

Maria Jarema

October 27, 2026 - April 25, 2027

Maria Jarema, the "revolutionary commissar of abstraction", was a woman of many talents: Jarema (1908–1958) is regarded as one of the most significant artists of Polish modernism; she was a sculptor and painter, she experimented with printmaking techniques, designed costumes and stage sets for dance and theater, in some of which she performed as an actress. She wrote theoretical texts on art, spoke out in the Polish Parliament for women's right to reproductive and general self-determination, and authored manifestos against class society.

In her hometown of Kraków, she and several fellow students founded the Kraków Group (Grupa Krakowska) in the early 1930s in protest against the nationalist tendencies at the local art academy. The group became an important context for the artistic generation of the interwar and immediate postwar periods.

Together with her brother, the artist Józef Jarema, she was active in the experimental theater group Cricot from 1934 to 1939 and founded the successor group Cricot 2 with Tadeusz Kantor in the 1950s (the above quote on Jarema's revolutionary abstraction is his). Jarema's interest in capturing rhythm and movement, the spoken word, and physical expression in the form of sculpture and image stemmed from this experience in theater. That she was an abstract thinker is apparent in the titles of her works: entire series are titled "Rhythm", "Expression", "Penetration", or "Filter".

Krakow was the center of her life. This is where she stayed during the German Wehrmacht's occupation of Western Poland from 1939 to 1945, a period that was particularly threatening for Jarema and her communist, anti-Stalinist artistic circle. During visits to Paris in 1938 and 1948, she encountered works by the Parisian surrealists, in which she recognized her own artistic convictions: For Jarema, art was not a political tool, but a revolutionary practice capable of transforming thought and changing society for the better.

The exhibition at the Lenbachhaus is the first monographic presentation of Jarema's work in Germany. On display are works from all periods of her career, including numerous paintings, monotypes, sculptures, and costumes.

In cooperation with Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie (Museum of Modern Art Warsaw). Original curatorial concept "Maria Jarema: Cracked Modernism" by Éric de Chassey and Natalia Sielewicz. Curated for Lenbachhaus by Stephanie Weber.

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