

ANTRAKT

By

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A PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS
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To my Mom, in memoriam.

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Abstract of Project in Lieu of Thesis Presented to
The College of Fine Arts of the University of Florida
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My current investigations in art oscillate around my ideas of material, spatial and temporal contingency, and the transformative aspect of making that creates ephemera. I produce art objects that exist in a transitional state: dispersed forms and shapes, which retain traces of their original properties and history, altered to a condition of indeterminacy.

My project in lieu of thesis, "Antrakt" (Polish for in-between) is derived from my Polish identity. Poland's very turbulent history of wars, rebellions, partitions of state, and even the absence from the map of Europe for 123 years, is a strong part of Polish consciousness. During my childhood, my family as well as the whole nation experienced a sense of uncertainty and instability due to the political and social change during the transition from Communism to Democracy. I draw upon this consciousness as well as motifs derived from traditional Polish folklore. I relate to the collective experience of

Polish history and my awareness of contradiction within the history through my art installation. As an Eastern European condition, it is something that is an inherent part of my consciousness.

In the presented project “Antrakt”, I construct an immersive and spatially ambiguous environment, absorbing the viewer in a dazzling and disorienting space. As the moment of reverie unfolds, the viewer will experience a sense of transience, uncertainty and chance. The project is rooted in the desire to communicate my personal feelings of detachment and displaced identity through the indeterminate and dislocated spatial and symbolic dimensions of my work. The artwork itself is a large installation, approximately 14' x 15', consisting of a number of transparent cut-out shapes assembled to create a suspended form resembling a flock of birds in ascending movement with pendulous translucent forms morphing into vessel-like shapes on the floor. The artwork, fused with light reveals a myriad of tiny flashes intermingling, reflecting and amplifying the repetitive cutouts that reference Polish *Wycinanka*.

ANTRAKT

The In-between

Poland's very turbulent history of wars, rebellions, partitions of state, and even the absence from the map of Europe for 123 years, is a strong part of Polish consciousness. I was born and raised in Poland as my family and the whole nation experienced a sense of uncertainty and instability due to political and social change. After the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989, Poland was in a very unstable moment of political transformation from communism to democracy. The social impact of the change was huge because the prevailing communist ideology that spanned over the previous 40 years was a universalist vision of society, in which all the people were to follow the same principles and goals, ultimately meaning that the government had the right to interfere with all spheres of human life.

Trying to forget the past and the hardships of life under the reign of communism, a willingness to rebuild a sovereign state, striving for rebirth of national identity, and adjusting to the Western standards of life by impulsively replacing the old with the new; all caused great confusion that marked that transitory period. Today Poland is pluralist democracy that still struggles with its haunting past. The attitudes toward the communist past are manifested on the one hand, through occasional trials against individuals involved in acts of violence on behalf of the regime, aversion to symbols of social and political life in the People's Republic of Poland – the former Communist state (PRL), and on the other through sentiment, irony, and even jokes reflecting on the past. Overall the common denominator for the approach toward the disliked past is “the complicity of oblivion”, a phrase suggested by German-based art historian Boris Groys in his article

East of Art: Transformations in Eastern Europe: "The Complicity of Oblivion." Groys explains that what he means is "a kind of complicity of oblivion; complicity of erasure, precisely of this erasure of erasure that seems to be purely recovering something hidden, but actually is bringing to the disappearance something other." (Groys, 2003) This awareness of contradiction, which deeply marks the Eastern European condition, is something that is an inherent part of my consciousness. Yet, I needed to translate that collective experience into my own personal one. I needed to step outside myself and look at it from a distance.

At a Distance

Since 2006 I have been traveling and living outside of Poland which was prompted by the loss of my mother during my undergraduate studies. As a result of my disillusionment, unclear expectations of life in Poland, and an urge to find a path to self-fulfillment, I began to seek a different cultural and geographical environment. I felt that the literal distance would help me in not only distancing myself from the condition of being Polish, the "Polishness" as a part of my identity, but also from my personal past. I would attempt to forget or erase the recent experiences, and then, recover the memory of them again for myself with a new perspective.

In 2006, I moved to study and live in Germany for one-and-a-half years, returning briefly to finish my studies in Poland followed by pursuing my graduate education at the University of Florida. America has always been a significant symbol of freedom for many people throughout history. For the Poles, such as my parents living under Communism, America was a romanticized vision of a mythical land that promised a

better life, freedom, and self-realization. Although that lofty image changed and lost its magic in today's free Poland, the exotic promise of a better life in a distant country still reverberates. My individual experience of detachment from the familiar, a psychological instability informed by leaving my familiar home, and being in a constant state of flux through relocation resulted in an acknowledgment of an unpredictable future and the condition of belonging neither there nor here have greatly influenced the way I understand life. Inhabiting and accepting that state of being in-between has become a point of departure in my art practice.

Before leaving Poland, I began to touch upon these challenges that have guided my practice in a few major artworks. "Double Black" is series of black canvases and their mirrored version in white. The series "Double Black" and "Double White" are paintings depicting the ultrasonography images taken from inside the body of my mother showing the tissue altered by cancer. Fascinated with the pattern of the tissue vaguely captured by the sonograph, I created heavily textured layers of paint in dark tones in a shape of the mirrored scan image. I believed that the disorienting reflections, as well as the emphasis on the tissue as literal matter would both question the status of the image representing the crude facts and the data it represented. I was responding to the typical flat immaterial electronic image constructed from the data and to the lack of tangible experience. I did so by turning it into a visible and densely built vibrant surface of glittering paint. Painting the black canvases was a way of working through the grief after my mother's death. The painted surfaces were like fresh wounds reflecting my disturbed emotional state.



Double Black II, acrylic on linen, 59 x 71 inches, 2007



Double White II, oil on canvas, 59 x 71 inches, 2009

On the other hand, the series of white canvases created approximately one year later conveyed quite a different mood. I thought of the white canvases as a vestige of

the black images that were so heavily charged with despair. Slight differences in tones of white hues, delicate texture patterns resembling lace, and the overall washed-out quality contributed to the impression that something was drastically erased or invisible. Juxtaposing each black and white pair resulted in multiple dichotomies: the positive and the negative, narration and abstraction, fury and calm, revealing and obscuring, visible and invisible. The opposites existed not simply between two series, two canvases, but they also created tensions within a single painting (i.e. the white paintings reflected strictly the black which doubled the internal reflection of an ultrasonography image). In these works, I aimed to express my mistrust toward the image and to defy representation. I did this by confusing reflections, obscuring and effacing through a densely layered surface, subtracting the built up material, creating surfaces that are either absorbing light greatly, reflecting light and my general emphasis on materiality as content. As my practice developed during my MFA studies at the University of Florida, I leaned heavily on these principals to explore my concepts.

My interests in painting at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wroclaw in Poland were informed by a certain tradition of Polish painting called *Malarstwo Materii*, in loose translation “Matter Painting”, a Polish version of the Informel. Along with painting, I was also creating videos and installations as a response to my fascination with the art of the 1990s that criticized Polish society, and the “complicity of oblivion” (Groys, 2003). observed in the society at the time of transformation through more direct and often ephemeral forms, such as video, performance, installations, interventions in public spaces, and organizing of art festivals in historical city sites. The works of Zuzanna Janin, one of the leading Polish multimedia artists, was a large

influence on my work at that time, especially her experiments with space showing it “from the inside”, and nontraditional substances as candy floss (cotton candy) and fog to create intriguing sculptures and immersive environments that dealt with time and the fragility of life and the body. Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk wrote about Janin: “She focuses on the emanations of things, on their traces, signs, and shadows” (Tokarczuk, 1999).



Light Blast, graphite on paper, 50 x 38 inches, 2010

When I came to the United States I realized that painting, with its high status as a noble art genre validated by the rich tradition throughout the centuries, was no longer the best medium to express the ideas in my art. I consequently abandoned painting and

turned my attention to drawing. Drawing allowed me a freedom that I could not have in painting because of the burden of conventions and the past that ultimately tied me to Poland. As I began to research contemporary drawing, I suddenly discovered the infinite potential of the drawing discipline often neglected in the past as a "secondary work." In "The Drawing Book" Tania Kovats cited Michael Craig Martin, artist and curator of the show "Drawing the Line" in 1995, who spoke of drawing's characteristics, he said, "These characteristics include spontaneity, creative speculation, experimentation, directness, simplicity, abbreviation, expressiveness, immediacy, personal vision, technical diversity, modesty of means, rawness, fragmentation, discontinuity, and open-endedness. These have always been the characteristics of drawing" (as cited in Kovats, 2007, p. 15). This statement clearly points to drawing's ability to keep imagination in constant flux, which strongly reflected my experience of personal migration and psychological condition of being displaced.

The Altered Book

A very important moment in developing my drawing practice was marked by the piece "Altered Book" realized in the spring of 2010. The book not only represented conceptual and formal ideas, but also suggested a material- and process-oriented investigation that I would continue to explore in larger drawings and installations. The book with built-in history allowed me to engage and incorporate fragmented photographs of my grandmother and her written notes from the World War II. My process included layering partially transparent images with various translucent materials, cutting them, tearing, and then piecing together into different arrangements.

The material built up was amplified by covering surfaces with tape, assorted papers, glue, graphite, and paint. The original writing of the book as well as consecutive layered imagery became obscured and even effaced by the superimposed processes. The finished pages resulted in traces of previous actions imposed onto the book.



Lost Words Spread from The Altered Book
tracing paper and glue on found paper, 16x20 inches, 2010

The spread entitled “Lost Words” consisted of partially painted ream of several book pages, literally slashed by the box knife and distorted by the application of translucent paper. The violent act of destruction-muted images, sharp became blurred; the image seemed to be emptied of the previous emotions. This veiling contradicted the image, word, resulting in the failure of representation. Regarding the formal issues, I believe that in this work I created something more than two-dimensional work. I asked myself: was it drawing or a record of performance, was it a relief advancing into or out of the space, into or out of the picture plane, or how could I even be able to locate the picture plane?

Inhabited Drawing

Soon after the book and my new questions regarding the performative act, I created the works including: video-performances, such as “Still Life” and “Accumulating”, as well as installations created from rolls of newsprint paper, “Waterfall.” Action, time and process are characteristics of the performance that reframed my drawing agenda. I began to seek new ways of engaging space and, consequently, began expressing a much deeper connection between the creative material and myself.

Many of my performances were inspired by Helena Almeida's photographic portraits entitled “Pintura Habitada” (Inhabited Painting) and “Negro Exterior.” In the 1970s Almeida, a Portuguese artist, explored the formal tensions between the factuality of paint, or the typical flat surface of a picture plane and the illusionistic photographic space in which she included herself (Indepth Arts News, 2001). In “Negro Exterior,” the reduction of tones to a strong value contrast, and the elimination of details were striking. The body of Almeida became highly abstracted and blended into the black and white background. The self of the author was lost. Instead, the drawing revealed itself. Almeida's photographs were somewhat similar to the works by Valie Export from the same time, in which Export depicted her body as a part of an urban landscape (Indepth Arts News, 2001).



Drawing in, still image, DV, Duration: 04:20, 2010; *Still Life*, still image, DV, Duration: 01:28, 2010

In my videos: “Still Life”, “Drawing in”, and “Accumulating,” I was attempting to record an unreal situation- physically entering the pictorial space and becoming a drawing. Through the intimate contact of my body with paper I literally drew the self into the enclosed world of shapes. I used a time-based medium of video to emphasize qualities of process, space, and material as the creative forces in the work. I was only a part of the event. “I”, as author was removed.

Paper Waterfalls

In the performative videos, the paper carried a significant formal and conceptual solutions that were further developed in series of paper installations entitled “Waterfalls.” The inherent fragility of paper, which metaphorically represented a human being with its susceptibility to disease and unexpected death, formally offered me a challenge and possibility. I played with the idea that the paper can resemble something

other than its material identity. I tore long strips off from large paper rolls. I piled the material exposing its multiple folds, creases and tears. Through this act, I transformed the material to represent swirls and torrent-like shapes. I was fascinated by the ambiguity of the paper: raw and brittle material suddenly evoked liquidity of water. The temporal and elusive nature of water was conjured into a tangible presence of paper. The constant shift between the literal and the illusion intrigued me. Yet, there was a certain temporal affinity between water and paper. Paper was also subjected to time. The installations made of perishable materials were site-specific which stressed even more the impermanent character of the works.



Waterfall #4, Installation at Tempus Projects, Tampa, Florida, paper, dimensions variable, 2010

Under My Skin

Materiality of paper and its performative aspect in the “Waterfalls” brought me to an increased interest in Post-Minimalism. In strong opposition to the paradigms of Minimalism, the Post-Minimalist movement emphasized physicality through the way the materials were managed and the haptic qualities of the surfaces achieved (Fer, 1999, p.27). Additionally, there was an inherent psychological impulse to explore chance and happenstance, while positioning and shaping of works in relation to the surrounding space, i.e. floors and walls of the gallery, and, ultimately, in relation to the viewer who experienced the given context. (Krauss, 1977) The ideas of chance, unexpectedness, and play, allowed for the composition to be determined by material properties. For example, Eva Hesse’s “Contingent” and Robert Morris’ felt works. Rosalind Krauss used the term “process art” to describe a type of art, in which transitive states of making became determinate, and the series of actions performed on materials lead to their transformation. Consequently, the composition was a function of the material (Krauss, 1977, p. 275). In describing Hesse’s “Contingent,” Krauss emphasizes a distinct characteristic of artists’ works that were neither painting nor sculpture, but rather concentrated on the condition of the edge (Krauss, 2002, p. 32). Krauss wrote: “In this way the edge that is displayed by Hesse is not focused on the boundaries *within* a painting or sculpture, but rather on the boundary that lies *between* the institutions of painting and sculpture” (Krauss, 2002, p.32). She went on to say, “from the position at the edge – the boundary between those two formalized conventions – there emerges an experience of matter that is both bewildering and beautiful” (Krauss, 2002, p.32). This

bewildering experience of matter from the position of an edge became slowly apparent to me through my experimentation with the drawing, material, and space.



Untitled (Under My Skin) – Installation Shot, wax on graphite on paper, 144 x 48 inches, 2010

The series of large drawings “Under my Skin” already carried out a sense of that experience in the way they were displayed. The strips of drawing were stretched out on the walls only to turn downward and lean on the floor, which stressed the temporal and fragmentary character of drawings. As each piece began on the wall and ended on the floor, the protrusion into space came into view, manifesting detachment from a two-dimensional plane. I created these drawings first by laying one paper strip on top of another and applying graphite powder with water in-between. The piled up layers caused the consecutive sheets of paper to imprint graphite texture onto the bottom

ones. This resulted in the pattern that was a record of the process setting up the character of the “conversation” within each drawing in the series.



Untitled #1 (Under My Skin) - Detail
wax on graphite on paper, 144 x 48 inches, 2010

Next, I drew detailed images of pieces of furniture, primarily chairs, and *Korale*, that is, coral bead necklaces derived from Polish folklore on each sheet. Often, the images became partially effaced. Lastly, the drawings were covered with a thin layer of beeswax, which emphasized the tactility of the surface and the intimacy of skin and the body. The style of furniture as well as the cultural significance of necklaces was reminiscent of my personal history. The tension between depicted objects and highly abstracted parts of indeterminate facture, also the skin-like quality of surfaces, began to dictate the emotional content of the work. The notion of “unmaking” or “undoing” an image at work was particularly meaningful here in relation to Freud’s concept of *lost object*. In his book “The Tears of Things. Melancholy and Physical Objects,” Peter Schwenger wrote: “while the lost object is an element in any representation, it can never

be regained or re-presented, for it is less a particular object that the irreversible experience of loss. In the representation there always remains a drive toward something beyond what is represented, something more than mimesis” (Schwenger, 2006, p. 30). Briony Fer described that operation as the lost object by pointing to a kind of interval within subjectivity itself, the interval “between desire and drive, and between disintegration and detachment” (Fer, 1999, p. 36). In regards to the art of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse she argued: “Detachment ends up being not just a necessary cost but also a gain – a condition of viewing objects that would deal not with bodily empathies so much as what gets lost in the very process of identification, lost in the sense of falling into pieces of a subject in disintegration, as in Bourgeois, or a subject who is effaced and rendered invisible in Hesse. Detachment in these terms, then, is anything but neutral. Rather, it is the very presence of the object that heightens the sense of losing a portion of oneself” (Fer, 1999, p. 36).

Unbecoming into space

Striving for deeper expression of that very presence of the lost and detached object, I moved the motifs of bead necklaces and chairs from a realm of flat drawing into three-dimensional space.

I am interested in the European traditional folk costume element of coral bead necklaces as a symbolically and biographically charged element. Coral, a semi-precious stone that has long attracted jewelers, is a symbol of beauty, fertility, and prosperity. Historically, it was a talisman that protected from evil, harm, and disease. Coral beads were often hung above cradles of newborns and worn as necklaces by children in

Ancient Rome. As a child I had my own folk costume that I wore together with the red coral necklace, that is, *Korale*, around my neck. At that time it was very popular to dress up children in folk clothing for special occasions, which was, undoubtedly, favored by the communist state, as it fit into its widely spread illusory image of a reborn nation that seeks its universal roots in folk culture to obliterate any ties to the “bourgeois” past. On the other hand, my coral bead necklace was my very first real belonging that I could identify with. In a sense, it was an object invested with spiritual meaning. It was a talisman to me.

Through my research, I realized that the dark origin of coral described in the Greek Mythology recalled this disquieting discrepancy between my personal memory and the collective history of the imposed and deceptive beliefs. I was inspired by the story of Perseus. Perseus, having petrified the sea monster threatening Andromeda, placed Medusa's head on the riverbank while he washed his hands. The seaweed hardened on contact with Medusa's blood turning into red coral. This myth explains coral's physical property of hardening on contact with air (Frontisi-Ducroux, 2003, p. 264). Hence, coral takes its place among victims of the Medusa's mortal gaze, which petrified, turning the living into stone. Petrification is a transformative process that infers the passage from the living animal to dead, petrified stone (Frontisi-Ducroux, 2003, p. 265).



Dream of Gorgeia
rope, thread, latex, paint, glue, paper, and plastic, dimensions variable, 2011

In my work entitled “Dream of Gorgeia” *Korale* were represented as strings of black and larger than life-size bead necklaces covered in dark paint that I tied together, entangled and wrapped in threads and ropes. First I thought of spreading necklaces and suspending them to “enshroud” the space with a threatening mood. Yet, I soon abandoned that idea intrigued instead by the potential of the material that began to reveal work’s own internal dynamics. I gathered the necklaces into a bundle, attached one side to the ceiling and let the beads to be pulled downward by gravity. I manipulated the lower part of the bundle in rotational movement so that it found its various placements on the floor. Finally, I detached the bundle and tossed it so that the beads fell onto the ground establishing a gesture evocative of a human form. Each of

those actions was involved in creating a series of various arrangements of the work. In these variations, I explored ideas of chance, material performance, and dependence on the transitive states to make decisions about the arrangements. At the same time the chain of actions was representing, or re-enacting, stages of a fall from the vertical axis, that is erected state, to the horizontal. This metaphorical movement of falling, collapsing or crushing horizontally, amounts to the destruction of representation, which points to death itself (Fer, 2002, p.74). The idea of a fall was central to George Bataille's theory of the avant-garde. While analyzing Eva Hesse's works, Briony Fer wrote about Bataille that through "metaphors of verticality and horizontality, light and obscurity, he pits the elevation of the sun, and by implication of the human spirit, against the notion of the fall, to "baseness", which characterizes the human condition" (Fer, 2002, p. 79)



Untitled (Rose Grove)
wooden chair, Tyvek, paint, glitter, dimensions variable, 2011

A chair is a very mundane object and a part of the domestic equipment indispensable at home. In the work "Untitled. Rose Grove" the object was stripped of its expected qualities and functions. The image of a chair transforming into a rising vertically cloud-like shape was striking. In place of expected functionality of an object designed to sit on or rest, the viewer was faced with chair's fantastic transformation into something other and new. The chair became unfamiliar, that is *unheimlich* (Schwenger, 2006, p. 70). The unexpected interplay of familiar and unfamiliar was a result of juxtaposing a recognizable object, the chair and, emerging from it and dispersing in the space above, indeterminate form - matter. The hovering form escaped any recognizable thing. It resembled cloud, clustered bunches, a grove, a smoke or steam/haze-like. Yet it was none of those, it was formless. Even the material (Tyvek, a sheet material used in building construction) that the form was created from resembled paper but it was not paper. Tyvek is a synthetic material that has similar qualities to paper, but unlike the latter it is waterproof, tear resistant and durable. I decided to oppose these characteristics and test the limits of the material strength. The material underwent aggressive processes including burning and melting that resulted in lace-like pattern of irregular holes. These destructive processes against material somehow recalled similar actions taken by Alberto Burri who was burning plastic in the 1960s in Italy. In his essay "Base Materialism" in the book "Formless. A User's Guide," Yve-Alain Bois wrote: "Demolishing the myth of plastic as infinitely transposable substance, as alchemical miracle, burning it, Burri presents it as "wholly other"." (Bois, 1997) In the very process of burning Tyvek I was revealing something new of the material – in its familiarity something unfamiliar. The randomness of burnt holes was balanced by a rather

organized chain of repetitive actions that eventually lead to creation of large strips with similar pattern. The strips were produced in the same almost mechanical manner. In this procedure resided the meaning of *faktura*. According to Benjamin Buchloh and Yves-Alain Bois, the term *faktura* characterizes European formalism. *Faktura* was taken from the vocabulary of the soviet avant-garde. Unlike *facture*, which referred to the expressive mark of an artist hand visible in a work of art, *faktura* emphasized “precisely the mechanical quality, the materiality, and the anonymity” (Finch, 1997). *Faktura* also cancelled the distinction between content and form pointing to the materiality, or matter that constructs the meaning of an artwork. “Matter seemingly generates its own representation without mediation . . .”(Finch, 1997).

In my next works I began to challenge the status of the artist’s hand even more and stress unmediated disposition of matter in the process of making.



Testing The Edges of the Breathable, wax, paint, yupo paper, chains, pins, dimensions variable, 2011

In the work “Testing the Edges of the Breathable,” I cut thick plastic paper either with my hands or with computer controlled laser cutter, then treated them with a heat blower, and then repetitively dipped them in wax. I later made molds of objects and subsequently cast them in wax. In all of these operations I was mixing the handmade with the mechanical or even machine-made. The procedures and the outcomes became primarily predicated on the qualities of the materials used and their susceptibility to mechanical and chemical transformations.

I let the material speak for itself. I also was subverting preconceptions regarding the physicality of objects by manipulating with the qualities of the materials they were made from. For instance, by including cast wax forms of brass weights, such as clock weights or plumb bobs in a melting state of dissolution, I undermined typical heaviness and the force of pulling down associated with these objects. This was visible in the works “Testing the Edges of the Breathable” and “And Ice Would Burn.” Once again, I recalled the idea of the material that works against itself, or presents itself as “wholly other”. The work draws upon contradictory psychic states: aspiration and disillusionment, desire and loss, vulnerability and aggression. The contradiction resided in materiality and a number of different operations that lead to transformation of elements within a work, as well as an emphasis on opposing directions and forces.



Testing The Edges of the Breathable - Detail
wax, paint, yupo paper, chains, pins, dimensions variable, 2011

In the installation “Testing the Edges of the Breathable” I used the motif of *Wycinanka* (vee-chin-non-key) for the first time. The term *Wycinanki* or *Wycinanka* is derived from Central-Eastern European folklore to name characteristic traditional cutouts made by craft people in Poland. Previously I explored in my works the motif of *Korale*. This Polish craft began to dominate my research and studio practice.

I am interested in the idea of craft as a creative process that has a revelatory potential in tradition rich with the social and cultural history of the everyday. Craft has been always dependent upon materiality, process, tactility, as well critically bound to ritual and the native. These occupy a unique position in my art making and are decisive in constructing the meaning. By undertaking a series of tasks and actions in the creation of my works I stress craft’s dependence upon process and its performative aspect. Valerie Cassel Oliver writes in her essay, “Craft Out of Action” that “craft is inextricably linked to performance” (Oliver, 2010, p. 11). The history of craft is filled with numerous examples of performance in the form of demonstrations that served to educate about

craft techniques and materials, and to reinforce cultural traditions within the community (Oliver, 2010, p. 11). Hence, “this demonstrative aspect of craft performance provides a silent entry point for a discussion of performance as a catalyst and an interloper to tradition”(Oliver, 2010, p.11). Craft significantly influenced art in the United States after the World War II, when many teachers and students from the Bauhaus in Germany immigrated before the war to US, became faculty, and contributed experimental paradigms of unifying art, craft, and technology to studio art programs in such schools as Yale University, California College of Arts and Crafts, and Black Mountain College. (Oliver, 2010, p. 12) As a result, emerging postwar art put often emphasis on performance, materiality, and process. The traditional boundaries between fine art and applied art were further transgressed. These explorations lead to an exhibition, historically important in establishing the Post-Minimalist movement entitled “Eccentric Abstraction” curated by Lucy Lippard in the 1966. The exhibition featured works by artists who integrated processes, techniques, and materials derived straight from craft. One of the artists was Eva Hesse whom I have already mentioned several times. Her way of managing materials and letting the performative impulse of materials and actions to determine content and composition of an artwork has consistently inspired me.

I am not engaged with craft that fetishizes produced objects and relies on the preciousness and the particularities of the media. Rather, I am interested in craft as the socio-historical relevance, and the practice focused on the everyday as well as the very act of making. Thus, I am not afraid of mixing different forms of making: I work directly with my hands, I cast objects multiplying them, and recently I have also been using digital fabrication, such as CNC laser cutting methods.

In craft, the outcome reveals truth of the material and the making. Sensitive to this, I accentuate and enhance the physicality of particular materials, for example I underline the viscosity and plasticity of wax, rawness and fragility of paper, or transparency and reflectivity of plastic film and plastic resins. Mary Caroline Richards said: "We cannot fake craft. It lies in the act" (Fariello, 2011, p.25). Anything that I make in my studio becomes a document that reveals material reenactment, which is fundamental to my studio practice.

Antrakt

Through my research on craft traditions in Poland, I became interested in the history of *Wycinanka*, Polish cutouts. The genealogy of *Wycinanka* is not clear. It is said that before paper became available to country people, Polish shepherds cut sheets of bark and leather with sheep sheers. Cutouts appeared first in plain white and then in the mid-nineteenth century in color paper.

Wycinanki were used to decorate whitewashed walls and house furniture each year before Easter. Characteristically symmetrical, made of one monochromatic piece of paper or multilayered in vivid colors, the cutouts usually represented the spruce tree and the rooster, a traditional symbol of Easter. Some other motifs, such as repetitive dolls and roosters, or dolls with raised hands holding roosters above heads were typical for different regions in Poland. After the World War II the *Wycinanka* as well as the whole of Polish folklore became subjected to communist propaganda. The regime considered the folk traditions as "politically correct" due to the sociopolitical ideology that stressed its strong connections with Polish country people. In 1949 the Socialist

government founded *Cepelia* – “Centrala Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego”, in translation – The Central of People’s Industry and Art. *Cepelia* took full control over folk crafts people, as many of traditional folk art forms, as well as craft production became commodified. By 1980 the organization operated with craft stores in major Polish cities. Its monopoly censored the design of traditionally crafted objects, including *Wycinanka*, and exploited craft workers, which caused the artistic quality of artifacts to deteriorate, and diminished their originality. Almost “mass-produced” in *Cepelia* stores, folk craft became the most available house decoration in 60’s and 70’s. Crafty tablecloths, wooden colorful trinkets and other ornaments spread out in my family home between other antique artifacts and furniture (revered by my mother) are still vivid in my recollections as a child. Folk craft was extremely popular in the whole Communist era. It is no wonder that the surplus devalued folk craft to mere kitsch. After the Communist regime collapsed in 1990s, people compulsively replaced unfashionable “communist” domestic objects and craft decoration with new and hip products from the West. Everything strongly associated with the old regime, especially native folklore, was suddenly despised.

Over the next twenty years the attitude towards the folk traditional design transformed into a tourist fascination with the exotic souvenir that the folklore it is identified with. Recently, it has been used in advertisement and in new Polish industrial design called *etno-design*. Eventually its reputation recovered greatly as it has also been used as national emblems in promoting Polish culture and Polish achievements internationally, for example: the use of *Wycinanka* motifs in the facade design of the

Polish pavilion at *Expo 2010* in Shanghai, China, or currently as a logo for the *Union of European Football Associations* Championship hosted by Poland in June 2012.



Antrakt, acrylic gel, epoxy resin, hand and laser cut dura-lar, 17 x 18 x 15 feet, 2012

In my installation entitled “Antrakt,” I subvert assumptions about traditional Polish cutouts and purge them of all sentimental and propagandistic qualities, or any positive and negative histories embedded in them over a time. In place of traditionally symmetrical flat images on paper decorating house walls, the cutouts are grouped in an assemblage of animated forms actively occupying the space. The typical extreme intense colors of *Wycinanka* are washed out, revealing the transparent raw property of plastic materials. Whereas, in the previous work I defied the typical vivid color of cutouts by dipping colored paper in hot black wax so they appeared dirty, muddy, in a state of deforming into mere formless matter. Through this process, I deny the cultural and

personal significance of the cutouts through appropriation, and then transformation of their physical properties in order to convey the idea of displacement and loss of the familiar and the native.



Antrakt, acrylic gel, epoxy resin, hand and laser cut dura-lar, 17 x 18 x 15 feet, 2012

Apart from materials that work against the historical *Wycinanka*, the processes I use contradict their traditional way of making, that is, crafting. Which usually only involves scissors carefully maneuvered by the maker's hand. I break the convention and use scissors along with CNC laser cutter machines. Either by hand or with the digital and mechanical manipulation I create objects and parts to be assembled that are a result of manifold repetitive actions performed on materials. In this regard I would not be afraid of calling myself a *fabricator*, which is totally contrary and improper to the idea of traditional craft.

In cutouts, the idea of positive and negative is profound. It is a concept of primordial double that was present already in my previous works, for example in the series of paintings “Double Black” and “Double White,” where I redoubled double reflections of the images, or in “The Ice Would Burn” and “Testing The Edges of the Breathable,” in which I cast weights in wax as to reproduce their forms. By introducing Polish cutouts to my work the idea of the double, as a symmetrical reflection of an image, duality of the positive and negative shape, or a repetition of the motif, became ever more explicit. This happened due to the importance of light in my installations which cast shadows of cutouts to multiply them, as well as to cutout’s double condition of an image that is either positive or negative that, ironically, depends on which cut out part of the piece of paper we call a “cutout.” Hence, the status of the relation between positive and negative cutout part is that of a false resemblance.



Antrakt, acrylic gel, epoxy resin, hand and laser cut dura-lar, 17 x 18 x 15 feet, 2012

According to Freud, the doubles “are at one and the same time the extreme opposite of oneself and yet the same as oneself, which is to say both alive and dead”

(Krauss, 1997, p.194). The double as a shadow, a mirror reflection, a cast of the original, a doppelganger, or any kind of twinning, infers a structure of the *uncanny*. “The structure of the uncanny turns, then, on a strangeness that grips what was once familiar, thereby producing the double as simulacral, as it also takes the form of repetition, of the inevitability of return” (Krauss, 1997, p. 194). The infinitely doubled and redoubled shadows in the installation “Antrakt” reference, to quote Rosalind Krauss, “a kind of shadow cast by profound absence.” As far as the light and shadow are concerned and the inherent absence inferred, ultimately, the issues surrounding visibility and invisibility come into play once again in my art. In “Antrakt,” the cutouts are translucent so the light is either reflected or transmitted almost in its entirety through the plastic material. If there were no light they would disappear into darkness. Similarly, the black wax that covered the surface of cutouts in “Testing the Edges of the Breathable” was fully absorbing the light adding formal and psychological obscurity to the work.

Again, the repetitiveness of hand and mechanical procedures in the making process and the unmediated matter are emphasized in “Antrakt” echoing the idea of *Faktura*. The material performs itself: it seems to be dissolving into space, draining down to the ground, or dispersing. The multiplication of the vessel-like forms, and translucent silhouettes repetitively intermingling with their numerous shadows projected onto the walls are disorienting and give a sense of space in constant flux. The figure-ground relationship is suddenly blurred. The positive is interchangeable with the negative and vice versa. Does it become or it dissolved? It may go on and on. It is reflective of the infinite performance.



Antrakt – Detail, acrylic gel, epoxy resin, hand and laser cut dura-lar, 17 x 18 x 15 feet, 2012

The implied movement along diagonal and vertical axes is suggested by the way the cutouts, and forms resembling weights and bowls are deployed on different levels of the installation that represent different stages of transformation. The cutouts, *Wycinanka*, are the most clearly defined shapes that dominate the upper part, hovering in space. They were cut from dura-lar, sturdy, archival plastic film, and then lightly dipped in epoxy resin to add the effect of waves, runs, and other surface blemishes indicative of process. I decided to work with two levels of scale; *Wycinanka* were cut out either large or very small. While the larger cutouts were created by hand, the CNC laser cutter became useful in cutting tiny intricate shapes. I then cut along their edges by hand once again and constructed delicate chains of lace-like structure that wrapped

around the larger cutouts or hung from them as if they were veins. I dipped these strands several times in acrylic gel so their ends evolved into translucent drips.

The accumulation of dripped material took the shape as solid translucent pendulous forms hanging in close proximity to the ground. They implied a material gravity of pulling the installation downward. With those dripping forms, the installation culminated in several vessels on the ground. Made of thinly and carefully applied layers of resin, the vessels took on the shape of the bowls in which they were cured. The process allowed the material to create an intricate pattern around the edges that was reminiscent of branching patterns often encountered in nature, but also added another quality to the textures and repetitive shapes existing in the installation. Seen in connection with the strands of tiny cutouts and the dissolving pendulous forms hanging above them, the vessels with their open shapes resembled blooming flowers or upwardly moving splashes of water. Evocation of water – liquid, its constant movement and translucency is visible in all elements of the installation. It pervades in “Antrakt”, suggested through the use of the material and space. Because water and movement are implied, yet in truth static, the idea of ice or being frozen comes into play. The pendulous forms, explicitly, can be viewed as ice, icicles, or stalactites. The viewer becomes a witness of a particular moment that is frozen for him or her in time. Numerous highlights reflected on translucent surfaces flicker and dazzle the viewer adding a quality of immensity to the experience. Familiar elements of *Wycinanka* become fantastically transformed into a soaring cloud of light or a fleeting flock of birds. The vessels on the floor ground the fantasy and activate the space by allowing the viewer to be immersed in this transformative event.

For my project's title I chose the word *ANTRAKT*, which is a Polish word derived from French *entr'acte* for interlude, interspace, or a piece between major parts in a theater production, a musical concert or an opera. As an interval between two acts in a play it conveys a sense of temporality and suspension of an ongoing action. Thus, within the word *Antrakt* resides meaning of the *in-between* condition that metaphorically explains not only the ideas behind this particular project but also formal and conceptual interests explored in my art. In my artistic practice I dwell on the verge between art genres, or even between art and non-art by including craft practice. I am suspicious of representation so I struggle between the recognition and vagueness of the image. In my recent installations I strive for a sensual immersion that conveys an abstract experience of discovery and wonder through the tension between shifting states of rising and falling, floating freely and being pulled down by gravity, solidifying and dissolving, or appearing and vanishing. In the work "Antrakt" I want the viewer to become aware of self-surrendering to the environment, teetering between many different activities at once. I produce shapes and forms that fluctuate between the visible and the unseen, the tangible and immaterial, things that are captured *in-between* – in the moment of transformation.

And, in the end, where I stand now, the works speak of me. I am neither there nor here, but in that very *in-between*. Inferred here the sense of transience and uncertainty can have also revelatory potential. The word *Antrakt* implicates anticipation of the future. As an interlude in a theatrical play it points to the simple fact that there was something before and something will happen after. Rooted in my experience of detachment, my project “evokes the usual sensations that accompany the archetypal departure: a sense of loss, a sense of anxiety, but also a sense of new possibilities” (Schwenger, 2006, p.71).

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kalina Winska, the third child of four, was born in Boleslawiec, Poland, on February 9, 1984, the daughter of Miroslawa Stozek and her husband Marian Winski. She grew up in Poland, mostly in Olesnica before moving to study in Wroclaw and earning her MFA in Painting from The Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wroclaw in 2009. As a recipient of Socrates-Erasmus Scholarship she went to study in Germany at the Braunschweig University of Art (HBK) in Spring 2007.

Upon applying to University of Florida as an international student, Kalina Winska received a Graduate School Fellowship in 2009. She earned her MFA at the University of Florida in 2012. While a student in Painting and Drawing Program in the School of Art and Art History, Kalina received numerous awards including the James J. Rizzi Scholarship Fund, Provost's Digital Fabrication Lab Award, Dennis and Colette Compay Studio Art Scholarship, Outstanding International Student Certificate, Codified Materials Fabrication Grant, and most recently she was nominated for a 2012 Joan Mitchell Fellowship. In addition, Kalina actively exhibited her artwork and was featured in Studio Visit Magazine. Kalina taught in four courses within studio foundations program and her student outcomes were highly regarded. She will be attending the highly regarded Vermont Studio Center in the summer 2012 to continue her creative research and to develop a new body of works.