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MENTAL STAINED GLASS

Frederick Abrams' "Underground Cathedral (The Routes of Civilization)" in Wroclaw's Entropia Gallery

A connection between traditional stained glass and contemporary art is the starting point of a multimedia installation, which using metro plans from different cities of the world attempts to say something important about the times we live in.

Frederick Abrams' installation at Entropia gallery in Wroclaw consists of two slides which are shown opposite of each other on two walls, of graphic diagrams and two television monitors on which we can see fragments of metro maps and scenes from different metro stations.

The central element of the installation is a slide based on a stained glass map of the Paris Metro made between 1980 and '83. Abrams says, "What these maps have in common is that they can be easily drawn but one cannot see the entire system as a whole. One can only see one station at a time. The rest of it we can only imagine or see on the schematic."

On the stained glass the original names of the Paris Metro stations are replaced with words which don't seem to have any references to anything or have any relationship to each other. These are quotations, names, phrases or hard to understand associations. But if we allow our thoughts to run free through different metro stations, one will discover that the diagram attempts to depict the human mind and different forms of its functions, thoughts, memory and subconscious. On the opposite wall we can see a picture made on a computer which shows multiplied metro line schematics from nine cities, each city's map represented by one color. Abrams says, "For the last ten years I traveled throughout the Western Hemisphere to many cities which have undergrounds. I documented it on videotape. I always record sounds which you can hear in metro stations, sounds of trains, megaphones and people I meet. The sounds from each city are different."

According to Frederick Abrams, the metro line schematics represent, just like icons, specific history and culture of a city (or even its roots: the English subtitle, "The Routes of Civilization," is a play on words). The way that the undergrounds were designed says

something about the differences of Latin Americans, North Americans and Europeans. Abrams says, "Bearing in mind that the diagrams are different, they always have something in common. I assume it's the similarity of the most basic structure of our minds. The differences are caused by different points of view of people from different cultures. It's like in Quantum Physics...I'm convinced that all systems in the world, both biological and technical, are very similarly connected and interdependent. I started my work in stained glass by showing diagrams of the first known forms of life and I later realized that those forms are very similar to metro line schematics. This is not only in its graphic form. It's a question of evolution: in the undergrounds' schematics are innate forms reflecting how our minds work and they were created during a very long process of evolution since the first known ocean life forms."

Frederick Abrams was born in Los Angeles but for the last ten years he has lived mostly in Europe and for the last three years as an artist in residence in Wrocław. Besides the stained glass he makes films, takes photographs, does computer graphics and composes music. An integral part of the opening reception was a solo concert of the artist who by programming sounds from different metro stations from various countries into a synthesizer made a musical landscape of a contemporary amalgamation. We could see as well a film being a poetic attempt to show the atmosphere of means of transportation and a kind of visual, sound and musical synthesis portraying different cities.

Tomasz Janos