

mirosław balka
nehtyM

PRESS RELEASE

via a. stradella 7
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Galleria Raffaella Cortese presents *nehtyM*, the gallery's fifth solo show by Mirosław Balka (Warsaw, 1958). The artist, whose significant retrospective *CROSSOVER/S*, curated by Vicente Todolí, was shown at Pirelli HangarBicocca in 2017, returns to Milan with an exhibition project featuring new works in the via Stradella 7 gallery space.

Introduced by the word-play of the title *nehtyM*, mirrored version of the German word "Mythen" (in English, Myth), which underlines the artist's voyage into the mythical concept, the exhibition will showcase new bodies of work, drawings and sculptures, across the three macro-areas of Desire, Gravity and Togetherness. The journey continues Balka's research within the delicate relationship between art and life, ever present in Balka's work since the 80s, interweaving personal experiences with images from collective memory.

While diving into the exhibition, the viewer approaches the first area of Desire, featured by three large drawings that represent Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love and beauty and Niobe, Tantalus' daughter who was punished for her hubris in maternal pride for her many children. These figures became the first subject of desire during Mirosław's childhood, when he was looking at black and white mythology books at the age of twelve.

The show continues unveiling the second zone of Gravity, characterized by a concrete sculpture titled *84 kg* that powers its own presence in the space with different shapes of concrete-cast flower pots. A multilayered work that was developed through different forms and intensities even if the only information we've been given here is the weight. The visible becomes invisible and vice versa, the measurement of the sculpture's title alludes to the totality of the final object, underlining its heavy presence in the space and at the same time its absence in an imaginary eternal heaven.

Balka leads us by activating a series of shifts and passages to the last area of the show, Togetherness, represented by *273 x 23 x 23 / NowHereWe*, a sculpture composed of various bells, all of which are sourced from different cultures and religious iconography. Retrieving found objects, repeatedly interwoven in itself, but always changing in its history and interpretation, the artist suggests different connotations, infusing each material used with a new meaning by their removal of their original context and drawing our attention to the formal language, the relationship with the space and whispering a new message free of any explicit interpretation.

Mirosław Balka ends the journey with a fragment from his private sphere represented by the work *Heaven – Jerzy*, a golden foil paper that he used to wrap the last Christmas present for his father, bearing witness to an intimate time long gone. It's a new narration of a space suspended between the time lost and the time evoked through memory, in which Balka invites us to linger on the myth of a family home, the myth of childhood and the collective myth of the human condition.

“Where are the borders of trust? You wouldn’t touch a painting with your fingers, but sculpture makes you want to touch it, to knock on it to understand what it is made of. The presence of the body, the role of physicality — it’s a different context, in which there are still perspectives for sculpture no longer figurative but dedicated to a different figure — the figure of the viewer.”

M.B. 2015

BIOGRAPHY

Mirosław Balka was born in 1958 in Warsaw, Poland. He lives and works in Otwock, Poland and Oliva, Spain.

Comprising installation, sculpture, video, and drawing, Balka’s work has a bare and elegiac quality that is also underlined by the careful, minimalist placement of objects, as well as the gaps and pauses between them. Often using his own body as a “template” or first point of reference, Balka’s work might incorporate personal or self-referential substances such as ash, felt, salt, hairs and soap. Balka’s work deals with both personal and collective memories, especially as they relate to his Catholic upbringing and the collective experience of Poland’s fractured history. Through this investigation of domestic memories and public catastrophes, Balka explores how subjective traumas are translated into collective histories and vice versa. His materials are simple, everyday objects and things, often powerfully resonant of rituals and hidden memories.

Selected solo shows include: *Red Nerve*, Castello di Ama, Siena (2019); *30/5780*, Galeria Labirynt 2, Lublin (2019); *[(!,,:?!-...)]*, Muzeum Śląskie, Katowice; *DIE SPUREN*, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2017); *CROSSOVER/S*, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2017); *Nerve.Construction*, Muzeum Sztuki MS1, Lodz (2015); *Fragment*, Akademie Der Kunst, Berlin and CCA Warsaw (2011); *Between Honey & Ashes*, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2011); *Ctrl*, Monasterio San Domingo de Silos, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (2010); *Topography*, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford (2009); *How It Is*, Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern, London (2009); *AAA + rauchsignale*, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka (2007); *Tristes Tropiques*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2007); *Lichtzwang*, K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2006); *Eclipse*, Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo (2001).

Mirosław Balka has participated in major exhibitions worldwide including: Venice Biennale (1990, 2003, 2005, 2013; representing Poland in 1993); documenta IX, Kassel (1992); Sydney Biennale (1992, 2006), The Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1995), São Paulo Biennale (1998), Liverpool Biennial (1999), Santa Fe Biennale (2006). In 2009 he presented the special project *How It Is* for the Unilever Series, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. He is the author of the *Memorial to the Victims* of the Estonia Ferry Disaster in Stockholm (1997), and numerous spatial works including *AUSCHWITZWIELICZKA*, Cracow (2010), and *HEAL*, University of California, San Francisco (2009). A series of conversations between Mirosław Balka and professor Zygmunt Bauman was published in 2012. In 2015 the artist created the stage design for Paweł Mykietyń’s *Magic Mountain* opera. He has participated in panel discussions with many distinguished speakers including Juan Vicente Aliaga, Julian Heynen, Anda Rottenberg, Kasia Redzisz, Anja Rubik, Joseph Rykwert and Vicente Todolí.