

GINTARĖ SOKELYTĖ - SONJA YAKOVLEVA
**WER HAT MACHT?
KÖRPER IM STREIK**

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FRANKFURTER
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PRESS RELEASE AND EXHIBITION COURSE

Who has Power? Striking Bodies
Gintarė Sokelytė and Sonja Yakovleva

4 May – 4 August 2024

Press preview: Friday, 3 May 2024, at 11.30 am

Opening: Friday, 3 May 2024, at 6 pm

Curated by Franziska Nori

The Frankfurter Kunstverein has invited two emerging Frankfurt-based artists, Gintarė Sokelytė and Sonja Yakovleva, to present their largest institutional solo shows so far. With powerful new works, they have created self-sufficient pictorial spaces in which the question of power is posed—what power are bodies exposed to, and what power is exercised by bodies in public space?

We live in a time of social acceleration, flexibilisation and optimisation. This dictate for constantly increasing performance and efficiency is not only reflected in the world of work, but also in each and every individual.

Sonja Yakovleva has been creating monumental papercuts with exuberant pictorial compositions for years. She became known for her ironic pop-feminist motifs, which developed into a manifesto of self-empowered female physicality. In this current exhibition, she looks at class issues and power relations in an achievement-oriented society. Yakovleva caricatures the cult of the body, the obsession with beauty and the competitiveness of today's fitness culture on social media as symptoms of internalised norms. In her visual worlds, she stages and reveals the work performed on one's own body as a means of dictating a compulsion to perform. As a counterpoint to this, Yakovleva examines labour as a

necessity both for people and for the functioning of cities and society as a whole. She contemplates the possibility of a strike, where primarily migrant workers would refuse the exploitation of their bodies in public and come together in solidarity to effect change.

Gintarė Sokelytė is a sculptor and filmmaker, but also draws and paints. The body, and its inner landscapes, has always formed the core of her research. It is seen as an instrument through which the self experiences the world and its own existence. For the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Sokelytė has created a completely self-contained course of spatial interventions, sculptures and video works, into she allows us to enter. She questions the power of unspoken fears and how it can be tamed, exploring a timeless urge with which one resists the uncertain through order and form. Her human figures are the field on which the power of an eternal struggle is played out. She interrogates what constitutes human existence and what humanity is when not governed by its self-created structures of order.

Who has Power? Striking Bodies is an invitation to take a sensual approach to contemporary phenomena through the works of Sonja Yakovleva and Gintarė Sokelytė. The exhibition is embedded in the Frankfurter Kunstverein's programmatic focus, which is committed to promoting emerging artists from Frankfurt and the Rhine-Main region and presenting innovative perspectives on social issues.

AUSSTELLUNGSPARCOURS

In the dual exhibition *Who has Power? Striking Bodies*, Sonja Yakovleva and Gintarė Sokelytė each occupy one floor of the Frankfurter Kunstverein.

Sonja Yakovleva has created new works and developed a monographic presentation across three rooms. She has been perfecting the art of paper cutting for more than ten years, transferring this historical medium into the very present. For the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Yakovleva has focused her attention and her extensive research on new areas.

As the primary thematic focus of her new works, Yakovleva has worked with images from Instagram fitness feeds. The central element is the body as

optimizable matter. The cult of self-presentation, expressed through contortions and overstretching of one's own body, becomes the motif and is artistically exaggerated. Yakovleva opens the exhibition with *Gym bro* and *Pink sexy gym boot camp*, two oversized figures from the cult of the body that is so prevalent in the world of fitness. These two silhouettes, one male and one female, strike a muscle flexing pose – bodies from the CrossFit world - *bigger than life*, muscular, strong and sculpted. Between self-presentation and empowerment, the figures embody the constraints of digital internet cultures with their body and beauty ideals. In online culture, beauty filters have shifted beauty ideals by exaggerating individual features in such a way that people adapt their real bodies to their digital image, giving rise to a zeitgeist phenomenon: Snapchat dysmorphia.

In a second room, Yakovleva creates her silhouette work as a ceiling installation for the first time. In *INSTAREXIE*, Yakovleva explores fitness worlds as sites and stages of such body performances. Six pictorial surfaces with a total of 240 tiles make up the monumental motif. Visitors are invited to use the scattered training equipment in the room as places to lie down. The ceiling areas display *Boutique Gyms*, self-contained worlds of fitness with differentiated community aesthetics - Barry's Bootcamp, Urban Heroes, Pilates Fused and countless more. Yakovleva portrays in her silhouettes those who zealously engage in physical exertion under the gaze of others, as well as the places where quantified performance enhancement is driven by coaches, headset commands, and precise timing. The large mirrors, transparent glass facades and omnipresent mobile phone cameras not only serve as perfect settings for presenting the body, but they also serve as a means of self-control, comparison, motivation and competition. Yakovleva's monumental visual worlds condense and compress, quote and caricature fitness worlds.

In a third room, Yakovleva has created a mural over 10.5 metres long. With *State of Strike*, she questions a city where workers refuse their poorly paid work, occupying the streets with their bodies. The power of the body becomes political, perhaps transformative, in this context. It depicts a dense flow of bodies and a city in which e-commerce, the meat industry, delivery services, day-care centres, hospitals, construction sites, industrial cleaners and restaurants have been condensed into a very small space. The city is depicted here as a symbol of the modern age and society at large, with all the buildings representing different production sites, and where we see a dense flow of

bodies going on strike. Yakovleva is driven by the contradictions of an increasingly flexible and yet insecure work environment. People, especially those with migrant backgrounds, are often forced to take on difficult jobs characterised by poor working conditions. What would happen if not only the unionised workers, but they too were to go on strike?

The representation of an abstract power that structures our coexistence and is imbedded in bodies is also the overarching theme of Gintarė Sokelytė. On the upper floor of Frankfurter Kunstverein, Sokelytė has constructed a closed world that can only be reached by visitors through the elevator.

The course begins with the installation ** (Asterisk)*, which consists of multiple parts. When the elevator door opens, you find yourself in a prehistoric cave, a reconstruction of the South African Blombos Cave. Blombos is the oldest Stone Age site where evidence of human creativity and cultures has been discovered. The cave corridor leads visitors to a large geometric and walkable sculpture where five films are shown. Sokelytė has bound five people, five volunteers, by their arms and legs to a metal sculpture and filmed them answering questions about fear, power, and order. Each individual searches deep within themselves for answers while their naked bodies are subjected to the constraint, the pain of being bound, and the camera.

The shape of the walkable sculpture is a dodecahedron – a geometric construction with twelve equal-sized faces and thirty equal-length edges. Sokelytė has lined the interior of the dodecahedron with numerous text copies of international state constitutions and collections of laws, from prehistory to the present day. For the artist, they define a transition in human history towards normative order for communal living. Thus, the dodecahedron serves as a conceptual counterpart to the primordial nature of the cave for the artist.

A second, narrower passage through the cave leads to a second room, in which the large installation *A-Type Complex* is shown. Human figures stand upright or sit within an igloo-like hemisphere architecture. It is woven from salvaged, rusty construction grids. Sokelytė's figures are neither female nor male. They are not individuals but rather expressions of being human. The sculptures are made of plaster and painted with burnt machine oil; they are open, raw, and permeable. They evoke the image of survivors of a catastrophe.

On the wall is the three-dimensional work **25**, a five-meter-long black wall relief. It's a dense structure of architecture, geometric patterns, ruins of grids and stone, and a stream of people winding through the construction. Sokelyté constructed it from found materials. The wall piece is also blackened with spent motor oil.

The materials she uses, such as motor oil and coal, embody time within themselves – from their primordial formation 350 million years ago, through their role as a catalyst for human energy production in ancient times, to their use as a resource and driver for the toxic environmental impacts of industrialization in the age of machines. Time and transience, the past and the ever-recurring, as an eternal principle of all life.

We thank:

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For further information please visit our website www.fkv.de/presse.

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