Grzegorz Jarmocewicz
From Post-Modernism to Critical Art

Abstract

"[...]. Human existence – a vast, unlimited space of reflections on life and death, in the fields of philosophy, morals, history, culture... Grzegorz Jarmocewicz, reaching into all these areas and categories, gives us his own interpretations to launch in us layers of associations and references to our own experiences. [...]". Critic, art historian Marek Grygiel. "[...]. Jarmocewicz's work presents a variety in the form of a search. It contains a modernist tradition, as well as an oppositional, postmodernist tradition. From the psychological side, through a specific form, it is contained between heaven and hell. [...]". Critic, art historian Dr. Krzysztof Jurecki. " [...]. (His photographs are) economic reflections of the diversity of cultural codes, which are the artist's modest contribution to certain areas of reflection, at the same time defining them and remaining outside the framework of the term [...]". Prof. Jerzy Olek. " [...]. He fits in with his attitude and creative search in the area of photographers of philosophers who, with the help of their pictures-photographs, reflect on life, death, time, history, culture. [...]". Prof. Marek Szyryk.

Key words

Artificial Intelligence. Authoritarianism. Biometrics. Critical Art. Culture. Daguerreotype. Deep Fakes. Embalming of Time. GANs. Image Memory. Manipulation. Metaphor. New Media. Object. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Oppression. Photography Experiment. Photosensitive Emulsion. Polarisation. Postmodernism. Surveillance. The Truth of Photography. Video Hologram.

Grzegorz Jarmocewicz is a visual artist who has been active in the field of photography since 1989. He gained recognition with a series of staged photographs entitled *Props Room* (1995). It is a description of the human condition that is a postmodern form, using the language of Dadaism in response to the changes taking place in post-communist society, drawing new patterns from the world of consumption. His work is often based on signs and symbols deeply embedded in cultural systems, considering the cyclical nature of changes in human life in a historical context (series: *Traces II*, 1996; *Usque ad finem*, 1997; *Tempus tenere*, 2008; *Usque ad hesternum*, 2011), as well as personal (*Ire ex praeteritis*, 2012; *Ire ex*, 2013). The structure of these cycles evolves from intermedia activities, using a photographic emulsion on canvas and a photo-object, to classical work with multiple exposure and a 4 x 5 inch pinhole camera.

In the following years, his creative attitude remains defined by his photographic experiments and the disapproval of the community's historical amnesia. Two projects are being created, the elements of which are large-format photographs prepared using a light-sensitive emulsion applied to an aluminum substrate. One of the messages of these works is "mirrors endowed with memory", as Oliver Wendell Holmes described daguerreotypes in the 19th century, that the artist alludes to. Both projects are presented below.

The first one, *To the Memory of Reflected Gazes* from 2014; is an artistic action within the framework of the Art Festival "Bridge" / Internationales Kunstfestival "Die Brücke" festival (2014), held simultaneously in Słubice and Frankfurt (Oder). These cities which had previously formed a unified urban and social fabric were divided into two separate parts by the Potsdam Agreement. Henceforth, for many years, the history of the division is written down in the often dramatic fate of the personal inhabitants living on both banks of the river. After the borders were opened, playgrounds became a symbolic space of unity. Today, Polish children often play on the German side, while German children play in Słubice. As part of the action, classic black and white portraits of several-year-olds who met there were created, and using photographic emulsion, they were transferred on a real scale to aluminum plates, which, as an artistic act, the author installed for a few hours at the place where they were taken.

In the words of François Soulages, "To photograph is to record in an irreversible way what is also irreversible" – "embalming time", and all forms of recalling people and events that occurred in front of the camera lens for many years through photography was a topic extremely close to the artist's thinking about the world, life, art and irreversible death. *Every Past Moment. Photography as Memory* (2015) is the second project published here, referring to the most important and fundamental properties of the medium of photography. Its idea is based on social and historical memory contained in a photographic image. The metaphor of return connecting the past with the present became the basis for artistic research and references to the multicultural history of the city where Jarmocewicz was born. Suwałki is the only agglomeration in the world that has an extraordinary necropolis with a unique formula. It is the *Cemetery of the Seven Faiths*. In an area exceeding 19 hectares, there is a common complex of cemeteries where the remains of followers of seven faiths are buried: Islam, Judaism, Old Believers, Orthodox Christianity, the Evangelical Augsburg Rite (Lutherans), the Evangelical Reformed Rite (Calvinists) and the Catholic Church. It was a starting point that made it possible to enter into a dialogue with the memory contained in old photographs and relate it to the present day. In the museum archives and private collections, the artist found photos from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which there were images of children of various religions who once lived or were associated with Suwałki. With the help of historians, he determined most of the addresses where the "found" heroes lived or probably stayed, and then checked whether their currently living peers could be found in these locations. Unfortunately, not all places look the same as they did a hundred or more years ago. Some houses no longer exist, and in those spaces there are other buildings or empty squares. However, Jarmocewicz managed to confront the past with the present and thus find a common relationship in the memory of the image.

Historical motifs also determine the set of works which was created in just seven days of the pandemic thaw that occurred at the turn of spring and summer 2020, when the borders were opened for a short while. As part of the artistic residency of the Kaunas Photo International Festival of Photography,

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Grzegorz Jarmocewicz collected material under the title *On Both Sides of the Border. Why do I Fall in Love with Lithuania,* which has evolved and is enriched with more elements for *A Line on a Map. Cultural Threads of the Polish-Lithuanian Borderland.* It is a kind of journey through places inhabited in the Middle Ages by Baltic tribes (Yotvingians and Prussians), whose direct heirs are contemporary Lithuanians, and an attempt to verify the historical identity of people currently living there, including Poles.

The final series of works presented here is *Camera Opresiva* (2022/23). It is a multi-segment, multimedia research project on the impact of photographic and film images on the functioning of modern society. Its elements reach for cognitive and descriptive references of mechanical recording devices used for surveillance and control of the human community on multiple levels. The project examines the impact of algorithms and artificial intelligence on our behaviour. It reveals the mechanisms of deepfakes and image GANs. It poses questions relating to commonly used polarisation and oppression. It demonstrates the intentional and large-scale use of photographic and cinematic images to manipulate and shape the group and individual consciousness of everyone, by governments and corporations around the world.

The *Camera Opresiva* exhibition was unceremoniously censored and closed by the authorities due to the metaphorically revealed tools of manipulation used by the right-wing nationalist government controlling the Polish people during 2015 – 2023.

TO THE MEMORY OF REFLECTED GAZES

Documentary copies. Originals made using photographic emulsion applied to aluminum, 100 x 143 cm, Frankfurt/Słubice 2014.

Kinderspielplatz, Frankfurt an der Oder. Emilka, 8 years old. Lives in Słubice.

Playground, Słubice. Noah, 4 years old. Lives in Berlin, spends holidays with his grandparents in Frankfurt (Oder).

EVERY PAST MOMENT.
PHOTOGRAPHY AS MEMORY

One who did not circled life before he began to live, never will not live.
Anyone who has experienced life and soon it saturated, is poor construction.
This one lives, who chose repeat. He will not run for butterflies, as a little boy,
will not climb up on his toes, greedy splendor of the world, because he already
know them. Not weaves as well as the old spinner, woven on a loom memories,
but quietly goes his way, pleased with the possibility of repetition.

Søren Kierkegaard [1]

MATEUSZ DREJER

UL. L. WARYŃSKIEGO / DAWNIEJ UL. JATKOWA

MATEUSZ DREJER

JANUSZ WIESE

From the book "Every past moment. […]". Bialystok 2015. Jan Wiese / Lutheran. Mateusz Drejer.

From the book "Every past moment. […]". Bialystok 2015.

From the presentation "Every past moment [...]"
Documentation of the exhibition at the gallery CSW Suwałki. November 2015.
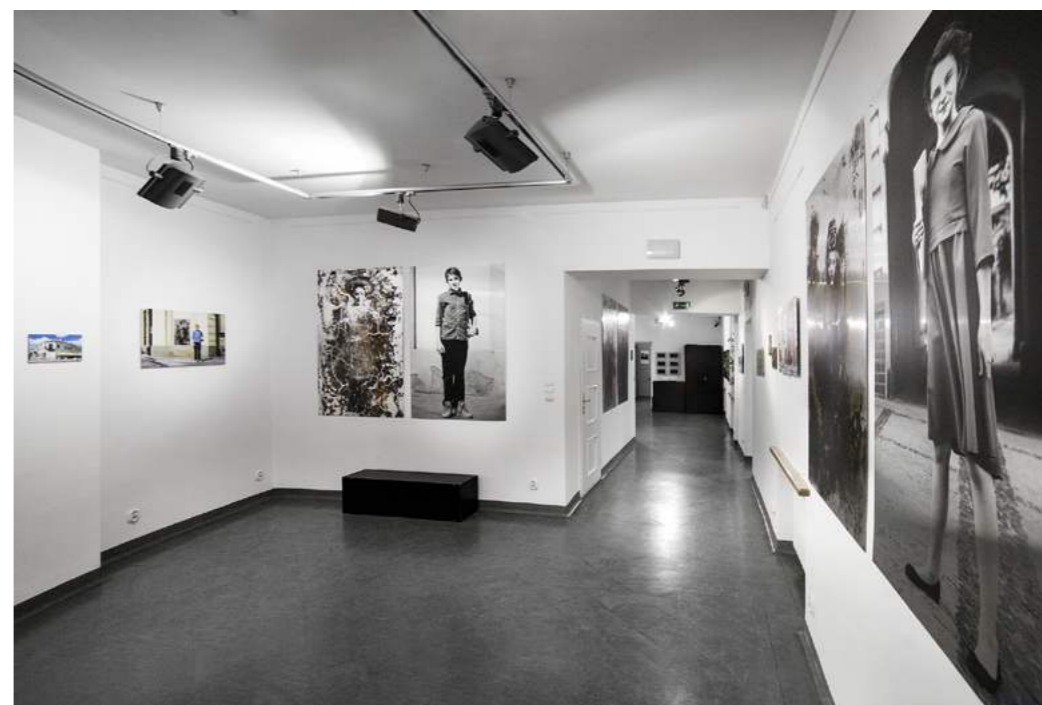
From the presentation "Every past moment [...]"
Documentation of the exhibition at the gallery CSW Suwałki. November 2015.

From the presentation "Every past moment [...]"
Documentation of the exhibition at the gallery CSW Suwałki. November 2015.

Staś Bogusławski / Catholic

Natan Adelson / Mosaic Faith

Personal data unknown / Calvinist

Personal details unknown / Orthodox

Personal data unknown / Calvinist

Yakup Güler / Muslim

Filip Maziewski

Krzyś Tumas

A LINE ON A MAP.

Robertas Vajculis

Arūnas Sujeta

Mindaugas Kavaliauskas

Algirdas Motiejūnas

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Exhibition view. Sleńdzińscy Gallery, Białystok. March 2022

Exhibition view. Sleńdzińscy Gallery, Białystok. March 2022

The Last Iron Curtain

The end of World War II was the process of "liberating" the countries of Eastern and Central Europe by the troops of the Red Army. It brought only apparent freedom to the peoples of this region. Lithuania became a Soviet Republic. Thirty years ago the country still belonged to the Soviet Union. However, it was the first of the republics to proclaim independence on March 11, 1990. The boundary of the Soviet Socialist Republics Union influence was the Berlin Wall, but thereal relics of that time are in Lithuania.

Osinki stronghold.
Organisational centre of the Yotvingian tribe in the upper area of the Czarna Hańcza River / Currently, Poland.

Territorial range of the Balts tribes around 1200 AD

CAMERA OPRESIVA SEGMENT ONE / DEEPFAKE

View of exposition. Gallery of Contemporary Art.
Chłodna 20, Suwałki. October 2022.
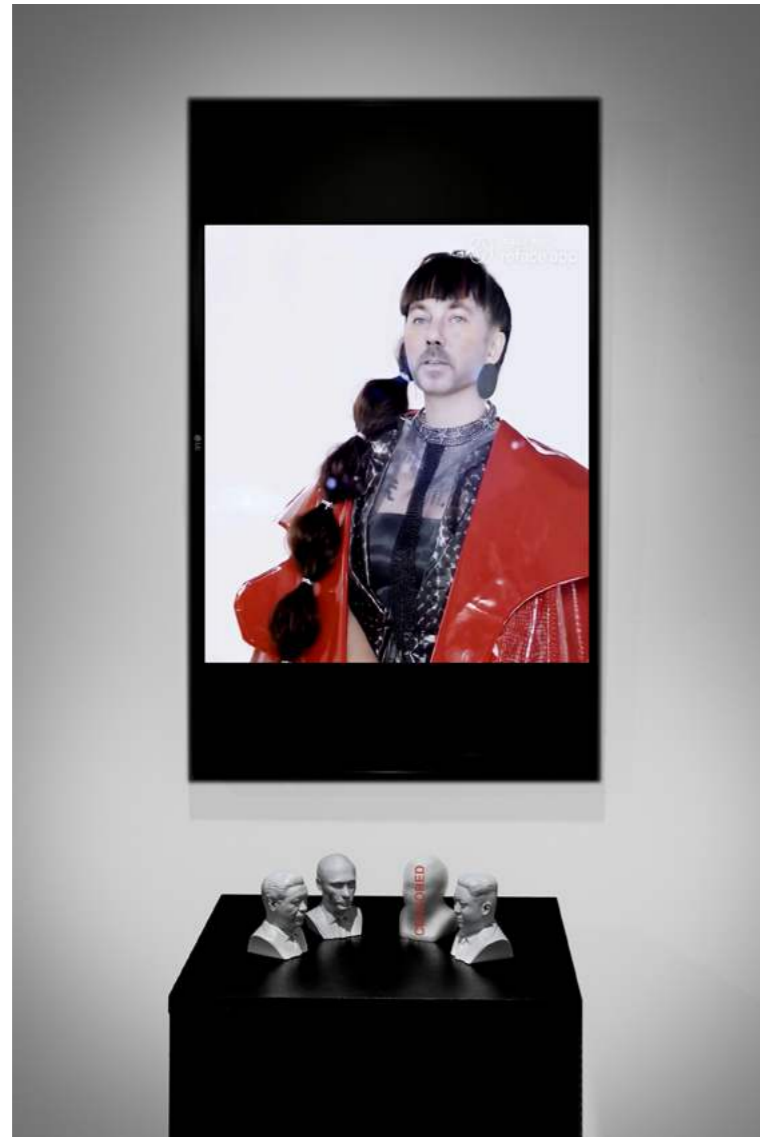
View of exposition. Gallery of Contemporary Art.
Chłodna 20, Suwałki. October 2022.

The first module of the exhibition is constructed from three video deepfakes created with publicly available mobile device applications, where the author's face was blended with the help of artificial intelligence and an algorithm in place of a face, a singer, a ballerina and an actress. The symbolism of surveillance and moral responsibility for manipulation, as well as its distribution, was highlighted in this module through the display of 3D printed models depicting busts of well-known politicians. A photograph manipulated by computer editing is also presented in the area of this segment, along with two others placed in varying contexts. The nature of this part of the show is maintained in a humorous tone, drawing the viewer into a form of play with the images and contexts.
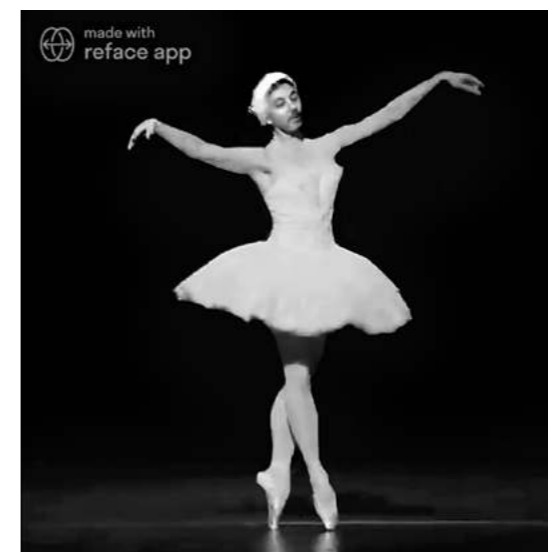
Screenshots. Deepfake created using the Reface app, to which the QR code was available in the description. This allowed viewers to create their own manipulated video on the fly.

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PIŁSUDSKI "IN MAGDEBURG",
80 x 120 cm, inkjet Fine-Art-Rag print, 2022 r.

The Polish leader, a national hero, was officially detained by the army of Kaiser Wilhelm II on the night of 21 to 22 July 1917. "On account of secret agitation against the command of the allied German forces" and imprisoned in the Magdeburg fortress, used as a prison since the 19th century.

In fact, the backdrop for the memorial is Dresden, rebuilt from total destruction during the Second World War.

People who had never been to Suwałki or Dresden commented upon seeing the photo that
Suwałki is a beautiful baroque city. Suwałki was originally built in the classicist style.

SEGMENT TWO
WORLD_WEB_CAM

Currently, it is artificial intelligence and algorithms that tell us where we will go on holiday, what we will buy, what café we will go to with friends.
This block of the exhibition consists of four mounted laptops connected to the network and emitting views of tourist sites. The viewer was given the opportunity to take a virtual journey around the globe and become a 'participant' in the different scenery.

View of exposition.

Screenshot

SEGMENT THREE
OBJECT / CAMERA OPRESIVA

A large-format Globica camera, 13 x 18 cm, in accordance with the postulate of surveillance voyeurism, was used to create a "surveillance" object. Instead of a focusing screen, a ten-inch CCTV monitor was installed with two hidden mini cameras connected to it. One, through the lens, records everything that happens in front of the camera, and the other in front of the focusing screen. Camera images are displayed alternately every 4 seconds. Thus, the recipient becomes both a voyeur and the watched at the same time.

View of exposition.

The dynamic development of technology is gradually eliminating our current, communal social behaviours. At the same time, it makes our everyday life more and more complicated. While building our comfort zone, protecting ourselves behind the screens of mobile devices, we do not realize that the mirror world deprives us of privacy, and its extreme forms of surveillance track and control our intentions and thoughts. On the other hand, through constant voyeurism, we paradoxically become lonely, which is related, among other things, to excessive attention to material goods. This type of consumerism is compensatory and is easily controllable. An additional negative effect is social polarisation – a phenomenon that all highly developed countries struggle with.

View of exposition.

SEGMENT FIVE
SOCIAL POLARISATION

Activities that cause a differentiation of human attitudes towards spheres of social life such as politics, religion, sex. As a result of the division, two factions of opponents and supporters of the solution are formed, while the number of moderate attitudes is decreasing. The process of polarisation contributes to the spread of public conflicts and the disintegration of social groups.

This state of affairs allows for control of society and easier governance of the country. In Poland, one of the manifestations of social polarisation was the ruling party's politicians triggering a discussion about some of the military, from among the so-called "Cursed Soldiers". Some of them committed war crimes against Lithuanian and Polish Orthodox civilians (associated with Belarusians) and and yet were hailed as national heroes by the Kaczynski government.

View of exposition.

The view of Dubinki main street.
238 x 357 cm, solvent print, 2022.

Banner on a block of flats in Bialystok
20 x 30 cm, inkjet Fine-Art_Rag, 2022.

Banner on the building of the Institute of National Remembrance
in Bialystok. 50 x 70 cm, inkjet Fine-Art-Rag, 2022.

On June 23, 1944, the Home Army brigade of Zygmunt Szendzielarz – "Łupaszko" committed the Dubinki Massacre. 20–27 Lithuanian civilians were killed in the mass murder. On November 11, 2007, Lech Kaczyński posthumously awarded "Łupaszka" the Grand Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

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SEGMENT SIX
BIOMETRIC PORTRAIT

The biometric portrait is used today in all identification documents. With the help of the face recognition system, it allows to track every movement of any person, anywhere in the world.

The Hardware backdoor component of system procedures gives manufacturers and supervisors the ability to remotely download data and track the user. Most devices manufactured today have this type of functionality built in. This means that surveillance can take place on a private level, without using a partner's or enemy's network. We can be monitored literally anywhere.

The popular face recognition system, which protects our digitally stored data (e.g. genetic data) on computers, phones or disks, protecting access to bank accounts and documents, is easy to hack using artificial intelligence and biometrics stored in a central database.

The reference point for the biometric portraits I created was the famous series by Thomas Ruff. Although the Bechers' student assumption, as he puts it, does not relate directly to the person in question, because as a portrait it has its own reality, an autonomous existence and is independent of the person it depicts, for the system it still remains a sign of identification.
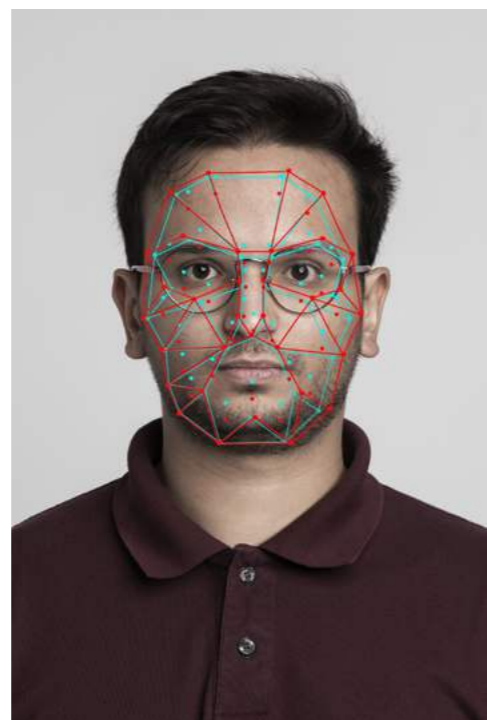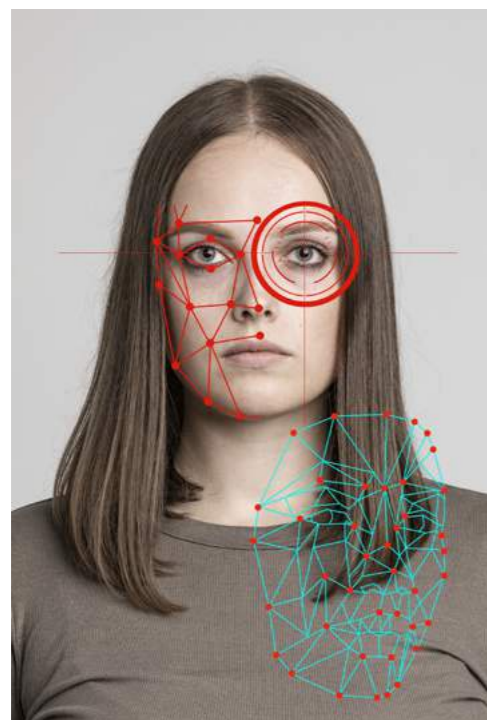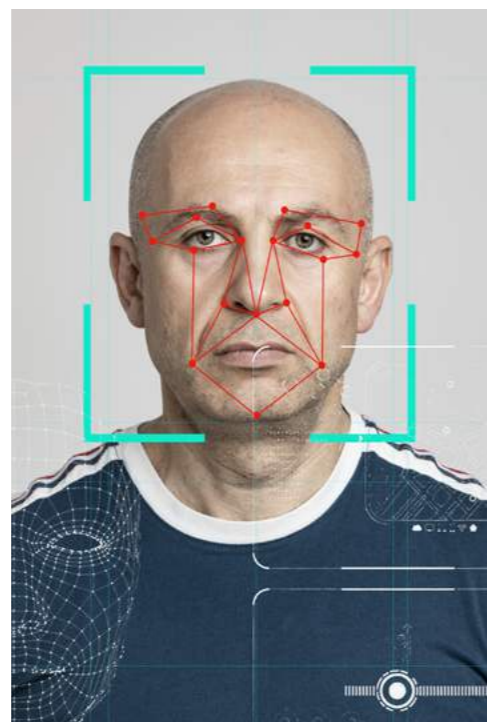

View of exposition
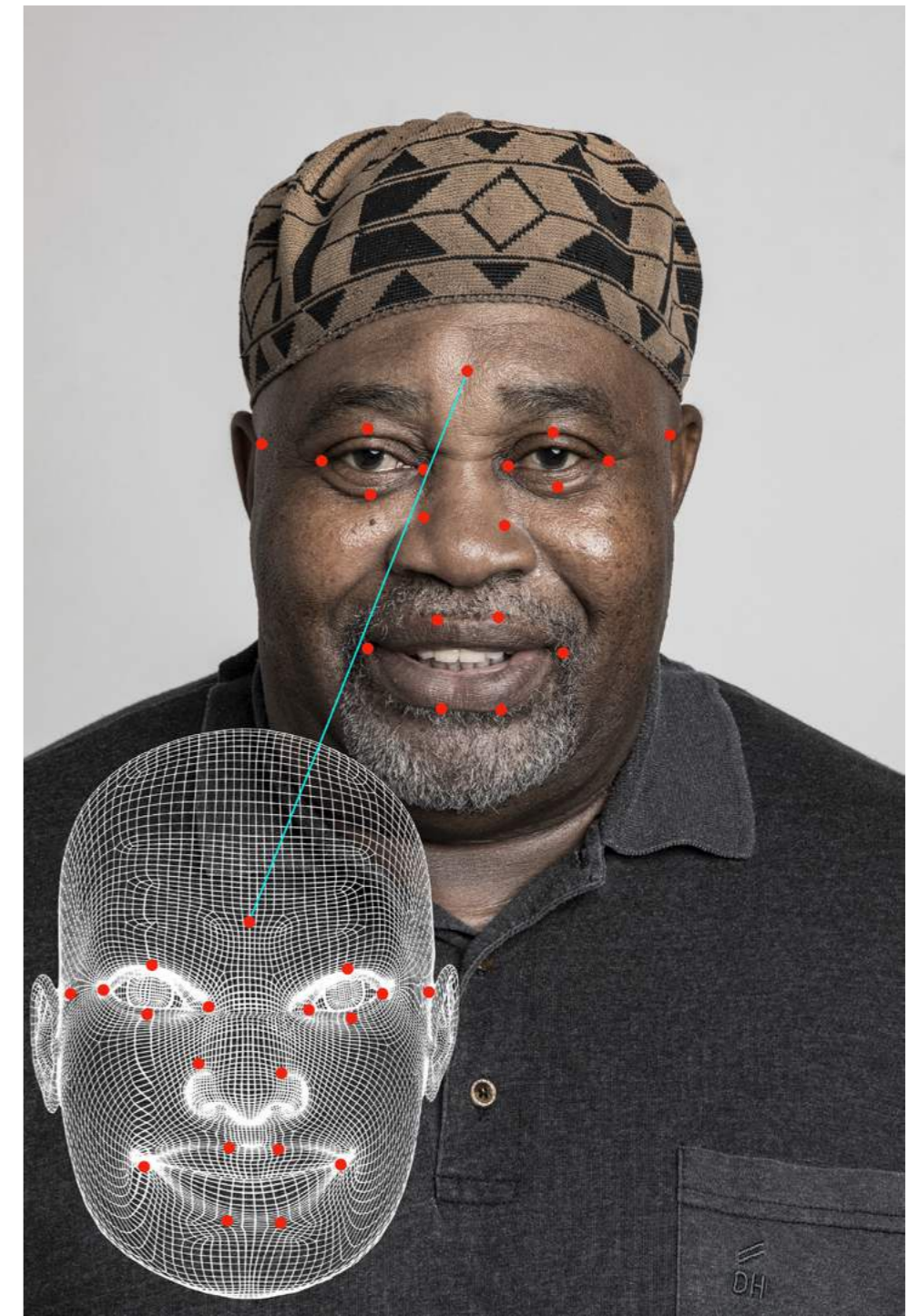
80 x 120 cm, inkjet Fine-Art-Rag print, 2022.

4 x 80 x 120 cm, inkjet Fine-Art-Rag print, 2022.

4 x 80 x 120 cm, inkjet Fine-Art-Rag print, 2022.

**SEGMENT SEVEN**
TOWARDS DICTATORIAL NIRVANA

Two objects are presented in this part of the project. A 3D lenticular print which allows to superimpose at least two different images and transform one into the other. And a video hologram, which is morphing of the faces of politicians, who in the project are examples of figures symbolizing various types of oppression.
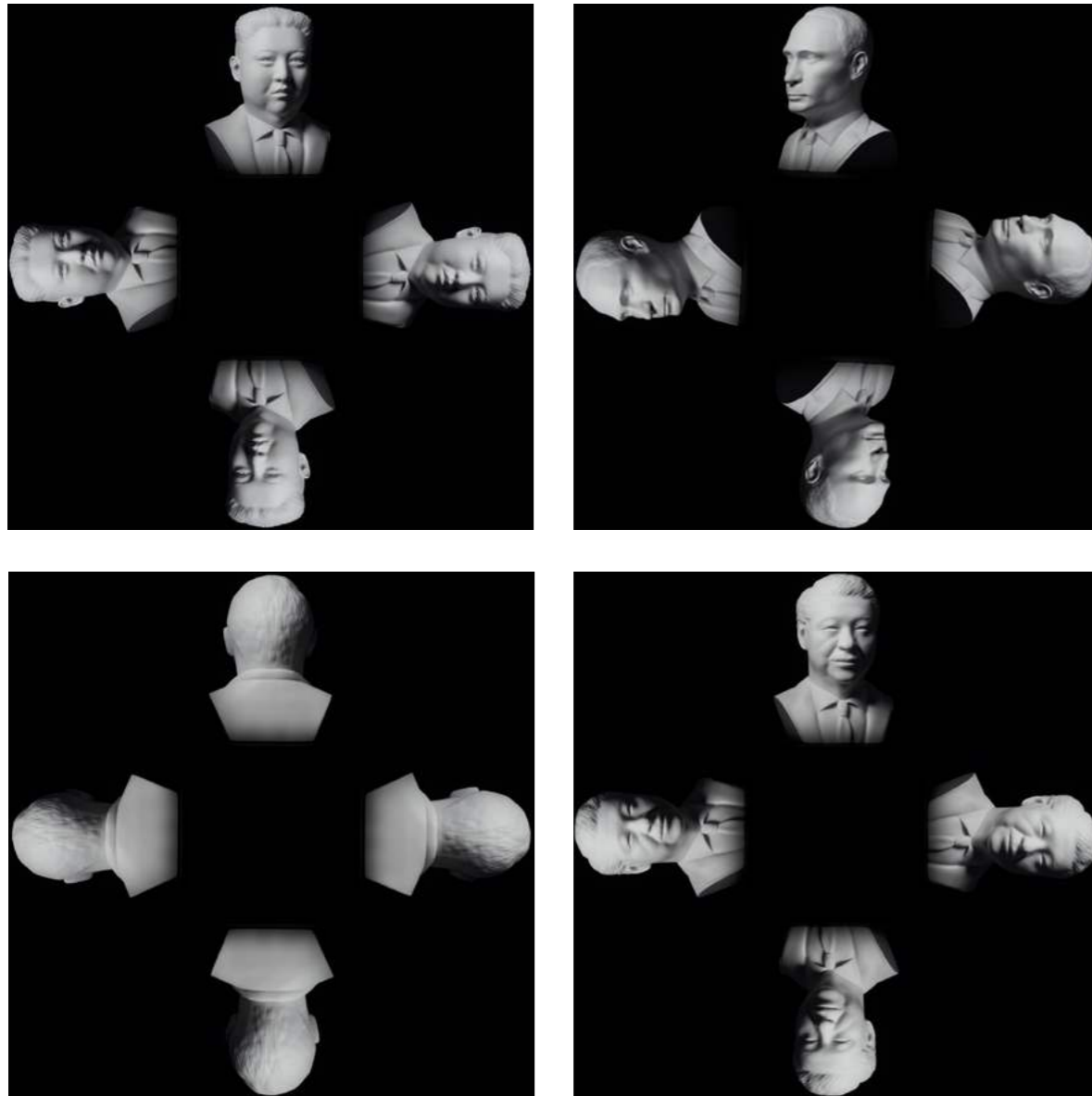
Components of a video hologram.
Screenshots, individual frames before morphing. 80" monitor.

Exhibition documentation. Video holograms. October 2022.

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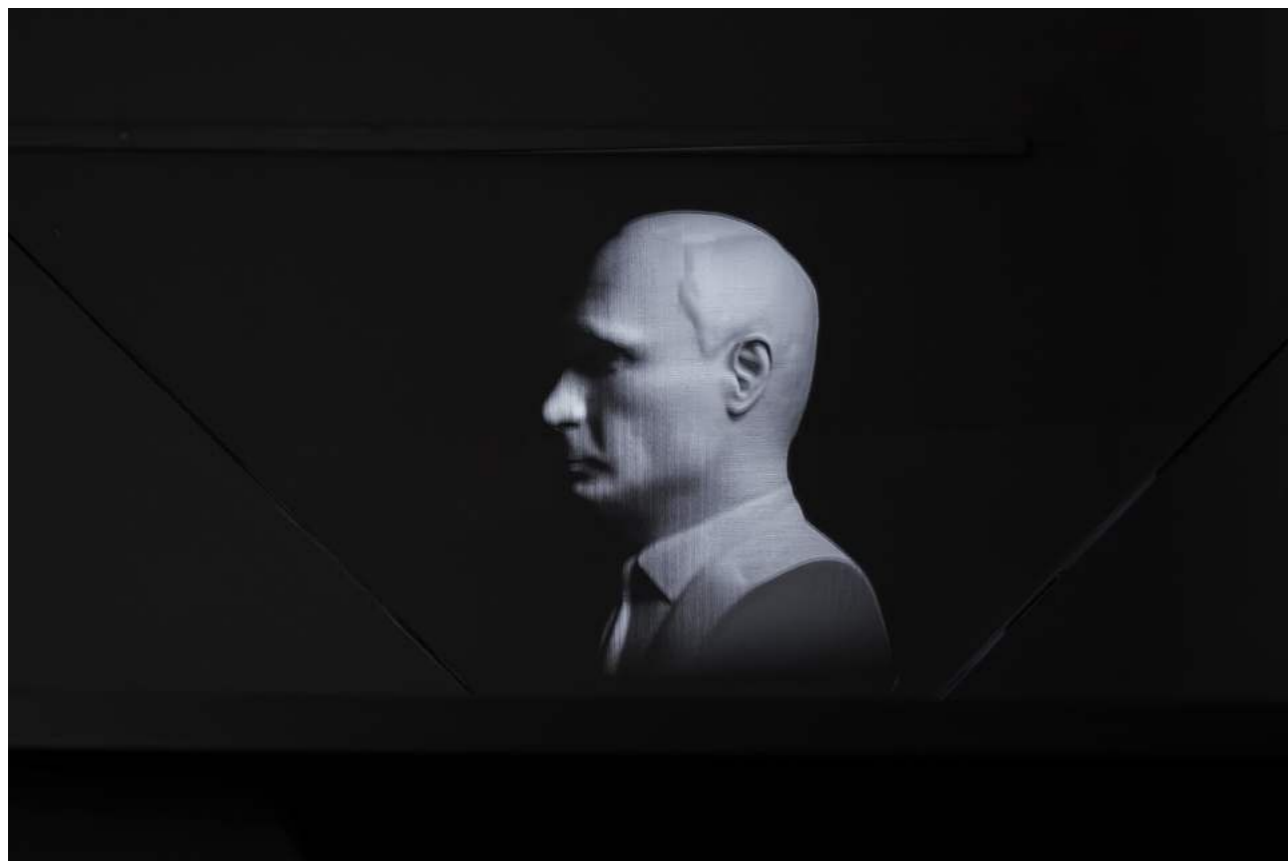
Exhibition documentation. Video holograms. October 2022.

Grzegorz JARMOCEWICZ

Grzegorz Jarmocewicz (1971) – Polish photographer and visual artist, Artistic Director of the International Festival of Photography Białystok INTERPHOTO, educator, curator, juror of international photography competitions. Participant of the Kaunas Photo artistic residency program. Member of the editorial network of European Photography art magazine. Author of many exhibitions in Poland and abroad, as well as publications on photography. His works have been exhibited in, among others, Berlin, Bratislava, Brescia, Budapest, Cracow, Dresden, Kaunas, Łódź, Poznań, Rotterdam, Tallinn, Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Yokohama. His photographs are in private collections, in the Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, Museo Ken Damy in Brescia, Italy, in the District Museum in Suwałki and the Ludwik Zamenhof Center in Białystok.
Grzegorz Jarmocewicz graduated M.A. from the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań (now the University of Arts), PhD. in Art from the National Film School in Łódź, habilitated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk, where he served as an adjunct. Currently, he is the professor teaching photography at the Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland.

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