

WLODZIMIERZ KSIAZEK

New Work: 2000-2001

Alpha Gallery

14 Newbury Street

Boston, Massachusetts

September 15 – October 10, 2001

1990-2001

Barrington Center for the Arts

Gordon College

255 Grapevine Road

Wenham, Massachusetts

August 28 - September 28, 2001

Review by Michael Cochran

For someone who has been underground for a number of years in his more recent life, Włodzimierz Książek and his art have become very, very public. With a March, 2001 show at Kouros Gallery in New York City, a second solo show at Alpha Gallery in Boston with a concurrent ten year retrospective at Gordon College in Wenham, this New England-based, Polish exile is getting the exposure that he justly deserves. In a recent studio interview, the artist spoke articulately about his difficult life in Warsaw, his asylum in the United States and mostly about the work to be shown at Alpha Gallery and Gordon College.

While viewing each painting it became immediately obvious that these are not didactic paintings about ideologies but are very expressive paintings that successfully balance emotion and structure. They are extremely powerful and engaging via their thick encaustic surfaces and delicate recessed channels that move across the canvases. The channels are like peeled-off strips of sunburned skin that reveal underlying tender surfaces. Książek sees these areas as entries into the paintings as a keyhole or peephole would be in a door. The contrast between the raised textures and recessed channels is echoed by the color in those areas. Overall color in each painting is quite subdued with contrasting warm and cool hues to further separate the different planar surfaces. Książek chooses to refrain from titling his paintings and instead refers to their color, size and year. In a yellow and white painting (68" X 80") from 2000, areas of soft pink emerge from behind a coarsely impastoed yellow surface. Thick white encaustic plateaus are covered with dripping blood red, brilliant yellow and bright white accents. Calligraphic letter forms allude to some enigmatic persona deep within the confines of the painting.

Each painting is quite unique although there are certain characteristics of size and technique that are consistent from one painting to the next. He agreed that the sizes of the canvases are standardized like pages in a tablet to assist him in focusing more on the development and construction of each of his "objects," as he calls them. In a large green painting (80" X 100") from 2000, dollops of thick dark green pigment appear to have been thrown at the canvas. Contrary to other paintings constructed of strong rigid encaustics, these amorphous shapes were soft and having succumbed to gravity, oozed down the crusty surface of the canvas. Occasional drier brush strokes of cool blue offset the richness of these earthy colors.

In his most current painting, a yellow and white (60" X 80") work from 2001, Książek has moved to a more refined composite of letter forms, fewer thick encaustic shapes with narrower channels moving across the canvas's surface as if connecting these isolated thoughts and emotions. The background is painted with a soft vertical brush pattern that creates a serene gauzy scrim (seen in many of his paintings) through which the shapes protrude. Each encaustic form hangs in space from the canvas suspending itself as if in defiance of the effects of gravity. The contrasts are ever-present.

There are subtle references to architecture and even archeological site topographies and sometimes personal linguistic symbols within the composition of each of his paintings. Yes, he studied architecture along with painting in Poland, and yes, he did visit an archeological dig in Crete many years ago, and yes, he acknowledges the influences of his travels to India and Oaxaca, Mexico on his textures and layering of color. But, what makes these paintings work so well is that they do not rely on that information to strengthen their credibility.

Unlike much of the contemporary art that is seen today, these paintings have the integrity and accomplishment to stand on their own without the supportive rhetoric that is needed to substantiate many artists' endeavors. Viewing the work is quite an experience. Plan to spend some time.