

Jaro VARGA

In Someone Else's Dream

solo show

Curated by Michal Novotny

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Courtesy of SODA gallery

Photo Adam Šakovy

In Someone's Else Dream

site specific installation, objects, paintings, drawings

"I cannot break free from the oppression of power, knowledge and sexuality." This sentence - a collage from Michel Foucault's texts, is one of the starting points and at the same time one of the threads that pervade the whole exhibition *V cudzom sne / In Someone Else's Dream* by Jaro Varga. In his trilogy *The History of Sexuality* Foucault convincingly showed how wrong our idea is of us having liberated our natural sexuality from the oppression of social restrictions only recently. Middle Ages knew tangible bodies and immediate pleasures. On the one hand Foucault was enormously legislatively strict with sexual act, on the other hand there was a vast practice of tolerance and in fact general lack of interest of the ruling circles. The bodily act and reproduction were a matter of course, unrestrained and spontaneous.

The very idea of sexuality appeared just in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries when there was an outburst of discourses about sex, its normativity and perversions. Sexuality emerged as either a conformity with or breach of the standard, as a basis of one's identity, something that belongs to us and determines us. Power ceased merely to punish and started to instigate, classify, normatize, gradually pervading more and more areas of human life, which it has quite conquered today. Thus sexuality is not just a specific practice of the body; it's an affair of truth, knowledge, reflection and irremovable identity of an individual. While in the Middle Ages humans were subject to power only in the moment of dying, in the times of the modern state it is solely in the moment of dying that they escape the bondage of power. While the mediaeval power judged just the body and deeds, modern state guards the soul, personality, motives, psychology, its development and history, what is hidden, implicit, unconfessed.

It would be a mistake though to consider power only restrictive as its actions create a field for counter-action at the same time. Thus the prohibiting discourse enabled its opposite to constitute itself. It was power that gave rise to notions like emancipation, legitimacy, naturalness and endeavor, often based on a vocabulary containing categories by which the out-of-norm sexual activities were originally medically disqualified. Thus pleasure often became the power to inquire, supervise, feel, sniff and grope around; yet it also has been pleasure kindled by having escaped the power, the pleasure of deliberate encroachment of what was forbidden. There was never such a thing as a natural state of free sexuality. It started to be claimed only with the onset of restrictive power. As Nietzsche put it, liberty was invented just to enable punishment.

Also the series of artworks by Jaro Varga oscillates between intimacy and depersonalization, subjectivity and universality. These all meet in the motif of a book and library as a structuring materialized knowledge that executes power - a motif Varga keeps developing in the long run. The exhibition poses the question, what is really my own and what merely determines me, while realizing the impossibility of an ultimate answer. It deals with the mutual relationship between power and sexuality creating possibilities for human action. How power and sexuality being embraced or rejected make their imprints on an individual, becoming intertwined and hybridizing one another. Varga's work maps out the genesis of pleasure arising from breaking a ban and shows how the instruments of classification become retroactively fetishized.

A central installation of white-painted volumes of books carries on the book covers 72 letters of a sentence that reads "I am not able to free myself from the oppression of power, knowledge and sexuality". The volumes represent certain sum of knowledge that determines our vision of the world. The white color

brings in certain erasure of contents, but also erasure of differences between individual books, a sort of standardization, which underpins their materiality even more. Knowledge thus becomes a kind of real wall, creating and structuring physical space. The letters against the aseptic whitewash on the book covers are executed in a very gestural fashion, with brushstrokes, by a specific hand of a given person, in whom the knowledge inscribed itself, but who at the same time inscribes his profile into the knowledge carrier, asking for his individuality to be recognized. Similar element of vandalism appears in the drawing on a series of school certificates, where Jaro Varga somewhat obstinately copied actual graffiti from the walls of now derelict elementary school he once attended. Here the school certificate becomes the symbol of education in the sense of German expression *Bildung*, a material creation, forming, emerging of a human as an individual responsible for his action and tied to his deeds. A modern entity with a name and a number subject to power, which on the one hand accentuates his individuality, yet makes his life vitally dependent on itself. Thus the act of vandalism is on the one hand a pleasurable excitement for having escaped the power, but also an empty gesture, which in fact doesn't mean anything. The pupil's certificates, despite being official, are after all never required, they just served, in a ceremonial way, the adoption of a system of responsibility and evaluation. The impossibility is underlined also by the desperate redrawing of revenge, which originally belonged to someone else. Even for him though it was but vanity, kicking the dead, desecration of a building that has no more purpose, breakage from a supervision that does not supervise any longer. The author himself, the artist, was, as his view of his evaluation suggests, an exemplary pupil. As if this action was just a kind of extravagance, a playful insubordination, which in its outcome has no significant meaning, apart from experiencing a titillating fear of temptation and violation.

The topic of someone else's imagination, which one appropriates, experiences, but also succumbs to it, is also represented by a series of photographs from a porn video with the motive of bondage, in which the props of a library even thicken the atmosphere of discipline, a ban and pleasure derived from breaking it. In the sense of the English word "suspension", which means hanging, but at the same time "withholding", interrupting (the final pleasure), where discipline becomes the enhancement of desire. The punishment, which precedes guilt instead of following it, becomes desire's part and drive. The order "you mustn't do it" is here transformed into another order: "you must do it". The book as a symbol from a code, a ban, becomes a fetish, a projection, an object along whose rough surface the moist tongue of the tied up person is sliding.

The series of somehow surrealist Magritte-like pictures work with motives of covers of books owned by the artist, books that influenced him and are part of his social and class status - cultural fetish of a kind. This time however the covers are conceived in abstracted and deconstructed forms, highlighting the implicit presence of ideology. As a book cover foretells the contents of the book, so do the words tell ahead whatsoever can be told, the same as the knowledge we adopted beforehand anticipates our choices. As with the school certificate, again the mechanism is highlighted of labeling, marking, inscribing certain signs into certain materials, be it sign-associative or alive and kicking. Again, symbols of desire and carnality are being highlighted. A book as the symbol of mystery and at the same time its revelation; both the motives and shapes in the pictures and on the walls accentuate, as most of the artworks do, the flatness connected with ideality, immateriality, neutrality of the code, acting at the same time as a screen, separating and articulating the space into what has been disclosed and what remains hidden, accessible and forbidden, defining thus the domain of desire.

Michal Novotný