

Mateusz Choróbski

THE EMPTY ROOM OF NIGHT

the empty room of night by Mateusz Choróbski opens a series of *site-specific* exhibitions in the Galeria Labirynt 2 located in the Lublin Old Town. The history of this space, at that time belonging to the Lublin Bureau of Art Exhibitions, dates back to 1988 – since then, over 150 exhibitions have been held there. Choróbski creates projects dedicated to the very place, fitting it into the architecture of the 15th-century tenement house and the infrastructure of its surroundings.

Steel sheet, interior of old thermos flasks, radiators, roof gutter, and glass cups used for cupping therapy are associated with house understood as a building but also as a place of our everyday existence, where its individual elements correspond to the functions of the human body. These materials refer to the concept of heat, breathing, and fluid flow, and, therefore, they add organic character to the objects they create. *Site-specific* works with their modest visual layer operate on the basis of suggestion. They build the mood and the play of meanings between space and installations placed in the context of their physical, historical, geographical, social, and cultural aspects.

The main point of the exhibition and an element that the display is built around is an installation in the window recess. Through the means of this installation, Choróbski makes a gesture of opening the space, adding some air and inviting random passers-by – the gallery is located at the main course of the Old Town. This kind of creation can be associated with the action of the artist called '*The Draught*'. In 2013, two planes flew over Piotrkowska Street in Łódź at the height of two hundred meters – the first plane, stimulating urban tissue, was a jet one, while the second, that left a line, a trail of smoke, in the sky, was an acrobatic plane. It was a symbolic act of ventilating the city, replacing the air remaining between buildings. In Galeria Labirynt 2 Choróbski's gesture is less violent, but it makes the small, stifling space open to the city. The tunnel located in the window recess is made of steel sheet, the most popular material for roof construction in Poland. This refers to the form of roof tiles located in the Old Town in Lublin. The sheet reflects rays of the sun and illuminates the space, therefore corresponding with the night from the title in a non-standard way.

Choróbski does not treat these materials as *ready-mades*, but he subjects them to metamorphoses. As a result, their usefulness is undermined, however, they retain the trace of their former destiny that carries the poetic character – this is also visible in the name of the work itself, which is an excerpt from *The House-wreckers*, a poem by American artist, Charles Reznikoff:

*The house-wreckers have left the door and the staircase,
now leading to the empty room of night.*

'Empty room' of Choróbski is filled with air and light that has two sources – natural one as well as artificial, that is emitted by four oblong objects made of radiators, melted thermos flasks and glass cups illuminated with fluorescent tubes. However, they are not lighting in a narrow meaning, but the echo of artefacts belonging to the living space. The technique of remelting, and thus transformation, has already been used by Choróbski in his earlier projects like *Cream*, *819,19/2* and *Dusk playing tricks on me*. Similarly, the artist uses fluorescent lamps as well as Favier radiators associated with common spaces such as schools, offices, or factories. In the 'empty room of night', natural light mixes with the glow of fluorescent lights. The first one breaks through the surreal hole, the second through the glass coming from the inside of thermos flasks and transparent cups used in medicine. The latter are reminiscent of the healing practice used not so long ago. Its principle is to apply hermetic cups filled with hot air onto the skin. It is meant to cure diseases related to respiratory system such as colds and pneumonia.

At a lower level, in the basement, Choróbski placed the object made from thermos flasks that were cut in half and joined together. Their damaged, rough surface is contrasted with a smooth copper gutter, referring to the roof structure and fluid flow, which takes place both at a building's architecture level and in the human body. Threads related to heat as well as to processes happening in the human body and within its life space are mixed together, creating a metaphorical image based on associations and scraps of memories. *'The empty room of night'* line should not be understood literally. Modesty of artistic means, austere language, and 'the emptiness of night', strangely enough, create a shelter that oozes with warmth of a living organism.

Agnieszka Cieślak

Mateusz Choróbski (1987) – a graduate of the University of the Arts Poznań and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He lives in Warsaw and cooperates with the Wschód Gallery. Choróbski is the author of short film forms, objects, *site-specific* installations, and actions in public space.