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WARSAW SALON

Salon means exhibition. The Salon, beginning in 1725, was the official art exhibition of the Academie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, France. The name derives from the Louvre's Salon Carré. In 1737, the exhibitions became public, in 1748, a prize-awarding jury was introduced. Being accepted for the Salon was a confirmation of artistic success; with time however, the Salon became a symbol of a conservative and academic approach to art. The Salon exhibited chiefly paintings – by various artists, on every available inch of space.

Hadassah Emmerich has called her Kordegarda exhibition *The Salon*. This is an unusual Salon, filled with works made using various techniques, but by the same author. The project was conceived specifically for the show and was preceded by the artist's study visits in Warsaw. In a way, it is a site-specific presentation in a double sense – devoted to the city, and inspired by the gallery's 'palace-like' architecture and its situation in the direct vicinity of the official institutions of culture and government.

During her explorations of Warsaw, Hadassah Emmerich was particularly fascinated with the city inhabitants' constant striving to regain the war-destroyed authenticity – the reconstruction of historical buildings on the basis of surviving fragments, or 'vintage style' reconstruction if no documentation had survived – as well as the issue of museum objects that had gone missing or changed their location. Fragments of the Kordegarda show inspired by the artist's wanderings around Warsaw can also be interpreted as an intuitive attempt to reconstruct the local 'style'.

Ornament plays an important role in Emmerich's art, functioning, besides figurative or textual elements, as an equal component of the works. Ornament, like the Salon itself, was rejected by progressive, modernist artists. Emmerich is interested in the difference between ornament and abstraction, as well as between Eastern art and Western art. Emmerich's multiethnic roots predestine her for such studies.

For a long time, Hadassah Emmerich remained faithful to wall painting. In her recently ended exhibition *Casino Exotique* at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, the artist showed various-size works on paper (combining the techniques of painting, drawing and collage). The colour of the walls served as an important binding element. The Kordegarda show also features a wall painted a bright – Salon-like (?) – colour. The artists hangs on it, and on adjacent white backgrounds, framed paintings, unframed works on paper, as well as painting directly on the wall. The viewer gets the impression that some elements have spilled out of the frame, which bonds together the composition. Emmerich says she has recently been moving away from pure wall painting, trying to redefine the genre.

Since the above-mentioned Berlin show, the colours of Emmerich's paintings have become more subdued, and instead of the recent *horror vacui* and a tendency to blur the exhibition rooms' architectural divisions, a more classical arrangement has been introduced. This is also visible in the Kordegarda show. Emmerich's installation repeats the space's symmetrical design. In her preliminary description of the project, the artist spoke of 'narratives transformed into drawings'. It seems that her method of working on the exhibition consisted in opening to images and sensations, and then letting the imagination work freely, triggering off the stream of consciousness freely juxtaposing historical facts, stories heard, shreds of information. The artist is aware she may err. She assumes the position of an outside observer. At the same time, she is interested in getting through to the deeper layers of history rather than stopping at the surface of the phenomena she is looking at.

Hadassah Emmerich explored Warsaw using various paths, but it was the classic tourist sites – the Old Town, the National Museum, the Historical Museum of Warsaw, the Łazienki Royal Park, Wilanów, Powązki – that proved most inspiring for her. Ornaments from buildings, tombstones, but also from kitschy cemetery decorations; an accidentally discovered modern sculpture on the grave of a word-famous Polish filmmaker; motifs from paintings shown at various Warsaw museums – these are but some of the elements that can be recognised in Emmerich's compositions shown at Kordegarda. The artist juxtaposes these pieces with colour and monochrome paintings, in which, from among a tangle of ornamental-organic shapes, there emerge fragments of the human figure (legs painted in the Oriental manner). The motifs and quotations allude here to the work of Paul Gauguin and the history, interpreted by Mario Vargas Llosa, of his search for a paradise lost. These paintings are part of a larger series devoted to the artist's favourite theme – the image of the Orient in Occidental culture (the question of exoticism), and, more broadly, the question of authenticity, identity, together with its constitutive elements. There also appears here an elevation of the modernist-rejected ornament to the role of an allimportant element – a symbolic allusion to marginalized phenomena and/or cultures. *Wake*, a painting inspired by etymology of the word *wake* (become or stay alert, watching or guarding or ceremony associated with death), enters in a dialogue in the exhibition with compositions reinterpreting motifs from Józef Simmler's *Death of Barbara Radziwiłłówna* (1860) and Wojciech Gerson's *Apparition of Barbara Radziwiłłówna* (1886). This is how the motifs of longing for a deceased loved one and attempting to bring her back from the beyond meet in representations originating in different cultures. In the context of Warsaw – a city ruined and reconstructed – they can be interpreted from the point of view of loss and a striving to compensate for it. Such striving is doomed to fail, because even the best reconstruction cannot replace the original, however sincere the intention. Similarly, Warsaw's new Old Town can be described in two ways – as a theatre set, or as a manifestation of the will to make up for a huge loss.

Certain works were inspired by a story heard by the artist about the changing fortunes of Poland's museum collection, about lost masterpieces, or paintings that have been relocated (such as the above-mentioned Simmler piece, owned by Zachęta before the war, today in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw). Another of the show's elements is a replica, painted directly on the wall, of Theo Van Doesburg's *Mouvement Heroïque* – a kind of tribute for Warsaw, a city rebuilt after the war based on documents and reproductions. In the catalogue of the show *Mixed Blood Banana* at Museum Het Domein in Sittard, Netherlands, Patricia Ellis called Hadassah Emmerich's work the 'epitome of dislocated desire'. In the context of a project devoted to Warsaw, these words acquire a new meaning.

Magda Kardasz

HADASSAH EMMERICH

Born in 1974 in Heerlen (NL). Studied in Fine Art, Goldsmiths College, London(2003–2005), Hoger Instituut voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (1997–2000) and Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten, Maastricht (1993–1997). Lives and works in Berlin. Co-operates with the Galerie Akinci (Amsterdam).

Selected individual exhibitions:

2008 Casino Exotique, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin
2006 Volta Show 02, Galerie Akinci (Amsterdam), Basel

2006 Tiger Lily, Galerie Akinci, Amsterdam
2005 With Love from Batik Babe, GEM Museum voor Actuele Kunst, The Hague

Selected group exhibitions:

2008 Be[com]ing Dutch, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven In the Shadows. Images of the New Pop Romanticism, Kunstverein Wolfsburg
2007 Cultural Confusion, Elisabeth Kaufmann Galerie, Zurich
2005 Art Forum Berlin, Galerie Akinci (Amsterdam), Berlin
2004 Kingdom, Market Gallery, Glasgow

curator Magda Kardasz

sponsor of the Kordegarda Gallery BenQ



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