

Oskar Dawicki

Karol Sienkiewicz



Oskar Dawicki, courtesy of the artist

Performance artist and creator of objects and videos, member of Azorro "supergroup".

In his work Dawicki (born 1971 in Stargard Szczeciński) usually employs in his works a strategy of ironic meta-reflection, characteristic also for the practice of the Azorro collective. In his case however, it is but a starting point for tackling a number of other issues, especially those related to identity. Humour is an intrinsic element of his projects, which usually resist simple historical-artistic classification. Since 1995 he has rarely parted with a blue brocade jacket that has become his trademark.

Between 1991-1996 he studied fine arts at the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń, earning a degree in painting under Prof Lech Wolski. Dawicki started his career as a performance artist in 1994 as a student, influenced by an encounter with the work of Zbigniew Warpechowski. His first performance shows, organised in collaboration with Wojciech Jaruszewski, took place at the Toruń

university-affiliated Galeria S. Dawicki and Jaruszewski also published an ephemeral periodical called "No ciagnij no".

In one his earliest performances, **This Defines Me, I Define Myself** (1994), Dawicki shaved his forearms, and then stuck the hair from his right forearm on the left one and vice versa. The successive performances revealed traits characteristic for the early period of his practice, when he studied the relationship between language and reality - translations between different languages, dead telephone calls, voices and sounds recorded using a dictaphone, soundless speech. With time, there also emerged the thread of the artist's disappearance and reappearance (**Please Be On Time**, Krakow, 2000), as well as of rubbish and cleaning (e.g. the performance during "Foodart, places and between", Bergen, Norway, 2000).

With time, the emphasis gradually shifted to the artist himself and the act of performing in public. Challenging the nature of performance as such, Dawicki entered the level of meta-reflection, developing a new set of motifs. During Krakow's "Tu Performances 5" festival in 2001, he handed photo cameras over to the viewers asking them to take pictures of him, and himself started photographing them. As part of **Performance 1:0** he and the audience sat and watched the Polish national football team's match in the World Cup qualifiers. In 2002, Dawicki gave an interview to the owners of **Galeria Raster**. To all the questions, which dealt with art and its meaning, he answered by playing back the words 'I don't know' from a dictaphone (**I Don't Know**).

From 2001, a frequent motif of his performances was apologising (e.g. during a book promotion he apologised for not being familiar with it), as well as bowing to the public and being booed by it (e.g. by the employees of **Warsaw's CCA**). On two occasions instead of a planned performance a film was presented explaining the reasons of the artist's absence - being stuck in a lift (Up zug Festival, Krakow, 2001), or a car breakdown ("Sztuka III RP", Orońsko, 2003).



Oskar Dawicki Exists

Another important part of Dawicki's artistic strategy was proving that he exists, and in the process also looking at himself through other people's eyes. During the 2001 **Ontological Show** he asked the viewers to fill a questionnaire asking "Does Oskar Dawicki exist?". Some 80 percent of the audience chose the yes reply. As part of **Advertising Project** (2002) Dawicki embedded his tiny image in posters or on product packagings (e.g. for a hot-water bottle) designed by an agency he commercially worked for. The images were examined by the viewers using a magnifying glass. A film was also made where Dawicki, reflected in household appliances, waved towards the camera. At another time his existence was to be proved by an IQ test (**IQ Test**, 2002), in which he received the maximum score.

Another of the artist's projects was based on hiring a private detective who followed Dawicki during his preparations for an exhibition and opening, unaware that it was the artist himself who had hired him. The result were a textual report in which Dawicki is codenamed 'O' and stealthily made photographs (**O**, 2002). The report says that the subject is a "peaceful individual, professionally and emotionally involved in the artistic movement. As a freelancer, he has a lot of spare time and is not bound by any specific working hours. He behaves typically for self-employed persons. Even though

he has occasions to do so, he does not abuse alcohol and one should suppose he prefers beer over hard liquor."

A continuation of that strategy were the **Street Portraits** (2003), a series of twelve portraits of Dawicki made by street draughtsmen in different cities (e.g. Gdańsk, Krakow, Berlin, Paris) and a film documenting the process of their making. (One of such actions was described by the private eye in the **O** project). Each portrait seems to show a different kind of personality - from a romantic to an unruly boy.

Another project involved hiring a person (unaware of being implicated in an artistic action) to write a master's thesis (**Master's Thesis**, 2005) about Dawicki, entitled "The Contemporary Artist's Identity on the Example of the Work of Oskar Dawicki". The anonymous author wrote about the **O** project: "(...) we have to do here with a reality which, we suddenly realise, even if not entirely fictional, is not entirely real either", which aptly sums up this project as well.



End of the World by Accident

At the same time, some of Dawicki's pieces bespeak of a desperate inability to face up to the demands presented by the position of being an artist, a helplessness towards the terrorism of moral authorities. In the installation **Tribute to Albrecht Dürer** (2002), Dawicki juxtaposed heaps of crumpled pieces of paper on which he had been trying to manually draw a perfect circle with the perfectly round imprint left by a coffee cup, to the sound of the artist's frustrated weeping. Dawicki on several occasions performed, or presented as project, the piece **In Homage to Bruce Lee** (e.g. Swietlica Sztuki Raster, 2003, Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, 2004) - a human figure knocked out in the wall. A piece that can be interpreted as a vengeance on authority figures is **The End of the World by Accident** (2004) - a collection of obituaries of persons whose names closely resemble those of artistic or political celebrities, such as Czesław Miłosz, Jacques Dirreda, Amad Michink, or Charles Satachi.



Hommage to Bruce Lee
Galeria Raster oraz Instytut Sztuki Wyspa

For the Decade of Painting exhibition, Dawicki presented a series of paintings entitled **Moulds**, seemingly abstract, but in reality faithfully reproducing the kind of mould fungi that could grow on the canvases if they were left to their own fate. The latter meaning was further emphasised by the pieces' Latin titles, e.g. **Alternaria Fastidiosa** (2005).



Myrothecium verrucaria (from the Decade of Painting I series), 2005, acrylic on canvas, 25 x 25 cm

During his presentation as part of the In the Very Centre of Attention series at the **CCA Ujazdowski Castle** in Warsaw in 2006, Dawicki created a room filled with absurd objects that had lost their original function. Special devices measured off the best-before dates of food products, and the windows had been boarded up with finely adorned planks. On the wall hung a picture from the **Moulds** series and a reproduction of the piece **Cannabis Polonica Legalis - Olim Ficus Elastica Robusta** (2004) - a potted rubber plant whose leaves had been cut to resemble those of Indian hemp. Two TV sets placed opposite each played looped closing credits. According to the show's curator, Jarosław Suchan, "the apartment, infected with absurdity, offers no shelter, being rather a trap into which we fall when searching to appease our existential anxieties".

In 2008 he made the video **Tree of Knowledge**, in which he recalled Adam's original sin in the Garden of Eden through performance, stripping the myth of its pathos and sentimentality - reducing it to sheer masquerade. It was shown at Manifesta 7 in Rovereto, Italy, that year and reprised by New York's Postmaster's Gallery in early 2011 as part of the "Phantom Pain" show - a series of intimate works that border on the edge of the grotesque and the absurd.

Author: Karol Sienkiewicz, October 2006.

Litwo! Ojczyzno moja! Ty jesteś jak zdrowie;
 Ile ci? trzeba cenia? ten tylko si? dowie,
 Kto ci? straci?. Dzie? pi?kno?æ tw? w ca?ej ozdobie
 Widz? i opisuj? bo t?skni? po tobie.

Panno ?wi?ta, co jasnej bronisz Cz?stochowy
 I w Ostrej ?wiecisz Bramie! Ty, co gr?d zamkowy
 Nowogr?dzki ochraniasz z jego wiernym ludem!
 Jak mnie dziecko do zdrowia przywr?ci?æ cudem
 (Gdy od p?acz?cej matki pod Twoj? opiek?

¹⁰ Ofiarowany, martw? podnios?em powiek?

I zaraz mog?em pieszo do Twych ?wi?tyß progu
 I?æ za wr?cone ?ycie podzi?kowa? Bogu),
 Tak nas powr?cis? cudem na Ojczyzn? ?ono.
 Tymczasem przeno?æ moj? dusz? ut?sknion?
 Do tych pag?rk?w le?nych do tych ?k zielonych,
 Szeroko nad b?kitnym Niemnem rozci?gnionych;
 Do tych p?al malowanych zbo?em rozmaitem,
 Wyz?acanych pszenic?, posrebrzanych ?ytem;
 Gdzie bursztynowy ?wierzop, gryka jak ?nieg bia?a,

²⁰ Gdzie panie?skim rumie?cem dzi?cielina pa?a,
 A wszystko przepasane, jakby wst?g?, miedz?
 Zielon?, na niej z rzadka ciche grusze siedz?.

Invocation 2002

Photos courtesy of Gallery Raster.



Cannabis Polonica Legalis

Selected solo performances and exhibitions:

- 1994 - Performance Stains upon Honour - Galeria S, Toru?
 - 1999 - Dasein Off - Galeria Zderzak, Krakow
 - 2002
 - Help!!! - Galeria Raster, Warsaw
 - Advertising Project - Galeria Display, Prague, Czech Republic
- 2003
 - O - Zach?ta, Warsaw
 - Vernissage - Galeria Raster, Warsaw
- 2004 - Accidental End of the World - Galeria Potocka, Krakow
- 2005

- Decade of Painting - Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow
- Decade of Painting II, Dziesięciolecie malarstwa III - Galeria Raster, Warsaw

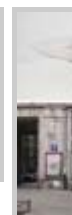


Przepraszam 2005, DVD 4'30'

Selected group exhibitions and festivals:

- 1996
 - Wrażliwość multimedialna - sztuka globalna - Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow
 - WRO-96 - Wrocław
 - Za-Res Widoczności - Toruń
- 1997 - Wro-97 - Wrocław
- 1999 - Wo ist Kunst Laboratory - Frauenfeld, Switzerland
- 2000
 - Model do składania - Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej, Orońsko
 - Foodart, Places and Between - Stavanger, Bergen, Norway
 - The Second International Festival of Performance Navinki 2000 - Minsk, Belarus
- 2001
 - 26 Youth Salon - Zagreb
 - Breaking News - Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, Warsaw
 - Eventgarden - garden of Archaeological Museum, Krakow
 - Zamek Wyobraźni - Bałtycka Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej, Słupsk
 - Tu Performances 5 - Goethe Institut, Krakow
- 2002
 - Sposób na życie - Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łażnia, Gdańsk
 - Look at Me (Novart.pl) - Krakow
 - Zona 4: Festival de Performance - Timisoara, Romania
 - Bone 5 - Schlachthaus Theater, Bern, Switzerland
- 2003
 - Reversed Art and Engineering - Skulpturen Hus, Stockholm, Sweden
 - Sztuka III RP - Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej, Orońsko
 - Balkan Konsulat - Galeria Rotor, Graz, Austria
 - Spojrzenia 2003 - Galeria Zachęta, Warsaw; Galeria Arsenał, Białystok (2004)
- 2004
 - Art Poznań - Targi Sztuki, Stary Browar, Poznań
 - BHP - Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, Gdańsk
 - L'art vivant en Pologne - Institut Polonais, Paris, France
 - Re: Location Shake - Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Łażnia, Gdańsk
 - Równoległy świat - Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow
 - Under a White-and-Red Flag. New Art from Poland - Estonian Art Museum, Rotermann Salt Storage, Tallinn, Estonia; Centre for Contemporary Art, Vilnius, Lithuania; National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
 - Leichte Arbeit - Kulturbrauerei, Berlin, Germany
 - Art Jeune - La Maison Folie de Wazemmes, Lille, France
 - Chellange - Synagoge - Centre of Contemporary Art, Trnava, Slovakia
 - Far West Near East - Forum Kunst und Architektur, Essen, Germany
 - Obraz kontrolny_1 - Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow
- 2005
 - Potencjał - Metropolitan building, Warsaw
 - Jak rozmawiać o sztuce współczesnej? - Galeria Arsenał, Białystok
 - Boys - Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow
 - Poland Overview, Prague Biennale 2 - Prague, Czech Republic
 - Un/real? - Instytut Sztuki Wyspa, Gdańsk
 - Egocentryczne, niemoralne, przestarzałe - Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw
 - Ukryty skarb - Hotel Novotel, Warsaw
 - Broniewski - Galeria Raster, Warsaw
 - De ma fenêtre. Des artistes et leurs territoires - Paris, France
- 2006

- W Polsce czyli gdzie? / In Poland, in other words Where? - Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, Warsaw
- Kolekcja Bunkra Sztuki - Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow
- Welcome to the Media - Królikarnia, Oddział Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie
- Architektura intymna, architektura porzucona - Galeria Kronika, Bytom



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