

# Anka Leśniak

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## A report from the exhibition Art – Object – Registration 5

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# ART FOR DOCUMENTATION – DOCUMENTATION FOR ART

Anka Leśniak

## A report from the exhibition *Art – Object – Registration 5*

The exhibition entitled *Art-Object-Registration* consists of openly submitted works and is a fixed event as part of the Art and Documentation festival. During last year's edition, we showed photography, video and other works referring to the problem of documentation which emerged in 2012. The exhibition is open, so the artworks may be sent by artists, art critics, curators, filmmakers, cultural and art institutions and also anyone who is interested in contemporary art. It is also international and there is neither an age limit nor profession boundary. The organisers are mostly interested in the fluid border between art and its documentation and the question of when documentation provides us with knowledge about the original event or when the documentation itself acquires independence and may function as an autonomous being. And once it acquires independence, whether one can still consider it in the categories of documentation or if it becomes autonomous art in itself.

As we know, theoretical guidelines may not be totally reflected in practice, as experiments with the "living matter" often reveal problems which were not taken into account when the ideas were shaped. After 5 editions of the festival, one may ask the question – what has really been on show during the *Art-Object-Registration* exhibitions and what has come out of these events?

The last edition differed from the previous ones by the number of projects presented. This was partly associated with the limitations of the exhibition space, but also because of the experiences of previous years. Previously, the exhibitions were more "dense" but as they included a large number of projects – difficult to watch, and even more difficult to embrace intellectually and to describe. This year we decided to show 17 documentation projects by Polish and international artists after considering the material submitted and the limitations of the exhibition space.

The project by **Paulina Semkowicz** from Krakow and **Alexander Wyatt** from Sydney fit the gallery space in an interesting way. It consisted of elements on the border of photography, installation and art action and was entitled *Interior Demarcations*. Paulina Semkowicz used a large window which separated the gallery space from the street where she made an installation using photos sent to her by Alexander Wyatt. The photographs presented the documentation of his studio during a clean up after a flood caused by a severe storm. The decision about what to do with the material sent was up to Paulina. The artist also used mops, a bucket and a fan, changing their normal functions, so the installation gained a metaphorical character. Wet photos were stuck to the window in

a seemingly accidental way,, some of them hung crumpled on the mops or on the bucket which hung from the ceiling. The work by Semkowicz and Wyatt was made possible through a form of correspondence, which is especially possible today, when despite geographical and time differences one can immediately exchange information and act together. However, this type of work has its roots in the seventies and mail art, in which artists from various countries used mail as a channel for information about their art as well as interaction.

Out of all the presented works, a project by **Marek Glinkowski** entitled *How it's made?* from the series *Quick fix* stood out. During the exhibition the artist showed a movie, a book and a fragment of an graphic installation from which the whole project originally consisted. The book included photos of fences made out of iron sheets placed around construction sites in the town. The artist makes graphics which are based on the photos and which are an exact copy of the corrugated iron sheets and he then makes 3D installations out of them. The movie presented during the exhibition was documentation of the process of making the graphic installation, but did not show the important phase of printing. The commentary in the movie related to manipulating the artistic idea and a general reflection on graphic art as autonomous discipline. The film referred to the popular series *How it's made?* by Discovery Channel, Canada. The artist also used theoretical texts from catalogues about graphics as well as some written by himself and fragments of the instructions on how to assembly trapezoid iron sheets. In this work a lot of elements were what they seemed – even the reader's voice was generated by a computer.

Both works asked questions about the trustworthiness of documentation and to what extent it can be manipulated.

Other cases in which the documentation became autonomous artworks are the works by **Maciej Jabłoński** and Iza Łapińska. Jabłoński for over a year has collected books that other people get rid of. Today, when on one computer drive we can have our entire home library, we start to get rid of printed editions. However we have reservations about throwing a book away or recycling it and in our culture the gesture of burning books is extremely condemned. The other issue is a drop in the number of books being read. Therefore Jabłoński in his project entitled *Usages* suggests other usages for books – they can be used as a wheel jack when one needs to change a wheel in a car, make a footbridge for oneself when walking over a puddle, cover one's private parts on the beach, cover one's face while being arrested or use as a palette when mixing paints. The artist makes his interventions with books often in a public space. These are ephemeral actions, which he then documents. It is a kind of a "performance for photography" (a term used by the Łódź Kaliska Group).

**Iza Łapińska** over the last few years "photographs" films by well known directors. This time she photographed a TV screen presenting a film by Patric Chereau entitled *Intimacy*. The movie shots were emerged in motion without the use of freeze-frame.

**Agata Materowicz** in an original way presented documentation from a workshop entitled *I, Here and Now*, which took place in Milano. This international workshop has its roots in Łódź and its curator is Prof. Jolanta Wagner from the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź. In the final form of the work more important than the documentation of the action presented in a catalogue designed by Materowicz, became a doll used in a stage set which was an alter ego of the artist and which accompanied her during her visit in Milano and other art places. The doll held a miniature camera and appeared in photos in Brer's Pinacothèque in front of the cathedral in Milano or in the Zacheta Gallery in Warsaw. Most viewers will have associations with postcards featuring a dwarf from the movie *Amelia*, and maybe a few remember the project by Michał Mądracki, who travelled around the world with a stuffed beaver. The animal in its preserved state which guaranteed eternal life to its body during after many adventures was acquired by Mądracki and made its way to the history of Polish art.

The works submitted by Katarzyna Zimna and Michał Wilk result from the observation of a certain process. **Michał Wilk** started to photograph the housing complexes of Nowa Huta in 2010, catching the changes in one of the largest neighbourhoods in Krakow built by the communist authorities to balance the conservative intelligentsia of Krakow. He collected a series of photos until 2012 which he hopes to continue. On the photos one can notice, how elements of a contemporary "capitalist" landscape are growing into the socialist dream, creating surreal contrasts.

**Katarzyna Zimna** referred to dreams of the future. The authorities of Łódź in line with various investors, feed their inhabitants with futuristic visions of modern buildings and urban solutions. And as everyone knows, in order to complete such a futuristic project (just as the followers of that movement in art claimed) one must destroy everything which is old and traditional. The last example of such a policy is the demolishing of the old railway station Łódź Fabryczna, which was to be replaced by a super-modern one. However, for two years now there remains nothing but a pile of rubble in the centre of the town. Katarzyna Zimna in her interactive work – a board game *Your move* referred to this process of planning the space of the New Centre of Łódź which has lasted for many years, including the building of a Special Art Zone. It is a documentation of unfulfilled dreams, which points towards the consequences of irresponsible actions on a real „board” showing the town. It is also an occasion for the viewers / players to propose their own model for the Special Art Zone building.

Some artists sent work which were transmedial. **Ada Avetist** presented ten photographs of sculptures in order to make a kind of re-enactment. It was a project involving a catalogue and was based on one page. The book was by Barbara Haskell *Donald Judd*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1998. The page presented a destroyed work by Donald Judd. Avetist showed photos of abstract sculptures, accompanied by captions which said: “made of concrete and / or wood”. Each of them had some traces of destruction, which was also confirmed by the caption: “destroyed”. Quite an interesting relationship between an object and its registration showed up here. After close look up at the photos, it turned out that it was the same sculpture in subsequent phases of destruction, photographed in various spaces. So the construction and the deconstruction of an artwork are not in this case contradictory. The artist created the work by destroying it. When the artwork was completed, the material sculpture disappeared. The photographs were arranged in a reverse order – from a totally white plane, through the photos of cast sculpture to the photograph presenting liquid concrete. It is an interesting reflection over the documentation as a registration of an artistic process.

**Marija Barkidija** made a video *Neon Hand*. It was created by accident, while she was working on another artistic project – painting on canvas. All of a sudden the artist realised that her hand was covered with paint, becoming an interesting surface (structure) to document and then to record and experiment with video effects.

**Krzysztof Maniak** in *Objet Trouvé 1* and *Objet Trouvé 2* presented a fragment of his activities for camera. Here he refers to the subject of the relationship between time, space, creation and the documentation of phenomena. The artist chose a few frames from the film material; which then he multiplies and loops. Thanks to this effect, there is an image on the screen which connects the features of photography and film. Both films were shot in a forest. At first glance nothing special is happening, but after a while we notice, that a branch on the first movie levitates in a supernatural way and in the second one the branch moves in a steady motion without any human intervention, which is impossible according to the laws of physics.

Visually interesting and in some way painterly an animation by **Kelly Andres** entitled *Still life* is at the same time a documentation of the artist’s activities in the sphere of bio art. It was created during her residency in the Eastern Bloc Media Center in Montreal, Canada in 2012. The artist conducts research into the relationship between imagination and the subjective and also into space, technical processes and living organisms.

**Monika Rak** sent the documentation of an installation entitled *Contemplative space*. The starting point were satellite photo of various places. The artist confronted on one plane various landscapes and this way created maps that do not exist in reality. Then she gave them material form by embroidering linear traces with a black thread. The artist wrote: “This way I try to catch what does not exist. I pick some shapes intuitively and I achieve a very spontaneous drawing notes. By using miniature images and presenting them on the planes of the space just like an iconostas, I try to mark a space which would have a contemplative character.” For the exhibition she sent two series of photographs in a square format. One consisted of the photos of embroidered works and the second was a documentation of the installation which used those works. Paradoxically, the photographs of individual objects-images deprived them of their concrete meaning. When looking at the reproduction we don’t know if we are looking at photographs or photographic collages. The media transition caused a different reception of the work, which gained different qualities.

A large number of the works sent by artists themselves was documentation of ephemeral art – performance art and art actions. Performance *One Man Unit* by **Paul Wiersbinski** was documented by a few cameras. *One Man Unit* is a hybrid man-sculpture armed with video commercials and mobile projections in order to “add a next layer to our fictional world”. On a short, very well edited video we see a man-machine, who walks around the town and projects films onto houses, cars and his own “body”. Reality becomes a holodeck in which visual information is implemented only to lead to another, unreal experience.

**Vienne Chan** sent documentation of an action entitled *V'lair*, during which she projected a quotation from a poem by David Avidan “Harechovot mamri'im la'at” [Streets take off slowly] in Israeli sign language, onto a building which was 120 m away, in the Neot Afeka suburbs in Tel Aviv. The work refers to a dynamic urbanisation of the city, which resulted in rapid rent increase provoking a wave of street protests in 2011. The artist who was on a residency in Tel Aviv found a graffiti work in the centre where the fragment of this poem was used. The line which struck her the most was “and therefore to the town, where there is no beginning nor end”. She multiplied this quotation and projected it large scale over Tel Aviv. The “handwriting” which featured on the wall has associations with a biblical prediction written by a mysterious hand on the wall of Babylon's ruler Balthazar during a feast.

**Francesco Format bez F** sent documentation of an action entitled *Woman with a trunk* performed in December 2012 on the streets of Krakow and inspired by David Lynch's series “Twin Peaks”. He was especially intrigued by an enigmatic woman with a trunk and by the line from the movie: Owls are not what they seem. The artist wrote: „Embodying the character of the Woman with a Trunk and walking around Krakow, I wanted to penetrate the grey, predictable and conservative space of Krakow with a bit of absurd, surrealism, something extraordinary and funny at the same time. Dressed as a woman I asked people: My trunk is asking what the owls are? When people responded that they are birds, I rejected it saying: Owls are not what they seem.” It was a kind of Dadaist intervention, in which the artist interrupts people from their stereotypical behaviours. reactions The of passers-by are registered on the video..

One category of work featured in the *Art-Object-Registration* exhibition are the documentations of exhibitions and artistic events sent by organisers or by people who are the authors of the works which were documented.

**The Center for Glass Heritage** from **Krosno** sent a film and photographic documentation of the process of making a three-dimensional painting entitled *The Underglass* (documented by **Damian Krzanowski, Dawid Iwaniec, Katarzyna Solińska**). The project was supposed to be a full documentation of subsequent phases of painting. The film in which the artist himself – **Ryszard “Ryho” Paprocki** is the narrator, presents on the one hand, the artist's reflections and on the other – has an educational function. From the movie one can learn how these kind of paintings are made. The progress of work was reported live (through a webcam) on a specially designed website: [www.3d.miastoszklapl.pl](http://www.3d.miastoszklapl.pl) and commented on a blog which was updated daily: [www.theunderglass.blogspot.com](http://www.theunderglass.blogspot.com). During the exhibition also photographs were also shown, whose interesting frames attracted the viewers' attention.

**Elena de Varda** made a film documentation of an installation entitled *Whisperers* by Wela (Elżbieta Wierzbicka). *Whisperers* is a fixed, audio-visual interactive installation at the Copernicus Center of Science. It consists of a dozen or so metal columns composed within a park space and equipped with motion sensors and speakers. When a viewer arrives, one may hear natural sounds such as murmuring stream, rain, wind, a volcano etc. coming from the columns. The installation is a kind of a *simulacrum* in which technology provides us with an impression of communing with nature.

**Marta Ostajewska** sent a photo and film documentation from *Stop-Motion* – a group performance in the Old Loom of the Księży Młyn in Łódź. *Stop-Motion* was created as part of the festival “Łódź-transborder city, transmedial art” (organisers: Prof. Marek Wagner and adjunct Bogdan Wajberg from the Department of Sculpture and Intermedia of the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź). Using found objects relating to a factory artists made a transmedia performance using sculpture, dance, image and sound. One of the main mechanisms was repetition and looping. As the author of the documentation and one of the participants of the performance wrote: “During the performance there emerged not only mutual interrelations between people and their projects. There was



also a very strong, almost tangible thread which slowly shaped the meeting space into a cocoon."

**Anna Zdebska** sent photo documentation from a cycle of seven performative meetings "Performance – art Jam Session" which happened as an initiative of the Monster Hurricane Wihajster Group (featuring Monika and Hubert Wińczyk) in the Dragon Club in Poznań in 2012. Local communities active in performance, sound experiment, music and independent theatre all participated in it. Interested participants added their names to posters placed in various parts of the city and had at their disposal the pub space, a video projector, sound system and a microphone and the duration of the performance was decided by themselves.

The Art for Art's Sake Foundation sent the photo documentation of the project entitled *Art Training* (curator: **Beata Seweryn**, artists: **Julita Wójcik, Roman Dziadkiewicz, Surdabs, Nikita Kadan, Anna Ostoya, Zhanna Kadyrova, Janek Simon**). The subject of the *Art Training* project was the city space understood as a common good and a space for the activity of its citizens. The artists created games which included a critical view on a chosen aspect of the functioning of cities like Kraków, Kiev, Wrocław (a similar concept – see: Katarzyna Zimna). The artists analysed the possibilities of art to animate changes in the city tissue. The idea on how to document the show was suggested by **Przemek Krzakiewicz** – his project was entitled *Training – Documentation*. The artists documented their own works and they were allowed to make maximum of 36 photos. The frame was up to them. The photos then were selected by a photographer who composed and framed the photos again to create – like he called it – a map or a meta-photograph of the *Art Training* project. Using photos taken by other people, Krzakiewicz built a kind of a photographic installation (photos of various formats hung according to a given model). Krzakiewicz in his description of the work posed a question if one can speak here about the collective authorship of the photographs? Probably collective – yes, but not equal, since it was him who set the rules on how to document, selected the material and decided about its final shape. The multiple views of the people who did the documentation were united into a whole by the artist's vision.

When choosing the documentation for the exhibition we are always faced with a few dilemmas. On the one hand, the aim of the festival is archiving and popularising information about artistic activities. There are so many of these events in the world, that our collection will always be accidental and fragmentary and will also reflect the various quality of the archived material. Keeping the documentation is not our aim, but a means to an aim, which is researching on the connections and relationships between art and documentation of art phenomena – various documentation strategies and also possible manipulations in this area. We are reminded again by the words of Kaprow who said that "Some of us [happening artists] will probably become famous. It will be an ironic fame fashioned largely by those who have never seen our work". There arises here the question if by perceiving the artwork through documentation we acquire a knowledge about the artwork or only about its documentation. To what extent is documentation an interpretation? By seeing a few photos from Kaprow's happenings we can only ask ourselves about what we haven't seen. And in the end – referring once again to the *Art – Object – Registration* exhibition I am happy that such artworks are sent, which on the one hand make us aware of the power of documentation making in the contemporary world, including art, and on the other – pay attention to what its limitations are and how easy it is to keep the impression of creating a document while actually to make it a tool to manipulate. And documentation may be today both a topic and a form of artwork.

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organiser: Art and Documentation Association, cooperation: Topografie Association.

Fragments of artists' statements were used in the text.

Photos from the exhibition: Małgorzata Kruszyniak

Photos of the works / video still shots: artists' archives