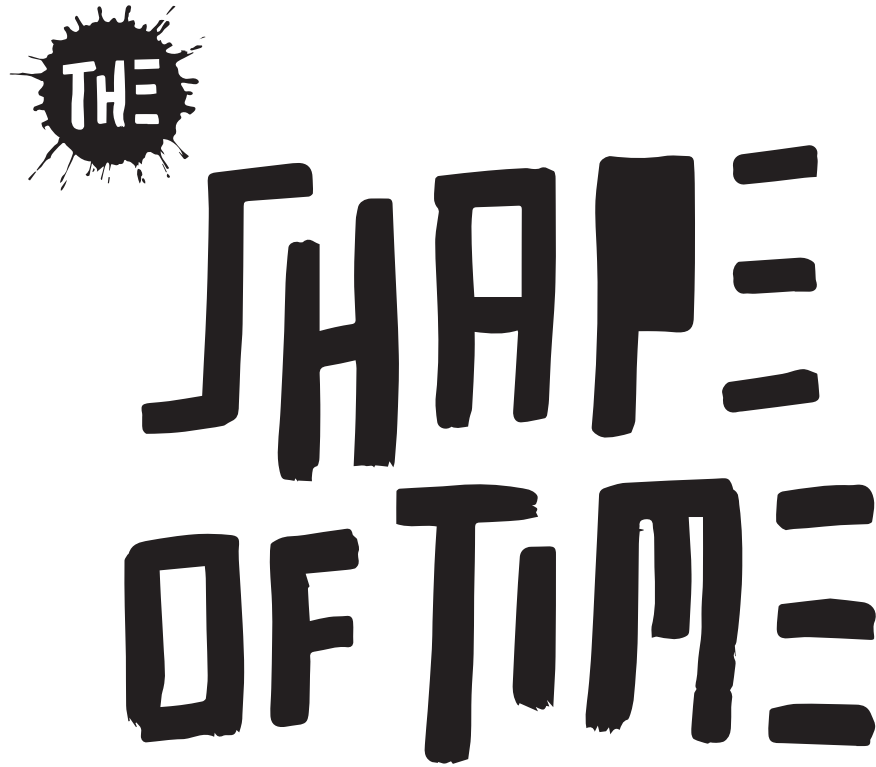


UNIVERSITY OF MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA in Lublin
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THE SHAPE OF TIME

DESCRIPTION OF THE THESIS

The shape of time. Series of paintings.

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Lublin 2021

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Abstract

Speaking and writing about the image as a subject of many disciplines is an activity that, by definition, precludes meticulous, scientific analysis. Depending on the accepted norms, we can only approach the „surface of the image”, but we can never be sure whether the object of our inquiry is actually the one we are looking at. The fascinating thing about thinking about images is that - depending on the methods of analysis adopted - the image constantly eludes us. Just like in physics – Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle states that the position and momentum of an elementary particle cannot be determined with any accuracy. This is the nature of reality. There are pairs of quantities that cannot be measured with any accuracy at the same time - and this is not due to imperfect methods.

At the beginning of a painting there is always a canvas. I cover the grey canvas with a glue. To this day I prepare all the canvas by myself. I stretch the canvas by myself, glue and prime it. The concept of a painting is often born during this physical work.

Painting is not a pure vision, which is then translated into materiality and framed. It is entirely permeated by a secret knowledge, an alchemy that has not yet constituted the form of its language.

In my thesis I argue that poetry is the best form to describe an image – and vice versa. These areas intermingle. Andrei Tarkovsky recites his father’s poem in the film *The Mirror* in its twelfth minute. In the film frame, we see a sequence of symbols: the interior of a house with a seated mother (Margarita Terekhova), a window, a glass of water, then a portrait. When the poem resounds, the camera continues to work to the rhythm of the poem. In the sound layer we hear the barking of a dog, the beating of a clock, the sound of a falling spoon knocked off a table. Then the camera shows a mirror in which is reflected what is the punch line and what is the climax of the whole shot – the fire of a barn.

The image in film is not the objective, documentary recording of an object on film. The film image is created from the ability to give the recorded object my own feeling of that object. I see my task in the creation of an individual stream of time, conveyed in the shot by my sense of movement, the flow of time. (...)

*Sculpting in time – this is (...) what the film image means*¹.

I limit my considerations to the areas of painting: American from the 1950s and Polish from the 1980s, which are a source of joy and inspiration for me.

Grzegorz Adach

The Mirror, dir. by Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.
Reference is made to a poem by Arseniy
Tarkovsky *First meeting*.

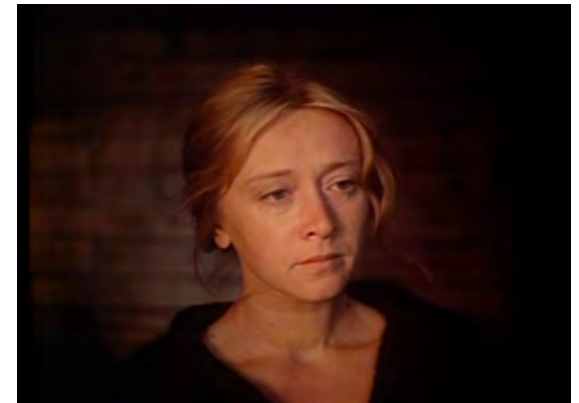
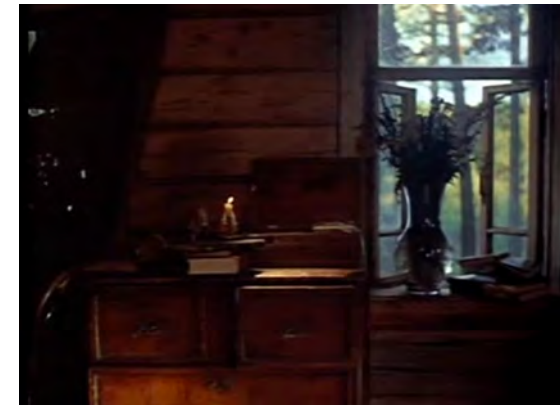
1. Andrei Tarkovsky, *On the Mirror*, op. M. Martin, „Film na Świecie”, 1980 No 11 (267), p. 53, after: Krzysztof Stanisławski, Andrzej Tarkowski’s *Mirrors*, „Powiększenie” 1987, No 1/2, p. 16.

Motto:

When I discovered Tarkovsky's first films, they were a revelation to me. Suddenly I found myself in front of a door to a room to which I had hitherto lacked the key. A room I had always wanted to enter, and in which he already felt perfectly at home. I feel encouraged and invigorated: here is someone who has expressed what I have always wanted to say but did not know how to do it. Tarkovsky is, for me, the greatest director, because he endowed cinema with a new, specific language that makes it possible to grasp life as a game of appearances, as a dream².

2. Ingmar Bergman, *The Greatest*, „Positif” 1986, No. 5 (303), [in] „Powiększenie Quarterly” 1987, No. 1/2, p. 107.

Ingmar Bergman on Andrei Tarkovsky, 1986.



Mirror, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, cinematography by Georgi Rerberg, starring Margarita Terekhova, USSR 1975. Frames from a shot in which Andrei Tarkovsky recites a poem by his father, Arseniy Tarkovsky *The First Meeting*, 00:13:39.

The shape of time

To talk about images it has become fashionable recently. We live in a world filled with images. We see ourselves in them. Search algorithms suggest images to us based on our previous choices. Technology shapes our taste. We reflexively reach for our mobile phone to take a picture. We don’t even try to remember anymore. It has been proven that a digital image, stored on computer disks and published online, lives longer than a tangible image.

I like the coldness of museums, temples of art. I am intrigued by a question: how does the digitisation of everything that surrounds us affect our perception of images, of paintings? Does painting still have any meaning? Is it able to evoke emotions? When I stand in front of a painting, I stand in front of the door of time. I am standing in front of a mirror, in which the history of my entire visual experience is reflected. My knowledge, intelligence, sensitivity and memory are put to the test. A painting is a record of the time spent by the painter at the easel, processed by his creative imagination and talent. It is more than just a record of an impression of a given moment. Before a painting, the intelligence and imagination of the creator and the viewer meet. For me, as an artist, a „painting” is also the shape of my time, the time in which I live.

Kant, aptly, outlined the boundaries for us. He outlined, as if from within, the contours of a network - a strange, opaque web whose nodes would be made of mirrors. It is a device for closing, stretchy as a network can be, and at the same time closed like a box: a box of representation, in which everyone hits its wall as if it were a reflection of himself. Well, so is he, the subject of knowledge: speculative and speculative, and it is in finding the reflected in the speculative - perceiving oneself in intellectual reflection - that the magical character of the box lies, the character of the dissolving closure, the self-rewarding seam. How, then, do we get out of the magic circle, out of the mirror box, if that circle defines our own limits of cognitive subjects?³.

My “box of representation” contains forms and styles typical of the new expression born in the 1980s. Strong contrasts, straight lines, a superficial poster-like approach to the subject matter - these treatments seem banal when juxtaposed with modern technology. I can’t express myself any other way.

In this work, I present the sources of my artistic fascinations and the influence of styles developed by my older painter colleagues from the so-called Gruppe. Parallel to my struggle with the painting form, I write about the aesthetics related to a fragment of history: the Solidarity carnival, martial law, the time of transition. It is a personal attempt to answer the question: how does the artist think? How do I think? Do I think analytically during the creative process, like a scientist, or do I work through my personal experience of a particular time?

3. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Image as a Tear and Death of God Incarnate*, transl. Mirosław Loba, „Artium Quaestiones” vol. X 2000, p. 229. The text is a translation of a fragment of G. Didi-Huberman’s book *Devant l’image. Question posée aux fins d’une histoire de l’art*, Paris 1990.

Transfiguration into a chair

I am often stuck in a chair
unable to move
I am waiting for someone to come in and sit down
then freely and imperceptibly
I move from my feet to the backrest –
in the meantime I smoke –
and back again
I run away
so you never know
where I am
I hear them asking
where is zomer
I like the confusion
I am rarely so bold enough
to stand on the ground
or sit next to you and talk
like man with a man

Piotr Sommer
"In the chair"⁴

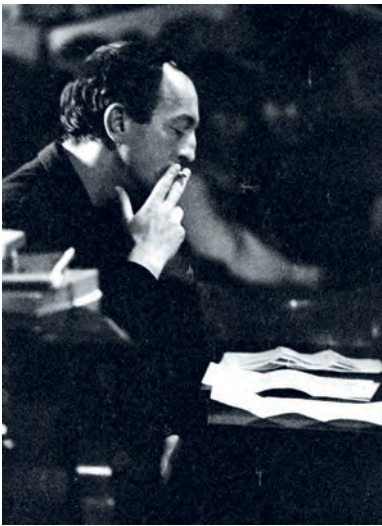
When, over a year ago, I decided to give my doctoral thesis the title *The Shape of Time*, I never imagined that reality would mock us in such a simple and direct way. And here we are, face-masked, hunched over, locked in our homes, harried by thoughts of mundane existence. It only took two months after the discovery of a new type of virus in Wuhan for the world to come to a standstill. Instead, our human time has clearly accelerated. Days pass quickly, every activity takes longer than normal. Going to the shop is a real expedition. Gloves, a mask, a shopping list. In emergency situations, the brain processes information differently. It concentrates on what is most important. To survive. To cook soup, to have a few zlotys for bread and maybe something to eat. Thinking about art recedes into the background, but you can't live without art. I belong to a generation that remembers well the emptiness of shops, the late Gierek era, the lockdown of martial law, so it didn't take me long to activate my defence mechanisms. The credit for this goes to memory. Just like then, my sources of inspiration are the same.

A painter who writes about painting is committing an anachronistic act. It is a different matter if he is a poet. The poem quoted at the beginning proves the mutual permeation of poetry and painting. I am referring to the painting *Ukrzesłowiona* by Andrzej Wróblewski, whose work was rediscovered in the 1980s by young painters. Unfortunately, I am not a poet. I am a painter. In moments of *metaphysical suspension*, I reach for a ready-made poem, for example from the „blue issue” (from the colour of the cover) of „Literatura na Świecie”. This issue would not exist if it were not for the commitment, passion and enormous translation talent of Piotr Sommer, whom I would like to thank wholeheartedly.



Andrzej Wróblewski, *Ukrzesłowiona II*,
watercolour, gouache, 1957.
Property of Tadeusz Brzozowski.

4. Piotr Sommer, *In the chair*,
Literary Publishing House, Cracow 1977.



Frank O'Hara, the poet among painters, 1963-1964,
photo: Mario Schifano, Rome. (<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/02/17/frank-ohara-and-the-skies-of-italy-in-new-york/>).



Frank O'Hara (left) in his loft in New York. A painting by Mike Goldberg in the background. (<https://greg.org/archive/2013/03/11/frank-ohara-and-alfred-leslies-lamp.html>).



5. Stockholm Divertimento. Talks with Joseph Brodsky, Publishing House, Pokolenie, Warsaw 1988, p. 49.

Number 7 (180) was signed for publication on 30 September 1986. It contains an anthology of New York poets, poetry by Frank O'Hara and John Asbery, translations of texts by American critics, and texts by painters Larry Rivers and Alex Katz. Reproductions of paintings by Willem de Kooning, Fairfield Porter and Larry Rivers take up only 16 pages. This small booklet of 5 x 7 inches format, 448 pages in small print, proved to be an important inspiration for me for several reasons. Firstly: it documented the relationship between New York poets and the world of modern art (a phenomenon not seen on this scale since the days of Apollinaire, Max Jacob and Picasso). Secondly: it presented critical texts, thanks to which one can feel „on the tongue” that specific taste of the time in which the world of the New York bohemia was immersed: writers, painters, critics, curators. And these are no mean names: Jackson Pollock, Allen Ginsberg, Patsy Southgate, Kennet Koch, Philip Guston, Andy Warhol, Frank Stella, Franz Kline. It shed some light on the creative process of the American avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s, both in terms of poetry and painting. This complex reaction of variables, historical time, events, knowledge, talents, personalities, social connections led to the phenomenon that is a modern American art.

In 1986 there were no sources presenting American art in such a direct and precise way in Poland. Reading this book had a great impact on me. It pointed to the necessity of searching for a private form of expression, my own visual language, turning towards alternative cultures, actions devoid of a pathetic-patriotic bent. It was a declaration of a specific „personalism”, singularity of feeling, the cult of imperfection and the present time. It allowed for the disability of form, unfinishedness, disruption, it gave faith in reality, in intuitive actions, it strengthened distrust in recognized authorities. At that time, it gave hope that there were oases of freedom in the world, happy islands where poets and painters could create freely. Since a painting can be the subject of a poem, it can also be part of so-called high culture. It follows that painters can be intellectuals who use the meta-language of plastic forms.

Communing with a dose of poetry, just like communing with a visual work, releases a sense of freedom. It is an inherently private, personal feeling, to paraphrase the words of Iosif Brodsky: “one can share bread, a bed, beliefs, a beloved with someone – but not a poem by, say, Rainer Maria Rilke. That is why the defenders of the common good, the leaders of the masses, the preachers of historical necessity do not love art, especially literature and poetry in particular. Because wherever art has passed, wherever a poem has been read, instead of expecting agreement and unanimity, they encounter indifference and polyphony, instead of readiness to act – disregard and disgust”⁵.

The atmosphere of the 1980s shaped my way of seeing the world. What inspired me at a time when my slightly older colleagues were already „entrenched” in their positions as the Polish „new savages”? What is a painting from the point of view of the passing of time? This is what these reflections are about.



Mike Goldberg, *Sardines*, 1955, oil and adhesive tape on canvas, 80 x 65 inches.
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

Why I Am Not a Painter

I am not a painter, I am a poet.
Why? I think I would rather be
a painter, but I am not. Well,

for instance, Mike Goldberg
is starting a painting. I drop in.
"Sit down and have a drink" he
says. I drink; we drink. I look
up. „You have SARDINES in it."
"Yes, it needed something there."
"Oh." I go and the days go by
and I drop in again. The painting
is going on, and I go, and the days
go by. I drop in. The painting is
finished. "Where's SARDINES?"
All that's left is just
letters, "It was too much," Mike says.

But me? One day I am thinking of
a color: orange. I write a line
about orange. Pretty soon it is a
whole page of words, not lines.
Then another page. There should be
so much more, not of orange, of
words, of how terrible orange is
and life. Days go by. It is even in
prose, I am a real poet. My poem
is finished and I haven't mentioned
orange yet. It's twelve poems, I call
it ORANGES. And one day in a gallery
I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.

Frank O'Hara

[1956]

from *Selected Poems* by Frank O'Hara

Mike Goldberg’s painting is 80 × 65 inches. Looking at the painting, I feel the physicality of the painterly matter. This is the first sensation, simultaneous with the impact of the colour red. *Quinacridone Rose* is the colour of a can of sardines in oil. I see a sea of gestures guided in different directions. I like the strokes of the broad brushes, the variation of gestures and the way the paint is laid down.

The rather large format is just right to embrace it with a broad gesture of the arm. This makes one feel the physicality of the author of the work. Accidental drips of paint prove that the painting was created on an easel. This is important because one can imagine the dynamics of the hand movements. This translates into visual perception.

Such a painting is not created in a single session. The painter lays down the first layer, maybe he starts with an outline of something that resembles a table with chairs? Maybe there is a glass, a newspaper spread out, a packet of cigarettes, a tin of sardines? He starts, paints the form and takes a break. A cigarette break is a technological break. The paint has to dry.

The painting action develops in the very centre, as if the author was aiming at the middle of the subject, without looking at the details. The composition is based on a slightly crooked triangle. I like the underpainting, leaving the canvas slightly overpainted at the bottom and the top. This makes the format, which is rectangular and vertical, more square. The composition is held together by a strong bevel highlighted by a short stroke of black paint with an extension in the form of a red line and an applied strip of tape. For balance a similar one is derived on the right, at the level of the raised arm. The upper left side of the painting previously hid the red plane, after being painted over it became a haven for strips of painter’s tape. Perhaps the artist peeled off the tapes and placed them directly on the canvas in order to paste them further. I sometimes do that. The tapes build up a drawing composed of mechanical lines, in which you can (but don’t have to) read the outline of the door. The word ‘EXIT’ on the right is an addition and complement to this treatment. Around the lettering and below, the whites and abrasions made with putty are interesting. Looking at them, I recall Ad Reinhardt’s words: no scraping! Yes, the noise made by the Expressionist muralists may have irritated him. And those heaps of meaningless paint! The composition is completed by yellow accents placed in an arc with the dominant at the top. The composition, despite its apparent chaos, is painterly rhythmic.

The method of arriving at the image is reminiscent of stream of consciousness, a method of writing used by Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. The painter breaks up the form in order to slow it down and make it difficult to perceive. He then reassembles it in order to give it a new meaning. As a result, all that remains of the initial subject is the inscription: “SARDINES”.



Émile Othon Friesz, *La Calanque à la ciotat*, 1906–07, oil on canvas, 15 x 18 inches. Sothebys auction catalogue. (<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/impressionist-modern-art-day-sale-n09741/lot.378.html>).

Modern aggressiveness

Fascination with pure colour and simultaneous simplification of drawing – this is how one can briefly describe the assumptions of the first artistic revolution of the 20th century. Liberation of colour, its influence (expression) did not have a definite beginning in the history of modern art. Somewhere around 1905, first in France, later in Germany and throughout Europe, young painters began to squeeze paint straight from the tube onto the canvas. As with Cubism, the name of the direction was invented by the critic, journalist Louis Vauxcelles. In the presence of Henri Matisse, he exclaimed: “Donatello among the wild beasts!”.

In the journal “Gil Blas” on March 20, 1907, he described the birth of the new direction as follows: “A movement that I consider dangerous (despite my great sympathy for its founders) is forming around a small clan of youngsters. They already have their chapel, where the rite is performed by two effete priests: Derain and Matisse. Dozens of innocent catechumens have already received the anointing from their hands. Their dogma boils down to a shaky scheme prohibiting the construction of form with chiaroscuro, in the name of I-don’t-know-what kind of pictorial abstraction. This new religion hardly appeals to me. I do not believe in their Renaissance. Mr. Matisse – the savage chief, Mr. Derain – his deputy, Messrs Othon Friesz and Dufy – the savage assistants, Mr. Delaunay (Mr. Metzinger’s fourteen-year-old pet) – the young savage”⁶.

By the way, it is hard to deny Mr Vauxcelles the accuracy of his phrasing, he called things by their proper name in a first-rate style. Les Fauves, the Fauves, the Wild - in reference to painters - it is hard to find a better advertisement. In France, wild aggressiveness is more colourful, stems from the Impressionist palette and sounds sensual. Things are different in Germany, where Expressionism operated with more graphic means and had a different tinge.

Historically speaking, Expressionism as an art direction reached its full form precisely in Germany under the influence of political events: the First World War, the November Revolution and the Great Depression during the Weimar Republic. The term “expressionism” was used by Kurt Hiller to refer to the young poets (“We are expressionists!”). The groups of young painters, Die Brücke (from 1905) and Der Blaue Reiter (from 1911), created an expressionist painting form, and the magazines: “Der Sturm” (since 1910, edited by Herwarth Walden) and “Die Aktion” (since 1911 edited by Franz Pfemfert) - a literary form. Within a short time Expressionism had taken hold of theatre, music and film. In 1908, in his treatise *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, devoted to primitive and non-European art, Wilhelm Worringer introduced the terms “abstraction” and “feeling”, which became a permanent part of the expressionist vocabulary.

We used to say that history likes to repeat itself. There are many common features that make us look at the beginning of the 20th – and in parallel the 21st – century with fear and trembling. A new era, a new

6. Russell T. Clement, *Les Fauves: A sourcebook*, Greenwood Press, 1994.



Erich Heckel, *Die Brücke*, linocut, 1912.

time, new challenges. The industrial revolution, like the digital revolution today, has invaded and anchored itself in every sphere of life. Did Expressionism, as a formal externalization of the shape of culture in Germany at the beginning of the new century, have an overarching goal? It would seem so. Its aim was to create a new man. Lothar Schreyer, who later taught stage design at the Bauhaus, described it this way in “Der Sturm” in 1919:

“We, the people of today, are the participants in the global breakthrough, its tools, its victims. It is in us that the old world is falling apart. It is in us that the new world comes into being.”.

“A man has a profession. He has to earn money. He who is rich can have everything. But those who work serve others and have nothing, building new wealth”.

“Work is not a blessing. Division of labour, growing indefinitely, makes work a curse. Excess work stupefies”.

“Society has created art for itself. Art glorifies people, members of society, and beautifies their existence. Poor liars deceive themselves”.

“Society has created morality for itself. Through such a morality indecency became a custom. The morality of use, the morality of boredom gave society the artists of life. The artist of life is the enemy of humanity”.

“The cause of suffering is the will to power that engulfs the Earth and its material goods. Everyone wants to have everything. Everyone fights against everyone”.

“The state is an idol created by society in its image. Its sanctity is conventional”.

“The state punishes anyone who puts themselves outside society”.

“In order to enforce the social order, the state has officials: servants of the state. The lack of responsibility among officials has been elevated to the status of a system. It is not the servant, the official, who is responsible for his act, but his master - the state. However, the state cannot be held responsible by anyone, because the state is an idol”.

“We ourselves bear responsibility for the world. For the death of the old, for the birth of the new world. The hour of breakthrough is our present time. In it a new man is born”⁷.

Sounds familiar. The young German Expressionists were politically and socially committed. Born “on that powder keg that was Germany”⁸, they had no illusions at the turn of the century and tried to put their ideas into practice. There are many points in common between then and now. It is from Germany and Switzerland that the social life reform movements (Lebensreform) carried out by informal communities and art colonies originated at the turn of the century. These programmes were about a return to nature, healthy living and eating (raw food), vegetarianism, sexual liberation, nudism, alternative medicine, alternative teaching methods, pacifism.



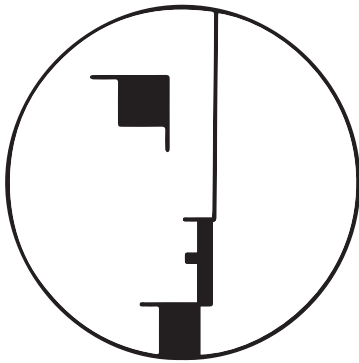
Karl Peter Röhl, Bauhaus logo, 1919. („Star Man”, German: *Sternenmännchen*, English: *Star Manikin*). The logo is a combination of Eastern (yin-yang symbols, swastika, pyramid) and the West (the shape of the Germanic rune - the tree of life, the key referring to the medieval Freemasons, the sun and the star underfoot – *homo coelestis*, the perfect man. (<https://www.bauhaus100.com>).



Stefan Szmaj *Poplars V*, linocut (fragment), 1918.

7. For: selection and dev. Wojciech Dudzik and Małgorzata Leyko *Expressionism in German theatre*. pp. 25, słowo/obraz/terytoria, Gdańsk 2009, p.25, Original title: Lothar Schreyer, *Der neue Mensch*, first printing: „Der Sturm” 1919, H.2; translation based on the edition: *Expressionismus, manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1910–1920*, mit Einleitungen und Kommentaren hrsg. von Thomas Anz und Michael Stark, Stuttgart 1982, s. 140–144.

8. Ibid



Oskar Schlemmer, Bauhaus logo, 1922. To już symbol funkcjonalnego modernizmu. It is already a symbol of functional modernism. It is worth noting that Oskar Schlemmer was a painter.

9. Third Civic Rights Congress. On the initiative of Adam Bodnar, Ombudsman, 13-14 December 2019, (<https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rekomendacje-i-relacje-z-iii-kongresu-praw-obywatelskich>).

Some of the leaders of these groups (but not the expressionist painters): William Pester, Benedict Lust, Arnold Ehret, emigrated to the United States and directly influenced the development of the hippie movement.

Slogans about the need to build a new world order resounded in Europe already 100 years ago. If we compare the texts of that time with those of today, we find many parallels.

“Young people must take responsibility for the world. The older generation has benefited from climate change – it is in the interests of the young to stop it.”

“Rescue action is still possible – but it must be taken HERE and NOW. We are perhaps the last generation that can prevent disaster.”

“Climate change requires a new, more serious approach to human rights. The alternative would be to subordinate these rights to climate needs – thus exposing people to threats from arbitrary decisions by authorities.”

“There are no provisions explicitly allowing citizens themselves to demand that the authorities introduce general environmental protection measures (i.e. local spatial plans or air protection programmes, for example) and thus to impose sanctions on the authorities for inactivity on this subject”.

“The situation is exacerbated by limiting the ability of citizens to control the work of officials by excluding them from proceedings.

“Climate change requires a new approach to the refugee problem.

“We must learn to share the good that is labour. Economic development is an opportunity but also a threat. Economic globalisation and new technologies have changed the labour market “⁹.

Can the state shift the responsibility for the implementation of these postulates to the next generation of its citizens? The set of recommendations of the Third Congress of Civil Rights consists of 31 recommendations for politicians, civil servants and citizens, grouped as follows:

- climate change;
- modern technologies;
- demographic problems;
- democratic education for young people;
- crisis of the rule of law.

These are concrete demands for the future adopted today, but they sound like echoes of the Young Expressionists’ manifesto of 1919.

Neue Wilde

In 1979, I took my first trip abroad to Erfurt in the GDR (German Democratic Republic). It was not a plein air painting trip, nor was it a typical tourist trip. I went to a summer work camp for young people, organised as part of an exchange of secondary school pupils from friendly towns. I had the opportunity to take a close look at the living and working conditions of my German peers. Working on a farm was an extremely interesting experience. The East German bayers, organised in cooperatives (similar to Polish state farms), grew vegetables on their own pre-war estates, which were nationalised after the war. The degree of mechanisation and organisation of work in the cooperatives was impressive.

Vegetables were grown in a highly mechanised manner. The architecture of the auxiliary buildings, greenhouses and research laboratories, which were located right next to the experimental sites, was carefully planned. I was in the centre of a field of several hundred hectares dedicated to industrial agricultural production. Seedling care, observation, planting, irrigation, harvesting, quality control, packaging, distribution – all these processes were planned and controlled with great care.

Growing vegetables brought to my mind a comparison with the process of ‘growing’ culture. Similarly, it requires careful planning, observation, care, maintenance, studios and laboratories, reviews, exhibitions, confrontations. In a word, a well-thought-out cultural policy not only at the central level, but also on the ground. It is a long-term process, because people ripen more slowly than vegetables. It is also a multi-stage and costly process, because culture remains invisible from the centre of management. It requires animators, people with special predispositions, often with unique abilities and talents, people who cannot normally be recruited overnight with a simple recruitment advertisement. Culture needs a diverse environment and the right conditions for its development.

The German landscape of brown fields running to the horizon, so close to Anselm Kiefer’s heart, was not only a respite for the eye, but also a metaphor for culture. At that time, in 1979, I could not have known what “doing culture” or “doing art” looked like in societies at a higher stage of development. I knew nothing about the modern art exhibitions in the West German town of Kassel, only two hours’ drive west of Erfurt. Today everyone who aspires to be an artist knows about *the Documenta* in Kassel. Back then, in the German fields, the cultural border between East and West was visible and tangible. Soviet armoured divisions watched over our safety. Working in the fields, we sometimes saw tanks, little green boxes gliding far across the horizon.

The real border between East and West (the one from the times of the Cold War) I had the opportunity to see from the window of the Erfurt-Berlin train while returning to Poland. Huge concrete anti-tank barriers, fortifications, bunkers, kilometres of barbed wire. The Berlin Wall stood firm and there was no sign of it ever coming down. I saw it only once, from the grey, unpainted side.

In 1981, Bożena Kowalska published a book, *Twórcy – postawy (Artists – Attitudes)*, summarising the achievements of Polish contemporary art since 1945. The author presented in a matter-of-fact and concrete way the attitudes of unquestionable authorities remaining in the circle of geometric abstraction. For me, this book was a kind of a handbook, a guide to contemporary Polish painting. It pointed to conceptualism and the art of geometry as the only and ultimate form which could be used by the avant-garde on the path of its dialectical development. The most imaginative and radical artist seemed to me to be a conceptualist living in France, Roman Opalka. For me, his paintings were a sad reflection on the inevitable passing of time, a painterly testimony with a universal horizon, but devoid of any hope.

We lived behind the Iron Curtain. News did not reach us, there were no sources, no books, no albums. Western painting ended up as pop art. At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the phenomenon and the very notion of *Neue Wilde* meant nothing to painters who today are officially counted among the so-called neo-expressionism.

Włodzimierz Pawlak in a conversation with Dorota Monkiewicz claims: “After our exhibition, Ms Bożena Kowalska wrote in Project No. 4 in 1984 on pages 78-79, a text entitled *Nowi dzicy (New Savages)*. There I encountered the term, which is still foreign to me and I do not feel any connection with it. If I am to feel any connection in art history, it is with the Pacific abstractionists. Really”¹⁰.

Ryszard Grzyb: “The best solution was to use a ready-made word. What we did grew more out of the relationships between us and these local references, like Cwenarski or Wróblewski, than out of watching it happen ”¹¹.

Marek Sobczyk: “...there were many conclusions from conceptualism, which had been dying here for a long time, and painting never died. I remember when we came up with the idea for the degree piece in 1979, we insisted that we would bring back painting”¹².

Ryszard Woźniak: “I got this (encouragement) not from the Germans, but from the Americans. In 1980, there were two exhibitions of American painting in Warsaw, one at the National Museum and the other at the Studio Gallery. For me, this was a strong incentive to take up painting, because the Americans painted like children, literally without any brakes. It just seemed that everyone did whatever they wanted in this medium”¹³.

10. *Gruppa artists talk to Dorota Monkiewicz about Jörg Immendorff, Polish and German art, about Poles and Germans*, [in:] Jörg Immendorff, *Signs, Symbols and Visions*, editor: Dorota Folga-Januszewska, National Museum Warsaw, 1998, p. 83.

11-13. Ibid



Joseph Beuys, *Action 7000 oaks – 7000 blocks of basalt*, 1982, ©Joseph Beuys / VG Bild-Kunst. Source: Documenta archiv / Dieter Schwerdtle

14. Term taken from study: Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1993, p. 253

Documenta 7 and Zeitgeist

In 1982, two important exhibitions took place in Germany that took stock of the achievements of the modern artworld since 1945. These were *Documenta 7* in Kassel and *Zeitgeist* in Berlin. They were linked by the idea of a ‘museum on the ruins’¹⁴, born in the 1950s during the escalation of the Cold War. It was based on the assumption that modern art “works well” on the ruins of historical buildings. Firstly, because it attracts attention with its modern, progressive programme; secondly, the destroyed monuments of great German splendour remain as the backdrop for modern art. This was the case in Kassel, where the central ammunition depots of the Third Reich were located during the war. The town, completely bombed by the Allies, was revived after the war as a venue for a new type of art exhibition. Initially, these were organised on the site of the national agricultural fair in the provisionally rebuilt Fridericianum museum. In later years (*Documenta* take place every five years), they covered not only the gallery building, but were also spread throughout the town and its surroundings.

The seventh edition of the contemporary art review Documenta in Kassel took place between 19.06-28.10.1982 and presented the work of 179 artists (including art groups), mainly from Western Europe and America. The artistic director of the event was Rudi Fuchs.

At this point I would like to make an analysis that will give an idea of the importance that painting had in Europe at that time. I have used a list of names of artists participating in the exhibition¹⁵. For each name, I have assigned a country of origin, a main discipline, and a leading direction in which the artist can be classified. For those artists who cannot be classified within one direction/discipline, I have assigned the name of the leading direction/discipline.

Poland’s representative at the exhibition was Edward Dwurnik. For comparison: Italian art was represented by 23 artists, German art by 47, American art by 50.

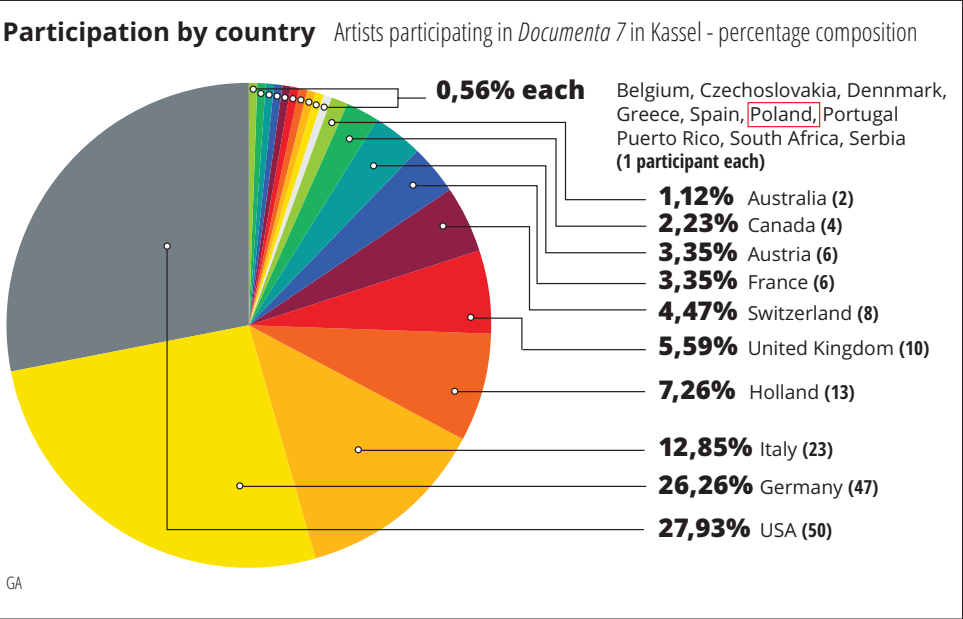


Jonathan Borofsky, *Five Hammering Men*, installation at Documenta 7, Kassel, 1982 (<http://www.borofsky.com>).

Documenta 7, Kassel, 19.06–28.10.82. Director: Rudi Fuchs, number of exhibits: 1000, number of artists: 182, number of spectators: 378,691. Poland was represented at this exhibition by Edward Dwurnik. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documenta_7).

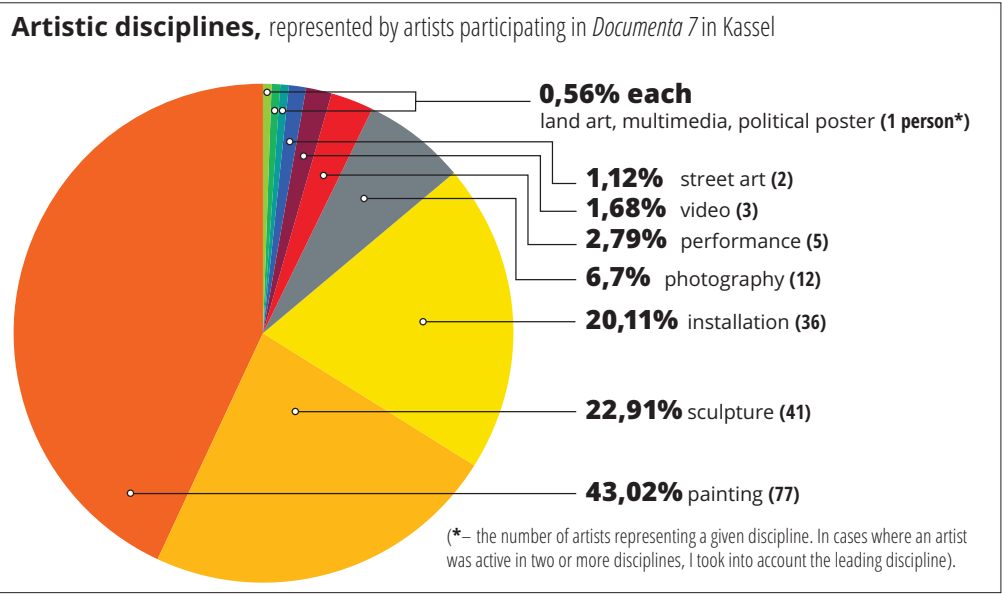
15. Source (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documenta_7).

Documenta are a presentation of artistic attitudes and problems, not an artistic national Olympiad. My aim here is to trace the countries from which the artists of the event came.

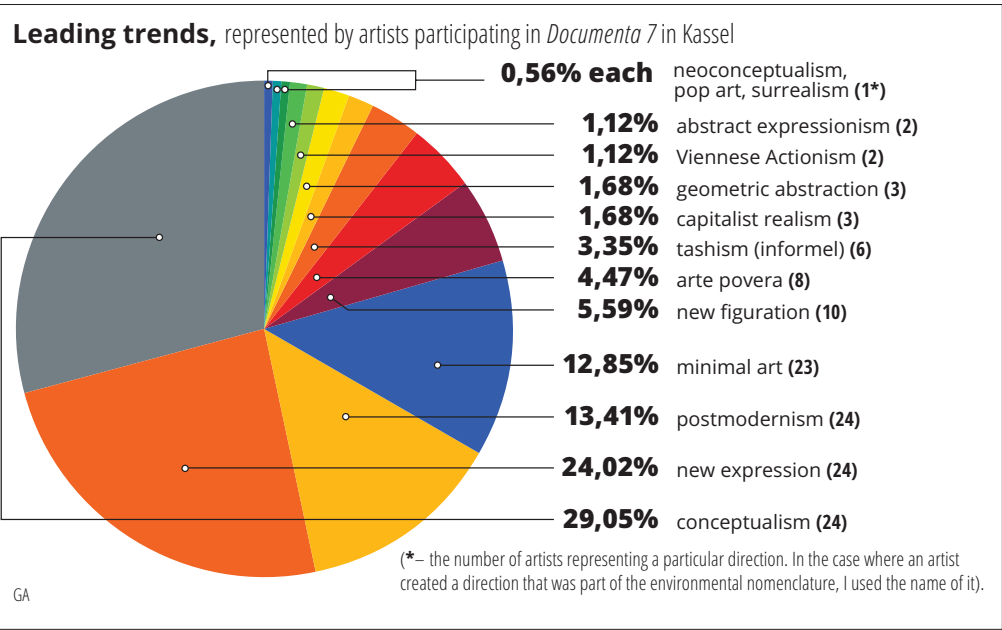


The next chart shows the percentage share of artistic disciplines (in a major simplification, as there are painters who sculpt or use the form of installation or performance). When assigning an artist to a discipline, I followed the principle of the priority of the main discipline. Thus, for example, Markus Lüpertz is listed as a painter, even if he presented sculptural objects.

Painting emerged as the leading discipline, meaning that ‘constituted’ painters were the strongest representation.



Assignment to a direction is made with an assumption: to artists who create painting objects remaining in the area of aesthetic considerations, but which are not painting in the spirit of *new expression*, I have assigned the general category of *postmodernism* (e.g. Roland Reiss, painter of the Californian scene, known above all for his sculptural objects (Psycho-social Environments)). This is a simplification, as postmodernism is a much more capacious term. In this case, I wanted to show a certain environment in which the *new painting expression* developed, competing with conceptualism and minimal art.



Zeitgeist, Berlin, Martin Gropius Bau. On the glass ceiling – Jonathan Borofsky's installation, on the floor – Joseph Beuys installation. Source: (borofsky.com).



Martin Gropius Bau in 1972 and ten years later, photo by Chris Dewitt. (<http://www.berlinunwrapped.com/mgb-a-memorable-grand-building>)



Zeitgeist, or *the spirit of the times* – at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin – wasn't an ordinary exhibition. It was a manifestation of painting as a medium shaping its time.

Organised by Christos Joachimides, a Greek-born art historian, and Norman Rosenthal, curator at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, the exhibition proved to be the most important event of the 1982 autumn season in Europe and had a great impact on European art in the following decades.

In this case the exhibition took place in the very centre of Berlin. The Berlin Wall (built in 1961) ran directly in front of the main entrance to the exhibition. The Martin Gropius Bau is a grand building in neo-Renaissance style. It was commissioned in 1881 as the Royal Museum of Arts and Crafts. During the Second World War it was the headquarters of the SS and Gestapo. It housed the Reich Chancellery, archives, interrogation rooms and executioner's quarters. Marked by war, not fully restored, in the heart of the lost German capital, it was ideally suited as a venue for a major exhibition. The event perfectly fitted into the concept of ‘an exhibition on the ruins of a museum’¹⁶, to use a term coined by Douglas Crimp.

16. Douglas Crimp, *The Art of Exhibition*, volume 30 (fall, 1984), p. 49-81. The MIT Press (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/778299>).



Exhibition of paintings by David Salle and Wolfgang Ludwig Cihlarz.



Helmut Middendorf, *In the red night*, 1981, oil on canvas, 220 × 180 cm.

Zeitgeist, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, Niederkirchnerstraße 7, 16 October 1982 – January 16, 1983. Directors: Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthal. Curators: Hans Hermann Stober, Barbara Jacobson, Eberhard Roters, Lucie Schauer, Wieland Schmied.

Participants:

Siegfried **Anzinger**, Georg **Baselitz**, Joseph **Beuys**, Erwin **Bohatsch**, Peter **Bömmels**, Jonathan **Borofsky**, Werner **Büttner**, James Lee **Byars**, Pierpaolo **Calzolari**, Sandro **Chia**, Francesco **Clemente**, Enzo **Cucchi**, Walter **Dahn**, Rene **Daniels**, Jiri Georg **Dokoupil**, Rainer **Fetting**, Barry **Flanagan**, Gerard **Garouste**, **Gilbert & George**, Dieter **Hacker**, Hans **Hermann**, Antonius **Höckelmann**, Karl Horst **Hödicke**, Jörg **Immendorff**, Anselm **Kiefer**, Per **Kirkeby**, Bernd **Koberling**, Jannis **Kounellis**, Christopher **Le Brun**, Markus **Lüpertz**, Bruce **McLean**, Mario **Merz**, Helmut **Middendorf**, Malcolm **Morley**, Robert **Morris**, Mimmo **Paladino**, A.R. **Penck**, Sigmar **Polke**, Susan **Rothenberg**, David **Salle**, **Salome** (Wolfgang Ludwig Cihlarz), Julian **Schnabel**, Frank **Stella**, Volker **Tannert**, Cy **Twombly**, Andy **Warhol**.

Number of spectators: 125 000,
Number of artists: 47.

(<https://kunstaspekte.art/event/zeitgeist-1982-10?hl=de>)



David Salle, *Zeitgeist Painting #1* (1982). Property of the artist and Mary Boone, New York. (<https://flash---art.com/article/zeitgeist/>)

The exhibition was not intended as a broad presentation of modern art, as was the case with *Documenta 7*. The curators narrowed down their selection considerably. They invited only 47 artists (the only woman was an American, Susan Rothenberg), whose work in terms of content and form, in their subjective choice, reflected the spirit of the times.

The organisers stipulated that, where possible, the objects should fit into the space of the building in which the show was to take place. As a result, works of painting and sculpture were brought together on a uniform, monumental scale. To meet the challenge, the artists invited to the exhibition were able to arrive early and work on site. Of course, it was better if they sent finished works, but because of the scale this was not always possible. The curators therefore commissioned eight painters to produce four paintings each measuring 3 x 4 metres especially for this exhibition. They were: Bruce McLean, David Salle, Francesco Clemente, Mimmo Paladino, Enzo Cucchi, Helmut Middendorf, Rainer Fetting and Salomé (Wolfgang Ludwig Cihlarz). The exhibition was a tailor-made order, so it could not fail. A total of 237 large-format paintings were presented, the scale of which was overwhelming in form and colour. “It was an eruption of painting in its most wild, uncompromising form. A real earthquake”¹⁶.

Robert Rosenblum, the art historian responsible for editing the American part of the catalogue for the exhibition, recalls the exhibition as follows:

“The ivory towers whose geometry was meticulously calculated by the artists of the previous decade in order not to miss by even a hair, the semi-otic theories, the visual and intellectual purities, have all been destroyed by an international army of new artists. Their deliberately bad manners are making an upheaval. Everywhere one feels the eruption of a turbulent, liberating faith”¹⁷.

As John Russel wrote in the New York Times after the opening:

“These were works of strong perception and representation, often describing private fantasies elevated to a public scale. Organising an exhibition of new art in Berlin is a renewal of a tradition long in abeyance. It refers back to the Autumn Salon of 1914, which was one of the largest and most imaginative international debates on contemporary art seen in Europe and the United States before the outbreak of the First World War. Today’s Berlin is once again open to what is good and new in art, and this on an international scale”¹⁸.

The American journalist was overwhelmed by the scale and overall impression of the exhibition. In his perception, the impact of the German artists’ work was devastating. “In the main staircase two huge canvases by A.R. Penck (16 x 32 foot in size) looking as if he had spat them out with a bicycle pump. Next to it, Andy Warhol’s works evoking Nazi architecture were downright hideous in their insensitivity. Barry Flanagan’s acrobatic bronze hares were neither large enough to dominate a room nor small enough to become sufficiently noticeable. (...) Joseph Beuys’

16. Breda Kennedy, *Circa Art Magazine*, nr 9, (03-04, 1983), s. 19–21, (<https://circaartmagazine.net/issues/issue9>).

17. Robert Rosenblum, *Thoughts on the Origins of Zeitgeist*, katalog do wystawy, s. 11-12.

18. John Russell, *Art view; a big Berlin show that misses the mark*. The New York Times, 5.12.1982. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/05/arts/art-view-a-big-berlin-show-that-misses-the-mark.html>)

monstrous installation, which fills the entire inner courtyard, takes the form of a small mountain of unshaped clay, complete with equipment with which it could turn into a large sculpture. Of course, if a sculptor decided to work on it”¹⁹.

19. Ibid

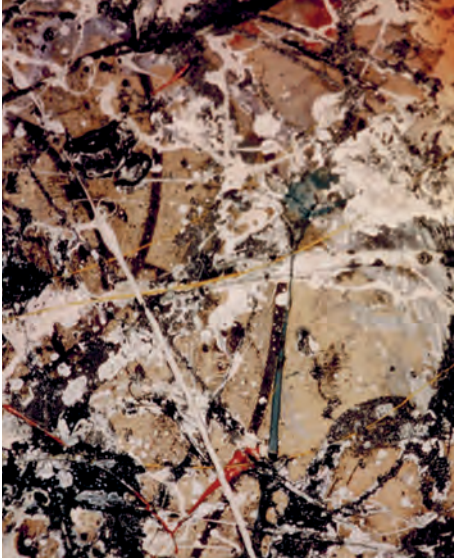
So, let us pose the question: is painting (or perhaps art in general) able to influence the course of events through its attractive or unattractive visuality?

As history proves, yes. The effect of the *Zeitgeist* exhibition was a kind of validation of the importance of the German *New Wave*, represented by A.R. Penck, Georg Baselitz, Rainer Fetting, Markus Lüpertz, Dieter Hacker, Helmut Middendorf, Salomè, Anselm Kiefer and others. The confrontation of their works with the rest of the world was favourable. It was their paintings that were talked about in the press and galleries. Through the presentation of their artists, Germany as a nation showed a strong will and determination in the reunification process.

The organisation of the exhibition cost \$600,000, coming from a subsidy from the local authorities – from the funds allocated for culture. Considering the increase in international recognition of German artists from this group over the years (which translates directly into the gallery circuit and auction market), one can guess that the investment in the event paid for itself many times over. The image benefits in terms of brand recognition for Germany in the upcoming years proved to be priceless.



Anselm Kiefer, *Bohemia lies by the sea*, 1996, oil, emulsion, shellac, charcoal, hemp and pigment powder, 191.1 x 561.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo by Grzegorz Adach.
Anselm Kiefer's commissioned painting refers in format and colour to a Jackson Pollock painting.



Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31*, 1950, (detail), oil and varnish on canvas, 269.5 x 530.8 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by Grzegorz Adach.

Gruppa

20. Paweł Kowalewski, *Oj dobrze już*, 2002, No 9, p. 12.

“When artists suck, they join into a groups”²⁰ – this is how, in a truly expressionistic style, one of its founding fathers describes the formation of the group. Paweł Kowalewski (the artist in question) together with Ryszard Woźniak, Ryszard Grzyb, Jarosław Modzelewski, Marek Sobczyk and Włodzimierz Pawlak developed an alternative approach to what was officially known in Poland in the early 1980s as modern art. It is assumed that 1982 (the time of the first exhibition at the Dziekan-ka Gallery) was the beginning of the activity of the painters from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, but the beginnings of the formation go back a little earlier, to the time of their studies. It is worth noting the climate at the Academy during the period when the gentlemen from Gruppa were studying.

At the Faculty of Painting, the Kapist Colourism formula reigned supreme - politically safe, it rejected everything that went beyond the generally accepted trend. In the studios, students worked mainly from nature, with the aim of mastering the subject of painting: portrait, nude or figure in clothing, still life, landscape. Observation of nature was the basis of teaching, starting from the first year. As a result, studios often followed the master model - churning out imitators of a particular professor's style. From the student's point of view, moving from one department to another was not welcome. This meant that the choice of a particular studio was a decision for life. The Dean of the Faculty of Painting at the turn of 1980-1981 was Stefan Gierowski, who postulated revolutionary changes. He wanted to create a common studio for painting, in which all first-year students of painting, sculpture, and graphics would study - under the auspices of the Faculty of Painting, of course.

At all faculties of the Academy, one could sense that the traditional models of education were inadequate. It was no different in my later years when I studied at the Faculty of Graphics (1985-1995). At that time, the painting studios were headed by Jerzy Tchórzewski, Janusz Przybylski and Teresa Pągowska. Jerzy Tchórzewski described his conception of the development of the studios as follows: “The ateliers should constitute a kind of young artistic micro-environment, not a school for the craft of painting in one convention or another. Simply put, it will be a constantly and invariably fundamental and lively form of creative activity, but only in conditions of harmonious coexistence with other forms of representation through such confrontations”²¹. Colleague relationships were most important, but they were difficult to establish, as the studios were not crowded during the day. Real life went on somewhere else, in the corridors, in the ancillary studios, in Dziekan-ka.

Paweł Kowalewski recalls: “We met in such a way that four people were in Gierowski's studio: me, Rysiek Woźniak, Jarek Modzelewski and Marek Sobczyk. The beginning was quite funny, because Rysiek Woźniak and I were in a kind of study circle. We felt that something had to be mixed up in this art. At that time there were – two stories – one – there was concep-tualism, and this conceptualism was still not accepted by the professors

– and there was painting. With Rysiek Woźniak we decided to set up “something”. (...) We knew that we did not want any group, but we started to look around the faculty to see who was the person who would match what we had in our heads. And in our heads we had a story about the world, and nonchalance in painting, and painting on our knees, and photography, and we didn’t know what else. And we met such a guy because they were friends: Rysiek and Rysiek Grzyb. We went to Rysiek Grzyb and said: you are a nice painter, why don’t you paint with us? And it turned out that Rysiek surprisingly said YES. But, he said, I have a friend, and my friend’s name is Włodek Pawlak. The gentlemen were at Rajmund Ziemiński’s studio. He showed us Pawlak and Pawlak made an incredible impression. Those scribbles he made, that nonchalance was perfect. Of course, there were those two gentlemen, Jarek and Marek, who were older colleagues to us. (You were probably doing your diploma at the time). I will never forget your picture, two jets that were flying in two different directions. And that’s how it started”²².

The first exhibition of young painters of the formation was to take place on 13 December 1982. The date was supposed to be the day of the suspension of martial law. During an initial conversation in Dziekanka with Tomasz Sikorski (the gallery manager), Paweł Kowalewski proposed the title: the metaphysical suspension. To this Grzyb and Pawlak exclaimed: What are you talking about, what nonsense, a forest, a mountain of clouds! Eventually, the opening was postponed until 14 January 1983. The next exhibition took place in March, at the BWA in Lublin. In 1984, two exhibitions were held, one in January-February at the Teatr Kameralny and the other in May again at Dziekanka. These were static exhibitions of paintings supplemented only by lectures, songs and music during the vernissages.

It is worth noting that the formation had no common strategy or programme. It was a group of separate individuals collectively manifesting their attitude to art. It was oriented towards mutual inspiration, a conglomerate of separate individuals who felt and reacted similarly to the world.

“At its beginnings, the Gruppa did not have a name and had a fluid composition (Sobczyk’s absence at its first appearance, the presence of Ewa Piechowska, Maciej Wilski and Małgorzata Rittersschild in the exhibitions of the first period, and finally the inclusion of Zdzisław Kwiatkowski in its context). Its members did not so much consider themselves as were perceived by those around them as a group, and they did not immediately accept this fact. It seems that the moment that consolidated the Gruppa in its final composition and under its proper name was the failure to organize an exhibition at the Studio Gallery at the end of 1984”²³.

But why exactly Gruppa? Outside, “we began to be called the group, which was supposed to prove the transience and shallowness of this phenomenon. However, we, with our innate contrariness, had ourselves called GRUPPA, but for two P “²⁴, wrote Paweł Kowalewski in the



Jarosław Modzelewski, *Two Jets*, 1981, oil on canvas, 37,5 x 39 inches.

22. Anda Rotenberg talks to Gruppa members at the opening of the pre-auction exhibition: *New figuration - new expression*. Curated by Klara Czerniewska-Andryszczyk. 12 September 2019, Desa Unicum, Warsaw. Recording by Grzegorz Adach.



23. Maryla Sitowska, *Gruppa*. Catalogue to the exhibition at the Zachęta Gallery, 1992, p. 4.

24. Paweł Kowalewski, *Oj dobrze już*, 2002 No 9, p. 12

magazine *Oj dobrze już* (*Oh well already*). And so, even though they did not want to form a group, they became Gruppa.

At the moment of the emergence of a new wave of painting in Poland, attention should be paid to those thanks to whom this phenomenon did not die a natural death at its birth. I am thinking here of the new generation of art historians who have turned their attention to young artists. This new phenomenon was described by Maria Morzuch in her paper delivered in November 1984 at the session of the Association of Art Historians: “Instead of stylistic uniformity, artists choose the dynamics of painting form and freedom in the representational layer, introducing absurdity expressed in irony and grotesque. This concise and simple, yet ambiguous painting, juxtaposed with perverse, surprising titles, often based on a play on language, manifests its ludic nature. It touches upon the human condition and the possibility of understanding this world in a special time and place It touches upon the human condition and the possibility of understanding this world at a particular time and in a particular place, in the situation “here and now”, played out as a kind of carnival in painting”²⁵.

Paweł Kowalewski adds: “She was the first to place our names in the current stream of painting, which was celebrating its return to the salons of the United States and Western Europe. What we presented at that time, Morzuch was probably the only critic who saw it in a broader, not parochial context”²⁶. It was this parochialism that caused the new expression to be perceived as a copy of ideas imported from the West. This was not the first, nor will it be the last time that we have tried to label domestic art as borrowed. It was customary to use the term “new wave painting”, because the German term *Neue Wilde* sounded good only in Germany, while the *New Savages* were associated with looseness and anarchy.

In the text for the catalogue of the painting exhibition (13.02-6.03.1985) Anda Rottenberg describes the new phenomenon as follows: “The proposal to give the exhibition the title *New Savages* was met with violent protest by its participants. And rightly so. For the new Polish painting shares with the Western trans-avant-garde a purely external similarity, namely the fact that it existed at all. Therefore, if we want to characterise it more precisely, we must pay attention to a certain unique circumstance connected with the place and time of its birth. If the twilight of the avant-garde changed the attitude of artists towards art all over the world, then it was only here that this attitude was determined, at least in a complementary way, by non-artistic reality and the related revision of moral and world-view values”²⁷.

Did historical events, the creation of Solidarity, martial law, anoint us morally to paint expressive pictures with paint squeezed straight from the tube? Each of us was searching for his or her creative path. Life in all its coarseness had become so tiring that there was no time for formal considerations, for searching for the right “tone”. Maciej Dowgiałło recalls that the best source of inspiration for him were clashes with the

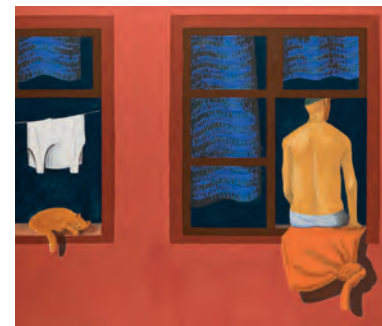


◀ Ryszard Woźniak, *Nowa fala papierdala* (*The New Wave is Fucking*), 1982, acrylic on canvas, 80x200 cm. „During Gruppa's second exhibition at the BWA Gallery in Lublin (excluded from the places subject to the boycott thanks to the attitude of director Andrzej Mroczek), the local punks liked this painting so much that they drew some other symbols on it, including cannabis leaves. After the exhibition I removed these drawings from the painting” (<http://artbazaar.blogspot.com/2007/03/nowa-fala-papierdala-historia-jednego.html>)

police during demonstrations. After a good “brawl”, he could paint well. *Nowa fala papierdala* (*New Wave is fucking*) – this is the title of a painting by Ryszard Woźniak from 1982. The diptych consists of two 39 x 31 inches canvases joined on the shorter side. The left canvas was probably painted first, which is indicated by the number of repaints. From the red background emerges a white form resembling an animal – perhaps a cow, perhaps an elephant? A cow would be indicated by its pale blue patches, while an elephant by its trunk. The animal is captured in motion and in a phase of sharp braking. The canvas on the right is a different shade of red, and it seems to have been created to complement the concept. In the upper right corner, a yellow crescent (or perhaps a banana, sickle?) emerges from the red and is crossed by a small palm tree (or perhaps a hammer?). Looking at the image from a distance, one can see in the form the contours of the Soviet Union against the background of the flag of the USSR.

The paintings of the Gruppa painters aroused enthusiasm during their shows. With their succinct commentary, they pointed out the absurdity of the situation in which we found ourselves in Poland after Martial Law. We lived in two realities – an official one and an alternative one. There were no private galleries, art was exhibited in any space that could “accept” paintings. The new expression, seeking its own way between the official and church circuits, was a zone of truly free creative expression. We listened to the music of Cabaret Voltaire²⁸, fully aware of the significance of this name in our painting reality. The spirit of Dadaism is visible in the texts (the magazine “Oj dobrze już!”), the titles of exhibitions and in the poetry of Ryszard Grzyb. The activity of Gruppa is only a small fragment of the artistic life of those years. Also active at the time were such painters as: Paweł Susid, Marek Sobczak, Wojciech Tracewski, Zdzisław Nitka, Krzysztof Skarbek, Maciej Dowgiałło, the Luxus group, Łódź Kaliska, Neue Bieriemiennost and many other artists whose presentation is beyond the scope of this work.

28. English music band formed in 1973, playing music of the industrial and post-punk, named after the Zurich nightclub where in 1916 Hugo Ball announced the Dada manifesto. The following bohemians met there: Tristan Tzara, Guillaume Apollinaire, Hans Arp, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Giorgio de Chirico, Max Ernst.



Jarosław Modzelewski, *Holidaymaker from Kołobrzeg, backwards* 1999, egg tempera on canvas, 55 x 67 inches.



Jarosław Modzelewski, *Shadow of a colleague* 1995, oil on canvas, 65 x 79 inches.

Wróblewski – Modzelewski

(About the painting of Jarosław Modzelewski)

When I look at Jarosław Modzelewski’s paintings, I feel as if I had stopped a film for a moment to contemplate a magical freeze-frame. Here is a seemingly trivial piece of reality. A man stands at a construction site, a woman rides her bicycle towards Magdalenka, a lost welder looks to the side. In each of these shots there is something extraordinary. Each of us is submerged in his own drop of time. When the dust settles on the paintings, the individual atoms of time that inspired the painter have already disappeared. They are no longer there. It so happens that a fraction of reality becomes a complement to the painter’s vision. Unintentionally, out of the corner of our eye, we notice something that is the wonder of the moment and could be a fragment of some renaissance painting. Ah, if only it were possible to go back in time! Or perhaps the moment still exists, only in a parallel reality?

This painting does not pretend to be anything. It simply is. It accepts the imperfection of matter and man. Modzelewski invites the everyday to his paintings. A towel is drying on a string, a cat is basking in the window. And yet this seeming calmness carries a huge load of expression. It is as if the expression was closed in the form, it was inside. The moment lasts, but it is not an idyll. Scenes from Nikita Mikhalkov’s *Burnt by the Sun* come to mind. The calmness of the passing summer in no way foreshadows the dramatic ending.

The form is built calmly, with a confident hand of the painter. Its expression must resound. Drawing is important. One must know what one is painting. A line is often created at the junction of two planes and has the colour of the layer underneath. The gesture is guided by the form, naturally and at its own pace. There is no rush here. It is as if the painter were saying: I have time. I will make it.

In a way, this is Renaissance painting. The painter uses the full instrumentarium of means. Good composition, usually central, perspective, chiaroscuro, solid drawing supported by sketches from nature – frankly speaking, there is everything here. The colours are balanced, and yet the expression is there. Thanks to this certain nonchalance which allows a colour to be placed all over the form and then covered with a complementary colour. The palette is dominated by earths – umber, ochre, ochre, juxtaposed with cadmium red, ultramarine, cobalt, yellows. The result is a highly suggestive, coherent painterly vision.

Image enclosed in the contour of an animal

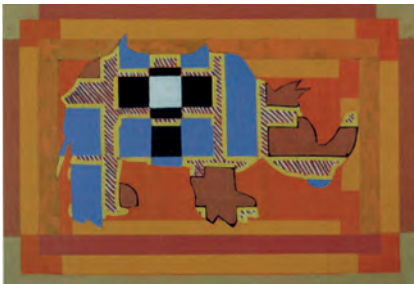
(About the painting of Ryszard Grzyb)

A mirror rhino in a wallpaper shop, a monkey in a haberdashery. The title of the painting will come later, the colour and shape are important. The colour should be clear and resonant, the shape decisive. Knock down the viewer with one strong accent. There is no room for formlessness. It is a resultant of a colour pattern and a graphically treated contour. Here is a painter who is not afraid. He already knows that an artistic picture must be clear, unambiguous, and must have a main theme. And let things happen around this theme! What is not here: there are birds and frogs, big-footed Tuscan tortoises and ostracods, cow-pigs emanating calm anxiety and a whole lot of rhinos. Mushroom rhinos are unique and have much in common with butterflies. They are byzantine coloured giants of fair size. Apparently, when running, they make a barely audible noise, similar to the fluttering of butterfly wings.

RG paints with an athletic streak. The subject matter, format and style depend on the daily creative condition. Large canvases exude vitality. The colours are vivid and pure, the way the paint is laid down is smooth and flat. There is no room for complicated formal considerations. The composition is usually central. The form is closed by a line. A sketch first appears on the rectangle of the canvas. If it is the outline of an animal, the picture plane is automatically divided into two areas - the outer and the inner. RG introduces a contrasting colour or pattern into these areas: mosaic, division, raster. Whatever he has at hand. In doing so, he blurs the contour and causes the form to break down. As a result of this formal procedure, the perception of form becomes difficult. The procedure brings to mind the practices of Russian formalists who defended Futurist and Cubist poetry at the beginning of the last century. To quote Viktor Shklovsky:

*In order to give us back our sense of life, in order for us to feel things, in order for stone to be stone for us, there is what we call Art. The aim of art is to give us the sensation of an object as it is perceived, not merely recognised. To achieve this goal, art uses two techniques: the defamiliarisation (singularisation, Verfremdung) of things and the deformation of form, so as to make the act of perception more difficult and to prolong its duration. For the process of perception is in itself an end and its duration must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the process of becoming (devenir, Werden) of an object; what has already become what it is is not important for art*³⁰.

RG’s representational proposals oscillate between figuration and abstraction. Purely visual considerations coexist together with figurative drawing. Both in the painting style and in the poetic language, the author pays attention to reconciling opposites. The painting forms a whole, just as a few lines of a poem perfectly describe the mental state or situation of the moment. One may ask - are these images autotelic? Knowing RG’s poetry, one can formulate a thesis that these are paintings resulting from a poetic observation of life. The two worlds of poetry



Ryszard Grzyb, *The search for comfort always ends similarly*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 37,5 x 39 inches.



Ryszard Grzyb (painting in progress), acrylic on canvas, 79 x 59 inches, (artist’s Facebook page).

30. See Viktor Shklovsky, *Art as technique*, after Marjorie Perloff, *New thresholds, old anatomies: contemporary poetry and the limits of exegesis*, „Literatura na Świecie” No. 7 (180) 1986, Warsaw, p. 12.

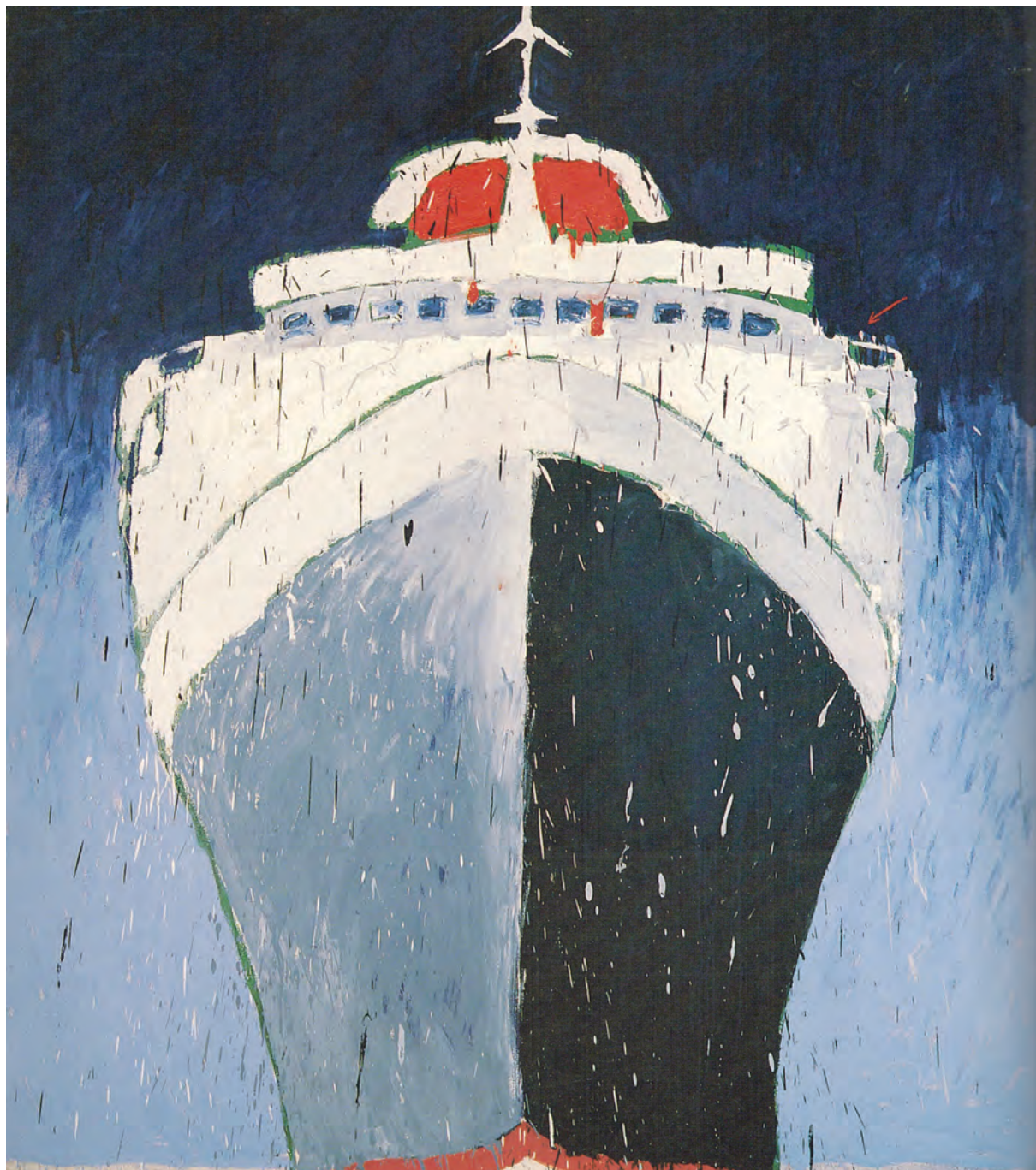
and painting permeate each other. He gives his paintings poetic titles in the style of Japanese haiku, e.g: *We will be like birds before we meet again, Juicy pink hydrangeas bloom, The search for comfort always ends the same way*.

How to paint and what to paint? Interesting lecture of aesthetics and the recipe for painting can be found in the poem “How to Paint a Picture?”²⁹:

**First the blue
is a magical colour
then paint the picture in several colours
wait for them to dry
or straight away
draw figures on them
black or very dark brown
and then wait for it all to dry
then cover the whole thing with different types of white
leaving the drawing as it is
vibrate the plane with white
let shreds of colour shine through from underneath
quite small or medium
but it’s in a different picture
let the figures emerge
can be attacked by the background
may themselves attack the background
come to the fore
warm colours on blue
browns and ochres
or just blues, different blues and nothing else
or blue pieces on a warm background of red
with added yellow and ochre
minor
scattered figurines
on a steady background**

1992

RG is a poet and a painter. At vernissages he reads his poem, replacing it with a commentary on the exhibition. He creates a reality in which a poetic everyday life is constantly being created. He recalls words or images of other painters (Wróblewski, Baselitz, Nikifor, colleagues from Gruppa). Motifs taken from poetic imagination appear in his paintings. He is like a shaman who knows that the beginning of the creation of the world was accompanied by myth. That is why he so often reaches out to organic memory, the memory that our body’s cells perhaps carry within them. RG succumbs to this temptation when painting animals. He does so in order to feel them, to see them as painters saw them in the time of the caves. He paints them by gesture, by reflex, because reflex exists beyond a reason. And this is the only way to escape from the trap of Kantian analysis, a chance to cross the border of what one knows and can do in a technical sense.



Włodzimierz Pawlak, *Witold Gombrowicz*, 1986, oil on canvas, 71 x 63 inches. Ownership: Museum of Art in Lodz.

Iconic image

(About the painting of Włodzimierz Pawlak)

Włodzimierz Pawlak's paintings, sketches, and painted diaries have been presented at numerous exhibitions and are often illustrations to press articles describing the work of Gruppa. Pawlak's work remained expressive until the end of the 1980s. At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, it entered a phase of formal search and took on the form of a dialogue with the past – an intellectual dialogue with the great art theoretician and his spiritual heir: Kazimir Malevich and his pupil, Władysław Strzemiński. Malevich, Strzemiński, Pawlak – three Poles presenting Polish painting in Poland. This would be a really good subject for a cross-sectional exhibition. Our national contribution to world art history. It is nothing that Kazimierz Malewicz (born in a Polish family in Kiev) is ascribed to the Russian avant-garde, and nobody (with maybe a few exceptions) in the world knows about Strzemiński. This does not bother us. After all, we are a proud nation.

In the mid-1980s, Pawlak was far from considering pure form. The strength of his paintings lay in their painterly quality. The thick painting matter, dripping, chipped, rubbed in, covered the canvas with many sloppy layers. I perfectly remember Pawlak's paintings still hanging on the walls of the Academy. They made an impression as if one could stick to them. The combinations of colours were not particularly sophisticated – or perhaps they were “anti-sophisticated” – they followed the accepted rule of opposition. To paint a picture so that it hurts. To make a painting that works as a shock, a stain, a wound, a torn seam, a torn scar. Pawlak was not extolling some aesthetic of his own. These were not images “for”, but “against”. Against what? Against everything that bothered the young painter working in Poland.

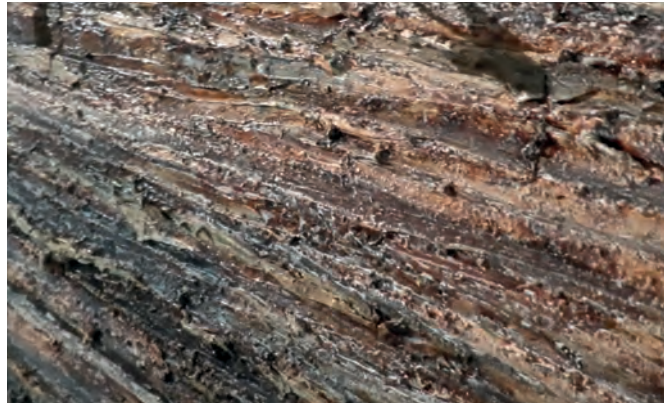
The painting entitled Witold Gombrowicz is not a portrait of the writer. It depicts the majestic silhouette of a transatlantic liner speeding at full speed towards the viewer. When I first saw this large canvas (71 x 63 inches), I was overwhelmed with a sense of joy and pride. What a wonderful work! At last a painter! The subject and execution – strong. The nonchalance with which the form and content create a whole in this painting – wonderful.

Insolent in its intelligence of its own separate self, which persistently becomes anew in every creator, artist, regardless of gender, race, nationality, origin, views, every day, every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, from today until the end of the world - be praised!

Jaromir Jedliński from the Museum of Modern Art in Łódź had a good eye. He chose this work for the exhibition Polish Realities – New Art from Poland, which took place in Glasgow in 1988. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue. Thirteen years later, Dave Brubeck's quartet released *The Crossing*, the cover of which is an exact copy of the painting. An absolute plagiarism. In this way, Włodzimierz Pawlak, underestimated and undervalued in Poland, became part of world mass culture.



The Dave Brubeck Quartet, *The Crossing*, 2001.
LP cover, Telarc Inc. label.



Włodzimierz Pawlak, *Poles are forming the national flag*, 1997, oil, pencil, canvas. (detail)

Anselm Kiefer, *Merkaba*, 2002, acrylic, lead objects, pencil, canvas. (detail)

“And again, as in the case of Strzemiński in the past, as in the 1950s with Wróblewski or Hasiór – the sensational discoveries of our artists have not been properly noticed by critics and discounted at the international forum”³¹. How timely, the words of Bożena Kowalska written 50 years ago are a sad statement of a simple fact: in Poland the value of our domestic discoveries in culture and art is not appreciated. With such an initial capital, it is difficult to undertake a substantive discussion on the shape of national art. Looking from a further perspective: indigenous art is poor, underinvested and lacking marketing support. We are unable to defend our individuality and promote our artists. Just as before the war, after the war, in the 1960s, 1980s or now – in order to be noticed in Poland, you first have to be noticed abroad.

Intoxicated by joyful dancing to the rhythm of disco polo, satiated by a bowl of rice, we enjoy the vision of a modern state. We compare ourselves with the West. It is good, and it will be even better. But at the same time we are losing something irrevocably. We forget about the values underlying the painting that was Gruppa’s hallmark. A breath of freedom, escape from grey reality, cutting oneself off from the past, rebellion, independence, pride, an individual distinct rhythm – all this was in those paintings. There was also a commentary to the existing reality, a title, an idea. It was also an interesting proposal for the relatively aesthetically and intellectually uneducated Polish viewer. The legibility of certain figures and signs, the simplicity seasoned with ribald humour, bordering on simplistic illustration, may not have been easy to digest, but it did not give rise to complexes. Here is a horse, and here is a pig’s head. Here is a skeleton, a sickle, and a hammer.

31. Bożena Kowalska, *Polish Painting Avant-garde 1945-1970. Chances and Myths*. PWN Warsaw 1975, p. 184.



Marek Sobczyk, *K. Kobro irons/ironing*, 2008, egg tempera, 53,5 x 49 inches. In the collection of the ZNAKI CZASU Centre for Contemporary Art in Toruń.

32. Pablo Picasso’s favourite saying.

Between East and West

(About the painting of Marek Sobczyk)

It is difficult to meet such a versatile painter nowadays. An art theoretician and action artist, he creates installations and spatial objects, writes literary texts, and is involved in publishing and advertising graphics. Looking at Sobczyk’s paintings and reading his texts, everyone is impressed by his talent. Both these things come easily to him. His paintings are usually done in the egg tempera technique. Courage with which he refers to this traditional technique is expressed in the way he treats the surface of the canvas with just a light touch of colour. Drawing? Since the invention of the overhead projector, it is no longer necessary to be able to draw. A theme? Any subject is good, as long as it corresponds with the current state of mind and the current rush of thoughts. Composition? Random. And if something doesn’t fit, you can always add something in the free corner. Or repeat the same thing as in the foreground, only smaller. Colour? It is the colour of the pigment chosen by the painter. “I do not search, I find.”³² Who has time to search for the right colour these days? You can only control its saturation by adding more or less binder. If something disturbs you, you can always paint it over. But in such a way that you can see that it has been painted over. Why correct it?

It is similar with writing. An analysis of Sobczyk’s texts shows that he adheres to the “stream of thought” method. He writes whatever comes into his head. There is something dadaist in this method. This is how to free the resources that lie in the subconscious – and for Sobczyk this is the right field for exploitation.

It would have been better for Marek Sobczyk if he had not gone to Kassel in 1987 together with six of his colleagues. Trauma related to the clash of civilizations, culture, and art remains a constantly active nutrient for a sensitive individual to work through. This process of transformation, rediscovering one’s weaknesses and facing one’s complexes is expressed in art. The question arises: does Polish art really have this depressive gene and must it constantly look in the mirror – in what is currently exhibited in the West?

In the painting *Replika* (from 2019, painted with Jarosław Modzelewski), Sobczyk revisits a life and painting situation that took place in 1987, when he and his colleagues represented Poland on the international stage. The young painters from Poland had a hall at their disposal, with a canvas measuring 6 x 6 metres on the wall. In front of the painting, they organised a painting workshop – a table where they mixed paints, ate, drank and discussed, and to which they invited other members of various artistic groups from all over the world. On the last day before the presentation they painted the whole painting red. (There was a vote; Modzelewski, Sobczyk and Woźniak decided on the act of painting).

Let us pause for a moment at this point. In 1987, young artists from Poland were given the opportunity to present their work in the Federal Republic of Germany. They act as a team. They integrate themselves



GruppA in action during the painting of *Kuda Gierman?*, Kassel 1987, 20 x 20 foot. Photo: R. Grzyb.



Marek Sobczyk, Jarosław Modzelewski, *Replica*, 2020, egg tempera on canvas, 400 x 400 cm.

into the international community. On the last day, they commit stylistic seppuku by destroying their work – by painting it all over with a beautiful, only right, red colour.

Forty years have passed. Let us return to the theme of how one of them, Sobczyk, worked through his trauma. The title of his greatest work (painted together with Modzelewski: *Replica*) is, in this case, an illusory title. I do not think that a painting painted together for a week would even accidentally refer to the original in form and style. Nevertheless, we must call a spade a spade. In the catalogue to the exhibition *Kuda Gierman?* Sobczyk writes: “The painting from Kassel has disappeared, perhaps our effort serves to preserve the basic issue: the lost painting.”³³ One has to come to terms with the fact that the painting did not disappear, it was just thrown away after the exhibition. It was a meaningless sheet painted over with red paint. The *Replica* is thus a dream, a return to the time when the artist (together with his colleagues) had a chance to shine on the international stage.

This ambivalent attitude towards German culture and the constant dance with it makes one wonder. Why? Sobczyk boldly paints a portrait of Angela Merkel, whose face – as he states in the catalogue to the exhibition – “resembles grain and stubble”. He paints the interior of his studio as if it were Anselm Kiefer’s studio. He is not Anselm Kiefer. Crowds will not come to his vernissages in Berlin. He looks for subjects for his expressive paintings, but in the meantime he has to earn money for paints, canvas, looms, pay for electricity and gas. He takes up important themes in his work. He swears that he will not “make money” by creating art about the Holocaust. But who cares?

Marek Sobczyk seems to be a great unfulfilled dreamer. He dreams about Polish art and about the proper place in it for the Creator, the Artist, the National Demiurge, the Bard. Undoubtedly, he is an avant-garde painter. With his typical intuition, he avoids classification and shies away from institutional categorisation, constantly commenting on the Polish reality.

33. Jarosław Modzelewski, Marek Sobczyk, *Kuda Gierman?* Catalogue to the exhibition, p. 10. Stefan Gierowski Foundation, Warsaw, 2020.



Marek Sobczyk, Jarosław Modzelewski, *#Metoo*, 2000, egg tempera on canvas, 79 x 79 inches. (fragm.)

Descriptions of paintings

Does it still make sense to think about a mythical avant-garde within painting? What is more important to me: looking into the future or revising the narratives of the past? In my opinion, both directions of research are equally important. Working with painting matter, with pigment, creating based on emotions, the element of gesture – these are important components of a painting work for me. I attach great importance to the manual processes involved in traditional technology. I prepare the canvas myself, I glue and prime it. I like this clumsiness, this lumpiness of form resulting from the gesture, as if I wanted to say: this is manual work.

I share with my older colleagues (those from GruppA and beyond) a certain generational sensitivity. It manifests itself in the search for an original, own form, an alternative way of approaching a subject. It may sound pathetic, but I believe in a certain archetypal, healing power of painting. In my paintings there is a noticeable attachment to certain narratives from the 1980s, a similar approach to formal issues, composition – and I find it difficult to change this. I appreciate Ryszard Grzyb’s colour combinations, Jarosław Modzelewski’s way of approaching a subject, I am familiar with Marek Sobczyk’s intellectual excursions, I am also not averse to heavy oil painting in the style of Włodzimierz Pawlak. This is the result of tradition, not of preference. It is a result of the time which has shaped our way of seeing the world. In this case, I do not prefer any particular style or method. Any method is good if it leads to discovering the truth about oneself.

Where do I get the inspiration to paint from? It is difficult for me to answer this question unequivocally. Painting is an area where one image is constantly being transformed into another. Motifs are acquired through selection, a kind of filtering of the resources stored in memory. I place the impression of colour and shape observed directly with the naked eye in reality above working with processed images. Inspiration can be anything that evokes impressions, emotions. I draw from poetry, music, film, photographs I have taken myself or from those available on the Internet.

Colour can be an impulse to work. Sometimes it happens that I unscrew the tube of paint, look at the little glowing circle of colour and start painting. What I have in common with the Pacific abstractionists and the New York School is a kind of idea (or rather a hunch) about what pigment is. I think of pigment as a substance that carries a certain embodied content. With this approach, figurative thinking can get in the way. Sometimes I want to satisfy my curiosity about what will happen when I put one colour on top of another, how the eye and the hand will react to the contrast. Sometimes I paint over something, experimenting with the composition, or programmatically do not finish a given fragment. I am driven to these actions by curiosity about transformation. For me, a painting will always be a waste, a remnant of some physical and intellectual process, a test of my sensitivity, a more or less accidental shape of my time. Like the shiny surface of an amber, I see in it a sketch of a concrete idea sunken in.



Notebook pages

To whom do I direct my art? I want to paint expressive, aggressive, intelligent and emotional pictures. I don't always manage to do this, as the end result sometimes surprises me. The painter is not the owner of his vision. A painter's vision belongs to a common area, it is a resultant of the given time in which the artist lives and the current vector of changes – civilisational and cultural. American Abstractionism or German Neue Wilde were not created because someone issued a decree ordering artists to create a new direction in art. They were created because there was a social demand. They were recognised through cooperation with autonomous, independent cultural institutions. Working in the area of the language of visual forms, we unintentionally create things that are initially difficult to name and pigeonhole. Paradoxically, they do not make any sense. The work at the moment of creation is naked, unnecessary for anyone. There are no rational reasons for it to exist. That is why practising one's own creativity – for any artist, regardless of the country of origin and the epoch – is inevitably connected with the risk of rejection. It requires personal courage to "dig down" to one's roots, persistence in working through one's complexes, and work on strengthening one's strengths. It also requires time, which we have less and less of.



The result of my lettristic deliberations in a painting *Stażewski, Strzeński are not mistaken to me*, oil on canvas, 87 x 55 inches.

When I paint, there are no words in me. I do not find a single word to defend what I do. Description seems unnecessary to me. It is just a clumsy attempt to make contact. There is a moment when words appear by themselves, one after another. I wish they were incomprehensible to anyone, as if coming from a foreign language. A language that no one speaks anymore. Thousands of words pouring through hundreds of pages heavy with print. Bound volumes full of unknown knowledge, dense and intense. Reading them should open new horizons, name worlds no one has discovered yet. I would like to write with a light pen. To throw words out, to write them on lines of text, to pour them onto pages. Tie the pages into chapters. Reinvent myself. To create a fictional autobiography on the scale of Borges. Get lost in the labyrinth of a library filled with rows of bookcases full of systematised knowledge. And not a single painting!

Judging and distancing myself from my own work does not come easily to me. I see painting as an attempt to escape from the obvious and perfect imagery to which we have become accustomed by the electronic media. My ambition is to create a modern form, but referring to the traditional, simple visual alphabet.

I refer to expressionism, from which the great masters of the 20th century drew. What remains to be considered is the continuation of this path, which boils down to a choice between two alternative attitudes:

1. To wade further into expressionism, directed towards the search for a theme, but controlled in terms of form.
2. A continuation of the search in the abstract direction – less towards the emotions, more towards reason.

Following the path of expression involves developing an attitude that expresses itself through spontaneous reactions to events. Impetuosity



Collection of industrial microbial cultures, personal photograph by Grzegorz Adach.



Cacti, 2019, oil on canvas, 87 x 55 inches.

requires dedication, a life tuned to the search for subjects and a constantly tense sensitivity. Can I be impetuous in the morning and organised in the afternoon? It's like being or not being. It takes courage to make a picture with a few moves and the right decisions. I wish I could say, following Jacek Sempoliński, that *I can handle painting*. In the meantime, I steal every free hour to paint.

It happens that the energy contained in the very act of painting influences the final shape of the picture. A new form emerges from the original idea, which is a mystery to me. I know that I should trust my intuition, but how do I reconcile knowledge and emotion? The image that emerges is for me the resultant of various processes. It is like a mathematical equation to be solved in which I use lines, colours and shapes instead of numbers. I can compare this stage to the considerations that made up the aesthetics of the early Bauhaus. The observation of nature combined with the analysis of plastic language did not negate the students' individual predispositions. In this aspect, the attitudes and teaching methods of the Bauhaus artists are an unrivalled model for me. The reflections of Wassily Kandinsky, the notes of Paul Klee or Johannes Itten, enriched with the achievements of the art of the 50s and 60s, contain hints which I use in my painting.

Biomorphic forms appeared in my paintings during my work at the Wacław Dąbrowski Institute of Agricultural and Food Biotechnology – State Research Institute. I was inspired to paint by my observations in the laboratory. The world of microorganisms is dominated by round, spherical shapes, which only when organized form lines and clusters. The photographs I took show fungi, moulds and other microorganisms identified during food storage and production processes. It is striking that straight lines do not occur in the world of biology. At this stage of ordering, Euclidean geometry has no use; the straight line, square or circle seem abstract creations of the human mind.

“The law commanding art to be as changeable as all great nature”³⁴ can be a pretext for a painting composed of abstract forms, but seeking a different path than geometric abstraction. The result is four canvases painted with a broad brush as an attempt to interpret images of nature, both as seen under the microscope and as observed by the naked eye. They are images-signs reminiscent of bacterial colonies, leaves, cacti, the world untouched by the hand of man. For me it was an attempt to liberate the painterly gesture and imagination. As in nature - a chaotic action, changing in time and circumstances, but with its own determination, striving to mark its presence, to create a new organised whole.

34. Paul Klee, *On Modern Art*, [in:] *Artists on art. From Van Gogh to Picasso*, selection and editing. Elżbieta Grabska and Hanna Morawska, PWN, Warsaw 1962, p. 311

The experience of a pandemic is not the subject of any of my paintings, but these difficult emotions, the sense of isolation, the fear of the future are automatically built into the creative process. My life has shrunk, moving laboriously in one place. Working for a living, cooking, children, dogs, cats, a piglet and a temple of contemplation – a studio with paintings against the wall – all function in one space open 24 hours a day. I have no time for contemplation. When I lean over a painting or a computer, life goes on right behind me. Like in the days of the caves, where one room had to accommodate everything. A fire in the middle, a bed around it, somewhere on the wall a drawing, the outline of an animal, a trace of a hand. So I do cave painting. In the first place, the recipients of my art are the household members, the members of the flock.

Exit is a painting about a painter’s studio-cave. The starting point for me was a catalogue cover with a photograph showing Francis Bacon’s studio at 7 Rees Mews in London. The chaos in the studio was a source of inspiration for him. The complete appearance of the studio and its furnishings were painstakingly recreated in the Dublin City Gallery in 2001. The vast majority of the carefully secured exhibits were photographs.

Chaos, chaos. These words of Lieutenant Kurtz from *Apocalypse Now* could be the title of a political picture at a time when escape into darkness is becoming a symbol. It seems that we have tamed the darkness and believed that it cannot be otherwise. But is this really the only way out? *Exit* – this word takes on a new meaning in the context of *polexit*, exit from Afghanistan, relocation.

My recent works have lost the qualities of figuration. In compositions with animals, the form is dematerialised, fragmented into particles. Brush strokes, traces of colour, lines become autonomous entities. Yellow, blue and red points, placed next to each other, create vibrating planes. Theoretically, they should result in an ashen grey or, if they were diodes, they should shine with white light. I am interested in contrasts. White and black juxtaposed together provide the greatest contrast, as do light and dark.

In a composition of dynamic slants moving from white to black, references to reality are no longer visible. This painting was created as a reaction to photographs depicting demonstrations and fires. It is at the same time a reworking of emotions and an attempt to encapsulate them in an abstract form. Creating images – signs referring to universal contents – seems to be an interesting direction of my further search.

Grzegorz Adach



EXIT, 2021, oil on canvas, 87 x 55 inches.



Thames & Hudson catalogue cover



Afghan woman burning paintings, August 2021.
(<https://twitter.com/BBCValdaHakim>).

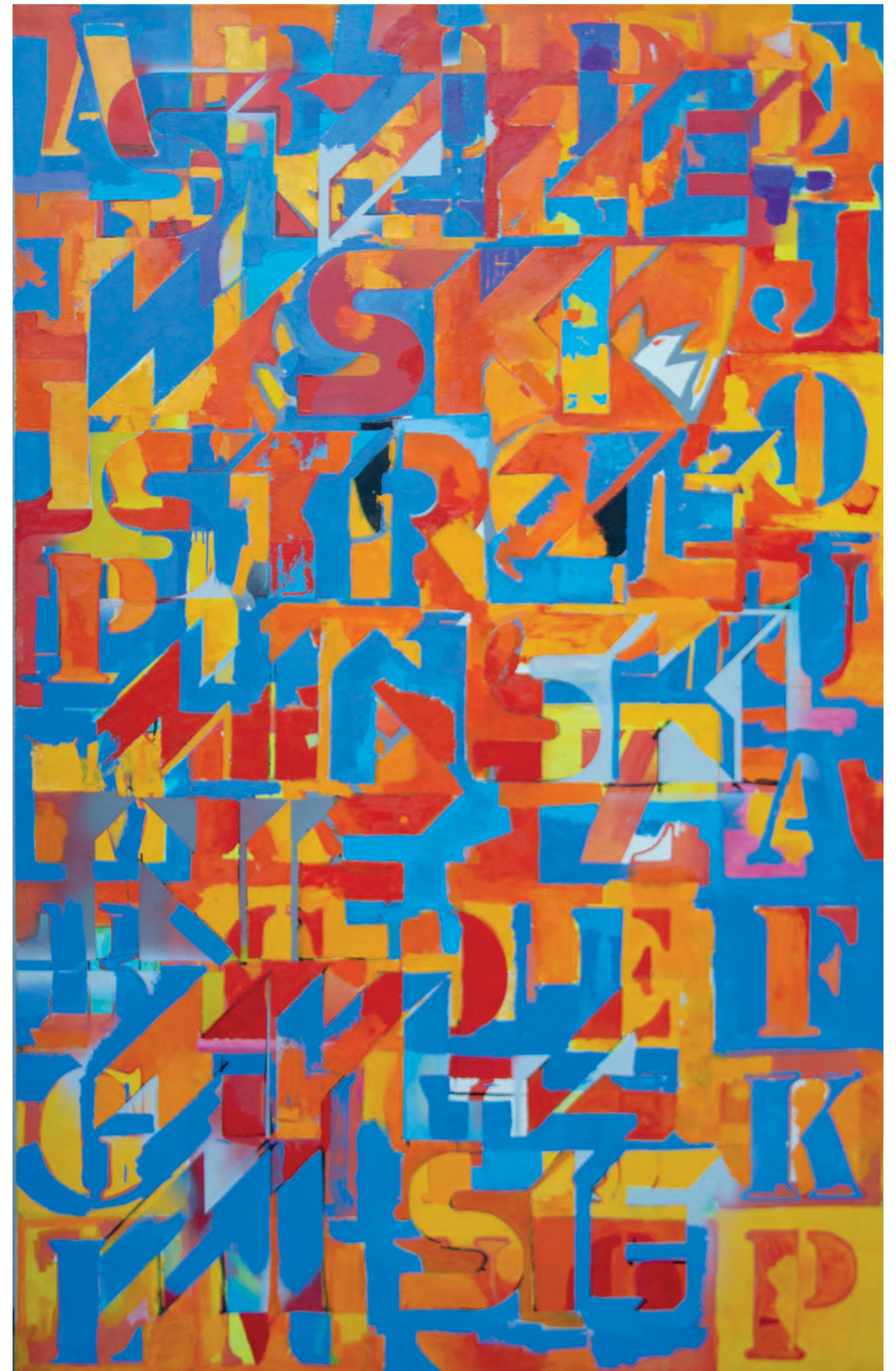
Reproductions of paintings
included in the doctoral thesis



Untitled, 2021, oil on canvas, 87 x 165 inches.



Untitled, 2021, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Stażewski, Strzemiński are not mistaken to me, 2021, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



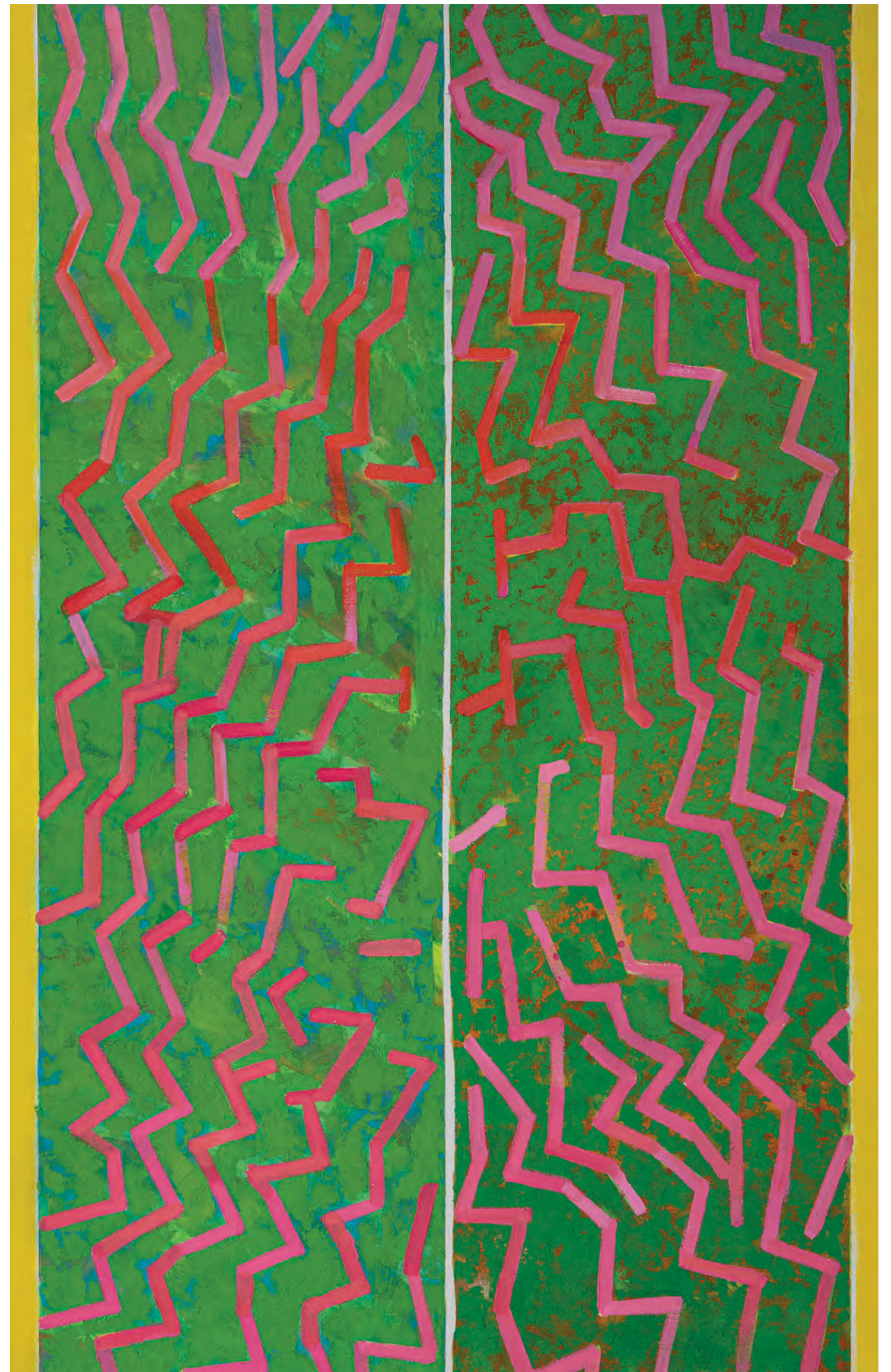
Cacti I, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x 55 inches.



Cacti II, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Autumn nocturne, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Leaf, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Untitled, 2020, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



United Colors of Benetton, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



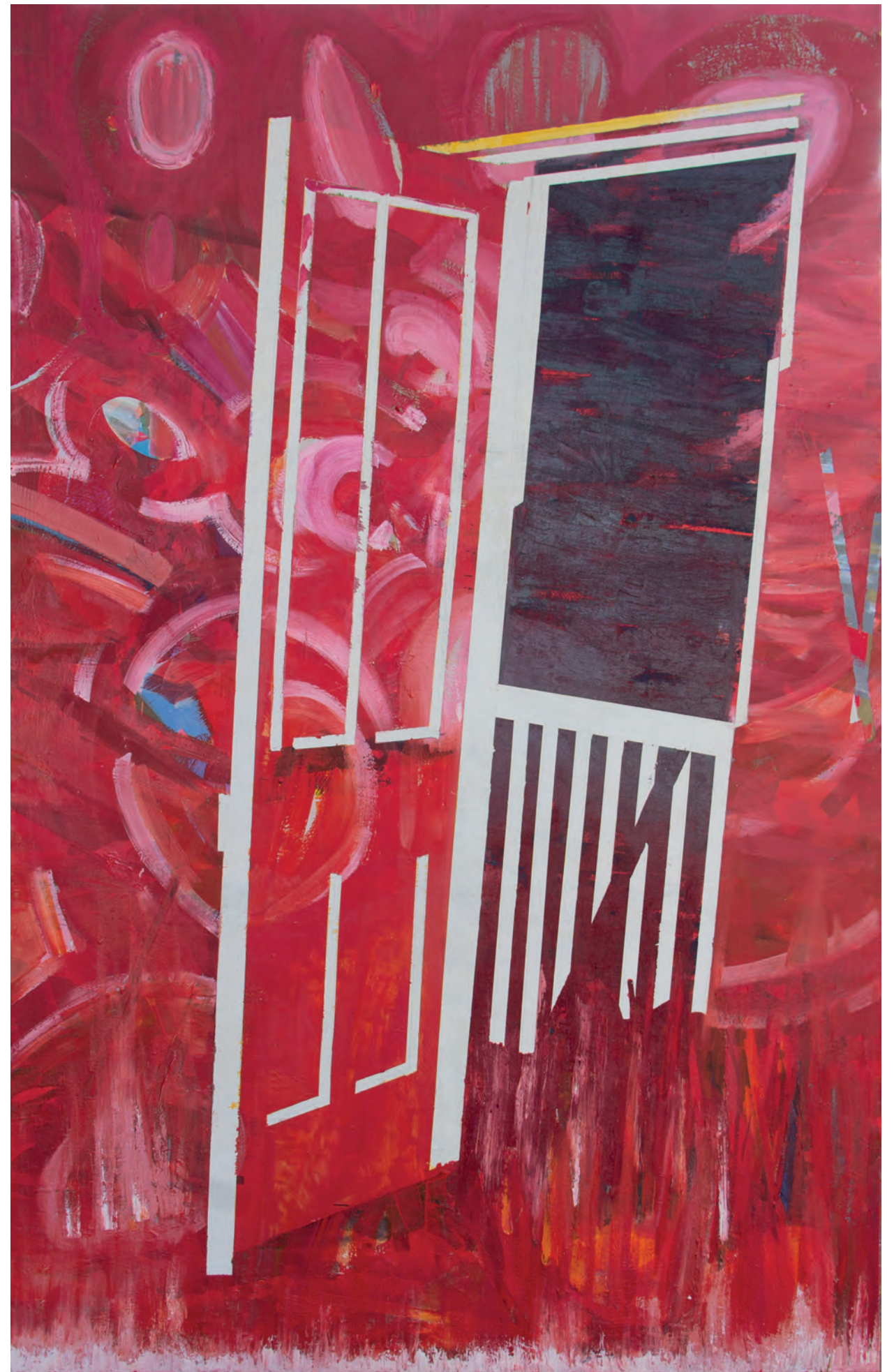
Untitled, 2020, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Jazz, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Jazz II, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



EXIT, 2021, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



Hostage, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



The reaper of minds, 2019, oil on canvas, 87x55 inches.



▲ *Welding lesson*, 2020, egg tempera on canvas, 87x 55 inches.

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