

“Goplana and Elfs” (“Balladyna”, 1943)



- Author Tadeusz Kantor
- Date of production reconstruction: Goplana — 1981, Elf — 1984
- Dimensions height: Goplana: 253 x 166 x 80 cm, Elf: 152 x 73 x 36 cm, Elf: 145 x 83 x 46 cm
- ID no. Goplana — CRC/VII/1/1-2, Elfy — CRC/VII/1/3/1-4, CRC/VII/1/4/1-4, CRC/VII/1/5/1-6
- Museum [The Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor](#)
- Subjects [war](#), [theatre](#), [famous people](#), [death](#)
- Technique [zinc-coating](#), [cutting](#), [forging](#), [welding](#), [casting](#), [painting](#)
- Material [wood](#), [metal](#), [metal sheet](#), [fabric](#)
- Object copyright The Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor
- Digital images copyright © all rights reserved, The Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor
- Digitalisation RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museums project
- Tags [tkanina](#), [scenografia](#), [teatr](#), [Tadeusz Kantor](#), [Teatr Cricot 2](#), [3D](#), [© wszystkie prawa zastrzeżone](#)

Goplana and the Elves is a reconstruction of the object from the performance *Balladyna*, performed in Kraków in 1943 by Tadeusz Kantor and a group of the artists from Kraków, in the Underground Independent Theatre. No objects survived from this period. As well as *Balladyna* by Juliusz Słowacki,

Kantor also directed *Return of Odysseus* by Wyspiański in 1944, in the Clandestine Independent Theatre. This object, like numerous sketches and collages, was created at the time when Kantor began his resumé, returning to selected periods and motifs of his work. At that time, he also began to prepare replicas of some of the items from his performances for the Museum of the Cricot 2 Theatre, which he had used before. Among them was the replica of the phantom in *Goplana and the Elves*, the prototype of which was the form from a war show. It is significant that the motifs from the performances from the time of the occupation were taken up by the artist in his late drawings quite intensively; they are both a kind of correction of earlier works and a complement of them. In *Balladyna* from 1943, Goplana's silver and white form was the object on which the drama was focused. Made of wood wrapped in silver paper, it was equipped with a string that produced vibrating sounds. "Goplana, Slavic lyrical forest nymph, turned into a soulless mechanism"^[1]. In an interview with Mieczysław Porębski, Kantor explains: "The reality was so absurd that most of us turned to abstract painting and our first performance, *Balladyna*, was abstract. This was the transfer of Słowacki's entire romanticism to the abstract Bauhaus concept. I worked there with geometrical forms, a circle, an arc, a right angle, and materials such as sheet metal, black felt, cloth."

In this conversation, the artist admits that the reason for rejection of realism was "the occupation and Nazi dehumanization", which disgraced the human figure. The "phantom-form" from the war was reconstructed in 1982. The object was made of galvanized sheet metal and wood (the phantom's skeleton), which were the artist's favourite materials. Goplana is a symbolic form "flattened, of sheet metal in the shape of a face profile with an eye socket and a 'mouth cavity', some primal fetish, 'playing' the role of the nymph Goplana."^[2] A geometric form was incorporated into a wooden platform, created a few years later, made of plywood and fibreboard; the sides of the platform were covered with a black fabric. The phantom is accompanied by two elves built of light, open-work structures made of steel bars, semi-circular metal sheets, and wooden elements. The abstract forms of elves were added in 1984. They differ slightly in height and the manner their shapes have been modelled. Set on wooden platforms, they are moving elements. "The Elves were two-piece moving wheels, gravitating around a parent form." The whole object is completed by a background consisting of a black cotton canvas, stretched on a metal, arched chassis.

For Kantor, this object—"a form, a spatial sculpture, with a metaphorical function",^[3] took the place of a theatrical set. It became an independent sculpture, a kind of environment (Fr. *environmental art*, arrangement of space that is supposed to "absorb" the viewer). Many drawings of Kantor and collages created for this object have survived.

Elaborated by Małgorzata Paluch-Cybulska (The Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor), © all rights reserved

^[1] T. Kantor, *Czas Balladyny*, [in:] T. Kantor, *Pisma. Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934-1974*, elab. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław-Kraków, 2005, p. 71;

^[2] T. Kantor, *Miejsce teatralne*, [in:] T. Kantor, *Pisma. Vol. 2: Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975-1984*, elab. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław-Kraków 2004, p. 365;

^[3] There, p. 407.

Mannequins by Kantor

Mannequins in museum exhibitions often signify attempts to reconstruct history, they are a tool for delving into the past, which, however, does not fully achieve the intended goals (although, of course, these are subjective judgements and experiences). At the moment when theatre objects enter the space of the museum – in which two worlds meet: museum and theatre, it is worth considering the role that mannequins played in the theatre, including, and perhaps above all, in Kantor's theatre.

The mannequins that appeared in Kantor's performances for the first time in the production of *Gosh/Kurka wodna* (1967), at first „were like an intangible extension, some additional organ of the

actor”. In the staging of *Balladyna* they duplicated actors, but as a props, dead actors, they bore the imprint of death. Mannequins were regarded as „poor” objects, they were an example of „the lowest rank of reality”. A figure that made it possible to execute transgression. An object that expressed Kantor’s conviction that life can only be expressed through contrast with its absence can only be understood through the context of death. Kantor proposed a new type of “Treatise on Mannequins”. He wrote:

„MANNEQUIN as a VIOLATION procedure
Mannequin as an EMPTY object. DUMMY.
Message of DEATH. Actor’s Model”.

Mannequins, just like wax figures, existed alongside the margins of art. Although Kantor did not agree with the idea of Craig and Kleist, according to which the actor can be replaced by a mannequin, he was fascinated by the potential of these artificial, created beings in his conviction that could best reflect the ideas of the *Theatre of Death*. Thus, mannequins were a tool that, through association with death, was to be a model for a living actor.

As Kantor said in an interview with Krzysztof Miklaszewski: „The mannequin in my theatre is to become a model through which a strong sense of death and the condition of the dead is to be transmitted.”

Elaborated by: Editorial Team of Malopolska’s Virtual Museums,



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

See:

[Manekin Pedla \(the image of Kazimierz Mikulski\), Dead Class, 1975\)](#)

[Goplana and Elfs \(Balladyna , 1943\)](#)

[Fairy circle / Child’s dummy on a bicycle \(Dead class, 1975\)](#)

Literature:

Tadeusz Kantor, *Pisma*, vol. 2: *Teatr Śmierci. Texts from 1975-1984*, selected and developed by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław-Krakow, 2004.

Tags: [Tadeusz Kantor, theater, Cricot 2 Theatre, The Cricoteka Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor, Creative Commons licenses](#)