

The critical discourse surrounding Pavel Opočensky and his work is a generally unanimous refrain. An artist trained in jewelry design, who also began making sculpture, he is a carver, unusual for a jewelry maker of his generation, who is following in the footsteps of a centuries-long tradition found in his native Bohemia. His work has been described as sensual, minimal, restrained, tactile, and organic. While these assessments are broadly accurate, there is a far greater complexity to his practice, especially when one considers more than a small sampling of works.

Since first establishing himself in the mid-1980s, he has worked with materials ranging from steel, ivory, ebony, wood, stone, jade, quartz, amber, Chrysopras, ColorCore, and Bakelite, moving back and forth between precious and unconventional resources. This non-linear trajectory of artistic method is not so much random in character, but rather one that seems guided by a combination of purposeful reinvention and unanticipated opportunities. This is what the best of artists do; rather than being mired in the ideology of a single material, each body of work is dictated by the availability and suitability of a given medium that best carries forward each successive endeavor.

From his earliest efforts to his latest, he has elicited distinct permutations from a restricted set of conditions in each series of objects. With works that are monochromatic as with those that are polychromed, Opočensky has managed to nonetheless offer up variations in hue and texture to such a degree as to lead one to believe that there are material differences between works that come into play. To the contrary, it is his ability to manipulate the physical properties of his chosen medium—whether organic or synthetic--, through a purposeful and painstaking process of extracting conditions that lie within a material that he gradually teases

out from within until the result is something that exudes a kind of delicacy embedded in an object that is resolutely robust. This is what sculptors do: begin with a rough piece of material and carefully work it through carving, filing, and polishing until something delicate and ineffable has replaced the formerly rough and unformed original.

Opočensky's art is replete with dichotomies. He exploits and confuses contrasts of concavity and convexity, opacity and translucency, light and dark, positive space versus negative space, and above all, scale. For even his smallest works contain an ambition towards monumentality. Moreover, he creates work that is abstract, muted, seemingly uncomplicated and reserved, but the effect he achieves is decidedly poetic, symphonic, and aspirational. Thoroughly modernist in conception, his work has a timeless universalism, recalling Cycladic and other Ancient or non-Western cultural references. In this way, he emulates the accomplishments of artists like Arp, Brancusi, and Noguchi, whose art embodied all of the characteristics discussed here. But Opočensky does so, at least within the parameters of this exhibition, couched in the language of ornament, where the object is conceived not only in relation to the body, but with the direct interaction with the body as his paramount concern and triumph.

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