

Ordinary and Unusual Memorabilia: Memory and Imagination

'Dream is a second life. Never have I been able to penetrate without shuddering those portals of ivory and horn that separate us from the invisible world.

Gérard de Nerval, *Aurelia*<sup>1</sup>

The exhibition entitled *Kroniki islandzkie [Icelandic Chronicles]* contains a number of references to different layers of memory. The author alludes to Daniel Vetter, the seventeenth-century Czech printer and author of *Islandia, or a short description of the island of Iceland*. It is the first description of Iceland in the Polish language and one of the first descriptions of this country in general. The artist extracts the traveller's memories to compare them with her own observations and reminiscences. Another confrontation of memory and imagination takes place at the point where the already existing works meet – in the transformed (imprinted) accounts of travel. The continuity of creative reconstructions triggers the fortuitousness and discontinuity of this single story: 'Why is something preserved in memories? Why do I remember how I arranged Doris and Markus in front of the camera during the trip to Akureyri? Emotions accompanying events are a precondition for better remembering.'<sup>2</sup>

In his dialogues with Theaetetus and Sophist, Plato depicts the inseparable aporia between memory and imagination. Mirror-like presentation (*ēikon*) is almost always accompanied by phantasma. The imprint (mark – *typos*) in the soul gives birth to eicastic art – mimesis and fantastic art – illusions. *Icelandic Chronicles* combine these seemingly distant poles of the art

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<sup>1</sup> Gérard de Nerval, *Aurelia*, trans. Monique Di Donna, Green Integer, 2001, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Sonia Rammer, *Kroniki islandzkie [Icelandic Chronicles]*.

of remembering and intuitively present imprinted traces of things. E. Casey outlines other modes of memory by distinguishing the following: reminding – reminders protect us from oblivion; reminiscing – reviving the past, memoirs and accounts are a stock of memories for the future; and the most interesting mode: recognizing – delightfully presenting the absent.<sup>3</sup>

The artist's works, ultimately unaffected by a place, time and devoid of great histories, create a sense of 'disturbing strangeness' and send us back to the history that may have never happened. Entering imagination requires special circumstances – breaking away from present-day activities, paying attention to 'the useless' and feeling the need for dreams. As Bergson wrote, 'Man alone is capable of such an effort'<sup>4</sup>.

The paintings displayed at the exhibition are not limited to the surface of the medium used. They spread out owing to their perfect flexibility. The pleasantly stretched horizons are not disturbed by any sharp cuts. They seem to express the thirst for the never-ending journey that once took place and is taking place here and now. This surplus lack of scratches makes us find pleasure in ourselves, which is possible also thanks to cleverly hidden multiplications and repetitions. The artist's works are based on very cost-effective imaging tools, often overexposed and illuminated by unknown sources of light. They create panels that reflect and absorb external light at the same time. While the summits shine with silvery glow, the night sky and the hope-giving endless ocean sparkle excessively. Presumably impossible in reality, the event may be the result of mental creation or memory error. The supernatural character of this ordinary setting starts a game that launches the aforementioned imagination. It is close to the sublime: 'The imagination gains by what it loses. It gains by losing. The imagination organizes the theft of its own freedom, it lets itself be commanded by a law other than that of the empirical use.... But by this violent renunciation, it gains in

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Edward S. Casey, *Remembering. A Phenomenological Study*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp. 90-140.

<sup>4</sup> H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 83.

extension. . . and in power.<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly, however, all the elements of the landscape are inseparably connected and appear as a whole at the levels of both representation and aesthetic experience. The disturbing interactions between the spheres of reality and surreality are thus semantically coherent and emphasize that which is wonderful with the metallic-silvery glitter.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the book-object, also displayed at the exhibition, the author writes

'I do not regret anything'. If this sentence is related to time, the time is not lost because, once set in motion, memory is subjected to a collective process of interpretation and ceases to be only a memory of the past and therefore lost time.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 130-131.

<sup>6</sup> Max Lüthi, a Swiss folklorist points out that metallic glow in European fairy tales evokes that which is wonderful.