

The mysterious, disquieting objects made from fragile tissues accompanied with discharges of cool light that one sees in Ondrej Michalek's prints incorporate a negative utopia in the horizon of history's convergence. These are pictures of slow decay, destruction, and nothingness on the end. The nothingness has, at least for a certain time, an objective, visual and possibly emotional content. In these picture is the world without people, being somewhat definite and unambiguous. It will be an emotivity for itself, a self mirroring the end. Being nourished with the energy left, it is supposed to close the process of the extinction and will open the field of absolute barrenness where the relics of objectiveness will, for a certain time, be phosphorescent, like gaseous mud in a marsh of nameless emptiness.

The luminous tissues in Ondrej Michalek's prints correlate with those programs of contemporary arts that see the world as a museum piece. The awareness of the fatality of historical civilization, as ours as well, is exaggerated today with the sad vision of devastation of natural world. Tinguely's prediction that the technical civilization will end in a grotesque spasm of self-destruction is today being linked together with more and more urgent consciousness of the possible end of the organic and biologic world. To see into tomorrow, as if we were to be aware of the horror, as well as the special touching poetry of the situation where everything is over.

Some sculptors conceive their works like models of cities, destroyed and disrupted long ago. In this stage of art mounts again ruins, stumps, fragments, and in better cases, braided structures of mysterious purpose with unknown definitions. In comparison with these artists, Ondrej Michalek gives a vision of semi-organic, semi-technical, threedimensional formations that are rolled up or plaited of something which is reminiscent of brushwood, straw, and grass in his drawings. When plaited, this material assumes a shape of bundle, bolt, fence or enclosure in a abandoned space. The strange thing is that these objects are illuminated with a discharge of cold light from neon tubes. One time a small released branch burning of this laboratory light is a smoulder from a dynamite charge, another time the light is entering the object like a flash. Often a more complicated light action can happen in these spacial formations. The light can also assume the shape of a plate, illuminating a dismal scene of the tragic end.

Despite that, particularly in recent prints, Michalek's attempts to have the viewer see the light as manifestation of life which is budding from extinct remnants. Mostly monochrome tonality in these prints is refreshed with minute colour accents. The printmaker himself mentions the miracle when a small branche springs from a dry tree. This represents for the work a suggestion of a way that could lead out from the narrowing space of hopeless prognoses. This hypothetic renaissance of life also reflects something of the hopes incorporated into contemporary changes of political and spiritual climate. Seen from the the point of development of art of today, Michalek's prints do not produce any pessimistic impressions. They prove that it is possible to issue from recent living sources without being limited in the creation of an original work. Michalek is certainly indebted to the influences of the stimuli of the tendencies of art such as minimalism and the symbolical demonstrations and actions in nature, hence land art. In a certain sense, Michalek's symbolical visions are evocations of situations in a concrete nature, even in a nature already extinct, as from the beyond. His light usage does not contest the coherence of the application of electric light in the visual arts, neon tubes in minimal art, light in kinetic objects or shining lines in games with laser rays. Here, as if the aesthetic concept of the existential branch of arte povera – the simpliest art consisting of demonstration of natural realities – combines with mythologization of top technology, both principles are being connected and critically reflected. Michalek works in such a gravitational field of opositional tendencies, as this conforms to his aiming to a complex symbol. Its intensive emotive atmosphere that consciously reveals romantic authority, involves both positive and negative intellectual attitudes, points of view, and prognoses. If the contemporary art can create such complex as well as communicative symbols, there is, finally, ray of hope.

Another reflection could be annexed in addition: who could still build – in that desert declining world – the tissues, and give them the form of relatively coherent objects or constructions? Is the light an unpersonal technical phenomena, or rather a symbol of life or death? Does this light come again as a symbol of spiritual force which is above all, so capable to inspire the life in the decaying world? These are all questions of the irrational contents in Michalek's prints.

Another integral part of the suggestive impressiveness of Michalek's graphic works is the technical aspect. The print alchemy discovers or modifies the print methods. After all, how otherwise can one communicate the mysteries of fatal prognoses rather than through a new print process where the attractive mystery originates? Thanks to this process the printmaker can create his virtual objects and discharges of light like sovereign magician.

*Jan Kriz*

Text in the catalogue published for the shows in 1990