

**The Twinkling Dream Of A Moth**  
by Jagna Lewandowska

Revisiting Piotr Łakomy's studio gives the impression that in the supposedly familiar rooms of an old tenement house, during one's absence a whole geological era has taken place. Layers have built up, sediments have formed. Even the works remembered from a previous visit have evolved into something new, have mutated and ulcerated. Aluminum "honeycombs" build up more layers of oil paints, boxes hide new materials: organic waste, eggs and shells. One must be careful about any movement – the placement of an idle finger, rubbing against fresh, delicate matter, a cocoon newly formed or a wax stalagmite. All those forms that are easiest to describe in a language with an organic root are also growths parasitizing on Łakomy's large-scale assemblages from various series: sculptural, futuristic 'crucifixes' on the scale of the human body, distorted cocoons or rectangular frames, which barely seem to contain their substance.

Nothing is constant in the specific microclimate of the interior of the Łakomy studio, nothing is safe. Even the yellow door to one of the rooms is removed from its hinges from time to time and presented at exhibitions. Łakomy's works seem to gain their final shape only in the exhibition space. As long as they are in the artist's burrow, however, in the backyard on Ratajczaka Street in Poznań, everything is subject to change. The artist himself seems like a spider that feels every twitch of foreign matter on his web, sitting right behind you when your gaze strays to something unfinished, something that still requires work.

In a famous anecdote, the painter William Turner, at an exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1882, added one red spot to his ocean landscape. It redefined his work, enlivened the composition. This act was the result of a spectacular rivalry with another painter, John Constable, whose canvas was hanging next to Turner's. The gesture itself, which was not necessarily intended as a final touch, but changed everything nonetheless, is probably well known to Łakomy, who himself will not rest until his 'capsheaf', 'corpus' or 'cocoon', as he defines his objects, obtains a form that is satisfactory to him, which is sometimes determined by a mere singular spot of colour. Even the framing process, which usually completes a work, is for Łakomy, who fabricates the frames himself, just another element of the creative process. The still evolving matter of the work often grows to such an extent that the wooden framing has to be precisely cut and altered to an irregular shape by the artist. It becomes an inseparable element of the work. Clear boundaries and contours no longer apply here, as in an overgrown garden or a decaying architectural utopia.

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*I am, if you will, like a traveler who throws up a shelter for the night, or an old silkworm spinning his cocoon. (...)*

*Small it may be, but there is a bed to sleep on at night, and a place to sit in the daytime.*

***As a simple place to house myself, it lacks nothing. The hermit crab prefers a little shell for his home. He knows what the world holds.<sup>1</sup>***

Defined spaces, such as a house, a studio or a garden are recurring themes in Łakomy's artistic peregrines. Human scale: no surplus space, but not confined either. One can feel good in all imagined rooms, chambers or vestibules. Stretch one's arms as in the Le Corbusier modulator, make oneself comfortable and, like a worm, safely start the process of transformation. With time, this place – a room or a cocoon – will begin to bulge. The angles will no longer be straight and the walls, like internal organs, will be covered with a system of veins and protrusions. A space originally named and associated with a specific function, based on a specific plan, becomes illusive. Its undulating structure, like a body, becomes a shelter for the continuous process taking place inside it.

In his recent works related to the architectural theory of Frederick John Kiesler, Łakomy focused, among others, on protective spaces which ensure survival during a potential catastrophe. The series of *GARDENS* that the artist is working on now, as well as its delicate offshoot – the *WORMS* series, seem to be created in a calmer atmosphere of reconciliation with decay and transience. I would wager that the two complementary cycles are proof of deriving a kind of pleasure from the awareness of the inevitable – gardens, like any other space Łakomy imagines, remain a pretext to observe the metabolism of all matter.

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***A person's awareness of space in a tea room is by no means limited to the small physical space of the room. On the contrary, the reduced space itself turns out to be a powerful means by which his inner awareness of space extends endlessly. Every unit of space, every inch of lines, even a single point is placed in the field of his spatial awareness, each in the right place, while the image of the infinitely great universe forms the background.<sup>2</sup>***

Dense with textures, Łakomy's multi-layered works may seem far from Japanese minimalism but they are in fact ruled by a thought that also determines the aesthetics of Japanese construction and the art of garden design. The inner and outer space functions as a whole here, a continuum. Sitting in a small room, one connects with the garden, the garden connects with the landscape and this experience, although it becomes a source of a sublime aesthetic experience, is only temporary. Sheathed with the awareness of imminent decay.

<sup>1</sup> Kamo No Chōmei, "Hōjōki" in Yoshida Kenkō and Kamo No Chōmei, *Essays in Idleness and Hōjōki* (London: Penguin Classics, 2013), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, "Droga herbaty. Sztuka świadomości przestrzennej" in *Estetyka japońska. Antologia* ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska (Kraków: Universitas, 2008), 200.

The works on silk from the *WORMS* series function as a record of traces; reflections of the transformation of other works, the *GARDENS*. On the smooth, shimmering textile surfaces on a loom, one can recognize the characteristic texture of honeycombs, an aluminum mesh, bent by the artist, with small coffin-shaped webs, which over the years, thanks to its sculptural properties, has become a recognizable sign of Łakomy's art and the basis of many of his works. *WORMS* are imprinted on fine textiles using a frottage method with the use of oil paints in the form of thick crayons. These thick sticks, when held in the hand, do not provoke subtle movements but impose blunt expression, bold colors, thick layers. At first glance, it is hard to discern that *WORMS* are made on such a delicate substrate. Even more so as Łakomy mercilessly sews together fragments of fabrics that are the background of the composition, layers and supplements them to be seen in the beautiful back side of these works. The silk canvas, however, reveals subtle vibrations provoked by the slightest gust of air, and a transparency that appears when the works are seen against the light.

The vibrating *WORMS* surfaces are reminiscent of wind-blown wisteria pods or silkworm cocoons hanging on delicate fibers – levitating capsules developed by nature where a process of transformation takes place. Moreover, silkworm cocoons are loosely sewn to the works. They not only refer to the silk used by the artist, acquired through the recovery of natural threads but at the same time are miniaturized reflections of egg shells – shapes often used by the artist. The cocoons also point to the cycle of transformation of the larva into a pupa and a chrysalis into a butterfly. However, as is often the case in Łakomy's works, natural structures with intriguing properties are confronted with the ruthless actions of Man and artificial matter. Silkworms were domesticated several centuries ago and are only used today for the production of threads several kilometers long. Even if, by some miracle, the worms manage to make it to the stage where they turn into a butterfly – the moths are completely defenseless and at the will of humans – their shrunken wings would not allow them to rise into the air, and the colours modified by years of artificial breeding have lost their protective properties. Most often the larvae do not even manage to transform into a chrysalis. From fear of breaking the braid thread, which would make silk production difficult, the cocoons are submerged in hot water or dried at high temperatures with the undeveloped organisms still inside. There is no more life in the nucleus of the oval, fibrous shells become body bags, symbols of a transformation that will never happen. Shapes full of potential events.

However, if we take a closer look at the processes of change taking place in nature, without human intervention, they are not without their brutality at all. "The butterfly larva, which we call the caterpillar, performs an act of self-annihilation in the covers of the pupa, where, as a result of a process called histolysis, the larval tissue, that is its worm-like body, is almost completely disintegrated. As a result of tissue disintegration, some organic soup remains in the chrysalis, like in an egg."<sup>3</sup> Only from this soup, or rather from floating in it as beautifully named *imaginary disks*, can a butterfly arise. Annihilation thus leads to a new, more complex life.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Pucek, "Powrót do świata. Cma i sześć papierosów", *Dwutygodnik*, June, 2015, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/5954-powrot-do-swiata-cma-i-szesc-papierosow.html>.

Let us return from these dark matters to the *contemplative moment*<sup>4</sup> of the **WORMS** series. Silk vibrates and flickers, like quivering paint covering it in colours of the human body – pinks, browns, ochres – broken down here and there, in the style of William Turner, with strokes of robust colour – ultramarine, rusty red. As in impressionist masterpieces where brush strokes create the effect of a vibrating surface of water, a vivid representation of fog or sparkling air.

While Łakomy's works do not reproduce reality, they seem to rather bear traces of it. The circular shape appearing in many of the series' pieces brings to mind a source of light: the moon's reflection distorted by the waves on the lakes in Edvard Munch's canvases, the sun or a light bulb that attracts and ultimately kills the night butterflies. In fact, those mesmerizing circles are softened outlines of objects that actually live in Łakomy's studio: cans, cut ostrich eggs, rolls of duct tape. And I see no obstacle for them to become a circular symbol of the unfulfilled dream of a silkworm caterpillar so beautifully described by Robert Pucek, Polish translator and essayist, and a keen observer of the smallest fauna:

*The caterpillar feels the need to glide towards the sun (...) Inhabitation of the luminous air is prevented by its worm-like body, more associated with moist soil (...). And yet the little animal knows what needs to be done to change this state of affairs (...) the caterpillar's papilla is like a weaving shuttle, the movements of which are controlled by cosmic light, because the caterpillar spins the thread in the direction of the rays of the sun flowing in the sky. In this way, it builds a shelter to itself – or a grave (...) – out of light trapped in its own matter.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Martha Kirszenbaum writes about the concept of the 'contemplative moment' in the context of John Ashberry's poetry in a book devoted to the work of Piotr Łakomy: Martha Kirszenbaum, "One Size Fits All", in Piotr Łakomy, 1211210 ed. Zuzanna Hadryś and Michał Lasota (Warsaw: Mousse Publishing, Griffin Art Space, 2017), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Pucek, <https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/5954-powrot-do-swiata-cma-i-szesc-papierosow.html>.

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