

# Persons Projects

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**KwieKulik – Portfolio of selected works (1971-1987)**



**KwieKulik** is an artistic duo consisting of Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, who were active in this constellation between 1971 and 1987, which was also the time of their partnership. In this period, KwieKulik carried out countless performances and artistic demonstrations and produced many objects, films and photographs. They postulated connecting politics with art, their practices being a deep resistance to Soviet totalitarian communism and a commitment to the fundamental values of democratic socialism, including self-organization and the solidarity of public life. Their work also always included others and they believed in the possibility of smooth cooperation with other artists, in the possibility of collective work, free from the problem of authorship. Yet their proposal of truly democratic, modern, scientific, self-organizing systems were thwarted both by the regime and the Polish neo-avant-garde milieu. As a response to this rejection, KwieKulik set up a private gallery in their home, which they named the *Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation (PDDiU)*. It was an artistic-political project that transgressed the distinction between the public and the private, making art that challenged the state's monopoly for 'common' themes. In the frame of this special place, they organised lectures and exhibitions and embarked on the documentation of the artistic life in the 1970/80s. Their creativity was of a radical, social and political dimension, it was a laboratory form of contemporary art.





***Game on Actress' Face, 1971, 35 mm film stills (from the Open Form)***

With the series of videos from the *Open Form*, Kulik experienced a release from traditional art objects. It was Zofia Kulik and Przemyslaw Kwiek's professor Oskar Hansen at Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts who propagated the theory of Open Form, the somewhat utopian idea that art and architecture should shape the collectively shared cognitive space of society vis-à-vis human activity. Art and architecture were thus responsible for responding to the needs of society. *Game on an Actress' Face* is a perfect example of the processual, collective visual game in which each successive take shows a 'move' made by another artist. Every move required the next participant to relate to existing facts. The artists communicated using both visual forms, as well as various kinds of actions. The freedom of expression signified by Open Form was both compounded and belied by disturbing images of silencing: the film stills involve imagery like a bay leaf - one thinks of the poet's laurels - glued to the actress's mouth by a hand in a glove.



***Activities with Dobromierz , 1972-74, three screen slide show, HD, 32:00 min***

After the birth of their son Dobromierz, KwieKulik incorporated the child in their art activities, working within their apartment, creating an extraordinary experimental piece constituting over 900 photographs (color slides and black-and-white negatives) of their son in different situations, partly coming out of everyday reality and partly arranged by the artists. KwieKulik, in similar fashion to Abramovic/Ulay, did not treat their private life as a safe enclave separated from art. *Activities with Dobromierz* attempted to relate mathematics and logic operations (which use variables, e.g.  $x, y, z$ ), creating similar artistic operations but using material forms (objects, textures, colors), including the already existing particular condition of life. In addition to this, they combined *Activities with Dobromierz* with the linguistic typology of spatial prepositions (derived from the theory of A. Weinsberg).



*Activities with Dobromierz*, exhibition view at Van Abbe Museum, 2012



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*Activities with Dobromierz*, exhibition view at Documenta 12, Kassel 2007



***Ameryka*, 1972, 115 x 168 cm**

*Ameryka* was a quarterly magazine that, according to the masthead, presented 'the leading ideas and opinions about social, political, economic, and cultural issues'. The magazine was published in Polish by the US Information Agency in Washington and distributed in Poland by the American Embassy. Browsing through the magazine, KwieKulik were struck by the images of happy people and the effectiveness of problem solving as shown. *Ameryka* therefore represented an ideal of reality. The artists wanted to create their own image in that semblance of the American dream. Their photographs show them as happy parents who travel the world and who have succeed in their career. Here, the artists mocked the aesthetics of *Ameryka*, but at the same time they were creating an image typical of all propaganda in that the goal was to idealize its 'own' reality, something that also mythologized it and evoked envy among the citizens of other political systems, then known as the 'enemy'. The project has never been terminated.





*Amerika and The Monument Without a Passport*, exhibition view at ŽAK | BRANICKA, Berlin 2016



**Activities with the AK Kinga Plaque, 1974, 24 photographs, 40 x40 cm each**

With this happening, KwieKulik developed a relational interaction on a hackwork commissioned piece for the first time. While carving in the sandstone slab the inscription in honor of the murdered National Army Soldiers, they documented the material-spatial Activities they were performing on the plaque using different objects such as mandarins, onions, plaster heads made by their artist-friend Wojciechowski, letters cut out of black paper, a red scarf, their piece Unknown X, and even their son Dobromierz. The stone plaque (together with the inscription) therefore started to shift in meaning. The commemorative plate (and inscription) turned into a prop, an 'element' embedded into a different chain of references. This Activity was accompanied by a unique catalogue, handmade by KwieKulik, entitled 'Carving and Activity, Earning and Creating, Have Your Cake and Eat it Too'.



Activities with the AK Kinga Plaque, 1974 , slide projection

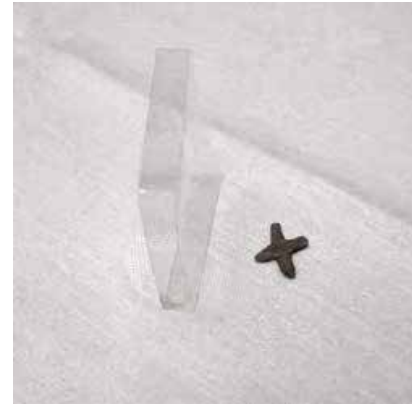


*Activities with the AK Kinga Plaque, exhibition Decades of Revolt view at Kulturhuset Stockholm, 2014*



### *A Bird of Plaster for Bronze, 1975*

When KwieKulik took part in a group exhibition in Malmö, Sweden, they published two pieces from the *Commentary Art* series in the catalogue. The first photograph showed the interior of the sculpture studio at the Visual Arts Workshops (PSP), where KwieKulik performed an activity whilst making a hackwork (see *Activities with the AK Kinga Plaque*). Behind the plate Kulik can be seen standing, sadly gazing upon it. In the background, on the left, a large gypsum eagle leans against the wall (the emblem of the People's Republic of Poland, made by another artist), which was scheduled to be cast in bronze. In the inscription 'A Bird of Plaster for Bronze in the Barracks of Fine Arts', the duo replaced the word 'Workshops' in the name of this muchhated institution with the word 'Barracks', which unequivocally expressed artists' attitude to the 'firm', that was established to manufacture propaganda objects by means of traditional artistic methods and that, at the same time, did not create 'decent' working conditions for the artists.



### *Unknown X, 1974*

This installation developed from the idea that two ontologically different problems can merge into one: the spatial relations implied by the prepositions in any language (linguistic research by A. Weinsberg) with the effects of the artists' own material-spatial Activities. The work consisted of a table covered with white cloth on which small models of all possible spatial relations between an unknown X (symbolized by X-shaped modelling clay) and abstract situations (symbolized by transparent solids and planes of plexiglass) were arranged. It formed a kind of catechism of the object's relationship to the situation in which it is located. These relationships could be understood linguistically by prepositions like: on, under, in, between, among, etc. KwieKulik invited viewers to take part in the 'contemplation' of the work and to test each model by making three mental operations: replacing the symbol X by something which could happen (e.g., a beefsteak on a plate, rubbish in a bin, a lamp under the ceiling); something which might have happened but usually did not (e.g., a baby in a toilet, a shoe on a head); and something which could not happen in reality but can be imagined (e.g., an elephant in a glass). The work was also titled *Set of Spatial Models of the Unknown*.



### *The Light of a Dead Star, 1979*

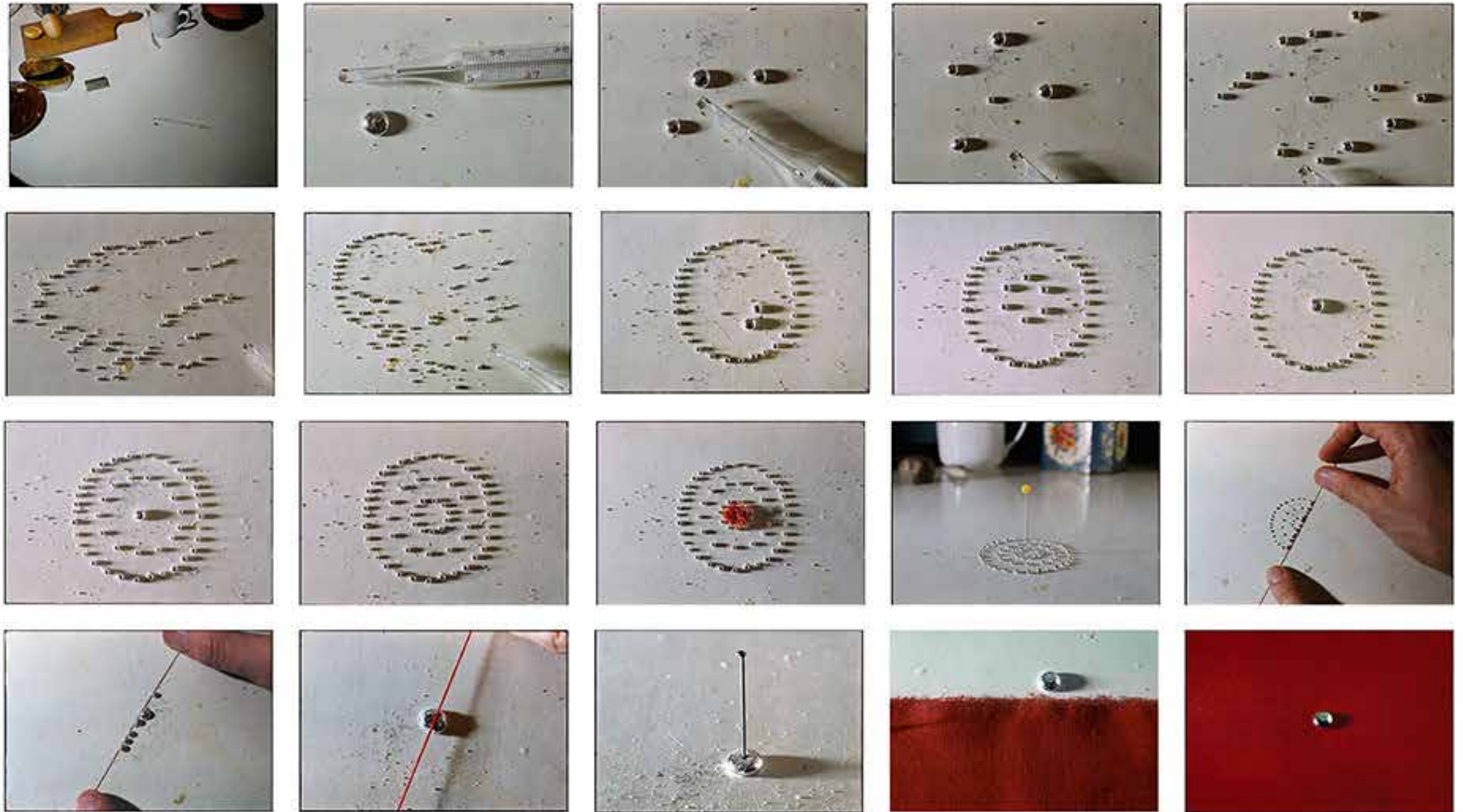
In 1979, the international event 'Works and Words' at de Appel was the first large-scale Western presentation of neo-avant-garde art from Socialist countries. For KwieKulik, this was the first trip abroad after they had been denied passports in 1975. Up until the very last minute though, they did not know if they would be allowed to leave the country. Their first pass-port applications had been rejected, and they had to lodge an appeal in order to finally obtain a positive decision. The artists went to Amsterdam in their own Fiat 126P, camping in a tent along the way, eating powdered soups and canned food cooked on a Russian primus stove.

KwieKulik's presentation took place at Kapel Huis van Bewaring, a large hall of a former prison. It took the form of a Multiperformance, where elements from previous presentations were incorporated into one multi-stage show. Various 'working' media were grouped at the entrance to the hall: projectors, a tape recorder, a radio, a TV set, etc. Entering the hall, each spectator had to go through the boundary of various sounds and projected images (some similarities exist between this piece and *Activities for the Head: The Media*) [see event 126]. At the back of the hall hung a cloth panel sewn out of smaller vertical stripes of a very decorative patterned fabric, rich in color. Each stripe represented one year of KwieKulik's creative work from 1968 to 1979. Plenty of black-and-white photos and additional documentation were stuck to the cloth. Along the upper part of the panel, there ran a sign in large typeface: 'THE LIGHT OF A DEAD STAR'. It referred to the belated presentation in the West of KwieKulik's pioneering work from the early 1970s.



KwieKulik, *Quotes from the Archive*, ZAK | BRANICKA, 2019





*Siewierz – A Plate and Activities with Mercury, 1975, 20 photographs, 41 x 60 cm (each)*

The artists shaped drops of mercury falling from an accidentally shattered thermometer into patterns. The arrangement of the balls alluded to *Activities with Dobromierz* and also related to certain mathematical and logical operations. This relation occurred as the activity began with stills from the television screen, because, simultaneously with the occurrence of the action, the TV was broadcasting a didactic program for mathematics teachers titled 'A Study of Early Teaching of Mathematics: Symbols and Names Used in Set Theory'.

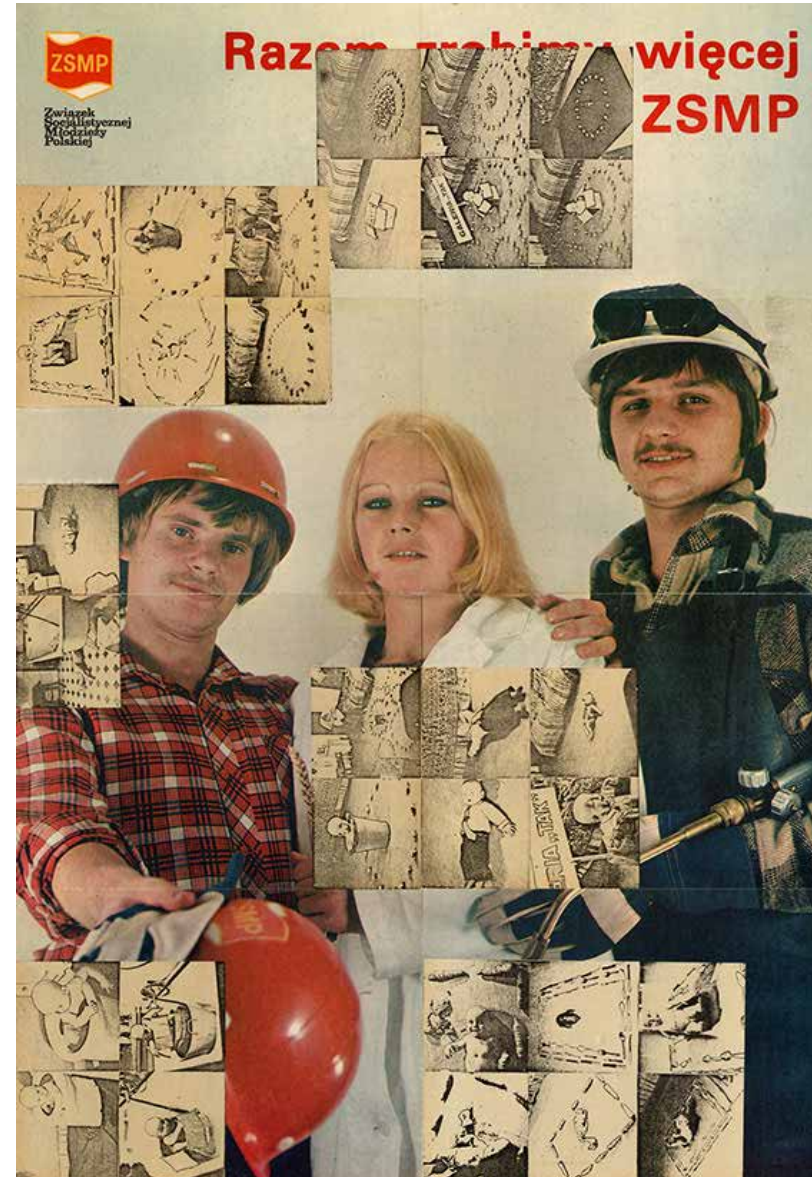


***Activities with a Tube*, 1975, 42 photographs 40x40 cm each, and cardboard tube object 148 x 40 x 28 cm**

*Activities with a Tube* belongs to a group of works KwieKulik developed in relation to commissioned hackwork jobs. It was the first of these works that was neither linked to martyrdom nor propaganda. A large tube, made from pieces of cardboard and painted with oil paint, a seemingly Pop art piece, looked as if it were made of plastic and was meant to advertise toothpaste. Using it like a strange fetish, a group consisting of KwieKulik's sister, Urszula, Zofia Kulik, and three-year-old Maksymilian Dobromierz performed (apart from material-spatial *Activities*) thematic gestures towards the tube: saluting, bowing, standing at attention, shooting, teeth-brushing. The day after this *Activity*, the tube was taken away.



*Activities with a Tube*, 1975, exhibition view at Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 2018



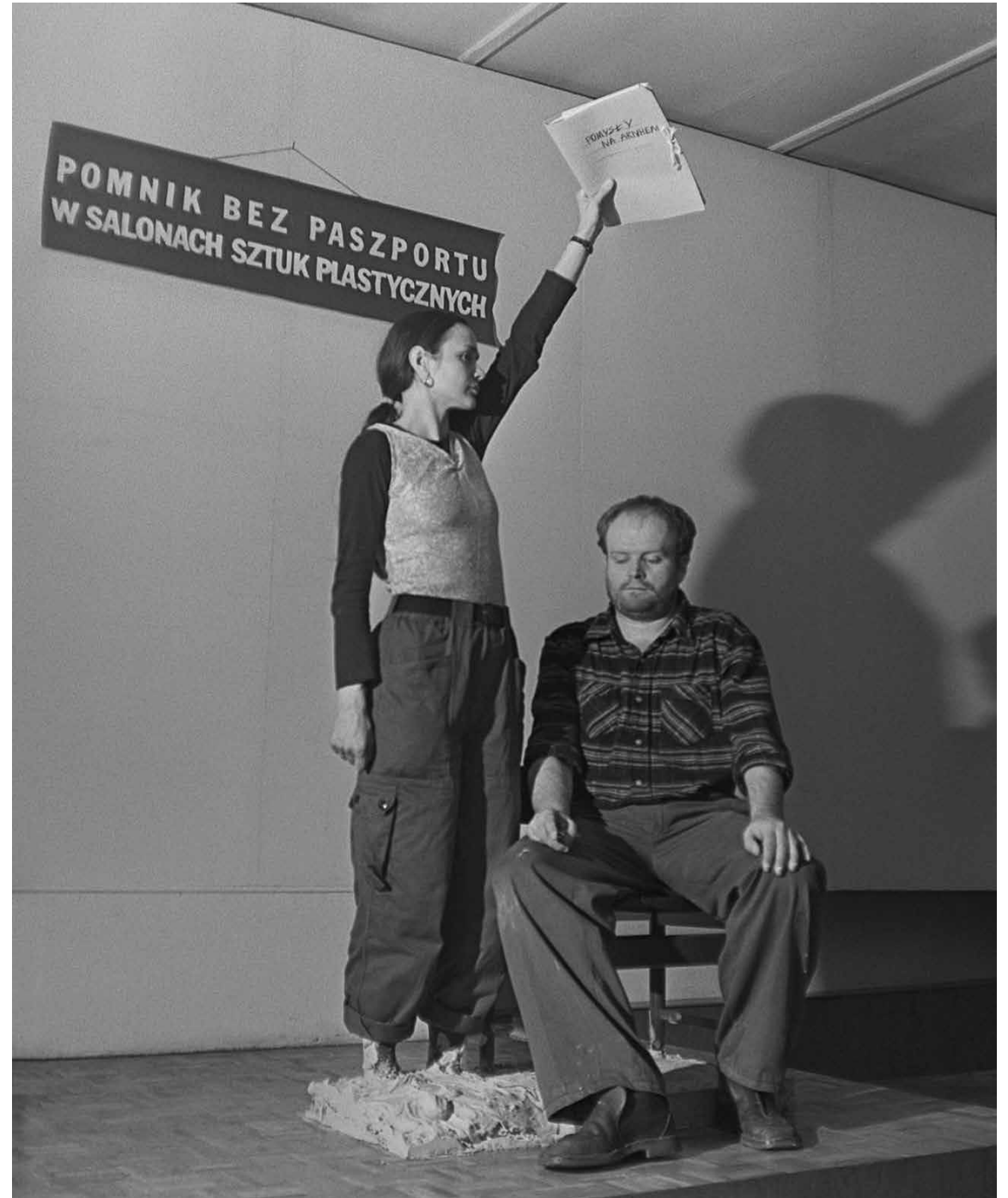
*Together We Will Do More*, 1977, collage, offset print and photocopies, 83 x 57 cm

This composition was made for an exhibition at the Hallwalls Gallery in Buffalo, New York. The artists used a Polish Socialist Youth Union (ZSMP) propaganda poster (from which they took the title) and stuck onto it a few pages of photographs from the work *Activities with Dobromierz*, which were photocopied on old yellowed paper by means of a technique known as thermocopying. They cut the manipulated poster into eight equal pieces, so that they could send their work to the US in an envelope by regular mail. The unnumbered parts of the poster created a kind of puzzle which could be randomly arranged to obtain more or less a grotesque design.



***The Monument Without a Passport, 1978 installation of 26 framed photographs***

In 1978, KwieKulik were invited to the All-Polish Biennale of Young Art in Sopot and at the same time also to Arnhem for 'Behavior Workshop' festival. Being convinced they would go to Arnhem, they wrote on the invitation from the Biennale: 'trash can', but, when denied their passports, they decided to go to Sopot. At the Sopot Biennale the performance *The Monument without a Passport* was carried out. It belonged to the *Activities for the Head* series. 'The Head' (in this case Kulik's head) was sticking through a tabletop onto which slides were projected therefore transforming into a screen. At a certain juncture Kwiek put Kulik's legs in plaster, thereby forming a small plinth. Thus her head and legs were now immobilized — in an act of changing 'state'; from the penetration of the body with images to its transformation into a sculptural figure, which then remained for the duration of the performance. Kulik stretched her hand up, showing a file entitled 'IDEAS FOR ARNHEM'; Kwiek cut a string tied around a roll of paper hanging on the wall, the roll unfolded, revealing the inscription 'THE MONUMENT WITHOUT A PASSPORT IN THE SALONS OF VISUAL ARTS'. Finally Kwiek sat down on a 'fixed' chair next to Kulik, the plinth in which the legs of the chair were embedded being adjacent to the one around Kulik's feet. This monument-like situation was then held in this static pose for a dozen or so minutes.



KwieKulik, *The monument without a passport*, 1978, print, 95 x 65 cm

***Polish Duo, 1984***

In the beginning of this performance the artists danced with red-and-white flags attached to their heads, whilst a small fan in front of the flags made them flap as if blown by the wind and the artists moved like figure skaters. After several other stages, the end of one flag was fastened to a wooden slat on Kwiek's head, the other, to a slat on Kulik's head. As the artists bent their heads backwards slowly two white-and-gray flags slipped from underneath the white-and-red flag. At the conclusion of this backwards motion the 'white-and-red cocoon' fell down on to the floor. The artists then left the room, each with a white-and-gray flag.



***Semantic Monster, 1984***

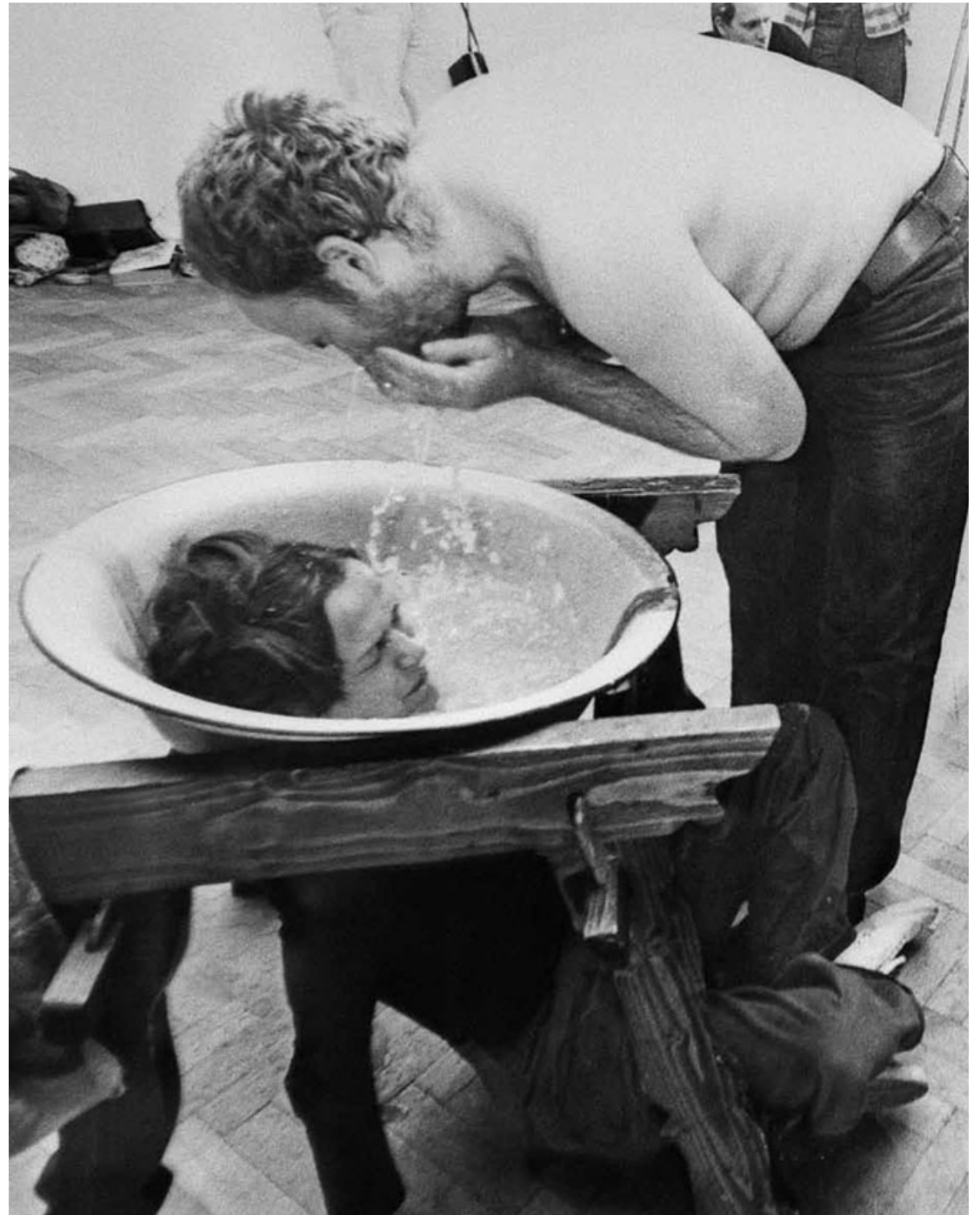
During this performance, KwieKulik composed what they called a 'living bas-relief': a landscape painting (2.5 × 4.5 m) lay on the floor and a metal pipe protruded upwards from it at a distance of 60 cm from its lower edge. The pipe bent at a right angle 80 cm along its length. A red-and-white flag (40 × 60 cm) hung from the horizontal part of the pipe; it flapped slightly in the 'wind' produced by a fan placed above it. Kwiek and Kulik held the pipe at its base with their stretched arms. They lay parallel and close to each other, tied together with a rope from their waists down to a 3-m long stick placed between them. A huge white-and-gray, S-shaped flag was fastened to the free end of the stick and spread out on the floor (it was their third use of the motif of a white-and-gray flag). Near the artists' feet lay a small plaque stating 'SEMANTIC MONSTER'. KwieKulik remained motionless until the audience left the room.





***Activity for the Head, 1987***

In the first part of this protest performance, the entering audience, who had been asked to put small red flags behind their ears (New Red Art), found Kwiek and Kulik lying on the floor with their heads 'locked-up' in two chairs. Two large sheets of brown paper were spread across the back wall of the room like curtains. When almost all of the chairs were occupied, KwieKulik stood up and hid behind the first curtain. After a short interval Kwiek tore the paper down, unveiling Kulik sitting on the floor with her head 'emerging through' a washbasin. Kwiek poured some water into the basin, washed his face, took off his shirt and washed his armpits; finally, he took off his shoes and socks and washed his feet. Kwiek then poured a little more water into the basin so that Kulik was able to breathe but could not speak. To the back of her head he then positioned the sharp tip of a knife and started yelling: 'Come on! Say something, you bitch, speak... you can't... can you?' KwieKulik then turned to the public explaining that their performance was a response to being banned from freedom of speech and compared this to other countries, such as Chile, where such a situation also existed. The third part started with the tearing down of the second curtain revealing Kwiek and Kulik sitting on chairs with buckets over their heads. Two other artists then proceeded to circle KwieKulik, tossing rubbish at them taken from a litter bin in the gallery hall.





***Banana and Pome-grenade, 1986, 10 photos on archival inkjet print, 116 x 80 cm each***

For this performance, KwieKulik were sitting immobile wearing buckets on their heads. Their son, Maksymilian Dobromierz, opened and closed a white curtain decorated with silver stars and crescents. After each opening of the curtain, another arrangement of four objects placed on the buckets and in the artists' hands was presented to the audience: a stone in a glass filled with water, an axe, pigs' snouts, a broken milk bottle, a sculpture of a copulating couple, passports, etc. In total there were twelve consecutive scenes. Some of these referred to personal experiences, others related to more abstract concepts, all created an endless chain of poetic associations. KwieKulik used national emblems and symbols of Catholicism made of poor materials, abstract forms, and quotidian objects. The performance was paradigmatic for KwieKulik's shift in methodology in the 1980s, transforming the conceptual analysis of society and the politics of the image into an enigmatic political theatre of form and object. The artists described the performance as reistic theatre. They used the term 'reism' or 'concretism' after Tadeusz Kotarbiński, who formulated a philosophical opinion that only things exist, while events, properties, relationships, and other abstract entities cannot exist independently.



***Autobiographical Aggregate (part I)***, installation 240h x 1400 x 105 cm

"Aggregate" - according to W. Kopaliński's "Foreign Words Dictionary" (Ed. XVII, 1989, p. 19) - means "a whole combined of heterogeneous parts." This word clearly points to a specific nature of the work of the artistic duo KwieKulik. (Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik). The installation consists of sculptures and photographs; drawings, prints and written documents (photocopies), as well as 8 and 16 mm films copied on DVD and presented on monitors.

A slogan "FROM the art of THE OBJECT TO the art of THE PROCESS" is also a part of the installation. The materials are pre-sented on a background of wrapping paper, commonly yet mistakenly called "grey" in Poland; in fact, it is brown. Although Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek use in their art so-called "other (new) media", they have apprenticed traditional sculpture.



*Autobiographical Aggregate (part I)*, installation view from the exhibition *Coloured Grey 1956-1970* at Zacheta, Warsaw 2000



*Variants of Red / The Path of Edward Gierek*, 1971, two-screen slide projection, HD

The projections *Variants of Red* and *The Path of Edward Gierek* consist of dozens of slides from the documentation of new art collected by KwieKulik, both their own Activities and interactions with other artists. Slides, all including an element of red (e.g., material, inscription, object, etc.), which appeared in various contexts, were shown on one screen. In turn, *The Path of Edward Gierek* included reproductions of the front pages of Polish newspapers from 1971, just after the bloody events of December 1970, which resulted in political changes in Poland, during which Edward Gierek was chosen first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).



***Videodecoration, 1978, video transfer to digital and photography, archival inkjet print on board, 40 x 30 cm***

On the occasion of the X Congress of the Polish Journalists Association (SDP), KwieKulik designed and created the decorations for the congress platform. The SDP logo was made as a relief using papier-mâché, and the letters were then gilded. As always for these 'jobs', the deadline for completion was very short, hence the artists did not manage to make any documentation during the process, something they always tried to do. So, the following day, KwieKulik filmed the television report of the congress from the screen of their portable Vela television set. The guests of the SDP Congress included the secretary of the Party's Central Committee Culture Department, whose decision - announced in a special publication for culture activists - mentioned the duo among several other artists who should not be supported by the Party. In 2005, the artists filmed a paper mock-up of the 1978 congress with a digital camera and edited it together with the original Super 8 film clip in which they then repeated scenes from the official ceremony aired by the state television more than a quarter century earlier.



***Poses, 1979, 4 channel slide projection, HD, digitalized***

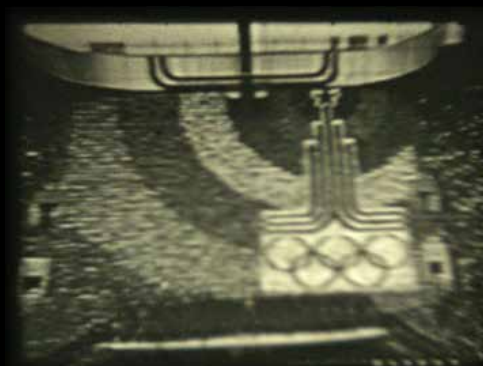
*Poses* was a four channel slide projection of different sets of slides documenting four related Activities. It deals with the subjects of originality, appropriation, reenactment, and the position of the observer. The first screen featured an Activity by Jacek Malicki on the reproduction of a Paweł Freisler portrait. While documenting this Activity on color slides, Kwiek performed various complicated poses, and Kulik simultaneously took photographs of Kwiek on black-and-white negatives. The documentation of the process was projected onto the second screen. The third screen showed Kwiek making the exact same poses but in a different situation, this time against a red panel from a hackwork commission. The fourth screen showed the documentation of an action Kwiek performed using the same poses at a meeting of Polish artists in Lublin. This time, the artist 'transformed himself into a projector' by randomly choosing slides from the previous series and reenacting the recorded body poses before the public.



*All Souls' Day—Chrysanthemums and Wrinkles, 1978, video 16 min*

KwieKulik often visited various cemeteries to document the people, graves and the very particular atmosphere to be felt in these places. On All Souls' Day 1978, Kulik took photographs of candles on graves and chrysanthemums, typical seasonal plants considered 'cemetery flowers'. KwieKulik filmed Kulik taking pictures. Later they took some of the chrysanthemums and candles home to the PDDiU. Once at home, they placed them on the floor and photographed them within their new surroundings. Afterwards KwieKulik filmed the wrinkles around Kulik's eyes, that resembled little chrysanthemum petals — wrinkles caused in part by her constantly squinting whilst looking through a camera viewfinder.





*Demonstrations*, 1979-1982, four parallel projections: *May Day Parade*, 1979, 12:27; *Pope in Poland*, 1979, 08:05; *Moscow Olympic Game*, 1980, 08:57; *Brezhnev's Funeral on TV*, 1982, 06:49  
An interest in the aesthetics of official propaganda events, political gatherings, and demonstrations was a permanent feature of Kwiekulik's practice. After firstly working with photography, the artists made these films and turned them into the *Demonstrations* series which consist of four parts documenting political events.



***Supermarket, 1981, video, 04:58 min***

Supermarket is a video performance KwieKulik realized in Stuttgart when they were invited to the group exhibition, 'New Art from Poland', at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart. During the action, they strolled through a supermarket (full of 'foreign' goods) with a supermarket cart, occasionally putting products into their cart, whilst discussing the totally absurd and completely disproportionate exchange rate between Polish currency and the Deutsche Mark; afterwards, they put the goods back onto the shelves, eventually leaving the shop with their hands empty. This work came into being as a result of the contrast experienced by the artists between the shortage of goods in Poland and their excess in the West.



*Trip Around Europe, 1981, Video, 09:19 min*

On the way back from a group exhibition of Polish artists in Belgium, KwieKulik visited several centers of artistic life and assorted friends around Europe. They were travelling by car, in which they had a tent and camping equipment, which gave them the freedom to plan their itinerary. They also carried an abundance of artistic materials, slides, a projector, photographic equipment. By organizing the trip in this way, they were thus enabled to give presentations of their documentation and function basically in the same way as at the PDDiU in Warsaw.



KwieKulik, *SHE and HE*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 2018



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