

THE TRACK MARKED OUT

On 4 June 2019, during celebrations marking the anniversary of the first partially-free elections which were taking place in the former shipyard area in Gdańsk and were designated as an civic expression of society, the exhibition *The Track Marked Out* took place, conceived and initiated by Łukasz Guzek, Jaeck Kornacki and Maciej Śmietański. Six creative artists raised banners commenting on actual reality on the slope of an earthen waste-heap close to the entrance to the former Imperial Shipyard. There would have been nothing exceptional in this, were it not for the context of this situation. For this activity took place during celebrations of the Day of Freedom and Solidarity, organised by the City of Gdańsk in collaboration with the European Centre for Solidarity, and was situated close to its main location. Gdańsk was the birthplace and one of the chief venues for politically-engaged art. This has always been created by means of bottom-up initiatives, which generally referred to the traditions of freedom, the legacy of work in the shipyard, and of the workers who were involved in the movement for social transformation in the 1970s and 1980s. This form of art has always been an alternative to institutional artistic activities, decreed and organised from above. That year's 4 June celebrations failed to reflect the social dialogue, avoided formulating important questions, and only served to maintain a binary image of society. Thus the project was conceived in opposition to the official position. Its artists were not interested in propriety. Their work was situated beyond opportunism, and likewise beyond ideology. It involved artists of varying backgrounds making use of different media, and this may be the most interesting aspect of the exhibition. The establishment censors itself, cutting itself off from events. Only those who have nothing to lose are capable of standing above ideology, those who are able to act together in spite of their differences. Self-censorship is the key factor here. Over twenty artists were invited to take part in the action, only six did so. It is important to notice that the exhibition indicates unequivocally that art cannot be decreed into existence from above. The Department of Culture administratively transforms vital organisms of artistic initiatives created on a bottom-up basis into institutionalised museums. And museums are moribund. Museums can only present that which is visible. That which is invisible, but whose context is significant, was exhibited on the earthen waste-heap.

Summary by Krzysztof Cieszkowski