

Walk Thru Gallery

Ondřej Vavrečka: Wasted to Metal

Ondřej Vavrečka is a trained filmmaker whose work spills over into other fields. In addition to his original documentaries, he is involved in theatre, music and exploration of various landscapes and corners, both internal and external.

The exhibition will run during the emergency period of the coronavirus pandemic, i.e. without a proper opening. How do you perceive this situation?

Actually, at the beginning of all the hype it was subconsciously clear to me that the exhibition would be cancelled. Everything is cancelled. We're cancelling the whole culture. That would be interesting, wouldn't it? I just didn't count on it at all. And now I'm enjoying going on a trip with the paintings and assembling something. Actually, when you ask that question, it opens up the question of what's private and what's public. Before the virus, an exhibition like this in a display case in the underpass under the road would clearly have been seen as an exhibition in a public space. But nowadays, when everyone's holed up, the streets look like private space. Intimate, separated by an invisible boundary from the public space, where we look through our computers and mobile phones. And whose private space is this that used to be public? The state. The state has shown that it lives in the depopulated streets. So the whole exhibition is actually for the state and a few people who dare to break into the state space and go out.

The exhibited objects were created under your hands for the filming of your current film, *The Personal Life of a Hole*. What role do these objects play in the film?

The important thing is that those objects, only a minor part of which is exhibited here, are made of rubbish. There's a certain smile hidden in that when I then sell the objects and paintings... Garbage is a majestic and beautiful thing that is intrinsically linked to art. Art has no primary meaning. The meaning is enclosed in the art itself. Art explores its limits. It is, in a good sense, superficial. And garbage has no meaning either. It is, like art, removed from the utilitarian chain of using things that are useful.

Moreover, sooner or later, everything becomes garbage, sooner or later, everything becomes somehow useless or dysfunctional. And as we become more and more accustomed to not repairing things, not incorporating them into newly created things, but throwing them away, we surround ourselves more and more with garbage. And that's one of the issues the film addresses in the chapter called "The Garbage Hole." What to do with garbage? How to live with it? Where to put it? And it comes down to the fact that we need to find some spirituality, some poetry in garbage, to try to see some transcendence in garbage. Only in this way can we love a world that is full of garbage. So the objects on display are a kind of attempt to find this in garbage.

Would your art object have been created without film?

Anyway. Initially, the objects were created by driving some inner obsession to shape the found material. It's matter that cries out to be kneaded. And by kneading it, it comes alive and you see that it itself has inner inclinations, it tells itself what it wants to say, where it wants to flow. The golden colour pulls through the sacred images, or rather their golden linings. And through this slow flowing, the idea of a kind of secret group for which the paintings and other paraphernalia are part of some sacred cult has arisen in me. And that's pretty close to the idea of the film *The Personal Life of a Hole*. And then came the day of the uninstallation of my previous exhibition. We invited friends and acquaintances who represent the fraternity, and they sort of steal the whole exhibition. Everybody takes something and then they run around Abbey Road in Dejvice with it, with Tomas Vtípil playing.

That was the fastest and most efficient deinstallation of the show I know, and I filmed it. Then they took the stuff on the tram, rode a few stops and we started the ritualistic spell with them. Thanks for that.

Do you think about the purpose of your work in advance or is it a process of actual need, how do you choose the subject matter for your films or other work?

My theme is the world. Everything. That is the stone that lies before me and within me. And then I work it. An acquaintance of mine, Erwin, told me that the world is collapsing into beauty. He's right. And I'm trying to capture that collapse, to soundtrack it, to cast it on film. The advantage of creating is that you always start from the beginning. You have nothing. Just a void. And a whole world to go with it. He can choose to do anything. He can stain that void with anything. And somehow he's trying to make peace with that reality, to mate, to go along with the world. Of course, you go against the world, but you still have to know it somehow in order to go against it. I'm interested in life on earth in the sky.

How would you describe your films?

When I start making a movie, I think: This is going to be a completely normal movie. And then I dive in. And this thing comes out, and some people call it an experimental film, but they don't know what's normal and what's not. It seems to me that somehow contemporary cinema shies away from the amazing possibilities that film expression gives us. And I don't know why. I'm making films that film can afford to make. Because I feel that contemporary cinema is in a mess and I'm trying to fix it, I'm making normal cinema.

Your films are interconnected in length and the relationship of themes, are you fulfilling a scheme of your own or are you revealing a spontaneous principle?

Both. My films are very loose. And so that I don't get lost in it, I must have determined the lengths of all the following films according to a geometric plan some time ago. I mean, when I make a film, I know how long it's going to be. But the free will of these films is conditioned by a very precise, minutely precise composition. That is to say, what initially moves then takes on a precise shape in the whole film. I don't know if I'm being clear. It would probably be better to look at something. After all, that's why I do it, to watch it.

Do you have a favorite? Are any of them more essential for you?

I like the movie I'm making best.

I like your new term "děník". Can you explain it?

That comes from the fact that I can't think of anything on purpose. I can't sit down and come up with something specific on command. Either I dream something, an image or some text, and then I redraw it and make it, or I directly rewrite the text from the dream. Or I work with what's happening around me. But it's not exactly a diary like I had cabbage for lunch. It's more of a method that comes from documentary and moves towards personal forms of testimony.

How important is it for you to be self-sufficient in your work, i.e. producer, cinematographer, actor, extra, editor, scriptwriter...?

She was at first a virtue out of necessity. But I love doing those things, too. Like, I really enjoy recording the hustle and bustle. That's an extremely important thing, especially when I'm shooting on a camera that doesn't record sound. Because the movement stretches the shot elastically, or creates a fold on it, or breaks it, in short, it's an orchestration of reality.

From all these components I knead and assemble the Golem, which then comes to life in people. With *The Personal Life of a Hole*, I decided to let other collaborators into my claustrum. The film is produced by Alžběta Janáčková from Silk Films, distributed by Klara Khine, partly shot by Simon Todorov, edited together with Anna Petruželová and Benjamin Kolmačka, sound by Jan Mesany. And of course the sound mixing, the huge organ work is always done by someone else and not by me. The previous and current film was mixed by Jan Richtř.

The film *The Personal Life of a Hole* is finished, is it living its life yet? And can you reveal what you're working on now?

It doesn't live all by itself, you have to give it a little push. The film is primarily intended for festivals and alternative distribution in an artistic context. And since we're living in a virtual age now because of the coronavirus, the distribution options for this film are narrowing, which is stupid. But we are happy that the film was selected to compete at the Jihlava Documentary Film Festival. We also found a distributor, which is totally cool and I'm happy about that.

I'm starting work on my next film now. It's called 1+1+1 and it's about progress. The development of this film was supported by the Czech Cinematography Fund, which we are very happy about. We are now writing the script with Veronika Janatková and Lukáš Červený. And it will be a normal film again. Colourful and bouncy. I don't make documentaries, animated or live-action, but playful.

Does the current emergency situation change your work in any way?

Of course, for the first few days I was out of it, even though it seemed like a total bullshit. But then I realized that for me, the state of emergency is actually the state in which I create. Well, not exclusively. In short, I do things because I feel some kind of need, some kind of absence. And when one creates something, one always has to isolate oneself to some extent. I take this time as a sanctification of reality. A chance to go through those drawers and inner corridors where you don't really go and poke around, or poke around, or finish it. I was reassured, though of course I was also annoyed, because the possibilities of distributing the film have worsened, no one will come to the opening of this exhibition, God knows if anyone will see it, etc.

You are a renaissance man, is there a new area of work that attracts you?

Yes, but I'm attracted to some of the most original areas ever now. And that's smell and dance. Smell and stink is a popular song we hear on the radio or play on repeat. We weigh our memory on it, our present experience. It sounds trite, but food simply cannot stink because eating itself is pleasurable, because it is an expression of life itself. By re-registering a previously perceived odor, we physically move into the past, we relate to it, to an earlier registration of that odor that was crucial to us for some reason. It is similar to a film, which also has an almost physical impact. It repeats what has already been perceived, that is, in the case of film, what has been sensed. Smells and stenches can organize presence without creating language. They repeat, they shift, or we forget them completely. This is very similar with film. Film doesn't have a language either. It repeats things, moves things around and leaves some things out. And dance doesn't have a language either, and it's very physical. I'm still interested in the inarticulate voice. For the same reasons. And yet the film is such a beauty!

Thank you.

Thanks for the interview, too. It was very inspiring for me.

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