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FOR

## MIROSLAW BALKA

"Neither"

September 18–October 23, 2004

Barbara Gladstone Gallery is pleased to announce "Neither," an exhibition of new work by Miroslaw Balka. Born in 1958 in Warsaw, Poland, notions of history and the residue of memory weigh heavily in Balka's approach to sculpture. Growing up in Catholic Poland under a Socialist regime where Western popular icons were rejected, the artist recalls that his childhood heroes were saints and martyrs. The grandson of a funerary-monument sculptor, and the son of a master masonry craftsman, Balka has said that sculpture is "in the blood." These religious and familial traditions lend his work a pervading sense of sacredness, a somber view of history and the individual's relationship to it.

His poetic works, recalling the tragedies of Western European history such as the Holocaust, memorialize events through symbolic abstraction rather than discrete monument. Balka's craft, imbued with a familial lineage, relies upon the well-worn objects of human use and the traces left by the body, such as blood and tears, evoking the burdened emotions that lie beyond the easily parsed dates and facts of the past. These artifacts of memory and forgetfulness, presence and absence, meditate on what history leaves behind—the psychic repercussions alluded to in abstracted object—and ties it to the body and the memory of those living in the present.

In the four new works presented in this show, Balka explores the individual's relationship to tragedy through his evocative use of video projection and rough-hewn sculpture. Balka's abstracted installations attempt to reify the absence of memory that swarms around historical tragedy. Noting that many turn a blind eye to tragedy, the pieces in this exhibition act as an exorcism revealing not only the trauma of the past, but also the cold passage to resuscitating its memory. Inverting his usual practice of highlighting bodily absence, the viewers confronted by these projected images and sculptures fill the void left by forgetfulness and must face these ruptures inflicted upon the psyche, the home, and the world that have received a blank stare for so long.

*Winterreise*, a work of 2003 included in this show, embodies Balka's method of capturing these haunting aspects of the past and reframes them to highlight the contrast of what happened and what memory reveals. Three projections show different views of the Brzezinka Concentration Camp, as it currently stands, wrapped in the lull of winter snow. Unaware that the landscape shown was a location of such incomprehensible tragedy, the viewer sees the wintry images of the barracks and the nearby pond, where ashes of victims were disposed of, free of historical context, and as Balka says, "almost like postcards." Another view of the camp shows two young boys scampering about the old barbed wire fences, recalling *Bambi*, the animated film released by Disney in 1942, the year Hitler began his infamous pogrom. By veiling these shots in hopeful banality with allusions to the easily digestible tragedies that populate commercial cinema, Balka reveals to the viewer how readily the world can turn away from tragedy and repress horrific memories.

Miroslaw Balka's work has been the subject of many one-person exhibitions internationally, including the Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst in Ghent; National Museum of Art, Osaka; Museet for Samtidskunst, Oslo; IVAM, Centre Del Carme, Valencia; Kunsthalle Bielefeld; Centre d'art contemporain, Thiers; Tate Gallery, London; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld; and Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. The artist was the representative of Poland at the 1993 Venice Biennale. Miroslaw Balka lives and works in Warsaw.

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