

Sonia Rammer

An artist, psychologist, traveller, an academic at the University of the Arts in Poznań, a researcher of psychological aspects of the practice and theory of art. She has taken part in collective exhibitions (e.g. Arsenal Poznań, BWA Bielsko-Biała, Wozownia Toruń, BWA Wrocław, Artists House Jerusalem, Israel; Studio 18 Gallery New York, USA), solo exhibitions (e.g. BWA, Gorzów Wielkopolski; Wieża Ciśnień, Konin; Arsenal Poznań; Art Stations Stary Browar Poznań; Galeria Student Ostrava, Czechia; Baer Art Center, Hofsos, Iceland; Marpha Foundation, Marpha, Nepal) and conferences. An author and co-author of texts on the phenomenon of artistic creativity from the psychoanalytical perspective. In 2019 she earned her post-doctoral degree in the Visual Arts in the discipline of Fine Arts.

The artist's focus is the human being, human existence, emotions, fragility, and memory. She is interested in the ambivalent role played in the world by the individual, who is simultaneously a part of nature and an element invariably conflicted with it. Travelling, also understood in a metaphorical way, is an important inspiration for her.

May You Find Your Inner Yeti

Until recently, I used the geographical names of the countries Nepal and Tibet interchangeably. This kind of unintentional ignorance happens to many Europeans trying to locate distant places on the world map. Why did the Western world want to prove the existence of the yeti? The presence of the yeti in Sherpas' legends is probably connected with taming the fears that accompany mountain hiking and encounters with wild animals. What caused the imaginary snowman to leave the pages of legends and migrate to Europe? Faith in the yeti allows highly developed societies to establish their representation in the natural world. It also allows us to take a safe look at human qualities, though not socially accepted. After all, it is an expression of a longing for a "return to the forest", for something primordial, instinctive and beyond reason. The desire to explore the puzzle of the yeti and to reach the least accessible areas seems to be a complex issue concerning the attitude of the homo sapiens towards wildness per se. The relationship humans adopt towards the wild is at least ambivalent. The desire to know is often accompanied by a desire to domesticate, while fascination is mixed with horror. The desire to discover the yeti is tantamount to the desire to know oneself, sometimes concealed deeply. The yeti as a hybrid being, a bit human and a bit animal. Neither entirely human nor animal, it contains various unwanted and therefore most likely displaced elements of human nature.

In 1957, Wisława Szymborska published a poem entitled *Notes from a Nonexistent Himalayan Expedition*, part of the poetry volume *Calling Out to Yeti*. Already more than fifty years ago, the poet was doubtful about the condition of mankind. An attempt by a lyrical subject to encourage the yeti to return to the orderly human world ends in failure. The yeti remains in the high mountains. Interestingly, the "snowman" does not respond to the cry, there is no dialogue; perhaps it was broken a long time ago and its reconstruction is impossible. The cry to the Yeti accompanied me on my journey to Nepal, and the slightly transformed title of the poem eventually became the name of an art project that started in the small village of Marpha in Lower Mustang. *Calling out to Yeti* is a performative and tran-

sdisciplinary project. By evoking a creature, the Yeti, I once again tried to define the relationship of contemporary man to nature as well as his sense of connection with the surrounding “uncivilized world”. Taking into account the most important elements of the project, one could consider it from two perspectives. One comes close to introspection, the other is connected with an anthropological attitude. First and foremost, however, *Calling out to Yeti* is a story about obliterating borders: between fiction and reality, nature and culture, east and west, science and crypto-science, *news* and *fake news*. It is likewise a story about the collapse of binary oppositions, which are of no use for the description of the world. Finally, it is a story about a road and a creative process contained in the road. Thanks to the stay in Nepal, the project gained another layer, becoming a story about the environment destroyed by humans, one where the yeti could not live, even if it would. I used the material collected during the residency in my solo exhibition at AT Gallery¹. The film, a mockumentary titled *The Secrets of the Himalayas* screened in the gallery, ushers in a comprehensive project where I will take care of a non-existent species. The sixteen-minute movie transports the viewer into the Himalayas, and the yeti, thanks to the narrative and pictures, becomes a creature out of a nature film. Initially, the recipient is introduced into the character of the Kali Gandaki Valley, but the yeti appears later as a result of a surprising observation. The film, though it may seem funny and light on the first level of reception, has a broader interpretative context. The narrative that builds the image began in my performative Nepalese experience (in the film I appear as a yeti) as well as in my reflection on the role of hybrid (human-animal) beings in building relationships between man and nature and with oneself. The nature of the narrative, seemingly objective and pseudo-documentary, and the voice of the lector allowed me to discretely convey something personal. The film is constructed by blurring the border. It is not entirely clear which information spoken by the narrator is fake news and which is true; whether it is about friendly nature or about loneliness and alienation, which become an experience that transgresses the boundaries of a species. Finally, the film touches upon the problem of the creative possibilities of the word and the relationship between word and image. Funny scenes are accompanied by a serious commentary and it is up to the viewer to decide which message will become paramount. Unjustifiably objective, the text refers to nature films from the 1970s, offering a narrative that the viewer was simply supposed to believe in. At the AT Gallery, there has been one more significant breakthrough of a boundary. The yeti from the film appeared in the exhibition space; he sat down in the far corner of the room and became one of the viewers. He was “reading” a poem by Wisława

» 1 Sonia Rammer, *Calling Out to Yeti (I)*, AT Gallery, Poznań, 19th-29th Nov. 2019.

Szyborska, emblazoned on a wall and translated into Nepali. With his back to the viewers, he was taking care of himself and it was hard to say how much and whether he was alienated at all and whether he was closer to Nepalese peaks or to poetry, or maybe to both? After all, these need not be either-or worlds which are mutually exclusive. ●