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Translated by Katarzyna Bartoszyńska

It was then ten in the morning; the rays of the sun struck the surface of the waves at rather an oblique angle, and at the touch of their light, decomposed by refraction as through a prism, flowers, rocks, plants, shells, and polypi were shaded at the edges by the seven solar colours. It was marvellous, a feast for the eyes, this complication of coloured tints, a perfect kaleidoscope of green, yellow, orange, violet, indigo, and blue; in one word, the whole palette of an enthusiastic colourist!

Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*

The photographic series that Maurycy Gomulicki selected for this issue of View at the request of the Editors, is provisionally (it is not yet complete) but meaningfully entitled *Night Flight to Venus*. The name Venus certainly refers both to the second planet from the sun in our solar system, to a fascinating journey into the unexplored realm of the cosmos and to the Roman goddess of love. This bestiary, as the author describes the photographs, is a continuation of the series *Minimal Fetish*. The artist eagerly engages image sequences, created with the help of photographic equipment—or rather with an eye in tune with an uncommon imagination and sensitivity to things that are non-apparent and, broadly put, exuberant. But the photographs from *Minimal Fetish*, which found their final shape in an album published four years ago (2010), differ from the fragment of the new series presented here.

The photographs published in the book are a collection of details orbiting the erotic and its cult as practiced by the artist. There is a lot of variation (the project was created over several years): there are photographs of the lips of mannequins, but

also of female lips; plastic hands as well as real fingernails, with more or less perfect manicures; neon tights thrown onto raspberry sheets and slender women's legs in fishnet stockings and so on. They form an individualized alphabet of the author's subjects, styles, designs, appearances, and turn-ons, generally (but not always) connected by the common denominator of saturated color. The titular "minimal" refers to the principle of composition, which limits the image to a narrow frame, and thereby also maximizes the intensity of the image, the fullest state of which was achieved by photographs exhibited under the same title at Leto Gallery (Warsaw, May-June 2010).

The photos presented during that exhibition are the direct predecessors of *Night Flight to Venus*. The relationship between the two is fluid and while the dynamics and principles of composition are basically the same, this time the artist offers an array of different associations. The bestiary evokes luxurious publications, which present astonishing natural wonders and atlases of rare and gorgeous fauna. The shapes in the images are not always legible, the photographs are saturated with neon colors. They transmogrify the female body into forms that call to mind the inhabitants of coral reefs in warm tropical seas or inaccessible ocean depths. We are on a higher plane of rendering the body unrecognizable.

The way that the pictures come to be is crucial—not as the result of prearranged sessions with invited models using carefully chosen accessories in a prepared studio, nor during the course of wanderings with a camera in search of interesting discoveries—but while having sex or, as the author puts it, "celebrating bliss" *Night Flight to Venus* is a greatly condensed photo-reportage from a bed illuminated by ultra-violet light, a series concentrated on form as a vehicle of color, described by the author as one of the fundamental elements of experiencing pleasure. Through the process of aestheticization, pushed to the utmost limit, these documents of fulfillment redirect our attention to other possible meanings. In *Night Flight to Venus*, the author focuses less on accessories meant to intensify the erotic experience than he does on the female body, attired in neon lingerie and framed in a surprising way, provoking associations with underwater worlds.

Gomulicki draws from imaginaries divided between internet galleries of underwater fauna; websites of nature photographers containing increasingly high-quality

images of metallicly sparkling spider eyes, sea anemones fluttering like frills and neon tentacles of venomous snails; as well as from more or less forgotten authors, such as Maurice Maeterlinck with his natural-philosophical studies full of fantastically vivid scenes bursting with drama and strongly anthropomorphized descriptions of the lives of insects and plants (*The Intelligence of the Flowers*, *The Life of the Bee*), Robert Stiller and his vision of the tropics in *Daughters of the Long-Toothed*, or Jules Verne and the worlds discovered by his heroes.

The artist skillfully sublimates this plenitude throughout contemporary images whose strength and energy is determined by a syncretic connection of minimalistic form and maximal saturation of color—an indispensable sign of sexual attractiveness in the natural world. This way a woman's arse becomes the eyes of a dragonfly, and the tips of high heels morph into a snail's pink antennae. The character of the photographs was most aptly summed up by the artist, who described them as "unbridled nature photography."

The publication of Maurycy Gomulicki's photographs in the **Viewpoint** section seems shocking, and by being an exception proves the rule of the queer theme of this issue of the journal. Because it is probably not actually queer. The point is not the obvious fact that the artist is thoroughly heterosexual and affirms his sexuality by using well-known (though admittedly not exactly average or everyday) and culturally accepted erotic accessories (lingerie, high heels, stockings). Not only does he not aim to destabilize culturally assigned and accepted meanings of sexuality and gender, he even reinforces them through granting them an attractive visual frame, which increases their effect. Gomulicki isn't waging a political battle in anyone's name; he is not interested in building a collective identity or grounds for opposition. He is not motivated by rebellion. The only "transgressions" one could arguably find in his works are never performed against something, but always seek to reinforce. He is not filled by a need to protest, but by a self-granted right and a real desire for a deep affirmation of a whole series of events, entirely on his own terms. Gomulicki creates spaces of celebration, but not emancipation. He says: "In pleasure there is little room for heroism." All of this situates him, it seems to me, beyond the mainstream and dynamic of activities that fall under the heading of "queer."

The only thing that arguably has a somewhat queer flavor (if we understand queer as something outside the norm) is the refusal to bow to cultural norms and their repressive force, which in this case would be operating under the name of "good taste." Even in this arena the artist, while rejecting the norm, does not seem to be waging any sort of battle and doesn't seem to feel excluded on the basis of his highly refined tastes and likes.

More suited to this case than queer theory, perhaps, is the most probably forgotten nineteenth-century tradition of *écriture artiste*. The heterogenous nature of the world in general, and culture in particular, was in full bloom in the nineteenth century, a time famous for the writings of brilliant and keen-eyed observers, who—crucially—were deeply interested in their own historical moment. We could mention the Goncourt brothers (Edmond and Jules), Théophile Gautier, Joris-Karl Husmans, as well as many others. This group of thinkers could prove to be an inspiration for queer theorists and subjects—if not their godfathers, then at least their uncles. It was the nineteenth century and its artists who were the first to disseminate the idea of the equality of various cultures and traditions, and to develop the idea of aesthetic travel, which Gomulicki conducts in a literal sense, setting off (with a camera) to distant and close geographic regions, and in a metaphorical sense, while wandering through the internet and literature or creating images of unknown utopias and their inhabitants. The artist is truly Huysman-like in his ability to suggest new qualities, dimensions, and scales of meaning lurking beneath everyday life. Furthermore, both share a need to change the gray aspects of life into the extraordinary. The point is not to estrange (as it might easily appear, at first), but to intensify that which we could call an emotional dissonance with the state of reality ("I am a slave of aesthetics," says the artist).

What I find to be a great advantage and strength of Maurycy Gomulicki's projects is that when you try to approach them critically, they skillfully knock all tools provided by contemporary critical theory out of our hands. Gomulicki is not only unafraid to stare directly ahead—with sensitivity but also innocence—he also does not hesitate to testify to what he has seen.

Undoubtedly, within the images he creates there exists a strength that liberates from convention, limitations, stereotypes—a force of pure and unashamed

admiration, which should not be channelled into a socially or politically beneficial process. It would be a detriment to that admiration.