

Esej

Tonko Maroević

Redoviti član Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti

Preobrazba kroz negaciju negacije:

ZLATKO KESER

Redoviti član Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti

Essay

Tonko Maroević

Fellow of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

**Transformation through the Negation of
Negation:**

Zlatko Keser

Fellow of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

Aktualna “crna faza” Keserova izraza nije unikum u njegovu opusu, premda možda jest apogej, vrhunac zahtjeva egzistencijalne usmjerenosti, nužnosti karakterističnog reduciranja na bitno. Služeći se isključivo grafitnim sredstvom i inim izvorima crnine, slikar je svoje kadrove ipak raznoliko artikulirao; na samom rubu gluhoće i bezizražajnosti ostvario je svojevrstan ples oko praznine, odnosno naznačio dijalektiku uranjanja u ništinu i izranjanja iz magme nepostojanja.

Ključne riječi: Zlatko Keser; slikar; crna faza

The actual “black phase” of Keser’s expression is not unique in his opus, although it is perhaps the apogee, the peak of the demands of existential directedness, the necessity of a characteristic reduction to the vital. Using exclusively graphite and other sources of blackness, the painter articulates his scenes in various ways; at the very brink of deafness and nonexpressiveness, he created his own manner of dance around emptiness, emphasizing the dialectics of diving into nothingness and rising to the surface of the magma of nonexistence.

Keywords: Zlatko Keser; painter; black phase

Intenzitet kojim slikar ulazi u kadar ne mora uvijek rezultirati sretnim ishodom, punim pokrićem, odgovarajućim uzvratom.

Jaka motivacija može biti i slaba pratnja neposrednosti i organskičnosti izvođenja, da ne govorimo koliko ideal ljepote znade smetali uvjerljivosti izraza, a – isto tako – žudnja za istinitošću umije iznevjeriti i svoje najrevnije zagovornike.

U želji da umakne zavodljivosti ili zloporabi estetskog učinka umjetnik počesto hrli ususret etičkom okružju, s nemalom opasnošću da mu izmakne uporište i s jedne i s druge strane.

S nekoliko preliminarnih općih mjesta želimo poravnati put do novijih stvaralačkih iskustava slikara Zlatka Kesera. Naime, želimo s njime podijeliti svijest o teškoćama pomirenja tako disparatnih svojstava kao što su žestina i nježnost odnosa s predmetom izvođenja, odnosno težina i lakoća energetske-materičke uloga u likovnu činjenicu. A za nas nema dvojbe da je upravo Keser slikar koji najvećim mogućim intenzitetom pristupa platnu i papiru te da namjerno preuzima rizik gotovo nerješivih dihotomija, odnosno prihvaća izazov – kažimo tako – kreativnih aporija.

Nedostatan je i kritički jezik da uđe u sve pore i brazde Keserovih slika i/ili crteža (odnosno, najbolje slikocrteža), pa se moramo zadovoljiti načelnim opaskama i naznakama rasta opusa. Od samoga početka taj je autor usporedno razvijao iznimnu linearnu gipkost i gustu strukturalnu mrežu, istančanu kolorističku osjetljivost i ljubav za radikalne kontraste, opuštenu imaginativnu žicu i strogu morfološku koherenciju, razvedenu figurativnu, zoomorfnu kombinatoriku i reduktivni jezik apstrakcije, povremenu posnost nanosa i učestaliju potrebu zasićenja plohe materičkim, reljefnim, superponiranim slojevima. Dakle, raspoložbe najširim mogućim registrom pobuda i umijeća...

S teretom raskošne darovitosti može se posrnuti na putu prema cilju, prema ostvarenju jasne individualne prepoznatljivosti i određene ekspresivne uvjerljivosti. Ne odustajući od mentalnih izazova

The intensity with which the painter enters the scene does not always have to result in a happy ending, full of security, appropriate requital.

Strong motivation can also be a weak companion to the directness and organicness of execution, not to mention how much the ideal of beauty tends to interfere with a work's convincingness, and – similarly – the desire for truthfulness has been known to betray even its most faithful proponents.

In the desire to avoid the enticement or misuse of aesthetic effectiveness, the artist frequently dashes to meet his ethical surroundings, at the significant risk of losing his footing on both one side and the other.

We wish to straighten the path to the more recent painting creations of Zlatko Keser from a few preliminary, general places. Specifically, we wish to share awareness with him of the difficulties of reconciling such disparate characteristics such as the intensity and delicacy of the relationship with the means used to execute a work, or, more specifically, of reconciling the weight and lightness of the role of energy and matter into an artistic reality. For us, there is no doubt that Keser is a painter who approaches the canvas and paper with the most possible intensity, and that he intentionally undertakes the risk of nearly unsolvable dichotomies, accepting the challenge – let us call it so – of creative aporeia.

We lack the critical language to enter into all of the peaks and valleys of Keser's paintings and/or drawings (or, better, painting/drawings), and so we must be satisfied with the general notes and indications of the growth of his opus. From the very beginning, this author simultaneously developed linear flexibility and a thick structural network, exceptional coloristic sensitivity and love for radical contrasts, a relaxed imaginative streak and strict morphological coherence, well-developed figurative, zoomorphic maneuvering and a reductive language of abstractions, occasional



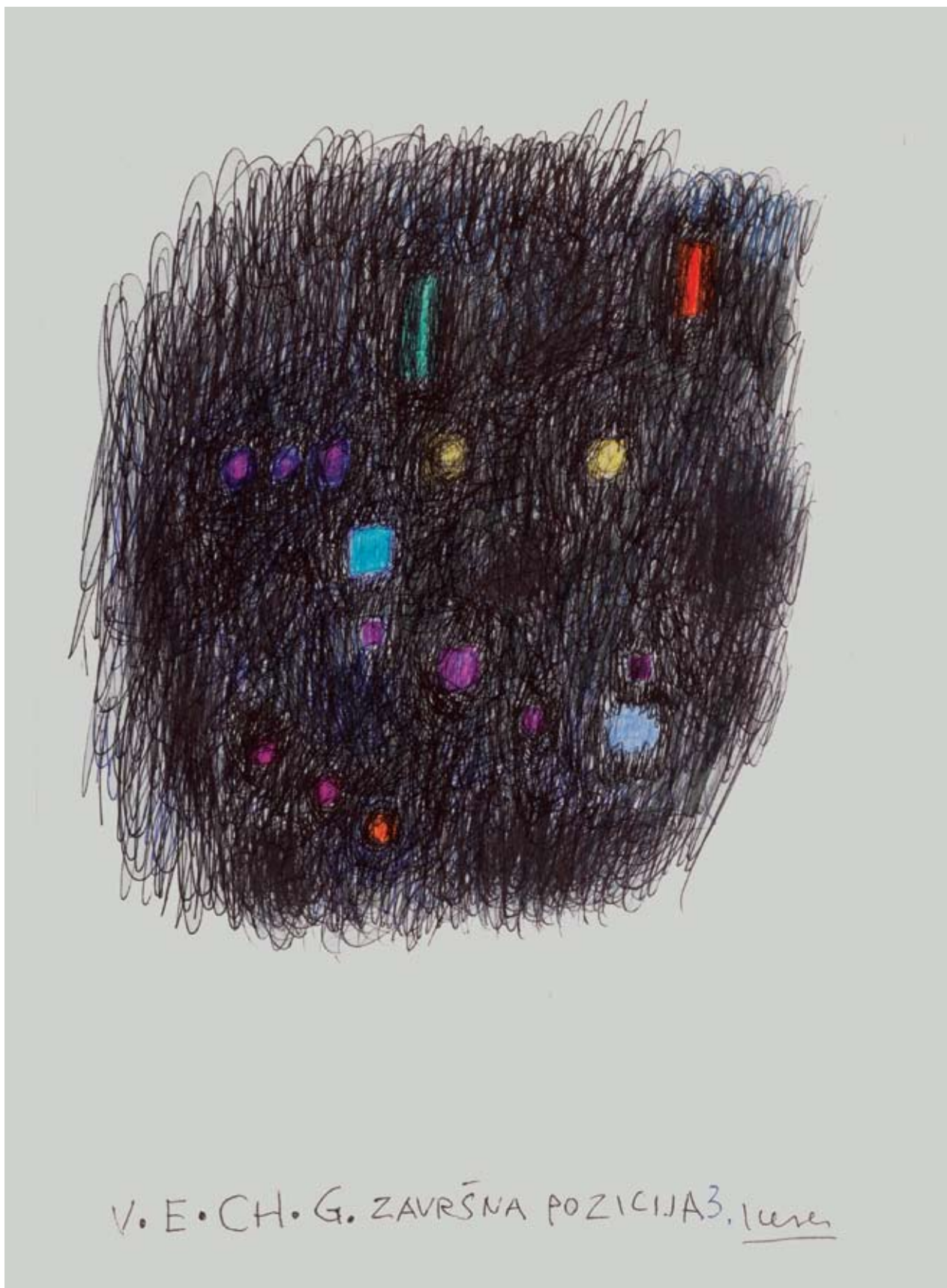
Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper

Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru



The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



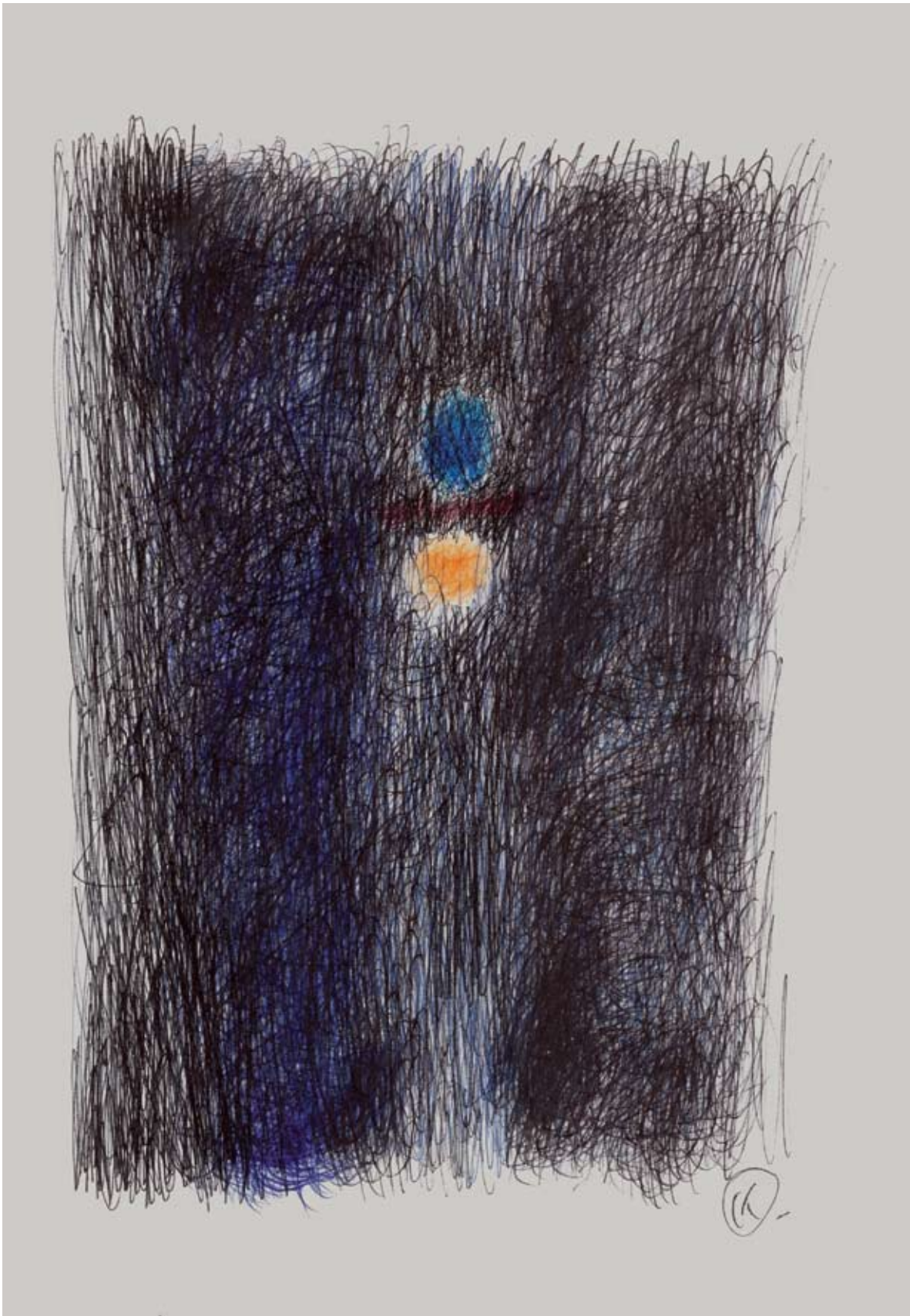
Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper

i povremene lucidne racionalne kontrole, Zlatko Keser još je manje smio žrtvovati nagonsku “ponornicu”, podsvjesni, onirički ili biofilno-molorički tok. Prepustio se stoga slikanju/crtanju poput kucanja srca ili disanja, ali ne sa samozadovoljstvom i lagodom nego sa strašću katarktičnog čišćenja. Što je grčevitije težio punini odjeka, to je nužnijim postajalo povremeno opuštanje, a što je ležernije ispisivao oblikovne natuknice, to se snažnije nametala korektivna disciplina.

Ne kanimo ovdje rekapitulirati složene i razgranate putanje Keserova opusa, ali nam se čini da je svakim svojim ciklusom nastojao zaokružiti naslućenu “problematiku”, odnosno iscrpiti mogućnosti prihvaćenoga usmjerenja kako bi mogao krenuti na drugu – ne nužno i suprotnu – stranu. Stoga smatramo da koherenciju njegova likovnog univerzuma možemo tražiti u pomirivanju krajnosti, u uvažavanju temeljnog ritma izmjene tvari i smjera. Shvatit ćemo cjelinu pridamo li pojedinoj mu fazi značenje sistole, arze ili udisaja, za kojima onda nužno slijede trenutci dijasole, teze ili izdisaja. Samo će nam tako postati razvidnom logika naizmjeničnog bujanja i sušenja, kristalizacije i rastapanja, ekstrovertiranosti i introvertiranosti, žarenja i gašenja, samo ćemo tako prihvatiti prividni paradoks autorove tvrđnje kako je veliki format zapravo najintimniji.

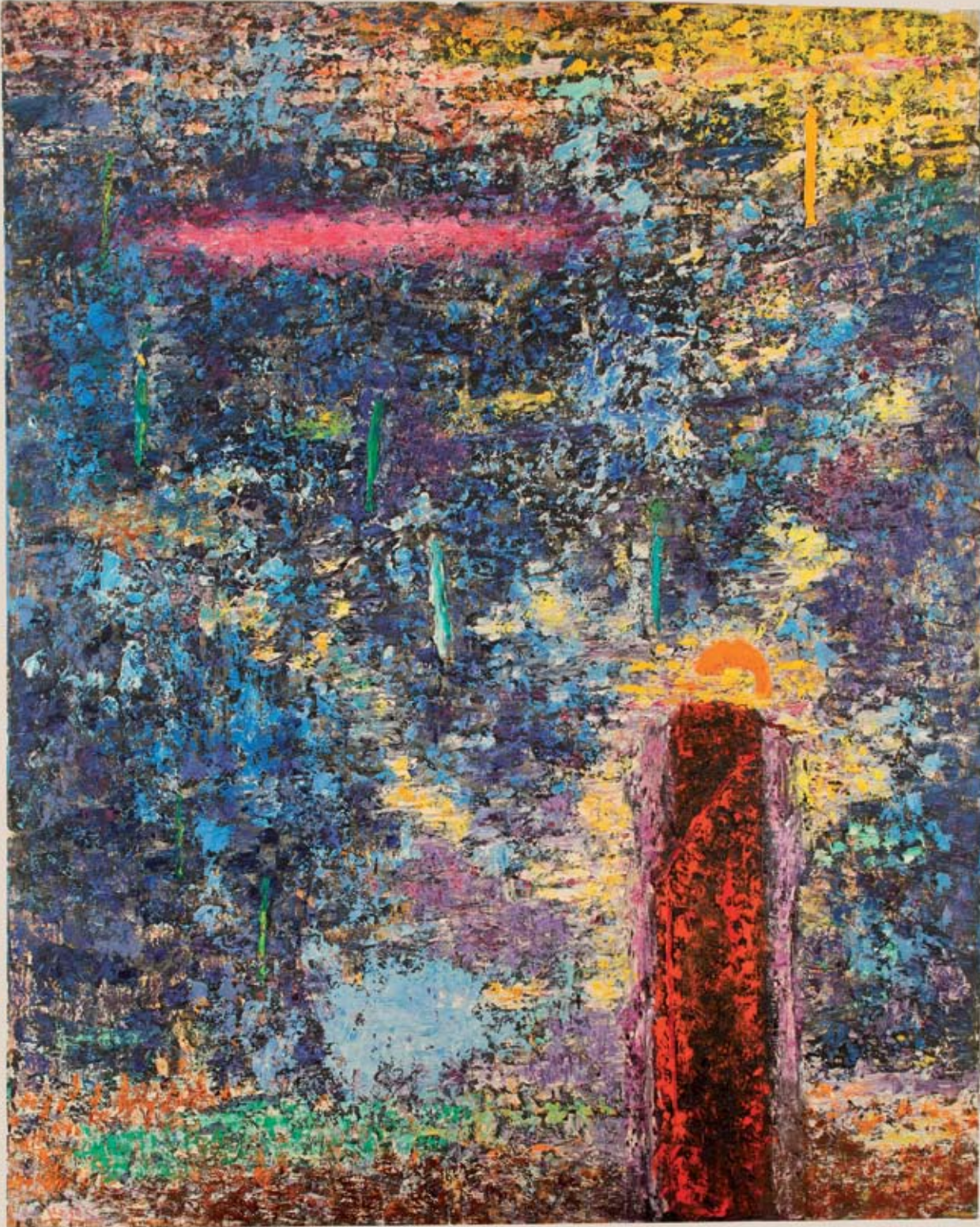
Živost, životnost ili jednostavno: život Keserovih oblika ravnopravno se manifestira u minijaturama i u golemim dimenzijama, u papirima i na platnima, u monokromnim i u kolorističkim razmetljivim kompozicijama, u delikatnim mrežištima crtovlja i u furiozno ekspanzirajućim, kaotično energičnim vrvljenjima mrlja. Nije pretjerano kazati kako ga učestalo usmjerava *horror vakui*, no kompenzativno se javlja i *tabula rasa*.

Susret sa sasvim crnim crtežima Zlatka Kesera može iznenaditi jedino one koji su njegovu kolorističku orkestraciju i linearnu bujnost shvaćali kao emanaciju slikareva hedonizma, kao izraz uživanja u umijeću i vještini. Naprotiv, nama se činilo kako u njegovoj kromatskoj ekstatičnosti i grafičkoj raz-

frugality of stroke and a frequent need to fill the canvas with material, bas relief, superimposed layers. He therefore commands the widest possible register of impetus and art...

With the burden of luxurious giftedness, one can rush onto the path towards a goal, towards the creation of clear individual recognisability and specific, expressive believability. Not relenting under mental challenges and occasional lucid, rational examinations, Zlatko Keser could to an even lesser extent sacrifice the primal “sinking river”, a subconscious, oniric or biophilic/motoric flow. He thus gave in to painting and drawing like the beating of a heart or breathing, but not with self-satisfaction and comfort, but with the passion of cathartic cleansing. The more intensely he strove towards the fullness of reverberation, the more necessary it became to occasionally relax, and the more calmly he outlined his formative allusions, the more forcefully corrective discipline imposed itself.

We do not intend here to recapitulate the complex and diversified trajectory of Keser’s opus, but it seems to us that each of his cycles strove to solve a certain perceived “problematic”, or rather to exhaust the possibilities of a particular chosen direction, so that he might set off on a different — not necessarily opposite — direction. Therefore, we consider that the coherence of his artistic universe can be sought in the reconciliation of extremes, in the acceptance of a basic rhythm of the exchange of materials and directions. We will comprehend the whole if we apply to one of his individual phases the significance of the systole, arsis or inhalation, which must be followed by the diastole, thesis or exhalation. Only in this way will the logic of interchanged flood and drought, crystallisation and thaw, extrovertedness and introvertedness, glowing and extinguishing become apparent — only in this way will we accept the apparent paradox of the author’s claim that the large format is, in fact, the most intimate.



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper

granatosti nikada nije bilo ni metjerske razmetljivosti ni neke vedre afirmativnosti. Žestoka, temperamentna izvedba i silovita akumulacija oblika i znakova nisu mogli proizaći iz smirenosti i sigurnosti pokazivanja urođene darovitosti i evidentiranja stečene zanatske razine nego su rezultat autentičnog stvaralačkog nemira, nespokojnog stavljanja na kocku svih povlastica talenta i znanja, prave potrebe da se kroz gustiš likovnih elemenata izađe na čistinu egzistencijalnog svjedočenja.

Ako je “dnevna” dimenzija Keserova slikarstva povremeno i pokazivala sretno usklađene strukture, odmjereni splet žilica i niti, nesvakidašnju ljepotu poteza i tvari (dakako, onu bretonovski “grčevitu” ljepotu), ipak se gotovo uvijek dalo naslutiti kako u njemu postoji latentna “noćna” žica, kako iza ostvarenih dinamičnih ravnoteža vreba napast razaranja, rastakanja, odbijanja već postignutoga (kao nezadovoljavajućega). I nije bila riječ o penelopinskom kompleksu produženog iščekivanja (“da joj prođe vrijeme”) nego o muževnoj smjelosti suočavanja s mračnom stranom postojanja, o svijesti kako iza slojeva vida i privida još nužno leži sloj nedogleda i nedohvata.

U biću Zlatka Kesera evidentno se bore dvije paralelne motivacije: sklonost prema oblikovanju, sposobnost uobličavanja, s jedne strane, i nagon za ništenjem, potreba da apsolutizam nijekanja bude trajni korektiv konformističkome relativizmu, s druge; znademo da se paralelne motivacije načelno mogu susresti tek u vječnosti, ali čudo stvaralačkog čina omogućuje povremeno i plodan susret figurativne, likovne moći s ikonoklazmom etičkog nemira, s razornom moći nezadovoljstva estetskim potencijalima i dometima.

Aktualna “crna faza” Keserova izraza nije unikum u njegovu opusu, premda možda jest apogej, vrhunac zahtjeva egzistencijalne usmjerenosti, nužnosti karakterističnog reduciranja na bitno. Služeći se isključivo grafitnim sredstvom i inim izvorima crnine, slikar je svoje kadrove ipak raznoliko artikulirao; na samome rubu gluhoće i bezizražajnosti

The living nature, liveliness, or simply, the life of Keser’s forms manifests itself equally in miniatures and in enormous dimensions, on paper and on canvas, in monochrome and in colouristic, ostentatious compositions, in delicate networks of staffs and in furiously expanding, chaotically energetic roilings of blotches. It would not be an exaggeration to say that he is often directed by *horror vacui*, but that the *tabula rasa* also appears to compensate.

An encounter with the entirely black drawings of Zlatko Keser can surprise only those who perceive his colouristic orchestration and linear fullness as an emanation of the painter’s hedonism, as an expression of enjoyment in art and skill. On the contrary, it seems to us that there was never any ostentatiousness of metier, nor any kind of cheerful affirmativeness in his chromatic ecstaticness and his graphic divergence. Such an intense, temperamental execution and a forceful accumulation of forms and signs could not have resulted from calmness and certainty in displaying his inborn talent and documenting his skill level, but are instead the result of true, creative disquiet, a restless gamble of all of the benefits of talent and knowledge, a true need for existential testimony to break through an underbrush of artistic elements.

Even if the “daily” dimension of Keser’s painting occasionally shows happily harmonised structures, a measured web of veins and threads, an uncommon beauty of stroke and material (certainly, that Brétonesque, “spasmodic” beauty), it is almost always perceptible that a latent “dark” streak lies within him, that, behind the created dynamic balance lies the danger of destruction, corrosion, the rejection of the already accomplished (as unsuitable).

A Penelope complex of extended expectation was not at hand (“so she might pass the time”), but rather a manly boldness in coming to terms with the dark side of existence, awareness of the fact



Obzor melankolije, grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy, print on paper

Tonko Maroević: Preobrazba kroz negaciju negacije: Zlatko Keser / Transformation through the Negation of Negation: Zlatko Keser

ostvario je svojevrsan ples oko praznine, odnosno naznačio dijalektiku uranjanja u ništinu i izranjanja iz magme nepostojanja. Neravnodušan odnos prema površini materijaliziran je grebanjem i gužvanjem papira, zarezivanjem i urezivanjem u tkivo “da se izađe u prostore poledine, da se aktivira naličje”, jukstaponiranjem glatkih, sjajnih, bljeskajućih parcela s mutnim, zagasitim, matiranim partijama tretiranoga lista. Morfološki raspon ograničena je dometa, namjerno ulančan u logiku cikličke koherencije, ali je učinak cjeline impresivan, u stanovitome smislu *horribile dictu*, čak monumentalan.

Dobro će nam doći usporedba s jednim od ciklusa što je prethodio toj euforiji crnine. Riječ je o seriji radova okupljenih u ciklusu *Raskorak* (s temeljnom

that behind layers of sight and insight lies a layer of boundlessness and unreachableness. Within Zlatko Keser, there is an evident battle between two parallel motivations: a tendency towards shaping, the ability to shape on one hand, and on the other hand a drive for nullification, the need for the absolutism of negation to be a lasting corrective measure for conformistic relativism. We know that parallel motivations can, in principle, meet only in iternity, but the miracle of the creative act enables a temporary and fruitful meeting of figurative, artistic power with an iconoclasm of ethical unrest, with the destructive power of dissatisfaction with aesthetic potential and scope.

The actual “black phase” of Keser’s expression is not unique within his opus, although it is perhaps its apogee, the peak of the demands of existential directedness, the necessity of a characteristic reduction to the vital. Using exclusively graphite and other sources of blackness, the painter articulates his scenes in various ways; at the very brink of deafness and nonexpressiveness, he creates his own manner of dance around emptiness, emphasizing the dialectics of diving into nothingness and rising to the surface of the magma of nonexistence. His concerned relationship towards the surface is materialised in the scraping and crumpling of paper, notching and cutting into the tissue “so that it comes out into the space of the background, so that the back side becomes activated”, in the juxtapositioning of smooth, shining, brilliant parcels with blurry, dark, matte pieces of treated paper. The morphological range is limited in scope, intentionally chained in the logic of cyclical coherence, but the effect of the whole is impressive, in a certain sense of *horribile dictu*, even monumental.

A comparison to one of his cycles that preceded this euphoria in black will do us well. His series of works compiled in the cycle *Discrepancy* (with a basic dichotomy of animal outlines and blotches) and drawings mainly entitled after variations on

Obzor melankolije,
grafit na papiru

The Horizon of Melancholy,
print on paper



dihotomijom animalnih obrisa i razlivenih mrlja) i crteža pretežno naslovljenih varijacijama na pojam znaka. Ti su radovi nastali u tjeskobnoj atmosferi rata (1993. – 1995.), a u njima je Keser sintetizirao ikoničke i strukturalne komponente svojega likovnog jezika, dosegnuvši puninu i zasićenost površine, ostvarivši maksimalnu jačinu linearne i kolorističke napetosti. Razumije se, nije mogao ostati na istoj valnoj dužini, poželio je otići dalje prema nezvjesnom cilju. U recentnim “crnim” crtežima naziremo dakle razvijanje i daljnje intenziviranje postojeće egzorcističke inicijacije (*Egzorcist* se naime zvaao jedan rad iz 1994.), prepoznavamo i “iskorak” prema potpunijem odricanju od svega sekundarnoga, marginalnoga i utješno dopadljivoga. Žedan apsoluta, željan preobrazbe, Keser je alkemičarski odlučio okušati “nigredo” kao šansu prolaska kroz nepoznato, neprivlačno (čime se pak nužno hrani izazov autentičnosti).

Zlatko Keser je naime ne samo bogomdani slikar i crtač nego i umjetnik u nekom starinskom ili nadvremenom smislu toga pojma (“hudožnik”, mag, vrač, izgonitelj nečistih sila, tražitelj otajnih suglasja, oslušivač dijakronih sugestija, slutitelj sinestezijskih vibracija itd.). Kao takav uvijek je na početku, nikad “na lovorikama” i nikad u izvjesnosti tradicionalnog, klasičnog lipa. “Crni crteži” naizgled su *summa* i sublimacija svih Keserovih dosadašnjih faza i postaja, gotovo zaglavni kamen maksimalističke orijentacije opusa, no uvjereni smo kako nipošto nisu zadnja riječ njegova kreativnog nemira, nisu definitivni uvir nezajajžljive vitalnosti, nisu drugo negoli zagovor (obećanje? prijetnja?) nove preobrazbe negacijom negacije...

the concept of the sign. These works were created during the anxious atmosphere of war (1993 - 1995), and in them Keser synthesises iconic and structural components of his artistic language, attaining a fullness and saturation of surface, attaining the maximum strength of linear and colouristic tension. It is understood that he could not remain on the same wavelength, and the desire arose for him to move on towards an uncertain goal. In his recent “black” drawings we sense, therefore the development and further intensification of existing exorcistic initiations (“The Exorcist” is the name of one of his works from 1994). We can also see a “breakthrough” towards a more complete renunciation of everything secondary, marginal and intrudingly pleasing. Thirsty for the absolute, desiring transformation, Keser has, like an alchemist, decided to try his luck at “nigredo” as a chance to pass through the unknown, unattractive (with which is it necessary to feed the challenge of authenticity).

Zlatko Keser is, thus, not only a god-given painter and drawer, but also an artist in some old-fashioned or timeless sense of the notion (a magus, a witch doctor, an exorcist of unclean forces, a seeker of secret agreements, an eavesdropper of diachronic suggestions, a senser of synesthetic vibrations, etc.) As such, he is always at the beginning, never “on his laurels”, and never within the safety of the traditional, classical type. “Black drawings” are apparently the *summa* and sublimation of all of Keser’s phases to date, and are a stop, nearly the keystone to the maximalistic orientation of his opus, however we are convinced that in no way do they represent the last word in his creative unrest, they are not the definitive end of insatiable vitality – they are nothing more than advocacy (a promise? a threat?) for a new transformation through the negation of negation...