

Marlborough

Press Release Magdalena Abakanowicz *Corporeal Materiality* November 12 – December 21, 2019

Opening Reception:
November 12, 6-8 PM
6 Albemarle Street

Marlborough is pleased to present *Corporeal Materiality* an exhibition of sculpture and drawings by the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017). Spanning 40 years across a wide variety of material, the show stands as testament to a towering figure of 20th century art. It is the artist's first exhibition in London since 1990.

A relentless innovator, Abakanowicz's alchemical transformations of humble materials like rope, burlap, stone and sisal into monumental, moving expressions of power, loss, violence and healing bespeak both her resourcefulness and ambition. Working in these mediums, which were often all that were available in Soviet-controlled Poland and at the time pejoratively associated with craft, the artist claimed a transformative power inherent in the feminine. It courses through these works and transcends physicality. As the celebrated sculptor Sir Antony Gormley wrote in the accompanying catalogue for the show :

"She was determined to make work that marks the present and faces the future; an anthropological approach that stands aside from both modernism or post-modernism and unites us. Survival and existential questions overtake style."

The exhibition begins with *Embryology*, a bulbous configuration of low-lying forms in blackened stainless steel. Welded in sections, the trio constitutes an immediate family of raw form and sets the stage for the confluence of brute-force and empathy that follows.

Her monumental fabric compositions known as *Abakans* - here wall-hanging works - are predominantly made of sisal, rope and horse hair that spill forth, folding in on themselves

and metastasizing into gracefully gnarled labial presences. These "weavings" so expand the field as to obliterate our preconceptions of this age-old practice. Their rich, earthy color to varied effect enact painterly concerns on the high-impact plane of tactile intensity and feeling.

The groups of amassed figures she called *Crowds* share the compelling surfaces of the woven works—whether fashioned in burlap or bronze—while more explicitly emphasizing complex notions of community over heroic, monolithic monumentality. Shaped by the last century's dual cataclysms of Facism and Authoritarianism, Abakanowicz was compelled to imagine a society that could encompass a delicate mode of togetherness that would not supplant the individual. These sculptures, particularly in their variable configurations, can exert the menace of a mob, or the protective, nurturing solace of the clan. Here on view from this series is *Infants*, a particularly touching group of thirty-three children created in 1992.

Other works based on the body include rarely seen individual works in plaster or cast aluminum which like all her figures are notably headless. There is also an emblematic caged, seated figure. Heads only appear in Abakanowicz's works when she studies herself, so thoroughly as to become every person. This is demonstrated in the rough-hewn bronze heads called *Anonims* on view. Their features, pushed and prodded from raw clay before casting, emerge as tender grotesques, simultaneously evoking the dogged perseverance and the ravages of time.

Taken together, these sculptures engage with existential limitations and speak to a humanizing tendency that cuts

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across Abakanowicz practice as a whole. Buffeted by the violence, cruelty and deprivation of her era—that she warned continues into our own—she maintains resolute, defiant and tender in the face of it all.

Next year, Magdalena Abakanowicz will be honored by a major exhibition at the Tate Modern in London opening June 17 and on view until September 13, 2020. Her work is also currently featured in the new Museum of Modern Art, New York's *Taking a Thread for a Walk* exhibition, on view in The Philip Johnson Galleries until Spring 2020 as part of the museum's celebratory Opening Season, Fall 2019 program. Magdalena Abakanowicz's work is included in numerous, prominent public and private collections around the world.

For press inquiries, please contact:
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