

## BURNED BY THE SUN

Beach – a place of holiday pilgrimage of townspeople, exhausted by work. The crowds are rolling through it trying to fit in with their leaves to the continuum of the few sunny days of the year to relax and enjoy the proximity of water and the comfort which gives the coastal strip, covered with loose material. The situation is accompanied by all sorts of behaviours, private rituals, different strategies of appropriation of territory and organizing the space around them. Observing people in the holiday context is like a visit to the zoo with a camera. Probably that's why many people believe beaches are most beautiful when they are empty. A real beach has nothing in common with 'Baywatch' because a true beach offers a completely different material to absorb and process – in some respects more inspiring. The owners of the huddled bodies in other circumstances might not dare to present them in all their glory. But on a hot day by the sea, different policies are applied. We forgive more and we bury a certain amount of self-criticism somewhere in the surrounding woods, even before the dunes.

In his latest series of works Jacek Świągulski explores the (anti)aesthetic potential of temporal coatings, which included even in such a prosaic situation can be a pretext for reflections on human condition. Arguing that the artist distorts human figures is not enough – they are in fact forms of barebones, treated brutally blunt. In the abstract background, consisted of geometric figures and sometimes only lines suggesting towels or blankets, shapeless and doughy mass, formed of polyurethane foam, is resting. The mass gains its anthropomorphic qualities primarily due to the colour of the flesh and the found objects such as broken sunglasses or goggles for swimming, which the artist incorporated to provide us with attributes of sunbathers. Such a particular metonymy of a man refers to the pure physiology, making us imagine how the sun-baked specimens melt slowly, giving off gallons of sweat. And in the wave of hot air the boundary between them and the surroundings blurs, too. Not having an explicit shape, commonly associated with a human figure, the images the artist proposes, gain an aura reminiscent of abjection, which refers to the most disgusting fact concerning our bodies – deformation and awareness of physiological processes. Jacek Świągulski knows well that you do not need to present extreme situations to bring out the biological drama of a human being – the announcement of decomposition lurking in our bodies. A trivial scene of recreation is enough. Looking at the swollen, covered with blisters bodies one would like to confront a hypothetical Creator with Leśmian words: "Why have you given us such a miserable form?"

A certain amount of critical potential with a touch of a mocking tone is also hidden in the described canvases. It is difficult not to pay attention to the way Jacek Świągulski shapes the physiognomy of these anonymous characters, smearing the lipstick of an elderly woman, who is sizzling on the towel. The artist revels weaving into his canvas objects from the real world suggesting kitschy chic typical for beach lovers. The content of the paintings, however, never overshadows their visual qualities, but remains in full symbiosis with them. The human figure has always been the central motif of Jacek Świągulski's artistic work. But in the previous series, the artist gave the figure a synthetic, far processed form, to some extent open, often penetrating a flat background. The transition from those briefly outlined figures to the current quasi-assemblages seems to be a consistent move, resulting from remodelling of the hitherto undertaken motives. As before, the background complements the composition and co-creates the atmosphere and the characters are still to some extent unspecified, which triggers the imagination of the recipient and allows to build

associations and pile speculations. Moving beyond the convention of a flat canvas and the introduction of unfamiliar elements work refreshingly on the whole series.

'The Beach' is a cycle of works of a particularly subversive nature, because it makes us confront our own grotesqueness in the circumstances in which we usually feel comfortable and keep away all the disturbing thoughts. Jacek Świągulski does not explain the meaning of his paintings. Are these images, which pile up, unpleasant connotations associated with the sun an environmental hyperbole which dresses our fear of climate change in the robes of a parody? Do they make us look at ourselves from a distance and gain a bit of self-criticism? Or they might just draw attention to the hypocrisy of the visual sphere, recalling that the mass filling the seaside landscape are far from 'photoshop' ideal imposed in the media and on billboards. The artist does not provide ready-made answers. Instead he sends subtle signals through intriguing formal solutions. Jacek Świągulski avoids cheap didacticism and intrusive journalism. Instead he makes us think.

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