

Marcin Dudek  
Slash & Burn II  
Harlan Levey Projects 1080, Brussels  
29.04 – 31.07.2021



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*A Mantle of Flames: Marcin Dudek's Passage Series*  
Amanda Sarroff

Marcin Dudek was just ten years old and living in a housing block outside Krakow when the Berlin Wall finally toppled. It was followed by Poland's freefall into capitalism as the country reeled from severe shortages, skyrocketing inflation, and now-defunct industry. An economic policy nicknamed "shock therapy" fueled wild speculation that sprouted a new wealthy class but left little for the rest. In Dudek's words, families like his were reduced to "living off the offal of society." A frayed social fabric lacking civic associations left children vulnerable to new allegiances. It was not long before Dudek was swept up by Cracovia, one of Krakow's two viciously sparring soccer fan clubs, whose uniform (shared by other clubs across Eastern Europe) was a black flyer jacket with bright orange lining. Members would collectively turn their jackets inside out in the stadium to signal they were ready to brawl. Like the strike of a match, the blazing orange lining would be revealed, and all hell would break loose.

Many of Dudek's earlier works are situated in just such stadiums. From the Pompeii amphitheater in 59AD to Bradford City stadium in 1985, they revisit sites of social conditioning and mass tragedy. For young boys like Dudek, sports stadiums roused both the euphoria of shared intimacy and the unarticulated rage of the dispossessed. His performances, sculptures, and collages delve into the inner magnetism of crowds and examine the scaffolding of places and events that shape human behavior.

Dudek's latest series whittles memory down to the singular. Three new collages titled *Passage* (2020), *Passage II* (2020), and *Passage III* (2021) reflect on what it was like to be that matchstick, to feed the flame that came roaring out of post-communism's concrete ruins. Against a backdrop of white primer and acrylic paint on wood and aluminum, Dudek builds limbs and impossible architectures from meticulously laid strips of medical tape. Emulsified photo rubbings layered through-out create a historical archive of selfhood and nationhood. Many of these images are worn away or effaced by the force of Dudek's hands or the blade of a grinder dragged across their

surfaces. With controlled burns he renders each work into a cauterized wound.

*Passage* depicts three flyer jackets stacked gently like hollow vertebrae. With arms outstretched, each one becomes successively disarticulated into ever smaller squares and slivers of tape. Glimpses of the jackets' orange linings along the central axis generate an upward surge, as if to tear them asunder. The entire composition is crowned by a head of sorts comprised of image transfers of the floodlights from Heysel Stadium, where in 1985 thirty-nine soccer fans perished in a stampede. The emulsified photo transfers become indexical traces, at times revealed or erased, beneath layers of Dudek's affective outpourings of anger, ecstasy, and grief.

Slipping into the jacket's soft, dark shell for the first time in 1993, Dudek suddenly belonged to something that felt greater than himself. That year, during a match between Poland and England, he turned it inside out and abandoned himself to the melee. From afar, the three jackets are the silhouette of a boy collapsing to his knees. At the very bottom edge of the frame, splinters of orange tape pulse like an EKG. They seem to capture the adrenaline coursing through his veins, the blood rushing in his ears. Dudek's first passage was a fall into soundlessness, save for the pounding of his heart.

If the garment's black fabric was a protective skin, orange is the emotional and psychological connective tissue that spans all three works, along with much of Dudek's oeuvre. In *Passage II* it erupts in sprays of fiery shrapnel from the jacket's right arm, and it bleeds to the surface where he has cut into the panel with a knife. It is no coincidence that Krakow is nicknamed the City of Knives, a violence which even Dudek's brother was not spared. Here, Dudek wavers between fight and flight. In a jacket half outturned, he distills the moment he will either jump the fence and enter the fray or lie in wait. The choice is a calculated one: once exposed, the jacket's vivid color leaves nowhere to hide.

*Passage II* is poised in this split second of deliberation. Dudek bursts memory and time wide open to look at how bodies lay claim to even the harshest and most uninviting of spaces. Spewed across the collage's surface are image transfers bearing the names and emblems

of soccer clubs and cities he visited during away games. Among these are also images of young men and women walking out of council estates. Dudek points to the urban terrain that helped constitute an entire generation brought to shelter inside flyer jackets. At the bottom, tongues of scorched surface, where controlled fire was set to the panel, lash at the garment's almost sacral depiction. Here Dudek draws a fine line between proselyte and zealot. These soccer clubs were their own kind of cult. One he extricated himself from but was never been able to leave behind.

The final work in the series, *Passage III* (2021), is also its most diffuse. Swathes of white primer applied with Dudek's fingers and hands lend emotional volume to the work. Here a single jacket has become many: they emerge as diaphanous clouds or smeared and spread as they take flight in wing-shaped silhouettes. The gesture of arms reaching up in joy, defiance, or surrender evoke figures cheering or embracing. Catenae of orange bodies contrast with the more rigid, black lines toward the bottom of the frame suggesting stadium fencing or perhaps a prison trammel. Elsewhere a birds-eye view of stands dotted with crowds as well as a scrubbed-out list of Polish soccer clubs blurs the line between friend and foe.

"Wherever you go, you will be a polis," wrote Hannah Arendt, quoting that ancient Greek catch-phrase. For Arendt, the polis resided in neither square nor arena but in "the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together." This moment of formation was what she deemed the "space of appearance," or the site in which dignity and importance could be conferred through the act of mutual witnessing.<sup>1</sup>

A polis cannot be borne of an individual. It must be summoned by a crowd, and it must be seen. As the disaffected youth of the Cracovia soccer club exited their concrete housing estates and entered soccer stadiums, they did not yet exist. It was only when they turned their jackets out to bare their flame-colored linings that they stepped into the space of appearance. In that moment they be-came actors, albeit violent ones, of a polis that had made no room for them. Convoking a spectacle of fury, they demanded to be seen and to be reckoned with the only way they knew how.

What Arendt understood and Dudek affirms is that to wear the flame's mantle is fleeting, and it is ultimately self-immolating. *Passage* delivers us to the point of dissolution. The space of appearance, like memory, relies on a collective. Not just to be remembered but so as never to be repeated. Dudek gathers the ash and invites viewers to bear witness with him in the hope of creating a new form of public assembly. One that can make sense of turbulent childhoods amid great social and political upheaval and endow them with new possibilities, with other futures. At long last, this is a passage he will not make alone.

(1) Hannah, Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 198.

*Roaming in Bomber Jackets*  
Ive Stevenheydens

*"Kraków to stolica Polski  
Perła ukryta we mgle  
Z najdalszych krain zamorskich Każdy wspomnienia tu śle  
Więc chociaż będę daleko  
Gdy los mnie rzuci precz  
Na zawsze będę pamiętał  
Co w życiu mym ważne jest"*

*("Krakow is the capital of Poland  
A pearl hidden in the fog  
From the most distant overseas lands All memories are here  
So at least I'll be away  
When fate throws me away  
I will remember forever  
What is important in my life")*  
- Maciej Malénczuk, Hymn Cracovii

*"Football divisions were a stupid and irrelevant nonsense, acting  
against the interest of working-class unity, ensuring that the  
bourgeoisie's hegemony went unchallenged."*  
- Irvine Welsh, Trainspotting

*"Don't blame the sweet and tender hooligan, hooligan Because he'll  
never, never, never, never  
Never, never do it again, not until the next time."*  
- The Smiths, Sweet and Tender Hooligan

Cracow, Wednesday 24 April 1996. The air in the city feels fresh: even after six years, it still tastes of liberation. While the whole country is groaning under poverty, it is in a strange state of excitement, that of complete transformation. Poland is in transition: from communism to capitalism. Marcin Dudek is also in transition. Yet this young man has a

lot behind him. Sweet sixteen, but far from immaculate. Wednesday 24 April 1996, in the centre of Cracow. Marcin is meeting mates at the Plac Bohaterów Getta, their usual gathering spot in the city. With its austere, squat terraced houses from the 1930s and its newly constructed but just as compact glass office tower, it's a nondescript place. But still, it's a popular haunt. Convenient: close to the river, away from the hustle and bustle of the city centre, and – especially for these guys – boasting a direct tramline to the football stadium. Marcin's 'team' congregates on the square. Cigarettes, beer and vodka. Bomber jackets, sweatpants, Adidas, red-and-white scarves. One of Marcin's pals shoves a gram of speed into the zippered pocket of his left-hand sleeve, which is the perfect size for a packet of cigarettes and his stiletto. The back of Marcin's bomber jacket is spray-painted with "KS", the initials of the football team Cracovia: these guys are its diehard supporters. The tram arrives. When the doors creak shut, all three grab their cigarettes between thumb and forefinger and flick the butts into the gutter.

Wednesday, 24 April 1996. At 5 p.m. today, in their very own stadium, KS Cracovia is playing a home match against Stalowa Wola (a club named after a city five hours to the east). Inaugurated in 1912 with a match between Cracovia and Pogoń Lwów, the stadium has changed radically in recent decades. Floods, aerial bombardment during the Second World War, storms and a huge fire in the 1960s prompted several reconstructions. Several facade renovations have culminated in the concrete mishmash of the site today, a veritable architectural jumble.

For Marcin and his mates, it's home. They're proud of their team but also of their stadium. Whenever they enter the car park through the half-rusted fence, their hearts quicken. Especially at a match like today's. Behind the twelve-metre high concrete back of the stands, cheering and singing can be heard. Some of the smoke drifts across the corrugated roof. Orange, tinged with grey and white. After their short trek through the dark and dank corridor (as chilly in summer as it is in winter), there lies the pitch. On the stands, the white-and-red Cracovia flags contrast with the green-and-black colours of the rival fans. Above them, in the centre, are the scoreboards. These too have had their day. They regularly fail. 0:0 they declare. And then go dark.

It was a close call: the police approved the match with only half an hour to spare. Too risky, too explosive a crowd in the stands. On the pitch, both teams attack. But there are few real chances to score a goal. It's what you'd call a boring game. Does it matter? Marcin and his mates follow the action but are easily distracted. For now, there's still enough vodka and speed to get them through. At the 16th minute, the host team misses a devilish opportunity: goalkeeper Kwedyczenko catches the ball. A swell in the stands.

And then suddenly, a scream, a signal from Marcin's mates. They turn their bomber jackets inside out. In the stadium, here and there, other groups follow. The black exteriors suddenly turn a vivid orange. They chant and sing, they shout until their smokers' lungs hurt and they start to cough. Marcin loves the adrenaline. Jacket inside out, he steps into another realm, as though entering a forbidden land. It's a victory, like breaking a non-existent law. For him, it's an almost mystical experience. Now he genuinely feels part of the surrounding masses. The mental shift is liberating. Marcin detaches himself from his identity and lets himself to be subsumed by the group. A whistle. It's still 0:0. The stands explode. Orange smoke obliterates the view. Now the real game begins. Outside the stadium, life, danger and confrontation await. This is where the daily fight will be found.

Laeken, 22 March 2021. Today, Marcin Dudek has completely distanced himself from past as a football hooligan. Completely? Actually, not at all. Although he is no longer actively involved in such circles – rest assured, he's one of the gentlest people you could ever wish to meet – his artistic practice has revolved around his former life in Poland since 2013. Profoundly autobiographical ideas in his work form a digestive engine that enables him to process these past experiences. It allows him to control his emotions on a daily basis. Ask him yourself: his work may be somewhat therapeutic, he thinks. But he also sees this as one of the great strengths of art in general. In his output, Dudek reveals his emotions. Using DIY strategies, he translates his feelings into objects, collages, videos, performances and more, in which the rituals of the subculture and the violence of the masses are transformed into universal stories. These are struggles that are frighteningly readable to everyone.

The installation/sculpture/environment *Passage* (2021), seven metres high and twenty metres long, is his most ambitious work to date. It transports us from A to B, inviting us to embark on a physical journey. In addition, it forms a bridge, a transition between an oppressive state of mind and a more purifying one. Made from some 300 individual bomber jackets, this immense garment asserts itself as a single entity. As though it's a group of people who have decided to henceforth function as one body. (1) The bomber jackets that today form *Passage* first started to appear in Poland from the 1990s onwards, all surplus to requirements in the West. Dudek sourced some 300 models from second-hand shops. This hand-picked neglect of the West mainly came from the UK, Scandinavia and the Benelux. With its shipment to Brussels in early 2021, some of these coats returned home (an interesting swing of the pendulum that could be placed in an economic template, but that's taking it a bit too far). In the workshops of "NJØRD Sew for Life" a handful of new Belgians (undocumented migrants, refugees and other people in need) diligently unpicked hundreds of bomber jackets for weeks on end. Only to immediately reassemble them into Dudek's installation.

*Passage* is effectively composed, therefore, of distinct but similar parts: some 300 cloth torsos comprise the new body of this giant coat, six hundred sleeve sections now make up the new, enormous arms. The work literally forms a passage: we, the viewers, enter the tunnel of the left sleeve via its cuff. Once inside, we are immersed in an alienating and resonant experience as the space reverberates with an eerie silence within the belly of 300 bodies. After a short ascent, we arrive at the top a papier-mâché amphitheatre facing three intricate mixed-media paintings, which are described in further detail in Amanda Sarroff's essay "A Mantle of Flames: Marcin Dudek's *Passage* Series".

Isolated in a small sanctuary under the jacket's left armpit, is a triptych with grinded lock and key. On the outside, the traces, stains and smudges of an orange smoke from the stadium remain. Inside, are over 400 portraits mapping a network of Cracovia hooligans through a recent trial and high reaching scandal. Personal stories and third-party observations mix, as recollections of the artist's own time in the group and his brothers' resulting prison sentence mingle with the four-hundred page testimony from one of the gang leaders. Human chains

made of collaged images of arrests evoke the chain of information leaked from each suspect caught by the police. Numbers on each panel are drawn by the artist's brother, as a record of each day of his incarceration. The laborious notation itself could itself be a metaphor for Dudek's work, painstakingly regurgitating his time in the gang, and paying his sentence through the enormous amount of time spent recounting his own testimony through his practice.

This triptych alludes to the shape of the stadium (we, the viewers, are on the pitch) and is a nod to the classic works by Bouts or Van Eyck. This formal reference is for a reason. After all, Dudek began by copying the old masters he discovered in *Wielcy Malarze* (a weekly collectible art magazine that slowly grew into an 'art book') while still an out-and-out hooligan. For Dudek, *Wielcy Malarze* was a never-ending collection. Every week, a different painter, each assigned a number: Dürer, Da Vinci, Tintoretto, Bouts, Bruegel... Every week was an eye-opener for Dudek – sometimes the flame would burn with unprecedented ferocity. *Wielcy Malarze*, his 'second' weekly rendezvous, gradually transformed into his new football club. Again: art as therapy? The artist sees it more as a form of escapism, powerfully fed by the cliché – fascinating nonetheless – of the bon vivant artist. Moreover, the horizons in the old master paintings had Dudek in their grip. He felt the paintings were also infinite, always offering new possibilities. Art effectively offered him an escape route of his own, a way to be independent. It was art that enabled him to break free from the toxic environment of his childhood and adolescence. In 1997, it took him to Salzburg, where his sister was studying. To this day, Dudek speaks about art school as a rebirth. A purification, a different life with new people and a fresh attitude. A year zero. Dudek emerged as a completely new person. He had found a new horizon.

Eastern Europe in the 90s (2). There was nothing for young people. But yet? The materialistic symbols of the 'West', the fetish products of capitalism, gradually infiltrated the country. They were coveted. To own these goods and to wear them = being part of it = to exist. You'd easily have to break your back for two months to earn the price of a pair of trainers. Capitalism wasn't an empty shell here, but the new gold. Yet things were far from easy for the adolescent Marcin. Born into a

working class family, the crisis and its aftermath hit them hard. He grew up with his mother and his two sisters and brothers. They soon came to the attention of the authorities: mum couldn't afford to raise the children. The brothers grew up in a shelter. The rest of the offspring were shuttled from place to place, non-stop. They frequently ended up in hotels, occasionally lodged with friends, and on rare occasions even lived in a meagre flat for a while. In these bleak years, the Red Cross provided a small degree of solace. Every few weeks, very irregularly but always to the delight of the entire family, parcels were sent to the home. They contain discarded clothes and things that the West no longer needed. And hurrah! One day, one of these parcels, this time from Switzerland, contained a pair of Reebok trainers. Little Marcin couldn't believe his eyes. Although they were a size 42 – which meant they swamped his size 36 feet – he walked the streets in them with pride. He wore them every day and showed them off at school.

Football hooliganism. For Marcin, it all began in 1991. From a street urchin, he became an ardent supporter of Cracovia, the football club which waged a virtual holy war with Wisła Kraków, its arch-enemy. A constant battle raged between the two sides. As a 'fan', Dudek lived in a state of constant stress, almost in fear. You never knew who in the school was waiting to kick your ass. In the neighbourhoods of the city, opponents also knew one another. Marcin felt constantly spied on. Hooliganism functions like a sect, like a mafia. The leader adopts a member and instrumentalises him to commit wrongdoing. The newcomer is expected to assimilate, to behave like the others. He is supposed to copy and outdo the 'in crowd', the followers of the group; he is supposed to amaze the members with (feigned) courage and daring. The key to holding office is to break the law, preferably in a violent way. After his rites of passage, Dudek entered the circle.

There, too, violence, drinking, ingesting and sniffing determined his status – daily. He skipped school and earned money, but only for the group. Nevertheless, Dudek felt relatively good. He was finally part of something bigger. With his group of twelve or thirteen mates, he travelled around Poland. They journeyed from match to match. Fighting and stealing. Paralytic and/or stoned out of their minds. In 1997, things went badly wrong. His best friend was murdered by

supporters of a rival club. Dudek was given a suspended sentence in court.

The bomber jacket that is central to *Passage* is a recurring element in Dudek's oeuvre. It is an essential item of clothing in football circles. It is the hooligan's steed, the transvestite's gala dress, the obelisk with an almost spiritual power. It's the insignia of the group (and paradoxically, it also emphasises a certain form of individuality. Which is precisely

melt into a single entity, a multi-headed hydra that is not instinctively benevolent towards the 'others', the outsiders.

Wednesday, 24 April 1996. End of the match. Outside the stadium, the daily fight is brewing. Surging, pushing and pulling in the stadium's icy tunnel. Marcin ducks and dives to the car park. Police in armour with batons. Smoke, the chanting Stalowa Wola supporters. He has lost his mates. He is reeling from the speed and vodka. And then a scream, a thump on his shoulders and a blow to the head. Blood and concrete. White, a beeping sound, and a momentary sense of calm regained.

(1) With this, Dudek indirectly refers to *The Leviathan* (1651) by Thomas Hobbes, which describes a powerful king and thus advocates and defends absolute sovereignty.

(2) A problematic and geographically incorrect term that had negative connotations in the West at the time, which has more or less worn off today.

(3) Colonel Cooper used the colours white, yellow, orange and red to indicate increasing levels of awareness. They are easily applied to everyday situations and critical incidents. As a contemporary society, we are highly familiar with orange. We've been living in code orange (and sometimes in code yellow or red) for the last five to ten years: think of the pandemic, the threat level after terrorist attacks and air pollution in cities. Orange equals danger, it means impending doom.

why the jacket is such a success amongst other subcultures – punks, skinheads, hip-hoppers and so on).

The American company Alpha Industries first manufactured the jacket for military pilots in 1963. In the once draughty fighter planes, the insulating, fire-retardant fabric offered both warmth and protection. The supremely functional cut gave the pilot optimum mobility. With a black, olive green, Bordeaux or grey exterior, the lining is invariably bright orange. Orange as a signal. If there is an emergency – or worse, a crash – the pilot can turn his bomber jacket inside out: his visibility is greatly increased. In 1990s Poland, the bomber jacket was yet another status symbol that represented capitalism. Owning one was a victory in itself. The 'uniform' created a sense of togetherness and stood for militancy, it demonstrated that the wearers were unafraid to man the barricades. Its aggressive appearance speaks more of attitude than materialism, therefore, and its high waistline allows complete freedom of movement in the street or stadium. Although for Dudek the bomber jacket garment is replete with memories and experiences from the subculture of hooliganism, it also symbolises protection. It represents shelter and can serve as a vessel, a mental journey between different states of mind.

Wearing the jacket inside out is a well-known signal in hooligan subcultures. Orange, the colour of the lining, is also often found in Dudek's work. Bearing in mind the Cooper Colours (3), orange equals a state of emergency: the moment at which one is poised to act. Or to do something insurmountable: for the hooligans, turning the bomber jacket inside out is a clear signal, both to each other and to the authorities. At that moment, the violent mass is ready to roar. Whoever turns his jacket inside out in the stadium is signalling that he belongs to a certain group but, in so doing, immediately becomes a target. Above all else, it is a warning to the outsider that the group can muster, will melt into a single entity, a multi-headed hydra that is not instinctively benevolent towards the 'others', the outsiders.

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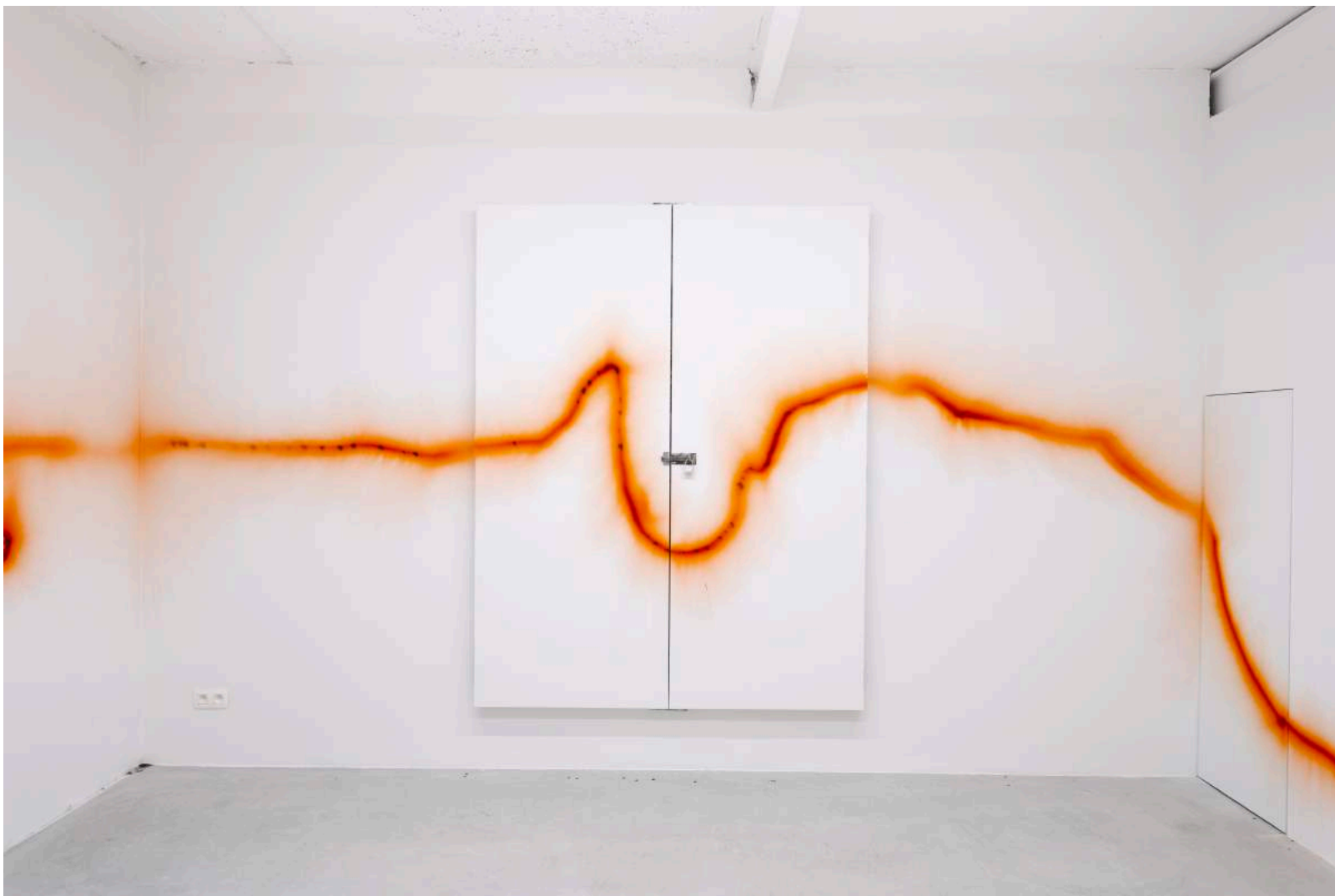
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Marcin Dudek, *Tablica*, 2021, acrylic paint, image transfer, medical tape, coloured smoke, padlock, uv varnish on wood and aluminum, 220 x 170 x 10 cm (closed), 220 x 340 x 5 cm (open).



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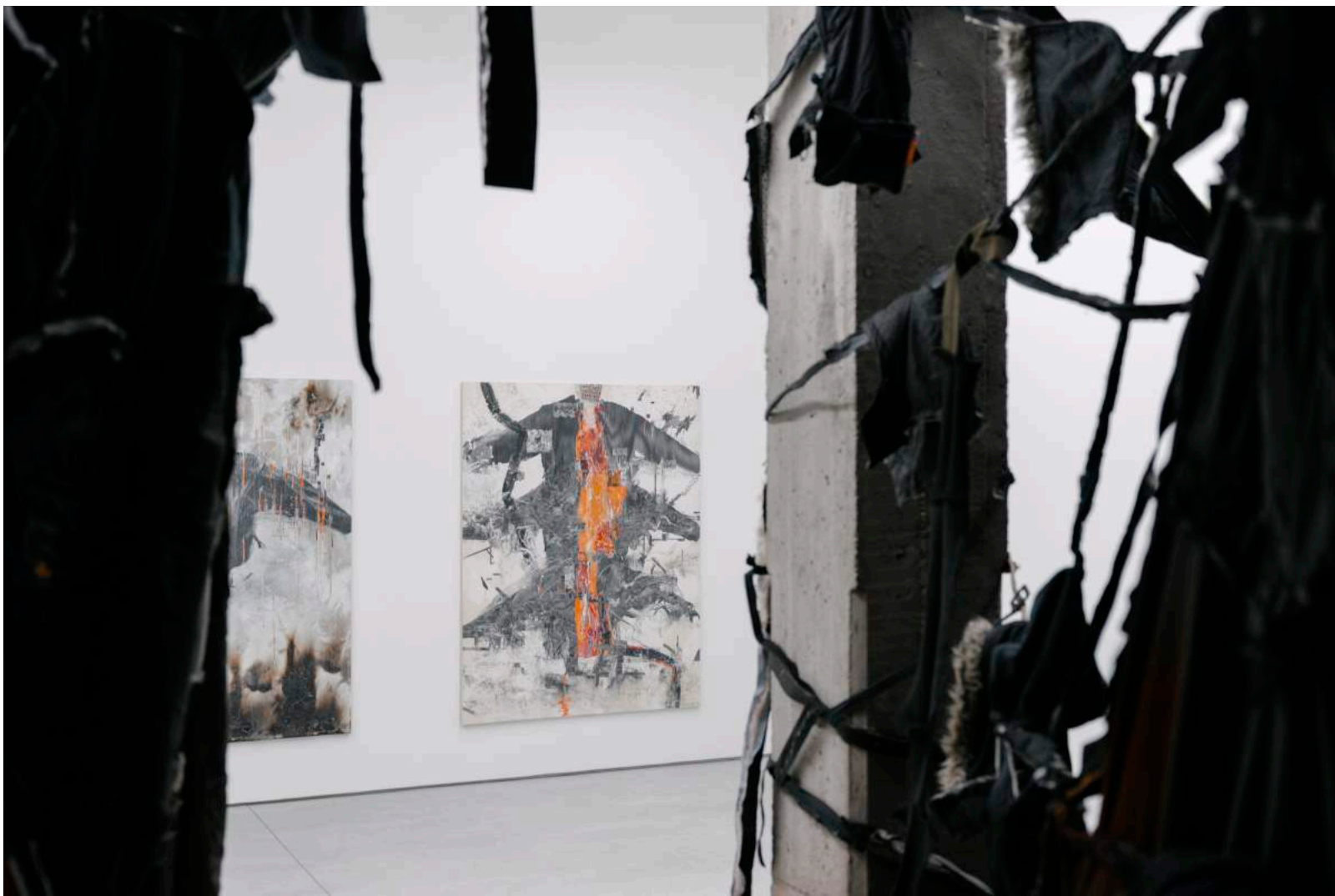
*Tablica* transforms the trial of Krakow's hooligan ring into an immersive experience, in which the spectator steps into both a football arena and a prison cell, depending on the extension of the triptych's side panels. Drawing on the vocabulary of altarpieces from the likes of Bouts or Memling, the work takes on an aspect of devotion. This is a devotion that holds the group higher than the self - until, of course, the moment that one's freedom is at risk, and the only way out is to talk. This is precisely what happened during the investigation of Krakow's hooligan-turned-drug gang, where hundreds of participants were exposed and put on trial, their names often betrayed by other members of the group who gave information in exchange for a kinder sentence. Four hundred and nine panels show portraits of gang members and prison guards coexisting with butterfly knives, architectural plans of both stadiums and jails, objects present in the courtroom, and countless other details contributing to a larger ambiance of the fight for self-preservation.

Personal stories and third party observations mix, as recollections of the artist's own time in the group and his brothers' resulting prison sentence mingle with the four-hundred page testimony from one of the gang leaders. Human chains made of collaged images of arrests evoke the chain of information leaked from each suspect caught by the police. Numbers on each panel are drawn by the artist's brother, as a record of each day of his incarceration. The laborious notation itself could itself be a metaphor for Dudek's practice, painstakingly regurgitating his time in the gang, and paying his sentence through the enormous amount of time spent recounting his own testimony through his practice.

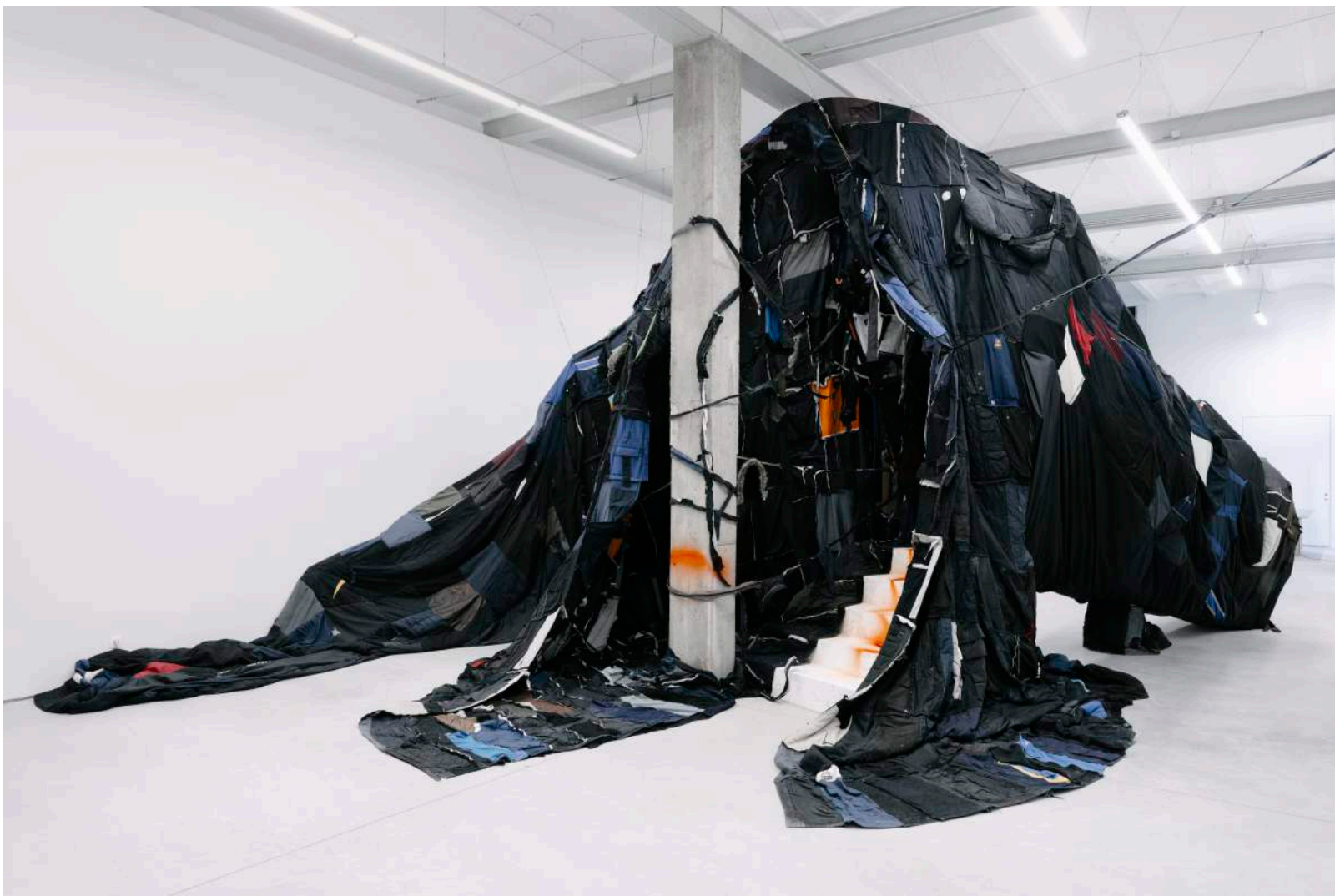




Marcin Dudek, *Passage III*, *Passage II*, and *Passage* (left to right), exhibition view, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels, Belgium



Marcin Dudek, 'Slash & Burn II', 2021, exhibition view, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels, Belgium



Marcin Dudek, *Inspire.People.Motion*, 2021, installation view, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels, Belgium.



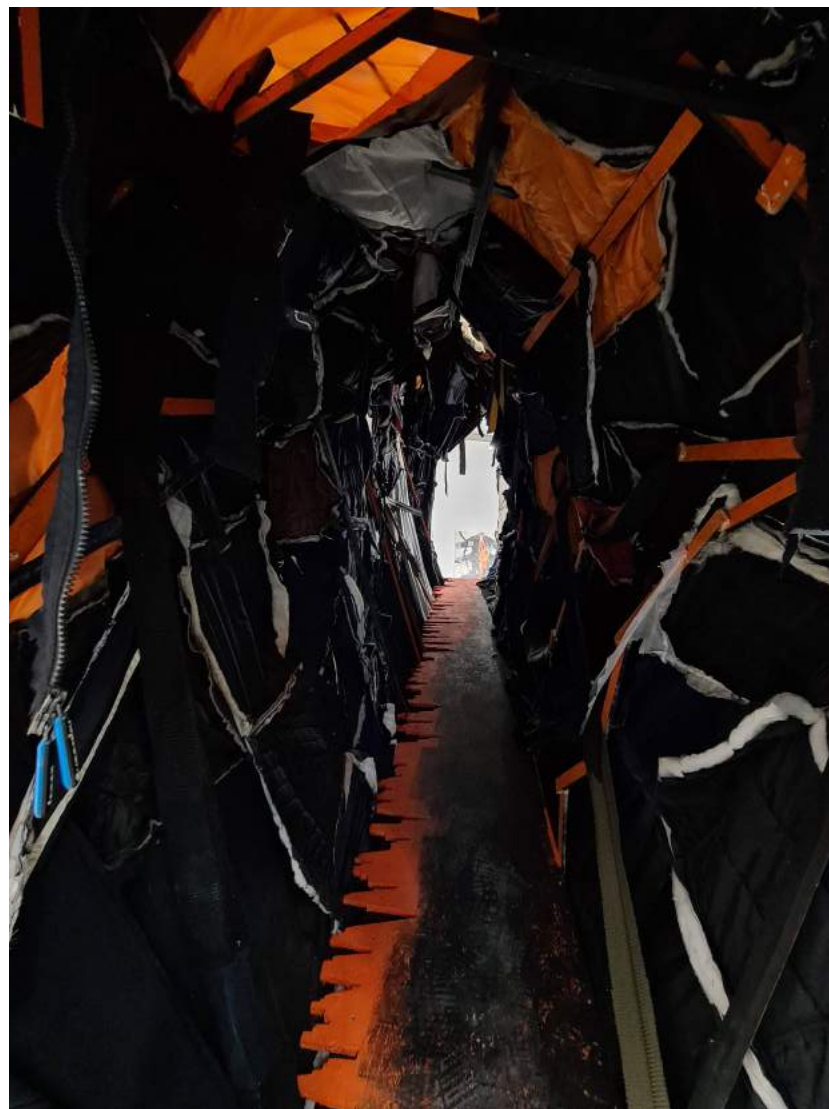


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Frieze, Wilson Tarbox, July 2021

## Marcin Dudek Deconstructs his Football Firm Past

At Harlan Levey Projects, the artist draws on his own experience as a working-class football fan during Poland's 1990s passage from communism to capitalism



The chaotic period that followed Poland's transition from communism to capitalism is an important thematic backdrop to Marcin Dudek's exhibition 'Slash & Burn II' at Harlan Levey Projects's new space in the Heyvaert district of Brussels. In this powerful show – which comprises installation, drawing and performance – the Polish artist explores his own experience of coming of age in the 1990s as a working-class football fan in a country with crumbling infrastructure, dysfunctional governance and a traumatic history of being caught in the crossfire of successive European conflicts.



Marcin Dudek, *Inspire.People.Motion*, 2021, installation view, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels, Belgium. Courtesy: the artist and Harlan Levey Projects

More than 300 bomber jackets, deconstructed and meticulously stitched together, form the installation *Inspire.People.Motion* (2021) at the gallery's entrance. Part of the uniform of the 'Jude Gang' – the hooligan football firm to which Dudek belonged from 1993 to 1998 – the bomber jacket is a recurring visual motif throughout the show. Seven meters high by 20 meters wide, *Inspire.People.Motion* resembles an enormous black and blue igloo and incorporates a long low tunnel with a sloping ramp that guides visitors to the top of a small set of stairs. This, in turn, leads to a trio of collages titled *Passage* (2020), *Passage II* (2020) and *Passage III* (2021). In her eponymous essay, the writer Amanda Sarroff likens this movement through the installation to both Poland's passing from communism to capitalism and to Dudek's own progression from adolescence to adulthood, hooliganism to artmaking. Painstakingly built up from thinly cut strips of surgical tape – a choice of material that hints at the therapeutic function artmaking holds for the artist – the collages figure a visual narrative in which the bomber jacket, as a symbol of Dudek's past, is once again deconstructed. Here, it



is depicted in a state of advanced decomposition, before being set aflame and, finally, totally disintegrated.



Marcin Dudek, 'Slash & Burn II', 2021, exhibition view, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels, Belgium. Courtesy: the artist and Harlan Levey Projects; photograph: Damon De Backer

In the adjacent room are the remnants of an untitled performance that Dudek conducted with an orange flare at the exhibition's opening. The meandering line traced along the walls looks like spray paint but, upon closer inspection, exhibits a faint purple tinge along its contours from where the flare's smouldering pigments burnt into the wall. It also snakes across *Tablica* (2021), a triptych with hinged panels that unfold like a 15th-century altarpiece. When open, the work reveals a grid of images that increase in size from top to bottom. Comprising portraits of childhood friends, redacted legal documents and architectural drawings of football stadiums and prisons, together they constitute a sort of personal archive of the prosecution of the artist's former football firm by the Polish authorities. Dudek's brother served jail time for his involvement in the group's illicit activities and each of the 200 or so images bears a number

corresponding to one day he spent behind bars. Standing in the centre of the installation – which, when angled at 90 degrees, replicates the dimensions of Dudek's brother's cell – one can't help but be struck by the tragic path that led so many young men to prison, or even to an early grave.



Marcin Dudek, *Tablica*, 2021, acrylic paint, image transfer, medical tape, coloured smoke, padlock, uv varnish on wood and aluminum, 220 × 170 × 10 cm (closed), 220 × 340 × 5 cm (open). Courtesy: the artist and Harlan Levey Projects; photograph: Damon De Backer

Dudek's work is neither a glorification nor a denunciation of hooliganism: there is no moralizing subtext. Rather, 'Slash & Burn II' is the artist's musings on his good fortune at having escaped his upbringing through art. Within this context, his use of soft or intangible materials, traditionally coded as feminine, could be read as a parable for his 'redemption' from ritualized male violence by enacting the opposing manual rituals. Despite the specific political and historical context from which they emerged, however, the story of delinquency, escape and redemption posed by these works could come from anywhere. It is this rare display of universality that allows the exhibition to transcend language and history, packing a powerfully cathartic punch.

Collect Magazine, April 2021

## Marcin Dudek, *Slash & Burn II*

Le 22 avril s'ouvre HLP 1080, nouvel espace de Harlan Levey Projects. La galerie s'installe dans un vaste entrepôt situé à Molenbeek. Son exposition inaugurale présente la pratique de Marcin Dudek. *Slash and Burn II* est la seconde partie d'un diptyque entamé fin de l'année dernière dans son antenne ixelloise. L'artiste, né à Cracovie en 1979, poursuit son exploration de la culture hooligan underground à laquelle il participa pendant sa jeunesse en Pologne, dans les décennies 1980 et 1990. L'exposition consiste en quatre tableaux (techniques mixtes), une grande installation textile et trois vidéos à canal unique. Marcin Dudek fonde toute sa démarche sur des éléments autobiographiques. Il explore en permanence les mécanismes de violences et plus particulièrement ceux liés à l'appartenance et aux comportements de groupe. Un travail qui se nourrit de nombreux matériaux de récupération. (gg)

Harlan Levey Projects  
Rue Isidoor Teirlinck 65, Bruxelles  
[www.hl-projects.com](http://www.hl-projects.com)  
du 22-04 au 31-07  
Prix : entre 4.000 et 50.000 €

Marcin Dudek, *Passage III*, 2021, technique mixte,  
200 × 150 cm. © de l'artiste /  
Courtesy Harlan Levey Projects



BRUZZ, Kurt Snoekx, April 2021

## HLP 1080 and Studio Khachatryan set up shop in Molenbeek

In September 2010, in the context of Festival Kanal, Emilio López-Menchero and Souleimane Benaisa set up their version of Berlin's Checkpoint Charlie on Vlaamsepoort/Porte de Flandre. The duo, dressed up in military police uniforms, would stop any car wanting to cross the border between the popular, highly fashionable Dansaert neighbourhood and Gentsesteenweg/Chaussée de Gand, the asphalt artery leading into Molenbeek. It was a playful and critical way to question the invisible wall on that bridge, built on a lack of interest, social disparity, true crime, cultural misunderstandings, a difficult reputation and easy prejudice.

Eleven years after that public intervention a lot has changed and a fair amount hasn't. Reputation and prejudice are hard to shake off, and the 2016 terror attack at the Maalbeek/Maelbeek metro station hasn't helped to heal either of them. At the same time, a number of old and new cultural players have ensured that the one tangible bridge has turned into a multitude of enlightened paths into Brussels's perceived heart of darkness. From LaVallée to the MIMA, from iMAL to Needcompany, and from Recyclart to Decoratelier.

*While it is a sad thing for the municipality that the canal has been a border for such a long time, it also provides opportunity here. Molenbeek is a place full of empty and cheap things to reinvent, to redream*

HARLAN LEVEY

"There is a rich tradition of cultural activities in Molenbeek," says gallerist Harlan Levey, who, together with his partner Winnie Kwok, has just opened a second space, HLP 1080, on rue Isidore Teirlinck, a stone's throw from the house on Rue des Quatre Vents where terror suspect Salah Abdeslam was arrested after a shootout with the police. "You have Wim Vandekeybus's dance company Ultima Vez, Charleroi Danse/La Raffinerie, Vaartkapoen, the Philippe Vandenberg Foundation, located in the artist's former studio... Now Recyclart has moved to the Manchester site, and even HISK, the Higher Institute for Fine Arts in Ghent, has opened a base in the former Gosset factory. So you're entering an area that has a very rich tradition of experimental arts and important pioneers."

"There are several reasons why all of these projects end up in Molenbeek," Harlan Levey continues. "The kind of buildings that are ideal for these experimental practices, the kind everyone is looking for, are often found in Molenbeek. While it is a sad thing for the municipality that the canal has been a border for such a long time, it also provides opportunity here. This is a place full of empty and cheap things to reinvent, to redream. Also, despite this weird idea of Molenbeek being so far away, and being something other, its own territory, it is at spitting distance from the centre of Brussels. I think that the more people dream their dream over here and the more things happen, the sooner that checkpoint will vanish."

## NO SWEAT, NO GLORY

The space that Harlan Levey reinvented in Molenbeek is a typically Brussels surprise. You can't tell from the façade that behind the door, along a narrow corridor, you end up in a courtyard from which you immediately look inside a enormous, kunsthalle-like space. The former warehouse of 440 square meters, that also used to house a temporary mosque, has been magnificently refurbished by Noro Khachatryan, an architectural, object and furniture designer who has teamed up with Harlan Levey and Winnie Kwok and now has his studio and showroom on the second floor.

"It was a long trajectory," Noro Khachatryan says on the eve of the official opening on Thursday 22 April, in between calls and visits from his family. "We only stopped building on Monday, after eighteen months of hard work. You go home for the night, and the day after, all of a sudden, you're using the space. I still need to adjust to that shift." (*Laughs*) "We're all having a hard time to digest," Harlan Levey agrees. "We have been working sixteen-hour days for months now. These last few weeks we had 25 people moving around the place, working on the building, putting up the show... I stand here now, and I love to be here, but besides a little bit of pride and a little bit of fear, it's hard to feel anything right now."

You can almost feel how this dynamic has seeped into the floors and walls of the building. In the exhibition space, the enticing smell of something new mixes with sweat, as a twisted body made up of 230 cut up and reassembled sports jackets – "a cathedral of human energy", Polish-born, Brussels-based artist Marcin Dudek calls it – arises from the floor. The exhibition "Slash & Burn II" is the latest episode in Marcin Dudek's overwhelming venture into his own biography, as a fan of the

football club Cracovia and a former member of a hooligan gang. "Back in the 1990s, Poland and Eastern Europe were the West's dumping ground for used clothes and textile waste, and they still are. I carefully selected these jackets, had them torn up and sewn together again by Sew for Life – a Brussels organisation, that works with refugees and was founded by someone Winnie got to know when HLP was still a project space in the city centre – as a monstrous installation returning to where it came from."

## SCAR TISSUE

It's not hard to see the symbolism of that textile body, if you take away the violence and power of the number. Just as it is a way for hooligans to have and express an identity and at the same time disappear in the crowd, as an inaugural piece of this new space, it could stand for the protection and warmth of the family Marcin Dudek is now part of. The family that has been of such importance in his practice of forever questioning, creating and destroying, cutting up and remembering, reassembling and killing. "Ideas tend to become fixated, they're almost totalitarian that way. That's why I reject them immediately and move on to questions. Questions put you on the pedestal of creation. That's why I feel such restlessness in that vacuum after I finish a work. That's why I lit a smoke grenade and intervened in the space, created this thread of gentle destruction on the walls."

*It was a long trajectory. We only stopped building on Monday, after eighteen months of hard work. You go home for the night, and the day after, all of a sudden, you're using the space. I still need to adjust to that shift*

NORO KHACHATRYAN

The orange scar – the colour being a reference to the orange-coated bomberjacks Marcin Dudek used to wear inside out – as a thread to a common past, a way for the body to remember.



“When we started out, back in 2011 on Rue Léon Lepage, we were still a project space,” says Harlan Levey. “You could count on us for looking at your ideas, going through the material, talking it through, helping improve, finding solutions, translating it into text or image...but not selling and making money. That only came over time. And even now, we stay involved in other projects to be able to remain independent from the market. We were just into the artists and, together with them, we grew into a business.”

That basis of kinship also becomes apparent in the fact that artist Emmanuel Van der Auwera, another part of the gallery's DNA, has his studio in the front building. “And then you have Sean Crossley's studio 500 meters from here and Marcin's studio just around the corner. We tend to work with a lot of artists who are based in Brussels. People have been boasting about the Brussels artistic scene, its diversity in backgrounds and stories and practices for quite a while now. So why wouldn't you be picking from this wonderful pool that is here with you?”



© Saskia Vanderstichele | Marcin Dudek left a thread of gentle destruction on the new walls of HLP 1080

“You know, we are all immigrants to this city,” Harlan Levey, who came to the Low Countries as an aspiring professional football player, continues. I dream up metaphors of ephemeral cities, of people moving through time and space, of energies continually appearing and disappearing, of an artist resisting fixed ideas... He means it literally: “Noro was born in Armenia, Winnie is from Hong Kong, I'm from Cleveland, Ohio – but at the same time, we have been part of the fabric here for so long. You're not gonna find another gallerist that set up their first projects at Mr Ego on Steenstraat/Rue des Pierres, worked at Cinema Nova, washed dishes at the Walvis, bartended at the DNA and wrote for the Beursschouwburg and *Etcetera*. Winnie has been through the design academies, done projects for UNRIC (United Nations Regional Information Centre), the city and the European network Glass Is Tomorrow, and has been building this HLP project with me every bit since the start, and Noro has been forever doing meetings in the cafes of the city.”

### A HEALTHY DOSE OF SERENDIPITY

“I have been sleeping in Mechelen, where I live, and working in Brussels for as long as I have been a designer,” Noro Khachatryan confirms. “This physical space, to work and to live in, finally makes it official.”

People have been boasting about the Brussels artistic scene, its diversity in backgrounds and stories and practices for quite a while now. So why wouldn't you be picking from this wonderful pool that is here with you?

“We have never been able to stand for culture,” Harlan Levey adds, referring to Still Standing for Culture, the collective that pleads for the reopening of the culture sector. “It's been running, scratching, sweating, fighting, dancing, screaming all the way. But we have definitely also had a good healthy dose of serendipity.”

“In meeting Noro back in 2008, at a Belgian design event in Saint-Étienne, giving way to this very organic and highly complementary exchange of Harlan and me writing and presenting his work, and Noro designing fair furniture for us for example,” Winnie Kwok adds. “But also in finding this amazing building that wasn't even on the market. This addition to our Ixelles-based gallery – called HLP 1050 – has been a dream for a long time. We knew that if we had a permanent space, and were not at the mercy of the unpredictable rental market like in Hong Kong and New York, we would be able to grow the business. After years of living rock 'n' roll, putting all our money back into the business, this sustainable future, for ourselves and for our artists, is what we want.”

### DREAM TEAM

“It allows us to dream,” Harlan Levey agrees. “Who knows what the next step will be? I would like to have a small place in the US, maybe Dallas or Cleveland, or even another one in Belgium. I don't think this stops here. I hope not. But first let's open this space. The real work still needs to be done. We will have to assimilate our practice in a neighbourhood that has nothing similar, that maybe hasn't seen things like this around. How will we keep our character while these new surroundings seep in? What will the neighbourhood do to our curatorial approach? I'm curious to find out.



© Saskia Vanderstichele

“You know, these past few months have been such a warming and rewarding experience,” says Winnie Kwok, when I say goodbye at the front door. Art has retreated behind its unsuspecting façade again and out on the street life picks up where I left off. “Our neighbours have been so friendly and I have the feeling this has all brought us even closer together than we already were. Maybe it's due to Harlan's football past. (*Laughs*) This is a team, you know.” A body running, scratching, sweating, fighting, dancing, screaming its way to a glorious future.

The Spaces, May 2021

## Marcin Dudek puts football hooliganism under the spotlight at Molenbeek's HLP 1080



Photography: Damon De Backer / Harlan Levey Projects

Anarchic orange spray paint streaks across the walls of Molenbeek's [HLP 1080 gallery](#) for its inaugural show of work by Polish artist Marcin Dudek.

Entitled *Slash and Burn II*, the show is a follow up to a 2020 exhibition of Dudek's work which was hosted at Harlan Levey Projects' 1050 space in [Brussels](#). In a similar vein to the first

show, it delves into the underground football firm culture in [Poland](#), drawing on the artist's own experiences as a young man.



Photography: Damon De Backer / Harlan Levey Projects

Pieces from the show reflect on Dudek's time supporting football club Cracovia – whose fans wore black bomber jackets with bright orange lining, which they'd turn inside out in the stadium as a prequel to a brawl.

[Dudek](#) has thrifted hundreds of these jackets and stitched them together to create one vast textile installation which inhabits an entire room. Other mixed media pieces marked with orange spray paint – which trails onto the white walls of the gallery – are also an expression of Dudek's experience. Prior to the show opening, the artist 'baptised' the gallery with an orange smoke grenade, reminiscent of those used in his youth.

Visitors need to book an appointment to see the show, [which is open until 31 July 2021](#).

HART Magazine, Sam Steverlynck, May 2021

## Portret van de kunstenaar als hooligan

In gesprek met Marcin Dudek

Het werd gepland, verschoven, uitgesteld en opnieuw ingepland maar nu is het eindelijk zover: de gloednieuwe tweede ruimte van Harlan Levey in Molenbeek is open voor het publiek. De Poolse kunstenaar Marcin Dudek mocht het nieuwe gebouw inhuldigen, net zoals hij dat eerder deed met de ruimte aan de Louizalaan in 2015. Ook nu bakent Dudek zijn territorium af en moet de maagdelijk witte white cube eraan geloven. Een autobiografische verwijzing naar zijn verleden als hooligan.



Foto: Jean-Pierre Stoop

De voorgevel van de nieuwe galerie, in de Vierwindenstraat in Molenbeek, de straat waar de terrorist Salah Abdeslam werd geklist, laat niet vermoeden wat zich achter dit typisch Belgische arbeidershuisje verschuilt. Zodra je je door een gang hebt gewurmd, kom je uit in een kleine open ruimte die uitgaat op een fraaie, gloednieuwe tentoonstellingsruimte van 250 m2 met hoge plafonds. De galerie is haast volledig ingenomen door een gigantische installatie waar je doorheen kan wandelen. Ze is

gemaakt met meer dan driehonderd oude jassen die Dudek aan elkaar heeft gestikt tot een immense, doorwandebare structuur.

Sam Steverlynck: Bomberjacks keren vaak terug in je werk. Het is een verwijzing naar de jassen die hooligans dragen. Waarom heb je voor deze installatie voor normale jassen gekozen?

Marcin Dudek: Ik wou de thematiek wat opentrekken, ze universeler maken. Het zijn ook dit soort (sport)jasjes die de jongeren hier in Molenbeek dragen. Ik wou van het autobiografische naar het universele gaan. Het zijn jasjes uit tweedehandswinkels. Ik heb ze jarenlang verzameld. Ze werden massaal in het voormalige Oostblok gedumpt, vooral vanuit Duitsland. Ik vind het interessant om te werken met verwaarloosd materiaal. Ik ben zelf opgegroeid in een verwaarloosd deel van de wereld, in de buitenwijken van Krakau. Die jassen zijn een soort metafoor, net zoals mijn statuut in deze wereld.



Courtesy Harlan Levey Projects, foto's Damon De Backer.

SS: Maar wat heb je specifiek met die bomberjacks?

MD: In de jaren 90 waren die jasjes deel van een subcultuur. Het was een manier voor fans en supporters om samen te komen rond een gemeenschappelijke identiteit. Ik droeg die omdat ik ook probeerde deel te worden van een groep, ik wou ergens bij

horen. Ik heb levendige herinneringen aan die periode. Voor mij was die jas haast een tweede huid, een reddingsboei. Normaal is zo'n jas zwart aan de buitenkant, maar wij droegen die binnenstebuiten. Dat betekende dat we klaar waren om te vechten. We provoceeden de politie. Er heerste altijd een ongelofelijke spanning in het stadion. Je zag honderden van die jasjes door het stadion bewegen. Het was zeer indrukwekkend. De eerste internationale match die ik bijwoonde was in 1993 toen Polen tegen Engeland speelde. Het was een unieke ervaring om door 60.000 mensen te worden omgeven. Als een collective body dat de hele ruimte inpalmt. De massa zien bewegen, en zoveel mensen in oranje ... dat is een herinnering die me de volgende zeven jaar is bijgebleven. En mijn werk sterk heeft beïnvloed.

SS: Het is een installatie die je kan betreden. Dat doet me denken aan de eerste installatie die ik van jou heb gezien op de groepstentoonstelling *Out of the Frying Pan* bij Espace Uhoda in Luik in 2007.

MD: Dat is lang geleden! De installatie bestond uit een zwart schilderij dat aan een wand hing. Ik had een gat in dat schilderij gesneden en zo een tunnel gemaakt die naar de kelder leidde, als een overgangsruimte. Met dat werk wou ik de tweedimensionaliteit van schilderkunst in vraag stellen. Het was het eerste werk in een reeks van tunnelinstallaties.

SS: Het ging over een tunnelervaring maar met een totaal andere benadering dan hier?

MD: Ja, mijn werk is geëvolueerd. Ik heb er een aantal autobiografische elementen aan toegevoegd. Vanaf 2013 was ik klaar om het meer te hebben over mijn privéleven en thema's zoals subculturen, groepsidentiteit, hooliganisme en crowdcontrol.

SS: Een ander werk rond tunnels was in de Verbeke Foundation in Kemzeke in 2014. Je maakte er een tunnel die het



beklemmende gevoel opriep van loopgraven of tunnels van gevangenen ...

MD: Inderdaad. *Cathedral of Human Labour* maakte deel uit van een reeks over ondergrondse architectuur. Ik heb de tunnel gemaakt met zestig ton hout die ik uit de Antwerpse haven heb gerecupereerd. Het heeft me meer dan zes maanden gekost om die tunnel te maken!



Courtesy Harlan Levey Projects, foto's Damon De Backer.

SS: In die werken rond tunnels komt het idee van claustrofobie terug. Zoals in de expo die je had opgezet rond het Heizeldrama bij Harlan in 2015. Probeer je dat gevoel van beklemming, van in een tunnel te zitten of te worden opgeslorpt door een massa in een voetbalstadion, fysiek te vertalen naar de toeschouwer?

MD: Het gaat om het effect van de dominantie van de massa. Door de massa voel je je samengedrukt maar tegelijk *larger than yourself*. Ik ben opgegroeid in een sociale flat in Polen. Het waren plekken waar soms negen mensen samen hokten op 40 vierkante meter. Dat verklaart de notie van claustrofobie in mijn werk.

SS: Nu we het toch hebben over die expo over het Heizeldrama: toen deed je ook een performance waarin je de ingang van de galerie openbrak en je je met je geel geverfde bomberjack tegen

de muren drukte en zo sporen naliet. Hier doe je iets gelijkaardigs?

MD: Voor de opening van die ruimte gebruikte ik mijn bomberjack als een spons. Ik had die beschilderd met verschillende lagen oranje verf en liet sporen na om mijn territorium af te bakenen. Het ging om het oproepen van een massa. Wat ik hier heb gedaan is anders. Deze keer heb ik gebruik gemaakt van Bengaals vuur. Het verwijst opnieuw naar voetbalstadia waar fans sfeer proberen te creëren. Ik heb een traject proberen te maken door de verschillende ruimtes met elkaar te verbinden met het spoor van die rook. Ik hou van het idee om een white cube onmiddellijk te besmeuren. Het leidt tot een conversatie.

SS: Vooral wanneer die gloednieuw is, zoals hier ...

MD: De schilder was nog maar net klaar met de muur toen ik hem zei wat ik van plan was en dat we hem opnieuw nodig zouden hebben om het te overschilderen. Maar hij leek het wel leuk te vinden. Toen ik die performance uitvoerde, waren de toeschouwers volledig opgeladen. Het voelde als een bevrijding.

SS: Wat ik ook zo fascinerend vind aan je performances: *you're in a league of your own*. Je hebt gebroken met het milieu van hooliganisme, maar lijkt nu een ploeg op jezelf, een eigen beweging?

MD: Het komt van het idee: hoe kan ik al die herinneringen en ervaringen in de massa vertalen naar één enkel lichaam. Het was interessant om haast een emotionele bubbel te creëren, gecondenseerd in één lichaam waarin ik de massa en haar gedrag probeer na te bootsen. Het is niet evident om ruimte te creëren met één lichaam. Het is moeilijk, want je hebt meer macht in groep. Het is haast zoals de positionering van de kunstenaar die alleen werkt in zijn studio. Er is een groot verschil tussen deel zijn van de massa als supporter en alleen in je studio geconfronteerd worden met je werk.

Ik vraag geen andere mensen om voor mij te performen. Ik wil de volledige verantwoordelijkheid. Ik heb verleden jaar in Boekarest geprobeerd om te werken met een performer. Maar het verliep niet echt zoals ik had gehoopt.

SS: Kan je iets meer zeggen over deze drie werken op canvas waarin de vorm van een bomberjack terugkeert?



Courtesy Harlan Levey Projects, foto's Damon De Backer.

MD: Deze reeks heet *Passage*. Het zijn drie werken op groot formaat die telkens een ander verhaal vertellen. Op het eerste zie je drie vormen van zo'n jas, haast gestapeld als een totem. Het werk drukt het idee uit van het escaleren van lichaam en geest. Waar het hoofd zit, heb ik het beeld gebruikt van een flashlight in een stadion. Het is haast een monument voor een supporter. Ik ben ervoor in mijn archief gedoken. Ik heb gewerkt met medische tape die sporters gebruiken om hun wonden te omwikkelen. Het is een soort katoen dat ik verf, snij en aan de drager toevoeg. Het is een heel lang proces. Als je dichterbij komt, zie je heel veel details uit mijn archief die ik heb toegepast op het oppervlak van de jas. De jas is haast een archief dat alle herinneringen en emoties bevat. Ik gebruik die foto's ook als confrontatie, om het geheugen te stimuleren, als een herinnering aan een specifiek moment. Ik gebruik altijd foto's van events

waar ik zelf bij was. Hier was ik aan het lopen en werd ik achternagezeten door politie, hier zie je een bendeleider die zijn achterwerk toont. Het is de klassieke manier om je disrespect te tonen aan de supporters van het andere team of de politie. Het maakt deel uit van hun taal.

In de tweede versie zie je twee contouren van de jas die duidelijker zijn. Deze jas bevindt zich in transformatie, hij gaat van zwart naar oranje en is binnenstebuiten gekeerd. Het oranje is zoals het materiaal van de lichamen, het overstijgt de lichamelijkeheid.

Het gaat over het ervaren van het *elevated body* wanneer je je in groepsgeweld bevindt. Ik hou van het idee van een explosie van energie, zoals bij rook. Ik heb dit stuk dan ook in brand gestoken. Je kan ook verschillende emblemen herkennen van andere clubs die ik hier heb samengebracht. Het is haast zoals een leren jas van een rocker met allerlei badges.

Het laatste werk is een compressie van de vorige twee. Het gaat over het worstelen met herinneringen. Ik heb het boek *Analysing Memory* gelezen en was geïnteresseerd in traumatische herinneringen en hoe het brein die verwerkt. Ik ging in op het idee van herinneringen uitwissen en ze overschrijven. Elementen uit het verleden wissen en er een nieuwe narratief op bouwen.

SS: Enerzijds vond je bij die hooligans een vorm van community, anderzijds gaat het natuurlijk wel om *toxic masculinity*.



Courtesy Harlan Levey Projects, foto's Damon De Backer.

MD: Het zijn jonge mensen in een kwetsbare positie die op zoek zijn naar een plek. We groeiden op in de jaren negentig in een periode van transitie, in een klimaat van armoede. Rond mijn twaalfde/dertiende raakte ik betrokken bij hun activiteiten, we gingen vaak op stap. Geleidelijk aan werd ik steeds meer betrokken. Rond 1997/98 begon het uit de hand te lopen en begaf ik me in de buurt van criminele activiteiten. Het was een turbulente periode in mijn leven. We waren allemaal verbonden, het stadion was de ontmoetingsplek voor alle groepen uit verschillende sociale klassen. Het bracht een vorm van veiligheid. Maar uiteraard moesten we er wel een grote prijs voor betalen. We leefden altijd met het gevoel dat we elk moment konden worden gearresteerd.

SS: Kan je iets meer vertellen over de transformatieve kracht van kunst? Soms maak je het werk zelf, soms gebruik je readymades. Zo toonde je in september bij Harlan DIY fitnessapparaten in de kelder van de sociale flat waar je woonde die door bewoners in elkaar werden gestoken met geïmproviseerde elementen?

MD: Ik ben wantrouwig ten opzichte van de homogeniteit van nieuw materiaal. Het mist elementen van de geschiedenis, maar

is ook anti-readymade. Het verwijst naar een economische strijd, omdat we ons geen nieuw materiaal konden veroorloven. Daarom vond ik een eigen wereld uit die ik zelf in elkaar knutselde met restmateriaal, een beetje zoals men in Cuba doet. Ik ben geobsedeerd door recycleren. Verschillende elementen in mijn werk keren dan ook steeds terug. De gymzaal is altijd in mijn hoofd gebleven. Dat fitnessstoestel ben ik in Polen gaan oppikken uit de kelder. Het is een replica op schaal 1:1. Hetzelfde geldt voor deze installatie. Het materiaal vertoont sporen van gebruik. En dat is belangrijk voor mij.



STIR World, Dilpreet Bhullar, June 2021

## Marcin Dudek's solo exhibition Slash and Burn II at Harlan Levey Projects 1080 is an invitation to relook at the violent past of the artist only to underline the importance of its futility.

It could not be easily refuted that art is a reflection of a creator – a mirror to a personal event or be an epitome of the subjective understanding of the situation. Many a time, the art could serve both the purposes. In the hindsight, creating a piece of art on a not-so-pleasant event could be therapeutic not for the creator, but also beyond the immediate line of audience. Brussels and Kraków based Marcin Dudek, who creates performances, installations, objects, and collages, is one such artist. From the figment of personal memories - when Dudek was a member of the Kraków-based football team, often dubbed as hooligan group - the artist gives shape to his immersive installation and performances.



Image: Courtesy of HLP 1080

Finding a parallel between the creative field of art and the aesthetic and tumultuous lifestyle of the past is Dudek's latest exhibition, *Slash and Burn II* at HLP 1080 in Brussels, Belgium. The exhibition is the second edition of the three-part series at the newly opened exhibition space by Harlan Levey Projects (HLP). As soon as the Berlin Wall collapsed, capitalism gripped the economic and social life of the people in Poland. The act of violence committed by Dudek is a manifestation of similar consequences - a transition from a communist to a capitalist way of life. During the football matches, the players would turn their bomber jackets inside out – making orange lining visible - to indicate the group would pick up a rowdy brawl. The black bomber jackets with orange lining make their presence felt in the current exhibition through the immersive textile installation and four monumental mixed-media paintings, *Passages*.



Passage III, Passage II and Passage. Image: Courtesy of HLP 1080

In an interview with STIR, Dudek offers a sneak peek into his artistic journey dotted by personal life events and what led him to transfer private life events to the performance art. "At a certain point it wasn't a choice. I had ignored my own past for around 10 years in my practice, and in order to be able to deal with the events of my autobiography I had to work through them. Being an artist, the most direct way to do this is through art. Performance is particular because it allows me to slip on this past persona, and to activate the authentic emotions that I felt during this period in my life," says the Polish artist.



Tablica. Image: Courtesy of HLP 1080

At the intersection of mob psychology, architecture and spectacle, Dudek's performance in the gallery space is a way of reconciliation between the past and present to avoid such events of violence in the future. With the previous performances such as Wild, Saved by an Unseen Crack, and We Stumbled as We Clambered, Dudek attempts to escape the room of confinement through the props including flare, knife and window still. For his performances, the artist literally breaks through the permanency of the architecture to make the art installations. Unlike the rush of feelings experienced by the mob during the violence, the audience at the gallery faces the aftermaths of the destruction. Distinct to the prompt response to the decay in the real-time situation, Dudek allows his witnesses to gauge the display of broken reality.



Image: Courtesy of HLP 1080

Dudek explains, if, and how the performances are determined by the spaces of the gallery, "Performance in itself has a site-specific nature, which is not negligible. The gallery spaces become the parameters of the performance. The architectural frame of the work can be the stadium, but also the gallery. It dictates movement, obstacles, and experience. The performance also triggers the flow of the crowd and movement of bodies". Moreover, it is not at the exigency of the moment, but during the time of retrospection that the futility of destruction could be fully

realised. To tap on the art to reconstruct the effect of violence in the minds of the audience is the aim of a creative exercise led by Dudek.



Image: Courtesy of HLP 1080

Through the residues of performances, the objects of installation come into being. Along with these objects of deconstruction is the deep presence of the colour orange. The grenade emitting orange curls of smoke is a part of the performance during the exhibition that leads the viewers to the padlocked work. Dudek explicitly draws the lines of synonymy between the orange hues and acts of violence, “Orange is a colour that was connected to the identity of the hooligan group. It is the colour of the inside of bomber jackets, which were flipped inside-out to signify an escalation of violence. It is also the colour of the sea rescue smoke grenades that we used as part of the stadium choreography. Orange is the colour of visibility - visibility to the police, and visibility of the spectacle of violence.”



Image: Courtesy of HLP 1080

The accidental formation of the sculptures or “anti-ready-made” objects as the artist likes to call, even if they carry a hint of immediate destruction, for Dudek is part of a well-thought artistic process. It is over the period of continuous making and remaking of the objects and immersive installation that the audience draws the meaning of the acts of violence. It is the political engagement encouraged by Dudek’s art practice that the audience is triggered to critique the multifaceted consumerist culture and self-deprecating episodes of violence.

The exhibition *Slash and Burn II* runs at Harlan Levey Projects (HLP) 1080 in Brussels until July 31, 2021.