

DESCRIPTION

Cloudy sky

mgr Marta Krześlak-Kolczyńska

supervisor: dr hab. Bogdan Achimescu, prof. ASP

EN

As part of my doctoral thesis I have created an installation titled *Cloudy sky*. The piece draws an analogy between an overcast sky and thoughts sweeping across the mind. As cloud condensation nuclei appear in a cloud, rain is produced and, for us, rain is a way of experiencing nature's water cycle.

The installation comprises a variety of paper elements: wood pulp, photographs, graph paper, cotton paper and crêpe paper. In the remarks that follow, I will give a point-by-point account of the installation's components and the process by which they emerged.

The wood pulp was made from various paper objects I found in my studio. I soaked these finds in water to soften them. I wanted the pulp to resemble a hill or a cave when it dried – depending on whether one viewed it from above or from below. To produce a hill, I needed a mould in which to dry the pulp. I was not keen on making such a mould out of Styrofoam or clay, so I used different objects from my studio instead. Chairs, bits of mattresses and structural components were all heaped together, and this heap was then covered with several kinds of foil: brushed foil used for protecting wood, rein-forced film for greenhouse glazing and smooth dust sheet. Because the pulp was dried on several different-textured foils, a variety of motifs was reproduced on its surface: brushed and grid patterns, and irregular creases. I then decorated the pulp with stars cut out of fluorescent crêpe paper, gluing them close to one another. Finally, I would break the pulp into pieces: sometimes, this was necessary for transportation purposes; on other occasions, the pulp would crack under its own weight. When that happened, I would soak it again, mould it into one piece and dry it. In this manner, an eclectic pattern emerged: a collage-like pulp. It would be difficult to say whether the pattern represents a star cluster, sunset sky or the pulped flags of different countries and alliances. I hung the pieces thus obtained at different heights, so that they resembled clouds. If I was to soak them in water, they would dissolve completely, their texture not unlike that of thick sour cream.

Stars are suspended between bits of wood pulp. Some of these stars spin round, fastened to an irregular plastic circle powered by a model engine. The circle is a structure pulled out of a children's kite. Another constellation is suspended

from plastic welded mesh hung flat below the ceiling. The mesh is transparent; occasionally, it catches the light and that is when it resembles a cirrus cloud. Yet another star cluster is pendant on cone-shaped mesh. This particular object allows us a closer look at the stars, which are hung at eye level. The stars are cut out of found photographs – or, to be more precise, from bits of sky shown in the photographs, where it appears in all shapes and forms: it can be clear, dusky, before the storm, overcast or thick. The stars are hexagons – an ornament commonly seen in cathedral vaults. The centre of these stars is the size of a fingertip, but their rays are long, their length corresponding to the amount of space taken by the sky in each photograph. Looking inside the transparent cone, one can see five-pointed, fluorescent stars cut out of cotton paper. Each of these stars is glued to a clear, coloured fishing line with a piece of mirror tape the size of half a nail: the smallest piece of tape a person is able to turn in her fingers. The fishing line shimmers in the light, as if it were a trajectory: a remnant of stellar motion. As in a photograph of starlit sky which has been exposed to light for a long time, here, too, the shining spots become a line.

Letters cut out of cotton paper are suspended among the stars. Occasionally, words can be made out amid the letters. This whole section comprises the English lyrics of a pop song I wrote down by ear. Mistakes could not always be avoided: at times I struggled to work out the correct word – or accidentally hit the wrong key on the keyboard as I wrote the lyrics down. This mistake-ridden, hasty record has been preserved: I hung the words inside the welded mesh and in a cobweb of wires from which, in turn, the wood pulp is suspended – this gives viewers the impression that the letters are floating in the air.

I glue A4 sheets of 40gsm paper together using masking tape. The vast expanse of paper obtained in this fashion is then covered in short lines; I do this using a brocade ball point pen in three shades of blue. An image of blue sky covered in white clouds emerges. When I am done, I cut the large-format drawing longitudinally every four squares (or every two centimetres). At that point, the structure begins to resemble a blind. I hang this ‘blind’ on two circles which remain in circular motion. As the structure moves, the sky alternates between disappearing and reappearing, depending on how the ‘blind slats’ arrange themselves. The grid on the sheets will fade gradually, as the paper is exposed to light. Some of the sheets have probably become white already: the structure is gone, all that is left is the drawing. But then the drawing was never dependent on the structure; perhaps the resemblance between the two was strictly formal, given that the drawing was made of lines.

The lowest-hanging part of the installation is the cave, made of the wood pulp already mentioned above. This time, I glued a collection of found photographs all over the cave. What the pictures show is immaterial: I am a lot more interested in

the periphery of the frame. Using my nails, I tear the paper off the plastic, photo-sensitive emulsion. Next, I tear human figures out of the photographs. It is important to tear off the paper at the back first, wedging one's nail into the delaminated corner of an old photograph. Because my tear in the photograph is fresh, the paper does not come off easily. The detached scrap of plastic rolls up and so, at this point, actually looking at it becomes almost impossible. Thus it is essential for me to choose the right shred before the photograph curls up. I choose the scraps where I discern a pavement, a kerb, a garden chair or a mountain road: things I have seen or dreamt of once. I glue these scraps of landscape and architecture onto the pulp. I do this quite randomly, placing one item next to another. I choose them depending on the shape of the pulp's surface. If the spot where I want to glue the photograph shred turns out to be more challenging, I select a more wobbly bit that comes apart in my fingers. If the spot seems more accommodating, I opt for a more robust scrap. I use bookbinding glue to glue the bits on and press them more firmly together with a soft sponge. Some corners will come off after a few moments: I will have to return to them and press them even harder into place. As I glue the photographs all over it, the pulp dissolves slightly, with bits breaking off here and there. I will have to glue these bits back on later or, failing that, hang them at different heights, as if they were entangled in a cobweb and suspended there.

I weave the cobweb from corrugated wires pulled out of a filter mesh. The process undergone by this wire is not unlike what happens to one's hair, weaving after one has worn it in a plait overnight. The wires are short: that is because, in order to split the filter mesh open, I had to cut it into small pieces. And so, having pulled out the wires, I have to weave them together according to their length. The end product of this is a sort of barbed wire.

One could lie down underneath the cave. And as we lie there, we can see, in the distance, a mobile with stars, surrounded by pulp which looks like a star girl's birthday cake after it has been run over. This is what we see if we set the focus to distant vision. If, by contrast, we opt for near vision, we will find ourselves lying underneath a mass of paper which had dried on brushed foil commonly used as a firewood cover. At that point, one thing becomes evident: what is known as satin finish is neither matte nor glossy. Compared with the installation's other components, this is an extremely minimalist surface, with a 10x15 photograph of a bonfire in a field at dusk pinned in the middle. In the photograph, the powerful flame is a lot lighter than the darkening sky, and burning wooden logs can be seen within the fire. The fire is definitely bigger than any one person, perhaps even greater than several people. The photographer must have felt the heat of the bonfire.

If a flame of this magnitude were to become a central part of my installation, the whole thing would dissolve in a matter of moments. The drawing on grid pieces of

paper would burn down like a handkerchief. The plastic circles would shrink like a hair, with nothing left except a small stump. The plastic mesh would burn down like a wafer – perhaps it would begin to drip down, too. The pulp would burn like wood, probably taking longer than all the other materials: it would scorch first and then smoulder like incense. I know the smell of burning pulp. I had to use an electric heater as I was drying it: in the early spring, temperatures in the studio struggled to get a few degrees above zero. As I was heating the pulp, parts of it would occasionally begin to smoulder. Photographs, too, would burn down in this kind of fire. It would most likely be a pretty sight – it's just that it would be over quickly. Quite unlike the process of drawing the blue sky, drying the pulp and manually cutting out the stars and letters (which went on for weeks). And quite unlike the years that passed since the photographs featured in the installation had been taken.

Once I have completed my installation, this is the kind of fire I would like to witness. Faced with such a prospect, I would have to pull everything out and then re-assemble it. Even if this painstakingly woven installation did not exist, all its parts would still be there. Even if we forget some of the things we see in a landscape, these particular components will always be part of it. The stars and the blue sky will always be above me; someone will always be humming a song – and I would find it easy to come across a familiar pavement, fence or kerb. What would survive would be the metal components. One could clean them of soot and use them for some other purpose.

The movement that keeps on changing its reference point, and the baroque quality of details dislocate the core of the installation. This spatial activity is devoid of density: it is nothing but a line and a plane. Items change their relative location either because they are powered by model engines (as is the case with the star mobile and the drawing mobile) or because human movement has caused a stir in the air (the cone featuring stars, the pulp suspended in a wire cobweb). The image in the background shifts from one moment to the next, depending on one's point of view. Viewers are able to move between the objects and thus they, too, become reference points. Perhaps they are giants and the landscape is a miniature. I have placed an assembly platform in the middle of the installation. You can climb the platform and take the installation in while standing 80 centimetres above ground. This changes the perspective. With our head in the stars, we can see the other side of the hanging wood pulp clouds, as the stars mobile sweeps around them. It seems to me we can easily lose our balance as we do this. By combining the installation's fragile parts with structural components, I emphasize the experimental nature of working with any material. Perhaps this approach will lift the burden of untouchability off objects and encourage viewers to practice activity multi-layeredness of seeing.

Coming into contact with a half-abstract, half-recognizable object allows for the redefinition of phenomena. Because that object has been constructed using familiar motifs, it may evoke nostalgic thoughts. Memory is a repository of nostalgic images, concocting the past, present and future. Our experience is therefore defined by memories. The exhibition is a collection of images emerging in the viewers' imagination. The objects in our imagination may well turn out to be a recurrent desire or trauma, and one is able to work through that trauma by feeling disappointed – or moved. Paying close attention to the world can bring about change in the way we think; it can also make us defy established systems. Stepping away from anthropocentric assumptions gives us the opportunity to regard crises with a fresh eye. The situation exceeds the scale of our imagination – and so it is getting out of hand. In response, I take a processual approach to the act of finding ourselves in relation to other bodies; this processuality occurs when we allow ourselves to think in an abstract manner, and view space with a heretical slant. The qualities of being ephemeral, prototypical and easily transformed help us become more open to interpretations: they comprise a structure whose essence is the process itself – and the moment when ferment of thought asserts itself as a work of art.

Cloudy sky will be shown for the first time at the '*Druga Skóra*' [Second Skin] group exhibition at the Museum of Textiles in Łódź (19 May-30 July 2023). The exhibition will take up one floor of an old textile factory: a surface area of 819 square metres. My installation will take up approximately 36 square metres. I will hang the objects comprising the piece at various heights: from 346 cm (ceiling height) to 220 cm (so as to prevent visitors from hitting their heads). The exact location of each object will depend on the surroundings of my piece. Due to the fact that the exhibition has been planned for the summer months, I will rely mostly on daylight, with extra lighting only provided in selected spots. 120 centimetres high fluorescent lamps, emitting white light, will be used where necessary.

The already submitted body of work is complemented with a book titled *Cloudy sky. Instrukcje dla podróżującej myśli* [Instruction for Travelling Thought] and digitally stored film documentation of the installation. The book is a guide to my methodology and my inspirations. In addition, it includes the present abstract and photographic documentation of my installation – capturing the moment when the finished piece was hanging in my studio.

translated by Joanna Przasnyska-Błachnio