

## Introduction

The history of art as a history of exhibitions is an already well-recognised research perspective which allows us to focus on the specificity of artwork constellations as presented to the public in a given cultural situation. This research methodology draws on contemporary interest in galleries' exhibition policies, curatorial strategies and exhibition design techniques. Simultaneously, questions posed as part of the exhibition history fall within the methods of researching the history of art criticism, or the history and aesthetics of reception. The current issue of *Ikonotheka* is devoted to the history of exhibitions in Polish art institutions presenting the works of Polish artists abroad and those organised from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inspiration for this theme came from the research project titled "The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970", which was conducted by the Institute of Art History at the University of Warsaw, in the framework of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities as instituted by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014). The five essays included in this volume were written by members of the research team: Marek Czapelski, Weronika Kobylińska-Bunsch, Iwona Luba, Stanisław Welbel and Karolina Zychowicz. One of the subjects of their analysis was the chronology of the Central Bureau's exhibitions as a reflection of the institution's policy. The history of exhibitions can also be considered as a point of departure for redefining the geography of Polish art history and the art geography of the whole region, taking into account its local significance as well as the political circumstances of international cultural exchange.

The volume opens with two essays on design and architecture exhibitions. Katarzyna Adamska discusses early 20<sup>th</sup>-century apartment interiors as presented in two exhibitions of the Polish Applied Art Society (1902 and 1908) in the building of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (currently known as the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art). Marek Czapelski's essay brings us back to the same gallery but moves us in time. After World War II, the Zachęta building became the site of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions. One of its first initiatives was to organise two celebrated exhibitions: the First National Exposition of Architectural Design (1951) and the First General

Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland (1953). The next three essays reveal some institutional and political contexts of international exhibitions in late-1940s and 1950s Poland. Karolina Zychowicz summarises her research on the archives of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, which was active in the years 1950–1956 and responsible for organising over one hundred presentations of international art in Poland. Petra Skarupsky focuses on the cultural consequences of the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance that was signed by Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1947, while Stanisław Welbel investigates the political aspects of Käthe Kollwitz's and Otto Nagel's exhibitions that were presented in Poland in the first half of the 1950s.

We would also like to present to our readers research studies on exhibitions of Polish art travelling abroad in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Iwona Luba discusses four presentations of avant-garde work by Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro which were organised in the years 1956–1957 in the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibition, at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw, Galerie Raymond Creuze and the Denise René Gallery in Paris. Konrad Niemira reveals some of the political contexts of an unprecedented event in Polish post-war artistic life, i.e. of the *15 Polish Painters* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1961). The history of exhibition encompasses an interest in the strategies of presenting diverse art media. Two texts included in the current issue of *Ikonotheke* are devoted to the medium of photography. Weronika Kobylińska-Bunsch discovers the return of Pictorialism, which was a movement in fine-art photography of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Polish post-war exhibitions. Kamila Leśniak investigates some aspects of the celebrated photographic exhibition *The Family of Man* that was initially presented in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and travelling until the year 1962 to numerous countries in the West, the Far East and to the Eastern bloc. Katarzyna Matul's essay examines the aesthetic and institutional status of the poster, which was originally an advertising medium that became a museum exhibit. Two Polish exhibitions – *Spring Salon* (1946) and *Sculpture in the Garden* (1957) – delineate the scope of Anna Maria Leśniewska's research interest in the medium of sculpture and the strategies of its presentation.

Sketched in the current volume of *Ikonotheke*, the history of exhibitions also addresses the issue of how the “canon” of post-war Polish (and world) art was shaped over time. Krzysztof Kościuczuk examines two exhibitions, *Voir et Concevoir* and *Critics' Picks*, which accompanied the 11<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) that was organised in the People's Republic of Poland in 1975. The volume closes with Agata Jakubowska's view on the first Polish exhibitions of women's art that were organised in 1978 and the cycles curated by the contemporary Polish artist Izabella Gustowska which fall within the modern phenomenon of collective exhibitions embracing works by female artists.