

mś¹

Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź
Więckowskiego 36
msl.org.pl

THE NEOPLASTIC ROOM. AN OPEN COMPOSITION



THE NEOPLASTIC ROOM. AN OPEN COMPOSITION

Designed by Władysław Strzemiński, the NEOPLASTIC ROOM is an avant-garde exhibition space created for the purpose of presenting the International Collection of Modern Art of the 'a.r.' group, established in the 1930s. The room was opened to the public in 1948 at the Poznański Palace, which at the time became the Muzeum Sztuki's new permanent exhibition space.

Reconstructed in 1960 (following its disassembly during the socialist-realist period), for almost fifty years the NEOPLASTIC ROOM was the highlight of the Museum's permanent exhibition. In 2008, the collections of modern and contemporary art were moved to the ms², a 19th-century weaving plant converted into the Muzeum Sztuki's exhibition space. The ROOM would remain in the building, however, and continued to serve the purpose for which Strzemiński had conceived it.

In recent times, the NEOPLASTIC ROOM has become a catalyst and reference point for contemporary artistic practices. Not only does the ROOM showcase the works of Strzemiński

and Kobro, but also those of Daniel Buren, Liam Gillick, Monika Sosnowska, RH Quaytman, and Céline Condorelli. Also presented as part of the project are sculptures and installations by other artists, which, while not directly inspired by the ROOM, have taken up the themes of corporeality and modernist ideologies that pertain to the organization of living space. To be found within the ROOM, a work by Susan Hiller demonstrates how a shared musical experience can serve as a basis for the "spatiotemporal rhythms" that link the body with new social and political rituals. Other aspects of the human body's presence in an ideologized space are brought to the fore in the works of Magdalena Abakanowicz, Alina Szapocznikow, Kitty Kraus, Oskar Dawicki, Roman Stańczak, and Koji Kamoji, all of which catalogue the relationships occurring between topography and the body, coupled with the related experiences of presence, absence, fullness, and relocation.

WŁADYSŁAW STRZEMIŃSKI NEOPLASTIC ROOM, 1948

On 13 June 1948, the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, previously housed in a dozen or so rooms of the former city hall, opened a new space in the 19th-century former palace of the industrialist Maurycy Poznański. The Muzeum's director at the time, Marian Minich, asked Władysław Strzemiński to help design the exhibition rooms. The artist was assigned the task of designing a second-floor space that enclosed a sequence of exhibition rooms, whilst also encompassing a chronological and evolutionary narrative, designed by Minich, presenting the history of European art. And so, the 'a.r.' group's International Collection of Modern Art found its home in the NEOPLASTIC ROOM. It would become a landmark moment in the history of the development of artistic forms. In 1949, socialist realism was officially decreed in Poland as the dominant artistic style. Under the doctrine, only art that was 'socialist in content and realistic in form' was permitted. Consequently, the NEOPLASTIC ROOM and the avant-garde, those abstract – and thus 'reactionary' and 'formalistic' – works, housed in the room, became the subject of official scrutiny.



Bolesław Utkin, Design for a reconstruction of the Neoplastic Room by Władysław Strzemiński, 1960

On 19 January 1950, the Minister of Culture, Włodzimierz Sokorski, personally signed Strzemiński's dismissal from his teaching job at the State College of Fine Arts in Łódź – as a matter of urgency, 'for the sake of the teaching profession.' On 1 October of the same year, the exhibition was closed down, and the modernist paintings and sculptures were locked away in the storerooms. The NEOPLASTIC ROOM itself was painted over. A month and a half later, the same room was host-

ing politically correct directions in art. Although the oppression of socialist realism ended in 1955, the NEOPLASTIC ROOM was reconstructed only five years later. The project was carried out by Strzemiński's disciple, Bolesław Utkin, in collaboration with Marian Minich.

While remaining the core of Łódź's Muzeum Sztuki for over fifty years, the NEOPLASTIC ROOM continues to pose inspiring questions. The ROOM remains Strzemiński's unique legacy,

and yet it has been wholly reconstructed. Whilst it is an autonomous art work, it is also a space for the works of other artists. It is a consistent aesthetic proposition, a materialization of the theoretical postulates of Neoplasticism and Constructivism; but also a functional exhibition 'device'. This 'exhibition lab' (originally created to showcase De Stijl and related works and the sculptures of Kobra) has served also as an inspiration for successive generations of contemporary artists.

MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ
CAGE I BACK, 1978-1981
MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ
FIGURE BEHIND GLASS, 1989-1991
ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW, NUDE, 1961
HENRYK MOREL, HOUSES IV, 1966

Two women artists, Szapocznikow and Abakanowicz, spearheaded the new arrangement of the *Open Composition*, which established milestones in the post-war artistic landscape of Poland. Their presence in the context of the NEOPLASTIC ROOM is important insofar that both artists radically foregrounded the idea of bodily representations in their works. This gesture anticipated artistic

experiments involving non-normative images. Bodies in Abakanowicz and Szapocznikow are subjects or entities, wherein the experiences of violence, disease, and also sensual pleasure, leave their mark. These same bodies are shown in fragments, without heads, and from the back. These are bodies that disintegrate, are tamed, and merge with non-human elements in the environment.

These representations are linked closely with the two artists' biographies, namely their experience of World War II. Szapocznikow, being Jewish, was imprisoned in the Łódź and Pabianice ghettos, and then in a concentration camp. Abakanowicz spent the war in Warsaw, working as a hospital nurse.

Also exhibited in the same space is a sculpture by Henryk Morel, who was one of the first artists in Poland to make recourse to the use of iron and rubber in his works. An artist working with contrasting combinations and textures, such as hard with soft, Morel was keenly interested in Kobro's art, which he meditated on in his writings. Morel's objects can be understood as entering into dialogue with Kbro, questioning, in turn, the absence of bodily

representations in her compositions. Morel's forms suggest the presence of a corporality functioning at the meeting point of the biological and the mechanical.

Magdalena Abakanowicz, Cage I back,
1978-1981



Alina Szapocznikow, Nude, 1961



Henryk Morel, Houses IV, 1966



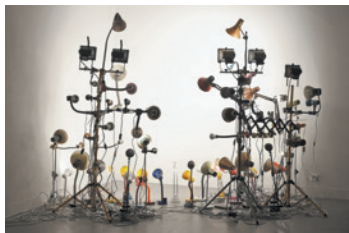
Koji Kamoji, Hiroshima, 1990

KOJI KAMOJI HIROSHIMA, 1990

Koji Kamoji has been part of the Polish art scene for over half a century. He came to Poland to study in the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts under the renowned Colourist, Artur Nacht-Samborski. In the forging of his art, Kamoji has entered into dialogue with Henryk Stażewski and Włodzimierz Borowski. Being generally both minimalist and site-specific, his works combine formal spareness with the use of materials, such as stone, aluminium, paper, and textile.

HIROSHIMA tackles the theme of the 1945 nuclear attack. The work has the shape of a kimono divided into two

parts. As Kamoji explained in an interview for *Biweekly*: “Once there was a body in it, but now there is nothing between the two halves but shadow. ... It’s a work about that which is no longer, and yet something that remains. ... Having conceived the piece, I decided to go to Hiroshima to see how the place looks like. I looked out for stones, but the city had been so cleaned up that I couldn’t find any. I was working as a translator for a magazine at the time, and my friends, Japanese journalists, collected some stones and the piece of a roof tile from a local river and sent them to me in a wooden box.”



Oskar Dawicki, *71 Sources of Light*,
2005/2010

OSKAR DAWICKI 71 SOURCES OF LIGHT, 2005/2010

Oskar Dawicki is the auteur of performances, videos, photographs, installations, and objects. His works often emphasize absence and non-presence. In one project, Dawicki for many weeks ran a swap scheme where the employees of cultural and artistic institutions could submit their old lamps in exchange for new ones. The newly amassed collection was subsequently used to illuminate an empty corner of the exhibition space. The result was a picturesque installation, featuring a tangle of various light sources directed at an inconspicuous and deliquescent place. Marked with light, the same installation became enhanced through the gesture of

the artist, who encourages the visitors to derive meaning from that which they are gazing upon.

ROMAN STAŃCZAK TRACKS, 1996

Roman Stańczak is an artist who changes the meaning of ordinary items through sculptural practices, such as everting, which involves turning objects inside out. The piece, *Tracks*, is one of Stańczak's last sculptures, executed prior to his temporary withdrawal from the art world in 1997, and the last one to survive the period of his absence. The work was inspired by long train rides from his native Szczecin to an art college in Zakopane, which for him were moments that attested to the idea of the constant effort of travelling. For the artist, the railways had been greatly neglected by the railway workers; and so he looked in his work to take them to task for their dereliction of duty and their almost ritual act of destruction. The 45-degree angle at which the track bends at the final stretch is one that would surely derail a train.

CÉLINE CONDORELLI, SPATIAL COMPOSITION 11 (TO JOHN TILBURY), 2014

CÉLINE CONDORELLI

SPATIAL COMPOSITION 3 TO 10, 2014

DOCUMENTATION OF JOHN TILBURY'S PERFORMANCE IN THE NEOPLASTIC ROOM, 2015, VIDEO

Céline Condorelli is an architect whose artistic practice focuses on an architecture construed as a supporting structure. The role of an art-supporting structure can be played by financial mechanisms and institutions, as well as by exhibition architecture or design.

SPATIAL COMPOSITION 3 to 10 arose from discussions with artist and designer, James Langdon, wherein the focus was on Strzemiński's designs, (whether realized or not), and Strzemiński's documentation, particularly SPATIAL COMPOSITION 1. The works are studies on Condorelli's project for the Galerie fur Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig, where Strzemiński's structure inspired a series of benches for the institution's café.

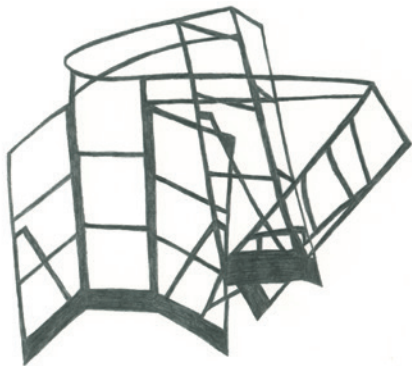
The sculpture was created by covering a model of the SPATIAL COMPO-



Céline Condorelli, Spatial Composition 11 (To John Tilbury), 2014

SITION 1 with a blanket filled with a hardening substance. The resulting “afterimage” became a utilitarian object for one performer only. SPATIAL COMPOSITION 11 (TO JOHN TILBURY) was used by Tilbury, a British pianist and improviser, as a seat for his concert performance in 2016 in the NEOPLASTIC ROOM, during which he presented his own composition inspired by Samuel Beckett's STIRRINGS STILL.

MONIKA SOSNOWSKA WEJŚCIE - URSUS, 2012



Monika Sosnowska, Entrance – Ursus, 2012

Ursus is a machinery plant best known for its tractors. It was there that, in June 1976, 14,200 workers went on strike in order to protest against a sharp increase in food price rises announced by the communist government. That protest, alongside the protest which took place in the city of Radom, was brutally crushed. These events led the strikers to form the Workers' Defence Committee and gave birth to the Polish democratic opposition movement. In 2011, the Ursus plant was closed down. In ENTRANCE – URSUS, Monika Sosnowska reconstructed, in

a 1-to-1 scale, the main entrance to the defunct factory. Then she transformed the entrance into a dysfunctional form, a cage made of steel and painted with oil paint. Paradoxically, the sculpture's shape brings to mind a modernist pavilion and the constructivist language of Katarzyna Kobro; or indeed the the spatial designs of Władysław Strzemiński, including those for industry. The artist looked to present the notion of an idea which contrasts with that of daily reality: here the dream of the benevolence of economics is crushed by the economics of profit.

SUSAN HILLER DIE GEDANKEN SIND FREI, 2012

DIE GEDANKEN SIND FREI is an interactive installation in the shape of a jukebox containing one hundred songs that can be readily played by members of the public. The title comes from a twelfth-century Old-German folk song, which praised freedom of thought. The songs were selected not only for personal reasons, but also for their political content, the work stemming as it did from Hiller's fascination with the kind of popular music that mobilizes and inspires protest. The artist alludes here in an unorthodox manner to the modernist ideal of art as a catalyst for social change, but she also foregrounds the emancipatory and revolutionary potential of globalized pop culture over that of avant-garde experimentation. Hiller calls the jukebox songs her personal "box of madeleines", evoking both personal memories and those relating to the political and social histories of the twentieth century. Hiller approaches pop music here as a counterpoint to the constant flux of

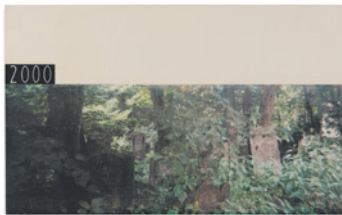


Susan Hiller, Die Gedanken sind frei, 2012

everyday life. By way of its installation in the NEOPLASTIC ROOM, the piece has acquired new meanings. Spatiotemporal rhythms can also be shaped by music.

RH QUAYTMAN ŁÓDŹ POEM, CHAPTER 2 (REPLICA OF KOBRO'S SPATIAL COMPOSITION, 1928), 2004 RH QUAYTMAN, ŁÓDŹ POEM, CHAPTER 2 (JEWISH GRAVEYARD), 2000-2004

The artist describes the project as follows: “For CHAPTER 2, I used a colour photograph from which two chromatically differing silkscreened paintings were made. I named both paintings SPATIAL COMPOSITION 23.3 PARSECS AWAY. Parsec is an astronomical unit for measuring the distance from a star to Earth. The light of a star which began its journey in 1928 covered a distance of 23.3 parsecs in order to reach Earth by 2004. I hand painted ‘1928’ in oil on top of the image in reference to the date of the sculpture depicted in the photograph. Unism, for Kobro, meant fully integrating her objects into both her material and the subjective context; and literally, into the realm of architecture and time. This added emphasis on the perceptual and temporal experience of viewing undermined the autonomous objectivity of sculpture. I tried to transplant this idea into painting. Through an



RH Quaytman, Łódź Poem, Chapter 2 (Jewish Graveyard), 2000-2004

acknowledgement of the shifting positions of the viewer (in front of and moving onwards to the next painting) within the immediate framing of the exhibition and its immanently larger social contents, the privileged position of the isolated picture is destabilized. (...) A painting from THE SUN, CHAPTER 1, depicting the overgrown Jewish graveyard in Łódź, was also included in the series. I painted ‘2000’ on top of the image, referencing the date when the photograph was taken, instead of the date of that which is featured in the photograph, as I did in my earlier SPATIAL COMPOSITION painting.”

KITTY KRAUS, UNTITLED (LIGHTBOX), 2012

This German-based artist relates in her practice to the work of historical art movements, such as Minimalism or Constructivism, polemicizing with their formal assumptions and technological optimism. Kraus has experimented with a limited colour palette, geometry, and the use of glass, ink, textiles, and electricity. Her works are usually handcrafted, and the artist further stresses the imperfection of both material and execution. Her

objects are often melted, blown up or unmade in other ways.

UNTITLED (LIGHTBOX) is a part of Kraus's search for "invisible light." One of her earliest works to deal this theme was a mirror-covered cube, inside of which was a light, a "mirror bomb," as the artist called it, perceptible as a source of heat only. In the art work featured here, Kraus allows light to escape and form a line on the wall of the room.

LIAM GILLICK PROTOTYPE STRUCTURE, 2011

A matter-of-fact description of Liam Gillick's PROTOTYPE STRUCTURE may sound disappointing; but here are 20 elements of simple, geometric shape, and made of powder-coated aluminium. Displayed in two rows, they look like the construction parts of a purely utilitarian purpose.

In PROTOTYPE STRUCTURE, Gillick illustrates how modernist avant-garde aesthetics are appropri-

ated today by the corporate world. Such aesthetics no longer serve emancipatory efforts. Quite the converse, in fact. They have been melded with mass production, standardization, and the disciplining of our reality.



Liam Gillick, Struktura prototypowa, 2011

DANIEL BUREN, HOMMAGE À HENRYK STAŻEWSKI, 1985-2009

In the autumn of 1985, at Stockholm's Moderna Museet, in the exhibition Dialogue, Henryk Stażewski, a pioneering figure of the Polish avant-garde, invited Daniel Buren to conceive a joint project. The French Conceptualist had long used his trademark stripes to protest the fetishisation of art. Stażewski was interested not so much in the provocation as in the iron discipline of Buren's artistic language. Stażewski himself had been producing numerous disciplined forms that had informed the space of his paintings.

Stażewski and Buren occupied a room where Buren honed an environment that

merged with the conceptions of Stażewski. The resulting work was the CABANE ÉCLATÉE NO. 9, a kind of 'little house' on a square plan, of lightweight, modular and symmetrical construction, with 'walls' made of a red-and-white striped fabric. Some segments of the 'house' were detached and mounted on the walls of the actual Museum room, allowing Stażewski's paintings and reliefs (his 'square' compositions of 1968-1984) to 'penetrate' inside the structure through the created openings. The wall-frame structure was also based on a square plan, repeating the constructional principles of Stażewski's reliefs.



Daniel Buren, Photo-souvenir: Hommage à Henryk Stażewski. Cabane éclatée avec tissu blanc et noir, travail situé 1985-2009. Détail, 2009

Nine years after Stażewski's death, in 1997, Daniel Buren re-conceived an environment for Stażewski's works on the occasion of an exhibition which took place at the Polish Cultural Institute in Paris. Here we saw the shape of a smaller CABANE ÉCLATÉE in black and white stripes. That 'little house', which eventually found its way to the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, concluded the two artists' dialogue at a place which Stażewski had been closely connected with as one of the initiators of the 'a.r.' group's International Collection of

Modern Art. On this occasion, Buren declared that he would refuse to repeat the (up until then repeatable) form at other museums, especially if an institution wanted the form for its 'four Mondrians or five Picassos'. Buren's CABANE not only enters into a dialogue with Stażewski's work, but it also references the nearby NEOPLASTIC ROOM, which Strzemiński created in order to consider the influence of De Stijl on the first avant-garde, which had also encompassed Katarzyna Kobro's sculptures.

RELATED EVENTS

Exhibition workshops for children and adults. Pre-booking is required.

FOR CHILDREN

The Sagacious Mondrian learns wisdom after the event / in the garden

A workshop devoted to the art of geometric abstraction, which reveals meaning through a juxtaposition with supra-artistic reality.

Mu-zoo-um

A workshop which explores the processes of synthesising, reducing, and abstracting from reality so as to arrive at the most basic and fundamental qualities.

FOR ADULTS

Brewing art, or making ideas for art

A workshop that considers the rules and ethics which artists adhere to in the forging of their creative outlook.

ABS Abstraction: on the composition of an art work

A meeting which considers the basic elements of the visual form, those being the point, the line, and the plane, and their mutual relations, which are of themselves the conveyors of meaning and sense.

Lights-Camera-Action: a film workshop

A workshop at the interface between visual performative art and film art.

Information is provided by the Education Department. Tel. 605 060 063.

ms²

OGRODOWA 19

LEGIONÓW

GDAŃSKA

PRÓCHNIKA

1 MAJA

WIĘCKOWSKIEGO 36

ms¹



msl.org.pl

ms¹
Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź
Więckowskiego 36

NEOPLASTIC ROOM. OPEN COMPOSITION

Curators
Jarosław Suchan with Aleksandra Jach,
Maria Morzuch and Daniel Muzyczuk

Editing of the leaflet
Leszek Karczewski, Aleksandra Jach
and Daniel Muzyczuk

Translation
Marcin Wawrzyńczak, Beata Połowińska

Copy-edting
Barry Keane

© Muzeum Sztuki & Authors, 2019

Cultural Institution
of Łódź
Voivodeship
Government



Run jointly
by The Ministry
of Culture
and National
Heritage

Ministry of
Culture
and National
Heritage of the Republic
of Poland.

Patron of
Muzeum Sztuki
in Łódź



Partner:

