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^ REVIEW

Aluminum Song

22 November – 24 January 2015, Raster Gallery, Warsaw

By Pavel S. Pyś



Aluminum Song, 2014 (installation view). Courtesy Raster Gallery, Warsaw

Karl Marx makes a fine jack-o'-lantern. Perched on a street-facing windowsill and glowing an eerie green, *Marks Trepanowany* (*Marx Trepanated*, 1978–2013) is one of the many sculptures by Krzysztof M. Bednarski on view in the seven-artist *Aluminum Song*. Underpinned by the familiar European narrative of a now waning, but not so long ago booming postwar industry, the exhibition takes

aluminium as its guide, a metal spurring associations with the everyday (furniture and cars) and the fantastic (spaceflight).

Grouped in Raster's front gallery are Bednarski's mocking, jocular aluminium assemblages of Marx portraits. Two floor-bound sculptures consist of conjoined heads, while elsewhere Marx's bust has a phallic-shaped hammer – a testosterone-pumped half of the communist symbol – nestled into its side. Bednarski's satirical proliferations of the portrait have hollowed out its political meaning: what once flew in the face of socialist imagery today verges on kitsch. Hung nearby are Marian Bogusz's compositions painted directly onto thin polished aluminium plates, which, too, betray a passage of time. Though still reflecting light, these once lustrous mid-1970s abstract paintings have faded, the modernity promised by the new material now dulled. A similar fate might await the new works by Przemek Matecki and Piotr Łakomy, which also employ ready-to-hand aluminium-based technology likely to warp. In Matecki's paintings (all *Untitled*, 2014), canvases are roughly wrapped with aluminium foil and covered with acrylic splodges or regular geometrical forms – lines or a circle. As in Bogusz's works, the shiny aluminium surfaces are both backgrounds and inherent to the composition, shimmering with light and reflecting the surrounding space. Leaning against a wall, Łakomy's *Untitled* (2014) is a triptych of roughly cut, hightech industrial aluminium-based honeycomb wedges. Unlike Matecki's kitchen-standard foil, Łakomy uses new lightweight composite panels at the height of current aluminium technology.

Most poignant in *Aluminum Song* is the contrast between the photographs by Paweł Pierściński and Jan Smaga. Selected from a 1967–8 series shot by Pierściński in the Polish Świętokrzyski region, the black-and-white photographs show proto-sculptural forms – coils and tubes – fabricated in foundries by anonymous workmen. Smaga's *MSNKDT* (2010), a concertina-shaped album displayed unfolded on a table, documents the abandoned skeletal interior of a prefabricated market hall, its floor strewn with rubbish. It is the site where the new building that will house Warsaw's Museum of Modern Art is to stand, its realisation a quest so far fraught with difficulty, as the city's municipality withdrew its contract with architect Christian Kerez in 2012. While Pierściński's photographs celebrate a once thriving industry (which today primarily continues outside of Europe), Smaga's album considers a wrecked in-between space, a site awaiting its uncertain future.

This article was first published in the March 2015 issue.

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