

REAL
ART WAYS

56 ARBOR STREET
HARTFORD CT 06106
860 232 1006
REALARTWAYS.ORG

This exhibition is a result of Real Art Ways' "Next" competition in 2005, which requested proposals from emerging artists living in New York or New England. "Next" was juried by Nicholas Baume, Chief Curator, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and Holly Block, Executive Director, Art in General, New York City.

The exhibition was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



Real Art Ways is a multidisciplinary contemporary space, with an emphasis on supporting contemporary artists, fostering the creation of new work, and working in creative ways with community. Programs include music, performance, spoken word, film and video, and visual arts, including exhibitions and public art projects, and creative social events designed to connect people with each other. Founded in 1975, Real Art Ways is an alternative to mainstream museums and commercial culture; its programs are made possible by a diverse and growing audience and support from a wide range of enlightened funders.

Adam Niklewicz



The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers, 2006, installation view (front).

A Slice of Adam Niklewicz

By Marek Bartelik

The well-known 1927 photograph of Federico Garcia Lorca and Salvador Dali posing gracefully, looking like a pair of exalted scissors, found its way into the imagery of Adam Niklewicz's mixed-media installation *The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers* (2006) in part by chance, as a result of his flipping through the pages of a book on Dali, an artist whom he has admired since childhood. Niklewicz responded to the mood in the photograph, which he found "a bit theatrical, ridiculous, and innocent—all at the same time."¹ Two full-size beekeepers central to his installation mimic the poses of the Spaniards in the photograph, but their physicality exceeds the mere copying of the referential motif, demanding a separate interrogative reading beyond or perhaps just after the original, while also suggesting a collapsing of the difference between the self and the Other. Suspended in time remains "the emphatic truth of gesture in the important moment of life," of which Charles Baudelaire had once spoken—and which Roland Barthes recalled in his discussion of the obtuse meaning of images, the one that is counterlogical and yet "true."²

To conceal the true identity of two beekeepers, Niklewicz turned them into automatons with sculpted white torsos attached to prosthetic wooden legs and physiognomies hidden under hybrid protective bee hats. They look vague enough to pass for the personages from a twentieth-century Polish family legend about Siamese twins who were born joined at the waist and, despite their condition, became highly successful beekeepers. Their religious family welcomed this

Polish-born Adam Niklewicz earned his BFA in graphic communications from Washington University in 1989 and his MFA in sculpture from SUNY Purchase in 2006. In fact, the Real Art Ways presentation of *The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers* doubled as his master's thesis exhibition. Niklewicz is the recipient of the International Sculpture Center's 2006 Outstanding Student Achievement in Contemporary Sculpture Award. His work has been featured and discussed in the *New York Times*, *Sculpture Magazine*, and the *Nation* and shown at such venues as ArtSPACE, Galerie fur Landschaftskunst (Hamburg, Germany), the New Britain Museum of American Art, the Stamford Museum, Pelham Art Center, Grounds for Sculpture, and Zacheta (Warsaw, Poland).

REAL
ART WAYS

vocation as a patriotic act of some sort, heroic for a country that was described by Ibrahim ibn Jakub (or Abraham ben Jacob)—a Jewish traveler, merchant, and diplomat of Arab origins who visited Poland in the tenth century—as “a land flowing with milk and honey,” in other words, the Promised Land. Further studies revealed that the twins managed to establish a successful business after they had consulted the writings of Father Jan Dzierzon, a pioneer of modern apiculture and apiculture who invented a beehive with detachable cells and, therefore, serendipitously created the first mobile.

Once put in motion, the beehive took on its own life—attached as much to a Polish farmland and Polish history as to the Philippines, or Mikhail Gorbachev’s forehead, which, as Niklewicz has observed, features a birthmark that bears remarkable resemblance to a map of the Philippines. As if anticipating a gradual death of the friendship between Lorca and Dalí initiated by taking the photograph, in 1927 a swarm of bees attacked a group of seventeen vacationing critics (who pretended that they were schoolteachers) in a Pszczela Wola resort, causing seventeen deaths, and also forcing an influential art magazine, *Forum sztuki*, to close. Although those events were originally viewed as unrelated, later studies, particularly those prompted by the discovery of the butterfly effect, proved that they were, in fact, totally interconnected.

Bees surrounded Niklewicz during his childhood: “I spent long summers at my grandparents’ country house helping my beekeeper-grandfather. Part of the huge apiary was managed by

The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers, 2006, installation view (rear).



The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers, 2006, partial installation view.

my uncles—identical twins.”³ Insects appear in contemporary art with great persistence, crawling from under the floor of artists’ imaginations and metamorphosing in front of our eyes once unleashed by Ovid, long before Niklewicz was born and, then, became an artist. In Ilya Kabakov’s work, flies stand for the artist’s double; they are metaphors both of his image and of freedom. For the Russian artist, what is most unusual about the fly is the fact that it is “some sort of flying observation apparatus” that “can fly back to Leonardo’s time or perhaps to the time of Pharaohs.”⁴ In Jan Fabre’s “insect-sculptures,” made of iridescent jewel beetles, arthropods are agents of a death wish, but “a non-negative death-wish that takes a form of vital energy,”⁵ necessary for existence. (Fabre is also renowned for his theater productions with twins as actors.) Louise Bourgeois, an indefatigable seducer in a league of her own, has monumentalized her mother as a gigantic spider. Niklewicz’s bees also belong to his personal story, in which the real is constantly modified by the imaginary and the symbolic.

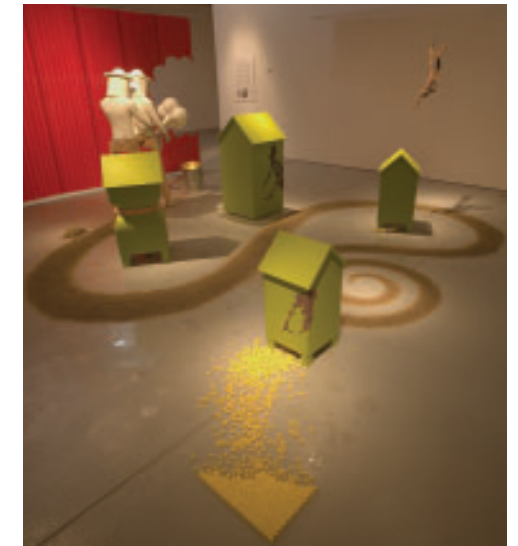
Strangely enough, similarly to the way the map of the Philippines resembles the birthmark on Gorbachev’s forehead,

Niklewic’s thirty-inch-long *Diver*, made out of dead bees, doubles the angel that hovers over the dead body in El Greco’s *The Burial of Count of Orgaz* (1586–88), in which it is a representation of the movement of the Count’s soul. As Comte de Lautréamont wrote in *Les Chants de Maldoror*: “Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It closely grasps an author’s sentence, uses his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with a right one.”⁶

Ut pictura poesis. The current heterogeneity of art reunites two sisters in post-surRealism, initiating a new, open-ended game of the Exquisite Corpse.

Suddenly, a red curtain—a fence of some sort, altered on its left side by a wastage that looks like a giant bite—is lifted. Inside a room, Siamese beekeepers prepare to make money as living statues, leaving behind them a path of crushed dried mint leaves mixed with grass that looks like a miniature Spiral Jetty. One of them holds a smoker that emits smoke made of highly inflammable *papier maché*. (Simultaneously, an irrelevant Cai Guo-Qiang has been emitting dark clouds of smoke made of organic dye into the air above the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, where his new works are presently featured.) Scientists insist that the smell of mint paralyzes bees. Four green beehives, some standing still, some rotating, are covered with suggestive patches made of dead insects. One beehive is tightened with a leather belt, looking like a home for wasps. *The Diver* plunges down toward another beehive. His real name should be Hart Crane. Someone brought to the room an electronic device for providing relief from nausea caused by seasickness, perhaps to prevent a potential disaster, for one of the twins suffers from such a theatrical condition. A ridiculous but irresistibly beautiful arrangement made of yellow earplugs forms a honeycomb, as they fall down on the floor, alluding to another potential phobia, that of excessive noise, from which the author of this essay

suffers after living near a construction site for three years. In the gallery, noise has presumably killed a small animal made of crushed dry leaves, which decomposes behind the twins on a floor covered with large patches of liquidlike substance that resemble giant tears. However, it is possible that the innocent creature died from smelling a rose that grows in a secret garden behind Real Art Ways, in Hartford, Connecticut, or passed away after having its eye slashed with a razor blade in Toledo, Spain.



The Ballad of the Twin Beekeepers, 2006, installation view (side).

Marek Bartelik teaches modern and contemporary art at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. He regularly contributes reviews to Artforum.

¹ Adam Niklewicz, e-mail message to author, April 22, 2006.

² Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1988), 52–68.

³ Adam Niklewicz, e-mail message to author, April 23, 2006.

⁴ Marek Bartelik, “A Meeting of the Fly and the Scarab-Beetle,” in *Een ontmoeting/Vstrecha/A Meeting*, by Jan Fabre and Ilya Kabakov (Diepenheim: Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, 1999), 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶ *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Comte de Lautréamont,” <http://wikipedia.org> (accessed May 4, 2006).