

Features

#11

Miroslaw

Balka

September

2022

In one of your exhibitions, I remember visitors touching the salt, which was part of the installation — I am pretty sure, though, it was not a participatory piece. Do you always consider activating this sense of curiosity when making new work?

Well, I would not mind if their touch was gentle. But, as you already know, the visual arts are not only about the eye.

The human presence stands at the heart of your practice in all its glory and decay. Katerina Anghelaki-Rooke once wrote that “the body is the victory and the defeat of dreams.” What do you think about this dipole?

I find her line to be very poetic. Still, I do not actually use the word “victory” in my vocabulary at all. But in any case, the human figure, as well as its shadow, are indeed essential to my research.

I read in ‘Tate Etc.’ that you were disappointed when you first saw Michelangelo’s “Rondanini Pietà” at Castello Sforzesco; your expectations about the Old Masters had been formed during your training upon black-and-white reproductions found in art books. Of course, today, there is a new generation of highly Instagrammable art, but... you are not using social media, right?

Regarding Pietà... there is a little misunderstanding. I love this sculpture. What I tried to describe in ‘Tate Etc.’ was the situation that the work had been thoroughly washed out by conservators. It was a shock for me, as I always imagined it dirty from the bad quality reproductions. Every time I am in Milan, I try to visit “Rondanini Pietà,” and so I have eventually accepted it as a clean masterpiece :) Concerning social media... yes, I am not really using them. No time, no need. But it is also not my problem if people use them in such a way.

Let's stay a bit more in Milan and, particularly, in your 2017 retrospective "CROSS-OVER/S" at Pirelli HangarBicocca. I was impressed by the work "15 x 22 x 19 (hard skull)" that could only be seen thanks to a guide who shined a flashlight on it. Could you tell me more about this enigmatic sculpture?

It is nice to hear that you managed to find this sculpture and that you liked it. In my work, I very often elaborate on the processes of recycling. For example, this specific piece's story is that I once found a very old, thrown-away motorcycle helmet; I cleaned it and gave it a new life. I firmly believe that the stream of light from the flashlight was also an integral characteristic of the sculpture.

You often use fragile, precarious organic materials; I am thinking of soap and how it relates to notions of care. Did the pandemic change the way you handle this element?

During the pandemic, for sure, we took more care and protection of ourselves. But, apart from this particular historical moment, I have always considered the use of soap quite significant in life.

Last question, Miroslaw — what is your idea of spirituality?

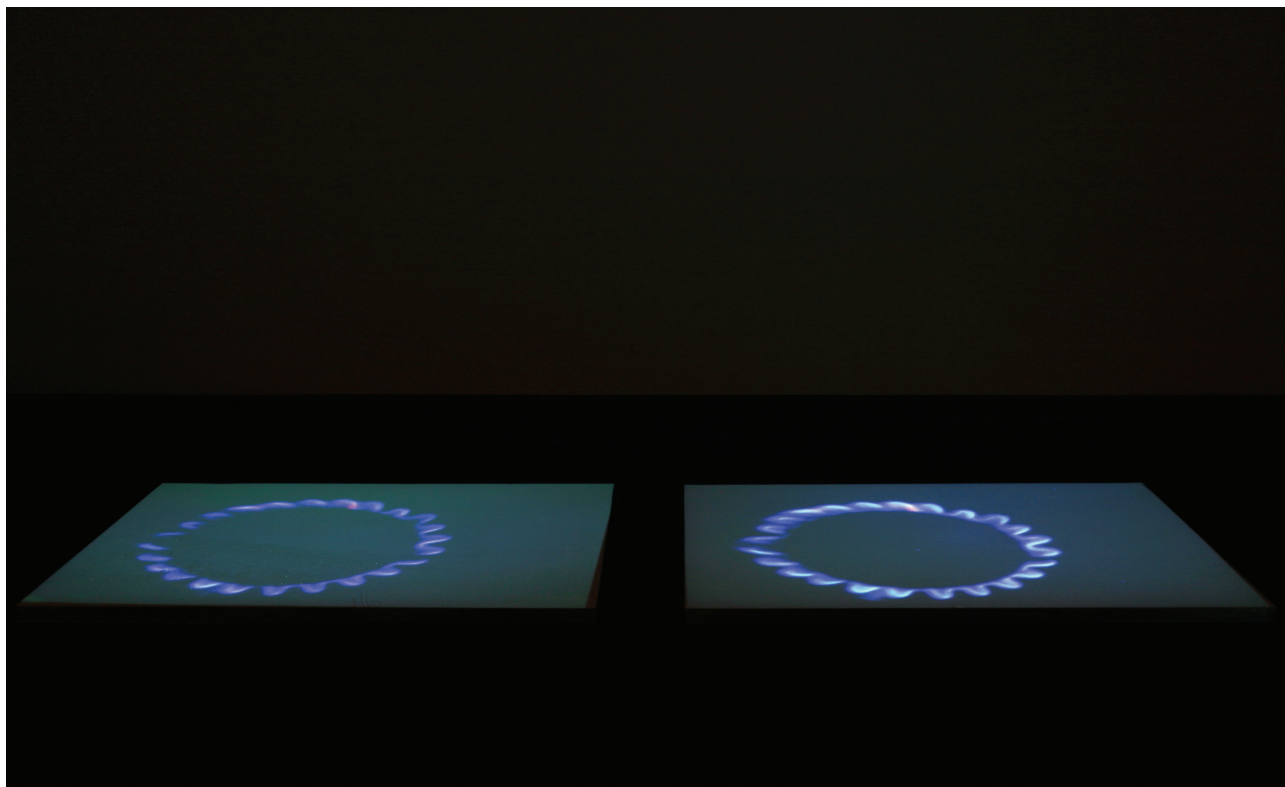
I am sixty-four years old and still not able to answer such a question. But most probably, my work is the answer to this.

Mirosław Balka

Blue Gas Eyes

2004

Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka
4 x 22 x 1018
2010
Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka
80 x 140 x 80 / *Gravity*
2015
Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka
200 x 760 x 500 / The Right Path
2008-2015
Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka
180 x 180 x 53 / Domestic Shelter
2015
Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka
Bonfire (detail)
2013-2015
Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka

15 x 22 x 19 (hard skull)

2006

Installation view: Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2017

Photo: Attilio Maranzano

Courtesy of the artist and Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan



Mirosław Balka
127 x 10 x 10
1993-2015
Courtesy of the artist and Dvir Gallery



Mirosław Balka

Mirosław Balka's work is characterised by a bare and elegiac quality, the outcome of the artist's focus on the precise, minimalist placement of objects as well as the spaces and pauses between them. Often using his own body and studio as a starting point, his subject matter draws on personal and collective memory, his Catholic upbringing, and the fractured history of his native Poland. Balka has participated in major exhibitions worldwide, such as the Venice Biennale, documenta, Sydney Biennale, and Carnegie International. His works are in numerous collections, including Tate, Van Abbemuseum, Hirshhorn Museum, Museu Serralves, and Moderna Museet.



Photo: Alessandro Moggi

Features is an interview series that explores inspiring artistic and research stories in contemporary culture. Invited artists and practitioners from all over the world — acting within a multitude of initiatives, spaces and contexts — share their creative processes with curator Nicolas Vamvouklis.

The opinions expressed in the interviews are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foundation.

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