



# Martin Skalický: Allegory

curated by: Eva Riebová

The work of Martin Skalický (born 1976) arises from the forms of figurative sculpture. He studied artistic craft at the SOU artistic high school in Prague, followed by sculpture at FaVU with Michal Gabriel (2000–2007) and an exchange in the studio of Kurt Gebauer at the Academy of Art, Architecture and design (2003–2004). Since his time as a student, he has passed through several development phases ranging from hyper-realist sculptures to more experimental works connecting “high art” with the “low” culture of kitsch objects, porn-mag motifs, or cheap items of everyday use. Since 2017, he has been using an original method to create textile sculptures, thanks to which he has developed a style that is well recognisable within the Czech art scene.

Formally, these recent works can be described as the appropriation of sculptural forms (mostly of historical origin), which he adapts by layering onto the casts a textile filled with two-component resin. Once it hardens, the soft textile material – old bed sheets, dish towels, or striped pyjamas – then adopts the forms of the original sculptures. We can find many examples of similar paradoxes in Skalický’s practice. The artist says that his work is built on opposites: massive sculptures are replaced with objects that weigh only a few kilograms, resin changes the soft textiles into a solid material, historical forms are remade into contemporary sculptures, and realist shapes are transfigured into uncertain figures.

Skalický discovered this technique with the aid of chance. In 2017, he was working on a restoration of the sculptural decorations of the building of the former Augustinian monastery, now the Governor’s Palace in Brno, one of the buildings of the Moravian Gallery. The decorations included two-metre-tall Baroque sculptures of angels bearing the monastery coat of arms. During the restoration process, the rock began crumbling, which meant a copy had to be made. A new cast was therefore made, from which a concrete copy was then created. The cast used could then await the same fate as many others: being thrown out or heaped up on a pile of dusty casts. Skalický, who had at the time made several unsuccessful attempts in working with textiles, had the idea of lining the cast with textiles. He first used liquid laminate, only later arriving at the more technologically suitable choice of resin.

*“When I took the sculpture out of the cast after a few days, it gave me a fright. It was only three days later that I decided it was actually pretty good,”* says Martin. He later agreed with the Moravian Gallery to exhibit his textile casts in the palace hallways, where one can still see them today. *“It suddenly came to life altogether. In the past, the original Baroque decorations were all but forgotten – they were too high up and few people thought to look up there. Now, when my new sculptures provide a comparison, the historical pieces seem to have acquired new life,”* adds Skalický.

Soon came further experiments and improvements to the technology. Today, Skalický has done a number of realisations and sculpture series: *Madony (Madonnas)*, *Nedělám si strachy (I Have No Fears)*, *Tenká růžová linie (A Thin Pink Line)*, *Big little Big horn*, and others.

In the spirit of postmodernity, Skalický connects the past to the present, durability with fragility, beauty and ugliness, a serious, existential expression with humour and irony. Examining his oeuvre, we must confirm the words of the famous art historian Douglas Crimp (1944–2019), who summarises art working with appropriation in a postmodern manner: *“We are not in search of sources or origins, but of structures of signification: underneath each picture there is always another picture.”* The modification of the historical sculptural approach thus brings up a number of questions, including questions about original authorship, originality, and how the Allegory of Justice from the attic of the institutional court in Brno found itself in a former glass factory in Smíchov, Prague.

### **Allegory of the Virtues from a Court Building Through a Cow Barn to a Factory**

The statues presented at the Kostka Gallery were created by Skalický using the forms created for the restoration of classicist statues from the 1870s on the attic of the Institutional Court in Brno. The statues were made by the Viennese stone sculptor Josef Schönfeld. According to a 2014 restoration report by Radka Levínská, the group of six female figures represent an allegory of the virtues: Poetry (or diligence in craft), Peace, Legislation, Happiness, Patriotism, and Science.

It is the Allegory of Poetry that represents the backbone of the installation in the Kostka Gallery. For the first time, Skalický is extending his experimental approach through the inclusion of a light source in the play of shapes and forms. The idea of working with light arose some two years ago, its source lying, once again, partly in a lucky coincidence. The building of the former cow barn in Veverské Knínice, which serves as Skalický’s studio, has no windows and only a single light switch, so Skalický has to use a flash light whenever he leaves the studio. One day, he illuminated a sculpture in progress from the inside. Light and shadow did their work, highlighting new details, giving the sculpture a new colour palette. It became even more subtle, as if it had completely lost its substance. Martin describes the experience in terms of learning to understand his works better.

The final form of the installation in Kostka was only created after this text was written. Our idea was to exhibit three allegorical light sculptures and create an installation from older pieces in the shaded areas of the gallery, thus staging a dramatic environment. But it is also possible that we will abandon this idea, as the spontaneous working methods of Martina Skalický and his feeling for space often leads to unpredictable results. Thank goodness.

**Martin Skalický: Allegory**  
**Kostka Gallery**  
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**curator: Eva Riebová**  
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