

## NATALIA ZAŁUSKA

### ZOOMING IN, ZOOMING OUT

‘There are those [stories] which seem to be a ragbag of all kinds of things that do not appear to make sense or to hang together at all: the listener is confronted with a tangle of coloured threads until with one little twist the storyteller – so far he has done everything to make sure we don’t catch on too soon – turns the whole thing over and it suddenly dawns on us that what we have been seeing is the back of a tapestry; now the front with the splendid “design” is plain for all to see, the sense of the story is not only artfully arranged, it is easily understood by all.’ [Herbert Rosendorfer, *The Architect of Ruins*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Hippocrene Books, New York 1992)]

As a consequence of its formal qualities, when one addresses abstraction, one often refers to something else. This is often a *pars pro toto* of the perception of images after the rise of postmodernism – currently one does not only regard the image, but its history and fate as well, introducing a complicated net of visual associations in place of the chains of cause and effect. When images past, present and future are compressed in one plane, both their chronology and genealogy are distorted and merge into one seeable surface. Natalia Załuska’s works have the capacity to both contain and sustain these paradoxes. The artist has a way of taming and handling temporal and affective contrasts: throughout her *oeuvre*, emotion and reason cohabit one plane, the ‘was’ and ‘will be’ co-exist, micro and macroscales synchronize.

Załuska often uses and repurposes material and formal echoes of her earlier work and is drawn to found elements: wooden leftovers, scraps of cardboard sourced from previous works, parts of incomplete or abandoned paintings. After being discovered by the artist, they wait in the studio to be imbued with sense anew and become parts of a fresh piece. Regardless of the synchronicity manufactured as a consequence of this process, it is perhaps no mistake to make an attempt (even if one risks succumbing to a teleological illusion) at describing a sort of progression, a development in Załuska’s opus. Anyone tasked with pinpointing the characteristics of such an evolution would be forced to admit that its vector shows more than one direction.

A comparison of paintings shown at Christine König Galerie in Vienna in 2018 – built around contrasts of black and white colors and occasional, discrete touches of blueish coloring, with those exhibited at the Foksal Gallery Foundation in Warsaw in 2020, might serve as a case in point. A closer examination reveals a striking development of both color and depth. Załuska’s constantly expanding palette presently incorporates a multitude of pigment: ochres and plums, emeralds and ambers. The increasing variety of colors coincide with a continually growing collection of materials that the artist applies when constructing her paintings. Fragments of thick cardboard, combined with Bristol paper and uneven sheets of

canvas produce a sculpture-like quality, beckoning the viewer to analyse the paintings at close range.

Apart from performing the role of chapters from an unfinished book, Załuska's individual pieces are independent universes in themselves. Some reveal an additional complexity, expanding the dimensions of the painterly reliefs. The backsides of the paintings – compositions of wooden blocks and colors – emphasise the materiality behind the works and their status as objects. As one notices the pieces' skeletons, one is reminded about various layers that build a city or constitute a biography (this has a particular resonance in Warsaw – a place where Załuska currently resides – a city equally damaged by history as failed by neoliberal promises). But the *verso* side of the works can serve as yet another metaphor – an acknowledgement of a disintegration of the myth of the all-rational roots of abstraction. Even though the *recto* sides of her works appear to be carefully calculated and precisely planned, some details uncover the paintings' emotional origins: Załuska does not shy away from exposing her creative processes to the viewer. She preserves small, practically indistinguishable imperfections, be it spills of paint or irregular folds of canvas and paper.

By virtue of its formal precision and capacity for the symbolic, abstraction might presently be the most pure and effective way of communication. As humanity exists within an increasingly overwhelming visual environment, the ambiguity of abstraction (which embraces its potential to serve as a screen onto which the viewer projects their hopes and fears, experiences and expectations) and its capability to evoke complex affects might work as the ultimate solution for the post-truth era. In both natural sciences and humanities, the dominance of the Cartesian concept of ego is in decline, while a reconciliation between mind and body ascends. Załuska's work resonates with the recent re-discovery and recognition of the affective and spiritual foundations of non-figurative art, and her progress proves that the definition of abstraction is also slowly morphing and expanding.

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