

AUTOREFERAT
ENGLISH VERSION

...

There is no need for me to understand my paintings.
There is no need for me to know more than I already know.
If I knew, I wouldn't seek to distance myself from what I do.
And rely on creativity.
Or worse – I would languish intentionally
and make works of art devoid of feeling.
Devoid of meaning.
There is no need for me to analyze my artistic choices.
Although they do stem from careful deliberation and planning...

You might accuse me of pretence.
Such an accomplished artist is surely capable of discerning his own intention,
goal and motivation.
He's no layman making spontaneous gestures in an unfamiliar space!

You're right.
A word is, however, deeply flawed as opposed to thought and image.
A word distorts meaning in lieu of constructing and elucidating the matter.
Besides, there is a difference between knowing and understanding...

Summary of artistic achievements.
Formalities obliging an artist to assess their entire practice.
The text born out of pure necessity.
Otherwise, it would have existed in another form or wouldn't have existed at all.

I can't stress this enough: there is no need for me to analyze my artistic choices.
My art occupies the space somewhere between intelligibility and
unintelligibility,
reality and utopia, perfection and imperfection.
Intuition is the key.

I explore the whole gamut of my emotions while trying to steer clear from bias
and ignorance.
I plunge into their weaves.
Is it catharsis?
Possibly

...

MULTIDIMENSIONAL SPACE

My extensive art practice is dictated by continuous exploration. Nothing is ever finished, ready and sealed, the form in particular. The main area of my interest has remained virtually unchanged for years. I take the relation between the artist, work of art and viewer under scrutiny and thus reinforce its implications.

What about me? What about my soul?
Is it agitated and volatile?
or rather composed and stolid?
Is it unfulfilled?

I enjoy performing experiments. I enjoy juxtaposing various forms of expression against each other and bear witness to what might and will ensue in the future. Nowadays, I find myself in an elusive sort of place that I will soon leave anyway, since my current predicament brings me no satisfaction. Nowadays, I assemble large glass cabinets. They will propel me towards a new medium. I can tell.

Nowadays, I juggle several notions at once that denote my art practice, its foundations, if you wish.

Here they are:

Viewer

I see myself and I see others. Those others determine my creative endeavors, mirror every single image I have ever produced. No doubt about it. I would've certainly reached an impasse if I preferred oblivion, if I looked away from the reflection of myself in them. It's not a matter of choice to see yourself through the eyes of other people. It's a necessity. What a fascinating and valuable experience it is to be able to absorb the equivocal and vibrant potential the viewers' interpretation has to offer. I've contemplated the role of the viewer in the creative process for a while now and even devoted a considerable section of my PhD dissertation to this subject back in 2009. Attention! The co-dependence I've mentioned doesn't lower the bar. It simply can't.

Artist

Never have I allowed myself to forget the role I play. I am the only point of departure, I am the driving force behind every subsequent form of expression. A gross oversimplification, I know. The entanglements are in fact much more intricate. I don't sign my works, because even their smallest particle already bears the trace of my hand movements. I imagine you can't surpass that.

Image

And the works themselves? In spite of an evident shift in aesthetics, which has occurred in the last seven years, its underpinnings are rather the same. The paintings are still trying to contain me and everything on the inside, to envelop me, my whole being. It's highly unlikely they can infer the reasons behind my actions. Their very existence is contingent upon the will of their creator, who made them in the image and likeness of himself. Sure, as they pause to look around, they notice the fact that other repertoire of relativism and ambiguity is obviously available. The conversation then veers into subjectivity, autonomy and proof of ownership. I consider myself the creator of my works of art, but am I though? The relation between image and myself seems negotiable.

Boundary

An image's surface symbolizes the boundary between an artist and a viewer – you can't argue with that. The words of a great master haunt me (was it Picasso?). He professed that your every attempt to grant access to your world to the viewer is bound to fail. The surface of a painting is impossible to penetrate. Therefore, the viewer must stay exactly where he/she is. Quite a radical thought. In my opinion, however, there is actually the point at which the people's feelings and convictions meet, the common ground whose boundaries are marked by differences in personalities. Admittedly, you still can't enter into someone's own world. All you can do is peek into it.

I am inclined now to wonder whether the consequences of these musings may exert any palpable impact on the state of my art practice. Can they manifest themselves in the final shape of my work?

Scale

I dare to say I've mastered the art of expanding my own space in the course of the several years. Lately, my works have burgeoned out of the blue in all three dimensions, which, to be honest, is far from convenient. The exponential weight gain takes its toll on my health. It's a logistical nightmare. Anyway, an outstanding end result alleviates the pain in the back. If only had I enough energy left after finishing a painting to look forward to another journey.

Word

I remain the word's humble servant. Undeterred by our prevailing incompatibility, I vow to continue this relationship. Without a doubt, the words I currently use are scarce. I put my loquacity days behind me due to the shift in perception on how words affect an image's meaning instead of some creative burnout.

The question is: does a person say too much by saying less?

I hide behind/in every single word. I believe the gesture signifies presence, whereas the written word put "on the screen" records an image similarly to the camera shutter. A few words enrich this image's perception so that it involves much more than a mere aesthetic response. I probe into the number of words that can trigger the intended connotations, which may deviate from the painting's underlying meaning.

Space

I can relate to the perennial desire to produce images that you can transcend both metaphorically and literally, slip into, meander in and out of its space, which in this case is absolutely essential. I build large-scale cabinets in order to achieve an unparalleled depth and open up the opportunity for multidimensional art creation. Needless to say, space can be arranged in the multitude of ways and scales, but we'll discuss that later.

Time

Recently, I seem to have gained a new (old) friend and ally. His name is Time. It is time that had a much more, if not the most, profound influence on my latest works of art. Time passes, people age, things crumble and break – these are only several manifestations of his power.

Exploitation of other people, and especially your friends, is not something to be proud of and yet I do it and I do it fully intentionally. Not only do I force my comrade to engage in the creative process, but I also expect him to make a contribution at a later stage in production.

The thorough review of the seven years of my art practice requires me to delve deep into the past and recall the moment I decided to transcribe my painting for the very first time. Only by way of a brief digression pertaining to the outset of my flirtation with language, will we be able to draw an informed comparison. I shall refrain from mentioning anything that happened simultaneously in my personal life. No additional points will be awarded for that, which is a shame, really, because the story is – I dare say – quite engrossing. Isn't privacy inextricably linked to one's artistic output?

I IMAGINE YOU LOOKING AT MY PAINTING

You are as important to me as the painting, more important in fact.

You are the one who heralds the (good/bad) every finale.

One, five, ten...how many of you are out there? Who should I believe in?

Times change. I used to ignore you, didn't even know your name and intentions. Like I said, times change. I first noticed you when I was a student listening to the assessment of his works (outside the office hours!). Ever since, the creation of paintings has always been accompanied by the reflection on the viewer's own understanding and associations with a given image. Am I capable of acknowledging the uncertain conclusions about my own work?

Could this line of thought affect the end result in any way?
It certainly could! And it did.

Times have changed, indeed. The hypothetic role reversal, putting myself in the viewer's shoes and looking at my painting from another person's perspective fascinates me. What if I could adopt a sensibility so distinct from my own?

The viewer – what an intriguing figure. At this point, I mercilessly curb my vision, judgment and expectations, since the self-imposed expectations I conjured up are the ones I have to meet first. They can't and never will comply with theirs.

I was overwhelmed by anxiety (embarrassment?) when I realized someone would read the words on my painting for the first time. In 2005, I opted for a miniscule font size so that the viewers would have to put a great deal of effort into decoding the message, finally lose their slight interest and abandon the struggle altogether. One had to bend over and look at the transparent letters against a semi-transparent backdrop from a certain angle to discern these letters' actual shape. I fooled myself they would actually listen if I addressed them directly: "Please, stop reading. Why bother? You don't need to know any of that... ." The painting wasn't a display of exhibitionism. It protected my right to privacy, shielded my intimate thoughts.

The power intrinsic in words intimidated me. Words carry meaning and I couldn't foretell what sort of meaning would be extrapolated from the deeply personal message. With each painting and exhibition, the agitation and fear faded away. The audience members consisted of some diverse and unpredictable creatures. People I came across usually wanted to know everything, but felt unnerved by the situation they were in (white cube syndrome?). Their timidity prevented them from engaging with an image. They cast one or two brief looks at the painting, conceded defeat and walked away.

The results of my strategy pleased me – a brief encounter with the written word and a much longer one with a painting and its imagery. However, those who dismissed my words and those who rejected them completely weighted heavily on my mind. The negligence disappointed me. I struggled in vain and failed. At least, that's what it felt like at that time. Consequently, I branched out and experimented with other techniques that wouldn't fall short of their expectations.

The word-viewer relation emerged.

For a while, the linguistic aspect overshadowed the visual one, which incurred my greater involvement with those who complemented the creative process. My previous attitude towards painting had to be reevaluated, the medium had to be embraced anew. Finally, as part of my doctoral research, I created a tight hermetic series that encapsulated my naked self and offered the viewer something they secretly coveted all along, something I think they demanded from me (or a painting). I enabled the viewers to interact with the paintings on their own, isolated them from an outside world, other people and stale gallery space. My qualms and speculations dissipated.

In the aftermath of the adventure, I had to redefine my entire art practice and forge it from scratch. I found myself in a tight corner with the stop sign right in front of my eyes. I wasn't allowed to continue because I did the painting I couldn't read myself, let alone relate to. We reached a complete deadlock.

A great wide-ranging change was imminent. My life would never be the same. I grabbed the first sign my gaze rested on (with the words DOUBT, as luck would have it) and moved on. I'm not sure what sort of slogan does the placard I hold right now carry...

LAYERS

*There comes a time you notice It within you
and others and everywhere around.
It's heavy. It inhibits your thoughts and movements.
Accept it or deny it. Your choice doesn't matter.*

Rough texture and different colors of cracked plaster, patches of rust on metal sheets, numerous repaints, discoloration, remnants of posters and ads – in other words, clear signs of man's interference with nature. The visually astonishing spectacle arises from their coalescence. I like studying them because they bear certain resemblance to a human face with the past years written all over it. There is no easy way out. There is only sheer authenticity.

Different time periods uniting different worlds that separately mean nothing and yet together they constitute a compelling space of visual representation, the amalgamation of the word and hue, figure and sign, texture and structure. The conspicuous connection is apparent on the stripped-down columns and boards, from which invalid ads have already been removed. I find the visualization of the space-time continuum combining the old with new, the outdated with current, the pale with saturated deeply intriguing. The inner tension and symbiotic relationship are exposed on the bare surface of a painting that consequently gains the anthropological significance.

Those principles of image production must've always been illicitly conveyed in my art practice characterized by the gradual formation of layers and their subsequent removal to reach and set free the layers underneath. Contrary to all appearances, I am not the master of destruction. I do create, bring together and put things in order. To construct or to deconstruct! To lose or to find! That's my forte!

In the late 2009/early 2010, I found myself standing in front of a large white wall in my brand-new studio. I was determined to create an ingenious painting from scratch. "From scratch" implied the repudiation of all the knowledge and experiences I'd gathered up to

that point. How could I've known that the clock on my two-year period marred with emptiness and nostalgia started ticking? The internal wasteland was so vast that I even considered changing professions repeatedly. The tables were about to turn. I did the painting that paved the precarious way for the whole series.

“I will help you...” (2012) was the large scale (140x200x11,5cm) glass cabinet filled with a paper relief weighting over a hundred pounds that concealed everything I'd just been so keen on revealing to the viewer. Thousands of correlating ties teeming with color, which carried the wealth of meaning, were obscured due to the use of the white dense substance.

I had to multiply and alter the layers for months in order to achieve this kind of result. A hopeful diversification was to embody the inner tension in the urban landscape. As the accumulated weight of the substance reached critical mass, I started scraping it off so that the painting wouldn't fall off the wall. I strived to get to the very bottom. My mind was, however, plagued with an unbearable thought that all there was left to discover was a white wall, meaning nothing. The end would mark a new beginning. Interestingly enough, on my way back I stumbled across the fragments of paintings that still waited to be reclaimed and used despite the fact that they'd already been forgotten and eliminated. For me, this creative process denoted (and denotes) the reversal of the circle of life for my own purposes.

The expressive painting full of aesthetic delights came gradually to resemble the piece that used to hang on the wall. Confounded and taken aback by the act's randomness, I realized that I lost control over the execution. I worked as a miner in a quandary regarding the essence of improvisation and its limits. The degree of work of art's autonomy had to be identified clearly. The final problem had to be solved. At that point, I resolved my dilemma by painting a whole surface white as if I were a fine member of the renovation company. To my surprise, the surface's condition was retained under the white emulsion. The camouflaged creations hibernated magically in the wide and narrow openings that were carved, wrenched and scrubbed off while relentlessly vying for attention.

The pattern of the creative process stayed the same. Although the layers were still formed and removed, they always produced the image poles apart from the original. Furthermore, the technique evolved. The white crust was substituted with the bursting medium of drawing and painting due to my resolve to cause destruction. Even today, I have no faintest idea how exactly did I manage to pluck up enough courage and determination to follow through. The unearthed details gained significance as I eradicated superfluous layers one by one. They provided me with a point of reference and helped me find my bearings even though after a while they all faded into oblivion. At long last, I was able to unlock and exploit the method's greatest potential. I created unwittingly something elaborate, innovative and ambivalent. The organic texture based on thick consolidated foundation was ultimately enclosed in a glass display cabinet.

Right now, I'm fully aware of the fact that the devised solution answers all my questions and fulfills my initial goal to capture the independent and sensual space surrounding the painting, to create the vessel for an image that defies a flat surface.

GOD BLESS COINCIDENCE!

*Thank God it makes the pompous art world bearable, carefree and worthy.
Sudden discoveries and revelations are as wondrous as an electric shock going through your body.
It startles you, inspires you to create, but be careful cause it leads to mayhem.
I always paint with it by my side, my equal partner in crime.*

The only thing that curtailed my vision was the size of the wall. The situation slipped out of control when the papier-mâché bulged to such an extent that in order to avert a total chaos, I had to resort to mechanical segmentation and rearrangement and, therefore, made a major breakthrough in the realm of imaging techniques while placing the fragmented artifact in the display cabinets. It was pure coincidence that I obtained another perspective on image production as I moved the pieces and stood inside the cabinet. I learned how to do paintings whose surface encroached on the surrounding wall suggesting that depth can exist in front of them.

My works of art are created on and from the inside. The translucent surface merges with an image the minute I leave and close the cabinet behind me. The pulsating living and breathing space the image occupies dares to transcend its plane, extends and adheres closely to the pane of glass, in other words its boundary. A painting undergoes an inner transformation.

The painting-cabinet relation gave rise to the series of complications. From the outset, I've produced spaces which break free from/in the paintings instead of the paintings themselves. It is the notion of space that my art practice has always revolved around. The lengthy creative process aims at one thing and one thing only, namely the formation of amorphous shape which has a potential to go beyond its imposed two-dimensionality. Obviously, fabrication of the substance follows no pre-established rules. The alchemy is a matter of eponymous coincidence that is revered and concentrated on. Your patience is rewarded by hope and support it gives you. On the other hand, its frequent appearance provokes a single question on every occasion: the question about the effectiveness.

Time flies. The possible and impossible arrangements of figures seem endless, which makes the choice even harder. You sign up for the audition where a single person commission doesn't even give you a script to prepare. You go on rehearsals for months and never know whether you'll get the part in the picture.

OPEN SPACE

*You're wrong. There is no such thing as "forever".
Don't you think you're moving on when you're standing still?
Don't you feel your mind and body changing?
I don't want it...you don't say! I heard it all before.*

Several years ago, random events conspired against me. The flood in my storage room destroyed my early paintings and drawings. Fortunately, the initial "wordy paintings" survived. I cleaned the dust and small damp patches from the canvas and carefully transported the pieces to the new studio, where they met their younger and taller siblings for the very first time. They didn't know each other. There was little they had in common.

After a thorough investigation of the paintings and inscriptions, I realized that I was simply not capable of understanding, welcoming and accepting them unconditionally after a decade. I still owned them, but the lack of connection was palpable. I didn't reject or disregard them. The painful awareness of the discreet personality changes that reorganize our entire belief system and their consequences hit me suddenly.

What should I do?
Should I accept it and move on?
Should I repaint and rework it
so that the works would be firmly rooted in the present?

I decided what their fate would be. The paintings preferred staying with me to finding a new home, so I figured I still had the right to place the old works in the new customized glass cabinets, which embodied separation and distance. The artifact behind the glass represented an obsolete object which doesn't fulfill its primary function though it probably still could. It proclaimed the end of an era it belonged to while distancing itself from the viewer. Despite quite pleasing results, I believed I had to temper with words to genuinely upgrade and modernize the paintings. However, the choice of words imbued with sentimentality and past memories evoked the sense of uneasiness as well self-consciousness bordering on distaste. Currently, this sort of literal waffle would be out of the question. Currently, I don't take myself this seriously.

Random magnified words were projected onto the pane of glass and rendered the message intelligible. New meaning and quality emerged from the convergence of the past and present. I managed to breathe new life into the paintings existing right here and there with me.

As you grow older, you gain a greater insight into the notions of delusion and fleetingness of a moment. You either come to terms with the facts or try to oppose them. Painting mirrors the reality, records the signs of your aging scrupulously. There is a fine line between the musty obsolescence and glorious relevance. The distinction depends on the individual perspective.

TRANSCENDENCE

Barely visible or invisible.

Marked by words, delineated on the map or in your mind.

They limit your freedom and imagination. They hamper your development.

Boundaries waiting to be crossed.

In 2006, I directed the performance staged, for instance, at the International Street and Open-Air Theatres Festival FETA in Gdańsk. The key notion of the boundary between the viewer and the work of art marked by the painting's surface was illustrated by an enormous cube (200x200x200cm) made of the transparent polycarbonate. The artist painted live, in front of the audience, on the inside walls of the cube. The performance culminated with the artist virtually disappearing behind his own canvas.

In 2010, I built much larger and much more sophisticated cube (250x250x220cm) after numerous trials and tribulations. The cube out of a sturdier material had a ceiling and a door. I pursued the subject of penetrating the painting's physical boundary. This time as well, the picture was created inside the cube, meaning in the absolute isolation. Nonetheless, the viewers were denied access to the cube (painting) since the door stayed closed. Only those holding the key could enter into the restricted area, which was off-limits to the outsiders. Gallery visitors had to use the adjacent basic equipment to take the virtual walk inside the cube. The image was recorded with the 360 degree camera and projected onto the giant screen positioned above the control panel. As a result, the avatar of the viewer could move around the cube freely, in every direction.

While working on this project, I experienced the inner creative process at first hand. My perspective on image construction shifted as I painted in seclusion on the walls of the enclosed structure. Pure emotions and intuition took precedence over the principles of form and composition. A sense of an absolute freedom and independence was reinforced by the realization that no one will ever see what I was seeing at that time. My initial intention was to never complete the project. Contrary to the painting, its inherent nature didn't place any limits on my vision. Each additional layer of paint gave the picture fresh energy and life. The previously adopted approach had wider applications to the new project.

I believe now the creative process in case of every single one of my works stays unfinished, unlimited.

The chapter has clearly muddled a chronological account of events. The issue of generating the variety of beneficial spaces around me persists and compels me.

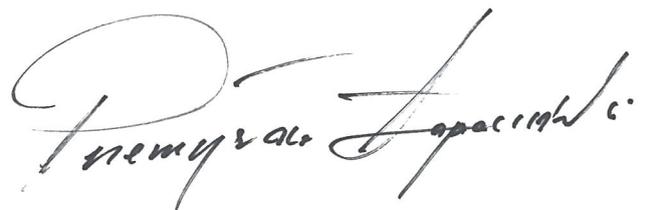
CONCLUSION

I have no idea what the future holds. Surely, my fascinating journey will continue. And all the questions I keep posing are the signposts on the road.

PS

I forgot to mention one thing I deem worthy of your attention, namely the photogenic aspect of the paintings and the lack of their accurate representation in print.

I've got to admit that my paintings never look particularly attractive in photographs. The world is filled with alluring things and people whose attractiveness is virtually impossible to capture even by the finest photographer. What's the issue, then? The high paper relief and reflective glass surface exert an adverse influence on the quality of documentation, I confess. Intrinsic to the paintings' reception are not only movement, but also changes in light and focus that can be easily detected by the human eye. Unfortunately, the use of camera is in this case hopeless.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Penelope Spheeris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "P".