

AGATA MADEJSKA

**FTHo**

*Grand Habitat Horror Vacui*

12 January–18 February 2024

**Agata Madejska's** artwork explores the power structures inherent in language and speech. These explorations are often expressed as sound, sculpture and installation, alongside post-photographic processes. Informed by her personal history, of growing up in and migrating from post-communist Poland, Madejska has responded to the space at Flat Time House by expanding and overlaying these narratives with an exploration of the power dynamics of the domestic and intimate. With a background in photography, Madejska has increasingly pushed beyond the surface of the flat image, expanding into embedded and durational forms. This new body of work examines the parameters of value and revenue by looking at various ideologies of ownership, such as assets; natural and public resources; housing and infrastructure; the woman's body as commodity; and the body politic at large. *Grand Habitat Horror Vacui* is the artist's first UK institutional solo show and develops from a residency that the artist undertook at the house in 2023.

The exhibition includes a series of site-specific interventions for the successive rooms of FTHo. In the entrance gallery – which John Latham, the artist and original occupant of FTHo named 'The Mind' – is the piece ***Essentials***. This work, like all the pieces in the exhibition, collates an intuitive selection of references to narrate a wider argument. The diagonal padded panels of the flooring is intended to evoke the quilted luxury of a Chanel handbag. In place of a golden CC logo however are a number of silver artifacts and assets, accumulated by the artist at home over time but also rubbish collected from the street. Included are objects with monetary value – coins, alongside those with object value – base metal, sentimental value – her son's toy, and those of uncertain value – found artifacts. The installation also suggests a child's soft-play area. Madejska is a mother, and the objects include those found in her own pockets, or reminiscent of those that a mother would carry in the bottom of a handbag, or that become indelibly attached (glitter). Ring pulls from mass produced drink cans, suggest the artist's acquiescence to these capitalist structures.

Beyond this object-based and semiotic reading is a further image-based reading. During her residency at FTHo, Madejska became fascinated by Latham's 1975-6 placement at the Scottish Office, where the artist looked at post-industrial mountains of mining rubble from a birds-eye perspective using aerial photography. Standing above this installation, the view is an aerial landscape, the toy cars specifically referencing this. In their different ways both Madejska and Latham work with the detritus and consequences of economic extraction.

The theme of capital and its relation to the personal and domestic is continued in the sound piece which can be heard throughout the house. ***Hello, Congratulations*** uses as a script and rephrases and restructures parts of *The Fable of The Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714), a social satire by Anglo-Dutch social philosopher Bernard Mandeville, which, using the symbol of the bee as the worker tells the story of a bee community that thrives until the bees decide to live by honesty and virtue. The text inspired the important economist and philosopher Adam Smith and as such has directly informed the capitalist structures within which we live today. The subtitle of the book "private vices" (or self-interest) lead to "publick benefits" (such as orderly social structures like law, language, and markets) speaks to the amalgam of the personal and civil which Madejska is exploring.

Alongside Mandeville's essay, the sound piece also encompasses found text from advertisements for banking and investment institutions, pension schemes and beauty products as well as fraudulent schemes from spam email – all of which are investment opportunities, into oneself or capital. The script also quotes the number for the abortion helpline in Poland. This phonenumber is available for people who may want to acquire an abortion outside the country due to the heavy restrictions in that state. Zooming in and out, Madejska is referencing the geo-political and domestic describing how the articulation of power permeates all parts of daily life.

In the 'Body-Event', the most domestic area of FTHo, the artist has placed ***Socle du Monde (Second)*** a clear acrylic box of smoke flashing red. The piece is titled after Piero Manzoni's *Socle du Monde* (Base of the World), an upside-down iron and bronze plinth installed in Herning, Denmark, in 1961 which presents the Earth as the artist's work. As with the aerial references of *Essentials*, the title proposes zooming out to a universal view. The piece also references a work by Latham, *Least Event as Habit* (1970) – a glass sphere containing a vacuum within a glass sphere containing a vacuum. Latham's piece is intended to give the appearance of permanence whilst also being so fragile it could break at any moment, much like a government's social contract, or indeed entire ideological structures such as the Soviet Bloc. Madejska has filled the cube with artificial fog as a reference to the pluming red flares that accompanied the 2020 *Strajk Kobiet*, the women's strike in Poland. The protests were in response to the ruling Law and Justice Party's interference into all branches of government and the Roman Catholic Church, and their tightening of abortion laws. They became the biggest protest in the country since the end of the People's Republic. Madejska argues that rights and assets, including those of women's bodies, seem immutable but can shift at any moment. The containment of this smoke however is resonant of the feeling of impotence in the face of these powerful structures, yet law can change and the appearance of permanence can yet be immensely fragile – the smoke could be released at any moment.

In the rear gallery is the large new sculpture ***Housing T (Current Affairs)***. The form of this piece references X-Rays of sea crustations, creatures that carry their home with them as a shell or exoskeleton. The work also references Metabolism in architecture, floating houses, the anthropomorphised 'living sculpture' of Flat Time House itself, and diving suits from the 1920s – bodies suspended in the deep, dependent on sources outside of their control for life. Once again, the domestic, hinted at through lice combs, hair pins and lipstick, is indelibly situated within wider structures of real estate and asset management, often forgotten but overarching in how they affect our everyday life.

When leaving, the exhibition concludes with the hand-woven yarn piece ***The End***. Presented next to Latham's spray painted 'The Shift', the work reflects on Latham's understanding of time and belief in a cyclical universe – the end being a new beginning. *The End* however, suggests a dooier outlook, an end of times, the end as now.

Through oblique critique of recent political debates, in Poland and internationally, Madejska scrutinises the structures of persuasion, be they myth or fable, propaganda or spam, gossip or speculation. For *Grand Habitat Horror Vacui* Madejska questions the articulation of power and how modes of address are used to assemble or disintegrate the public mood.

We are grateful to the Elephant Trust and Goethe-Institut London for their support of this project.



THE  
ESTATE  
OF  
BARRY  
FLANAGAN

The John Latham Foundation

✓ Edition Taube

be ma z



### 1. *Essentials*

Site-specific flooring installation, dimensions variable. Leatherette, plywood, carpet underlay, steel, ring pulls, marbles, money, glitter, keys, whistles, toy cars, personal and found objects. 2024.

### 2. *The End*

Hand woven cotton yarn. 2023

### 3. *Socle du Monde (Second)*

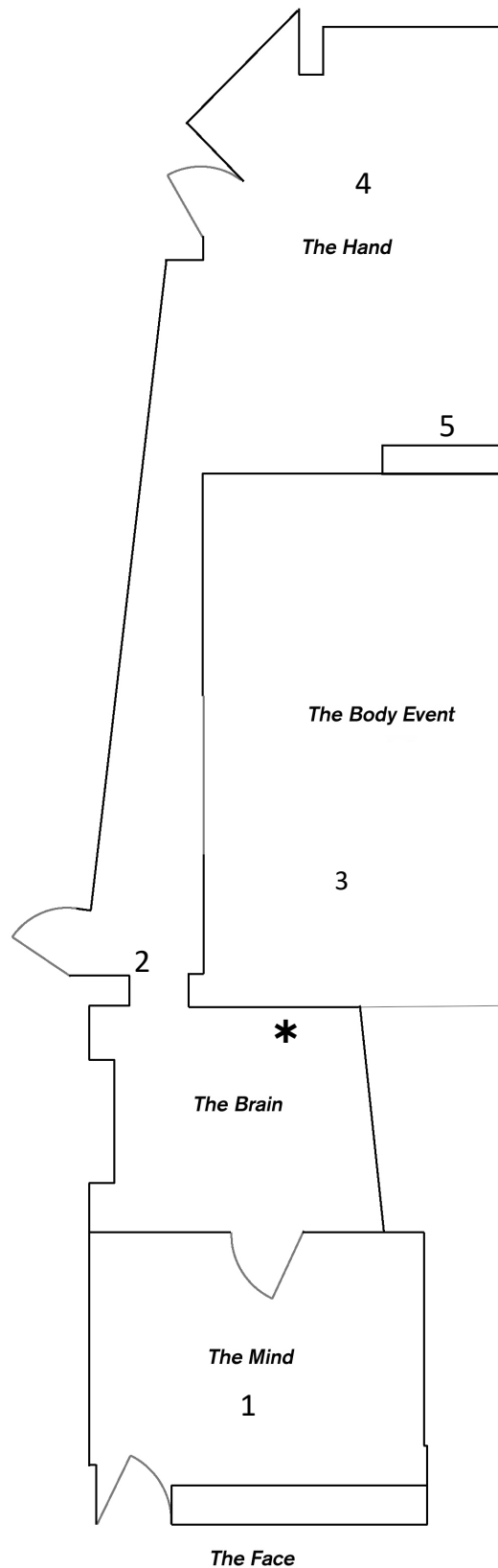
Perspex box, steel, rubber hose, cable, led lights, resistors, smoke generator, glycerine, propylene glycol, batteries. 2024

### 4. *Housing T (Current Affairs)*

Organza, steel, aluminium, marbles, lice comb, tweezers, lighter, lipstick, whistles, key, ring pulls, hair pins, coins, pendant. 2024

### 5. *Hello, Congratulations,*

Audio recording, 10m40s, looped. 2024



### **Agata Madejska:** ***Mistakes Were Made***

Published by Edition Taube, Munich. Co-published by Belmacz, London. 2024-01-15, Softcover, Edition of 501, 272 pages. 2024

Agata Madejska's new book ***Mistakes Were Made*** develops her ongoing interest into the fissures of institutional power by looking closer at the linguistic structures of contemporary politics. The collection of poems at the core of *Mistakes were made* are deconstructed speeches made by Western leaders between 2016 and 2022 — pronouncements which mark the beginning or the end of a political reign. Transformed into jittering, self-affirming monologues, here, the political content of these public announcements has been removed. Debased of rhetorical action, Madejska's editing exposes the patterns of persuasion that colour the play of contemporary political practice.

This publication not only brings together transcriptions of these ominous proclamations but positions them next to a range of abstract light-sensitive drawings. Operating in a manner similar to courtroom sketches, these drawings are instinctive gestures made by the artist as she pays witness to the narrative flows of political rhetoric. Loose and ephemeral, they record how the lulling voice of politics infiltrates the body, directing one's movements through as well as one's adaptations to life.

In an age of ever-increasing radicalisation and shifting narratives within mainstream discourse, *Mistakes Were Made* asks us to look beyond the facade of our political architecture and to become more cognisant of the grains that dictate our social being.

**Agata Madejska** (b.1979, Warsaw, Poland), is a London-based artist working across photographic and post-photographic processes, sculptural interventions, sound and installation. Recent exhibitions include Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven; Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw; Tate Modern, London; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Albertinum Dresden; and Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover. Madejska was awarded the Contemporary German Photography award by the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach Foundation in 2008 and the Emerging Artist Award of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in 2011. Publications include *Where Should We Turn To ...* Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven, 2018; *Form Norm Folly*, Krefelder Kunstverein, 2014; *Agata Madejska*, Distanz, Berlin, 2013.