

Paweł Książek *Figures*

Exhibition: October 31, 2014 – January 31, 2015

Opening: Friday, November 14, 2014, 6 to 9 pm

ŻAK | BRANICKA gallery is proud to present the third solo exhibition by Paweł Książek, titled *Figures*.

The word “figure” derives from the Latin language; it can be abbreviated as “fig.” or symbolised by the Greek letter “φ”, which refers to the figure, it can be a symbol of luminous flux as well as golden ratio. Książek uses this ambiguity as the starting point for his new series of paintings entitled *Figures*.

Paweł Książek is a painter – an analyst. His paintings cannot be traced back to an emotional source, but rather are a result of a process of research. The artist’s strategy relies on the analysis of visual sources as in his previous series of paintings (for example, *NN vs. Artists*). In *Figures* the available raw materials (including photographs depicting different phenomena or people coming from visual arts, pop culture, movies or the internet) are collected by the artist. Książek then, classifies and processes them through the medium of painting. In this way, Książek directly refers to the methodology developed by Aby Warburg, based on the building of iconographic atlases and their comparative analysis.

Figures is a series of portraits of women. Each one of the paintings includes the abbreviation “fig.” in the title and an ordinal number. The artist states: “This series is my next project relating to the creation of an alternative history of obsessive collecting. I am building an architecture of emotion, based on several canons of aesthetic and visual material sources. I do not portray people, but rather create a collection of emotional states”. Once again, Książek is reaching out to the traditions of early cinema, searching for a heroine with a distinctive type of beauty: thin lips, sparse eyebrows and rounded cheeks. Silvia Sidney, one of Fritz Lang’s favourite actresses, possessed these very features. On black and white films, these actresses resemble porcelain dolls or wax sculptures, almost unreal. When changing the medium to painting, these faces suddenly seem to gain life. The subject transforms into an entity. It is this precise moment which is of particular interest to Książek. For the viewer’s perception, this practice is as astonishing as the viewing of coloured films from the Second World War, when history suddenly became more authentic. It is unexpected that in Książek’s work it is painting – a medium referring to fantasy that can authenticate film.

The series *Figures* uses portraits of actresses, as well as contemporary photographs from the artist’s personal archive. The identity of the women depicted in the portraits, however, is not important here. The figures represent a certain character or emotional state as opposed to specific individuals; they are an example of a certain type. When arranged together, these images – like the anthropological atlases – become atlases of emotions resembling insect collections enclosed in glass cases. Książek takes this idea as another challenge for the painter; he tries to capture those moments, which are difficult to classify or interpret. The difficulty lies in the catching of a certain moment in time, which cannot be combined with any specific meaning. This applies to the relationship between the process of painting and time. In contrast, cinema and photography are based on real-time events. The camera can easily capture a fraction of a second or a state “in-between”; painting, on the other hand, prefers what has already been completed, what has already been defined. The artist diagnoses this shortfall of painting in relation to time, and makes use of capabilities taken from cinema; as is the case in which he presents his painted portraits, relating them to the rhythm of film frames. As a result, Książek introduces a real-time factor to painting.

Sometimes it is the other way around; when, thanks to the possibilities of painting, Książek expands the boundaries of cinema. Whilst photographs can always be unmistakably assigned to an age in which they were taken, painting is timeless. The artist explains: "Painting allows one to unify all the images and create a single homogenous collection". For this reason, in the series *Figures* the artist refrains from using elements, which identify a certain epoch by maintaining a real-time action (or states of emotion). The effect is that the painted women don't belong to a particular era.

The references to cinema are not the only ones to be found in the series *Figures*. The letter "φ" is a symbol of luminous flux – a physical quantity, which measures the total power of visible light emitted from a given source, causing a certain visual impression. The symbol "φ" appears also, therefore, in Książek's light sculptures and is a manifestation of that, which it symbolises. With regards to the tradition of painting, Książek relates it to the metaphorical figure (sic!) of the inner light, which emanates from his paintings. In this way, we are once again faced with the old problem of painting, but reinterpreted in a new way by the artist.

Paweł Książek (born in Andrychów in 1973) uses painting as his main medium, though he can be easily called an interdisciplinary artist – he is a painter that has developed his own highly recognizable style. Between 1992-97 he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow and had the DAAD-Scholarship at the University of Design in Offenbach. His work can be found in many international collections, such as MOCAM in Cracow, SØR Collection Rusche or Art Stations Foundation.