

Introduction

The three young Polish artists—all in their early 30s—began to work collaboratively under the name Potencja in 2012, while working towards their diplomas at the Fine Arts Academy in Kraków. Potencja has exhibited together—and apart—and operated an independent art space by that name. Characterized by a sense of the absurd, playing with extreme scale and distinct color palettes, their paintings take everyday life experiences as subjects, with frequent nods to art historical references, and riff off each other in a close artistic dialogue. At the same time, each artist has developed their own formal vocabulary.

Installed on a painted background made to resemble pages of an open book, *Reconciling Apparent Contradictions* plays with the idea of what an exhibition of paintings may look like. The works by the three artists are mixed and placed as if illustrations on a page. At the same time, the setting—and the monumentally-scaled book in the center of the room—are references to their recent publication *Potency. A Glossary of Symbols*. Published to accompany their exhibition at BWA Zielona Góra in 2021, the book tells a tall tale of the founding of their group, taking a mock mythologizing tone to playfully introduce their respective painting practices and symbolism of (shared) motifs. This mixture of self-seriousness and mockery is characteristic of their practices and equally evident in the paintings on view.

Karolina Jabłońska's paintings in this exhibition have a distinct palette. Her purplish depictions of face—generally self-portraits—suggest strong emotions but also evoke a visceral response in the viewer. We feel the freezing cold, even if her pictorial alter ego, standing in a frozen lake or with her head encased in a giant ice cube, appears not to mind. *Turtleneck, 2022*, depicts a large sweater, slightly snowed in, apparently with a person inside. Feet are seen below and a flimsy ponytail protrudes from the collar. A recurring motif, the work is a perfect example of Jabłońska's mixture of low-key drama and hilarity. Deeply felt and keenly observed, the work captures the awkwardness but also the brief moment of panic that can take hold when taking off a sweater. As the artist has put it, "the paintings come from small sensory and emotional impressions." Yet, the personal is also political: metaphors for emotional states, inherent in these paintings are references to the role of women, the existential threat to their bodies and restrictions imposed by political realities.

Scale and the body are also major motifs in the paintings of Tomasz Kręcicki. Grotesquely enlarged fingers applying gelatinous substances from an unmarked tube have an absurdist element but also evoke the artist's continued exploration of the abstract in figuration. A surrealist unreality imbues the artist's depictions of common activities and everyday objects, recalling a Lynchian atmosphere but often cut with a dash of the campy spookiness of B-movie horror. Yet, the recurrence of fingers, hands and eyes, also refers to a painter's tools. A major theme has been a kind of bathos: the mockery of earnestness, undercutting aspirations through absurdity, jokes, and wit. At the same time, works such as *Pin 2023*, or *Needles, 2022*, evoke a sense of anxiety and foreboding created by the implied physical threat of a pushpin poised to break the skin or pattern of long black wires used to deter birds. Kręcicki's subject matter then is inherently existential and addresses both contemporary politics and its repercussions on the individual.

Oscillating between the natural and the everyday—sometimes in the same work—Cyril Polaczek imagery can have a rebus-like and/or narrative quality that conjures up a story or, in its incongruity, provokes puzzlement: what are we to make of the comb hovering over a brooding seascape, cloverleaves in a wallet or a hand holding an oyster with its pearl? Often the spectator is part of the scene, as in *Rain, 2023*, walking in a rainy landscape and apparently looking through a transparent umbrella at either a path or a river as water drips down all around us. Polaczek, as do Karolina Jabłońska and Tomasz Kręcicki, uses scale in a deliberate, often funny, manner as in his depictions of the monumental dandelions "battling" a bright red poppy. Technically sophisticated, the artist's paintings vary in technique. Works such as *Pearl and Wallet, both 2023*, use thick layers of paint almost in a sculptural way to create surfaces outlining depicted objects. Another series of recent works, the seascape and rainy scene mentioned above and a dramatic painting of storm clouds, are painted in thin washes with loose brushstrokes, on the brink of dissolving the contours of its motifs.

Biographies

Karolina Jabłońska, born 1991 in Niedomice. Lives and works in Kraków.

The artist studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków (2010-2015). Residencies and fellowships include Scholarship in Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze UMPRUM (2014-2015), LIA Programme Residency, Spinnerei Leipzig (2018), Fern Residency, Brussels (2021), Fores Project Residency, London (2022). Institutional group exhibitions include Mainly for Women, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah (2021); Sensation: Closer to the people, Kunstverein Schattendorf (2019); Paint also known as Blood, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2019).

Tomasz Kręcicki, born 1990 in Żary. Lives and works in Kraków.

The artist studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków (2010-2015) and the Academy of Fine Arts, Nuremberg (2014.2015). Residencies and fellowships include LIA Programme Residency, Spinnerei Leipzig (2018), MeetFactory Residency, Prague, (2018), Fores Project Residency, London (2022). Institutional solo exhibitions include XXL, Muzeum Regionalne, Stalowa Wola (2020); Spirit level, Grey House Foundation, Kraków (2019); XXL, BWA Tarnów (2019).

Cyryl Polaczek, born 1989 in Zielona Góra. Lives and works in Kraków.

The artist studied painting at the Academies of Fine Arts in Gdańsk (2008–2010), Berlin (2013) and Kraków (2010– 2014). Winner of the main prize of the 11th edition of the Hestia Artistic Journey competition (2012). Institutional group exhibitions include Czas i piana, Academy of Fine Arts Gallery, Kraków (2020); All of Poland. The Journey to the Source of Art (Non-institutional Art Spaces in Poland), BWA Wrocław (2019).

Institutional exhibitions of Potencja include Potencja – Humoral Theory: Quattro Stagioni, Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała (2022); Potencja – Humoral Theory, BWA Zielona Góra (2021).