



**Grief
encounter:
Anna
Molska's
'The
Mourners'
(2010)**

COURTESY
FOKSAL
GALLERY
FOUNDATION

VISUAL ARTS

The Forgetting of Proper Names

Calvert 22, London



By **LAURA McLEAN-FERRIS**

A young blonde woman in a teensy white bandeau top is singing straight to a video camera that "Jesus loves me for the Bible tells me so". But her singing is woozily distorted and alarming, and her words muddle our expectations of the song. She sings about how Jesus will bring her a fancy car and a wedding ring. And this: "Jesus loves me but not my wife, not my nigger friends or their nigger lives". Her face starts to become mutated, as though seen through a fish eye lens, bulbous and strange, as though a different self is trying to burst out of her. The woman is, in fact, the artist Anna Molska, one of three Polish artists included in *The Forgetting of Proper Names*, exhibiting work from a country that has been highly influential in contemporary art over the past few years.

Wojciech Bakowski's film, which one has to climb into a small cabin to watch, is a set of abstract animations – flickering squares, lines and circles, accompanied by a tense narration.

"Everything is unstable in all directions," he says, "it's starting to get on my nerves."

Agnieszka Polska's film *Medical Gymnastics* (2008) uses old photographs of young people exercising and animates them, so that they elegantly lift their arms and legs as though exercise was nothing strenuous at all, but simply a display of beauty. In another film, *How the Work is Done* (2011), she restages a 1956 student occupation of an art school in Krakow by creating stand-ins for the students, using clothes laid out in the shapes of bodies.

Yet my favourite work here is Molska's *The Mourners* (2010), a film depicting a group of professional mourners talking and singing in a sculpture gallery. Dressed in ugly puffy coats to keep out the bitter cold, they laugh, cry and tell stories, tickle each other and roll around like friendly, padded sages.

Shows curated by country are always tricky. There's no necessary connection between the artists and no particular theme. However, the three artists in this exhibition all have a sense of a constructed world vulnerable to change that is deeply rooted in history – something that does seem tied to a generation that has grown up in a country remaking itself after communism. The worlds that these artists create are off-kilter, nonsequacious and fantastical, presented in a deadpan, everyday fashion.

To 18 March (020 7613 2141)