

# KAROLINA BREGUŁA

## PROGRESS

Text: Teodora Dinu

"Progress" includes a selection of five video works created by the acclaimed multimedia artist Karolina Breguła in the recent years. Through her practice, the Polish artist orchestrates more or less fictitious scenarios in which the concept of art becomes the main focus. Furthermore, the tactics of incorporating in the narratives different types of audiences, related or not to the art world, reveals a genuine interest in exploring a wide spectrum of values that art can enhance.

The variety of situations created by the artist compels the public to reconsider its take on art in post-postmodern times, thus trying to institute progress. On a general level, progress is the element that keeps us moving, that motivates and creates a sense of purpose. But as much as we depend on innovation, we cannot break free from the state of fear connected to it. Either we find ourselves stranded to the past or we feel comfortable with the present, we always find motives to maintain a status quo.

In arts we tackle the same issues, which became more and more controversial at the break of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, igniting from the ambivalence of the solutions proposed: do we deny the history, do we bury the cultural heritage or do we draw from it to create a new art? These are some of the questions that Karolina Breguła addresses through her work, creating not answers but different perspectives on the matter.

This considered, the layout of the exhibition is purposefully constructed to trigger a reflective state around concepts imbued in her videos, such as culture, memory, innovation, mediocrity, revolution. We are either put in the position to evaluate our understanding of art, presented with a situation in which art is in danger of being eliminated from the community, or we get to contemplate on the purpose of the artist as a buffer between society and politics. The different layers perceptively created by the artist do not elude the message, quite the opposite, help us address the question of progress, how we attain it and if there is such a thing as a gridlock.

The narrative of the exhibition is enhanced by the string of ideas that connects the five videos, even though they were created on a span of 5 years, and it grows in meaning as we move from one video to another. First we are stimulated to reconsider our relation to art in "I Don't Understand", we imagine the possible resorts to institute change in "The Offence" and "Fire-Followers", but at the same time trying not to overlook the importance and impact of art on social and institutional levels in "The Soup" and "Leaving".

The extent of her expression means - photography, performance, video, installation - unveils a special cinematography infused in her films. The recurring silences, peculiar characters, odd

gestures, create some sort of intimacy and empathy between the audience and the imagined story lines.

Delving into the depths of her video works, we get a clearer image, as she succeeds in creating a praxis of progress, by insightfully putting in perspective different theoretical standpoints. For example, she intuitively interprets the concept of archive developed by Boris Groys<sup>1</sup> in his writings.

The philosopher places the archive at the center of his theory of new, but gives it a distinct meaning, that of a machine producing the future, and not representing the past. This cultural archive has to be constantly assessed through the process of revaluing the value of art, and delimiting it from what is contained in the mundane, average world.

Going back to Karolina Breguła's video works, we discover, on an empirical level, a translation of the said theory. This is the challenge that locals are faced with in "Fire-Followers" where art is going through a process of reevaluation, at the risk of complete disposal from the community, as it is thought to be the cause of recurring fires. The struggle inside the community can be narrowed to the same two attitudes regarding progress, on the one hand that without fire there is simply no new life, so for progress to be initiated we have to erase the past and start afresh, and on the other hand that heritage, history, culture shape the identity of a community, and is considered the source of innovation, so they must be kept and protected. Could this anxiety predict the exhaustion of a whole set of ideas, concepts, and the need to transcend them through an identity checkup, but done in respect with the present and not the past, as Lyotard<sup>2</sup> states? This abiding dilemma is passed on to the public present in the exhibition, creating a chain reaction and validating the works of art.

What sets apart Karolina Breguła's video works is that she unexpectedly explores the dualism of constricting circumstances, and transforms crisis in a value for modernity. They either unveil resistance to change or readiness to break from the status quo, but more importantly they create a relevant and productive debate.

The panoramic view of Karolina Breguła's works undeniably paints the social, political and cultural environment in which she works, whether it is her home country or any other foreign place. Used first as an instrument to unveil different social aspects, in time, her art enhanced the power of a critical instrument directed towards the concept of art with respect to the institutional arena, the larger audience, and not the least, to the artist and his leverage in society.

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<sup>1</sup>Groys, Boris. 2003. "On the new". Cluj Napoca: Idea Design&Print.

<sup>2</sup>Lyotard, Jean- Francois. 1993. "Postmodern condition". Bucharest: Babel.