



Angular Dynamics

Grey Crawford | Józef Robakowski

Exhibition: 14 September – 28 October 2023



Grey Crawford,
El Mirage #01, 1976

For this year's Berlin Art Week, Persons Projects is proud to present the duo exhibition *Angular Dynamics*, focused on early experiments with photography and film. As both media were oriented more toward image making, a lens-based practice of capturing what was in front of the camera, these kinds of experimentations were ground-breaking for later developments. This exhibition focuses on how these two experimental artists, Grey Crawford and Józef Robakowski, both from different political and artistic cultures, used their chosen mediums as a means to create and challenge the accepted borders of what art was at the time.

Grey Crawford's *El Mirage* (1975-78) series beginning in the mid-70s, consisted of numerous experiments using metal etching plates, glass panes, mirrors, wood, and darkroom manipulations in various performance-like positions on Mojave Desert lake bed in Southern California. What makes these early images important is how Crawford utilized the photographic process as a way to alter the physical scale of his angular configurations. The significance of these sculptures and visual performances, as pointed out by Lyle Rexer, "are not in what they reveal about a specific event or situation, but in how they reflect on everything around or beyond it: photography, sculpture, space, place, and perception." Crawford's use of different materials reflects his innate sense of activism, making art through the act of doing. His *El Mirage* series combines his knowledge of art history with his use of Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* to a more collaborative dialogue with his contemporaries at the time, such as Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, and Carl Andre.

Crawford's artistic roots were grounded in photography due to his academic studies at the Rochester Institute of Technology, yet his approach was more like a sculptor-painter. This unique combination afforded him the latitude to utilize the photographic process on his own terms. Unlike the other photographers in this era who championed New Topographics, Crawford's approach was far from neutral. His photographs weren't about capturing a view or a scenic something but enveloping an experience. He wanted to expand this dialogue by using a conceptual point of view and manifesting it through reality.

Józef Robakowski began his artistic experiments with photography and painting beginning 1958-67. This practice led him to go beyond the scope of how these mediums had been used at that time by creating installations that combined both objects with video. His concept of Energy of Art originates from his knowledge of Russian Constructivism and is based on Malevich's theory on image: In this hypothesis, a painting is an "energy screen" that the artist first saturates with his own creative life force, radiating back to the viewer. Robakowski's pieces are fueled by this natural state of Energy and emanate his intention to liberate the works from its non-structural elements. His use of energetic expressions combined with an investigative and analytical attitude are the central themes behind his artistic practice.

The Energetic Angles (1975-85) series consists of photographic works as well as drawings and paintings. These pieces are an example of the artist's fascination with the existence of angles in the form of intuitive geometry. This imaginary model, created in the human mind, has been the primary driving force of Robakowski's artistic activity. "I contemplate how geometry, whose aims can solely be practical in its intentions, can function in art. I decided to create the Angle as an energetic cultural sign in the form of a personal fetish in order to highlight this problem." By imposing geometry on reality, Robakowski investigates to what extent it can function as a purely abstract phenomenon.

In his video *Dynamic Rectangle* (1971), Robakowski translated its pulses into organic fluctuations of a red rectangle by filming through a mechanism with a diaphragm. The film is thus not just an abstract object of contemplation that references the traditions of the Soviet avant-garde but also a documentation of the movements of the animator's body as he tries, in real-time, to convey musical changes visually. It is also an early example of "pure cinema." We could almost think of it as a work that references the unfulfilled film collaboration between Hans Richter and Kazimir Malevich or the lost Berlewi film, all intended to expose the possibilities of abstract cinema fully.

Nearer-Further, a short video made in 1985 presents the process of recording the view from the window of the artist's home. Zoom manipulations mean that in close-ups, the black rectangle in front of the window turns out to be a mirror, reflecting the figure of the artist standing behind the immobile, tripod-mounted camera. The disappearance and reappearance of his image follow orders ('zoom in!', 'zoom out!') issued to the camera. This seemingly analytical work on the camera's technical capabilities turns into a kind of game with one's own image. *Nearer-Further* can be viewed as an allegory of Robakowski's 'own cinema': aiming the camera outside, beyond the window, he ends up filming himself filming.

Grey Crawford (*1951 in Inglewood, CA, USA) is one of the first artists from the West Coast challenging the photographic medium through his darkroom experiments. After receiving his BA degree from the Rochester Institute of Technology, he attended the Claremont Graduate University. His main body of work, *Umbra*, *El Mirage*, and *Chroma*, has been published in several books and incorporated into the collections of the Getty Museum, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and the Turku Museum in Finland, as well as in other major private collections.

Józef Robakowski (*1939 in Poznań, lives and works in Łódź, Poland) is a key figure in Eastern European art. He was an originator of the Polish Avantgarde as a member of the Workshop of the Film Form (1970-77) focused on an analysis of new media language and film and video. He has exhibited in some of the world's most important museums, such as Tate Modern, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.