

Patterns of Passing

On entering the exhibition space, the straightforward visitor might breathe a sigh big enough to chase the clouds away from above his head. But let us immediately lay it down that this place is no reserve lending itself for any sighing. The works of Ádám Gáll are undoubtedly capable of creating a climate whereby we feel we are in an ethereal metaphysical space without matter and thus pain; this condition, however, is only one aspect of these works, and can be readily associated with the brilliant notion of György Konrád: “you need art so as not to be here always. To be elsewhere sometimes.” This is also true—with the qualification that we always have one foot here. We might shut the door of the gallery, but we will not be able to shut the world out. No way.

When encountering works like Gáll’s, the referential level of which is low—seemingly low—it is still advisable to go about reception and interpretation along the lines put forward by Panofsky. Having felt the optical and physical reality of the work and mapped its meanings, we must, at the level of iconology, contrast the view, the phenomena related to sight, and our personal feelings with the conditions of the civilization and cultural environment and our knowledge of them. The contemporary work of art, whatever it has to say and however it says it, cannot be cut away from our present situation—though let me immediately note that works of former periods come to bear and operate when compared not only with the period of their nascence but the now. One of the lessons from this is that the post-modern has a predilection for quoting, appropriating and re-using cultural forms.

The works of Ádám Gáll have an extraordinary aura, but these deep and heavy pictures of silence shifting between earth colours do not float in the middle of a vacuum. No doubt, there is a certain kind of timelessness and therefore a sort of solemnity, some of the dignity little appreciated today hanging about them. By the by, this is a result of a nice paradox: timelessness is presented in very palpable material, cracked surfaces. The long and short of it is that we have these works here, not far from a Danube streaming tediously, and they are, I believe, saying something like Krasznahorkai did in a recent interview: “We are unprepared for reality. We know stunning little of what our own reality is.” In the reduction process of Ádám Gáll’s art, the works lose the forms of momentariness, or, to be more exact, its illustration and illusion, while, in exchange, we have the depth of reality and moment, as well as the opportunity to contemplate the conditions of a prodigal world. When an artist is involved in reduction, he relinquishes and gives something up, but reduction also means bringing back or restoring something. These works are particularly instructive and thought-provoking from this respect. Reduction is of course not a means of sparing physical or intellectual labour. Not at all. For per se, the basic material of Gáll’s works, to become such massive structures, extraordinarily concentrated and controlled activity is required, which does not exclude contingency, and Gáll counts on the contribution of nature. This is most obvious in the dried wood objects.

The fine arts have by now made the semiotics of nature part of the tradition. The immediacy of material—and through it, reality, which we are unprepared for—has been elevated to the aesthetic horizon. It is not subordinated to the world of form and figure. This is what Umberto Eco has to say on this: “In modern art, material is not only the body of the artwork but also its aim; it is the subject matter of aesthetic discourse.” And certainly, seeing the works of Ádám Gáll, we first think of the material-demonstrating experiments and experiences of twentieth-century avant-garde, but the relevant findings of Mediaeval aesthetics are also worth bearing in mind. According to Saint Thomas of Aquinas, the creative process of art can only create accidental forms on the surface of material carrying substance and interpreted as completed act. Form is moved by the material, not creative intent. At first sight, this might sound naïve, but we dither on seeing Gáll’s pictures, for what we see is material absorbing and releasing form. But why should material play second fiddle anyway—it is always some physical vehicle that anticipates for us the sensual, emotional, and intellectual matrix of

the aesthetic. The only exception to this is literature—though there hardly is any material more malleable and tougher than language. I mention not in parenthesis: Gáll writes poetry, too.

Gáll has his reductive material pictures result in two objects: wall and picture. Both function in their own concreteness and as symbolic fields of force. The pictures actually redouble the walls of the gallery, but they also stand in opposition to its neutrality, and offer points of view for interpretation. The wall can not only store factors of artistic authenticity but also shed light on the social and cultural relations of our environment. The wall contains and brings into play the three domains of space. The first one is the one behind it, hidden from ourselves; the second one is the space and mass of the wall itself, which is most defenceless against the effects the social and natural environment, and is thus its indicator, and, finally, the wall marks off the space before it, the space of perceiving it, the space where we now are. And now we cross over to the picture, pictorialness, for these walls, which sometimes behave as though they were barks of trees, cliffs, earth surfaces, are works of art, and can be best defined as pictures, which include image as sign, symbol, and subject matter. By default, we take the existence of picture as natural, however abundant its literature inspired by aesthetics, politics, psychology, and, of course, art history is; it is not the picture we see but the view appearing in it, and we seek its meanings and interpret it. This is right enough, but it will be more right if Gáll probes into this certainty, which he engages in for the sake of personal and artistic self-examination, but also for the sake of confronting us with our artistic experiences and judgments. What are we to do with pictures after iconoclasm and suprematism and our consciousness of them? What are we to preserve and how? What do symbols mean? What meanings have the angel, cross, perspective, order, and contingency acquired and continue to bear? What do we and can we expect of art? Gáll's probing thus spurs the viewer to action, though doubt is always good for the artist, not letting him rest and urging him to action and creation.

In the works of Ádám Gáll, the picture turns into wall, and wall-likeness into pictorial quality; material absorbs image, its characteristics, and the criteria of image, to use the title of the exhibition, to create *patterns of vanishing*. We see the whites square of Malevich in them—perhaps before their final vanishing. But what is certain, the pictures of Ádám Gáll are here.

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