

Over the Edge of the Painterly Medium

In contemporary artistic worlds brimming with diverse genre creations, Andrea Zabric's exhibition is significant because it (once again) addresses the question of why painting needs to be regarded as a separate entity in artistic production. Indeed, why do painters still engage in painting as a discipline focused on brushwork, pigment, surface, and colour?

Transformations of form within the context of the painting discipline, with a particular emphasis on the materiality of colour or pigment and their inseparable connection to surfaces, formats, and shapes, constitute the latest exhibition concept of the younger generation artist Andrea Zabric. Her meticulously conceived exhibition journey through the changes of form consists of three segments: paintings on wooden panels, pigment sculptures, and the ambiance of a Pompeian “chapel.” More precisely, it revolves around rhizomatically intertwined segments linked with the figure of Afra Sperantia.

Who is she? She is a Pompeian innkeeper whose story prompted Andrea to explore Pompeian Roman wall paintings in the context of investigating the processes of formal pictorial transformations. Moreover, Andrea is interested in the roles and positions of women in history and culture, hence female figures, whether historical or fictional, often become initiators of the exhibition concept.

The first exhibition segment begins with a wooden diptych painted with earth pigments from the Apennine Peninsula (Venetian and Istrian earth, Pompeian red, Terra Pozzuoli, Umber, etc.). Their “function” is to meticulously explore the edges of the “painterly medium and composition of content arising from a dialogue with materials and potential figures.” Alongside the diptychs on wooden panels, Andrea presents the tondo format, a circular element that introduces (im)balance into compositions. Andrea carefully analyses the materiality of pigments, which becomes entirely evident in the next exhibition segment featuring pigment sculptures. These objects are created by pressing raw pigment into specific shapes using a special technique she devised during her studies. The pigments are not bound by a binding material, which is a common practice, but over time, they dissolve and disintegrate, thus displaying their “inherent vulnerability and transience.” The artist emphasizes the importance of these sculptures changing from static objects into moving matter, thus creating a dynamic exhibition setup. Pigment Sculptures, explains the artist, are made from hydraulically compressed masses of pigment powder. They are made exclusively from pigment, which, under high mechanical pressure, causes the grains to compress into a specific shape. These sculptures are significant to her as they represent the transformation of the basic painting substance into a new form of “visual energy.” Positioned atop specially designed displays, each plinth features one side coated with various pigments. She uses ultramarine blue, French light and dark ochre, and Berlin red pigment, emphasizing the ambivalent nature of pigments; they are an industrial product but simultaneously a painting material. Finally, considering the specific spatial layout of the Kranjčar Gallery, Andrea creates a Pompeian “chapel.” In the only space in the gallery bounded by walls on three sides, the artist manually rubs black iron oxide pigment onto white walls. Then, she hangs wooden-

plaster elements on the walls, painted with architectural details of Pompeian wall paintings in the *trompe-l'œil* technique. Although it is common to equate the materiality of colour with brushstrokes, ridges, scraping, or traces of colour, Andrea Zabriz's project shows us that materiality is not limited to surface effects of colour and pigment on a painting canvas or substrate. The artist demonstrates that it is possible to use materiality as a kind of material performative. Consequently, raw pigment, colour, and their materiality property in this project have the ability to perform, as emphasized by the first two exhibition segments. Moreover, the artist points to the possibility of transcending materiality in the context of illusionistic “baggage,” which becomes evident in the final exhibition segment, in the Pompeian “chapel,” where she merges the painterly negation of flatness with pure materiality.

In fact, Andrea presents us with a very simple equation; pigment and colour! However, the sum of these two elements synergistically produces a miraculous presence in the painting. This presence is simultaneously deceptively simple and infinitely complex, pre(know)n but still enigmatic, giving materiality a role and importance that cannot be replicated in any other artistic medium, except painting.

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