



Project Gallery: Monika Sosnowska
December 4, 2013–September 28, 2014


Monika Sosnowska
b. 1972, Ryki, Poland; lives in Warsaw
Market, 2013
Painted steel
287 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 208 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 165 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches
Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, New York

This project is commissioned by Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) and organized by PAMM Curator René Morales. Additional support for PAMM's Project Galleries is provided by Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable Foundation.

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Project Gallery

Monika Sosnowska

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Market

There is a metal fabricator’s workshop in Warsaw – little more than a few rusty sheds flanked by piles of corroding material – where the door handles, balustrades, window frames, and other furnishings for several of the city’s Soviet-style housing blocks were produced. When Monika Sosnowska approached the men who labored there, the factory had been officially closed for nearly two decades, a casualty of the teetering socialist economy. The meeting would spark a bold new phase for the workshop. A place where the utopian aspirations of an earlier era had once congealed into mundane architectural elements would reemerge as an unlikely site for the production of objects at once vividly original and haunted by a broken and receding paradigm.

Though it appears to hover almost weightlessly, Sosnowska’s newest sculpture, *Market* (2013), consists of over 1,100 pounds of bent and welded steel. Commissioned and designed specifically for Pérez Art Museum Miami’s double-height project gallery – with its soaring, 30-foot-high ceiling – the work confounds perception, its contours shifting continuously as one navigates the room’s tight parameters. Its shape is contradictory: unified yet fragmentary, contained yet volatile, it contracts as it expands, by turns imposing and as delicate as a tangled spiderweb.

The strong sensorial impact that the sculpture engenders is characteristic of Sosnowska’s work. Over the years, her output

has oscillated between surreal, tableaux-like installations and discrete objects made from steel, concrete, and other materials associated with gritty industrialization, which are often large and customized for the galleries in which they are displayed.

Sosnowska has a penchant for transfiguring immaterial space into an almost palpable element. This central aspect of her work results, in part, from an engagement with the lineages of modernist geometric abstraction, particularly the rich legacies of the Polish postwar avant-garde, including those of such figures as Henryk Stażewski and Katarzyna Kobro. Her work relates, at the same time, to her manner of processing the subjective experience of the built environment she calls home.

With its vast industrial zones, abandoned or repurposed Soviet-era buildings, and reconstructions of historic neighborhoods destroyed during World War II, the Polish capital is defined as much by its turbulent history as it is by its central position in the still-unfolding narrative of a new, post-Communist world order. Sosnowska’s work is imbued with the distinctive urban landscape and material culture that have arisen as a result of this paradoxical condition.

Market specifically references the skeletal steel structures that became increasingly common throughout Warsaw following the collapse of the Communist system, springing up amid unregulated bazaars where black-market merchandise –



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knockoff designer sportswear, bootleg CDs, and other products imported from China and Vietnam – is openly bought and sold. Arising first in the vicinity of the city’s main train station, where itinerant merchants from Eastern Europe and Asia instinctually flocked, the bazaars then brashly invaded the spaces in and around derelict public sites, such as the now demolished Stadion Dziesięciolecia (10th-Anniversary Stadium), which came to house the largest open-air market in Europe. Made from found scrap metal and often welded together by the same individuals who use them as kiosks to sell their goods, the armatures exemplify the chaotic process by which the architectural vestiges of Poland’s failed former self have been cannibalized and transformed into pure articulations of vernacular urbanism, hiding in plain sight while impinging on the local topography in significant ways.

The structures also embody the kind of spontaneous, untaxed, and unsanctioned street-level commercial activity that is increasingly seen less as a societal pariah than as a crucial factor in determining a given city’s economic viability. While this sort of phenomenon invariably arises in response to local specificities, it resonates with global trends. From Singapore to São Paulo, the inability of official systems to cope with dramatic urban growth, together with the unprecedented mobilization of capital unleashed by a combination of globalization and neoliberalism, has contributed to the development of vibrant, informal economies that hum beneath the radars

of metropolitan authorities, particularly among the vast and growing populations of urban poor that comprise majorities in the developing world. Amid the general failure of official institutions to absorb the aftershocks of recent history, the cresting informal sector has provided new paths for survival and, arguably, resistance.

Market evokes the realities of economic instability and the precarious new forms of urbanism that have come to define our time. Though it neither illustrates nor confronts these forces directly, it redoubles our role as witness to the dramatic intensification of the 21st-century city, transposing it into a radical aesthetic encounter.

René Morales
Curator

Biography

Monika Sosnowska was born in Ryki, Poland, in 1972; she lives and works in Warsaw. Sosnowska studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, and at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam. In 2012, she was a finalist for the Guggenheim Foundation’s Hugo Boss Prize. Solo exhibitions of Sosnowska’s work have been presented at many institutional venues, including the Aspen Art Museum; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; Artpace, San Antonio; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art; Schaulager, Basel; 52nd Venice Biennale; Sprengel Museum, Hannover; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw; Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna; De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam; Serpentine Gallery, London; and Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw. Her work is included in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Cleveland Museum of Art; Daimler Art Collection, Berlin; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; and Rijksgebouwendienst-Ministrie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, Netherlands.



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- 1 Monika Sosnowska. *Market*, 2013. Painted steel. 287 3/8 x 208 1/16 x 165 3/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, New York. Photo by Daniel Azoulay photography
- 2 *Market* (detail), 2013. Painted steel. 287 3/8 x 208 1/16 x 165 3/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, New York. Photo by Daniel Azoulay photography
- 3 *Market*, 2013. Painted steel. 287 3/8 x 208 1/16 x 165 3/8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth, New York. Photo by Daniel Azoulay photography
- 4 Informal market, Warsaw. Photo by Monika Sosnowska