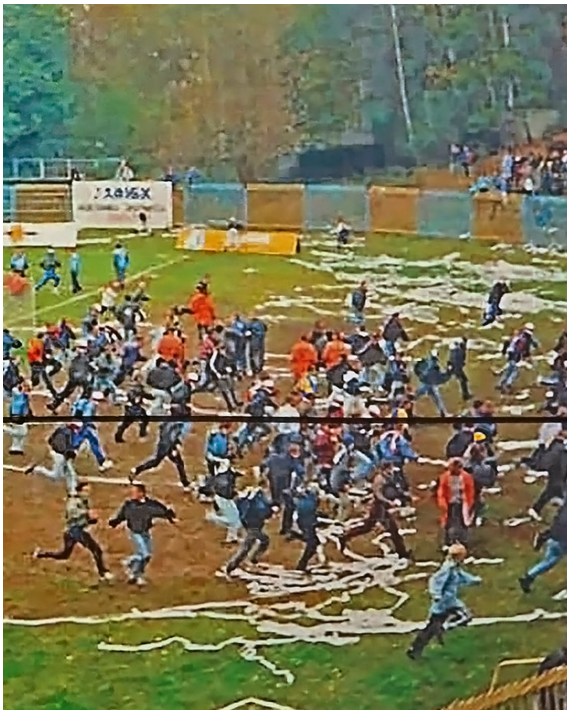
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Slash & Burn

Marcin Dudek

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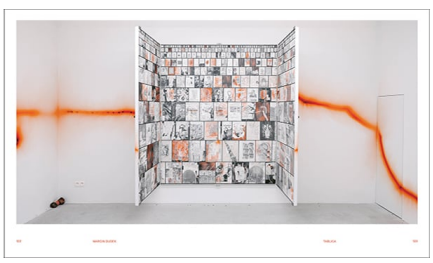
- An insight into the Polish-born, Brussels-based contemporary artist Marcin Dudek, represented by Harlan-Levey Projects
- Marcin Dudek continually searches the reminiscences of his childhood, translating key elements that defined his upbringing into compelling artworks that vary from sculptor, to mixed-media paintings and installation, all documented into this bold book

Slash & Burn presents some of Marcin Dudek's key creations, focusing on what he refers to as 'Memory Boxes' and touching on other elements of practice including collage, performance, sculpture and research.

Marcin Dudek was just 12 years old and living in a concrete housing block outside Krakow, Poland, when the Berlin Wall finally toppled. Poland's free-fall into capitalism followed as the country reeled from severe shortages, skyrocketing inflation and suddenly-defunct industry. For many, food was scarce. Money, more than hard to come by. A frayed social fabric, lacking civic associations left children vulnerable to new allegiances. Before becoming a teenager, he followed his older brother into the arms of a wild group of football supporters who created havoc in and outside the local stadium. Over time, many from this group moved from the council estate into the prison block as petty crimes escalated into enterprising criminal endeavors. Thanks in part to his sister, Dudek found an alternative path, moving to Salzburg, Austria to attend University of Art Mozarteum. He found work in art galleries, learned German and later moved to London, earning an MFA at Central Saint Martin's.

Art as methodology for living, coupled with the DIY survivalist strategies of his youth, became tools for transformation as well as dealing with childhood trauma. Shortly after settling in Brussels in 2012, he began to publicly question and explore his past in the seminal exhibition*Too Close for Comfort.* Marcin Dudek is represented by Haarlen Levy Projects in Brussels.

Marcin Dudek was just ten years old and living in a housing block outside Krakow when the Berlin Wall finally toppled. It was followed by Poland's free fall into capitalism as the country reeled from severe shortages, skyrocketing inflation, and now-defunct industry. A frayed social fabric lacking civic associations left children vulnerable to new allegiances. As a preteen Dudek was swept up by Cracovia, one of Krakow's two viciously sparring soccer fan clubs, whose uniform (shared by other clubs across Eastern Europe) was a black bomber jacket with bright orange lining. Members would collectively turn their jackets inside out in the stadium to signal they were ready to brawl. Like the strike of a match, the blazing orange lining would be revealed, and all hell would break loose. Tied together by unseen bonds, each member of the group was a pawn to the larger mission, acting as one force. One can feel the physical power of the bodies that crowded the stands through their jackets alone, as witnessed in Dudek's monumental installation,*Passage.* As a testament to the impact of the switch to capitalism in Eastern Europe and the resulting survival economy, hundreds of jackets sent from the West to the East were collected from thrift shops and brought back to the West to be stitched together, creating a monumental coat which envelops, shields, and takes over the viewer. As one ducks to walk through the sleeve and into the path laid out for them, a series of three meticulously-crafted hybrids between collage and painting become visible, all using the jacket and its ability to hold memory, violence, and meaning. Orange lines burnt into the walls on either side of this trilogy are signs of Dudek's performance during the build-up of the exhibition, which baptized the gallery with a smoke grenade like the ones used in his youth. Following this trail, the viewer is brought into a small room with one single padlocked work. When opened, we find a testimony to a life of crime, imprisonment, and self-preservation; the path that Dudek himself would have taken had art not allowed him an escape route. - Excerpt from Amanda Sarroff's essay "The Passage"







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