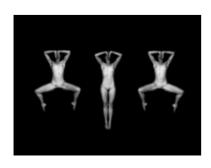Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Untitled Film Stills, #13*, 2006, Raster Gallery, Warsaw



Aneta Grzeszykowska, *Album* (detail), 2005, Raster Gallery, Warsaw



"Heads with Tails," installation view, Harris Lieberman, New York



# Aneta Grzeszykowska
# NESTLING UP AGAINST DEAD LOVE
## by Walter Robinson

The Polish artist Aneta Grzeszykowska (b. 1974) debuted her series of Cindy Sherman knockoffs at Art 38 Basel in 2007, making new versions of the 70 black-and-white photos in Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" series, except doing them in color and, of course, with herself as the subject.

The idea was certainly familiar, but the effort was impressive, and added a global, even geo-political dimension to the now common notion of appropriation art. Her sponsor, the Polish Rasta Gallery, calls the series "truly Warsaw," and it does have a sort of socialist white-trash feeling. But at bottom, are the two series different or the same? The question remains a mystery.

Four years later, Grzeszykowska has made her way to New York, via a work in "Ostalgia," Massimiliano Gioni's smart survey of Iron Curtain abject art at the New Museum. There, she has a family album in which she's effaced her own image, just like Stalin did so famously to his purged political opponents. It's a reminder that Postmodernism was presaged by the Soviet censors.

Grzeszykowska turns this history on its ear by erasing herself, a harmless gesture that shifts a Soviet motif into a Western one, like she's trying to get away from her parents, relatives and in-laws. It's a classic sitcom setup -- the family as comic relief.

Over in Chelsea, Harris Lieberman is presenting what is billed as Grzeszykowska's first New York gallery show -- a film and an accordion book displayed in the back office section of the gallery's large, temporary ground-floor space on West 26th Street. (The front of the gallery is occupied by "Heads with Tails," a group show organized by West Street Gallery, a one-year-old New York project space; "Head with Tails" boasts cramped and unprepossessing figurative works that are designed to be unable "to render wholeness, objectivity or complete understanding." This fascinating rationale for "bad painting" is inspired by the late critic Craig Owens' notion of a "refusal of mastery" in Bill Wegman's early videos, which draw comedy out of failure and ineptness.)

Grzeszykowska's film, which is projected in a darkened room, is a stop-motion photo-animation that uses a black-and-white image of her own naked body to mark off the hours in a kind of body-art clock. With the global success of Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, it just makes me think that her timing is off here.

*Lovebook* (2010), by contrast, is the real sleeper of the summer in Chelsea. Grzeszykowska collages color photographs of her own naked, pregnant body nestled up against images taken from works by six women artists who suffered tragic deaths -- Francesca Woodman, Ana Mendieta and Hannah Wilke, plus the New York performance and video artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-82), who was raped and murdered in SoHo; the British conceptual artist Helen Chadwick (1953-96), who died of a viral infection; and the Austrian artist Birgit Jurgensen (1949-2003), a feminist body artist who remains little known in the U.S.

Grzeszykowska's *Lovebook* pictures a literal embrace of her feminist heroines via photographs, and despite a certain strangeness in the object, feels passionate and even inflamed (especially notable in postmodernist photography). The gallery ventures that the images may even contain a bit of violence. The photo-collages are spread along the wall in an open accordion book (edition of 30, ca. €4,000 each), and are unlabeled, so the identity of the individual women or their works is submerged.

It all seems richly female, as if Grzeszykowska has layered a second set of markers of "woman" onto representations that have already categorized themselves as primordially feminist.

Aneta Grzeszykowska, "Lovetime," Aug. 11-Sept. 9, 2011, at Harris Lieberman, 508 West 26th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001.

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