

JAN de WERYHA-WYSOCZAŃSKI

Internet: www.de-weryha-art.de e-mail: jan@de-weryha-art.de

Urszula Usakowska-Wolff, art critic, "Archives of timeless time finiteness", Art Gallery PATIO, Łódź, 2005.

Archives of timeless time finiteness

A tree grows very slowly and lives very long: several decades or several centuries. In comparison with a slow process of its growth and its longevity, the length of human life is nothing but a short moment. Trees live and die standing, and after their death, despite the finiteness of time, they keep on living in a different form, revealing the richness of potential accumulated for decades. Wood, one of the most exquisite and most universal organic materials, obtained from a fallen tree, reveals the story of a tree's life, exposes the rhythm of its growth, engraved with light in its growth rings. An artist, who chooses to work in wood, is forced to act in accord with its processing pace. Wood is primeval and slow-processed material, its transformation into a work of art is also a slow process, which demands patience, concentration and respect for the material. In the course of artistic act, wood, a document of time or rhythm of life, evolves into timeless form which records the history of human and nature. In a wooden work of art on exhibition, three stories melt together: the story of a tree, of an artist and of a spectator, who, confronted with the work of culture, experiences time finiteness of his own existence. Wood symbolizes as well sensuality; unlike any other material, it evokes many associations: it is both rough and smooth; sharp and blunt, linear and round, tough and soft, cold and warm, flexible and motionless, dark and fair, loud and quiet. This contrasts contribute to the rhythm of wood which is an element of time structure. Its rhythm influences its form, it is a kind of tune, a means of artistic expression. The form is also an expression of life, and the culture conveys its nature. Since late 1990s, wood is a favourite material of Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański. Exploring its mysterious texture and essence of wood became, on one hand, an artistic credo of the artist, on the other hand, his walk of life, far from the life in noisy, chaotic, superficial reality of everyday life, and far from the commercialized market of art. His choice of wood as a main means of artistic expression was a conscious act of protest against the reality around, the last hope of the artist for freeing himself from everyday life's necessities – like being a manufacturer of art-like accessories for sale. It was an attempt to find a way to tidy up the problems of the world, a way to control the chaos. Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański opposes the frantic pace of superficial existence to slow, strenuous and complicated process of research and creation, when, during the physical and intellectual effort, which lasts even a few months, the works of art of simple forms and intricate surfaces have been created – the works of art which encourage meditation and which emanate with rough beauty and simple harmony. The fact that Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański has decided to choose to work in wood could be also a consequence of his earlier experiences from the past. Born in 1950 in Gdańsk, the artist, who moved to Hamburg when he was 31, studied in the department of sculpture of Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych (The National Academy of Fine Arts) in his hometown at the banks of the Moltava River. There he learned from the outstanding sculptors – professors: Alfred Wiśniewski and Adam Smolana, who created anthropomorphic sculptures in wood, which referred to classical statues. What the artist gained from the education in Gdańsk is an excellent theoretical background and, what is quite uncommon in Germany, an excellent practical knowledge of sculpture craft. To call Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański a sculptor is not enough; he is as well a sculptor of grand format and an architect able to organize the biggest interior space.

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According to the nature of his favourite material, works of Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański are being born slowly, some of them demand even a nine-month work, which makes them creatures born in the act of creation. The forms, extracted from the inside of wood, bore traces of tools used by the artist: a saw, an axe, a chisel and a hammer. They remain on his works forever, as the surfaces of Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański's works are not smoothed out, polished or embellished with French polish; his objects exist in minimally changed, but still primal ecological purity. The ready works, in solid forms of cuboids, circles, pyramids, columns or obelisks or in the similar forms, are not narrative because they do not tell any stories, they have stories deep-rooted in themselves. They are marked with traces of a tree's life and with traces left by the artist, their surfaces make a spectator aware of the story of their creation. Their rounded or angular shapes can be also read as symbols of the Earth, the Moon, burial mounds and tomb stones, which are the symbols of lasting, growing and passing away. Sometimes Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański sings or chars individual elements or the whole objects. The process results into a transformation of wood from a vegetal state into mineral one, through the artistic interference the plant changes into a mineral. Because of wood qualities, a carefully thought-over and apparently unemotional art becomes impetuous, when the sculptor interferes into wood in such a way that he should not to lose anything in its identity: It functions in practice due to introduction of strict rules, which an artist has to negotiate in its empirical dispute with nature. Certain rhythms emerge, on the other hand, some monotony prevails. I choose these two phenomena as subjects trying to highlight the process in progress, which is surprising with its pulsating balance. Simultaneously I introduce certain geometry, full of matter-of-fact ways of expression, which inspired me in minimal art. I am also interested in individual, unrepeatable tangle of artificially created, but naturally working wooden surfaces, where the traces of tool interference are minimal, says Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański, who uses in his works only the wood obtained from blowdown trees or sanitary clearing.

The art created by this universal artist is an art of contrasts. It is minimalistic, which means both uniform and unindividualized in its form, but it characterizes with widely varied, individual surfaces. It is a continuation and enrichment of minimal art, it is related to it by its masterful use and control of space. The objects of Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański hold a conversation with the space, they are extension of the space, as they refer to signs, characteristic for the interior where they have been placed or hung. Some are covered with a delicate net which resembles outline of bricks on white painted wall. His mural works, entitled "Drewniane Tablice" (Wooden Boards), look from the distance like swaying cloths, in close perspective as libraries of wood called xylotheques, which were created at the end of the 18th century. They are more and more architectural, they enter the space, they look like windows on the facades of Prussian walls, like gates in village fences or balconies in blocks of flats. They stimulate imagination, evoking most surprising associations. Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański is an exceptionally creative artist, unbelievably hard-working. For the last eight years he has created more than one hundred works of impressive size and quality. Some of them are made of dozens, or hundreds of thousand tiny pieces of wood, more than several hundred years old. It is a unique archive of timeless time finiteness.

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