

Professor Helmut R. Leppien, main extracts from the opening speech of the exhibition *Holzobjekte – 1999-2000* of Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański in the DB-Ausbesserungswerk in Hamburg, 24 August 2000

Good evening Senator, Consul-General, Ladies and Gentlemen, Master,

We stand and sit in the studio of Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański. This is a studio-exhibition. Admittedly, for today and the coming weeks everything here is cleared up neat and tidy, but strictly speaking, it always looks like that in the former railway repair workshop.

And a bit of the job, which was done here previously, one still wants to experience. This as a first impression. [...] And let us now focus on the art. Standing and lying, the vertical and the horizontal, are the two basic positions of the human condition. For thousands of years sculptors have modelled and hewn standing and lying figures. And we can rest assured, that during his sculpture studies at the College of Fine Arts in Gdańsk in the early 70s Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański had modelled and hewn figures of standing and lying humans. [...] But we do not see here anything of that kind. [...]

Soon after we perceive other basic forms. The sequence, the accumulation, the adding to a circle. All this is a product of work, which is artisanal as well as artistic. [...] Many artists today are no workers, artisans, but inventors and finders. Smart alecks among you might have exclaimed: “Oh, this looks like by Richard Long!” But the great British artist, by whom you have surely already seen the large stone circle in the Galerie der Gegenwart, is not like Weryha an artist, who is at the same time an artisan, but solely a searcher and finder. The material with which Richard Long works was found and is not processed by him. Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański, on the other hand, hews the wood with the chisel and with the axe. He takes apart tree logs with the power saw. He works. All what is created in this work is material for works of art. There is no waste. [...] How does he handle the wood? The bark: he leaves the bark, he strips it off coarse, he peels it off thoroughly. The log: he cuts it in slices, he sharpens it or he sharpens the slice, this time or another. He turns the log into a square timber. Here, I compare him with a carpenter. All, what has been built, up until now, is done with square timbers, i.e. with tree logs, which became square-shaped, which have a rectangular, often quadratic cross-section. He makes square timbers, he splits the log in square timbers of different sizes. He dismembers the slice, which can be round or angular, he chops it, then he positions it. He lays everything next to each other, in a row, or piles it up or he forms a pile. Or, he lays the pieces together, so that they form a square. Enough of examples.

You may have discovered the last thing with the most disconcertment: the cocking of the strands around the now really steely columns. What we experience in these works, is at the same time proof of a centuries old natural life. Again and again it becomes clear, do not quarrel with me, if all tree logs are hundreds of years old, maybe some only decades, but all are marked by this natural life. Over there, the logs with their shakes, which can be seen from here, where we have not yet started to perceive the growth rings. And at the same time we witness the traces of the work, the intervention, the modification, the creation. So meet natural form and human work, man-made form. I called Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański a worker. His works remind us of the actions of yeomen, because they take up traditions of archaic acts. Exactly the word as the senator, archaic. Stacking, cocking is part of the work of the yeomanry. Heaps have a circular shape, a round cross-section. Weryha makes also in the next step flat circles, rings, [...] over there lies a flat circle. All these rings have something magical about them, are monuments of invocation. Also a basic form like the

circle is the cuboid. And again he works with the original form of the square. The cuboid as a surface is taken up to the top and becomes a cube, and cubes emerge strung together individually, stacked, small cuboid forms, large cuboid forms hung at the wall as a bas-relief, again and again laid on the floor. So is Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański a sculptor, who, working, is looking to acknowledge the peculiarity of wood as a material, who perceives its peculiarity and treats it with respect, at the same time forming and shaping the material like the sculptors at all times.

I congratulate the artist on this exhibition.

(Translation from German to English by Rafael de Weryha-Wysoczański)