

It Is As You Think It Is

The *It Is As You Think It Is* exhibition asks important questions about what the symbolic field of art is and how its circulation is shaped, and attempts to critically analyze ready models of perception of artworks, a certain type of engineered perception of reality that is shaped by cultural contexts, embedded clichés or institutional mechanisms themselves.

A sandal abandoned by someone, overgrowing with moss in a forest, is an object that has the status of trash, which nature incorporates, annexes, appropriates into the cycle of life. By transferring it into the space of the gallery, **Diana Lelonek** not only changes the object's material status – from trash to work of art – but also reconfigures the viewer's perception of this object. The use of a symbolic field of art, or a certain prepared and arranged space of perception, is part of the artist's activity here. The act itself of removing the ready-made object from its environment and placing it in completely different circumstances of perception becomes an integral part of the work. The narrative that is created around the object – about that which is natural and that which is artificial, the status of trash incorporated into nature to some extent (are they foreign objects or do they already belong to the forest's environment, or maybe something in between?) – becomes an intangible component of the work.

Can a mirror be photographed? If so, what does the photograph present: the reflection or the mirror itself? **Witek Orski**, a consummate juggler of philosophical and aesthetic theories, subversively photographs a mirror from the side. On one hand, the black plane through which a greenish, jagged line cuts through becomes an autonomous image that combines the tradition of conceptual photography with abstract painting, and on the other hand, it remains a photographic representation of a mirror. Orski complicates the situation further: by exhibiting the photograph behind glass, he creates an additional illusion of a mirror in which the viewer can see their reflection. This seemingly ordinary photograph generates questions about the limits of the medium in a refined way and provokes a discussion about aesthetic theories and the cultural tradition of art. Besides itself, it presents many much more complicated phenomena. *Is it what it seems or what it is?* – the impossibility of an unambiguous answer to this question is problematized aesthetically here by the artist.

Janek Simon's *Polyethnic* series of sculptures, made using 3D printers built independently by the artist, presents figures that are a blend of the ethnic cultures of India, Africa, South America and Poland. They are a specific deconstruction of national or ethnic identity, which is only seemingly monolithic and monochromatic, enclosed in a single modeled shape that consists of many layers and colors in actuality. In reference to the imaginarium of collective tradition, the sculptures resemble both primeval mythical creatures and figures of a cosmic alien civilization.

One of the animations presented by **Piotr Bosacki**, *Dracula*, is an attempt to take a closer look at the mechanisms of perception themselves. In the ten-minute minimalist animation (the image consists of a sheet of graph paper on which organs of the body, atoms, shapes and other existences are drawn), Bosacki half-ironically, half-scientifically meditates on what a tongue moving over teeth can see, how elementary particles work, and how the senses determine perception of reality. *Dracula* is also an example of the independent animated

sound film movement that is growing to new heights in contemporary art, which smuggles very personal messages under the cover of scientific narration.

Wojciech Bąkowski is an artist who has significantly expanded the medium of animation in contemporary art, experimenting with it not only as a visual layer, but above all, with sound (Bąkowski is known as the vocalist of the alternative music groups NIWEA and KOT, which have already achieved cult status). In his multimedia compositions, he has succeeded in developing a recognizable language with which he contends with reality – dirty, organic and vulgar as it is – in an innovative and formally refined way. Bąkowski does not only revolutionize the art of new media on a formal level (by skillfully working with the audio layer, in which well-assimilated echoes of John Cage's compositions can be heard), but also at the "spoken", verbal level – the text used in the video is a literary experiment that takes on the form of an audioperformance, a poetic melodeclamation.

The work of **Piotr Łakomy** also operates in a symbolic field of art, testing the interpretative possibilities that the gallery's space generates. Scrap, as civilizational waste, would seem to be a material presenting little aesthetic value, but when processed into a sculpture, it begins to release meanings that remain hidden within the space of the scrapyard. Scrap is matter that defines the condition of the modern human, who sinks himself in constant overproduction despite differences between social classes that are still uneven and poverty. Gigantic quantities of trash and waste colonize increasingly large areas of the world every day. Łakomy's installation initiates an ironic game with the viewer and with stereotypes about contemporary art – like with the fact that even a heap of scrap can be art nowadays. It cannot be art in and of itself, but when consciously placed in a symbolic space and properly composed and processed, embodying and reinterpreting the Marxist idea of commodity fetishism – it certainly gains the fully justified status of an artwork while simultaneously being a critical commentary on how the work gains this status.

Alicja Bielawska also critically redefines the medium of sculpture. As she herself admits: 'When I call my works "objects", one expects less of them than if I would call them sculptures. There is also another important matter: when I talk about an object, I emphasize that it holds the same rank as the table at which we are sitting'. If Bielawska's installations were to be broken down into their base elements, they would be a curtain and ceramic tiles, materials encountered in every home. But in the artist's arrangement, they form a derealized space that evokes associations with a surrealist aesthetic, in which a metaphysical background is very often contrasted with an empty plane.

Gizela Mickiewicz presents a performative sculpture, *Falling before the fall*. The installation consists of concrete pillars with centers of gravity that have been shifted slightly, giving the impression that they are bowing towards a fall. Several hours before the vernissage, the artist pours a substance into the object that slowly increases its volume and bursts it from the inside. The viewer is confronted with a work that cracks, crumbles and disintegrates before their very eyes. Mickiewicz is only able to plan the progression of this process to a certain degree, and to some extent, she withdraws as the author and allows the object to be destroyed autonomously. The sculpture is stripped of its traditional status here; the entirety of the work consists of: the original state, the process, and the result (ruins). Mickiewicz issues a

challenge to the traditional model of exhibiting an object while observing the object itself in action and in interactions with viewers at the same time.

Paweł Bownik's photograph *Reverse*, presenting Józef Piłsudski's coat on a mannequin, resembles a postcard from a typical history museum where objects are exhibited as a historical record and undergo fetishization. The artist undertakes a dialogue with the historical narrative generated by museum exhibits, which, due to their specific configuration and exhibition, are subject to manipulation or arbitrary historiographic visions. Bownik attempts to show Piłsudski's coat objectively, without spectacle, from the inside, breaking off with the cult of the heroic leader.

Iza Tarasewicz's mushroom installation, exhibited in Arsenal Gallery's basement, is a continuation of the artist's ruminations on the material possibilities of a work of sculpture. Tarasewicz studies how placing organic matter in the field of the exhibition will work but also how matter builds the sculpture and whether mushrooms can become an essential building block of an artwork. The artist is known for experimenting with the materials used in her works and investigating their effect in the exhibit space.

The *It Is As You Think It Is* exhibition is composed of a polyphony of artists who critically view the symbolic field of art that allows objects to appear in the public space as artworks. Here, the stakes are continuous renegotiation of the boundaries of this field, indication of its limitations, and the attempt to cross and surmount these boundaries and limitations. Radical gestures of negation, such as the destruction of Paweł Ukleński's work by Daniel Olbrychski with a sword, Dorota Nieznalska's court case for offence against religious feelings resulting from her *Passion* installation, or the illegal hanging by Kamil Sipowicz of his own painting at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw demonstrate that the symbolic field of art is a field of the battle for the possibility of existing subjectively within it and a field of continuous negotiation of the status of the works that appear therein. Is it art? Is it sculpture? Does this photograph have artistic value? Is it video art or just an ordinary video? Do the interpretations of the works given in the text reflect what these works are, or are they maybe something completely different? Are these even works of art? What do you think?

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