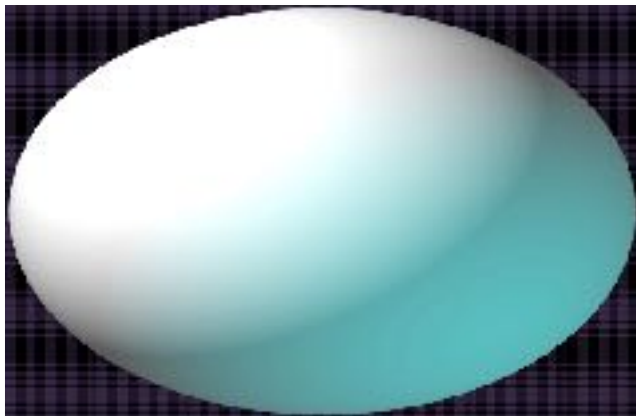


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Confrontation.

The event.

Steps out.

View.

Steps in.

"On Fire"

Break in.

The gift.

Imagine that one morning, on a Friday 13th, you wake up as you usually you do and do your morning routine, if you have one. Like mine was: peeing, stretching, bothering my boyfriend by deciding who's turn is to make coffee, try to find clean underwear, check facebook, wash face, dress up like a pantomime character in black and white striped shirt and black pants, drink coffee with an optional cigarette (David and Goliath, Dutch brand), check Instagram, take a morning selfie on the toilet while taking a shit and reading a dutch comic magazine, forget to have breakfast, kiss, key, another kiss, bike, cycle, arrive to Theatre Rotterdam. Obviously after this strong start of a morning I didn't have any clue about that it could have been a better decision to wear my favourite gloves or just take Esterházy Peter's¹ book with me, since he died few years ago, but dedicated that book for me before. Just because twelve hours later I lost everything, including my gloves and the book by Esterházy. During that night, after checking the focal point of some concave lenses, I had a bar shift at Wunderbar and I was just about to get annoyed by some drunk costumers around midnight when I got a phone call from an unknown number. My boyfriend was on the phone, in a panicky tone and his voice was just like Kurt Cobain playing a victim role in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. Out of his control, repeating the next sentence: *"Come home now, I'm watching our house burning down.."* So, what could I do, I cycled home like a maniac, the whole road was a blackout and then I was watching my house burning down.

photo

¹ Péter Esterházy (14 April 1950 – 14 July 2016) was a Hungarian writer. He was one of the best known Hungarian and Central European writers of his era. He has been called a leading figure of 20th century Hungarian literature, his books being considered to be significant contributions to postwar literature.

I'm not telling this story to remind you that every morning before leaving your house to be aware of a possible fire caused by an electricity shortcut, I'm telling you my story because this event made me able to document an unusual and bizarre interior of a living space after being destroyed by fire.

Capturing the moments or the evidences of a crime, a catastrophe, a war or a destroyed space are a few subjects in history which made an astonishing impact on photographers, on the media and on movie makers from documentaries to arthouse movies till Hollywood productions. The key of being able to tell and describe by images to other people how horrific and decaying these events are for human race and sometimes reminding about the global descending. By the time these documentations and art works, achieved to show us reality, were highly influencing how we think about empathy and visual manipulation. Example, before the Crimean War we didn't have photographed documentation on war time, when those pictures arrived to the public it shocked the world and changed the common attitude about how we saw wars before. "The Crimean War of the 1850s, after all, was arguably where the genre was born, with British photographers like Roger Fenton (1819 - 1869) and James Robertson (1813 - 1888), the Italian-British Felice Beato (1832 - 1909) and the Austro-Hungarian Carol Szathmari (1812 - 1887) making what most historians consider the very first photographs of a major military conflict. Their pictures might lack the often-brutal drama of modern war photography, but they nevertheless serve as compelling documentation of the look and, in a sense, the logistics of mid-19th century warfare."² All around the world artists felt the urge to express their thoughts and struggles as a reaction. From the moment, in my case, when I saw the destroyed interior of my apartment I knew that this experience will highly influence my life and my way of looking at my artworks.

6examples (photographs)

² Time Life Magazine, 30.11.2014., "Crimea: Where War Photography Was Born" by Ben Cosgrove

In another hand, similar images and footage were used in different context for pure propaganda to build fear and for manipulate the population. The world witnessed the dangerous and irreversible results caused by strongly discriminative propaganda of dictatorial regimes all around the world and it looks like a huge part of it still doesn't want to question it. For me it's not that difficult to see, for example how far the Hungarian government went recently by using provocative, sometimes fake footage in their propaganda against immigrants.

photo

My point here is that since photographers or movie makers are trying to communicate through capturing scenes of catastrophes, it doesn't matter if the reasons are political or artistic, the target audience is interested and influenced by it. All this can come from curiosity about the non known or from a fear that it can happen with you too. Large part of media strategies are based on shocking, by building a "buzz" and, often the most easiest way, by showing images which will 'freak you out'. The same thing happened with me, when I saw the first few photographs by neighbours and journalists taken about the event. It busted my imagination, I was upset and tried to face reality around the question: *"How is my house looking after this? Is there something left inside?"*

photo

We had to wait five days to figure this out, because the high level of toxics were too dangerous to breath in. Our last conversation with a fireman wasn't giving too much hope either, he said: *"Just forget what you had there, focus on the future."* I personally never have seen anything like this before, I didn't know anyone who lost her/his home and artworks in a fire. Soon I figured, that there are plenty of other artists who already went through similar experiences. I felt that I became part of an inner circle of artists who felt the same and started to focus on new perspectives to not feel pity for myself. It's really easy to get lost in this process emotionally and rationally, I was hiding my trauma and I was afraid to show that I was feeling weak. I lost my passports and all my official documents together with my artworks and underwear, I was a refugee without a house and even if my family was supporting me from Transylvania, I felt everyone and everything was too far from me to feel safe in The Netherlands.

photo

Artists studios have been burning down for centuries, but since I started to study several artists and their relationship with these events I realised that they are also looking for a metaphorical understanding and translation of the moments after fire. One book by author Jonathan Griffin, titled *'On Fire'* had an essential impact on me, he asked ten contemporary artists how they recovered after their studios went up in flames. Talking to them, he gained surprising insights into their working methods, their relationship to their chosen profession, and their reasons for making art. *'On Fire'* is at once an oral history of the phenomenon of the studio fire, a catastrophic but potentially transformative event in the lives of a surprising number of artists and a behind-the-scenes look at daily life in the artist's studio. As Griffin

writes in his introduction, "For each of these artists there was an instant when time spun on its axles, when they realised that the tiny refuge of safety and freedom that they had won for themselves was gone. It would take months and years, resources and resolve to claim it back." But in the process, something unexpected and valuable career-altering, as in many cases was revealed to them about the stakes and the possible rewards of their lives as artists.

On Fire includes writing on Matthew Chambers, Anthony Pearson, Christian Cummings, Catherine Howe, Erik Van Lieshout, JP Munro, William J. O'Brien, Kate Ruggeri, John Riepenhoff, and Brendan Fowler. As fortune works, one of these artists is a Rotterdam based contemporary artist, mostly known about his installations and movie works. Erik Van Lieshout has been working on projects located in the South of Rotterdam, in the neighbourhood of my old house.

...conversation with Erik van Lieshout...

photo

The urge to work with the photographs and footage material I collected in the burned house is coming from a realisation of *simplicity and complexity of beauty* in the blackest and darkest way. The simplicity of the space and the complexity in the details of the images, the details in the blackness of them. The fact that you are looking at images, which were taken in a regular apartment and they are mostly reminding you of an abandoned building made me think about the possibilities of experimenting with different layers. My first exhibition after the fire, where I presented some of the photos was based on this research, I used transparent papers, clear films and baking papers for printings, unconsciously already then I was looking for ways to deconstruct the images and trying to hide behind of them. It took me few months to admit that I was running away from the confrontation to look at these photographs without thinking that they are kitsch and to realise the potential impact as a curse or a gift.

-photos of the exhibition and details of the transparent papers

I would like to continue with the next main points:

- the break in the old house a year later (documentation from a new perspective)
- new works 'back in black'
- conclusion.