

KAROLINA BREGUŁA

INTERVIEW BY: TEODORA DINU

Teodora Dinu: Looking at your portfolio of works, I am impressed about the versatility of your expression means - photography, installations, happenings, videos. How do you choose the proper instrument for your ideas? Do you feel more comfortable working with one or another?

Karolina Breguła: Every message requires a different medium, that's why I do so many things. I guess I am feeling comfortable with each and one of them. However, I have noticed that when I start to think about a new work it always feels easiest to use the same medium as the one of the previous project. When my thoughts are used to thinking cinema, it takes some time reprogramming the mind to think photography. My latest work is a theatre piece so at the moment I am struggling not to make another performative piece just because it's easiest.

T.D.: Many of your works revolve around the role of art institutions (especially public art institutions) and how they select, protect and make available art for the greater public. Museums are entitled to regulate and decide which art is good and should be placed in this so called cultural archive, but do you believe this decision should also be made at a more informal level, somehow arbitrary, by art lovers, collectors, artists themselves? How democratic should this process be?

K.B.: I think the choice of the art should be done by professionals but in a democratic way so that the public has access to everything that is valuable, no matter how fashionable it is, who the artist is and where he or she has been exhibiting so far. The institutions have enormous power. They create the art history. If they, for some reason, decide someone's works are not going to be shown, I think it's very likely that this person will not succeed as an artist. Obviously there are alternative spaces, private galleries and other ways of exhibiting but it is the institutions that the public trusts so it's them who have the power to define what is good and what is bad. This is also why I believe it's so important to discuss and be able to question the decisions made by institutions.

T.D.: The connection between your projects from the recent years, focused one way or another on the complexity of art, its role in today's society and the relation with history and heritage, made

me think of a possible didactic dimension of your work, an informal one, but nonetheless a translated theoretical version. Do you believe that the contemporary artist can be seen also as an educator for the larger public?

K.B: I absolutely believe that one of the very many roles of art is educating. And maybe every art to some extent is doing it by opening up the minds. My works are not directly meant to educate but I am aware that a lot of people would perceive them so. What I want the do is to ask questions, show different perspectives, create some alternatives for what the institutions have to propose. I am glad, though, if they teach something at the same time.

T.D.: Your project Useful Art is a series of reinterpretations of different artistic gestures from the history of art, and alongside the purpose of this approach, I am also curious how you chose those artists, such as Richard Long or Bruce Nauman?

K.B: The Useful Art is simply an effect of thinking about artworks I like. If I think about them too much, I start to incorporate them in life. It's the same with the "Butter triangle" which you're also exhibiting at Eastwards Prospectus". Usually the works I refer to will be the ones I admire for various reasons. Useful Art is a reflection on the position of the conceptual art in the museum collections. You know it's a paradox that what was meant to be free from the physicality of art objects is now beautifully framed and getting dusty in the museum storages, playing such an important role in the modern art collections.

T.D: From the video works present in your exhibition at Eastwards Prospectus Gallery we draw two different standpoints, one that for progress to be initiated we have to erase the past, or, on the contrary, we have to preserve the cultural heritage and draw form it. The futurist manifesto radically promoted the destruction of museums and libraries, clearly not a realistic scenario, but do you find it possible for the young artists to be burdened by culture, heritage?

K.B: I don't see the two standpoints as clearly as you do. If they are there, they are supposed to make the viewers ask questions they maybe did not ask before.

The futuristic manifesto mentioned in Fire-Followers is a part of an image of art being a self-destructing monster. Assuming that art needs difficult environments and problems to feed itself. I was trying to imagine what would happen if the world suddenly turned perfect? What would be the place for art? Fire-Followers is a landscape of a place where art has no longer reason to exist so in order to have a fuel, it produces fear. The progress is suddenly changing the direction. Fire-Followers is not at all a diagnosis that we are burdened with the heritage. Even though when

I am now asking myself a question if we are, I actually have to say yes, a little bit. The contemporary art is obsessed with the modernism and almost everything we do refers to it - not only in art but also architecture and design. Sometimes I think we don't go forward, we just analyze the same thing over and over again. As if we could not digest it. So maybe this is a burden which stops us from development?

T.D.: Fire-Followers shows such a rich variety of audiences, from art lovers, critics, curators, to people outside the art world or who don't have any interest in it. One particular character drew my attention, the artist concluding the documentary who talks about the personal archive and how he cannot move in a foreign country without taking this archive with him. The scene made me think about your work, Self-burial, where you talk about fear of leaving your familiar, creative context and working in a strange, different environment. Can this detachment be used as an instrument to reach progress?

K.B.: The old performer in Fire-Followers probably doesn't want to leave because he knows well that he really is the only person on Earth who is able to put the archive in order. I have seen a few archives of works by artists that have been active for less than this 92-year old man and most of them are chaotic masses of images and documents lacking description. As the performer says, nobody but the authors themselves understand it all. Creating this character I did not think of the fear which I meant in Self-burial.

Self-burial is referring to the situation of many contemporary artists like me who are traveling all the time. If I want to be financially able to focus on my work and have the budget to produce new pieces, I have to use the international system of scholarships and residencies. It is good as it gives me opportunities and makes me travel. But at the same time it never gives me time to be in a place long enough to actually understand it. This way every new trip puts you in a risky situation of making artistic statements in the context of a place unfamiliar to you. Self-burial is questioning the value of the messages we produce as strangers in a place. I love traveling and learning but I also want to work in a context which I am sure of. This is why I will always miss that little Warsaw square in the picture.