

Bonus Episode #3 The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast - Written Edition!
Michał Gałtarek - Antynatalizm - odsłona druga
02.03.2021 - 31.03.2021
At Galeria Arttrakt

Who is Michał Gałtarek?

I am a painter and sometimes I create electronic music. I graduated from the painting department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław. I live and work in Wrocław.

Are you an Antinatalist, Michał? If so, why? And if not, why?

I do not consider myself as a follower of Antinatalism in the sense of a follower of another ideology. Nor do I believe that Antinatalism is the ultimate answer to the problems of our world. In my opinion, the main source of the threat of a climate disaster is not the overpopulation of the world, but the non-ecological industry. This is one point humanity should focus on first. As for Antinatalism itself, it is an interesting idea for me, an attitude towards life as such. Its growing popularity says a lot about our time. I like Schopenhauer's philosophy for its pessimistic and critical, and therefore exceptionally sober, attitude towards human existence as such. Antinatalism seems to me quite similar in this aspect. In my opinion, humans are degenerate children of nature which would do better without them. However, it is worth remembering that we all sit on its branch. Let us not kid ourselves to the contrary.

Have you been making art all your life? Do you work in other mediums in addition to Painting?

I draw and paint from an early age. When I was a teenager, I broadened my field of interest to music. Then I started playing the keyboard and then the piano. However, I have never studied in this direction and I've never got any formal education in this area. Since 2009, I have been implementing a music project called Der Slapstick Tod. Its name is a small tribute to the German silent expressionist cinema.

In the future, I would like to try my hand at creating animated films. It would be a perfect opportunity to combine my painting visions with my tracks or soundscapes.

Who and/or what are your greatest artistic influences?

My favorite painters are Andrzej Wróblewski, Francis Bacon, Edvard Munch and Philip Guston. All four were outstanding painters of human existence, which is the most important topic for me. When it comes to contemporary artists, I really like the works of Manuel Ocampo and Aleksandra Waliszewska.

What inspired this series of paintings?

Many different things. The first inspiration was the novel by Kurt Vonnegut entitled Galapagos.

He touched upon the subject of the end of humanity several times. In the Galapagos, this takes the form of humans mutating into something like seals, and in this form they achieve harmony by living together in the world. This is perhaps the most optimistic of his visions of the end of humanity. Because, for example, in the Cat's Cradle, for a change, life is completely annihilated

when a certain substance freezes water all over the Earth. It even says that people are simply too stupid to survive.

I also came across a popular science article about a jellyfish species that can resume its life cycle. It returns to its original form, something like a polyp, and starts growing again. Theoretically, if it were to take place under ideal conditions, it could play endlessly. Later, I started reading other jellyfish texts which started to get me more and more drawn. At first, I thought it was a silly, threadbare theme - there are many visually appealing jellyfish images that they can make as the wallpaper on the desktop. So I needed some time to get it right. In the end, I decided to paint jellyfish that triumph over human remains after the great flood. I called this cycle "New Atlantis". Later, the time has come for pictures of deserted suburbs and post-industrial landscapes. As for the word "Antinatalism" itself, I don't remember the first time I heard it. However, I decided that the reference to this concept in the title of the series would reflect its content well.

Were there similar themes in your work even before this Antinatalist series? How does this series of painting differ from your previous work?

The earlier series called "New Atlantis" is closely related to "Antinatalism". The subject of immortal jellyfish, however, relates more to the concept of post-anthropocentrism.

What have been some of the reactions to your work that you've encountered so far? And specifically how have people reacted to your use of Antinatalism as subject matter?

Overall, I have had a positive reaction to my work. The very concept of Antinatalism appears and is described more and more often by the Polish media. There are also Antinatalist groups on social networks.

In recent times it does seem like Poland is slowly emerging as a place of some very strong Antinatalist activity - Are you connected at all with the Antinatalist community in Poland? And if so, how would you characterize the community there?

I am following a certain group of anti-natalists on Facebook. Most of its members are young people under 30, with different views. Some people's comments point to a very classist way of thinking. This is manifested by contemptuous criticism of large poor families with many children. In my opinion, Antinatalism should be seen more as something positive, open and concerned with the future of the world. Under no circumstances should it be associated with a lack of empathy. Fortunately, there is no shortage of people who understand Antinatalism this way.

Antinatalism is of course controversial in any part of the world, but do you feel that it's been especially hard at all to be vocal about this idea in Poland? Especially considering the recent ban on abortion there, it's hard for me to think that you wouldn't experience some push back?

The problem with the situation in Poland consists mainly in depriving women of the right to decide about their own bodies by the authorities and the church. Huge protests across the country have shown, however, that the girls are in solidarity and that the vast majority of society supports them. Right-wing parties have repeatedly used the topic of restricting access to abortion

as a bogeyman. This time they made a big mistake that Polish women will not forget.

A year ago, I painted a three-part painting called Totem, which commented on the way the Catholic Church and the authorities treat women in Poland. In the triangular image, the figure of a woman with an embryo on her face is surrounded by the figure of a priest and a judge. This work received a generally positive response from viewers.

Do you read books on the subject of Antinatalism? Do you watch videos on the subject online? Are you at all involved in the online Antinatalist community?

I have yet to read a book solely devoted to the topic of Antinatalism. On the other hand, reading Marek Fisher's 'Capitalist Realism' turned out to be a great summary of my painting series. It is for this reason that I decided to put it in my painting entitled Free Time. It is the only work from the series Antinatalism that was created after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Besides, I saw some short videos on YouTube explaining what Antinatalism is today in its local and global version. After my exhibition at the Bielska BWA Gallery, I was invited to join the Facebook group of Antinatalism by their admin. I accepted the invitation. However, I am not an active member. As a rule, more of an observer than a participant. I do not participate in forums because I prefer individual conversations.

Are you failure at all with a recent book that's been written about in Poland, also called Antynatalizm by the photographer, Mikołaj Starzyński?

This is the first time I've heard about this book, but thank you for your recommendation. I'll check it out. I have a book of Ewa Bińczyk on my reading list entitled "The Age of Man. Rhetoric and apathy of the Anthropocene". It is not devoted to Antinatalism as such, but addresses topics that are important to every Antinatalist.

Antinatalism is often broken up into 4 general schools of thought, Child free, VHEMT, Antinataism & EFILism - do you have any thoughts on each? Is your personal Antinatalism characterized by any one of them, or perhaps a combination?

Well, I'm almost 36, don't have children, and to be honest, I don't feel the slightest need to change that (apart from my concern about Antinatalism itself). If that makes me a child free person then I am one of them. I said at the beginning of our conversation that I think nature would do best without us. It is true. However, we are a creation and a part of it, and I am aware that people will continue to reproduce regardless of the consequences. I am not going to convince anyone of my model of life because I believe it is a matter of personal choice. Generally, I declare myself a pro-choice person.

I was thrilled to learn that your 2020 Antynatalizm show at Galeria Bielska BWA included the production of a beautiful Katalog all about the show - it's truly exciting to see a publication of this kind, truly the first of it's kind in the Anti-Natal world! (My copy is on the way!) What can you tell me about the Katalog?

Katalog includes a great text by Ada Piekarska, the curator of my exhibition at

Galeria Bielska BWA, entitled It Is Easier to Imagine the End of the World than the End of Man. There is also a record of an interesting conversation that art critic Piotr Policht had with me. The graphic design and photos of the paintings and the exhibition were undertaken by Krzysztof Morcinek. I really like the minimalist cover of this publication.

If I'm not mistaken, the first time you showed your Antynatalizm series of paintings was in 2020 at the Galeria Bielska BWA , and now this new show at Galeria Arttrakt will be a part 2 installment - how has the series changed since the last time? Does the new show at Galeria Arttrakt feature new paintings?

Yes, that's right. The exhibition at the Arttrakt Gallery will be slightly smaller than the one at Galeria Bielska due to the smaller size of the white cube and will only include works from 2017-19. However, the work that was created in June 2020 will appear for the first time.

I really appreciate that a lot of your imagery is not necessarily what most people expect from visual depictions of Anti-Natal concepts. Can you tell me a little bit about your thought process in converting Antinatalism into a visual language?

Overall, my work is a mix of different inspirations. Music is one of the most important. In addition, various kinds of memories of places, events and conversations, as well as movies and read texts. It is quite a complicated process.

I'm curious about both the presence of people in some of the painting in your Antynatalizm series, and then the stark absence of them in others - it almost feels like you are telling a story of both a pre-extinction, and post-extinction world at the same time - is there a narrative or story behind these images that you are illustrating for us in this series?

I try to avoid telling stories. I believe that painting is not a suitable medium for this purpose. While working on a given cycle, I focus more on thematic coherence. However, these are not specific stories, but rather a collection of images with a similar theme and mood.

I'm fascinated by the fact that with a few exceptions, there is an absence of many familiar horror tropes in these painting, where as in other examples of other artists working within the subject of Antinatalism, horror icons are a bit of a go-to practice - was there a continue decision on your part to avoid darker, horror themed references at all?

In my opinion, reality gives us strong enough impressions. For this reason, my works are closer to realistic representations. I try to get as much out of the observation of my surroundings as possible. Even in the most banal theme, there is something very disturbing. However, looking for horror scenes is not my job. All I want is to point out the threats of the present day. The most frequent themes of my paintings are alienation, the crisis of social relations, ecological catastrophe and oppression of power.

I've noticed that there are some depictions of animals within this series, and I wonder if you could tell me about your decision to include animals within these paintings? As you may know, A great deal of Antinatalism

does extend to include all sentient life within it's consideration, and so I wonder if in the world you are depicting - have the animals survived after human extinction? Or have they, like the humans, eventually left these sometimes devoid-of-life-landscapes? And if they have, in your mind, is they're extinction a positive or negative thing?

In my works, animals are most often presented as victims of human cruelty. There are a few exceptions, however. These are mainly jellyfish that survive mankind after the Great Flood, the vision of which I presented in the previous series of works entitled New Atlantis. Another example of triumphant animals are the ravens in the painting entitled Fog. They are the universal symbol of impending doom. On the other hand, the fish I painted in the painting "Forest Party" I would describe as a victim without a voice.

Are you failure at all with the term 'Anthropofugal'? The great Antinatalist historian, Karim Akerma talks about Anthropofugal art, or paintings without people, as being one of the oldest examples of an Antinatalist expression existing within the fine arts. Is this a concept you have heard of before, and are you continuously working within it?

The term anthropofugal is familiar to me, although it appears extremely rarely in Polish texts on art (almost never at all). Personally, however, I do not limit myself to presenting empty landscapes. Human figures appear in my paintings many times. However, their presence is not a necessity. It all depends on the topic I want to raise in my work.

Antinatalism is not a subject that been very widely exploring in the arts yet, but I feel there is a huge wealth of untapped possibilities in using Antinatalism as artistic subject matter - do you feel that this is likely to be a subject matter more artists exploring in the future?

The idea of Antinatalism is not a modern invention. It appeared much earlier in world religions, the history of philosophy or poetry. Perhaps, it was not referred to this word. Currently, as it is easy to observe, Antinatalism has become quite popular due to the growing anxiety about the future of our planet. These problems will not end, so the idea of Antinatalism will continue to circulate.

Do you consider yourself an Antinatalist activist? Do you think of your work as an act of Antinatalist activism?

I think that is too much to say. I am interested in this idea as such, but I do not belong to any of group of activists.

Do you think that Antinatalism will continue to be a subject that will inspire your work?

I think yes. Perhaps it will not be the main topic as in the case of the last series. I think, however, that its echoes will still be heard.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read and answer my questions, Michal! Your work is beautiful, and I wish I could come to the show! I wish you great success, and hope that the Antinatalist community in Poland comes out to help support the show!

Thank you very much :)

Follow Michał Gałarek here:

Blog: <http://mgpaintings.blogspot.com/>

Instagram: Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/m.gatarek/>

2021 Show:

Facebook event page: <https://www.facebook.com/events/253931156174510>

<https://www.arttrakt.pl/en/wystawy/1543-antynatalizm-ods%C5%82ona-druga.html>

<https://artinfo.pl/wydarzenia/michal-gatarek-antynatalizm-odslona-druga>

<https://stayhappening.com/e/micha%C5%82-g%C4%85tarek-antynatalizm-ods%C5%82ona-druga-E2ISTGQ6TB9>

2020 Show at Galeria Bielska BWA:

<http://galeriabielska.pl/en/exhibition/michal-gatarek-antinatalism>

<https://magazynszum.pl/antynatalizm-michala-gatarka-w-galerii-bielskiej-bwa/>

Katalog - Buy it below!

<http://galeriabielska.pl/en/shop/product/michal-gatarek-antinatalism>

Der Slapstick Tod Music:

<https://soundcloud.com/der-slapstick>

<https://soundcloud.com/derslapstick2>

<https://derslapsticktod.bandcamp.com/>