

Anna Reinert-Faleńczyk

I can't sleep when there's a war going on

State Art Gallery in Sopot, Poland

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Curator: Mariola Balińska

Anna Reinert-Faleńczyk's exhibition brings together paintings and sculptural objects created over the last few years that represent the artist's commentary on contemporary warfare. The paintings contain various depictions of architecture, a heritage of material culture that becomes vulnerable in the face of catastrophes. The showcase is complemented by a site-specific installation whose form alludes to sandbags. The object provokes reflection on the need to protect not just human life in emergency situations but also precious secular and sacral buildings that form part of the broadly understood cultural legacy.

The artist's earlier works testify to her fascination with the architecture of huge agglomerations, seen as the symbol of progress and modernity. More recently, she has diametrically reconfigured her approach to architecture. In her opinion, the civilisational glitz and impressive lightness of glazed urban buildings do not constitute a solid pillar for our day and age. Reinert begins to see the city as a brittle space that may easily become deconstructed. Ultimately, modern steel and glass structures become the opposite of solidity and permanence. In a situation of danger, the city does not act as a shelter. People seek refuge among nature, in the mountains or forests, and – as the artist underlines – what is particularly important in this context is the presence of others, their tangible corporeality, as they await joint survival.

Europe is grappling with migration movements and the plight of people who found themselves within the range of hostilities. Citizens losing their homes and families have become the involuntary victims of armed conflicts provoked by oppressive political regimes. These events have shocked the world and drastically contributed to a sense of collective insecurity felt not just by those caught in the eye of the storm but also by the onlookers of these events.

The artist follows media coverage of the war in Ukraine. She is familiar with the dire situation of migrants crossing the Polish border from Belarus and the fate of people in the Gaza Strip. All this information about armed conflicts challenges the image of the world to which we have grown accustomed, forcing us to address contemporary challenges from the position of observers.

Reinert's exhibition reignites the debate around migration, displacement, loss, lack of security and the disrupted continuity of generations and traditions. On many occasions, the painter's narrative turns to the past, when she revisits her family's stories about a generation that experienced the trauma of World War II. The artist knows that our sense of security, rebuilt after WWII, is now crumbling. Not long ago, the prospect of another global war seemed unimaginable and hostilities always seemed to take place somewhere 'far away' from us, at least so we thought. Today, we already know that war can go on somewhere 'close', provoking potent fears about the scope and scale of the conflict raging just outside our borders.

The exhibition poses questions about the role of art in unstable times, while acting as a springboard for discussing the fate of those who have fallen victim to imperialist ambitions of oppressive regimes, becoming entangled in contemporary conflicts. Most importantly, while the themes explored are hardly optimistic, as viewers, we know the type of world we do not want. The most crucial message

of the exhibition is the community of empathy and reacting to violence and human suffering – even when we're distracted by our day-to-day affairs, we ought to afford extending helpful gestures and showing solidarity with those in crisis.

Mariola Balińska

Anna Reinert-Faleńczyk was born in 1979 in Gdańsk. She is a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, where she has been working since 2011. She received her habilitation degree in 2018. Reinert works with painting, including site-specific painting, and press illustrations. In her artistic practice, she explores the relationships between painting and architecture as well as between the city and its users. Her paintings are held in private and institutional collections (e.g., in Stockholm, Uppsala, Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig, Warsaw, Szczecin as well as the State Art Gallery in Sopot and the National Museum in Gdańsk, respectively). She has exhibited her work at over twenty solo shows and several dozen collective ones in Poland and Europe. Reinert has won multiple awards (e.g., Storm of the Year in the Visual Arts category, Young Sopot Muse, GrandFront for the best cover of a weekly magazine, Mayor of Gdańsk's Award for Young Creatives in the Field of Culture) and scholarships, such as the "Young Poland" Scholarship of the Minister of Culture and National heritage, Pomeranian Marshal's Scholarship for Artists and Mayor of Sopot's Scholarship for Artists. She lives and works in Sopot.