

## PROLOGUE

The 1960s brought about bold acts of creative imagination. From its very beginning, from abstraction, the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed artistic manifestations radically different to what had gone before. What became a foundation stone for the falsifying speculations of artistic and aesthetic nature was the work of Marcel Duchamp.

In the 1960s, the creative practices of artists had a particularly subversive character. They could not be captured directly, being a manifestation of the disappearance of artefacts in their previously used and recognizable forms. In other words, there appear works which – for some people clearly, for others unclearly or totally incomprehensibly – eluded the traditional qualification as objects of art. Some did so in a purely visual way, like the **objects of the minimalists** (Carl Andre, Richard Serra, Robert Morris), others were provocative and perverse (like Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista*). Apart from being conceived by a rather large artistic milieu, these artworks attracted the attention of critics and the public to a larger extent than in the first half of the century.

In the late 60s, **Conceptualism** (Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Art & Language) added to this 20<sup>th</sup>-century sequence of challenging tradition, a seemingly ultimate decision, eliminating the material foundation of an artwork. 'Art is the definition of art' declared Joseph Kosuth in *Art after Philosophy* (1969), one of the most important artistic manifestos of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thereby 'scrutinising' the long tradition of western art and performing a falsification not so much aesthetic as ontological. Within this strongly affecting tendency, there appeared a postulate, never previously presented in such an absolute form, of ignoring the material and visual foundation of an artwork as a source of its aesthetic quality. It is radically eliminated from 'view', and replaced with a philosophical or socio-philosophical speculation. In the foreground of artistic practices, you may note what was previously expressed verbally and conceptually rather by aestheticians, historians and critics, and not the creators of art. And it was not in the form of hard, systemic definitions but rather in the form of philosophical metaphors, or indeed in the descriptions of an artist's life experiences, that the socio-cultural contexts of art were elucidated. It is onto this terrain of speculation that artists ventured *en masse*.

**The first half of the 1970s played a special role in the reception of new practices in art.** The revolutionary tendencies of the 1960s had not only become widespread in their original forms, but

had also inspired artists to undertake completely new experiments with the use of text, photographic and film records, processual and ephemeral forms; as well as making recourse to the use of their own bodies. And the generation of baby-boomers, relentlessly took up the artistic gauntlet. For them, the new horizons of art had provided an opportunity to manifest their presence in the social sphere.

Despite the presence of the Iron Curtain, even in the second half of the 1960s the **Polish reception** of this radical line of thinking, with its aligned artistic practices, was clearly discernible in elite circles. In the new political conditions after World War II, especially from the time of the memorable exhibition at the Arsenal (1955), the Polish modern art scene managed to redefine itself both in a personal and institutional sense (Foksal Gallery, Pod Mona Lizą Gallery). One could say that the revolutionary reinterpretation of all the original concepts and production practices in the visual art of the western culture happened here in the second half of the 1960s. In Poland, the institutional march of these tendencies was visible in such events as, among others, the *Symposium of Artists and Scientists* in Puławy (1966), the *Biennial of Spatial Forms* in Elbląg (1965-1973) and the *Symposium Wrocław 70* (1970).

Aside from all-Poland events, such as the *Festival of Art School Graduates* in Nowa Ruda (1971-1975), quite well-attended by representatives of the youngest generation of artists, in **the first half of the 70s** in Poland there began to appear independent centres of new art in the form of so-called independent galleries (inter alia Zero Museum, Repassage, Akumulatory, Permafo, Remont, Znak).

**Sculpture** had a special part in this artistic discourse. Indeed, one could say that it was sculpture that performed the most radical operation on the body of its historically established forms and artistic-aesthetic patterns. The eponymous ‘absolute elimination of sculpture’ occurred at this time, which was all about challenging the previously constitutive features of sculpture, such as: being situated in a specific place, resulting in the use of permanent and so-called precious materials, symbolic, metaphorical or allegorical references to nature, or to canonical cultural contents.

**There was only one academic centre in Poland** in which the spectacular adaptation of these trends to didactics happened, being almost parallel to western practices. It was Warsaw’s Academy of Fine Art; and to be precise, the Faculty of Sculpture, with its two studios, that of Prof Oskar Hansen (the Studio of Solids and Surfaces) and Prof Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz (the Diploma Studio).

In 1961, under Hansen's mentorship, Krystian Burda made the world-scale monument of Frederic Chopin, *The Road to Żelazowa Wola*, Paweł Freisler made the processual artwork, *Rust Culture*, whereas Andrzej Dłużniewski created the *Sand Pit* (1968). In the first half of the 1970s, Jarnuszkiewicz mentored a group of radical innovators who looked to create an artwork least resembling a sculpture in its most popular form; and here we may mention Przemysław Kwiek, Zofia Kulik, Karol Broniatowski, Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski, Wiktor Gutt, and Waldemar Raniszewski.

## Sculpture as **CONCEPT**

A radical negation of the material foundation of visual arts by conceptualism encourages, even provokes, many artists to build intellectual narrations about art. This trend has been well defined in the Polish variation of conceptualism, sometimes called 'impossible art'. Transferring the effort of producing an artefact into the sphere of the imagination, which may find its manifestation also in the form of text, drawing, project or idea, dynamizes artistic production. For sculptors, this opening of an immaterial horizon of practices has a special character; after all sculptors are encumbered both by tradition and the weight of their material properties. Releasing this burden allows sculptors to almost 'fly' (Karol Broniatowski's *Big Man*). We encounter the freeing of ideas from the duty of being incarnated in a material form, as in the case of Wanda Czełkowska's work bearing the title *Absolute Elimination of Sculpture as a Concept of Shape* (in 1972 in the form of an artwork concept, and only later in its full spatial formula [1995]). This work so clearly illustrates the direction of artistic speculations in those days that the whole exhibition took the name for its title. Another example of the success of the concept, in the days of a radical dominance of thinking over the material form of the artwork, is *Carousel of Stances* by Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars, both of whom were masters of fine art in the scope of sculpture, and who chose to retain one aspect of their profession, that being spatial operation. They freed space from material obligations but 'clothed' it in concepts referring to an artist's axiological choices. Andrzej Dłużniewski's *Globe of Europe* provides another form of psychological speculation. Intellectual openness resulting from the abandonment of technical procedures connected with the production of a material artefact generated a mindscape for sculpture, whilst also encouraging sculptors to perceive artworks anew. Actually, in those days, the concept of 'artwork' lost ground to high craft, becoming readily associated with the flash of the contradictory or even the iconoclastic idea.

## Sculpture as **PROCESS**

Renouncement of the static, material object as the canonical form of representation in art led to 'catastrophic' consequences for the same. Having your head in the clouds – in the case of conceptual artists – acquires an additional temporal acceleration. The message (artwork) does not end in any place, nor does it stop in time. The message 'gets created' under the impact of many possible circumstances; first and foremost, under the influence of the circumstances created by the process of producing the artefact. These are not circumstances imposed by refined craft, but by discursive ideas. The artwork happens over time and in an open space, and in chosen, atypical surroundings. We will find a spectacular example of such an unbridled, spontaneous activity in an open landscape in the charts documenting Professor Oskar Hansen's didactics. We can also discern the same in two films: Beata Tomorowicz's *Działania [Activities]*, documenting the individual and group actions of artists connected with Prof Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz's studio and the Museum Zero Gallery, as well as in Piotr Andrejew's *Po omacku [In the Dark]*.

## Sculpture as an **EPHEMERAL EVENT** (from happening to performance art)

Ephemeral art is a form of new artistic practices critical of the fixed place for producing an artwork and of the artist's attempts at creating a tangible, symbolic narration defined earlier. Ephemeral actions are revolutionary to the material conditionings of a visual artwork and to its determination resulting from the selected and stable place of existence: the disciplined time of perception and the assumed intentions regarding the message conveyed. Nothing deconstructs historical functions of sculpture like ephemerality or depriving a sculpture of its permanence in time, and even manifesting the momentariness of an artistic activity. In the happening of art, artists manage only to capture moments of our attention in the place which appeared unexpectedly, thanks to their 'intervention', due to the previously unpredicted inspirations arising in the given moment. Characteristic of the 1970s, performance art was a novel variation of a form which had its roots in the previous decade. Władysław Hasiór's works are such a variation of an ephemeral action, anchored as they are in the happening of the art itself. The innovation suggested by artists in the early 70s – within the framework of an ephemeral action – involved diverting attention from events in the surroundings and directing it towards the artists themselves, and their bodies. These are the

genetic features of performance art (body art/ performance), which acquired a spectacular form in the work of Jerzy Beres.

## **OBJECT and sculptural INSTALLATION**

A radical metamorphosis of the previously accepted features attributed to sculpture happened in **object and installation** art (in the 70s these categories ousted the word 'sculpture' in colloquial conversations about art). What comes to the fore, in lieu of prior commemorative functions of memorialising great events and grand, secular or sacred narrations, is the speculation regarding spatial forms, individual expression, a private 'commentary' on the everyday, personal experiences. This process reaches its extreme stages in the objects made at the end of the 60s and beginning of the 70s, where attention on the part of the sculptors was focused on their own bodies, their own physiology, guts and excretions (*Photosculpture* – Alina Szapocznikow's forms made of spat out chewing gum). Great politics found itself either being camouflaged (due to censorship) or forming an artist's individual protest or standpoint (Barbara Zbrożyna's *Sarcophagus – In Memory of Jan Palach*). Religious faith also assumed an intimate symbolic form, and the great ritual of sacrifice was also brought down to the sculptural 'laudation' of one artist over another (Krystyn Jarnuszkiewicz's *St John's Head* and his *Oblation for Xawery Dunikowski*).

## **Sculpture and DOCUMENTATION (photography, film, other media)**

**Due to the processual character of sculptural practices, documentation would soon come to the fore.** There appeared a separate category of art, which is the photographic object, being a derivative of the earlier happening of art, the ephemeral event, and creative action. This led to the emancipation of the media recording images, apart from traditional film and photography, as well as the expansion of electronic recordings (not digital yet), which happened under the influence of the growth of processual positions and ephemeral artistic activities. The photographic document (secondary to the processual creative act) achieved the status of being a unique artwork. Objectified in a frame or isolated in a transparent box, it became an object of aesthetic interpretation, as well as a unique object of market speculation. The three-dimensional photographic object found itself situated in the new semantic field between sculpture, photographic documentation, painting, *tableau*, and *panneau*.

The photographic document additionally won elevation thanks to its representation of the artist's *post factum* intervention in graphic and para-sculptural operations (Grzegorz Kowalski's *tableau*). It might happen that a material and spatial operation was started only so as to be filmed. After the 'activities', the material object ceased to have any significance, undergoing degradation, and ultimately oblivion; and it was only the documentation in the form of a *tableau* of film frames that remained permanent (Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski's film *Hand*, made specially for Józef Robakowski's film *Living Gallery*). What became a subject of interest was the 'degraded' object, raised to the rank of an artwork via the act of photographing (Alina Szapocznikow's *Photosculpture* from the spat out chewing gum).

## **TEXTS, MANIFESTOES, sculptors' THEORIES**

**Verbalization, previously present in sculptors' work, but secondary or in fact parallel, now achieved an autonomous position.** Poeticization wins out over philosophizing. Besides self-commentary (Alina Szapocznikow), there appear a plethora of verbalizations accompanying projects based on a difficult idea or one that is totally unimplementable, coupled with radical declarations of social character (Kwiek/Wojciechowski), intellectual speculations (Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski) as well as the popularity of visual poetry and books – often quasi-visual objects without a literary plot.

*Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski*