

ROMAN ROAD

PHOTO LONDON NATALIA LL

Thursday 18 May – Sunday 21 May 2017

Opening Hours:

Somerset House
Strand
London, WC2R 1LA
United Kingdom

Thursday 18 May: 12pm – 8.30pm
Friday 19 May: 12pm – 7.30pm
Saturday 20 May: 12pm – 7.30pm
Sunday 21 May: 12pm – 6.30pm

Roman Road is pleased to be participating at the third edition of Photo London with a solo booth by Natalia LL, an artist of the Polish neo-avant-garde. Featuring a collection of her early works, the display presents varied photographs and an installation first realised in the 1970s during a decisive decade in Natalia LL's practice, when she unveiled her artistic stance at a time of profound feminist awareness.

A pioneer of feminist art in Poland, Natalia LL has had a prolific career spanning over five decades. She began taking photographs in the 1960s while studying for her MSc at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław and by the early 1970s had begun to define both her own artistic position and new spaces for erotic photography. She visited New York in 1977 on a scholarship from the Kościuszko Foundation. During her 3-month stay there, she met and worked with a number of other feminist artists, including Carolee Schneemann, Marina Abramović and Suzy Lake. One year later, she organised the seminal show *Women's Art* at the Jatki Gallery in her hometown, Wrocław, and pioneered the first exhibition devoted to feminist art in Poland. Natalia LL was the first Polish artist to contribute to international feminist expositions and publications since the 1970s and her work became an instrument in the fight for equal rights, expressing identity through a manifestation of female self-awareness.

Presented for the first time in London at Roman Road's booth, Natalia LL's *TAK* installation comprises photographic assemblages of female lips pronouncing 'tak' (the Polish word for 'yes') alongside a visual representation of the written word. Printed in a trio of colours, the artist's imagery is presented in an immersive display, covering a wall of the stand. A collection of unique aluminium photographic cubes displaying her *TAK* images are also stacked into a sculpture and show Natalia LL's latest development with this series.

In *TAK*, the mouth can be seen as a symbol of a woman trying to express herself but being constantly objectified and fetishised because of her feminine body. The models lips, painted in a suggestive, red lipstick, become the focus of the photographs instead of the word that she emphatically spells. On the other hand, however, the depicted woman can also be seen as empowered; she is in control of her language and the (implicitly male) viewer is the one who cannot communicate with her. There is also almost a sense of frustration at nearly being given permission because of the implication of the word 'yes', which in turn is rendered meaningless as it is never fully articulated by the photographs of the mouth.

Among the presentation of Natalia LL's *TAK* installation, Roman Road's booth also features a collection of framed photographs by the artist. Her large-scale piece *Słowo* (1971) further explores her interest in words as visual objects, presenting a photographic assemblage of 12 close-up shots of the artist's face as she is captured pronouncing 'słowo' (meaning 'word' in Polish). In much the same way as the women documented in Natalia LL's *TAK* and *Słowo* are portrayed in command of their language, works from her later series *Consumer Art* (1972) and *Post-Consumer Art* (1975) show women in control of their sexuality and erotic pleasure.

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By documenting women eating certain foods, including bananas, hot dogs and pudding, Natalia LL's two aforementioned series introduce themes of confrontation with the male viewer and criticise the commodification of women in pornography. In *Consumer Art*, female models are photographed gazing at the camera playfully as they fondle and eat such suggestive foods. However, rather than being perceived as passive objects of male pleasure as stereotyped by the pornography industry, the women here are seen as active protagonists; they are given agency and the masculine element, symbolised by phallic shaped fruits and meats, becomes a product for their consumption. In Natalia LL's subsequent *Post-consumer Art* works, the depicted woman has grown to embrace her own sexual pleasure and is pictured delighting in the food remains.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Natalia LL (Natalia Lach-Lachowicz), born in Żywiec in 1937, is a Polish visual artist working in photography, video art, performance and installation. From 1957-1963, she studied at the PWSSP (known today as the Academy of Fine Arts) in Wrocław, where she completed her MSc degree. In December 1970, Natalia LL co-founded PERMAFO Gallery in Wrocław, together with fellow artists Zbigniew Dłubak and Andrzej Lachowicz and art critic Antoni Dzieduszycki. The gallery, which was active until 1981, promoted new media and art built on the process of recording reality. Since 1975, Natalia LL has engaged in the global feminist art movement and her art became an instrument in the fight for equal rights in Poland. The originality of Natalia's work has garnered much critical attention and has seen her featured in international exhibitions and institutions, including in *The EY Exhibition: The World Goes Pop* at Tate Modern from late 2015 to early 2016. From 19 May to 01 October 2017, Natalia LL will be featured in a retrospective exhibition entitled *Sum ergo sum* at the Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej in Toruń, Poland.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Roman Road was founded in 2013 by Marisa Bellani and initially began as a project space. The peculiarity of the premises has had a direct impact on the gallery's programme since its beginning. Tall and with a small footprint, the space led the director to challenge artists to employ the architectural elements in order to develop or restructure a body of work. Artists have frequently been asked to use the exhibition as a medium and have managed to transform the gallery room into a unique work of art. In 2014, the building underwent refurbishment to instate an additional private viewing space that gathers varied works by the gallery's represented artists, which are viewable by appointment. Since completing this renovation in 2015, Roman Road has established a qualitative programme, including participations at art fairs, and has seen its represented artists become internationally recognised both by institutions and collectors.

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