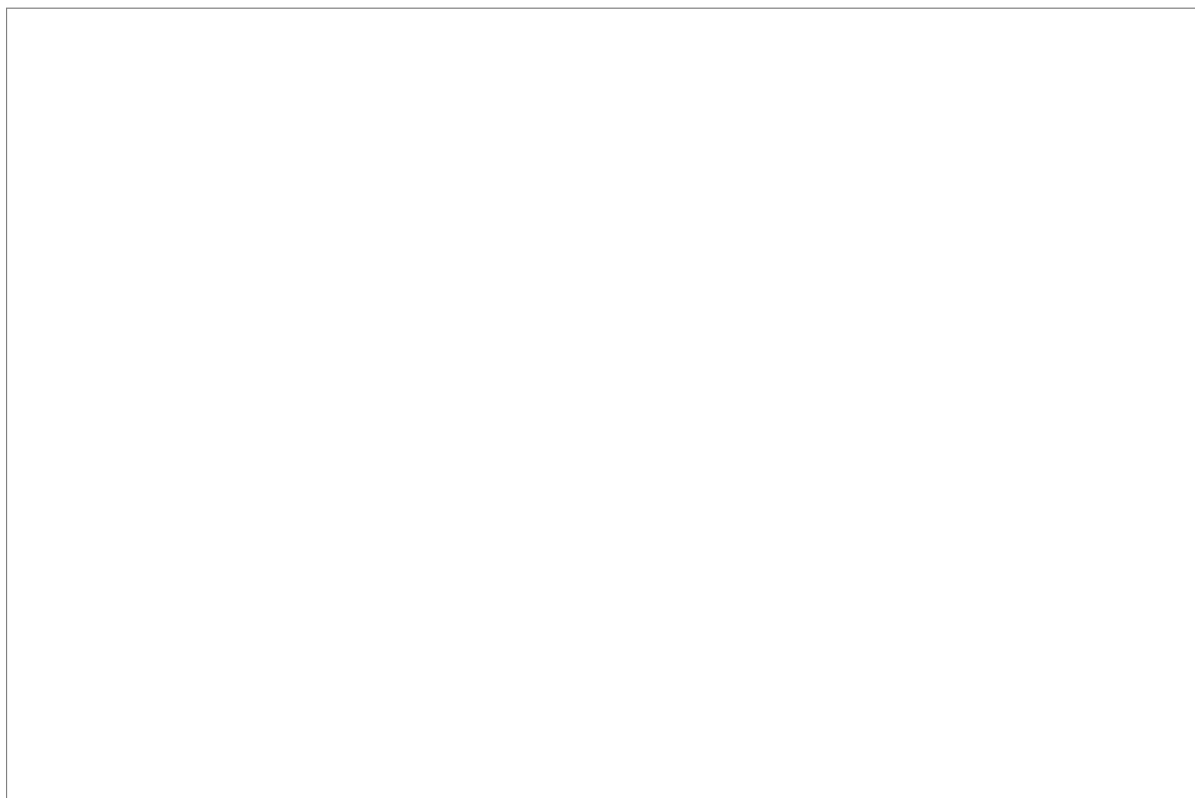


# Wojciech Doroszuk, “Reisefieber”



- Author Wojciech Doroszuk
- Date of production 2007
- Dimensions height: photograph: 70 cm, width: photograph: 100 cm
- Duration “Volkshochschule City West”, Berlin: 11'05"; “Sumela Restaurant”: 6'30"; „Cosy-Wasch”, video, 5'40"; “2006/07”, video, left channel: 8'23", right channel: 6'23"; “Flight”: 14'
- Author's designation none
- ID no. BS/935
- Museum [Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art](#)
- Availability in stock
- Subjects [authority](#), [city](#), [multiculture](#), [daily life](#)
- Technique [video](#), [photography](#)
- Material [DVD](#), [digital photography on dibond](#)
- Object copyright Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art
- Digital images copyright © all rights reserved, Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art
- Digitalisation Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art
- Tags [miasto](#), [wideo](#), [© wszystkie prawa zastrzeżone](#), [dokument](#), [wielokulturowość](#), [Wirtualna Małopolska](#), [2D](#)

A project by Wojciech Doroszuk called *Reisefieber* concerns the problem of economic migration. During his stay in Berlin, the artist played the role of a newcomer from the East and was employed in the service sectors which are usually entrusted to emigrants. Based on his experience, five films and photography have been created, that form a multi-layered story of everyday, ordinary life in a foreign country, including both paid work and leisure activities, for example, participation in mass events organized in the city space. In each situation, the hero is shown as a stereotypical stranger, deprived of the will and the possibility of joining indigenous members of the community. His video portraits are saturated with a sense of uncertainty, loneliness, and fear. The only exception is the film introducing the viewer into the history of an emigrant: a journey recorded from the window of a plane, amidst the clouds, leads him into

the unknown and seems to give hope. However, it dissolves at the moment when the landing of the plane begins and the urban landscape of Berlin emerges from the clouds, disappointingly converging with the views of Polish cities that the hero leaves behind. They are far from the mysterious land of new visions and possibilities.

How real and up-to-date is the image of the migrant created by Doroszuk? We live today in the era of globalization, in which the fluidity of places of residence is associated with the lightness of life, with success rather than with failure. Anna Dezeuze in the text *Years of lightness. Lata lekkości. Sztuka w epoce bezcielesnego kapitału* [Art in the age of disembodied capital][1] emphasizes that it is necessary to distinguish between those for whom “movement is life” (modern elite, managers, lawyers, marketing specialists, etc.) and those for whom “life is movement” (emigrants, outlaws, refugees). The former live according to the logic that contemporary movable capital imposes, while the latter are excluded from its circulation. The hero of *Reisefieber* disrupts, through his attitude, the image of an individual, common in consumer culture, who is forced to be happy and active. He performs the simplest, least ambitious activities, such as car washing or helping in kitchen. He is sad, demotivated, lonely. We do not want to identify with such a person. The times when young people were leaving Poland in search of any earning potential, which often meant hard and poorly paid work, are already behind us – we are closer to the image of educated and successful elite, which usually is as deceiving as the image of a poor emigrant. The work of Wojciech Doroszuk, however, has not lost its relevance. Currently, when more and more emigrants from Ukraine, Belarus, and the Caucasus are coming to Poland, we can see the situation of his hero in our own surroundings. Wandering in search of opportunities for a better life is not usually voluntary, regardless of its time and place. The titular word *Reisefieber* describes the accompanying state of anxiety, which, in the case of forced migration, most often does not end with the journey, but can last for years: it is a state of permanent postponement of the fullness and meaning of life for an indefinite period. In this expectation and existential suspension, however, migrants build lasting relationships, create local communities, build solidarity, and support each other, attempting to tame the foreign environment. One of Doroszuk’s stories is devoted to a group of foreigners learning German. It shows cooperative activities that unites people above the categories of race and nationality. Despite this, it does not allow them to get rid of the label “different”, “foreign”, which is even more conspicuous today, in an era of growing nationalism.

According to Dezeuze, contemporary artistic practices have the opportunity to create a space for dialogue between divided communities, in which an opportunity arises for shaping new policies, models of action, and rules for coexistence. Doroszuk strives to provide this kind of asylum and social laboratory, giving an insight into the experiences and emotions of excluded people. One can find them not only in the story about the fear of journey into the unknown contained in *Reisefieber*, but also in his other video works, such as *Raspberry Days* (2008), *Birkac Yer* (2007), *Lunch I. Lunch II* and *Picnic* (2005), *Party* (2006) and whether *El Dorado* (2006).

Elaborated by Vera Zalutskaya (Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art), 

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Poland License](#).

Wojciech Doroszuk (born 1980) is a visual artist, author of video films, and a photographer. He is a graduate of the Painting Department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków (2006). He is the holder of a scholarship of the Minister of Culture (2005–2006) and a laureate of the Geppert competition (2007). He was nominated for the Deutsche Bank Spojrzenia Award (2009). He is interested in problems of exclusion, xenophobia, and death, as well as issues of communication, language, and translation. In his work, he uses the form of a documentary or para-documentary. His realistic film footage is characterized by a rigorous selection of motifs, frames, and colours. Its image aesthetics often come into dissonance with the subject matter taken up by the artist. He is the author of individual exhibitions, including: *Reisefieber* (as part of the Transkultura project, Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art, Kraków, 2007), *Raspberry* (HIT Gallery, Bratislava, 2008), *Special Features* (BWA Awangarda, Wrocław, 2009), *Pierwszy dzień lata* [*The first day of summer*] (lokal\_30, Warsaw, 2010), *Festin* (Joseph Tang Galleries, Paris, 2013), *Secret Cinema: Wojtek Doroszuk* (Fondation Ricard, Paris, 2014), *Bliż* [*Closer*] (Arsenał Gallery, Białystok, 2016). His works were presented as part of group exhibitions, such as: *Nie ma sorry* [*There is no sorry*] (Museum of Contemporary Art, Warsaw, 2008), *DEgeneration /*

*REgeneration* (Marina Abramovic Institute, San Francisco, 2009), *Rückblick* (Polish Institute, Berlin, 2010), *Between Ideology and Identity* (LABOR, Budapest, 2011), *Self Staging* (as part of the Young Art Biennale, Magician Space, Beijing, 2012), *Mikroutopie codzienności [Microutopias of everyday life]* (CSW Znaki Czasu, Toruń, 2013), 4. International Biennale of Young Art (National Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, 2014), *Towards a critical institution* (Arsenał City Gallery, Poznań, 2014), *Artis'Film Biennale* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 2014), *Procedures for the Head. Polish Art Today* (Kunsthalle, Bratislava, 2015), *Musrara Mix Festival 16*. (The Naggar School of Art, Jerusalem, 2016). He lives and works in Rouen, France.

---

[1] A. Dezeuze, *The light years: contemporary art in the age of weightless capital*, 9.06.2011, traduction: B. Bauer, online: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/light-years-contemporary-art-age-weightless-capital#> (access: 19.07.2019).

## **A collection subject to special care. On the preservation of modern art using the example of the digitized resources of the Bunkier Sztuki Art Gallery, made available on the Malopolska's Virtual Museums website**

Is a conservator needed for contemporary art, if it is new? The availability of increasingly refined artistic materials should potentially translate into the greater durability of works of art, resulting in a gradually smaller need for maintenance treatment. It would then be sufficient to cover them with so-called preventive maintenance, which consists in providing appropriate storage conditions and in preventing damage and undesirable changes. Such reasoning, however, does not fully fit modern works of art, which only in a few cases rely on the use of innovative technologies and professional materials that have stability certificates. They rather represent a cross-section of what is currently within the artist's reach, ranging from all kinds of materials (not necessarily intended for artistic use), through mass production objects and the most recent inventions of technology, to natural matter, and even living organisms. Mineral photoluminescent substances, sets of cosmetics, virtual diagram scripts and stuffed animals are only a few examples of the material that contemporary artists are working with and which can all be found in the resources of the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art. Preserving these original and often complex compositions, which are unpredictable and, therefore, difficult to plan in terms of their renovation, requires particular caution from their keepers. Expertise in material appraisal and the search for the best methods of conservation often necessitate engaging authors and specialists in the field of applied means and technologies.

Works which were created yesterday, a decade ago or even decades ago and fall within the artistic tendency to experiment, innovate and break existing art conventions, diverge from works of classic art even more than purely material issues would indicate. Fairly often, they do not even take on the form of an object. It often happens that they are not even designed to last in an unchanged material condition. Contemporary artistic realizations can be expressed through processes and recurring or non-recurring events, just as well as through objects. In such cases, the very idea of making them durable and converting them into part of an art collection seems to contradict the very nature of these works, which are permanently embedded into a specific moment and place, happening in the present.

The creation of this kind of collection, even though extremely hard, is still being initiated by individuals whose goal is to collect works being emblematic for present times. The collections of Bunkier Sztuki, among which there are many examples of variable installations, artistic actions, interventions, processes and projects, bear testimony to this. Their maintenance is demanding. It has to be carried out with caution to preserve their temporary and situational character. This involves taking responsibility not only for

objects, but also for actions allowing for their presentation in accordance with the artistic idea, and even for the implementation of artistic concepts. A keeper of this type of collection must answer the question: what exactly are the objects in his/her care: a piece of work, its documentation, a remnant or an execution instruction? And how, with the help of materials at his/her disposal, can he/she ensure the preservation of its authentic expression?

Taking care of modern art works goes far beyond material analysis, monitoring the state of preservation, preventing damage and compensating for any loss. It focuses on conceptual issues to the same extent as on the physical level of a given work. The conservator's scrutiny encompasses the problems concerning the status, functions and the mutual relations envisaged for the material, means applying oneself in order to make artistic assumptions a reality. Do they constitute a work of art or a record of a bygone realisation? Are they an isolated creation or one of the many possible variations of an idea? Do they serve the purposes of passive contemplation or are they supposed to initiate the recipient's actions? Is it their specific appearance that matters rather than the process obtained through their participation? Recognizing these issues is important in order to protect a work of art properly. It allows us to determine what exactly their destruction and loss means in any given case and also choose a suitable moment for the conservator to intervene. Scratches on the surface of the sculpture by Maurycy Gomulicki, [Bestia \[Beast\]](#), which had become a mascot for the youngest audience in the open air, would be small-scale damage. A similar scratch on Tomasz Baran's painting with a uniformly coloured surface would be damage on a larger scale.

The identification of the importance of damage in the case of contemporary works is not very obvious. As the example of another monochromatic painting from the Bunker of Art collection proves, what may seemingly appear to be damage is sometimes an object of conservation care. The canvas in question is part of the project [Rewitalizacje \[Revitalizations\]](#), implemented by Wojciech Gilewicz in Sanok. For a few weeks, a green square with a hole cut out in the middle replaced the missing fence of a street flowerbed. The flaws and surface scratches created during that time are an important element of the work. They are material proof of implementing the assumptions of the artistic project, which consisted in improving the image of the city and filling in the devastated urban fabric with pictorial dummies. The removal or repair of defects would be equal to the erasure of the significant history of the object, documented also by means of a film, which may accompany the painting during its exhibition in a gallery.

Violation of the work's integrity is related to the damage of its substance only in some cases. It is equally important to present it in a correct form, one consistent with the intentions of the author. Therefore, a significant part of the contemporary art conservator's attention is devoted to the problem of obtaining information about mutual relations — spatial and ideological — between elements of a given work. Artistic projects, consisting of many complex components, can easily lead to misleading combinations or juxtapositions. In order to prevent this, it is not enough to be in possession of all the necessary components of the work: it is also indispensable to have instructions for their use.

In the collection of Bunkier Sztuki, one of the most complicated cases is the work by the Strupek Group [Rakieta \[Rocket\]](#), originally created as an artistic performance, and finally transferred to the collection in the form of a rich set of materials, consisting of conceptual sketches, scenario, costumes, props and photographic documentation. Their utility has allowed a fairly free repetition of the course of the performance. In the case of static shows, the aesthetic dimension of artefacts has been emphasized — the work then takes the form of an installation whose shape outline is determined by the authors' guidelines.

The work [+48 XX XXX XXXX](#) by Jan Hoelt may also appear in a dual form, which is both an artistic intervention in the public space and its perverse, semi-fictional documentation. The gallery is impermanent possession of only the elements necessary to present the latter version, which are compiled into a fixed composition for the needs of each exhibition. The outdoor form of the work, which has been exhibited only once so far in Cracovian Błonia for several months, has only been preserved in a project form. It is the basis for the restoration of the work in the same shape of a standard factory-made steel

barrier, with a knitted scarf with a telephone number hanging over it. The scarf, following these assumptions, has been produced in many copies, to enable regular replacement of this willingly appropriated element of the work. Restoration of the work also requires a helpline to be launched, which is indicated by the characters on the scarf and which initiates an artistic intrigue planned by the author.

The examples mentioned highlight a sensitive area of contemporary art. An important element in the exercise of custody over works of art is, in fact, their display. It is sometimes an activity more complicated than the mere retrieval of an object from the warehouse, hanging it on the wall or placing it on a plinth. The exhibition is often the only opportunity to see the work in its entirety, but also the moment in which it is easiest to misrepresent it. Many artistic projects create the need to assemble physically unconnected fragments, and even to make certain parts from scratch. The responsibilities of collection conservators include: supervision over the appropriate course of these actions as well as deciding whether a certain work should be destroyed after the exhibition or not. This applies above all to large-size objects, ones which are easy to reproduce and – as in the case of Hoefl's work – ones which do not require the participation of authors at subsequent exhibitions of the work. Their re-production may prove to be a more prudent solution than the long-term provision of appropriate storage conditions.

This specificity of contemporary art works causes meticulously and methodically maintained documentation to become the basis and integral part of the conservation of resources. New techniques of creating visual mappings – including digitalization – are also helpful. They allow the physical parameters of the work to be preserved with great precision and in full spatial dimension. Their usefulness turns out to be invaluable in the case of such works as Valtki Horvat's installation, [BalanceBeam # 0715](#). At every exhibition, it requires an accurate reconstruction of the configuration of objects placed on a wooden beam extending between two chairs. No technical tool, however, can show the sense of repeating this activity. It consists in finding the titular balance in the process of arranging another set of round and spherical shapes in the right order.

Documentation, on which the possibility of preserving artistic projects often depends, rarely resembles a technical instruction containing a list of simple tasks to be performed. It happens (as happened in the case described above) that it introduces a requirement to act out the activities important for the work, in which there is a certain amount of randomness. Sometimes, they leave a considerable margin for discretion, assuming the need to adapt a work to a given place and circumstances. The element of freedom and flexibility, embedded in an artistic project, becomes the subject of protection. Its recording by means of photography, film or three-dimensional visualization can lead to excessive attachment to a single image of the work. This situation is not possible in such works as *Rocket* by the Strupek Group or even a formally simple installation by Tomasz Dobiszewski from the series [Anegdota \[Anecdotes\]](#). The latter consists of photographs depicting a desert and the shadow of a figure observing it, which is created by pouring sand on the floor (intentionally without the use of a template) and looks a touch different each time.

Works that evade the possibility of their recording are far from rare. Such cases include projects constantly developing over time, such as the second of Wojciech Gilewicz's works, held in the care of Bunker Sztuki. *Paintings 2002* – is a painting process carried out on eleven supports. This process continues thanks to the commitment of the gallery to repaint them at least twice a year according to the guidelines provided by the artist. These paintings have become their own documentation by accumulating further layers on the surface. The main object in the proper conservation of the work is regular continuation of the painting activity.

A collection of contemporary art turns out to be a laborious project. Conservation of the works, which are collected not in the form of objects, but in variable installations, interventions and actions, is not limited to eliminating physical threats and counteracting dangerous incidents. It rather turns into continuous action, inextricably linked to the programme of public access to works of art. Without the involvement of the actively and conscientiously conducted conservation, a significant part of this type of collection would only be a dead and rather curious collection of instructions, documentation, props and replicas, from



which individual works could not easily be extracted in their full splendour. Works of this kind, without any conservation, simply do not exist.

Elaborated by Kinga Olesiejuk, 

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Poland License](#).

See all works from the collection of [Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art](#).

See all works from the collection of [Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków MOCAK](#).

Tags: [Creative Commons licenses](#), [contemporary art](#)

## Value added – value subtracted

### 1.

When is contemporary art good and when is it bad? How can this be assessed and who can undertake such an assessment? And furthermore, can people who are not experts talk about this, since they are often dying to say: “this is not art at all!”? There are known cases of destruction of valuable works that were not recognised as art at the right time. An example: the story about how a cleaning lady in a German museum scraped the residue away from a water container, thus destroying a sculpture by Martin Kippenberger worth € 800,000. Similar situations happen almost regularly, even in such renowned institutions as the Tate Gallery and to such recognised artists as Joseph Beuys.

The problem with defining and evaluating contemporary art has been an issue for a long time. All over the world, people complain about its incomprehensibility, real or assumed elitism, and cynicism. Many point out the lack of criteria and reliable tools, recognised by the majority of real, or only potential, recipients, used in order to verify questionable judgments on artistic topics — in a nutshell — on widespread relativism. In Poland, the blame for this state of affairs is often passed onto the audience. The average Pole does not read and does not go to either the museum or the theatre. Their aversion to culture is said to arise from their lack of aesthetic sensitivity, for which, in turn, school curricula, that are outdated and overloaded with content, are, of course, to blame. This is my account of the reflexive train of thought characteristic of Polish intellectuals. In recent years, the reasons for this aversion started to be looked for on a deeper level, namely, in the social structure, with the memory of poverty and the fact that the majority of Poles came from the countryside preserved therein, as well as in the ways of thinking formed back in the age of feudalism.

However, let us not forget that low participation in culture and the troubles of contemporary art with its own identity are two separate problems, which, at times, tend to overlap. There exists a problem with evaluating art and there is nothing to indicate that it is going to disappear. For several decades, reviewers have regularly proclaimed the death of its various disciplines. As such, we have reached the end of painting, drawing, sculpture, performance, poster art and so on, and a number of times at that. The end of the arts as an institution also took place, at least in the form in which we have known them (since the beginning of the modern period). In a widely-read essay, Jean Clair described the end of museums in the traditional sense of the word, which abdicated in favour of institutions dedicated to entertainment,<sup>[1]</sup> and, earlier Arthur Danto promoted the idea of the end of art,<sup>[2]</sup> which was to be marked by Andy Warhol's exhibition of boxes of the Brillo washing powder in the 1960s.

### 2.

Humanists examine the deadlock intently, but their actions resemble the efforts of Sisyphus. XI Seminarium Metodologiczne Historyków Sztuki [the 11<sup>th</sup> Methodological Seminar of Art Historians], which was held in 1986 in Nieborów, had both diagnostic and remedial intentions. The participants agreed that a crisis had ensued. Mieczysław Porębski observed: “three converging pathways of the syndrome threatening the fundamental value of creative work”.<sup>[3]</sup> These were: textualisation, musealization, and conceptualization, that deprive art of its main value: a concrete, unique existence. Maria Poprzęcka demanded room “for artistic failures, creative defeats, analyses of unsuccessful works”,<sup>[4]</sup> that is, reliable negative evaluation, which is also missing in this day and age. Elżbieta Wolicka tried to outline a vision of a new order of carrying out assessment that would be based on: “the intuition of the complementarity of opposing but not contradictory values, on the sense of the criteria and scales of cultural assessment, complementing rather than excluding each other”.<sup>[5]</sup> To some extent, the author has taken into account civilizational changes, closely related to the twilight of modernist cultural formation and the advent of what, following Zygmunt Bauman, we call liquid modernity.<sup>[6]</sup> However, she did not predict the power and inevitability of change, hence elegantly dodging the matter of problems that trouble contemporary culture. Nevertheless, it is worth paying attention to the concept of intuition which she brought up, and which intellectuals will soon be using as the primary source of judgments on art.

These kinds of diagnoses which, *incidentally*, have been rendered many times in different places and across varying timeframes, contrast with the rapid pulse of the art world.<sup>[7]</sup> The global circulation of art, is probably doing this well for the first time in its relatively short history. As such, are the pessimistic humanists talking about the same artworks that have, over the last dozen or so years, scored triumphs at gigantic exhibitions scattered around the world, from Venice, through São Paulo, Havana, Gwangju, Moscow, to Istanbul, Dakar, Sharjah and Porto Alegre? At the immensely popular art fairs, from Basel, through Singapore, to Madrid and Miami? In commercial galleries springing up like mushrooms after the rain? The contrast between this diagnosis and reality is striking.

Let’s stop for a while at the international art biennials. They show what art is used for in the modern world and what values are sought in it. Although the first one of them, the Biennial in Venice, was established over one hundred years ago, in 1895, and other important events of this type emerged around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (São Paulo, Sydney), the real *boom* for these gigantic ventures took place in the 80s, to explode at the turn of the century. According to the estimates made by a specialist organisation – the Biennial Foundation – their number has already exceeded two hundred and is still growing.

The role that these impressive art festivals play in the life of the host city or region is multifaceted: symbolic, brand-establishing, economic and social. The reason for their popularity cannot be attributed only to art, which is a pretext. Cities use art for their own purposes: to be a testimony of their openness and worldliness, and strengthen their position in the globalised world. The biennials are also of benefit to local communities, expressing their aspirations and offering them a sense of pride and belonging. German critic and curator Peter Weibel spoke in this spirit, warning that one should not only see politicization of the biennials and the instrumental treatment of them by the authorities, because they offer the audience: “space for a critical meeting with political and social problems, for which there is often no place in existing institutions”.<sup>[8]</sup>

Specialist employees ready to act anywhere around the globe have appeared around biennials. The artists produce works, whose message and form fits the format of these usually effective, and, at the same time, socially engaging exhibitions perfectly. A narrow group of curators moves around the world from one place to the next, because employing someone with a recognizable name to build the biennial reduces the risk of failure and increases the chance of getting a return on the investment. The brightest star in the group was the Swiss Hans-Ulrich Obrist, invited to so many places that probably even he lost track and did not know where he was at any given moment. Modern art offers artistic celebrities of Obrist’s calibre the opportunity to travel, enjoy good food, and attend parties, as well as gain fame, money, and power.

As part of the biennial model, art becomes an instrument of urban marketing, a cog in the machine of the entertainment industry, an opportunity to adopt a proper lifestyle. It is a tool for building media careers. It sometimes happens that art criticises the hegemonic attitude of the Western approach to organising such events; it speaks in the voice of the excluded, provides small countries, ethnic and political communities with an opportunity to gain prestige.

### 3.

Since art meets so many different needs of the modern world, why do intellectuals talk about its crisis? The reason for this is that they measure the artistic products of modern times with inadequate standards. They apply fixed, rigid criteria to that which is variable, contextual, relative. Art in the old sense is either in a state of perpetual perfection, looking for novelties and ideal identification with the medium, or strives for transcendence, adhering to some spiritual system.

The search for the fundamental value of art is an expression of nostalgia for a classical pattern, which was the only one that had clearly defined qualities and was widely recognized. This pattern does not fit today's era. Andy Warhol's silk screen-prints reproducing ordinary photos from newspapers, basketball balls sunk in Jeff Koons' aquariums, and thousands of other works, do not have the aura of uniqueness; we do not see their mastery. They show us the artist's charisma, the magic of his name, his image, in a word: the commercial brand they have managed to create. By the same token, the division of art into disciplines, still used in art schools, does not make much sense at a time when artists – such as Paulina Ołowska – can exhibit ceramic objects, fabrics, costumes and not be their creator. What's more, the artist also exhibits works by other creators (neon signs, garden sculptures), copies of others' creations, opens a cafe, creates cabaret shows. Other artists – such as Oskar Dawicki – are able to create painting exhibitions without even touching the brush, by employing subcontractors.

There is no single universal definition of art or an artwork. Since the memorable gesture of Marcel Duchamp, who, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, decided to treat a bicycle wheel on a stool, a bottle dryer, and a urinal as works of art, the power to label things as art has been transferred over to the artist. Decades later, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the century, the centre of gravity found its place in the environment: an artefact that had been accepted by the world of art became a work of art. The considerations by Arthur Danto on the subject of *artworld* have been creatively developed by the philosopher George Dickie, who proposed a theory according to which art is what institutions approve of and exhibit. Over the last hundred years, in parallel with civilizational changes, a radical departure from the essence of a work of art took place. Today, we define them through the environment: the utilitarian, functional, historical context... The new status of art has also been considered by Polish theorists. Jerzy Ludwiński developed a vision of the “era of blue”, which was to constitute the ultimate goal of avant-garde transformations, that assumes the dissolution of art in reality, and the utopia of universal and instant interpersonal communication.<sup>[9]</sup> On the other hand, Świdziński created a less visionary and more pragmatic theory of contextual art, inspired by the Polish experience of living in isolation behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>[10]</sup>

Theories are one thing, but the functioning of the art world is best regulated by market principles in the broad sense of the word. Still, it might be said that there is public art, participatory art, relational, critical or socially-oriented art: these are the types that, at first glance, are not subject to marketization. However, they are also bought, most often by the state or other authoritative bodies, which award grants for their production and thus guide artists ideologically in the direction desired by the grant provider. As for the proper art market, those who enjoy the most recognition are the ones who have succeeded in the west, and they don't really sell any works in Poland because of their high prices. Success has made them credible in the eyes of the local environment, making their works desirable at exhibitions in local galleries or museums. Among them are Wilhelm Sasnal, Paulina Ołowska and Piotr Uklański, who has lived in America for years. Besides, market value doesn't always translate into artistic value: the choices of those investing in art do not necessarily correspond with the taste of professionals; there are perhaps too many examples of that. Random examples include the works of Franciszek Starowieyski or the late works of



Edward Dwurnik.

The situation in Poland is a peripheral chip off the global situation. The bitter words of the aforementioned Peter Weibel, refer to this:

[...] “the contemporary art system works like a stock exchange. Former collectors became market operators. They buy artworks [...] for a good price and count on selling them quickly for a much higher price. Few artists and works are able to follow these rules of capital. Hence, 90 percent of the global artistic production is a waste from the point of view of the market, its subcontractors and suppliers, such as museums, galleries and private collectors. All the new museums built by owners of renowned brands such as Prada and Gucci (François Pinault) and LVMH (Bernard Arnault) show that a certain kind of art has become structurally and systemically part of the luxury goods market and the financial industry”.[11]

Such processes can also be observed here, although admittedly, to a lesser extent. They can be seen, for example, in the case of Grażyna Kulczyk’s activities as a patroness of cultural events at the Stary Browar in Poznań and in her efforts to create a museum that would accommodate the collection of pieces of art she has accrued. After the collapse of negotiations with the cities of Poznań and Warsaw, the millionairess pursues her idea of a museum in Switzerland’s Susch.

#### 4.

The answer to the question of how modern art should be assessed cannot be provided by art criticism. As James Elkins, a specialist in the analysis of contemporary literature on arts, points out, nowadays more critical texts are being created than ever before, but they have no influence on shaping the opinion about a given work.[12] Publications are just an addition to the portfolio of those artists, whose works commercial galleries are trying to sell at the highest possible profit. That is why nowadays we are dealing with “the phantom of criticism”. Judgements, opinions and analyses have become a kind of little theatre played out to keep up appearances, regardless of the fact that there is no audience.

In the colourful history of criticism, let us especially clearly mark those moments, when attempts to introduce certain kinds or even entire systems of valuation were made. During the Baroque period, the first modern academies began (“free artists’ associations under the protectorate of the ruler”, as Maria Poprzęcka wrote[13]): in Florence, Rome, Bologna and Paris. The last one – Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture – opened in 1648 – gave rise not only to a new education system. but also – indeed – criticism. The theoretical and organizational activity of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers associated with the Academy, such as Charles Le Brun, Charles Perrault or Roger de Piles, introduced operative networks of concepts, which were employed in the analysis of art. There was a belief that art is the work of mind and should be judged on the basis of the appropriate selection and treatment of a subject, not the ability to evoke emotions. It was these assumptions that gave rise to the conviction that the art could be learned and that rational, universally applicable, immutable principles governing it make it possible to objectively evaluate any work. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century academies, theory had primacy over practice. “Tables of principles” regarding drawing, the proportions of human figures, expression and colours multiplied. Report cards given to painters by Roger de Piles were the result of this code. His *Balance des Peintres* employed four criteria (composition, drawing, colour, expression), within which it was possible to award points on a scale from 1 to 20. De Piles’s evaluation amazes the contemporary viewer, for he awarded Rafael a score of 18 points for his expression, while Caravaggio did not get a single point.[14]

The establishment of the academy marked the beginnings of art criticism. The first attempts, made by Étienne La Font de Saint Yenne in 1748, were met with strong opposition from artists who expressed their indignation that someone outside the academy would dare judge art. The reason for this commotion was, of course, the protection of their own interests. The term “art criticism” was used for the first time not by a French author, but by the English painter and writer, Jonathan Richardson. In the book, *An Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism*, from 1719, he introduced strict categories used for the assessment of a

painting. A table designed by him made it possible to award from 0 to 18 points for such criteria as inventiveness, composition, drawing and colour. The goal was to create a system of unbiased assessment that would be available to everyone.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the literature on art grew in strength. The famous case of critic John Ruskin, who lost in court proceedings against painter James Whistler after accusing him of deceiving the audience, shows how much the words of reviewers, who could ruin an artist's career and diminish his earnings were being reckoned with. As early as 1829, Eugène Delacroix published a scathing article *On critics*, in which he accused them of craving for the ability to exercise power over artists: "These vigilant gendarmes exist to teach you, the audience, how you should feel pleasure, to send you ... [the creators] onto the scene using strings, the ends of which they hold...".<sup>[15]</sup>

However, neither Whistler nor Delacroix managed to stop the ongoing processes. The moment of art criticism's greatest glory was undoubtedly the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it was not limited to analyses, but told art what shapes and meanings it was to take. It owed its rise to three authors: Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg and Lawrence Alloway. However, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the decline of its power. On the pages of the British "Guardian", Adrian Searle gave art critics the following piece of advice: "You can be as creative and as mischievous, as serious or as funny as the mood takes you or the situation demands...".<sup>[16]</sup> Contemporary criticism, at least declaratively, is not based on a specific set of concepts and verifiable criteria. However, by maintaining that the shape of texts depends solely on his own mood, the author hides the real requirements directed towards published statements (attractiveness, accessibility, addressing emotions, fulfilling the advertiser's conditions etc.).

## 5.

In one of her texts, Dorota Jarecka asked a question: *Who decides that something is a piece of art and how do they do so?*<sup>[17]</sup> She replied to herself immediately: "the group consisting of the heads of the following institutions decides: the Museum of Modern Art, the Foksal Gallery Foundation, the Raster Gallery, the Zachęta Gallery and the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków, the Museum of Art in Łódź, plus Anda Rottenberg". In the next paragraph, she continued the countdown: "Abroad, these are respectively: Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Adam Szymczyk, Okwui Enwezor, Massimiliano Gioni, Klaus Biesenbach [...] and the heads of the Frieze London fair [...]. Now and then, there appear newspaper articles that expose this gang, but to no avail, because everyone has known about it for a long time." The text carries tension caused by the fact that the author poses an extremely significant question and jokes about it. By ironically referring to the institutional theory of art (in the version, which says that nowadays people have become institutions) and to the texts appearing in the media from time to time and aiming to blow the cover of the "mafia" that's in charge of art, she says that the act of defining something as a piece of art can only be based on the piece itself. Returning to the essential understanding of a piece of art, the author does not defuse the tension present in the initial question. How do you sense the existence of an artistic essence? Who has the credentials to do so? One can discern evasion in the text: the author's ironic reply to the question she poses remains true, regardless of whether Jarecka is mocking it or not. Yes, the status of a piece of art is determined by a small group of people who are at the top of the hierarchy of the *artworld*, yes, these people are institutions – Jarecka's text seems to be saying – but we have to accept it because that's how the world of art is structured. Let's not be bothered by the issue of power, and let us not talk about values.

In response to the question about the criteria for the assessment of good and bad art, Anda Rottenberg admitted: "I do not have the feeling that I can objectively determine that. I can only say that I either respond to something or I don't. Some things have persuasive power over me and they attract me in, others do not [...] I use the sum of intuitive convictions, supported by years of being surrounded by works of art"<sup>[18]</sup>. This is what the situation looks like from the point of view of a person mentioned by Jarecka among the ranks of the elite endowed with the power to transform items into works of art. And there is no reason not to believe her.

The ideological envelope of today's art can be unbearable. People who are not experts in it may feel repelled by its hermetic, environmental language. The discrepancy between the declared, noble ideas, such as criticism, opposition to social injustice and exclusion, the struggle for equal rights, and so on, and the use that is made of such ideas is sometimes striking. Meanwhile, these ideas can be used as marketing slogans, covering up the struggle for prestige, power and money. That is something we must remember.

There is no easy answer to the question of values in contemporary art. It is you – the viewer, the reader, the listener – who chooses whom you're going to listen to: yourself or the expert. Speaking of experts, be cautious and choose someone wise, whose knowledge is supported by achievements and life experience. The choice is yours; there is no other way.

Elaborated by Magdalena Ujma-Gawlik, 

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Poland License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/).

- 
- [1] Jean Clair, *Museums' crisis*, trans. Jan Maria Kłoczowski, słowo / obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2009.
- [2] See e.g. Arthur C. Danto, *After the end of art. Contemporary art and the pale of history*, trans. Mateusz Salwa, Universitas, Kraków 2013.
- [3] Mieczysław Porębski, *Zagrożona wartość*, [in:] *Sztuka i wartość. Materiały XI Seminarium Metodologicznego Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, Nieborów, June 26-28, 1986, edited by Maria Poprzęcka, Zakład Wydawnictw "Sztuka Polska", bm. bd., p. 15.
- [4] Maria Poprzęcka, *Jak mówić źle o sztuce?* [in:] *ibid*, p. 81.
- [5] Elżbieta Wolicka, *Kilka uwag na temat wartości i wartościowania w historii sztuk*. [in:] *ibid*, p. 65.
- [6] See e.g. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid modernity*, trans. Tomasz Kunz, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2006.
- [7] An adequate name for the increasingly globalizing world of art — *Artworld* — was proposed back in the 1960s by Arthur Danto, cf. *idem*. *The Artworld*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61, No. 19 (1964), pp. 571–584.
- [8] Peter Weibel, *Introduction*, [in:] *Biennials: Prospect and Perspectives*, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe 2015, p. 3.
- [9] Jerzy Ludwiński, *Epoka błękitu*, Open Studio, Kraków 2003.
- [10] Jan Świdziński, *Konteksty*, Galeria Labirynt, Lublin 2010.
- [11] Peter Weibel, *Introduction*, [in:] *Biennials: Prospect and Perspectives. International Conference at ZKM (27.02.-01/03/2014)*, Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe 2015, p. 3, [zkm.de/media/file/de/2015-publication-prospect\\_and\\_perspectives-zkm.pdf](http://zkm.de/media/file/de/2015-publication-prospect_and_perspectives-zkm.pdf) (access 23/08/2018).
- [12] James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2003.
- [13] Maria Poprzęcka, *Akademizm*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 3rd edition, Warsaw 1989, p. 22
- [14] Quote from: *ibid*, p. 52.
- [15] Quote in: *Francuscy pisarze i krytycy o malarstwie 1820-1876*, wybór i oprac. Hanna Morawska, vol. 2, PWN Warszawa 1977, pp. 16-17.
- [16] Adrian Searle, *Do not trust your prejudices but believe in your instincts*, [in:] *Our critics advice*, "the Guardian", 8.07.2008, [www.theguardian.com/arts/youngcritics/story/0,,2289650,00.html](http://www.theguardian.com/arts/youngcritics/story/0,,2289650,00.html) (access 10/11/2017).
- [17] Dorota Jarecka, *Kto i jak decyduje o tym, że coś jest dziełem sztuki? "Notes na 6 Tygodni"*, [notesna6tygodni.pl](http://notesna6tygodni.pl) (access: 28.08.2018).
- [18] *Należy sobie ufać Anda Rottenberg w rozmowie z Łukaszem Białkowskim*, "Znak", No. 736 (September 2016), p. 27.