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View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

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A Book of Her Own: R. H. Quaytman's Visual Historiography – A Conversation with Katarzyna Bojarska

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abstract:

A conversation with the artist R.H. Quaytman about the project of the Book, which she has been "writing" since 2001, and whose 35th chapter was presented at the Museum Sztuki in Łódź (2019-2020). The conversation is devoted to her visual historiography as well as to how she manages images in order to create life- and art-stories.

Katarzyna Bojarska - Assistant professor in the Department of Cultural Studies of the SWPS University in Warsaw. In 2008-2012 worked as assistant and 2012-2019 as assistant professor in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, in the Department of Late Modernity Literature and Culture. Co-founder of View. Since 2024 head of Center for Comparative Research on Memory Cultures (CCRM). Author of articles and translations interested in the relations of art, literature, history and psychoanalysis. Translated among others Michael Rothberg's "Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization" (Warsaw 2016). Author of a book "Wydarzenia po Wydarzeniu: Białoszewski – Richter – Spiegelman" [Events after the Event: Białoszewski – Richter – Spiegelman] (Warsaw 2012). Editor and one of translators of Ernst van Alphen's book "Criticism as Intervention: Art, Memory, Affect" (Krakow 2019). Receipient of numerous research grants and awards, including Fulbright, National Centre for Science, Horizon2020.

R.H. Quaytman - She received her BFA from Bard College and continued her education at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin and the Institut des hautes études en arts plastiques, Paris. Since 2001 she has worked on a series of "chapters," groups of paintings executed on plywood panels that conform to a consistent set of geometrically interrelated dimensions. She has had solo exhibitions at venues including San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

(2010); Kunsthalle Basel (2011); Renaissance Society, University of Chicago (2013); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (2016); and Secession, Vienna (2017). Her work has been included in the Venice Biennale (2011) and Documenta, Athens and Kassel (2017) among others.

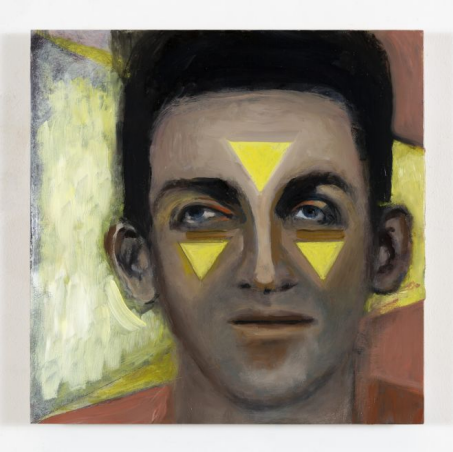
A Book of Her Own: R. H. Quaytman's Visual Historiography – A Conversation with Katarzyna Bojarska

KB: Could you tell me why, in 2001, you set out on your life's-work project of "painting" the book of R. H. Quaytman, preparing each exhibition as a subsequent "chapter"? Was it about your personal history, the historicity of the moment? Of your moment? What I immediately thought about, and taking to consideration the importance of history, Jewish history, art history, traumatic history, and your personal history in your work, was that for some Jewish-American writers and artists 9/11 has become their own "event," so to speak – a sort of foundational trauma which interrupted the dominant narrative that had established them as the so-called "second generation" or the "generation of postmemory." It's more intuition than hypothesis. I'm thinking here for instance of Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers,* which was his only major work after the two volumes of *Maus*.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, Installing at the Muzeum Sztuki

RQ: It wasn't really in 2001; I've been preparing for this since the 1980s, but things got more intense at the turn of the century. I had a baby in 1995, and although I was always very involved and active in the New York art world, I wasn't showing a lot. I had a very hard time getting my work into exhibitions or finding a gallery; I hardly knew conceptually where the things I was thinking about in my studio were leading. It took me a decade to work through photography via the Kobro model. And it was by chance that Ryszard Waśko invited me to a show in Bydgoszcz, and at that time I knew I wanted to make site-specific

paintings. And it was also at that time that my father was diagnosed with cancer and he was dying, and I realized that I knew next to nothing about the history of his side of my family. All of a sudden, these elements coming together made me very curious about this unknown past.



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, 2019

In 2000 I came to Poland and went to Łódź, the city where my paternal grandfather, Marcus Quaytman, was born. He was a Polish Jew who emigrated to the US in the 1910s, and here I was in Poland, not even 60 years after the Holocaust but also in the city of the avant-garde, of constructivism. How to integrate the two? Or how to get to one through the other? I took some pictures during the train rides then, and I learnt a lot about Kobro and Strzemiński. And later on, back home, when I was preparing for the show at the Queens Museum of Art, I was struck by another event from my family's history, the memory (or actually non-memory) of which emerged from the site: the museum is located on the former grounds of the 1939 World's Fair. I used this project to recall the repressed family trauma: on October 14, 1940, my paternal grandfather and great-grandfather were on their way home from the World's Fair when an accident happened – their car was hit by an oncoming Long Island Railroad train. Both were killed. While researching for this exhibition – which ultimately became Chapter 1 of the book, I came across an article in *The Sun* that described the event. I appropriated the newspaper's masthead and its title (but also the sun as the beginning of the day, the beginning of a story anew), and I turned to the photographs taken on the train in Poland, and in an overgrown Jewish graveyard, to my encounters with the avant-garde, and

to the archival material I found in New York. 9/11 came later, but it certainly added to all of this, provided an unexpected context, another trauma. This is how it started. So, it was an impulse to tell the story; I don't know the story clearly yet, but I'm always trying to figure it out.

KB: The story that begins in Poland?

Lodz Poem, Chapter 2 (Jewish Graveyard), 2001-2004

RQ: Funny, it was a very patriarchal urge in the beginning, in the sense of wanting to go back home and to know the genealogy. Also, I know my mother's family story very well – they're all Irish, I spent a lot of time in Ireland, and I'm an Irish citizen too. But I knew nothing about Poland. So, I took a train one day, alone, from Bydgoszcz to Łódź. It was depressing and interesting at the same time. So, as you see, the book began. The first three chapters (*The Sun*, *Łódź Poem*, and *Optima*) were all based on this little trip to Łódź. I found out the Quaytmans (then spelled Kwejtman) were ostrich-feather dealers, so I used ostrich feathers in Chapter 35, as symbols of lost nature.

KB: The natural vis-à-vis the human-historical.


The Sun, Chapter 1, 2001

RQ: Yes. This trip also allowed me to find a key to making site-specificity the origin of the chapter and the content of the paintings, and actually also a key to seriality: trains and their movement – series of views from the train window; they're all interconnected, and relate to each other in this or the other way. In a way, I could be saying I'm making a train as much as I'm making a book [laughs]. I took a leap from trains to filming and montage – to movement in

the painting, out and into the next one.

KB: Also, chapters and spectators. The montages in your work are mobilized by all kinds of connections. I wonder, how was Chapter 1 received when you showed it for the first time in New York City?

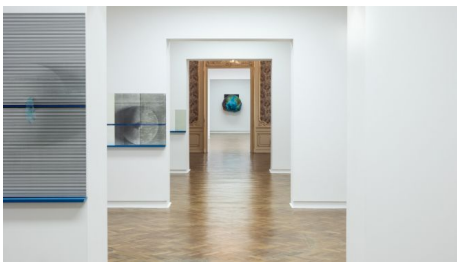
RQ: OK – nothing much happened in terms of response. I made two shows of the same chapter: 40 paintings, each panel the same size – one in a gallery and one at the Queens Museum. After this, again, nothing much for two years.

KB: So, when did the second chapter come about?

RQ: When I was invited to Poland again in 2004. And there was another opportunity to show it in a space in Brooklyn, and that was *Łódź Poem*. So, you know, my father is dying, I'm raising this kid... distracted and confused. In 2001 I turned 40...

KB: ...and it seems like a very powerful passage between two lives and two histories: one that's running to an end – the history of your father, Harvey Quaytman, himself a painter, and a life story that's about to begin – your child's.

RQ: It was. Also, my father had a studio full of paintings which didn't sell. So, to me – who at the time had begun accumulating unsold paintings – it was traumatic and paralyzing to look at all of this work that no one wanted. It's how I arrived at the first idea to make 80 paintings of one size: I'd be able to put them all on a shelf in my own space after the exhibition. That way, it wouldn't be so shameful, so bad. This feeling of failure was what I began with. But then I became involved in the artists' run gallery called Orchard in 2005. That was the beginning of the time when the depression lifted, because I finally had a context – I realized what I'd been missing was the context. I still think it's the number one



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

problem for artists – the lack of a context.

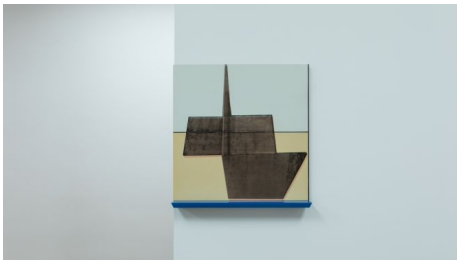
KB: What was it about Katarzyna Kobro that you found so relevant to your own life and work?

RQ: I was overwhelmed by the tragic nature of her life story, but even more so I loved her work! Especially the piece I ended up making an exact replica of – the *Spatial Composition 2* [1928]. When I photographed it for the first time, I realized that it's not marked by time or space. It could have been made any time and be any size. To me, that particular piece was free and open. It was a very liberating experience, and I decided to use the sculpture-image as a tool, literally. Both paintings were entitled *Spatial Composition 23.3 Parsecs Away*. A parsec is an astronomical unit for measuring the distance of a star from Earth. A star whose light was released in 1928 would take 23.3 parsecs to reach Earth by 2004. I painted "1928" on top of the image, in reference to the date of the sculpture depicted in the photograph. Kobro aimed at integrating her objects into both their material and subjective contexts, and also into architecture and time, stressing the perceptual and temporal experience of spectatorship. I tried to appropriate this idea for painting. I've been reading a lot about architecture, also because I was Dan Graham's assistant for a long time, and he influenced a lot of what I was reading. And he turned me on to Anne Tyng, who was Louis Kahn's partner – they had an architecture firm together – and it was her sense of geometry that really gave him his backbone, so to say. And Kobro was similar in her approach to geometry. And both of them struggled because of their status as females. And of course there was also Hilma af Klint, the radical female pioneer of abstraction, whose exhibition I did for PS1 and who taught me the sense of the work as a whole. As you see,

Lodz Poem, Chapter 2, 2001-2004

I love these ways to reconceptualize. It doesn't even have to be seen in the object itself, it's just how you think about it. And it's hard to find ways to change one's thinking, you know?

KB: These acts of reconceptualization seem to lead to a paradox where this very well-thought-through system is at the same time boundless and open to rearrangement. As a viewer I feel invited to participate in this vertiginous process, to bond with your "text." It seems to me your "book" is an exceptional case of the writerly text Roland Barthes was talking about in *S/Z* [1970], which, unlike the readerly text – rather straightforward and demanding little insight or effort to be understood – needs time, attunement, and proper engagement, because its meaning isn't immediately accessible, nor is it evident, owing to the elaborate and experimental use of language. Maybe this is the Irish in you – Barthes celebrated James Joyce for his writerly texts [laughs]. Your chapters require lots of effort and creativity on the one hand, and on the other, various forms of relationality and affective attunements to counter the recurrent frustration, failure, sense of loss, and being out of sync. It seems to me that the image and the viewer constantly desynchronize temporally and spatially, move away from each other. At the same time, the viewers seem to create a fugitive community of readers, those who might never meet yet participate in "writing" the same book. And so, here we are, 35 chapters into the story. But when it comes to paintings that form specific chapters, they seem to work and not work on their own at the same time; they're serial and part of a story, or rather parts of different stories at different times and sites.



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

RQ: They're dispersed after each chapter is completed and exhibited; they're dispersed to people, collections, markets...

KB: So, the book is never one book, nor is it a totality, but rather a potentiality.

RQ: It's never complete; it's sort of lost, always.

KB: Does this loss bother you at all, or is it a productive condition?

RQ: In essence, I do like the way it's destroyed by the market. There's one thing though: I still have all the films I made the silkscreens with, and the sizes of the panels remain consistent, so whenever I want or need an image again, I can retrieve it. But every time I pull a silkscreen it's different. But they're monoprints. Silk-screening gave me access to content without the need to paint it with a brush. I found that liberating. It abstracts the photograph, materializes it, and snaps attention back to the picture plane. I've only very rarely printed an image twice, but here I do it several times for this chapter.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: Yet, you've also claimed that one painting is never the painting. What is it then? In an interview you said that "the idea of one painting not being *the* painting is feminine. My idea of meaning being contingent on the neighbour, or the context, is a kind of feminine concept. [...] [it's] *boundless*."[1] I find it fascinating, this refusal of totality, and as you yourself wrote: "It's a good thing to be past the time of genius, the intuitive, and the heroic."[2] The stress here is on potentiality and becoming; on the fact that meaning is never given, nor imposed by a sovereign, but rather it's becoming in relationality: it's "interimaginal" and interpersonal. As one critic said, "the monocular focus of the egotistical isolated picture" is being displaced and sight is set in motion – it leaves the picture

and begins to wander.

RQ: I love the idea of making a genealogy that visibly links with other works of art and artists rather than mine or me, me, me. I think my approach differs from how we tend to understand appropriation, whose aim was to delink the art object from the male artist. Also, I've never quite trusted the idea of one painting equaling a story or narrative. To me, seriality means the fact that one painting is informed by others in a spatial-temporal sequence.

KB: This seems similar to the feminist works (mostly photographic) from the 1970s, very much based on seriality, multiples, and dispersal, as well as a refusal of fixed meanings and identities, yet from a different standpoint.

RQ: Of course. Just think of how history has changed, even in our lifetime. For example, the Holocaust: what it was in the 1980s, and how it's being "told" nowadays, has radically changed. Feminism also, as a historical fact, keeps radically changing shape. So, for example when, ten years ago, I wouldn't voluntarily proclaim my works' feminist leanings – today it seems the only option, politically and sexually.

KB: Yes, the only option for survival.

RQ: There's an old engraving by Raimondi that supposedly depicts Hecuba, the mother of Paris, She's seen reclining, pregnant, and having a nightmare that supposedly prophesied giving birth to a flame [Paris] that sets Troy on fire. Right beneath her reclining figure is a mirror image of herself or another woman. I love this image; I used it: cropped it to open it up. I included it in Chapter 22 [*I Modi*, 2011]. This led me to Raimondi's more famous engraving entitled *The Judgment of Paris*, which recurs in the

Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Dream of Raphael*, 1507–1508 / *Morning, Chapter 30,* The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles 2016, installation view

current chapter in Łódź. I like the androgynous appearance of the nymph who looks back at us. If paintings could have a posture, this would be it!

KB: So, your paintings look back at us and the book gets written in the process. All the loss and dispersal that we were discussing made me think of the Lurianic idea of creation, degeneration, and attempts at restoration. His Kabbalistic theory is based on three concepts: *tzimtzum* – "contraction" or "withdrawal," *shevirat ha-kelim* – "breaking of the vessels," and *tiqqun* – "restoration." Creation emerges from divine light (the sun!), which is enclosed in the "vessels," most of which break; the catastrophe introduces disharmony and instigates the struggle to restore order and save history. Humans play an important role here: they work with words, combining them in order bring back harmony. Your book seems like this kind of attempt to mend history, to glue the vessels together. The difference being, as we've already said, that the totality is left behind, and the laborious reparation, the putting together, remains.

RQ: I feel very much attached to Jewish thought and tradition. I'm not a believer in… but if I was, I'd be Jewish; I like their concept of doubt and I love the Hebrew alphabet. I got lots of ideas from Hebraic and Kabbalistic thinking, from Gershom Scholem and of course Walter Benjamin. My trip to Israel was also a very important event, again personally and artistically. I worked on Chapter 29 there, entitled *Haqaq* [2015], exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. While researching for the show, I visited the Gershom Scholem Library at the National Library of Israel,

Haqaq, Chapter 29 invitation card drawing

and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* [1920] is part of the collection. I literally sank into Hebrew typography and Kabbalah for about two years. I researched the exchange between Scholem and Benjamin on Klee's painting. I found my title in this reading, the Hebrew word *Haqaq*, meaning –
"to engrave" but also "to legislate." It also sounds violent. As we all know, first there was the word. This word was apparently engraved or cut in stone. I also travelled to the desert and took photographs there. In Israel my chapter was hung to read from right to left. It's interesting that for this exhibition I actually ended up painting a crucifix, to my total horror. But there it was! I draped it with an alphabet. I love it when a painting goes on its own little walk with or without me sometimes. Yet, you've to follow what it's doing even when it arrives at images that you never in a million years thought you might paint. To my surprise, many people don't see it as a cross but rather as constructivist geometry.

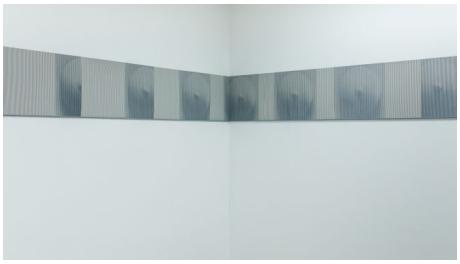
KB: When you were talking about the process of "writing" the Israeli chapter, I kept returning to the concept of the site-specificity of your paintings. It seems that even after the exhibition is over, the dispersed paintings carry with them the memory of the site, the building, the city, the country, other artists, etc.

RQ: I think it was one of the problems that got me to the idea of calling it a "book." I was able to say that site-specificity includes these ideas as they're illustrated in this book in various ways. Sometimes they're illustrations of a lost text. They can also be reorganized by other people to do their own thing. So, also the whole idea of hieroglyphic reading rather than Renaissance perspective. I read a lot about perspective beginning back in 1992, actually – trying to figure out how to bring perspective into abstraction. Then I got a camera and photographed the Kobro sculpture. How do I say where the site is? It can be in

a concept, in a word, or many things. I think site-specificity involves mirroring where the spectator stands. Yet, "where the spectator stands" can be widely interpreted.

KB: Where is it now, here, in Łódź in 2019?

RQ: Yeah, where is it now? Basically, I started because I needed to do part two of *Spine*,[3] update the whole manual of the book, and I wanted to do it here. I started going through my most important images and looking for this one image, a source. I found this image from Chapter 21 called *Cherchez Holopherne* [2011] with Judith, another wonderful feminist protagonist who is the source of so many wonderful paintings, often by women – Artemisia Gentileschi being the most famous. Anyway, there it was, this one image of something that looks like a stone breast. It looks more like the idea of a breast rather than a real one: it's circular and seems cast in cement.



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: Always too round and too high [laughs].

RQ: Exactly – no gravity to this breast at all. But there's only so much I understand to do that again – it opens Chapter 35, a chapter where I introduce a new size, which has a whole new complex logic to it. Now all of them fit as modular units, better than before. So, now there are eight sizes, and the biggest is 7 ft. I moved into a much bigger studio and found myself painting more and more on photographs. It got to a point where I was an abstract expressionist with a cigarette and a glass of whiskey in my hand. It was much more physical, painting in this old-

An Evening, Chapter 32 / Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Judgment of Paris*, 1510–1520 / *The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35 [Judgment]*, 2019

fashioned sense, and much slower too. So, for Chapter 35 I began with that image and two close-ups of Strzemiński's paintings, with these very wet brushstrokes. One of them is particularly suggestive – it looks like lips – and I also went back to the Kobro sculpture and took a few images of that. In my studio I still had the screens from my Secession chapter [*An Evening*, 2017–2018] where I did Amazons and Persians, so I used them, and just started painting over the silkscreens and just let it go where it was going to go. So, it's very much about looking back. I really love painting on photographs.

KB: Why?

RQ: It just frees you up. Always the problem is the blank white nothingness. As if there had been nothing before this image that I'm bringing into this world of images. So, with photographs as the ground you eliminate the problem, and then you can see – you've a choice what to see, and you can start painting what you see, no matter what it is.

KB: Do you photograph a lot?

RQ: Not seriously, no. But back then... I had this wonderful Polaroid camera but it finally broke. It broke on my last trip here, when I went to Treblinka. So, my last Polaroid images, the ones I truly love, were those Polaroids. With digital photographs it's as if I don't care, you know?

KB: So, this trip to Treblinka...

RQ: Yes, it must have been in 2016. I just finished this huge panorama for an exhibition at the MOCA in Los Angeles [*Morning*, Chapter 30], and it was right before Donald Trump was elected. And I remember thinking Trump might win because of the poverty and homelessness I saw around the neighborhood of MOCA, simply that. This was beyond acceptable, something felt

Morning Chapter 30, 2016

desperately wrong, and it was going to be bad. The panorama was made up of 22 60-inch-wide panels stretching 110 ft. I think it's the best thing I ever made. Right after opening that chapter I had to do research for Documenta 14 [2017], so I went to Athens, and during the trip I pursued my interest in Amazons and Persians for the upcoming Seccession exhibition. I went to Delphi and took Polaroids there of my assistant Eli Farahmand standing in the landscape. It was really beautiful. I did a lot of reading then about the beginnings of European history and researching how the Amazons fit into it. Also, the ancient histories of Iran and the Persians and all of that went into this history, which is truly fascinating. There was this incredible, under-researched matriarchy – the oracles in Delphi, basically. I thought it wasn't insignificant that basically every important temple in Greece depicts Amazons being defeated. This road trip brought me through Vienna to look at the van Veen paintings again, and then to Berlin. I woke up in the hotel room there to see that Trump had been elected.

The trip had one last stop, with a visit to Warsaw and Łódź. I've always avoided the Holocaust as an overt theme for painting, especially when I did work to be shown in Poland. It seemed like all the American artists who ever come here always end up focusing on "the Holocaust" with an air of superiority, and it seems embarrassing. There are so many other subjects; the tradition of Polish modernism and conceptual art is so deeply interesting to me because it shows what artists thought about outside of capitalism or the hope of riches. Anyway, I trusted my instinctual modesty when it came to that existential tragedy. While in Vienna, I discussed this trip to Poland with my friend, Sylvie Liska, and she recommended

Parthian Shot, Chapter 31 [Treblinka], 2017-2019

visiting Treblinka. It's only two hours from Warsaw, and it's better to experience spiritually than Auschwitz, which has essentially become a museum. So, after Berlin, in this post-election mood, I resolved to make this "pilgrimage," not sure though how to get there. I began asking the few people I knew in Warsaw, and Andrzej Przywara generously offered the use of his car for the day and he'd found someone I knew a little from NYC to drive me. This was Joanna Zielińska. The drive turned into a love affair for the next three years. She became something between a muse and a siren. I made quite a few paintings from the Polaroids of that day. In Chapter 35 there's a very powerful portrait of Joanna, using a cast I made of her face last summer. It makes an illusion called the hollow-face illusion.

KB: It's a beautiful story! Quite analogous to the story of your father's dying and your child being born. Another powerful passage.

The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, 2019

RQ: You know, with this looking back thing that has interested you for a while, it's so interesting to me that I never understand what to do until I understand what I did. So even though it might very often sound like I know very well what I'm doing, with all these ideas, and rules, and systems I have, it's not true – I never knew when I was making it, what I was really doing.

KB: That knowledge is the thing of looking backward, and yet when you do that, it seems you do it in your own, very particular way, which implicates many others and which is always a response not to what was but rather what is, here and now, right? You talked about it previously, how there is never direct access to what was, how mediation and abstraction are crucial

to the process of backward looking.

RQ: You know, that also applies to art history. I'm sick of the fact that so many fantastic female artists were repressed, and it's our job to bring them back from oblivion. Their work is what might save us, for real. It has to be taken into account. The process of forgetting or erasure is always active; there's always someone behind it. We need to see it clearly now. On the other hand, one needs to remember that sometimes it's also good to be outside the dominant structures. It can be beneficial, especially in formal terms.

KB: Of course, because you don't have to care too much.

RQ: You don't have to care about the issues that are being cared for at the time, and instead you can find other issues to care about and other communities to address. Vision is clearer.

KB: And once you don't seek mainstream recognition, you can allow yourself thoughts and affects, forms and poetics which might be truly revolutionary though not yet praised as such. Let's return to the sun now. If *the sun does not move* now, what does it do here?

RQ: [laughs] The other day, I was listening to – very cheesy – a biography of Leonardo da Vinci while I was painting, and they read this quote from his notebook with that phrase and it just got stuck in my head: *the sun does not move*, *the sun does not move*... and I thought, wait a minute, for one thing, it orients you to a bigger idea of space; on the other hand, it's also wrong – the sun *does* move, but we don't know that from our senses. So, yes, it's about orientation, how to orient oneself toward the source of

Spine, Chapter 20, 2011

light and life, I guess. And it's a beautiful title.

KB: And it relates to the origins of the book, to its opening, oscillating between Queens and Łódź.

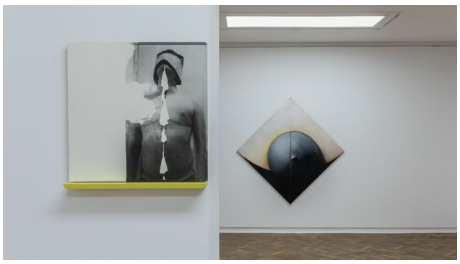
RQ: Yes, but also maybe to an idea that this book isn't moving either.

KB: Or maybe it's the only movement.

RQ: Yes, I guess you could say something like that. You, yourself cannot grasp the whole story from the outside. I read this line in the Washington Post the other night: "Scientists are confused about the universe." I thought this was fantastic! All the maps are wrong; it's all to be retold and reframed – how great [laughs].

KB: What is right, then? Us, our memories of the relationships we had, the feelings we felt. The more I think about the two "sun" titles, the more it gets complicated and dense: the sun of the first chapter is related to the newspaper, the popular medium which announced the death of your relatives – personal trauma which emerges in the midst of this huge collective Jewish trauma, the Holocaust. Almost as if the news announced the "wrong" death, and yet somebody's loss. 35 chapters into the story, the sun seems to be you. It doesn't move; it's a kind of *axis mundi* – the world swirling, the world which is grasped in the book.

RQ: There's one more element to that word, which is my son, who is also my daughter. He transitioned right after Chapter 20 [*Spine*, 2011]. In retrospect, I can see how this became a primary reference. So, as I already told you, in Chapter 21 I first used the breast image and it was a tough time – it still is, but not in the same kind of way. A very challenging and confusing experience for all of us.



The Sun Does Not Move, Chapter 35, Muzeum Sztuki, Lódz, 2019, installation view

KB: Which again introduces this perspective of beginnings and endings, of how one narrates the story of their lives – as who and

for whom. It immediately brings to my mind Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, a book which, a little bit like yours, is made up of so many other books and people but has a unique voice, expression, and affect to it.

RQ: You know what, I was just thinking it would be great if I could just give a writer, like Maggie, all my images and then tell them to write the story they see. I wonder what would happen. And if it would still work without this biography. I hope so.

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1 *I always felt that paintings had a lot of ego*. Lidija Haas, an interview with R.H. Quaytman, *Apollo. The International Art Magazine,* 26 November 2017, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/i-always-felt-that-paintings-had-a-lot-of-ego/ accessed January 20, 2020.

2 R. H. Quaytman, *Allegorical Decoys*, published on the occasion of the exhibition *From One O to the Other* at the Orchard, New York, 2008.

3 *Spine* (2011) is a kind of retrospective after a decade of Quaytman "writing" her book – a group of 37 paintings which can be treated as an abbreviated index to her work since 2001.