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# Hübbe Mastalerz

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KATARZYNA PISKORZ

**STRUCK** / TRAFIENIE  
14.03–1.06.2025

RYNEK 27/28  
WROCŁAW



artists

CONRAD HÜBBE

AGNIESZKA MASTALERZ

curated by

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Selected works by Agnieszka Mastalerz were created in collaboration with the Castle-Museum in Łańcut, OmniVet Veterinary Clinic in Rzeszów, and Wechta Equestrian

What remains when we strip love of its romantic narrative? What if we begin to perceive it as a chemical process, a biological determination, or a struggle for control? The works of Mastalerz and Hübbe intertwine in this narrative, proving that love has never been free from power, influence, or control.

Love begins with a strike. Sometimes literally – like in hermaphroditic snails. Before mating, they dance, touch each other with their tentacles, striking the area near the mouth, where their reproductive organs are located. Courtship lasts for hours until the final blow is struck. A calcareous structure, known as a love dart, pierces the soft tissue of the chosen partner, increasing the chances of passing on genetic material. Only wounded bodies can be fertilized. Biology knows no euphemisms – love is domination and a struggle for survival.

Eros in Greek mythology and Cupid in the Roman one wielded similar weapons. Their arrows dictated emotions, pierced the will, and altered fate. Eros – the very one whose name became synonymous with desire – had two arrows: one evoked love and brought relief, the other destroyed life and signified eternal damnation.

In Conrad Hübbe's paintings, a deity embodying love and desire appears – usually the desire for what one

does not possess. The artist draws on motifs anchored in history, exploring how images serve as carriers of meaning and how they can break free from their original contexts, transform, and connect us with the past. Carefree Cupids – children – control affects: they play with the heart, use it as a tennis ball, stitch together the ones they previously condemned to be broken.

Hübbe employs imagery rooted in painting traditions, analyzing it from a sculptural perspective. He digitally creates drawings that are then projected onto the canvas. On a pre-primed and white-painted surface, he applies monochromatic outlines with spray paint. In his works, love is not a choice but a fate imposed by an unpredictable higher force. Emotions are seized and woven into a system. Here, love appears as something more than an emotional state – it is a mechanism into which one can be unconsciously drawn.

In Agnieszka Mastalerz's works, romantic ecstasy also intertwines with control. The artist examines the aestheticization of tools of domination. In her series *Nodes*, comprising video and photography, the recurring motif of orchids appears. These parasitic plants were already known in antiquity – they were used to concoct love potions, while their roots were considered an aphrodisiac to be placed in the clothing of lovers to influence their emotions.

Mastalerz created her works in a production hall in Stężyca, where perfect plants are mass-produced for sale. She focused on the commercial aspect – where one species' body becomes a space for another's aesthetic fulfillment. Each specimen undergoes a process of unification – first by machines, then by humans, mainly women, who trim the roots and leaves that deviate from the ideal model. Touching and shaping the plants carries an artistic, sculptural gesture, yet it is simultaneously an act of violence. Removing elements that do not fit aesthetic canons satisfies the desire for beauty. In this way, a living being is reduced to a decorative function, a substitute for a work of art. The final form – perfect, pure, repeatable – resembles an emotion filtered through social expectations.

Mastalerz often assumes the role of an observer. In the video *Play Down*, she recorded the moment of collecting semen for artificial insemination from a young stallion. The horse – a symbol of strength and untamed energy – becomes an object of control in the process. Semen, instead of being the fruit of ecstasy, functions as a commodity subjected to regulation. Here, the strike is precise, deliberate, determined – functional, not romantic. Love becomes a sterile process, confined to laboratories, test tubes, and sperm banks. The storage of animal material is documented in the photograph

*Vault I*, while a photo-wallpaper features an image from the castration procedure. The artist captures moments when the body, stripped of autonomy, is subjected to supervision and programmed for function. The physical act becomes subordinate and tamed.

Love is not a neutral state – it is a process, an act of persuasion, manipulation, and ritual that we attempt to control. It is also the meeting of bodies, the moment of passing on life, and the traces that remain within us. Mastalerz and Hübbe intertwine these themes, exposing how an emotional state is subjected to mechanisms of programming. In the world of art, mythology, biology, and pop culture, love has never been just a feeling – it affects us even when we pretend to be free from it.

Mastalerz and Hübbe explore processes of formation and deformation as gestures that enforce change. A strike can be accidental or intentional, painful or ecstatic, violent or long-awaited. It is an act of penetration, infiltration, transformation, and connection; a force whose consequences are impossible to predict – one that alters the course of events and never leaves us the same as we were before.

## AGNIESZKA MASTALERZ

*vault (I)*, digital photograph, pigment ink print on archive paper, framed in acid-free steel, behind museum glass, 2024, 100 × 6,6 cm.

*Merit (castration)*, medium-format analogue photograph, printed as a wallpaper, 2024, 269 × 299 cm.

*Love Darts (I-IX)*, found footage, printscreens transferred to slides, 2025, 9 × 5 × 5 cm.

*Play Down*, looped digital video, 2017, 2'31".

Recording the process of semen collection from a stallion and its use in artificial insemination. After a few walks around the so-called dummy, the stallion jumps onto the mare-shaped, sculpture-like object made out of leather.

*Nodes (I, II, III)*, medium-format analog photograph, pigment ink print on archive paper Moab Entrada Natural Rag 300gsm, on dibond, framed in acid-free metal, 2024, 45 × 45 × 3 cm.

*Nodes (III)*, still from the digital video, pigment ink print on archive paper, framed in welded steel frame, without a glass, 2024, 26,5 × 35,5 cm.

*Nodes*, looped digital video, 2023, 2'17".

*Nodes* is based on research conducted on historical and contemporary relationships between humans and orchids. In creating this work, I employed a robot, directly referencing the technological methods used to cultivate these plants. Drawing on anthropological and economic data, I developed a video that materializes the symbolic and normative aspects of human-plant interdependence shaped by cultural and market conditions.

In Poland's past, the dried roots of wild orchids were discreetly placed inside clothing to affect the wearer, while in Italy, powdered roots were mixed with goat's milk in the belief that it enhanced sexual stimulation. Reflecting on these intimate, magical rituals of the past, the I shifted my focus to the modern industrial production of orchids.

Here, orchids serve both as instruments of enchantment and as commodities, mass produced to generate as many uniform, standardized plant as possible to meet market criteria. This industrialized and technologized production process relies on workers who shape each orchid to meet a fabricated ideal of beauty. Their intervention is essential, transforming organic, living beings into sculpted forms that fulfill human aesthetic expectations.

Through *Nodes*, I highlight the enduring interconnections between nature and human desires – ties that entangle us, creating mutual dependencies.

## CONRAD HÜBBE

*untitled (Cupid 1)*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 2023,  
160 × 120 cm.

*untitled (Cupid 2)*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 2023,  
160 × 120 cm.

*untitled (Cupid 3)*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 2023,  
160 × 120 cm.

*untitled (Game)*, oil and acrylic on canvas, 2025,  
200 × 160 cm.

*untitled (170 Cupids)*, pile of 170 porcelain cupid figures, 2021 – ongoing, approx 15 × 50 × 35 cm.

With a mischievous look behind the curtain, ringing the doorbell equipped with a quiver of arrows and flowers, sewing damaged hearts with needle and thread – Cupid is a cultural figure of transgression. In classical mythology known as the god of desire, attraction, and affection, Cupid initiates, controls, and directs affects. His objects of agency and their ability to transform and transcend desire between (potential) lovers are multifaceted: shooting arrows, gifting flowers, playing with

hearts. It is the cupids that play with others' hearts, and you are invited.

In the exhibition *Struck* at Krupa Art Foundation, Conrad Hübbe presents a series of cupid paintings based on historical postcards, which serve as points of reference to reflect on how historical images can be reconfigured under the conditions of the present. In his artistic practice, Hübbe uses strategies of citation and translation of historical motifs. The fragmented mostly illegible writings around the central motif of the cupid, hint at the source material that stems from around 1900. Since it wasn't allowed to write on the back of postcards, people used the front side to write down their messages resulting in an involuntary rivalry between word and image.

In the work *Untitled (170 Cupids)*, Hübbe used a found tin figure depicting a cupid holding a heart in one hand and pushing an arrow through it with the other. This small figure became the starting point for a series of porcelain cupids, of which there are 170 to date.

## AGNIESZKA MASTALERZ

Female visual artist based in Warsaw, born in 1991 in Łódź, Poland.

Graduate of the Studio of Spatial Activities by Mirosław Bałka at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw (BA, MA, 2018), former student of Candice Breitz and Eli Cortiñas at the HBK in Braunschweig (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst Scholarship for 2019/2020). She also obtained her BA in Cultural Studies at the University of Warsaw (2013) and was a participant of the Autumn Intensive at the Malmö Art Academy (2024).

Agnieszka Mastalerz exhibited with Catinca Tabacaru Gallery at the Goethe Institut in Bucharest (2024), NS-Dokumentationszentrum in Munich (2023), MO-CAK – Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, east-contemporary gallery in Milan (2022), Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (2017 – laureate of the Hestia Artistic Journey Competition).

She was a resident of Muzeum Susch in Switzerland, the Artist Development Program at the EIB Institute in Luxembourg (2021), and Futura gallery in Prague (2020, Visegrad Fund). Mastalerz is a laureate of Młoda Polska scholarship for 2024.

Works of her are in Fondazione in Between Art Film by Beatrice Bulgari, Ergo Hestia Group, European Investment Bank, and Warsaw Ghetto Museum collections, as well as in private ones.

Since 2021, the artist is represented by eastcontemporary gallery in Milan.

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## CONRAD HÜBBE

A graduate of the Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts, where he earned an MFA in the class of Prof. Andreas Slominski. His interests lie in the transcultural aspects of images and motifs from the history of art and everyday culture in Central and Eastern Europe. He lives and works in Hamburg, Berlin, and Warsaw.

Since 2014, he has been involved in various artistic projects, with his works exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions, including at renowned galleries in Hamburg and Berlin. In 2022, he was nominated for the Hamburg Grant for Contemporary Art and presented his work at Kunsthaus Hamburg.

His artistic practice often explores themes of identity and social interactions. He collaborated with international artists during an exhibition exchange with Goldsmiths University in London and participated

in the Erasmus+ program in Warsaw, studying in Mirosław Bałka's studio. His works have been shown at international festivals such as the Youth Art Biennale in Bolzano and the Phototriennale Hamburg. In 2023, he participated in the 8. *Salon* exhibition in Hamburg.

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## KATARZYNA PISKORZ

Curator, art historian, and writer. A graduate of art history at the University of Warsaw, she also studied in the United Kingdom and Denmark. She gained professional experience in museum institutions in Poland (Zachęta – National Gallery of Art) and abroad (Saatchi Gallery, Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice). She has participated in academic conferences, given lectures as a speaker, and provided artistic consulting as a specialist in private sector collaborations. She worked in the auction projects department at Desa Unicum and was involved in advising and building art collections.

From 2019 to 2024, she served as the Artistic Director of HOS Gallery in Warsaw. In 2023, she curated the exhibition *Hold Me Closer*, for which she and participating artists Marta Niedbał and Paweł Olszczyński received the Main Award of the ING Polish Art Foundation, with the work *Rozpuszczenie* becoming part of its collection. From July 2024 to February 2025, she was the

project coordinator at the ING Polish Art Foundation.  
As of March 2025, she has assumed the role of Artistic  
Director at bliss gallery in Warsaw.