

**This summer you went head-first down the facade of an office tower by Warsaw's Morskie Oko Park. The place was not chosen by accident; in Zakopane you had just participated in a plein-air. I'm quite fond of the very idea of the plein-air, and you?**

**Katarzyna Krakowiak.** I was initially quite taken aback at the location, because I had forgotten how different winter is by the seaside and in the mountains. As for the plein-air itself, recalling the energy of the trips we've shared is priceless. It sometimes leads to joint projects.

**Grzegorz Stefański** I had the impression that you were terrified at first at the thought of a week in the mountains. So was I, perhaps mainly because I found out that there was no Internet in the hostel, and I had no reception. It was only when Piotr loaned me his SIM card that I managed to overcome that deep-set anxiety of being cut off from the Web.

**Piotr Urbaniec** I was happy to give it to Grzegorz, because I wanted to be off the grid... And that was the start of our collaboration!

**So will you tell us something about your stay in the Zakopane hostel?**

**G.S.** First I had to come to terms with being cut off from the Internet, and get used to a new rhythm: meals, conversations, walks. Only then could I appreciate the peace of the place, our Davos from *The Magic Mountain*. Stories began coming together, energy flowed from person to person. This was the result of spending ordinary time together, prosaic events. If I wanted to call Piotr for lunch, I couldn't do it through Face Time, I had to go find him in person. That stay in Zakopane meant spending time with one another all day, not just exchanging (seldom disinterested) courtesies at a gallery opening.

**K.K.** Right, this relationship also evolved because we had become vagabonds, at the tail end of the group. There were seven artists at the plein-air. But I should stress the role of the landscapes and the mountain rocks in all this. Everyone had to come to terms with it at their own speed, everyone had to get in the groove for himself. After a few days we were all starting to communicate better.

**P.U.** All three of us are from the same studio (Miroslaw Bałka's Spatial Projects Studio – ed.), where we were used to working in groups, but when we got to Zakopane we took a more common-sense approach. The priority there was just being present, and drawing energy from our mutual understanding; the mountains and the apple pie were great stimulants. We weren't looking to feverishly invent new projects on the spot, it was more like we wanted to find a foothold.

**So what did you take home from that plein-air?**

**G.S.** Lots of positive energy. We only began releasing and focusing it on some concrete project when we got home. The final work we made together – descending the wall of the building – was a book-end, a reconstruction of those meetings, conversations, and mountain activities, brought into a city context.

**P.U.** I remember one situation – a ski-tour trip organized for experienced skiers only. I just looked at Grzegorz and in a moment we had decided: “Of course we’re going.” So we went, and that motivation helped us through the experience, which I don’t suppose either of us would have done alone. It was like our unity made us free. The girls called us “Lolek and Lolek” [a reference to a popular children’s cartoon about two friends, Bolek and Lolek – trans.] for our bumbling involvement in every initiative.

**G.S.** Trust was one of those categories on which we inevitably built our work. You see a small hill, then the guide tells you that a group of high-schoolers and a mountain rescue team once died here. Mountains mean another thing: what athletes like to call a challenge.

**People often travel to the mountains for a reason, to conquer a summit, or their own selves.**

**K.K.** I had the idea that I had only worked in groups so far, that I hadn’t opened myself up. I remember that during the stay, I began wondering how to get involved in my work physically.

**G.S.** Like Katarzyna, my work rarely speaks in the first person, I more mediate and delegate activities. Absence is an important topic for me. Scaling down a wall head-first was a challenge, and not only in terms of a “performance,” or dealing with a stage audience, but for myself. I had to be 100% present.

**That’s just what I was wondering about – on the one hand, you decided to do something that was, at least in principle, extraordinarily dangerous, and on the other, when you got down, you stepped off to one side, you didn’t want to meet with the large group that was observing you.**

**G.S.** Because presenting this in front of an audience and wild applause were not the main thing in this fairly spectacular piece. We wanted to keep our distance. This was not a *per-formance*, in which we borrow a pre-established form, we play our role, and win our applause. This was a *trans-form-ance*, because life was the (symbolic) stakes, and that evokes entirely different emotions.

**P.U.** Here we come to the aspect of repetition, the fact that we began training several days earlier, and on the day when we did our public descent it was maybe our fourth trial. Despite what you may assume, each of these “expeditions” was an equally emotional experience.

**I wanted to ask about a different risk, the risk of working solo; you did something different because in a group, I suppose, you can’t pull off such things.**

**G.S.** That’s also why we transcended our “I” in this project. Meeting Katarzyna and Piotr gave me the chance to depart from only thinking about my own work, about what “I” wanted to do. You know, the academies in Poznań, Warsaw, or London perpetuate this nurturing of the ego, although so much is said about building relationships, community, and usefulness. Such as Tino Sehgal, a big name who mainly bases his art on relations; he undermines the modernist vision of the artist, yet constantly takes advantage of it. Few groups manage to work as an ensemble, but we managed to, for a moment at least. Moments like that, when you transcend yourself, are very important.

**P.U.** And yet we were not anonymous here. We did not hide our identities. I think all the pieces fit together.

**But tell me what this Romantic myth of mountains has in common with the modernist architecture you climbed down head-first.**

**K.K.** The context of the building is important because we all do site-specific work and we all think about the location of our art. Thinking about our project, about the descent, we were searching for the best way to translate nature into the city in terms of landscape, though the modernist design of this building was not particularly important, perhaps.

**G.S.** I wonder – if alongside that building was a skyscrapers from ONZ Roundabout, if we would have gone down that one instead. For me it was this building, this walking down modernism and its facade that was important. It was only when I looked at the documentation of our action that I realized how, despite how we think of modernist housing architecture as “living machines,” we looked like fairly large figures on that building. We nonchalantly used this architecture, bringing it down to a human scale.

**The text that announces your action brings in the context of dance. I was more reminded of the dance with death in Bergman’s *Seventh Seal*.**

**G.S.** That depends on your understanding of “dance.” I think we were dancing the whole time – while walking or sitting – in this sense, the descent was choreographic.

**P.U.** I see it quite literally in the dance context. We trained to choreograph walking down the building. I should add that it wasn’t so easy to have three people walk downwards in time – our first attempt looked like we were leaving Plan B after a night of drinking. We had to find our centre of gravity in the body, get our balance, and get used to this perspective. We relearned how to walk, almost like we were in physical rehab. We each had our own style and our little tricks to feel safer – Katarzyna had to change her shoes for ones with hard soles, I clung madly to the safety line, and Grzegorz kept his fingers under his suspenders.

**Do you think that this work changed you somehow? It’s not every day that we face such a challenge.**

**K.K.** That plein-air was a big deal for me. I experienced something I hadn’t felt for ages – I had the chance to truly laugh in a group of friends.

**G.S.** That’s why I would stick to the word “transformation,” because it describes our work perfectly. And that showed the importance of discussion, of the kind of exchange that’s basically missing in everyday discourse on art. Individuals were not watered down here, they met one another, and a community grew out of the experiences we shared. On the first day I would not have climbed down anything with you two.