

Where art meets its subjectivity

Maciej Proliński talks to Aneta Muszyńska, curator of the exhibition project “Spectra Art Space”

PM We are meeting shortly before the “European Night of Museums” – the only such “White Night”, also in Polish cities, showing quite measurably how great is people’s interest in the art. But this is the art’s holiday. And what is in your opinion the art’s ordinary day?

The “European Night of Museums” is a very attractive, unusual and nice event. After all, it is interesting to be able to go in the evening and at night to places that usually are not open at this time. It is also a massive campaign that has an important and somehow nicely unifying social dimension. Ordinary life in this regard is definitely different though. I have been dealing with the promotion of contemporary Polish art phenomena for 25 years. My understanding is that what we have to do now is to answer the question whether we are building the awareness of art among people. In fact being conscious of the need to commune with art is of paramount importance, namely because it entails active participation in the widely understood culture. I am not talking about the level of Polish art and related issues such as various initiatives and foundations. What I mean, and I would to emphasize, is first and foremost building art awareness Polish people.

PM I have always insisted that the most powerful, influential globally recognized Polish brand is culture. A few years ago, we even started to draw a parallel between the words “culture” and “capital”. Do you think that today’s global economic slowdown will affect, I mean obscure, this parallel?

No, I do not agree that the economic crisis will obscure anything here! The “economic downturn” or “crisis” are the buzzwords that have no influence on art. What is impactful, however, is asking embarrassing questions such as: “Why is the point in dealing with culture if we lack orphanages or hospices?” Combining these categories that are completely incommensurate is something simply erroneous! You cannot compare museums to orphanages! Both are needed. Nor can you make the choice between what is “more needed”: something for your spirit, or something for your body. All in all, art it is about making people realize the imperative that creates the necessity.

PM Spectra Art Space has been involved in building art awareness since the beginning of 2013. The project of the Starak Family Foundation draws upon the world’s best practices and aims to create a new, experimental venue dedicated to contemporary art in the office building at 6 Bobrowiecka street in Warsaw. It is something pioneering in Poland. Could you elaborate on that?

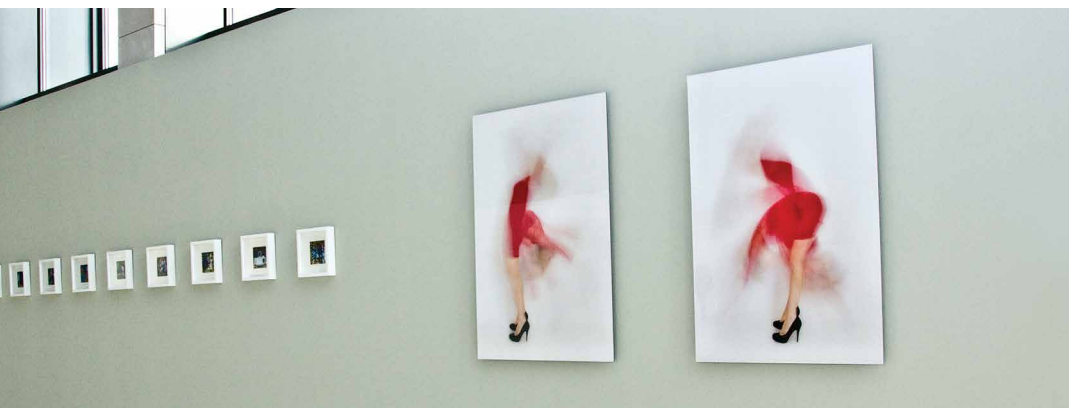
Art has always been meaningful for the human being insofar as it conjured the reality. Art is also such an element of social life that shapes the remaining elements. It is often at the forefront of other social and political developments and trends. That said, art is never maintained “by itself”. It does not earn money. It is a sphere that bears fruit in people’s minds... so it works differently. It is nearly 30 years ago that, in what I call a

“civilization”, the first symptoms of Corporate Social Responsible began to appear.

What does a responsible business do? Responsible business plans long-term projects aimed at achieving the desired effect. Activities of this type have been introduced to serve the purpose of the promotion of art, including mostly contemporary phenomena, which best reflect what is happening in society. Projects like “Art Space” are usually independent units in the company’s structure. Moreover, there are also foundations set up to coordinate all these activities and curator who works out the substantive program, geared to the expectations of the targeted audience. In Spectra Art Space we do something right for the people, that is for those who are here to work every day. Drawing upon the world’s best and proven practices of such corporations as Deutsche Bank or Bloomberg Space, we create a promotional and integrational place, but also a social one – open to all those interested in cultural phenomena.

PM What is the development strategy of Spectra Art Space for the future? What kind of an artistic message have you conveyed so far?

We started in February 2013. In the Spectra building at 6 Bobrowiecka street it was possible to see an interesting photo exhibition “Beyond Time”. This was yet another presentation in the area of contemporary art, held by the Starak Family Foundation. Previously, the Foundation organized two exhibitions featuring works of the young generation of artists: Young Creation Plan “Painting” and Young Creation Plan “Sculpture”. The “Beyond Time” exhibition showcased works of the Polish artists: Ewa Doroszenko, Aleksandra Buczkowska, Dorota Kozieradzka, Agata Michowska, Monika Misztal and Agata Zbylut. In the future we intend to hold three major exhibitions a year, both collective and individual, possibly with one of the celebrities of Polish contemporary art. Exhibitions for the Spectra office building staff and for the residents of Warsaw will be open from 2 to 3 months. I am currently working on the summer exhibition. The development strategy of Spectra Art Space involves artistic and



cultural activities, with the special emphasis on the promotion of young Polish artists. We are also willing to establish cooperation with other similar institutions, as well as to organize guest meetings, combined with guided tours of the exhibition and collections. In addition, we are planning educational activities, workshops, symposia and lectures for employees, visitors and customers. In the long run a library with publications and catalogues on contemporary art is to be created.

PM So your strategy is also to “garnish” this place as far as possible both substantively and educationally?

Creating an art friendly place is not enough to present all the related aspects. We want to give the audience an incentive to further seek the art connotations in a wider context. That is how creative thinking and attitudes are shaped towards other, not merely artistic, phenomena. One employees are linked to art projects, they develop a natural need for dealing with a given phenomenon as well as a greater self-esteem. And that is something which directly affects the creative thinking. What is important is that art education should first teach how to formulate questions. When we are able to ask questions, we are not indifferent to certain matter any more. We do not stick rigidly to our ideas, but we are open to many other issues.

PM Looking at what we are talking today, it seems that we will need to attain the level due to the Central European nations, and to make reference to the thoughts of the previous generations of Poles and the interrupted national tradition. Poles are one of the largest nations in Europe. Poland's population represents a huge strength. It should be remembered that the world's major art collections or design school were created by artists, but also (and even above all!) by the people who understand that the profession of artist has already its bearing, I mean businessmen. So finally, let me ask about Jerzy Starak, the owner of the pharmaceutical company Polpharma and the sixth richest Pole according to the 2013 Forbes list. It must be a sheer pleasure to work with someone who understands the importance of art?

Jerzy Starak is an exceptional person. Not only did he get involved in the project, giving it the green light and the necessary funds, but he also shares his private collection of art with other users of the Spectra building. The collection includes nearly 100 objects of Polish post-war first rate pieces of art: Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Nowosielski, Wojciech Fangor,



Władysław Hasior, Jan Lebenstein, Roman Opalka, Stefan Gierowski. I think that the people who work in the Spectra office building in Warsaw fell a bit like in a museum. They have a direct and daily access to an excellent review of the Polish works of art created after 1945. The selected works are mostly described as outstanding achievements of individual artists. Apart from this special collection, the mere idea and exhibitions held as part of the Spectra Art Space, it is also worth visiting the Spectra building itself. Its architectural project has been mentioned in the prestigious Phaidon Atlas of 21st Century World Architecture. The space dedicated to art is a very special place, too. What I want to say is that this is not a “corridor on the way to the dining room”, but a place has its subjectivity. With the surface of 300m² it was possible to create a really comfortable space for art presentation, and therefore for the fulfillment of the foundation's objectives in terms of promotion and popularization of the contemporary

artistic phenomena. It is worth writing about it. If Mr Starak gives an example, it is possible that other courageous businessmen will follow in his footsteps. It is a norm, a standard thing in elsewhere in the world, while in Poland there are still very few entrepreneurs committed to such long-term investments. I am confident that we are able to reverse these unfavorable trend and to wide open Polish culture to the economy, breaking some existing mental barriers. What we should start with is to build the awareness, the one we talked a little bit today, and that is we are doing. I do invite you to visit the Spectra Art Space! ::

Photo exhibition “Beyond Time” inaugurating exhibition project “Spectra Art Space”
Photo: Ewa Doroszenko

