

Such Feeling

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Such Feeling is a gathering of choreographic meditations on the structures and queer politics of touch, desire, pleasure, and sensuality by Alex Baczynski-Jenkins. The Polish-British artist and choreographer deploys micro-gestures, dance, and poetic texts to engage with embodiment and relationality.

To speak of his work thus entails speaking of queer sensuousness and sociality, the affective charge between bodies, and the collectivities these constitute.

As the first exhibition to chart the persistent concerns found within the artist's practice, *Such Feeling* includes three of Baczynski-Jenkins's performances conceived between 2014 and 2018. These are presented, one per weekend, during special opening hours, for the three-week duration of the exhibition. Alongside them, the artist premieres his first film, newly commissioned by Kunsthalle Basel, and extending his choreographic thinking to create what the artist considers a "cine-performance."

To experience Baczynski-Jenkins's exhibition, one first encounters a large projection screen that has been installed in the institution's stairwell. This site of the projection, together with recurring shots of thresholds and transitions featured in the film, thematizes the notion of an intermediate space. Introducing a visual language to express the themes of desire and community prevalent in the artist's work, the film functions as a prologue to his performances, a welcoming of the visitor: "You are a guest now, in the house of my love. Welcome," recites one of the performers from his bedroom window. These are the words of poet Ezra Green, whose touching and timely 2018 work *A Poem to the Nationalist Marcher (For the queer people of Warsaw)* lends its title to Baczynski-Jenkins's first film, *Faggots, Friends, and A Poem to the Nationalist Marcher*, 2019.

Adopting the style of a nonnarrative documentary fiction, the film is "a chronicle of a summer" and of the relationships between three performers and their environment. The film unfolds a larger social, political, and affective reality pertinent to certain communities in current-day Poland, in other words, pertinent to life under the rule of a right-wing government and its entrenched ideologies. A 1930s villa in Warsaw hosts the three protagonists as they pass an indeterminate amount of time, sheltered, tenderly articulating care for each other. The figure of the villa alludes to ideas of homemaking in hostile

Alex Baczynski-Jenkins
Kunsthalle Basel

27.09. –
13.10.
2019

Performance times

*Until a thousand roses bloom
(with Warsaw in the background), 2018*

Thurs 26.9.2019 7–9:30 pm

Sat 28.9.2019 2–5 pm

Sun 29.9.2019 2–5 pm

Untitled (Holding Horizon), 2018

Thurs 3.10.2019 5:30–8:30 pm

Sat 5.10.2019 2–6 pm

Sun 6.10.2019 2–5 pm

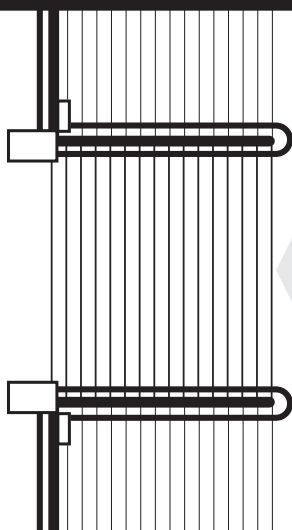
Us Swerve, 2014

Thurs 10.10.2019 5:30–8:30 pm

Sat 12.10.2019 2–5 pm

Sun 13.10.2019 2–5 pm

*Faggots, Friends, and A Poem
to the Nationalist Marchers, 2019*



Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background), 2018
Performance

3 hrs.

In collaboration with and performed by Ewa Dziarnowska, Agata Grabowska, Joseph Funnell, Billy Morgan, Rafał Pierzynski, Filip Rutkowski, and Katarzyna Szugajew
Artistic advisor and production manager: Eliel Jones
Set design in collaboration with Małgorzata Nawrocka
Live sound: Krzysztof Baginski
Sound research: Filip Lech, DUNNO Recordings
Originally commissioned and produced by Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw, 2018

Untitled (Holding Horizon), 2018

Performance

3 hrs.

In collaboration with and performed by Ewa Dziarnowska, Rafal Pierzynski, Sigrid Stigsdatter Mathiassen, and Agata Grabowska
Artistic advisor and production manager: Eliel Jones
Live sound and lighting: Krzysztof Baginski
Sound research: Tobias Koch, Filip Lech, and Jana Androsova
Developed as part of Kem's residency at Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art, Warsaw
Originally commissioned and produced for the Frieze Artist Award, London, 2018

Us Swerve, 2014

Performance

3 hrs.

In collaboration with and performed by Zachariah Fletcher, Carlos Maria Romero, and Jake Sherwood
Artistic advisor and production manager: Eliel Jones
Originally commissioned and produced by Liste – Art Fair Basel, 2014

Faggots, Friends, and A Poem to the Nationalist Marcher, 2019

HD video, color, sound

53 min. 55 sec., in loop

Artistic advisor and production manager: Eliel Jones

Cinematographer: Krzysztof Baginski

Producer: Ola Knychalska

Editor: Sue Giovanni

Performers: Agata Grabowska, Billy Morgan, and Filip Rutkowski

Poem: *A Poem to the Nationalist Marcher* (2018) by Ezra Green, originally commissioned by Kem for Parliament of Bodies/*Black Milk*, which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw on Polish Independence Day, 11 November 2018

Sound editor: Konrad Błaszczuk

Music: Jaś Rabiej, Gracjan Smolinski

Styling: Rafał Domagała

Camera assistant: Piotr Januszkiewicz

Sound recordists: Anna Rok, Jakub Jaworski, Ola Landsmann, and Wojciech Skrzypczynski

Subtitles: Samuel Reynolds

Filmed in Warsaw and Białystok, PL, in the summer of 2019

Commissioned and produced by Kunsthalle Basel, 2019

With thanks to Anton Ambroziak, Sasza Goluk, Romain Hamard, Jakub Jakielaszek, Ian Kaler, Michal Kawecki, Ola Kluczyk, Zoi Michaelova, Adam Repucha, Tim Steer, Paulina Szczepanska, and Agnieszka Tarasiuk

With special thanks to Królikarnia – Xawery Dunikowski Museum of Sculpture Warsaw, who provided their spaces and sculpture collection for several scenes in this film; Teczowy Białystok, who organized the city's first ever LGBT+ march with resilient pride; and to the inhabitants of Willa Bolesława Pietrusińskiego, Warsaw, who so generously opened their home for our production

environments and also invokes a past that haunts the present, and a present that still lives in the past. Instants of idyll are interrupted by images of the first LGBTQ pride march in Białystok, which was, de facto, a protest during which the very real threat that queer communities face is palpable. Shot—and seen—as if through a lens of desire, the film dazzles with the way bodies, care, and collectivity form a queer utopia.

The film is a response to the urgency of a specific political moment, when in Poland, the artist's home country, the very fact of being queer runs counter to the church and current government's notion of what constitutes a valuable and (re)productive member of society. At a time when certain communities have been rendered enemies of state, the film asks: What kind of expression and modes of relating are viable forms of resistance in such a context? The film mobilizes intimacy as a form of micro-politics; it is intended to inoculate visitors with its imagery as they enter and exit the exhibition space proper, surrounding the performances within it like an embrace.

The first choreography to be presented is *Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background)*, 2018, in which eroticism and pleasure take center stage. Two hands graze one another, mouth approaches mouth (the kiss never landing), bodies undulate, rituals of sensual encounters are played out. Masculinities and femininities caress against a calculatedly wild landscape of sand, dried branches, and flowers; a soundtrack composed of extracts from Urszula Sipińska's 1972 romantic ballad *Nim Zakwitnie Tysiąc Róż* (Until a Thousand Roses Bloom) forms the core sonic backdrop.

The romantic ballad accompanies what might be the artist's most camp choreography. It insists on the feminine and queer by taking on those qualities that long have been used as insults—the decorative, “flowery” queer and the feminine as always already “too sensitive,” “too superficial,” with a love of the superfluity of “silly materials.” These are embodied by red, hand-held fans and silky fabric, cabaret props that reference a history of queer performance, and that billow in the artificial wind of industrial fans. Here, too, the everyday is imbued with a utopian potential and latent queer histories.

In all of Baczynski-Jenkins's pieces, each gesture conveys a paradoxical sense that no matter how small or seemingly insignificant,

it has been minutely choreographed and rehearsed. Conversely, the gestures also appear to be improvised by actors who know each other so well as to be able to carry their own relationships amongst each other into the piece. The result is a sort of rigorous openness. There is no beginning or end to the pieces, no dramatic climax, and, indeed, most of the artist's works are demanding in their duration, often running several hours. The performances enthrall by alternately rendering visitors passive viewers or complicit voyeurs as they observe scenes of cruising set in various topographies of desire.

In the second performance on view, *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*, 2018, a neon sign, created by Kem, a collective co-founded by the artist, stands at the entrance of the space. The sign was used for Dragana Bar, a queer bar operated by the group during the summer of 2018 and that occupied the same space in which *Untitled (Holding Horizon)* was developed. When the audience enters the upstairs space this time, it is cloaked in darkness, immediately conveying the sense that one is entering not an exhibition space, but such private-yet-public spaces of social interaction as a club or a backroom. Surfaces disappear in darkness where only a single colored light helps eyes adjust to the scene. It is a place where music blares and bodies throb, coming together toward the center of the room, then moving apart, sometimes slowly, sometimes with quickened pace and to the music, as if in a swarm. Shared, synchronized movements coexist with moments of slippage into individualization. In the process, the performers both affect, and become affected by, the live sound and lighting effects.

If choreographing relationality is integral to the artist's practice, so, too, is poetic language pivotal to the way most of Baczynski-Jenkins's pieces are articulated. This is performance that makes manifest the materiality of language. It actualizes French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes's notion that “Language is a skin,” expressing what the philosopher adds by way of explanation: “I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire.” Baczynski-Jenkins's mingling of bodies and language literally trembles with desire. In *Us Swerve*, 2014, the last of the performances to be presented in the exhibition, performers rollerblade in an empty space while reciting fragments of poetry by writers ranging from Eileen Myles to Langston Hughes. The resampled poetic composition, delivered

throughout the duration of the performance, voices queer desire.

Poland (literally or figuratively) forms the backdrop to the exhibition as a whole, and most explicitly in the film and in the performance *Until a thousand roses bloom (with Warsaw in the background)*. The country's presence is pointed and deliberate, standing in for the broader political threat confronting the subjects of Baczynski-Jenkins's film and performances. In the context of a place whose current policy makers seek to devalue and eradicate queer social life, the choreographer and his collaborators advance private desire and vulnerability as a political act. They offer what the writers Stefano Harney and Fred Moten call "the interiority of sentiment, the feeling that what is to come is here. Hapticality, the capacity to feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you." Such feeling is vital, and, in turn, *Such Feeling* is vital, because it is a project that is meant to invite its public into a situation of longing, but necessarily also of action.

Alex Baczynski-Jenkins was born in 1987 in London; he lives and works in London and Warsaw.

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GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Every Sunday at 3 pm guided tour, in German, except on Sundays when the curator's tour takes place

Curator's tour with Elena Filipovic, in English
6.10.2019, Sunday, 3 pm

SPECIAL EVENTS

Newly reopened Kunsthalle Bar (at Restaurant Kunsthalle)
Open every Thursday from 6 pm
With DJs, readings, and events until December 5, 2019, in collaboration with Culturescapes
Overlapping with his exhibition, Alex Baczynski-Jenkins invites Kem collective affiliated DJs.

26.9.2019, Thursday, 8:30 pm with Zoi Michailova
aka DJ Facherioia

3.10.2019, Thursday, 8:30 pm with Jaś Rabiej aka jsa

10.10.2019, Thursday, 8:30 pm with Mukuna (Somatic Rituals)

In the Kunsthalle Basel library you will find a selection of publications related to Alex Baczynski-Jenkins.

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More information at kunsthallebasel.ch