

Freeze-frame of the Imagination Element

MARIA MORZUCH

A freeze-frame of an element of imagination becomes a painting by Magda Moskwa.

A pivot within, vital nerve pulsating.

Magda Moskwa is a renowned art rebel, manifestly challenging both the period of her existence and the context of contemporary art alike.

Enchanted with northern art, which she describes as transparent and crystal-clear, a trophy of artistic skill, she is capable of spotting beauty everywhere (in religious works – brutal scenes of martyrdom in sainthood, in secular portraits, in nature and in life). While Moskwa's own art is frequently associated with turpism, the artist claims to be preoccupied with a beauty that she is most avidly seeking where it seems to be – in all probability – absent. She makes attempts to discern and share it with others through her paintings. She has always been interested in a beauty less obvious, in an intricate beauty.

She is known for her portraits of women branded with the stigmata of experience, women who underwent rites of passage, women with blue knuckles and sore palms, leading ladies encapsulated in a variety of misfortunes. In contrast to traumatic signs, a hieratic human figure persists – within an aura of steadfastness and calm, mangled hands overlap in emulation of an insignia of power in an official presentational gesture. These are extraordinarily strong female figures, resolute and courageous, well-nigh shameless in their display of uncorrected form, different to those we know: hairless, browless, one ear shifted beyond the correct anatomical position. Some things seem too small, others too large – some things are missing while others are dissimilar to what they ought to be. But they are no longer so in a transgression of commonplaceness.

The male portrait *Untitled [Portrait of the Father]* stands in isolation: heavy, swollen and thickset, yet free of all symptoms of

particular incidents, left to himself to himself, touched by no keen personal commentary of the artist.

Her paintings reveal simple motifs, such as a green belt (of a porcelain figurine at home), a patterned backdrop, lush flowers, phallic creepers and colourful bowed ribbons.

Luxuriant background components flourish in contrast to the discipline and consequence of frames frozen in art. Note a sudden cut to the figure (waistline downwards) or the calves of a body only, clad in ornate, ribbon-adorned boots. Then behold a silver panel creating the rhythm of hands only, as if in suggestion of an architectonic relic altar.

While the time Magda Moskwa spent studying art at the State College of Art in Łódź was chiefly about designing print on fabric, trademark motifs soon made their way into the realm of clothing – objects, and then onto paintings. Yet her tutors stood in increasing opposition to the very isolated art she began creating, up to and including a threat to her diploma. Then a student, Moskwa was helped out by her entry to the Władysław Strzemiński competition: a non-College jury awarded her a prize.

Magda Moskwa painted her first painting early in life, at the tender age of thirteen, having nailed a piece of sheeting as canvas to the back of a children's rocking chair as canvas support. One may well suppose that the piece was a portrait (Magda's sister), as portraits were her fundamental preference from the very beginning. The instinct to paint appeared unusually early, and has remained unchanged until today.

Her first aesthetic experience involved the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the Catholic Church, and Catholic faith-related visualisations: martyrdom of saints, votive offerings and relics, human remains on display. Her initiation took place in Poddębice, Moskwa's hometown, with its historic palace and class zero in the lush renaissance and baroque interior style.

On the obverse of an early 1995 painting shows an inscription reading "Nomana", later adopted as the title of all individual exhibitions of the artist. The meaning of the word escapes interpretation. No one specific is pointed to – yet potentially anyone or everyone can be Nomana. That word, that sound, reverberates across the artist's biography in emulation of a monotonous spell. All paintings by Magda Moskwa are merely and modestly referred to as *Untitled*.

For centuries, figurative art has been a definite and continuously reliable way of communicating with viewers.

The figure and its fragments – palms, an isolated finger, a frame of a figure from the waist down. As in the case of movie stills, centrally planned compositions thus make new dynamics.

This does not mean that we communicate with sight and gesture. The enormity of emotion is revealed in the detail and movement of the smallest part of the body. In departure from hieratic norm and in destruction of standard expectations, tension grows, with a game transpiring between the visible and the invisible, the concealed and the open. The concept of the self of the soul is exposed: vital strands of life, fragile, the stream of elements, tireless.

The territory of paintings involves a game of veiled eyes, of a visible navel, of head hair spiking the sky, of hackled attire outlines with small hairs on the shoulders, or of flying ribbons stood on end; energy rolls, ejected beyond the canon of the body in silver armour – emotion, fear, an instinct to fight for one's own all exaggerated omit – in the form of a self-defending finger in suggestion of an armed factor, as alien hands are additionally shown nearby in too close an approach to the visible figure.

Autonomous parts of the body – separated, weightless in their lack of a figure, solitary and in the lead – become the only theme: who needs the entire figure? This is a question asked by the artist

herself when she paints parts of the body and close-ups of the skin, claiming that such a format allows observers to better identify with the piece than any portrait could.

The closer Moskwa comes to skin surface, the more everything becomes general and universal: while isolated cases disappear, an impression of keen organic presence remains.

The question would lead Magda Moskwa's art to a new condition, paintings morphing into full-spaced objects.

Let us return to artistic college initiations, with the originally important designs of print on textile oozing out of the surface and entering the third dimension.

At the Muzeum Sztuki exhibition, the first multidimensional situation the viewer encounters involves such patterned fabric, stylishly flattened with a horizontally placed sheet of glass, a gown thrown casually on top. The installation seems to suggest a carefree carnival. Yet for the time being, all we have is an aesthetic foretaste of how the artist measures herself in confrontation with the body-attire relation theme.

The score of the emotional bonds between carnal form and exteriority is about to be revealed, with only a certain extent of truth actually divulged.

A certain discomfort of the body is apparent in the limitations of clothing: shells, caftans, uniforms turned, a former property of a penal colony or of strangers.

Visible structure, ostentatious stitching, the crude essence of fabric with an enormous label: in their entirety, they resemble an arrival wearing a bonnet slit to accommodate the ear. Yet the difference and distance prove misleading in a suggestion of time machines of times long gone. Coats clinging to the body, fabrics worn, torn, and turned are but portraits of emotions and inner

conditions forever carried as a memory. They continue functioning as concrete forms of something long forgotten, which is possibly why the deconstruction of a coat worn in times of youth seems to have imprisoned the (photographed) model like an uncomfortably tight cocoon of the past. The outline of the figure seems to have been created in three dimensions; note the crooked hump in the blood-red satin and the one protruding ear.

The tougher the form of attire, the more rigid the contour of clothing (corset), the more frequently the unbroken line of the outline comes apart at the seams, revealing large fissures.

Unclosed forms, cracks and canals remain a trope in Moskwa's art – a trope soon to become an independent, then leading theme of her paintings. A fundamental change in technique transpires: oil on canvas to chalk temper on sculpted board, pliable to the touch and caress of the strenuous process of hardening the base, of forming and shaping. Pliability and versatility have proved conducive to Moskwa's analysis of her paintings, her breaking through to the other side, and creating art as if dabbling in organic tissue. The increased carnality of the image would ultimately lead to the creation of a full-bodied, an exclamation mark within the final part of the exhibition.

The sculpture on display is accompanied by organic paintings – some wrapped in fabric, others with magnifying glasses and own lighting embedded, still others fully encased in glass boxes; they all suggest a full landscape of carnality.

The Muzeum Sztuki exhibition also reveals the mysteries of the artist's techniques in a suggested studio mock-up. Yet nothing could be further from the notion of a romantic atelier. Nothing was left to chaos or chance. Bright lights (the artist's actual studio at św. Jerzego has fluorescent illumination only) showcase a sterile table and materials arranged thereon: aluminium slag (to replace silver), mixtion, shellac – and precision tools, such as a dental chisel and others. The process of creation is

time-consuming: works have to be protected in the meanwhile, the artist continuously returning to works created (subsequent objects displayed with chalk temper in its different stages placed on the board): chemical and physical procedures are at play here.

In the reality of such a meticulously organised art lab, the everyday nature of the process of creation speaks of the different, of the clear, and of the transparent.