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Particolare - Art that Sparks Unrest

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Giovanni Anselmo, "Particolare", Marc Domage, 1972 courtesy of Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris

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The exhibition deals with the complex relations between contemporary art and politics, and poses the difficult question of the place of radical art in contemporary democracies. It consists of two main parts: the first historical, and the second covering the here and now. Shown alongside them, the film and photographic works of Stefan Themerson, a member of the 20th-century Polish nonconformist movement and political avant-garde, provides an overarching leitmotif for the whole exhibition.

The first element of the show's title, Particolare, is derived from the work of the Italian artist Giovanni Anselmo. Particolare - 'detail', 'singularity', or, as an adjective, 'specific' - signifies what is individual, separate and exceptional. According to the hero in one of Stefan Themerson's stories, "In a society governed by a minority, Democracy (means) the defence of the rights of the

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oppositional movement and was a cofounder of the *arte povera* style.

Another Italian artist represented in the exhibition, Gilberto Zorio, comes from the same artistic background. They constitute the political and artistic context for all the works presented at the exhibition.

Particolare presents works by artists who, within democratic systems, position themselves critically at the centre of social conflicts and provoke proliferating doubts and question false answers, who intervene in the social space. It is 'art that sparks unrest'. The processes of democratisation in today's societies constantly come up against political struggle and ideological divisions among the powers that be, as well as dangerous manipulations by those in authority who exploit populist, xenophobic and nationalist sentiments. The fundamental mode of operation of radical art in the democracy of contestation is critique, and its method is 'civil disobedience'.

Two watershed dates define the history of contemporary democracy in the exhibition: 1968 and 1989. The year 1968 and the revolts that took place in various parts of the world at that time collectively created a great wave of protest movements directed against an increasingly autonomised authority and alienating culture. In 1989 the world was swept by a wave of revolution and liberation. Notably, in Central and Eastern Europe countries stood up against the mono-party system and Communist governments, building new, grassroots democracies: Poland saw the rise of Solidarity (1980) and in Germany the Berlin Wall came down (1989). The ensuing period of economic and political transformation was difficult in social terms, and remains so today.

The exhibition opens with an installation by Mirosław Bałka, a metaphor of

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It is a first warning and a crucial message, providing an introduction to the whole exhibition. The scene is set by documentary photographs from a 1968 protest in Venice, as well as posters of Lotta Continua and reprints of pages from Venetian daily, *Il Gazzettino*, from the same time. Further on there are also journals, books and an episode from the radio series "Tre colori", based on remixed archival materials of Rai 3 – documents relating to the events of March 1968 in Rome and Venice. On the other side of the room is a video collage projection of clips from the 1977 film, "Una giornata particolare" ("A Special Day"), directed by Ettore Scola, relating to the history of Fascism, a theme that had a particular resonance for Italy in the 1970s, a period of recurring terrorist outrages. Still further there are exhibits relating to the history of Polish "Solidarity": the logo of the movement designed by Jerzy Janiszewski (represented at the exhibition by the first poster to carry the logo, signed by Lech Wałęsa), and a homage - a documentation of a performance by Ewa Partum (1982). Related to the above is a film narrative by Anna Molska, "The Weavers" ("Tkacze", 2009), as well as two works by Andrzej Wróblewski from the cycle "Chaired Woman" ("Ukrzesłowiona", 1957) that serves as a poignant reminder of alienated society under Communist rule.

In democratic society, the presence of the Other is the basis of human rights, which guarantee a sense of people's dignity and worth. Manifestations of intolerance and oppression regarding choices of lifestyle and sexual identity, no matter where they arise and whatever their motivation, are always a grievous threat to democratic freedom. This is the theme of works to be found in the next rooms. They include a film by Józef Robakowski that takes the form of a gay love ballad; then "Majka from the Movie", a TV soap-style story by Zuzanna Janin about a girl rebel who, in the quest to define

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for jobless men whom the artist asked to make paper tulips on which their desires and dreams about work, their families and a better life were printed. Here we also find "The powwow democratic sculpture table for 12" by Gioia Meller Marcovicz, and, on a wall, the ironic inscription by Mladen Stilinović "An artist who cannot speak English is no artist".

The next room is devoted, among other works, to a presentation of 20 films by Artur Żmijewski, from the series "Democracies". The artist documents public protests, demonstrations and gatherings in support of rights and demands, community festivals, religious ceremonies, political parades, sporting events, mass theatrical stagings and celebrations of anniversaries. Żmijewski's short films are displayed next to a selection of Jonasz Stern's graphic works, testimonies of war, of the tragedy of the ghetto and the era of extermination. On the opposite wall we can see three large paper assemblages by Marek Szczęsny, selected from a series of portraits titled "Immigrants". From assemblage forms emerge tense faces marked by expressions of alienation, lost identity, screaming resignation. In the middle of the room, is a work by Gilberto Zorio, "Star of Javelins" ("Stella di giavellotti", 1974). The symbolism of the star touches upon the sources of revolutions, it signifies action and transmutation – it is a lens focusing the most heated disputes. And then, at the end of the room is "The Alien Mouthpiece" ("Porte-parole", 1994) by Krzysztof Wodiczko from his series "Instruments", a device in which an image and voice from a screen, which covers the mouth like a mask, speak of alienation and, beneath the hubbub of false voices, seek words of truth and identity, words unique and particular.

The next room presents the work of three women whose art can be associated with the idea of political anthropology. The works displayed here

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installation, "I Am Become Death", 2009). All three artists deal with the dependencies and relations of power in the field of cultures and civilizations in the broadest meaning of these terms. Their themes are the conflicts that arise at the intersection of national and ethnic cultures and issues of sexuality and gender, religious wars and fanaticism, the place of minorities and of exclusions, the meaning of memory and crises, and the rites and ceremonies of the contemporary world.

The exhibition comes to a close with an installation by Angelika Markul ("Confessione", 2011). It is a kind of minimal form recalling modernist elementary structures. Here, however, it assumes the shape of a real walk-through body scanner of the kind used to screen people at airports or at the entrance to museums or large concert halls, except for one telling feature - it leads nowhere.

In different places around the exhibition space we come upon Particolare by Giovanni Anselmo, the work from which the exhibition takes its title. It is a continuous project started by the artist in 1972 and still evolving. The latest rendition of the work, installed in Palazzo Donà, was specially commissioned by the Signum Foundation. It is titled "**Particolare. Mentre la luce focalizza.....**" (1972-2011) and consists of three projectors and three slides. This most recent version has been located by the author in the courtyard and in the Gothic Room. the idea of the ongoing project as a whole is to make us aware that reality can be seen as the sum of its individual components, as a multiplicity of details, gaps and exceptions, but will never be grasped in all its infiniteness. The world, man, things and life, as Anselmo adds elsewhere, are all forces in action. The important thing is that they should not petrify into an immobile form fixed once and for all.

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testimony reaches even what is most deeply hidden, its criticism does not fear any truth, its disobedience knows no law. If democracy is a means of improving collective life (rather than a political utopia), and politics ensures a socially desired order (rather than political power), then radical art sparks that unrest without which democracy as a form of critical participation in the collective project would be unthinkable.

The exhibition is a second presentation of works from the collection of the Signum Foundation and by artists closely connected to the Signum Foundation - the first one, "**Awake and Dream**", organised in 2009, marked the inauguration of the foundation's presence in Venice. **Particolare** shows another, but equally important facet of the collection and its meaning. While the notion of desire determined the choice of works for the previous exhibition, the crucial problem of the present one is the participation of the artist in the community, the place of the art object in democracy. The shift in emphasis is also an apposition, a venture to voice different aspects of the same stance. In the social space, the ethics of desire means equality, justice and freedom, or the desire for democracy, for responsible participation in public life. Both concepts run in parallel with the two main fields of social activity of the Signum Foundation, which through the emotions (the desires and needs of the concrete and particular individual) and through argument (human rights and a critique of threats) is open to the Other and to the Collectivity.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue in English and Italian (with a text insert in Polish), published in collaboration with Marsilio Editori. Texts by: Giorgio Agamben, Federica Barozzi, Germano Celant, Cesare De Michelis, Grzegorz Musiał, Elisa Prete, Kacper Przyborowski, Andrzej Turowski, Andrzej Wirth.

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Janin, Jerzy Janiszewski, Katarzyna Kozyra, Zona Kuлік, Gosnka Macuga, Angelika Markul, Gioia Meller Marcovicz, Anna Molska, Ewa Partum, Józef Robakowski, Jonasz Stern, Mladen Stilinović, Marek Szczęsny, Stefan i Franciszka Themerson, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Andrzej Wróblewski, Gilberto Zorio, Artur Żmijewski

The exhibition opens June 3 and runs through November 26, 2011 at the Pallazo Donà, Venice.

Source: Andrzej Turowski - from the exhibition guide

For more information, see: www.signum.art.pl

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