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The Artistic Strategies for Pleading the Cause of Refugees and Migrants in Today's Poland

The Research

The aim of my dissertation is to analyse the different aspects of the representation of refugees in the media and contemporary art. My research focuses on artwork created by European artists that engage in the public debate on the European Union's migration policies and hospitality. Despite my experience working on various European projects – such as the performances of the German collective Center for Political Beauty or the video game *Frontiers. You have reached the Fortress Europe* produced by Gold Extra from Austria – during the process of material selection, I noticed an important number of Polish art initiatives that tackle this topic. This phenomenon seems particularly interesting when the country's actual socio-political context is considered: Poland is one of the EU member states that has accepted the lowest number of refugees and asylum seekers during recent years and the Polish government consistently continues to enforce its "historical policy" that leaves little space for cultural diversity or non-European minorities. This situation has provoked a range of critical and powerful artistic responses, ranging from radical Artur Żmijewski's *Glimpse*, or *Refugee Uprising Manifesto 2016* by the Anonymous Stateless Immigrants Collective, to more dialogical and reflexive works, such as *In the Same City, Under the Same Sky* by Anna Konik. The main goal of my paper is to examine these creative projects as manifestations of a more general political and ideological position formulated in response to the so-called "refugee crisis" but also to point out some crucial differences between these and other European initiatives.

Analytical Tools and Methods

My dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that mobilizes tools and methods that originate from art history, philosophy and social sciences. The theory of agency of art, along with the concept of "hos(ti)pitality", as articulated by Jacques Derrida, are central to this approach. What is more, my sociological background convinced me of that dialogue with the artist that can make an important and prominent contribution to the theoretical analysis of this phenomenon. That is why conversations and research interviews, with the aforementioned Polish artists, have become a key part of my project's methodology. By invoking the works of Jacques Derrida on hospitality and applying their insights to the complex relationship between host and guest (stranger), I aim to shed new light on ground-breaking contemporary art initiatives that deviate from the dominant schema and cross the limits of institutional art in order to reach a broader audience and raise

awareness of pluridimensionality, in addition to highlighting ambiguities in the European vision of hospitality.

Themes Explored

My decision to address this particular question – of how Polish-based art initiatives react to the challenges of internal and international migratory politics – is based on a theoretical assumption that it is possible to identify some of the patterns that contribute new insights into the specificity of these projects. Such perceptions may well be discernible in the Polish tradition of “critical” and socially engaged art. The problems of mobilization of the collective memory, as well as, references to historical and systemic violence, are also to be considered. With this paper, I would like to focus simultaneously on the local context of the analysed artworks, as well as the way they function in wider international space, while also advancing the debates on the agency of these type of initiatives that intersect contemporary art, affective provocation and political activism.