

The property of focus and place

Shortly after my meet-the-author event attended by Koji, the artist handed me a card while I was still writing dedications to those who asked for them. It was handwritten:

Dear Jarek!

Can you write a short text about Jack Sempoliński and me? I really like and value his work (...). For a couple of years, I have been thinking about a joint exhibition. Shortly before his death, I had the opportunity to get to know him.

I would be happy if you could write it.

Koji

A few days later, we made an appointment at his flat in the center of Warsaw. Today, it seems important to me to mention “in the center of Warsaw”. Although I would be happy to change this to “at the center of everything”. The rest of the text somehow seems to explain this.

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It took me a long time to walk to the artist’s place from Plac Zbawiciela. I don’t know why it took so long. It’s as if I hadn’t been going to a specific place, but was just inventing it. Or rather – as if I had been a dowsing rod looking for it. For groundwater. Springs.

When I entered the flat, it smelled of incense. No ecclesiastical one from the Polish tradition. Buddhist. Eastern.

I took off my shoes.

I was barefoot.

I don’t wear socks.

They pinch me.

But I also often, at certain spots in the world, deliberately take shoes off my bare feet. In Turin – in the hotel room where Cesare Pavese, my beloved poet, committed suicide. In Lviv – in the flat where Zuzanna Ginczanka lived. Then – at the site of her execution, in Płaszów. (I remember as I was standing on a patch of land shown to me and it started snowing. When I walked away, I left my footprints there). In any case, it felt good to stand in an invisible cloud of incense in Koji’s house, barefoot, on a paint-stained floor, like a small-town version of one of Jackson Pollock’s works. The common sea and the common meadow tickled at my heels.

When I asked, Koji explained that on the anniversary of the deaths of people, cats, dogs, and other familiar beings, he opens a notebook with the names of the deceased – the names used when they were alive on earth, and the ones the priest gave them for now when they are not here.

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I was partially familiar with the output of Jacek Sempoliński. I met (saw) him in the 1980s at the Museum of the Archdiocese in Powiśle. I think it was the opening of Jerzy Tchorzewski's exhibition.

On that day, when Koji spoke about his death, I immediately thought I had to go to the Powązki cemetery before writing these few words. I remembered that the artist had his black columbarium in the wall of merit, somewhere on Herbert's level. I went with a carnation, I found it. I didn't remember, rather didn't know, that right next to it, in the twin blackness of the stone, lay Wiesław Juszczak, who died later. I thought, or rather felt (thinking doesn't exist), that without this second point, the wall with Jacek Sempoliński only would be incomplete. Meaningless. Even irritating. Was it the result of a neurosis that makes me think of some places as completed, soothing, and others as unfulfilled ("unfinished", like the symphony by Schubert)? I don't know. In any case, I went to the Powązki as if to get a key to the affinity of the two artists. Koji and Jacek Sempoliński. But it's not like the key can give names. The key opens reality but closes names. It leaves you wordless. On the path of feeling and inquiry. Of internal festering. And so I stayed in that graveyard walk of mine – with the certainty that I know, and the certainty that I should not attempt to name. Because, after all, I am a poet. And when Koji and Jacek Sempoliński invited me to write the text accompanying the exhibition, they could not have expected me to be less honest, less silent when confronted with impotence than those who remain beyond definition.

Shall I say that the works of these artists are dissimilar? Anyone who sees them knows well that they have different faces. Koji's – focused, aiming for mono-color or silence of contrasts. Jacek Sempoliński's – screaming with a short color as a scar of a fresh wound, still lined with carmine or blue blood.

When I looked at Koji Kamoji's work in his flat, and later when I saw Jacek Sempoliński's paintings prepared for the exhibition at the Monopol Gallery, I knew one thing: the human condition, probably everyone's, is a happy prank of despair. The artist's creative act is an attempt to soothe desperation and pain. As Breton wrote in "The Manifesto of Surrealism", it's the utopia of finding such a place where that what suffers and what celebrates find some kind of reconciliation. They illuminate and eclipse each other. They shout down and gag the outer turmoil so that they reverberate deep inside us and in the depths of the sea that washes our feet.

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Who am I, a focused guest of Koji and Jacek Sempoliński who roams the earth – too heavy, unintelligent, protuberant, crooked, trampled? Someone who takes off his shoes only in one place in the visible and invisible universe – the only one possible for me and for everyone – to stand at the "right" point. A unique point. One reconciling everything with everything. A focused and listening seeker of consent. Of harmony. Of pre-birth and pre-future. Of the paradox of my existence

Thank you, Brothers in wondering to the Point. Thank you, Koji, and the barely acquainted Mr. Jacek.

TEA ROUTE

To Koji, also with Mr. Jacek in my thoughts

from the saviour's square straight
and left

and left again to a short
stretch
and to the right to a longer one, and to the right
upstairs
by stairs or by lift
but today i prefer to take a lift

inside, it is quite
a different drawing

i say it smells good here and koji
that it is incense
lit for the dead

he takes out an open notebook
like a gate
written with i don't know what
passwords

he says
that the names are of the dead
before their death
ascribed to the days of the year

and next to these names are
the names of the dead for now

he explains
that these are priestly names
distilled
from life before death

what will be my name
after i die
i ask
but koji is not a priest today
so he doesn't know
my name for eternity

in the atelier
(straight and short to the right)
new works against the wall

planks and on the planks
straight

then left
and pebbles with shadow

koji says
that the pebbles are in the right
place
for his peace of mind
but also for the world

and says that the planks
are not a snippet
but that it is the whole
reality of existence

and that the right place
for the field next to the wall
is the right place for the whole
entirety

i say
that when i touch
something with my left arm
then i must also touch it with the right one
and i ask if the place
of a stone on the plank
is something like this

we understand each other quite well
on the tea route
like two who have
the same peculiarity

different in itself
illness and art

Jarosław Mikołajewski

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