

Third Spaces by Minnie Weisz

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In the oeuvre of photographer Minnie Weisz, camera obscura suggests itself as a starting point or perchance a point of decoding.

Principally, this is an occupational revisit of the very premises and origins of photography. However, the symbolic connotation of camera obscura – as a phenomenon that was recognized long ago – is also of interest here: it is an enclosed space, therefore the darkness, yet with an opening that allows the entrance of light. This part may be expected, however, the inverted image of external world that gets inside the chamber is not expected unless one is already familiar with the phenomenon.

Historically speaking, in traditional photography, this phenomenon was achieved by constructing camera obscura. However, one can stumble upon it with no prior intention or knowledge, as for instance in caves with very narrow entrances. This is suggestive of Plato's cave, an important metaphor in European thought, the metaphor of insight, perception and reality. One is further lead to the question of reality and unreality, an essentially non-photographic issue, since the unreal cannot be photographed.

Eventually, the oeuvre by Minnie Weisz suggests yet another ex-photographic question: is it necessary or is it rather optional to consent to the external world as a fairy creation that arrives through a tiny opening of either camera or individuality.

Nevertheless, the definition of camera obscura as an exclusively symbolic point of this oeuvre has been ambiguous from the very start. The author's work and statement indirectly suggest these are terminologically, actually philosophically, rather clear coordinates and it is of no importance whether they are conscious or unconscious. It is irrelevant both regarding the result and the experience of what we are seeing.

The reasons for this metaphorical approach to the artwork are opened by the artwork itself: the pivotal cycle *King Cross as Camera Obscura* 2006 was shot by Minnie Weisz in the abandoned Great Northern Hotel, constructed in 1854. The author is utterly familiar with the vistas, as she grew up watching them. She shoots in haunted empty rooms of what once was lively travellers' spot. The photographer darkens the room scenes, leaving a white small opening towards the outer world. By applying five to six hours long expositions, she achieves an image of hotel room as it is, merged with the other image, the external one. Together, they are read as a unique space.

The real space of abandoned room is amalgamated with a confusing reflection of external scene on walls or doors.

In this manner we come to see a characteristic picture of room, displaying an indiscernible wallpaper design pattern or a room that is simply dissolved by dampness while its door feature an outward reflection of St Pancras neogothic tower. The picture is inverted through author's intervention, hence the tower at the door appears to be erect and realistic. Only by reversing the picture to the original position, as it was shot, it becomes clear that the external scene has been, naturally so, inversely mirrored at the door. The landmarks include the position of doorknob and a dilapidated sink with no faucets. In author's layout concept, the latter resembles an inconspicuous element up on the ceiling.

The room 418 increases confusion regarding the borders between unreal and real, inner and outer. In room 213, St Pancras Tower is inverse, the reason for this being stronger realistic accents appearing at pictures more frequently. These are abandoned objects: shoes, roller-skates, suitcases, pots with desiccated flowers. The photograph of a blurry room angle with rejected suitcases is titled *Pinhole noire*. Despite potential irony, it does not lack the fuzzy anxiety, radiated by those forgotten or left-behind attributes of who-knows-which-journeys. Equal ambiguity can be found in author's statement concerning shadows on the walls: *It's what I call merry wall ! A little shrine*.

The statement is apparently poetical and childish. However, it does not hurt to consider the dormant horror of childish utterances.

Finally, the author sometimes exhibits *King Cross as Camera Obscura* as *A Room with a View*, a title not deprived of cultural references, as for example to

James Ivory's *A Room with a View* or *Rear Window* by Alfred Hitchcock.

By the way, let us mention that in the first case the window-opening is but an incidental element. Here, the external world is not arriving to the room as a reflection or a shadow. The magical outer world challenges one to venture out, on a beautiful adventure of living. In the second case the window-opening is the only possible frame for structuring the external, but also the truly real story, in which journalist-detective solves a mystery murder in the neighbourhood. As *an architectural detective* Minnie Weisz does not offer to solve a riddle of external reality. Within the room's interiority, she gazes at the layers of time that resemble Martryoshka (a Russian nesting doll). In this context, the title of exhibition, *A room with a View* seems to be distanced or at least counterpointing in regard to the above mentioned examples. There is really no view from a room. There is just a room without a view and there is a view, the gaze itself, that is directed at real and unreal, wherein the borders between those two spaces become evasive.

Arriving to the notion of room without a view, the room whose walls are populated with the sanctuaries of external reflections, has its own genesis. The preceding cycle is *Eye Dream*, created in 2005. When shooting a series of photographs of *Fish and Coal* buildings dating from the 1850s, the author felt she carried a camera, but she also sensed she was in that very camera. The next degree was logical. It says: *I am the camera*, expressing an attitude that is more than just metaphorical and poetical.

The first possibility is, at least superficially, a new-age asiaticism with the element of combativeness: the bow and arrow became efficient only when being one with a combatant. The interpretational turnabout changes the situation: means-weapon does not form a spiritual unity with a man. On contrary, the actual man becomes that very means. In the actual case, Minnie Weisz does not humanize the camera: she becomes the camera herself. In this case it is camera obscura that is entered by the external world, as a more or less blurry reflection that conforms with the optical laws and the magic of light. Philosophically speaking, the author rejects her essence, therefore her art is not the shine of essence but a *dark shine* of non-essence-nothingness, wherein she arrived not in a quest for truth, but following the imperative of will and emotions which are basically postmodernist, however floating that term may be. And the emotions at hand are fear and anxiety.

Of course, the work by Minnie Weisz can and should be considered within a context of the tradition of photographic visuality. In this dimension Weisz does not offer intelligent pictures which we think we've already seen, unless we understand the merger between unreal and real picture to be a mere conceptualist wisecrack. Apparently it is more than a wisecrack, though perhaps it was conceived as such in the beginning.

Namely, the ambiguous poeticism and romanticism of the abandoned is known in both photography and painting. The nostalgia of ruins, which admittedly always threads on a thin edge of Piranesi's apprehensions, is something that has been seen before. The photogenic quality of old walls with their aesthetics of decay idiom, is not new. Objects at non-place, actually at the place where one does not expect them – are also a known theme.

The fascination with the abandoned, with the exiles in time and space – whether holes, object or beings – is not new. Just as there is nothing strange in the fact that this fascination was born during author's stay in Berlin, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It seems that novelty here lays with the uneasiness of accompanying emotionality, probably whereby the consistence, up to a point, reveals a possible logic of this path, the laws defining its direction.

The alibi for the approach which is not strictly visual is ultimately provided by the author herself. Her approach is mental-emotional, which is only apparently an oxymoron. Because, thought is reduced to will and intention, while emotion is brought down to dull restlessness, inasmuch as the descriptions may wander when depicting it as nostalgia or even documentarism. The new challenge of this, actually philosophical, work is opened through a claim that the author's work is a dialogue between inner and outer, the opening of *third space*, one between wakefulness/reality and dream.

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In this case, the colloquial analysis of dream-wakefulness' twofoldness would reduce wakefulness/reality to an abandoned dilapidated room, that was long ago abandoned by somebody, while the dream would become an evasive reflection upon a wall, the reflection of outer or reflection of the other, which arises and vanishes with the changes of light.

It is an unjoyful discourse, even within the coordinates of mannerist inquisitiveness with Calderon dela Barca or W. Shakespeare which, perhaps due to the temporal distance, appear as comfortably colourist, though always featuring immanent violence, as well as more or less concealed faith in the problematic ethical task at hand. The confusions regarding borders between dream and wakefulness that are spoken of by Minnie Weisz, the life in *third space* is a known emotional, psychological and even philosophical category, recognizable under various names throughout European time in art.

The cases of reflected ideas from Plato's cave belong to the same sensitivity as the scenes in the mirror by Velasquez or C. Manet. A postmodernist shift that is discernible in the work of Minnie Weisz belongs to a time inasmuch as it, besides emotional and perceptive inquisitiveness, introduces also the element of inquiring the mind, as a way to achieve the unambiguous and exclusively single truth-reality of artwork. It is the inquisitiveness that eventually results in uncertainty and in revisiting the beginnings.

Revisiting the beginnings in this works is actually twofold. I already spoke about one of those. The other is located within the occupational moment. The digitalization of photography is the refraction, in many ways. The most striking of those is the democratization of media, wherein photography becomes universally available, and everyone becomes a photographer capable of controlling his image (the selfie phenomenon) and of documenting the objective events.

The essential turn occurs within the refraction concerning traditional photography that is based on the optical rules and chemical processes invoking alchemical secrets. Photography is actually an art that occasionally dwells on the edge of magical rituals, through its less known use of organic compounds or the importance of spring water. Digital photography is dematerialized. The difference is essential.

This refraction displays a significant attitudinal difference regarding the truth of photography. Despite the fact that there were no substantial reasons for the faith that photography can be a reliable witness to the real world truth, since the history of photography is paralleled by the history of manipulation with the very same truths. The experience of Photoshop eventually abolished any faith that the photographed scenes are truthful, since any scene can easily be transformed into anything else.

In this context, there is no surprise in return to the photography's beginnings, whether it's a manifest act against the digital democratization, or perhaps a return to the substance magic, where one final artisan task is to arrest the permanent image, since other optical and chemical preconditions have been historically solved, long ago. And, of course, this is about the impulsive desire for photography to reclaim the dignity of truthfulness and eventually, the documentarism as well.

Therefore, Minnie Weisz's choice of camera obscura is not unusual. Neither is her co-exhibiting with the authors that pursue similar direction. The peculiarity of author's preceding artwork gradually crystallized as the interest in *third space*, one between reality and dream, a space of connivance and dialogue between inner and outer. And this space cannot be shot concretely, since it is neither material nor real. Inasmuch, in Minnie Weisz's interpretation camera obscura is not a wisecrack but an expression of the state of spirit, which belongs to a time, following its radiating unease of a lonely individual in an abandoned world. Conclusively, one can only apprehend the continuation of this rather covert search by photographer Minnie Weisz.

Through her cycle that is presented in Šutej Gallery in Motovun, the photographer underlines everything she has done so far.

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