

# | Grzegorz Stefański



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Born in 1983, Grzegorz Stefański graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland and Photography at Art University in Poznań, Poland. In 2016 he graduated from Miroslaw Balka's Studio of Spatial Activities at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw. In 2016 he received Felix Slade Award to undertake MFA degree at Slade School of Art in London. He lives and works in London and Warsaw.

He creates cinematic and photographic projects as well as delegated performances. Protagonists of his works are introduced to space between private and public. In his works he deals with identity, relations and *mimesis*. He blurs the boundaries between documentary and fiction (*restraint*, 2016) and by using memory as an archive of identity, he questions differences between facts and fiction (*do-over*, 2016; *Paul*, 2015). His visual aesthetic is simple and often reductionistic.

He made his debut in 2010 with solo exhibition *emptybottles* in Goldex-Poldex Gallery in Cracow, Poland. Since then his works were presented e.g. during Manifesta 11 in Zurich (2016), in MoMa PS1 in New York (2010), in The New Theatre in Warsaw (2016), in Pastificio Cerere Foundation in Rome (20114), in Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw (2015) and during Wro Media Art Bienalle in Wrocław (2015).

## education

- | 2016 - 2018 Slade School of Fine Arts, London (MFA)
- | 2014 - 2016 Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities (MA in Fine Arts, University of Arts in Warsaw)
- | 2010 - 2013 Photography Department, University of Arts in Poznan, Poland (BA in Fine Arts)
- | 2006 Philosophy Department, University of Paris X Nanterre, Paris
- | 2002 - 2008 Philosophy Department, Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland (MA)

## solo shows

- | 2016 *do-over*, New Theatre, Warsaw
- | 2015 *new face*, solo exhibition, Lookout Gallery, Warsaw
- | 2014 *go-see*, solo show, Zpafiska Gallery, Cracow
- | 2010 *emptybottles*, solo show, Goldex-Poldex Gallery, Cracow

## group shows, screenings and others

- | 2016
  - Work Work Work*, Leipzigerstrasse 63 - Berlin / Marszałkowska street 19 - Warsaw
  - Visual Spa*, Blue Tower, Warsaw
  - Is There Somewhere?*, delegated performance, Manifesta 11, Zyrych
  - Studio for Students: Video Art Now*, Studio Gallery, Warsaw
  - Restraint*, projection during Short Waves Festiwal (experimentan section), Poznań, Poland
  - Wola Warm+Up*, group show at Wola Musem, Warsaw, Poland
- | 2015
  - Team*, group show, Salon of Academy Gallery, Warsaw, Poland
  - Exquisite Corps of Polish Photography*, group show, BVVA Avangard Gallery, Wroclaw, Poland
  - Does on your island night begins later?*, collective activity, Gdansk Shipyard, Gdansk, Poland
  - Mimicry*, group show, National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, Poland
  - Just between us, those videos are very serious ones*, group show, BWA Zielona Góra Gallery, Poland
  - The memory of a crying tree (...)*, group exhibition of Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities, WRO Media Art Bienalle, Wroclaw, Poland
- | 2014
  - Myths. Students/Artists/Teachers. A process of exchange*, group show of Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities, Fondazione Pastificio Cerere Gallery, Rome, Italy
  - No yawning*, group show, New Theatre, Warsaw, Poland
  - inSpirations Festival*, group show, 13Muz Gallery, Szczecin, Poland
  - Darkroom*, action performed in Bunkier Sztuki Gallery, Cracow, Poland
  - Just between us, those videos are very serious ones*, group show, IA Collective, Poznań, Poland
  - Digital\_ia Festival*, group show, 13 Muz Gallery, Szczecin, Poland
- | 2013
  - Hole*, group show, TRAFO Gallery, Szczecin, Poland
- | 2011
  - NY Art Book Fair*, MoMa PS1, New York
  - Second Annual Zine and Self-Published Photo Book Fair*, New York
  - Pile of Photography*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland
  - Publish yourself!*, Czułość Gallery, Warsaw, Polad
- | 2016
  - Felix Slade Scholarship
- | 2015
  - ARTECITYA*, residency at Apollonia Foundation, Strasburg

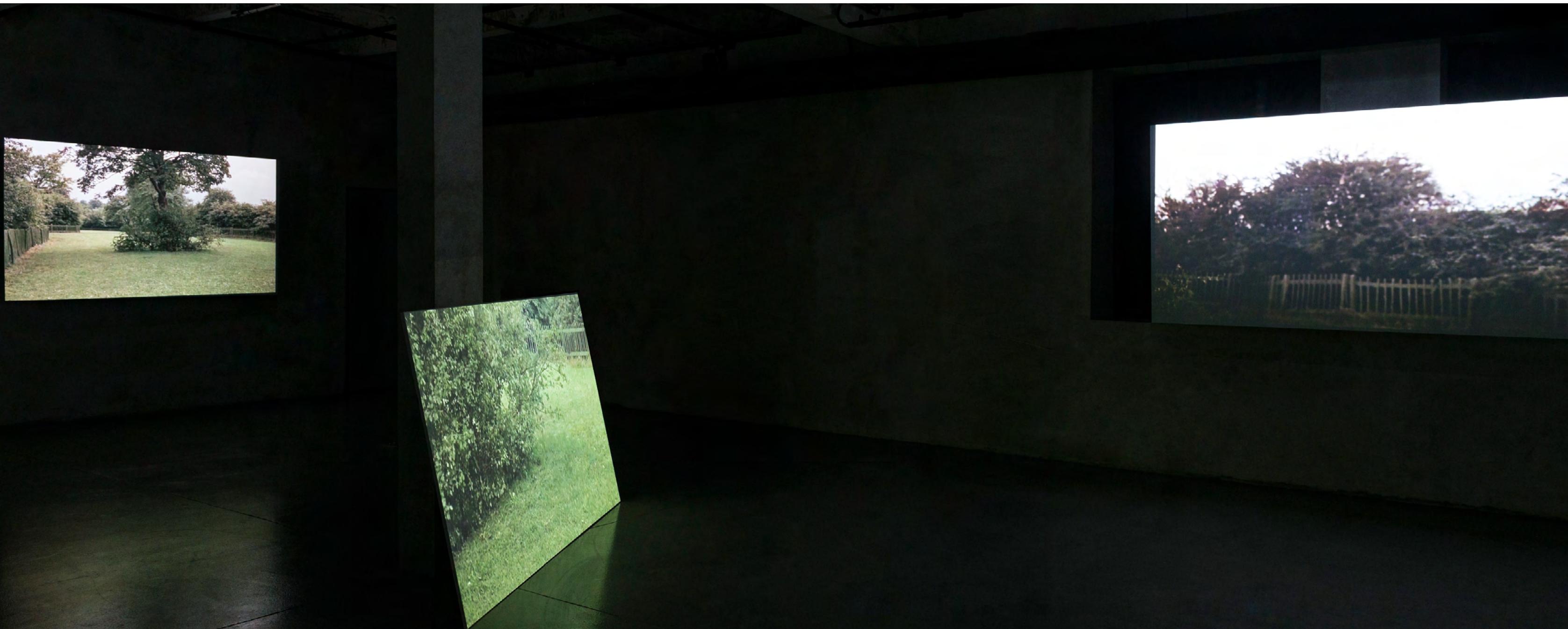
## awards, residencies

# | blow out (2016)

six-channel video installation with sound, dimensions variable.

MA in Mirosław Bałka Studio of Spatial Activities.  
The New Theatre, Warsaw, 23-26.09.2016,

Main character of Michelangelo Antonioni's „Blow Up” has been digitally removed from the final scenes of the film. Myriad Park sequence was broken up into six screens and set up in the exhibition space according to the logic of how it was shot. The audio sphere of the installation was the original sound from the film also cleaned from any sounds made by the protagonist. Both decisions - removal of main character and blowing out the linear sequence of the film - were made to remove guarantors of the meaning of this motion picture. The result is ambiguous pictorial situation - familiar yet uncanny. Spectator's sight encounters a void.



blow out, installation view, The New Theatre, Warsaw, 23-26.09.2016



*blow out*, installation view, The New Theatre, Warsaw, 23-26.09.2016



*blow out*, installation view, The New Theatre, Warsaw, 23-26.09.2016



# | closing credits (2016)

single channel video projection, sound, duration 30min.

„Credits for a film“ is a 30-minutes long footage from credits from nine films. It elongates a transit situation of watching credits after the end of the film and just before going out of the cinema. This buffer space between fiction and reality is transformed to a film based on repetition of usually unique experience, thus intensifying the state of this liminal situation. Seductive strength of the cinema is at the same time negated by rendering all backstage informations about contributors to its fictionality.

clapper loaders	<b>Charlie Guy</b> <b>Rob Gilmore</b> <b>Richard Swingle</b>
grips	<b>Chris Rusby</b> <b>Craig Mellor</b> <b>James Ray</b>
grip hand	<b>Charlie Guy</b>
rigger	<b>Martin Ingram</b>
sparks	<b>Peter Baines</b> <b>John Cartright</b>
unit medics	<b>Mediprop</b>
health and safety advisor	<b>Chris Cullum</b>
visual effects by	<b>Rushes Film &amp; TV</b>
vfx supervisor	<b>Jonathan Privett</b>
vfx producer	<b>Louise Hussey</b>
vfx line producer	<b>Paul Hyman</b> <b>Warwick Hewitt</b>
vfx coordinator	<b>Paul Jones</b>
cg artists	<b>Craig Travis</b> <b>Seb Barker</b>
vfx compositors	<b>Dan Alterman</b> <b>Simone Coco</b> <b>Berry Garsenan</b>



closing credits, film frame

# | do-over (2016)

one-channel video projection, sound, dimensions variable,  
duration 1 min, looped

protagonist: Daniel Sałaciński  
picture: Mikołaj Syguda

*do-over* is a review of few gestures detached from score for classical music pieces. Young conductor was asked to remind those music scores and play choose measures to the camera. Slackened moments of reminding those measures contrast with sudden bursts of conductor's body turning into a medium of musical force majeure. The memory is an archive and the body becomes a vessel for de-contextualized gestures that appear as abstract choreography of male's ferocity.



*do-over*, video frame



do-over, video frame

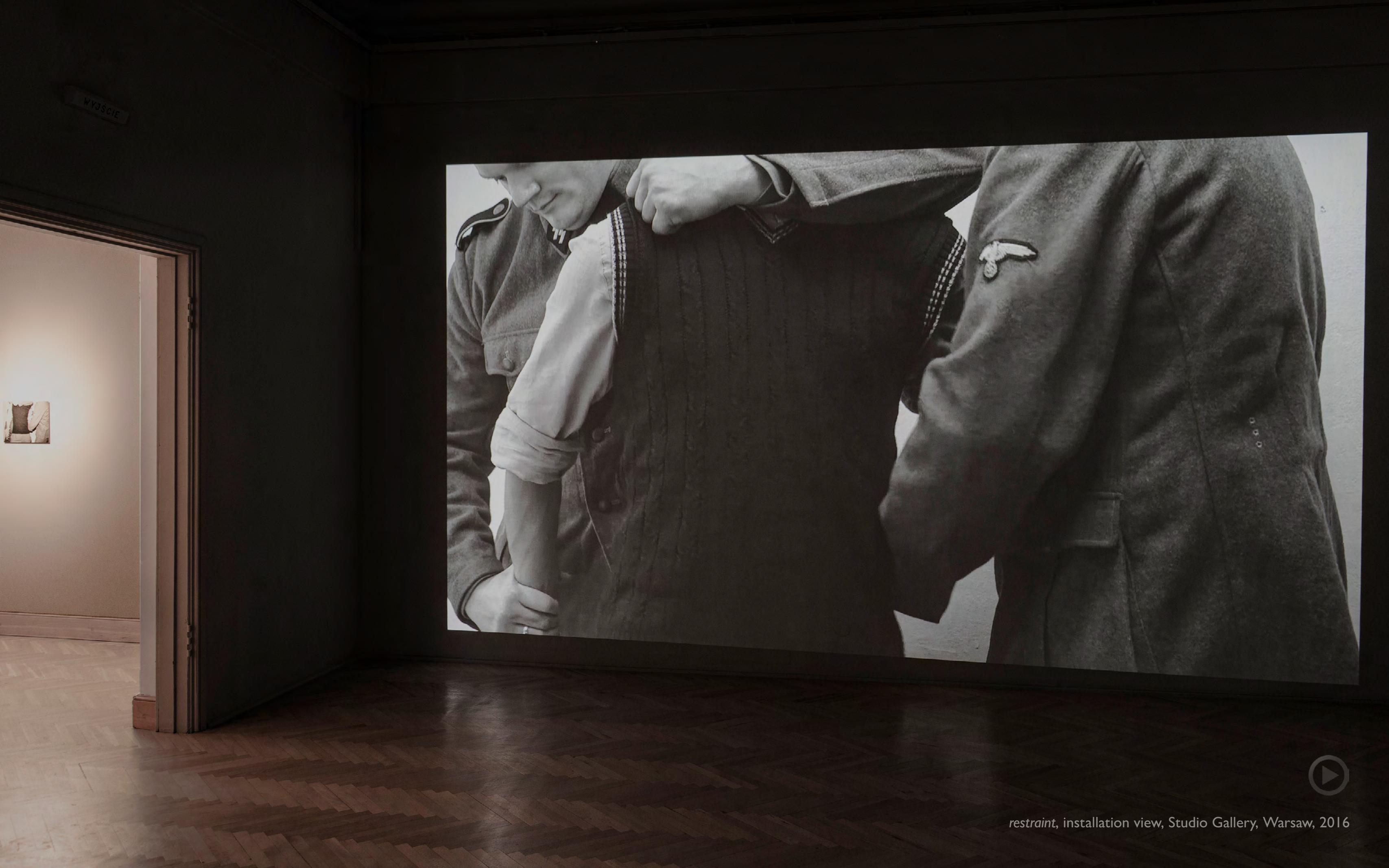
# | restraint (2016)

three-channel video projection, duration round 16 sec. each,  
looped, dimensions variable

Two men in nazis uniforms present to the camera how to incapacitate civilian with bare hands. Calm anticipation followed by position-taking, then few efficient moves and pause at the end of the sequence. Re-enacted choreography of struggling bodies balances between theatre and documentary (participants are members of historical reconstruction groups) emphasising the role of the body as the vessel for both the good clean fun and catalyst of involuntary violence. Though looking and lasting almost the same at the first sight, each video is another try of restraint. Triplication is fake but repetition triggers a search for differences by gazing at the images thus involving viewer into this choreographic rehearsal for spectacle of abuse.



restraint, installation view, Wola Museum, Warsaw, 2016



*restraint*, installation view, Studio Gallery, Warsaw, 2016



# | go-see (2013)

digital photographs 20x30cm, mounted on 30x40 glass,  
infrared DV video, 720x576px,  
147 x 121 sticker on the wall

Project deals with questions about the nature of sight, need for visibility and the mechanism of production of the images. The frame for those questions is “go-see”: a popular relational scheme of encounter between model and an artist in commercialized industry. Used as relational *ready-made* it is reduced to the very basic situation: in the completely darkened room model encounters no one but automatically set-up cameras. The author steps back from the process of production of those portraits forcing the model to constant self-control under the sight of the anonymous voyeuristic spectator. Go-see is a situation that unveil mechanisms of power and visibility obsession that lay behind the production for the sake of disintegrated spectacle of “models and other lovely things” (McKenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration*). The catalyst for those question is complete darkness and silence as if they - paradoxically - could visualise the dilemmas of sight.



go-see, video frame





go-see, zpafgallery, Cracow, 18.10 – 9.11.2014

# | new face (2013)

WQHD video, duration 10 min.

A model is posing en face for the camera. The initial smile, innocent and sincere, gradually disappears and transforms into a grimace of disgust and embarrassment. The sound simmering quietly in the background becomes louder from time to time, providing the context for the young woman's change in mood: in spite of appearances, she is not smiling at the viewer – the film being played on the screen behind the camera is clearly pornographic. Grzegorz Stefański's project *New Face* appears at first to be nothing but trivial provocation. Here we have young girls blushing at the sight of sexual intercourse, and we blush with them. The artist himself says he is looking for "tensions that create discomfort and question the viewer's natural tendency

to form a uniform image." So what is the image created by Stefański? Susan Sontag has remarked that in the standard rhetoric of the portrait making the model face the camera lens means seriousness, honesty, revealing the subject's essence [*On Photography*]. Here, the models' eyes are directed directly at the viewer; their look seems to be a provocative question about the excess of sexual content in the public sphere, about objectifying women in the post-feminist world, and about the relation between the media and the audience. In a sense, the artist created an extreme portrait of contemporary humanity.

Łucja Waśko



new face, video frame



# | darkroom (2012-2014)

performative action, infrared DV video, 720x576px, audio

*Darkroom* is a term with several denotations and numerous connotations. It's mainly a synonym for a place for performing anonymous sexual acts; it's a space of the taboo, the forbidden, the inaccessible. On the other hand, it can simply refer to a dark room for developing photographs. Grzegorz Stefański's *Darkroom* also takes place in complete darkness. Anonymous people, perfect strangers to each other, meet in extremely new and specific conditions. In the minimally created space and on the pretext of dealing with a simple task in pairs (building a tower with wooden blocks scattered over a table), they undergo a specific analytical examination, watched by a discreet, fascinated, almost voyeuristic observer. With no possibility of any visual or verbal communication, the participants need to work out some avisual and a-verbal forms of communication with a view to comprehending, describing and controlling the space; by using intuition and the sense of touch; by finding and delineating their own territory and its boundaries; and finally by frequent violations of those boundaries in order to complete the task "given" by the artist together. An audio-visual recording of the behaviour of the "actors" becomes their individual as well as collective picture; an alternative portrait emphasising and depicting more than just physical or psychic characteristics. Stefański's *Darkroom* refers to the idea of environment but, as opposed to its canonical form, the project is of an open construction, refuses any passive experiencing of the surroundings, provokes the participants to act and promises catharsis and transgressive experiences in exchange.

Andrzej Kłos



*darkroom*, Bunkier Sztuki Gallery, Cracow, 2014

# | Paul (2015)

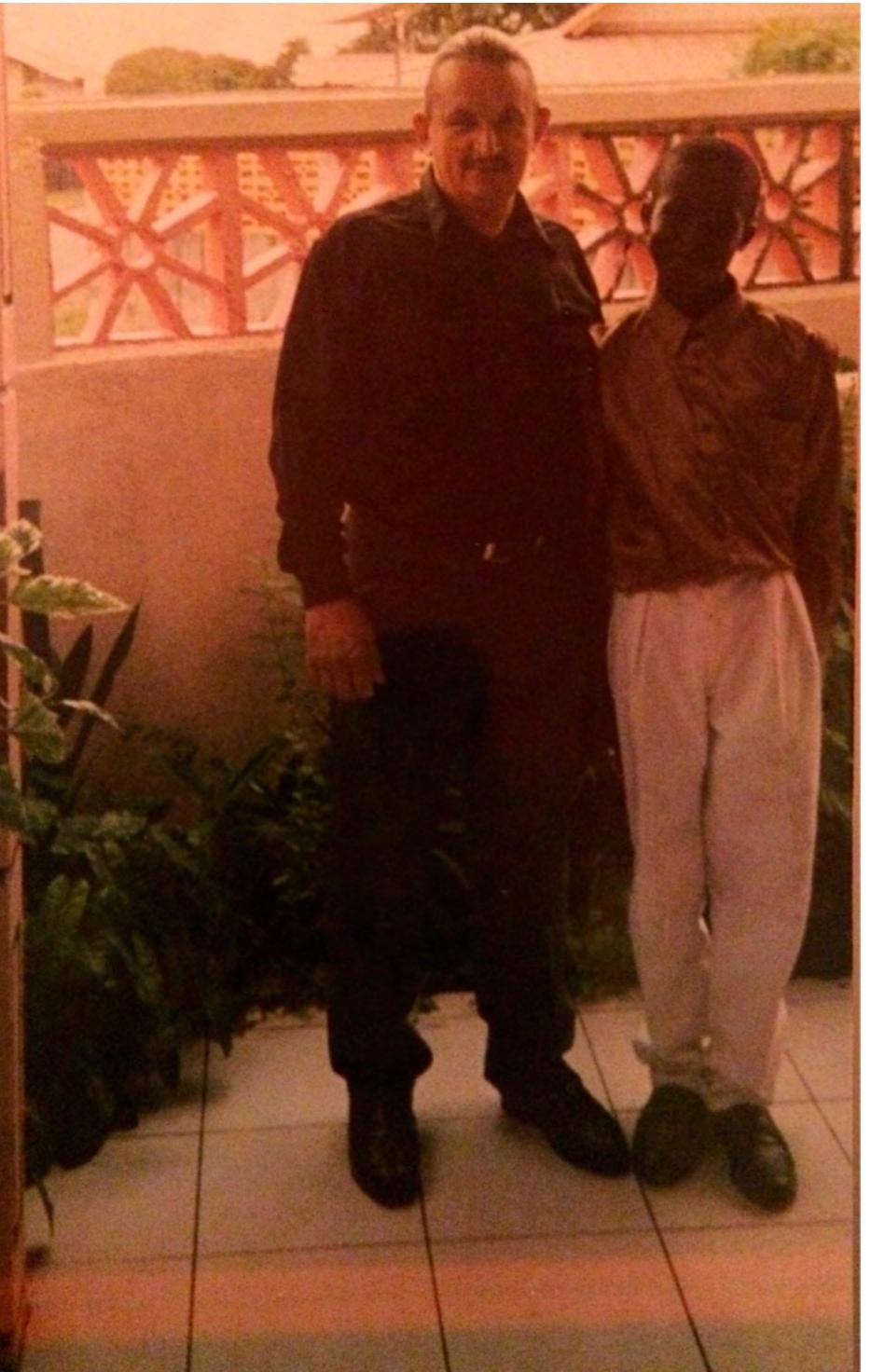
whisper phone game, video documentation, 40 min.

Produced as part of the resident artist placements of the City of Strasbourg and with the support of Apollonia and the City of Gdansk

interpreters (in order of appearance):

Roberto Jean, Laurent Bicrel, Charlotte Achkar, Coline, José Baert

*Paul was a performative game, based on the forwarding of the original story by the following participants. Their task was to pass the story to the next interpreter and when the memory would fail, the participants could fill the gaps with their personal experiences. The original story, told by Roberto, was a distant memory of his boyish relationship with his stepfather – Paul who had mysteriously passed away. Facts from the past were mixed with the boyish mythology whereas the game paradoxically became a test for its authenticity, as if the individual's identity could be confirmed by the collectively generated myth.*



video stills, documentation available in french



# | pocket-size economy (2016)

Wrigley's Orbit chewing gum, saliva, two polish groats, dimensions 2x2cm

This sculpture was created during a tour in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.  
Part of PKO Polish Bank art collection.



# | Happy Dog Statue [revision] (2015)

moulage, stone monument,  
site-specific action held in Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities,  
The author of the original statue: Bogna Czechowska

In October 2004 Happy Dog statue was unveiled to the public on Mokotów Field in the centre of Warsaw. The idea came from the redaction of *Four Paws* - popular magazine of dog's enthusiasts. "The idea of the statue was to demonstrate a happy dog that is loved and taken care of" (after the wikipedia.pl). The statue is situated in the park which is very popular to walk one's dog to.

The critical gesture - referring to situationist's *détournement* strategy - of repositioning the statue's moulage into the zoo environment is an attempt to revise its original meaning. Swapping the context of the original monument that represents official narration about human relation with beloved animal, unveils its unsaid aspects such as enslavement, domination or aggression. Extracted form the dark cellar into the daylight, the moulage of the monument represents what is hidden from rational and official narration.



original cast of bronze in Mokotów Field in Warsaw (2004)



moulage of the monument positioned in the area of warsaw zoo (2015)

# | wake-up call (2014)

announcement, mobile phone, conversation,

This piece is an offer of a free wake-up service in the form of a phone call that can be voluntarily ordered by a willing participant. It's an offer of a contract of mutual exchange of intimacy. To be executed, each party needs to question their assumptions and get out of their habits. A participant's trust is rewarded with the artist's help to overcome the difficulties of starting a new day. Curiosity results in an unusual encounter. The piece makes use of social contract and provocatively alludes to nostalgia for non-mediated human contact. It begs the question of the borders of intimacy, mutual trust and social alienation.



# | emptybottles (2010)

internet blog, exhibition, book





The photo shows a naked young couple. A boy sprawled in an armchair, and girl resting lazily on his lap. In the background, there is a wooden casing, old-school furniture and a glass of wine. An image which might be from an old Polish film. The plot is simple and universal – they meet on a sunny afternoon and spend a few joyful months together. Then she leaves. Scenery: a rented flat, Kraków, winter. The romance boasts an epilogue on Skype. The boy and girl in the photographs are something like an archetype of the Polish Adam and Eve. So normal as to be atypical. And even when I already know that the Polish Eve is really Ella and that she lives in Newcastle, that first impression remains.

The camera is always close; it becomes part of the game between

the partners (or maybe even their erotic toy?)

The photographs are honest and unpretentious, which is without doubt their strong point. Each intimacy, however, has its own limits, which is why

we have decided not to show a few frames. A specific privacy has once again turned out to be highly universal. (Looking at Grzesiek's photos for the first time, I was very curious about what sort of music he listens to. It turned out it was jazz. He even has his own radio programme.) The exhausted convention of the snapshot seems here to be totally natural and justified. The composition, often accidental, turns out to be exceptionally aesthetic. EMPTY-BOTTLES is a set of photographs which could form the storyboard for a film. A classic tale, with jazz in the background. This, too, is how I thought of the whole presentation while Grzesiek –who, as he put it, "trusts me organically") and I were preparing it together. What results might come of this in the future depends solely on him. As the artist says: "The thing is, not to get bored".



Karol Radziszewski

curator of *emptybottles* exhibition,  
Goldex Poldex Gallery, Cracow, Poland, 2010

