



Nicholas Grafia & Mikołaj Sobczak, *The Accursed Ones*, 2018,  
Performance Dokumentation, Installationsansicht, Foto: Ivan Murzin

*ffriedrich gallery in Frankfurt: An exhibition in three acts*  
by Luise Del Prete  
September 08, 2020

How do curatorial practice and artworks influence how we perceive what we see? Can they work together to form new ways of exhibiting? The group exhibition side by side, which took place in the fffriedrich gallery in Frankfurt explores this notion of collaboration.

The Protagonists:

The Artists: Lydia Ericsson Wärn, Maryna Makarenko, Nicholas Grafia and Mikołaj Sobczak

The Curators: Louisa Behr, Anna Holms and Sofia Steffens

The Space:

A gallery in the center of Frankfurt, small scale, with white walls and a grey linoleum floor. A huge rectangular window dominates the wall that faces the sidewalk.

### **Act Three: Nicholas Grafia and Mikołaj Sobczak**

Today is the finale of the three-part exhibition, finishing off with the works of Nicholas Grafia and Mikołaj Sobczak. From afar I see a group of people gathered in front of the gallery. Coming nearer I notice it's not only the visitors and participants who have set up outside, but also the display of the work. A screen is put up in front of the window, showing a performance piece of the two artists which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2018.

*The Accursed Ones* is conceptualized as a split screen video, showing different angles of the same room lit by a cold blue light. It's a lot to take in, at times it's dizzying to keep track of what is happening. Three performers rush through the room in a kind of frenzy. Their interactions are livid, loaded with strong gestures thrust at the spectators. It seems as if they are performing a kind of religious cleansing, pushing a stone as if working with a Ouija board, using an egg to pace the body of one of the actors in a kind of palm healing motion. Their speech emphasizes this notion. I hear them talk of priests and psychiatrists declaring homosexuality a mental sickness, or spells uttered in repetition. Throughout the video the movements become more hectic, the speech louder and sharper. In a sense, it reminds me of horror movies, in which the protagonists are possessed by demons that have to be exorcised by clerics or healers. Except in this case, there is no final expulsion of evil. On the contrary, it is acknowledged and integrated into the concept of self. "We are not humans," one of the performers says.

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“We are zombies.” A phrase that gains even more significance in current times, when the president of Poland Andrzej Duda declares homosexuality as an ideology and homosexuals as not human<sup>1</sup> In a way, this mode of appropriation takes this debasement to show the strength that comes from adapting to a society built on the elimination of one’s identity, the agency that arises from being silenced.

I get a glimpse of blue drawings hanging from the wall inside the room, partly concealed by the monitor. They work as a visual study – together with text-based research – forming a multimedia Gesamtkunstwerk. Painting, drawing, reading, theatre and performance play into the mode of their collaborative art production, opening the barriers of conventional professionalization in art practice. But not only is the question of media scrutinized, also modes of knowledge production are held for account. In his drawing *The Library of Hate*, Grafia portrays the accumulation of knowledge through a library containing allegedly established theories and literature. The people standing in the foreground of the picture function as gatekeepers, overlooking the organization and structure of a room filled with books that make up society.

They get to say what is to be included, what excluded, therefore reflecting the development of an educational canon and its fixation on a singular viewpoint. I have always believed that there are few things that can be rendered as objective, and that in most cases knowledge comes from personal and cultural background. However, western thought has often professed to hold an objective standpoint, thereby blocking access to other forms of knowledge. From this vantage point the assertion of objectivity reveals itself an instrument of power, that works in favor of a Eurocentric monopoly. Nicholas and Mikołaj counter this notion through an inclusion and amalgamation of their heritage. Owing to the possibilities of performance, Polish and Philippine teachings or sayings are communicated through dialogue, often varying in language to show the myriad of conscious or unconscious viewpoints structuring knowledge. There is no hierarchy of knowledge, no diminishment of it on the base of it being a “superstition.” Moreover, in a way Nicholas’ and Mikołaj’s art practice shakes the fundamentals of the conventional, westernized way model of thought to produce an authentic expression of our world.



Nicholas Grafia, fünf Zeichnungen, Tinte auf Papier,  
Installationsansicht, Foto: Ivan Murzin

Although the curatorial decision to put the monitor outside obscures parts of the other artworks on display, it does not deny the access to it. On the contrary, by moving the exhibition outside it pries open the White Cube, enabling a fortuitous look inside. The issue of opening seems to be a general theme, pervading the exhibition. It is not only interventions in the artworks themselves, which break open the walls of the conventional and assumed, but also the way of showing it that questions the conventional and triggers a “thinking outside the box.” I’ve always believed that art and its rendition can shed light on what is concealed, that in a way it works as a text that spells out its context, but I have also come to think that it paves the way for creating new contexts in the sense of educating, of making you think in new mindsets that cannot be taught in books and teachings. The artists shown, as well as the curators, seem to me to participate in this process by simply offering new approaches and exposing what tends to be obscured.

**The group exhibition side by side took place in the fffriedrich in Frankfurt from 24 July to 27 July. It showed artworks by Lydia Ericsson Wärn, Maryna Makarenko, Nicholas Grafia and Mikołaj Sobczak and was curated by Louisa Behr, Anna Holms and Sofia Steffens.**