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abstract:

Narratives about women artists usually point to the obstacles they face in the development of their artistic careers. In her article the author proposes an analysis that concentrates on how a woman artist – Zofia Kulik – presented herself as the heroine of a successful story of emancipation in the series of works titled *The Splendor of Myself* (1997, 2015, 2017). The self-image she presents is paradoxical: we deal with both her ostentatious presence and her absence as her physical presence is hidden behind the gorgeous but extremely stiff dress. It corresponds with Kulik's understanding of her success as directly related with the wealth of images and the mastery of composition.

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Zofia Kulik. The Splendor of Myself

Zofia Kulik's self-portraits are seldom the subject of art-historical and critical inquiry, which is surprising given the important position they occupy in her art. In an interview with Kulik conducted in 2004 by Bożena Czubał – one of two texts devoted to Kulik's self-portraits – the latter notes that the self-portrait "has been present in your work since you finished your co-operation with Przemysław Kwiek, so one might have the impression that since you started working independently, you have started to look at yourself and your own image more closely."¹ Kulik agrees, noting that the self-portrait from the *Medals* series "probably was my first individual project after the KwiekKulik period" (*Self-Portrait with a Skull*, 1989), and adds: "I also felt a great urge to communicate something. [...] That I am. I exist."²

This first self-portrait marked the beginning of a process – which lasts until today and will probably endure – of continuous self-analysis. What we observe in this process goes beyond the statement "I exist," which was crucial at the beginning of her solo career, into deliberations on "how I exist." In this text, I will concentrate on two moments in this process, marked by the creation of the first three versions of the series titled *The Splendor of Myself* in 1997, and the last two elements (to date), made ten years later.³ Analysis of these self-portraits allows us to observe the ways in which Kulik addressed the issue of success. *The Splendor of Myself* series offers an insight into how she perceives herself – or rather perceived herself at those two moments – as the heroine of a successful story of emancipation. In the case of women artists, this is not a common situation. Since Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* the title question has dominated narratives that usually point to the obstacles women artists face in the development of their artistic careers. Narratives stressing how

successful some of them were belong to the minority of stories told; a success, if achieved, is usually presented as the final stage of an obstacle race. The political significance of these negative narratives is clear: they aim at recognizing and describing the art world as patriarchal, as it remains so even today. Yet one of the side-effects of their domination is the absence in feminist art history of an analysis of how to be a great woman artist. The works discussed here confront us with precisely this.

Of the circumstances in which the realization of the series began, Kulik wrote: "I made the first version of the work *The Splendor of Myself* in 1997 just after returning from Venice, where I presented my installation during the Biennale [that year, Kulik had her solo exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the International Biennale in Venice –AJ].⁴ I wanted to forget about heat, noise, responsibility, contact with many unknown people. I wanted to 'get back to myself.' I found a photograph of my face from [1991] and started composing a photographic costume for myself."⁵



Zofia Kulik, *The Splendor of Myself I*, 1997, black-and-white multiple exposure photograph, 180x150 cm, Collection of DG Bank, courtesy of the artist

To "get back to myself" in such a situation – after the intensive period that participation in the Venice Biennale generated – can be understood in multiple ways, of which two are of paramount importance here. Firstly, she wanted to be able to concentrate on herself, to rethink her position as an artist, after a decade of a solo career that, in a sense, culminated with the Venice presentation. Secondly, she wanted to come back to her home in Łomianki, near Warsaw, and spend some time in her studio working alone on what she wanted to do, not what was required. This process of "getting to herself" resulted in the creation of the

first piece of what turned into the series *The Splendor of Myself*. In it, Kulik presents herself as a queen on a throne, wearing a splendid dress that resembles the robes worn at royal courts, and confronts the viewer with her majestic presence.

There are two images that come to my mind when I see *The Splendor of Myself*: Marina Abramović in the long red dress worn during her performance *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010,⁶ and Cate Blanchett in the final scenes of Shekhar Kapur's 1998 movie *Elizabeth*.

The juxtaposition of *The Splendor of Myself* with a photo of Marina Abramović in a red dress is less obvious, at least in visual terms. There is no single photo from *The Artist is Present* that became iconic and could be placed next to Kulik's work for comparative visual analysis. There are numerous photos showing Abramović during the performance (and beyond it) that nevertheless create a coherent image that I perceive as another statement by a woman artist about being a great one.

The (art) biographies of these two artists bear interesting convergences. They are almost of the same age (Abramović was born in 1946, Kulik in 1947), and were born and grew up in socialist countries, in families that were relatively well-off. Both artists worked with their male partners in duos for some time (Kulik with Przemysław Kwiek from 1971-1987, Abramović with Ulay from 1976-1988), then successfully developed solo careers after the partnerships broke up, with more success than their partners. What seems an interesting coincidence is that they both exhibited for the first time solo at the Venice *Biennale in 1997* (an event that was mentioned by Kulik when describing the circumstances under which she began making *The Splendor of Myself*).⁷ For both women it was an important moment in careers that subsequently thrived. (I will put aside a comparison of the scale of their success, in terms of international fame and money earned.)

Both *The Splendor of Myself* and *The Artists is Present* are works

in which their authors – women artists – confront the success they have achieved; likewise, both artists chose to create, through the use of a regal dress, a majestic self-image.

Abramović is known for her liaison with haute couture. In the 2012 film *The Artist is Present*, about her retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, there is a scene where she talks with Riccardo Tisci at the Paris Givenchy office about splitting up with Ulay, and adds “It was then that I said, ‘Oh god, I really like fashion.’ It was a kind of secret desire.” She not only began wearing haute couture, appearing with big names from fashion, but also began collaborating with them. I have never seen a photo of Kulik taken during a glamorous event; she seems to be completely indifferent towards fashion, much like she is towards the lives of celebrities. It seems that she chooses what is comfortable to wear and work in, and it is hard to imagine her dressing up for an event and playing the part of a star. An attentive observer will notice that she wears different earrings on different occasions, and that she fixes her hair in front of the camera, showing that she is not entirely indifferent to how she looks; yet, if we compare Kulik and Abramović, there is an abyss between their respective investments in clothing and appearance.

The above may resemble remarks from a lifestyle magazine, drawing the portraits of a vain artist and a modest one, yet I see this difference as strongly related to the type of art that these artists create, influencing their various strategies of self-representation as successful women artists. The self-images that Kulik and Abramović create in *The Splendor of Myself* and *The Artist is Present* have a lot in common, especially their majestic character; yet, while Abramović’s appearance – as with her art – is based on her presence, Kulik’s performance – understood in its wider sense, not just as an art event – could actually be titled *The Artist is Absent*. In her case, the dress is not only to cover, but to eliminate her body, paradoxically eliminating

her presence; to turn attention from this onto her dress and what it stands for – the wealth of images and the mastery of composition.⁸

The authors who mention *The Splendor of Myself* perceive it as a direct reference to portraits of Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland. Although this juxtaposition is justifiable, important, and inspiring (I have already mentioned scenes from the movie *Elizabeth* as my own visual association), I will return to it later, but concentrate first on other inspirations that are indicated by Kulik in her self-commentaries.⁹ The artist does not draw our attention to the British monarch, or at least not directly, so much as she does to the Spanish fashion that influenced what English rulers wore in the 16th century. As François Boucher, author of a book mentioned by Kulik as one of her inspirations, explained: “The prestige of Spain had then reached its highest point and continued until almost the end of the century. Even the hostility felt toward Spain in England, even the defeat of the Armada in 1588 could not weaken the influence of Spanish fashion, and the tendency to stiffness and solemnity symbolized by the ruff and farthingale had its origins at the court of Phillip II.”¹⁰ Spanish fashion of the time was a reflection of the wealth of the Kingdom of Spain and its Church, achieved through intensive colonization.¹¹ This inspiration is important, as it makes us realize that, when Kulik wears a dress similar to the robes worn at 16th-century Spanish and English courts, she is confronting herself with the issue of wealth. In her auto-commentary she explains: “‘The Splendour [sic] of Myself’ is related to my fondness for collecting. If I were a well-off person, I would busy myself with collecting, not necessarily art. In old times, rich ladies from the aristocracy collected precious things, jewellery, some curiosities. Because I do not have financial means at my disposal, I collect images. One could say I am rich in images. I dress myself in them.”¹²

Most commentaries point out that Kulik juxtaposes herself with Elizabeth I ironically, suggesting that she is underlining the

distance between them. Indeed, the exchange of the royal insignia for a cucumber and a weed (the “puff-ball” head of a dandelion) in particular, and also of the crown for a composition of dry plants, encourage such a reading.¹³ Yet this replacement of precious objects with common things is not, in my opinion, what should dominate our reading of the image. It introduces some light-hearted overtones, as if the artist wanted to counterbalance the pomposity of the image; we can read the statement “I am rich in images,” as “I am not that rich and I only have images,” but we can also hear her saying – and this is what I hear – “Maybe I am not rich in diamonds, but I am rich in images; I am good at collecting them, at mastering this collection, and this is what makes me a queen.” In one of her commentaries on *The Splendor of Myself* she says: “I decorate myself with what I feel strong in,” and concludes the whole statement with the words “it creates an atmosphere of joy in me.”¹⁴ Kulik decided to present herself as a queen, and titled this presentation, without false modesty, “the splendor of myself.” Even if we notice the auto-irony in these self-portraits, we must also admit that the images are nonetheless full of pride. Simultaneously (I will return to this later), they present a powerful woman as if she was isolated and solitary.

The dress is basically composed of (or “sewn” from) a large number of elements that come from Kulik’s photo archive. In the first three versions of the work she used various elements and arranged them differently, but the general design remained the same. In the fourth version the design changes slightly, and it takes a visibly different form in the fifth version. What also differentiates the versions is an additional element that accompanies her portrait. If we decide to compare Kulik’s works with Elizabeth I’s portraits,¹⁵ we can see that the former always correspond with elements present in different royal paintings. On the so-called “Ermine” portrait by Nicholas Hilliard (1585), an ermine, a living animal, is depicted, standing on the

queen's left arm. In Kulik's works this is replaced by a man – in fact, in each of the first three versions a different photo of a man was used: in versions one and two we see the figure of Robert Rumas on all fours; in version three he is replaced by Zbigniew Libera, also on all fours, but naked; and in version four there is the naked figure of Libera again, but this time sitting. These figures are larger than the small photos of a naked man that create the dress design, and they do not function as decoration. The juxtaposition of Kulik "as a queen" and these men, whose figures have been diminished in relation to her body and who are photographed in submissive positions, refers to the problem of power relations between genders that is often recognized by critics as one of the important subjects of Kulik's art. Here, as in many other works, she is presented as a dominant figure, and the men are subordinated. Yet what seems crucial to me in this relationship is that it does not have a private character, by which I mean that it is not an issue between Kulik and these particular men – young artists at that time, her models and friends; it is Kulik and her self-formation that are important here. One of the statements Kulik made about taking photos of Libera is telling. She wrote to Marek Bartelik: "In my photographs, Libera is a *defenseless* [my emphasis – AJ] figure. I do not know whether he is defenseless as a person and artist, or if he requires care and tenderness. But he is a brilliant model. He totally subjected himself to me. I was under the impression that while modeling he took himself out of reality and stripped himself of his conscience."¹⁶ Thus it is not Libera here, as a person or an artist, who is important for her and who she wants to dominate, but rather herself, her ability to be "the woman in charge of the formal process"¹⁷ and in possession of a huge archive.

When making the first three versions of *The Splendor of Myself*, Kulik could not have known the biographical movie *Elizabeth*, which was released in 1998 (she said that she finally saw it after the two other versions of the series were created),¹⁸

but it preposterously¹⁹ sheds new light on Kulik's work, and has certainly influenced my interpretation. The movie concentrates on the early years of Elizabeth I's reign: we see her elevated to the throne and countering internal and external threats; she is advised to marry to provide stability to her reign, but she is in love with an unsuitable candidate; she eventually quashes the threats, but decides to end her affair and not to marry at all. The final sequences of the movie show her transformation – via a short haircut, the whitening of her skin, and the wearing of a splendid (but above all stiff) dress – into the “Virgin Queen,” married to no one but England. The final intertitles suggest that what we have just observed was the birth of the powerful, independent queen who ensured England's Golden Age.

As absurd as this may sound, I notice some close similarities between Kulik and Elizabeth, or rather the Elizabeth from the movie. To say that, as Elizabeth becomes married to England, Kulik becomes married to Art, would sound pretentious, and it is not my intention to develop interpretation in this direction. Yet in *The Splendor of Myself* I see the culmination of the creation process of a self-conscious, self-reliant woman artist; a woman artist who does not need a man, or men, to achieve and support her position, and who is in possession of wealth, capable of mastering it, but also – which is of great importance – responsible for it.

Angela Dimitrakaki, when writing about the beginning of this process, the beginning of Kulik's solo career, points out a sense of adventure: “this was happening in the late 1980s, when Kulik's world had accelerated: her personal re-orientation, following the dissolution of KwieKulik, was matched by that of Poland's and the upturn of the premises on which her art-life nexus had so far been built. There was certainly a sense of adventure – Kulik uses this word.”²⁰ Dimitrakaki underlines Kulik's intellectual explorations and intensive search for new forms of art production and exposition. In another text, by Zofia Krawiec,

we read: "Zofia Kulik claims that it was a combination of eroticism, art, and the social situation between 1984 and 1992 that led her to develop her own artistic practice."²¹ Her life in that decade was more complicated than one might assume when they learn that her art-and-life-partnership with Kwiek ended in 1987 and her solo career began. The abovementioned text, from a book devoted to "love performances" ("works of art made by artists especially for the person they love"), based on Kulik's confessions, reveals a more turbulent image. Here we read, for example, that when she began working on her first individual show (which took place in Warsaw in May 1989),²² she noted: "Please be informed that I dedicate this exhibition to J. T. [...]" Besides, I explicitly state that the author of the exhibition is Kulik, without Kwiek."²³ "J. T." are the initials of Jerzy Truszkowski, a young artist with whom she began an affair in 1984. We also learn about her crisis in 1989, when the relationship with Truszkowski ended, and when her brother disappeared.

All of this can be seen together with the turbulence in political life. On June 4, 1989, a partly open parliamentary election took place, won by the trade union Solidarity, and followed by the formation of a non-communist government and the end of one-party rule. The political changes in Poland were accompanied by the need to re-organize life on all levels (including in the art world).

In *The Splendor of Myself I* we see Kulik a couple of years after these events, and there is no sign of such adventures or turbulence. In 1997, when Kulik made this first version of the work, she was already an established artist. That is not to say that her art would develop no further,



Zofia Kulik, *Self-Portrait with a Flag (Mandala)*, 1989, black-and-white multiple exposure photograph, 50x50 cm, courtesy of the artist

but rather to observe that she was aware, at that moment, that the road she had taken at the end of the 1980s was the right one, as it brought her recognition and appreciation. At that time, the artist was already admired by both Polish and foreign critics, which manifested itself in the form of numerous exhibitions, texts, and also an invitation to represent Poland at the 1997 Biennale. Kulik admits this herself, when she compares *The Splendor of Myself* to *Self-Portrait with a Flag* (1989), saying that they demonstrate two different moments in her career – the beginning of her solo career, and the moment when she felt she received “full confirmation from the outside for what I do.”²⁴ This is clearly visible in the works when one compares her two completely different head positions and facial expressions. In the case of *Self-Portrait with a Flag* we see her as if hesitant whether she should meet our gaze or look away (like “a hounded dog,” as she describes herself). In *The Splendor of Myself* she openly, calmly confronts spectators with self-confidence (despite obviously being exposed to our gaze).

This look is repeated in the later versions of *The Splendor of Myself*, made in 2005 and 2007. As I have already stated, the fifth version is the one that introduces major changes. Kulik changed the design of her dress and attributes, and the images of men were replaced by a composition where she holds her mother and her ex-partner (Kwiek) in her arms. If we reach for a specific portrait of Elizabeth I, *The Splendor of Myself V* could be juxtaposed with the Woburn Abbey version of the *Armada Portrait* (c. 1588). Here the queen’s hand rests on a globe below the crown of England, “her fingers covering the Americas, indicating England’s dominion of the seas and plans for imperialist expansion in the New World.”²⁵ Direct comparison is not the best method of interpretation here, as Kulik seem to loosely play with different images of Elizabeth I. Yet this juxtaposition, even if not intended and foreseen, is telling. She is no longer dependent on men, and neither on her family,

her closest relatives; it is rather the other way round – it is she who seems to take care of them.²⁶

In comparison with the versions created in 1997, there is one more significant change here: in the first three, a sickle was placed to the left of the artist's head. This looks like an emblem on a wall, probably taken from the communist symbol of worker-peasant alliance (the hammer and sickle). Kulik's art from the turn of the 1990s has been unanimously recognized by art critics and historians as referring to totalitarian systems, usually to communism and the way the individual functions within it. "If the critical dimension of Kulik's photomontages extends beyond the parameters of the Communist era to the present, it is then precisely insofar as they acknowledge and examine the after-life of the Soc-Age's idioms in the post-Communist psyche,"²⁷ observed Ewa Lajer-Burcharth. Another scholar, Piotr Piotrowski, assessing the validity of Kulik's observations, saw them as being aimed at the post-communist system rather than the post-communist psyche. He was convinced that the fall of communism did not actually entail the regaining of freedom, and he highlighted this explicitly in the text where he analyzed Kulik's works: "It would be naive to say that the societies of Eastern Europe are now free. If they are free, then they are only free from Soviet domination. The destruction of the Leninist-Stalinist state has been paradoxically accompanied by the revival of old demons such as nationalism, xenophobia, and intolerance, which could pose a much greater threat to our freedom than the presence of soldiers with five-



Zofia Kulik, *The Splendor of Myself V*, 2007, black-and-white multiple exposure photograph, 250x180 cm, courtesy of the artist

pointed red stars on their caps.”²⁸ As Piotrowski and Kulik would probably agree, the Catholic Church was responsible to a great extent for the “revival of old demons.” This has not been stated directly in any of Kulik’s interviews (while Piotrowski wrote about it multiple times), but we see her criticism expressed in multiple ways in her works. In *The Splendor of Myself*, the most visible aspect of this is the cross made of male nudes that Kulik situated on the opposite side of her head, as an element corresponding with the sickle.²⁹

The tension between the central position, interpreted as dominant, and subjugation to something larger was already present in Kulik’s earlier self-portraits. In the one most often recalled, *Self-Portrait with the Palace* (1990) from the beginning of the artist’s solo career, Kulik is presented as a figure who dominates the pictorial field, but simultaneously seems entrapped by several elements. The mandorla in which she is placed elevates her

symbolically, building comparisons with the Virgin Mary, but also encloses her within a narrow frame. She is holding the metal tip of a spear, so it seems that she is taking the symbolic power, but its sharp end points at her, as do the other peaks depicted here. At the time Kulik wrote:

Why am I not a joyful citizen? I have been hammered, we all have been hammered. Hammering implies a repetitive driving of a nail into something. And now it seems that I am struggling with some invisible blade which I try hard to turn away from me and point it outward – at others? It is not gentleness



Zofia Kulik, *Self-Portrait with the Palace (Mandorla)*, 1990, black-and-white multiple exposure photograph, 60x50 cm, courtesy of the artist

that fills me but the suppressed desire to attack. The only problem is the one of direction: to myself or from myself... By visualizing the 'subordination' do I appreciate and praise it, or do I mock it and abolish it? Accepting the 'subordinate' as my problem and theme, full of fear and hatred toward the situation in which the urge to subordinate occurs, I take an artistic revenge with every weapon (symbolic and formal) that has been used against me.³⁰

In *The Splendor of Myself V* the cross remained in place, but instead of a sickle there is a dead bird to the left of the artist's head, and the sickle now sits in the artist's left hand. This becomes a dangerous object in the hands of a proud queen – a tool in the hands of a woman who is presented not as being subjugated to the sickle, but able to utilize it. The translocation of this element strengthens the image of Kulik as a woman in power that was already present in the first versions of *The Splendor of Myself*. In a similar way, we could read it as the taking over of a political weapon, but now – in 2017 – it seems to lose its political dimension. The artist explains that the sickle was "bought in a garden shop," yet had "never been used in a garden,"³¹ but to use this as an argument would be false, as many elements from her immediate, private surroundings acquire political meaning in her works. The change rests more in the confrontation, in the work, of the sickle and a "family portrait" that may suggest battles other than political ones. This corresponds with a transformation that is visible in her art in more general terms, which became much less political at that time; series such as *Patterns*³² or the piece *Garden (Libera and Flowers)* include no political elements.

When asked whether she planned more versions of the work, Kulik answered: "This fifth version is not the one I had imagined in my head when I did it, so maybe I will make one more attempt. [...]" The point is that I still have not made the 'total' version where I am hardly seen anymore, as I'm immersed in the excess of

pictures-ornaments.”³³ This answer points to an important aspect of *The Splendor of Myself*, and to one more link between it and the picture of Elizabeth I as the Virgin Queen: the relationship between these women and the dresses they are wearing, dresses that should be perceived as indicating something beyond themselves – the British Empire, in the case of Elizabeth, and the archive, in the case of Zofia Kulik.³⁴ The women ostensibly possess the dresses, but – of their own free wills – still allow the dresses to dominate them. The women seem to disappear, which is clearly visible in the last scenes of the movie and in Kulik’s works, especially the final version of *The Splendor of Myself*.

Zofia Kulik says a lot in different interviews about the process of her emancipation as a woman artist; the first *The Splendor of Myself*, in 1997, marks the final stage of this. Yet it can also be perceived as the opening of a different period in her career, in which she functions as a “great woman artist,” and the consecutive versions of the work refer to the consecutive phases of this. The self-image she presents is paradoxical: we deal with both her ostentatious presence (for example, when we encounter her majestic figure in a gallery where one of the versions is being shown) and her absence (as her physical presence is hidden behind the gorgeous but extremely stiff dress). I do not see a contradiction in this, as Kulik – in her art and also in the way she functions within the art world – put her archive (of objects and images), and not her presence, first.³⁵ This was already clear in 1997 when the first version of *The Splendor of Myself* was created, and it became even stronger later, when Kulik made *From Siberia to Cyberia* – a monumental photomural consisting of thousands of screenshots of the artist’s television set that she has continuously collected since the 1970s – and when she began working on the KwieKulik Archive. Simultaneously, having succeeded with the self-emancipation process, she did not want to stop presenting herself as a person

proud of her artistic position, of her artistic wealth and powers. As for her plans for the final version of *The Splendor of Myself*, she says that she hasn't had the time to carry them out yet. There might be one more reason, besides the lack of time, for postponing it – some sort of self-defense, and a reluctance to ultimately disappear behind images, however important they are.

- 1 They worked together as KwieKulik between 1971 and 1987. "Self-Portrait: I am, however, myself, not somebody else. Bożena Czubak interviews Zofia Kulik," in *Zofia Kulik – Self-Portraits and the Garden*, ed. Bożena Czubak, ex. cat. (Warsaw: Galeria Le Guern, 2004), available at <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/autoportrety-ja-to-jednak-nie-ktos-inny/> (accessed August 21, 2018). The other is a text by Jerzy Truszkowski ("Córka, Matka, Partner," *Sztuka.pl* [September 2007]), which is devoted solely to *The Splendor of Myself V*.
- 2 "Self-Portrait: I am, however, myself, not somebody else."
- 3 *The Splendor of Myself IV* in 2015 and *The Splendor of Myself V* in 2017.
- 4 See <http://labiennale.art.pl/en/wystawy/47-art-exhibition/> (accessed August 22, 2018).
- 5 Zofia Kulik in: *Historia w sztuce / History in Art*, ex. cat. (Kraków: MOC AK, 2011), 256. In the MOC AK catalog, the date in the quote is given incorrectly as "1992" (information from the artist).
- 6 Abramović wore dresses in three different colors: a red one during the first month of the show, then a blue one, and a white one at the end.
- 7 Kulik had her exhibition in the Polish Pavilion, where she presented *Symbolic Weapon IV*, and Abramović presented *Balkan Baroque*, for which she received the Golden Lion.
- 8 One more difference could be noted: Abramović has her dresses made by other people – usually famous designers – while Kulik made her dresses herself, as if following her mother's occupation (as a seamstress), but working with photos rather than fabric.
- 9 Besides in Czubak and Truszkowski, the work is also analyzed in Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans, *Images Performing History: Photography and Representations of the Past in European Art after 1989* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 99-156.
- 10 François Boucher and Yvonne Deslandres, *20,000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment*

(*Expanded Edition*) (New York NY: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1987), 244.

- 11 The title *The Splendor of Myself* comes – as the artist explains, “from the catalogue of an exhibition in Northern Carolina, ‘Splendours of the New World’, subtitled ‘Spanish Colonial Masterworks’. The exhibition indicated the relation between the discovery of America, accompanied by the plunderage policy of the Spanish rulers and the splendour and riches of the Kingdom of Spain and the Church.” See “Self-Portrait: I am, however, myself, not somebody else.”
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 A different reading appeared in a television program “CTWOS – co Ty wiesz o sztuce [What Do You Know about Art?],” where art critic Bogusław Deptuła read these elements as underlining the transience of power, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivsr7oji_IA (accessed August 26, 2018).
- 14 “Zofia Kulik o swojej twórczości [Zofia Kulik about Her Art]” (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht4ajGz1Kow> (accessed August 26, 2018). It may not be mere coincidence that she made the piece when she turned 50, and *The Splendor of Myself V* at 60.
- 15 Some authors seem to suggest that Kulik referred to one particular portrait of Elizabeth I, but I do not find any evidence for this, and visual analysis of particular versions of *The Splendor of Myself* and different portraits of Elizabeth do not confirm it.
- 16 Marek Bartelik, “An e-mail conversation between Zofia Kulik and Marek Bartelik” (2006), <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/rozmowa-internetowa-z-zofia-kulik-rozmawial-marek-bartelik/> (accessed August 26, 2018). A similar remark can be found in Zofia Krawiec’s *Portrety trzech [Portraits of the Three]*: “A few years later, Zofia wrote: ‘It is possible to love someone not for that person but for what he (she) makes you, the kind of you that he creates. That’s because he elicits various kinds of your potential, he creates an aura in which you reveal a better part of yourself [...] Such feeling is not disinterested: you love the fuel that keeps your stove burning. [...]’ [...] Her notes from that period reveal an intensive search for a new way to follow,” in Zofia Krawiec, *Miłosny Performans [Love Performance]* (Warsaw: Lampa i Iskra Boża; Lublin: Galeria Labirynt; Tarnów: BWA Tarnów, 2016) (unpublished English translation made available by the artist).

- 17 Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "Old Histories: Zofia Kulik's Ironic Recollections," in *New Histories* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996), 127.
- 18 Email from the artist, August 20, 2018.
- 19 I am referring here to Mieke Bal's notion of "preposterous history." See Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 20 Angela Dimitrakaki, *The Struggle for Non-Alienation: Zofia Kulik's Work in Terms of Labor*, in *Zofia Kulik. Methodology, My Love*, ed. Agata Jakubowska (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, forthcoming). Kulik said: "This created a certain form of pleasure, both cognitive one and that which was related to a new exciting adventure," in "Bunt neoawangardowej artystki [The Rebellion of a Neo-Avant-Garde Artist]," *Artmix* no. 9 (March 2005). Conducted by Joanna Turowicz, the interview is available in English translation at <http://kulikzofia.pl/en/archiwum/bunt-neoawangardowej-artystki/> (accessed June 15, 2018).
- 21 Krawiec, *Portrety trzech*.
- 22 The first exhibition was *Wizualne idiomy socwiczca [Visual Idioms of the Soc-Ages]*, organized in 1989 at the ZPAF Small Gallery in Warsaw, followed by a show at the Postmasters Gallery in NYC a year later.
- 23 Krawiec, *Portrety trzech*. Kulik's note as of September 22, 1988.
- 24 "Zofia Kulik o swojej twórczości." The photo used in *Self-Portrait with a Flag* was taken in 1978 and used in some of KwieKulik's actions (information from the artist).
- 25 Andrew Belsey and Catherine Belsey, "Icons of Divinity: Portraits of Elizabeth I," in *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c.1540-1660*, eds. Nigel Llewellyn and Lucy Gent (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 11-35.
- 26 Both Helena Kulik, who came back from the US after retirement, and Przemysław Kwiec lived at the time in the house owned by Kulik.
- 27 Lajer-Burcharth, "Old Histories," 133.
- 28 Piotr Piotrowski, "Beyond the Old and New Belief," *Magazyn Sztuki* no. 10 (1996), 175.
- 29 In the first self-portrait, mentioned at the beginning of the text, there are reproductions of two stars from officers' distinctions and a holy medallion above Kulik. The artist explained in an interview that she received the latter for her new-born son from an

Italian nun she met in Italy in 1972: "Because the baby has never been baptised, it did not get the medallion as a present," "Self-Portrait: I am, however, myself, not somebody else."

- 30 Zofia Kulik, "Autokomentarz," *Magazyn Sztuki* no. 15-16 (1997), 214.
- 31 *The Splendor of Myself V*, ex. cat, (Berlin: ŻAK | BRANICKA, 2008), n.p.
- 32 Fragments of *Patterns* were used by Kulik in *The Splendor of Myself V*. Email from the artist, August 20, 2018.
- 33 Email from the artist, August 20, 2018.
- 34 Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans interprets it in a different way – she wrote about Kulik's dress as "the giant body-machine of the state," "the body of the Communist leader," and "the totalized collectivity," with individual bodies molded as cogs within it. Ruchel-Stockmans, *Images Performing History*, 131-132.
- 35 I am using the word "archive" after Zofia Kulik, yet it could also be called a collection.

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