

Krzysztof Jurecki

A global view

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In today's fragmented and increasingly virtual world, existing without clear mediatic boundaries, the division of photography into fine art and commercial one is problematic, or impossible to maintain in many cases. What is perceived as fine-art-related is not necessarily so, and vice versa: what is commercial may convey a specific knowledge of the world or rather its vision, and even of the most contemporary myths and mythemes (Stefan Morawski's term).

In the art world, Borys Makary divides his projects into artistic and commercial ones, similarly to Man Ray. Let us have a look at the two concepts of his most recent photography. I shall try and answer a challenging question: are we dealing with two opposing or complementary art forms here? The above text supplements two earlier ones of 2017: *They were, i.e. about photographing women* and *Reflections on Borys Makary's two cycles Connection and Le factice*¹.

Advertising and its mobile territory

The analysis begins with advertising photographs where the photographer is a producer of specific works, but the decisive voice regarding the approval of the purchase and potential use of the photographs in an advertising campaign belongs to the client. It is an important point. I shall focus then on analysing the artist's photographs displayed at www.bmakary.com.

¹ I selectively refer to the analysis presented in two earlier texts. So far, the key theme in his creative activity is an interpretationally varied female form.

I find the black and white works - the works which remain photographs and are not combined with text - most convincing. Why? The black and white photographs represent wider possibilities as an art form. They are portraits, as well as shots from above, as if the photographer remembered Aleksander Rodchenko's and André Kertész's lessons. And, what is important, Borys Makary, referring to contemporary photography - e.g. in the photograph showing women lying on the stairs - and opposing the currently compulsory aesthetics of glamour, establishes new, interesting categories for this mobile area of culture. It needs to be said that commercial photography, unlike fine art one, is mostly "a game of codes without conclusion" which allows for the introduction of, theoretically, mutually exclusive styles and formulas. And so the Cracow photographer draws on Helmut Newton's formula adding some aspects of the most contemporary style which he finds important, e.g. an interesting artistic makeup in the form of e.g. the hairstyles of the women rolling a huge circle. But, in contrast to Newton, a different perception can be noticed here, which covers not only a wider background, but also landscape or industrial landscape, which are sources of new impressions. The aforementioned photography also contains a subtle joke on the system corporatisation, as well as a deliberate renouncement of eroticism, which Helmut Newton used to shock and which, in turn, raised feminists' protests.

From among the colour photographs, the most appealing to me is the series called *Liuid*, where an unspecified threat is present, or maybe even a not entirely defined *signum* of death. Let us return to the black and white photographs. The nude with glasses, evoking surrealist onirism and the category of the image / mirror in an image, is particularly interesting. A truly expressive version of the most contemporary illusionism has been created.

But do I notice any risks concerning such a kind of photography? This new type of artistic work, often of the nature of *techne*, is much more prone to be "artificial", simulating, and therefore out of touch with reality, which exists despite

the crisis of representation we are experiencing now². As we know, photography has existed only in direct relationship to the reality, or, alternatively, started a mediatic discussion on it, as in the practice of Bauhaus, or, still more clearly, in the conceptualism of 1960s and 1970s, which entirely broke away from its documentary heritage. Of course, commercial photographers have emancipated from the tradition of both documentary and modernist (avant-garde) photography and created an autonomous genre. They even seek, as the case of Peter Lindbergh shows, to put themselves on the pedestal of fine art photography. Will they succeed? I rather doubt it, as this kind of photography is expected to contain a defined vision, an interpretation of the world, or even its criticism – and such procedures are difficult to find in the commercialised ground of advertising.

What is (still) artistic?

The cycles the artist himself values the most are *They were* and *Connection*, and one must agree. He is inspired, as he admitted in an interview, by Nabuyoshi Araki's work who is perceived in Poland very one-sidedly, as an obsessive fanatic of eroticism and sexuality, following into Man Ray's footsteps. Personally, I much prefer his earlier, mainly black and white works documenting his happy married life, until his wife's death (*Sentimental Journey*).

Attempting to separate commercial and artistic creative work, one should reflect on what the term, which encompasses a variety of imaging practices in 21st century, means to Borys Makary.

Is the cycle *Unseen Dialogues* an answer? In this work in the form of diptychs the viewer faces comparisons and, often, repetitions, although it is not known which motif, the one on the right or the one the left, was created first. Nevertheless, the important thing is that the series defines rather well what post-

² The problem of the representation crisis is very broad. J. Baudrillard's analyses of imaging and the implosion of sense are particularly convincing. J. Baudrillard (2005). *Symulakry i symulacja*. Translated by S. Królak. Warszawa.

modern photography is and can be, without a specific place and time of origin. The concept of the exchangeability of ideas is interestingly implemented here by means of black and white and colour images, which may be put together in various ways. Such a manner of imagining has been popularised in Europe by Wolfgang Tillmans. The cycle *Unseen dialogues* has no beginning or a defined end, as was the case in classical photography, novel or film. Everything is suspended in an unspecific space-time, acting by way of poetic gaze. Such a type of photography is shown, among others, in Western Europe, but also in the exhibitions of Instytut Twórczej Fotografii (Creative Photography Institute) in Opawa. It is worth mentioning that the photography type in question was already noticeable in the concept of the so-called sets, consisting of two or three photographs and always bearing substantial metaphorical titles, by Zdzisław Beksiński, created in 1958/1959 – which set them apart from the postmodern formula, although brought them closer to it at the same time, as there was no single linear narration there.

Polish misia - "among women's lives"

I do not take this cycle, executed in the pop style, too seriously, i.e. I do not perceive it as a mirror authentically reflecting an image of the Polish woman – which is not easy to come across. A hundred women of different ages, from teenagers to mature ladies, cuddle plush toys. The photographer has given the cycle a frivolous and erotic character, but the meaning of a children's toy seems to be more complex – which was already demonstrated by Witold Wojtkiewicz in the painting of the Young Poland.

The exhibition at the Imaginarium Gallery in Łódź is, in my view, an action in the vein of the pop tradition as realised by e.g. Jeff Koons or David LaChapelle. Let us remember, however, that ludic laughter should be followed by reflection. Only once did I see when a dying person (in photographs) in dementia turned to a teddy bear for consolation. The expression of the photographs by Małgorzata Skoczylas, a graduate from the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk (2010), was truly

tragic. I mention this to emphasise that the problem of "Polish misia" (*translator's note: "misia" - from "mis" i.e. "teddy bear"; also used as an endearment*) is much broader or even sad.

Carpe diem

These erotic – by no means pornographic – triptychs bring up associations with the surrealist oeuvre (Brassai, Salvador Dali), and still more with Jeff Koons who experimented with his then wife Cicciona several years ago, creating works ranging from – as he put it himself – from soft to hard porn. Naturally, creative activity has had rich erotic connotations, which turned into analyses of human sexuality, from its very beginning. This is the type of works we encounter here. I wonder, which photograph is the most important? I would say, the one bearing the date of 26 June, because it is deprived of the woman's name as she became intangible and ephemeral, and, as a result, suggestive of many things, without literalness, which sometimes is an asset, but more often a flaw of photography. I also find the unusual camera position very interesting – the camera has become a sexual weapon, which is confirmed by Susan Sontag's postulate included in her essay *On photography*, containing a multitude of definitions and stories concerning the development and characterisation of photography. The background constitutes another engaging aspect. In one of the photographs there is a teddy bear. The meaning of the cycle may also be interpreted differently in terms of man and woman's sex life.

No light

These photographs are dark, there is little light. They show private fragments of the world which can be unveiled only in part, because it is intimate. The photographed persons would not like to be recognised. To their paradoxical, strange suspension between analogue and digital photography testifies the fact

that noise, i.e. the former analogue grain related to the use of insufficient, albeit intentionally, light, is shown.

Borys Makary has deliberately entered the area defined as "error aesthetics", popular in late modernist photography which explored the boundaries of the medium, attempting to introduce unconventional methods to artistic practice (e.g. multiple exposure, photogram, blurred motifs). The Cracow photographer photographs in the same manner, although by means of digital technique, despite, as it were, its assumed perfection. The form of light box refers to the tradition of advertising, but the photographs are closer to Andrzej Pawłowski's late works of 1980s with a reflected body, or Yves Klein's still earlier *Anthropometry* of 1960, which, registered as a documentary, greatly influenced various trends (in painting, photography, film, performance) literally all over the world.

How to sum up Borys Makary's achievements?

Certainly, the summary should not be definitive, as his work is still in progress. Summing it would involve the risk of making a mistake in the final assessment. Indeed, a critic's task is to make as few of them as possible.

What is important, in my view? A note of romanticism and longing for symbolism (*Connection*), elements of graphic procedures combined with actions stemming from the tradition of body art (*They were*). I find a good control over the creative process and the awareness what abstraction is nowadays (*Body scapes*) – important. And abstraction is a real, bodily ornament arising from the essence of the body. In recent years, the artist has become increasingly important on the scene of the Polish photography (also, thanks to his exhibitions in France), pulsating with various trends and attitudes, from documentary or post-documentary to staging.

The artist intends to be active principally in the area of art practice, not in photography related to advertising. Replying to the question regarding the

problem of the two formulas applied by Borys Makary, I conclude that, despite evident conceptual differences, which are more difficult to mark in advertising photography, these forms of expression stem from a common language, and often refer to similar standards, therefore, they are complementary – with some exceptions (the cycle *Forms*).

Will the artist persevere in his art practice in view of the fact that the status of not only photography, but above all, visual arts, including painting, is becoming more and more blurred? In a longer perspective, it is a threat to the existence of photography as a form of art, since there are no more rules, no continuity of development, and neither there are masters, i.e. authorities.