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Summary of the doctoral thesis

Phantasms and Awakenings

Painterly representation of the experience of mourning and loss based on selected psychoanalytical concepts.

The doctoral thesis starts with the description of my personal experiences connected with mourning and loss. I then proceed with the discussion of the presented problem in the following five chapters:

1. *Trauma – wound,*
2. *The task of mourning and the state of melancholy,*
3. *Within the ring of illusion: fantasy, imagination, symbolisation,*
4. *In the world of lost objects. Hanna Segal's concept,*
5. *Phantasms and awakenings.*

In the first four chapters, I contained all the issues, concepts and theorists' opinions I found meaningful and useful on my path towards the cognition and formulation of what I defined in the subtitle as the "painterly representation of the experience of mourning and loss." Reading scientific texts, opening myself to new formal solutions and experimenting during the creative process, as well as analysing my own feelings, led me to the last – descriptive – chapter, a series of painterly works executed as part of my doctoral degree work, entitled: "Phantasms and Awakenings".

A traumatic experience which brutally invaded my reality changed it so dramatically that, in order to reflect the change, I had to re-create its image, making it dependent on my own imagination and depriving it of real existence. Remaining between two time dimensions, that is, viewing past events from the present perspective, I was in search of evidence for the existence of a "fatal force" – the one which could somehow contribute to the tragedy through the accumulation of bad emotions and conflicts. Placing new figures of women in the space of a painting, with their complicated, sometimes very tense and difficult relationships, generated a kind of a negative force field, revealing a world marked by traces of personal trauma.

A phantasm is a form of transforming reality and an awakening is a traumatic content here. I concealed my oneiric visions, painterly representations and symbols under the guise of

phantasms. In the awakenings, I refer to memories, the past gone, personal life events and the difficult relationships between the persons I used to know. Waking up, I found inside me a source of an internal conflict, but in order to express it, I needed a phantasm. Just as there is consciousness and unconsciousness, the visible and the invisible, reality and unreality, there are also phantasms and awakenings, which permeate each other. An awakening and a phantasm are a combination of two areas. The first of them is a psychological layer, containing my experiences and feelings such as: mourning, death, loss, melancholy, loneliness, absence and emptiness. Another area is the aesthetic layer, in which I used my imagination and the process of symbolisation so that, applying various artistic means, I could transform the painful reality into a painterly image.

Emotion shaping the image is the essence of phantasm. What initially was a feeling, is turned by creative imagination into a visual form, becoming a real object. The object is a compensation for the loss experienced in the real world.

"Phantasms and Awakenings" is a series of painterly works executed as part of my doctoral thesis in oil on canvas. All the works are of the same format: 100x150 cm. The proportions of my paintings resemble a film frame. I wanted to introduce the viewer into a painterly narration whose plot does not form a coherent story. Following the Sigmund Freud's observation that a phantasm is a kind of an imaginary scenario and inspired by Maria Janion's words that there is an internal film ceaselessly being played inside each of us, I created a series of representations composed of fragments of personal life events arranged without any chronological order. Each image is a part of personal past which I subjected to numerous transformations on the surface of the canvas. I distorted the reality presented in the paintings with chosen painterly means, thus reinterpreting it and giving it a personal, private and intimate character. The deconstruction, comprising also a reconstruction of memories, departs from the photographic original. The form of painterly narration was a new manner of representation for me. It consisted in the duplication of some fragments of the painting or building the composition of cut elements. It is in these formal interventions, among others, that I found a way of showing the "traumatic point", about which Hal Foster wrote. "Dismembering" memories so that they cannot be arranged in one whole is one of the defence mechanisms of the psyche against trauma. I deliberately chose the aesthetics of a dreamlike oneiric vision kept in a cold colour tone. In my compositions, expressive, figurative scenes are combined with fluidly applied patches of colour. Opening to experimentation in the creative process made me cross a certain boundary consisting in pouring colour spots onto the canvas surface, which, uncontrolled by me, intruded the image. I called it a "dark suspension" in order to define the dark force hidden in the painterly

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phantasm. Its shape evidently interferes with the space of the painting. What differentiates these works from my previous output is the representation of a dead person. She is located in a vague space, suspended in non-existence, as she has lost her real figure, belonging now to the realm of unreality. The person has had no physicality since the first attempt at the depiction. The image of the deceased remains inside me, stays in my mind, has become a part of my self. Paraphrasing Jacques Derrida's reflections, since the moment of her death I have been carrying Her (the "Other") in myself and I am trying to find the right form to express Her. In my memory, She exists surrounded by women close to her. During her life, she had sisterly and friendly relationships in which conflicts full of tension emerged, which I call pieces never to be assembled. I represented these women in my paintings, depriving them of portrait-like depiction. Faceless, they are mysterious and reduced to symbolic signs. Depending on the emotions they evoke in me, these "frozen" figures are divided into the "good objects and "bad objects". Together, we form a complex bond established by the figure of the deceased. Mysteries hidden under the layer of oil paint are like a silent scream, a sound impossible to make while the dream lasts. The creative process did not bring me release – it was a familiarisation, an attempt at understanding and a relief in longing. The artistic process, whose therapeutic properties I recognise, is a way to reveal the problem tormenting me. It is present in the painting, filling each of its fragments. The space of a painting is a passageway to the world of internal traumas. Art allows for working with them, transforming them and transferring their traces into another type of being. It is also a path of seeking and comprehending oneself. Just as Carl Gustav Jung wrote, inside every one of us there is someone we do not know. He speaks to us in our dreams and explains that his view of us is entirely different from the way we see ourselves.¹

¹ Based on the Polish translation: Z. W. Dudek, *Wprowadzenie*, [in:] Tenże, *Jungowska psychologia marzeń sennych*, Warszawa, 2010, p. 15.