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PERCEPTION / RECEPTION

Being passionate about painting, I set a goal of acquiring a “grand slam,” i.e. visiting the Louvre, Prado, National Gallery in London, Museo Vaticano and Eremitage at least once. It took years to achieve this goal, although I took advantage of every opportunity. In the meantime, other art galleries joined my “collection.” The admired works could be divided into eras, styles, forms, contents, schools and artists. To talk about the reception of a work of art, perception is necessary to systematize and read the cognitive and aesthetic qualities, and to express evaluative judgments. Certain works will appeal more to the viewer, others may irritate him. Each viewer has a certain individual sensory sensitivity, and as the ancient maxim says “De gustibus non disputandum est” — it is pointless to discuss it.

However, there are works that escape all conventions and hence shock with their boldness and difficulty of reading. At a certain period of my life, thanks to my acquaintance with Adam Nidzgorski and Alain Bouillet, I discovered ART BRUT. The former, who was a teacher in his professional life, indulged in various unconventional art forms in his spare time, to focus on painting after his retirement. He draws and paints figures that penetrate, irritate and even frighten the viewer. In Adam Nidzgorski’s works, the anatomy of the depicted creatures does not correspond to what we know about them. The proportions of the body (head, neck, limbs, etc.) do not agree with what we are used to. The mass (usually absent) does not harmonize with the usual form of objects, the colors do not correspond to what the depicted figures have in our imagination. It is impossible to situate the depicted figures in place—the space lacks the depth to which we are accustomed. There is no background beyond the background of the paper or the decoration. The figures are suspended either singly or in stippled groups

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on the surface of the page. In addition, they are not illuminated, the shadow is not part of their light, their light is internal, as if radiating.

Alain Bouillet, art educator and ART BRUT expert, gives an interpretation of Nidzgorski's art, noting the inspiration the artist draws from his childhood experiences, when he recalls his mother's embroidered macaw hanging on the wall above his bed, the painting of Mary in his parents' bedroom, or the sculpture of the horse rearing up. He points out that it is in childhood that sensory associations are unconsciously formed, structuring the field of imagination and the constructs of imagination. Several decades later, these images reappear, coming from nowhere, absorbing attention, arousing admiration for this or that motif, defining color preferences or reservations, and a tendency to specifically associate the figure with the background. These images are encoded to such an extent that they determine the automaticity of the movement made by the hand with a graphite or ink stick on the surface of the paper. "What we would consider a flaw, an imperfection, an anomaly or a lack, is in fact the result of the artist's choice: he situates the figures in what is immutable, spaceless and timeless, which by definition is not subject to change."¹ For Adam Nidzgorski, painting and drawing means describing his world. He wants the world as he sees it to appear, to appear to his eyes. He paints for himself. He is not a representative of any style, he does not identify with any group of artists. He is simply an artist, an artist with a soul, an independent artist.

At first, I found it difficult to receive the works of ART BRUT artists. They eluded all known conventions. Their otherness bordered on strangeness. Perception did not result in reception. I often stood as if in front of a wall that certainly hid a secret, but I did not know how to overcome this wall. It is not without reason that ART BRUT is combined with naive or primitive art, or even the art of mental hospitals. But, any such label indicates that we are trying to interpret the world according to our own, often learned (European) models, as the only real and possible one. How to break down this wall that covers the full view of the world?

For years I have been working on the issue of intercultural dialogue. One of the prerequisites for the existence of such a dialogue is the expansion of sensitivity, which includes both senses and patterns that shape the world view. Sensitivity is a certain knowledge that is acquired in the process of socialization, the shape of which is imposed by the culture of a particular era. We were raised to look and listen, not simply see and hear—the latter skills are given to us by nature.

¹ Alain Bouillet, „Adam Nidzgorski—współczesny polski prymitywista? [Adam Nidzgorski — A Contemporary Polish “Primitive Artist”?],” *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 65, no. 1 (292) (2011): 157.

Recognition of sounds, forms and colors is cultural and involves a process of definition. A good example is the knowledge of colors. One must be able to name in order to distinguish. This was the case with the Berbers, whose language had a single term for the colors green and blue. Only the use of borrowed names from Arabic made it possible to distinguish between them.² It was not a visual defect, but the lack of a name that caused the confusion. Expanding sensitivity is to enlarge and deepen the range of perception, a condition for entering the world of another culture.

A difficult task appears before art critics. Their rich knowledge derived from years of study and acquired experience may not be enough in forming an opinion about a given work, without being open to the new, without hanging their judgments, without assuming that the work exceeds the scope of convention, and yet is neither kitsch nor bohomaž. ART BRUT artists remain a challenge to academic art. They often do not call themselves artists, and are not willing to show their work, much less exhibit or sell it. Like traditional African artists, who consider their talent a gift from heaven to be used to create beauty, which cannot be transacted.

REFERENCES

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² Paul Castella, *La différence en plus. Approche systématique de l'interculturel* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2005), 76–77.