

## JOURNEY FROM POINT A TO POINT A

"The artist senses the relationship between the artificial and the natural as something interchangeable. Individual phenomena are binary, and the unpredictability of their newly discovered nature gives rise to a complicated, differentiated relationship"

*Jiří Valoch, 1984*

Ondřej Michálek (\*1947, Brno) works in cycles created through precise, original and cleverly combined techniques. Although today he uses a computer when preparing his matrices, in the subsequent steps he still works with laborious graphic methods. His intaglio prints consist of thematic series of 'parallel reality' – an intersection of concreteness and fiction. His references sometimes contradict one another. In a constant flow of meanings, one association bounces off another. We can try to interpret his artistic metaphor, but can we express it in words?

Michálek's first artistic period was dominated by figures captured in moments of superficial existence. Using intaglio printing techniques followed later by traditional linocut matrices, he constructed interpretation of the bizarre world of advertising and the atmosphere of the 1970s and '80s. During a later phase, he increased the abstract character of his prints in order to open up new possible interpretations. Figures and banners disappeared, replaced by mysterious shapes, clusters, and structures illuminated and irradiated by light. Multiple printings of white glazes on a background toy with our uncertainty as to whether we are witnessing a moment of miraculous primal explosion or a silent and lonely decay. The silvery print, worked using a combination of engraving and real structures on the plate, never offers the same answer or a clear one at that.

Since the Velvet Revolution, Michálek has returned to a tangible contact with reality through the motif of bowls and cups. In terms of technique, he continues to use multiple layers of white onto a black background – an approach that he continues to find inspirational. With this return to reality, he presents objects that, although intimately familiar, possess a nebulous history and mysterious identity. A different parallel existence can also be found in the series *Resting Places* and *Refuges*.

In the series *New Houses*, on which he has been working since 2006, he explores territories that he explored in the past, working with light created by white layers on black. He uses sensitive accents of colour, and the human figure makes a comeback.

From this well-trodden path on his artistic journey, Michálek has again gone off to explore new areas. His new technique has enabled him to look at his earlier phases while creating new and innovative works: large-format single-colour intaglio prints depicting the eternal and contemporary theme of the desire to conquer and build up uninhabited territories. Through concentrated clusters of shapes, we enter a labyrinth of confused structures and curious dwellings. The aqueducts, houses, screens and dwellings offer themselves as shelters for both rest and confrontation. These structures' abstract form remind us of the signs that Michálek works with every now and then. The prints glow and enchant with their rich and variously transparent composition. They strike us with their technical sophistication and – if you can call a black-and-white format variegated – they possess the brightly variegated range of grey.

Ondřej Michálek's exhibition *Journey from Point A to Point A* in the gallery's Printmaking Crossovers section is a retrospective look at an artist who, in his experimental search, has succeeded in finding, exploring and refining space as a stage for metaphorical stories that continue within us – the viewer – and in our personal discoveries.

*Karin Militká*

