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Comments on Borys Makary's two cycles *Connection* and *Le factice*

Borys Makary is an artist who has transferred from advertising to fine art photography. He intends to refer to conceptualism, as this trend in 1970s, when its expression through various media, including photography developed, testified to its strongly intellectualised status and postulated scientific nature. How does Borys Makary draw upon this heritage in his two different cycles?

The cycle *Connection* i.e. about the interlink

The cycle has been started but it is not yet finished. It is difficult to guess how it may end. Certainly, as the commentators of his work have noticed so far, it stems from the Romantic tradition in a pictorial version. In 19th century, human staffage was presented against the background of the power of nature, e.g. in mysterious paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, which influenced Edward Steichen's work at the beginning of 20th century. This pantheistic tradition was modified, or rather modernised, by Edouard Manet in his famous *Breakfast on the Grass*, among others. On the other hand, there existed the tradition of a bolder and bolder photographic nude aiming at bringing closer the timeless idea of the human body through its beauty.

When I first saw the photographs in the cycle *Connection*, I was reminded of Paweł Kula's similar attempts, and, especially, Magda Hueckel's cycle *Autoportrety emocjonalne / Emotional Self-Portraits*. Borys Makary's cycle is closer to Kula's approach, although there are some obvious differences. What is important, the Cracow photographer continues to develop his concept in reference to other cycles, while Kula has concluded his series in the formula of the nude.

Borys Makary's photographs are panoramas which act differently to traditional photographic formats. One needs spend more time on them, penetrating; all the more so, as they are large-format works with a multitude of details. The awareness of frame composition is also one of the important aspects of the ontology of image. Two women modelled for this cycle: a short-haired blond and a redhead with long hair, of a similar type of beauty. In the photographs, the women are facing backwards, and so they remain anonymous, and cannot be identified. It is also a trace of conceptualism which I shall address later.

The landscape represents the plurality of the visual word matter and its vivaciousness in a multitude of manifestations (air, water, forest, mountains), although it does not constitute the dominant of the works. Nevertheless, the landscape always seems static, monumental, permeated by the assumed rationality of a photographic record.

Let us return to the question of the female form and its meaning. It is always immobile, like a classical sculpture. Placed in the middle of a photograph, it seamlessly merges with the landscape. The woman with her naturalness, corporeality, or even primal animality, appears to harmonize with the seemingly inanimate landscape. Naturally, due to a static shot, it is only possible in a photograph and only for a moment. but we cannot guess the outcome. There is a conceptual tone, as I have mentioned earlier, in the repeatability of the image of the woman, in combing her figure with the view. It is an attempt at „freezing“ and exercising symbolic authority over the form captured by a camera. Thus, as Susan Sontag points out in her book *„O fotografii“* (*„On Photography“*)(Warszawa, 1986, translated by Sławomir Magala), it is a kind of visual violence, albeit very sublime and camouflaged in this case.

The classical Polish conceptualism of 1970s using a visual structure in its photo-mediatic version aimed to explain the objective existence of an analysed and studied problem - within a defined framework of references, of course - finally resulting in a new idea it constituted. But the conceptual structure

appeared to be most often relevant if it referred to issues related to the illusion of the image, the mythical world or social-political problems¹.

On the cycle *Le factice*, i.e. about artificialityⁱⁱ

In this colourful, intentionally festive cycle in terms of colour, the female body is subjected to various procedures and structural transformations. Among others, it is reduced to the image and form of a flower, but of unobvious references, also by means of formally varied creation. Thus, the woman is an image of beauty, its illusion, sometimes emerging straight out of darkness. Artificial, flat flowers cover the woman's bosom, which is also a reference to Nobuyoshi Araki's work. The women, more closely resembling mannequins than real figures, are surrounded by artificial flowers of – at least – double meaning: unreality, and sometimes an image of the phallus. There are also intentionally blurred works, all the more approaching the unreal. The cycle concentrates on a personal perception of women – who they are to Borys Makary.

The image of women in the most current visual culture is, above all, unnatural, as well as unbalanced, changeable and phantasmagorical, but more in the manner of Jeff Koon's photography than Man Ray's. They are more defined by the concept of artificiality than realistic documentariness related to the notion of "trace" ("sign"). One cannot say much about the women portrayed by Makary, apart from the fact that they are "fragmentarily" beautiful, but also unreal.

How are the female figures connected?

Naturally, the two cycles are connected by my analysis of the female figure. The first cycle still represents an idealistic dimension, related to the former image of the woman as ideal beauty, albeit a modernised one. The other cycle presents a post-modern interpretation where the hitherto familiar female figure is deconstructed and fragmented – which was commenced by the surrealist Hans Bellmer in his perverse cycles *The Doll*.

ⁱ This reflection is based upon an analysis of Polish conceptualism in photography. The illusion of space is a very important achievement of Zdzisław Jurkiewicz and Leszek Brogowski. The mythic world is combined with structural studies in Andrzej Różycki's oeuvre (cycles *Fotografia warunkowa* / *Conditional Photography* and *Konkluzje*

fotograficzne / Photographic Conclusions). Socio-political references play an important role in Ewa Partum's linguistic happening *Legalność przestrzeni / Legality of Space* (1971) held in the centre of then socialist Łódź, and in the cycle of photomontages *Samoidentyfikacja / Self-Identification* (1980).

- ii In 2016, the artist wrote an interesting short original text on the cycle *La factice* in the manner of methodolising conceptual artists: "In his new project, Borys Makary addresses the topic of modern woman. Observing the surrounding world created mostly by media and advertising, he poses a question about the contemporary model of femininity. Concentrated mostly on social media, he confronts the viewer with the omnipresent, promoted model of creating one's alter-ego, which seems to be imposed from the top down. An artificial woman, a contrived woman, an imposed woman, an illusory woman, an objectified woman... Woman - body - thing - the contemporary perception of femininity... Ideal, like a flower, an artificial flower. Eternally young, eternally beautiful..."