

## **ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF SPIRITUALITY IN POLISH ART 1945-1989 – ABSTRACT FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

Currently, researchers, discerning observers, and participants in culture are increasingly paying attention to the changing meanings and functions of spirituality in human life. The 59<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2022), a tribute to artists seeking new relationships with the world based on harmony and empathy, was evidence of such reflection. The curator Silvia Federici pointed to the need to re-enchant the world by ‘reconnecting what capitalism has divided: our relations with nature, with others, and with our bodies, enabling us not only to escape the gravitational pull of capitalism but to regain a sense of wholeness in our lives’. Referred to as alternative or new spirituality, non-institutional forms of religiosity, spiritual and occult practices and esoteric knowledge are not only becoming relevant to modern man, but their increasingly intense presence is prompting questions about whether they are part of a particular tradition and, if so, how to understand, describe and creatively continue it.

This project seeks to investigate alternative forms of spirituality in Polish art from 1945 to 1989. In the reality of the Polish People’s Republic, the authorities eliminated the sphere of the sacred from public life. The socialist state was to be based on a materialist worldview entailing the secularisation of social life and the private sphere of citizens’ existence. Institutionalised religious practices were considered against the established status quo. However, equally inconvenient – and definitely more difficult to control – were forms of spirituality that escaped the organisational framework of religious communities. Their extra-institutional dimension was treated with distrust not only by state authorities but also by leading religious organisations, such as the Catholic Church or academia. This was the situation in Poland and other socialist countries, although it manifested itself in slightly different ways depending on the context. To date, the place and role of alternative forms of spirituality in the communist social and political reality of Central and Eastern Europe has been the subject of few analyses. Particularly little attention has been paid to research on their significance for work in the visual arts, focusing mainly on more general studies of abstract art, the reception of surrealism or the examination of the attitudes of selected, rather outsider artists.

Preliminary research, however, allows us to believe that artists, although functioning in an ideological field, relatively often sought a space of freedom and individual expression by immersing themselves in a space of spirituality. However, a number of questions need to be asked as to what this spirituality was, to what extent it was related to religiosity, was it linked to specific values associated with spiritual transformation and attributed to art, or was it the effect of a certain stylisation, or perhaps a manifest gesture of political resistance?

In this project, we aim to answer these questions. We intend to look at various artistic milieus operating in Poland to reflect on their connections with the Western esoteric tradition and with local and Central European cultural and philosophical currents and artistic tendencies. The research team set up for this purpose will undertake a series of national and international research visits to collect and compile the materials needed to understand this undiscovered path in Polish art history.