

I grew up in an unusual circumstances. Big part of my early childhood took place balancing between Poland and Canada. In the early 90s the contrast between two countries was huge. Dividing my time between the two worlds, I was unsure which one was real. Cultural and geographical differences were confusing but helped me see how multi-layered my surroundings were. My attempts to explain my situation to myself resulted in more questions about my identity and belonging.

Living between the two worlds, I started creating a third - imagined and personal. It was a combination of memories and experiences which stuck with me as a child. In the following years - spent in Poland - memories started to fade away and shift my view of Canada towards a more dreamy, forgotten land. I started to question the realness of my memories.

My PhD research is focussing on memory and perception of space in the context of childhood memories. Space is one of the fundamental concepts, which help to describe the reality, but in itself it is elusive and difficult to define. Memory is one of the most subjective and personal concepts defining ability to register what we experience and how we perceive our surrounding. This presentation is a result of exploring a clash between my childhood memories of places with perception of them as an adult.

For the needs of this project I have compiled a glossary of terms essential for this project. It is designed to give you an insight to the matters entangled in my work. (Please note that this glossary was designed mainly for Polish readers).

**Flashback** - Eng. for suddenly remembering a slither of the past. Also used in film and literature studies to describe narration style, where bits of the past are used to give more understanding for the current events or to change their meaning.

Wspomnienie - Polish word translated as memory but also recollection, crucially consisting of *re-* prefix, alluding to recovering something forgotten and past. It's also worth to point out the difference between *remembering* (as in remembering to do something), *memorising* (a word in a foreign language) and *recollecting* (remembering something forgotten).

In most Latin American countries Spanish word *recordar* apart from remembering/recollecting is also translated as awakening. It suggests understanding of memories as something that belongs to both the present and the past.

Latin *recordare* meaning to remember, reminds of English to record, and therefore to register, note. Going from an elusive, not fully conscious bits of the past to more archive-like, thought through and orderly series is an important part of my work.

*Pustka* - Polish for *void*, *emptiness*. Interestingly English *to void* has a meaning of cancelling,

invalidating.

Instynkt - Polish for *instinct and aptitude*.

Intuicja - Polish for *intuition*, also translated as sense, feeling, insight.

## **The endless blue**

Long plane flights were a big part of my early childhood. Between 1987 and 1999 I flew to Canada 11 times, crossing the Atlantic Ocean 22 times. It sums up to about 240 hours (or 10 days) on the plane. Endless, empty skies about 10,000 m above sea level is one of my strongest childhood memories.

In less than 20 minutes the aircraft is reaching its cruising altitude. In that time it goes through a layer of cloud, which depending of weather conditions mark a more or less defined border of two realities. After crossing it, for couple hours we are 'suspended' in an abstract area. Endless blue, changing from cyan through to lapis lazuli and into ochres and beiges, up until total darkness. This space lacks any orientation points, other than the sun and the monotone and still line between the upper part of clouds and the sky. Suspended the endless unknown sky you often start asking yourself questions about fundamentals - our space in the world and sense of our existence.

Endlessness of the skyscape can make us fearful and uneasy, but also give us an immense feeling of freedom. This unreal space always signaled something new and exciting for me. I understood it as a gateway to another reality, crossing into a different dimension. It became a transient space for contemplation and clearing before entering a new world.

To this day I still can't shake off the feeling of contemplative loneliness during flights.

Clouds became more meaningful and symbolic to me as well. From my love for abstraction derives fascination for their form and constant change. I'm amazed at their scale, the medley of shapes they create, their uniqueness and transience. Over time the symbolic meaning became more and more important for me, as my plane flight became somewhat of a metaphysical experience.

*Reminiscenja* - Polish for Latin *reminisci* - a reminiscence. In psychology unconscious flashback, afterthought and a paradoxical effect of memory improvement after some time from the last attempt to recollect. This phenomenon is best described as older people remembering their childhood and late teens memories the most vividly. In cognitive psychology this is called the *reminiscence bump*. Even for patients with dementia, the years during the reminiscence bump remain intact (until their illness has become very advanced) and can be easily recalled with some simple triggers like pictures or songs.

Over time our memory naturally shifts towards more positive experiences. It often helps to optimistically 'sum up' one's life giving them the sense of fulfilment.

The journey to Canada

In winter of 2016/17 I travelled to Canada to retrace my childhood steps. I visited Montreal and rural areas in Quebec, returning to places I remembered and rediscovering forgotten spots. I visited family and friends and tried to remember the past. We exchanged stories, looked at old photos, travelled.

Before I left Poland I was hoping for this trip to be a validation of my memories. I was hoping to find material evidence that what I remembered was real. This trip was supposed to be a return to the childhood land.

Reality - of course - clashed with my plans. As an adult and more than ten years after my last trip, my memories turned out to be quite different to what I found. Montreal was disappointingly similar to any other metropolis and with every step I was realising that my search for the past is going to fail. For a while I was devastated, thinking that a trip that was meant to be the core of my project will be fruitless. I was indifferent when visiting places that I used to be fascinated by and for a while it felt like I was lost.

Ed: Do you own a video camera?

Renee Madison: No. Fred hates them.

Fred Madison: I like to remember things my own way.

Ed: What do you mean by that?

Fred Madison: How I remembered them. Not necessarily the way they happened.

Leaving Montreal for the countryside turned out to be a turning point. In the wilderness the beauty of a winter landscape stunned me. Contemplating the nature instead of overthinking my expectations gave me a distance to my goals and helped me shift focus from my hopes to reality. I realised I could not find the dreamy land of my childhood, no matter how hard or where I looked. It was the core of my problem and my thoughts then shifted towards the vanishing and emptiness we feel after we realise that what we longed for is no longer around. My personal world of childhood memories of different places still exists, fluctuating and evolving with each year and new experiences. Abstract landscapes often present in my work are expressing my emotional state and my state in surrounding world.

Artistic works

My reaction to everyday life and space around me is embodied in my abstract works, depicting

alternate realities and landscapes. Through my works I try to face my fears and answer the questions that I keep asking myself.

I started working on lithographies after returning from Canada. These series carry a feeling of loneliness and restlessness. In some works forms are scribbled, resembling of child's drawings, other have unobvious titles, pushing the viewer to interpret them their way.

Diving into the past is always an unknown. Our character is defined by what we experience. Accidental situations often stay with us and shape our views. Similarly our preferences of certain colours, shapes, textures have roots in our past, becoming sort of a visual diary of experiences. Memory bends, changing with new experiences and the context of today.

I don't try to plan my pieces, or have a final effect in mind. I'm always open to changes and how my perception and mood fluctuates during every step of the process of creating each work. It gives me a sense of freedom and allows to follow my instinct, surprise myself. To explore new solutions and forms - the titled Forgotten Worlds.

Subsequent pieces in the series complement each other, creating tensions which can be read differently depending on the order of viewing and one's interpretation. They have diverse formal layers, however together they tell one story. Ultimately, my journey towards the form is more important than the final form itself. Working on a lithography is a therapeutic experience of re-exploring my past.

Very natural for abstract works is the fact that every viewer will interpret it differently. I don't try and tell certain stories with each piece; my intention is to set a scenography in which each viewer can reach to their own past and memories.

List of works

Forgotten Worlds series consists of lithographies, a kinetic object and two animations

Lithographies

During my time working on this project I created about 30 works, with 15 chosen for final presentation. However each of the 'rejected' works has taught me something, pushed me further, deepened my technical exploration.

I decided to only show my works created after returning from Canada (post January 2017).

1. Catastrophic landscape, 2017 lithography 70 x 100cm
2. Dusk / Dawn, 2017 lithography 70 x 100cm

3. Whale hunting, 2017 lithography 70 x 100cm
4. Captain nemo Great Druneness, 2017 lithography 70 x 100cm
5. Nautilus I, 2017 lithography 60 x 80cm
6. Nautilus II, 2017 lithography 60 x 80cm
7. Wave, 2018 lithography 70 x 100cm
8. Catastrophic landscape II, 2018 lithography 70 x 100cm
9. War landscape, 2017 lithography 40 x 60cm
10. Camping, 2017 lithography 40 x 60cm
11. Strom in a whiskey glass, 2017 lithography 70 x 100cm
12. Circus, 2018 lithography 70 x 100cm
13. Stupid idea, 2018 lithography 70 x 100cm
14. Wilderness I, 2018 lithography 70 x 250cm
15. Wilderness II, 2018 lithography 160 x 100cm

#### Kinetic object

*Memory generator*, 90x70,65cm, 2018

I've been thinking about finding a spatial expression form that would complete my lithography series. I wasn't looking to create a '3d lithography', more a form that would carry the same ideas but in a fresh and autonomous form. This led me to the idea of creating this object - a rectangular aquarium filled with styrofoam, and equipped with a small fan, creating a vortex inside. Its form somewhat resembles my works on paper - rectangular shape, in similar proportions. Inside the aquarium the feeling of chaos allows for a broad interpretation. Both lithographies and this object share the organic forms. Styrofoam electrifies and gets stuck to the walls, creating accidental compositions, with an ever changing, moving center.

I was trying to avoid brazen narration and straightforward interpretations. This object invites viewers to contemplate it on its own and in dialogue with the works on paper.

#### Flow - motion graphic, animation

I filmed a lot of footage during my last trip to Canada. For this project I chose one frame that became somewhat of a symbol of my travel. The footage was taken about 150km north of Montreal, near a waterfall that I have visited couple times when I was young. During my recent trip I remembered how much it had amazed me as a kid and decided to visit it again.

Video is slowed down to one frame per minute and played backwards. It's a seemingly static shot and only after a long contemplation it becomes clear that it is not a still image but a very slow video. The effect of 'rewinded' waterfall is hypnotising, giving a classic landscape a surreal twist. It has a symbolic value of a journey back in time, rewinding us to our pasts.

#### *Wkraczając w pustkę* - Enter the void - animation

The title was inspired by Gaspar Noe's movie. Footage was taken in the Tatra Mountains around The Valley of Five Lakes in February and March 2017, just before the dusk. That day the visibility was minimal. I couldn't see further than couple meters ahead and suddenly started feeling immensely alone. Low visibility and the awareness of the space I was in - up on the mountain, alone - resembled being on a plane, flying through the clouds. Sudden flashback made me realise that the project had come the full circle. Returning to one of the earliest memories became a start of a retrospection.

#### Technological matters

Experimentation has been an important part of my technological process. A lot of methods I now use in my work have been developed by trial and error and going against what I was taught. These experimentations are a fundamental part of my series, becoming my new tools of expression.

During my PhD studies I've worked on my own method of building a lithography image with arabic gum. Compositions are built with droplets of gum, transferred to the stone using a syringe. Droplets sometimes conjoin, creating fluid forms. As the arabic gum is drying, it shrinks, causing cracks on the surface. The final effect is organic, resembling microorganisms or bacteria seen through a microscope. The ink is poured on this surface, getting into the cracks of the arabic gum and the pores of the stone. Limestone is then treated with nitric acid wash and cleaned of any remaining dried ink and arabic gum. The final image is rich in intricate details and accidental effects.

For a long time compositions consisting of those droplets were one of the main motives in my works. Apart from process I was also fascinated by their conceptual values.

Dotting method is the fundament of traditional Aboriginal art. It originated from sand drawings which had both ceremonial and storytelling purpose. It is worth noting here that the native People of Australia didn't used to use written language so spoken word and art - whether drawn on the sand, painted on the rock, body or, later, canvas - were the medium of convey and preserve history. Despite mostly being abstract, Aboriginal paintings are telling a story. Painting is quite literally a language for Aboriginal culture.

My version of dotting technique is crossing the line of lithography as a flat printing technique. The dried arabic gum droplets are very hard and raised, forming a coating, in a way resulting in a relief-like surface. Arabic gum when drying and erupting *etches* into the limestone. Final print is therefore a combination of traditional lithography with an effect borrowed from etching.

#### Examples of previous projects

One of my other works inspired by childhood memories from Canada is a lithography inspired by a memorised plan of Montreal metro system. For years I have been drawing sketches and outlines resembling of some sort of transport plan. It was only recently that I realised that they all had roots in looking at metro plan so many times as a kid. It was engraved in my memory and affected the way I was building my compositions.

This work is the first one of the *Dlugi Spacer / A long walk series*, my longest continuing body of work to date.

#### Conclusions

Idea of using abstract images to convey my vision/my memory of the past has been a core and a driving force of my artistic exploration in the last couple of years. I was searching for an individual voice that would be suitable to present universal matters. My works do tell a story, but it is more of a sketched one, leaving viewers to interpret them on their own or fill it with their stories. I am interested in creating works that give space for contemplation and individual exploration. I didn't decide to signal precise situations; my intention was to evoke a mood and set a scene. My focus was on keeping it open for individual interpretations even though the works for myself are quite personal. My memories and experiences were a way to achieve a work of art that carries universal message.

