

INVERSE PROCEDURES IN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL CULTURE

Kunsthalle Bratislava presents a wide-ranging exhibition entitled *Inverse Romanticism*, comprising works by five leading Czech and Slovak artists of the contemporary scene (Josef Bolf, Martin Gerboc, Jiří Petrbok, Ivan Pinkava, Richard Štipl). Using the media of photography, painting, drawing and sculpture, the artists elaborate the theme of “inversion”, which is present in a fundamental sense in their works and fulfils a critical role in relation to the present time. The opening of the exhibition will be held on Thursday, April 4, 2019 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Right from the start, the term “Inverse Romanticism” signals to viewers that a certain measure of empathy and imaginative creativity will be required of them. “Romanticism” as an expression is associated with describing a manifestation of highly-charged imagination, which may be realised in any medium whatever. In turn, the idea of the inverse designates a turning of some original manifestation “upside-down”. The curator Petr Vaňous grasped this issue theoretically in 2018 with the publication of his book *Inverse Romanticism*, which he wrote with the conviction that this term contains an important critical aspect, linked with certain registers of contemporary visual art which escape the more general critical practice. He distinguishes such inverse expressions from the “decadent” tendencies, whose emergence and widespread media response has supplanted any interest in a deeper theoretical differentiation of the problem in question.

For the most part, the continuity between the birth of romantic expression and the inverse process has its origin in a personal, social or historical situation, designated as a crisis. For the artists Ivan Pinkava, Jiří Petrbok, Richard Štipl, Josef Bolf and Martin Gerboc there is a common crisis of “representation” and hence of support in the majority society. The real state of things is that the greater part of society rejects these works, does not understand them, or regards them as shocking and entirely improper or decadent.

A further aspect of crisis is the so-called non-verbal, purely visual communication of artistic work which cannot, however, be simply passively consumed by the viewer. In a refined manner, but sometimes going to lengths of violence, these artists combine diverse communicative means such as deformation, exaggerated colourfulness, charged expressiveness, and all this with a tendency to dramatisation of pictorially reduced situations, theatricality, artificial arrangement, and also evoking distress, irony, powerlessness or perversity, which in varying degrees contaminates their work process.

On the other hand, they also use “muffling” or “neutralising elements”, which in the final result may lead to a revaluation of conventional concepts such as conservative, progressive, avant garde etc. This confirms the statement of the philosopher Herbert Marcuse: *“Culture is redefined by the existing state of affairs: the words, tones, colours, shapes of the perennial works remain the same, but that which they express is losing its truth, its validity...”*

Inverse procedures in contemporary visual culture, even despite their unclear definition and variegated character, are capable of demarcating and defending

a distinctive artistic space for free creation even in a hostile environment, which they will ultimately be able to influence. As Petr Vaňous observes: *“In the work of all five artists one can find traces of inversion, which as negation dissolves and assembles what it negates, in an attempt to open a space for the critical movement of creative work and thinking. Here we might find the site of Inverse Romanticism, the concept which we are tracking.”* At the Kunsthalle *Inverse Romanticism* follows on from the identically-named book project (2018), as its continuation in the form of an exhibition.

With *Inverse Romanticism* Kunsthalle Bratislava is organising accompanying and educational programmes, during which the individual artists will be introduced to visitors, and the curator Petr Vaňous will lead a tour of the exhibition. Among other events, there will be a guided tour with the philosopher and translator Miroslav Marcelli, who together with Martin Gerboc will analyse the latter’s work. The art historian Lucia Fišerová will deliver a lecture focusing on the photographic work of Ivan Pinkava. Another who has confirmed his participation in the exhibition is Otto M. Urban, Director of 19th Century Art and Classical Modernist Art at Prague’s Academy of Fine Arts. The “exhibition guide” will be aimed at the adult visitor, with emphasis on the strategy of interpretation in the work of the exhibiting artists.

This exhibition is suitable for viewers over 18 years of age.

INVERSE ROMANTICISM

Curator: Petr Vaňous

Exhibiting artists: Josef Bolf, Martin Gerboc, Jiří Petrbok, Ivan Pinkava, Richard Štipl

Opening: Thursday, April 4 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on KHB 1st floor

Duration: April 5, 2019 – June 16, 2019

Venue: 1st floor, KHB