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MARTA ZGIERSKA

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Rooted in the murky depths of the human psyche, Marta Zgierska's (b. 1987, Poland) work probes the nebulous landscapes of memory in the wake of trauma. Unseen takes a journey through the layers of her personal history that led her there.

Q: There is a rich cultural discourse between photography and trauma. Where does your interest in this field come from?

A: Neurosis in everyday life has always been a part of the human condition, and in my work what matters most is the perspective of an experiencing, ordinary individual. Author Cathy Caruth pointed out that during a traumatic event we do not fully experience what is happening to us, and it returns to us later, in the form of phobia, nightmare and obsession. The impossibility of working through such an event at the time makes its presence permanent. We cannot free ourselves from trauma, it repeatedly takes us back to the past and grasps hold of the present. Isn't that similar to photography? The past is conjured up by a photograph not as a simple repetition of what took place, but as something that takes the form of an interplay between the past and the present – something which endures between, or even beyond time.

Q: Tell us about the experiences that led you to begin work on *Post*, the series you are presenting at Unseen Amsterdam 2017.

A: *Post* started to emerge a few years ago, out of my personal experiences. I found a note written by my primary school teacher that was full of praise for me as a pupil. Something didn't feel right when I read it. My memories are different, and I started to wonder about the tensions that we carry within. This very tension inside me is what I wanted my work to present. Later on, I had a serious car accident and that was a real turning point in the project. Paradoxically, what breaks a person, powers art. Naturally it had a profound impact on me – I was very close to death. The accident shook me, changed my life and triggered many different events. For my photography this meant more audacity in choosing motives, sharper imagery and a stronger bond with physicality.

Q: The images in *Post* appear like fragments of short, sharp recollection – impressions left behind after the fact. Do they represent what you saw in the time following your accident?

A: In a life after trauma we are left with shattered images. Details and freeze-frames. Sequences of images devoid of verbal narration. The accident is important, but only some

of the photographs refer to it directly. In the series I introduced different kinds of images – there are real artefacts related to the accident, such as the blood-stained coat or a ball of my hair, but there are also installations, actions closer to the performative, and also very austere, almost abstract images. Real experiences are mixed with the glimpses of the aforementioned imagined – fear, obsession, nightmare. The overarching greyness of the images offers a visual oxymoron – peaceful yet full of tension. *Post* is not a narrative about a car accident but about a personality which is shaped, or perhaps deformed, by past events.

Q: You intermittently place yourself within the images. Is *Post* ultimately a self-portrait?

A: *Post* is definitely a self-portrait, constructed directly around my anxieties, experiences and qualities, but it is easily made universal. This is because as human beings we share a lot, we encounter similar situations. Physicality is very important here. The body experiences and remembers. It has symptoms: neuralgias, short breaths, an inability to move. Next to being fragmentary, post-traumatic memory is characterised precisely by corporeality. It is often related to a direct interference into the human body during violent moments. My own moments of pain keep coming back to me. This is why my physical presence in the photographs was so necessary, just as a cut on the hand for an image had to be real too. Otherwise the message would simply not be as powerful.