

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI



Heavy Weight History, 2013

Video, PAL, 16:9, color, sound, Polish with subtitles (English), 25:46 min

In a series of photographs and a video performance narrated by a famous Polish sports commentator, a group of Olympic weightlifting champions attempts to lift historic monuments throughout Warsaw. *Heavy Weight History* at once poetically and literally addresses the meaning of resistance, in every sense of the word. Using humor as itself an act of resistance against the heavy weight of post-war history in Europe, *Heavy Weight History* is presented in this exhibition as a tragicomic history lesson at a time when war has once again returned to Europe. By utilising the medium of human relationships, comedic humor, or indeed any of the other innumerable tools of modern communication available, Christian Jankowski trades blows with history, politics and the language of art. His playful and far-reaching projects tug at the very fabric of society itself - of the (re)reading and (re)making of history - querying many notions of authorship, ownership, originality, propriety and authenticity that might otherwise be taken for granted.



Heavy Weight History (Syrenka), 2013

Photograph on baryta paper, b/w, 140 x 186.8 cm, from a series of 7

ARTIST STATEMENT

In a city like Warsaw, which was almost completely destroyed during World War II, memorials function as signs of identities old and new. So with *Heavy Weight History*, Jankowski decided to rupture that historical narrative, to introduce lightness to a subject with such gravity – and have weightlifters try to lift the city’s monuments from the ground. “All the champions of Poland,” announces the professional sports commentator who follows the contest, describing the heroes from the world of sports who have accepted Jankowski’s challenge. One after another, they approach the monuments; some separate from their bases and rise into the air, but others don’t leave the ground. Syrenka, a mermaid armed with a sword who serves as a Warsaw landmark, is raised up high. But the monument to the Warsaw Genuflection, from 1970, turns out to be too heavy; German chancellor Willy Brandt’s symbolic gesture of asking for forgiveness in front of the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising stays put. The then US president, Ronald Reagan (to whom a monument from 2011 is dedicated), also refuses to budge, “just as he did in the era of the Iron Curtain,” says the commentator. Following the contest, the mood is euphoric: fans congratulate the athletes. History is revived through the combination of sports and art: “In this way, before our eyes, new history is created!” As chance would have it, the 2013 World Weightlifting Championships were also held in Poland. Parallel to their own event, the Polish Weightlifting Federation decided to organize a presentation of *Heavy Weight History*.

BIO

Christian Jankowski was born in 1968 in Göttingen, Germany, and studied at the University of Fine Arts, Hamburg, in Germany. In his conceptual and media artworks he makes use of film, video, photography and performance, but also of painting, sculpture, and installation. He lives in Berlin.

Jankowski's work consists of performative interactions between himself with non-art professionals, between contemporary art and the so-called 'world outside of art'. These interactions give insight into the popular understanding of art, while incorporating many of contemporary art's leading interests in contemporary society: regarding lifestyle, psychology, rituals and celebrations, self-perception, competition, and mass-produced and luxury commodities. Over time, Jankowski has collaborated with magicians, politicians, news anchors, and members of the Vatican, to name just a few. In each case, the context for the interaction and the participants are given a degree of control over how Jankowski's work develops and the final form that it takes. Jankowski documents these performative collaborations using the mass media formats that are native to the contexts in which he stages his work—film, photography, television, print media—which lends his work its populist appeal. Jankowski's work can be seen both as a reflection, deconstruction, and critique of a society of spectacle and at the same time as reflection, deconstruction, and critique of art, which has given itself over to spectacle and thereby endangered its critical potential.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Fluentum*, Berlin, Germany (2020); *Galleria Enrico Astuni*, Bologna, Italy (2019); *@KCUA*, Gallery of the **Kyoto** City University of Arts, Kyoto, Japan (2018); *Galeria Hit*, Bratislava, Slovakia (2017); *Haus am Lütowplatz*, Berlin, Germany (2016), *Kunsthaus Hamburg*, Germany (2015), *Center for Contemporary Art*, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland (2013); *Sala de Arte Publico Siqueiros*, Mexico City, Mexico (2012); *MACRO*, Rome, Italy (2012); *Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden*, Germany (2009); *Kunstmuseum Stuttgart*, Stuttgart, Germany (2008); *Miami Art Museum*, FL, USA (2007); *MIT List Visual Art Center*, Cambridge, MA, USA (2005); *Swiss Institute*, New York, NY, USA (2001) and the *Wadsworth Atheneum*, Hartford, CT, USA (2000). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions including 'Autogestion', *Joan Miró Foundation*, Barcelona, Spain (2016); 'When I Give, I Give Myself', *Van Gogh Museum*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2015); *Project Los Altos* (off-site show in Silicon Valley, staged by *San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*, CA, USA, 2013); *Taipei Biennial*, Taiwan (2010); *Sydney Biennial*, Australia (2010); the *Whitney Biennial*, New York, NY, USA (2002) and the *Venice Biennale* (2013 and 1999). In 2016, Jankowski curated the 11th edition of *Manifesta*, becoming the first artist to assume the role.