

PRZEMEK BRANAS MOUNTAIN/COSMOS/HEAD

**exhibition opening: January 26th, 2018 (Friday), 6 p.m.,
on until February 16th, 2018
(Tuesday – Sunday, 4 p.m. – 5 p.m.)**

How to make a connection between French chemist who discovered combustion reaction and who was beheaded during The French Revolution, Ball's Pyramid – a “sea excrescence” whose ecosystem was altered by rats from crashed ship, and astrologist from the Cape of Good Hope who, with a measure in his hand, tried to find the shape of chemical lab oven in a star constellation he discovered?

The idea of creating work MOUNTAIN/COSMOS/HEAD originated in two motives that are particularly interesting to Przemek Branas – bread and simplified sculptural form of head that somehow resembles primeval sculptures found on Easter Island or Olmec colossal stone heads. In the previous works of Branas we may find some clues connected with materials and motives chosen by the artist to create his new ones. Bread as organic matter and basic human nourishment appears to be result of artist's interests that include “matters” with symbolic burden and obvious economical reference to culture as well as those easy to change or transform. The process of conversion in this case is as natural as strictly controlled and calculated. Sandwich that is going mouldy is a vital part of work called *General Bem returns home* (*Generał Bem wraca do domu*) which directly predated the project in Galeria Labirynt. Branas took aforesaid sandwich in a symbolic à rebours journey using the same route which in 1922 body of general Bem was hauled from initial gravesite at the Muslim graveyard

in Aleppo, Syria to Tarnów, Poland. The sandwich that eventually went mouldy had been prepared by Branas' grandma. The artist left it at the Syrian border, where, before coming back to Poland, he converted to Islam following general Bem. Bread mould is yet another basic element of current Branas works. In his pieces he consciously uses smells and aromas. The artist has already created numerous olfactory installations that consist of such materials as: beeswax, tar and aromatic oils. The installation in Galeria Labirynt Plaza can be definitely classified as another project that largely relates to the sense of smell. The form of head in Branas' works is often presented as a mask of different kinds. This mask may be perceived in socio-cultural context, in relation to ritual set of human behaviours, as a taboo or a symbolic sign of force and violence. Two twin heads of screaming child (black and white) occur in work called *Birth of black and white* (*Narodziny czarnego i białego*). The piece deals with economic and social stratifications and myths connected with these concepts.

The exhibition MOUNTAIN/COSMOS/HEAD, somewhat mysterious and seemingly concentrated on mere formal aspects, corresponds with themes formerly dealt with by Branas. They include above all political and systemic issues as well as questions of the place of an individual in preposterously codified world. The exhibition consists of several related parts that are not closely connected. Their reciprocal relation is the result of artist's interest in specific characters, discoveries, historical facts as well as properties of matter. The matter, although invisible, constitutes the basis of the project. Relations inscribed in history of west civilization occur

between individual objects such as: of hills, heads and star constellation sculptures. Nonetheless, in this case they are a draft of the path which thoughts of the artist followed as well as his personal studies, research and explorations rather than rational and linear cause-and-effect relationships. Compelling motifs from the reality are carefully examined and chosen by Branas. The artist tries to tell their stories as a combination of reality and fiction. Following the selected path, Branas saves and uses those elements that occur the most significant. In the course of work on specific motives, the artist not only examines their “technical” features, he also leaves them for his imagination to be filtered through personal fascinations as well as experience. He looks for “moments”, points that cause excitation and agitation.

Major work of the exhibition, a 180 cm high and almost 150 cm wide hill, has been covered with bread that was put under the work of mould. It is accompanied by two head forms – one of them is salty with black mouldy eyes, whereas the other one is brown-reddish, made of bread and distinctly covered with alive velvet. The third part of the work is “infected” undefined object – an “Oven”, geometrical object that resembles plain, bent, cylindrical pole. It is hung above copper construction shaped as a star constellation. Charts, drawings, print-outs and sketches of the artist are also a part of the exhibition. Through reference to cognitive activity and expansive nature of a man they are also a comment on the work. All these still elements are placed in intoxicating smell of bread that is going mouldy. Devouring, growing and reproducing takes place here. On the photographs bread mould presents itself beautifully, fascinates with brilliance of colours and seems to be so fragile, but in reality, it is an element that causes fear. The fear is intensified by the odour. Damp basements, tainted food, decomposing. We are afraid of inflexibility of this life form and the rate of covering everything in the vicinity with the white coat. One day, it will take over us. Thousands and millions of spores are floating in the air. They are normally harmful to our body. We may sense them minutes before we see the soft coating in the middle of austere white interior of the gallery. It grows physically and symbolically from under the pillar to finally shape the Ball’s Pyramid – hill growing sharp in the middle of the Tasman Sea, formerly unknown, then “conquered” and named after its discoverer, now made into tourist attrac-

tion. Eyes are looking at the hill from both of its sides, two heads place themselves in accordance to the hill. They observe. A strange object hung above copper construction does not make it easier to navigate through this “stuffy” space. It is a star constellation, covered with mould geometric guideline mapping part of night sky. Hill, space, head are being transformed, they change and create their own ecosystem. Carefully designing system of copper pipes and a special scaffolding construction that conducts heat and fosters mould growth, the artist brings into life something like a biological factory. Copper frames that accompany each of works, compulsory for practical reasons, become organic and integral part of them – extremely elegant, shiny and perfectly fitted to the austere white interior of the gallery. Bread is the basis of the installation, thereby its life-giving matter and a principle. The same applies to mould. The history of discovery happens in the background – hill in the middle of the sea, beheaded man, great revolution and disgraced idea. These and many other stories of people and their struggles, beliefs, aspirations and limitations. Their passions, knowledge, defiance and stupidity, will of personal fulfilment and frustration, which could be read from the brownish landscape of mould grown under the strict surveillance of the institution.