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Moderator: Dr. David Alexander
Curators: Doron Polak, Amir Cohen**

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Earth



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**Wlodzimierz Ksiazek, “Possibilities of Understanding”
A lecture presented at ‘What is Earth’ Symposium at the
Orensanz Foundation, May 8, 2008, NYC**

For this symposium, “What is Earth,” I propose to share with you some of my thoughts about the topic of “earth.” I will not be talking about the globe versus the universe; the astronomical, mathematical, physical, or chemical, etc., factors related to the dimension, shape, and structure of the earth, for example. Nor will I talk about issues that preoccupy our thoughts today: that is, the issues of disasters, escalating military conflicts, abuses of human rights engineered by states, terrorist organizations, or domestic situations, global economic calamities on the scale not experienced before, which surely will require interventions to radically refocus and reinterpret those problems.

My remarks will tackle issues of my personal attempt to find ways to try to understand the world, to try to understand my position in the world, and by that, to keep reminding myself that there is a reason for our existence in this particular time/space; and that there is a hope for more clarity of comprehending the sense, aura, the idea – of earth – in the light of evolution of evolving history. An attempt to understand is an intellectual concept, since we know that our planet is a mysterious formation so enigmatic that so far nobody can figure out from where it arrived, for what purpose and why and how it was made. However, as long as we are intellectually and artistically creative, new discoveries will emerge. And we just may keep coming closer to grasp what is unattainable – to answer the most simple and the most important question, “Was it possible? Is it possible?” “Will it be possible?”

With this basic question, we are in a similar situation to Veronique, the main character in Krzysztof Kieslowski’s film “The Double Life of Veronique,” who, after a long, complicated, meandering, confusing, annoying process, finally detects and finds the Puppeteer, the man, the symbol, and metaphor, and her link to her “double,” only to be challenged by his asking: “if it was possible?” . . . “whether it was psychologically possible?”

The case of “possibilities” cited here from Kieslowski’s film, of course, is an example. We face those questions in a variety of shapes and forms related to all the issues we can possibly imagine: in sum, related to one idea: the idea of the possibility to understand.

Let me now present you with a quotation from Michael Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which I’ve found to be very much apropos to what I’m trying to articulate in relationship to strategies of the quest for understanding.

“For many years now historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events...”

“And the great problem presented by such historical analyses is not how continuities are established, how a single pattern is formed and preserved, how for so many different, successive minds there is a single horizon, what mode of action and what substructure is implied by the interplay of transmissions, resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions, how the origin may extend its sway well beyond itself to that conclusion that is never given – the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting

foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations..."

"In short, the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities, whereas history itself appears to be abandoning the irruption of events in favour of stable structures.[1]"



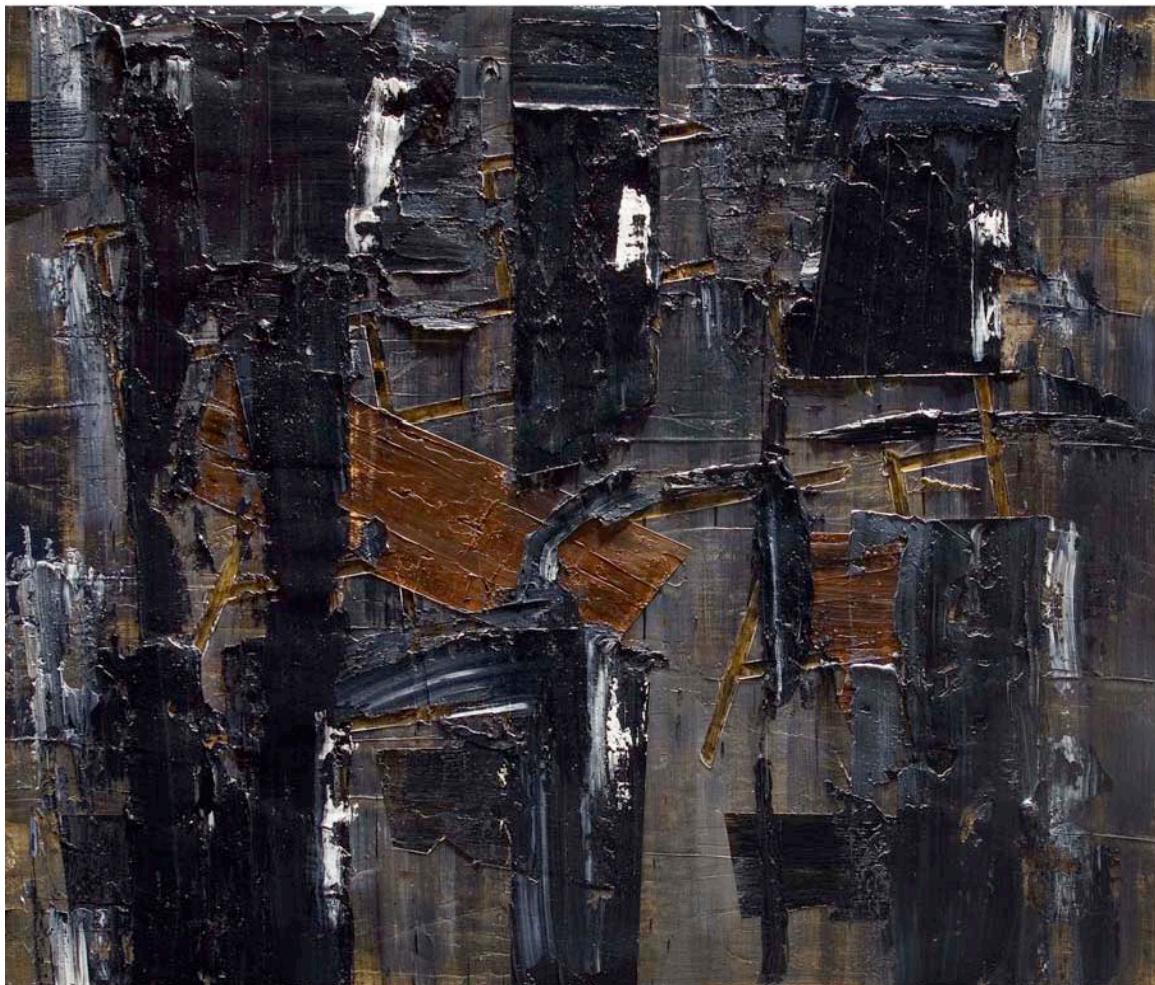
Włodzimierz Ksiazek, 2007, oil on canvas, 80" X 90"(203 X 229cm)

As an artist, I do my research and go through the design process and production of my artwork taking into my artistic laboratory selected fragments of a larger body, as some tissues to be analyzed under a microscope. In that sense, I am able by necessity to use that information, which emerges in the process of construction of my painting to function as a vehicle for my artistic expression, my artistic commentaries, and my interpretations.

My paintings, large-scale compositions made in oil and cold wax on canvas or in encaustic technique and my paintings as an installation - presented here represent examples of my artistic research of the last several years and are governed by similar quests, hesitations, even anxieties to those articulated similarly by historians, philosophers and scientists. Continuing attempt of trying to grasp and express through my art and my art *habitus* forming my art - the world which surrounds me and the earth I am part of, gives me an optimism that my work will continue to engage and therefore to endure as part of the evolving history of art, history of culture, history of earth.

I look at my art, my paintings as a “process of excavation,” or, to be more precise, paintings as an accumulation of historical, archeological, artificial excavations of forces of retrievals, attritions, and additions. I typically begin my project with quotation taken from archeological excavation sites, historical maps, geographical, architectural, urban territories, for example. Those quotations I record in slides. Let me give you a few examples: photographs of Dacca, Bangladesh with its capitol complex designed by Louis Kahn, and shantytowns scattered everywhere through their contrasting associations reference the case of monumentality, marginalization, regionalism, and vernacular. In a similar way, altered slides of the city of Jodhpur in Rajasthan, India help me to illuminate the case of artificial excavation. Images from Delhi and the Maharaja Jai Singh’s remarkable observatory, “Jantar Mantar” exemplify “historicism of urbanism” where understanding of palimpsest and collage best explain the structure and the history of the city, where new formations over time constantly replace old ones.

Slides from Jerusalem with its wailing wall and Al-Aqsa Mosque and other images from Israel, such as the ruins of Masada, remains of archeological sites from the Negev desert, West Bank, Upper Galilee, as well as pictures from the destroyed Palestinian villages are examples of archeological excavation, historical excavation, tradition, and its role in the context of time, the relativity of freedom, and authenticity.

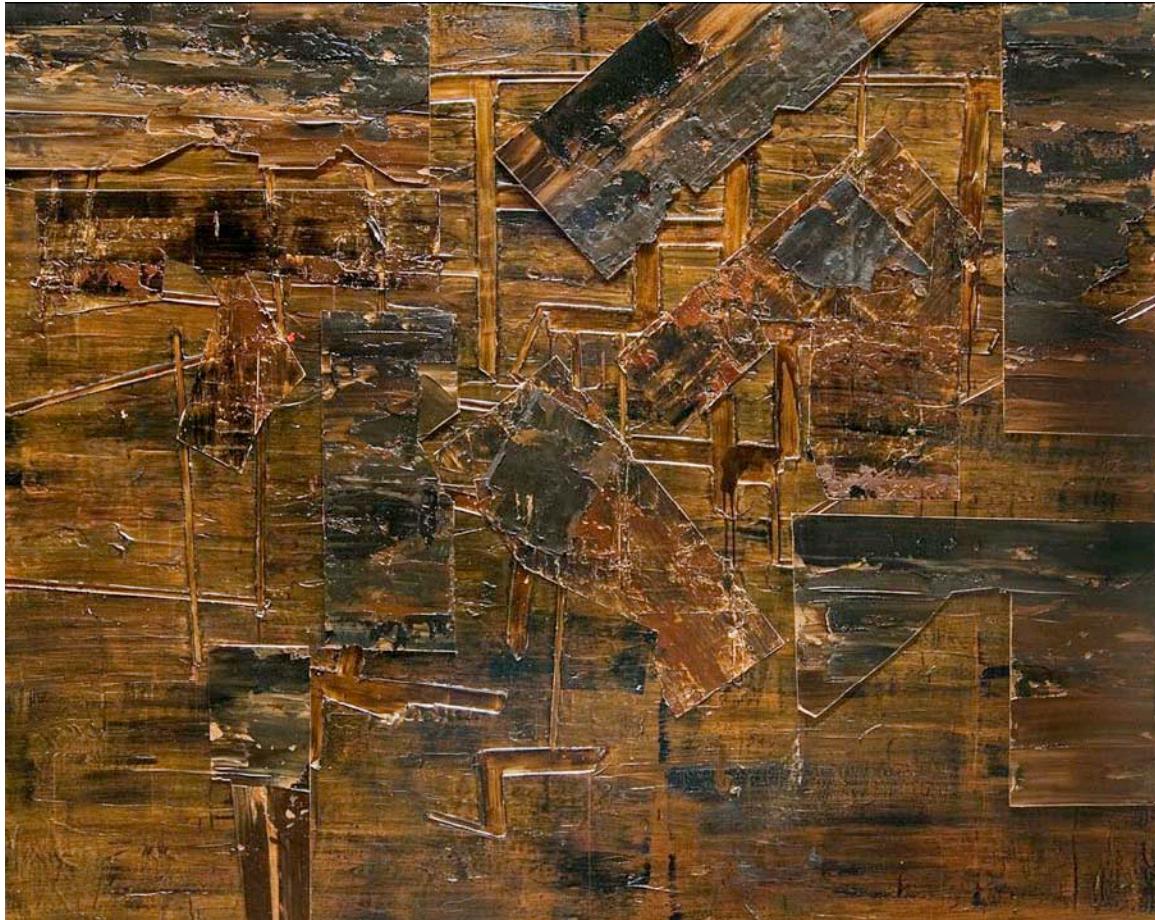


Włodzimierz Ksiazek, 2007, oil on canvas, 68"X 80" (173 X 203cm)

Once the selection of transparencies is determined, I manipulate, reduce, and fragment them to uncover different points of view, angles, perspective, space – in short, to arrive at new, unexpected material, new forms, images, and new narratives perhaps.

In the next step, I trace abstracted and altered fragments onto the canvas, and start the process of layering and purification. Campaigns of subsequent semi-transparent layers with different details that symbolize existence of some unique formations pile up in the process of seemingly never-ending superimpositions to arrive at the clearly articulated three-dimensional field somewhere between painting and sculpture. Volumes of paint hide traces of its beginning, that is of manipulated transparencies of reality – revealing by my acts of digging out, retrieving, and exposing only selected residues. In that sense, I create an organism of multiple maps or fields superimposed one over another where building blocks of heavy impasto and semitransparent volumes of paint mixed with varnish and cold wax are the “brick and mortar” of the painting’s architecture.

Different sections of the “maps” superimposed vertically reveal its own archeology, its own history, its own struggles – never completed, never finished. Within this process of working vertically up and down the membranes of the painting, and through that articulation memory of initial motif is reshaped, as we can only see the residue of traces of the initial inspiration at the lowest level of the excavation. What remains is a shadow - a mirror of duality.



Włodzimierz Ksiazek, 2007, oil on canvas, 78"X 100" (198 X 254cm)

And this is where eventually I arrive with my art, my paintings – at the state of ambiguity, in-conclusion, irresolution, uncertainty – at the state open to modifiable interpretations: emotional, analytical, spiritual, logical, mystical, etc. Thus my work appears to be on parallel

tracks to the quest of understanding of what I think I know about myself vis-à-vis the earth - and what I think I know about the earth herself. In that sense, I believe I come close to see the earth as a metaphor of art, creation, or by an extension, the drama of insemination, pregnancy, and birth. And therefore, I can see myself alert and alive – moving forward and still asking, “Is it possible?” “Was it possible?” “Will it be possible?”

Wlodzimierz Ksiazek

[1] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

This lecture will be published as a chapter of a book presented at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

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