



## TILTING AT WINDMILLS

Who can tell that he is truly satisfied with his life and with the world he lives in? What do we do to change it? Is that constant need to change the status quo given to us genetically and evolutionally, are there egoistic reasons behind that need, or a true empathy and interest for society and other people?

Activism, engagement and politics are quite common and in many cases „fashionable“ themes in contemporary art. As we cannot change anything by reactive swearing at politicians in the pub, also the art cannot change the society by fruitless criticism. Real solutions must be offered. But are we still speaking about the art? And does art has a real „power“ to influence something and change?

Oto Hudec cares about what is happening in the world. It emerges from him somewhat naturally, honestly, it is connected with his opinions and way of life. But he did not choose to promote his opinions in politics, or to fight the system on barricades. He chose art – creative and communicative way, how to interpret his view to public and offer the possibilities for change.

Unlike other activist and socially critical artists, Oto Hudec is not against traditional esthetic function of art – to create „something nice“. Beside direct action that might take a form of community work, street happening or intervention, it is always important for him to create an artwork – artefact which works in the category of art operation, it can be shown in a gallery space and can communicate with its visitors who did not participate in the event. It doesn't matter if it is going to be an installation, a painting, drawing, photography, object, sculpture, animation, video, music.. Oto chooses a form that fits best to express a specific idea and sometimes he cooperates with other artists or common people.

The themes that are most usual in Oto's work are immigration, ecology, sustainability / unsustainability of food industry and other problems connected with globalization. Somebody might object why

he is not caring for our local problems, which we have plenty. But we need to realize that we live in globalized world where even Slovak souvenirs are made in China, where everything is willy-nilly linked, where we cannot close our eyes from what is happening on the other side of the planet and disclaim our responsibility.

The contact with people and a dialogue is important for Oto and thanks to that his artworks have a potential to address wide range of viewers. So his criticism is not made belligerently but he choses a strategy of non-violent form of protest which express the philosophy of creating positive change through positive energy. Somebody might find his approach too idealistic or even naive. But Oto is also accepting some scepticism, searching, insecurity. Art is for him a road, path, not a final destination.

If I should, as a proper art theorist, use some terminological „box“ (term) to describe the work of Oto Hudec, it comes to my mind a collocation „poetic activism“ (instead of political activism). In my opinion, it is truly poetic, when Oto sings to the sea, to the mountains or corn field, when he builds wooden model of permaculture arch or a slum from cardboard, when he creates imaginary land/ non-land of nomads where everyone is living in tents, when he paints people living in hard conditions of the third world while sleeping, or when together with teenagers he builds a plywood megaphone that amplifies the voice of hispanic community in USA.

Sceptics could compare activities of such artists as Oto Hudec to the fight of Don Quijote against windmills. But Oto knows that these notionally windmills aren't imaginary giants, nor he considers his fight „futile“, heroic act. He believes that art can give something more to people than only an esthetic experience. Even that it is unreal for one man to change the world, the most important is to start from ourselves. The windmills then can turn into specific problems that need specific solutions.

Omar Mirza

## INTERVIEW

### *Why is it important to address the wealthiest cities*

The economy of the world is supported by farming in the US and corn and consequently developing countries to a very often become cheap. This is a very obvious example, but there are other places on earth...

### *Many of your works address global inequalities - the experience of living and working in the US*

Undirectly, I have been in the US. There are some problems, but there are much high quality countries and some are not. I was working in coffee shops that was thrown away, or excessive spending, or Eastern Europe. A habit inherited from harder times, media and public show, world. We lack this internationalism with high unemployment interested in our own...

### *In your work there are cars, boats, flying in the sky, in which way*

It's great, that you have my interest in transport making my child dream of the 21st century. We passed the porter was celebrated in Italy. Today I regard those such a simple, almost... But your question is not only looking for the answer, avoid it, almost every... sense of limiting car... heating, avoiding meat... believed in idea of per... comfort. We become... belief that it will always... lessening our comfort...

## INTERVIEW

### **Why is it important to build a miniature shanty town in one of the wealthiest cities in the world?**

The economy of the world is interconnected. For example modern, state supported farming in developed countries lowers the prices of wheat and corn and consequently, cheap export forces the small farmers in developing countries to abandon their land and move into the city. Those very often become cheap laborers who inhabit shanty towns. Maybe too obvious example, but shows that the relation between richest and poorest places on earth exists, one influences the other.

### **Many of your works show sensitivity to the existence of vast global inequalities - does that awareness come from your experience of living and working at home and abroad?**

Undirectly. I have been living in Slovakia, Portugal, UK and United States. There are some economic differences between those countries, but there are much bigger ones between the standard of living in these countries and some Asian, African, or Latin American states. Still, while I was working in coffee shop in London I realized the amount of food that was thrown away, or in USA a lack of consideration for gasoline use, or excessive spending, something that until lately wasn't common in Eastern Europe. A habit of saving all what might be used in future was inherited from harder times. On the other hand in western countries the media and public show some concern for the situation in the rest of the world. We lack this interest in Slovakia, from the perspective of a small nation with high unemployment and regional inequalities we are more interested in our own problems. But that is bit short minded.

### **In your work there appear various different forms of transport, cars, boats, flying carpets - if the world is to avoid a total 'traffic jam', in which direction should we be travelling?**

It's great, that you found this out. I was asking myself lately, where does my interest in transport mechanisms comes from. Honestly, I think I am making my child dreams true, but considering this new perspective of 21 century. We passed the technical revolution era, when every new transporter was celebrated as a proof of progress and celebration of humanity. Today I regard these vehicles as almost evil machines comparing to such a simple, almost primitive one - bicycle.

But your question is very deep and I think best scientists, thinkers are only looking for the answer. Can we avoid traffic jam? I am skeptic. To avoid it, almost every human being will need to agree on a general consensus of limiting car use, traveling abroad, balanced use of water and heating, avoiding meat consumption, etc. For last century the humanity believed in idea of permanent progress that will bring us more and more comfort. We become used to that - not only to comfort, but also to the belief that it will always get better. So how would we accept the idea of lessening our comfort now?

Of course there are individuals who changed their life already. But there are millions in developing countries waiting to reach our level. This does not take the responsibility from our backs, I think each of us needs to do the maximum, but still a total traffic jam might happen. And maybe that will be a part of the solution.

### **Selling bags of water, planting trees in pick ups, growing a garden on a boat might all be funny, but in your opinion is there fragility of the natural balance on the planet beyond a joke?**

Speaking about these issues with a little humorous twist is my way of talking about the subject without sounding too tragic or preachy. In no way it is meant as cynical. I would say, that it is not a fragility of natural balance that is in stake, but the fragility of human existence. Nature exists in all forms. Desert is a part of nature, although its a hostile environment for a man. Hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, all are part of nature, almost like processes in our body, like responses to infection. The question is, what role humans play and will play in this organism.

I have a lot of passion for indigenous people and their relation with nature - much more harmonic and sustainable. There is no chance for civilisation to turn towards this way of living, but I like the shift of perspectives - until lately we wanted to teach these people, now it seems we have more to learn from them.

### **Why is important to amplify the voices of migrants, ethnic minorities and those disadvantaged by the global system of border controls?**

Speaking about minorities is related with previous themes. Recently I made interviews with Mexican immigrants to US in Dallas. One mentioned that his reason to leave were consequent years of dry season that made farming impossible. Just much later on he realized that the reason might have been global warming. Now he lives easier life in US, the country that significantly contributed to the climate change. Speaking about migrants and refugees we speak (again) about inequality, climate, conflicts. But also about a dream of better life that fairly belongs to everyone independently of race or nationality. But the dream for better life is often a myth and might be even a pretext for constantly growing consumption..

### **Does your interest in migration reflect your own experience of trans-nationalism?**

For sure. Although again, my position of a migrant was a very privileged one. I never experienced being illegal, hiding from authorities, working in underpaid jobs. The biggest difficulty was an adaptation to different customs and culture. So at the beginning I was interested how immigrants deal with this new situation in whole new world, but the theme itself is much wider: their life in the country of origin, their traveling experience, their vision of the new land and complicated economic relations between two worlds.

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