



Red Trim
Prof. Yumi Janairo Roth, Sarah Bowen, Christopher M. Lavery/U.S.A.
granary exterior/painting

D o t e k y / C o n t a c t s International Open-Art Symposium

Scissors and a red dashed line. Nothing more, and nothing less. To those who used to be fond of cut-outs while still children, or later, at a more advanced age, fell for various commercial “competitions” involving the cutting out of vouchers from newspaper pages propelled by the illusory vision of a prospective reward in the form of a brand new Skoda Felicia or a holiday in Majorca, this sober language of graphic symbols is by no means unknown. After all, one needn’t even go that far: for is it not true that similarly simple symbolism is the standard device employed by most food producers, to make sure that the consumers find no difficulty in overcoming the barrier of paper and plastic wrappers before enjoying the taste of their favourite brand of skimmed milk-for instance.

Appearing on a house facade, though, such signs may still strike the observer as unusual, perhaps even confusing. there, change of location entails change of meaning. Thus the red horizontal stripes running all around the Granary at Klenová, combined with the image of wide-open scissors, may look out of place in the context of the snow-white, late-Baroque style building, to which at first sight all this assigns a reckless, virtually Pop-Artish expression. On the other hand, however, the tension thus generated between historical

architectural language and modern-age graphic icon calls up various questions which greatly transcend the boundaries of comics-style superficiality. Indeed, by symbolically cutting the premises in two separate zones, the creators of this project-Professor Yumi Janairo Roth and her students from the University of Colorado, Sarah Bowen and Christopher Lavery- not only reflected the Baroque dichotomy of earthly and celestial worlds, but at the same time also challenged the very principle underlying the standard paper cut-out and fold kits. They did this by defying the principle of construction by a hint of de-construction which, nonetheless, is not meant to serve as a subversive demolition handbook, but rather as a reminder of the existence of an invisible force which, shielding itself by the tokens of reason and practicality, often commits acts of violence on heritage of the past ages, and which converts us into slaves executing automatically instructions handed out in the widest variety of manuals. (What, for instance, if one of these days we tried to cut a box of milk open in an unprescribed corner?)

The international symposium of art school teachers and students at Klenová Granary, co-organized by he Galerie Klatovy/Klenova and the academy of Art and Design in Prague, is being held already for the fourth time, and even though a majority of the works

shown here this year differ considerably in terms of form from the cool (albeit efficient) aesthetics of the aforementioned trio of American artists, their *Red Trim* can indeed be regarded as a brilliant three-dimensional, but also semantic framework for the whole exhibition.

The *Doteky/Contacts* Symposium has been conceived ever since its inception as an opportunity to disengage (or “cut away”) art from institutional alignments: to work in a location where nature is wed to man-made historical environment, and there to establish multicultural dialogue, or more precisely, polyogue, between artists coming from from the world over. In this context then, that dashed red line can also be understood as an appeal for a reassessment of the duality between “here” and “there” (or, in this particular case, between “down” and “up”), which in Western society breeds so many irreconcilable and hierarchically structured relations—including the relation between authorities of teacher and student—thereby preventing openness. Beyond that, the red “ribbon” assigns the Granary a rather impish tinge, ushering in an atmosphere of relaxed good cheer.

Such projects as has been the *Doteky/Contacts* Symposium are typically characterized by liberal breadth as regards selection of themes, style, and material, a looseness which mirrors the varied scopes of experience encompassed by their international participants, and which lays emphasis on the actual process of an art work’s creation. Unlike the traditional types of exhibi-

tions, these projects usually do without being linked to any specific curatorial intent; rather, their element of cohesion is more often than not constituted by the shared experience of work together, plus in this specific case, of course, the Granary’s unique architecture. However difficult to grasp and hard to decipher the spectator might find, at first sight at least, these inner links between the various works on show, it remains true that this year’s collective endeavor has succeeded—as, to be sure, did the symposium’s previous three editions—in turning the Granary’s three storeys, plus attic into the location of an exciting exhibition. Most of the artists involved reacted to the specific features of the environment in which the Symposium was set, not just with respect to the architectural dispositions of what has originally been a purely utilitarian structure, but also taking into account the surrounding landscape and customs of the local village community. Some made use of scrap textile discarded by a nearby plant, while others—such as Margita Titlová-Ylovski, head of the Printmaking Workshop of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno, combined local soil with natural pigments, and another participant did not hesitate to make the attainment of her artistic objective contingent on the presence of domestic animals as part of the exhibit. For her part, Professor Izabella Gustowska of the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznan, and her two students, Marta Jurowska and Jan Poppenhagen, thus carried out, in the course of two

weeks, a script-based balladic mixed cinematic-photographic project entitled *A Girl with a Pony, a Rabbit, Several Kids and Ducks*, whose protagonists were the three artists, and a group of pets and domestic animals owned by villagers of Klenové.

The illusive atmosphere of that fictional story, which contrasts its darker aspects with elements of revealing carnival-style humour, may perhaps serve as a common denominator that can be found in most of the works present at this year’s Symposium. A fair share of illusion can be found in the manipulated landscape photographs of Adéla Pavliková who transformed a view from the Granary’s windows into a picture-postcard fake; as well as in the intricately woven web of the three dimensional labyrinth, *Magic Child, or Will You Touch Me?* by Tereza Dancová; and in the ingenious periscope mirror object, *Autopoesis*, from Silvie Kupcová. the deceptive illusion that technology can help us to stop time (and wake up on top form sometime in brighter future) is the central theme of the installation called *Hibernation*, by Onjrej Sevcik; and illusion in fairy-tale disguise—as a form of escape into fantasy—is definitely present in the sculpture-assemblages of Jakub Chocholousek. Finally, there could hardly be a more eloquent document of the ease with which the human senses succumb to the illusion of seeing a three-centuries-old building converted to a large paper box, than *Red Trim* itself.

From time immemorial, illusion has been part and parcel of art cultivated by the Western civilization. What has changed in the course of history have been merely its forms, and the degree of its elaboration. If illusion becomes part of artistic expression still today, it is in most cases no longer induced by the inevitability of mimetic imitation, but much rather by the need of revealing its force and its power to tempt and manipulate our minds and senses. While reviewing the works produced in the course of this year’s *Doteky/Contacts* Symposium, one might certainly seek and find more than a few other common traits. And yet, to me at least, any associations of this kind are clearly eclipsed by those links which are purely human—those which have in fact constituted the very purpose and driving force of this Symposium and which have enabled Czech and international students and teachers, for several years already, to engage in a lively exchange of artistic, cultural, and social experiences.

-Martina Pachmanová