

LAURA GOWEN

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Marta Zgierska, born in Lublin (Poland), began her artistic activity in 2012, after graduating in photography from the Leon Schiller School (film, television, theatre) and earning a master's degree in theatre and journalism from the Marie Curie-Sklodowska University.

Her best-known series, entitled *Post* (2013-2015), refers to her personal experience following a serious car accident in 2013, which led to several months of psychotherapy and rehabilitation. This body of work was awarded the prestigious HSBC Prize for Photography in 2016 and has since been featured in numerous major international exhibitions. The *Post* series, inhabited with dreams and obsessions in an atmosphere of suspended silence, invents a visual language and an aesthetic that has become the artist's signature.

Marta Zgierska's own body is often the starting point for her creative action as well as the raw material in her artistic practice, through performing steps that allow her to bring together the memory of the traumatic experience, the character of the photographic medium and the confrontation with reality.

The *Numbness* (2016), *Drift* (2017) and *Afterbeauty* (2018) series are created from shots taken through long and exhausting performances involving the application of different materials on the face or body. These materials, ranging from plaster to fabric, charged with semantic content, generate unconventional self-portraits in the form of masks isolated in the theatricality of the scenography. Very sculptural, these mysterious and elegant envelopes of flesh bear the traces and stigmas of trauma, past sufferings or simply inevitable changes. Far from the Greek tragic masks or the expressivity of the 19th century, Marta Zgierska's masks arise from the paradoxical ambiguity between power and fragility.

The *Afterbeauty* series (2018), presented at artgenève, is made from discarded beauty masks. The performance is pushed to the extreme by a repetitive process and a ritual overlapping of multiple layers of beauty product on the skin, repeated to the limits of the physically bearable, until it becomes harmful to the skin.

The photographic result is the image of a colourful material shaped in an apparently abstract form. The self-portrait is thus deprived of gender of expressiveness, with no reference to scale or context. This image, reduced to an essential form, leads the viewer towards a pure aesthetic perception. Through *Afterbeauty*, the artist questions the very notion of beauty by challenging the usual canons of feminine beauty and the pressure that the contemporary society exerts on the woman's image.