

# Anna Ostoya

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Anna Ostoya "Composition (People)", 2009, collage and oil on canvas, 40 x 51cm, from the series "From A to ∞", photo - [www.waterside-contemporary.com](http://www.waterside-contemporary.com)

**Visual arts artist. Born in 1978 in Kraków. Lives and works in Kraków and New York.**

Anna Ostoya makes use of various media in her work: paintings, collages, objects, sculptures, texts and sounds, which make up topical series of works, intermedial installations and complex exhibitions. Her works are usually elaborate, intertextual projects, in which she creates alternative approaches to knowledge.

She studied at the Parsons School in Paris (1997-2001) and at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main (2002-2005) and in the years 2008-2009 she realized a study program within the framework of the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York. As a professional artist, she often focuses on selected issues (violence, history of the avant-garde, contemporary information overload), which she thoroughly analyzes by means of queries. She builds complicated relations between themes taken from literature, philosophy, history, art, political science, sociology, science but also mass culture, media, the internet and everyday life. Her palette of references extends from Kazimir Malevich ("**The Object and the Non-Objective World**", 2008) or Donald Judd ("**Complete Writings**", 2006-2007) to contemporary thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe or **Zygmunt Bauman**. The contexts of the places, in which the installations are created- with their history, tradition and current social-political reality, are integral parts of the works.

Critic Michał Jachula has written that an important part of her work is the construction of "a system of notions and references linking the past with the future and provoking the viewer to make an intellectual effort and reflect on the essence of the considered problem". He goes on to say that

The viewer however is never deprived of the pleasure coming from the aesthetic experiences provided by the piece itself. The meaning of the artist's particular works is to a large extent a function of the place they're located - the venue is treated as a local or cultural context. The message also depends on the place of exposition and institutional and non-institutional conditions of the presentation.

Ostoya often uses the collage technique. Her installations are built as collage juxtapositions or palimpsest accumulations of meanings (for instance the cycle "**Because My Name is Lion**", 2004-2005). Using heterogeneous media as a deliberate artistic strategy in the time of postmodern capitalism, she focuses at the same time on the materiality of objects and doesn't evaluate media as new or old. In interviews she has likened her work to "the process of bringing order", which she compares to "struggling with a material or situation". She reaches for the boundaries of intellectual and emotional limitation in an experimental fashion. She has explained her use of diverse media and subject matter,

In contemporary art one can merge text, image, scent, two-dimensionality, three-dimensionality, virtuality, facts and fantasies, information and ambitions from many fields such as science, films or literature, in a whole which expresses itself beyond words. I perceive this potential of art as a chance - for instance to take up in the future experiments which will enable us to find new ways of cognition.

One of the examples illustrating Ostoya's method of action is her installation "**Saturday Afternoon, 1st of December 2007, Leeds**" (2007-2008), presented at the prestigious exhibition Manifesta 7 in Italy in 2008. It consisted of such pieces as minimalist furniture, a space form, an abstract painting (entitled "**A Sense of Perspective and Other Attempts**"). A recording of the philosopher Zygmunt Baumann reading a selected chapter of Italo Calvino's novel "**Invisible Cities**" entitled "Leonia", was the main point of reference. Jachula called it a "multi-dimensional work merging ponderings about memory, history and architecture. It included deep thought about the consumer society. Its hybrid (ancient-contemporary) form and presentation in a factory interior gave it a metaphysical character".

The relations of consumption and ecology and particularly the postmodern consumer society as understood by Baumann were additional contexts of the installation. In Baumann's opinion Leonia - a fictional city refurbished every day by its citizens, which results in the production of heaps of garbage - is a metaphor of the postmodern consumer society.

A year later in Bologna Ostoya opened the exhibition "More Real than What We See". It consisted amongst others of collages created using press clippings collected by the artist during her stay in that city and of an oil painting "**Image One**" - based on a photograph of a station in Bologna, taken after it a bomb exploded there in 1980. The installation was made of abstract, simple space forms, which had a colour scheme that ranged from dark grey to white - each colour corresponded to a different voice that uttered basic expressions taken from Italian language-learning CDs. In the magazine Flash Art Luca Panaro wrote that "the project evolves around a medial bombardment, which we experience every day, opposing the attempt to escape from or understand reality, in which we live in".

At the biennale in Athens in 2009 Ostoya presented the project "**Safe and Harmonious Security Environment**". Its title includes a quote from the propaganda slogan of the Chinese communist party created before the Olympics in Beijing. This citation itself suggested that slogans about security are essentially means of control and manipulation of the public opinion. The artist placed her work at a beach - three objects resembling formalistic sculptures (constructed by pulling white canvases over stretcher bars) offered the possibility to use them as screens protecting from the wind and sun. In the text of the auto-commentary the artist focused on the symbolic ambiguousness of the beach, which is "to the same extent a space of relaxation as it is a place of tension. Taking into consideration human interdependencies and interests of various groups, one can think about people for whom the beach is a workplace, or about those who change it into an investment, or those for whom the beach is a gate to a new world as it is for illegal immigrants or refugees. Here, as in any other place, there is an antagonistic fight between hegemonic projects - the accumulation of capital, issues concerning environmental protection and workers' rights". The risk involved with exhibiting the work outside the gallery was an integral part of the project.

The collage "**Marginalia**" (2009), which was part of the exhibition at Bard College in New York, was also based on the specificity of the place of presentation. It consisted of announcements Ostoya collected from the campus. They were layered in such a way that one could see only the white and coloured margins. The work was exhibited alongside normally functioning announcement boards, where - similarly to the world of information in general - the information placed on top prevails above the rest.

In 2010 two important, individual exhibitions of Anna Ostoya's works were held in Poland - in the Kronika Gallery in Bytom and in the **Foksal Gallery** in Warsaw. The project in Bytom entitled "**From A to ∞**" consisted of oil paintings, collages, sculptures and texts and addressed the problem of war and violence. It was accompanied by the thought that the "impossibility of finding a solution to the problem of war and violence defines the boundaries of the human intellect". The artist was inspired by the correspondence between Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, which was published in 1933 under the title "Why War?". As a pacifist Einstein asked how the threat could be stopped. Freud didn't provide him with a satisfactory answer. That is where Ostoya recognised the moment of the "end of knowledge", which forces us to abandon the search for the answer to the question asked by the famous physicist and obligates us to seek solutions that are alternative to conventional wisdom. The variety of incorporated media and means of expression suggested the existence of a multitude of points of view on this problem, together with the main one - the impossibility of representing "the atrocities of war" - which implicates the presence of the point of "the end of painting" and the problem of eradicating violence at the same time.

The tension at the exhibition was a result of the contact between the images and texts and also of the two-dimensionality (of the press photographs) and three-dimensionality (of the objects the artist created using the press photographs). On the other hand the pressure was caused by the

fight for meaning between the abstract and the figuration. The rivaling works ranged from the grey monochrome "**Nothing Happened Behind This Wall!**", which opened the cycle to the repainted in a cubistic style "**The Origin of the World**" - Gustave Courbet's famous painting, which depicts female genitalia and is considered to be the ultimate achievement of chauvinism and bourgeoisie.

Referring to Ostoya's project's title, Klara Kemp-Welsch wrote that "it suggests stepping out of the space of the conventional alphabet and objective violence. This objective violence is a result of the language, which is the alphabet's consequence. The title declares a brutal dispersion of the conventional alphabet. This breaking up assumes systematic work on available languages and mixing such idioms as representation, realism, photography, collage, sculpture, drawing and text. The language of the abstract deconstruction returns to haunt images that attack us from the media. The endlessness of possibilities seen in Malevich's white canvas appeals to Ostoya, however she is conscious of the violence of the prewar language of the avant-garde".

Ostoya's second individual exhibition in Poland "**Auto-Script. Notes, Replicas and Masterpieces**" was held in the Foksal Gallery in 2010. It was later presented in Amsterdam and Berlin and can be considered the artist's creed because it showed art as a dynamic field of discourse, strongly connected to social-political issues. Ostoya once again used paintings, collages, objects and texts, this time to cast a doubt on the narrations of the history of art. She referred mainly to the avant-garde - the original period of the 20th century and to the later avant-gardes and also to those present in contemporary times. She was interested in issues such as centers and peripheries; she addressed the problem of the absence/presence of women-artists in the world of art and the development of art on both sides of the iron curtain.

In the exhibition she juxtaposed visually similar elements, for instance works by Andy Warhol with **Jarosław Kozłowski's** pieces, or a photograph of a dirty-faced **Wilhelm Sasnal** in a Marc Jacobs advertisement with a picture of Natalia Goncharova, or pictures of popular actresses - Brigitte Bardot and **Kalina Jędrusik**. She called these similarities "pseudo-morphisms". In an article in *Przekrój* Stach Szablowski wrote about the exhibition that it was a case of "art after art". He wrote, "This exhibition is sort of a multithreaded essay, only that instead of speaking the artist shows - she finds a form, an aesthetic and a visual shape for her discourse. This changes a lot because it is one thing to know about something and a completely different thing to see it".

As always in Ostoya's realizations, the context of the presentation has always been important - the history of the place, the Foksal Gallery, which exists since 1966. But the project can also be understood as being self-reflective in the sense that it addressed the problem of the role and position of a contemporary artist.

At the beginning of 2011 the artist presented the cycle "**Exposures**" at the Bortolami Gallery in New York. It consisted of collages on canvases of equal format, constructed from golden foil, paper- mache, paint and photographs found in the internet and cut out from magazines and newspapers. The materials were cheap in and of themselves, but representative of forms of luxury. The artist was pressed for time when creating these works. The 28 compositions corresponded with the number of days in February in the year 2011. Starting from the first day of the month the artist worked on a new collage each day intending to finish the series in time for the opening of the exhibition on the 1st of March. The performative character of the project, which tested Ostoya's efficiency, creativity and creative determination, generated an additional level of risk, questioning the artist's position of a liberated creator.

Sienkiewicz, Karol. "Anna Ostoya." Culture.PL. Mar. 2011. Web. 19 Jan. 2012.  
<[http://www.culture.pl/web/english/visual-arts-full-page/-/eo\\_event\\_asset\\_publisher/Ny17/content/anna-ostoya](http://www.culture.pl/web/english/visual-arts-full-page/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/Ny17/content/anna-ostoya)>.



Anna Ostoya, "Image One", 2009, oil on canvas, 80.5 x 101.5 cm, composition based on a picture of Bologna Massacre

### **Selected individual exhibitions:**

- 2004
  - "Presentation", Bumper Gallery, Cracow
- 2005
  - "Dance", Bumper Gallery, Cracow
- 2006
  - "It Might Be a Truth or a Lie, or Just the Sound of a Kiss", Schnittraum, Cologne, Germany
- 2008
  - "The Object and the Non-Objective World", Basel, Switzerland
- 2009
  - "More Real than What We See", Car Projects, Bologna
- 2010
  - "From A to ∞", Chronicle Gallery, Bytom
  - "Auto-Script. Notes, Replicas and Masterpieces", Foksal Gallery, Warsaw
- 2011
  - "Auto-Script II", tegenboschvanvreden, Amsterdam
  - "Exposures", Bortolami Gallery, New York
  - "Auto-Script III" - Silberkuppe, Berlin

### **Selected group exhibitions:**

- 2003
  - "Supermarket IV. Global Attraction", House of the Plastic Artist, Warsaw
  - "Beauty or Painting Effects", BWA Bielska Gallery, Bielsko-Biała
- 2004
  - "Dream Universe", Portikus, Frankfurt/M,
- 2005
  - "Beauty or Painting Effects", BWA Avant-garde, Wrocław; BWA Zielona Góra
  - "Compulsive\_handmades", Exit Gallery, Skopje
- 2006
  - "Me and My Rhythm Box", Silverman Gallery, San Francisco
- 2007
  - "Polish Painting of the 21st Century", Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw
- 2008
  - "Something Must Break", Mysłowice
  - Manifesta 7, Bolzano, Italy
- 2009
  - "Lisson Presents 6", Lisson Gallery, London
  - "Heaven. 2nd Athens Biennial", Athens
  - "Whitney ISP Exhibition '09", Art in General, New York
  - "Financial District", ISCP, New York
- 2010
  - "**Cornered Rooms**", Waterside Project Space, London
  - "What a Difference a Day Makes", Andreas Grimm, Munich, Germany
  - "Footnote 2. Correction", Silberkuppe, Berlin
  - "Derangement", CCS Bard College, Anandale-on-Hudson, USA
- 2011
  - "Rearview Mirror", The Power Plant, Toronto; Art Gallery of Alberta, Alberta