the by now classical Association A – R. Following the exhibitions of Marián Meško or drawings by Milan Paštéka of the 1960s, the Gallery has showcased Robert Urbásek, another unique personality of the Czechoslovak art scene. He is among a handful of our artists to remain faithful to monochrome painting.

The theme, however, enjoys authentic development abroad. Despite all its changes over time, while the Czech and Slovak context tends to prefer literary content, Vienna or Berlin continue to produce new facets. Our artists such as Vanesa Hardi, Kateřina Štenclová, Václav Krůček or Robert Urbásek play more of a solitary role, though this is not indicative of any lack of quality or significance of their work.

Rudolf Fila, whose concepts remain as perfect as ever, has defined a meaning of an artist. We cannot but agree that, at the time when many confuse art with entertainment, genuine immersion into a particular artistic issue in an authentic form carries in itself also an ethic value.

He often employs at times an utterly subtle interface of two colours and sometimes articulates a particular structure with a monochrome. Characteristically, his pieces are untitled, identified merely by a number and date: it is the very uniqueness of the different colour articulations that communicates the message.

The truly subtle interface of two dark tones on a smooth surface of canvas can be seen, for instance, in his splendid series of 2002 that carries the theme of broad brush strokes. Urbásek has been also working with cleverly created relief structures since 1996.

Individual cycles, highlighted in this exhibition with excellent examples, show the varying options of working with relief that assume a new, unique art form. Whilst this technique tends to respect the principal horizontal syntax, beautiful and impressive organisation of diagonal lines appear in Urbásek's pieces of 1998.

For instance by lifting a relief of stretched ropes that serve as the foundation of painting, he makes the picture to enter the surrounding space. Such method enables us to see the distance between a brush and the art piece.

This unveils another of Urbásek's unique techniques: transfer of a painting into space. It has been fifteen years ago that he drew interest in his paintings on spatial shapes – boxes.

He thus changed the discourse about monochrome as a matter of traditional painting: his interpretation of 'minimalist' cube offers a new, truly unique perspective on monochrome painting.

The current exhibition concludes with a piece from the cycle which, to my delight, premièred in the Pilsen City Gallery at the Slovak Geometry I exhibition, which I prepared together with Václav Malina less than a year ago.

Urbásek developed yet another innovative approach to the relationship between a painting and space: he allowed materialised lines made from long wooden sticks to leave the surface of painting and reach out to the surrounding space with its new articulation through a relief, thus making the surrounding space a part of the art piece.

He thus articulated a new relationship between the painting and its environment, largely through the golden median. A painting thus became a relief capable of integrating with ease even an entire wall, as we have seen in Pilsen.

With subtle reference to the classics of geometric art and in an acknowledgement of the 'post-modern lesson' Urbásek uses their preferred basic colours: yellow, red or blue. He thus enriches the scale of the interaction with a reference to the Mondrianite geometry, yet he comments on it with a contemporary phenomenon – his specific monochrome.

At the same time he conceptually explores the possibilities of a connection between the picture and wooden objects: they may be attached to the surface or penetrate it, or the two concepts are combined.

It opens the contemporary discourse between two faces of abstract painting, whilst bearing in mind that an author's decision 'to do monochrome pictures' is a concept per se.

The pure, diverse space of the Gallery enabled to show the authenticity of Robert Urbásek's work and confirmed its significance not merely within the local, but also wider context.

Well, this is a beautiful and important exhibition!