

Source, night and daybreak

In the art of Kadri Mälk, the original pattern has mixed with several later layers of solidarity, cultural phenomena as well as personal experiences and feelings of the author.

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The exhibition “Bulldog“ by Kadri Mälk in the gallery of the Museum of Applied Art and Design until 10.1.2021. Designer Taso Mähar, graphic designer Jaanus Samma.

After having visited the exhibition of Kadri Mälk, the title and short foreword of the book of Clarissa Pinkola Estés “Women Who Run with the Wolves” started to haunt me: “We are all filled with a longing for the wild. There are few culturally sanctioned antidotes for this yearning. We were taught to feel shame for such a desire. [—] No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four-footed.”

The creation of Mälk in last five years, or at least the way of this selection and presentation, has directly nothing to do with wild and rampant aboriginal woman or her companions, brave wolves yearning for freedom. The latest project of the artist, the book about her jewellery collection, homage to all friends and admirers of art, to whom she has given her jewellery as a gift or who had bought these items, was titled “Hunt“ (Wolf), and in the foreword, the author recommends to let your inner wolf roam free, feed it, not to try to bend the wolf into a zoologist. The current exhibition is titled “Bulldog“, and this metaphor refers to a tame creature, who is still stubborn, but melancholic with aristocratic manners, and much persistence and patience is needed to teach them. In an effort to get rid of this constant feeling, I visited the exhibition once more, but the presence of the aboriginal woman became yet stronger.

American Jungian psychoanalyst Estés belonging into the post-World War II generation, with Mexican and Hungarian origin, does not contrast aboriginality or wildness with culturality or sophism, her aboriginal woman means also ideas, feelings, drives and memory: “She is a source, light, night, darkness and daybreak. [—] She is the seedbed of fresh small idea sprouts and basic plans. She is the thought that thinks us, and we are the thoughts she is thinking.“ Her aboriginal woman is the balance, because “she lives in a drop as well as in the ocean“, she comes from “the future and the beginning of all time“, she is living “in the past and has formed of all of us“, she is simultaneously in the present and in the future. The main research method of Estés includes ancient heritage, stories and their rendering. She has no warm feelings towards artificial fairy tales, because the moral of the time of their writing has trimmed down any uncomfortable sharp corners, bumpy twigs, sunken recesses – anything needed for pure expression of pain, passion and happiness. However, she does not discard them completely: “In spite of all structural somersaults amidst different versions of tales, the strong original pattern has still preserved, and its radiance glows through any crust. Basing on this radiance, we can restore the original form.“ Radiation of the original pattern is also visible in the creation of Kadri Mälk, either in the form of a piece of jewellery directly pertaining to body, or an object related to body more indirectly. When speaking about the art of Mälk, I would not concentrate only on jewellery, but on the pure art, where the original pattern has mixed with several later layers of solidarity, cultural phenomena as well as deep personal experiences and feelings of the author.

As a correct professional, Kadri Mälk has consistently listed any tiny fraction of material she has used in her work. This is the accuracy and pride of an old-school master goldsmith, who knows that abundance of material speaks about excellence and provides value to the jewellery item. However, it includes also piety towards material, be it very expensive and rare precious stones or so-called trash, such as pieces of wood, horsehair, fish skin. Kadri Mälk has behaved like a sculptor of Ancient Greece, for whom stone was not just a raw material for providing form to the ingenious idea of the author and raising them to the pedestal. They searched patiently the right piece or chunk of stone, in order to free the sculpture, the work of art, captured in the stone, by removing anything redundant. Kadri Mälk has her own collection of precious stones, for taking the right stone at the right moment and put it into the service of her thought in the right composition.

Any material, irrespective of the fact, if it is considered precious, regular or even trash material, has a memory. The “Bulldog” exhibition clearly reveals the level of personal memory beside collective memory. Pieces of mole skin do not speak only of a small animal living underground, who also features in many stories; the mole skin in the jewellery of Kadri Mälk is a fraction of the fur coat of the grandma of the artist and the grandma herself. Silk embroidery is not just a beautiful example of ancient handicraft, but related to the life and memories of the artist. Silver and almandine framework is not meant only for conservation, but first and foremost for providing a new life.

In case of Kadri Mälk, design of the exposition is an important factor. Her exhibitions have always a designer, but I believe that without hurting the designer it can be considered cooperation. Even if the artist has not intervened herself in the design. Her spirit and mind is always present. “Bulldog” reminds *Kunstkammer* of a mad scientist, and perhaps also that of an aboriginal woman free from restrictions, where the life of the artist in last five years has been properly laid on a neutral grey table. To be correct – her creation and more precisely a selection of it, made with the assistance of Kai Lobjakas and Ketli Tiitsar. Each component, item, integral world is correctly numbered: the first is “Franz”, and the last has significant title “Wolf words” (where also mole skin has been used beside rock crystal, smoky quartz, shungite, oxydized silver, black raw tourmaline and spinel necklace). However, one item has been exposed separately: this is dedicated to the teacher, Professor Leili Kuldkepp, and beside black diamonds, beech, steel and silver it includes mammoth bone, once presented by the professor to her student; in this, the artist has left very delicate trace of herself with paint and blood. “Kuldkepp” is numbered with zero – this is the beginning and the end. It is perfect, but as any perfection, it has also ambivalence. Just like the beginning of many old tales: once upon a time, there lived and also did not live ...

Several times, Clarissa Pinkola Estés has mentioned the aboriginal woman and soul-keeper La Loba. In a story, La Loba collects wolf bones in the desert as an old lady, in order to recite the right spell and turn them alive, when the whole has been achieved.