

“I began my creative path by walking on stilts”
Jaromir Jedliński speaks with Ludwika Ogorzelec

Jaromir Jedliński:

You have carried out many spatial objects, summarily calling them “Instruments of Equilibrium”, although it seems that you mostly focus on the realization of works which you describe as the “Space Crystallization.” In our recent conversation, you said that “all of it (my work) is the ‘Space Crystallization’.” What does that mean, and how is it different from your other areas of interest and activity?

Ludwika Ogorzelec:

The cycle “Instruments of Equilibrium” came first in 1980, and everything began there, while I was still in my fourth year of studies at the Wrocław Academy of Fine Arts (about the beginning of this cycle, more later). On the other hand, “Space Crystallization,” begun 10 years after that first cycle, stems from the same trunk of my creative contemplations. Even in the Instruments cycle, though still close to the traditional definition of sculpture, there exists a structural skeleton and division of space using lines (that is unique to my work). How did this come about? Participating in the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown in 1990 and facing the task of showing work that summarized what I had accomplished during my stay there, I thought: and why not bring a person inside my sculpture? That is, to create a large-scale structure which people spend time inside of. And so it happened. I decided that the whole gallery would be my sculpture. I divided up the interior with lines so that their arrangement completely changed the “function” and the aesthetic of the place, which would affect first and foremost the “primary” emotions of a person, and not one’s knowledge or reason... etc.

Neither “Instruments of Equilibrium” or “Space Crystallization” rely on symbolism or anecdotes, nor do they have a hidden meaning or didacticism, nor are they an interpretation of existing phenomena. The goal of “Space Crystallization” is to shake a person up from the stereotypes and habits of their everyday life. To stop for a moment, to offer, are positive emotional experiences, and the next step, perhaps, the viewer will remind themselves that they are an individual living in the universe, and not just one cog in the social machine.

The “Space Crystallization” is also therefore a type of artistic action that I began in Provincetown in 1990 and am developing through today in a variety of spaces and places in the world. Speaking of the intervention of line in a given space brings to mind the experiences and developments resulting from the various transformations of this intervention and furthermore, the impact of these procedures on the human psyche. I named it - it meaning the division of space into individual pieces/crystals - “Space Crystallization” somewhat after the fact. I decided in the program written at the time that the cobblestones of space / were entrusted with my first, most relevant sculptural material. Line - seeable and touchable - is the only contour dividing such and such fragments of space from the previously undivided whole.

However, the material out of which that line is made (be it wood, metal, glass, Plexiglas, fabric, cellophane, paper, or other materials that I have not used up to this point) is integral in creating a specific aesthetic, and with that same energy influencing a person. And yet, for me this has a secondary meaning - despite the fact that the material of lines is most often noticed by viewers who are taught that the invisible doesn't exist, that it is simply emptiness. Space can serve perhaps only as the scenery for exposing that which is visible to the eye of the audience. I, on the other hand, as creator want to and must know that a given fragment of space can be weighed, compressed. We know that it is also the territory for the existence of physical, chemical or acoustic phenomena invisible to the naked eye. Imagine, for example, the flow of sound in a given space, which, hitting the wall returns and crosses itself - that was very inspirational. I wanted to show the invisible.

How does the process of crystallization occur? - Meaning, how do I go about it. First, the given space undergoes my groundbreaking analysis: cultural context (I try to find out who might make up my audience in Costa Rica, for example); historical context; function (that is, what is the public space - open, indoors - which the viewer moves through and is surprised at the sight and impact of the sculpture); and the gallery or museum to which viewers come specifically to see the exhibit. Still another space is the landscape. I examine its proportions, aesthetic, ambient shapes, existing materials, and typical weather events (e.g. winds, their direction... there exist places with so-called "drafts"). Next, often - if an invitation comes, for example, from Australia - based on photographs and earlier reached conclusions of the given place, I try to find a concept, or how I will "act" in the given space, what effect might crystallize. Usually, I make many versions and visualizations for each project in order to choose the most appropriate one.

The realization of a work is a type of performance in and of itself, in which "I dance with lines" in the space given to me. Normally these actions are public and fit into the whole of the project. In the Nancy Margolis Gallery in New York we announced that the creation of a work is a public act and that we invited all to participate. For me, this time is also a period of studying perceptions; it is important for further exploration.

Now we can return to your question regarding how the "Instruments of Equilibrium" cycle came to be and how from there my further creative path was laid. I was in my fourth year of academy in the sculpture studio of Professor Leon Posiadlo at the Wroclaw Academy of Fine Arts (in 1980 - PWSSP), wherein my adventure with space began. Among other assignments, the professor proposed to us a so-called "improvised" project regarding issues of "balance", of course understood in many ways: the first stage was supposed to be a performance in which - with the help of our own bodies - we were to portray our understanding of balance.

In this assignment I became fascinated by the phenomenon of the human body as "mechanism" (mobile sculpture), an object of space with multiple possibilities: changing its shape from one to another, the possibility of movement, etc. However, I had to concentrate on the issue of balance in my upcoming performance. Having already an experience with theater and dance, I could analyze certain dancing figures, but that was not enough. I wanted the spectacle to take place away from the floor/ground, somewhere in the air? Why? I had a psychological desire to be light (therefore happy?) in those tough times, at the beginning of the 80s. Maybe this was a subconscious "illustration" of my then complex life situation? By this I mean my engagement with the actions of the "Solidarity" opposition movement in Wroclaw, meeting with the beautiful people of the "underground", our friendships; saving ourselves being caught by the security forces and the feeling that the present moment was important, sublime, and also

walking “on the edge”, walking “above the ground” in spite of the reality of life in a totalitarian, communist country!

I built myself stilts (I had practiced them as a child) and I presented this spectacle, arriving at an analysis of the phenomenon of the human body, which, when carried above the ground, with their weight on only two points, is forced to maintain their balance at every moment. Putting your legs forward forced head and shoulders to rebalance by sticking out in the other direction as a counterbalance. I remember from childhood and relived via the realization of this improvised assignment a happiness that gave me my “victory” over the force of gravity by walking on stilts; I even deftly got myself from one end of the room to another. I could say that in my creative path I got on stilts at the end of 1980. Otherwise stated, they led me into the sphere of mobile sculptures, and the same goes for unraveling riddles such as what is space, time, and movement... The next step of our assignment was to sculpturally “illustrate” our personal experiences from the first stage of the project.

My fascination with carrying myself above ground helped me make the decision that my sculpture would be levitating in space, very light, mobile and in spite of the knowledge imparted into me through three years of study - I was then in my fourth year at the academy - the basis of issues addressed by the sculptures, meaning figures as heavy shapes taking up a certain space, looked at from the outside (all around). The sculptures most commonly exposed on a pedestal such that they would be comfortable for the viewer) mine would fill the space, as though preventing a person from moving through in the comfortable way. Why? Was I arrogant, or rebellious? Or rather did I need to go over and get rid of the boundaries, boundaries of aesthetic and psychological norms in the viewer and in myself. My crossing boundaries depended and depends on attempts to transition from areas where everything is known to those that I have not experienced or gotten to know.

The next dilemma was the choice of material with which to create the “illustration” of my developments on the theme of balance. In order to achieve lightness, I thought of using paper, but after reflection I changed my mind. It is a material impregnated with many different meanings, a product of a technological process, before me paper touched a lot of people, thousands of artists have used for centuries. So I thought about wood - the material created by nature; light, warm, tender, with its cellular internal structure.

Wood can be cut, carved and rough-hewn but I preferred not to do any of those, as other sculptors had already done. I decided to “Blow air into the wood,” and hang it in the air to make it really light. I knew a lot about wood, about trees. It is essentially derived from the “objective” world (World of Nature), a living being that is nourished by the food of the earth and the cosmos (photosynthesis), which is a vertical form (Earth - Cosmos). I knew that wood could be cut along the grain and reveal lines formed only by nature. I also take into account the species of tree used. I already knew that I would use wood to present my reflections on balance. I began to connect split wood fibers end to end using bone glue in order to cover the largest area or block of space.

The phenomenon of the human body/mechanism as instrument searching for the moment of balance - that is, my walking on stilts - also enthralled me, and the line and how it spanned the space, and all of this following the laws of mathematics and physics; the force of gravity was essential in my searching and it influenced the creation of ****"Equilibrium objects". They relate to structures, the borders of something that is "in-between", for example between existence and non-existence, something visible and invisible, the problem of sense and the absurd, organization, for example geometric, or chaotic; they also embodied questions of beginnings and infinities.

J.J. You created many further incarnations of this main theme of your oeuvre - the "Space Crystallization" - all over the world, and lately even in Poland, at times in open air, and other times indoors: What determines the individuality of each unique incarnation of the aforementioned theme/idea? Now, in the summer of 2013, you are preparing an exhibition for the interior of the Muzalewska Gallery in Poznan, Poland. Would it be possible for you to tell us now, a few months before the inauguration of the project, some details about it?

LO: As I once wrote in a program: "... in my creations - in general - I am driven equally by intellect, the sum of my experiences, intuition, temperament and the psychological state that I am in at the time." Moving to the next project, I do a thorough and insightful analysis of the "given" space. I try to see the space's aesthetics and physicality, meaning the shape of the terrain, architecture, materials from which it is built, proportions, dimensions, etc. I study the history of the space and the cultural context of the audience - I work in many countries in the world - thus I want to know to whom my work will be offered, I want to decide how to "get to" them so that they can absorb it to the fullest extent. It is also important to know what the daily function of the "given" space is, to figure out who will make up the audience. Further:

THE STREET is a public space in which pedestrians might be uniquely surprised by my work. It's possible that my work will stop them, change their actual way of thinking, break up their "daily grind" and perhaps give them an emotionally positive moment, different from those in which they existed up to this point.

A TOWN SQUARE functions similarly to a street, but with a greater possibility for free stopping and looking. A piece of art in the street or in a town square (and other similar public spaces) is addressed to everyone who finds themselves there, no matter what's their level of artistic initiation. Art in public spaces educates, makes one feel comfortable, and turns into insiders even those who are normally far from the art world.

A LANDSCAPE is a unique, different space. For there, the aesthetic of the place where I am working (experimenting) is most important element, because I work to redefine it in order to create another, new reality. A person is often merely a viewer here, and only sometimes a participant in any action.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS are places to which a person goes specifically to perceive and take in a work, or works of art. These places are only for certain people, only for those who decide to go there, usually those that are higher on the ladder of aesthetic initiation. These places are selective; however for me they are the best, most practical places (in terms of freeing the space from restrictive - and often illogical - laws limiting artistic freedom of expression, as it goes in indoor spaces), for experimentation (a laboratory) with emotions and the sensitivity of a person who doesn't have the chance to become the only viewer. Usually the viewer participates with a lot of enthusiasm.

The place itself (and everything that makes it up) I call "latent energy", which in concert with "introduced energy", meaning my concept of the intervention of lines in space, heightens its effect on human emotions. Aside from the aforementioned analysis of place, I also try to feel the given space in order to decide on a concept of intervention, that is the crystallization of a situation in which a person lives a special moment and is shaken out of the stupor of everyday life, they will live a moment which will be their own, they will take off their mask, the last role they played, since in that state their life is organized by others; beyond that, for just a moment they might feel anew like an individual with the right to choice? It will help him or her to recognize that he/she is a person with higher emotions, and not just a cog in the social mechanism.

Also important to the concept are the various limitations and events related to the organization of an artistic happening. Just as my sculpture is the result of the situation of a space, so I myself usually try to adapt to the space and surroundings in which the exhibition is organized. For example, take my most recent work in Spoleto, Italy (Summer 2013). It was organized spontaneously by artists and lovers of art. However, at this moment there is an acute economic crisis in Spoleto, which is on the brink of bankruptcy. The budget once promised by the city authorities was sharply cut and it was impossible to rent a forklift in order to realize the huge (to use colloquial language) hanging piece in the enclosed patio space whose form was meant to start a dialogue with another form - a mist of water - and tied to this were changing optical phenomena, thus crystalizing the space and interacting with human sense other than sight.

Under these new circumstances, was I to simply say: too bad, I can't realize this project? I didn't want to let down my friends. Conversely, in these situations I normally try and help to overcome the bad. Therefore I changed the plan in order to adapt it to the limited possibilities. During my first visit to the site, at the historic landmark that is Chiostro San Nicolo of Spoleto, someone said to me that I would likely be observed by a resident of the top floor of the nearby building, a famous professor of art history. In that moment I knew that I would compose the space for his eyes, for the "observer from above" (that is the title I gave the work), having at that many other aesthetic, legal and economic limitations. Working 9 hours daily in 35° C for 10 days I build the piece, which was met with great applause - the old professor also praised it, but I knew that I hadn't had enough time and the piece wasn't saturated or balanced enough.

In order to realize "Wild Apple Tree No I" in Wroclaw from the cycle "Space Crystallization" at the BWA Awangarda in 1993, I was given one space that was considered difficult by everyone - a glass walled space of 8m x 4 m x 22m. One of my professors from the Academy of Fine Arts said, "Lutka, you won't do anything interesting with this site, it's basically just a display case after all, and what can you do in that sort of space?" "What do you mean, by I won't do anything interesting?" I replied, giving myself a goal. Other motivations that influenced that concept were the horror I was living through at the time in relation to plagiarism of my work (particularly my spatial and aesthetic inventions) from a dishonest artist acquaintance whose behavior seriously harmed me. I was forced to be pinned against her, which provoked much discussion in the Wroclaw establishment, not always favorable or fair to me. The plagiarist was "well-connected", so my actions against this local status quo went against the tide.

I decided also to make my piece perpendicular to the display case in the Awangarda Gallery of Wroclaw. I treated this "important" gallery like one object that formed part of a larger whole, that is - my sculpture. A large pyramid standing in the main corner, made at a right angle, a side of which cut diagonally across the site, coming outside at one end through the window on the street, on the other end of the triangle it cut diagonally into the wall dividing the interior of the gallery, ending in the adjacent room. The line that I introduced into the space was made of a whole, worn, old tree, no longer bearing fruit - a wild apple tree that my brother decided to remove from his orchard.

While preparing the wood by cleaving and separating it, I felt and considered the life of the apple tree. It was planted before the Second World War, it was therefore a witness to the changing history of Lower Silesia - it was planted by the Germans, survived the war and blossomed for many years after. I decided to give this tree a new life by turning it into a piece of art, honoring it in the title. This was the first edition of "Wild Apple Tree." After finishing the exposition in Wroclaw, I kept the wood, which from I built "Wild Apple Tree II" in the Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw one year later.

At the Muzalewska Gallery I will definitely mold the viewers' emotions. It will be a laboratory!

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