

# UNDER THE SURFACE. The illustrated world of Joanna Concejo

Dates: 21 January – 3 April 2022

Opening: 21 January 2022 from 6.00 PM to 9.00 PM

Venue: 4G, Szeroka 37 Street

Artist: Joanna Concejo

Curator: Adrian Chorebała

Coordinator: Agnieszka Baaske

Visual identification: Anna Witkowska

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday 12.00 PM – 6.00 PM

Joanna Concejo's illustrations lure the viewer with their attention to detail and melancholy of the passing time, evoking the scent of childhood with their narrative power. Rather than to be watched, these illustrations are to be read and absorbed with all senses, bridging imagination with reality. Concejo creates her graphic worlds through understatement and ambiguity, frequently taking the perspective of a child. Naivety of the innocent look justifies the surrealistic motifs and moving beyond the logic of grownups. Yet often the perspective turns out to be dominated by nature, with plants and rootstalks moving to the foreground of the setting. The illustrated world is subtle yet marked by raw naturality and saturated in stories.

"Illustrating is not about depicting what has been written. I have to desacralise the text in order to compose my own story on its basis, because ultimately this is all I've got. If I draw what's important to me, there's a chance that it will catch someone's attention. The writer's text and my story together give rise to a new value" explains Concejo.

Concejo often makes use of archetypal stories, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Wild Swans*. Her books can be viewed as philosophical treatises: *Kiedy dojrzeją porzeczki* (When the Blackcurrants Ripen), *The Lost Soul* created jointly with Olga Tokarczuk, or *Książę w cukierni* (Prince in the Pastry Shop) with the text by Marek Bieńczyk. She does not shun difficult subjects such as the Holocaust, which she approaches in her book *Humo* (Smoke). Her books have been published in Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Korea, Romania and Mexico. This proves that her stories have a universal potential while maintaining a very unique and lyrical style, with a healthy dash of a sense of humour.

The exhibition called "Under the surface" invites the audience to Joanna Concejo's unique world, showing her work in an original way. Visitors will be able to literally enter into Concejo's illustrations and learn some of the secrets of her trade: from scaling techniques through cut-outs and embroidery, to interactive installations

showing popular motifs from her works in form of a game played with the audience. One of the exhibition's go-to spots is a reading room equipped with Joanna Concejo's books, and the whole exhibition area is designed as a refuge from the rush of the external world for both young and old readers.

**Joanna Concejo** was born in 1971 in Słupsk, Poland. She spent her childhood in a small village attending the school and helping her family around the house. When she was 15, she left for Koszalin to go to the artistic high school, where she was remembered as a diligent and hardworking student. After graduation, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań at the Faculty of Graphic Art. She took a break after the first year and went to France. The leave turned out to be longer than expected, and when she returned to Poland to complete her studies, she was already married with a daughter. In 1998, she obtained a degree in drawing and illustration and moved to France where she tried to find her place in the artistic world – somewhere between the birth of her son, washing clothes and cooking.

Her installations caught attention in 2002, earning her an invitation to the Busan Biennale in Korea. A year later, she showed her work in the contemporary art exhibition in Chelles, France. The subsequent years brought a few more opportunities for showing her works to a larger audience (Plattform Gallery in Berlin, Public Gallery in Paris), but at the same time, whether by fate or her own indecision, her enthusiasm slowly faded away and dissolved in the prose of life. For a couple of years, she only kept drawing a little.

In 2004, she sent her drawings to Bologna Children's Book Fair and qualified to the illustrators' exhibition; this was the beginning of her career as a book illustrator.

Since then, she has participated in a number of collective exhibitions: *The Emperor's New Illustration*, Bologna, Italy (2005); *Figures Futures*, Montreuil, France; *Blue Book*, Iran; *Le imagini della fantasia*, Sarmede, Italy (2008, 2010 and 2015); *Tea with Alice*, Oxford, UK (2012); *It's always the tea time*, Estonian Children's Literature Centre in Tallin, Estonia (2015); *L'illustration des contes*, Centre André François in Margny-lès-Compiègne, France (2015); *Little Red Riding Hood and others*, City Library in Eragny, France (2016); *Little Red Riding Hood*, Centre Una Volta, Bastia, Corsica, France (2017); *L'œil intérieur*, Serpent Vert Gallery, Paris, France (2019).

Solo exhibitions: *Attorno al giardino*, Hamelin, Bologna, Italy (2008); exhibition at Médiathèque in Saint-Herblain, France (2011); *Un pas à la fois*, Nei rami in Bologna (2013); *Les visages du lointain*, Musée Beurnier-Rossel in Montbéliard, France (2014); *Dans l'atelier de Joanna Concejo*, Angle Gallery in Saint Paul Trois Châteaux, France (2015); *Historie osobne* (Peculiar Stories), Artrakt Gallery in Wrocław, Poland (2015); *La Fabrique des images de Joanna Concejo* in Nougaterie Soubayran, Montélimar, France (2017); *The picture garden in winter*, Albus Gallery in Seoul, Korea (2017); *Histoires fragiles* in the Robillard Gallery, Paris, France (2018); *Zgubiona dusza - jestem, rysuję* at Dom Słów, Lublin, Poland (2018), *Concetto*, Galeria UA, Poznań,

Poland (2018); exhibition as part of Biennale des Illustrateurs (Illustrators' Biennale) in Moulins, France (2019).

Joanna Concejo regularly works with Le Petit Atelier de Paris in the field of functional design and ceramics. She collaborates with various illustration schools, including Ars In Fabula, Macerata and Scuola Internazionale dell'Illustrazione Stepan Zavrel, Sarmede, Italy, and also with La Petite Galerie in Reims and the Robillard Gallery in Paris, France.

Her books have been published in Italy, France, Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Korea, Romania and Mexico. She has also worked with various magazines, such as DPI (Taiwan), Tiny Pencils (UK), Influencia (France), Kukbuk (Poland) and many others. In 2017, she took part in IKEA Art Event with nine other artists to create an original drawing for the event.

She collaborates with Wydawnictwo Literackie, Poland as the book cover designer and illustrator of books by Olga Tokarczuk.

#### Books:

*Il signor Nessuno*, Topipittori

*Grand et petit*, L'Atelier du Poisson Soluble

*L'Angelo delle scarpe*, Topipittori

Humo, OOO; Polish edition: *Dym (Smoke)*, TAKO

*Au clair de la nuit*, Motus

*Cuando no encuentras tu casa*, OOO

*I cigni selvatici*, Topipittori; Polish edition: *Dzikie łabędzie (The Wild Swans)*, TAKO

*Entrez!*, Rouergue

*Zimbo*, OOO

*Una stella nel buio*, Topipittori

*Un pas à la fois*, Notari

*Les fleurs parlent*, Casterman

*Les visages du lointain*, Notari

*Książę w cukierni (Prince in a Pastry Shop)*, Format, Wrocław

*Little Red Riding Hood*, BIR Publishing; Polish edition: *Czerwony Kapturek*, Tako

*Quand les groseilles seront mûres*, L'Atelier du Poisson Soluble; Polish edition:

*Kiedy dojrzeją porzeczki (When the Blackcurrants Ripen)*, Wolno

*Zgubiona dusza (The Lost Soul)*, Wydawnictwo Format, Wrocław

*Ne le dis à personne*, Wydawnictwo Format, Wrocław (French edition)

#### Coming soon:

*M*, Topipittori, Italy

*Senegal*, L'Atelier du Poisson Soluble, France

Awards:

- Calabria Encantata (2004)
- 2013 IBBY Poland Book of the Year Award for illustrations to *Książę w cukierni* (Prince in a Pastry Shop)
- Distinction in the Fiction category in the 2018 edition of Bologna Ragazzi Award for *The Lost Soul*
- 2021 Grand Prix d'illustration Award from Musée d'illustration Jeunesse in Moulins, France, for *Sénégal*, L'Atelier du Poisson Soluble

She received the scholarship from the French National Book Centre (CNL) for the following books:

- *Quand les groseilles seront mûres* (When the Blackcurrants Ripen) in 2013
- *Sénégal* in 2016

**Authors of the multimedia installations: tajny\_projekt**

A creative design studio specialising in multimedia installations and applying new technologies to art and design. Using Kinect detector, hologram, 2.5D animation, programming and custom solutions, the collective strives to find the optimum form of presenting just about an idea.

**Author of the mural: Bartek Buczek**

Bartek Buczek (b. 1987) received the scholarship from the National Found for Children. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice where he studied under Andrzej Tobis. Professional easel painter, second hand bookseller, amateur cyclist, gallery worker with a variety of skills (doing technical, exhibition, artistic, arranging and curating jobs), creator of video art and installations, author of texts (including the book *Za drogie, za słabe, zbyt trudne* [Too expensive, too poor, too difficult] owned by Cracow's Bunkier Sztuki Gallery). Buczek's erudite art, often going beyond painting frames, draws on melancholy deeply in existential reflexion. He is broadly interested in the human being – specifically in himself. Although he has not developed a strict artistic strategy, since 2020 he has consistently focused on panegyric art devoted to his favourite work tools. He has had 8 solo exhibitions and has participated in 33 collective exhibitions in numerous art galleries.

Partners:



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