

The Enigmatic Monochromatic Painting of Breda Sturm

The most recent painting cycle by Breda Sturm, titled *Sound, Note, Painting*, arose as a spontaneous response to her encounter with America, where she was pursuing her studies. Her dark, brownish-black monochromatic images, divided into balanced but not entirely symmetrical, rhythmically connected segments, emphasize directions and indicate pulses reminiscent of the sequencing of parallel railroad ties, obscured traces or tracks, and the blinking of traffic signals or traffic lights. However, they were not created as stylized allusions to the nighttime hustle and bustle seen in large cities in bright, gaudy colors; rather, the symbolism of their signs is highly internalized. Each painting helps us sense the feeling of loneliness, finding orientation in time and space, and searching for strength in the chaos of the unknown and balance in pitch darkness, balancing the life-giving rhythm that assumes the existence of an unknown higher order, and the persistence of a premonition that the hidden inner light also glimmers and flickers in possible darkness, from which we are taken to the light by the inner light of the heart always bringing about new creativity. The differences between paintings conceptualized in this way can be seen in the shades themselves, which capture their essence as paintings.

This kind of painting is evident only within fundamental darkness, which is not only one but in reality many (according to the graphic designer Marjan Pogačnik, there is a whole range of black colors), and the painter—who focused on her blackness in a completely ascetic way, from the mine-like depths, was able to read her own inner variety with different shades of color and tints. Within the dark “zero” point of origin, she limited her balance with life pulses within a single coordinate system comprised of lines and points or circles, in which she regulated both her entrapment and, within it, her emerging and shining, pulsing creative freedom and its fullness. In doing so, she inventively held on to the cracked relief structure of painted surfaces, which is outwardly comprehended in the tradition of Art Informel, which—due to her basic education as an architect—she included in a distinctive architectonic form. With adapted professional devices, she also introduced dim flashes of shining light to the monotony of matte-like darkness and thus gave life to her paintings with beautiful dynamics captured in fundamental immobility and rigidity, as though she was searching for starting points or support for her steps in the crossroads of life, set in the unknown.

In such light, her images, which are sleeping in the quiet of the night and come to life only in suitable lighting, emanate a slightly cosmic feel. Their dark surfaces and more emphasized light also look like flashes of muffled sound, which introduces an inkling of life into the darkness of hollow sound. Being aware of this effect, the author translated the shapes of her samples, which rhythmically flash amid motionless silence, into broken-up signs of Morse Code—which could also allude to a thought about humanity’s cry for help—and in places made them look like Braille symbols (square A’s), which again creates associations for a person like a blind man in the darkness that wants to detect light. At the same time, these signs with their architectonic letters also seem like windowsills on the facades of night, through which there is a flow of cosmic distances captured in a dark surface. Even when both hidden alphabets dominate outwardly in the paintings with their rhythm and shapes, their dimensions are included in them only as sound signals and a tangibly comprehensible undertone of meaning because the artist can already search for a convincing solution and the right direction with the direct artistic intuition of a painter, which also surrenders itself to her on the paths of silence and darkness.

All such devices pervade her images and are not finally defined, as is the case with series of graphic designs, so alongside all of its systematics the images also seem impulsive and rudimentary, in that they do not change into a mechanical pattern, and they by no means have only one meaning. Their contents are captured in the shades of the original darkness in a

distinctly semiotic way and in no way as a narrative; however, the painter does not wish to merely study and play with the options of the monochrome artistic language and its contrasts and signs, nor is she merely interested in the artistic sequencing and regeneration of surface structures and linear and graphic rhythms and well-considered relationships between segments and the whole, but she is primarily interested in rhythmic variation founded in uniform experiencing, by which the author, who was listening to the inner rhythm of her heart, was captured suddenly, without knowing where it came from and why.

Because the painter is also an avid designer of visual messages and books with a special meaning as well as distinctly legal books, in which her artistic principle inventively searches for semiotic correlates with non-literary contents, the semiotic system apparently also suits her inwardly. Thus, in today's dedication to painting and as a synthesis of her previous artistic experiences—her sense for architectonics and for semiotic meanings of artistic shapes—she also captured her self-perception, set among unknown paths and directions, with the help of artistic reflection and her emotions. She uses these paths and directions to build a secure framework of her architectonics, in which she attempts to use her signs to overcome chaos in the dark, which is becoming her artistic and experiential point of origin as the mysterious unknown. She handles this unknown with her sense for arranging and orientation and with her vital ability to detect light even in the darkness, in which she discovers the point of a new beginning.

In this light, Breda Sturm also established this painting cycle—as an attempt at original mastery of monochromatic painting that may, as we know from the history of modern art, have in and of itself very different conceptual and spiritual meanings—as a special chapter in her master's thesis *Slikarstvo v vizualnih komunikacijah* (Painting in Visual Communications), which she defended with honors at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana. For this reason, we may also view her paintings within the conceptual context defined in the thesis as a more explicit artistic deliberation or test, which, due to its “study” of the contrast within black, is the sequel of the painter's prior academic research into contrasts between white and black. However, regardless of such research, the true meaning of her paintings is intrinsic, as an existentially founded image of the creative impulse, with which the author (who also sees this kind of painting as her inner map) communicates about herself, about her lights that she detects in the dark, and about the unknown end goals that she also foresees with the help of the beginning.

Milček Komelj