



THE TIMING OF EVERYTHING IS A GENIUS.

"A lot of stories too many to fit in such a small box"

Adam Mazur

"Far too many stories to fit in such a small box" is a melancholy, shameless, emotionally moving and simply beautiful exhibition. Just in time for the end of the next chapter in the Castle's institutional history.
Ujazdowski

The story prepared by the Dutch duo Bik van der Pol takes place in the former space of the permanent collection of the Centre for Contemporary Art and is not as dense as the title suggests. In preparing their performative exhibition, the curators have not forgotten to leave space for movement, thought and memory. There are many great moments, a lot of text, whispered and broken gossip arranged into an unconventional, poetic guide.

The exhibition presents the remains of a legendary collection of art from the times of Wojciech Krukowski and, to some extent, his successor, Fabio Cavallucci. Yes, the remnants. Remains of lost works and withdrawn deposits. Reconstructions and fragments of exhibitions. There are also a number of objects preserved in a suitable condition for exhibition, which are a trace of the times of glory. These are mainly works of foreign stars, who used to be regular guests at the Centre. For those who remember the exhibitions of Nan Goldin, Nedko Solakov, Barbara Kruger, Kosuth and Kabakov or Martin Creed, the exhibition will be an opportunity to travel in time. Bik van der Pol managed to play out the atmosphere of entropy perfectly. It is a metaphor for the disintegration, or maybe even the collapse, of contemporary art as a promise of a better tomorrow, a more interesting and pluralistic world. This is an excellent criticism of the institution in a state of collapse, a criticism that the artists managed to smuggle in under the watchful eye of the director of U-jazdowski. In this respect, the exhibition Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pola is in itself a work of critical art, updating this tradition, which is fundamental for the Warsaw Contemporary Art Center.



The title of the exhibition refers to the work of the American minimalist Lawrence Weiner, emblematic for the Ujazdowski Castle. The inscription, which talks about many things, not the title stories, was painted over during the renovation of the facade, which coincided with the appointment of Małgorzata Ludwisiak as director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in 2014. Weiner, despite the requests of the new management, did not allow for the renewal of work on the facade and the specific "logo" of the Centre remained strictly conceptual work; the idea with which curator artists play at the exhibition. Referring to the Weiner sequence, Bik van der Pol comment on the institutional memory, the term of office of Małgorzata Ludwisiak, but also refer to the identity of the institution which in the times of Krukowski was actually buzzing and led the entire artistic scene in a programmatic way. It is above all this epoch, stretching from 1989 to 2010, that the stories collected by Bik van der Pol are concerned, which are repeated in the exhibition space in the form of sounds - whispers rather than screams. These scraps of expression were taken from conversations with the Centre for Contemporary Art team, people who remember history from today's distant but very significant perspective. The curators encourage us to listen to these shreds. Already at the entrance you can download a portable loudspeaker and visit the exhibition with them or, while stopping before work, be it Zbigniew Libera or Marek Kijewski, listen to the voices resounding from the loudspeakers hidden at the exhibition. This meta-commentary is lyrical, but also critical. It exposes institutional practice, telling anonymously about the secrets of institutions, abuses, irresponsibility and disarmament. This hidden knowledge of the mechanics of the field of art can be shocking and can be considered as punnonsense fiction. And yet it is all true.

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Weiner's work, opening and crucial for the concept of the Bik van der Pol exhibition, is present in the gallery in the form of a photocopying drawing - an instruction given by the artist and sent to the curator of his exhibition. Milada Šlizińska, because she is in question, may feel a particular satisfaction when visiting the collection spaces. It seems that her exhibition program has passed the test of time, and the star-studded cast works well in the form of leftovers and fragments, even in a decaying institution, as shown by the curators. The drawing, about which Bik van der Pol probably had no idea when placing a photocopy at the exhibition, is in fact the property of Šlizińska, the main curator of the

international programme of the Centre for Contemporary Art, who was released during Cavallucci's time.



"Excessive self-knowledge leads to perversion."

Each of the works selected from the collection has been provided with an extensive commentary. This is a great story about the fate of things. Strange stories of works of art are a fascinating subject and the curators managed to play it out with hauntological vigor. Describing them, the artists create, on the one hand, a catalogue of relics of a bygone era and, on the other hand, update their meanings, ask about the presence of the ideas behind the objects. This can be seen in the example of Barbara Kruger's poster in public space, "Your body is a battlefield". The poster, made in 1989 by a New York artist and shown in the CCA's programme in the middle of an abortion debate in Poland in the early 1990s, is still relevant, strong and controversial. It is wonderful that art, including art accused of journalism and politics, is going through the test of time and still works.

Even by exposing an abstract square and describing it as a basic figure for Krukowski's institution and his Academy of Movement, Bik van der Pol refer to the politics of art. It is an in-depth, empathic reconstruction of Krukowski's ideas, which Cavallucci tried to take over, and Ludwisiak eventually gave it up. The "Square" placed in the center of the exhibition, near the roofed and occasionally turned into a place of commercial events, proves this. It is a work-manifesto, or rather a tribute to Bik van der Pol for the first director. It is worth recalling a few sentences opening the description of this work:

"The square returns in various forms.

As a grid in the art center logo.

During demonstrations, in pamphlets and on billboards.

As a poster.

In communication.

During public conversations.

As a guiding principle. "

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The uninitiated can admire a simple and abstract form. The curious will find here a reference to the old logo of the institution. Inserted in the name of U-jazdowski in 2015, the division made the logo incomprehensible and untranslatable. This is troublesome because it poses questions not only about the logo, but also about what has happened to the institution's critical programme in recent years. Did it make sense to withdraw from the public debate and create a secure programme?

In such a gentle, but consistent way, Bik van der Pol score the ending U-jazdowski era of Małgorzata Ludwisiak. By mythologizing Krukowski's time in their own performative way, the curators demythologize the last years of the institution. It is confirmed to some extent by the words of Artur Żmijewski, who, thinking about the collapse of the art institution, spoke in one of his conversations: "The effectiveness of art comes from the courage of cultural institutions, from the intuitive but accurate recognition by the creators of those social processes which at a given time are the bloodstream of common life. Lack of courage takes revenge on a once critical institution. Bik van der Pol, a meta-commentary exhibition, is an attempt to cross the threshold of self-knowledge, to change a small work into a collection and archive again into action. However, it will not be possible to breathe courage into the ossified structure. Too late. Program deficits, wasted energy, opportunism and withdrawal from action lead to the current situation, impasse and... Piotr Bernatowicz.



"Freedom is luxury, not a necessity."

The exhibition of the collection is advertised as performative. It is a fashionable term, just like performance is fashionable today. In the Castle, works of art are performed, positioned towards each other, decomposed and constructed anew. There is also the before mentioned soundscape edited by Wojtek Blecharz, there are actions in the exhibition space, performed lectures and guided tours. Generally speaking, it works well. First of all, the exhibition is alive, which is often the biggest problem when it comes to the exhibition of the collection. Moments that cannot be performed are troublesome, because they require concentration and narration tracking, as in the case of film archives or catalogues of exhibitions and CSW publications from Krukowski's times, which are spread out on the tables. This part of the museum may be the weakest, but it will please every art historian. It is a peculiar center for the study of contemporary art. There are many publications on the tables. They are so diverse and interesting that one can wonder how the production of all this in the 90's and early 2000's, i.e. in the era considered a crisis, was possible at all. Each exhibition with an invitation, almost each with a catalogue, the most important with accompanying publications and texts by outstanding art critics and historians, available in Polish and English. And posters. Great and testifying to the pace of exhibitions. Krukowski exhibitions rarely lasted more than six to eight weeks, even to stars like Marina Abramović, or Kosuth and Kabakov. Continuous pursuit and constant hunger, exhibition in every corner of the basement and tower, on the stairs and corridor. Exhibitions lasting after six months, as is customary in the current U-Zjazdów, with monthly breaks for disassembly, and also devoid of publication (also the exhibition Bik van der Pol has no catalogue), not to mention an interesting audience program, is another sign of the transformation that has taken place in recent years at the Centre for Contemporary Art. The archival part of the exhibition testifies to the obsession, compulsiveness, murderous pace of work imposed by Krukowski without mercy, but also in faith in art and artists. Maybe even in the mission of an art institution. Today it seems that the opportunity has been missed and the exhibition illustrates this sense of loss. Summer art, summer program like hot water in a tap did not pass the test. The end of the exhibition is symbolic, perhaps even pathetic, in this context. Bik van der Pol invited the Fontarte duo to participate, which prepared a sequence of graphically strong posters commenting on the programme of an institution important also for these committed artists. The last poster before leaving the gallery shows the inscription "Blowing up the Castle...! Imagine that...!". The words of one of Bik van der Pol's interlocutors, which can be heard in the exhibition space, referred to the legendary blowing up of the ruins of Ujazdowski Castle by sappers already after the end of the war. In the context of the story told at the exhibition, they have a much more metaphorical meaning.

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Nostalgia seemed to be the biggest threat to the Bik van der Pol concept. There are a few moments when we stand on the edge and the emotions start to take control over the reception of art, great art from the great, past years. The exhibition frame is strong and withstands the pressure of reactionary nostalgia. Bik van der Pol treat the Centre for Contemporary Art as a case study. If the institution is on a bend or another moment of falling down, then you can afford more here (isn't that what the castle's genius loci, eternal leaning down?). There is also a feeling that perhaps the Ujazdowski Castle, on the eve of Piotr Bernatowicz's taking up his post, is still in the vanguard. As paradoxical as it may sound, the institutional trajectory of the CCA coincides with the dynamics of the whole field of contemporary art. In the last five years we have lost more institutions, from CCA Znaki Czasu to Artstations, but above all we have lost faith in art and its mission. After all, Bernatowicz is an old liberal, a man belonging to the "cultural mafia" and the editor-in-chief of "Arteon" who regularly visits the salons of CCA Krukowski. Christened ultraconservatism, he intends to transform the CCA into a center for the study of contemporary art. Ironically, he enters an institution with Krukowski's favorite, Jerzy Kalina, present in the early 1990s. Bernatowicz could start by studying the exhibition Bik van der Pol, which they set up as a research center on contemporary art from the very beginning of the institution.

Bik van der Pol leaves a shadow of hope for the artists who write protest letters, the lost program council and all those who favor the Centre for Contemporary Art. The next seven years will be a blink for art, and what is important and critical, what is indeed artistic, will defend itself, whether in the form of a fragment, a poor object or a memory. Just as Wojciech Krukowski's contemporary art defends and even attacks us. After all, like at the Bik van der Pol exhibition, everything falls apart, but the important thing is how and what remains after that. "Any attempt to stop time is heroic."

* The headlines are quotes from Jenny Holzer, an artist whose work can be viewed at the exhibition "Too many stories to fit in such a small box".