

Velata

Lucia Čarnecká

Curated by: Lucia Kotvanová

Exhibition Architecture: Anna Mihoková

Sound Composition: Lenka Novosedlíková

In her artistic practice, Lucia Čarnecká has long focused on sculpture as a medium, exploring its new forms and transitions from the material to the virtual. In her ongoing research she examines the shift from the classical, tangible medium towards the digital, with the hologram becoming her principal means of visualisation. She strips her work of physical matter, rendering it in a sense intangible. The very essence of traditional sculpture, modelling and working with material is confronted by an entirely immaterial form and a technique that demands skills wholly different from those expected of a classical sculptor. She adapts the sculptural medium to the contemporary world, innovating its very nature, while retaining in her works the “classical” elements of modelling and figuration. In her previous work, Čarnecká concentrated on the relationship between the sculptor and the object, exploring the identity of sculpture, often fictionalising and reshaping it. She sought to identify the creative process itself. A shift in her practice occurred during her residency at the Schaubmar Mill, where she became more closely attuned to the authorial role of the sculptor and began using 4D scanning technology to record the movements of the sculptor’s hands at work. The hands—symbols of sculptural skill—are shown performing the act of modelling alone, without the presence of either the author’s figure or the modelled object. The central motif in her work is one of the most fundamental and classical forms of sculpture – the bust. It carries not only the physical symbolism of art history but also serves as a metaphor for individuality, existence, and the human mind itself. In her most recent work she focuses on a specific phenomenon known as the *figura velata*. The veiling of the human (female) face and head is a motif known in visual art since antiquity, significant in certain cultures and tied to diverse symbolic interpretations.

On this basis, the artist plays with the notions of veiling and unveiling, of the visible and invisible, while also reflecting on the role of women in society. The veil becomes a bearer of meaning, a sign of layering. Veiling may symbolise modesty, concealment of imperfection, protection against harm, but also, paradoxically, a form of revelation. Potential gestures hidden beneath the drapery are materialised in the exhibition’s central work, in which the artist herself becomes the *figura velata* in a digital performance (in the form of a 4D scan). She builds upon her earlier practice of addressing the identity of women through her own lived experience. She grants a new significance to the anonymous woman—partly legible, immutable, typified, one of many similar figures. She humanises her, uncovers her essence, gives her a face, and thus makes her alive. She creates an icon, which she then installs at height, elevating her in a “sacral” manner. The narrative of this revived stone *Velata* is complemented by sound with an inner monologue. A sequence of feminine adjectives, listed as if from a lexicon, builds the persona of the veiled woman, naming her and imbuing her veil with meaning. This site-specific installation attains an almost altarpiece-like character, evoking a celebration of the individuality of the woman beneath the drapery—an effect amplified by the context of the former Jewish synagogue. The entrance to the exhibition is from the upper floor that had been historically reserved for women, who were separated from the men and observed the rituals “from above.” The positioning of women, their “veiling,” and traditions tied to Jewish religious practice lend the work further significance and specific connotations. Throughout history and still today, women have occupied numerous roles defined not only by religion but also by personal and professional life. Despite progress towards emancipation across the centuries, women’s positions in society remain constrained by countless layers of categorisation.

They are veiled in stereotypes and in the projections of others about what a woman “ought to be.” Yet beneath every veil lies a human being.

As in her previous work, Lucia Čarnecká incorporates elements of theatre, reflected also in the collaborative aspects of the project. Drawing on her professional experience in creating stage productions and the principles of devised theatre—where gesture serves as the dominant carrier of meaning—she applies these to her visual art. Gesture – expression, and performance itself emerged as the first element of this work. It is a one-off initial attempt, a version for which the inner voice, text, and musical narrative were developed retrospectively.

The most unifying characteristic of the exhibition, connecting all its elements, is the concept of the fold and the iconic motif of drapery in its many forms, linking and layering the exhibition’s architecture with the works themselves. Drapery is further amplified by its depiction in the digital performance and by 3D-printed transparent filament objects. Paradoxically, the objects representing veiled heads reveal nothing of the person beneath—the veil itself becomes the essence. This play with drapery culminates in its modelling. The artist continues, in essence, to model—physically with her hands, yet in an immaterial form shaping the drapery through movement. She sets the static sculpture in motion, distorting it further by projecting onto a fabric full of folds. This is literal bending and twisting of reality, a search for new sculptural forms.

Spatially, the exhibition is unified by the architectural symbol of the circle, specifically through the principle of the embroidery hoop that gathers the drapery into folds while also stretching the fabric as a surface for presenting the core of the work—“its point, like the metaphorical embroidery.” The fabric itself and the act of embroidery are deeply feminine, stereotypical aspects that the artist deliberately treats with irony. She works intensively with the space, experimenting with installation formats adapted to the site, manipulating the viewer’s perspective, and composing the works into a distinctive site-specific arrangement. A key element of Čarnecká’s practice, alongside the above, is her view of the author as an iconic figure and her rejection of such absolute veneration by fostering collaborations with other artists and specialists, thereby blurring disciplinary boundaries and challenging the notion of the author as a solitary genius. In this project, her collaborators include Michal Šabík as long-term technological and VFX support, Anna Mihoková as exhibition architect, Lucia Kotvanová as curator and voice, and Lenka Novosedlíková, who composed the principal soundscape for the main installation in the synagogue’s tower.

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