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Katarzyna Frankowska, TVP, Warszawa 17.06.2005.

The Identity of Wood (Tożsamość drewna).

The first building and sculpting material. Can it possess any hidden properties? Or become a medium for new senses? Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański, a Polish artist working in Germany has made wood the object of his work by . He introduced it into regions from which it was banned by art and technology.

The Wilson Shaft Gallery in Katowice, on the premises of an old mine of over 2000 m² amassed about a hundred abstract works. Their author says that he records wood in archives. His art is a kind of giving order to or gathering forms and figures in which this material appears in nature. He does not encumber the created objects with meanings. He does not build associations. Maybe apart from the most natural ones - let's say archetypal, such as a wall, a window, traces of a bonfire, ant hill. On the surface of the wooden solids he leaves marks of simple tools, attributed to work with this material, and traces of natural elements such as fire. Thanks to it, there appears a certain bond between the abstract form and the viewer because

of, you might say, a common past, a co-existence of man and tree lasting thousands of years. Co-existence, because, as the author himself says he is interested in 'the extent to which you can interfere in wood so that it does lose anything from its identity'.

There is no doubt that the author places his works within the trend of ecological art. But, curiously, for their presentation he uses phenomena from the domain of art and technology whose consequence was a departure from wood or making it lose its identity.

I have in mind minimal art - a stylistics in which these sculptures were made, the post-industrial interior or the context and place of the exhibition, and I mean a trend present in contemporary culture defined as aesthetisation of life - at a superficial glance this exhibition could be recognized as a way of interior decoration.

Minimalism means simple geometric solids of a large scale or small, module-like solids made of plywood or glass - smooth materials, which eliminate the possibility of tools leaving any marks or any individualisation of an object. Their task was to draw attention of the viewer to the spatial relations of the whole interior or to the basic relations between the solids themselves, for example their proportions. In Wysoczański's art, the huge cubes or masses of tiny elements of similar shapes attract attention with their texture. Seen from a distance, they evoke in our consciousness a memory of something well familiar. Observed closely, they provide our imagination with material due to the picturesqueness of bark or associations that arise when we see a charred log. etc. Thus the minimalist principle of the neutrality of the message is preserved only partially. The solids presented in the old branding shop direct the viewers to spaces different from the gallery. Even small fragments of bark or chips of wood ultimately, always bring images of nature. The artist also plays with another of our customs which is to look for aesthetic sensations outside art.

Recognizing from a distance, for example, rectangles on the walls or on the floor of the Katowice gallery, we guess familiar, wood-related details: shelves, washboards or books. The effect of surprise in the close contact with the fragments of trees scattered or gathered into collections is thus multiplied; it is genuine, raw wood and at the same time a work of art which does not fulfill the principle of usefulness or decorativeness.

The exhibition 'Epiphanies of nature in late-modern world' at the Wilson Shaft Gallery in Katowice will be open until the end of 2005.

Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański was born in 1950 in Gdańsk. In 1976 he graduated from the Sculpture Department of the Art Academy in that city, in Prof. Alfred Wiśniewski and Prof. Adam Smolana's studio. Since 1981 he has been living and working in Hamburg. Until recently he had his own studio in a room of an old industrial shop. He participated in many exhibitions, among others in Germany, the USA, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Belgium. In Poland he has presented his works twice so far: last year at the Chapel Gallery of the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko and at the Patio Gallery in Łódź. For the last few years the artist has been using only wood in his art. He uses trees that are to be felled.