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## A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE INSPIRES A HAUNTING PHOTO SERIES

“VICE”, NEW YORK, USA, MAY 2017

After surviving a horrific car accident, photographer Marta Zgierska found inspiration in the aftermath.

Four years ago, Polish photographer Marta Zgierska was involved in a near-fatal car accident. Although she survived, the trauma of the incident and of the enduring physical difficulties she encountered after the fact left Zgierska in an almost destitute state. But rather than languishing, the artist used her experience as a source of creative energy for her new photographic series *Post*, a project about "trauma, frozen in dead greyness, silence and tension," currently on view at Filter Space in Chicago.

Like microscope slides of a nightmare, Zgierska's images are calmly horrifying. In one image, a nude figure is entangled in multiple wooden chairs in an almost elegant fashion, but the situation becomes gravely disturbing once you realize that the chairs seem impossible to escape from. In another image, a luscious overcoat that would seem at home on a rich Upper East Sider hangs on the wall, one side covered in the splattered blood of an unknown victim. A different image shows a direct allusion to Zgierska's accident, portraying a tightly crumpled automobile reminiscent of a crushed soda can.

All of the images in *Post* share the same bland, grey backdrop. What may seem like an incidental detail is actually a crucial tool for understanding the artist's images: "Choosing greyness has been one of the major decisions regarding this project," Zgierska explains to Creators. "It freezes the flickering flashbacks, lets the silence continue, and at the same time resonates within ourselves. It is like an oxymoron – peaceful yet full of tension."

"In order to fully comprehend this measure, next to references to a sterile aesthetics or perfectionism, we need to translate the title from Polish, as *Post* does not only stand for something which happened after an event," she adds. "In Polish the basic meaning of this term is 'fasting,' which denotes a time of asceticism and renunciation."

This notion of self-reflection and contemplative resonates heavily in Zgierska's image of a note handwritten in Polish, which, coincidentally, was the catalyst for the entire project: "The idea for this series came to me a few years ago, when I found a feedback note from my primary school teacher in my family house, written when I was seven years old," tells the artist.

"When I saw this sheet of paper, my heart sank. Nothing has changed—the appearance of an exemplary pupil outside, and the low self-esteem, insecurity, and tangle of anxieties

inside. After finding this note, I started to wonder about anxieties, limitations, and tensions that we carry within and wanted to present them in my works. However, when I just finished some of these first images, I had the car accident that changed my life, a hard time full of pain and surgeries. So, this note became the beginning to something else entirely."