

Margaret Hunter

Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, Kraków

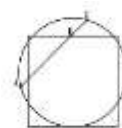


Margaret Hunter

punkty styczne / tangents / tangente



19.10 – 22.11.1998



Galeria Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury
Kraków, Rynek Główny 25

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Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, Kraków, 1998

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Maria Hussakowska-Szysko

Coordination:

Anna Śliwa, Regina Pytlik, Jolanta Barlosz

Art Direction:

Feliks Szysko

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Margaret Hunter in Cracow

On welcoming Margaret Hunter at the International Cultural Centre, I would like to express my belief that her exhibition, *Tangents*, will offer one of the most important presentations of modern art this year in Poland. Margaret Hunter is an artist who employs an original form of expression. Born in Scotland, she spent her childhood in Africa and has been based in Berlin for a long time. I remember our first meeting in Panzerhalle, on the old dividing line which until not long ago had separated East from West Berlin, at a place where a Russian division of tanks had been stationed several years earlier. Margaret Hunter produces and keeps her works in this very place. Her paintings, sculptures and drawings have captured everyone's imagination. Her art, close to the art of avant-garde classics, displays African influences while reflecting the creative atmosphere of Berlin of recent years, in which the personality of the artist herself, a student of Georg Baselitz, has played by no means a small role. We opened our Gallery in 1991 with a Baselitz exhibition. I am happy that today, thanks to Margaret Hunter, visitors from Cracow will again have the chance to become acquainted with art produced in Berlin, a city which towards the close of the 20th century is reasserting its position as a great centre of universal art. These values are also present in the works of this Scottish artist. She and her art transcend borders. I was glad to hear, as we were making preparations for her exhibition in July 1998, that Margaret Hunter won the prestigious European Woman of Achievement Award.

Jacek Purchla


Director of the International Cultural Centre in Cracow



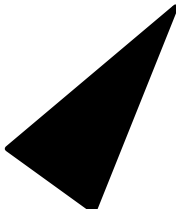
Margaret Hunter

In 1933 the great British art critic, poet and thinker, Herbert Read declared that it was possible to learn "more of the essential nature of art from its earliest manifestations in primitive man (and in children) than from its intellectual elaborations in great periods of culture". Sixty years on, looking at the works of Margaret Hunter it is these words, with their momentous ring of truth, which most readily spring to mind. Hunter paints large, vibrant, simple images which, while they might seem to hark back in their form to the artistic avant-gardes of the early years of this century, in reality share with the artists of those movements the common inspiration of a much older form of art. Hunter belongs to a tradition which stretches back through Post-War Paris, via Appel, Dubuffet and Picasso, to the Surrealists and Symbolists and beyond them to Blake and Palmer. Ultimately, she looks at the art of primitive man, stripping away the baggage of 500 years of western artistic tradition. Hunter's dynamic aim is to allow herself - and by implication her viewer - to see the world with entirely new eyes.

To arrive at such an idea has not been easy. It probably helped of course, to come late to the practice of being an artist. Hunter was 33 and the mother of two children, before she entered Glasgow School of Art. Similarly, she was almost forty before she went to Berlin to study under the man she acknowledged as mentor, Georg Baselitz. It was Baselitz who opened her eyes to the possibility of an art which could be purely expressive and who first made her aware, in a still evolving sense, of the importance to her of her early childhood years spent in Nigeria. This exposure to African folk art she now herself uses to explain the visual directness of her work. It accomplished for



her what Baselitz has called the ability of artworks to "set imagination free". Further epiphanies have followed. But always the aim remains the same.

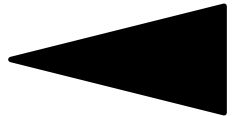


Hunter's work is essentially "figurative" - in that it contains a figure. Placed within the central area of the canvas, or sculpted in the round, this form, generally female, is often accompanied by an object and it is the dialogue between the two which gives life to the piece. Hunter herself has explained the specific significance of some of her motifs - how the triangle so often attached to the head of a figure may have been inspired by the idea of the Nuremberg Trichter - the funnel of knowledge. Similarly, she will discourse on how, when inverted, the same motif can become the dunce's cap. Such ambiguities pervade her work, with an obvious sense of delight and wonder. On the whole though, these are primeval works of art which, in their use of basic, universal semiotics, tap into our inner feelings the most direct of ways. They are new visual songs of innocence and experience - evidence of a longing to return to a forgotten state of grace, and yet at the same time fully aware of the realities of the human condition. Hunter seems to know that it is only by exploring these realities, through her art, that such salvation might be possible.

A recent theme has been the constant sense of conflict which exists within us all - between the intellect and the instinct - a prevalent subject in the Scottish Enlightenment of the eighteenth century which locates Hunter within yet another tradition of art and philosophy. The evolution of this struggle in her work is clearly defined. Look for example at Janus, made in 1997, in which two heads appear about to tear apart a single body. Similarly in All Together Now the force required to rip apart or push together the two parts of the image is amplified by the highly gestural brushstrokes of what Hunter refers to as "scaffolding". It is not surprising that this work, and others, should

have been inspired in part at least, by the experience of German unification and the disruptive effect of that cataclysmic event.

Resident in Berlin since 1985, Hunter has been lucky enough to have lived through a tumultuous decade at the very vortex of events. It is surely this, as much as her understanding of her own inner emotions and their universal application to humankind, which has conditioned the development of her work. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to overpoliticise. The chief preoccupations here are those common to much painting at the end of the 20th century - the power of colour and form to convey visual experiences which stand as metaphors for the inexpressible essence of what it means to be alive. Hunter deals with basic human impulses - creation, the emotions and basic, fundamental physical and metaphysical functions in both man and nature- balance and equilibrium and the forces which are a part of our everyday life. She strips away the artificial layer of "civilised" manners and custom to reveal life in its raw state.



As much is clear from her materials. Her palette is earthy, expressive in itself of a desire to engage with nature. Her sculptures too are made largely from the bare wood of a tree, sometimes in its entirety. Conjuring her image - with brush or chisel - she has about her something of the shaman and in the best tradition of western primitive art (as it has been ever since Gauguin, Matisse and Picasso evinced the same fascination) the marks made with emphatic scratching into the surface of the paint or on the wood become charged with an almost magical power. Here is the idea of the tribal tattoo - a mark made on the skin as a badge of identity - transformed into a post-modern artistic device. The paint is no longer in a sense merely pigment but seems the very stuff of life.

There is a quite brilliant sense of tension in these works - taut, stretched to the limit, they never fail to achieve a vital balance. Their


simplicity is deceptive. These are rigorous, hard-won images, the product of real personal struggle and consideration which, for all their monumentality, depend for their success upon fine tuning. Remove one tiny detail and both image and idea would fall apart. This new work, increasingly resolved and confident, represents the achievement of a mature artist. Hunter has developed her own identity - her own language. She talks to us not only as an "Afro-Hebridean" or a Scottish artist living in Germany - but as the embodiment of a pan-European tradition which has in fact characterised Scottish art since the 18th century. She is a truly international artist whose work can traverse geographical boundaries with ease, to pierce the heart and fire the mind.



Iain Gale

Art critic ("Scotland on Sunday"), July 1998

biographical note



Margaret Hunter deals in painting, sculpture and drawing. She was born in 1948 in Irvine (the county of Ayrshire, Scotland). Some childhood years spent with her parents in Nigeria had a strong impact on her art. Hunter became a professional artist after graduating from the Glasgow School of Art, where she studied between 1981 and 1985. Fascinated by Georg Baselitz, she went on an art scholarship to Berlin to study under her master in the Hochschule der KOnste (1985-1986). Baselitz's thinking and other phenomena in the strongly expressionist Berlin scene of the eighties largely shaped Hunter's language. It was due to that particular period in her life that she gave up certain artistic conventions to follow her instinct and derive inspiration from African art forms. The political situation in Berlin, a divided city, seen through the eyes of an outsider, is mirrored in Margaret Hunter's work. Apart from the artist's involvement in the underground movement of the former GDR, her political inclinations were manifested in 1988, when she came to her Przemysl exhibition held in the Franciscan church under the umbrella of the Solidarity trade union. In 1990, Margaret Hunter was invited to take part in the painting of the Berlin Wall, which was classified as a historical monument. For several years she has been a co-organiser of exhibitions and other art events at the Panzerhalle (former barracks), an alternative site bestowed on artists by the authorities of Brandenburg. She has participated in several dozen or so group exhibitions in German and British museums and galleries. Among her individual shows, highly acclaimed was the *Changing Places* exhibition presented in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London and Berlin in

1992-1993, during which she first displayed her wooden sculptures. Since 1996 Margaret Hunter has been connected with London's Art First gallery in Cork Street. In July 1998, she received the prestigious European Woman of Achievement Award (Arts category). She works and lives in Berlin and Scotland.

Maria Hussakowska-Szysko



drawings



Drawing, 1996
pastel on paper, 84 x 59 cm
Private Collection



Large Drawing, 1998
pastel on paper, 205 x 132 cm



Drawing II, 1998
pastel on paper, 84 x 59 cm



Large Drawing II, 1998
pastel on paper, 205 x 132 cm



Drawing III, 1997
pastel on paper, 84 x 59 cm

paintings





Trichter Balance, 1992
oil on wood, 250 x 170 cm



Changing Places, 1992
oil on wood, 250 x 170 cm



All Together Now, 1992
mixed media on paper, 194 x 120 cm



Lines of Continuity II, 1994
oil on wood, 153 x 113 cm



Crossing Paths, 1994
oil on wood, 183 x 123 cm



Passing Friends, 1994
oil on wood, 183 x 123 cm



The Seeker, 1995
oil on wood, 140 x 105 cm



Correspondance, 1996
oil on wood, 105 x 75 cm



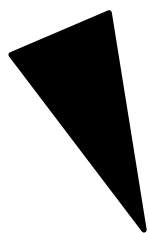
Belonging Form, 1998
oil on wood, 153 x 112 cm



Translation, 1998
oil on wood, 153 x 112 cm



Signal, 1998
oil on wood, 153 x 112 cm



sculptures



Holding One's Own, 1997
wood, lead, copper, 140 x 40 x 25 cm
Private Collection



Transformation, 1997
wood, copper, 182 x 29 x 22 cm
Private Collection



Points of Contact, 1997
wood, steel, copper, 164 x 60 x 20 cm
Private Collection



Persona, 1997
wood, lead, copper, 71 x 38 x 19 cm



Doppelkopf, 1997
wood and copper, 67 x 32 x 22 cm
Private Collection

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For definitive information or images, please consult Margaret Hunter through her website:

www.margaret-hunter.com