

Persons
Projects

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Katarzyna Kozyra – Portfolio of selected works

Katarzyna Kozyra's performances, quasi-theatrical productions and audience engaging happenings challenge traditional boundaries between artist and audience. Her video work points to some of the most important issues of human existence: identity and transgression. She acts in the realm of cultural taboos referring to the bodily nature of man and to behavioral social stereotypes. While stirring controversy and usually inviting the critics' outrage, Kozyra questions these stereotypes and overcomes them. By unveiling the facts of reality, she forces us to re-examine and newly validate (or not) the settled order of cultural values. Kozyra represented Poland at the 1999 Venice Biennale with her piece *Men's Bathhouse*, for which she received Honorable Mention.

Katarzyna Kozyra was born 1963 in Warsaw, PL. She lives and works in Warsaw, PL and Berlin, D.





Looking for Jesus

Video, 2013 - present

Looking for Jesus

The Polish artist and filmmaker has travelled to Jerusalem four times since 2012 to document people who exhibit symptoms of Jerusalem Syndrome—a strange condition in which visitors to the Israeli city develop religious-themed delusions, obsessions, and even psychosis. Sufferers “usually wash up in police custody or emergency rooms, suffering from dehydration and self-neglect of, well, biblical proportions,” wrote Sam McPheeters in a 2011 VICE feature on the condition. He went on: There are several diagnostic types of Jerusalem syndrome. There are the traditional crazies—travellers with profoundly skewed worldviews, acutely religious, who find themselves caught in Jerusalem’s psychic force field. Some come with claims that they have decoded religious secrets, such as the date of the Messiah’s return, the location of Eden or Golgotha, or the exact criteria for heavenly ascension. Others arrive to act out particularly grisly Bible passages. Many of them are practitioners of what the journal *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* terms “psychotic asceticism.” Kozyra’s footage has been compiled and edited into a feature-length documentary called *Looking For Jesus*.





In Art Dreams Come True

Selected Video Works, 2005 - 2008

In *Art Dreams Come True* is a multimedia project linking different forms of visual, musical and performance art. Begun in August 2003 when Kozyra decided to spend the first of her DAAD stipends to learn to sing opera and the art of make-up, she took a defining step in the direction of a new performance art, all documented on video. Kozyra finally concluded the series with *Summertale*. With the help of Gloria Viagra, a famous Berlin Drag Queen, and the Maestro, the professional operatic vocal coach Grzegorz Pitulej, Kozyra began a process and a work of art that demanded of her new feats, artistically and personally. Both lead Kozyra into a world equally dominated by artifice: Gloria, a DJ and singer, into the world of night clubs, and Maestro, a professional singer and instructor, into opera. In both of these worlds, strong, but very different stereotypes of femininity reign. Gloria Viagra's main task is to help the artist discover the "woman" inside her, the ideal or incarnation of which is, for the artist, none other than Gloria herself. The Maestro, always as artificial in life as on stage, is the personification of the world of the opera, of sublimated feelings and emotions expressed in an unrealistic way, imbued with a powerful sense of artifice: in song. The project questions celebrity, what it means to be a star, in relation to those fundamentals of femininity that allow a woman to exhibit herself, sing, dance, satisfy and succeed. The series consists of 13 segments: documentation of performances, quasi theatrical productions, audience engaging happenings, and videos.

Kozyra summarizes *In Art Dreams Come True* with this confident statement: „Anyone can dance, sing, and act. And from my omnipotence comes a certainty that I will succeed at whatever I choose to focus on, because I'm potentially talented in every area.”





Summertale

Video, 2008, 19:56 min



Summertale is the final piece in the series *In Art Dreams Come True*. It brings the three protagonists together to enact a final fantasy and to abstractly but assuredly tie together the series' concurrent themes. The scene is set within a fantastical garden. During their garden work, a group of female dwarves encounter three enormous mushrooms out of which pop Gloria Viagra, the Maestro and Kozyra herself. Although initially the dwarfettes receive the three gracefully, they gradually become distrustful of the motley trio, eventually attempt to poison the Maestro, and finally brutally murder both the Maestro and Gloria, warning Kozyra, "...They are men. They are evil!"



Il Castrato

Video, 2006, 15:59 min

The Gender Bender Gay Culture Festival co-produced the twenty-odd minute long performance titled *Il Castrato*, which took the form of a one act Baroque opera. In the opera's finale, the Maestro and Gloria Viagra plucked the drag queen (Kozyra) from the audience and castrated her. Stripped of dresses and wig, the „drag queen” recovered her androgynous appearance with an artificial little body and genitals that granted her all the characteristics of a young boy. Following this scene, accomplished by those who were to teach her femininity, the artist sang Schubert's „Ave Maria” before riding off on a white steed. While in the previous projects of this series, Kozyra sought to become, transform into, or dress up as a woman/princess/star, in this episode she reverted to her boyish looks in order to undergo nearly literal castration.





Cheerleader

Video, 2006, 04:30 min

Cheerleader was conceived as a pop video to the music and words of the Gwen Stefani song "What You Waiting For?" The scenes unfold in a typical men's locker room, evoking clichés of femininity and masculinity. In the beginning the young, fit men do not pay the slightest attention to Kozyra, the attractive, singing and dancing cheerleader. But when she reappears in her nude, obese, female opera singer costume, the thong-clad athletes stand at full attention. The video explores, amongst others, the problems of the body as a costume and of one's own identity that have frequently been the artist's preoccupation. The artist significantly makes use of images that she created of herself in previous works: the fat woman from *Diva: Reincarnation* and herself dressed as a man from *Men's Bathroom* the work that received Honorable Mention at the 1999 Venice Biennale. A choir comprised of two of the directors and a curator from the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw also appears in the film singing backup for the artist.







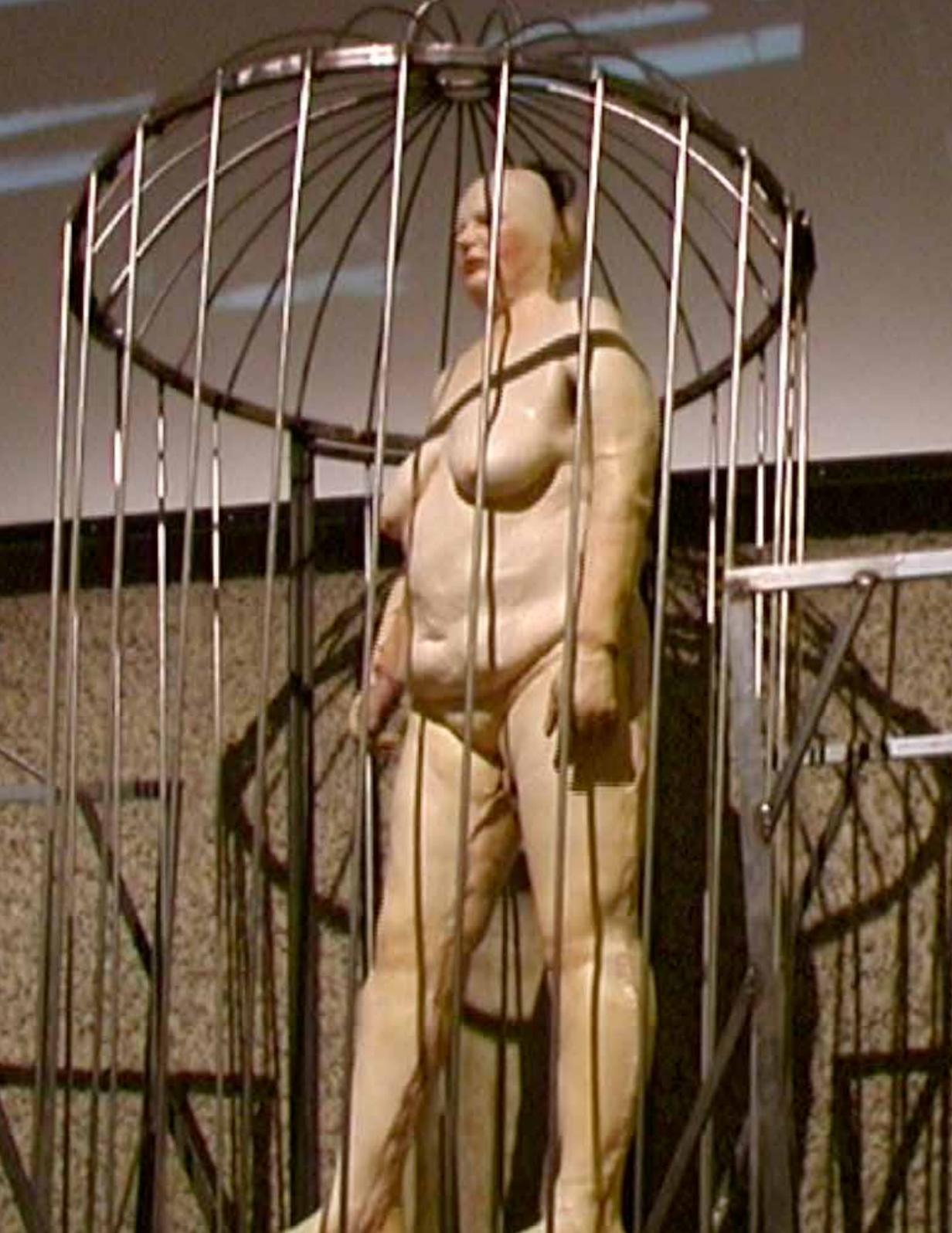
Wintertale

Video, 2005-2006,

11:42 min

Wintertale is the first piece of *In Art Dreams Come True* in which Gloria Viagra and the Maestro appear in a single setting and in equally important roles, vying for the body and soul of their student, Kozyra. The artist is transformed into a Snow White-like character, inhabiting a strange forest inn with a company of dwarves. The film, whose narrative offers no closure and appears hazy, combines and blends various myths and stories, as well as diverse cinematic styles: horror here meets melodrama and comedy, contemporary fable is married with period film, and the musical is juxtaposed with opera. The film records the artist's struggle to insert herself and her companions into a structural convention. She approaches that convention from inside of it, and by doing so, finally explodes it.





Diva: Reincarnation

Video, 2005, 08:05 min

Awaiting the artist, the audience was first shown a projected image of a prewar operatic diva in a cage with a lion, which was accompanied by an opera overture played from a vinyl record. The image gradually disappeared and a fabric-draped cage appeared holding Kozyra, dressed in a bodysuit, which was molded from a real human body, that made her resemble an obese woman. In a review published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Dorota Jarecka wrote, „The artist offered a parody of opera, of an opera diva who squeezes into an elaborate dress to sing the role of a girl. Here the situation was reversed — the singer’s abundant body was on the outside, the girl was inside. Completely “concealed” in this costume and conducted by the Maestro, the artist performed the aria of Olympia, the soulless doll from Offenbach’s “The Tales of Hoffman.”



Other Works

1992 - 2006

Homo Quadrupeds

Photographs, 2010



In photographs from the series *Homo Quadrupeds* (2018) naked men are led on a leash by burqa-clad women who tame their instincts. This is a reference to the legend of unicorn, in which only a virgin could tame the wild animal. While the women meet during the walk, the dogs sniff each other and seek to dominate. It is no longer only a matter of freeing women from male domination, as in the performance *Aus der Mappeder Hündigkeit* (From the Portfolio of *Doggishness*, 1968) by VALIE EXPORT and Peter Weibel, in which Weibel obediently waddled at the artist's side. Kozyra expands the feminist approach with a political aspect: the dogs in her work, played by Arabs and Americans, are aggressive and ready to jump down each other's throats any minute. Kozyra might therefore have more in common with Oleg Kulik, who attacks the establishment in his performances as a dog (literally!), but also dreams of a non-anthropocentric, ecological society and fights for democracy.









A Dream of Linnaeus' Daughter

Video, 2018

A Dream of Linnaeus' Daughter was shot in Uppsala, in the gardens of Carl Linnaeus, famous Swedish botanist living in the 18th century who invented the classification system of organisms and the theory of sexual reproduction of plants, whose nomenclature derived from human sexual anatomy sparked universal outrage at the time. In her work, Kozyra acts as Elisabeth Christina von Linné, one of Linnaeus' five daughters, an exceptionally talented figure forgotten by history, who could never take up studies, but still followed the steps of her father and became a botanist. In Kozyra's interpretation, Elisabeth conducts a choir singing Ludwig van Beethoven's famous Ode to Joy but... with the voices of such animals as a dog, donkey, cow, horse, goat and monkey. The creatures moo and squeal the anthem of the European Union while standing on typical pallets that symbolise Noah's Ark. What an irony of fate: in Kozyra's piece the daughter of the founder of an organism classification system based on difference builds a new world order that levels all differences, deeming all creatures equal.

Lou Salome in Vienna

Video, 2005, 03:30 min

Lou Salome in Roma

Teatro di Cane, Video, 2005, 03:30 min

An image of the artists' friend and femme fatale, Lou Salome, driving a buggy drawn by Nietzsche and Ree inspired Kozyra to create a video performance and photo series for which Vienna's Schwarzenberg Palace and Gardens served as the backdrop. As rendered by Kozyra, Nietzsche and Rilke (another of Lou Salome's acquaintances) — or more precisely actor-dancers masked as dogs strongly resembling the philosopher and poet — are subjected to animal training.

Kozyra devised her *Lou Salome* project while working on *In Art Dreams Come True*, and an interweaving of these projects is clearly perceptible. With *In Art Dreams Come True*, Kozyra became a material/doll/toy in the hands of Gloria Viagra and the Maestro, who shaped her. In Appearance as *Lou Salome*, on the other hand, she is a dominatrix who completely controls her men-dogs. The closing credits scroll by with Kozyra gently humming the aria of the Queen of the Night from "The Magic Flute."







Faces

Video, 2005-2006,

multi-channel
video installation



Faces is a continuation of the investigation of classical screening regarding choreography and dance that Kozyra began in *The Rite of Spring*. The audience, walking among huge projections sees only the dancers' faces during performance. They express extreme emotions, tremendous concentration, and impressive effort. The distorted facial features appear as though masks. But the audience can't see the dancers' bodies. The order is disturbed. The usually invisible face of the dancer this time takes the lead. A number of distinguished dancers took part in this project: Magada Ciechowicz as a white and black swan from *Swan Lake*, Carla Fracci dances to Isadora Duncan's routine, as well as Nazaret Panadero and Andrzej Stasiewicz.



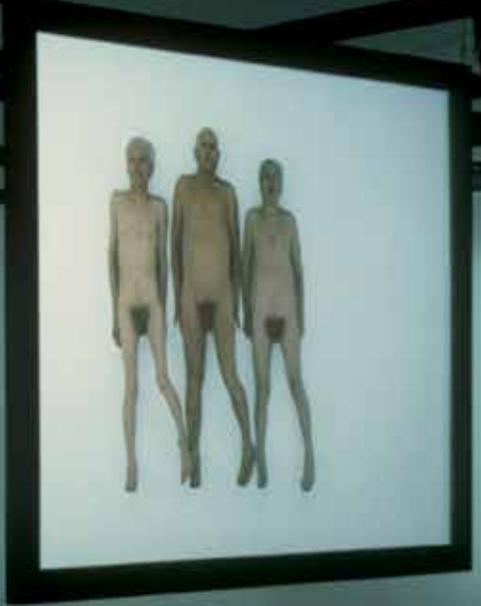
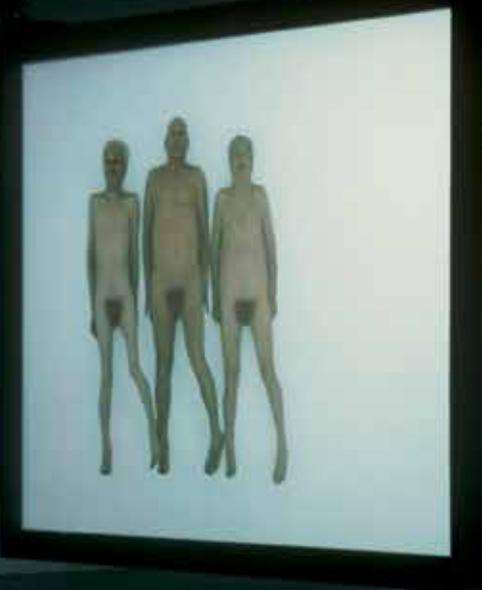


The Rite of Spring

Seven-screen video installation, 1999-2001

Katarzyna Kozyra's installation *The Rite of Spring*, takes its title from a ballet scored by Igor Stravinski and choreographed by Vaclav Nijinsky (1913) and considers the larger questions of dance and performance art from a historically informed and critical perspective. The Dance of the Chosen Victim, a single scene from the original *The Rite of Spring*, is the apex of Kozyra's work, allowing her to blend the ritual themes of Nijinsky's choreography into one condensed and integral act. The layered arrangement of the viewing screens emphasizes this simultaneity. In addition, Kozyra's choice to use aged, un-beautified dancers to fill the roles of Nijinsky's idealized virgins questions our assumptions about the limits of the body and its transformations over time. The naked dancers' ambiguous gendering also pushes the work further into a state of critique and consciousness, as the meaning of virginity and the definitions of beauty and biology are challenged.

The relativity of gender, sex and health is often starkly present in Kozyra's work. With her dancers Kozyra creates a death-driven ecstasy, full of movements that would require the most intense training from even the youngest and fittest bodies. The dancers are able to master these movements because they are lying down. After the initial filming of the pure movements, the film is animated, accentuating the re-centered gravity of the dancer's bodies. Despite the animation, and perhaps due to it, the jerky and hysteric gestures create the same sensations of urgency and dread that one experiences in Nijinsky's work.





Men's Bathhouse

Four-screen video installation, 1998,

08:00 min loop

For the first time the work was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1998, where Katarzyna Kozyra received an honorable mention. *Men's Bathhouse* consists of four simultaneous projections (each lasting 8 min) onto four screens mounted within an octagonal architectural structure, suggesting the interior of a bathhouse. The projections are visible both within and outside of the construction. The screens show scenes from the footage shot at the Budapest bathhouse, and show men's behavior at the bath while being filmed with a hidden camera. The artist is disguised as a man and appears among the other men being filmed in the bathhouse. A three minute film of the artist disguising herself is screened on the small monitor situated at the entrance of the installation.









Woman's Bathhouse

5 projections, 1997, 04:00 min

The first in a series of works made using a hidden camera, shot at the public woman's bathhouse in Budapest. The installation consists of a main screen showing a four minute looped projection, and five monitors showing unedited footage. These present scenes from the bathhouse, recording the prevailing atmosphere. Reproductions of classical works of art have been edited into the footage shown on the main screen: Rembrandt's „Suzanna and the Elders” and Ingres's „The Turkish Bath.”





Women Are Waiting

1998, c-print, 150 x 200 cm

Her interest in the body and how it changes due to the passage of time, disease and her own fight with leukemia led Kozyra into her work *Women Are Waiting*, started in 1994. This project took five years to complete and captures the intimacy between older women who were posing naked in front of a young girl holding a camera. Eventually this search was reflected in her most well-known work *The Women's Bathhouse*.



Olympia

1996, (White, Blue, Old Lady) c-print, 180 x 240 cm

Olympia is composed of three large scale photographs and a 12 min. video. The first photograph depicts the artist as Manet's *Olympia*, the second shows her on a mobile hospital bed, and the third depicts an old woman. The video documents the artist being administered an IV drip while undergoing her treatment for cancer.

Katarzyna Kozyra's skilfully referential *Olympia* engaged this conflict with incredible honesty and courage, setting an example for other artists to do the same. The work is based on Edouard Manet's 1865 *Olympia*, which he presented at the Paris Salon, and the scandal that it incited that sent a ripple through the art world so strong that it still resonates today. The title was uncompromising, for *Olympia* at that time was explicitly an alias for "prostitute." Clearly, this naked woman was just that; and further, she was unabashedly staring back at the viewer, refusing to be shamed.

Kozyra's 1996 *Olympia* (one of the most important work in polish art after 1989) is a self-portrait of the artist during her struggle with cancer. But here, a dwindling body lies on the hospital bed replacing Manet's voluptuous figure. Instead of an African maid presenting flowers from a potential client, a hospital nurse delivers Kozyra an IV drip. Livid, bandaged hands take the place of decadent bracelets, but the same brazen and unwavering strength and beauty remain. Just as her 1993 piece, *Pyramid of Animals*, shocked viewers with its explicit confrontation, in fact objectification, of death, Kozyra intentionally refers to the scandal that Manet's *Olympia* elicited one hundred years earlier engaging the same provocative attitude toward mortality. The artist, recognized as the proverbial witch of Polish art, has been condemned to go up in flames. But she is resilient and her expression, like Manet's original *Olympia*, is poised and confident. Publicly baring her sick body on the border of life and death, Kozyra proudly looks straight into the viewer's eyes and at the same time into Death's.







Blood Ties

1995/2010, set of 4 , c-print, 100 x 100 cm

Katarzyna Kozyra created this work in 1995 under the influence of events in former Yugoslavia. The symbols of the blood red cross and crescent are the symbols of humanitarian organizations that bring relief to persons in need of help. While making the piece Kozyra was thinking about the symbolic metaphor of fratricidal rivalry and struggle over ethnic and religious ideologies.

Ties of Blood of 1995 (the other version of which was shown on billboards throughout Poland in 1999) not only ironically debunks the ethnical myth. It is also, and first of all, an artistic and, as always in this artist, a congenial inscription of the social phenomenon. Several years before the publication of the „Balkan as Metaphor” she exposed the extraethnic, chauvinist sense of religious symbol, intuitively connecting it with the problems of woman’s body as the object of oppression. Her billboards have triggered off very radical protests in Poland, because the artist hit the very centre of the common opinion in this country, according to which woman is the symbol of religious subjection. Therefore the *Ties of Blood* are not only an attempt at illustrating the relation between religion and the distribution of images of sex, but first of all the attempt at showing the mechanism of a religious conflict as a „disguise” for the phenomenon which is known today as „Kulturkampf”. It is not an accident that all discussions on sexual minorities in Poland always vent inevitably in religious problems. Women, just like gays and lesbians, are the objects of cultural manipulation in these disputes.

The Catholic cross and the Islamic crescent take us on the surge of tourist nostalgia and pseudo-international illusions into regions of Europe we hardly understand, knowing them only from televised news. However, Kozyra’s work is mainly a vivisection of our own provincial world, where symbolism, semantic hierarchies and the gendarmerie of the myth have arrested the common sense, taking the freedom of artistic expression under a ghastly tutelage.





Pyramid of Animals

1993

Pyramid of Animals is the artist's degree piece and was originally presented at the Department of Sculpture of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

The work consists of four taxidermic animals: a horse, a dog, a cat and a rooster, and of a video documenting the process of the horse being put down and skinned. A written commentary by the artist forms an integral part of the work, parts of which are quoted below: "A very specific situation developed while I was working on this piece, a situation that caused myself and those somehow included in the process of creation to react in many different ways. The starting point was an animal pyramid, which can be found in the fairy tale of the Brothers Grimm. ... what was intriguing about this sculpture was that it could be made using ready-made materials, i.e. animals. The idea of this monument to animals - this pyramid, carries in itself clarity and simplicity - and at the same time a rich and multi-layered symbolism (belief, culture, religion).



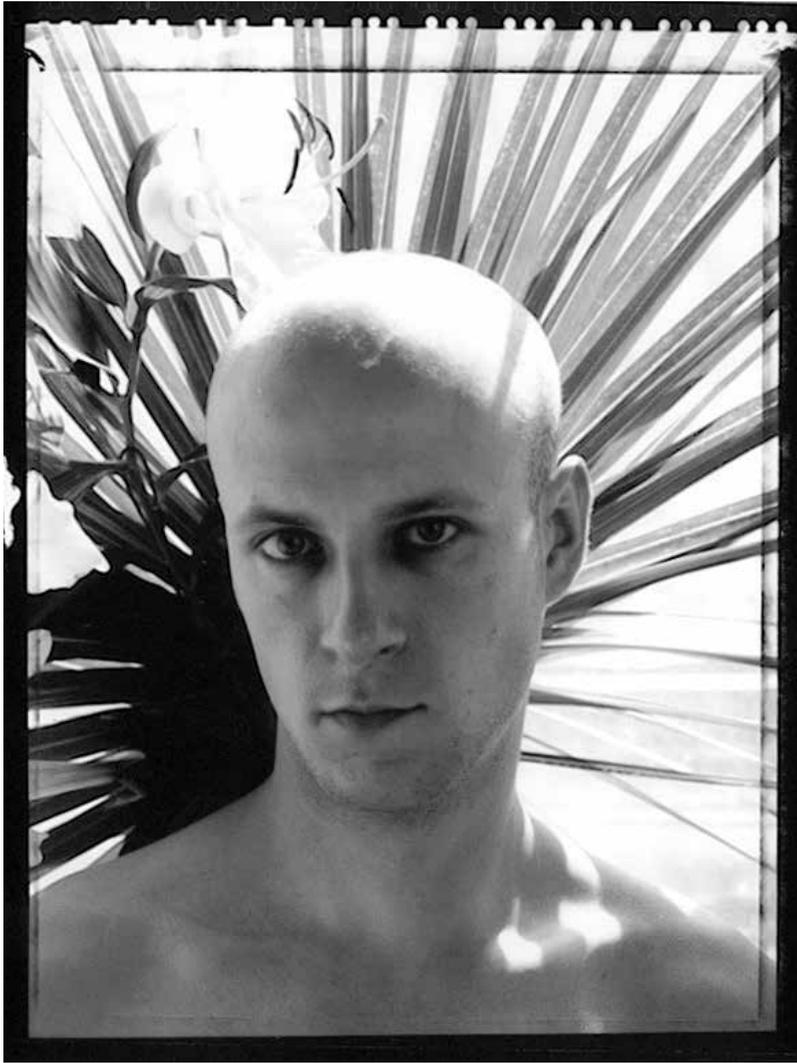


Karaski in Beef

1992, set of 4

silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm





Black and White Polaroids

1992, set of 7, silver gelatin print, 13,5 x 11 cm

