

AFTERBEAUTY

“ARTEON”, POZNAŃ, POLAND, JUNE 2019

A wholly different aspect of the aesthetic turn, including the specific usage of staging, is explored by Marta Zgierska (1987), undoubtedly one of the most interesting figures among up-and-coming photographers in Poland. Fiercely introspective, Zgierska’s works carry considerable intellectual potential and are characterized by a keen visual sense and a proclivity for exploiting the traditions of documentary and avant-garde photography, and even playing with contemporary art tropes. Marked by individual history, they echo the work of Magda Hueckel, treading the border between documentary record and creative effort, performative in nature and steeped in female experiences. *Post* is Zgierska’s best known effort—the series, comprising photographs and objects, was created in the wake of a horrific car accident that the artist suffered. Zgierska’s work offers a meticulous record, featuring photographed objects, studies of details of natural forms, staged self-portraits, and photographic documentation of plaster casts of her own face (*Numbness*), which all come together to form a subtle yet existentially dense story about observing oneself and the world. Like Kołodziejcki, Zgierska also weaves into her *oeuvre* subtle references to surrealism, maybe even Polish postwar photography (the self-portrait of the artist “trapped” by the chairs being one example). Her subsequent efforts, *Drift* and *Afterbeauty*, are more than just mere stages in her process of (self-)capture—the former traces the body’s emergence from a dark matter, while the latter revolves around the remnants of peeled-off beautifying face masks—one interpretation considers them a subversive take on the traditions of painting. The play of light and shadow in *Drift*, further augmented by printing the photographs on canvas, allows the viewer’s gaze to glide with delight along the surface of the image, making it somewhat difficult to penetrate to the experience on “the other side.” *Afterbeauty*, meanwhile, is not just an experiment in abstract photography conducted using means borrowed from the advertising industry (white backgrounds, color), or an incisive piece of commentary on culturally-produced aesthetic canons—the series also stands as a measured reflection on the modernist ethos of art and its many implications, including those touching on gender issues.