

FRANCI PEPERKO

In memoriam (1978–2016)

FINALLY INFINITY

April 22–June 1, 2016

KIBLA PORTAL Maribor

“Even though the purposiveness in a product of fine art is intentional, it must still not seem intentional; i.e., fine art must have the look of nature even though we are conscious of it as art.”

(Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*)

The artistic drive of **Franci Peperko (1978–2016)** was striding along an original creative path, which ended, unfortunately, much too quickly. The intensification of his sophisticated sensibility as a painter, and his feel for esthetic cold were accompanied by an exponential shift in the volume of his production. Indeed, he left behind an intriguing body of work, which testifies to his subjectivized essence; i.e. rather than being primarily interested in painting fashion trends, he always remained stubbornly true to himself

In 2004 he enrolled in the Arthouse-College of Visual Arts in Ljubljana, and successfully completed his degree in 2011 under the mentorship of professor, Mladen Jernejec, academic painter. Already during his studies, Peperko displayed an exceptional talent, which did not go unnoticed among the teachers and fellow students. He exhibited in several group exhibitions and often participated in art colonies. His works were concerned mostly with nature as such; he was intrigued by its orderliness, and at the same time its necessity and purity. He symbolically unfolded the so admired realm of myths, the borderline between reality and illusion, connected to a time when nature was still unspoiled, pristine.

A retrospective overview of the artworks created during his studies, as well as a few years after his graduation, demonstrate his principal psyche. Peperko's study years works reveal to us that he spent a great deal of time studying the old masters. Especially the still-lives in oil indicate the influence of the Dutch masters of the 17th century. The drawings for them are crafted with unshakable precision, revealing the detailed reflections of light in the deliberately incorporated glass material, which is thereby even physically separated from the others. Peperko's drawings undoubtedly corroborate the perfection of his presentment. Skilled in the use of the pencil and charcoal he delves into depictions of realistic compositions, though his typically unconstrained manner makes them almost inevitably turn out as surrealist.

In his post-study years he was partly influenced by the academic tradition of the 19th century realists and the art of the old masters, which was popular on the Slovene art scene already in the nineteen-seventies. This academic heritage was specifically addressed by artists like Kirai Meško, Rudi Španzel, and the also

untimely deceased Bard lukundus, who were trying to break away from the modernist academism and the esthetic of abstract painting, and return back to the foundations – back to the figure and formal ideals.

Franci Peperko took a step even further, and replaced figurality with nature; yet not in the fashion of landscape painters, but rather by means of anthropomorphism, where the depicted tree motifs are replaced by a human image. It is this, ultimately, which leads him to the final surrealism-inspired conclusion.

The visual motifs of Franci Peperko are distinctive and repetitious, almost invariably bordering on morbid eeriness, presented in a mystical manner. Clearly we cannot overlook traces of Tisnikar's influence – not in the stroke, but rather in the motifs, which are related to the thematic mysteriousness of the crows and the self-portraits.

The artist searched for challenges even in abstraction. The opus of abstract paintings, the series *Untitled*, created in 2010, is painted in mixed technique and charged with a certain symbolic distinctiveness, which implies the works were created in at least two separate phases.

Franci observed abstraction in nature. A testimony to this are the black-and-white photographs taken during his study years, one morning after an unexpected storm, as he set out to search for ideas at the Tivoli city park in Ljubljana. He passed the Jakopič statue, and saw that a thunderstruck tree had fallen on the sculpture. This was the cause for a series of photographs, all titled *this time*, which further asserts their significance. The *Jakopič demon* is compositionally conceived in a way that effectively blends the demonic shadow to the sculpture, while the black-and-white technique additionally accentuates the gloominess of the symbolic struggle of Rihard Jakopič with the storm.

In his diploma thesis the artist states: "All of the drawings are made from green materials. Both the medium (charcoal), as well as the carrier (paper) were made from a tree. Therefore, I use a dead tree to draw on a dead tree, a tree, which is, nonetheless, as alive as the observer mistakenly imagines it to be."

Franci Peperko proved that he is well worth the remembrance in the overall opus of Slovene fine arts. At the same he remains as a bitter reminder of how we lost, much too prematurely, a highly original painter, for whom painting means discovering, and at times swiftly charging between common diversity and the discovery of new truths. In other words, the temporal indefiniteness of existence leads Peperko to the realization that the actual "truth" (for whatever that is) depends each time and exclusively on its opposite. And both poles are here, in front of our eyes, simultaneously.

Franci Peperko took a step beyond infinity, his truth beside him. In absolute infinity, this truth is endless as well.

And that's what counts.

Nina Jeza, Artists&Poor's

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