GORDANA BAKIĆ – IMAGE AND SPACE (with the exhibition A *DIFFERENT IMAGE)*

Although subject to various interpretations within complex socially conditioned circumstances, the fundamental definition of the painting may not have changed as much as its contemporary interdisciplinary interpretations might suggest at first glance. Naturally, we will accept with due attention any form of its multifaceted interpretations, especially those whose result is determined by a complex media environment. However, the basis of our analysis will always reveal what we, somewhat in an old-fashioned manner, refer to as the artist’s intent. We do this also with the work of Gordana Bakić, including her recent project created for the space of the Bačva Gallery in the Home of the Croatian Association of Fine Artists (HDLU).

If we recall Gordana Bakić's earlier works, we might, to our own surprise, first recognize the search for the focal point of the painting. From a symbolic or merely optical centre, the work expands across the surface, intentionally extending into the space itself. However, the forces of expansion are by no means unidirectional; at times, they can appear as a reversible process, condensing and compressing space into a primary core. In such processes, the boundaries of the medium were often quite loose, the real space and its illusion deliberately undefined, and the artistic intent entirely unrestricted by predetermined theses. We interpreted this primarily as a result of the artist’s frenetic need for work, for processuality, for inscribing a mental and sensitive "image," and even the fear that the artistic stance might turn out to be rigid and unambiguous. Only when a certain whole reached the stage of exhibition realization, or more often when the exhibition space itself ultimately dictated the organization of space, the concept, previously strictly internal, had to be revealed. The artist, not looking for challenging spaces in advance, was only then able to fully define the content, scope, and media character of her work. Sometimes, as in the *Gameoverland* exhibition at the Račić Gallery, the environment served as a static background/framework for frames that created the tension of a kind of horror vacui. At other times, as in the cases of exhibitions at Galženica, the Student Centre, or the Glyptotheque, the symbolic centre of the image "spilt" into space, conquering it and ultimately squirming on the floor plane.

However, this dual tension – within the image itself and in the space – rarely caused discomfort for the eye and mind or created a hallucinatory atmosphere that would drag the observer into a visual vortex. It is more appropriate to say that the effects produced by her paintings, combined into an ambient whole, align closer to the values of two-dimensional work rather than spatial work. In other words, the (exhibition) space remains static, if not exactly as a backdrop, then certainly to achieve a relatively neutral ambience.

Conceptualizing her work for the Bačva Gallery, the painter found herself in a significantly more demanding situation. This space, with its regular circular form and domed ceiling, "forces" the exhibitor contemplating the ambient conditions to unconditionally conceptualize the thesis, content, form, and arrangement of her exhibition in a dynamic relationship with the space, not necessarily integrative, but even less in a polemical relationship. As a space of circular rotation with the potential to activate centrifugal forces, Bačva "called" for total ambientization and the utilization of its illusionistic, "kinetic," and even sound properties. Embracing this concept would mean surrendering to the space, letting it dictate the conceptual and value elements, as well as the scope of the work. The paintings would be in a "function," they would create, like wall paintings in Baroque churches, the illusion of a different world from the world of the painting itself. Instead of the totality of the pictorial, the focus would shift to the totality of the spatial.

However, Gordana Bakić is primarily a painter, for whom the drawing is the beginning and end of the painting, its content. Regardless of the dimensions of the works - from modestly sized "sketches" to giant canvases - they are considered two-dimensional surfaces, whose extension into space does not signify the appropriation of that space and its complete symbiosis with the work and the creation of an ambience, installation or some other categorically defined environment.

Bakić, of course, takes the space into account, especially the space for this exhibition. The circular form of the current exhibition venue has determined the form, size, technical elements, and methods of setting up the exhibition. In this sense, the complete idea had to be realized in a way that the dictate of the gallery space would not overshadow the narrative of the paintings. In other words, it was necessary to establish a dominant emphasis through the internal values of the painting/drawing, which would in some way appropriate the spectacular spatial framework and put it into the service of the work. This procedure may have been unexpected but purposeful: Bakić did not oppose the energy of circular rotation with fragmentation, caesuras, and optical accents that would calm the movement, but rather established a distinct line of movement. With more than two rows of connected panels measuring 10x2 meters, with the "content" stacking in a repetitive form on top of each other and continuing in a continuous sequence, her idea corresponds to the idea of rotating the gallery space. However, how is it that the pressure of that rotation is not felt, nor does the potential circular motion turn into an ever-accelerating force that would “spin“ the space to the limits of the hallucinatory?

We have mentioned the artist’s need for focalization, for establishing a starting point from which the painting develops into space or creating epicentres in the painting itself, most often striking circular forms, symbolic places born more from implosion processes than defined as focal points of explosion. Considering the very specific, defined, and solid spatial dimensions, with a circular form in which there is a geometric centre, Gordana Bakić gives the focal point to the observer. They are in the ideal centre from which, through gentle rotation of their own body, they "unroll" the frieze applied to the spherical walls of Bačva. At the same time, there is no need for accelerated rotation: uniform, permuted details line up in sequence, without interruption, but also without dramatic accelerations. Even the "motifs" of her paintings do not reveal a sense of urgency; as soon as certain constructions begin to move, she calms them down and overcomes the mechanism of self-control. Her achromatic acrylics on canvas scrolls are filled with forms that freely combine two dominant "motifs" from her entire visual repertoire so the organic shapes of swelling, growth, and dispersed blisters harmoniously alternate with "technical," archeomechanical details almost regularly, “controlling“ each other so that they do not dominate the whole painting. This collision creates, of course, a certain "noise", so - considering the sound hypertrophy of Meštrović's space - any uncontrolled movement of the observer could cause an unwanted sound cacophony. For the same reasons, the artist does not create an environment that requires physical interaction and participation of the observer in a manner dictated by ambient installation or any other form of "open" work. However, this does not suggest a passive relationship between the work and the observer but rather establishes a dynamic balance: the work does not capture the viewer, and the viewer does not usurp the appearance, position in space, status, and character of the work.

Meštrović's Home of Fine Artists, by its main characteristics, is a synthetic expression of some of the artist's most important artistic attitudes, an architectural demonstration of their eclectic, historicist, and monumental inclinations, but with a perfect circular form and a reduction of details, essentially a modernist work. For the central space of such a venue, Gordana Bakić deliberately creates a painting, relying on the correspondence between the highly organized eclectic space and the profiled language of her own eclectic and neo-mannerist works.

In this process, the language of her works does not submit to the trials of that space, meaning that she does not deviate from or revise her dominant discourse. The "technical" adaptation and gigantism of motifs are already established practices in her body of work: the journey from miniature diary-like visual notes from the series *Pokusni radovi (*EN *Experimental Works)* or from small drawings in the *Uz prijenos (*EN *With Transmission)* series to developed formats is not of an evolutionary nature but rather these units emerge in parallel. Viewed from a single, ideal centre, we will perceive these minimal, fragmentary records the same way as the whole that we are following in a circular sequence.

Marijan Špoljar