

Mariusz Knorowski, art director the Center of Polish Sculpture, Orońsko, 2006.

Catalogue text: Revelations in wood

Mariusz Knorowski: More and more often we have the chance to see your art after many years of your absence from the country; let's remind: the introduction was an inconspicuous presentation of one object at the Chapel Gallery in Orońsko in 2004, followed by the exhibition Wood Archives at the Patio Gallery WSHE in Łódź, a monumental exhibition Epiphanies of Nature in the Late-Modern World at the Wilson Shaft Gallery in Katowice last year and now at the Museum of Contemporary Sculpture at the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko, and in the meantime good reviews, resonance in the media, remembering about yourself and meetings with the new artistic environment and a new group of viewers. Such a sequence is very significant and it cannot be a matter of incident that there has appeared around you a special, favourable aura which is evoking interest - it is a rather unusual phenomenon in response to contemporary art.

Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański: It is true that the resonance in the media, as all the previous exhibition reviews have been glowing. I think it is due to the fact that the material I'm working with is so well familiar to everybody, and it evokes only 'warm' associations at the first contact.

MK: Until recently your creative productions were known more extensively in Germany. You had a series of exhibitions in respected institutions. I know that to a large extent the character of your works has been shaped by seemingly secondary circumstances, such as the scale of your studio, the climate of a post-industrial interior. But I am really interested in the choice of material - substance; although I know that you do not limit yourself to wood alone, to mention at least the monument made of granite so highly evaluated by Andrzej Szczypiorski, commemorating Poles deported after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising to Neuengamme. So why wood? A natural substance, incorporating properties of both physical and metaphysical nature, tangible and purely practical, inspiring and symbolical. You are working with wood in the age of multimedia!

JWW: I have chosen wood to work with for very good reasons. It is a product of nature which after its physical death seems to come back to another life. It has a scent, it swells, dries. The power of this material has caused that it captured me and made me stay with it despite, one may think now, more 'up to date' multimedia technologies.

MK: I know that a violin maker who must predict the acoustic values of the instrument sound, recognizes the acoustic properties of different species of wood, and composes them

skillfully - such non-verbalised knowledge, or a kind of imagination which testifies to his mastery. Do you search, match, compose your works basing on a similar rule? Do you receive any impulses flowing to you from a certain species of wood, its properties, features or hidden meanings?

JWW: The work with this material relies primarily on respect for it. You mustn't hurt wood. The tools for its processing must be used only in such a way that the trace they leave should not accidentally interfere in the structure and character of wood. This material allows to do a lot with itself. Yet you must obey certain rules. Any interference is allowed only to such a degree that it does not affect the character, that its intensity does not lose its power. The restrictions I put on myself include among others a conscious resignation from any elements of 'narrating means'. I concentrate exclusively on the essence of the material. After some time of working with this natural substance there appears as if a certain level from which wood send its impulses to which and I try to respond.

MK: The 20th century art did not penetrate the nooks and crannies of nature in search of picturesque facts and phenomena. It focused attention on revealing morphology of natural processes, the miracle that happens under the surface of things. Instead of the notion of mimesis and the inseparable illusion of 3D space, there appeared a notion of Raumausstrahlung (radiation of space, its disappearance). Professor Ewa Chojecka described the situation in the following way, Art has transformed from a storyteller to a manifestation of expressive form contents: symmetry, congestion, dilution, vibration, motion and motionlessness, crystallicity or doughiness, shining and roughness, phenomena of the surface treatment and spatial modelling, synesthesia of visual, auditory and tactile sensations. Nature appears as a source of endless experiences of forms, colours, expressions, tensions, rationality and randomness, conscious and subconscious order, dichotomic arrangements. Do you agree with this diagnosis, because it seems to relate to your art as well?

JWW: I do. I agree with it, many of the presented aspects match my own reflections.

MK: Your works affect us primarily with the structure. One often notices the geometrical division, a kind of regular composition scheme, especially in the series Wooden Tables. Sometimes they are solids as ideal as the Cube which we had a chance to see in both forms: compact and extended one. It shows the acceptability of two variations - even for the status of the work which changes its form. But I actually mean another problem: geometry - an intellectual invention - is a contradiction to natural order, whose character is more organic, spontaneous, impulsive, often conventionally random than rational, structured. How do you reconcile the two antagonistic orders?

JWW: It's true, in my works the structure becomes one of the major aspects. Often the whole elements are as if modules, which I use interchangeably in subsequent presentations, e.g. the Cube in the Chapel Gallery was presented as a compact, in Patio Gallery it was an extended form unfolded on the floor, and now in the Sculpture Museum it is hung on the wall as a huge wooden board. When it comes to reconciliation of geometry with nature, the former enables me to create and organise certain frames for the natural order, which I then try to introduce. This externally derived 'natural order' gets inscribed into the prepared beforehand 'geometry' of the interior. It is during such transformation that new values are born - of new spontaneous forms, often as if overfilled with controlled chaos.

MK: I have noticed that some of your exhibitions are 'spreading', they are happening in the existing space, they are creeping into crevices, openings, bays etc. They make an impression of natural excrescences, very expansively overgrowing the civilisation products. There happens a strange symbiosis. Is it a kind of intervention, or rather a counterpoint provoking to reflections? In your case does ecological awareness project on your artistic work?

JWW: This 'spreading' results from my comprehension and understanding of the essence of building space. Each space is always different, full of conditions resulting from the architecture itself, and on the other hand dependant on the character of the presented works. So each time we face a completely new situation. Finding optimal relations and ideal balance between these two components is, in my opinion, the key to creating an effective exhibition. It is almost always a kind of attempt to interfere in the architecture of existing space. You're asking about ecological awareness; of course it does influence my activity. Maybe my artistic productions, even to a very limited degree, will succeed in drawing more attention to ecology issues with the people who see my works. Maybe they'll notice how important role in the closed complex of ecological clock plays the tree, without which all humans would be doomed to extinction.

MK: Particular fragments of your exhibition make an impression of a ritualistic treatment. I mean marked out circles, figures, continuums. Sometimes one notices a clear boundary - and it raises questions: is it an intentional division of space, or do we enter a sphere of sacrum? So is it an activity aimed at sacralising space, or only formal aesthetics?

JWW: I only aimed at intended division of space, so you may call it formal aesthetics, but I leave the viewer complete freedom in his perception, even when I think he enters the sacrum sphere.

MK: It was a little provocative on my side to have asked you about the mystery expression of your activities and its accompanying concentration. When I'm gazing at your works, my first association concerns the laboriousness of their production, precision, cohesion and simultaneously a noticeable consistence in the sequence of elements, a certain correctness indicating a well-taught hand movement. This, naturally, brings to mind writing. Is it a special case of ideographic record representing notions, larger units of sense? Is it a kind of hieroglyphic text of nature?

JWW: Well, it seems to me that in that case, the traces of my activity could be in a way compared to a kind of hieroglyphic text of nature.

MK: I would go further in this continuum of associations: contents, script, revealed truth. Epiphanies in your works have already been mentioned and it sounds very convincing. It might be a gift of revealing truths hidden before the profanum. Can your whole artistic production be considered a kind of book, a chapter of a huge book of nature, or is it a modest booklet of man on man who constitutes its tiny little piece, 'a thinking reed' and with humility seeks a place for himself in nature, in harmony with it?

JWW: I'll answer like that. In the last years I made very many works and if one could look at them all at the same time, you might notice in this multitude of various structures, as if a germ of an attempt to visualise a certain table of wood morphology, or wood archives. I think that in the future I will continue to reveal these hidden truths of nature.

MK: As you know the proverbial 'benedictine patience' has contributed to sustaining the continuity of our culture and conservation of the heritage of antiquity. Arduous activity, yet useful. The laboriousness of the monks who were anonymously rewriting books in scriptoriums is well known. And they even tried to embellish the books with illuminations, a kind of artistic commentary. Are you writing a text, arduously and with a deep faith in its significance? Is there a message in it, because I understand that with your art you not only immortalise the fact of your existence.

JWW: I think that it is a kind of independent, rather vague force that continuously drives me in this constant pursuit and 'completion' of new files of my 'archives'. Undoubtedly, it all means arduous work which is carried out with a conviction of its importance, because somehow I do not find any reasons that would make me stop it.

MK: Does your experience and belief make you see any difference between Kunst and Gestaltung? I'm asking because Paul Klee supported the latter notion which emphasizes the creative sense of artistic practice.

JWW: I think that neither of these ideas, Kunst and Gestaltlung, can do without creativity in some sense; for example painting a picture or making a sculpture requires a limited creativity, such that is limited to the creative process itself. You can easily place them in the most diverse interiors without any risk of changing their character, and thus for example a work of sacral character can easily 'exist' in 'lay architecture'. The matter looks completely different when an object/installation is created for a concrete architectural interior. Then we have to do with creative artistic practice, that is Gestaltung according to Paul Klee, whose example you mention. The process of creation in that case goes simultaneously and inseparably both within the object and in the space surrounding it. I guess this is the main difference between the two mentioned terms.

MK: Tell us about technologies you are using, because as far as I know, in your work there is a special respect for the material, not only religious attention. Isn't the process of working in fact a kind of a coded objective, just like the notion of route does not necessarily include the real point of destination and it is the movement itself that matters?

JWW: With a great respect for the material in my works, I am limiting the technologies of its processing to a minimum. I allow only the indispensable traces of tool intervention on the surface of wood. Only as much as is really necessary. Indeed in my work the fact of reaching a previously set real goal is not important, what matters is the fact of perseverance in continuous pursuits.

MK: Such an attitude of an artist as a wanderer (homo viator) has a romantic heritage. Your work seems to have romantic connotations as well. In that epoch, artistic attitudes were touched with extreme subjectivity, and nature was often used as a medium to express artistic credo. Is your Creed in art- to use such organic comparison - rooted in the your work itself or does it lie outside it? We, the viewers, are ready to contemplate the works.

JWW: I would be willing to place my creed in art in the works themselves. You're saying that as a viewer you're ready to contemplate my works - I must confess that I do it very often myself. During this ritual I recover a balance of mind and a full tranquility. Wood apparently possesses some very special features, to which we, people, react positively. When it is arranged in appropriate rhythms, there seems to appear a full harmony of structure connected with the delicate gamut of colours and smells. What I find very interesting is the first contact with the architecture in which I intend to place my works. It always gives rise to a kind of contemplation which in the process of growing finally leads to very concrete decisions about the situation of appropriate rhythms, orders and wooden structures. This story repeats with every 'new' meeting with a new space; it is a sort of journey on which I always

take all my luggage of hitherto experiences and adventures I had encountered during my long-standing process of discovering this wonderful material given to us by nature - wood. I think that this natural substance hides in itself so many mysteries that my whole life will not suffice to acquaint and understand them.

MK: Do you find any similarity between your works and the so called Konkrete Plastik? I would like to refer to the works of Ulrich Rückriem (we had a chance to meet his works here in our Museum). Max Imdahls once tried to define it in comparison with works by Theo van Doesburg, Serra, Rabinowitch, It is very important for the definition of fine art category, that it conveys the three dimensionality of the object that is shows and possesses (...) According to the definition of its own category, it becomes art which is in a special way ascribed to the so called concrete art. Such art does not present anything else that is constitutes itself.

JWW: It is a little awkward to define one's own art, but answering the question, yes! Ulrich Rückriem is one of my favourite sculptors, whose works have been fascinating me for years. One of his major artistic actions in the material such as stone is an act of splitting. This act belongs to the most important ones in my work too, with the difference though that I do it in wood.

MK: Finally, a simple question - with a request for a sincere answer - what mystery does your art hide?

JWW: It would be simplest to say that my point in this case is to make very frank attempts to define the mysteries of nature.

Orońsko, 12. 01. 2006