

PAWEŁ
ALTHAMER

ROMAN KURZMEYER
ADAM SZYMCZYK
SUZANNE COTTER



PHAIDON

PAWEŁ ALTHAMER

ROMAN KURZMEYER
ADAM SZYMCHYK
SUZANNE COTTER

常州大学图书馆
藏书章

PHAIDON PRESS LTD.
REGENT'S WHARF
ALL SAINTS STREET
LONDON N1 9PA

PHAIDON PRESS INC.
180 VARICK STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

WWW.PHAIDON.COM

First published 2011
© 2011 Phaidon Press Limited
All works of Paweł Althamer
are © Paweł Althamer

ISBN:
978-0-7148-6085-5

A CIP catalogue record of
this book is available from the
British Library.

All rights reserved. No
part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise,
without the written permission
of Phaidon Press Ltd.

Designed by Melanie Mues,
Mues Design, London

Printed in Hong Kong

PUBLISHER'S
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Andrzej
Przywara, Joanna Diem and
Aleksandra Ściegienna at
Foksal Gallery Foundation,
Warsaw; Tim Neuger,
Burkhardt Riemschneider,
Emilie Breyer and
Maria Elisa Marchini at
neugerriemschneider, Berlin;
Fondazione Sandretto
Re Rebaudengo, Turin;
Fondazione Nicola Trussardi,
Milan; Claudio Poleschi Arte
Contemporanea, Lucca, Italy;
Tate, London; Kunsthalle
Fridericianum, Kassel,
Germany; Open Art Project,
Warsaw.

Photographers: Agora
Archives, Cecilia Alemani,
Marco De Scalzi, Jacek
Gładykowski, Katarzyna
Kozyra, Archive Grzegorz
Kowalski, Iza Izdebska, Jacek
Markiewicz, Mary McCarthy,
Roman Mensing/artdoc.de,
Grzegorz Olech, Błażej
Pindor, Maria Prosowska, Jan
Smaga, Bartosz Stawiarski,
Ali Subotnik, Rafał Szambelan,
Adam Szymczyk, Jens Ziehe.

Caption descriptions by
Joanna Mytkowska and
Andrzej Przywara in
collaboration with Aleksandra
Ściegienna, Artur Żmijewski,
Michele Robecchi and
Craig Garrett.

ARTIST'S
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paweł Althamer would like
to thank Michele Robecchi,
Craig Garrett, Aleksandra
Ściegienna, Suzanne Cotter,
Roman Kurzmeyer, Adam
Szymczyk, Marek Sieprawski,
Artur Zapalowski, Foksal
Gallery Foundation, Andrzej
Przywara, Joanna Diem,
neugerriemschneider,
Burkhardt Riemschneider,
Tim Neuger.

CONTENTS

INTERVIEW 007 Adam Szymczyk in conversation with Paweł Althamer. SURVEY 037 Roman Kurzmeier, *To an Invisible Sculpture*. FOCUS 101 Suzanne Cotter, *Common Task*. ARTIST'S CHOICE 113 Marek Sieprawski, *Mezalia*, 1990. ARTIST'S WRITINGS 121 *The Song of a Skin Bag: Interview with Artur Żmijewski*, 1997 (122); *Working on the World: Interview with Artur Żmijewski*, 2003 (130). CHRONOLOGY 147 *Bibliography* (156).

PAWEŁ ALTHAMER

ROMAN KURZMEYER
ADAM SZYMCZYK
SUZANNE COTTER



PHAIDON PRESS LTD.
REGENT'S WHARF
ALL SAINTS STREET
LONDON N1 9PA

PHAIDON PRESS INC.
180 VARICK STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

WWW.PHAIDON.COM

First published 2011
© 2011 Phaidon Press Limited
All works of Paweł Althamer
are © Paweł Althamer

ISBN:
978-0-7148-6085-5

A CIP catalogue record of
this book is available from the
British Library.

All rights reserved. No
part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or
by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying,
recording or otherwise,
without the written permission
of Phaidon Press Ltd.

Designed by Melanie Mues,
Mues Design, London

Printed in Hong Kong

PUBLISHER'S
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Andrzej
Przywara, Joanna Diem and
Aleksandra Ściegienna at
Foksal Gallery Foundation,
Warsaw; Tim Neuger,
Burkhardt Riemschneider,
Emilie Breyer and
Maria Elisa Marchini at
neugerriemschneider, Berlin;
Fondazione Sandretto
Re Rebaudengo, Turin;
Fondazione Nicola Trussardi,
Milan; Claudio Poleschi Arte
Contemporanea, Lucca, Italy;
Tate, London; Kunsthalle
Fridericianum, Kassel,
Germany; Open Art Project,
Warsaw.

Photographers: Agora
Archives, Cecilia Alemani,
Marco De Scalzi, Jacek
Gładkowski, Katarzyna
Kozyra, Archive Grzegorz
Kowalski, Iza Izdebska, Jacek
Markiewicz, Mary McCarthy,
Roman Mensing/artdoc.de,
Grzegorz Olech, Błażej
Pindor, Maria Prosowska, Jan
Smaga, Bartosz Stawiarski,
Ali Subotnik, Rafał Szambelan,
Adam Szymczyk, Jens Ziehe.

Caption descriptions by
Joanna Mytkowska and
Andrzej Przywara in
collaboration with Aleksandra
Ściegienna, Artur Żmijewski,
Michele Robecchi and
Craig Garrett.

ARTIST'S
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Paweł Althamer would like
to thank Michele Robecchi,
Craig Garrett, Aleksandra
Ściegienna, Suzanne Cotter,
Roman Kurzmeyer, Adam
Szymczyk, Marek Sieprawski,
Artur Zapalowski, Foksal
Gallery Foundation, Andrzej
Przywara, Joanna Diem,
neugerriemschneider,
Burkhardt Riemschneider,
Tim Neuger.

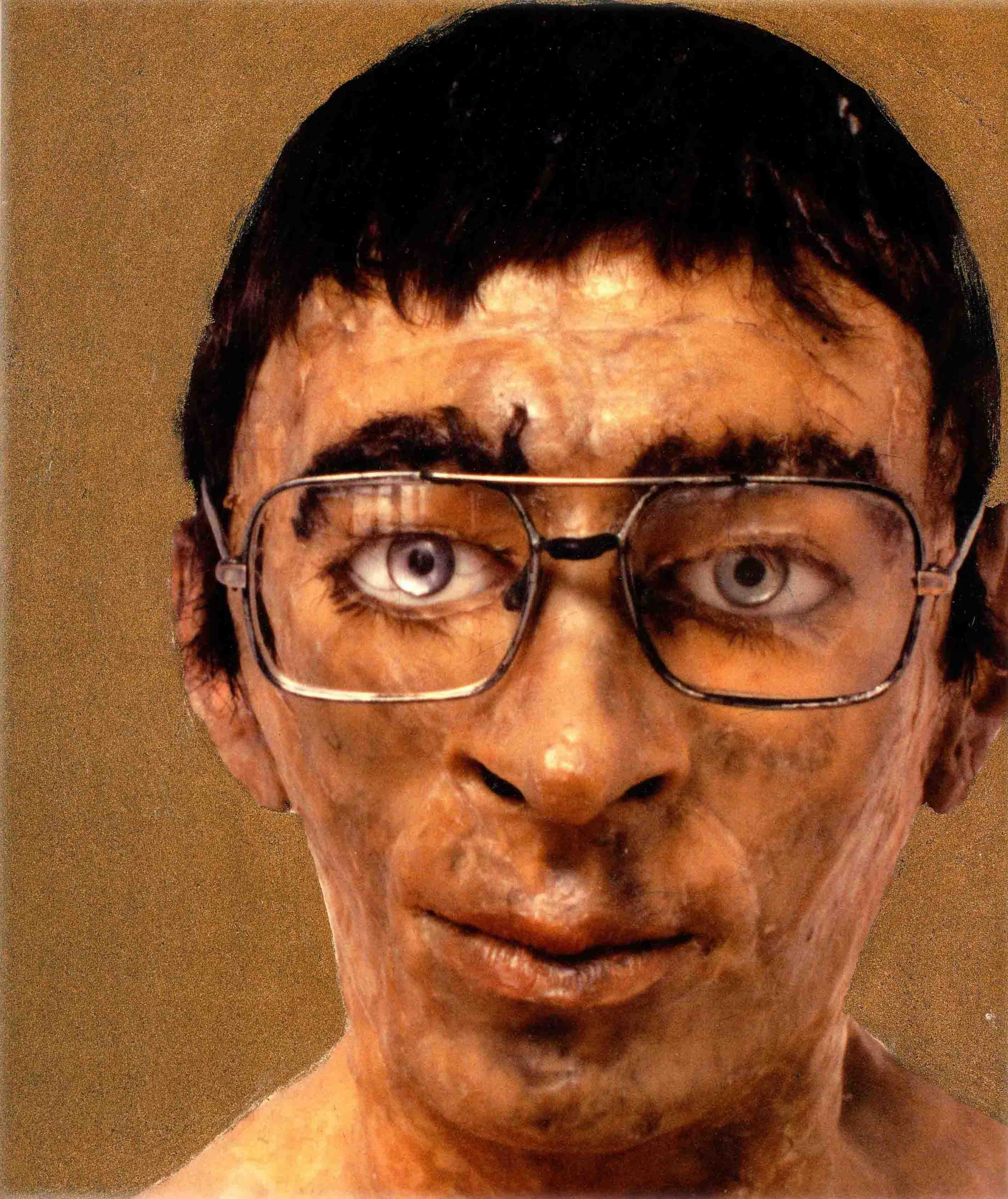
HOUSE ON A TREE, 2001
PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION
OF AN ACTION
FOKSAL GALLERY FOUNDATION,
WARSAW

A bamboo house with a plastic roof was installed in a tree in downtown Warsaw, facing the window of the Foksal Gallery Foundation exhibition space. Hidden at the tree house, Althamer was absent from the vernissage in the gallery, where the audience had gathered. His illegally installed private "flat" had the basic facilities – a bed, a heater, electricity – and the artist spent several nights there during the winter. The temporary architecture remained in place for six months before the city authorities ordered it to be removed.



CONTENTS

INTERVIEW 007 Adam Szymczyk in conversation with Paweł Althamer. SURVEY 037 Roman Kurzmeier, *To an Invisible Sculpture*. FOCUS 101 Suzanne Cotter, *Common Task*. ARTIST'S CHOICE 113 Marek Sieprawski, *Mezalia*, 1990. ARTIST'S WRITINGS 121 *The Song of a Skin Bag: Interview with Artur Żmijewski*, 1997 (122); *Working on the World: Interview with Artur Żmijewski*, 2003 (130). CHRONOLOGY 147 *Bibliography* (156).



007 INTERVIEW

Adam Szymczyk in
conversation with
Paweł Althamer

ADAM SZYMCZYK: *I'd like to look back to one of your earliest pieces, which you made at Jacek Markiewicz's a.r.t. gallery in Plock (Untitled, 1991). In this work you tried to wipe out the gallery and bring back the domestic appearance that the apartment had had before Jacek Markiewicz turned it into a white space for the gallery, which opened just two months before your exhibition. You performed and recorded on video several operations as a sort of 'renovation in reverse' to restore the sense of age, history and use to the space. In the a.r.t. gallery retrospective catalogue,¹ the following components of this action, as you refer to it, are listed: video (recording your stay at the gallery), warm tiled stove, the smell of freshly waxed floor, traces of author's presence. Remember that?*

PAWEŁ ALTHAMER: Yes. Actually, the room was already cleaned and ready. I just dirtied it a bit to strip it of that readiness. Before the Second World War the flat had belonged to the Jewish owner of a barge company operating on the Vistula River. Jacek Markiewicz from the a.r.t. gallery, located by the Vistula in Plock, wanted to turn the place into a gallery. The first step was to transform the interior into a white cube, which was a fairly brutal move, or so it seemed at the time. Some sensitivity was suppressed or lost when the beautiful tiled stove was painted white. It was interesting in a painterly way but still sordid somehow.

SZYMCZYK: *But that didn't make the stove entirely disappear.*

ALTHAMER: Not only did it not disappear – it became even more intriguing. It became an emblem of violation, of failure to recognize the character of a place, while I thought galleries ought to do precisely the opposite.

SZYMCZYK: *Then you restored the space to its original condition.*

ALTHAMER: I did. I decided to leave the walls white. I didn't strip the paint – that would have made me a mad restorer – but I strove to restore all that was human to the space, everything that could either encourage me or anyone else to stay around for a moment or that could repel people.

SZYMCZYK: *Was that it? Didn't you put anything there?*

ALTHAMER: Well, I did bring some things.

SZYMCZYK: *Like what?*

ALTHAMER: I brought a cot. You see, I kind of knew what I didn't want to do, but I also wanted to listen to what was there. It still works that way – someone invites you for a project and shows you around the space, the museum, in the hope you'll come up with something cool. But in fact you carry the actual space with you – wherever you go, your space is with you. Sometimes you need an encounter like that, sometimes you don't. In that particular case, I was thrilled with the space but not so much with the gallery or what its manager was doing. But I treated the project as a move forward. Remember that this was after I participated as a student in *Obszar wspólny, obszar własny* (Common and Private Space), the extremely significant task that Grzegorz Kowalski has been assigning to his students since 1981 in his class in the sculpture department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. In other words, I wondered what my next move should be, how I should respond to what the place did, and that's what I made the exhibition about.

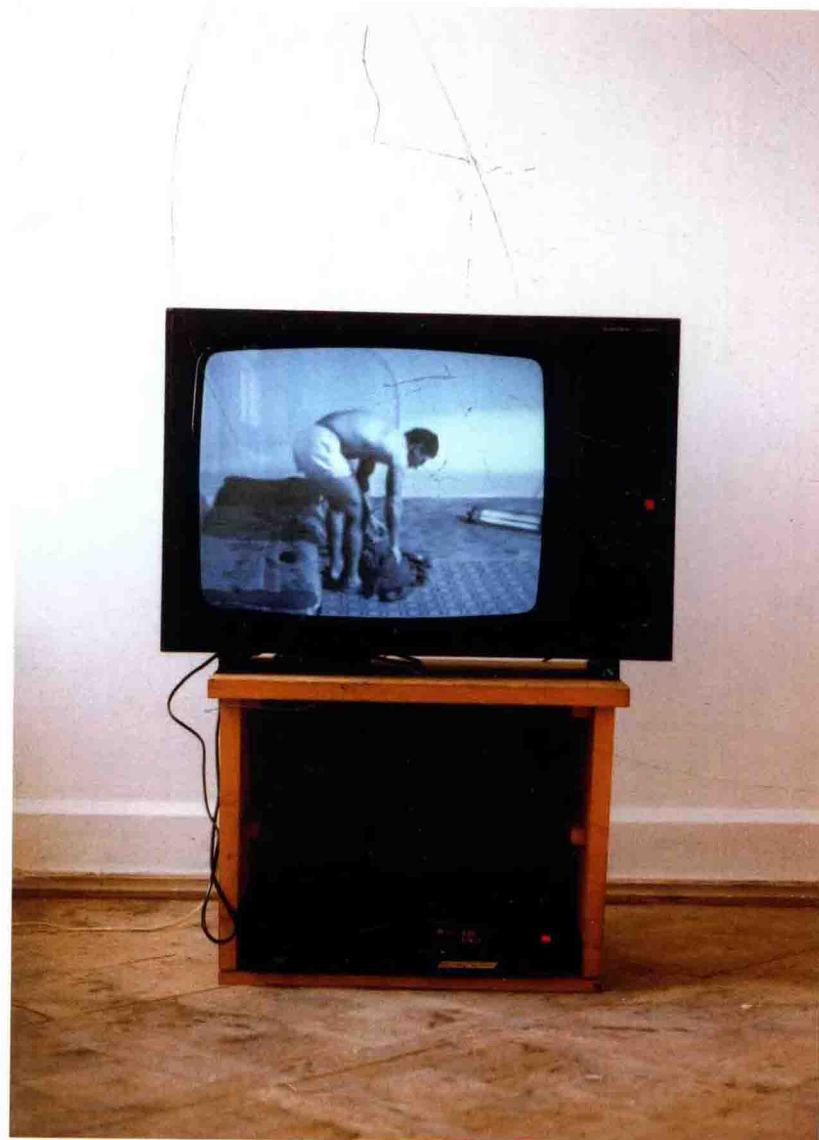
SZYMCZYK: *This was around the time you made Self-Portrait (1993)?*

UNTITLED, 1991
PHOTOGRAPHIC AND VIDEO DOCUMENTATION
OF AN ACTION, A.R.T. GALLERY, PŁOCK, POLAND

The artist redesigned the gallery to look like the apartment it used to be.

previous pages,
SELF-PORTRAIT, 1993
COLLAGE ON PAPER
11 X 15 CM

Postcard made by the artist from a
close-up photograph of his sculpture
Self-Portrait (1993)



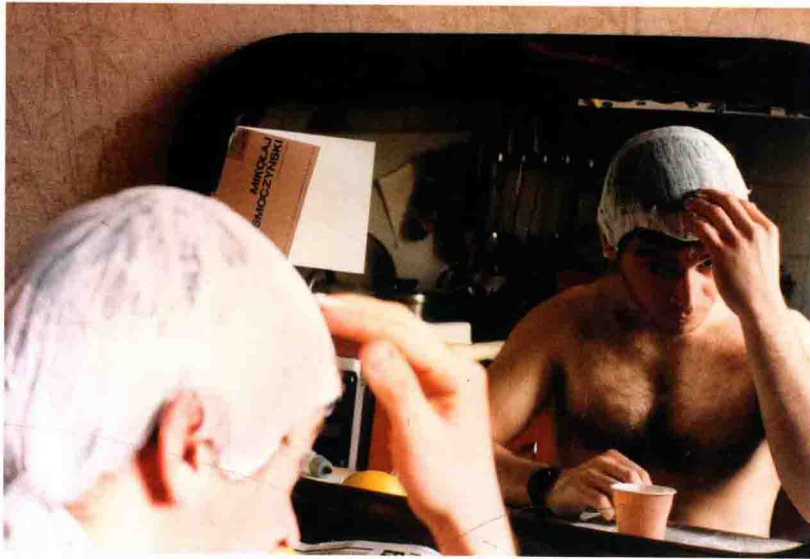




SELF-PORTRAIT, 1993
GRASS, HEMP FIBRE, ANIMAL INTESTINE,
WAX, HAIR
189 X 76 X 70 CM

This lifelike figurative sculpture, which involves an element of psychological awe inspired by the figure, was part of the artist's work for his master's degree project.

opposite,
the artist at work on Self-Portrait (1993) at his studio in Warsaw.



ALTHAMER: Yes, I think I was already out of the Academy by then.

SZYMCHYK: *How did you make the shift from works that were quite traditional in terms of technique – though one could argue about whether they were indeed traditionally executed – to the process of reverting places to their original character, to re-infusing spaces with the real?*

ALTHAMER: My sculptures had more to do with performance art than with figurative sculpture. Crudely put, I felt comfortable with two means of expression: I either made sculptures or extracted them – teased them out, covered them up, lost or buried them.

SZYMCHYK: *Yet most of your sculptures have an extremely forceful presence. They thrust themselves upon the viewer and require a lot of looking. On the other hand, you've made a great number of works in which you blend individuals or situations into the background.*

ALTHAMER: It's about a kind of helplessness affecting artists, when they try to experience and represent what it's like to be an artist, the relishing of sensations. Artists can use tried and tested techniques and manifest themselves as sculpture or pseudo-sculpture – self-portraits, usually. Or they can go out into the world in person to show they were there, to leave a trace of their existence. This can be done through film, performance or interventions into their immediate surroundings. An artist can, for example, wash the floor to anoint it somehow. An artist can leave an imprint of his or her hand, or meet the local people and leave a trace in their memory. This is one of the threads I explore with my works, though reflection usually comes later. The actions themselves are most often spontaneous.

SZYMCHYK: *When, in what circumstances, did you stumble upon the idea that someone could stand in for you when you were supposed to make a work? How did you start delegating work?*

ALTHAMER: It happened once I saw that my gestures were being misread, that viewers were focusing on the surface instead of what was truly interesting. Artists aren't identified with what infuses them, what drives them to action or makes them distinct. They're treated as specimens, curios.

SZYMCHYK: *So you wanted authorship to be ...*

ALTHAMER: Distorted. Yes, I wanted to distort it. To show that being jolted from the habits of perception, deprived of certain expectations, is something I can relate to personally – it stimulates my ceaseless curiosity. When I go to a sculpture exhibition and see that there are no sculptures, I find that very interesting. If I were to go to a Paweł Althamer exhibition – I'm projecting here – and find no Paweł Althamer, it would set the right processes in motion.

What was it that attracted me to the exhibition in the first place? The artist's name? His or her persona? Who is that artist? And who am I in the face of what I'm witnessing? Who am I in general? That seems to be the most interesting question you could ask. Also: what am I doing here?

SZYMCHYK: *You've often sent your children to participate in projects for you. Is that because there's a difference between involving strangers, professional actors, and people who are important, not to say vital, to you? Where did you first get that idea? Was it at the Migros Museum, when you sent your daughter to guard the exhibition?*

ALTHAMER: It would be dishonest to claim I knew when and where I got the idea.

SZYMCHYK: *So let's focus on the event itself.*

ALTHAMER: I was spending a lot of time with Weronika back then. I found her

FRÜHLING 2009

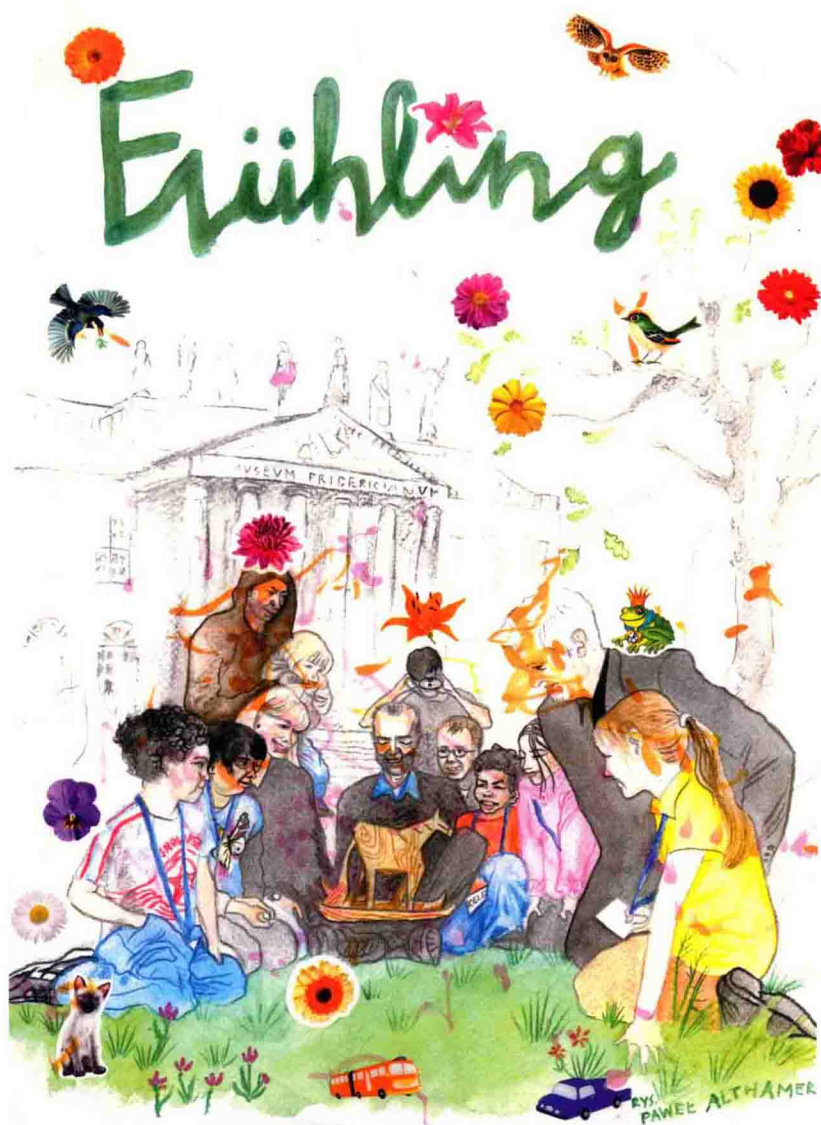
DRAWING

40 X 30 CM

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

OF AN ACTION, KUNSTHALLE FRIDERICIANUM,
KASSEL, GERMANY

During "Frühling" (spring) the artist invited 312 children from Kassel to occupy over 1,000 square metres of exhibition space in the Fridericianum Museum. His main aim was to create a children's version of Documenta, enlivening and transforming the venue with the help of their youthful, bold and above all free creativity. The children were the main actors, while the artist played the role of their guest and assistant. Frühling continued to develop as a process-based artwork until it closed, with the official end of spring, on 21 June 2009.

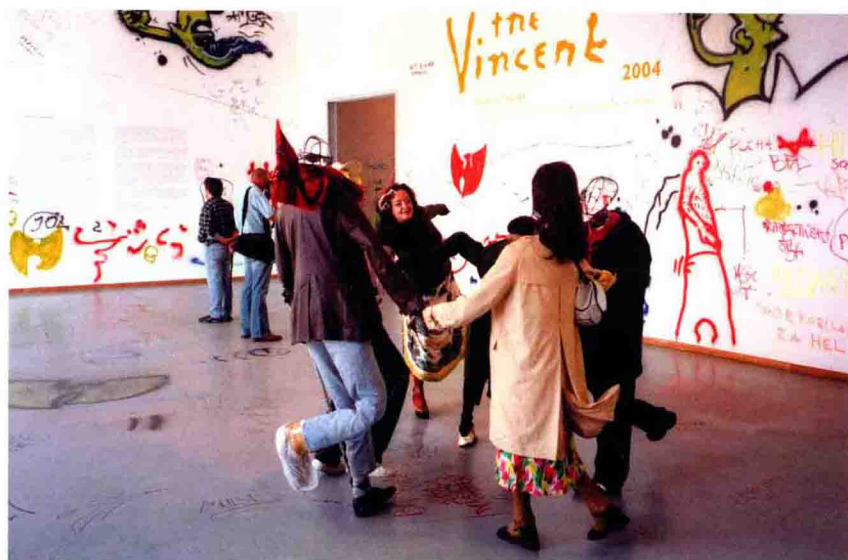


FAIRY TALE, 1994-2004
METAL, MESH, USED CLOTHING AND
ACCESSORIES, HAIR
5 SCULPTURES, EACH APPROX 190 X 60 X 60
BONNEFANTENMUSEUM, MAASTRICHT

In 1994 the artist made a sculpture showing parents dancing in a circle while waiting for their children to finish their art class. The original piece was destroyed and eventually recreated in 2001 on the occasion of the exhibition 'War in Man' at the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Oronoko, Poland.

DANCERS, 1997
VIDEO ON 5 MONITORS
3 MIN 34 SEC
PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPH

Shot in a film studio and featuring men and women the artist met at a homeless shelter, the video shows a group of naked people dancing in a circle. Made for the artist's exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel, it is presented on five suspended monitors in such a way that the figures appear to jump from one monitor to the next.



personality and the way she saw things extremely inspiring and familiar. Because she was my daughter, I knew her pretty well, but she was still a child like many others: estranged and alienated somehow, with this freedom and self-confidence bordering on insolence. Children can behave in barbaric ways, not that it bothers me much. Children tend to touch everything, they don't know how to lie, they often take things too far, driven by an energy that – as I discovered – was beyond my reach. I'd get too caught up in the game. So I made use of that energy. I could safely rely on Weronika, and I knew I could count on the other children as well. In any new place, they exhibit the traits I value most: curiosity and a readiness to explore. There were awkward moments, but there was also pride and joy at just being there. Such experiences were much stronger and emotionally gratifying for me than simply mounting my work, pleasant though that is.

SZYMCZYK: *Agreed, but there's also a visual aspect involved when you employ the expressiveness of a child. For instance, when a child is simply too small in relation to the surrounding space, when he doesn't ...*

ALTHAMER: ... fit in.

SZYMCZYK: *If you sit a child on a stool, and his feet don't reach the floor, you affect the form, even if you do it through contrast.*

ALTHAMER: Well, yes. You can find precedents in tradition, such as depictions of putti or little angels.

SZYMCZYK: *The Migros piece was called Król Maciuś I (King Maciuś I).² I remember the classic illustrations to that Janusz Korczak book, of King Maciuś sitting on a throne too big for him.*

ALTHAMER: I'd say it was about substitution or maybe changing a system that failed, one that was worn out, burnt out – or simply not interesting enough. Quite a risky change. Though I don't think I felt the risk, it was rather a child-like joy when I recognized myself in the children. But I wouldn't have looked convincing swinging my legs out there, though that's exactly how I felt. I was happy to be pulling a prank on the adults, with their habits and routines.

SZYMCZYK: *Do you still think that way? Do you still feel like pulling pranks, as you put it – overthrowing or distorting the order of things?*

ALTHAMER: A lot of time has passed since then. My context has changed. All of a sudden I found myself functioning in the art world, adapting to it. I take part in too many exhibitions to enjoy each of them. I admit I do some of them half-heartedly. But it still turns me on when I'm given the right conditions and invited to take an active part in the process.

SZYMCZYK: *You've done a lot of figurative sculptures lately. What makes you sculpt so much? What do you want to sculpt?*

ALTHAMER: It might have to do with the art of camouflage. A game of mimicry.