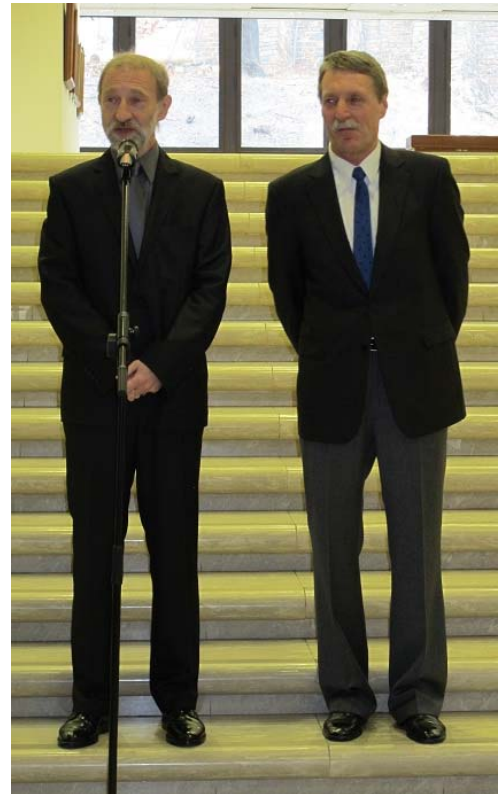


## Okińczyc

Andrzej Jajszczyk

On Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2012, an important event took place in Poznan. It was so important that Barbara and I even decided to rough it and use the Polish railways to get there. In the National Museum in Poznan, a large exhibition of Andrzej Okińczyc's works was premiering, one of the most prominent, although somewhat undervalued Polish painters. He was born in 1949 in Poznan and is a graduate (1973) of the University of Arts in the same city. The difficulties of the travel were well worth it. The exhibition was, put simply, great! At first what surprised me, was the absence of portraits which are usually a trademark of the artist. However, on viewing the exhibition in its entirety, it is clear that this was the right choice.

Just before the opening we purchased a beautiful catalogue. The book, deftly published in both Polish and English, was supplemented by a DVD containing multimedia material covering exhibitions from other artists arranged by Andrzej Okińczyc.



From left: Director of the National Museum in Poznan, Wojciech Suchocki, and Andrzej Okińczyc



*Meadow. 2001*

A long but interesting speech on the artistic output of Andrzej Okińczyc was given by Professor Wojciech Suchocki, the director of the National Museum in Poznan. The artist himself was, as usual, quite brief. He simply said: "I've said everything in my work, I invite you to see the exhibition." The vast crowd of spectators moved in to the exhibition halls.

The entire exhibition is composed of five parts of varied character, located throughout three halls of the museum. The first one mostly contains very large works that map the texture of nature — in both living and lifeless form — like meadows and solidified volcanic magma. These oeuvres are complemented by three views of stairs suspended next to those leading to the old museum building.



*Meadow*. 2010. Views from the front and the side

In a smaller auditorium, two parallel video presentations document the earlier exhibitions of Andrzej Okińczyc. The third, darker part, shows autumn-inspired reliefs. Next, in the same relatively small room, we can find works from the drapery and curtain series. The last hall plays the role of the seashore and contains several works from the beach screen series, supplemented by a couple of smaller paintings that can be found hanging on the walls. The distinctive feature of practically all the presented oeuvres is either the virtual or real three-dimensional effect achieved — whether that be on an absolutely flat canvas or by the careful shaping of the painting support.

### **Meadows, grass, and water**

Meadows, grass, and water surfaces constitute the leading themes of the first cycle we see when entering the exhibition. The assiduity and diligence that was required of the artist to make these very large works is quite remarkable. The size of “The meadow” painted in 2001 is 172 by 247.5 cm, i.e., it is as tall as I am. It depicts, with incredible detail, the view of thousands of blades of grass and small flowers. The effect of the acrylic paint is multiplied by the







*Grasses II*. 2010. Front and side views



*Grasses III*. 2010. Front and side views



*Grasses*. 2011

undulating structure of the support. This is clearly captured in my photograph which was taken from an angle. A similar effect was achieved in a work of the same title made in the year 2010. This technique is a *spécialité de la maison* of Andrzej Okińczyc. In times when artists create their paintings in a couple of minutes, such attention to detail is worthy of honour and recognition. Surely, the amount of work invested alone does not testify to anything. You can put in lots of effort to producing something absolutely kitsch. But, this is definitely not the case here.

It is interesting that the artist crosses the boundary between art forms. His works link flat painting with three-dimensional sculpture, and in doing so considerably differ from American hyperrealists (also known as photorealists) who exploit two dimensions only. Moreover, unlike hyperrealists he concentrates on nature-related themes.

Form crossover is also seen in another dimension here. In fact, the realism of the presented works migrates in to abstraction. It is clearly visible in the “Grass” cycle, especially the red and black work of 2011.



*Beata's Pond. 2001*

A masterpiece of illusion is “Beata’s Pond” featuring a regularly rippled support. A similar topic has been tackled in the work from 2003, the “Water”. And again, there is a play with the third dimension, weeds and light distorted by water ripples. I am a little bit irritated by the association I find with Monet’s water lilies, although this link is only in my own imagination.

Water is not the object of art for the first time, but often in the past it took the shape of threatening sea waves



*Beata's Pond. 2001*



*Water. 2003*

like in Aivazovsky’s or Turner’s paintings. It often constituted just a small part of larger compositions like in the works of the already mentioned Monet and many others. However, Okińczyc looks at it differently. His interest is in water’s role in transforming the view of submerged plants. It is also a challenge for a painter who is trying to capture the difficult dynamics in a fixed image.





Front: *Lava*. 2005. Next: Barbara Jajszyk and Julek Małecki



### **Lava and stairs**

The abstract character of works is more visible in the "Lava" series, although hyperrealists would find something of interest here too. These works were made in 2005. One of them is a monumental three metres in length. Here we can find another play with the fabric. Appropriately shaped support along with acrylic paints imitate real solidified magma. Here, the hyperrealism mimics the abstract-looking reality. A special and very rewarding effect was achieved by hanging some of the works on a background of semi-transparent



From left: *Lava 3*, *Lava 1*, *Lava 2*. 2005



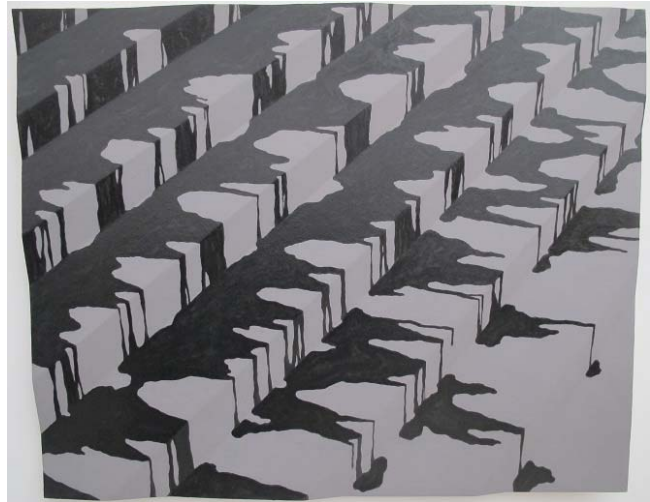
*Stairs II. 2011*



*Stairs I. 2011*

fabrics, protruding some distance from the museum walls. This effect did not come without some troubles. The day before the opening of the exhibition the gigantic “Lava” exhibit fell to the floor and needed the immediate attention of the artist.

These very large works with their volcanic texture remind me of the monumental works of Anselm Kiefer that I have seen in several art galleries throughout the world. By far the largest collection I admired was at the end of 2006 at an exhibition in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art under the title „Anselm Kiefer: Heaven and Earth“.



*Stairs III. 2011*

A texture similar to that of “Lava” is also featured in “Stairs II”, although “Stairs I” remains my favourite. Similarly to other works shown in this room, the paint-driven three-dimensional design is fortified by shaping the painting’s substrate. “Stairs III” are the least convincing for me, although they probably match the best aesthetics of contemporary art. This is possibly because they are so

different from the other works presented here. Or maybe there is something false in the blotch flowing down the stairs.



From left: *Hibernation II*, 2004, *Curtain*, 2005, *Hibernation I*, 2004

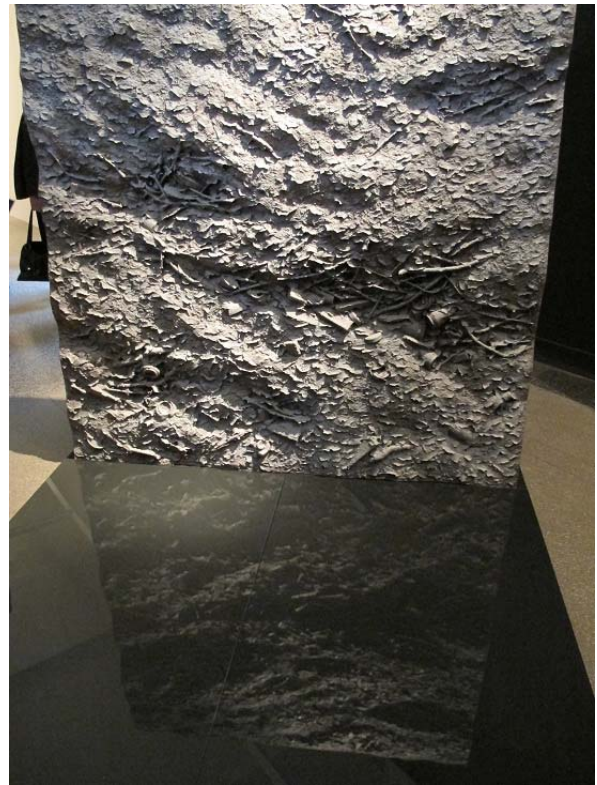
### **Fall Reliefs**

The cycle of five works placed in a semi-circle is really impressive. Vertical slabs overlook horizontal blocks of black polished granite forming something that looks like gravestones. However, this unpleasant association emphasises the





*Fullness. 2005*



*Hibernation II. 2004*

character of the oeuvres, along with the twilight in this side of the hall and the reflective effect of the polished plates. The reliefs' texture has also a connotation to the passing of time as it is a conglomerate of withered leaves, sticks, and fruits. The only exception here is "Fullness" displaying a blooming meadow convincingly illustrating that everything will pass away some day.

### **Draperies**

Paintings imitating loosely hanging fabrics are one of the specialties of Andrzej Okińczyc. I have to admit that he is a master at this. The illusion of depth in flat paintings, for example in "Drapery" from 2006 shown here or "Drapery IV" from 2004, is absolute. But there are paintings in which the painting substrate itself is undulated. The mix of paintings using both techniques gives us a good opportunity to compare similar effects achieved by different technological approaches and the possibility to think about the deceptiveness of our senses. I saw some of the presented draperies earlier at a Krakow exhibition of Andrzej Okińczyc in *Czartoryski's Arsenal* in December 2003. Draperies, especially those that are dark or bear imprints of the passing of time such as punctures and jaggies stir us into an eschatological mood and remind me of the extraordinary exhibition "Vanitas: the coffin portrait and the Sarmatian funerary customs" that I saw at



*Drapery. 2006*



*Draperies IV. 2004*



*Curtain VII. 2007*



*Curtain V. 2003*

the end of 1996 in the same building of the National Museum in Poznan. Maybe draperies, curtains, and veils are the result of the author's fascination with that exhibition? The more gloomy draperies could only match the interiors of a very specialised function. And, of course, art galleries and museums.

In contrast, the white drapery of 2006, shown below, I, minimalism lover that I am, would be happy to put in my own home or on an empty wall of my office in

the National Science Centre. However, purchasing it for the Centre could be seen as wasting public money 😊.

### **Folding Screens**

The "Folding Screens" cycle shown in the main hall of the old museum building constitutes a somewhat pleasant version of the draperies mentioned above. Illusion is also at play here. It is not entirely clear if the three-



*Draperies. 2006*



dimensional effects are achieved exclusively by painting techniques or they result from the support shaping. The effect of authenticity is strengthened by hanging some pieces of clothing including swimsuits. I look at these beach screens with a special pleasure as some years ago I watched their production in the workshop of Andrzej Okińczyc.



Barbara behind *Folding Screen XI*

In the same hall, there are some works, for example "Scale 1:6 I" that I do not particularly like. The coupling of navy blue and gold irritates me, and the works themselves resemble a cheap decoration. But this is only my personal opinion.

### Exhibition Arrangements

Andrzej Okińczyc has also arranged many wonderful exhibitions. Documentaries from some of these are presented simultaneously on two screens in a smaller room. From those shown, I recognise exhibitions which I have been to myself. The wonderful and large exhibition of Jerzy Nowosielski in the National Museum in Poznan in 1993 is one of these. This was probably the first time I had the occasion of seeing a larger collection of this artist's work (I was able to see an even larger collection of the artist ten years later in Warsaw's *Zacheta* at an exhibition organised by Andrzej Starmach).



From left: Andrzej and Barbara Jajszyk and Grażyna and Piotr Soszyński.  
In the background: *Folding Screen II*. 2007



*Scale 1:6 I*. 2006

## Decorators contra Publicists

Andrzej Okińczyc is an artist of, what you could call, classical painting. Painting for the reason of painting. He is interested in showing realism in his works as well as experimenting with different techniques that border with sculpture. This is a noble and long lasting tradition. A tradition that is being pushed away by artists for whom painting is not a goal in itself. For them it is the story or the idea that counts — sometimes even just the scandal. These that I myself call “publicists,” often take painting technique lightly and quickly make their creations with no attention to detail. Sometimes they simply do not know how to paint. They underestimate true painters that they call “decorators.” I must admit that ‘nice’ painting is difficult, as it is easy to move to the side of kitsch. “Publicists” often add certain ideologies that do not really correlate with their works of art. I recently had this exact feeling when I was viewing the works of Tatiana Czekalska and Leszek Golec in Lodz’s *Atlas of Art* at the exhibition “Contract Killer,” where, in my opinion, the amazing photographs had nothing to do with the label of “animal rights” that was presented in the reviews of the exhibition. Of course, from those that I spoke of before and more, there are a few excellent artists who strive for both an original message as well as strong professionalism in their works. I add such Polish artists as Wilhelm Sasnal or Marcin Maciejowski to this group. I do not speak of the work of artists that experiment with multimedia since that is a topic for a separate essay.

In a bit of a provocative mood, during the opening ceremony, I asked Andrzej Okińczyc if he would not see an opportunity for himself if he painted his screens grey and decorated them with barbed wire. He brushed the idea off by saying he would never sensationalise his art just to be able to sell it better. But if Sasnal or Mirosław Balka did not follow in the footsteps of Luc Tuymans and did not imply the Holocaust in their art, who knows if their pieces would have landed in the most prestigious art galleries of the world (I must admit that when I saw Tuymans exhibit in 2008 in Warsaw’s *Zacheta* I was a bit shocked to have discovered who the inspiration for Sasnal was).

I must say that I do not have a preference between “decorators” or “publicists.” Publicising seems to be a bit more interesting though. I think Masza Potocka, the director of MOCAK (the *Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow*), might be in the right when she says that there is a great number of people that can paint well. Not many of those though can be called artists. In one of her recent interviews she admits with great candor that who is deemed an artist and who is not is arbitrarily decided by directors of art galleries. This great power of theirs is a bit unnerving. I would like to believe that it is not the directors that have the last word, but rather the art itself.

I have no doubt in my mind that Andrzej Okińczyc’s exhibit and the art found within it is truly splendid. It was definitely worth the trip.

Text and photographs by Andrzej Jajszczyk

Translated from Polish

by Robert Ciszek and Andrzej Jajszczyk

Krakow, March 15, 2012



From left: Andrzej Jajszczyk, Andrzej Okińczyc,  
Wojciech Suchocki