

Geta Brătescu, Wanda Czełkowska

5.04 – 18.05.2024

Galeria Monopol is thrilled to present the duo show of works by Geta Brătescu and Wanda Czełkowska, hosting Ivan Gallery, Bucharest, as a part of Constellation. It is the first joint exhibition of the artists, showcasing their diverse body of work. The presentation consists of works created with different techniques in different periods, introducing their versatile approach to the art. Moreover, the complex artistic statements of Brătescu and Czełkowska point to numerous parallels that result from their internal motivations and the socio-political realities in which they functioned.

Geta Brătescu and Wanda Czełkowska shared the experience of living in a totalitarian regime. Brătescu encountered Soviet occupation and then Nicolae Ceaușescu's repressive leadership. Czełkowska studied in the times of socialist realism doctrine and afterward functioned as an artist in the reality of the Polish People's Republic. Both were completely serious about their art while playing with paradigms, forms, or tendencies like conceptual and minimal art on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Both took the language as the starting point – Brătescu studied at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, and Czełkowska read works devoted to modern art, French philosophy, and contemporary music during her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts, Cracow. Their intellectual influences resulted in a focus on ideas and narratives instead of the primality of the form or technique.

A further common point was their perception of the studio going beyond a normative definition of a workspace. Brătescu described her studio as a sort of interior self-portrait, a space going beyond its walls, a mental space described by words, by writing, a place for the material transformation of something into something else. Czełkowska worked and lived in her studio for almost her whole life, blurring the line between private life and the artistic process. In the political context, their studios can be perceived as places far away from the apparatus of oppressive authority. Its surplus value is revealed in the entangling of the subject with a creative process and a spatial extension of one's existence.

Brătescu differed from Czełkowska in her working method. The Romanian artist focused on concepts such as inner vision and automatism, understood as crucial contributions to the creative process. Czełkowska's approach to art-making was more analytical. Her love for French philosophy emulated into mathematics. Their techniques were oriented, as it were, against all odds - one towards the mechanical, the other towards the organic. While Brătescu was warming up the conceptual language of expression, Czełkowska was dematerializing it and eliminating further formal aspects of sculpture. The opposing azimuths, chosen by the artists, had one familiar source – the need to preserve artistic freedom.

The exhibition at Galeria Monopol may be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it could be two small-scale surveys. On the other, it could be a correspondence between a body of work displayed in different rooms of the gallery. The show connects two pioneering artists who transcended geographical barriers and gender roles of their time. Their creative imperative resulted in a multidimensional output that allows us to redefine the framework of 20th-century art and negotiate the boundaries between personal life and artistic process.

Geta Brătescu (1926-2018)

Has been a central figure of Romanian contemporary art since the 1960s. An artist with a rich and long career, Brătescu developed a complex body of work that comprises drawing, collage, engraving, tapestry, object, photography, experimental film, video, and performance. She studied at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy and concurrently at the Fine Arts Academy in Bucharest and worked as an artistic director for the magazine *Secolul 20* [20th Century], renamed *Secolul 21* at the turn of the millennium.

Geta Brătescu took part in some of the most important contemporary art exhibitions, such as Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel (2017), La Biennale di Venezia (2013), La Triennale, Paris, Palais de Tokyo (2012) and the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011), to name just a few. In 2017, Geta Brătescu represented Romania in the Venice Biennale with the project "Apparitions", the first solo show of a woman artist in the Romanian Pavilion. Her most recent solo exhibitions were presented at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland in 2020, Kunstforeningen GL Strand, Copenhagen, 2021, Francisco Carolinum, Linz, 2022.

Brătescu's works are in important collections such as MoMA, New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; MUMOK, Vienna; Kontakt Collection, Vienna; Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana; and FRAC Lorraine, Metz.

Wanda Czełkowska (1930-2021)

Trained at the Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow, from 1949 until 1954. She was a member of the Second Kraków Group. Czełkowska received numerous awards for her work. She was honoured with the 'Award of the Critique and Artistic Information Section' by the Association of Polish Journalists in Krakow for her spatial project, 'Absolute Elimination of Sculpture as a Notion of Shape' (1973), and was twice awarded the scholarship of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (2001, 2012).

Czełkowska's oeuvre spanned various mediums, including sculptures, installations/environments, paintings, drawings, and photographs. Her work was characterised by an exploration of the boundaries between different artistic forms and media. Despite her significant contributions to the art world, her work was largely unnoticed until recently.

Her recent solo and duo shows includes "Posthuman Abstraction", Double Q Gallery, Hong Kong (with Zuza Golińska); "Art Is Not Rest", Muzeum Susch; "Betwixt", Piktogram, Warsaw (with Paul Czerlitzki); "Wanda Czełkowska. Retrospection", Xavery Dunikowski Museum of Sculpture, National Museum, Warsaw. Her works are in the collection of Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; National Museum, Warsaw; National Museum, Cracow; Silesian Museum, Katowice; Centre of Polish Sculpture, Orońsko among others.