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Muzeum Sztuki

W TAKIM

WHAT

PIĘKNYM

A FABULOUS

MIEJSZOU

PLACE

JESTEŚMY

WE ARE IN

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“What a fabulous place we are in” are the words repeatedly spoken by Andrzej Mitan and Cezary Staniszewski during their performance in 1992. The title, with its message, is ironic. It signals, on the one hand, the distance from the spoken, and on the other, the artists’ aspirations to be elevated above everyday life. Geopolitical conditions are not without their relevance either—in the performance, the artists used a photograph showing the “architects” of the 1945 Yalta conference, who established what would be the global spheres of influence after World War II, an issue that is coming back to us with all its impact now.

The exhibition is composed of artworks donated to the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź between 2008 and 2021. This institution itself was established nearly a hundred years ago thanks to the dedication of international avant-garde artists and activists. The crises of the then world, when empires were collapsing and an alternative to exploitative economic relations was urgently sought after, was accompanied by a belief in progress and universal emancipation. The manifestation of this faith was reflected in avant-garde art. The works donated to the collection represent an artistic expression, constitute a historical record, and are also a reflection of exhibitions and projects run by the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. The image by Tamás Kaszás “We don’t ask nor demand, but we take and occupy” shown at the exhibition reminds us, however, of the anger at the unequal distribution of goods, even if public institutions, such as a museum, were originally established to mitigate this inequality.

The first theme of the exhibition concerns museums. Artists working with art institutions constantly reflect on the function of those institutions and artists’ presence in them. The worn-out golden-painted sneakers on a tall metal plinth is an installation documenting a performance by James Lee Byars during Documenta 5 in 1972, which indicates, *inter alia*, the process of creating meaning around artistic gestures. The counterpoint here is a film by Assaf Gruber about a person for whom taking care of art and its presentation has become their very reason for being and the main element of everyday activities. Jasmina Cibic’s photos remind us that museums are the time capsules in which we store unusual and poetic objects. The artist photographed the reverse of paintings by Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Władysław Strzemiński with numerous stickers documenting the history of these objects, on which we see butterflies whose life by Nature’s plan is short.

The second theme of the exhibition, indicated by the literal reading of the title, is a exploration of the beauty of distant worlds, which produces an impulse to get to know them. It refers to the relationship between museums and cabinets

of curiosities. The wing of an exotic bird in Zbigniew Rogalski’s work refers to the dream of distant lands, to flying, but also to this bird’s death. Joanna Malinowska, in the sculpture “Mammoth Tusk”, made mainly of polystyrene, asks a question about the imitative possibilities of art and the ancient principle of mimesis. A museum may also be a place where differences and strangeness are negotiated. Wiktor Gutt and Waldemar Raniszewski painted the faces of people participating in the Rockowisko rock music festival in Łódź in 1981 with unique patterns. The photos documenting this artistic action show the collective desire for otherness, as well as the individualism of contemporary people at a specific historical moment. While Gutt and Raniszewski engaged in capturing the uniqueness of their interlocutors, in the film by Zbyněk Baladrán we come across a story about the impossibility of engaging in dialogue. The artist, in a distant reference to Stanisław Lem’s novel *Eden*, focuses on procedures created in a neutral language, leading to the shooting of a creature that entered an oil rig on a distant planet. The story unrolls with conjectural competition for resources taking place in the background. The question of how many conditions must be met in order for the Other to be an enemy has been asked in an extremely subtle way in this work. The protagonists of the film abandon the attempt to understand the Other in favor of conquest.

This takes us to the last theme of the exhibition: the war. *Four Battles* (Olszynka Grochowska 1831, Solferino 1859, Sadowa 1866, Bzura 1939) by Włodzimierz Jan Zakrzewski is an abstract painting made of the plans of these well-known military clashes. An effective military strategy does not require the bodies and blood of the soldiers to be present. *Banknotenlied 2* by Gerhard Rühm is a collage of the musical notation of a song from 1813, *Was ist der Deutschen Vaterland* [What is the German’s Fatherland], with banknotes issued during the hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic. The artist points to nationalism and the economic crisis as the sources of Nazism. Natalia LL’s works refer to the mythical Nordic character of Brunhild, which the artist herself plays the role of. Zbigniew Warpechowski, in his work from 1981, proposes an artistic inauguration of the Third World War. After all, important international events should have the appropriate setting. Isn’t it surprising that in the peaceful years between 2008–2021, the museum’s collection gathered so many works depicting or discussing armed conflicts? They had been created at different times and relate to various conflicts, but with today’s perspective of Russian aggression against Ukraine, their message, that only a moment ago seemed to be just playing with a certain distant notion, has become very relevant.

transl. Beata Połowińska

Artystki i artyści / Artists

Zbyněk Baladrán, Jan Buřhak, James Lee Byars, Jasmina Cibic, Céline Condorelli, Dom Mody Limanka, Assaf Gruber, Wiktor Gutt i Waldemar Ranszewski, Servie Janssen, Tamás Kaszás, Agnieszka Kalinowska, Leszek Knaflewski, Igor Kopystiansky, Svetlana Kopystiansky, Piotr C. Kowalski, Natalia LL, Joanna Malinowska, Andrzej Mitan i Cezary Staniszewski, Magdalena Moskwa, Włodzimierz Pawlak, Zbigniew Rogalski, Gerhard Rühm, Teresa Tyszkiewicz, Zbigniew Warpechowski, Anna Zagrodzka i Karolina Wojtas, Włodzimierz Jan Zakrzewski

Kuratorka / Curator

Anna Łazar

Wsparcie / Support

Daniel Muzyczuk

Współpraca i aranżacja przestrzeni / Collaboration and spatial arrangement

Kacper Szalecki

Projekty graficzne / Design and typesettings

Rene Wawrzekiewicz

Projekty siedzisk / Seat design

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