

Signs of the Apocalypse

The concepts of the “Signs of the Apocalypse” exhibition and the accompanying publication refer to the medieval idea of the “Poor Man’s Bible”, which in the era of contemporary visual culture finds new applications and justifications. The aim of this artistic endeavour is to deepen present-day reflection on the *Revelation*, to make an insightful and multi-faceted analysis of the messages it contains, and to create an up-to-date artistic message on the content of the *Revelation of Saint John* that is addressed to contemporary man. The project that was launched in autumn 2017 is going to be concluded in the spring of 2020 with the monumental International Exhibition of Contemporary Art at the CCA in Toruń and accompanying album publication.

The concept of the “Signs of the Apocalypse” project was intended to render into artistic and visual means of expression the entire text of the *Apocalypse of Saint John* in a new translation made by an excellent expert on the subject, Rev. Prof. Dariusz Kotecki. The artists invited to participate received different pieces of this text in order to create, using their own creative codes, individual styles, conventions and artistic techniques, a kind of visual “transcription” of its content in their work. Through assigning specific, corresponding content to that materialised in the work “idea”, each of the resulting works can be considered as a “Sign” of the Apocalypse.

The artists invited by the exhibition curators have realised their visions regarding specific fragments of the *Apocalypse of Saint John* over nearly three years. The artistic visions of the Apocalypse have been filtered by the artistic sensitivity of each of the authors, their individual creative experiences, possibilities and preferences of their artistic discipline, as well as by cultural differences and influences of the religious traditions of the countries they come from. Never and nowhere before has such a large number of works by contemporary artists, presented and published in the vast majority for the first time, been collected in one place at an exhibition and in one publication; works that in an extremely varied and scrupulous manner – verse by verse – pertain to the *Apocalypse of Saint John*.

There are 177 works of 93 artists from Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus, Denmark, Brazil and France gathered in this exhibition. The works representing classical art disciplines, such as: painting, graphics, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, and artistic fabric, are presented side by side with disciplines using digital media and techniques, such as: video art, animation, and digital drawing. The set of works created as part of the project was complemented by the curators with a selection of works from the existing artistic oeuvre of authors who have taken up the subject of the Apocalypse before. Due to the simultaneous nature of the text of the Apocalypse and its impact on all human senses, the designed interdisciplinary arrangement of the exhibition was supplemented by the sound material composed and directed by Jędrzej Roch Rochecki, which creates an ambience and adds dimension to the visual impressions. The sound effects are also accompanied by fragrant stimuli.

Due to a twist of fate, the time of opening the “Signs of the Apocalypse” exhibition, scheduled for 24 April 2020, intertwines with an extraordinary global situation, resembling a catastrophic movie scenario: the mysterious “crown-virus” – shakes the whole world and shows how little the achievements of our civilisation mean in the face of an invisible microbe that changes the order of the world and its preferences. In a global pandemic situation, the following questions have come to the fore: Is this a sign of the approaching Apocalypse? Is this only a warning? No one can answer them. Undoubtedly, the ‘Signs of the Apocalypse’ exhibition, which has been under preparation for three years, concludes at the climax of it, when the fragility of human life, as well as the fallibility of operating in the world systems, legal regulations, hierarchies of values, accepted norms and rules of conduct, and even everyday ways of functioning, have become so very evident. Therefore, the “Signs of the Apocalypse” exhibition presented at the CCA in Toruń has become the “Sign of the Time” itself.

Paradoxically – this is probably the best time to remind us of the *Revelation of Saint John* and a profound reflection on its content. Regardless of whether it will be possible to perceive this exhibition directly in the CCA exhibition space, or, because of the announced pandemic, the presented works will only be available to the public in virtual reality, it is certainly worth getting acquainted with its contents when following the verses of the Apocalypse.

Permeated with complex and elaborate symbolism, the Apocalypse of Saint John has a timeless and universal dimension. Even today, the human desire to know the future, the interest in death and transience are still affecting its popularity. This common interest, however, is usually superficial, focused on sensational threads, “attempts to foretell the future”, without taking the effort of analysis and exegetic readings, or even more so, without the exploration of the depths of hermeneutic, *more-than-literal*, interpretations, i.e. the spiritual, mystical and allegorical sense¹. Bearing in mind the constant relevance and timelessness of the Apocalypse, like previous generations, we keep looking for its “Signs”. Perhaps more than before, because we live in a state of self-perpetuating acceleration, and as we are racing against time and constantly running ahead with our thoughts, we try to anticipate and neurotically “secure” our future. This is compounded by anxiety and instability in the world and numerous threats to civilization. The date 2020 stimulated the

¹ R.E. Brown, S.M. Schneider, M. Wojciechowski, *Hermeneutyka biblijna 30-37 [Biblical Hermeneutics 30-37]*, in: *Katolicki Komentarz Biblijny*, eds. R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer, R.E. Murphy, scientific ed. of Polish edition W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2001, pp. 1796-1810. 10 Jan Paweł II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, Watykan 2003, § 5, p. 97.

imagination... and here it is. We live in a “time of plague”. Reading the signs of the *Apocalypse* during the home quarantine is easier. We have time... (?). It must not be wasted.

I wish everyone a deep and considerate reading of the *Signs of the Apocalypse*, in this difficult “time of plague” which shows us that our human precariousness is unreliable and that a city built without God or against God¹⁰ turns into ruin. Hence, “let us persevere to the end” (!), carrying under the eyelid a beautiful vision of Joseph Panfil’s “blue Jerusalem” or our own, hoping for a “wreath of victory”.

To conclude, I quote after John Paul II the reassuring words of the bard: “From chaos there rises the world of the spirit ...”².

During the preparations for this exhibition, two artists invited to participate in the project have sadly departed this world – Peter Krupa from Levoča (10 August 2019) and Marlena Makiel-Hędrzak from Rzeszów (31 December 2019). By presenting works they have realised at the exhibition, we honour the memory of our deceased friends.

Kurators

² Adam Mickiewicz, *Oda do młodości [Ode to Youth]*, in: Jan Paweł II, *List...*, op. cit.