

Sława Harasymowicz: H.N.5 515

H.N.5 515 is a new work from London-based artist Sława Harasymowicz which fuses personal biography and documentary records to explore one of the biggest World War II maritime disasters; one that remains obscured in history and clouded in ambiguity.

On 3 May 1945 in Neustadt Bay near Lübeck, three anchored German ships, Cap Arcona, Thielbek and SS Deutschland, were torpedoed by RAF Hawker Typhoons. Unknown to the British pilots, the ships were populated by thousands of primarily Polish and Russian prisoners evacuated from Neuengamme concentration camp. In the camp, prisoners were 'employed' to construct miniature detonators for anti-aircraft rockets using tools that included magnifying glass and tweezers. The production of these timed mechanisms proved poignantly if ironically futile in confrontation with the fighter-bomber planes.

As a way of unpacking the personal and public significance of this event and interrogating the impulses of destiny, timing and control, Harasymowicz juxtaposes drawing, print, found footage, archives and sound. The result is a potent and multilayered audio and object installation, in which distant voices and buried stories compete for attention as we try to make sense of the richness and density of material. A variety of narratives reverberate and overlap, bringing together the ordeal of the victims and their unwitting perpetrators whilst further interweaving the artist's family history. The project seeks to examine universally inherent tensions between images, words and historical records in reconstructing and invoking memory.

The title of the exhibition refers to numeric codes that the camp prisoners were marked with in place of their names. The same numbers as subsequent archival references continue to designate their memory. In this case the code H.N.5 515 is revealed to hold a particular resonance for the artist as it denotes her maternal great-uncle, who perished on board of SS Thielbek at the age of 31, having endured four years as a political prisoner in Neungamme.

Recalling Walter Benjamin's mnemonic excavations, **H.N.5 515** is conceived as a three-chapter interrogation that exposes the inherent tensions between images, words and historical records when reconstructing and invoking memory and continues Harasymowicz's interest in exploring contradictions of history, archive and representation.

The installation forms an investigative *bricolage* that does not aim to 'tell history'; instead Harasymowicz questions the usefulness of an archive and the notion of historical value, interrogating and provoking tensions between subjective memory, imagination and collective knowledge. How are the hierarchies set, and how can they be destabilised, in the ways we remember and forget?

After this inaugural presentation, which has been specially configured for the space at Centrala, the project will be reformed at Narrative Projects in London next summer, and culminate in a final evocation at The Poetry Library, Southbank Centre, at the end of 2016.

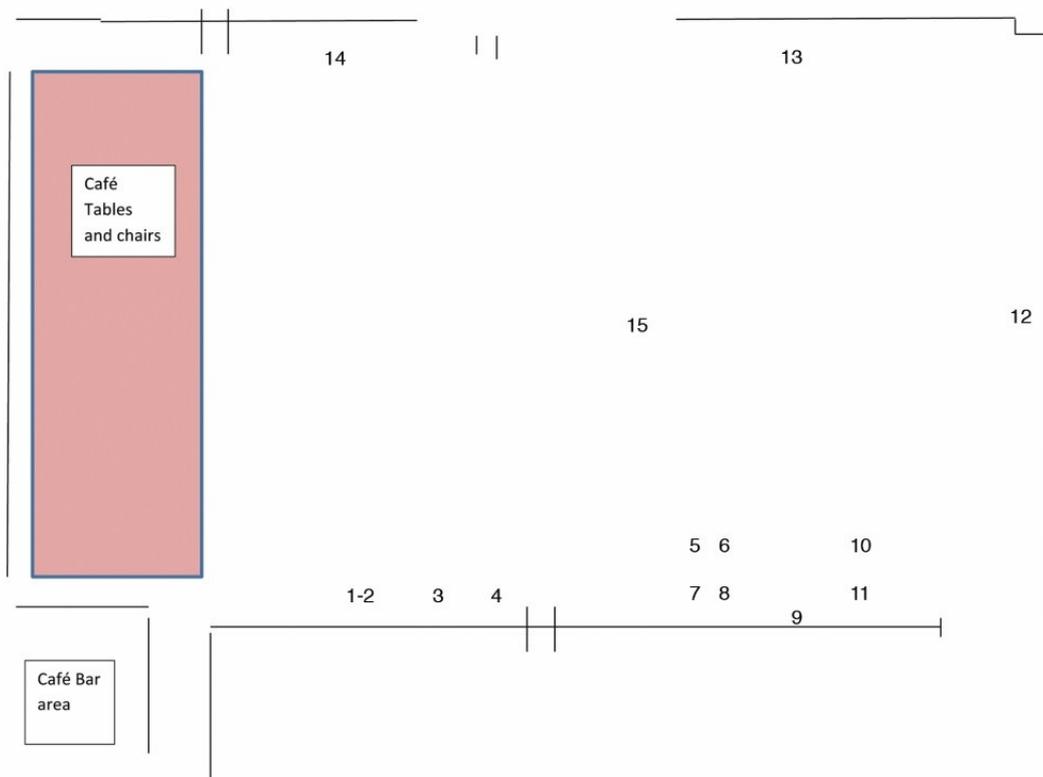
With thanks to:



International Tracing Service ITS-Arolsen; Murnau Stiftung; Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial; Pomorska Branch Historical Museum of Kraków; USHMM Washington DC & Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive

Sława Harasymowicz is a Polish-born, London based artist. Graduate of the Royal College of Art, she is currently a PhD candidate at University of the Arts, London. Her practice negotiates the positions between the personal and the public in exploring questions around history, memory and identity. Her solo exhibitions include *Ersatz*, Ethnographic Museum, Kraków (2014), *Wolf Man*, Freud Museum, London (2012), and *Playhunt* at temporarycontemporary London (2009). Harasymowicz is a published artist, including *Wolf Man*, a graphic novel based on Sigmund Freud's case study (2012). Her work is held in V&A Prints and Drawings Permanent Collection and other public and private collections.

Gallery Map:



1-2 screenprint on paper

3 original letters from Neuengamme camp, 1941

4 screenprint on paper

5 image transfer with drawing on card

6 oil-based crayon drawing on paper

7-8-9 screenprint on paper

10-11 drawing-based screenprint on paper

12 film, silent, 4'53", loop

13 sixteen screenprints, stencil on sandpaper

14 two image transfers with drawing, optical PVC

15 sound, 22'39", loop

Vitrines: original archival material, xerox copies, drawing, print, image transfers on card, 1930s Junghans pocket watch