

P. 44. Mónika ZSIKLA

EXPANDING COLOURS

MONOCHROME GESTURES

Monochrome does not end with painting. Mountains of pigments, colour codes, tones turned into masses, chests of drawers, and the bedroom secrets of a garage. We had a conversation about the new ways of monochrome with three young representatives of the Hungarian art scene, ÁA Ádám Albert, ICS István Csákány, and GSZ Gergő Szinyova.

MZS All three of you have artworks that are connected to the concept of the monochrome in one way or another. How would you characterise your relation to the monochrome tradition?

GSZ What is monochrome painting? – I think this is an inspiring question in itself, worthy of contemplation. The theoretical consequences of the trend have expanded considerably: today it can refer to spaces and objects as well. Think of Anish Kapoor's pigment mountains, or Roni Horn's resin bathtubs! They all connect to the monochrome tradition in some way. Perhaps the most important aspect is that of the medium: I almost always focus on that. What interests me is the technical aspect, how a certain work is executed. This may sound a bit too "professional," but if you see two blue paintings, sooner or later you will start comparing and analysing them, including their physical attributes as well.

ÁA Regarding the "classics," monochrome has a massive intellectual range, which basically consisted of focusing separately on all the segments constitutive of painting as such. The pioneers called attention to such obvious facts that paintings have sides and a surface, or that paints possess material qualities and colours have temperatures. This took the entire tradition of painting to pieces, while making minimal propositions about the details, and throwing these into a strange space where they continued to exist and come together, to form newer and newer narratives.

ICS What matters most for me is that space be monochrome. White cube space has a very influential role, and I also like it, but the moment you decide to fill a certain space with colours, you create an entirely different atmosphere. You can rely on the very same system, yet, the work will gain a completely different significance due to the colour filling the space. Moreover, you can

also take the work out of this environment and place it in a different one, which also changes it completely. Right now I am in the middle of negotiations with a museum about the fact that I do not only need pink rooms, but also a space that is pink to the very last detail, from the light switches to the radiators and the window frames. A colour is a mass that determines the space. It is important that it has weight, that it's not just mere decoration.

MK How do you relate to colours?

ICS With the amber room (*Bernsteinzimmer*, 2010) it was the colour blue, while for the pink room (*It was an experience to be here!*, 2009) it was pink that had a special significance for me. Pink has quite negative connotations for me, so I treat it very critically. The colour itself is associated with a weird quality of life, it evokes a kind of bubble. I apply it when I meet a situation I want to criticize. That is why I painted the space pink inside in Prague. I painted everything that the institution would let me, thus I enveloped it all in a critical narrative; yet I did not paint my own objects, thus I remained a neutral participant of the story.

MZS Is colour in this sense the expression of a gesture critical of institutions?

ICS Yes, indeed. This colour has a special significance in Prague, because of David Černý's pink tank which is on public display, and connotes a special social and historical awareness. He used the colour pink to criticise the false revolution, the pink revolution that worked like a big, fake bubble.

ÁA There is a monochrome-related tendency in which the colour turns into mass. In the case of my works representing the Humboldt and Goethe studios (*Never take a trip alone*, 2011) it was important for me to keep a certain surface grey; moreover, these were virtual spaces. One question that interests me is whether monochrome refers to painting or the colour itself. With the works above, both the lack of colours and their totality may be evoked with the help of "grey." If you mix all the colours of your palette, the result will be something greyish, thus it involves all the other colours in a way.

MZS Can the colours you use be described by definite colour codes?

ÁA Previously I had works that were specifically about colour. That was the time when I was try-

› **István CSÁKÁNY**, *Sudden gust of motivation / Hirtelen támadt motiváció*, 2012, painted fibreglass, installation in Anne Grethe's garage at the 2013 Lofoten International Art Festival, Norway / szobor (festett üvegszál), installáció Anne Grethe garázsában a 2013-as norvégiai Lofoten International Art Festivalon, 70 × 165 × 135 cm
© courtesy of the artist / a művész engedélyével, photo / fotó: Kjell Ove Storvik



ing to understand what it is like when a single colour enamel board becomes reflective, or how one may associate the code numbers of the CMYK code system with actual colours. The enamel paintings served my purposes well, as I could create surfaces where the three main colours (blue, red and yellow) are painted in a way that enables the enamel surface to reflect the "describable" world in monochrome. From the pragmatic point of view this can be connected to the idea that practically one can paint anything from these three colours. Reflection, on the other hand, refers to the fact that you see yourself in all this in pieces, that is, colour turns into space.

GSZ For my part, I dealt a lot with RGB colour codes, I even have a series on paper with this title. You cannot buy the RGB colours in tubes, as they are used in the digital world, you only meet them on monitors and screens. That is why it was a new challenge for me to deal with these basic colours. RGB cannot be mapped in reality. This is the part of my work so far that I regard as a specifically monochrome gesture. From red, green and blue, applied to the paper with markers, a fourth colour is created by transparency. The markers were of the same colour, but of different brands and qualities, thus they resulted in different surfaces. This way you cannot create the same work twice. That is not my aim anyway, but I could not do it even if I wanted to.

ÁA The CMYK and RGB codes are important for me because at a certain point they turn into theoretical colours. At this transformation something completely sensuous like the col-

p. 68. Zsolt MÉSZÁROS
 URBAN HISTOLOGY
 ZSÓFI BARABÁS

↳ Zsófi BARABÁS Cobalt line / Kobalt vonal, 2013, acrylic and graphite on paper / akril, grafit, papír, 50 × 65 cm
 © courtesy of the artist / a művész engedélyével, photo / fotó: Miklós Sulyok

our of the paint becomes something descriptive. When defined by codes, colours do not mix on a sensuous basis, but rather follow numbers and percentages. I was also always interested in the theoretical bases of colour perception. There are some very serious studies of colour, from such authors as Goethe and Newton, and we apply these topics in a manner similar to a DJ.

MZS At your latest exhibition in Paks (Late works) you painted a whole wall with a colour much similar to one of the famous historical precedents of monochrome, the Yves Klein Blue. Why?

GSZ One can connect the work with Klein's blue, but there is no conscious connection or reference. This wall that is blue on one side is only one element in that space, an extra surface for the works. This section of blue wall highlights two laser-cut paper works and separates them from the other laser-engraved pieces on the other side of the wall.

MZS István, is there a shade of pink that you particularly insist on? Will the pink in Norway be like the one in Prague?

ICS Actually, no, I do not have a particular pink. If I have to define it, I would call it "Barbie pink," even though that is not the actual colour that I have in mind, yet this is how I call it. Recently I looked it up, and it turns out there is an official "Barbie pink," but it is a darker shade, not the ice-cream-like, bubble-gum-pink that I like.

MZS In Norway you are going to paint only the garage walls pink, but not the works themselves in it. Is that from aesthetic considerations?

ICS For me, that garage is a very exciting place. It feels like it's full of the secrets of the bedroom. Everything gets inside, while all that is built gets outside. The garage or the backyard shed are places where people store all sorts of junk, things that have become useless – objects that were once important, but not any more. My sculpture is going to be placed in such a collection, like one "element." That is why I did not want to paint the objects there; rather, I wanted to establish a dialogue with the existing surroundings.

↳ **Ádám ALBERT** was born in Veszprém in 1975. He lives and works in Budapest. (FAH 2013/1., 64–69.)

↳ **István CSÁKÁNY** was born in Sepsiszentgyörgy, Romania in 1978. He lives and works in Budapest. (FAH 2012/4., 36–45.)

↳ **Gergő SZINYOVA** was born in Budapest in 1986. He lives and works there. (FAH 2012/5., 36–39.)



In the studio one encounters high ceilings, order, clean surfaces, and minimalistic white furniture. The walls, shining with the balanced brightness of a white cube, are enlivened by colour samples and former works. This space, cleansed of all unnecessary elements, is the cradle of Zsófi Barabás's pleasure-driven artistic practice, which riots in colour and gestures. The seemingly closed, white interior forms a delicate shell that excludes outer events, but welcomes the interested visitor. The books, photos, drafts, notebooks and former works that appear during our conversation reveal pulsing, multipolar creative processes inside the white cube. Barabás is inspired by many things: literature, music, film, travelling, even histological illustrations. The creative process always marks a dense and intensive period for her, a sort of blessed state of grace. As she notes, "for me, creative work is an intensive time when I put all the previously collected impulses in an imaginary jar, close it and shake it well. Whatever ends up on the canvas originates from this." Of course she makes preparatory studies, but the ultimate message of the work emerges even for her only during the actual creative process. She deliberately takes breaks between individual series so as to relax and get stimulated. During transition periods she usually travels, which may take the form of 3–4 months' long residency programmes as well as a few days' long excursions.

Although her family background is ideal – a shining ancestor (Miklós Barabás, the noted biedermeier painter), and her father, Márton Barabás, a prizewinning artist, as well as many artist friends – her choice of career was not a matter of course at all. Her parents did not want to push her in any direction, they found it natural that she drew a lot. When she was accepted to art school, she chose graphic design. She meant to pursue the same discipline in her further education at the University of Fine Arts as well, but her application was rejected at first. As a result, she went to study illustration at the Anglia Polytechnic University for a term. When she came back she applied again, and this time she was accepted. It was during her third year that she realised that her vocation was the fine arts, so she also took up painting beside graphic design. She tries thoroughly to take advantage of the cultural potential of the place she happens to live: she visits bookstores, openings, exhibitions and other cultural programmes. The influences thus absorbed are later channelled into her compositions. The two months she spent in Frankfurt early this year may be a perfect example of this. Here the most influential and most constant visual stimuli included the structure of the studio's lattice window, the prism-shaped containers behind it, the tower of the European Central Bank which resembles a space rocket launching station, and the burn-