

Name of the Father? Name of the Mother! – Polish-Korean exhibition

Anka Leśniak, Kim HanByul

In May 2013 as part of the Art and Documentation Festival there was an exhibition and presentations of performance art by Polish and Korean artists. For the second time in its five year history, the festival hosts a group of artists and art theoreticians from abroad. Last year there was a symposium and two nights of performance art by artists and critics from the Visegrad countries. This year Łódź was visited by artists associated with the organisation Unesco A.Port from Incheon, South Korea.

During their stay the Koreans aimed to acquaint themselves with the ways that non-profit art venues function in Poland and also with the art and artists from Łódź. In addition they aimed to organise a common exhibition featuring artists associated with the Art and Documentation Association and artists from Korea. The exhibition entitled: *Name of the Father? Name of the Mother!* took place in the Gardener's House in Źródlińska Park in Łódź (one of the galleries of the Academy of Fine Arts) and the Wschodnia Gallery. The curator of the exhibition was **Kim HanByul**. In both places the exhibitions were opened by performance art events – **Antoni Karwowski** performed in the Gardener's House, **Sung NeungKyung** in the Wschodnia Gallery.

Many people may ask what can connect such distant countries, whose inhabitants differ in everything – a different alphabet, different food, even a different appearance. However, if we analyse briefly Polish and Korean history after 1945, it turns out that we have many similar experiences in common. After the war Korea was divided into two parts – the Northern under Soviet rule and the Southern which remained under American influence. Poland in a divided Europe found itself in the Soviet camp. The iron curtain was noticeable in every aspect of living and although it was not as tight as the name suggests, it severely limited our contacts with the West, with which as a nation we feel more connected to than with Russian culture. Until the beginning of the nineties, in South Korea there were various forms of dictatorship. In Poland, we went through various phases of communist regime until the first free elections in 1989. We could say then, that our democracies are of the same age. Catholic churches are a common feature of the city architecture (around 1/10 of the population in South Korea is Catholic). The most important aspects of the meeting between the artists from Korea and Poland are the similar episodes in their art history – such as the time when the first art happenings emerged. In Poland in 1967 there was the *Panoramic Sea Happening* by Tadeusz Kantor, and in South Korea – *Happening with a Vinyl Umbrella and Candles*. In both countries conceptualism was developing and today, artists undertake topics such as multiculturalism, equality and feminism inscribed in the discourse of globalism.

Artists associated with the Unesco A.PoRT organisation are active in various forms of art – from traditional art practices such as wood and stone carving and painting, to contemporary genres – photography, video, installation and performance art. Artists from Łódź, maybe because of the strong avant-garde tradition, including avant-garde film, more willingly express themselves in video, photography and ephemeral art. The final shape of the exhibition was a great unknown until the very last moment, because for the Koreans it was their first trip to Poland and from the group of Polish artists only two had visited Korea before. The exhibition was therefore a presentation of artists from Incheon and Łódź. In this unfamiliar situation however, there appeared some surprising similarities.

The works by **Tomasz Komorowski** and **Lee Soyoung** had similar poetics. Komorowski's work was entitled *On a certain evening in my garden* and looked like an abstract image. On a blue background there was a bright splash – it turned out that it was the artist's cat running through the garden. Although it could have also been a photo of a galaxy. A game between the abstraction ascribed to painting and the registration of reality characteristic for photography is typical for Komorowski's work. On a large scale photo-collage by **Lee Soyoung** entitled *Travels in LAPUTA*, also in blue, we could see a strange shape, resembling a large, dry leaf. The work evoked associations with surrealist paintings. *Laputa – Castle in the Sky* is one of the most outstanding film works by Hayao Miyazaki. The film is about the search for a legendary island in the sky called Laputa,

which hides in its interior technological knowledge, possession of which would allow someone to rule the world. The heiress of the key to this power is a girl who together with her friend has to fight not only against pirates, but also an army and a usurper who would like to take control over the military power of the castle. The Laputa island features in the third part of *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. The interest in the poetics of a dream and vision is also seen in a second work by this artist which was shown in the Wschodnia Gallery – entitled *Potential World*.

Between the works by Lee Soyoung and Tomasz Komorowski *Butterflies* were placed by **Anka Leśniak**. The poetic title and expressive splashes seen on monotypes whose shape resemble butterflies are a game between what we see and what we know. The reception of this work changes when the viewers get to know that *Butterflies* are vaginal stamps. Here we again deal with the relationship between the abstract form and the concrete image. The abstraction and realism (naturalism) do not have to exclude each other. *Butterflies* is a part of a multi-media project *Body Printing* which connects painting, installation, photography, video and performance art.

Moon Jaeseon showed a photo-documentation of his performance *Le Deux*. The artist expresses himself mainly but not exclusively in this form of art. In the Gardener's House he presented a series of black and white photos *Synesthetic Mono Skin*. They resemble microscopic photos of bacteria. The artist is also interested in the relationship between the external and internal dynamics of the body and the problems of synesthesia. The inspiration for his actions are various disciplines – theatre, dance, art-therapy, biotechnology and sound.

An interest in the phenomenon of synesthesia also shows up in the works by **Maciej H. Zdanowicz**. During the exhibition he showed two computer graphics from the series entitled *Monophonic images*. The artist has been interested for four years in the question of the translation of auditory sensations into a visual form. In his work he analyses the acoustics of chosen sound tracks. In order to translate sounds into visual forms the artist uses a system of equivalence that results from conditions of psycho-perception.

The exhibition also featured political works. The series of large-scale drawings by **Pak Chungui** undertakes the topic of the division of Korea. The inspiration for his work are landscapes from the border zone, e.g. from the Baengnyeong island which is merely four miles from North Korea. In the drawings, at a closer look, one can notice people's silhouettes melted into the landscape. The images emanate the atmosphere of silence before a thunderstorm, a frozen state of threat, living in disguise and at the same time – longing and the desire to get to the other side.

Jan Jubaal Wasiński in his work *Mask of Living Death* (computer graphic, paper masks) referred to dead icons which continue to function in people's awareness. The artist used the images of Hitler, Kim Dzong Il, Bin Laden, Lech Kaczyński and Jesus Christ on the masks, which the viewers were invited to put on. By connecting in one work the images of dictators, terrorists, criminals and Jesus, the artist made us aware that what connects these figures is the aura of death, known to people on all continents, be them criminal, martyr or tragic persona.

Oh Sukkuhn in perhaps the most widely recognised series of photographs entitled *Textbook*, uses the puppet figures of Chulsuo and Younghee that appear in Korean textbooks. These didactic images were confronted however with a brutal reality by the artist and his peers when they were kids. The presentation *Textbook* could be seen in the Wschodnia Gallery, and in the Gardener's House there was a work entitled *The Manners of Korea: Porteair de Seoul* and from the same series *Reisernte – Reinigen und Dreschen*. Oh Sukkuhn served as a photographer in the Korean army before graduation.

Norbert Trzeciak referred to the history of Poland. The main element of his work was a film *Forging the scythes*. The title refers to a print from the nineteenth century by Artur Grottger, who made a series of drawings presenting scenes from the January Uprising in 1863 and more precisely – his impressions of that topic. In Trzeciak's movie we see a party with a lot of alcohol, in which the artist himself participates. After a certain amount of drinks, the men move from words to actions and the party ends up with a fight and everything smashed. Trzeciak included in this work his ironic attitude to the vision of Polish history presented by nationalistic movements and textbooks. No earlier than 150 years after the uprisings during partitions there began to be some analysis

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Sung Neung Kyung,
Imię Ojca? Imię Matki!
Galeria Wschodnia,
fot. Norbert Trzeciak

of those events. This analysis took place in other media than the national liberation propaganda which was ignoring questions about the actual sense of those revolutionary impulses in that political situation. Finally, the term of "Poland as Christ of the Nations", (for centuries prosecuted by the invaders) by Adam Mickiewicz – a poet from the time of Romanticism, slowly starts to belong to the past. Those views seem to neglect Polish features of character – the once lawlessness of the nobility, still actual quarrelsomeness, nepotism and favouritism which led to many failures in the history of the country. In this context the sentence: "Where there are two Poles, there are three opinions" is appropriate. Although one can also say that the inclination towards quarrelsomeness and lawlessness often saved the Poles. Despite many different regimes, submerging into total terror was impossible in Poland.

Sin Wonsan in his paintings undertakes the topic of the influence of a developing civilisation on our environment. In his work *The Enough* we see a junction of people's silhouettes with an industrial landscape, which is typical for him. People's figures are made unrealistic by the usage of blue colour. As Kwang-suk Jo writes, the principle of their unification refers to contemporary people who are unified by clothes which are produced in large quantities. The paintings by Sin Won San evoke an association with George Orwell's 1984 or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Apparently everything seems to be all right, but inside we feel anxiety caused by a lifestyle dictated by the corporate world, genetic engineering and a life according to patterns imposed by the media.

Lee Tal showed an object entitled *Fat Pigeon*. The work has a humanoid form – it is a blown-up, supernaturally large pink fatso. The sculpture at defined intervals is filled with air and then grows flabby. It excellently complimented a drawing on wood by Pak Insein entitled *Capitalism* which was hanging next to it. The artist converted the Coca-Cola's sign into the word: capitalism.

Maciej Bohdanowicz showed works from the series *Freaks*. These are small photos which show people in various everyday life scenes. Apparently there is nothing extraordinary about them, but after a closer look we notice, that for example an elegantly dressed woman is a man and the photo of a young couple is a photo of two women.

Sung NeungKyung showed a photo documentation of his action *Venue* from 1985 and a video *S'tay* (2001).

Justyna Aulak referred to a quotation from Marcel Proust "Art proves to us, that there is something other than nothingness". The series of seven photos was inspired by the process of disappearing. They show a sheet of paper with the quotation which is drowning in water. The ink dissolves gradually in water until the paper is completely white, as it was before anything was written on it. Back to the beginning. Each of the photos presents a phase during which the water is dissolving the ink. The work is a registration of a certain process. The work itself in the end was destroyed and the only proof that it existed is its photo documentation.

Artur Chrzanowski showed a series of photos entitled *Letter. Barycz 1943-2013*. The inspiration was a series of photo of houses in Barycz, taken in 1943 by a German photographer. Chrzanowski confronted these original photos with his own photographs of the same houses, taken 70 years later. The second work *Good and stamp* was placed by the artist in the hallway of the Wschodnia Gallery. On the photo one can see the artist in a public space during the Chinese New Year celebrations in February 2011. The artist was dressed in a red jumper with a sign "Poland".

Monika Drożyńska presented a series *City Embroidery*. The inspiration was the graffiti which the artist "rewrote" in the form of an embroidery. Neatly made messages such as "Winter – Get the Fuck Out" or "Have you been hit by a girl?" take new meanings. The artist put the original embroideries on a neglected staircase leading to the Wschodnia Gallery. In the gallery space she showed the documentation of the action in which the embroidered signs were placed back in the city space (transferring the photos of embroideries into billboards).

Ela Wszakowska-Walters used the kitchen in the Wschodnia Gallery for the presentation of her work. The video *Sleeping over a rope* excellently fit the climate of the kitchen in the Wschodnia Gallery and the center of Łódź. Łódź has many neglected houses and homeless people – a relic of the industrial golden age of the city and the workers who were the driving force of the factories both in the nineteenth century and later – under communism. Sleeping over a rope in English means to be extremely tired. In Polish

we say "sleeping standing up". The terms comes from the time of the industrial revolution and describe the real conditions of the workers. The artist pays attention to the fact that language is an archive of people's experience. Using the expressions remembered by it to describe contemporary situations open new possibilities for interpretation.

The kitchen in the Wschodnia Gallery is a legendary place, in which after openings the friends of the gallery meet and organise parties in the old Polish style – with compulsory strong alcohol. To make it even more Polish, one should have something to eat. This time the audience had a chance to try a fantastic meal prepared by the Koreans.

Justyna Jakóbowska prepared an artistic dessert entitled *Art is a Pleasure*, which consisted of candies wrapped in prints which contained a drawing and short message such as: "art is sweet", "art is a pleasure", "art is good", "taste it!" The sentences reflect the artistic stance of the author who thinks that the creation of art is a simple and pleasurable activity with an almost physical need, such as eating. In an event such as an opening, we experience the possibility of sharing her art with others – in this case the exchange of ideas was accompanied by a tasty element.

The title *Name of the Father? Name of the Mother!* is a reference to a change of awareness in society and art in recent years. As Lee Tal – the director of Unesco A.PoRT wrote: Before the 1980's, the flow of art was male-oriented. Its perspective was towards institutional centered exhibition planning and the massive capitalistic art market. However the flow of art after the 1980s was filled with subjects such as multiculturalism, nationalism, tradition, feminist art, regionalism, overcoming racism, matter of sexual minorities and gender. These subjects concentrated the attention towards issues such as how unique groups or individuals are different from each other. The conception of a modern subject, one represented by the 'Name of the Father' in the past, brought out a formalistic esthetic with the self and a rationality as the center. However, in the stream of post-structuralism, such as power and knowledge (Foucault), renewal of eroticism (Bataille), the death of the author, and transition to the text (Roland Barthes), center and surrounding, the subject and the other aren't the matter of a vertical array or priority anymore. This is about accepting 'gap' and 'difference' and also applies to social, historical and institutional environments generally.

The visit by the Korean artists to Poland also shows, that among all possible forms of communication the best platform for our mutual understanding is art, which crosses all other limits.

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The Polish artist were looking for their metaphors and attempting to make sense of their history. Especially in the field of visual arts, we can see interaction with the audience through their works. The artists who participated in this exhibition had individual genres and media but also formed a joint contemporary discourse, especially with regard to avant-garde feminism and body image etc. Polish art covers the subjects of the problem of the present and of history. In addition, Polish art uses imagery to reflect the spirit of the age and its politics. This was a chance to see the artists closely exploring and expressing their own historical changes and political paradox. Due to their history, background, Poland's art resembles our own, unlike other Western Countries. Their own spirituality, which Polish people had to defend is binding them together as a local community through their literary, documentary, film and contemporary art. From this perspective, the encounter of Unesco ApoRT and Wschodnia Gallery will also give an opportunity to widen the network of community.