

In many of your series there is a backdrop with a certain pattern and then there's an object that visually fits into that pattern. It looks like the object/subject and the background are continuations of each other.

Could you describe this process for one of the images? Where did you look for the objects/clothes and backdrops (e.g. in second-hand stores, in people's houses)?

The process is always a little bit different, but here are some common elements. In the case of most of the pictures from the Protagonists, I used what I found in a particular family's house, and created a scenography from that. After the shooting session I chose one picture and then work on it very carefully.

How and when did you start working with backdrops?

I started at the university, where found a wonderful closet, a little room with a huge amount of stuff, often used to construct still nature in painting and drawing classes - a collection of fabrics and objects, many of which remember Communism times. Now I have my own huge collection of fabrics and clothes and countless items from second-hand shops. Slowly, I'm running out of place in my studio... I also collect contacts to people, who I very often I meet in the street, to arrange a photo session with them later.

Do you remember the first time you used one? Did it immediately work out the way you wanted?

My first photograph (from Thanksgiving – my first photography project) was created when I was preparing a design for a book – Tango by the Polish writer Slawomir Mrozek - I composed scenography to the shooting session.

Surprisingly, having taking the picture, I noticed that the elements of the still life were „absorbed” by the backdrop, deconstructed - this kind of fusion of elements emerged only on the photograph. So that's how my experiments in this matter began.

How do you know when the continuation ‘works’? Can you visualise this beforehand, or do you find out during the photo shoot itself?

There is always a specific concept, a sort vision at the beginning, but I think is important to be able to change your plan, to be ready for and open to a surprise, to changes...especially when I work with people, that is always a bit unpredictable.

Visually, the ways in which the objects and persons fit into the patterns gives a suggestion of infinity. As if a person or object is sucked into an endlessness pattern somehow. Did you have this effect in mind? What were you looking for in making these images (especially Thanksgiving, Things In Common, and The Protagonists)?

If there is a suggestion of endlessness, infinity, it may be connected with the continuity and diversity of human community, bonded with archetypes and common narratives.

Is there any fabric/piece of clothing with a special story?

The first photo in Things in common series, which refers to beginning of my motherhood and the most intimate period of that time, shows my own underwear - a dirty bra. The breast milk that the fabric was absorbing for many hours of daily activities began to create a kind of ornaments, patterns ... This bra, as it was, is an object in my collection.

In your series The Protagonists you use backdrops to create visual connections between your subjects. You do so in order to highlight the idea that people form 'families' on the basis of similarities that go beyond blood ties. Yet, you also want the viewer to hesitate before drawing conclusions on the basis of what he/she sees. As you write: "We can only wonder what [the subjects'] relationships out of the frame are and whether the community they have formed in front of the eye of the camera really exists."

Do you think a photo is able to make us alert to our own impulse to believe what we think we see?

Yes, I guess the photo has that ability. People still believe in a photographic image, and it is often synonymous to them with a document. I like to use this feature. By the way, I think the status of photography as a „document“ is very interesting, but it's a topic for a separate conversation. In this series I introduced a kind of disorder, among so called "documentary pictures of families", there are also inscenizations I created. The series is constructed in several ways. One is the registration of the actual families, the other, connected by the similarities: place of residence, the religious group etc. or their visual resemblance. I must admit that the sessions created with the "temporal families" are always fascinating, especially people's reactions and the way they behave when they have to create a family in front of a camera. This kind of work is particularly important to me, it does not give a clear answer, introduces ambiguity and because of that, people reacted strongly to some pictures, they were outraged by some configurations, but it only makes me more confident that it is worth introducing such shifts, doing such experiments.

You've said that working with people was a challenge, that you had to change your plans sometimes. Could you give an example of how a change of plans actually worked out great for the photo you eventually took?

Which was the most fun photo shoot you ever did?

One of the most interesting and surprising sessions was when we drove the entire studio to a countryside, to pay a visit to a typical Polish farm. We did not know the place, we did not know the people we were to meet. The session was held in the barn, and the family we met was simply wonderful. And the photo from that day is one of the most characteristic from this series.

In your series Non-places you photographed a shopping mall at night, in order to show the idea of 'non-places': places that don't have enough of an identity to be considered a 'place'. Examples are:

airports, shopping malls, or gas stations.

A non-place is thus a place that can be found anywhere, yet it isn't a place that can be recognised as such. Since in your other series, you look for peculiarities, I was wondering what you were looking for when you started photographing the shopping mall? (Non-peculiarities – does such a thing exist? :))

Non-peculiarities... that's a really nice word :) I think my Non-places series is not an illustration of Marc Augé's theories, but it's more a discussion with it. I deliberately photographed those places in specific conditions, in a situation in which it is not seen on a daily basis. I removed all the advertisements, logos, posters from those spaces. By such baring I tried to look at them, their structure, striking symmetry and character more accurately, so I guess I was looking for peculiarities. But again, I don't want to answer for the viewer if such places are particular enough to be considered a "place".

Beside being an artist, you're also a teacher. Is there something you learnt from your students that you benefit from in your own photography?

Yes, I'm teacher in the department of photography and digital media at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Working with the students is invaluable; it's a continuous exchange of thoughts and ideas, and our discussions are a source of fresh insights! I am always learning something new.

You say that you're interested in how a work comes alive as a viewer sees it and that this idea is always present in your work. Could you give an example of how this idea is present in one of your photos (or series)?

There's an infinite amount of possibilities in experiencing a work of art. Do you have any examples of how you thought your work dealt with a certain issue, and you heard from a viewer that he or she thought it was about something else entirely?

I think there is no work of art without the audience. The work of the artist is not just creation of new, unique things but a dialogue, a continuous drawing from what is already there, and from discussions, interactions with, and being close to people. Art is about participating.

An example, maybe, is an experiment that I conducted few years ago, when I started working on Thanksgiving series. I took one picture – the one with the rabbit, and I asked people - anthropologists, art theoreticians, curators, theologians, artists, psychologists, historians for a comment, interpretation. I also gathered comments of people who were often not connected with the art world at all, which I found on the Internet. It was so intriguing to see how often they were different from my intentions and ideas I had while working on the project and how all of those interpretations interact with each other to form an independent piece of art.

Could you tell a little bit about your new series Re-collection?

You write that the photos are of museum collections: you place objects from the collection in front of a painting from the collection. How do you choose these paintings and objects? And from which museum(s) are these collections?

After my experience with non-places, I focused on places in the full, cultural sense of the term. I've learned that museums should be the exact opposite of non-places.

It all started with my site specific project prepared in a salt mine - Museum of Saltworks in Wieliczka. It is one of the most often visited museal institutions in Poland. The project was created for this institution, with the institution and in the institution. I based it on the history, stories, collections and people who are connected with this place. People are really important in this project and I dedicate my all works to them.

I prepared a performance and a series of works- films and animations, using their immense collection of salt shakers. I also used prints of paintings from Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam as a background or a „stage” on which I presented "events" (I attach the curator's description. Please, take a look at it, there's a great story in it :)).

So at first, I worked with museal collections only, now I moved to everyday objects (“non-objects” ;), the ones without specific meaning – rubbish, balloons, decorative elements that often I find in people's houses and I put them together on the paintings as a performative work/installation captured as a still image/photography.

Now, I'm also working with the collection of the National Museum of Cracow.

The goal of all these projects is to reflect on the role of the museum in the process of forming collections, while redefining and transforming the latter. I wanted to discuss the status and the role as a museum in preserving the heritage.

**You also work with installations. What role do photos play in your installations?
What makes a good installation, you think?**

I'm glad you've mentioned installations in the context of photography. For me it has always been interesting where exactly performative activities starts, and where installations, sculpture and photography end. It seems to me that it has been long since art escaped the clear division into different fields.

From the very beginning I create temporal installations. In my first projects (Thanksgiving, The Protagonists...), the construction of the scenography / installation was key and the photograph was only one element of the creative process.