

The Picture Lives by its Space

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The first impression when looking at George Pusenkoff's pictures is their decorativeness. Generally, two contrasting – or, alternatively, two extremely similar – colours create an intense decorative effect. This is increased by the black contour that always outlines the selected objects. Although instantly perceived, this effect does not hold our attention. One can continue, thinking that everything is clear. Yet something engages us in these simple pictures, retaining us in its grasp, even though we cannot understand what could possibly be holding our attention, when everything is, ostensibly, clear.

Things would appear to be not quite as simple as they seem, so let us investigate further. At first, of course, we look at what is depicted on the picture, what the objects are, what they mean, and so forth. But this will not take us far. The entire image is a quotation – details of famous pictures or photographs. Moreover, the artist does not attempt to interpret them. There is no author's reflexion. The quotation is reproduced with the help of a computer – deliberately defamiliarised and disinterested...

What else is there?

Objective images are not always present in Pusenkoff's pictures. Sometimes, they are simply vertical, multi-coloured stripes. What is to be done with them?

In essence, these are two-tone stripes or several vertical stripes of equal width. A stripe of one local colour (for example, blue) alternates with stripes of that same colour – only not entirely local ones. Something seems to shine through the stripes, gradually transpiring, as if through a body of water. There is some sort of movement; something emerges, stirs, lives in the depth.

As it turns out, we are already in another space, while those blue, locally coloured stripes have remained outside the field of our attention – not in the focus of vision, too close, possibly even behind our backs, in the past. This simple picture, it appears, lives not only in space, but also in time. Moreover, we can perceive the picture in the reverse space. We can regard the stripes of complex blue colour as an objective surface with

some inclusions, while the local blue stripes are perceived as a depth – for example, the sky. We can then immerse in this depth, while the objective verticals remain out of focus. What is important is that we cannot focus our attention immediately on both stripes. It is this effect that constitutes the basis of the spatial life of the picture.

This is no longer a quotation – it is the personal space of Pusenkoff's picture. This is also how it lives in his figurative paintings. Its basis is constituted by the possibility of our own movement and immersion in the depth of the picture. Some element of the picture always remains behind our backs – the gates through which we entered.

This is the breathing of the space. Its quiet, hidden life is the life of the picture and its true music, for those who are capable of hearing it. The nature of the picture – I refer not only to Pusenkoff's pictures, but to pictures in general, the picture as such – is dualistic. This is both a potential space and an objective surface onto which something can be painted, drawn, glued, etc.

I believe that the importance of the picture as a surface has recently been exaggerated, while the spatiality of the picture remains outside attention, almost forgotten. Pusenkoff shows that, no matter how active or even aggressive the surface of a picture is, the space constitutes the foundation of its life and breath. The space of the picture is also its lungs.

This communication is extremely important, particularly now, when so many claim that the picture has no prospects and that it has died. Treating a picture as an objective surface actually implies splitting it in half and examining one half – not necessarily the main half – as the whole. That is what is so vital for the picture. The picture is a space – not to a *lesser* extent, but to an even *greater* extent than the object.

Everything possible appears to have been already done to the picture surface. It has been drawn on, glued, adjoined, cut, sewn back together again... Enough is enough! What is important is not to come up with something new; what is important is the space. The picture lives by its space – as proven to us by the pictures of George Pusenkoff.

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