

12. 4. — 29. 5. 2022 (MeetFactory Gallery)

UK US



Young and Restful

Part 1

Young and Restful

The *Young and Restful* is an exhibition of artists of the very generation that encountered the dominance of conceptual minimalism at schools and galleries during their studies almost ten years ago. As the hand-crafting techniques became the center of international contemporary art, the featured artists took to them in recent years as well. The repetitive rhythm of crafts and haptic material perception bring about the beneficial state of full concentration or flow that is praised by all mindfulness coaches generated by our performance-based society. This is, however, only a theory. Long hours of manual labor may also cause stress, exhaustion, and physical pain. The exhibiting artists often turned to hand-work because they were frustrated with either creative arts (the oversaturation of both digital and conceptual art approaches), the societal marginalization, or new living conditions (social isolation connected with early maternity, worsened health state, or the current pandemic). I call them *Young and Restful* with a touch of humor as they do not shout loudly at today's challenges but they sew them in, carve them in, dig them in and engrave them in their artworks. But as it turns out, the name fits less and less.

The exhibition is a part of the long-time exhibition cycle of the MeetFactory Gallery called *Other Knowledge* that we curate together with Tereza Jindrová. It follows forms of knowledge transfer that go against the rational principle that dominates the Western and Central European society. When we craft by our hands, we pass on the experience not only orally through stories but also using motoric memory. Our knit and purl is the same as that of our ancestors, who taught us the craft.

In the spirit of insanity, which is one of the subliminal themes of the exhibition, I interviewed the artists to prepare for the show and understand their personal motivation to use time consuming manual labor. Some of them said it was initiated by a passion for collective creation as an interhuman contact of sharing. On the other side of the spectrum are the artists who exclude such moments of sharing and purposefully isolate themselves. However, it is apparent in both cases that they capture their stories using stitches, cuts, and strokes. If they injure their hands sometimes, they imprint DNA on their art literally.

The materials turn out to be great confessors, both discrete and resistant to pungent confessions. I must also mention the Greco-Roman mythological story analogy of Philomela which I read about while researching the current trend of crocheting in contemporary art by the Bosnian artist Šejla Kamerić. The story, as captured by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, is about Philomela who is dragged into mountains, raped, and tortured by her brother-in-law Tereus. He, then, cuts off her tongue to silence her. In the end, Philomela weaves her story into a white yarn and gives it to a servant to bring it to her sister who sets her free. „*She was unable to talk as she was mute but her pain inspired her imagination and her misfortune sharpened her mind. She stretched her smart white yarn on someone's loom and weaved in her fate in purple letters.*”

Apart from already stated frustration or need for loosening of the art form, which is being mentioned by artists themselves when talking about learning the craft, another often stressed motif is longing for "return". Of what? The craft which they mostly learned to do during their teens and later left behind being burned out and fascinated by then new technologies. It is also the return of archetypal work and basic skills which bring back feelings of self-affirmation and "re-anchoring" that are much needed in the times of fluently passing from paralysis of the pandemic to the reality of until recently unimaginable and not-so-distant war in Ukraine.

Part 2

Dare to Waste Time

The monumental installation dominating the whole space of the gallery was created from the cuttings of discarded pieces of sector furniture coming from the 60's, 70's, and 80's by the artist, light designer, and scenographer **Pavel Havrda**. He graduated from the Studio of Digital Media and, then, from the Interactive Media at the University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem. He connects digital and hand-craft. The huge floor installation was based on the digital draft which he realized in the gallery space partially using CNC technologies (which are scorned by more than a few "orthodox" joiners and carvers). The installation is accompanied by *Tenura*, a ceramic object consisting of two broken vases. The artifact serves as a reference to inherited values that must be broken down and put back together. It was created in cooperation with his three-year-old daughter Apolena.

Pavel Havrda used to work with video and digital programmes during his studies and for a few years after finishing them. His works were conceptual and focused on searching for different perspectives of the casually observed. He became a joiner almost by an accident when he was helping Petr Níkl prepare the *Orbis Pictus* project. At that time, he was frustrated and burned out by working in digital environments connected with the imperative of conceptual possibilities.

"Every time something pisses me off, I end up doing it," says Pavel. He used to hate theater and design, so he started to do theater light design. He had the same experience with the craft which he used to despise when he was studying applied cybernetics at a secondary school. He also scorned the playfulness of art that his work cannot be imagined lacking today. He began to focus on the craft in his workroom during the pandemic when he stopped getting job offers for a time. He enjoys woodwork and its slow process. *"You cannot be stressing over that you are wasting time... When you do something that takes time, you have to make it that you do not waste any. It's like playing with children,"* says the father of two.

Scrape It Out

Kristýna Šormová paints large-format abstract canvases. When she gave birth to her son four years ago, she had to stop spending long hours in a studio and using turpentine colors because of his allergies. This is why she started to draw on paper which she then tears and perforates using a needle. Kristýna Šormová has always worked in an unrestrained manner since her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Her canvases and drawings reflect her emotions which she was also able to direct by well-done painting techniques. Now, she applies the same work methods to her series of drawings, although she takes into account the smaller scale of the paper format. Her "torn drawings" capture something disturbing as the obsessively torn shreds resemble self-harm wounds, even though the pain does not affect the skin but the artwork.

The Craft as an Artistic Dowry

Semir Mustafa a.k.a **Dante Buu** comes from Montenegro and is the only international artist featured in the exhibition. His mother, grandmother, and aunts taught him embroidery. It was the only job he was allowed to do after he came out in his orthodox Muslim environment of the small town of Rožaje. Since then, he uses embroidery to process his emotions and to partially deal with his own identity. He worked on the embroidered cycle *Five Seasons* for four years and this is the first time he is exhibiting it. When he was working on it, he was watching TV and learnt German and English. He writes about the series *Five Seasons*:

"Four Seasons, Wiehler's gobelins, still hang on the wall in the living room of my parents' house. They have always been a hot topic among my mum, her sisters and my grandmother. Actually, these Four Seasons were part of the dowry of my youngest aunt; due to her immigration to Sweden, she left them behind, and my mum took them. I am not sure if my late grandmother ever got over that fact. Dowry played such a significant role in her upbringing. Once upon a time, when she got married, it was the custom for a young bride to open her hope chest, lay out all of the handmade objects in the garden and hang them on the plum trees for the whole village to see how skillful she was. I am the Fifth Season and Fifth Season is my dowry. Contrary to the 'once upon a time dowry' of young brides-to-be, embedding their hopes and dreams about their future life, my dowry embroiders feelings, stories so dear and heartbreaking for me, of the past, ever alive in the present."

Dante Bluu spent the pandemic in Berlin at a residency in Künstlerhaus Bethanien where he continued to create huge expressive embroideries. Gradually, he gained bigger self-confidence in both his artistic expression and personal life. He came out of this process as Semir Mustafa, using his own name proudly. The *Young and Restful* exhibition features his work *Wozu tränen schöner mann?* which serves as a reaction to the war in Ukraine. He was inspired by not only the omnipresent reaction graffiti all around Berlin but also a chorus of the after-war Serbian song by Đorđe Balašević "Čemu suze, lepa ženo?" (Why the tears, pretty lady?), which he adapted to his personal reality, translated into German, and turned the love interest into a man. The work on embroidery cloth connects the works of Semir with those by Dante Bluu.

Creative manual work as a means of establishing dialogue

Alžběta Bačiková represents an important personality in the Czech fine arts scene due to her video audio-visual projects with social themes. We met during preparations of one of the future exhibition projects of the *Other Knowledge* cycle. Our conversation somehow naturally and accidentally resulted in her inclusion in the *Young and Restful* exhibition. A tiny bobbin lace work, which she created in cooperation with her sister Veronika Janštová, formally deviates from everything Alžběta has done so far. It is her first sibling cooperation and is basically an experiment which is to be elaborated on later. Even the aptly named work "1" features a common principle of all her projects, though, that being a motivation to initiate collaboration and a desire to intensify a contact with someone who she is interested in. Like in, e.g. the *Setkání* project, where the focus is on young people suffering from hearing or vision disabilities, "1" happened under the pretense of analyzing relationships, adapting a certain theme, or simply getting closer and starting to talk to another person. The cooperation with the sister is, of course, very personal and cannot be pre-planned like the narrative audio-visual works.

Alžběta Bačiková stresses in connection with "1" the need for return to the basic skills from the time before self-professionalization. Alžběta was studying for PhD at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Veronika Janštová has PhD from Biochemistry. "One has to professionalize and specialize for a long time, and then reaches a point when they miss something and have to take a step back." Coming back to the activities they have practiced for a long time and which helped them shape their personalities without getting their degree in them was a natural next step for the sisters.

Michael Nosek learned to paint much like Kristýna Šormová at the Secondary Professional School of Applied Art and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He focuses on realistic figurative painting. However, while (or because) he mastered canvas painting on such a high artistic level, it turned out to be rather constricting for Michael. He lacked a space for experimenting and spontaneous expression. He found these in the embroidered masks which connect the principles of painting and sculpture using neutral linen cloth. To the surprise of no one, the masks

became very popular on social media (and sometimes even in the streets of Prague while walking his dog) during the first wave of the pandemic which took the hand-made cloth masks for its symbol.

Similar to already mentioned exhibiting artists, Michael Nosek used the handwork as means of improving a relationship with someone close to him as they changed the routine of family reunions using the creative arts. He collaborated with his grandmother **Hana Nosková** to create a carpet for the *Young and Restful* exhibition. Following Michael's drafts, they tied over 120,000 knots over the course of several months using tapico technique (a very popular home handwork before 1989) which made them champions of the fictitious competition "The Most Suffering Artist of the Exhibition".

The Eternal Recurrence Myths

The large-format paintings by **Radka Bodzewicz** are inspired by the archetypal stories from mythological and religious texts. She creates at night when her two small children are asleep. The motifs on canvases resemble cave paintings not only because of their earthy colors but also for their figurative shortcut. This reference or "recurrence" of the art archetype puts Bodzewicz's works in the context of the fabricated exhibiting art group of "Young and Restful".

When asked about her creative process, she mentions the katathym-imaginative psychotherapy. Its aim is to completely focus on a specific picture motif out of which, then, other fantasies develop spontaneously coming from the collective unconsciousness. As a recently published review of her solo exhibition from the Respekt magazine states: "*The ancient stories, whose basic outlines are used by the world nations across both borders and times, are not literally illustrated by her. She only uses them as a stepping stone for her own imagination.*"

Radka Bodzewicz follows an opposite direction than the aforementioned artists. She enriches her well-learned painting craft by adding a digital animation level later. She puts her paintings in motion in an expanded digital reality using the Artitive app. She does not want to achieve a spectacular effect but rather experiment with the medium and learn to use a new, this time digital, craft.

The Infinite Rehearsal

Marie Tučková (a.k.a. Ursula Uwe) took to crocheting thanks to her grandmother but used the technique only temporarily. Recently, she graduated from the Studio of Photography at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague and from the Dutch Art Institute. Then, she stopped making photos and videos and turned her attention to handwork. These days, she is working on a music video project with elements of performance. Her works blend a lot of themes in different shapes and forms, including music, countryside, birth, womb, and cyclicity. When it comes to her creative process, she stresses the importance of the cyclical conception of time and the concept of "the infinite rehearsal", which was invented by Guyanese geodesist, poet, and writer Wilson Harris. In her own words, she does not understand what a "waste of time" in the context of her relentless handwork is as she does not evaluate her works using this metric. She compares the rhythmical arrangement of the cotton loops to music and adds: "*It's like a stream of consciousness that can be easily interrupted or lost if you pull one yarn which makes the whole row disappear...*"

The Embroidered Apocalypse

Juliana Höschlová is a multimedia artist whose works feature a strong social and cultural undertones. In recent years, she focuses on climate change and environmental activism. Her "Suits" series connects her own artistic interpretation of the coming climate apocalypse, which will wipe out the human race from the face of the



Earth, with an anxious reaction to media pictures of the current migration waves coming from the Eastern Europe. Winter jackets and overalls thrown in the streets and out in the border forests as a reminder of forever lost bodies, lives, they used to cover. The colorful organic form of the embroideries purposefully does not fit the especially depressing model of the humanitarian disaster. Although Juliana foresees the apocalypse and inability to save ourselves, life itself is not lost. The organic motifs embroidered on the inside of the left-behind clothes suggest an arrival of new life forms which will establish a post-human era on (formerly) our planet.

The colorful motif embroidered in the worn-out jackets are inspired by a series of digital paintings Juliana created during the pandemic lockdown as a form of a regular exercise. Transferring the digital paintings into a textile medium marks her return to working with recycled materials, which she used in her previous works (in previous years, she focused mainly on a critical use of plastic). She sees the textile handwork not only as a fitting medium for conceptual expression but also as a way of slowing and calming down. Working offline from her mountain cottage helps her regulate the information flow and live in the present moment.

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Galerie MeetFactory

Artists:

Alžběta Bačiková a Veronika Janštová,
Radka Bodzewicz, Dante Buu, Pavel Havrda,
Juliana Höschlová, Semir Mustafa,
Michael Nosek (in cooperation with Hana
Nosková), Kristýna Šormová, Marie Tučková

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