

ANNA OSTOYA, Autopis I, II and III: Notes, Copies and Masterpieces at Galeria Foksal (Warsaw), tegenboschvanvreden (Amsterdam) and Silberkuppe (Berlin) by Martha Kirszenbaum



Anna Ostoya, Pseudomorphism of a Political Event, 2010-11

“Autopis: Notes, Copies and Masterpieces” is a multiform traveling exhibition by Polish, New York-based artist Anna Ostoya, presented in three parts and three locations over the past few months. In Warsaw, Amsterdam (curated by Michal Jachula) and more recently Berlin, the artist has developed a singular body of re-appropriated works, organized around a precise attention to avant-garde aesthetics and a specific interest in Polish modernism. The “Autopis” series, a title in the form of a neologism for self-footnotes or an anagram for autopsy and utopia, subtly distillates political discourses and actions from the past century to the present.

Permanently displayed throughout the trilogy, a small plant goes up and down from inside a pedestal, appearing at an eye-level for a few seconds every minute. This common piece of vegetation becomes here a symbol of intellectual conformism, or the banality of an every-day office environment. The pot appears and disappears in a regular movement, as if to rock, the viewer, or rather the consumer, to sleep. This ready-made object, borrowed by the artist from the image cover of George Orwell’s novel *Let the Aspidistra Fly*, could be the contemporary equivalent of an orchid, the classical office flower, which signifies boredom and convention.



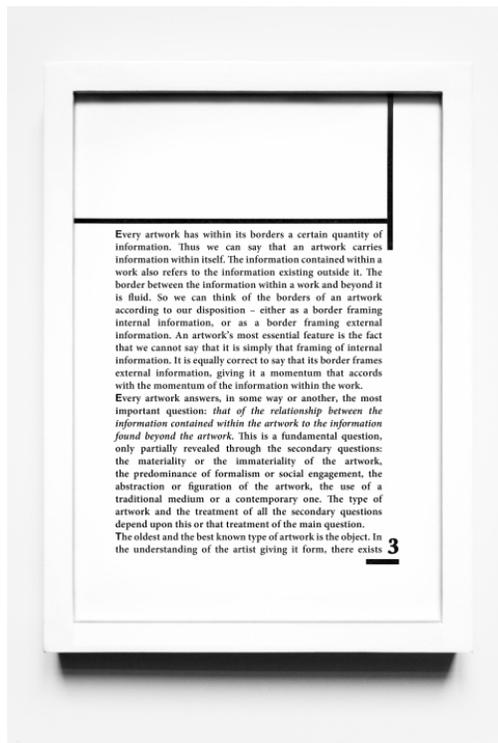
Installation view, tegenboschvanvreden, Amsterdam

Collages, superimpositions and patchwork compositions constitute an important part of Ostoya's practice, developed in parallel to her *Autopis* project which features the use of newspaper cuts, paper mâché or goldleaf.

A particular drive to confront materials, forms and temporalities can be found in Anna Ostoya's work. The most reflexive work in the trilogy is the series "Pseudomorphisms," which is an attempt to compare art-historical periods, engagements and ideals. Addressing social and political issues (censorship or the absence of women in major art movements), Ostoya is also interested in comparing an Eastern, or Polish perspective to that of the West. For instance, she contrasts two perceptions of feminine beauty through the use of two glamorous blonde icons from the 1960s: Brigitte Bardot and the Polish movie star Kalina Jedrusik. She also merges two political events from 1968: a student demonstration in Warsaw and a sit-in at New York University. To emphasize the connection and the difference, each work is bent between the two images and displayed on or in a corner, sometimes internal, sometimes external to the wall. As a striking visual message, Ostoya confronts stills taken from two films which, in different times over the past decades, were censored: Luis Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, banned in France in 1930, and David Wojnatowicz's *Untitled (Desire)*, removed last November from the exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington. Both images represent ants crawling on a naked torso, and, apparently unacceptable in our contemporary era, on a Christian cross.



Anna Ostoya, Adad Good Spirits, 2010-11



Anna Ostoya, Composition of information, 2010-11

Political questions are evident in Anna Ostoya's Autopis and are expressed through the formal imagery of modernism and the avant-garde. Her photo-collages that represent groups of men who form the main artistic

movements of the 20th century avant-garde (Surrealism, Minimalism or New Realism) contrasts with a montage of single women artists' heads, suggesting that gender inequality and masculine domination in the arts could be expressed in the tension between the collective and the individual, and a corresponding lack of feminine solidarity. Another attempt to reconstruct the discourse of the avant-garde is the artist's piece "Composition of information", where Ostoya reinterprets a manifesto written in 1931 by Polish avant-garde artists Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński, exposing their theories on space and sculpture. On the first page of their essay, the artists has replaced the word "space" with "information," subtly interrogating whether our current artistic theoretical thinking is in fact focused on the container rather than on the object contained or analyzed.

Finally, the artist's signature to the three parts of the Autopis project seems exposed in an ironic "pied-de-nez" to the political tag that has often been affixed to her work. The artist—a recent graduate from New York's Whitney Program, has installed on a cylindrical roller-print the infamous photograph of Dadaist writer Hugo Ball reciting the poem "Karawane", and replacing the sentence "Dada ist politisch" with her own name. Here again, a woman artist confronts a revolutionary avant garde movement, doing so with a detached distance and a touch of self-derision.



Installation view, Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, Phot. F. Miller, courtesy of the artist and the Foksal Gallery, Warsaw

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