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POOR BUT SEXY

Nikita Kadan, Dominika Olszowy, Mila Panić, Ala Savashevich, Anastasia Sosunova, Miroslav Tichý

curated by Sergey Kantsedal

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POOR BUT SEXY takes its title from the iconic phrase former Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit coined. Originally designed to rebrand post-Wall Berlin as a raw, seductive destination for the West—defined by its low-cost labor and vast infrastructure—the slogan also serves as an emblem of how, from a pro-Western perspective, the fate of the East after 1989 was framed and sold. But here is more: the phrase reflects the ongoing polarisation between East and West, as described in *Poor But Sexy: Culture Clashes in Europe East and West* by Polish author Agata Pyzik (2014, Zero Books). Pyzik's book delves into the "hidden" history of the East, examining its complex and often submissive relationship with the West—something that cultural operators from Eastern European middle-class backgrounds likely internalise. From artistic practices to subcultures, from post-punk to Bowie's fascination with the Eastern Bloc, from orientalism to self-colonization, Pyzik's work rejects nostalgia for the "good old days" and the aspiration to become a "normal" part of Europe.

Starting from this provocation, POOR BUT SEXY brings together works by Nikita Kadan (1982, Ukraine), Dominika Olszowy (1988, Poland), Mila Panić (1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ala Savashevich (1989, Belarus), Anastasia Sosunova (1993, Lithuania) and Miroslav Tichý (1926–2011, Czech Republic). Spanning generations, artistic languages, and geographies, the exhibition functions as a time capsule—a glimpse into the living archive of fractured and oblique present we inhabit. Each work engages intimately with the others, occupying a shared space where experiences, genealogies, and micro-histories intersect.

The group show opens with Dominika Olszowy, whose work combines truth and fiction into a 'nightmarish' vision of reality. *Final Push* introduces a transgender body with shoes filled with coffee—a recurring motif in her practice that represents both daily rituals and capitalist acceleration. Balancing roughness, humor, and feminist critique, Olszowy's work embodies a spirit of surreal emancipation.

The exploration of the body continues in the melancholic pole-dance erotica of Anastasia Sosunova's *Preyer* video, which integrates surveillance footage with performative action in a perpetual loop of self-constructed representation. Its playful yet sensual undertones create an immersive soundtrack for the entire exhibition.

In dialogue with this is a piece from the *Refigured* series, which explores the legacy of underground print practices by reimagining iconographies from Soviet propaganda, LGBTQ+ publications, personal archives and social media. Inspired by

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Lithuania's secret printing house 'ab', which operated from 1980 to 1990 in Kaunas, these works reflect on resistance, identity, and the power of image dissemination under the pressure of political censorship.

Ala Savashevich engages with the politics of self-objectification in her work *Pose. Position. Way.*, exploring how the choice of a pose can determine acceptance or rejection within social expectations. Symbolic imagery—such as high heels made from a Soviet star—highlights the enduring legacy of past ideologies in shaping present realities.

Miroslav Tichý's voyeuristic drawings, which capture women through the male gaze, provide a contrasting perspective on the female body and reflect on the power dynamics of looking. In a broader sense, Tichý's artistic practice, shaped by isolation and deliberate lack of institutional support, reflects the broader neglect of Eastern European artists in the global art system, where their research was often overlooked or confined to outsiders circles.

Expanding the exploration of identity, Mila Panić's *Südost Paket* shifts the focus to objects as vessels of memory. Featuring Bosnian coins hidden in a tire, the work captures the microcosm of long bus journeys between her home country and Germany. These everyday items serve as markers of identity and folklore, reflecting the duality of migration—fear, smuggling, and anxiety alongside joy, excitement, and solidarity.

The exhibition concludes with Nikita Kadan's *Dream Flags* series, in which he repurposes metal panels destroyed by missiles in Ukraine into flags, accompanied by transcriptions of dreams recorded in Kyiv during the long nights of shelling. These objects question whether art can bear witness to war crimes or serve as a record of collective suffering, acting as a powerful reminder of the ongoing conflict and its profound impact on the East-West relations.

Bringing together a range of perspectives, *POOR BUT SEXY* navigates history, memory, and identity. It reimagines belonging not as a fixed state, but as a dynamic, shifting attitude. Through the intertwining of personal and political stories with surreal overtones, the exhibition unveils a raw visual language that celebrates DIY tactics and imperfection. Playful yet serious, poor but sexy, it triggers a conversation that unfolds across time and space, sparking a dialogue between bodies, objects, fantasies, and dreams.

Sergey Kandsedal

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Nikita Kadan (1982, Ukraine) lives and works in Kyiv, Ukraine.

The artistic practice of Nikita Kadan incorporates installation, graphics, painting, wall drawing, and urban postering, sometimes in collaboration with architects and human rights activists. His work critically engages with the social, cultural, and political experiences of Ukraine and its relationships to the former Soviet era. Nikita is interested in how history is remembered and represented in media and visual culture. In his recent works, he uses the very same material that once was a fence, a roof or a wall, creating sculptures that are evidence of the Russian war.

Dominika Olszowy (1983, Poland) lives and works in Warsaw, Poland.

Dominika Olszowy operates at the crossroads of various media, including installation, video, performance, and a unique blend of truth and fabrication. She draws inspiration from the mechanics and production values of amateur theatre, cabaret, and talk shows. While her works are rooted in personal experience, she transforms them into universal statements about the human condition and the passage of time, often infused with subtle humor.

Mila Panić (b. 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina) lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Panić's artistic practice ranges from personalized documentation to highly poetic visual and discursive elements, from sculptures and drawings to videos and photographs. Through visual art and stand-up comedy, she focuses on personal stories that she transforms into witty and droll narratives about longing for a better life. The artist uses humor to create liberating moments, laugh and engage with issues such as selective empathy, politics, war, displacement or desperate situations.

Ala Savashevich (b. 1989, Belarus) lives and works in Wrocław, Poland.

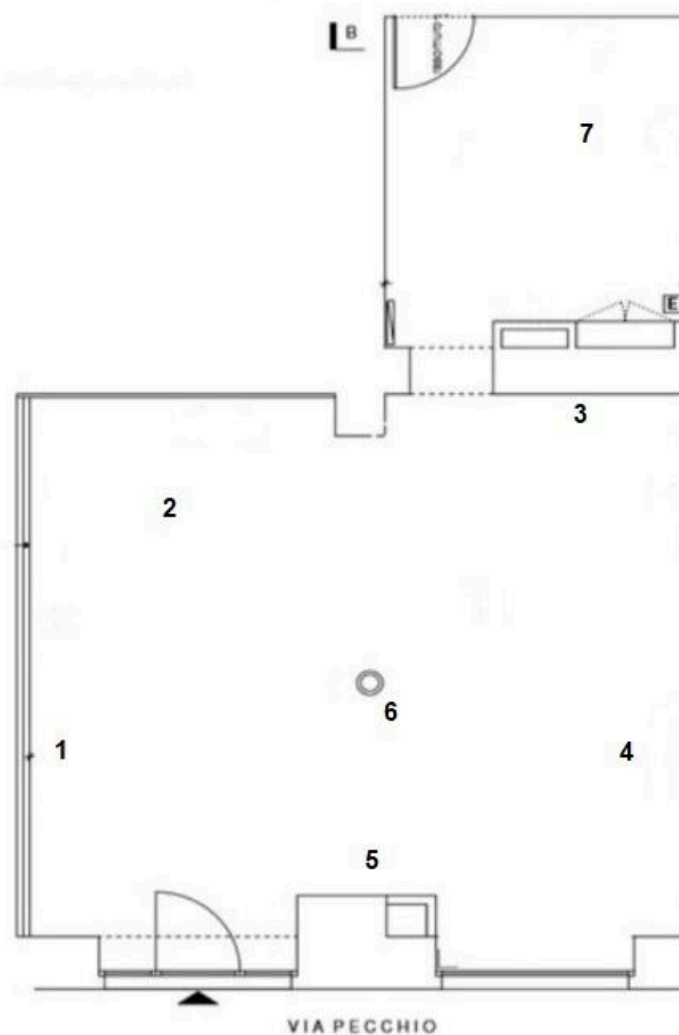
Ala Savashevich works with sculpture, installation, video and performance. In her artistic practice, she addresses the issues of social pressure, control mechanisms and oppressive systems. In particular, she explores themes of collective memory, trauma and identity formation in societies with experience of authoritarianism and patriarchy. Savashevich is interested in the mechanisms of socialisation into the role of women in family systems, education and through the gendered division of labour.

Anastasia Sosunova (b. 1993, Lithuania) lives and works in Vilnius, Lithuania.

In her multidisciplinary practice, Sosunova explores the power of systems of control, traditions and religious or enigmatic beliefs to shape the behaviour of individuals and communities today. Through a reflection on understanding and analysing the economic and spiritual structures of her surroundings – in particular concerning Eastern Europe and Lithuania – the artist envisions arenas in which stories, memories of past events, legends, secular faiths and the reinterpretation of ancient mythologies co-exist.

Miroslav Tichý (1926–2011, Czech Republic).

Miroslav Tichý was a photographer who, from the 1960s to 1985, captured thousands of images of women in his hometown of Kyjov, Czech Republic. He used homemade cameras crafted from cardboard tubes, tin cans, and other readily available materials. He later mounted the photographs on handmade frames, adding finishing touches with pencil, blurring the line between photography and drawing. Following his death in 2011, new works resurfaced—drawings that reveal Tichý's dynamism, highlight his technique, and demonstrate that he was more than the voyeuristic figure he is often portrayed as.



1. Miroslav Tichý, *Untitled*, drawing on paper, 34 x 42 cm
2. Dominika Olszowy, *Final Push*, 2022, tetra diaper, tights, fake snow, ceramics steel, wood, concrete, glue, epoxy resin, 212 x 65 cm
3. Anastasia Sosunova, *Preyer*, 2024, single channel video, sound, 06'09''
4. Anastasia Sosunova, *Fiction*, 2023, etched zinc, offset lithography on aluminum, brass, intaglio ink, spray paint, steel, 65 x 50 x 3 cm
5. Ala Savashevich, *Pose.Position.Way*, 2023, video still, fine art inkjet pigment print, Hahnemuhle Photo Rag 308gsm, 35 x 45 cm
6. Mila Panić, *Südost Paket*, 2025, bus tire, coins, 80 x 20 cm
7. Nikita Kadan, *Dream Flags* (Dolyna sculptures), 2024, metal, 250 x 83 cm