

AMERICAN ARTISTS
IN THE MUZEUM SZTUKI
COLLECTION
INTERNATIONAL
SYMPOSIUM
17.10.2022



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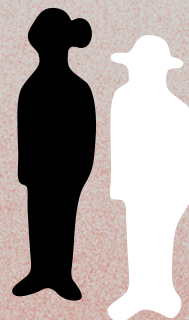
In 1983, American artists donated a collection of their works as part of a project entitled *Échange entre artistes 1931-1982, Pologne-USA*, initiated by artists Henryk Stażewski (founding member of the a.r. group and the Foksal Gallery, both initiatives devoted to the promotion of the avant-garde) and Sam Francis (member of the Artists Committee supporting and advising the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles), as well as Anka Ptaszkowska (critic, co-founder of Foksal Gallery) and Pontus Hultén (director of MOCA). The idea behind the project was to establish a dialogue between Polish and American artists: works by Polish artists were given to the MOCA collection "in exchange" for works by American artists donated to the collection of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.

The nearly forty works by American artists reflect a range of tendencies in American art of the turn of the 1970s and 80s: post-minimalism, performance, and conceptual art. Many of these works are difficult to classify and fly in the face of prevailing interpretations of American art of the era; they exemplify west-coast approaches to artmaking, contrasting with the languages established by artists centered around New York. The *Échange* project and the resulting collection invite interpretations of the complex political circumstances of the time: the politics of the Iron Curtain and Martial Law in Poland.

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM 17.10.2022

Through this symposium, we wish to take a closer look into Polish-American relations and art exchange in the 1980s. The main outcome of the project is to better understand the significance of the *Échange* collection within the larger context of the Muzeum Sztuki collection.

The Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź is one of the world's oldest museums of modern art. As early as the turn of the 1920s and 30s, a collective of visual artists (Władysław Strzemiński, Katarzyna Kobro, and Henryk Stażewski) and poets (Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski) began gathering pieces by the most important artists of the day, who donated their works to the a.r. collection. Soon, this unique symbol of solidarity and avant-garde cooperation was donated by the a.r. group to the museum in Łódź to popularize the new art.



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Dr. Paweł Polit

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SYMPOSIUM AGENDA

9:45 A word to open the symposium
by **Agnieszka Pindera** and **Dr. Paweł Polit**

10:00 **Agnieszka Pindera** (Muzeum Sztuki)
The Exchange in More than Three Words

10:30 **Maria Matuszkiewicz** (University of Warsaw)
Message in a Bottle

11:00 **Dr. Paweł Polit** (Muzeum Sztuki)
*Process, Place, Intervention: on the Affinities between
Polish and American Artists in the Neo-avant-garde Era*

11:30 **Prof. Lucy Bradnock** (Courtauld Institute of Art, London)
Los Angeles International: the L.A. Art World circa 1980

12:30 lunch break

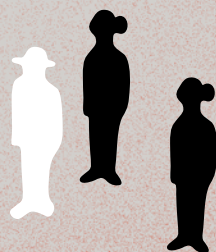
14:00 **Prof. Michael Leja** (University of Pennsylvania)
Narration and Comedy in 1970s Art in the United States

15:00 **Dr. Wojciech Szymański** (University of Warsaw)
Deluxe Photo Book 1971-73: Chris Burden in Poland

15:30 **Dr. Elizabeth Buhe**
Conceptual Space Between Polish and American Painting

16:30 **Prof. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska** (University of Łódź)
*Sculpting Light: The Work of Barbara Kasten
and the Modern "Lichtspiel" Tradition*

17:00 **Barbara Kasten** in conversation
with **Prof. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska**



Agnieszka Pindera

The Exchange in More than Three Words

This collection, composed of donations from the American artists (as well as Canadian and Japanese artists who were based at the time in the US) in the 1980s, reflects several pre-existing international networks of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. *The Échange entre ar-tistes 1931-1982* made reference to the International Collection of Modern Art created by the a.r. group (founded by visual artists Władysław Strzemiński, Katarzyna Kobro, and Henryk Stażewski and poets Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski) and first presented to the public in 1931. It largely consisted of donations from Michel Seuphor, and was based on the contacts of artists such as Wanda Chodasiewicz-Grabowska (Nadia Léger) and Jean Hans Arp, all of them based in France. Members of the a.r. group—Stażewski and Brzękowski—mainly traveled to Paris to obtain donations. On the other hand, the *Échange* project was preceded by the *Construction in Process* exhibition held in Łódź in the fall of 1981, involving fifty-four international artists. This event was organized with the support of the Solidarność [Solidarity] Workers Union, and all the works exhibited were donated to the Union. The initiator of *Construction*, Ryszard Waśko, not only evoked the a.r. collection as a precedent for assembling the Solidarność collection (today under the care of the Muzeum Sztuki), but also mentioned Henryk Stażewski in the Honorary Committee. The following artists took part in the *Construction* and were also engaged with the *Échange* project a year later: Peter Downsbrough, Dan Graham, Les Levine, Sol LeWitt, Paul Sharits, and David Rabinowitch, a Canadian based in the US. The work of Nancy Holt was also exhibited on both occasions. I am interested in mapping these networks and indicating the points they share, as well as discussing the connections created during the *Échange*, building bridges between

a group of Polish artists, the Muzeum Sztuki, and the community involved in shaping the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Agnieszka Pindera is a curator of exhibitions, writer, and cultural organizer currently working at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. She is interested in cultural policies and the history of art institutions, including grassroots and independent initiatives. She has edited a series of books on artists' self-organization, and co-edited a history of alternative artist-run institutions. Pindera has authored a biography of Józef Patkowski, the founder of the Polish Radio Experimental Studio, which was a center established in 1957 to stimulate experimental interdisciplinary work (*Patkowski: Ambassador of Music from the Planet Mars*). She co-curated (with Jarosław Suchan) an exhibition devoted to early twentieth-century artist-created institutions (*The Avant-Garde Museum*) and co-edited an anthology under the same title. Together with Natalia Słaboń and Marta Madejska, she is currently working on a book project entitled *Please Go on: A Social History of the Muzeum Sztuki* in Łódź, based on oral history, interviews with and testimonies by longtime employees of the oldest modern art museum in Poland. She has curated several group exhibitions (e.g. *Peer-to-Peer: Collective Practices in New Art* at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź), as well as solo shows by artists such as Nikita Kadan (with Alona Karavai and Anna Potiomkina), Jasmina Cibic, and by Konrad Smoleński at the Polish Pavilion for the 55th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia (with Daniel Muzyczuk).



Maria Matuszkiewicz

Message in a Bottle

Anka Ptaszkowska is a critic, curator, gallerist, and a friend and collaborator to dozens of artists both in Poland and in France, including such prominent figures as Henryk Stażewski, Tadeusz Kantor, Edward Krasiński, and Daniel Buren, and marginal ones rejected by the art world during their lifetimes, such as Krzysztof Niemczyk and Andre du Colombier. She was a co-founder of Foksal Gallery in 1966, and of two experimental institutions in Paris in the 1970s, a teacher in a French art school for some twenty years, an organizer of many exhibitions and events, and, most recently, a host of *soirées privées* at her Paris apartment. Anka's involvement in art is marked by discontinuities in her professional career (in terms of institutional affiliations or fixed positions), and a great constancy in her commitment to and lifelong support for "her" artists and associates. A refusal of fixed social roles, a life between two countries (Poland and France), a reliance on personal relationships combined with a great talent for bringing people together, an enthusiasm for daring and unusual projects, and a willingness to take risks are all characteristics of this unorthodox figure. In my talk, I will discuss the *Échange* project in the context of Anka's practice.

Maria Matuszkiewicz is an art historian and philosopher. Recently she curated (together with Sara Martinetti) the exhibition *Anka au cas par cas* co-produced by CAPC Bordeaux and Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. She has also cataloged Anka Ptaszkowska's archives donated to the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.



Dr. Paweł Polit

Process, Place, Intervention: On the Affinities between Polish and American Artists in the Neo-avant-garde Era

The political climate of the early 1980s was an important factor in re-considering the extant notions of artmaking and art institutions. The economic crisis and the resulting imposition of martial law in Poland, alongside the intensification of neo-liberal tendencies in the American context, made both sides share a conviction of the exhaustion of the neo-avant-gardist ethos and the need to build sensitivity to the symptoms of new attitudes. For Warsaw's Foksal Gallery (established in 1966) the *Échange entre artistes 1931-1982, Pologne-USA* project, in which the gallery played a key role, was a chance to re-evaluate its own history, with an emphasis on the more recent developments in the work of artists cooperating with the gallery.

Most of the Polish artists who took part in the *Échange* were tied to the Foksal Gallery, in one way or another. Their works were juxtaposed with works by American artists at the exhibition in 1982 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In my presentation, I would like to reflect upon the degree to which the history of neo-avant-garde in Poland was told from the perspective of Foksal Gallery at the exhibition. Secondly, I would like to comment upon the dialogues between Polish and American artists resulting from the occasional juxtapositions of their works in the exhibition. I would also like to highlight the references to ideas worked out in the American context that were inscribed in the works by Polish artists.

Dr. Paweł Polit is a writer on art and a curator at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. He has curated exhibitions at the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, including: Peter Downsbrough (1994), *Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art: Experiences of Discourse 1965-75* (1999), *Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz: Philosophical Margins* (2004), Martin Creed (2004), Silvia Kolbowski (2007), Bruce Nauman (2009), and Hanna Łuczak (2010); he also co-curated *Ryszard Stanisławski: Open Museum* (2006). He has been the curator of exhibitions at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź: *The Themersons and the Avant-Garde* (2013), Jeremy Millar (2014), Stephen Kaltenbach (2017), and *Leopold Buczkowski: Glimpses of History, Fleeting Images* (2021), and co-curator of *DADA Impulse* (2015), *Montages: Debora Vogel and the New Legend of the City* (2017), and *The Great War* (2018). He curated *Franciszka Themerson: Lifelines* (Łaźnia Centre for Contemporary Art in Gdańsk, 2019), and co-curated *Włodzimierz Borowski: Network of Time* (MoMA, Warsaw, 2010) and *Witkacy: Seismograph of the Age of Acceleration* (National Museum, Warsaw, 2022). He has published widely in exhibition catalogues and periodicals: *Afterall*, *ARTMargins*, *Er(r)go*, *Kresy*, *Magazyn Sztuki*, *Obieg*, *Piktogram*, *Szum*, *Blok*, *Czas Kultury*, and *Teksty Drugie*. He is the author of a book on the philosophical ideas behind the paintings of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (2019).



Prof. Lucy Bradnock

Los Angeles International: the L.A. Art World circa 1980

This paper contextualizes the US-Polish exchange of works of art within the cultural and institutional landscape of the Los Angeles art world at the turn of the 1980s, in particular as it shaped the founding of the Museum of Contemporary Art (1979) and the California/International Arts Foundation (1981). I take as a framework the model offered by art historian Lisa Tickner, who has described points in a network of artists, gallerists, curators, and collectors as “sites and catalysts for the translation and consolidation of economic and cultural capital” (Tickner, 2007). I attend to the critical debates that shaped the Los Angeles art scene of the 1970s, including those that emphasized the importance of educational and artist-led spaces, and I discuss the ways in which Los Angeles artists and institutions navigated different pressures and opportunities offered by local, national, and international artworlds. I explore the value of the international context in the local cultural field, the perceived relationship between the international and the contemporary, and the shifts that such relationships inaugurated. In doing so, I ask what the exchange program meant for the Los Angeles art scene at this particular moment, and why L.A. proved an especially productive partner in this project of international art cooperation.

Prof. Lucy Bradnock is Reader and Vice-Dean for Research at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, and Editor of the journal *Art History*. Previously, she was Research Fellow at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2009–12), then Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Nottingham (2012–22). Her research examines histories of art, criticism, and curating in the postwar United States, with a particular focus on Los Angeles and California. She is author of *No More Masterpieces: Modern Art After Artaud* (Yale University Press, 2021), and co-editor of *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art, 1945–1980* (Getty, 2011) and *Lawrence Alloway: Critic and Curator* (Getty, 2015).



Prof. Michael Leja

Narration and Comedy in 1970s Art in the United States

During the 1970s, a number of artists—many of them working in photo-based conceptualist modes—shaped their work around storytelling or varieties of comedy, including irony, parody, and deadpan absurdity. Some works in the Muzeum Sztuki collection fit these categories, particularly those by Terry Allen, John Baldessari, Douglas Huebler, Les Levine, and Alexis Smith. Having organized small exhibitions around themes of narration and comic conceptualism featuring these artists at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, Massachusetts over forty years ago, I will situate these works in the context of the artistic and historical developments of the period.

Prof. Michael Leja is James and Nan Wagner Farquhar Professor of History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania. He studies the visual arts in various media (painting, sculpture, film, photography, prints, illustrations) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, primarily in the United States. His work is interdisciplinary and strives to understand visual artifacts in relation to contemporary cultural, social, political, and intellectual developments. He is especially interested in examining the interaction between works of art and particular audiences. His book *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (2004) traces the interactions between the visual arts and the skeptical forms of seeing engendered in modern life in northeastern American cities between 1869 and 1917. It won the Modernist Studies Association Book Prize in 2005. An earlier book, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (1993) situates the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, and others in a culture-wide initiative to re-imagine the self in the midst of a traumatic history. It won the Charles Eldredge Prize for Distinguished Scholarship in American Art from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Most recently, *Art of the United States, 1750–2000: Primary Sources* (2020), co-authored with John Davis, surveys the art of the US through a broad array of historical writings by artists, patrons, literary figures, and other commentators. A forthcoming book is *A Flood of Pictures: The Formation of a Picture Culture in the US, 1830 to 1860*, which explores changes in pictorial forms and in social relations associated with the industrialization of picture production and the development of a mass market for images.



Dr. Wojciech Szymański

Deluxe Photo Book 1971-73: Chris Burden in Poland

Chris Burden's Deluxe Photo Book 1971-73 is a self-published artist's book documenting twenty-three of the artist's performances. Both an independent work of art and a record of his seminal performance, the piece was conceived as an archive of Burden's early works, including *Shoot* (1971) and *Through the Night Softly* (1973), among others. *Deluxe Photo Book* became a part of the MSL collection in 1983, at a time when Burden had already emerged as an internationally recognized artist. The aim of this paper is to investigate the artist's presence and his possible influence on the Polish performance and contemporary art scene from the 1970s until today.

Dr. Wojciech Szymański is an art historian, art critic, and independent curator. He is assistant professor at the Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw, the author of several dozen articles, editor and author of monographs and exhibition catalogs, principal and researcher in a number of Polish and international academic projects; he has published *The Argonauts: Postminimalism and Art after Modernity: Eva Hesse—Felix Gonzalez-Torres—Roni Horn—Derek Jarman* (2015, in Polish); since 2019 he has been editor-in-chief of the *Ikonotheke* journal. He has recently been a curator of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's exhibition *Re-enchanting the World* in the Polish Pavilion at the 59th Biennale Arte in Venice. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). He lives in Kraków.



Dr. Elizabeth Buhe

Conceptual Space Between Polish and American Painting

In 1966, Polish and American artists sought to reconceptualize the space of art's presentation, ultimately derived from the conventions of painting. In step with sociopolitical transformations that would culminate with the international uprisings of 1968, this space would merge the circumstances of making with those of viewing, and its character would be participatory and itself resistant to ossification. This paper examines the parallel emergence of active spatial ontologies at Foksal Gallery in Warsaw and the New Arts Society in Los Angeles, the latter founded by artist Sam Francis. A concrete albeit retrospective link between the Polish and American reconceptualizations of space exists in the form of Francis's 1966–68 *Untitled "Edge"* painting, now in the Muzeum Sztuki collection. This work exemplifies the anti-hierarchical understanding of space that governed Francis's approach to the New Arts Society, and was also shown alongside Foksal Gallery artists in 1982 in the exhibition marking the *Échange*.

Dr. Elizabeth Buhe is an art historian and art critic based in New York who is writing a book on abstraction and perception at mid-century and regularly publishes in *The Brooklyn Rail* and elsewhere. Her research has earned her grants from the Fulbright, Luce, Getty, and Terra Foundations, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. She is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and a practiced educator who teaches and lectures widely.



Prof. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska

Sculpting Light: The Work of Barbara Kasten and the Modern “Lichtsspiel” Tradition

The German word “Lichtsspiel” is a name for light projections that were theorized and translated into abstract art practice in the early twentieth century by artists like Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack and László Moholy-Nagy. In Moholy-Nagy’s photographic experiments as well as in his other projects, issues of “optical creation” (“light painting” and “light sculpture”) were of central importance, as he regarded them as a field where various modern developments intersected (including stage sets and architectural space). In my discussion, I would like to analyze Barbara Kasten’s work—her *Construct* series (one piece of which is in the Muzeum Sztuki collection) and *Photogenic Paintings*, through the lens of Moholy’s ideas of optical creation (*Optische Gestaltung*), visuality, and the relationship between vision and the other senses.

Kasten’s work is often associated with Moholy and the Bauhaus tradition, based on her experimental and cross-disciplinary approach, and due to the formal analogies with modern “abstract photography.” *Construct PC/4B* may elicit comparisons with the work of Florence Henri and other 1920s experiments in the spirit of the New Vision (the use of glass, reflected light, and abstract geometric structures). Such a formalist reading, however, would not fully explain the impact and meaning of Kasten’s photographs, which work as “visual puzzles,” reminding us of their construction and creation process. Even if her abstract compositions suggest an affinity with what Moholy called “freeing a material of its weight,” they cannot be assimilated into the modernist notion of progress toward “pure opticality.” Working with light, Kasten said, is “photographing the shadows”—even in the abstract one cannot dispose

of remnants of physical reality, and luminescent materials further complicate the issue, since their brightness marks their density. Like other West Coast artists connected with the Light and Space movement, Kasten cannot be listed among those minimalist figures (like Richard Serra) who radically turned against modernist opticality to regain true and real materiality. Her balance of opposites, engaging tactility and opticality, stasis and movement, offers an interesting perspective on the (much debated) modernist ideals. It also allows us to take another look at Moholy’s work, with which it is in dialogue.

Prof. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska is a researcher in modern art history and aesthetics. Her research interests comprise the history of modernist avant-gardes, their relations with the processes of modernization, art history criticism and methodology, and theories and practices of the public sphere. Her books include: *Obraz zwielokrotniony. Reprodukacja fotograficzna i wizualne narracje sztuki awangardowej 1910-1939* (The Image Multiplied: Photographic Reproduction and Visual Narratives of Avant-garde Art 1910–39, 2017); *Polityka doświadczenia. Clement Greenberg i tradycja formalistycznej krytyki sztuki* (The Politics of Experience: Clement Greenberg and the Tradition of Formalist Criticism, 2017); *Puste miejsce po krytyce? Modernizm imaterialistyczna rewizja autonomii sztuki* (The Empty Space after Criticism? Modernism and the Materialist Revision of the Autonomy of Art, 2014); she has also edited *Migracje modernizmu. Nowoczesność i uchodźcy* (Migrations of Modernism: Modernity and Refugees, 2014).



**Barbara Kasten in conversation
with Prof. Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska**



Barbara Kasten was born in Chicago in 1936. She graduated from the University of Arizona (B.F.A.) in 1959. Kasten also received an M.F.A. in 1970 in Sculptural Textile Design at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California. She was then a student of Trude Guermonprez.

Kasten initiated the *Dimension of Fiber* exhibition, the first West Coast fiber presentation at the California College of Arts and Crafts gallery, in 1971. In 1971 and 72 she worked with Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz at the Higher School of Arts in Poznań as a Fulbright-Hays Fellow. While in Poland, she exhibited at the Galeria Rzeźby (Stołeczne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych) in Warsaw.

The work Kasten donated to the Muzeum Sztuki Collection in 1983, entitled *Construct PC/4B*, was created in 1982, when she started using a large-scale 24x20 Polaroid camera. At the time she was also investigating Bauhaus and Constructivism, and felt that a piece reflecting those interests would be the most apt donation.



AMERICAN ARTISTS IN THE MUZEUM SZTUKI COLLECTION

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