

SOPHIE CHARLOTTE HOFFMANN

PURE GRAY, THE COLOR OF RESIGNATION AND SILENCE

A SERIES BY MARTA ZGIERSKA

“THIS ORIENT”, MUNICH, GERMANY, NOVEMBER 2017

Her images are sharp. Absolutely sharp and formidably precise. They are simple images, photographs which focus on an object. A single object, centered, marked out: a little girl in too big clothes, a stone on a rope, a blood-stained coat, teeth, a snare wound. No approximation, no effect, no gloss. White background, strong light, nothing distracts from the exposed motifs. All these objects seem to have sprung from a nightmare, a horror movie. But what do these pictures tell us? What story does the photo series tell?

They tell the story of Marta. Marta Zgierska. Zgierska was born 1987 in Lublin, a city in the east of Poland. There she grew up and went to school. While studying Polish literature and theater studies, she found her creative talent. “Somewhere on the way I began my adventure with photography”, says Zgierska about what the beginning looked like. Her interest in art began growing of itself, with each passing year. “I was getting closer and closer to it, and today it occupies the entire space of my everyday life.”

In her latest project entitled “Post”, the Warsaw-based photographer talks about her experiences dealing with trauma, frozen in dead grayness, silence and tension. The idea for the series was born after Zgierska found in her family home a teacher's descriptive feedback from the time she was a seven-year-old, exemplary student. On her website it says: “I am still one in my adult life.” The opinion begins with the words: “Schoolgirl Marta Zgierska is talented, conscientious and hard-working.” It told how much a good student and well-behaved child Zgierska was. Having seen the paper, Zgierska thought how, in her adult life, her limitations, shame and anxiety were still teeming inside her. She started taking photographs to embody the fear aesthetically.

But an incident brought her work to a halt: in 2013, while Zgierska was in the middle of creating the series, she was involved in a serious car accident. This misfortune brought about another: surgeries, months of physical limitations, a break up, and the return and aggravation of anxiety neurosis. Nevertheless, she decided to finish her work and came back even stronger. The accident didn't hinder her creative process, on the contrary, the series, *Post*, received the “Prix HSBC pour la Photographie” 2017. “Working on *Post* took several years, including the time before and after the accident. The series began to emerge before the event, when I decided to incorporate the personal aspect into my works, and to use my own experiences”, says Zgierska.

“Art is a result of our experiences. My experiences are the raw material I work with.”

One of the first images she took after the accident was a pile of her own light brown hair

that she had arranged into a neat cocoon-like ball. Zgierska explains: "After hospitality and intensive therapy my hair fell out. I was shocked and afraid. I didn't know what had happened." As a visual artist who works at the intersection of art and science she intuitively felt: I must do something about it. So she collected it and used the hair ball in a very abstract way.

On the other hand some images in *Post* take a more visually direct approach to Zgierska's experience of the car accident: the blood stained coat or the crushed car. The coat she wore during the accident itself and the crushed car represents the crushing of both the car and Zgierska's body.

"Art has no meaning, it is the meaning, naturally, as long as it is true."

One and a half years later Zgierska took a direct self-portrait, although she was not in the best condition. She stood with her back facing the camera, four wooden chairs piled upon the delicate structure of her body. In this image Zgierska's body appears to be almost held up by the chairs beneath her arms. She appears to be somewhere between half-trapped and half-resigned to the confinement of the chairs – an impressive picture which speaks volumes.

However, the jumbled assembly, which seemingly traps Zgierska, also appears to be so carefully positioned that the image takes on a very calm and aesthetically pleasing appearance. And this applies to all her photographs. This careful, precise and delicate arrangement of quite haunting objects or concepts can be seen across the breadth of Zgierska's project.

To our question, what she wants to achieve with this minimalistic form language, Zgierska answers: "Through the choice of form I decided to present the image of anxiety that I know best. Hence the minimalism, sharpness, grayness. We are stuck here, still, held with our fear, frozen with anxiety." In her opinion the subject of the anxiety grows, stretches the consciousness, becomes everything. It resonates in silence.

„Gray is a very sad colour. It's the color of resigning. Of silence."

Marta Zgierska doesn't know if art can cure, so she does not consider her art as therapy: "It is more of an effect of our state, of what we carry within, of the things we think about and which fascinate us". She thinks of art as a result of being the person, a human being. She adds: "The nature of this existence determines the art work. One thing conditions the other. At the same time, this 'effect of being' can have an impact on both the audience and the author."