

The Night of the Great Season

Group Exhibition

Artists: Bruno Schulz, Tadeusz Kantor, Erna Rosenstein, Alina Szapocznikow, Agnieszka Polska, Jakub Julian Ziółkowski and Tomasz Kowalski

Curated by Martha Kirszenbaum, guest curator at La Kunsthalle in 2014.

February 19th –May 11th 2014

Press conference: Tuesday, February 18th at 4.00 pm at La Kunsthalle

Meeting Curator/ Artists: Tuesday, February 18th at 5.00 pm at la salle des colloques –La Fonderie

Opening Reception: Tuesday, February 18th at 6.30 pm

The Night of the Great Season focuses on Polish neo-surrealism, tracing the historical influence of art, theater and literature in this little known artistic movement. The aim of the exhibition is to question a tendency observed in the early 2000s amongst a generation of young Polish artists, influenced by 1920s and 30s Surrealist techniques, such as automatic writing and the representation of dreams. This placed the actors of this scene in opposition to the previous generations of Polish art, such as those who were proponents of critical art and realism from the 1990s. The artists presented here create works that exist outside of reality, often based on chance and the subconscious, where fantasy, magic and imagination prevail in dark, unsettling, and often disturbing ways.

The exhibition begins by introducing the drawings by **Bruno Schulz** (Drohobycz 1892 – 1942), an avant-garde Polish Jewish writer and artist from the 1930s and 40s, who often combined surreal humor with realistic details, imbuing his graphic and literary work with a keen sense of everyday life. Shot in the head by a Nazi officer in the Drohobycz ghetto in 1942, he left behind dozens of brilliant drawings and short works of fiction, such as *The Cinnamon Shops* published in 1934, also called *The Street of Crocodiles*¹ in English. His best-known short story, *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, was published in 1937. The poetic and uncanny outline of his pen and pencil reflects the everyday life in a provincial Polish town where every element is glorified and transformed into dreams by his imagination.

The 1950s produced a need to escape the traumatic legacy of World War II in Poland and the rigidity of the newly established regime. It is in this context that the artistic *milieu* of Krakow expressed a desire to bypass reality, a position incarnated by the Krakow Group. This included notable artists such as Tadeusz Kantor and Erna Rosenstein. A major figure of post-war Polish art, a painter, theater director, poet, actor and happening performer close to Dadaism. **Tadeusz Kantor** (1915, Wielopole Skrzyńskie – 1990, Krakow) would explain the absence of Surrealism in Poland by the prevalence of Catholicism. He gained international recognition for his work as a stage director and designer. His theatrical events included an illustration of the memory mechanism through a succession of unreal images, crumbs of remembrances, obsessive scenes and absurd situations, transforming characters and objects according to his imagination. **Erna Rosenstein** (1913, Lvov – 2004, Warsaw) was a Polish-Jewish artist who survived the Holocaust and was educated in Lvov before moving to Krakow. She was very affected by the concept of abjection dear to George Bataille and related to the excess and degradation of natural elements. Her paintings and drawings evoke a feminist engagement that conveys corporality, sensuality, and an attention to difference, while simultaneously relating to automatic writing.

The female body and the tragedy of the Holocaust are topics developed by the sculptor and photographer **Alina Szapocznikow** (1926, Kalisz – 1973, Praz-Coutant), who produced elaborate casts of body-parts which are transformed into everyday objects such as lamps or ashtrays. Expressing a lineage with the Surrealists' erotic fetishism for objects, her work also echoes their desire to jostle the body's hierarchy and to disorientate the viewer towards the status of the object and the image. **Agnieszka Polska's** (1985, Warsaw and Amsterdam) animated films and photographs are visual collages of images gathered from 1960s art magazines and newspapers, which provide her practice with a subtle documentary tone. She often revisits Polish modernism by using historical material and archival photographs in narrative and melancholic animated films. Her series of photcollages *Arton* (2010) refers to Polish conceptual artist and performer Włodzimierz Borowski and figures an organic, almost fairytale ensemble of fragments of organic elements and elegant sculptures made of mud and branches.

In closing, the exhibition presents paintings and drawings by **Jakub Julian Ziółkowski** (1980, Zamość) and **Tomasz Kowalski** (1984, Krakow). The first depicts hallucinatory landscapes of supernatural vegetation and troubling human figures, referencing the fantastical qualities of Jerome Bosch and the grotesque features of Robert Crumb. The latter manipulates a detailed mise en abyme, mirroring the mannequins and puppets of Schulz and Kantor, childhood experiences and fragmented memories. Both originate from Galicia, a southeastern region of Poland, whose culture is infused with Baroque magnificence, glowing poetry, ornament, and a certain form of spiritualism that seems to have deeply influenced their practices. It is also in the same region where Bruno Schultz lived and worked, to whom both artists pay deep admiration.

(1) Bruno Schulz, *The Street of Crocodiles and other stories*, New York: Penguin Books, 2008.

Martha Kirszenbaum (b.1983) is a curator based in Los Angeles and Paris. She worked at the Department of Media and Performance Art at MoMA, New York (2006-2007), the Cabinet of Photography at Centre Georges Pompidou (2007), and as a research assistant at the New Museum, New York (2008-2010). Independently, Kirszenbaum has organized exhibitions, projects and screenings in the United States, Europe and at the 2012 Marrakech Biennale. Kirszenbaum was a curator-in-residence at the Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, and the 2012 guest curator at the Belvedere Museum/21er Haus in Vienna where she organized two interventions on the collection. She has recently developed a double-exhibition project between Palais de Tokyo and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibition. Since January 2014, she is the director and curator of Fahrenheit, a new exhibition space and residency program in Los Angeles.

She regularly contributes to *Kaleidoscope* among other publications, and has led seminars on curatorial practices at University Paris VIII and Parsons Paris.



Jakub Julian Ziółkowski

Planet, 2012

Oil on canvas

144 x 111 cm

Courtesy of the artist, Foksal Gallery Foundation and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

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Opening hours

Open Wednesday to Friday, noon to 6 pm; Saturday and Sunday, 2 pm to 6 pm; late-night opening Thursdays until 8 pm

Closed Mondays, Tuesdays and April 18th & 20th; May 1st & 8th

Free admission

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