

# Kunstverein

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## PRESS PACK

Barbara Kozłowska

From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon  
30.09.2022—17.12.2022

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Barbara Kozłowska  
From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon  
September 30–December 17, 2022

The show your feet are now planted in celebrates the late artist Barbara Kozłowska (1940–2008): an under-appreciated proponent of the Polish neo-avantgarde who was actively committed to interrogating space and its organising principles. A few things to know before you dive in:

Barbara suffered from a weak heart.

Barbara was full of contradictions.

Barbara never had children.

Barbara was anti-abortion.

Barbara didn't want to be called a feminist artist.

Barbara didn't come from money, nor ever had much.

Barbara was against the Polish People's Republic.

Barbara never met her father, who died in Dachau after refusing to sign the *Volksliste*.

Barbara's work is abstract.

Barbara's work is political.

Barbara visited Amsterdam in 1973. She went to the Rijksmuseum and then hit the beach.

Barbara wrote her own biography every day—there are many versions.

Barbara was a painter who abandoned painting for sculpture, a sculptor who did not stay faithful to any of the accepted schools, a concrete poet, installation artist and para-theatrical performer without *métier*; an oddball even amongst oddballs, and the centre of our attention here.

Like many other artists working within the geopolitical region now commonly referred to as the misnomer 'Eastern Europe', Kozłowska very often set her actions outdoors 'in nature'. Her interventions were perceptible but not obtrusive; for example, she took care to use only non-toxic, natural pigments. Works like *Powierzchnia kulista w ruchu* [Spherical Surface in Motion] and *Nivegatywy fikcji* [Negatives of Fiction], which can be seen upstairs, focus on natural phenomena such as the opening and closing of flower buds, the 24-hour cycle of a day, biological time and chemical reactions. Given this and the poetics that her oeuvre takes on—as well as those of other artists active alongside her—the assumption could quickly be made that a cultural movement was brewing throughout 'Eastern Europe' at the time, one which held a pioneering focus on the interconnectedness of art and ecology. And yes, seen from this perspective, Kozłowska's pieces should be considered a forerunner, or at least an historical pillar, for the current trend unfolding within contemporary art, which similarly connects these two domains.

Yet, unlike the land artists who were operating in the West around the same time, the context in which Kozłowska and her peers had to operate added an additional political layer to their works. In her private notes and correspondence, Kozłowska frequently voiced her opposition to the reality of the Polish People's Republic, which she described as 'limiting', 'brutally lowering individuals and society' and 'shoddy'.

Since Kozłowska and her peers were not welcomed by the official art establishment, they had to either make their own or take to public space—removing art from the context of the museum and positioning it within daily life. Barbara did both. In the delicate social circumstances she found herself operating within, her works inherently took on a—however subtle—political stance against the institutional structures (of art) surrounding them. Therefore, her projects should not be seen as a negation of this context, but as a direct reaction to the sociopolitical situation she was surrounded by. As an example, her work *Borderline*, displayed in two vitrines on the ground floor, are not just fanciful, colourful sand cones that are easy on the eye, but rather a subtle push back against the absurdity of borders—a stance which, at a time of mass migration (due, in part, to the effects of global warming), border wall talks and Russian aggression, continues to ring all too true.

This exhibition brings together Kozłowska's plural practice through ephemera and publications, sculpture and correspondence, a restaging of two early installations as well as documentation of her performances—designed for various places around the world, even if realised in only a few.

Make of it what you will.

Within the framework of Kozłowska's exhibition, Kunstverein is happy to announce a series of events that will expand on Kozłowska's practice:

October 1, 4–5pm

Talking points and framework: A talk by Marika Kuźmicz / Fundacja Arton on the 1970 Wrocław Visual Arts Symposium (free)

November 5, 2pm

Babel Gallery: A topical lunch with limited availability (ticketed)

December 1–17

Point of View: An online film program expanding on Kozłowska's interests and methodologies, in collaboration with Springs. video (free)

Kunstverein

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The Netherlands

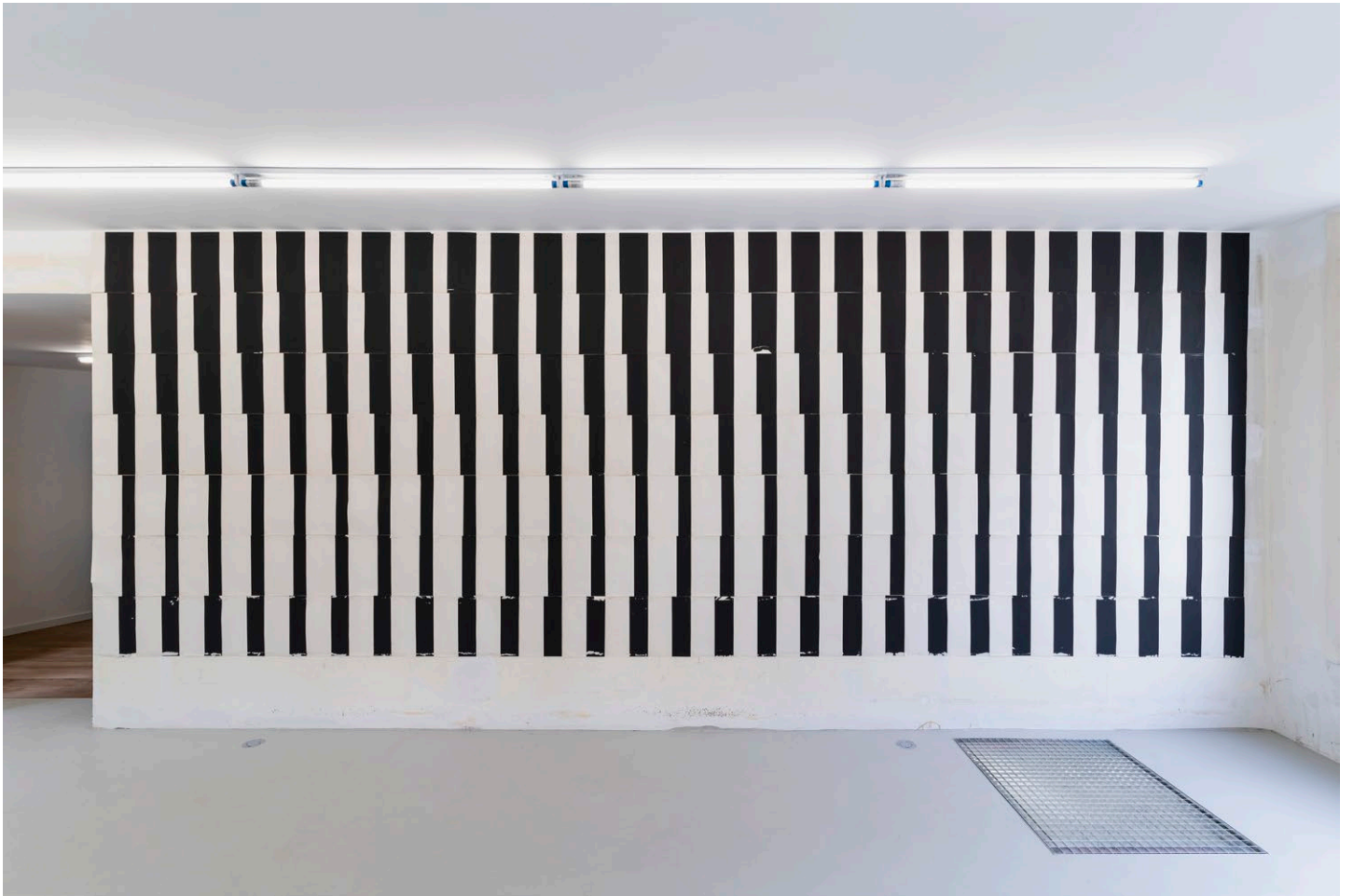
Hours: Wednesday–Saturday 1–6pm

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While enrolled at the State Higher School of Visual Arts (PWS-SP) to become a ceramic and fresco painter (one of the few departments that would accept women), Barbara Kozłowska met artist Zbigniew Makarewicz. He would become her partner both artistically and in love, her assistant and her biggest supporter, to this day. We would like to thank Zbigniew Makarewicz for his efforts in keeping Kozłowska's work in circulation and giving a whole new generation the chance to discover her practice. It should be noted that all the works in this exhibition have been loaned to us from his private archive—currently, no official estate exists and her work is not widely available otherwise. Kunstverein would also like to thank Marika Kuźmicz for her help, research and guidance, as well as Fundacja Arton and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute for their support of this exhibition. As always, we would also like to thank our members and Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst for their continued support, as well as Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Experimental Jetset, Reform, Senso and every person who supported our renovation through the m<sup>2</sup> fundraiser. Where would we be without you!



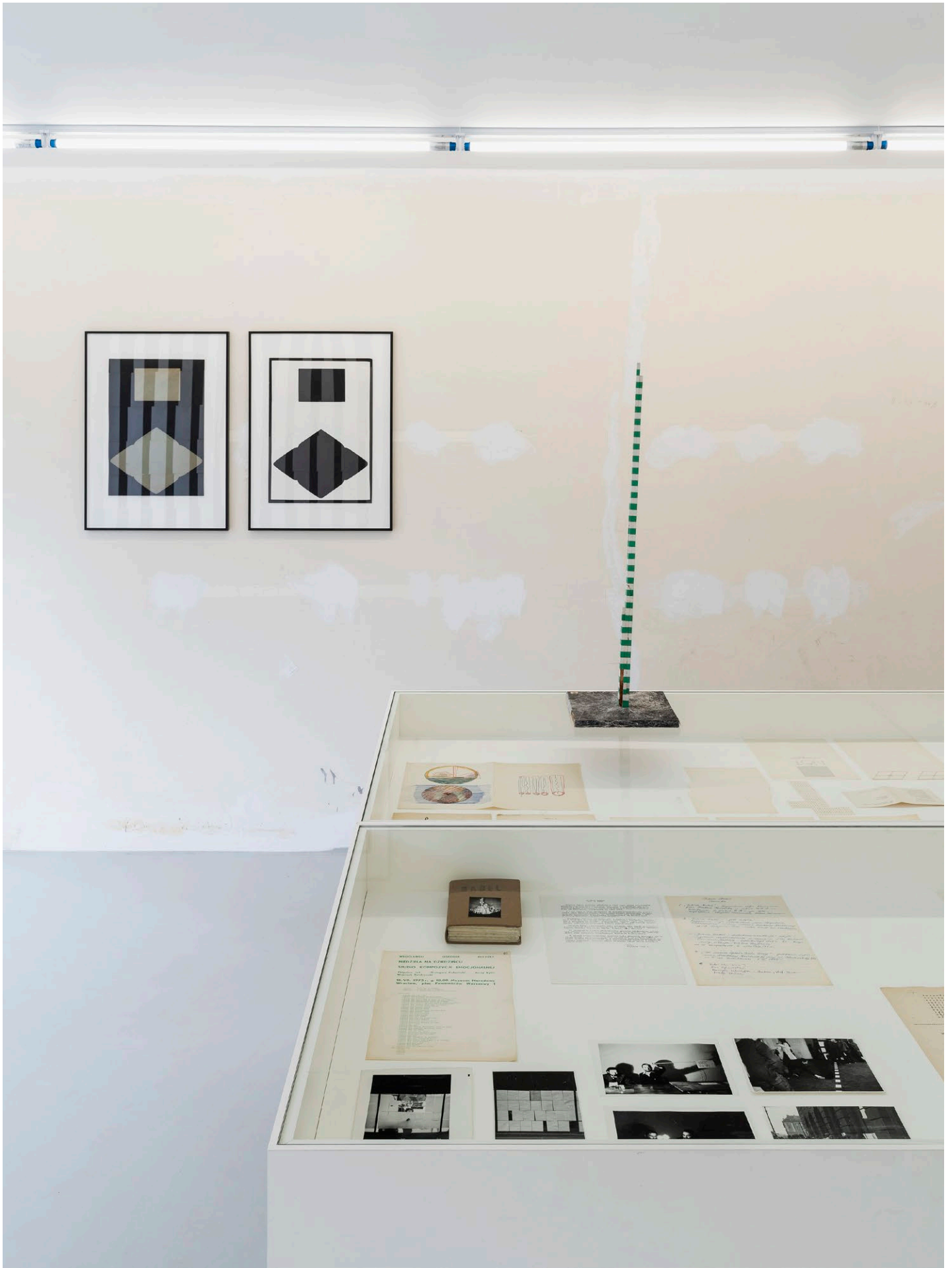


*Nivegatywy fikcji [Negatives of Fiction], 1976*

From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL. Photo: Gunnar Meier..



From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL © Photo: Gunnar Meier..



From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL. Photo: Gunnar Meier.



*Babel Gallery [Galeria Babel], 1972-1992*

From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL. Photo: Gunnar Meier..





From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL. Photo: Gunnar Meier.



*Action of the Sea and Five Colored Cones [Akcja morzapięciu kolorowych stożków], 1973*

From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL. Photo: Gunnar Meier.



*Witrochromie [Vitrochromy]*, 1982

From East to West, Through the Globe, Towards the Moon, 2022, Kunstverein, Amsterdam, NL. Photo: Gunnar Meier.

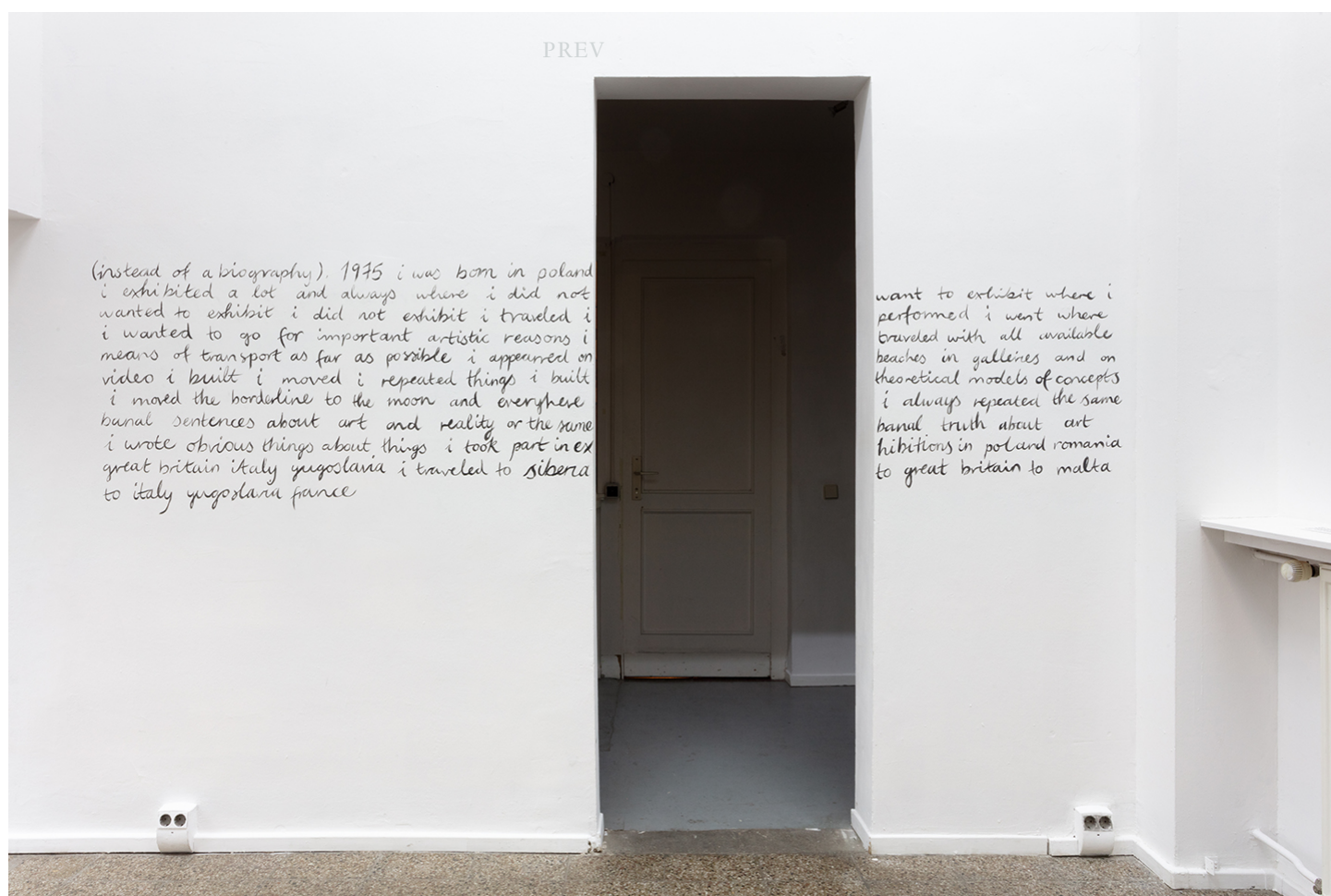


## Barbara Kozłowska "Borderline" at June, Berlin

27.04.2021

READING TIME 5'

SHARE



Barbara Kozłowska "Borderline" at June, Berlin, 2021

Barbara Kozłowska (1940-2008) drew a line from east to west across the globe by marking a series of places where land and water meet with sand cones, natural pigments or simply her own presence. Kozłowska suggested that the line could continue to the moon along this axis. "Borderline" charts a cartography counter to political blocs and nation states, conjuring instead an ephemeral map that is grounded in collaboration. "Borderline" comprises an indexical and systematic approach to subjectivity: navigating the self via contact with others and with nature. Like connecting dots to form a line. "Borderline" intuits the codependency between humans and the cosmos. And positions human life as a nonlinear line—fragile and fleeting—endlessly iterative until it's over. "Borderline" makes abstraction material and potentiality physical.

This major work of Kozłowska's life and oeuvre encompasses the concept, its nine manifestations between 1967 and 1990 and their documentation in photographs, notes, maps and postcards. Alongside sketches and other collected materials, archival photographs from three iterations are on view at June: from Lake Baikal, Siberia (1967),

marking the first point of the “Borderline” during the artist’s first time abroad, Edinburgh, Scotland (1973), in which Kozłowska repeatedly formed five colored cones during low tide and the her direct intervention in the landscape on the Mediterranean coast in Malta (1975), where onlookers were invited to shape the cones and Kozłowska walked along the line they formed.

A pioneering work of Polish performance and Land Art, “Borderline” emerged from the burgeoning Polish neo-avant-garde in the late 1960s and 1970s. Kozłowska was part of a circle of conceptual artists and concrete poets in Wrocław at the time and her work transmuted many of the spatial notions the group concerned itself with from a mental to a material realm. As such, space itself can be seen as Kozłowska’s primary medium. She and her peers sought a place for artistic experimentation outside of state-controlled institutions, often turning to the natural environment, as she later described: “because totalitarianism entailed the monumentalism of its ideology and all interventions in nature, the use of forces of nature posed a threat to it. Art subordinated to ideology was to become nothing but a propaganda tool, so to escape that role, artists referred directly to the spiritual idea expressed in conceptual art. That aesthetics was logical to us, and at the same time, it carried the sense of the very search for truth.” Kozłowska’s summary evokes the modus of the Central European avant-gardes more broadly, like the ecological awareness of the Slovenian OHO Group (1966-1971) or Czech artists working with water at the time like Karel Miler and Milan Maur. Understood in the context of such non-invasive, minimal intervention of abstract elements into the environment, *Borderline* was particularly radical for the increasing restraint of each iteration, as well as its collaborative and performative dimensions. While the work embodies an vision of freedom of movement as a line that is impermanent and unimpinged by borders, a number of Kozłowska’s intended manifestations were not possible due to difficulty receiving travel documents in the 1970s because of her husband’s anti-communist organizing. One unrealized marking of the line was carried out in India by the late Polish artist Agnieszka Lasota, which she documented in her 2017 film *THE LINE (All This Can Be Seen Anywhere)*, which is on view here.

A search for some kind of spiritual truth is evident in *Borderline*, as Kozłowska delineated her presence by way of the world around her, positioning each as a point of reference for the other. She seemed to sense that repeated indication of this relationship might tap into a deeper or more expansive connectedness. Kozłowska wrote many short texts about *Borderline* and her practice as a whole, including (*instead of a biography*), 1975, which is exhibited in translation here as a wall text. In marked contrast to the parascientific lexicon typical of artist’s texts in Poland at the time, Kozłowska wrote about the relationship between art, reality and meaning in the first and third-person: In *Untitled*, 1991 she writes, “Barbara M Kozłowska does not want to use her art to tame whatever she encounters, because what she encounters is just a matter of which way she goes. [...] If possible, Barbara M Kozłowska would like her art to be the scream of her soul”; in *Art and Courage*, 1993: “Will we be bold enough to transfer art forms into new spheres of sensitivity, to abandon traditional ideas and pretenses of art? To look for and find redness, yellowness, the goodness of things, blueness, heavenliness, violet, blackness and whiteness.” These texts also figure as autobiographies, mirroring “Borderline” as an abstract transcription of the self. Kozłowska’s persistent marking of her presence in space and time also arose from an acute sense of her own mortality, having suffered from a chronic heart condition since childhood, as well as never having met her father, who was taken to the Sachsen hausen concentration camp before she was born and died at Dachau in 1942.

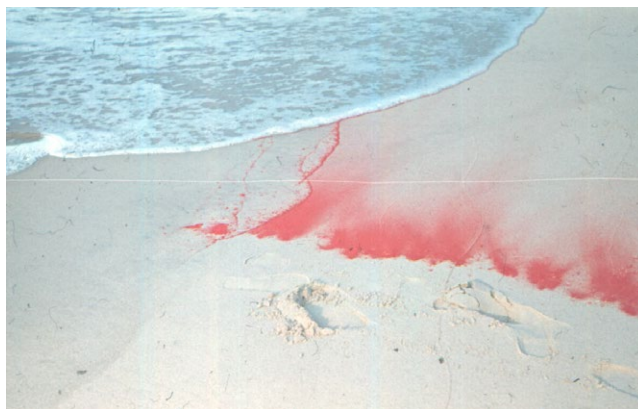
“Borderline” is a foundational work of Polish contemporary art, not widely recognized as such precisely because of the ephemeral and collaborative elements that made it so radical, not to mention the delayed recognition of women artists in the Polish conceptual art movement and in general. While grounded in the wartime trauma and totalitarian regime under which she came of age, her performance of subtle and persistent transgression finds renewed resonance today. Kozłowska’s utopian vision, as well as her open invitation to pick up where she left off, reverberate in a call to pay attention to where you stand and perhaps, to situate that place along a line to the moon.

Curated by Camila McHugh

At June, Berlin  
until May 2, 2021

## “The Best Version of Human Possibilities”: Barbara Kozłowska’s Planetary Conceptualism

Karolina Majewska-Güde



It is somewhat difficult at first to understand what can be seen in the photograph (fig. 1). A bird's-eye view of a harmonious constellation of three multicolored matters. In the bottom-right corner, an oval patch resembling sea water meets the sand that fills the whole of the composition's upper part. The sand perhaps bears traces of feet, which might offer a hint as to the scale of what we're seeing. In the central part, a red cloud of pigment cuts diagonally across the rectangular composition. Another photograph (fig. 2) features a cone of blood-red pigment formed on sand, whose kneaded, wavy structure betrays human (non-)presence. But only when the view of a beach and the sea in a conventional postcard shot is added to these images (fig. 3) do we begin to understand that what we are facing is an artistic intervention in a natural landscape. Competing with the horizon line is a red, diagonal line of the pigment.

The series of photographs originates from 1970 and documents the action *Marking the Borderline* [*Wyznaczanie linii granicznej*] carried out by Barbara Kozłowska during the 8th Meeting of Artists and Art Theorists in Osieki, in collaboration with Antoni Dzieduszycki and Zbigniew Makarewicz. Some photographs depict the action in a wide shot, while others concentrate on details. It is the latter that resemble the lyrical compositions of matter painting, generated through juxtapositions of material fragments of nature. They are supplemented by a laconic bilingual description of the action, and a handwritten note with information concerning simultaneous observation of the borderline from five spots.

Zbigniew Makarewicz explained: “The idea was to indicate a line running across the entire globe, from the east to the west, so the concept was rather monumental, but, characteristically of Barbara, the work was also restrained as far as the means used are concerned. It merely consisted in marking one's presence through photography or by forming sand cones on different beaches worldwide. Basia later colored those cones, using only colors from Newton's scale, and then watched as the sea devoured them.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The artist embarked on her project in 1967 during – and, as it seems, as the result – of her first journey to Lake Baikal, where she borrowed the Siberian mountain form – a cone – from the local landscape. During subsequent years, *Borderline* [*Linia graniczna*], ephemeral and documented in photographic cycles or transposed onto

fig. 1. Barbara Kozłowska, 'Marking the Borderline' [*Wyznaczanie linii granicznej*], 1970, private archive

videotape,<sup>[2]</sup> was marked by Kozłowska on beaches in Poland, Great Britain, Malta, and the USA. The actions followed a similar scenario, although “the idea depicted through an arbitrary decision adopted ever more varied germinal forms.”<sup>[3]</sup> Interestingly, photographic sequences from specific actions vary slightly in narrative, compositional, stylistic, and conceptual terms. This heterogeneity of the photographs indicates that they were not central to the artist’s focus. Their constant element remains the presence of the landscape, sea, beach, and sand cones, not always colored – as in the case of the project’s Maltese iteration. Kozłowska herself also appears in the photographs. In the one taken in San Francisco in 1990, the artist can be seen stretching her arms, thus co-shaping the horizon line (fig. 4). There is also a photograph from a kindred action in Świnoujście, titled *Imaginable*, taken facing the sun (fig. 5). Kozłowska looks into the camera, but her obscured face remains virtually invisible. It blends into her silhouette, which cuts a slant across the luminous background. Kozłowska points at the horizon. Her simple gesture holds extraordinary energy – physical focus, the concentration of matter, agency.



fig. 2. Barbara Kozłowska, ‘Marking the Borderline’ [Wyznaczanie linii granicznej], 1970, private archive

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Kozłowska’s extremely varied, yet coherent and consistent artistic practice, which we discover by following her traces in her photographs and texts, invites many questions that result from it and were considered by the artist in her work, along with questions her work provokes from today’s perspective.

Kozłowska formed part of the Wrocław circle of concrete poets<sup>[4]</sup> and experimental conceptual artists. She put into practice her concept of art open to the viewer’s participation and activity, employing a broad range of artistic media and materials, such as action, activity, gesture, installation, text, textual-visual works, and – from 1972 – the institution of a conceptual gallery, existing in all places which offered “the possibility of a special encounter with people [...] who wish to project their person expressed not through specific artworks, but rather through acts of establishing meeting spaces as certain artistic possibilities.”<sup>[5]</sup> The artist collaborated with founders and



artists from the conceptual scene, and her close artistic friends included Zdzisław Jurkiewicz and Jerzy Rosołowicz, among others.<sup>[6]</sup> A major role in the development of her work was played by the cooperation with Zbigniew Makarewicz and the intellectual exchange with Jerzy Ludwiński.<sup>[7]</sup> Kozłowska participated in events recognized as seminal manifestations of Polish conceptualism, such as the Wrocław '70 Symposium, the 8th Meeting of Artists and Art Theorists in Osieki in 1970, and the Dreamers' Congress in Elbląg in 1971.<sup>[8]</sup>

Her professional artistic career began with training at the Architectural Painting Studio at the State Higher School of Visual Arts (PWSSP) in Wrocław (now the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław), which was an artistic initiation in a syncretic field that combined the process of painting with thinking in spatial categories.<sup>[9]</sup> She also tapped into this type of co-existence or co-dependence of media and activities in her ephemeral works, with the use of pigments on/in the natural environment. Studies in architectural painting probably also involved confrontation with public art understood in the most archaic sense – not only as art that engages the viewer, but that also functions in physical (public) space, with it and through it. And it is in this sense that space was present in Kozłowska's processual projects, as an intra-active, co-participating material.<sup>[10]</sup>

The initiatory action in space was the piece *Continuous Falling* [*Ciągłe spadanie*] (1968) at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. Alongside Zbigniew Makarewicz, Ernest Niemczyk, Wiesław Rembieliński, and Ryszard Zamorski, Kozłowska created an environment that became a spatial interpretation of Tadeusz Różewicz's poem *Falling*. Inspiration drawn from literary texts remained a constant element of her work.

The genealogy of Kozłowska's artistic practice can also be sought by tracing the motifs of the line, the point, and the marking of borders, which appeared therein. In this text, I would like to pose two questions as part of developing a historical perspective on her work – related to one another as they both originate from the *Borderline*. The first concerns the model of conceptualism practiced by Kozłowska; the second pertains to the planetary and environmental aspects of her practice, particularly in the context (or against the backdrop) of ecologically oriented art in Central and Eastern Europe during that era.



fig. 3. Barbara Kozłowska, 'Marking the Borderline' [Wyznaczanie linii granicznej], 1970, private archive

## The idea of art is born out of reflection<sup>[11]</sup>: Barbara Kozłowska's conceptual figurations

Do we still need the historical term “conceptualism” in order to understand art created at the turn of the 1970s, which challenged traditional media and sought new forms of production and distribution? On the one hand – in the discourse of global conceptualism – the term has become blurred. One of the ways to introduce a certain order in the field is to differentiate between conceptual art understood as a historical formation, and broadly understood conceptualism, embracing various artistic practices directly or loosely connected with the notion of process or action.<sup>[12]</sup> However, what contributed to the pluralization of the notion of conceptualism was not only the rush to lend paradigms a global dimension, but above all the feminist critique of defining conceptual art in a narrow, androcentric sense that pursued the reconstruction of the intentions of a narrow group of alpha-male activists.

The contemporary paradigm of decentering conceptualism through reconstruction of its manifold starting points follows the premise that plural modernisms also spawned conceptualisms. Globally applied conceptual aesthetics is therefore interpreted within diverse artistic biographies and local ideological and political contexts. What, then, are we dealing with when we say “conceptual art/conceptualism”? With a range of historical reconstructions and with the blurriness of the term itself.

The historicizing narratives devoted to the genealogy of conceptualism, such as the narrative of the administrative idiom of the late-capitalist society (Buchloh)<sup>[13]</sup>; focus on innovative distribution strategies (Alberro)<sup>[14]</sup>; the dematerialization of art (Lucy Lippard)<sup>[15]</sup>; ideologizations of art depicting the social realm (Mari Carmen Ramirez)<sup>[16]</sup>; the heterogeneity of Eastern European conceptualism and its political entanglements (László Beke)<sup>[17]</sup>; feminist critique of conceptual orthodoxy and logocentrism (Rosalyn Deutsche)<sup>[18]</sup>; as well as the latest material-semiotic analyses that focus on relations between matter and meaning (Christian Berger)<sup>[19]</sup> – as historical reconstructions – relate to specific sets of practices and cannot be easily extended to embrace other projects in alternative locations.

Luiza Nader's proposal to approach historical conceptualism as a discursive formation – an antagonism, whose essence consisted in the heterogeneity of definitions – remains topical.<sup>[20]</sup> In the Polish context, this dispute involved both Ludwiński's concept, according to which conceptualism was defined as a space between art and linguistic logic, excluding many artists of the era from the field of conceptual art, and also a range of individual artistic stances and propositions of conceptual art, embracing conceptualism founded on tautology, language, intermedia, or activity.

Given the lack of clarity of the very term “conceptualism,” what might an attempt to reconstruct Barbara Kozłowska's model of “conceptual art” involve? My primary goal is to connect her unique mode of art-making with a particular historical context, while participating at the same time in the further pluralization of (the canon of) Polish conceptualism. Another aim is to tap into knowledge concerning that embodied practice, in order to open up a new perspective on the possibilities of defining historical conceptualism.

Just as Barbara Kozłowska searched for a new syncretic language of art within the idiom of conceptual art, her art today compels a more flexible approach to descriptive language. That is why I propose to approach “conceptual art/conceptualism” in this text from a perspective inspired by post-metaphysical feminist epistemology, which employs the notion of figuration. Figurations, as defined by Donna J. Haraway, are “performative images that can be inhabited”<sup>[21]</sup> – embodied notions that “do not stand outside the world they describe, but are living maps and transformative accounts never detached from their geopolitical and historical locations.”<sup>[22]</sup> This theoretical framework not only offers the possibility of embracing the dialectical relation between a specific artistic practice and the conceptual formation, but also to grasp “conceptualism” as a figuration of *becoming*. On the one hand, in this perspective conceptualism is a map that organizes Kozłowska's imagination – a map with no precise borders, but with suggestive characteristics. On the other hand, it is a map

that requires constant reproduction and rewriting; it is created by the user, and since it constantly transforms, it influences her practice and modifies it. Yet, most interestingly, motifs and figures used by the artist can be understood in this context as conceptual figurations.



fig. 4. Barbara Kozłowska, 'Borderline' [Linia graniczna], San Francisco, 1990, private archive

Notions used by Kozłowska, such as *field*, *area*, *line*, *point*, and *perception*, formed part of the repertoire of figures evoked by the adherents of conceptual art, but were mostly perceived in the conceptual, mental sphere. In the case of *Borderline*, its physical, material dimension was equally significant.

In Zbigniew Makarewicz's text from 1977 devoted to the analysis and genealogy of *Borderline*, tracing its origins to the area *in between* – Kozłowska's experiments in the field of expanded painting and spatio-temporal sculpture – the author wrote about the material aspect of the line: "The lines of rivers, roads, flight. The line of a journey traced by man as a point that moves in space across the borders of states and continents, and above borders."<sup>[23]</sup> Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka adds: "The very notion of the line appears in her work as a determination of the line of the shore, river, road, flight. It reflects the diagram of a journey, the trace of a track running from one point coded by history to another; it is a drawing in space [...]"<sup>[24]</sup>

The line therefore did not "merely" function as documentation, akin to objects in conceptualism, but went beyond this rank. Using Donna J. Haraway's suggestive vocabulary, we might say that *Borderline* belonged to the order of metaphorical realism, and marking it was a material-semiotic process. In other words, in this work-in-process, the idea and the material form do not diverge as they do in similar conceptual-linguistic projects, but are rather co-constitutive and co-existent. *Borderline* is embodied – situated spatially, territorially, connected with the environment. As a physical object, it evokes the categories of impermanence and dependence on uncontrolled natural processes, its material transformations observable at such critical points as where the sea and land meet, but also on the processes of life and death, the line of the artist's life – as a work that "needs to constantly develop in order to live as long as the artist lives."<sup>[25]</sup> As a mental object, it is always a fragment of the

infinite, a potentiality.

A different kind of conceptual figuration that appears in the artist's work – an object that exists simultaneously in the literal and symbolic senses – is the fractal. Akin to the line, the fractal is a mathematical notion, a specific and complex structural model. Fractals occur in nature – they materialize in physical phenomena as diverse as snowflakes, the circulatory system, river water systems, lightning, and cauliflower florets. A fractal appears in Kozłowska's drawing from 1972 (fig. 6) as a model of the concept of the *Borderline* project. In a much later text from 2005, the artist defines fractals as “a structure that constructs our reality – trees, stones, waves.”<sup>[26]</sup>

The fractal is therefore a certain model of the universe, embodied or materialized in smaller individual phenomena. Kozłowska searched for such a model from the beginning of her artistic activity. In 1973, she wrote: “I agree with the claim that the artist is a discoverer.”<sup>[27]</sup> Her explorations often adopted the form of reflection on the dualism of reality.

In the action *Arrhythmia* [*Arytmia*, 1980], an anatomical model is confronted with its individual embodiment – the artist's own body. The determination of relations between the particular, the embodied (arrhythmia), and the universal (rhythm) is also reflected in the form of visual poems, in which Kozłowska contrasted handwriting, originating from an individual body, with neutral typescript (*Snow*, 1976), or in the form of an abstract mathematical model of relations between the point (oneness) and the line (multiplicity), which provided the conceptual model for *Borderline*.

The interest in thus-understood dualism (idea/embodiment) also informs work devoted to the laws of perception. In the performance *Point of View* [*Punkt widzenia*, 1978] Kozłowska considered a number of classic anthropocentric models of reality perception, setting her own, individual body in motion (which, according to the artist, “expresses an element of life”),<sup>[28]</sup> using it as a tool to verify the workings of abstract concepts.



fig. 5. Barbara Kozłowska in Świnoujście, Poland, 1990, private archive

Moreover, that work once again articulated the idea that accompanied the artist and which she put into practice: “Everything that can be anywhere.” This was not a category of existence specific to Kozłowska’s work; many other conceptualists who created projects in open space referred to the non-arbitrariness of the beginning of their activities, imprints, markings, and appropriations of space. A good example is Zbigniew Gostomski’s piece *It Begins in Wrocław [Zaczyna się we Wrocławiu]*, described by Luiza Nader as one of the few projects related to conceptualism created during the Wrocław ’70 Symposium which followed the principle that “ideas, concepts are both the starting point and the destination point of the artistic fact.”<sup>[29]</sup> According to the concept of a three-dimensional system of elements marked on the city map, marking “could start anywhere.” Another example is Jarosław Kozłowski’s project *Expedition [Ekspedycja]*, “which may begin at any moment.”

While the two abovementioned conceptual works belonged to the sphere of impossible projects, the conceptual figuration of Kozłowska’s *Borderline* constituted both a mathematical, abstract, impossible model and the material aspect of *anywhere*, understood as “at any moment, in any place.” The line was marked, was material, but at the same time “impossible” in itself as something infinite, all-embracing. On the other hand, it was immanent and necessary; the artist did not so much create it, but rather revealed it. In a text published in 1973, Kozłowska defines “an important work” as something that must come into being, as a certain necessity. The artist writes that “an important work will appear in the artist’s proper idea anyway.”<sup>[30]</sup>

The material aspect of *Borderline* unfolded in a real space; it was related to the use of materials existing in nature. In the abovementioned text, Kozłowska reveals the relations between her works and extra-artistic reality, writing about found material as the foundation of her activities:

The search for new artistic areas entails the necessity of discovering in oneself the ability to decide to shape non-artistic novelties in art into an artistic form. It should be assumed, of course, that a found material is both clay, paint, and a mathematical model or the fact of traveling, and therefore time, and movement, and mass, and thought, and vision, and sensation. In my understanding, a found material is a source matter for artistic shaping because it is as yet undiscovered in art. So a source of interest to us would be every source that exists and is uncontaminated by artistic functions, and thus releases creative energy.<sup>[31]</sup>

Therefore, the artist did not consider space as a found material, but rather an effect of perception. An interest in the category of space in many aspects, always in relation to the possibility of perceiving it, is present, among other examples, in the early work on paper *Spherical Surface in Motion [Powierzchnia kulista w ruchu, fig. 7]* from 1969, in which the human being is defined in visual terms and in the accompanying text as the center of the configuration and the “producer” of space. The piece *City-Cosmos [Miasto-Kosmos]*, created for the Wrocław ’70 Symposium, was accompanied by the text *Space as an Information Configuration [Przestrzeń jako układ informacyjny]*. The work, which consisted of “infinite transformations of an assumed configuration of points projected each time on a different map, complete with the proposal of implementation in growing dimensions of space,”<sup>[32]</sup> is indicated by Zbigniew Makarewicz as the source of the later *Borderline*. According to Makarewicz, it is its conceptual seed.<sup>[33]</sup>

By marking the *Borderline*, Kozłowska constituted space, setting relations and programming interactions with it. She created something of a continuum, with the focal point located in her own living body. The understanding of the processual meaning of space in the artist’s work is facilitated by Doreen Massey’s texts. She emphasizes that, although our basic assumptions and the categories in which we think about space merit attention, it is worth taking up the challenge of considering space in a different, more abstract way. The author proposes the recognition of space as a product of mutual relations constituted by interactions: as a field where diversity exists in the sense of a simultaneous multiplicity, and as a domain where separate trajectories co-exist – a sphere that combines heterogeneity.<sup>[34]</sup> Massey states that space is a product of relations that are embodied material practices, which always exist in process.<sup>[35]</sup> In this sense, by marking the *Borderline*, Kozłowska determined the geography of relations: by establishing relations between entities and materials, she created space herself.

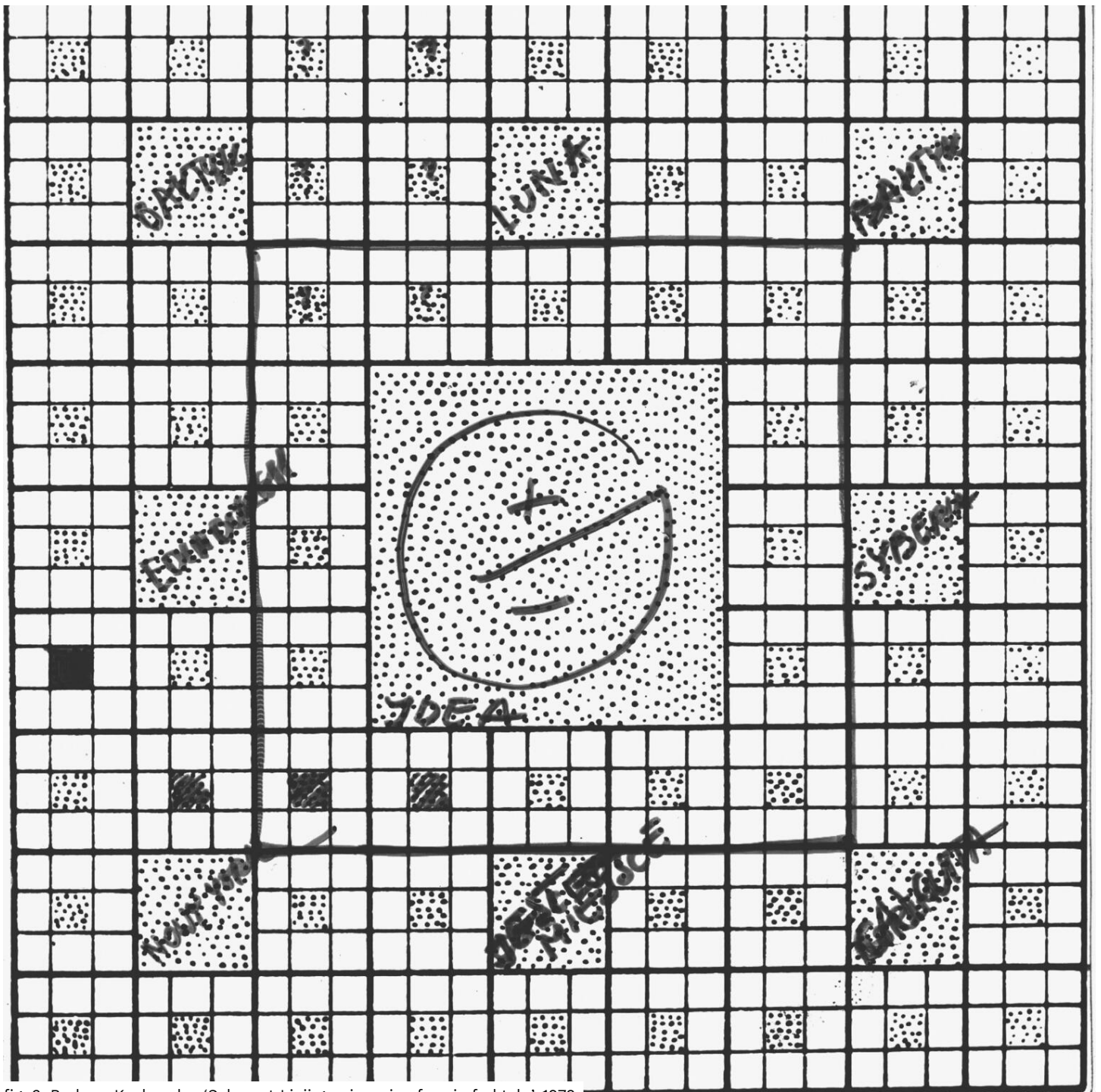


fig. 6. Barbara Kozłowska, 'Schemat Linii granicznej w formie fraktalu', 1972

In her text/manifesto *For Space*, Massey combines spatial and political imagination. She writes that thinking about space can change the way in which certain political questions are formulated, and that “the very possibility of any serious recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity itself depends on a recognition of spatiality.”<sup>[36]</sup> Seen in this context, the practice of indicating the *Borderline* on the surface of the planet is tantamount to radical openness to the future, to unknown history.<sup>[37]</sup> In *Borderline*, the world is not a world of East and West, a world of political blocs and nation states – it is a planet, a diverse Gaia. Similarly to Massey’s analyses, Kozłowska in her work brings space to life – she indicates it as a place of potentialities, relations, and continuations. In Massey’s conception, it is an open space of torn-off ends and missing links, a dimension of things that exist next to each other, which confronts us with the fact of the existence of other (human and non-human) entities. “Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the dimension we call ‘space’” – writes Massey – “is that it is the dimension of multiplicity, of the more-than-one. One vital thing that that insight gives us is the insistence, even within globalisation, on a plurality of positionalities.”<sup>[38]</sup>

Relational thinking about space therefore brings us closer to the social dimension of indicating the *Borderline*. In the previously mentioned text from 1977, Zbigniew Makarewicz wrote: “Just as it always happens, also now the essence of activity is revealed to the author in the course of creating the work. The difference is that this revealing happens in front of our very eyes, and the way in which the entire community exists is undoubtedly included in this process.”<sup>[39]</sup>

### **But the sea and the sun were there before<sup>[40]</sup>: Ecological aspects of Barbara Kozłowska’s work**

In her text from 1999, Kozłowska describes *Borderline* in retrospect, drawing attention not only to the processual character of the project and the immanent fragmentariness of its record, but also referring to the conditions of the (co-)existence of that “activity on the sea”<sup>[41]</sup> with the natural environment: “The idea of *Borderline* – a colorist beach – complies with the laws of ecology. What matters is the use of pigments, paper – non-toxic materials.”<sup>[42]</sup> However, traces of the artist’s ecological awareness can already be found in her text from 1973. Kozłowska underlines that the use of found materials in her work not only serves the goal of artistic progress, but also a (rather imprecisely defined) renewal, which can be interpreted from today’s perspective in the context of the social mission of ecological art (“the sources would be informed by a twofold goal – artistic and that of renewal”).<sup>[43]</sup>

*Borderline* is therefore also a proposal of what a paradigmatic change might look like in thinking about relations between humans and nature. The piece likewise hints at the necessity of changing the scale of perception and activity. The modern-day ecological crisis compels reflection pursued on a different, greater scale – planetary, geological, prehistorical. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak made an important differentiation between the global and the planetary perspective, arguing that if the notion of globality is a virtual abstraction, which allows us to “think that we can aim to control globality,” the planet “belongs to another system,” in which we live following the principle of borrowing from it. That is why thinking in planetary categories, i.e. thinking about ourselves as “planetary creatures,” does not entail an unambiguous hierarchization, and allows us to position ourselves not as those who subordinate, but those who are co-dependent.<sup>[44]</sup>

Barbara Kozłowska undoubtedly took an interest in the co-dependencies and regularities occurring between human beings and the cosmos, as well as in the natural world: the cyclicity of the structure of the universe, changeability and permanence, with endlessness and measurement as its phenomena. She posed questions about the model of the world’s structure on the borders between light and darkness, lasting and disappearing, sea and land. However, Kozłowska’s planetary works are not devoid of individual experience – just as the piece *Negatives of Fiction* [*Negatywy fikcji*], which relies on the phenomenon of light and darkness, features the indication of a specific date, in *Borderline* it is the artist’s presence in a given place, at a given time, that enables indication of the line.

In *Negatives of Fiction*, created for the first time in 1978, Kozłowska relies on the motif of black and white in order to indicate a certain regularity and impose her individual trajectory on this impersonal rhythm. The motif also appears in her projects that refer to literary texts, such as *Babel (Borges)* from 1979, and becomes the dominant theme of her practice in visual poetry (*Snow* from 1976; variations on the Greek letter *tau*).

According to Maja and Reuben Fowkes: “The planetary aspects of East European art can be uncovered in a host of artistic, curatorial, and art historical positions toward the ecological crisis of late socialism, although these did not constitute a coherent movement and were rich in contradictions and dissonances.”<sup>[45]</sup> Kozłowska’s art sits comfortably in the traditions of Central European avant-gardes, such as the OHO Group, characterized by increased ecological awareness and considered, respectful use of the natural environment. Central and Eastern European neo-avant-garde artists who worked with the environment not so much intervened in the natural space, but rather situated abstract elements in natural contexts in order to observe processes of integration and decomposition. An interesting example is offered by the activity of Czech artists working primarily with water,

“Water also became [...] a constant source of various records, including tracing the hanging shape of the riverbank, the water level, and recording melting ice.”<sup>[46]</sup> Such activities were characterized by intimate, restrained, non-invasive, tiny gestures performed in relation to nature and within it – abstract visual signs reduced to the minimum, which investigated the so-called fundamental laws of nature: the separation between night and day, land and sea.

Akin to the abovementioned artists, instead of intervening in nature, Kozłowska practiced indicating and all its synonyms: *constituting, determining, designating, circumscribing, marking, outlining, defining, pointing, specifying, pinpointing, concretizing, formulating, sketching, delineating, singling out, assigning*. Her *Borderline* does not separate, but – owing to the artist’s presence – connects phenomena and points in space filled with the active matter of nature. In 2005, the artist wrote: “Nature is where void appears. Nature is not controlled by the creative human being because it is creative itself, and it is the human being who draws inspiration from nature throughout the centuries. It is an endearing act of creating out of nothing something that brings us to the peak of humanity.”<sup>[47]</sup>

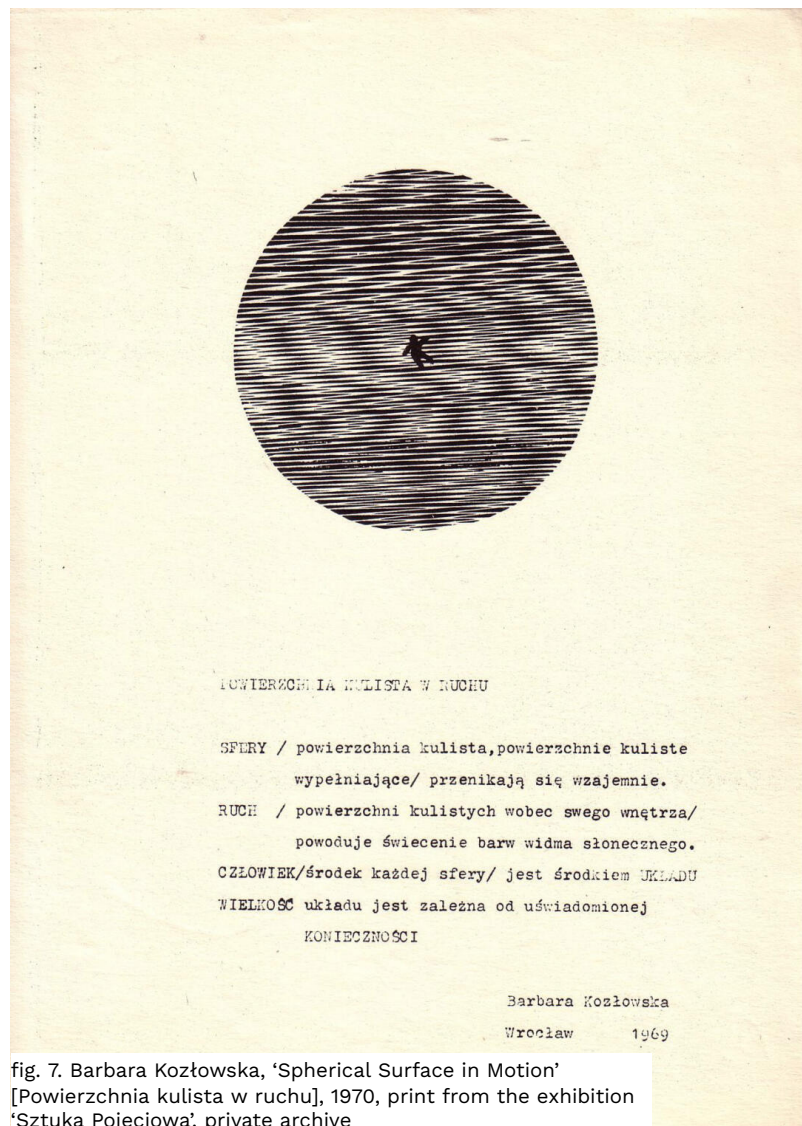


fig. 7. Barbara Kozłowska, 'Spherical Surface in Motion'  
[Powierzchnia kulista w ruchu], 1970, print from the exhibition  
'Sztuka Pojęciowa', private archive

<sup>[1]</sup> “Znana i nieznana. Rozmowa o Barbarze Kozłowskiej.” Zbigniew Makarewicz in conversation with Marika Kuźmicz, *Magazyn Szum*, July 31, 2016, <https://magazynszum.pl/znana-i-nieznana-rozmowa-o-barbarze-kozlowskiej/> (accessed March 5, 2020).

<sup>[2]</sup> Makarewicz uses this term with reference to the iteration of *Borderline* in Malta in June 1975. Cf. Zbigniew Makarewicz, “Linia życia i linia sztuki Barbary Kozłowskiej,” *Nadodrże* no. 12 (388), June 12–25, 1977.

<sup>[3]</sup> Ibid.

<sup>[4]</sup> On the specificity of Barbara Kozłowska’s work and, more broadly, on the Polish specificity of the concretist movement, see: Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka, *Historia tekstu wizualnego. Polska po 1967 roku* (Kraków: Ha!art, CMW, 2012), especially the chapter “Topografia linii według Barbary Kozłowskiej,” 304–322.

<sup>[5]</sup> Barbara Kozłowska, “Języki” (undated typescript), <http://repozytorium.fundacjaarton.pl/index.php?action=view/object&objid=4318&colid=90&catid=26&lang=pl> (accessed April 5, 2020).

<sup>[6]</sup> Zbigniew Makarewicz talks about this in “Znana i nieznana...”



[7] Testament to the longevity of these inspirations is, among others, the fact that in the project *Model* from 1999, concerning the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art in Wrocław, Kozłowska refers to Jerzy Ludwiński's initiatives, such as the Museum of Current Art and the Center for Artistic Research. She also proposes here a decentralization and spatialization of the institution – the museum is devised as a process,

[10] The term “intra-active” was proposed by the feminist theoretician of science Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham & London: Duke University Press 2007), in which she presents a new materialist theory of agential realism.

[11] Barbara Kozłowska, “Konceptualizm polski” (June 1999), <http://repozytorium.fundacjaarton.pl/index.php?action=view/object&objid=4322&colid=90&catid=26&lang=pl> (accessed April 5, 2020).

[12] See e.g. Terry Smith's text, in which the author writes: “It is important to delineate a clear distinction between *conceptual art* as a term used to denote an essentially formalist practice developed in the wake of minimalism, and *conceptualism*, which broke decisively from the historical dependence of art upon physical form and its visual appreciation. Conceptualism was a broader attitudinal expression that summarized a wide array of works and practices which, in radically reducing the role of the art object, reimagined the possibilities of art vis-à-vis the social, political and economic realities within which it was being made. Its informality and affinity for collectivity made conceptualism attractive to those artists who yearned for a more direct engagement with the public during those intense, transformative periods. For them, the de-emphasis—or the dematerialization—of the object allowed the artistic energies to move from the object to the conduct of art.” Terry Smith, “One and Three Ideas: Conceptualism Before, During, and After Conceptual Art,” *e-flux Journal*, January 29, 2017, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/29/68078/one-and-three-ideas-conceptualism-before-during-and-after-conceptual-art/> (accessed February 6, 2020).

[13] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* vol. 55 (Winter 1990), 105–143.

[14] Seth Siegelaub and Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

[15] Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

[16] Mari Carmen Ramirez, “Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America,” in: *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Aldo Rasmussem, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, June 6 – September 6, 1993, 156–166.

[17] László Beke, “The Present Time of Conceptual Art. The Political Implications of Eastern European Art,” [http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/htm/workshop/bcn\\_Essays/Present\\_Beke\\_eng.pdf](http://www.vividradicalmemory.org/htm/workshop/bcn_Essays/Present_Beke_eng.pdf) (accessed March 20, 2017). The text refers to the presentation *Radical Conceptual Art Revisited*, held at the Barcelona Workshop in May 2007.

[18] Rosalyn Deutsche, “Inadequacy...,” in: *Silvia Kolbowski, Inadequate... Like... Power*, ed. Frank Rilke, exh. cat., Secession, Vienna, September 17 – November 11, 2004, 67–70.

[19] *Conceptualism and Materiality: Matters of Art and Politics*, ed. Christian Berger (Boston: Brill, 2019).

[20] Nader, *Konceptualizm w PRL*, 12.

[21] Donna J. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York–London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

- [22] Federica Timeto, "Diffracting the Rays of Technoscience: A Situated Critique of Representation," *Poiesis Praxis* no. 8 (2011), 151–167, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3234354/> (accessed March 3, 2020).
- [23] Makarewicz, "Linia życia i linia sztuki."
- [24] Dawidek Gryglicka, *Historia tekstu wizualnego*, 304.
- [25] Makarewicz, "Linia życia i linia sztuki."
- [26] Barbara Kozłowska, "Fraktale" (Wrocław, 2005), <http://repozytorium.fundacjaarton.pl/index.php?action=view/object&objid=4316&colid=90&catid=26&lang=pl> (accessed April 2, 2020).
- [27] Barbara Kozłowska, "Fraktale" (Wrocław, 1973), <http://repozytorium.fundacjaarton.pl/index.php?action=view/object&objid=4316&colid=90&catid=26&lang=pl> (accessed April 5, 2020).
- [28] Barbara Kozłowska, "Punkt widzenia" (Wrocław, 1978), <http://repozytorium.fundacjaarton.pl/index.php?action=view/object&objid=3662&colid=84&catid=26&lang=pl> (accessed April 6, 2020).
- [29] Nader, *Konceptualizm w PRL*, 355.
- [30] Kozłowska, "Fraktale" (2005).
- [31] Ibid.
- [32] Makarewicz, "Linia życia i linia sztuki."
- [33] Ibid.
- [34] Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Newbury Park CA: Sage Publishing, 2005), 9.
- [35] Ibid.
- [36] Ibid., 11.
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] Doreen Massey, "Geographies of Responsibility," in: *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* no. 86(1) (1999), 5–18, [http://oro.open.ac.uk/7224/1/Geographies\\_of\\_responsibility\\_Sept03.pdf](http://oro.open.ac.uk/7224/1/Geographies_of_responsibility_Sept03.pdf).
- [39] Makarewicz, "Linia życia i linia sztuki."
- [40] Barbara Kozłowska, "Idea kolorystyki. Idea Linii granicznej" (1999), <http://repozytorium.fundacjaarton.pl/index.php?action=view/object&objid=4322&colid=90&catid=26&lang=pl>.
- [41] Dawidek Gryglicka, *Historia tekstu wizualnego*, 304.
- [42] Kozłowska, "Konceptualizm polski."
- [43] Kozłowska, "Fraktale" (2005).
- [44] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet," in: idem, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 335–350: 338.

[45] Maja Fowkes, *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde Art and Ecology under Socialism* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2015), 66. “The planetary aspects of East European art can be uncovered in a host of artistic, curatorial, and art-historical positions toward the ecological crisis of late socialism, although these did not constitute a coherent movement and were rich in contradictions and dissonances. For instance, the Maribor Art Gallery in Slovenia initiated a Yugoslav Triennial of Art and Ecology that started in 1980, motivated by the desire to show how ‘Yugoslav artists think about the suicidal relationship of today’s society toward the environment’ (Gabršek-Prošenc 1980). As it was organized on a federal basis with each republic taking part, the organizers opted for a ‘panoramic view of artistic production,’ and included works that ‘search for not only existential, but also ontological questions,’ which were local as well as general in focus and addressed the relationship of ‘man-nature-man.’”

[46] Pavlína Morganová, *Czech Action Art: Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art Behind the Iron Curtain* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2014), 147.

[47] Kozłowska, “Fraktale” (2005).

Artist	Barbara Kozłowska
Exhibition	<i>Barbara Kozłowska. You Can See It All Anywhere</i>
Place / venue	Wrocław Contemporary Museum
Dates	17 July – 27 September 2020
Curated by	Marika Kuźmicz
Website	<a href="http://muzeumwspolczesne.pl/">muzeumwspolczesne.pl/</a>
Index	<a href="#">Barbara Kozłowska</a> <a href="#">Karolina Majewska-Güde</a> <a href="#">Marika Kuźmicz</a> <a href="#">Wrocław Contemporary Museum</a>



ARTIST: Małgorzata Dawidek  
 ARTWORK/YEAR: Text Paths (2016)  
 REGION: Eurasia  
 RESEARCHER: Lesia Prokopenko

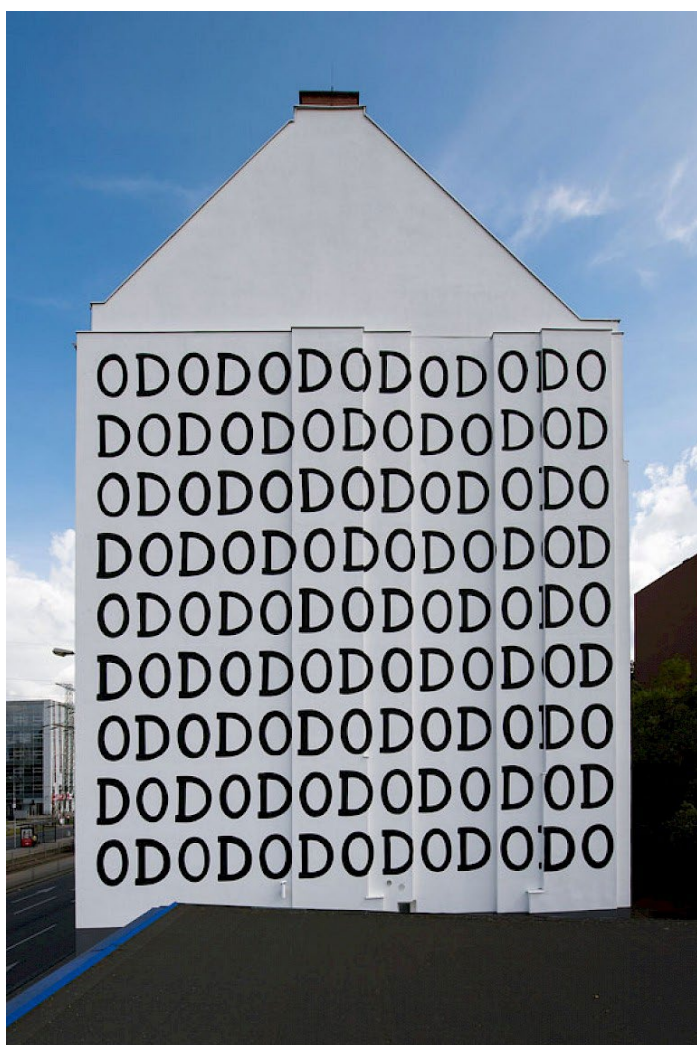
Wrocław (known as Breslau in German) is the fourth-largest city in Poland, located in the southwest of the country. First recorded in the 10th century (although Slavic settlements in the area appeared as early as the 6th century, and a Roman settlement was known there dating back to the 2nd century AD), the city has a rich and complex history. It was part of the Polish Kingdom, the Kingdom of Bohemia (of the Holy Roman Empire), and the Kingdom of Prussia — becoming the sixth largest city in the German Empire after the Unification of Germany in 1871. After World War II, the city became part of Poland, and the name «Wrocław» was declared official. In August 1945, the city had a German population of 189,500, and a Polish population of 17,000. According to the decrees of the new administration, almost all of the German inhabitants were forced to leave the territory, and were replaced by the Polish population that had been deported from the eastern Polish lands annexed by the Soviet Union. Therefore, Wrocław remains a place of complicated legacy and mixed heritage, combining medieval architecture with impressive concrete poetry, he identified his practice with it.

This is how he interpreted his practice later: «concrete poetry consists in isolating the word, making it autonomous. In isolating it from the linguistic context, as well as from the context of the non-linguistic reality, so as to make the word signify in itself and unto itself. In concrete poetry form is determined by content, and content by form. Traditional poetry describes an image. Concrete poetry writes with it.» In 2003 Stanisław Dróżdź represented Poland at the 50th Venice Biennale with his work *Alea iacta est*.

The walls of the pavilion were covered with about 250,000 slightly enlarged (3x3 cm) rolling dice, demonstrating all the possible combinations that can be obtained by throwing a set of six dice. In the centre of the space stood a billiard table with exactly such a set. In a user manual printed in 40 languages the artist invited the viewer to roll the dice and then find the combination obtained among the 46,656 possible results on the wall. This example provides a very particular insight into the overall conceptual interests of the artist. Generally, the works by Dróżdź came about as texts on two-dimensional surface and texts in three-dimensional space — they were realized in the form of manuscripts, photographic prints, computer prints and spatial installations.

For «Text Paths», Małgorzata Dawidek implanted them into the public spaces of Wrocław in the form of murals, installations, and posters, creating new modes of existence for the poetry of Stanisław Dróżdź. Three of the works, «optimum» (1967), «Forgetting» (1967), and «Temporally-spatially» (1969), were presented as murals (the former on Hubska street, the two latter on Legnicka street respectively). «optimum» consists of two antonyms understood in many languages: «minimum» and «maximum». The piece presents





the process of transforming one word into the other. As a result of changing letters, the words are being substituted with their opposites — the work emphasises the unclear meaning of both notions, while its title offers a balance between them.

The work «Forgetting» literally depicts the process of forgetting, visualised by reducing the letters making up the word «Zapominanie» («Forgetting» in Polish). Line after line, the word loses letters, until all that is left is a singular dot, a trace left by writing. «Forgetting» shows the act of memory's reduction and transformation, along with the impossibility of retrieving lost reminiscences. The composition of «Temporally-spatially» is based on the arrangement of two letters forming two words with opposite meanings — Polish prepositions «do» (which means «to») and «od» («from»). The title of the work suggests that the words used in it have both temporal and spatial meanings, pertaining to distance, length and duration. The graphic forms for «optimum» and «Forgetting» were developed by the poet and painter Stanisław Kortyka back in 1967; «Temporally-spatially» was graphically designed by the conceptual artist Barbara Kozłowska in 1969.

The second part of the project presents the spatial interpretation of Stanisław Dróżdź's piece «Loneliness», designed by Barbara Kozłowska in 1970. The work consists of 45 concrete blocks; each of them in the form of the digit «1». The digit is separated from its numerical aspect and becomes a lyrical sign, representing loneliness in a crowd — or singularity. The third part of «Text Paths» is based on the new publication of Stanisław Dróżdź's first volume of verse, «Inwards beyond the words between» (1969). Compiled and edited by Małgorzata Dawidek and translated into English by Krzysztof Bartnicki, the volume was published by Warstwy in September 2016.

Simultaneously, in September and October, reproductions of selected pages of the publication were featured as city light posters at 42 tram stops all over Wrocław as well as in the street gallery Szewska Pasja in Szewska Street. «Text Paths» project was a vivid experiment in creating an organic place for the minimalist poetic language in the historically and culturally oversaturated public spaces of Wrocław, launching an altogether different symbolic order from within. It was a manifest of urban interconnectedness and a bold move against aesthetic hierarchies, providing avant-garde art with the outputs it had always claimed — making it accessible to every spectator and open to the productive contingency of random encounters.

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Marika Kuźmicz

## *Barbara Kozłowska. The Great Journey<sup>1</sup>*

“i was born in poland i exhibited a lot and always where i did not want to exhibit where i wanted to exhibit I did not exhibit i travelled i performed i went where i wanted to go for important artistic reasons i travelled with all available means of transport as far as possible i appeared on beaches in galleries and on video i built i moved i repeated things i built theoretical models of concepts i moved the borderline to the moon and everywhere i always repeated the same banal sentences about art and reality or the same banal truth about art i wrote obvious things about things i took part in exhibitions in poland romania great britain italy yugoslavia i travelled to siberia to great britain to malta to italy yugoslavia france”

\*

These are the words of Barbara Kozłowska (1940–2008) about herself. This form of autobiography, without punctuation and capital letters, akin to a text-object, often accompanied her exhibitions. Seemingly laconic, it touches upon some of the matters that she found most important: movement, travel, exploration of space and the study of “ordinary” reality that invariably occupies it. There is a tinge of provocative ambivalence in it, the same as in the phrase “You can see it all anywhere,” which she used to describe her artistic practice. It was her sentence-work, sentence-manifesto, a key sentence that unlocked her art built upon constant observation of everyday phenomena and of herself vis-à-vis them.

Another interesting aspect of the autobiography is how the subject manifests itself in it. Such a personal approach, writing in the first person in a simple way that was understandable to a wide audience, was a rare occurrence in Polish art in the 1970s or 1980s. Artists’ texts at the time were typically dominated by a para-scientific language, so that an essentially simple message was often made deliberately obscure. Kozłowska’s writing about her own art was clearly focused on authentic communication with the audience. The artist wrote a lot about her work, but only a small part of these texts was published. “Known and unknown” – this is how Kozłowska was described in 2016 by Zbigniew Makarewicz<sup>2</sup>, who was her husband and co-creator of some of her works from the 1960s and

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<sup>1</sup> The title refers to a fragment of one of Barbara Kozłowska’s biographies, written by her probably in 1976, in which she stated: “Barbara Maria Kozłowska is an artist who is well-known everywhere, because of her great journey across time and space.” Zbigniew Makarewicz’s archive.

<sup>2</sup> <https://magazynszum.pl/znana-i-nieznana-rozmowa-o-barbarze-kozłowskiej/>.

early 1970s. Prompted by this exhibition, which is the first comprehensive, monographic presentation of Kozłowska oeuvre, I would like to delve deeper into the actual meaning of Makarewicz's words. Before I do so, let me recall some basic facts from the artist's life.

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Barbara Kozłowska was born in Tarnobrzeg. This simple statement is underlain by personal drama: before her birth, Zygmunt Kozłowski, the artist's father, was arrested by the Nazis for refusing to sign the Volksliste and taken to a concentration camp (first to Sachsenhausen, then to Dachau, where he died in November 1942). Before the outbreak of the war, the Kozłowski family lived near Bydgoszcz. In 1940, after Zygmunt's arrest, Emilia Kozłowska, who already had four children and was expecting the birth of her fifth one (Barbara), was displaced to Tarnobrzeg. The wartime trauma and the acute lack of her father's presence were later reflected in Kozłowska's art in a very special and characteristic way, to which I will come back again.

After the war, Barbara and her mother settled down in Wrocław. Although their financial situation was extremely difficult, in 1959 she began studying at the State Higher School of Fine Arts, which was costly and did not guarantee a "respectable job", but it was a fulfilment of her dream. Given the circumstances, this decision testifies to the future artist's determination and certainty about the chosen life path. Unfortunately, the school disappointed her – she had bad memories of it, apparently because she was not able to find herself in the bureaucratic rigour imposed by the education system in the People's Republic of Poland in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Kozłowska wrote that for her, art was a space of freedom<sup>3</sup>. Despite this, in 1965 she graduated with honours from professor Stanisław Dawski's studio. Later<sup>4</sup> the artist in her writings would frequently refer to Black Mountain College, the legendary interdisciplinary college founded by former Bauhaus lecturers in North Carolina, USA, in 1933. The BMC educational offer was characterised by almost total openness of the curriculum, focus on the creative process rather than its result and on developing students' individuality and cooperation between them. All these aspects were clearly present in Kozłowska's practice by the time she made what she considered her first mature works, i.e. around 1962. At that time, she was a member of "Brzeg", an informal group of Wrocław-based artists who had not yet systematically developed their practice, but whose actions can be considered precursory in the field of Polish performance art (e.g. *Abduction*, an action which took place at Lake Wolsztyn in 1965)<sup>5</sup>. From then

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Kozłowska's manuscript, Zbigniew Makarewicz's archive.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Makarewicz, *Wrocławska tradycja artystyczna – Przedstawienia i inne praktyki parateatralne* [Wrocław artistic tradition – performances and other para-theatre practices], in *Sztuka otwarta. Parateatr II* [The open art. Para-theatre II], edited by E. Dawidejt, O.T.O. Kalambur, Wrocław, 1982.

on, Barbara Kozłowska created and exhibited works as an active participant in the progressive environment of the Wrocław avant-garde for five decades.

In 1967, Kozłowska began making one of her most important works – *Borderline*. The idea of drawing a line across the entire globe, from east to west, had probably appeared at least a year earlier, but it materialised in the summer of 1967, during Kozłowska's trip to Lake Baikal in Siberia. Importantly, the action was not a "by-product" of the journey, but the very reason for it. The artist manifested her presence on the shore of the lake by arranging small stones into cones, marking in this way a point on the *Borderline*. She repeated the action many times, in different places – in Osieki, Malta, Edinburgh or California. Wherever possible, Kozłowska made sand cones. She would sometimes colour them with Newton's primary colours, stressing that the dyes were non-toxic and harmless to the natural environment. It testifies to Kozłowska's sensitivity to environmentalism, understood as making very restrained interventions in the existing landscape and nature. At the same time, she experienced space in a very deep way. Space was one of the main mediums of Kozłowska's work, if not the main one.

All this and much more permeates the subsequent instalments of the *Borderline*. Since its first "unveiling" on Lake Baikal, Kozłowska participated in exhibitions, symposia and open-air meetings that became part of the history of Polish art of the 1970s, such as the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium (1970), the 8th Meeting of Artists and Art Theorists in Osieki (1970), the Convention of Dreamers in Elbląg (1971), Atelier 72 at the Richard Demarco Gallery (Kozłowska and Makarewicz could not go to Edinburgh because their passports had not been issued in time, although they did receive invitations)<sup>6</sup>. They eventually went to Scotland the following year and took part in the next edition of Edinburgh Arts organised by Demarco – it enabled Barbara to carry out the *Sea Action and Five Coloured Cones*, i.e. the next stage of drawing the *Borderline*.

The following years brought more exhibitions and her own place of art – from 1972, Kozłowska ran the Babel Gallery in her and Makarewicz's studio in Malarska Street in Wrocław. The Babel Gallery was an independent space for art that functioned beyond the censors' reach. It was open to visual artists, but also to representatives of various other disciplines. Although many artists declared that they were interested in artistic and intellectual exchange of thoughts, situations in which ideas could be exchanged horizontally, disciplines and media would mix, were extremely rare. Being the undisputed founder of the Babel Gallery, Kozłowska not so much invited others to her space as created it for them.

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<sup>6</sup> Author's conversation with Zbigniew Makarewicz, February 2020.



She did all this despite a chronic illness that she had been struggling with since childhood – she had a heart condition and her life was threatened many times. It also caused frequent hospitalisations, which obviously limited her activeness, but never (in hindsight) resulted in prolonged periods of inactivity. Kozłowska continued her work – the *Borderline* was her journey, as she put it, whose subsequent manifestations were more and more radical in terms of limiting the means of artistic expression. Gradually, Kozłowska gave up colouring the cones, then stopped forming them from sand (or piles of stones), reducing the action to arriving in a given place at a certain time and **being** there.

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Even this brief overview of Barbara Kozłowska's activity, without going into details about her works, is sufficient to show that it was an extremely original attitude against the background of what was happening in Polish art, not only in the 1960s and 1970s, but also in the decades to come. Yet very few art critics or historians have reflected on it. Considering the current state of research, we quickly come to the conclusion that Kozłowska actually is “unknown”, as Makarewicz put it. Not only are there no monographs devoted to her work, but even shorter texts just about her art are also scarce. Andrzej Kostołowski<sup>7</sup> and Jerzy Ludwiński mentioned her. Makarewicz also wrote about Kozłowska, mainly in studies devoted to the Wrocław avant-garde<sup>8</sup>. Although she has appeared in several collective studies in recent years, there have been no attempts to systematically analyse her art.

Given the absence of studies on Kozłowska's art, it is her private archive that proves to be the most valuable source of information. This exhibition is based on research of this archive, which I conducted with the permission of Zbigniew Makarewicz. Working with an artist's archive is always an excellent source of information about their work, but in the case of Barbara Kozłowska, it is particularly important – not only because it constitutes the main source material, but also because its structure perfectly reflects the uniqueness of her method of work and her way of thinking. It is a reflection of the creative process. By preserving the archive in its entirety, Makarewicz acted in accordance with his wife's intentions, understanding that her work was a process. This decision was far from obvious: important notes, thoughts or observations can be easily overlooked, because she wrote them on inconspicuous paper cuttings, napkins or tickets. The archive consists of short notes, manuscripts, typescripts, old invitations to exhibitions adorned with handwritten comments, correspondence, shopping lists on which I also found ideas for work titles, notes about her own health, exhibition

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. A. Kostołowski in a leaflet accompanying the exhibition *Barbara Kozłowska 1940–2008: A Retrospective*, Galeria EL Art Centre, 02.12–09.12.2010, Elbląg, Zbigniew Makarewicz's archive, or “Micro-Macro”, *Kultura*, no. 37, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> L. Nader, *Konceptualizm w PRL* [Conceptualism in the People's Republic of Poland], Warsaw, 2008, or *The Wild West. A History of Wrocław's Avant-garde*, exh. cat., Wrocław Contemporary Museum, 19.06–13.09.2015, edited by D. Monkiewicz, Wrocław, 2015.

designs, future plans for the Babel Gallery (both very prosaic, such as the need to repair heating, and highly abstract, such as the purchase of a palace to house the gallery), excerpts from philosophical texts or physical theories, and numerous autobiographies in various versions. As I mentioned, Zbigniew Makarewicz did not dispose of any materials from this vast collection – he arranged all the documents in several dozen ring binders, without any subjective attempts to determine their importance, and stores them in their former studio in Malarska Street in Wrocław, in the attic of a tenement house in the Old Town where in the 1970s his wife initiated the functioning of the Babel Gallery. The “founding act” was Kozłowska’s action of moving all materials from the studio to the BWA gallery in Wrocław, and presenting them publically in 1972. After a police intervention, caused by the fact that Kozłowska allowed viewers to carry out independent actions in the exhibition space, beyond the control of censorship, the exhibition was closed, which made her aware of the need to have a place of her own – a creative platform beyond the reach of the censorship apparatus. Treating the archive as artistic material, opening it to the creativity of others, was an unprecedented gesture at that time which today, nearly five decades later, makes us approach its structure and the materials contained in it with utmost care. Kozłowska considered the archive – this inhomogeneous collection of clues, thoughts and ideas, arising from each other and mixed together – extremely important. This is why I suggest approaching these materials not only as sources needed to determine dates or other historical facts, but also as a form of artistic and creative expression.

“Art ought to be treated as a living thing,” the artist wrote on a piece of paper preserved in the archive. In fact, Kozłowska’s art and her method of working resemble an organism that develops to a certain degree by itself; sometimes its fragment manifests itself to us when favourable circumstances arise, but the lack of manifestation does not mean that the process of creation has stopped. It is clearly seen in the structure of Kozłowska’s archive. It has no clear centre, it mushrooms, grows in all directions, as demonstrated by the notes and writings to which the artist returned, changed them, corrected, created subsequent versions of texts, including her biographies. Of course, the archive does contain works. But apart from elements that are clearly connected with works there are also those seemingly unimportant, which does not mean that they will not actually turn out to be the opposite – the subsequent words, drawings, charts and sentences add to the sense of the works (performances or “events”, as she called them, drawings, sometimes paintings), which in Kozłowska’s case were not the **culmination** of the creative process, but its **manifestation**. Theoretically, this can be said of many artists, but in the case of Barbara Kozłowska it was particularly important. After the emergence of a work – usually in an ephemeral form, although not always – the artist would return to it, having enriched her knowledge by reading, writing and conducting a kind of dialogue with herself, in order to **manifest** the next stage of her creative process after some time. This is how she described the *Borderline*: “The *Borderline* is a work in process. What follows from this is that it will never be a work that could be unambiguously described as a finished whole. It does not matter which part of the

work we present to the viewer, it will still result in a lack of clarity rather than full contact with the work. Documents, fragments of actions, photos or slides can only hint at this journey of the work in time. Some barely perceptible pieces, unpredictable points at which these pieces become works of art. What is left is documentation from 1966 to 1999, which will wait for the presentation or implementation of the next events at some point in time, somewhere. The presentation of the documentation should be as objective as possible (...). So the *Borderline* continues to exist. Its duration is ensured by the artist and artists who are to participate in the work.”<sup>9</sup>

I have already mentioned that in order to reveal her ideas, Kozłowska typically used highly reduced means of expression – gestures that were not so much intended to create a new entity (a work of art), but rather to draw attention to certain phenomena existing in nature, to highlight a feature of the universe or reality. She retrospectively described some of her works as “events” – their structure was constituted on “presence with minimal intervention.” At the same time, these small gestures were clearly connected with Kozłowska’s need to exist as a subject in relation to time and space. At this point I shall return to the artist’s biography presented at the beginning of the text, which aptly characterises this aspect of her attitude that was based on constant examination of her dynamic situation or position in the world. Most of Kozłowska’s works could be described in terms of mapping the universe, in both conceptual and literal sense, using the measure of her own physicality, psyche, memory and perception.

This need to reveal herself through other people and phenomena permeates most of Kozłowska’s works, including the *Borderline*. The subsequent points on the line marked the places that she had physically visited. As the work continued to exist, this became increasingly apparent. In the early photographs and slides, we see not only the artist, but also other people engaged in the construction of sand cones. Those who documented these actions did not try to capture the artist in the centre of the frame – in all likelihood, this was not her intention, at least until the very last instalment of the *Borderline* that took place in San Francisco. In one of the photographs taken there, the artist is in the middle of the composition, with her arms stretched out to the sides, standing on one leg in the spot where the beach and the ocean meet, probably at the time of the tide. Kozłowska’s silhouette is dominant against the gray surface of water and sky. There is not a trace of the sand cones in the picture, as if her presence alone was finally enough for the artistic gesture to occur. I mentioned that space was the medium of Kozłowska’s art, but to put it more precisely – her art was about exploring it, determining her position in relation to space, time and other people. This translates directly into the form of her works – they develop at the level of cognition, mapping space and experiencing it.

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara Kozłowska’s typescript, Zbigniew Makarewicz’s archive.

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Her own subjectivity was a source of constant reflection. However, it was not egocentric in character, but based on the realisation of various complex relationships. After all, we cannot know the world beyond ourselves, beyond our own perception. Just as we cannot get to know one thing by learning about something else. “Only the same can be comprehended through the same,” to quote the artist’s words again. This sentence could be treated as a tautological conceptual figure or as a lapidary truth, very practical and real. The need to determine the position of the self in relation to the world is an important feature of Kozłowska’s art. “In non-European languages, there are gradations of pronouns indicating the determination of the relative distance from ‘I.’” This is another of hundreds of small notes made and kept by Barbara Kozłowska. It was accompanied by three sketched circles. In the smallest one, the one in the middle, there was an inscription “I / here.” In the next one, surrounding the central circle – “you: there.” Inside the outermost were the words “he – they: somewhere,” and further deliberations on the gradation of pronouns in different languages to describe one’s position in relation to other things, people and phenomena, especially since they also create us. What I see in this is Kozłowska’s need to create collective works – with other people serving as points of reference that supplement the meaning of the work, just as the work supplements them.

The desire to see oneself, in a biographical sense, in various contexts, or simply in a broader context, is also manifested in the work *Negatives of Fiction* (1976). I mentioned earlier that Kozłowska in her art reflected the experience of wartime trauma and loss of father, in a way that was simultaneously reserved and poignant. *Negatives of Fiction* is an installation consisting of 365 cards, corresponding to the days of the year, whose part is covered with black ink proportionately to the length of day on a given date. Only one card does not follow this system, the one corresponding to the date when Kozłowska’s father died in November 1942. In this way, the artist repeatedly introduced aspects of her biography into the context of universal phenomena, emphasising the randomness of our existence as well as its uniqueness and importance. This is why the motif of the number of days that had passed since her birth often appeared in the artist’s later works, always in the context of time that had elapsed in a global sense, measured, for example, by sunrise and sunset.

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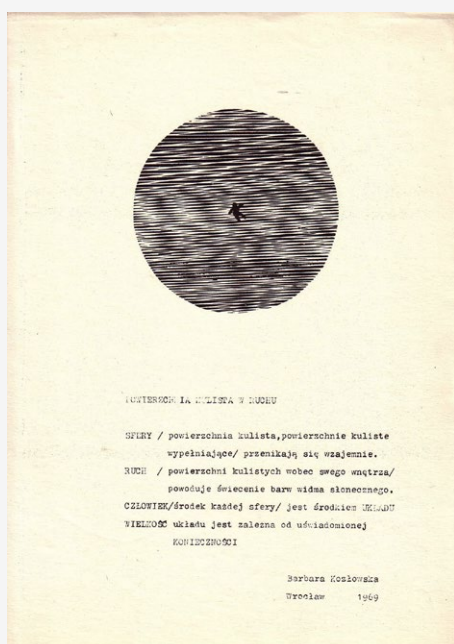
What invariably attracts attention in Kozłowska’s archive is the number of autobiographies. The short version quoted at the beginning of this text is just one of many variants of her life story. I suggest approaching them as something more than just collections of pure facts. Of course, biographies sometimes play this role, but at the same time they could be performative texts or texts-performances that express the need to define **oneself**, describe **oneself** in relation to the world, the physicality of

Archive

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# KubaParis review-kozlowskas-borderline-by-denisa-tomkova





### Subheadline

Review: Kozłowska's Borderline. By Denisa Tomkova

### Text

In the late 1970s, during the period of the Cold War, Czechoslovakia came up with a somewhat utopian proposal to create a 410km railway tunnel under the Alps, linking the Czech Republic with the Yugoslav coast. The Czechoslovak, Austrian, Italian and Yugoslavian governments even met to discuss this provisional plan. In her mockumentary *Return to Adriaport*, (2014), Czech artist Adéla Babanová depicts this proposal for connecting Czechoslovakia with the Adriatic coast. Not dissimilarly to this utopian vision of overcoming the national borders, Polish artist Barbara Kozłowska imagined a line from

east to west across the globe suggesting that the line could continue to the moon along this axis in her project *Borderline* (1967-1990).

Kozłowska, a member of a group of conceptual artists and concrete poets in Wrocław, worked continuously between 1967 and 1990 on her conceptual project *Borderline*. The project consists of 9 manifestations depicted through photographs, notes, maps and postcards. At the current exhibition in the Berlin gallery June, curated by Camila McHugh, visitors can see Kozłowska's project documentation from three places: Lake Baikal in Siberia in 1967; Edinburgh in Scotland from 1973; and from the coast of Malta in 1975. Next to Kozłowska's documentation, visitors can also see a video work entitled *The Line* by Agnieszka Lasota, who continued with the unrealized marking of Kozłowska's line in India in 2017.

During the Cold War period, when travelling to the West was restricted, Kozłowska travelled to Edinburgh thanks to an invitation from Richard Demarco, whose Traverse Gallery organised a series of 'blockbuster' Edinburgh International Festival exhibitions in the 1970s, presenting among many others, artists such as: Joseph Beuys, Gerhard Richter, and many contemporary artists from Romania, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Austria. In 1972 Kozłowska was invited to Edinburgh, when Demarco organised the exhibition of '43 Polish artists' where Kozłowska's work was exhibited alongside works by Magdalena Abakanowicz, Tadeusz Kantor, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz (Natalia LL), Makarewicz, Nowesielski, and Roman Opalka. Demarco's influence on mediating and connecting artists through the Edinburgh festival activities was also argued for by Klara Kemp-Welch in her recent book *Networking the Bloc: Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981*. Not only in the 1970s, but even today, researchers and artists working on Eastern European art tend to make the trip to Demarco's Archive in Edinburgh, as I did during my PhD studies in Scotland.

During Kozłowska's stay in Edinburgh in 1973, she created her *Sea Action and Five Coloured Cones*, consisting of five coloured cones created during low tide at the beach, documented in photographs. However, Kozłowska's work is not merely centred on the objects she created, but rather on her conceptual outlook that expresses her desire for freedom linked with the movement and pursuit of a journey. *Borderline* like other neo-avant-garde art projects created during the socialist period of the former Eastern bloc, had a strong utopian vision. These neo-avant-garde artists managed to seemingly erase the distinction between art and life. Additionally, Kozłowska's use of ready-made natural materials (pigments) and her awareness of human-nature planetary relations, suggests the genealogies of ecological art practice in the region, similar to the Slovenian OHO group.

Especially in the current condition of the global pandemic, where one finds it difficult to imagine global movement across borders without restrictions, Kozłowska's work opens two important propositions: firstly, the potential to imagine some other realities and utopian visions in relation to the planetary thinking; and secondly, it invites us to consider the ecological crisis we are facing today. Despite the spatial limitations of June's gallery, a visitor can experience a very complex conceptual story of Kozłowska's imagined line across the globe and her environmental vision for art. The exhibition is on view until May 2, 2021. In addition to the exhibition, on April 20, at 6pm CET, the gallery will host an online discussion with the Berlin-based art historians Karolina Majewska-Güde and Constance Krüger who will discuss Barbara Kozłowska's *Borderline* and Feminist Art in 1970s Poland. (Zoom Webinar, RSVP [june-borderline.eventbrite.com](https://june-borderline.eventbrite.com))

Denisa Tomkova is a Slovak-born, Berlin-based and UK and US-educated art historian and curator. She gained her PhD from the University of Aberdeen in the UK. Between 2015-2018, she was a member of the international research project 'Comparing WE's. Cosmopolitanism. Emancipation. Postcoloniality' based at the University of Lisbon. She taught the Introduction to Visual Culture class and was a guest lecturer in the Performance Art Class at the University of Aberdeen. She was a Research Fellow for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) in Berlin. In April 2020, she curated an online group exhibition *Performing the Museum* at ERAC which questioned the absence of Roma representation in arts and culture spaces. She contributed to journals such as *Third Text*, *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, *ARTMargins Online*, *L'Internationale Online*, *Camera Austria*, *Profil – súčasného výtvarného umenia*, *H-SHERA*, *Berlin Art Link* and *Magis Iteso*. Recently, she has been working as a curator for the Secondary Archive project - an online platform devoted to the work of female artists from Central and Eastern Europe.

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