

# 20

# 70

\* The title refers to Zbigniew Gostomski's work prepared for the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium.

**It begins in Wrocław\***  
**The Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium in a Nutshell**

***The Symposium in a Nutshell* is one of the elements of the educational programme prepared in connection with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium. It has been created in order to popularise knowledge about this unique event and reach a wider audience with the assumptions and ideas developed in 1970.**

**On this occasion, more than a dozen organisations, institutions, independent creators and grassroots initiatives from Wrocław joined forces to set up a working group that devised a programme of year-round celebrations, including exhibitions, lectures, walks, picnics, educational activities and other events. The starting point for these educational activities is the map, *The Symposium in a Nutshell* and plans of activities to be done individually.**

***The Symposium in a Nutshell* contains essential information about the event. We hope that by reading it you will discover the uniqueness of the meeting that took place in Wrocław in 1970. We would like to not only broaden your knowledge about contemporary art, but also to enable you to rediscover Wrocław and its history in the context of the projects proposed during the Symposium. Below, we present a short calendar of events, names of the participating artists, the organisational context of the Symposium, and the reasons why most of the proposed ideas have never been implemented in our city.**

## Contents

- A Symposium means meeting p. 4
- B New trends in art in the world and in Wrocław p. 6
- C Post-war Wrocław - urban planning and the need for symbols p. 7
- D Art in the service of the new ideology p. 8
- E Model of creating artworks - cooperation with industrial plants p. 8
- F Reasons for the failure of the Symposium p. 10
- G The Symposium - what is left today? p. 11
- H Keywords p. 11

## Calendar of Events

**2 November 1969** – agreeing on the rules and guidelines of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium, drawn up by the Board of Wrocław Enthusiasts' Association.

**19 December 1969** – meeting with invited critics and theorists of art and architecture, agreeing on a list of artists participating in the Symposium.

**6–8 February 1970** – first meetings within the framework of the Symposium, discussions about the guidelines, acquainting the artists with the city and choosing sites for works.

**26 February – 1 March 1970** – the first of nine several-day exhibitions (to be held by 9 May) at the Mona Lisa Gallery, where the works of artists invited to participate in the Symposium were presented.

**17–18 March 1970** – subsequent meetings, opening of an exhibition presenting 57 projects at the Museum of Architecture (shown until 30 March), discussions on the production of works, meetings of the Symposium organisers with critics and artists.

**27 March 1970** – meeting of the Symposium organisers with representatives of production plants from Wrocław and Lower Silesia who, having familiarised themselves with the projects, undertook to produce them through the so-called voluntary community service.

**9 May 1970** – the day of the main celebrations of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Regaining the Western Territories, a one-time presentation of Henryk Stażewski's work *Unlimited Vertical Composition. Nine Streams of Colour in the Sky*.

**30 April 1972** – establishing the Art Documentation Centre in Wrocław as the first stage of implementing the programme of the Centre for Artistic Research.

**20 October 1972** – the first unveiling of the incomplete version of Jerzy Bereś's project called "*Arena*" *Living Monument* (removed in 1983).

**30 May 1973** – dissolution of the Art Documentation Centre in Wrocław.

**5 December 2008** – repetition of Stażewski's concept in front of the Palace of Culture and Science by the Museum of Modern Art and the Warsaw City Hall as part of Warsaw's bid to become European Capital of Culture.

**26 April 2010** – presentation of the second version of Bereś's concept marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium.

**1 April 2011** – happening consisting in painting the crown of Bereś's tree green, which has become an annual spring tradition cultivated to this day.

**8 September 2011** – ceremonial unveiling of the *Location of the Chair*, constructed according to a design based on the original sketch by Tadeusz Kantor, combined with the inauguration of the European Culture Congress in Wrocław.

**2017** – opening of Barbara Kozłowska's installation *Spatial Interpretation of Stanisław Dróżdż's Structural Poetry "Loneliness"* as part of the visual arts programme of Wrocław 2016 European Capital of Culture.

**2020** – a special programme prepared to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium, created and implemented by the artistic community of Wrocław – institutions, organisations and independent initiatives – working together according to the bottom-up formula since 19 July 2019.



## Symposium means meeting

The **Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium** was organised to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, after which the borders of Poland shifted westwards to include the so-called **Regained Territories**. By the decision of the then authorities of the Polish People's Republic, Wrocław, as the largest city in this territory, became the centre of the jubilee celebrations. The Symposium was a meeting of **artists** (i.e. those who create art), **critics** (i.e. those who evaluate art) and **art theorists** (i.e. those who create knowledge about art). They gathered to reflect on how art can function in the city space, what role it can play, who should be the audience and what should be the role of a concept (idea) in an artistic work, i.e. what constitutes and should constitute **conceptual art** (conceptualism), which in principle places the greatest emphasis not on producing the work, but on the idea behind it. As a result of the meeting of artists, critics and art theorists, **ideas** and even complete **plans of activities** (actions) or **works** (installations) were created, which were to serve **public space**, i.e. parts of the city of Wrocław that are available to everybody. These activities were supposed to make housing estates built as part of the city's intensive development after the ravages of the war more attractive and interesting. At the time, the authorities in Poland, including Wrocław, believed that art could be a **tool of ideology** and politics, which meant that people's beliefs could be changed through art.

The Symposium was initiated by the still functioning **Wrocław Enthusiasts' Association**, which, together with its partners: **the Association of Polish Architects (SARP)**, **the Association of Polish Visual Artists (ZPAP)**, **the Museum of Architecture** and the now-defunct **Mona Lisa Gallery**, obtained the consent and support for the organisation of the event from the **Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)**, which governed Poland at the time.

The organisation of the Symposium was planned across several stages, culminating in the assembly of completed works in the city space. The first stage was the establishment of an Organising Committee consisting of **12 art critics and theorists**, who selected and invited **39 artists** from all over Poland to participate in the event. This number eventually increased to **55 people**.

As part of the Symposium, meetings of artists, critics and art theorists were held to discuss the programme, locations of the works and scope of the event. In March, an exhibition featuring 57 projects and concepts was opened at the Museum of Architecture. On the following days, the organisers discussed their feasibility. From February to the end of April, short exhibitions were held at the Mona Lisa Gallery, during which the ideas submitted by the artists were brought for discussion. In addition, during the meetings sociologist Władysław Misiak conducted research on the presence and significance of the event in the awareness of the inhabitants of Wrocław. The final stage of the Symposium – the only one that could not be completed, or, more precisely, was completed to a small degree – was the production and placement of artists' projects in selected places. The finale was scheduled for 9 May 1970, i.e. the **Victory Day** commemorating the end of World War II, on which the most important part of the jubilee connected with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of annexing the Regained Territories into Poland was celebrated.

# 4

Unfortunately, only two ideas developed during the Symposium materialised in accordance with the assumptions: Henryk Stażewski's **Unlimited Vertical Composition. Nine Streams of Colour in the Sky** and Jerzy Bereś's **"Arena" Living Monument**. The former was a one-time and temporary event, whereas the latter was carried out by Wrocław Polytechnic students in 1972 on the initiative of the Wrocław Enthusiasts' Association.

The concepts that originated in 1970 did not wither in the minds of the local artistic community. Forty years after the Symposium, Bereś's installation, which was removed from its original site in the early 1980s, was reconstructed.

In 2011, the installation **Location of the Chair**, constructed according to a design based on the original sketch by Tadeusz Kantor, was placed near the Współczesny Theatre in Wrocław. Since 2017, Barbara Kozłowska's installation **Spatial Interpretation of Stanisław Dróżdź's Structural Poetry "Loneliness"** could be seen in Popowicki Park. The Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium was a milestone for the development of art in Poland because it influenced the way architects and urban planners thought about planning and developing space in the city through installations or ephemeral activities. Thanks to the Symposium, the idea of conceptual art reached wider audiences, and the event itself became an important symbol of new trends and concepts in Polish contemporary art.



## The Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium – artists and organisers

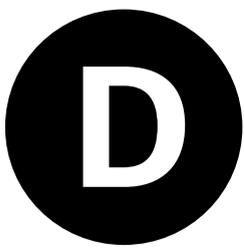
Bogusław Balicki, Andrzej Bartyński, Jerzy Bereś, Marian Bogusz, Włodzimierz Borowski, Józef Burlewicz, Jan Chwałczyk, Krzysztof Coriolan, Zbigniew Dłubak, Jerzy Fedorowicz, Michał Diament, Jan Dobkowski, Tadeusz Dobosz, Zygfryd Dudzik, Stanisław Fijałkowski, Henryk Gała, Wanda Gołkowska, Zbigniew Gostomski, Oskar Hansen, Władysław Hasior, Konrad Jarodzki, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz, Tadeusz Kantor, Grzegorz Kowalski, Barbara Kozłowska, Jarosław Kozłowski, Edward Krasiński, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz, Andrzej Lachowicz, Andrzej Łobodziański, Zbigniew Makarewicz, Adam Marczyński, Andrzej Matuszewski, Alfons Mazurkiewicz, Maria Michałowska, Igor Neubauer, Ernest Niemczyk, Eugeniusz Nyga, Roman Nyga, Jerzy Olkiewicz, Janusz Orbitowski, Ludmiła Popiel, Jerzy Rosołowicz, Kajetan Sosnowski, Zdzisław Stanek, Henryk Stażewski, Adam Styka, Anna Szpakowska-Kujawska, Bogumiła Winiarska, Ryszard Winiarski, Anastazy B. Wiśniewski, Andrzej Wojciechowski, Jerzy "Jury" Zieliński, Krystyn Zieliński, Jan Ziemiński.

*Count the number of artists participating in the Symposium – were there more women or men? What do you think were the reasons?*

*Pay attention to the names and count which letter appears most often and which appears most rarely?*

# 5





## Art in the service of the new ideology

Due to the context of the Symposium, both official and artistic bodies were involved in preparing the event. The decision to organise the Symposium was connected, among other things, with the intention of the local authorities to emphasise the uniqueness of the region and strengthen its prestige.

## Organisers of the Symposium

Wrocław Enthusiasts' Association, Association of Polish Visual Artists, Association of Polish Architects (SARP), Museum of Architecture and the Mona Lisa Gallery, Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, National Council of the City of Wrocław, Provincial Board of Labour Unions

•  
*Can you think of who else could join the organisers' team? What institutions or organisations could help in this process?*

The organisers of the Symposium assumed that it would be an opportunity for different artists to meet and confront creative attitudes, which would lead to the creation of "outstanding" projects fitting into the urban structure. The authorities counted on a spectacular success of the

undertaking, which would emphasise the Polishness of Wrocław, show it as a modern city that had not only risen from war damage, but was also economically and culturally strong. Situating the artworks in public space would influence the residents' awareness through their symbolism and form, and revive local patriotism. It was expected that the new monuments would raise the spirits of the inhabitants of the **Western Territories** and help to build their identity. The rules of the Symposium proposed by the authorities were opposed by the artists, who pointed to the absence of ephemeral activities and insufficient time to produce the projects. City officials were unable to guarantee that the artists' ideas for works – created without remuneration, as a gift to the city – would actually materialise. In the face of many ambiguities and uncertainties, each artist prepared proposals according to their own interpretations and guidelines, which is the reason for their large variety.



## Model of creating artworks – cooperation with industrial plants

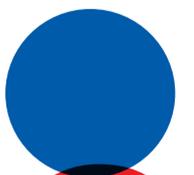
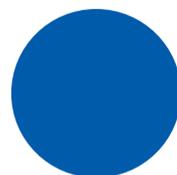
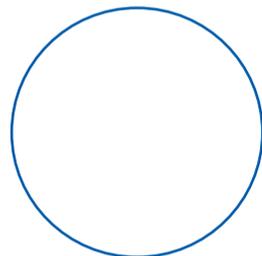
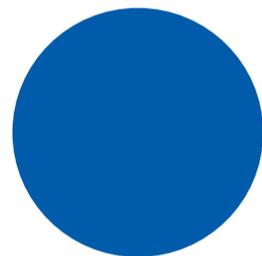
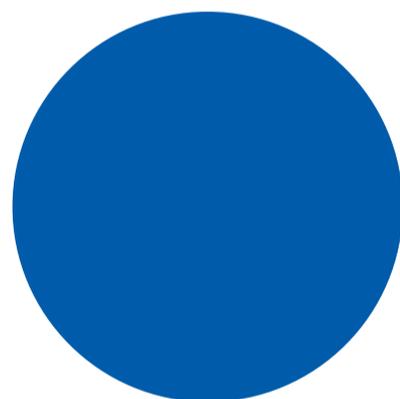
Four years before the Symposium, the **1<sup>st</sup> Biennale of Spatial Forms** was held in Elbląg, which demonstrated that cooperation between **artists and local production plants** could bring very good results. The city became a field of artistic experiments. This collaboration provided inspiration for the event in Wrocław. Talks with representatives of municipal and regional enterprises

began just after the March sessions of the Symposium. The enterprises committed themselves to produce 16 (out of 57) objects. It was planned that the works would be ceremonially handed over to the city of Wrocław on 9 May – the Victory Day. However, due to the short time scheduled for producing the works and other organisational problems, the plan was not implemented, and the energy generated around the Symposium was completely dissipated after the jubilee celebrations.

## Production plants involved in the Symposium:

Pafawag (national locomotive factory), Hutmen Wrocław (copper processing plant), ZNTK Wrocław (railway rolling stock repair plant), PILMET (agricultural machinery factory), MPK Wrocław (municipal transport company), WSK Wrocław (telecommunications equipment factory), Mostostal Wrocław (steel constructions manufacturer), FUM Wrocław (mechanical equipment factory), Madro Wrocław (road machinery maintenance), Jelcz (producer of lorries and buses), ZNTK Oleśnica (railway rolling stock repair plant), Wrocław Faience Factory, Bolesławiec Ceramic Plant, Jelenia Góra Industrial Glassworks, Wałbrzych Glassworks, Szczytna Glassworks near Polanica, and the Polish People's Army.

•  
*Have you heard of these enterprises? Which of them still exist? Perhaps they have changed names?*





## Reasons for the failure of the Symposium

The vast majority of projects were created with a view to implementation, although already at the stage of the initial meetings many of the assumptions were modified. After the Symposium, many original projects were destroyed, others were dispersed, ending up in private hands or various institutions. The execution of the works was additionally complicated by the unrealistically short deadlines – according to the original plans, the works were to be produced between March and May 1970, which seems an almost impossible task. Finally, in the wake of objections from artists and critics, the deadline was extended until the end of 1970. And then, as it soon turned out – into an indefinite future. Over time, the artists' works came to be viewed mainly as manifestations of **impossible art**. Conceptual works, whose value did not critically depend on whether or not they would be produced, accounted only for a small percentage of the submitted ideas. Many concepts required costly and expensive technological solutions.

The enthusiasm and energy generated around the Symposium quickly evaporated. The artists, now scattered all over Poland, complained about poor communication with representatives of industrial plants, who could do little without the involvement of artists on the spot, but above all **without institutional and administrative support**. It seems that after the jubilee celebrations, the authorities were happy to let the situation quieten down – some of the projects did not fit into the assumptions outlined in the rules concerning the creation of permanent works in Wrocław. More and more institutions and influential persons disappeared from the cityscape – the ideological spirit of the Symposium was lost. In 1970, the Mona Lisa Gallery was closed down, three years later – the Art Documentation Centre, the only institution storing materials connected with the Symposium. At the same time, Jerzy Ludwiński, one of the main initiators of the Symposium and the driving force behind it, had to leave Wrocław due to the inability to find employment.

Viewed from this perspective, the Symposium was unsuccessful – the residents of Wrocław were never given the opportunity to learn about the artists' unusual ideas. On the other hand, however, the innovative concept was ahead of its time – it holds a prominent place in the process of art development and has not been forgotten. Today, by presenting you with this map and text, we would like to provide the missing element of the Symposium – the opportunity to get acquainted with the artists' projects. We hope that the activities of the **Symposium 70/20 group** – a grassroots and social initiative – will allow you to rediscover the Symposium.

# 10



## The Symposium – what is left today?

There is not much left after the Symposium, if we measure it by the number of completed projects. In most cases, extraordinary works of art did not materialise, no new **spatial and urban structure** of Wrocław emerged thanks to them. Apart from the previously mentioned concepts by Stażewski, Bereś, Kozłowska and Kantor, we will not find any material traces of the Symposium in the public space of Wrocław. Other ideas were not used. Today we can return to some of them, allowing them to exist in the city or treating them as inspiration for further actions. Despite the passage of time, the issues raised by the artists participating in the Symposium are still valid: the monotony of architecture, the lack of contemporary art in public space, or the lack of an unconventional approach in its planning and development.

An important remnant of the Symposium are the results of **Władysław Misiak's research**. The event became an opportunity to analyse the artists' attitudes towards the challenges posed by living in a modern city and a chance to discover Wrocław dwellers' opinions about creative interference in the city structure. The reactions of the attendees of an exhibition featuring the ideas generated during the Symposium, which opened at the Museum of Architecture on **17 March 1970**, were carefully observed. As the respondents felt, it was necessary to rebuild the city and create new symbols. They appreciated the diversity of projects, which they saw as a manifestation of democratisation. On the other hand, what seemed to be crucial for the artists was to address their activities to all the residents, not only to art connoisseurs. This sociological research shows that during the Symposium a new model of work was created, which boiled down to connecting the artists' ideas with the experiences of the inhabitants. We believe that this model is still worth following.

For historians, culture experts and sociologists, the Symposium continues to be an interesting field of research, all the more so because there are still no publications analysing and popularising this topic. The very concept of cooperation of many entities – city authorities, entrepreneurs, artists, theorists and residents – is a valuable example of acting for the benefit of Wrocław and an inspiration for the development of subsequent initiatives through cross-sectoral cooperation.

**Sources** – we encourage you to deepen your knowledge about the Wrocław '70 Symposium:

- Luiza Nader, *Symposium Wrocław '70: przestrzeń „niemożliwego”* [The Wrocław '70 Symposium: the space of the "impossible"] <https://www.asp.wroc.pl/dyskurs/Dyskurs3/LuizaNader.pdf>.

- *Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70* [The Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium], edited by Danuta Dziedzic and Zbigniew Makarewicz, Wrocław 1983.

- Władysław Misiak, *Symbolika miejska w świadomości artystów i mieszkańców. Symposium Plastyczne Wrocław '70* [Urban symbolism in the minds of artists and residents. The Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium], Wrocław 1970 [unpublished text].

- Edward Saliński, *Symposium plastyczne – Wrocław 70* [Art Symposium – Wrocław '70], Toruń 1974 [unpublished master's thesis written under the supervision of Janusz Bogucki].



**Keywords** – we encourage you to get acquainted with the keywords that appear in the context of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium:

- ephemeral art
- process art
- impossible art
- conceptualism
- the avant-garde
- the neo-avant-garde
- urban planning
- biennale

# 11

# 20

prepared by: Krzysztof Bielaszka, Anna Bieliz, Magdalena Kreis, Anna Krukowska, Natalia Romaszkan, Małgorzata Rzerzycha-Myśliwy, Maria Zięba

The concept of educational materials, which includes *The Symposium in a Nutshell*, was devised by the so-called education committee of the Symposium 70/20 working group, which consists of independent educators as well as animators associated with the Ładne Historie Foundation and Wrocław Contemporary Museum.

The publication was created to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium as part of the following projects:

*Symposium 70/20. The programme of educational activities accompanying the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wrocław '70 Symposium*

and

*City, Art, People! Symposium 70/20 years later*

implemented by:  
Wrocław Contemporary Museum  
pl. Strzegomski 2a  
53-681 Wrocław  
www.muzeumwspolczesne.pl

Ładne Historie Foundation  
ul. Długa 33  
58-100 Świdnica  
www.ladnehistorie.pl

graphic design and DTP: threeedotstype.com  
translation and proofreading: Karol Waniek

Organisers:



ładne  historie

Support:

**Ministerstwo  
Kultury  
i Dziedzictwa  
Narodowego.**

Co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage from the Culture Promotion Fund

**Wrocław**  
miasto spotkań

Co-financed by the Municipality of Wrocław



# 70