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Towards a new definition of “matter painting” in Poland

My doctoral project is devoted to “matter painting” in Poland – a tendency, which occurred here during the Thaw period (the second half of 1950’s). The main goal of my research is to provide a new definition of this phenomenon. Till now Polish examples of matter painting have been interpreted in two general ways: firstly, as a part of the most perceivable style of the Thaw’s modernity - abstraction *informel* and, secondly, as the evidence

of the evolution of Polish artistic practice, which was believed to abandon traditional medium - the paint - and lean towards experiments in three-dimensional space (*assemblage*) or those bordering on conceptualism. These interpretations of matter painting captured

its characteristics, but only partially. The researchers were mainly concentrated on describing it as a part of the process in which Polish art was making up for the lost time of socialist realism. Consequently, the specificity of the tendency remained blurry and its boundaries indeterminate.

In order to capture the characteristics of matter painting in Poland properly, it was necessary to analyse the empirical material, which I gathered through search queries in 14 Polish museums (National Museum in Warsaw, National Museum in Cracow, National Museum

in Poznań, National Museum in Wrocław, National Museum in Kielce, National Museum in Gdańsk, National Museum in Szczecin, Museum of Art in Łódź, Lublin Museum, Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz, District Museum in Toruń, Museum in Chełm, Jacek Malczewski Museum in Radom, Silesian Museum in Katowice). As a result of the queries I catalogued an extensive group consisting of ca. 300 objects created between the end of 1950’s and in 1960’s. Among them, especially notable were works by the artists related with The Cracow Group (J. Maziarska, A. Marczyński, T. Rudowicz, J. Stern),

the Nowa Huta Group (D. Urbanowicz, W. Urbanowicz, J. Tarabuła, J. Jończyk, J. Wroński) or the Zamek Group from Lublin (W. Borowski, T. Dzieduszycki, J. Ziemski) and the authors who were not associated with any group (e.g. B. Kierzkowski, A. Matuszewski).

The analysed objects illustrate a huge diversity of the formulas elaborated by Polish artists. Every one of them developed its own idiom, combining specific kinds of non-painterly materials (eg. scraps of fabrics, canvases; stearin-/plaster-based masses; metal waste or fragments of everyday objects; wood; fur and other organic elements etc.) with specific modes of using them (eg. sewing, moulding, nailing, welding, sticking etc.) to compose a two-dimensional object.

In my opinion, the works – in spite of the differences between the formulas – should be seen in a perspective, which unifies them with a common denominator of introduction of materials so far foreign to painting and using them in a painterly way – in relation to the surface.

This new broader view on matter painting in Poland emphasizes the specificity of this tendency, not only as a simple transfer of western (mainly French) ideas to Polish ground. Thus, matter painting can be regarded not only as one of the stages of the process of abandoning the painting, but can be recognised as an attempt to make it remain in force.