

Vigintas Stankus.

Silent Abstraction

Vigintas Stankus (born 1962) is a creator of meditative abstraction, who has from the mosaics of memories pieced together the stories of the future. Excerpts from conversations with close ones and friends, children drawings, Sanskrit words and symbols – everything had a place in the artist's canvases and thick layer of paint. As if foreseeing his early departure, Vigintas collected his works from all the art galleries and left them at his family home. Maybe to be discovered again.

V. Stankus was born in Kaunas, graduated Vilnius Art Academy majoring in glass and stained glass. He joined the art scene together with active artists of that time, who were driving the changes in Kaunas. The art field became very active during the first years of Lithuanian independency. Lithuanian painters groups were forming and trying to present a new generation of art to public, free from control of Soviet art institutions. At the same time the abstract neo-expressionism emerged as one of the dominant forms in painting.

At the time of all these events Vigintas Stankus formed his creative style. As a calmer personality and follower of Eastern martial arts philosophy, the artist kept a distance from the most active processes of the scene. He was a professional sportsman, one of the first to get a karate black belt in Lithuania, he used the teachings of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism to establish a self-discipline, patiently and consistently work towards his goal. Each day starting with meditation, Vigintas only touched the canvas only in a good mood. Ager and negative emotions never inspired him, he did not try to shock the viewer, but strived to find a harmony with himself and share it through the painting with the world.

In early works Vigintas showed an inclination to expressive abstractionism. The paintings on paper, cardboard and canvas breathe with fresh light, freedom and expressive strokes. A bit later his works become filled with heavy textures of paint, crossing and covering each other, and thin lines, connecting the different areas on canvas. But even with such a "weight", work of Stankus remains light and positive comparing to quite gloomy style of Lithuanian art. This can be named as one of the most distinctive features for recognizing the painter's style.

At the time when the artist's friends were looking for new media and more radical expressive forms (video, objects, installations, performances, etc.), Vigintas was also experimenting, but only with painting and sculpture. He was interested in the texture of canvas and wood. In all the works of the artist, both early and late, it's easy to feel the impact of his stained glass studies and constructive approach.

When looking for more interesting textures, Stankus started creating wooden sculptures. Wood was always a close material to him, his philosophy. It is a symbol of growth, power, strength and eternal nature's renewal. The form and texture of stems, branches and ridges became a base for totems, anthropomorphic masks and cubistic figures. The work with wood for Vigintas became another form of meditation and a way to release creative energy.

It could be said, with a dose of humor, that the love for form and texture was costing Vigintas dearly. Everyone who has dealt with professional art knows how expensive the high quality materials are, such as canvases, brushes and especially paints. Stankus loved a heavy structure of the painting, so he used a very thick layer of paint on canvas. That's how a large collection of landscapes, towns and portraits was born, filled with colors and thick paint lines. This collection is united by the creative manner and bright colors and their combinations, which distinguishes these works from other creations of the artist.

For example, in one painting the basis of landscape is formed by grey and brown tones, but suddenly they are crossed with thick black stripe, thus chopping it in many planes. Other painting is of a blue forest or ocean, as if electrified before the storm. The sky is mixed with trees (or water) in blue, white and black paint. And from the bottom, from the deepness of the painting, as if a shore or the meadow in the woods, shines a calm yellow light. Vigintas was a talented colorist, he could tell the stories by using varied colors and textures in his paintings.

It is important to mention one exceptional theme, which accompanied Vigintas Stankus in almost all creative career – city. These paintings are full of life with towns, small houses, windows, other spots. In other words – lives. Objects of various forms, colors and sizes fill all the space on canvas. Allusion to cities can be also found in artist's collages, which are constructed out of small paper, cardboard, canvas and paintings pieces.

During the last years the artist almost never left his workshop. He was working a lot and intensively. Never stopped experimenting with the texture of canvas, using not only paint but ash. The color palette changed, white and lots of gray and brown tones took over. Colors of such materials as quartz, sand, asphalt, cement, gave birth to abstract blossoms, orchids, birds, portraits and dreams. One of favorite and established motifs in latest works became a chair. Its abstract form, structure, legs, backside became a symbol of stability and endurance.

Vigintas Stankus was a curious person, always finding areas to study intensely, which reflected in his art. In the latest year Sanskrit emerged as the topic of interest. The classic language was and still is used for liturgy in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, works of philosophy and literature. The painter started using Sanskrit words and symbols in his abstractions, coding the messages in his paintings.

In 2013, talking about abstractions the artist was saying "At some point of painting they are born, happen, start to live. But you need to stop at the right time. On the other hand, they were lacking in form for me, so I needed to think of something. With internal resistance, I dared to paint a small person. I needed him as form, so I would not need to think about what to express". The painter needed a basis from which to lift off, and knowing this it is easier to understand his wish to include words and symbols in the paintings, which would be close to him. Why did he choose Sanskrit language to do this? Maybe because it represented a prayer language to him and allowed to give meaning the most important things: duhita (daughter), mata (mother), lumene (light), sapana (revelation, dream).

Despite being a closed type person, Vigintas Stankus actively participated in personal and group exhibitions. During three decades of creative work, he was part of more than 50 group exhibitions in Lithuania and abroad, and organized more than 20 personal shows. Especially successful was one of the latest exhibitions in Paris gallery La Capitale Galerie, where he was participating together with Lithuanian sculptor Stasys Zirgulis. The Paris gallery owner, Faik Bazencir, was saying that he was proud to show talented artists from Lithuania, exceptional in their high quality and mature works, and interesting techniques.

Vigintas Stankus is a distinctive and interesting creator, who left a large collection of abstractive, associative, expressive paintings and drawings. Abstractions of various forms represent the artist's generation's spirit and aesthetics, which formed during the first years of Lithuanian independency. The passion for eastern martial arts and philosophy, daily meditations influenced the harmonious and open relationship with the world, which can be felt in his paintings. Maybe that is the reason why Stankus' art is so multilayered and immersive.

Julija Dailidenaite, art critic