

Mark Barker, Libuše Jarcovjáčková, Zuzana Šrámková
with text by Alice Hattrick

13 December 2024 – 16 February 2025

Cursor Gallery – CCA Prague

curator: Zuzana Blochová

collaboration: Marek Meduna

exhibition design: David Fesl

graphic design: Jan Šerých

photo-documentation: Daniela and Linda Dostálková

The exhibition focuses on the physical experience that artworks can capture and subsequently evoke. Through observation of themselves and others and the documentary approaches of photography, sculpture and drawing, the artists depict internal processes, loneliness in the body, and the intertwining of individual and social bodies.

The exhibition, which remains nameless, presents and joins the work of one visual artist and two documentary photographers that engage with the aforementioned themes from various positions and to varying degrees. Writer Alice Hattrick, whose 2021 book *Ill Feelings* is a “personal and political reckoning with the nature of illness, inheritance, time, silence, bodies and invisibility” (Francesca Wade), was invited to write a free-form text related to the exhibition and the work of the exhibiting artists.

Mark Barker's work speaks of bodies, how things move in and out of them. Characterised by considered material investigations, his multi-faceted practice spans sculpture, drawing, painting, photography, and video. Increasingly, Mark employs widely accessible and mundane materials, such as bread, oil, and other domestic substances. These material choices, coupled with his diverse conceptual approaches, articulate the concreteness of bodily experiences – digestion, desire, anxiety, shame – while probing the mechanics and limits of living alone in a body. His subjects are in a persisting confrontation of form and collapse. Through brokenness and decay of the animate and inanimate – by way of leaks, cracks, waste, and fluids – Mark proposes and embraces the body as porous and messy, potentially limitless, and in need of support.

Mark's drawings and sculptures are developed through imagination, observation, and careful research, with sources ranging from sanitary design to human and animal anatomy. In his works on paper, the bodies are often leaking, disfigured, and somewhat exposed, broken to the point between slippage and containment. His sculpture often reimagines the figure as a body of parts, strangely reduced and exaggerated simultaneously. There's an inherent element of care in these, inscribed through the process of making.

In *Are you more* (2024), Mark presents a taxonomic display of objects, crafted in bread, more or less. These include wasps, human ears, buttons, cottages, and flowers, and are arranged by type on the floor of the gallery, which was once the site of a bakery. Through this work Mark

attempts to articulate how we organise and classify the world around us, drawing attention to the ritualistic, and at times obsessive, acts that shape our domestic and cultural practices.

The photographs by Libuše Jarcovjáčková selected for the exhibition represent just a small part of her systematic record of herself. Libuše began to photograph herself at the age of 16; at present, her photographs stretch across 56 years of her life. With a need to not disrupt the succession of her own images, she places herself in the centre of her attention. She often records herself repeatedly and opts for volume of images rather than reduction.

It is as though the photographs were not created primarily with the awareness that they would be shared with an audience. They are created with a certain detachment from the self. She tries to manipulate her appearance and expression as little as possible, minimising the aspect of self-judgement and self-evaluation and documenting herself without regard to the changes her body has undergone over time. For the artist, the act of photography represents a link to the present, and the act of looking at the photographs after the fact serves as evidence of her existence in a given place and time. They are means of both introspection and grounding in reality. They are methods of coping and establishing a relationship with oneself, of feeling the closeness and distance of one's own body.

Also on display are portraits of Libuše taken spontaneously by some of her close friends with her camera. Without calling their authorship into doubt, Libuše places these among her own records. Self-portraits created with a tripod, which she rarely uses in her work, can be seen as a special event in which the artist has tried to express her emotional and physical state or capture herself in a crucial life situation. Instead, Libuše's work consists predominantly of self-portraits taken by hand with a camera aimed directly at herself or at her reflection in a mirror. For the artist, these represent a record of herself without any additional layer of meaning.

One of Zuzana Šrámková's first photographs, from 2010, depicts two young girls bearing a marked resemblance to one another seated in identical armchairs posing in reaction to the fact that they are being photographed by someone close to them. One girl has a turned head on a contorted body, while the other balances the feral composition with a gesture of silence. It's a funny and also harsh physical scene implying close contact with the person behind the camera, who is having a good time in conspiracy with them. This photograph is a foreshadowing of sorts for all that came after.

The interest in physicality in Zuzana's photographs is more of a natural component of their environment than a plan. Life in an open community of young people in the subculture of Ostrava has enabled openness, affinity, and closeness through shared experiences, views, self-destructive tendencies, exposure and physical contact, hanging out outside, parties, playfulness, fun, music, tobacco, alcohol, and other substances. Zuzana's photographs show the vulnerability and, at the same, resilience of bodies. These bodies are formed by togetherness, a demanding social life, and the environment in which they live. Some of her photographs are almost sculptural in nature, evoking nude bodies and objects referring to volumes, movements, and the energy within them.

Zuzana is a part of the group of people she photographs, standing too close, intentionally not

trying to step to the side, focusing more on the experience itself and her participation in it. To her, objectivising documentarian approaches are an obstacle for capturing something that only exists within a shared experience. Unlike Libuše, Zuzana is not in the centre, but stands with evident understanding at the edge of what's inside. She works with a range of image quality and in high quantity, which strengthens the intensity of her individual photographs. The technical and pictorial perfection of her work is not intentional, but rather a consequence of impulsiveness and lightness – leaving things and events as they are.

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