

**Spatial
Agent**
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In *ORANZ* (eng. *ORANGE*), in the same manner as in her previous projects, Ewa Axelrad begins with the space of a gallery, in which her pieces are to be presented; she tries to adopt the way, in which that space affects the viewer. Once more, we are also dealing with an exceptionally aesthetic, pristine and minimalistic exhibition; in fact, only two objects have been displayed. Nevertheless, in *ORANZ* the most significant is what is physically absent. Preparing for the exhibition the artist acts like a spy - conducting land reconnaissance, *recruiting* the space, swaying it to her side and taking it over entirely. As a result, when entering the gallery (a classic white cube) somewhere under our skin we sense that we have entered a hostile territory. The military vocabulary that I'm choosing here is most appropriate since the exhibition *ORANZ* in a way takes on the subject of the *warfare* - the clue implied in the text accompanying the exhibition written by curator Piotr Pękala and in the titles of the pieces - *Leakage (Based on Two Photographs of Disturbing Resemblance)* and *Fair Child UC-123K*.



The central element of the show is a small aircraft mould lit by a spotlight. It is a somewhat transformed replica of an American aircraft Fairchild, which was commonly used, among others, in operations in Vietnam. In the exhibition the freighter has its two 'equivalents' - one of them is the shadow which the plane casts onto the opposite wall. Immediately, however, we note that there is something not quite right in this object-shadow relationship - it is the shadow that appears more 'lively' than the physically present mould. The latter exists as a static object suspended on a nylon line, whereas the shadow resembles a flying, gracefully diving body of a gymnast.

Another Fairchild aircraft's *alter ego* is situated in the second part of the gallery - a lightbox with a photograph of a child dressed in a space suit. The child is standing on one leg with slightly raised spread arms as if reluctantly preparing for a 'balance test'.

The gallery turns into the 'air space', which is brought out by the entire room being painted blue - including the floor and ceiling. As a consequence, Ewa Axelrad's project affects us physically, sensorily. Having entered the gallery, the viewer experiences dizziness and at times completely loses the sense of space. The room with the lightbox, although no longer painted blue, also draws us into its own universe - the lightbox is mounted in a black enclosure which sucks

everything around in, including the viewer. For these reasons the show should be viewed in solitude - only then all the subtleties get noticed - a subtle sound of the fluorescent light or the smell of the lit lamp. It also allows to give in to this dizziness and confusion, even though it is not a pleasant sensation, since straight away it becomes apparent that something adverse is seeping in.



The author encourages to search for the titled *orange*, which is not explicitly present. The posters and brochures accompanying the show prove helpful - on the featured photograph we see an 'explosion' against the 'sky' background. It is not stated whether it is a bomb explosion or perhaps an unleashed surface of the Sun. What is also significant here is the collation of the orange and blue - complementary colors, and hence after staying for a while in the gallery the light coming from the hallway appears rather orange-pink than white. A more attentive viewer will see yet another kind of presence of that color, its most vicious form. Fairchild freighter was used in Vietnam to spray defoliant called Agent Orange - a strongly poisonous and carcinogen substance causing mental retardation and deformities in newborns.

After acknowledging this connotation the reception of the exhibition changes diametrically and the viewer acknowledges having got caught in a trap. The child's spacesuit gains different meaning and the blue room with the aircraft model suddenly resembles a child's room lacking, however, the child. The actual pose of the 'cosmic child' refers us to the well-known 1972 photograph on which the naked Vietnamese girl runs away from the aircrafts dropping the napalm (this photograph was also used by Zbigniew Libera in his series 'Positives').

Another very interesting feature is the division of the space generated by the shadow. The blue room is a kind of a *shadow play* - yet the viewer is not the actor. It rather renders an impression that our shadow gets *separated* from our body becoming an autonomous entity. In the second room the depth of the photograph sucks in so intensely that it seems that the shadow has no right to exist there at all. The blue room, in which the distorted shadows command our attention, may be associated with the Plato's cave. And although the artist didn't arrest us with chains preventing us from turning around we are still unable to look directly at the plane, due to the spotlight blinding us. We also cannot look at ourselves otherwise, than with looking at our deceitful shadow.

The Lublin project is another successful work by Axelrad. It triggers a sense of dread and encirclement, stimulates the mind to work at top speed. That is quite a challenge for the viewer and an absolute torture - first to get on to the right track and then to forget everything he had seen.