

THESES ON HOPE

#10 Karol Radziszewski: One Day These Kids...

10 February–15 April 2023

Between Bridges is delighted to host an exhibition by Warsaw-based artist Karol Radziszewski. Challenging predominant historical narratives and their prevalent modes of representation, Radziszewski's multidisciplinary and archive-based practice convenes a myriad of political, social, religio-cultural and art-historical references, probing their relation to the history of sexuality and the construction of gender. The exhibition presents an array of newly conceived works, extended series, and an extensive public programme. All of these highlight Radziszewski's idiosyncratic methodology of assembling and sharing historically marginalised queer practices across Central and Eastern European countries, as well as his current preoccupation with portrait painting that looks beyond dominant modes of representation.

Continuing his ongoing investigations into the normative logics and politics of institutions, for the exhibition *One Day These Kids...*, Radziszewski has conceived an expansive site-specific installation that alludes to a conventional 1990s Polish classroom and its habitual visual language; it is a space that reiterates a queerness-excluding historiography and a conception of nation-state-based cultural heritage. Echoing and yet eschewing these traditions, Radziszewski employs the exhibition space to speculate on alternative pedagogical models that might have or could be centered around underrepresented or repudiated queer histories, desires and bonds. The exhibition title refers to David Wojnarowicz's epochal 1990 Photostat *Untitled (One Day This Kid...)*, in which a portrait of the prepubescent artist is surrounded by prospective accounts of homophobic violence. The work was presented at the inaugural Between Bridges exhibition in London in 2006, and Radziszewski acknowledges the continuity and plurality of Wojnarowicz's experience. At the same time, he sets out to re-imagine world-making without sexuality- or gender-based violence, and in doing so argues that the representation of the history of queerness is not only important because it shows a reality but because it builds it.

The two gallery spaces are structured around the series *The Classroom* (2023), fourteen school desks, sourced from a Polish educational facility. Radziszewski has transformed these desks into sculptural surfaces on which he both paints and creates collages with images and documents that are closely related to his research on queer historiographies. Such research is evident in two long-term projects: the first is *DIK Magazine*, a periodical founded, published and edited by Radziszewski since 2005 – and to this date the only Central and Eastern European art magazine to focus on male homosexuality (it later expanded its framework to queerness). The second is the *Queer Archives Institute*, a para-institution founded in 2015 by Radziszewski as “non-profit, artist-run organisation dedicated to research, collection, digitalisation, presentation, exhibition, analysis and artistic interpretation of queer archives, with a special focus on Central and Eastern Europe”. Assembling traces of explicit or suggestive queer desire and dissidence across time and space, both projects embrace personal encounters, friendships and infatuations with artists, critical thinkers and activists, many of which feature in this exhibition.

In the gallery space on the ground level, Radziszewski presents twenty framed reproductions from his series *The Gallery of Portraits* (2020 – ongoing). They recall the common practice of installing reproductions of portrait paintings of historically significant – and government-approved – figures in Polish classrooms. The series is itself an extension of his monumental *Poczet* (2017), composed of twenty-two ancestral portraits of non-heteronormative Polish figures from the past millennium. It includes a range of persons from across Central and Eastern Europe, reaffirming an expression of queerness that has to a large extent been suppressed or erased from their biographies. They include:

Polish-born nobleman and American military commander Kazimierz Pułaski (1745–1779); Estonian poet Kristian Jaak Petereson (1801–1822); Ukrainian writer, artist, and ethnographer Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861); Hungarian painter-philosopher László Mednyánszky (1852–1919); Ukrainian writer and feminist Olha Kobylanska (1863–1942); Ukrainian poet, playwright and activist Lesya Ukrainka (1871–1913); Czech poet, writer and literary critic Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic (1871–

1951); Croatian artists Nasta Rojc (1883–1964); Latvian stage and silent film actress Marija Leiko (1887–1938); Romanian composer and pianist Clara Haskil (1895–1960); Slovak gay rights advocate Imrich Matyáš (1896–1974); Czech artist Toyen (1902–1980); Romanian painter Magdalena Rădulescu (1902–1983); Slovenian writer and lawyer Ljuba Prenner (1906–1977); Lithuanian artist and photographer Veronika Šleivyte (1906–1998); Armenian film director, screenwriter and artist Sergei Parajanov (1924–1990); Lithuanian poet and translator Janina Degutyte (1928–1990); Belarussian chess player Eugenij Ruban (1941–1997); Lithuanian photographer Virgilijus Šonta (1952–1992); and Polish physicist, member of the Solidarity movement and transgender activist Ewa Hołuszko (1950–).

In the same space, Radziszewski presents two additional paintings that refer to what are considered the two “Polish Stonewalls”. Citing the aesthetics of a chalk board, *Hiacynt* (2023) directs attention to the significance of the *Akcja “Hiacynt”* (Operation “Hyacinth”), a mass police action that took place in 1985–87 and aimed to create a database of all Polish homosexuals. Yet as well as emigration and secrecy, it also enabled a counter-movement, including the formation of the *Warszawski Ruch Homoseksualny* (Warsaw Gay Movement). Positioned in such a way as to reference the classroom portraits of political or religious leaders is the painting *Margot* (2020). It features the non-binary activist whose arrest after damaging a truck that displayed homophobic slogans initiated a national and transnational wave of protest against the Polish government and its brutal and authoritarian infringements of basic human rights of LGBT+ communities.

Installed in the staircase is *Self-portrait* (2019), depicting the artist at the age of nine as a princess. It is part of *1989* (2017 – ongoing) for which Radziszewski has transferred his sketchbook childhood drawings mostly of femme and effeminate figures and creatures, amongst a few religious or governmental citations, made during a period of momentous political and social transition onto a series of paintings and murals.

A second classroom is installed in the downstairs gallery, framed by three new portraits of non-heteronormative educators that belong to *The Gallery of Portraits*. The first features the painter and founding member of the Munich Secession Paul Hoecker (1854 in Oberlangengau, today part of the Lower Silesian Voivodeship – 1910 in Munich); Hoecker was appointed professor to the Munich Academy in 1891 and was considered one of the first “modern” teachers there, resigning in 1897 in the wake of a scandal that claimed he had used a male prostitute as a model for one of his Madonna paintings. The second portrait is of the painter, graphic artist and performer Krzysztof Jung (1951 in Warsaw – 1998 in Warsaw), today considered the precursor of Polish queer art, who was economically forced to become a high school art teacher and became renowned for his unconventional teaching methodologies. The third depicts literary scholar Maria Janion (1926 in Mońki – 2020 in Warsaw), known for her infamous seminars that shaped generations of feminists and critical thinkers across and beyond Poland. Janion was a fierce supporter of queer-feminist and anti-racist movements, who publicly came out as a lesbian at the age of 91. A second chalk-board-alluding painting complements the downstairs gallery, titled *Odmieńcy* (2023), loosely translated as “misfits” and an old-school slang word for both “freaks” and “queer”, in reference to an eponymously named seminar and publication by Maria Janion, and citing visual codes by Jean Genet, Jean Cocteau, and Georges Batailles.

The installation simultaneously serves as a stage for the exhibition’s public programme, conceived as integral part of the show and aligned to Radziszewski’s long-term, transnational community-building practice. Radziszewski has invited a group of his peers – artists, thinkers and activists from Eastern and Central European countries whose practices are conceptually, aesthetically and ethically connected to his own – to perform alternative “history lessons”. They include: Ukrainian artist Anatoly Belov; Romanian performance duo #FLUID (composed of performer, choreographer and playwright Paula Dunker and musician Alex Bălă); German artist Philipp Gufler; Czech photographer Libuše Jarcovjáčová; Polish artist and activist Ryszard Kisiel; Estonian artist Jaanus Samma; Ukrainian artist and photographer Anton Shebetko; Slovenian writer, translator, activist, and sociologist Suzana Tratnik; and Polish artist Liliana Zeic together with drag queen Twoja Stara. These “history lessons” will shed light on minor queer and non-normative histories of their respective geographical backgrounds. On the closing day of the exhibition, Radziszewski will launch the latest edition of *DIK Fagazine*, on Ukraine, co-edited with Anton Shebetko.

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Featuring history lessons by:

11 February	6 pm	Ryszard Kisiel
	8 pm	#FLUID (Paula Dunker and Alex Bălă)
25 February	6pm	Libuše Jarcovjáčková
	8pm	Suzana Tratnik
11 March	6pm	Philipp Gufler
	7pm	Liliana Zeic with Twoja Stara
25 March	6pm	Jaanus Samma
15 April	6pm	Anatoly Belov
	7pm	Anton Shebetko
	8pm	DIK Fagazine No 13 launch