

Krzysztof Gil

*Welcome to the Country where the Gypsy Has Been Hunted*

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16 November - 22 December 2018

Private view: Thursday 15 November, 6:30 - 8:30 pm



Krzysztof Gil, *TAJSA Yesterday and Tomorrow*, 2018. Installation detail, Henryk Galery, Kraków, Poland.

l'étrangère, in collaboration with Henryk Galery in Kraków, Poland, is pleased to present *A Country Where the Gypsy Has Been Hunted*, an exhibition by the Polish Roma artist, Krzysztof Gil, curated by Wojtek Szymański.

The show is comprised of a single installation, entitled *TAJSA Yesterday and Tomorrow* (2018), which takes as its point of departure the ritual of 'Heidenjachten' or 'Gypsy-hunt', prevalent in Germany and the Netherlands from the seventeenth until as late as the nineteenth centuries.

Inside the shelter is a large panoramic tableau that depicts a procession of hunters, animals and human corpses, drawn with white chalk on a black background. The characters have been inspired by the Rembrandt painting, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), in which Dr Tulp presents a public dissection to members of the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons. Gil's drawings of the hunters' trophy heap, which includes a deer, a hare, a bird and a Roma, perversely resembles the aestheticised paintings of the Dutch still life tradition.

Both legally and socially marginalised throughout their history, beginning in the fifteenth century Roma peoples were dissuaded from following their traditional lifestyles for fear of severe punishment or enslavement. The sixteenth century was marked by anti-Roma legislation passed by the then Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I, which meant that any Roma individual captured anywhere throughout the imperial territory could be subjected to torture and extermination. In 1530, Roma were legally banished from England, and in 1540, from Scotland. In the seventeenth century, a law was in force throughout Germany and the Netherlands according to which anyone could kill Roma without liability, thereby establishing the custom of Roma hunting, or 'Heidenjachten'. The hunts were official, co-organised by the army and police, and became a form of public entertainment, often with cash prizes awarded for a hunter's success.

Krzysztof Gil's family originates from the Burgetka Roma community who settled in the Polish region of Podhale in the fifteenth century. A diverse yet stateless population of approximately 9 to 12 million people, Roma people speak many languages, practice different religions and have varied customs. For this exhibition, Gil has produced a soundtrack that accompanies the installation, which juxtaposes the remote history of persecuted Roma people with his own family history and the contemporary moment. The sound component consists of a recorded conversation between the artist and his grandmother, in which she tells the story of her father, who was murdered in post-WWII Podhale, after making remarks that called into question the quality of work of his Polish colleagues. His death was concluded to be an accident by doctors and the authorities, and the perpetrators went unpunished.

Krzysztof Gil (b. 1987, Kraków) is of Polish Roma origins and grew up in Nowy Targ, Poland. Between 2008-2013, he studied Graphic Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. He is the recipient of the Jolanta Kwaśniewska Foundation scholarship 'Understanding without Barriers', and a three-time recipient of the Polish Minister of Interior and Administration scholarship.

In 2008, he co-founded the artistic group Romani Art, and is also involved in social activities that oppose discrimination and social exclusion. He is a member of the ternYpe International Roma Youth Network, which helps young Roma people to become active citizens. As he says: 'From the beginning of my artistic education at high school in Krakow, the topic of Roma has been extremely important to me. Now, years later, I realised that I had to look at my culture from different perspectives and take more distance. It helped me to get involved in projects against intolerance and stereotypes.'

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The exhibition is supported by the Municipality of Kraków, Poland and the Polish Cultural Institute, London, UK.



# l'étrangère

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