

Alicja Bielawska

If not here, where?

Exhibition opening: February 17th, 2017 (Friday), 7 p.m.

On until: April 9th, 2017 (Tue – Sun, 12 a.m. – 7 p.m.)

Admission free of charge

Curator: Waldemar Tatarczuk

Alicja Bielawska's ability to transform everyday life into artwork is indeed extraordinary. The prosaic materials that the artist uses in her works, such as steel and aluminium tubes, pieces of string, ceramics and chequered blankets seem to be surprisingly familiar. Forms made out of metal tubes saturated with colours bring to mind the realm of a childhood playground. The lines drawn with lightness and nonchalance tell the well-remembered story of the first attempts at drawing. Particular shapes and forms are taken either from objects used on a daily basis or ones recalled from the past, but due to transformations and disruptions of scale they completely lose their functionality. They become sculptures that are close for a person, however ascetic, evoking the spirit of minimalism. Similarly to the most simple structure of a hideout consisting of two chairs and a blanket look differently each time depending on the author, time and place.

It's interesting that when one looks at Alicja Bielawska's artwork, it is impossible to determine the time when the particular pieces were created. Only her first pieces stand out – works where the artist used ready-made items and intermediate products, such as linoleum, carpeting, furniture boards and desk frames. Subsequent ones create a consistent group, which remain in a reflexive relationship, where some ideas come as a result of other ones and are mutually complimentary. Since the time she defended her diploma the artist consistently delves into the subject matter of lines, volume and scale as well as movement, to which the objects encourage viewers and to which they are subject to. Her art forms a relationship with the place, in which it appears, requires a large space and is capable of perfectly taking advantage of it. Thus

it was only a question of time, when her work would appear at the Labyrinth Gallery, a place which distinctly provokes artists to take advantage of the effect of scale and volume. After a closer look the seemingly clean, white interior of the exhibition hall reveals the horizontal divisions of the walls, which transfer into a series of tubes and wires reminiscent of the original purpose of the building. The essence of Bielawska's works finds a precise reflection here: on the one hand we are dealing with something familiar, yet on the other hand – the object or the place no longer serves the same thing, it becomes transformed and evokes new contents.

Line

I begin with drawing a line, which I later follow. Initially on a sheet of paper, afterwards in the outline of the objects, when I slide my hand over its edges and when I weave a thread into the fabric or I run on the metal structures and teetering on stretched lines.¹

It seems that Alicja Bielawska's thinking is determined by a line. Both by the visible one as well as the one, which cannot be seen, which is nevertheless a mark, a trace leading from the drawing to the sculpture and the other way around. When asked what is most important for her – drawing or her spatial projects – the artist says that one cannot make such a distinction. Both forms of expression exist simultaneously, mutually interweaving with and complementing each other. The difference is encompassed in the scale of its activity. Drawing for Bielawska is a very intimate action, which requires concentration as well as a specific type of work with one's body. The gesture of using the crayon comes from within and the hand constitutes a direct extension of the thought, the literal transposition of the ideas to

¹ All of the definitions and comments cited in the text are Alicja Bielawska's.

a sheet of paper. The sculpture, however, exerts an influence with its material and the size of its project. The artist reaches beyond the sheet of paper and traces lines in space – literally and metaphorically. Her works are based on divisions rather than building structures, seizing space, partitioning and connecting it back together.

The drawings and the sculptures have their source in the lines. Following Katarzyna Kobro, the creator of the theory of sculpture as a shaped space – diagonal lines correspond with visual impressions, whereas horizontal ones are a visible symbol of the passage of time separating one visual impressions from the next ones. In this way Bielawska is able to grasp the essence of the sculpture – its fourth dimension: time. It emerges only then, when the work of art is gazed upon. According to this theory, the steps of the observer are planned ahead and the authorship of this choreography becomes divided between Bielawska and the space surrounding her works.

The lines do not appear exclusively on paper and in space, but they also appear on pieces of fabric that the artist uses. She uses cloths: smooth, made out of cotton and wool, as well as blankets covered with a custom designed chequered pattern. This most popular motif in mass-production, which all of us have encountered, becomes a cartographic network of connections. The fabric created according to the artist's design is one of a kind – with a potential to become a serial product. It appears as an element of sculptures and spatial projects, which balance between an artistic object and an item of everyday use.

Volume

The vessel encompasses the water, the fabric is wrapped around the body or the piece of furniture. The vessel imposes the shape, the fabric takes one on. The lines of the sculpture run through space engulfing the air and light.

If one would want to capture the objects created by Alicja Bielawska within spatial figures, one could say that she is the author of cylinders, cones and cubes. Each of these shapes has a particular volume, measured using a specific formula, based on its dimensions. And yet how can one measure something, which isn't enclosed within a particular space, but rather opens it up? The works of Bielawska are simultaneously closed and opened, citing Kobro (*Spatial Composition [Kompozycja przestrzenna]*, 1931), their boundaries can be understood at the same time as forming the internal and external

sphere. And what does the sculpture become in such a case? Should it be described as a form of a particular volume? Looking in this context at Bielawska's projects, we become convinced that her works are mostly extremely capacious. Despite most often being created out of a singular line, above it and below it there is a space that become – in a way – "scooped".

The consistency of the block becomes broken by the colour. The artist using it covers large areas, which causes her works to break apart into many surfaces. Regardless whether she uses a coloured fabric, or she put colours on the thin line of a metal tube, she dematerializes the form, which becomes a symbol in space. This way the mutual relations between the diagonal and horizontal lines become revealed. Sometimes the colours overlap, they mask the scaffolding on which they have been placed. Looking from afar, colour patches gently swaying to the pulse of blasts of air or drafting strong lines of spatial forms come to the forefront.

Movement

At first I move with my fingers and my eyes. I change the point of gravity and my shape changes. The forms which I see turn together with me, although sometimes in the opposite direction.

Alicja Bielawska's objects suggest a particular movement of the viewers. One can move along them, go between them, trespass them, look inside or find shelter in a conventional tent consisting of two long rods based on the angle of the gallery. In this subconscious choreography the memory of gestures and steps is contained. They are associated for everybody with something else and the story is not imposed top-down. It seems that, although the compositions do not refer to the particular situations in the artist's life, in the viewers' memory it recalls to them only familiar situations. Alicja Bielawska's works are directed rather at themselves, through the disruption of proportions of their functionality they subside to their modified form. The ladder becomes looped in such a way, that one can climb it without end; an installation similar to a delicate screen rather reveals than conceals space; a colourful sheet suggesting hammock is suspended high under the ceiling beyond the viewer's sight. A hint at understanding this can be the titles of exhibitions and art pieces – poetic statements torn out of context (*We wake up early to see the sun rise, I have a feeling that I forgot about something, I think that you remember too much, I look at the sun and see a hula-hoop*) indicate a specific plot and often refer to the transformation of objects, showing the path of their movement.

The artist also examines the choreographic capabilities of her works during her performances with the participation of dancers. The first one took place during her creative residence in the Nida Art Colony in Lithuania in 2016. In the clear, white space delineated on the floor, with the aid of colourful lines of the drawing, the dancer struggles with the movement determined by one of the works. The blanket folded in a cube is the eponymous *soft ground* under her feet. A small rectangular piece of material becomes a base on which the dancer carries out a sequence of moves taken from everyday situations. At the same time every change of the blanket's position is followed by a change in the positioning of the body and, what follows, a change in the space surrounding it.

Scale

The size can be stretched or squashed in every possible way. Creating models and drawing gives a certain freedom of thinking about scale, which turns out to be subjective.

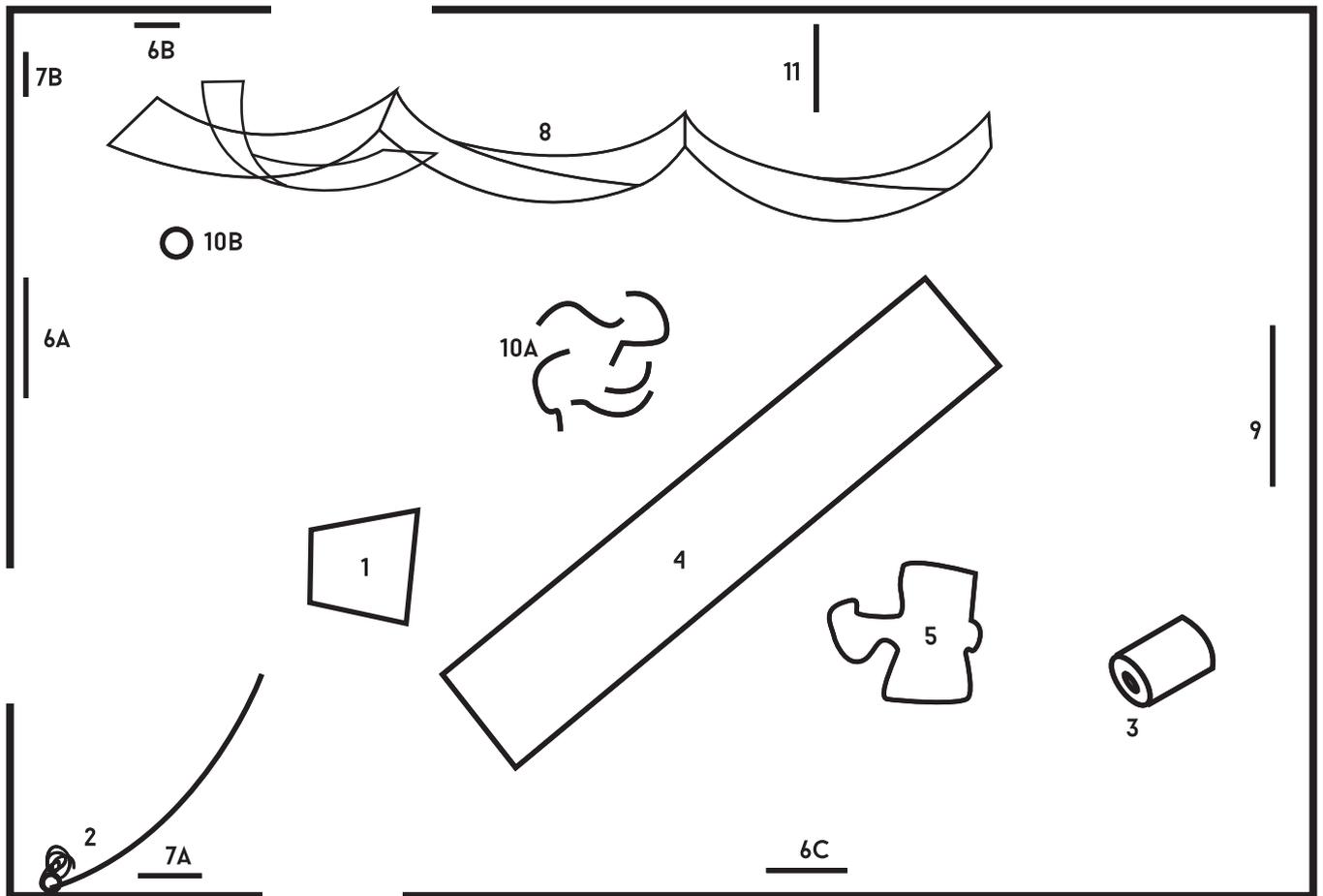
With unconcealed fascination Alicja Bielawska allows herself to experiment and react to all the situations which appear on her path. It turns out that just as in her drawings one can notice moments of hesitation, interrupting the continuousness, imperfections, so do such purposefully committed mistakes, or controlled errors. The spatial forms are subdued to the rigour of straight angles and parallel lines, which are driven relatively freely, slicing through the gallery's inside with the disarming verve of a children's drawing, which can move from the sheet of paper to the table, wander further to the couch, wall and then stop on the window frame. In these shortcomings, holes and gaps human activity is contained – a crushed place on a couch, crookedly folded blanket, bed sheets lacking ironing... Alicja Bielawska transposes everyday gestures in an extraordinary way, while forming her objects and sculptures with their non-mathematical and completely ungraspable rhythm. This is something, which the artist calls a "human gesture": a type of imperfection that turns out to be a mark of a human being. Loss is an element of everyday life. The artist needs errors, for they are a part of a process of creation and that's why one cannot as such speak about something undesired that we cannot get rid of. They are rather a hidden potential, which can transform one thing into something completely different.

In Bielawska's projects there are no direct references to the human figure or its size. The image of a human being taken out of context appears only in several drawings and yet her works seem to have his presence organically engraved in them. One can recognize him by the traces, which he leaves behind – fingerprints on the layers of modelling clay covering long, metal tubes in a

pile of meticulously organized layers of fabric from the artist's drawings or in the ceramic forms which could constitute armrests. A significant role is played here by the scale of the objects. Its literal projection or deformation influences the perception of the work of art: setting them in the context of everyday life or in the artist's imaginary world. The objects recall a familiar shape, but the disrupted proportions do not make it possible to notice within them a table or shelves. Folds, scratches or traces of human activity are, as if, accumulated gestures that one carries out during everyday activities. The change of scale do not allow for accepting one, ultimate interpretation – large, glazed, spherical forms can simultaneously be vases, elements of a necklace, beads of an abacus as well as the most simple, primeval shape forming on the potter's wheel under the pressure of human hands.

Anna Szary

Exhibition map



- 1 *Morning Constellation (II)*, 2016
- 2 *Vector (I, II)*, 2016
- 3 *Mufka na trapezie*, 2014
- 4 *Points of Reference (reversed version)*, 2016
- 5 *Inside Out*, 2017
- 6 *A/B/C* from the series *Difference Hides in the Scale*, 2016
- 7 *A/B* Things from the series *Places*, 2014
- 8 *I Look at the Sun and See a Hula-hoop*, 2017
- 9 *Reverting with Nonchalance*, 2017
- 10 *A/B* from the series *Variable Order*, 2017
- 11 *Perpendicular View on the Horizon*, 2017