

The international exhibition GRAY ZONES is focused on mutual communication between exponents of early post-modern visual arts arising in the milieu of Central European totalitarian regimes during the 1970's and 1980's (Ion Grigorescu, Sanja Iveković, Jiří Kovanda, Józef Robakowski, Mladen Stilić), and a younger generation of artists who respond to specifics and its cultural reception of that period (Oskar Dawicki, Michal Moravčík, Tomo Savić Gecan, Kateřina Šedá).

What was the position of contemporary art in the totalitarian regimes of the 1970's and 1980's? How art observed the world? Where to look for joins with the previous development of artistic forms, and where conversely innovative artistic approaches show? And last, but not least - what was the specifics of artistic production growing from the atmosphere of socialist totality? These are just some of the questions that initiated the analysis of the mimetic models by the selected Central-European artists focused in the first place on exploration of the relations between totalitarian social mechanisms and models of their artistic reflection.

Without question, the early postmodern visual art was in the atmosphere of the Central European totalitarian regimes wedged between the contradictory processes of global integration and local multicultural destination. Artistic concepts as a matter of course grew out of particular situations; however, if they wanted to find their audience, they had to transform these individual sources into communication forms understandable in a broader context, but at the same time independent on ideological schemes of the political power to a certain extent. Although the visual artists reflecting the hybrid situation of the 1970's and 1980's were aware of the deep crisis of mimetic models, they continued to tell (or rather visualized) stories. They retained the mythological character, however the essence of these myths changed radically. It was not anymore the traditional universal archetypal parable, but new metaphors relating to subversive cultural processes or also to redefinition of systems and rules significant for particular social and political environments.

With a certain portion of hyperbole we could say that the early postmodern art mythologized itself, or perhaps its own discourse. This anthropological projection of visual art had its roots in the modernistic conception of exploring formal boundaries of an artefact. However, it was just modernism as a rich source of stories to be read in a new way, to re-cultivate and reactivate their cultural as well as social potentials.

Discussing limits of artistic forms and principles of visual communication themselves allows us to apply openness of aesthetic structures to movements representing contrary, but always mutually interlaced social processes. The discussion about the boundary between the modernistic aesthetic forms and principles of postmodern visual communication certainly gave the late totalitarian socio-cultural processes of the 1970's and 1980's an absurd character.

After the decomposition of the Central European totalitarian regimes in the early 1990's, the production of the rising generation of artists for a certain time brought a reflection of new topics and means of expression interconnected with the experience of social, political and cultural integration of the post-totalitarian world into the globalized Euro-American society. As early as at the end of the 20th century's last decade however, we could see new interest in the cultural and artistic specifics of the 1970's and 1980's. Young authors most of all respond to the subversive forms of social involvement typical for the period of totality. An intentional distance from the institutional frame of art, criticism of the post-totalitarian social models, and endeavour to reach nonpathetic forms of direct communication between an artwork and the particular social environment are becoming characteristic for these artists.

Presenting the early postmodern artistic production of the totalitarian era and its redefinition from the point of view of the present day post totalitarian artists could therefore not only broaden the view of how the Central European visual arts have been developing in the recent decades, but it could as well contribute to cognition of various historical and social traditions of the Central European milieu.