

**Václav Mílek**

## **Looking back at Large Format symposium**

The symposium has become a very popular part of institutional culture, though only as a complimentary part of a different event. The Prostor art magazine pays its attention to the symposium from time to time. We can try to find answers to questions like what the mission of such symposia is or where the original meaning of this word shifts.

Everybody knows that the original meaning of the word is a feast. The transferred meaning of the word is linked with discussion. Thus it can be said that the goal of painting symposium is fulfilled when the communication between participating artists and public meet, regardless of the fact whether the communication comes to some conclusion or ends up opened. That's why I always think about the term "results of the symposium", the term you both hear at exhibitions and read in reviews. It is for sure, that events like this one demand a tangible output, because of financial or legitimate reasons, which make the event more visible and thus more attractive for sponsors. But I would like to stress out that the most significant results of the symposium are very difficult to share outside the circle of participating artists.

All comments on art works done during the symposium can be only a paraphrase not reproduction of ideas which were born at the symposium. This is why the symposia have always been a bit of a private matter and also the reason why it is very hard for these events to get more public support than various festivals or happenings are given. The latter ones can fully operate without live participation of visitors.

And so there is an effort to find further output and justification for organizing the symposia. This output predominantly unwinds from the main organizer of the symposium. Many times I have faced complaints about the fact that symposia are held by various villages, towns or cities just to get works of art to represent the place for free. I will leave aside legitimacy or moral value of such complaints. I do believe that it is apparent there are differences among symposia not only in the material used there, the aim or organization but also at the basic level meaning to understand the word symposium. Beside those that are satisfied with the only aim to get a work of art there are symposia linked with solving more or less real problems. It can be space, art heritage of some personality, but also purely theoretical topics.

The latter group is represented by the international symposium Large Format Valtice, which has been held since 1990s in the town of Valtice, south Moravia. This symposium operates as one of few which are organized by artists themselves. The main organizer is the Association of Visual Artists and Theoreticians of South-Eastern Moravia and since its beginnings it has been linked with the name of Jan Pospíšil, a painter and the headmaster of the Secondary School of Applied Art in Uherské Hradiště. The tradition of Large Format can be traced back to 1989 when the horse riding hall in the Valtice castle housed the first painting symposium.

Since 1991, the symposium has been known as the International Painting Symposium Large Format Valtice. The name is not randomly chosen. The idea to organize a painting symposium appeared when interest in traditional painting techniques on Czech art scene was stagnating.

The period after November 1989 seemed to be a deaf ground as for the opportunities to introduce and present artists. When, at the beginning of 90s,

the organizers discovered the space of Valtice horse riding hall with its amazing dimension of 77 × 18,5 metres, the goal of the symposium was derived from this fact. Large format painting should have been an opportunity to experience something that common studios never enable.

After first five runs 1992-1996 there was a four-year gap, which gave a chance to summarize the former symposia by means of a catalogue where there were not only pictures but also reviews by art theorists Jaroslav Pelikán, Radek Horáček and Jiří Bohdál.

The sixth run of the event followed the tradition of five-year cycles with a new one. When it is finished a catalogue and a CD are planned to be published. If the organizers succeed in getting enough money it should be published this year.

Since the first run each symposium has been finished by a final exhibition held in the exhibition halls outside the castle. The second cycle was introduced to public at the castle in the town of Veselí nad Moravou and also in an alternative space of Michal mine in the town of Ostrava and last but not least at the restored room of the castle in the town of Bzenec.

Ten days' symposium is usually attended by some 10 painters both from the Czech Republic and abroad, e.g. Austria, Hungary, Slovakia or Poland. The choice of participants goes across generations and aims at forming groups of artists who come with various experience and approach to art. The choice is always consulted with several people, both art theorists and artists. In a way it can be unfair and a bit random, but with events like this it does not matter. The list of participants involves names of both well known artists and names of those who are less known.

In the course of 2001-2005 there were Mikoláš Axmann, Kovács Péter Balász, Kriytýna Boháčová, Daniel Bednář, David Čárský, Stano Černý, Stefan Emmelmann, Daniel Brunovský, Miloš Fekar, Petra Fekarová-Čejková, Andrea Forsterová, Vladimír Franz, Galina, Josef "Danglár" Gertli, Patrik Hábl, Aleš Pavlíček, Eva Hradil, Aleš Hudeček, Pavlína Chrenková, Lencsés Ida, Petr Lysáček, Libor Lípa, Kamil Mikel, Adam Malenda, Jan Pospíšil, Robert Makar, Moje Menhardt, Molenda, Eva Ploczeková-Lazuri, Vladimír Popovič, Veronika Rónaiová, Jiří Surůvka, Kateřina Szanyiová, Csaba Szegedi, Zdeněk Tománek, Markéta Zlesáková. In comparison with the last five runs, the above mentioned events belonged to those where the topics and artists diversified. There appeared some extreme trends as hyperrealism or comics. But due to the broad styles of painting in this run and former ones as well it is very difficult to trace the ways

Each participant left one picture as a part of the collection which is run by the above mentioned Association of Visual Artists and Theoreticians. Thus there is a remarkable collection reflecting a certain period of contemporary painting, especially that of large format phenomenon.

To characterize a piece of art according to its format is nothing new in the history of art. First it was mentioned in the original ancient theory of golden section and later in so called harmony gate. This topic was vivified especially in connection with renaissance interest in architectural proportions. Painting derived three sets of so called French formats from this. They were supposed to suit better to three painting genres: portrait, landscape and seaside painting. These standard formats had been in use till the beginning of 20th century. The present lack of given rules as for the size and proportion might lead to rebirth of interest in this topic. The size of the large support itself has its history as well but it is doubtful whether it is linked with the above mentioned formats. The amount of large format art works from

the second half of 20th century cannot be rated as a monumental one in the sense of large altar paintings from 17th century.

While the format of the latter is given by its artistic mission, and monumentality is a matter of quality, the former case represents formal and quantity growth. Growing size of painting formats in last decades has its own reasons and particularity. This trend, which can be traced after seeing several exhibitions of contemporary art, is apparently linked with general inclination to abstraction and expression in painting. But I am not able to define it precisely.

The way the exhibitions are installed might be one of the reasons. Each piece of art is given its autonomous and sufficient space and when we take into account largeness of many new exhibition halls, it is clear that smaller size pieces fade away compared with the large ones.

These few ideas of mine are a proof that there is strong need of expert discussion covering this topic. A conference and a catalogue might be a good dividing line between the last and next stage of Large Format Symposium and at the same time it could act as a take-off platform for future.

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