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Terribly Close Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust

curated by

**Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojciech
Wilczyk, Magdalena Zych**

Kraków Ethnographic Museum

01.12.2018 - 31.03.2019

Kraków, October 30th, 2018

Terribly Close: Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust

A Temporary Exhibition at the Kraków Ethnographic Museum
Esther House, Krakowska Street 46

Dates: 12.1.2018 – 3.31.2019

Opening: 11.30.2018, 6 p.m.

– press release –

The exhibit *Terribly Close: Polish Vernacular Artists Face the Holocaust* introduces works from Polish and German ethnographic museums and private collections. Visitors will see sculptures by Władysław Chajec ("Nazis" 1967), Adam Zegadło ("Shared Fate" 1969), Waclaw Czerwiński ("The Last Embrace" 1983), Zygmunt Skrętowicz ("Auschwitz" series 1963), Jan Staszak ("Gas" 1969), Jan Wojtarowicz ("German Factories" c. 1970), and paintings by Adam Czarnecki ("Banishment of the Jews of Pierzchnica" 1959 and "Jews Get to Work" 1965-67), among others.

These works tell about World War II as seen from up close. Some of them – intentionally or by chance – depict the Holocaust. Others obscure the specifically Jewish character of the genocide, framing it instead as Catholic Polish martyrology or a universal human tragedy.

These objects are complex documents born of various impulses: their creators are artists, but also collectors, ethnographers, curators, ideologues. The oldest example is a painting from (ca.) 1948 by Sławomir Kosiniak from Zalipie, a village famous for its decorative floral motifs. Recently discovered in the archives of the Kraków Ethnographic Museum, it presents the round-up of local Jews. The most recent work is "Jedwabne" by Jan Kowalczyk, commissioned by a German collector in 2017.

Wojciech Wilczyk photographed selected works. His series *Blow-ups* (2016-2018) focuses on the perspectives of the creators as bystanders or witnesses. Wilczyk brings our gazes in line with theirs, looking towards the victims and perpetrators. In dialogue with the original artworks, his series completes the exhibition.

This show raises many questions: How did these works come about? Who made them, and why? Who bought, commissioned, and collected such scenes? Were they exhibited? For which audience? What do they actually depict? How should we look at them today? Can we treat them as witnesses to murder?

Who are we – and who do we become – when confronted with these uncanny documents today?

The exhibition is the product of systematic research undertaken by its curators: Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojciech Wilczyk, and Magdalena Zych. The initial question concerned whether visual statements made by artists about the Holocaust could be found in Polish ethnographic collections. But others quickly appeared: What is the status of such objects today? What are their biographies? What were the artists trying to tell us? What emotions surround them? The research, which began in 2016 in Poland and Germany, explored the holdings of public institutions and private collections (including those of Ludwig Zimmerer, Marian Pokropek, Leszek Macak, Walter Graetz, Louis

Galinski, and others); conversations with artists (e.g. Roman Śledz from Malinówka near Lublin, Jarosław Furgała from Brzeg, Włodzimierz Naumiuk from Kaniuki, Jan Kowalczyk from Koszalin) and their descendants, as well as interviews with collectors, museum ethnographers, and exhibition curators.

The curators documented all of the works they found. Among the more than 400 war-related works we discovered, violence against Jews appears in about 60. Precisely what they depict, and what they are trying to say, is not always obvious. They include sculptures by Władysław Chajec ("Nazis" 1967), Adam Zegadło ("Shared Fate" 1969), Waclaw Czerwiński ("The Last Embrace" 1983), Zygmunt Skrętowicz ("Auschwitz" series 1963), Jan Staszak ("Gas" 1969), Jan Wojtarowicz ("German Factories" c. 1970) and paintings by Adam Czarnecki ("Banishment of the Jews of Pierzchnica" 1959 and "Jews Get to Work" 1965-67), among others.

The project is part of the research project *Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-Production: TRACES* (2016-2019). Implemented as part of the European Commission Horizon 2020 Reflective Society program, its purpose is to interpret contentious heritage. The experimental research carried out by the TRACES team involves building multilateral collaborations among the academy, museums, and artists.

Project Partners include: Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt (Austria), Milan Polytechnic (Italy), University of Oslo (Norway), Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK, Switzerland), Jagiellonian University in partnership with the Kraków Ethnographic Museum, Hosman Durabil Association in partnership with Mediaș Synagogue (Romania), Association of Domestic Research Society (Slovenia, Ljubljana) in collaboration with The National and University Library, Moderna Galerija Ljubljana (National Museum of Modern Art), University of Edinburgh and Natural History Museum in Vienna (Scotland-Austria), Ulster University in cooperation with Forum for Alternative Belfast (Northern Ireland). The Head of the consortium is Professor Klaus Schöneberger (Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt). Grant No. 693857 (Horizon 2020, Reflective Society). *The authors of the presentation take full responsibility for the contents presented.*

Curators: Erica Lehrer, Roma Sendyka, Wojciech Wilczyk, Magdalena Zych

Opening hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 10 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Tickets: 9 zł (regular), 6 zł (discounted)

Visiting the exhibit is not recommended for children under the age of 14.

Contact information for journalists:

Ludmiła Maruszewska / maruszewska@etnomuzeum.eu

Tel. 012 55 75, ext. 53. Mobile: 728 865 013

Kraków Ethnographic Museum – A Cultural Institution of the Lesser Poland Region.



Muzeum Etnograficzne
im. Seweryna Udzieli w Krakowie
Instytucja Kultury Województwa Małopolskiego



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MAŁOPOLSKA

Curator biographies:

Dr. Roma Sendyka is head of the research team for this project. She teaches (associate prof.) in the Department of Anthropology of Literature and Cultural Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, and is co-founder and head of its Center for Research on Memory Cultures (est. 2014). She specializes in literary and cultural theory and research, in particular in relation to visual culture and cultures of memory. Her current work deals with the theory of “non-places of memory” and visual research on genocide. She is author of *The Modern Essay: Studies in Historical Awareness of a Genre* (Universitas 2006), *From “I” Culture to the Culture of the “Self”* (Universitas 2015), and co-editor of the volumes *From the Memory of the Book to Post-memory* (2013), *Memory and affect* (2014), and *Affective Stories and Memory Politics* (2015), *Migration Memory, Community, Identity* (2016). She leads the Center for the Study of Memory Cultures research team for the grant “Uncommemorated Places of Genocide and their Impact on Collective Memory, Cultural Identity, Ethical Attitudes and Intercultural Relations in Contemporary Poland” (NPRH 2016-2019), as well as the “Awkward Objects of Genocide” project as part of the grant *Transmitting Contentious Cultural Heritages with the Arts: From Intervention to Co-Production* (Horizon 2020, Reflective Society, 2016-2019).

Dr. Erica Lehrer is a socio-cultural anthropologist and curator. She is currently Associate Professor in the departments of History and Sociology-Anthropology at Concordia University, Montreal, where she also held the Canada Research Chair in Museum & Heritage Studies from 2007-2017. She is the author of *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Indiana University Press 2013); editor (with Shelley Butler) of *Curatorial Dreams: Critics Imagine Exhibitions* (McGill-Queens 2016); (with Michael Meng) of *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland* (2015); and (with Cynthia Milton et al) of *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (Palgrave 2011). In 2013 she curated the exhibit *Souvenir, Talisman, Toy* at the Kraków Ethnographic Museum, and in 2014 published the accompanying book *Lucky Jews* (Korporacja Ha!art) and the online exhibit www.luckyjews.com

Wojciech Wilczyk is a photographer, curator, poet, art critic, and lecturer at the Kraków Photography Academy. He has undertaken many documentary projects: *Black and White Silesia* (1999-2003), *Kalwaria* (1995-2004), *Life after Life* (2004-2006), *Postindustrial* (2003-2007), *There is No Such Thing as an Innocent Eye* (2006-2008), *Holy War* (2009-2014) and together with Elżbieta Janicka, *The Other City* (2011-2012). Twice nominated for the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize, he awarded Photography Publication of the Year 2009 (for the *Innocent Eye* album) and Photo Book of the Year 2014 at the Grand Press Photo 2015 exhibit (for *Święta Wojna*). Since 2009 he has blogged at hyperrealism.blogspot.com. Together with Grzegorz Wróblewski, he undertook the intermedia project *Blue Pueblo* (2013-2014), combining text and photographs, and accompanied by an artbook issued in 350 numbered, signed copies.

Magdalena Zych, is a cultural anthropologist, curator, and graduate of the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Jagiellonian University. At the Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków she coordinates research projects including a current reinterpretation of the museum’s Siberian collection, and an exploration of the presence of the Holocaust in Polish folk art collections. She is completing her doctorate on contemporary ethnographic museum collections at the Jagiellonian University’s Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology (IEiAK). She held a Ministry of Culture and National Heritage scholarship in 2016 and is author and co-editor of the exhibition catalogs *The Art of the Allotment* (2012) and *Weddings 21* (2015). She has published in journals including the *quarterlies Self-Portrait* and *Contexts: Polish folk art*.