



Opening
19th november at 7pm

Exhibition
from 19th november 2019
to 15th january 2020

Opaque to Herself.
Poland and postcolonialism.

Opening
19th november at 19pm

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to 15th january 2020

7:30pm

Janek Simon and **Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa** in conversation
with **Joanna Warsza**

8pm

A guided tour with the present artists

Agnieszka Polska
Janek Simon
Slavs and Tatars
Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa

Curated
by **Joanna Warsza**

Exhibition architecture
by **Janek Simon**

In collaboration with the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, which in February 2019 presented the survey exhibition of **Janek Simon**, a choice of which is presented here. The accompanying reader was published by SAVVY Contemporary Berlin in 2017 in relation to the previous iteration of this show and with the support of the Goethe Institut — Paris.

Previous page :
Janek Simon, *Polyethnic*, 2016

What is the place of Eastern Europe in (post)colonial debates and in the larger colonial project? How to understand the region, which was both oppressed and oppressor? The exhibition casts a light on how colonial and neocolonial forces have navigated the territories of Eastern-Europe, Poland in particular, and shows a tiny fragment of this complicated picture. From the abolishment of serfdom, the unfulfilled hegemonic aspirations in Africa, to today's perverse use of postcolonial theory in the nationalist agenda. Such an inquiry can offer ways to better understand the region's right-wing turn, the permanent need of affirmation of its exceptionalism and victimhood, the firm anti-immigration stance, and finally the lack of the critical examination of its own imperial past, but also think of the ways of going beyond such entanglement.

The collective **Slavs and Tatars** presents a banner reflecting on the nature of self-determination, derived from the struggles against the division of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungarian Empire, which coincide with the transnational movement for abolishment of serfdom. It was a condition of indentured servitude of peasants developed in Eastern Europe from Middle-ages till the mid-19th century.

Janek Simon traces the history of the Maritime and Colonial League, an non-governmental organization counting one million members in 1939, lobbying to get possessions of Togo, Cameroon and Madagascar, violently linking the Polish independence of 1918 with colonies. Janek's other works, 3D sculptures and algorithmic mosaics search for a planetary language between the singular and the common.

Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, engages with the history of Polish refugees evacuated to Iran during World War II, from where some fled onwards to Uganda, housed in refugee camps, the memory of which is totally erased.

A film by **Agnieszka Polska** refers to the concept of Slavdom as analyzed by renowned scholar Maria Janin: diagnosing Polish superiority and inferiority both to the East and the West. "Sometimes — as says the artist — I feel Poland is drowning."

According to some thinkers, there's an etymological link between the words "Slav" and "slave". Scholars such as Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein have shown that part of Europe East of the river Elbe, inhabited mostly by Slavs, was the first semi-peripheral zone of capitalist world-economy in early modern times. It was pushed into a state of dependency, forcing rural populations into serfdom. In parallel, the kingdom of Poland became a local hegemon, then was itself later divided between three countries, before aspiring, after its independence, for its own colonies to the today perverted appropriation of the postcolonial theory against for e.g. the EU. This slalom of oppression lived and transmitted not only complicates the decolonizing debates but also leaves the region pretty opaque to herself.

Agnieszka Polska (b. 1985, Lublin, Poland) lives and works in Berlin, where she received in 2018, the Preis der Nationalgalerie. Her solo exhibitions have been organized by the New Museum in New York, the National Gallery in Prague, Nottingham Contemporary in the UK, and the Salzburger Kunstverein in Austria. Polska's work has been included in exhibitions and screenings at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, the 19th Biennale of Sydney, the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the 13th Istanbul Biennial, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. Polska's work was also featured in the 11th Gwangju Biennale in Korea the 57th Venice Biennale.

Janek Simon, born 1977 in Kraków, is a conceptual artist, curator and a documentary filmmaker based in Warsaw. Guided by curiosity, the history of science and political ideas, and the practice and ethics of the DIY culture, he has in recent years developed a body of work investigating notions of distance and difference between places; working on projects that try to remap the semi-peripheral position of Eastern Europe through geographical experiments. He ran a project space called Goldex Poldex in Krakow between 2008 and 2012. The space's programme dealt with issues of autonomy and it's contemporary meaning, the influence of funding bodies on artistic production and the politics of the presentation of marginalised positions in the art system. His works was shown, among others, at Manifesta 7, Liverpool Biennale, Prague Biennale, and numerous solo shows in major public art institutions like Arnolfini Bristol or Casino Luxembourg. In February 2019 Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art hosted his mid-career retrospective "Synthetic Folklore" parts of which are presented here.

Slavs and Tatars

Founded in 2006, Slavs and Tatars mine the complexities and unexpected affinities across cultures through three axes: publications, lecture performances, and exhibition-making. Originally set up as an informal book-club, the collective explores a literary and political geography known as Eurasia, defined by themselves as "east of the former Berlin Wall and west of the Great Wall of China". The artists work across cycles, where extended periods of research give life to an eco-system of installations, sculptures, lectures, and printed matter that question our understanding of language, ritual and identity. In this context, viewers are invited to perform the «metaphysical splits» by trying to accommodate conflicting ideas and sensations drawn from opposite ends of the cultural, religious, historical, or emotional spectrum. Imbued with humor and a generosity of spirit, their work commonly blends pop visuals with esoteric traditions, oral rituals with scholarly analysis in a way that opens new paths of contemporary discourse.

Joanna Warsza (born in Warsaw, based in Berlin) is a curator and researcher in the fields of visual and performing arts and architecture. She is the program director of CuratorLab at Konstfack University in Stockholm. As a free-lance curator she was the artistic director of Public Art Munich 2018, curator of the Georgian pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale, or of the public program of Manifesta 10 in St. Petersburg. Warsza has also edited several publications including *The City Curating Reader* (2018) *I Can't Work Like This: A Reader on Recent Boycotts and Contemporary Art* (2017), as well as *Stadium X: A Place That Never Was* (2009), *Forget Fear* (2012), *Ministry of Highways: A Guide to the Performative Architecture of Tbilisi* (2013).

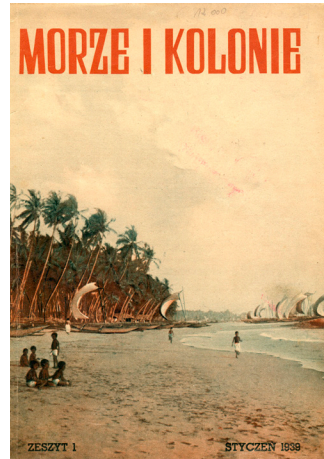
Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa born in Glasgow in 1976, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa studied Literature at Cambridge University and Art at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. She is Research Fellow in Fine Art at the University of Bergen, Norway and Convener of the Africa Cluster of the Another Roadmap School. Wolukau-Wanambwa works in a wide range of media, formats and contexts. Recent and upcoming exhibitions and events include: *You Must Make Your Death Public* (De Appel, Amsterdam, NL), *Kabbo Ka Muwala* (National Gallery of Zimbabwe, ZW, Makerere University Art Gallery, UG & Kunsthalle Bremen, DE), *The Society of Exclusion* (tranzitsk Gallery, Bratislava, SK), *Greetings To Those Who Asked About Me* (Contemporary Image Collective, Cairo, EG).

A previous iteration of this show was shown at Savvy Contemporary, Berlin in 2017 and at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw in 2019.

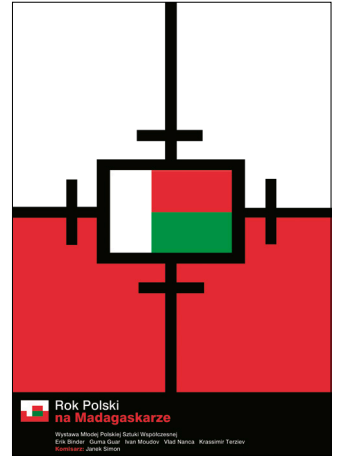
Images



1 **Janek Simon**, *Synthetic Folklore*, 2019
photo Bartosz Górka, Ujazdowski Castle Centre
for Contemporary Art in Warsaw



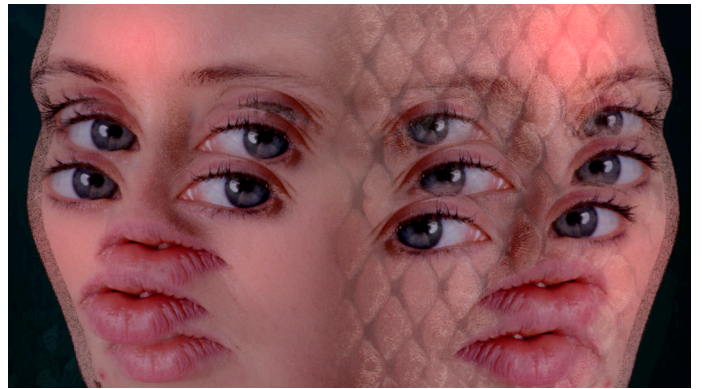
1.1 **Janek Simon**, *Cover
of Sea and Colonies*,
archive of the artist



1.2 **Janek Simon**, *Polish
Cultural Season on
Madagascar*, 2006



1.3 *Demonstration in support of Polish colonies, Poznań July, 1938*, From the archive of **Janek Simon**



2 **Agnieszka Polska**, *Ask the Siren*, 2017



3 **Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa**, *Paradise*, 2012



4 **Slavs and Tatars**, *In the Name of God*, 2013.

A space for “living-knowledge” and “knowledge-sharing”
founded by Kader Attia, Zico Selloum and their family.
~~La Colonie~~ is run by Kader Attia.

Curator of the exhibition
[Joanna Warsza](#)

Exhibition architect
[Janek Simon](#)

press and communication
[Alix Hugonnier](#)
alixhugonnier@lacolonie.paris

~~La Colonie's team~~

[Lucas Erin](#)
Coordinator of the production at ~~La Colonie~~

[Alix Hugonnier](#)
Events coordinator at ~~La Colonie~~

[Sean Kiely](#)
Sound engineer at ~~La Colonie~~

Website
www.lacolonie.paris

Facebook
www.facebook.com/lacolonieaparis/

Acknowledgement

This exhibition is organized in collaboration with the
Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in
Warsaw, which in February 2019 presented the survey
exhibition of [Janek Simon](#) «Synthetic Folklore» and
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