

Karol Radziszewski

«POCZET»

AUGUST 23 – NOVEMBER 1, 2020

Curated by Fanny Hauser and Viktor Neumann

The two interrelated exhibitions *Poczeta* at the Kunst(Zeug)Haus and *Eat the Museum* in the Alte Fabrik Rapperswil take the exceptional and complex history of the adjacent Polenmuseum (Polish Museum, founded in 1870) and its soon expected closure as a starting point to examine the logics and politics of exhibiting and collecting, and to call into question the conception of the museum as a neutral, apolitical, and non-violent space.

Poczeta is the first solo exhibition of Warsaw-based artist Karol Radziszewski in Switzerland. Challenging predominant historical narratives, Radziszewski's multidisciplinary and archive-based practice reassembles and connects a multitude of political, social, or religio-cultural references and inquires their relation to the history of sexuality and construction of gender. Reminiscent of the portrait collection of the Polish Museum in Rapperswil (that was brought "back" to Warsaw in 1927, where it was destroyed during World War II), the exhibition presents, for the first time outside of Poland, the eponymously titled monumental portrait series *Poczeta*.

The Polish word "poczeta" once referred to the smallest unit of the army of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795), and later came to describe a group of people of common descent or performing a specific role. Most importantly, the word relates to a series of portraits of Polish kings and queens (since 966 to 1795), arranged chronologically and conceived as pictorial representation of Polish history in its uninterrupted entirety, until the time of Partitions (1772-1918) that finally erased the country from the map of Europe for 123 years. Such series were most famously created by Marcello Bacciarelli (1731-1818), an Italian court painter of Stanislaw August Poniatowski, the last king of Poland, and Jan Matejko (1838-1893), the painter of Polish history who was active during the Partitions period.

The artist's employment of portraiture, traditionally considered a bourgeois genre, constitutes a crucial part of his practice as a means to paraphrase and inquire the aesthetics of a variety of historic artistic movements and practices. Adding another perspective to the common visual codes and historical narratives, this contextual shift becomes a subversive strategy to challenge dominant modes of representation and commemorates those who have been subjected to the patrilinear logic of history.

Radziszewski's *Poczeta* is a bold retake on the idea of the formation of national identity as demonstrated by pictures that testify to (or rather construct) the continuity of royal power, exercised by heterosexual, cisgendered males and perpetuated through royal marriages. Forming a gallery of twenty-two ancestral portraits of non-heteronormative Polish figures of the past millennium from fields including politics, science, literature and art, *Poczeta* deliberately reaffirms the protagonists' expression of queerness that has been suppressed or erased from their historiography to a large extent: the kings of Poland Boleslaw Śmiały (c. 1042–c. 1081), Władysław III Warneńczyk (1424–1444), Henryk Walezy (1551–1589), writers Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–1876), Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910), Maria Dulębianka (1861–1919), Maria Rodziewiczówna (1864–1944), Piotr Włast (b. Maria Komornicka, 1876–1949), and Alice B. Toklas (1877–1967), composer Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937), Zofia

Sadowska (1887-1960), the first Polish woman to ever defend her doctorate, choreographer and dancer Waclaw Niżyński (1989–1950), writers Maria Dąbrowska (1889–1965), and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (1894–1980), painter Józef Czapski (1896–1993), poet Jan Lechoń (1899–1956), writer Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969), movie director Michał Waszyński (1904–1965), writers Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909–1983), and Jerzy Waldorff (1910–1999), poet Miron Białoszewski (1922–1983), and literary scholar Maria Janion (b. 1926).

Extending his engagement with these personalities, Radziszewski was invited to examine the holdings of the Polish Museum and search for connections and traces of some of these figures in the archives and collections preserved in the premises of the museum. The outcome of this research is presented as part of the exhibition including amongst others, a watercolor drawing by Józef Czapski, letters by Maria Dabrowska, and an additional portrait of military commander Kazimierz Pułaski (1745–1779) who was posthumously identified as intersex person in 2019.

Radziszewski further offers an insight into the *Queer Archives Institute*, a long-term project and para-institution founded by the artist in 2015 as an attempt to build up an alternative archive of queer ancestry with a focus on Central and Eastern Europe. In this context, Radziszewski presents a video interview with physicist and transgender activist Ewa Hołuszko (b. 1950). Once celebrated as one of the crucial members of the Solidarity movement, Hołuszko's involvement has been erased from its history as a direct reaction to her transition in 2000. In the interview, Hołuszko discusses strategies of survival under authoritarian regimes and means of organizing counter-movements through giving an account of her life. A large-scale portrait of Hołuszko, reminiscent of guerilla poster actions, serves as a powerful declaration of a queer historiography and re-inscribes her as one of the Solidarity movements' fiercest activists.

Hołuszko's image is presented in close proximity to the portrait of Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), the *de facto* leader and authoritarian father figure of the beginnings of the Second Polish Republic. To this day, his portraits and effigies can be found in various Polish institutions and public sites, most often depicted in his military attire as part of a lineage of patriarchal ruling. Referring to the lesser-known fact that Piłsudski decided to decriminalize (or, to be more precise, did not continue to criminalize) male homosexual acts in the 1932 Penal Code, Radziszewski portrays the statesman bare-chested, thus deconstructing the common modes of representation of this complex figure and reinterpreting him as an ambiguous *daddy*-figure.

Since its conception as a dialogue with the history of the Polish Museum, that was built as a rhetorical and material invocation of the ideal of then-non-existing Poland (and its future reconstruction as nation-state), and confronting this concept of nationhood with the potentials of transnational conviviality, Radziszewski's exhibition has gained even more pressing significance as an urgent call against nationalist violence, homophobia, transphobia and the oppression of women's rights. An immediate reaction to the recent and unprecedented violent escalations in Poland, Radziszewski has decided to include a portrait of 24-year old non-binary activist Margot. Arrested on August 7 and locked up since in solitary confinement for a two-months pre-trial detention period since, the case of Margot is indicative for the government's brutal and authoritarian infringements of basic human rights of LGBT+ communities. Shortly after the re-election of Poland's right-wing conservative president, who used anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in his successful election campaign, referring to an "LGBT ideology" as public insult to national pride and a threat to traditional family values, the country approaches the total dismantling of rights for minorities and the establishment of state-managed violence under the rule of a president who, in 2016, visited the Polish Museum in attempt to coopt its history as a symbol for the preservation of Polishness.

Acknowledging the politics and ambivalences of representation beyond the known and worn narratives, Radziszewski opens up a space that calls for new, transnational and transhistorical forms of alliances and kinships, against the heteronormative stability of construction of history — and the present.

Karol Radziszewski (b. 1980) lives and works in Warsaw. Since 2005 he is publisher and editor-in-chief of DIK Fagazine, and has founded the Queer Archives Institute in 2015. His work has been presented in institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw; Whitechapel Gallery, London; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; New Museum, New York; VideoBrasil, Sao Paulo; Cobra Museum, Amsterdam; Wroclaw Contemporary Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow and Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz. He has participated in several international biennales including PERFORMA 13, New York; 7th Göteborg Biennial; 4th Prague Biennial and 15th WRO Media Art Biennale.

Poczet is the second of four exhibitions curated by Fanny Hauser and Viktor Neumann as part of the 2019/20 Curatorial Fellowship of the Gebert Foundation for Culture.

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Guided Tours:

Wed, October 7, with Fanny Hauser and Viktor Neumann

Kulturnacht Rapperswil

Sat, September 19, with Fanny Hauser and Viktor Neumann

LIST OF WORKS

Poczet, 2017

22 paintings, each 100 x 80 cm, acrylic on canvas
Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

Józef Piłsudski deciding not to penalize homosexual acts in the 1932 Penal Code, 2018

100 x 80 cm, acrylic on canvas
Courtesy Agata Araszkiwicz and Robert Soltyk

Ewa „Harda” Hołuszko, 2019

300 x 240 cm, acrylic on canvas
Courtesy BWA Warszawa and JR Collection, Gdańsk

Margot, 2020

55 x 45 cm, acrylic on canvas
Courtesy the artist

Excerpt from the interview with Ewa Hołuszko

Video, 30 min.
Collection of the Queer Archives Institute

Vitrine:

Photo portrait of Szymanowski
reproduction, framed, 34,5 x 26,5 cm

Photo portrait of Maria Konopnicka
reproduction, framed

Two letters by Maria Dąbrowska to Jerzy Stempowski

Letter from 24.7.40 (Folder 141)
Letter from 15.1.1962 (Folder 1962)

Józef Czapski, *Les sapeurs-pomiers*, 1957

Watercolor drawing, 17,5 x 28 cm

Solidarność badge, 1980s

Portrait of Kazimierz Pułaski, 1890(?);

Oil print on tin sheet, 27,5 x 23,5 cm

Henri III frère de Charles IX..., France, before 1589

Copper engraving, 30,3 x 22 cm (paper), MPR 3003

Nicolas III [?] de Larmessin, Henry 3e Roy de France et de la Pologne..., Paris, c.1680

copper engraving, 25,6 x 19,1 cm (paper)

Bolesław II Śmiały, commemorative medal from

the series „Collection of Portraits of Kings“, Warsaw, 1985-2003
brass, silver plated and patinated, Ø 7 cm

All objects: Courtesy Polish Museum Rapperswil