

***PPP.* Robert Kuśmirowski**

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Documentation (excerpt) submitted for the competition
for the curatorial project for the exhibition
in the Polish Pavilion at the
59th International Art Exhibition in Venice in 2022

Robert Kuśmirowski *PPP* (Polonia Polish Pavilion)

CONCEPT for the EXHIBITION IN THE POLISH PAVILION 59th International Art Exhibition in Venice

Poland has participated in the Venice Biennale since 1932, so the 2022 edition marks the 90th anniversary of our presence at this important event. Historically, the Polonia Polish Pavilion had been presenting projects selected through closed competitions, or artists from ministerial nomination. It was only in 2007 that the Polish contribution had emerged as a result of an open competition. Since 2017, after the Jury's deliberations, the submitted proposals have been made public. It is their analysis that has become the starting point for this project, which aims to create an oneiric imaginarium, a storehouse of dreams and ideas.

In keeping with the theme of the forthcoming Venice Biennale provided by Cecilia Alemani, we propose a surreal archaeology of the future, in which the artist's never-implemented projects come to fruition. As Leonora Carrington's mysterious stories in her *Milk of Dreams*, originally written on the walls of her house, our yarn will be fused with architecture. The form of the central façade of the Polish Pavilion will be replicated in its interior – in parallel to the concepts of the competition projects presented by Robert Kuśmirowski in the thus newly created exhibition space.

The surreal recreation of the façade inside the Pavilion – resulting in the external and internal appearance becoming identical – aims at jolting the viewers from the start out of their comfort zone of taking perception for granted. They need to approach the world created by the artist, a critically acclaimed virtuoso re-constructionist of history and futurologist, with probing perspicuity and a critical insight, if they are to explore further than merely the first layer of the project, with its mainly aesthetic dimension – the façade intricately reconstructed in its architectural detail within the interior to provide the backdrop for the three small works of art on display: a self-portrait by Robert Kuśmirowski and two copies of paintings by Kazimir Malevich. The effort put into preparing this stage set is misleading: it is only behind it that the actual presentation is hidden – the perceptive trophy reached by the observant viewer. The only access is via the three aforementioned paintings, which are in fact specially prepared panes of anti-reflective glass.

The 'image' displayed in the portal of the replica Polonia Pavilion will both conceal and reveal the performance space of Robert Kuśmirowski. At various times throughout the Biennale

he will be seated behind the glass – becoming a living portrait. Thanks to the properties of glass, the image of the artist frozen in motion will acquire the character of an old, varnished oil painting. At the times of the artist's absence from Venice, his presence will be replaced with his photograph exhibited in the same place. Only careful observation will determine whether the artist is physically present himself. In a niche flanking the façade on the left, there will be a pane imitating the painting *Black Square on White Background* (1914–1915) by Kazimir Malevich. As the viewers' eyes become accustomed to staring at the blackness, they will begin to notice the subtle tonal gradations. Finally, an installation appears before the eyes of the viewers, a metaphorical storehouse of past projects that have not been realised in the Polish Pavilion, including elements from Robert Kuśmirowski's own projects submitted for previous editions of the Biennale. In the niche on the right of the façade we will place a pane of glass that will imitate another well-known work by Malevich – *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918). It will again provide access to a hidden exhibition space, this time an installation showing a fragment of a sterile, orderly exhibition – symbolising works that have already experienced consecration by becoming part of a museum collection.

Why include Kazimir Malevich? Because this artist, whose works had a canonical role in the history of art, had Polish roots and thus we hope to sneak him in posthumously as Poland's second, honorary, representative at the Biennale. *Black Square on White*, deemed the first-ever non-representational work of art, was a milestone for the avant-garde and the cornerstone of Malevich's theory of art known as suprematism. The author himself balked at the idea of creating it for several years, fearing the controversy the painting would cause. The story of the painting reveals a mechanism familiar to most artists: burgeoning concepts simmering in their mind as a dreamlike storehouse of ideas waiting for favourable conditions to come to fruition. Malevich's *White on White* have become a par excellence symbol for a space dedicated to ideas that are yet to see the light of day. For Malevich himself, this radical work brought closure in his quest conducted within a single figure. The square itself has been blurred due to the lack of clear contrast; it is neither a backdrop nor a main protagonist. Such is the fate of most works presented in large, collective museum shows, in which the accumulation of objects often leads to a cacophony of ideas, despite the seemingly favourable, sterile conditions of display in white cube spaces.

Our concept of the exhibition nurtured by the 'milk of dreams', has woven together antinomies such as the past and the future, that which has been realised and that that which has not, the interior and the façade, the individual and the collective, the obvious and the hidden. With its elaborate system of references, this story-within-a-story, the embedded narrative of our exhibit has been informed by research in the field of neuroaesthetics, which has provided the rationale for the elements of surreal play. It aims to whet the viewer's curiosity while creating a degree of uncertainty. These devices encourage the viewers to go on a quest of their own, thus ensuring that what is perceived is remembered for longer. This makes the experience of this presentation unique.

EXHIBITION SCENARIO FOR THE POLISH PAVILION

59th International Art Exhibition in Venice

/short version/

The vestibule of the Pavilion will be empty apart from a plotter graphic with information about the exhibition. The space will remain austere so as not to introduce additional perceptual stimuli at the entrance to the exhibition hall proper, whose main element will be a monumental replica of the Polonia façade. Spanning the entire width of the Pavilion and executed with attention to detail, it will disorientate the viewer by replicating the exterior in the interior. In its central part, in a built-in entrance niche, a self-portrait by Robert Kuśmirowski will be on display, and the niches flanking it will house reproductions of two canonical works by Kazimierz Malevich: *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918) and *Black Square on White Background* (1914–1915). The main walls of the Pavilion will remain bare in order to direct the viewer's gaze directly to the false screen façade, behind which the actual exhibition will be concealed – its existence revealed only to those viewers who come up to take a closer look at the three artefacts. Each of these will in fact be a crafted pane of anti-reflective glass, behind which the display proper will take place. Nobody apart from the project team will have physical access to this separate space, accessible only by the back entrance to the Pavilion.

Prolonged scrutiny of *Black Square on White Background*, displayed on the left side of the façade will – after the eyes of the viewer have accommodated to the darkness – reveal the space hidden behind, marked MAGAZYN [STOREROOM] in the enclosed simulation. This will be a metaphorical repository of ideas, a storehouse of unrealised projects presented as visualised renditions of the descriptions submitted in the past competitions for the project to be exhibited in the Polish Pavilion. They will also include works by Robert Kuśmirowski, submitted in several previous editions of the Biennale. The aforementioned artefacts will be part of a lapidarium of items collected by the artist in numerous storehouses. All the elements will be painted black – their shapes be recognisable only thanks to the lighting, which will bring out tonal nuance. The objects will be placed in gabion baskets, forming a structure imitating a monumental fence. This manner of display will cause the artworks to lose their individual character, rendering them part of a chaotic collection of unrealised projects. We have employed this display technique in order to illustrate the fate of works that exist only as a possibility, a concept in the imagination of the artist, a message devoid of the recipient.

Robert Kuśmirowski's subversive self-portrait will be located in the central part of the façade replica. Periodically, it will have the character of a performative action: the artist himself will be seated in a specially designated space, separated from the audience by an anti-reflective glass pane. Thanks to the lighting and the appropriately prepared glass, his image will gain the appearance of a painting, resembling a work of an old master. It is only through careful scrutiny

that the viewers can discover the presence of the artist in the exhibition space. At times of his absence, his photographic self-portrait will be displayed behind the glass.

A replica of Malevich's *Suprematist Composition: White on White* presented in the niche on the right of the façade will act as a window on to a hidden exhibition space, marked on the visualisation as MUZEUM [MUSEUM]. This part of the exhibition will be reminiscent of a museum display of classical, academic works. They will all be painted white, and only a subtle play of chiaroscuro will enable the viewer to differentiate the individual elements of the installation. The arrangement of this part of the Pavilion will be a subversive play on traditional, institutional methods of presenting works. Hence we have included archaic display systems and engraved name plates, which, however, will lose their role; repainted white, they will become illegible. Due to being uniformly white, the works have lost their individual character. This is deliberate – as a metaphor for how museum displays often silence or flatten the original overtone of a given work.

ELEMENTS ACCOMPANYING THE EXHIBITION

THE ARTIST'S PERFORMATIVE ACTIVITY

In the central part of the Pavilion's replica façade there will be a self-portrait of the artist, having the character of a performative action. At various times during the Biennale, Robert Kuśmirowski will be seated behind the glass and become a living portrait. The timing of the performance will be unpredictable.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition will be accompanied by a bilingual Polish-English catalogue. The publication will include four texts. The curatorial text will introduce the concept of the exhibition, describing in detail its surreal connotations, and its roots in the thought of Leonora Carrington and the earlier work of Robert Kuśmirowski. The publication will also include essays on neuroaesthetics in the context of the *PPP* project and the perception of museum space, including the influence of traditional ways of presenting works on their reception, and a text prepared in connection with the 90th anniversary of Poland's presence at the Biennale, covering the activity of the Polonia Pavilion to date – the concept, the history, and the most interesting projects and their reception.