

## Art Criticism in times of Populism and Nationalism

### 'CROWDS AND POWER: Two Polish artists in London'

In late 2017 the exhibitions of Marcin Dudek (*Steps and Marches*, Edel Assanti Gallery) and Eva Axelrad (*Shtama*, Copperfield) coincided. Each installation of sculptures and videos addressed issues of 'Polish' violence and the crowd. Dudek's striking orange-walled show was based on football hooliganism as autobiography and metaphor; Axelrad addressed issues of the Polish right via symbolism and metonymy. These sparked my investigation into the theorised 'long history' of crowd violence and 'Propaganda as a weapon', from Hobbes and Gustav le Bon, Georges Sorel, Jules Romain, Walter Benjamin, Willi Münzenberg, Sergei Chakotine (*Rape of the Masses by Political Propaganda*), Elias Canetti and Klaus Theweleit. Dudek specifically mentions Raymond Mombouisse, *Riots Revolts & Insurrections*, 1977; Eva Axelrad recalls the Polish translations of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, 1954, as regards *shtama* ('group aggression'). First contextualised for me by the show *Melancholia, A Seebald Variation* (Kings College London, 2017), these reflections on 'Polish' violence, racism and constructions of masculinity have been reconfigured 'for home'. The metamorphosis of our democratic body — arguably subjected to 'mind rape' in the context of media data harvesting and abuse — has become monstrous. These two shows invite art-critical analysis; but how do they themselves analyse / offer a mirror to contemporary British publics?

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Asian Biennale / Fifth Guangzhou Triennale, Guangzhou, China. Sarah Wilson was appointed Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by the French government in 1997 and in 2015 received the AICA International award for distinguished contribution to art criticism.

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