

DISOBEDIENT BODIES EWA PARTUM & LENKA KLODOVÁ

HUNT KASTNER

curated by Karolina Majewska-Güde

16|11|2024 – 18|01|2025

Hunt Kastner is very pleased to present an exhibition that examines the practice of two feminist artists, Ewa Partum (b. 1945, Grodzisk Mazowiecki) and Lenka Klodová (b. 1969, Opava), who share a focus on liberating women from constraints, stereotypes and oppression, albeit working with different aesthetics. From a broader perspective, the exhibition focuses on time-specific feminist struggles in East Central Europe during the periods of socialism and neoliberalism and stages a productive dialogue between the work of Partum and Klodová.

The artistic practices of both artists have emerged from different disciplines and artistic contexts: Ewa Partum's work stems from a critique of painting and conceptual art in the late 1960s, and Lenka Klodová's from the discourse of extended sculpture and radical identity-based art characteristic of the period of political transformation in the 1990s. Both artists have arrived at employing their own bodies as artistic tools in their performative works. With radically different aesthetics, they explore feminist issues related to the constructed divisions between the private and public spheres in relation to their own bodies, roles and stereotypes of women, as well as the supposedly universal and genderless language of art. They address topics such as the relationship between motherhood and artistic practice and use their art towards a rising feminist conscience. In their biopolitical works, in which they have appropriated administrative language, they show how the apparatus of the state determines the status of gendered bodies.

The notion of "disobedient bodies" in the title of the exhibition refers to the main tool of Partum and Klodová's artistic practice - the naked female body that subverts existing social and visual orders. It is a body used beyond the conventions of traditional art, where it has been an object of the male gaze rather than an active subject of transformative action. In her work, *Luncheon on the Grass* (1971), reconstructed for the exhibition, Ewa Partum refers to Eduard Monet's famous painting depicting a female nude figure deprived of any mythological or symbolic alibi. Partum has translated the famous painting into an action in which her name confidently overwrites that of the modern art master. Her performances *Change* (1974 and 1979), on the other hand, show how the artist established the body as an artistic tool to protest social and artistic exclusions. The exhibition also includes a series of unique vintage photographs documenting the performance *Wedding Attire*, shown for the first time since it was realised in 1981. In this work, Ewa Partum exposes the institution of marriage as a patriarchal social convention and defines it as a source of oppression for women. She uses a self-created feminist slogan on the banner, which reads: "Women, marriage is against you!" Other works relating to the institution and ritual of marriage (*Private Performance*, 1985, *Marriage Disasters*, 1985) move from the symbolic and

representational level to an exploration of Partum's actual lived experience.

A similar tension between the private and public, as well as representation and action, can be traced in the work of Lenka Klodová. In her early work *Golden Kids* (1996), the artist delegated the performance to her own children Matouš and Božena, dressed in golden suits freely playing in the environment of the sculpture studio. Her own embodied experience, as well as the limitations of the performing body, have been recorded in the series entitled *Library* (2021), plaster casts of the artist's torso, holding stacks of books on the subjects of female transition, divorce, and cancer. Objective scientific narratives are stored between the breasts, testifying to the actual knowledge of an individual experiencing body. In many of her works, Klodová explores specific and culturally marginalised female experiences, such as pregnancy. She does not show this stage passively but puts the pregnant bodies into action, often in an absurd context, as in the installation *Demonstration* (2004). The strategy of subversive representation is central to Klodová's work. In *Libát/Kiss* (2006), an installation of manipulated advertising posters, blown-up lips of women kiss the window from the inside. This work, juxtaposed with Ewa Partum's *poems by ewa* from the early 1970s, shows a unity of feminist aims between both artists, but it also reveals a different set of references. In Klodová's case, it is a sexist visual culture and the intrusive aggression of advertising and stereotyped femininity that she challenges in her work; in Partum's case, it is the seemingly universal genderless subject of conceptual art.

The exhibition positions Lenka Klodová's work as a tool for rereading Ewa Partum's feminist practice and, at the same time, it presents Ewa Partum's work as an active context for Klodová's practice, recreating intergenerational artistic ties and genealogies of post-socialist feminist art. It not only shows formal correspondences, motifs, and themes between the artists but also demonstrates how differently they used their tools, such as the naked body and language, in different socio-political contexts. How differently they developed strategies, such as provocation and social mobilisation in public space, before and after the political changes of 1989. Thus, the exhibition traces the emergence of different strands of feminist art in East Central Europe.

Special thanks to the Gallery of Fine Arts in Ostrava, Ústí nad Labem House of Arts and Joachim Fels for their help with the exhibition. We would also like to thank the Czech Ministry of Culture and the City of Prague for their ongoing support of our exhibition program.

HUNT KASTNER

Ewa Partum (1945 in Grodzisk Mazowiecki, PL) is a conceptual artist, performance artist, film maker, mail artist and photographer. She belongs to the first generation of the Polish neo-avantgarde and is a pioneer of European feminist body art and conceptual art. Between 1963 and 1965 she studied at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Łódź, from 1965 onwards at the Department of Graphic Art and Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Her practice developed in a dialogue with the Polish constructivist tradition of engagement between the visual arts and poetry. In the mid 1960's, Ewa Partum brought the discourse on experimental poetry into the field of visual arts, moving beyond pure deconstructive gestures which had lost their radical potential. Since 1969 she has been engaged in linguistic activities in an effort to discover and formulate a new artistic language. Affirming that "an act of thought is an act of art", she focuses on the political economy of signs and the materialisation of language in her actions and installations in public space, as well as in her mail art or visual or "active" poetry. Partum made her first performance in 1971, two years later, she began to work in the sphere of avant-garde film. Since the 1990s, her films have almost exclusively had a feminist theme.

Partum has participated in many individual and group exhibitions, including: *Jesteśmy* at Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw (1991); *Wack! Art in the Feminist Revolution* at MoCA Los Angeles (2007); European Contemporary Art Biennale Manifesta 7 in Italy (2008); *re.-act. – feminism – performance art of the 1960s and 70s today*, Akademie der Künste in Berlin; *REBELLE. Art and Feminism 1969-2009* in Museum voor Moderne Kunst in Arnhem; *Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, Museum Moderne Kunst in Vienna (2009); *Promesse du passé*, Centre Pompidou in Paris (2010); *Intense Proximity*, La Triennale, Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2012); 18th Sydney Biennale (2012-13); *Bigger Splash Painting after Performance*, Tate Modern, London (2012-13); *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960-1980*, MoMA, New York (2015-16); *Zerreißprobe. Kunst zwischen Politik und Gesellschaft*, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2023); *Ewa Partum. Lovis-Corinth-Preis 2024*, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg (2024); *Multiple Realities: Experimental Art in the Eastern Bloc, 1960s–1980s*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, United States (2023) & Phoenix Art Museum and Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada (2024); *Extreme Tension: Art Between Politics And Society 1945–1990*, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2023-2025); *15th Baltic Triennial (2024-2025); Poetry & Performance. The Eastern European Perspective*, Museum of Czech Literature, Star Summer Palace, Prague (2024).

Her work can be found in major institutional collections around the world, including Tate Museum in London, Reina Sofia in Madrid, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin Frac Lorraine, Generali Foundation, Vienna, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Muzeum Sztuki w Lodzi, and MoMa in New York.

Lenka Klodová (*1969 in Opava, CZ) is a visual artist, performer, sculptor and pedagogue active on the Czech art scene since the 1990s. She graduated from the University of Applied Arts in Prague in the Sculpture Studio of Kurt Gebauer, in 2005 she also completed her PhD there. As part of her scholarships she attended the Escola de las Belas Artes in Lisbon and the Staffordshire Polytechnic in the UK. The central motif of her work focuses on the human body, which she perceives in an expanded field and multilayered contexts that go beyond its physical boundaries into the social and political sphere. In her works she deals with themes related to intimacy, sexuality, motherhood and interpersonal relationships. Within these themes, she focuses on social and societal constructs and stereotypes, which she reflects mainly from a gender perspective, and explores the dynamics, behaviours and situations that arise from these social structures. The work she has been developing over the last 30 years is often ambivalent and subversive, making visible the complexity and ambiguity of established categories, opinions and beliefs. Klodová is the founder and curator of the Festival of Naked Forms, held for the first time in 2015. Since 2010 she has been the head of the Body Design Studio at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Brno University of Technology.

Her solo and group exhibitions include: *From the Black Shadow*, GMU Hradec Králové (2022); *Leatherette and Other Imitations*, PLATO (2021); *What We Talk About When We Talk About Family*, House of Art Ústí nad Labem (2020); *Power of the Powerless. Political Aspects in Slovak and Czech Art After 1989*, Kunsthalle Bratislava (2019); *First Respect, Then Love*, Futura (2017); *Showrooms*, Gallery NoD (2015); *VII. New Zlín Salon*, Regional Gallery of Fine Arts Zlín (2014); *In a Skirt – Sometimes*, Moravian Gallery (2014); *The Intimate Circle in Contemporary Czech Photography*, GHMP Prague and House of Arts Bratislava (2013); *Alphabet, etc.* Gallery (2013); *Invisible Body*, House of Arts Opava (2012); *Social Bitch*, Karlin Studios (2011); *Phenomenon Game and Body Limits*, NTK (2010); *After Velvet. Contemporary Czech Art with Past Connotations*, Museum of Prague (2009); *Sexism?*, Václav Špála Gallery (2008); *The Art of Giving Birth*, Trade Fair Pallace, National Gallery (2006); *Insiders*, Brno City Gallery (2004); *Art Against Time* (2021), *5 Women, 5 Questions* (2003) and *Pasted Intimacy* (2001), Jelení Gallery.