

Katarzyna Jankowiak **The Green**

The State Art Gallery in Sopot, Poland

10.11.2023 – 07.01.2024

Curator: Marta Smolińska

Katarzyna Jankowiak's oeuvre explores the age-old links between art and nature. The artist's solo exhibition at the State Art Gallery features paintings, works on paper, and video projections whose common denominator is the color green in its various shades: from dark, deep and saturated, through almost venomously intense, all the way to a tinge verging on yellow. Green is a color associated with plants, vegetative processes, and vitality. Palpable in the background is the inspiration drawn from the landscape: cornfields rippling in the wind, meadows, forests, the current of a stream, the interference of waves with a view of a sandy bottom... Jankowiak, and we, through her work, immerse ourselves in the green, *through flowery petals in foam*.¹

Taking nature as their starting point, Jankowiak's paintings abstract from mimetic representations and strive for synthesis, offering the viewer something of its condensed essence. They are almost monochromatic, painted with repetitive gestures, saturated with a rhythm that mesmerizes and draws us in as we follow each brushstroke and realize that, on a plane, they transform into *plant-others*.

Jankowiak's watercolors, on the other hand, are host to an analysis of individual elements of nature, likewise inspected as if on a micro-scale. These are studies of leaves, flowers, stems, perhaps mold, some microbes, possibly seeds, clusters of stalks rolled by the wind... Their forms both intrigue and build tension in relation to the synthetically treated images.

The projections, in turn, show the wind in a tuft of grass, gently cavorting in a field of blossoming clover; rain against the backdrop of a tree crown; ripples of water and plants reflected in the mirror of a pond; a brisk stream; small waves in the sand; a slow-flowing river. These are accompanied by sound—a kind of discreet hum—perhaps that of the falling rain, perhaps the rustling of a meadow, accompanied by the discrete buzz of insects. These sounds invite contemplation and meditative perception; they encourage us to immerse and lose ourselves in them, tuning out of the speeding and technicized reality.

Another important element of the exhibition “The Green / Zieleń” is a carpet of living plants, seeded and grown tenderly and with care by the artist herself. This both is an expression of an individual relationship with these non-human actors who accompany us at every turn, and a

¹ Adam Mickiewicz, *Crimean Sonnets. The Ackerman Steppe*.

protest against their heartless industrial breeding. At the finissage, the audience will receive these plants as gifts to take to and nurture at their own homes. Thus, the greenery from Katarzyna Jankowiak's exhibition at the State Art Gallery will spread beyond its confines.

The entire exhibition is therefore a kind of environment that we could refer to as an *ecoartsystem*. Within its framework, the artistic is intertwined with *plant-others* in a network replete with the interplay of nature and culture. Viewed in this way, Jankowiak's body of work is akin to Japanese aesthetics, focused on the contemplation of nature and each (even the tiniest) element thereof, regarded as an image of the macro world on a micro scale.² Each stroke of green paint on the canvas—along with the various rhythmizations of color splashes, and the effect of undulating planes in Jankowiak's paintings—conjure in them and the painting matter the very green in which we immerse ourselves while wading in nature, wandering in meadows and walking through forests.

Jankowiak contemplates the landscape, penetrating it in depth to transpose it into an art that invites a meditative, peaceful and tranquil perception. Our eyes, bound to sentient bodies, oscillate between concentration on individual details and an overall impression of *living* nature or *life-like* nature. Although we are not dealing here with an illusionistic imitation of nature's external appearances, it does appear before us in all of its abstracted green essence and vitality. It is *natura naturans*, i.e., the processual, living nature, saturated with the sheen of paint and varnish as if with sap that fills leaves and stems, resilient in its beauty, which the magic of art transforms into an *ecoartsystem*.

Within this system, painting, video projections and actual plants are intertwined with one another, and their environment is complemented by the presence of viewers who fuse this microcosm into a whole. Thus, Jankowiak's "The Green / Zieleń" orchestrates a micro-world that—not least through the final act of nurturing individual plants—is meant to elicit our care: the ecological care for nature. Ecofeminist Maria Puig de la Bellacasa postulates the importance of this concern in a world that extends beyond humans only: "Care [...] is explored as a significant notion to appreciate affective and ethico-political dimensions in human-nonhuman relations in naturecultural worlds."³ Drawing on posthumanist thought, the researcher focuses on non-exploitative forms of community. In doing so, she poses the question of how our commitment to care and ecological concern can help us think about ethical "duties" in human-centered cosmologies. Without invoking the theory of ecological

² See *Estetyka japońska. Antologia*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, Kraków 2008; Agnieszka Kozyra, *Estetyka zen*, Warszawa 2010.

³ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Posthumanities, Band 41), Minnesota 2017, s. 3.

care directly, Jankowiak creates one such non-exploitative form of community at the State Art Gallery exhibition hall, in which *plant-others* interrogate us and call upon our empathy. We simply immerse ourselves in the green, and this experience sensitizes us and stimulates reflection on the need for ecological care towards the plants, our eternal partners on Earth.