

## AGNIESZKA MASTALERZ

*no mental scars, no nursed grudges*

18/01 – 26/02/2022

*with text by Antonio Grulli*

Although Agnieszka Mastalerz's work consists mainly of video and photography, I have always recognized its strongly sculptural side. Sculptural in the sense of perceivable through our gaze and body as if having a three-dimensional presence. This exhibition is an example of that. The bodies are the protagonists of the presented works, the bodies as shapes in space, in meaningful forms and poses.

The white and black analogue photographs present a young woman inside a Warsaw-based building traceable to the Bauhaus period in style. The woman interacts with some architectural elements and her poses are not natural. They remind us of gestures linked to security or medical protocols. They evoke images related to the protection of limbs and sensitive parts such as the neck.

The video, instead, is in color, even though having delicate and muted shades. We see two young acrobats intent on making figures with their bodies, mostly interacting with each other, sometimes with some tools for stunts. The two bodies and the age of the girls vary slightly. In most cases, the older girl acts as the support for the younger and smaller one.

During the days I was starting to write this text, I visited the Possagno Gypsotheca, where many of Canova's plaster casts and sketches are kept, and I felt something akin to Agnieszka's subjects and works. Indeed, I perceive a profound sense of 'classic' in her works. The atmospheres are suspended and detached, the subjects are harmonious and without any sense of guilt in their beauty; I find in her works the same notion of adolescence so beloved by Canova. With their artificial poses, the girls recall neoclassical plastic sculptures, in which the arms and limbs move as if guided by the metaphysical and not-of-this-world feeling.

The same use of the slow motion in one part of the recording accentuates this tension towards something that would potentially like to be eternal. The slowed-down images were in fact captured with a video camera mounted on a large robot, which becomes one of the two "directors" of the video, and which appears "dancing" alongside the two acrobats. Here is, where the cybernetic, robotic, and silicon element of this sculpture in movement meets with a classical aesthetics, contaminating itself with it: it is as if it were a sculptural classicism, more enhanced, apparently perfect, and far away from the disharmony of vulgar human sentiments. It is fluid, Apollonian, unalterable, shiny, and with a sexy surface, as attractive as only the inorganic can be, and as cold as the marble of Canova's sculptures.

Agnieszka Mastalerz's work manages in subtle and very elegant way to reveal the anxieties and frictions inherent to our collectivity and the way in which the individual inserts itself into the social dynamics aimed at his or her control and directing. In recent years there has been a lot of talk about how the robots are always more efficient, and about the day when they will come to look like us. I have an impression that these are not the robots that resemble us more and more, but that we are the ones who are increasingly looking like them. In the moment in which the humanity puts away the soul and the spiritual side of human being, it is inevitable to envy a digital entity, one that is infinitely faster than us in computing and with much better physical performance than ours. Perhaps, because of the exasperated use of technological prostheses and robotic supports in our everyday life

# eastcontemporary

and at work, we want to be like them and function like them as we are already convinced that they work better in a reassuring way and without disturbing surprises that humans are prone to. Furthermore, robots have an advantage and the enviable comfort of having no responsibility, they only follow protocols, no matter what happens. This is also why we entered the era of adoration of big data, our new gospel and horrid abyss in which the sense of the sublime of our time resides.

However, in the artist's work there is an escape from all of this, a potential salvation, a redemptive crack. Indeed, there is always a sort of internal dichotomy to each work, in which a vital and organic element meets with and bumps into something artificial and inorganic, sometimes wanting to direct and control the chaotic part of the organic. And even the atmosphere, that classical and Apollonian construction of the image, always carries within itself a tiny hint of a possible 'decomposition'. Among the exhibited photographs there is an image that speaks perhaps in a more exemplary way: you can see a girl shot from below on a flight of stairs. Everything is perfect, sinuous, suspended, but in the upper left angle of the image you can see that a building has a water leak ruining and corrupting the plaster. It is something small and secondary, but in reality, we are faced with a visual and psychological worm clinging to remain inside those who look. In almost all works of Agnieszka Mastalerz, there is an inkling of failure, something in a state of decay or corruption: it is the human that emerges in its purest essence as a deviation from a norm that would otherwise make everything alienating and inhuman.

*Antonio Grulli*

**Agnieszka Mastalerz** (b. 1991, Łódź, Poland) lives and works in Warsaw.

Agnieszka Mastalerz is a Polish video artist and photographer graduated from the Studio of Spatial Activities led by Professor Mirosław Bałka at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (2013 – 2018). In her artistic practice, Mastalerz puts the main focus on mechanisms of control and processes influencing and exploiting an individual. Through the use of photography, video, performance and installation, distinguished by poetic visual language, she analyses restrictive rules established within intimate relationships, social structures and towards the natural environment. She has recently exhibited at FabbriSchenker Projects in London, the Center for Contemporary Art Luigi Pecci in Prato, MAXXI in Rome, Wschód Gallery in Warsaw, Starak Family Foundation in Warsaw, Deichtorhallen in Hamburg, Fondation Hippocrène in Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. In the last months, Mastalerz participated in the residency program Temporars Susch at Muzeum Susch in Switzerland, Artists Development Programme by the European Investment Bank Institute in Luxembourg and the residency at Futura Gallery Prague in Czech Republic. Her works are in the collection of Fondazione In Between Art Film by Beatrice Bulgari, Ergo Hestia Group, European Investment Bank Institute and private art collections.

"No mental scars, no nursed grudges" was realised with and thanks to: 3-channel video - Marcin Gołąb: director of photography, Kuba Gryżewski: assistant director, Zuzia Ćwikła, Magda Wróblewska: performers, Bartłomiej Ptasznik: focus puller, Olaf Jurdyga: gaffer, Anna Słowińska: make up, hair, Mirella Panecka: backstage, Bites Studio: studio, staff (Michał Raczyński, Łukasz Mergner), robot, cameras, Black Photon: color-grading, Fast Media: lenses. Series of analogue photos - Agnieszka Kryst: performer, Ewa Ledóchowicz: location owner, Pracownia Obrazu, Jerzy Łapiński: photo scanning, banda printshop: photo scanning.

The exhibition is produced thanks to the support of the Consulate General of Poland in Milan, the Polish Institute in Rome and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute:

