

Lászó Földényi F.:

The Luster of Darkness
Gábor Záborszky's exhibition

While I was walking through these halls two days ago, with the exhibition still under construction, some of the works not yet in place, I was thinking: what is the genre of the pieces already installed in there? Would they be paintings? Although Záborszky graduated as a painter, he made relatively few paintings in the traditional sense, and none in recent years as far as I know. When we enter after this opening, you will see that most pieces are of another genre. Or perhaps they are sculptures? No doubt, he has made works that can be installed spatially. I still wouldn't call him a sculptor, as his works do require a frontal point of view, and most of them can be hung on a wall - although he often makes do with propping them against the wall. So are they mere objects then? I'm not inclined to use this word, it's too down-to-earth, especially as since the seventies - since Záborszky has been in the scene - several artists have incorporated objects into works of art, although with a different purpose than Záborszky. Objects are often given special roles precisely because of their mundane meaning. In Záborszky's art, however, what I would call an object often gives the impression of having been taken from a cult ritual - while it would be difficult to track down an actual cult, let alone reconstruct a ceremony these objects might have been used in. When lined up in a row, his large, soft reels - which are, of course, soft only to the eye, to the touch they are quite hard - are like neatly folded requisites of a catholic mass. While, of course, there is no mass here. Transcendence, radiation, golden aura all the more so. Some of these pieces remind me of Byzantium.

So it is hard to decide what exactly these works are. Most of all I would say: handicrafts - especially as in most of them it is almost tangible how Záborszky was shaping, rolling, smoothing them with his own hands, how he was kneading the damp paper pulp with two hands like raw dough, how he was delightedly squishing and pressing, flapping and folding the various materials, earth, paper and metal, sand and plextol. When you look at the piece *Silver Bridge* inside, you will see that he applied so much material onto the substrate that the two-dimensional picture became a three-dimensional piece of plastic art. Only one other Hungarian contemporary painter could give himself so ecstatically to the material: Ákos Birkás in

his large oval paintings. Some of Záborszky's works also give me the feeling that their maker would have immersed into the material with his whole body if he could. These are remarkably aesthetic, refined pieces of art, I say at first sight, but when I look closer, I notice that while molding them, he was pressing and folding them like they do in primitive cultures - especially when mud walls or earth huts need to be raised. Many pieces have an airily Japanese atmosphere while showing influences of native Indian or African tribal cultures. Aesthetic yet barbaric. At once modern and archaic - as can be observed in his role models, Tàpies or Beuys; he even made a piece in honor of the latter. What's more, I consider some of his works particularly humorous - for instance the piece entitled *Duet* featured on the flyer of this show. The piece displays a little hen performing a hilariously clumsy dance with an old whale. *Bird* or *Indian Fence* are somewhat reminiscent of the animal duet, and yet these take my thoughts in other directions. Their atmosphere is heavy, almost depressing, but without the intention of stirring up emotions. They affect without being affected.

Back to their genre: I am puzzled, and I don't want to solve this problem, so I will take a different approach. Instead of their genre, let me speak about their color. More precisely: about the color of the exhibition. What is the color of this exhibition? I think this is a valid, albeit unusual question. If I had to respond with one word, I would immediately say: to me, in this case, black is the dominant color. Even if actual black is scarce, and other colors prevail. For there is white and gold, silver and black, blue and grey here, in diverse blends and tones. And there are the reels, dominated by brownish sand colors, and the pieces I call gates, opening onto silvery horizons. Not to mention the gold foil appearing here and there, emanating such luster that would be difficult to create with paint and brush. And then there is the grand series of ten pieces, *Dream on Etna*, an array of colors with an air of floating and drifting - like when smoke dissolves unnoticeably, lit by the rays of the sun above and the crater's cauldron burning below. This piece is all but black. Even so, contemplating the works of recent years, I consider black a very strong, dominant color. And the longer I look at the result of the last two or three years, the stronger my impression that black has always haunted Záborszky's works. Most of the time invisibly. For this black is not just a color, but - borrowing a term from music - it is like general bass: it is the fundamental note even when it can't be heard. In retrospect, from the perspective of some great pieces of the past years, I am inclined to see the ghost of the color black even in his snow-white reels

and gold and white series, whereas those were meant to invoke light. Of course, black had cropped up much before; for instance in the earliest piece at this exhibition, *Icarus* from 1976: black literally explodes from the red background. Or - not on display here - his *Babits* and *Radnóti* series from the early eighties, the most dramatic group of works in Záborszky's oeuvre so far, exposing what he had always hidden or placed into the background. Such retrospective exhibitions displaying the work of forty years are a perfect opportunity to make otherwise barely noticeable correlations and underlying links visible. For instance the darkness that is unnoticeable in the white or beige reels and pillows when exhibited in themselves. For this is not a darkness or blackness visible to the physical eye, but such a dramatic perception of existence that can be gleaned in the colorful and white pieces when placed next to the ones radiating black.

Back then, Záborszky said in an interview about the *Babits* and *Radnóti* series: "this series of collages, the creative process made me sick. For I'm afraid as well. From other things, obviously, but it is a shared fear." Accurate wording. He wasn't talking about individual fear, he spoke about shared fear. Obviously, he was not under the threat of the same fate as *Babits* or *Radnóti* - and their fates are not even comparable. If the fear is still shared, then it is not a fear in the common sense, but a human world view directed at human fate in general, as well as at the cosmos surrounding us all, in other words, what everything belongs to, including us. Fear, then, refers to existence itself, and it is agonizing because there is no comforting answer. Only eternal questioning and seeking. To me this is one of the most characteristic traits of Záborszky's art: questioning, moving forward or inward layer by layer. "Inward leads the mysterious path," wrote Novalis. Záborszky too, while experimenting with materials and testing how they match, moves inward like someone whose every gesture is controlled by an invisible center. Overlaying layers and thereby flashing a peculiar depth before the spectator's eyes. This was the case with his very early complexly layered screen prints as well. Like someone who incessantly wants to peep into somewhere, behind something, continuously pulling a curtain aside, hoping he would find what everyone is looking for, the comforting answer. Perhaps this answer is rolled up inside the reels, so far invisible, waiting to be rolled open. Schiller has a poem, *The Veiled Image at Sais*, about a young gentleman who is forbidden to lift the veil behind which Truth is hidden. However, the youth disobeys and sneaking back at night, lifts the veil. "And ask ye

what / Unto the gaze was there within revealed? / I know not... / His lips disclosed not. Ever from his heart / Was fled the sweet serenity of life, / And the deep anguish dug the early grave."

This story comes to mind especially in relation to Záborszky's newest works. In his piece *The Black Soul of the Material*, the black sphere seems to be fastened to the black base by silver pins, but the sphere, which literally has a body, wants to break free from the hold of the pins. Its body is strained, cracking up in the middle, revealing further black layers. What is this sphere? Would this be the veil behind which lurks the hoped-for truth, in this case, tar-black, crusty blackness? Or is this sphere itself the mystery exposed behind the lifted veil? However we look at it, the entire image is veiled in black, which is compensated by the luster of silver. This piece is the interplay of the veil and the condition of being unveiled. The underlying layer - the cracked black crust - is the most spectacular; what is in front, on the surface, gives the impression of a background.

What is this blackness? I would refrain from associating it with emotions. I wouldn't call it the color of mourning, depression or sorrow. Black has dignity and gravity in Záborszky's works. The titles are also pivotal: *Reference Point* or *Opening Geometry*; as if referring to the act of creation. "External darkness is a giant dragon snake," says an early gnostic text from around two thousand years ago, "and this darkness is outside the entire world (cosmos), surrounding it." Black - darkness - in Záborszky's work is something that envelopes everything - it is the beginning and the end, temporarily ruptured by light.

Spectacles have their own alchemy. This alchemy assists submergence into the soul through the labyrinth of materials. And what is down there in the depth? The soul of the soul, referred to as spirit. Sometimes it is golden, sometimes dark; sometimes it surrounds light as darkness, sometimes it ruptures darkness. In any case, it is certain that not only the Earth has a black soul. Just like it is certain that the soul is not black in the common sense. Its blackness glows; its darkness shines. Záborszky's works are pervaded by this dark luster; cracked surfaces, archaic forms, reels, sometimes soft, sometimes crusty and hard materials, glittering gold and sparkling silver, indecipherable calligraphic symbols - all the protrusions of that massive darkness that visibly or invisibly surrounds this rich imagery. Let us then enjoy the luster of darkness.