COMMUNICATING VESSELS

THE TROUBLE WITH VALUE
In the early 1970s, Hungarian artist Endre Tót tapped a zero on his typewriter. That symbol, originally used by Indian mathematicians for denoting a lack of sorts, he commented on with the sentence “I am glad if I can type zero.” Subsequent loose pages made space for one more zero, then for yet another one, and eventually for whole series of zeroes arranged in rows and columns, bringing the artist closer and closer to his declared bliss as he was tapping them out and away. “Not a day without a zero”, Tót might have been thinking, in an allusion to what Apelles once said when challenging Protogenes on craftsmanship and precision in art—nulla dies sine zero. Romans used to leave a blank space in between non-zero figures, while Greeks filled it with a circle topped off with a vertical stroke, almost identical to the middle letter of the name Tót. That void, which the ancient had named and represented in writing, came to be perceived by medieval monks as nothingness (Latin nulla), emptiness, worthlessness. The compulsive preoccupation with zero-art—zero-performance, zero-actions, zero-publishing, zero-whatnot—was Tót’s conscious conceptual strategy to find out where an artistic gesture begins as well as his act directed at the institutional art-world structures of the seventies. The artist reduced his earlier painting activity drastically, smothering own canvases and instead suggesting the dismantlement of defunct academic practice.

May the story of Endre Tót—an artist bearing a literally deadly surname—become a starting point for deliberating the temporal aspect of artworks, the ideas and notions circulating in the art world as distinct systems and orders, the art that refuses to just reproduce reality while trying to deal with the passage of time no less than with its own status. Such are the challenges posed by the shows Communicating Vessels and The Trouble with Value.

Magdalena Ziolkowska
THE TROUBLE WITH VALUE

Opening:
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15TH, 6 P.M.

Duration:
FROM DECEMBER 16TH, 2017 THROUGH MARCH 18TH, 2018

Featured artists:
Rachel Carey, Fokus Grupa, gerlach en koop, Sława Harasymowicz, Monique Hendriksen, Femke Herregraven, Gert Jan Kocken, “Kra Kra Intelligence” Cooperative, Sarah van Lamsweerde, Louise Lawler, Adrian Paci, Ewa Partum, Mladen Stilinović, Feliks Szyszko, Maciej Toporowicz, Timm Ulrichs

Curators:
Kris Dittel, Krzysztof Siatka

Coordination:
Renata Zawartka

Curators’ assistant:
Gabriela Brdej

Location:
GROUND FLOOR, LOWER GALLERY
KRYSZTOF SIATKA: Is it possible to show the mechanisms that are at play when evaluating an artwork?

KRISS DITTEL: And also to show what kind of values an artwork carries and deals with?

KS: Shall we investigate this topic from an artistic point of view?

KD: Is it even possible to make a survey of artistic approaches that deal with all kinds of values? Wouldn’t that be a lifelong project?

KS: It would, but I don’t see that as a reason to stop! Imagine an exhibition about this issue!

KD: So tell me, where to start? What kind of value comes to your mind?

KS: It seems to me that we can talk about two main kinds of value: monetary and symbolic. For me, more interesting is of course the symbolic value.

KD: But can you separate the two? Of course, good old Marx has already taught us the difference between use value, bound to a concrete useful thing, and exchange value, that is an abstract socialist category. Even though I think it is impossible to isolate monetary and symbolic values, I would like us to focus on interrogating their mutual relationship and the way they are produced.

KS: No, you cannot separate them, but the mechanism of monetary evaluation of art is more visible and easier to understand. It can also be easier to create a work inspired by it.

KD: Perhaps the most obvious definition of value that comes to mind is the economic one. Something that is quantifiable and measureable. At the same time, when you think about art and the art market, its mechanisms are vague and confusing. Of course, there are monetary measures involved, but other components—symbolic, cultural, ethical et cetera—are also employed in the creation of value.

KS: For me, everything there was to say about the monetary value of art was expressed by Yves Klein in his action Zone de Sensibilité Picturale Immatérielle [Zone of immaterial pictorial sensibility] (1959–1962). The work involved selling a proof of ownership of an empty space, taking the form of a cheque, in exchange for gold. If the purchasing party wished, the piece could then be completed in an elaborate ritual that would consist in the buyer burning the cheque and Klein throwing half of the gold into the Seine.

KD: That’s an amusing example! Also, it very well illustrates the idea that value is after all the greatest capitalist category—the lens through which everything, all social relations and objects get evaluated.

KS: Shall we start and try to look into topics and mechanisms which could be described as reasons to evaluate? Maybe the age-old idea of an artwork as a monument could be a nice and inspirational starting point for further discussion?

KD: Do you have in mind the way an artwork gains importance, or becomes valued, because it carries some kind of historical significance?

KS: Exactly! The commemorative function of an artwork, one of the oldest reasons for creation, is visible until today even on the streets full of monuments. Unfortunately, this language of artistic expression, which has its origins in the 19th century’s realism, is usually anachronistic. The most recognised monuments could be phenomenal artworks and inspire us to better understand the world. Usually, however, the event or person that is commemorated strongly influences the evaluation of the sculpture or painting that honours him or her. It’s hard to find a lot of examples where the form of the artwork is really related to the commemorated person, place, et cetera.

This is obvious, and another aspect is even more interesting to me, one which also follows from this commemorative function. Don’t you think the work of art as a monument, with all the paradoxes I suggested before, disclaims the notion of ideological independency of art?

KD: Rosalind Krauss wrote in the 1970s that the logic of sculpture is inseparable from the logic of the monument. In that sense, a sculpture is always a commemorative representation; it has its particular place and speaks a symbolic language. Since then many artists have challenged the idea of sculpture, its materiality and language, yet I can still relate to this original statement. And perhaps it is also possible to expand this idea to a larger domain of art. Of course, when we think of monuments, the first thing that comes to mind is large public sculptures, commemorating historical figures and events. And with time, they often lose their relevance, or the original meaning gets forgotten.
KS: Even the examples of conceptual art function as monuments today. Could you describe an artwork that carries such features?

KD: The photographic installation of GERT JAN KOCKEN titled JUDENPORZELLAN examines the coerced purchases of decorative porcelain figures from the royal porcelain factory under Frederick the Great, king of Prussia, in the late 18th century. In order to obtain certain certificates and enjoy civil rights, the Jewish population was forced into buying the porcelain ape figurines; allegedly one of them belonged even to philosopher Moses Mendelssohn.

KS: Such examples of works show a cognitive problem. I think I could describe it as: the impossibility of separating the evaluation of the work itself from the evaluation of the idea that determined its origin. I mean not only the idea invented by the artist but also the inspiration they found in reality.

KD: I don’t think that separation is even necessary. Judenporzellan consists of large photo prints, a human-scale representation of the ape figures, a booklet with items of information about their history, and stacks of posters that visitors can take with them. These images, visually very compelling, may end up in someone’s room as a poster and become a private companion. And at one point one may recall the story and contemplate it. The work deals with a complex historical narrative, but it has the potential to enter a more private sphere.

KS: Consider the idea of a monument also in the case of more personal events, when the relation between the thing being commemorated and the individual is closer. A way to deal with, or even exorcise personal history?

KD: Do you have in mind artworks with personal narratives, which can lead us to think through the notion of an artwork as a monument?

KS: SŁAWA HARASYMOVICZ prepared for us an installation called 12/6. It is a reflection over a place where she spent a few years in her childhood. The project documents the transformation of the structure of an apartment. The artist talks about it using many languages: drawing, graphic art, photography, Morse code, several short poems, et cetera. In this way the story becomes more and more saturated, but not more communicative. The spectator is not able to read the story of her life, only to experience the entropy inspired by her early years. The private monument of her story remains in fact silent to the audience.

KD: Could you elaborate on where you see the question of creating and perceiving value in this respect? Is it about a reflection of personal or subjective values when encountering an artwork?

KS: Sure, let’s get back to the topic. I like to imagine an artwork’s form as a kind of gatekeeper that is preventing the full understanding of the plot. The communicative power is an important distinction to consider. It seems to be one of the possible ways to understand the heritage of the early avant-garde and later art. For my private view on the 20th-century and contemporary art history, an important contribution is also contained in the expression “art is a lie” by Picasso. These points of view determine further questions to ask: “Who’s lying?” and “Who’s lied to?”. Paradoxically, such an order could give supremacy to the spectator, who is of course fooled. She or he is probably more important to us, because each exhibition is prepared for an audience, whose reaction in turn determines our work. Certainly a person who knows and has the tools to interpret is privileged.

KD: I’d like to complete your Picasso quote, and that may also answer some of your doubts. As far as I know, the quote says in full: “art is a lie that makes us realise truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand”. I interpret it as a way to express that art only imitates reality, yet by doing so it also has the potential to unveil some otherwise obscured truths. And that may lie in the objecthood of an artwork, in its communicative power, and so on.

KS: You’re right. At the same time you pointed out how quotes and clichés work: in isolation from the context and sometimes incomplete. There lie the roots of incomprehension. To me, the only inspirational part of what Picasso said is “a lie”. Thoughts of truth bring me always astray, however this time we approached a reflection on the language of art, its use and function. In this context, evaluation is controversial, because it would be ridiculous to compare the interaction between art object and its spectator to a typical communicative situation. Traditionally, during a conversation we learn something, in contrast to standing in front of an artwork, when we can only gain awareness. Such a situation can give us only new questions and no answers.
Treating a work of art as a guide, instruction or information, we are doomed to eternal wanderings. Is it not a paradox?

KD: Hmm... Maybe that is a question for epistemology, and in that sense knowledge as such is not so important. Rather, what’s valuable is understanding, and in that sense the understanding of an artwork may happen outside the terms of language or expertise. To change our focus a little bit, I would like to bring up another aspect important when thinking about various concepts of value and art. Instead of an art object, let’s think about the person of the artist as a maker.

KS: An artist as maker is usually considered an individual; many classical masters are talked about in terms of the artistic genius. But what does it take to create and what forms of knowledge are considered in this process? Is it only the work of art made by such a genius that is of importance?

KD: I think where you are heading is a set of questions we considered when inviting artist Reinaart Vanhoe to the exhibition. He has been engaged for a long time in the issues of collectivity and collaboration, not only among artists but also among people who are not necessarily trained in art as professionals; working together with an employee of Bunkier Sztuki, Agnieszka Tyman, they came up with the idea of initiating a certain cooperative, named KRA KRA INTELLIGENCE.

KS: What is the purpose of this collective?

KD: The collective involves more employees of the Gallery, and they collaborate with another cooperative, “Ogniwo” from Kraków, too. They call the outcome “Kraków receptionist art”—an art form that welcomes visitors, happens at the “front desk” of the institution, in the literal as well as the symbolic sense. “Kra Kra Intelligence” looks into what kind of knowledge there is in the institution and what sense of agency can be created through this joint process. Their expanding programmes—information on actions and the “additional wing of the exhibition” located in private spaces—are announced on an info-board in front of Bunkier Sztuki. Along with this process, the cooperative also questions the idea of artistic work and what can be considered as such.

KS: From certain other perspectives we could also look at some neo-avant-garde artistic practices. We have well-known examples, such as MLADEN STILINOVIC’s piece ARTIST AT WORK from 1978: a series of photographs documenting the artist at rest.

KD: He wrote a short text The Praise of Laziness where he calls for times of idleness, doing nothing. He also defined laziness as “a time of pain, a futile concentration” and called for practicing it to perfection, especially as an artist. The pragmatic might think he expressed the necessity to “do nothing” in order to make way for the flow of ideas, but what I really think he was advocating for was a genuine nothingness as a practice. Thinking about it from today’s perspective, in the hectic world we live in the most luxurious activity I can imagine is to do nothing. Can you imagine such a luxury?

KS: Sure, and it’s easy to find examples in our time: the slow food or slow email movement, for instance.

KD: On a different note, the title of that piece includes the word “work”. Thus, here the practice of laziness, or doing nothing, is still considered labour. In a subversive way, I think, Stilinović expressed his concerns about the perception of artistic work in society and the way artistic labour is valued.

KS: His expression is a subversive sign that is emblematic for that period. You can see similar attitudes in other attempts from that time.

We have decided to give the audience a new edition of a certain artwork, an old mail art classic made by EWA PARTUM: the sentence NOW MY IDEA IS A GOLDEN IDEA (1974) pressed on the covers of an exhibition invitation. This is a connection between the immateriality of the idea and its monetary value, related to the meaning and symbolism of gold.

KD: Indeed, the artist’s persona here is someone who can channel a unique experience and create a specific piece of art. The original work of Ewa Partum existed as a sentence printed on an exhibition invitation card including all the necessary information about the opening and venue. In fact the art piece was not the postcard but an immaterial concept. The only remaining copy of the exhibition invitation card is in Ewa Partum’s possession, and as the last copy it also became symbolically valuable to her, to such an extent that she would not lend it for the exhibition. Yet she agreed to the reproduction of the card. Somewhat paradoxically, with her permission we have materialised this work, which is now available to the exhibition’s visitors.
KS: That invitation is related to an interesting story from her gallery Adres in Łódź, from 1972–1977. The film *Documentation of the Adres Gallery* (1972) included Ewa Partum into the exhibition shows as an artist, performer, animator, feminist and... avant-garde hero. In her gallery she exhibited conceptual art and documentation of works by Fluxus artists.

In 1975 Wiesław Borowski, a famous Polish critic, wrote an infamous text entitled *Pseudoawangarda* [Pseudo-avant-garde], which caused a polemic and a large row in the local art world. He accused Polish artists of inadvertently imitating Western standards. He used examples to illustrate the "low quality" of this movement, among them *Now My Idea Is a Golden Idea*. He tried to establish an anti-canon of the worst art in Poland. Yet, as time has shown, artworks from his list belong in the mainstream of the Polish art history.

KD: Do you think MACIEJ TOPOROWICZ’s artwork comes out of this tradition, Polish mail art in particular? The piece titled *Forza Italia* is an envelope that was posted from Italy to New York in 1994, but what is specific about it is a postal stamp depicting the fascist leader Benito Mussolini.

KS: His idea follows this tradition of mail art, but it’s a late example from the 1990s, and it would be good to interpret it in the context of the Italian reality of that period. It was a reaction to the situation when a far-right party came to power again. Here I see another interesting point, because creating and using a new postal stamp is an illegal activity.

KD: So the artist, again reflecting on a historically and politically significant event, is also taking a personal risk—the forgery of a postal stamp as an illegal activity.

KS: The idea of a personal risk is significant nowadays when capitalism operates on the basis of individual risk.

KD: Definitely! Think of how debts are accumulated and risk is taken by individuals. We are not only consumers but also risk-taking subjects, and even the products themselves in the era of late capitalism.

KS: Let’s think of it this way: an artist as producer and an artwork as a product or asset and an audience as a target.

KD: The work of FEMKE HERREGRAVEN, *SPRAWLING SWAMPS*, might resonate with the issue you raise. The film is a prototype for an interactive environment; it maps fictional infrastructures and geographical instability. Femke uses satellite and self-generated imagery that maps unstable territories—swamps, ice caps, shifting shorelines—in order to probe into the cracks in our contemporary value system and imagine possible new forms of value. Such new values that emerge may be exhaustion, gossip, or even empathy. The poetic narration resonates with the topic of labour, yet in an unexpected way: “Contaminated soil, exhausted mind. The goal was to make a sleepless soldier, but the scandal of sleep has been abandoned....” *Insomnia* is a time of indifference yet here only paid with the currency of exhaustion.”

KS: Facing her installation is a video work *NATURALLY FALSE* by MONIQUE HENDRIKSEN, with very seductive imagery.

KD: Monique uses images that seem quite familiar, yet these landscapes also look oddly unnatural, artificial, as if coming from the future. She is seeking an aesthetic that could represent our contemporary state of capitalist realism, but instead of searching for new images and compositions, she is in quest for models that could represent the invisible—as diagrams depict abstractions, in her words. All images and sounds in the film come from copyright-free sources and are then recomposed into a new pattern which is again radically copyright-free. In doing so she aims at thoughts of overcoming the neoliberal myth of individualism and rationality in art.

KS: As far as I understood, her work is deeply rooted in philosophy, too.

KD: Yes, her work draws its inspiration from Alfred Sohn-Rethel’s theory of real abstraction, an abstraction that appears without a conscious effort, something that precedes thought. This abstraction takes place for instance when people exchange commodities and abstract their values in order to facilitate that exchange. She looks into the effects of such abstraction in our contemporary era of late capitalism.

KS: It seems to me we can now pause for a moment and consider the subject of abstraction in art. Although this art phenomenon has a century-long tradition, it still succeeds in determining interesting narratives and reflections. As far as I remember Plato’s philosophy, he did not value visual art too
Mladen Stilinović, An Artist Who Cannot Speak English Is No Artist, 1992
much, because it was reproductive. Artists have understood abstraction in various ways since the beginning of the 20th century: they tried to express spirituality—Wassily Kandinsky, the pure sense of form—Kazimir Malevich, or created aesthetic treatises on the order of the universe—Piet Mondrian.

We present the work of Feliks Szyszko titled ART BOX MONDRIAN (1972). The neoplastic composition of the image has been transformed into a net which can be made into a cube decorated with Mondrian’s characteristic colours. I am fascinated by the transformation of values in this example: the visual treatise translated into the form of a simple toy. I remember that Claes Oldenburg once compared a sculpture of Hans Arp to spilled ketchup. I think Feliks Szyszko was on a similar path.

KD: When it comes to abstraction in art, I always feel that its early makers in the 20th century, like Mondrian, did not worry as much about its evaluation in their present. They felt their visions would be vindicated by the transformed future society; they truly believed that the aesthetic values they created would have an acknowledged function in everyday life. Perhaps today there is less confidence in art as a provider of utopian societal values, there’s a strong focus on the present. Perhaps from this presentness, another artist group featured in the exhibition, FOKUS GRUPA, is trying to look into future possibilities.

They use the tools of narration, statistical extrapolation, fiction, and their material is the system of art institutions and their relations—relations of power—in shaping this scenario.

KS: They decided to make an installation, MAP OF INVISIBLE MATTER, about how certain institutions and their activities are involved in generating symbolic value in art. Fokus Grupa uses the e-flux client list as a source of information, focusing more on e-flux as an institution. They are looking at the network of relations among different actors of the art world that have been receiving e-flux newsletters and announcements. Their goal is to show the connections between actors and geographical maps.

KS: Again, Mladen Stilinović gave us a good conclusion in the beginning of the 1990s: AN ARTIST WHO CANNOT SPEAK ENGLISH IS NO ARTIST.

KD: Yes, it is a very pertinent work, and we can expand it to the entire art world: interns, gallery assistants, production managers, curators, et cetera. But can you relate it to the visitors too? “A spectator who cannot speak English is no spectator”?

KS: Sure. Here we can see the power structure and exclusivity of language, and the dominance of English in particular.

KD: Thinking about the role of language in creating value, apart from the dominant jargon, we can also consider it from another point of view: the role of narration and the use of language as material of an artwork. For instance, there is the performance of Sarah Van Lamsweerde, TELL/SELL, A COMMON STORY...
KS: ...and what’s more, it’s in Polish! The performance revolves around found, fictional or factual narratives of art objects. The work takes the form of a classic art auction, and although an art object is indeed presented on a plinth, what can be purchased, as opposed to a conventional sale, is the story behind it. Each word of the story must be sold to willing bidders before it can be told as part of a narrative whole. The audience in attendance blindly shapes the tale, through the frame of their own consuming desires, in advance of the story being recounted. Inspired by writing and translation—for which one often gets paid per word—van Lamsweerde created a performance in which stories are sold and shared word for word. Unsold words affect the story being told. Upon purchasing a word, each of the new owners receives a certificate of authenticity stating his or her share in the story, which leads to a situation where a work of art is not owned by one but by several persons.

KD: In Sarah van Lamsweerde’s performance, while she makes use of a certain structure of the art system, that is an auction, language becomes commodity.

There is another type of “sale” going on at the exhibition, a project by Rachel Carey, Liquidate It All Away. The idea of this work refers to difficult circumstances: when people lose the ability to pay off their debts and their personal belongings are being sold off for cash. Rachel created a series of clay sculptures, often inspired by objects in possession of Bunkier Sztuki. These sculptures, together with objects destined for liquidation from the institution and other items for sale, are evaluated by a professional agent. The agent prices these objects based on their use value: a clay copy of a soap dispenser may be evaluated for its material or its potential use as, for instance, a paperweight, rather than for its artistic value as a sculpture.

KS: And, of course, all objects with a price tag are available to the visitors for the stated amount of money.

KD: Indeed. What happens here is that we get a chance to feel the difference between an object’s use value, conditioned by the evaluation process on the part of the agent, and something rather symbolic, subjective—the value we ascribe to an art object. Also, yet again, the language is important: the term liquidity does not only refer to the fluidity of water, for instance, but also to a feature of assets that are easily convertible to cash.

KS: Language and narrative seems to be an important thread in our project.

KD: And apart from just making use of language, many artists create artworks in which it becomes a really essential part. They think of it not as a tool but rather as material. In these instances, language is not something outside the artwork but an integral part of it. I see this process also in the work of Gerlach en Koop. Their work is situated precisely at the border between the materiality of an object and language. The piece titled Dispersion is a good example of it. What you see is an abstract, painting-like image. As a spectator you will likely turn to the title card of this work to see the name of the artist, and so on. What you will also read is the material of the work: sandpaper and a one euro coin. Having read this information you’ll likely arrive at the conclusion that the swirling shapes on the sandpaper-canvas were created using the coin, which ultimately dispersed, dissolved. I can reveal to you that the defaced coin is hidden inside the frame of the work. So you come closer to this artwork by understanding its materiality and as I or the title card reveal more.

Moreover, Gerlach en Koop has an elusive presence throughout the exhibition. Visitors may notice two granite blocks that protrude from the gallery walls in two locations. These are so-called vide-poches, French for “empty pockets”—trays designed for collecting ones and other coins, keys, transport tickets et cetera; they are usually positioned near entrance doors, in order to keep all these small items organised. What’s more, the pair of them at the exhibition is identical to the ones found in the vaults of Générale de banque in Brussels [now part of BNP Paribas Fortis—author’s note]. Générale de banque was a bank that once belonged to the largest-ever companies in Belgium [Société générale de Belgique—author’s note] and has an intriguing history, involving colonialism, various takeovers, share drops and government interventions.

KS: I think we should devote more attention to the mechanisms of seeing. In 1967 Roland Barthes suggested in his essay The Death of Author a new way of interpreting a work of art. He gave us the tools to emancipate the spectator, he
proclaimed the birth of the reader. It is evident that viewers of contemporary art use mainly their sense of sight. I think that one's ease of seeing and understanding has a direct impact on the evaluation of a given phenomenon.

**KD:** Would that be a reason to include in this discussion a member of the famous Pictures Generation, LOUISE LAWLER? The photographer of iconic artworks, a director of gaze, one may say. Her images depict artworks in situ: surrounded by their everyday environment, with their frames and other distortions that influence our perception of a work of art. She has been looking for such specific vantage points for the past thirty years of her activity, yet here we decided to show a piece from a recent body of work, titled **MOON (PLACED AND PULLED)**, 2014/2015. This work is a tracing of an original image from her archive, entitled Moon. It looks almost like a document or a copy of the original. Moreover, the image is distorted—we can hardly recognise what we’re looking at—it is tailored for the art institution, demonstrating what a picture can do.

**KS:** Pay attention to the part of the title of the work which is in brackets: Placed and Pulled. Digital data editing was involved, and this activity destroyed the original photography. The picture is broken! The work introduces us to another perspective on error in the era of post-internet aesthetics.

Yet another aspect I would like to go back to is the labour of artists, craftsmen in the creation of an artwork, maybe also the outsourcing in artistic production. From an economic point of view, this is an important aspect that determines the value of an object. We chose to show a film by ADRIAN PACI titled **THE COLUMN**, about the production and the weeks-long transport of marble columns. I am intrigued by the use of that motif of the column. It is one of the most obvious ancient architectural features that connect us with the great civilisations of the past. The column is also an element of the ancient temple, and belongs to the sacred sphere. The column is the base for architectural construction, which has its symbolic meaning. The Corinthian column used by the artist symbolises durability, immutability, and antique elegance. I think the film is a commentary on the roots of European culture—but don’t you also see a critical analysis in it?

**KD:** I don’t think I can sign up to saying that the work comments on the roots of European culture; it rather points at the trade relations in the globalised world: a European aesthetic model being reproduced on a Chinese cargo ship. I think the work binds together two seemingly contrasting ideas: on one hand, the need to hold on to an old standard of beauty, and on the other, the current trade routes and work conditions that make it possible. On the way, a rough piece of marble is being shred of its material surplus until a flawless column emerges out of smoke and dust in all its perfection on the European shoreline. The creation of one form requires the destruction of another.

**KS:** In relation to this I would also like to talk about the notion of iconoclasm. First and foremost, it joins our discourse from the ancient and the Byzantine eras, when a Christian was afraid to imagine the shape of God in an artistic creation. Maybe it was one of the first manifestations of the abstract art movement, maybe I’m also naïve, having studied the matter too briefly, without understanding theological writings. What determines my thinking is in fact the ambiguity of an event when an artwork is devastated. Whoever destroys an artwork inspired by some ideology or religion, wants to erase the art piece. Such an act is actually the birth of the victim, who will always remain in a privileged position within the mechanism of evaluation. We regret the destroyed works regardless of whether they were valuable or not. Maybe I should try this: is the process of destruction a form of creation? Not in a philosophical sense. I am talking about examples from contemporary art.

**KD:** We don’t have to come as close to the present as contemporary art in order to find relevant examples. In my opinion, the paradox of physical iconoclasm is that the destruction of images always produces new images. For instance, when I think of iconoclasm during the Protestant Reformation, I recall detailed 16th-century etchings and paintings that illustrated the acts of demolishing statues and interior decorations in churches. Coming back to your question, I’d like to give an example from the contemporary era. Do you remember, from the recent years, the videos of ISIS, or Daesh, depicting the destruction of ancient artworks and museums in today’s Iraq and Syria? They are also very well aware of this mechanism, and are using it for their own purposes.
KS: You described it like a form of strategy, which is determined by the goals and oriented towards the production of certain images. Eventually the religious or philosophical reasons are translated by mass media, and it changes the scope of the impact. Here the mediation of the media makes the monument of the situation. It seems to me that each side, the destroyer as well as the victim, could use that for their own purposes.

KD: One of the artists featured in our exhibition, GERT JAN KOCKEN, produced a series of artworks, large-scale photographs, that depict what the iconoclasm left behind in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. His compelling pictures precisely point to the power of images that were created by destruction. In our exhibition we don’t have a work from that series, but the one on show is in a way related.

KS: Once again we got back to the topic of artwork as monument. In that particular case, photography could be used as a means of commemoration. But what we decided to present is MADONNA OF NAGASAKI, DEFACEMENT 9 AUGUST 1945: a photographic portrait of a sculpture from the Urakami Cathedral, which was destroyed in a bombing in 1945. The face of the figure was burnt, and so it acquired a new expression. The sculpture was not a target of destruction; one can say it was destroyed by chance. The artist noticed the incredible, demonic expression of the figure and documented it using photography. The destruction of this work in 1945 had been a step towards its life after death, which started when Gert Jan disclosed the photograph to us in the 21st century. Something tempts me here to quote Fyodor Dostoevsky, who said, “true art is always contemporary”. I have no intention of wondering what true art is, but I do find in this sentence some important inspirations. It seems to me that the present value is above all a result of reflections and experiences of people of different ages. The outcome of this process cannot be fully predicted. Although the artist assumes kindness, determination and competence on the part of the audience, the value of any work seems to be shaped not quite consciously.

KD: Indeed the historical significance of the Madonna sculpture contributes to the way we value this artwork. It sheds light on the tragic event of the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945 and makes a grim account of the Catholic minority in Japan—it certainly is a carrier of memory. Yet what I find stunning is the affective quality of that image. Like you said, it still speaks to us more than seventy years on, captured in that photograph. The hollow eyes of the sculpture are confronting with our own subjectivism and experiences.

KS: At the very end of the show we have a delightful addition, and maybe a kind of conclusion to our trouble. A blind man pictured, his eyes behind dark glasses, a cane in his hand, and on his chest, a sign with the following inscription: Ich kann keine Kunst mehr sehen. That means: “I cannot see art anymore”. The photo is a documentation of the artist’s performance during the Cologne Art Fair in 1975. That work, for me personally, is the ultimate example for when I think that there is nothing more to say... After all, how are we to look at artworks if they are not visible, or similar to the ordinary life, or if there are too many of them to notice the good one?

The poster we present is an edition of this work available for purchase at 20 euro. Each copy is signed by the artist! You can see the work, the same that we have bought for The Trouble with Value show, in the collection of photography at Fotomuseum Winterthur.
Contextual events programme

FROM FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15TH, 2017 THROUGH SUNDAY, MARCH 18TH, 2018

"Kra Kra Intelligence" Cooperative

Cooperative activities run by the group which gives name to the project, established by Reinaart Vanhoe.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19TH, 6 P.M.

Tell/Sell – a common story

A performance act presented by Sarah van Lamsweerde, an artist employing dance and visual arts in her work.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20TH, 1 P.M.

Curatorial tour

Co-curator Kris Dittel is going to speak in detail about the exhibition.

FRIDAY, MARCH 16TH

Escape Room

An action out in town, organised by Sława Harasymowicz.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17TH, 1 P.M.

Curatorial tour

The exhibition as presented by its co-curator Krzysztof Siatka.
Gert Jan Kocken, *Judenporzellan, Affe Meissen* [Jewish porcelain, monkey]
Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, 2009

Timm Ulrichs, *Ich kann keine Kunst Mehr sehen* [I cannot see art anymore], 1975
Featured artists:
Semâ Bekirovic, Matthijs Bosman, Karolina Breguła, Matthew Buckingham, Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčova, VALIE EXPORT, Anya Gallaccio, Lotte Geeven, Agata Ingarden, Beili Liu, Dane Mitchell, Jacek Tylicki, Barbara Visser

Curators:
Anna Lebensztejn, Kinga Olesiejuk

Coordination:
Dorota Bucka

Location:
UPSTAIRS
Matthijs Bosman, *Anecdote*, 2017, object and anecdote


Anya Gallaccio, *Preserve ‘Beauty’*, 2003, object

VALIE EXPORT, *Fragmente der Bilder einer Berührung*, 1994, six objects


Matthijs Bosman, *Anecdote*, 2017, object and anecdote

Anetta Mona Chișa & Lucia Tkáčova, *Far from You. Memorial to Lida Clementisova #16*, 2009, installation

Barbara Visser, *Herbarium*, 2013, video

Semâ Bekirovic, *Unfixed Galaxies*, 2013, installation

Karolina Bregula, *Kippenberger Cookies*, 2012, installation

Dane Mitchell, *All Whatness Is Wetness*, 2015, installation


At the turn of the fifties and sixties Gustav Metzger developed, in a series of manifestos, the concept of auto-destructive art, supposed to become the social form of artistic activity in the post-industrial era. In his practice he was translating it into acts of annihilation of artistic objects, taking advantage of deficiencies of media, mechanical force and caustics in doing so. As the artist suggests,

Auto-destructive art is art which contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time not to exceed twenty years. Other forms of auto-destructive art involve manual manipulation. There are forms of auto-destructive art where the artist has a tight control over the nature and timing of disintegrative process, and there are other forms where the artist’s control is slight.

It was not long before the concept of auto-destruction merged, in the author’s perception, with auto-creation of works: “Auto-creative art is art of change, growth, movement.” Nearly a decade after Metzger’s notions John Baldessari put forth, as the next work of his own, cremation of his artistic output to date. At once he emphasised, to an extreme extent and most accurately, the creative aspect of destruction. Artists, today, are not avoiding the use of materials likely to disintegrate by nature—they do arrange situations that cause damage to, or accelerate the decay of an object. Not many of them, however, embark upon as radical activities as Baldessari or Metzger have undertaken, welcoming a total annihilation of their works. Few allow for a progressing or partial destruction of original productions, and whoever does so evidently stresses their past presence by way of documentation or remains meant to represent the pieces at exhibitions. Looped processes aimed at auto-destruction of physical objects are more common—such artworks last in change, disappearance and return.

The production of contemporary art assumes its continued reproduction. This strategy corresponds to Badiou’s observations, for in his view, the current century is a time of creative, and not destructive negation. Artists who follow the direction of art not focused on permanent artefacts do not necessarily celebrate the incorporeality or gradual passing of their works. Fading augurs well, above all else, for reappearance; loss, for compensation or new creative circumstances. What is subject to transformation or dying out, comes back around, at times in an altered state, shape or location. This resembles the functioning of a closed system, where a balance is maintained despite continual shifts.

Communicating Vessels revolve around objects and installations constructed as either proceeding transformations or series of events. These operate at the border of physical and non-physical dimensions of art; the conceptual plane, which determines the laws regulating their existence, is of no less importance to them than the expressive corporeal aspect. The latter is designed to be destabilised because of compositions’ structural properties or under external factors affecting them. The peculiarity of process-oriented works is comparable with the behaviour of liquids contained in a communicating vessel system: transformation-susceptible matter circulates and takes forms different from...
the initial ones while their nature stands unchanged. Shifts inside the system are an effect of the dynamics a given substance demonstrates as well as a result of environmental or human elements' impact. In consequence an array of interconnections is formed where various factors may prevail, including the work itself and its immediate surroundings, the creator's gesture, and the viewer's decisions.

Gunge that smells of burnt sugar, clouds of vapour, the odour of decomposing plants, heat accelerating the decay of photographic emulsion...

Process-oriented works of art, although dealing mostly with the problems of loss and disappearance, are deeply rooted in the physicality of employed matter. Artists probe the limits of materials' strength, bringing them to extreme states, and initiate processes that lead to their eventual disintegration. They do so utilising both the inherent impermanence of a given medium and its susceptibility to damage caused by the environment. They create objects that may endanger any items exhibited nearby. Unveiling the material tissue of artworks, authors at once release stimuli that arouse the sensuality of cognition. Wear and destruction of matter enhance the impressions' intensity, setting off the carnal awareness of existence.

DANE MITCHELL, *INVISIBLE FORCES*, 2017 (FIRST PRODUCED 2015), SITE-SPECIFIC OBJECT

A coconut fibre floor mat with the following words printed on it: "BEYOND THIS POINT INVISIBLE FORCES ARE AT PLAY".

DANE MITCHELL, *ALL WHATNESS IS WETNESS*, 2015, INSTALLATION

The vapourised homoeopathic solution's essence is water taken from the Maeander (now Büyük Menderes) river in Asia Minor. Its mouth, into the Aegean Sea, is where the ancient Ionian city of Miletus was located, home of philosopher Thales (ca 624–546 BC), who regarded water as the first principle and origin of all things (*arche*).

AGATA INGARDEN, *HEAT PI PES*, 2017, SERIES OF OBJECTS

The artist cast the objects in burnt caramel which set on steel strips and small brass wires.

MATTHEW BUCKINGHAM, *IMAGE OF ABSALON TO BE PROJECTED UNTIL IT VANISHES*, 2001, INSTALLATION

Displayed continuously and fading, the slide depicts a monument to Absalon, the controversial 12th-century bishop and legendary founder of Copenhagen. Famous for being exceptionally cultured and intelligent, at the same time he set himself apart with unusual brutality when commanding military expeditions against pagans. He also commissioned the first written history of Denmark, which only sheds light on the brighter side of his accomplishments.

Courtesy of Daniel Marzona and the Artist.

VALIE EXPORT, *FRAGMENTE DER BILDER EINER BERÜHRUNG*, 1994, SIX OBJECTS

Steel rods with light bulbs attached to their ends plunge, in repetitive mechanical motion, into glass cylinders filled with various liquids: milk, water and used engine oil.

Work from the collection of MWW – Wrocław Contemporary Museum.
ANYA GALLACCIO, PRESERVE ‘BEAUTY’, 2003, OBJECT

Five hundred Gerbera flowers of the “beauty” variety—now hardly ever grown but once valued for its visual qualities—steadily transform in time and subject to the exhibition’s environment, affected by such factors as light, heat, moisture and bacteria.

Work from the British Council Collection.

Process-oriented artistic projects raise questions of who is behind the contrived situation and to what extent it is acceptable. By doing so they make the artist the centre of attention. The strategies for working with unstable matter he or she pursues determine the work’s living rhythm: they define a narrower or wider scope within which to interact with it freely, and assume a less or more significant effect on its further existence. The author’s decisions may consist in just indicating arbitrarily the ideal physical state of an object, making one aware what power lies with an artistic gesture. The opposite situation is possible too, when the artist, having initiated a certain process, at some point withdraws from steering its course. Waiving his or her right to control of the matter, the creator puts it at the mercy of chance, nature or another human being. He or she then makes do with the final result or entirely gives up the keeping track of what happens to the piece, which may, as a consequence, take forms the author never expected.

Regardless of how strictly or not the artist controls his or her work, the problem of artistic manipulation emerges, that of distortions affecting how process-oriented art objects are experienced. Some of these create an illusion of involvement, deluding with an opportunity to influence their future—but looking back on that some time later, it may turn out it is the author who has been pulling strings all along.

JACEK TYLICKI, NATURE NO. 367 – GENESIS, 1973–2016, INSTALLATION

The work in a way documents the Natural Art project initiated by the artist in 1973. In a process triggered by the author, canvases or sheets of paper were left exposed to environmental factors in different parts of the world, including Poland, Sweden, the US and Oceania. The double-faced original Nature No. 367 is a record of nature’s forces made in 1979 in Iceland.

Work from the collection of Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art in Kraków, acquired as part of the task “Boundaries of Collection. Growth of the Bunkier Sztuki collection”, co-financed with funds of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

BARBARA VISser, HERBARIUM, 2013, VIDEO

The video Herbarium was shot inside an abandoned tropical greenhouse located near one of the largest botanical gardens in the Netherlands, that is Arboretum Belmonte in Wageningen.

Courtesy of the Artist and the Annet Gelink Gallery in Amsterdam.

SEMÄ BEKIROVIC, UNFIXED GALAXIES, 2013, INSTALLATION

The artist subjected photographs of galaxies to partial photochemical treatment: developed but not fixed, they remain sensitive to light. Their display is only possible in a space illuminated with red light, under conditions similar to those created in a photographer’s darkroom.
Works employing the creative potential that lies in change often await the viewer’s cooperation. He or she plays an important role in the artwork’s life cycle, being able to influence the dynamics of transformation and so bring about an alteration, distortion or wear of the artwork’s physical form. In many instances, faced with the choice between destroying a piece and leaving it intact, he or she unsuspectingly fulfils a predetermined course of events; elsewhere, successive stages of the work’s development are triggered off by him- or herself deliberately. The viewer’s figure takes a peculiar shape in the light of any narrative-oriented piece, becoming not only a carrier of the given account but also a contributor, expected to introduce an original element in order to advance its evolution into quite a different story.

BEILI LIU, LURE/KRAKÓW, FROM THE LURE SERIES, 2008–2017, SITE-RESPONSIVE INSTALLATION

An installation made of coils of red wool, inspired by an ancient Chinese myth saying that people, when born, are joined with their soul mates by invisible red threads, and that it is these links which allow them to finally find each other despite any adversities.

The composition is arranged anew for each presentation, with the artist’s participation, so that it is adapted to the volume and architecture of the given exhibition space.

SEMĂ BEKIROVIC & LOTTE GEEVEN, SONG FOR A LOST COLLECTION, 2015–2016, VIDEO

The starting point for the work was an invitation to participate in the International Sculpture and Painting Symposium Dakar Senegal. Its organisers’ formal requirements aroused the artists’ suspicions—they were expected to have their selected works sent to Dakar as well as to pay registration fees of a considerable amount. So, the artists launched an investigation: before the dispatch they fitted the pieces with a GPS transmitter, which was to lead them to Senegal’s capital indeed. But then, asking around the town’s inhabitants, local artists and even fortune-tellers about the missing works turned out to be of no avail. Semă and Lotte’s Senegalese guide Omar eventually mentioned to them the griots, West African bards who orally pass down stories from generation to generation. At the artists’ request, Omar was supposed to visit his home village griot and ask him to compose a song for Dakar’s lost collection.

MATTHIJS BOSMAN, ANECDOTE, 2017, OBJECT AND ANECDOTE

Material for a new version of the tale—originally invented in 2006 for the Short Stories show in Amsterdam’s W139 gallery—consisted of accounts collected during a few days’ residency in Kraków. Once unleashed by the author, the anecdote is incidentally passed on to subsequent listeners.

ANETTA MONA CHIŞA & LUCIA TKÁČOVA, FAR FROM YOU, MEMORIAL TO LIDA CLEMENTISOVA #16, 2009, INSTALLATION

The project invokes an almost forgotten Czech opera singer, wife to Vladimir Clementis—Slovak opposition politician and victim of Stalinist era purge in 1950s. Having shared with her husband the tragedy of imprisonment and torture, Lida devoted the rest of her life to immortalising Vladimir’s services for democracy; she has not entered the collective memory herself.
Memorials designed by the artists subtly give back the heroine her due place in history. One of these variations consisted in planting species of Clematis around monuments existing in the public space; another, in creating, out of letters the couple exchanged when imprisoned, a musical score to be performed by the viewer. Memorial bearing the number 16 is reconstructed based on a photographic portrait of Lida made in her emigration period.

KAROLINA BREGUŁA, KIPPPENBERGER COOKIES, 2012, INSTALLATION

The piece alludes to the destruction of Martin Kippenberger’s installation When It Starts Dripping from the Ceiling: on show in 2011 at the Museum Ostwall in Dortmund, it was damaged by the cleaning lady who removed planned residue from one of its parts. The museum has not commented much on that irreplaceable loss. It is worth noting that this unit is run in line with Alexander Dorner’s theory that institutions should operate like dynamic power plants—generate buoyant energy indispensable for responding to changes in the social order.

Work from the collection of Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art in Kraków, acquired as part of the task “Boundaries of Collection. Growth of the Bunkier Sztuki collection”, co-financed with funds of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

Anna Lebensztejn, Kinga Olesiejuk

Contextual events programme

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20TH, NOON

Curatorial tour

An introduction to the peculiarities of process-oriented artworks, given by the exhibition curators Anna Lebensztejn and Kinga Olesiejuk. Event translated into Polish Sign Language.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24TH, NOON

Work in process

Follow the trail of transformations with yet another stage of the painting process Pictures 2002– by Wojciech Gilewicz. During the meeting, the artist’s canvases held in the Collection of Bunkier Sztuki are going to be repainted as per his directions.
You can visit the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art Tuesday through Sunday at 11 a.m.–7 p.m.

On Tuesdays, admission is free to all exhibitions.

Any viewer, regardless of the day or time of his or her visit to Bunkier Sztuki, may approach the exhibition keeper on-site and ask for a brief introduction, free of charge, to what the current shows deal with. This is our All-Round Ever-Available Viewer Support.

Our offer also includes original tours developed by the exhibition keepers as part of the “Exhibition Explained” project. Events for mature visitors take the form of inclusive discussions, whereas children are invited to participate in workshops inspired with stories from the featured artists.

Starting from 2017, accessible tours are available too, tailored for the visually impaired (employing such means as audio description), the hearing impaired (in the company of a Polish Sign Language translator, for instance) as well as the intellectually disabled and individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum (covering the use of facilitated communication techniques).

Tours offered in the “Exhibition Explained” programme are available at all exhibition opening times. Apart from that, we have a regular workshop offer and organise many open, family-friendly events.

For more information, email spodaryk@bunkier.art.pl or call/text +48 733 890 810.

Prices: admission ticket + guide/facilitator fee (flat rate per group of up to 20 people: PLN 65 for a tour in Polish, PLN 85 for a tour in English, PLN 120 for a workshop in Polish, PLN 150 for a workshop in English)

As part of the project “Open Gallery. Accessible culture at Bunkier Sztuki”, an extra pool of complimentary “Exhibition Explained” events is available to educational institutions from the Kraków area.

“Open Gallery. Accessible culture at Bunkier Sztuki” is an interdisciplinary initiative intended for people whose access to culture is limited, enabling them to get involved in the institution’s life and develop creative attitudes. In it, we draw on our long-standing experience in cultural education, in making art available to the disabled, and, in a broad sense, in social integration.

The project “Open Gallery. Accessible culture at Bunkier Sztuki” builds on the postulations of a universal right to consume cultural goods: it provides the hearing or visually impaired as well as the intellectually disabled with tools that enable equal participation in the Gallery’s events and caters for them by enhancing the sztuka24h.edu.pl portal’s accessibility; it entitles educational and cultural institutions from smaller towns of Lesser Poland to free Sztuka24h/24h workshops held locally; finally, it encourages groups from out of Kraków to take part in all-day subject-specific visits arranged under the title “Let’s meet at Bunkier!”

The project “Open Gallery. Accessible culture at Bunkier Sztuki” is co-financed with funds of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.
The Trouble with Value

OPENING:
Friday, December 15th, 6 p.m.

DURATION:
from December 16th, 2017 through March 18th, 2018

FEATURED ARTISTS:

CURATORS:
Kris Dittel, Krzysztof Siatka

COORDINATION:
Renata Zawartka

LOCATION:
ground floor, Lower Gallery

PARTNER OF THE EXHIBITION:
Onomatopee project space and publishing house (Eindhoven), onomatopee.net

SPONSOR OF THE EXHIBITION:
Krakchemia SA

These two exhibitions are parts of the project “Beyond the Zero Point. Contemporary Art and Its Appearances”, co-financed by the Mondriaan Fund.

The project “Open Gallery. Accessible culture at bunkier Sztuki” is co-financed with the funds of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.