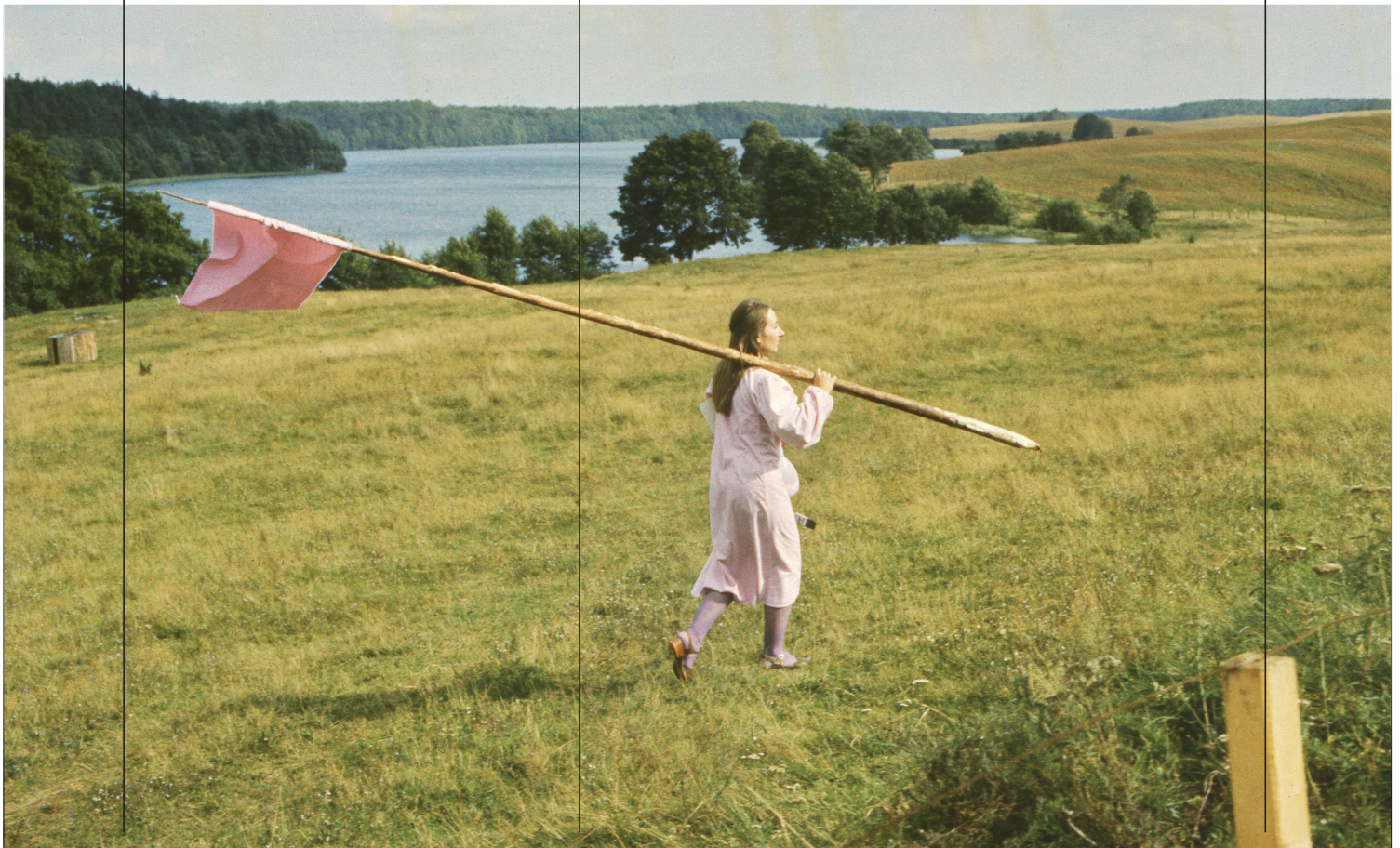


Maria Pinińska-Bereś

Under the Pink Flag

24. Okt. — 14. März 2027



Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931 – 1999) is an extraordinary figure in 20th-century Polish art — her body of work spanned sculpture, installation, and performance. At the heart of her artistic practice lies an exploration of femininity and the social challenges associated with it. As a sculptor she experimented and challenged the conventions of sculptural practice, expanding sculpture to include performance and actions in public space.

This retrospective exhibition showcases the most significant moments in Pinińska-Bereś's artistic and emancipatory work. Her art is subtle, humorous, and erotic. It speaks to the complexities of an authoritarian system, from which within the artist forged her own path. The colour pink — a recurring element in her works — conveys her critique of society. Often misunderstood as naive, or harmless, the colour pink in Pinińska-Bereś's Œuvre stands as a counterpoint to the omnipresent color red of then communist Poland; pink represents the feminine, the domestic, and the body.

For many years Maria Pinińska-Bereś remained in the shadow of her artist husband, Jerzy Bereś, a renowned sculptor and performance artist whose works are also represented in the Kunstmuseum Bochum's collection. In staging this retrospective, Pinińska-Bereś is finally receiving the recognition she deserves.

Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931–1999)



Maria Pinińska-Bereś with *Sztandar-Gorset* (Standard-Corset), 1972.
Courtesy of The Family Collection.

Maria Pinińska-Bereś was born in Poznań in 1931. At the outbreak of World War II, when her father was drafted into military service and taken prisoner by Soviet troops that invaded Eastern Poland, she fled with the rest of her family to Kraków. With the loss of their father, and under the influence of their grandfather, Catholicism took on great significance for the family. After the war Pinińska-Bereś lived with her family in Katowice and graduated from the High School of Fine Arts. In 1950, she began her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków in Xawery Dunikowski's sculpture class. In 1956 she received her diploma and married the artist Jerzy Bereś. In 1958, the couple had a daughter, Bettina,

who would also become an artist. The apartment where Maria Pinińska-Bereś and her family lived served as both a studio as well as a gathering place for artists and intellectuals. Maria Pinińska-Bereś participated in numerous artistic events and was active in artistic circles. In 1962, together with her husband, she initiated the annual exhibition *Rzeźba Roku* (Sculpture of the Year), in which she also exhibited her own works. In 1979, she was accepted into the artists' association *Grupa Krakowska* (Kraków Group).

At the same time, she exhibited in the major group exhibition *Feminist Art International* in The Hague, Netherlands. Despite the difficulties she faced as an artist in communist Poland, where censorship and restricted freedom of expression prevailed, she steadfastly pursued her artistic trajectory. She died in Kraków in 1999.

FIRST FLOOR

ROTUNDY — A RADICAL BREAKTHROUGH

In the late 1950s, after graduating with a degree in sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Maria Pinińska-Bereś initially created figurative works. However the conventions of classical sculpture quickly became too restrictive for her: “When I began making art, I felt the urge to reinvent sculpture. By abandoning the techniques of traditional sculpture and imposing an unconventional working method on myself, I achieved a radical breakthrough.”

This development is evident in the series *Rotundy* (Rotundas, 1961–1963). The massive cement figures are imbued with allusions and symbols relating to the body and religion. Instead of placing them on traditional



Łoże (miłość kołdry do prześcieradła) (Bed (the Love of a Quilt for the Sheet)), 1975. Courtesy of the MOCAK Collection.

pedestals, the figures are positioned on quilted fabrics. The works allude to a society that, on the one hand, elevates women — placing them on a

pedestal — and, on the other hand, devalues them by forcing them into rigid roles.

The *Rotunda Tekstylna* (Dzwonnica) (Textile Rotunda. Bell Tower, 1963) announces a final departure from the use of heavy sculptural materials: “I removed the weight from my works. Because I had always dreamed of being able to wear my sculptures without needing anyone (a man) to help me.”

PSYCHOMEBELKI—THE POLITICAL IN THE DOMESTIC

In the late 1960s, Maria Pinińska-Bereś created a series of objects she called *Psychomebelki* (psycho-furnitures). These are pieces of furniture into which naked female body parts, made of painted papier-mâché or foam, are incorporated. These works critique a patriarchal society that confines women to the domestic sphere, and turns them into objects of male desire. At the same time, however, her *Psychomebelki* also confidently affirm female sexuality.

From the early 1970s she began to incorporate soft materials into her artworks. She stuffed custom-made fabric covers with cotton batting and foam, as in *Łoże (miłość kołdry do prześcieradła)* (Bed—The Love of the Comforter for the Sheet, 1975). The installation *Mój uroczy pokój* (My Pretty Little Room, 1975) could represent a dollhouse, a bedroom, or even a room in a psychiatric clinic. The



Rotunda tekstylna (dzwonnica) (Textile Rotunda (Bell Tower)), 1963. Courtesy of The Family Collection and The Approach, London.

colored marks on the quilts can be interpreted as a reference to either a sexual act or domestic violence.

The color pink, which Pinińska-Bereś had up until this time used occasionally, became a defining characteristic of her work, representing an expression of female self-determination.

She recognizes pink — the dominant color in girls' clothing and toys — as a tool for differentiating women and preparing them for their social roles in a patriarchal society. While Pinińska-Bereś engages with this cultural connotation — more decisively — she seems to elevate the celebration of emancipated female sensuality, transcending the individual body and permeating everything with 'life energy'. Furthermore, her works offer insight into the psychological tension between traumatic experience and sexual desire.

FEMINISM

As an artist Maria Pinińska-Bereś experienced marginalization and indifference in the male-dominated art world. Even though she always worked from a distinctly feminine perspective and position, she remained skeptical of the term "feminism." According to her, Western feminism was ideologized, and didn't reflect the real and everyday experience of women. Pinińska-Bereś became part of a female avant-garde in Poland that developed in an environment shaped by Catholicism and communism. In 1979 she participated in the *Feminist Art International* exhibition in The Hague, Pinińska-Bereś



Pranie I (Laundry I), 1981. Courtesy of The Family Collection.

recalls that "in the second half of the 1970s — more than ten years after I had set out on this path — I heard that my work was being called feminist art. [...] It came as a shock. It brought with it the hope of kindred spirits."

Her performance *Pranie I* (Laundry I, 1980) draws attention to women's invisible labor. Pinińska-Bereś washes white clothes by hand, which she then hangs up to dry. The pieces of fabric, marked with pink letters, spell out the word 'feminism'. The performance concludes with the artist transforming her pink apron into a flag and erecting it in the center of the installation. With the pink flag, Pinińska-Bereś confidently advocates for the visibility and recognition of women in the art world and beyond, while simultaneously celebrating her own art.

STAN WOJENNY — MARTIAL LAW IN POLAND, 1981 — 1983

In 1981, to crush the protests by *Solidarność* (Solidarity) — the trade union and the pro-democracy movement — the Polish government imposed a martial law. The administration, economy, and media were militarized — and citizens' rights were suspended. Arrests, repression, and food shortages defined the daily lives of the population. Around one million people fled Poland to West Germany, the vast majority of whom were young and highly qualified engineers, doctors, architects, and artists. This wave of migration after 1981 had a lasting impact on the Polish diaspora in Germany. In protest against the violence and censorship of the government, the

Polish art scene boycotted state-run galleries and exhibited in basements, studios, and church spaces. Yet, in the latter space (church) Pinińska-Bereś's provocative works found no place.

"Martial law was a tragedy for art," she later wrote. "During martial law, I drastically revised my own body of work, my own signature style (the use of pink). I painstakingly explored new possibilities to test the acceptable boundaries of contemporary art in light of the new circumstances."

In *Okno II — odejście różu* (Window II: The Disappearance of Pink, 1982), the color literally flows out of the picture as a large drop of paint, leaving behind an empty canvas. In the performance *Tylko miotła* (Just a Broom, 1984), Pinińska-Bereś wears a black dress as she symbolically sweeps the exhibition space. Her engagement with state repression and political violence is evident in *Roleta* (Blind, 1982), a canvas window blind sewn with the telling inscription "Nie, nie pogodzona" ("No, no, unreconciled").

NATURE AS SHELTER

In 1976 Maria Pinińska-Bereś began to stage performances and actions in nature. In her text *Dlaczego performance?* (Why Performance?), she writes: "In my youth, I regarded nature and art as the only beautiful worlds that were good in their primal state. I saw art as a refuge from the pitfalls of the world around me (communism)." Nature allowed Pinińska-Bereś to be free from social constraints. Her work *Przenośny pomnik pt. "Miejsce"* (Portable Monument Titled "Place," 1979) is a transportable structure bearing the inscription "Jest takie miejsce na ziemi" (There Is Such a Place on Earth) – the work is a tribute to nature, and is only temporarily installed as part of the landscape, ensuring that it remains preserved.

At open-air gatherings, artists and theorists from all over Poland experimented with and discussed art forms that transcended cultural-political notions. Pinińska-Bereś often appeared at these events carrying a pink flag, as in the performance *Aneksja krajobrazu* (Annexation of the Landscape, 1980). Her treehouse, *Punkt obserwacyjny zmian w sztuce* (Observation Point for Changes in Art, 1978), perched high in the trees and accessible only via a rope ladder, offers a humorous – yet critical – commentary on the institutional art world.



Przenośny pomnik pt. "Miejsce"
(The Place. A Portable Monument), 1979.
Courtesy of The Family Collection

SECOND FLOOR

EROTICISM AND THE OLD MASTERS' GAZE

Eroticism plays an important role in Pinińska-Bereś's art, often rendered in humorous depictions. As well, Pinińska-Bereś expressed her critique of male-dominated art history with wit. She adapted works of famous painters and created her own versions, such as the painting *Mme Recamier* by the French painter Jacques-Louis David, from 1800. She translates the depiction of Jacques-Louis David's female figure into her own visual language, using the soft, pink materials characteristic of her work. In her final creative period of the late 1990s,

Pinińska-Bereś adopted a new material: she crafted cage-like sculptures from wire that allude to the (female) body's lack of freedom. Among these is *Infantka z dzwoneczkiem – Klatka* (Infanta with a Bell – Cage, 1997), which references Diego Velázquez's famous work *Las Meninas* (1656), where she creates a metal structure resembling the shape of a 19th-century hoop skirt. With this work the artist returns to her early *Rotundy* (Rotundas). However, instead of a concrete, closed and opaque block, the sculpture's materiality is now characterized by lightness and transparency. However, the works cage-like structure conveys a feeling of oppression.



Infantka z dzwoneczkiem – Klatka (Infanta with the Bell – the Cage), 1997.
Courtesy of The Family Collection and The Approach, London.



Aneksja krajobrazu, (Landscape Annexation), 1980, from the archives of the Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Jerzy Bereś Foundation

PROGRAMME & ACCOMPANYING EVENTS

OPENING

Friday, 23. October 2026,
7 pm
Free admission

CURATOR TOURS

Saturday, 24 October, 2pm
With Heike Munder
and Jarosław Suchan
in English

Wednesday, 2 December
2026, 5 pm
With Julia Lerch
Zajązkowska

GUIDED TOURS IN POLISH

Wednesday, 4 November
2026, 5 pm

Sunday, 13 December
2026, 3 pm

SPECIAL EVENTS

PERFORMING THE MUSEUM: ANIA NOWAK — OBELIX NUTRIX

Wednesday, 3 February
2027, 6 – 8 pm
Performance in collab-
oration with Agnieszka
Roguski & Fiona McGovern,
as well as students from
the Institute of Art History
and the Institute of
Theatre Studies at Ruhr
University Bochum
Admission free

SCULPTURAL ACTION

Sunday, 14 February 2027,
2 – 5 pm
Paula Erstmann
and Magdalena Los

FLYING UNIVERSITY

Saturday, 13 March 2027
Performance, action,
lecture by Grupa Mauczka
featuring Ewa Majewska,
Dorota Sajewska and more

FINISSAGE

Sunday, 14 March, 3 pm
With the Performance
Żywy róż (Living Pink)
by Bettina Bereś

EXHIBITION AND MUSEUM TEAM

Curators

Julia Lerch Zajązkowska,
Heike Munder,
Jarosław Suchan

Director

Noor Mertens

Deputy Directors

Julia Lerch Zajązkowska,
Eva Busch

Exhibition Installation

Andrea Grun, Frank
Hellweg, Jörg Mertens

Technical Support

Erwin Golze

Exhibition Organisation

Jennifer Braun

Curatorial Assistant

Adèle Anstett

Communications and

Public Relations

Leonie Böhmer,
Jennifer Krämer

Lighting Design

Max Hübener

Graphic Design

Bart de Baets and
Sandra Kassenaar
with Kai Udemä

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Kerstin Kuklinski,
Shasti (Andara Shastika)

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Arne Krauß, Zoja Morina

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Anna Hanelt, Jolanta Hinzmann,
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Dr Elisabeth Kessler-Slotta, Nathalie
Litzner, Alicia Madloch, Agnes Motz,
Chiaki Nakaune, Alla Zhyvotova

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of Poland.

Kunstmuseum Luzern



Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
Republic of Poland



ADAM
MICKIEWICZ
INSTITUTE

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BOCHUM

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