

Catalogue text for the exhibition in Cracow in 2011

Ursula Radel-Leszczyński a native of Kraków. She graduated in Fine Arts from the Jagiellonian University and completed her diploma in contemporary art under Professor M. Porębski. She then moved to Vienna, where she has lived ever since.

In Salzburg and Peking, among other places, she attended the artistic happenings of ShanZuo Zhou and DaHuang Zhou, known as the Zhou Brothers. In the years 2004 – 2009 she continued to develop under their direction in Salzburg and Chicago. The Zhou Brothers have attained worldwide popularity. Famous for their unique group work approach, they have created paintings, sculptures, graphic art and interdisciplinary shows. Their aesthetics, thinking and creativity are a symbiosis of Eastern and Western philosophy, literature and art.

The pictures in this exhibition are painted dynamically, on a grand scale. They emanate a wealth of colour and latent emotion. We enter a world of coloured stains, which suggest that space has given birth to something new, something worth recording. The artist constructs a pictorial space based on colour. The richness of colour does not come from a wide range of colours, but from her knowing how to put them together. She achieves a carefully thought-out and precisely linked construction of planes. Each 'stain' has its own logic, emotional and constructional.

The paintings do not have formal geometry, but they certainly don't lack structure, which comes from the twists and turns of the brush strokes. Each touch of the brush, contriving both breadth and synthesis, brings to the whole a character of unusual weight. It has a life of its own, and giving off an individual radiance it goes towards bringing about that overall harmony which can be likened to that of a musical symphony. A diversity of images arises from a palette of warm and cold colours whose rhythm, discreetly but unwaveringly, leads to a play of values. The range of values addresses the intellect; the range of colours expresses the emotions.

Truly fascinating are those pictures which employ a vermilion (cinnabar) yellow tint. These canvases seem to spark, glow, smoke, with the painter transforming ordinary paints into substances from hell itself. The colours contrive to blaze and give off heat. The artist's reds force us to think, order us to wonder at the conceptual intensity of the colours. As a matter of course we go through an extraordinary adventure with reds. They are suggestive of pride, sensuality, a satisfied life.

Four pictures from the series 'Perfect Past' keep to a cold colour scheme and arouse associations with an underwater world. These fantastic imaginary landscapes, skirting the borders of non-figurative art, are a romantic escape into the unknown world of the deep.

The painter uses various values (hues) of grey, blue and black to create a uniform, highly evocative feel induced by silvery colours. The water is a symbol of chaos, changeability and instability, of cold and distance, while a symphony of pink and grey renders it friendly. The depth of the pictures is achieved by overlaying several coats one on another. A composition with multiple layers and planes is thus created. The colour 'stains' overlap; they reveal themselves and cloak each other; the lower layers are visible beneath the surface, and they permeate everything, giving tone to everything above. The big red area is shaded with black, yellow, gold and brown. A top coating of white creates a misty surface. The effect which pervades is achieved by using the technique known by the French term 'frottage'.

Metaphorically, looked at up close, this enrichment of a surface has something of the nature of fabric about it. The direction of the brush strokes to and fro and back upon themselves, shows the effect of a blending together. The decorated details on the canvas bring to mind a brocaded fabric, and the brush marks a woven textile. What we have here is more an implicit suggestion of forms than their explicit expression; they are more at the stage of revealing themselves than completely there.

In many paintings the artist uses a 'ruler' to divide the surface into several colour zones. These vertical and horizontal lines lose their contours in several places, are blurred, hidden beneath the next coat of paint. Sometimes the brush strokes descend into a whirlpool, creating a fantastic woven calligraphy, other times the brush snakes with furtive delicacy across the canvas, and then disappears. On several pictures painted spots appear; the moon, the sun, squares, rectangles or decorative stamps.

The creativity of Ursula Radel-Leszczyński spans the East and West. The composition, colours and artistic technique shows us an artist with a fine grasp of what surrounds her; we are simply obliged to react to the choices she makes.

This artist creates imaginary landscapes, but ones that arouse associations of the world which surrounds us. The subject matter of these abstract unshown paintings is the romantic need to escape into a secret microscopic world with a touch of the beauty of fabrics. The fascination with colours, with their aesthetic and emotional potential, speaks of a connection to the tradition of European painting.

The decorative elements suggest a liking for Art Nouveau, with its continuing presence in our daily life.

The spontaneous and unerring touches have their source in the Art of the Far East.

Written by Halina Bilka

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