

Hanna Nowicka *Peripetia*

State Art Gallery in Sopot

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Curators: Mariola Balińska, Maja Murawska

Peripetia showcases Hanna Nowicka's seminal works spanning from the early 1980s until the present day, which include objects, installations, photographs and video films. The title of the exhibition comes from the Greek word *peripéteia* meaning "a sudden change". This is a unique opportunity to see Nowicka's rich artistic oeuvre, among others the notable *Dust Column* (1988–1993) and *Six Images About Closeness* (1996), which mark a breakthrough in her vision of art as she moved from painting towards more innovative forms.

Hanna Nowicka graduated from the Faculty of Painting, Gdańsk Academy of Fine Arts, in 1987. Although her paintings, which explored primarily the figure of woman's body, were valued and appreciated by the academic circle, her principal focus moved to other media. Working with the material that was meant to become for her a substitute of the human body, she was able to show the whole gamut of human emotions. Nowicka's art has always gravitated towards such topics as closeness, body and sexuality, or emotions in interpersonal relations. The artist often explores relationships, including the mother-daughter relation (*Sanctuary of My Mother*, 2000; *Initiation*, 2002), pointing out to issues such as instability, sense of threat or manipulation.

Her works from 1990s gain a feministic dimension; they caused a confusion in the artistic community of the time due to general misunderstanding and lack of theoretical interpretative tools. In fact, Nowicka was well aware of the trends and phenomena prevailing in the then contemporary Western art, and was inspired by artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse or Kiki Smith. She was very conscious of the direction of her art, echoing the works of the leading American female artists from mid-20th century. Her art touched on the bodily and sexual (*Self-portrait*, 1998; *A Very Precious Necklace*, 1998), subtly raising the issue of female desire (*Six Images About Closeness*, 1996).

Visitors will have an opportunity to see the revolutionary *Dust Column* (1988–1993), which marks a breakthrough in Nowicka's artistic vision. In this particular work, the dust collected for years in the artist's home became a work material: a memory medium for tedious daily rituals of tidying up and organising the private space. The object disrupted the traditional and approved models of artistic expression of the time. Associated with dirt, dust set the direction of Nowicka's pursuits for a long time; it can be seen in works such as *Essence* (2016–2023) or *Consecration of Home* (2016). Apart from dust, the principal material of her objects and installations is rubber, which, through its flesh-like hue, brings associations with human skin. The exhibition is a chance to see some of the artist's installations made from rubber, including *Six Images About Closeness* (1996) and *Self-portrait* (1998), as well as objects – *Imperfect Parts* (2009), *Sacrifice* (2023) – and a photograph from the *Defects and Flaws* series (2023). An important part of the exhibition are the video films *Lamella* (2009) and *Shelter* (2016), dealing with absence and loss but eventually defying interpretations. The exhibition is

completed with works reflecting Nowicka's interest in cultural anthropology, such as the photographic series *Colonial Furniture* (2002–2015), and lightboxes *Wandering Into the Fading Past* (2007), accompanied by the video *Anthropology of Art* (2006).

Hanna Nowicka's latest works – *Essence* (2023), *Bodily Exercises* (2023), *Defects and Flaws* (2023) – refer to earlier projects as well as offer new interpretations of her oeuvre. The artist goes across traditional forms of artistic expression and opens up art to new possibilities once functioning outside the established canon. *Peripetia* shows an original way to approach art beyond painting. For Nowicka, this was the only possible, even if necessary, choice in her journey to transgress the existing art patterns and break with imitation.

The exhibition restates Hanna Nowicka's artistic accomplishments and highlights her role in the emerging artistic discourses in post-transformation Poland of the 1990s. It also shows how Nowicka's steadfast and uncompromising attitude came at a cost in her professional and private lives as she searched for appropriate tools to present reality through personal and often intimate lens.

Mariola Balińska