

- 1.**
PILOT 9_11 Proof of Concept, 2018, video, 10'
- 2.**
Trainspotter, oil on fibreboard, 2024,
oil on fibreboard, 120 x 100 cm
- 3.**
A Different Kind of Home 2, 2024,
oil on fibreboard, 120 x 100 cm
- 4.**
A Different Kind of Home 1, 2024,
oil on fibreboard, 120 x 100 cm
- 5.**
A Different Kind of Home 3, 2024,
oil on fibreboard, 120 x 100 cm
- 6.**
PILOT_9_11 VR_spherical Video, 2021, video, 8'
- 7.**
Sailor Update, One Decade Later [Vlog], 2021,
video, 46'

Norman Leto


PROOF OF CONCEPT


curator: Stach Szablowski
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Proof of Concept is a project that draws on the figure of a studio visit. Through the exhibition we visit Norman Leto in his atelier, or rather in the two ateliers that he uses in his work.

In one, he is developing his most recent cinematic venture, a film under the working title *Pilot 9_11*. As part of the *Proof of Concept* exhibition, the artist gives us an insight into his project-in-process, showing related film sketches, tests of technical solutions and fragments of sequences.

In the second atelier, Norman works on his easel paintings.

Norman Leto, Pilot 9_11, 2011, film, 10 min.

Proof of Concept is a story about the creative process of Norman Leto, an artist whose attitude defies the classic categories used to position people who produce cultural texts. Arguably, it is this failure to fit into categories, coupled with a desire to transcend them, that is the essence of his stance – both in his functioning as a creator in society, and in overcoming thought patterns in his reflection on humanity and the cognitive and existential frame-work within which we experience our condition.

The narrative axis of *Proof of Concept* is the relationship between Norman’s work on film projects and his activity in the visual arts. He works in both areas in parallel, but on his own terms. The exhibition is where these two threads, spun in two different studios, are woven into a single story.

We visit Norman in his studio seven years after the premiere of *Photon* – his last film, which won awards at the New Horizons Festival and the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, among others.

Since then, Norman has been working on *Pilot 9_11*. The artist estimates that the project will take several more years to complete.

The length of Norman’s creative processes stems from his philosophy of filmmaking. It is closer to the *modus operandi* of a visual artist than to the culture of the film industry. As with his debut feature *Sailor* and then *Photon*, the main setting of the new project is the virtual dimension – a space of digital animation, simulation and visualisation. Film industry is traditionally based on teamwork, but Norman reduces this aspect to a minimum – he models the visual matter like a sculptor who is gradually giving shape to it in his studio. *Pilot 9_11* is created outside the film production system as a uniquely original work. By developing a feature film by himself, the artist makes a trade-off: he exchanges time for absolute autonomy. The “market” that makes such a trade-off possible is the digital environment, which offers potentially unlimited possibilities – subject only to imagination, the processing power of computers and the man-hours invested in the work.

In *Pilot 9_11*, Norman returns to the attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 – an event that, according to Andrzej Leder and many other historians of ideas, symbolically closes the 20th century. The collapse of the New York skyscrapers is, to use Lacanian categories, a case of the drastic incursion of the Real into the realm of the Imaginary. In the wake of this foray, the symbolic field was radically transformed. 11 September 2001 shattered the illusion of the “end of history” – the happy end that was supposed to follow a brutal century of world wars, totalitarianisms and the Holocaust. At the same time, the fall of the Twin Towers heralded the unstable world we live in today. The attacks are not only a historical event, but also a contemporary

one – in the sense that the effects of their symbolic radiation are still being felt today, bringing them close to the figure of a work of art. Fortunately, neither Norman Leto nor anyone else has to take responsibility for the articulation of this thought, which is both inescapable and, for moral reasons, unutterable. The consequences of saying aloud what so many had been thinking were borne by the German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, who still in September 2001 described the attacks as “the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos.”

The sequences from *Pilot 9_11* shown as part of *Proof of Concept* offer no insight into the plot of the film. In the exhibition, they exist as autonomous video works that function outside the narrative of the main story. This is not the first time Norman Leto has made such a gesture. Fragments of his previous films, *Sailor* and *Photon*, have also been shown in galleries as video installations. And vice versa – sequences originally intended as projections for the galleries have sometimes been incorporated by the artist into his feature films. An important element of Norman’s strategy is to constantly oscillate between different disciplines, particularly between the visual arts (in which form plays an essential role) and cinema (in which discursive and narrative elements come to the fore).

At 66P, the video projections based on *Pilot 9_11* are juxtaposed with Norman’s easel paintings. While creating their iconography, the artist experimented with artificial intelligence generators. Although none of the paintings refers to the film, they were all created in parallel to his work on it.

Norman made his debut as a visual artist in 2007 with a solo exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle. It seemed as if he had come out of nowhere. He was 27 years old, worked under a pseudonym and had never attended an art school. He was a computer geek who, instead of becoming an engineer, decided to use his digital skills to create art.

His first exhibition was tellingly entitled *Negative Aspects of Excessive Freedom at Age 26*. It brought him to the attention of the art world, which hailed him as one of the most promising young creators of new media art. However, since the very beginning of his presence on the art scene, Norman has also been showing paintings. He learnt to paint – as well as to programme and create 3D animations and digital virtual environments – on his own, outside the formal education system. He has made a name for himself as a technically skillful and unpredictable painter, who is capable of simultaneously using the most varied conventions, from academic realism, through paintings alluding to scientific diagrams, to non-geometric abstraction.

In 2010, the artist published the quasi-autobiographical novel *Sailor*. Almost simultaneously, a film under the same name, based

on motifs from Norman’s book, premiered at the New Horizons festival. This literary-cinematic diptych marked not so much the artist’s move from the gallery world into the realm of extended narrative forms, but rather a broadening of his field of activity. Despite becoming involved in film projects, Norman has never severed his links with the visual arts field, and neither has he interrupted his painting practice.

Proof of Concept closes with a video entitled *Sailor_Update*. *Vlog*. In it, the artist returns to the protagonist of his mystified literary autobiography and debut film. Should the Norman Leto from *Sailor* be identified with Norman Leto the author of *Sailor*? The artist endowed the character with his own voice and lent him his face. The resemblance to a real person is intentional and not coincidental, but sometimes deceptive. The protagonist of *Sailor* – a sociopathic creator who rejects the humanist perspective on humanity in favour of what physics, neuroscience and cybernetics can offer – is a doppelganger, a double agent, whom the artist places in his stories to perform various philosophical or narrative tasks.

In *Sailor_Update* the protagonist, resurrected after 15 years, returns to tell us about one day in the life of Norman Leto, during which we visit the artist’s studio and witness the creation of one of his paintings. We also venture into the artist’s second studio, where he works on digital models of reality and virtual creations that transcend its physical limitations.

Sailor_Update is a dialectical device linking the poles between which the exhibition is set: the two studios, the documentary and the feature, the physical and the virtual, the work ethic necessary to see through years-long projects and the spontaneous artistic gesture. It also highlights the relationship between painting and film in the artist’s practice – these alternating disciplines are elements that keep the creative process in balance as well as expressions of freedom, which has remained a fundamental category for Norman Leto since his debut.

Norman Leto, Pilot 9_11, 2011, film, 10 min.

Stach Szablowski

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Norman Leto (born Łukasz Banach) is a painter, director and self-taught artist working in the field of new media. One of the most original and interesting contemporary artists using advanced 3D technologies, he works at the intersection of science and art. His reflections and artistic activities often focus on the human being. In 2009 and 2010 he completed the autobiographical novel *Sailor* and the feature film under the same title. In 2012, he began work on his second feature film, *Photon*, which premiered at international documentary film festivals: CPH:DOX (Copenhagen 2017) and HotDocs (Toronto 2017); it had its Polish premiere in the main competition section of the 17th T-Mobile New Horizons IFF. He has had a number of solo exhibitions (including *Negative Aspects of Excessive Freedom at Age 26*, CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, 2007; *Buttes Monteaux 3*, National Museum in Krakow, Krakow, 2009; *Swot*, Kolonie Gallery, Warsaw, 2013) and participated in numerous group exhibitions (including *Perfect Summer, New Media Artists*, gallery vertexlist, New York, 2008; *Establishment*, CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, 2008; *We Would Like You To Know That We Are Not Them*, lokal_30 at the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, 2009; *Collections. International Collection of the Centre for Contemporary Art*, CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, 2009).

Stach Szablowski (b. 1973) is a curator, art critic and writer. He graduated from the Institute of Art History of the University of Warsaw. From 1998 to 2006 he was associated with the Centre for Contemporary Art – Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw. In the course of his career, he has created or co-created dozens of exhibitions, art festivals and artistic projects in Poland and abroad. As a curator at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, he accompanied his peers as they made their artistic debut in the newly post-communist Poland, depicting the reality of the country after the political transformation. In his curatorial practice, he pays particular attention to the anthropological perspective on art, the intersection of film and the visual arts, and narrative strategies in the visual arts. He combines his curatorial practice with art criticism. He has edited a number of monographs and exhibition catalogues and written texts on art both in specialist magazines and in mainstream press, including “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Dziennik Gazeta Prawna”, “Życie Warszawy”, “Architektura-Murator”, “Fluid”, “Machina”, “News-week Polska”, “Wprost”, and “Obieg.pl”.