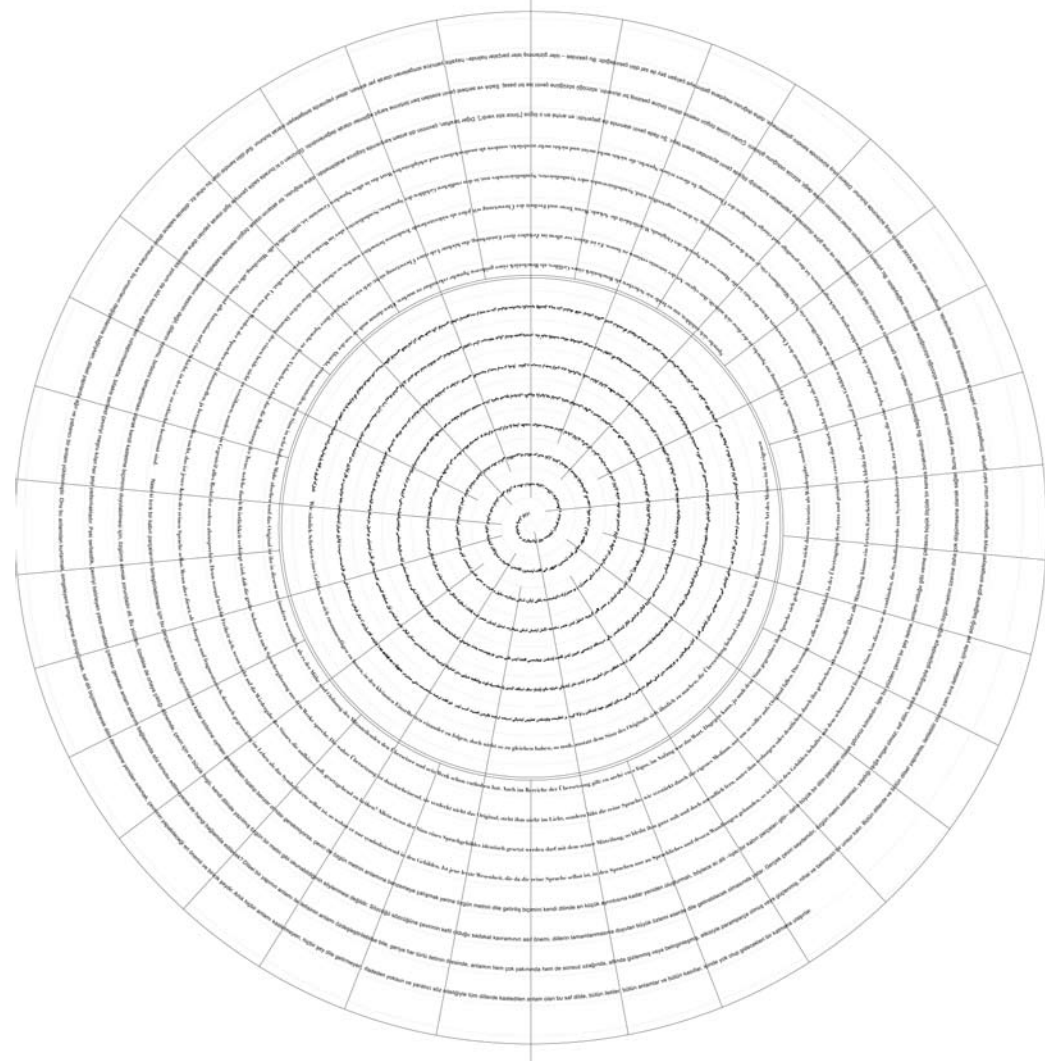




Joanna Rajkowska



Joanna Rajkowska  
*Walter Benjamin in Konya*

front and back: *Walter Benjamin in Konya*, 2010, installation view  
*Walter Benjamin in Konya*, 2010, wallpaper, 280x280 cm

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Joanna Rajkowska is best known as an artist who works with public spaces. Collective memories and identities of societies form the raw material for her pieces. Her newest project *The Task of the Translator* was inaugurated in Konya (Turkey) last year. The starting point for Rajkowska's project is her reflection on the mechanisms and consequences of the language reform that took place in newly founded Turkey in 1928, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Within this reform the Perso-Arabic alphabet was replaced by the extended Latin, the so called Turkish alphabet. Arabic or Persian loanwords were exchanged for Turkish equivalents that were partly absolutely built from scratch. Taking up on this, Rajkowska bases her work on one of the probably most important humanistic texts *The Task of the Translator*, written by Walter Benjamin and published in 1923 as an introduction to his translation of Charles Baudelaire's volume of poetry *Tableaux parisiens*.

Benjamin understands the task of the translator as a striving for the "pure language": *Real translation is transparent, it does not hide the original, it does not steal its light, but allows the pure language, as if reinforced through its own medium, to fall on the original work with greater fullness.*

Regarding the fact that in contemporary Turkey, the Ottoman language is only known by a handful of specialists and is, when used, interpreted as a political response or religious declaration (the Persio-Arabic alphabet is reserved only for the Koran), Rajkowska asks: What happens to the meaning of written texts, when its visual form is changed? What happened to Turkish culture and identity after 1928? And finally: what happens to a society with a „replaced“ identity and what kind of processes lead to the denial of one's own culture and the enforcement of a new, alien one instead?

Rajkowska presents the process of translation through a symbolic gesture – an artists book. She translated the complete text of Benjamin's essay into Ottoman Turkish, as well as two different renderings in Turkish that were written in Latin script. Copies of this limited edition were donated to the library in Konya and to other libraries both in Turkey and abroad. We should remember that for the majority of people from this country, archival, literature and poetry of the Ottoman Empire from before 1928 became unreadable and can only be understood by very few people.

The exhibition in Berlin sheds new light on Rajkowska's work in several ways. First of all, through Berlin as a city and second of all through the biography of Walter Benjamin, which is closely linked to the city. Benjamin was a German-Jewish intellectual, born and raised in Berlin, who was forced to leave Germany in 1933 and committed suicide in 1940 while trying to escape the Nazis. Furthermore, ŽAK | BRANICKA gallery is located in Berlin-Kreuzberg where the majority of the population is from Anatoly, known as the most conservative part of Turkey. And last but not least, the exhibition takes place at a time in Germany when a book by Thilo Sarrazin *Deutschland schafft sich ab* can sell more than a million copies and while the chancellor Angela Merkel declares the death of German multiculturalism.



*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers (The Task of the Translator)*, 2010, book, 12x15 cm



*The Stroll To the Library*, 2010, video 08:15 min



*Yusuf Ağa Library, 2011*  
silver gelatine print, 109x250 cm



*The Task of the Translator*, 2011,  
exhibition view at ŻAK | BRANICKA gallery

## JOANNA RAJKOWSKA

Born in 1968 in Bydgoszcz (PL), lives and works in London and Warsaw.

### Public Projects (selection)

- 2010 *Walter Benjamin in Konya*, British Council, Konya, TR
- 2009–11 *Minaret*, Poznań, PL (upcoming project)
- 2009 *Rotor*, Vistula River in Warsaw (part of *Dissapear* at Vistula River)  
*Aquarius*, Wilga, tributary to the Vistula, Art Boom Festival, Kraków, PL  
*The Bat* (project not realised), Bern, CH
- 2008 *Gold and Silver*, Zachęta National Gallery, Constitution Square, Warsaw, PL  
*The Uhyst Refugee Asylum*, Uhyst, DE  
*The Airways*, Trafo Gallery, Budapest, HU  
*Camping Jenin*, Freedom Theatre, Jenin, PS
- 2007 *Oxygenator*, Grzybowski Square, CCA, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, PL
- 2006 *Umeå Volcano*, Verkligheten Gallery (project not realised), Umea, SE
- 2004 *Only Love*, Wolski Hospital, Warsaw, PL
- 2003–05 *Artist for Rent*, [Twenty-Two Tasks], Berlin, DE; Łódź, PL; Sheffield, UK
- 2002 *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue*, Warsaw, PL
- ### Solo exhibitions (selection)
- 2011 *The Task of the Translator*, ŻAK | BRANICKA, Berlin, DE
- 2008 *Camping*, Kronika Gallery, Bytom, PL
- 2006 *Leave it*, CCA, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, PL  
*My Great-Grandmother Rosa Stern*, Skulpturen Hus, Stockholm, SE
- 1998 *The Love of a Man Named Dog*, Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, PL  
*It Was Not Me*, Kronika Gallery, Bytom, PL  
*Lobster Lovers*, Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center, Buffalo, USA

- 1996 *Water-Tower. Headache*, CCA, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, PL
- 1995 *No Sign of Dying Soon. The Past – the Physical Presence*, State University of NY, NYC, USA

### Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2010 *Early Years*, KunstWerke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, D
- 2009 *1989, End of History or Beginning of the Future?*, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York, USA  
*Warsaw Under Construction*, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, PL  
*Where to go? Notes on Transformation after 1989*, < rotor > association for contemporary art, Graz, A
- 2004 Busan Biennale, Korea
- 2003 *White Mazur*, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, D
- 2002 *Oder-Sprung*, Kunsthalle Essen, D
- 2001 *Irreligia*, Muzeum Atelier 340, Brussels, B  
Museum Junge Kunst, Frankfurt, D
- 2000 *Scena 2000*, CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, PL  
*In Freiheit endlich, Polnische Kunst nach 1989*, Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, D  
*Postindustrial Sorrow*, Kunstverein Wiesbaden, D
- 1999 *Blue Fire*, 3rd Biennial Prague, CZ
- 1997 *Re-Bates*, The L.C.Bates Museum, Hinckley, USA

*Walter Benjamin in Konya* was commissioned by the British Council as part of the *My City* Project (2010) in Turkey.

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Lindenstr. 35, 10969 Berlin | +49 30 61107375 | [www.zak-branicka.com](http://www.zak-branicka.com) | [mail@zak-branicka.com](mailto:mail@zak-branicka.com)



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