

Art and nature

1.

In her book *Uncanny Slavdom. Phantasms of literature* Maria Janion writes that the Slavs did not have the opportunity to preserve a memory of the beginnings of their own culture, pagan traditions and mythology, which were wiped out during the *often brutal* Christianization. Christianization has probably saved us from becoming a folk curiosity, an ethnic minority in the Germanic or Scandinavian element, but it caused the loss of cultural roots. The scholar writes that until recently it was generally believed that “the Slavic people” is unique among the world's culture, having no memory about its mythology. Yet the matter is not simple, there is a symptom of *a particular Slavic trauma* in the Polish culture, which is connected with the feeling that one has been *deprived of some hidden heritage, unfairly forgotten, moved aside...* Attempts of referring to this denied heritage appear also in art.

2.

The latest, third edition of the Landart Festival was governed by the same principles as the previous ones. The events took place in the idyllic, green landscape of the Lublin Region. This time – similarly to last year's edition in the Roztocze region, but the organizers chose one particular location: Zwierzyniec, and specifically – a place called Zwierzyńczyk. It is a freshly renovated, restored to its former glory park-and-palace complex over the ponds and a channel. Greenery is reflected in the mirror of water. There are alleys and footbridges for strollers. The park imperceptibly changes into a forest. History of this place is connected with the Zamoyski Family Fee Tail. *In 1593 Jan Zamoyski has purchased the Szczebrzeszyn estate. ... on the area covered with forests he decided to carry out the Renaissance idea of a "villa". The term should be understood as a landscaping form which harmoniously combines the abode with natural landscape; it is a complex which comprises of a two-storey wooden mansion, which provides a gateway from ardours of city and court life, and Italian-styled gardens with a water system; it is located in a place that gives close contact with nature* – we read on a website devoted to the history of Zwierzyniec. With successive *Ordynats* (principal heirs) Zwierzyniec changed its shapes, the landscaping form of city-garden have been affected with the introduction of industry in the 19th century, and later after 1945. However, Zwierzyńczyk remained intact.

Thus, the Organizers of the 3rd Landart Festival invited the artists to a special place. Their works were located in a historic part, which entails certain consequences. The installations must respect the landscape perspectives, scale and the character of the complex. Therefore, mostly there were not too big, made of natural materials, mostly obtained on spot; they merged into the original landscape. Let us emphasize again – a landscape which is not natural, but shaped with a human hand; a landscape which is neither urban nor post-industrial, but picturesque, historical. As a result of this perspective virtually entire Zwierzyńczyk has become not as much an outdoor exposition, but a comprehensive work of art, accessible by everyone. Culture dominates in a place like this, with wilderness pushing its way as if through the side door. Robert Morris said once that we get to know the space *through the objects which are in it*. In Zwierzyńczyk objects, that is the artworks, further specified the park's space and redefined it gently, modernized it. Interestingly, they attempted to resemble the works of nature.

There is a similar kind of space at the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko, in the local manorial park where artists face the problems which form the classical modernist topos of “art versus nature”. Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka describes this dilemma in an interesting way: *...visual arts are not considered in the former, “static” and separable manner, like painting, sculpture, architecture. What is important is spacial organization and dynamic coexistence of different elements...* The author defines these changes in the approach to art as *comprehensive, integrating culture-nature*. Exposition of Landart Festival places itself in this line of thinking. The idea of scattering the works around the park takes the viewer into account from the beginning, thus the concept of the Festival is dynamic. We get to know the space of the park, along with the works, on the move, walking around, watching the changing configuration of works amidst the

greenery.

This type of location creates an interesting contrast to the ones prevailing in today's art. Zwierzyńczyk is not a "classical" public space in the sense that it is not a part of a big city. ("Public space" for us is still a highly urbanized space.) Thus, Landart Festival presents a proposal rare in our art to address the questions of art placement outside the big cities: among nature, in the countryside, in a small town.

In Poland we have maybe not a very common but very interesting tradition of artists working in the countryside. One needs to mention plain-air sessions, although they were often organized in isolation from the problems of the local community. Working in the countryside was specific to theatres originating from the counter-culture (Grotowski's Theatre of Sources, Gardzienice Theatre Association or Village Theatre "Węgajty") but also to artistic groups such as probably the most well-known which operates in the village of Lucim. Among the artists few take on the subject of public art outside the city. These include: Roman Dziadkiewicz who studies the iconography of mud, Daniel Rycharski who carries out street art projects in the village of Kurówko as well as Jan Gryka, present at the 3rd Landart Festival, who runs plain air sessions for students in the village of Hołowno, developing with them projects of small architecture for this place.

The features recurring in most of the works presented in the framework of Landart Festival are: their biological character and inscribing in the local context. They fit into the ecological trend. The works are cheap, made from materials obtained on spot: wood, hay, branches, recycled items (old threshing machines, transport pallets), stones and webbing rope. Organizing a plain air ECODIY in Szczecin in 2012 Łukasz Skąpski voiced a postulate to increase environmental awareness among artists: *It is assumed that they will use only recycled, second-hand materials, which is inspired by the responsible design. The camp should not impact the environment...* Landart Festival seems to implement these postulates moving them into a radically different environment: a post-manorial park in a resort town, in the heart of the Roztocze National Park, with rich history and ambitions.

Despite the fact that the artists taking part in Landart Festival come from different cities, circles and countries, their works follow a similar style, adapted to the location. Hence my cautious inquiry about Slavdom, quoted after Maria Janion. I wonder whether, based on the works from the Festival, it is possible to recreate features of a certain, different sensitivity to landscape and nature. A sensitivity somehow pre-industrial, related to nature and landscape. I am encouraged to pose this question by the fact that the curator and founder of the Festival is Jarosław Koziara, an artists who often uses monumental forms blending with landscape. Known for a characteristic, "tribal" style of his projects, using symmetry, rhythmical, repetitive geometrical motifs. His works result from the knowledge of nature, are biological through frequent use of natural materials, but also through the principle behind their construction (usually by adding and accumulation of separate, smaller elements). Koziara's style is completely different from what is happening on main stages of art in Poland and – I think – has a profound influence on the style of particular works of the Festival. This style manifests itself through rural, natural materials, the use of archetypal motifs and drawing from the patterns of folk art, which has preserved in itself the memory of pre-Christian Slavdom, as well as the spirit of revolt against Western, Mediterranean culture.

3.

Let us discuss individual works. *Wicker justacorps* by Anna Waszczuk and Maria Polakowska-Prokoopiak. The title refers to an old Polish ceremonial dress (it is a Polish translation of the French name *just au corps*). Slender tree trunks next to a walking path, wrapped with branches of wicker. But the work does not look like a wicker plaiting but as an effect of some animal's work which made a home for itself there. It blended completely into nature, at the same time remaining different, thought-provoking, strange. Seemingly natural, yet unnatural. Both the tension between what is nature and what is culture, and the fusion of these concepts are clearly visible here.

Silent by two young artists from Latvia, Iveta Heinacka and Laura Bistrakova, is a simple installation made of several silhouettes of birds created from hay and placed on wooden perch stuck into the ground. Placed at the end of a channel and viewing axis it gives an impression of being created spontaneously from items

found in the forest and the neighbouring meadow.

Thrombotic wilderness is a blood-red object made of rope braided strings spread between the trees by Natalia Ostrowska and Agnieszka Waseńczuk. One of few works which stood out sharply from the environment, at the same time referring to it. It resembles an empty cocoon or other construction created by an insect, it slightly also looks like a cage. It is something both light and decorative, but also oppressive. Made of red strings it is supposed to awake associations with a living organism, dissected veins where blood pulsates.

Agnieszka Sobczak's *Labyrinth* is an extremely simple work which, despite the overall character of the place, highlights its wilderness. The artist says she wanted to create a strange and mysterious spot, a nature reserve close to a path visited by strollers. In a clump of trees, connecting the trunks with branches, she built a strange structure in which it is possible to find an outline of a labyrinth. Similarly to *Wicker justacorps* one may wonder whether it is a structure created by animals or maybe tree spirits. Incredibility and demonic character of nature echoes in this piece.

These are not water-lilies by Jan Gryka refer to his installation from the previous year. Plenty of vividly coloured artificial flowers cover ruins emerging from water. An ironic work, it completes the set of park vegetation with flowers, and so what if these are not water-lilies? Artificial nature, practical and indestructible. Beautifying the ruins.

Tomasz Domański's *Gazebo* is located already outside the park grounds, but it is visible from there. It is a kind of a wooden tower built on a square form, with entrances on every side. The ambiguous construction took its name from a kind of garden summer house. Domański's *Gazebo* carries a vague threat in itself, resembling a watchtower. One cannot climb to the top but only gaze up standing inside.

Sticks and Stones by Bill Gould of the U.S. is an installation consisting of stones and sticks wrapped with wire, suspended on an intricate construction in the treetops and on a fence. Also in this case the work, especially if it was more developed, would resemble a biological structure, a work of a monstrous spider. The installation blends well into the surrounding nature, reacting to natural phenomena: it is moved by wind, the artist takes into account a gradual process of its destruction, erosion.

USO that is *Unidentified Swimming Object* by Robert Kuśmirowski is an incredible floating unit made of two old rural threshing machines. One gets an impression it was created by some mad visionary-handyman. It is a surreal fantasy about boats, but with appearances of probability, old machinery and appliances whose time has already gone by.

Jarosław Koziara's *Biopolis* is a monumental construction of wooden pallets arranged in a circle. It may be associated with a great terrinary, at the same time – with the tower of Babel or a pagan burial pile. Unstable balance between nature and culture has been preserved. It also contains a vision of civilization – does the one of animals (ants, bees, termites) differ so much from the human one?

Ropeway by Paulina Kara consists of rope creations resembling cocoons hanging over a cage. Between the net's mesh one can distinguish some biological forms. The artist declared she wanted the viewers to have an impression they were watched by her work. Therefore, also in this case a motif of the extraordinary, and of anxiety appears.

4.

The opening day of this year's edition of the Festival was accompanied by the concert over the water, with unforgettable images of lanterns being reflected on the surface of ponds designed by Koziara. Combined nature and art created an atmospheric whole.

I believe that the most significant works of this edition of the Festival were those, which included a certain oddity, tended to be demonic, disturbing and ambiguous. There were many of those. Whether they were

supposed to express the repressed spirit of “the Slavic people” or are only an artistic interpretation of a particular location, they constitute a fresh approach to the subject of art and nature, art in nature, or maybe simply the naturalness of art and artificiality of nature.