

## INTAGLIO (From the Depths)

The name of the exhibition evokes a number of interpretations. In the exhibition's depths, one can find references to his early work, one can connect the exhibition to interior experiences; so too, the graphic technique comes from traditional intaglio – engraving, going into the depths – the approach when the ink is rubbed into the relief of the matrix and then from its depths, however slight of course, is printed onto paper.

Equally provocative as this purposefully open-ended designation is the work of Ondřej Michálek himself, for it is multifaceted, ambiguous, and often irritates. Over the course of time it has undergone a number of deliberate transformations: from an interest in incorporating stereotypes from life to returning to dreamy planes. Eventually the artist took on the role of an observer of the human swarm, which is played out in a fantastic world of strange edifices and complicatedly constructed building complexes, in order to subsequently be held up by estranged, raw houses and artificial gardens.

Michálek's work is thus created in a number of cycles in which the artist plays with a theme which interests him and with which he longs to connect, shape, and discover its expressive and technical dimensions, in order to finally displace and replace them by another area of research. The thematic wholes however mutually pervade each other, even through the different printing techniques used. His is continually inspired by the consumer world, as well as signs, mysterious objects, hidden faces, traces of human presence. The characteristic feature of the artist's creativity is at the same time an ability to evoke tension, in the past for example by white overlays, which create an eerie light source deepening the mysteriousness of night-black darkness.

For the artist, the graphic surface remains a spur toward the permanent path to a new space, which he perceives as the unique occupation of a shabby terrain by a very personal, perhaps more favourable world. But not even here is one able to precisely determine the real nature of the artist's vision. His view is distanced and empathetic, ironic and playful, never however unambiguously understandable.

The unifying expressive element in the graphic work of Ondřej Michálek is a baffling, placid harmony, evoking a certain nostalgia, which is however immediately anchored by tiny intruders – figures, benches, colour elements. These subtle accents often arise in the technique of stencil and increase the tension between the realistic and the dreamlike. At the same time his expressive ambivalence offers a space for imagination and remains an invitation to uncircumscribed movement in the virtual world.

Ondřej Michálek certainly does not aim to become entrenched in any one of these most bountiful creative phases. He gently trespasses the temporal horizons of various returns, intersections and newly verified prior approaches. It can be said that his initial creative principle is curiosity and constant experiment. His masterful technological bravura is freed of laborious searching and he perceives thus his own work as an exhilarating game with shapes, colours, space and meanings. Each shift for him is a challenge to reveal other exciting interpretations.

Michálek's graphic works, characterized by a certain speculative lyricism, reflect the destabilised society, whose mutability has become one of the initial sources of postmodern thinking. Profit as a principle of existence, and the world "as if" lead the artist to ironic distance and also to the conviction that hidden humour and play may be a counterbalance to the growing coarseness and emotional aridity. The declared aim of the artist is never to shock, but to think about and get beyond the world of aggression, aiming toward intellectual experience.

Ondřej Michálek in his publication dedicated to graphic techniques, entitled *Magie otisku* (The Magic of Printing, 2016), perceives printmaking, against the background of the contemporary artistic goings-on, as artistic „communication, uttered in a quiet voice, which in today's ubiquitous shouting is one easy to miss.“

I believe that he won't hold it against me, if, when speaking on his own work, I have to disagree.

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