



Zofia Kulik. The Practice of Irony

Press Release

Curator: Timothy Persons

Curatorial collaboration: Katarzyna Bek

This exhibition focuses on Zofia Kulik's exploration of irony as a critical tool within her artistic practice. It encompasses both her individual work and the seventeen-year collaboration within the duo KwieKulik. Through absurdity, seriality, and formal exaggeration, her work exposes mechanisms of power and the paradoxes of everyday life in the Polish People's Republic. The works also reflect the socio-political transformation following 1989 and the increasing presence of the Catholic Church in public life.

The exhibition presents two key stages of Kulik's practice: the performative actions realised together with Przemysław Kwiek during the 1970s and 1980s, and the monumental photographic compositions developed from the late 1980s onward. The later works, constructed through black-and-white multiple exposures, marked Kulik's emancipation as an independent artist. Although her practice shifted from ephemeral actions and documentation toward large-scale photomontages composed of numerous photographic modules, both periods remain connected through a sustained investigation of power, control, and representation. Exaggeration, visual play, and serial structures repeatedly undermine the authority of political imagery and the official language of ideology. Irony becomes not only a strategy of critique, but also a means of distancing oneself from dominant historical narratives.

The first part of the exhibition focuses on the activities of KwieKulik, whose practice combined performance, artistic action, and documentation. In *The Banana and the Pomegranate*, an absurd sequence of images and objects — a stone in a glass of water, passports, pig snouts, or a broken? milk bottle, a small eagle made of a soap — creates a kind of "theatre of objects" in which state, religious, and private symbols lose their stable meanings. The linguistic play embedded in the word *granat*, meaning both pomegranate and grenade in Polish, together with grotesque arrangements of flags and gestures, reveals contradictions between the official image of the state and the realities of everyday life. The work exposes the ways power objectifies the individual while simultaneously operating through grotesque associations and unstable meanings.



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A similar strategy appears in *KwieKulik. Nudes on Stamps – Mail Art* (1979), where the artists' official passport photographs were transformed into a subversive erotic photomontage. After participating in an exhibition in Malmö in 1975, KwieKulik lost their passports for several years. Through the use of transparent colored foils and fragmented bodies, the artists juxtaposed intimacy with the language of administrative control. Provocation and visual humour dismantle the seriousness of bureaucracy while simultaneously becoming a metaphor for the duo's symbiotic creative relationship.

An important aspect of KwieKulik's practice were slide projections such as *Variants of Red* and *The Path of Edward Gierek*, based on the rhythmic multiplication of political symbols and newspaper imagery. The repeated use of red elements revealed propaganda as a mechanism of aesthetic organisation and ideological image production.

The second part of the exhibition is devoted to Kulik's individual practice following the dissolution of KwieKulik. During this period, the artist developed her characteristic language of monumental black-and-white photomontages constructed from multiple exposures and modular arrangements. These works evoke the aesthetics of ornament, heraldry, and propaganda monuments while simultaneously destabilising their authority through formal excess.

Ewa Lajer-Burcharth interprets irony in Kulik's work not merely as a visual effect, but as a form of historical consciousness. According to the scholar, Kulik's photomontages employ repetition, fragmentation, and amplification in order to challenge established narratives of political and art history. Rather than nostalgic, these works critically reinterpret collective memory, revealing how ideological pasts continue to shape the present. Through the multiplication of gestures, symbols of authority, and subordinated bodies, Kulik transforms the visual language of totalitarian systems into ornamental and rhythmic structures that expose their internal contradictions.



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In Kulik's work, ornament never functions merely as decoration. Instead, it becomes a structure through which political and visual memory is organised. Repeated military, religious, and corporeal motifs generate images that oscillate between fascination and critique. By transforming symbols of authority into dense ornamental patterns, Kulik exposes the aesthetic mechanisms through which ideology operates. Excess and accumulation serve as tools for revealing how images construct collective imagination while simultaneously destabilising the narratives they appear to celebrate.

A central work within this section is *Splendour of Myself II* from the Common Arts collection, in which Kulik presents herself as a sovereign figure. The monumental costume is composed of dozens of black-and-white photographs of a nude body subordinated to the ornamental order of the composition. This gesture simultaneously reverses traditional relations of gaze and authority while commenting on historical representations of power. Particularly significant is the juxtaposition of monumentality with banal attributes — a ruff made of lettuce leaves, a cucumber, and a dandelion — which undermine the pathos of the official portrait. Humour emerges through exaggerated grandeur and the multiplication of identity-forming elements that both glorify and ridicule the idea of sovereignty.

The series *Archive of Gestures* (1987–1991) constitutes a photographic catalogue of poses, gestures, and cultural signs performed by the nude model — artist Zbigniew Libera — against a neutral background. The systematic arrangement of the body creates a visual lexicon derived equally from art history, religious iconography, and totalitarian aesthetics. Kulik treats the body as a carrier of historical codes and social choreographies of power. At the same time, the theatricality and stylisation of these representations keep the boundary between the heroic and the grotesque deliberately unstable.

The exhibition proposes reading irony not as a satirical device, but as a method of critical reflection on the history of Central and Eastern Europe and the persistence of structures of power. The works of Kulik and KwieKulik demonstrate that political systems operate through images, rituals, and repetition — and that deformation and exaggeration can create distance from dominant narratives.

– Timothy Persons



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18.09.2026-26.02.2027

Opening hours:

Tuesday: 12.00-18.00

Wednesday: 12.00-18.00

Thursday: 12.00-18.00

Friday: 12.00-18.00

Admission: PLN 10

Free admission for school and university students up to the age of 26 and for seniors.

Tickets can be reserved at: <https://commonartsfoundation.com/pl/rezerwacja-biletow>

Common Arts Foundation, Sienna 83/802, 00-815 Warsaw

Common Arts Foundation

The Common Arts Foundation was established in 2021 by collector Jakub Mrówka as the result of a long-standing desire to create a space for collectors, while engaging in activities that go far beyond building a private collection. The Foundation's main objective is to create comprehensive online catalogues raisonné of Polish artists of the 20th and 21st centuries. These catalogues are free and continuously expanding. To date, the Foundation has published the catalogue of Jerzy Tchorzewski's paintings (www.jerzytchorzewski.com) and is developing catalogues of works by Witkacy (www.witkacykatalog.com) and Tadeusz Brzozowski (www.tadeuszbrzozowski.com). Another key aspect of the Foundation's mission is organizing contemporary art exhibitions at its headquarters. These shows are based on the Founder's private collection, other Polish collections of modern and contemporary art, or present solo exhibitions of artists who are considered significant for the development of contemporary art. The Foundation focuses on the most compelling currents and themes in contemporary artistic practice. In 2024, the Foundation presented the exhibition of Edward Krasiński *I Lost the End* (in partnership with the Foksal Gallery Foundation) and Iza Tarasewicz *It is stable? Yes. It is unstable? Yes, again. Unstable? Yes, again* (in collaboration with Gunia Nowik Gallery). In 2025, the Foundation hosted *Witkacy (Un)known*, which attracted more than 3,000 visitors, as well as *24.20* by Monika Drożyńska, part of her ongoing project *Embroidery on Transit*.



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List of works:

Zofia Kulik

Ambassadors of the past (Made in GDR, USSR, Czechoslovakia and Poland), 2006

Archival pigment print

210 x 243 cm

Jakub Mrówka collection

Zofia Kulik

Light Rose II (Grass), 2000

Silver gelatine print

180 x 150 cm

Jakub Mrówka collection

Zofia Kulik

Still Life (Libera and Scull) 04, 1994

Archival pigment print

40 x 40 cm

Jakub Mrówka collection

Zofia Kulik

Splendour of Myself II, 1997

Silver gelatine print

180 x 150 cm

Jakub Mrówka collection

Zofia Kulik

Instead of Sculpture: One Yellow Cone, 1968-71

Ink jet print

61 x 41 cm

Jakub Mrówka collection



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KwieKulik

Banana and Pomegranade, 1986

Archival inkjet print

116 x 80 cm

Jakub Mrówka collection

Zofia Kulik

Jesus, Chocolates and Me, 1996

Archival pigment print,

60 x 48 cm

Courtesy of Persons Projects

Zofia Kulik

Come with Me Through the Valley of Tears – after Artur Grottger, 1988

Archival inkjet print,

67 x 53 cm

Courtesy of Persons Projects

Zofia Kulik

Viva New Year 1989, 1988

wall paper

dimension variable

Courtesy of Persons Projects

KwieKulik

Together We Will Do More, 1977

collage, offset print and photocopies

83 x 57 cm

Courtesy of Persons Projects



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KwieKulik,

I Bet on Quality, 1977

collage, offset print and photo

83 x 57 cm

Courtesy of Persons Projects

KwieKulik

Variants of Red / The Path of Edward Gierek, 1971

Two-screen slide projection, HD,

2 x 136 slides

Courtesy of Persons Projects

KwieKulik

Nudes on Stamps – Mail Art, 1979

Archival inkjet print

74 x 80 cm

Courtesy of Persons Projects



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