

frieze

Roman Stańczak

Galeria Stereo

'I don't believe in rare phenomena, in people experiencing odd, unusual states, that others are not given to feel [...] I chose the medium of everyday objects, present in many homes'. So said Roman Stańczak, in 1994, in one of the few interviews he has given over the last two decades. A peer of Paweł Althamer and Artur Żmijewski, fellow graduates of Grzegorz Kowalski's studio at the Sculpture Department of the Warsaw Academy, Stańczak made his debut in the early 1990s with a series of powerful sculptures investigating the materiality of quotidian objects. Shortly after, he dropped off the radar, resurfacing only sporadically. 'One Among a Billion' at Warsaw's Galeria Stereo marked his return to the art scene.

Sitting in the middle of the room, covered in fine sawdust and shavings, was a large wooden object (*Untitled*, 2014), which had once been an elegant single bed with a sideboard at its head. Stripped of varnish and ripped open, it now resembled an otherworldly bunk – one that was not so much filed down as whittled anew. This is Stańczak's trademark treatment of commonplace items; his earlier works include a chair, a sofa and a bath, all mangled – turned inside-out, as it were – using chisel and mallet or hammer. His practice, marked by perseverance as well as intensity and violence, gestures towards the very essence of things that, although rendered useless, retain a haunting sense of familiarity. Here, tucked away inside the bed's cabinet, was a small female figurine, seemingly forgotten by the previous owner. Reminiscent of Catholic representations of St. Barbara, it wielded a model of New York's Empire State Building. This miniature sculpture, made by the artist during a recent stay in the US, offered a stark contrast to the coarse look of the furniture and pointed to another characteristic feature of his work: references to religion, often as incongruous as his handling of objects.

Mounted on a nearby wall was an odd trophy (*Untitled*, 2014) – a single elaborate antler projecting from a round metal base. On closer inspection, it turned out to be the branch of a tree with two animals painted on the orb, itself fashioned from an old kettle. This was a trophy indeed, one found by the artist's dogs during a walk in the woods, and it was with images of them that he had adorned the base. Offhand and seemingly reliant on chance, Stańczak's approach is in fact grounded in a very deliberate interaction with the world; the objects in his works are seldom simply

About this review

Published on 15/09/14

By Krzysztof Kościuczuk



Roman Stańczak, *Arithmetic of Platonic Love*, 1991/2014, installation view

[Back to the main site](#)

found – rather, they are selected, or gifted.

Arithmetic of Platonic Love (1994/2014), shown in the gallery's other room, was a remake of Stańczak's diploma project. Consisting of a video and an object, the installation is an account of a curious episode. While still a student at the Academy, the artist received a peculiar offering: a plastic bag filled with several hundred pairs of used women's legwear, amassed for over a decade by one of his former friends. In the eight-minute VHS footage, we witness Stańczak as he puts the on the tights, stockings and socks, the accruing layers hindering his movement and, eventually, making it difficult for him to breathe. At one point in this captivating, though grotesque, spectacle, he is joined by a man who helps him remove the layers, which form bulging, organic shapes. The resulting objects are part of a sculpture presented alongside the video. Displayed on a steel rack, these lumps of nylon have little to do with apparel, much less eroticism, testifying only to the bizarre fascination of their collector.

It is not that Stańczak's new work returns to where he left off but rather that his whole practice is rooted in acts of obsessive repetition. Take his 1996 installation, *Untitled*, at Warsaw's Centre for Contemporary Art, in which five antiquated vacuum cleaners, connected in a closed circuit on the wall, incessantly pumped air between them. Rather than describing the artist himself, the 'One Among a Billion' of the shows title referred to these acts of compulsive repetition that push the ordinary to the point of absurdity.

Krzysztof Kościuczuk

Frieze

3-4 Hardwick Street, London EC1R 4RB, 020 7833 7270