

Early Years

group exhibition presented by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

Wojciech Bąkowski, Yael Bartana, Tania Bruguera, Oskar Dawicki, Sharon Hayes, Sanja Iveković, Daniel Knorr, KwieKulik, Zbigniew Libera, Anna Molska, Paulina Ołowska, Agnieszka Polska, Joanna Rajkowska, Ahlam Shibli, Jan Smaga, Anna Zaradny, Artur Żmijewski

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Wojciech Bąkowski „Film mówiony”

Soundproof booth, DVD film, 4', 2010

Another piece in a series of Bąkowski's "spoken films". The author is a musician, filmmaker, creator of sound installations, and a poet – his works relate both to the tradition of Polish animation, as well as the esthetics of contemporary street art. His spare, or formally "poor" works are compared to the poetry of the avant-garde poet, Miron Białoszewski, whose language was a reaction to the "information buzz" he experienced in the post-war reality of Central Europe. Bąkowski's animated cartoons (usually drawn on the film with a ballpoint or a magic marker) are usually accompanied by hypnotizing, chanted comments – personal opinions about quotidian or imagined events, full of puns and linguistic traps. The commentary part is not mutually illustrative with the cartoons – both elements usually remain autonomous.

Yael Bartana "Mary Koszmary"

HD film, 2007

This is the part inaugurating Bartana's "Polish Trilogy", where the complicated Polish-Jewish relations are the starting point for constructing a more universal narrative about the figure of stranger and visitor. Sławomir Sierakowski (leader of "Krytyka Polityczna" - a leftist movement and magazine) takes on the role of an activist appealing to Polish Jews to return to Poland. Standing in the empty National Stadium, he delivers an impassioned speech, calling, "Jews! Fellow countrymen! People! Peeeoople!!! This is a call, but not a call of honor but a call for life. We want for the 3 million Jews to come back to Poland, to come and live with us again. We need you! Please come back!". The artist refers to the timeless esthetics of a propaganda film, recalling, on the one hand, such works as Leni Riefenstahl's work from 1934 entitled "Triumph of the Will" (where the stadium too is the arena of political manipulation), but also early Zionist newsreels addressed to the Jews settling in Palestine.

Yael Bartana "Wall and Tower"

35 mm film, 15 min., manifesto of the Jewish Revival Movement in Poland, poster, circulation of 2000, 2009

The film is set at a construction site of the "first kibbutz in Europe" – in a square by the monument of the Heroes of the Ghetto in the Warsaw district of Muranów (which was part of the Ghetto during World War II, presently the site of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews which is under construction). The artist proposes a hypothetical scenario according to which Jews settle on Polish land according for the Homa U'Migdal (wall and tower) strategy applied by Jewish settlers during the Arab revolt of 1936 - 1939. The new settlements were usually built overnight as the Ottoman law in force at that time, prohibited the destruction of the already erected structures. Bartana presents a "political hallucination" about a new resilient movement which consolidates the Jewish desire of coming back to the land of the forefathers – the Jewish Revival Movement in Poland. The

activity of the movement seems very probable, with active members, a manifesto, and plans to organize the first political congress.

Tania Bruguera "Consummated Revolution"

3 digital print-outs, text, 2008-2009

In the summer of 2008 Bruguera participated in a conference organized in Warsaw on the consequences of the political events of 1968 and 1989 in terms of the impact they had on the art scenes in Central and Eastern Europe. Her performance was based on the simple but hardly feasible instruction: a group of blind persons dressed up in military uniforms was asked to flirt and make sexual proposals to strangers, all in a historically and ideologically stigmatized place. The performance took place in front of the Palace of Culture and Science – an edifice from 1955 which for many Varsovians is a symbol of Soviet domination and an icon of the passed regime. To the artist's mind, the event illustrated a dream of a sexual revolution which, for reason of communist discipline and control in the countries of the Eastern Block, was never fully let to happen. The performance was recorded by a Warsaw artist, Jan Smaga.

Oskar Dawicki "Mama"

sound installation, 5 loudspeakers, 2009

Oskar Dawicki's sound installation is written over other elements of the exhibition and dispersed among the floors of KunstWerke. Every once in a while a voice of a hysterical child calling its mother can be heard from the loudspeakers. For Dawicki, who has made himself known on more than one occasion as the author of critical and ironic works referring to the art market and circulation, this one is rather institutional (expressing the uneasiness and loss of a new museum looking for its predecessors and having to position itself against tradition), as well as personal (the helpless search for "parents" who could take care of the artist lost in the reality of institutional and market games). The work is a collaboration with the sound artist and musician, Wojciech Kucharczyk.

Sharon Hayes "In the Near Future"

five 35 mm slide projections, (81 slides each), 2008

In the summer of 2008 Hayes continued a series of events in Warsaw, which she had begun in New York (2005), and then carried on in Vienna (2006). The artist uses mottos and slogans – quotes from banners and poster boards used during strikes and manifestations. She appears with these props in venues of historical protests, displaying to passers-by slogans taken out of their original context and trying to reintroduce them to public debate. Hayes relates to the possible future and the hypothetical perspective of taking over power over the street. Simple cameras are distributed among the witnesses of the event who are asked to document the situation. (text: Monika Szczukowska)

Sanja Iveković "Invisible Women of Solidarity"

light box, glass case, newspaper clippings, print-outs, books, newspapers 2009-2010

The main theme of Iveković's latest work is the position of the woman in a post-transformation society. The project realized upon the invitation of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw focuses on the marginalization of women who had participated in the establishment and activities of the breakthrough liberation movement of "Solidarity". Aiming at constructing a "monument to the invisible women", the artist concentrates on the private narratives which were not included in either the leftist or the rightist discourse of contemporary political life in Poland. One of the first stages of Iveković's project was to "appropriate" the front cover of a women's magazine, "Wysokie Obcasy" [High Heels] (insert to "Gazeta Wyborcza" daily), featuring a modified poster by Tomasz Sarnecki,

used during the first free election to the Polish Parliament in 1989. The poster is a quote from the western film “High Noon” – only that here, Gary Cooper, instead of a gun is holding a voting ballot. In Sanja Iveković’s version of the same poster, Gary Cooper is a woman.

Daniel Knorr “Architecture București”, 2005

26 photographs, each 6.7 x 9.7 cm, 2005

The photographs were taken by Nea Costică, a street photographer, for several decades taking portrait shots of visitors to the Bucharest municipal gardens. He was hired by Knorr to photograph the new buildings which have appeared in the Romanian capital and which represent the institutional and economic development of the city in the new historical context following the overthrow of Ceaușescu in 1989. Nea Costică uses an archaic equipment from the 1920’s, where no film is used and the negative is printed directly onto paper. The positive is obtained by re-photographing the negative. All photos were made following Knorr’s detailed instructions.

Kwiekulik “Działania z Dobromierzem”

slides, 2009 (on the basis of photographs taken in 1972-1974)

Shortly after the birth of their son, KwieKulik began to “use their own child in their own art”.

“Działania z Dobromierzem” was the first attempt at a complex translation or search for correspondence between mathematical-logistic activities and visual efforts. In their art, KwieKulik tried to apply practical expertise gained during seminars which they attended at that time. They believed that the same operations which are performed by mathematicians and logicians can be done by sculptors (or themselves, in other words) by means of different types of visual forms and then by means of registering the images (slides). ... KwieKulik believed that “Działania z Dobromierzem” proved that in a situation of a limited number of spatial relations between objects (there are 10 basic relations) it is possible to produce an infinite number of “spatial temporal consequences”. (text: Łukasz Ronduda)

Zbigniew Libera “Wyjście ludzi z miast”

Digital print-out, wooden construction, 2009

Libera’s photographic installation refers to panoramic battle depictions. The session – a frame from a potential catastrophic movie – has been shot on a closed fragment of a highway near the town of Płock. Libera’s futuristic vision is based on the literary motive of dead metropolies. People flock from cities gone wild, with no electricity, running water, or fuel, in search of a better place to live. The apocalyptic surroundings still display remnants of the uncouth visual landscape of contemporary Polish suburbia – billboards, road stalls, amateur advertising banners. “Wyjście ludzi z miast” is reference to earlier series by Zbigniew Libera: “Pozytywy” and “Mistrzowie”, which concentrated on the analysis of press photography and its ability to create collective memory, including canons of art history.

Anna Molska „Placzki”

HDV 16:9colour, 27'38', 2010

The film by Molska is a paradocumentary featuring a folk choir “Jarzębina” from a village of Kocudza in the region of Zamość. Apart from the broad repertoire of songs sung at different festivities and customs, the band also performs funeral rituals in the tradition of village weepers lamenting during funerals. The artist does not expose the folklore, exotic to the contemporary viewer, but presents the coarse recording of a ritualistic grief and mourning, devoid of any folk ornamentation. What is important in Molska’s new film is the clash of the two, seemingly

incompatible worlds: the traditional spectrum of local customs and the folklore cultivated in the region, and the institutionalized world of art. A feature which is also visible here is the method of laboratory/community work practiced in the atelier of Prof Grzegorz Kowalski stemming from Oskar Hansen's theory of the open form. The film was produced at the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko.

Paulina Ołowska "MUSEUM"

neon, smoke, 2009

Paulina Ołowska's neon sign (created in collaboration with Mateusz Romaszkan) is an institutional "relict", a testimony of the early and conflict-ridden times of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. The temporary seat of the institution is located in a typical block of flats from the 1960's. The space was once commercial, holding storage facilities and office space of the furniture shop next door, and a café. Ołowska has emphasized the harsh and "heroic" times of the museum by applying simple typography and cheap light bulbs.

Agnieszka Polska "Sensitization to Colour"

HD 2009, 5'2", 16:9, 2009

Second part in a trilogy devoted to the methods of institutional commemoration and preservation of art history, as well as other methods of intermediating it by means of school handbook reproductions or legends built around heroic artistic stances. The quasi – documentary is dedicated to Włodzimierz Borowski (1930 – 2008), one of the key, if somewhat forgotten, creators of Polish avant-garde. Agnieszka Polska has reconstructed the interior of Od Nowa gallery in Poznań, where in 1969 an exhibition was organized entitled "VIII Pokaz synkretyczny", with Borowski's performance "Uczulanie na kolor", in which the artist drilled holes in the place of eyes in photographs of himself. The faithfulness with which Polska reconstructed the space and the works there displayed is difficult to verify by those from outside of the circle of initiates.

Joanna Rajkowska "The Ravine"

Digital print-out, 2009

Rajkowska's installation and actions in public space can be interpreted as contemporary, ironic variations on community based art, land-art, or the so called relational esthetics, which the artist breaks up into basic constituents by the consistently used tactics of "participative observation". "The Ravine" is a proposal of an absurd intervention (treated with the precision of a fictitious architectural investment project) to be constructed in the passageway dividing the temporary seat of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and the neighboring building of the furniture store. The deep crevice would serve as a picturesque tourist attraction, encouraging inhabitants to explore the underground tectonic layers. At the same time, the gorge would force the Museum's employees to walk on bridges hanging over the precipice. "The Ravine" functions only as a suggestion, a sort of an *impossible monument*.

Ahlam Shibli "Dom dziecka" (The House Starves When You Are Away), 2009

The series was created during the artist's trip to Poland and her visits to eleven orphanages all over the country. Shibli focused on portraying the living conditions of children deprived of homes. As she has observed, they were rarely left alone and, when adapting to the rules, created a peculiar social organism. The lack of typical family relations made the children emotionally dependent on each other and created strong ties. The artist has concentrated on individual people, their customs, ways of organizing private space (e.g. by wall decorations). She has portrayed children in their sleep and in the rare moments of solitude. As in the case of her previous photography projects, here

too there is no feeling of sensation or emotional exaggeration. The artist creates a grid of allusions and connections, with no final conclusion.

Jan Smaga "KDT"

Photograph wallaper, 2009

Jana Smaga is a photographer, a documentalist of exhibitions, and author of conceptual photography works. He most often works in tandem with Aneta Grzeszykowska, creating very elaborate photographic installations, concentrating on the relations between architecture, private space, and the human body. From almost the very inception of the Museum of Modern Art, Smaga has been documenting exhibitions and projects in public space organized by this institution, as well as individual works of other artists. He archives and "mythologizes" the beginnings of the museum, which may be remembered through the prism of his spectacular photographs. At the beginning of 2010, Jan Smaga documented Warsaw's Plac Defilad, focusing on the "wreck" of the former KDT shopping stalls – planned location of the new museum.

Anna Zaradny "eM U Zet E U eM"

Sound installation, 2009

Initially, "eM U Zet E U eM" was an audio intervention on the façade of the temporary seat of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, entering into a dialogue with the neon of the MUSEUM by Paulina Ołowska (also loosely referring to yet another work by the artist, namely "Alphabet" from 2005). Zaradny makes use of a woman's voice (Ołowska), tracing the dissolution of the word "museum", which begins to constitute an entirety upon a tedious process of being reconstructed from individual syllables, only to start sounding nonsensically and strangely, and finally again fall into pieces.

Artur Żmijewski "KDT"

film from the "Democracies" series, 2009

In his monumental and ever developing "Democracies" series, Żmijewski dwells on the nature of contemporary political involvement, and creates catalogues of issues for which people are ready to fight and in defense of which they are ready to manifest. These postulates are different and bear different weights. They may even be mutually exclusive. Żmijewski devoted the new episode of "Democracies" to the riots which broke out when a market hall (KDT) by the Palace of Culture and Science was taken over in July 2009 by a court enforcement officer escorted by the police. Once the shop owners were kicked out of the premises, the riots moved out on the streets. A metro construction site is planned in the location of the former market hall, and in 2014 the new Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw according to the design of the Swiss architect, Christian Kerez, is to be built there.