

The State of Need to See Something

Today we've started with the exhibition's installation. What assumptions did you come here with? You seem to be doing the basic scheme of the installation ahead of time, but leaving a part of it up to the interaction with space?

It is a risk to some degree, but the benefit can be directly reaped from the quality of the output. The less I prepare, the more the thing can develop. And whatever is not prepared always creates the necessary space for portraying what can be unique and what is waiting for the needed space.

I've noticed you going through a folder with various linear sketches. Are these drawings from different periods? Are you looking for the appropriate pieces to copy onto the gallery walls and floors, or do they serve as free inspiration, because each space needs a different visual pattern to be formulated?

I use a language that has become so vast that I just cannot memorize it. It is a purely practical solution. These are the things I carry in my head/hand; I just need a trigger to recall them. The oldest pieces are about twelve years old.

Should we regard your drawings as ideograms that represent specific meanings for you?

They have meanings that try to get attention in different situations, but which, due to some obsession, still move in the same direction — towards the paradox where I want to remain as long as possible. It is hard to talk about the meaning as is, though. It is a state caused by both the intellect and the feeling of the seen. Of the need to see something. When the ideograms are multiplied, the space is louder. Or, on the contrary, the space is quieter when they are reduced. Still, "it speaks" about the same thing.

A great role in the exhibition is played by light and reflections. Surely this is not just for aesthetic reasons.

Reflections represent the frequency of perception. Any object can glint when wet. And conversely, any object can be set on fire and burn. It's the same value — reflections and light. My thought process about reflection is hidden in the phrase I often repeat: Everything repeatable in the mirror testifies about that unrepeatable, about a certain potential space of thoughts. Which, by the way, is also demonstrated by the very fundamental conditions of human perception. In a human, this duplication is anchored primordially.

You have previously exhibited a rotating mirror. It's probably an important component of your installations.

It always initiates a certain meaning. It was exhibited separately only once, at the *Poetic Materialism* group exhibition. There it was about making two mirror circles; that is, what we can see and it appears to us as static, and what rotates in front of us but we can't see. I use it in my installations as a moment that layers the perception of the whole exhibition, or the elements that come to a close association. Here, it will communicate through touch with a line whose quality is thus completely modified. Duration of the image. By the way, this mirror was created based on a written record.

And is that important?

It is, because my pieces are created in the opposite way; they come out of drawings or discovered visual material and gradually mature into final works. Here, it was the other way around.

You mention tautology as an important concept in relation to your work. In what way does it guide you while you work with visual elements?

It is a subsequent reassessment. Those terms are not in my mind when I'm doing something. My activity as such doesn't have to be included within the human activity yet... The art framework may come first, other disciplines of human activity directing it, for example, towards tautology. Our perception is precisely dependent on the mentioned reflections. We perceive in duplicates, doubles. Like when we look at each other's faces. The most banal doubling. I am interested in this and it leads me to the way of thinking and the logic you see here. It's something "between" the display, where we all function constantly. Between the meaning. Non-chronological representation. Meaning that cannot be held the way the meaning of letters and words can by putting them next to each other. The image of letters and their sound flows inevitably, and they must cease to be what they are before getting to the next letter/note, so that they can gain further meaning. It

is a line growing from each corner of the room we're in. As if there was only one. If the Sun could see with its light, it would see everywhere, in all directions. And as Agnes Martin says: one who sees everything does not see anything at all.

At this moment, we don't know whether at the vernissage we will be able to execute the event with figures who are supposed to look at their own reflections in stainless steel plates. What made you think that it would be good to incorporate human actors in the exhibition?

Actually, it's a natural progress. I worked with the reflecting of people already in 2010 at Manifesto 8 as part of the *Self Observing Consciousness* installation. However, it was horizontal reflecting, repeating through the eyes of different people. The results were photographs. Here, I would like to do vertical reflecting. By using real people —their marking/designation – I will somehow materialize them. Similarly to the space and objects around us at the exhibition. But at the same time, I give value to the whole using people, as if we were all dressed up in all the material things. And it all interconnects us over again and testifies about us.

You're about to write a theater play. What convinced you, as a visual artist, to engage in dramatic art?

Michal Pěchouček gave me the idea of considering a play. However, I've always been writing and had the ambition to execute the same in texts as I have in the fine arts. Theater play gave me space to introduce the circumstances, very simple everyday events, in which the same thing "happens" that I „repeat" at the exhibitions. I think the need to work with living people has something to do with it, too.

Martin Vongrej visualizes the relationships between perception and consciousness. He has long been focusing on the subject of "thought space." In this respect, he builds on the basic parameters of conceptual art. In his exhibitions, he always strives to create a closed system of interrelated visual elements. His drawings can be perceived as the lines of force of mutual magnetism between a place and a sentient/thinking person. Their internal geometry is biormorphically bent and arrogates to an observer through the relationship of lines and points, symmetries, asymmetries and tautologies. Vongrej's complex installations are not a sprawling segmentation of the gallery space, but a serious attempt to bring out a conscious individual in relations that are external-internal, static-moving, beholding-thinking, etc. The condition of participation is to forget the contrariness, or perhaps to "offer it to oblivion".

Martin Vongrej (*1986) lives in Bratislava, where he graduated from Ilona Németh's "IN" studio at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 2010, he was chosen for the Manifesta 8 contemporary art show in Murcia, Spain. In 2013, he was the finalist of the Oskár Čepan Award. In cooperation with amt_gallery he organized exhibitions in the Bratislava and Milan exhibition spaces (2012 and 2016). This spring, he prepared an exhibition for the Hit Gallery in Bratislava. He is often invited to Czech art institutions and had an exhibition at the Moravian Gallery in Brno and at the Fotograf Gallery in Prague shortly after one another (2014). A year later, he received an invitation from the Ferdinand Baumann Gallery in Prague. Last year he opened up the new premises of Karlín Studios in Prague. Simultaneously with Non-Chronological Meaning Exhibition, he participates in the Orient collective exhibition in Riga, Latvia, created by the Czech curator Michal Novotný.

www.martinvongrej.com