

Anton Kern Gallery

Paweł Althamer: *Polish Sculpture*

October 27 – December 17, 2022
First and Second Floor Galleries

Anton Kern Gallery is delighted to announce the Polish artist Paweł Althamer's first gallery exhibition in the United States. After 30 years of exhibiting throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia and participating in numerous international biennial shows, as well as in Documenta and Skulptur Projekte Münster, it is nothing short of a sensation that the acclaimed sculptor and performance artist has chosen this moment to stage a large-scale exhibition in New York. The artist's previous appearances in the city were a solo exhibition at the New Museum in 2014, and a performance project at the Wrong Gallery in 2003, a one-square-meter pretend gallery space curated by Massimiliano Gioni, Ali Subotnick, and Maurizio Cattelan.



Paweł Althamer, *Emissaries of Light, Hermes*, 2022
Metal, papier-mâché
77 1/8 x 74 x 35 7/8 inches (196 x 188 x 91 cm)

For the installation at Anton Kern Gallery, Althamer has intertwined four distinct bodies of sculptures into a network of figures that sprawls over the first and second floors. The viewer will find: a group of five life-size dancers; a group of three small figures on found vintage furniture; three ceramic sculptures depicting the artist's son Kosma; and eight 'sleeping bag' portrait sculptures. All works were created in Warsaw over the last year and a half. For all the differences in material and process, these four groups are held together by the common thread of the communal experience, for which the theme of the dance creates the fitting, overarching key and vision.

This motif, found throughout the ages and in all cultures, has been on Althamer's mind since high school days, when he first saw Matisse's *Dance* during a class trip to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Since then, the artist has made numerous sculptural and performative renderings of the subject. The ancient and universal theme of dance as a ritualistic, communal, and Dionysian (ecstatic) experience of vitality as well as of suffering and death finds a way into Althamer's strikingly concrete and contemporary language, without the heavy burden of (art)-history and arcane symbolism, but with the dexterous, agile, and lively manner of a contemporary storyteller.

In all his sculptures, Paweł Althamer allows the material to speak and help formulate motif and narrative. The *Emissaries of Light* dancers are made of a hybrid material, applied onto a metal skeleton, that holds the qualities of self-drying papier mâché and the malleability of clay, resulting in a stunning natural liveliness of the figures in motion: joyous, uninhibited, and naked. The unique character of the material, smooth when wet and crystalline hard and lightweight like lacquered paper when dry, further enables the artist to manipulate the surface and even incorporate found materials like memorabilia from the dancers' real lives into the figures' skin.

Similarly, the finely glazed and fragile ceramic portraits of Kosma, shown naked and in lotus position, display a shiny, hard yet delicate surface, unified by the glazing process which allows Althamer to incorporate the sitter's thoughts-come-to-life head-extensions of fantastical and mythological scenes. The staunch and perplexing naturalism of the figures is presented in harmony with the imaginative world of the portrayed.

At the core of the 'sleeping bag' sculptures is the artist's friendship with a group of unhoused people in Warsaw. To portray the many facets of this particular group of friends, their individualism and their existence within a larger, defective societal context, Althamer combines the hyperrealism of the plaster face mask with the concrete objecthood and the symbolism of the sleeping bag. The synergy of the hyperrealist likeness of the mask, with the actual sleeping bags that have been embellished by the group, create sculptures of both great intimacy and political urgency.

Born in Warsaw in 1967, Althamer studied under the renowned sculptor Grzegorz Kowalski at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. Since graduating in 1993, Althamer has established a unique artistic practice featuring an expanded approach to sculptural representation and consistently experimental models of collaboration. He is widely known for the life-size and often haunting figurative sculptures he creates of himself, his family, and various individuals within his community. Althamer's groundbreaking collaborative projects call for community engagement and social transformation, as most famously evident in the Nowolipie Group, a weekly sculpture workshop he has led since 1994 for people with multiple sclerosis.

Paweł Althamer's work has been exhibited worldwide in solo shows at institutions such as Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg, Germany (2022); Lentos Museum, Linz, Austria (2020); HAM Helsinki, Finland (2019); Münsterplatz, Zurich, Switzerland (2018); New Museum for Contemporary Art, New York, NY; Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, Hydra, Greece (both 2014); Sammlung Goetz, Munich, Germany; MUSEION, Bolzano, Italy (both 2012); Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany (2011); Secession, Vienna, Austria (2009); Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan, Italy (2007); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2006); Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland (2005); Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, The Netherlands (2004); The Wrong Gallery, New York, NY (2003); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL (2001); and Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland (1997).

Althamer has taken part in major international exhibitions including the Helsinki Biennale, Helsinki, Finland (2021); JIWA Jakarta Biennale, Jakarta, Indonesia (2017); Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kochi, India (2016); Performa 13, New York, NY; 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (both 2013); 7th Berlin Biennale, *Forget Fear*, Berlin, Germany (2012); the 8th Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; *Les Promesses du passé*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (both 2010); *The Fifth Floor: Ideas Taking Spaces*, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; *After Nature*, New Museum for Contemporary Art, New York, NY (both 2008); *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, Münster, Germany (2007); *Dreams and Conflicts – The Viewer's Dictatorship*, 50th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2003); Manifesta 3, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2000); and documenta X, Kassel, Germany (1997).

Althamer has received the Vincent Van Gogh Bi-Annual Award for Contemporary Art in Europe (2004); the Kunstpreis Aachen (2010); and most recently the Lovis-Corinth-Prize (2022).

His work is included in the collections of Fondation Beyeler, Riehen, Switzerland; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; FRAC Normandie Rouen, Sotteville-lès-Rouen, France; Tate (London, Liverpool, St Ives); Museion, Bolzano, Italy; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz, Liechtenstein; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, The Netherlands; Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow, Poland; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland; Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw, Poland; Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland; National Museum, Wrocław, Poland; MoMA The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, among others.

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