

Tectonic Movements

An abstract painting with a vibrant, swirling palette of blues, greens, yellows, and reds. The composition suggests geological forces, with deep, dark blue and purple areas representing valleys or the depths of the ocean, and bright, yellow and orange areas representing ridges or volcanic activity. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and texture.

ON THE ARTISTIC
SYMPTOMS OF
THE TRANSITION

I-XIV

Tectonic Movements

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THE TRANSITION

18.11.2022–19.03.2023

ms¹

Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi
Więckowskiego 36
msl.org.pl

artists

Jacek Adamas, Paweł Althamer, Andrzej Awsiej, Rafał Bujnowski, Faustyn Chetmecki, Ewa Ciepielewska, Jerzy Czuraj, Andrzej Dudek-Dürer, Edward Dwurnik, Egon Fietke (born Andrzej Miastkowski), Jarosław Fliciński, Galeria Działañ Maniakalnych, Władysław Hasior, Paweł Jarodzki, Joanna Kabala, Marek Kijewski, Kijewski/Kocur (Marek Kijewski, Małgorzata Malinowska), Grzegorz Klamen, Leszek Knaflewski, Paweł „Konjo” Konnak, Paweł Kowalewski, Jarosław Kozakiewicz, Janina Kraupe-Świderska, Jacek Kryszkowski, Zofia Kulik, Paweł Kwiek, Przemysław Kwiek, Zbigniew Libera, Marcin Maciejowski, Piotr Młodożeniec, Jarosław Modzelewski, Teresa Murak, Yach Paszkiewicz, Praffdata, Mariola Przyjemka, Krzysztof Raczynski, Marek Rogulski, Wilhelm Sasnal, Michał Sidorczyk, Marek Sobczyk, Jacek Staniszewski, Roman Stańczak, Kazik Staszewski, Lech Emfazy Stefański, Karol Suka (born Karol Kazimierski), Eugeniusz Szczudło, Jerzy Truszkowski, Piotr Uklański, Zbigniew Warpechowski, Wspólnota Leeieżec, Piotr Wyrzykowski, Yo Als Jetzt, Marcelo Zammenhoff (born Piotr Wygachiewicz), Ziemia Mindel Würm, Alicja Żebrowska, Artur Żmijewski

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mural and stencil paintings

Andrzej Miastkowski

cover: Ewa Ciepielewska, *Strange Landscape*, 1985, courtesy of the artist (fragment)

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Eugeniusz Szczudło's sculpture depicts an androgyne, a male-female hybrid. An androgyne is a characteristic figure of spiritual transformation. It is a symbol of a new quality resulting from the union of two opposing forces.

Eugeniusz Szczudło

(b. 1957)

Onone

1984

sculpture, painted wood

collection of the Museum of the
Region of Lubusz in Zielona Góra



Edward Dwurnik often returned to his old works, altering them in a myriad of ways, endowing them with new meanings. *Christ in the Village* is a painting from 1979, which the artist remade in large format in 1991. The work was originally part of the *Cross* series. Over the years, it went on to acquire additional meaning. The end of the 1970s saw the beginning of the end of the communist modernization project. It was at this time that global capitalism was born. By the early 1990s, in turn, the free market model was dominant, in Poland and elsewhere. These dates form the framework for the tectonic movements of the Transition. The inclusion of the crucifixion in the industrial theme signals that changes in the material sphere are always accompanied by changes in worldview. The tone of the canvas places Dwurnik's work within the *topos* of mud, a motif of Polish culture. Regardless of the era, it symbolizes the state of incomplete modernization.

Edward Dwurnik
(1943–2018)

Christ in the Village
1991
oil on canvas



Zbigniew Libera became fascinated with Gnosticism in 1988. From November 1989 to May 1990 he resided in Egypt, where he traveled in the footsteps of the early Christian Gnostic sects. During these peregrinations, he created several dozen drawings. Some of them, like the presented figure of the “Psychagogos” bringing the souls of the dead to God, are original interpretations of Gnostic doctrine and symbolism. Others are sketches of works he made in 1992 for the Gnostic exhibition at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art. The same year, Gnosticism faded from Libera’s work.

Zbigniew Libera

(b. 1959)

Jesus Psychagogos

1989

pencil on paper

courtesy of Paulina and Sebastian Maliszewski

IV

Portico is one of the five sculptures created by the artist in 1989–92, a series that represents an expression of her spiritual searching. The other works are titled *Mystic*, *Hypermystic*, *Architecture of a Drive*, and *Światowid*. These sculptures and accompanying drawings allude to the relationship between culture and nature. The former is symbolized by architecture, the latter by the human body. Żebrowska created a hybrid on this basis, a symbol of interdependencies and of the natural sources of culture. Reason, creativity, mathematical thinking: all are rooted in the human brain. The artist was also inspired by the history of masonry, and also the neo-Gnostic texts of Carl Gustav Jung and the works of Mircea Eliade.

Alicja Żebrowska
(b. 1956)

Portico
1992
epoxy resin, marble, sandstone

courtesy of the artist

untitled
1988
charcoal on paper

courtesy of the artist

V

When, millions of years ago, an ice sheet was retreating across the territory of today's Poland, it carried gneiss, granite, and quartz. The Tatra Mountains were formed from the gneiss and granite, while the quartz was deposited in what is now central Poland, in the present location of the sandstone mine in Szydlowiec. Alicja Żebrowska brought sandstone from Szydlowiec to the Tatra Mountains and spread it across the crevices to be found on Kościelec. In this way, she "moved" the world back to a prehistoric time, thus restoring the original order of nature. Her endeavor to reverse the geological process can also be seen as a faith in willpower typical for the Transition era.

Alicja Żebrowska

(b. 1956)

Trans-fero

1992

VHS movie

courtesy of the artist

VI

Leszek Knaflewski was one of the most original artists of the 1980s and 90s, having developed his own iconography, whose essence was the inter-penetration of culture and nature. He co-founded the Koło Klipsa group, which, in 1988, formulated the “Mystical Realism” manifesto, where we read: “We feel everything as alive and interconnected. Revelation as a mystical contact with the Absolute is what allows us to live and create. We synthesize mysticism, realism, symbols, and irony as a form of distance. The law of our way of thinking is metamorphosis, allowing everything to be transformed into almost anything else.” Typical exponents of the new spirituality, the Koło Klipsa group espoused a synthesis of living and inanimate matter, waking and dreaming, and object and sign. This work by Knaflewski is a striking example of their outlook.

Leszek Knaflewski

(1960–2014)

untitled (*Excavated Drawing*)

1989

own technique

courtesy of Aleksandra Knaflewska
and the Piktogram Gallery

VII

The artist attended a fortune teller who “foretold” that the world would be his oyster, and that he would achieve great success. Here divination can be seen as a service, whereas fortune-telling may be understood as a product perfectly tailored to the needs of the customer. The performance took place in New York, but both the rhetoric of success and the phenomenon of commodifying the practice of magic perfectly commingle with the Transition. It is no coincidence that the free-market model came from the United States, which also exported cultural phenomena. Magic would come to represent hope in the face of increasing problems and an uncertain future. The divinations of the Transitional prophets, though dressed in different words and symbols, always sounded the same: *things will get better... given time.*

Piotr Ukleński

(b. 1968)

untitled (*Psychic Reader & Advisor's Session*)

1995

performance

courtesy of the artist and the Foksal Gallery
Foundation. Thanks to director Jarosław Suchan

VIII

Ewa Ciepielewska's work is replete with references to New Age philosophy. A special place is occupied by *New Age, 33 Years Old*, a visionary self-portrait of the artist, including as it does a number of themes related to the New Age movement. In this work, we see the artist's face and hands painted in indigo and folded in prayer. Indigo here is a significant choice of color, as it is associated with the "third eye," a state of spiritual enlightenment. The second dominant color, green, reflects the order of nature. There are other motifs and symbols to be found in the painting, such as hallucinogenic mushrooms, the "eye of providence," or the Buddhist *thigle* (a luminous point in meditation) and *dorje* (a scepter symbolizing unity). Also of note is the fact that thirty-three was the age of Christ when he died; this number is a symbol of a higher consciousness in numerology.

Ewa Ciepielewska

(b. 1960)

New Age, 33 Years Old

1993

oil on canvas

courtesy of BWA Gallery Warsaw

IX

Zbigniew Warpechowski, a pioneer of world performance, underwent a significant transformation at the turn of the 1980s and 90s. From his fascination with Eastern mysticism he turned to a radical criticism of postmodernism from a Christian standpoint. The present work represents the culmination of this artistic process, with the artist juxtaposing items associated with primitive cultures (horn, soot, leather apron) with one of the most important symbols of Christianity: the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Warpechowski smashed them, thus repeating Moses' gesture. Then he tore out pages from the Bible, rolled them up, and put them in condoms, which he used to spell the words "New Age." In this way, he sought to show that primal spiritual energies were primitive and destructive forces that could lead to the collapse of a civilization based on Christianity.

Zbigniew Warpechowski
(b. 1938)

New Age—Memory Horn
1997
VHS, digital copy

courtesy of the Monopol Gallery

X

Jerzy Czuraj was an important figure in the counterculture movement at the turn of the 1980s and 90s. Fascinated by Eastern mysticism, he organized concerts and exhibitions as part of the legendary “Free Tibet” campaign. In 1982, he moved to the village of Suskowola, which quickly became an enclave for hippies and “blue birds” of all sorts. It also became home to an informal recording studio and an outdoor center. The artist hosted, among others, members of bands and art groups such as Brygada Kryzys, Totart, and Praffdata. In his works, Czuraj combined threads of Eastern mysticism and Christianity, making them a typical example of New Age religious syncretism. The “quarternarium” motif occurs in Christianity, ancient Greek philosophy, and Gnosticism. The number four is related to nature, symbolizing the four directions of the world and the four elements. It is also a symbol of an ideal figure: a square. Finally, there was the “fourth element”— the feminine element, which completed the Christian trinity.

Jerzy Czuraj
(1952–2009)

Four
1991
oil on canvas

collection of the Mazovian Elektrownia
Center of Contemporary Art

XI

Paweł Kwiek was one of few artists who successfully combined spiritual themes with a neo-avant-garde language. In 1980, he experienced mystical revelations; and from that time onward he began to create religious works, albeit using modern means of expression, such as film, photography, and performance. In 1987, he was baptized a Catholic. The idea of ecumenism became especially important to him. In this work, Kwiek looks to foreground this conviction using formal tools from the repertoire of architectural photography. The series consists of black-and-white photographs of the artist holding a blank sheet of paper. This was a frequent theme in the art of the 1970s. In this way, artists (including Kwiek himself) looked to convey their awareness of the specificity of their medium. This time, however, emotion rather than reason was decisive in the artist's solution. On consecutive boards, he painted a white sheet of paper in different colors. The variety of colors symbolized the idea of the *eponymous* "ecumenisms of art."

Paweł Kwiek
(1951–2022)

Ecumenism of Art

1988

photograph on canvas

courtesy of the Arton Foundation

XII

In her artistic practice, Teresa Murak combines ecological themes and Christian and pagan spirituality. Her favorite materials are grass, earth, watercress, and silt. In her *Holy Dishrags* series, she used old, unused rags found in the Church of the Visitation Sisters in Warsaw that was stitched from hemp that grew in the monastery garden in the 1920s. Murak used these rags for their intended purpose: for washing floors, in this instance, the floor of the gallery. She also exhibited them as “lignin” for watercress. The *Holy Dishrags* exemplify how ecology and religion are united by the themes of sacrifice and care.

Teresa Murak

(b. 1949)

Holy Dishrags

1988

photograph

XIII

Like many radical artists of the Transition era, Jerzy Truszkowski went from nihilism to mysticism, and looked to combine various spiritual traditions. From the mid-1980s, his work began to be filled with religious symbols, such as the hexagram (Star of David) or the swastika (Hinduism). And most of all, the cross and pentagram, which in early Christianity was a symbol of the five wounds of Christ (Greek: *péntalpa*). Truszkowski carved these motifs into his own body, thus doing away with the boundary between the subject and the “Supreme Godhead,” the cosmic essence. Inspired in part by Srimad-Bhagavatam, one of the Hindu scriptures, Truszkowski looked to achieve a psycho-corporeal unity. In the present work, the artist juxtaposes themes of passing, the cross, skull and blood, and through the title, places them in the realm of art. *Caput mortuum* is Latin for “dead head,” but is also the name of a red pigment used in painting.

Jerzy Truszkowski

(b. 1961)

Caput Mortuum

1997

photograph, Cibachrome

XIV

Jacek Staniszewski created a number of works using Christian iconography. He also made the *Way of the Cross for the Camillian Order in Warsaw* (1991). This graphic symbol accompanied the exhibition *Mystical Perseverance and the Rose* at the State Art Gallery in Sopot (1992). The sign of infinity turns into a crown of thorns, an eloquent symbol of the religious transitions taking place in the Transition era. Eastern mysticism blends seamlessly here with Christianity.

Jacek Staniszewski

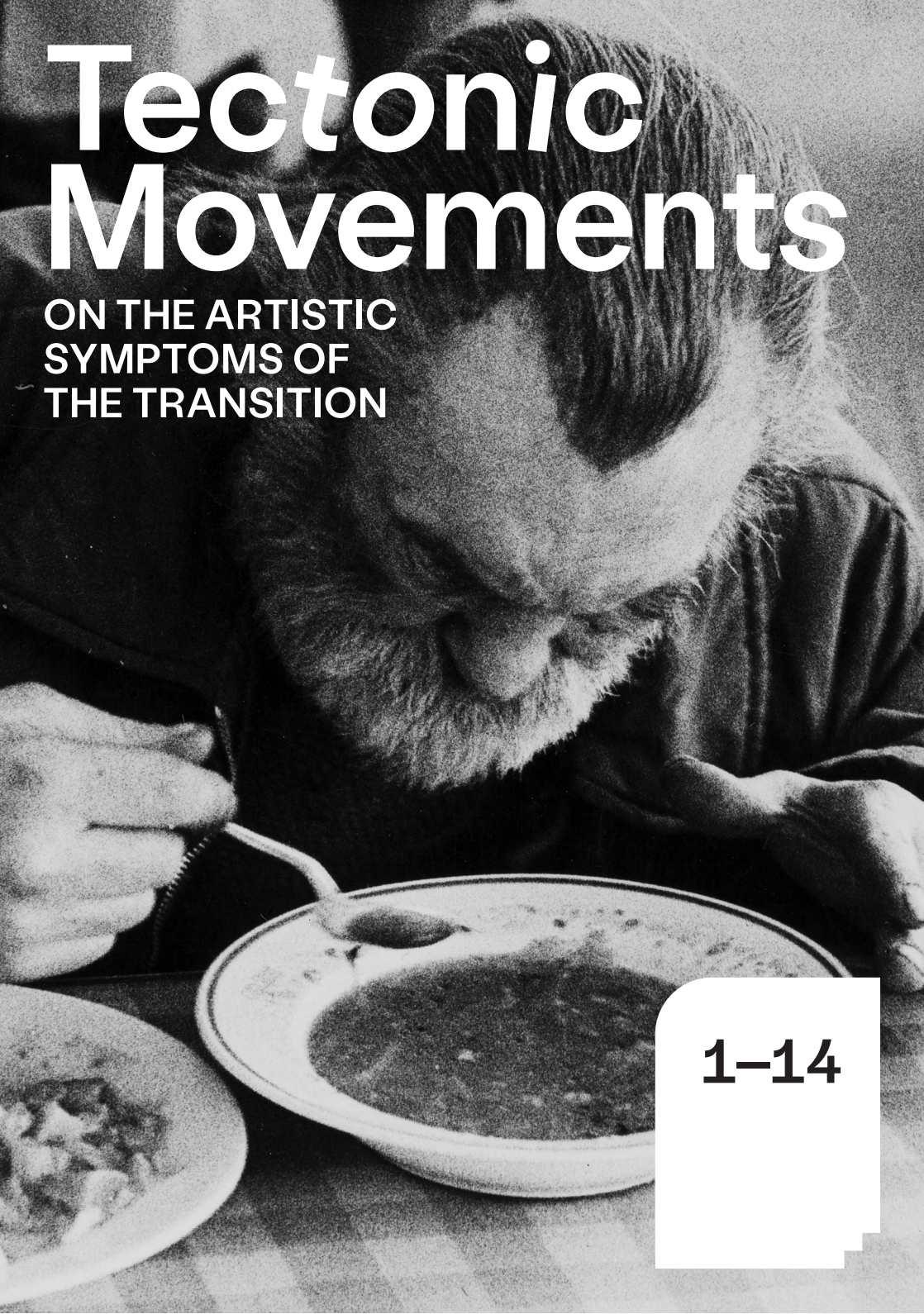
(b. 1957)

untitled

1991

logotype

courtesy of the artist



Tectonic Movements

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1-14

1

Praffdata was one of the most important art groups of the Transition era, active at the crossroads between music and art. They performed in the late 1980s and early 90s, when the Polish counterculture was also changing its stripes. The unequivocal anti-communist and anarchist notions of “no future” typically found in the first half of the 1980s gave way to a support for social causes. Praffdata raised issues such as nuclear energy, the environment, and pacifism, which brought it closer to Western counterculture movements. The group also looked to draw attention to economic inequalities and even the problems of the prison system (*Pornostrojka* in 1990, a concert supporting prisoners’ access to sex). Eventually, they made use of the possibilities afforded by the new system. In 1993, they established the ironically-named Praffdata International Corporation, which dealt in the wholesale and distribution of beer. Most of the profits were used to organize Praffdata events. The company ceased operating in the late 1990s.

Praffdata

banner of the Praffdata group

1987

paint on canvas

courtesy of Jarosław Gula

2

In a series of photos from the early 1990s, the artist uses visual motifs that originated in the communist era and persisted during the Transition. Here the artist is interested not so much in political change as in the slow transformation of perceptions. Unlike his master, Zbigniew Warpechowski, Uklański identifies with the new, consumerist order, but is also interested in vivisectioning it. This ambivalence is often clothed in irony. The same ambivalence can be discerned in the present work. Indeed, Uklański exhibited this work in Jan Kuziński's hairdressing salon in Przemyśl, where, at the invitation of Warpechowski, he took part in an open-air workshop.

Piotr Uklański

(b. 1968)

untitled (*High Density Color – High Definition Lips*)

1994/2022

color photograph

courtesy of the artist and the Foksal Gallery
Foundation. Thanks to director Jarosław Suchan

3

Marek Sobczyk painted two *Gandzia* works. The first (1981), often reproduced, and now regarded as a classic, was a critical and scathing commentary on Martial Law. In this famous painting manifesto, the artist depicted Wojciech Jaruzelski against a Rastafarian flag. The general was “toking” a smoke pot like a reefer. The second painting, almost completely forgotten today, also features Jaruzelski; this time he is a symbol of the changes underway in the country, in a blurry black-and-white television image. The general has swastikas in his eyes. Following the Round Table Agreement, Jaruzelski became president in 1990. Many considered this not as proof of the political maturity of Solidarity, but as a betrayal of its underground ethos and an insult to the victims of Martial Law. This feeling was shared by numerous figures in the world of culture, including artists.

Marek Sobczyk

(b. 1965)

Gandzia [Replica] after 1989

1989

oil on canvas

courtesy of the artist

4

Mikhail Bakunin was a legendary Russian anarchist who traveled throughout nineteenth-century Europe in search of a “revolutionary moment.” Kryszkowski planned the exhibition so that the viewers of the exhibition would walk over his headstone. This simple gesture made the work hard to define. Is the paper mâché headstone a tribute to Bakunin? Or is it simply a postmodern critique of ideology? With *Bakunin's Headstone*, Kryszkowski bid farewell not only to the counterculture of the 1980s, but also to art as such. Indeed, he would soon cease to be an artist. In the narrative of the exhibition, the headstone is also an important turning point: the subsequent rooms will now deal with the negative effects of the Transition.

Jacek Kryszkowski
(1955–2006)

Bakunin's Headstone

1990

cardboard, glue, paper, paint, earth

collection of the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw

These works make an informal diptych. The film shows a man who demonstrates a “catalog” of political poses and gestures from the perspective of various ideologies. In the film, as is typical for postmodernity, they become empty signs, adornments without content. The protagonist, Gary Hell, was a friend of Jarosław Fliciński, and something of a larger-than-life figure in the Tricity art scene of the 1990s. One day, Hell visited the painter in his studio and launched into an oratorical thespian monologue. From that time onward, Hell would be a regular visitor to the studio. As Fliciński admits, Hell freed him from the need to tell a story, which allowed the artist to focus on form. Their friendship would give rise to the painting series *Diving into the Water*. In 1994, Fliciński wrote: “If we are able to imagine ourselves at the moment before diving into water, then fear would be the dominant note. But after some time, we would learn to embrace this fear, regarding it as a thrill associated with the risk of diving.” It would be hard to find a better metaphor for the ambivalence of the optimism of the Transition.

Jarosław Fliciński

(b. 1965)

Gary Hell

1993

VHS, digital copy

Diving into the Water

1994

oil on canvas

6

The work of the Kijewski/Kocur duo (Marek Kijewski and Małgorzata Malinowska) is a unique example of art that affirms a new transitional reality, supporting vitality, sensuality, and intense visuality. Kijewski/Kocur looked to combine eroticism with mass culture, creating a situation whereby low culture and high culture collided. For their sculptures, they used materials such as Lego blocks, jelly beans, plastic and colored feathers, and gold and precious stones. The result was an art that can be seen as a hymn to transitional energies.

Kijewski/Kocur
(1996–2007)

Self-Portrait in a Burgundy Shell
1996
plastic

collection of the Centre of Polish Sculpture in Orońsko

7

The work comes from a series of the artist's early performances, which took place in the "new temples of consumption": shopping malls and fast food restaurants. Hailing from a working-class background, Uklański feigned a fascination for such places. At the same time, he sought to show that under the veneer of attractive packaging, shopping malls and fast-food places only peddled lies and offered trash. In the present work, he makes recourse to the climbing motif. Indeed, climbing up toward success was a key motifs of the Transition. At the same time, Uklański is attempting to re-evaluate the tradition of classical performance, wherein the artist confronts his own self, viewing his body as creative material. This was all about the repetitiousness of the everyday and the mundane. Uklański proposed a different kind of performance: one that was ironic, devoid of pathos, and aware of its theatricality.

Piotr Uklański

(b. 1968)

untitled

1995

performance

courtesy of the artist and the Foksal Gallery
Foundation. Thanks to director Jarosław Suchan

The work alludes to Jan Matejko's portrait gallery of Polish kings. Wyrzykowski used the images of Poland's rulers to comment on the idea of the "end of history," which was being widely discussed at the time. The American political scientist who proclaimed this notion, Francis Fukuyama, argued that liberal democracy was the pinnacle of humanity, and that with the fall of communism, the era of political revolution had ended. Wyrzykowski put on more T-shirts, cut the images of kings out of them, chewed them and then spat them out. His body gradually "grew" with holes appearing in the T-shirts, and his own figure became deformed. This was a vision of a post-political subject, one devoid of form and content.

Piotr Wyrzykowski

(b. 1968)

44

1994

performance, cut T-shirts

Gdańsk Collection of Contemporary Art, deposit of the
Gdańsk city commune in the collection of NOMUS—New
Art Museum, Branch of the National Museum in Gdańsk

9

This mural repeats the motif from a billboard designed by Maciejowski in 2002 for the AMS Outdoor Gallery. The poster was found on over 400 billboard trailers all over Poland. It is one of the few representations of Transitional exclusion.

Marcin Maciejowski

(b. 1974)

How to Live Here Now

2002/2022

paint

courtesy of the artist

A series of paintings imitating everyday objects is one of the symbols of painterly expression and artist's lot at the beginning of the twenty-first century. These works are usually considered in an intra-artistic context: as a reflection on the specificity of the painting medium or as a subversive update of the *trompe l'œil*. However, the first paintings in this series—*Bricks*, *VHS Cassettes*, and *Planks*, presented at the exhibition—were also to be traded. Bujnowski talked about commodifying art in the simplest way. He turned images into reproducible, mass-produced objects. He sold them as “cheap art from Poland” on the sidewalk in front of the Tate Modern gallery in London. In this way, he commented on the western aspirations of the Polish art world.

Rafał Bujnowski

(b. 1974)

Planks, from the Cheap Art from Poland series

1999–2000

oil on canvas

Collection of the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, depository of the Capital City of Warsaw

11

A year after copyright law was introduced, the artist tattooed a “©” on his arm. An integral part of the work is a map of Europe with the shape of Poland cut out, next to which are quotes from similar laws in other European countries. The work signals the ambiguity of the new regulations. Copyright protects intellectual property, but at the same time, it reduces ideas to a commodity.

Piotr Wyrzykowski

(b. 1968)

Copyright

1995

color print, collage, photograph

courtesy of the artist

Zbigniew Warpechowski organized a highly unusual party in a clearing near Zawoja. The crockery was cracked. In the place of a jug was a jar. And to boot, the artist was shoeless... and not even wearing a bow tie. In this way, the performance pioneer sought to comment on the mass production of culture and the degradation of contemporary art in the new socioeconomic reality. He did so from the position of high modernism, defending a model of “true” art—one that is created selflessly, which poses the most important questions, and does not succumb to *ad hoc* trends. The performance also has a class dimension. The artist opposed “rudeness,” a term by which he understood the early *nouveau riche*, who were ruthless toward others and toward the culture they had commodified. As an alternative, Warpechowski proposed a new “aristocratic culture.” In this paradoxical way, the avant-garde returned to its roots: prodding and provoking a consumption-focused bourgeoisie.

Zbigniew Warpechowski
(b. 1938)

Aristocratic Art
1992

performance, VHS tape recording

courtesy of the Monopol Gallery

In the early 1990s, Piotr Wyrzykowski made a series of performances based on a simple idea. The artist used an ax to cut a hole in the wall, and then bricked up the same ax in the same hole, symbolizing the events and emotions of the Transition era. The theme concerned a sense of helplessness, and not being able to influence the course of things. It was also a metaphor for work that does not bring fulfillment. The photographs presented here are the only surviving traces of the artist's performances.

Piotr Wyrzykowski

(b. 1968)

***How Many Cuts Are Needed
to Find Oneself on the Outside***

1993

photograph

Like so many, Paweł Kwiek found himself in a very difficult financial situation during the Transition era, and his predicament inspired him to begin work on the *Meals of the Poorest* project. This was a series of photographs which presented people affected by the homeless crisis. The artist met these people in the same social welfare centers that he himself was attending. In this way, a unique testimony of empathy toward people affected by the Transition was created and captured.

Paweł Kwiek
(1951–2022)

Meals of the Poorest
1990
photograph

courtesy of the Arton Foundation