

EXHIBITING POLISH ART ABROAD: CURATORS, FESTIVALS, INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

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Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, numerous exhibitions contributed to the development of scholarship and the promotion of Polish art, increasing its presence in international art-related discourse. This special issue of *Art and Documentation*, explores the curatorial, institutional, artistic, and cultural contexts of international exhibitions of Polish art. It examines global and local impacts, trajectories of development across periods of political and social turmoil, as well as multiple narratives formulated by various actors, both individual as well as collective. It covers a long period – from the late forties up to the present, and therefore also examines times when creating international contacts was very difficult. Currently, the presence of Polish art in the international art circuit is mostly determined by finances, but some issues remain the same – the artists and curators try to define the position of Polish art in relation to the ‘centre’ as well as to other peripheral milieus.

The set of articles starts with the subsection entitled “How Is it Going? Or the Need to Build Relationships in the Field of Art.” The text by Bernadeta Stano, “The Thaw, or Warming in Kraków’s Artistic Community Relations with the

West, and Consequences to Art” focuses on the time after the 1956 Thaw and sheds light on state subsidised travel by artists born in the thirties who debuted during the Thaw and who were active in the Kraków community – the Nowohucka Group and the Second Kraków Group members. The following article by Kata Balázs. “Paraphrase as an Act of Art: Some Aspects in the Work of the Artist Collectives Łódź Kaliska and the Substitute Thirsters” analyses the connections between the Hungarian Substitute Thirsters (1984-1992) and the Polish Łódź Kaliska (founded in 1979) groups. The article underlines some aspects of the cooperation methods between the two groups and their activities in producing DIY samizdat publications and especially their relationship with paraphrase as a genre, aiming at re-creating and re-enacting paintings from the 19th century that serve as national symbols in both countries. These articles are followed by two texts (subsection “Branding Polish Graphic Arts”) that focus on the Polish Poster School: “An Escape From Socialist Realism. State-Organized Overseas Exhibitions as the Road to Fame of the Polish School of Posters” by Mateusz Bieczyński and the more specific “The International Poster Exhibition Vienna 1948” by Jeannine Harder. The

Polish poster artists in the worst time of Stalinism (1945-55) had relative freedom, in comparison to other art fields like painting or sculpture. The International Poster Exhibition in Vienna was the starting point for the worldwide popularity of Polish posters, especially in the fifties and sixties.

The next sub-section, “Polish Art in Scandinavia and Great Britain,” refers to Polish Art in Scandinavia and Great Britain and consists of three texts: “Władysław Hasiór in Sweden: Reassessing Peripheral Neo-Avant-Garde Networks Through Horizontal Art History” by Karolina Kolenda, “The Politics of Appearance: Tadeusz Kantor Exhibiting in Sweden 1958 - 2014” by Camilla Larsson, and “From a Demarcation Line to a Living Archive. Documentary Exhibitions of the Foksal Gallery on the British Isles” by Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak. The first two texts draw on Piotr Piotrowski’s concept of ‘horizontal art history.’ Karolina Kolenda examines the exhibitions of Władysław Hasiór’s work in Sweden to reconsider the mapping of Neo-Avant-Garde art in Europe. She also proposes a reading of Hasiór’s work through the lens of environmental art history. Camilla Larsson analyses the exhibitions by Tadeusz Kantor in Sweden and proves that he has mainly been perceived as a Polish artist, even though the ideas of Polishness have shifted over time, mainly shaped by a centre – periphery logic. Anna Dzierżyc-Horniak, analyses the contacts between the Foksal Gallery run by Wiesław Borowski, Tadeusz Kantor, and Richard Demarco (Scottish art promoter who opened Great Britain to Polish art). She proves that the network of personal friendships built across the Iron Curtain developed into institutional cooperation and concrete artistic projects.

From the north of Europe we move “Overseas” – to the USA, to read two texts: “A Firecracker, a Light at the End of the Tunnel? The First Polish Programme of Residential Stays for Artists in the US” by Łukasz Białkowski and “Freedom Is Not Free. The Poland-USA Performance Art Project *Julieta 484* and Its Social-Political Background” by Małgorzata Kaźmierczak. The first text’s purpose is tracing the history of

Polish art residencies operated by the Kościuszko Foundation since the seventies, and focuses especially on the first decade of the programme to delineate its organization, as well as the artists’ motivations and attitudes. Małgorzata Kaźmierczak recalls a Polish-USA performance art project *Julieta 484* – which resulted in a co-operation between the Castle of Imagination Performance Art Meeting in Poland and the Mobius Group in Boston and took place in historically important spaces such as Modelarnia in Gdańsk or a demobilized submarine *Julieta 484* in Providence, RI. It is the only text in this set dedicated solely to performance art (the position of which is special, as performance artists need to be present in the space to practice their art).

The collection of articles is closed with three texts on “Polish Art in a Global Context,” arranged chronologically. The first text by Krzysztof Siatka “Hamdi el Attar and Kassel’s *Stoffwechsel* shows of the Eighties: Notes on the off-mainstream presence of Polish artists” again uses the horizontal methodology and examines the presence of certain Polish artists within three shows set up by Hamdi el Attar: *Stoffwechsel* (1982), *MuKu – Multimedia Kunst* (1985), and *Künstlergruppenzeigen Gruppenkunstwerke* (1987) in the contexts of the artistic, political, and existential reality of Poland after the introduction of Martial Law in the country. Maciej Gugała, in “Entangled in Contexts: Ten Years After the *Side by Side* Exhibition in Berlin’s Martin-Gropius-Bau” examines the largest Polish-German exhibition and the largest display of Polish art in Germany to date. The author analyses its meaning in the political, museological, artistic contexts as well as the exhibition’s possible aftermath. Finally, Jarosław Lubiak, in his article “Recognizing a Polish National Idiom in Global Art: Two Exhibitions of Polish Contemporary Art Abroad” writes about the most recent exhibitions: *State of Life: Polish Contemporary Art within a Global Circumstance* organised by the Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, Adam Mickiewicz Institute at the National Art Museum of China in Beijing in 2015, and *Waiting for Another Coming*, a joint presentation of Polish and Lithuanian artists, shown first at

the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius in 2018 and then at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (October 25, 2018, to January 27, 2019). He uses the exhibitions as a case study to reflect on defining and locating Polish contemporary art in the context of global art. He refers to Jean-Jacques Lecercle's philosophy of language to create a theoretical framework based on three concepts: minor language, refraction and conjuncture.

This set of articles merely begins mapping the presence of Polish artists in the international circuits. As mentioned above, chronologically they cover a period since the post war Stalinism, until present. The conditions under which artists and art promoters created the international contacts are, of course, varied. The above texts also discuss all media, each of them having its own peculiarity. Nevertheless, this collection of articles underlines the fact that art cannot flourish in isolation and that the creating of international contacts is one of the most vital powers for art. This is something that in today's globalised world seems obvious, and is what artists have always practiced – on an institutional, as well as on a personal level.