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If you would like to read more about the exhibitions, or watch videos please use our Study off Gallery 1. You can learn more online by visiting the Research and Archive area of our website.



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Agnieszka Polska

I Am The Mouth

Agnieszka Polska's dreamlike videos explore time and memory. Born in Poland, in 1985, while it was still a communist state, she is interested in obscured histories and cultural myths, particularly those of vanished artists. Using computer animation and live action she rescues, embellishes and re-animates events that are on the verge of oblivion, using a narrative style that is both serious and playful.

Gallery 1

Agnieszka Polska sees the archive as a living organism, "alive and subject to incessant change." Archives provide the source material for both the form and content of her films. They are a space for forgetting, distorting and superseding facts. In these gaps the collective memory that is legend and myth thrive. In Polska's *Future Days*, the notion of legend is explored through the films. Dead artists from different generations meet in the afterlife. Masked characters play Paul Thek, Jerzy Ludwiski, Włodzimierz Borowski, Lee Lozano, Charlotte Posenenske, Andrzej Szewczyk, and Bas Jan Ader. Each were mythologised through their sudden disappearance from the art scene. In particular, the disappearance of Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader, who was lost at sea in 1975, has become one of the art world's best-known legends.

The remote Swedish island of Gotland was the setting for Polska's imagined afterlife, a timeless, largely uninhabited landscape. The elasticity of time is central to the Polska's work. The influence of the past on the present, and the present on memory are key themes in *Future Days*.

The artists wander through the landscape, encountering traces of past artworks, including Robert Smithson's legendary "lost" artwork *Partially Buried Woodshed*, which becomes a resting place for the artists overnight. The afterlife portrayed in *Future Days* imagines time at a standstill. Past and future are an eternal present, evoking larger existential questions about how the past is integral to the way in which the present is constructed and understood.

Speaking about her residency in Gotland where *Future Days* was written and produced, Polska said: "The atmosphere of the film is an echo of the experiences from my trip. Firstly, from the sense of isolation, and secondly from the stubborn, exhausting thoughts of the ultimate questions that come to you in times of prolonged solitude."



Agnieszka Polska, *The Garden*, (film still detail), 2010.
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Zak | Branicka

Gallery 2

The Garden (2010) explores self-mythologisation through the act of disappearance. The video refers to Paweł Freisler, a Polish artist active in the 1960s and 1970s known for his "art of storytelling." The stories he told were about his performances, and art objects, and were impossible to verify. In the late 1970s Freisler stopped being an artist and chose to develop a garden in Sweden, his adopted home. Polska's video documents a hypothetical visit to Freisler's garden, narrated as if by him, telling the story of his search for the perfect sculptural form. In *The Garden*, Polska creates another story, dedicated to extending and reinforcing the legend of Freisler's withdrawal from the art world.

The use of collage in Polska's animations references techniques used in experimental films of the Polish avant garde. Appropriated, subverted and spliced with documentary-style filming. The first Polish montage films were made in 1927, and from the 1930s members of the Krakow-based Studio of Polish Avant Garde Film began to combine the formal tactics of Constructivism with a freer use of images that evoked Surrealism. Constructivism embraced the mass-media, treating art as a universal force-field purged of realism, romance and ornament. The "classic" disciplines of painting, sculpture and architecture were linked with craft tradition, photography, montage, design and cinema. In the 1970s the National Film School in Łódź made it possible for a whole generation of young filmmakers and artists to investigate film's formal conventions, producing films that defied the established traditions of both narrative and documentary cinema. Seen as the most liberal and least Communist institution of higher education in Poland, the National Film School made its films outside the large, state-run studios. During this "second wave" of the avant garde in Poland a new generation of filmmakers revisited the collage techniques of 1930s Constructivism.

Polska's video *How The Work Is Done* revisits collage again. Presenting a hypothetical reconstruction of an actual event, *How The Work Is Done* tells the story of the 1956 student strike at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. During the strike, students barricaded themselves in the sculpture studios, shutting down production to protest against the Communist government's labour standards. Inaction became a form of artistic resistance. The animations accompanying this quasi-documentary equate the creative process of producing a piece of art to arduous physical labour. The actions are slow and hypnotic, appearing mundane and meaningless.

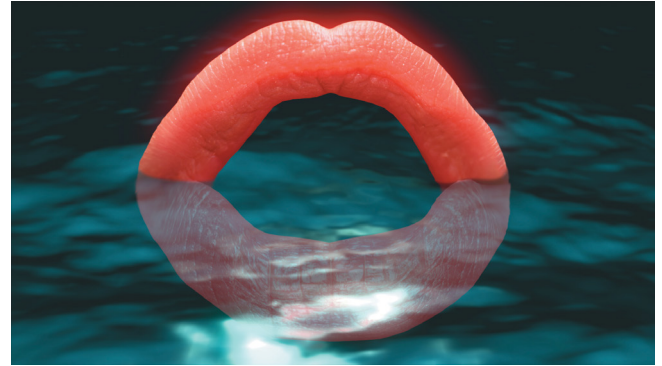
Watery Rhymes is a new digital animation commissioned by Nottingham Contemporary. It explores how language is influenced by the laws of physics, featuring a voiceover by artist David Bernstein and a soundtrack written specially for the work by acclaimed American musician Sun Araw.

Gallery 3

The unique hallucinatory quality of many of Polska's videos is characterised by slow, unnaturally calm movements. The influence that an artist can have over a viewer is fundamental to her work. She has said that "each project needs a lot of time and concentration for viewer and maker" in order to encourage a meditative and contemplative experience. This idea is explored both aurally and visually in her videos. Like a hypnosis tape, the steady monotone of the narrator's voice provokes an immediate physiological response.

In her new work, *I Am The Mouth II*, the subliminal influence of the artist on the unconscious is implied through the hypnotic waves and whispering mouth. The mouth guides the viewer through the art work by explaining the mechanisms of speech and the physiological effect of sound. The film illustrates the complexity of Polska's practice. It questions both its own mode of production and how an artist "transmits" understanding to an audience. Her work also asks wider questions about how art history is shaped, how we experience art in relation to our understanding of the world, and how these questions fuel the production of art itself.

On Tuesday 21 October, Agnieszka Polska will perform Future Days with her co-writer Sebastian Cichocki.



Agnieszka Polska, *I Am The Mouth II*, 2014 (film still).
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Żak | Branicka, Berlin

The exhibition is supported by Culture.pl, promoting Poland and Polish culture through art, music and design. www.culture.pl is the most comprehensive source of knowledge about Polish culture.