

DRIFTS

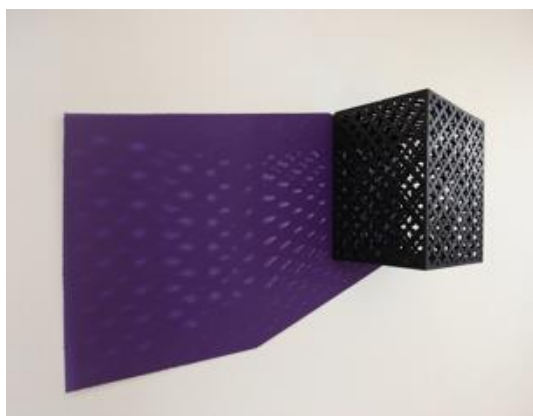
Agata Orlovska in conversation with Alberta Vengrytė

September 2022

Alberta Vengrytė: Hello, Agata,

In analytic geometry, the term „near-zero tangent limit of a curve“ is used, which denotes the point of contact between a straight line and a curve extending to infinity, i.e. *asymptote*. The essential property of this mathematical concept is as follows: the distance between a curve and its asymptote approaches zero as the curve approaches infinity indefinitely. In other words, the curve and the straight line approach each other, but never touch... When thinking about your creative approach, I often remember this allegory: it seems that in order to grasp what you call *the body of painting*, you never let the technique and the narrative of the work come into contact. But *the body of painting* here is not simply the materiality of the painting, the surface of the canvas. Could you tell us more about your understanding of this concept? How does *the body of painting* relate to *the body of the picture*?

Agata Orlovska: It's a very beautiful allegory. I need a narrative that creates a personal relationship with the work and fills it with faith. However, the narrative itself, as you mentioned, never touches the technique of the work, it is often hidden, and only conceptual references remain from it. I remember how Tarkovsky once said - *An artist must be calm*. He has no right to show his excitement, his interest and pour it out to the audience. Any excitement caused by the object must be transformed into an *Olympian calmness of form*. Only then will the artist be able to tell the audience about the things that excite him. Therefore, in my opinion, the technique and the body of the painting itself can and should be the main orator. As you have rightly observed, in my case *the body of painting* is not simply the surface of the picture, its' materiality. Nor is it an experience of color in itself, like in abstract paintings. The color used, the layer of paint and the size of the canvas, the experience of the painting as an object in space are very specific. Color is often a cultural reference. Like the purple shadow that appeared on the wall, from the sin box, the color of which in Christianity represents repentance.



Agata Orlovska
Listen², 2021

A layer of paint often also becomes a reference, if diluted and thin, acting as a filtered, transparent thought. Also, matness (where excess oil is technologically removed from the paint) and gloss (created by mixing in varnish) often become references to function. As in the work „I Recorded Nothing“, its motif came from a cassette tape. In which the matte (rough surface) creates friction, thus creating a record. On the contrary, the shine indicates a non-functional band (surface). In this way, *the body of painting*, as if by itself, raises associations due to the cultural memory of its function. However, the cassette tape itself is no longer important, I leave a small link from it with the name. Here, the cassette tape becomes a narrative, passing alongside the work itself, but without touching it.

For me, *the body of painting* is what the viewer will make of it, so it has to be universal, balancing between faith and knowledge. My choice as an artist is to deconstruct my observations to *zero* until they find their new, unrecognizable form.



Agata Orlovska
I Recorded Nothing, 2021
Dyptich
Oil on canvas
130 x 28 cm (each)



A.V.: It is interesting that while creating an abstract image you do not refuse the storytelling of the painting. When we visited your studio, we heard wonderful stories about a bat's ear, car windshield wipers in the rain, about „The sound of a melting snowflake“, how hot fields hum. What is your relationship with painting technologies and narrative imagery? How does mastery of the craft allow for the abstraction of these sensitive stories that seem to emerge from a rich, meditative observation of the environment? I'm thinking about your piece where, depicting a notebook page, you eliminated its cells, leaving only the edge of the margin...

Agata Orlovska
Out of Bounds, 2021
Oil on canvas
162 x 114 cm

A. O.: Knowing about technology allows you to spot the narratives in the media itself. I usually notice motifs first during the painting itself, only later in life. I think this kind of art becomes in a certain sense elitist, oriented towards professionals. Therefore, so that painting does not become about painting, these stories appear as keys to understanding the material itself. Car windshield wipers in the rain is a commonly understood and recognizable image. But for me, it's about stripping the canvas down to its bare expression. About the renewed relevance of the painting, the layers of which are washed away by time. Realizing that such enjoyment of art alone is not common, I look for parallels in life.

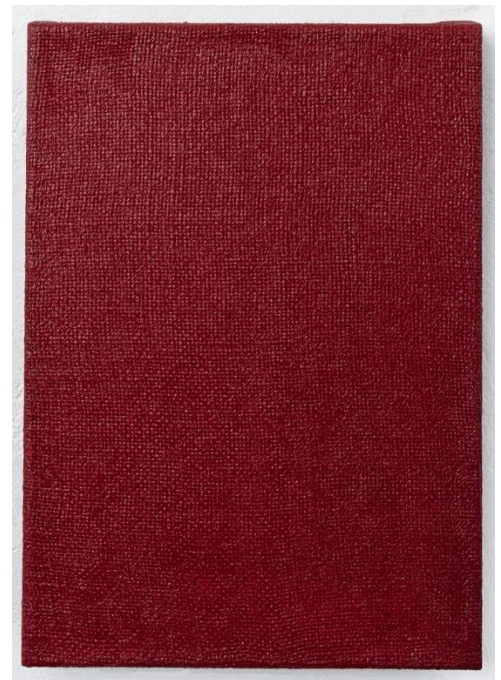


Agata Orlovska
Into the Rain, 2021
Glue, canvas
94 x 140 cm

The work „Out of Bounds“ is a very vivid example of how through painting you can play with a familiar and, it seems, very mundane image. Destroying it, cleaning it, changing its color, size, changing its meaning. Aptly observed, in this work it is the knowledge of the craft that allows to deconstruct the image and highlight only the periphery. Thus, the A5 notebook sheet became enlarged to human size and equal to the viewer. The border thus becomes no longer a formal border, but a physical place. An artist who knows his field must create something new, by the means of technology and their general knowledge. We have seen the sheet of the notebook, painting another sheet of it does not make sense to me. But how to remove from the notebook page and emphasize the feeling of the border as a physical place? This is where being painting *tech-savvy* helps.

A.V.: Some of your works have a peculiar humor, a certain dose of irony. I'm thinking here of the work „I made a red diploma“ that you created while studying for a bachelor's degree in painting. How is the conceptual approach of your latest works and this work different? What role has technology played? Where did the image of an honors degree come from?

A.O.: The work „I made a red diploma“ arose from the reaction to the society's assessment of the artist, his specialty and diploma. When I graduated with a bachelor's degree in painting, I felt truly worthy of the appreciation of higher education. But on the side, the painter often still remains a craftsman. Relatively recently, *painters have become artists* and scientists have begun to collaborate with them. And my red diploma was created as a reaction to such an assessment. What did the artist get with the red diploma? Knowledge of how to make this red diploma, in our specialty. Cover the frame with a material resembling paper, and mix the paint, the red color of which will resemble the color of a red diploma. To hang it next to your entire bachelor's collection as proof that you've mastered the art of painting. Irony is characteristic of my latest works as well. It often stems from the cynical assessment of the viewer of art and his stupidity. One of these is the work „False“, which does not have any narrative, apart from the knowledge of painting and its manipulations. It is false even in its exposition, the possibilities of which are endless. „False“ refers to a small deviation that can often go unnoticed in the overall composition. This is how I play with the viewer and his attentiveness, leaving the mistakes of the artist, or on the contrary, highlighting the inattentiveness of the viewer.



Agata Orlovska
I made a red diploma, 2021
Oil on canvas
29,7 x 21 cm

Sometimes misinterpreting art or not understanding it makes me angry with the viewer. This resulted in an installation with a moisture collector, which, regardless of the level of understanding, any viewer will benefit from. Here, an important position is taken away from the viewer and turned against him. But all these games only confirm how important the viewer and his understanding are for the artist.

A.V.: When deconstructing the narrative of a work, you often sense the movement of the image, you capture it at a specific stage of its development. What role does language play here, the verbal idea of the work? Japanese theater director Tadashi Suzuki has written that one of the essential and most difficult moments of theater creation is to convey the text through the author's lips. At first, the actors simply read the written words, then the words are acted out and become a body. According to him, it is precisely this process during which writing turns into speech that engages us the most. In other words, it is not the actor's text per se that inspires the audience, but rather the formal feature of the speech act. Are you close to such a procedure? Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems that in „The painting is experienced from left to right“ you enable the viewer to see two different states of the same work. A slightly different approach you use when trying to understand „The Sound of a Melting Snowflake“...

A.O.: Yes, very aptly observed. I often leave small gaps for the audience that open up the transformation of the canvas. These may be the unpainted sides of the support exposing the colored stretched canvas. Sometimes the main element of the picture is pressed to the edge. This leads to the fact that the viewer becomes a witness to the appearance of the motif, if he is curious enough. I like to hide because the truth comes out in hiding. I allow the viewer to experience the birth of art.

I do the same with installations, they are often procedural, the creation of which takes place in front of the viewer, or only after he appears in front of the work. Like, for example, at work, „I'll only see You when I close my eyes, cover my ears, I'll hear You“. In order to awaken and understand the work itself, you first need to approach it, only then a flash appears, which leaves the image recognizable on the canvases. It is like a constant game and guiding the viewer, which allows you to re-touch the places where art originated.

A.V.: You also create sound installations and objects. Could you tell us about a piece where the voice of your teacher commenting on the work is recorded on the same cassette tape during repeated academy auditions? This track reminds me a lot of Alvin Lucier's „I'm sitting in a room“ composed in 1969. The composer records the text that he spells, then „brings“ it back into the room and records it again a number of times. Due to the specific size and geometry of the room, certain recording frequencies are emphasized and others are attenuated. Eventually the words become unintelligible, replaced by the inherent resonant frequencies of the room itself. Isn't such a process the „reverse“ of trying to make sense of *the body of painting*? The function here seems to become the narrative itself.

A.O.: Bringing relevance back through new listening opportunities. I think it's about how new conditions and accesses can constantly recreate something new while standing in the same old place. This affects the entire development of art, which changes, but remains on the same construct. The construct often loses its shape in the endless rotation of its own wheel and remains unrecognizable. Then the path becomes the goal itself. Often one thought is enough, just „I'm sitting in a room“ and sitting becomes not about sitting or a room, but about the very form of sitting in a room. I am fascinated by these infinities. I myself like being sedentary, both in the creative process and in everyday life. It often shows how much opportunity and potential lies in a worn-out place. Then you need to stretch yourself more than ever, intellectually and spiritually. Change not the place, but your abilities, so that you can listen and see anew.

A.V.: Your works depicting movement are especially suggestive. Currently, you are working on a canvas, the motif of which is the flicker created in the retina of the so-called sun bunnies. You've also created a work inspired by the migraine pain caused by light coming through half-closed blinds. How do you grow such a multi-layered plot? How does this relate to elective technique? In the piece „I will not brush my hair in the mornings“ the movement is created by the formal properties of the freely stretched canvas, you call it *misleading stretching*. What other methods do you use to convey the narrative of a painting through its form?

A.O.: I think it's often about physiology, vision and visual perception in general. Physiology is often involved in the process of (sub)vision.

John Cage, after visiting an anechoic chamber, the quietest cavity that can be technologically equipped, said that he heard two sounds in it: one low, the other high. High was the hum of the nervous system, and low was the blood pulsating through the vessels. This proves that there are sounds that are meant to be heard forever. There are also physiological and cultural traces, the echoes of which are destined to be seen and sought at all times.



Agata Orlovska

I will not brush my hair in the mornings, 2021

Canvas

40 x 30 cm

Therefore, my goal is often to notice the gaps in vision itself, into which physiology enters, changing the color, vibration and even its legibility of the image. Sometimes the wrong stretching of the canvas itself also hinders the vision, then I leave it and highlight it. If it's sun bunnies on the retina, I leave them alone, on a blank, primed canvas. This is how disturbances that were once intermediate become fundamental. How to see what prevents you from seeing is an important skill not only for art.

A.V.: Do you feel a divide between what you create in the academy and for other projects? Do you have artist-authorities? How does discussion and collaboration with other artists affect your work?

A.O.: I don't create for the academy, I think I stopped doing something for the academy along with finished productions and assignments in the third year. These were also done because it was necessary to understand the tools of art. I think the often repeated phrase in the academy, "an artist must stand out a pit at the easel" is not correct. So now I feel the academy as another platform watching me, which may disagree, sometimes admire, but basically get involved only if I want to and allow it.

My teacher Konstantinas Bogdanas was always my authority. In a timely manner, he was able to highlight what is important to me and how to discover my topic without going through any recipes and personalism. Once he said, ``Create about what it hurts, about why you don't sleep at night'', since then I've been composing about the sound that keeps me awake at night. This is extremely accurate, no work will be able to develop if the artist purposefully chooses common human issues or follows the path of success. Only a personal connection with work will encourage you to continue working. Bogdanas has the talent to introduce doubts on days when I am sure about everything, and to introduce determination and faith on days when I doubt everything. I also admire him as an artist, a conceptualist, as a marginal artist who creates only for the sake of an idea, who lives an idea. He raised my worldliness by his example, but never taking a hard line.

In my master's studies Tomas Daukša, the teacher of my theoretical work, appeared. I chose him as a guide only after knowing his work and reading his PhD thesis, which I absolutely loved. But in the long run, I realized that he is also a great person, endlessly motivating and supportive. I fell in love with creativity and its playfulness all over again. I remembered that it can be just fun to create, not from suffering, but from light.

I think that an artist inevitably grows and develops depending on the time, context and people around him, this is reflected in his work even without him noticing. The most important thing here is to learn that creative friendship not through competition or the application of *recipes*. Only through support, faith and sometimes reminding strictly – create!

A.V.: Could you tell us a little bit about your creative process? How does your day in the studio look like?

A.O.: My day in the studio probably doesn't start without music. It is vital to keep the mind free from any domesticity, it removes all external and internal noise. Sound is an important companion not only in my creative process, but also in the future towards my work towards the viewer. Therefore, meditatively clean creation is an important condition for the emergence of such work. I spend a lot of time reading and writing, in other words constructing the artwork. It doesn't take long to make a work in its' material expression when you know exactly what you want from it. A solid conceptual foundation is an important starting point for me. Therefore, I have an armchair and coffee in the studio, the most important process takes place there.

Later, I have a material research phase, I make a lot of sketches, I look for color and texture, I often experiment and explore materials. I think these are habits formed during studies, where it was constantly repeated how important it is to find the right composition, color, drawing. It's only after these stages that I feel I deserve access to a physical body of work, lately it's more and more about logistics. The materials I need are often produced somewhere far from the world of art, I have repeatedly gone to a hardware store, a metal laboratory, electronics stores, wood workshops, to "Heliopolis" consultants, "Senukai", cycling and fishing supplies stores - this is a part of how many different places I have to visit on the way to the right materials. Doing the artwork itself is and, it seems to me, should be the smallest part for a professional.