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RECENT PAINTINGS BY MARIA SOCHANIEWICZ

Press Release - "Recent Paintings", solo exhibition in SOHO20 Gallery, 1998

A well known artist in her native Poland Ms. Sochaniewicz built her reputation there as a leader of the Neue Wilde movement, a trend in painting emphasizing expressive figuration. In recent years, however, she has moved increasingly towards abstraction, while retaining the style and intensity of her figurative work. Her SOHO20 show features a number of abstract paintings of uncommon energy, originality and emotional range. There is a great diversity of color, line, and mood but a unity of style.

Compositionally, Ms. Sochaniewicz utilizes the methods of repetition and recursion as well as unique color sense in the service of an unapologetic painterly illusionism. Thus, in some of the works, slashes of thick acrylic paint form dense tickets, creating surfaces that function like portals to maze-like worlds topographies oscillate between geometry and biology. At the other times, her lines form teeming groups or microbe-like entities hunting in packs. And finally in her more serene moods Sochaniewicz blends lines into wave like color fields on which small flecks of light paint float like foam.

In short, Ms. Sochaniewicz has created a uniquely and challenging body of work that eludes easy classification and hence, merits our attention.

New York, September, 1998

Thomas Slaughter  
Director of SOHO20 Gallery

IN THE BRUSHWOOD

Introduction for catalog for solo exhibition "Paintings" in Test Gallery, 1998

"I have an impression, that it isn't easy for the artist to reveal her secret which might be the farewell with figurative painting. If it is so, the next gathering with her former public, is going to be a kind of very intimate confession.

...this time the author has decided to speak out: my present fascination refers to the signs and structures totally departed from the real life, so I brought my abstraction.

...the artist that we know is still present, but only in her strong impact, emphatic gesture, expressiveness and fleshiness of the outline. It is beyond all questions that the present world of this painting, with no human figure or outlines of a woman's face, being characteristic and favorite motives of the author in the past carries in it reliable transformation of anatomic outline into anatomy of matter. At present, public can see the carpet of limited structures, the ornamental repetition of which, pictures them as the elements of some infinite carpet.

...the world of Maria Sochaniewicz has changed and broadened by the field of imagination, inspiration of which, and then the interpretation, leaves a lot of freedom to the artist and to the spectator."

Warsaw, May, 1998, (excerpt)

Wojciech Krauze, Art Critic

"ORIGINAL TECHNIQUES - RETROSPECTIVE SHOW II" - "ON THE PAINTINGS OF MARIA SOCHANIEWICZ

"A Harz pyrite...", Introduction for catalog for solo exhibition in "Pokaz" Gallery, 1987

A Harz pyrite - says Cordano - shows various figures as ostrich, salamander, cock, abraded priest, and also Holy Mary cradling Her Son in Her Arms".

In her paintings Maria depicts objects of finished defined form, fish, pyramids, butterflies, snakes etc.

With complete certainty, we can't deceive in them any escapism from portraying things. However, her paintings apparently originated in the course of denying any form to visible things. A formless spontaneity, gained by intensive effort, fascinates by its strength, shows us shapeless things pressing their objective evidence upon a spectator. I think that this distinguished achievement also conveys a meaning of the contemporary understanding of modern art.

Warsaw, June, 1987

Janusz Petrykowski, Artist Painter

## TOWARD ABSTRACTION

Nowy Dziennik Polish Publishing

In her painting Maja Sochaniewicz focuses on specific subjects. The first well defined series called "Victory" was composed of powerful, sort of archaic female figures, remote sisters of Nolde's characters, Gauguin's beauties or Matisse's models.

The end of '70s brought series with groups of figures, scenes from whorehouses, "dancers and ballerinas", "punks". The situation presented on canvas acquired more descriptive precision and a higher dose of realism without losing momentum, solid fracture treatment, vivid colors, so typical for Maja Sochaniewicz's painting.

Even though it never became a fact, the artist feared falling into realism and portraying life, which was against the real spirit of her painting. She desired more freedom and fun in "smearing paints", as she herself calls it. Therefore, she gave up painting interiors with figures and changed subjects, but not the atmosphere of her artwork, always full of universal symbolism. It implied experiments in painting techniques: painting in metal foil and large sheets of cardboard, combining ink acrylic paints and decorative varnish. Recently Maja Sochaniewicz has also applied shiny brocades and powdered pigments, which create the effect of velvet surfaces.

The painting presented in this exhibition are saturated with Pan-biological elements, symbolic and sensual at the same time. As in ancient mythology, half human, half divine creatures populate this world, and they have strong links with structured still life or studies of real life objects. They are images completely deprived of unnecessary external similarity.

"Angels", a motif recently favored by the artist, are more like winged demons, carnal and subject to emotions, closer to Assyrian myths than to Christianity. Her recent works strike with variety of matter and color combined with synthetic form, with a desire to find a sign, a pictogram. The easily perfectible uncompromising attitude of those austere composition, created by restless wide movements of her brush are softened by subtlety and the choice of color. Compared to her earlier works, with their contrasts, sharp, even harsh at times, the art of Maja Sochaniewicz tends to nuances, enriched by silver and gold tones.

Looking at her paintings, we have a feeling of facing universal order, primary and primitive in its nature, pagan in a way, where the same spiritual element exist in a plant, an animal and a human being, and the half divine element is equally hard to extract from the human nature as it is hard to draw a line between what is part of humans, plants and animals. Therefore, the photographs Maja Sochaniewicz included in this catalog cannot be viewed just as a poetic joke, but also as camouflaged sort of artistic credo.

In 1979 I wrote about the art of Maria Sochaniewicz – "Her artistic temperament has clearly expressionist features. The psychological atmosphere of violent and hot emotions hardens in wide movements of her brush, in the sharp contrasts of 'barbarian colors'. In her art nothing is feminine, sweet, delicate, tasteful. She is attracted by the kitsch of a small town market combined with barbarian abundance and dark atmosphere of passion, derived from Flaubert's 'Salambo'. The line of her drawings is harsh, artistic matter is dense, brush movements of varied fractural treatment are well defined up to the limits of brutality" - that is I wrote about Maja Sochaniewicz in 1987.

Years later we saw each other in her Brooklyn apartment, which she also used as a studio. I had already seen her works from the past few years in the USA. What is a continuation of what she used to do in Warsaw, and what is new in her art?

She started from well defined figuration, interior scenes with female figures. Than plants and animal turned to be the main subject. The following stylistic changes consequently resulted from earlier periods. It is also the case now. The artist almost give up realistic painting in favor of abstract compositions, with noticeable fascination, also present in her earlier works, with the world of plants and animals as their basis.

In the mid - 80s Maja Sochaniewicz created her own beastly world, teasing the viewer's imagination: magic snakes, exotic fish, cats with refined movements. She also liked to paint tropical rapacious flowers, demonic angels, mysterious shapes of pyramids. A snake, one of her favorite motifs, has now become a silver and gold winding strand and fish have become glittering strips. At one of her exhibitions she presented a painting that brings about associations with some indefinite primitive forms of biological life. Compared to her earlier works, you can observe less rigid structure of forms, which now create rich matter, visually 'leaking' out of the frame. This way painting become an image of a larger part of symbolic universe. In earlier times, looking at Maja Sochaniewicz's paintings you had a feeling of facing universal order, pagan in its nature, where the same spiritual element is present in a plant, an animal and human being. This universal unity is now expressed by the unifying, pulsating matter of her paintings.

Her artistic temperament has always had clear expressionist values. She has been attracted by its uncompromising ideas of composition and pure strong colors: the momentum of artistic gesture. She may be called the pioneer of "Neue Wilde" trend in Poland.

Neo - expressionism, visible in the monumental female figures from the series called "Victory", which began her artistic career, was fully developed during in times of her contact with West Berlin, where at the beginning of the 80s she started to present her works. She came to the United States as an artist with clear vision of her art and fashionable art (I mean basically the galleries in SOHO that impose specific models) inspires her by its unique variety of shapes and colors, ugliness and beauty, like New York itself. In a new environment, however, I still see her as a distant sister of pagan fairies with a touch of Witkacy's demons. She still makes strange paint mixtures: she mixed varnish with ink and acrylic paints, she puts color pigments and shiny brocades on metal foils. This kind of experiments, so popular in the United

States, where there are no taboos as to techniques, in Poland have always unusual. Perhaps the fact that Maja Sochaniewicz began to express herself by using forms close to abstraction, not quite defined, is a result of her reaction to the 'complexity of reality' that surrounds her in New York. Her recent experiments aim at abstract forms that are in constant movement. The reappearing motif of a school of fish in moving water has a symbolic meaning.

In the interview the artist emphasized that to her it is extremely important to portray in her art the aura of mystery and understatement. Therefore, she is mesmerized by silent and impenetrable lives of fish and snakes. For the same reason she is fascinated by the shape of pyramid. She does not accept in her art what is straight and obvious, mechanical or logical. Painting is an element like the ocean, which she loves to observe.

The Painting of Maria Sochaniewicz is constantly saturated with Pan-biologism and sensuality.

Warsaw, 1990

Kinga Kawalerowicz, Art Critic

"RETROSPECTIVE SHOW III - '13 YEARS LATER'" - IN THE BEGINNING WERE WOMEN...  
Gallery of Young Artists, 1988

In the beginning were women.

They were powerful, imperious and mad.

They were vital, sensual, inspired.

They were devilish female angels.

They were like the Mantis seducing males with physical beauty.

They dominated men and nature, negligent of their surroundings, negligent of every one and everything except carnal love, the only value that life offered them.

The women from Maria Sochaniewicz's paintings, Victoria, Azteca, Nefretete, Primavera, heroines in many embodiments, have yielded to a force they initially underestimated. They have been defeated by time which has slowly, imperceptibly transformed their monumental figures into frail shapes. Deprived of their main asset, their breathtaking bodies, they have lost absolute primacy in the world. At their creator's instance, they have been forced to accept an inferior position, among men, plants and animals. Degraded to a rank of barely discernible, nonchalant traces of the brush, they have merged with the surrounding matter and their partners, and have hidden behind screens painted up with serpents.

What has remained in the foreground is nature, as rapacious, disturbing, sensual and at the same time severe and unyielding as once the women.

For four years now, Maria Sochaniewicz's canvases and drawings have been filled with reptiles, fish and leaves. Despite their well-defined forms, they are intriguingly sensual and mysterious. Though almost free of stylization, they seem synthetic as well as decorative.

And yet, their natural shapes are as straight forward as their painted transposition. The disturbing, vibrating bodies of the fish and serpents, and almost animal like plants correspond in a strange way to the anthropomorphic silhouettes in Sochaniewicz's other works executed at the same time...

Maria evidently avoids producing uniform images. She oscillates between subtlety, expression and decorativeness, almost bordering on kitsch. She surprises the viewer with the material used for the groundwork of her paintings; at times, she is tired of two dimensions, and arranges a chosen area in the house or at the gallery by means of additional elements. She makes experiments with various materials, combining paint with fabric, brocade with mirrors.

All these qualities, and especially her consistent attraction to figuration, resulting from energetic strokes of the brush, and up to an easily definable style, Maria's oeuvre fits in with the Neue Wilde Malerei, so popular for the last few years. But, Maria started to paint like this many years ago. So, wouldn't it be more justified to call her a harbinger of expressive figuration?

Fortunately, Sochaniewicz claims no titles, makes light of nominal questions and simply paints what she finds emotionally fascinating, evidently concerned with the ambiguity of apparently unequivocal forms.

Warsaw, November, 87'

Monika Malkowska, Art Critic

## WOMAN AND SNAKE'

Interview in "Razem" Magazine

Angels from hell. Sirens that seduce with their beauty. They dominated men and nature, ignored the outside world. They ignored everything except love, full of eroticism. It was their only value that life offered them.

Women in the paintings by Maria Sochaniewicz: Victoria, Azteca, Nefretete, Primavera, heroines in several embodiments were conquered by the power they initially underestimated. They were conquered by time, slowly changing their monumental figures into more and more delicate shapes. Deprived of their main value, an appealing body, they lost their power over the world. By will of their creator they had to find satisfaction in something of a lower value and to be put next to men, plants, animals. Degraded to hardly definable lines made by the artist's brush, they blended into the background, tied to their partners, they hid behind decorative screens with snake patterns.

Nature, equally violent, provoking, sensual, as well as rigid and unconquerable at the same time, stayed in the foreground, like women used to do before. For the past four years the canvas of Maria Sochaniewicz have been filled by reptiles, fish, leaves.

Intriguing in their sensuality, mysterious despite their visibility and clear form. Deprived of stylization, synthetically defined, they seem to be rich and decorative at the same time.

However, their shapes, given by nature, are as uncomplicated as their artistic transpositions.

Reckless, nervously pulsating bodies of fish and snakes or animal-like plants in a strange way go together with anthropomorphic shapes that appear in other works by Maria Sochaniewicz created at about the same time. Shapes of male and female figures are less and less definable as if the main characters of her creations were given an ability to melt into the surrounding world.

The tissue of that world changes from one painting to another. It is either a vibrating matter with subdued colors of brown and orange, or it may become a juicy, clearly organic matter, or, at other times, an aggressively colorful, shiny foil that changes the shapes of painted figures into an illusion from a street market.

Maria tries to avoid following one track in her painting. She balances between subtlety, expression, and decorativeness on the verge of a daub. She plays with materials that she uses as basis for her paintings; she puts them into strange frames. At times she gives up the two dimensional aspect by using extra space outside the frame in her own studio or an exhibition. She experiments with different materials, putting together paints with fabrics or mirrors. These features of her artwork and her constant tendency to figuration, created by determined brush movements all add up to her own original style, easy to recognize. You could put her works among the ones that belong to the recently in vogue 'New Wilderness'. However, she used to paint this way several years ago. Is she the pioneer of the new movement then? The happy artist does not like to be called this name. She does not have such an ambition. She ignores names, and she paints what she is emotionally interested in.

-Why did you forget about women, the main characters of your former works?

I did not completely forget about them. They still show up in my paintings, but I deprived them of fancy clothes. Now I paint naked or half naked women in such situations where nudity is natural. They become part of nature. Naked like plants or animals, they show their bodies without any shame. This kind of nudity was possible only in paradise, so that is where I imagine the women I paint.

-Where did you get the idea for the snake in your paintings? In paradise?

No, at the zoo. I go there very often and watch snakes and fish. I am fascinated with their outside indifference. Do they have souls? I do not know. When they move, they constantly change their form. It happens so quickly that when you try to register it, you become abstract. Snakes and fish are very naked and decorated by nature at the same time. They have soft, flexible shapes with scales. When I watch them I feel their skin...

-Your fish and snakes never represent a given species. It is rather a summary of their features that you portray. You do it easily. This kind of skill needs practice and experience and proves you do a lot of thinking on the subject.

When I paint, I approach it spontaneously. However, before a painting session, which takes a few hours, I spend a few weeks thinking about it. To be able to relax while I paint I have to get very disciplined before that. Each line takes a lot of thinking. I wait for the moment when my vision becomes clear. When that happens, I am able to control each movement of my brush. I have to keep the same tension during the whole session to be able to create the painting. If something makes me change the idea, I get upset, and I have to stop working. I know ahead of time what kind of mood my painting is going to have. All the time I concentrate not to spoil my vision. This kind of work requires being constantly in shape. After I finish it, I am exhausted.

-Is this kind of session preceded by making sketches?

I have no rules. Sometimes I select one of many sketches, and I paint it on canvas. Other times, I do not need a sketch, because I have a very clear vision. -Do you ever improvise?

I use many techniques and materials, sometimes quite cheap. I always have everything ready. If I need a shiny effect, I have polish ready, if I need darkness, I have matte paints. I do not rely on chance. However, if that happens, it results from a movement, not the use of color or matter.

-What do you do when you make an unnecessary movement or use an inappropriate color? Do you correct it?

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I never correct the first movement. If I ruin something, I cover the canvas and start over again.

- For someone who is familiar with contemporary art, the stylization of your paintings can be associated with the 'New Wilderness', so popular in Poland a few years ago. Do you feel related to that new movement?

I am pro freedom in the arts even though there has to be some idea behind it, which I do not always find in the works of the 'New Wilderness' artists. I used to like their works, but after seeing an exhibition at the National Museum, I do not want to have anything to do with them. I work out my own style in stages within a few years. When I was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts, I never used to follow trends and styles. When everyone used to paint a model in her natural colors, I used to paint her in green. It does not mean that I used to avoid reality. On the contrary, what still inspires me in my work is what I see, not what I made up. I go to the zoo; I buy postcards of animals, not to copy them, but to watch them. I hire models to take a new look at the female body and then reshape it.

-In your paintings there is some kind of sensual aura, some hidden aggression, even though there are no expressive shapes or forms... I do not like neutral things, I prefer clear and well defined ones. I happen to paint something that can then be related to sex. Other times, I do it deliberately. I think sex makes our lives more interesting.

-Does your personal life influence your paintings?

Personal life in general influences what I do. Over time, my system of values has changed. I feel that, and those changes must affect what I create. I treat my work as some kind of fun; I cannot be tired with it. If I feel bored with what I do, I immediately look for a new situation. I do not know whether I am mature now, or whether I was mature when I was twenty years old. I think that a human being at every stage of life should try to be mature adequately to the age and situation he is in. You cannot force changing it or speeding it up because it may result in losing the joy of life, the joy of creation. Forcing any aspect kills free spirit.

Warsaw, 1988

Monika Malkowska, Art Critic

MAJKA SOCHANIEWICZ. I LIKE HER PAINTING...

Introduction for catalog for solo exhibition in Nowy Swiat Gallery, 1981

"Majka Sochaniewicz. I like her painting and this is the reason why I am writing this introduction to her catalog. In fact I should have married her long ago, but now we are both past such nonsense - she paints, I write introductions.

Delicate Mary and her cycle of hard, solid pictures. The variety of women she paints. This lack of consistency is only superficial, in fact there is a very feminine consistency underlying all her painting. An original, overdrawn style bordering on the primitive and caricature. And what seems obvious to me is her conscious departure from the primitive, although at first reading we detect here a strong affinity to glass painting.

Of major importance here is the background. The artist does not use a normal perspective, her perspective is imposed by certain hierarchies, some imperative values. And the foreground, those overdrawn pictures of women, seem to be a series of self-portraits. The same person created over a new by her environment, shown in various cultural contexts.

The excellent brothel scenes. For it is the environment that forms women - and not only those from the canvasses of Majka..."

Warsaw, 1981 (excerpt)

Andrzej Pastuszek, Writer

ON THE WOMEN - THE PAINTINGS OF MARIA SOCHANIEWICZ"

Introduction for catalog for solo exhibition "Original Techniques - Retrospective Show II" in "Pokaz" Gallery, 1987

...She calls them various names: Azteca, Primavera, Nefretete. Her true name is Victoria - victorious, dominating, fierce femininity. As powerful as the very picture of vitality, as strong as the elements of nature. Her lips are lusting for love, her eyes promising fulfillment. Seemingly quiet, collected, almost dignified, but surrounded with a haze of madness. At any moment ready to follow the call of instinct...

Warsaw, February, 1980 (excerpt)

Monika Malkowska, Art Critic

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MARIA SOCHANIEWICZ PAINTS...

Introduction for catalog for solo exhibition "Original Techniques - Retrospective Show II" in "Pokaz" Gallery, 1987

Maria Sochaniewicz paints predatory flowers with fleshy leaves, nude men and women, angels and demons, as well as disquieting of sex and mystery - magic snakes, flickering fish, cats beautifully caught in motion.

There is nothing of the woman, sweet or nice or "in good taste" in her paintings. She favors suburban church-fair daubs combined with barbaric ostentation and a gloomy mood of the lusts of Flaubert's 'Salambo'.

The lines of her drawing are heavy, her paintings material is tough and of different facture treatment, with an emphatic stroke of the brush verging brutality.

She prefers painting on glossy foil, and she uses gold and silver paints, as well as glistening brocade.

As an artistic personality, Maria is a sister of heathen fairies from Thessalia with an addition of "first-class demon" by Witkacy. This spicy hybrid yields a kind of expressive, sensual art, saturated with peculiar panbiologism.

Warsaw, 1987

Kinga Kawalerowicz

ARTIST MARIA SOCHANIEWICZ...

Artist Maria Sochaniewicz graduated from Academy of Fine Arts in 1975. She studied painting and graphics in the studios of the best artists like Prof. Aleksander Kobzdej and Prof. Jan Tarasin.

Her debut in 1975 made her well known to the critics and she was acclaimed one of the most interesting artists of her generation, introducing her individual and original style.

She has cooperate with the Nowy Swiat Gallery since 1979. Her work are constantly part of the exhibitions organized by the gallery. The works are occasionally presented to the public in large or individual exhibitions. Maria Sochaniewicz had several presentations at our gallery, as well as a few individual exhibitions and she has always participated in collective exhibitions.

I have become particularly interested in her work after she left Poland to the United States. I presented her paintings and graphics in individual exhibitions, collective exhibitions and presentations in June 1992, May 1993 and January 1994.

I am working with the artist on an individual exhibition planned for September 1995 that will present her American works to the Polish public. Maria Sochaniewicz is one artist in this gallery whose work are being sold. By being very consistent in her artistic ideas she managed to reach the sensitivity of particular client. Her works go from our gallery to France, Italy, Germany, as well as reception halls and private homes of prominent Polish artists, like movie director Andrzej Zulawski.

The contact between Maria Sochaniewicz and our gallery are constant. However, we miss the artist herself and her unique individuality as well as her original paintings and lifestyle.

We just miss her.

1994, Warsaw

Barbara Janicka, President of Nowy Swiat Gallery