

TRAVERSABLE WORKS

There are certain books which would be especially important for a generation in order to understand the events of the recent past, but have, for some reason, been stuck on the bookshelf. This "some reason" can usually be linked to the feeling of the book being outdated, to the thought that its content is founded upon the premises of a distant era. Nevertheless, as a result of a constellation of circumstance or a chance encounter, some of these books eventually find their way into our hands and prove to us, time and again, that our prejudices about the antique or outdated only obstruct the passage between different eras.

It was by chance that I picked up a copy of János Frank's *Studios Made to Talk*. Published in 1975, the book presents 94 interviews conducted by the author, an excellent art historian and exhibition-maker. The subjects of these interviews made in the late 60s and early 70s are important figures of the Hungarian art scene, painters, sculptors, architects, designers, and graphic artists, young and elderly alike. Flicking through these conversations from 50 years before, today's reader may have the feeling of being able to light up a hitherto invisible corner of an imaginary space; suddenly, oft-repeated expressions become clearer - it came to my mind, for instance, that the Hungarian art history of the 1950s and 1960s could be rewritten based on the notion of "the lyrical".

Preparing for the opening of Katalin Hetey's exhibition, I once again pulled out Frank's book, in which almost all the interviewees - typically of the time - talk about keeping the balance between abstraction and figuration. I thought that Hetey's paintings from the 1960s and 1970s, currently displayed in Art+Text Budapest Gallery, can be approached from this duality, and so a passageway between two eras and two worlds can be created. Looking back upon that era, the expression "two worlds" seems appropriate: Katalin Hetey, alongside many of her fellow artists who had emigrated in 1956, could not be featured in the book - from amongst the group of artists who had left Hungary Frank only made interviews with Dezső Orbán, Márta Pán and Zsigmond Kolozsvári; only the early 1980s brought the cultural return of those who had left after the revolution.

Nevertheless, upon reading the book we get the impression that the artistic distance between the two worlds is not a great one at all - physical hindrances did not prevent the Europe-wide spread of the zeitgeist. Moreover, for the majority of artists this zeitgeist was still linked to the Paris of the first half of the century and to avant-garde tendencies much more strongly (certainly than what the younger generation imagines or learns about today), and so the effects and differences can be much more easily read into or from one another - in my mind I imagine that if Katalin Hetey and János Frank had sat down in the artist's studio to have a discussion, Hetey's words would not necessarily have stuck out from those of her fellow artists living in Hungary at the time.

Hetey never made a secret out of Soulages' or Fautrier's effect on her in the 1950s, and this lyrical abstract impetus can be seen throughout her painterly oeuvre which runs parallel to her sculptural career. Painting, in Hetey's case, is a surface based on dichotomies: reality and a painterly universe, the mechanical and the organic, the figure and the abstract form can all be crossed over in this world. Hetey's motives always teeter on a borderline: that of the complete and the incomplete, the accidental and the deliberate, the tangible and the intangible. Most typical, however, is her constant crossing over boundaries of genres, and, above all, the predominance of a distinctly sculptural quality in her artistic thinking - after all, an important aspect of all of her works is to clarify and reconsider the relationship between artwork and environment. The creation of tension between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, and the intention to reach a monumental effect is accompanied, in the case of several works, by a technical thinking: it is as if plans of different machines emerged in the paintings - useless machines, which could, nonetheless, work if they were to enter spatial reality. Hetey's art is characterised by this primarily sculptural and technical perspective as well as an idiosyncratic painterly thinking in which polychromatic variations of tone are balanced by an emphatic presence of blacks and whites, where lines serve not only as means of delineation, but as counterpoints of colour plains. Indeed, all of Hetey's works are built upon counterpoints and momentary balances. As if the works conjuring up images of machinery or geometric forms could become snapshots of a process if they were put next to one another, and the plastic result of these could be a variable sculpture having its own mass, entering the three-dimensional space around us.

When it comes to works created forty, fifty, or sixty years ago, certain questions always arise: how much are these works confined to their own time, how much are they capable of breaking out from their former definition of "lyrical structures" or from the outmoded paradigm built on the dichotomy of abstraction and figuration. The paintings that can be seen in Art+Text Budapest Gallery today - exhibited for the first time thanks to a favourable circumstances - can not only shed light onto the thinking of the time but open the passage between the world of the recent past and that of the contemporary.