

MESSAGES OF NASCENT PICTURES IN PROMISE OF A REMEMBRANCE. MUSIC EVOCATIONS FOR THE HERMENEUTICS OF DOBRIBÁN EMIL'S WORKS

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SUMMARY. The domain of interest represented by the paintings and other artforms of Dobribán Emil, is defined mainly by the so called *Landart* stream. This short introspection presents some works opened to public on the exhibition entitled *Mondo Cane* (2016). His works, in general, can be characterized as a fine tuned outcry against our destructive society, which disregards entirely our mother nature. The analysis of works presented here, represent a sum of memory based associations, generated by ideas that stimulates us to cultivate our spiritual world – in the restrictiveness of understanding – towards beautiful and right goals.

Keywords: Dobribán Emil, *Mondo Cane*, *Landart*, indignation, creation in nature, silhouette, clair-obscur, associations.

„Kutya egy világ!” [Hungarian expression, meaning: “It’s a tough world”] – thus I would translate the motto of Dobribán Emil’s exhibition², inspired by the title of the unforgettable film *Mondo cane* (1962). At that time, this late neo-realist film presented to the viewers the nihilist no comment episodes of human attitude towards nature, using unbidden tools of unveiling representation. The objects of the exposition, the paintings, graphics and works made under the auspices of *Landart* stream, were meant also as a warning in Dobribán Emil’s case. His exhibition, especially his *Landart*³ works, just as in the film mentioned, are *No comment* projections of his opposition, as he says, his inherent ecologist soul’s indignation against the destructive

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² *Mondo Cane*. Exhibition of Emil Dobribán, Museum of Art, Cluj, [Bánffy-Palace] 2016. October 17- November 20.

³ *Landart* – Typically expansionist movement of the sixties, which on the one hand, extends the artistic activity in the real, actual space, natural or urban environment, on the other hand, creates a reductive form-language, from which the personal moments disappears completely. [www.artpool.hu/Research/fogalom/landart.html]

indifference, which destroys our flora, fauna. He spoke about his creed of anti-environmental degradation on a film report made with the occasion of the exhibition: „The characteristic of Landart is that we work out in nature, we use natural materials. The social and ecological shades of Land Art are close to my soul. I am also a friend of nature and it is very disturbing how much our environment goes to ruin. In this direction, I try to show my indignation with my Landart”⁴.

He built leaning stone tower as an allegory on the orphaned falling over Citadel of Cluj, symbol of tornado from a bundle of bare branches swaying tormented and a metaphor of huge trembling dragonfly in Kassel against the hurtful indifference. He travelled from our country to Japan the world, even though he knew the works will be living just a few years. Then they will crumble to dust. The nature, with its rights, it will reclaim their living being, letting them slowly passing away. The artist hopes, however, that the viewers of their carp existence will identify with his quiet indignation.

In his Landarts, he records the prominent figures life and their passing of the nature, but the reminiscent (!) passing, through Silhouettes. His Mementos are crossfading in paintings and graphics also.

The semblance of silhouettes and contours from the background, Dobribán converts with individual style into artistic reality: the works become visible during their birth along the forces of passing time. It is not the object, but the presence of the object, not the presence, but the authenticity of the presence, and is not even the authenticity of the presence, but its hidden spaces and times are those what are permanently holding his studies awake, in artistic re-creation of the changing world.

It is no coincidence that his paintings present perceptions of mysterious conjectures – correlating sometimes alike, sometimes unlike the expected experience. The artistic authenticity of the object, its presence and time, eventually coincide in their mystery. In hope of understanding, the viewer must accept the reception of any Dobribán-exhibition as a whole.

We examine his works in the aesthetic community of music and painting. We base our examination on the cross-post of their relations, on chiasmus, according to which *the picturesqueness of the music is the music of picturesqueness*.

Walking around his exhibits, it seems that we stand and contemplate still, the nascent pictures, which on a magical touch, they are scrolling in front of us, remembering wilted trees on a chilly sunset from the Radnóti's poem entitled *May*⁵:

⁴ Web: <http://emildobriban.simplesite.com>

⁵ Miklós Radnóti, *The Complete Poetry in Hungarian and English*, translated by Gábor Barabás, In: https://books.google.ro/books?id=2E7AAwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=hu&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=m%C3%A1jus&f=false

The petals shudder on the branches, then fall,
as twilight sprinkles its glistening perfume,
and the trees bathe and splash in the cool of evening
trickling down the mountain.

The precious warmth seeks refuge from the cold,
and the wild chestnuts glow like tapers.

[February 25, 1941.]

Image 1



Emil Dobribán: Fák [Trees]

We don't realize that we walk the path of the paintings as they pass us on the walls, on the podium, waiting for us on the scaffolding.

Just as the artist, we look with curiosity for the lingered mystery: We try to see behind the picture's foreground, for what is to be seen there? What can it be? But we see only ourselves in it - like a cat that is searching behind the mirror.

The indignation of ecologist Emil Dobribán is expressed in his works symbolically, but interactively: we also cope with his indignation. His messages are allegorical; we try to reveal their inner world through reception. Our revealing effort leads to associations. Based on our memory, the contemplations associate existing memories with these meanings, through them is looking for the contents of the message.

But the success of understanding, and above all, the discovering of the message, stand or fall, if the magic will happen: whether the found message will impart us with the experience of wonderment.

The success of our wonderment is based on both immediate and long-term vividness of our memory. During our walk through the exhibition, we compare *then* and *there*, the hidden relationships of the paintings, but we also recall the *past* and *alike* memories. Sometimes both moments are taking place simultaneously in the process of aesthetic understanding

Paintings entitled *The Wise* and *The Removal from the Cross* compels us to make multiple associations, whether visiting the exhibition, or looking them in a reproduction album.

Image 2



Emil Dobribán: A bölcs [The Wise]

Image 3



Emil Dobribán: Levétel a keresztről [The Removal from the Cross]

The contemplation of the first silhouette brings to mind the wise Diogenes lying on the stairs, from the well-known painting of Raphael's *School of Athens*, or those pictures, on which he stands before the barrels talking to Alexander the Great.

His raised hands pointing toward the sky offers commandingly solace. It also comes to mind the conclusion of their Dialogue. On Alexander the Great's question, "You do not want to defeat anything?," he replied: "Yes, I would like to overcome the desire to defeat someone." From here, a long-term memory leads to evocation of the wisdom of Christ.

Let us contemplate first *The Removal from the Cross* painting. The artist warns us in advance about the specific technical design of the picture:

„The white surface became through scraping and translucent wash⁶, without using any white pigment⁷.“⁸ Without using pigment to bleach the darkness, scraping outlines and transparent shadow deepening, the Painter applies the gesture as primarily expression toolkit, and by that, he attains the symbols of *light - dark* contrast expressing the movement of pain, suffering.

The compositional structure of silhouettes from *The Removal from the Cross*. The merely outlined figures by the multiple of smallest recognizable redistribute among themselves the components of the meaning: the contour of diagonally lying across figure, which „personated” the thoughtful scientists in the composition of *The wise*, here he personifies the agony-suffering Christ, dead after being separated from the cross. The other silhouettes, shapes of surrounding figures, divide further. First, they suggest, with similar to Christ’s white tones, Mater dolorosa, the painful Virgin Mary and Magdalene in their gesture revealing deep sorrow, on the other hand, they depict henchmen, executioners, soldiers, with dark shades generating sharp contrasts. But the separate details are far from clarifying themselves before the recipient. They expect almost pretentiously further interpretations of associations. Why are the scientist and Christ wearing glasses? – They ask us conspiratorially. Perhaps they stimulate us to discover similarities hidden in differences? Indeed, this grotesque-like Christ head echoes “the humility of the witted Wise”⁹.

The biblical correspondences of the details are no less expressive. For example, the small scaled shadow of the sword’s handle of the dark silhouette on left side, projected onto the arm of Christ, becomes ennobled

⁶ Translucent wash: blurring the outlines with various water-soluble dye, so that it deepens the shadows. In: Bakos, Ferenc, *Idegen szavak és kifejezések szótára [Foreign Words and Expressions Dictionary]*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1974, 488.

⁷ Pigment: insoluble solids of the paint providing colour. Idem, 651.

⁸ *Coborârea de pe cruce / ulei [The Removal from the Cross]* /canvas, 100cm / 120cm, 2016. Suprafețele albe sunt obținute prin zgâriere și laviuri transparente, nu s-a folosit pigment alb. [From the exhibition’s album: Breaz, Dan – Dobriban, Emil, *Emil Dobriban. Mondo Cane. Pictură, obiect, instalație, [Emil Dobriban. Mondo Cane. Painting, object, installation]*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Tact, 2016, 52.

⁹ Verseghi, Ferenc, *Az igaz bölcs [Sage’s Song]*. Translated by Geoffrey Russel-Smith from original poem by F. Verseghy (1757-1822)

Now the young blade of corn
Proudly lifts its head to the sun,
Yet, come the seed in the ear,
So will its pride disappear.
Youth is so vain and knowing,
Sturts like the young corn blowing,
Yet, comes wisdom with age,
How quiet and humble the sage!

crucifix: through transformation the killer weapon grows a symbol of redemption. The painter used a rare technique in this painting. From the dark background, he scratched out with a single steel needle all silhouettes, both white, black. We surmise deep pathos in his passionate artistic technique, metaphor from the indignation-gesture scraped with ten fingernails.

We get to the final conclusions under the common spell of the two paintings: *Jesus is the master of wisdom*¹⁰ and *Jesus is wisdom of God*¹¹.

Another association from our memories is connected to a painting of Dobribán about a Serbian church. The painting entitled *Ligh Effect in Serbia 2016* depicts a Catholic church in Novi Sad with a crucifix in front of it. The tip of the tower was not to be seen on the painting, so I was uncertain regarding the respectively affiliation. The artist, answering to my questions, wrote: " I inquired my Serbian friends (hence the delayed response), we were working here on an artists' colony in 2016, and I found out that is a Catholic church on a settlement called Svetozar Miletityen – Lemes, 50-60 km- away from the municipality of Subotica, between Subotica and Sombor, next to the main road. On the top of the tower is a cross, but there was no room for it on my canvas (due to compositional reasons). I have two photos about it, I send them; the left one inspired me!"¹²

¹⁰ Jesus showed himself in highly complex external forms to his contemporaries: he is the prophet of repentance, but is more than a prophet (Mt 12,41); he is Messiah, but he has to go through the suffering as a servant of Yahweh before he will know the glory of the Son of Man (Mk 8,29kk); he is a scientist, but not in the way of the scribes. His teaching methods remind us mostly of the methods of Wise from the Old Testament: taking over their genres (proverbs and parables), he gives life- rules, just as they did (vö. Mt 5—7). Those who watch with amazement this unique, authenticated miracles of wisdom, don't mistake (Mk 6,2). In: *Biblikus teológiai szótár [Biblical Theological Dictionary]*, Szent István Társulat, az Apostoli Szentszék Könyvkiadója, Budapest, 1972, 157.

¹¹ In fact, Jesus promises in his name, to his people, the gift of wisdom (Lk 21,15). Since the unbelieving generation misjudged him, but God-susceptible hearts received him, concludes mysteriously: "The wisdom of all the sons acknowledged to be true" (Lk 7,35; or "the wisdom justifies itself with actions»: Mt 11,19). (...) The lessons are summarized by from the apostolic documents. They call Jesus as "God's wisdom" (IKor 1,24-30), and not simply because he communicates wisdom with people, but because he himself is the Wisdom. In: Idem, 158.

¹² Emil Dobribán's letter to István Angi, 16 January 2017 (owned by the author)

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Image 4



Photo of the Church, from the left side

Image 5



Photo of the Church, from the right side

Image 6



The painting of the church by Emil Dobribán

Here, the eternity of spatial immobility is dissolved in the infinity of time. He drove to motion the silent relationship of the crucifix and the church. He invited them to dialogue on the wings of the wind. And he turned us, the spectators, into listeners. It made us recall the words of Christ about his Father's house. The figure of the suffering Christ on the cross, resuscitated from its numbness, looks like as if he would raise his stretched arms to hug his loved ones; from his embrace are radiating thoughts and feelings of the sacrificial lamb and the judge, from anger to love, from the Old Testament to Eternal Testament. For the initiates, it resonates the melodies from Kodály's, *Jesus and the Traders*, over John's Gospels, in the expectance of Easter, about the desecrated temple, the sprawling money changers, about the vendors of sheep, pigeons, their expulsion - "weaving whip from a rope, he sent them out of the temple", - and about the judgment "It is written: my house is a house of prayer for all people, and what have you done with it? You made from it a cave of thieves!" The memories of John lead eventually to the cross, to the majesty of sacrifice. "Hearing this, the chief priests and scribes wanted to lose him, because they were afraid of him." Why? "Because all the people were listening to Him!"

The composition of Dobribán introduces in the foreground a female figure also, who seems to appear from the opposite directions, and *stands there* between the temple and the crucifix, defying the wind. Illustrated in thoroughly modern garments, with hesitant gestures, she presents the stillness of space and the infinity of time, in the presence of our Remembrance of Christ.

The creative principles of Dobribán Emil are generative principles. His works express the status of birth in the appearance of shaping, colouring and movement. Of them are created his expressive instrument, which are syncretic, inseparable from each other. The message shown by the painting finds itself in us.

The inspiration is the today's status of the church, which was recorded by the painter in the above photography. There is some musicality in the way it transcends this state, and how the transfiguration makes it so rich. Leonard Bernstein analysing the airiness and evanescence of musical impressionism for his young students, presents the atmosphere in the series on the Cathedral of Rouen by Monet.

„Have you ever seen a real French Impressionist painting? I'm sure you did, but maybe you did not know that it is one of it; you only saw a blurry, hazy, a «not real» looking painting like, for example one artwork of the great impressionist Monet: the facade of the Cathedral of Rouen.

Image 7



Monet: The Cathedral of Rouen

Do you see how blurry it is? At first glance, it can hardly be perceived *what it is*. Now, just for fun, let's look at the original photograph of the same cathedral. Can you see the difference?

Image 8



The Cathedral of Rouen (Photo)

We see the strong, clear outlines, corners and shapes. The realist painter would paint the cathedral as realistic as possible, with lights and shapes, exactly like the photo. But not the impressionist Monet, *who wants to present not so much the cathedral itself, but the lights and colours reflected from the building. It's almost as if the cathedral would be a dream, a suggestion or impression, as it would be seen at a certain hour of the day, in a certain light.* Monet made around thirty different paintings from the same cathedral, in different lighting conditions – on a sunny morning, on cloudy afternoon, and so on. The painting presented here shows the cathedral at sunset, when sun washes the stones in the dazzling dance of blue, orange and mauve colours. This is a certain impression of the Cathedral of Rouen.”¹³

¹³ Leonard Bernstein, *Hangversenyek fiataloknak [Young people's concerts]*, Zeneműkiadó Budapest, 1974, 163-166. We replaced the black and white illustrations of the quoted text with colour illustrations.

Dobribán is also inspired by a given state of the church, but the reflection about the reality of the painting, is experienced in a different way. He is interested in the recreation of the shapes, colours, and instead of their oscillating evanescence, he eternalizes the expression of the defiant gesture-being. His forms and colours in their moving origin, similar to scenic force-lines, convey the message of defensive protest.

The presence of the female figure between the windswept church and the crucifix, which survived from the eighteenth century (on the photo we can see on the base of the cross the year 1796), representing the twenty-first century, just as the messages of Landart works, warns us for protection: admonishes us to preserve the values of nature, of artistic and architectural worth; He craves surging to protect them, because those are our values, let them remain so, – for our own pleasure.

His messages are not from the evanescent world of impressionistic vision; his painting is leading towards the *Gestalt psychology*, towards the visual perception and association, so we could call it “Gestalt-painting”.¹⁴

The reception of the paintings from *Mondo Cane* exhibition, leads from the grip of their state of birth, to the memory based non-finite associations of ideas, in the restrictiveness of understanding.

The promise of remembering is made happen by the science of understanding, the hermeneutics. The great masters of memory-based understanding, the ancient hermeneutics, as Rimbaud would say, using their prior knowledge, they expound vanished messages from parchment torn in conceptions. Christians from the middle ages who could not read and write understood the episodes of the Bible through images. The contemporary icons were rightly called: bible of the poor. Today, Dobribán’s paintings in their vivid existence are as if they unite the pendulum way from the image to the idea: they stimulate us through understanding the message, to not only recall our hidden thoughts, our words, our actions, but, from there back, on the wavelength of dissatisfaction to the significance of the inspiring paintings, to cultivate our spiritual world more promising, towards beautiful and right goals.

Translated by Csákány Csilla

¹⁴ Gestalt psychology: (Gestalt [German]: shape, formation), – it developed from the psychology of perception in the early 20th century in Germany. The main areas of interest are the sight, visual perception, visual communication; its basic foundation is largely rooted in this psychological tendency. Typically, it explores and explains the phenomena of perception using images, and attaches great importance to associations.

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