

## **Maria Plucińska. My Body Covered with a Handful of Earth**

Venue: Gdańsk City Gallery (GGM1), Piwna 27/29

Dates: September 20 – November 3, 2024

Opening night: September 20, 2024 at 6 PM

Artist: Maria Plucińska

Curator: Andżelika Kliś

Visual identification: Kaja Gliwa

If you eat too much dirty soil, your stomach will hurt.

I feel sick, thinks the girl as she walks through the forest. She is followed by the shadows of the dead. She is walking, dragging one foot after another. She was a weak child, always ill. With her right hand, she is leaning on a wooden stick to support her crooked body. She passes a roadside chapel decorated with colorful ribbons. The scattered rosary beads are digging into her bare feet. With a nod of her head, she greets the Virgin Mary standing on a blue plinth. They can barely see each other through the tall grass. After a while, she comes to the vast ruins of an old cemetery: the remains of the so called solid foundations, the legacy carved in stone. In the past, people buried their dead in a place specially designated for that purpose, but now they don't do that anymore. All the dead were supposed to stick together, but in the end, it turned out there were too many of them.

The year is 2024. It's scary and strange. The future is simply the present, stretched out further<sup>1</sup>. The total number of people born since the beginning of humanity has exceeded 107 billion, of which 7 billion are alive, and the remaining 100 billion are dead<sup>2</sup>.

Fortunately, the traveller has remembered to take a wicker basket with her. After all, you never know what you might find while walking among the ruins. Perhaps even something useful, edible, or beautiful<sup>3</sup>. Today, the most important are the marshmallow root for stomach ache and some kindling.

Without looking for too long, on one of the moss-covered tombstones she notices an abandoned habit and a small book. She carefully tears out page by page. She only needs a few to light a fire. A bookmark with a reproduction of Hans Holbein's 1522 painting *The Dead Christ in the Tomb* falls out from the book. It must have been bought in the museum shop of the Kunstmuseum in Basel. The painter depicted the posthumous pallor, the corneal opacity, the bruising and stiffening. The process of Christ's decay.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark ecology*, New York 2016, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ewa Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* (Nekros. Introduction to the Ontology of the Dead Body), Warszawa 2017, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, 1986.

She hasn't been so excited about a new discovery for a long time. She always finds the greatest joy in decomposition. You know, people will eventually transform into other bodies, she says to an unknown listener. Every day, we are accompanied by around two thousand living organisms that we carry inside our bodies and on our skin<sup>4</sup>. We are them and they are us. I once read a book that ended with a beautiful sentence: "*And then the animals will enter your room and sit on you peacefully, as if on stone and earth*"<sup>5</sup>. Since then, I have known that the best thing we can leave behind is fertile soil. I wish they could sit on me one day.

It's 8:40 p.m. The sun is setting. In the same place but at a different time, Maria Plucińska, an artist and director, records the last scene of her short film to be presented at the exhibition. *My Body Covered with a Handful of Earth* is a story about decay and a journey through the subsequent stages of rotting. Inspired by the idea of rescue history<sup>6</sup>, we shift our interest in the catastrophe and apocalypse towards the uncanny reconstruction of natural processes. We think about saving what will be, *covering what was with a handful of earth*. We do not want to yield to the feeling of overwhelming negativity towards what is happening here and now.

Andżelika Kliś

The exhibition is the Gdańsk City Gallery's award for the 2022 Best Diplomas of Academies of Fine Arts.

Literature:

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Word for World Is Forest*

Katie Lowe, *The Furies*

Ottessa Moshfegh, *Lapvona*

Richard Powers, *The Overstory*

Dolores Reyes, *Eartheater*

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<sup>4</sup> ZOEpolis. *Budując wspólnotę ludzko-nie-ludzka* (ZOEpolis. Building a Human and Non-human Community), Warszawa 2020, p. 42-43.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Lipski, *Piotruś (Apokryf)* (Little Peter. An Apocrypha), Olsztyn 1995, p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Ewa Domańska, *Historia ratownicza* (Rescue History), in: "Teksty Drugie" no. 5/2014, p. 12-26.