

Gábor Pataki
On the Works of Ádám Gáll

What has the artist to do when he is always to confront the power of time, the force whereby it constantly destroys and creates? What can he level against rock turned into pebbles and dust, shells clustering into loess, and plants charred? And what against the layering of man-made building upon building, the hecatombs of objects and tools fabricated, destroyed and turned into rubble? And how is he to relate to the millions of artworks made over millennia, obliterated, stored in museums, duty-free warehouses, and waste dumps?

An artist with a huge-grown hubris would not care less, and build up his own oeuvre. Ádám Gáll however continually faces these dilemmas. He is in no easy situation; after all he is a creative artists and maker, and he cannot but create and make. But, like Walter Benjamin, he also pictures the Angel of History in the drawing by Klee trying to put fragments together but to no avail, stormy winds blowing them on to the future. This kind of knowledge wants a modesty, an attitude of understatement, and a major restraint of creative self-consciousness, the Ego. The keywords of his works are: hiding, forgetting, evacuating, and void. If so wished, his works approach the point 0 of painting. It is not the personal impulses, emotions, sorrows, and joys of Ádám Gáll that are important here; to put it bluntly, it is not Ádám Gáll that is important. His basic approach is that of the observer, the unseen chronicler inscribing signs on a tablet with a stylus.

This is the very point, this retreating and hiding attitude, that distinguishes his works from non-figural matter painting, which would formally lend itself to comparison. Following in the footsteps of Burri, Tapiès, and Clavé, many otherwise masterful and suggestive works have had the intention of rendering material palpable, demonstrating its nature of provoking touch, the tactile sense, scratching up layers of the past decoratively lying one upon the other, and aestheticizing history. The other tendency arising from the output of another master, Fautrier, was hallmarked by existential self-revelation and the symbolizing of historical traumas.

But Ádám Gáll wanted something other. Naturally, he would not forgo the materialness of his works, the presentness of his plastered, knife-applied, literally worked surfaces, the raggedness of their terrain, and the cracks resulting from layering and drying. And so it is, several of his works have adventure-enticing surfaces, associative wrinkles, and seductive creases. Yet all this is not merely an adventure to study the secrets of matter, a being absorbed by the excitements of momentary opportunity. Our eyes are not to play about: spots will reveal no heads of horses or battle scenes; they allow no harking back to the past. Gáll peels of all romantic second-themes, emotional roulades.

What is left is the reality of the picture entity and its objective nature. What is left is the finding. The surface worn by corrosion, the shape rubbed amorphous

by storm, and the relic cast ashore by the waves of history. Evidence that has nothing certain about it.

A paradoxical situation comes about: the work completed turns into the lack of our knowledge about the work. Amid the mass of historical ruin, the clamour of reflecting on all this—“the ever thinning field of force of cultural metaphor”, to use *Ádám Gáll’s* turn of phrase—, it is this figurative “non-knowledge”, lack, that might be an appropriate standpoint. It is well to remember that “cultural metaphor” was one of the often repeated slogans of the post-modern turn. It meant—by all including ourselves—the free use and mixture of cultural *topoi* and artistic values, placing them in optional contexts, and transcending normativity. Naturally, this would boil down to the evacuation of meaning, to a kind of “white noise”, and a lack—coming full circle to the dilemma mentioned in the beginning remarks.

And to the possible response to all this: demonstrating the materialness of the artwork and the withdrawal and concealment of the artistic self as far as possible. The recognition (admission) of the fact that it is not possible or at least proper to give or formulate final answers. *Ádám Gáll* is obviously aware of this, as he accepts uncertainty, marking time, and fumbling about an issue. “Doing as though as-thoughts ever existed”, “what is in us (or no)”, he writes, but this is no inability to make decisions or a flight from solution. Rather, it is an insight into, a recognition of, our finitude.

It is precisely this recognition that makes for the integrity of *Ádám Gáll’s* works. This is how the glimmers from an unknown source, bruises, sores, and dissections in the pictures yield a subdued and truly hidden transcendence, and can thus give, in their particular monolithic and brooding way, answers to not only the doubts arising from the honesty of their creator but also the questions of the viewers.