

MARIA JAREMA
CRACKED MODERNISM

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RECLAIMING THE VOICE

Maria Jarema’s biography and body of work, which long existed more in the realm of myth and legend than in rigorous scholarship, have to a large extent shaped the perception of modern Polish artistic life. Jarema is admired primarily as an unyielding artist who, despite—or perhaps because of—her leftist convictions, did not succumb to the pressure of state-imposed socialist realism, and, in the name of artistic freedom, withdrew from regulated public life for the duration of the Stalinist period. Her singular, radically experimental stance made a profound impression on her contemporaries: those within the circles of the first and second Kraków Group (Grupa Krakowska), the Cricot Theater, and later Cricot 2. Numerous testimonies leave no doubt that her artistic personality possessed a mesmeric power. At the same time, her oeuvre remains known only fragmentarily in Poland. Although championed and interpreted by numerous critics and art historians,¹ it is largely inaccessible to the general public, lacking a persuasive exegesis that would bridge the oeuvre and the myth. Internationally, she remains entirely unknown.

In the 1930s, Jarema was beset by poverty and by political pressure exerted on the leftist circles to which she belonged, and later by the horrors of World War II. Following a brief period of creative intensity surrounding the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art (I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej) in 1948 in Kraków, she withdrew from artistic life into the seclusion of her own studio during the period of socialist realism. She returned during the post-Stalinist Thaw, albeit for a very short time. She managed to participate in the Venice Biennale in 1958, only to pass away prematurely almost immediately after her only major international exhibition.

Amid this entanglement in political and social history, her persistent assertions emphasizing the separateness of artistic exploration from life were rarely heard. Jarema did not wish to link visual practice with a worldview; she defended the right to

1. During her lifetime, Maria Jarema remained in close dialogue with critics, including Mieczysław Porebski and Helena Blum, who dedicated numerous texts to her. Ryszard Stanisławski, a proponent of the artist’s participation in the Venice Biennale, prepared the first *catalogue raisonné* of her work in 1962 for her monographic exhibition in Kraków. In later years, meticulous archival research by Józef Chrobak and Barbara Ilkosz (National Museum in Wrocław) played an important role, as have the work of Agata Małodobry (National Museum in Kraków), Natalia Zarzecka (Cricoteca), Ada Grzelewska, and Anna Batko over the last decade.

autonomous artistic decisions against both the Party’s prescriptions for socialist-realist art and the rigid international codifications of modernism. Although she was deeply interested in the latest developments in art and felt part of international modernism, she did not belong to any specific movement. She consistently explored visual forms and their relationships, often returning to figuration or its suggestion, allowing only those forms of abstraction that she had filtered through her own sensitivity and experience.

The exhibition *Maria Jarema: Cracked Modernism* seeks to examine what fuels one of the most enduring myths of Polish artistic life. Why is it so difficult to reach Maria Jarema—an artist whose undeniable significance eludes precise definition? Why, while remaining so central to the prewar avant-garde and postwar artistic life, is she practically inaccessible to an international audience?

A breakthrough in the reception of the artist’s work came with the interdisciplinary approach proposed by Agnieszka Dauksza in her book *Jaremianka. Biografia* [Jaremińska: A biography]. By transcending the field of art history, staying close to the material reality of Jarema’s life, and affectively interpreting both known facts and newly uncovered archival materials, Dauksza paradoxically liberated Jarema’s own voice. It is the voice of an artist speaking about her work, in which the personal processing of form, a distance from rigorous modernism, and openness to chance, relationality, and the viewer’s sensitivity are essential. Through painstaking research into the texts and actions of her subject, Dauksza uncovers a heroic struggle for a separate path that allows for the expression of an unreduced subject, fraught with contradictions. Through this analysis, we finally understand, for example, the artist’s attachment to the monotype technique, the essence of which lies in accepting the contingency of the final result. Thanks to Agnieszka Dauksza’s research, texts written by Maria Jarema in 1947 in defense of women’s reproductive rights—ground-breaking from today’s perspective—were also discovered.²

² Maria Jarema, “O losie kobiet,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021), 75–79.

The participants of the conference *Psychobodies, Not Figures*, held at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2023, continued the work of opening Maria Jarema’s life and oeuvre to new interpretations; most of the essays in this volume originate from that event. New analyses of Jarema’s small-scale works in the texts of Dorota Jarecka and Luiza Nader open vast areas of reference and inspiration while clarifying the artist’s highly conscious political stance. The role of the Cricot Theater, where Jarema tested new formal developments, is revisited—particularly in the essay by Joanna Kordjak. Małgorzata Dziewulska offers a previously unexplored perspective, examining the artist’s relationship with Ukrainian culture—the environment in which Jarema was raised while living in Stary Sambor (now Staryi Sambir)—touching upon the phenomenon of multiculturalism in Eastern Galicia and the complex links between its various cultural spheres, which may have informed the artist’s relational stance.

A vital contribution is made by Barbara Ilkosz, the author of the chronology of Maria Jarema’s life and work, who has researched her oeuvre for decades. Finally, the tender care with which the artist’s family—her recently deceased son Aleksander Filipowicz, his wife Maria Filipowicz, and her grandchildren—attends to her work is truly exceptional. The studio in the house in Wola Justowska in Kraków has survived almost intact, along with archives, books, and memorabilia. I wish to express my profound gratitude to Maria Jarema’s family for their trust and for granting access to the artist’s legacy, which enabled the exhibition curators, Natalia Sielewicz and Éric de Chassey, to refine and enrich numerous aspects of the presentation.

Drawing on previous fragmentary research, exhibition curator Éric de Chassey proposes the titular concept of “cracked modernism” to describe the artist’s complex stance, thus offering a coherent perspective on the nature of her achievements. In his erudite analysis, he provides the first precise examination of Jarema’s international contacts and affiliations and their traces in her work. He builds an argument regarding the artist’s conscious separateness as she sought to find forms of expression capable of

“The relationship between two forms can be described as an anecdote; even a monochromatic image is a kind of single-plane anecdote.”¹
Maria Jarema

MARIA JAREMA AND A DREAM OF INTERNATIONALISM

Museums invite each other to collaborate on exhibitions. In most cases, things do not quite align; often there’s no shared interest in a given artist or topic at that exact moment in time. When the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw sent us their short dossier of an exhibition dedicated to Maria Jarema, an artist whom—we are embarrassed to admit—we did not know, the agreement among our curatorial staff was unanimous. We all wanted to present Jarema’s work in Munich.

The Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau in Munich is a museum of modern and contemporary art. It is historically associated with and most renowned for its collection of Der Blaue Reiter, an influential group of artists who formed a loose artistic network in Munich in 1911. Although many of its members had moved to Munich from what was then the Russian Empire—Wassily Kandinsky hailed from Moscow, Marianne Werefkin had studied in Warsaw and lived partly in Kaunas, in today’s Lithuania, Alexej Jawlensky was born in Torzhok near Moscow, Elisabeth Epstein in Zhytomyr in today’s Ukraine—Der Blaue Reiter’s intrinsic connection to Central and North-Eastern Europe has largely been severed in German and Western European art history books, including those published for decades by Lenbachhaus. To be sure, Der Blaue Reiter and Lenbachhaus itself are a testament to how effective the Cold War divisions were in the field of art. The essential delimitation between abstraction and figuration, the former’s association with a notion of Western “freedom” is just one example, and one that exerted a major influence on the reception of Der Blaue Reiter, frequently reduced to the figure of Kandinsky as “the inventor of abstraction.” Abstraction veering toward lyricism had become a dogma in West Germany after World War II, shaped as it was by the influence of

¹ Maria Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021), 162, trans. Arthur Barys.

the United States and its funding of painterly abstraction over potentially subversive realism from anywhere east of West Germany. This was further stoked by exhibitions such as the first two editions of *documenta* in Kassel, in 1955 and 1959, whose organizers declared abstraction a universal and non-ideological “Weltsprache” (world language).² The outcome of these ideological maneuvers is widely-known and remains valid to this date: the very canonization intended to validate an individual artist renders nearly invisible any significant study of their work’s evolving meaning, their exchanges with others, and the antagonisms in which they were engaged.

The work of Maria Jarema single-handedly unlocks many convenient categories, the stale opposition of geopolitically instrumentalized abstraction and realism being one of them.³ What is particularly fascinating to us in Jarema’s method is not the sheer range of disciplines— sculpture, print, painting, political agitation, acting, stage design, costumes—but the way in which she interlocked those activities through consistently pursued formal research. The “anecdotal” relationship between two forms—in other words, an encounter between the two that results in more than the sum of its components—was a key principle of her thinking, and one of endless elements that Jarema labored through spatially, visually, emotionally, politically.

The exhibition at Lenbachhaus will be the first monographic presentation of Maria Jarema’s work in Germany.⁴ First and foremost, the exhibition and this publication present the work of an artist that is noteworthy and, in our eyes, unique. Presenting Jarema’s art at Lenbachhaus—in the very building that houses the collections of art by the

² In the words of Werner Haftmann, former NSDAP member and artistic director of the first three editions of *documenta* alongside Arnold Bode. In 2022, Lenbachhaus organized a presentation of its collection, analyzing how the Museum’s close relations with *documenta* as a geopolitical tool has shaped its holdings, see Matthias Mühling, Eva Huttenlauch, and Dierk Höhne, eds., *The Remains of 100 Days... documenta and the Lenbachhaus*, exh. cat. (Lenbachhaus, 2023).

³ “I will not call what we do today ‘realism,’ because false interpretations and false realizations have made a slogan of the term.” Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji plastyków w Nieborowie w 1949 roku,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 104, trans. Arthur Barys.

⁴ It is not the first time that Jarema’s work has been presented in Germany. As early as 1956, both Jarema and Gabriele Münter, member of Der Blaue Reiter and an artist of particular importance to Lenbachhaus, participated in the Internationale Ausstellung 1956 in Traunstein and Bad Reichenhall. The exhibition, of impressive scale—with more than 150 participating artists—was organized by the Roter Reiter group, whose color-specific moniker was not indicative of the group’s politics, which were rather haphazard. We’d like to thank Natalia Sielewicz for pointing out Jarema’s contribution to this exhibition.

members of Der Blaue Reiter and the Neue Sachlichkeit, as well as the “Art after 1945” collection, as we call it here—will provide visitors an opportunity not only to discover artistic output they may not be familiar with, but also to see the works that they know anew. The portfolios and publications that Jarema brought back from her travels to Paris—including those featuring works by Kandinsky and Klee now held in the Lenbachhaus collection—reveal the broad scope of her intellectual affiliations and artistic curiosity reaching beyond geopolitical borders, a legacy that endured despite the violence and ruptures brought by the war, life under the occupation, and political divisions.

We’d like to envision this curiosity as reciprocal. While Kandinsky and Klee were most likely unaware of Jarema’s work during their lifetimes, we do hope that from now on, visitors to Lenbachhaus will no longer be able to see their work without hers in mind.

Our gratitude for this opportunity goes to our colleagues at MSN. We could not have imagined better cooperation partners than the Museum’s director, Joanna Mytkowska, and the exhibition curators: Natalia Sielewicz from MSN and Éric de Chassey, director of Beaux-Arts de Paris. Not only did they propose the exhibition to us, but they were also generous in sharing their extensive research and ample knowledge over the course of the last year and a half. It was thanks to them that we were introduced to Olga Wysocka from the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw, who welcomed us and agreed to support the exhibition at Lenbachhaus. We extend our warmest thanks to them. The Förderverein Lenbachhaus e.V. has been the Museum’s generous supporter for some time now. We wish to thank its board and members for their unstinting loyalty. A big thank you to the entire team at Lenbachhaus for their work on the exhibition in Munich and to everyone at MSN for leading the way—and not just in this exhibition.

MARIA JAREMA'S CRACKED MODERNISM

A TORN ARTIST

Although a famous artist in Poland—once deemed “the greatest of the Olympian gods” by artist Jerzy Beres¹—Maria Jarema has remained virtually unknown outside her native country. This might be the result of a lack of curiosity by international art historians, who still limit their interest in Eastern and Central European artists to token names such as Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro for the Polish interwar period, or Tadeusz Kantor and Alina Szapocznikow for Poland in the 1950s and 60s. It could also be a consequence of the fact that, at a superficial glance, Jarema’s work might look too similar to that of her contemporaries from the second School of Paris (the French version of abstract expressionism) and therefore be immediately dismissed as derivative.² This similarity is not fortuitous, as Jarema always strived to be part of the international modernist strand, from which she adopted the *lingua franca* of post-cubist abstraction, but it would be largely misleading to reduce her to this adoption, and to understand her as an epigone.

By wanting to remain truthful to herself (to her own personality but also her concrete situation in a specific location and context), she established her own brand of modernism, which can be understood and described as *cracked modernism*. I borrow the adjective from the late Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski, who, in his plea for a “horizontal art history,” stated: “the marginal observer sees that the center is cracked. While the center perceives itself as homogeneous, the margins, in this process of receiving and transforming it for its own use, can see the inner tensions that belong to their essence.”³ In the case of Jarema, this cracking of modernism happens from the periphery, and it is literal, active and specific. If her themes and grammar fit into an international framework, her subject matter and vocabulary were highly personal.

Indeed, what most distinguishes Jarema, almost from the start of her artistic path in the 1930s, whatever the means and techniques she employed, is the contradictory tension between a modernist wish to create unitary artworks—autonomous from a literal depiction of the outside world and proceeding from foundations laid at the start of the twentieth century by expressionism, cubism, abstraction, and surrealism⁴—and a fidelity to a situation where this unitarian goal was simply impossible, because any subject, herself in particular, was constantly punctured, ruptured, cracked from within and from without. At the core, Jarema was a torn artist: torn between the logic of representation and the logic of the medium, between early leftist commitment and what happened to communism in Poland after 1948, between assembling and cutting—but never beginning or ending with a totality.

Thus, in the last ten years of her career, when she appropriated the abstract – expressionist idiom, taking inspiration from artists she admired and competed with, she was bound to fail. But it is in this

failure that her achievement lies, probably best graspable today because we live in a time in which the dangerous effects of grandiose proclamations and virile triumphs are so clearly visible. Even when expressed through abstract vocabularies and methods, the self and selves always remained her subject matter. Throughout stylistic shifts and turns, even when she seemed to completely embrace abstraction, she never relinquished her subjective (and highly political) perspective; she kept addressing what it means to be a living body in the world—in the specific world where she lived, in a context (whether personal or political) where this perspective amounted to a constant struggle. It was a struggle waged through a steadfast adherence to principles that did not tolerate any form of compromise, and it made her an exacting presence for most of the artists she interacted with, as well as an isolated figure.⁵ For this reason, throughout the years, her subject matter did not change a great deal, so much so that her entire oeuvre could be described as tackling the various circumstances in which a body is situated: as a single entity, in a dual relationship (a couple for instance), as part of a limited group (a family), or as a member of a multitude. These are therefore the categories, in ascending order, according to which the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw is organized.

ART AS POLYLOGUE

Historiography has tended to explain the specificity of Jarema’s works by events from her personal life (wartime struggles, a difficult marriage, an illness that eventually caused her death) or political commitments (a deep belief in socialism as a tool of liberation) and disillusionments (when the victory of the communists led to a dictatorship that ignored the basic rights of women and imposed stylistic regression on artists). The terms in which this was done are usually too generic to fully make sense, even if they are relevant because of her constant will to be true to herself in her art.⁶

One other line of investigation, following Piotrowski’s aforementioned, influential postulate for a “horizontal” art history of Eastern and Central Europe, has been to isolate her from the international context and focus on her participation in the two iterations of the Kraków Group (Grupa Krakowska) in the 1930s and 1950s, or on her friendships and rivalries with Henryk Wiciński and Tadeusz Kantor—even though it was the international context that she wanted above all to measure herself with and be measured against.⁷

Jarema actually viewed art as progress and as being the result of a polylogue with the inner history of the development of painting and sculpture, recent and old; with the personal history of the artist; with what took place in the outside world, including social issues; with the medium with which she was working. Viewers entered this polylogue at a later stage but Jarema insisted that their expectations should not be considered when working in the arts—and among the viewers, she counted the state, politicians, etc. For this reason, it is crucial to better

¹ Jerzy Beres, *O awangardzie w Polsce i Krakowie* (1992), w: *Grupa Krakowska (dokumenty i materiały)*, cz. VII, red. Józef Chrobak, Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, Kraków 1992, s. 13.
² Waldemar Baraniewski noted that when Ryszard Stanisławski attempted to present Jarema’s work in earnest in his exhibitions of Polish artists abroad, “[f]oreign partners politely declined, for they saw and interpreted her works precisely in the context of what Przyboś would called [sic] the ‘greatest achievements of contemporary painting ... realised somewhat earlier in their own countries.’” “Modernity, Indifference, and Oblivion: Katarzyna Kobro and Maria Jarema,” in *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism 1918–1956*, ed. Beáta Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Jonathan Owen (The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2019), 212.
³ Piotr Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,” *Umění* 56, no. 5 (2008): 380.
⁴ Jarema herself defined modernism as art that was “freeing itself of the function of depicting the world, shedding its passivity, and beginning to attack life directly with the increasingly emerging and distinct internal structure of the picture—its very concept.” Maria Jarema, “Zapiski,” in *Maria Jarema: Wspomnienia, zapiski, komentarze*, ed. Józef Chrobak (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, 2001), 37, trans. Marzena Jarczak. I want to thank Marzena Jarczak for her invaluable help throughout this project. Unless otherwise stated, translations from the Polish are hers.

⁵ Mieczysław Porębski stated: “She was the one who was the leading authority; she was the moral authority over the course of all those years in which she, not Moses, led the Kraków Group across the Red Sea. Everyone was afraid of her. Even Kantor.” “Podsumowanie sesji,” in *Władysław Strzemiński 1893–1952. Materiały z sesji*, (Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 1994), 170–71.
⁶ Tadeusz Różewicz, for instance, wrote: “She painted the history of her body ..., her hidden inside and the sickness developing within it. They were pictures of tissues and cells viewed through a microscope, ... The still, abstract forms in these paintings began to feed on their creator.” “W najpiękniejszym mieście świata,” in *Proza. Utwory zebrane*, vol. I (Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2003), quoted in Agnieszka Dauksza, “Wrażliwość tkankowa. Materializm plastyczny Marii Jaremy,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021), 276, trans. Arthur Barys.
⁷ Placing Jarema in an international context is the only way to avoid the trap signaled by Piotrowski: “On the one hand, we have national art histories of particular countries, while on the other hand we have international art history.” Piotr Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History”, 381.

understand how her art actively fed off the art of others, not in general, but specific, terms. She consciously chose to be an international artist and not to limit her ambition at the local level, which meant, for her, engaging with the European version of modernism. Again, this resonates with Piotrowski’s remark that “East-Central Europe after World War II ... remained a part of Europe, although it was dominated by the Soviet Union. Its art remained European, although it had limited contact with Western art.”⁸ In this, although unknowingly, she was similar to her Hungarian contemporaries of the European School group (Európai Iskola), who proclaimed in their 1945 Manifesto:

Europe and the old European ideal have been destroyed. ... From now on we must reckon with the concept of a whole Europe. This new Europe can emerge only as the synthesis of East and West. ... We must create a living European school that will redefine the relations between life, the individual, and the society.⁹

In 1937, Jarema stated: “In order to avoid becoming an epigone, the artist has to make an enormous effort to understand, experience and overcome problems which have already emerged and ripened somewhere else but have not yet been solved by his [*sic*] predecessors in his own country.” She added: “Art, like any knowledge, is international. It builds upon global achievements, seeking further problems and solutions that, in their intellectual sense, have nothing to do with nationality or race [*sic*].”¹⁰ In 1949, she again said: “Each new reality augments its predecessor with new ideas and absorbs the legacy of past experiences.”¹¹ And, in 1954, she wrote: “There is no progress in art without the possibility of confronting the results of experiments. We cannot live in isolation, we must join the international struggle for a new, most creative art.”¹²

Writers and art historians have frequently considered her work in the context of her Polish predecessors and peers, and of an artistic avant-garde defined loosely, extending from post-impressionism to what is called “Tachisme” or “Informel” in Polish historiography, centered in Paris, with other art scenes mainly left out. As an alternative method, I propose to look closely at what Jarema actually saw, and will try to assess what she made of this experience. The vexed notion of passive influence is not relevant here: Jarema was not being influenced by what was happening in Paris, which she clearly considered the center of the art world of her time, but she *influenced herself from it*, actively confronting and using it for her own ends. Here, I concur with Matthew Rampley when he writes, against Piotrowski, that the

talk of centers and peripheries cannot simply be excised from art historical discourse, for the reason that they have been and continue to be more than just discursive constructs of the art historian’s imagination. ... Acknowledgement that art produced in certain locations had a normative function that was absent elsewhere does not involve unquestioning commitment to a canon of modernism;

8 Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn,” 379.
9 “European School Manifesto” (Budapest, 1945), quoted in Éva Forgács, “The European School in Budapest, 1945–1948,” in *Between Point Zero and the Iron Curtain: International Cooperation in Art at the Postwar Moment, 1945–1948*, ed. Éva Forgács (Brill, 2024), 164.
10 Maria Jarema, “Odpowiedź na ankietę rzeźby,” *Głos Plastyków* 5, no. 1–7 (May 1937): 43–44, quoted in Dauksza, *Jaremianka*, 159.
11 Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji plastyków w Nieborowie” [1949], quoted in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 105, trans. Arthur Barys.
12 Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź w dyskusji na IV Ogólnopolskiej Wystawie Plastyki w 1954 roku,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 6 (1958): 30, quoted in Agata Małodobry, “‘Frail Threads of Premonition’: Jaremianka and Her World Contemporaries,” in *Jaremianka*, ed. Anna Batko and Ada Grzelewska, exh. cat., trans. Joanna Figiel (Cricoteca, Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach, 2019), 109.

nor does it entail omission of “avant-gardes born in remote areas” or justification of “the international domination of a small Parisian elite who are seen as the model of cultural, ethical, and political progress in the history of modern art and culture.”¹³

Because it is impossible not to notice similarities in Jarema’s visual language with that of French artists of the first half of the twentieth century, I will revisit her three trips to Paris (October 1937–February 16, 1938; May–July 1947; December 1956–September 9, 1957), where she was able to experience firsthand what was currently being shown there. However, I will not forget how she also engaged with examples of the Italian version of abstract expressionism, as well as with the work of her Polish contemporaries.

Information on these trips is quite scarce and general, but by delving into the content of the exhibitions that we know she saw, it is possible to map out a contextual foil against which to better understand her own developments. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that, as shown by the books, brochures and magazines she acquired and kept,¹⁴ she was far from following the artistic hierarchies from that time as they are recognized today, and that she also saw many works in reproductions or got some information about them by hearsay, especially through her older brother, Józef, who kept in close contact with Paris from the early 1930s onward.¹⁵

13 Matthew Rampley, “Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe,” *Umění* 69, no. 2 (2021), 147.
14 Jarema’s library, as it has been preserved by her family over several decades (with some items displaced or missing), was made accessible to the curators of this exhibition through the generosity of Alexander and Maria Filipowicz. This text and the exhibition it accompanies would not have been possible without their welcoming dedication.
15 In 1945, Józef Jarema became the founder of the Art Club in Rome with Futurist veteran Enrico Prampolini, before moving to France in 1951. Along the way, he curated the Polish Pavilion at the 24th

FIG. 1 MARIA JAREMA, STUDY FOR THE SCULPTURE POMONA, FROM THE ARTIST’S SKETCHBOOK, 1930, GRAPHITE ON PAPER (DOUBLE-SIDED WORK), NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAŃ



FIG. 2 FIG. 2 VIEW OF THE EXHIBITION ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL INDEPENDENT ART, JEU DE PAUME, PARIS, 1937



FIRST TRIP TO PARIS
When Jarema went to Paris for the first time, she was of course aware of the developments in French art from the previous decades. *Pomona* (ca. 1932, National Museum in Poznań) [FIG. 1], one her earliest surviving sculptures, fits into the tradition of Aristide Maillol, who actually produced his own version of the subject in 1910. Jarema did not strictly follow the French sculptor though, as one of her detail studies for this sculpture (drawn on the back of a provisional version of the entire composition) [FIG. P. 1] shows: even at this early stage she struggled with the continuity of the anatomy, combining the belly and the upper part of the right arm of the figure to form a round shape that looks like a separate, abstract entity. A few years later, she would transform this with emphatic holes for her large quasi-abstract sculpture *Nude (Akt)* (ca. 1936, National Museum in Kraków) [FIG. P. 2].

Through Leon Chwistek (Formism) on the one hand, and Tadeusz Peiper or Jan Brzękowski (constructivism and geometric abstraction) on the other, as well as through her colleagues from the first Kraków Group, she also possessed a rather thorough knowledge of the recent developments in Paris, although mainly thanks to reproductions—she owned copies of Polish, French and British avant-garde magazines from the 1930s, such as *Praesens*, *L’Art Contemporain—Sztuka współczesna*, *abstraction création: art non-figuratif*, and *Axis*. Indeed, Jonasz Stern, from the Kraków Group, recalled that they “were hypnotized by [Marc] Chagall’s poetic mood, [Pablo] Picasso’s drama, [Fernand] Léger’s order, [George] Grosz’s uncompromising political satire and the form and character of [Erwin] Piscator’s epic theater. As for Polish artists, we were particularly interested in [Mieczysław] Szczuka’s ideas, [Władysław] Strzemiński’s theory of visual perception, the architectural concepts of Helena and Szymon Syrkus, and [Henryk] Stażewski’s painting.”¹⁶

Her four-month stay in Paris gave her the opportunity not only to visit the Louvre and see masterpieces of French art from the medieval period to post-impressionism gathered in the exhibition *Masterpieces of French Art (Chefs d’œuvre de l’Art Français*, of which she kept a brochure), but also to study first-hand some major examples of recent developments in international modern art. The latter thanks to two exhibitions which were running until the end of October when she arrived: *The Masters of Independent Art 1895–1937 (Les Maîtres de l’art indépendant 1895–1937)* at the Petit Palais, which emphasized the fauvist and expressionist strands, and *Origins and Development of International Independent Art (Origines et développement de l’art international indépendant)* at the Jeu de Paume, which showed how, Cubism understood as “the birth of a new order,”¹⁷ spawned the development of both abstraction and surrealism [FIG. 2]. As Christian Zervos, the head curator of *Origins and Development...*, wrote in an issue of *Cahiers d’art* (which Jarema, who read French, carefully kept):

Up until now, as much in France as in other countries, sometimes Cubism has been exhibited, sometimes Surrealism, sometimes lastly non-figurative art. It is the distinction of the Musée du Jeu de

Paume to be the first to have grouped and confronted the ensemble of these artistic tendencies.¹⁸

Jarema’s work from the mid-1930s up to 1945, shows that she herself engaged with all of those strands, separately or at once, using some of their features for her own attempts at renewing the representation of her lived reality—and always with a tendency to defeat the reach towards unity that was their common feature.¹⁹ In *Composition (Kompozycja*, ca. 1935–39, Aleksander Filipowicz Collection) [FIG. P. 3], she made her own version of a portrait of a young girl, a subject similar to Henri Matisse’s *Marguerite Reading (Marguerite lisant*, 1906, Musée de Grenoble, which was shown in *The Masters of Independent Art*), using a fauvist vocabulary but obscuring the figure with a wide vertical black streak. In several gouache or watercolor portraits from the early 1940s, she literally dismembered the sitters or their surroundings with free floating thick lines that appear less as structures than ruptures [FIG. P. 4]. She sometimes resorted to collages or cut-outs, a fact ignored by most commentators but mentioned by Kornel Filipowicz, her partner at the time of the war, whom she married in June 1945, who wrote: “When painting watercolors, if she was not satisfied with some part of the picture—and the watercolor technique does not tolerate correction—she would simply cut out a hole in that place with small scissors, tape it up from underneath with clean paper and put on a new color.”²⁰

18 Anon. [Christian Zervos], “Les expositions,” *Cahiers d’art* 12, no. 4–5 (1937): 162–64, trans. in Kangaslahti, “The (French) origins,” 26–27.
19 In her essay in the present volume, Natalia Sielewicz emphasizes how Jarema’s work resists the unification of the artwork and instead gestures toward a more non-binary understanding of spatiality and its politics. I want to thank her for her companionship and commitment throughout the process of thinking and preparing this exhibition and its accompanying catalogue.
20 Kornel Filipowicz [1992], quoted in Agnieszka Dauksza, “Silnie unerwiona ruchliwość. Kilka słów o życiu Jaremiarki,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 26–27, trans. Joanna

FIG. 3 JEAN HÉLION, *ABSTRACT COMPOSITION (COMPOSITION ABSTRAITE)*, 1932, OIL ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



Venice Biennale in 1948. I thank Karolina Czerska for her invaluable information on this pivotal figure.
16 Jonasz Stern [1978], quoted in Barbara Ilkosz, *Maria Jarema 1908–1958*, exh. cat., trans. Małgorzata Moźdzynska-Nawotka (Fundacja Instytut Promocji Sztuki, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1998), 35.
17 Anon. [Christian Zervos], “De Cézanne à l’art non figuratif,” in *Origines et développements de l’art international indépendant*, exh. cat. (Musée du Jeu de Paume, 1937), n.p., trans. in Kate Kangaslahti, “The (French) origins and development of international independent Art on display at the Musée du Jeu de Paume in 1937,” *Módos* 2, no. 2 (May 2018): 20.

These works show how she used devices employed by cubist and surrealist artists alike, with a specific habit of hollowing out the faces of her subjects and, sometimes, with a proliferation of sub-images which seem to subconsciously emanate from the depicted scenes—such as the faces that punctuate the background of a family scene in *Portrait (Portret)*, 1942, National Museum in Warsaw [FIG. P. 5]. Her engagement with cubism or cubist-derived abstraction (as practiced by Jean Hélion [FIG. 3], for example, who was featured in *Origins and Development...*, or by Léger, whose studio, or Academy, she visited in 1937²¹) entirely bypassed the analytical phase of these movements but retained their emphasis on the use of autonomous geometrical shapes as structuring devices—although, in her case, and up till the early 1950s, these devices were played against broader elements in the compositions, which they cut and broke apart, with a recognizable violence, be they bodies, genre scenes or non-representational elements.²² [FIG. P. 6]

This violence can be said to be both an acknowledgement of the actual context of Jarema's life—determined by the repressions of the political left to which she belonged in the 1930s, the German occupation and savagery in the 1940s, etc.—and an engagement with one of the works she had most admired during her first stay in Paris: Picasso's *Guernica*, which was the main attraction at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris (*Exposition internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne*). She held the piece vividly in her memory, aided by the extensive reproductions of its numerous studies featured in a special issue of *Cahiers d'art*, which she kept in her library [FIG. 4]. Years later, Jarema kept returning to the impression the painting had made on her. In her sketchbook she recorded the nature of her first encounter with Picasso's work: "The first time I saw an actual Picasso in front of me. Picasso's experimentation. Concession. Reflex. Emotion. In modern art, this is not an experiment! For them, it's not an experiment. What came first: emotion or the calculation of the object? Who knows? One turns into the other."²³ In 1946, in a review of an exhibition of French modern art where she felt that Picasso loomed large by his absence, she wrote: "Picasso also accentuates this human and social drama in his art, and few understand it. He specified how in his *Guernica*. No great artist is antisocial, because he lives in society, and art is created from his experiences."²⁴

We can therefore infer that *Guernica* was the work that consciously had the most lasting effect on Jarema, as can be seen, for instance, in *Portrait (Portret)*, 1942, National Museum in Warsaw [FIG. 5], with the fracturing of the face which she had observed in Picasso's studies of a weeping woman. We see this also in the mixture of direct depiction of violence and ambiguity of subject, with which, just as Picasso had translated the bombing of an entire city with an interior scene, she approached her treatment of the horrific scenes that she was witnessing in Nazi-occupied Poland, e.g. in *Beach (War II) (Plaża (Wojna II))*, (1942, Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław) [FIG. P.

MacBride.
21 The notebook from her trip to Paris (Cricoteca, Kraków) contains the name "Fernand Léger," with the address "86, rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs," where Fernand Léger had both his studio and his academy. In the absence of more information, it is impossible to know if she met the artist or only his students.
22 Agnieszka Dauksza writes: "Jarema's paintings bear no trace of the Cubists' deconstruction of reality into its fundamental elements, nor is there any reduction to primeval unity; on the contrary, the artist coaxes forms to emerge from the chaos of infinite elements with the potential for infinite configurations. These elements are mutually confronted, colliding like 'planets crashing into each other.'" Dauksza, "Wrażliwość tankowa," 261, trans. Arthur Barys.
23 Agnieszka Dauksza, "Awangarda jako forma bycia. O teorii sztuki Marii Jaremy," in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 113, trans. Joanna MacBride.
24 Maria Jarema, "Wrażenia z wystawy malarstwa francuskiego w Krakowie" [1946], in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 61.

7].²⁵ And, after the war, in more ambiguous scenes of confinement, such as *Theater (Teatr)*, 1950, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź) [FIG. P. 8], we can see Jarema used Picasso's staging of a massacre between crushing walls bearing down on a multitude.

According to her friend Helena Blum, who was with her in Paris, Jarema also attended the opening of the *International Surrealist Exhibition (Exposition internationale du surréalisme)* at Galerie des Beaux-Arts on January 17, 1938. Her interest in Surrealism—evidenced by the fact that she came back from Paris with a copy of André Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir (Anthology of Black Humor)*, featuring a drawing by Yves Tanguy on its cover,²⁶ did not immediately find its way into her drawings and paintings but was clearly put to use in the theatrical costumes she created for the first plays staged by the Cricot Theater company, with their unexpected and uncanny piecing together of disparate and conflicting elements, similar to what Max Ernst, André Masson and others had done in the corridor of mannequins of the "Rue surréaliste" at the *Exposition internationale*.²⁷ Her full engagement with surrealism would ensue only after her second trip to Paris, in 1947.

FRENCH MILD MODERNISM IN POLAND

Before that trip, she took the opportunity offered by an exhibition of French painting and graphic art organized in Kraków in

25 On this aspect, see Luiza Nader's essay in the present volume.
26 According to Agata Małodobry, "Maria Jarema w najpiękniejszym mieście świata. O paryskich inspiracjach artystki," in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 212–13.
27 On Masson's *Mannequin*, see James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 146–48.

FIG. 4 PABLO PICASSO, STUDIES FOR GUERNICA IN CAHIERS D'ART, VOL. 12, NOS. 4–5, OCTOBER 1937, P. 143



FIG. 5 MARIA JAREMA, PORTRAIT (PORTRET), CA. 1942, GOUACHE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW



1946 by art historian and head of the French Institute in Warsaw, Pierre Francastel,²⁸ to confront what was presented as the new wave of the French avant-garde, even if it actually consisted in a selection of works by the *Jeunes peintres de tradition française* (young painters in the French tradition). This rather mild version of modernism that appeared in France during the war, blending post-cubist structure with fauvist colors, was described in the words of Parisian critic Léon Degand as: “aim[ing] at obtaining an original synthesis between the given of the exterior world, the passion of their individual sensibilities and the imperious and ineluctable demands of the plastic art.”²⁹ In a review of the exhibition, Jarema expressed ambiguous feelings, to say the least:

It is truly unpleasant. ... [So far the Poles] thought that the difficulty consisted in achieving these tasteful subtleties. ... Our public is even offended: who do the French think we are—Asia or something?—to throw dust in people’s eyes by showing this trash. Perhaps our official critics can draw a lesson from this exhibition. Maybe they could understand that the socialist-realist showers with which they seek to water the barren soil of Polish art is far removed from the problems addressed by current or future art.³⁰

This reaction was not isolated; Degand echoed it from Paris: “This summer, many echoes came to my ears of the disappoint-

28 Exhibition of Contemporary French Paintings and Drawings (*Wystawa współczesnego malarstwa i rysunków francuskich, Peinture et dessins français contemporains*), Kraków Society of Friends of Fine Arts, June–July 1946, artists: Jean Bazaine, Édouard Pignon, Charles Lapicque, André Masson, Alfred Manessier, Maurice Estève, Gustave Singier, Jacques Villon, Pierre Tal-Coat, André Fougeron.
29 Léon Degand, “Préface,” in *Jeunes peintres de l’École de Paris*, exh. cat. (Galerie George Moos, 1946), trans. in Natalie Adamson, *Painting, Politics and the Struggle for the École de Paris, 1944–1964* (Ashgate, 2009), 169.
30 Maria Jarema, “Wrażenia z wystawy malarstwa francuskiego w Krakowie” [1946], in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 61–62.

FIG. 6 TADEUSZ KANTOR, *ABSTRACT COMPOSITION* (KOMPOZYCJA ABSTRAKCYJNA), 1946, OIL ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



FIG. 7 PIERRE TAL-COAT, *FISH* (POISSONS), 1945, OIL ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



FIG. 8 MARIA JAREMA, *NUDE* (AKT), 1946, OIL ON FIBERBOARD, MUSEUM OF TARNÓW LAND



FIG. 9 ANDRÉ FOUGERON, *THE STONE SORTER* (LA TRIEUSE DE PIERRES), 1946, OIL ON CANVAS, MUSÉE D’ART MODERNE DE PARIS

ment caused in foreign countries by some traveling exhibitions on young French painting. People expected more truly audacious and original works.”³¹ While her review did not mention any of the artists who were shown in Poland and only referenced—once again—Picasso, it seems that Jarema was nevertheless compelled to take stock of what she had seen, just like her friend Kantor, albeit less derivatively than him. Indeed, his *Washerwoman* (*Praczką*, National Museum in Warsaw), and *Abstract Composition* (*Kompozycja abstrakcyjna*, National Museum in Kraków, both 1946) **[FIG. 6]**, look like pastiches of the figurative and abstract works, respectively, from the French show in Kraków. In her library, Jarema did keep a book with large color reproductions of works by some of these artists,³² and her paintings from the time noticeably challenged the work of Pierre Tal-Coat **[FIG. 7]** and André Fougeron in particular, and also showed a renewed interest in Matisse and Picasso, who, in combination, were considered the sources of the *Jeune tradition française*.³³

Jarema’s 1948 *Pantomime* (*Pantomima*, National Museum in Warsaw) **[FIG. P. 10]** is composed of the same loosely brushed interlocked and disjointed shapes that she could see in Tal-Coat’s still-lifes, albeit with a much looser configuration. Her 1946 *Nude* (*Akt*, District Museum in Tarnów) **[FIG. 8]** echoes Fougeron’s 1946 *Stone Sorter* (*Trieuse de pierres*, Musée d’art moderne de Paris, which was shown

31 Léon Degand, “Synthèses d’automne,” *Les Lettres françaises* (November 10, 1946), quoted in Serge Guibaut, *Ping-pong culturel existentiel France – États-Unis (1944–1947)* (les presses du réel (Œuvres en société), 2024), 122.
32 Roger Lesbats, *Cinq Peintres d’aujourd’hui – Œuvres de Beaudin – Borés – Estève – Gischia – Pignon* (Editions du Chêne, 1943), 20 color plates, 38 x 28 cm each. It is not known when Jarema acquired this book.
33 Helena Blum commented on Jarema’s participation in the Spring Salon at the Warsaw National Museum in 1946: “Maria Jarema is confidently following her own path. She and Kantor are currently the only official representatives of post-cubist tendencies. Jaremińska is decisively following in the footsteps of Picasso” Quoted in Dauksza, *Jaremińska*, 360–61.

in Krakow) [FIG. 9], with a similar monumentality encompassing both the female figure and its background, but without the firm linear structure that characterizes the Frenchman’s work, leading to a breaking apart of the composition in all directions. It also signals a reengagement with Matisse’s paintings of female figures of the 1930s and 40s (which she had seen in Paris in great number and had access to, in her own library, via a portfolio of large-scale color reproductions³⁴) [FIG. 10]. In writing about how Jarema “avoid[ed] an exact relationship between line, plane, and object” in *Nude*, when it was shown in January 1947 at the Second National Winter Salon at the Palace of Art in Kraków, Helena Blum pointed out what I see as the artist’s personal engagement with Matisse’s nudes.³⁵ Jarema explicitly emulated their features in another 1946 *Nude* (*Akt*, Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław) [FIG. P. 11], using a typically Matissean palette of pinks and greens but translating the homogeneity achieved by the French artist into a violent and disjointed representation of a lying body in a luscious environment that she transformed into piercing and aggressive shapes.

SECOND TRIP TO PARIS
What Jarema actually saw when she went to Paris in 1947, accompanied by Kantor for the first two months of her stay, must have come as a surprise, as the city—whose numerous galleries, museums, and artists’ studios she roamed extensively³⁶—was filled with works that

³⁴ André Lejard, *Matisse 16 peintures 1939–1946* (Éditions du Chêne, 1946).
³⁵ Helena Blum, “Ogólnopolski Salon Zimowy w Krakowie,” *Twórczość*, no. 4 (1947): 100.
³⁶ Julie Verlaine counted 122 art galleries in Paris in November 1946; Les galeries d’art contemporain à Paris. Une histoire culturelle du marché de l’art, 1944–1970 (Publications de la Sorbonne, 2012), 40.

FIG. 10 HENRI MATISSE, *YOUNG WOMAN IN PINK* (*JEUNE FEMME EN ROSE*), 1942, REPRODUCTION FROM THE PORTFOLIO *MATISSE 16 PEINTURES 1939–1946*, ÉDITIONS DU CHÊNE, PARIS, 1946, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN WARSAW (FROM MARIA JAREMA’S BOOK COLLECTION)



embodied the renewed legacy of surrealism and abstraction, often blending these two tendencies that had been directly antagonistic before the war. This was a far cry from the mild versions of modernism that had been sent to Poland. Jarema reported that this stay was of great importance to her for further artistic development and gaining inspiration from the vibrant Parisian art scene.³⁷ The opening of the Musée national d’art moderne gave Jarema the opportunity to take a crash course on the development of French art in the twentieth century, even if it contained only a handful of the masterpieces that later gave it its importance and acuity. She enthused: “This great retrospective gave me the opportunity to have a general view of the historical development of art: how ... in the last few decades there has been an overcoming of craftsmanship, and art moves towards pure creativity that reflects human thoughts and emotions.”³⁸

Most importantly, Jarema came at a moment which has been described by painter Georges Mathieu as the launching of “the anti-geometric offensive,” with the birth of a “new form of expression ... : lyrical abstraction.”³⁹ Critic Édouard Jaguer (whom she would meet during her third trip to France) summed up the situation, mentioning the artists whose works Jarema saw in Paris:

There is no abstraction here, but liberation, liberation of a new reality, different, complete. Each time, the painter, under the spell of an emotion, a desire or a passionate impetus, automatically lays on the canvas a series of signs or shapes (rarely geometrical), whose colors can be part of the same impetuosity ([Jean-

³⁷ *anka*, 381–383.
³⁸ Jarema, “Sprawozdanie.”
³⁹ Georges Mathieu, *De la révolte à la renaissance: Au-delà du tachisme* (Juillard, 1963), 33.

FIG. 11 HANS HARTUNG, *T 1947–12*, 1947, OIL ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



FIG. 12 MARIA JAREMA, *COMPOSITION* (*KOMPOZYCJA*), 1949, DISTEMPER ON PAPER, 49 × 35 CM, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN SZCZECIN



Michel] Atlan) or, once the “crisis” is over, result from a “rational” choice ([Serge] Poliakoff, [Henri] Nouveau, [Nicolas] De Staël, [André] Lansky), or even from the organization, at a later stage, of the various planes and initial chaos that were obtained, according to the visual means that will seem to him more capable of formalizing the elements of his mental universe (e.g. [Hans] Hartung, [Jean] Dewasne, [Alberto] Magnelli). ... In most cases, the line is quite thin between that kind of painting (named “non-figuration non-abstraction” by [René] Guilly) and the works of surrealists like [Roberto] Matta, [Enrico] Donati, [Raoul] Ubac, [Henri] Goetz, [Francis] Bott, etc. For both alike, what is at stake is the conquest of a subconscious, albeit real, place, where universal and human components melt and fight against each other, as well as the dramatic unveiling of the treasures buried inside vision. ... Anxiety, joy, hope, and desire inscribe themselves most of the time as a “non-figurative” form. But one should not conclude that the surrealist spirit takes charge of abstract painting, nor the opposite.⁴⁰

In her 1948–54 works, emulating what she had seen during her Paris trip—works produced largely in isolation, as, contrary to most of her colleagues, she refused to abide the imposition of socialist realism as the only admitted style—Jarema appropriated the transformation of the post-cubist structuring of the painterly surface effected by Hartung [FIG. 11], De Staël⁴¹ and other French proponents of abstract expressionism. The outcomes were expansive linear networks combined with vivid patches of color—sometimes alluding to a standing human figure.⁴² Contrary to what Kantor or Stern were doing in their paintings from the same period, in the pieces that Jarema showed in 1948 at the *1st Exhibition of Modern Art* (*I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej*) in Kraków, as well as in later works, such as *Composition* (*Kompozycja*, 1949, National Museum in Szczecin) [FIG. 12] or *Composition* (*Kompozycja*, 1951, Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław) [FIG. P. 12], she never let these components cohere into a legible whole, emphasizing the way they were in conflict with each other, and breaking their internal continuities. At an unknown date, she wrote in her notebook:

The canvas is a battlefield, so says one of the French *tachistes*.⁴³ This definition of the white rectangle is open to interpretation. ... Is it a battlefield of two warring adversaries, two opposing forces comprising a multitude of elements which, through their mutual destruction, through the emotions of the game, through collision, give rise to a new phenomenon, a new life—the life of a painting? ... Once unleashed, the forces take the artist by surprise, and curiosity about this unforeseeable outcome becomes the sole—or perhaps the main and only—driving force, liberation of creativity.⁴⁴

40 Edouard Jaguer, in *Juin* (October 1, 1946), quoted in Guilbaut, *Ping-pong culture*, 147.
41 In her copy of the brochure of the *Troisième Salon de Mai*, Jarema crossed out the name of De Staël, annotating it with several cryptic signs.
42 Jarema saw their works in July 1947 at the *Peintures abstraites* exhibition at Galerie Denise René, as well as at the *Troisième Salon de Mai* and the second *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, together with more geometrical forms of abstraction.
43 Here, Jarema, using the term “Taschiste” for Nabi or post-Impressionist artists, is referring to Maurice Denis’s famous 1890 quote in his “Definition of Neo-Traditionalism” (“Remember that a picture, before being a battle horse, a female nude or some sort of anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order”), distorting it out of its original context to fit her own preoccupations.
44 Maria Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 158.

Her work from this period never fully embraced abstraction but maintained a recognizable representational base of bodies and faces, sometimes redoubled or multiplied, which were literally attacked, or pierced, by abstract shapes. Andrzej Wróblewski, who also showed his work at the *1st Exhibition of Modern Art*, summarily pointed out this aspect in the paintings she showed there: “Jarema—What you have in front of you are joyful colors that move through energetic marks. Focus your attention: you can see a person there but they immediately get lost in the bold gestures of color. Keep looking for them, follow their footsteps through the entire surface of the vibrating image.”⁴⁵ In later works, she emulated the linear fusion of abstract organization and representational drive that she had seen in Paris and in Rome, where she visited her brother Józef in August 1947, discovering early examples of the local version of abstract expressionism (which she interpreted as a lesser version of the second School of Paris).⁴⁶

Her *Heads* (*Głowy*) from 1953–54 take on the biomorphic linear vocabulary of Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s individual works and “duo-drawings” [FIG. 13] in an aggressive and explicit direction, echoing what she could see in lithographs made by Italian abstract-expressionist artists like Afro and Gillo Dorfles, collected in a 1949 portfolio known to have been sent to her from Rome by Józef (*Arte Concreta 24 litografie originali*) [FIG. 14]. In her 1954 *Figures* (*Postacie*, Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom) [FIG. P. 13], what appears first as

45 Andrzej Wróblewski, “Tekst, który wraz z innymi służył do oprowadzania wycieczek robotniczych po Wystawie Sztuki Nowoczesnej,” in *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej. Pięćdziesiąt lat później*, ed. Marek Świca and Józef Chrobak (Starmach Gallery, 1998), 1.12.
46 She wrote in 1947: “Italian Modernism looks up to Paris: true, as does any other nation in art, it has its own skin (moreover saturated with a taste of past glory) but still it is Paris that is the best prepared to formulate art problems for the rest of Europe.” Quoted in Małodobry, “Maria Jarema w najpiękniejszym mieście świata,” 215.

FIG. 13 13 SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP, JEAN ARP, DUO-DRAWING, CA. 1939, REPRODUCTION IN *LE SIÈGE DE L'AIR, POÈMES 1915-1945, AVEC HUIT DUO-DESSINS PAR ARP ET TAEUBER-ARP*, VRILLE, PARIS, 1946, PRIVATE COLLECTION, PARIS



FIG. 14 GILLO DORFLES, BEZ TYTUŁU, 1949, LITHOGRAPH ON PAPER, FROM THE PORTFOLIO *ARTE CONCRETA. 24 LITOGRAFIE ORIGINALI*, SALTO, MILAN, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN WARSAW (FROM THE COLLECTION OF MARIA JAREMA)



a network of striated surfaces, full of holes, reveals itself as a redoubled figure holding something—or someone—in her arms (like a mother with child), in the way she had seen in Atlan’s paintings from 1945–47 [FIG. 15], where this method was also applied, albeit with more continuity. All this reveals her engagement with the biomorphism that characterized postwar surrealism in Paris, especially the phantasmagoric depictions of bodies she had discovered in the spring and summer of 1947 in solo exhibitions of Masson (at Galerie Louise Leiris) [FIG. 16], Matta (at Galerie Drouin), and Toyen (at Galerie Denise René), as well as—and maybe, because of its spectacular aspect, above all—in the show *Surrealism in 1947* (*Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght), the opening of which we know she attended [FIG. 17].

Her notes testify to the fact that she had a vested interest in surrealism as a counterpoint to abstraction:

Surrealism attacked with a kind of different intimacy, with a human desire to keep on fighting, compared to which the open question of abstractionism has become insufficient in an age whose interests ... do not line up with the interests of humanity.⁴⁷

As a case in point, she occasionally created works that can be interpreted as fully surrealist. Her pieced-together costumes for plays staged during the second incarnation of the Cricot Theater, created in 1956–57, are obvious examples, with monotype studies of female and male costumes for *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątwą*) [FIG. P. 14] showing bodily organisms parasitizing standing figures, as did numerous works shown in the 1947 surrealist exhibition. Jarema’s own drawings, prints

47 Maria Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” 158.

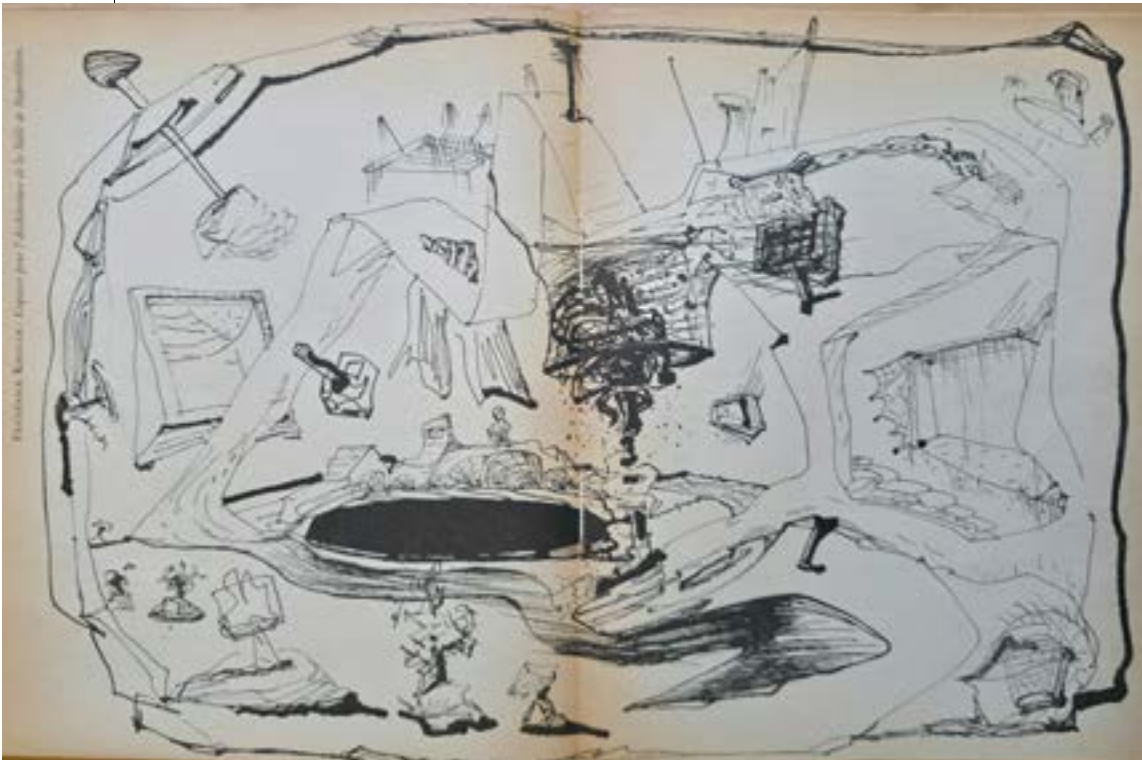
FIG. 15 JEAN-MICHEL ATLAN, *UNTITLED*, 1946, OIL ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



FIG. 16 ANDRÉ MASSON, *THE CAT AND THE FISH* (*LE CHAT ET LES POISSONS*), 1942, PASTEL, GOUACHE AND SAND ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



FIG. 17 FREDERICK KIESLER, “L’ARCHITECTURE MAGIQUE DE LA SALLE DE SUPERSTITION,” IN THE CATALOG *LE SURRÉALISME EN 1947*, GALERIE MAEGHT, PARIS, P. 132–133



and paintings from 1947 bear similarities to Louise Bourgeois’s personal extension of surrealism, such as *Woman House* (*Femme Maison*, 1946–47, Museum of Modern Art, New York), although she could not have seen anything by Bourgeois, even in reproduction.⁴⁸ One should also consider a series of drawings from 1949–50, where a distorted female body with accessories is shown lying on a plinth, echoing drawings created in Prague by Toyen (and shown at Galerie Denise René), as well as works from 1953–54 that represent one or two (opposed or merging) monstrous figures, more or less abstracted, which emulate works shown by Jacques Hérold at Galerie Maeght.⁴⁹ And the painting *Expressions* (*Wyrazy*, 1954, National Museum in Warsaw) [FIG. P. 15], where five ghostly standing figures form a frieze behind a recumbent body, depicts a scene that stems from the kind of impulse one can find in Matta’s works representing *Les Grands Transparents*, although it lacks the narrative consistency obtained by the Chilean artist during his stay in the USA during the war and after his return to Paris.⁵⁰

Jarema’s combination of the surrealist insistence on the body and expression of selfhood and of abstraction’s drive for the autonomy of artistic means, was transmitted, from 1949 onward, by her very personal use of the monotype technique—sometimes, as in the 1955–56 *Composition* (*Kompozycja*, National Museum in Kraków), with added collage elements, in this case two glass eyes) [FIG. P. 16]. It enabled her to convey with great precision an approach to selfhood that alluded to the self as a conceived, perceived and aimed-at totality as well as an impossible,

48 On Jarema and Bourgeois, see Dorota Jarecka’s essay in the present volume.
49 In *Words* (*Wyrazy*) (1953, National Museum in Szczecin), she exploded the bodies in discontinuous parts.
50 On Matta’s *Grands Transparents*, see Didier Ottinger, *Surréalisme et mythologie moderne. Les voies du labyrinthe d’Ariane à Fantomas* (Gallimard, 2002), 85–93.

fragmented and cracked place of multiple aggressions, from within and without. In 1958, Mieczysław Porębski precisely described her process:

For several years now, Maria Jarema has been working on the floor rather than at an easel. This is the technique she uses and demands, a technique that is partly monotype. The artist's works are created by combining parts painted in gouache with parts transferred to the surface of the painting using a glass plate covered with printing ink. In the latter case, the artist draws on the back of the sheet of paper. It rests on the plate and is impregnated with dye under the weight of a tool. This can only be done on the floor, kneeling over a white surface, which conceals on its other side a clever combination of shapes and colors, some already decided, others still undecided, awaiting an external intervention that can only be verified later. The emerging result is controlled by memory, by the experience of the artist's hand, by the trace of the tool on this unfriendly, smooth surface that will forever be inaccessible to the viewer of the finished work.⁵¹

The final work is thus always a juxtaposition of parts, partially inverted, where control is only limited, while resting solely on memory—memories of the body more than of the mind and vision.

In so doing, Jarema went one step further than Strzemiński's use of stenciling in the drawings that he made just before and during the war (which, judging from the similarity of her cover for Julian Przyboś's manuscript book from 1943, *Póki my żyjemy* [So long as we still live], with its meandering lines and specks of color as well as cursive handwriting, she might have seen). Those drawings by Strzemiński have been interpreted as “neurotestimony” by Luiza Nader (a term that might also apply to Jarema's work).⁵² The way Jarema used the monotype technique was a personal handling of the principles of automatism employed by surrealists since Breton's manifesto of 1924. However she did this not to create an imaginary and fabulous world but rather as a distancing means through which she was able to embody her lived selfhood, to return to it with a vengeance, and with the realization that “our biological bodies have experienced physical shocks which we have long forgotten, sidetracked and numbed by our human lives.”⁵³ She thus created cracked-modernist works that answer questions about selfhood which are as relevant today as they were seventy years ago. These are questions that Rachel Haidu has recently used as interpretive tools for understanding the current practice of Amy Sillman, who employs collage and printmaking procedures as well as painterly marks that go beyond the borders of abstraction:

In identifying oneness with bounded shapes, we each see ourselves as *one*. What can shape in paintings tell us about this state of oneness? How can we think more complexly about our own perceived openness? Can we shift how that oneness operates by looking at how painted shapes contend with their own boundaries, their interactions with other elements in painting, and their displacements, fragmentations, multiplications, and reappearances? What about the way the shapes not only signify (a sphere looking

like an apple, for example) but suggest qualities—like the abjection of a droop or the perkiness of an upward-pointing tip?⁵⁴

Jarema's *Expressions* (*Wyrazy*, 1954, Leon Wyczółkowski Regional Museum in Bydgoszcz) [FIG. P. 17] and *Hours* (*Godziny*, 1954, Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom) [FIG. P. 18] are particularly striking examples of her use of the monotype technique to question embodied selfhood. In each, a fairly simple and legible body—whose eyes, mouth, breasts and belly (uterus?) are treated as holes in an otherwise complete figure—is printed in grey and superimposed with acute shapes (and a pair of elements that evoke clutches), of which the contours are also printed but overpainted in bittersweet colors, so that the shrieking image with which the artist began acquires ambiguous meanings.

THIRD TRIP TO PARIS

Jarema never abandoned her surrealist leanings [FIG. P. 19]—she stated in a 1958 interview:

Art is aggression. It disrupts established concepts and images, opposing them with something new. Without the active engagement of the viewer, there is no full perception of art. Breton's definition seems much closer to the essence of things to me. The window that he speaks of is the window of our imagination. It seems to me that through such a window, both the artist and every individual can see what they have been waiting for.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Rachel Haidu, *Each One Another: The Self in Contemporary Art* (The University of Chicago Press, 2023), 3.
⁵⁵ Janusz Bogucki, “Rozmowa z Marią Jarema,” *Życie Literackie*, no. 18 (1958), 5.

FIG. 18 MAURICE ESTÈVE, *THE FALL OF LUCIFER (CHUTE DE LUCIFER)*, 1951, OIL ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L'ART, GENEVA

FIG. 19 JEAN DEYROLLE, *BRANDAN. OPUS 470*, 1956, DISTEMPER ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L'ART, GENEVA



⁵¹ Mieczysław Porębski, preface to *Maria Jarema, Wystawa malarstwa i rzeźby*, exh. cat. (Kordegarda, 1958), n.p.
⁵² Luiza Nader, “Strzemiński's War,” in Hock, Kemp-Welch, and Owen, *A Reader in East-Central-European Modernism*, 344–57.
⁵³ Jarema, “Zapiski,” 37.

Nevertheless, she increasingly emphasized her engagement with abstraction, in the vein of French abstract expressionism, stating in the same interview: “Today abstraction has become the only artistic language, in which the artist reveals the maximum of his possibilities.”⁵⁶ This engagement was fueled by reading art magazines and exhibition brochures sent to her throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, in particular *Art d’aujourd’hui* and *Cimaise* from France, and *Arte Concreta* from Italy, which not only featured small black and white reproductions of new works that Jarema certainly perused, but also vividly colored covers designed by artists. It reached a new level when she visited Paris for the third time in 1956–57, for almost a full year, where she painted steadily while she was being treated for leukemia, which had been diagnosed in 1955.

Even before the post-Stalinist Thaw, in 1954, Jarema publicly articulated the necessity of abstraction (although with a very loose use of the term) in her speech at the *4th National Exhibition of Plastic Art (IV Ogólnopolska Wystawa Plastyki)* in Warsaw’s Zachęta Gallery, stating, in defiance of the socialist realism of Wojciech Fangor, and strategically using Picasso’s *Massacre in Korea (Massacre de Corée)* as a foil, that: “without transposition, metaphor, and abstraction, we are unable to grasp and express the escalating conflicts of today.” She concluded her speech with a plea to “integrate ourselves into the international struggle for a new, most creative art.”⁵⁷ And the relative freedom of the Thaw actually saw her try to fully integrate in the international modernist movement.

56 Bogucki, “Rozmowa z Marią Jarema.”
57 Maria Jarema [1954], quoted in Dauksza, *Jaremianka*, 458–59.

FIG. 20 FIG. 20 ALFRED MANESSIER, *PLAINSONG (PLEIN-CHANT)*, 1955, OIL ON CANVAS, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



Jarema’s final works exhibit a tendency to create more integrated and harmonious compositions, which at times forego any hint of bodily feelings and, for this reason, can sometimes be taken as pastiches of the works of the second School of Paris (her interest in which is attested to by the numerous exhibition pamphlets and catalogues, as well as books on art, that she brought back to Poland). Her local and international recognition (her participation in the 1958 Venice Biennale being an untimely climax, as she died soon afterwards) might be the reason for this softening, visible in particular in the series *Rhythms (Rytmy)* and *Penetrations (Penetracje)*, which, in Poland, became most emblematic of her achievements. She nevertheless continued creating works that more or less defied this trend, by installing a sense of discontinuity and discomfort amidst otherwise unitary compositions, through various means.

As early as 1947, Jarema had singled out the abstract or semi-abstract paintings of Maurice Estève, noting how their “sharp juxtapositions of hot and cold create a flickering of color ... an interesting optical effect.”⁵⁸ *Expressions (Wyrazy)*, 1956, Beata De La Rubia Collection) goes as far as to lift the meandering patterning and palette of Estève’s paintings [FIG. 18] from the 1950s that were omnipresent on the Paris art scene of the time, but their shapes remain more discrete and do not fully cohere into a continuous whole. Her painting *Rhythm I (Rytm I)*, 1957, Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław [FIG. P. 21] is similar in its vocabulary to the abstractions of Jean Deyrolle [FIG. 19] (which she could have seen in this artist’s May 1947

58 Maria Jarema, *Szpicownik nr 10* (Cricoteca), n.p. A French reviewer of her participation in the *Prix Guggenheim* exhibition, at Musée National d’Art Moderne in Paris, summarily characterized her work by mentioning “Jarema’s effects of superposition.” MCL [Michel Cosnil-Lacotte], “Le Prix Guggenheim,” *Le Monde* (December 21, 1956).

FIG. 21 JEAN TINGUELY, *RELIEF SYN NO. VII (WHITE RELIEF SERIES, 1956–1957)* (*RELIEF SYN N° VII [SÉRIE RELIEF BLANC, 1956–1957]*), 1956, WOODEN PANEL WITH TINPLATE SHAPES ACTIVATED BY AN ELECTRICAL MOTOR AND A MECHANICAL SYSTEM, FONDATION GANDUR POUR L’ART, GENEVA



exhibition at Galerie Denise René, and again during her third stay in Paris), but instead of covering the entire surface with interlocked patterns, she placed them on a black background, suggesting the overall shape of a body, so that these patterns seem to break it apart much more than unify it. In the same way, her interest in Alfred Manessier [FIG. 20], testified to by her acquiring a monograph on the artist,⁵⁹ led her to emulate his compositions where large patches of color were superimposed with a thick black linear structure sub-populated by smaller flatly colored shapes (a device that Jarema had already used in several works). Yet, in *Rhythm IV* (*Rytm IV*, 1958, National Museum in Kraków) [FIG. P. 22], for example, however obvious the similarity may be, she avoids the feeling of a continuous landscape in favor of a fragmentation of the surface, in which the elements seem to be opposing each other, echoing her idea that forms are “living organisms which need to be protected from mutual destruction” and that the artist’s task is thus “to search for a perfect rhythm of forms in order to give a person some sense of co-existence with the worlds that surround him, with their constant change and motion.”⁶⁰

This search for a rhythmic effect might have been “shaped by sculptural, not painterly, thinking about space,” looking backwards to her early sculptures of the 1930s, as Waldemar Baraniewski has persuasively argued.⁶¹ The fact that she had resumed sculpture in 1955–56 supports that interpretation [FIG. P. 23, 24]. But it was also the result of her first-hand experience of the paintings of Piet Mondrian (which she had known since the 1930s, albeit only in reproduction), through that artist’s joint retrospective exhibitions in 1957 at the

59 Jean Cayrol, *Manessier* (Georges Fall “Musée de poche”), 1955.
60 Maria Jarema, late 1950s, quoted in Ilkosz, *Maria Jarema 1908–1958*, 126.
61 Baraniewski, “Modernity, Indifference, and Oblivion,” 212.

FIG. 22 VICTOR VASARELY, UNTITLED, 1956, SCREENPRINT ON SAN FRANCISCO BRISTOL PAPER, IN VENEZUELA, PAROLES DE GUILLERMO MOSES, EDITIONS DENISE RENÉ, PARIS 1956, PRIVATE COLLECTION (FROM THE COLLECTION OF MARIA JAREMA)



Daniel Cordier and Denise René galleries (the catalogues of which she kept). Her interest was so extensive that she even translated some of the Dutch artist’s writings, yet it was somehow filtered by her embrace of the new kinetic abstraction. In her last interview she enthused:

In Paris, I was very intrigued by the ‘movement’ paintings I saw in galleries. This is not the illusory movement we know, but actual movement of the elements of a painting, in one case caused by a hidden mechanism, in the other—changes in the position of the passing viewer, that is, of the eye in relation to the painting. The creators of the first type are [Jean] Tinguely and [Frank Joseph] Malina; of the second [Victor] Vasarely, [Yaacov] Agam and [Jesus Rafael] Soto. I am talking only about those whose paintings I was able to see during my stay.⁶²

With its restricted palette and flickering effect, *Untitled* (*Bez tytułu*, 1957, Alice and Adam Orawski Collection, Paris⁶³) [FIG. P. 25], might be her response to Tinguely’s *Metamatics* [FIG. 21], shown in 1957 at the Edouard Loeb and Denise René galleries, just as *Rhythms* (*Rytmy*, 1957, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź) [FIG. P. 26], with its interlocking shapes, interpreted a similar device evident in a 1956 screenprint from Vasarely’s *Plates from Venezuela* (*Planches de Venezuela*) [FIG. 22], which she brought back from Paris to Poland. But, in both of Jarema’s works, the visual situations are much more fragmented than in their Parisian counterparts.

In Paris, Jarema made one last discovery: the looser, and wilder, form of abstraction that critics called “tachisme” or “informel.” Ten years prior, at the 1947 *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, she had seen at least one early example of the style, a painting by Wols (who also had a solo exhibition at Galerie René Drouin that she might have seen), but she evidently had not really taken note of it. Now, she remarked:

The Tachists⁶⁴ have made a wonderful leap into the stratosphere. They freed painting from the bonds of geometric construction, in which form, once closed, became inviolable. Tachist matter explodes out of the frame, goes out into the world, not recognizing its boundaries. Despite the mass of attempts, full artistic manifestations of “informel” are few. Hartung, Mathieu and Pollock have long been known. Newcomers include [Paul] Jenkins, [Natalia] Dumitresco, [Pierre] Soulages and a few others.”⁶⁵

Her death prevented us from ever knowing what she could have made of this discovery.⁶⁶ Judging from her previous endeavors, despite her wish to participate in the international modernism of her time, it is very likely that, contrary to what Anna Markowska has shown about many Polish painters of the Thaw, she would not have used it to make her “audience believe that what came after 1956 was genuine freedom [even if] the painter’s ostentatious liberty was wanted, idealized, and painted with responsibility.”⁶⁷ She would certainly have re-

62 Jarema, in Bogucki, “Rozmowa z Marią Jarema” 5.
63 I wish to thank Alice and Adam Orawski for generously providing me with several hard-to-find Polish publications on Jarema.
64 The same term was employed by Jarema in reference to postwar abstract art in 1949, long before it came to denote abstract expressionism in France. First used combatively by critic Charles Estienne to mean “abstract surrealism” from 1954 onwards; while *informel* was coined by Michel Tapié in 1951 (see Adamson, *Painting*, 196–200).
65 Maria Jarema, in Bogucki, “Rozmowa z Marią Jarema,” 5.
66 Her only known attempt at making a drawing by spilling black ink on a sheet of paper—*Automatic Tests—Tachism* (*Próby automatyczne – taszyzm*), 1955, Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław—is almost caricatural. It was certainly done in reaction to Kantor’s similar attempt at *informel* after his return from a trip to Paris in 1955.
67 Anna Markowska, “Wielkie teraz czyli o sztuce,” in *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956*, ed. Piotr Piotrowski, exh. cat. (Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, 1996), 287.

mained faithful to the ideals of a cracked—and combative—modernism that she had expressed as early as 1934:

In the era of expanding capitalism, the independent artist was afforded a certain degree of freedom to develop his art. Today, any independent art threatens to rupture the framework of this society, whose cultural needs have been reduced to official journals of various forms.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Maria Jarema, “Manifest *Do Artystów* wydany przez Grupę Krakowską w kwietniu 1934 roku,” quoted in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 40 (my emphasis).
ERIC DE CHASSEY, MARIA JAREMA’S CRACKED MODERNISM

ENTANGLEMENTS
AND COLLISIONS:
ON THE RELATIONALITY
OF FORMS IN MARIA JAREMA'S
POSTWAR OEUVRE

Maria Jarema once observed that art is not a mirror reflecting reality, but rather a machine that deciphers it, and that “machines can be complex and constantly undergo transformation.”¹ These words, spoken at the Fourth National Exhibition of Visual Arts (*IV Ogólnopolska Wystawa Plastyki*) in 1954, are most often interpreted as articulating a contrast between two models of art’s political engagement and ways of visualizing wartime violence. In her speech, Jarema referred to Wojciech Fangor’s *Korean Mother* (*Matka Koreanka*, 1951) and Pablo Picasso’s *Massacre in Korea* (*Massacre en Corée*, 1951).

Fangor’s painting, which depicts a child keeping vigil by their mother’s dead body, employs dramatic pathos and realism akin to theatrical staging and, at the same time, aligned perfectly with the expectations of socialist-realist propaganda. Picasso, meanwhile, contraposed this with a universal, “less literal” approach in which, as Jarema wrote, “(through imagination) emotions revolutionize thinking.”² What mattered to her was not so much what the paintings depict, but how they engage the viewer—what sensory and affective relations they activate, and in what modes they compel the viewer to “experience” war.

What is intriguing in her remark about art as a machine for deciphering reality is not the aforementioned contrast itself, but the subtle critique of the obsession—prevailing at the time and, indeed, still present today—with explaining, unifying, and “revealing the truth” through unequivocal images. Elsewhere, Jarema elaborated: “Forms are living organisms that must be protected from the disaster of mutual destruction; one must seek a perfect rhythm of forms in order to give human beings a sense of coexistence with the worlds around them, with their constant movement of change.”³ Her words seem strikingly relevant today.

If we assume that Fangor’s socialist realism operated with a clearly defined form—an archetypal subject, a heroizing theme, a legible narrative, and accessibility for the masses—then this form served as a machine that rigorously organized collective vision. Jarema, by contrast, proposed open, rhythmic, and polysemic forms—in other words, an alternative politics of perception. For an artist who readily drew on musical metaphors, the political dimension did not arise from the subject of a painting but rather from the manner in which it operated—from the rhythms, tensions, and sensory structures that offer different ways of organizing both the picture plane of a painting and relations in motion.

In this sense, Jarema appears strikingly contemporary—a visionary for whom art was a means of apprehending hidden bonds between a human being and the world. As an artist, she intuitively sensed connections that contemporary theory would only later come to describe as “networks” or “entanglements.” Her mode of thinking places her close to today’s posthumanist theorists—Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, and Keller Easterling—who argue that forms, senses, and tensions are not merely aesthetic phenomena but also organize social and political experience.

These issues are also addressed by Agnieszka Dauksza, who was the first to introduce an interdisciplinary perspective into interpretations of Jarema’s work and to foreground the political implica-

tions of her spatial imagination. I, too, would like to examine the potency of her forms—understood not only as aesthetic means, but as affective fields and reservoirs of information that may be activated through contact with other planes and energies.

Forms accompany us in everyday life. As literary scholar Caroline Levine points out—there is no politics without form, just as there is no politics without affects. This claim raises a question about the conditions under which politics operates within the sphere of perception: who is able to see, how do they see, at what rhythm, with what sensitivity, and with what degree of tension?

From this perspective, Jarema’s work emerges as an attempt to develop a new language of relations with the world—one grounded in the interdependence and interference of bodies, forces, and vital matter. Such a view expands traditionally understood notions of color, shadow, and light toward a new grammar of rhythms, penetrations, and filters. This is most fully articulated in her monotypes from the 1950s, which bear precisely such titles. As Dauksza observes, “Jarema’s aspiration was to create a new, non-mimetic system for the communication, presence, and variability of forms—a distinct system of relations. She did not want to represent, imitate, or depict; she created a separate and rival code that was at once parallel and at times complementary to other “codes” such as animate and inanimate matter, language, and the laws of physics.”⁴

In this vein, Jarema appears as a persistent architect of fluid forms who—confronted with the progressive disintegration of public life and the deterioration of her own body caused by leukemia—was

⁴ Agnieszka Dauksza, “Wrażliwość tkankowa. Materializm plastyczny Marii Jaremy,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema*, 260, trans. Arthur Barys.

FIG. 1 MARIA JAREMA, *FILTERS (FILTRY)*, 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, LEON WYCZÓLKOWSKI DISTRICT MUSEUM IN BYDGOSZCZ



¹ Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź w dyskusji na IV Ogólnopolskiej Wystawie Plastyki w 1954 roku,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria; Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 2018), 120.
² Jarema, “Wypowiedź w dyskusji...,” 119.
³ Barbara Ilkosz, *Maria Jarema 1908–1958* (Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 1998), s.

able to turn vibrating, unstable matter into both a strategy of resistance to the surrounding reality and, more broadly, a field of political experimentation. Through forms and collisions between them, she sought tools for apprehending tensions that often remained invisible.

Jarema consistently rejected attempts to interpret her work solely through her politically motivated decisions, artistic isolation, or illness. She preferred her works to be seen as autonomous compositions, independent of her biography. And yet she invested her entire “self” in them, continually probing networks of interdependence. “I wouldn’t be able to separate imagination from form, nor material from my visual thinking, from the method that is acquired through work,” she wrote.⁵ In the same vein, she understood working with form as a tool of political expression—one that enabled her to act against a hierarchical and authoritarian world. The artist was acutely aware that “without deformation, transposition, metaphor, abstraction—we are today unable to grasp and express the mounting conflicts of feelings and affairs.”⁶

Jarema’s works from the second half of the 1950s are generally devoid of direct representations of human figures or any recognizable objects. While the figurative gouaches from the wartime period—such as *Procession* (*Pochód*, 1940, National Museum in Kraków) or *Doctors* (*Lekarze*, 1943, Aleksander Filipowicz Collection, on deposit at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw)—and the surrealist-leaning monotypes from the early 1950s (such as ...) still reveal a disquieting rhythm of human bodies, it is only the postwar series of abstract forms, developed across multiple configurations, that most fully articulate the idea

⁵ Józef Chrobak, ed., *Maria Jarema. Wspomnienia, zapiski i komentarze* (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, 1992), 35.
⁶ Jarema, “Wypowiedź w dyskusji...,” 119.

FIG. 2 MARIA JAREMA, *FIGURES (DOCTORS)* (*POSTACI [LEKARZE]*), 1943, GOUACHE ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



of unrestrained movement and disrupt the linear narrative conventionally associated with rhythm.

The series titled *Rhythms* (*Rytmy*), *Filters* (*Filtry*), *Expressions* (*Wyrazy*), and *Penetrations* (*Penetracje*) take shape via an intersection of parts created with tempera and fragments transferred onto the painting’s surface as impressions from a smooth plate coated with printing ink. In these compositions, fragments with a strictly organized structure are juxtaposed with freely flowing passages whose final form emerged from the very technique of monotype, which repeatedly led the artist toward elements of chance and experimentation. Cuts, aleatory ruptures, and unexpected occurrences become the natural environment of her formal explorations. Jarema deliberately incorporates “chance” into the structure of a painting—as if seeking to domesticate it, assign it a place, and make it an integral component of the system.

Comparing Jarema’s works from this period to Władysław Strzemiński’s concept of Unism (*Unizm*), Mieczysław Porębski wrote: “Strzemiński strove for a ‘flat,’ optical ‘unity,’ whereas Jarema’s paintings are characterized by optical complexity and spatiality. A Unist painting was to be ‘self-contained.’ Jarema’s works are open, dynamic, seemingly independent of the frames that restrain them but do not confine them. A Unist painting was to be ‘indifferent to its surroundings.’ Jarema’s works actively engage their environment and are, in turn, strongly engaged by it. They are active.”⁷

When looking at the *Rhythms* series, it is hard not to notice the paintings’ internal tension—their capacity to resonate with other forms while simultaneously positioning themselves in opposition to them. Unexpected, transformative effects emerge from these frictions—different temporal and visual orders collide, overlap, and fragment one another, continuing to generate new configurations.

In her book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Caroline Levine reminds us that forms always organize us, but never in isolation.⁸ In everyday life, we inhabit a field of multiple rhythms—social, political, biological, and aesthetic—each imposing its own logic and order. These rhythms do not coalesce into a single harmonious experience, nor do they neatly align with one another. Instead, they collide, leaving us in a space of intersections, disruptions, and shifts.

Jarema’s *Rhythms* operate precisely in this way. Structured by multiple, often conflicting configurations, they generate an open, polysemic effect that is at the same time deeply emotionally engaging. My impression is that the artist juxtaposes different logics in a manner that resists erasing the differences between them. On the contrary, she constructs plural, alternating, and contrasting rhythms on the basis of two opposing principles: on the one hand, the work of chance—namely rejecting the predictable repeatability usually associated with rhythm; on the other, a particular form of harmony that does not impose a totalizing or limiting experience upon the viewer.

In *Rhythm VII* (*Rytm VII*, National Museum in Kraków), a sequence of diverse forms and colors coalesces into a loose composition, swirling around the center of the image without fully subordinating itself to it. In *Rhythm V* (*Rytm V*, Museum of Architecture in Wrocław), sequences

⁷ Mieczysław Porębski, “Z wystawy Marii Jaremy,” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 20 (May 15, 1958).
⁸ My reading of Jarema’s formal exercises is to a large extent informed by literary scholar Caroline Levine’s book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton University Press, 2017). By analyzing literature and poetry, the author treats the realm of aesthetics, affects and politics as an information system in which various networks permeate one another. Levine points to the patterns of time which organize and shape both art and life itself, highlighting their multiplicity and incessant collisions—forms overlap, transform and destabilize one another.

of dense abstract configurations unfold in parallel gradations of gray, beige, and white, even if the primary centrifugal impulse appears to be a pronounced black section on the right side of the composition. This very element initiates the movement of the remaining semitransparent layers, turning them into developing structures that generate tension between tonal neutrality and dramatism of forms. Sharp, irregular contours occupy almost the entire space, with rhythms cascading over one another.

Jarema employs a markedly gentler dynamic in *Rhythm IV* (*Rytm IV, National Museum in Kraków*). Dispersed pink patches with soft contours enter into dialogue with rhythmically repeating, almost rectangular white imprints and with their fragmentary texture. A vertically elongated red blot serves as the compositional anchor—it organizes the space of the painting, drawing dynamically scattered elements into its orbit.

As Caroline Levine aptly observes, rhythm often appears to us as an organic—and therefore seemingly positive—form, associated with time as experienced by the human body (e.g., pulse, breathing) or with the cycles of nature. And yet, she points out that rhythms can “reveal opposing affordances: on the one hand, they can produce communal solidarity and bodily pleasure; on the other, they can operate as powerful means of control and subjugation. Whether imposing a temporal order on bodies or labor, sounds or machines, rhythmic form has the potential to do serious political work.”⁹

If, following Caroline Levine, we assume that forms are never innocent—that hierarchies organize subjugation, rhythms discipline, networks enable the circulation of some while blocking others, and divisions establish regimes of segregation—then Jarema’s work reads

9 Levine, *Forms*, 49.

FIG. 3 MARIA JAREMA, *RHYTHM V (RYTM V)*, 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE IN WROCLAW



as a proposal for a radically different way of organizing the world: Instead of hierarchical divisions—ambiguity; Instead of the discipline of rhythm—pulsations; Instead of subjugation—internal tensions that do not lead to resolution, but to coexistence; Instead of a model of vision based on domination—non-hierarchical vision, in which a painting does not impose an interpretation but rather encourages the viewer to come up with one.

All of this comes together as a composition that doesn’t so much represent reality as reorganize the experience of it. In this sense, in Jarema’s art, aesthetics also turns into politics—not through subject matter, but through relational structures which it offers to the viewer. This is not merely about the artist’s courage to think beyond painterly frameworks of political issues by way of artistic means—and even beyond what we might today describe as identity politics. Of equal importance is the fact that her works incorporate a practice of testing the viewer’s senses: a capacity that enables one to function in a world plagued by violence, where—as Jarema herself wrote—forms, objects, and people are always threatened with mutual destruction.¹⁰

I would argue that the power of Jarema’s art lies precisely in the unsettling vibration and networking of forms. These qualities can attune the viewer to subtle tensions that often remain invisible and yet contain forms of violence operating beneath the surface of everyday relations and interactions. Jarema’s works both challenge the rhythmic organization of the painting and disrupt binary divisions. They reveal entanglements and instabilities in which forms remain in constant interaction.

10 Ilkosz, *Maria Jarema...*, ...

FIG. 4 MARIA JAREMA, *RHYTHM VII (RYTM VII)*, 1957, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON CARDBOARD, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKOW



In her complex visual grammars of the 1950s, Jarema demonstrates a unique capacity to undermine hierarchies and divisions while avoiding the declarative language of the politics of identity or unequivocal narrative positions. Rather than transmitting information, her works operate at the level of a specific “chemistry” of signals.

In her book *Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World*, architect and writer Keller Easterling observes that culture is highly adept at naming and identifying things, but “not so good at describing the chemistry between them or the repertoires they enact.” Things have “names, shapes, and outlines; they are usually valued in markets and possessed as property, and they are generally regarded to be inert or inactive rather than dancing with interdependent potentials.”¹¹ Easterling thus proposes a shift in attention away from objects themselves towards their dispositions—in other words, towards an immanent agency, a potential inscribed in arrangement.

A disposition is not a simple attribute but rather a propensity rooted in context and in relation to other elements. It seems to me that Jarema was working precisely with this cultural blind spot—one “dancing with interdependent potentials”¹²—cultivating a form of imagination capable of activating reality’s hidden potential. Rather than positioning herself within ideological frameworks, she explored different velocities, intensities, susceptibilities to reaction, and sudden possibilities of counterpoint. Like a master weaver—or a cyberneticist—she interlaced these elements, assigning each a specific function and place within a pulsating, shared configuration.

¹¹ Keller Easterling, *Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World* (Verso Books, 2021), VII.
¹² Easterling, *Medium Design*, VII.

FIG. 5 MARIA JAREMA, *PENETRATIONS I (PENETRACJE I)*, 1957, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, MUZEUM SZTUKI, ŁÓDŹ



One of the most telling examples of the artist challenging dichotomous hierarchies is her series of twenty works from the 1950s entitled *Penetrations*. Here, more than merely illustrating binarity, Jarema disrupts its rigid framework, exposing the arbitrariness of the division itself. Created in the context of postwar Poland—shaped by the oppressive communist regime, accumulated experiences of antisemitism and wartime trauma, and deeply-rooted gender inequalities—the works can be read as a disturbance within the system, dismantling a primitive vision of binary logic.

Jarema reveals in these works that even the most dominant forms do not exist autonomously but are entangled in relational constellations: they enter into dynamic collisions, interferences, and dependencies that generate the pulsating tissue of a painting. In doing so, the artist went so far as to question the binary opposition between representational and non-representational art, between figuration and abstraction, arguing that such a division contradicts the very notion of the artwork as a visual whole. Even before the war, together with other members of the Kraków Group, she claimed: “There is no work of art that is not social, and when it comes to its social direction, a work as such is not defined solely by ‘theme’ nor by ‘form,’ but by the whole sense of plasticity, which means the deliberate use of all creative possibilities.”¹³

In this way, *Penetrations* disrupts the dominant postwar context not by way of declarative political gestures, but rather by shifting the political field from the level of content to the level of form. At a moment when the state enforced unambiguous representation—consolidating hierarchies, binarities, and linear narratives—Jarema proposed

¹³ Grupa Krakowska, “Margines naszej orientacji plastycznej,” *Tygodnik Artystów*, no. 19 (1935): 3.

FIG. 6 MARIA JAREMA, *PENETRATIONS X (PENETRACJE X)*, 1957, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, MUZEUM SZTUKI, ŁÓDŹ



a relational model: multi-threaded, interferential, and non-hierarchical. It is precisely within this matrix of relations—rather than in thematic commentary—that the political dimension of her art manifests itself.

As Caroline Levine reminds us, binary structures operate according to a logic that orders two polarized terms in such a way that one becomes privileged, while the other is suppressed, subordinated, or rendered negative. In the case of the *Penetrations* series, the problem of binaries arises immediately in its title, suggesting a dualistic division of objects (or bodies) into those that are active—performing the act of penetration—and those that are passive and receptive. The very notion of penetration, as encoded within the socio-cultural field, is further burdened by a sexist perception of power relations: sharpness versus softness, aggressor versus victim, activity versus passivity. Jarema dismantles this order by proposing a relational interaction in which forms are not immediately coded as dominant or subordinate, masculine or feminine, but are instead regulated through their mutual interdependence. She brings multiple forms into play that transform the entire picture plane. By layering and interweaving elements of different shapes and colors, the artist constructs compelling compositions in which binaries intersect and obstruct one another—sharp forms succumb to blunt ones, while delicate fragments of monotype draw out the lavishness of tempera paint.

The contemporary scholar Bini Adamczak describes such a mode of operation with the term *circlusion*—as an antonym of penetration. She coined this term to describe the same physical process but viewed from an inverted perspective. *Circlusion*, she reminds us, is “an extremely common experience of everyday life. Think of how a net catches fish, a throat envelops food, or a hand encircles a bottle of beer...”¹⁴ In this framework, soft, circular forms that ‘circlude’ phallic objects are rendered active, and their subversive power lies in their capacity to destabilize the binarity on which the conventional model of penetration is based.

Jarema’s complex grammars offer us an insight into processes of continuous transformation, critical reflection, and interaction—possibilities that enable both the artist and the viewer to search for new combinations and scenarios. As Jarema herself explained, “the clash of opposites, the collision of the entire mass of elements, through their mutual fertilization, gives rise to a new phenomenon, a new life—the life of an image.”¹⁵ Maria Jarema’s work pulses like a living organism—a body in constant motion that simultaneously disintegrates and regenerates. Her forms are not closed shapes but traces of energy—they vibrate, enter into a dialogue with one another, entwine, only to separate again. Jarema reverses the order of looking: what appears soft proves elastic and active, while what seems fragile reveals its capacity for transformation. The artist’s paintings and sculptures function as visual equivalents of bodily movement—wherein the bodies do not exist in isolation but in continuous interpenetration.

In this sense, Jarema’s work resonates with later concepts of relationality and co-agency developed in the humanities over recent decades. Her understanding of forms as active participants in the world—capable of organizing relations, flows, and tensions—brings to mind Karen Barad’s notion of *intra-action*, namely dynamic processes

in which the boundaries and properties of entities are not given in advance but emerge only through their mutual, agential entanglement. It also evokes Jane Bennett’s vital materialism, grounded in the conviction that matter is neither passive nor inert, but endowed with a vital, instrumental force. Meanwhile, the way Jarema engages rhythms, hierarchies, and visual networks could be interpreted through Caroline Levine’s typology of forms and her analysis of their role in shaping social and political structures. This is not a matter of genealogical influence, but rather of a shared problem-space in which form is understood not as a passive layer of representation, but as a tool for organizing both the world and imagination. This art is not about durable forms; it is about flow—a process in which force and finesse, domination and vulnerability are perpetually entwined. It is precisely within this choreography of energies that Jarema finds her own language, which, despite the passage of time, remains strikingly contemporary and opens a space of imagination freed from binary constraints.

¹⁴ Bini Adamczak, “Come On. Diskussion über ein neues Wort, das sich aufdrängt und unser Sprechen über Sex revolutionieren wird,” *analyse & kritik* (2016), 614. See also: <https://thenewinquiry.com/six-years-and-counting-of-circlusion/>.

¹⁵ Maria Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema*, 160.

MARIA JAREMA'S FIGURES:
EXERCISES IN ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE IMAGINATION

As the postwar period of relative freedom was drawing to an end in Poland and a new system of power was taking hold, just before socialist realism was established as the obligatory style, Maria Jarema delivered her last public statement at the 1949 conference of Visual Artists in Nieborów before entering a long phase of absolute silence. She concluded it with a striking argument in defense of creative freedom: “To conclude I would like to quote the words of the Soviet poet Pavlo Tychyna, who said that ‘without the spirit of music, socialism cannot be established even with the most powerful guns.’ I believe this saying can equally be applied to the visual arts.”¹

When the conference took place, the territories of present-day Ukraine, formerly Eastern Galicia, were already part of the Soviet Union, and the names of many poets remained strictly censored on both sides of the new border along the Bug River. They symbolized the terror that annihilated independent art in the land of the Dniπρο at the turn of the 1930s. An émigré anthology of these mostly eliminated poets would later memorialize them as the *Executed Renaissance*.² Yet, what is striking is that Jarema did not draw upon the names of these murdered poets but rather that of the one poet who, in the face of the terror, committed fully conscious poetic suicide—acquiescing to the system, and even holding public offices in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Why Tychynathen? Did she know *V kosmichnomu orkestri* [In the Cosmic Orchestra] (1921), or his first volume, *Soniashni kliarnety* [Clarinets of the Sun] (1918), which inspired three generations of Ukrainian avant-garde artists? The conclusion of Jarema’s statement in Nieborów is perhaps the sole clear sign of the artist’s contact with the idiom of the Dniپر-centered Ukrainian avant-garde of the 1920s and, indirectly, of any artistic links she may have had with the artistic heritage of the East.

I IN THE BORDERLANDS

Encounters between cultures in the borderlands, where political powers opportunistically exploit neighborly conflicts, tend to be encoded. In prewar Poland, the so-called Second Republic, issues related to the Eastern borderlands, including “Ukrainian” lands, were already thorny in the 1930s. After the war, in the People’s Republic of Poland, they were practically unmentionable.

For a long time, critics in Poland aspired to juxtapose avant-garde art exclusively with Western art. As late as the 1970s, Helena Blum, a witness to Jarema’s work in the interwar period, believed it was her duty to defend the argument that Jarema’s sculptures and paintings belonged to the canon of European art. Another art historian, Mieczysław Porębski, who had been following Jarema’s work from the 1940s, set a tendency to inscribe it into the structures of Western European currents, thereby shaping the postwar reception of her oeuvre.

And yet, Porębski, too, admitted that there was something about Jarema’s art that was hard to grasp. He referred to her works as “elusive paintings that defy definition.”³

What remained outside the field of interest was the somewhat exotic artistic legacy of the East. Thus, to reconstruct the first

twenty-two years of Maria Jarema’s life, before she left to study in Kraków, poses a particular challenge.

After the war, the Polish-Ukrainian border along the Bug and San rivers wasn’t, contrary to official assurances, a “border of friendship,” with little news coming in from either side. As World War I drew to a close, a bloody Polish-Ukrainian confrontation broke out in the so-called Battle of Lviv (1918–19). For Poles born—like Jarema—in Eastern Galicia, the memory of these events was a very tangible one. For the most part, it was tied to a nostalgic longing for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pre-partition Poland. Jarema’s progressive milieu, however, were the first group to fully understand that they had been born in Ukrainian Halychyna.⁴ Unlike many of her compatriots, Maria never considered herself to be an “exile” from the Eastern Borderlands.

A landscape and an antagonistic community

Sometimes, artists have antennas tuned to the past. Our first image of the world is said to be that of a specific site that leaves an impression in our brain. The primal natural scene that Jarema beheld was a land with the Carpathian Mountains on the horizon. Long before she was born, the mountains had formed a barrier, isolating her native Dniپر region—with her home town of Stary Sambor (now Staryi Sambir)—from the rest of the world, or, as it was in her day, from the rest of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first institutions of the imperial administration reached this region slowly and with considerable difficulty. Early ethnographers admired the intimacy and dignity of the local geography, later to be wiped out by the expansive energy of modern times.

Even today, we can still read about Maria Jarema having been raised in the idyllic habitat of the Borderlands. This is hard to believe, given that her parents’ ancestors had lived through the Kraków Uprising and the Peasant Revolt of 1846 in Galicia, with the defining experience of subsequent generations being the exceptionally bloody Eastern Front of World War I. The nostalgic myth of the so-called *Kresy* (Borderlands), a construct of the landed gentry, became widespread in Poland after World War II for a variety of reasons. It compelled Norman Davies to write a “non-national” history of Galicia,⁵ in which the historian proved that the defining feature of this reality had been—for generations—unceasing eruptions of violence.

Already, in the depths of the nineteenth century, with relative freedom of association, waves of conspiratorial fervor swept through the region. The imperial intelligence dealt with various kinds of subversives, ranging from ordinary criminals to ephemeral political organizations. The tenure of Baron von Sacher-Masoch as chief of police was a time of “constant surveillance, arrests, interrogations, beatings, retaliations, military maneuvers, denunciations, suspicion of espionage, trials, death sentences, commutations, suicides, renewed detentions and imprisonments.”⁶ Chaos prevailed.

Norman Davies argues that the specific “Galician mentality”—multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual—emerged in the final phase of the Austrian Empire, when the Habsburgs decided to introduce constitutional reforms. While this led to the establishment of representative governments, it was already too late to put an end to the political chaos, as the effects of the onset of modernity were just beginning to

1 Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji plastyków w Nieborowie w 1949 roku,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021), 107, trans. Arthur Barys.
2 In 1959, at the initiative of Jerzy Giedroyc, the Paris-based Kultura published an anthology of 1920s Ukrainian literature in the Ukrainian language titled *Rozstrilane Vidrozhennia* [The executed renaissance], edited by Yuri Lavrinenko. The authors include the most prominent writers of interwar Soviet Ukraine, featuring works erased from history by the communist authorities—ed. note.
3 Mieczysław Porębski, “Maria Jarema”, in Publikacje „Przeglądu Artystycznego” (Państwowy Instytut Sztuki, 1958), 11.

4 In Polish: Halyczyna or Galicja Wschodnia (Eastern Galicia). The region became the site for the formation of modern Ukrainian political thought during the interwar period—ed. note.
5 Norman Davies, *Galicja. Historia nie narodowa* (Znak, 2023).
6 Davies, *Galicja*, 229.

snowball. With the emancipation of several nationalities, a Galicia riven by conflicts was born, including ones fueled by the statehood ambitions of Poles and Ukrainians, as well as by struggles between Orthodox Jews, Hasidim and adherents of the Haskalah, or the Jewish Enlightenment.

The period did, however, produce an extraordinary phenomenon, one unseen anywhere else in Europe: a vibrant, nuanced world shared by three national communities (Poles, Ukrainians and Jews). Davies believed its idiosyncratic colorful character stemmed from the fact that each of the local communities had roots and enduring connections across the vast stretches of Europe. Because of this, each of them possessed a strong bond with countrymen who were raised differently, under different circumstances, in different settings. For Poles, the scope of reference lay in the old Polish provinces now under Prussian and Russian rule; for the Ruthenians it was Russian Ukraine; and for the Germans—Vienna and Berlin. The Jews maintained links with centers of Yiddish language and Jewish culture, from Vilnius and Minsk to Kyiv, Vienna, Prague and Chernivtsi, as well as to the massive wave of Jewish emigration that was heading toward the capitals of Western Europe and the Americas.

These conditions engendered a deeper awareness of what it meant to be different, and with it an acknowledgement of cultural and religious non-centricity as a natural state. What’s more, ethnographers have observed that Greek Catholics and Roman Catholics tended to have “alternating” religious lives. The practices of local parish priests ignored the hierarchs’ efforts to keep the faiths separate, allowing families for whom a Greek church was closer than a Roman Catholic one to attend Greek mass on ordinary Sundays. Pre-holiday and indulgence confession brought together practitioners of both faiths in Roman and Greek Catholic churches alike. In a world already unstable and divided, the notion of traditional neighborliness offered a measure of cohesion, and the “world below” remained in some kind of balance. It was traditional “local knowledge” that defined the boundaries of what was familiar and what was foreign.⁷

The artistic context of Maria Jarema’s work would be shaped by modernism. Yet, personal memories of her “multilayered” environment may have shimmered through these new, modern images. This is a less expected affinity than the Polish tradition of postimpressionist colorism—symbolized in Jarema’s biography by a box of paints given to her as a child by the outstanding painter Zygmunt Waliszewski.

Here I would like to pick out a few specific paintings from the Carpathian cultural context, from the “adjacent world” in which the young Maria Jarema grew up.

Parallel worlds

Rooted in multiplication, the spatial sense of the Dniester River valley made itself manifest not only in the local landscape but also in the region’s traditional architecture. The sacral buildings of the Boyko people had a particularly rich geometry.

Churches were composed of three volumes topped with tiered, four- or six-sided roofs. While the buildings’ form was tripartite, it constituted an integrated whole. Organically blended with the rolling hills, the numerous small Orthodox churches were a distinctive feature of the landscape. The act of dividing and at the same time unifying is considered a prominent artistic gesture in Jarema’s work.

Another “parallel reality” is multilingualism. On a map of language zones in the upper section of the Dniester River, where Stary Sambor was located, Ruthenian dialects clearly dominated, with a multitude of small spots of a different color marking densely scattered islands of Yiddish. Stary Sambor boasted a high percentage of Jewish residents and a strong presence of local Ukrainian institutions, such as *Prosvita* and the *Boy-kivshchyna* Ukrainian scholarly society. The Polish colony, albeit culturally dominant, was a minority.

The modern caste of the provincial elite from which Jarema hailed, owed its social status to education, yet they never managed to advance further. Even before the economic crisis of 1929, Maria’s father, who ran a legal practice in Stary Sambor, was struggling to maintain the household’s level of comfort. Her mother was a pianist.

As the Jarema children went off to school, the local Polish-Ukrainian conflict materialized as a conflict of language. The number of supporters on one side or the other was inflated depending on whether it was Polish propaganda or Ukrainian national activists that prevailed in a given area. The result was havoc, complaints to the education authorities, and protests. In the span of a single generation, individuals and national groups took a significant step up the social ladder. The University of Lwów accepted an ever-greater number of Jews and Ukrainians, and even had twenty women students at the outbreak of World War I. A cascading wave of emancipation raised national awareness, which in turn spurred radicalization among supporters of Ukrainian statehood. “The Polish element was retreating,” observed Jerzy Stempowski.⁸ Davies, meanwhile, notes how quickly radical factions coalesced within the respective nationalist movements. The future confrontation became inevitable.

What was an “artistic household” in Eastern Galicia like after World War I? The biographies of Maria’s elder brothers suggest that their mindset was dominated by the myth of Paris. Maria inherited this attitude, too, but “her” Paris was already well into its surrealist phase.

For Jarema’s contemporary, Jerzy Giedroyć, also born in 1908, a “Borderlands” home meant above all that the National Democratic model of a Catholic Pole was—as he wrote in his autobiography—simply inconceivable. In these parts, the idea of a monoethnic and single-faith Poland was a decisively foreign one.

The much younger Tadeusz Konwicki from Nowa Wilejka, raised in a hierarchical borderland society, wrote about himself: “The hierarchy was in my blood.” Hierarchical order elicited a sense of defiance in him; it provoked him and pushed him to contest it. Yet, as the writer insists, it also made him “desperately seek hierarchy.”⁹ In the twentieth century, the entire Eastern Borderland was a confrontation zone of competing political forces. Faced by the challenge of chaos, artists of the now largely secular-minded younger generation explored various forms of “hierarchy.” In the case of Maria Jarema, this became a bold artistic attempt to bring order to chaos via art.

ANUM and the Byzantine collection

Another vibrant world unfolding in Jarema’s vicinity centered around exhibitions of Ukrainian art in what was still officially Lwów. In the 1930s, a series of high-profile shows was put on by the ANUM association, time and again presenting the work of local artists, such as

7 Olga Linkiewicz, *Lokalność i nacjonalizm* (Universitas, 2018), 301–02.

8 Jerzy Stempowski, *W dolinie Dniestru i inne eseje ukraińskie. Listy o Ukrainie*, selected, edited and with an afterword by Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk, (Wydawnictwo LNB, 1995), 204.
9 Tadeusz Konwicki, *Kalendarz i klepsydra* (Znak, 2020).

Oleksa Novakivskyi and Olena Kulchytska, as well as Ukrainian émigré artists. Alexander Archipenko and Oleksa Hryshchenko—a compelling post-impressionist and an expert on Byzantine painting—sent in their works at their own expense.

Just as the beginning of the Greek Catholic revival coincided with the rise of cubism and abstraction, and with a renewed interest in icon painting, the Lviv Metropolitanate was taken over by Archbishop Andrey Sheptytsky (from 1901), a proponent of ecumenism. The descendant of Polonized Ruthenian nobility returned to his Ruthenian roots and joined a Greek Catholic Basilian monastic order. During his long tenure spanning many shifts in Polish-Ukrainian relations, he negotiated between the followers of the two rites, and later confronted both Soviet authority and Nazi occupation.

One of the metropolitan bishop’s aims was to foster a revival of Byzantine heritage. Under his auspices, Ukrainian painters reconstructed many sacral artworks. Many artists of the tri-national avant-garde later earned their living from polychrome work. The bishop made his private collection of pre-fifteenth-century Italo-Byzantine art, and numerous copies of Italian works by Vasyl Diadyniuk, available to the public—the collection was exhibited in the interwar period. An encounter with the Byzantine art collection—stashed away after the arrival of the German army in the apartment of the director of what was then the National Museum in Lwów—was to influence the work of Jerzy Nowosielski, an “icon painter” slightly younger than Jarema.

A song on the indestructibility of matter

Another “adjacent world” was that of another of Maria Jarema’s contemporaries. Bohdan Ihor Antonych, a Ukrainian-language

FIG. 1 MARIA JAREMA, *LANDSCAPE*, FROM THE ARTIST’S SKETCHBOOK, CA. 1932, WATERCOLOR ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



poet and successor of Pavlo Tychyna’s ideas from the *Cosmic Orchestra*, was the son of a Greek Catholic parish priest from the Lemko village of Banica. He spent his short life in interwar Polish Lwów. A broadly educated philologist, he created a poetic system based, in a nutshell, on dual perception. In recent Ukrainian biographical scholarship, it’s referred to as an “antinomic” system. In his poems, Antonych superimposed simultaneous images, much like a painter applying layered perspectives. The result was a multiple poetic record in which shapes, colors and sonic planes intermingled.

Antonych and the Kraków Group (Grupa Krakowska), of which Jarema was a member, both shared a belief in the authority of reality seen and experienced. Antonych’s series of poems *Zelena Ievanheliia* [The Green Gospel] arose out of what the author described as a physical interaction with tangible objects. The earth with animate as well as inanimate nature is a living and visible organism. In Antonych’s pulsating vision, objects are in constant motion. Household utensils, animals, shadows of Lemkos and Hasids, weeds, moths, clay, stones, coal and leafy bundles of hands are kept swirling. In *Pisnia pro neznyshchenist’ materii* [A Song on the Indestructibility of Matter], the poet is swept away by a flood of “plant-rivers” and is ultimately consumed by lava.

Contemporary writer Yuri Andrukhovych, an admirer of Antonych, described the master’s approach as “cosmic tragism” in a nod to Pavlo Tychyna. Both Tychyna and Antonych sought to recover the unity of humanity and nature lost in civilization. A kindred sentiment appears in Maria Jarema’s recollection of Henryk Wiciński (1947) where she writes that every artist, in his act of creation, “in the drama of mutually interacting forms senses the cosmic drama of planets colliding with each other.”¹⁰ Could this also be an allusion to Tychyna’s *Cosmic Orchestra*?

Today, Antonych’s poetry is sometimes regarded as an avant-garde precursor to non-anthropocentric artistic systems. Recurring regularly in his work is a vision of post-civilizational twilight in which ruins are reclaimed by nature. Exegetes cannot agree on whether the vision was “extra-material” or “metahistorical,” or perhaps even relating to pure materiality. One thing that is certain is the presence of a unique dimension: a tenderness toward matter.

According to Antonych, artistic language must rely on experience. It does not need interpretation in discursive language asking about meaning and sense, aiming to assign names that later become standards. The poet warns against using a conceptual language in matters of art. He was always at odds with orthodoxies grounded in dualistic images of the world. Though a loner by nature, he meddled in politics in his journalism, which was addressed to the Ukrainian-speaking intelligentsia of Lwów and published within the Polish state. He was a thorn in the side of extremist Ukrainian groups, from the Catholic right to the pro-Bolshevik left. He left behind poems about the Spanish Civil War and about the executions of Ukrainian artists in Kyiv. Much like Jarema, he stubbornly defended his own, often distinct, position. When Ukrainian public life devolved into fierce partisan battle between political factions in the 1930s (with terror raging on the other side of the Zbruch River), he distanced himself from the avant-garde formations he had started out with. He would be best remembered for the phrase “I will not be a mandolinist for any group.”

10 Maria Jarema, “Wspomnienie o Henryku Wicińskim,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 68.

Maria Jarema, “Wspomnienie o Henryku Wicińskim,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić*

Both artists were involved in the disputes on national art taking place in the late 1930s. As socialist realism had already taken hold in Soviet Ukraine, captivating the eastward-looking radical left, Antonych argued that expectations “to gauge the condition of society in art” were misguided. He claimed that while external national traits are demanded in art, nationality is “determined not by subject matter, but by form.” He went on to say that art in no way “reproduces reality”; instead, it “fulfils its social role in a completely different way than shallow materialism would have you believe.”¹¹ Four years later, in her response to a survey in *Głos Plastyków* monthly, Jarema condemned nurturing “pseudo-art just because it is homegrown, native, national.”¹²

II AT THE ACADEMY

When Maria and her sister took the newly built railway line to their middle school in Sambor, the ongoing conflict had little direct impact on students of a private school for children of the intelligentsia. As an art student in Kraków, however, Jarema found herself in the epicenter of a violent dispute. Several years earlier, the catalog of a Kraków Group exhibition at the National Museum in Wrocław revised the legend of the events that had taken place at the Kraków art academy. The clash was originally viewed as an artistic revolt and an intergenerational conflict. Barbara Ilkosz, in recalling the anti-Semitic context of these developments, drew attention to a further dimension: the presence of new techniques of political provocation.

Internal struggles within the Communist Party of Poland, which was part of and subordinate to the Comintern (Communist International), were exploited in the propaganda of the “world revolution.” Jonasz Stern, who served as an intermediary in the group’s political contacts, was a member of the Communist Party of Poland and of the Communist Part of Western Ukraine. According to Ukrainian sources, painter and graphic artist Leopold Lewicki—Stern’s colleague from the Kraków Group—was also a member of the latter. The son of a Ukrainian mother and a Polish father, he hailed from Chortkiv near the Soviet border, where Bolshevik agitation was rampant. During the events at the Academy, the Polish judiciary carried out an investigation and charged him with treason in relation to actions “aiming to usher in a Soviet communist system and a so-called proletariat dictatorship in the Polish State by way of revolution and inciting separation of Eastern Lesser Poland, Volhynia and Polesia from the Polish State.”¹³ Such were the (clumsy) efforts the police made to protect the country from propaganda designed to encourage the incorporation of Ukrainian lands into the USSR.

Playing a central role in the events at the Academy were Lewicki and Stanisław Osostowicz, who, like much of the group, hailed from Eastern Galicia. Their confrontational temperaments manifested themselves in aggressive speeches. They were part Jacobins and part belligerent eastern schismatics, but had yet to work out the mechanisms of brutal political struggle.

The group’s successive actions attest to their leaders’ progressively knee-jerk behavior. From 1934, successive members began to leave the group. Then came news of a purge already underway, one

of its victims being the artist Witold Wandurski, found guilty and executed by gunshot in the USSR in June 1934.

By then, the pressure of revolutionary parties throughout Europe ceased to be stimulating and became paralyzing. The Kraków Group, like the Lwów-based “artex” group, initially registered for the upcoming Congress of Cultural Workers in Lwów in 1936 but ultimately did not attend. Historians presume that this was due to tampering with the attendance list for the Congress, which was all but a facade by now, resulting in the removal of socialists and their replacement with “rising apparatchiks.” When the Comintern ultimately dissolved the Communist Party of Poland and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, many activists wound up behind bars once again. Lewicki, a communist with a Ukrainian nationalist agenda, remained in Lwów and was plagued by the ongoing scrutiny of the NKVD.

Jarema had the ability to establish a rapport with people from very different backgrounds. Henryk Wiciński, a sculptor, was from a Łódź family with ties to the 1905 Revolution. His experience was altogether different—a rigorous schooling in the proletarian movement. Someone recalled many years later that Maria “quickly turned communist” under Wiciński’s influence.¹⁴ She learnt the lessons of extreme radicalism and revolutionary extravagance. Crossing this threshold was surely a grueling experience, but the outcome was that the two radicals, Wiciński and Jarema, would form the most innovative wing of the Kraków Group. They were fascinated by space as a dynamic and magical agent for change, which could yield different effects depending on the vantage point.

¹⁴ Józef Chrobak, “Rozmowa z Eugeniuszem Wańkiem,” in *Grupa Krakowska, dokumenty i materiały z lat 1932–2008*, ed. Józef Chrobak and Marek Wilk, (Galeria Krzysztofory, Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora Cricoteka, 2008), 181.

FIG. 2 MARIA JAREMA, COSTUME DESIGN, 1938, WATERCOLOR AND POSTAGE STAMP ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



¹¹ Bohdan Ihor Antonych, “Natsionalne mystetstvo (Sproba idealistychnoi systemy mystetstva),” in *Karby* (Gurtok Ukrainських Plastykiv “Rub,” 1933)—published in Lwów and intended as an almanac with subsequent volumes, it remained a one-off publication.

¹² Maria Jarema, response to a survey in *Głos plastyków*, nos. 1–7 (1937), in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 47.

¹³ Barbara Ilkosz, “Historia i twórczość Grupy Krakowskiej,” in *Grupa Krakowska 1932–1937* (Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu, 2018), 513.

Jarema was said to be “the youngest of them all”¹⁵ and Porębski cast her in the role of a disciple. We have no evidence of the kind of influence she exerted on Wiciński. She was his better-educated peer who hailed from the milieu to which the self-declared proletarian aspired. The hierarchy remained traditional: in the poster for the Cricot Theater’s production of *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątwą*, 1933), for which Wiciński designed costumes, Maria’s name was nowhere to be seen, even though she assisted in the production; Jacek Puget once even suggested her co-authorship.¹⁶

“Savage newcomers”

With this label, Jonasz Stern captured something essential, yet he went on to describe his group as a collective of political activists. We read: “In 1934, at the initiative of the party, the Kraków Group issued a May Day appeal to artists, signed by Maria Jarema.”¹⁷ Stern penned his text in the 1960s, as the party’s political commission, to be included in a volume of memoirs by prewar communists. In its wake, communist-era art historians cultivated the image of Jarema as a fervent activist. That narrative persisted for decades. As late as 2000, Andrzej Turowski was convinced that Jarema had authored the 1934 statement. Even Tadeusz Kantor, in his final and unfinished performance, portrayed her as “a kind of revolutionary with a pistol.” In Agnieszka Dauszka’s recent book, the alleged appeal is described as a leaflet, with an annotation reading “published by Maria Jarema.” In fact, the leaflet (as well as its wording) was the initiative of her colleagues, who had accepted the offer to finance the printing from physician Gabriel Gottlieb, who had supported them before. As Gottlieb did not wish his name to appear, Jarema, acting as a go-between, was listed instead.¹⁸

Jarema took part in exhibitions, signed declarations (though there seems to be no evidence of this), distributed leaflets, and attended demonstrations. We do not find her name in any debates in the artistic press of the 1930s. Under the pressure of radicalization, the group’s leaders did not have enough time to develop an individual language. Wiciński was among those who contributed to the artistic press, but his letters from a sanatorium attest that, seeking to articulate his bold ideas, he wandered through a labyrinth of languages. And he confessed he could not cope.

Avoiding the public spotlight, Jarema sometimes gives the impression of willingly assuming the status of a woman who was not expected to make public statements. But not always. Her design for a monument to fallen workers at the Rakowicki Cemetery—a personal response to the bloody suppression of the 1936 strike at the Semperit factory—represents a clear-cut choice of her own mode of rebellion: a concrete, lasting act of intervention.

The two faces of the Kraków Group

While other collectives’ ideological programs imposed their esthetic choices, one of the Kraków Group’s inalienable rules was to maintain individual artistic sovereignty. The Cricot Theater was similar in that way—the critics reproached it for lacking a clear ideological platform and coherent repertoire. It was precisely that “program-less” stance that would later shield the Kraków Group from socialist realism.

15 Mieczysław Porębski, “Maria Jarema”, in *Publikacje Przeglądu Artystycznego* (Państwowy Instytut Sztuki, 1958), 8.
16 Jacek Puget, “Cricot,” *Proscenium*, no. 3 (1963/64).
17 Jonasz Stern, “Grupa Krakowska,” in *Cyganeria i polityka* (Czytelnik, 1964), 235.
18 Agnieszka Dauksza, *Jaremianka* (Znak, 2019), 116.

They resisted its directives, while part of the Polish avant-garde acquiesced.

And yet, the role played by the Kraków Group’s public political activism is certainly worth closer reflection. Two very different practices paradoxically had to complement each other. The first—an extreme revolutionary narration—satisfied the demands imposed by growing political pressures by way of critics with affiliations to both artistic and political circles. The second encouraged “active passivity.” From the logical point of view, the two seem contradictory. The group’s antagonistic universalism assumed that modern subjectivity forms part of a universal structure, a micro-chaos capable of maintaining the view of the “whole.” While this “whole,” understood more in terms of disintegration than harmony, is not “benevolent,” the view from the artist’s studio shows “everything.” That is, of course, so long as the process is not disciplined by anyone and the artist can discover a space of freedom within themselves. This space is tense yet more passive; free from the ties of activism, the immediate effect of anger.

III SEPARATE

In Agnieszka Dauksza’s book, Jarema, weary of the futile confrontations within her milieu, dreams about change. Sculpture no longer brings her joy, for every emerging form is pulled into a never-ending dialogue with Wiciński’s works. It seems logical to leave the artistic territory she shares with him, as identification in art cannot be collective, only individual. In Dauksza’s book, the year 1934 sets off a whirlwind. It marks the death of Józef Jarema Senior in Stary Sambor, the relapse of Wiciński’s illness, and Maria Jarema’s first work for the Cricot. In the following year, a production of *Mute Canary* (*Niemy kanarek*), based on Ribemont-Dessaignes,

FIG. 3 MARIA JAREMA, *KOMPOZYCJA FIGURALNA*, 1936, WATERCOLOR, OR AND TEMPERA ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW

FIG. 4 MARIA JAREMA, *GROUP OF FIGURES WITH A PONY (GRUPA POSTACI Z KONIKIEM)*, 1935–1939, WATERCOLOR AND GOUACHE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



features her decorations and costumes. A reviewer noted an inner contradiction in the stage design: the decorations were three-dimensional whereas the costumes were graphic and flat. Thus emerged Jarema’s favorite dichotomy: spatial vs. planar.

Weight and “lightness”

The legend highlights the generational surge, repressing the later, more dynamic phase. The world was leaving its mark; the avant-garde’s cohesiveness was being drained of its substance, transforming earlier confidence into a game with reality. This is a new rupture in Jarema’s biography, one she curtly described as “people are turning into savages.” In a letter to her mother, she wrote: “I can’t do it here; I can’t go on like this.”

The final years of the Weimar Republic were described as a time of regression, cynical twilight, indifference and demoralization.¹⁹ Poland, too, experienced changes in everyday life, albeit indiscernible at first. People complained about increasingly formalized relations, loss of empathy and mental stagnation. Artists were a medium for peoples’ states of mind.

Jarema may well have asked herself then: “Where am I?” “What has happened to me?” A flight from nightmares breeds other, “potential,” worlds. By way of constructs that appear to belong to pure fantasy, a new perspective opens up.

Jarema’s gouaches, temperas and watercolors from 1936–38 seem cheerful at first glance. A clue appears to be leading some-

¹⁹ Peter Sloterdijk provides a lengthy analysis of the collective mood in the Weimar Republic in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 384–550, followed by Modris Eksteins in *Solar Dance: Van Gogh, Forgery, and the Eclipse of Certainty* (Knopf Canada, 2012).

FIG. 5 MARIA JAREMA, *KOMPOZYCJA FIGURALNA*, 1936, INK AND WATERCOLOR ON PAPERGALER, GALERIA PIEKARY W POZNANIU



where, but the viewer quickly loses the trail. The figures (dolls, torsos?) undergo a curious mechanization—they levitate with other items in undefined background planes, as if swept up by an abstract cataclysm. The verticality proper to a figure is alluded to but constantly violated. Yet, there is no melancholy, no prophecy of the world collapsing, no apocalyptic verdict. Life of some kind continues to endure, and though it has begun to crumble, the scattered figures seem to trust that everything will return to its place.

At Cricot

What we know about these “pictures” from 1936–38 is that they “derive from theatrical experience” which, by way of experimentation, sought a departure from the classic interpretation of reality.²⁰ And yet, Cricot really stood out for its unique type of humor. When the word “surrealism” became a catch-all and when reviews of Cricot’s program noted “a slightly grotesque treatment” or “surrealist effect,” the critic Lech Piwowar pointed out the theater’s “abstractly contrived wit.” In its early days, Cricot presented experimental performances; only recently have these “light” forms begun to be regarded as bona fide theatrical productions. A poster assured spectators that the theatrical piece would only take up twenty minutes of their time, and the rest was just dance grotesques, barbershop quartets, and songs.

Was Maria Jarema’s manner of “acting/not acting” on stage part of the “abstract wit” that Piwowar wrote about? Karolina Czerska believes the several variations of her Modern Woman role reveal a fracture between the source text and the execution. Over the course

²⁰ Ada Grzelewska, “Maria Jarema. *Tańcząc czyli w swojej skórze*. O doświadczeniu teatru,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 206–07.

FIG. 6 MARIA JAREMA, *SCENE FROM THE CRICOT THEATRE (SCENA Z TEATRU CRICOT)*, 2ND HALF OF THE 1930S, GOUACHE ON CARDBOARD, SANDOMIERZ CASTLE MUSEUM



of the 1930s, Cricot itself changed, with Józef Jarema turning once again to the older generation and more established theatrical practices.

In theory, at Cricot, the costume design was to fully define the character, but do we believe it was actually that way onstage? The practice of imposing form onto the personal space of an actor’s body can be a nightmare for costume design. For Jarema, Cricot’s decreasingly “abstract” and ever more sloppy “messiness” could have become tiresome.

In irreverent grotesque and the war

Mieczysław Porębski summed up the images from 1936–38 as a kind of painterly “irreverent grotesque.”²¹ He spoke of “extravagance,” and “lackadaisical trials,” going on to say: “After all, she did only what she wanted ... she reacted spontaneously, one might say nonchalantly; she painted just as she sculpted.”²² But was that truly the case? Though the critic clearly and accurately notes that Jarema’s experience with three-dimensional forms returns on the flat surfaces of her paintings, he did not see any innovativeness in the small-format works. He repeatedly tried to grasp Jarema’s artistic “lightness,” but perhaps his lexicon was helpless in the face of this “circus-like,” subversive art employing a technique similar to what the Situationists would call *détournement*?

This “carefreeness” was an artistic strategy to create an exercise that would activate the viewer. Jarema continued to work out a certain equation as she repeated her bold attempts to artistically tame the chaos and turn it into a work of visual art.

Writing about Jarema’s subsequent small-format works from 1939–46—unduly underrecognized on account of their dispersion and late rediscovery, as well as of the fragility of the medium—Wiktoria Koziół noticed an inconsistency in the interpretations they rarely received. Formalist critics, to whom historical experience was an unknown category, considered them to represent a period of “recession.” What counted was “modernity.” Koziół reintroduces the category of experience into her art history, appreciating the importance of fragmentation and illegibility in the portrayal of the world, as well as the effect of “compositions falling apart” and the spectral quality and mechanical embroilments of the figures. She validates her diagnosis by borrowing the notion of “traumatic realism,” coined in the 1990s, with its characteristic ambivalence of approach, incoherence and fractures.²³

Vestiges of Eastern heritage

In Jarema’s small-format works, until her shift to the monotype technique, there is at once flatness and spatial depth, and a reliance on different perspective principles. The figures are sometimes barely roughly sketched, sometimes blocky and outlined with contours. There is no logic, no defined topography. The proportions are odd and the shifts in scale bear no relation with distance. There is no shortage of animals and other mute, enigmatic beings. They are like those in medieval paintings: not meant to convey the real appearance of a creature but to carry symbolic meanings. Although Jarema’s symbolism is ambivalent, idiosyncratic, unpredictable and random, taking a closer look at her menagerie could perhaps reveal some unexpected affinities.

The work of Jerzy Nowosielski in the postwar, second Kraków Group was an emphatic reminder of what the artist called “fading lessons of Eastern tradition.” Porębski noticed a “strong figuration” in the works of both artists: “What Brzozowski or Mikulski painted, what the younger Nowosielski was doing, what Kantor proposed at the time, as well as Jarema—it was all oriented toward a highly decisive form, with a search for new spatial solutions.” He added: “Meanwhile, the experience of the icon that Nowosielski brings in ... it all held together, with the experience that Jarema might have brought in being no exception.”²⁴

And what was the connection between Jarema’s paintings and Nowosielski’s “icon experience”? What they shared was an artistic resistance to the official socialist-realist academism, at a time when the term “abstraction” was something of a covert language of dissent. Nowosielski juxtaposed abstraction and icons, seeing both as a kind of freedom, a visual synthesis in place of discursive concepts, a beginning from actions of a formal, visual nature, and as something magical. The art of both painters owed much to surrealism and the discovery of the “primitive.” And let’s not forget that medieval painting was also considered “primitive,” and that the chief concern of illuminators—masters of the small format—was how to imbue a small image with a much bigger idea. In those days, grand themes were reserved for the polychromes of churches.

Nowosielski spoke of the “atheistic mysticism of the surrealists.” In his *Inność prawosławia* [The otherness of the Orthodox], he likened it to “lightness”: to changes in mood, to a flash of wonderment, to a kind of “losing oneself in oddness.” A highly individual variety of negative theology in these paintings put forth a unique image of an atheist. Nowosielski dubbed his atheist-abstractionist faith “ontological atheism”—a state in which “consciousness touches a bottom of sorts” and the experience of “the non-existence of God” becomes liberating.

The painter also expressed certainty that “Poland’s withdrawal from the Ruthenian territory as a result of historical processes is a logical and irreversible fact.” And yet, the bilateral flow of influences had sustained long enough to “leave lasting and indelible traces throughout Polish literary, artistic, and religious-political thought.”²⁵

²¹ Porębski “Maria Jarema,” 12.
²² Mieczysław Porębski, “W trzydziestolecie,” in *Maria Jarema, Grudzień 1988 – styczeń 1989*, exh. cat. (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, Galeria Krzysztofora, 1988), 3.
²³ Wiktoria Koziół, “Pochód (1940), Twórczość Marii Jaremy w latach 1939–1945,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 230–46.

²⁴ Marek Świca, “Rozmowa z Mieczysławem Porębskim w 50-lecie Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej 1948–1949,” in Chrobak and Wilk, *Grupa Krakowska, dokumenty i materiały z lat 1932–2008*, 115–16.
²⁵ Jerzy Nowosielski, *Inność prawosławia* (Anafora, 1990), 143.

MARIA JAREMA
AND AN AVANT-GARDE
STORY OF FAILURE

“I’m afraid this might come out as nonsense, as I can neither speak nor write, but there are certain things that concern me and, as difficult as it is for me to do so, I want to make a statement;”¹ declared Maria Jarema at an artists’ conference in Nieborów in 1949. The event proved to be crucial to the symbolic and material economics of the following years. Socialist realism took up residence at the salons; allegiances, positions and postings spun like a merry-go-round, heads rolled, tables turned—and so it went for about seven years. Yet it seems that the most vital change transpired in the circulation of affects. The enthusiasm of people engaged in building a new state and a new kind of art after 1945 is dismissed as a manifestation of recklessness, vanity, silliness and narcissistic obstinance. Their art is labeled “amorphous.” Henceforth, the enthusiasm of the postwar years is replaced by feelings of shame and guilt—at least among those who switch sides, embrace mimicry and cut ties with avant-garde ideals. Those who refuse to join the socialist-realist canon descend into feelings of dissent, anger and helplessness.

So where does Jarema fit into this divide? At first glance, it seems that what followed the conference in Nieborów—meaning the party’s tightening of the noose around the necks of the less compliant artists, division among people in the profession, strained or severed relationships and Jarema’s withdrawal from the public eye—lets us definitively place her activity somewhere in the territory of a difficult, ugly or simply blurry mindset of disillusionment and futility.

This would explain Jarema’s several years of silence, her self-sequestering in her studio, personal setbacks and gradual but resolved retreat from figurative art toward abstraction. Yet something is amiss in this ostensibly simple equation. I do the math once more—I admit—as I myself have fallen into the cognitive trap too many times.

I call this mechanism an error of the unhappy archive, to cite a concept of Sara Ahmed’s in relation to the study of archives of sadness.² Of course, when Ahmed suggests focusing on feelings of sadness, she is looking for a counterweight to narratives on progress and success, and criticizing the Western regime of happiness understood as a model for managing individuals and groups. It must be noted that, in Poland, Ahmed’s proposal sounds perverse: one could say that for years we have been doing nothing but creating archives of sadness, analyzing crises and tracking various forms of violence, wrongdoings, misfortune and trauma. Truth be told, we have never moved beyond this sphere of reference; what we lack is an archive of optimism. It is no wonder then—and even to be expected—that, for years, Jarema’s social-artistic activity has been located in doleful modes of perception.

And so, when I set about writing a biography of Jarema a few years ago, many people said it was an exercise in futility.³ It was suggested that Jarema’s life was blighted—marked by the oppression of regimes, poverty and illness—just as her body of work had been fragmented and odd. They said that she surely had great talent, but it was squandered potential, that Jarema’s art is too difficult and ambiguous for her to be brought back into the conversation. There’s no point in discussing the validity of opinions passed down by arbiters of good sense and guardians of the canon, yet such labels—performatively repeated—certainly tend to stick, permanently defining the thing in ques-

tion and creating a context in which a different view becomes tricky or even impossible. In short, it might have felt like a lost cause; lost from the very outset, considering the sequence of difficulties Jarema faced in trying to even enter the system of significance.

And what were the causes of these difficulties? Firstly, there were the provincial origins and ostensible efforts of a girl from Stary Sambor trying to make it in the conservative and insular Kraków. Secondly, a young female artist’s position in the Kraków academy’s sculpture studio was far from a sure thing, as women had just recently been granted the right to even enroll in the school. Thirdly, there was the matter of political orientation—Jarema was a left-wing, verging on communist, in a country under the sway of the right-wing Sanation movement. But here, too, she remained an “almost” something, although involved in the milieu, she never officially declared herself a communist. Besides, communism in prewar Poland was practically a marginal phenomenon within the broader social scale. After the war, however, Jarema’s political choices had a lasting impact on how her work was received: though an actual communist in 1945, she soon began to deviate significantly from the dominant line of thinking and creating. In 1949, her standing changed once again—what kind of communist was she, they said, if she could betray them the way she had: ideologically, socially, artistically. After 1956, it seemed she was rehabilitated, albeit briefly—and not only because of her death just two years later. All the way through to the end of communism in 1989, she didn’t fit into the cultural vision of the People’s Republic—she was no good as a standard-bearer, for she was neither one of “us” nor fully “other.” Gradually, her artistic achievements were forgotten, with not a single retrospective staged. Paradoxically, not much changed after the fall of communism: Jarema was too liberal, too ambiguous and too much a woman to become a patron of Polish culture, intent on finding its identity in the pains of the past (a process which continues to this day). What kind of picture emerges from this puzzle? Jarema: victim of patriarchy, of the right-wing Sanation movement, of Nazism, communism, class violence, Warsaw bias and, finally, capitalism? All of this could make for an attractive, emotional story, as people relate most easily to such well-worn sentiments. The problem is that the victimhood angle provides little help in understanding the phenomenon that was Jarema’s art.

I believe that the cognitive error in attempting to describe the case of Jarema with categories taken from her unhappy archive is not solely the product of routine readings and top-down symbolic violence. Jarema actively applied herself to the art of failure and worked doggedly for the little status she earned. For this reason, I suggest that her strategy be regarded as a complex and multi-dimensional performance that eschews bourgeois divisions into “life,” “biography,” “art,” “relationships,” “identity,” “body,” “matter,” “political engagement” and “worldview.” Whenever one tries to distinguish between these things, Jarema becomes unfathomable.

Therefore, I shall start afresh, from her return and shift, meaning from that particular moment at the conference in 1949 when Jarema warned that, since she could neither speak nor write, she might talk nonsense, but very much wanted to speak out nonetheless. What was Jarema doing opening her speech this way in the company of fellow artists, advocates of the socialist-realist order, bureaucrats and cultural policymakers? She was consciously employing the device of the “em-

¹ Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji plastyków w Nieborowie w 1949 roku,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021), 104, all quotations from this source trans. Arthur Barys.
² Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2010).
³ Agnieszka Dauksza, *Jaremianka. Biografia* (Znak, 2019). In 2020, the book was nominated for the prestigious Nike Literary Award—ed. note.

barrassing female performance”⁴ and seeing it through to the end, in this particular appearance as well as in many later interventions. She feigned awkwardness and dilettantism to counterbalance the coarse pathos of the party upstarts. As they deploy ready-made soundbites, she pretends not to know how to speak. Seemingly improvising, she takes a swing with each sentence she utters: first, she calls socialist realism an order “mandated by non-artists,” claiming that “its ties with art were severed, and it came to represent the gauche bungling of kitschmongers.”⁵ Next, she describes the movement as “regressive; it is a rubbish revolution,” which, if it worked at all “in Soviet Russia, it’s only because 70% percent of the population was illiterate and could not progress past ... icons.”⁶ She concludes her speech with a remark that those who impose socialist realism on artists are acting as if they believed that “we have no future ahead of us—that the world will only last two more years.”⁷

It is clear that with each new sentence Jarema was checking herself out of the new order and denying the dubious rationale of a shared future. But it was her own future that she denied, too. It is worth taking note of the form of her gesture. She performed an act of parrhesia, speaking freely to strike out against the dominant political tendency, represented in Nieborów by specific bureaucrats but also supported by individuals who were already engaged or about to be engaged. She exposed her affective reasons and insignificant status, not pretending to be a hardened professional but rather speaking from a layperson’s position, performing an act of civil defiance against the official narrative.

⁴ Here I reference an important concept proposed by Katarzyna Waligóra in “Niedoceniana ścieżka emancypacji: zenujący kobiecy performans,” *Teksty Drugie*, no. 6 (2020): 157–78.
⁵ Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji,” 106.
⁶ Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji.”
⁷ Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji,” 107.

FIG. 1 MARIA JAREMA, *PORTRAIT (PORTRET)*, 1949, DISTEMPER AND WHITE CHALK ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAN



Her arguments were rooted in past experience—she spoke of the dying community of “us,” the people of communism—while at the same time formulating her own here-and-now and predicting what would have to come. She burned bridges, killing her chances to show her work, travel abroad, receive grants and land paid commissions. She chose the convention of organic nonconformism, which does not tolerate compromise. And she did it from a deliberate position of weakness, losing her erstwhile status of someone who is removed but at the same time engaged in the advancement of the socialist cause. Presumably, she did not really believe in the potential good that lay in the exchange of arguments or in the alleged open-mindedness of the discussion’s participants.

I believe Jarema was trying to embarrass her listeners, acting directly and emotionally to touch a nerve with her performative naivety and awkwardness. But what for? So that they would finally feel something, anything—if only a formal incompatibility—and be disarmed of the tools of violence at least for a moment. She finished her speech with the words “So much has been said today about modern art and art in general that I’m unprepared to say anything new.”⁸ Indeed, she stayed silent for five years, even though she was still around. She continued to show up at party-organized artist meetings; her name appeared on attendance lists. But, as the minutes show, she did not speak. What game was Jarema playing as she maintained her silence?

In short, she was performing failure, putting to use her status as an artist, her social standing, her family ties, her increasingly ailing body and mind, and finally, the matter of her visual works. Jarema’s performance in 1949 was a watershed moment, as it crystalized in public, in front of the eyes of many witnesses and under the pressure of concrete changes taking place. And, as it would turn out, it informed the direction and style of her later actions, proving to be more than a one-off occurrence. Collectively, I call this a strategy of failure, one relying on a variety of methods. I would now like to focus on a few of these.

THE KILLJOY ARTIST

I will start with something I noticed early on: going by the accounts of third parties, colleagues, friends and family members, Jarema would constantly play the killjoy,⁹ be it as a companion, friend, feminist or family member. In the Party’s artists’ association, she was always kicking up a fuss, disagreeing, criticizing and challenging the suggestions of others. She didn’t shy away from butting heads even with older and more established colleagues—including while still at school in the studio of Xawery Dunikowski, or with members of the Cricot experimental theatre. When discussing other artists’ works and exhibitions at get-togethers in cafés and in her correspondence, she would pull no punches if the work wasn’t innovative enough. Luckily, most were.

As a feminist killjoy, Jarema often clashed with fellow activists and women of culture, such as Irena Krzywicka, accusing them of hypocrisy or classism. She argued for universal abortion rights, guaranteed access to medical care for all women, including the underprivileged, postnatal care, social insurance and mental health resources. She was blunt and opinionated on both political and social matters, but tended to keep her distance for the sake of protecting her own mental space. Helena Blum recalls a scene in Paris, when Sasza Blonder, one of

⁸ Jarema, “Wypowiedź na konferencji.”
⁹ Here I cite a concept proposed by Sara Ahmed in her book *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook* (Penguin, 2023).

Jarema’s cohorts in the Kraków Group, tried to distract her as she was playing chess, saying: “Maria, I saw a beautiful painting by Bonnard to-day.”¹⁰ Jarema did not so much as twitch, and when he stubbornly waited and repeated his provocation, she ignored him and stayed silent, only to finally shoo him away with her hand like a pesky fly. When disturbed while examining a painting, be it her own or someone else’s, or when she was working and someone—for instance, her husband, Kornel Filipowicz—stepped through the door of her studio, she would explode in a tirade of irritation and despair, claiming that the process was irreparably ruined, her relationship with the work severed and the entire day wasted. One exception was when it was her young son that interrupted her, which seems to suggest that these fits of annoyance were a reaction to those aiming to bother her with less important things or occupy her with their own matters. Jarema was satisfied being a “good enough” friend, partner, mother; she did not aspire to have perfect relationships. She fought tenaciously for freedom to do what she wanted.

Why do I cite these anecdotes from those close to her? I want to show that in Jarema there was not even a hint of division between private and public, personal and professional. When she weighed in on government decisions—in her prewar manifestos or public appearances in the 1950s—she often lambasted them as cynical, myopic, stupid, crude, violent and condescending toward citizens. In 1954, speaking out publicly for the first time in years at the 4th National Exhibition of Visual Arts at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw, and helping to initiate the political thaw in the process, she said: “If, after five years of breaking spines and so on, the cause [of socialist realism] still ends in a fiasco, as we can actually see right here, then perhaps it would be proper to admit to the fact and look around for some other artform? The number one thing is the right to choose. Let’s not be so fanatical.”¹¹ Exposing her affective engagement and signaling the punches to come, she went on to add: “In politics, one can, or even should, be an artist, but in art you mustn’t be a politician. I ask that you don’t make me shut my mouth. The fact that I’m speaking up today and not a year ago is because I work very intensively, because I put in a huge effort, and because, as a result, I have colossal trust in myself.”¹²

THE CLOAKROOM ATTENDANT STRATEGY

The declaration of self-trust once again brings us back to the question of the cognitive error of unhappy archives, which is also an error of an affective nature. Jarema’s reaction had long been interpreted as anger, disillusionment, sorrow, contention and defiance toward the socialist-realist policy. From this perspective, her status is again reduced to that of a victim who has lost self-direction, is condemned to withdrawal from public life, leads a phantom life and creates things that will never see the light of day. But what if we were to view the cancelation that Jarema experienced after 1949 as the outcome of a deliberate strategy? And what kind of picture emerges if, instead of seeing her actions as impulsive and maudlin outbursts spurred by despair and anger, we see them as simply common expressions of boredom with the derivativeness and insularity of the Polish cultural landscape? Or maybe of irritation and a thirst for new stimuli, travel, conversation, confrontation

and multiplicity of argument? I believe the artist cut ties with the official party line so violently and emotionally as to be able to feign injury and throw people off. Roleplaying as someone who’s been broken or deceived by the system, someone forced to seclude herself in the safety of her own studio, she attained a relative degree of artistic freedom. Adroitly, she deployed something I call the mechanism of cautious distance and limited presence. On the one hand, she was always “at hand”; regularly attending meetings and assemblies, she was a visible presence. Being seen, she maintained a proper vantage point for herself. On the other hand, she exuded passivity and aloofness. In doing so—as an embodiment of the failure of avant-garde ideals—she did not evoke suspicion or aggression, got her antagonists to let down their guard, and secured a space for her formal experiments behind the closed doors of her studio.

I suppose Jarema worked for years to undermine her status, choosing emotional instability and identity ambiguity.¹³ She turned these qualities into a screen to conceal the freedom of her endeavors. Of course, the deliberate game of distance and pretended indifference do not diminish Jarema’s real sense of powerlessness in the face of the Stalinist regime. After 1949, she assumed a position of someone “politically depressed,” though her loss of illusions did not mean she would stop searching for innovative forms of survival and defiance. And here I return to the emotional error, the trap of the unhappy archive. If we dwell mainly on categories like powerlessness, despair and rupture in interpreting Jarema’s body of work, we risk missing its subversive potential and not acknowledging the scale of the artist’s performative opposition. We also overlook the story of her contrarian agency, which oscillated between being a strategy of survival, management of loss, and of playing games with whatever was available.

Besides—and this indirectly attests to the success of the strategy of misdirection—we trust Jarema too much. Local art history believed every word she said, every declaration and even the slightest hint of a suggestion. As a result, the same observations have been made about her work for years. The first of these relates to the choice of sculpture as the medium she studied in Dunikowski’s studio; purportedly, Jarema did that so as not to go down the same path as her older brother Józef, who studied painting. This alleged fact meant not many people took her prewar paintings seriously. They either went unnoticed or were considered nothing more than novice exercises. Another observation relates to her involvement with the Cricot theater, to Jarema’s acting and her costume and set design work. Years later, the artist talked about those experiences as something pleasant and as a kind of social adventure. As a consequence, this branch of her activity was deemed tangential and approached as fun and games with friends in her free time. To this day, her stage pieces have yet to receive critical attention.

It was the same with her activity during the war, when she worked as a cloakroom attendant in an artists’ café. For a long time, it was believed she didn’t make much art at that point, and what she did create wasn’t very inspired—just some odd watercolors and gouaches painted under the counter at the café and never meant for sale. There were also some crude rag and wire dolls, made just to earn some money and sold to random people. Yet, these things lacked commercial appeal. The form, materials and execution of the matador, dog or now-lost mer-

¹⁰ Helena Blum, “Maria Jarema – wspomnienia i refleksje,” in *Maria Jarema (wspomnienia i komentarze)*, ed. Józef Chrobak (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, 1992), 35.

¹¹ Maria Jarema, “Wypowiedź w dyskusji na IV Ogólnopolskiej Wystawie Plastyki w 1954 roku,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 120.

¹² Jarema, “Wypowiedź w dyskusji,” 122.

¹³ In this line of thinking I take inspiration from Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011), which deals with individuals who turn failure into a personal style of being.

maid or devil figures, meant they were certainly not meant to be played with—they were avant-garde textile sculptures.

On top of this, during the war Jarema painted many landscapes and flowers. Supposedly, they were made as something peaceful and beautiful to look at for the baby she was expecting at the time. This theory is problematic, however, as the artist had been painting works of this kind since 1940, three years before she got pregnant. And then there's one other crucial matter: the generally accepted belief—based on the recollections of art historian Helena Blum—that Jarema decided to put sculpture aside because of fatigue. These theories, so presumptive of a dispiritedness, sound rather suspect in the light of Jarema's regularly feisty rhetoric during public statements. I therefore wish to ask: What was Jarema doing during the war?

If I had to give a short answer, I'd say she was camouflaging and downplaying the effects of the avant-garde. Both literally and figuratively. Years later, an avant-garde sculpture by the artist was discovered underground, in the basement of her family home in Wola Justowska. She had taken it apart and hidden it beneath a heap of coal during the war in an effort to avoid interest from the Germans, who were on the prowl for avant-garde art. She informed Helena Blum—the same person to whom she admitted not having the strength for sculpture—that she wasn't making anything interesting at that time. Nor did she wish to show the effects of her work, even though there were paintings of flowers on easels and on the floor of the room where she worked. I suspect that these flowers were meant to conceal her avant-garde pursuits. These actions—hiding certain items and showcasing other things that wouldn't generate controversy, her very choice of form and motif, and downplaying her efforts as insignificant in order to deter prying eyes—were to divert

FIG. 2 MARIA JAREMA, *FLOWERS (KWIATY)*, 1945, OIL ON CANVAS, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



attention away from her real artistic explorations. Since Jarema was concerned about potential visits and checks from authorities, the highly visible flower paintings would explain the presence of painting supplies in her home and stave off further inquiry. And Jarema had things to hide.

She painted amidst the coats in the artists' café where she worked in order not to lose her *Kennkarte* [the German occupation-era identification document – trans. note]. I don't expect that anyone—not her friends and certainly not any Germans who came into the café—would have treated art made under such circumstances seriously. Yet Kornel Filipowicz recalled how upset she got when something went wrong with these works:

[S]he worked with a fragile medium, painting mainly on paper and cardboard, and she was liable to break out in tears if the paper ripped, if the gouache binder didn't come out right, if the paint spilled.... During the war, when all original art was not only prohibited by the occupying authorities, but also seemed like something frivolous, or downright absurd, in the midst of all the human suffering taking place, I saw with my own eyes how Maria—in spite of the ban and her own inhibitions, and contrary to the needs of the market, which saw paintings as a vehicle for capital investment—painted watercolors and gouaches that neither the occupants nor potential buyers could possibly like. Of course, she could paint a nice picture of golden chrysanthemums in a crystal vase, but she didn't want to paint things like that. Working in the cloakroom of the artists' café, she painted small, notebook-size watercolors, and larger-format gouaches on scraps of cardboard at home. She mainly gave them away. The arrivistes couldn't have liked them and, besides, they were rather strange, as they didn't look like anything

FIG. 3 MARIA JAREMA, *CAFÉ (KAWIARNIA)*, 1942, DISTEMPER ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION

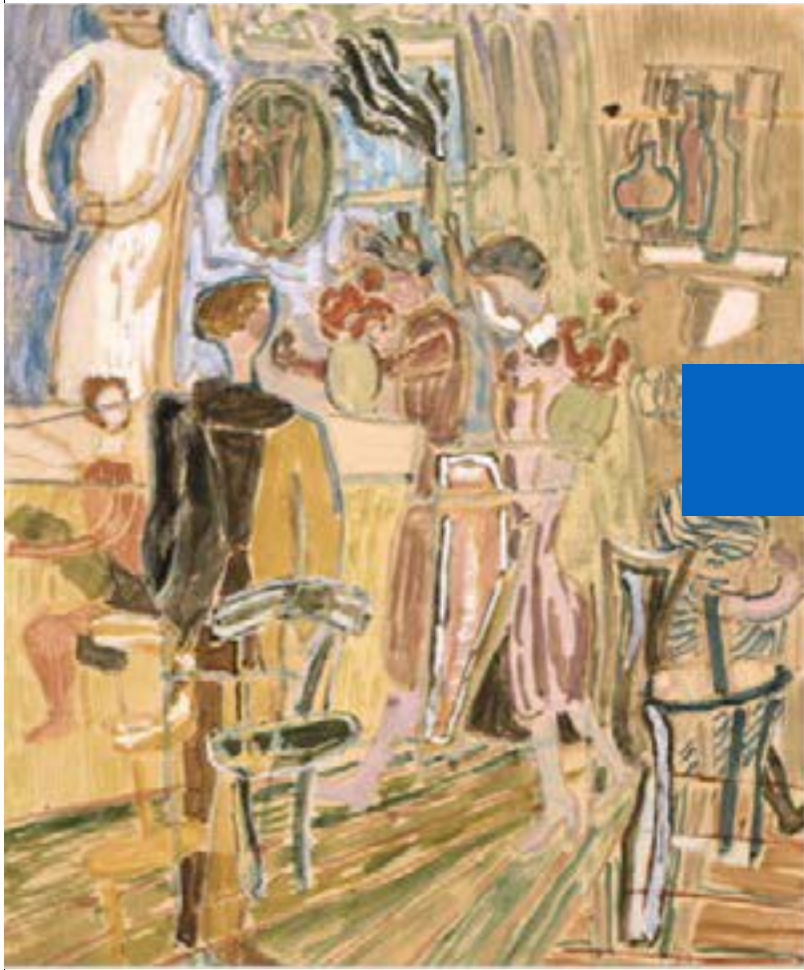
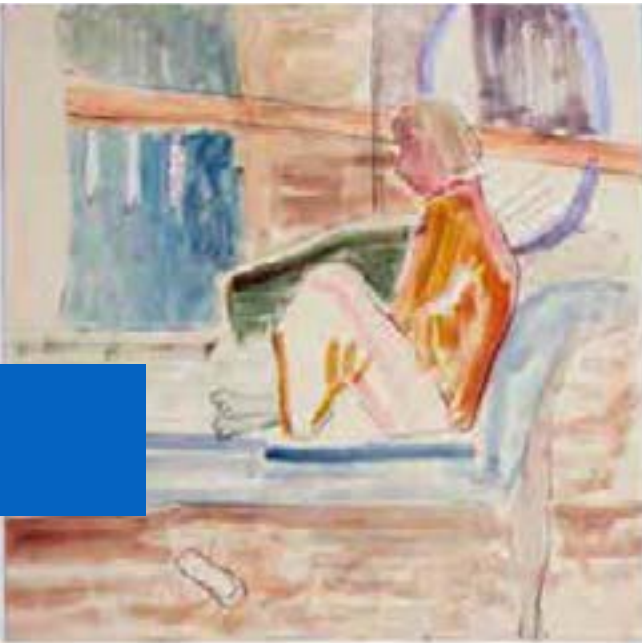


FIG. 4 MARIA JAREMA, *SISTER (SIOSTRA)*, 1935–1940, WATERCOLOR AND PEN ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



that could have any monetary value; they lacked a certain technical elegance that buyers looked for. But Maria didn't care about that. When painting watercolors, if she was not satisfied with some part of the picture—and the watercolor technique does not tolerate correction—she would simply cut out a hole in that place with small scissors, tape it up from underneath with clean paper and put on a new color. Visually, the picture would be perfect, but if you wanted to sell it, it was practically worthless. As a technique, collage was not very widespread yet.¹⁴

There are several things here that are significant. First, Jarema's aims were not economic, but her activity obviously wasn't purely recreational. She did not create for pleasure: she had ethical reservations, and she was afraid. Nor did she paint for practice; if that were the case she would not have fought for every work, gone to such great lengths to rescue or fix them. So, what was in it for her?

I think the strange pictures mentioned by Filipowicz are a kind of testimony on the violence of war. Jarema painted what looked like landscapes which for the sake of disguise were called beach views with sunbathing bodies or figures sitting, half-sitting, reclining, outstretched flatly on the surface, and lying side by side. The limp bodies are submerged in a nearly shapeless setting that eschews the rules of scale and composition. Mingling in these landscapes are the contorted bodies of humans, horses and dogs, fragments of ammunition, vehicles of some kind. Standing upright are figures holding guns; they are faceless or zombie-like. After the war, these works acquired titles like *Figural Composition* (*Kompozycja figuralna*), *War* (*Wojna*), *War II* (*Wojna II*), and *Germans* (*Niemcy*). Among the exceptions are the paintings *Procession* (*Pochód*) and *Figures (Doctors)* (*Postaci (Lekarze)*)—the tension they exude is not caused by the portrayal of violence but by a profusion of solidified matter undergoing decay. It can be felt, however, that an echo of recent violence provokes this analogy of routine gestures and is the driving force behind the figures' movements.

I imagine that it was exactly these works that Jarema was downplaying by alleging a lack of innovativeness, covering them up with the flower paintings she claimed to have abandoned sculpture for. They certainly emerged in an act of ethical responsibility as a testimony of terror. Surely, however, they also presented a formal challenge for the artist to convey the experience of violence, fear, destruction and death in a non-representative and non-illustrative way. We do not know today how many such works she made; it is possible she gave them away to friends so as not to let the testimony amass in a single place, to disperse the archive of testimony and let the pictures of scattered bodies continue to be thought of as beaches, circuses and frolics in landscapes for as long as possible.

I bring up these wartime practices of creating numerous interpretative "smokescreens" in order to illustrate the scale of the problem. Jarema practically never worked in conditions that were free of institutional pressure, and so her encoding was usually at least two-fold: she immersed herself in reality so that her art would arise from the "rhythm of the present" and she explored the resulting sensations with avant-garde means. At the same time, she encoded it all in a way so as to redirect, disperse or conceal the effects. Whenever history sped up and the intensity of the disturbance left its mark on her—during World

War II, in 1949 and in the mid-1950s, when Jarema was diagnosed with an incurable disease—there were significant turning points in her artistic growth. It's as if political depression and situational impasses caused a shift in her thinking about form.

The decisive factor for Jarema was most likely the suspension of agency, which forces one to reevaluate their position and redefine the relationship between powerlessness, passivity and resistance. More than anything, it changes one's perception of everyday life. It was by no coincidence that the artist thought of her art as a far cry from geometric abstraction, which she described as pure and rational. What she put forth was an affective abstraction, an abstraction based on conceptual feeling and thinking—intentionally tied up in the material world and tying up ever more bodies in interrelations. Jarema argued that it was exactly this kind of art that offered the fullest chance to "grasp and express the [presently] mounting conflicts of feelings and issues."¹⁵ It is highly likely that the experience of impeded or suspended agency forced her to look for ways out: to use artistic means to generate connections that would create a passage between the here-and-now and whatever lay ahead.

RHYTHM FROM IMPASSE

Jarema's shift in agency corresponds in an interesting way to Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism.¹⁶ Here, however, there is no sign of an external object of desire that perpetuates the state of difficulty. The object is creative potential, freedom of opposition and loyalty to one's own defiance toward factors that stand in the way of creation. After all, Jarema's methods of failure management are a response to pressure. The practices of playing the killjoy, compromising one's own status, enacting emotional ambiguity, limiting presence and creating distance are not the end goal themselves, even if they are elements of an artistic strategy. The end goal is to devise a new rhythm from a state of impasse.

Berlant writes that people forced to negotiate and to relinquish their position, who are worn out and torn up by the political promises that they latched on to, most often discover a new logic and new chances just at that very moment when things reach an impasse. Additionally, they cease to be dependent only on the rules of public development and the economics of profit, prestige and advancement. Confronting oneself as an object of political and historical depletion and becoming aware of one's own insignificance eliminates the risk of disintegration. The failure of ideals and plans—and their resulting satisfaction—"is not cause for mourning or rejoicing: it is just a fact."¹⁷ These material and affective facts can engender a more deeply intimate testing of forms and a discovery of strength in disturbance.

After years of silence and observing "spines being broken," Jarema publicly declares that she has colossal trust in herself—and this is not empty rhetoric. Berlant states that a person driven by the dynamics of cruel optimism "can stand detaching from the promise of his habituated life and can thrive in the openness of desire to form,"¹⁸ and that what replaces the ballast after the identification of social belonging is a sense that the individual is finally truly alive, precisely in the tension of searching for new forms and in the hunger for what is to come.

15 Jarema, "Wypowiedź w dyskusji," 119.
16 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011).
17 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 34.
18 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 36.

In 1955, when Jarema learned that she had only two or three years left to live, she reportedly took it in with a strange exuberance, or even excitement. The same day she got her diagnosis, she said to her son: “Now I’ll have even less time for you than before. I have so little of it and there’s so much I won’t get around to doing.”¹⁹ And so, she locked herself away in her studio, where she stayed practically day and night. It was similar in Paris in 1957, where she underwent a several-month-long round of treatment: she spent her free time mainly cooped up in her hotel room, working. In this situation, the experience of crisis—political and psycho-physical—impelled her to step away from routine and created a “space for internal displacement.”²⁰ Gilles Deleuze described this mechanism as “deterritorializ[ing] from the normal by digging a hole in sense, like a dog or a mole.”²¹ However, a question arises: What did Jarema create as she rode the wave of failure?

TISSUE-LEVEL ABSTRACTION

In around 1955, the artist confessed to Helena Blum that she hadn’t “achieved the kind of abstraction [she] had hoped to achieve.”²² Blum interpreted this self-diagnosis as sign of weariness and doubt. It seems to me, however, that Jarema was not speaking about herself as an agential individual experiencing a fiasco, but rather about the nature of the medium, about the difficulty or even impossibility of abstracting that which is corporeal, affective and material in art. In short, she was talking about a failure of abstraction, about exposing the crisis of abstractiveness faced by abstraction itself. Perhaps, reconciling with this perspective was the most important part of the process: to realize that abstract thinking and conceptual feeling are not objective, that in art there is no way to do away with the body, reflexes or engagement in things that are seemingly non-artistic.

The fault- or failure-oriented position that Jarema adopted also stemmed from the specifics of working with an unstable medium, from limited possibilities of perception and from the shortcomings of the language used to talk about these processes. At the same time, it was from this position that Jarema sought new angles as she consciously strove to embody abstraction. She wrote: “When we speak about art, it is as if we constantly begin anew. Could it be so elusive, so unattainable? No: it is alive and thus constantly changing.”²³ Thus, for her, it was not about failure as an objective of her pursuits but about creating life within her understanding and her spectrum. From such a perspective, Jarema’s avant-garde was to be a cognitive difficulty, a fault in the system, a fiasco of the policies of strong identity and unequivocal endorsement. Simultaneously, fallibility understood in this manner was the motor behind her actions; it fueled her departure from figurative esthetics and realism, and validated her distanced attitude to rational or geometric abstraction.

Many have described Jarema’s art as biological, whatever that may mean. Yet, indeed, there is something in her work that brings to mind all that is organic and amorphous, all that can affect the viewer’s body secondarily but intensely. This seems to result from a willful rejection of perfection as the goal, from a rebuke of the cult of carefulness

and of the finely honed form understood to reflect purity of craftsmanship and sterility of an image. What links her achievements at different stages in her life is an unwillingness to cover up the traces of the automatic, accidental, corporeal and quintessentially human. What changes, however, are the angles by which these qualities are revealed. Jarema’s paintings from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s are—as the artist herself described—above all “a contorted line.”²⁴ They are an affective abstraction, meaning that they transpose the way certain figures, objects, scenes and events are felt. They register the spectrum of these things’ movement as well as the psycho-physical impact they have on the artist.

Gradually, Jarema focused more and more on particular gestures, going on to create forms that resemble lateral cross-sections or tissue samples. Ultimately, she concentrates on the tissue-level dynamics of distress, undulation, permeation, exchange and the kinds of relations that seem to evade verbal description. I have already written about these works’ tissue-level materialism elsewhere,²⁵ and here I’d like to briefly expand on that. The paintings from the *Rhythms* (*Rytmy*), *Filters* (*Filtry*), *Words* (*Wyrazy*), and *Penetrations* (*Penetracje*) series in the last stage of Jarema’s life represent a distinct visual quality that I call tissue abstraction. There is something in these works that suggests a transcendence of conceptual, symbolic and mimetic influence. Jarema does not depict rational human beings or an anthropocentric order; in fact, she refrains from representing anything individual at all. If it has anything to do with a picture of a human being, then that would be only from a relational perspective, within a bigger picture of a human-non-human network. The artist is interested in tensions, in networks of momentary material relations, in the intermingling of different elements and formation of new connections. This is a visualization of community glimpsed from the perspective of tissues.

Jarema’s last works constitute an interesting breach of the myth of exclusivity: the artist transforms individuality into a concrete, material here-and-now of non-universal abstraction. The relations between elements in the network are impermanent and fragile just as every type of organic matter is brittle, frail and prone to decay. There is something of an affective logic in the mechanism of these images—they are the effect of psycho-physical excitement, but at the same time their expression transcends narration and illustration, they exert their influence via other channels. Jarema seems to suggest a failure of the rules of identity and identification. Her paintings have no boundaries; they transform individuality into something indefinite, conjunct, post-human. They occur outside of the narrow frames of identity, choice and endorsement. At the same time, they form relationships with other models of time and seek out new territories in which to achieve embodiment. Perhaps it is precisely thanks to this that they dispel the illusion of clear-cut boundaries between different types of matter. They are open in a multitude of ways, but they present the viewer with a *fait accompli*: they embody us and reduce us to sentient entities before we even have time to realize it. And in this, Jarema’s art of failure becomes our doing too.

*This text originated as a talk given at the *Psychobodies, not Figures* conference held at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw on 15–17 September 2023, and was subsequently published in the journal *Konteksty*, no. 4 (2024): 217–24. The essay was also included, almost in its entirety, in Polish, in Agnieszka Dauksza’s book, *Ludzie nieznaczeni. Taktyki przetrwania* (Karakter, 2024).

19 Aleksander Filipowicz, “Mówilem o niej,” in Chrobak, *Maria Jarema (wspomnienia i komentarze)*, 45.
20 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 48.
21 Quoted in Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 48.
22 Blum, “Maria Jarema – wspomnienia i refleksje,” 40.
23 Maria Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema, Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 150, trans. Arthur Barys.

24 Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” 163, trans. Arthur Barys.
25 Agnieszka Dauksza, “Wrażliwość tkankowa. Materializm plastyczny Marii Jaremy,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema, Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 257–82.

MARIA JAREMA:
*LET THE RAIL
SPLITTER AWAKE*

In 1949, Maria Jarema began working on a series of monotypes distinguished by an “organic” or “biomorphic” treatment of the represented phenomena.¹ This very approach to image carries a certain violence, an acutely tense emotion and spontaneity locked in an antagonistic clench with a desire for control. Monotype is a method of producing a single, unique print. Above all, it doesn’t require a printing press, a lithographic workshop, chemicals or a burin. As has often been noted, the technique bears a strong affinity to surrealist automatism and the Hegelian concept of “objective chance,” transposed by Breton into the realm of poetics. The process begins by coating a glass plate with paint, for example printing ink, though tempera may also be used; a drawing is then incised into this surface. A sheet of paper is pressed evenly onto the prepared plate. Alternatively, the paper may be placed on the painted surface and the drawing produced on the reverse side, for instance with a pencil. In both cases, once the paper is lifted from the plate, an image emerges. Speed is essential—the artist is constrained by the drying time of the paint. Thus, the presence—almost bodily—of an artistic subject is not merely a matter of impression. It appears as if imprinted in the density of strokes, scratches, and incisions. Such a drawing, which reveals a reality located beneath the surface, between the sheet of paper and the glass plate, records bodily movements; and reflexes, too. It is, as it were, a frozen fragment of our life, akin to the playful gesture of placing one’s hand on the glass of a photocopier and seeing it flattened into two dimensions, entirely black, with a white pattern of fingerprint lines. A monotype is a record of the intensity of life.

1. See Isabel Wünsche, *The Organic School of the Russian Avant-Garde: Nature’s Creative Principles* (Ashgate, 2015). Andrzej Turowski, *Biomorfizm w sztuce XX wieku. Między biomechaniką a bezformiem* (Fundacja Terytoria Książki, 2019).

FIG. 1 1 MARIA JAREMA, UNTITLED, 1949, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



FIG. 2 2 DORA MAAR, *PÈRE UBU*, 1936, GELATIN SILVER PRINT, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK



One of the most remarkable of Jarema’s compositions of this sort is held in the collection of the National Museum in Kraków, dating from 1949. The figure appears just as it would conventionally be rendered in a portrait painting: the scale is similar and, consequently, the relationship between the figure and the background, since portraiture requires a sufficient proximity to capture the most essential features. And yet—top to bottom—something in this figure contradicts the very idea of closeness. There is no face, but an abhorrent mask beneath which someone else is concealed. From within the open mouth—or rather from an abyssal maw—two narrow, almost feline eyes are staring back at us. This human-animal hybrid extends an arm towards the viewer—macabre and, at the same time, rag-like. The gesture is apotropaic. The repellence of the gaze is reinforced by an act of destruction—a white hand tosses a table into the air, the symbol of a home. This gesture of aggression, entirely unidirectional, is crucial. The grotesque figure, which shares so much with invertebrate life, appears to be of superhuman proportions. We experience a disruption of scale, akin to that produced by Dora Maar’s famous photograph *Père Ubu*, which presents a close-up of an armadillo embryo. “The big toe is the most *human* part of the body,” argued Georges Bataille in 1929 in the pages of *Documents*, “in the sense that no other element of this body is as differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape (chimpanzee, gorilla, orang-utan, or gibbon).”² Alongside the text were three different illustrations showing magnified views of a big toe, whose appearance was—colloquially speaking—decidedly inhuman. Envisaged by photographer Jacques-André Boiffard, the toe seemed to come alive, while remaining off-putting in its independent existence—it became an autonomous entity masquerading as a human individual.

Maria Jarema’s monotype is cloaked in further ambivalence at yet another level of meaning. It concerns the space in which information is exchanged between the image and its viewer. An outstretched hand is always an act of communication, even if the gesture’s intentions are sometimes misunderstood. In her literary theory, Julia Kristeva describes the term *jouissance* as a specific experience of pleasure combined with abjection, which is indispensable to our experience of subjectivity³. The same mechanism applies to Maria Jarema’s representation of a repulsive object which simultaneously attracts the gaze, exerting a magnetic pull. The black cavity gaping toward us—a mouth and an anus in one—reveals that things that seduce and annihilate are dialectically intertwined. The grotesque figure also serves as the artist’s reflection on the nature of an image itself. Images possess power—they are defiant and carry the potential to provoke emotions such as fear, shame and disgust.

The conviction that Jarema’s works from this period constituted a place of resistance against the demands of socialist realism, understood as both the dominant aesthetics and a mode of governing artistic life, is widespread and promoted in most of the literature on the artist. And yet, the issue of polemics with socialist realism tends to obscure another issue: a polemics with this kind of modernist narrative which is focused on values such as construction, structure, affirmation, clarity, and future. It is, therefore, not for the sake of formal similarity but rather due to a specific positioning vis-à-vis the “Apollonian” current

2. Georges Bataille, “The Big Toe,” in Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoeckl, trans. Allan Stoeckl et al. (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 20.
3. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (Columbia University Press, 1982).

of modernism—associated with the affirmation of order, harmony, rules and norms—that it is worth recalling, for comparative purposes, Louise Bourgeois’s drawings and prints (etchings) produced in this same period. Mignon Nixon stresses the significance of the body’s fragmentation, and the role of rejecting the “temptation of wholeness” in Bourgeois’s 1947 graphic series titled *He Disappeared into Complete Silence*.⁴ Rosalind Krauss characterizes virtually the entire oeuvre of the French-American artist within the framework of “abject art.”⁵ In their works from the second half of the 1940s, both Bourgeois and Jarema introduce motifs linked to corporeality and residue—to whatever has been rejected and repressed, to the abject. The abject is always political, and if feminist critique and Foucault are correct in asserting that the body itself is political, then its rejected residue must be political, too. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to trace the connections and flows between the realm of art and the realm of politics, to identify the points at which they intersect, and to show how the artist engaged in the politics of painting—shaping its rhetoric and language—in the climate and circumstances of political antagonisms that accompanied the trajectory of Jarema’s art.

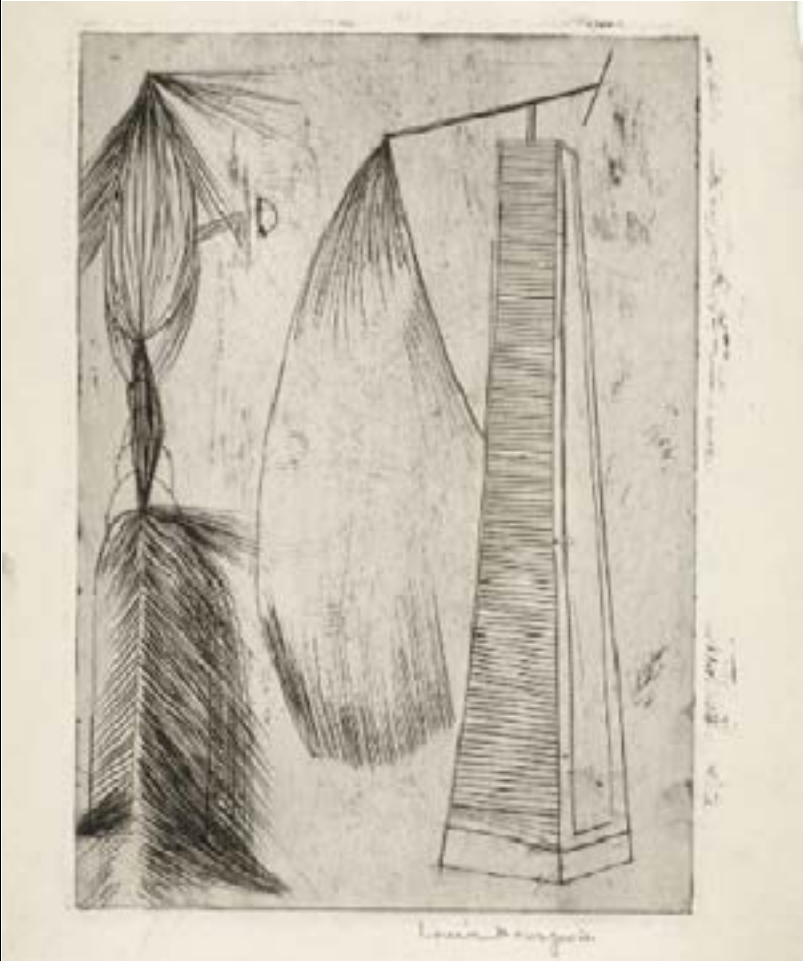
In 1945, Maria Jarema joined the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza—PPR). The PPR was the successor to the prewar Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski—KPP), even if it did not include the word “communist”—a choice linked to the complex history of the workers’ movement and the specific conditions of the prewar political scene in the country. Before the war, the Communist Party had been illegal in Poland. This distinguishes Poland from countries such as France and Czechoslovakia, and aligns it with Hungary, where, after the revolution of 1919, the communist movement was crushed and forced underground. Paradoxically, however, in Poland it was the Comintern itself that contributed most to the destruction of the communist movement—in 1938, the Communist Party of Poland was dissolved on charges of foreign espionage and effectively destroyed. Approximately one thousand members of its leadership were murdered in the Soviet Union following show trials. The KPP activists were also persecuted by the Polish state. Jonasz Stern—one of the artists associated with the Kraków Group (Grupa Krakowska), an art collective to which Maria Jarema belonged—was sent to a penal detention camp in Bereza Kartuska in the late 1930s. Therefore, after the war, the communism of prewar Polish communists was often an object of both admiration—many had spent years in prison—and caution, since Stalin had turned them into enemies of their own party.

The Kraków Group was formed in the early 1930s in Kraków. The group’s goals were not exclusively artistic as it had emerged out of resistance to the growing wave of antisemitism. Students affiliated with nationalist organizations grouped within the so-called Camp of Great Poland (Obóz Wielkiej Polski) demanded a reduction in the number of students of Jewish origin, propagating the slogan *numerus clausus* and, ultimately, *numerus nullus*—that is, a complete “Aryanization” of universities. This was accompanied by violence, and met with tacit consent by the authorities of most universities and schools in Poland.⁶ In November 1931, in a corridor of the Academy of Fine Arts, nationalist

students assaulted a Jewish student. Those who came to his defense and those who attacked him were punished alike for participating in the commotion. Outrage at this unjust verdict marked the beginning of the Kraków Group. The bond between artists such as Jonasz Stern, Mojżesz Szwanenfeld, Henryk Wiciński, Leopold Lewicki, and Berta Grünberg, grew stronger when, the following year, a student exhibition at the Academy was subjected to censorship. The group thus emerged not to promote a defined artistic program (which had never been discursively formulated), but rather as an act of self-defense. It also had a pronounced class character, being composed of individuals of modest background and from outside elite circles, for whom joining the communist movement (Kraków Group was affiliated with KPP) constituted an emancipatory strategy. In 1935, the literary journal *Lewar*, published under the auspices of the Communist Party of Poland, printed a letter signed by members and followers of the Kraków Group—a censored one at that (there are two blank spaces on the page).⁷ The letter declared accession to the United Front of Artists and Writers being formed at the time by the Comintern, which at that stage sought to decrease conflicts between the communists and the socialist party. In the letter to *Lewar*, the Group articulated its own demands: the introduction of social insurance for artists, free education and equality of all nationalities. It also opposed the expulsion of nonconformist artists from the Academy, compulsory religious practices in schools and the “domination of art by the Church.” Jarema’s worldview did not change after the war. In the same year that she joined the Polish Workers’ Party, she formally left the Roman Catho-

⁷ “Do redakcji Lewara,” *Lewar*, no. 13 (1935): 2. Signed by Sasza Blonder, Berta Grünberżanka, Kornel Filipowicz, Maria Jaremówna, Leopold Lewicki, Jacek Puget, Bolesław Stawiński, Jonasz Stern, Henryk Wiciński.

FIG. 3 LOUISE BOURGEOIS, *PIVOTAGE DIFFICILE*, 1947, ETCHING, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK



IL. 4 MARIA JAREMA, *FORMS (FORMY)*, 1952, MONOTYPE AND INK ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



⁴ Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (The MIT Press, 2005).

⁵ Rosalind E. Krauss, “The Destiny of the ‘Informe,’” in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Zone Books, 1997), 236.

⁶ See, among others, Natalia Judzińska, *Po lewej stronie sali. Getto ławkowe w międzywojennym Wilnie* (Krytyka Polityczna, 2023); Monika Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, “paragraf aryjski”*. Antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931–1939 (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999).

lic Church—a decision officially certified by the Kraków municipal authorities on August 28, 1945.⁸

Today, two opposing historical narratives concerning communism exist. One is deeply suspicious of emancipation and revolution, always ready to stress that one of the greatest dangers for twentieth-century intellectuals was entanglement with such utopians beliefs as communism or socialism.⁹ The other narrative goes against this current—it examines the positions of non-privileged groups and places emphasis on emancipation, emotions and individual trajectories, asking to what extent actions undertaken in relation to the Party could be considered subjective and autonomous.¹⁰ Looking at Maria Jarema’s oeuvre anew, it is not enough to dismantle patriarchal art history or formalist art history alone—one should also question the historical narrative that understands politics primarily as manipulation and management and thus denies agency to individuals, simply because they were party members. I propose a reconfiguration, or a shift. In this narrative, the avant-garde will not be set in opposition to communism. Nor will there be an opposition between “independent art” and “Party art,” or between Marxism and abstract painting. These categories begin to converge while we, in turn, move closer to the ways in which they were lived and experienced by historical actors themselves.

In Polish art historiography, communism and communists are most often perceived as a homogeneous formation. It is, however, worth thinking otherwise—seeing communism as a territory of disputes. Maria Jarema was an artist who participated in an important debate brewing within communism, but not only there—also within Marxism and, last but not least, within the Party itself. A number of phases or iterations of this discussion unfolded in postwar Poland. This was by no means a marginal debate, but rather one of the most fundamental controversies around art to occur in the twentieth century: a conflict concerning art’s social function, its role in the education of the masses, and its significance to the idea of a revolution.

One stage of this dispute occurred in Poland in 1946 in the form of a debate over the “social isolation” of contemporary painting. Avant-garde art—practiced at the time primarily by artists associated with socialism and the communist left—was accused of being detached from the masses and of cultivating an elitist and incomprehensible form of creativity. This was paradoxical, given that the attack was launched in the pages of *Odrodzenie*, a journal edited by members of the very same political formation.¹¹ The conflict surrounding contemporary art developed throughout 1949 also. In February of that year, Maria Jarema, acting as a member of the executive committee of the local branch of the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza–PZPR) within the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków– ZPAP) in Kraków, traveled to an official conference on art held at a state-run center in Nieborów. There, a debate took place concerning the directions of artistic policy and the state’s mode of managing art.

8 Certificate from 28 August 1945, issued by the Kraków Municipal Office, confirming Maria Jarema’s withdrawal from the Roman Catholic religious community. The artist’s family archive, Kraków.
9 Cf., Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944–1956* (University of California Press, 1992).
10 See, Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow, *Obywatel Jidyszlandu. Rzecz o żydowskich komunistach w Polsce* (Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2009); Łukasz Bertram, *Bunt, podziemie, władza. Polscy komuniści i ich socjalizacja polityczna do roku 1956* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2022); Agnieszka Mrozik, *Architektki PRL-u. Komunistki, literatura i emancypacja kobiet w powojennej Polsce* (Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2022).
11 I have discussed this in detail in the book *Surrealism, realizm, marksizm. Sztuka i lewica komunistyczna w Polsce 1944–1948* (Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2021).

Juliusz Starzyński was invited to deliver the inaugural keynote address. He was a member of the prewar establishment, a loyal adherent of the state cultural policy of the Second Republic of Poland, an affiliate of the Camp of National Unity (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego–OZN), and a member of the Party. He expressed views that were completely contrary to the principles of the artistic avant-garde. What is more, he condemned contemporary progressive painting for signs of “decay.” The Nieborów conference—from which an extensive transcript remains—is often regarded in the narratives on art in the Polish People’s Republic as a turning point in the process of introducing centralized control over art. However, as Agata Pietrasik and Piotr Słodkowski rightly argue, it would be a mistake to view it as such a sharp pivot since the changes taking place at that time had the character of a process rather than a rupture.¹² The testimony I shall now cite lends support to this thesis.

Maria Jarema is often said to have fallen “silent” during the period of socialist realism. This is misleading, and it would be more accurate to say that she found herself at the very center of the struggle. On November 22, 1949, a meeting of the “Visual Artists” Primary Party Organization of the PZPR within the Kraków chapter of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers was held.¹³ Representatives of the analogous Party cell in Warsaw attended the meeting in order to present the objectives of the *First Nationwide Thematic Exhibition*, planned for 1950 in Warsaw. A conflict quickly emerged. Painter Helena Krajewska, secretary of the Warsaw Primary Party Organization at ZPAP, spoke of a special committee which “monitors the work of comrades and is responsible for its ideological direction.” Jonasz Stern declared that he had not submitted his sketch for evaluation by such a committee and had no intention of contributing a painting to the planned exhibition.¹⁴ He also rejected the accusation of “formalism” directed at his milieu, arguing that the true formalists were in fact artists such as Fryderyk Pautsch, Władysław Jarocki, and Felicjan Kowarski—painters of the older generation with an academic orientation, who were still active shortly after at war—since they were ideologically indifferent and concerned mostly with securing commissions.¹⁵ Stern dismissed the discussion on socialist realism proposed by Krajewska as “gibberish.”¹⁶ Another member of the Kraków Primary Party Organization, graphic artist Jerzy Malina, stated bluntly: “You are not going for realism, you are going for kitsch.”¹⁷ Maria Jarema, too, was unafraid to speak her mind.¹⁸ She declared that she had not taken part in the presentation of sketches because she did not feel like it and, moreover, she did not expect to be accepted to the planned exhibition. “I don’t paint the way you want me to paint anyway,” she snapped.¹⁹ The discussion—or rather the reprimand issued by Warsaw on the “formalists” from Kraków—ended dramatically: “Comrade Malina jumps up and, raising his voice, shouts toward Comrade Krajewska and Witz, ‘You are blackmailers,’ and leaves,

12 Agata Pietrasik and Piotr Słodkowski, *Czas debat. Antologia krytyki artystycznej z lat 1945 – 1954. Tom 2. Realizm i formalizm* (Fundacja Kultura Miejsca, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, 2016), 17. Jarema’s Nieborów speech is also discussed by Agnieszka Dauksza and Małgorzata Dziewulska in this volume.
13 Minutes of the meeting of the Primary Party Organization from 22 November 1949, Primary Party Organization of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) at the Association of Polish Artists and Designers, Board of the Kraków District, State Archive in Kraków, ref. 29/2625/0/-/1.
14 Minutes, 37.
15 Minutes, 13.
16 Minutes, 22.
17 Minutes, 14.
18 Minutes, 22.
19 Minutes, 22.

slamming the door.”²⁰ In the “Appendix to the minutes” preserved in the State Archives in Kraków, Malina’s words are quoted more explicitly: “We attest that Comrade Jerzy Malina, leaving the meeting of the ‘Visual Artists’ Primary Party Organization in Kraków (at which comrades from the Warsaw’s Primary Party Organization were also present, namely First Secretary Comrade Krajewska and Comrade Witz), said: ‘I don’t give a shit about you’ or ‘kiss my ass,’ which amounts to the same thing, really.” Signed: Paciorek Stanisław, Brykner Bronisław, W. Bednarski, and two illegible names.²¹

This was not merely a struggle over positions of power, nor simply a debate about form. It was a profoundly political conflict, rooted in an entanglement of desires, affects, and worldviews. A division within the communist left had persisted for several decades and concerned the role and place of art in relation to revolution, to the masses, and to the problem of mimesis.²² Andrzej Turowski argues that the antagonism between the two paradigms—“ideological” and “productivist”—in the theory and practice of avant-garde art, already emerged in Russia in the aftermath of the Revolution.²³ The conflict evolved over time, it also expanded beyond the party, involving broad circles of the intellectual left, yet the tension between these two poles endured, all the more so because both sought legitimation within Marxism. To put it more figuratively—translating the dispute into a realm perhaps more familiar to an English language reader—on the one hand, we have Georg Lukács,

²⁰ Minutes, 22.
²¹ Appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the “Visual Artists” Primary Party Organization of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) at the Association of Polish Artists and Designers, from 22 November 1949, State Archive in Kraków, ref. 29/2625/0/-/1, p. 37.
²² Ronald Taylor, ed., *Aesthetics and Politics: Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertold Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno* (Verso, 1980).
²³ Andrzej Turowski, “Le monde à bâtir... la philosophie de la construction,” in *Existe-t-il un art de l’Europe de l’Est ?* (Les Éditions de la Villette, 1985), 89–103.

FIG. 5 MARIA JAREMA, *FORMS (FORMY)*, 1950, FROM THE EXH. CAT. *ZWEI POLNISCHE MALERINNEN: MARIA JAREMA, MARIA HISZPAŃSKA-NEUMANN*, BERNER KUNSTMUSEUM, MARCH 20–APRIL 16, 1963

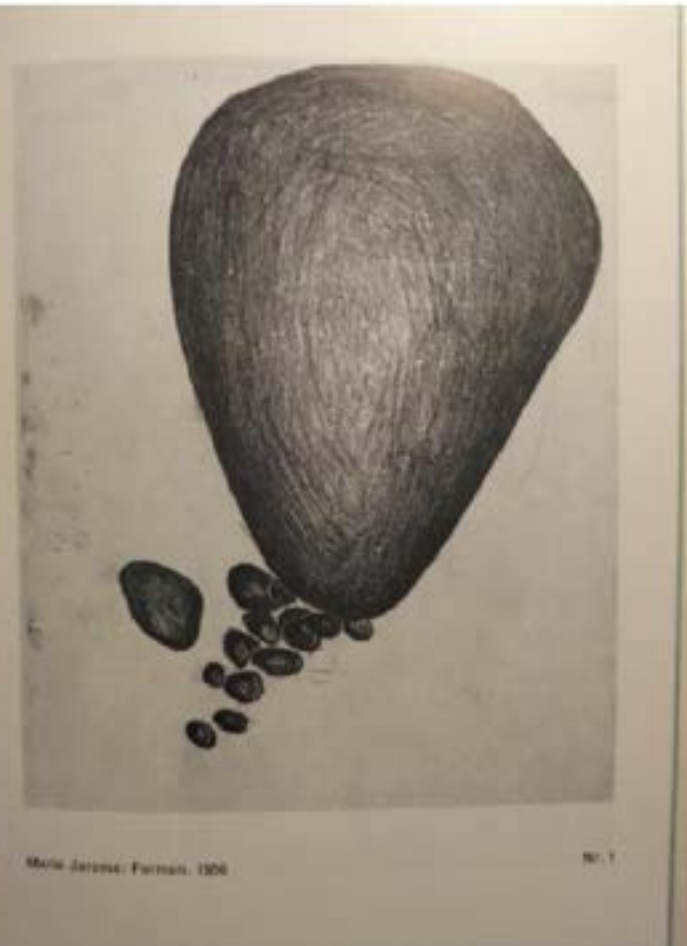
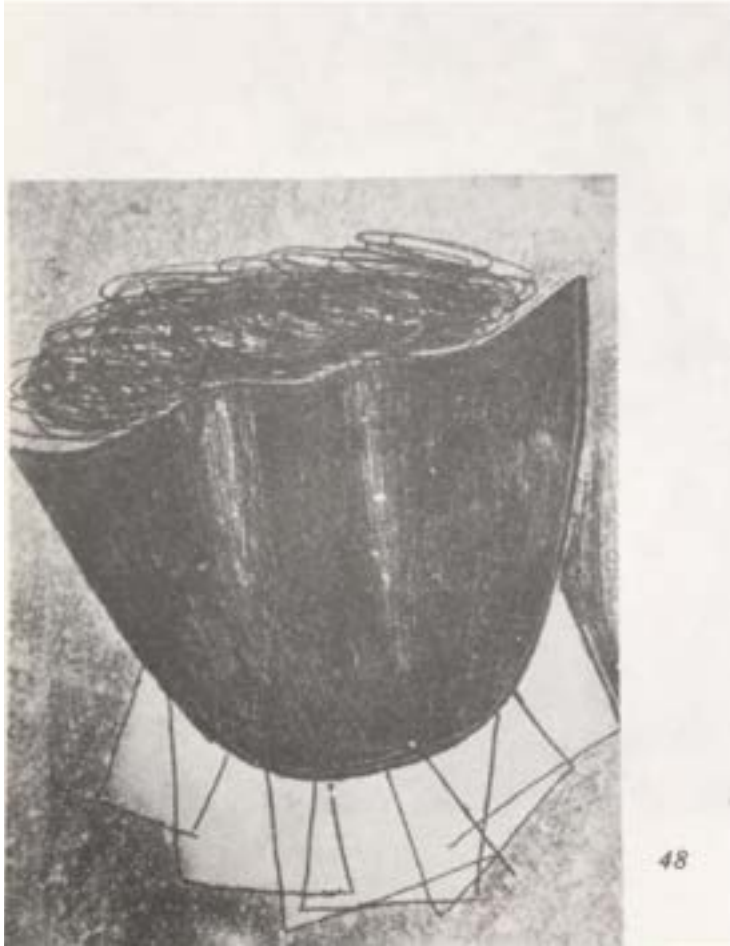


FIG. 6 MARIA JAREMA, *COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA)*, CA. 1952, MONOTYPE, FROM THE EXH. CAT. *MARIA JAREMA, STOWARZYSZENIE ARTYSTYCZNE GRUPA KRAKOWSKA*, GALERIA KRZYSZTOFORA, KRAKÓW, 1988



fighting for “realism,” understood as the representation of historical reality; on the other, we have Walter Benjamin, who combined aesthetic theory inspired by *Proletkult*²⁴ with surrealism, and sought to harness “intoxication” in the service of revolution. A similar division became visible in Poland as early as in 1945. Should revolution be represented as a subject of art, or should it transform its language? Should art be realist in the sense of mimetically reproducing images of the world, or should it be abstract while nonetheless containing emancipatory potential? This was the core of the dispute, reverberations of which also appeared in the program writings of intellectuals associated with the Polish Workers’ Party camp, published in literary journals such as *Kuźnica* and *Odrodzenie*.

Tracing the concepts circulating in all of this (in polemics primarily concerned with literature), it is impossible to miss a group of terms that were effectively blocked from entering socialist discourse. Experimentation, dadaism, absurdity and surrealism were deemed hazardous. Warnings were issued about disintegration and decay, about the destruction of bodies and forms, about the decomposition of the represented world.²⁵ What is particularly striking here is the vividness of these references. Writers—who were the main participants in this debate—condemned what they described as an unreflective recourse to images of war, an excessive exposure to bodily destruction and disintegration of the world. Such tendencies, they argued, hindered the construction of a new order. Negative connotations were attached above all to what was fluid, “billowing,” slippery and corporeal. Surrealism, in particular, was regarded as a negative influence.

Bataille argued that only by taking into account what he termed *bas materialisme*, the “base materialism” bound up with sexuality and excretion, can matter be adequately defined. He regarded all other definitions as idealist. According to *Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss*, Bataille identified precisely what mainstream modernism rejected in order to secure the coherence and consistency of its self-image.²⁶ In debates on art in Poland between 1945–49, the problem was therefore not “socialist realism” *per se*—that would be an excessive reduction. What was at stake was rather a model of experiencing culture. Socialist realism, promoted as art seeking harmony and order, art that constructively shaped the masses, can thus be understood as a mere modality of modernism, rather than as an externally imposed or arbitrarily enforced phenomenon.

Thus, in the context of this split within modernism, I propose to look at Jarema’s work of the late 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. In the 1949 monotype which was the point of departure for this text, the artist recounts the connection between enjoyment and revulsion, fear, and the grotesque. In this period similar motifs appear in her other works, where we can see a ruptured organic continuity of skin and body, growth, multiplication, budding fragments and parts, incoherence, residue, and perhaps pain.

Agnieszka Dauksza highlights Jarema’s materialism, drawing parallels between Catherine Malabou’s theory of plastic materialism and the artist’s treatment of form.²⁷ I would complement and reinforce this interpretation by situating it within a political context—

²⁴ Association *Proletarian Culture* founded in 1917 in Soviet Russia to promote new, revolutionary working-class esthetic, and dissolved in 1932.
²⁵ Mieczysław Jastrun, “Poza rzeczywistością historyczną,” *Kuźnica*, no. 1 (1945); Jan Kott, “Powrót do rzeczywistości w poezji,” *Odrodzenie*, no. 18 (1945).
²⁶ Yve-Alain Bois, “The Use Value of Formless,” in Yve-Alain Bois, Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Zone Books, 1997), 13–40.
²⁷ Agnieszka Dauksza, “Wrażliwość tkankowa. Materializm plastyczny Marii Jaremy,” in *Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (Słowo obraz/terytoria, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2022), 290.

specifically, the debates surrounding art at the time and attempts to ennoble the role and position of the artist within society. Jarema’s works are specifically conditioned by contemporary discussions on the relationship between art and reality, in which arguments concerning humanism recur, alongside calls for art to be rooted in reality and to adhere to rationalism—to be “human.” It is worth noting that what is at stake here is a particular interpretation of modernism that had become relatively entrenched in Poland, sharpened in the 1930s and reaching its peak in the following decade—an interpretation that excised modernism’s subversive strands. In summary, it can be said that within modernity, two opposing propositions of its understanding clash. On the one hand, there is the Enlightenment or “humanist” model, grounded in progress and faith in modernization; on the other, an avant-garde subversion that, while also belonging to modernity, incessantly undermines and questions its integrity and coherence.

Let us listen to one of the many representatives of the former, “humanist” trend, who lamented in 1948: “contemporary art, instead of offering solace and consolation, inflicts abandonment and betrayal on humankind—pushing it into the abyss and denying assistance at the very moment it is most needed.”²⁸ What else does Jarema do if not provocatively stage a regression in the face of a subject of culture constructed in such a way? She undertakes a deliberate descent into a state preceding “civilization and humanism,” namely toward projections which psychoanalysis associates with early childhood—when one’s own image has not yet coalesced into a subject capable of recognizing its boundaries. As the aforementioned Mignon Nixon wrote of Louise Bourgeois: “the great force of negative energy renders her art so intensely fragmentary and so radically resistant to the temptation of wholeness.”²⁹ The same holds true for Jarema’s art—floating forms, fragments, detached patches and fibers of tissue originate from a time prior to the emergence of a coherent image of the body, revealing the truth of how subjectivity is experienced at moments of crisis.

For Jarema, this very period—when the language of her postwar monotypes was taking shape—was a time of major confrontation, not only within the internal forum of the Party but also in the public sphere, namely in her return to the theater stage.

On 23 June 1949, a figure resembling a large puppet appeared on a platform in the courtyard of the “Pod Baranami” Palace in Kraków. It was clad in a costume with multiple white, grasping hands. According to Julian Kydryński, it represented a “personification of [William Randolph] Hearst’s press.”³⁰ *Let the Rail Splitter Awake*, based on Pablo Neruda’s poem about Abraham Lincoln, was a multimedia spectacle: Prokofiev’s music flowed from loudspeakers; a narrator’s voice reciting the poem—performed by an actor—resounded across the courtyard; and on a screen stretched at the height of the first-floor balcony “an episcope projected images of the famous figures mentioned in the text.”³¹ The performance, created jointly by Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Jarema, involved an ensemble from the Trade Unions’ Workers’ Cultural Center in Kraków. This theater piece constitutes a forgotten link—between the prewar and postwar Cricot Theater, between visual art and theater, and between Jarema’s prewar and postwar political engagement.

It is a missing link also because of its surrealist context, whereby “the performance gave the impression of an expanded pictorial space akin to certain surrealist paintings by Paul Klee.”³²

Neruda’s poem from 1948 addresses the struggle against capitalism and the future of communism, legitimated by the victory over fascism in World War II. Like the entirety of *Canto General*, of which it is a part, *Let the Rail Splitter Awake* is packed with a repertoire of visionary metaphors and bears much potential in its poetic imagination. At the same time, it is a propaganda piece, with a portrait of Joseph Stalin working late into the night in the Kremlin for the sake of humanity. The “Rail Splitter” is a famous moniker of the legendary president Abraham Lincoln, whose spirit is meant to return to capitalist America “with his axe and his wooden plate to eat with the peasants.”³³ The poet’s ambition is to unite the people, in all corners of the globe, above the ruling elites.

Only two photographs of the scenography and staging devised by Jarema and Kantor survive to this day.³⁴ One of them depicts the figure of Hearst, likened in the poem to an “octopus” and described as spreading the venom of fascism and racist violence.

There is a visual correspondence between the hands of this figure and the white hand extended toward us in Jarema’s 1949 monotype. Does the stage interpretation render this seemingly enigmatic form more concrete? If we were to treat the monotype in question as a model or an illustration, it would amount to little more than a costume design. Yet perhaps the relationship between the stage mask and the imagined mask is more complex—perhaps the two mutually induce one another, participating in the production of an encounter with what Freud described as the “uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*)? Jarema’s theatrical experience must have influenced her approach to art, but this influence cannot be reduced merely to the presence of the motif of a puppet or a mask. It is something deeper, more fundamentally structuring.

In the prewar period, Jarema collaborated with the Cricot Theater, founded by her elder brother Józef Jarema. In the years 1934–35, she designed stage sets and costumes for productions such as a dance performance by Maria Mikuszevska, *The Green Years (Zielone lata)* by Józef Jarema, and *The Mute Canary (Niemy Kanarek)* by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes.³⁵ There was, however, another equally significant dimension to her theatrical involvement. This was a kind of “political nativity scene” for which—between 1936–38—she designed sets, costumes and masks together with Jonasz Stern. The plays, written by Adam Polewka, were addressed primarily to working-class audiences and staged at venues used by trade unions (tram workers, retail workers, and miners) in Kraków, but they were also presented to the intelligentsia at the House of Visual Artists (Dom Plastyków) on Łobzowska Street. According to Karolina Czerska, the boundaries between the ostensibly apolitical Cricot Theater and Polewka’s interventionist projects were not clearly defined—at times, the two spheres overlapped, e.g., in 1937, Polewka’s satirical play titled *Herod and the Arians (Herod i Ariowie)* was staged under the auspices of Cricot.³⁶ There was yet another, third field of theatrical-visual activity in which Jarema participated: rally-based performances connected with strikes and demonstrations. One such

28 Andrzej Banach, “Sztuka nieludzka,” *Dziennik Literacki*, no. 18 (1948).
29 Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*.
30 Juliusz Kydryński, “Niech się zbudzi Drwal,” *Dziennik Literacki*, no. 27 (1947).
31 Leokadia Kałuska, “Niech się zbudzi Drwal,” in *Grupa Krakowska, Dokumenty i materiały*, p. XI, ed. Józef Chrobak (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, 1993), 51–52.

32 Kałuska, “Niech się zbudzi Drwal,” 52.
33 “Let Abe come with his axe and his wooden plate to eat with the farmers,” Pablo Neruda, *Let the Rail Splitter Awake, and Other Poems*, trans. Joseph A. Bernstein (Masses & Mainstream Inc., 1950), 37.
34 Two photographs in the text, Juliusz Kydryński, “Niech się zbudzi Drwal,” *Dziennik Literacki*, no. 27 (1947).
35 *Maria Jarema*, exh. cat., Palace of Art, Krzysztofory Gallery, Kraków, November 1962, 37.
36 Karolina Czerska, “Maria Jarema w pejzażu teatralnym Krakowa lat trzydziestych,” in Dauksza, *Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 210–11.

example was the set for a commemorative event for the victims of a violent suppression of a strike at the Semperit factory in Kraków in 1936. In the show, figures with bandaged faces—symbolizing the murdered workers—entered the stage. These actions employed strong, unequivocal means and a modern visual language known from proletarian amateur theater, which was particularly popular in Germany.³⁷ “A working-class spectator sensed a new form of spectacle,” observed the painter Erna Rosenstein in her recollection of this event.³⁸

In Maria Jarema’s art, what took place onstage and what appeared in a painting permeated one another in a striking way. The monotype may therefore have been created already after the staging of *Let the Rail Splitter Awake*, in the aftermath of the impression left by the uncanny presence of the theatrical figure. The misshapen hand in the 1949 monotype is obscene—it endeavors to touch us, attempts to cross the boundary of the image, and even to hurl a small object across it. This gesture constitutes a reflection on the possibilities of an image—one which acts with complete immediacy, like a scream or a gesture.

“From an alluring visual composition or an enchanting fabric of sound, the Dadaists turned the artwork into a missile. It struck the viewer,” remarked Walter Benjamin in 1936.³⁹ It is within this context—of dadaism and, later, surrealism, of avant-garde theater and film which dismantled the aura, transformed the relationship between viewer and image, altered and modified distance—that Jarema’s art of the second

³⁷ Odette Aslan, *L’Acteur au XXe siècle* (Seghers, 1974).
³⁸ Erna Rosenstein, “Akademia Sztuk Pięknych i środowisko lewicy artystycznej Krakowa (1934–1939),” in *Cyganeria i polityka. Wspomnienia krakowskie 1919–1939* (Czytelnik, 1964), 404.
³⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (second version),” in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland et al. (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 39.

IL. 7 PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, MARIA JAREMA, TADEUSZ KANTOR. *LET THE RAIL SPLITTER AWAKE*, SCENE FROM A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE, 1949, DIGITAL PRINT, COURTESY OF LECH STANGRET AND DOROTA KRAKOWSKA



half of the 1940s should be considered. In her life, this was exactly the moment when hope for the possibility of a new form of understanding between artist and viewer was rekindled.

“Art is aggression,” the artist once said in a radio interview.⁴⁰ In her statements on art one can discern a conviction that the assumed barrier between the image and the viewer must be shattered at all costs: “For art to come into being in a given country, there must be an artist and there must be an audience. ... These are, as it were, two acts of creation—one of the artist who creates, and the other a secondary creation, the creativity of a viewer who, without an effort of imagination and intellect, will never see anything, will never hear anything, will never understand anything.”⁴¹ The emphasis on this exchange, on relationality and co-creation, constitutes one of the most important elements of Maria Jarema’s affective Marxism, rooted in surrealism, in the vision of social equality, and in a belief in the emancipatory power of an image.

⁴⁰ Mieczysław Porębski, “Introduction” in exh. cat., *Maria Jarema*, Palace of Art, Krzysztofory Gallery, Kraków, 1962, 6.
⁴¹ “Notatki Marii Jaremy,” in *Maria Jarema (wspomnienia i komentarze)*, ed. Józef Chrobak (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, 1992), 57.

THE WAR.
MARIA JAREMA'S
RESPONSE
TO BRUTALITY

This essay offers a close reading of two works by Maria Jarema: *Niemcy* (*Germans*, 1941, Aleksander Filipowicz Collection, on deposit at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw) and *Plaża / Wojna II* (*Beach / War II*, Aleksander Filipowicz Collection, on deposit at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 1942). Taking Michael Rothberg’s concept of an “implied subject” as my point of departure, I shall reflect on problems of artistic response and responsibility in relation to experiencing war and witnessing the genocide of Jews. Following Judith Butler’s thought, I shall pose the following questions: how does one oppose violence in the field of culture without reproducing its logic? Violence circulates; however, is its incessant movement indispensable?

The time, events and experiences of the World War II and the Holocaust are omitted, silenced, or treated as a rupture in synthetic art history narratives in Poland.¹ And yet it was precisely the War and the genocide of Jews—treated here as two distinct, separate events—that determined the later choices, decisions, and stakes of a biographical, political, artistic, and existential nature within the cultural field. Visual arts output from the period of the War and the Holocaust remains poorly recognized in Poland. Meanwhile, preliminary research reveals a very high level of activity on the part of artists—this was a time marked not only by silence (which I nonetheless treat as a vital form of bearing witness), but also by an actual eruption of visual testimonies, as well as reports, records, and notes. For the most part, these operated outside both the dominant and alternative currents of art history. What occurred was not so much a silencing as a continuation—sometimes a transposition or intensification, and in other cases a change or rupture—of previously known esthetics, modes of expression, and visions of the world and of humankind. On the other hand, even a partial survey has made me aware that there are exceedingly few works by non-Jewish artists—those “poor Poles looking at the ghetto”—that engage with the reality of the Holocaust.² This stands in stark contrast to the proliferation of visual testimonies produced by Jewish artists (including non-artists) in ghettos and camps, as well as beyond them.

¹ I refer here to several of the most well-known critical—and often mutually opposed—research frameworks, which nonetheless consolidate and reinforce the postwar state of research. Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* (Rebis, 1999); Piotr Piotrowski, “Auschwitz versus Auschwitz,” in Piotrowski, *Sztuka według polityki. Od Melancholii do Pasji* (Universitas, 2007); Anna Markowska, *Dwa przełomy. Sztuka po 1955 i po 1989 roku* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2012); Piotr Juszkiewicz, *Cień modernizmu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2012); Marcin Lachowski, *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945–1960* (Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013). Particular attention should be paid to this last publication, as it is the first study to situate postwar art in Poland (up to 1960) in relation to the War and the Holocaust (even though it does not distinguish between these two experiences). A partial exception in this regard is a monumental work by Andrzej Turowski titled *Budowniczości świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej* (Universitas, 2000); in this study, the author introduces the shift brought about by World War II and discusses works by Władysław Strzemiński and Teresa Żarnower which relate, on the one hand, to the Holocaust and, on the other, to the experience of occupation: wartime drawings and collages from the series titled *To My Friends, the Jews* (Moim przyjaciółom Żydom, Strzemiński) and collages from the series *The Defense of Warsaw* (Obrona Warszawy, Żarnower). A new approach toward the events of World War II and the Holocaust in the studies on art has been proposed, among others, by Luiza Nader, *Afekt Strzemińskiego. „Teoria widzenia”, rysunki wojenne, Pamięci przyjaciół – Żydów* (Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, 2018); Piotr Ślódkowski, *Modernizm żydowsko-polski*. Henryk Streng / Marek Włodarski a historia sztuki (Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, 2019); Luiza Nader, Piotr Ślódkowski, “The History of Art in Poland and the Holocaust. Introduction,” *Miejsce*, no. 6 (2020), <http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/en/english-the-history-of-art-in-poland-and-the-holocaust-introduction/>; Agata Pietrasik, *Art in a Disrupted World. Poland 1939–1949*, Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021); Andrzej Turowski, *Radykalne oko. Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, słowo/obraz terytoria*, 2023); Luiza Nader, “Wizualne świadectwa (z) Zagłady. (Bernard Henryk?) Fein, Witold Lewinson, Artur Prinz/Arie Ben Menachem i Mendel Grosman,” in: *Oto widać i oto słysać. Świadcowie Zagłady w okupowanej Polsce*, ed. Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, Dariusz Libionka, and Alina Skibińska (Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów IFIS PAN, 2024), 800–69. In my research, I have argued for understanding the Holocaust as an event and experience that is fully pivotal to the history of art in Poland; see: Luiza Nader, “Afektywna historia sztuki,” *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1 (2014), 32–36; also: “Sticky spot of crime. Rethinking art history in Poland,” *EHR1* (2015), <http://ehri-project.eu/sticky-spot-crime-rethinking-art-history-poland>. I also postulated the idea of a departure from thinking about modern or contemporary art in Poland as a postwar phenomenon in the book *Afekt Strzemińskiego*....

² I wrote more broadly on the subject of works by non-Jewish artists reacting to the Holocaust, as well as on the problem of being an observer, of responsibility, of looking and seeing in the articles: Luiza Nader, “Teatr i mur. *Tańczący Mieczysław Wejmana*,” in *Mieczysław Wejman. Tańczący*, ed. Piotr Rypson (Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2022), 58–71 and “Polscy obserwatorzy Zagłady. Studium przypadków z zakresu sztuk wizualnych – uwagi wstępne,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, vol. 14 (2018), 166–211.

A modest reflection on Jarema’s artistic practice in the years 1939–45 provides, on the one hand, an instructive example of the exclusion of works made in this period from discussions on her oeuvre.³ And, on the other, prompts me to pose a question formulated some time ago by Jan Tomasz Gross: “*What did you do / what was done to help Jews?*” It is worth noting here that, under these conditions, “doing nothing” was also a form of action and carried certain consequences.⁴ I shall therefore ask about Jarema’s stance towards wartime violence and the murder of Jews unfolding in her immediate proximity, day after day—in the Kraków ghetto and in the Płaszów camp.

BRUTALITY

From the very moment the German forces entered Kraków, the city was subjected to ongoing repressions, arrests, and executions—I shall mention only a few of the so-called pacification actions. On 6 November 1939, *Sonderaktion Krakau* took place—the arrest of Kraków’s university professors during the inauguration of the academic year at the Collegium Novum. Those detained were deported to the Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp. On May 16, 1940, the AB Operation (*Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion*) began—an extraordinary pacification campaign involving arrests, imprisonment, executions, and other crimes committed against Polish intelligentsia living in the General Government, including Kraków. In the spring of 1940, a manhunt targeting Polish reserve officers resulted in the detention of approximately two thousand individuals, some of whom were murdered.⁵ On 16 April 1942, the police carried out arrests at the Artists’ Café (Kawiarnia Plastyków) on Łobzowska Street, where Maria Jarema had worked, first as a waitress and later in the cloakroom. A total of 198 people—artists, journalists, and actors—were imprisoned and subsequently deported to Auschwitz. Only around twenty survived. The café itself was first placed under German administration and then, in October 1942, it was closed. At the same time, underground associates of Jarema and Filipowicz—Ignacy Fik and, somewhat later, Mieczysław Lewiński together with his wife Pelagia—were also arrested. All three were affiliated with the “R” (Revolution) communist group. Fik and the Lewińskis had known one another from their scouting days. They were beaten and tortured during interrogation; Fik was murdered in a mass execution, Lewiński most likely took his own life.⁶

Another of the so-called pacification actions, aimed at intimidating and murdering members of the elite, took place on 28 July 1943 in Wola Justowska—a district of Kraków where Jarema lived with her family:

On that fateful day, the Germans “occupied every house, violently pounding on doors and shouting at residents who were half asleep and unsuspecting. Having ordered them to dress quickly, [the Germans – trans. note] drove the stunned inhabitants hastily onto an empty grassy area behind the post office building. Everyone was commanded to lie face down on the ground and, under threat of

³ There exists but one article on the subject, penned by Wiktoria Koziol: “Pochód (1940). Twórczość Marii Jaremy w latach 1939–1945,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo* (Terytoria Książki Foundation – Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021), 229–246. Jarema’s wartime oeuvre is also discussed by Agnieszka Dauksza in an essay included in this volume (previously published as: Agnieszka Dauksza, “Maria Jarema i awangardowa historia porażki,” *Konteksty* 347, no. 4 (2024), 217–24).

⁴ Jan Tomasz Gross, “Sprawcy, ofiary i inni,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, no. 10, vol. II (2014), 886–87.

⁵ Andrzej Chwalba, *Okupacyjny Kraków* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002), 179–80.

⁶ See: Agnieszka Dauksza, *Jaremianka. Biografia* (Znak, 2019), 284 and Janusz Wojtycza, the entry: “Lewiński Mieczysław Stefan,” in *Harcerski słownik biograficzny*, vol. IV, ed. Janusz Wojtycza (Muzeum Harcerstwa, 2016), 116–20.

death, not to move or look around. Young men were selected, given shovels, and ordered to dig a large, deep trench on the spot.” Moments later, that trench proved to be their collective grave.⁷

Among the several thousand people who were forced to lie face down on the ground for many hours that day was Jarema herself, who at the time was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. In 1944, her partner and father of their son, Kornel Filipowicz, was arrested and imprisoned first in the Gross-Rosen concentration camp in Rogoźnica, and subsequently in the concentration camp in Oranienburg.

On 21 March 1941, the ghetto in Kraków was sealed off, and in October the Nazis introduced the death penalty for leaving the ghetto without a permit. In 1942, the so-called deportation actions took place, during which 12,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto to the Bełżec extermination camp and murdered there. As Dariusz Libionka wrote, on 28 October 1942:

... yet another “resettlement action” was carried out in Kraków. It was commanded by Wilhelm Haase (1906–1952). Events that unfolded that day surpassed anything that had previously occurred in terms of sheer barbarity. People were captured in the streets, dragged from their homes, beaten, shot at. The youngest children from the Jewish Orphans’ Home were driven out of the city and murdered. Older children were included in the transport to Bełżec together with the Orphans’ Home director, Anna Feuerstein. The sick, the elderly, and people with disabilities were treated with equal cruelty. Those selected for deportation were

7 Chwalba, *Okupacyjny Kraków*, 178.

FIG. 1 MARIA JAREMA, *GERMANS (NIEMCY)*, 1941, DISTEMPER ON CARDBOARD, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



assembled at Zgody Square and from there driven on foot to the railway station in Płaszów. In total, 4,500 people were deported, and 600 were murdered.⁸

In October 1942, the Germans established a camp that soon began to function as KL Płaszów. On the night between March 13 and 14, 1943, the Kraków ghetto was liquidated.

[members of the Jewish *Ordnungsdienst*, i.e., the Jewish Ghetto Police—trans. note]
The toll of those two days was devastating: the Germans deported and murdered approximately three thousand people, while nearly two thousand men, women and children were killed in the ghetto. In the days that followed, the “Odemen”—as members of the Jewish *Ordnungsdienst*, i.e., the Jewish Ghetto Police, were commonly referred to—stripped the bodies of the dead of their clothing. The corpses were transported on platforms to Płaszów and buried in mass graves.⁹

“PERPETRATORS, VICTIMS AND OTHERS”¹⁰

The painting titled *Niemcy* (*Germans*, 1941, tempera on cardboard, 50 × 65 cm) [FIG. 1] is divided into two zones by a diagonal blue line. The scene that I am looking at appears to unfold in a space that is simultaneously interior and exterior. The colors in the painting correspond to the palette of Zygmunt Waliszewski’s oeuvre (yellow, light blue, red, green), yet at the same time they seem strikingly inappropriate, in sharp contrast with the subject matter and the events depicted. To the left, I see curtains, striped wallpaper, a lamp hanging from the ceiling, a piece of furniture or an instrument; there is even a cuckoo clock. One might assume that this is a bourgeois living room, bedroom, or children’s room—or perhaps all of these at once. The center is occupied by three figures. The largest, placed slightly to the left, is a rather coarse figure of a half-naked woman with a pink body, her head shown in profile and turned to the left. Her right arm hangs down, holding and protecting (as if from bumping into something) the small figure of a child with a gaping pink mouth. With her left arm, she is pushing away the figure of a soldier who presses in on her from the right. The woman’s pink body is partially covered by a brown-green fabric, from beneath which a leg protrudes, bent at the knee. She appears to have been caught by surprise in an intimate situation—perhaps during sleep, or bathing, or while feeding a child. She is looking to the left, towards an object invisible to us, while the soldier she is pushing away aims his rifle in that same direction. The background is formed by figures that seem to belong to a different order altogether. This group includes, on the left side, the bent silhouette of a woman in a striped skirt, with a face devoid of distinguishing features. The two remaining figures stand by a window; their humanity is suggested only by visible eyes and heads devoid of mouths.

On the right-hand side, the room appears to extend further; I can even spot a rocking horse at its very edge. This zone, however, is occupied by ominous figures of armed soldiers—the titular “Germans.” It is one of them, the figure in the center, who strikes the child with the butt of his rifle. Shown in profile, his face is light blue; he wears a helmet

8 Dariusz Libionka, *Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie* (Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2017), 162.
9 Andrea Löw and Marcus Roth, *Juden in Krakau unter deutsches Besatzung 1939–1945* (Wallstein Verlag GmbH, 2011).
10 *Sprawcy, ofiary i inni* is the title of an essay by Jan Tomasz Gross, 886–87.

and a green uniform. The brown rifle “brushes against” the child, passes beneath the woman’s arm, and is aimed beyond the limits of the painting. Immediately behind the soldier, I see a blue toy-clown whose triangular cap seems to be knocked off his head, as if by a violent gust of air or a forceful push. Right above him, a mysterious bird (perhaps a stuffed toy?) snaps its beak shut in astonishment. Higher still, right next to the right-hand edge, a brown wooden rocking horse appears to be rushing to the rescue. Of whom? The mother? The child? Someone out of frame?

German soldiers march through a child’s room, a bourgeois living room, and a bedroom. They intrude on the intimacy of the home, exposing its domestic space to war, violence, and brutality. The central scene captures the moment of a house search—of violence and beating—perhaps immediately preceding murder. The three key figures are a half-naked woman, the screaming child that accompanies her, and the soldier who strikes the child with the butt of his rifle. The soldier’s figure is simultaneously obstructed by the woman’s arm. The remaining figures in the painting appear to be terrified bystanders.

Humans and toys are rendered equivalent in their modes of being—toys are animated, while people are objectified—a set of motifs that Jarema seems to be quoting from the work of Witold Wojtkiewicz. A toy clown sheds tears; a wooden rocking horse gallops to the rescue. Human figures, by contrast, literally lose their faces, forsake their human attributes, and are transformed into abstract forms.

The second work of Jarema’s, variously titled *Beach* (*Plaża*) and *War II* (*Wojna II*),¹¹ **[FIG. 2]** and tentatively dated 1942, is in

¹¹ Various catalogues provide different titles of this work; see: Bożena Ilkosz, *Maria Jarema. 1908–1958*, (Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu – Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Zachęta, 1998), 55; Marta Orczykowska, ed., *Jaremianka. „Zostaje w tym teatrze. Podoba mi się tu”* (Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora „Cricoteka” – Muzeum Śląskie w Katowicach, 2018), n.p. (artwork no. 5).

IL. 2 MARIA JAREMA, *BEACH (WAR II) (PLAŻA (WOJNA II))*, 1942, DISTEMPER ON CARDBOARD, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



tempera on cardboard. In the family inventory it was titled *Plaża*, while in the literature I’ve come across the following variants: *Wojna II*, *II wojna* (*Second War*), and *II Wojna / Plaża* (*War II / Beach*). Jarema had already produced portraits of sunbathing people, yet this work deviates considerably from those representations. She also painted a tempera work with a very similar—indeed, almost identical—composition, titled *Wojna* (*War*), and dated by the artist 1943. The date of *Beach* or *War II* is not certain, however—the work was not dated by Jarema herself; it could have been conceived after *War*. This may explain why the other (possibly earlier) work came to be referred to as *Wojna II* in the literature. A painting executed in watercolor and tempera titled *Execution* (*Egzekucja*) also exists. At any rate, the title of the work under discussion remains uncertain. In my interpretation here, I will draw on the clues suggested by the titles themselves—both war and beach.

The scenes I’m looking at unfold against the backdrop of a shimmering spring or summer landscape: green grass, a sandy shore, and a blue sky—or perhaps the reflective surface of water. The composition is executed with small, firm brushstrokes, somewhat in the spirit of a chromatic “eye test.” Most objects—albeit not all—are delineated with contours. The painting vibrates with slightly dulled colors, which once again recall the palette employed by Witold Wojtkiewicz. The figures that appear here are not so much human as humanoid. Indeed, it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between figures, objects and landscape, which seem to overlap and interpenetrate across multiple temporal and existential planes. In some cases, it is hard to distinguish what constitutes a figure and what already belongs to the landscape or to the stage props.

IL. 3 PABLO PICASSO, *STUDIES FOR GUERNICA* IN *CAHIERS D'ART*, VOL. 12, NOS. 4–5, OCTOBER 1937, P. 113



Like the work *Niemcy* (*Germans*), this painting is also diagonally divided into two zones. On the left-hand side I see a group of four figures. The pink face of the first figure—presumably a child—bears vertical brown strokes indicating eyes, as if wide open in terror. Devoid of a mouth, the figure is mute, deprived of the capacity for speech. Its head is turned slightly to the left, covered with a small black headpiece. It supports a second figure, significantly larger, naked, semi-reclining in an unnaturally contorted pose, with the right hand open and fingers splayed. This figure has elongated limbs that stretch and dissolve into the landscape on the right-hand side of the painting, as well as corpse-like greyish-pinkish-bluish colors, mottled with patches of brown. Its head, too, appears to be covered—perhaps with hair, or a wig? Shown in profile, it is deprived of eyes, ears, and nose; its head is tilted upwards, mouth opened in a scream. Below, in the lower left corner of the composition, stands a brown cannon.

In the section of the painting discussed above, Jarema makes an explicit reference to Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica* [FIG. 3], which she saw in Paris in 1937 during the International Exhibition of Arts and Technology. The tilted head and mouth opened in a scream are almost a direct quotation from Picasso’s famous anti-fascist work, recalling the figure of the woman holding her dead child in her arms. Here, however, it seems to me that the configuration of the group is reversed and the brutality multiplied—it is the child who supports the mother dying in agony.

Slightly higher up, I see two figures shown in profile—one larger and one smaller. Both are oriented toward the right side of the composition. The larger figure appears to be constructed from three barely connected components—a head that almost no longer touches the neck, which in turn rests on an elongated black torso. The head of the larger figure resembles a brownish-bluish skull seen in profile. There is a black hat slipping off of it. The smaller figure, tinted brown and pink, is composed of five elements that seem to be losing their balance, on the verge of falling apart. An irregular, oval head—marked only by the faint outline of an eye, mouth, and nose—is set atop three trapezoidal forms. Similarly to the other figures, it is crowned with a black head covering. This figure, too, appears to be looking at someone or something on the right side of the composition. Are they watching people sunbathing—is that the sight that provokes their terror? How is it possible to bathe, to lay in the sun, to rest, to lead a carefree life in such close proximity to an unfolding catastrophe? Or perhaps they are not looking at all, perhaps they do not wish to see? Their eyes may be closed.

The force with which the hat appears to be falling, the symbolic disintegration of their bodies, the livid colors, and the horrific, almost grotesquely rendered fear visible on the face of the larger figure, together with the fact that the figures stand one behind the other, the larger behind the smaller, suggest that I am witnessing the execution of a man and a child—perhaps a father and a son. Nearby, a child supports its dying mother. Is this the execution of a Jewish family? Such an interpretation seems to be supported by the head coverings, which resemble black *yarmulkes* and a hat. In 1942, so-called deportation actions were organized in the Kraków ghetto, during which 12,000 Jews were deported to the Bełżec extermination camp and murdered there. It was late spring; the heat was intense. The deportations took place on June 2, 4, and 8, 1942:

Police officers, the “Odemen,” chased nearly two thousand people on foot toward the railway station in Płaszów, located approximately four kilometers away. There, they were crammed into cattle wagons and transported to the extermination camp in Bełżec, where they were murdered immediately upon arrival. ... On the night between June 3 and 4, yet another police round-up took place with the participation of the Jewish policemen. [The perpetrators] searched one street after another, checking identity papers and chasing people to a square. In the early hours, heavily armed units of the German police entered [the ghetto]. They were accompanied by the Polish [Blue] Police and the so-called Polish *Baudienst* (construction service). The square was filling up with people. The ghetto resounded with gunfire; people were kicked, beaten and abused. Auxiliary units were hurrying to remove the bodies ... more and more people were crowded in the square in scorching heat. ... Soon, the entire city learned about the atrocities committed on that day.¹²

The second, right-hand section of the painting suggests that I am, indeed, looking at an execution. It presents an altogether different reality, even if everything—let us recall—appears to unfold within the same landscape. The three figures stretched horizontally on the grass or sand can be interpreted in two ways—I do believe this ambiguity is deliberately sustained by the artist herself. These figures may represent people sunbathing—carefree and indifferent to those who are dying right beside them. They may also be corpses—the latter interpretation suggested by their horizontal position (even though their bodies are rendered in shades of brown rather than bluish grey “corpse-like” tones). Their legs are directed—as if they were rifle barrels—toward the man and the child. A similar logic governs the two odd vehicles on wheels that are moving ominously toward the group on the left. Only at the bottom of the painting do I see a naked child—carefree, running across the grass with an animal.

I suggest approaching this painting as an interface of two realities coexisting within the same environment: that of the victims and that of the bystanders. In Jarema’s depiction, however, the latter are, in a sense, positioned closely to the perpetrators. On the left-hand side, the artist confronts viewers with murder—possibly an execution. She makes the viewer face pain, suffering, fear, the disintegration of body and subjectivity, the loss of any possibility of articulating this liminal situation other than through a scream. On the opposite side, the artist represents a world seemingly not moved by the suffering of others—the sun is shining, people are sunbathing, picnicking; children are playing cheerfully. And yet, this second realm, meeting the gaze of the dying and the suffering, harbors a latent threat—after all, this order may collapse at any moment. In the background, I can see two small reddish-brown mountains resembling volcanoes; one of them is already erupting, almost imperceptibly. One of the figures among the observers lies face down on the ground. A few months later, in July 1943, during the pacification of Wola Justowska, Jarema herself lay like this on the grass for more than twelve hours, awaiting death.

Both works depict spaces of violence. In fact, they could be made into a kind of a diptych, or even—were we to include the work *War* from 1943, which I have not discussed here—a triptych. In the first

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Löw and Roth, *Juden in Krakau*, 147, 149, 152.

painting, *Germans*, there is a clear division between perpetrators (the Germans) and victims, whom we can identify as women and children. The victims symbolically belong to what is imagined as a safe sphere of domestic and familial life. War and its agents transgress boundaries and violently destroy states, cities, homes, families, people, subjectivities, bodies, and objects. The victims, although depicted by Jarema as naked and exposed to violence, are not stripped of agency or resistance. The woman at the center of the painting pushes the perpetrator away, shielding the child; through her movement and the positioning of her body, she does not so much reproduce violence as impede it. In the second case—the painting titled *War II / Beach*)—more actors enter the space of violence alongside the victims and perpetrators. The victims are shown in a liminal situation—a state of extreme psychological and physical pain, at the moment of execution, just before death. The perpetrators are located outside of the depicted scene, on the right-hand side. Their presence is both assumed and suggested through the represented image. On the right side, we encounter the other actors in this scene—those who are present during the genocide but are not its direct agents. However, their actions, or rather lack thereof—“doing nothing” which is equated here with “sunbathing”—have a huge impact on the condition of the victims, whose suffering remains unseen.

The sunbathers are not Germans. They are what Michael Rothberg has dubbed “implicated subjects”—namely subjects who have been “entwined” or “folded into,” “im-plied in” stories and situations that exceed individual agency.¹³ Rothberg observes that “systems of oppression are interrelated,” and thus “most people do not occupy positions at the bottom but rather occupy more ambiguous, mixed positions close to various vectors of power.”¹⁴ In this way, “implicated subjects” function less as detached observers or direct accomplices than as “transmission belts of domination.” Their actions are unintentional, isolated, and dispersed—it is their accumulation that leads to violence.¹⁵ As Hannah Arendt—to whom Rothberg refers—argued, Nazism brought about a moral collapse that tore apart preexisting forms of social solidarity and friendships related to everyday life. The “invasion of criminality into the public sphere” entails various forms of society’s implication in the actions of a regime.¹⁶ Rothberg draws attention to a distinction articulated by Arendt between guilt and responsibility. Guilt is contemporaneous with the perpetrator’s act, whereas responsibility extends not only to those implicated at the moment the act was committed (even if they did not participate directly) but also to transgenerational communities¹⁷—thus projecting responsibility into the future. This distinction separates guilt from responsibility and, at the same time, differentiates “implication,” “entanglement,” or “being folded into” historical processes from complicity.

The sunbathers may be only incidentally implicated in a space of brutality. They are neither perpetrators nor victims; they nonetheless inhabit a field of violence, even if death and suffering do not affect them directly at that moment. This violence, however, is neither incidental nor singular in nature but rather extended and enduring. On

the other hand, their “doing nothing” in the face of genocide and the Holocaust constitutes an action, for—as Jan Tomasz Gross has argued—“violence obliges people and institutions who witness it to become engaged, specifically to oppose it.”¹⁸ It is not only the sunbathers who function as implicated subjects—viewers, too, are implicated alongside them. *Beach / War II* is compositionally structured in a manner analogous to *Guernica*—it places us, the viewers, at the heart of events, at the center of catastrophe; it entangles us in the scene of violence and renders us “implicated subjects.”

PAINTING. THE FORCE THAT OVERCOMES VIOLENCE

Judith Butler points to the relationship between subjects who adhere to the principle of non-violence and those who are subjected to violence. She points to their strong bond, the reciprocal flows between them, and the implication of one “self” into another.¹⁹ The principle of non-violence constitutes the foundation of the conviction that interpersonal relations are grounded in reciprocity. Relationality can assume destructive forms; at the same time, however, it serves mutual—or rather multilateral—sustenance and support; it is life-generating.²⁰ The principle of non-violence breaks with individualism and posits equality: we are all mutually interconnected and affect one another—both human and nonhuman entities alike. This approach, however, does not entail the absence of force. As Butler writes, “it is a right, a demand articulated with words, gestures, and actions, through networks ... and assemblies.”²¹ The philosopher does not refer to actions within the field of art. However, I, for one, believe that artistic practice can potentially assume precisely the form of thinking, assertion, and action advocated by the author of *The Force of Non-Violence*.

At the level of everyday life—permeated by violence, experience of threat, and death—the Jarema family took considerable risks. As Agnieszka Dauksza states in her book, from the outbreak of the War until the winter of 1940, the Jarema family lived in Wola Justowska together with Teresa Rosenson. When Teresa’s life became endangered by a denunciation, they intervened on her behalf, arranging for her to stay with a friend in Rzeszów.²² At the same time, Kornel Filipowicz’s short stories are permeated by a sense of guilt and responsibility stemming from the insufficient help provided to Teofila Kleinberger, the wife of Jonasz Stern. After months of searching for shelter and repeatedly changing hiding places, exposed to the constant threat of denunciation and blackmail by *shmaltzovniks* on the so-called “Aryan” side, Kleinberger—driven by despair—ultimately turned herself in to the Gestapo. She was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943.²³

Jarema’s art oscillates at the threshold between figuration and abstraction, waking vision and dream, impaired sight, blurred and uncertain perception, looking at scenes beyond comprehension or those that shatter perception altogether. Both *Germans and Beach / War II* function as subjects that demand our gaze—an insistent, attentive, obsessive form of looking, even if it has been fallible. Through her ambivalent representation, and through her refusal to employ either the rhetoric of a document or literalness, Jarema resists the violence and

13 In the Polish context, Roma Sendyka introduced the concept of an implicated subject to the field of research on witnesses; Roma Sendyka, “Od świadków do postronnych. Kategoria bystander i analiza podmiotów uwikłanych,” in *Świadek: jak się staje? czym jest?*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza and Karolina Koprowska (Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2019), 61–82.
14 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford University Press, 2019), 35, 37.
15 Rothberg, 53.
16 Rothberg, 46.
17 Rothberg, 46.

18 Gross, *Sprawcy, ofiary i inni*, 886.
19 Judith Butler, *The Force of Non-Violence. An Ethico-Political Bind* (Verso, 2020), 8.
20 Butler, 9.
21 Butler, 24.
22 Dauksza, *Jaremianka...*, 242–45.
23 Dauksza, 265–67.

brutality of extreme events—events that, by inundating viewers on a daily basis, initially provoke shock but ultimately produce numbness and indifference. After all, as we know well from the vast archives of perpetrators, photographic or filmic representations of subjects in liminal states; subjects in crisis, victims, carry within themselves a component of—or at least a potential for—violence. In the case of the Nazis, photographing Jewish victims constituted another form of cruelty. How, then, do we respond to violence without perpetuating its displacement? In what ways can an image, a sculpture, an object, or an action oppose brutality while affirming a non-violent world?

In her postwar statements, Jarema defined a painting as the space of an event comparable to a “collision of planets,” as a “battlefield,” a “field of struggle”—a site of liberated forces exerting a powerful impact on an entangled body, mind, and the affective–emotional life of a human being:

The canvas is a battlefield, so says one of the French *tachistes*. This definition of the white rectangle is open to interpretation. ... Is it a battlefield of two warring adversaries, two opposing forces comprising a multitude of elements which, through their mutual destruction, through the emotions of this game, through collision, give rise to a new phenomenon, a new life—the life of a painting. ... The artist does not fully follow this struggle. Once unleashed, the forces take the artist by surprise, and curiosity about this unforeseeable outcome becomes the sole—or perhaps the main and only—driving force, liberation of creativity. ... There are times when the artist (at the moments of greatest effort and the greatest release of sensitivity) feels the responsibility for unleashing these forces, for their psychochemical action, for their unconscious complication of human feelings and thoughts. The artist begins [with them], manages [them]. These are rare moments, when the artist briefly regains the sensitivity of a child—or even a barbarian—whose powers of apperception are so sharp that art’s operation would provoke biological shocks across their body.²⁴

Thus, the canvas becomes a space of positive forces which—even though it contains layers of tension, contrast, and aggressive drives—is, once covered with painterly matter, nevertheless a cause of life, the life of a painting. The force of a painting does not shatter bodies or objects, it does not wound or kill; rather, it enables, releases, opens up a potential for change. A painting is a force that transforms, a force that overcomes brutality. Can we therefore assume that the two tempera works discussed here are not merely visual representations or artistic objects, but also forms of action—attempts to generate an affirmative force under conditions of powerlessness and in the name of resistance to violence? I hear in them a right and a demand: “war against war,” a “roar of colliding planets” whose echo continues to resonate and re-activate, carrying the “there and then” towards the “here and now.”

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²⁴ Maria Jarema, “Notatki rozproszone,” in Dauksza, *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, 158–59.

“THEATER OF REBELLIOUS
PUPPETS”: ON EMANCIPATORY
MOTIFS IN MARIA JAREMA’S
ACTIVITY IN THE CRICOT
AND CRICOT 2 THEATERS

“Theater of Rebellious Puppets” was a phrase used by the master of ceremonies introducing performances of the prewar Cricot Theater, with which Maria Jarema was associated between 1934–39 as a set, costume and puppet designer, as well as an actress.¹ In the case of Cricot, this slogan constituted an esthetic rather than a political manifesto. It referred primarily to the artistic revolution that the theater’s creators sought to achieve on stage, adopting a program of rejecting norms, genre divisions, hierarchies, and conventions in the realms of esthetics, acting, stage movement, and repertoire. They drew from popular and street culture, including puppet theater, which was associated with fairground entertainment or works for children.² Nevertheless, a streak of political engagement, expressed among other things through the figure of a puppet, became a key element of the “political nativity play” (*szopka polityczna*) genre, as staged by Cricot.³ The subversive potential of a puppet was used in these plays as a tool for socio-political critique.

In 1955, Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Jarema, together with Kazimierz Mikulski, established the Cricot 2 Theater, invoking the legacy of prewar Cricot and the transgressive potential of the “Theater of Rebellious Puppets.” As Jarema serves as an important link between these traditions, this essay examines her pivotal involvement in both formations, with particular emphasis on the role of the mask, stage makeup,

1 Tadeusz Kantor also referred to this term later. See Stanisław Żytyński, *Bez rampy i sztampy: wspomnienia o młodym Krakowie lat trzydziestych* (Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1972).
2 These sources of inspiration, which brought with them the esthetics of the grotesque, humor, and sometimes obscenity, were already suggested by the very name of the theater, where Cricot is a quasi-anagram of the Polish phrase “To cyrk,” meaning “It’s a circus.”
3 This aspect of Cricot’s activity was studied by Karolina Czerska in “Maski i lalki w teatrze Cricot,” *Teatr Lalek*, nos 3–4 (2019), and Karolina Czerska, “Cricot: marzenie o teatrze politycznym (fragmenty),” in *Polityki Awangardy*, ed. Agnieszka Karpowicz, Jakub Kornhauser, Marta Rakoczy, and Aleksander Wójtowicz (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2021), 331–342.

FIG. 1 MARIA JAREMA, COSTUME DESIGNS, FROM THE ARTIST’S SKETCHBOOK, 1935–1938, INK AND GOUACHE ON PAPER, INK ON REVERSE, PRIVATE COLLECTION



and costume. These elements co-create the figure of a “puppet-like” actor or dancer, who emerges as a living abstraction—a kinetic sculpture, a marionette.

POLITICAL NATIVITY PLAYS

Satirical political nativity plays emerged in Poland out of the cabaret culture of the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴ Initially drawing on the tradition of church nativity plays, they were gradually stripped of their religious context. The political potential of nativity plays manifested itself fully only in the period of the Second Polish Republic (1918–39). Their sharp satire was aimed at the state authorities, mocking prominent politicians represented as caricatured puppets.

The Cricot Theater, and Jarema with it, aligned themselves with this tendency by producing “workers’ nativity plays” under the leadership of Lech Piwowar and Adam Polewka.⁵ From 1935, Polewka worked closely with Cricot and was even considered one of its driving forces. Aside from performances on the Cricot’s own stage, the plays were staged in industrial plants. Polewka’s collaborators were the most socio-politically radical artists associated with Cricot, including Jarema.⁶ For her, political nativity plays (alongside the organization and visual design of rallies and marches) offered a way of active political engagement through her art—advocating for workers’ rights and opposing the rise of fascism in Europe.⁷

For Józef Jarema—Maria’s brother and a cofounder and artistic director of the Cricot Theater, as well as a set designer, director, and actor—the Dada movement served as a vital source of artistic inspiration, particularly through his contacts with Tristan Tzara and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes in 1920s Paris. However, he also drew heavily from folk traditions, primarily Galician culture. These influences included Polish nativity plays, medieval performances by itinerant artists known as *igrce*, and likely the Ukrainian *verteps*—itinerant puppet plays combining religious and secular themes—which he would have seen in his native Sambor.⁸

The Kraków cabaret tradition was equally important to the artist, as was the situational humor of *opera buffa*. The formula of a puppet nativity play was transformed for the production of *Herod and the Arians* (*Herod i Ariowie*) staged at Cricot—here, the puppets were replaced by live actors and dancers wearing oversized masks.

The design of the puppets created for political nativity plays can be assessed primarily through recorded memoirs, as almost no documentation has survived. In the Józef Jarema archive analyzed by Karolina Czerska, Natalia Sielewicz found original photographs documenting the play *Lajkonik*, based on a text by Józef Jarema and Eugeniusz Stec, and staged in Bucharest in the autumn of 1939. No complete puppets have been preserved either—only two plaster heads survive,⁹ created by Maria Jarema in collaboration with Jonasz Stern for one of the nativity plays, most likely Polewka’s *Abyssinian-Krakow Nativity Play* (*Szopka abisyńsko–krakowska*), which premiered in 1935 at the Artists’ House in Kraków, the Cricot Theater’s first home. These are fragments

4 On the subject of cabarets and nativity plays, see Dariusz Kosiński, “Polityczność lalkowa,” in *Lalki: teatr, film, polityka*, ed. Kamil Kopania, Joanna Kordjak, exh. cat. (Zachęta–Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2019).
5 A political activist (member of the Communist Party of Poland since 1932), driving force of the workers’ theater scene, and director of the Workers’ Theater in Sosnowiec.
6 Also including Jonasz Stern, Sasza Blonder, and Henryk Wiciński, among others.
7 The nativity plays addressed various themes in response to current events; for instance, they mocked the colonial ambitions of the government at the time.
8 The *vertep* tradition also inspired the Ukrainian avant-garde theater; it was first adopted by Les Kurbas, whose *Christmas Vertep* (1919) marked the first time a puppet appeared on his theater’s stage.
9 The artist’s family collection.

of puppets representing Joseph Goebbels and the informant Karol Macioł. Two other puppets were described by critic Stanisław Żytyński: “the puppets of Haile Selassie and Mussolini, created by Jarema and Stern, were incomparable in their visual expression and dynamic movement.” What’s more, “the Abyssinian in a flowing white robe was made from a spring, which gave him an extraordinary advantage in the fight against the corpulent and sluggish Duce, squeezed into a fascist uniform with a vast number of medals.” Żytyński highlights both the comical, caricatured expression of the puppets and their peculiar materiality: “Made of various scraps, wire, rags, and springs, they were so excellent in movement and expression that their mere appearance provoked volleys of laughter.”¹⁰

Their existence was ephemeral by design: the puppets were produced quickly and at the lowest possible cost, utilizing various scraps provided by shoemakers, furriers, and carpenters. The surviving accounts provide an insight into both the working method (which was collective, the visual artists serving simultaneously as designers, manufacturers, and performers) and the result—a specific esthetics defined by an exceptional freedom in the use and combination of materials. The influence of these experiments can be found in the small-scale sculptural objects—assemblages—that are the toy-puppets created by Jarema during the occupation.

Theater proved to be a force that utterly consumed Jarema. On the one hand, it was a sphere of collective work, political struggle, and a vital relationship with a mass audience;¹¹ on the other hand, it of-

¹⁰ Stanisław Żytyński, “Szopki Adama Polewki,” in *Cyganeria i polityka. Wspomnienia krakowskie 1919–1939*, ed. K. Bidakowski (Czytelnik, 1964), 591.
¹¹ For instance, the aforementioned performance *Herod and the Arians*, staged under the Cricot banner at workplaces, was seen by approximately 20,000 workers. See Jonasz Stern, “O Marii Jaremie. W oczach przyjaciół,” *Kierunki*, no. 50 (1958).

FIG. 2 APARTMENT OF MARIA JAREMA AND KORNEŁ FILIPOWICZ, ON THE TABLE PUPPET HEADS FOR ADAM POLEWKA’S “WORKER’S NATIVITY PLAY,” DESIGNED BY JAREMA AND JONASZ STERN



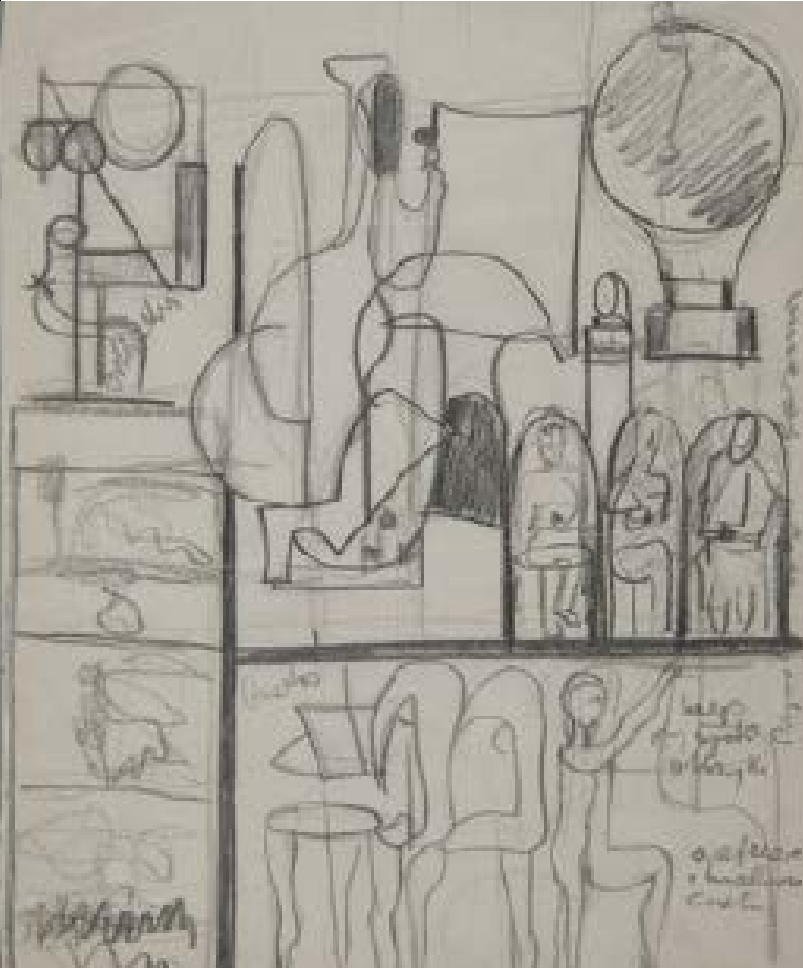
fered an opportunity to work directly with an actor’s body, as well as with the artist’s own physicality, femininity, and sexuality. Painting the actors and dancers, as well as designing costumes and masks, was inextricably linked to her conceptualization of the characters’ stage movement and choreography. Indeed, by designing abstract costumes that did not merely ignore but actively defied human anatomy, she forced a specific, non-human choreography upon the performer, rendering the actors’ figures akin to puppets.

Sculptor Henryk Wiciński—one of the artists collaborating with the prewar Cricot Theater who also, like Jarema, trained in Xawery Dunikowski’s studio—pushed the abstract treatment of an actor’s figure to its most radical extreme. His most remarkable works include the designs for *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątwą*, 1933) and *Triangle and Circle* (*Trójkąt i koło*, 1939), both clearly inspired by constructivism. In these productions, the actors were “encased” in geometricized costumes that restricted their movement. The same influences are also evident in his unrealized designs for marionettes.

Jarema shared Wiciński’s sculptural approach to costume design, one that transformed the actor’s body into a spatial composition. However, unlike Wiciński’s geometricized costumes, her designs had softer, organic forms. Critic Halina Krueger reported:

One thing was striking about these costumes [by Jarema]: their structure necessitated actors’ fundamental gestures for each character, thus fostering a form of cooperation with the acting concept. This is undoubtedly the most appropriate path for a theatrical

FIG. 3 HENRYK WICIŃSKI, SET DESIGN FOR *THE CUTTLEFISH* BY STANISŁAW IGNACY WITKIEWICZ, 1934, GRAPHITE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



designer, whose task is not to dress the actor, but to give a visual form to the stage character.¹²

The costume designs featured motifs and composition-al solutions that corresponded to the artist’s tempera works from the mid-1930s, for instance *Two Figures* (*Dwie postacie*, 1937, private col-lection), and *Composition: Two Figures* (*Kompozycja: Dwie postacie*, 1936, private collection). In them, grotesque humanoids mock human anatomy, equipped with monstrously large jaws and multiplied, pros-thetic or overgrown fragments of the body.¹³ Jarema’s postwar designs, in particular, abound with references to the biological, animal, and plant worlds—as seen in the unrealized projects for the 1948 ballet *Svan-tovit* (*Swantewit*). Another excellent example of this surrealist esthetic and its play with human and non-human anatomy is found in the designs for the staging of Pablo Neruda’s poem *Let the Rail Splitter Awake* (1949), produced in collaboration with Tadeusz Kantor.¹⁴ In postwar temperas such as *Pantomime* (*Pantomima*, 1948, National Museum in Warsaw) or *Theater* (*Teatr*, 1950, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź), one can discern both a post-cubist disintegration of composition and subtle echoes of prewar stage-design solutions, including changes of perspective and a spatial expansion of the wings.

12 Halina Krueger, *Kurier Poranny*, no. 105, April 16, 1936.
13 See also Karolina Czerska, “Maria Jarema w pejzażu teatralnym Krakowa lat trzydzi-estych,” in *Maria Jarema. Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza (słowo/obraz terytoria, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2018), 180–190.
14 See also Dorota Jarecka’s essay in this volume, p.

FIG. 4 MARIA JAREMA, COSTUME DESIGN FOR MAMUNA IN SVANTEVIT, A BALLET BY PIOTR PERKOWSKI, 1947, WATERCOLOR, GOUACHE AND INK ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



FIG. 5 MARIA JAREMA, COSTUME DESIGN FOR WILL-O'-THE-WISP IN SVANTEVIT, A BALLET BY PIOTR PERKOWSKI, 1947, WATERCOLOR, GOUACHE AND INK ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



**INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND
FORGING THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE**

For artists of the first decades of the twentieth century, puppet theater in its broadest sense—as integrated by them into the realm of art—served as an ideal field for interdisciplinary experimen-tation. In Jarema’s performative work, one can find several significant points of contact with the practices of artists such as Hannah Höch, Emmy Hennings, and especially Sophie Taeuber-Arp, who cofounded the Dada movement in Berlin and Zurich and employed puppets and stage costumes as new artistic forms. These often served to construct metaphors of the female experience, allowing for the exploration of themes related to the body and sexuality while challenging stereotypes regarding female passivity, naivety, and eroticism.

In Jarema’s later work, a conscious play with the fetishi-zation and eroticization of the female body is evident, for instance, in the costumes for *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątwą*, 1956), produced for Cricot 2. In these, the artist plays with attributes of femininity by attaching large, protruding breasts or nipples to the costumes.¹⁵ Much like the grotesque depictions of women known from Höch’s photomontages of the 1930s, motifs of exaggerated, fetishized fragments of the body and face (e.g., monstrously large mouths) serve here to subvert the traditional male ideal of femininity and draw attention to entrenched gender roles.

Similarly, a photograph of a scene from *The Circus* (*Cyrk*, 1957) shows the tangled bodies of actors enveloped in a large black cloth, from which individual parts—hands, legs, fragments of faces—protrude. Although the production was a collaboration between Jarema, Mikulski,

15 As in the costume for Alice d’Or or her own Matron costume.

FIGS. 6, 7 MARIA JAREMA, COSTUMES FOR ALICE D’R AND MATRON II IN *THE CUTTLEFISH* BY ST. I. WITKIEWICZ, 1956, CRICOTEKA CENTRE FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE ART OF TADEUSZ KANTOR IN KRAKÓW



and Kantor as the director, it can be assumed that, as the set and costume designer, she exerted a considerable influence on the final visual expression of this scene. Evidence for this can be found in the 1957 monotype and watercolor on paper *Project XII* (*Projekt XII*, private collection), and the 1956 tempera on paper *Curtain Design* (*Projekt kurtyny*, Aleksander Filipowicz Collection), among others. Jarema had a similar influence on a scene involving the use of mannequin fragments for female legs.

The aforementioned female artists frequently likened themselves to puppets through grotesque poses, gestures, and makeup. This strategy was adopted by Sophie Taeuber-Arp, creator of the first abstract marionettes, as well as costumes and choreography. A distinctive element of Taeuber-Arp's performative practice within the Cabaret Voltaire is the figure of the puppet-like actor or dancer who becomes a living abstraction—a kinetic sculpture or marionette. This can also be found in Cricot's performances and Maria Jarema's work. For Jarema, who was fascinated by movement and dance in sculpture, working with the actor's body opened up new extraordinary possibilities. The body became a canvas or was transformed through costume and mask into a hybrid mechanical-animal or mechanical-biological being. Through this, the static language of art was brought to life.

Painting directly on the body and face belongs to those avant-garde strategies that aimed to transform an actor, a dancer, or an artist themselves into a living work of art.¹⁶ The defining feature of these practices was the temporality of painterly compositions created on the

¹⁶ The pioneers of such experiments in the field of art were Russian Futurists. Natalia Goncharova, practicing her own "living theater," walked the streets of Saint Petersburg with her face painted in abstract motifs, manifesting the interpenetration of art and life. Face-painting for both artist-actors and the audience was an essential element of the cabaret evenings she organized with Larionov and other members of the Rayonist group. In the 1913 manifesto "Why We Paint Ourselves," they stressed the importance of anthropological inspirations for these practices, such as tattoos and Siberian shamanic traditions.

FIGS. 8, 9 ALEKSANDER WASILEWICZ, EDWARD WĘGŁOWSKI, PHOTOGRAPHS OF *THE CIRCUS* PERFORMANCE AT THE ARTISTS' HOUSE, 1957, CRICOTEKA CENTRE FOR THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE ART OF TADEUSZ KANTOR IN KRAKÓW



face—be it one's own or a performer's. These were abstract and stood apart from facial expression or mimicry; on the contrary, they concealed these, much like they obscured gender.

Examples of "costumes" painted directly on the body include those created by Jarema for Maria Miklaszewska, a dancer who performed with her own program at the prewar Cricot Theater. Due to the lack of surviving photographic documentation of these prewar activities, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact traditions Jarema drew upon. It is likely, however, that she sought inspiration from the same sources as she did for her mask designs: from local folk traditions (and their Formist reinterpretations) to those of non-European cultures—a plausible connection given the explicit influence of African art on the work of Wiciński.

Jarema was responsible for "visual design of the face" in several prewar Cricot productions. One of the most compelling photographs documenting her work in this area comes from a postwar staging—the last in which she participated—of Mikulski's *The Circus* (1957), directed by Kantor. This image leads one to consider "visual design of the face"—much like body painting integrated with costume—as a distinct yet entirely consistent field of Jarema's painterly and sculptural experimentation, one that should be recognized as a fully-fledged segment of her practice.

The actress Wanda Kruszevska's face—on which Jarema used lines and a lock of hair to trace an asymmetrical division—is transformed into an abstract composition. Here, the makeup was perfectly harmonized with the costume, and brings to mind an abstract composition created by Jarema during this period (*Composition* (*Kompozycja*), 1957, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź). Fascinated by kinetic art, the artist used the theater to transpose painting into space and set it in motion, further heightening the sense of dynamism and the mutual penetration of forms

FIG. 10 MARIA JAREMA, *COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA)*, 1957 / 1958 (?), DISTEMPER ON PAPER AND CARDBOARD, GRAPHITE (?) MUZEUM SZTUKI W ŁÓDZI



and their shadows through the projection of Andrzej Pawłowski's abstract film *Kineforms* (*Kineformy*) onto the actors' bodies.

"PUPPETIZATION"

In drawing analogies between Jarema and artists associated with the Dada movement, another aspect comes to the fore: like Hennings and Taeuber-Arp, Jarema created spatial forms, puppets, costumes, and objects, while simultaneously treating her own physical presence—body, movement, and voice—as a fully-fledged form of artistic expression.

Jarema herself took on several roles in both the prewar and postwar Cricot Theater. Before the war, she played the Modern and Contemporary Woman in *The Green Years* (*Zielone lata*), and *The Female Element* (*Element żeński*). She also performed in Adam Polewka's cabaret TAM-TAM (appearing as Little Red Riding Hood and the girl from *Father's Return* (*Powrót taty*)). After the war, she appeared as Matron II in *The Cuttlefish*. Through her design for the Matron II costume, the artist transformed herself into a puppet with a strange, grotesquely elongated body. In discussions with Kantor, who directed *The Cuttlefish*, she advocated for a specific acting style—lines were to be delivered in a rigid, mechanical manner, ensuring the voice harmonized with the non-human appearance and mechanical movements of the puppet-like figures.

THE INTERPLAY

For Jarema, theater and puppet theater—broadly understood as meaning engagement with the puppet-actor and the theatrical puppet—became a space for interdisciplinary experimentation at the intersection of sculpture, dance, and choreography. Genre fluidity and the evasion of definitions carried a powerful subversive and political potential. Stage productions allowed the artist to expand the boundaries of self-expression through the body, movement, and voice.

Theatrical experience most likely influenced the artist's thinking about movement and composition—both in sculpture and in painting. Theater and visual arts interpenetrate; at times, it is difficult to determine the direction in which inspiration flows. Beyond works directly referencing specific performances, the influence of theatrical experiments with puppets, costumes, and masks is visible in some paintings from the 1930s and 1940s populated by human figures resembling puppets or marionettes, as in *Figural Composition* (*Kompozycja figuralna*, 1936, National Museum in Warsaw). I believe that in postwar works—both in paintings, such as *Landscape – Dance* (*Pejzaż – Taniec*, 1945, National Museum in Kraków) and *Theater* (*Teatr*, 1950, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź), and in selected monotypes—the impact of theater is revealed in the construction of the composition. In the *Penetrations* (*Penetracje*) and *Rhythms* (*Rytmy*) series, one can discern not only inspirations from kinetic art but also traces of the artist's own experiments with "moving abstraction" on the stage: the interpenetration of light and shadow and the interplay of perspectives.

Theater provided Jarema with an opportunity for the socio-political activity so vital to her through art and collective action. At the same time, it created a space for formal experiments extending beyond the two-dimensional work of art. As the artist recalled in an interview, Cricot II, upon its reactivation in 1956, "could not do without her." With equal certainty, however, it can be said that Jarema could not do without the theater, of which she said: "it is not work, it is a pleasure."¹⁷

¹⁷ Maria Jarema, "Rozmowy z malarzami. Z Marią Jaremianką (napisał Juliusz Kydryński)," *Przekrój*, no. 674 (1958): ...

I think the hardest thing one can do is to be free. To be free of all prejudice and convention, and anything that allows a person to live in a “secure” setting, without great effort. But one who is free also bears responsibility! The fundamental discovery of contemporary painting is freedom. Not selflessness or fantasy, or originality “at any cost,” as they say, but the painter’s right to explore himself to his furthers boundaries without reservation. The self, for every person, is the matter that is most inaccessible and shrouded in doubt.

Maria Jarema, *Notatki rozproszone* (*Scattered Notes*), trans. Arthur Barys

SINGLE



STUDY FOR THE SCULPTURE POMONA, FROM THE SKETCHBOOK, 1930, GRAPHITE ON PAPER
(DOUBLE-SIDED WORK), NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAN



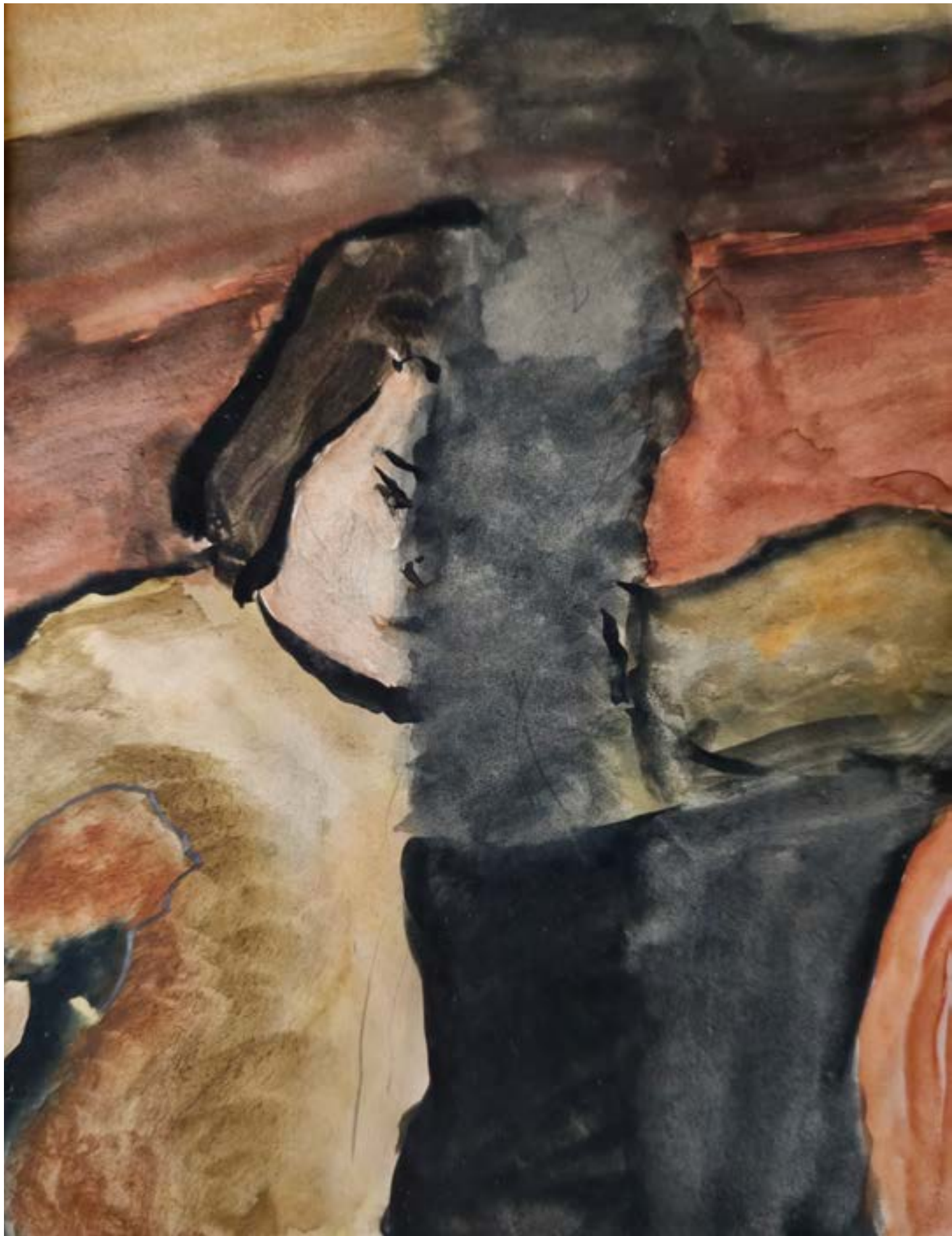
SZKIC RZEŻBY POMONA – ZE SZKICOWNIKA, 1930, OŁÓWEK NA PAPIERZE
(PRACA DWUSTRONNA), MUZEUM NARODOWE W POZNANIU



COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1935-1936, BRONZE CAST; ADAM JEZIERZAŃSKI, 1977, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAŃ
SINGLE



NUDE (AKT), CA. 1936, PLASTER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1935-1939, WATERCOLOR AND GRAPHITE ON PAPER,
SINGLE



COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), FIRST HALF OF THE 1940S, WATERCOLOR ON PAPER,
NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



COMPOSITION: SEATED FIGURE (KOMPOZYCJA Z SIEDZĄCĄ POSTACIĄ), SECOND HALF OF THE 1930S, WATERCOLOR, GOUACHE AND COLLAGE
ON PAPER, UPPER SILESIA MUSEUM IN BYTOM



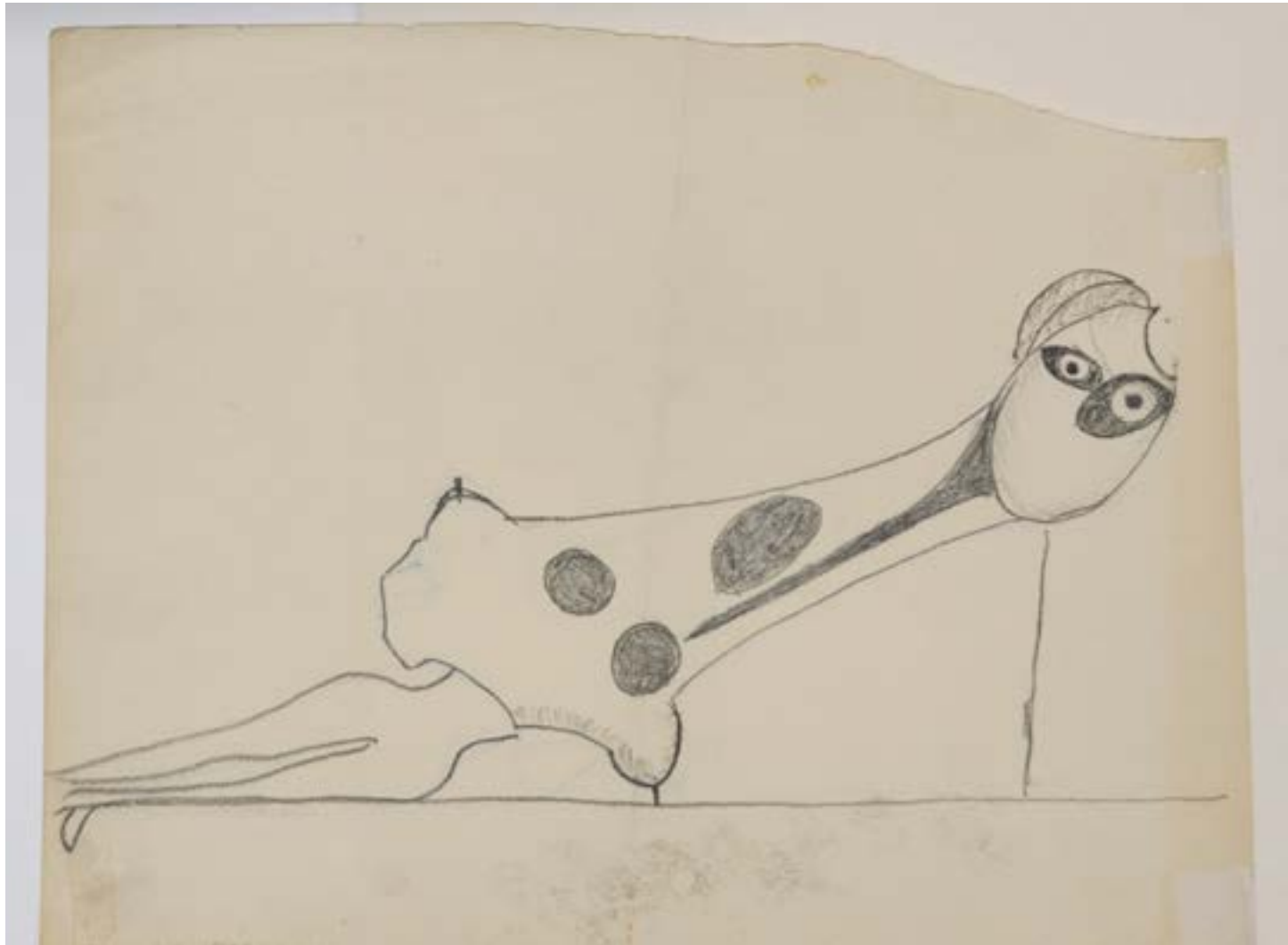
RECLINING MALE (PORTRAIT OF ROMEK ON HIS DEATHBED) (LEŻĄCY (PORTRET ROMKA NA ŁOŻU ŚMIERCI)), 1943, DISTEMPER ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION



↑ NUDE (AKT), 1946, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW
 → COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1950, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1951, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS,
NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAN



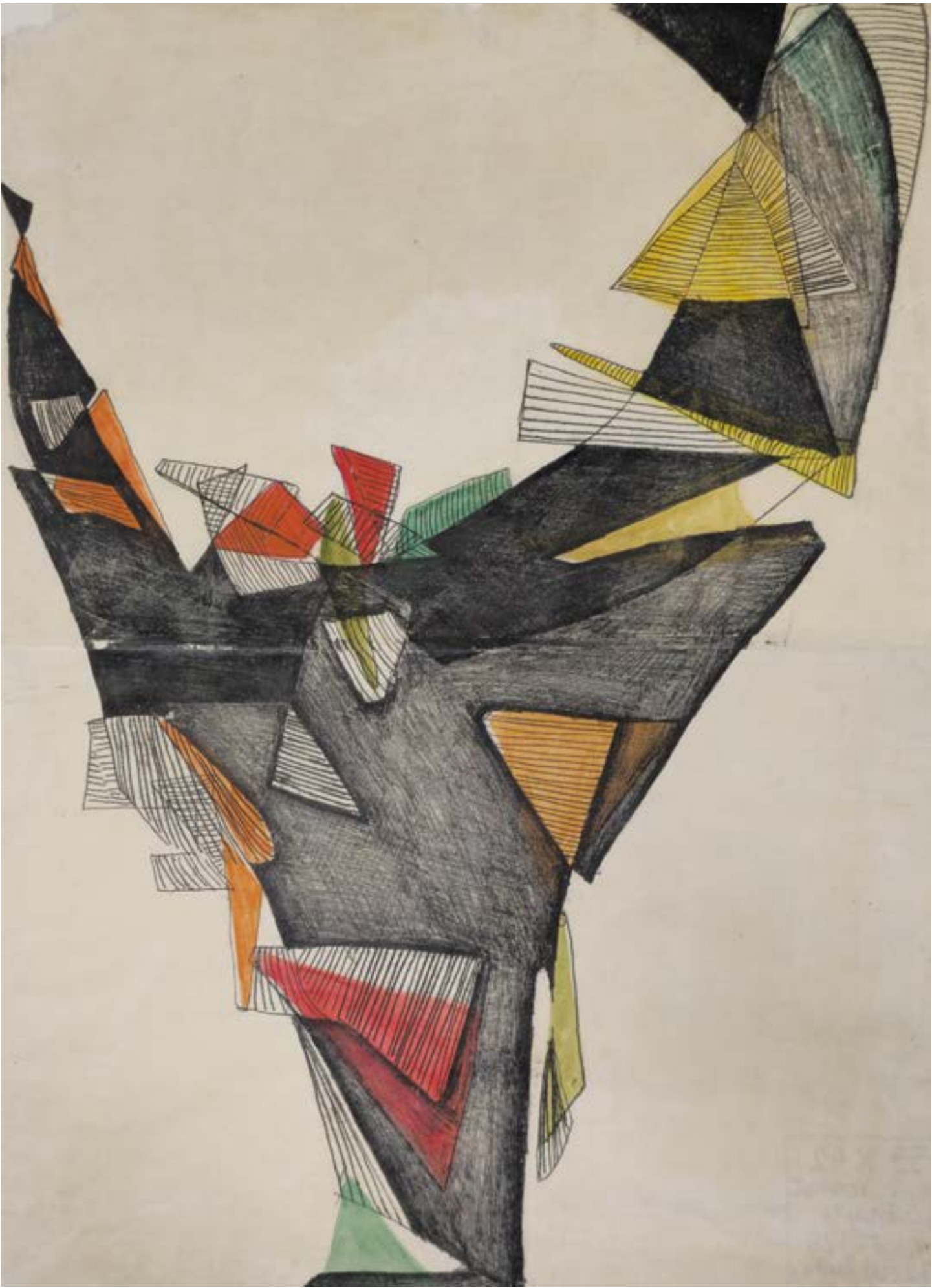
SKETCH (SZKIC), 1949-1950, INK MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE,
PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



SKETCH (SZKIC), 1949-1950, GRAPHITE ON PAPER, INK MONOTYPE ON REVERSE, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT
AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



DANCE (TANIEC), 1953, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN SZCZECIN
SINGLE



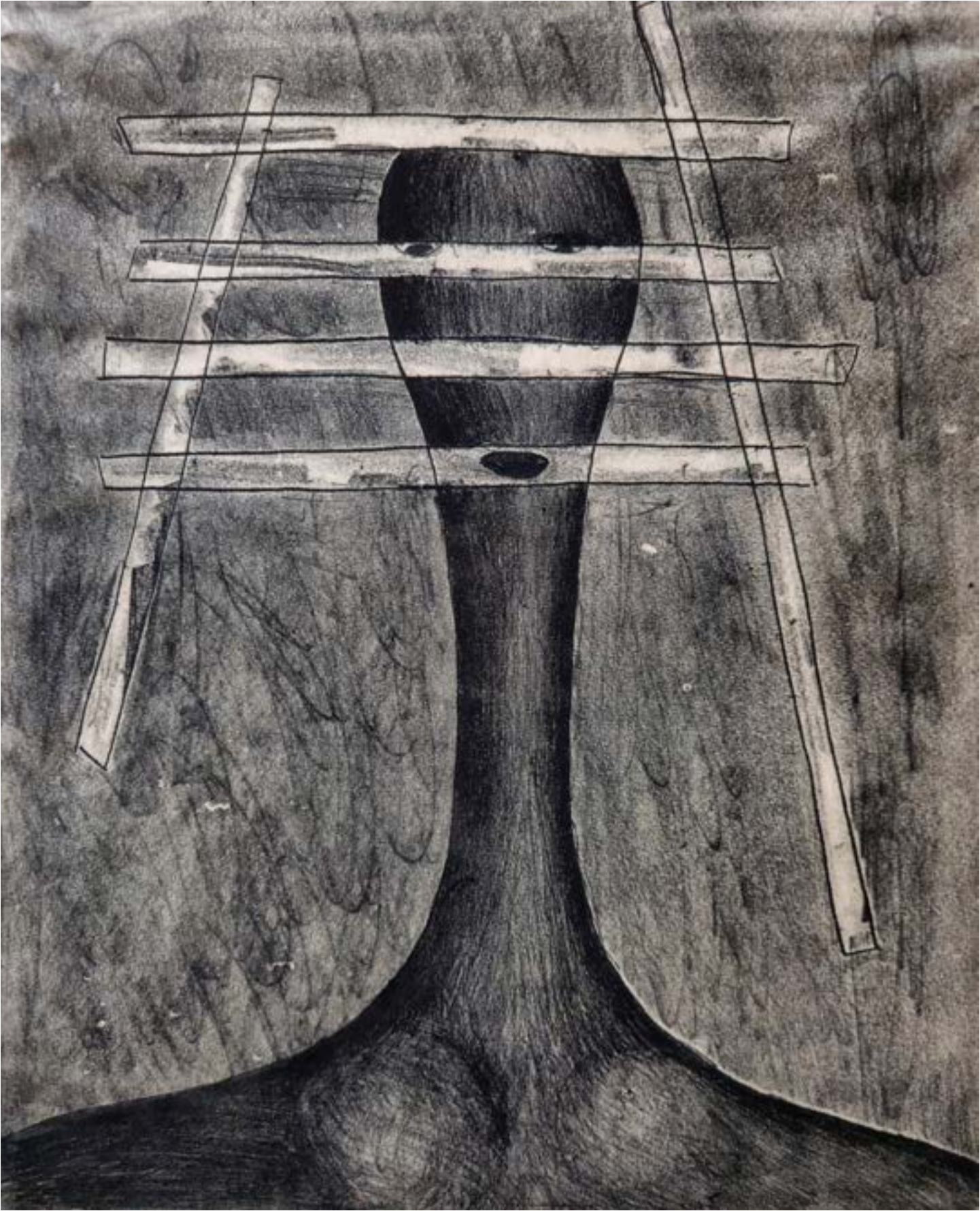
HEADS (GLOWY), 1953, INK MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD, PRIVATELY OWNED,
ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



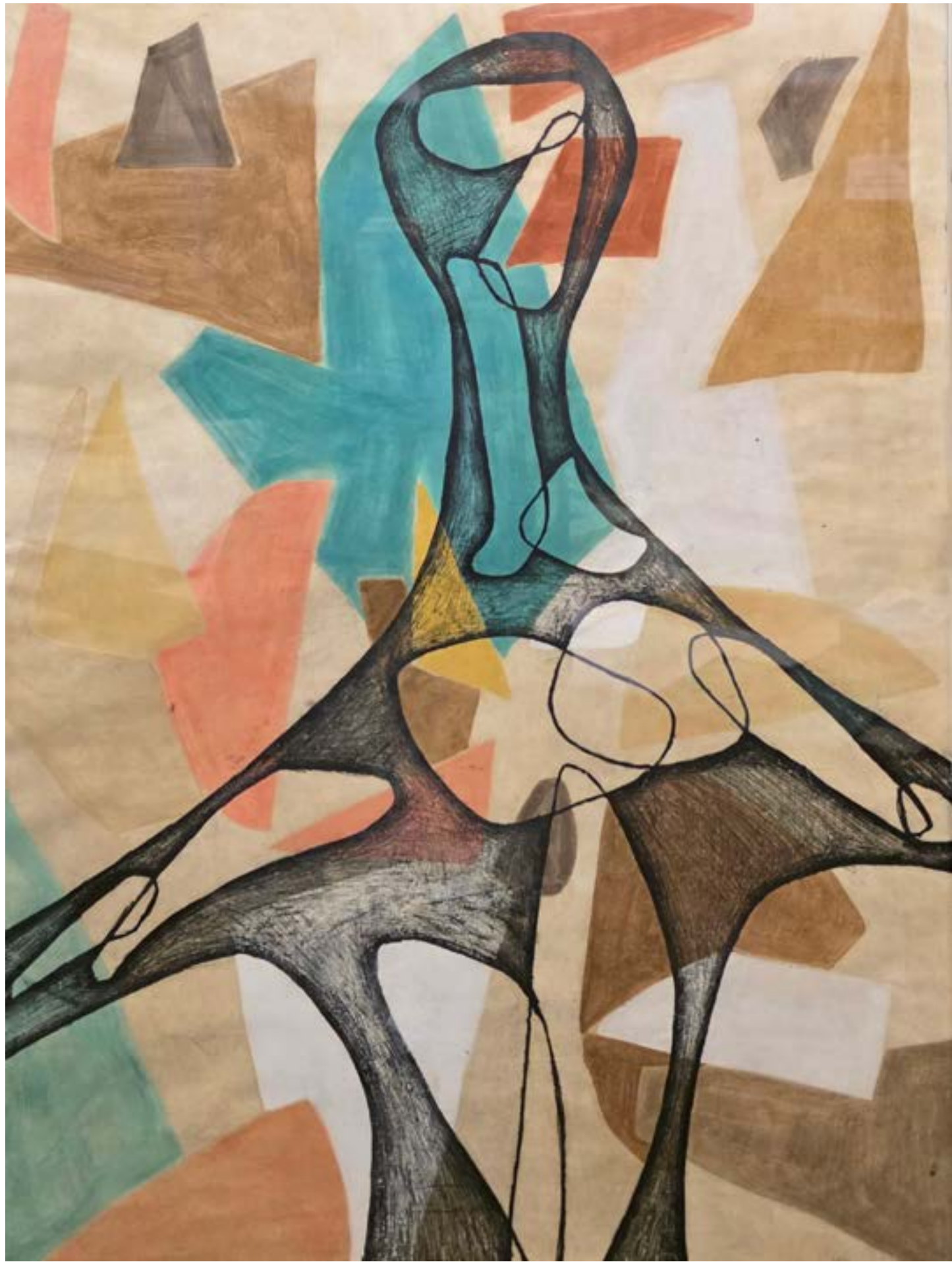
COSTUME DESIGN FOR THE *CUTTLEFISH* BY STANISŁAW IGNACY WITKIEWICZ, 1956, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE, PRIVATE COLLECTION



COSTUME DESIGN FOR THE *CUTTLEFISH* BY STANISŁAW IGNACY WITKIEWICZ, 1956, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE, PRIVATE COLLECTION



NUDE (AKT), 1954, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE,
NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW



↑ *HOURS (GODZINY)*, 1954, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS,
UPPER SILESIA MUSEUM IN BYTOM

→ *EXPRESSIONS (WYRAZY)*, 1954, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS,
LEON WYCZÓŁKOWSKI DISTRICT MUSEUM IN BYDGOSZCZ

SINGLE



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ARRANGEMENTS (UKŁADY), 1957, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, LEON WYCZÓŁKOWSKI DISTRICT MUSEUM IN BYDGOSZCZ



COMPOSITION 1956 (KOMPOZYCJA 1956), 1956, MONOTYPE, GRAPHITE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER
MOUNTED ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAN



YELLOW-AND-BLUE COMPOSITION FROM THE EXPRESSIONS CYCLE (KOMPOZYCJA ŻÓŁTO-NIEBIESKA Z CYKLU „WYRAZY”), 1956,
MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAN



DANCE (TANIEC), 1955, PLASTER, PAINT, PRIVATE COLLECTION
SINGLE



FIGURE (FIGURA), 1956, BRASS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW

RHYTHM I (RYTM I), 1957, DISTEMPER ON BLACK CANSON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, PRIVATELY OWNED,
ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW

SINGLE



For art to exist in a country, there must be an artist and there must be an audience. Both matters are perhaps equally difficult; both require preparation; both are a matter of culture. They are, as it were, two creations: one by the creating artist, and the other a kind of secondary one—the creativity of the viewer, who, without an effort of imagination and intellect, will never see anything, never hear, never understand. ... [A painting] is thinking in form and color that discovers the laws governing the world, its progress and its dramas; that the collision of two colors and forms is like the collision of two stray planets, only on a different scale.
Maria Jarema, *Notatki rozproszone* (*Scattered Notes*)

COUPLES



COMPOSITION: TWO FIGURES (KOMPOZYCJA: DWIE POSTACIE), 1936, DISTEMPER AND COLLAGE ON PAPER, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1937-1942, GOUACHE ON PAPER, UPPER SILESIAN MUSEUM IN BYTOM
COUPLES



TWO FIGURES (DWIE POSTACIE), 1937, DISTEMPER ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, PARIS



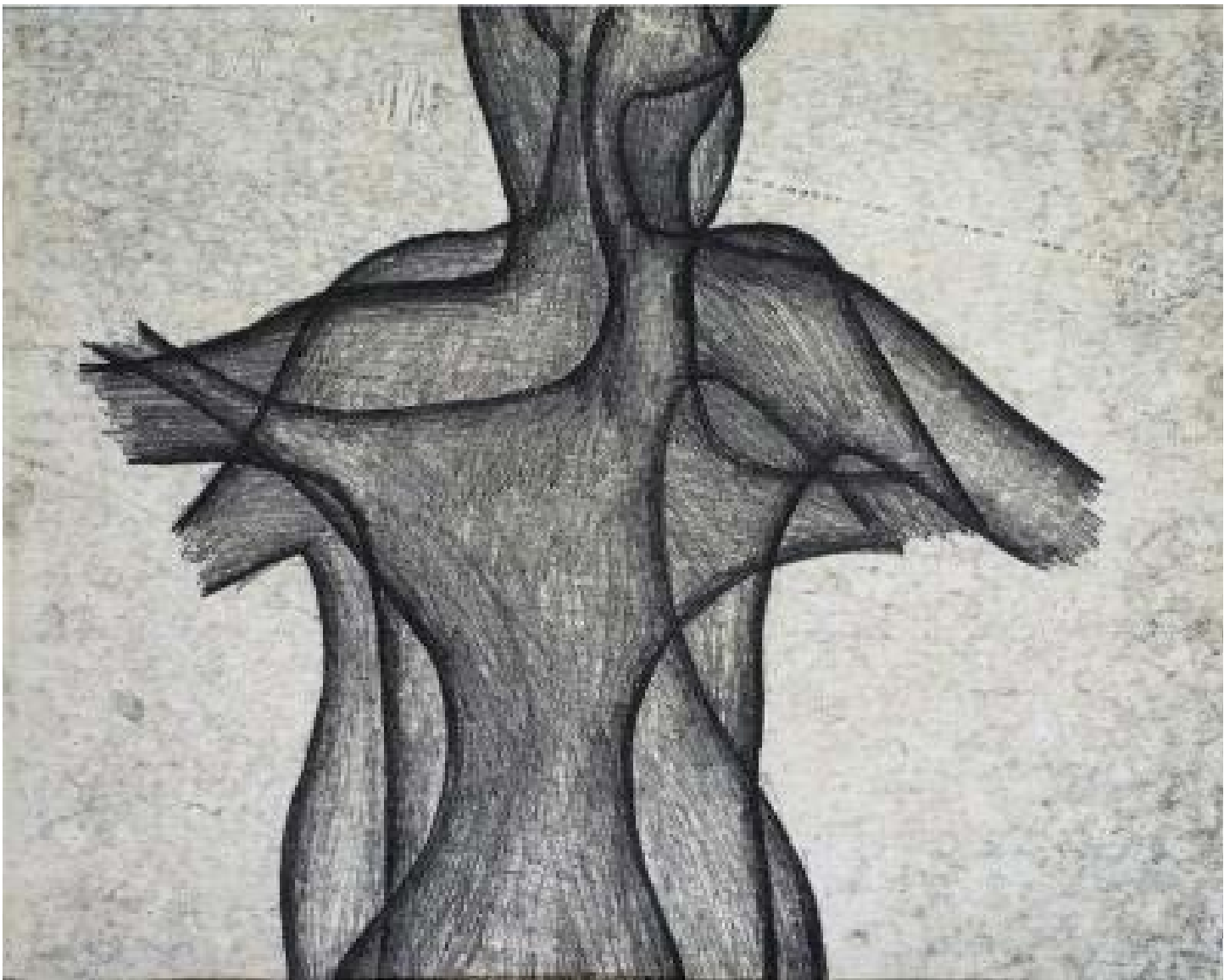
FIGURES AT TABLE (POSTACIE PRZY STOLIKU), FROM THE SKETCHBOOK, 1942-1943, DISTEMPER ON CUT PAPER,
PRIVATE COLLECTION
COUPLES



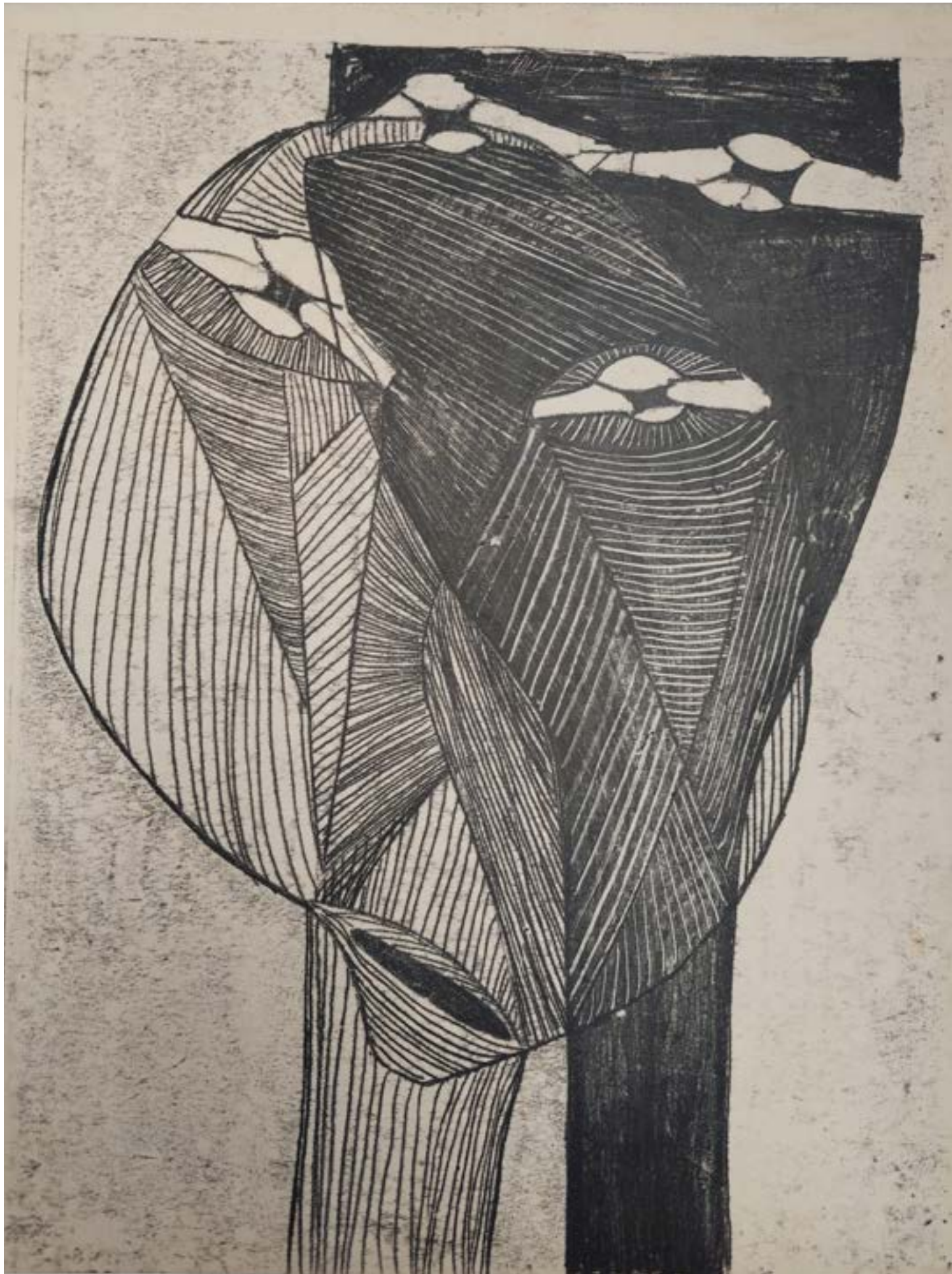
↑ COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1951, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD,
 PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW
 → PANTOMIME (PANTOMIMA), 1948, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW



GRIP (CHWYT), 1951, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW
COUPLES



NUDES (FIGURES) (AKTY [POSTACIE]), 1953, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE, MUZEUM SZTUKI, ŁÓDŹ



↑ UNTITLED (BEZ TYTUŁU), 1950-1955, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW
 → COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1952-1956, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW
 COUPLES

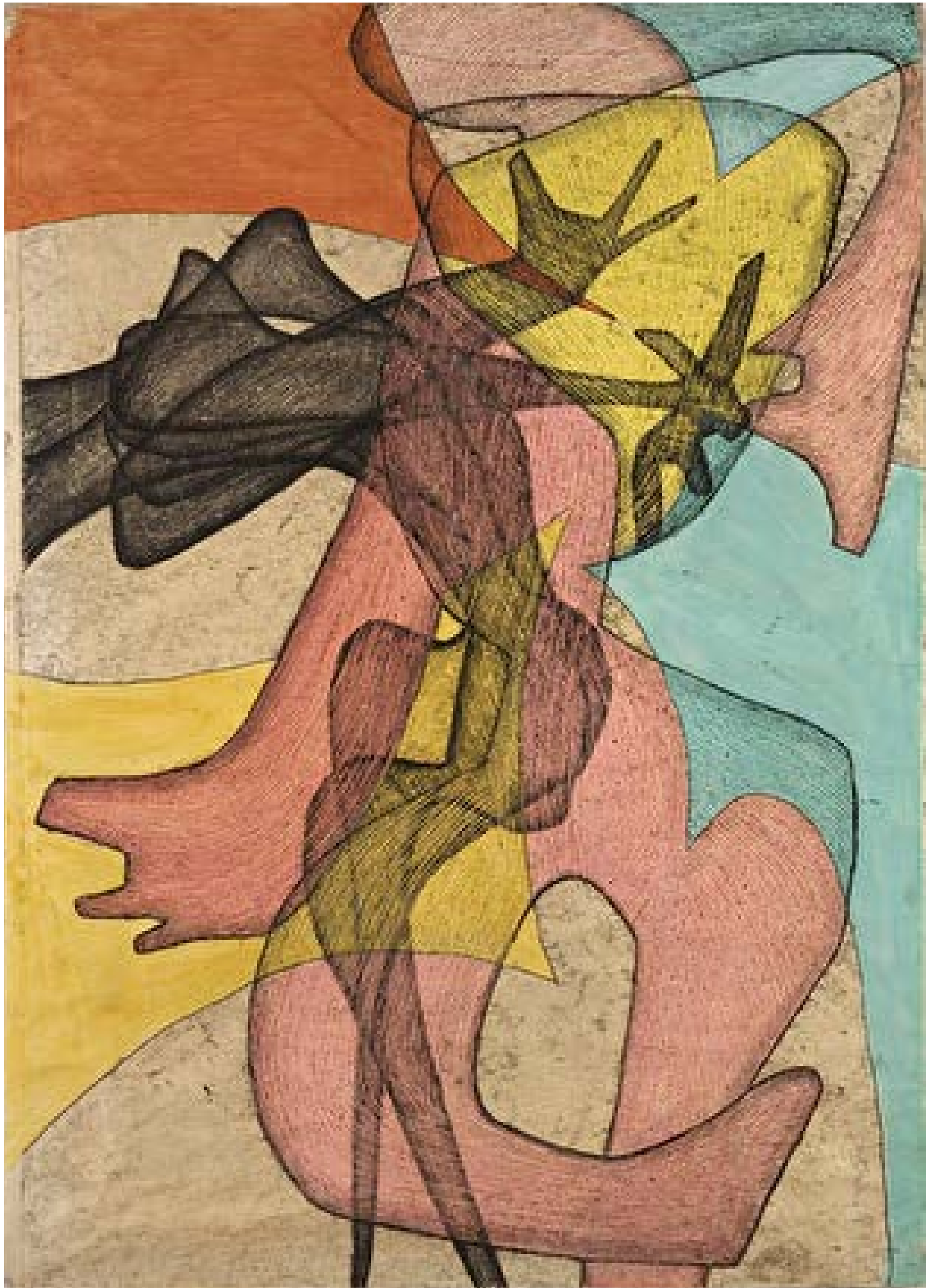




↑ TWO SISTERS (DWIE SIOSTRY), 1954, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW
 ← EXPRESSIONS (WYRAZY), 1953, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN SZCZECIN

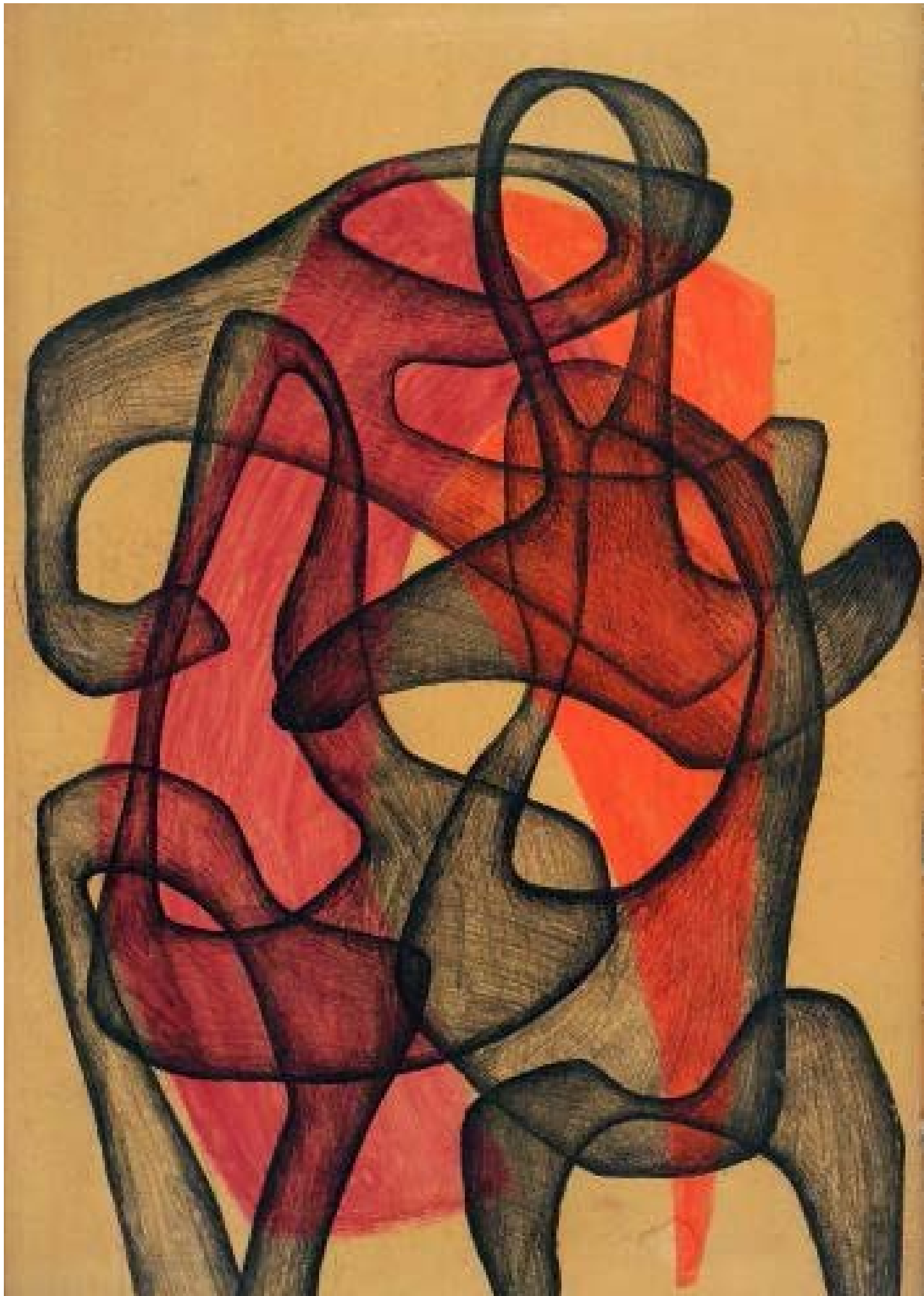
EXPRESSIONS IX (WYRAZY IX), 1955, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW





↑ *EXPRESSIONS V (WYRAZY V)*, 1957, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW
 → *EXPRESSIONS VIII (WYRAZY VIII)*, 1956, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN POZNAŃ



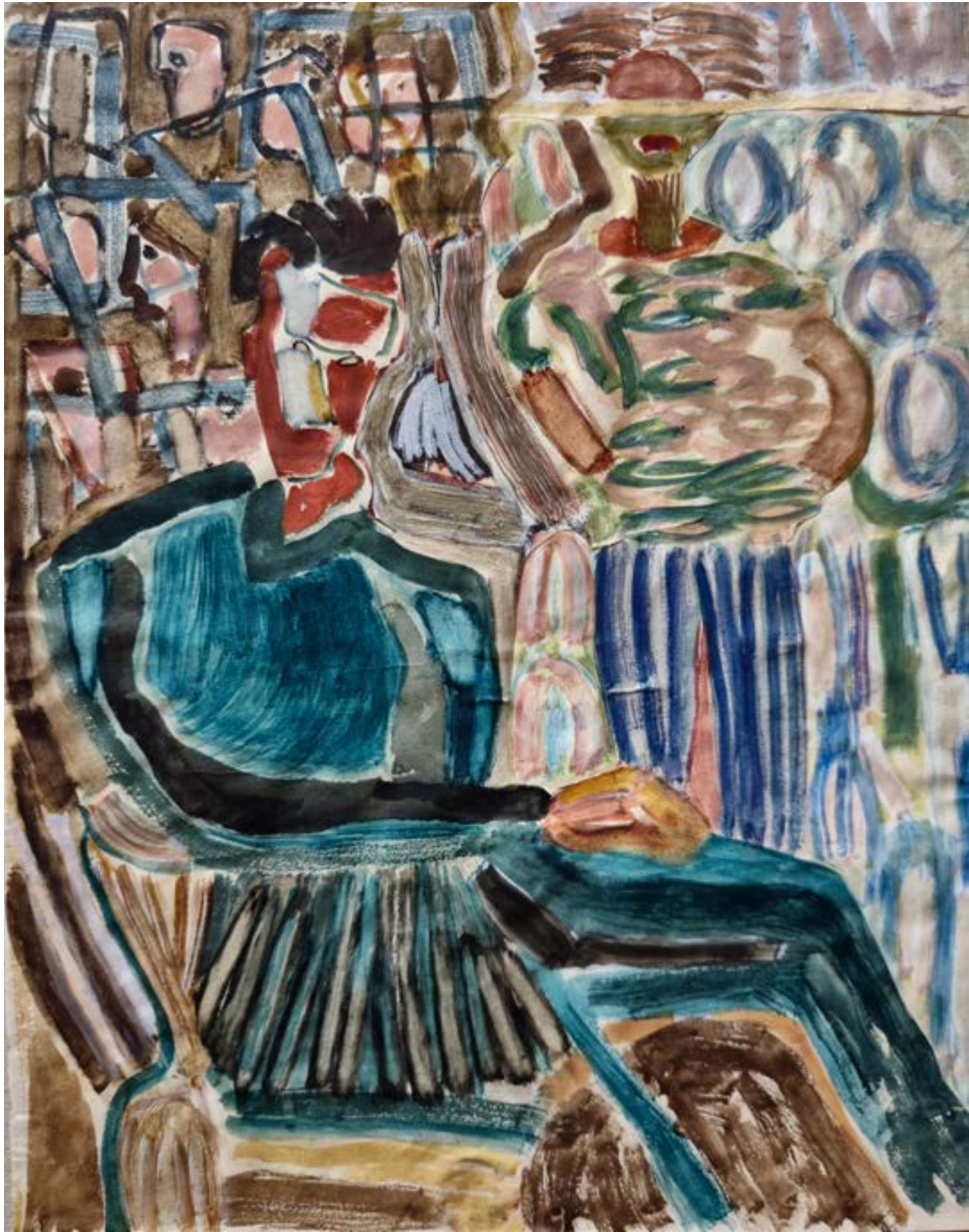


FIGURES (POSTACIE), 1953, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, LEON WYCZÓLKOWSKI DISTRICT MUSEUM IN BYDGOSZCZ
COUPLES



The clashing of opposites, the collision of a whole mass of elements which, through their mutual fertilization and destruction, causes the emergence of a new phenomenon, a new life—the life of the painting. Painting has approached the poster, and the poster has become occasional painting; they do not yield to one another in the sharpness of their voice..
Maria Jarema, *Notatki rozproszone* (*Scattered Notes*)

FAMILY



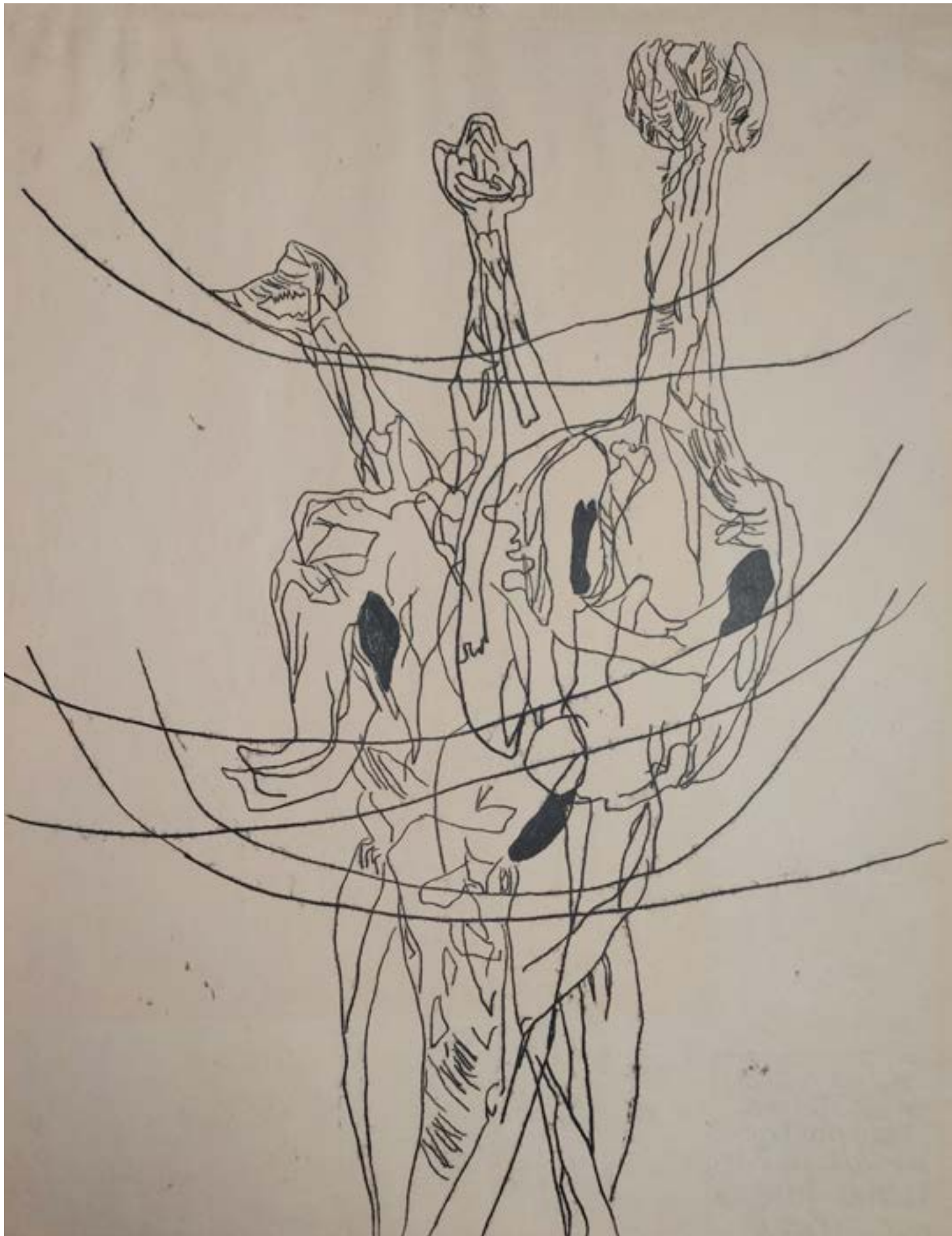
PORTAIT (PORTRET), 1942, GOUACHE AND COLLAGE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW



COMPOSITION: TWO FIGURES (KOMPOZYCJA: DWIE POSTACIE), 1936, DISTEMPER AND COLLAGE ON PAPER, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



FIGURES (POSTACIE), 1950-1955, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON TWO SHEETS OF PAPER, GRAPHITE ON PAPER ON REVERSE, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



THREE FIGURES (TRZY POSTACIE), 1954, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW
FAMILY



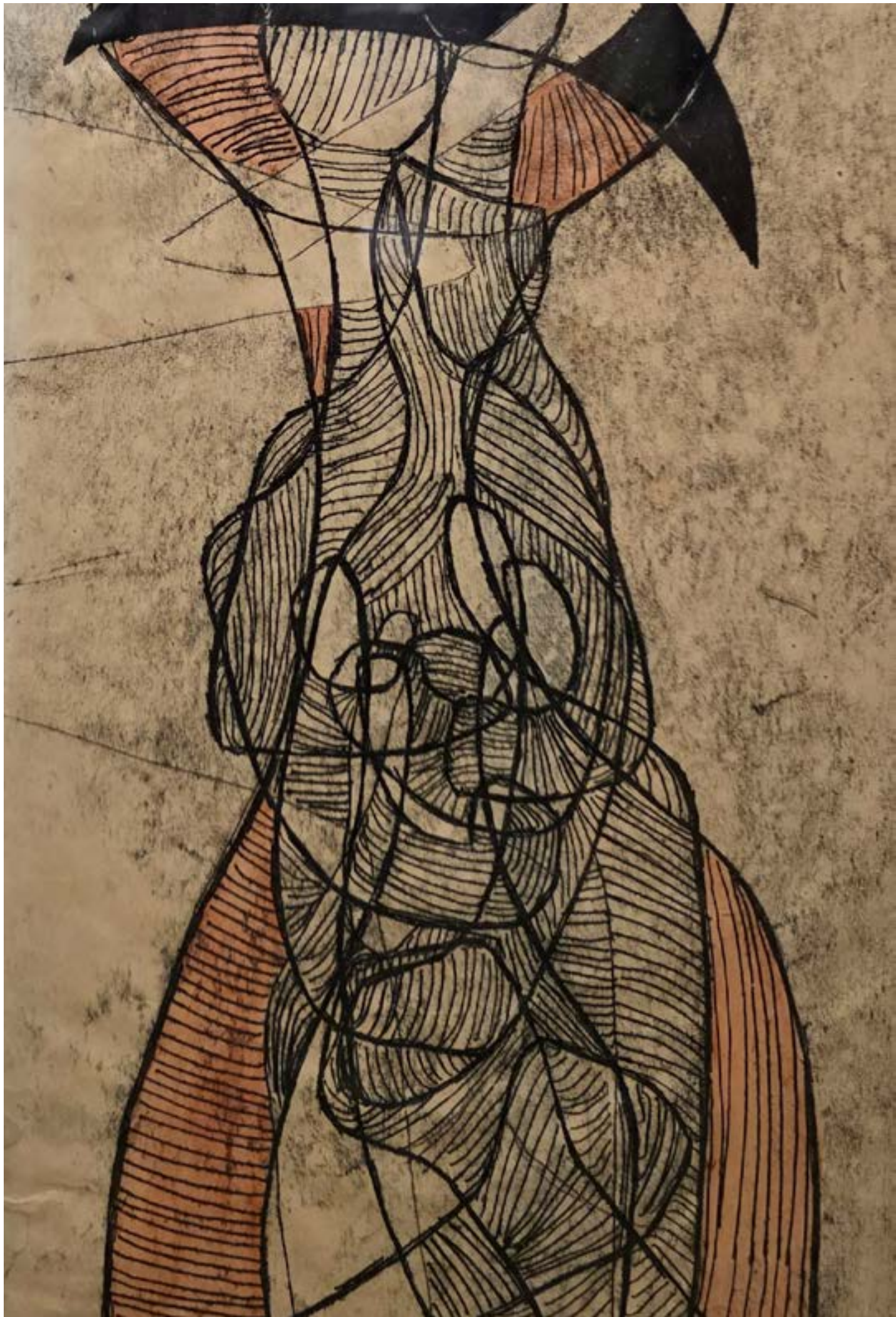
FIGURES (FIGURY), 1953, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



HEADS (GLOWY), 1953. INK MONOTYPE ON PAPER, GRAPHITE ON REVERSE, PRIVATELY OWNED,
ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



HEADS (GLOWY), 1954, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW



FIGURES (POSTACIE), 1954, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, UPPER SILESIA MUSEUM IN BYTOM



COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA), 1952-1956, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



EXPRESSIONS (WYRAZY), 1954, MONOTYPE AND GOUACHE ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WARSAW



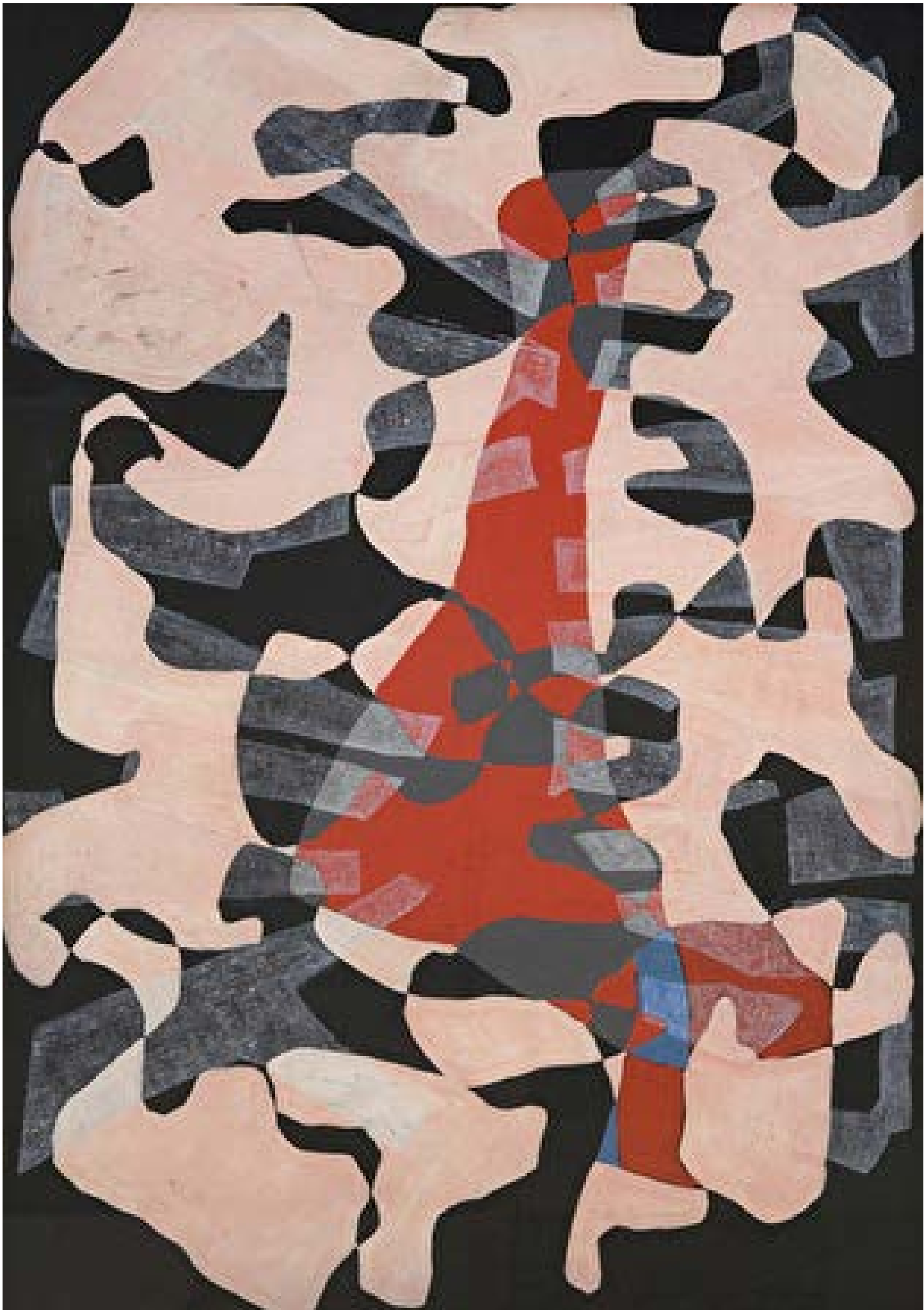
SIGNS (ZNAKI), 1956, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW

UNTITLED, 1957, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION, PARIS





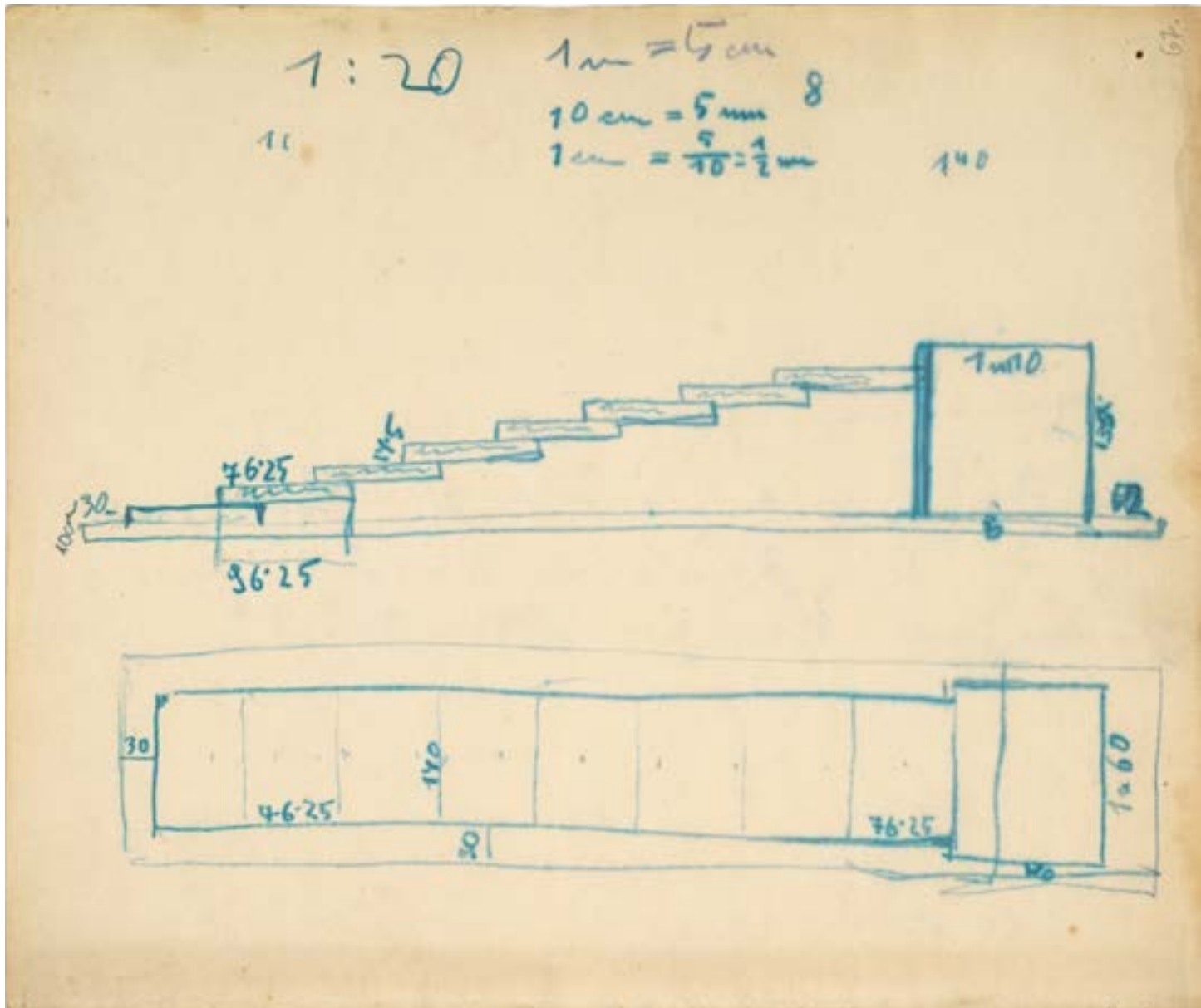
RHYTHM IX (RYTM IX), 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW
FAMILY



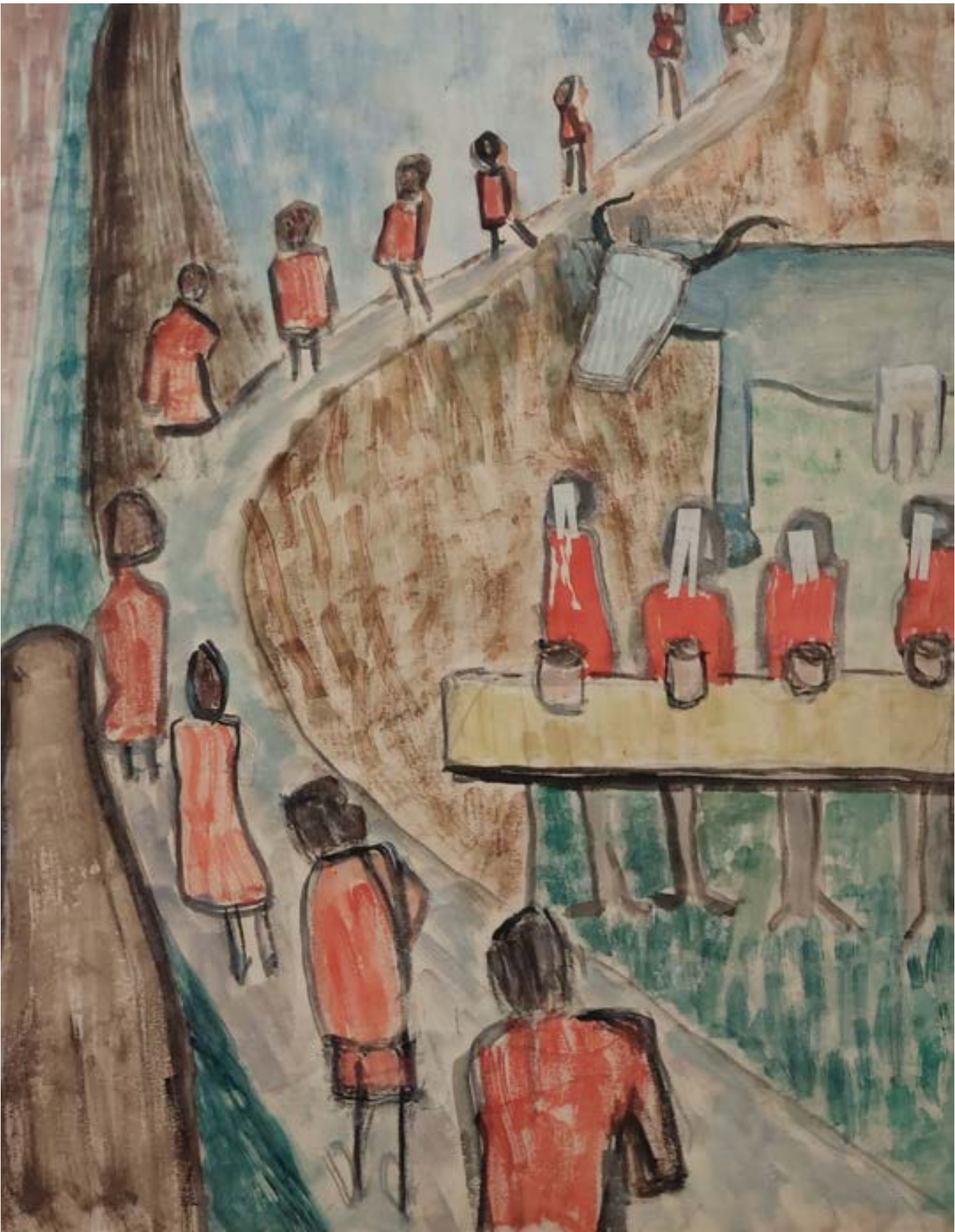
RHYTHM IV (RYTM IV), 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW

Modern painting, from post-impressionism through cubism and abstractionism, has shattered the walls of interiors, gone out into the streets, climbed the blocks of modern architecture, and seeped through the thin wall of reinforced concrete; it has ceased to speak in a whisper and screams to the human masses. A single human ear is no longer able to keep it for itself. Maria Jarema, *Notatki rozproszone* (*Scattered Notes*)

MULTITUDE



SKETCH FOR A MONUMENT COMMEMORATING WORKERS KILLED DURING A STRIKE AT THE SEMPERIT FACTORY IN KRAKÓW, 1936, CRAYON, INK, GRAPHITE, AND FELT-TIP PEN ON PAPER, PRIVATE COLLECTION



PROCESSION (POCHÓD), CA. 1940, MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW



FIGURAL COMPOSITION (KOMPOZYCJA FIGURALNA), 1942, WATERCOLOR AND OIL ON CANVAS, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW
MULTITUDE



BEACH (WAR II) (PLAŻA [WOJNA II]), 1942, DISTEMPER ON CARDBOARD, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW
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THEATER (TEATR), 1950, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD, MUZEUM SZTUKI, ŁÓDŹ



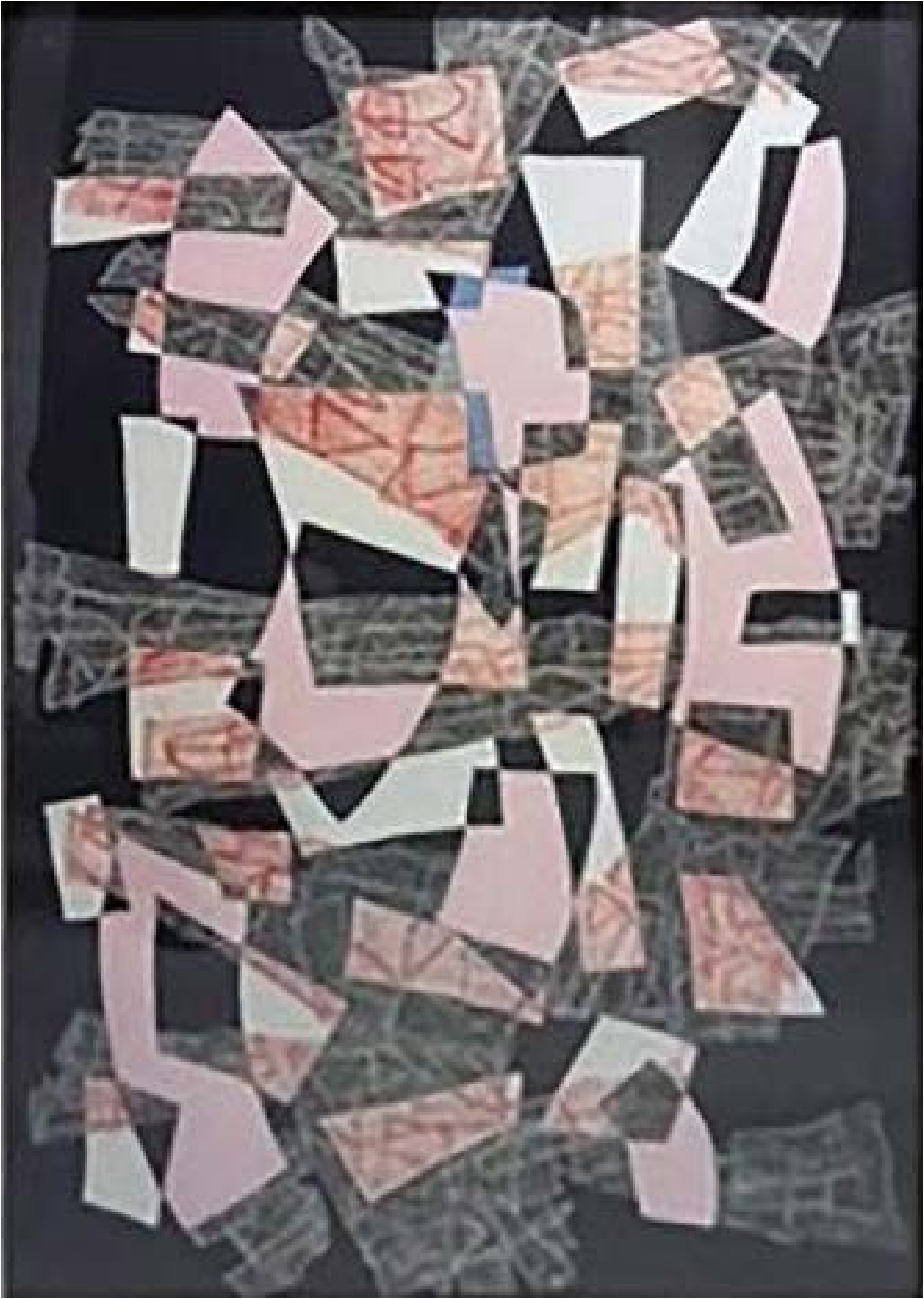
ROUND TABLE (OKRĄGLY STÓŁ), 1946, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, PRIVATELY OWNED,
ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW



COMPOSITION (FABRIC DESIGN): COAL (WĘGIEL), 1949-1950, DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, CENTRAL MUSEUM OF TEXTILES IN ŁÓDŹ



HEADS (GLOWY), 1955, MONOTYPE ON PAPER, MUSEUM OF ARCHITECTURE IN WROCLAW
MULTITUDE



PENETRATIONS (PENETRACJE), 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, MUSEUM OF CENTRAL POMERANIA IN SŁUPSK



RHYTHMS (RYTMY), 1957, MONOTYPE, GRAPHITE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CANVAS, MUZEUM SZTUKI, ŁÓDŹ
MULTITUDE



FILTERS II (FILTRY II), 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER, NATIONAL MUSEUM IN KRAKÓW
MULTITUDE



FILTERS (FILTRY), 1958, MONOTYPE AND DISTEMPER ON PAPER MOUNTED ON CARDBOARD, PRIVATELY OWNED, ON DEPOSIT AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN WROCLAW

MARIA JAREMA (1908 – 1958): CHRONOLOGY

NOVEMBER 24, 1908



NUNA AND MARIA
JAREMA, CA. 1918

Maria Jarema (Jaremińska) is born in Stary Sambor (now Staryi Sambir) on the Dniester River to Józef Jarema (1861–1935), a lawyer, and Maria Stefania née Śmigielńska (1875–1954), a pianist trained under Karol Mikuli at the Lviv Conservatory. One of seven siblings: Władysław (1896–1976), graduate of the Lviv Drama School, founder and director of the Groteska Theater in Kraków; Józef (1900–1974), painter, member of the Paris Committee (1923–31), founder of the Cricot Theater (1933), emigrated to Romania and the Middle East in 1939, fought in Italy with Anders' Army, served as president of the Art Club in Rome from 1945, and lived in Nice from 1951; Aleksander (1901–1955), graduate of Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv and Jagiellonian University, Kraków, lawyer; Adam (1903–1984), graduate of Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv, biologist and educator; Roman (1906–1944), graduate of the Lviv Polytechnic, engineer; Bronisława-Nuna (1908–1959), Maria's twin sister, graduate of the Lviv Polytechnic, engineer; and Maciej (1911–1977), physician, who emigrated after the war.

1929

Graduates from the Maria Konopnicka School for Girls in Stary Sambor. Subsequently enrolls at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, joining the sculpture studio of Xawery Dunikowski. Attends painting and drawing classes conducted by Kazimierz Sichulski and Władysław Jarocki. Matriculates on November 29, 1930. Receives a monetary award during the second semester of the 1930/31 academic year and commendations in both semesters of the 1931/32 academic year.

1933

During studies, becomes closely associated with a group of students at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków who express leftist views and advocate for modern trends in European art.

Nationalist and political unrest at the Academy in November 1931, along with a provocation involving painter Leopold Lewicki during an exhibition in June 1932, lead to the expulsion of a group of students from the institution. Amidst the atmosphere of scandal, three students—Leopold Lewicki, Stanisław Osostowicz, and Franciszek Jaźwiecki—gain the support of the Kraków branch of the Trade Union of Polish Artists and Designers (ZZPAP), which provides them with exhibition rooms in the newly built Artists’ House (Dom Plastyków) in Kraków in the autumn of 1932. In the wake of this exhibition and thanks to the assistance of Leon Chwistek, the artistic association Kraków Group (Grupa Krakowska) is established in 1933. Its members include Sasza Blonder, Berta Grünberg, Maria Jarema, Adam Franciszek Jaźwiecki, Leopold Lewicki, Adam Marczyński, Stanisław Osostowicz, Bolesław Stawiński, Jonasz Stern, Henryk Wiciński, Aleksander Winnicki, and Mojżesz Schwanenfeld.

Art Exhibition (Wystawa Dziel Sztuki) at the headquarters of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts (TPSP) in Lviv. The first part of the exhibition is a presentation of the achievements of the Kraków Group, “remaining under the patronage of Professor Leon Chwistek” (as stated in the catalog). Jarema exhibits five works: *Sculpture I (Rzeźba I)*, *Sculpture II (Rzeźba II)*, and *Sculpture III (Rzeźba III)*, *Head (Głowa)*, and *Wawel Head (Głowa Wawelska)* (these works have not been preserved).

If we cast a glance at the sphere of Ms. M. Jarema’s art, we perceive almost everywhere the outlines of a reflection of reality, which serves the artist as a visual stimulus for the interpretation of her emotions. The Formizm [Polish avant-garde artistic movement – trans. note] inherent in her works reduces all real shapes to a harmonious, rhythmic synthesis, to a play of convexities and concavities, of soft planes and sharp angles interrupted by a series of abstract voids, animated here and there by the cubist force of forming creeping matter. These compositions, to which—as with Expressionism—naturalistic criteria cannot be applied, are focused rather on a musical play of abstract planes with a thread spun from reality, or on a powerful synthesis and mechanization of the representation, supported occasionally by a sparse play of colored planes, as if they were intended to be integrated into the colorful space of an interior.

Marian Minich, “Ze sztuki – Salon Jesienny w Towarzystwie Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych. ‘Grupa Krakowska’: rzeźba – Artyści Lwowscy – Przemysł artystyczny II,” *Kurier Lwowski*, October 25, 1933.

The highly interesting sculptures of Wiciński and Maria Jarema also come closer to Unism, wherein sculpture is conceived as the shaping of space rather than volume; they are, moreover, enriched by a vital element and a greater wealth of situations in comparison with Unistic sculpture ...

Debora Vogel, “O sztuce abstrakcyjnej,” *Wiadomości Literackie*, April 17, 1934.

The Kraków Group intend to establish an Artistic Cooperative for visual artists, writers, musicians, and actors. Leon Chwistek and Tadeusz Peiper agree to lead the Cooperative. Its objective is to initiate a dialog with the public and to protect artists from exploitative intermediaries.

Jarema begins her collaboration with the Cricot Theater (Teatr Cricot), founded a year earlier by her brother, Józef. The experimental stage initially operates at the headquarters of the ZZPAP at Św. Ducha Square in the House under the Cross

OCTOBER

UNKNOWN, NUNA, ROMAN AND MARIA JAREMA, 1920S



MARIA JAREMA WITH HER BROTHERS, INCLUDING ROMAN AND ALEKSANDER, 1920S

NOVEMBER



1920S



EXHIBITION OF THE KRAKÓW GROUP, ON THE RIGHT JAREMA’S SCULPTURE MATERNITY

1935

(Dom pod Krzyżem), and from 1935 at the Artists’ House. She collaborates with the theater until 1939, serving as a set designer, costume designer, and actress.

Together with her brother, she prepares a costume for dancer Maria Mikuszevska, who performs in a dance and mime recital presented in February. Alongside Zbigniew Pronaszko, she oversees the visual design for the staging of Ludwik Gołąb’s *Reportaż z przedmieścia* [Reportage from the suburbs]. The play is performed in March at the café of the Institute for Art Propagation (IPS) in Warsaw. She prepares the sets and costumes for a performance adapted from Jan Kasprowicz’s short story *Pani śmierć* [Lady Death]. Alongside Czesław Rzepiński, she co-authors the set design for the play *Green Years (Zielone lata)*, in which she performs wearing a “modern woman” mask. During this year, the Cricot Theater changes its appellation from “experimental theater” to “theater of plastic arts.”

The Kraków Group Association of Modern Artists (Zrzeszenie Nowoczesnych Artystów Plastyków Grupa Krakowska) issues the appeal “Do Artystów” [To artists], addressed to “all artists, regardless of political convictions, in defense of independent creativity.” The print is annotated: “Published by Maria Jarema on the occasion of May Day.” In fact, the costs are covered by Gabriel Gottlieb at Jarema’s request.

An exhibition of the Kraków Group with the participation of Leon Chwistek is organized at the Krzemieniec Lyceum through the efforts of the Artistic Section of the Union of Social Organizations of the Krzemieniec District.

The names of Maria Jarema and Henryk Wiciński are absent from the exhibition catalog. According to Małgorzata Sobieraj, the two artists most likely decided to participate in the exhibition after the catalog had been printed. In a letter addressed to Sasza Blonder on May 19, 1934, Stanisław Osostowicz notes: “I protest against such withdrawal from the event by individual members. ... Where are Jaremówna, Wiciński, Schwanenfeld?” (Stanisław Osostowicz, *Listy*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1978, 197). A photograph from the exhibition has been preserved, in which Józef Chrobak has identified—aside from works by Stanisław Osostowicz, Leopold Lewicki, Eugeniusz Waniek, Sasza Blonder, and Jonasz Stern—a sculpture by Jarema. This is most likely *Figure (Figura)*, two fragments of which are currently in the possession of the artist’s family.

... in the works of the members of the Kraków Group, with few exceptions, there still exists a connection with nature, though perceived in a very diverse and subjective manner. Through expressionism, Formism, futurism, and cubism—movements represented in numerous paintings—this exhibition introduces us to the latest creations, such as “Strefizm” and abstract art. ... More than six hundred people visit the exhibition.

Stanisław Sheybal, “Ze sztuki. Grupa Krakowska. Wystawa malarstwa nowoczesnego w Krzemieńcu,” *Życie Krzemienieckie*, no. 6 (1934).

The Kraków Group plans to organize an exhibition in Warsaw in the following year. Stanisław Osostowicz mentions this in a 1934 letter to Blonder: “In Kraków, I saw Maryśka Jaremówna and Berta. We met at the Esplanada. I said what we had discussed, and they agreed that an exhibition of the Group is to take place at IPS in the autumn of next year” (Osostowicz, *Listy*, 199). The exhibition does not materialize.

Modern Art Exhibition (Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej) of the Kraków Group is held in the galleries of the Artists’ House on Łobzowska Street in Kraków. The group receives a 150 PLN subsidy from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education to cover exhibition costs. Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński are also invited to

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participate. The exhibition is accompanied by a leaflet including a text reprinted from Lech Piwowar’s article “Grupa Krakowska,” published in *Tygodnik Artystów*, and an essay by Władysław Strzemiński titled “*Przeciw Stabilizatorom Sztuki*” [Against art stabilizers]

In her sculpture, Jaremianka develops volume with convexities and circular, upward-arching concavities. Her work is very well-conceived. Henryk Weber, “Grupa Krakowska w Domu Plastyków,” *Nowy Dziennik*, no. 60 (1935): 9.

The article “Margines naszej orientacji plastycznej” [The margin of our visual orientation] published in *Tygodnik Artystów* supplements the group’s program outlined in an article from February of that year in the same weekly. The eight reproductions of group members’ works include a photograph of Jarema’s polychrome plaster sculpture of a human figure.

Jarema is admitted to the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (ZPAP) in Kraków. She graduates from the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts at the end of the 1934/1935 academic year.

The Cricot stages the premiere of a political nativity play titled *Lajkonik*, *Student Corps Member*, and *Hamlet* (*Lajkonik, korporant i Hamlet*) by Józef Jarema, for which masks were created by Maria Jarema, Adam Marczyński, Ludwik Puget, and Jonasz Stern. Jarema performs as an actress.

Jarema designs costumes and sets for *Open Doors* (*Drzwi otwarte*), based on fragments of Adam Ciompa’s *Diogenes*, and for *The Mute Canary* (*Niemy kanarek*) after Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes at Cricot, which premieres at the Artists’ House.

She joins the Tam-Tam cabaret established at Cricot under literary director Adam Polewka. The cabaret program includes satirical sketches such as “The Joyful Kraków Radio Wave,” “Cave Consules,” and “Little Red Riding Hood and the I.K.C.-ur Wolf”; the artist performs several roles and co-designs sets with Stern and Blonder. The cabaret is active until 1936.

The journal *Lewar* publishes a resolution of those “in solidarity with the agreement of progressive writers in defense of culture and peace,” initiated by the journals *Lewar*, *Lewytor*, *Nowa Wieś*, and *Po prostu*.

Kraków Group members Sasza Blonder, Kornel Filipowicz, Berta Grünberżanka, Maria Jarema, Leopold Lewicki, Jacek Puget, Bolesław Stawiński, Jonasz Stern, and Henryk Wiciński also sign the resolution: “We stand in solidarity with the working masses, the avant-garde of social progress, in their fight for their rights, and join them in a broad people’s front.” “Rozszerzamy front,” *Lewar*, no. 13 (November 5, 1935).

From 1935–38, the artist is involved in distribution for International Red Aid.

Jarema participates in the ZZPAP Artists’ Salon at IPS in Warsaw, presenting three plaster sculptures: *Kompozycja I* (*Composition I*), *Kompozycja II* (*Composition II*), and *Głowa* (*Head*).

His [Wiciński’s] and Jaremianka’s compositions implement the postulates of modern sculpture, which elides the object and operates with elements of mutually intersecting volumes and the surrounding space as a component. Thanks to this, the projections achieve a magnitude of views and connectivity with the surroundings. Jadwiga Pawłowska-Puciata, “Salon Plastyków,” *Pion*, February 1, 1936.

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SEPTEMBER

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER

NOVEMBER

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MARCH

1930S



MONUMENT COMMEMORATING FALLEN WORKERS FROM THE SEMPERIT FACTORY, RAKOWICKI CEMETERY, KRAKÓW

Together with Stern and Wiciński, she designs the stage for a memorial solidarity event at the Miners’ House (Dom Górników) on Krasieńskiego Avenue in Kraków, honoring workers killed during the strike at the Semperit factory.

Shortly thereafter, a monument to the fallen workers according to Maria Jarema’s design is erected at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Kraków. Few today recall this work, realized at the Rakowicki Cemetery in Kraków. The grave consists of eight or ten steps, ascending toward a platform resembling a rostrum—upon each, the name of one of the fallen is inscribed. Jonasz Stern, “O Marii Jaremie. W oczach przyjaciół,” *Kierunki*, no. 50 (1958).

Exhibition of “secessionist” painters, organized for the Days of Kraków at the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) premises on Dunajewskiego Street. Members of the Kraków Group participate alongside Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa, Zygmunt Waliszewski, and Karol Larisch. Jarema debuts her paintings.

The group comprising Grünberżanka, Stern, Jaremianka, Stawiński, and Marczyński distinguishes itself with great cohesion; from strictly coloristic problems (Blonder with his most noble greyinges, Grünberżanka), we transition to formal-textural concerns (Jaremianka, Stern), which in Stern’s case reach as far as abstractionist solutions. H.W., “Motywy Krakowa,” *Nowy Dziennik*, no. 175 (1936): 8.

Jarema designs the costumes for Cricot’s performance *Female Element* (*Element żeński*), a *buffonade* by Józef Jarema dedicated to the modern woman, and appears in the role herself.

1937

In connection with the 1st National Sculpture Salon (I Ogólnopolski Salon Rzeźby) opened in April, the journal *Głos Plastyków* publishes responses from artists, including Maria Jarema, to a previously distributed survey on the state of contemporary sculpture.

The ZPAP Board in Kraków decides to finance a trip to Paris for eight artists, Maria Jarema among them. Cricot restages Józef Jarema’s grotesque *Lajkonik*, *Student Corps Member*, and *Hamlet*. Maria Jarema and Jonasz Stern produce the costumes and masks.

Jarema travels to Paris with Erna Rosenstein, Sasha Blonder, and Berta Grünberg. She visits the 1937 World’s Fair and the exhibitions: *The Masters of Independent Art 1895–1937* (*Les Maîtres de l’art indépendant 1895–1937*) at the Petit Palais, *Origins and Development of International Independent Art* (*Origines et développement de l’art international indépendant*) at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, and—in January 1938—the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (*Exposition internationale du surréalisme*) at Galerie des Beaux-Arts. She meets Polish artists who arrived for the World’s Fair, including Jan Cybis and Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa.

At the end of 1937, the Cricot stages Adam Polewka’s political nativity play *Herod and the Arians* (*Herod i Ariowie*). Masks and costumes are designed by Maria Jarema, Zbigniew Pronaszko, Jonasz Stern, and Adam Marczyński, among others. The intention of this political nativity play was to fight for a united front directed against fascism. We carried all the equipment, decorations, props, and puppets on our own backs from one trade



MARIA JAREMA, JAN CYBIS, HANNA RUDZKA-CYBISOWA, STEFAN ZBIGNIEWICZ, PARIS, 1937

union center to another. As far as I know, about 20,000 workers saw the performance then.

Jonasz Stern, “O Marii Jaremie. W oczach przyjaciół,” *Kierunki*, no. 50 (1958).

The Kraków Group ceases to exist, due to the artists’ underground activity and political involvement; in 1937, they are removed from the ZZPAP under the pretext of unpaid membership fees. The Group’s leading representatives leave Kraków.

1938 JUNE AND JULY

1st ZZPAP Salon at the Artists’ House in Kraków. Writer Kornel Filipowicz notes the exhibition’s high caliber, identifying an influence of French painting that distinguishes the works from the “humorous craft of Szukalski or the naive pseudo-classicism of German art.” He singles out Maria Jarema among the sculptors. k.f. [Kornel Filipowicz], “Salon w Domu Plastyków,” *Nasz Wyraz*, no. 6 (1938).

OCTOBER

Survey of Current Art (Wystawa Bieżąca) of the Kraków ZZPAP at the Artists’ House in Kraków.

Special attention is due to our Kraków abstractionists: Maria Jarema and Adam Marczyński. Jaremianka has contributed two small gouaches that speak volumes of her grasp of reality, which treads the border between deformation and abstraction. The compositional content of these paintings is vivid, and the palette decisive yet delicate.

Z[ofia] W[ielowieyska], “Wystawy w Domu Plastyków,” *Nasz Wyraz*, no. 12 (1938): 8.

NOVEMBER

Jarema participates in the 10th Salon of Painting, Graphic Arts, and Sculpture (X Salon Malarstwa, Grafiki i Rzeźby) at IPS in Warsaw. She presents two tempera paintings, as indicated on her entry form; the exhibition catalog lists one work.

1939–45

In 1939, Jarema is due to be awarded a scholarship to travel abroad, yet the outbreak of war prevents her departure. During the occupation, she stays at her family home in the Wola Justowska district of Kraków. She works as a cloakroom attendant at the Artists’ Café (Kawiarnia Plastyków) in Kraków until the German authorities close the venue in April 1942. In the following year, she works in an artistic doll workshop run by the Main Welfare Council (RGO; a Polish charity operating with the consent of the German occupying authorities during World War II, headquartered in Kraków). She collaborates with the “R” (Revolution) underground organization of Ignacy Fik and Mieczysławewiński until their arrest in 1942.

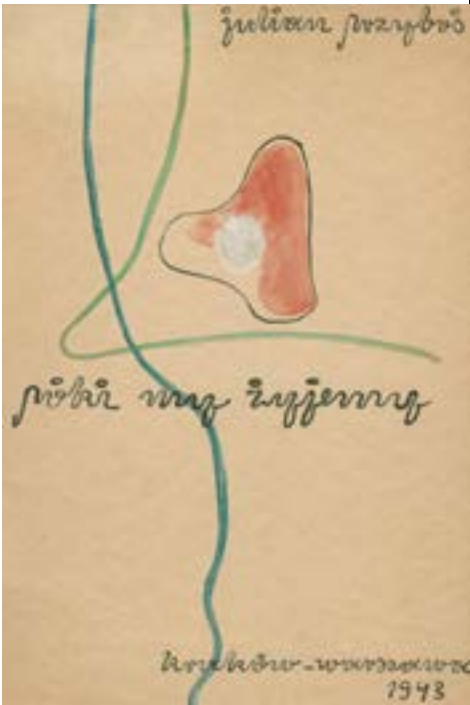
She forms a friendship with Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa. The Kraków Group was dissolved, Jaremianka was friends with Rudzka-Cybisowa. They could be spotted together in the Artists’ Café—through a window, as we did not go to that café. It was a completely different world.

Krystyna Czerni, *Rozmowy z profesorem Mieczysławem Porębskim* (Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1992), 43.

During the occupation, Jarema abandons sculpture in favor of painting, working in gouache, watercolor, and tempera on paper. Her works include portraits of friends and figural scenes. Between 1943–44, she also creates over a dozen paintings with floral motifs.

1943 – Birth of a son, Aleksander, from her relationship with writer Kornel

COVER DESIGN FOR JULIAN PRZYBOŚ’S VOLUME OF POETRY *PÓKI MY ŻYJEMY* [SO LONG AS WE STILL LIVE], 1943



DON QUIXOTE, DOLL OF FABRIC AND WIRE, 1943



AS A CLOAKROOM ATTENDANT IN THE ARTISTS’ HOUSE CAFÉ IN KRAKÓW, 1941.

Filipowicz. In April 1944, Jarema’s husband is arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps (first Oranienburg, then Sachsenhausen), from which he returns after the war. Jarema and Filipowicz marry in 1945

She designs covers for the underground editions of three volumes of poetry: *Póki my żyjemy* [As long as we live] and *Najmniej słów* [The fewest words] by Julian Przyboś, and *Mijani* [Those passed by] by Kornel Filipowicz.

1945 SEPTEMBER

A ZZPAP exhibition of painting and sculpture is held at the Palace of Art in Kraków, in conjunction with the General Congress of ZZPAP Delegates in early September. Jarema presents two paintings: the watercolor *Composition (Kompozycja)* and the tempera *Flowers (Kwiaty)*.

The clou of the exhibition lies in the efforts of artists whose painting is grounded in color. ... What is lacking are works of young art, of the so-called leftist movements; Maria Jarema alone, by some miracle, is included in the exhibition.

Helena Blum, “Pierwsza Wystawa Plastyków,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 26 (1945): 9.

Newer trends are represented in Kraków primarily by Maria Jarema in her graceful, cheerful, and sophisticated watercolors.

Helena Wielowieyska, “Wyznania plastyczne,” *Twórczość*, no. 5 (1945).

The artist joins the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) and, following the Unification Congress, the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR). She joins the Group of Young Visual Artists (Grupa Młodych Plastyków) in Kraków (alongside Tadeusz Brzozowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Kazimierz Mikulski, and Jerzy Nowosielski).

1946 MAY

She participates in the Spring Salon (Salon Wiosenny) at the National Museum in Warsaw, the first postwar nationwide art exhibition organized by the ZZPAP. Jarema presents two works: the oil painting *Composition (Kompozycja)* and the tempera *Landscape (Pejzaż)*.

Maria Jarema follows her path unerringly. She and Kantor are at this moment the only official representatives of post-Cubist trends. Jaremianka proceeds decidedly along Picasso’s line, both in *Composition* and *Landscape*. Her painting demonstrates a clearly defined program.

Helena Blum, “Salon Wiosenny w Warszawie,” *Twórczość*, no. 7–8 (1946).

Maria Jarema exhibits constructivist-abstract compositions that only slightly strike the chord of reality—coloristically original and bold.

Tadeusz Dobrowolski, “Salon Wiosenny w Warszawie,” *Odrodzenie*, no. 25 (1946).

Maria Jarema is a big individuality among the younger generation of artists. A sense of color and decorativeness, combined with a refined painterly culture and a serious approach to strictly visual principles, merge in her work with a vast visual imagination from which the strange and distinct world of her art emerges. A some-

what romantic landscape and a coloristically intriguing composition offer a glimpse of Jarema's talent.
Jerzy Malina, "Salon Wiosenny," *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 6 (1946): 3.

I am enveloped by the coolness and pleasant atmosphere of the exhibition halls. In the first—very bright, perhaps overly so—two ladies command attention. They are the finest there; we must give them justice.... The second, Maria Jarema, in *Composition* and *Landscape*—constructs originally conceived abstract concepts with succulent colors. These are intellectually daring works, Western European in their culture, yet bearing the clear stamp of Polish individuality.
Stefan Flukowski, *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 6 (1946): 5.

OCTOBER

Exhibition of Young Visual Artists (Wystawa Młodych Plastyków) at the Palace of Art in Kraków, featuring: Tadeusz Brzozowski, Maria Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Jadwiga Maziarska, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Erna Rosenstein, Jerzy Skarżyński, and Bogusław Szwacz. The artist presents four paintings: *Dancers (Tancerki)*, *Nude I (Akt I)*, *Nude II (Akt II)*, and *Round Table (Okrągły stół)*, along with twenty-eight works in watercolor, gouache, and tempera.

Maria Jarema has undoubtedly undergone the discipline of Picasso, yet today she is liberating herself from that influence, demonstrating a bright, harmonized palette. I observe two elements that have recently become most pronounced in her work: a decorative quality, particularly in *Dancers*. Within this highly modern decorativeness, one finds distant echoes of Art Nouveau—something akin to a modernized Wojtkiewicz (specifically in *Dancers*). This heralds a new style for the era. In her many watercolors and gouaches, besides compelling formal concerns, there emerges a connection to life, and even a theme. For all her high artistic merit, Maria Jarema exhibits an extraordinary grace—all the more striking for the force of her individuality.
Helena Blum, "Z Pałacu sztuki. Wystawa Młodych Plastyków," *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 44 (1946).

We find ourselves here under the spell of a capricious fantasy replete with allusions, understatements, and distortions. A wondrous flora of detached formal entities coalesces into a lush, autonomous vegetation. Realistic elements are, as it were, bracketed or renamed. Nevertheless, a distant affinity between the picture plane and a suggestive, if undefined and unlocalized, world of three-dimensional relations and affairs is preserved. This, of course, has little to do with realism—even of the kind represented, after all, by Kantor, Szwacz, or Brzozowski. In Jaremińska's paintings, something else occurs: the vivid activity of a pure visual imagination is realized, testifying in its own way to the human being and their active experience.
Mieczysław Porębski, "Dwugłos o Wystawie Młodych Plastyków w Krakowie," *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 11–12 (1946).

The canvases of Maria Jarema, who builds with honesty and consistency, represent an independent position within this exhibition. It is a regret that this "reflective knowledge" of which Porębski speaks in the catalog is not evident beyond Jarema's paintings. Furthermore, the practiced eye observes that Jarema's works result from a strictly personal inquiry.

1940S



Eustachy Wasilkowski, "Wystawa współczesnego malarstwa francuskiego w Krakowie," *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 11–12 (1946).

The work of Maria Jarema is most extensively represented—an artist possessing an abundant repertoire of expressive means and handling a wealth of themes from all walks of life. This life pulses within her mobile genre scenes, interiors, and groups, rendered with feminine grace. The linear technique she employs multiplies and redoubles to convey this mobility and the rhythm of constant change. Jarema is at her most eloquent in small sketches and pictures that combine simplicity of artistic premise with the wealth of observational material gathered therein. Transposing this intimate mood to larger formats proves an attempt that is not always successful; thus, several larger compositions included in the exhibition represent a rather secondary position in the overview of Maria Jarema's profoundly interesting output.
Dr S. Kosieñ, "Wystawa Młodych Plastyków. Z krakowskiego Towarzystwa Sztuk Pięknych," *Trybuna Robotnicza*, no. 301 (1946).

I find *Dancers* most interesting in the exhibition, with a line that is sinuous, decorative, perhaps somewhat stylized, although vivid as it possesses nothing of the dryness of mannerism. In character, this line recalls the unrest of Art Nouveau. It is a new element in Maria Jarema's painting and is most intriguing, for we observed something similar, though of a different character, in Fougeron, from whom Kantor also adopted it in the painting *The Ironer*. Jaremińska, however, achieved this rather independently. The artist also exhibited a greater number of sketches, drawings, and gouaches. The connection to contemporary French art is unmistakable, yet Jaremińska knows how to take what she needs with great grace and taste. ... Thus, Maria Jarema, appearing for the first time with a retrospective exhibition of her works, has immediately secured a strong and prominent standing in the latest art.
Helena Blum, "Wystawa Młodych Plastyków," *Twórczość*, no. 12 (1946).

Maria Jarema's paintings represent a continuation of her earlier, seemingly established manner, founded upon either the total deformation of the objective object—such as a grotesque "mechanization" of man—or the complete "rolling out" of the figure, leading to a vision of a peculiar "catastrophism."
Tadeusz Dobrowolski, "Wystawa w krakowskim Towarzystwie Sztuk Pięknych," *Odrodzenie*, no. 45 (1946).

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER

International Exhibition of Modern Art (Exposition Internationale d'Art Moderne) at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, organized under the patronage of UNESCO. The Polish section features works by artists from Poland as well as those living in exile in France and Great Britain. One oil painting by Maria Jarema, *Composition (Kompozycja)*, is exhibited.

JANUARY–FEBRUARY

Jarema participates in the 2nd Nationwide Winter Salon (II Ogólnopolski Salon Zimowy) at the Palace of Art in Kraków with the oil painting *Nude (Akt)*. Attention centers primarily on the painting by Maria Jarema, who has the strongest individuality among the youth. Her *Nude* arises from post-cubist foundations.... The passage through cubism has led the

1947

artist to employ a system of planes and contours aiming to bring out three-dimensional solidity. However, in accordance with the principles of cubism, this arrangement remains within the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. Jaremińska manifests an extraordinary talent for color. We have grown accustomed to our cubists’ hard, defined color planes. Meanwhile, Jaremińska applies color intuitively. Not only the sets of light colors and their range, but also the arrangement of color on the picture plane reveals a distinct character. This color does not coincide with the shape marked by the contour but is independent of the contour and the probable outline of the object. In Jaremińska’s paintings, it possesses spatial value. Hence the specific character of this painting. ... This artwork grants Jarema a serious and distinct position among Polish painters. In her art, one more feature is striking: the avoidance of a precise connection of line and plane with the object. In its place, there is a certain wavy continuity, a transition and merging of these elements into a certain rhythm, as if a reference to Art Nouveau. The problem of Art Nouveau demands a new consideration. The word itself tends to be an unpleasant memory of the Viennese version of this style from the fin de siècle years. Most unexpectedly, it begins to appear fifty years later in the works of the last Parisian modernists. Jaremińska sensed this in her own way. We are facing an interesting artistic phenomenon.

Helena Blum, “Ogólnopolski Salon Zimowy w Krakowie,” *Twórczość*, no. 4 (1947).

Maria Jarema’s *Nude* is an experimental work of undeniable artistic merit, formally mature and impeccable in terms of its painterly structure. It appears, moreover, to be a serious step forward for the artist whose work we had the opportunity to explore extensively at the October exhibition. The capricious breaking and scattering of forms that characterized her previous works now gives way to focused concentration. In place of the fantasy of contours, we encounter deep reflection devoted to every line. Their arrangement describes the subject in a way independent of natural appearance, creatively concretizing the essence of the represented bodily form. Instead of coloristic mobility and elusiveness, we finally encounter a clear tonal disposition. It introduces the element of light into the composition of the nude—light understood as a function of matter and shape, rather than a case of natural lighting. As a result, we find in Jarema’s painting an imaginative creation of multifaceted richness of characterization, a creation which, without repeating nature, provides its painterly, equivalent concept. On the path to an imaginative reflection of reality and its structural problems, Jaremińska’s painting will remain a permanent achievement—instructive and innovative.

Mieczysław Porębski, “Salon zimowy,” *Twórczość*, no. 4 (1947).

On this occasion, we may add that among our “modernists” there are undeniable talents. ... Jarema is one of those endowed with a sense of color construction. But the “communicability” of these paintings seems very limited.

Tadeusz Dobrowolski, “Salon Zimowy,” *Twórczość*, no. 4 (1947).

At the beginning of the month, Jarema leaves for Paris on a three-month scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and Art. She visits the Louvre exhibitions, the French painting collection at the Petit Palais, the Impressionist gallery at the Musée du Jeu de



1940S-1950S



1ST EXHIBITION OF MODERN ART, KRAKÓW, 1948/1949
IN THE SECOND ROW FROM THE LEFT:
TADEUSZ KANTOR, MARIA JAREMA,
ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI;
SEATED FROM THE RIGHT:
ERNA ROSENSTEIN, JADWIGA MAZIARSKA

Paume, the Musée National d’Art Moderne (opened in June), and an abstract painting exhibition at Galerie Denis René. In July, she attends the opening of *Surrealism in 1947* (*Le Surréalisme en 1947*) at Galerie Maeght. At the end of July, she travels to Italy at the invitation of her brother, Józef.

NOVEMBER

Exhibition of Modern Painting (Wystawa malarstwa nowoczesnego) in Warsaw—organized by the Young Artists and Scientists Club (KMAN) to document connections between science, technology, and contemporary art. The Warsaw, Łódź, and Kraków circles are represented, including avant-garde mentors Władysław Strzemiński and Henryk Stażewski.

While the Łódź group is ideologically rather cohesive, young Kraków presents itself more diversely. The very adoption of the adjective “young” defines more closely the character of the Kraków artists’ endeavors. They have not yet achieved a work so mature that it could be contraposed with Strzemiński, yet they exhibit much resilience and a variety of interests, in accordance with their age. ... Maria Jarema is really the only one to have ventured an independent expression. Her paintings, *Horses* and especially *Dancers*, are true achievements in Poland. Jarema has come much closer to the motif, moving away from abstractionism, and yet she continues to devote herself primarily to matters of purely visual expression.

Helena Blum, “Wystawa Młodych Plastyków,” *Twórczość*, no. 2 (1948).

In 1947, Jarema responds critically to a proposed People’s Republic bill tightening penalties for abortion. In a letter to writer Irena Krzywicka—most likely unsent, preserved in the family archive—she addresses structural inequalities and the lack of equal access to reproductive rights for women in rural areas. She writes: “Democracy cannot use terror against a woman in matters so personal and so consequential as bringing children into the world and rearing them. ... Where are female intellectuals, conscious women who have a duty to fight for the liberation of the female masses? It appears that either they are afraid, or they wish to pursue their careers, or it is enough for them that they themselves do not have such troubles—which means they are cynical.” (Maria Jarema, “Do Ireny Krzywickiej,” in Maria Jarema. *Wymyślić sztukę na nowo*, ed. Agnieszka Dauksza, słowo/obraz terytoria, Fundacja Terytoria Książki, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie, 2021, 75–79). That same year, she authors an essay titled *O losie kobiet* [*On the fate of women*], reiterating her opposition to the tightening of the law while addressing social mores, economic conditions, and women’s personal freedom.

1948

FEBRUARY

Jarema participates in the exhibition *Polish Art Today* at the Kościuszko Foundation House in New York, showing two oil paintings: *Youthful Drummers* and *Lady in a Chair*.

She enters the competition for set designs for Piotr Perkowski’s ballet *Svantovit* (*Swantewit*). Five artists are invited by the State Committee of the Poznań Opera; her stage and costume designs, submitted under the “Ubu” emblem, receive the highest monetary prize in the uninvited artists category.

DECEMBER 1948–JANUARY 1949

1st Exhibition of Modern Art (I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej) at the Palace of Art in Kraków. Organized by the Artists’ Club in Kraków which, alongside the Young Visual Artists Group, includes Ali Bunsch, Andrzej Cybulski, Zofia Gutkowska, Janina Kraupe-Świderska, Maciej Makarewicz, Ewa Siedlecka, Jonasz Stern, Marian Szulc, Jad-

wiga Umińska, Eugeniusz Waniek, Kazimierz Wojtanowicz, and Mieczysław Wejman. They are supported by art critic Mieczysław Porębski, painter Andrzej Wróblewski, and writers Jerzy Broszkiewicz, Kornel Filipowicz, Zdzisław Nardelli, Tadeusz Różewicz, and Tadeusz Kwiatkowski. [The organizers sought] “to showcase the artistic output of the Artists’ Club members in a way that helps viewers understand its rationale and goals; to highlight connections with contemporary reality in its scientific, technical, and social aspects. ... Visitors to the exhibition will find themselves as if in a great studio of modern artists from Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, and Kraków. They will see not only finished paintings, prints, drawings, and photograms. Models and structures will demonstrate how the spatial imagination of today’s artist works; photomontages will reveal the close links between modern art and the real world, discovered by science and organized by technology.

Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska, *Wkręgu lat 40-tych. Rysunek, grafika, akwarela i formy przestrzenne, część 1* (Galeria Krzysztofor, 1990). Jarema shows five works in tempera: *Birds (Ptaki)*, *Landscape (Pejzaż)*, *Nude (Akt)*, *Fisherman (Rybak)*, and *Portrait (Portret)*.

Maria Jarema is perfectly attuned to the visual rhythm of our era; her imagination combines forms and colors with the concept of an object, as in the composition *Birds*. Motifs distant from their natural prototype exist solely as a plastic shape of great value. Maria Jarema possesses an established, highly personal style. Helena Blum, “Wystawa Młodych,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 1 (1949): 6.

Many of the exhibited works, despite their complex content, lack the means to act upon the visual imagination. These paintings may give the impression of survey and situational photographs of philosophical ideas or scientific diagrams, but they are not expressed in the language of visual arts. ... Meanwhile, works of another category—represented by Włodarski, Kantor, Jaremińska, Nowosielski, Tchórzewski, Szwacz, Wegner, Stażewski, Maziarska, and Makarewicz—establish a foundation for a positive resolution of the problems haunting the new era. Józef Edward Dutkiewicz, “W walce z przedmiotem,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 1 (1949): 5.

Jarema participates in the Mixed National Competition (Mieszany Konkurs Krajowy) for paintings and prints intended for the International Art Competition and Exhibition during the 14th Summer Olympics in London with the composition titled *Boxing (Boks)*.

A convention of visual artists and art theorists is organized by the Ministry of Culture and Art in Nieborów. Jarema participates in the sessions and takes the floor. The conference heralds the initial imposition of socialist-realist principles in art by the communist authorities. In June, at a visual artists’ convention in Katowice, modern tendencies are harshly criticized from the standpoint of Marxist aesthetics. The 1st Nationwide Visual Arts Exhibition (I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Plastyki) opens a series of official exhibitions from which avant-garde art is entirely eliminated.

Jarema enters a competition for a monument to Fryderyk Chopin in Kraków, to be located in Park Krakowski. Out of forty-seven entries, three designs are honored: those by Józef Bandura, Maria Jaremińska, and Teodor Ostaszewski.



1950S

1949–54

Jaremińska’s project is a park pond of excellent form with ingeniously integrated fountains that interpenetrate, creating a uniform musical harmony between the pond’s shape and the arrangement of water jets. Tadeusz Kwiatkowski, “Ładny gips,” *Dziennik Literacki*, July 10, 1949.

Maria Jarema proposed an abstract shape based on the motif of a grand piano. Combined with jets of water flowing from forms based on the shapes of piano hammers, she achieved a spatial creation of profound resonance. Helena Blum, “Krakowska kronika plastyczna,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 28 (1949).

On **June 25**, alongside Tadeusz Kantor, Jarema develops the staging for Pablo Neruda’s play *Let the Rail Splitter Awake* at the “Pod Baranami” Cultural Center in Kraków. The performance features amateurs—an ensemble from the Trade Unions’ Workers’ Cultural Center in Kraków. It’s a multimedia production with costumes and projections designed by the artists. This year and the next, Jarema produces decorative work for commemorative exhibitions and events: the 6-Year Plan, Small Industry, Harvest Festival, and the Spartakiad. During this period, she creates designs for the *Coal (Węgiel)* fabric as well as for wall hangings for the Department of Artistic Industry at the Ministry of Culture.

Jarema withdraws from active artistic life but continues to work, refraining from exhibiting at official shows. She experiments with various techniques, producing her first monotypes.

... the period after 1949 brings geometrically oriented compositions of planes intersected by bright contours—as cheerful and colorful as decorative folk art. In the years that follow, she works on monotypes, creating her “nudes” and “heads” with massive, silhouetted forms and an expression full of dread and suffering. Lately, Jaremińska has been striving to combine both threads, placing planes of vivid colors beneath these dark, expressive shapes, somewhat in the manner of Léger in his paintings. Janusz Bogucki, “O nowoczesnych,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 5–6 (1955): 78.

A group of works from the years 1949–51 has only now been exhibited for the first time. So this is what those years looked like—a time of the most difficult, fundamental decisions that had to be made, and not only on the creative plane? These paintings are cold, concentrated, resolute. If they ooze a sense of anticipation, it is of the “what will be necessary?” type, rather than “what will be possible?” Provided, of course, that “necessary” refers to an internal necessity, not to external coercion or an order. Mieczysław Porębski, “Z wystawy Marii Jaremy,” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, May 15, 1958.

1954

Jarema speaks publicly during a discussion at the 4th Nationwide Visual Arts Exhibition, for the first time since the 1949 Nieborów debate.

1955



WITH HER SON AL-ALEKSANDER FILIPOWICZ, THE 1950S.

Jarema participates in an exhibition of paintings, monotypes, drawings, and gouaches at the Artists’ House in Kraków, later known as the *Exhibition of Nine* (*Wystawa Dziewięciu*). Other participants include Tadeusz Brzozowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Jadwiga Maziarska, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Erna Rosenstein, Jerzy Skarżyński, and Jonasz Stern.

... multilayered and ambiguous expression also present in Maria Jarema’s compositions, where two elements, at once interrelated and clashing, are executed through different technical means. Working on paper, the artist combines black-and-white monotype with an arrangement of colored planes in tempera. Monotype is used to create sculptural, biological forms, often marked by a disquieting expression. Through a meticulously scratched texture, their massive shape becomes semi-transparent and ethereal, permeable to the geometric forms of color. Janusz Bogucki, “Z powodu krakowskiej wystawy ‘nowoczesnych,’” *Życie Literackie*, no. 50 (1955): 5.

M. Jarema’s paintings develop a field of contemporary knowledge about movement and time. This seemingly disinterested play of planes, colors, and lines is joyful and full of inventiveness, while simultaneously continuing the new understanding of movement first demonstrated by Rodin in *The Walking Man* or Géricault in *The Derby at Epsom*. Leokadia [Loda] Kałuska, “Łechtanie czy myślenie?,” *Życie Literackie*, December 18, 1955.

These canvases bring to mind the Platonic parable. Reality appears to people like shadows on the wall of a cave, which itself remains an unknown. ... Reality in Maria Jarema’s work casts faint shadows not on the cave wall, but on a background that is an abstract visual idea of harmony. Marcin Czerwiński, “Dwugłos o Wystawie Krakowskiej,” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 51–52 (1955).

Maria Jarema’s pleasant color studies bear the titles: *Moments*, *Sequence*, *Duration*, and *Concerns*. Why not “smile,” “horror,” or “fear”? Everything is permissible here. The lack of verifiability between the exhibited kaleidoscopic collection of spots and tangled lines and their quasi-philosophical titles makes anything possible. Andrzej Bursa, “Stare szaty króla,” *Od A do Z*, no. 44 (1955).

Jaremianka’s colorful, falling planes, with transparent outlines entangled within them, tell of the restless and shifting birth and disappearance of imagined visions too subtle to be captured and fully recognized. Mieczysław Porębski, “Dwugłos o wystawie Krakowskiej,” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 51–52 (1955).

Maria Jarema in *Życie Literackie*: Since we are to talk about art ... I have nothing to say about the past five years of our artistic life except that visual artists did not allow themselves to be destroyed by schematism. Alas, time lost in culture is lost tenfold. Culture hindered for even a short period of



CRICOT 2 THEATER
POSTER DESIGN, 1956

time regresses far back. We have been almost completely deprived of that thin layer of audience members who, less through direct emotion and more often through snobbery (that motor compelling an interest in the arts, and sometimes even high expertise), always sought to join the rhythm of modernity and manifested and transferred—through various forms of social coexistence—their gains to ever wider social circles. Artistic youth is in a difficult position, their as yet unconscious receptivity having encountered emptiness or falsehood in those past times. But I do think it is precisely youth that will save them. “Z pracowni plastyków. Maria Jarema,” *Życie Literackie*, no. 28 (1956).

Following the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Nikita Khrushchev’s secret speech on Stalinist crimes, Jarema destroys her party membership card.

Tadeusz Kantor, Maria Jarema, and Kazimierz Mikulski launch the Cricot 2 Theater in Kraków. The inaugural performance at the Artists’ House features *The Cuttlefish* (*Mątna*), based on Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, directed by Kantor with costumes and sets by Jarema. The cast includes artists Jarema, Kazimierz Mikulski, and Andrzej Pawłowski.

At the Artists’s House on Łobzowska Street, where Cricot evenings once took place, a new stage emerges after years of theatrical stagnation. It is created by the visual artists of the “Group of Nine”—Tadeusz Kantor, Kazimierz Mikulski, Maria Jaremianka, and Jerzy Skarżyński. Conceived as a mix of café, jazz concert, and show, the program includes: *The Cuttlefish*, or *the Hyrcanian worldview* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, directed by Tadeusz Kantor, and Kazimierz Mikulski’s pantomime *The Well*, or *the Depth of Feelings*, directed by the author. Though distinct in concept, the creators share a common experimental tradition opposed to official theater, adopting the name Cricot 2. The troupe’s strongest link remains Kantor’s wartime underground theater. ... Kantor meticulously eliminates all naturalism. Character interaction is achieved not through gaze or direct gesture, but via movement, color, and costume. ... The costumes for *The Cuttlefish*, designed by Maria Jaremianka, shatter the illusion of naturalistic “truth of life,” highlighting the characters’ tragicomic roles. Pope Julius II wears a yellow leotard with irregular black stripes and a tiara-shaped mask—all this unerringly makes up the figure of a liturgical sage-clown. ... The Uncles, indistinguishable in the script, share a single jacket like Siamese twins, representing a single scenic concept. Andrzej Osęka, “Cricot 2,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 2 (1956).

Witkacy is notoriously hard to crack. ... Kantor succeeds through creative interpretation and theatrical elements—actor, costume, and scenery—transforming *The Cuttlefish* into a production as readable and witty as a play by Shaw. Jaremianka’s costumes perfectly complement the experiment. ... She demonstrates an acting style suited to such a theater. Tadeusz Kwiatkowski, “Trochę wspomnień, refleksji i zachwyków,” *Dziennik Polski*, no. 117 (1956).



THE CUTTLEFISH
AT CRICOT 2, 1956

In Maria Jaremianka's costumes, we saw bold sets of semantic emblems that facilitated the viewer's work of thought and imagination. Kazimierz Barnaś, "Powrót do 'Cricot.'" *Życie Literackie*, no. 26 (1956).

The costumes for Witkiewicz's *The Cuttlefish* and Mikulski's *Circus* represent her most complete theatrical statement. Perhaps one day this lesson of new theater will be fully understood. ... She created the costume much like that of Pierrot or Columbine, using the means of contemporary painting. She understood she could not stop at the surface by applying the forms used in her paintings—she must arrive at them under new conditions and in a new material. ... On stage, colorful forms were animated by actors. These autonomous costume-forms, intensifying the actor's presence without being detached, represent an extremely rare synthesis in modern theater. Tadeusz Kantor, "Maria Jarema 1908–1958. Polskie dzieło plastyczne w XV-lecie PRL. Wystawa scenografii," (Warszawa, 1962).

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER

Jarma participates in the Prix Guggenheim—Musée National d'Art Moderne exhibition in Paris, representing Poland with Jan Cybis.

DECEMBER

Works by Maria Jarema and Tadeusz Kantor are shown at the "Po prostu" Salon in Warsaw. She presents a series of eleven works from 1955–56.

A note of anxiety, suffering, and an unreal, metaphysical obsession dominated last year's set. The current set shows more composure and balance. The artist arrests individual forms, viewing and confronting them. Their color and plastic projections settle on the canvas and stay there. Eyes and mouths no longer open in the transparent outlines. Visual thinking has triumphed over intrusive figments of the imagination. Looking at Jarema's recent paintings, it is worth remembering they were painted by a sculptor. The variability of interlinked profiles, the multiplicity of aspects, the diversity of overlapping "shadows" of a single motif—all this suggests volume, a three-dimensional concrete entity reborn in a flat, abstract arrangement of painted forms. ... Jarema's "sculptural" paintings are allusive. They say nothing of concrete realities as such; they speak of the need for them.

"Maria Jarema i Tadeusz Kantor w Salonie 'Po prostu,'" *Po prostu*, no. 52–53 (1956).

The works exhibited by Jaremianka at the "Po prostu" Salon represent a type known from last year's *Group of Nine* exhibition in Kraków: monotype with tempera. Here, two techniques merge with two currents—subtle abstraction of colored planes and dark, convex forms. The subject is always a figure in motion, generally rendered in the register of sculptural forms, with broad spots of color providing accompaniment. The artist creates two distinct realities—one of shape and one of color—causing them to interpenetrate and complement each other according to her own rules. Their play, shifts, and dispersions could be read as a conflict between the hard laws of matter and light, lyrical coloristic arguments. In various paintings, the degree to which shapes allude to the human figure and the dispersion of these shapes vary. Contrast and unity,

1950s



distinctness and interpenetration of color and form—Jaremianka resolves these conflicts differently each time, resulting in paintings of exceptional visual value. "Jaremianka, taszyzm, Kantor," *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 225–226 (1956–57).

The subject of Jaremianka's paintings is the movement of colors and forms. After years of study, she has reached results comparable to the most interesting achievements in contemporary painting. Jaremianka proposes a new way of representing movement and has even reached the threshold of a new aesthetic formula. She achieved this alone, not swept up in any artistic current or supported by fellow enthusiasts. These paintings are the result of years of work of an eye fascinated by movement, unaided by local experiments, as Strzemiński's experiments followed a different path toward other goals. Jaremianka does not start anew each time or experiment according to varying models; like any strong individual, she follows her own path. ... Her recent work develops the movement of human figures—forms and colors presented on a plane. Thus, themes of dance, dancer and a dancing couple constantly recur. I know her works of a few years back, where this theme is shown in a way suggesting she also knew how to derive insights from Futurist experiences. Julian Przyboś, "Widzenie ruchu," *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 2 (1957).

At the end of 1956, Maria Jarema leaves for Paris. This scholarship trip is combined with hospital treatment following a diagnosis of leukemia. The artist remarks:

In Paris, I was very intrigued by the "movement" paintings in the galleries. This is not about illusory movement, but about the real movement of elements, caused either by a hidden mechanism or by the shifting position of the viewer in relation to the work. The practitioners of the first type are Tinguely and Malina; of the second—Vasarely, Agam, and Soto. I speak only of those whose work I had a chance to see during my stay.

"Rozmowa z Marią Jaremą," *Życie Literackie*, no. 18 (1958).

1957

JANUARY

Together with Tadeusz Kantor, Kazimierz Mikulski, Marek Włodarski, Bogusław Szwacz, Alina Szapocznikow, and Jonasz Stern, Jarema participates in the *International Exhibition (Internationale Ausstellung)* in Munich organized by Der Rote Reiter, a left-wing German artist group set up in 1945 and cofounded by artists such as Willi Baumeister, Max Ackermann, and Ida Kerkovius.

JANUARY 13

The premiere of Mikulski's play *Circus (Cyrk)*, directed by Tadeusz Kantor, takes place at the Cricot 2 Theater. Maria Jarema designs the costumes.

T. Kantor compensates for the author's disregard for the dramatic structure through his direction, demonstrating inventive ingenuity in heightening expression by all means. In terms of acting, he employs circus comedy or commedia dell'arte, bordering on pure nonsense—simple clownish gags with umbrellas, floor holes, and surprises in the closet. Corresponding with this was the anti-aesthetic stage setting, clothing and equipment designed by M. Jaremianka, every gesture and inflection, and even the smallest detail of makeup. The uncanny power of a plain black and white sheet, animated by a human body, becomes a new means of expression in a rhythm of horror and cruelty.

Tadeusz Kudliński, “Nowości sezonu – Cricot II,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 4 (1957).

Scraps of film projection, trapdoors, white or black curtains showing only fragments of the actors’ limbs and faces, the tangling of tonal and concrete music, non-realistic props, and the surreal costumes and makeup by Maria Jaremińska—they all serve Kantor in assembling a performance unique in its expression. Wojciech Dzieduszycki, “Kolacja z nieboszczykiem, czyli Cyrk w Cricocie,” *Nowe Sygnały*, no. 15 (1957).

The costumes and visual solutions are of interest. Beyond any doubt, they partially rehabilitate the idea of staging *Cyrk*. Jerzy Horodyński, “Drugi wieczór w Cricocie,” *Dziennik Polski*, no. 20 (1957).

Maria Jarema’s success lies in the costumes, which contain a witty allusion to the circus, where misery and neglect are aestheticized. T. Brzezicka, “Bohater i cyrk,” *Kierunki*, no. 7 (1957).

The Kraków Group Artistic Association (Stowarzyszenie Artystyczne Grupa Krakowska) is established and granted historic cellars in the Krzysztofory Palace for a gallery and the seat of the Cricot 2 Theater. Bringing together modern artists and art critics, the Group includes: Stanisław Balewicz, Janusz Bogucki, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Władysław Józef Dobrowolski, Tadeusz Kantor, Piotr Krakowski, Wojciech Krakowski, Janina Kraupe, Jadwiga Maziarska, Adam Marczyński, Kazimierz Mikulski, Daniel Mróz, Sokrates Mróz, Jerzy Nowosielski, Andrzej Pawłowski, Karol Pustelnik, Erna Rosenstein, Teresa Rudowicz, Jerzy Skarżyński, Jonasz Stern, Jerzy Tchórzewski, Marian Warzecha.

OCTOBER–NOVEMBER

Jarema participates in the 2nd Exhibition of Modern Art (II Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej) at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. She shows: *Rhythm I (Rytm I)*, *Filters XIV (Filtry XIV)*, *Filters XV (Filtry XV)*, *Penetrations I (Penetracje I)*, and *Penetrations II (Penetracje II)*. The Organizing Committee (Janusz Bogucki, Andrzej Jakimowicz, Mieczysław Porębski, Juliusz Starzyński, Andrzej Wojciechowski) unanimously honors her for *Filters XIV*.

It is worth noting that not only did Julian Przyboś consider her paintings the most outstanding in this exhibition, but all members of the jury also unanimously submitted these paintings as the first position on the list of honors in the painting section. I think that this exceptional convergence of opinions among people whose views on art often proved to be very discordant is one of the proofs of the persuasive power of Jaremińska’s painting.

Bg [Janusz Bogucki], “Rozmowa z Marią Jarema,” *Życie Literackie*, no. 18 (1958).

Maria Jarema is my greatest artistic experience of the exhibition. Her paintings are a spatial arrangement of two contrasting colors, defined with clarity and without understatement. Between these planes, taut like sails, a subtle mesh of tonal gradation penetrates. The entire colored plane is in motion—the image plays, pulses, breathes, with planes approaching, receding, and interpenetrating—which the titles of the compositions, *Filters (Filtry)* and *Penetrations (Penetracje)*, aptly convey.

Zbigniew Herbert, “Jesienny salon nowoczesnych,” *Tygodnik Powszechny*, no. 49 (1957).

MAY



CRICOT 2 THEATER
CURTAIN DESIGN, 1956

I like Maria Jaremińska’s compositions very much. A year has passed since I saw her paintings in the “Po prostu” Salon. I did not expect her to brighten her palette so significantly and intensify her vision of movement within this year. Her earlier works lacked brilliance—Jaremińska used only broken colors—whereas today her compositions are among the most luminous in the exhibition. She has intensified her vision of movement; it is no longer merely the play of contrasted, interpenetrating forms on various planes that creates this impression. In some compositions, the totality of shapes interferes with a distinct sphere of forms in strong contrast to the rest of the canvas, suggesting rhythmic waves of colored forms moving toward the viewer’s eye and into the depths of the planes. Jaremińska’s independent explorations converge with, and even precede, a current in Parisian abstract painting that seeks to suggest movement on a plane in a different way than Futurism. Perhaps Jaremińska will take another step and cross the threshold of abstractionism?

Julian Przyboś, “Sztuka abstrakcyjna. Jak z niej wyjść?” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 45 (1957).

The moderns appeared in crowds (55 painters and sculptors), marking perhaps Poland’s first official salon representing this trend. The number of outstanding works was negligible compared to the mediocrity and outright failures. ... There were few peaks: Henryk Stażewski, the doyen of Polish abstractionists and a classic “geometrist”; Maria Jarema, brilliant and peerless; Adam Marczyński, who reconciles modernity with the sensitive eye of an impressionist; and Stefan Gierowski, the most talented of the young.

[zb], “Po wystawie nowoczesnych,” *Twórczość*, no. 1 (1958).

Jarema receives Kraków’s municipal art award for her creative achievements.

1958

A solo exhibition of Jarema’s work, organized by Gizela Szancerowa, is held at the Kordegarda Gallery of the Ministry of Culture and Art in Warsaw. Thirty-one paintings and four sculptures from 1946–58 are shown.

This was not a path of theoretical speculation, but of living, spontaneously developing experiment. Its fundamental stages and vicissitudes are illustrated by the Kordegarda exhibition. ... Here is *Nude* from 1946 opening the exhibition; at the 1947 Kraków Winter Salon, it intrigued and convinced with its honest attempt to resolve the problem of the object. ... And here is *Seascape* from 1948. At the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art, this work spoke of a growing need for greater discipline of means, precision, selectivity, and autonomy of the creative imagination. A group of works from 1949–51 has only now been exhibited for the first time. So this is what those years looked like—the most difficult, most fundamental decisions that had to take place not only on the creative plane? ... Works from the following years, 1953–57, recall the first group exhibition after a long period of “absence”—*Kraków 55*. The changed technique—monotype with tempera—and method—an automatism of the imagination verging on surrealism—bore witness to a period passing like a nightmare, when necessity crystallized in forms of uncontrolled, and thus authentic, expression. Finally, several works shown at the end of 1956 at the Salon on Królewska Street signaled



MARIA JAREMA PODACZAS OTWARCIA
WYSTAWY W KORDEGARDZIE, 1958

the progressive liberation of the imagination from surreal obsessions and the “neutralization” of forms with “objective” meaning—the necessary transition to the final, fully “non-objective” phase. Mieczysław Porębski, “Z wystawy Marii Jaremy,” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 298 (1958).

For many years, Maria Jarema has worked on the floor rather than at an easel, as required by her partly graphic technique. Her works are created by combining tempera sections with parts applied to the surface via a smooth plate covered in printing ink. In the latter case, she draws on the reverse side of the cardboard as it lies on the plate, accepting the ink under pressure. This can only be done while kneeling on the floor over a white, foreign surface that conceals an ingenious set of forms and colors—some decided, others awaiting external decisions to be verified only afterward. The result is generally predicted but invisible during realization, controlled solely by memory, the hand’s experience, and the mediating mark of the tool on the working surface—a surface that remains hidden from the viewer of the finished work.

Mieczysław Porębski, [from the introduction to the catalog:] *Maria Jarema. Wystawa malarstwa i rzeźby* (Kordegarda, 1958).

In Maria Jarema’s recent paintings, the vision of the world is dramatic, unsoftened by anything, perhaps even close to layers of tragedy. But it is a vision that is the fruit of a rational passion and insightful work. There is not a bit of pious humbug here: neither optimistic nor pessimistic. And if this dramatic vision gives great joy to those looking into it, it is probably because all the discrepancies, collisions, and disharmonies fuse into an unexpected but logical whole, with a luminosity and purity of colors that characterizes only the most mature works. I believe the essential source of these plastic qualities of the painting is the internal maturity and moral strength of the artist.

Bg [Janusz Bogucki], “Rozmowa z Marią Jarema,” *Życie Literackie*, no. 180 (1958).

Alongside dozens of artists and intellectuals, Jarema signs a motion for the approval of the Society of Modern Art Lovers (Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Sztuki Nowoczesnej), published in the visual-arts section of *Życie Literackie*.

Over a dozen of the artist’s works are exhibited at the 29th Venice Biennale—in the Polish Pavilion, alongside works by Artur Nacht-Samborski and Waław Taranczewski. The artist is honored with the Associazione Italo-Polacca Francesco Nullo prize for the paintings *Penetrations II* (*Penetracje II*), 1957, *Rhythm VI* (*Rytm VI*), 1958, and *Rhythm VIII* (*Rytm VIII*), 1958.

From a letter to Jarema: “In general, it is starting to get grim; signs of a retreat from liberal politics are already being felt in a painful way.... Regarding the Biennale, your candidacy is to be put forward from many sides, but whether it will pass in this situation is unknown. And even if it does, it is still important in what company.” (Letter from Gizela Szancerowa to Maria Jarema, November 16, 1957).

In late April this year, in the company of Zdzisław Kępiński, we vis-



IN VENICE, 1958

JUNE



VENICE BIENNALE,
MARIA JAREMA'S WORKS, 1958

ited Jaremianka in her Kraków apartment-studio. The point was to finally establish the details of the Biennale exhibition. Crouched on a low stool, the Artist worked bent over paper spread on the floor, on which new color *Penetrations* were blooming. Such was Jaremianka’s meager ‘workshop,’ where she prepared new compositions for the exhibition at Warsaw’s Kordegarda. I was moved as I listened to Jaremianka speak cheerfully and with calm about her artistic projects, even though she well knew, as did we, how small the chances were of their realization.

Juliusz Starzyński, “Wspomnienie o Marii Jaremie,” *Kierunki*, no. 50 (1958).

Awarded for the first time, the prize founded by the Francesco Nullo Italian Association for the best work by a Polish artist exhibited at the Biennale went to the Kraków-based artist Maria Jarema for one of her abstract compositions.

“Maria Jarema zdobyła nagrodę na Biennale w Wenecji,” *Echo Krakowa*, June 25, 1958.

In our country, as usual, we fail to draw conclusions from past experiences, and there was already an opportunity for this at previous Biennales. The Biennale is supplied mostly on the principle of some fictional cross-section of Polish art. As a result, we always find ourselves on the margins of the main artistic events. Our pavilion, with a very good display of works—disappeared along with many others that were often much weaker. It disappears because the painting it represented was not strongly enough engaged in the field of the struggle taking place in art today. Due to unfavorable location, on the periphery of the exhibition grounds (across the canal), in the company of several other not particularly attractive pavilions—it disappears all the more. It took a lot of goodwill from a visitor to get there.

“O 29 Biennale. Rozmowa z Marią Jarema,” *Życie Literackie*, no. 31 (1958).

This year’s solo exhibitions of paintings by Artur Nacht-Samborski, Waław Taranczewski, and Maria Jarema add new pages of this anthology of contemporary Polish art which we are gradually presenting to international opinion via the Biennale. Perhaps we bring disappointment to some fans of sensation and shock. However, we believe that this systematic work best contributes to establishing the authority of contemporary Polish visual arts abroad

Juliusz Starzyński, “Refleksje po XXIX Biennale,” *Sztuka i Krytyka*, no. 33–34 (1958).

Following the question marks posed by colorism, Maria Jarema resumes the abandoned experiment, initiating a direction for subsequent generations. Her role in our country is similar to the role played in French art by Estève, Singier, Manessier, Hartung, Poliakoff, or Vieira da Silva, and in Italian art by Capogrossi, Santomaso, or Afro. She is linked to them by the need to justify innovative searches through the quality of artistic execution, the clarity of premises, the richness of the obtained effect, and finally non-conformism—nonconformism both in relation to the previous rigors and limitations of geometric abstraction and to the traditional

“painterliness of vision.”
Mieczysław Porębski, “Z XXIX Biennale w Wenecji,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 6 (1958).

NOVEMBER 1, 1958

Maria Jarema dies in Kraków and is buried at the Salwator Cemetery.

Maria Jarema passed away. She built an oeuvre to which we will return on the occasion of a collective exhibition of her works, or whenever we speak of the very lush period of the development of Polish art, permanently linked to her name. She created a model of the moral stance of a contemporary artist, a creator who consistently combines an unshakable faith in the social meaning of their work with the rejection of all compromises, whatever their source and justification.

“Maria Jarema 1908–1958,” *Przegląd Artystyczny*, no. 60 (1958).

We, friends gathered over her grave at the Salwator Cemetery in Kraków, felt a painful anger of sorts, pressing into our hearts with sadness and grief. Maria was not spared the hardest Polish fate of an artist—exhausted by many years of struggle for existence and for the right to her art, she succumbed to illness and passed away at the moment when her painting had unfolded from its source like a colorful bud. ... Maria Jarema was an independent creator, one of only a few who could measure their achievements against modern visual thought in the world.

Julian Przyboś, “O Marii Jaremie,” *Przegląd Kulturalny*, no. 324 (1959).

APARTMENT OF MARIA JAREMA AND KORNEL
FILIPOWICZ IN WOLA JUSTOWSKA, KRAKÓW, 1962



This chronology is a revised reprint of the version originally published in the catalog *Maria Jarema 1908–1958* (National Museum in Wrocław, 1998), with editorial changes by the exhibition curators.

Éric de Chassey is director of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and professor of modern and contemporary art history at the École normale supérieure in Lyon. He was director of the French National Institute of Art History (2016–25) and the French Academy in Rome –Villa Medici (2009–15). He has published extensively on the work of Henri Matisse, US and European art, transatlantic cultural relationships, and visual culture of the second-half of the twentieth century, especially in relation to counterculture and politics. He has curated numerous exhibitions in France, Belgium, Germany, Finland, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, the United States, and Poland (*Andrzej Wróblewski: Recto / Verso 1948–1949, 1956–1957* at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2015, with Marta Dziewańska). A Polish translation of his latest book *Donner à voir* (Gallimard, 2024), on images of Birkenau from the Sonderkommando to Gerhard Richter, which won the Prix Pierre Daix, is forthcoming.

Agnieszka Dauksza is author of the books: *Ludzie nieznaczni. Taktyki przetrwania* [Insignificant people. Survival tactics] (Karakter, słowo/obraz terytoria, 2024), *Jaremianka. Biografia* [Jaremianka. A biography] (Znak, 2019), *Afektywny modernizm* [Affective modernism] (IBL PAN, 2017), *Klub Auschwitz i inne kluby. Rwane opowieści przeżywców* [The Auschwitz club and other clubs. Broken stories of survivors] (słowo/obraz terytoria, 2016, 2021), *Kobiety na drodze. Doświadczenie przestrzeni publicznej w literaturze przełomu XIX i XX wieku* [Women on the road. The experience of public space in literature at the turn of the twentieth century] (Universitas, 2013). Finalist of the Nike Award; winner of the Teresa Torąńska “Newsweek” Award, the Foundation for Polish Science Award, the “Polityka” Scientific Award, the Adam Włodek Award, the “Gryfia” Award, the “Juliusz” Award, and the KMLU Award. She has received scholarships from the City of Kraków and the City of Gdańsk, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. She is an editor of *Teksty Drugie* journal and a Professor at Jagiellonian University.

Małgorzata Dziewulska is a theater director and critic, a lecturer, and author of numerous publications, including books on contemporary theater: *Teatr zdradzonego przymierza* [The theater of the betrayed covenant] (PIW, 1985), *Artyści i*

pielgrzymi [Artists and pilgrims] (Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1995), *Inna obecność* [Another presence] (Sic!, 2009). Her current focus is on the interwar theatrical avant-garde of Eastern Europe. As part of the *Reclaimed Avant-garde* project, operated by the Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute, she published the book *Awanga podkarpacka. Dziewięć reportaży historycznych* [The avant-garde of the Carpathian region. Nine historical reports] (Theatre Institute, 2024).

Barbara Ilkosz is an art historian. From 1985–2021, she was curator of the contemporary painting collection at the National Museum in Wrocław. She focuses on twentieth-century Polish art and the Wrocław artistic milieu during the interwar period. A member of the Association of Art Historians (SHS) and the International Association of Art Critics (AICA). In 1999, she was awarded the First Prize of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage “Sybilla” for the exhibition *Maria Jarema (1908–1958)*. She is author of several publications, including: *Maria Jarema (1908–1958)* (1998), *Kolekcja sztuki polskiej II poł. XX i XXI w.* [Collection of Polish art of the second half of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries] (2016), *Grupa Krakowska (1932–1937)* [The Kraków Group (1932–1937)] (2018/2019), published by the National Museum in Wrocław. She has served as a curator of Polish art exhibitions abroad and a co-curator of international art shows at the National Museum in Wrocław, including *Painter. Mentor. Magician. Otto Mueller and His Artistic Network in Wrocław* (with the Nationalgalerie-Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2020).

Dorota Jarecka is an art historian, literary historian and curator based in Warsaw. Assistant professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In 2021, she published *Surrealizm, realizm, marksizm. Sztuka i lewica komunistyczna w Polsce w latach 1944–1948* [Surrealism, realism, Marxism: Visual arts and the communist left in Poland in 1944–1948] (IBL PAN). She has co-authored the books *Erna Rosenstein: I Can Repeat Only Unconsciously* (Foksal Gallery Foundation, 2014), *Decolonizations* (2022), *Looking Into the Sun: Hanna Orzechowska* (2024, both published by Galeria Studio). She has co-edited the publications: *Krystiana Robb-Narbutt: Drawings, Objects, Studio* (Zachęta, 2012), *Natalia LL: Doing Gender* (2013), *Ewa Zarzycka: Heyday* (2016, both published by Fundacja Lokal Sztuki, lokal_30). In 2013, she published a career-spanning interview with curator Anda Rottenberg entitled *Anda Rottenberg. Już trudno. Rozmawia Dorota Jarecka* [Let it Be: Anda Rottenberg in conversation with Dorota Jarecka]. From 2016–24 she was the program director of Galeria Studio in Warsaw.

Joanna Kordjak is an art historian and curator at Zachęta–National Gallery of Art in Warsaw (since 2011). Her primary

research area is Central and Eastern European art of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on the postwar period. She is author or co-author of numerous group exhibitions at Zachęta, such as: *Map. Artistic Migrations and the Cold War* (2013), *Just After the War* (2015), *The Future Will Be Different: Visions and Practices of Social Modernisation After 1918* (2018), *Puppets: Theater, Film, Politics* (2019), *Cold Revolution: Central and Eastern European Societies in Times of Socialist Realism, 1948–1959* (2021), *Spring Never Comes Again... Children and Art in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (2023), *What Are Our Collective Dreams? Global Connections–Abandoned Friendships* (2025–26), and *I Know that I Can Double Myself: Gisèle Vienne and the Puppets of the Avant-Garde* (2024–25) at the Georg Kolbe Museum in Berlin. She was the editor of publications accompanying these exhibitions and organizer of international conferences. Recipient of the Jerzy Stajuda Art Criticism Award.

Matthias Mühling is an art historian and director of Lenbachhaus Munich. He majored in art history, theater-, film- and television studies, and political science at the University of Bochum and the University of Münster. From 2003–05, he was research assistant at the Hamburger Kunsthalle, and from 2005–13, head of the department of collections, exhibitions and research and Chief Curator of the post-1945 art collection at Lenbachhaus. He has authored numerous publications and curated exhibitions on the art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Joanna Mytkowska—art historian, curator of numerous exhibitions, including the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2005 (Artur Żmijewski’s *Repetition*). Cofounder of the Foksal Gallery Foundation in Warsaw, she also worked at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Since 2007, she has been the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. In 2018, she was awarded the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory.

Luiza Nader is an art historian, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, and author of the books: *Konceptualizm w PRL* [Conceptual art in the Polish People’s Republic] (Warsaw University, 2009) and *Afekt Strzemińskiego. Teoria widzenia, rysunki wojenne, Pamięci przyjaciół – Żydów* [Strzemiński’s affect. Theory of seeing, war drawings, in memory of friends–Jews] (Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, 2018). Her research is focused primarily on twentieth century and contemporary art (with a special focus on practices from the 1940s, 60s and 70s), methodologies of art history, methods of oral history, feminist theories, memory discourse, theories of affect and trauma, and relations between limit events/experiences and the cultural field. She is currently working on visual notations, arti-

facts, reports and visual testimonies from and of the Holocaust, and on questions of witness and observer subject positions. Founder and leader of the Women’s Museum Laboratory at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw: a network of seminars, workshops, lectures, exhibitions and events committed to feminist theory, practice and activism.

Natalia Sielewicz is an art historian, writer, and head curator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Her curatorial practice addresses the issues of feminism, affect, and the impact of technology on the current human condition. Curator of numerous exhibitions at MSN, including *Private Settings. Art After the Internet* (2014), *Ministry of Internal Affairs. Intimacy as Text* (2017), *Paint, Also Known as Blood. Women, Affect and Desire in Contemporary Painting* (2019), *Agnieszka Polska. The Thousand-Year Plan* (2021), *The Dark Arts. Aleksandra Waliszewska and Symbolism from the East and North* (2022, with Alison Gingeras), *Maria Jarema: Cracked Modernism* (2026, with Éric de Chassey). Curator of the Estonian Pavilion at the 61st Venice Biennale.

Stephanie Weber has been a curator at Lenbachhaus Munich since 2014. She previously worked as a curator in the Department of Media and Performance at MoMA in New York. She is responsible for the Munich iteration of the Maria Jarema exhibition. Lenbachhaus exhibitions and publications curated and edited by her include: Senga Nengudi: *Topologies* (2019), *Radio-Activity: Collective Approaches to Art and Politics* (with Karin Althaus, 2020), *Iman Issa: Let’s Play* (2025), and *But Live Here? No Thanks: Surrealism and Anti-fascism* (with Adrian Djukić and Karin Althaus, 2024)—an exhibition that will be presented in a new iteration at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw starting in June 2026. She is currently preparing a Maria Jarema exhibition in Munich for 2026.

LIST OF WORKS OF MARIA JAREMA	Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Portrait (Portret)</i> 1940–1943 watercolor on paper 28.6 × 22.4 cm National Museum in Warsaw	Sketch 1949–1950 ink monotype on paper, graphite on reverse Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 29.4 × 36 cm Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź	monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 48 × 38 cm National Museum in Kraków	monotype, graphite and oil on paper mounted on canvas 100 × 70 cm National Museum in Poznań	21.5 × 12.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
Costume design 1938 gouache, watercolor, ink and graphite on paper 15.5 × 19.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	Costume designs, from the sketchbook 1935–1939 graphite, ink, watercolor, silver-colored paint on paper 16.5 × 19.5 cm Private collection	<i>Figures at Table</i> , from the Sketchbook 1942–1943 distemper on cut paper 19 × 15.5 cm Private collection	Composition (fabric design): <i>Coal (Węgiel)</i> 1949–1950 distemper on paper mounted on canvas 123.5 × 154.0 cm Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź	<i>Figures (Figury)</i> 1953 monotype on paper 36 × 29.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Figures (Postacie)</i> 1950–1955 monotype and distemper on two sheets of paper, graphite on paper on reverse 58.2 × 42.3 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Expressions 8 (Wraży 8)</i> 1956 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 86 × 60.5 cm National Museum in Poznań	Sketch for Alice d'Or's Costume in <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 ink, distemper and collage on paper 21 × 8.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
Study for the sculpture <i>Pomona</i> , from the artist's sketchbook 1930 graphite on paper (double-sided work) National Museum in Poznań	<i>Group of Figures with a Pony</i> (<i>Grupa postaci z konikiem</i>) 1935–1939 watercolor and gouache on paper 22.5 × 28.5 cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Reclining Male (Portrait of Romek</i> <i>on His Deathbed) (Leżący</i> <i>(portret Romka na łożu śmierci))</i> 1943 distemper on paper 15.2 × 19 cm Private collection	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1950 distemper on paper mounted on canvas 112 × 76 cm National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Figures (Figury)</i> 1953 monotype on paper mounted on cardboard 36.0 × 29.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Figures (Postacie)</i> 1950–1955 monotype, distemper, graphite on paper; graphite, green and red crayon on reverse 58.2 × 42.3 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	Costume of Alice d'Or in <i>The</i> <i>Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 knitwear, linen, foam, plastic, thread 150 × 50 × 19 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków	Costume design sketch for <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 distemper on paper 21 × 12.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1935–1939 watercolor and graphite on paper 18 × 14 cm Private collection	Set design for <i>The Cuttlefish</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz second half of the 1930s gouache on cardboard 29.5 × 39.6 cm Sandomierz Castle Museum	<i>So Long as We Still Live</i> (<i>Póki my żyjemy</i>) 1943 cover of manuscript book on textured paper 20.8 × 15 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Theater (Teatr)</i> 1950 distemper on paper on cardboard 78.5 × 88.5 cm Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> from the <i>Expressions (Wraży)</i> series 1953 monotype (printer's ink) and oil on paper, graphite on paper on reverse 35.8 × 29.6 cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Untitled (Bez tytułu)</i> 1950–1955 monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 49 × 38.6 cm (52.3 × 42.3 cm) National Museum in Kraków	Costume of Matron I in <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 mask: linen, linen coated with glue, metal, cardboard, thread; long- sleeved shirt and tights: knitwear, flannel, metal, thread; outer part of the costume: linen, metal, thread 160 × 50 × 25 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków	Costume design for <i>The Circus</i> (<i>Cyrk</i>) by Kazimierz Mikulski 1956 watercolor on paper 23 × 10 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1935–1936 bronze cast: Adam Jezierzkański, 1977 52 × 17 × 21 cm National Museum in Poznań	<i>Procession (Pochód)</i> ca. 1940 mixed media on paper 28.5 × 21.5 (57 × 47) cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Untitled (Scene from a Café)</i> (<i>Bez tytułu (Scena w kawiarni)</i>) 1942–1944 gouache on paper 20 × 19 cm Private collection	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1951 distemper on paper mounted on canvas 75.5 × 113.5 cm National Museum in Poznań	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> 1953 ink monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 47.5 × 39 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Dance (Taniec)</i> 1955 plaster with paint 26 × 18 × 15 cm Private collection	Costume of Pope Julius in <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 knitwear, cotton, plastic, thread 170 × 50 × 20 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków	Cricot 2 Theater poster design 1956 distemper and monotype on paper, graphite and pen on reverse 24.5 × 30.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
<i>Nude (Akt)</i> ca. 1936 plaster 104.5 × 46 × 37 cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Procession (Pochód)</i> ca. 1940 distemper and collage on paper 28.5 × 21.5 (57 × 47) cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Nude (Akt)</i> 1946 oil on fiberboard 80.5 × 66 cm Museum of Tarnów Land	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1951 distemper on paper mounted on cardboard 94.5 × 81 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Nude (Akt)</i> 1954 monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 36.3 × 29.5 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Expressions IX (Wraży IX)</i> 1955 monotype and distemper on paper 76 × 62 cm National Museum in Kraków	Costume of Pope Julius in <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 knitwear, cotton, plastic, thread 170 × 50 × 20 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków	Theater curtain design 1956 distemper on paper, graphite on reverse 39.5 × 29.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
<i>Composition: Two Figures</i> (<i>Kompozycja: dwie postacie</i>) 1936 distemper and collage on paper 28.4 × 22.3 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Germans (Niemcy)</i> 1941 distemper on cardboard 50 × 60 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1951 monotype on paper 29.5 × 37.8 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Grip (Chwył)</i> 1951 monotype on paper 29.5 × 37.8 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> 1954 monotype on paper 41.5 × 33.8 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> 1955 monotype on paper 36 × 29.5 cm National Museum in Poznań	Linen Curtain for the Cricot Theater 1956 machine-sewn, linen weave, linen 240 × 670 cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Expressions (Wraży)</i> 1956 monotype and distemper on paper 86 × 61 cm Private collection
Two Costume Designs 1936 watercolor on paper 10.5 × 16.5 cm Private collection	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1937–1942 gouache on paper 21.2 × 28.5 cm Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom	<i>Round Table</i> (<i>Okrągły stół</i>) 1946 distemper on paper mounted on canvas 80 × 60.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> 1949–1952 monotype on paper 35 × 29 cm Private collection	<i>Expressions (Wraży)</i> 1954 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 85 × 57.5 cm Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> 1954 monotype on paper 41.5 × 33.8 cm National Museum in Warsaw	Costume design for <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 21.5 × 11.3 cm Private collection	<i>Signs (Znaki)</i> 1956 distemper on paper mounted on canvas 70 × 100 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
<i>Sketch for a Monument</i> <i>Commemorating Workers Killed</i> <i>During a Strike at the Semperit</i> <i>Factory in Kraków (Szkic do</i> <i>pomnika upamiętniającego</i> <i>robotników poległych w strajku w</i> <i>zakładach Semperit w Krakowie)</i> 1936 crayon, ink, graphite, felt-tip pen on paper XXXX cm Private collection	<i>Portrait (Portret)</i> ca. 1942 gouache on paper 19 × 15.2 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Portrait of Hanna Rudzka-Cybis</i> (<i>Portret Hanny</i> <i>Rudzkiej-Cybisowej</i>) 1946 distemper on cardboard mounted on canvas 50.5 × 35.5 cm Private collection	<i>Heads (Głowy)</i> 1949–1952 monotype on paper 35 × 29 cm Private collection	<i>Hours (Godziny)</i> 1954 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 81 × 58.7 cm Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1952–1956 monotype and distemper on paper 59 × 41 cm National Museum in Kraków	Costume design for <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 watercolor on paper 32 × 25.5 cm Private collection	<i>Arrangements (Układy)</i> 1957 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 65 × 49.5 cm Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz
<i>Two Figures (Dwie postacie)</i> 1937 distemper on paper 29.0 × 39.0 cm Private collection, Paris	<i>Café (Kawiarnia)</i> 1942 distemper on paper 12 × 16 cm Private collection	<i>Round Table</i> (<i>Okrągły stół</i>) 1946 distemper on paper mounted on canvas 80 × 60.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Dance (Taniec)</i> 1953 monotype on paper National Museum in Szczecin	<i>Two Sisters (Dwie siostry)</i> 1954 monotype and distemper on paper 83.5 × 61 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Figure (Figura)</i> 1956 brass 34.5 × 12 × 8 cm National Museum in Kraków	Costume design for <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 watercolor and graphite on paper 32 × 25.5 cm Private collection	<i>Rhythm I (Rytm I)</i> 1957 distemper on black Canson paper mounted on canvas 110.7 × 75.2 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
Costume designs (double-sided), from the sketchbook 1935–1938 ink and gouache on paper, ink on reverse 19.5 × 33 cm Private collection	<i>Beach (War II) (Plaża (Wojna II))</i> 1942 distemper on cardboard 50 × 64 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Pantomime</i> (<i>Pantomima</i>) 1948 distemper on paper mounted on cardboard 99.2 × 70 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Abstract Composition</i> (<i>Kompozycja abstrakcyjna</i>) 1953 monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 36 × 30 cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Expressions (Wraży)</i> 1954 monotype and gouache on paper mounted on cardboard 61 × 85.5 cm National Museum in Warsaw	<i>Composition 1956</i> (<i>Kompozycja 1956</i>) 1956 monotype, graphite and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 86 × 61.5 cm National Museum in Poznań	Two costume designs for <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 ink on paper 21 × 11 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Expressions V (Wraży V)</i> 1957 monotype and distemper on paper 86 × 61 cm National Museum in Kraków
Two Costume Designs 1937–1938 gouache, watercolor and graphite on paper 15.0 × 19.0 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Beach (War II) (Plaża (Wojna II))</i> 1942 distemper on paper mounted on cardboard 50 × 64 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	Sketch 1949–1950 graphite on paper, ink monotype on reverse 22 × 29 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Expressions (Wraży)</i> 1953 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 121 × 86 cm National Museum in Szczecin	<i>Three Figures (Trzy postacie)</i> 1954 monotype on paper, graphite on reverse 50.5 × 37.5 cm National Museum in Kraków	<i>Yellow and blue composition</i> (<i>Kompozycja żółto-niebieska</i>) from the <i>Expressions (Wraży)</i> series 1956 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 86 × 61.0 cm National Museum in Poznań	Costume design for Paul Rockoffer in <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 ink on paper 22.5 × 14 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	Costume of Małgorzata in <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 long-sleeved shirt and tights: knitwear, flannel, metal, thread; outer part of the costume: linen, thread 149 × 46 × 17 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków
Costume design 1938 watercolor and postage stamp on paper 20 × 16 cm	<i>Figural Composition</i> (<i>Kompozycja figuralna</i>) 1942 watercolor and oil on canvas 36.5 × 51 (40.5 × 54.5) cm National Museum in Kraków	Sketch 1949–1950 ink monotype on paper, graphite on reverse Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Figures (Postacie)</i> 1953 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 86 × 61 cm Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz	<i>Figures (Postacie)</i> 1954 monotype and distemper on paper 42 × 29.5 cm Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom	<i>Composition (Kompozycja)</i> 1956 monotype and distemper on paper 100.2 × 69.5 cm Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom	Costume design for <i>The Cuttlefish (Mątwą)</i> by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz 1956 monotype on paper	<i>Rhythms (Rytmy)</i> 1957 monotype, graphite and

distemper on paper mounted on canvas 100 × 70 cm Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź	<i>Filters II (Filtry II)</i> 1958 monotype and distemper on paper 88.5 × 108 cm (90 × 111.5 cm) National Museum in Kraków
Costume of the Juggler Anastazy in <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 long-sleeved shirt and tights: knitwear, flannel, wool, metal, thread; outer part of the costume: linen, thread 151 × 50 × 23 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków	<i>Filters (Filtry)</i> 1958 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on cardboard 75.5 × 90 × 4 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
Costume of Clown August in <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 long-sleeved shirt and tights: knitwear, cloth, metal, satin, thread; outer part of the costume: linen, cloth, metal, thread; leg: linen, metal, thread 157 × 40 × 27 cm CRICOTEKA Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków	<i>Filters (Filtry)</i> 1958 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 105.5 × 75 cm Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz
Costume design for <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 watercolor on paper 12.5 × 10.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Penetrations (Penetracje)</i> 1958 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 107 × 75 cm Museum of Central Pomerania in Słupsk
Costume design for <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 ink and distemper on paper 21 × 11.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	<i>Penetrations (Penetracje)</i> 1958 ink monotype and distemper on black paper mounted on canvas XXXX cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław
Costume design for <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 ink and distemper on paper 21 × 11.5 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	LIST OF WORKS BY OTHER ARTISTS
Costume design for <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 watercolor on paper 12.5 × 9 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	Jean-Michel Atlan (1913–1960) Untitled 1946 oil on canvas 100.1 × 73.2 cm Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva
Costume Design Sketch for <i>The Circus (Cyrk)</i> by Kazimierz Mikulski 1957 distemper on paper 22 × 12.7 cm Privately owned, on deposit at the National Museum in Wrocław	Jean Deyrolle (1911–1967) <i>Brandan, Opus 470</i> 1956 distemper on canvas 116.5 × 89.2 cm Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva
Untitled 1957 monotype and distemper on paper 62.6 × 49.5 cm Private collection, Paris	Gillo Dorfles (1910–2018) <i>Untitled (Bez tytułu)</i> From portfolio <i>Arte concreta. 24 litografie originali</i> , published by Salto, Milan 1949 lithograph on paper 32 × 21.8 cm Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (from the collection of Maria Jarema)
<i>Penetrations I (Penetracje I)</i> 1957 monotype and distemper on paper mounted on canvas 75 × 97 cm Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź	Maurice Estève (1904–2001) <i>The Fall of Lucifer (Chute de Lucifer)</i> 1951 oil on canvas 92.1 × 73 × 2 cm Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva
<i>Rhythm IV (Rytm IV)</i> 1958 monotype and distemper on paper 106 × 75 cm (110.5 × 79 cm) National Museum in Kraków	Hans Hartung (1904–1989) <i>T 1947-12</i> 1947 oil on canvas 146 × 97 cm Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva
<i>Rhythm IX (Rytm IX)</i> 1958 monotype and distemper on paper 106 × 87 cm National Museum in Wrocław	Jean Hélion (1904–1987) <i>Abstract Composition (Composition abstraite)</i> 1932

oil on canvas
64.9 × 49.8 cm
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva

Józef Jarema (1900–1974)
Bull costume design
date unknown
crayon and ink on paper
25 × 16.5 cm
Private collection

Józef Jarema (1900–1974)
Costume designs for a Modern Woman and a Peripatetic
date unknown
mixed media on paper
25 × 16.5 cm
Private collection

Józef Jarema (1900–1974)
Study for the portrait of a nun
first half of the 1920s
graphite on paper
28 × 20 cm
Private collection

Józef Jarema (1900–1974)
The Iron Age (Wiek żelaza)
1955
screenprint on paper
24 × 31 cm
Private collection

Maria Jarema (1908–1958)
Jonasz Stern (1904–1988)
Puppet heads for a workers' political nativity play mask-and-puppet farce by Adam Polewka
date unknown
plaster
Private collection

Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990)
Hollowed-out Figure (Postać wydrążona)
1947
watercolor and gouache on paper
39.8 × 29.7 cm
Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom

Alfred Manessier (1911–1993)
Plainsong (Plein-chant)
1955
oil on canvas
54.4 × 81.4 cm
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva

André Masson (1896–1987)
The Cat and the Fish (Le Chat et les poissons)
1942
pastel, gouache and sand on canvas
48.55 × 38 cm
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva

Henri Matisse (1869–1954)
Young Woman in Pink (Jeune femme en rose)
Reproduction from the portfolio *Matisse 16 peintures 1939–1946*, Paris, Editions du Chêne, 1946
1942
37.5 × 27.5 cm
Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (from Maria Jarema's book collection)

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Reproductions of works by Pablo Picasso
Cahiers d'Art nos. 4–5, 1937
1937
ca. 32 × ca. 49.5 cm
Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (from the collection of Maria Jarema)

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Reproductions of works by Pablo Picasso
Cahiers d'Art nos. 4–5, 1937
1937
ca. 32 × ca. 49.5 cm
Private collection, Paris

Erna Rosenstein (1913–2004)
Portrait of Maria Jarema (Portret Marii Jaremy)
1946

graphite on paper
22.6 × 16.2 × 0.3 cm
Private collection

Jonasz Stern (1904–1988)
Dancing
1936
lengthwise woodcut on handmade paper
40 × 30 cm, 30.4 × 21.8 cm
National Museum in Kraków

Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943)
Jean Arp (1887–1866)
Duo-drawing
Reproduction in *Le siège de l'air, poèmes 1915–1945, avec huit duo-dessins par Arp et Taeuber-Arp*, Paris, Vville, 1946
ca. 1939
22 × 38 cm
Private collection, Paris

Pierre Tal-Coat (1905–1985)
Fish (Poissons)
1945
oil on paper mounted on canvas
152.5 × 152.5 cm
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva

Jean Tinguely (1925–1991)
Relief SYN No. VII (White Relief Series, 1956–1957) (Relief SYN n° VII (Série Relief blanc, 1956–1957))
1956
wooden panel with tinplate shapes activated by an electrical motor and a mechanical system
62.5 × 56 × 22.5 cm
Fondation Gandur pour l'Art, Geneva

Victor Vasarely (1906–1997)
Untitled
In *Venezuela, Paroles de Guillermo Moses*, Paris, Editions Denise René, 1956 (12 plates)
1956
screenprint on San Francisco Bristol paper
60,7 × 50,8 cm
Private collection (from the collection of Maria Jarema)

Zygmunt Waliszewski (1897–1936)
Mask I (Maska I)
date unknown
distemper and graphite on transparent paper
26.5 × 20 cm
Private collection

Zygmunt Waliszewski (1897–1936)
Mask II (Maska II)
date unknown
distemper and graphite on paper
27 × 21 cm
Private collection

Eugeniusz Waniek (1906–2009)
Portrait of Maria Jarema (Portret Marii Jaremy)
1933
graphite on paper
18.1 × 12.4 cm
National Museum in Warsaw

Eugeniusz Waniek (1906–2009)
Caricature of Maria Jarema (Karykatura Marii Jaremianki)
1929
graphite, watercolor on paper
17.5 × 12.5 cm
National Library, Warsaw

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Head of Maria Jarema, Frontal View (Głowa Marii Jaremy ujęta na wprost)
date unknown
crayon on paper
30 × 25.5 cm
National Museum in Kraków

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Set design for *The Cuttlefish* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz
1934

graphite on paper
21 × 15.2 cm
National Museum in Kraków

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Set design for *The Cuttlefish* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz
1934
graphite on paper
21 × 15.2 cm
National Museum in Kraków

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Set and costume design for *The Cuttlefish* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz
1933
graphite, watercolor on paper
XX × XX cm
Museum of Kraków

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Constructivist theater stage design
1930
graphite, watercolor on paper
XX × XX cm
Museum of Kraków

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Constructivist theater stage design
ca. 1935
distemper, graphite on paper
15.2 × 19.7 cm
National Museum in Kraków

Henryk Wiciński (1908–1943)
Costume Design
date unknown
graphite and watercolor on paper
30 × 29.8 cm
National Museum in Kraków

Paulina Włostowska (b. 1987)
Mural for the Room "Theater, Café, Revolution"
Execution: Paulina Włostowska, Michał Szuwar, Adam Biszewski
2026
watercolor, graphite

MARIA JAREMA: CRACKED MODERNISM

Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie
20.03–28.06.2026

Artists

Maria Jarema
and
Jean-Michel Atlan, Jean Deyrolle, Gillo Dorfles, Maurice Estève, Berta Grünberg, Hans Hartung, Jean Hélion, Józef Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Alfred Manessier, André Masson, Henri Matisse, Erna Rosenstein, Jonasz Stern, Sophie Taeuber-Arp & Jean Arp, Pierre Tal-Coat, Jean Tinguely, Victor Vasarely, Zygmunt Waliszewski, Eugeniusz Waniek, Henryk Wiciński

Projekt muralu inspirowanego teatrem Cricot
Paulina Włostowska

Zespół kuratorski
Éric de Chassey, Natalia Sielewicz

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Olga Pawlak

Exhibition design
CENTRALA: Simone de Iacobis, Małgorzata Kuciewicz

Exhibition design
Biuro Kreacja
Współpraca: Aleksander Kalinowski

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Kwerendy naukowe
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Tekst łatwy do czytania i zrozumienia (ETR)
Aleksandra Sztajerwald

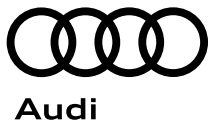
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MARIA JAREMA: CRACKED MODERNISM

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