

U-jazdowski

12/04—22/09/2019

exhibition

Maria Loboda
*Sitting Here Bored
Like a Leopard*



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The presentation at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art is Poland's first solo exhibition by Maria Loboda, an interdisciplinary artist (who has described interdisciplinary art using the title of a Victoria & Albert Museum show: "All of This Belongs to You").

In her art, the works of professional artisans connect with film noir, demonology, references to antiquity, *American Gigolo* or esoteric Buddhism, resulting in true alchemical refinement. In Warsaw, Loboda is showing almost exclusively new works: sculptures, photographs, stained glass, and many other objects.

When trying to describe the rather enigmatic and elusive nature of Loboda's work, one could say that she analyses communication systems, stressing the transformative power of languages and codes – or suggest that she simply likes to tell stories. Her stories are usually rather surprising ones, rooted in her personal fascinations, passions and even obsessions, though her works give these a universal dimension. "I always try to build the show around a small story – a haiku, as it were – so that all the works 'belong to each other' and interact." As befits a fan of Alfred Hitchcock, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler and Edgar Allan Poe, Loboda skilfully draws attention away from the meanings and senses of her works and towards their codes, metaphors, symbols, and puzzles. It is the medium of the exhibition that determines the message. Loboda constructs each show as a structure that is logical in its own way, but she also searches for ways to distort the cohesiveness of the narrative. "I love a good puzzle, a difficult code, or a forgotten game. I like it when art resembles an ancient oracle or the sphinx." For Loboda, art is a responsible and risky operation: the artist translates words, their referent concepts, reflections or situations, into material things or objects that usually adopt the quality of ready-mades. As a material, language

sometimes reaches its limits, so that, in order to tell the full story, the artist needs to use an object.

Loboda herself refers to her practice as archaeology. Her works include references to endless cultural deposits: history, art, philosophy, literature, science, folklore and alchemy, as well as various aspects of spirituality and transcendence in the wider sense. Asked by the online Metal Magazine what inspires her, she replied: “Archaeology, Art Deco, *World of Interiors*, demonology, Hermes Trismegistus, the Permian-Triassic Boundary, Shinto, blue velvet and celadon, Iggy Pop and *American Gigolo*, scenography, the British Museum, candied fruits, Concorde, Sotheby’s and Christie’s, Saville Row, wilderness, and the I-Ching. These are just a few of my current inspirations.” Loboda is an intercultural artist, which means that she develops her artistic vocabulary in relation to cultural texts that she finds interesting; through this reference, she brings forth her own, unique universe. She builds contexts and obtains tools for working out interesting problematics and a vision of the world. In her work, therefore, we find a huge spectrum of allusions, quotations and collages. “Basically, I start with words – not with the material; I start with poetry, a quote, a scientific term that interests me and for me has the quality of a verbal sculpture itself. Then I start to look into materials that have, what I consider, a beautiful and devastating and sexy quality.”¹ Her work oozes a fascination with language and literature. Work and exhibition titles are highly meaningful for Loboda; just read through them and you will have found a helpful map to navigate you through those obscure, magical, and weird stories that share their mood with the films of David Lynch: nothing is really what it seems here.

1. Quoted after: Erwan Filidori, 'Maria Loboda. Art is Within Yourself', Metal Magazine, <https://metalmagazine.eu/en/post/interview/maria-loboda-art-is-within-yourself>.

Loboda's first public presentation, while she was still a student at the Städelschule, was an installation using rather ordinary materials: walnuts, a piece of steel, white wood, verbena, camphor, goat hide and green ribbons. Those had been formed into Cubist/Constructivist objects, but the title of the piece – *The Grand Conjuration of Lucifuge Rofocale* (2006) – meant that the viewers found themselves in a space filled with the ingredients of nothing but a demonological formula through which satanic powers were being evoked. An artistic installation in the form of a spell, albeit happily an inactive one. The work is significant, for some of its qualities remain characteristic for Loboda's work even today: the way she enciphers the logic and meaning of her works, the way she uses the power of beauty as a vehicle for ominous messages, her fascination with the fact that ordinary things can be vested with a mysterious and overwhelming power, and her use of archaic sources.

In her work, Loboda translates, as it were, between language and materiality at the level of formal references – testing how the two orders operate and how they interact, as well as what can be expressed through them beyond their standard interpretation. She explores all kinds of codes and grammars of materials, such as stones, plants, sounds, pigments and words. The piece she showed at DOCUMENTA (13) was called *This Work is Dedicated to an Emperor* (2012) and had a dedication quoted from *De re militari*, a Roman military treatise. Twenty potted cypress trees were brought in and installed at the beautiful baroque Auerpark in Kassel. Over the hundred days of the exhibition, the cypresses re-enacted various historical military formations, creeping imperceptibly by night towards the orangery at the far end of the park in what was obviously a reference to Shakespeare's famous lines: "Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Bir-

nam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him.”

The work could be traced back to the artist's earlier preoccupation with nomadic sculptures and the idea of the artwork's anarchic attitude in the presentation space.

In contrast to the rich contexts and cultural references, such as military treaties, alchemy, mythology and occultism, the aesthetic of her works is usually austere and restrained. Minimalism does a good job of formalising complex phenomena. It also serves as a kind of camouflage, for often there is much more to a Loboda exhibition than meets the eye, and the contents are far richer, much more ambiguous than the adopted form or aesthetic would suggest. Let us take, for example the photographic series *The Man of His Word* (2014–2015). The low-key images show hands in black leather gloves performing puzzling gestures against the background of a tweed jacket. The “man of his word” is someone who observes the proprieties of high-brow culture, a gentleman. The hand positions shown in the pictures are mudras, symbolic meditation gestures used in religious rituals by Buddhist monks. These two completely different cultural contexts meet on the level of hard-to-attain ideals, embedded, respectively, in social space (gentleman) and spiritual space (mudras). Still, the elegant and sophisticated compositions evoke a vague sense of unease: sacred gestures, embodying something powerful, unspoken, are performed in leather gloves that leave no traces.

The show borrows its title from Sylvia Plath's poem *Leaving Early* (1960) and the paraphrase of a fragment *sitting here bored as a leopard* was the point of departure in developing its concept. A bored, lazy predator is calm and deadly at the same time: mortal danger is expressed here not through tension, but through tedium. A sensual image, a calm before the storm. A threatening boredom that can also be an existential boredom, a source of nihilism or anarchy.

A gate with three tall and graceful entrances leads into the exhibition space – as if to an Egyptian temple. This is a dysfunctional temple, a place where a strange, invisible deity is worshipped; or perhaps it is the lobby of some indeterminate office, agency, corporation, power or prestige? This is suggested by the venetian-blind shadow cast on the gate's façade. A combination of the sacred and the profane, which in effect is neither. The exhibition's highlights include fair-sized sculptures, their aesthetic neutral and modern, which the museum guards on duty can relax in. This is a sly, subtly anarchist gesture towards artworks that are protected from the viewer's touch.

Deeper into the show, we encounter references to the figure of the businessman, here extracted from Edgar Allan Poe's scathing satire *The Business Man*, as well as motifs derived from film noir, where the criminal is a metaphor of the "dark" and incomprehensible side of human nature. The refined colour palette of *American Gigolo* appears in a monumental stained-glass composition showing a scene from the movie. The motif of the blinds returns here, casting a shadow over the scene where Julian searches through his apartment in panic. Venetian blinds are inherent to noir-cinema style, but also to office aesthetics.

Jean-Luc Godard said that a story should have a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order. Maria Loboda's art follows the logic of poetry – it forces you to interpret it, while inviting you to search for a key to the secret message.

Ewa Gorzadek

Ewa Gorzadek
interviews
Maria Loboda

Ewa Gorzadek

You have repeatedly mentioned the important role of poetry, which has often inspired your works. In the case of the Warsaw exhibition, clues lead to Sylvia Plath, from whom you borrowed the title of the show. What is poetry for you as a visual artist?

Maria Loboda

My interest in poetry lies not only in the content itself, but very much in the written form – I find it very satisfying to analyse the writers' original handwritten notes, to understand the structures, the stanzas, the metrical schemes and the rhythm. I experience great joy in analysing how all the apparent chaos on the page, the arrows, the crossed out words, the repetitions, exclamation marks etc. are formed at the end into a very organised and powerful essence of clandestine information.

For me, a poem is very much also an object – like a verbal sculpture – and I consider my own artistic challenge to translate these thoughts into a body in space.

For me, looking at great poetry is like looking at a plan of attack – its tactical formations – for a moment, all the possibilities are up in the air and then they are suddenly formed into symmetry, a vanguard force, rear cover, attack, withdrawal. It's about discipline and focus; it's about what not to say in order to say more. What not to show in order to show everything.

I observed this for the first time when I read *The Waste Land* and I am forever impressed by this work, I love T.S. Eliot very much and I read his writings frequently to get into the mood to start to formulate and think up a show.

So basically, I am trying to use a poetic form to build and think up an exhibition – to divide the art and the positions of works in space into lines – stanzas – verse – paragraph etc.

I want the works to echo each other.

My shows are narrations, all of it is woven together but kept loose, and the relative obscureness of some works can maybe explained by the fact that there is only one poetic form I really don't like and try to avoid at all cost – even if it's at the expense of creating an easier access to the works – and that's rhyme. I really despise it.

I think rhyming is lazy and fails to challenge the beholder/reader in a way I believe to be stimulating.

I admire Sylvia Plath's craft a lot; I think she was a brilliant wordsmith and had a lightness and crystal clear precision in her use of the English language. Her poems are sumptuous, both piercing and purist at the same time. Each word hits a bull's eye.

I was carrying the title sentence with me for a while, like interior designers do with a piece of upholstery material – trying it out, holding it against different backgrounds, colours, shapes and thoughts, and the end it won. I love it because it's such a forceful and dynamic usage of boredom. Only a big cat can make the state of being bored so dangerous. It comes from *Leaving Early*, 1960:

*Me, sitting here bored as a leopard
In your jungle of wine-bottle lamps,
Velvet pillows the color of blood pudding*

Ewa Gorządek

How do you build mutual relations between the works at the exhibition *Sitting Here Bored Like a Leopard*? At what level of interpretation can viewers look for these links?

Maria Loboda

I think the viewer should expect anything but rhyme. I hope I've created something amusing and worth being thought about.

You know my biggest dream is to make works that are like people you start to be curious about and want to investigate them, because they seem worth getting to know better.

Those people who trigger your imagination and spark your interest – the ones you might even start to stalk a little.

At least this is what I am looking for in art. Art works I want to stalk, thoughts I want to follow, like Alice into the rabbit hole.

The works I've built for this show are also inspired by the interior and the colour schemes of Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo*, as I like this film a lot. The set design is by Ferdinando Scarfiotti and it is impeccable, the colour schemes, the lights, the café au lait carpets, the obligatory shadows from a venetian blind everywhere, such a sexy movie.

The title implies the possibility of sudden dynamism inside an otherwise very tranquil environment. Sitting here bored like a leopard. It almost implies that the next moment might not be boring whatsoever.

American Gigolo's filmic peak is when Julian is frantically searching and destroying his beautiful apartment while looking for an incriminatory package. The stained glass window is

based on a film still from this moment; he is on his sofa taking paintings down and checking everywhere for the object. I wanted to bring a bit of this energy into the show, contradicting monolithic works with soft vandalism and objects that weirdly stand for themselves and have their own inner life.

Also, I wanted to involve the guards of the exhibition, having seen them as a vital part of every show, seemingly invisible, but still very present in each room.

I've designed these large abstract public sculptures on which they will sit. Surrounded by books, thermoses, blankets etc. I want the guards to sit on the very same thing they are protecting. To bring a slight element of anarchy into the story.

Ewa Gorzadek

You attach great importance to the backstories associated with each work. What are the stories behind the new works you will show in Warsaw?

Maria Loboda

I started to explain this in the earlier answer; the backstories are a mixture of the vibe of *American Gigolo* – a selfish, narcissistic, self-indulgent background mixed with misfortune and bad luck, ha-ha.

Why this movie – I can't answer that – it simply fit the mood I was in, and this is the story I wanted to tell. A story of ritzy aesthetics but being broken – an interior, a set design that seems to be inhabited by something or someone who might experience great rage while keeping up outward appearances. I want to keep the vandalism subtle.

A text hidden behind Elizabeth Taylor's jewellery stickers, a ready-made object covered in snow, a brass plaque declaring someone's status, but being scratched over.

It's a show about a very oppressive calm situation of great taste and nowhere to go with it. All dressed up and nowhere to go.

I wanted to experiment for this show, breaking new ground, trying new ways of building a concept, or even leaving it open as I never have before. And I wanted to create a mystery worthy of Raymond Chandler.

The show is opened by the large *City Gate* in the late afternoon, painted using an airbrush of a large dramatic venetian blind shadow, and also covering and overlapping part of the exhibition text; right from the start I want to hide vital information.

An unusual carved coral group of two figures on a bridge, a maiden and a beggar holding a bird perched on a chain and A Fluorite Figure of a Dog of Fo, the crouching beast carved with its head turned to one side are the titles of the two sitting sculptures for the guards. The titles are descriptions of objects of virtue from Sotheby's catalogues, I consider them some sort of "pragmatic poetry". They have to be so precise that one can envision the object even without seeing it.

I wanted to incorporate the guards, they are the inhabitants of this environment, having a picnic and reading books, sitting there bored like leopards, on the very object they are meant to protect. The blankets are embroidered with the titles.

Cha cha, chi chi, hejza, hola! is a wall painting of a vessel going through three stages of tying a perfect knot. In the beginning it was meant to be a more shapeshifting transformation of a vase turning into an animal, but I decided to keep it more prude. I am still seeing it as a transformative image – the vase getting ready for business. The flash photography is, to a certain extent, a continuation of this and a lead in to the stained glass window work in the next room.

The image of someone looking at porcelain vase collections in the light of a torch under blankets is similarly comical, nocturnal, terrifying and plain nerdy.

The Business Man and *The Methodical Man* brass plaques are a nod to a very funny little story by Edgar Allen Poe with the same title, and the ancient Egyptians who sometimes erased every trace of a former pharaoh by chipping off their name cartouches from wall reliefs.

The Grand Interiors is a painting from the cover of a great magazine from the early 1960s. It was part of my last solo show at the Schirn Kunsthalle, but I felt it belonged in this story too.

With its gargantuan size, it was always meant to be wedged somewhere or standing in the middle; it was painted by one of my elder brothers. The stained glass window is done by another brother – a bit of a family affair here.

The lamps, titled *The Chosen*, are inspired by the great Pierre Chareau; they are a nod to his La Mouche Lamp design from the 1920s. They are like a beautiful ritual vessel for the sacrifice of insects and they lend a bit more gravitas to this dysfunctional environment I've created.

The Omniabsence snow-covered sculpture is meant to simultaneously express this omnipresence and omiabsence.

Maybe this title is significant for the whole show, for my poem.

You are omniabsent and omnipresent at the same time.

You exist and don't exist simultaneously.

You are sitting here bored like a leopard.

Maria Loboda

Born in 1979, Maria Loboda has been based in Germany for over thirty years; she is a graduate of the Städelschule Frankfurt, an academy that offers its students a maximum of creative freedom, focusing on complete independence from all non-artistic constraints or goals. The artist has participated, among others, in dOCUMENTA (13) (2012) and the Taipei Biennale (2014), she showed her works at individual exhibitions at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid (2013), Kunsthalle Basel (2017), Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius (2017), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main (2018), Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2019) and this year has been invited for the main show at the Venice Biennale. In 2015 Loboda did a project for Kraków's Bunkier Sztuki, she has also participated in the Tatra Conference (her work was realized in a mountain chalet in Dolina Pięciu Stawów) and in The Mycological Theatre in Rabka, but she hasn't had an opportunity yet to present a larger body of work to the Polish public.

Titles of works:

City gate in the late afternoon

dry wall, wall painting

The Chosen

Chrysochroa castelnaudi, Cereopsius luctor, Callimetopus jugalis Newman, Xylindes philippinensis, Chrysocharabus punctaroarautus montanus, Sarrathrocera lowi, Micrencaustes, Fruhstoferia birmancia, Stephanorrhina guttata, Euselates strictica, Eupholus Schoenherri, Chrysochroa fulminans, Heliocopris bucephalus, Heteropteryx dilatata, Creobroter gemmatus, glass, metal, electric wiring

An unusual carved coral group of two figures on a bridge – a maiden and a beggar holding a bird perched on a chain

styrodur, resin, sand, various objects, embroidered linen blanket

Sleeping with gods

digital prints on cotton paper

A fluorite figure of a dog of Fo, the crouching beast carved with its head turned to one side

styrodur, resin, sand, various objects, embroidered linen blanket

Cha cha, chi chi, hejża, hola!

wall paintings

Methodical Man

engraved brass plate

Business Man

engraved brass plate

The Omniabsence

high fidelity equipment, fake snow, vase

A man takes down a painting while standing on the sofa

stained glass

Grand Interiors

acrylic paint on canvas

Note the Old Fashioned on the cornice

1 1/2 oz Bourbon, 2 dashes Angostura bitters, 1 Sugar cube, cocktail cherry,
orange slice, ice cubes, vinyl text

***Refers to all the ways in which human beings overcome
their original barbarism and through artifice, become fully
human***

pine wood, various objects

Untitled

stickers, vinyl text

Young Satyr turning to look at his tail

plaster

Education

{Smykowizje}

A workshop for families with children up to age 5 (in Polish)
Saturdays, 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.
Admission by ticket only
Pre-book at info@u-jazdowski.pl
Participants meet in the foyer

25/05

29/06

21/09

{Smykowizje – Guided Tours in Baby Carriers}

Guided tours for families with children up to age 5 (in Polish)
Wednesdays, 1 p.m.
Admission fee included in the ticket
Participants meet in the foyer

05/06

17/07

21/08

{How Does Art Taste?}

A workshop for families with children aged 5–10 (in Polish)
Saturdays, 12 noon
Admission by ticket only
Pre-book at info@u-jazdowski.pl
Participants meet in the foyer

25/05

10/08

{Art Knows No Age}

A series of get-togethers for adults (in Polish)
Wednesdays, 12 noon
Admission free
Participants meet in the foyer

24/04

22/05

{Art Viewpoints}

Guided tours in Polish
Thursdays, 6 p.m.
Admission free
Participants meet in the foyer

18/04

23/05

13/06

18/07

29/08

12/09

{Let's Talk About Art}

Guided tours in English
Saturdays, 3 p.m.
Admission fee included in the ticket
Participants meet in the foyer

13/04

25/05

22/06

27/07

31/08

{Teacher in the Centre}

Guided tours with teachers (in Polish)
Selected Wednesdays, 4 p.m.
Admission free
Information at edukacja@u-jazdowski.pl

{Creative School}

Workshops for organized groups
Admission by ticket only
Information and pre-booking at edukacja@u-jazdowski.pl

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