

ARCHAEOLOGY: (UN)REAL HISTORIES

The exhibition entitled *Archaeology: (Un)Real Histories* consists of various artistic works referring to the past, time, memory and archaeology. What prompted us to take up this topic was the reflection on the ambiguity of the interpretation of the past and the fragility of memory. Reflection on art and history gives rise to basic questions of what history and art talking about the past are. It also forces us to think about the relationship between art and history and what connects them. In principle, art is always created in connection with historical changes, and one of its goals is to 'make the past present'. However, it is not only art that makes the past present; the past also appears in our memory in the form of images. In this case, historical facts and archival images are superimposed by images known from popular culture: films, photos and sometimes even urban legends.

Questions about the past, history and memory constitute our reality and our place in relation to history. One of the most important questions concerns the ways in which the past affects the present and our embedding in the 'here and now' changes the perception of the past. Artists move between various areas, such as: history and its truth about past events, images encoded in cultural memory, artistic research into interesting topics, artistic fantasy, as well as art itself and its irremovable materiality. It is in art that we can escape from linear thinking about the past, turn back time, look through the other side of the binoculars, think about the structure of our knowledge and ask 'what if' questions: what if the history was different. Therefore, art refers to unreal histories, unbelievable, alternative versions of the past. Just like archaeologists, artists try to give meaning to that which is unknown, forgotten and sometimes overlooked in scientific considerations. They create stories located between the real and the imagined worlds. This construction of the past, the creation of its various versions, is the key problem of the exhibition entitled *Archaeology: (Un)Real Histories*.

In their works, artists combine ideas about the past with futuristic visions and ask about the possibility of traveling in time. This is the case of **Agata Agatowska** ('The Cat', 2009), whose work resembles a classical sculpture and also refers to popular culture and figures of mutants. **Marta Węglińska** also offers a specific journey in time in her film entitled 'Wolves Are Prowling' (2016-2019). The artist touches upon the problem of playing the past and asks whether it is possible to embody and re-experience the past.

Some of the works displayed concern the aforementioned creation of alternative histories. This is the case of **Łukasz Jastrubczak's** video (2007) about an old diary which has been found in the ground and predicts the end of the world. In her work '100047' (2018), **Sonia Rammer** tells the history of an astronomer, Leo Baeck from Leszno, an authentic person who allegedly discovered the asteroid 100047. It has been discovered again by modern scientists who have realised that a collision with this asteroid would completely destroy our planet. The artist creates fake objects related to this non-existent discovery. The problem of counterfeiting and copying is also extremely important in the creative output of **Robert Kuśmirowski**. The exhibition features his drawing entitled 'A Patient' (2005), which seems to date back to old days. This work refers to the madness of history and the history of madness because the latter has often been associated with artistic visions. In her 'Written Drawings', **Ewa Zarzycka** tells her private and alternative stories, which refer to her famous performances. **Jerzy Kosalka** also tells an alternative, yet probable history by presenting the meeting of a Wrocław artist Alfons Mazurkiewicz with Joseph Beuys in Dusseldorf in 1961. The latter became famous for the implementation of the idea of the Free University, which he copied from Mazurkiewicz.

The combination of truth and fiction is also the subject of the work by **Piotr Macha**, who uses a quite surprising photo of Wehrmacht soldiers performing acrobatics with chairs. Moreover, the artist

creates a photographic re-enactment of another historic photo. **Diana Lelonek** also refers to the overlapping of truth and fiction in her work entitled 'Liban and Płaszów: New Archaeology' (2017), fragments of which are presented at the exhibition. The artist conducted her archaeological research in the area of the Liban Gorge and the former concentration camp in Płaszów. She was particularly interested in the place where the imitation of the concentration camp was built for the purposes of Spielberg's film entitled 'Schindler's List'. It is now a tourist attraction and also a place for picnics and garbage disposal. The artist discovered various remains of modern civilization there, including an encyclopaedia and various fragments of electrical and electronic devices. Lelonek seems to ask what will remain of us because she associates that place, marked by various meanings, with a place after the end of the world or the end of the Anthropocene.

As regards catastrophic moods, ecological threats and also in the context of history, which makes us constantly watchful because it can repeat itself at any moment, art becomes a kind of warning and also wants to enchant reality by evoking magical thinking. This is the topic of late **Wiesław Michalak's** work which shows a blurred totemic figure. **Anna Tyczyńska's** work entitled 'Twelve Moons' consists of delicate 'boats' that may resemble sacred vessels for ablutions. The work alludes to the world of magic, femininity and closeness to nature. The artists also point out that the very matter of art can refer to the structure of memory or the structure of history, where successive layers overlap one another, while the whole is covered by dust, obliterating the memory of what happened. In this context, it is worth looking at the works by **Marcin Mierzicki** and **Sławomir Sobczak**.

The exhibition is accompanied by **Piotr C. Kowalski's** postcards addressed to the

curators of the exhibition. They also refer to this artist's exhibition 'My Archaeology' held simultaneously in the Archaïos Gallery at the Institute of Archaeology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The postcards are made of the artist's barn boards in Nienawiszcz. The barn which destroyed by a whirlwind in 2012, and the postcards perpetuate its history. At the same time, like items sent by mail to specific people, they are a medium of relational memory, which appears between people who are close to each other and is built through stories, reports, photos, greetings and memories.

Is every memory and every history relational? It seems that the works that are focused on stories, people and things, the works that also enter into a dialogue with each other show this relational aspect of credible and unbelievable histories. They also provoke conversations about the past, time and memory and their significance for art itself.

Artists taking part in the exhibition: Agata Agatowska, Łukasz Jastrubczak, Jerzy Kosalka, Piotr C. Kowalski, Robert Kuśmirowski, Diana Lelonek, Piotr Macha, Wiesław Michalak, Marcin Mierzicki, Sonia Rammer, Sławomir Sobczak, Anna Tyczyńska, Marta Węglińska and Ewa Zarzycka

'Archaeology: (Un)Real Histories'

Curators'LAB Gallery, ul. Nowowiejskiego 12,

Poznań

22 March – 14 April 2019

Curatorial text: Izabela Kowalczyk

Curators: Anna Tyczyńska i Izabela Kowalczyk

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