

Goal of the project

The aim of the project is to investigate the female artists operating in Wrocław in the 70s of the twentieth century who were engaged in various disciplines: from traditional painting, sculpture and graphics, to conceptual, contextual art, performance or ephemeral activities and work associated with the new media. The project will attempt to obtain an answer to the question, what were the artistic strategies chosen by the creators, and how their professional decisions were conditioned by the outside world - their everyday life, social relations, university and family, politics and culture of that time. The 70s was a period of the so-called second wave of feminism, primarily advocacy for equal place for women in such structures as the state, law, education and the economy. However, this wave had not reached the Poland of the times, in which – behind the so-called Iron Curtain - the public was satisfied with the prosperity of the period of government of Gierek.

Contrary to popular belief, however, it was not possible to speak of total equality of women, there could be no question of the same access to professional success.

In the field of art it can be seen, among others, on the example of museum collections of the PRL times, in which women's work is largely underrepresented. Art escaping the traditional categories was on one side overlooked by conservative-minded specialists of the Recovered Territories, and on the other hand, all the manifestations of the avant-garde attitudes were supported by the then authority. The work of women found itself between a rock of duplication of existing schemes and a hard place of cooperation with the state, because it was a particularly unfavorable situation - unfortunately, many female artists disappeared from the field of art, and of those who openly expressed at the time the emancipatory content success was reached by only one - Natalia LL. The main task carried out in the project involves acquiring micronarratives, that is, female artists' own stories of all of those who undertook creative activities in the studied decade. From these stories will be re-created the image of their strategy, motivation, decisions, context of activity and of self-agency, which is a real potential to influence the environment and change it.

What studies will be carried out in the project?

The project is multidisciplinary, which means that it will be based on methods specific for the different disciplines of the humanities. Although it relates to art, the main research will be carried out with the help of oral history - the method developed by historians and used mainly in research on the past and the culture. In Poland, oral history has not found a wider application in the study of art, but its use seems very reasonable for the marginal or ephemeral and processual works of art. This method consists mainly in conducting interviews with people related to the topic of the research - the so-called witnesses to history or events - and the subsequent critical development of the results.

These studies will be linked with mapping a network of Wrocław's art, that is, obtaining information, among others, about individuals, exhibitions, works, events, actions, performances and places associated with artistic circles. It will be realized through the use of the library, archive and museum queries, art analysis of the documentation and the online tool Gąszcz, enabling bottom-up data acquisition (wersja.org/gaszcz). These "hard" information will form a grid-skeleton around which the braid will be weaved with each other micronarratives-stories about art and strategies employed by the creative female artists.

Reasons for undertaking this subject

The 70s were a period of Wrocław called a "golden decade" of culture - Jerzy Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory operated here, student's Theatre Kalambur functioned dynamically, organizing international meetings under the slogan "Open Theatre", from that Wrocław originated also Conceptual Art recognized throughout the country and abroad, promoted primarily by Jerzy Ludwiński, therefore, the town can safely be called the capital of Polish conceptualism. Unfortunately, in all these avant-garde and artistic endeavors the presence of women was relatively small, even though in the post-war period women were allowed to study and eager to benefit from this law. Statistics show that in the middle of the decade female students accounted for slightly more than 50% of students in higher art schools. However, only a few of them managed to make an international career, many artists withdrew from active work, some also from the social life. Only today, after the great wave of Polish feminist art in the 90s, we can recognize the original creative attitudes of women and appreciate them. Their art had no chance to fully resonate in the PRL times, or during the transformation, and - for biological reasons - soon we will lose the opportunity to study and archive their memories. Therefore, it is high time to turn their stories - as intangible heritage of Polish culture – to the history of art. Ideally, these female artists should make it in their own voice.