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Self-Portrait in Modern Polish Printmaking

The proposed dissertation project concerns a problem of two seemingly opposing art phenomena: a genre of self-portrait and a medium of printmaking. Such a conflict proceeds from a combination of a print perceived as a mechanical and 'impersonal' mean of art and the self-portrait understood as the most personal genre of all in visual arts. Despite the strangeness and limitations of printmaking in the self-portrait genre, the medium sparks vivid interest among artists in the 20th century. Thus, the project aims at investigating a language of such a specific form of self-expression on the example of self-portraits created by Polish printmakers in the intervening years.

The primary aim of my project consists in establishing, describing, and analysing the self-depicting process in printing techniques and the relation between artists-printmakers and their self-portrait prints. Particular emphasis is placed on the tension between the reproducing and 'impersonal' printmaking techniques and self-perception in self-portraiture. The secondary aim is inextricably linked to the first one as it involves investigating the multistage process of self-depicting in printmaking.

The choice of the field for investigation is dictated by: (1) the untapped interpretative potential of self-portrait prints in general, (2) the noticeable and influential activity of printmakers in Poland, and (3) the shortage of scientific analyses of artworks created through the medium of printmaking. The choice of the time frames was determined by: (1) the rise of popularity of printmaking in Poland started by pioneers like Feliks Jasiński, Józef Pankiewicz, and Leon Wyczółkowski who executed their first self-portraits prints ca. 1900, and (2) the continuous presence of the genre through decades of 20th century.

This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How does the process of self-portraying in printmaking look like? What are the specific materials and technical features of prints? What are their roles during the process of self-depicting in printing techniques? How does the materiality of the printing medium influence the artist's perception?
2. What is the relation between the artist and their multiplied self-portrait prints? What are the consequences of multiplying the artist's unique appearance? Does that impact self-consciousness or the sense of individuality?
3. What are the roles of self-portrait prints for their authors and the artistic circle in the 20th century in Poland? What was the self-portrait's place among other genres in printmaking and how did it contribute to the wider phenomenon of printmaking?

The research project is of interdisciplinary character for it combines art history (printmaking, in particular), the history of the self-portrait genre, temporality, material

culture, and selected problems of philosophy. Yet, the research is a part of the newly emerging research in Poland into 'the importance of materiality, craft and manual touch' in printmaking as well as of the theoretical approach in which the 'technology and technique are never purely «technical», or mere «tools», and that they are always mediated by multiple factors' (Pelzer-Montada 2018). The particular interest in the process of self-seeing may be analysed both in terms of perception and bodily activity on the basis of Jacques Derrida's, Dario Gamboni's, and Merleau-Ponty's studies.