

ústí nad labem
house of arts



TIME JOURNEY

Artist

Lukasz Skapski

Curator

Michal Koleček

6/9 — 13/10 2018

Exhibition opening

Wednesday, September 5

at 7 p.m.

Ústí nad Labem House of Arts
Faculty of Art and Design
Jan Evangelista Purkyně University

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Admission free

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TIME JOURNEY

We live in a world that has been increasingly forcing us to experience it in a rather indirect way. The information package that is, often only seemingly, necessary for us to understand the interwoven relations with the reality surrounding us has been dramatically extending and exceeding our mental as well as physical capacity. We therefore rely on various means of communication, on summaries of news compiled by other people and coming to us from the chaotic and anonymous virtual environment. In fact, it is an unlimited and constantly expanding intangible parallel of the physical universe full of supernovas – more or less reliable, trustworthy or sensationalist rumours that fade away on a daily basis, transforming the vanishing energy into new embryos of the explosions to come on the sky of the fermenting society. Submerged in this galactic chaos of news, broadcasts and even conspiratorial despatches, we lose both our will and ability of drawing the lines, verifying the evidence as well as critical thinking, which leaves us in a schizophrenic state of permanent distrust and absolute dependency on information sources at the same time.

There is no doubt that current migration crisis can serve as an exemplary case of destruction of both value and communication orientation. There is a huge discrepancy between the interpretation of the crisis presented by the media and the actual experience most of the Central European citizens have with the "migrants". All the dangers of accepting ethnically and culturally different people are nothing more but a virtual construct; if there is something putting our community in danger, it is our own inability to cope with the demands of the today's world.

I believe that Lukasz Skapski (born in 1958 in Katowice) fiercely resists this incapability by deploying various defensive strategies, such as continuously developing analytical thinking on the social levels and experimenting with the visual language within contemporary arts. Paradoxically, his works follow the tradition of the medium of photography, i.e. especially from static and dynamic digital pictures. On the other hand, Skapski chooses his means of expressing himself while keeping an ironic distance since he does not employ direct aestheticization; he is also aware of their manipulative powers and tries to understand the essence of everything surrounding him rather than to document it.

Lukasz Skapski's exhibition called Time Journey prepared specifically for the Ústí nad Labem House of Arts is inspired by the reality of contemporary Kenya as experienced by him when he spent a month there on a study stay this spring. He did not live in the capital city but in a smaller town of Kilifi on the Indian Ocean coast, which allowed him to discover the African countryside not defined and contorted by global tourism. It seems that some aspects of this experience have reminded Skapski of the social transformation era after the communist regime was defeated in Poland as well as the rest of the Central Europe in the beginning of 1990s. The desire of the then citizens of the region to become part of the Western world as quickly and painlessly as possible and the then crowds of tourists longing to see the newly opened, cheap and exotic world seem to have shown a comparative perspective to the artist to contrast the two historical situations as well as the two geographical and cultural environments.

By using a sensitive optics of a sophisticated viewer understanding the marginalized social classes, Lukasz Skapski watches the processes and the developments through various time zones, both real and fictitious, chooses a hyperbolized symbol and transfers them to the gallery space, using both static and dynamical technical pictures and relating them to our common interest. To compare the different contexts, the author's basic strategy is to hyperbolize the paradoxes of social situations, presented within the individual projects in a seemingly inadvertent way. In his digital photography series, pseudo-documentary video pictures and series of both found and reality-based reconstructed objects, Skapski always constructs a story in which he works with elements of the reality and accentuates the sense of authenticity while watching it from the outside as a "naïve traveller" or even an "amateur ethnographer".

The exhibition offers several photography series in which Lukasz Skapski interconnects different contexts based on principally similar mechanisms, appropriating traditional documentary strategies characteristic for the Western way of "understanding" the African continent. The author imitates the tradition of classical romanticizing and highly aestheticized landscape photographs which idealize our view of nature – he records parts of what seems as the wilderness but his pictures are defective and somehow artless, failing the expectations for this kind of shooting (Tsavo National Park, Kenya, 2018). The artist uses an analogical approach when taking pictures of the Kilifi citizens and foreign visitors, making portraits of their groups in front of a white-coloured bed sheet which they help to install in an amateurish way. The layout of Skapski's figural compositions and the roles the participants unwittingly assume on themselves within the photographic genre refer to the postcolonial criticism and emancipate the authentic wealth of the depicted landscape and community in an almost unobserved way (Like This or Like That, 2018).

The surprising bridge between "their" and "our" ideas of successful lives is further developed in a series of objects representing hand-made toys and traditional doohickies. All the objects are either real or reconstructed and reflect both the extent of their creators' creativity (rising from the need for an unavailable commercial object and the creation of a more or less successful substitute for such an object) and the consensus shared by a community knowing there are such substitutes and accepting them on the level of common purpose (Arsenal, 2014; Arsenal Plus – Kenya, 2018; Modern toys, 2018). The principle is then accelerated in his videos depicting DIY devices made by fitness centre lovers who build various training devices on their own, realizing their dream of living large the attribute of success of which is the perfect body (Fitness, 2011; Gym place, 2018).

The exhibition of the paradoxes supplementing each other is completed with a series of video pictures presenting seemingly unimportant yet definitely neither culturally and politically vital nor aesthetically refined, more or less banal scenes of an unsettling nature. The level of authenticity renders them tiny pieces of parallel everydayness, of civil motives documenting lives of our contemporaries living in incommensurable parts of Central Africa that are hard to grasp for the Europeans (Lunapark, 2000; Matatu, 2018; What do you want, 2018).

When staying in Africa, Lukasz Skapski was looking for his relationship to the continent and its citizens based on several questions crucial for our own existence. He managed to slide through time towards the feeling of imperfectness as provoked by the post totalitarian experience and residing somewhere deep in his soul, and at the same time to cast doubt upon the schemes of the dominating white men in the contemporary rearranging world. He made a journey to the other direction, to a place where the idea of wealth equals something completely different, just to come back to the coordinates of his own life and, by using artistic reflexion, to open further dimensions of the seemingly unshakable shapes of our lives both for us and those to come.

Michal Koleček

Most of the works presented at the Ústí nad Labem House of Arts exhibition Time Journey by Lukasz Skapski was created during the author's study stay at Pwani University College, Kilifi, Kenya, realized this spring within the international research project Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art, and Social Sciences Project (TICASS) supported by the European Union as part of the Horizon 2020 programme.