

Towards a Holy Day

A Holy Day can be approached in different ways, here the artists encourage us to meditate on its less obvious connotations. They question existing paradigms and show what usually remains unnoticeable. They propose another perspective towards the world and nature based on harmony more than on manifesting power. Many works focus on the relationship between man and nature, some on protecting what remained, some inspire to meditate, some discover 'holiness' in what is ordinary.

Many years ago the artist, art critic and art historian Suzi Gablik coined the term „ecological imperative” which refers to our particular ethical responsibility for the environment. In this respect artists and their research are unique because as Gablik writes: “In the past we believed in the idea of art as a mirror (reflecting our times) ... However, there is another kind of art, the one that relates to the power of connection and establishes relationships”. This guide is merely a suggestion; everybody can discern in these realizations what their imagination tells them.

Spiritual Feast for Everybody

"A buzzing fly arrived from somewhere. It is a rare view. Many days have passed since I saw birds. There are less and less of them. They hunt rare insects, the ones that have survived, and they starve like the rest of the world." - this quotation from „The History of Bees” by Maya Lunde is one of many responses to the devastation of natural environment which causes the extinction of pollinating insects.

"Gathering" by Alicja Łukasiak directs our attention towards the world beyond humanity and tries to define its role. Instead of domination, subordination and superiority she encourages care and attentiveness in relation to nature. This work has also a functional aspect – it is a little house for lonesome bees, the ones that do not produce honey and live in bee hives, but their role is equally useful. It is estimated that bees pollinate one third of the world crops. Einstein used to say that the mankind can survive only four years without bees. The artist points that these apocalyptic visions are not such distant ones. It seems that an ethical perspective is the key factor for her. - There are already such places in the world where there are no bees any more, hence people have to pollinate plants. It is high time to look after these little insects which are so important for us, whereas we tend to neglect them – she declares.

A temple, house, hotel – this work simple in its form and rich in its message can be defined in various ways. Apart from it being a shelter for pollinating insects, its round shape symbolizes the world's unity. Man is not a lord and master, but one of its ingredients. For Alicja Łukasik „a holy day” means harmony and coexistence, for

although celebration is a typical human activity the artist proposes a wider perspective: a holy day for insects becomes ours.

The circles in Mirosław Maszłanko's works bring associations with movement related to nature, movement of the world, circles reflected in water or dance. „Multi-turns” is a title of no particular meaning, but at the same time with many references. I associate it with the name of pre-historic creatures, fossils and, at the same time, it relates to the activity I repeated while realizing this work – the artist explains.

He brings to life mysterious and spiral quasi organisms, woven from natural materials. In a symbolic way they replace the extinct ones. These objects which do not interfere with nature, but subtly get intertwined with it, constitute a bridge between human activity and nature. Multi-turns floating on the surface of water seem to be organically embedded in its environment like duckweed or reeds. They whirl joyfully, unrestricted for this holy day bursting among grass: „ The scent of water, green in the shade, gold in the sun/ in dreamy windlessness almost getting lost, swinging/ When grasshoppers from the meadow in the August heat/ slash silence with thousands of silver scissors (Leopold Staff „ High Trees”).

Their other side is connected with time : a circle and spiral are the symbols of passing, its inevitability, or just mercilessness when what is old gets replaced by the new. Unlike men these simple and unassuming microorganisms deal with it wonderfully.

Piotr C. Kowalski decided to invite animals to his project. His action in a form of an art joke obliterated the boundaries between man and animal, city and countryside. The human crowd had to stop in order to let the cows, horses and gees walk through a zebra crossing (an element alien to this landscape). Such a funny change of roles formulates a question about the role of man in the surrounding world – the one man assumes and the one man actually fulfils.

Stanisław Lem claimed perversely that the whole animal world, including humans who unlike what they think belong to this group, are parasites feeding on plants. Using very plain references, **Bettina Beres** invites us for a spiritual feast with the utmost respect. We always associate “a holy day” with “a table”. Although this table is carefully set with hand painted floral patterns and dishes, it does not serve the purpose of eating. Veiled by the delicate net of elaborately painted lace “**A Feast in Bubel**” functions as an atlas of local plants, aromatic herbs and flowers. Their picture-like names framed by plates do not leave any doubt: we are confronted with something much treasured and noble. The table covered by the imagined ceremonial cloth and located on the meadow is also a kind of a surrogate home among the wilderness. Ordinary everyday life gets domesticated in nature.

But it is not the end of the story. “ Ostentatiously female” painting (quoting Anna Markowska) emphasizes the fact that eating, setting the table is a domain culturally

attributed to women – mainly women feed children, family, guests... There is neither rebellion nor fascination in it. The artist, just like the protagonist of “Babette's Feast”, the artist invites for a meal which is quiet and heart opening revolution.

Inside the Commonplace

“I believe that a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of stars/ And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and the egg of wren”. It is a quotation from Walt Whitman's poem. “**A Leaf of Grass**” is the title of a triptych by **François Monnet** realized in collaboration with **Isabelle Barthélémy**. The sun woven from aromatic grasses, a rosette hidden in the trees and the moon towards which it is to climb up using the colour steps (there are seven of them, as many as the days of a week) are subtle in their form, ascending towards the sky, constructed with old traditional tools from simple materials found locally. They express enchantment with the perfection of nature in its most modest manifestations - the leaves of grass in which the moonlight gets reflected, the variety of grasses and their scent, light that passes through the leaves of the trees. At the same time, they make us look up following the direction of growing. - When our ancestors celebrated life, the change of seasons, new moon, they looked up. Just like them we lift our hands when we celebrate - says François Monnet.

Dance, lifting hands, the arsenal of meaningful gestures – all that have accompanied mankind since the very beginning. In *Homo Ludens* Johan Huizinga wrote: “ The relation of dance to playing does not consist in the fact that dance has something of playing in it, but that it constitutes its part: it is a relation based on the identity of essence. Dance as such is a particularly perfect form of playing itself.” Regardless of the fact whether we deal with the magic dance of traditional communities, biblical dance of King David in front of the Ark of Covenant or entertainment dance is a perfect ludic form. For Huizinga playing is something totally serious, simply holy and lies at the foundations of forming human relationships and culture. **Karolina Parada's “Dance”** brings to life slim dancing human figures. The sense of movement, ascending, energy and connection with nature emanate from this work reminding of mysterious totemic objects.

Others go on marching. A little further a snow-white parade proceeds. Are these white ceremonial clothes drying for Sunday? The line of clothes seem to be infinite. Against the sky human figures get outlined. In spite of its lightness “**The March**” embodies seriousness and solemnness. **Noa Biran** and **Roy Talmon** used second hand clothes – material traces of physically absent people – in order to create the vision of pilgrims walking along the slope. The impression of movement caused by the wind reinforces the immateriality of people-ghosts. - Movement is a very important part of celebrations in many religions. The Jews visit Jerusalem three times a year, the Christians go on pilgrimages to places like Santiago de Compostela, the Muslims - to the Black Stone in Mecca. Regardless who and where one goes, apart from the physical dimension, it has also the spiritual one – stresses Noa Biran.

Invisible pilgrims cross the abyss and continue their journey. Maybe they will fly away, as it happened in *A Hundred Years of Solitude* by G.G. Marquez when the beautiful Remedios ascended to the sky with white sheets?

Washing, cleaning, moving around, getting ready are our rituals when a holy day approaches. A man puts on a snow-white shirt and sighs “If it is a holiday you have to be well dressed”. Who is he: a romantic tragic hero, prophet, poet and maybe a figure from a cheap film?

“**Tree, Knee, Dark**” a film by **Paweł Korbus** realized in collaboration with Janusz Czyżewicz endows bucolic romantic scenes with existential tension, mixes the shots of the surrounding area and local nature with a completely absurd struggle. The film which opens with the scene of escape, as if from a thriller, reminds of the scattered pieces of a puzzle, constantly revealing entirely new connections – the beginning could have been the end, the end could have happened in the beginning or in the middle etc. Mickiewicz's “the vastness of the dry ocean” can be found in a path across the fields here, within your hand's reach, in an ordinary scenery. The vicious circle of gestures, words and views leads to the conclusion referring to Charles Bukowski's poem “Only you can save yourself”.

Fertile Land, Suicidal Grain

For **Shotaro Yoshino** a process of creating is equally important and maybe even more than the work itself. His work has an oblong shape reminding of a boat excavated from the ground. It constantly struggles with gravitation being suspended above the hole under it. The artist kept discovering “**The Layers of Memory**” gradually, digging and exploring the ground for many days. It culminated with casting a concrete shape – a trace of man in unity with the surrounding world. - Layers are conveyors of memory, not only for human society. The traces of animals, all beings that were alive once upon a time are present there. These are the memories I want to reveal – explains the artist.

Yoshino's immense endeavour of lifting a massive and heavy form becomes a metaphor for human condition. It embodies the Hebrew saying “everything that comes from earth will return to it”. By lifting the cast the artist invites us to a dialogue with earth proposing a number of connotations: earth is history, motherland, a place of burial and symbolic birth in relation to which all creatures are equal. Touching earth, forming something completely new out of it is a symbolic act. It is about the past and memory of generations, retrieving their place in present times.

„**Forefathers**” by **Katarzyna Sienkiewicz** can be seen as somehow related to the previous work. Here in order to expose the old layers of memory the artist refers to

folk rituals. She uses two elements: earth and pastry. Pancakes form “ a dry hand” bringing a number of meanings, one of them being Forefathers ritual dedicated to ancestors. The food left for the ghosts of ancestors has a universal dimension. This food can be a pancake placed under an icon in the holy corner and cake left on a pagan stone. The artist transfers the symbol embroidered on the ritual cloth straight to the soil in order to perform a ritual.

- Earth is all that is essential, it gives birth to us and takes us away. I wanted to create a binding factor for these two situations: this strange birth from earth and the moment when we disappear in it – comments **Leszek Mądzik**. His theatrical micro essay “**The Tract**” is an allegory of human existence, portraying our journey in time. This suggestive mobile image activating our imagination is performed in the natural setting of trees. “Human grain” grows from the peat, then it is collected, grows and finally it dies, like nature does.

In this intimate performance man becomes part of nature, this connection is a burden as well as one of the greatest mysteries. “Celebrating” can mean accepting the situation, good nature which brings peace of mind and ability to get enchanted by the frail beauty of the world and human existence. Although the ceremony of the cycle of life and death happens in open space, it is separated from it by the curtains which create the sense of “being inside”, spying on what is commonly invisible.

The opposite of “human” grain or grain in general is what does not bring any life. This infertility constitutes a paradox and stigma of present day. For **Marc Nones'** “**Sterile Grain**” is a vast metaphor of our times which embraces his attitude to environment as well as human relationships. The term itself means the grain of plants that cannot be used for sowing being a product of biotechnology. “Suicidal grains” which grow only once constitute a depressing expression of the power of laboratory over the laws of nature prolonging life.

Marc Nones' “Sterile Grains ” - rounded, wooden, slightly open and innocently left - introduce a subtle element of anxiety to the environment. One time plants are a logical consequence of human attitude - “Sterile Grain” is a reflection of our present day mankind, a sterile man who resigns from relations chasing for money. It is a reflection of destruction and human selfishness – comments the artist. Grains detached from their role, deprived of their weight, coexist with the landscape peacefully and seem to follow nature.

The Banana Atlas and its Babel Tower

A banana – nutritious fruit without a stone, an object of desire in the old days, symbol of pop culture in the era of consumption is a vehicle of meanings for **Marcin Berdyszak**. In his **Elevation** the artist discusses the problem of eternal insatiability

and endless need of possessing generated by our culture. On one hand, a banana is a joke, ironic wincing, taking in brackets. On the other hand, this fruit becomes a nostalgic metaphor. The most delicious Gros Michel bananas disappeared as a result of so-called Panama disease and now we are left with the less delicious ones, but immune to diseases, cheap and easily available.

The barbell with a diaphanous banana motive is like a slightly mocking monument of consumption. Its size is not human, just like weight it personalises. Lifting it is an act bordering on a miracle, impossible to perform. Only some absurd and imagined banana Atlas could have done it. "Elevation" can be interpreted in the simplest and purely physical way. But for me it is also related to liturgy and elevation which is its most important moment, when everybody falls to their knees, but also it is a moment of reflection, meditations on what we lift – the artist explains.

How would the Babel Tower, a universal symbol of conquest and incredible aspiration, look like if it was to be constructed backwards? **Jaroslav Koziara's Bubel Tower** is located in an unusual place, at the end of the gorge which is the relic of the old gravel pit and constitutes a response to the dead surroundings. A dry tree trunk, a Christmas tree, strange curved construction emerges straight from the sand, placed ideally opposite an abandoned power shovel. If it felt like moving forward the work would be in its way.

"Economically speaking cutting down rain forests is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal" - these apt words formulated by Edward O. Wilson, promoter of biophilia concept (that is an inborn feeling of being at one with nature) is a concise statement of our short-sighted barbarian attitude. Koziara's work constitutes a similar, equally sharp and funny commentary concerning the same issue. This tower has an elevated and proud form, whereas its curved top has got a mocking element. As if it was not enough, its underwear is constituted by a metal skeleton which brings association with another tower that suffers from "the Babel complex". It was argued by Roland Barthes that although the engineer Eiffel continued enumerating its possible functions it turned out to be perfectly useless, but extremely prone to imagination. And although there are no Elysian Fields we have other fields here, and although it is not over 300 metres high, but much lower, the Bubel Tower raises above the sand desert and reminds of ever present dream of greatness and burning a valuable painting to cook lunch.

An unexpected form, against the frozen – as if a prehistoric mammoth – power shovel. It responds to the machine and, at the same time, challenges it. The Bubel Tower fulfils a protective function and conveys a positive message. A weird construction one does not know what to do with it. It has a slight aura of bad conscience, also reminding us that 'a holy day' can be celebrated every day. This high form constructed on a circle seem to be erected so that people can gather around it for celebration.

Jarosław Tomasz Klos' "Holy Day -+∞ " is also a response to the surroundings. Its degradation counterbalances the ever reviving power of nature. Little fake trees made of branches imitate nature, but sooner or later their true form will be identified. The artist created some kind of a refuge which is both natural - by making use of a little green island among sands - and human by using the elements that suggest human presence, at least in the past. What has happened to man? Will man return? Scientists estimate that after 25 years abandoned towns start reminding of science fiction film sets: 75% of streets and pavements will be overgrown by grass and plants. Man dug a hole in the ground, took out sand and clay, but nature found a way to grow trees. Nature is always stronger – concludes the artist.

A Token of a Holy Day

Since the times immemorial people have incorporated symbols in their life. As a matter of fact, a single point does not function in our perception because our mind aspires after incorporating it into a bigger whole. An observer draws an imagined line from one point to the other, regardless of his/her will. Looking into the sky, primitive people drew in their minds the lines joining the stars which are the origins of constellations” - wrote Adrian Frutiger, a Swiss typographer and artist in his book *Der Mensch und seine Zeichen*.

The ancient people believed that stars think and take care of the world „**Defender**” by **Grzegorz Drozd** has a form of a three dimensional upright amulet that guards the village. A five pointed star in a circle is a defending symbol which brings associations with a human being with open arms. It portrays the harmony of five elements, union of material and immaterial world. Apart from mystical connotations it is also “a symbol of health, knowledge, Christmas, Epiphany, emblem of Thomas Aquinas” (Władysław Kopaliński “Dictionary of Symbols”).

The revolving star which moves when the wind blows is an exemplification of colourful and ornamental aesthetics. Multi-coloured trip wires remind of ribbons decorating roadside shrines, embroidery, patterns in folk costumes, caroller star etc. This work has an element of weaving – Intentional objects have to be handmade in order to be effective. Then they are endowed with energy, in this case very positive, because it is what we associate a holy day with – adds Grzegorz Drozd,

Joyful and positive energy emanates from the work **Earth Is Generous and Free** by **Katsuhiko Azuma**. It can bring numerous associations like a woodlet emerging from the ground, dancing or moving silhouettes, or people engaged in a lively discussion, fantastic spider-like creatures, the relics of some construction works...The surroundings, natural materials are juxtaposed with the ones that are products of culture: wooden elements, strings, fragments of clothes made of fabrics with traditional Japanese patterns. They have a special dimension for the artist as they

refer indirectly to particular people. Their lively colours and textures stand in a clear contrast to the natural colour of wood. Being bound to the wooden construction they constitute an additional factor. Azuma stresses that his work is “an encounter” of these elements, at the same time being a symbiosis of two worlds.

The work in a form of spatial composition relating to landscape is completed by symbols-signs of a universal character and the sun constitutes its visible centre. It is a human trace left in this place, an expression of connection which is not necessarily domination.. Earth is generous – it is a source of power and richness, it is also free because it cannot be controlled, all products of human brain and hands have to subordinate to its power.

Let us imagine human helplessness in relation to nature many years ago. What a drama was when fire got extinguished. Dependence on fire was a reason for its cult. It was a manifestation of some divine communication – f. ex. extinguishing fire caused by a thunder was forbidden and this superstition survived in Poland until the 20th c. Brama Grodzka Centre-NN Theatre in the article *Etnography of the Lublin Region – Folk Beliefs about Fire* quote what the women inhabiting Wólka Kałna said in 2009: “God forbid spitting! It was a sin (...) people said that when you spit into fire your tongue got rotten. And you cannot pee because people said that this something would get rotten.” Fire at home meant safety. “Sometimes people said that something – evil spirits - could come into the house through a chimney (...) when there was fire in the house it was protected, then nothing could invade it. Fire as if guarded.”

However, fire also means celebrating and being together. **From a Holy Day to Holy Day** by **Stanisław Brach** is a tribute to fire. I refer to the ancient times when man took control over fire and started using it. Fire was a binding factor for people, it demarcated their space, accompanied celebrations – comments the artist. Two holy days featured in the title refer to the ancient community and this year's celebration of 100 years of independence which is symbolized by Marshal Pilsudski's heads fired in the stove. A stove is a place around which people gather. It is also functional, you can still sit next to it regardless of your views and beliefs.

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