

SZABÓ Dezső
SCALE / SKÁLA

14 November – 14 December 2018

The series entitled *Scale* explores and elaborates on the problematic represented in works created, and exhibited, during the course of the past four years (*Black and White*, Vintage Gallery, 2015; *Exposed*, Vintage Gallery, 2016; and *Limits of Light*, Vintage Gallery, 2017). In terms of genre, the present material, as well as my three preceding works, belongs in the category of cameraless photography. The photos displayed at the present exhibition show a closer kinship with the problems raised by the *Limits of Light* series – and not only because, in a technical sense, both works can be classified as luminograms. In the series entitled *Scale*, the two basic elements of photographic imaging – light and the light-sensitive surface – manifest in an even more reduced visual form. Here, neither imprint-like images of objects or materials, nor phantom-like visual traces of some ephemeral phenomenon can divert one's attention away from the essence that is to be shown.

The pieces of the series can be grouped into two basic types. Half of the material consists of one or sets of two or more related – but autonomous – panels of homogeneous surfaces. The other group includes works where continuous gradations of tone are shown on a single image surface, from the bottom edge to the upper border of the image, with varying dispersion values. In other words, these images are, in essence, the graduated or continuous representations of different portions of the grey scale (from black to white).

Leon Battista Alberti, in his treatise on painting entitled *Della Pittura/On Painting* (1436) writes: "Ivory and silver are white; placed next to the swan or the snow they would seem pallid. For this reason things appear most splendid in painting where there is good proportion of white and black similar to that which is in the objects – from the lighted to the shadowed. Thus all things are known by comparison" (Book One, Chapter 18). Alberti is discussing painting, and, within that, he makes this fundamental statement from the position of what is referred to today as realist painting. He is writing about what today's psychology of perception would call a relational effect – or, more precisely, about how the relativity of brightness values can be applied to painting practice in an effort to recreate the illusion of the world as perceived through the senses. Elsewhere, he returns to this thought by writing: "The painter has nothing other than white with which to show the highest lustre of the most highly polished sword, and only black to show the deepest shadow of night" (Book Two, Chapter 47).

The individual images of the *Scale* series cover the entire tonal range of the black and white photographic paper. This range is considered to constitute the entire palette of tools of (black and white) photographic image-making. In this sense, essentially, the same effect is at work here as what is discussed by Alberti in relation to painting. The photos in this series, however, do not belong in the system of traditional or optical imaging. To use an analogy, let us say that the task at hand is the visual representation of a steaming cup of tea. Now let us approach the problem by looking at the mechanism by which the hot liquid transfers its surplus energy to its environment. It heats up the air around it and the solid surface of the table it is set on. This invisible heat, which leaves a temporary trace in its surroundings, can be captured in the form of an image.

Scale, as well as the preceding three works, is based on an examination of the medial properties of light-sensitive material (black and white photo paper) as a surface that records and carries information. It also follows that, similarly to paintings, the unique physical properties of these image objects must also be taken into consideration. All information, by necessity, exists in some kind of physical system. This fact is usually – and erroneously – disregarded when it comes to digital-electronic images/information. In the case of these works, however, this is not explicitly obvious. The expression of the implicit content is intentional. These images have physical substance, spatial dimensions, and surface qualities; their coming into being is best characterized as a process of "formation". In contrast to painting, the information-carrying surface is not composed of pigments. Here, the light-sensitive surface of the paper (photo emulsion) conveys the function, the intention and the possibility of entering into interaction with light and thus fulfilling its potential by forming an image. Another difference is that the raw material, in contrast to how our eyes are accustomed to seeing, represents light in a reverse manner; when coming into contact with it, the material turns dark. To our everyday mode of perception, the world of photonegatives feels foreign, even if consciously we are aware of its existence.

This series, just as the preceding ones, has been created by applying the natural laws of physical and chemical interactions. These imprint-like images are formed by an elementary mechanism of action. The second law of thermodynamics states that most processes occurring in nature have one direction. The entropy of the universe is always increasing, and everything is based on this process of moving from order to chaos, be it a cup of hot tea or a star that is burning out. While the universe is falling apart, however, it also possesses constructive powers. This is perhaps best considered through the metaphor of a waterfall, where everything tumbles into a bottomless abyss, but, in the process of this perpetual downward cascading, dust is whipped up that can create planets, stars come into being, destructive storms are generated, and plants, animals and human beings – even images – come into existence for a brief moment. This group of works is also a result of these properties of the world we live in, forming a system and manifesting as images the basic elements of the photographic image.

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Scale / Skála I, 2018
Grey Scale / Szürke skála a-d
4 luminogram, silver prints, 58x48 cm each
unique

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Scale / Skála II, 2018
Light Grey Triptych / Világosszürke triptichon a-c
3 luminogram, silver prints, 58x48 cm each
unique

Scale / Skála III, 2018
White / Fehér
luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm
unique

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Scale / Skála IV, 2018
Black Diptych / Glossy-Matt / Fekete diptichon / Fényes-Matt a-b
(Ilford warmtone glossy-Ilford warmtone semi matt)
luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm each
unique

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Scale / Skála IX, 2018
luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm
unique

Scale / Skála X, 2018
luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm
unique

Scale / Skála VII, 2018
luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm
unique

Scale / Skála VIII, 2018
luminogram, silver print, 58x48 cm
unique