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The essay is an attempt at a reading of Maryan S. Maryan's oeuvre in the frame of autobiography, testimony, survival and multidirectional memory. Based on his latest works, it reconstructs the artist's unique historical sensitivity and criticality.

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Maryan, or the Life in Death¹

Le nouveau Christ, ou notre frère à tous.

Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*

War is precisely an effort to minimize precariousness for some
and to maximize it for others.

Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable*

These are the words, the words are these.

Death lingering, stunk,

Flies swarming everyone,

Over the whole summit peak,

Flesh quivering in the heat.

This was something else again.

I fear it cannot be explained.

The words that make, the words that make

Murder.

Polly Jean Harvey, *The Words That Maketh Murder*

In June 1977, Maryan dies of a heart attack in his Chelsea Hotel room in New York City. He is survived by his wife, Annette. Earlier that year, he had painted a series of dead birds after Goya. On the day of his death, Spain conducted its first democratic elections, after 41 years of Franco dictatorship. But it was also the year marked by the Taksim Square massacre in Istanbul and the deaths of the RAF members in Stammheim prison in Germany, as well as other turbulent events, such as the kidnappings and hijackings of the German Autumn. Does it make any sense to think of these events in relation to the event of the death of an American of Polish-Jewish origin, an artist educated first in Jerusalem and then in Paris? Why would one bring these seemingly disparate elements together? In what follows, I will try to argue, among other things, that it makes perfect sense to think of such affinities, and to perform such associations while looking

at and reading Maryan S. Maryan's oeuvre. This article focuses on how life, work and history came together, enfold and encompass one another in the most unexpected, violent, absurd and dramatic ways. The aim is not to analyze in detail the heterogeneous work of the artist, but rather to provide an insight into his exceptional historical and political sensitivity, as well as his own very particular historical condition of and as a survivor.

Even though the Nazi regime initially designated him as a spectator to be crushed, blinded and muted by the images it produced, and then as "vermin" supposed to perish forever, he became a historical actor and a producer of images himself: transformed from the passive onlooker into "an active participant in visualization."² This historical articulation proceeds in Maryan's case, I shall argue, not from his epistemological detachment from the world, but from his sense of urgency and emergency in the face of catastrophe(s). I am indebted here to Shoshana Felman's reading of Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history, in which danger and emergency illuminate themselves as conditions of both history (of life) and of its theory (its knowledge). New, innovative theories and images of history (those which enable a displacement of official history) come into being only under duress.³

It is under duress that Maryan lived and worked, and it is this specific condition that stimulated the development of his artistic idiom. I have reversed the order of the quasi-biographical narrative in order to begin with a piece that brilliantly encompasses most of the motifs, themes, images and affects recurrent throughout the artist's work. Its analysis will allow us to unwrap the multilayered interrelatedness of Maryan's biography; his engagement and struggle with artistic form. I treat his works not merely as the artist's affective response to history as it happened to him, but rather as a formally forceful meditation on the human condition in history at the time of what seems to be a permanent state of war (be it cold or "hot"), rising

(mass)crime, and the continual presence of often extreme violence. This is his frame of reference and the frame of his life.

As previously evidenced by, among others, Goya's *Disasters of War*, David's *Death of Marat*, Manet's *Execution of Emperor Maximilian* or Picasso's *Guernica*, the times dictate what the art is. It seems necessary to think of the artist not as a traumatised victim of history, but rather as one who testifies to man's inherent vulnerability and monstrosity, and thus takes a stance, becoming a potent part of the public: responsive and responsible. In an essay for the catalogue of a 1969 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York entitled *Human Concern/Personal Torment*, Robert Doty observed:

To those artists who are engaged not only in wresting signs and symbols from the chaos of action, but also in mocking the complacency, coarseness and banality of the environment, the contamination of life is the core of existence. For artists of this conviction, the world is estranged, life is absurd, the grotesque is the measure of all things, spiritual or material.⁴

In Maryan's case, the "contamination of life" resided in the very facts of loss and survival, their contingency and absurdity. Maryan's life work bears witness to the ways in which historical events merge with one another, overlap, recall one another; to how their signs and traces refer to other events' signs and traces, and to how they all dissolve the discourse of emancipation and reveal latent violence and agony, by forming – as Hannah Arendt put it – a "constellation that poses the threat of total annihilation through war against the hope for the emancipation of all mankind through revolution."⁵

If This Is a Man⁶

In 1975, at the age of 48 years, in his room at the Chelsea Hotel, Maryan, together with Kenny Schneider, shoots a 90 minute, black and white 16 mm film. It is titled *Ecce homo*, exactly like the artist's series of notebooks with drawings from 1971.⁷ It is at the beginning of the very same year that the Weather Underground bombed the main office of the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., and later (also after the shooting of the film) American soldiers were evacuated from Vietnam as the war ended with the Fall of Saigon and the surrender of South Vietnam forces.

The film alludes to the poetics of experimental cinema: it is a series of staged recollections where photographic images and reproductions of Maryan's paintings, drawings, and lithographs alternate with a disturbing performance. Maryan reenacts Holocaust memories with the use of numerous accessories such as an M16 gun, dummies of SS officers, a straitjacket, ropes, and paint. The film opens with the following sequences of images appearing one after another: the Virgin Mary, women in robes during a Ku-Klux-Klan ceremony, Maryan himself in a black dress resembling a cassock with his arms stretched wide (as if crucified), Yasser Arafat, the Pope on a stool, images of crucifixion, a black cloth with a white swastika on it, black crosses on the white robes of Ku-Klux-Klan members, the shooting of Maryan as a Nazi, black tape covers his eyes and mouth, then pictures of Pinochet, Napoleon, Maximilian Kolbe (with the camp number 214510672 on his chest), piles of corpses from the My Lei massacre, Christ in a crown of thorns covered in paint. Religious motifs, iconic images of historical events and people, press clips



Maryan, Notebook 4, 1971

and holy images are all montaged in a sequence that stimulates imagination and affect, driving both to the very limits of alarm.

This vertigo of images is perhaps the outcome of a struggle to narrate the past and to relate it to the present. The artist attempts to relive certain episodes in order to make them accessible and shareable, but also to make them more fully his own. On the other hand, however, the film's narrative is driven by the urge to re-stage the execution, and to provide an ultimate solution to an event, which got stuck in time, unresolved. "Why, why did I not kill a Nazi?" asks Maryan time and again, and he also wonders why he did not die when shot by a Nazi. The torture of recalling merges with the torture of (unexpected) survival. "I was astonished; why did they let me live on. For kicks, they let me live for fun, just like they killed others for fun, for nothing."⁸ Maryan says. We return to the scene of execution several times: we see him trying to face the absurdity of the life of one who was executed (a human target shot at several times, as we find out in the course of the film), and, with the attempted execution of a crowd of cardboard SS-men, those already dead. He frees himself, grabs the M16 and shoots the dummies of SS-men, then cries with desperation, "Oh no, I shot the mannequins!" This is the revenge of life over the absurdity of survival, over something beyond understanding, or even beyond any moral structure, an urge for establishing one's own order – fulfilled first by shooting, then by dripping paint on, the dummies. There is a dose of anger and repulsion towards oneself for the very fact of not being able to come to terms with one's life, to take it as a fact. The affects involved in this process are topical and vivid.

What is most disturbing throughout the visual narrative are the associations, or rather the juxtapositions of words and images, that the viewers have to take in. When the protagonist speaks of piles of corpses seen on the streets of ghettos and in camps, we see the well-known image of the My Lei massacre. Moreover, it is an image already transformed by an artistic gesture, shown with an inscription by the Artist Workers Coalition:⁹ "Q: And babies? A: And babies."¹⁰ There is thus a certain temporal, thematic, and political shift between what is being said and what is being shown. The way words and images come together in this film is crucial for understanding how these histories come together and how the psyche, the mind, and the body of the traumatized protagonist operate and exchange stimuli. Recollections from Maryan's youth overlap with his recent visual experiences and with cultural, political and religious icons, images and motifs. When he mentions remembering dogs during the Second World War, when he speaks of the smell of crematoria, and of Hiroshima, and images of bones everywhere, we are shown a single image of the demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama in 1962 – dogs attacking Walter Gadsden, a Parker High School student.¹¹ There are numerous examples of this technique throughout the film.

The insanity and distress of the protagonist's imagination and memory are additionally signaled by his costume: Maryan sits in front of the camera tied up in a straitjacket with a big star of David painted on the front and crossed out – a mad man of his



Maryan, Stills from *Ecce Homo* 1975

times. While his entire body is immobilized and marked with a sign of exclusion, all the movement takes place in his voice – the modulations of which organize the fractured narrative, its rising, falling, silencing, going high and low, fast and slow. When possible, he sways and wiggles. The rest of his expression remains within his eyes that roll, shift from side to side, or fix on one point for a longer moment. The attempted descriptions or longer parts, which become all too coherent, are immediately interrupted by exclamations of some sort: "I cannot even say anything about this," "I cannot any more, it is too much, you know..." "Let's stop." Yet, he neither stops nor stops himself.

His very specific and singular ability to make associations continues to bring to the surface new stories from the Holocaust, which resonate with more incongruous images. We hear about the cattle carriages – "this is how we were transported" – we hear stories of torture, escape, fear, and hunger. We learn of the artificial golden fillings in the artists' father's teeth, which were traded for bread, and about the loss of his father followed by the shame of his own survival, we see the drawings of dismembered human figures, images of people with mouths wide open and heads cut open, portraits of political leaders and historical villains (among them Mussolini and Moshe Dayan), drawings of countless figures crouching, vomiting and defecating. Recurring violent and abrupt addresses to the listener/viewer shatter any possible illusion that one remains outside of this insanity, as when Maryan says: "I cheated, that is my guilt, do you think I am guilty?" and later: "I tried to get rid of that guilt for a couple of years. I did not do anything wrong!". He shouts out loud and cries: "Oh no!". He rolls his eyes, then clenches them and begs again: "let's stop." Shall we? But we cannot. No one can, the film seems to be saying. And this is not any kind of moral blackmail; this is just the way it is. To imagine otherwise would be hypocritical.

Maryan consciously plays with the audience: "I wish there could

have been a happy ending, but there was not." His survival thus was not the happy ending. Or, one might dare to think, the survival of the world was not the happy ending. The film closes with the story of the Death march and the evacuation of the concentration camp. He was shot at again, as many others were. He vividly sketches the image of red snow, and asks "Can you imagine?" This painful but necessary question recurs in the film. And it is almost obvious that it relates as much to what is being said as to what is being shown, to that which belongs to (somebody else's, his) past, as well as to our present (both in the late 60s and in the second decade of the 21st century). And this is no therapy, Maryan finishes: "This is why I decided to do this, but this does not help!" Possibly there is no help, no remedy, neither for him, nor for us. His task seems to be "to bring the audience to a state of awareness that will permit no evasion."¹²

Can it be assumed, based on one of the last works he made, a kind of *summa*, that his entire oeuvre was determined by the events of the Holocaust as well as by his survival, and his physical and psychic injury? Or is one allowed to say that (as the artist himself was trying to convince critics), it should not be read through the biographic prism at all? How is one to account for the (in)directness of the influence? *Ecce homo*, the film, allows one to realize that the artist was not trapped in the past, returning blindly to the wound, nor was he cut off from the present in a way that would prevent him from experiencing the world as it developed into further historical traumas and nightmares. On the contrary, it seems that once traumatically marked, he remained exquisitely alert to the evil of the world and devoted his life not so much to advocating against oblivion, but rather, to proving that war has never stopped, and that tormentors only change their costumes while he continues playing in this theatre of absurd violence and extermination, as we all do. Maryan thus seems to be incarnating the model of multidirectional memory as conceptualized recently by Michael

Rothberg. Memory that, as against the model of competing collective memories, is "subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing ... productive and not private."¹³ Such memory stresses its anachronistic component, the fact of the "bringing together of now and then, here and there," which in turn results in unbound creativity.

Embodied survival

Much has been said about survivors, especially about those who lived through traumatic events such as the Holocaust, other genocides, and extreme forms of violence.¹⁴ That they are not the true witnesses, that they possess neither the understanding of the reasons for their survival nor the knowledge of its powers, and last but not least, that certain historical events are designed precisely as "events without a witness."¹⁵ For many, it has become common knowledge that the survivor is the paradigmatic political figure of late modernity, and trauma is a synonym for historical experience. As Gil Anidjar has put it:

Trauma and survival are of course not identical, but – barring future objections—they seem to be linked in a number of ways... The tendency to associate and even collapse witness and survivor *fait symptôme*, signals that (like the victim or the enemy, perhaps) the survivor has become an ambiguous figure, a concrete image of our collective imagination – albeit a less acknowledged one.¹⁶

In recent years, we have become more and more accustomed to the idea that it is possible to survive in an instant a large



Maryan, Notebook 5, 1971

number of human beings, on the one hand, and, that our survival seems utterly inexplicable, if not purely accidental or absurd, on the other. And yet a Western audience, whose survival is both a fact and an accident, becomes more and more immune to omnipresent war and destruction, owing to the ceaseless stream of images that is fed to it by mass media; images which guarantee that the wrong is being done somewhere else and to someone entirely different than us. Such a spectator remains an "invulnerable and all-seeing survivor,"¹⁷ one who sees everything and says nothing, who stays screened off from a world immersed in catastrophe.

Maryan's oeuvre, which arrives to us today from the dark times of the Second World War and the not-much-brighter times of the postwar period, addresses our vulnerability and our silence in the face of recent destruction, violence and pain. Maryan wants us to lament both his and the world's survival: survival in order to face more racism, more violence, more political insanity, madness, and cruelty, more anger, blind horror, and pain.

When writing about the question of survival and war, Judith Butler returns to Melanie Klein. She claims that Klein rightly observed that the development of mankind's moral responses was a reaction to questions of survivability, but at the same time, Butler says, she missed the point, thinking that survivability is the feature of the ego. "Why the ego?" asks the author of *Frames of War*, and shifts the focus onto the relationality of survival, the very fact that it is always dependent on the other. "My existence is not mine alone, but is to be found outside myself, in this set of relations that precede and exceed the boundaries of who I am."¹⁸ Such an observation seems to be a good point of departure for understanding Maryan's testimony in both the film discussed above, and in his oeuvre more generally. It could be argued that through his artistic gesture he was aiming at reestablishing a connection to the world – both social and critical. It was by way of making these seemingly insane associations, connections, and

juxtapositions that he struggled for an affective frame of solidarity and interconnectedness. And it is by entering this encounter that we might be able to participate in this process for our sake, rather than his.

The point of such an encounter is the body:

The body, in my view, is where we encounter a range of perspectives that may or may not be our own. How I am encountered, and how I am sustained, depends fundamentally on the social and political networks in which this body lives, how I am regarded and treated, and how that regard and treatment facilitates this life or fails to make it livable.¹⁹

The disabled body of the artist presents itself as the site of the making and unmaking of the world,²⁰ that which transmits intensities and transforms them into affects. The disfigured and defaced bodies on Maryan's canvases are the markers of history, and surfaces upon which history imprints its mark. As evidenced by Maryan's numerous paintings and drawings, peopled with hysterical and spasmodic bodies, which release all the liquids they have at their pathetic disposal; blood, piss, shit, saliva, vomit, in order to express what they have gone and are still going through.

According to Butler, however, the body, as that which connects us to its outside, the world, makes us exposed and responsive not only to injury, but also to pleasure. There are only vulnerable bodies, and there are only bodies beyond control:

And yet, this obtrusive alterity against which the body finds itself can be, and often is, what animates responsiveness to that world. That responsiveness may include a wide range of affects: pleasure, rage, suffering, hope, to name a few... responsiveness – and thus, ultimately, responsibility – is located in the affective responses to a sustaining and impinging world. Because such affective responses are invariably mediated, they call upon and enact certain

interpretive frames; they can also call into question the taken-for-granted character of those frames, and in that way provide the affective conditions for social critique.²¹

The responsiveness we encounter in this oeuvre oscillates between the testimonial frame of "pure factuality" (illustrated both by facts from the artist's life and images of world historical events and protagonists), and the overtly fictive or artistic frame of the mediation. Maryan's obsessive reenactment of past and present provides an interpretative frame that is on the one hand that of an autobiography (or as Jacques Derrida would have it, autobio-thanatography), and on the other, that of testimony. What moves most in his construction and deconstruction of these frames is the specific temporal dimension of both; their relation to the "artistic," and their potentially critical aspect.

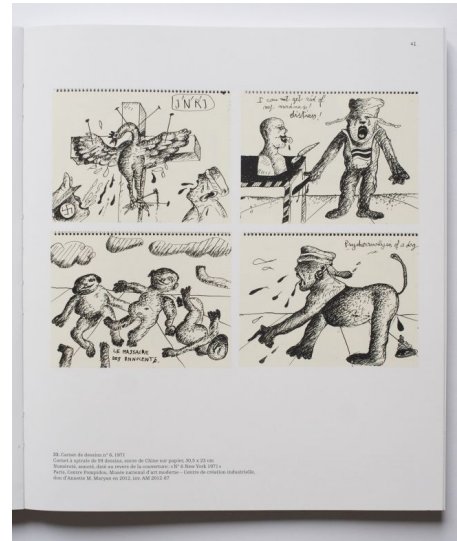
The possibility of "the artistic" haunts the so-called truthful, responsible, serious, real testimony as its proper possibility. This haunting is perhaps the passion itself, the passionate place of artistic creation, as the project to show everything – and whether it is auto-biographical, that is to say, everywhere, and everywhere autobio-thanatographical.²²

When Derrida writes that a certain dose of *hauntedness* is the necessary condition for a testimony to remain one, and when he defines the haunting element as the possibility of "literature" within testimony, there is little doubt that a similar argument may apply to visual art. Namely, for an artist to provide a real testimony, that is one which does not eliminate the haunting element, such work of testimony "must allow itself to be parasitized by precisely what it excludes from its inner depths,"²³ an indispensable artistic component. What is more, it is the artistic, the choice of and struggle with form, that opens up a space for this process to come into being. At this instant, the unique character of testimony – no one can testify, in my place, to what I did and do – comes together with the unique character

of the artistic idiom.

And thus both become transmittable and shareable on the condition that there is another body that comes in contact with the work, that gets involved in the exchange and the struggle. It is in *Ecce homo* that we see how the two come together, and also how a place is established for a third party: one who listens and sees, possibly even hears and understands. As has already been implied, the matter of the transmission of such testimony does not solely come down to words or images. Rather, it is a complex tissue of overlapping codes: sounds, gestures, gazes, silences, tone of voice, etc. All these "can also call into question the taken-for-granted character" of existing frames of transmission of historical experience as testimony. This autobiography, the staging of life (and art) as it was and is, presents itself precisely "in the manner of a work of art."²⁴

There is a vertiginousness involved in this process that is related to the question of multidirectionality on the one hand, and substitution and displacement on the other. Let us elaborate a little more on substitution: can Maryan, the protagonist of *Ecce homo*, substitute the young man found among the corpses, in ghettos, and camps? What is the affective and epistemological relationship between the two, and what comes in between them? The construction of the film suggests there is no direct path that would lead back to the past self, to the moment in front of the execution squad, to the "instant of death." These events have acquired the thick layer of "skin" of other events and experiences,



Maryan, Notebook 6, 1971

the events after the Event materialized in imposing and pressing images and affects. And so what constitutes the real character of this testimony is the difference resulting in the struggle for substitution: "[t]his is the difference both null and uncrossable, real and fictional, actual and virtual, between the one who says 'I' and the 'I' of the young man of whom he speaks and who is himself, whom he still remembers..."²⁵

Tormented autobiography

My name is Maryan S. Maryan. I was born in Nowy Sącz 1.1.1927 ... I was sent to summer camps with many other kids from all over Poland. It was close to my hometown. We used to say to each other: next year same place... the following year instead of summer colonies I found myself at Auschwitz.²⁶

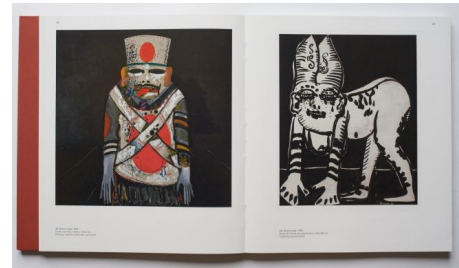
In 1971, the year 500 000 people in Washington, DC and 125,000 in San Francisco marched in protest against the Vietnam War, and two years after he obtained an American citizenship and officially changed his name to Maryan S. (Simson / Samson) Maryan,²⁷ the artist's psychic and physical condition deteriorates and he experiences a major breakdown, the outcome of which is a temporary loss of speech. As advised by his therapist, Maryan undertakes a project of drawing "the story of his life" and creates a series of sketch-books filled with drawings depicting his life-story. The series is entitled *Ecce homo*. The project lasted a year, during which the artist completed 9 notebooks with 478 drawings, each 20x30 cm.²⁸

Making these comic-like images, and ordering them like frames of a film, was supposed to provide a way to overcome silence and suffering. It can also be seen as a way to come to terms with the silence that remained after the extermination of the artist's family, and silence resulting from the lack of the story of their death and his survival.²⁹ By definition, speechlessness is what remains off the record. The task of the drawings can thus be read

as that of establishing a record, of negotiating the mute survivor's position inside visual language. His speechlessness as wordlessness is not a silence outside of language, but its very disruption and exhaustion. His falling silent is, as Felman rightly puts it, "not a state but an event."³⁰ The event of silence is to be countered by the exuberant if painful process of re-staging the past through drawing—scene after scene.

These mini-narratives framed by comic strip-like boxes are peopled with the artist's family and other characters already known from his earlier works. Maryan arranges everyday situations as if looking for a family story that would be outside of History: "It is not only this, it must be the childhood—one of my shrinks said" says Maryan in *Ecce homo*, the film. And it is this childhood that is drawn "inside-out," as if the artist was really looking for something other than "this." The result, however, is the multilayered confession of a dead man—as he himself bluntly puts it in one of the frames—an autobio-thanatography. It locates itself between the psycho-pathologic document and an autobiographic comic-book, or even a graphic novel.

Again, these drawings do not tell or narrate any story, but rather stage certain events, intensities, or moments of affective ruptures (bursting out crying, vomiting, shitting, shouting), encounters with one's own disturbed and destroyed self, and with others who were left behind. Here, as in the film, Maryan works by way of anachronistic associations and montages. In effect, one cannot recognize the past (or the story proper) in these images. Instead, one needs to imagine, re-imagine, and face it. The artist is not imagining in our stead, but opens up a set of possibilities: the possibility to see and make one's own "right" connections. The work of the reader/onlooker is



Maryan, *Personnage*, 1963 oil on canvas / *Personnage*, 1963 India ink on paper

to follow, connect and associate, to put some effort into figuring out, combining and juxtaposing. There is no progress to the story and the outcome is never clear, while the cost seems high: shockingly intense ruptures, embarrassing associations, horror, or even paranoia when things come too close to themselves and to us. Yet such is the cost of the post-traumatic yearning for self-knowledge, which can only be realized within an encounter that constitutes the autobiographical moment as such. As Paul de Man phrased it:

The autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution. The structure implies differentiation as well as similarity, since both depend on a substitutive exchange that constitutes the subject.³¹

As has already been suggested, the substitution of the one who survives by the one who assembles this autobiography, struggling to bring the past self to life and to an encounter with the reader/on-looker is provided by way of this artistic testimony. This dialectics of differentiation and similarity is in turn constitutive for an empathetic response and an extension of memory processes in further directions.

Autobiography, claims de Man, restores mortality and disfigures it. One wonders what happens if mortality has already been disfigured by a lack of understanding of one's own survival. In Maryan's context, it seems, the question of survival displaces that of "defacement." This is not to say that this instance of autobiography rescues the very autobiographical project and makes it correspond perfectly to the outside of the subject telling his life. Quite the contrary, this (failed) attempt at exhausting the tale of one's past and telling the truth veils nothing.³² Rather, it lays bare the impossibility and necessity of the project in the face of survival, and it leaves the other forever interpellated: "Can you

imagine?" and implicated.

How then should we frame the autobiographical dimension of Maryan's oeuvre? He provides some hints by calling his works "the Truth Paintings" and claiming "I will be myself in any color I put on the canvas."³³ The "being oneself in any color" suggests there is nothing that would not be him: of him and about him, including the series *Personnages*, initiated at the beginning of 1960s and continued for over a decade. These paintings and drawings (made with Chinese ink) show solitary figures in often theatrical, strange, violent and boisterous poses: torsos of men in military or religious uniforms, whose bodies are weirdly fragmented or disfigured by insane gesticulations and wild facial expressions, tongues skewered to the side of their mouth or sticking out. Partially comical, partially maniacal facial expressions. All these figures incarnate power and authority, injustice and cruelty, bestiality and brutality. Their attributes are often military helmets, tiaras. The figures wear religious costumes and robes, ass-ears, Ku-Klux-Klan hats, judges' robes, Napoleon hats, bishops' and papal dresses. These are bodies gone out of control: they cry, shout, vomit, stick out their tongues at the viewer (or the painter), show grimaces full of rage or pain. And yet, they are always alone, encased in cage-like or tomb-like interiors. Placed centrally on the canvas with a monochrome background, they are exposed and ridiculed, yet remain monstrous and terrifying.

As had been the case earlier, the most intimate and familiar aspect of the human – the body – here again become the ground for playing out the horrific experience of a historical subject, the screen for projecting all repressed fears and perverted desires. Maryan was able, as not many in his times were, to expose man to him/herself and point to the most blurred zones of moral,



Maryan, *Personnage (Napoleon)*, 1973
crayons on paper

political and also existential indistinctions. Through at times cruel operations, and the use of excess and phantasy, he reached into the deepest realms of the Real at once historical and transhistorical, like Beckett, Kafka, Goya and only a few others.³⁴ It is important to remember that Maryan was often exhibited, mentioned, and discussed next to Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, Roberto Matta and Alberto Giacometti (for example in the exhibition *La nouvelle figuration* in 1961); as well as British pop artists such as Richard Hamilton, American pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Capitalist Realists from Germany such as Sigmar Polke or Gerhard Richter, as well as Nancy Spero, Leon Golub and Philip Guston.³⁵

Maryan was one of the past century's artists whose personal experience of war, violence, racism, and loss made him alert to many of their ongoing scenarios. His work, permeated with anxiety and rage, often seemed monstrous to his contemporaries and excessive to latecomers. Through various media Maryan tried to express the absurdity, futility, terror, distortion, and repulsion of what he experienced and could not leave behind. Or, at this point, perhaps one should rather say, what did not leave him behind nor alone. He dealt with estrangement, creating affective intensities of multidirectional memory through various kinds of deformations and associations that enabled him to create a unique testimonial record of Western history as it unfolded.

After he was refused French citizenship, he traveled to the United States with his wife on a boat called the Leonardo da Vinci (!) in the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis and Algeria's proclamation of independence. He went to France at the age of 23 in the midst of the Indochina War, from Israel/Palestine where, after being admitted to the Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem, he had survived the War of Independence and the siege of the city. Maryan left Poland to seek refuge in Germany in 1946 having witnessed a growing wave of postwar antisemitism. In 1944, he was sent to Auschwitz and – as inmate A17986 – worked in Gleiwitz. Between 1942 and 1943, he lived in the Rzeszów ghetto. On the night of his arrival, together with 22 other Jews, he was chosen to be executed. Shot twice in the face and once in the neck, he was found alive among the corpses. Pinchas Burstein (Bursztyn), was born – or so he claimed – on January 1st 1927 in Nowy Sącz.



Maryan, *Personnage* 1962 oil on canvas

A postscript

In the Fall of 2012 a part of Maryan's New York studio and room were recreated in the Dawna Synagoga Gallery (Old Synagogue Gallery) in Nowy Sącz, in the context of a larger exhibition curated by Anda Rottenberg, entitled *VOID*. This can be treated as a metonymical, even if too literal, gesture of bringing the artist back to his place of birth, and granting him a proper place, not among Polish artists, but among artists from Poland and Polish Jews, whose histories wait still to be told – be it in

word, image, or both.

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- 1 This essay was inspired by the exhibition *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine*, at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris, 6th November 2013 - 9th February 2014, curated by Nathalie Hazan-Brunet, Catherine Thieck and Juliette Brailon. All images used in the text come from the catalogue of this exhibition.
- 2 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 242.
- 3 Shoshana Felman, "Benjamin's Silence," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 2, "Angelus Novus": Perspectives on Walter Benjamin (Winter, 1999): 211.
- 4 Robert Doty, *Human Concern/Personal Torment. The Grotesque in American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1969), no pagination. Besides David Smith's *Medals for Dishonor*, works by Edward Kienholz, Paul Thek, Robert Crumb and many others, as well as two works of Maryan, were included in this show: *Donkey Personage* (1962) and *Personage with Candy Cane* (1969).
- 5 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 11.
- 6 In 1947, Primo Levi published his book based on his Auschwitz experience, *Se questo è un uomo*. There is much to be said about the way this title, and the book as a whole, refers to the biblical *ecce homo*. One could also speculate if the title of Maryan's film bears any reference at all to Levi's book. An English translation by Stuart Woolf was published in 1959 as *If This Is a Man* (New York: Orion), two years later in 1961 by the same translator it was published under the title *The Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Macmillan).
- 7 There is also an intriguing correspondence between the title chosen by Maryan and a portfolio of satirical drawings by George Grosz, entitled *Ecce Homo*, published in 1923, which provided a grotesque image and a pointed criticism of Berlin society at the beginning of the 20th century. The original book perished in the Nazi book burnings. Maryan claimed on several occasions to be an admirer of Grosz's work. See for example <http://www.goldmarkart.com/scholarship/george-grosz-ecce-homo-catalogue/>, accessed February 20th 2014.

- 8 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Maryan are from the film *Ecce homo*. I am deeply grateful to the employees of the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris for letting me watch the whole of the film in the museum's library.
- 9 Irving Petlin, artist and political activist, was said to have encouraged Maryan to move to the US from Paris. Both Petlin and Nancy Spero were among the members of the Artist Workers Coalition. See: Philippe Dagen, "Paris New York, 1950-1977," in *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine*, (Paris: Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme, Flammarion, 2013), 85. See, among others, Nancy Spero's *War Series* from 1966.
- 10 R.L. Haeberle, *Q. And Babies? A. And Babies*, 1970. Offset lithograph, 25 x 38 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Published by the Art Workers' Coalition. The title and inscription on the image is an excerpt from the transcript of an interview with Private First Class Paul Meadlo, who participated in the massacre:
- Q. So you fired something like sixty-seven shots?
 A. Right.
 Q. And you killed how many? At that time?
 A. Well, I fired them automatic, so you can't- You just spray the area on them and so you can't know how many you killed 'cause they were going fast. So I might have killed ten or fifteen of them.
 Q. Men, women, and children?
 A. Men, women, and children.
 Q. And babies?
 A. And babies.
- 11 The image was published in *The New York Times* on May 4th, 1963. These images of state violence directed against the black American community were partially responsible for the shifting of international support to the protesters and consolidation of the community around Martin Luther King Jr.
- 12 Robert Doty, *op. cit.*
- 13 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 4.
- 14 See, among others, the recent article by Gil Anidjar, "Survival" *Political Concepts. A Critical Lexicon*. Issue 2 (Winter 2012): <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/survival-gil-anidjar/>, accessed January 10th, 2014.
- 15 See: Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony. The Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*

(New York: Routledge, 1991).

- 16 Gil Anidjar, op. cit.
- 17 Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 332.
- 18 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable* (London: Verso, 2009), 44. See also Melanie Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," in: *Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell. (London: Penguin, 1986), 115-46.
- 19 Ibid., 53.
- 20 An allusion to Elaine Scarry's *Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1987).
- 21 Butler, op. cit., 34-35.
- 22 Maurice Blanchot, *The Instant of My Death / Jacques Derrida, Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press, 2000) 72. There is an interesting analogy between Maryan's biography and Blanchot's narrative. Like the narrator of Blanchot's short story, *The Instant of My Death*, Maryan survives an execution. He is not only chosen to be executed but also nearly shot to death (he gets two bullets, one hits his face, the other his neck. As is the case in Blanchot's narrative, a death that had already been decided is cancelled and the protagonist "escaped death without fleeing."
- 23 Ibid., 30.
- 24 Ibid., 44.
- 25 Ibid., 65.
- 26 *Maryan* (Paris: Gallery Ariel, 1977). On the occasion of his exhibition at the Ariel Gallery in Paris in 1977, a catalogue was published which included stills from the film, drawings as well as his testimony that the artist dictated in 1976. The quoted fragment was reprinted in the exhibition's catalogue *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine* and on page 11 of the dossier available at <http://www.mahj.org/documents/dossier-de-presse-Maryan.pdf>, accessed January 20th, 2014.
- 27 The question that has to be left aside in this essay, yet which remains troubling and worth exploring, is what does it mean to choose as one's first and last name the same word, a proper name doubled, and divide the two by an initial.

- 28 Two of these were reproduced in the catalogue *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine*, and all were exhibited at the show at the Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris.
- 29 See: Gérard Wajcman, *Help!*, in: *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine*, 87-93. Out of his entire family; mother, father, brother, and sister, he was the only one who survived the Holocaust.
- 30 Felman, op. cit., 204.
- 31 Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *MLN*, Vol. 94, No. 5,(December, 1979): 921.
- 32 Ibid., 930.
- 33 Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "De Pinchas Burstein à Maryan," in *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine* 69.
- 34 In 1953, Maryan made ten lithographs for Franz Kafka's *Trial*. As some critics point out, the fear of authority and of not being loved brought the artist closer to the writer.
- 35 Philippe Dagen, "Paris New York, 1950-1977," in: *Maryan. La Ménagerie Humaine*, 77-86.

