

## THEY

Magdalena Pastuszek, an artist residing in Warsaw, a lecturer in the Faculty of New Media Arts of the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, a designer, an illustrator, a director of commercials, an authors of several dozens of individual exhibitions in the country and abroad, a laureate of numerous contests, including among others the Cracow Graphics Biennale. Simply, a figure of enormous artistic experience, a grounded position, fulfilled in plenty of fields, with a rich personality and a clear artistic attitude. Magdalena Pastuszek is not a kind of person, who seeks relief and cheerful contemplation in the nature, she is not driven by a need to capture phenomena, and for her, the nature is not just a source of relax or an escape from sad reality and every day hardships. This specific morphology and atmosphere of her graphics is created mainly by images and visages of persons, ordinary, moderate faces, statistically average, however impenetrable, with a certain internal mystery, therefore disturbing. Her art is an expression of those creative visions, which - hidden under a beautiful and charming tissue - bring unsettling questions about human condition, humanity and humane instincts. Her works attract with their beauty, at the same time triggering an unspecified anxiety, they pose a perfect combination of aesthetic sophistication and sensitive inquiries about a human status. On one hand, the creations amaze with their form, on the other, they ignite certain worries through their message, they are like the calm before the storm, were terror of nature is hidden under a beautiful surface of charm. They are even like scratching glass with a nail for me, they disturb and provoke through their difference.

We are observed by human faces hanging on the gallery walls, usually young, having undergone a complex graphic processing. Contemporary but unreal people, ones with dead orbits, others looking out with no expression or emotion, with blurred faces, and shifted or fuzzy contour. As a result, we obtain a set of deformations, a kind of panopticum, where each person brings different features and their own mystery. At the same time, each work has a similar composition. The artist always uses the same frame, always en face, as Fayum portraits. Interesting is the fact that worlds created in such a manner, with their whole consequence and rigor of composition, are surprisingly varied. Instead of the feeling of monotony and harsh discipline, we are struck with richness of patterns, dynamics of colorful forms and their quivering. Variety of the initial parameters, such as tones, selection of colors, the applied kinds of marks or lines, provide a great number of possibilities with large differentiation of visual outlines. While it is not a medieval jewelry workshop, devoted to decorations or incrustation of form. The painting tissue hides the author's persistence in reaching the external layer of objects, where a biological nerve of an elusive secret, seasoned with an allusive eschatological undertone is located. Hence, we obtain a new artistic phenomenon based on sophisticated aesthetics, elaborate colors and intriguing contents. Furthermore, we need to mention size of the works, as all graphics are prepared in B0 format, i.e. 100x70 cm. Now, the faces, not only deformed but also scaled, enlarged to unnatural sizes, adopt additional expression,

where strong tensions between biology and spirituality can be encountered, we are placed between real existence and non-material phantasmagoria.

A technique and a method of work of Magdalena Pastuszek is highly differentiated, certainly secret. Her creations are a mixture of traditional techniques: drawing, watercolor, photography, processed digitally at the final stage. Thus, we can just imagine the variety of a computer record. The only thing we see is that each fragment of surface is treated differently, depending on requirements of expression and its place in the whole picture. Nothing is repeated, nothing is schematic, everything lives, vibrates in its own rhythm: on and under the picture's surface. The act of creation has become a record of creative energy and artfulness, a desire to realize the vision, it impresses with various measures of expression. At the same time, I will emphasize it again, the elegance of visual tissue is not a purpose for itself, but it brings spiritual contents, introducing us into the supplies of hidden affections, emotions and feelings, trying to decode a certain invisible internal pulse, which couches under the surface of things and events.

While new phenomena, which are constantly surprising for us, appear on the surface, as efflorescences on skin. We live e.g. in the world, which becomes pointedly free from secrets. Bloggers claim to have problems with concentration, obesity and self-esteem, they describe diets and therapeutic sessions, begging for sex, unsuccessful relationships and broken friendships. Are they just provocative jokes or transgressive intellectual experiments? At the same time, we live in times, when it is unbearably easy to take offense at somebody, sometimes even vilify and humble; the political wrongheadedness crosses subsequent boundaries of a good taste, and lack of loyalty seems to be something normal there. When hate is so common on Internet forums and chats, when media compete to inform not only about acts of mindlessness, romp and effrontery, but also about cruelty towards fellow human beings and animals, in this context the author's voice can be perceived as a warning, as a memento and a disturbing questions: where do these sources of stupidity come from, and why do we maintain them?, what are the scales of our wildness and where are the boundaries of human offense?

Works by Magdalena Pastuszek leave a certain sediment of uncertainty about what is hidden inside us, what secrets we hide under makeups, masks of social refinement and so called normality, what we would do during a trying time, what lays at the bottom of our biological existence. This art encourages to exploration of self, to discover the deepest corners of our souls. The artists asks these embarrassing questions, and we feel that each answer will unfortunately be incomplete.

*Michał Baca, painter, artistic curator. Cracow*

## TRUTH OF A METAPHYSICAL SIGN

A human, his gestures, surrounding and first of all face, have always been a point of creative interests of artists. Development of photographic techniques, especially application of computer processing in photography, has moved the center of gravity from so called "manual" towards digital work. A graphic art has obtained a new technique, which results in computer creation with limitless possibilities of processing and creating.

The presented set of several dozens of graphics by PhD Magdalena Pastuszek, entitled "INTOVERTO" pose an amazingly interesting and expressive record. PhD Pastuszek develops each image with great precision and consequence, obtaining formal, color, and first of all artistic results of the highest purity. Versatile graphic skills, combination of techniques, mastery of gesture, feeling of color and incredible sensitivity of the Artist cause that while looking at the graphic, a detail after a detail, a recipient becomes incorporated into dramaturgy of the work, eagerly reading out the depth of fate distinctly expressed by face mimics, where a whole array of power represented by fullness of human feelings can be observed.

The Artist's imagination strolls about the edge of reality, provoking the viewer to think and seek for their own source of vision, which while coming out from a real face image, achieves a hot point in a form of metaphysical sign that is ambiguously inscribed in the history of individual's fate, and reflected in the broader plain of meaning and sense of existence, of a social group, one's own country, Europe and the world. The album constituted a crowning achievement of numerous national and foreign exhibitions, where the cycle of graphics triggered common interest. Published with a great dose of carefulness, editorially perfect in every piece. Quotations, neatly adjusted to separate images, aptly fulfill the whole picture. "Truth has only one face, but a lot of masks", a Japanese saying cited by the Author. Her work demonstrates sole TRUTH, without a mask... When I look and the works by Magdalena Pastuszek, I am aware that I am communing with serious, profound contemporary art, open towards difficult, sometimes painful problems, prognosticating further successes. It opens eyes to reality, and becomes deeply embedded in the heart.

*Barbara Szubińska Rutkowska, Associate Professor, a painter.*

## POWER

There is power and mind clarity in Magdalena Pastuszek. She holds an ability to engage the observer thanks to graphics rich in moods, especially in portraits, which demonstrate definition of image exhilarated with a desire to move on, slip out of schemes, exceed barriers.

*Lodovico Gierut, an art critic and a writer. Italy*

## EYES WIDE SHUT

"When you close your eyes - especially before falling asleep - you can see human faces, which passed in front of you, even for a short moment, in a long movie of our lives". This quotation from a collection of essays by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz entitled "Aleja Przyjaciół" (eng. Friends Avenue) (Czytelnik 1984) crosses my mind, when I look at the created "non-portraits" - because as the Author claims, these are not particular persons. According to her, they are products of imagination. Every presented face may be formed of numerous others, seen in reality, without a first and second name. Each of them has its depth. The Artist calls them masks. These masks are constructed by an array of structures. "Live faces" emerge from these layers (masks), often beautiful, of young girls, sometimes of mature persons with marks of deep experiences ("a map of their lives"). All of them are highly expressive, they are looking into our eyes - they seem to ask, which one of the masks' layers is true, or close to the real one.

...There is this Japanese saying - "truth has only one face, but a lot of masks". The Artist leaves us, the audience, with this problem, this riddle. And this is a fascinating aspect of this art. Questions, inquiries of how it is made are secondary. Although, they are highly luring for experts.

Creation of such an original art, of such a power of action, would be impossible without such a long route of artistic education. This creativity would be then deprived of depth, which it holds now, without deep sensitivity, which the Artist has at her disposal. I have an impression that she often asks herself a question about who a human is, what the point and secret of existence is.

*Professor Roman Banaszewski, a graphic designer. Cracow.*

## HUMAN EGO

"Human faces from the boarder of real life and dreams, become a certain collection of masks, which may be adjusted by a viewer to persons that are familiar or accidentally met on a street and remembered. Each of these masks expresses a large portion of emotions. It forces to think about human fate. There is a different story hiding after every face, a story of one's life. Human countenance poses a record of this extraordinary and unique story of one's ego. These are faces with a character. They trigger emotions in a viewer. Sometimes sympathy, sometimes empathy, sometimes terror and dread, but never indifference. Suggestive meaning of these portraits-masks is multiplied by a perfect workshop of the artist. Her works make an impression rather of colorful lithographs or mezzotints than computer graphics. They combine a traditional workshop of passed epochs with modern technologies in the process of creation".

*Zbigniew Kołaczek, a graphic designer, a satirist, an artistic curator. Żyrardów.*

## STIR

A shroud placed on the face. Eyes looking right at me.  
Severity, seriousness, non-articulated fear, shadows of anxiety, melancholy that may transform into depression.  
Meaningful silence, enhanced by shut mouth.  
Dispersion of light through the prism of mystery,  
which needs to be leaned over, stopped, taken look at.  
Colorful circles, ragged lines, a cracked shell of dry soil.  
I also associate it with an earthquake and cracks appearing  
on walls of an old Byzantine temple.  
Body is a temple and a head is its crown.

Despite stability of picture, the faces seem to tremble.  
As they were to leave one dimension in a minute and travel to another.  
From presence to future. Or in a completely different direction.  
Another layers placed one on another. A human, who is never the same again.  
Surrounded by auras of colors.  
Attraction and repulsion. Blazes of magnetizing mirages.  
Senses put out of order. As in case of Rimbaud, looking for the essence of poetry.  
Finding out the unknown, that what words attempt to grasp,  
and what is materialized by picture.  
Materialization.

*Tomasz Jakubiak, a poet.*

## TRANSPORTRAITS

... A portrait has been a noble domain of art from the centuries, reflecting a visual record of personality, and in case of Magdalena Pastuszek, also beauty of women. Each portrait presents a separate "chromatics of the owner", with often demonstrated enigmatic space of female mimics. Women of Pastuszkowska are no beautiful dolls from cosmetics advertisements, and the tone of independence of thinking, provided these portraits with various personality features - hence each image is bruised with expression of dynamics. However, there is an affiliation of the portrait positions, and each face is treated in an en face position. The Artists conducts a face-to-face dialog with every "portrayed" woman. Pastuszkowska applies here the Russian principle of communion: "kak cziekistka z cziekistkoj"... Rich interiors of image with application of IT techniques, with use of filters, masks, superpositions of image, prove sophisticated aesthetics. The arising image is a result of materialization of the concept flowing from the inside of the author's ego, where each face has "something to say". Intention - design - egos - imagination - graphic luggage - aesthetics - softs - perception... - applause.

The world of numerical photography has been complemented with a "sandwich" of graphical magic with lightness of feminine hands and compositional order, which spiritualize the pixels. Thus the noticeable dynamics and power of these portraits! In 21st century, portrait "materializations" result from the whole painting heritage (artistic past), where the Artist derives the richness of workshop from. Historically, each art epoch had its own trend of modern art on a current basis. Within the course of time, this avant-garde was becoming classic, or faded away as arriere-garde. The presented works of Magda Pastuszek will be soon called fascinating socles of classicism of 21st century. Today, we just need to run our pupils and "thought receptors", because Magdalena Pastuszek and her thinking have a bright future.

*Sławomir Urbański, an art critics, an artistic director in "Art Et Valerus". France.*

## **HYBRIDITY**

First associations connected with a highly interesting cycle of graphics by Magdalena Pastuszek leads towards ancient portraits from Faiyum. Modern graphics, as faces of wealthy people from Egypt, whose bodies balsamed bodies were to be covered by those portraits instead of masks, trigger deliberations related to passing and death.

However, questions asked by Magdalena Pastuszek in her graphics, exceed the scope of existential problems. On one hand, through their hybridity (as combining graphics, painting and photography) they force the viewer to abandon widespread and convenient classifications, and on the other, they negate a question about who was portrayed in a given work. Then, a question about status of "the face" emerges, which is not individual and therefore unique, but according to definition of the superposition technique proposed by the author, they pose a "mixture of all possible conditions put on one another". We are willing to be unique, and we desire to meet unique faces - because of their extraordinary beauty or ugliness, or fame. Works of Pastuszek rather hide than show, and hundreds of pictures of men and women, in various ages, placed one on another, do not serve exhibition of perfect proportions and beauty, as it was done by classic creators, starting from ancient Phidias and ending at computer graphics that work in the Photoshop program for advertising agencies.

To present a different approach of the artist, it is worth to cite famous statement of the renaissance painter and art theoretician, Albrecht Dürer. "However, if we would like to achieve good proportions, and therefore introduce some beauty into our work, it seems most profitable for this purpose to measure numerous living persons. However, you need to look for the people, who are believed to be beautiful, and draw them with the highest level of carefulness. From numerous and various persons, someone, who knows the ropes, may read something good from all parts

and members. A man with good measurements of all parts is a rare case, as everyone has some lacks. And since there is a necessity to collect [the measurements], there is a need to apply persons of one kind to a given figure. And - as it was stated above - to achieve harmony, you need to take only a young man for the pattern of a young figure, and an old person for an old pattern [...]. And do the same with thin, fat, delicate and rough, strong or weak persons. Let every kind be used in a separate figure".

The interesting technique of superpositions does not serve extraction of idealized beauty from an array of persons, as it has been done by numerous artists from thousands of years, but it forces the viewer to watch it carefully, despite the fact that eventually each portrait presents no one and everyone at the same time. Because even if we manage to reach the first layer and the first face, it will bear the same meanings as all the previous ones, forming something that may resemble a costume, with a so called active camouflage, of the character from *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) directed by Richard Linklater. Similarly to the costume in the mentioned movie (based on the story by Philip K. Dick), Magdalena Pastuszek in her works maybe does not hide the identity of the portraited persons, but rather creates it through continuous placing subsequent layers-visages/ layers-appearances of other people on one another, whose faces as insects in amber - immersed in lack of time, they have no history, but at the same time they can be transformed through application of another layers-masks.

Numerous contemporary sociologists emphasize that identity of an individual is connected with the necessity to find a permanent point of reference in oneself, as there is no such a point in the surrounding world. Differentiation and complexity of the world leads to lack of transparency and blurring of relationships among people, and the omnipresent media, bombarding with plenty of pictures, which inertly overlap each other in minds, enhance the feeling of both déjà vu and uncertainty. We not only do not know who we watch (in the sense of identity: first and second name, age, sex), but we slowly realize that - as Bertold Brecht wrote - a person is an "uncompleted object".

*Adam Trwoga, an art historicist, a movie critic, PJATK.*

## INFATUATED, ABSENT, DISTRESSED

*"[...] people put on faces very quickly,  
one after another, and they exploit them."  
Rainer Maria Rilke*

A face poses a highly significant element of a human body. It usually is an uncovered "gate", which leads to depths of internal world. It is like a mirror, which reflects the whole complexity of human mental structure. A human constructed a cover very quickly, providing it with a shape of a mask, out of fear from excessive reveal of secrets of their lives. By putting a secret veil, he somehow camouflaged a human soul.

Faces portrayed by the artist Magdalena Pastuszek, grasped in a widespread cycle, force the recipient to deep deliberations, seek meanings, metaphors and certain symbolism. They pose a continuity of thoughts that are drawn in spaces of human cognition of the world, including the size of richness and variety of emotional conditions of a human, and indispensable longing for the lost paradise.

Faces of non-existing persons, called for creative existence, pose an artistic story of the artist about new emotional conditions, admirations, fascinations, uncertainties, anxieties, longings and doubts, inseparable passions, which accompany a human being regardless place or time. The portrayed faces are strongly set in direct observation of contemporary world, which is engorged with immensity of human suffering, surrounded by darkness but also dreams and desires, good and hope. They present a picture of presence, where the human is immersed in chaos. They hide longing for shapes of harmony and absolute perfectness. Each of these reports, both those, which locate graphics of Magdalena Pastuszek closer to expressions of being lost, and those which incline towards primary homogeneity of the beauty, stimulate and do not allow to remain neutral. With the INTOVERTO cycle, Magdalena Pastuszek passes the threshold of space-time continuum of life, and incorporates a person called to life by herself into a kind of "lack-of-time". This time should not be comprehended as a period, which has already passed, but as present and future.

I understand the emergence of faces of people that do not exist symbolically as" longing, dramas, uncertainty, neutrality or apathy. They pose a metaphor of creative penetration of a human face in seeking and understanding human behaviors in today's world. Both those uncertainties and desires form an imperative of Magdalena Pastuszek.

The cycle of Magdalena Pastuszek's graphics comprises of such faces, which have been ascribed by the artist with timeless dimensions. They recall images of looks captured in faded pictures, located on cemetery, stone and moss-covered plates. They emerge from the darkness of oblivion, as shadows of those absent in the photographer's studio. Unspecified, untold, non-existing, but still called by the artist to creative existence, images of fake persons. Their presence sensitizes as towards numerous aspects of life, including the passing time and fragility of human existence.



They have come from the artist's imagination, from nowhere, from non-existing time space, to communicate something important.

There are distinct faces among them. They look straightly and firmly into space that is unspecified and deprived of time. Faces without eyes, with no eye glow, with empty orbits, as they were demonstrating lack of interest in the surrounding. They do not want to look at this world. They have a pinch of sadness in the artistic expression. They express certain loss, untrue astonishment with contemporary times, or they are blindly staring into space. Rapidness, expression and richness of the expression resources, which include a line and a color stain, blur the image of lips, therefore prohibiting the portrayed person to speak. Dramaturgy is highlighted by deformation of the whole face, including cracked and peeling skin. Intensity of expression is added to the shapeless forms by colors of deep red, green, blue and black applied by the author. Maybe through such expression devices applied in compositions, the artists sensitizes us towards the vastness of suffering, which we carefully hide under a mask, which we put on so eagerly, to make it impossible to identify our personality.

Nevertheless, the graphics that present faces of those lost in thought and staring are piercing. They seem to be closer to a bright future. The artists applies a lightened color pallet and soft outline of the face. It personalizes the condition of a hopeless person, but at the same time awaiting a certain touch of harmony and peace in outer space.

Both the vision faces, which image dramaturgy of a man, as well as those, which reflect the peace and awaiting, emerged on the route of creative penetrations, investigations and experiences of the artist. The cycle of graphics by Magdalena Pastuszek developed in the process of creations, at the gates of states located far away from mildness. This spiritual condition, demonstrated with peace, would not emerge without oppositions: fuss and dilemmas. Clash of those emotions resulted in interesting and astonishing works of distressed, absent and infatuated in limitless and timeless future - called for life faces from graphics of Magdalena Pastuszek.

*Elżbieta Gnyp, an art historicist, a pastelist. Zamość.*

## UNSTABLE FOUNDATION

A disturbing climate, emerging from black pupils, characteristic for those, who have passed away. Colors of graphics by Magdalena Pastuszek is based on contrasts of black, red, tones of fire and rotting soil. Some works, e.g. an ephebe hidden behind a leaf, trigger a feeling of sensual expectation. The ephebe is a combination of the leaf and the face, i.e. plant and animal elements. The face of Cernunnos is watching us from the painting, a figure from Celtic stories, who can be encountered in contemporary fairy tales as Oberon, an archetype entangled in the plant-animal world. In architecture, an ornament of a green man (Cernunnos - Bacchus - a green man) decorated buildings, disturbing the passers-by with his otherness, a combination of human, animal and plant features, at the same time looking carefully at everything what surrounded him. His aesthetics - of a mascarons, deterred unfriendly guests from e.g. home, being placed above the gate it focused attention on reflections about boundaries of the present world. Apart of the ephebe, we have got a cubist face, a combination associated with sensitivity even more original, which is proven by reptilian eyes. Because of its frozen in grimace face and a semi-opened mouth, the figure seems to observe the stage of its own death. With no segregation, emotions marked in the head drawing seem to be an ornament of lines surrounding an object. The mouth seems to beg the statement - to exists at all costs, even perversely, as the world was a theater. Homo sapiens, woken up, not feeling reality in the dream, planning maybe the last act. But he still waits, have not made the decision yet. Between the ephebe and the cubist face there is a portrait of a young girl with a regular face, empty, as from a statue. Bloody red background, is it a silent request to live that separates the pictures from undecided misters? The head has piece of headwear that resembles a tiara, a collar, an attribute that connects it with symbols of Egyptian leaders, which locates it in distant history, time when the magic symbolics of the previous era was born in mind, but foundations of today's science were already being created. A certain dialog is taking place...

*Liliana Kozak, philosopher, painter. Lublin*