

\ Grzegorz Stefański

Born in 1983, Grzegorz Stefański graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland and Photography at the Department of Visual Communication at the University of Arts in Poznań, Poland. Currently, he continues his artistic education at Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities at the Fine Arts Academy in Warsaw. In his latest photographic and video projects Grzegorz Stefański introduces suspension of epistemology. He does not accept current state of reality and artificially creates situations at the nexus of psychology, philosophy and ethics. He has presented his works at individual exhibitions (**New Face** in Lookout Gallery, Warsaw, Poland, **Go-See** in Zpafiska Gallery, Cracow, Poland, **emptybottles** in Goldex-Poldex Gallery, Cracow, Poland) as well as at group shows (in Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, in MoMa PSI in New York, in Bunkier Sztuki Gallery in Cracow, and during Wro Media Art Bienalle in Wroclaw).

education

\ 2014 -

New Media Department (MA in Fine Arts), University of Arts in Warsaw, Poland
(Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities)

\ 2010 - 2013

Photography Department (BA in Fine Arts), University of Arts in Poznan, Poland

\ 2006 - 2007

Philosophy Department, University of Paris X Nanterre, Paris, France

\ 2002 - 2008

Philosophy Department (MA), Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland



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solo shows

\ 2015

New Face, solo exhibition, Lookout Gallery, Warsaw, Poland

\ 2014

Go-See, solo show, Zpafiska Gallery, Cracow, Poland

\ 2010

emptybottles, solo show, Goldex-Poldex Gallery, Cracow, Poland

residencies

\ 2015

ARTECITYA - Envisioning the City of Tomorrow, residency at Apollonia Foundation, Strasburg

group shows

\ 2016

Restraint, projection during Short Waves Festiwal (experimantan 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, BWA 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 PSI, 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, Poland

\ restraint (2016)

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

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.



Warm+Up exhibition, Wola Museum in Warsaw, January 2016



\ Paul (2015)

two-channel video documentaiotn of life performance, duration 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

participants (in order oa apperance):

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

Paul is life „broken phone” game performed in Apollonia Foundation in Strasburg, 22th of November 2015 and recorded on two cameras in the form of torso portraitures. Interpreters were volunteers and met for the for time at the very day of performance. Their task was to listen and remember the story and pass it on to the next interpreter. They were asked to retell the story from „I” perspective and remain as faithful to remembered details as possible but - if necessary - to fill the gaps of their memory with their own experiences.

Starting story was Roberto's memory of close but ambiguous boy-man relationship with his mysterious uncle - Paul. Paul was Polish and migrated, through several european countries, to French Guiana were he became a step father to Roberto. Cloudy, boyish memories render him as solitary, strict but epic persona who died in unclear circumstanced. Who really was Paul? What is true and what is only a young boy's fantasy and mythology about this paternal figure? Did he really committed suicide or was an international spy that needed a cover story for his disappearance? The game of mediating private, boyish story through memory and individual experiences of other interpreters seems to be - paradoxically - a test of its authenticity. As if uncertain memory could be confirmed in private experiences of the others.

Paul concerns bodies and memory as vessels for narrations that balance between private and public and questions the sharp boundaries between those areas. Anthropological turn towards the prime role of the language poses a question if individual identity is constituted or denied by collective narrations.



video stills, documentation available in french

\ 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)

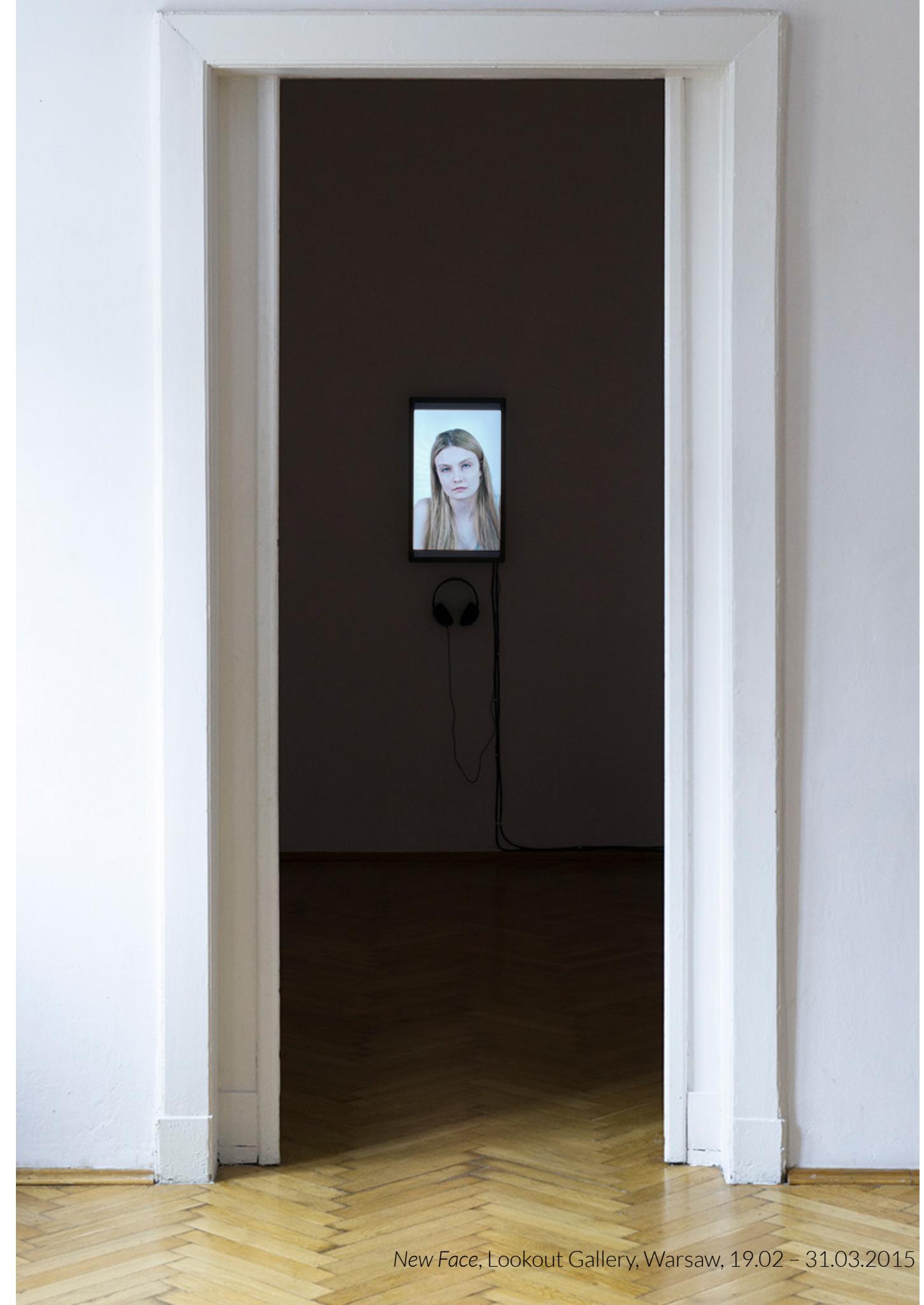
In his latest photographic and video projects Grzegorz Stefański introduces suspension of epistemology. He does not accept current state of reality and artificially creates situations at the nexus of psychology, philosophy and ethics. In his observations he employs art under the least obligation to answer “serious” questions which, paradoxically, provides those very answers.

What is common about all Stefański’s works is voyeurism as knowledge device. We watch female models in darkness. Deprived of any physical observer, they automatically transform from subjects to objects. They are in fact observed by a mechanical camera that registers young women’s behaviour in complete darkness. The camera does not attract interest of women professionally working with their appearance. They very quickly stop performing their aesthetic social function and shed their mask. Does this resignation result from absence of physical observer or rather from loosening social rules because of their “invisibility”? Photographs taken at different time intervals can answer these, and many

other, questions. The role of these pictures is significant despite mechanical repetition of frame. There are subtle differences that allow an insightful reflection on models’ behaviour.

An identical laboratory device, mechanical observation, is used in other projects (*New Face* or the *212/62*). The artist verifies models as a function and social “model”. Under physical strain of endless dancing or invited to watch full-length porn film, they undergo empirical catharsis; from controlled social form to crisis to absolute decline. Grzegorz Stefański is aware that only somebody who uses image for constructing their identity can encourage the reflection ton epistemology by offering an alternative image. Realism in this respect plays a key role and enriched with objective laboratorial methodology becomes non-negatable.

Paweł Bownik



New Face, Lookout Gallery, Warsaw, 19.02 – 31.03.2015

\ 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



video still, vimeo password: new_face_2013





\ 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.



sticker on the wall, 147 x 121 cm



Go-See, zpafgallery, Cracow, 18.10 - 9.11.2014





Go-See, infrared video still

\ 212/62 (2015)

HD video, 24 min.

The music used in the video is 212 by Azealia Banks. The video shows the last 24 minutes of 62 minutes-long dance improvisation.

cooperation: Iza Szostak

camera: Mikołaj Syguda

dancers: Magdalena Fejdasz, Helena Ganjalyan, Karolina Krynicka

212/62 is the attempt to verify whether it is possible to achieve a satisfactory portrait in extremely conventional structure. The method explored in this situation is a sprawling, tiring repetition of a dance that is being accompanied by a popular song. Dancers improvise using their natural environment yet they are confronted with unnatural situation of repetitive scheme and cultural stereotype of the image of Three Graces. A group pictorial painting represents the tension between the ease and strict concept.





New Face, Lookout Gallery, Warsaw, 19.02 – 31.03.2015

Grzegorz Stefański concentrates in his works on the relation between the purely aesthetic, the abstract and the cognitive experience of photography. In situations arranged by himself, he records the things that happen beyond the controlled intention to extract meaning in a photographic representation. Stefański asks about the possibility to locate photography between the literal character of the image of the world and the image that shifts the burden of gaze and elaborating on it onto the viewer. Everything that happens on the surface of artist's visions is unquestionably very attractive, but it can be read in various ways once we change the perspective. Following that idea Grzegorz Stefański do not explore the image itself but the process of looking, which ends with specific image. In Stefański's project, the camera highlights the alienating character of sight, which is dominated in this case by an analytical and critical outlook on the problem of seemingly flawless, rational and purely descriptive portrait photography.

In his work *New Face*, which preceded the project, the artist arranged a quasi-documentary situation based on an uncomfortable relation with a person sitting directly in front of the camera. Captured on video, women's faces focused their gaze on something that evidently attracted their attention. Only after a moment did the viewer realise that the rustle

heard from short distance was actually the sound of a porn film, which formed part of the arranged situation. In that work, we were dealing with a voyeuristic scene where devouring the image was dampened and paradoxically indifferent. Due to that measure Stefański gets rid of all the unauthentic features of the traditional portraits. Seemingly aesthetic scene becomes caricature of stereotypical portrait. The pleasure of looking is disturbed by uncomfortable situation, which negates artificiality and objectiveness of the portraiture. In his project *Go-See*, he continues the reflection on mechanical observation, which is seemingly unreflective and unconscious. We are confronted with a similar scheme of shortened distance and strong feedback between the observing and the observed. Models in front of the camera are not entangled in voracious, lecherous and infantile fashion photography. In this context, we are dealing with a reversed situation where photographs shown in a condensed form tear the humdrum process of posing and recording out of complete lethargy. In the project *Go-See*, the artist's gaze is intentionally mechanical, and for this reason the process of portraying accidental and unintended gestures does not discriminate anything. It is also a method of operation on a portrait, overturning its classic form. On the other hand, it is also a critique full of ambiguities because we are witnessing here a delicate shift of meanings that refer to tropes related to

the contemporary pop cultural category of beauty. Apart from a camera, which takes photos upon self-activation, Stefański uses a video camera, which carefully documents everything that happens in a completely darkened room. The narration, which is thus introduced guarantees a rupture with the illusory character of theatrical, manneristic and often pretentious relations. In this configuration, the series of systematic and automatic photographs starts to acquire a clearly performative character.

Looking at the work *212/62* we should ask ourselves what is the artist's connection to vision? According to the more advanced streams of cognitive poetics, photography's relationship to vision is to be found through the acts and conventions of perception. It is an intermediary between the personal and the collective faculties of sight. As an artist he becomes an activist employing visual formula and cognitive stimuli to represent his or her expression as it is found in the world or how such a world of expression is truly seen. The artist who aims to reconstitute expression will thus assign and choreograph visual prompts and artistic demarcations to guide forces within the imagined viewer by way of the photographic frame. As onlookers we are confronted with the artless surface, absent of human hand, and an image that we know, subconsciously, is replica. Thus, it falls to the viewer to steer

their way of seeing within the force and charge of the artist's photographic frame, or, instead, allow themselves to be guided as guest. In Stefański's vision the project *212/62* is "the attempt to verify whether it is possible to achieve a satisfactory portrait in extremely conventional structure. The method explored in this situation is a sprawling, tiring repetition of a dance that is being accompanied by a popular song. Dancers improvise using their natural environment yet they are confronted with unnatural situation of repetitive scheme and cultural stereotype of the image of Three Graces. A group pictorial painting represents the tension between the ease and strict concept".

Piotr Drewko
curator of *New Face* exhibition in Lookout Gallery,
Warsaw, 2015

\ Darkroom (2012-2014)

performative action,
infrared DV video documentation, 720x576px, audio recording

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



\ 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





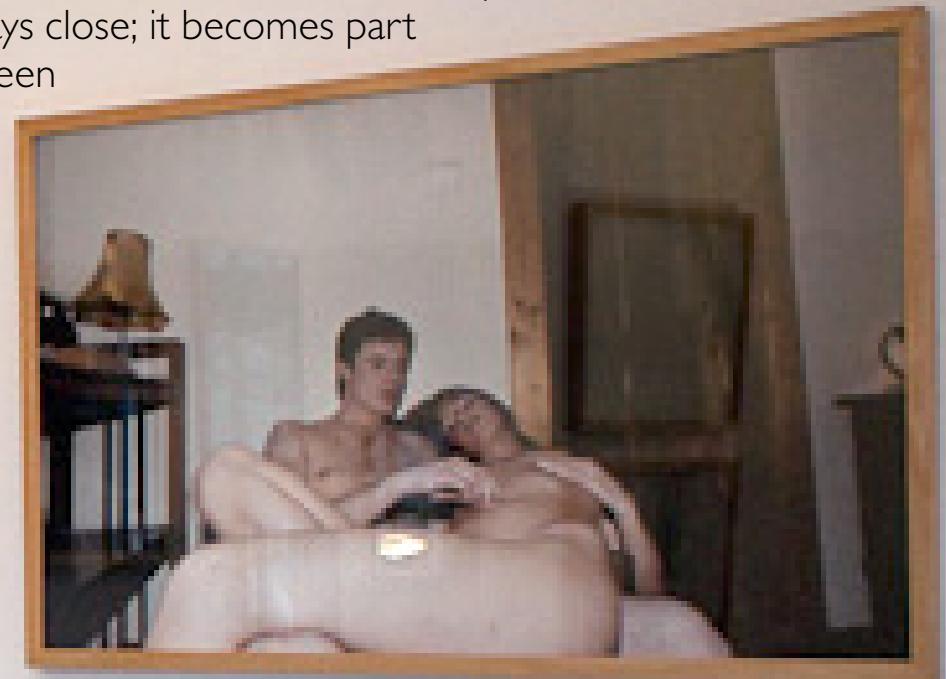
The photo shows a naked young couple. A boy sprawled in an armchair, and girl resting lazily on his lap. In the background, there is a wooden casing, old-school furniture and a glass of wine. An image which might be from an old Polish film. The plot is simple and universal – they meet on a sunny afternoon 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