

POLISH FEMINISM - PARADIGMS

Sylwia

Witkowska



The beginning of Polish feminist movement is considered to be the turn of the eighteenth century. While English and American feminists were mobilising to fight for a law reform and a change in women's economic conditions of living, Polish women were forced to act mainly in conspiracy, as at that time Poland was partitioned. Female associations were established only to deal with cultural, social and independence issues. Any mention of women's rights resulted in an admonition to stop decreasing the gravity of the historical situation (sic!), since the fate of the Polish nation was at stake¹. Therefore, any women's attempt to liberate from the traditional dependence on family was regarded as treason.

The first Polish book with feminist features was written in 1819. *Pamiętka po dobrej matce* by Klementyna Hoffmanowa (born Klementyna Tańska), on the one hand depicts a whole array of expectations demanded from women, and on the other defines how Polish women should behave to meet these expectations. Hoffmanowa addressed her publication predominantly at middle- and upper-class women, claiming that physical appearance is one of the woman's most important virtues. As she writes, *Try to be attractive to everyone, women, men, the old and the young; strive to make everybody say about you*

*'What a pleasant person!'*². She devotes an entire chapter to the ways of beauty treatment. In addition, she believes that every female citizen, besides shapely figure and regular facial features, should be interested in 'good manners', which include the way of speaking, moving, or behaving in general. And thus, she leads her readers into the world in which women are admired by men, yet, simultaneously, they are submissive and humble. The woman is (...) *unspeakably grateful to her spouse. It constantly seems to her that she worships and loves him not yet enough. Preoccupied solely with his contentment, she obeys him blindly, always follows his advice*³. The woman in *Pamiętka po dobrej matce* proves with her whole being that she is weaker than the man, as it ennobles her and manifests her value. The next generation of emancipationists harshly criticized such imaging of a woman; they considered it to be a manifestation of enslavement. One of them was Eleonora Ziemięcka⁴, who considered women's pursuit of education to be of utmost importance, and who attached secondary significance to the issue of femininity.

Consequently, two groups started to be distinguished among Polish emancipationists: women demanding the right for education, freedom of dressing and behaving, the so-called 'Enthusiasts', and wealthy women with strong social position, uninhibited in their contacts with men and, at the same time, disdaining the fight for their rights and emancipation, the so-called 'socialites'. The founder of the Warsaw group of Enthusiasts, Narcyza Żmichowska, objected to the existing model of education popularised by Klementyna Hoffmanowa and strived to rebut stereotypical beliefs concerning typically male behaviour. As she wrote in her letter to Wanda Żeleńska⁵, *when I smoked my first cigar, there was mourning at home, and when I mounted a horse, there was weeping and teeth grinding you probably have not the remotest idea about*⁶.

The upbringing and education of women could not be limited to raising submissive wives and socialites. Therefore, the Enthusiasts'

strong determination resulted in decisive changes in fashion: women wore more loose clothes, not restricting their bodies; they began to wear short hair, spent less and less time in front of a mirror, smoked cigars, rode horses and went out unaccompanied by governesses. However, this relaxation of rules had its certain boundaries and did not concern the area of physicality and male-female relations. The behaviour of socialites constituted the only opposition in this field; they were stigmatised for the so-called misconduct implying promiscuity. Thus, the concept of the body disappeared from the discourse of Polish emancipationists for the next half a century.

The arrival of the modernist feminism wave in Poland increased demands for changes in the legal, educational and social situation of women. 'Świt', the first Polish magazine of feminist nature, raised the issue of higher education: (...) *as we first mentioned female students – Poles, we were given to understand the impropriety of that step as firstly (...) they lose their very femininity. Then, they do not profit from their studies. And lastly, they do not wish, do not desire that education that much... They do not wish? They do not wish, indeed? Are you, gentlemen and ladies, certain that the issue of women's higher education is the issue of coercion?.* However, pursuit of education and labour could ensure women equal social status. Therefore there began a struggle to launch new university programmes exclusively for women. Eliza Orzeszkowa was among those responsible for such precise conceptualisation of femininity. Just like her mentor, Hoffmanowa, Orzeszkowa believed that *Not in the name of erroneous female emancipation, not in the name of that false wisdom that deprives of charm and diverts her from useful and obligatory work, but in the name of family peace and the power of the idea of a family, in the name of humanity's dignity whose strongest pillar is schooling and work, in the name of the inherent right of every human being to participate in happiness streaming from light, we should call for education for women*⁸.

Orzeszkowa claimed that women had to surrender to emancipation in order survive. They did not have any civil rights; in fact, they were owned by their husbands and they could make decisions about their assets, take up employment or even correspond freely without the consent of their spouses. Thus, after the failure of the January uprising, the question of gender equality became not only a positivist postulate but a vital necessity. As a result of repressions, the quantitative predominance of women over men increased, which led to the development of low-cost urban (textile) industry that took on women. On the other hand, middle-class women could only take up positions like a post office clerk or a governess⁹.

Independence and the women's issue

The issue of Polish independence had always been of paramount importance, therefore women, setting out to actively participate in social life, finally signalled their wish to obtain full civil rights, and at the turn the nineteenth century started to act in the area of public life and established social organisations. Polish women opposed male dominance and demanded equal treatment irrespective of sex. There emerged propagandist feminist periodicals, like the Warsaw 'Ster' or the Cracow 'Nowe Słowo', which drew attention to women's issues no longer related exclusively to education, labour or the role of women in marriage. A Polish activist Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmidt wrote that *Political equality of women constitutes an integral part of overall aspirations for freedom and can be achieved only in connection with them*¹⁰. The women gathered by Kuczalska formed the Union for the Equal Rights of Polish Women, a feminist organisation of firmly radical nature, whose utmost objective was to gain equal political rights for women regardless of their social origin, political orientation or financial position. Feminists from the Union linked their hopes with the socialist movement, yet they did not miss any opportunity to

present women's demands. They sought allies even among left-wing parties and the nationalist orientation; they sent petitions, invited to rallies and conventions, and spread propaganda leaflets. Nevertheless, all those actions failed to deliver the expected results¹¹.

This lack of success caused women to accept the fact that obtaining suffrage might be possible only in an independent Poland. The National Women's Organization was founded, whose activists were convinced that when Poland recovers its political entity, [...] *while specifying new electoral laws, there could be obviously no possibility to deprive women of suffrage and, in general, to exclude them from building the reborn Poland*¹².

The outbreak of World War I resulted in a change in the political situation, which encouraged women to intensify propaganda actions and efforts to obtain suffrage. Women's participation in the fight and their work during the war definitely influenced the decision of the Chief of State. On November 28th, 1918, soon after Poland regained independence, Marshal Piłsudski issued a decree, which was a response to many years of suffragettes' consistent efforts, and which read as follows: *The elector to the Parliament is every citizen of the state, regardless of sex, who until the day of proclamation of the voting has reached the age of 21. (...) All male and female citizens of the state with an active right to vote may be elected to the Parliament*¹³. The fact that Poland did not exist as independent state made the struggle of Polish women for suffrage less fierce than in Western Europe, yet eternally subordinate female Poles eventually did not abandon their firm demands for their privileges.

The interwar period of independent Poland

It was the time to legalise gender equality in politics and education. A number of female associations of various political profiles commenced their activities, among them organizations of professional,

feminist, religious, national, social and educational nature. They all focused on one objective, i.e. women's issues, and related common actions. Gender equality offered women a number of new perspectives; they gained broader access to higher education, employment in new professions and activity in state administration. *Women's achievements in the field of equality are, bearing in mind such a short period of time, real and immense. Maintaining and increasing of these achievements relies now upon women themselves, who shall prove their rights by further diligence, studies and skilful reconciliation of their fundamental duties*¹⁴. Post-war modern female Poles were professionally active and particularly emphasised the issue of equality of women and men given their respective diversity. The time of emancipationists imitating men by means of their clothing and lifestyle was gone. Female representatives of the new generation grew up in new customs; educated in co-educational schools, they relied upon friendship and equality. Yet, the manner of thinking about the objectives and the forms of women's activities remained the same. In Poland it was still believed that the 'feminine nature' common to the entire female sex was biologically determined. *Consequently, it's a discussion on maternity as a substantial component of the future of Polish society*¹⁵. As a result of such thinking more and more actions were performed to promote conscious maternity, sexual education, the right to divorce and legalisation of abortion.

Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, a social activist and a doctor by profession, became the initiator of conscious maternity in Poland. He propagated contraception and strongly called for legalisation of abortion in order to eliminate the life-threatening 'abortion underground'. His book *Piekło kobiet* broadly develops these issues. *Only the one who has had an opportunity to read women's confidential letters can have the idea what a constant fear of pregnancy, of its disaster, means for a woman, for a family. In fact, above a certain number of children hardly any*

woman accepts her pregnancy; she knows she has to terminate it. There begins a humiliating journey to doctors, to clinics; begging for medical certificates which, in the case of the poor, usually prove insufficient; derision, jokes and moral preaching of doctors who refuse to help her. Finally, a poor woman visits a midwife who seems to understand her and shall relieve her from pregnancy; yet she will fleece her and most probably get her into illness requiring medical treatment. This way or another, it is wreckage of health, wreckage of the household. This spectre of pregnancy is something so oppressive that it harms any joy of life, paralyses marital relations, turns love into defeat; germinating life that should give happiness becomes a malignant tumour and, like a tumour, is operated on¹⁶.

Another person speaking out in favour of women was Irena Krzywicka. Regardless of the general public, the writer fiercely fought for the truth and discussed controversial and uncomfortable issues. One of those highly inappropriate matters was, for instance, her cooperation with Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński to popularise sexual education and birth control. She presented a precise position as regards abortion; she was a supporter of the woman's right to her own body and to decide on it. She considered as exemplary a situation in which children were born as a result of a conscious decision. She regarded abortion as an interim solution¹⁷. She wrote in this respect as follows: *if every newborn child receives optimal conditions for development, if a woman starts to be perceived as a real human being and not a creature incessantly involved in the torturous circle of her own physiology, if creation of a new human being becomes a rational act that is aware of its significance, if children's martyrdom that we still do not fully realise finally comes to an end, humanity shall undergo one of the most important upheavals of its existence*¹⁸.

Irena Krzywicka remained firm in her beliefs and proved it in her actions. Together with Boy she contributed to the establishing of the first Conscious Maternity Clinic in Poland. The clinic concentrated on unwanted pregnancies' prevention and infertility treatment. The

institution was widely condemned and mocked in the country. The clinic failed, yet it gave rise to fierce discussion on contraception and family planning. World War II put an end to this period of Polish feminist activity.

Women in PRL (People's Republic of Poland)

The political situation in Poland after World War II impeded the development of the women's movement. The existing organisations were far from feminist ideas and their role amounted exclusively to assisting women in adapting to the new situation. All political activities in Poland had a different character than in the Western countries and the USA, where the problem of equality was strongly emphasised. By the Vistula River much more significance was attributed to opposition actions and the issues concerning the change of the political system and obtaining civil rights by the society members. Another difficulty arose from the relationship between feminism and communism¹⁹.

People's Republic of Poland, formed in 1948, promoted women's emancipation in the field of family and professional career. As the church was often the only place where political opinions could be freely expressed, involvement in the area of religion increased. Consequently, women felt appreciated due to their position in a family and were not interested in self-realisation and public activity. As Walczewska states in her book *Damy, rycerze i feministki, Complacency of the then employers was reflected in the view that the legal system of socialist countries is so progressive that it precedes women's aspirations*²⁰. Mass propaganda was launched which proclaimed full gender equality and encouraged women to join industrial production and collectivised agriculture; at that time there was a popular slogan 'Women on tractors!'²¹. The feminist movement started to fade away since the PRL authorities assumed they had fully satisfied all postulates concerning women. In practise, the officially propagated gender equality did not translate anyhow into any rights,

and any debates regarding the issues of women were prohibited. It was also forbidden to make any contacts with the Western feminism²². And thus, while Western emancipationists were fighting for freedom, Polish women were fighting for the 'cause'.

Solidarity movement and the breakthrough year of 1989

It was not until the Solidarity movement that the traditional patriarchal order was restored, together with the related 'noble-chivalry gender contract'. Therefore, on the wall of the striking Gdańsk Shipyard there appeared a sign stating '*Women, do not disturb us, we are fighting for Poland*'²³, which ultimately determined the nature of the relationship between a woman and a man in the new reality. As Sławomira Walczewska briefly and accurately stated, the contract was supposed to rely upon men's declaration: *We will bring the Poland of our imaginations to your feet, and then you will give us a white rose*²⁴.

In the PRL times emancipationists became forgotten. Additionally, the equality idea promoted by socialists was no less artificial than the idea of eliminating disparities between mental and physical work or between rural and municipal areas. As Walczewska writes, *So it was in the case of the general labour law, yet excluding promotion opportunities on equal terms with men. Such was the right for abortion, lacking sexual education as well as information about and access to modern contraception methods. And such was the legal prohibition of discrimination against women, allowing no forms of bottom-up protests when this prohibition was being violated*²⁵.

In the period of the activity of 'Solidarity' (Solidarność), Polish women had a chance to get close to a similar situation like the one of American women fighting for their rights in the seventies. This was the time when civil rights awareness became particularly prominent. Nevertheless, the necessity to fight a common enemy once more precluded women from managing their own affairs.

The year 1989 is marked by an exceptional importance for Polish feminism due to the downfall of the PRL; the entire background changes suddenly and the new democratic Poland collides with the ideas of the 'second wave' of Western feminism. More and more female organizations, associations, foundations and non-governmental organisations launch their activities, pledging fight against discrimination and promotion of women's participation in the social and political life. Discussions on women's rights remain, however, on the margin of the public debate and are carried out on an occasional basis.

The political environment of 'Solidarity' constitutes a perfect example thereof, since right after its victory it removed women from among its members and even from its history. As soon as it started concerning women, the issue of subjectivity was excluded from the priority themes. The elimination of women from the authorities of 'Solidarity' was directly related to the involvement of the union in actions aiming at the prohibition of abortion. Along with the appearance of this aspect in politics, a spontaneous movement against the abortion ban was initialised, which then transformed into the women's movement. In 1993 the prohibition of abortion was introduced²⁶ and Polish feminism underwent a series of divides and changes. Women's organisations defined their identity as feminine or feminist. Even when they rejected the adjective 'feminist', they were united by a common cause, i.e. the patriarchal society reproducing inequality as well as the Catholic Church responsible for the introduction of the ban on abortion. Thus, alongside groups calling themselves feminist or related to feminism, other women's organisations were established, for instance Catholic ones or conservative 'new feminists' separating themselves from the struggle against the abortion ban and usually presenting views in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church. These are, for example, women acting according to the 'pro-life'²⁷ strategy. There was also an opposing faction, based on the conception of the American Pro-Choice²⁸ movement.

The Women's Party

Polish accession to the European Union in 2004 was the turning point in the approach of Polish women to the tactics of their fight for rights. They realised that although organisations did help to act in favour of women, it was necessary to engage into politics to make their voice be heard and taken seriously. It led to the establishment of the Women's Party, the first and, so far, the only politically determined social organisation in the history of Polish women's movements, whose aim was, through obtaining and exercising of public authority, to introduce a feminist programme. As Manuela Gretkowska, the founder and first chairperson of the Women's Party, presents it in her manifest, (...) *women should be elected to Sejm (House of Parliament). Create a real power for political pressure – a party. We should not only rebel; we live in democracy and we can reach for our right in accordance with the principles of a democratic country. I believe we can succeed and women will have a party in the new parliament representing their interests*²⁹. Ignoring the women's voice during political debates, particularly as regards fundamental aspects they raised, as well as the absence of satisfactory results made everyone wait for changes; the Women's Party addressed those expectations.

The attitudes of Polish women towards feminism can be understood within the context of the national history and cultural tradition. The matter of gender equality was repeatedly marginalised in the Polish society due to the necessity of focusing on issues regarded as overriding in particular periods – regaining Polish statehood and preserving national identity in the period subsequent to the partitions; rebuilding the country and creating centrally planned economy after World War II; fighting with the communist regime in the nineteen eighties; or the political system transformation and building a new political, economic and social order after the year 1989. In view of the above, one can easily understand the distance of Polish

women towards feminism as well as difficulties they had in defining themselves directly as feminists.

Women's art in Polish

The beginnings of feminist art in Poland constitute an intricate topic. After 1945 Polish women were the subject of communist manipulation and their presence in the society referred only to their traditional role. During the entire PRL period women represented cheap workforce and the reportedly existing 'equality' only aggravated their already negative situation, triggering animosity of the Polish society towards any feminist ideologies. Thus, while it is difficult to discuss 'female art', we can definitely mention 'female plight' of the artists creating it³⁰. Polish mass media provided a deformed picture of feminism, considering it to be a symptom of degenerated culture of the capitalist West. Therefore, when subsequent waves of feminism flooded Western Europe and America and led to significant improvement of women's situation, Poland promoted exclusively the traditional picture of a 'Polish Mother', the guardian of Polish home environment and national values³¹.

Thus, the life of women artists was shaped not by art, but by the situation in the country. In Poland feminist art regarded as an artistic activity involved in the issue of women fighting against discrimination and oppression does not enjoy popularity and appreciation. Western ideologies reached the Polish society after the fall of communism; the development of feminism started gaining momentum, yet, there was a problem with perception and acquiring of this new theory among Polish women. Female artists adopted models from the art of the West and developed no creative programmes. Feminist threads appeared in their works as a result of a trend for feminism, and the lack of understanding of feminist views triggered a number of consequences and a wave of criticism. Therefore, Polish artists

have become even more discouraged with the notion 'feminist art' and are still seeking to distance themselves completely from this style of art, although in the works of many of them one can easily trace some feminist motives³³. Thus, this chapter does not exploit the thematic scope of female art in Poland, but it touches on certain feminist issues and themes. The works of the artists I have presented here do not fully answer all questions related to this trend, either; it is merely an attempt to define women's issues among Polish female artists.

The sculptor Alina Szapocznikow was definitely not a feminist, yet she was the first one to refer to women's issues, when in 1954 she created the works *Pierwsza miłość* and *Trudny wiek*, presenting a young, adolescent girl. Right at the beginning of her artistic work Szapocznikow decides to *be the consciousness of her times*³³. She manages to express the said signs of the times by experimenting with the form and through the experience of her own body. Introducing motifs connected with corporality and biology into art, the artist breaks divisions that situated women's activity in a closed area. In her artistic work she demands the right to promote subjects that have been ignored so far, like female sexuality, fertility and maternity, sickness, ugliness or old age. Casts of the body parts created after the year 1960 give authentic expression to the words of the artist. This struggle to preserve the constantly changing look of her body depicts the very truth about art. As Alina Szapocznikow herself said, *my gesture addresses the human body, this 'area of solely erogenous nature', its most indefinite and ephemeral sensations. To praise impermanence in the nooks of our body, following our footsteps on this earth. With the human body casts I strive to preserve in transparent polystyrene the fleeting moments of life, its paradoxes and absurdity. (...) I strive to record in resin imprints of our body; I am convinced that, among all symptoms of impermanence, the human body is the most sensitive, the only source of every joy, every pain and every truth, all of it because of its ontological*

*misery just as inevitable as, on the consciousness plane, absolutely unacceptable*³⁴.

Maria Pinińska-Bereś, a Polish sculptor, is referred to as an ironist. Although she sometimes acted on behalf of women, she distanced herself from feminist art. She never became an adherent or a propagator of feminism, and her criticism remained a mild reproach wreathed in pink duvets³⁵. Yet, many critics regard the beginnings of Pinińska-Bereś's artistic activity as emblematic for Polish feminist art. This is reflected, for instance, in the critical analysis of the roles attributed to a woman, which can be traced in Pinińska's works, as well as the theme of the female body enslaved by the patriarchal culture. Working with the female figure and its parts, Pinińska fights against the strictly imposed customs she herself refused to accept. The female body understood in these terms appeared in the work *Maszynka miłości* and *Umywalka*. In the text *Jak to jest z tym feminizmem?* written in 1998 Maria Pinińska explained that *Even as (...) a child I felt something like humiliation and disappointment that I was a 'woman'. (...) At adolescence and having entered the adult life, I 'collected' situations, behaviours and customs I assessed as detrimental and humiliating for a woman*³⁶.

Pinińska's art cannot be treated unambiguously since she herself frequently changed its formula or meaning as if the work evolved with the author. Pinińska indicated the year 1956 as the birth moment of her own unique style in art. When the artist openly described the burden that her husband's artistic success was to her, while she herself was trapped in homework and childcare³⁷, a cycle of works entitled *Gorsety* was created: *Real Corsets / mental corsets/ accompany women for centuries / limit / deform / body, psyche / bodies go away / pass away / corsets stay / grandmother's corset / great grandmother's corset / great great grandmother's / cages of young bodies / cages of warm hearts / cages of mind / imagination / for centuries / corsets – a cry from the darkness*³⁸.



Maria Pinińska-Bereś, *A corsette standing* (1967) ↵
Is a woman a human? (1971) ↗

The last piece of art in the series *Gorsety* is the work *Czy kobieta jest człowiekiem?* It depicts a part of a nude female body cut out and hollowed out in the shape of a swimming costume and covered with kisses' marks. A significant element of the work is a label, where one can write production and expiry dates. By means of this ironic comment the author addresses the problem of female body functioning as an object used to meet male needs and points out to its usefulness only when it is capable of satisfying these needs.

Conceptualism and photography

The emergence of conceptualism in the seventies intensified feminist tendencies in Polish art. The artists deployed new means of expression, for example photography which from then on has been frequently used in many of their artistic works. At this point the creative activity of Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, an artist from Wrocław, should be emphasized. It was photography that brought Natalia LL her first success. It was photography that enabled her to perform visual shaping. *I believed photography had the power to change the ordinary, banal reality into a unique and mysterious occurrence, a phenomenon. My photographic activities were definitely an attempt to discover rareness, uncommonness in the surrounding world. I found it fascinating that the seemingly reliable photography showed this rareness in a more comprehensive and direct way than, e.g., graphics or painting. I would call the photography I performed at that time existentialist*³⁹.

One of the first cycles of her photographs was *Egzystencje* depicting the issue of human presence in an image and in the world. These simple attempts of picture recording, preceded by a glance in the mirror, constitute a process aimed at seeing oneself from the outside, in all its existentialist magnificence. Natalia, just like this young girl, is afraid to look straight ahead. However, over time, her works become bolder and more provocative. She begins intimate considerations on the essence of humanity. For the artist who participated in the creation of the conceptual environment in Wrocław, visual representation of corporality becomes a significant analysis of the relationship between the body and art. Its perfect example is the effect of recording sexual intercourse within the work entitled *Sfera intymna* as well as the cycles like *Aksamitny terror*, *Słowo* or the individual exhibition *Fotografia Intymna* of 1971, all of them being the outcome of the awareness of fundamentally feminist problems⁴⁰. *Art realises itself in every moment of reality (...). That is why I record usual and trivial events, like eating, sleeping, copulating, resting, speaking (...)*⁴¹.



Natalia LL, *Velvet terror*, 1970

Returning to the question of conceptualism and the tendencies, intensified in the seventies, of consumer culture and its ambiguous status, it is worth mentioning a cycle of photographs by Natalia Lach-Lachowicz entitled *Sztuka konsumpcyjna* which despite a complexity of meanings presented the sphere of freedom within that culture. The said works, displayed in 1972, comprise multiplied images of a young attractive woman eating sausages or a banana. The objects of consumption constitute an overt reference to a penis. An important aspect of this performance is the woman's glance which is directed towards the viewer and at the same time it controls the whole situation. The artist thereby plays a game with the spectator; she presents a woman who performs a symbolic sexual consumption explicitly handling the objects she has in her hands. This gesture recalls oral love, yet also

a threat of castration; the images may therefore evoke discomfort or even fear in a male viewer. At this point the woman rules over the male organ and she can do with it whatever she wants. The power of her glance is reflected in the ambiguity of the model's poses. On the one hand, she looks at the spectators tempting and seducing them; on the other, her look emanates ridicule and irony. Natalia LL seems to suggest that the right for pleasure is reserved here for the woman; she is the one who manages it and controls the sensations. She tempts the viewers, yet remains unattainable to them⁴². The artist exploits in her works gestures creating a characteristic system of signs with ambiguous meanings. Such a use of the body language intrigues and induces art's reflection upon art.

It should be emphasized that the lack of feminist discussions at that time made it impossible to read the criticism implicit in the *Sztuka konsumpcyjna*. The seventies in Poland are the period of consumer needs stimulation, relative prosperity and partial opening towards the West. In the case of sexual customs the situation looked likewise. Notwithstanding the existing eroticism and female nudes printed on the last page of the magazine 'Perspektywy', and even despite nude photographs exhibited in art galleries, women were still presented as passively yielding to male gazes. Hence, the symbolism of taking control over one's body, over lust and even over the male gaze is so significant in the works of the Wrocław artist. As a consequence, Natalia LL does not so much stimulate consumer desires but rather indicates the non-existence of certain patterns in the Polish visual sphere of that period, i.e. an independent woman, controlling her pleasure, and aware of her sexuality. She emphasises it is time to escape the existing stereotype of an asexual woman committed to her home and family⁴³.

The use of the sexuality identifying means plays a material role as regards the discussed photographs. In 1974 Natalia Lach-Lachowicz formed the words NATALIA IST SEX out of her previous

photographs of the *Sfera intymna*. Natalia LL was constantly attracted by the interpenetration of art and reality areas, yet in the centre of those considerations there always was a human figure, often the artist herself. Her fascination with the body taken over by pleasure inevitably led to the discovery of subsequent areas of knowledge of ecstasy. And even if eroticism is connected with fertility, this declaration entails her individual defining herself as an artist and as a woman immersed in the matter of art and reality⁴⁴.

‘This lipstick imprint is my mark in the language of art’

One of the most prominent artists and the progenitor of Polish feminist art is Ewa Partum. Although she was, like Natalia LL, one of the first women to create within the framework of conceptual art, from the very start of her work as a woman-artist she openly admitted to feminism. She made her first feminist declaration already in 1971, when she marked a piece of paper with a red lipstick print and signed it ‘My touch is a touch of a woman’. This statement on femininity is a part of the cycle *Poems by Ewa*, created in the form of poetic objects with imprints of the artist’s lipstick while pronouncing particular letters or sometimes entire phrases.

The artist thus combined conceptualism and feminism; she became a tautological sign of Polish feminism. Her work of 1971 is exactly such a typical tautological statement and this *stricte* conceptual action definitely has feminist undertones – it refers to feminine language⁴⁵.

In the years of her activity Partum creates several short films called *Films by Ewa* and gives them a common title *Kino Tautologiczne*. She also carries out numerous performances constituting an emblematic protest against ‘objectification’ of women. In 1974 she stages a performance entitled *Zmiana* during which a professional make-up artist ages half of Partum’s face, making it aesthetically unattractive. In this way Partum criticises the culturally encoded

stereotype of perceiving a woman through the prism of her body, whose beauty confers value upon her. She continues her project in the years 1978–1979 and calls it *Zmiana – mój problem jest problemem kobiety*. During the exhibition in the Art Forum gallery in Łódź she lies nude among the audience, with not only a part of her face being aged but half of her body. Having finished the performance, Partum declares herself a piece of art.

In the next performance of this cycle entitled *Samoidentyfikacja* Ewa reveals the most radical attitude in her art. In 1980 during her exhibition in the Mała Gallery in Warsaw the artist appears dressed only in high-heeled shoes, and then goes out into the crowded streets. She walks among accidentally met pedestrians, arousing strong interest. The title *Samoidentyfikacja* determines seeking one's identity and the author's recognition of her own femininity, yet it also shows a female body as an object to look at, as a fetish.

Partum expected that as a result of this performance the nudity present in media and art, being solely an object of sexual fantasies, would collide with the reality of a woman's naked body which, in the given circumstances, would evoke some discomfort, embarrassment or even quandary in the spectators. However, among the gallery's



Ewa Partum
Performance of *Self-identification*
1980

guests unfamiliar with feminist theories, not to mention the casual viewers in the public space, the performance elicited completely different reactions and the artist's body met only lustful gazes⁴⁶. For a long time, the artist's performances remained therefore incomprehensible and exposed Partum to locker-room jokes, harassment and rude laughter, both in the Polish environment and outside it⁴⁷.

Feminist implications can also be traced in another Ewa Partum's performance *Kobiety, małżeństwo jest przeciwko wam!* in which the artist manifests a view that marriage hinders women and accompanied by the sounds of a wedding march she symbolically cuts a wedding gown she is dressed in. With this artistic show she enters the eighties where she expands feminist themes to a greater and even more expansive extent.

In 1981, in a dark room, dressed exclusively in Christmas tree lights, Ewa Partum starts the performance *Stupid Woman*; she applies a 'beautifying' mask on her face and says: *To be beautiful, to smell beautifully, to be in love, to be nice to my audience, to be truly*⁴⁸. It is a parody of the female masquerade that women resort to so that they can conform to the image idealised by male desires and expectations. She puts on some lipstick and discusses cosmetic preparations; then she drinks wine, throws banknotes, offers kisses, approaches men, kisses their hands and asks: *Do you find me attractive? Do you love me?*⁴⁹. She delivers philosophical analyses and finally pours alcohol over her head. The situation becomes awkward and seems to be getting out the artist's control; it starts to look like a bout of hysteria and the boundary between the performance and reality is becoming increasingly blurred⁵⁰.

Before leaving the country in 1982, Partum delivers the performance *Hommage à Solidarność* in an underground gallery in Łódź on the anniversary of the 'Solidarity' founding. The naked artist pronounces subsequent letters of the word 'solidarność' making imprints

of red lipstick on white cardboard. Since 1983 she lives and works in Berlin. She repeats her performance from Łódź in the Wawerka Gallery in West Berlin, and in 1984 she creates a photographic record of the work *Ost-West Schatten (East-West Shadow)*. The artist stands naked in front of the Berlin wall with her arms widespread and holds the letter 'O' in her left hand (Ost – East) and the letter 'W' in the right one (West). Her body casts a shadow at the wall and it shifts as the day passes. The installation takes on a particular relevance when considered in the context of the artist's biography, divided between the East and the West⁵¹.

In my opinion the creative output of Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz and Ewa Partum constitute a key to the development of feminist themes in Poland in the seventies and at the beginning of the eighties. These artists' works explore the problem of female body consumption, though each artist does it in a different way. They all depicted beauty coercion resulting from the status of being perceived, culturally ascribed to women. At this point it is worth to quote the words of Lucy Lippard related to female art: *A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she wants with them, but it is a subtle difference that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that process*⁵².

Seeking one's identity

(...) *And yet the most important question is: 'And I?'*⁵³ Feminist art has changed the traditional picture of a woman, and the postulates of self-identification it spread have raised in consequence the issue of one's own identity. This aspect of the identity of the artist being first of all a woman is crucial to the art by Izabella Gustowska. It is first manifested in the multithreaded cycle *Względne cechy podobieństwa* of 1979, developed at the turning point for the artist. As Gustowska said, *for the purpose of seeking relativity of similarities (...). It is, actually,*

*seeking one's identity in the threats like: duality of twins (I am a twin myself); a look-alike or a stand-in; a shadow – an eternal presence; a spectre and mirror reflection*⁵⁴.

Her output comprises works based on multiplied self-images; it analyses the said duality. Her made-up twin acts as the artist's *alter ego*. Images of female persons, usually of natural size, are captured on canvas or photographic paper and often undergo painterly transformations, i.e. they are manually re-touched, which highlights their expressivity. Such interference provides the objects with characteristics of the author's private, existential confession, and the applied colours like red or green symbolically refer to universal matters: transience, death or rebirth in the eternity. By means of the objects' contours, shadows or mirror reflections Gutowska analyses the complex relationship between projection and genuine existence; the images reveal alterations in a human being resulting from the passage of time and inner experiences⁵⁵.

Gustowska's art relies exclusively on depicting women; everything is clearly defined in terms of gender. She does not yield to the male spectator, she remains indifferent to him. Her artistic world is a world without men, it is a closed area governed by femininity existing in a symbiosis with nature. The woman presented by Gustowska is usually engrossed in contemplating her own 'Self'. She is separated from the world, the viewer; it might even be said she lives only for herself. The artist brings the isolation from the outside world to the extreme in the series *Sny*, where, plunged in the world of nature, she totally loses contact with reality⁵⁶. *Dreams (...) are a sort of our left bodies, abandoned in bedclothes and gardens, in a hot summer and winter cold. It is reality interspersed with a night dream. Sometimes a moment on the verge of eternity*⁵⁷. Femininity has been permanently identified with nature, the woman's element is water, and her strength derives from the power of giving birth. Moreover, female sensitivity,



Izabella Gustowska, *Relative features of similarity 30*, 1984

intuition and protectiveness have always been stressed. Discovering this symbolism constitutes a culture-based commonplace scheme concerning women. These traditional connotations are presented in Gustowska's works. Protagonists of *Sny*, immersed in dreams, nearly blend with the surrounding nature and fluctuate on the very edge of magic; it resembles seeking symbolic representations related to the

morphology of female body, like exploring the meanings of water and the moon, learning about the Mother Goddess or female rituals.

The artist encourages women to seek this cultural heritage in order to regain the rejected elements: femininity, nature, magic, ignorance. She denies therefore the rationalisation of our thinking and dualistic divisions created by European metaphysics. Although her art has no critical load and it is subject to traditional interpretations, it acquires a unique power of expression. It presents a different dimension of femininity, which pours down like streams from the mouths of the spring protagonists in the work *Płynąc. I (...) overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames (...)*⁵⁸.

It is, however, interesting that Izabella Gustowska denies the existence of discrimination against women and distances herself from feminism. As a result, there emerges a sort of discrepancy between her statements and the art she creates. On the other hand, her artistic output in which gender issues seem to be among the most basic ones entails no social criticism, while art critics notice in Gustowska's art first of all formal values and emanation of femininity.

In the mid-eighties the art referring to the avant-garde tradition of photomedia was sidelined by new expressive trends. In the course of the political battle there were also attempts made to firmly combine any avant-garde attitudes with communism, ultimately demising in 1989, yet all those actions proved inefficient due to both the complexity of this artistic tradition and further notable creative activity of a number of eminent artists.

'Meaningful gestures'

The works of Zofia Kulik belong to most interesting settlements with the totalitarian age. Although the artist begins her activity already

in the seventies when she carries out numerous performances together with Przemysław Kwiek, the actual birth of her creative work is dated at the mid-eighties when her photo-collages collections originate. In her notes the artist describes difficult first steps in her art. *In 1970 I was afraid to be an artist, to think about myself as an author who brings new objects into being. I was obedient to philosophizing authorities (...). In fact, there is no me. I am only a servant – of space, material, occurrences*⁵⁹. She experienced a brainwave in 1981 when she met in Warsaw an Iceland artist Singurdur Gudmundsson. This was the beginning of her revolt. Kulik asked herself a question *Why am I trying to embrace the whole world? I cannot save it anyway. Who has instilled this utopia in me?*⁶⁰.

Zofia Kulik's art created after 1987 substantially differs from the women's works discussed above. The artist changes the traditional relationship between a woman and a man, between the patriarchal order and governance systems, between authorities and servitude. This ambiguity is highlighted in Kulik's large format composite photographs, based on geometric principles and following the patterns of mosaics, gothic windows and altars, Persian carpets or mandalas. The artist creates her compositions out of multi-exposure black-and-white photographs. The main decorative motif comprises a human body, usually the male nude by the use of which she implies a defined ideology as the multiplied nude man constitutes a clear reference to the patriarchal system. Situated among symbols pertaining to various governance orders, he serves as a carrier of diverse gestures and varied meanings of domination. In her composite photographs Zofia Kulik freely manipulates the human body, and her model assumes poses originating from iconographic schemes, performs gymnastic presentations, choreography of political manifestations or a military drill; all these routines express unnatural discipline and constraint. A human being becomes a sort of ornament, deprived of individuality and

trapped in a mosaic; a common part of a greater whole⁶¹. The work *Gotyk międzynarodowy* (1990) depicts a man as an executor of orders, a slave with a noose around his neck. By means of these visual metaphors the artist draws attention to perception of the world which is a key that binds systems like fascism or communism, institutions like the army and other similar forms of subjugation.

Nudity in Kulik's works deprives a human being of the protective layer and reveals the symbolism of the assumed gestures denoting strength and power in our culture. Adaptation to the system takes place at the body level, thus its neutralization means it is merely *a cog in the machine of power (...); sexuality, power and knowledge are combined by a complicated network of relationships. It shows how power seized our corporality under its rule and incorporated it in the discourse of knowledge. Power shapes the bodies for its own use, therefore they are exercise bodies, set in motion by the authority, bodies of useful training. They are disciplined bodies, subjects to its control and performing tasks it determines (...). In Kulik's art power is presented as being dispersed; it does not need any centre for its existence, it is present within each of us*⁶².

However, two versions of Kulik's work *Wszystko się zbiega w czasie i przestrzeni, aby się rozproszyć, aby się zbiec, aby się rozproszyć, no i tak dalej* (1992) differ from the above rule, as the predominant motive in the said centre is a female figure. She stands among elements resembling missiles or ammunition pieces and holds an arrowhead. Everything is surrounded by horizontal bands with a figure of a nude man in different poses. On the sides there is an oval with a figure of a man holding his hands up like in an act of adoration or surrender. The work with its form resembles a gothic altar. The artist breaks with the traditional depiction of a woman in which her body serves only as an object of visual pleasure for a male viewer. In art a woman is usually presented as a sexual object that attracts attention, fuels and expresses male desire, hence it is obvious that she does not rep-

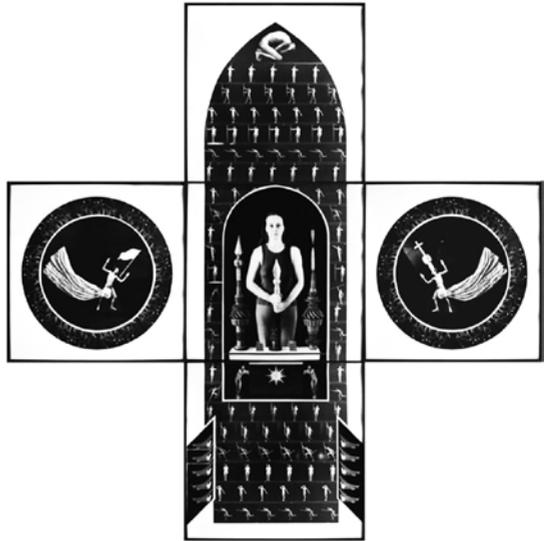
resent any kind of power. Moreover, such her depiction only confirms the power of the man-artist. The female nude is so heavily burdened with the connotations of body appropriation that it is hardly possible to detach from these connotations. In Zofia Kulik's works, if a woman is present in composite photographs at all, she is usually dressed yet she is provided with the power of glance and occupies a place of honour in the entire composition. All other elements of the performance are subordinated to her. She appears in a privileged place reserved for power which in the patriarchal order has always been represented by a male observer⁶³.

Therefore, it might be concluded that in her works Kulik constructs her statement on gender differences and gender-related inequalities; on relationship in which one side is always dominant and active while the other one subordinated and passive. The artist reverses the man's position; he becomes objectified and depicted in the way characteristic for centuries of women. Kulik decides on this new order in the work *Wszystkie pociski są jednym pociskiem*, whose title is a paraphrase of T.S. Eliot's words *all the women are one woman*⁶⁴. Due to its phallic shape the missile appearing in her works may relate to a man. By such a displacement of the meaning, its reversal, the artist manipulates, as she says, *the weapon used against her*⁶⁵.

These symbolic compositions by Zofia Kulik, based on the rules of gender exchange, dependence and competition, lead us to women's art of the nineties. It is also worth to consider feminist themes in the works of the youngest generation of artists.

Original sin

Approximately in 1993 Alicja Żebrowska starts using in her creative activity a more and more controversial language of artistic expression and, consequently, soon acquires an opinion of a provocateur. The reason for such negative reception of the artist was the subject



Zofia Kulik, *Everything coincides in time and space, to disperse, to coincide, to disperse, and et cetera, (I version), 1992*

of her works. Żebrowska refers to the problem of female sexuality, and, at the same time, intensively explores the areas of the bodily taboo and forbidden sexuality, equally repulsive and fascinating. She focused particularly on the issues of constructing one's own identity, transsexuality, both in the symbolic and real dimension. She is the only Polish artist who deployed so boldly the image of female genital organs; she presented vagina in a natural and free way, with no refinements⁶⁶. In 1994 she creates a video installation *Grzech pierworodny*, combined with the photographs *Narodziny Barbie*, *Tajemnica patrzy*. She (...) *strips sexuality of the invisibility and inaudibility*

*sphere. Female sexuality is here something that has existed for centuries, yet remained unspoken and unnamed*⁶⁷.

The first version of *Grzech pierworodny* subtitled *Domniemany projekt rzeczywistości wirtualnej* is a video installation with a green apple as a dominant element. The first part of the film presents a girl eating an apple and the subsequent scenes show a sexual act, yet limited to displaying sexual organs. The very title of the work evokes the Book of Genesis, in which Eve, the first woman, picks the forbidden fruit which leads to the sin, the fall and the banishment of the first people from Paradise. By recalling this theme Żebrowska points out the moment of condemning female sexuality. The scenes from the second version represent in turn a rebellion against the rebuking words of God uttered to the first woman, which denoted subordinating her to the man and the imposed on her burden of childbearing pain. The key video scenes of the installation refer to the initial sexual experiences of the artist herself, when she realises an array of conflicting feelings, from the joy at the experienced pleasure, through the exploration process itself, and up to the shame and fear of discovering and unmasking of this pleasure. Żebrowska discusses the fear of the all-seeing eye of God which, perversely situated in the vagina, was presented as blind⁶⁸.

Subsequent images depict female ecstasy reached with the help of her own hand or an artificial object. The conclusion of the plot is the painless birth of a Barbie doll instead of a child whose conception is related to a man; the artist thus breaks this biological dependence and liberates the female body from the male control. The work by Żebrowska is often subject to criticism for pornography. In general terms, it highlights a thin line distinguishing art from pornography as well as difficulties arising while defining both themes. This direct physicality manifests rejection of shame associated with the body and physiology and imposed by the cultural norms. The reduction of



Alicja Żebrowska, *Original sin. Alleged project of virtual reality*, 1993

femininity to mere biology is the price the artist pays for her feminist or even radical attitude. Addressing sexuality in Żebrowska's work indicates one of the primary sources of female problems. *A woman is always shown as elevated, eliciting desire, yet her sexuality evokes fear. (...) The image of female sexual organs has been pushed to the sphere defined as unofficial, forbidden, dark and filthy. Thus, if female sexuality appears, it is always perceived through negative connotations of pornography, and it serves mainly male satisfaction*⁶⁹. The artist thus recorded a specific, subversive, female version of pornography in a sense, according to her feminist postulate of creating her own erotic language. However, her film is not supposed to elicit sexual desire but to expose the experience and liberate from this sexual trauma suffered by her gender so that women can live without embarrassment and unnecessary metaphors⁷⁰.

'Excluded bodies'

Katarzyna Kozyra is another artist stirring up great controversies on the Polish art market. She became well-known in 1993 thanks to her thesis project *Piramida zwierząt* (1993)⁷¹. I consider her to be one of the most prominent Polish women-artists as her output relates to the theme of human being's identity. In her works she concentrates on the issues of gender, femininity, disease and death. Her works *Więzy krwi* (1995), *Olimpia* (1996) and both *Łaźnia żeńska* (1997) and *Łaźnia męska* (1999) expose the social exclusion of those who are sick or old, and actually of all those who are 'different' and who diverge from or do not fit the imposed cultural norms. In 1995 Kozyra exhibited a series of four large format photographs entitled *Więzy krwi*, which showed naked women against the background of religious symbols (Christian and Muslim) and humanitarian aid emblems. The incentive for the creation of the said work were the acts of war in Yugoslavia. The cross and the half-moon are pictured as the symbol of fratricidal fight on the ground of religious and ethnic conflicts. However, the most enigmatic elements are cabbage and cauliflower heads; on the one hand, they can refer to nature's fertility evoking associations with femininity, and on the other, to those sites in former Yugoslavia where victims of mass murders were found, as well as the places where Muslim women were raped. Kozyra shows how ascribing a human being to a given system enslaves them from the very moment of birth. Blood ties eloquently reflect defencelessness of women, unable to escape this system and being victims of the places assigned to them⁷².

The art by Katarzyna Kozyra is purely autobiographical and constitutes simultaneously an artistic message and a personal therapy. By the use of her own suffering the artist addresses further important themes in art, i.e. sickness and old age. Kozyra suffers from an incurable disease causing carcinogenic changes in the lymph

nodes – Hodgkin's lymphoma. Her only chance to survive is regular chemotherapy. The artist's photographic triptych *Olimpia* of 1996, a reference to the painting by Manet, bears witness to the painful process of becoming reconciled with the devastating disease. The photographs are accompanied by a drastic video film documenting the course of the medical procedure. *A perverse and provocative game in which the courtesan from Manet's painting becomes a woman suffering from cancer; a collision of overt sexuality with its clear contradiction – a fatal disease. Olimpia's obscenity constitutes a challenge for the patriarchal order and the boundaries of its identity, for what is permitted and forbidden (...)*⁷³. In this dimension the haughty courtesan is the one who has power and dominion, receives flowers, lies on precious fabrics. Kozyra plays the role of the goddess of femininity and desire; she regains everything that has been taken away from her in cold hospital wards. Olimpia embodied the femininity myth and helped the artist to renew her gender identity, which gave her access to social visibility awarded exclusively to a healthy, beautiful and perfect

Katarzyna Kozyra, *Olimpia*, 1996



body. The provocation the work entails is just as relative as the former scandal concerning Eduard Manet's *Olympia*, today a recognised masterpiece. In her art Katarzyna Kozyra has never run away from reality; on the contrary, real context constitutes the source of her creation⁷⁴.

Olimpia-Kozyra enforces our deeper consideration regarding the issue of physicality; she reproaches the society for the fact that people cannot even look at a sick or old body and tend to interpret such images as a kind of a taboo since old age, ugliness and sickness are hardly displayed in public. Kozyra thus portrays the reluctance to watch which goes hand in hand with the exclusion of the given issues from our awareness. The cycle *Olimpia* also draws our attention to the mortality of our body; it reveals how misleading it is to think that human beings rule over their bodies.

A similar thread of physicality outside any control is developed in the video installation *Łaźnia żeńska* (1997), which intentionally begins and ends with reproductions of paintings by Rembrandt and Ingres in order to prove that the beauty canon in art is changeable. Young, old, ugly and shapeless women were filmed with a hidden camera in a bathhouse in Budapest. Unaware of being observed, they behave naturally, with no posing or trying to impress anybody. Since Kozyra thereby encourages to peep, it stirs up controversies and indignation as there arises a question whether these most intimate moments of life, the physicality with its brutal aspects should not remain concealed. The feeling of discomfort resulting from the violation of those women's privacy evidently moves the viewer because it may directly affect everyone. Nudity is still considered to be something shameful, non-aesthetic, something we need to hide; it elicits certain embarrassment shared by everybody in a similar situation. Given this context, *Łaźnia* by Kozyra is indeed inappropriate and too realistic. In view of the falsity of presenting exclusively an idealized

body the revelation that we do not know the truth about our corporality, that we prefer artificial images rather than reality, causes embarrassment at the presented film. In contemporary culture the image of privacy when shown in public is always subject to construction, even by fashion or mass media. It makes the 'privacy' an artificial product, a product for sale. Creation of the factitious image of privacy according to receivers' expectations determines what should be revealed and what should be hidden. *Katarzyna Kozyra, transgressing the imposed taboo and demonstrating nudity in this manipulation, goes against the current and unveils these aspects of privacy which we do not want to know and which are yet an inherent part of our life*⁷⁵. *Why then not to see what men are like without their 'protective layer', their elegant facade, without their entire symbolic status (...)*⁷⁶.

On the other hand, *Łaźnia II* created in 1999 consisted of four screens located on the projection of a figure resembling an octagon. This time the displayed scenes were recorded in a bathhouse for men. The work was supplemented with the artist's provocative performance. Kozyra, perfectly characterised, entered the men's bathhouse in a 'male' body and hence undermined the self-evident nature of gender divisions. In doing so, she discovered that the closed world of men substantially differed from the one observed in the case of the earlier *Łaźnia*. Women captured in a similar situation were engaged in personal activities and did not pay attention to one another, whereas men in the company of other men seemed to be fully aware of the presence of other bodies. As a consequence, two different *Łaźnia* reflected two different culture-based types of behaviour. *The artist's provocative actions reverse the gender hierarchy. Here the woman becomes the spectator and male bodies are the subject of gazes. Masculinity recorded with a hidden camera is on the wane; what is left is the naked corporality perceived under control of the male identity's norm. On the stealthily captured frames the male body 'stops playing', and its*

*culture mask of power and domination slips off. (...) The woman has the advantage, the woman gazes and is the perpetrator of the objectification of male body*⁷⁷.

To sum up, in her creative output Katarzyna Kozyra uses the nude to expose absurdities of the beauty canons and to confront the unattainable body form created by media with the presence of the naked and thus real body.

Art 2000 +

Katarzyna Górna creates her art within the perspective of female perception of reality. Her output significantly broadens feminist themes in Polish art after the year 2000. The artist deals with motifs of religious and social nature, frequently constituting a taboo. This female view becomes therefore not only a reflection on the status of her gender, but also a deconstruction of the dominant masculinity. Her series of black and white photographs portraying Madonna, took in the years 1991 to 2000, consists of three shots depicting subsequently a teenage girl, a half-naked woman with a child, and a woman with a man on her lap in a pose referring to Pieta. The photographs abound in physicality: due to a trickle of blood flowing down the legs of the girl as well as the body of the girl sitting in the pose of the Madonna and Child, depicted as young, fresh and sensual; yet the last female body is shown at the threshold of old age. Górna emphasizes contradictions in Christian iconography, with an ideal figure of Mary on the one hand and the instrumental treatment of the woman on the other. Another aspect is the denial of corporality and physicality by the Church⁷⁸. In the interview with Artur Źmijewski Katarzyna Górna admits that the image of the woman that we know is false. The Church seeks to impose this picture, though the ideal woman does not exist and is fairly unreal.

I use images of deities and depictions referring to Christian iconography, to pious paintings. I do it to deprive these figures of holiness. My

*deities are ordinary people. This is my polemic with the Church, with the image of a woman as a Madonna, with the notion of purity. (...) The photographs I take are literal; they do not falsify the woman's picture. My photographs are a kind of a documentary record*⁷⁹.

Woman's physicality is portrayed only in terms of her maternal duty. The body becomes a prison and men (being superior in the Church) are the ones who decide on it, impose on it the obligation to fulfil the role attributed to the woman. Thus, in *Madonny Górna* creates an absent image of a woman endowed with physical body, self-aware and dominant. The same image is presented in the triptych *Fuck Me, Fuck You, Peace* of 2000; on each of the three photographs a nude woman makes a gesture mentioned in the title. The artist emphasized various needs of women at different periods of life as well as the altering source of their strength and motivation. The very fact of the artist's stressing the possibility for women to decide now on themselves and their bodies is already significant. Górna explained in detail the ideology behind these three gestures in the interview with Artur Żmijewski; she stated that the gestures demonstrated by the women are obscene, yet meaningful and obvious.

Fuck you shows a thirty-year-old who knows how to deal with men; she is confident and aware of her value. Another woman, the youngest one, only just entering adulthood, shows the 'fuck me!' gesture and thus overtly poses a sexual challenge to men. This shameless gesture, widely regarded as unwomanly, constitutes a sort of female rebellion since in our culture such behaviour befits only men. The last of the women, definitely the oldest one, makes the victory and peace gesture. Because of her age she is no longer attractive; she is no more a sexual object and cannot have children, therefore she is excluded from the society⁸⁰.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to describe in this short sketch the feminist art of all Polish artists. A characteristic feature of their creative output, evocative of feminist threads, is accentuating their



Katarzyna Górna, *Fuck Me, Fuck You, Peace*, 2000

own sensations, obsessions and experiences. What also dominates is the need of self-expression which allows the understanding of the core of the problem, yet which is also an intermediary means of cognizing the context of the reality in which Polish women live. The range of the presented creative output illustrates the complexity of the manner in which women are perceived, starting from an instrumental attitude towards women as objects of consumption (Natalia LL, Ewa Partum, Maria Pinińska-Bereś) to the culture-based stereotypical ideal of beauty (Katarzyna Górna); from paradoxical condemnation of the

body to invisibility when it does not conform to the said ideal (Katarzyna Kozyra), through female sexuality burdened with the stigma of sin (Alicja Żebrowska), up to the negation of strict gender divisions (Zofia Kulik) and, finally, discovering one's own female identity (Izabella Gustowska). Another significant feature of Polish artists is, however, the reluctance for their creativity to be labelled as 'feminist art', as only Ewa Partum and Alicja Żebrowska openly admit to feminism. As regards other artists, it might be said that they pick up feminist themes erratically and they often distance themselves from feminism at all in their statements.

At this point I would like to quote Magdalena Ujma, as I believe her words can serve as an apt recapitulation of feminist art. *Women's art does not exist. However, what does exist is art created by women, which stems from the experience determined by gender. Also when they are preoccupied with issues other than femininity, they do not employ a universal perspective. In the patriarchal culture only the male view is hidden under the mask of neutrality. Everything a woman does constitutes a masquerade in the culture. Even if female artists adhere to the prevailing canons of performance, they need to adapt them, sometimes so easily that it is hardly noticeable, and sometimes with difficulty. Women are doomed to femininity⁸¹.*

KEYWORDS: POLISH FEMINISM; IDEOLOGY; SOCIAL STATUS; LANGUAGE OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION; ENGAGED ART

ILLUSTRATION SOURCES

Maria Pinińska-Bereś, *Gorset stojący* (1967), *Czy kobieta jest człowiekiem?* (1971).

Available at: http://www.intertekst.com/201_artykul.html

Natalia LL, *Aksamitny terror*, (1970).

Available at: <http://www.nataliall.com/links/uspiony-kapital>

Ewa Partum, *Samoidentyfikacja* (performance), (1980).

Available at: http://www.zacheta.wroclaw.pl/ep_03.html

Izabella Gustowska, *Względne cechy podobieństwa* 30, (1984).

Available at: <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/izabella-gustowska>

Zośia Kulik, *Wszystko się zbiega w czasie i przestrzeni, aby się rozproszyć, aby się zbiec, aby się rozproszyć, no i tak dalej, (version I)*, (1992).

Available at: <http://kulikzośia.pl/archiwum/wszystko-sie-zbiega-w-czasie-i-przestrzeni-aby-sie-rozproszyc-aby-sie-zbiec-aby-sie-rozproszyc-no-i-tak-dalej-2/>

Alicja Żebrowska, *Grzech pierworodny. Domniemany projekt rzeczywistości wirtualnej*, (installation), (1993). Available at: <http://www.onone.art.pl/gallery/enter/12x02.html>

Katarzyna Kozyra, *Olimpia*, (1996).

Available at: <http://forecastpublicart.org/public-art-review/2014/02/righteous-indignation/2/>

Katarzyna Górna, *Fuck Me, Fuck You, Peace*, (2000).

Available at: <http://news.o.pl/2011/01/14/wystawa-tozsamosc-fotografia-w-kolekcji-grazyny-kulczyk-poznan>

REFERENCES

Books and articles:

Beauvoir S. de, *Druga płeć* [translated by G. Mycielska, M. Leśniewska], Warsaw 2013

Burzyńska A., Markowski M.P., *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Antologia*, Cracow 2006

Butler J., *Akty performatywne a konstrukcja płci kulturowej*, [in:] *Lektury inności. Antologia*, M. Dąbrowski, R. Pruszczyński [ed.], Warsaw 2007

Butler J., *Uwikłani w płeć* [translated by K. Krasuska], Warsaw 2008

Chojnicka K., Olszewski H., *Historia doktryn politycznych i prawnych*, Poznań 2004

Czubak B., *W zmienionej roli, miejscu, płci...*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000

Demko I., *Waginatyzm*, [doctoral dissertation], Cracow 2012

Dziamski G., *Sztuka u progu XXI wieku*, Poznań 2001

Friedan B., *Mistyka kobiecości* [translated by A. Grzybek], Warsaw 2012

- Humm M., *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, Warsaw 1993
- Jakubowska A., *A jednak najważniejsze pytanie brzmi: 'A Ja?'. O twórczości Izabelli Gustowskiej*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000
- Jarymowicz T., *Queer theory – bardzo krótki wstęp*, [in:] *Lektury inności. Antologia*, M. Dąbrowski, R. Pruszczyński [ed.], Warsaw 2007
- Kałwa D., *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej*, Cracow 2001
- Kowalczyk I., *Matki-Polki, Chłopcy i Cyborgi... sztuka i feminizm w Polsce*, Galeria Miejska Arsenal, Poznań 2010
- Kowalczyk I., *Tożsamość zapisana ciałem*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000
- Krakowski P., *Sztuka feministyczna*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000
- Kulik Z., *Półowa świata*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000
- Mill J.S., *O rządzie reprezentatywnym. Poddaństwo kobiet* [translated by J. Hołówka], Cracow 1995
- Pinińska-Bereś M., *Jak to jest z tym feminizmem?*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000
- Poprzeczka M., *Pochwała malarstwa*, Gdańsk 2000
- Rich A., *Zrodzone z kobiety. Macierzyństwo jako doświadczenie i instytucja* [translated by J. Mizielnińska], Warsaw 2000
- Sękalska D., *Kobieta wyzwolona?*, Warsaw 1982
- Ślęczka K., *Feminizm. Ideologie i koncepcje współczesnego feminizmu*, Katowice 1999
- Ujma M., *Strach przed śmiesznością*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Galeria Bielska BWA, Bielsko-Biała 2000
- Tong R.P., *Myśl feministyczna. Wprowadzenie*, Warsaw 2002
- Walczevska S., *Damy, rycerze i feministki*, Cracow 1999
- Żmijewski A., *Drżące ciała. Rozmowy z artystami*, Cracow 2006

Journal articles:

- Czubak B., *Sztuka kobiet?*, 'Format' 1992, no. 3-4 (8-9)
- Baniecka E., *Krótką historią feminizmu jako ruchu społecznego*, 'Obywatelka' 2013, no. 1
- Baniecka E., *O kobiecie, zazdrości, płci i prawie do aborcji*, 'Obywatelka' 2014, no. 1
- Dziamski G., *Sztuka kobiet: od outsidera do Innego*, 'Format' 1992, no. 3-4 (8-9)
- Lis I., *Krótką historią feminizmu jako ruchu społecznego*, 'Obywatelka' 2013, no. 1
- Lach-Lachowicz N., *Ruch feministyczny w sztuce*, 'Format' 1992, no. 3-4 (8-9)

Internet sources:

- Baworowska B., *Sztuka kobiet*, 'Sztuka' 1978, no. 4/5, <http://www.nataliall.com/interpretations/95> [accessed on: 30.04.2015].
- Buczak D., *Różowa rewolta*, 'Wysokie Obcasy' 2008, <http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokieobcasy/1,96856,4972303.html> [accessed on: 02.05.2015].
- Boy-Żeleński T., *Jak skończyć z piekłem kobiet?*, [in:] *Świadome macierzyństwo*, www.wolnelektury.pl [accessed on: 23.05.2015].
- Dziamski G., *Spór o sztukę konceptualną w Polsce*, 'Dyskurs' 2008, no. 7, www.asp.wroc.pl/dyskurs [accessed on: 15.05.2015].
- Franus E., *Widzące, widziane*, 'Artium Quaestiones' 1993, no. 4, <https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/jspui/handle/10593/9580> [accessed on: 04.04.2015].
- Gorządek E., *Ewa Partum – życie i twórczość*, 2004, Culture.pl, <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/ewa-partum> [accessed on: 23.05.2015].
- Gorządek E., *Maria Pinińska-Bereś*, 2006, Culture.pl, <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/maria-pininska-beres> [accessed on: 21.05.2015].
- Gouges O. de, *Deklaracja Praw Kobiety i Obywatelki. Forma kontraktu społecznego między mężczyzną a kobietą*, translated by A. Araszkiwicz, 'OŚKA' 2000, no. 2, www.ekologiasztuka.pl [accessed on: 21.05.2015].
- Kwiecień A., *Egzystencje intymności w obrazach Natalii LL*, 'Artemix' 2011, Obieg.pl, <http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/19893> [accessed on: 29.04.2015].
- Kaliś N., *Histeria jednego performance*, 'Arteon' 2007, no. 10 (90), www.ceabiblioteka.pl [accessed on: 29.04.2015].
- Kowalczyk I., *Feminizm w sztuce polskich artystek*, 2006, http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/articles.php?article_id=24 [accessed on: 01.05.2015].
- Kitowska-Łysiak M., *Alina Szapocznikow: życie i twórczość*, 2012, Culture.pl, <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/alina-szapocznikow> [accessed on: 02.05.2015].
- Kitowska-Łysiak M., *Izabella Gustowska*, 2004, Culture.pl, <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/izabella-gustowska> [accessed on: 25.05.2015].
- Kowalczyk I., *Ambiwalentne piękno*, 'Artemix' 2010, Obieg.pl, <http://www.obieg.pl/artmix/18386> [accessed on: 14.05.2015].
- Kowalczyk I., *'Grzech pierworodny' – domniemany projekt rzeczywistości wirtualnej Alicji Żebrowskiej – pomiędzy sztuką a pornografią*, http://www.onone.art.pl/gallery/12_original.html [accessed on: 20.05.2015].
- Kowalczyk I., *Kobieta, która patrzy*, 'Kresy. Kwartalnik Literacki' 1999, no. 1, www.kulikzofia.pl [accessed on: 15.05.2015].
- Kowalczyk I., *Kozyra, czyli problem*, 'Magazyn Sztuki' 1999, no. 22, http://magazynsztuki.eu/old/archiwum/No_22/archiwum_No22_tekst_1.htm [accessed on: 24.05.2015].
- Kowalczyk I., *Sztuka krytyczna – wybrane zagadnienia*, 2006, Culture.pl, <http://culture.pl>

- pl/pl/artykul/sztuka-krytyczna-wybrane-zagadnienia [accessed on: 23.05.2015].
- Ksieniewicz M., *Specyfika polskiego feminizmu*, 'Kultura i Historia' 2004, no. 6, www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl [accessed on: 25.04.2015].
- Kruger B., *Feminist Artist*, The Art History Archive, <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arhistory/feminist/Barbara-Kruger.html> [author's translation, accessed on: 21.05.2015].
- Leszkowicz P., *Sztuka a pleć. Szkic o współczesnej sztuce polskiej*, 'Magazyn Sztuki' 1999, no. 22, http://magazynsztuki.eu/old/archiwum/No_22/archiwum_No22_tekst_6.htm [accessed on: 18.05.2015].
- Millet K., *Teoria polityki płciowej*, [in:] *Nikt nie rodzi się kobietą*, [T. Hołówka, ed., trans.] Warsaw 1987, www.ekologiasztuka.pl
- Partia Kobiet www.partiakobiet.com.pl
- Partum E. interviewing Karolina Majewska, [in:] *O uhistorycznieniu konceptualizmu i interpretacji feminizmu*, *Obieg.pl* 2014, <http://www.obieg.pl/teksty/31875> [accessed on: 23.05.2015].
- Piętka A., *Pleć – biologiczna i kulturowa (teoria gender)*, Encyklopedia 'Epistema' 2009, Wiedza i Edukacja <http://wiedzaiedukacja.eu/archives/16328> [accessed on: 22.05.2015].
- Sherman C., The Art History Archive.com, www.arthistoryarchive.com/arhistory/photography/Cindy-Sherman.html [author's translation, accessed on: 07.04.2015].
- Sherman C., [exhibition review], 2012, Moma.org, www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1170 [author's translation, accessed on: 07.04.2015].
- Sienkiewicz K., *Katarzyna Górna*, 2006, Culture.pl, <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/katarzyna-gorna> [accessed on: 28.05.2015].
- Sikorska-Kowalska M., *Historia politycznej emancypacji polskich kobiet*, Pabianice 2009, www.ekologiasztuka.pl 2012
- Skurczyński Ł.P., *Mary Daly – prorokini postchrześcijańska?*, 'Jednota' 2011, no. 3-4, www.jednota.pl
- Sobota A., *Twórczość Natalii LL*, www.nataliall.com
- Świerkosz M., *Nie jestem siostrą mojej matki*, 'uniGENDER' 2010, no. 1(5), <http://www.unigender.org/?page=biezacy&issue=04&article=03> [accessed on: 23.04.2015].
- Tatar E.M., *(Nie) jestem feministką, ale...*, *Kilka słów o feministycznej postawie Marii Pinińskiej-Bereś*, 2008, *Obieg.pl*, <http://www.obieg.pl/teksty/4405> [accessed on: 20.05.2015].
- Tatar E.M., *Sztuka Marii Pinińskiej-Bereś i surrealistycznie rozumiana korporalność*, 2010 *InterTekst*, http://www.intertekst.com/201_artykul.html [accessed on: 28.04.2015]
- Womanhouse www.womanhouse.refugia.net

- 1 As cited in: E. Baniecka, *Krótką historia feminizmu jako ruchu społecznego*, 'Obywatelka' 2013, No. 1, p. 2.
- 2 As cited in: S. Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze i feministki*, Cracow 1999, p. 17.
- 3 Ibid, p. 20.
- 4 Eleonora Ziemięcka, the first Polish philosopher, was a member of the Warsaw group of women called 'Enthusiasts'. She wrote a book entitled *Thoughts On Education Of Women (Myśli o wychowaniu kobiet)* published in 1843, which for the first time touched upon the issue of reforming women's education by combining intellectual development with affection.
- 5 Wanda Żeleńska, wife of the composer Władysław Żeleński, mother of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński. She was a friend of Narcyza Żmichowska, which is evidenced by the extant correspondence, namely 185 letters. Boy-Żeleński devoted a large part of his book *Living People (Ludzie żywi)* to this friendship, and then in 1930 published their correspondence under the title *Narcyssa and Wanda (Narcyssa i Wanda)*.
- 6 S. Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze i feministki*, op. cit., p. 23.
- 7 As cited in: M. Sikorska-Kowalska, *Historia politycznej emancypacji polskich kobiet*, Pabianice 2009, p.10.
- 8 As cited in: S. Walczewska, op. cit., p. 73-74.
- 9 Ibid, pp. 68-80.
- 10 As cited in: M. Sikorska-Kowalska, op. cit., p. 13.
- 11 S. Walczewska, op. cit., pp. 176-180.
- 12 As cited in: M. Sikorska-Kowalska, op. cit., p.18.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 As cited in: D. Kałwa, *Kobieta aktywna w Polsce międzywojennej*, Cracow 2001, p. 29.
- 15 Ibid, pp. 25-39.
- 16 As cited in: T. Boy-Żeleński, *Jak skończyć z piekłem kobiet?*, [in ibid.:] *Świadome macierzyństwo*, [excerpts available online]
- 17 E. Baniecka, *O kobiecie, zazdrości, płci i prawie do aborcji*, 'Obywatelka' 2014, no. 1, pp. 10-11.
- 18 As cited in: ibid, p. 11.
- 19 S. Walczewska, op. cit., p. 11.
- 20 As cited in: ibid, p. 65.
- 21 As cited in: I. Lis, *Krótką historia feminizmu jako ruchu społecznego*, 'Obywatelka' 2013, no. 1, p. 2.
- 22 I. Lis, op. cit., pp. 1-3.
- 23 As cited in: M. Ksieniewicz, *Specyfika polskiego feminizmu*, 'Kultura i Historia' 2004, No. 6, p. 7 [available online]
- 24 As cited in: S. Walczewska, op. cit., p. 62.
- 25 Ibid, p. 114.
- 26 The Act of 7 January 1993 on Family Planning, Protection of Human Foetuses, and the Conditions under Which Pregnancy Termination Is Permissible (Journal of Laws of 1993, no. 17, item 78) limited access to abortion. Since then legal abortion has been allowed only under certain circumstances.
- 27 *Pro-life* is the expression defining organisations and social movements engaged in informative, educational and scientific activities aiming at protection of human life from the moment of its conception to natural death. They provide assistance, among others, to large or dysfunctional families and single parents. They also strive to influence the legislation concerning issues such as abortion, euthanasia or death penalty, yet within the general social perception they are mainly associated with objection to abortion.
- 28 *Pro-choice* is the expression defining organisations and social movements standing for legalisation of abortion. They refer to human rights regarding, among others, deciding on one's life and privacy; they declare that the good of the family is an overriding issue (even over the good of the foetus) and consider that a foetus/embryo is not a human being but merely a part of the woman's body. While promoting their opinions, pro-choice believers often stress various social pathologies, for instance abandonment of new-born babies, infanticides or the abortion underground, and claim that the number

- of such incidents shall drop significantly once pregnancy termination is legalised.
- I. Lis, *Krótką historia feminizmu jako ruchu społecznego*, 'Obywatelka' 2013, no 1, pp. 1–3.
- 29 The quotation derives from a text published on the website of the Women's Party, www.partiakobiet.com.pl
- 30 M. Poprzęcka, *Pochwała malarstwa*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 206.
- 31 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki, Chłopcy i Cyborgi... sztuka i feminizm w Polsce*, Poznań 2010, pp. 135–136.
- 32 Ibid, p. 147
- 33 As cited in: B. Czubak, *Sztuka kobiet?*, 'Format' 1992, No. 3–4(8–9), p. 42.
- 34 M. Kitowska-Lysiak, *Alina Szapocznikow: życie i twórczość*, [available at:] www.culture.pl
- 35 As cited in: G. Dziamski, *Sztuka u progu XXI wieku*, Poznań 2001, p. 93.
- 36 As cited in: M. Pinińska-Bereś, *Jak to jest z tym feminizmem?*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, J. Ciesielska, A. Smalcerz [ed.], Bielsko-Biała 2000, pp. 194–195.
- 37 D. Buczak, *Różowa rewolta*, 'Wysokie Obcasy' 2008, [available online].
- 38 As cited in: *ibid*.
- 39 As cited in: A. Sobota, *Twórczość Natalii LL – lata 60.*, [available online].
- 40 As cited in: A. Kwiecień, *Egzystencje intymności w obrazach Natalii LL*, Obieg.pl 2011 [available online].
- 41 As cited in: A. Sobota, *Twórczość Natalii LL – lata 70.*, www.nataliall.com
- 42 I. Kowalczyk, *Feminizm w sztuce polskich artystek*, [available online].
- 43 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki...* op. cit., p. 138.
- 44 As cited in: A. Kwiecień, *Egzystencje intymności w obrazach Natalii LL*, Obieg.pl 2011 [available online].
- 45 E. Gorządek, *Ewa Partum – życie i twórczość*, Culture.pl 2014 [available online].
- 46 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki...* op. cit., pp. 140–141.
- 47 As cited in: I. Kowalczyk, *Ambivalentne piękno*, Obieg.pl 2010, [available online].
- 48 As cited in: N. Kaliś, *Histeria jednego performance*, 'Arteon' 2007, no 10(90), pp. 28–30.
- 49 Ibid, pp. 28–30.
- 50 Invitation to performance workshop: *Reproducing the Past*, Obieg.pl 2006, [available online].
- 51 As cited in: E. Gorządek, *Ewa Partum – życie i twórczość*, Culture.pl 2014, [available online].
- 52 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki...* op. cit., p. 141.
- 53 As cited in: A. Jakubowska, *A jednak najważniejsze pytanie brzmi: 'A Ja?'*. *O twórczości Izabelli Gustowskiej*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit., p. 122.
- 54 As cited in: M. Kitowska-Lysiak, *Izabella Gustowska*, Culture.pl 2014, [available online].
- 55 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki...* op. cit., p. 143–144.
- 56 A. Jakubowska, *A jednak najważniejsze pytanie brzmi: 'A Ja?' ...*, op. cit., pp. 122–127.
- 57 As cited in: M. Kitowska-Lysiak, *Izabella Gustowska*, op. cit.
- 58 As cited in: I. Kowalczyk, *Tożsamość zapisana ciałem*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit., p. 171.
- 59 Z. Kulik, *Połowa świata*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit., p. 184.
- 60 Ibid, p. 184.
- 61 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki...* op. cit., pp. 145–146.
- 62 I. Kowalczyk, *Kobieta, który patrzy*, 'Kwartalnik Literacki' 1999, no. 1, [available online].
- 63 P. Leszkowicz, *Sztuka a pleć. Szkic o współczesnej sztuce polskiej*, 'Magazyn Sztuki' 1999, No. 22, [archive ed., available online].
- 64 This sentence can be found in references to his book *Ziemia jałowa*, part III, *Kazanie ogniste*.
- 65 I. Kowalczyk, *Matki-Polki...* op. cit., p. 146.
- 66 P. Leszkowicz, op. cit.
- 67 As cited in: I. Kowalczyk, *'Grzech pierworodny' – domniemany projekt rzeczywistości wirtualnej Alicji Żebrowskiej – pomiędzy sztuką a pornografią*, [available online].
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 As cited in: I. Kowalczyk, *Tożsamość zapisana ciałem*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit., p. 168.

- 70** Ibid, pp. 166–170.
- 71** 'Excluded bodies' – As cited in:
I. Kowalczyk, *Sztuka krytyczna – wybrane zagadnienia*, [available online]. See also
I. Kowalczyk, *Kozyra, czyli problem*,
'Magazyn Sztuki' 1999, no 22, [archive
ed., available online].
- 72** I. Kowalczyk, *Sztuka krytyczna...*, op. cit.
- 73** As cited in: B. Czubak, *W zmienionej roli, miejscu, płci...*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit.,
p.133.
- 74** Ibid, p. 132–134.
- 75** I. Kowalczyk, *Kozyra, czyli problem*, op.
cit.
- 76** As cited in: B. Czubak, op. cit., p. 134.
- 77** Ibid, p. 134.
- 78** K. Sienkiewicz, *Katarzyna Górna*,
Culture.pl 2006, [available online].
- 79** Ibid.
- 80** A. Żmijewski, *Drżące ciała. Rozmowy z artystami*, Cracow 2006, p. 91.
- 81** As cited in: M. Ujma, *Strach przed śmiesznością*, [in:] *Sztuka kobiet*, op. cit.,
pp. 82–83.

Sylvia Witkowska
Polish Feminism – Paradigms

The issue of feminist art struggles with a great problem. In my study I focus solely on Polish artists, and thus on the genealogy of feminist art in Poland. Although all the presented activities brought up the feminist thread, in many cases a dissonance occurs on the level of the artists' own reflections. There is a genuine reluctance of many Polish artists to use the term "feminist" about their art. They dissent from such categorization as if afraid that the very name will bring about a negative reception of their art. And here, in my opinion, a paradox appears, because despite such statements, their creativity itself is in fact undoubtedly feminist.

I think that Polish artists express themselves through their art in an unambiguous way – they show their feminine „I". The woman is displayed in their statement about themselves, about the experiences, their body, their sexuality. Feminism defined the concept of art in a new way. The statement that art has no gender is a myth. The activities of women-artists are broader and broader, also in Poland women become more and more noticed and appreciated. Feminist art does not feature a separate artistic language, it rather features a tendency towards realism, lent by photography or video, which reflects the autonomy of the female reception of the world. It should be stated that feminism is a socially needed phenomenon, and its critique drives successive generations of women-artists.

KEYWORDS:

POLISH FEMINISM, IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL STATUS, LANGUAGE OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION, ENGAGED ART



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Paid by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education according to the agreement no. 796/P-DUN/2018 signed on 4.04.2018 r.

The assignment name: Creation of the English version of the Scientific-artistic Journal "Dyskurs" publications; DUN financing – 30 000 PLN.