

MIROSLAV SANDANUS EARTH, WIND & FIRE

Exhibiting Artist ↘ Miroslav Sandanus

Curator ↘ Barbora Kurek Geržová

Duration ↘ June 24 – August 28, 2022

Venue ↘ Youth Gallery

Opening ↘ June 23, 2022, 6pm

Miroslav Sandanus' creative program focuses on urgent social and environmental themes, reflects on the escalating ecological crisis caused by man's doing and its negative effect on the natural environment, nature, landscape and the whole planet. He critically emphasises its alarming state and continually growing issues that cause climate changes and global warming.

Sandanus' landscapes reflect on the current state of the environment caused by man's ignorance, indifference and disinterest. The artist's work follows a certain path which is not linear, but rather consists of themes that have been developing in parallel. What the works have in common is their effort to connect man with nature.

In the first line of his work, linked mostly to his early creative period (from 2017), the artist focuses on depicting landscapes destroyed by civilisation's waste. He comments on visual smog, consumerism, overproduction, accumulation of material possessions – shopping, wasting – and illegal landfills. An important part of the theme becomes the motive of a figure – man with his ambivalent attitude. He is portrayed as a “destroyer” of nature and its “saviour” at the same time. On one hand, he criticises him, on the other, he depicts him actively trying to fix his doing (collecting garbage), moralises, searches his conscience and emphasises his ecological and social responsibilities.

The second line of his work, represented by this exhibition, consists mostly of paintings without any figural presence, featuring dark, melancholic, existential atmosphere. His deserted, destroyed and desolate landscapes appear borderline apocalyptic.

The artist has decided to incorporate the symbolism of natural elements – fire, water – but also natural disasters – tornadoes, storms – or generally destroyed nature and environment by man's doing. Despite the figure of man being absent, his mark is clearly apparent even without his physical presence.

The artist creates dramatic “theatrical” scenes full of heavy emotions. Views of natural sceneries depicting chaos, horror, void, loneliness, emptiness bring up mixed feelings of fear, anxiety, anger, sadness or desperation, but also a feeling of guilt caused by man's improper actions. The artist appears to be projecting these feelings onto the “tormented” nature and thus make it more human. The violent scenes seem to be reflecting a fight “to the death” between the devastating force of man and the invincible (belligerent) forces of nature.

The exhibition critically maps various theme sections reflecting on environmental issues that seem to affect the natural balance, threaten its stability and perhaps even result into its gradual decay.

His free series titled *Undefined* turns its focus on one of the basic forces of nature – fire, which is full of symbolism (from early beginnings, through cleansing to rebirth). In the context of the artist's creative program, it mostly reflects upon climate changes caused by man and his actions, our overheating planet, droughts, increasing number of heat waves causing massive, uncontrollable fires that swallow entire landscapes, woodlands and fields. Sandanus' paintings capture fire-affected forests, but also fragments of fire or the actual fire sites. The theme is captured in various forms, from realistic depictions to abstract art (in regard to both details and whole images), larger and smaller (intimate) form factors, while the size of the image does not determine the level of intensity projected on the viewer.

The paintings showcasing polluted air and smog (also titled *Smog*) are dominated by dynamic compositions resembling explosions, gigantic whirlwinds that suck the viewer in, swallow and “grind” them. Within the context of art theory, *Posthuman Glossary* by Rosi Braidotti and Mária Hlavajová puts smog in line with the four standard natural elements – earth, water, fire, wind – as a modern phenomenon born from the current environmental crisis.

He chooses a different approach in the case of his smaller images of hurricanes, tornadoes, storms and lightnings whose speed appears to be “stopped” by the artist who wants to allow us to observe them from a “safe” distance.

The seemingly calm sea with floating and disintegrating icebergs depicted in *Disappearing* and *Disrepair* comments on the climate changes that cause dangerous and gradual melting of icebergs.

His large-scale paintings like *Void* and *Chaos* portray destroyed, devastated, deserted natural landscapes with broken trees or cut-down forests. He also comments on the “mythical bark beetle” that is often used as an excuse for deforestation – referencing the senseless and needless timber production.

In the works titled *Oblivion* and *Inherency*, the artist records the interiors of deserted houses in a phase of absolute decay while falling apart without man’s maintenance. These former households are slowly turning into ruins with collapsing ceilings, wall coating and construction waste resembling abandoned landfills or dump sites. It is just a matter of time before nature takes its course. Within the context of the exhibition, these fragments of architecture and urban environment are in contrast with the other works that focus solely on depicting nature, while their common denominator remains the fact that their “life-like” characteristics are defined by and subject to man’s actions.

Sandanus’ paintings do not just record our gradually changing world while delivering a clear ecological message, but the actual paintings of natural elements – fire, smoke, smog, hurricanes, icebergs and water levels – become visually interesting and attractive images also in the context of their structure, materials, shapes or colour palettes.

Miroslav Sandanus (*1994, Žilina) graduated from the Open Studio of Painting led by Rastislav Podoba at the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica. His works have received several awards: Rector’s Award, Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica (2021), 3rd place in the Painting 2020 competition – VÚB Foundation Award (2020) and Dean’s Award for his Bachelor thesis (2019). He lives and works in Žilina and Rajecské Teplice.