

U-jazdowski

{ **Bank Pekao
Project Room** }

2017

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{Bank Pekao Project Room} 2017

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The second edition of the {Bank Pekao Project Room}, which had an entirely new formula this time, is over. The program made it possible to carry out 10 completely new exhibitions by artists selected from over 300 proposals sent out by representatives of the most important artistic institutions in Poland. We consider them to be the people with the best knowledge of the most intriguing things that are going on in the young art scene. At this point I'd like to wholeheartedly thank you all.

I'm very happy that this year's edition of {Bank Pekao Project Room} also included a competition with two prizes. The first prize was 20,000 zlotys, the second - 10,000 zlotys. They will be awarded by a jury made up of: Mirosław Bałka, Krist Gruijthuijsen, Jarosław Lubiak, Małgorzata Smagorowicz, and Paulina Wrocławska. This additional aspect has made {Bank Pekao Project Room} one of the most interesting competitions for young artists in our country.

But the most important thing is that the {Project Room} offers them a unique chance to carry out brand new projects in a prestigious venue. Young artists receive a budget, payment for their work and the professional assistance of curators from various artistic institutions. Just like last year, the whole project is summarized in this publication consisting of photographic documentation, articles by the curators and their interviews with the artists.

We're also happy that, despite the fact that the sponsor company withdrew its backing for the project, the management of Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art decided to continue it next year.

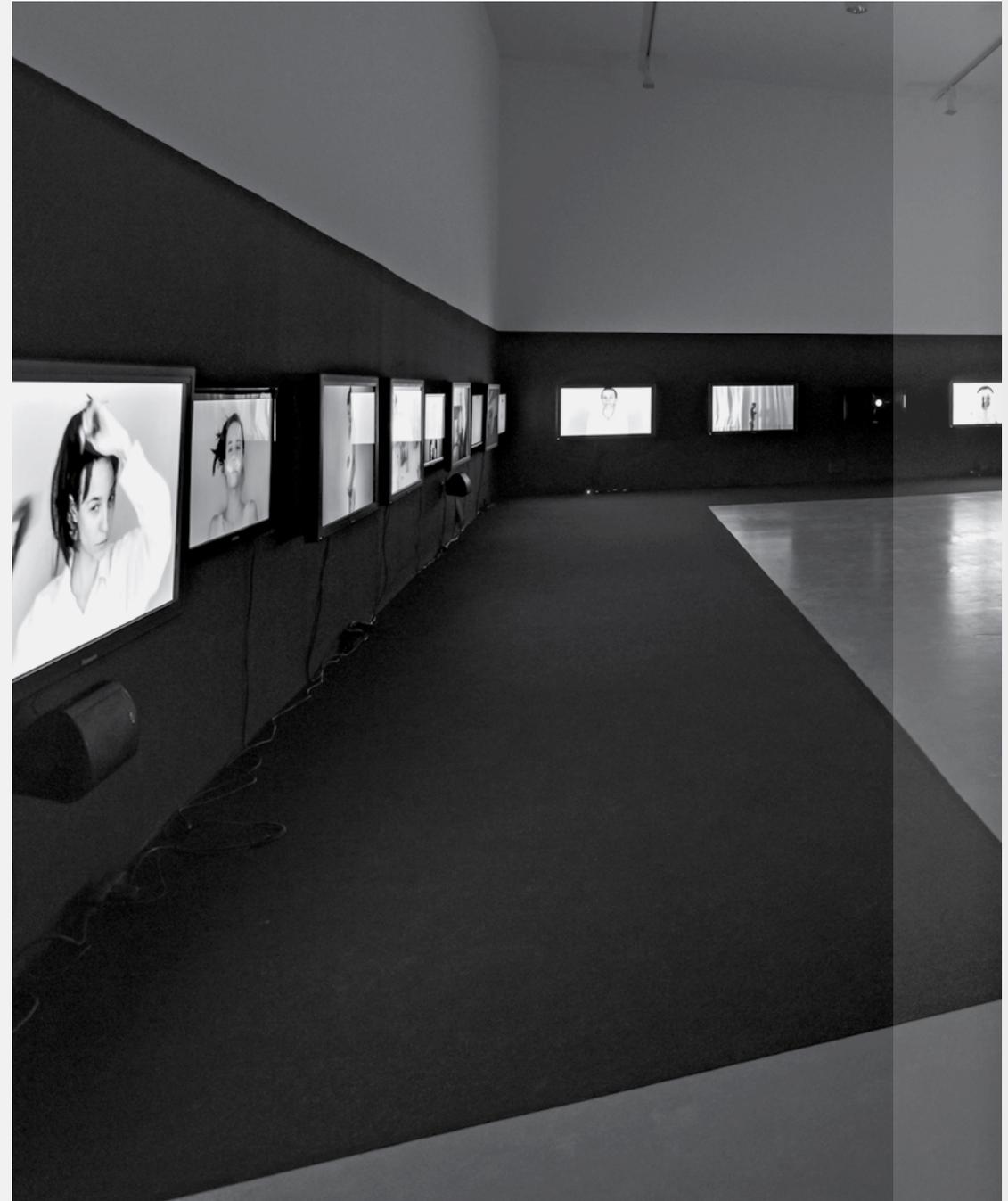
I'd like to invite you to start following the events that will take place as a part of the *U-jazdowski* {Project Room} next year.

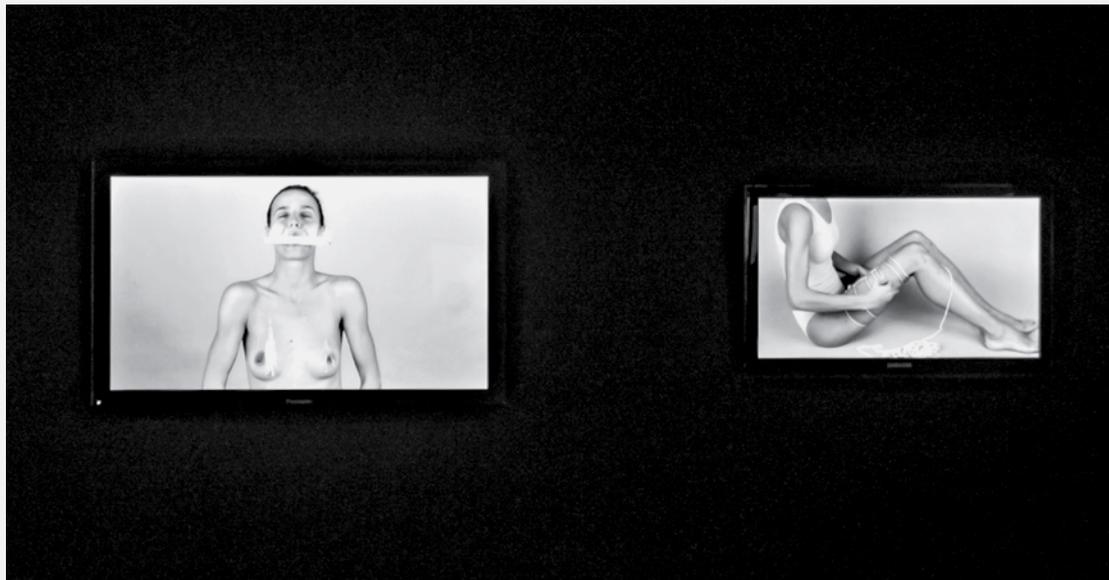
Kamil Kuskowski
Coordinator of the
{Bank Pekao Project Room}
2017 program

12/01—12/02/2017

Małgorzata Michałowska

30 days





Every day, Małgorzata Michałowska performs in the presence of a camera, and the video of the activities she carries out are published on the website of her project. The title, *Everyday Performance*, refers both to the regularity of the project as well as to the context of the artist's background – actions and gestures inscribed in everyday life. The exhibition *30 days* – another channel distributing the artist's activities – like an online rerun, develops over time and remains incomplete. It presents the gradual accumulation of the performative activities, registered as a recording by Michałowska: a new video transcription arrives daily at the exhibition. And every day, the fragmented layout of the exhibition is expanded with new semantic content.

In her project, the artist creates not so much an autobiographical record of her surrounding reality, but more so; she utilizes this format to analyze the work of an artist-performer. Methodically, she strengthens her own daily experiences, trials and tribulations that accompany her in being a performer – in being an artist. Michałowska pays special attention to the process itself, during which the specific intentions and specific choices determine the legitimacy of the gesture, establishing it as a creative act. Thus, her auto-reflexive presence in the world, awareness of performative actions, and more or less staged situations are defined in terms of performative actions.

As a reference to the neo-avant-garde tradition of performance and action art, the artist redefines the symbolism of the reenacted activities and points to the widespread fetishization of the items used, but also goes a step further. She is trying to undermine the narrative, to which the process of his-

toricizing performance is subjected, trying to somehow reevaluate this history through a demythologization of the figure and artist's technique.

Michałowska refers to the tradition of performance and updates this tradition. The act of recording her actions does not function as documentation, but as a video-performance – a symbiotic form of action, registration, and reception. A live performance is filtered through the lens of a camera, and then, through other channels of presentation: in the case of the artist's work, the performance is revealed as an image on a TV or computer screen. With these actions, the artist perfectly fits into the modern culture of the mediasphere, into the incessant fixation regarding the presence of our image in it. This consistent fabricating of reality is accompanied by a constant awareness of the performance's role-play/implementation. Michałowska systematically breaks down the first components making up the experience of not only the performer, but also the viewer. She draws attention to the form of language, communicating the individual actions that she carries out. In her short video recordings, she questions the divisions between performativity and theatricality, between art and everyday life. The artist works out daily reality and the reality of a performer functioning in their hermetic world in terms of a complex construct, selecting specific roles, poses and gestures.

curator
Patrycja Ryłko
 exhibition coordinator
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 illustration
Karolina Pietrzyk
 text
Patrycja Ryłko

Małgorzata Michałowska

Born in 1990. Holds an MA degree in Multimedia from the Faculty of Painting and New Media at the Academy of Art in Szczecin. She earned her BA at the Faculty of Design and Architecture at the West Pomeranian University of Technology.

Selected exhibitions/prizes: first place in the Media Art Diplomas Competition, Wro Art Center 2016, honorary distinction in the Best Diplomas from Academies of Fine Arts 2016 competition, Gdansk 2015, participated in the *Trzy Czte Ry! Performance!* project *Scena jako miejsce wynegocjowane* (*The scene as a negotiated space*), BWA gallery, Zielona Góra, 2015, participated in the VI Youth Biennale in Orońsko, 2012, performance at the International Art Festival INTERAKCJE in Piotrków Trybunalski, 2011.

Patrycja Ryłko in conversation with Małgorzata Michałowska

Constant search

Patrycja Ryłko

Can you tell me about the idea behind your *Everyday Performance* project, the one presented in the Project Space? What are its exact parameters – besides a certain episodic repeatability of the performance, the systematic rehearsal of everyday life and the time frame you imposed on it?

Małgorzata Michałowska

Everyday performance was about doing the same performance every day and recording it with a camera. The idea was about referring both to the regularity inherent to the project and the context of the actual activities – the actions and gestures that are a part of everyday life.

The aim of the project was to stir up a dialog and, most of all, examine the relations between the daily work on a performance, the performance itself, and the performer's private life.

I was always interested in the duty to create art and its influence on artists' creative processes – the influence of regularity, deadlines, limitations, creativity and all the other things that stem from being formally beholden to an institution and from what is expected of an artist.

This is how I created the framework that I imposed on myself: the daily rhythm of working on the performance, production, postproduction, publishing, writing and, during the exhibition, also sending the video performance to the *U-jazdowski*. With time, the project expanded to include the necessity of reconciling it with my personal life and socioeconomic situation.

Patrycja Ryłko

What made you take up such a methodical, but at the same time utopian, project?

Małgorzata Michałowska

I don't think the idea is utopian. The experience of working in a task-based system with stiff deadlines that I gained at the Academy and in other institutions has taught me that it's easy to make the wrong assumptions both with regards to the time frame and the creativity required to see a project through.

It would seem that a performance can be completely planned out, but in fact its course and final effect are unknown from the moment it starts to the moment it ends. Planning is an unending process of selection and elimination, and one that doesn't even consider the use of the medium.

Patrycja Ryłko

Your project is definitely very open and processual. I bet it influenced the way you see reality – maybe as a constant search for the subject of your next work? What did your daily work look like? How did you filter reality and pick the parts you wanted to emphasize? What happened between the episodes that the visitors saw on the screen?

Małgorzata Michałowska

The thing that doing all this in such a short time and creating a new performance every day gave me was definitely sensitivity, alertness, and a fascination with the amount of stimuli and emotions around me. I also understood the natural drive to get to the essence of gestures and meanings, to draw

from culture as well as my intuition. I concentrated on reducing the unnecessary aesthetic, and sometimes semantic, superstructure. I really cut down the duration of the performances, partly thanks to the fact that it all took place on video, partly because I limited the theatricality of the situations I arranged.

Patrycja Ryłko

How do you work when you're on camera? I'm mostly interested in how the camera itself influences your performative actions.

Małgorzata Michałowska

I didn't just use cameras to record the way the performances happened. Sometimes the cameras would take an active part in them or even generate performances in which they themselves were used. One of the methods of performative utterance that I developed during this project was dialoging with the camera. Experiencing the difference between performance and video performance made me see each one of them within the context of space. It made me see how they relate to the screen and the camera; the difference between "coming into being" and "occurring" when the lens of the camera becomes the audience, and when the physical presence of others is transformed into an anonymous recipient, into someone looking at a screen.

Only a few of the video performances were edited. Turning the camera on and off are just the start and end of a performance. The rest is pure reality unadulterated by performance. Sometimes it's curtains, perform, go back. A particular moment.

Patrycja Ryłko

The subjects which you examine in your works – the role of the performer, the artistic gesture – are integral parts of the history of performance. Which tools do you use to analyze them?

Małgorzata Michałowska

I often compose my performances using a combination of costumes, props, and surroundings. These are semiologically and culturally motivated elements of the language of symbols that has become a staple of performance art. Using common cultural phenomena, our bodies or our societal roles, which are the elements that make up our collective conscience, is something natural, but it can also be done consciously.

Can you create a unique performance using such props as a red lipstick, bread, a fish or a candle? Does using them automatically generate a pre-determined meaning? Why are some props used so often in performance art? Should performers dress appropriately (white shirt, nude underwear), or just the opposite – undress completely? Does the body of a female performer, especially if it's naked, give the performance a feminist aspect even if the artist didn't intend it to have any?

I'm trying to answer all these questions by using these objects, outfits, and situations. And so the gestures and performances generated some combinations: studio, lipstick, white shirt; studio, bread, nude underwear; studio, black clothes, candle...

I examined the conditions that led me to make certain decisions about using these things. These examinations are part phenomenology and semiology, and part parody – "the props and costume of a performer." This is the subject of my theoretical explorations.

Patrycja Ryłko

You decided to start the exhibition off with a single video and then add a new one every day. This involved the viewers in the actual time and rhythm of your work. The exhibition ended with a showing of over thirty videos. This format made it very clear that your actions were performed for the camera. I was wondering if you thought about any other means of distributing this project. Can it function outside the constraints of an exhibition?

Małgorzata Michałowska

Everything depends on whether I want the camera to participate in the performance or just document it. The assumption was to record and thus catalog all the performances. Outside of the exhibition, the videos were also saved on digital media and published on the web. The whole thing doesn't clash with creating more complex works or doing performances in front of an audience. It might even complement it. The project itself wasn't made with any particular exhibition in mind. I first decided to do the project, and then figured out the way it should be exhibited.

Patrycja Ryłko

We're talking a few months after the *U-jazdowski* exhibition. During this time some of the assumptions of the project, especially the practicality of producing a new performance every day, have been verified by reality. Did you manage to maintain the original regularity of your work?

Małgorzata Michałowska

Performers involve their whole selves in the creative process: their bodies, psyches, emotions. They often face pain, fatigue, and emotional instability. Working on performances every day led me to consider taking a break from art – I was overloaded,

lost faith and couldn't reconcile my daily life with my creative work. I was also slowly coming to terms with the fact that this wasn't going to be a year-long project, which is what I called it in the first note about *Everyday performance*.

Still, when I stopped doing the project daily I felt like I had failed. So did others. However when I think about the other assumptions of the project, such as examining the influence of intensive regularity on creativity and the possibility of reconciling daily, time-consuming, badly paid and expensive work with everyday life – my current state feels like a result, like the end of the "first wave" of daily performances. I don't feel like the project has ended yet.

Patrycja Ryłko

How much does the surrounding reality directly influence your creative practices, and how much do your creative practices influence your personal life? What has really changed in your life and art during these few months?

Małgorzata Michałowska

For a hundred and four days I performed the project, for seventy I published and wrote about the video performances on the web, for thirty the works sent by me were displayed on screens in the {Project Room}.

I learned how creativity can go hand in hand with effort. I often battled with my own judgment of my performative gestures and the tendency to aestheticize my works that I picked up from the academy. The time pressure made me feel burned out, tired, coerced, and devoid of energy.

As it turned out, the biggest challenge that I faced during the project wasn't a depletion of my creativity, but the way it conflicted with my personal life. What I mean by that is also my financial situation as a registered unemployed person, a graduate

of the Academy of Fine Arts, working on a very intense project. Currently very few artists can afford to be artists.

Art definitely affects life, just like life affects art – as well as our ability to create it. The *Everyday Performance* project keeps on developing naturally. Sometimes it's my main priority; sometimes my personal life takes over. But the project is based on my emotions and reflections, so the whole thing is very natural and cyclical.

16/02—19/03/2017

Mateusz Kula

Excavations





The forms prepared by Mateusz Kula attract attention with the deposits of dirt sensed under a coating of tasty abstraction. It's like a scaled decoration from an avant-garde performance, a lunatic's drawing, or a lavish children's dance. Their rickety structure resembles a psychedelic western film set, or a futurist museum of natural history. A giant horn, a giant shrimp, a lopsided totem – it all seems familiar. As in a Rorschach test, they remind us of memories which have extensively tormented the viewer's imagination in the past. The background for these carnival objects consists of walls covered densely with thick strips of cut up pictures that won't ever meet again. They are like fossils crushed into tiny fragments. These forms – stacked in neat rows – are the starting point for further action, a basis of prototypes demanding materialization via three-dimensionality.

The study of the imagination is Kula's objective; ever since he can remember, he has been interested in the different kinds of classifications and in the gestures that set images in motion. The organic aspect of his works places him in a secondary position as they grow on their own terms; however, he is very enthusiastic about his role as the withdrawn initiator of a creative process. He even defines himself as a modest intermediary between collected visual events and the recipient; an enthusiast, who builds his collection without a clearly defined purpose. Perhaps that is why his latest collection resembles an updated version of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* by Abe Warburg – an iconographic collection examining the mechanisms of the collective memory. Nevertheless, Kula intersperses far more down-to-earth territories.

The area wherein he seeks templates for his forms is the significantly less-developed territory of Poland. It is a place where, according to artists from Warsaw, civilization ends and an aesthetic *interior* begins – unleashing the imagination. A land filled with fog, slush, and darkness; the world of cheap products, abandoned billboards, dodgy hairdressers, and rubbish. This visibility of Poland's peripheries appears here as a gigantic museum, which must be cataloged and named.

Attempting this exhausting task, Kula reaches for a popular collection of clipart dating back to the early nineties, coming from the catalog added to the program Corel Draw 3.0. It was the impetus for the emergence of small printing companies that shaped the appearance of the cities of the former Eastern bloc. Kula re-scales the art found there; accordingly, he goes on a journey to the beginning of advertising.

After ripping clipart from its natural environment, he treats the pieces with the delicacy of an experienced archaeologist who carefully bends together every new discovery. Under intense focus, he dismembers them into initial pieces; he cuts, and rearranges them – taking away the colors or the details. Now, being in a gallery, the viewer can reinterpret their meaning; faulty forms wheedle the viewer, showing their better side. Well-mannered design is being left far behind the visual garbage – an embarrassing aesthetic that concerns us much more than we think.

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exhibition coordination
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Aleksandra
Knychalska
illustration
Karolina Pietrzyk
text
Marta Lisok

Mateusz Kula

was born in 1983. He is the creator of installations, texts, objects, photographs, and videos. He studied philosophy and film studies at Jagiellonian University, Intermedia at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, and Art & Science at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. Currently, he is working on a doctorate in the Faculty of Intermedia at the University of Fine Arts in Poznań. Kula is also a member of the Foundation '36,6. He has participated in the following exhibitions: *SFX: AUDIENCE* at the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Munster in 2005; *Imhibition* at the National Museum in Kraków in 2006; *Ain't No Sorry* at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2009; *Body in the Library* at BWA Wrocław in 2010; *Filling the blanks. Tribute to Jerzy Ludwiński.* in 2011 at the CCA Znaki Czasu in Toruń; *Jeff Koons' Gloves* at the CCA Kronika in Bytom in 2012; in the project *Spoczywanie* in 2015; *All Mounds Can Be Seen From My Window* at Bunkier Sztuki Gallery in 2016. Most important solo exhibitions: *End of Time* at the Kunsthaus in Dresden in 2015 and *Zestawy* at Widna Gallery in Kraków in 2016. His works can be found in the collections of the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery, Miroslav Kubik Gallery in Litomyśl, and the CCA Kronika Gallery in Bytom. He lives and works in Kraków.

Marta Lisok in conversation with Mateusz Kula

Simply collecting

Marta Lisok

You've recently prepared three exhibitions which deal with, as you've pointed out, the aesthetics of poverty. Stacked forms built with found objects pullulated into temporary arrangements during the recent *Zestawy (Sets)* at the Widna Gallery in Cracow, *Excavations* in the *U-jazdowski* {Project Room} and *Pozostałości (Remains)* at Zona Sztuki Aktualnej in Szczecin. You're an avid collector. Why are you so interested in the idea of collections?

Mateusz Kula

My first experiences of collecting are related to my interests from my childhood and early teens. Living in the Eastern Bloc before the digital revolution was centered around things that were available in second-hand book shops, newsstands and open-air markets. There were also other forms of analog exchange through networks of friends. We collected prints and records in their various forms. The world of filled wall units was a formative period for me. Similarly, the unguided process of obtaining knowledge and reading material followed the path of research and collecting. Amassing music, books and other products of the entertainment industry was my main daily activity in the carefree years of junior and high school. I also partook in marijuana and psychedelic drugs, which were then entering the Polish underground – getting them was also a form of collecting. Things such as acid and mushrooms were often stored in specially prepared incubators for extended periods of time. I still remember the hallu-

cinogenic mushrooms suspended in honey inside glass jars. Psychedelic experiences and collecting these substances went hand in hand with the way I obtained cultural products. This shaped the way I work today and to which I'm loyal. The period of political transformation, when the market was flooded with products which had to be sifted through, picked over and so on, gave prominence to the figure of the collector. I could go so far as to say that grassroots, feeble modes of the accumulation of goods under the nascent capitalism of the transitory period shaped my subjective and artistic strategy. The diachronic nature of the market, the opening of the historical narrative and its collage-like juxtaposition of entire eras using trite objects is the basic weapon which the subject can use to protect himself against the ideological steamroller. Interacting with commodities and signs is still my main way of orientating myself in my surroundings.

Marta Lisok

What's your goal in tracking the aesthetic shame of the repressed? Why is the dirty, dusty, unwanted, useless, and putrid more appealing than the shiny, fresh, and new?

Mateusz Kula

I think that the dirty and unwanted – much like the repressed – is very powerful. To speak in the most general terms, it seems to me that art is an activity that has the tools to face these dangers (because I think they are dangerous) so that they don't appear in politics. It seems to me that if we manage to include these things in truly dramatic art or work with them using comedic methods, then there's a chance that they

won't come back to us in the shape of political nightmares. I'm very interested in the comedic aspect here. I consider most of my works visual comedies. This has nothing to do with jokes. What I'm trying to do is show a certain absurdity, get some distance and make it possible to analyze the things inside us that are dangerous to ourselves.

Marta Lisok

Following in the footsteps of Aby Warburg, you examine the mechanism of collective memory. Your exhibitions are like time capsules, cabinets of curiosities, collections without a subject that compulsively archive reality. Do you ever try to classify or label these collections? Do you examine them further or process them intellectually?

Mateusz Kula

Many of my works mature with time. I archive everything and postpone it until some undefined "later." I really like working in a manner in which my decisive capacity is limited to that of a custodian of artifacts that I, for unknown reasons, create myself. I'm not quite sure what they mean, but I know they must come into being. This is the difference between the methods of art and intellectual reflection. Here, everything happens through associations and operates at the visual level. Intellectual insight is just something additional. Conversations like this one, lectures and other public speeches are an opportunity to summarize and rethink things. I think that in a few years I'll start juxtaposing collections from different orders. Currently I'm most interested in the moment of political transformation and how the visuality of that period relates to watershed moments in history, such as the Reformation. I'm planning to devote my doctoral thesis to juxtaposing the iconography of the renaissance hermeticist tradition with prints from the 80s

and 90s. It seems incredibly appealing to me. Placing familiar and deceptively trite stories in a wider historical context allows one to see the momentousness hidden in small, inconspicuous objects, stories, and artifacts.

Marta Lisok

You studied in Vienna. Did the atmosphere of that city have an influence on the form of your recent works?

Mateusz Kula

In Vienna, I was interested in motives related to ornaments. In particular the combination of fear and attraction that the Viennese have towards ornaments and the broadly understood biologism, which has an especially strong presence in the works of Adolf Loos, whose racist views make very clear the connection between modernity and fascism. This is of course and old tale we've heard from Adorno and Horkheimer, however in Vienna, which even today combines the positivist paradigm of science with heavy idealistic metaphysics, it's still very palpable. It's a city overtaken by a kind of historical fever, full of antique shops, fashion and home decor handicraft, and antiquaries. The Hegelian category of *Erinnerung* manifests itself here with a great impetus. The diachronic work of a genius, exemplified by Konrad from Thomas Bernhard's *Kalkwerk*, is an immanent element of this city. Vienna is a fantastic place for research on bourgeois culture, its ambivalence and its work ethic. The insanity of retracting subjectivity back into the life project takes on a clinical form here, which leads to the mania of removing ornaments of which Vienna is, paradoxically, the European capital. This is where Ernst Gombrich wrote his first works, including his introduction to *The Sense of Order*, which says a lot about Vienna.

The oldest Persian rug in Europe is stored there, in the archives of the museum of the university which I studied at. Moreover, Vienna is a city of undergrounds, of *katabasis*, death and bourgeois radicalism understood as a return to the roots. It's the verso of the phantasy about a unidimensional bourgeoisie. Everything here functions within the mutual cancellation of perfectly geometric, dry architecture and wet, biological orientalism. The wet-dry opposition, described by Jonathan Littell among others, takes on a new, dialectical dimension here. One should descend into the Viennese underground to see that here fascism is wet, sexual and biological. It's naturally complemented by the dryness of modernist architecture and home interiors which give the moist fascist a moment to catch his breath after he returns from the whorehouse district to get back to working on his life project. Here, wet and dry elements are subordinate to their functions and intermingled in what's hidden. The kind of generalized Viennese whom I was interested in is a late-capitalist bourgeois, outwardly dry, with geometric muscles carved out by fitness machines and draped in an expensive suit – a suit stained with shellfish and bodily effusions. This character is attracted to prostitutes and classy restaurants. Expensive, handmade details of clothing and home decor accumulate traces of the commoditized circulation of people and things. He spends his life in clubs for lonely swingers, the opera, cafes, and jewelry stores. A piece of steaming *apfelstrudel* placed on a tiny plate with the name of the Ritz-Carlton hotel written on it in subtle lettering and being picked at with an ornamented spoon in the company of a high-class prostitute

from Eastern Europe is a metaphor that actualizes the libidinal structure of old Europe. Wet orientalism and dry fascist modernism in one picture. No wonder that this is the favorite city of Russian and Ukrainian gangsters, oligarchs and political criminals. The city has been welcoming them with open arms for years. Budapest, the European porn capital, is right next to it. Budapest is also where the girls who walk the Viennese streets are recruited. The world of affluent bourgeoisie and a sexual hell-hole live in perfect symbiosis. It might be worth considering if it's just a coincidence that the paternal pathology of Josef Fritzl (with his rich, Catholic-whorehouse history that preceded the discovery of his family's nightmare) happened in an Austrian cellar. One could also give some thought to whether the socialization of the crimes perpetrated by Unterweger (who mostly targeted prostitutes) and making him a media star would be possible in a different, less paradoxical and dialectically wound-up country.

However, I would like to make one thing clear: Austria is not the issue of Austrians. It doesn't matter that it's Austria. Above all it's Europe and the real tragedy of its idea of Enlightenment which is very visible, and thus nameable and examinable, in Austria. The tragic elements have been condensed in Vienna, which is why the city remains so fascinating to me. These things are universal to all of Europe. Austria is the proving ground of the constant actualization of the dark side of the European Enlightenment. It was with this thought in mind that I went there to study. I chose "Art & Science" as my specialization because Vienna has a very peculiar scholarly tradition. Its positivist, empirical, and Enlightenment-inspired version has always been balanced by the tradition of pagan pseudoscience

combining earth mysticism, theosophy, runic magic, etc. The esoteric path, built on top of scientific discoveries, developed in parallel with the natural sciences. The line continues even today. Today's Vienna could be considered to be the European center of scientific new-ageism exemplified by neuroscience and quantum physics.

Marta Lisok

Do you notice any differences in how art is taught in universities in Poland and Austria?

Mateusz Kula

The difference is money and equipment. Besides that the work is very similar: individual projects, consultations, corrections, finalization. Austrian universities are definitely more open to suggestions and ideas from students. Another huge positive is that students can influence the shape of the curriculum and even the employment status of teaching staff, which makes universities more democratic. One key characteristic of my studies was the ability to choose institutional partners who specialize in science, such as the Institute for Wildlife Ecology and the Vienna General Hospital (AKH). Both these worlds – the world of wildlife and the world of medicine – were the main points of reference for my university projects. Viennese medicine has a very long tradition organized around the Natural Sci-

ences Society which once expelled Freud in a pretty spectacular manner. Here, the Enlightenment-fascist narrative of hard science goes hand in hand with the German-speaking countries' entirely mythological fascination with the motive of a wild, thick and dark forest (*Deutscher Wald*). Vienna is full of men in gamekeeper's jackets and hats. This kind of clothing has entered into the iconographic canon of Viennese streets. The same is true about food and the general rustic, ornamental atmosphere of the entire city. Both these worlds are depicted in a very interesting manner in Bernhard's novel titled *Gargoyles*. Getting back to the university – it's hard for me to speak arbitrarily because my department was very isolated from the rest of the academy which itself is very different from typical academies of fine arts. I was definitely inspired by the guest lectures organized by my university, which gave us a chance to start a dialog with such modern thinkers as Graham Harman and Boris Groys.

The economic standing of these universities gave me, as a student, the chance to enjoy a trip to the CERN center for quantum physics and work with interesting researchers in the field of natural sciences.

23/03—23/04/2017

Cezary Poniatowski *Compost*





The title of the exhibition by Cezary Poniowski, as it is presented within the framework of {Bank Pekao Project Room}, refers to one of the paintings in which the artist captured the characters and motifs typical of his work in a joyous, peristaltic dance. The installation was inspired by the painting's motifs and acts as its spatial interpretation as well as the evolution of the ideas contained therein. It is an invitation to advance inside the artist, inside the space, wherein the remnants of reality, art, and experience are subject to the processes of decomposition and decay and ultimately change into the material of future operations.

Composting is one of the deterioration processes of organic matter, different from anaerobic decomposition. It involves the controlled microbial decomposition of organic substances.

Its result is fertile humus, a material that allows for the growth of new organisms.

The theory of composting, transposed by the creators of the exhibition to the field of art, undergoes two different considerations.

Compost acts here as a metaphor for commonly applied creative methods – artists cannibalize their own experiences as well as those of others, forming a closed circuit, the basis of the art world's metabolism. On the other hand, interest in the decomposition of organic matter becomes a commentary on current political events. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" – Poniowski's work stems from a sense of anxiety associated with the abandonment of the current meanings of words, leaving behind existing consensuses, turning around towards a mythologized version of the past.

However, the artist avoids nihilistic beliefs about the inevitable end and the coming destruction of civilization. He avoids a mentoring tone, or naive attempts at indicating a way out of a complicated situation. Through his work, he reminds us that an oxygenated environment and the right temperature are enough to transform decaying rot into useful fertilizer.

Cezary Poniowski

was born in 1987 in Olsztyn. He studied at the Faculty of Graphic Art of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, from which he graduated in 2012. Winner of the Grand Prix XI Geppert Competition in Wrocław in 2013. He paints and draws, in addition to creating collages, objects, and installations. He has participated in exhibitions, among others, at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, BWA Wrocław Gallery, BWA Tarnów Gallery, BWA Olsztyn Gallery, and the Labyrinth Gallery in Lublin. He collaborates with the Piktogram Gallery. He has been awarded the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Scholarship. He lives and works in Warsaw.

curator
Szymon Żydek

sculpture
Cezary Poniowski
Bartosz Sandecki
Alfred Laskowski

sound installation
Lubomir Grzelak

exhibition coordination
Michał Grzegorzek

illustration
Karolina Pietrzyk

text
Szymon Żydek

Going inside the painting

Szymon Żydek

During my last visit to your studio I got the impression that you have adopted a radical approach towards moving beyond the two-dimensionality of painting. Your relationship with this medium was one of the key motives of our {Project Room} exhibition. Your newest works show that you're consistently working on a new chapter in this story – can you tell us something about them?

Cezary Poniatowski

I've been painting more and more rarely for some time now. I became interested in new materials that I had never used before, such as upholstery foam, pleather, nails, staples and glue. In effect my new works look like bas-reliefs created using upholstering techniques and attached to a wooden base. Stylistically they are similar to my paintings, I'm continuing with my earlier motifs. But I think that these new techniques make the scenes fuller, more saturated. The concavities, convexities, and plays on the idea of bas-relief make the characters' situations even more tragicomic, they makes the pieces seem like an "elevated farce." The characters want to escape the piece, but they're attached to it with staples and nails. They're stuck inside a show and enslaved, but also very strong and motivated. Perhaps a bit like traditional zombies. The living dead whose brains have been taken over and who are diligently doing their work. I really like the fact that the physical effort and energy I put into making these bas-reliefs is clearly visible in the pieces. The marks left by tools, glue, hammers,

and knives are absorbed by the piece and become an integral part of it.

Szymon Żydek

Could you please expand on the motive of narrativity in your works? Your paintings are often seen as anti-narrative compositions which play on some recurring motifs.

Cezary Poniatowski

Everything I do is absolutely narrative. However not in the traditional sense of linear narration. My works are not illustrations either. They're a kind of a pulp, a pot where different sensations and situations crystallize, mutate, transform, and intermingle. This is why the resulting narrative is so torn up and cut up. The aesthetic of my works is a side effect.

Szymon Żydek

This leads us straight to the {Project Room} exhibition.

Cezary Poniatowski

Yes. I try to approach the things I do, not as chapters in a story, but as parts of a large cycle, of a bigger whole. This way everything means something. In the case of *Compost* the initial idea was to make it a space for all the things that I had in the back of my head but for some reason had never done. You remember that initially the exhibition was meant to have multiple threads, but they merged into one as we worked on the concept. I treated these different threads as waste that was later synthesized. By being "composted" they became a useful fertilizer, the core of the exhibition. I did the whole thing in the spirit of cut-up narration. This gave the exhibition its meta-fictional character – it became an exhibi-

tion about making an exhibition. I wanted the visitors to feel like they were entering a different dimension, but one that is very close to them and, in a way, familiar and organic. At first I thought that this could be achieved using introspection – moving around the artist's head like a mind palace full of rooms and corridors. As I was working on the exhibition, I realized that it was more interesting to go into the artist's guts, his insides, which resulted in the whole thing being more organic. Parts of the compositions and the techniques I used are similar to the ones in my paintings. The end result is a theatrical situation, an event halfway between dream and reality, something very nuanced and impression-based.

Szymon Żydek

What is the role of the disturbing waiter in this whole situation?

Cezary Poniatowski

The waiter was something that I think naturally became the center of the whole scene. This very disturbing amorphous character who emerged from the ground is made of the things beneath our feet and is carrying some kind of dish on a tray with his back turned to the viewers. An enigmatic character with a sardonic smile appeared in my works some time ago. He often dances or otherwise coquets the viewer. One could think that he rules the entire image, but also that the whole scene overwhelms him. He's a hero that takes on many forms but remains nameless for the time being. I think he's a quasi-narrator or a demiurge-super-numerary. He takes part in the whole situation in a very suggestive way, but mocks it at the same time. The character makes my paintings look like genre art, which is because the scenes themselves don't really have a particular subject. They're not illustrative.

Szymon Żydek

The waiter is surrounded by composters which, thanks to the shadow play you created, look like dreary, dystopian architecture.

Cezary Poniatowski

The composters are where the titular process of composting – turning waste into useful material – took place. It's a comment on how artists work and on what processes take place inside them: the way they analyze reality, juxtapose the things they see with what they feel, how these things complement each other. The exhibition affects multiple senses. When you enter the room you feel like you're in a different dimension. The room is full of fog made by the composters. The whole thing is brought together by sound – a piece of music made special for that exhibition by Lubomir Grzelak, which starts with a few piano sounds, a pompous, monumental composition. With time the composition starts to fall apart and rot. Something goes wrong with it. The structure of the musical piece is similar to that of the entire exhibition. Lubomir recorded layered sounds on a deteriorated tape, much like William Basinski in his "The Disintegration Loops." The composition changed its tempo; it fell apart to come together again. A repeating piano melody was at its core. With time more and more samples that you can almost, but not quite, recognize, appeared. The whole thing had the effect of being grotesque, artificially pompous.

Szymon Żydek

Watching the reactions of the people entering this world you created was very interesting. Some people treated the situation like a party at a club, others sat on the soft carpet and contemplated the whole thing.

Cezary Poniatoski

Yes, all these things were present in that space – references to club culture, hypnotism or reflective action, references to movies. Many visitors felt like they were entering a movie set. I think that the multi-threadedness of the piece was a result of teamwork. In working on it I had the chance to feel like a movie director and rely on the talents of other people involved in this endeavor. By that I mean Bartosz Sandecki and Alfred Laskowski who built the waiter, Lubomir Grzelak who scored the exhibition, as well as Michał Grzegorzek and you, who helped me conceptualize the whole idea. Looking at the project a few months later I think that this was a key aspect of it – teamwork. Teamwork based on trust and giving people room to make their own autonomous decisions. I think this is why the final reception was so varied. The exhibition was a crystallization of many different approaches combined into one piece.

27/04–28/05/2017

Anna Orłowska

Sunday Night Drama





In a permanent refuge, the most important thing is the conviction of its impermeability. If only for looks – and the fantasy of a passive bystander coming along – whenever one wants to turn off the rush of reality and rest one's eyes.

The past, especially of one's dreams, borrowed – and un-lived – seems to be one of these refuges. Pushing towards it is the Walter Benjamin sentiment, which can be treated as a sort of escape from the complexity of reality.

One example of such an escape is a fascination with the pre-war lifestyle of the privileged classes. It has been growing since the mid-twentieth century, along with a fashion for trips to British country residences and the popular literature of the era, British period dramas and films like *Gosford Park*, and finally the restaurants of Polish castles such as Pszczyna, Łańcut, or Moszna. In all these places a need arises to look into the past, whose very depiction is the fulfillment of the promises of the “good old days,” in which the rules were simple and followed, the hierarchy of power unchanging, and the environment beautiful and sublime. Anna Orłowska, through the exhibition *Sunday Night Drama*, herself admits to cultivating such escapes and also to attempts of delicately deconstructing them.

What is most significant in this trend, which speaks to the masses' imagination, seems to be the palace with its complicated, box-shaped structure. Therefore, Orłowska takes a perfect image of a building together with its interior architecture as the starting point and frame for this visual deconstruction. It is her giving it the specific characteristics of a complex organism with two blood vessels; they are separated by rigid rules and doors hidden behind ornamented wooden paneling.

The first, belonging to the aristocracy, flowed through all the main rooms that today's tour-

ists admire. The stylish interiors, ornate furniture, stucco – all bathed in light, to better show the wealth and status of the owners. In their surroundings, the piercing pace of contemporary life, every second counted, is becoming almost perceptible. The palaces' spaces were designed in opposition to this feeling. They acted as arenas wherein those in power manifested a discord over the effective, pragmatic approach to time itself. Hence the concept of the Leisure Class, proposed by Thorstein Veblen. Leisureness is a form that is realized through the acquirement and practice of useless knowledge – the complex etiquettes of rituals and gestures. An example may be the refusal to install a fixed bathroom in the palace, because the bathtub should be brought to its master. So, your time and those of others was wasted – for show and in front of those who could never reach such a state.

The second blood vessel belonged to those who carried that bath; usually remaining invisible to tourists, and sometimes marginalized by researchers. It ran through narrow corridors, often hidden in walls surrounding the grand rooms, through the tunnels, into the windowless kitchens. There, time was counted directly by the masters of the household in proportion to the possibility of it being wasted. The servants were, therefore, along with the double architecture of the castle, part of the mechanism that allowed the leisure form to function. This all had to be carried out invisibly, so that leisureness itself remained light, with no apparent signs of effort.

Anna Orłowska discovers the complexity of this system, drawing attention to the omitted part of the ideal image of the palace lifestyle. In the course of ensuing visits to palaces and the exploration of

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special thanks to:
the Castle Museum in Pszczyna, the Łańcut Castle Museum, the Museum in Nieborów and in Arkadia and the Castle in Moszna.

attractions based on costume games, she discerns the often unconscious cultivation of this invisibility of the former servants in the activities of contemporary hosts. Many of the premises, even before the arrival of the restaurateurs, were walled or converted into offices thereby amputating half of the palace body. The artist understands the fate embedded in the very architecture of the objects, which in the moment of their being designed, as well as now, is an attempt to put a stop to the visible traces of the servants' activities, sealing the permanence of this perfect image.

Anna Orłowska

was born in 1986. She received an MFA from the Photography Department at the National Film School in Łódź, Poland (2011) and an undergraduate degree from the Institute of Creative Photography in Opava, Czech Republic (2013). She has participated in numerous group shows including *reGeneration2: Tomorrow's Photographers Today* presented at the Musée de l'Elysée in Lausanne, Switzerland and the Aperture Foundation in New York. Author of several solo exhibitions including *Case study: invisibility* at the Josef Sudek Studio in Prague and at the Asymetria Gallery in Warsaw, and *Leakage and other works* at the Panopticon in Stockholm. In 2013, she was awarded a scholarship to the PhotoGlobal program at the School of Visual Arts in New York, and was awarded a prize at the International Festival of Fashion and Photography in Hyeres, France. She was also nominated for the Discovery Award at Rencontres d'Arles in 2015. In 2017, she received The Overseas Photographer Award at the Higashikawa Awards.

What is fascinating about escaping into the past of the palatial lifestyle, is a certain viscosity and sweetness accompanying the ideal image; the same escape, which we know from numerous guilty pleasures. In subsequent works in the exhibition *Sunday Night Drama*, Orłowska gives the viewer a variety of visual flavors, which may be unbeknownst to a tourist. Fragile, sugar-coated structures and moving images in paraffin baths make up the unknown face of a sweet refuge.

Jakub Śwircz in conversation with Anna Orłowska

The figure of the castle and its presence in culture

Jakub Śwircz

What do palaces mean to you?

Anna Orłowska

Palaces and castles are the scenery of fables and movies; they are the places where history happens. Something that represents the past, belongs to the old order, is outdated. Seemingly. When we start analyzing it, it becomes a very versatile figure, a Chinese box whose form hides multiple meanings.

Jakub Śwircz

Where does the story start? Your {Project Room} exhibition seems to be more of a continuation of your earlier work than something entirely separate. It seems to me, and I've known you for a few years, that the beginning must be further back in the past.

Anna Orłowska

The figure of the castle and its presence in culture was the starting point. But what came even earlier was my personal fascination with these buildings and the mysterious, long-gone life which used to go on inside their walls but today interests few people, except of course for historians and some fans of historical movies, of which I am one. I used to wonder about what the sentiment towards these images of the past signifies, and to what degree they are artificial creations of cinema and literature. I also remember my work from a few years ago – *Case study: invisibility* – which deals with a small hunting castle which I used to visit when I was a child. After the war, the small castle was turned into a facility

for the mentally disabled. The fact that it was located deep within the forest, far away from our small town, was supposed to – according to official responses to questions asked by us, the local children – “protect its inhabitants.”

Jakub Śwircz

This is just one example of many similar transformations.

Anna Orłowska

After the Second World War castles were nationalized and repurposed – divided, remodeled and adapted to new purposes which were completely incompatible with their architecture. I started by photographing these visual transformations, traces, rifts, and shifts. I've been interested in the castle in Moszna near Opole, where I come from, for a long time. Tracing the history of this place is like looking at the history of the 19th and 20th centuries through a magnifying glass. The castle in Moszna in its current shape was built by the Thiele-Wincklers – a German family which managed to climb to the top of the social ladder in just three generations, a success reflected by this fairytale palace. From then on its history was very similar to that of other Silesian palaces. The owners were chased away, and the building destroyed by Soviet troops who burned books and parquet tiles in its fireplaces. After the war, the palace became a neurosis treatment facility and then, recently, a hotel, where tourists can go on guided tours accompanied by a ghost. All these things leave visual traces on the building.

Jakub Śwircz

So, given this context, does the history of the Ujazdowski Castle mean anything to you?

Anna Orłowska

The Ujazdowski Castle is an example of using and repurposing a castle, which is why I really liked it as an exhibition space for my work, but its history is slightly different. It stopped being a residence as early as the 18th century and was first turned into army barracks, then into a hospital. Besides, it was rebuilt nearly from scratch in the 1970s. So its history is even more tangled.

Jakub Śwircz

Having seen your works commissioned by *U-jazdowski*, I have to ask you about your practices. Why do you keep looking for unique, personal techniques? We have a series of photos varnished with sugar glass; some works change their state of matter – for example the photographs in a wax bath which cyclically warms up and cools down.

Anna Orłowska

I thought a lot about the moment when an image becomes a thing, an object. We don't think about images the way we think about objects, perhaps because in a way they're a continuation of mental images, like a dream or something imaginary. A negative is a kind of an object, but its projection is just light. Photographic prints ensnare images, objectify them. Perhaps when I hide images behind different substances I am trying to give them back the power they have when they are pure light, their exciting ephemerality and brittleness. In the works you mentioned photographs are submerged in paraffin inside steel tubs. The system cyclically warms the tubs and melts the white wax, which turns transparent, like water, and an image emerges. Perhaps

it's a way to restore the experience of photographs as light, as something that has to "emerge"?

It may be a bit trite to say, but the aspect of experimentation and simple curiosity about the material, playing with it, is also important. Sometimes I also build objects for my photographs, but they remain hidden behind images – they don't smell, they don't change, they don't refract light. This time I allowed them to exist in parallel, which is why they complete each other, they create a relation. Wax and sugar take the place of the glass – they separate the photograph from the viewer, but they are also unstable, they change, drip down, they affect the image and the way it's experienced.

Jakub Śwircz

Even back when you were working on *Case study: invisibility*, architecture was one of the key things which interested you. The work featured a black castle – a rendering made based on your photographs. In *Sunday Night Drama* architecture becomes the key factor that organizes the entire logic of the project. You uncover the hidden interiors of palaces which used to serve (sic!) invisible servants. What draws you to architecture?

Anna Orłowska

I created a lot of works where I concentrated on different human artifacts and looked into what they say about us humans. Architecture is one of these artifacts, a very special one, because it can be overwritten and updated, but at the same time it's also quite long-lived. Which is why it can be perceived as a medium of history, memory or even energy. We assign it many incredible characteristics: a building can be haunted, cursed, good, bad, loved or hated – we have an emotional attitude towards it. A palace

is also a home – an overgrown, extravagant version of one which, thanks to someone's financial resources, became a materialization of the way its owners think, an expression of their intentions, tastes, aspirations and wants, but also – which they probably wouldn't want – of their prejudices and vanity. The emergence and development of notions like "home" or "comfort" is closely coupled with social changes, it shows the thinking of people from different eras. And palaces say a lot through their scale. This is explained very well in the book *Home. A Short History of an Idea* by Witold Rybczyński.

Palaces often have a double structure, a double bloodstream. They have a representative part, meant for the family, and a hidden one designed for the help in such a way that the servants could perform their duties in the least visible way possible. It's interesting to think about the kind of change that had to occur in society to transform a place where servants "sleep at the feet of their master's bed" to a sophisticated, hidden structure which makes it possible to keep interaction with that very same servant to the absolute minimum. I understood that these spaces were doubly hidden; first at the design stage, and then when the castles were transformed into museums – they were considered not interesting enough to maintain or display and usually turned into storage or offices. Which is why I wanted to look at the architecture of these unusual houses as a mechanism which allows one to see a certain microcosm of a much larger social system.

Jakub Śwircz

The organic and organic-like materials which you use in *Sunday Night Drama* force viewers to think about architecture in a more sensual manner. Do

you identify with the views expressed in books like *The Eyes of the Skin*?

Anna Orłowska

Let me answer with a quote: "They [buildings] project our human measures and sense of order into the measureless and meaningless natural space. Architecture does not make us inhabit worlds of mere fabrication and fantasy; it articulates the experience of our being-in-the-world and strengthens our sense of reality and self."

Pallasmaa also points out that we have organized architecture around a single sense – sight. Palaces are a great example of this tendency. Both their architecture and the spectacle of life which took place inside them were meant to be admired. The thing that disturbed this perfect image – the presence of servants – was concealed. This resulted in a paranoid but symptomatic situation. All the things and people that made the continuing existence of these beautiful images possible also had to remain outside of that very image, because they were like a visible seam that spoils a perfectly tailored outfit.

Jakub Śwircz

The exhibition also features a large vaulting which gives visual closure to the entire project. Where did it come from?

Anna Orłowska

It touches on another subject I find important, which is the history of gardens. More specifically I mean the fake ruins and pavilions in various historical styles which were built in gardens starting from the 18th century. The vaulting is a reproduction of a painting – a plafond located in a side bedroom of the Temple of Diana which is located in the romanticist Arkadia garden near Nieborowo. The pavilion was built as a presentation space for a collection of antique sculptures. The main room features

Jutrzenka (*Aurora*), a painting by Norblin, while the painting that I photographed is a sort of a splinter of that one, it doesn't feature any characters, just a vague shape of a cloud soaked in pink light. It's just that when I saw it first – this cut-off piece of heaven, the background itself like a theatrical stage decoration – it seemed disturbing to me. Although it depicts so little, the emptiness breeds anxiety. It also somehow seemed very contemporary to me. In many buildings the ceiling is a place – a huge “canvas” (a screen?) – which was used like a billboard: to express an idea, to dazzle or to moralize, which is why I didn't want it to be left out of my exhibition.

Jakub Śwircz

In the process of working on the *Sunday Night Drama* exhibition you've reached into places that are undergoing a rebirth or a deep reconstruction. Do you think that the need for such places is a symptom of something broader? For example a demand for some kind of national pride?

Anna Orłowska

This is a very complex subject. There aren't a lot of these places left in Poland anyway, so it's important to look after them. These are often first-class historical monuments, and yet they still suffer from underfinancing. We can analyze more than just the buildings themselves – we can also look at what we do with them. I mentioned the post-war nationalization, but in the Recovered Territories many palaces were completely demolished despite being in good shape. This is because they represented not just the “rotten aristocracy,” but also the German past of these lands. So the government was doubly interested in making them disappear. For example, this is what happened with the palace of the Thiele-Winckler family in the center of Katowice – it was demolished in the 70s, although earlier

there were plans to use it as a museum. The palace garden was converted into a public park with a monument to the fighters of the Silesian Uprisings. This total erasure of a place's history became the starting point for one of my earlier works. I built and photographed a mock-up of a hedge labyrinth whose shape was the same as the pathways in the old Winckler garden. In some strange, obscure way the shape seems to recall the characteristic form of the monument, as if it had been preserved the city's subconscious.

So the few remaining examples seem to point to a rift, a lack of certain people and places that used to play a key role in the way society functioned. Not just the castles, but also the manors and the entire culture of Polish landed gentry. They used to be the organizers of social life. Polish people need role models and they especially like to invoke the culture of the landed gentry, which they associate with tradition. Sadly, because of the rift and a certain lack of continuity, things are what they are – like “a bathtub with a colonnade,” to quote Filip Springer. We follow role models selectively. It seems that positive things, such as hiring good craftsmen and artists, haven't caught on, while a certain aspect of the drive to build fences, partitions and enclaves has put down solid roots in contemporary Poland.

Jakub Śwircz

Sunday Night Drama also deals with the subject of power. It's shown through the very concept of two spaces, but also through a reference to the notion of the leisure class. Do you think this class still exists?

Anna Orłowska

I'm not so sure about class divisions today. They're not as clear as they used to be, which doesn't mean that they're not there. They're just harder to grasp – they're more subtle and less obvious, but sometimes perhaps even more painful because of that. The idea of the leisure class was that its life consisted mostly of wasting time and resources to display status, wealth, and power. Veblen called this conspicuous consumption and claimed that, at some minimal level, it happens in every class. For a gentleman it was demeaning to work and his identity was based around not having to do any. It's funny that the exact opposite is true today. However, this doesn't mean that they never did anything. They were busy creating so-called useless knowledge – complicated rules, conventions and rituals, but one should stress that many of them also devoted their time to various scientific studies. It's thanks to passionate amateurs that great progress was made in such areas as botany and zoology in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Jakub Śwircz

When we started working on *Sunday Night Drama* you said that you wanted to touch on the subject of lifestyle as a concept. What is it to you?

Anna Orłowska

Yes, it turned out that carefully looking at castles provokes a reflection on class inequalities, economic dependencies, the tension between the things that are visible in social structures and the ones that are hidden. It was also unavoidable to look at the idea of lifestyle and its evolution. Today everyone constructs a lifestyle for themselves, whether they're doing so consciously or not. The notion is so widespread that we don't even think about where it came from. My intuition tells me that the

way we live now was in a way invented by the so-called leisure class. Different models for different things were adopted by the growing bourgeoisie in the 19th century. They are the ones who loved the display cabinet, which appears in the exhibition, more than any other type of furniture. The display cabinet allowed the owner to arrange items in a way that projected a certain image of himself. In the past only the privileged class had free time and the precise, even ritual, management of it was a way of projecting an image that attested to their position and status. Their lives were like images which were supposed to manifest power, superiority, or good taste. One good example, a very popular one, could be the Versailles of King Louis XIV. Today everyone tries to project an image of their life and include a message for others in it. A significant part of this now takes place on the web, but what we post there is still images of what we buy, eat or where we went on vacation. And, obviously, the way our apartments or homes look.

Jakub Śwircz

What about the unsettling photograph of a dark face? It looks like the embodiment of one of Lovecraft's or Poe's characters; she's stuck inside a wall.

Anna Orłowska

This photograph was inspired by an anecdote about the life of the help in English country houses. When a low-ranking member of the staff – and we should note that the help, just like the higher classes, followed a very strict hierarchy – met a family member, they had to turn their face to the wall and pretend that they didn't exist. All this so that the member of the household wouldn't have to start any kind of relationship with a person of such low stature. In the photograph the face kind of blends into the wall, and it's photographed

in a way that makes it hard to discern whether it's concave or convex. The blackness is tar, another unstable substance featured in the exhibition. It also reminds me of the black windows of a limo which hide the face of someone important.

Jakub Śwircz

Do you think that you've exhausted this subject with this project?

Anna Orłowska

Definitely not. Right now, I'm working on a publication which is going to include all the photographs I've taken in the aforementioned castles and palaces.

01/06—03/07/2017

Bracia [Brothers]

Not too shabby





What do Brothers do when no one is looking?

They are not going to invite just anybody to take part in their game; there is no place for haste or imposition. No playing around with contests, races, or prizes.

Agnieszka Klepacka and Maciej Chorąży, very peculiar twins indeed. In their surreal compositions, they give life to familiar objects, involving them in a parade of weirdness and ridicule. These objects reveal their hidden nature: glass melts like ice, a podium refuses to participate in a festival of hierarchies, Martin Creed's works are at the same time not his works.

One could think that this is just a school prank, and the rascals who played it are standing there, hands over their grinning mouths. But nothing could be further from the truth. Brotherhood, the artists' term from the title, is also a consistently followed idea. They are not interested in contemporary rivalry, the rigid limits of authorship or conventions that others would perhaps like to pigeonhole them with. They make their costumes from waste, cook chicken legs, investigate

satanic tattoos. Everything is the wrong way: inside out and upside down.

The subversive content and the aesthetics of *Brothers* bring one out of the everyday, both its monotony and pompousness. On seeing weeping glasses, the podium starts dancing with happiness (Or is it moved? Or, perhaps, relieved to lose its mindfulness?). A familiar concrete roller crushes flat everything in its way, like in a cartoon. Wild creepers race each other on Persian rugs. Martin Creed's neon lights make up a larger installation, an equation in which the sum of THINGS and FEELINGS are Brothers.

The artists have made use of the *U-jazdowski* collection, of the plastic ready-mades and complicated mechanical solutions. They light up neon lights which are not theirs, violate rules of orthography, rescale the classical white cube, and roll up ionic snails from duvets. They laugh and scream: now, that's fun! Chaos is order! Failure is victory!

Bracia [Brothers]

The duo was founded by Agnieszka Klepacka and Maciej Chorąży in 2011. The artists work together at the intersection of visual arts and theater, making stage designs and costumes for performances, installations, and spectacles. They mix up set orders and do not really follow any specific principles. Instead, they seek a language which is universal – understood both on stage and in a gallery. The junkyard of images and objects, as well as mass culture, are their sources of inspiration and provide infinite creative possibilities. *Bracia* are made up of things and feelings.

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Michał Grzegorzek

exhibition coordinator
Joanna Manecka

illustration
Karolina Pietrzyk

text
Michał Grzegorzek

The following art works by Martin Creed were presented at the exhibition: *Work no. 236 (FEELINGS)* and *Work no. 325 (THINGS)*. Courtesy the artist and Houser & Wirth Zurich London.

Michał Grzegorzek in conversation with Bracia [Brothers]

Institutional site-specific

Michał Grzegorzek

Do you get stressed out by interviews?

Bracia [Brothers]

A bit, especially in front of cameras. But sometimes they can lead to funny situations, like when we talked with one of the TV stations before the opening of the {Project Room} exhibition. It was a weird experience. The journalist tried to direct us in a way that only she understood: she sat us on armchairs, made us look at a piece and then asked us questions like: "What is this thing supposed to be, anyway?" None of our answers were good enough, so she tried to force us to use her words and kept us from using our own language. It was very hard to communicate. We talked and she nodded – which was supposed to mean that she understood everything – and then she would stop the cameras and say "that's all great, let's do this again, but more normally." It seems that the recording was never broadcasted.

Michał Grzegorzek

Is your language difficult for the viewers, too?

Bracia [Brothers]

It's not our intention to muddle the connection between us and the viewers. This just isn't something we're interested in. In fact we don't like art that cuts the viewer off from the artwork. Since we spend a lot of time together it's obvious that we've come up with some inside codes and gestures which we use to communicate. Many of our works are very lyrical, they're like graphic poems, which is why we try not to over-explain them. We'd rather leave room for interpretation.

Michał Grzegorzek

Still, language itself is very present in the exhibition which we've worked on together, whether it's through artistic lettering, puns or misspellings.

Bracia [Brothers]

Yes, but it doesn't serve an explanatory function. We consciously decided to not use titles and explanatory descriptions – we wanted the exhibition to be an adventure, a spontaneous experience. If there were to be some associations or contextualities we wanted them to be based on the viewers' spontaneity rather than to be explained by descriptions. We're interested in creating meanings collectively, together with the viewers. This is also what we enjoy in art in general.

Michał Grzegorzek

I found it difficult to decipher the title of the piece you made out of duvets and carpets. You arranged them into ionic columns that welcomed the visitors entering the exhibition. Can you tell me more about this piece?

Bracia [Brothers]

Google Image Search – we consider it the crowning piece of the exhibition, a jewel in the crown of this installation. We did a simple thing there, pretty similar to the Google search engine feature called "reverse image search": you send an image, and Google – after analyzing its patterns, shapes, color spectrum and other factors – returns visually similar ones. Instead of the tradition of ancient Greece, the lineage of Western Europe, we used Iranian carpets and rolled-up duvets, as if they were prepared for travel, for either moving out or running away. When you go to

a hotel – a symbol of nomadism – the bed linens and towels are often folded up into fancy shapes. You may come across a towel swan moored to the bed of a newlywed couple or an elaborate piece of origami made out of toilet paper.

Michał Grzegorzek

Do you avoid naming your pieces?

Bracia [Brothers]

Quite the opposite. For us naming the pieces is a part of the process, we pay a lot of attention to it. The tiles are often very long, they're almost poems. Sometimes the titles are so subversive that they change the meaning, or even the authorship, of a piece, like in the case of *3 prace Martina Creeda* (3 works by Martin Creed).

Michał Grzegorzek

Your pieces consist of words and associations, but they're mostly found objects. I know you have a large collection of those. Are you collectors or gatherers?

Bracia [Brothers]

We do a lot of gathering together, but mostly for work. We do our collecting separately.

Michał Grzegorzek

What about these separate collections?

Aga Klepacka

Maciej's collection is much bigger than mine, but it also deals with other things, just like our individual artistic practices are different. Brothers are a completely separate entity, they're not the simple sum of Aga Klepacka and Maciej Choraży. They're a completely different strategy and set of tools. Sometimes we all get together, like at the *Doniosłość kurzu* [Significance of dust] exhibition at the Museum of the Botanic Garden of Jagiellonian University which I curated, Brothers arranged and where Maciek and I presented our works.

The things I collect are related to the first botanical expeditions and the birth of anthropology – the mythical, forever lost childhood (or virginity) of travel and the naivety of collecting pieces of flora and fauna, artefacts from other cultures and ecosystems, and looking at them completely detached from their original context. I collect plants, stones, insects, bones, dusty books, devotional articles, cones, twigs – the more brittle and complicated something is, the more I like it – which forces me to deal with the preparation, securing and transport of very delicate specimens, often in very difficult conditions in the middle of nowhere. I reconstruct the way different natural scientists built their own collections. For instance: the scholar who discovered genetic variability had to (intentionally or not) collect many specimens of the same species of beetle, but had no space for them. It's also my attempt at reconstructing a long-dead manner of thinking about nature. You could always look at it as a way of storing structures – whether esthetic or genetic – in times of impending doom and mass extinction. But most days I don't.

Maciej Choraży

I can definitely say that I'm the owner and practitioner of a large collection of improbable objects. Like Aga I have a lot of pieces of nature, mostly ones I brought back from travelling to the tropics, such as seeds, stones, dried-up bugs, fishes, or plants. But toys are the majority of my collection, they rule over it. With time the collection also grew to include other categories: masks, brochures, counterfeit goods, unopened sweets, items with manufacturing errors or other curios that I found at home or abroad. These are the things that appeal to me the most. People often tell me to stop it when I, for instance, take a heavy rain-soaked toy lion with a cracked head from the

curb. I ended up taking it anyway, entirely because of the head. Aga never tells me to stop it, which is something I really like, but it doesn't really help me quit compulsively adding more and more things to that huge bag.

Michał Grzegorzek

Do you think that collecting can end?
Can a collection?

Bracia [Brothers]

We really want to believe that an affirmative answer exists, but we can't give one.

Michał Grzegorzek

When we were working on the exhibition I asked you to look at the collection of the Zamek Ujazdowski Center for Contemporary Art. Can you try to describe it?

Bracia [Brothers]

The collection is very special to us. It pretty much shaped our thinking about art when we were young. When we were teenagers we used to look at it pretty much every time we came to Warsaw. We often came just to look at it and treated the objects like our property. We decided to borrow the neon signs by Martin Creed mostly because of the open nature of his pieces. In our practice we consider it important to create a dialog with existing objects – including artistic ones – and his pieces are very conducive to it. We used his *Work no. 236 (FEELINGS)* and *Work no. 325 (THINGS)* in the installation. We also gifted him our *BROTHERS* neon sign. This is how 3 works by Martin Creed came to be.

Although it's not in the *U-jazdowski's* collection, we fantasized about Katarzyna Kozyra's *Pyramid of Animals* for a while. We believe that the spirit of this piece would be incredibly inspiring and that it would definitely open up our minds.

Michał Grzegorzek

You find objects, including works of art, and make them live a new life.

Bracia [Brothers]

We're interested in arranging works and exhibitions non-hierarchically. This practice also allows us to look at copyright in a broader context. After all, copyright is not an artistic notion but a market one. It's also very young, a disabled child of the 20th century. We feel that this child is doing a lot of harm to art and its development across all disciplines.

Michał Grzegorzek

I thought that it gave artists sure footing by guaranteeing their income.

Bracia [Brothers]

The state or artistic institutions can fulfill that role. Perhaps it's an anarchistic view, but it's based on a sense of community and the sanctity of individual experience. Cannibalism and plagiarism have negative associations in the world of art, but they could be treated as tools of the trade. Remixing always used to be a part of culture, of artistic practice, but today we're at a place where people are afraid of it because of the risk of being accused of copying someone else's work. I mean, the spirit didn't come from nowhere, artists are more a family than a corporation, so you can't really draw clear delineations with a precise, surgical stroke.

Michał Grzegorzek

Before we finish I guess I have to ask – why do you call yourselves Brothers?

Bracia [Brothers]

You don't choose your family.

06/07–06/08/2017

Stachu Szumski

Prognosis for the era of post-thermomodernization





With this implementation, Stach Szumski is trying to establish an abstract simulation of the future. The installation, composed of materials that enable buildings to store heat, is reminiscent of a para-archeological outcrop of the facade of a block, wherein the relics of vandalism undergo the process of fossilization.

We live in a time of progressive thermo-modernization. The alchemical practice of foam polystyrene granules guarantees us a great deal of polystyrene. Without it, thermo-modernization would not have transpired. When the details of the pre-war tenement houses are drowning in insulation, with every step we are surprised by the transformation process of modernism into thermo-modernism; a new, insulated, and secure architectural perspective is born.

In regard to the question of the vitality of these shells, technologists claim that polystyrene covered in a plaster cover is temporarily immortal. How will archeology shape itself in the era of post-thermalmodernization? Will subsequent generations end up taking styrofoam scales off from facades in search of prior relics, and will the graffiti hidden during insulation become a kind of stratigraphic unit? Will there be another field of archeology dedicated to thermo-modernization explorations?

The source of archeology is rooted in the process of generating polystyrene. Styrene is processed crude oil, and according to the theory of the organic origin of oil, it is comprised of metamorphosed plant, animal, and mineral deposits. Polystyrene as the direct descendant of original layers returning in a materialized and processed version, by layering the present.

Stach Szumski

was born in 1992 in Gdańsk. He holds an undergraduate degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in the Faculty of Media Art in Warsaw and is currently represented by the Polana Institute. From 2013 to 2016, the artist collaborated with V9 Gallery and the Vlepvnet Foundation. Co-creator of the Nomadic State project. Szumski has participated in numerous exhibitions and projects, including: Late Polishness at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw; Tajsa at the BWA Tarnów Gallery; OUT OF STH Biennale of Urban Art organized by the BWA in Wrocław; India's First Biennale of Contemporary Art in Fort Kochi, India and the Der Regionen Festival in Linz, Austria. His work is multifaceted, from conceptual-interactive activities, in which he critically looks at first world countries devoid of folklore aesthetics (the Nomadic State project, together with Karolina Mehnicka), to purely intuitive visual practices.

curator
Jagna Domżańska
exhibition coordinator
Joanna Saran
illustration
Karolina Pietrzyk
text
Jagna Domżańska

Archeology of the future

Jagna Domzalska

Your most recent work, "Prognosis for the era of postthermomodernization," is a sort of speculation on the future of thermo-modernization technology. Is it more about contemplating insulation itself, or was the technology used for it and its visual properties, as well as the ways in which it can be transformed (through sculpture), more inspiring to you?

Stach Szumski

My main source of inspiration was the popularity of polystyrene in revitalization and insulation, as well as the way it warps the real shape of buildings by simulating an insulated, safe architectural perspective. This contains an aspect of not caring about the previous layer. The surface lagging becomes a perfect, plastered-over pastel shell that gives off an impression of durability and solidity, while the actual state of the building's core can be undergoing a deeper process of degradation. For instance, the communist apartment blocks built from large concrete panels had a pre-planned, predetermined life expectancy. Today the panels, mostly beyond their expiration dates, are cracking, creating the perfect testing-ground for styrofoam coverings. The coverings also hide grassroots acts of vandalism. Local treasures and various graffiti relics also disappear under the safe layer of styrofoam and become unwittingly preserved for the future.

Jagna Domzalska

So was it more about the things that thermo-modernization conceals than about styrofoam itself?

Stach Szumski

It was about both things, but styrofoam as a material was the initial source of inspiration. I came across the bottom layer when I was researching various thermo-modernization-related disasters. Pieces of styrofoam facades torn off by strong wind or marks left by fires create a cross-section that shows all the layers of materials used for thermo-modernization. These disasters were the main inspiration for creating an outcropping of the facade, which is the key element of the installation.

Jagna Domzalska

So it's two things: affection for the hidden murals and fascination with styrofoam. How important was your interest in its form, color, and production process?

Stach Szumski

I'm not being affectionate towards murals. I'm just affirming this process of unwittingly preserving signs of vandalism, signs which often cover the entire bottom part of the facades of apartment blocks, which occurs as a result of thermo-modernization. It's a record of a certain stage in the history of the condition of public space.

Jagna Domzalska

What about the prehistoric motifs featured in your exhibit: fossils, ammonites, fern leaves?

Stach Szumski

When I was researching the process of manufacturing polystyrene I noticed that it shares some characteristics with petroleum. Polystyrene is one of the byproducts of the oil refinement process. According to organic theory, petroleum is made up of transformed undersea deposits of plant

and animal remains as well as various minerals. The exhibition features some forms that look like skeletons and plants from the Carboniferous period. They are a symbolic allusion to the circulation of organic matter, as well as to the connection between styrofoam and petroleum. This relationship opened up another inspirational dimension.

Jagna Domzalska

Yes. I think the exhibition places us on two points of the timeline: the present, or the near future, and the Carboniferous period. Your project is all about accumulating layers. The perspective of millions of years is particularly interesting in contrast with styrofoam, which seems so ethereal and physically absent. It also seems very "contemporary."

You mentioned disasters – does this mean that the work has an environmental aspect? You point to the multiplication of layers, made thoughtless by the convenience of technology.

Stach Szumski

The process of manufacturing styrofoam is not harmful to the environment. Pentane, the foaming agent used in the production of styrofoam, is a saturated hydrocarbon. These compounds are not bad for the environment. They are constantly being released into the atmosphere from natural sources and are naturally broken down.

Jagna Domzalska

I was thinking more about the gradual loss of space and how easy it is to cover large spaces with insulation. Several visitors at the opening thought that your exhibition was an allusion to the Grenfell Tower fire in London.

Stach Szumski

That's a very interesting connotation – the catastrophic look of the main part of

the exhibition was initially meant to be aesthetically similar to an outcropping, to hacking off. I didn't intentionally reference the terrible disaster that the Grenfell Tower incident was.

Jagna Domzalska

I still think that you have, in a subversive way, achieved the effect of an archeological exhibit – something like an outcropping taken straight from an archeological site, prepared and preserved. Something created by researchers, not by a disaster. Although the scale was catastrophic. The monumental outcropping is accompanied by huge panels with bas-reliefs of the aforementioned fossils. They are presented like specimens in a museum, although one could also associate them with a cemetery. Is this a valid way of reading your work?

Stach Szumski

I think that the fact that the panels are graphite may make them look cemetery-like. Fossilization itself is also a way of documenting the process of dying. Death could be considered another characteristic shared by styrofoam, the shape of the panels and the relationship of both these things with prehistory.

Jagna Domzalska

Tell me something about the image that brings it all together. A smiling satellite dish, the '90s, apartment blocks and more – not easily made out from afar – insulation material.

Stach Szumski

Yes – mosaic plaster, sometimes called marmolite. It's a material often used in construction for finishing. It's usually employed as a covering for the lower parts of buildings, cornices and baseboards.

Jagna Domzalska

I can see that you've copied one of the ways in which baseboards are decorated; the image created by marking is also a kind of a bas-relief. The smile of the personified satellite dish makes the whole museum-cemetery situation less serious.

Stach Szumski

That's true – the satellite dish itself is an autonomous modification of the apartment block's expanse, something that is at the same time unsanctioned by the building's administration and common in the landscape of housing estates. They can be seen on both pre- and post-thermo-modernization buildings.

Jagna Domzalska

So it serves as a parenthetical device for the work's meaning. Still, I'm trying to decide if you're being critical and ironic or if you're just investigating a topic with a certain affection.

Stach Szumski

In the end it's more of an exploration than a critical view. Of course, you could go into the negative effects of society being possessed by an endless stream of channels made available by satellite and cable TV, and the social isolation that follows. The marmolite bas-relief is more of a futuristic gravestone for the era of satellite dishes, which is slowly leaving the landscape of housing estates to be replaced by less physical signal receivers.

Jagna Domzalska

Marmolite is also less imposing than blocks of granite. Your works are always very taciturn despite including multiple elements. I think this is the case because you always artfully balance opposing qualities, combining brevity with monumentality, archaism with contemporaneity, seriousness

with aloofness. Where do these combinations come from?

I would say that your works are both savage and lyrical; daring and contemplative. Do you see these things in yourself?

Stach Szumski

I usually act intuitively. It's difficult to categorize clearly because it's a result of many experiences. For instance – before I started working on thermo-modernization I used to be very interested in cracking concrete panels and the esthetics of filling these cracks. When I traveled through Siberia with Karolina Melnicka I had the chance to encounter some advanced cases of concrete cracking. I couldn't shake the impression that the times of thermo-modernization are still ahead of them. We also researched degrading petroglyphs in the Russian part of Altai during the same journey. After I returned to Poland the local BWA (Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych – Bureau for Art Exhibitions) in Jelenia Góra [literally "Deer Mountain" – translator's note] asked me to paint a mural. Deer-shaped petroglyphs transposed into the esthetic of limestone fillings for cracking concrete blocks ended up being their leading motif. I think this illustrates the nebulosity of my practices.

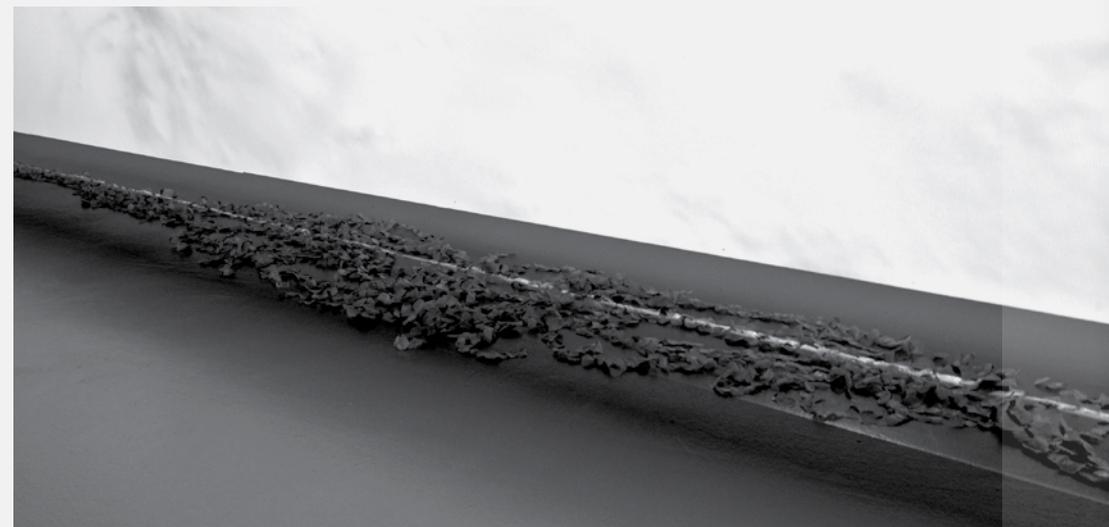
Jagna Domzalska

This shows the multiplicity of available topics and stimuli, but also some kind of interrelation and consequence. For me, the key things are that in every work, composition or exhibition you always manage to touch on multiple subjects without overdoing the whole thing. You find balance despite reaching for the extremes. But maybe it's better that you do it unconsciously.

10/08–10/09/2017

Marta Hryniuk

Cold Body Shining



Marta Hryniuk's films stem from her intuition and the compulsive desire to collect images, whose origins are preceded by extensive research, recorded thoughts, dreams, as well as stories she has heard. For Hryniuk, filming reality is a way of being as well as a way of studying that which is around. The camera is a metaphorical extension for her, with which she observes the world.

By working with representations and memories, Marta Hryniuk creates complex, nonlinear, collage narratives, set between past and present. The manipulation of the perception of time and space by stretching them, the repetition of certain motifs, a lightness, and simultaneously the density of images serve to awaken the viewer's unconscious and to make every one of us project our own images and thus become a protagonist in her story.

Marta Hryniuk

was born in 1991 in Warsaw. She holds a degree in Painting from the University of Arts in Poznań and one in Multimedia from the Academy of Arts in Szczecin. She currently lives and works in Rotterdam and studies at the Piet Zwart Institute. She co-runs the nomadic artist-curator collective Silverado. She has participated in exhibitions in Poland and abroad. Holder of the "Young Poland" (2017) scholarship as well as of one from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage (2015).

The immersiveness of Marta Hryniuk's works draws us into their poetic matter. Her camera pulls us into diaristic and languid images of the area around Rotterdam. We can hear the artist's hypnotic voice in two languages, which some can understand, while for others it tends to provide no more than an abstract tone, a rhythm. Her sensuous narrative of an imaginary world gradually leads us into Europe's largest port.

The art of storytelling is an ancient one. One might think that the experiences of the twentieth century's avant-garde preclude the return of storytellers in the visual arts. So where does this newly reawakened interest, need to tell, and to listen come from?

curator

Aurelia Nowak

music

Robert Skrzyński
(Micromelancolié)

exhibition coordinator

Joanna Saran,
Michał Grzegorzek

illustration

Karolina Pietrzyk

text

Aurelia Nowak

Aurelia Nowak in conversation with Marta Hryniuk

I feel like a nomad

Aurelia Nowak

"Cold Body Shining," which was presented in the {Bank Pekao Project Room}, is your second individual exhibition this summer, after "O, Little Bird" at the Gdańsk City Gallery. How are they different from each other and did you achieve what you intended with them?

Marta Hryniuk

I tried to use these two exhibitions as opportunities to test different ways of thinking about space. The "O, Little Bird" exhibition presented at the Gdańsk City Gallery is a video installation created with that particular space in mind. By this I mean especially using a serpentine, hanging chiffon curtain as a video projection screen. The fabric is a half-transparent, delicately undulating wall, whose shape forces the visitors to move around the gallery space. It's a kind of a visual narrative. The fabric's characteristics give the exhibition a quality of visual lightness.

On the other hand, the {Project Room} exhibition is much more monumental. The projections are large – you experience the image with your entire body. The exhibition has a very simple structure. It's made up of two projections with their "backs" turned against each other and a single musical score that accompanies the two images. In this case the space of the {Project Room} is less important, it's meant to work for the benefit of the movie. You could say that its half-light and neutrality make it disappear from view.

I also see some significant similarities between these two situations. I think that experiencing either of the two exhibitions

puts the viewer into a kind of trance; they are contemplative, soothing, but also disquieting experiences. I'm interested in that paradoxical tension and in working in the area between these two extremes. Moreover, both works have undefined durations. Looping and repetition are integral to them. The {Project Room} exhibition, although it features some narrative forms, doesn't have a narrative defined as a linear progression. It's more about eliciting a state where multiple stories create a plexus in a single moment of time.

Aurelia Nowak

I wish you would tell me more about the language and structure of your works. What inspires you and what do you draw from when you're collecting material for your movies?

Marta Hryniuk

In the case of "Cold Body Shining" it took me a very long time to collect the material. I spontaneously shot short videos, wrote down my dreams, made notes and recorded audio clips in the hope that they would come together at some point. I wasn't filming with a particular goal in mind. The camera was more of a companion, a way to observe my surroundings. I exercised mindfulness, I was interested in coincidences, subtle connections which, with time, started to form stories. I never worked this way before. When I was collecting material for this realization, I allowed myself to act without a plan, with no scenario. My aesthetic choices were guided by intuition and impulses and informed by the events around me. The images featured in the movie come from many sources. There are HD images, images recorded on a VHS

camera, there are images shot on a small camcorder and on a phone. There are aerial photos and images taken from Google Maps; some are so blown up that you can see their pixelated structure. There is some footage shot in the dark; there is shaky footage shot while running. There are also long, concentrated, static shots shot with a hand-held camera. The images are not thought up, composed and only then recorded. They are not foreign to the body – they are a cohesive part of my sense of vision.

I also used some material from my growing archive. I'm building the archive in parallel with my other activities, and sometimes use images from it in my work. The movie was shaped during the editing process, when I re-watched my footage, cut it, looped it, scaled it, slowed it down, mixed images together, gave it a rhythm and a pulse. This is also when the images were given significance – in part after the moment of recording. During the editing process I organized them vertically rather than horizontally. In other words – the structure of their organization is centered around the intensification of a moment, moving towards the core, towards the inside, not around the linear progression of action.

I said before that I see narrativity as coexistence of multiple narratives in a single, complex plexus. Read, heard, remembered and dreamed up stories are treated equally. For me, the way images in this work are combined and the stories are told is a commentary on how memory works. Its structure is open. It gives the viewers space so that their memory and imagination can work. For instance, some shots are long and monotonous. I think that this either makes you leave bored, or forces you to activate some mental imagery of your own. I care about active reception. I want the

movie to be present and material, to reach the viewer's body.

Aurelia Nowak

You've been studying at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam for a year. Have the classes and encounters you've had as a part of your studies influenced your work? How are your current studies different from those in Poznań and Szczecin?

Marta Hryniuk

Piet Zwart is a small institute – there are just 25 students across two years of study. We're in a building in the center of city. There are studios, a workshop, and a project space, all available 24/7. Everyone shares their studio with another person. The Dutch model of education puts less emphasis on the master-student relationship than the Polish one. You set up studio visits with tutors, but you're not tied to a single studio or a single person. The relations here are colder and more "professionalized." This means that you have to be more self-sufficient and responsible for your artistic practice. We also have so-called "group critiques" – mandatory presentations which take place twice a year. They have no predetermined structure apart from the requirement that the presenter has to stay quiet while the group discusses their work for an hour and a half. It's a way to take your work apart – the what, the how, the why. The whole experience is very instructive, but also difficult and, at the same time, uncanny – having a dozen or more people discuss your work for ninety minutes. There are also elective seminars – both theoretical and workshop-based. They often require you to do a lot of reading and actively participate in discussions.

I think that immersing myself in an international environment and meeting mature, well-shaped people allows

me to look at my work from a distance. I feel that I'm learning a language that is suitable for talking about my practice. I think that changing places and contexts has allowed me to see more shared characteristics with the attitudes of my friends from Szczecin and Poznań, as well as with the ones grouped around Wojtek Łazarczyk's 3 Pracownia Obrazu (3rd Image Studio). The geographic distance allowed me to better see these connections. I don't have the feeling of "growing up together" with the people who are around me now – I think it'd be more accurate to say that I'm entering into a dialog with them.

Aurelia Nowak

The movie you presented in the {Project Room} takes place in Rotterdam. Tell me about your perception of that city.

Marta Hryniuk

Rotterdam is usually seen as ugly and eclectic. It was completely leveled during the war and then built from scratch rather than rebuilt. This is the reason for many of the radical urbanistic and architectural decisions which sever the city from its past, such as paving over the canals. Rotterdam is a port city, with a lot of ethnic and cultural diversity. It's not charming. It's stern, but also slightly less pedantic than other Dutch cities. The whole organism is, obviously, centered around the port. Its gigantic space cuts into the city or, to put it another way, the entire city is built around the port. The neighborhood I live in – Oud-Charlois, which used to be a poor port district – is now undergoing gentrification. Artists play a part in this process. It has the biggest concentration of artists in Europe thanks to its generous social support system and cheap apartments for creatives. Living in the neighborhood, I naturally started

exploring the port. It's a fascinating place; the flow of goods is unimaginable. Everything is here temporarily: containers from beyond the Pacific are put on smaller ships and sailed down the Meuse and the Rhine to different parts of Europe – and vice versa. The place somehow suited my state of mind after the move. It became the third most important spot on my personal map of the city, a part of the home-studio-port triangle.

I've recently become more interested in notions such as nostalgia, migration, nomadism, displacement. I tend to agree with what Hannah Arendt wrote in her essay "We Refugees" – it was written in 1943, but it's just as topical today, when the world is full of refugees again. She says we should rethink the ideas of human rights and the nation-state and start viewing refugees as the paradigmatic figures of historical consciousness – "the avant-garde of their people." The entire history of the 20th century could be told through the lenses of migrations, resettlements, and escapes. Just as refugees are the "avant-garde of their people," artists-expats are the avant-garde of art. I'm especially interested in the attitudes of artists who incorporate their condition of being a nomad or an expat into their art. They create a certain sensibility, a different outlook inspired by being an outsider. They deal with such notions as being uprooted, home, place of origin, memory, nostalgia and so on.

Aurelia Nowak

Do you feel like an outsider? What does it mean for you to live in Rotterdam and have to travel to Warsaw to return to your home town?

Marta Hryniuk

On the one hand, being in several places at once is fairly natural – most of my friends live this way. On the other hand, I don't feel like I belong anywhere. Sometimes it's difficult to live this way – there is no sense of stability. I feel like a nomad. I quickly become attached to places but, at the same time, I don't feel at home. Overall I think I like the idea of a multiplicity of homes.

04/09–15/10/2017

Natalia Janus-Malewska

*May the shadow of the sun fall
on a world at peace*





curator
Bartosz Nowak
exhibition coordinator
Joanna Saran
graphic design
Karolina Pietrzyk
text
Bartosz Nowak

In 1979, as he forecast an approaching solar eclipse, ABC news anchor Frank Reynolds told his viewers that there would not be another one until 2017. He added, "May the shadow of the moon fall on a world at peace," words that have been quoted of late.

The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman described the sixteenth century as one filled with darkness and fear, uncertainty about what was to come, "ignorance of the threat." Modernity, on the other

hand, "was to be the great leap forward," promising stability and order, an end to misery and fear.¹ As we well know, peace has never governed our world, and the greater our stability, the more reasons we have to be fearful. It is we, the people of Western culture, who are convinced that we are living with the largest number of threats. "Contrary to the objective evidence, it is the people who live in the greatest comfort on record,

more cosseted and pampered than any other people in history, who feel more threatened, insecure and frightened..."²

Fear is the main theme of Natalia Janus-Malewska's project. She uses an imaginary lion to represent it, but only his paw prints remain. The lion allows the artist to pursue many interpretations of issues she cares about that are the subjects of many discussions today, such as animal studies and post-humanism. The ancient dualisms of human-animal and nature-culture come to life.

Natalia Janus-Malewska admits that she is an anti-naturalist, rejecting the interpretation of fear as a defense mechanism, a component of the id that we need to survive. Fear has its own history in culture, which has long lost its connection to natural reactions and cause-and-effect sequences. Natural reactions have become an element of the game being played by the producers and consumers of fear.

We constantly surrender to the powers of artificially generated fear, both consciously and unconsciously. Detached from its natural sources, fear becomes a trait of the world of our imagination. The circus, the zoo, the amusement park, the cinema, and literature provide the adrenaline that is missing from our everyday lives. Our imagination, which is managed expertly by us, the mass media and politics, finds replacements for true dangers. This is why, with no lions left in "our" world, the lion can exist only as a hologram flowing out of our imagination, materializing our fears. But, again to quote Zygmunt

Natalia Janus-Malewska

lives and works in Szczecin. She holds a Master's degree in painting and new media art from the Arts Academy of Szczecin. She makes sculptures, videos, and installations, in which she explores fears and dualisms in contemporary culture.

Bauman, "Fear is at its most fearsome when it is diffuse, scattered, unclear, unattached, unanchored, free floating, with no clear address or cause; when it haunts us with no visible rhyme or reason, when the menace we should be afraid of can be glimpsed everywhere, but is nowhere to be seen."³ The artists allows us to face the quintessence of fears, to inspect their cultural and internal sources.

The lion that once represented a real threat appears as guilt. The king of the beasts steers our reflection to the borderlands between the worlds of the humans and of an untamed fauna. As we compare Deleuze's and Guattari's "becoming-animal" with Donna Haraway's "companion species," it becomes obvious that the author of this exhibition identifies more closely with Haraway's ideas, which go beyond anthropocentrism and reference "actual trans-species encounters." The line between people and animals takes on an agreed-on meaning. It is no longer an object of transgression and becomes a factor in the game of the liquid, expanded identity.

Observations demonstrating that animals are not as passive as has been thought transform, overcome the fears of spending time with animals or of being an animal. We even see fantasy in their actions. There is more and more talk about spontaneity and disinterested cooperation between species.

Notes

1. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Fear* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 2.
2. *Ibid.*, 130.
3. *Ibid.*, 2.

I'll confide in you about animals

Bartosz Nowak

Your work often shows how the human and animal worlds overlap. Can you tell me something about your interests?

Natalia Janus-Malewska

I'll confide in you about animals: they were always there. They probably first appeared when I was a naive child who animalized everything and everyone. They became the stars of my drawings, games and prayers. I wanted to be one of them. Well, since nobody listened to my prayers, I had to find my animal self on my own. Your question about the human and animal worlds overlapping accentuates a certain opposition, one that I understand well. I don't want to fight it, because that would mean accentuating it even more. I don't want my work to cross over to either side of the border between the human and the non-human, the good and the bad. I want my work to straddle it. If you want to cross borders, keep your mind in a carnival-like state of smuggling and balancing, you have to make sure that the border is subtly held up. Don't "become an animal," but become the animal that man is. In practice, I do my best to make my works show the non-human in some sort of relationship with the human – either through physical presence, or through symbols and myths. This reveals all these connections or, to be more precise, a huge, hard-to-grasp, constantly moving tangle. This is an anti-hygienic philosophy – there is something in art that allows the everyday to be suspended in a sort of a Bataillesque celebration where people give in to the impulses which they tend to suppress in normal, secular time. The difference is that, for me, there's no

dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. There's only heresy.

Bartosz Nowak

Exactly. Your unique attitude to the subject of borders drew my attention when we talked during the installation of your exhibition. I remember reading an article whose author described nature as a DIY enthusiast. New solutions, no matter how weird, are put into practice as long as they are functional. One could see it as chaotic and inelegant. I think that this is the "tangle" that you spoke of. Tell me what you think: what are we running from, what are we afraid of?

Natalia Janus-Malewska

What are we afraid of? I think this is one of these perennial questions that humanity keeps asking itself. The Wikipedia entry for *homo sapiens* includes an IUCN status. The IUCN seven-degree scale (from "extinct" to "least concern") is used to classify different species. The status of *homo sapiens* is of "least concern."

"Least concern" sounds a bit paradoxical. On the one hand, it classifies us as another species of mammal, for which the Earth could be the same thing that Mauritius was for the dodo – but we have the green light so far. On the other hand, given the number of safety measures that we take – hygienic, social, epistemological – this classification kind of punctures the balloon of the conviction that human beings are something more than their bodies. Copernicus removed the Earth from the center of the universe, Darwin uncovered our evo-

lutionary and genetic affinity to all living beings, Freud stripped away our feeling of control over the self. Kicking yourself off the pedestal is something that requires courage.

Bartosz Nowak

I think that one particularly strong point of your works is that they deal with the subject of the human condition. They are a voice in the discussion about the relationship of humans with other living beings, with technology. You mentioned Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud. The list could include all emancipatory movements, even all political movements. Our *status quo*, if it even still exists, is constantly being redefined. Where do you see yourself as an artist in the middle of all this turmoil?

Natalia Janus-Malewska

I could say that I'm an egoist – I'm doing what I want to, and what I would want to see as a viewer, and doing it on my own terms. When I'm experiencing art, I want to – even if just for a moment – lose my *I*, see the world through the eyes of another. This is not possible if the author is not subjective and honest. I don't believe in the revolutionary potential of art or my ability to change something important. I don't even have such ambitions. My biography is not very interesting – I live the average, unattractive life of a homebody, which I very much enjoy. Rather than educate others about my views, I prefer to test my postulates. They obviously have some grounding in philosophy, but there are also moments when philosophy dissolves into poetry. The simplest language or a small gesture can be enough, if they show the intersection of borders. Appearing at that intersection, at the right place and time, is what gives me the most intense sensations. What usually results is objects,

because I have always been fascinated by them. Many activities probably stem from my compulsive collecting – I collect both organic and immaterial objects. I know that what I do could be called anachronistic, but I often think that there is nothing more anachronistic than being current. This pushes me, as an artist, to the margins of art but, then again, I never wanted to be in the mainstream.

Bartosz Nowak

Is your attitude based on intuition, or are there some thinkers and artists whose thoughts you'd like to share, or who you consider kindred spirits?

Natalia Janus-Malewska

I like Andersen's fairytales and Paleolithic art from the Chauvet Cave. I'm kind of joking, but I also see a similarity between the two – for example they both show people being devoured by other animals. Naturally I do have a few favorite artists – I really love the work of Marc Quinn, Pierre Huyghe, Wolfgang Laib, and Franko B. There's also Kiki Smith. Well, maybe not all of her work – I like the early sculptures about internal organs and the way they create a weird sort of fear and respect for the body. Their art and attitudes give me a lot of joy when I experience them. In a way they have shaped not just my sensibility, but also what I do with it. I wouldn't want any aspirations – maybe besides the aspiration to do my thing and do it well and ethically – to shape my practice. As far as theory is concerned, I have learned a lot from Latour, Braidotti, Haraway and other post-humanist thinkers. I also have to mention *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. The novel contains, in my opinion, one of the most beautiful confessions of all time. These are the words the being (which has no name in the novel) says during a conversation with its creator. The being outlines its future

perspective. It begs its creator to soothe its suffering by giving it a companion with whom it would live away from people and adds: "I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite." The first layer of interpretation would simply indicate that the being doesn't eat meat. It feeds on acorns and berries. "The lamb and the kid" are also a fairly clear reference to Satanist and Christian symbolism. The being, which is neither dead nor alive, neither human nor animal, is a very good example of a post-human entity. What is more, it doesn't want to "destroy" good or evil (the lamb or the kid), it doesn't choose either – it doesn't consider them different or opposite, because they don't "glut its appetite." If I had to indicate someone who is, as you called it, a "kindred spirit," I would point out that being.

Bartosz Nowak

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's "being" reminds me a lot of Philip K. Dick's android. A new film inspired by his writings has just appeared in theaters. The idea of anthropocentrism is disputed in both cases. So, is the lion, who so ethereally yet pointedly features as the main hero of your exhibition at the *U-jazdowski*, the next in line for the throne? Is our value system changing? Is this a reason for optimism or pessimism?

Natalia Janus-Malewska

I haven't seen the new *Blade Runner* yet, but I really like the one from '82. It fits the definition of a fairytale or a myth. Sometimes the untrue says a lot more. Facts can't illustrate your fears and desires as well as a bizarre, non-human shape of a deity, monster, android, or *Godzilla* stuck together from archetypes. The lion doesn't have to sit on the throne, it's already a symbol of power. This is not a good place

for lions as individuals and subjects. Taming and training big predatory species is an attribute of power. It's a familiar mythological motif, but we can also see it around us. Ramesses II was accompanied by a lion in battle, Pope Leo X sat on an elephant, and your neighborhood alpha male is more likely to walk around with a Bull Terrier than with a Yorkie. I also showed the lion as, among other things, an archetype whose symbolic meanings are very rich and often contradictory. Essentially the idea of the exhibition is very simple. It's a space that synthesizes places which are unsafe due to the presence of a lion. An enclosure, an arena or a circus are spaces associated with humans, with their cultural entertainment – but these places keep the lion away, while this one puts it in the middle. I've been to many zoos and I don't believe in their educational or environmental mission. Enclosures for dangerous animals have a very specific architecture. Many have bulletproof glass instead of metal bars. This amplifies the sensation of danger, as if the center of what we consider human has to include something alien that refreshes our fear. To avoid accusations of objectifying the lion, I'd just like to say that the paw prints were real, just like all myths. You've also asked me about our value system. Is it changing? Yes. I think it's a dynamic mass that's going nowhere, as opposed to the utopian stagnation whose vision seems to sometimes be the guiding force behind the actions of various radical groups. And that's a reason for optimism – at least something's moving, something's alive.

19/10–19/11/2017

Kamil Kukla

U+1F351 PEACH



November 2015. Oxford Dictionaries, for the first time in the history of the “Word” of the Year, nominates no word, but a pictograph. An emoji, commonly known as “Face with Tears of Joy,” which according to the judges, best reflects the ethos and mood of the time. There is quite a bit of truth in this – soon enough, the face with its unsettling expression gained an even more demonic aspect, as it is being used massively to express Schadenfreude. The evolution of its meaning resembles the sad fate of Pepe’s frog, which became the emblem of the alt-right movement.

November 2016. Users of Apple’s mobile devices are flooding the Internet with complaints about the decision to redesign the peach emoji. In the new version, it resembles – simply – a peach. The company immediately restores the fruit to its former form – a peach butt, which, thanks to its erotic associations, became one of the most common expressions in the language of Tinder users. If we are indeed doing a complete U-turn when it comes to our literary culture and reverting to an image-oriented one, then the images comprising it will never be as simple and straightforward as in the olden days.

Kamil Kukla

was born in 1989 in Tarnów. He graduated from the Faculty of Graphic Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. The artist works with painting, drawing, digital graphics, and experimental music. He has participated in exhibitions in BWA in Tarnów, BWA Sokół in Nowy Sącz, the Knoll Gallery in Vienna, MOCAK in Kraków, and MODEM in Debrecen. In 2016, he won the Grey House Foundation Competition. He lives and works in Kraków.

curator

Piotr Policht

exhibition coordinator

Joanna Saran

illustration

Kamil Kukla

text

Piotr Policht

Composed of images, time-lapse photography, digital prints, and a sound installation prepared for the {Bank Pekao Project Room}, the exhibition by Kamil Kukla presents the artist’s latest works, in which an accumulation of organic-digital motifs complement each other and create post-human hybrids. The title refers to the ambiguity and condensation of motifs visible in the work of Kukla. Glittering, oval shapes, meticulously chiseled, are adorned here with nervous, impasto brushstrokes. Bodies that have been fragmented and reduced to sexual organs are enticing, but also swollen, reddened, bruised, decaying, and sick.

Although Kukla’s painting stems formally from the surrealist tradition, his dense, fragmentary images are in fact a faithful reflection of our reality, its synthesis torn from the superficial anecdote. They depict the world of manga for teenagers, in which everyday life is mixed with the supernatural, sweetness with violence, and prudery with exaggerated sexuality. A world that has imperceptibly become our own.

Piotr Policht in conversation with Kamil Kukla

Guilty pleasures

Piotr Policht

The *U+1F351 PEACH* exhibition in the Ujazdowski Castle CCA {Project Room} is a complete overview of your activities, such as painting, music, and digital art. Do they have a common denominator?

Kamil Kukla

My daily practice is about bifurcation – on the one hand there’s painting, which I do during the day. On the other there’s music, which I play during the evenings. These are two completely different disciplines which require different techniques and which I pursue in different workspaces. In my head there’s always the question of whether these two paths meet somewhere. These exhibitions are a chance to bring them together and see if my paintings actually harmonize with my music. It’s definitely not the case that one of these disciplines is subservient to the other, which is why some of my musical projects play well with my paintings, while others clash with them.

Piotr Policht

When did music become a part of your practice?

Kamil Kukla

Early, back when my parents bought their first computer, so about 2002 or 2003. This is when I started recording stuff.

Piotr Policht

Why do you think that was?

Kamil Kukla

It was a reflex, like a child doodling on a piece of paper because it wants to make his/her mark. When I got my hands on some recording equipment I started recording things without rhyme or reason.

I recorded hours of drums, I let off steam by playing on instruments, boxes and pans which I fashioned into a jerry-rigged drum set; I also used my voice. For a long time, I treated all this as a game, but at some point this changed – it became more ordered and disciplined. At the same time, I never had the chance to show off with my music – it was lost in the depths of amateur and anonymous creations available on the internet. Now an opportunity has presented itself during my exhibitions, where I sneak in my music.

Piotr Policht

When did you first sneak it in?

Kamil Kukla

During my *Martwa natura (Still life)* exhibition at the AS gallery in 2014. It included one sound-based piece – a kind of a loop made up of biological-type sounds. It was an element that meshed with the other ones, such as a collection of objects and a short, animated movie – which wasn’t really that much different from the animations we’ve shown in the {Project Room}.

Piotr Policht

Was it created in a similar manner?

Kamil Kukla

No, not at all. In part, it was created in the animation workshop of the Faculty of Graphic Arts at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts using traditional techniques. I recorded corundum and sand on the surface of a lit-up glass pane, which looked like a bunch of swirling pieces of matter. It was a similar kind of a nervous moment that appears in my stop-motion animations shown at the exhibition. As for sound – it didn’t resonate in space. You could only

listen to the loop in the corner of the gallery by putting on the headphones coming out of a wooden partition. If I remember correctly there was also an armchair there, that you could sit on and watch the exhibition.

Piotr Policht

You started playing with music on your first computer intuitively, as a kid. Your newer sound works are also partly about blowing off steam using tools, although they also feature some more structured motives. Have you started getting into contemporary music with the passage of time? Has it become a point of reference?

Kamil Kukla

I don't really listen to the kind of music that I make. I was raised on progressive rock, which might be hard to tell by listening to the things I make. I can say with complete conviction that I was influenced by Robert Fripp and Brian Eno who, in the early 70s, put down the foundations of ambient music by building a system of loops that enabled you to create thick, monumental sound structures using a single instrument. This allowed Robert Fripp to perform as a one-man orchestra. I use a similar method of concentrating sounds although, obviously, it's digital. I put different sounds, not just instrumental ones – often non-musical ones, such as scrapes, squeaks, drones, faraway sounds recorded with a dictaphone – through this machine. This results in a musical pulp which is often disharmonic and generally amorphous, but sometimes reveals a more orderly structure. This balancing act between music and non-music is very appealing to me. I also have to mention that, at a certain point,

I think when I was at university, I had an episode when I recorded honest-to-god songs – with vocals, lyrics and melodies.

Piotr Policht

Did you write and perform them yourself?

Kamil Kukla

Yes, I did everything on my own.

Piotr Policht

But you never shared them?

Kamil Kukla

I never had the inclination to do so. Those songs are somewhere in the depths of my archives.

Piotr Policht

There are probably also a few paintings in these archives. From your current perspective, which ones would you consider to be your first mature compositions?

Kamil Kukla

I don't like thinking about the things I do in terms of artistic maturity or immaturity. Let me put it this way: the first exhibition I can think about without cringing is the one in AS in 2014.

Piotr Policht

So after you graduated?

Kamil Kukla

Yes, a year after I finished the academy. Looking at it after all these years I can see that the painting I did when I was a student, or even before, was a way for me to torment myself. Some relaxation came after I graduated. The very moment of leaving the university wasn't that important since, as a student of the Faculty of Graphic Arts dividing his time between the Animation Studio and the Intaglio Studio, I painted on the side, just for myself. One thing I didn't like were the constant comparisons to Beksiński which brought me down. I don't think they were completely baseless, but definitely very superficial. This was a major problem for me, one that could have made me give up on art. As an artist who wanted to have my own voice I didn't want to be

an easy target for attacks and humiliation any more. This tension made me destroy a painting I was working on – I broke it into little pieces. I took a few weeks off which let me catch my breath and relax. During the following months I painted very freely, often using tricks which – if I had stuck with the craftsmanlike, classical manner of painting I employed before – I would never have allowed myself to utilize. I put the paint down very thickly, spilled it around and created abstract magmas.

Piotr Policht

So, at the beginning, the most important thing was the gesture, the loosening up of your technique?

Kamil Kukla

Yes, it was a way of freeing myself from the patinated and exhausting painting paradigms which I had followed before. I figured that I didn't have to stick to them and played with painting for a year. I painted one fiberboard after another in an automatic sequence, like a conveyor belt. This nebula finally started transforming into something more ordered that actually referred to some external visual order.

Piotr Policht

What point of references were there?

Kamil Kukla

At first they were Flemish still lives which I for some reason clung to.

Piotr Policht

Which modern painters did you consider important then?

Kamil Kukla

Encountering Albert Oehlen was important to me. It showed me what can be done with painting. For a long time I saw painting much like music – I didn't understand much, I didn't even really care about meeting other artists.

Piotr Policht

So you didn't get deeper into the local circles when you studied in Cracow?

Kamil Kukla

Definitely not. I started hanging out with painters a year or two after I graduated. As a graphic artist I had friends from class some of whom went towards graphic design, others went into printmaking, some others into photography. Nobody was going the way I wanted to go. The things I saw, I came by accidentally. It was also accidentally that I came by Oehlen.

Piotr Policht

So how did you end up in the AS gallery as a fresh graduate from outside the artistic circles who wasn't even close to the people from the academy?

Kamil Kukla

I met Grzegorz Siembida, who was then working with the AS gallery, through a friend from class who had worked with him earlier. At that time I felt like I was in a vacuum, with no point of reference – no institution, no circle, no anything.

Piotr Policht

What did you do for a living then?

Kamil Kukla

I worked as a conservator. I made enough money that I didn't have to paint any pot-boilers. However, I had the feeling that my situation was quite solipsistic – this way of closing myself off with my practices. Since at that time AS was basically the only place in Cracow which invited young artists, I got in touch with Grzegorz Siembida and, after a few conversations, I managed to get an exhibition done. An exhibition which was the last one ever shown in that gallery. [laughter] Maybe I'm cursed, because the same thing happened with BWA Sokół in Nowy Sącz – my exhibition was one of the last before the staff changed.

Piotr Policht

So what did you do after AS closed down? Go back to the start?

Kamil Kukla

The exhibition wasn't a huge commercial success. I had to keep on working as a conservator for a while longer. In the meantime, I got a job at the Art Institute which was created within the State Higher Vocational School in Tarnów. It's a three-year school where you graduate with a BA. I got in right after it was founded and have been giving classes in printmaking since then, which has given me the base that I'm still building on today.

Piotr Policht

How did you end up there?

Kamil Kukla

I was invited by the graphic artists from the Cracow circle who got the school up and running together with the people from the Faculty of Industrial Design and the Art School in Tarnów.

Piotr Policht

How has your painting style changed after the exhibition centered on still life motifs?

Kamil Kukla

It evolved very freely. I don't think I would personally put so much emphasis on the Flemings. I did maybe 5 or 6 paintings that were actual travesties of still lives. My interest in them came naturally, and then just as naturally went away. They were replaced by other inspirations. Or a lack of inspiration. I didn't have too many moments that you could call pivotal. Something from the outside would seep into my paintings from time to time through a half-open gate. Zdeněk Burian got in through that gate about a year after the AS exhibition. I have known his work since I was a child. I think that his album *Life before man* – a once-popular book depicting extinct fauna – was

the first collection of pictures that I ever encountered. I had that book, I knew it very well, and at some point it played very well with my animalism, with the biological shapes that appeared in my paintings – including the old ones that I kind of disavow now – from time to time.

Piotr Policht

As a child you were influenced by images that could not be called canonical by any stretch of the imagination: Burian's illustrations, Beksiński, the leather pictures your father would make...

Kamil Kukla

Yes, I think you could put this into a kind of a Holy Trinity of mine: dead fauna reconstructed by Burian, very bizarre and alien; my father's leather pictures – I was always surrounded by scraps of ripped leather jackets which would then be transformed into Holy Marys, the Pope or the The Last Supper... And the terrible Beksiński. I think his album was my first encounter with art.

Piotr Policht

At some point these childhood events were replaced with motives closer to the visual culture of the web, to digital reality.

Kamil Kukla

Burian, like the Flemings, was a short episode. I didn't feel the need to hold on to it and explain myself with it. More external elements started to appear. Before digital art, emoticons and manga I did a few paintings with iPhones, iPads and Apple Watches appearing in the middle of dozens of made-up figures.

Piotr Policht

Why these devices in particular?

Kamil Kukla

It was a kind of fascination with Apple's brand and their advertising, which is full of beautiful Asians and Mulattoes in some sort of made-up hyperreality. I wanted to juxtapose these polished, pampered devices with something "dirty," something from a completely different world, something organic, liquid, and decomposing. It was a perverse way of having fun – the kind of fun you can have by breaking something. Although I'm not really satisfied with the final products and want to pick this subject up again. As for digital art – I became interested in just as I bought an iPad, its latest iteration with a special stylus that allows you to draw much more easily than the previous versions. I got sucked into that pretty quickly. I also started scouring the web with all its Tumblrs, DeviantArts, and Digarts.

Piotr Policht

You hadn't visited those websites before?

Kamil Kukla

I had, but I guess with different intentions, and I also paid attention to different things – I was mostly doing it for kicks, to make fun of the stuff. This changed pretty significantly and at one point I started pretty much studying under different amateurs, looking at how they create things from scratch. There is a lot of tutorials that show, for instance, how to create manga using a specific piece of software: you start with a sketch, then you build a flat form, then you add shadows, then flashes... It all comes together as a very structured whole. I started studying it all – maybe not very seriously, but as another game, a way to blow off steam on the side. I wasn't doing it with an exhibition in mind. I was ashamed to share the results for more than a year. Sometimes when I would share it with painters they would reject it with disgust,

saying it was too insipid, polished, and pampered. They thought that, in a way, it was too pretty to be treated seriously. [laughter] So it was a guilty pleasure for a while.

Piotr Policht

As for connections with more mainstream art, you always distanced yourself from associations with post-war surrealism, such as the paintings of Erna Rosenstein and Alfred Lenica. Is this because you naturally dislike being labeled, or because you think your practices belong to a different tradition?

Kamil Kukla

I'm not distancing myself from this entirely, although I feel close to different artists than the ones you mentioned. Lenica never really intrigued me. I knew his paintings – it's difficult not to since they are hanging in almost every Polish museum with a 20th century art collection. If I had to choose, I would mention Tadeusz Brzozowski and Hans Bellmer and other, foreign surrealists, such as Roberto Matta.

Piotr Policht

What about contemporary artists? I would think that Piotr Janas from the "tired of reality" ["zmęczeni rzeczywistością"] circle is someone you might enjoy?

Kamil Kukla

In 2010, I visited the *Przekleństwa wyobraźni* (*Curses of imagination*) exhibition in the Bunkier Sztuki gallery without knowing anything about *Zmęczeni rzeczywistością*. I was a sophomore then, I wasn't really keeping up with it and didn't really know what was going on in art. As far as I was concerned, the exhibition came out of nowhere. Janas made a huge impression on me then. Not Ziolkowski, I really didn't like those paintings of his – I only saw his much better ones later. However, coming

across Janas at that point was a signal that you can paint this way and that it's not something to be ashamed of.

Piotr Policht

Zofia Krawiec and Łukasz Ronduda mention the paintings by Janas and Ziółkowski in *Unieruchomienie (Immobilization)*, their article that presents the motive of bound bodies and other BDSM imagery as a metaphor for the functioning of an immobilized society that doesn't do anything about the *status quo*. Your newest paintings feature a lot of sexually charged shapes, but they're completely different from that. Where do they get this kind of eroticism from?

Piotr Policht

I've been hearing that I paint things that look like genitals for a long time. At some point I picked this up and started playing with the viewers – and myself. It became my *modus operandi*. I think this was boosted by my immersion in manga, which is so eroticized that it makes your head spin. I think that moving in the transitory zone between sweetness and repulsion, pleasure and disgust, is something that really appeals to me. I pick these things up with an alibi: I can always say that what I'm painting is no more and no less than innocent peaches and asparagus.

23/11–26/12/2017

Zuzanna Czebatul

TRIP CITY





People need fiction. Only through faith in shared fictions could societies, religions, and nations have emerged. Systems founded on looking unitedly in the same direction.

They offer the majority of people relief in identifying with a greater cause. And the minority – a sense of exclusion. That's what the separatist power of language, flags, and monuments is all about. Power is exercised at the symbolic level by dictatorially forcing images and objects – through which history is written – into the public sphere. Power depends on collective fictions. For shaping public opinion, it is not so much the facts that matter as the emotional potential of the message, as well as how it resonates with the recipient's beliefs. This is how contemporary political culture works and why it is ever more difficult to distinguish reality from hallucination.

TRIP CITY is a site-specific landscape of a psychoactive hue. Zuzanna Czebatul reads the socio-political sentiments active in public space, hijacks material objects, deconstructs and enters them into new contexts thereby changing their meaning. She explores the city, focusing on its vulnerable

places. In *Frequency Respond Test* (Harry & Paul), featuring two life-sized plush beasts with their heads cut off, she locates the idea of a dumbed down conflict without a chance for dialogue. A conflict that ceased to be constructive due to more value being placed on physical rather than verbal confrontation.

In the series *New Republic*, the artist takes fragmentary casts from monuments and breaks them into pieces – disassembling their symbolic power as well as the collective cultural identity they project. The identity is ordered to form anew. Complementing the series, a mural refers to expressionist films from the early 20th century – in a critical moment for European history, they helped to tame the fear and negotiate the borders of reality. Czebatul also negotiates these borders – *TRIP CITY* is a distorted reality weighted by an increasingly emotional burden. By treating history as an area of knowledge particularly susceptible to manipulation, the artist undermines and rejects the mechanisms running the public sphere and scrapes off the layers of ideology.

Zuzanna Czebatul

was born in 1986 in Międzyrzecz, Poland. She studied at Staedelschule in Frankfurt am Main and Universität der Künste in Berlin. She was a Fulbright Scholar at New York Hunter College and SOMA in Mexico. Sculpture is the primary medium utilized in her work. The main areas of her research are the dependence on aesthetic and political systems, the physicality of the sculptural matter, as well as popular and club culture. Czebatul has had solo exhibitions at Gillmeier Rech, Berlin; Bad Reputation, Los Angeles; Goethe-Institut/Ludlow 38, New York; and Piktogram in Warsaw. She has also shown her work at Fondazione Baruchello in Rome; Kevinspace in Vienna; Plato in Ostrava; Tenderpixel in London; Exile in Berlin; Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis; Jeanrochdard in Brussels; Heidelberger Kunstverein and at Villa Romana in Florence. Artnet considers her to be one of the most interesting young artists in Europe. She lives and works in Berlin.

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We need utopias

Anka Herbut

While working on your exhibition, we were talking a lot about identity – the individual and the collective one. What seems the most problematic or dangerous to you in the process of developing an identity?

Zuzanna Czebatul

Everybody knows that the personal identity is something pretty unstable and in a permanent flux. We live in times with strong mantras, which command us to follow our passion or to invest in fulfillment rather than stable futures and careers. To become what we are meant to be. This neoliberal individualism is an expression of economical and ideological abundance. It promises a happy global village. But just a few have access to this place. The rest are left behind and to build their own global pseudo-communities. Nation, Religion, or Race serves easily as common ground for identification. Combined with turbo-capitalism they lead to separatism and fundamentalism. Those identities are rigid and stiff. They are not free.

Anka Herbut

How important for you is the identity of the monuments you were working with?

Zuzanna Czebatul

For *TRIP CITY* I wanted to show a variety of images related to the inherent offer to identify with the commemorated. A wing, a giant hand, marching legs and such, originally stood for something or somebody but are now puzzled and have lost their initial purpose. Memorials and monuments are often accompanied with emotionally charged symbolism, which highlights the

glorious, noble or in some way ambitious achievement of a particular representative subject of a nation in a certain historical era. I wanted to isolate these gestures of significance to see what is left of it. I was also curious what was going to happen when I put together a fragment of an angel from a sacral sculpture, Karl Marx's palm and marching soldiers from a Soviet war monument.

Anka Herbut

The cycle *New Republic* consists of sculptures that are the fragmentary casts of the monuments. It seems like someone broke those sculptures into pieces before. There may be two explanations: on one side destroying the material heritage deprives one of the reference point those who identify with it. It happened in Syria and it would probably happen in Poland if Kornel Morawiecki's recent idea of demolishing the Palace of Culture and Science was carried out. On the other hand we may have a problem with monuments which present vision of the world, on which we cannot agree. Me, I have this kind of problem with the Monument to the Little Insurrectionist in Warsaw...

Zuzanna Czebatul

Last time I passed by the Little Insurrectionist there were candles and flowers laid at his feet. He is a good example of the problematic aspects of public monuments and memorials: while "Antek" serves as a reminder of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, there is doubt that such young children were sent into battle-also due to the lack of weapons and munition. The statue ampli-

fies the braveness of the Varsovian Resistance during WW II through an emotionally charged image of a little boy. So what stories are such statues telling? Another good example is the current discussion in New York City: over 120 scholars and artists, among them Lucy Lippard and Martha Rosler, have signed a petition for the removal of several public monuments due to their controversial history, like the Christopher Columbus Monument or the equestrian Statue of Theodor Roosevelt.

Anka Herbut

Tell us a bit about working on these sculptures. How people were reacting when they saw you in publicly taking the casts? The sculptures of the cycle *New Republic* were "illegally" taken from Berlin monuments...

Zuzanna Czebatul

Taking a cast in these sizes is a quick thing to do. Nevertheless, people see what's going on. The reactions range from curiosity to anger. I deliberately cast in broad daylight since I do not consider it illegal, actually. It has nothing to do with mere vandalism; the casting process leaves neither traces nor damage. But some people get angry when seeing somebody even just touching public sculptures. When it comes to a conversation I often sense a strong affiliation towards the object, even when people don't know what they are standing in front of, though they are defending it. There is a weird and strong entitlement. When I casted the head of an angel, a recently replaced element of the Goethe-Monument in Berlin's Tiergarten, a man asked what I am doing. It turned out he was the sculptor the City of Berlin commissioned to recreate the sculpture's missing fragments. I explained my practice to him and why I decided to use the new, much whiter marble part. He forgave me,

even though he had good reasons to be particularly angry.

Anka Herbut

I've mentioned "illegal" practices, because you didn't get permission for taking casts in Warsaw. Although you don't treat your practice as illegal, it could be taken as such by others...

Zuzanna Czebatul

U-jazdowski tried to get permission from the City for me to take casts of some prominent war memorials and religious monuments, but due to the long bureaucratic processes and probably a lack of interest in the request it didn't work out. It is especially sad because *TRIP CITY* is partly shaped by my long walks through Warsaw and another project: in autumn of this year the Warsaw under Construction festival invited me to design a sculpture for Defilad Square. For this I researched the cities' squares and public sculptures and learned about the city's thematic tendencies.

Anka Herbut

One work from the *New Republic* cycle seems to be setting out a topic for the entire exhibition - the torso of a faceless angel viewed from behind

Zuzanna Czebatul

In this specific situation I tried to avoid showing the face in order to highlight the empty interior of the cast itself and what it represents. Maybe it's this subconsciously generated analogy of the body as a package for the soul :)

Anka Herbut

Yet the heads of the beasts from the *Frequency Response Test* (*Harry & Paul*) are not anonymous. They have their names. They are like from some cartoon or computer game. They are also very aesthetic which distracts our attention from the fact that they are decapitated...

Zuzanna Czebatul

The placement of these two heads in the space was very deliberate: when the viewer enters the exhibition Harry and Paul are dramatically staged in the center but it is not visible that they are beheaded. So first they have a certain relationship through their similarities and lively appearance. You have to approach it from the other side to see their chopped off heads. That changes the narrative completely!

Anka Herbut

And what about the trip? The title trip may suggest a bad trip even. Broken monuments, cut off beasts' heads and the yellow glow over the line of the city buildings which remind us of knives...

Zuzanna Czebatul

Yes, the skyline is supposed to suggest a tilt or frailness but also a peril within the scenario. The radioactive yellow of the sky and the dark petrol speak for themselves and the design is to be read as literal as its comic-like ease. Together with the dramatic light the *Project Room* of *U-jazdowski* becomes a mood-setting element and chips into the theatrical aspects of the contents it is staging.

Anka Herbut

At the beginning you mentioned that identity construction assumes the danger of being unfree. Yet in your art you refer quite often to rave culture, in which the utopian vision of freedom is very strong...

Zuzanna Czebatul

Rave culture shaped my understanding of freedom: When people can dance together, they can live together. For me as an illegal immigrant kid this was a healing experience. Rave is the youngest utopian concept, which after the Hippies got a foot in the door. But it wouldn't be utopian if it hadn't been a dream. A good trip :) Nevertheless we need such concepts. Especially young people, who are looking for perspectives and optimism and a healthy portion of escapism.

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