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## The Work of Patricia Olynyk: Facing Irrationality

Skulls, statuary, columns, capitals, armors, amphora ceramics, scarabs, seashells, seeds, architectural elements such as doors and staircases, geometric shapes, letters, and so on — Patricia Olynyk commands amazingly rich visual vocabularies. The cultural and geographical backgrounds of these elements are not limited to a specific civilization but extend from Egypt and Greece through all Europe and Asia. These different motifs of hers are layered and composed without becoming confusing or incongruous, which creates a visual expression that is mesmerizing. Yet many of these elements, which are carefully collected like insects and rocks in specimen cases, seem to relate profoundly to a sense of death and impermanence — as seen by the frequent use of skulls in her works.

Many elements in her works, such as archeological structures and ornaments, religious symbols, architecture and its decorations, and primitive life forms, are not contemporary forms, but those that were created in the past or whose lives have long since ended. The ruins of abandoned structures and furniture, and even fossilized animals and plants, are represented and layered with geometric shapes and letters, which seem to record the passing of time. Her works remind one of excavated objects, ancient books resting quietly in a medieval library, dusty artifacts stored in exhibit cases, or old photographs tempered with time. Despite these associations, however, Olynyk's works by no means convey nostalgia. Using a variety of motifs and exploring in some sense a stoic and quiet world, her works are shaped by her strong drive to question the irrational in human beings, and in doing so, she achieves her unique expression.

Beginning in the spring of 1990, Olynyk spent three years as a visiting scholar in the Department of Fine Arts at Kyoto Seika University, where I was her instructor. Her research topic was contemporary art in Japan that uses traditional materials and methodologies. Unusual techniques in her later works, such as handmade papers and works in book format emphasizing sculptural forms, are perhaps largely influenced by her research and experience in the East at that time. The breadth of her interest was extensive. Yet she has an exceptionally keen

sensitivity that allowed her, in an amazingly short time, to acquire and utilize these techniques in her own works.

Olynyk employs a vast range of techniques and materials – drawing, handmade papers, collage, assemblage, printmaking techniques such as lithography, offset printing, woodblock, photoengraving, and digital image processing, and, more recently, three-dimensional works of architectural salvage, semi-three-dimensional objects, and installations. As with her images, her use of these techniques and materials is amazingly complex: she employs unique methodologies in her creations. When she began work in Kyoto in 1990, I remember that I was astounded at the precision and illustrative nature of her drawing. Yet I felt that her drawings seemed to be similar to anatomical diagrams, biological representations, or (I might say) excellent scientific illustrations. This first impression of mine alone indicates that her interest is more toward recording deeds and facts than expressing human sentiment and feeling. It is also evident that her use of various mixed media is the crucial element in distilling and representing her vision.

I have heard that both Olynyk's father and older sister are engineers. I have not had a chance to ask her what type of engineers they are, but it seems obvious that their blood also runs in her veins. I believe that an engineer-like sensitivity is especially abundant in her artistic creation and is evident in all her efforts – her unceasing interest in new techniques and materials, her great ability to adapt them for her own creation, and her facility in selecting and reorganizing with a clear eye the complex symbols and signs of different times and cultures, of nature and humankind.

In front of Olynyk's works, I sometimes feel as if someone were asking me a question, "Why are we trying to make things?" Yet at the same time, her elaborate pieces, like intricate metalwork of precious gold and silver, evoke a sense of sadness and the transitory traces of an unknown artisan. Although I don't think Olynyk intends it, these images of the past, coming forward from the depths of her picture planes, seem to create a sense of unease. However, her works eloquently speak of the inescapable task of an artist who is compelled to battle against the irrationality of being human.