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Rudolf Sikora: Konec světa? Ekologický komiks

Galerie výtvarného umění v Ostravě
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Rudolf Sikora
Oceány, z cyklu Ekoškoláci / Oceans, from the cycle Eco(co)mix 2016–2017
akryl, tuš, tisk / acrylic, ink, print, 70 × 50 cm
majetek autora / property of the artist

Rudolf Sikora's latest exhibition — The End of the World? (An eco-comic) — is conceived as an urgent appeal to everybody who cares about the future of our civilization and our planet — which the world's leading scientific figures now consider to be under acute threat of ecological collapse, and indeed very close to self-destruction. Sikora has been concerned with environmental issues since the beginning of his career in the late 1960s and early 70s. By that time, he was already one of the leading names in Czechoslovakia's art scene, and it was only the intervention of political events (the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, which crushed the country's burgeoning liberalization known as the Prague Spring) that prevented him from pursuing his career on a broader international stage. Instead he became part of Czechoslovakia's unofficial art scene; unwilling to bow to the regime's demands for cultural and political conformity, he was banned from exhibiting, travelling and publishing. Despite the repressive regime, Sikora nevertheless retained his internal artistic freedom, and he focused his efforts on producing work that expressed its message with the greatest possible authenticity. He played a fundamental role in creating a new visual syntax reflecting various stages in the "de-materialization" of an artwork. He often expressed himself in very compact forms, yet without compromising the forthright and comprehensible nature of his work.

At Christmas 1970, Sikora created the land-art event Out of Town, scattering red pigment to create several large arrows pointing outwards from a typical socialist-era town (including drab concrete housing estates) into the virgin nature surrounding it. By 1972, a work from this cycle (designated with the abbreviation NQL, the symbolic coordinates of any city on Earth) was published on the cover of Klaus Groh's book Aktuelle Kunst aus Osteuropa, which mapped trends on the contemporary art scene was emerging behind the Iron Curtain. Having studied materials of the Club of Rome (1968) and its report The Limits to Growth (which entered Czechoslovakia in samizdat form), Sikora became aware of the urgency of the ecological threats that had been articulated by some of the world's leading scientists. He created a powerful artistic memento entitled The Earth Must Not Become a Dead Planet (1971–1972 — this collage forms part of the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago). He applied a similar principle in the series Cuts through Civilization (1972), combining photo collage with typomontage and exploiting the symbolic meanings of punctuation (question marks and exclamation marks).

Rudolf Sikora
Z cyklu Vyhrňánk / From Exclamation Mark, 1974
kombinovaná technika / mixed technique, 70 × 50 cm
majetek autora / property of the artist

Sikora's art has always been characterized by grand gestures on a monumental scale: he planned to erect his five-metre-high Exclamation Mark (1974) as a warning to civilization. His intended venue for this work was the Paris Youth Biennale in 1975, but the Czechoslovak authorities prevented him from leaving the country. The work was to be interactive, its surface constantly transformed with the addition of new inscriptions, articles and cuttings reflecting the ecological, social and political problems faced by humanity. He eventually implemented the project in a different way, using photo media techniques (or prints if he was unable to work with large formats). In the cycle Habitat I–III (1975) Sikora presented a sketch of a cosmic home shared by all beings dwelling on the planet, composed of the names of all the continents.

Sikora's gradual shift from ecological concerns to cosmology brought a new metaphorical imagery into his work. Perhaps the most characteristic and emblematic element in his oeuvre (occurring in various forms and mutations) are the enigmatic symbols * ✝ † (signifying birth, life and death). These symbols were depicted across entire landscapes, on rocks (meteors) floating through space, and on highways leading across the Earth's surface to some unknown destination. The concentrated accumulations of these symbols, creating vortices of energy, also gave rise to Sikora's black and white holes, which achieved cult status. The prints made by the symbols painted on the artist's hands lent a human, personal dimension to his cosmological meditations on the anthropic universe (Pyramide IV – Circulation of Life, 1976; Infinite Circulation of Life , 1976/1979; Destiny Reversed, 1980; Touching the Grave III, 1981/1990). Later, through the image of his alter ego (Earthling-Observer), he not only commented on the social and political problems that troubled him personally, but also expressed a powerful ecological message (Outory/ Silence... 1995/2016).

Rudolf Sikora
Přežije, z cyklu Ekoškoláci mix / Survive, from the cycle Eco(co)mix, 2016–2017
akryl, tuš, tisk / acrylic, ink, print, 70 × 50 cm
majetek autora / property of the artist

Sikora's warnings about the future (with a particular focus on ecological problems) have been expressed periodically throughout his career, becoming one of the leitmotifs of his oeuvre. He is currently working with the format known as eco-comics, which he draws with passionate intensity, frequently applying subconscious techniques and then using a computer to "mix" the results and create the finished work. Sikora's eco-comics show a different, less familiar side of his oeuvre. Here an intellectual artist — known for expressing himself in the language of science, using symbols and with an aesthetic sensibility that tends towards asceticism – embraces the role of chance, spontaneity and intuition. Eco-comics — like all comics — have their own characteristic repertoire of signs, and their visual style includes loose references to the avant-garde (such as the black-white-red "declarative typography"); here we can find Sikora's omnipresent crosses, stars, arrows, grids, pyramids, and obsessive signatures. All these features combine to create an extraordinarily vivid, pulsating autobiographical mesh of images, a form of conceptual graffiti presented in instalments. In his earlier work too, Sikora often incorporates his own comments and texts, offering a commentary on the worrying state of our contemporary civilization; his warnings are typically accompanied by radical demands targeted at the powerful of this world (From the cycle Eco(co)mix, 2015–2018).

Although Sikora's artistic gestures are always charged with untameable, never-restrained energy, the people (earth-dwellers) in his works are constantly doubting, never ceasing to think about the meaning (or the end?) of our journey... Sikora's work is a provocative challenge urging people to think and to act, aimed at everybody who is capable of doing so. Reflecting the artist's engagement with his audience, the exhibition is a complex and multifaceted ideological and visual gesture. In Sikora's words: "Our time has become incredibly short, and today we perceive the ecological situation as a huge planet-wide memento — an exclamation mark that is hovering over our civilization." Rudolf Sikora is determined to leave nobody indifferent.

Katarína Bajcurová

Rudolf Sikora
Souhvězdí listu / Laminá, 1985
fotografie, tempera, papír / photograph, tempera, paper, 67,5 × 36,9 cm
majetek autora / property of the artist

RUDOLF SIKORA

16 10 2019
—12 01 2020

KONEC SVĚTA?

EKOLOGICKÝ KOMIKS

THE END OF THE WORLD? AN ECO-COMIC

DŮM UMĚNÍ
HOUSE OF ART

#rudolfsikora

JUREČKOVA 9
OSTRAVA

Rudolf Sikora
Vykřičník / Exclamation Mark, 1974
kombinovaná technika / mixed technique, 69 × 49,5 cm
majetek autora / property of the artist

Komentovaná prohlídka s Rudolfem Sikorou a Katarínou Bajcurovou se uskuteční 28. 11. 2019 v 16.30 h
A guided tour with Rudolf Sikora and Katarína Bajcurová will take place on 28 November 2019 at 4.30 p.m.

Beseda s Rudolfem Sikorou a hosty na téma ekologie se uskuteční 26. 11. v 17 h
A discussion on ecology with Rudolf Sikora and guests will be held on 26 November at 5 p. m.

Záštitu nad výstavou převzal Lukáš Curyło, první náměstek hejtmana Moravskoslezského kraje
The patron of the exhibition is Lukáš Curyło, First Deputy Governor of the Moravian-Silesian Region.

Rudolf Sikora svou nejnovější výstavu nazvanou Konec světa? (Ekologický komiks) koncipoval jako naléhavou výzvu všem, komu záleží na budoucnosti naší civilizace a planety, která se podle nejvýznamnějších vědeckých osobností světa dnes nachází v akutním stavu ekologického ohrožení a není daleko od sebezničení. Ekologickou problemátkou se soustavně zaobírá od přelomu 60. a 70. let 20. století. Už tehdy patřil k významným postavám česko-slovenské výtvarné scény a jen nepřízniví politické události a situace, která nastala po vstupu vojsk Varšavské smlouvy do Československa v srpnu 1968, mu zabránily ve větším mezinárodním rozletu. Ocitl se mezi umělci tzv. neoficiální scény, kterým, protože se nepodvolili kulturně-politickým požadavkům režimu, bylo zakázáno vystavovat, cestovat a publikovat. I přesto si i v tomto nesvobodném období dokázal zachovat pocit vnitřní svobody a soustředěně se věnoval tvorbě, aby podal co nejautentičtější svědectví. Zásadním způsobem se zasloužil o formování nové vizuální syntaxe, která odpovídala různým stupňům „dematerializace" uměleckého díla. Svá poselství často formuloval do úsporných, ale úderných a srozumitelných pojmů.

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