

## SPIRIT LEVEL

**Tomasz Kręcicki**

**Grey House Szara Kamienica**

**Curator: Wojciech Szymański**

*Exhibition: 06-30.04.2019*

According to Mary Douglas, jokes are a kind of anti-rituals operating in reality. Their anti-ritualism resides in mocking and parodying ritual social behaviour. In order to capture the anti-ritual character of the joke, suffice to imagine, Simon Critchley suggests, a bishop stuck in an elevator or spreading margarine on a communion wafer. A good example may also come from a joke recounted by Milan Kundera, the point of which is that, at a funeral, a hat falls onto a coffin, as it is being lowered into a grave. The funeral loses its ritual gravity and so the liberating laughter is born.

Tomasz Kręcicki's painting could very well serve as an example of the anti-ritual joke in Douglas' and Critchley's analyses. His paintings, entirely like the hat that dropped into the grave, deride and disenchant a ritual: the practice of painting, composed of ritual spells and routine formulas, as well as its assistant, circum-painting discourse, conducted by art criticism. The ritual, mindless repetition of formulas about painting is based on a fetishism of authenticity, which turns out to be a mere rhetorical figure. The jargon of authenticity is, on the one hand, based on purported, both transcendent and transcendental values, to which the painting refers, to that academics' jolly gibberish, and on the other, to a ritual conviction, according to which an emancipatory narrative has been hidden behind the painting, and painting as such may be a medium with a capacity for a betterment of social reality.

Kręcicki's paintings neither promise a social change, nor a Parousia of the Real. Being a painterly joke played on painting and the discourse around it, they become a liberating and parodist, meta-painting joke, which at the Grey House Gallery exhibition has been based on the play with the definition of the picture as representation and physicality – of it and of the thing it represents. Kręcicki painted his paintings-objects, alluding to the illusionist tradition of trompe-l'oeil. This is the case in the artist's latest canvas, at once a joke about painting and on the tradition of the landscape with its post-Romantic and always spiritualist vision of nature, as well as in the title of his exhibition. In the painting, a black silhouette of a bird, gliding on the wind with its wings widely outstretched, froze against a grey sky background, becoming an existential sing of metaphoric character. It is, naturally, a joke, the butt of which relies on the fact that the bird was stencilled, using a pattern commonly pasted on sound-walls set alongside roads. The bird turns out to be a cut-out from plastic foil, while the grey sky is merely dirt applied to glass. The landscape is framed from the bottom by a – painted and placed according to the Renaissance painting convention of the windowsill – spirit level. Precisely the English name for the object provided the title for the whole exhibition; this much and as much has remained from spiritual dimensions of painting – a Spirit in the shape of a bubble of air.

Wojciech Szymański