

NATALIJA ŠERUGA
Vrnitev v domači kraj ★ *The Return of the Native*



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22. 10. - 13. 11. 2009

ZA DEVETIMI VODAMI IN DEVETIMI GORAMI ...

Vse, kar je bilo o slikah Natalije Šeruga napisano, nedvomno drži. Vsi, ki so pisali o različnih temah, od začetka do danes, so vsak iz svojega gledišča vstopali v njen svet in iskali v njem. A če slikarstvo ni drugega kot raziskovanje, če te lahko drugam usmeri beseda, povedana ali napisana v določenem trenutku, predmet, ki se zakotali pred noge, ali vsi boleči in čarobni dogodki v življenju, potem je tudi pisanje o njem lahko tako raziskovanje. Če skušamo po svoje interpretirati opus nekega umetnika ali umetnice, se lahko kaj hitro uštejemo, ne moremo pa se zmotiti, če usmerimo pozornost na to, kar nam slike določenega opusa pripovedujejo s svojo obliko in vsebino. Slike Natalije Šeruga so kot enigme, polne ovir, ki naj odvrnejo preveč zvedav pogled od bistva slikarkega sporočila, od njenih najintimnejših iskanj. Pri razvozlanju teh ugank postane jasno, da vsako razumsko vstopanje vanje nima smisla, saj kaj kmalu opeša na brezpotju iskanj.

Vsakodnevno posvečanje slikanju prevaja Šerugova v meditativno pozornost umetnice, ki ji ni bila odvzeta sposobnost čudenja, občudovanja in navdušenja nad tako preprosto stvarjo kot je podoba. Da likovna dela Natalije Šeruga z nerazložljivim magnetizmom tako neustavljivo pritegnejo, sem prvič doživela in začutila že pred več kot desetletjem. Bila sem čisto prevzeta od pogleda v njene presojne grafike, razstavljene na letni razstavi študentov Akademije za likovno umetnost v Ljubljani. Kadar si od določene podobe popolnoma prevzet, se strokoven pogled nanje postavi v drugi plan, ker podobam enostavno dovoliš, da si te prilastijo. S skrajno subtilnimi, pravljичno krhkimi, a eksistencialno domišljenimi podobami vzpostaviš lasten odnos, ki kot najtesnejši stik z njo ostane za vedno del tebe. Seveda vsaka slika in vsak način umetniške izpovedi ne učinkujeta enako močno na gledalca. Gledalec se lahko znajde v zanimivi situaciji, ko ne opazuje slikarkine razgaljene intimne, temveč z vstopanjem v prostore njenih podob svojo lastno. Ob gledanju njenih motivov na prejšnjih slikah (kosti, lobanje, jelenovi rogovi, ciprese) je prisiljen vzpostaviti kritičen odnos do lastnega intimnega sveta in se šele nato soočiti s slikarkinim sporočilom.

Težnja po raziskovanju življenjskega prostora je ena izmed značilnosti človeške narave, saj lahko z njeno pomočjo spreminjamo obstoječe in ustvarjamo nove svetove. Ta želja pa ni osredotočena samo na realni svet, ampak Natalijo Šeruga zanima tudi nevidni in neznan svet človeških misli, v katerih obstajajo svetovi, ki jih skuša doumeti, razumeti, obvarovati, ohraniti. Motivni svet, ki se prepleta na teh podobah, je raznolik, prevladujejo pa podobe mistične pokrajine oziroma njeni detajli. V tem primeru morda najbolje občutimo umetničino hotenje po razkrajanju stvarnosti, po njeni sublimaciji. Svetlobo dojema v novih dimenzijah, ki se vse bolj oddaljujejo tuzemskemu (samo)spraševanju in se vse bolj dotikajo tistih nevidnih sil in silnic, ki kraljujejo nevidnemu, prividnemu, sanjskemu, pravljичnemu. Imaginarno svetlobno žarišče predstavlja enigmo samo po sebi, po drugi strani pa simbolizira izvir, rojstvo in tudi preporod, ponovno rojstvo. Svetlobo na slikah obravnava slikarka kot notranji iluzionistični vir luči. Kot da prihaja luč od zadaj in preseva skozi zatemnjeni prednji plan. Če si je pri prejšnjih delih prizadevala doseči prividno razsvetljenost likovnega polja, je pri teh novih slikah nastopila konkretna žarilna intenziteta, ki jo omogoča svetloba. Luč, ki skupaj z barvo in potezo sodi med najpomembnejše slikarske elemente vsakega umetnika, je tudi pri novih slikah Natalije Šeruga bistvenega pomena. Svetloba v

nekaterih podobah zazveni v prosojni belini, druge pa se poživljajoče žarenje kaže v drugih barvah, v sončno rumeni, modri, vijolični... Z barvo in obliko, s proučevanjem prostora in svetlobe, z gradnjo nenavadnih elementov, ki jih slikarka skrbno izbira, se sprošča notranje videnje, ki se na slikovnih poljih razvije v načine, ki jih logika le stežka sprejema. Realna podoba blede in pred gledalcem ostaja le njeno abstrahirano bistvo. Včasih so njene slike do te mere z(a)brisane, da obstaja le še forma, ki lahko sproži različne asociacije. Ponekod navzoča formalna dvodelnost pripelje tudi do vsebinskega kontrasta, resnično-neresnično, prividno-stvarno, predvidljivo-šokantno. Slike zaznamuje pridih neskončnosti in brezčasnosti, ki s svojo sugestivno močjo gledalca kar posrka vase.

Slikarka Natalija Šeruga se nedvomno navdihuje tudi v naravi. In, ali je vrnitev v domači kraj – če pomislimo na naslov razstave – eden izmed odgovorov, ki ga je doslej iskala v svojih slikah? Ne glede na velik vpliv okolja in umetničnega neposrednega doživljanja le-tega, je slikarkin namen prav nasproten: konkretni prizori so upodobljeni zato, da sporočajo prikrito vsebino. Toda, čeprav je temeljni namen in motiv preprost, v osnovnem izrazu čutimo, da vsak izsek in vsako minimalno čustvo na teh podobah lahko povzdignemo v vesoljno resnico. Podobe, še vedno naslikane na platna kot razpete kože na kovinskih nosilcih, ponujajo videz pravljичnega razkošja, kakršno bi bilo lahko v okras v nekem drugem času in v nam neznanih prostorih. V današnjem svetu popačenih, razosebljenih vrednot učinkujejo kot popolnoma zasebni prostori, kjer je razsežnost življenja še vedno polno navzoča. Njene podobe še vedno nosijo s seboj prizvok bolečine in ljubezni, strasti in smrti. In sublimnost estetike, tako značilne za vse slike Natalije Šeruga, celo najbolj morbidne prizore še vedno dela duhovno in likovno privlačne. Zagotovo pa brez prejšnjih, tudi slike cikla Vrnitev v domači kraj ne bi bile take, kot so.

Večpomenske slike, ki so se v vseh dosedanjih ciklih porajale kot poetično iskanje odgovorov na najbolj tabuizirana vprašanja bivanja, življenja in smrti, so podobe njenečasne notranje uglasitve in poistovetenja z univerzumom. Prostor na njenih slikah je po eni strani neskončen in neizmeren, duhovni in sanjski univerzum, po drugi strani pa zgradba njenih slik deluje kot urejena celota. Tako kot motivom (vrtovi, ciprese, votle figure) je slikarka vse od začetka zvesta tudi šivanju platna na železne podokvirje, le da pri tokratnem ciklu slik zameji zgornji in spodnji rob slike z ravnim robom, v sliki primerni barvi, ki jo prav tako premišljeno izbira in izslika. Fokus pogleda, gledanja slike, pa s tem ni premeščen. Točka vida je usmerjena v sredino ne glede na kompozicijo vsake podobe.

Če je ob slikah, navdihnjenih z besedami pesnikov, pisateljev ali filozofov Natalija Šeruga še imela distanco do svojih intimnih trenutkov, so nove podobe z njeno intimnostjo prepojene. Šivi so še vedno pomemben del slike, a z odmikom od izslikane podobe dobivajo drugačen pomen. Morda je nešteto vbodov lahko tudi nešteto vhodov v podobo? Morda so rane in bolečine potrebne, da najdeš pravo pot, da se vrneš k sebi? Morda je slikarka tudi zato zavrnila sliko, da bi lažje vstopila v (lastno) podobo? Da bi se lažje vrnila domov? So prelomnice in mejniki, ki nek tok zaustavijo, da si izbereš novo pot do izpolnitve želja. A nič ni enostavno. Do vrhunca, ekstaze, ljubezni ne prideš po ravni poti, čim več preprek je na poti, tem slajša je zmaga. Kot v pravljici: Tam, za devetimi vodami in devetimi gorami, tam je moj dom ...

Tatjana Pregl Kobe



Fig. I

2007/2009, olje na platnu/oil on canvas, 140 × 160 cm

BEHIND NINE RIVERS AND NINE MOUNTAINS...

Everything that has been written about the paintings of Natalija Šeruga is, no doubt true. Everyone who has written about her various themes, from the beginning until today, has arrived into her world with his or her own perspective and has searched through it. But if painting is nothing more than searching, if it can guide your words (written or spoken) to another place at a given moment – to the object that hides between your legs, to all the painful and magical things in life – than writing about art can also be a sort of search. When we try to interpret the opus of an artist, we may be led astray, but never mistaken, if we simply direct attention to the paintings themselves and let them speak to us with their own particular form and content. The paintings of Natalija Šeruga are enigmas, filled with obstacles that avert the inquisitive gaze from the essence of the painter's message, from her most intimate searchings. Unravelling these riddles, it becomes clear that any rational approach to them is senseless because you are soon abandoned in unmapped terrain.

Quotidian dedication to painting has transformed Šeruga into a meditative and attentive artist who is not overwhelmed by the capability for amazement, admiration, and enthusiasm over such a simple thing as an image. I first experienced the visual art of Natalija Šeruga more than a decade ago and immediately realized that it possessed an undefined magnetism that irresistibly attracts. I was completely taken by a glance into her translucent prints exhibited at the annual student exhibition of the Ljubljana Academy of Visual Arts. When you are completely taken with a certain image, your critical faculties are relegated to a secondary plane because the object has essentially taken you over. In the case of Šeruga's work, I felt a special relationship with the extremely subtle and fairytale fragile but also existentially imaginative images. It was the closest kind of relationship, the kind that always remains a part of you. Of course, each picture and each form of artistic expression does not exert the same power on every viewer. The viewer can find himself in the interesting situation of regarding the artist's denuded intimacy and instead facing an image of his own. Regarding the motifs of Šeruga's recent works (bones, skulls, antlers, cypresses), the viewer is forced to construct a critical relationship to his own intimate world and only then can he comprehend the artist's message.

The tendency to search the space of life is one of the characteristics of human nature and, with it, we are able to transform existing worlds and create new ones. This desire is focused not only on the real world; Šeruga is also interested by the invisible and unknown world of human thoughts in which other worlds exist, worlds that she tries to perceive and understand, protect and nourish. The motif of worlds interwoven in these images is diverse, dominated by mystical images of landscapes and their details. What we feel above all in these works is the artist's desire for the disintegration of reality, for its sublimation. The light is captured in new dimensions that are increasingly removed from worldly (self)questioning, and come closer to invisible forces and extremes that reign in the invisible and the illusory, the dream and fairytale spheres. The focus of the imaginary light represents its own enigma and symbolizes the source and birth, regeneration and rebirth. The artist treats light in the paintings like an internal illusionist light source, as if the light is coming from behind and shining through the darkened foreground. If her previous works achieved the seeming illumination of the visual field, these new paintings fuse with the concrete glowing intensity made possible by light. Light, which along with colour and brushstrokes belong among the most important painterly elements, has acquired in Šeruga's paintings an essential meaning. In certain images, the light fades to a

transparent whiteness; in others, its stimulating flow is revealed in other colours: sunny yellows, blues, violets... With colour and form, with the investigation of space and light, with the construction of unusual elements carefully selected by the artist, an inner vision is released and develops on the picture field in a way that logic cannot explain. The real image fades and what remains is only its abstract essence. Sometimes, Šeruga's images appear erased to a degree that only the form remains, triggering various associations. Sometimes, a formal duality is present that leads to a substantive contrast: real-unreal, illusory-concrete, expected-shocking. The paintings are characterized by visions of eternity and timelessness, the suggestive power of which the viewer pulls into himself.

There is no doubt that Šeruga is also inspired by nature. Is the *Return to Native Places* – if we think of the title of the show – one of the answers she has been searching for in her paintings? Regardless of the substantial influence of her surroundings and the artist's direct experience of them, Šeruga's purpose appears to be the precise opposite: concrete scenes are presented in order to speak of hidden content. Although the fundamental purpose and motif are simple, we sense in the basic expression that each fragment and each minimal emotion in these images can be elevated to a universal truth. The images, which are painted on a canvas that is stretched like skin on a metal carrier, give the appearance of a fairytale richness that could easily be a decoration from times and places that are unknown to us. In today's world of corrupt and impersonal values, Šeruga's work functions as a totally private space where the full scope of life is present. Her images still carry in them traces of love and pain, passion and death. And as much as the aesthetics of the sublime are characteristic in Šeruga's paintings, so too is the way the almost morbid scenes have both a spiritual and visual attraction. Without her previous works, it is certain that the painting from the current series, *Return to Native Places*, would not be what they are.

The multi-meaning paintings that have emerged in previous series as a poetic search for answers to the most taboo questions about existence, life, and death nevertheless present images of a provisional internal harmony and fusion with the universe. The space in Šeruga's paintings is, on the one hand, eternal and boundless, a spiritual dream universe, and, on the other hand, an edifice of works that function as an orderly whole. Just as she has been to her motifs (gardens, cypresses, hollow figures), the painter has been faithful from the very beginning to the stitching of the canvas to the iron under-frame. In the current series, the upper and lower part of the painting are stitched with a straight edge in a colour similar to the painting, chosen deliberately for that reason. The focus of the gaze upon the picture does not need to shift. The point of vision is directed to the centre, regardless of the composition of each image.

If Natalija Šeruga's previous paintings were inspired with the words of poets, writers, and philosophers, and maintained a distance from her most intimate moments, her new images are inundated with intimacy. The stitches are an important part of the painting but they attain a new meaning because of their distance from the painted images. Are the countless stitches countless entries into the image? Or are these the wounds and pain needed to find the right path back to the self? Or are they there for the same reason that the painter flattened the painting, to more easily enter her (own) image? To more easily return home? Turning points and boundary stones stop the flow and force you to find a new path toward fulfilling your needs. But nothing is simple. You do not arrive at the top, at ecstasy, at love along a straight path. The more difficult the path, the sweeter the victory. As in a fairytale: There, behind nine rivers and nine mountains, there where I am at home...

Tatjana Pregl Kobe



Fig. XI

2007/2009, jajčna tempera, olje na platnu/egg tempera, oil on canvas, 128 × 160 cm



Fig. X
2007/2009, olje na platnu/oil on canvas, 102 × 160 cm



Fig. IX

2007/2009, jajčna tempera, olje na platnu/egg tempera, oil on canvas, 71 × 101 cm



Fig. VI

2007/2009, jajčna tempera, olje na platnu/egg tempera, oil on canvas, 77 × 121 cm



Fig. V
2007/2009, olje na platnu/oil on canvas, 113 × 160 cm



Fig. IV

2007/2009, jajčna tempera, olje na platnu/egg tempera, oil on canvas, 102 × 160 cm



Fig. II
2007/2009, olje na platnu/oil on canvas, 114 × 160 cm



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Natalija Šeruga je rojena leta 1971 v Mariboru. Diplomirala je iz slikarstva na Akademiji za likovno umetnost v Ljubljani (1999), kjer je tudi magistrirala (2003). Kot svobodna umetnica živi v Radencih.

Natalija Šeruga was born in Maribor (Slovenia), in 1971. She graduated in painting from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana in 1999, and in 2003 obtained MA there. She lives and works as a free-lance artist in Radenci, Slovenia.

SAMOSTOJNE RAZSTAVE (IZBOR)/SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Vrnitev v domači kraj*, Mestna galerija Nova Gorica, Nova Gorica
Orpiment, Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Maribor
- 2008 *Pokerajina iz voska*, Galerija Equrna, Ljubljana
- 2007 *Armamaxa*, Galerija Miklova hiša, Ribnica
- 2006 *Triptih*, Mestna galerija Ljubljana, (z M. Gregorič in N. Ribič), Ljubljana
- 2005 *Plastenje podob*, Galerija HIT Nova Gorica, (z M. Zloknarik in K. Čerče), Nova Gorica
- 2004 *Slike*, Internetna baza Media Nox, MKC, Maribor
Z vsemi očmi zre bivajoče ven, v odprto, Galerija Muzej Radenska, Radenci
- 2003 *Z vsemi očmi zre bivajoče ven, v odprto*, Galerija Equrna, Ljubljana
Z vsemi očmi zre bivajoče ven, v odprto, Galerija Murska Sobotna, Murska Sobotna
- 2002 *Bolest in strast sta v isti krožni črti*, Razstavni salon Rotovž, Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Maribor
- 2000 *Spomniti se. Loviti sebe*. Razstavni salon Tehniških fakultet v sodelovanju z Umetnostno galerijo Maribor, Maribor
- 1999 *Spomniti se. Loviti sebe*. Likovni salon Celje, Celje

SKUPINSKE RAZSTAVE (IZBOR)/GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Poletje*, Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Maribor, Slovenija
- 2008 *Henkel Art.Award.2008*, Platform for Young Art, Dunaj, Avstrija
Henkel Art.Award.2008, Gallery ArtPoint, Dunaj, Avstrija
VI. International Biennial of Drawing Pilsen 2008, Pilsen, Češka
Slovenian painting after 1945 from the Art Collection of NLB, City Hall, Bruselj, Belgija
- 2007 *Razstava slovenskih umetnikov*, Češko ministrstvo za kulturo, Praga, Češka
- 2005 *Umetniki iz Maribora*, Galerija Roman Petrović, Sarajevo, Bosna in Hercegovina
11. ausstellung der kunstkolonie / 11. Razstava umetniške kolonije, Galerija Slovenski kulturni center Korotan, Dunaj, Avstrija
Eye-Try, Vision Center, Cork, Irska
- 2003 *Slovenska umetnost po izboru komisarja Gunterja Verbeugena*, European Commission, Bruselj, Belgija
- 2002 *Moška in ženska ročna dela*, Mestna galerija Nova Gorica, Nova Gorica
Eye -Try-2, Galerija Kibela, Maribor
Zbirka Talum, Jakopičeva galerija, Ljubljana
- 2001 *Razstava likovne kolonije Talum*, Miheličeva galerija, Ptuj
- 2000 *2.s*, Galerija Miklova hiša, Ribnica
Slika 2000, Galerija Equrna, Ljubljana
Razstava likovne kolonije Talum, Miheličeva galerija, Ptuj
Kompilacija, Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Razstavni salon Rotovž, Maribor
Umetniške študije, Umetnostna galerija Maribor, Razstavni salon Rotovž, Maribor

NAGRADE IN REZIDENCE/GRANTS, AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2008 Nominacija - Henkel Art.award.2008, "artistic drawing"
- 2007 Rezidenca v Berlinu, Ministrstvo za kulturo Republike Slovenije
- 1996 Študentska Prešernova nagrada

UMETNIŠKE ZBIRKE/ART COLLECTION

- Umetniška zbirka Nove Ljubljanske banke, Ljubljana
- Zbirka Talum, Kidričevo
- Zbirka Slovenskega kulturnega centra Korotan, Dunaj, Avstrija
- Zbirka Galerije Murska Sobotna, Murska Sobotna

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