

art & BUSINESS 7-8 , Monika Branicka, art critic

The soul of wood

De Weryha-Wysoczański graduated from the Gdańsk Art Academy in 1976, then he left for Hamburg. After almost a quarter of a century he is presenting an extraordinary exhibition in the Wilson Shaft Gallery in Katowice.

It is enough to reflect generally on the state of Polish contemporary sculpture to make you sad. Who does not want to become an epigone, who wants to escape from buffoonery or at least mannerism - escapes towards new media. Traditional materials like bronze, plaster or wood have become exhausted and devalued. Wood is at a twice lost position. It has got its natural limitations and the inglorious past of communist times and folk associations. It is used unwillingly, and then usually as a material for students' practice.

Weryha uses wood in agreement with its properties. He cuts it into chips, scraps, scales and slices. He builds hills, roads and circles from hundreds or thousands of elements. He assembles the slices into a column, and makes a triangle from twigs. The fragments of bark are used to make a cone, to build an ant hill, to build a new tree. He makes figures which do not exist in nature (wooden cube), but he does not violate its principles and natural order. He wants to understand the structure of wood and is interested in *the extent to which you can interfere in wood so that it does not lose anything from its identity*. It is probably the only abstraction which cannot be called cold. Minimalism with a soul. For some years now, Wysoczański has been working in an old railway cars repair shop where he opened a gallery. The exhibition in an unused mine shaft is a presentation in the 'site-specific' style. The works are carefully inscribed in the space of each of the rooms. Most do not have titles, like the one in which a heap of scraps stands (!) in a small room. Randomness is only make-believe here. Controlling the chaos of hundreds of elements needed Benedictine patience and humility towards the material.

It is one of the most beautiful and most thrilling sculpture exhibitions in recent time.

Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański , Epiphanies of nature in late-modern world, Wilson Shaft Gallery, Katowice - until 30.12.2005