



Press Information

MAURIZIO ELETTRICO: IMAGO MUNDI. Hell is not the shadow of paradise / L'inferno non è l'ombra del paradiso.

EXHIBITION AT THE CENTRE OF POLISH SCULPTURE IN OROŃSKO

24 June 2023 – 3 September 2023

Curators: Marta Wróblewska

Collaboration: Paulina Kuhn CRP

In his oneiric post-Baroque installation *Imago mundi*, executed for the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko, the Naples artist Maurizio Elettrico used the archetype of the garden. The garden as a model of the Cosmos has been omnipresent in the cultures of the world since the dawn of time, like, for example, the Biblical Eden, the Elysian Fields, the mythological garden of Hesperides, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, or the Japanese Zen gardens. The symbolism of the garden contains a specific dichotomy: on one hand, it is strongly rooted in the nature as the superior ordering force associated with the cycle of life and death, while on the other, it cannot function without human intervention and control.

The *Imago mundi* installation exerts its effect at the interface of various areas and their associated poetics. Processing and arranging components from the organic and inorganic worlds into original combinations of images, words, sounds and smells, Elettrico paints a speculative scenario of a parallel pseudo-reality. It assumes a form of a peculiar artificial and natural habitat, with a post-man - a transhumanistic bio-aristocrat - being its designer. Its ecosystem consists of hybrid species of plants and animals created by a sophisticated combination of genetics, magic, shamanism, and... art.

THE SQUIRREL AND THE GRAIL

Narrative threads and visual motifs present in Elettrico's immersive, multi-sensory installation have been drawn from the literature work *The Squirrel and the Grail*, consisting of seven volumes, in which the artist presented a half-utopian and half-dystopian image of the world designed in an artistic and scientific experiment. It is dominated by a union of two political forces: technocracy and artecracy, building their position of power based on the cult of sophisticated beauty, by expanding their scientific and esoteric knowledge, as well by conducting advanced biotechnological experiments.

The Kermer Gardens, described in the plot of *The Squirrel and the Grail*, located in some unspecified and elusive hyperspace, become specific biospheres with a clear spiritualist



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trait, a scene of obsessive biological manipulations leading to development of transgenic forms, like, for example, *Vanessa extraordinaria* – a species of a butterfly created with an admixture of ichneumon and cobra genes, used as a deadly biological weapon. Gigantic *obsof* flowers provide them with lifegiving nectar. Mutated creatures from the interface between the reality and fantasy, a zone of light and darkness, like Canjal, Glamstax, Splepix, or Glostock, symbolise a coexistence of the forces of good and evil, where the latter is eventually neutralised and changed into the positive vital energy.

POLYMATERIALISM

The polymaterialism of the world created by Elettrico has a metaphorical meaning. The Mediterranean area, in which the artist's sensitivity was shaped, is identified with the centuries old artistic and craft tradition, based on a frequently pioneer development and implementation of various materials and techniques representing aesthetic, but also intellectual scenographies of successive epochs and styles in the art, starting with the Ancient world, through Baroque, Art Nouveau, known as *liberty* in Naples, up to the contemporary times, represented by an extensive spectrum of art genres. Combining semi-precious stones coming from all over the world, porcelain manufactured at Real Fabbrica di Capodimonte, and local Polish timber with *Oera*, a synthetic material of a new generation produced using innovative recycling-based technologies, Elettrico points towards material and conceptual relationships between organic and inorganic beings. His garden becomes a laboratory space for experiments on objects representing specific geographic and cultural origins, as well as functions and meanings assigned to them. Thus, Elettrico's art is ideologically approaching considerations of contemporary researchers associated with new materialism, like Timothy Morton, TJ Demos or Rosi Braidotti, who focus on the potential of cyber- and biotechnology, as well as social relations of power. Thus, exploring the potential of the matter has a double meaning: it can be a way to control and shape the reality, or it can lead to philosophical understanding and to the conscious, critical and responsible existence based on the awareness of the limits of the universe, which at some point needs to be able to look at itself in its own mirror.

UTOPIA OR DYSTOPIA?

The empire of bio-aristocrats with supernatural powers is a variant of the organisation of the world as a consequence of the unbounded thirst for power, and moral relativism, closely connected with the omnipresence of sublime and refined beauty as a *sine qua non* condition of existence. Speculating about the type of the ecological tyranny based on peculiar bioethics, Elettrico simultaneously plays with the natural, human and divine order known to us. The world described by him, underlined with an obsession of beauty and immortality, does not accept old age, imperfection, or passing. On the other hand, the presence of various hybrid forms, evading all taxonomies and standards with which we are



Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej
w Orońsku

ul. Topolowa 1
26-505 Orońsko

www.rzezba-oronsko.pl
sekretariat@rzezba-oronsko.pl

tel. +48 48 618 40 27
fax +48 48 618 44 70

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familiar, is an attempt at relativisation of definitions with which the man hierarchised, classified and dominated the reality.

Imago mundi is therefore an alluring aesthetic and political construct, a fantasy on the post-humanistic era, in which the role of the natural man is extremely marginalised. A subtle critical overtone of this vision is, however, free of an ambition to moralise, value, reform, or repair the reality. This stimulation of the imagination by using suggestive poetics is rather an invitation to make an attempt at the revaluation of ossified paradigms and fixed practices, leading the humanity to the voluntary annihilation.

Marta Wróblewska

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Contact for media:

Agnieszka Filipowska

a.filipowska@rzezba-oronsko.pl

tel. + 48 48 618 45 16, w. 31,

mobile: + 48 690 096 044

Organizer:



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