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The self-reflexivity and self-referentiality in self-portraits in Polish graphics

In analysis of self-portraits, the self-reflexive and self-reference practices have been established as a key of understanding of inwards (towards oneself) and outwards (towards e.g. a piece of work) motivations while depicting oneself. The term self-referentiality refers to author's reflection upon the process and aims for creating a piece of work, while the self-reflective character of self-portraits allows a viewer to retrace a relation binding the artist and their piece, to learn more about intimate approach to the one's art. The main aim of this research is to investigate an interpretative potential and new qualities of the notion of self-contemplation in printmaking, the media which is generally on the margin of similar studies. All these issues have received considerable amount of critical attention regarding paintings - mainly because of the great variety of iconographical motives - and photography, especially as a part of social research. Previous studies show that topics that gain the most attention in the scientific community are self-portraits in the act of creating, exposition of ateliers within, or used tools. Phantasms of Muses – or other inspirational internal spirits – seems to be particularly popular due to its number of variations.

Therefore, the main purpose of my Ph.D. thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of various self-reflexive strategies of depicting oneself in the media of printmaking by the example of Polish self-portraits. In particular, this dissertation will examine five main research questions:

- Have printmakers developed the independent language of self-seeing, or borrowed their means of self-portraiture from painting and other media?
- What are visual and iconographical inspirations in depictions of printmakers?
- How printed self-portraits participate in the artistic phenomenon of self-reflection?
- Which visual apparatus is used to develop self-referentiality and self-reflexivity?
- What are the purposes of raising the theme of introspection and methods of its execution?

To answer these questions, there are certain steps of the research process to be instigated. The first of delineating the problem and selecting group of prints have been already executed. The selection criteria have met the following limitations: the works are made in fine art

printmaking techniques by Polish artists and feature self-reflective or self-referential problems such as manifestation of formal doubled self-portrait, a frame within frame, fantasies encompassing artist's head, intense and enigmatic forms of crosshatching. Although all these motives are known from painted and drawn self-portraits, this study seeks original and unconventional approaches towards mentioned subjects – both in formal, as well as in semantic layers of prints.

The methodological approach taken in this research is a mixed methodology, each time determined strictly by the image. It was decided that this is the best method to adopt for this study, as selected works cover various problems of self-portraiture. For the reversal of mirror reflection, Jacques Derrida's studies are taken into account, while for scrutinising forms such as shadows, Victor Stoichita's and Dario Gamboni's theses are used. A number of Hans Belting's and Omar Calabrese's remarks on the nature and particular categories of self-portraits are also included. The reader should bear in mind that the methodology might significantly change in order to expose wider context of printed self-portraits. Additionally, there is chance of encountering infeasibility in developing peculiar semantic language of printing self-portraits. However, if this effort will not succeed, this won't indicate the weakness of the selected group of works, it rather proves a strong relation between printing and other media.