

RYSZARD WASKO

PORTFOLIO OF SELECTED WORKS

Persons
Projects

RYSZARD WASKO

Born 1947 in Nysa, PL. Lives and works in Berlin, DE.



Ryszard Wasko is one of those artists whose creative attitude was shaped in the nineteen seventies. His work was a part of that decade and helped to form Polish art in the following years. The unconventionality and radicality of his works is still a challenge to modern art historians because they demand equally unconventional methods of interpretation. A scholar analyzing artistic events in Poland of the last twenty five years, who might try to describe and interpret Wasko's work by placing it in the space marked by any of the artistic genre categories, would have to admit quickly that such an attempt is completely futile. Wasko's works are not limited to any of the artistic genres he uses because they easily cross the borders between them: And his individual realizations, even if they remain - due to the materials used and some general genre manifestations - within a certain kind of art, they still cannot be explained by referring to the characteristics of that branch of art which is realized in them. On the contrary, quite often the fundamental principles which make up the structure of the artefacts come from a different branch of art than the one in which the works were actually created and where we would be inclined to place them. This suggestion leads to the hypothesis that the character of Ryszard Wasko's work in general, as well as the character of his individual works, is often defined by inter-generic, inter-media relations. Those works set in motion a whole net of intertextual relations on the level of general structural and ontological determinants, and on the level of different types of perception and rules of interpretation. In other words, in order to grasp a work which belongs to a certain artistic genre in its specificity, one should refer to its non-specific features which are characteristic for another kind of art. Another hypothesis in regard to his work may state that if a work by Ryszard Wasko belongs to a different kind of art than film, it is precisely film which plays the role of the "intertext" with regard to the work. In such a case one might also want to examine how the process of intertextual references is realized with regard to films.

Ryszard Wasko studied at the Łódź Film School, Poland. Here, he became a member of the Workshop (*Workshop for Film-Making*, 1970–1976). In 1981, he organized the famous exhibition *Construction in Process*, which later underwent further editions in Germany. Wasko has received awards from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation three times, and has exhibited in the Centre Georges Pompidou (1983), at the documenta 6 in Kassel (1977), the Venice Biennial (1991, 1999, 2001, 2007), the São Paulo Biennale (1973), and the Sydney Biennial (1980). For two years, he was Artistic Director at PSI in New York.

PHOTO WORKS 1970s – 80s

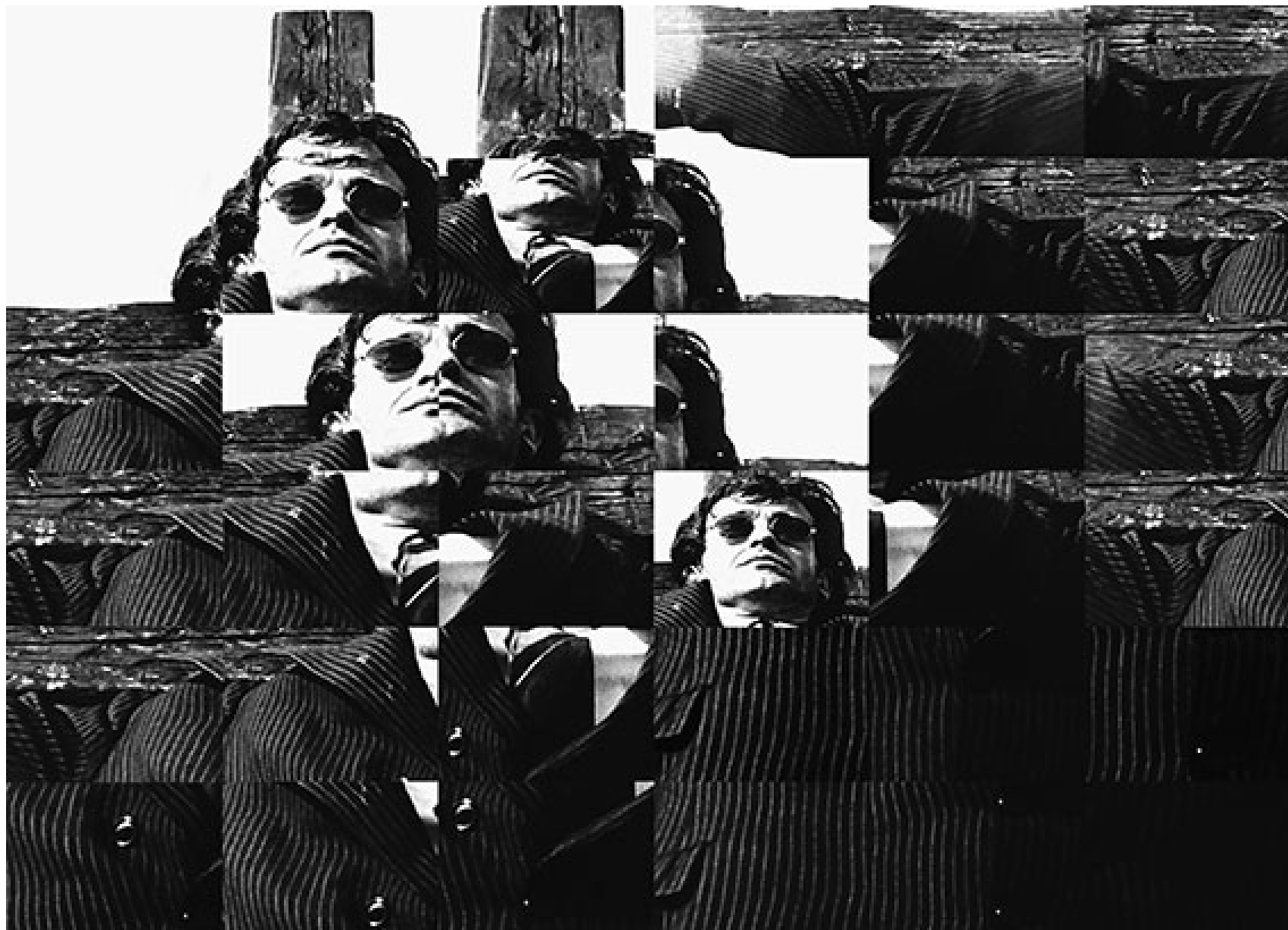
The 1970s were a key period for Wasko. As a member of Warsztat Formy Filmowej [Film Form Studio] (1970–1976) tied to Łódzka Szkoła Filmowa [Film School in Łódź] (whose other members included Paweł Kwiek, Józef Robakowski, and Zbigniew Rybczyński), Wasko concentrated on the conceptual analysis of the medium: at this time he created films, video art, photographs, installations, and drawings in which time, space, movement, and perception were the main subjects. These elements were analytically broken down into their basic components, allowing the artist to deconstruct the media photography and video.



***The Accident (a police record)*, 1971, photography, silver gelatine print, 64 x 97 cm**

The Accident is a photographic construction from 1971, which transgresses the standard of a photographic presentation through the multiplication of the picture. Significantly, not one of the individual photographs presents us with the whole picture of the event – instead, they each show only a particular detail. Piecing these fragments together also does not form the complete picture. The potential whole is accessible only as a mental image, a notion. Our gaze is not located or

fixed on a certain point, but moves from one place to the other. Dissimilarly to in film, however, this change of vantage point is not developed in a linear way – it moves in many different directions and is not limited in time. In this work we see where the aspect of infinite presentation, which is characteristic of many of Wasko's works, and its static-dynamic order stem from.



Cut up Portrait, 1971, photography, silver gelatine print, 99 x 140 cm

From 0° to 180°, 1971, photography, silver gelatine print, 84 x 18 cm

From 0° to 180° is a photography series which pairs a person's field of perception and the frame of the camera. The artist documents the field of vision by moving his head up and down, and from left to right by means of a constant, linear movement of the point of view of the camera. The artist's record of movement is recreated by the viewer and therefore forces him to enter into a dialogue with the work.

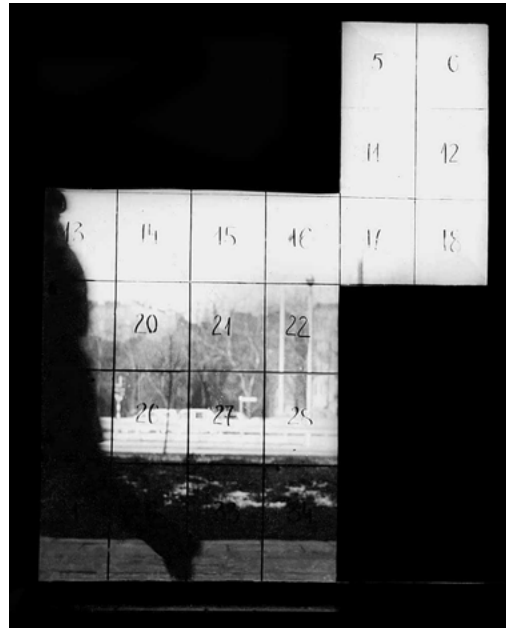
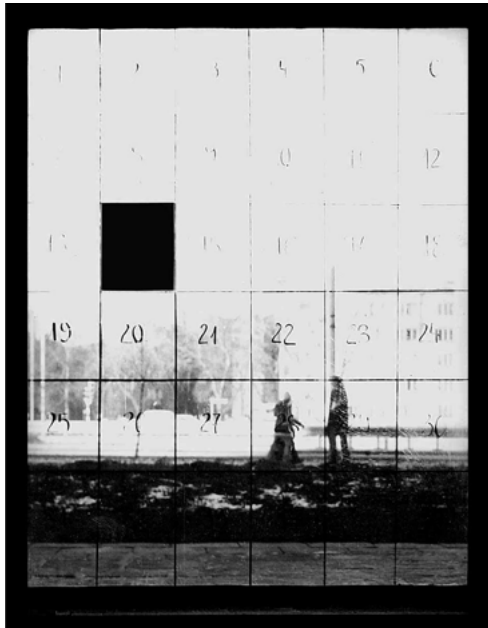




***Four Dimensional Photography*, 1972, photography, silver gelatine print, 70 x 100 cm**

Movement is also inherent in the structure of Wasko's series of works entitled *A Four Dimensional Photograph* (all from 1972). Six horizontally placed photographs presenting a city landscape reveal the growing disturbance (motion) which is introduced into the static photograph by movement and, thus, by element of time. In the first print there are two blocks of flats partially obscured by a telegraph pole in the foreground. Each of the following photographs shows the same view,

taken at the same location, only with a different exposure time. Gradually the picture becomes more distorted and blurred. Distortion expands until the last frame, where there are no more identifiable objects, only dark indefinite spots. Thanks to the distinct foreground and background one can imagine the depth of the field.



Action on the Pane, 1975, photography, silver gelatine print, 26 x 83.5 cm



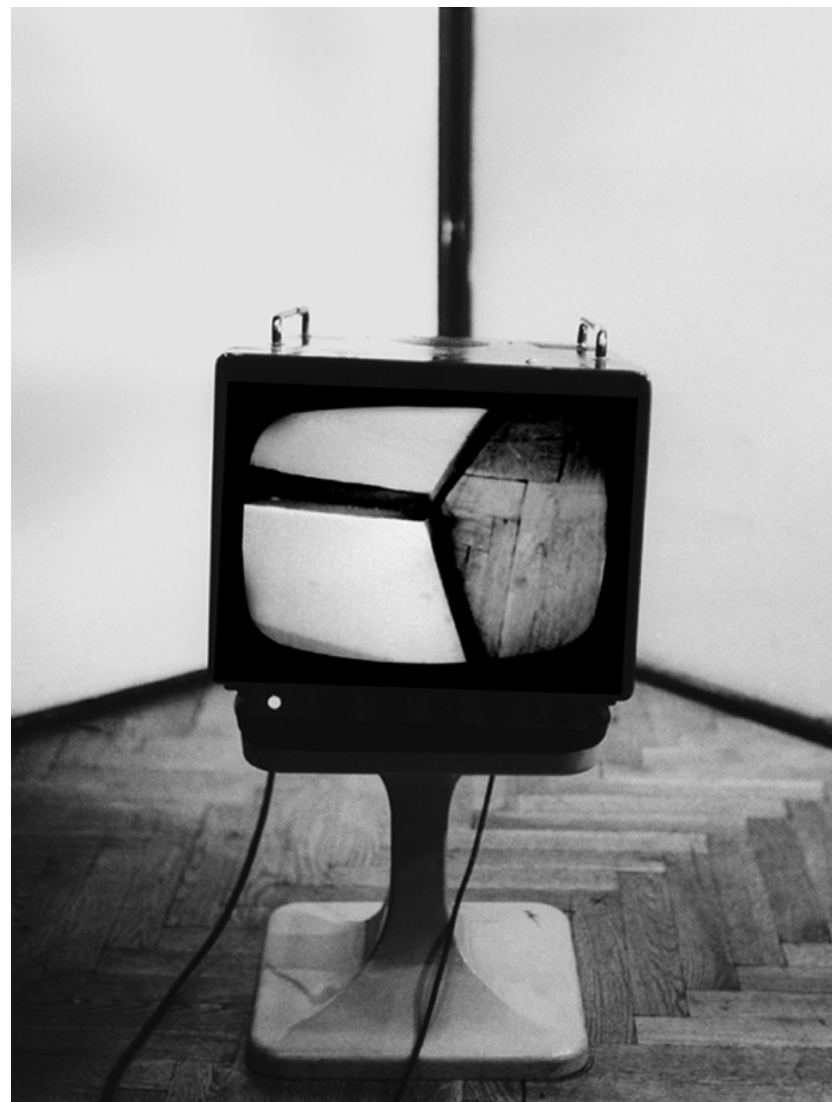
Making an Inventory of Space with the numbers 1 - 8, 1976,
photography, silver gelatine print, 24.3 x 33 (each)

This is another example of a work of Wasko in which multiple photographic systems situate the observer in a sequence of ever changing vantage points, but always in the same place. The viewer is placed within the world he observes and the overall vision is created by the imagination of the observer; it is not simply the object of his vision.



Enlargement-Decrease, 1976, photography, silver gelatine print, 33 x 210 cm

In many of Wasko's photographic works, the sense of deconstructing photographs plays a major role. This is also the case in this series of images which manipulates spatial structures in relation to the perception process. Graphic elements enter into the structure of photography, disturbing the relation or representation.



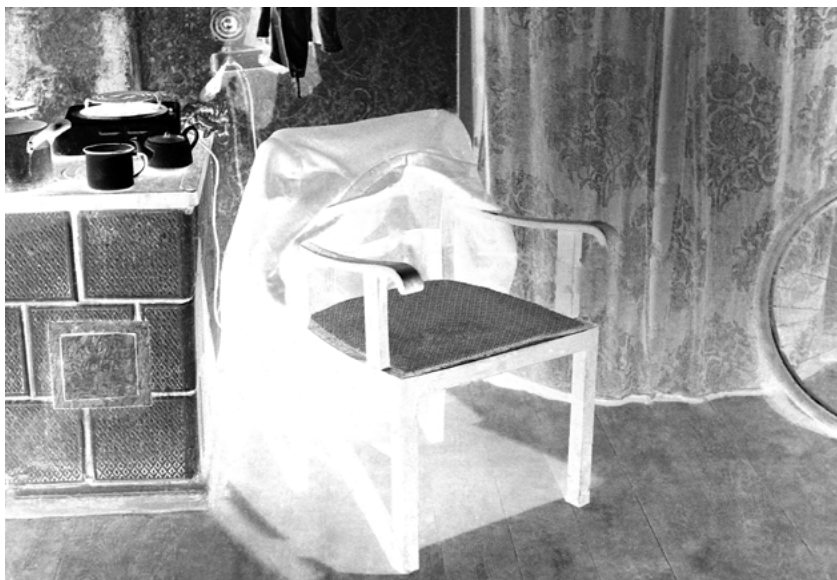
***A Corner*, 1976, photography, silver gelatine print, 27 x 18 cm (each)**

In *A Corner*, Wasko problematises the phenomenon of direct transmission, analysing simultaneously the relation between reality and its representation, between real space and presented space. Another important aspect of this work is the spatial character of the installation itself (the

monitor) – it is a point where real space meets the representation of space, so the installation not only deconstructs the medium of video, but it also comes into an inter-textual relation with sculpture and environment art.



Negative / Positive (chair), 1972,
photography, silver gelatine print, 20 x 30 cm (each)

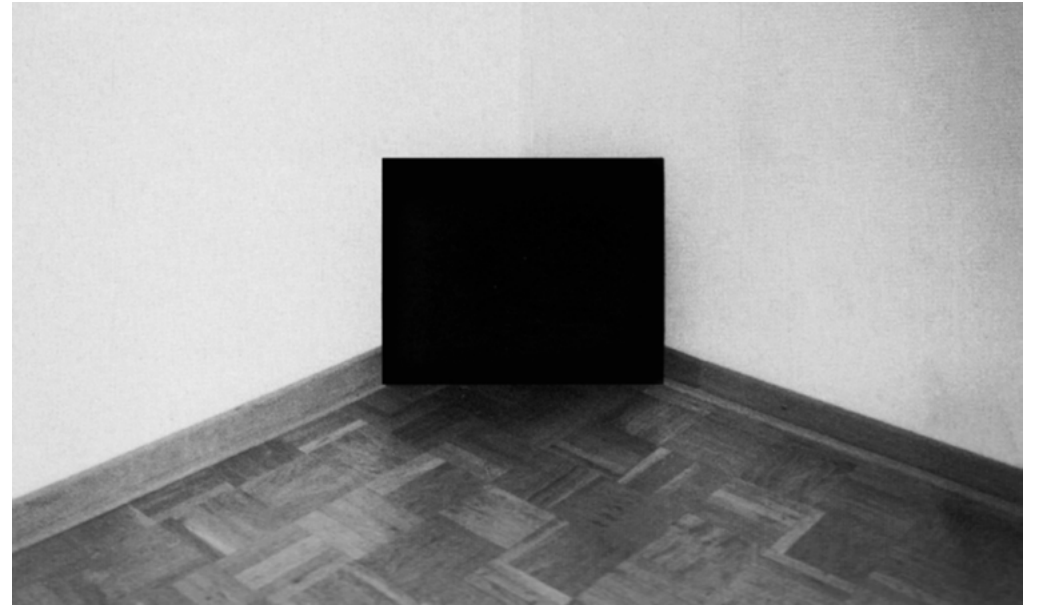
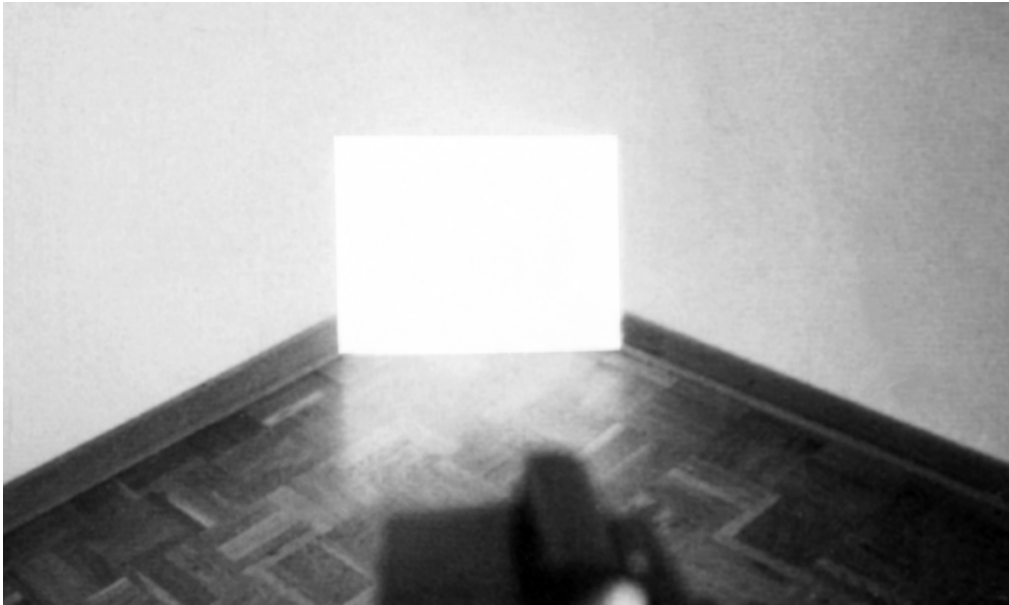


Negative / Positive (shoes), 1972,
photography, silver gelatine print, 20.5 x 29 cm (each)





Black into White Corner (to Joseph Beuys), 1984, photography, silver gelatine print, 20 x 30 cm

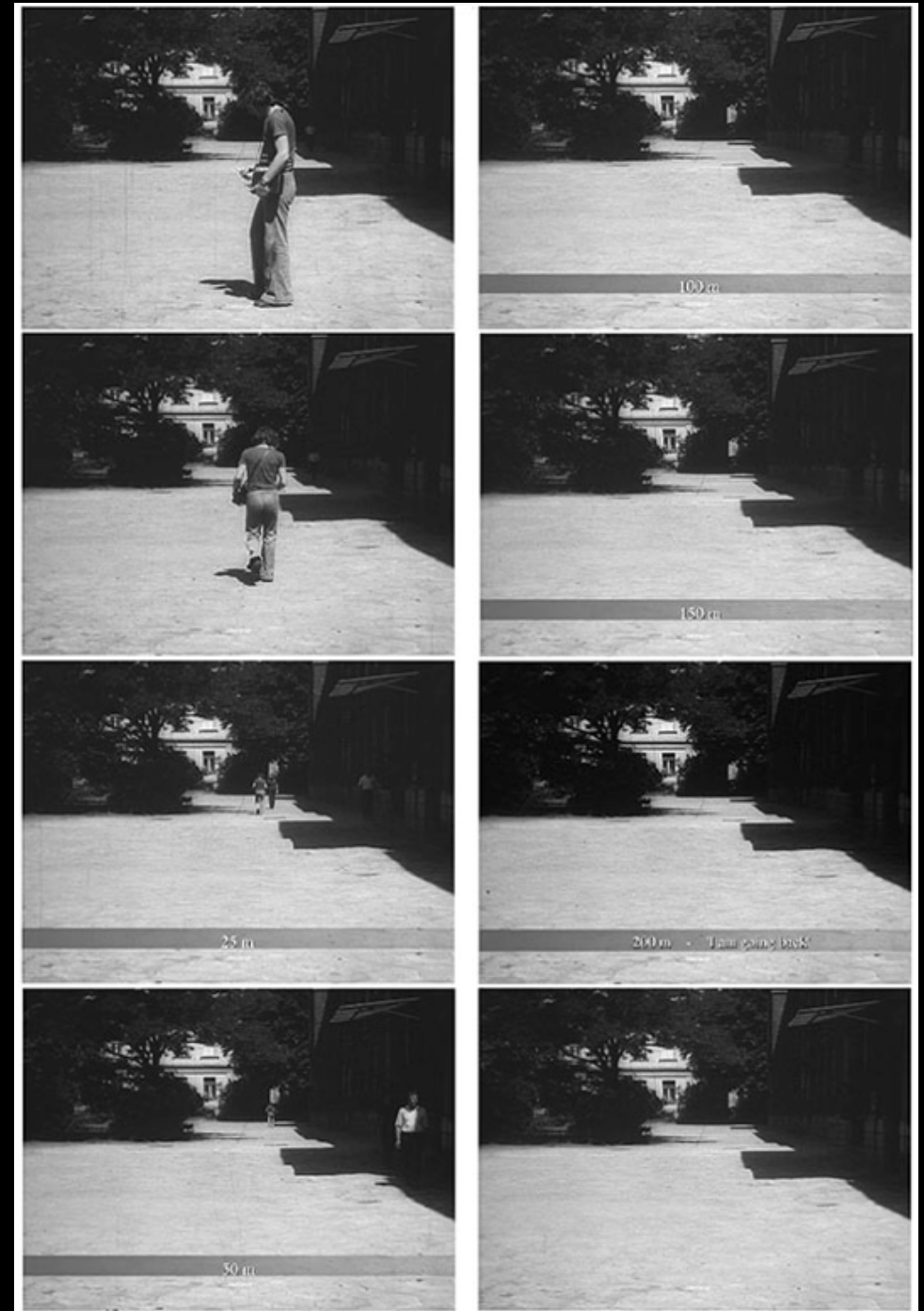


Black into White Corner (to Joseph Beuys), 1984, photography, silver gelatine print, 20 x 30 cm

VIDEO WORKS 1970s

From A to B and back to B, 1974, video, 7:19 min

In this work the artist analyses the relationship between space, sound (the microphone), and image (the camera). This film/performance can be seen in relation to other experimental films in Poland from the era, but also has a real affinity with like-minded pioneering works made in the West at that time. Everything "filmic" is removed from the piece; there is no plot, no story and no shifting camera angles. This is a work that completely interfaces with the reality of the city, without mediating input of any cultural authority, and it uses completely spare means to a maximal effect.





30 Sound Situations, 1975, video, 9:23 min

This work is both a film and a performance in which Wasko went to thirty sites around Łódź; he stands in front of the camera (at different distances) and loudly claps two pieces of wood together. Wasko's sound interventions both blend with and highlight their surroundings, and as a result the reality of circa 1975 Łódź, and not the fictive or invented space of a movie, becomes the

total focal point. Wasko himself, doing his acoustic experiments at different urban sites, is an inscrutable figure making his sonic interruptions in the city at large, and as such is an imperturbable force for individual freedom.



The Wall, 1972, video, 4:04 min

"For seven minutes Waśko filmed the wall of the Film School in Łódź; he then cut up the film stock, mixed up the fragments and edited them together randomly. In effect, the only stable element of the film is the flat, unchanging wall. Because of the editing method, what is happening in front of the wall (people walking, electric carts passing by) can never be finally established. The artist thus

prevents the illusion of three dimensions from materialising. He draws attention to the flat wall, which in turn recalls the flatness of the film stock. Therefore, like *The Straight Curve*, *Wall* features an attempt at reducing the 3D illusion of the film to two-dimensionality, more adequate to its physical properties." (Łukasz Ronduda)



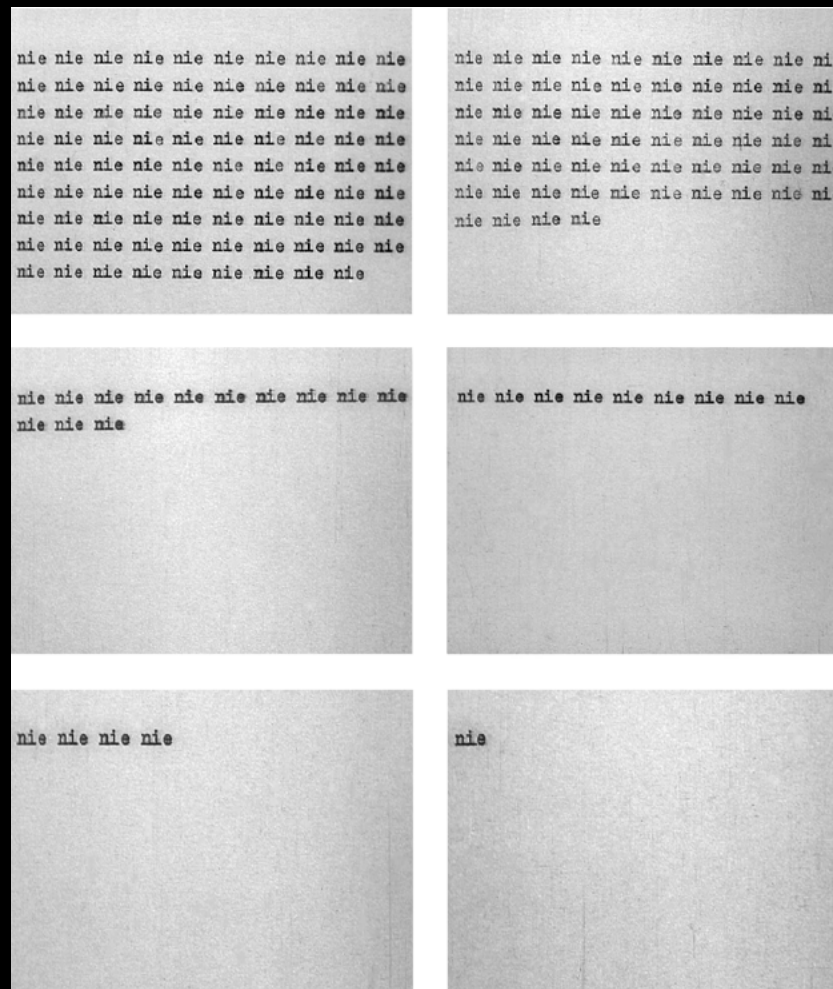
Mr. Antczak's Trip, 1973, video, 4:25 min

"Emphasizing the material dimension of the film camera, the artist points to the opposition of the space of the film frame (what is represented) and the off-screen space (what is excluded, namely the reality continuum). Such a strategy, as Katherine Russell writes, "emphasizes the subjugation of reality to form. The frame of the image has its own autonomy, limiting the 'view' to a simple economy: inside/outside. The nature of the 'inside' is determined by the composition and detail,

on the 'outside' there is an unknown space, which is never entirely described. The fixed frame represents the intentionality of phenomenological consciousness, but also the limits of the visible and the knowable. The fixed frame indicates the subject of perception. The four sides of the frame also direct our attention to what is outside of them, i.e. the continuum of reality as defined by the anti-continuum of the frame." (Łukasz Ronduda)



Straight Awry, 1973, video, 7:01 min

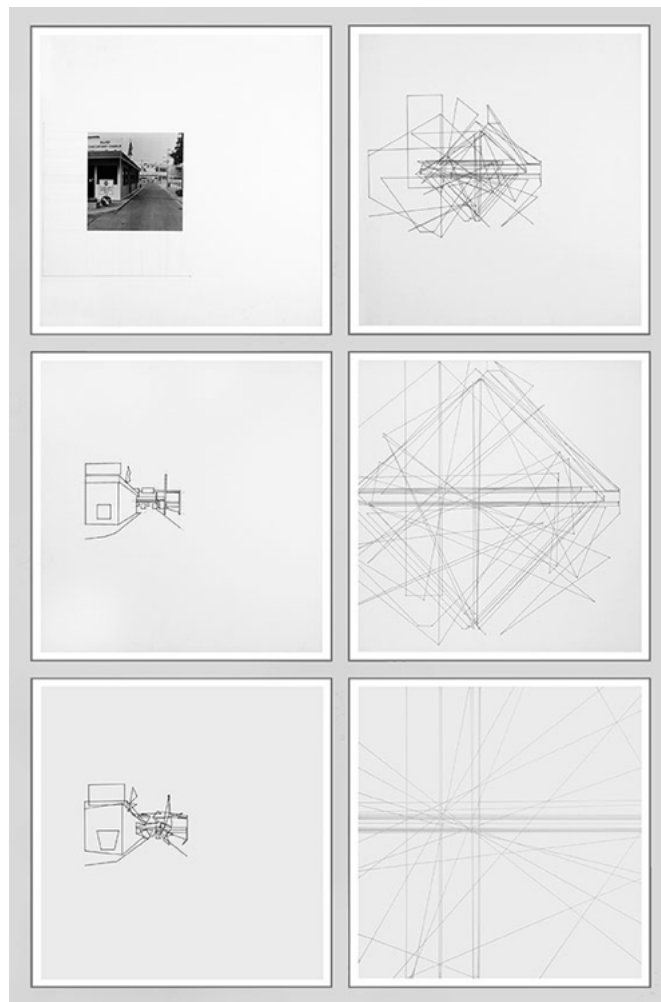


***Negation*, 1973, video, 4:10 min**

While outwardly the film is yet another serious, analytical experiment created within the framework of the *Workshop of the Film Form*, it takes on an absurd character as the score is rigorously “executed” by the artist. The initial epistemic goal is quickly transformed – as repetitions of similar operations continue – into an ironic “play with form”. Thus, in a highly humorous manner, the

seriousness of Waśko’s earlier experiments is diffused. This analytical experiment, due to monotonous, emphatic repetition and multiplication of the word ‘no’ (on the visual and sonic level), was interpreted in Western countries (much to the artist’s surprise) as a protest against communism in Poland.

DRAWINGS



***Hypothetical Check-Point Charlie*, 1987, silver gelatine print, pencil, tempera and ink on paper, 70 x 70 cm (each), set of 6 drawings**

The transition between different mediums and the intersection of two genres is where the concept of "hypothetical photography" is developed. *Hypothetical Check-Point Charlie* is the key work visualizing this idea. It comprises a series of drawings and photographs, where Wasko executes a metaphysical deconstruction of the Berlin Wall, somewhat prophetically anticipating its actual fall two years later. The photograph in the first panel depicts the famous border crossing between

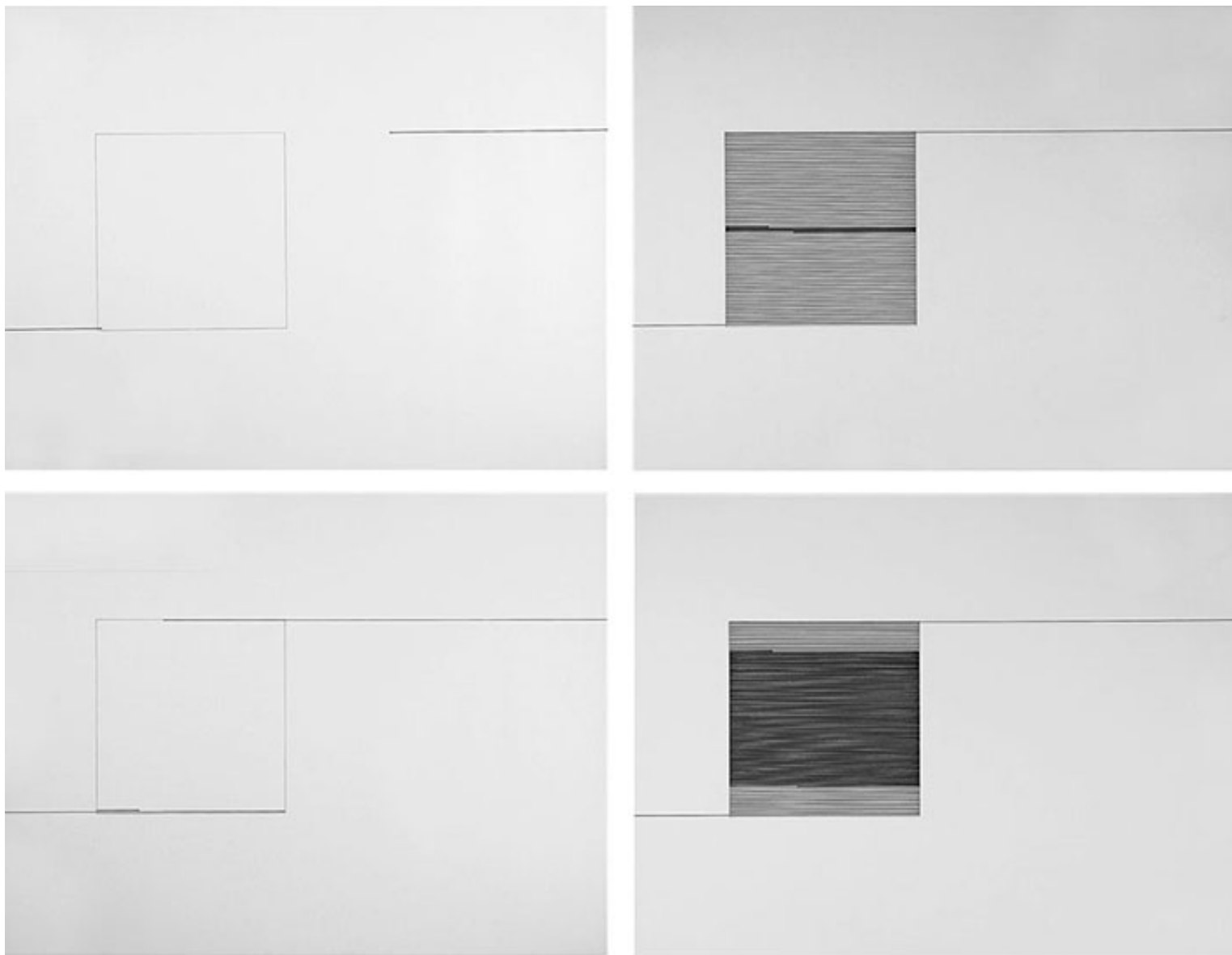
East and West Berlin. In American "occupiers" slang it was called Checkpoint Charlie. The following five images show a plan view of buildings subjected to mathematical and geometric transformations. Checkpoint Charlie, an important symbol of the Cold War, slowly dissipates, dissolves in the abstract grid of straight lines. The actual fall of the Berlin Wall becomes visible in the second part of the work, which includes six photographs documenting the events of November 9th 1989.



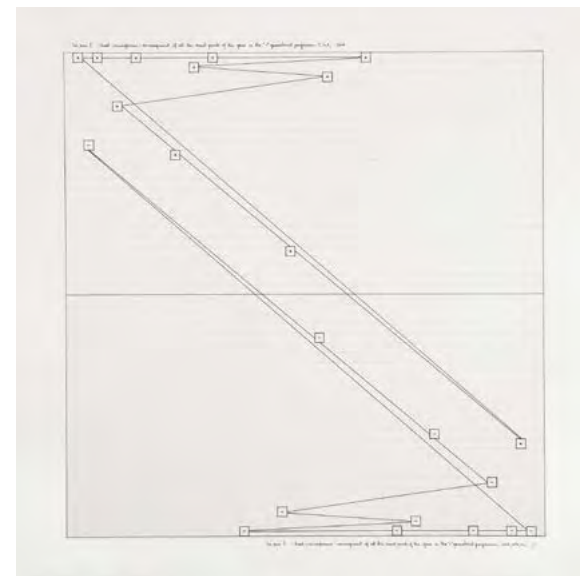
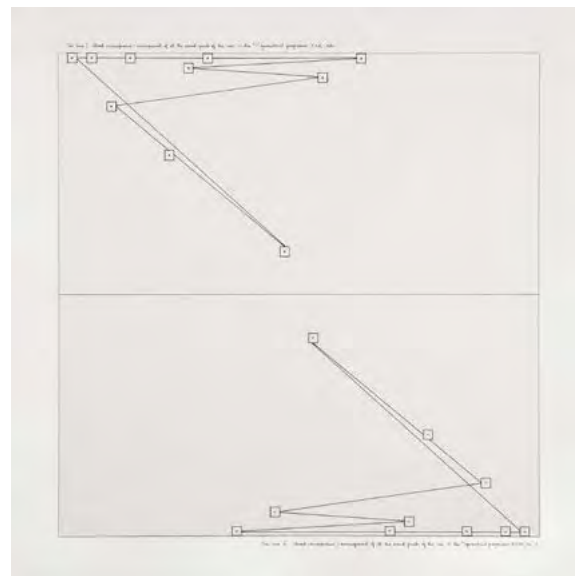
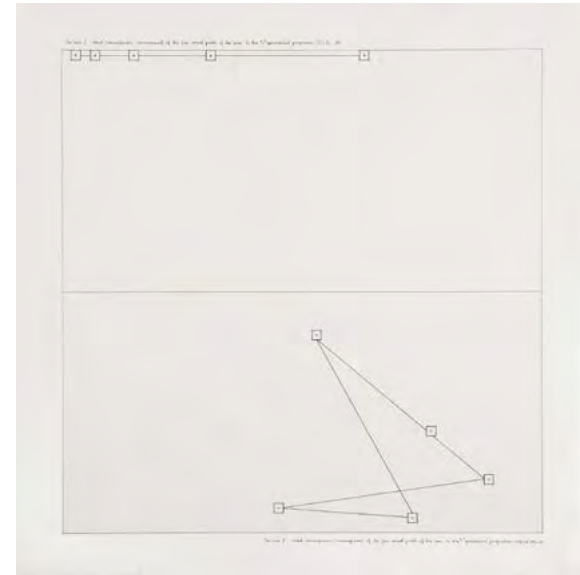
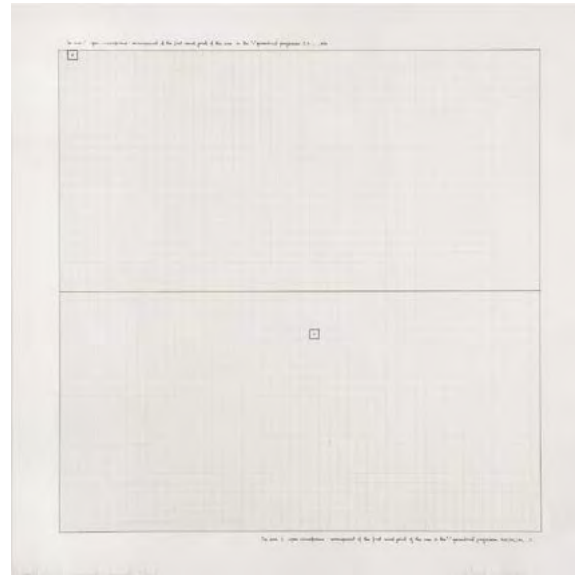
***Hypothetical Photography*, 1977, work on paper, pencil and ink on paper, 70 x 100 cm (each)**

This character is different in works where photography is elongated and transformed by drawings. *A Hypothetical Photograph* (1977) is a series of illustrations, the first one of which is a photograph: a city landscape that changes into an abstract form by means of a drawing (contour lines are drawn around objects, creating “diagrams”) projected in a series of nine other illustrations. The

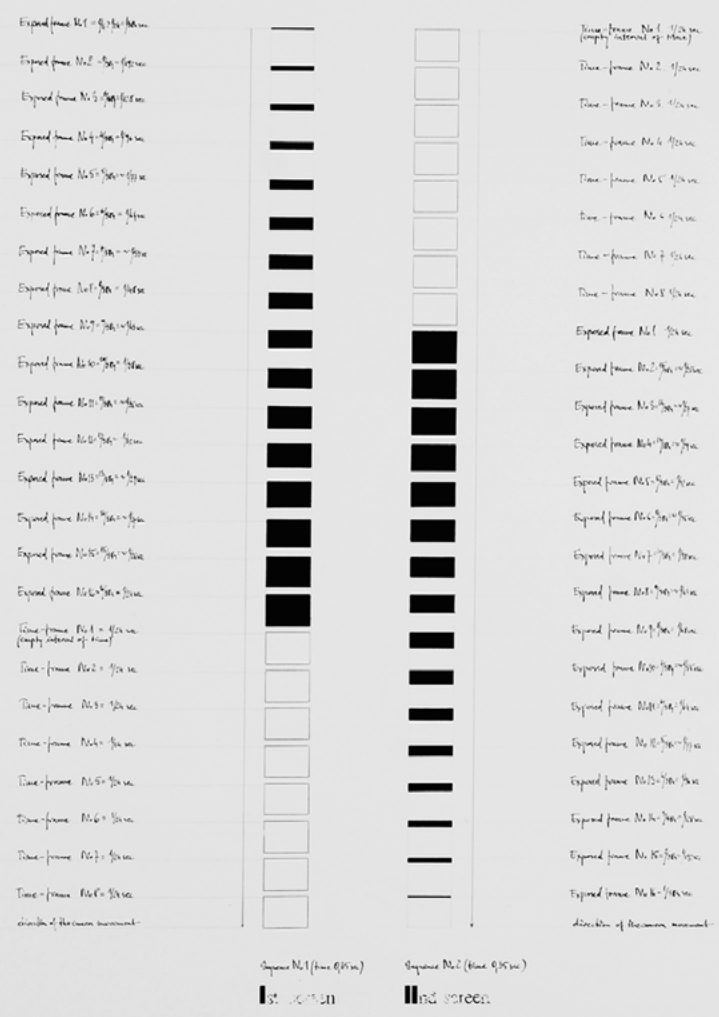
deconstruction of photography turns to abandonment of photography in this work. In *Enlargement* – a work created one year earlier – graphic structures enter into the structure of photography disturbing the relation of representation.



Potential Location, 1980, work on paper, pencil and ink on paper, 70 x 100 (each)



Sound-board "+" and "-", 1977, pencil and ink on paper



Hypothetical Film, 1979, pencil and ink on paper, 70 x 100 cm

WORKS 1980–1990

For Wasko, the transformation that took place in his art from the 1970s to the 1980s is tantamount to a shift from video and photography to sculpture and painting: during this period, he extensively tested the boundaries of the different media. In his private life as well, this was a time of great change. Immediately after his participation in the famous Pier + Ocean show at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1980, he organized the legendary exhibition *Construction in Process* in Łódź, Poland, which was described by Richard Nonas as an event “that happens only once in a generation”. The years that followed were very intense for him politically. Eventually he emigrated, first to England, and then to Berlin, where he received a scholarship of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Later, he came to realize that he had considered his earlier artistic activities as a kind of battle, whereas the Berlin years had brought him artistic freedom.

In order to begin anew in Berlin, Wasko had to return to his roots: to the history of the avant-garde in the 1920s, and the origins of experimental film with which he had grown up during his studies at the Łódź Film School. Here, especially the artists of the group “BLOK” were of significance: Katarzyna Kobro, Władysław Strzemiński, and Mieczysław Szczuka. This is where he established a link in his work: his point of departure, were the writings by the author of *The Theory of Vision*, Władysław Strzemiński. Wasko’s relief images *From Darkness into the Light*, whose color transitions are hardly perceptible to the human eye, recall Strzemiński’s “unistic” compositions, and yet they are by far more radical than these.



***Broken Film No 2*, 1983, collage, film and pencil on paper, 50 x 50 cm**

In the collages which originate from Wasko's early years in Berlin, time is explored as a regulating, yet not always calculable factor of life. Every matter, every human being, every relation between people has its own "time", as well as every decision that has to be made - this is how Wasko defines an aspect of his understanding of time. In these works, he depicts the factor time by using a material both time-related and fitting the developments of the time Wasko lived in: unexposed

filmstrips. He took the sense of segments or sections, which time can have, literally by separating the strips into pieces, by cutting patterns into white cardboard and layering these structures on top of each other. One segment overlaps the other - how they do so is arbitrary, is a question of the right moment, of the point in time, upon which the artist decides.



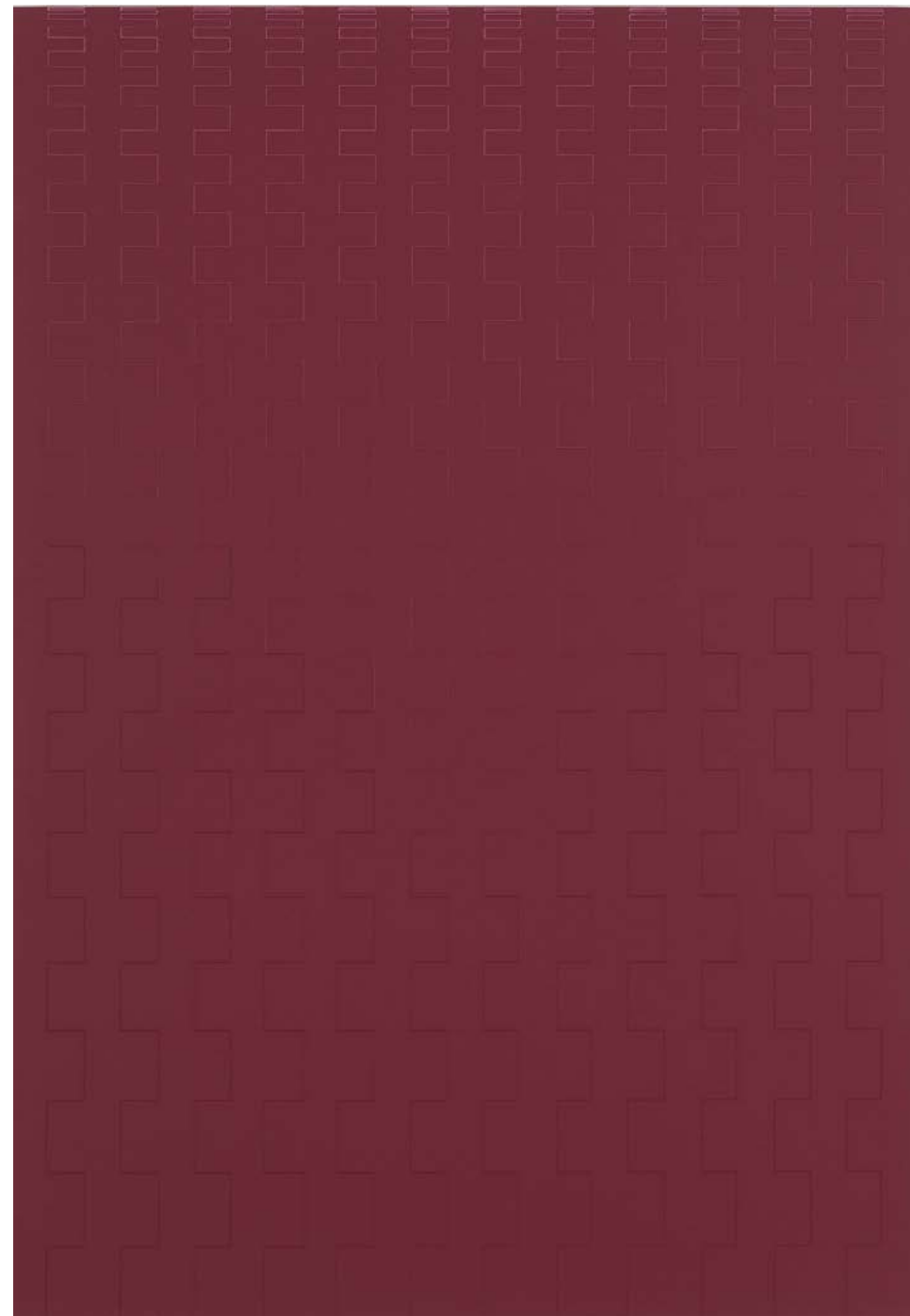
***Eckfilm No 3*, 1985, sculpture, acrylic and linen on wood, 40 x 220 x 15 cm**

Time as a stretch being divided into units is what Wasko demonstrates with the small sections lined into strips on black wooden plates. They refer to measured time in two ways: In their format, they correspond to the individual images of a film strip (being time-units) and they contain time,

as they are the result of many hours in which Wasko built up the fragile edges of the sections by applying thin layers of paint, time becoming a factor of work.

Dark into Light No 2, 1987, painting, acrylic on wood, 160 x 110 cm

Revisiting his time at Łódź Film School, where the artists of the group “BŁOK”, namely Katarzyna Kobro, Władysław Strzemiński and Mieczysław Szczuka were of significance, Wasko established a link in his work: his point of departure were the writings by the author of *The Theory of Vision*, Władysław Strzemiński. The relief images *From Darkness into the Light*, whose color transitions, created by building up thin layers of paint, are hardly perceptible to the human eye, recall Strzemiński’s “unistic” compositions, and are yet by far more radical than these.





Time sculpture at black paint, 1986, sculpture, acrylic and linen on wood, 470 x 250 x 6 cm

The outset for the relief found on this room-filling sculpture was a standard 35 mm film, which the artist separated by breaking the linear continuity of the frames. This created a changement of rythm and tension. The result of this were lines made up of individual sections still appealing

to the original material, yet the patterns were made visible through a time-consuming process of building up thin layers of paint. In this way, time is an indispensible factor in Wasko's work that connects both sculpture and film.



Broken Film Sculpture No 1, 1984, acrylic and film on board, 96 x 230 x 6 cm



Homage for the Street, 1987, sculpture, acrylic and linen on wood, 1100 x 800 x 7 cm

Many of Wasko's works from the 1980s are still in contact with film, which he rejected as the medium of expression, but which returned as an intertext. The work's static structure consisting of many elements gives the impression of a process in motion (and thus also in time). *Homage for the Street* is a particularly interesting example for this notion. A construction of many elements – black polyhedrons – was laid out on the floor of the gallery. Their shape and appearance evoke associations with a piece of film tape. The movement of the film is replaced here by the movement of the spectator who – moving within the space of the gallery – builds a reversed but still dynamic

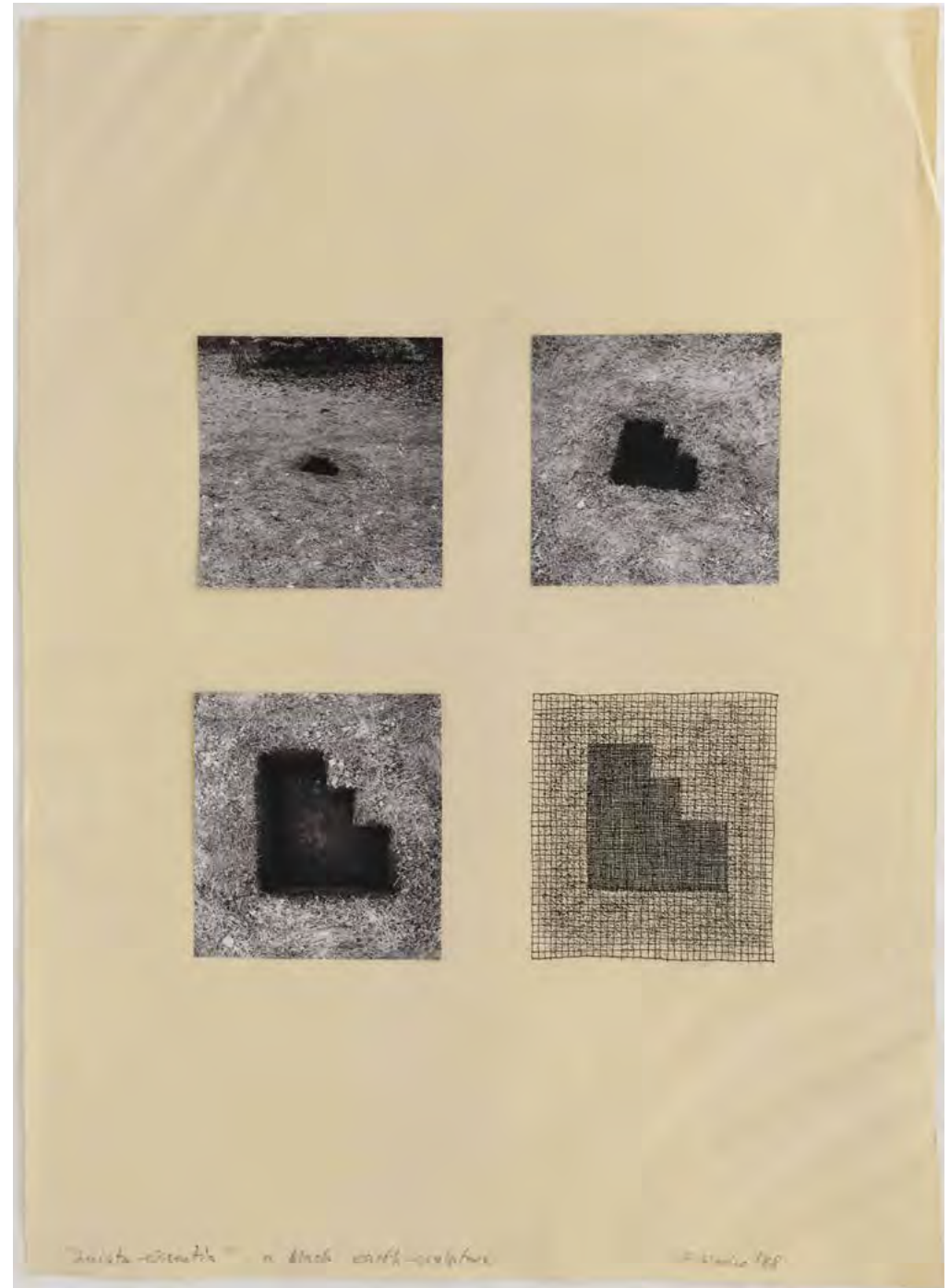
relation with the imaginary "film". At the same time the movement of the viewer represents a walk on the street, hence the title. This dynamism is completed by the perceptive changeability of the work dependent on the changing light (natural light coming through the gallery windows). This work, while keeping its intertextual relations with film, seems to be its ultimate rejection. It is a move towards plastic visualization, towards matter, texture, paint; physical activity and real space. Towards new creative possibilities.

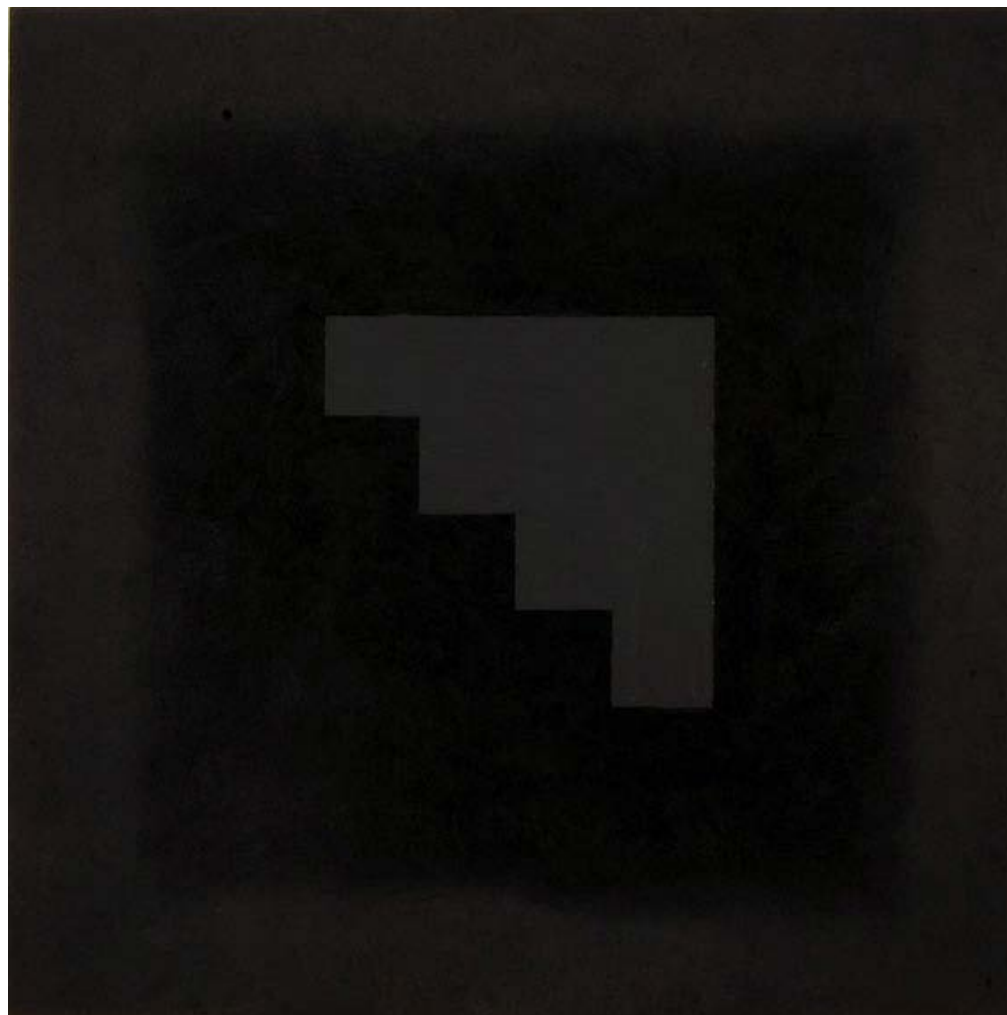
DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS 1980s – 90s

In Wasko's work, the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s also means a modification of his use of material. In a time when the choice between nature and technology was an important artistic decision, he turned to the simplest means by using materials which were either natural or changed by man only to a lesser extent (e.g. soot, ash, wax...), and the technique lacks perfectionism – it becomes a philosophical exercise of infallibility by the artist who no longer has complete control over the outcome of his work.

***Quinta Essentia*, 1988,
work on paper, silver gelatine print and pencil on paper, 42.6 x 35.2 cm**

In 1987, Wasko created a small sculpture in a private garden in Berlin Zehlendorf that carried the title *Quinta Essentia*: a sculpture made of air, for which a hole in the shape of a step pyramid was scooped out of the earth. The geometrical form of the sculpture, not corresponding with the natural qualities of earth in any way, indicates that the sculpture was only supposed to have a short life, lasting at most up until the next rain.





Soot painting, 1989, painting, soot, pigment, oil and glue on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

Drawing with Soot, 1989,
painting, soot, pigment, oil and glue on canvas, 140 x 110 cm

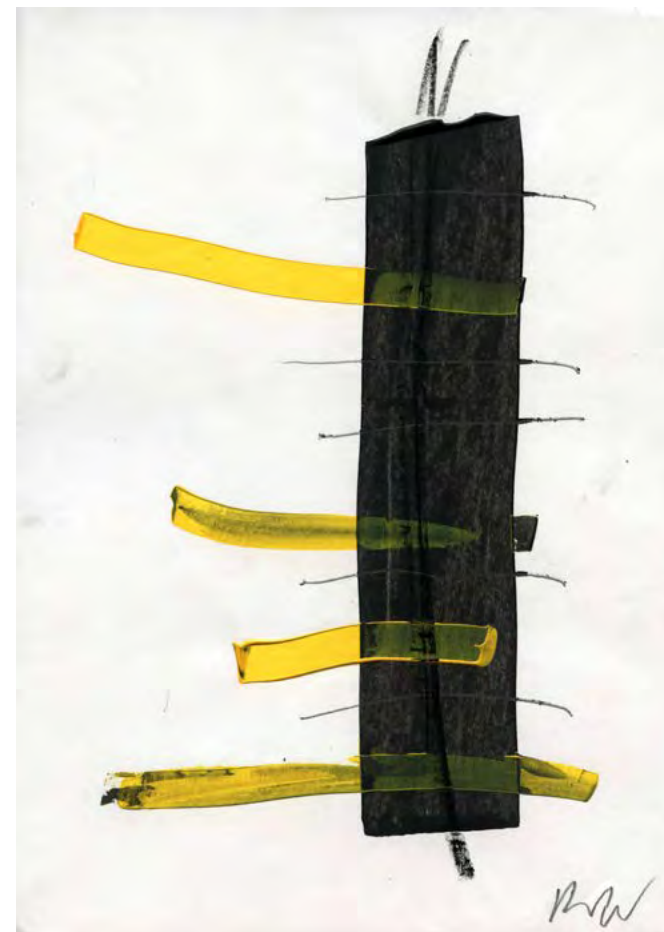
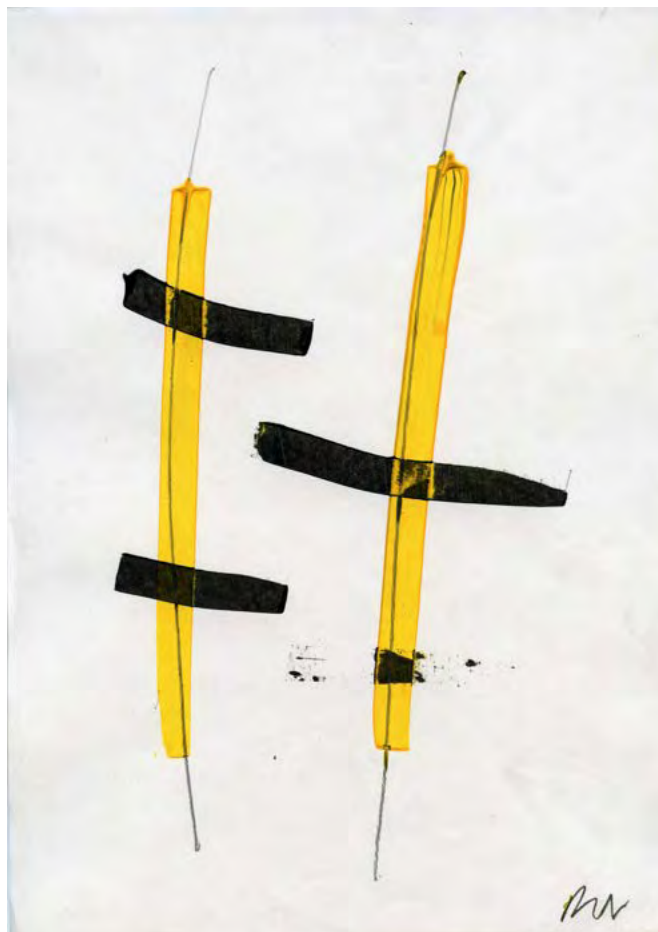
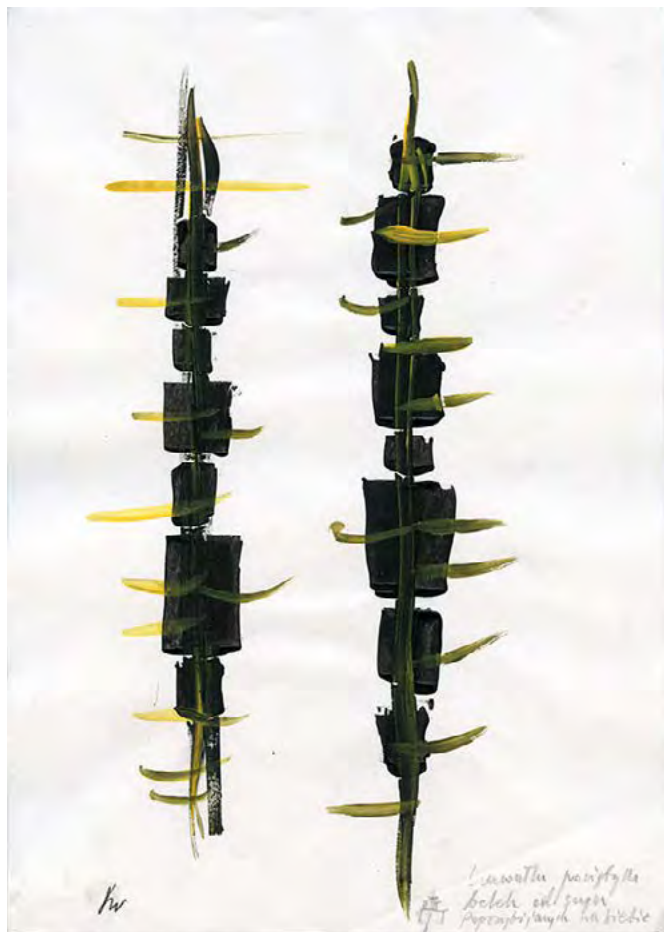




Man in the Night (to Barnett Newman) 1, 1989,
painting, soot and gold flakes on canvas, 160 x 120 cm

Man in the Night (to Barnett Newman) 2, 1989,
painting, soot and gold flakes on canvas, 160 x 120 cm



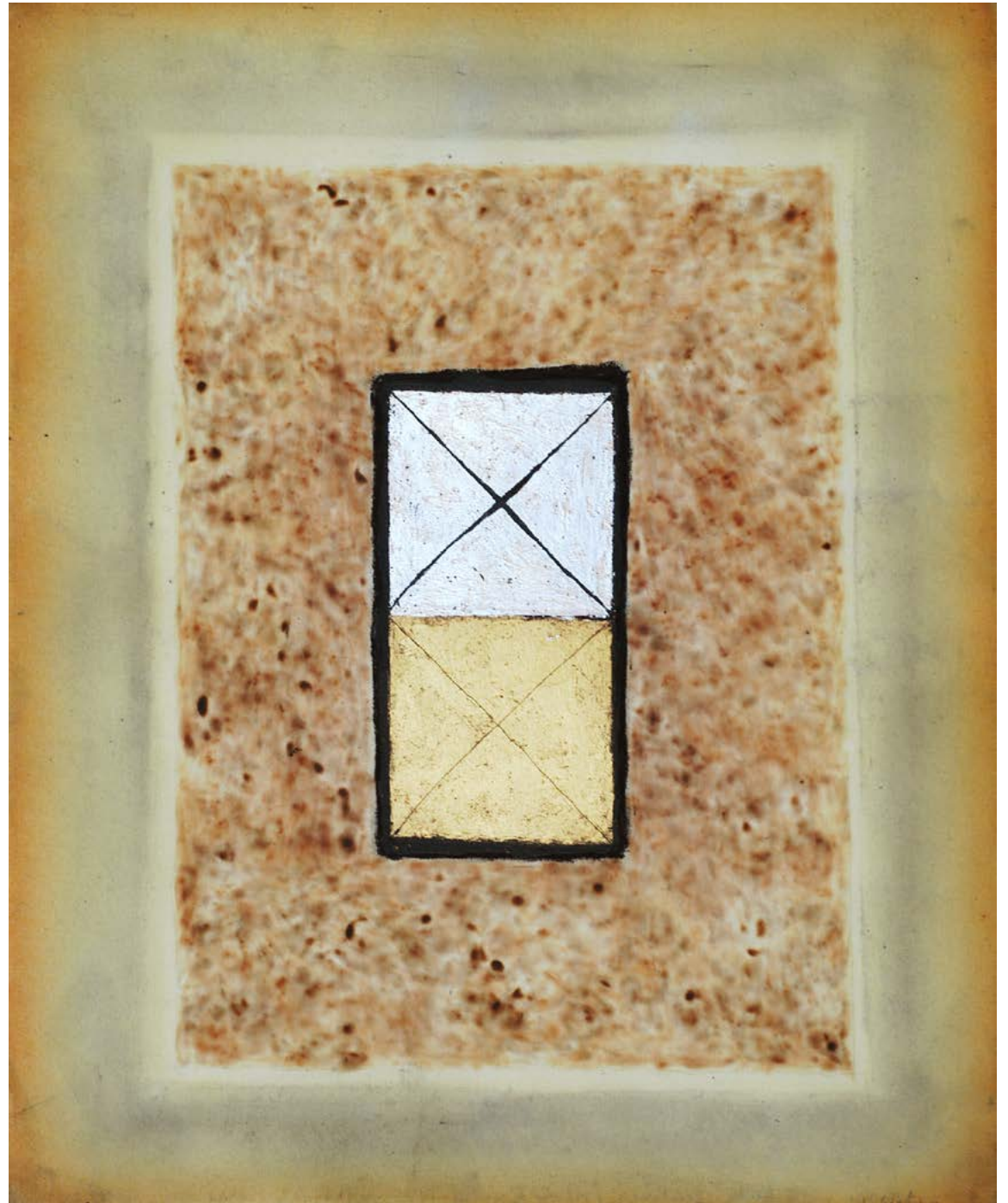


Sculptural Drawings, 1985–1987, works on paper, acrylic, pencil and oil chalk on paper, 30 x 21 cm (each)



Painting Drawings, 1985–1987, works on paper, acrylic, pencil and oil chalk on paper, 30 x 21 cm (each)

Drawing with Burnt Matches, 1991,
work on paper, burnt match, flakes of silver and gold, fat and ink on rag
paper, 43 x 35 cm





Drawing with Fluid Zinc, 1991,
work on paper, fluid zinc, soot, oil chalk and fat on rag paper, 43 x 35 cm

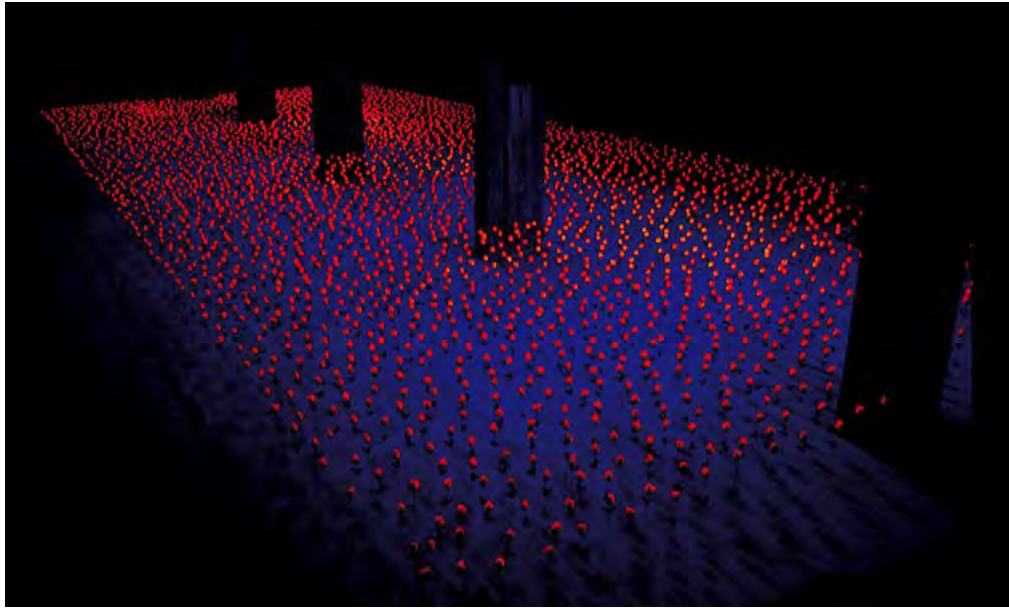


Event with Frozen Fluid Zinc,
1992, painting, fluid zinc and soot on canvas, 63 x 52 cm

Drawing with Fluid Zinc, 1991,
work on paper, fluid zinc, soot, oil chalk and fat on rag paper, 43 x 35 cm



INSTALLATION AND OBJECTS 1990–2000



Small Rose Garden, 1997,
4000 Chinese plastic roses, ventilators,
installation at Zacheta Gallery, Warsaw



Small Rose Garden, 1998,
5000 Chinese plastic roses, UV-light, ventilators,
installation at Municipal Museum, Bydgoszcz



Child Territories, 1996,
mixed media, installation for the exhibition "Shattered Lattitudes",
Lombard-Fried Fine Arts, New York



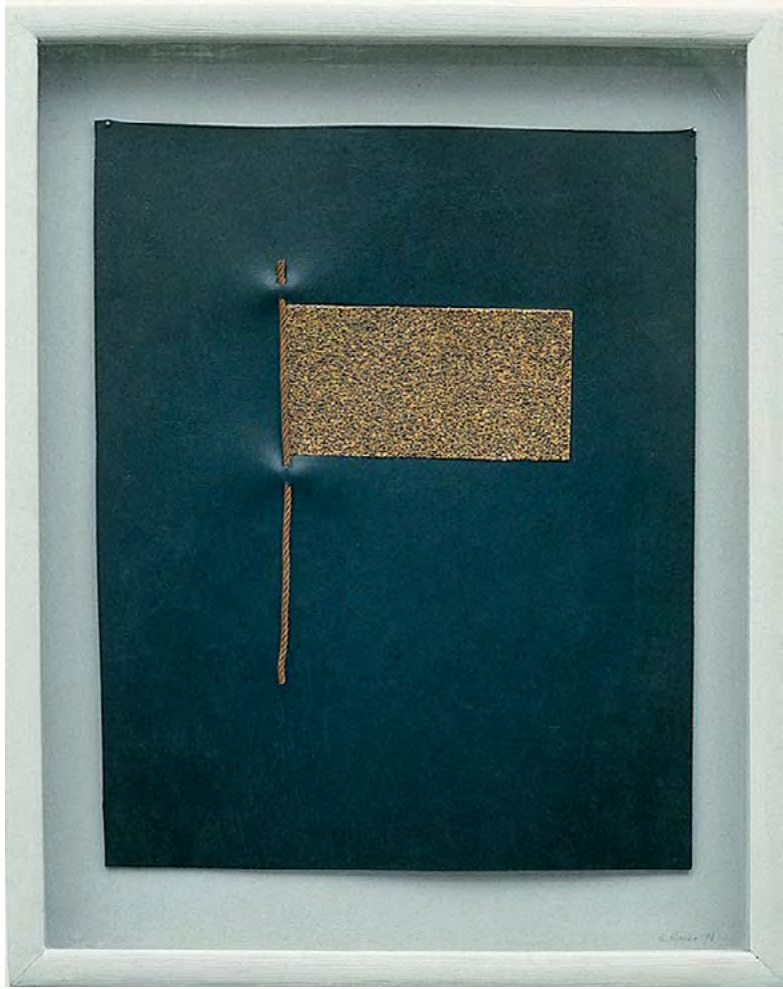
Child's Territory, 1997,
sand, xerox, flags, approx. 5 x 10m, installation for the exhibition
"Another Language", Museum of Art, Haifa, Israel



7 Paths of Roses, 1995, sand-painting, approx. 50 x 100m, Negev Desert, Israel

In 1995, Ryszard Wasko organized the 5th edition of Construction in Process, which took place in the Negev desert in Israel. The idea behind this event was to carry out the work on site, in the context of a given situation – social, political and economic. The main title of that edition was Design in Process, Co-existence. Its purpose was to support the peace process in the Middle East, more specifically, between Palestine and Israel. Wasko states, “The idea of my work came to my mind when I saw a huge natural crater cutting through the Negev desert. This crater was about 1 km deep and was enchanting to me because of its charm and scale. In order not to disturb its ‘pristine’ character, I decided to create a large, simple painting made out of sand and pigments which were left over from past eruptions. The painting was located on a hill inside the crater, with

the dimensions of a football field, and pigments were brought from the bottom of the crater. Therefore, the entire process of creating a picture, despite the large number of participating artists, was time-consuming and lasted from dawn to noon. I titled this painting Seven Paths of Roses, because it was a metaphor for the planting of roses in my garden at home. An interesting aspect of this work is that the installation could not be seen in its entirety from the surface of the hill on which it was made. Its overall view could only be captured from the top, above the crater, from a height of approx. 700 meters. My intention was also that this sand painting would be destroyed by the sand storms that often occurred in the desert.”



No-Man's Land Flag, 1997,
wood, abrasive paper, wire, rubber, paint, 40 x50 cm



No-Man's Land Flag, 1998,
wood, hardboard, painted pumex, bamboo-sticks, paint, 42,5 x 50 cm



Game, 1998,
object, soap, sponge, horse hair, paint and lipstick, 51 x 41.5 x 7 cm



Kíss, 1997,
object, vaseline, lipstick and paint, 46 x 31 x 8 cm



Cleaned Wound, 1998,
object, melted soap, horse hair, rubber, wire, iodine, 46 x 31 x 8 cm

Persons Projects

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