

# POLAND'S NEW GENERATION ART

by Xanthi Skoulariki

*As the new art season unveils, three contemporary artists from Poland are introduced to the London art scene for the first time at an exhibition organised by the Calvert 22 Foundation, curiously titled 'The Forgetting of Proper Names'. Wojciech Bakowski, Anna Molska and Agnieszka Polska are turning heads with their galvanic, fresh art show.*

"The Forgetting of Proper Names" is a two-month show opening on 25 January that focuses on Poland's vibrant contemporary art and culture and which explores the way the past is reshaped over time and reinterpreted as it crosses cultural boundaries. The main event is an exhibition of three young Polish artists who show for the first time in London: **Wojciech**

**Bakowski** (b. 1979), **Anna Molska** (b. 1983) and **Agnieszka Polska** (b. 1985). These artists primarily work with the moving image and cross-discipline methods. Hence, there will also be performance, screenings, literary readings and discussion that explore the artist's innovative engagement with the avant-garde's history and Poland's changing social conditions today. Now in their late twenties and early thirties, Bakowski, Molska and Polska grew up in post-communist Poland. Although close in age and sharing a use of media and materials, each artist interacts with their subject in individualised and diverse way.

The artists, presented as part of this particular exhibition employ in their practice the

contemplative and introspective, rather than restorative, more romantic type of nostalgic attitude. This in turn provides a counterpoint to, and makes comment on, an ever elusive contemporaneous style, which refers to a rapidly changing order that undermines any notions of durability and implies a sense of rootlessness. If nostalgia is a yearning for a home then where there is desire, it follows there must be a lack, a need. Further, a consideration of nostalgia, melancholy and loss in the constitution of personal and cultural identity leads to issues of such 'lack' as central to the construction of subjectivity, the formation of personality and the creative development of artistic signature. This becomes

important when thinking of the younger generation of Polish artists in the context of the historical and political realm after the collapse of the binary geopolitical world structure in 1989.

In her animated videos, by juxtaposing archival black and white photographs of performances, actions and spaces, illustrations from old textbooks and vintage magazines, **Agnieszka Polska** conducts and performs her private research into the archaeology of modernism, whilst simultaneously attempting to identify and analyse the nature of remembering and forgetting. Polska's monochromatic video work, based upon poor black and white photographs, further questions the intentions

WOJCIECH BAKOWSKI,  
TAKE A MINUTE, 2011

AGNIESZKA POLSKA,  
PLUNDERER'S DREAM, 2011

AGNIESZKA POLSKA,  
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of creating the history of art through visual analysis and historical study, as well as erroneous memories and the misreading of history.

A graduate of the now legendary workshop of Grzegorz Kowalski at The Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, **Anna Molska's** work embodies Kowalski's conceptual and multidimensional educational approach. This, in turn, was shaped under the influence of Oskar Hansen, an architect, urban designer, utopian visionary and author of the humanist 'Open Form' manifesto (1959) written as a reaction to 'stagnant' modernist form, which encouraged partnership and collective authorship within creativity.

In contrast to collective, cultural memory, or external memory related to history,

personal memory is expressed in the context of events related to the private individual and autobiographical memories of the self. For **Wojciech Bakowski**, the subject and period of nostalgia is located in the time of his early youth/childhood, the particularly fascinating, yet bleak decade of the 1980s – that time of active resistance against totalitarian, communist speech, of social transformations, the birth of Solidarity, the imposition of martial law and the ensuing general shortage of goods. Reflecting upon everyday rituals, as well as the realm of the artist's own consciousness, **Bakowski** is perhaps the most prolific and visible protagonist of the vibrant Poznań art and music community. He operates across multiple platforms, as the founding member of

bands KOT and NIWEA, and a member of artists' group Penerstwo.

The commemorative, as well as contemplative and, to a degree, celebratory nature of **Bakowski, Molska, and Polska's** art on the one hand reflects a cul-de-sac: the impossibility of a full analysis or definitive construing of the past, and on the other, honours a 'forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity'. A 'forgetting' that is crucial to the formation of autobiographical, individual memory, which retains its holistic and prescriptive nature.

*The curator, Lina Džuverović, further explains "For better or worse, the artists in The Forgetting of Proper Names are as much children of the former East as they are children*

*of the former West and the complexities of their modus operandi are the complexities of today's globalised cultural arena. The exhibition is filled with narratives, which through both personal and collective memory give us an enormous insight into contemporary Poland but also reflect how a young generation of artists is negotiating a tricky and often precarious relationship with the past, the present and the West".*

The Forgetting of Proper Names is co-curated by Dominik Czechowski and is accompanied by an in-depth publication, digital resources, curator and artist gallery talks, and a special performance by Wojciech Bakowski.

*The Forgetting of Proper Names*  
25 January – 18 March  
[calvert22.org](http://calvert22.org)



AGNIESZKA  
POLSKA,  
SENSITISATION  
TO COLOUR, 2010

ANNA MOLSKA, JESUS  
LOVES ME, 2005