

MAŁGORZATA PAWLAK

PAINTINGS WITHOUT PAINTING

Opening: June 3rd, 2017 (Saturday), 7 p.m.

Exhibition open until July 2nd, 2017 (Tue – Sun, 12 a.m. – 7 p.m.)

Free entrance

Curator: Waldemar Tatarczuk

Cooperation: Agnieszka Cieślak

The title of the exhibition – *Paintings without Painting* – accurately captures Małgorzata Pawlak's art and her attitude towards painting. The artist's works simultaneously are and are not paintings, literally escaping strict frames or definitions. Pawlak consistently attempts to discover the meaning of painting, and her works are not simply reflections captured on canvas, but they are also physical interventions in material: they are scraped off, frayed, smashed against each other or bent. The experiments of the artist contain humorous elements which are expressed both in word play and in the jokingly applied formal operations.

What is painting and who exactly is a painter? These are questions which absorb the artist, and she looks for the answers through undertaking successive ideas, through carrying out successive experiments. It can be said that Pawlak pares down painting to its primary elements, separately probing questions of colour, light, texture or form. She creates works that are seemingly abstract and conceptual, which are peculiar metaphors: one must discover them, scraping away successive layers of paint, in a manner similar to that of the artist.

Upon entering the gallery we see a medium-sized rectangular canvas painted in a uniform grey colour. In its upper part a hole is visible, which came about as the result of scraping off some of the acrylic paint: the gap can bring to mind the peeling paint on a neglected stairwell. The work's title, *Primary Matters 4* (2017), serves as a clue: it indicates an attempt to thoroughly comprehend the subject, as well as applying primer to the canvas. The artist strives to probe the essence of painting, literally scraping her way inside the picture. What does it hide? White colour – the painting's support, emptiness or infinity? As far as its form is concerned the work evokes associations with Lucio Fontana who punctured or cut his canvases.

Pawlak uses a similar device in the installation entitled *Scraped Off* (2017). The painting – in this case multicoloured – is full of grey stains: the places where the paint has been scraped off. In front of it, just like evidence of a crime, wrapped bits of enamel are piled up. Both parts are like a positive and negative. The work hanging on the wall is reminiscent of a colourful map of an alternative world, while the scraped off layers of acrylic paint form a sort of horizontal picture. The installation reveals the creative process, presenting one of the possible answers to the question of what is painting and how it is created.

In the works from the series *Mishmash* (2015), which were created as part of Małgorzata Pawlak's diploma requirements, the artist ponders the definition of painting. From the subversive statement "it's only paint" the

idea arises to paint pictures made up simply of a number of its layers. One may cite here the statement of the French artist Maurice Denis, who as far back as 1890 asserted that before it becomes an anecdote a painting is above all a flat surface covered with colours placed in a given order.

The *Mishmash* series reveals the process of painting – in this case – placing layer upon layer of multicoloured acrylic paint. The last layer is white, contrary to traditional painting where the artist starts his or her work by applying primer to the canvas. In their form these paintings resemble packages with waste paper. This is not a coincidence – the artist was inspired by Bohumil Hrabal's novel *Too Loud a Solitude* (1976) in which the protagonist works as a paper crusher. Before destroying books he reads them and then he carefully decorates the packages. By destroying he creates – such a constructive destruction is also close to Pawlak.

In the spectacular spatial installation entitled *Smash Up* (2017) the artist explores one of the basic concepts of painting in her characteristic uncompromising manner. Five glossy canvases – red, yellow, green and light and dark grey – look as if they smashed into each other like cars during a crash. That is what the title suggests, but the work refers primarily to contrasting juxtapositions of colours. Colour tensions are presented by means of physical confrontations as a synthetic rendering of the painting process.

Pawlak's "smashed up" pictures bring to mind installations by Bartosz Kokosiński, who wraps up objects attributed to specific types of paintings in a large canvas (*Pictures Devouring Reality*, from 2011). In this way the artist analyses the problem of the status of the painting, emphasizing its material side and the mechanism of its creation. What both artists have in common is the strategy of deformation, formal experiments, unobvious relating to tradition, as well as a profound reflection on the nature of painting today, in the twenty-first century.

In the *Shadows* series (2017) Pawlak presents the issue of chiaroscuro in an interesting way. There are three matt canvases hanging on the wall, the shadows that remained after the pastel paintings that "seeped down" to the floor. The shadows took the place of the paintings, or perhaps the paintings entered the shadow? The installation is marked by subtle humour, like most of the artist's painted works.

The *Drawings* series (2017), in turn, focuses on the question of drawing and sketching. Rectangular glass sheets painted white were covered by the artist with a tangle of multicoloured lines and back lit with light bulbs. They look like window panes scratched by vandals or abstract drawings by children who have just learned how to use crayons – here the artist again takes advantage of the ambiguous title. She was inspired to pursue this concept of presenting the traditional opposition of drawing and painting by a painted over and scratched window pane that she spotted on Wileńska Street in Lublin.

Małgorzata Pawlak's art is full of paradoxes: humour is combined with reflections, tradition with experiment, and its seemingly abstract character brings to mind numerous associations with objectiveness. The artist constantly reflects upon the status of painting, the painter and the picture, and she skilfully combines insightful observation of the everyday reality around her with a theoretical reflection on art. Her paintings without painting seem to wonder what they really are and at the same time they constantly take us to the reality outside of painting. *Paintings without Painting* is an exhibition of paintings about painting and what it really means to be a painter, both from the perspective of the artist and the contemporary viewer.

Agnieszka Cieślak

Małgorzata Pawlak (b. 1991 at Opole Lubelskie) graduated from the Faculty of Art at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (she did her diploma work under the supervision of Professor Jacek Wojciechowski). This is her first individual exhibition where the artist presents her newest works from the years 2015-2017.