



***Itsy-bitsy crayfish marches up your arm
Itsy-bitsy crayfish leaves you with a scar***

There is a popular Polish nursery rhyme that accompanies a game which parents like to use to entertain their children. The loose translation above refers to a comparable song known among English speakers, because it, too, tells the story of a marching critter. Only in the Polish rhyme it is a poor little crayfish, “rak”, which happens to be the very same word used to indicate cancer. It is marching on, then backwards, in order to finally leave a “mark” when and where it pinches the child. The rhythm and lyrics of the rhyme emphasise a certain rule, as well as the principle of randomness. Palpable tension participants of the game feel before the last word – “scar”, or “mark” – must be uttered, adds drama to the created situation. In fact, it comes at a moment when the parent pinches the child in a randomly chosen spot on their body. The pinch may tickle a little, and sting a little, but in the end, all participants of the game will have enjoyed playing immensely. However, the same words uttered in a different context may cause your throat to suddenly constrict. A genuine “ouch” without a trace of joy. This is precisely the moment which the artist – Monika Mamzeta – must now deal with. It’s time to grow up.

There is a particular kind of maturity. It is reached in the face of an encounter with an illness. One of the elements of this process is a biological, physical degradation and/or deformation. Changes that occur as a result of deteriorating health or a long course of treatment are often irreversible. Visible with a naked eye in the mirror, they formulate our new “ME.” They forcibly emphasise the presence, reality and power of the illness. Visible weakness or lack of body’s integrity resulting from the condition are far removed from the established, socially acceptable patterns. Various theories concerning the correlation of a woman’s physical appearance with her personality, have circulated for centuries and they are deeply rooted in our culture. They suggest that certain aspects of the appearance influence a woman’s character, add or subtract particular qualities, reflect virtues, determine her culturally and impact other people’s perception of her, which is important in the process of self-acceptance. In this new situation, and in the old world, each of us must grow up in their own way, to notice all the things that are the most important.

Monika Mamzeta graduated from the Faculty of Sculpture of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts (atelier of Prof. Grzegorz Kowalski). She completed an interdisciplinary post-graduate programme in the School of Social Sciences affiliated with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, as well as law programme at the University of Warsaw. She works as a lawyer and patent attorney. Monika creates sculptural and multimedia installations, photographs and video art. She is the author of posters and photographs



for non-governmental organisations, and she writes feminists pieces. Scholarship holder of Hochschule der Künste, Berlin; Zentrum für Kunst und Media, Karlsruhe and École d'art Aix-en-Provence. Since the 1990s, she participated in individual and group exhibitions in Poland and abroad, including: Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe, MUMOK, Vienna and Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw. Mom of two children, wife in the process of divorcing. Privately, Mamzeta is also a collector of contemporary art.

In 2015 she had a mastectomy. Monika has lived with cancer for generations. Her works tell the story of relationships, stereotypes, and body. The latest project, "Itsy-bitsy CANCER... leaves you with a SCAR" constitutes a radicalisation of previous activities in which the artist used a marker pen to draw marks on her body. A washable marker will be now replaced with a permanent ink from a tattoo artist's needle. The design will be selected in the course of a competition.

The artist announces an international competition for a design which will be tattooed in the area of her removed breast(s). The competition terms and conditions are available on the website: www.wallgallery.online. The assessment criteria used by the Competition Jury to select the best design will be as follows:

- a) original and individual character of the visual and semantic aspect of the graphic design,
- b) the relevance of the design for the topic, which is women's self-acceptance of their post-mastectomy bodies,
- c) unconventionality and novelty of the approach and composition,
- d) artistic qualities, such as how harmonious the composition is and how it fits into the shape and colour palette of the background,
- e) how well the design fits the shape of the body surface on which it would be placed,
- f) the possibility of transferring the design onto the skin as a tattoo,
- g) the possibility of expanding the visual layer of the design beyond the left breast, to other parts of the body – particularly the right breast.

The winning design will be executed before the end of 2020 on Monika Mamzeta's body. The documentation of the entire process will be made available online, as well as at the artist's exhibition.

Anna Walewska
Project curator

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