



Walter May's art has always successfully been on the edge of the cerebral and intuitive. The contradictory relation between man and his natural and artificial environment is addressed repeatedly through the unlimited richness of the artist's messages. He is also intrigued by how nature, man and man-made things age. His recent works, Campfires, are alluring in the recording of presence and absence, they are melancholic and contemplative as fire itself. Campfires are man-made and, to a degree, man-controlled, thus they require our presence. After being animated, they become sites of abandonment, silent in their melancholy and ready to be rediscovered. The sites of fire that fascinate May the most are the ones located very close to water. Water and fire construct a unique and often antagonistic relationship.

May's choice of medium for recording campfires – photography – is particularly significant because a photograph in itself is a

collection of memory of past actions, and yet, it becomes a desirable collector's item. The artist says that he does not consider "any one of these images would necessarily stand alone as a traditional fine art photograph." It takes an enormous amount of care to choose and compose shots that transgress his interest in each individual image. What matters to him is the process of "gathering the images, of collecting places...that is reminiscent of" how he acquires materials or objects. An important parallel develops here: May feels that the way he collects images of campfires is comparable to the way someone gathers material to create a portrait. The artist's eye and lens are responsible for mapping the terrain, and its painful and pleasurable belonging. In poignant ways, May creates a portrait of nature that is scarred by man and fire. Sorrow leaves scars that are difficult to remove, so does fire.

The process of constructing anything is extremely vital because it combines elements of physical labour and an idea. It is about building and thinking, building and reflecting, creating and contemplating. Constructing fire is exciting, like participating in a happening, a performance or an installation, but on an intimate level. Fire in its archetypal and ritualistic association starts in darkness. Darkness makes it more captivating by providing a perfect background of mystery and seduction: "There is feeding, stirring, tending the fire," and May continues, "We may think that building a fire is strictly pragmatic," but it is far from it. Fire creates a visual narrative: melancholy embedded in red heat, impossible to touch. It is like red-hot velvet, dangerous in its unpredictability.

In his installation, May provides two captivating and contrasting images: photographs of firepits juxtaposed with video images of fire. Total silence envelops them and exposes quiet serenity

Sztuka Waltera Maya zawsze pozostaje na pograniczu intuicji i logiki. Artysta systematycznie akcentuje sprzeczne powiązania między naturalnym i sztucznym środowiskiem. Z przekonującą siłą i zaangażowaniem May dostrzega sposób w jaki natura, człowiek oraz środowisko stworzone przez niego, starzeją się. Ostatnie prace Maya, "Ogniska", tworzą łańcuch połączeń między czymś, co zaznacza swoją obecność, i czymś co zniknęło lub znika. Ogniska są inicjowane przez człowieka i do pewnego stopnia są przez niego kontrolowane. Ogniska są pełne życia w momencie kiedy ogień jest ich częścią, ale po wygaśnięciu ognia wyglądają na opuszczone. Ciche w swojej melancholii istnieją po to, żeby być odkryte na nowo. Miejsca gdzie ogień istniał fascynują Maya: szczególnie te, które są w sąsiedztwie wody. Woda i ogień wytwarzają osobliwy i często antagonistyczny związek.

Fotografia jest wyborem Maya w przedstawianiu ognisk.

Fotografia jest sama w sobie kolekcją pamięci i jednocześnie obiektem kolekcjonowanym. Artysta mówi, że jego fotografie "nie są obrazami fotograficznymi w tradycyjnym pojęciu". Nie mniej jednak proces ich powstawania wymaga czasu i koncepcji, które wykraczają poza zainteresowanie tylko jednym obrazem. Proces jest tym, co jest istotne dla Maya: "zbieranie fotografii, kolekcjonowanie miejsc... sięganie pamięcią w przeszłość". Pojawia się tutaj ważne porównanie: May mówi, że sposób, w jaki zbiera wizerunki ognisk sugeruje proces zbierania materiałów potrzebnych do stworzenia portretu. Oko i kamera artysty są odpowiedzialne za tworzenie osobistej mapy terenu, z jego bolesnymi i urokliwymi przynależnościami. May tworzy portret natury wyraziście i przejmująco. Smutek pozostawia szramy, które są trudne do usunięcia, szramy i rany spowodowane przez ogień są podobne.

Proces budowania i tworzenia jest nadzwyczaj istotny ponieważ łączy w sobie pracę fizyczną z pracą koncepcyjną. Ten proces jest związany z konstruowaniem i myśleniem, konstruowaniem i refleksją, tworzeniem i kontemplacją. Konstrukcja ognia jest fascynująca i przypomina happening, przedstawienie lub instalację. Ogień w swoim pierwowzorze i rytuale jest również powiązany z ciemnością. W ciemności ogień wydaje się mieć nieodpartą i tajemniczą siłę uwodzenia. "Płomienie ognia wymagają opieki, ogień wymaga obecności," May kontynuuje, "można myśleć, że konstrukcja ognia jest praktyczna z natury," ale jej rzeczywistość jest daleka od praktyczności. Ogień tworzy opowieść: melancholijną i zamieszkałą w rozgrzanym promieniującym gorącu, niemożliwym do dotknięcia. Ogień, tak jak rozgrzany do czerwoności welwet, jest niebezpieczny w całkowitej nieobliczalności.

of textures. A concept of scale emphasizes the dichotomy of May's installation: the viewer looks at a wall of sixty four digital photographs and then at "a small flickering moving image." Our perception of small can be removed from the intellectual, to become intuitive and instinctual. As Bachelard writes, "Platonic dialectics of large and small do not suffice for us to become cognizant of the dynamic virtues of miniature thinking. One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small" (Bachelard 44-45).

Is fire about change and aging? How does aging go beyond physicality of our bodies into spheres of safety? Eva Hoffman tells a wandering story of age and a city: "Age is one of the things that encloses me with safety; Cracow has always existed, it is a given, it does not change much. It has layers and layers of reality. The main square is like a magnetic field pulling all parts of the

city together. It is heavy with all those lines of force..." (Hoffman 96). How does the form of fire change when it extinguishes? The memory of fire is "There" when the form is "Gone".

Bożenna Wiśniewska

W swojej instalacji May przedstawia dwa kontrastowe i jednocześnie fascynujące wizerunki: fotografie ognisk oraz obrazy wideo przedstawiające ogień. Absolutna cisza otacza te wizerunki i wzmacnia ich spokój i łagodność. Różnica skali, którą May stosuje w swojej instalacji pomaga mu zaadresować dwuznaczność pojawiającą się w jego opowieści. Widz ogląda sześćdziesiąt cztery fotografie, które są statyczne i nieruchome, poczym przygląda się obrazom ognia na wideo, które są w ciągłym ruchu. Ściana wypełniona fotografiami kontrastuje w skali z małym ogniem na ekranie wideo. Nasza obserwacja czegoś co jest małe i czegoś co jest gigantyczne, nie jest powiązana z intelektem, a raczej opiera się na instynkcie i intuicji. Gaston Bachelard pisze, "Platoniczna dialektyka w rozpoznaniu czegoś, co jest małe i czegoś, co jest wielkie nie jest wystarczająca w docenieniu dynamicznych cech myślenia o miniaturze. Trzeba użyć wyobraźni i

wydostać się poza obręb logiki, aby zauważyć i docenić to, co jest wielkością, w czymś co jest niewielkie" (Bachelard 44-45).

Czy opowieść ognia jest o zmianach i starzeniu się? W jaki sposób starzenie staje się czymś poza i ponad naszym ciałem? Opowieść Ewy Hoffman o starzeniu się miasta jest rozczulającą ludzka: "Wiek jest czymś, co kojarzy się z bezpieczeństwem; Kraków istniał zawsze, nie ma co do tego wątpliwości. Kraków w swoim istnieniu prawie się nie zmienia. Miasto wydaje się być stworzone z wielu warstw rzeczywistości. Rynek Krakowski wytwarza nieodpartą siłę magnetyczną, która łączy wszystkie części miasta" (Hoffman 96). W jaki sposób forma ognia zmienia się w momencie kiedy ogień zanika? Pamięć o ogniu jest "Istnieniem", ale jego forma jest "Ulotna".

Bożenna Wiśniewska



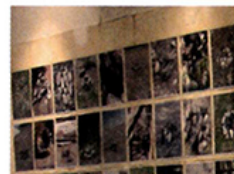
I was impressed by a comment from a viewer of my campfire photographs: a Polish architect, who had visited Alberta, recognized the visual clues of scale, light, or ecology that are unique to this area. He observed that the campsites could only be located in Canada. He saw the landscape and campsites as somewhat exotic, qualities that may be invisible to Canadians by virtue of the simple fact that we live here. Travelling renews our sense of wonder about so many of the simple things taken for granted at home, and enables us to “see the forest” so to speak, because it is a foreign forest to which we bring our own perspective.

A weekend flea market at Kolo in Warsaw. offered a wealth of fascinating objects, somewhat similar to what I could find locally. Each thing however, had its own particular quality because of the difference in place. Somehow, the market alluded to Warsaw's history, crowded, complicated, almost too dense to be compre-

hended. Laid out like artifacts in a curious and chaotic museum, were objects associated with Polish history, culture, daily life – which, for me, made them all the more intriguing. The sculptural works made for Galleria Klimy were composed largely of objects from this market. The tripods, the dislocated and upset chairs, the brass stags, the various references to fuel, all echo my previous sculptures, but also carry new meanings.

This is not to say that I left behind my interest in our environment, in how we engage with our surroundings or in how aspects of the natural world literally and metaphorically fuel our society. I also maintain my belief in the ability of contemporary art, to give insight, to imbue objects or spaces with particular meaning, to pose questions, to express doubt or sentiment. None of this is contradicted by the idea that a certain object, sculpture or photo might be of particular interest because of place.

Walter May



## Reflections and Pensiveness

The opening of the installation "There and Gone" by the three Canadian artists Walter May, Laura Vickerson and Peter von Tiesenhausen took place at Galeria Klimy in Warsaw on June 22, 2005. This first group exhibition of Canadian artists from Alberta in Poland was curated by Bozenna Wisniewska and Klementyna Bochenska.

The Polish audience was able to witness the creative adaptation of a contemporary gallery space into a fascinating installation journey.

Laura Vickerson's work "Ripple", a tapestry created of rose petals, could be viewed on many complex levels because it simultaneously adapts to specific as well as universal perceptions. Its beauty is undeniable and wraps the viewer in smell and colour. The juxtaposition of elements - the brittleness of the rose petals

and the sharpness of the mass-produced metal pins - are vivid reminders of the fragility of life and the passage of time. The scale of "Ripple" perplexes and makes the viewer pause to contemplate the contrast between the infinity of ideas and their physical realization in painful, laborious steps. Vickerson's "Small Box Architecture" captures the imagination by examining scale - metaphorical and physical. It also offers a free interpretation of the contemporary phenomenon of a society that displaces and throws away. As Hans-Georg Gadamer writes in *Art and Imitation*, "We live in a contemporary industrialized world. That world not only pushed our rituals to the bare margins of visibility and existence, but it also destroyed their form."

The most moving among Peter von Tiesenhausen's installation works is "Testament to Warsaw" created in-situ. This work becomes also a testament of von Tiesenhausen's visit to Warsaw and it

holds significant appeal to every Varsovian. Hundreds of black figures inhabit long stretches of wooden panels. After careful examination the viewer discovers that each figure differs in individual gesture, the traits of personality are distinguishable and appreciated. The sharpness and sensitivity of the artist's vision are clearly imprinted here: the figures have something to say in their own and in the artist's language. That language becomes ours.

Walter May's artworks possess a free flowing feel reflecting something that Poles can identify as Canadian. But what is it? Is it the openness of the land and sky? Most likely, because his photographic images of fire pits are not confined and restricted. Look carefully and then your eyes will be guided from the fire pits to their adjacent environment: a forest, a field, a beach. There is something beautifully contemplative and calm in these images that differ from one another, and yet are united by the feeling of irresistible solitude

and pensiveness.

The works of May, Vickerson and von Tiesenhausen were our guests in Warsaw and they became guides into a world where we could begin to contemplate our existence. That contemplation is needed for every sensitive human being who lives in these times of global commercialization and the race for success. We are grateful to the Canadian artists for their subtle and refined expressions.

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