

# AV FESTIVAL

## 1–31 MARCH 2014

# EXTRACTION

### **Anna Molska: The Weavers The Mining Institute 1 – 31 March 2014**

This single screen film is based on *The Weavers*, a five-act play by the German Nobel Prize winning playwright and novelist, Gerhart Johann Hauptmann. Written in 1892, the drama deals with the 1844 rebellion of Silesian weavers against the poverty of their lives and harsh working conditions they suffered in textile factories.

Anna Molska's re-make takes place in the contemporary Polish mining region of Silesia, another industry threatened with unemployment and technological change. The non-professional actors recruited from the coal mine gather on a slagheap and narrate Hauptmann's text, binding their fate with that of their nineteenth century predecessors.

Despite the use of the original text, choir and author's staging, the scene is devoid of the political revolt itself, reflecting the workers apathy following the mine closure. As natural resources are exhausted and coal is replaced by other fuel sources, the miners are left by the wayside like Hauptmann's weavers, whose livelihood was threatened by the arrival of power looms.

The work was produced against the backdrop of the announcement that the Bobrek Centrum mine in Silesia (today in Poland) would be closed down, which was met with no protest from the miners. Struck by the contrast between the 1844 rebellion and the growing resignation or apathy of Polish workers, who used to be known for their activism, Molska secured permission to film at the mine. Her radically condensed version of Hauptmann's play omits the central event, the rebellion, while retaining selected dialogue and a doleful chorus set to evocative, exaggeratedly mournful music commissioned from the composer Krzysztof Janczak.

### **Voice-over of The Weavers**

*Pieszyce. A spacious gray room. The walls are almost completely covered with dark dirt. A sultry day in late May. The clock strikes noon. Most of the weavers resemble people on trial, waiting for their life or death verdict with tormented anxiety. Their depressed faces. These expressions bear traces of many desperate thoughts. They look very much alike. People of the looms, their arms twisted with hard work.*

*One can hear the same stories amongst the weavers. That every one of them had an accident twice and that they can't go on like this any longer. That their wives are barely breathing... but they work their hands off. That they haven't slept for weeks,*

*but things will work out somehow. If only they could get rid of this weakness in the bones. It's New Year new promises here. The children scream, the goat bleats, and the devil chortles down the chimney.*

*The song fades away. One could sense despair, pain, fury, hatred and even a longing for vengeance. All of this after a few stanzas of this peculiar performance. The weavers, touched by the lyrics, feel the power in them.*

*All the papers bring reports of dreadful poverty. One could almost take it for granted that three quarters of the people here are facing starvation. At the same time a funeral takes place in the village. A brass band, teachers, pupils, the pastor and crowds of people. As if the Chinese emperor himself was to be buried.*

*Until recently, those in high positions were convinced that the weavers are a humble, patient and obedient flock. Then came various misleading humanitarians and all kinds of associations and aid committees. They have put in so much effort to convince the weavers that their situation is terrible.*

Anna Molska (Poland) studied at the legendary studio of Grzegorz Kowalski at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Her work has been presented internationally at venues and events including: Art in General, New York; Berlin Biennial 5; Kunsthalle Basel; Kunst Werke, Berlin and the New Museum, New York.

Curated by AV Festival. UK Premiere. Courtesy of Foksal Gallery, Warsaw.