

CONTEMPORARY
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RYSZARD SZOZDA – THE WINNER OF THE 13th EDITION OF ARTE LAGUNA PRIZE

Ryszard Szozda has been awarded for the triptych “Test #03” in the Painting Category and his work was among 100 of 8500 selected for the final exhibition at the Arsenale in Venice. We spoke to Ryszard about the story behind the awarded work and his motivation to enter the competition.

Meanwhile, you can apply for the 14th Edition of Arte Laguna Prize until 27 November 2019. The short-listed artists have the possibility to exhibit at the Arsenale in Venice, win cash prizes of a total amount of 40.000 euro and much more. Read terms and conditions

SK: First of all, congratulations on winning such a prestigious art prize. What made you enter the competition?

RSZ: Thank you very much, this prize means a lot to me. Before I received the statuette, I already had approached the Arte Laguna Prize twice. I applied for the 11th and 12th Edition – to no avail. I tried for the third time, because I liked the concept of the competition; the selected works were of a high standard, the jury’s decisions were right in my opinion, and the exhibition of the finalists’ works verified the selection. What I saw was fair. Besides... who wouldn’t like to see their work showcased at the Arsenal in Venice?

SK: Why did you decide to enter this particular work? Was it an easy decision?

RSZ: Submission of the triptych to the competition, i.e. one work painted in three separate pictures, was quite risky. According to the regulations, I could submit three separate works – which is tempting because it theoretically increases your chances. If one painting doesn’t work, there are always two others. In my case, it was enough to reject one work in order not to pass the first selection. But... I won!



SK: How did you feel when they announced the winner?

RSZ: First, I received the message that I passed the first selection – I was among the 100 finalists out of 8,500 artists from around the world: I couldn't believe it! It was so amazing that I bought a ticket to Venice – I really wanted to see the exhibition! I went with my friend, an artist from Warsaw, Robert Mendel. We booked a room for two nights (Venice is not cheap). On this occasion, I also wanted to see Luc Tuymans' exhibition, who I admire a lot. I never dreamed about winning the Arte Laguna Prize. I even remember when we were on our way to the Arsenal for the award show and we passed a 5 star hotel, and I joked to my friend: "If I win, I'll buy you the most expensive cocktail at the hotel bar". Luckily, he didn't make me do it later (laughs)!

The award ceremony of Arte Laguna Prize itself was very impressive: in Italy a lot of people go to exhibitions – there were crowds at the Arsenal as if it was a rock concert. Because I wasn't expecting a prize at all, I stood quite far away from the stage. When the decision was read out loud in Italian by the Jury, I didn't understand that it was about me. Suddenly my friend started screaming in my direction: "Rysiek, you won". A moment later, I was on stage, receiving the statuette from Vasila Tsereteli – the executive director of MMOMA (Moscow Museum of Modern Art) and Alessandra Tiddia – the chief curator at MART (Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto). And just a few hours earlier, I was packing my suitcase in Warsaw...

SK: The jury in their statement wrote that "The prize is awarded both for the subject matter and for the stylistic choice". Your triptych depicts a photographic image that refers to the nuclear tests in Nevada in the 50s. Can you elaborate more on your piece?

RSZ: "Test #03" is a triptych, based on military time-lapse footage, documenting nuclear project progress. To maximize the level of destruction, the army set up copies of existing urban structures to annihilate them in hydrogen bomb explosions. In my opinion it has become the best-documented test version of the Apocalypse. I made three separate paintings for three separate phases of the nuclear test to keep the time-lapse character of the footage. Most of my works have common ground: I believe we all possess the raw material required to commit all kind of horrible acts. We just need either the right or wrong combination of events to make this material combustible. Whether we like it or not – it's part of human nature. After all, we did not dominate this planet because we are nice. I'm far from being judgemental and even further from glorifying brutality, I'm just analysing. I believe that instead of denying the fact that violence is a crucial common feature we all share, we should be honest with ourselves. It isn't love that rules the world, even though I wish it were. But making a diagnosis is the first part of healing – even if the process is painful. That's the reason for using real documentary footage, press photos and other authentic materials in my paintings: it's not inspiration – it's evidence. You cannot ignore facts. You cannot argue with history. Because it's us who made it. Because it's real.

SK: How many competitions a year do you enter?

RSZ: Not much, around 2 or 3. I don't see the point in applying just because a contest exists. You also have to be responsible: even being a finalist and taking part in an exhibition does not guarantee a prize. And you have to take into account the costs – transport of works, insurance, travel and subsistence. All these expenses often need to be covered by the artist, and the prize covers only a part of them. You really have to take this into account. I honestly admit that I simply can't afford some of the competitions. It is also important to carefully check the credibility of the competition – very often these are only marketing products that drain the pockets of artists without giving much in return. I recommend checking who is on the jury panel, what the previous editions were like, what previous exhibitions looked like. It allows you to quickly verify if it is really worth reporting.

SK: How does the winning of the Arte Laguna Prize help you in your artistic career?

RSZ: The prize is definitely of great importance. It is proof that what I do has a value. This is very important for any artist. Recently, I also got a fantastic offer – this year the Arte Laguna Prize began to cooperate with MMOMA in Moscow, and together they're organising an exhibition of the works of the winners of subsequent editions of the competition. I was invited to this exhibition. I feel very honoured; the exhibition will take place in Moscow in 2021, I can't wait!

Interviewed by Sylwia Krasoń

Edited by Paulina Prońko



Biography:

Ryszard Szozda, born 1976, graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, Poland.

In his works, he explores topics related to symbolic violence, the threat of racism and war, presented in contemporary iconosphere. He is a co-author and director of the documentary Don't pay me about the negation of the conventional priorities of having money and owning goods (dontpayme.com). The winner of the First Prize of the 13th Edition Arte Laguna Prize for the triptych "Test #03" in Venice, Italy in 2019.

https://www.instagram.com/ryszard_szozda/

Arte Laguna Prize, the world's most influential competition for emerging artists and designers, showcases and promotes creative talents. With fourteen years of history the Arte Laguna Prize gives the opportunity to join the huge network of collaborations worldwide, exhibit in the breath-taking location of the Arsenale of Venice, win cash prizes of a total amount of 40.000 euro and much more. Read terms and conditions.