

2. KIRSTINE ROEPSTORFF & MATYÁŠ CHOCHOLA SIDE STEP: NADIM ABBAS

Walkthrough with the artists and curators on December 8, 2017

KIRSTINE ROEPSTORFF

“Many of these works are very different. Actually these [brass paintings] are quite new to me, as of now.

My practice, regardless of whether it is sculpture or painting I consider it to be very collage based. That was my start out and training and when I think collage it is not necessarily paper on paper or paper on fabric it is more of a way of thinking. I was a very bad school kid and basically doing collages was my way of starting to understand the world. When you do collage your work is made up of positives and negatives, not in terms of values but in terms of physically a space. You have an image, you decide to cut out something, and that cut-out is the positive and gives negative space. But both of them represent form, whether it's presence or the absence of presence.

In that way, much of my production has to do with things that are not really the way they appear. And when you are working with collage it's like you have a triangle with two corners and the last corner is the space in between.

And the more you can push the images away from each other, the gap becomes bigger, but the mind is trying to combine the two images. The actual images might be of less importance, but the space in between them might become more important, that's really when the story gets created or the entity or the energy. In the beginning I was trying really hard to put as many images next to each other because they were very important to me and to make you understand the same things as I understood them: of how fucked up and wrong the world is. The more I've worked the more I let images apart. So the superior structure or energy could trespass through. And of course that has to do with more confidence in my practice and what collage could do, but also more confidence in the viewer that they were eager to combine the dots in a way. Many of my things do have to do with things that are outside our “picture”.

The fact that when we're presented with a reality, we agree on something that we consider to be real because we think we see it, but really the information that lies between us and above that we don't see with our visual eye, we are more influenced by because it's a pressure from above. And that's really what the pictures [*Waterings* series] next door are very much about where I started to work with these canvases where I put a horizontal line that was marked with a thin red line which I basically consider to be the scope of our lives. Everything, the dramas, the weddings, the deaths that happen in this red line, but the pressure from above and below, which is out of this physical world but is in the total world, is what pushes us to get experience because we have this body.

I think these pictures here [brass paintings] I see them as a post-product of the Venice project because before I was invited to Venice, two weeks before I was in the middle of a move, and every time I looked up I saw the word “influenza.” And I thought “what the fuck is this word?” That's peculiar, but I'm so busy... And every time I was thinking Venice, it was like “influenza”. And I thought they probably have something to do with each other. And I started to look into

what this word wanted, how it was taking shape and I quite soon understood that it had not so much to do with the physical influenza like the physical disease but like a state of mind that makes us weak. The influenza was linked to some kind of collective weakness that we all are part of. In the beginning, I thought of it as a weakness that comes from too much light. We have this screen culture and of course the light pushes us away from ourselves and in a way also from each other. Because we connect via the digital world but we don't connect in a room where we have sensitivity and a physical dimension. Intellectually it was interesting.

And I walked along the line of this idea of too much light, and I suddenly thought to myself: "Well no, it's not because we have too much light, it's because we have too little darkness." And that's a whole different ballgame. I started to understand and to look into what it means to have too little darkness. Because for me darkness in conventional thinking darkness is pain, trauma, depression, when we go to sleep at night and it's dark, it's all the things we don't want. It's loaded with negative connotations, but in darkness is also where we find the regenerative, healing force and the ultimate spark of creation, we just tend to forget this. Everything which has a form in the light, has raised from the non-form of darkness. So really, darkness also is what yet does not have a form. If you turn off the light, we can't see each other, we can sense each other, the form is deprived.

That's really interesting and that is something I have something to say about because I'm an artist and because all artists are working in the field of non-form. All artists work from a space that a form has not yet appeared, but the sensitivity and the sensibility and the sensation of something is there. This is also why like-minded ideas and material can occur and pop-up independently on various places, crossing times and via different persons, who are not obviously connected. It's the unification in the realm of non-material and non-form. It travels effortlessly and without time.

The only aspect is to have or rehearse this sensibility. To gather it and inject it with density in order for it to be so dense that it falls down and gets a form, say, like Matyas's sculptures. You can pass it on, I receive the form of Matyas's sculptures through my eyes and absorb them again with sensitivity. It is one of the big challenges in our times, it's the human paradox because we have body. The body is our form and it is our vehicle to understand and experience the world. We link to everything that has to do with form to what we consider reality, but our real information comes from the formlessness. That's the paradox that I was working with for Venice. These pictures are called "Harvesting Darkness" in a way they are made by sewing, the fabric has been sewn into many different shapes and forms, but I as I'm painting on top of the sewings, I'm constantly eliminating the lines. A new order or depth is occurring. That's what also happens in darkness. In Venice, the mantra was: light separates us, but darkness unites. Darkness is trespassing borders, my physical body is here but the influenza has no problem, it penetrates my body and makes me sick and makes me weak and I'll pass it on to you, because you're my next neighbour. In that way the conventional understanding of limits and surface is really not existing in darkness. These pictures are constantly trespassing the existing borders.

We are in a time where things are very shaky and rocky, where things dissolve, people are moving, borders are being shifted, the economy is changing its status and power structures, nationalities and value systems have constantly been moving, and that makes people very afraid and brings a lot of anxiety into the world. We know what was but we don't know what will come. We hold on to what was which is understandable but it's just not very efficient. For example a leaf that leaves a tree leaves because it's lost its inner elasticity and inner hold, it dissolves. I see that we stay in the world, things are dissolving because it is lacking new energy, it's looking for new forms. That is our challenge for now, how to rise. The project about darkness is to encourage people to allow the non-form to take place and meet it with curiosity instead of fear and anxiety.

These meta-things [the mobiles] come from the idea that our eyes are so strong but really its

pictures that you can hear, it's instruments that you can play, but if you did it would most likely break. It's really for the eye to understand a sound of a vibration."

MATYÁŠ CHOCHOLA

"I will start with the link that you just mentioned, that forms are disappearing or dissolving because for me what I'm always researching are those dissolved traces of our own history, the forgotten layers which we still keep in the mind but that are inactive. I like to work with those associations, either with the sculptural forms of a whole installation which trigger those parts of your mind which activate processes of remembering.

Similar to your collages, for me the topic of collage is always the work with the whole space. I perceive it as a constellation and to place the works is like poetry, like a performative gesture. I work with sculptures and half-finished things and create this story or tension of balancing the elements and even the space of the information represented by these single forms. They wouldn't work without the particular depth. I try to create a holistic but at the same time an open structure.

The topic of darkness was coincidentally also the topic of my last exhibition at the Prague National Gallery. I took it from a different corner, more on the topic of shadows, shadows of our contemporary society and all those forgotten layers which push us like a fast car in front of a wall. The reality where we have to face all these unconscious things which are reflective of the craziness all around. People are missing a strong core or orientation which would give them some kind of perspective. I was trying to unfold those hidden aspects from our personal core but also collectively.

This is the domino effect from that project, I have used the same asphalt floor, which defines and creates the space and changes our perception of reality and for me it symbolizes this universal darkness as a reminder of industrialism which we have inherited from our grandparents.

I have been interested in the topic of black matter as a creative substance for the universe. Once you go back to the Big Bang, you realize that there were three or more components, matter, anti-matter and they have discovered dark matter which is something in between, which literally eats the light of the universe, otherwise the light would be so bright that we would get blind if there is not this active dark matter. In our kind of bi-polar way of thinking, inherited from Christianity, how to categorize this ultra-metaphysical, between the genres, and super fluid entity?

The glass sculptures are reminiscent of forms from various movements of modern art. The sculptures are about emotions. This one is called *Versace Extravaganza*, a funny emotion. This one is called *No Name*, it's standing on a mini disc player, reminding us of the blind path of our history, mini discs were discontinued due to Sony not wanting to open up their copyright for this genius idea. This one is slightly uranium based. Here we have a monument for CD culture, a kind of totem pole, which was formerly alive. The younger generation doesn't know what it is.

Here is a fossilized shell, a rough natural element with universal information, that is saved in the stones, as a kind natural medium for memory. Esoterics believe that crystals are keeping information in some kind of holographic way.

The glass stick sculptures, I was inspired by the big bang theory.

Downstairs is the environmental installation *Big Bang Style*, what is behind the Big Bang energy if you go into the micro size of the molecules and atomic movements in an esoteric way. This landscape is some kind of frozen surface of some planet with crystal flowers that grow from all that movement.

This one is a dark purple, but actually it appears black. Super black doesn't exist in glass, but they use a high concentration of dark purple it appears black.

These are called *Miami Nights* from the famous CD compilation which I was listening at the time I made them. They are prints on aluminium. I also like to work with Microsoft Word Graphic Editor, and to rediscover the visuality of the 90s and of postmodernity. Drawing the hidden legacies which is for my generation is important, which I feel we can learn from."

NADIM ABBAS

Nadim: It all started when last time I came here I did a site visit. Two things I mean: I saw these blue lights around Zurich and didn't really know what they were and then I asked Linda and Arianna and they told me it was related to this sort of drug scene that they had here back in the 80s and then I started doing more research about it and of course blue lights are meant for to prevent people from shooting up in public. So the more I looked into it the more it became very interesting and of course this space is quite close to what it used to be called "the needle park". And then I started to think about the use of blue lights and what have meant... I didn't really want to explicitly talk about that sort of history of Needle park. I didn't feel it was my place and I didn't grow up here but I did read a lot about it and I probably know more about it than most people in Zurich. I have talked to a lot of people so instead I have tried to think about the blue lights in relationship to the idea of concealment and the action of not being able to see your veins in this context became quite interesting to me and I tried to apply that to a parallel subject. And that's where the thing about horseshoe crabs came, because Horseshoe crabs and actually most crustaceans have copper based blue blood and whereas our veins are blue not because they are blue but because of the way our skin refracts the light, so there's a interesting difference. And as I have told many of you already, horseshoe crab's blood is very special. Lots of crustaceans have blue blood but horseshoe crabs have a very specific chemical in their blood which clots on contact with certain kind of bacteria, gram negative bacteria which is some very common bacteria, it causes infections such as e coli what the scientists discover was that they could convert this chemical and synthesize a special chemical that is now widely used in pharmaceutical to test drugs and surgical instruments for sterility. It's the most cost effective and efficient way of doing so.

Linda: So very small amount of the blood, or how does that work?

Nadim: Apparently yes, So it's the blood that they extract that chemical from it. And then they have this clear liquid and have it in a vial. And you only need a small amount of whatever you are testing and it reacts immediately. You have one of those spinning things, and then they test it and it takes like a day. I think it used to take much longer like a weeks or months. They used to test it on rabbits, something like that.

Kirstine: Waste of animal lives.

Nadim: I know. I know. So the whole procedure is very medieval. They take this crabs from the sea. They are very harmless, they don't really do anything to anyone, so you'd just pick them up. They look very scary but actually they don't bite.

Kirstine: But you'd have to kill them to use their blood?!

Nadim: Well, you don't actually. That's the thing. So, in a way, it's more humane than what they used to do to rabbits. Well I don't know what they did to rabbits actually. So they take them and then they put them on this sort of assembly line sort of thing with metal tables and they open, do you see that middle slip in the middle? You can sort of bend it and they shove a needle in the soft bit, and they extract the blood into milk bottles.

Kirstine: They're like water cows.