

EXHIBITION OF THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART IN WARSAW

On February 21, 2025, *The Impermanent: Four Takes on the Collection* will open to the public at MSN Warsaw. It will be the first presentation on this scale of the Museum's own collection, which the institution has steadily built for almost two decades. The exhibition will consist of over 150 works created between the 1950s and the present, shown in four sections in the galleries on the 2nd and 3rd floors of the newly opened building. The exhibition will be open to visitors for over six months.

The MSN Warsaw collection consists of artworks and documents testifying to the changes in the visual arts over the last seven decades, in Poland and around the world. The collected works display a diversity of media and artistic attitudes, and illustrate the artists' dynamic engagement in social life, the circulation of information, and the development of new technologies. The MSN Warsaw collection also includes artists' archives and the Filmoteka Muzeum film archive with hundreds of titles. Visitors to the exhibition will also find significant works from other institutions and from private collections.

"From the very beginning, our collection was created on the basis of lively relations with contemporary artists, but also reflecting the debates within the artistic community," said **Joanna Mytkowska, director the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw**. "Ongoing development of the collection has been made possible thanks to the program of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, but equally important are grassroots movements and experimental methods of acquiring works, which have greatly shaped the MSN Warsaw collection. The first group of works in the collection, shown in the exhibition *Art Comes Before Gold* in 2008-2009, were gifts from artists who supported the idea of establishing the museum."

The current presentation of the collection was prepared for the opening of the new museum building, the result of many years of efforts to create a place for art in the center of Warsaw. The architecture, spare and rational, striving for perfect simplicity, is conducive to experiencing the works of artists.

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON VIEWING AND INTERPRETING THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTIONS

The exhibition prepared by **the curatorial team of Sebastian Cichocki, Tomasz Fudala, Magda Lipska, Szymon Maliborski, Łukasz Ronduda and Natalia Sielewicz** will consist of **four parts**, which intertwine but constitute separate chapters of one story. Organized around recognizable terms from the history of art, such as pop art, socialist realism and abstraction, they concern the same historical period, between the 1950s and the present day. They take four different approaches to the same era in art history. The proposal of several perspectives is an open invitation to **the public to freely construct their own path for visiting, noticing nuances, and finding individual approaches to get to know the works from the Museum's collection.**

The exhibition begins with a collection of works related to political engagement and dreams of building a better world through art. The second part contains works that seduce the heart and eye, arising from a fascination with popular culture, advertising and design. The next chapter presents art based on uncompromising imagination, drawing on non-modern traditions—folk,

non-professional and Indigenous art, artistic practices flourishing away from established art centers and their rules. The last part of the exhibition returns to the question of the limits of art, its independence from other systems of knowledge and cultural products, especially in the context of the disintegration and destruction of the world as we know it.

Some of these chapters are arranged chronologically, while others employ aesthetic or structural juxtapositions. The exhibition is thus built along an axis between engagement and autonomy, and between popular art, close to life, and art that creates its own worlds and languages. This allows for observation of how much the meaning of works of art depends on the context in which they are experienced. In this way, the curators seek to share the symbolic “power of discourse” with the audience, who receive “instructions” along with the story of the collection, so that together or independently they can draw meanings from the juxtaposition of individual works of art.

THE IMPERMANENT: FOUR TAKES ON THE COLLECTION

The first part of the exhibition, *Banner: Engagement, Realism and Political Art*, includes works related to political engagement and a faith in the power of art to make a difference. The works come from different countries, decades, and ideological systems. The human figure, advocacy, and belief in the universal language of art set the tone. Part of this history is also propaganda: art in action, linked with current politics, for better or worse. This chapter opens with Alina Szapocznikow’s sculpture *Friendship* from 1954, which stood in the entrance hall of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw for almost half a century. After 1992, it was decided to scrap the work—the arms of the figures and the banner they held were stripped so the sculpture could be removed from the building. These missing elements were never found. Near Szapocznikow’s sculpture “flutters” a steel banner by Ukrainian artist Nikita Kadan. It was made from fragments of the body of a car that was shelled in the city of Severodonetsk, Ukraine, which was occupied by pro-Russian military forces in 2014. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (following the annexation of Crimea in 2014), the order in Europe has once again fallen apart.

The second part of the exhibition is titled *Synthetic Materialities: Body, Commodity and Fetish from the Cold War to the Present*. It contains works expressing consumerist desires, a fascination with pop culture, advertising and mass media—not only in societies that experienced the economic boom and the onslaught of consumerism after World War II, but also among the poorer “peripheral” countries of Eastern Europe and the Global South. The main metaphor here is the “plastic body” in a totalitarian regime, consuming images from the other side of the Iron Curtain. Plastics (and petroleum), achievements of post-industrial capitalism, had a sensational run in the second half of the 20th century in both prosperous Western societies and socialist economies.

A work that exposes the military and consumerist sources of plastics, and the fantasies surrounding them, is a sculpture by the Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury made of synthetic resin and fiberglass, a material invented for the army. The sculpture depicts slender, crossed female legs in turquoise, wrapped in a silver vinyl coat. In the 1950s, both the post-military trench coat and fiberglass were popularized in fashion and design. The wry title of the work, *Silver Rain*, conveys a sexual innuendo in English slang but also means military bombardment.

The third chapter of the exhibition, *Dark Planet: Art, Spirituality and Future Coexistence*, comprises works drawing on uncompromising imagination as well as non-modernist traditions: folk, amateur and Indigenous art, and isolated artistic practices. The objects and artistic attitudes featured here are united by an effort to “see through” the existing reality, to reach its depths, extracting its dark spiritual and existential potential. The juxtaposition of artists from sometimes very distant geographical and political contexts reveals the possibility of a future community.

This chapter of the exhibition was inspired by the work of Roman Stańczak. He belongs to the generation of artists debuting during the post-communist transformation in Poland. He captures the tensions of that period of rapid change which, in his view, abandoned what was

most important for art and existence itself—sensitivity to others and the experience of depth—when production of things and acquisition of goods overshadowed any reflection on the essence of life.

The third part of the exhibition also features a spectacular sculptural installation from 2014 by Cathy Wilkes. The scene of “unsettling” recreated by the artist is made up of a mixed *tableau* of found objects—vessels, table coverings, and trinkets—as well as mannequins handmade from yarn and old fabrics. **The last part of the MSN Warsaw exhibition is entitled *Real Abstractions: The Autonomy of Art Against the Catastrophes of Modernity*.** It revisits the issue of the limits of art, its independence, and the ability of art to maintain autonomy from other systems of knowledge and experiencing reality. The works collected in this chapter of the exhibition often employ the idiom of abstraction, one of the basic categories of modern art. This time we view the works through the prism of the debate over the crisis of modernity as a dream of progress and unlimited growth. Will modernity manage to face the catastrophes it has accelerated or even caused itself?

Monika Sosnowska’s *Façade*, a sculpture addressing modern architecture by depicting its decay and collapse, takes a central place in this part of the exhibition. In this work, the artist employs the magic trick of making a metal modernist structure sag and wither, like a figure in the terminal stage of life. The modern form undergoes processes of decay as in nature and biology. Sosnowska perversely evokes modernist fascinations with shapes found in nature. Maria Jarema’s works are also key to this part of the exhibition. They rely on opposites, blurring the boundaries between the autonomy of art and engagement, the matter of the image and the matter of the body.

AN “IMPERMANENT” EXHIBITION

This new way of presenting the steadily growing MSN Warsaw collection has been driven in large part by the experience of cooperating with a divided audience, an audience from the age of culture wars. What stories should we tell today, and how should we tell them, if we hope to create a shared narrative? ***The Impermanent: Four Takes on the Collection*** is “impermanent” not only because it runs only until the autumn of 2025, but first and foremost because the canon of contemporary artworks is not fixed, but remains in constant motion. Understanding this forces us beyond the limitations of our own points of reference, to a quest for common, fundamental values, in the history of art and in the life of the society. This was the task that the curators set for themselves when creating the first exhibition of the MSN Warsaw collection in the Museum’s new home.

EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

On the first weekend of the exhibition, the audience can also take part in performances and concerts prepared especially for the opening. The activities in the MSN Warsaw spaces by invited artists, including Ewa Zarzycka, Zuza Golińska, Diane Severin Nguyen and Kamil Wesołowski, will comment on and complement what visitors see in the Museum’s galleries. The events planned for the opening will inaugurate a rich program of guided tours, meetings and educational workshops to be conducted for the duration of the exhibition. We invite you to explore our collection “in action.”

The museum’s publishing house has prepared two volumes accompanying this show of the collection. *MSN Collection Guide*, edited by Jagna Lewandowska, is an accessible and richly illustrated compendium of knowledge about the Museum’s collections—artworks, but also archives, the Bródno Sculpture Park, the Hansen house in Szumin, Joanna Rajkowska’s iconic palm tree, and amateur works from the Polish Archive of Home Films. There will also be a catalogue devoted to the first exhibition in the new MSN Warsaw building, entitled *A New Museum and the Impermanent Canon: Four Takes on the Collection*, edited by Joanna Mytkowska and Katarzyna Szotkowska-Beylin. In addition to providing background on the works shown in the exhibition, this volume will also examine the role and tasks of the contemporary art museum today, in Poland and around the world, in a time of unrest.

Tickets for *The Impermanent: Four Takes on the Collection* at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw will go on sale February 14, 2025. Thanks to the Museum's strategic partnership with Audi, admission to the exhibition on Friday, February 21, will be free of charge. This is another step in pursuing the mission of an open museum—making art available free of charge to the widest possible audience. Free admission tickets for the opening and paid tickets for the following days will be available on the MSN Warsaw website sklep.artmuseum.pl and at the Museum's ticket office.

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