

# Krzysztof Siatka

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An art historian and curator, assistant professor at the Department of the Art Science at the Pedagogical University of Kraków. A researcher of neo-avant-garde and contemporary art, conceptualism and its aftermath and the history of exhibitions. A doctor of the humanities; his doctoral dissertation *Krakow-based Artists of the 1970s and Their Participation in the Neo-Avant-Garde Breakthroughs* was accepted by the Faculty of History of the Jagiellonian University in 2017. Former director of Foto-Medium-Art Gallery (2007-2011) and a curator at the Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery (2011-2019). An author of the concept of a few dozen solo and collective shows displaying work by artists such as Carlos Amorales, Graciela Carnevale, Tony Cokes, Tomasz Dobiszewski, Sława Harasymowicz, Gert Jan Kocken, Sarah van Lamsweerde, Louise Lawler, Justyna Mędrala, Adrian Paci, Ewa Partum, Zdzisław Sosnowski, Timm Ulrichs, and Roland Wirtz. Co-organiser of conferences, e.g. *Hide and Seek. Absence, Invisibility and Contemporary Art Practices* (15-16.03.2018, Pedagogical University, Kraków, Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery), *Make no Mistake* (24-25.11.2018 Budapest, Kaposvár University, Pedagogical University, Kraków). An author of a monograph *W kierunku sztuki ukrytej. Historia Janusza Kaczorowskiego* (2019). Editor of the exhibition catalogues for the shows in the Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery in Kraków, e.g. Tomasz Dobiszewski, *Drobne nieobecności* (2014), Roland Wirtz, *immediatus* (2015) and of a monograph *Księga zmian* (2018).

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# Exhibitions

## at the Centre's Periphery

The exhibition and especially its periodic formula contributes in a unique and attractive way to the discourse of contemporary visual arts. I take into consideration projects that have redefined the meaning of the terms “centre” and “periphery”, making this transformation an enhancement of the artistic message. The annexation of places by periodic events and within them by the intentions of artists and their utopias sometimes empowers representatives of society with their pressing problems (*good-place*). Usually, however, splendour and megalomania, both consequences of commoditisation, delineate a *no-place*<sup>1</sup>. *Good-place* and *no-place* coexist and are inseparable vectors of multiple exhibition initiatives.

*Documenta 14* in 2017 took place in two cities and two countries: first in Athens, Greece, and then in its usual location in Kassel, Germany. The tense atmosphere in the contacts between Greece and Germany provided an interesting reference frame and the artists' perspective on the issues they addressed was double-coded. Greek became the official language of the event; it is spoken daily by about 15 million people, by no means an insignificant number.

The exhibition explored the institutional and non-institutional levels. It annexed museums, galleries, university buildings, public buildings, squares, and streets. The title *Learning from Athens* and the three attendant intriguing and inspiring questions: *What shifts? What drifts? What remains?* were the essence of the vision of the artistic director Adam Szymczyk. It offered a chance to explore the artists' work process as well as to study and create conditions for the development of shared projects. The need to depart from the effect of spectacle towards exploring the creative potential of everyday reality was highlighted<sup>2</sup>.

» 1 See: Ch. Esche, *Making Art Global: A Good Place or No Place* [in:] *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, London 2011, p. 8-13.

» 2 A. Szymczyk, *Interability and Otherness-Learning and Working from Athens* [in:] *The documenta 14 Reader*, Munich-London-New York 2017. *Documenta 14* created a critical place of an exchange of ideas (*good-place*) or its persuasive appearance, which I believe owes a lot to the philosophy of so-called *Open Form*, developed years before under the supervision of

Athens was the cradle of European civilisation; today, however, the city is beset by an economic, social and political crisis. This drama necessitates joint action. At a time of decline, the city becomes an agora for public debate.

*Documenta* failed from the point of view of efficiency. The inscriptions on the walls of buildings in Athens made by activist-artists, reading: “the crisis of commodity or the commodity of crisis?” or “learning from capitalism” unequivocally confirmed that an art exhibition in a similar format is entertainment solely for the elites, which make it a spectacle in the era of crisis.

To me, one of the most intriguing reactions to the challenges of contemporary art is the formula of an event with not permanent address: *Manifesta*, the European Nomadic Biennale. Exhibitions are held in cities that are not capitals of contemporary culture, but rather important locations from a historical point of view. Today they are faced with their own problems. It is possible that the *Manifesta* aspires to spark off a revolution in the approach to the geography of contemporary art.

The list of challenges formulated by the organisers of the 12 editions of the *Manifesta* includes those that provide an identity to contemporary Europe. These are the migration crisis, climate change and a reflection on how these factors affect cities and their residents. Palermo is perceived as a place where many influences have intersected in the history of European civilization;<sup>3</sup> Palermo is also a legendary city of mafia and corruption.

The event in Palermo was permeated with the need to confront the concepts produced by culture and nature. For centuries, Sicily has experienced political, religious and economic changes. Today it is a space synonymous with the migration crisis. The biennale curators were reminded of an aspect of migration other than a demographic one by Francesco Lojacono’s 1875 painting *Veduta di Palermo*. He inspired the exhibition authors to explore the image of the garden as a place of diversity, which develops via movement and transition. The plants shown in the picture are the flora of today’s Sicily. They made their way to the island at different times and were cared for and spread as a result of human agrarian policy and climatic factors. They come from almost all over the world. The garden, therefore, is a place of cultivating the coexistence of diversity, which should remind us that we are all descendants of immigrants.

Oskar Hansen, whose mental and material presence was marked with the presentation of the mock-up of *The Road Monument*. The idea envisages a harmonious integration of biological life forms into the space of human activity. Space is a dynamic and socially conditioned phenomenon. Concentration on the creative role of the user of this space makes the function of the artist or architect merely auxiliary. See: *Oskar Hansen. Ku formie otwartej*, ed. J. Gola, Warszawa 2005.

» 3 See: *Why Palermo?* [in:] <http://m12.manifesta.org/why-palermo/> [access: 10.06.2018].

Abandoning the human perspective is the last migration, a migration of thought that I am now paying attention to, and which the last *Manifesta* addressed. Rosie Braidotti, the intellectual patroness of the event, argues that the proper subject of humanities is by no means the human being. She explains: “the post-humanist theory calls for a new vision of the subject, based on processual ontology, which challenges the traditional equation of a subject with rational consciousness, opposing the reduction both to objectivity and linearity”. Braidotti expresses her hope for the development of humanities in the demand of reuniting the diverse branches of philosophy, sciences and arts to form a new alliance.

Places of public debate and knowledge construction (good-place), which are created in the spaces of contemporary exhibitions, especially those whose formats are subject to the need for experimentation – change and migrate - are at the same time centres of affirmation of contemporary humanities. ●