In Search of a Painter’s Stroke. Female Body Boundaries in Zora Petrovic’s Painting Acts (1956/1957)

The treatment of female body in the paintings of Zora Petrovic anticipate the feminist theories that originated during the 70’s and 80’s of the 20th century, which suggested androcentrism and absence of the female perspective and the necessity of re-evaluation on the concept of body. Through the expression of female body, in the traditional painter’s act, Zora Petrovic flirts with the social constructions of body and gender, intuitively pushing the boundaries towards the spiritual realm while treating body not only as an physical object but also as the bearer of the subjectivism and the point where personal and sexual identity, cultural and social stereotypes and relations between power and domination interconnect.

The Act (1956/1957) represents an artistic deliberation on the social position of female body in the patriarchal capitalism with the elements of her own fictitious projections in search of the artist’s personal female and artistic identity, including her own intuitive artistic indication and conjecture on the feminist theories that had followed. The painting of this act depicts an act of self-identification, while the object of observation becomes the perspective of beholder who detaches the perspective of an observer while rendering his (male) absolute power ineffective. The naked body brings disarray by an indication of an erotic promise while dismissing an illusion of the absolute capitulation. The developed artistic form of ambiguous sexualised body that is revealed to the male voyeuristic observation transitions into the sensual dreaming of the model about own erotic and exhibitionistic body seductiveness which is, in fact, a provocation to the observer by its revealing eroticised position while encouraging a voyeuristic enjoyment that becomes an outcome of creation and observation of self-admired body, and in the process transposing the artist and the model into the voyeuristic roles. The innate understanding of eroticism, in the process of development of a new form of female act, in Zora Petrovic’s paintings, faces us with an array of ideological presumptions and stereotypes that are conceptualised around the perception of body as an object and as a bearer of subjectivism while allowing an opportunity to question own interpretations and boundaries of personal and social discourse on the subjects of body, gender and sensuality.

Key words: act, concepts of body, gender identity, pleasure in seeing, sexuality and power, Zora Petrović.