

Silent dialogues

Until recently, Kati Madarász Decsi and Lucia Veselá did not know each other very well. Last year, however, based on the successful results of the open call, they had a joint exhibition in Bratislava's Flatgallery (spring / summer 2020). They responded to the call with their exhibition projects independently, but the related nature of their work and the number of points of contact led the then curators (Andrej Jaroš and me) to join them in an exhibition. At the exhibition in Bratislava, the artists opened their dialogue and it somehow spontaneously led to (their / our) further cooperation, which resulted in interventions in the Zahorie Gallery and the accompanying catalogue.

Silent dialogues is a joint project of visual artists Kati Madarász Decsi (1982) and Lucia Veselá (1985) conceived for the Zahorie Gallery of Jan Mudroch in Senica based on the affinity between their current and recent work. The catalogue was preceded by an exhibition of the same name which is taking place in the Zahorie Gallery from 22 October 2021 to 16 January 2022.

The follow-up dialogues at the Bratislava exhibition between the artists continued, but they became rather quiet, based on empathy, similarities of their thinking and perception of the surrounding reality. From their further collaboration and empathy, it somehow turned out that – the exhibition in the Zahorie Gallery – it is not absolutely necessary to focus on individual authorship, which allowed the works to be organically connected within the space. Although Kati Madarász Decsi and Lucia Veselá work in various media, their exhibition creates a relatively symbiotic whole, fragile in its essence and location on the timeline. The points of contact in *Silent dialogues* became the questions of the passage of time, uniqueness, but also banality of the moment. Both artists approached the expression of these principles specifically – Decsi focused mainly on the experimental level of paintings and objects using natural dyes and materials to verify their longevity / temporality, whereas Veselá examined the relationship between painting, analogue photography and object and natural, atmospheric phenomena / states in analogy to interpersonal relationships.

As part of the exhibition *Silent dialogues* in the Zahorie Gallery of Jan Mudroch, Kati Madarász Decsi is presenting some of her massive “time specific” series *Transparent pieces* (since 2011) and *Mud paintings* (since 2015). The term time-specific is offered here as a category precisely because the artist herself characterises them in this way – as time-limited research, in which, for example, she has devoted herself to the series *Transparent pieces* the tenth year out of the original intended ten (2011 – 2021). At the exhibition in Senica, she is exhibiting a wide range of works from the above-mentioned series, ranging from the monumental piece at the entrance to the exhibition consisting of partial drawings / paintings glued into one piece (*Transparent pieces*, 2021), through medium formats, up to miniature epoxy objects, evoking jewellery. She continues in previous large-format works – installations and environments, but also in the type of smaller and planar adjustments, similarly to her other exhibitions. The selection presented in Senica consists of paintings of various sizes and epoxy objects of diverse shapes from the last two years.

In her work, Kati Madarász Decsi uses her own experimental techniques, which result in fine paintings on various types of paper made from soil and natural juices. In addition to paintings, she also integrates these principles into epoxy and plexiglass objects. Her series *Transparent pieces* is a characteristic experiment with the material transformed into fine, visually almost watercolour paintings, in which she uses several types of paper support (various grammage, wrapping paper, parchment substitute, silk tissue paper, Chinese paper), natural dye and final stabilisation / fixing. The colour represented by the natural red cabbage extract is chosen for its instability and tendency to fade, which further underlines the overall ephemeral character of the works. The artist depicts everyday objects: kettles, watering cans, irons, various containers, instruments and tools, to which she draws our attention, but at the same time obscures them due to a high level of abstraction. She makes them less recognisable, and thus “makes them transparent”. She captures objects independently, as if in the form of portraits, while avoiding the procedures and compositional schemes of the classic still life. What we see as a result is rather an imprint or a shadow from which a considerable degree of objectivity has disappeared. The disappearance of the form is caused by the repeated depiction of

the subject and also by the instability of the material / support itself, which gradually wears out and fades. However, the necessary disintegration of the form is temporarily suspended for *Transparent objects* – objects embedded in epoxy (2020 – 2021), which complement the works on paper. Epoxy shapes can remotely evoke prehistoric fragments of wildlife solidified in fossilised resin, forms of crystal or jewellery. At the exhibition in Senica, the objects are installed in such a way as to respond to the arrangement of the paintings by Lucia Veselá and complement them, creating a “dialogue” between them. Some are installed directly on the paintings, others on the ground, sometimes visible, sometimes rather hidden. *Transparent pieces*, a series by Kati Madarász Decsi, suggesting the ambiguity of testimonies, reminds us of a merciless passage of time. Its fragile morphology is doomed to gradual extinction ending as if in the beginning – on an empty background. Thus we can perceive the works as a kind of imprints of the past present, which reminds us of our own temporality.

Decsi similarly approaches another series, part of which complements the exhibited *Transparent pieces*, namely the *Mud paintings* series. She works here with memory, recollections and a personal archive. The artist depicts human figures taken out of original contexts and situations that represent members of her family and the loved ones placed in neutral environments. She complements the figures with the “personification” or symbolism of nature and life. Attributes, such as a circle, a ball, a branch, etc. often appear next to them. She paints the figures with soil mixed with water, thus creating a kind of watercolour temporarily layered painting, which gradually fades and falls away under the influence of light and other weather conditions. The artist does not attempt to fix this crumbling structure; on the contrary, she leaves it to its own destiny and gradual erosion. However, she temporarily preserves and presents the scenes in the created objects, in some kind of boxes made of plexiglass. This principle is primarily applied to *Mud paintings* exhibited in Senica, in which she adds glue, thus experimenting with the texture of the material. A plexiglass object called *Transparent pieces – collection box* (2021) is based on a similar principle of preservation or a kind of “collection bank”, in which the artist collected individual miniature sketches and paintings created within the *Transparent pieces* series and complemented with larger pieces. Small works were sometimes created as templates for larger works, but also as separate paintings or bases for epoxy casting. The object of the “collection box” works on the principle of a kind of kaleidoscope, the spectator can take in his hands and turn. The small drawings / paintings inside move and always create a different spatial and colour situation. A newer type of the artist’s work (not only in terms of subject matter but also in terms of treatment) is an ephemeral spatial installation created from abstracted hand shapes cut from various types of paper, referring to the atmospheric and fragility of life events – *Hands* (2020). At the exhibition in the Zahorie Gallery, she suitably complements the series *Mud paintings* and *Transparent pieces*, following a similar line of concept. The light-spatial intervention works well with the crumbling structure of the figure and the natural motif of the birch in the painting of Lucia Veselá – *Embrace* (2021) installed in the previous exhibition hall.

At the exhibition *Silent dialogues*, Lucia Veselá, like Decsi, is also presenting her current and recent work, primarily focused on working with painting and her own analogue photographs, which she complements with other media – objects, sound recordings and video recordings of the performance. In her current work, Veselá focuses on the search for forms expressed mainly through painting and photography, which, however, she treats more as a painter and vice versa. At the exhibition in the Zahorie Gallery, she creates a loosely intertwined structure of arrangement, consisting of paintings and analogue photographs mostly monochrome in colour, objects made of fragile materials and natural products, and sound and video. The individual media and works refer to objects and situations from everyday life and the atmospheric light moments of the day. The exhibited series is connected with the artist’s previous projects concerned with human / nature on the basis of reflecting on unique moments in interpersonal relationships and natural situations. Emphasis is placed on finding ways of the coexistence of artistic or non-artistic materials with natural weather conditions, such as daylight, water and air, influencing the creation of her works. The empathetic form of Veselá’s work is based on the perception of subtle nuances and changes in the transition process from one state to another. According to a different degree of fixation of the motifs, the artist also allows various influences (water, sun, air, temperature) to act, while she counts on the change and

possibility of destruction of the unstable support / material and motif. She attributes personal poetics to the depicted moments of interpersonal or natural relationships and portrays them with varying degrees of abstraction and obscurity as autonomous portraits of fleeting situations without attempting an implicit narrative. Objects and situations from everyday life thus carry different degrees of liberation from the original meanings and acquire new meanings.

As part of the creation of paintings and photographs, Veselá is sensitive not only to capturing the subject, but also to the technological process of developing the photograph and applying the colour while painting. The recently adopted photographic principles, which she is studying intensively, are somehow naturally transformed into the way in which she currently reflects upon painting. The process of creating photographs is no longer entirely traditional. Instead of the standard development in a dark chamber, she exposes them to different daylight conditions, which is reflected in their colour, blurring and illumination of the subject. She is interested in the time and intensity of the light to which the photosensitive paper or other supports coated with the photosensitive layer is exposed. She therefore intentionally manipulates the photographic developer and the exposure time. At the exhibition in Senica, she is presenting a selection from a photographic series called *Modus Vivendi*, on which she has been working since 2020. She leaves the shots to a not entirely predictable process that can significantly distort their image (reflection of reality). On the other hand, the final form of the recording is restored by the ephemerality of the initial moment of the “click” of the camera. The principle of controlled – uncontrolled photographic exposure is also transferred to the method of painting. She examines the penetrations of painting and photographic media in terms of content, subject and technical level. Veselá works with the lightening and darkening of the surfaces on the principle of colour transitions – gradients. The artist applies this method, for example, to a large-format painting called *Early evening* (2021), exhibited in the baroque chapel of the historic gallery building, which gives an almost transcendental impression, both in contrast and in harmony with the original baroque frescoes of the space. Thus Lucia Veselá’s paintings and photographs may appear as emotional ephemeral time-determined traces on the border of abstraction and reality, rather than specific scenes.

Objects and installations created from natural or soft materials evoking abstract private places intended for human residence, contemplation and protection form a separate category presented at the exhibition in Senica. The fragile character of their construction and their subtlety are a reference to human sensitivity and relationship. The motif of a barrier frequently appears in Veselá’s work, which is, however, questioned in terms of its very function and strength – solid changes to soft, stable is subject to instability. This moment appears not only in her objects, but also in one type of paintings, where she works with abstracted disappearing or sliding elements of the living space. In the latest object created specially for the exhibition called *Soft corner* (2021), the artist works with the corner of the room, which is usually negatively associated with something inconsolable, evoking punishment (“kneeling in the corner”). On the other hand, however, she creates, in the corner of the gallery, a soft, pleasant natural space, made up of grasses intended for the viewer’s contemplation, complete with a record of slow inhaling and exhaling. In *Soft shield* (2021), she plays out the transformations of painting into a participatory object. She transforms an ephemeral gradient painting lined from the inside with soft material into an object resembling a mattress, which the viewer can touch and lean on. The object *Hiding place* (2021), reinstalled in a different form than in previous exhibitions – deconstructed into two parts, shows an abstract private space of a natural hiding place, evoking a return to something original and natural. A short video entitled *Conversation* (2020), which takes place on the basis of touch and knowledge without words, is symbolically placed at the end of the exhibition, in the last hall. The central idea of the recording is related to touch as a way of interpersonal communication, which Veselá “enlivens” and considers its importance as well as the importance of verbal expression. The touch of man and nature is often combined in her work into one form. She perceives nature, dwellings and people around us as sources of “stroking” that shape our existence. The tactile characteristics of the works, focused on the senses and personal experience, have become an important theme for the artist not only in her work, but also in the communication with the viewer.

The common denominators of the exhibition *Silent dialogues* and some of its attributes were temporality, ephemerality, subtlety, softness, fragility and transience of living and non-living forms, fading, working with light and atmospheric conditions, treatment of natural material, archives and memories, as well as random encounters of similar motifs of hands, parts of nature (branches, stalks) and representations of a closed cycle of interpersonal and natural relationships. The artists' effort to capture time, its slowing down and fixing for an indefinite period of time is an attempt to explore the medium of their choice, but also the common life situations and necessities to which each of us is exposed without any difference. Both of them directed their artistic interest in their collaboration in the *Silent dialogues* project to artefacts from the private environment of man, but also to nature and its phenomena. They used a personal archive of accounts and memories, which, however, always bears the universal language. They captured the process of slowdown that we all desire to liberate from the senseless speed of the perception of the present moment.

It is probably thanks to the pandemic that many conversations fell silent and became less noisy, but went deeper under the surface. They taught us to pause and perceive ourselves more intensely. Now it is up to us whether we are willing, like the artists, to look for a new modus vivendi – a form of coexistence – as a better model of tomorrow.

Kati Madarász Decsi (1982, Nové Zámky) is a graduate in Studio of Graphics and Experimental Art from the Faculty of Arts of the Technical University of Košice, studying under Professor Rudolf Sikora. She is the finalist of the NOVUM Foundation Award for 2018 and 2019 when she won the first place. She specialises in experimental graphic art and painting with overlaps with object, installation and environment. She lives and works in Nové Zámky.

Lucia Veselá (1985, Trnava) is a graduate from the Atelier mal + by, studying under Assoc. Prof. Mgr. art. Klaudia Kosziby, ArtD. at Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava and the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica. In 2019, she became a finalist in the competition Painting – The VUB Foundation award for paintings by young artists. Her artistic programme focuses on painting and its overlaps, objects, installations, photography and video. She lives and works in Bratislava.

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