

I Could Live in Africa

24.07 – 19.09.2010

opening: 24<sup>th</sup> of July (Saturday), 7 p.m.

Mirosław Bałka, Krzysztof Bednarski, Mirosław Filonik, Ryszard Grzyb, Wiktor Gutt i Waldemar Raniszewski, Koło Klipsa (Leszek Knaflewski), Jacques de Koning, Zbigniew Libera, grupa Luxus, Jarosław Modzelewski, Neue Bieriemniennost, Włodzimierz Pawlak, Józef Robakowski, Darek Skubiel i Zdzisław Ziniczuk, Marek Sobczyk, Jerzy Truszkowski, Ryszard Woźniak.

curator: Michał Woliński

collaboration: Magdalena Lipska

*I Could Live in Africa* takes you on a trip into the exotic, from today's perspective, 1980s. Then, following a hot August (the Solidarity agreements, 1980), came the cold December of 1981, *Apocalypse Now* was to open in cinemas, and tanks suddenly appeared on the streets. TV and radio kept broadcasting the worried Gen Jaruzelski announcing, through clenched teeth, the introduction of martial law. The borders were closed, a curfew was introduced. The shop shelves were empty, long queues formed in front of the shops. There were cuts in power and gas supply, petrol was rationed. The adolescent generation faced the hopeless perspective of living in a frozen reality as the ineffective system fought to prolong its existence with tanks and the secret police. The central government controlled virtually all channels of production and distribution. The official cultural circuit had lost credibility, the unofficial 'second' circuit was driven by the logic of political conflict. The opposition's main ally was the Catholic Church. Cinemas, theatres, and galleries were closed. Young people could choose either a cynical career in the official structures, joining the underground opposition movement, or abnegation. They were surrounded, on the one hand, by the regime's dull propaganda and, on the other, by Radio Free Europe, samizdat, street demonstrations, and church exhibitions. The atmosphere was extremely stuffy, young people felt suffocated. An eruption of subcultures followed. A 'third circuit' emerged – music recorded during concerts circulated on bootleg tapes, fanzines were being launched, subversive graffiti covered the walls, and young people demonstrated their attitude through extravagant dress and hairstyle. In art, there was a return to expression, to primitive forms and inspirations, artists using pop-cultural junk and rubbish, employing techniques like collage or stencil. Exhibition openings, organised in private apartments or 'claimed' spaces, turned into improvised happenings complete with partying and concerts. Handmade samizdat publications and art zines (printed or copied outside the censors' reach) abounded. Although the times were hardly funny, there was a lot of open mockery of the totalitarian regime, official culture, the mass media, the Catholic hierarchy, social obscurantism and hypocrisy. Concerts turned into ecstatic group rituals, serving as outlets of pent-up energy.

The exhibition takes its title from a documentary about the post punk/reggae band Izrael, made by Jacques de Koning, a young Dutchman, who arrived in Poland near the end of the martial law and, talking to the band's members, tried to understand what was going on. The exhibition focuses on such forms of reaction towards the 1980s reality that were based on an anarchic revolt against the jammed system, on searching for alternative social economies, on spontaneous, primitive means of communication, on self-organisation, DIY, recycling, copying, exchange. On uncompromising commitment and, at the same time, on remaining distanced. It is about wild times when young people smoked weed and flew from Babylon – to warm countries.

**The exhibition was produced by Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam and curated by Michal Wolinski in collaboration with Nicolaus Schafhausen and Anne-Claire Schmitz.**

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