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## LIVING STORAGES: Socially Appropriate, Statistically Average, Scientifically Healthy, Personally Desired . . .

12.06-22.08.2021

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art  
zacheta.art.pl

**artists:** Stanisław Drózdź, Aneta Grzeszykowska, Izabella Gustowska, Marianne Heske, Marek Sapetto, Zbigniew Warpechowski, Anna Witkowska and Artur Żmijewski as part of the exhibition's accompanying programme

**curator:** Daniel Kotowski

**collaboration:** Maria Świerżewska, Monika Zaleszczuk

**media support:** British Council

The latest show in the *Living Storages* series came about as the result of a search of the Zachęta collection for works depicting reactions to the experience of social pressure. The selection of works shows the difficulties posed by a system in which the model of the 'statistical human' is in force, also calling attention to the problem of biopower, the mechanisms of power over the body, people, or oneself.

The title of the show is a subversive reference to the privileged position of a person in society. The fulfilment of expectations concerning behaviour or appearance allows us to live in accordance with norms, and the model of a 'normal person' represents what is universal. Thus, a person is expected to be normal, to feel formally, to see normally, to hear normally. This standard model impacts both the formation of the body and the way of life. In her book *Staring: How We Look*, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson characterises this normal as 'the measure of the good, true, and healthy, [which] also determines the status and value of people in the modern world'.

Anyone who wants to be a member of society must conform to the norm. They must be socially appropriate, statistically average, scientifically healthy and personally desired. Thus, they strive to achieve a state of normality. They do this by working on themselves and controlling their reflexes in everyday behaviour, conduct and habits. In this way, they become part of the power mechanism that regulates social life.

Daniel Kotowski

## Works at the exhibition:

Stanisław Dróżdź, *Loneliness*, 2003, black foil pasted on plexiglass, collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art

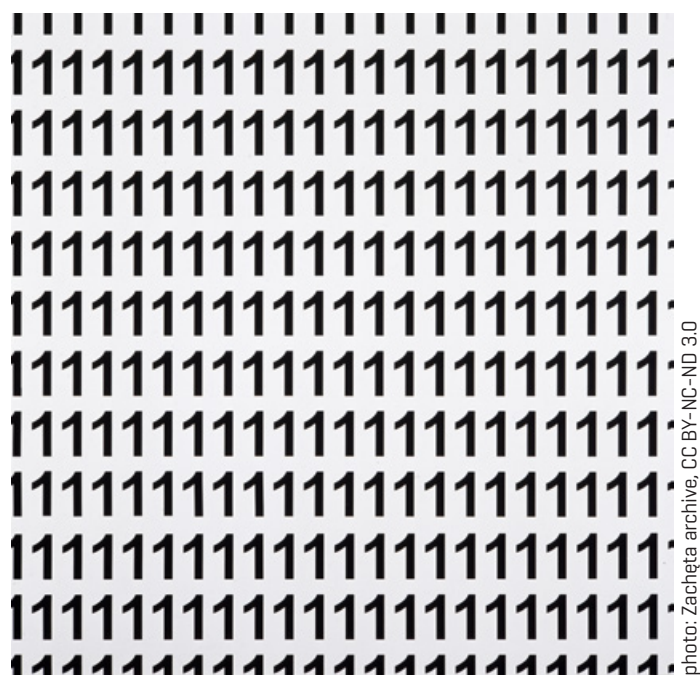


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Stanisław Dróżdź, graduate of Polish Studies at the University of Wrocław, which he attended in 1959–1964, is one of the most prominent representatives of concrete poetry, to which he has devoted himself completely since 1967. The key to the artist's activities was the term he coined, 'concept-shapes'. Studying words, he searched for the purest visual forms to represent them, with the strongest possible influence of the viewer's visual imagination. He has created both two-dimensional works [black letters and symbols on white canvas, later on plexiglass] and large installations. Although Dróżdź's works appear cool, mathematical and minimalist, they are nevertheless accompanied by a deep reflection of existential nature.

**Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Negative Book #7*, 2012, photograph and pigment ink on cotton paper, collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**



photo: Zachęta archive, CC BY-SA

Photographer, author of objects. In 1994–1999, she studied at the Faculty of Graphic Arts of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Since 1999, she has been working in a duet with Jan Smaga; since 2005, she has been creating her own projects. In them, she takes up the issue of individual identity, as well as personal histories and the issue of body representation. The photo is part of the *Negative Book* series of black-and-white photographs, which through its particular kind of deconstruction of positive photography takes up a reflection on the character of the photographic medium and its various transformations. It is a kind of personal, intimate diary consisting of classic family photos. In each of them, the bright, 'positive' figure of the artist is visible. Photograph #7 was created based on two photographic procedures. The first is the exposition of the whole body, only partially painted white [with all shadows marked with white], which means that in the negative, the body is light-coloured. This procedure is particularly visible when the artist's figure is placed in next to other figures, whose skin colour is maintained in the negative black. The second procedure is the use of photos in negative versions. The work takes up the existential issues of othering, invisibility and alienation in everyday life, as well as perhaps the identity of a woman-artist in the world of art.

**Izabella Gustowska, *Relative Similarities XIII*, 1980, coloured offset printing and fabric on paper, collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**



photo: Zachęta archive, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

The artist works with various media, creating painting objects, graphics, photography, installation, video, video performances and films. In 1967–1972, she worked at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań [currently University of the Arts Poznań], she is a professor of the university. She works in series, experimenting with form. In her pieces, she takes up issues such as femininity, twinship, as well as hetero- and homosexual relationships, using subversive strategies for this purpose. The work presented is part of the *Relative Similarities* series [1979–1984], which refers to the idea of relativity of similarities, the issues of copies and originals, surrogate twinship and twinship by choice, as well as the relationship with one's own and others' femininity. The artist is also interested in experiments with photography, leading to building a new form of reality.

**Marianne Heske, *Heads*, 2014, installation, mixed media, collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**



photo: Zachęta archive, CC BY-SA

Conceptual artist and pioneer of video art in Norway. Studied at the Bergen National Academy of the Art and Design [1967–1971], Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris [1971–1975], Royal College of Art in London [1975–1976] and Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht [1976–1979]. In 1971, she purchased a box filled with identical doll heads at a flea market in Paris. Since then the head has become an important element of her artistic employ. Heske has said: ‘everyone looked the same, everyone played their role . . . because dolls are a mirror of society.’ According to her, all beliefs and opinions about politics, religion, ethics, art or culture change depending on the time, place and social context, but the head invariably remains a symbol of the human experience.

**Marek Sapetto, *Composition (Building Strength)*, 1972, oil on canvas, collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**



photo: Zachęta archive, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0

Painter and graphic artist, in 1960–1966 studied at the Faculty of Painting and Graphic Design of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where he graduated with distinction from the studio of Michał Bylina. In 1971, he began pedagogical work at this faculty, where he has been a professor since 1990. Since 1968, he exhibited jointly with Wiesław Szamborski; they were both leading representatives of the new figuration trend of the 1970s. The painting *Composition (Building Strength)* is one of the examples of this movement. It is dominated by a jarring, cacophonous colour scheme. The nonchalant way of painting shows an unembellished world and the artist’s critical attitude to contemporary social phenomena. Szamborski ridicules human vices, stupidity, giving up one’s dignity for success, power or material possessions.

**Anna Witkowska, *Kiss*, 2008, video, 6'35", collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**



photo: Zachęta archive, CC BY-SA

Visual artist, illustrator, designer. In 1999–2003, she studied at the Faculty of Graphic Arts of the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, where she received her doctorate at the Faculty of Sculpture and Intermedia in 2018. She creates solo or in a duet with Adam Witkowski. The work presented directly references Andy Warhol's 1963 experimental film of the same title, *Kiss*. The artist says: 'My video is a gesture full of love towards a loved one. It is more important than everything around. Let's not lose time, let's go kiss instead.' The kissing couple [the Witkowskis], completely focused on each other and isolated from any spatio-temporal context, creates a peculiar and private universe on a micro scale, in which love becomes a liberating feeling. The heterosexual kiss is a universal depiction, frequently found in art.

**Zbigniew Warpechowski, *The Dialogue with a Fish*, 1973, photograph, collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**



photo: Zachęta archive, CC BY-SA

Precursor of performance art in Poland and one of its first creators in the world. He creates paintings, poetry, and deals with theory of art, philosophy and film set design. Since 1985, he has been a member of the 2nd Kraków Group, since 1986, a member of the international Black Market group. The presented work, one of a series of photographs, shows an activity referencing suffering and the cruelty of life. The photos document a performance carried out in 1973 as part of the Lublin Theatre Spring. Using his body language, full of tenderness and love, the artist tried to distract his viewers' attention away from the suffering of a fish deprived of water, close to suffocation. The provocation was aimed at testing what was more important for the audience: art or the death of an animal. The artist himself could not complete the game, throwing the fish back into water.

## Work showing as part of the exhibition's accompanying programme:

**Artur Żmijewski, *Singing Lesson 2*, 2003, video, 16'3", collection of Zachęta — National Gallery of Art**

**Artur Żmijewski** Film author, photographer. In 1990–1995, he studied at the Faculty of Sculpture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, where he defended his diploma in the studio of Grzegorz Kowalski. One of the leading artists of the critical art movement. He deals with the issues of the body and otherness, as well as historical trauma and the Holocaust. The protagonists of his works are most often ill or disabled people, those who have been shunted off to the margins of society for various reasons. He takes up uncomfortable subjects, explores areas of taboo. *Singing Lesson 2* is the second film based on the artist's idea of creating a recording of a song performed by Deaf people.\* The group of deaf youth from the Samuel-Heinicke-Schule in Leipzig, along with the Barockensamble der Fachrichtung Alte Musik orchestra, performed the cantata *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* by Johann Sebastian Bach at the Church of St Thomas in Leipzig, where the composer was a cantor and where he was later buried.

Most Deaf people do not use speech fluently, they are also not able to tune their singing to music. We hear their distorted voices in combination with the pitch-perfect performance of mezzo-soprano Ewa Łapińska. The Deaf students accepted the proposal to work on the performance of the cantata, adapting to the normalised world in which sound is omnipresent and in which the dominant form of communication are phonic languages. The work shows the relationships between the common perception of completeness and incompleteness. For the last 20 years, since the work was created, Deaf people increasingly identify with their language of a different modality than phonic languages; they are aware of their cultural distinctiveness. The question remains whether the youth from the Leipzig school would agree to participate in this project in 2021.

\* The descriptions of Żmijewski's work use the term 'deafmute'. It reflects the low social awareness of the essence of deafness, which is not about a lack of language and speech, but the lack of full access to the world of sound.

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