

## An Introduction to the work of Natalia LL

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Natalia LL is a legend of the Polish neo-avantgarde, an artist of a very clear stance, tackling social and political matters stemming from the tradition of conceptualism. In the 1970s, she belonged to the group of forerunners of performance, experimental film, video, dealing also with installation and sculpture. In 1970, she founded the Wrocław-based artistic group and gallery Permafo. The artist living in communist Poland was recognized by foreign feminist critique already in the mid-1970s. Natalia LL's work has invited many feminist interpretations, which underlined the presence of the problems of sexuality and eroticism contradicting the status quo of social and cultural patriarchal structures. The artist's works from the 1970s feature the themes of confrontation with male viewer, objection to "phallic structures" and the issues of shaping female identity against tradition by means of taking over social, cultural and political activity – represented by the image of a woman who takes the active position in eroticism. In the 1970s in Poland, it was significant not only from the individual perspective, but also the social and the political. The visualization of satisfying sexual needs by a woman and equal rights in the domain of sex were received as somewhat of pornography, with the artist's exhibitions censored and no public displays allowed. The art of Natalia LL became a political tool, an instrument of fight for equal rights, defining identity on the basis of consciousness-related look upon oneself.

The artistic stance of Natalia LL and her works being a clear manifestation of female self-awareness, as well as her presence on the international scene of the 1970s were somewhat of a link between the reality of the communist state, where equal rights were still a myth kept up by the authorities, and the reality of democratic states, which were already witnessing the second wave of feminism. The works of Natalia LL were not unambiguous, but their tone is still surprisingly current, which proves that she always tackled the right social and political threads.

Natalia LL's film work is closely related to her artistic practice, mainly photography and performance art. Her early pieces from 1970: *Permanent Measurement of Time* and *Permanent Measurement of Every 1 km of the E22 Motorway* are conceptual meditations on time and space – topics that became vital for the artist's work in conceptual photography at the time. Marking the next major stage of her practice was *Consumer Art*, a performance-for-camera series developed from 1972 to 1975. A subversive take on consumerism in the light of the shortage of goods in communist Poland and the commodification of women's bodies, the piece garnered Natalia LL popularity among second-wave feminism theorists and curators. *Impressions* from 1973 also addresses the experience of one's own body, joy and bliss on one's own terms, and *Artificial Reality*, created two years later, is an interesting example of how Natalia LL introduced sensuality and subjectivism into the field of conceptual and experimental art.

Toward the end of the 1970s, the artist's work began to concentrate on mystical and spiritual motifs, portraying herself and her body as an element of the cosmos. Performances originating from that period are more autonomous and frequently carried out not directly for the camera, although the awareness and necessity of film documentation was vital for the artist. The first of a series of such sessions was titled *Dreaming*, held in 1978, and its film recording, *Pyramid*, comes from 1980. These actions took various forms: Natalia LL was asleep in the presence of the viewers or only in front of the camera, or else she herself photographed sleeping people. Around the same time, she created the piece *Points of Support*, set in a meadow in the Pieniny National Park, where the artist, nude, performed gymnastic exercises combined with a choreography. Each posture she adopted corresponded to a stellar constellation, thus building something of a bridge between the woman and the cosmos. The same tendency, marked by an interest in ecology and natural energy, is also represented by two later video pieces: *Voracious Cats* (1994) and *Menego* (1997).

Of note is Natalia LL's private revolution, taking place since the mid-1980s until her death in 2022, which concerns the artist's attitude to her own body and the passage of time. Her transformation is represented in photographic series and video works, such as *Brunhild's Dreams* (1994), among other pieces. A forerunner of feminism in Polish art and the artist behind the most uncompromising works devoted to the body and sexuality, Natalia LL equally boldly confronts the topic of old age, self-acceptance, nudity and eroticism not only of people under thirty. This topic is almost absent from global art and public space, and seldom addressed by feminist theorists. Meanwhile, this question and the way it is approached by Natalia LL are crucial for the liberation of women (and men) from patriarchal structures and ageism.