

# Summary of professional achievements

## Daniel Rycharski

### Table of contents

#### 1. Foreword

Artistic activities before doctorate

#### 2. Fears

##### **Description of the series of works appointed as the main achievement in the post-doctoral thesis**

- Plaque
- Bed (Without Justice There Can Be No Solidarity)
- Saw
- Cross
- Monument to a Peasant
- Gateway Commemorating the 150 th Anniversary of Abolishing Serfdom
- Scarecrows
- Island
- Covers
- Gay Ghost
- Valentine's Day / Ash Wednesday
- Banner of Saint Expeditus
- Ku Klux Klan
- Rosaries

#### 3. Works created after my PhD that were not included in the exhibition

- Museum of Alternative Social Histories
- Invitation to a debate

# Introduction

## 1. Activities prior to obtaining my PhD

My art is intrinsically connected with the place where I was born and where I spent a considerable part of my life. The villages of Kurówko and Gorzewo are small, typically rural localities situated around 30 km north of Płock in the north-western part of the Mazovian Voivodeship. After I graduated from high school, I moved to Kraków to study at the Faculty of Art of the Pedagogical University. I continued my education at the Faculty of Painting, in the studio headed by Zbigniew Sałaj and Grzegorz Sztwiertnia, as part of a cross-institutional PhD programme of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. At the time I collaborated with the writer Sławomir Shuty; our art duo, DUET, was active for a few years. I regard it as a formative experience, a point of reference and inspiration. When I was still working on my PhD, I decided to return to my home village. I approached Kurówko and its vicinity as a huge laboratory, an open-air studio, and began creating public art there. At that point, I had the impression that rural areas were deprived of access to contemporary culture. Nevertheless, I was convinced that village dwellers had the same right and need to use its resources. I wanted to do something that would help them take up art and include them in the artistic process. One of my first experiments was the *Rural Street Art* project, which began when I painted a hybrid mural, a cross between two animals, on the house of my grandparents. Other villagers took an interest in what I was doing and invited me to their yards to paint similar works there. Consequently, the project spread organically throughout the entire village. Hybrid representations of animals could also be seen in the public spaces of Kurówko, e.g. the dairy, the local shop and bus stops.



*Village Street Art* mural, Kurówko 2009–2011



*Village Street Art mural, Kurówko 2009–2011*



*The Multimedia Wild Boar and Bird Repellent instalation in public space  
Kurówko 2011*



*The Multimedia Wild Boar and Bird Repellent* Kurówko 2011  
instalation in public space

The places where my project appeared slightly changed their meaning for the locals. To me, the murals represented the changing nature of rural Poland, which – as a result of social and economic transformations – often turns into a village-city hybrid. Another important inspiration for the project were extraordinary stories about mysterious animals inhabiting nearby marshes, local legends and fears. The basic diagnosis behind our common actions was the hypothesis that Kurówko was in a crisis. Until recently, there had been community places (such as the bus stop) where people could meet. Before that, Kurówko even boasted a village theatre, created entirely by the locals. However, at the moment in question, one could observe a significant lack of community spaces and a longing for pretexts to come together. This led to a favourable social situation where art could serve as a tool to restore this potential. Consequently, even the first works created in the *Rural Street Art* series met with considerable interest and understanding on the part of the community.





*The Multimedia Wild Boar and Bird Repellent* instalation in public space Kurówko 2011

I knew then that in order to stay in Kurówko and be able to work there as an artist, I would have to find a method to activate the inhabitants. The key to achieve this were actions related to their everyday lives and work, touching upon their vital needs, confronting both the fears and dreams of this local community. Having adopted a way of thinking rooted in rural areas, according to which something is good when it has a practical use and is fit for purpose, I decided to look for a solution to a real problem. For a long time, farmers had been complaining about wild animals destroying their crops. As a response, I devised the *Multimedia Wild Boar and Bird Repellent*, one of the first projects that relied on the visual code popular in rural areas. The work currently exists as a documentary film, but was an action where the village dwellers and their problems served as a point of departure for appropriate means of expression. At the same time, it was the first collaborative action in Kurówko, based on neighbourhood involvement to achieve a common goal.

Inspired by Wiesław Myśliwski's text *Kres kultury chłopskiej*<sup>1</sup> [The end of peasant culture], I suggested to the villagers that we should symbolically take a TV set – which Myśliwski describes as one of the factors responsible for the disappearance of rural

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<sup>1</sup> Wiesław Myśliwski, *Kres kultury chłopskiej* (Warsaw-Bochnia: Prowincjonalna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 2003).

culture – to the meadows as one of the elements of the wild boar repellent. A wooden structure built by my grandpa protected the TV, which was connected to a generating set. The TV played films I made about the realities of living in the countryside, including *Bride* and *What I Was Born For*. The latter is a story about a young girl and her village life. Filmed in the form of a music video, it tells the story of aspiring to a better world. In his text *My jesteŝmy solą ziemi, my jesteŝmy solą w oku*<sup>2</sup> [We're the salt of the earth, we're the salt in your eyes], Szymon Maliborski very aptly describes the last scene of the film, which takes place in a cemetery, as a subversive image of the triumph of life.



Image from movie: *The Bride* Daniel Rycharski, Sławomir Shuty, 2007, Kurówko

full movie: <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/rycharski-daniel-shuty-slawomir-oblubienica>



Image from movie: *Do czego mnie matka urodziła* Daniel Rycharski, Kurówko 2009

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<sup>2</sup> Szymon Maliborski, *'My jesteŝmy solą ziemi. My jesteŝmy solą w oku'* in *Strachy. Wybrane działania 2008-2019* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2019).

Full movie:

<https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/rycharski-daniel-do-czego-mnie-matka-urodzila>

The *Multimedia Wild Boar and Bird Repellent* installation stood on the meadows for three days. The project ended with a communal bonfire near the Kurówko fire station. This was when the village leader, Adam Pesta, proposed that we build an art object in Kurówko – one that would not be ephemeral, but form a permanent part of the space, visible to anyone visiting the village.

It was thanks to Adam Pesta, who transferred 10 ares of land to me, that I could embark on my next project: the *Shrine Gallery*, a place dedicated to contemporary art. The glass cabinet on a plinth, with a roof made of solar panels, took on the form of a wayside shrine – a typical devotional object in the local landscape. The *Shrine Gallery* has already hosted around a dozen miniature exhibitions, including Zbigniew Sałaj's 2012 installation, where the artist used a movement sensor: villagers passing by the shrine activated a voice message bidding them good morning.

A further project was the *Winter Garden*, a set of several dozen spatial objects in the form of welded metal flowers made of used tools and agricultural machinery collected among the residents of Kurówko and neighbouring villages. Painted in intense colours and exhibited against the background of fields, it leaves a distinct mark on the landscape and has been interpreted as a metaphor of changes affecting contemporary rural areas.



*Shrine Gallery instalation Kurówko 2013*



*Working on Shrine Gallery Kurówko 2012*



## 2. Fears

As the subject of my post-doctoral habilitation, I chose my solo exhibition *Fears* held at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and curated by Szymon Maliborski. Works for the exhibition were created between 2014 and 2019. *Fears* summarized the last five years of my creative work, with the exception of *Rural Street Art* and *Winter Garden*, which I have described above in the part devoted to art created before obtaining my PhD in 2013. The monographic exhibition showcased most of my works made after that date.

The subjects of my works are focused on three major areas: rural identity, queer identity and spiritual explorations. Most of my works were created in cooperation with the local community, leading to the development of a new type of social activism in Kurówko. Apart from the locals, I invited various activists to collaborate with me: farmer associations, people from the Faith and Rainbow [Wiara i Tęcza] foundation for LGBTQ Christians, experts in ethnography and theology. However, almost all of my works were rooted in personal experience and family situation. Stimulating family ties is another structure on which I have based my further actions in Kurówko.

My projects went through various stages of realization: from the research phase and conceptualization until the ideas materialized into specific works. The works/actions were created in a very dynamic process: they were first discussed with various experts or locals and then realized based on different collaborative models.

To come back to my initial statement, I treat Kurówko as a workshop of sorts – an artist's studio spread over square kilometres rather than metres. In my opinion, the image of the contemporary Polish countryside is largely distorted, ranging from idyllic stereotypes to being perceived as a hotbed of all social ills. Through my exhibition, I wanted to show a real-life Polish village, reflect on the methods of articulating an alternative history and show rural areas as places where key aspects of the local identity are openly discussed. What was important for me was the possibility to act upon a complex social and sexual identity, which breaks with the routine ways of perceiving the periphery. To me, actions conducted in my home village and presented at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw represent a reconciliation of various seemingly conflicting components: being a person from the country brought up in a traditionally conservative family, a member of the LGBT+ community, an artist and a believer.

The exhibition also testifies to my struggles with the contemporary Polish reality, my experience of someone who believes in God, has a questing mind and is confronted with the institutional church. The arrangement of the works is not accidental: it reflects my transition from wanting to change the church from within, with the help of the Faith and Rainbow foundation, to cultivating faith according to my own rules. While the works remain rooted in Catholicism, they attempt to demonstrate the (im)possibility of dialogue with the Catholic Church from the standpoint of an LGBT person.

The exhibition is composed of fourteen objects, one video work (two-channel installation) and video documentation. The following descriptions offer a brief outline of the works forming part of *Fears*.

## Plaque

The exhibition began with *Plaque*, a work from the set we provisionally titled 'cemetery corner', because this part of *Fears* relied on a specific type of recycling of objects associated with the cemetery or the making of tombstones. These items had been discarded, worn out, set aside after renovation or had simply stopped being used by the Catholic church in its rituals. The *Plaque* represents one such unwanted object. It was cast from remelted figures of Christ, metal crucifixes that used to decorate graves, which I received or purchased from stonemasons renovating tombs in the town of Sierpc and its vicinity. When I acquired around 50 kilograms of scrap metal, I took it to a foundryman to have it cast into a plaque with a fragment of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on non-binary persons. The quote read: 'They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided'.

I was fascinated with objects that had lost its holy character – I pondered on their fate and what would happen if they were to be used again. In the autumn of 2016, I stood with the *Plaque* in front of St Hyacinth's Church on Freta Street in Warsaw. At the time, I regarded it as one of the so-called 'open-minded churches' that seemed like a good spot to start a debate on the place of homosexuals in the congregation. I stood in front of the building, confronting the faithful coming to pray with the official church doctrine. While many people stopped to talk to me, I also faced criticism and the friars even threatened to call the police to have me forcibly evicted from their property. The *Plaque* was an attempt at striking a dialogue, a conversation with the religious institution. However, what it ultimately did was demonstrate that any dialogue was impossible, that the church – even in its supposedly most open part – was unable to engage in any such conversation.



*Plaque Warszawa 2016*



*Plaque Warszawa 2016.*

## **Bed (Without Justice There Can Be No Solidarity)**

The inspiration behind making *Bed* was rural loneliness. When I spoke to farmers, they named loneliness as their most poignant problem. Severed ties, young people migrating to larger localities, isolation that was not necessarily good for you – all of the above concerned both myself and my family. In my case, there was also the additional layer of loneliness and inability to form part of the community on the same rules as other members of the congregation.

The work is composed of an old bed that once belonged to Ms. Struzińska from Kurówko and a large terrazzo crucifix, originally meant for a grave, which I received from a memorial masonry company in Sierpc. Together, they create a single, dramatic composition: the bed, made with white linen and hardened through a generous application of epoxy resin, is pierced with the heavy cross.

The sculpture was created at the bottom of a dried-up pond in the village of Smorzewo, where – as legend has it – a church or local chapel once collapsed into the ground.

The cross that seems to have fallen from the sky to pierce the bed symbolizes the inappropriate location of religion and its symbols in a place associated with the most intimate part of our lives. A symbol of religion forcing its way into our personal affairs and adjudicating on what is right and wrong.



*Bed (Without Justice There Can Be No Solidarity) sculpture Smorzewo 2016*



*Bed (Without Justice There Can Be No Solidarity) sculpture Smorzewo 2016*



## **Saw**

Most of my projects are made using ready-made found objects. This builds on the village tradition of altering and converting things, the peasant understanding of materiality, where nothing can go to waste and recycling represents a natural method of work. The rationale behind *Saw* is derived from this approach to objects.

The saw was found on the yard of Teodor Zasadowski's memorial masonry company in Dobaczewo. The blade, 3 metres in diameter, had for years been used to carve granite blocks to produce tombstones. When using a tool of this size was no longer economically viable, the saw was propped up against the workshop, a discarded tool left to rust. I modified its surface by sanding an inscription on it, a quote from the writings of Father Józef Tischner: 'Before you are saved, one has to know whom to save. You have to be yourself; if you pose as somebody else, that somebody is going to be saved and not you'. The saw is intended as a public work; when rust returns to the surface as a result of weather conditions, the inscription will have to be renewed. This work concerns revealing one's identity and points to the need of introspection, of sustaining the testimony of our conscience and enduring the constant difficulty of reconstructing its message.



Saw instalation, found object, Warszawa 2019

## Cross

In 2016, Marcin Dzierżanowski, activist of the Faith and Rainbow foundation, told me about two young people who jointly committed suicide. The alleged reason for their dramatic decision was the community's lack of acceptance for their relationship. In early 2017 I travelled to the town in question and cut down the tree under which the bodies were found – the witness to the tragedy.

I used it to make a cross decorated with an incised motif of herb-of-grace – a symbol of innocence and femininity. The sculpture was made for a Way of the Cross dedicated to victims of homophobia. The service was meant to be celebrated in cooperation with Faith and Rainbow, but unfortunately this gesture was regarded as too radical, especially since it called on the congregation to repent. When the object was presented at the *Late Polishness* exhibition at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, I removed it from view and embarked on an alternative Via Dolorosa through the streets of Warsaw. I took this cross of reconciliation to the Presidential Palace, replacing another cross that had stood there several years before, dividing the Polish society.<sup>3</sup>

The National Tragedy, represented by a sign used by political parties to divide people, was temporarily replaced by a cross symbolizing homophobia, which I regard as another national tragedy. With this action, I entered a complex sphere of conflict and debate, intending to cut across it, overcome set patterns of thinking and articulate an important thought. Remind people that homophobia kills.

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<sup>3</sup> The cross in question was spontaneously placed there in 2010 to commemorate victims of the Smoleńsk plane crash, which killed the Polish president and his entire delegation. When some time later the authorities attempted to move it to a nearby church, they faced opposition from organized groups of 'defenders of the cross', largely instigated by the Law and Justice Party (which saw the crash as a politically motivated act rather than a tragic accident). The presence of the cross in front of the Presidential Palace and subsequent events sparked a conflict between religious groups and supporters of a clearer division between church and state [translator's note].



*Cross carved wood, Warszawa 2017*



*Cross carved wood, Warszawa 2017*

## Monument to a Peasant

*Monument to a Peasant* is a sculpture modelled on Albrecht Dürer's unrealized design for a statue from 1525. The original illustration, featured in Dürer's book on geometry, shows a peasant depicted in the pose of Pensive Christ, pierced with a nobleman's sword. The design for a statue commemorating the failed peasants' revolt from the 16<sup>th</sup> century was too controversial and ambiguous to be realized in Dürer's time. *Monument to a Peasant* from 2015 is a contemporary interpretation of this motif. It is composed of a trailer from a manure spreader decorated with pitchforks and chains, with a platform on top of it (equipped with a working lift – a machine that was used during renovation works), on which I placed a hyperrealistic sculpture of Adam Pesta. The Kurówko village leader sits on his own rusty milk can, which went out of use following a change in food trading regulations.

The protest statue was made in the villages of Gorzewo and Kurówko following months of intense preparations. My work on the concept of the monument was largely informed by striking farmers, who from February to June 2015 protested in front of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. Ever since the work was first presented in Kurówko in October 2015, it has been constantly on the road, visiting villages and towns across Poland. It is passed from hand to hand, from tractor to tractor, like a holy image. Its pilgrimage around the country may be seen as a new secular celebration meant to bring people together. Whenever the monument changes its location and context, its appearance changes too. In Sierpc, it was placed on the site of the town's former synagogue, burnt down by the Nazis in 1939. Painted red and decorated with tools used by the national fire service (jackets, firehoses and helmets), it served as an interpretation of local events and the history of emergency rescue services. This is a monument to disobedience: musing on the condition of the Polish countryside, it tells the story of centuries of slavery, but also of contemporary rural life and the peasant identity of the Polish society transformed into farmers, who have to take on the world on other economic frontlines.





*Monument to Peasant, sculpture, mixed technique, Kurówko 2015*



*Monument to Peasant, sculpture, mixed technique, Gorzewo 2015*



*Monument to Peasant, sculpture, mixed technique, 2015, Gozdowo 2015*



*Monument to Peasant, sculpture, mixed technique, Sierpc 2018*





*Monument to Peasant, sculpture, mixed technique, Kraków 2015*



*Monument to Peasant, sculpture, mixed technique, Smorzewo 2016*

### **Gateway Commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Abolishing Serfdom**

The metal gateway which commemorates the abolishing of serfdom in Congress Poland (the Russian partition) is a welded object placed on the edge of the property belonging to Kurówko village leader Adam Pesta. The object, painted in intense colours, refers to the tradition of rural metalwork and grassroots creation of functional objects and decorations. Built in 2014 in Gorzewo, it also testifies to an animated discussion on the peasant roots of the Polish society and forces us to think about contemporary social exclusion and problems such as rural depopulation, the economic rationale of farming and contract work under late capitalism.





*Gate instalation, Kurówko 2014*



*Gate instalation, Kurówko 2014*

## **Scarecrows**

This is the key installation of the exhibition. It is composed of twenty-two wooden crosses in various forms and sizes, reflecting the symbols of different Christian denominations. They were built in Kurówko in the autumn and winter of 2018. Each of the crosses is 'wearing' colourful clothes I collected from members of the LGBT+ community who faced discrimination because of their sexual orientation. In December 2018, the crosses were placed together on a meadow in Kurówko, acting as a line of scarecrows meant to drive wild boars away from the crops. I wanted to form a temporary alliance between farmers and the urban LGBT+ community. Through the exchange I began, homosexual people donated their clothes to help protect crops belonging to the inhabitants of my home village. Each of the scarecrows was made in my typical collage technique: the clothes were cut to pieces and sewn back together in new configurations with the participation of Kurówko villagers, while the crosses were painted in intense colours to resemble the Holy Mountain of Garbarka or the Lithuanian Hill of Crosses. The installation touches upon the presence of homosexuals in Christian congregations and reflects on the influence of religion on homophobic attitudes. Scarecrows placed on the outskirts of the field serve as a metaphor of LGBT+ people, standing alone on the periphery of religion.



*Scarecrows sculpture, found objects, Kurówko 2018–2019*



*Scarecrows sculpture, found objects, Kurówko 2018–2019*

## Island

The *Island* project materialized in 2018 in Sierpc – the town where I currently live – on a pond dug out by forced Jewish labourers during the Second World War. A few years ago the authorities had a small artificial island made on the reservoir, where –for my action – I placed a set of artificial matzevot that were used as set design of *Aftermath*, Władysław Pasikowski's 2012 film about the Jedwabne pogrom.

Under the matzevot I placed a ribbon of four thousand rainbow-coloured crepe paper flowers. The Mutual Support Association [Stowarzyszenie Pomoc Wzajemna] from Zawidz spent a few weeks to prepare them in the agreed form. At night, the installation was lit up by multi-coloured LED lights.

The inspiration behind *Island* was Marcin Dzierżanowski's text *Biedni chrześcijanie patrzą na paradę równości* [Poor Christians looking at the pride parade], where the author compares anti-Semitism and homophobia, referring to well-known texts written by Czesław Miłosz and Jan Błoński. The installation – the first such public artwork in Sierpc – operated on the Jeziórka reservoir for three weeks. The second part of the project was the *Monument to a Peasant*, painted red, decorated with firefighting equipment used in emergency rescue operations and placed on the site of the Jewish synagogue burnt down by the Nazis in 1939.

*Island* resulted from a temporary coalition between various social groups, formed especially for the occasion. The National Fire Service, the farmers' wives association and a private Catholic school were just some of the involved entities.

I wanted *Island* to use subject matter from the past to talk about present and future dangers, and draw attention to a complex network of concealed facts about victims of the Holocaust (including non-binary persons). This was also the first public action in Sierpc that referred to the situation of the LGBT community, combining it with the history of the town's Jewry (once forming a half of Sierpc's population). The *Fears* exhibition included a video documentation of the project.





*Island* site specific, Sierpc 2018



*Island* site specific, Sierpc 2018





*Island* site specific, Sierpc 2018



*Island* site specific, Sierpc 2018

## **Covers**

This was a continuation of the *Island* project. The mayor of Sierpc, Jarosław Perzyński, told me about Dworcowa Street, where a pavement renovation revealed buried matzevot, stolen by the Germans from the local Jewish cemetery to pave the road.

*Covers* are metal objects that look like manholes, with a poem written by local author Jolanta Smykowska. The sentence is illustrated with the star of David. The authorities are meant to install the covers on the pavement above the buried matzevot and in locations associated with the town's Jewish past. I see them as a gateway, a manhole leading to hidden problems lurking right beneath the surface. This is another action that uses the form of a statue.



Covers metal cast, Kurówko 2018



Covers metal cast, Warszawa 2019

## Gay Ghost

*The Gay Ghost* is a work from 2019 made in the stained glass technique in collaboration with the Warsaw-based company Witraże S. C. I set out to transpose a page from *The Gay Ghost* comic book published in the 1940s in America into a monumental stained glass window. The main protagonist of the comic is the spirit of Keith Everet, whose mission is to combat totalitarianisms and injustice in the world. The title hero fights with the rise of Nazism. In the speech balloons, instead of the original text spoken by the ghost, I quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Protestant pastor and antifascist, author of the concept of non-religious Christianity. Bonhoeffer was murdered on Hitler's express orders for taking part in an anti-Nazi plot.

Fragments of his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, where Bonhoeffer criticizes churches that collaborated with fascists, form the essence of his lecture on faith and how it can be salvaged in the face of ongoing apocalypse. His accusations directed at religion and calls to work for the benefit of other people are related to the active heroism propagated by the comic book. Together, they manifest a new attitude resulting from juxtaposing these two seemingly distant figures





NADZ KOSCIÓŁ, KTÓRY PRZEZ 12 LAT WALCZYŁ TYŁKO  
O ANI CALKIE BAMBACACHWARGCE, CIOTI NIEZDOLNY DO  
TĘDZI BY BWC HODOPICHTA DOZWIADACIŚCIBO I UBEZPACIENIO  
ALDHA PŁA LUBSI I PŁA BAWIA, PŁATEBU SWAHI BŁONIA WŁADZA  
WYKACIE BOCY I BAMBACI, I CHERBACIOWIETWO NADZE BOSTE  
TYDZE POLICIA: NA STRA KOSCIÓŁACH TYŁKO NA MODLTWIE I NA  
CZYNNIKU GRYNIBELIWOBOCIBIŁOŚĆ LUBSI, Z TĘD CALKIE  
LEP. TĘDZI I CIOTKI POWIĘDZ KILK NARODZIE, JIE NA NOWO CALKIE  
BIBLIKIE, UŁOBIENIE, BIEDE TO UWIĘDZI KORY, MOZE CALKIE  
WYBRZAGUWO, LECIE WYBRZAGUWO I CIOTKIOWIETWO TĘDZI  
MOCNA NIEBIA, KTÓRA PRZEKAZAŁA LUBSI, LECIE PRZEKAZ  
PODOBIALA ICH TĘD SWA MOCA, BIEDE TO DZEWY NOWY  
Z LUBSI.

WOTY BIEDE, KOTY BIEDE, W KOTY FOTOCYFNA KOTYBIE, JAKO TĘD  
WOTY BIEDE, KOTY BIEDE, W KOTY FOTOCYFNA KOTYBIE, JAKO TĘD  
WOTY BIEDE, KOTY BIEDE, W KOTY FOTOCYFNA KOTYBIE, JAKO TĘD  
WOTY BIEDE, KOTY BIEDE, W KOTY FOTOCYFNA KOTYBIE, JAKO TĘD

The Gay Ghost stained glass, Warszawa 2019



## **Valentine's Day / Ash Wednesday**

In 2018, Valentine's day and Ash Wednesday, two holidays that are quite distant in popular culture, fell on the same day: 14<sup>th</sup> February. I used this interesting coincidence as a pretext to film a video performance. I bought a used confessional and managed to acquire wooden fragments of a darkroom from one of Warsaw's gay clubs. I took both of them to Kurówko and burnt them into ashes, repeatedly pouring petrol over them. I then mixed the ashes from the two conflicting objects, spread them on slices of bread and ate them.

The aim of my action was to symbolically erase divisions: the burnt objects represented two opposing realities which I have tried to transgress using my artistic gesture. The inspiration behind the performance was the philosophy of Genesis and Juliusz Słowacki's epic poem *Genesis from the Spirit*. The prayer-monologue tells the story of a spirit striving to reach God while shedding subsequent forms, each time destroying the shell of his previous incarnation. This is also a work about identity and the impossible gesture of abandoning the elements that constitute my personality (in spite of their contradictory nature). The exhibition featured a two-channel video documentation of the performance.



*Valentine's Day / Ash Wednesday two-chanel wideo 5'31" 2018*



*Valentine's Day / Ash Wednesday two-chanel wideo 5'31" 2018*

## **Banner of Saint Expeditus**

Between January and June 2015, Polish farmers were on strike for a total of 129 days in the so-called 'green village' – vernacular architecture erected in the green belt between the Royal Łazienki Park and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. I spent a lot of time with the farmers, taking on the role of an artist-cum-ethnographer. As I observed their actions, tried to understand their demands and organized art workshops for them, I struck up a close relationship with a number of the farmers. This resulted in an official invitation from one of the circles of the Rural Solidarity trade union to make them a flag or union banner. Since the union was to gain a second patron, Andrzej Filipiak, I took up the task to design the appropriate composition. On the one hand, I attempted to reinterpret the iconography of the early Christian martyr. On the other, I wanted to depict the tragic history of the aforementioned Filipiak, who on 13 June 2013 set himself on fire in front of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister in an act of protest against 'inhumane politics and poverty'.

The banner I designed is an embroidered image that combines the aforementioned threads in a single composition that employs the motif of the patron saint of desperate causes.

The same saint became the symbol of the Faith and Rainbow community of homosexual Christians. The rainbow version of the banner was made for the 2016 World Youth Day in Kraków. In both versions of the composition I impersonate Expeditus so that a single symbol may unite two distant communities.



*Banner of Saint Expeditus embroidery, Warszawa 2019*



*Banner of Saint Expeditus embroidery, Warszawa 2019*

## **Ku Klux Klan**

*Ku Klux Klan* is a costume made of garments and liturgical vestments donated by members of the clergy, sewn according to the 1930s Ku Klux Klan catalogue. In this work, I reflect on religion as clothing – the outer layer of rituals and principles that obscures the essence of Christianity.

The work is meant to serve as a pretext to talk about violence that may result from a religion that focuses too much on its surface – the aforementioned cultural norms. Religion, while beautiful, may become equally dangerous and be used as an instrument of lynch. During the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, there was a custom for women to donate their ball gowns to monasteries, where they were turned into liturgical vestments. This act was seen as a form of penance and compensation for sins. In my work, I wanted to refer to this peculiar recycling tradition and in a way bring out the critical queer potential of these gestures.

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*Ku-Klux-Klan* found objects,  
Warszawa 2019

## **Rosaries**

Rosaries are a set of jewellery made of unusual materials. Two out of three rosaries shown at the exhibition were made from the blood of a homosexual person mixed with epoxy resin. One was made of antidepressants I take each day before going to sleep.

I was inspired to make this work by an event that took place in 2017, when thousands of people cordoned off Poland's borders, turning their back on other countries. Supposedly defending Poland against an enemy from outside – or expelling an enemy from within – the rosary was used as an instrument of defence or attack. To me, when it serves as a weapon against another person, the rosary turns into a worthless religious stage prop. Jewellery may be associated with votive offerings and seems to enter into a dialogue with the Catholic tradition of holy relics.

Enriching the tradition with the new element, the blood of people excluded from the community, I try to take over this object, turning it into an instrument of acceptance, a votive offering for openness.

This is also a reference to Bonhoeffer's theology and his call for a deeper religious practice.



*Rosaries jewelry, Warszawa 2019*



*Rosaries jewelry, Warszawa 2019*

## **Works created after my PhD that were not included in the exhibition**

### **Museum of Alternative Social Histories**

#### **Project realised with Szymon Maliborski as part of the 2015 ART BOOM festival in Kraków**

In September 2014, an old hut from Kurówko was demolished and the building materials thus acquired served to build the *Museum of Alternative Social Histories*. This was a quasi-institution erected at the foot of the Wawel hill in Kraków. Bricks, fragments of wooden gables and the metal structure of the house, built by my grandpa – a village builder – and the village leader Adam Pesta, were all transported to Kraków and placed at the foot of the castle hill. After the metal structure was put together, the building materials were scattered around it – as if the brick walls had fallen to reveal the transparent interior with displayed exhibits.

A new temporary building was erected in the centre of Kraków using metal, stone and Plexi. Seen from a distance, it seemed to snuggle against the silhouette of Wawel. We used this space, with its unique design and location, to organize an art show. During the Art Boom public art festival, the structure housed the *Village People* exhibition, which presented an alternative history of the countryside told, among others, by rural activists. One of its elements were aspects related to rural queer history. Roch Sulima once wrote that the city often disguises the village in a costume of its representations. One of the projects shown at the museum was a photoshoot arranged with the inhabitants of Kurówko dressed up as North American Indians. Another work created especially for the Museum was the film *What Are the Farmers On About?*, which showed the everyday lives and ways of self-organization of farmers who were striking in front of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. If Wawel recounts the history of Poland from the nobility's perspective, the Museum of Alternative Histories was meant to supplement this narrative with the majority view, for centuries represented by the country's rural inhabitants. This is a story about the real-life transformation of peripheral areas, which was never deemed important enough to be featured on the Wawel hill.





Demolition house in Kurówku, 2015



Demolition house in Kurówku, 2015



A metal structure built by Stanisław Adamski and Adam Pesta  
in Kurówko, 2015



*Museum of Alternative Social Histories* instalation I public space, Kraków 2015





*Museum of Alternative Social Histories instalation in public space, Kraków 2015*



*Museum of Alternative Social Histories instalation in public space, Kraków 2015*

### ***Invitation to a debate***

The subject taken up in the actions of the Museum of Alternative Social Histories was continued in 2016, when together with Stanisław Garbarczuk, a critical rural artist from the village of Gorzewo, I made the performance *Invitation to a Debate*. Garbarczuk, who lives next to the main road passing through his village, has turned his farmyard into an open gallery of sorts, using art to vent his frustration and disappointment with the political and economic reality.

*Together, we made a large-format painting with a Styrofoam inscription reading 'Invitation to a debate'. We used it as a background for our makeshift TV studio placed right next to the road. The remaining decorations were armchairs painted gold, modelled on those used in the studios of popular current affairs programmes. Sitting in our armchairs, with the painting right behind us, we waited for any of the passing cars to stop and join us for a debate. The one-day performance was recorded by a young farmer from Gójsk, an amateur filmmaker, who has a YouTube channel with films made on his farm.*



*Invitation to debate performance, Gorzewo 2016*



*Invitation to debate performance, Gorzewo 2016*

Deniz  
Rytkonlu