

Natalia LL. Only love will survive

26th April - 31st May, 2024

Curator: Prof. Dr. Marta Smolińska

Natalia LL is one of the first artists in Poland to create feminist works. Since the 1960s, she has been fighting in her works for the emancipation of women, erotic freedom, and the liberation of the female body from the role of a passive, male gaze object. Her artistic creation was a courageous attempt to denounce traditional values. Because even though the equality of women was promoted in socialist countries, the reality was different. Nakedness was considered in socialist countries as both an authority and system critical gesture and as resistance against the prevailing social norms and conservative Catholicism. Against this background, one of her works is currently on display at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin as part of the exhibition "Extreme Tension. Art between Politics and Society- Collection of the Nationalgalerie 1945 – 2000" in the chapter "Liberation of the Body," among other feminist artists from the West (including Martha Rosler, Rebecca Horn, Valie EXPORT, Hannah Wilke), Japan (Yoko Ono), or the so-called former Eastern Bloc (including Cornelia Schleime, Ewa Partum, Marina Abramović).

The exhibition at NADAN, featuring works from the artist's three series ("Consumer Art," "The Word," and "Animalistic Art"), takes its title "Only love will survive" from Natalia LL's 2013 text "Magical Intimacy." In this text, the artist emphasizes that the most important things for her are everyday life, intimacy, and love.

I would describe Natalia LL's art, primarily working in the media of photography and performance, as embodied conceptualism. In her series "The Word," the artist embodies and eroticizes language, which is considered a phallogocentric symbol in culture. Natalia LL's sensual, lipstick-covered lips speak words - sometimes they say "TAK" (YES), sometimes we can only guess what the artist intends to convey. Perhaps it's LOVE? The artist moves within the circle of male-dominated conceptualism, which she passionately eroticizes by becoming a speaking, embodied subject.

As part of questioning her own identity, Natalia LL also analyzes her own first name, which she repeatedly rephrases and plays with the individual letters. Among other things, the artist arranges the individual entries of her first name in the form of a pyramid, symbolizing the merging of spirituality and physicality. Regarding the series "Natalia!," the artist wrote the following: "The inner order of a word composed of individual letters has something mysterious. I noticed this when I looked at my name, which consists of three letters A and four individual letters N, T, L, I."¹ By playing with her first name, Natalia LL raises questions about the status of her own subjectivity, which can be inscribed in various ways. Because behind the order of the letters stands the living body, which is typically concealed by the logos of language. Throughout her entire oeuvre, the artist emphasizes the tension between physicality and rationality expressed in language, pointing to the mutual incompatibility of these two spheres.

In the photographs and in the video series "Consumer Art," we see models shamelessly consuming bananas, sausages, pretzels, jelly, or pudding: a manifestation of embodied language that no longer needs words. The models lick and suckle on their own fingers with pleasure. Without inhibition, they celebrate their own female pleasure, looking directly and provocatively into our eyes. The phallic shape of bananas and sausages - the inaccessible fetishes of communist Poland - connects the erotic undertones of these works with the de(con)struction of the perception of art as the contemplation of

¹ Natalia LL, *Natalia! (1)*, in: Natalia LL, *Texty*, Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2004, S. 20-25.

aimless beauty. "Consumer Art" has a purpose: to make perception embodied, sensual, lustful, enjoyable, and erotic. The versions of the works in this series with pudding and jelly - associated with ejaculatory fluids and semen - are even stronger in their expression, as they confront the viewers with both fulfillment and constant insatiability. It's an excessive abundance, where taste, smell, and touch have been excluded as animalistic from the category of aesthetic senses. Young and beautiful women are aware of their needs, greedy, insatiable, uninhibited in licking pudding. The fluids that emerge from their mouths must tickle their lips and the delicate skin on their chins, which they eagerly lap up. Natalia LL thereby violates the communist grayness and prudery, breaks through the inflated patriarchy, and operates the camera or video camera in a way that does not objectify women but solely takes over the symbolic power of the gaze.

The potential of the series to break taboos was once again evident through the removal of these works from the exhibition of the National Museum in Warsaw in April 2019 when they were deemed offensive. Natalia LL thus creates a subversive female art in which women become subjects who can no longer be disciplined.

The series "Animalistic Art," on the other hand, addresses the biological and animalistic aspects of human nature in a different way - the nude artist lying on a sofa covers herself with fur as if with a second skin. These works are ambivalent: they celebrate both the closeness of humans and animals (as also evident in the photographic diptych "Naked Natalia and the Cat" from 2000) and fur as an erotic fetish.

When I consider these works from today's post-anthropocentric perspective, they gain even more significance. In the video of this series "Animalistic Art," Natalia LL feeds her beloved, voracious cats with meat, making us aware that we are connected to them through the category of corporeality. This corporeality makes us akin to animals and dismantles the hierarchies that humans have believed in for centuries to assert their own superiority and uniqueness. It is a philosophically dangerous category because it allows us to shake the foundations of our beliefs about who we actually are. As the American philosopher John D. Caputo emphasizes, we all have suffering bodies, and flesh is not the principle of the species, it is not a natural kind, nothing specific to a species, and certainly not the private property of humans: "Flesh is flesh in human and non-human beings, wherever there is zoe."² It is the flesh that makes the differences between species disappear.

Natalia LL thus celebrates not only interpersonal erotic relationships in her work but also relationships between species. In this way, she becomes a being for whom love in the broadest sense is paramount: **Only love will survive.**

² John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics. Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction*, Bloomington–Indianapolis 1993, S. 210.

Natalia LL (Poland, 1937-2022)

Natalia LL was born in Żywiec, Poland, in 1937. In 1963, she graduated from the State Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław (now the Academy of Fine Arts). After a year, she joined the Association of Polish Photographers. In the years 1970-1981, together with Andrzej Lachowicz, Zbigniew Dłubak and Antoni Dzieduszycki, she founded the PERMAFO gallery, which not only organised exhibitions but also produced publications. This activity contributed significantly to the development of neo-avant-garde tendencies in Poland. Together with Andrzej Willem and Andrzej Lachowicz, she organised the International Triennial of Drawing, for which she acted as commissioner and deputy chairman. In 1975, she joined the international feminist art movement and took part in numerous symposia and exhibitions. In 1977, she received a scholarship from the Kościuszko Foundation in New York. From 2004 to 2013, she worked as a lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań (now the University of Arts in Poznań). Her works can be categorised as conceptualism, photographic art and body art. She worked in the fields of painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video, performance and drawing. Natalia died on 12 August 2022 in Wrocław.

SELECTED SOLO SHOWS *(last 20 years)

- 2021 Natalia LL. The Mysterious World, Francisco Carolinum
- 2018 Natalia LL. Intimate Photography, Galerie Steinek, Vienna
- 2018 Natalia LL. Sum ergo sum. Retrospektyva. Mykolas Zilinskas Art Gallery in Kaunas, Lithuania
- 2017 Natalia LL. Sum ergo sum. Retrospective Exhibition, Centre of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu in Toruń, Poland
- 2017 Natalia LL. Vanitas. The Fiducia Photo Gallery, Ostrava, Czech Republic
- 2016 Natalia LL. Słowo. Signum Foundation Gallery, Łódź, Poland
- 2013 Natalia LL „The grammar of the body”, Galeria upp, Wenecja
Natalia LL “Piramida i Tajemnica”, Galeria Sztuki Najnowszej w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim
- 2012 “Natalia LL – OPUS MAGNUM”, Ernst Muzeum, Budapeszt
- 2011 “Opera Omnia” Muzeum Narodowe, Wrocław
“Donatio – Istnienie i Nadzieja” ze zbioru OPERA OMNIA, Oddział Sztuki Nowoczesnej Muzeum Narodowego, Gdańsk
- 2010 „Prywatne Magie” ze zbioru OPERA OMNIA, Galeria FF, Forum Fotografii, Łódź
- 2009 “Opera Omnia 3. Energetyczna intymność” Galeria EGO, Poznań
“Opera Omnia II – Energy of Personality” brot. undspiele galerie, Berlin
“ZŁOTY GLAN” Kino Galerii Charlie, Łódź
- 2008 “Natalia LL” Galeria Art NEW media, Warszawa
- 2007 “Natalia LL” Galeria Foto Medium Art, Kraków
“Miętkość Dotyku 2007” Galeria BWA, Zielona Góra
“Sztuka Zwierzęca i mało znany epizod ze Sztuki konsumpcyjnej” Galeria 86, Łódź
- 2006 “Ciało wizyjne” – X Krakowska Dekada Fotografii, Galeria PAUZA, Kraków
- 2005 “Całość części” Galeria AWANGARDA” BWA Wrocław
“Consumer Art.” brot. undspilele galerie, Berlin
- 2004 “PODSUMOWANIA” – Galeria Bielska BWA, październik, Bielsko-Biała.

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS *(last 20 years)

- 2024 Zerreißprobe. Kunst zwischen Politik und Gesellschaft, Sammlung der Nationalgalerie 1945 – 2000, Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin, Germany
- 2022 ON EVERYONE’S LIPS, from Peter Bruegel to Cindy Sherman, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
- 2020 Yesterday is today | Natalia LL + Ryszard Waśko, Galerie aKonzept (Berlin) & Raphael Levy, Berlin, Germany

2016 Natalia LL, Józef Robakowski, Ewa Juszkiewicz, gallery lokal_30 at Frieze New York City
2010 Gender Check, Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe, mumok Museum Moderner Kunst – Stiftung
Ludwig Vienna & Zachęta National Gallery of Art Warsaw
2009 Rebelle: Art and Feminism 1969–2009, Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Arnhem, Netherlands
2008 Darkside - Photographic Desire and Sexuality Photographed, Fotomuseum, Winterthur

SELECTED COLLECTION

Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin, Germany
National Museum in Warsaw
National Museum in Poznan
Muzeum Lubelskie in Lublin
Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw
Frauen Museum in Bonn
Museum of Modern Art in Lublana
Museum of Modern Art in New York City
Ludwig Museum in Cologne
National Museum of Contemporary Art in Paris
International Center of Photography in New York
Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko
Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague
Slovenian National Museum in Bratislava
Joslyn Art Museum, California, USA
Collection of BWA in Sandomierz
ARTOTEKA Fotografii, Biblioteka Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, Zielona Góra
Regional Contemporary Art Fund of Lorraine in Metz
Museum in Bielsko-Biała
Tate Modern, London
Centre Pompidou, Paris
Collection of Zachęta Sztuki Współczesnej in Szczecin.
Collection of Lubuska Zachęta Sztuki Współczesnej in Zielona Góra.
Kolekcja Łódzkiego Towarzystwa Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych (Depozyt Muzeum Sztuki) in Łódź
Collection of Fundacja Signum