

Retouch

Galeria Duża Scena UAP

Galeria Mała Scena UAP

Al. Marcinkowskiego 28, Poznań

artists: Marie-Lou Desmeules, John Heartfield, Chris Niedenthal, Artyści nieznani, Łódź Kaliska, Diana Lelonek, Zbigniew Libera, Paweł Łubowski, Gyula Pauer, Max Skorwider, Aleksander Waclawczyk, Filip Wierzbicki-Nowak, Krzysztof Wodiczko

curators: Mateusz Bieczyński, Piotr Grzywacz

In 1964, Frank Stella said the following about his paintings: 'What you see is what you see', thus summarizing his vision of minimalist art. His declaration – although it seems to be a banal cliché – denoted satisfaction from achieving such a level of a painting's 'transparency' in terms of its meaning that any additional content would not be possible – a painting in the shape of the letter 'Z' covered with colourful stripes could remain itself. Asking a question whether such a work of art constituted any 'achievement' is only seemingly ironic. Stella's suggestion was in complete opposition to figurative socialist realist art which offered a vision of reality full of manipulation and understatements at the same time.

Characters and situations recognized on the canvas changed their meaning according to their political interpretation. Moreover, numerous works of art brought into public circulation behind the so-called Iron Curtain constituted a carefully crafted image of „political” (mystification). In this context, the clash of Stella's statement with the practice of figurative and politically motivated interference into a painting exposed the essential truth: our knowledge about the world and about events taking place around us is mediated by paintings which are often false. Their falsehood results not so much from the imperfection of the medium which never shows everything, but from intentional interference in presentation – political retouch.

The issue of intentional modification of paintings – both in political terms and a broader social context – situates art in the very centre of the 'war for the power over paintings' which may have various forms. Artists, who are aware of this principle, join the game with the question about 'the truth of a painting' not only by rejecting realism – as was the case of Frank Stella – but also through an attempt to make their own artistic method from the political strategy of visual retouch. Their taking control over paintings takes numerous forms and it is often used to unmask official political rhetoric contained in instrumentalized works of art.

Particular works of art presented at the exhibition 'Retouch' concern a slightly different aspect of intentional modification of political paintings. Examples of historic works have a special place within the exhibition; they constitute a testimony of various practices of painting modification for political purposes. One of the oldest examples are works of antique art devastated as a result of the penalty for the condemnation of memory called *damnatio memoriae*. The persistence of this idea is also showed by the graphically destroyed image of Martin Luther from the Counter-Reformation period. Another type of modification of the

artistic message was the impact on the medium of photography, the most well-known example of which are operations undertaken upon Joseph Stalin's orders. Practices presented here constituted direct inspiration for artists' actions who used the strategy of artistic retouch to critically develop the rule of discourse in politics and mass media.