

Who's Afraid of Black and White

"There is a tendency to look at large pictures from a distance. The large pictures in this exhibition are intended to be seen from a short distance."

If we cast even a cursory glance at the modern art, we shall discover, inside and around its bonds, numerous myths raised on a common foundation, that is on the discrimination of the media: from myths that take painters or the art of painting to be *démodé* to myths that only recognize the traditional media, like a painting, as real art and all others as naught, the case remains the same. However, there is a danger in the acquiescence of myths, it being their transformation into the criteria or *factum* according to which an artwork is either prized or discredited. Some artworks can clearly demonstrate that myths are not healthy: the essential-realistic content of an artwork is unrelated to the medium or technique used in its making, but close to the logic of transitivity.

In 1996 and 1997, Snezana Vujovic Nikolic created a series of paintings under a joint heading "OSVIT" that have epitomized an unusual solution. Through then Snezana has transformed text into painting, citation into pattern and artwork into plane ritual recording. Her black-and-white paintings are the most powerful of the lot: large in size, they use the contrast of two non-colors and the absence of colorist or other decorative elements to precisely underscore the obsession and enthusiasm attending her primary step in painting, the operation that yields thick, unreadable, textual structures, words, letters, signs of a compositionally conceptualized plane diagram. Snezana's painting technique stands as a successful merge of the traditional manual painting (the "handwriting" of the artist) and the technique of paint-writing – the painting of text not with a paintbrush, but with a paint-tube. The paintings could be seen as an orderly continuation of Pollock's "chaotic" dripping-ritual: the canvas is the field of action; the canvas is the painted representation of that action; the canvas is the trace of the euphoria of painting. Still, the paintings are not "all-over" Pollockian. They lack an anti-compositional quality, the shortening of the plane-frame boundaries and a limitless flow. Instead, the black-and-white *Osvits* are based on compositional solutions – they all possess the beginning, the middle and the end, and some of them have a centerpiece. On the other side, their rhythm, their plasticity and their gradual buildup of texture by paint-writing could be associated with a free paraphrase of the calligraphic method or Tobey's "white writing".

Regardless of that and in spite of everything else, these paintings exist outside any past, present or future social mechanism and that mechanism's possible influence on the artistic act. They exist inside the idea of the reality of transcendental experience. It seems that the major role of these paintings, if painting could have a "role" at all, is to influence the observer, whom they absorb, hypnotize, overcome and exalt... "The observer is not being guided by the painting as a representation to perceive the otherwise imperceptible, but intuitively known, ideal entirety, which is the real topic of the painting, but it is rather the observer who becomes the theme, being the one who, upon confronting the phenomenon of painting, recognizes his own experience, and with that the one which is exalted."

The paintings of Snezana Vujovic Nikolic are entrenched in those ideas that negate the "dogmatic principles", perceive a painting as a plane for emancipated, free activism, a place for sublime announcements, and define empathy as the principal kind of communication in artworks. It has already been said that "that which is unusual is more likely to produce wonderment and stir things up than that which persuades or is likable... If it comes at the right time and at the right place, that which is exalted unsettles everything like a thunder and uncovers the true power of the narrator".

Lidija Merenik