

Karolina Jabłońska

Carpe diem

Artist critic for "Carpe diem" exhibition / FF Gallery, Łódź (Poland) 2013 / translated by Maciej Świerkocki

Horace's saying „carpe diem” encourages us to make the most of our lives – it tells us to concentrate on those aspects of living which we are able to control and to renounce all others, especially those that do not bring us happiness and satisfaction. This attitude is typical for epicureanism in which the most important object in life was the achievement of happiness based on worldly goods, the leading of a life free from all kinds of suffering, sadness and worries that usually keep us company. In our times epicureanism has been conceived as the ability to “make the most of life” without any limitations whatsoever. In his work entitled Carpe Diem, Borys Makary refers precisely to such a model of life.

Carpe Diem consists of seven triptychs. Each one has been signed with a different woman's name and a different date. Successive dates of those black-and-white photographs suggest that they have all been taken within the space of one week. The middle photograph of each triptych is a portrait of a naked woman who is always looking at the camera, two other pictures illustrate fragments of an interior. In the last triptych both the model and the interior are completely out of focus; also the woman's name has been obscured by the author. The photographs presented at the exhibition are accompanied by an installation: a bed with crumpled sheets used as a screen for the projection of a film that includes portraits of women from the photographs. This installation makes the viewer believe that the work as a whole is an illustration of intimate relations that one man had with several women during one week.

The fact that each triptych contains the woman's name and the date of her meeting with the man implies a document. It is curious that actually by means of this act alone the border between art and document is erased and that the viewer has been cunningly confused. The imbalance of the spheres of art and document

is brought about by the inconspicuous inscription on the photograph. If *Carpe Diem* really were a document, we could consider it to be a kind of a photographic diary, something like a social notebook or perhaps rather a record of intimate relations with women. The protagonist – the only unalterable part of the project – would therefore resemble a contemporary Casanova. However, in the case of *Carpe Diem* we do not have to do with a man for whom women are most important in life, though we could say that about the 18th century heartbreaker mentioned above. On the contrary – the different women who accompany Makary's male protagonist suggest superficial contact, devoid of deeper feelings, based solely on sex, perhaps on carnal fascination alone. His attitude might seem outrageous, all the more so because we also have this meaningful, unambiguous bed in the gallery. The faces of women shown on its "screen" are even less sharp and clear than the background, they seem to be moving – and they actually do move closer and farther as the crumpled bedsheets distort them and in a certain sense deprive them of identity. In this context the author could easily be regarded to be a sexist who treats women as objects used to fulfill male needs – because Makary shows only one kind of man's relations with women.

It is interesting how in this case the author's sex determines the reception of his work. If we had to do with an authoress-female artist, we would discuss this project rather in the feminist perspective and in the context of reinstating the female body as an ontological subject. But the author of *Carpe Diem* is a man, and to make matters worse, he is associated with the world of fashion where women are treated as objects, "instruments" used merely to present clothes. However, if we reject such deeply rooted stereotypes and assume that we are standing face to face with a work of art, we must also admit that Makary in his *Carpe Diem* brutally exposes those stereotypes. He puts forward the problem of a woman-model almost naturally and to a large extent bases the idea of his work on it. The dramatic tension is built by the portraits of women; they position the viewer in an ambiguous situation, while their names help to erase the border between art and document. In order to interpret *Carpe Diem*, the viewer must decide for himself whether in this case we have to do with models (and then we can consider it to be an example of artistic creation) or with concrete women, registered by the eye of the camera (and then we can speak of a document).

The photographs have been taken from below and nearly all of them seem to be moving. All women are looking straight at the camera or squint. In spite of the fact that those photographs are clearly erotic in character, Makary concentrated on the women's faces, not on their torsos, breasts, hips or thighs, traditionally considered to be the attributes of womanhood and at the same time the most sexually attractive female body parts. The trick of sharpening the images of portraited women and taking the photographs against the light allowed the author to create a dreamy, oneiric atmosphere, to make his protagonists somewhat unreal and situate them somewhere on the border between waking and sleep. The author's hand visible in the triptych signed *Ola*, 21. 06. 2011, proves his authorship and domination – he watches these women and registers the fleeting moment using a photographic camera. These women seduce him, though he is in control of the situation and has them at his "arm's length". The craftiness of *Carpe Diem* is revealed here yet again – as on the one hand the models are subjugated to photography, but on the other they have their own identity.

Makary is not afraid to show that photography as a medium which registers reality is imperfect. In spite of the fact that it enables us to reproduce the appearance of a given object and to transmit its image in an almost perfect way, it also presupposes its motionlessness. Moreover, it can register only a single moment, a single particle of time. Using photography we cannot show events that progress in time, an action, a process or a an object in motion – but by means of photography it is also difficult to characterize anything or a person, especially their nature, preferences or moods. That is why Makary used a triptych in which the middle part is a portrait of a woman while both side photographs present the interiors in which the portraited woman lives. It is these three pictures that make up a triptych. In this way the author tried to make his protagonists more familiar to the viewer and less anonymous, as well as to register not only their appearance but identity, too.

Looking at what Makary does as a professional – at his fashion photography – we can observe that it resembles standard commercial pics, is usually very vivid and uses sharp contrasts. But his artistic works seem to lose this sharpness and the contours become blurred – which on the one hand might suggest some parallel with the world of dreams, and on the other with abstract art. Hence Makary turns

our attention to the fact that art is something different than reality, something created by man from beginning to end, and deprived of literalness.

In the case of Carpe Diem we have to do with art, with an artistic project, not with documentary photography or photographic documentation. Makary only uses the strategy of a document here. He makes the viewer uncertain and forces him to make an individual choice in the process of interpretation. He does not answer any questions – on the contrary, he erases the boundaries between art and document and therefore makes us ask questions on which the reception of his art depends.

The title of Carpe Diem is also ambiguous. This project was Makary's reaction to the contemporary model of living our lives without any obligations towards others. The direct impulse for his work was a movie entitled Galerianki and an MTV programme that invited mothers who advertised, marketed their own daughters in front of a man – the winner would go on a date with him. Makary criticizes such superficial relations that always leave people empty. He seems to warn us against this emptiness and at the same time asks the viewer what carpe diem means to him or her personally.