

Grzegorz Stefański

choke

22 November 2017 – 13 January 2018

Private View: Tuesday 21 November, 2017 6 - 8pm



Grzegorz Stefański, *choke* (2017), one-channel film installation, dimensions variable duration 10min., looped, edition 3+2AP. Director of photography: Mikołaj Syguda. Performance: Mateusz Korcz, Andrzej Piasecki

l'étrangère is pleased to present Grzegorz Stefański's inaugural solo exhibition in the UK — *choke*. The exhibition features two of Stefański's latest video installations — *choke* (2017) and *do-over* (2016) — together with *restraint* (2016), a photographic print produced alongside the artist's synonymous award-winning video installation.

His artistic practice is located at the nexus of psychology, performance and film; primarily concerned with power, identity and the politics of embodiment. Stefański's interrogation into the complex dichotomy of the male body, is a common thread running through this exhibition. Where the male body is capable of holding multiple, contradictory connotations, each gesture

or movement is often reduced to an expression of power. Stefański's artistic practice seeks to blur these boundaries. His most recent work is a ten-minute video installation, *choke* (2017). The slow-motion film canvases the unfolding of movements of two Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu fighters who perform their routine for the camera. The film here becomes a vehicle for observation, where the entangled limbs and torsos are abstracted from their context, and their connotations obscured. The fast-paced violence of a Jiu-Jitsu fight is replaced by an intense power-playoff between the moving figures – expressed in each grasp, clench and pivot. Whilst each minuscule movement of the male body might be conceived as an expression of power, Stefański's intimate, borderline invasive, filming of the interaction between these two male bodies raises questions as to what is permissible in male-on-male contact. In this sense, *choke* blurs the boundaries between expressions of force and those of intimacy.

do-over (2016) similarly looks to abstract and displace the male body, where the gestures performed by a young musical conductor border on violent expressions of might and power. Whilst the conductor's memory acts as an archive, his body becomes a vessel for the expression of a complex symphony of gestures. Though the movements retain a sense of instruction, they seem to mimic expressions of auto-aggression – where the conductor, in his solitary stance, appears to be fighting with himself. In this sense, the work explores the power relations we hold with ourselves, and the role aggression plays in acts of self-control.

The photograph, *restraint* (2016), depicts the torsos of two men in Nazi uniforms, holding in restraint a civilian. The image is a reconstruction of a photograph included in the *Evidence* (1977) series – a collaborative project by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel that explores the re-appropriation of documentary images in art. Stefański's reconstruction takes the concept one step further: using two different groups of historical actors, dressed in authentic uniforms, *restraint* radically calls into question the authenticity of power itself, whilst examining how positions of authority can be manifested through patterns of behaviour. The power-dynamic between the men is clear, though the precise conditions of the situation are not. Nevertheless the image is charged with tension, carrying with it an undercurrent of violence. Whether the aggression of the image is the product of the actors' acute historical knowledge or the uniform they wear is unnerving considering the superficiality of the event. It seems the choreographed nature of the set-up does little to detract from the image's abusive connotations.

Grzegorz Stefański

Based between London and Warsaw, Stefański (b. 1983, Poland) is currently completing a Masters degree at Slade School of Fine Art in London. His previous solo exhibitions include *o-over*, New Theatre, Warsaw, Poland (2016); *new face*, Lookout Gallery, Warsaw, Poland (2015); *go-see*, Zpafiska Gallery, Cracow, Poland (2014); *emptybottles*, Goldex-Poldex Gallery, Cracow, Poland (2010). Selected group exhibitions include: *Slade Interim Show*, Slade School of Fine Art, London, UK (2017); *Young Art Biennale*, Ustka, Poland (2017); *Clinic //2*, The London Design Festival, London, UK (2017); *Brave or Stupid*, performance, Morskie Oko Park, Warsaw, Poland (2017); *Survival Festival*, Wrocław, Poland (2017); *Summer Brake*, Salon Akademii gallery, Warsaw, Poland (2017); *Short Wave Film Festival*, screening, Poznan (2017); *Nothing Happens*, The Fort Institute of Photography, Warsaw, Poland (2017); *Have You Seen This Women*, Chalton Gallery, London, UK (2017); *On Primrose Hill*, group show, Primrose Hill, London, UK (2017); *Authentic Tongues*, delegated performance, Bloomsbury Theatre, London, UK (2017); *Work Work Work*, Leipzigerstrasse 63 - Berlin / Marszałkowska street 19 - Warsaw, Poland (2016); *Visual Spa*, Blue Tower, Warsaw, Poland (2016); *Is There Somewhere?*, delegated performance, Manifesta 11, Zyrych

(2016); *Studio for Students: Video Art Now*, Studio Gallery, Warsaw, Poland (2016); *Short Waves Festival*, screening, Poznań, Poland (2016); *Wola Warm+Up*, group show at Wola Museum, Warsaw, Poland (2016); *Team*, Salon of Academy Gallery, Warsaw, Poland (2015); *Exquisite Corps of Polish Photography*, group show, BWA Avangard Gallery, Wroclaw, Poland (2015); *Does on your island night begins later?*, collective activity, Gdansk Shipyard, Gdansk, Poland (2015); *Mimicry*, National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, Poland (2015); *Just between us, those videos are very serious ones*, BWA Zielona Góra Gallery, Poland (2015); *The memory of a crying tree (...)*, Miroslaw Balka Studio of Spatial Activities, WRO Media Art (2015); Biennial, Wroclaw, Poland (2015).

Awards and residencies include: Ivan Juritz Prize, London (2017); Young Art Biennale, Poland, (Grand Prix) (2017); Margherita and Mario Crema Travel Award, London (shortlisted) (2017); Ivan Juritz Prize Residency, Cove Park, Scotland (2017); Residency in Five Polish Lakes Valley, organised by National Museum in Warsaw, Poland (2017); Felix Slade Award, London (2016); Short Waves Festival, Poznan (shortlisted) (2016); Residency at Apollonia Foundation, Strasbourg, France (2015); Digital_ia Festiwal, Poland (2nd prize) (2014).
