

Bogdan Čobal

THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA

29 July–20 August 2021

artKIT

Bogdan Čobal usually exhibited his works by building ambiances with paintings and paintings-objects, which worked together in the sense of the so-called integrated work of art. Such interaction was typical during the Baroque period, when space, art equipment, music, liturgy, communion/audience... added new meanings to works of art. For decades, the artist has been a tireless researcher of media and spaces in the field of painting and graphics. With cycles such as *Cores (Core Dynamics, Return to Core)*, *Fracture in Motion*, *Energy Fields*, *Rhythm of the Vertical*, *Landscapes*, *Four Seasons*, *Hayrack Anatomy*, *Dumb Furrows*, *Polyptychs*, and others, he always felt an artistic commandment of a time since the 1960s, when the development of science, art, and humanism was gaining wings.

In the current exhibition, he presents himself differently in terms of personally expressed poetics and how he invites spectators into it. The latest *The Raft of the Medusa* cycle requires a different communication with the audience, as the theme is also particular to the viewer. It is a completely new, intimate approach. We enter the paintings very directly, which is made possible by paintings-windows and windows-paintings, as there are special »windows« inside the painting itself.

In the second half of the 20th century there was a new cultural atmosphere in Europe; a similar atmosphere was established in the Romantic era in the early 19th century, when artists no longer had to conceal their views on the subject; art and artists have become autonomous, independent of clients and patrons. Thus, they were able to comment on the state of society sovereignly. There was a time when French artist Théodore Géricault exhibited the painting *The Raft of the Medusa* at the famous Salon in Paris in 1819 (he painted an actual event with the tragedy of the shipwrecks from the frigate Medusa). Despite King Louis XVIII's comments that his shipwreck was not a disaster, the painting became a symbol of the call of suffering and affected people. Its truthfulness attracted the audience so much that crowds gathered in front of it in masses. Géricault, before he began to paint, sought out the survivors, listened to their confession, even had a model of the raft made. He then retreated into solitude for months to convincingly depict their suffering. With a shocking painting, he criticized the authorities and the inhumane treatment of the chosen ones and the ship's captain. They saved themselves and left the remaining 149 passengers at the mercy of raging waves, winds, darkness, threatening moonlight, fear, and the struggle for survival... Only fifteen survived.

In contrast to the painful dark light of Géricault's colors, with Čobal, the blue is only luminated and extinguished. Nature is not evil, waves and winds are not to our detriment, is his message... He painted a pendant to the quote of Géricault's painting and entered quotes from current events of the 21st century. Ships and boats full of people... Pictures of refugees fleeing wars, famine, and terror are published by the media every day... How could a person be

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artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor
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indifferent, we are confused and powerless... The artists show solidarity with refugees and call on the public to respond humanely to the refugee crisis, to show solidarity with more than 60 million refugees worldwide.

Čobal presents us with this concrete, cruel reality, but in a completely different way. With the blue lights of the sky and the depths of the sea, he opens horizons and invites us into the depths, into the cradle of life... Virtuoso masters gestures, subtle listening to the language of colors, thin layers of pigments, layer by layer to maintain the transparency of water, drops, and air... When he adds more pasty passages to express depths, darkness, and mystery, he is thoughtful, just as he is when adding other colors, e.g., red tones and more earthy colors, colors of old gold. That's why the paintings are so plain until we really get close to them. Then we catch our breath. We notice the painting in the painting. We discover what we already know and push out of our consciousness day by day... the greatest tragedy and shame of the 21st century! Crowded boats with refugees, quotes from actual events, tragedies that unfold before us every day, every minute, every second... Decomposition of values and humanity in front of everyone; the greatest dehumanization since World War III! After believing in a humane 21st century, in science and culture. Just as the revolution's achievements failed in France in the first half of the 19th century, and imperialisms of all kinds came to the surface, the beginnings of class antagonisms in Europe led to ever new catastrophes... Humanity was not sobered even by the catastrophes of the 20th century; not even the two world wars, after the abyss of human depravity seemed to have reached the bottom... Then the ever-increasing exploitation of all earthly resources, our only world we have... And humanity is once again on a great test...

In the age of the Covid-19, the new reality of the 21st century, viewers will be able to enter the exhibition *The Raft of the Medusa* of the 21st century more or less alone; a lonely man will sink his gaze into the deepest and also into the most luminated blue. The viewer will be surrounded by the depths of the sea and unimaginable distances of the sky as in the painting *The Wreck of Hope* by the German painter C. D. Friedrich. An eloquent comparison, because such is the predominant first impression in Čobal's paintings and expresses hope for humanity. It is a pure artistic address until we see boats with refugees in the pictures. However, through paintings-windows, we see both outside and inside spaces, social and own entities. The artist leaves us plenty of time to reflect, allowing the view from afar to be so calm. The interior is our intimate world, which we people did not build-up, we left the windows...

Čobal's latest cycle, *The Raft of the Medusa*, is an artist's engagement in current issues. He introduced realism into the paintings in the form of art quotations and emphasized actual events, thus knocking directly on everyone's conscience. Nevertheless, he artistically preserved his characteristic manuscript: thin applications of colored layers, soft color transitions, on some parts strong traces of gesture, together with thoughtful geometric interventions as spatial definitions and illusionist aids.

At the forefront of the cycle are not only the master's artistic perfection and aesthetics but also the knock on the conscience of humanity.

– Milena Zlatar

The Raft of the Medusa cycle was premiered in the gallery of the Jožef Stefan Institute.

BIOGRAPHY

Bogdan Čobal was born in 1942 in Zrenjanin (Serbia), where the Nazis expelled his free-thinking family. They were, like so many compatriots, emigrants and refugees. After the war, they returned home to Maribor. The family was connected to the intellectual elite of the city, so the parents supported the decisions of the children, including the youngest son, who decided to be a painter like his older brother Ivan. After studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, graduating in 1967, he dedicated his creative decades to Maribor as a critical intellectual: an excellent painter, a dedicated pedagogue (ten years as an assistant professor and associate professor at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor) and a professional activist. Glazer's award of the city of Maribor for an exhibition at the Art Gallery in 2002 and later the Grand Glazer Award testify to his undoubted contribution. Through his exhibitions, he addressed art audiences across the country and abroad, almost all over Europe; he has also been awarded several times. He lives and creates in Maribor.