



**KISSING
DOESN'T
KILL:**

MUZEUM
sztuki
nowoczesnej
w warszawie

M

**ANIA
NOWAK
AND
GUESTS**

**KISSING
DOESN'T
KILL**

Warsaw
2023

**ANIA
NOWAK
AND
GUESTS**

The lips are parted, slack. A warm smell drifts out of the darkness, a sparkling red. A rhythm. A trembling.

The performative exhibition we are calling *Kissing Doesn't Kill: Ania Nowak and Guests* begins with a tongue—that moist, remarkably muscular organ found in the oral cavity. Indispensable for chewing and tasting. A tongue as prone to changes in the sign systems that facilitate communication and the tensions within it: agreement, dissent, uncertainty and understanding, violence, the vulnerability of emotion. A tongue is a performative tool of attack and pleasure rolled into one.

For choreographer Ania Nowak, a language is a physical experience—not just produced by the body, but a body in itself. Whoever should try to name reality will be disappointed—language never was a system that sufficed to describe the experiences of fluid identities. In her spoken performances, Ania Nowak puts forward a new grammar, based on rhythm, alliteration, kinship, and contrast, to express the truths about her own gender, sexual, national, and class identity. The series of words, often grouped in threes or fours, are suggested by affects. Ania Nowak seeks feminist/queer expression to infect the prevailing emotional and political systems. She longs to create alternatives to both hetero- and homonormativity.

This choreographer works with the media of performance, on-camera performance, installation, and text, to keep re-exploring pleasure, often live, and the difficulty inscribed in intimacy and difference. At the heart of her interests are the potential and limitations of bodies and the relationships they create. Nowak explores touch as a cognitive tool, providing an experience of the "other," and through the other, herself as well. The touch of a hand on an ailing body, a tongue brushing against a tongue, a voice in the mouth. Touch as a potential boundary: infection, solace, and arousal permeate the museum, where the overriding principle is "don't touch." In *Men in the Off Hours* Anne Carson writes: "As members of human society, perhaps the most difficult task we face daily is that of touching one another—whether the touch is physical, moral, emotional, or imaginary. Contact is crisis. As the anthropologists say, 'every touch is a modified blow'."

This exhibition is filled with the whispers, shrieks, entanglements, and kisses of those who have always been socially untouchable. It speaks of the complex emotional and social processes of queer grieving, understood as sorrow over the loss of rights, health, and loved ones. Grief experienced by people who, owing to their (sexual) identity, background, class, and state of health, mental or otherwise, do not fit the normative image of the world. As Judith Butler puts it, certain lives (and thus, deaths as well)

are more grievable and widely acknowledged to be worth mourning than others.

Kissing... is a subjective map of queer yearning for what has been lost and a fantasy about a feminist/queer future. Nowak examines some lethal dangers, collective rescue operations, and gestures of bliss. To speak of these, she calls in other artists to join the exhibition, rewriting their work, borrowing and arranging them with her own works and non-art objects. The museum on the Vistula has invited works, people, and spirits that have long formed our dissenting imagination: works of queer mentors, collaborators, allies, and activists.

Nowak's voice gives way to others' at many points in the exhibition, creating a polyphonic and multilayered statement. She is interested in how far differences can support one another in a dialogue; how the tensions play themselves out; how visual and philosophical allies can become foundations for a diverse community; how the works of some artists can disguise themselves as the work of others and linger undisturbed in camouflage. And if such safe transformations within the sphere of art can point the way to more perilous transformations in politics and society?

We propose an experiment in non-binary thinking, in which divisions into subject and performance, copy and original, and individualism and collectivism collapse, providing new

opportunities for contact. The choreography of the exhibition is an attempt to build ephemeral, embodied relations between the performative actions, the objects in the space, and the audience. Through this multilayeredness, Nowak seeks to activate (not just represent) the complex and non-linear processes of coping with loss. She wants to grapple with what remains inexpressible in the language as we know it.

Strategies of queering the world, which involve reading and telling it through non-normative experiences, appear in Nowak's performances. Queerness has mainly manifested itself in ephemeral formats, ones that did not want to be, or could not be material, stationary, or monumental. Alternate lives and expressions thereof have remained peripheral to museums' interests for centuries.

Queerness is eternal. Its time, non-linear and incomplete, is measured by million-year-old boulders, breaths, and experiences of trauma. The title of the exhibition and possible survival strategies are borrowed from *Kissing Doesn't Kill: Greed and Indifference Do* (1989) by the Gran Fury arts collective, which fought the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the USA in the 1980s. The colorful banners with images of kissing single-sex couples were the first public presentations to address the subject. They directly stated that it was not possible to be infected through kissing. With grassroots social actions in the

Western world, the epidemic created models of collective organization and care for queer minorities. Perhaps, when there is no systemic support, alternate ways of producing and sharing knowledge and delivering aid are still the only way to live a full life, however imperfect they may be.

Bodies entangled in hugs and yearning. Sex, which stokes violent hostility. A change of time. Reanimation. Transition. Memory.

Generally speaking, kissing doesn't kill, but it does happen that an exchange of saliva, or more broadly speaking, body fluids, emotions, and thoughts, becomes a political subject, and then a kiss may cause deadly peril. Where to escape it, in this time of the crisis of authorities, knowledge, and institutions? In collectivity, revolution, or slow transformation? In stuffy clubs, pyramids, animals? In museums, with their promise of immortality? In truth, revenge, in orgasms? In rhythm and trembling? In hands, eyes, and lips open wide?

Michał Grzegorzek

GRAVES

①

Ania Nowak

Kissing Doesn't Kill

2023

Performance

Kissing Doesn't Kill is the title of both the exhibition as a whole and this performance by Ania Nowak. These macro- and microscales become spaces in which interior and exterior, raveling and unraveling, growth and post-growth intersect. What does it mean to want all of life? Fits, flights, satisfaction, a full stomach, a multiple orgasm, a good rest, a good eternal rest?

How much of a burden can you shoulder of your own volition, and how much because you are unable to deny it? Do you sometimes feel the urge to be crushed by a greater, overwhelming force? To stop resisting, just for a moment? To give yourself up to the pleasure of just existing, instead of producing, accumulating, and multiplying? "Playing dead" can be a survival strategy for those living under constant compulsion or in peril: the pleasure of respite, non-being, oblivion.

Ania Nowak seeks the erogenous zones of the exhibition—its folds, lips, bruises—to explore the tensions between power, visibility, and communication. She works in a spectrum between loss and acquisition, expectation and appeasement, grieving and delight, in a chorus of the dead and the still alive.

②

Kim Lee and Maldoror

Kim Lee Strikes Back

2023

Textile, metal, plastic, leather, latex

The artist used objects from Kim Lee's wardrobe to build the installation. Courtesy of Remek Szelağ.

Kim Lee and Maldoror never met. That is happening only now that the queen of the drag scene has passed away, which makes it a meeting with a ghost. Maldoror has designed a new costume for Kim Lee, something between a disguise and an assemblage from Nowy Sącz. As always with these artists, it is made up of scraps and ruins, material remains, broken rhinestone jewelry, Polishness and emigration.

How to speak of nocturnal animals in underground clubs in a museum context without losing what is most beautiful in them? It is impossible to make an exhibit about a sweaty crowd waiting to see Kim Lee; about the light on her face when she starts singing. We have a look at her wardrobe to ask: What tools and means of commemoration do we have as Poland's queer community? After all, ghosts need neither costumes, nor exhibitions, nor assemblages.

How to keep from forgetting? With monuments and squares, heroic tales? Whose mouths should tell these stories? Whose hands should place them in other hands, until they return to where they've never been?

③

Jonny Negrón
Rave New World

2020

(reproduction)
Digital print on paper

Courtesy of
Jonny Negrón and Château Shatto

Torn from their dancing, some figures carry an unconscious person out of a club. The protagonist in their arms has his eyes shut, an arm flayed out in an unintentionally dramatic pose, and an unzipped fly (could the accident have occurred in the bathroom? Or maybe in the darkroom?). The contrast between the verticals and the horizontals of the picture, between the unconscious man and those still on their feet, is softened by the sudden pirouette of a dancer oblivious to the situation.

Negrón's piece is an apotheosis of club culture with its vibrant energy, narcotic high, temporary dancefloor communities (alliances of fun and compassion), desire, and fantasizing of the radical acceptance of difference. The artist alludes to its genesis in the 1970s and 80s, the creation of a safe space where bodies (not white, cis, or hetero) could be together and be themselves. Negrón uses a dash of humor to translate a well-known biblical motif into the clubbing vernacular, from the Catholic iconography of a figure lowered into his grave. In both stories, death is a beginning, a great weariness of the body and its resurrection. Can the underworld of the club offer immortality?

④

Itziar Okariz
*Mear en espacios
públicos o privados*
[*To Pee in Public
and Private Spaces*]

2000-4

Video
9'40"

MACBA collection.
MACBA Foundation

A video in which the artist pees for several minutes in various public places. This is not a municipal fountain, it is a waterfall, a golden shower, it is fire. A stream of revenge for the social fictions that demand some of us stand, and others squat.

Itziar Okariz's work mocks this urinary performance, not only disdaining its social choreography ("sit!"), but also transgressing where it ought to occur. Peeing in a public place is an attempt to write human biology into the tissue of the city, which forbids the naked body, with all its cracks, fluids, and dirt.

5

Ania Nowak

Copy

2023

Plaster

Design and execution: Weronika Czajka, Hanna Tur

Collaboration: Anna Siekierska

EMBRACES

A plaster sculpture depicting a young man, part of Ania Nowak's *Kissing Doesn't Kill* performance every Thursday and Friday at the exhibition.

In our little quarry
there are kisses,
embraces, and
hugs. A stone can
embrace the
neck, just as a fist
can grip a stone.
A hand can
disappear in the
body.

⑥

Placoderm sandstone with
fragments of fish bones of the
acanthodii class

Location: Świnia Góra, near Kielce, Świętokrzyskie Mountains
Period: Devonian (Emsian), around 400 million years old

Collections of the PIG-PIB Geological Museum

⑦

Ania Nowak
and Pakui Hardware
Golden Gate
(excerpt)

2022

Reperformance by Natalia Oniśk and Alicja Czychel
Glass, performance

Courtesy of the artists

8

Stones of disgrace

16th century

Relief carving, sandstone, metal

Museum of the Lubuska Region, Zielona Góra

9

Paving stone from the Independence Day March, 2012

Paving stone from the Cursed Soldiers Day ceremonies, March 1, 2016

Collections of the
Lambda Warsaw Association Archive

The oldest one is the placoderm sandstone, which has been changing in the earth for 400 million years. It is among the remotest of memories, it cannot be fully evoked, it is the oldest heritage, the oldest queer relative. Excavated in the vicinity of Łysa Mountain, whose name and rituals changed as a result of Christian colonization, the sandstone includes bones of placodermi, which were alive in the Devonian Period. Fragments of bones, shells, and weapons—teeth. A stone like this is not afraid to transform and it does so before our very eyes, though quite slowly.

These two glass objects produced by the Lithuanian Pakui Hardware duo, by request of Ania Nowak (*Golden Gate*, 2022), are a sleeve, bladder, connecting tissue, and an empty jug, from which you cannot drink. The point of departure for these sculptures was the secret between man and angel immortalized in the Caravaggio painting. Every day during the course of the exhibition, the performers, Natalia Oniśk and Alicja Czyczcel, will appear momentarily in the museum to move the glass sculptures and be moved by them. Penetrated, gently rotated, put to their lips, and embraced, the objects become a mobile *vanitas*, a fragile choreography with a skull.

As in the works of Felix Gonzales Torres, a Cuban-American Romantic minimalist who died of AIDS in 1991, time plays a major role here (and in other works of stone). The performance is not announced, but you may stumble upon it by accident. Synchronization, desynchronization, expectation.

Objects to be performed, to use, to give meaning. To administer pain. These sixteenth-century stones of disgrace are instruments of torture borrowed from the Museum of Past Torture. The chain was tied around the neck of women who, for whatever reason, were deemed worthy of suffering, pain, derision, mockery, fear, insults, degradation. The identical stone parts were hung from the navel by a chain with a suggestive illustration.

Next to these we find contemporary instruments of torture—paving stones thrown through a window of the Warsaw headquarters of the Lambda Association by “unknown assailants.” These sidewalk bombs are made of cement and silicon, their bottom sides probably have a bit of dirt and some dead biological waste: roots, mushrooms, microorganisms. They are small, inconspicuous, you might trip on one, curse, and carry on. They are more for the feet than the hands. These stones were used for a different purpose, however. They were meant to wound, or maybe kill.

Stored in the organization’s archive, they are reminders of fear and good fortune, as no one was physically hurt or killed. (How to bear in mind that reverse order—first the good fortune, and only then the fear?)

①①

Tessa Boffin
*Angelic Rebels Lesbians
and Safer Sex*

1989

Photographs, digital print on paper

Courtesy of Boffin Estate and
UCA Archives and Special Collection

A work that is a lesbian rendition of rebellion and activism. These angels have come down to earth to speak of safe sex. They are costumed rebels and mimes, they want to teach you love and self-defense. Lesbians tempting your daughters and mothers, putting flyers, feathers, stones, and dried flowers in their pockets.

Boffin's photographs have many angels. The newspaper headlines about the HIV/AIDS epidemic describe those who were infected helping the ill (we must remember the epidemic as inseparable from the media violence). A fragment of a London fountain with Anteros, the god of disinterested, requited love, who has nothing in common with his impersonator, Eros. Apparently the god spreads his wings at the top of the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain for the philanthropist, reformer, and angel who replaced child labor with school learning in nineteenth-century England. Is this a knowing allusion to the fact that, even during an epidemic, we need education? There are other angels in a different embrace in part of a mysterious Wilton House diptych invoked in one photograph. This fragment of a larger whole entirely omits the kings, children, and saints, as if all that mattered were these girlish faces and their promise. Boffin's photographs hold more riddles and coded information, taking them to the realm of the allegorical. Will we be saved by an otherworldly embrace? Who can carry the harness, and who will culturally appropriate it? What is the plastic crocodile doing in all this? And how can the dildo save the day?

①①

Wojciech Weiss
Kiss on the Grass

1899

Oil on canvas

National Museum in Poznań

Wojciech Weiss's picture captures the ambiguous choreography of desire, expressed not only in the performance of the picture's protagonists, but also in the nature: in the high temperature of the sky's color, the blurring of the line of the horizon, and the softening of what is generally sharp. For Weiss, intimacy is mysterious—it is a kiss far from the prying eyes of people and the city.

But are these really lovers? Or maybe it is a vampire drinking a woman's blood? This would not be an exceptional depiction of femicide in the works of Young Poland artists. Blood spreads across the sky like a scream. No, men need not flee the city to kill a woman. They do that at work, in the cafes, in their homes, on the streets. They do it in theaters and museums, when no one is looking and in front of a full audience.

Or maybe these are people who can only kiss far from the city, because the sight would upset conservative onlookers? Maybe these are two female lovers? Maybe one of the figures is a man who enjoys putting on a dress before he is kissed? Or maybe gender has no meaning for them, but decades were needed for this thought to become a revolution. Maybe it is just a crazy, Expressionist metaphor for souls uniting? The flow of energy through the meeting of lips? Blood, saliva, and sweat. Oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus.

① ②

Tee A. Corinne

Titles unknown

1975-1982

Digital print on paper

Courtesy of the Tee A. Corinne Papers,
Coll 263, Special Collections and University Archives,
University of Oregon Libraries

These photo negatives of lovers in amorous embrace allow us to preserve the protagonists' anonymity. To love or to survive, sometimes you have to reverse the whole world's colors—what was white must be black, and so on. The women in the photographs create sensual geometrical compositions, patches of dark color, in which two bodies melt in intimacy. An erotic pietà, in which the more capable body holds the less capable one in an embrace, or vice-versa. Less domination than cooperation. The medical equipment penetrates the contours of the body like a sex toy, seeking to be a part of it.

Cleansed of their identities, placed behind a pane of glass in a museum, they are now safe in their embrace.

① ③

Justyna Stasiowska

Grotto

2023

Two-channel audio installation

120', looped

Courtesy of the artist

Individual sounds are stretched out or appear suddenly like a cold bead against the skin. This is a curtain that leads to an exhibition, unobtrusive contemplation, a joke to unwind the visitor and accustom the eyes to the dark. Stasiowska calls it an "audio lubricant," because it eases one's passage, protects, and compensates.

The artist created *Grotto* from warped relaxation melodies: the artificial burble of a stream, a waterfall, and rain. Add to these the sounds of drops of a tired body: coughing, swallowing saliva, or sneezing. The course of the water between the rooms is designed in order to trick the memory. The composition does not colonize the space, it is more of a sort of echo. The repetition of the body's sounds in the acoustic space of the museum.

①④

DViJKA
re-written

2023

Chalk

Courtesy of DViJKA

HEADS

re-written is the fictional correspondence of Ukrainian twins who have been forced to separate. The piece was inspired by the tradition of lovers exchanging letters during wartime, and the importance of letters as declarations of love between queer people. This correspondence, initially written by DViJKA in Great Britain, has been reshaped into an installation here in Warsaw—a text handwritten on a wall of the museum, translated from English into Ukrainian and Polish. Through this gesture, the work becomes moving epistolography: the intimate letter-writing process is made material not only through its content, but also through the body writing it.

Heads observing one another, looking for a reflection to see themselves fully. They tense up and parade around. They check each other out, though they haven't got any eyes. They stare so intently that they almost create a separate exhibit in the exhibition—an exhibit of heads.

① ⑤

Luiz Roque
Modern

2014

Video 4'

Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM
São Paulo, Brussels, New York

When the clock strikes the hour, a figure totally covered in latex appears in the quiet halls of the Tate Modern in London. She is accompanied by music, dance, and desire. This is the night life of the museum.

Surrounded by Henry Moore statues, the figure does a performance that is like casting a spell. Is it a love spell? Or maybe an attempt to bring the statues to life? In the end, these two things are quite similar. The performer looks at herself in the sculpture, speaks to it, flirts. Is this a duel, a struggle for dominance between the living and the inanimate? This campy, mysterious (and fun!) encounter asks what bodies have access to the museum. Why are the normative ones more visible than the non-binary or trans ones, the impoverished or ailing ones? What are the rules for showing works in a museum, and who makes them?

①⑥

Nancy Grossman *Smith*

1971

Leather, wood

Collection of the
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam

A head almost entirely covered in black leather. Pulled tight over a piece of wood, it only exposes a white nose. Everything that chances upon it (or comes out of it) must get past the ridge of bared teeth, laughing at the nearby masks of shame. A gate between what goes in and out of the opening. A shark in an aquarium.

In one of her interviews, Grossman says that her heads, of which she has made over a hundred, are self-portraits, and that she leaves their noses open to breathe. Their eyes, ears, and mouth are generally covered. For over fifty years, the artist has been examining violence—in historical events, such as the Vietnam War, in a stifling childhood, restrictive norms, and claustrophobic patriarchal institutions. In countries that hamper movement and freedom, in which we feel like the public space, homes, and our own skin is one big jail. At the same time, the head might evoke the visual codes of BDSM fetishes, in which dominance and submission are pleasure and a performance, a game based on mutual consent.

①⑦

Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha *Mouth to Mouth*

1975

Video
8'

Collection of the University of California in Berkeley, Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; donated by the Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha Memorial Foundation. © Regents of the University of California. Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York

The mouth opens, to very softly dictate: wind, white noise, and the sound of water. It emerges from the snow of a television set, it calls out and vanishes. The tongue falls apart in emigration, translation, and memory. The lips form the shapes of Korean vowels, abandoning grammar. The voice is smothered and falls silent. It lets itself be replaced, dubbed.

What the mouth says is not all meant for the ears; as in the resuscitation method, it is for other mouths. The artist's mother tongue is expressed not in speech, but in its lack, in longing and sensitivity. In joint breathing and sharing air, until the breath runs out.

① ⑧

Masks of shame

16th century

Contemporary copy
Metal

Museum of the Lubuska Region, Zielona Góra

Torture is punishment for committing a crime or a sin, or is a difficult way of gaining the truth. We may suppose it is more connected with the law and sanctity than with crime, yet it is a favorite method of government regimes, war criminals, religious fanatics, psychopaths, pseudo-doctors and scientists, American and Russian soldiers, drunken fathers, and schoolyard terrorists, preying on their peers.

Masks of shame were a very popular tool for punishment and torture in the Middle Ages. Today, with no head inside, they are no longer so terrible. They are not even real—these are replicas of their old, worn-out ancestors. They are empty cages from which the warm body has escaped. Like a door through which a terrified exhalation has passed.

① ⑨

Ania Nowak *To the Aching Parts!* (Manifesto)

2020

(performance 2019)

Video
14'49"

To the Aching Parts! (Manifesto) is a speech made of language used by and against present-day queer communities. Devoid of grammar, the text (dominated by three-word phrases) conforms to the discipline and pleasure of rhythm.

The performance is inspired by the resilience necessary for the emancipation of minority groups. The language Nowak uses works like a spanking or a shot (but also a wink or a kiss), pointing to the danger of normativity, including homonormativity. It also shows the urgent need for intersectionality (the overlap of social categories strengthening discrimination: socially constructed genders, ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, age, religion, or disability) to create queer alliances today. Nowak plays with the language of resentment and trauma, as well as empathy and healing, she proposes destabilizing identity, practices, and well-known acronyms, such as LGB [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual] or FtM [Female to Male] in the name of a queer future we are trying to imagine.

This video was made in collaboration with Anu Czerwiński (camera, editing) and Maldoror (costumes).

20A

Sin Wai Kin

Coming off effortlessly

2017

Makeup on face wipe

Private collection

20B

Sin Wai Kin

Her story repeating itself

2017

Makeup on face wipe

Private collection

This make-up pressed perfectly on a wet wipe is a trace of presence and a small archive of a great change. A sign that work is done and the night can be finished. Sin Wai Kin collect their make-up after their nightclub appearances and turn it into works of art—the paint on drag queens' faces might be traced back to Lascaux, ancient masks, the Egyptian pyramids. The English and French courts. The magic rituals of the night. The circus, the silent cinema and modernist struggle against tradition. It is a picture and a theater. It is a rebellion against the gender binary.

Traces of blood on toilet paper. A mouth ready for a kiss. A crown.

These pieces are dedicated to all the workers of the night, whose queer community activism, though remarkable, often goes unacknowledged. Amid the make-up, costumes, and wigs, we forget that drag can be a form of activism; a social act, political fun, a crossing of paths, where femininity and masculinity are mere performances. Drag does not belong to men alone. Drag is older than time itself, and greater than gender.

We thank you, cross-dressers, boys in their mothers' dresses, butch sisters with eyeliner mustaches. All of you who perform multiple identities. Who impersonate and mock. Who resurrect and nurture memory. Who press their lips to songs and bottles. Spies in floor-length trench coats, sirens and seductresses. Sex bombs and love train conductors. Mothers, guides for perplexed gays. Monsters. Hurricanes Aldona, Charlotta, Kim Lee, Filipka. Pink flamingos, high priestesses of high decibels and artists. Those who cannot stand it and those who will press onward. We applaud you and bow to you, our queens.

②①

Lambda Warsaw Association Rainbow flag

2006

Textile

Flag-makers:

Michał Pawłęga, Krzysztof Kliszczyński
and volunteers from the Lambda Warsaw Association

Collections of the Lambda Warsaw Association archive

CRUISING

This rainbow flag was created to oppose the ban on organizing the Equality Parade in Warsaw in 2005. Volunteers of the Lambda Warsaw Association stitched it over the course of six hours in a small office on Hoża Street, where its headquarters was located. For the next fifteen years, the flag appeared on Warsaw's streets as a symbol of the struggle for equality of all citizens. In 2018, it also took part in the Equality Marches in Szczecin and Lublin. During the latter, it was damaged by two firecrackers fired by anti-demonstrators. The green strip has two holes burned into it.

It last appeared on the streets of Warsaw on May 24, 2019. Activists tried to hang it from the Łazienki Bridge as a gesture to commemorate Milo Mazurkiewicz, a twenty-three-year-old volunteer of the Poznań Stonewall Group, a transgender person, who committed suicide on May 6, 2019, jumping into the Vistula River. The gathering was attacked by men who tried to break up the demonstration. Several people were wounded, and the violet strip was torn from the flag. For four years after this event, the flag was held by the Warsaw police as evidence of property destruction, but it has returned to Lambda and is presented at the exhibition.

If this exhibition
were a park,
a Gdańsk beach
in Stogi, or
a city bathroom,
then this part
would be a place
for hooking up,
enticing, and gazing.
And these trysts
would be
imperceptible to
the chance
passer-by.

② ②

A.K. Burns and L.A. Steiner
Community Action Center

2010

Video
69'

Courtesy of the artists and the Video Data Bank,
School of the Art Institute of Chicago

If this video by Burns and Steiner were a cosmogonic tale, it would go like this: In the beginning there was chaos; from it emerged women, non-binary and trans people, and then desire, laughter, fun, and art.

Burns and Steiner produce a mythology unlike the religious, male, patriarchal one, built from scraps of the old world: gay porn films, feminist art practices of the 1970s and 80s, and social gender performance. What remains of the old world returns in the stories of artists as a joke created by queers for queer pleasure, or as an endless gender masquerade. They reinterpret famous figures and introduce new ones. A world in which sex without men is possible, joyous and free. The effect of these actions is new laws and principles of being in the world. If there is pain, it is only of the sort that leads to pleasure. If there is violence, it is only as a tool for understanding and mutual consent.

② ③ ①

Liz Rosenfeld
My Bed #1: Brekka, Iceland
from the *W/HOLE* series

2021

Ink on tracing paper

Courtesy of the artist

② ③ ②

Liz Rosenfeld
Ficken 3000
from the *W/HOLE* series

2021

Graphite and ink on tracing paper

Courtesy of the artist and Sadie Weiss

② ③ ①

Liz Rosenfeld
Glory Duet
from the *W/HOLE* series

2021

Graphite and ink on tracing paper

Courtesy of the artist

② ③ ①

Liz Rosenfeld
The Tide from the *W/HOLE* series

2021

Graphite and ink on tracing paper

Courtesy of the artist

First the void, then a sudden sense of fullness. Ebb and flow. Inhale and exhale. The lips, and the tongue behind them. Liz Rosenfeld's work hidden behind a pane of glass is something like a journal, drawn in ink on crumbly tracing paper. This material does not hold onto memories. The museum, frame, and glass are no help here. Rosenfeld seek queer pleasure in the orifices, wounds, and cracks. All the places the normative body fears to look. The experience of these encounters is created by landscapes:

A (now) empty bed in a white room.

Liz Rosenfeld lying down in a club where, until recently, only people born as men had access.

Holes in walls, in tracing paper, in the memory.

Ebb and flow.

②④

© JEB (Joan E. Biren)
*Priscilla and Regina,
Brooklyn, New York*

1979

Photograph (reproduction)

Courtesy of the artist

This photograph records very slow movement, from the edges to the center, from the darkness to the light. Joan E. Biren has traced and documented this movement since the 1970s—the first to portray lesbians on such a scale, so consistent and diverse. Her work, which goes far beyond artistic parameters, has profound political resonance—certain lives, and by the same token, experiences, simple joys, tears, and hands raised in anger, become visible. A performance of unveiling, of pointing out, of making visible.

It is a sunny day, and Priscilla and Regina are making full use of it. The sleeping faces complement one another. Light flickers across them, then shadows (like fear that appears for just a moment). Lips are close to and far from each other. All thoughts lead to the body, which was working a minute ago, but now is at rest. Collective voyeurism.



Nadia Markiewicz
*one-armed bandit
(excerpt)*

2019

3D print

Courtesy of the artist

In this work, part of which we are presenting here, the artist deals with a joke kids used to make about her disability at school. Markiewicz becomes a one-armed bandit, conforming to the wishes of her old peers. What once made her sad now has emancipatory power.

With her new ableist pseudonym, she sets out to conquer the casinos, full of one-armed machines for bringing luck and losing fortunes. Like a museum or a tomb, the casino is cut off from the everyday world; it is a place that disrupts time, where the hour of the day, the senses, space, and scale are constantly being mixed up.

Three cherries is a win on a slot machine—a reverse narrative about otherness (in Markiewicz's case: about disability) as losing the biological lottery, or even a punishment. For the artist, a disability is a triple cherry, a sweet victory.

② ⑤

Ania Nowak

Lip Service

2023

Video
20'39''

Together with hard-of-hearing performer Athena Lange, Ania Nowak draws from the visual expression of silent films to explore ways of communicating that are not based on the sense of hearing and verbal language. Nowak and Lange use lip movements, facial expressions, gestures of lesbian desire, and German sign language. They create a sort of manifesto, in which they denounce some transgressions of those who hear against the d/Deaf. They upend the hierarchy and expose a hearing audience ignorant of sign language to the difficulty of lip-reading.

[And what if the d/Deaf ruled the world?]

"I want a d/Deaf dyke for president!" signs Lange, paraphrasing the first line of artist and activist Zoe Leonard's *I Want a Dyke for President* of 1992.

The practice of the title—a service performed by the lips—need not limit itself to forming tidy verbal messages. It can also involve spitting, kissing, or licking. In this erotic game, Nowak (the hearing person) turns into a submissive student and surrenders control to her partner. Lange takes the role of the dominatrix—the caretaker and teacher—introducing Nowak to her experience of d/Deaf culture and sign language. In this piece, the pleasure arising from sharing experience and eroticism becomes a tool for both performers' transformation. *Lip Service* does not want to meet the expectations of the hearing majority toward the d/Deaf.

This video was created in collaboration with Athena Lange (performance, creation), Janne Ebel (camera, editing), Maldoror (costumes), Justyna Stasiowska (sound), Antina Christ (make-up, wigs), Julia Plawgo and Eyk Kauly (dramaturgical consultation), and Mouna Assali (subtitle design).

②⑥

Annie Sprinkle and
Beth Stephens
Instruction

2023

Delegated performance

Courtesy of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens

②⑦

Rüzgâr Buşki
*How I realised that the agony
and the bliss both belong
to universe as I was transitioning
interspecies to save myself
from the misery of the human
kind*

2019

Printing block, wood carving

Courtesy of the artist

On Ania Nowak's request, Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens—a sex-positive duo in art and love, who have been working together for twenty years—wrote out an instruction for the artist's performance in the museum. What is an instruction? A hint, a fantasy, an order, a secret? An imaginary, disfigured, transformed activity?

Twice a week, Nowak will embody the instruction as one part of her performance, including it in her action. The work of Sprinkle and Stephens shimmers in this space, only to vanish for several days, until the next performance.

Before we turn into an enormous lizard, a parrot, a tree, and a red-winged moth let's find out everything we can about the world, including what was once off-limits—this is, at least, what the title of Rüzgâr's work promises. And although the artist themselves are only speaking of agony and delight, we are assuming for the purposes of the exhibition that agony and delight, Thanatos and Eros, are everything.

For instance, this bench. It was a tree, then a heavy log to which the artist fled in their addiction. A matrix for multiplying images. Physical yearning that wracks the body. A shield. A temptation, a promise, revolving doors. As with *Preciado*, a record of a voyage. A raft, and later a boat sailing through the internal waters and outward from there.

②⑧

Ania Nowak

Untitled

2017

Reperformance by Ig May Engel (Polish)
and Edyta Kozub (Polish Sign Language)

Ig May Engel appear in the space of the exhibition twice a week; this young performer enact an untitled piece by Ania Nowak.

A constantly shifting landscape of facts, speculation, and affect is created by a language with no grammar. Lists of words mainly pointing to names, objects, places, and numbers gradually reveal the sadomasochistic history of Poland, and more broadly, Eastern Europe, governed by the Institution, Faith, and Desire.

Words meet, formulating pairs, threesomes, ultimately foursomes. They vanish and leave us baffled, though oddly aroused.

The past, the present, and the future are infinitely repeated and seem to be lodged in the horizontal, not the vertical movement of words, giving us hope for a resolution, then abruptly taking it away. The new, reformulated language comes from the need to grapple with issues of individual and collective trauma/healing and evolution/revolution today, when the need for change is more urgent than ever before.

Untitled is the first in a series by Nowak, using a strategy of reformulating language, issuing a challenge to internal contradictions and predictable binaries, inextricably bound to our perception of history and (r)evolution.

②⑨

Alicja Żebrowska

The Death of a Butterfly Breeder

2008

Video
9'19"

Courtesy of the artist

Although in Alicja Żebrowska's video the encounter with death is real and direct, one might call the work generally optimistic. Here a butterfly breeder, a great figure of the patriarchy, is dead. We are free.

30

Petrit Halilaj

*Do you realise there is
a rainbow even if it's night!?*
(orange red)

2017

Carpet, polyester, steel, brass construction

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

Financed in part by funds from the Ministry of Culture and National
Heritage, from the Fund for the Promotion of Culture
National Program for the collection of contemporary art

The choreographic practice of **Ania Nowak** (no preferred pronoun, b. 1983) approaches vulnerability and desire as ways towards reimagining what bodies and language can and cannot do. Nowak develops formats such as live and video performance, installation and text. In their practice Ania engage with bodies in their nonlinear feeling and thinking capacity to tackle the difficulties of companionship and care in times of perpetual crisis. Her work attempts to reimagine the notions of disorder, pleasure, disease, intimacy, pain, sexuality, class and accessibility as sites of binary free living. Nowak collaborates with alternative educational programs in Eastern Europe, such as Kem School in Warsaw and the School of Kindness in Sofia. Their works have been presented at HAU Hebbel am Ufer, Berlinische Galerie, Akademie der Künste, KW "Pogo Bar" and Sophiensæle, Berlin; Nowy Teatr, Warsaw; Kiasma, Helsinki; La Casa Encendida, Madrid; Q21 MuseumsQuartier, Vienna; the Baltic Triennial 14, CAC, Vilnius a.o. Solo shows include "Matters of Touch", Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona (2017); "Can You Die of a Broken Heart?", Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art (during the directorship of Małgorzata Ludwisiak), Warsaw (2018); "III Delights," Galerie Wedding, Berlin (2023).

This sculpture is a costume. You can put it on and for a second you become someone else. It is a hideout, camouflage, or shelter when you don't want to be found and killed. The artist speaks of a private experience—the war he survived in Kosovo as a child and his later life as a queer refugee. In Halilaj's artistic universe the child's imagination, of the kind that has no boundaries (state, identity, and scale) is a tool to structure the world, which can be dangerous or turned to rubble. Enormous insects, flowers, or animals inhabit the museums and say to the viewer: we're alive, we love, and we're together. For although this work references past events, the moth speaks primarily about the future: about happiness and the strength to hang on. About hope and triumph. About the light that peeks out of the darkness we see when we cease to be afraid. Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night?

and guests

JEB, Joan E. Biren (she/her, b. 1944)

is a photographer, filmmaker, activist, and artist. She has co-created lesbian collectives, documenting lesbian events and societies for decades. Her work focuses on providing visibility to lesbians and showing their presence as diversely as possible: at work, in public, and in private life.

Tessa Boffin (she/her, 1960–93)

was a photographer, performer, and writer. Her works problematized lesbian absence in British political life during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. She was also interested in expanding people's images of lesbian identities and communities, often with Surrealist-inspired studio photography.

L. A. Steiner (she/her, b. 1967)

and **A. K. Burns** (no preferred pronoun, b. 1975)

are a duo who focus on the political aspects of physicality, sexuality, and gender. They explore relations between materiality and language, and revise the categories of friendship and queer sexuality. Their works use film, photography, collage, installations, and sculpture.

Rüzgâr Buşki (they/their; he/his; she/her, b. 1986)

is interested in how the body and identity are constructed by social imaginations. They submit their Turkish identity to constant analysis, documenting local coups and revolutions. They look for societies and groups that emerge on the margins of normative structures. They work in a variety of media: from lithographs to photography, film, and video.

Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha (she/her, 1951–82)

was a filmmaker, writer, poet, and visual artist. In the course of her brief career, cut short by her brutal murder at the age of thirty-one, she explored themes related to South Korean-American identity, migration, and resettlement. She was also interested in language as a medium and its boundaries: those experienced during efforts to express traumatic experiences or describe her own biography.

Tee A. Corinne (she/her, 1943–2006)

was a photographer, writer, and lesbian and feminist activist. Her work focused on presenting lesbian and (cis) female sexuality, fighting with the male gaze's objectification of the female body. She made a series of naked female portraits, lesbian novels, and essays on sexuality.

Weronika Czajka (she/her, b. 2000)

is a sculptor and a painter. The fairy-tale or tongue-in-cheek conventions of her works analyze the relationship between the individual and their surrounding world.

Hanna Tur (she/her, b. 2000)

is a sculptor. Her work focuses on ecosystems and the relationships between nature and civilization, joining them with individuals' ways of sensing the environment.

Alicja Czyczel (she/her, b. 1991)

is an educator, choreographer, and performer. Her practice concentrates on ecofeminist (the perception of and struggle against the systemic oppression of women and nature) ways of being and feeling, community-building through movement and the senses, blurring the boundary between the body and its surroundings. At this exhibition, she performs Ania Nowak's *Golden Gate* (excerpt).

Natalia Oniśk (she/her, b. 1982)

is a dancer, performer, and educator. She teaches contact improvisation, a kind of contemporary dance in which physical contact is a point of departure for communicating with a partner through movement. In her practice, she focuses on embodying internal experiences in dance. She is interested in expanding the consciousness of the body, her own and others', as an object related to time, space, and other objects. At this exhibition she is performing Ania Nowak's *Golden Gate* (excerpt).

DVIJKA

is a twin arts/research duo who collect, archive, perform, and describe the experiences of Ukraine's queer community.

Ig May Engel (they/them, b. 2005)

are an actor. They have appeared in music videos and films, joining performative pursuits and an interest in the culture and art of Japan. At this exhibition they are performing an untitled work by Ania Nowak.

Nancy Grossman (she/her, b. 1940)

is a sculptor, painter, and ready-made artist. Her works are made of found objects (such as pipes or tires), clothing, scraps of material, and sometimes press clippings, which, when brought together, address the contemporary human condition. Her humanoid figures encourage us to think beyond gender categories and their transgressions.

Petrit Halilaj (he/him, b. 1987)

makes work exploring collective and individual ways of commemoration, cultural and queer identity, the influence of history and conflicts on the present and future of nations. These topics are reflected in drawings, paintings, and spatial installations, sometimes made of branches, roots, or handmade objects.

Kim Lee (he/him or she/her, 2002–20)

is a Polish drag queen created by Andy Nguyen (he/his, 1962–2020), who appeared on Warsaw stages in the early aughts, and then across Poland and abroad. He has played dozens of divas from Poland and around the world, including Hanna Banaszak, Violetta Villas, Marilyn Monroe, Cher, Kora, Beata Kozidrak, Urszula, and Marlene Dietrich. His shows often linked the Warsaw context with his Vietnamese roots. Every Kim Lee performance was a visual feast, with dresses, accessories, costumes, and props handmade by Nguyen.

Maldoror (he/him, b. 1986)

is a fashion designer and co-founder of the shop/gallery/concept Wsiura. He makes "low couture." He is inspired by club culture. His projects join epochs and decades of extremely varied aesthetics, renowned labels and the names of hyped designers with objects from the underground fashion scene. He regularly collaborates with Ania Nowak, and has made costumes for works including *Lip Service* and *To the Aching Parts! (Manifesto)*.

Nadia Markiewicz (she/her, b. 1992)

is a performer, and a video and installation artist. Her works are tied to the body and how it is perceived, and the norms by which it must abide in the differences between able and disabled, using tools drawn from the world of entertainment.

Jonny Negron (he/him, b. 1985)

starts with a vision of the human being as a microcosm of the universe. This means his pictures confront people with the outside world and their expectations. He records daily rituals and social situations, including performances of femininity and masculinity, paying special attention to their affective, and sometimes even absurd dimensions.

Itziar Okariz (she/her, b. 1965)

analyzes the norms in language and the sign systems that determine people as subjects and define their identities. Her performances, photographs, and installations raise the issue of communication, and the changes it undergoes depending on its context.

Pakui Hardware (Ugnius Gelguda, he/him, b. 1977

and Neringa Cerniauskaite, she/her, b. 1984)

is an art duo that creates objects and installations joining artificial and organic materials. Their practice draws inspiration from the latest breakthroughs in science and technology and reflects on the themes of society, nature, and art.

Luiz Roque (he/him, b. 1979)

makes experimental films at the crossroads between science-fiction and sensual narratives, exploring the power relations and tensions between modern technology and the individual. He uses many film formats, and for every project makes a choreography to comment on issues in bioethics, queer theory, and experience, and to propose alternate scripts for past and future events.

Liz Rosenfeld (they/them, b. 1979)

are an artist who make performances, and also write and direct experimental films. They use archives and cultural artifacts, dealing with subjects like individual and collective memory. They look for fissures in the ways we recall the past and produce the future. They are interested in the history and present of cruising, finding cracks in national and gender identities, as well as their overlap.

Sin Wai Kin (they/them, b. 1991)

focus on the practice of gazing as a communal and socialized activity. They explore the conventions of looking and its limits, which they cross by creating fantastical narratives on subjects like desire or identity. They use performance, particularly drag, to break down taboos, misogyny, and stereotypes.

Annie Sprinkle (she/her, b. 1954) and

Beth Stephens (she/her, b. 1960)

is an artist and activist duo working in the ecosexuality movement, which treats nature on earth like a lover. Their performances, films, books, scripts, and photographs explore the spectrum of human sexuality. From the outset, Annie Sprinkle's activities have also been tied to sex work practice and activism.

Justyna Stasiowska (she/her, b. 1987)

works in sound art and the dramaturgy of sound. She is interested in the culture of sound and listening, as well as the affective dimension of music. She translates works and runs lectures and seminars in sound studies, and writes about Digital Drugs (sounds that trigger varied sensory experiences, such as binatural beats) and sonocytology (a field of nanotechnology focusing on the processing of information about a cell and the vibrations it produces through sound). She creates sound collages. She is a regular collaborator with Ania Nowak. She created the sound for such videos as *Lip Service*.

Lambda Warsaw Association (founded 1997)

is one of the oldest LGBTQIA+ NGOs in Poland. It provides support to non-heteronormative people in the form of legal, psychological, or expert assistance. It organizes anti-discrimination training sessions and workshops, and publishes reports and analyses of the social situation of LGBTQIA+ people domestically.

Wojciech Weiss (he/him, 1875–1950)

was a painter, printmaker, and photographer. He was active in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. He was a Polish modernist, an important figure in Krakow's bohemian life, and a member of the Viennese Art Nouveau. His work joined a range of inspirations: he combined a fascination for the legacy of European art with an interest in nature and everyday life, ancient and Christian culture, vitality and youth with mortification and pessimism.

Alicja Żebrowska (she/her, b. 1956)

is a multimedia artist, performer, and filmmaker. She is interested in the transgression of the body. She uses photography and performance to probe transcendence of gender norms, ability or disability, and even belonging to society. Her works also explore how religious and secular rituals operate in society.

KISSING DOESN'T KILL: ANIA NOWAK AND GUESTS

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw
July 28–September 10, 2023

Ania Nowak

WITH

Joan E. Biren
Tessa Boffin
A.K. Burns
and L.A. Steiner
Rüzgâr Buşki
Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha
Tee A. Corinne
Weronika Czajka
and Hanna Tur
Alicja Czyczel
and Natalia Oniśk
DViJKA
Ig May Engel
Nancy Grossman
Petrit Halilaj
Kim Lee and Maldoror
Nadia Markiewicz
Jonny Negron
Itziar Okariz
Pakui Hardware
Luiz Roque
Liz Rosenfeld
Sin Wai Kin
Annie Sprinkle
and Beth Stephens
Justyna Stasiowska
Lambda Warsaw Association
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