

Zdenek Felix: Luisa Kasalicky

For her exhibition at the Polansky Gallery, Austrian artist of Czech origin Luisa Kasalicky has brought together a group of ten works completed between 2009 and 2016, including paintings, reliefs, textile hangings, drawings and wall installations. The diversity of media represented is reflected in the number of techniques and materials employed by the artist. Besides traditional tempera paintings on canvas, we come across construction materials such as polystyrene, wood, plaster, industrial foam, tar insulation and roofing panels, artificial leather, wax, as well as decorative elements of interior design. For the most part, the works are assemblages composed of several different materials which the artist partially coats with paint, often favouring a chocolate hue. As with the materials utilised, the forms and individual elements also relate to architecture and design. Luisa Kasalicky's practice makes use of parts of metal furniture, gutters, tiling, decorative house plants, but they mostly appear only as fragments and in enigmatic contexts. In their own way, they are puzzles in two or three dimensions, with hidden meanings and biographical connections.

Luisa Kasalicky was born in 1974 in Prague and she moved to Austria with her parents at the age of eleven in 1985. Between 1998 and 2004 she studied painting and graphic art at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, receiving her diploma in 2005. Since 2004, she has completed various architectural projects and exhibited in numerous galleries, for example in Linz, Klagenfurt, Innsbruck, Berlin, Düsseldorf, London and in particular in Vienna. In 2012 she received the Scholarship of the Republic of Austria and the following year she was awarded the Monsignor Otto Mauer Prize. She is represented by the Viennese Galerie nächst St. Stephan, Rosemarie Schwarzwälder. Following a solo exhibition at the House of Arts 2011 in Brno, her show at the Polansky Gallery marks her Prague debut.

Centre stage of the exhibition is taken by a large ornamental work on the theme of a disintegrating - or perhaps expanding - star. It is made from tar paper, perforated in such a way that the circular openings form apertures onto the light surface of the walls behind it. The motif of the star is only one possible interpretation, however. On closer inspection, other associations come to mind, such as a view of a metropolis at night, an arabesque composed of lines and points of light, or the universe seen from a planetarium. In view of the artist's engagement with interior design, another notion also suggests itself - a large cupola, levitating above the viewer. A similar emotion might be experienced by an observer standing in the middle of the Pantheon in Rome, eyes gazing upwards, rapt by something akin to a metaphorical vision of the celestial orbs.

A sizeable hanging relief thematises the idea of Ex Libris, the symbol of the owner of a library, consisting of various, autobiographical elements. The relief includes the letters Y and K, anagrammatic elements of the name Kasalicky, together with hints of other letters such as L, S, U, and A. Additional elements of the relief, including a piece of firewood, decorative paper and sections of brass furniture, are optically unified with a coat of brown paint, a pigment that tones down glossiness and induces a sense of the ordinary. In the artist's own words, her piece Ex Libris consists of "two letters carved in wood that has been smoothed over with putty and coated with water soluble paint to make it look like the surface of a wall. The letters are accompanied by other smaller elements whose forms oscillate between structural components of functionalist architecture, decorative ornaments and shapes derived from nature."

Luisa Kasalicky's own description is interesting particularly because it expresses the range of themes which we often encounter in her practice. In the hanging tapestry entitled Intro 2, for example, abstract and floral elements intermingle on a blue background representing

a conglomeration of various motifs embroidered into textile, including flowers, but also lines and purely ornamental forms. If we compare these two works, there's an evident difference in the materials employed. Wood and textile have different characteristics, but on the other hand, in terms of their effect, they can work together in a similar way that interior design elements are coordinated with ornamental decoration. Several smaller reliefs complete the installation of the exhibition, pointing to the multiplicity of the artist's practice, both in terms of form and content. The aim is to establish a metaphorical interconnection of the whole into a staged, sensorially rich setting. This spatially interventionist - "Baroque" - principle is a striking feature of Luisa Kasalicky's practice and calls for a revitalisation of the ornament as a form moving between the abstract and the emblematic. A form which has an equal metaphorical effect on both reality, and fiction.

In this regard, the artist is bringing back an art practice reaching as far back as the Baroque, an important period which importantly is the heritage of both Czech and Austrian art and in Kasalicky's case in a certain sense becomes personal inheritance. Sometime around 1887, the renowned Swiss art historian Jacob Burckhardt talked of the idea of "apparent perspectival extension" of space in Baroque art, by which he meant the characteristic tendency towards illusionism in the case of murals as well as sculptural elements in interiors of the period. At the end of the 19th century, while Burckhardt was still alive, the onset of modernism introduced a fundamental refutation of illusionism as an artistic principle into contemporary art, and this went hand in hand with a rejection of the ornament as a decorative element in architecture and design.

Born in 1870 in Brno, Adolf Loos is considered one of the most important opponents of illusionism and decorative art. For a number of young builders in the 1920s and 1930s, his notorious statement *Ornament ist Verbrechen* – ornament is a crime – served as an argument for opting for constructivist and economical forms in architecture. It's interesting to note that an impulse for thinking about a possible revitalisation of the ornament is now coming from the Austrian milieu. In Kasalicky's practice, this aspect is understandable in relation to her biographical position, binding her to the Baroque, but also in relation to her efforts to revive a language of forms which links natural elements to historical models and gives new space to "decorative thinking". Perhaps for this form of practice, the designation *peinture parlante* (speaking painting) might be appropriate as an analogy of the concept of *architecture parlante* (speaking architecture). In this respect, the work of Luisa Kasalicky provides an original and distinctive impulse for discourse.

In: Cat. Luisa Kasalicky, *Synonym for Group Five*, Polansky Gallery, Prague, 2016