

This research project responds to the need for reviving the history of Włocławek “Fajans” during socialism from feminist and transnational perspectives. Since the end of the 19th century, the Włocławek “Fajans” factories have been devoted to the production of kitchen sets and containers, breakfast and dinner services, and a large range of accessories. After the Second World War, the factories were nationalized into Polish United Faience Factories and resumed the production of handpainted products, inspired by vernacular tradition and designed by visual artists. Throughout its existence, the factory employed mainly female workers, and the research project focuses on reassembling their practices, voices and cross-generational solidarities. The aim of the research is not only to include a minor artistic form (faience) and marginalized voices (female ceramic painters) in the art historical narrative but also to propose an intervention in art history. This is realized by integrating artistic research activities into the project – not as a form of disseminating the research results but as a complementary research method.

The project focuses on the specific aspects of women’s creative work, the hierarchical relationship between art, craftsmanship and industry, and the local and international circulation of so-called “Włocławki” in socialist Europe, as well as the importance and functions of these wares for various consumer groups. The emphasis on regional framework stems from the fact that folk and popular culture had a similar status and function in an industrial context in all socialist European countries. At the same time, the coexistence of professional and non-professional artistic practice was a characteristic feature of socialist art institution.

By asking new questions, centred on the gendered labour history in the “Fajans” factory and the historically evolving concepts of artistic work and artistic knowledge – as well as by using artistic strategies such as painting, performance, and installation – the project proposes a comprehensive reinterpretation of this cultural heritage. The answers to these questions will enrich not only our understanding of the culture of this historical period but also our current understanding of the concepts of artistic work, collaboration and artistic knowledge. In addition, the importance of the “Fajans” objects in the history of the region will be determined, so that an alternative transnational cultural history of the People’s Republic of Poland will be proposed.

The project is designed in such a way as to communicate its meanings to various groups of recipients, including local and international audiences. The dissemination of the research results is planned in the form of scientific publications and a research exhibition.