



Karol Radziszewski

The Power of Secrets

Karol Radziszewski is an interdisciplinary artist who uses different media: painting, film, photography, and installations. His methodology, which involves working with archives, draws on a multitude of cultural, historical, religious, social, and gender-related references. Radziszewski has offered re-interpretations of the works of other artists – both men and women – mainly from the Eastern European avant-guard. In doing so, he has focused on excerpting queer tropes or looking at them from a queer or feminist perspective. By means of appropriation art tools, he has endeavored to rewrite official history and offer his own narratives.

In his newest exhibition at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Radziszewski is looking at secrets, a power which has for centuries had a huge impact on history. Mysteries add drama to narratives, they push stories forward and make one look into the future in waiting. The action of revealing or hiding secrets bears very grave consequences: figures of authority and empires are overthrown, past positions are renegotiated, and a new knowledge is built. It all later finds manifestation in the changes in the public and private spheres: from WikiLeaks through #MeToo to a new understanding of a person's place in family, society, and the world.

A secret is also a means of survival – which is no news to any queer person. The experience of exclusion – from the family, school, work, the street – on grounds of one's sexuality is very present in Radziszewski's exhibition in the series recalling the drawings from his childhood past, in the interviews with female and male activists, as well as in his painting concerning the "Hiacynt" campaign. At the same time, however, the artist does not fall into lamentation and drama. He plays around with motifs from art history, fantasizes about a urinal-monument, and associates Donald Duck with the AIDS "specter."

Both private and public experiences are important in the histories of queer communities told by Radziszewski. Childhood games, memories of a conservative background, or sexual fantasies are present at the exhibition where they are on an equal footing with the political and social changes going on in the world. The artist's biography can be read as one of the many experiences of growing up queer and living in Central and Eastern Europe.

In both Polish and common history, gays, lesbians, trans, and queer people are still insufficiently represented. It does not mean that they had not previously existed though it is the most common choice of narrative. Radziszewski's exhibition is far from any forced coming-outs, unmasking scandals, or homo-investigations. The thematic axis of the exhibition is the performative nature of queer archives which restore the memory of a past denied and which democratize history. Regardless of the tools he uses, the artist formulates new ways of understanding history, memory, and legislation. He connects facts with fantasies, combines documents with memory scraps. He misleads so as to show alternative paths of remembering. He not only reveals individual experiences but records the fate of entire communities. He also goes beyond Polish borders in doing so.

To his individual work Radziszewski invites artists whose work he sees as important in creating a collective memory. Wolfgang Tillmans completes the story of the heroes from Central and Eastern Europe – not just the famous historical figures – but also the nameless participants: seekers of sexual adventures, activists, romantic lovers. At the *Power of Secrets* exhibition he will show portraits of Russian activists fighting for the rights of sexual minorities. Libuše Jarcovjácová expands the queer archive by introducing documentation

of the legendary T-Club from Prague which, in the 1980s, was the prime meeting place for gays and lesbians. A pioneer of feminist art, Natalia LL, returns to her artistic dialogue with Radziszewski (the two artists collaborated on the film *America Is Not Ready for This*, 2012) so as to touch on the subject of queer death and the underworld which escape any absolute religious definitions. The works of the Canadian collective, General Idea, offer a reflection on what mourning means in excluded communities, and how it can be used as an impulse triggering an activist fight. Finally, Ryszard Kisiel, a friend of many years, whose archives are the heart of the Queer Archives Institute (QAI) – a para-institution founded by Radziszewski with the aim of investigating the queer past.

The story of excluded communities must be compiled together though it does not have to be told in one voice. Contrary to normative histories, a place must be found here for affect and intimacy, understatement, pleasure, and the body. As the history is fragmentary and invisible to official chroniclers, queer artists who work with it, Radziszewski included, risk having to grapple with fantasies and mistakes which are bound to be woven into the story – a challenge for the memory.

The secret of the performativity of Karol Radziszewski's archives is not embedded in the story about the past but, first and foremost, in the queer potential of the future: its revolutionary nature, change, and the promise of freedom.

Room I

Karol Radziszewski

1989

2017 – ongoing

Painting, acrylic on canvas; murals

Karol Radziszewski as a fairy, sometimes as an abandoned Cinderella. In his series of paintings and murals titled *1989*, the artist returns to his childhood drawings which covered the pages of his school notebooks. Most of the sketchbooks that have survived date back to the turn of 1989 and 1990, when the then nine-year-old Karol was not entirely aware of the transformation processes taking place in Poland. The fall of socialism, the budding capitalism, and the abrupt development of consumerist culture on the one hand and, on the other, abducted princesses, good fairies, and sexy temptresses. The artist now looks back at his old works from the vantage point of experiences gained and the identity they have given him. Now rescaled and transferred from notebook pages onto canvas and walls, the drawings gain new life as autonomous paintings. In this newly created microcosm, a dog-siren heavily festooned with jewelry encounters hyper-feminine figures in a style reminiscent of drag queens. There are also the random religious motifs (the artist comes from a conservative Catholic family) revealing, through these childhood drawings, their camp potential. The successive pages of the drawing-filled notebooks are at times like surreal comic strips or, again, as if they had been taken out of amateur ladies' fashion mags. In some cases, Radziszewski used dolls as his models – he played with them in secret as a child. More often than not, however, he would portray himself (look for glasses!) – a boy dreaming of becoming a princess. Don't strain your eyes for pirates, cowboys, or tanks – you won't find them here.



Karol Radziszewski

Barbie

1989/2019

2 digital prints

Pictures from childhood, the effects of one of his many “photo shoots” with dolls, professionally edited by the artist: scanned, blown up, cleaned, and printed on archival paper.

The fact of putting this meticulously prepared amateur material in an art gallery gives visibility to the practice of boy's playing with dolls – something which was apparently shameful and stigmatizing among his peers, but also one in which many boys secretly indulged. For Radziszewski, the line separating private and public archives seems to be of no significance: he just as freely and easily resorts to the materials they contain, using them as inspiration for his works.

Karol Radziszewski

O Snob

2019

2 paintings, acrylic on canvas

Radziszewski uses the murals with his childhood drawings also as a backdrop for paintings which he hangs there. They were inspired by the front covers of an underground Brazilian queer mag published in Rio in the 1960s under the title *O Snob*. Edited mainly by trans-persons, it was not only a tool for communication and generating social ties but also a platform for self-expression. The zine covers were simply illustrations of how the participants of beauty pageants for cross-dressers perceived their own looks – each cover dedicated to a different victorious beauty queen.

This obvious appropriation of the American beauty mag aesthetics is for Radziszewski tantamount to the sources of his childhood fantasies and the search for a universal feminine standard.



Karol Radziszewski

Interview with Laerte

2016

Video, 39 min

Queer Archives Institute Collection

The interview Radziszewski conducted with Laerte Coutinho, a prominent Brazilian artist, is one of the materials he gathered during his several-months-long Video Brazil residence in São Paulo. The artist has included Brazil (and a number of other South American countries) in his research and the artistic narrative he offers about queer communities in the globally peripheral countries, seeking, at the same time, common tropes with Central and Eastern Europe. Laerte, who came out as a trans-woman after almost 60 years of her life, tells Radziszewski of the experience of coming out in Brazil, and the influence it had on her social relations.



Room II

Wolfgang Tillmans

Saint Petersburg LGBT Community

2014

In 2014, Wolfgang Tillmans travelled to Russia to meet members of the LGBT community in Saint Petersburg. This inspiring group of young men and women risk their jobs and more to promote change. Tillmans photographed ten of these extraordinary individuals and conducted interviews with them on the current attitudes toward LGBT people in the country, and why it is so hard to be openly gay in Russia.

works clockwise from left:

Generation 404, 2014

Chromogenic print

Fake facade, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Dimitry & Ivan, St. Petersburg, 2014

Unframed inkjet print

Ruslan, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Daniel, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Artyom, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Elena, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Olga, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Alfred, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Ivan, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Svetlana, St. Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Page from Generation 404, 2014

Chromogenic print

outside The Blue Oyster Bar, b, 2014

Chromogenic print

outside The Blue Oyster Bar, a, 2014

Chromogenic print

The Blue Oyster Bar, Saint Petersburg, 2014

Chromogenic print

Courtesy the artist and Galerie Buchholz Berlin/Cologne



Karol Radziszewski

Was Taras Shevchenko Gay?

2017
Installation

Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) was a Ukrainian poet, writer, painter, and ethnographer with a passion for folklore. He was also a public and political figure. His literary heritage is seen as foundational for contemporary Ukrainian literature and language.

But was the greatest national hero gay?

Of course, not. The term “gay” is associated with emancipatory movements of homosexual communities in the West, and it did not appear in the Soviet republics before the 1980s. Although there are elements known from Shevchenko’s life that could at least prove his bisexuality, Radziszewski prefers to focus on the works of this Ukrainian Romantic artist, seeking in his poetry and painting new interpretational keys that have thus far been overlooked by the critics. We are invited to a common reading, as the way the archival material and Radziszewski’s contemporary photos have been assembled does not end with the artist’s gesture, but also involve the gaze of the viewer.

Is there a similarity between the Kazakh figures from the works of Shevchenko and the contemporary residents of Kiev? Are the fantasies materializing?



Karol Radziszewski

Invisible (Belarusian Queer History)

2016
5 analogue photographs

A series of five photographs with handwritten captions in Belarusian, recalling actual stories that the artist heard when recording his interviews in Minsk during a research project on the local non-normative history.

The works formally draw (queering it, at the same time) on a project under the title “Invisible” by a Belarusian photographer, Igor Savchenko. The photos, intentionally underexposed, are completely black; we do not see any of the people or events recorded.

Oral histories are key to Radziszewski’s practices. In most of the post-Soviet countries they are the dominant type of “documents” testifying to queer history. The situation is no different in Belarus, where homosexuality was considered a criminal offence until 1995. Every material trace of a non-heterosexual nature, be it a photo, letter, or a story, was seen as evidence of a crime. Radziszewski again follows the invisible stories reflecting on how to visualize the secrets and mysteries. In the end, they are brought to life in the viewers’ imagination.

Translation of photo descriptions:

- 1) Her portrait taken during their last meeting; she forgot to take the lens cap off. Vitebsk, late 1960s.
- 2) Photo of Kim Khadeev’s inscription in the toilet of the public library. The shot remained for some reason unexposed. Minsk, 1970s.
- 3) Photo taken with insufficient exposure when a policeman was trying to document a painter having sex with a guy in the square on the corner of Lenin Avenue and Lenin Street. Minsk, late 1970s.
- 4) Very upset after losing a chess game, Evgenii Ruban made a mistake and the exposure turned out too short. Grodno, early 1980s.
- 5) The shot he was trying to take while traveling on a very overcrowded no. 2 trolleybus on Francysk Skaryna avenue. But he felt the hand of this guy on his ass so he closed the lens, hid the camera in his pocket, and released the shutter. Minsk, early 1990s.

Karol Radziszewski

Interview with Ewa Hołuszko

(fragments)

2019

Video, 30 min

Queer Archives Institute Collection

Ewa Hołuszko, born in 1950 in Białystok, is a Polish physicist, oppositionist, and member of “Solidarity,” as well as a transgender activist.

During an over four-hour-long interview (or rather monologue), Ewa Hołuszko gives an account of her life, mainly in the context of her struggle in the opposition and Poland’s political transformation. The story, told with chronicle-like and detailed precision, includes one of the most important figures and events from the 1980s and 1990s in Poland. We hear of Wałęsa, father Popiełuszko, Mazowiecki, Kuroń, Olszewski, but also about Ewa’s detention and the year she spent in the Warsaw prison on Rakowiecka street. Radziszewski has recorded a very important lesson in contemporary history, in which Hołuszko describes practical strategies of survival under a regime – how to organize, how to stay in hiding, and evade arrest. The advice, which might seemingly be already a thing of the past, is again terrifyingly relevant.



Karol Radziszewski

Ewa “Harda” Hołuszko

2019

Acrylic on canvas

Ewa Hołuszko is a Polish heroine who is inconvenient to the conservative political circles. The attempts at removing her from the history of “Solidarity” are connected with her transition in the year 2000. Radziszewski completes the Polish iconography of heroes and heroines by creating her poster-like portrait.



Room III



Karol Radziszewski

Queer Archives Institute

2015 – ongoing

The Queer Archives Institute (QAI) is a non-profit organization founded and created by Karol Radziszewski. Its main objective is to research, collect, digitize, present, analyze, and offer an artistic interpretation of queer archives with a special focus placed on Central and Eastern Europe, as well as other “peripheral regions.” Founded in 2015, the Institute is a long-term project welcoming curators, artists, activists, and academic researchers. When describing his one-man archiving activities, Radziszewski uses a term which usually evokes connotations with official and complicated structures or at least a team of people. The word “institute” suggests that the knowledge generated and studied by the artist is just a fragment of endless resources worth discovering and investigating. QAI is not a formalized organization, neither does it have a permanent location. It annexes the places to which it is invited. It can be a single film screening, a lecture, a temporary office, or a performance lasting many long hours. Most often, however, the model it follows is that of museum exhibitions that present collections in display cabinets. Notwithstanding the serious form of the exposition, the nature of the artist’s archive still escapes any academic classifications per se. It simultaneously draws on truth and fiction, it is fragmentary and non-linear, it elevates everyday – or even vulgar – objects to the level of a relict, it is non-normative, queer, or even, as researcher Magda Szcześniak would have it, “way bent.”¹ One should also remember that despite its formal-sounding name, this curious archive is also propelled by the emotions of its collector. QAI expresses a longing for a common queer source which is not only limited to gender or sexual identity but stems from being excluded from the norm. The archives embody a longing for a community living a promise of a liberated future, not only in the political sense, but also in the realm of pleasure, friendship, and care.

This is the first such complete presentation of the QAI collection in Poland. It has already been shown in such places as at the Videobrasil, São Paulo, Brazil; Y Gallery of Contemporary Art, Minsk, Belarus; Fundación Gilberto Alzate Avendaño, Bogotá, Columbia; Centrala, Birmingham, United Kingdom; Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, Croatia; Schwules Museum, Berlin, Germany.

¹ Magda Szcześniak begins her analysis of the archives of Karol Radziszewski from before the artist founded the QAI. Magda Szcześniak, *Queerowanie historii, czyli dlaczego współcześni geje nie są niczymi dziećmi*, „Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja” no. 5 (137) 2012, pp. 205–223.

Karol Radziszewski

Poczet

2017

22 paintings, acrylic on canvas

Twenty-two paintings of the *Poczet* (The Gallery of Portraits) series are portraits of queer representatives from the worlds of art, science and Polish politics. This monumental work is an attempt at a new non-heteronormative view of history.

Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw



From the left:

Bolesław Śmiały (1042–1081)
Władysław III Warneńczyk (1424–1444)
Henryk Walezy (1551–1589)
Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–1876)
Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910)
Maria Dulębianka (1861–1919)
Maria Rodziewiczówna (1864–1944)
Maria Komornicka (*Piotr Włast*) (1876–1949)
Alice B. Toklas (1877–1967)
Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937)
Zofia Sadowska (1887–1960)
Wacław Niżyński (1989–1950)
Maria Dąbrowska (1889–1965)
Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1894–1980)
Józef Czapski (1896–1993)
Jan Lechoń (1899–1956)
Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969)
Michał Waszyński (1904–1965)
Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909–1983)
Jerzy Waldorff (1910–1999)
Miron Białoszewski (1922–1983)
Maria Janion (1926–)

Libuše Jarcovjáková

T-Club (1983–1986)

4 inkjet prints

The pictures taken by a Czech photographer show a carnival party at the T-Club in the 1980s. The author was there almost every night, recording the night life of Prague's homosexuals. Gay and lesbian clubs in post-Soviet countries – hidden in cellars, behind unmarked doors, promoted by word of mouth were – or perhaps still are – the most important formative centers of the queer community. This is what the author herself has to say about the legendary T-Club: "Strobe lights and super-cooled vodka, close to midnight – nowhere to move, a too small, overcrowded space, the air thick with smoke. Near dawn the DJ was paid fifty for each additional song. Convulsive laughter and genuine tears. Insightful conversation and superficial coquetry. One-night stands and love for life. Beautiful young men and beautiful young women. Effeminate "Bs" and respectable-looking gentlemen, who rebounded from their families. Female footballers, waiters, taxi drivers, and most probably the secret police too. Drugstore assistants, a postman, and a train conductor. The girls from Yalta finished up their night work here. They all belonged here – belonged to a kind of pseudo-family, to the community of one Prague gay club, which was one of two."²



Hommage à W.S.

2019

Exhibition re-enactment

A small red exhibition pavilion contains the exhibition "Hommage à W.S.". The project is a tribute to Wojciech Skrodzki (1935–2016), art critic and author of numerous elaborations on 20th century Polish art, who in the late years of his life revealed his sexual orientation and became an active member of the Lambda Association in Warsaw. Skrodzki's late coming-out was accompanied by his open interest in queer art and visual culture. He also re-evaluated his life in a typewritten autobiography which he donated to the Queer Archives Institute. The typescript and a small childhood photo of Skrodzki served as a point of departure for this small exhibition in the exhibition.

"Hommage à W.S." is a reconstruction and a re-enactment of sorts of an exhibition put together by Skrodzki in May 1997 under the title "Hommage to Andrzej Matynia," organized in the Critics' Gallery on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street. Although neither the institution nor private collections hold any photographs documenting the exposition (thus we do not know what works were actually presented there), the brochure accompanying the event contains names of the artists whose works were on display, including those who inspired Skrodzki in his curatorial choices. These included Henryk Błachnio, Edward Narkiewicz, and Krzysztof Zarębski. Out of the artefacts which were definitely shown forty years ago, it was possible to find and once again display the works of two artists: Ewa Kuryluk and Natalia LL.

This forgotten exhibition, insignificant in Polish art or exhibition history, was, in the eyes of its author, a secret and deeply coded presentation of an erotic and autobiographical nature. Now, reconstructed over four decades later, it is not only an attempt at a queer interpretation of the potential of the works exhibited as Skrodzki saw it. Its fragmentary and collage-like nature also shows the impossibility of creating a coherent vision of queer past history which, for that reason, must always be stuck between truth and desire.

The exhibition has been prepared as part of the Polish-German-British-Spanish project "Towards the 1970s – in search of non-normative sexual culture from before the era of HIV/AIDS" (CRUSEV) financed by the HERA Joint Research Programme (www.heranet.info).

The project is co-created by NCN, BMBF via DLR-PT, MINECO, AHRC, and the European Commission as part of the Horizon 2020 programme.



Karol Radziszewski

Afterimages

2018

Film, 15 min

Afterimages is a short story about a single film from the archives of Ryszard Kisiel. The exposed negative from the late 1980s is both the starting point of Kisiel's personal history, as well as a portrait of the gay scene in the Tri-City area in the times when the socialist system was approaching its final moments.

Ryszard Kisiel is a pioneer of gay culture in Poland. In the 1980s he founded the "Filo" magazine which was one of the first gay mags in Central and Eastern Europe and which, among other topics, also contained texts on the dangers and prevention of AIDS.

Kisiel is the founder of the most abundant and best-preserved homoerotic archive documenting the lives of gay men in Poland under socialism.

Most of the materials there were produced by Kisiel himself: artistic photo shoots, books, magazines, leaflets. The collection is now the heart of the Queer Archives Institute.

Room IV

General Idea

Great AIDS (Quinacridone Rose Deep)

1990/2019

Acrylic on linen

Courtesy The Estate of General Idea and Esther Schipper, Berlin

The most recent works by General Idea (created by AA Bronson in 2019, 25 years after the death of Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal) continued the interests of the group which was one of the first in the world to focus on the problem of HIV/AIDS back in the 1980s. The visual quote of Robert Indiana's pop-art painting, *LOVE*, is one of the iconic examples of appropriation art and one of the most representative works referring to queer death and mourning.

With their posters, wallpaper, stamps, sculptures in public space, and billboards with the word AIDS on them, General Idea played with what was publicly deemed invisible, absorbing the huge taboo of the epidemic, giving it visibility, and thus, creating a place for it in the general public consciousness.



Karol Radziszewski

AIDS (wallpaper)

2012

Digital print

By making a reference to the subversive activities of General Idea from the "AIDS era" (1984–1994), Karol Radziszewski has started an artistic dialogue between the oeuvre of the Canadian collective and the activities of Ryszard Kisiel from the 1980s, whose collage – made up of Donald Duck letters stickers – he has transformed and multiplied onto wallpaper.

Radziszewski sees the home photo shoots organized by Kisiel, his publication of the gay "Filo" zine, and his researching and cataloging activities of the cruising spots in Eastern and Central Europe as early and rare activist undertakings which were in direct reaction to the "Hyacinth" campaign launched against Polish homosexuals.

Karol Radziszewski

The Mushroom

2019
Steel sculpture

"The mushroom" is an informal name for one of the few public urinals in post-war Warsaw where men would meet for sexual purposes. One of the most popular ones was situated at the Three Crosses Square – the legendary venue was a silent hero of homoerotic encounters and militia raids. There is no trace of the place left today.

"And the toilet in Krzyżanki was the most important of them all. The place. Rome and Mecca. You know. The sacred mushroom. A tin structure. The heart of everything. The headquarters and the committee. Foreign but our own. Nowhere, on the verge, in the back, at night and during the day. Where there is nothing apart from everything. There they were at home and there they were themselves. In the public urinal. There. You know."³

Karol Radziszewski has reconstructed its form based on the only available archival photograph, with the urinal's characteristic "snail-like" tunnel which he then squashed thus making a reference to the fate that met the structure in the late 1990s. The object, so special to the gay community, ended its existence as a result of the visual changes introduced to the urban space leaving an empty plot in place of what probably used to be the most famous cruising spot in Poland. The collectively compiled history about the Mushroom, made up of bits and pieces, impressions, and anecdotes, is an attempt at creating



and preserving the memory of homosexual communities. In building a common queer history, places such as the Mushroom, underground bars, and dark park corners are associated with men seeking carnal pleasures. The affect is not welcome by chroniclers as it does not fit the normalized image of the city.

Radziszewski deals with the issue of contemporary sites of queer memory and the visual forms of their celebration. If there was to be a queer monument to the queer Warsaw community, what would it be? Could it display sexual overtones? What would deserve the longing for the soc-modernist heritage? Could it be a city urinal?

Karol Radziszewski

Lech Wałęsa

From the 1989 series
2017
Acrylic on canvas

Karol Radziszewski

Gorbachev

From the 1989 series
2019
Acrylic on canvas



Karol Radziszewski

Hyacinth

2019

Acrylic on canvas

Room V

The “Hyacinth” campaign was a mass operation conducted in the years 1985–1987 by the Civil Militia aimed at gathering information about Polish homosexuals. One of the many reasons given for the campaign was to counteract the AIDS epidemic, combat prostitution, and protect against criminals but also to collect compromising materials which could help recruit agents. The multifaceted nature of the campaign is being increasingly raised by researchers of the event, who claim that not in all Polish cities the “suspects” actually suffered oppression.⁴

The *Hyacinth* by Radziszewski is the first visual presentation of this historical event in Polish iconography. In telling the story, the artist again resorts to experimenting with the tradition of European painting – this time, however, he makes a reference to the leading representative of the 1980s new expression, A.R. Penck. Queering the style of Neue Wilde, Radziszewski draws on his brutality and exceptionally strong expression filling the canvas with drawings from the “Filo” mag. Associations with cave paintings lead our imagination towards the amateur sexual graffiti found in public toilets. Under a seemingly promiscuous and entertaining façade, the artist hides a violence-filled political motif – discrimination on sexual grounds.

4 Ewa Majewska, *Public against our will? The caring gaze of Leviathan, “pink files” from 1980s Poland and the issue of privacy*, *Interalia Queer Studies Journal*, 2017.

Ryszard Kisiel

Chałupy 1982

2 digital prints

Sobieszewo 1969

Archival images

Sobieszewo 1971

Archival images

Of all the informal meeting places of Polish homosexuals in post-war Poland, there are few that could stir one's imagination as much as the Baltic Sea beaches. Far from AIDS (but so close), from the oppressive policy of the state, from shame and the everyday normative performance a homosexual person had to give, frequenters of the gay beaches could engage in a different and liberating choreography. The amateur sessions, the charming dancing routines, the camp, and the lazy celebration of nature, and freedom take the figures from Kisiel's photos beyond time and space – to the queer utopias, the underworld, the blank spaces. The sea merges with the sky in these melancholic pics – the identities of the men are blurred, they can be sirens, exotic dancers, seekers of sexual treasures.

The oeuvre of Kisiel – the scrupulous archivist of the “queer times” in Poland's socialist reality – could be analyzed through the prism of Jack Smith or Nan Goldin whose artistic strategies helped the excluded annex physical and metaphorical space. Sobieszewo, Stogi, and later Lubiewo or private apartments, the “nowhere” places that only the informed could access, ruins, parking lots, sites suspended between the past and the future – queer geographies extend far beyond the physical. They materialize in the enigmatic gestures and gazes, in the intimacy and carelessness of the main characters.

Light arrangement: Jacqueline Sobiszewski



Dulce-Post Mortem

2019
Neons

In November 1980, when spending time in the village of Michałkowa, the artist wrote: "Energies charge our actions, our existence. I do not believe in human death. What's more, I do not believe in the death of any entity. Life only changes the form of its manifestation. It can be good or bad. Happy or sad."⁵

The text is a wonderful introduction to the most recent works by Natalia LL from the 2016 series *Dulce – Post Mortem*. It is a compilation of photographs of a flickering point of light – a photographic recording of a performance in which the artist presents herself as an infinite and immortal particle. A human does not die, it only transforms – it is never a single and final body.

In her new project, Natalia LL changes photographs into neon lights, a medium which she used a lot when in art school, at the Department of Glass and Ceramics at the State High School of Art (presently the Academy of Fine Arts) in Wrocław.

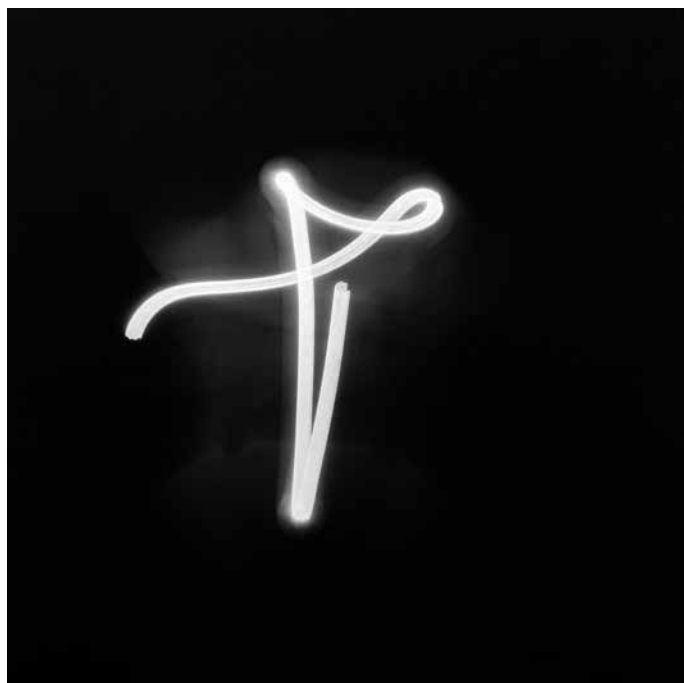


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General Idea, *Great AIDS* (*Quinacridone Rose Deep*), 1990/2019. Courtesy The Estate of General Idea and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo © Andrea Rossetti

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Archival image of the "Grzybek" at Plac Trzech Krzyży in Warsaw. Pink Press Sp. z o. o.

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Karol Radziszewski's Gorbachev portrait drawing from 1989. Courtesy of the artist.

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Ryszard Kisiel, *Sobieszewo 1969*. Courtesy of the artist and QAI.

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Natalia LL, *Dulce – Post Mortem*, 2016, analog photography. Courtesy of the Natalia LL Archive, ZW Foundation, Toruń.

5 Natalia LL, *Stany skupienia*, 1980, Klub Związków Twórczych. Interpretacje, Wrocław: Galeria PERMAFO, 1981.

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15/11/2019—29/03/2020
Karol Radziszewski
The Power of Secrets

Special guest appearance
General Idea, Libuše Jarcovjácová,
Ryszard Kisiel, Natalia LL, Wolfgang Tillmans

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Edward Narkiewicz, Wojtek Sperl, Krzysztof Zarębski

Collaboration *Hommage à W.S.*
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On the cover

Karol Radziszewski, *AIDS (wallpaper)*
2012

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