

Daniel Pitín, Artist's Statement

An Archeology of Painting (or, I am Still Here with You)

My most recent work has been focused on an investigation into the past. I try to dig up lost experiences – or at least those whose significance has been lost to me – that I have, for some reason or other, buried deep in my subconscious. Something comes over me, an unexplainable impulse that can only be given shape through painting. In painting, I attempt to expose the real significance of some forgotten experience that has been buried under the dense layers of the preceding years.

I was born during communism and grew up in a period of capitalism. It's only recently that realized that I am not the only one who feels a victim of this kind of "oblivion". My paintings are not meant to illustrate my investigation into the past, or to offer a key to open the past, but rather they provide a clue of the direction I am heading in now. Sometimes they are a simple reaction to the recurring impulses, thoughts, and unconscious pressure to find respite in faint memories.

From the outset, I have looked for, and often found, inspiration in films. Films are, for me, an enormous archive of the memory of mankind of the 20th century. With films one can capture a moment, hold it still, and awaken memories of hidden away experiences. I watch films intently, collecting random sequences that in some way move me. In a similar fashion, I observe the world around me. As I walk thorough the city, I closely watch what is happening around me, waiting for that moment when something will trigger my unconscious, which I then try to capture in my mind and put down on canvas. Often, when painting, I try to remember a specific moment, relive a sensation; like an actor I try to put myself in role, I attempt to revive and bring to life some experience concealed in a fading memory.

I paint from the back to the front. I often paint over older works, covering them with various layers. I imagine the canvas as a complete scene, a sort of model, or a film or theatre stage set, which allows me greater freedom and a distance from reality.

Most recently, I have noticed that more and more a sort of sign or emblem keeps showing up in my work. After a period of deconstruction, as I stand in front of each work and review the architectural debris, I start over again with the remains of what is left and construct new objects. The styles, periods and social settings are often mixed together so that you can not really tell where it comes from. I realized that the new constructions create a sign or emblem that reminds me more of memory itself, rather than an actual moment, which I am trying to capture. I lose myself in the space.

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Today, around 10 in the morning, I drove off in the direction of the airport and then towards Horoměřice and Suhdol. During the trip I made several random photographs of the area around me. I stopped off in a village, got out of the car, and photographed some older houses under reconstruction. While I was doing this, several people from the village appeared. Even though, from the very beginning, I had the feeling that I was getting close to what I was looking for, I lost the memory trail and had to leave. During my trip back to Prague, I stopped off in Victory Square in the neighborhood of Dejvicka. I stopped in front of the Faculty for Biochemistry and waited a few minutes. A young man parked in front of me; a Peugeot car with license plate from Chrudim. He got out of the car and took a bag out of the back and then looked at me. I felt exposed, so I left. On the way back, while I was waiting at a red light, I saw a woman on the sidewalk smoking. It was obvious that she had only stepped out for a moment as she was lightly dressed and didn't have a bag with her. She was around 50 years old, with black hair cut short. This could be it, I thought. I made a series of photographs. I don't think she noticed me, but in my rear view mirror I noticed that the man in the car behind me was watching me closely. I couldn't go, so I put my right arm over the passenger seat next to me and several times tapped my fingers on the seat, as a distraction, to minimize the whole situation, and then luckily the light turned green and I could drive on.

After I got back, I closely studied all the photographs that I had taken, but had to admit that unfortunately, this time, I had not found what I was looking for.

Daniel Pitín, Prague May 8, 2008