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Abstract

The medieval cathedral is a relatively common theme in art, and the fascination that these buildings evoked among artists even soon after they first appeared can be traced through history. Nonetheless, artistic attitudes toward medieval architecture have evolved over time and by the late 20th century, interest in depictions of Christian places of worship had waned almost entirely. By the end of the century, however, spirituality was rediscovered as a subject of art and the theme was addressed in several important works of art in subsequent years. Some of these works attempted to foster a dialogue between history and the field of digital technology, and this study will examine examples of this approach with examples from two artists. The first of these is the world-renowned German artist Gerhard Richter's design for the window of the south transept of Cologne Cathedral. Richter used a random number generator in the preparation of his design to express the understanding of God as the cosmic principle of the infinite, of an abstract and inconceivable order. The second artist is Marko Blažo, part of the generation which appeared on the Slovak art scene in the mid-1990s. His images of the cathedral are created from the repeated manipulation of original photos using a photocopier which are then further distorted by being expanded and reduced using a computer. Through this process and its subsequent reworking, the cathedral is shifted into a new visual level of the interpretative and multi-layered desanctification of the subject. The aim of this study is to offer a detailed analysis of these two approaches, examining the media character of the two works and thereby interpreting the attitude of the two artists to the specific object of the medieval church.

Key words

Cathedral. Contemporary art. Gerhard Richter. Marko Blažo. Technology.

Introduction

Interest in cathedrals has varied during different historical periods. In some eras, they were the object of admiration, while in others, they were perceived in a more negative light[1]. The period in which the interest in Gothic architecture reached its peak was the era of Romanticism, as is reflected in the art of the epoch, in particular the popularity of landscapes featuring cathedrals or their ruins[2]. Over the course of the 20th century, interest in the cathedral varied according to individual artistic trends and movements. Moving beyond the more obvious inspirations of the Middle Ages on modern art, many scholars have begun to address the issue of the complicated relationship between medieval art and the art of the 20th and 21st centuries. A key study in the field of the connections and relations between "old and new" art is *Medieval Modern - Art Out of Time* by the American art historian Alexander Nagel[3]. Among the ideas addressed in this work, Nagel considers the cathedral as a creative concept which can also be identified in modern art and architecture[4]. In one example, he notes the parallels between a reliquary bust of St Yrieix from the early 13th century and the 2007 work *For the Love of God* by Damien Hirst[5]. Another book, *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum* by the American art historian Amy Knight Powell, identifies several affinities between the fates of paintings from the late medieval period and the modern era[6]. Knight Powell even considers the early works as a precursor to the development of modern art[7]. In addition to these "foundational" works, many minor contributions have also addressed individual aspects of the given theme. Although the literature on the topic continues to grow in the international context, there is a distinct lack of similar work examining this phenomenon in the Slovak environment. It would, therefore, be useful to draw attention to some examples of Slovak art, attempting to interpret them in terms of their historic inspirations and thereby introduce them to a wider international audience.

1 Richter's Random Paintings

Many examples can be found in international art in which contemporary artists have "entered the field of medieval art". One such case is that of Gerhard Richter, the internationally renowned German painter and visual artist whose work is characterised by the diversity of its artistic program, with figural work coexisting with abstract compositions[8].

Richter first appeared on the art scene in the 1960s, a period in which German society was attempting to come to terms with its recent history and the burden of guilt which it had borne since the end of the Second World War. Richter, however, was among those who were attempting to systematically dissect national history through art, and his enthusiastic interest in the past is apparent in his complex and intellectually rigorous approach to the theme[9].
Photography plays a crucial role in Richter's early work as a basis for the development of his paintings but also as a means of expanding upon and transferring his abstract sketches onto the canvas or

1   On the issue of the attitudes to Gothic architecture across different periods, see: FRANKL, P.: *The Gothic. Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries*. New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1960.

2   BROWN, D. B.: Gothic Cathedrals from Romanticism to Modernism: Images and Ideas. In *Tate Papers*, 2020, Vol. 33, 2020. [online]. [2021-06-23]. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/33/gothic-cathedrals-romanticism-modernism-images-ideas>.

3   NAGEL, A.: *Medieval Modern: Art Out of Time*. London : Thames & Hudson, 2012.

4   Ibid, pp. 241-247.

5   Ibid, pp. 64-68.

6   POWELL KNIGHT, A.: *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum*. New York : Zone Books, 2012.

7   In each chapter of her book, Knight Powell addresses a different issue of late medieval art followed by a "Vignette" which focuses on its parallels with art of the 20th and 21st centuries. For example, the theme of crucifixes with moveable arms is contrasted with the work Unhappy Readymade by Marcel Duchamp. For more information, see: POWELL KNIGHT, A.: *Depositions: Scenes from the Late Medieval Church and the Modern Museum*. New York : Zone Books, 2012, pp. 81-102.

8   Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in 1932. His artistic career began in the 1960s and he gradually became one of the world's most sought-after contemporary artists. The record-breaking prices for which his works have long been sold are testimony to his continuing popularity. For a comprehensive overview of his work, see: FRIEDEL, H. (ed.): *Gerhard Richter: Atlas*. London : Thames and Hudson, 2007.

9   FOSTER, H. et al.: *Umění po roce 1900. Modernismus - antimodernismus - postmodernismus*. Prague : Slovart, 2015, pp. 656-660.

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providing a zoomed-in view of some specific detail in his paintings[10]. In addition to this, Richter also employs photography in the unique process of the "technological composition" of his paintings, an aspect which is of key importance for the purposes of this article[11].

In 2003 a call was announced for new proposals for the glazing of the window of the south transept of the Cathedral of St Peter in Cologne. The Gothic tracery window, more than 20 metres high, had been fitted with temporary glazing in 1948 following the destruction of the earlier stained-glass from 1863 during the Second World War. The monochromatic nature of the temporary glazing cast too much bright light into the interior of the cathedral, and the decision was taken to replace them with a new stained glass arrangement which would commemorate the German martyrs of the 20th century and serve as a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust[12]. Several artists submitted designs but none of these were selected, as the cathedral chapter had been convinced by Richter's proposal which was based, apparently by coincidence, on

the concept of his 1974 painting titled *4096 Colours*. The design incorporated Richter's characteristic Colour Charts, grids of colours which he separated into smaller panels and installed into the window tracery. The design for the window is formed from small squares which combine to form a multi-coloured grid. Richter prepared the colour scheme for the design by selecting 72 colours from a palette of 800 which most closely approximated the spectrum of colours used in the original stained glass. The individual colours were placed into an arrangement using a random number generator. In order to retain the original visual rhythm of the window, every second vertical panel was a mirror image of another, with the first panel mirroring the third, the second panel mirroring the fifth, and the fourth panel mirroring the sixth. The system of randomly placed coloured squares creates a vibrant abstract mosaic resembling a pixelated map, which also has the appearance of a zoomed-in view on a digital image[13]. Richter intervened in the final design by rearranging some of the squares in places where the grouping appeared to form a recognisable shape. The final installation was ceremonially unveiled on August 25th 2007 and was composed of a total of 11,263 squares,

each measuring 9.6 x 9.6 cm, which were attached with silicon glue onto a transparent reinforcing base which avoided the need for connecting materials such as the lead panes of earlier stained glass windows[14]. This technological approach combines with the light flowing into the cathedral interior to create an effect in which the individual squares appear to merge across the remarkable 106 m2 expanse of the window, forming a constantly shifting spectrum of colours[15]. The resulting image, endlessly transformed by the changing light conditions, suggests the impermanence and mutability of the world, in which we can perceive the light as a manifestation of the supernatural. The system of random selection was used in an effort to develop the allegory of the cosmic principle of infinity. Spirituality appears here as an order which lies beyond our comprehension, granting the world a purpose which extends further than the limits of our perception[16]. The symmetrical mirrored composition of the panels can be understood as an attempt to expand upon the somewhat ambivalent character of the work, an effect which is partly heightened by its formal distinction

from the other decorative elements of the cathedral. Richter's window incorporates both a chaotic, random assembly of its constituent parts but also a secondary organisational level with a traditional medieval geometric structure. The use of geometric proportion can also be perceived as an image of divine order harmonising the chaos projected by the random arrangement of colours. Through this proportionality, combined with the use of the light and the allegorical understanding of God as a universal system of generative randomness, Richter's work fulfils all three of the key requirements of a medieval cathedral: proportion, light and allegory[17].

However, the installation of Richter's window in Cologne Cathedral reveals one more interesting "medieval enigma": an inclination towards abstraction and the sense which this inclination evokes. As was noted above, the initial concept for the window was a figurative work which would refer to specific saints, but this was later abandoned, and the window was given over to an entirely abstract composition. Indeed, this decision was by no means welcomed by all members of the religious community, and Cardinal Joachim Meisner openly criticised the new window, refusing to accept that it was an expression of the Christian faith. The Cardinal also argued that the window was

more appropriate for a mosque, suggesting that it should do more to reflect Christian teachings rather than the Islamic doctrine which forbids the depiction of the human figure[18]. In this sense, it is possible to discern some degree of iconoclastic controversy in the completed work. On the one side, a non-figurative, abstract approach to the depiction of the transcendent; on the other, a defence of the traditional figurative depiction of Christian motifs. This type of discussion is strikingly reminiscent of the conflicts between supporters of iconoclasm and iconodulism[19].

Although it can be conceded that Richter's work largely fails to meet the historical conventions of sacral art, the work should be considered as a deeply contemplative and profound contribution to the theme of the place of contemporary art in sacral spaces or as an artistic reflection of modern forms of spirituality[20]. The speech given by the Provost of the Cathedral, Norbert Feldhoff, at the press conference introducing the window is ample evidence that Richter's approach to the cathedral space is capable of positively developing the

religiosity of the site: "*This window represents nothing religious but rather the challenge to see; it invites silence, creates a light shimmering with colour, enlivens, inspires, evokes meditation and creates an atmosphere which opens itself up to believers*"[21].

2 Blažo's Manipulation of the Cathedral

The Slovak art scene features several artists whose work uses modern technologies to form a dialogue with medieval art and architecture, and one artist in particular addressed this theme throughout his artistic career. The Košice artist Marko Blažo first became interested in the cathedral space in the mid-1990s as an emerging young artist[22]. Although he studied at the Department of Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava, from the beginning of his career Blažo had mainly worked with intermedia interventions on objects and installations, primarily with digital

10   GERŽOVÁ, J.: Konceptuálna maľba. Terminologický paradox? In GERŽOVÁ, J. (ed.): *Maľba v kontextoch. Kontexty Maľby. Zborník z česko-slovenského sympózia venovaného problémom súčasnej maľby.* Bratislava : Slovart, 2012, pp. 92-95.

11   OBRIST, H. U. et al.: *Gerhard Richter: 4900 Colours.* Stuttgart : Hatje Cantz, 2009, pp. 62-90.

12   RICHTER, G., DIEDERICH, S. et al.: *Gerhard Richter – Zufall: Das Kölner Domfenster und 4900 Farben.* Köln : Walther König, 2007, pp. 14-27.

13   We might understand this as the inspiration of pop art with which Richter has been in repeated dialogue. See: FOSTER, H. et al.: *Umění po roce 1900. Modernismus - antimodernismus - postmodernismus.* Prague : Slovart, 2015, pp. 521, 598-599. Additionally, the similarity to a zoomed digital image also suggests the interpretation that, in the adage attributed to Mies van der Rohe, "God is in the details".

14   BÜHREN, R.: *Kunst und Kirche im 20. Jahrhundert. Die Rezeption des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils.* Paderborn : Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008, pp. 619-620.

15   RICHTER, G., DIEDERICH, S. et al.: *Gerhard Richter – Zufall: Das Kölner Domfenster und 4900 Farben.* Köln : Walther König, 2007, pp. 619-620.

16   ROBERTSON, J, MCDANIEL, C.: *Themes of Contemporary Art. Visual Art after 1980.* New York, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 366.

17   FREELAND, C.: *But Is It Art? An Introduction to Art Theory.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 36-42.

18   MEISNER, J.: Dom-Fenster passt eher in eine Moschee. In *DIE WELT,* 30.8.2007. [online]. [2021-07-20]. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/politik/article1145710/Dom-Fenster-passt-eher-in-eine-Moschee.html>.

19   AVENARIUS, A.: *Byzantský ikonoklazmus: storočie zápasu o ikonu.* Bratislava : Veda, 1998, pp. 36-95.

20   ROBERTSON, ROBERTSON, J., MCDANIEL, C.: *Themes of Contemporary Art. Visual Art after 1980.* New York, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 366.

21   *Gerhard Richter stellte seinen Entwurf für das Dom-Fenster im Südquerhaus vor.* [online]. [2021-07-20]. Available at: <https://www.koelner-dom.de/index.php?id=19801&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35>.

22   Marko Blažo was born in Košice in 1972 to an artistic family. From 1991 to 1998 he attended the studio of Rudolf Sikora at the Department of Painting in the Academy of Fine Art and Design in Bratislava. During his studies he also completed study trips to the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Dijon and at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania. He has received numerous prestigious awards including the Oskár Čepan Prize in 2001. His work features in dozens of Slovak and international collections. He died at the age of 48 on March 10th 2021 after a long illness. See: SLANINKA, L.: *Umenie Ducha - Návrat súčasného umenia do chrámu.* Bratislava : Cathedra, 2015, p. 98.

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technologies[23]. The origins of his interest in medieval architecture are connected to his 1993 visit to the Gothic chapel of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, an experience which had clearly affected him deeply and led him to work further with the photographs which he had taken there[24]. However, as he revealed in interviews, this was not the first time that his attention had been drawn to historical architecture. Even as a child, he had experienced feelings of wonder upon entering the interiors of cathedrals and other historical buildings, sensations which would later appear in many of his artworks[25].

During his studies in the USA which he undertook shortly after his visit to Sainte-Chapelle, Blažo decided to explore his personal experience through his art. He began to manipulate his photos of the chapel's interior by creating photocopies which he then deformed by repeatedly expanding or reducing the images. This process produced pixelated images which formed a variety of shapes, breaking up the original scene into a composite of complex forms. As Blažo himself stated, the resulting images were formally reminiscent of black-and-white television static

suspended within a uniformly multifaceted structure[26]. The process of repeated photocopying distorted the original image; individual details disappeared, and the contours of the chapel interior were only apparent when viewed from a distance. The architectural outlines vanished and were replaced by abstract shapes. The electrographic approach enabled the creation of an entirely new work of art which was entirely unencumbered by any authorial stamp. Marko saw drawing as the basis of his work, and he attached a fundamental role to the technique in his artistic process[27]. He later modified his drawings by tracing the outlines with penwork and filling the spaces with correction fluid, a process which both homogenised the image but also allowed the drawing to retain its newly formed sense of visuality[28]. In line with technological developments, Marko gradually switched from photocopiers to working with computers, offering him a greater potential for experimentation. Individual images were first created as digital prints or Xeroxed copies of manipulated images, but in 1996 he produced his first painting based on a digital subject. The large-scale black and white painting cannot

be considered as fulfilling the role of the original subject, nor should it prevent us from considering the digital version of the painting as the definitive article or as an accomplished work in its own right. Marko himself stated that he saw the output from the computer as a completed work, with only some of these pieces being used as the subjects for his paintings. While he did concede that his art achieved a higher level of quality through the medium of painting, he quickly added that he considered the input of digital media to the painting process to be extremely useful[29].

The very fact that the new version of a digital work, openly proclaiming its own individuality, is created in the medium of painting is particularly interesting. The primary motivation for working in the medium of paint is the high esteem in which painting continues to be held in the modern world through the high level of technical skill, patience and painstaking effort involved in the creative process, qualities which are typically attributed to the works of the "great masters". Marko himself often spoke of his admiration for earlier art and architecture, evident also in his frequent inclinations towards scenes from art history[30].

On the one hand, he clearly sought out an experimental approach to new media, exploiting its limitless potential for the fulfilment of his own aesthetic desires[31]. Yet on the other hand, he was aware of the innate power of the painterly medium. The relationship of painting to digital technology has been described indirectly but no less aptly by Wolfgang Welsch: "*In this way we learn to appreciate inertia in comparison to electronic hyperspeed, resistance and immutability in comparison to universal mobility and changeability, perseverance in comparison to free play, solidity in comparison to floating, constancy and reliability compared to variability. Electronic omnipresence and the universe of virtual possibilities awaken the longing for another presence, for the unrepeatable presence of the hic et nunc, for the singular event*"[32]. On this basis, it seems inevitable that Marko's own "aesthetic desires" as they materialised in electronic media would be developed further in his paintings[33]. He himself

expressed his own position at this time, arguing that "*the medium of painting has its own particular qualities which no other media can reach*"[34]. He persevered with this artistic practice despite the fact that he was working in a period in which painting was in no way seen as a "fashionable" medium[35].

In 2000 Marko began work on another series of paintings related to his experience in Sainte-Chapelle. At first, he only coloured photocopied images with highlighter pens, but the series later developed into large-scale painted canvases, with the new approach resulting in the acrylic paintings titled *Sainte-Chapelle I* and *Sainte-Chapelle II*. Marko had been sceptical when he first started work on these paintings due to the technically demanding format, but he was highly satisfied with the final results[36]. He had discovered a new system of working, experimenting with painting techniques and

repainting in particular. The lines and contours of the shapes which emerged from the technological manipulation of the image were filled with colour, a technique which grants the work a highly distinctive character. Marko himself compared the approach to tapestry embroidery, as he applied multiple layers of paint to specific patterns in the painting until he was satisfied with the result[37].

An even more appropriate comparison can perhaps be found in the approach of children's colouring-in, where the child completes the image by applying colours to the contours of the scene in a scheme loosely based on the original subject. In our example, however, the artist applying the paint "does not adhere to the rules of the painted reality". Instead, he chooses his own system, independent of the subject, based rather on that which Welsch terms the artist's "aesthetic desires". These may be the fragments of the child's imagination which the artist has deliberately nurtured into his adulthood by means of the artistic process, the act of colouring in. This approach can therefore be understood as an example of Blažo's apparently conscious choice to work almost exclusively with a child-like playful creativity in his artistic process, a reflection of the child's world of memories.
It would be naive to suggest that Marko chose his overall colour

23   This could in fact be associated with the working practices and operation of Rudolf Sikora's Open Studio which Blažo himself attended.
24   GERŽOVÁ, B.: *Ticho a pokoj. Silence and Peace. Marko Blažo*. Nitra : Nitrianska galéria, 2013, pp. 5-6.
25   SLANINKA, L.: *Umenie Ducha - Návrat súčasného umenia do chrámu*. Bratislava : Cathedra, 2015, p. 98.

26   BLAŽO, M., GERŽOVÁ, B.: „Svoju tvorbu by som prirovnal k práci vynálezcu". Marko Blažo v rozhovore s kurátorkou výstavy Barborou Geržovou. In GERŽOVÁ, B.: *Ticho a pokoj. Silence and Peace. Marko Blažo*. Nitra : Nitrianska galéria, 2013, pp. 18-19.
27   Ibid, p. 15.
28   Ibid, p. 18.

29   Ibid, p. 18.
30   His work features frequent references to the paintings of artists such as Giotto di Bondone, Leonardo da Vinci and Katsushika Hokusai, but also Giorgio de Chirico and others. See: HANÁKOVÁ, P.: *Marko Blažo*. Bratislava : White & Weiss Contemporary Art Gallery, 2017, p. 3.

31   My argument in this context is in line with the thinking of Wolfgang Welsch: "*If there is such a thing as an easy existence, it surely exists in the electronic space. Electronic media thus addresses old aesthetic desires and yearnings. Surrealism, for example, dreamed of these types of free transformations, but could only carry them out only in hints and even those were, at first glance, rather cumbersome. How perfectly could Yves Tanguy bring his visions to life with today's electronic equipment!*" In WELSCH, W.: Umelé rajské záhrady? Skúmanie sveta elektronických médií a iných svetov. In CSERES, J., MURÍN, M. (eds.): *Od analógového k digitálnemu... Nové pohľady na nové médiá v audiovizuálnom veku*. Banská Bystrica : Fakulta výtvarných umení Akadémia umení, 2010, p. 14.
32   Ibid, p. 17.
33   The collection titled *Painting in the

Postmedial Age* edited by Jana Geržová addresses the relationship between new media and painting on the Slovak scene. It was also this book which drew my attention to the work of Wolfgang Welsch. See: GERŽOVÁ, J. (ed.): *Maľba v postmediálnom veku. Painting in the Postmedial Age*. Bratislava : Slovart, 2015.
34   BLAŽO, M., GERŽOVÁ, B.: „Svoju tvorbu by som prirovnal k práci vynálezcu". Marko Blažo v rozhovore s kurátorkou výstavy Barborou Geržovou. In GERŽOVÁ, B.: *Ticho a pokoj. Silence and Peace. Marko Blažo*. Nitra : Nitrianska galéria, 2013, p. 16.
35   GERŽOVÁ, J.: Maľba v kontextoch, kontexty maľby (úvod do problematiky). In GERŽOVÁ, J. (ed.): *Maľba v kontextoch, kontexty maľby. Zborník z československého sympózia venovaného problémom súčasnej maľby*. Bratislava : Slovart, 2012, pp. 8-24.
36   BLAŽO, M., GERŽOVÁ, B.: „Svoju tvorbu by som prirovnal k práci vynálezcu". Marko Blažo v rozhovore s kurátorkou výstavy Barborou Geržovou. In GERŽOVÁ, B.: *Ticho a pokoj. Silence and Peace. Marko Blažo*. Nitra : Nitrianska galéria, 2013, p. 18.

37   Ibid, p. 16.

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scheme on the basis of intuition alone. While this may be possible in the case of the arrangement of the colours, I believe that a more distinctive approach should be looked for in the selection of the colour palette. The colour scheme for Richter's window was chosen on the basis of its similarity to the colours which appeared in the original stained glass. In the case of Blažo's work, however, the colour scheme is completely different from anything which would be found in a typical church interior: pinks, purples, turquoises, pale blues, oranges, bright greens and many others. The colours of Blažo's cathedral are more likely to be found in the pages of comic books or advertisements. Of course, this same approach could also be seen as a dialogue with mass media and pop art, a frequent source of inspiration for Blažo's works. Nonetheless, in my opinion the passion for what Vladimír Beskid termed the "poetry of paradoxes" is crucial to the choice of the colour scheme[38]. This approach is based on the disruption of the natural context of the objects in which the selected themes typically appear or are depicted. Anyone viewing the painting will immediately be struck by the transformation of the red, green, blue and yellow colours of stained glass to purples and turquoises which are spread across the entire surface of the

chapel's interior. For this reason, Tajkov argues that Blažo's works are interactive, as they *"pull the viewer out of the lethargy of conventional perception and force them to reveal the meanings hidden behind the disrupted 'natural context' of their subjects"*[39]. The fact that Blažo chose a colour scheme which is more typical of advertising or the visual formats of mass communication also makes us wonder whether it was not in fact his intention to bring the church interior closer to the visuality of mass media. Such a gesture could be understood as a form of desanctification in which the site is stripped of its specific visual qualities which connect the viewer to sacral spaces or to the sacred itself. "Freed" from this metaphysical aspect, the church interiors are open to Blažo's playful intervention in which he captivates the viewer without relying upon the former character of the subject. Connections can be found between this process of the "deliberate loss of meaning" and the postmodern theory of the simulacrum which was developed in the work of Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault and others[40]. While simulacra have been perceived in an overwhelmingly critical light (especially in Baudrillard's understanding),

Michael Camille approached the topic from a different angle. In his study of simulacra written in response to an essay by Deleuze, Camille criticised Baudrillard for *"not taking into account the positive effects of new mass-media images and their ability to provide alternative viewpoints and teach difference, not just unitary 'Big Brother' ideology. While Baudrillard has pointed out some important ways in which strategies of simulation now control our everyday lives, he overlooks how many artists of the past decade have sought to dissect or criticize the media and ironically displace it in their work"*[41]. Marko Blažo seems to be attempting to use the elements of his own works as a guide for the rejection of the old and the discovery of new and distinctive values of the subject.

As was noted above, Marko's adherence to the visual image of individual shapes filled with colour grants the painting a remarkably similarity to the stained glass of a Gothic cathedral. Marko himself recognised this, and it may be one explanation for why he continued to develop the artistic technique. When talking about the series, he stated that *"it creates variations on the chapel interior, constructed from stained glass"*[42]. This also

opens up the question of the interpretation of space, a factor of immense importance in Blažo's work; indeed, one of his interests was the creation of illusory spaces[43]. In more direct terms, what kind of space is the viewer being led to in Blažo's paintings? Should we see the interior as being located behind the stained glass, with the viewer looking inside from the exterior? Or should the image be understood as the interior being projected onto the stained glass itself, with the artificial light from the interior penetrating through this layer onto the viewer? The ability to pose such questions is one of the main principles of Blažo's work. The creative diversity of space becomes a game in which the rules of looking are never fixed, nor are they entirely unambiguous. Just as the viewer feels certain of what they are looking at, the rules change abruptly, and they are forced to re-evaluate their "point of view" on the subject[44].

In addition to those with stained glass, another formal association can be identified, especially in the black and white versions of the image. Empty spaces appear within the structure of intertwining

lines forming complex paths which meander through the painting in various directions. These forms are reminiscent of intricate labyrinths with seemingly infinite paths in which the unaware can lose their way[45]. For Marko Blažo, only the artist truly knows the complicated space of the *"pictorial labyrinth" and can navigate the viewer through its paths"*[46].

Blažo's best known colourful cathedral interiors were created between 2010 and 2013, large-scale acrylic paintings on canvas which predominantly featured the presbytery of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. In the paintings *Sainte-Chapelle* (2010), *Sainte-Chapelle II* (2010), *Katedrála I* (2012), *Katedrála II* (2012), *Zimná katedrála* [Winter Cathedral] (2012), *Interiér I* (2013) and others, the interior of the chapel could still be discerned, albeit with a radically changed colour palette and minor changes to the view into the interior. In other works from the period such as *Záhrada II* [Garden II] (2012) or *Opera* (2012), the chapel interior was only apparent in a fragmentary form. By the time of *Gotika* (2013), the interior of the cathedral had been transformed beyond recognition and the field of coloured structures had

already become entirely abstract. The original inspiration for the scene could only be determined through the title of the work or the context of the open series into which the painting was included. The final three abstract interiors were created though composite techniques and digital printing. It can be assumed that these works were the result of Marko's ongoing experimentation with digital technologies in which he dug deeper and deeper into the process of manipulating the original subject matter. These works were incredibly demanding in terms of technical execution, a factor for which Marko had a natural respect, and this may account for the fact that the works were digitally printed rather than painted.

Conclusion

The works of Gerhard Richter and Marko Blažo reveal two different approaches to the sacral space in contemporary art. In both cases, the image is constructed using digital technology and complemented by the artists' semantic interventions. In the case of Richter, who is operating directly in the context of the religious space, this is a confession of his own spiritual values and their embodiment in a contemporary approach to the transcendent, rooted in a universal, non-religious concept. His approach is contemplative, founded upon an awareness of the parallels between the digital character of the modern era and the multiple potential interpretations of God as reflected

38   BESKID, V.: Nalomené stavy melanchólie. In BESKID, V., HANÁKOVÁ, P., KUSÁ, A.: *Marko Blažo: Melanchólia.* Bratislava : Artisan, 1998, p. 3.

39   TAJKOV, P.: *Marko Blažo.* Košice : Múzeum Vojtecha Löfflera, 2004, p. 2.

40   DELEUZE, G.: Plato and the Simulacrum. In *October,* 1983, Vol. 27, pp. 45-56; BAUDRILLARD, J.: *Simulacra and Simulation.* Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1994; FOUCAULT, M.: *This Is Not a Pipe.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London : University of California Press, 1983.

41   CAMILLE, M.: Simulakrum. In NELSON, R. S., SHIFF, R. (eds.). *Kritické pojmy dejín umenia.* Bratislava : Nadácia – Centrum súčasného umenia, Slovart, 2004, p. 70; DELEUZE, G.: Plato and the Simulacrum. In *October,* 1983, Vol. 27, pp. 52-53.

42   BLAŽO, M., GERŽOVÁ, B.: „Svoju tvorbu by som prirovnal k práci vynálezcu". Marko Blažo v

rozhovore s kurátorkou výstavy Barborou Geržovou. In GERŽOVÁ, B.: *Ticho a pokoj. Silence and Peace. Marko Blažo.* Nitra : Nitrianska galéria, 2013, p. 19.

43   GERŽOVÁ, B.: Interiér versus Exteriér alebo Na hranici (možných) svetov. In ČARNÝ, J., GREGOR, R. (eds.): *Paradox 90.* Bratislava : Dom umenia Kunsthalle Bratislava, 2014, pp. 58-87.

44   HANÁKOVÁ, P., KUSÁ, A.: Lámač herných pravidiel. In BESKID, V., HANÁKOVÁ, P., KUSÁ, A.: *Marko Blažo: Melanchólia.* Bratislava : Artisan, 1998, p. 5.

45   For more on the symbolism of the labyrinth, see: ECO, U.: *Od stromu k labyrintu.* Prague : Argo, 2012, pp. 58-61. One of the most famous examples of the use of the labyrinth in the environment of the Christian church is the maze depicted in the paving of Chartres Cathedral.

46   GERŽOVÁ, B.: *Ticho a pokoj. Silence and Peace. Marko Blažo.* Nitra : Nitrianska galéria, 2013, p. 7.

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in the arbitrary selection of colours created using a random number generator. It also represents the principles of religious openness and dialogue which the work provoked when first revealed to the public. Nonetheless, its abstract character also encourages an interior dialogue, opening up a wide range of subjective, even intuitive interpretations.

In contrast, Marko Blažo's approach suggests an effort to desanctify the subject. Blažo seems to peer through the prism of the child's imagination and memories in an attempt to shake off the heavier issues of spiritual concerns while preserving the interest in the sacral space aroused by his visit to Sainte-Chapelle. It is this playfulness which draws him into the complexity of religious meaning and enables him to process his memories in endlessly new fantastical forms. The viewer undergoes a similar experience when he joins in with this game of situational paradoxes. Blažo's approach is not a diminution of the original scene but instead a means of shifting the subject from the sacred to the profane, aimed at reconfiguring the world of the transcendent to that of the child-like imagination. This offered the artist a remarkable sense of freedom, a feeling which he sought to share with the viewer through his technological images.

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Adrián Kobetič (b. 1995) completed studies in the History and Theory of Art at Trnava University's Faculty of Philosophy and Arts. Participated in stays at Masaryk University in Brno and Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome. He works with medieval as well as contemporary art, for which he has prepared multiple exhibition projects. He is currently working as City Curator in Trnava while completing his doctorate at the Art Research Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts at Trnava University. He lives in Trnava.

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Figure 1: Gerhard Richter. 4900 Colours, 2007.
Source: BUCHLOH, B. H. D. et al.: Gerhard Richter. 4900
Colours. Berlin : Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008, p. 120.
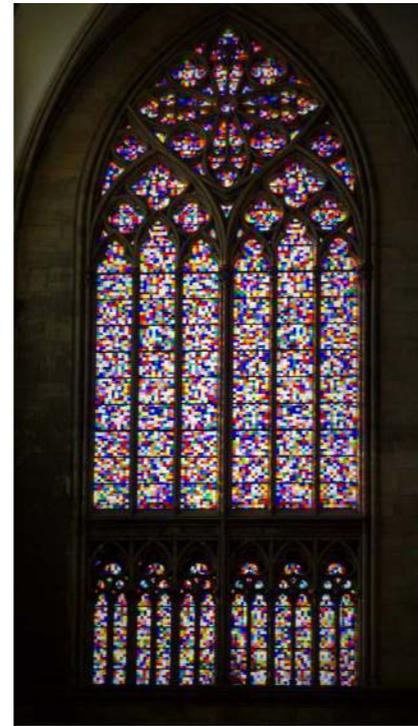
**Figure 2: Gerhard Richter.
Cologne Cathedral Window, 2007.**
Source: [online]. [2022-02-22].
Available at free recourse: <https://
www.pinterest.com>.
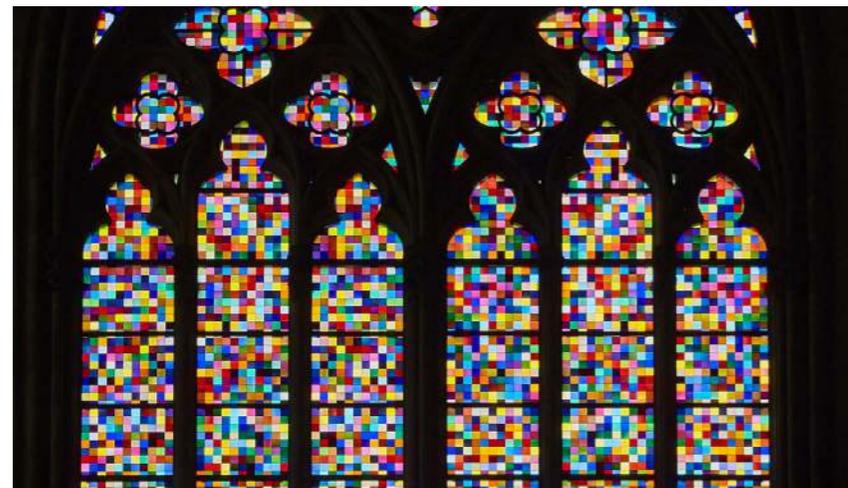

Figure 3: Gerhard Richter. Cologne Cathedral Window, 2007.
Source: [online]. [2022-01-18]. Available at free recourse: <https://www.
pinterest.com>.
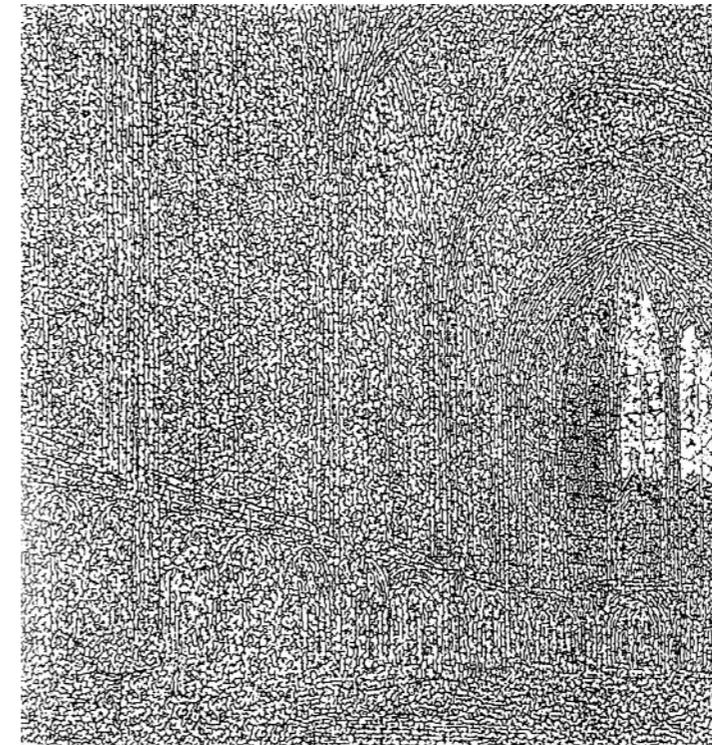
Figure 4: Marko Blažo. Untitled, 1994.
Source: Archive of Blažo's family.

Figure 5: Marko Blažo. Saint Chapelle II., 2010.
Source: Archive of Blažo's family.
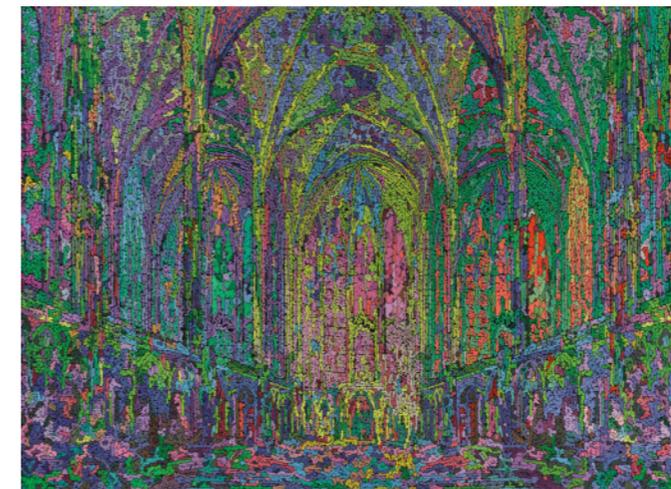
Figure 6: Marko Blažo. Cathedral II., 2012.
Source: Archive of Blažo's family.
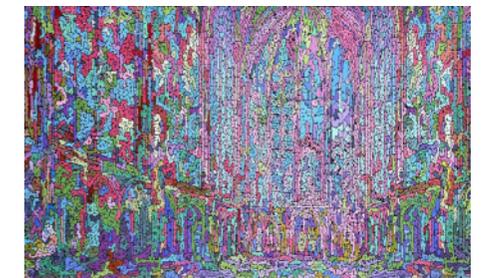
Figure 7: Marko Blažo. Cathedral II., 2013.
Source: Archive of Blažo's family.