



MARTIN KAČMAREK

Stalks for their Importance

A few months ago, when at the gallery Tuesday to Friday I first saw the paintings of Martin Kačmarek (Spisská Nová Ves, Slovakia, 1996) I thought it must be about a particular guy with a strange view of the world –or who saw a strange world– and who painted in a very peculiar and exotic way. They were paintings that fit perfectly into the gallery's program after a fun and carefree collective such as Superfácil (January–March 2021). In fact, Kačmarek's are also casual paintings in their own way, mannerist and somewhat punk, which can be related to what the New Yorker Marcia Tucker accurately labeled as “Bad Painting” at the end of the seventies. The “Bad Painting” –Tucker explains in his memoirs, and this could be equally valid nowadays– was “a new pictorial trend that he had been seeing in studios across the country: throwing out the window the notions of beauty and good taste classics [...] These works were characterized by figuration, personal narrative and by avoiding the great artistic conventions.” Such was the fascination that under the same title he organized in 1978 one of the first exhibitions of the New Museum (which he founded in 1977 and directed until 1999) which would be key to presenting to the public a “good” painting but one that showed deformed figures, out of tradition –except perhaps the Art Brut defended by Dubuffet–, with a free mix of historicism and non-artistic elements with irreverent, bizarre, fantastic, street content. Paraphrasing the press release of that exhibition: these paintings that serve as a presentation of Martin Kačmarek in our country move away from the modes of classical drawing –although maybe not so much: I think of its Michelangelo-like power– to present a somewhat ironic, perhaps sarcastic, often formally naive, but intensely personal vision of the world.

In Kačmarek's paintings, a series of “types and landscapes” are represented that, far from being popular characters, refer us to a globalized imaginary shared by mainstream film, television and the rest of the media. communication, from the western to the rural or the urban suburb (in essence, folkloric). They are powerful figures in their features and limbs, drawn with a curious fusion of plastic techniques in which the qualities of the spraying and the hard cutting of the silhouettes stand out, an apparently dirty sensationalism and a certain subtlety in the representation of the skin, in the meat shaping. They are, he says, characters stalked, persecuted, watched or even harassed because of their importance; although they are faces and invented figures: any resemblance to reality is mere coincidence. Or not.

Perhaps the most curious of these works that Kačmarek exhibits are those four canvases with references to the four seasons that suppose a continuity with respect to the temporary representation of nature, its variations, and that connect especially with the well-known haystacks painted by Claude Monet between 1888 and 1891 in the whereabouts of Giverny. It's simplicity and effectiveness lies in the almost abstract nature of some enigmatic circles like straw bales or rollers, something really formless, which are imposed on a diffuse memory of the landscape in the background, like a floating palimpsest in the same strange way that some giant stones gravitate to the surreal settings of René Magritte.

As Amália Rodrigues sang the fado A strange way of life, Kačmarek's is a strange way of painting and a strange view of the world that can be disconcerting coming from central Europe or because of its artistic particularity, but which connects with a whole tradition that goes from mannerism to Art Brut and from punk to Bad Painting with which the practice of painting is shaken, also in these times.

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