

Artur Żmijewski **Repetition**

Polish Pavilion,

51st International Art Exhibition

Opens Friday June 10, 3 P.M.

Closes November 6, 2005

Screenings are held every hour on the hour.

The Polish Pavilion at the 51st International Art Exhibition will present Artur Żmijewski's new film, *Repetition*. The space of the Polish Pavilion was transformed into a cinema. *Repetition*, Żmijewski's film realized in 2005 in Warsaw, is a documentary recording of a re-enactment of the Stanford Prison Experiment – a famous 1971 psychological experiment studying human behaviour under prison conditions, conducted by Professor Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University in California. The purpose of the experiment, which consisted in isolating a group of volunteers playing roles of inmates and guards, was to analyse two issues. First, the patterns determining how people behave in a new situation. Second, the different perceptions of a given situation by people of the same background but forced to play different roles (here inmates and guards). Professor Zimbardo's experiment, which was supposed to run for two weeks, had to be interrupted after just six days, as both groups began manifesting behavioural patterns normally regarded as pathological: sadism, violence, degradation. Thirty-four years later, the Stanford Prison Experiment remains a source of inspiration for psychologists, sociologists, and filmmakers alike.

The risk of reconstructing Professor Zimbardo's experiment was taken up in early 2005 in Warsaw by Artur Żmijewski – an artistic radical who, in his film trips into the past, confronts dysfunctions of the human body, historical traumas and the disintegration of will and memory. Żmijewski tried to precisely recreate the architecture of the simulated prison and its rules. Seven "prisoners" and nine "guards" were selected through a procedure involving psychological testing and examination, aimed at eliminating mentally unsuited candidates. The rooms



were equipped with one-way mirrors, and the course of the experiment was filmed by five humanly operated cameras and several night-vision enabled, industrial video cameras. Besides the "inmates" and the "guards" the experiment's other participants included psychologists acting as experts and authorised to stop the experiment if things turned dangerous, a former prison inmate, and a sociologist involved in prison system reform. The experiment lasted seven days.

In making *Repetition*, Żmijewski referred, not for the first time, to the aesthetics of violence and segregation. The artist has often played the role of "a laboratory scientist" arranging quasi-therapeutic situations: a choir of deaf children trying to sing Bach's cantatas (*Singing Lesson*), amputees and able-bodied people enacting bodily hybrids (*An Eye for an Eye*), or a group of naked people playing tag in the gas chamber of a former Nazi death camp (*Game of Tag*). Dramatic events from the past return in Żmijewski's films deformed, processed by imperfect memory, rendered unreal. His works are often comments on the processes of victimisation, stigmatisation and exclusion – subjects also studied by social psychology. Reaching back to the Zimbardo experiment is a natural consequence of the artist's interests. *Repetition* stands among the most complex and challenging works by Artur Żmijewski to date.

Polish participation in the 51st International Exhibition of Art is made possible through the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Poland.

The exhibition was organized by the Zachęta National Gallery of Art.

ZACHĘTA

Pavilion commissioner: Agnieszka Morawińska – Director of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art

Exhibition curator: Joanna Mytkowska

Cooperation: Ewa Wojciechowska

Sponsor of the Zachęta National Gallery of Art

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