Art beyond Borders

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The Foksal Gallery was certainly one of the few cultural institutions in Poland that could develop contacts with international partners in Socialist times. Thanks to its backing in the art community, mainly from Tadeusz Kantor and Ryszard Stanislawski, the gallery entered the international art scene during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This article will focus on two stages of its international experiences: Foksal’s participation in the “3e Salon international de ‘Galeries-pilotes’” in Lausanne (1970) and, a few years later, its attendance at the Edinburgh Festival (1972 and 1979).

When the Foksal Gallery was founded in 1966 by the art critics Wiesław Borowski, Hanka Praszkowska, and Mariusz Tchorek, some of the most respectable Polish artists of these times, such as Tadeusz Kantor and Henryk Stażewski, joined the gallery. Foksal mainly presented exhibitions that problematized the artistic process itself. As a public institution on the margins of the state-owned Visual Art Workshops (Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych, PSP), it received infrastructural and material support to organize its artistic projects. While exhibiting modern and avant-garde art, the gallery kept an apparent distance from governmental endeavors to instrumentalize art.
However, Foksal’s combination of different institutional layers and artistic discourses provoked ambivalent reactions. In recent times, a number of publications have focused on the gallery’s artistic and institutional strategies. Marek Krajewski, for example, has analyzed the reluctance of the gallery to combine highly self-reflective art with contemplation about its social and political embeddedness. By so doing, Krajewski concludes, Foksal was taking the risk that its institutionally critical statements, finally, would turn into formalistic gestures.1 In a recent publication, Luiza Nader examined the conceptualistic traits of the art presented at Foksal. The author observed a change from a self-critical institution to a gallery, rather conservatively defending its former status against the art community.2 Besides other publications, these studies refer to the controversial achievements of the Foksal Gallery.3 Within the scope of this publication, the present article wishes to continue the critical approach of these studies by examining some aspects of the genealogy of Foksal’s international affairs.

The idea of international contacts was central for Foksal from its very beginning. Kantor’s words became a leitmotif for the gallery: “National art only matters when it transcends its own national borders. Otherwise, it becomes particular.”4 However, the sociopolitical system in Poland imposed certain restrictions. Therefore, for every exhibition that should be taken abroad or every foreign artist invited, official permission was to be requested. Correspondingly, the first international experiences of the gallery began rather by chance. According to Borowski, one of the first contacts with members from foreign art worlds took place in Warsaw during the Seventh International Congress of the Association Internationale des Critiques d’Art (AICA) in 1960. Here, the group of critics met with Pierre Restany, for example. Al

4 This article is based on an interview with Wiesław Borowski, Warsaw, 16 September 2010. All translations T. S.
though these first personal contacts did not result in cooperative projects immediately, they paved the way for future encounters. Thanks to the photographer Tadeusz Rolke, such a personal relationship was responsible for Foksal’s first journey abroad, as well as the first foreign artists shown in the gallery. In 1967, a friend of Rolke’s, Lars Englund from Sweden, had an exhibition at Foksal. In the following year, the gallery members received a private invitation to Stockholm. During this trip, they met with Pontus Hultén, at this time the director of Moderna Museet and the future founding director of the Centre Pompidou.

The “official” history of Foksal’s travels abroad begins with a visit by Pierre Pauli, the founder of Lausanne’s Musée des Arts Décoratifs. He came with an invitation to the “3e Salon international de Galeries-pilotes.” The “Salon” was an exhibition of art galleries taking place in the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts in Lausanne. In 1970 it was organized for the third time by René Berger, Paul-Henri Jaccard, Pierre Pauli, and others (the previous occasions having been in 1963 and 1966). In these years, a total of forty-three galleries from Europe, North and South America, and Japan exhibited at the “Salon.” From Eastern Europe, there were three institutions besides Foksal: the Gallery of Contemporary Art (Zagreb, 1966), the Galerie Art Centre (Prague, 1966), and the Moderna Galerija (Ljubljana, 1970). The Swiss agreed to cover all costs and to deal with any administrative matters. For organizational help, the gallerists turned to Kantor. To represent Foksal, the following artists were chosen: J. Bereś, Z. Gostomski, T. Kantor, E. Krasiński, M. Stangret, and H. Stażewski. They were accompanied by the three gallerists and the photographer Eustachy Kossakowski. Except for Kantor, all eventually left for Lausanne.

Concluding from the countries the galleries predominantly came from—in Western Europe and the United States—the “global” approach of these events was quite restricted. But considering the political division of Europe in East and West, the “Salon,” certainly functioned as a means of transgressing these borders. In the preface to the catalog of the second “Salon,” Berger mentions the antagonism of “America” and “Russia,” though he reformu-

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5 See http://college-de-veveyvd.ch/auteur/gp123/index.html.
6 Thus, according to Borowski: “The project was done mainly by Kantor,” Interview with Borowski.
7 Kantor did not receive his passport to leave the country. Cf. Interview with Borowski.
lates it at the same time. Currently, Berger writes in 1966, it is the cosmos where the superpowers continue their struggle. Nowadays, scientific discoveries are the foundation of supremacy. That is, Berger literally moves the political conflict into space, extracting science as a means for knowledge production and control. Therefore, according to Berger, developments in the arts should be examined as meticulously as in other areas. For this reason, the author calls for “observatories” that would monitor ongoing processes, “research facilities” that would help to grasp not only “known constellations” but also “flashing lights” as well.8 “Truth,” Berger accordingly continues in the preface to the third catalog, “becomes critique.”9 As a positive example, Berger discerns the Venice Biennale or documenta. And: “Somehow, the international salon of the ‘Galeries-pilotes’ pursues the same goal.”10 A “Galeries-pilotes” dedicates oneself to the “discovery of new talents.”11 Thus, Foksal was represented here as a scientific institution observing the development of art in Poland, based on the elastic paradigm of universalistic and modern art. According to Borowski, the focus stayed on art; no ideological or political issues were raised.12 Collateral to the proceeding artistic exchange, the participants encountered each other as professionals of perception. Each gallery observed artistic and institutional developments while at the same time being observed. Despite some sociopolitical differences, art galleries in the East and West had to cope with similar factors. Namely, the White Cube as one of the spatial and discursive conditions of exhibiting art, catalogs, and archives as administrative devices or the task of interconnecting collectors, critics, and an interested public with artists and their art. Thus, the “Salon” functioned as an observational technology, confirming and reinforcing the ultimately scientific role of galleries that, in the words of René Berger, consisted in the production of knowledge and truth.

For Foksal, the sojourn in Lausanne was a gateway for further meetings. In Chexbres, they met with Theodor Ahrenberg, a collector interested in

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10 Berger, Bedeutung und Ziel der internationalen Ausstellung der “Galeries-Pilotes”, 11.
11 Ibid.
12 Interview with Borowski.
Eastern European artists, notably in Kantor. In Rome, Foksal stayed with the artist Achille Perilli who was among the first foreign artists exhibiting at the gallery (in 1969). Finally, the Foksal group also visited the Venice Biennale. After the exhibition finished in Lausanne, it moved to Paris at the end of October 1970, where it was exhibited in the Musée National d’Art Moderne. As before, the members of the Foksal group came to the exhibition. This time, it was Jean Leymarie, the director of the museum, who was an important contact person, as well as Pierre Restany, with whom the gallerists refreshed their contact from Warsaw. As before, the members of the Foksal group came to the exhibition. This time, it was Jean Leymarie, the director of the museum, who was an important contact person, as well as Pierre Restany, with whom the gallerists refreshed their contact from Warsaw.13 Asked about the immediate consequences of the “Salon” for the gallery, Borowski referred to the directory that was created with contacts in Western art worlds.14 Furthermore, Foksal asked Studio International for a subscription. Subsequently, the gallery received this and many other Western publications, such as Art Forum or Kunstforum. Thus, the “concrete” travel experiences were translated into an administrative compilation, where locations and persons were represented as junctions in a discursive network. Interestingly, this mapping was, in part, under way before Foksal left for Lausanne, thanks to Kantor or Perilli. The effect the journey had can be described as a realignment of a discursive map. Within this realm, future inspections of geographical spaces as well as exhibitional projects were preliminarily staged. To give a negative example, a presentation of Beuys, planned in the 1970s, could not be realized due to interference from Polish officials.15 Thus, while this project remained inside the gallery’s administrative regime, it still “transpassed,” in its own way, national borders and geographical distances between Düsseldorf and Warsaw.

After the “Salon,” the next experiences abroad were in Scotland in 1972 and 1979. Once again, the invitation to participate arrived from the outside. But, obviously, it was also a result of Foksal’s reputation, the gallery having become well established by then. And it was Kantor, once again, who functioned as a key mediator for Foksal. Richard Demarco, one of the organizers of the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, was fond of the art he saw in the gallery.16 Thus, he agreed to invite Kantor’s theater “Cricot 2,” together with Foksal, as

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 16 September 2010. Similarly, in 2004 a major exhibition of Foksal in Munich did not materialize.
16 Ibid.
well as other artists from Poland. The success “Cricot 2” had in Edinburgh was, partially, also one for the gallery. Contemporary art from Poland was recognized as part of a cutting-edge visual culture. As a consequence, Demarco continued his cooperation with Foksal in subsequent years. In 1979, the Foksal Gallery was back in Edinburgh. As before, it was part of a major event, as the press release of the Richard Demarco Gallery shows:

The 1979 Edinburgh Festival will see the Demarco Gallery much involved in the Official Festival program and on the Fringe. The official program of exhibitions will include the Demarco Gallery’s exhibition presenting ... two important Polish artists for the first time in Britain. These artists, ... Witkiewicz and ... Stazewski, represent the widest possible range of the Polish visual art character. Whereas Witkiewicz is the personification of Polish Expressionism, Stazewski represents the extraordinary development of Polish Constructivism, linked to the Russian Constructivist School in the 20s. These two exhibitions will be presented at the Scottish Arts Council’s Fruitmarket Gallery with financial support of the Scottish Arts Council and in association with the Łódź Museum, Polish Ministry of Culture and the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, which will be presenting the exhibitions in Glasgow in the early autumn. The Demarco Gallery is also presenting two other Polish exhibitions, one at Gladstone’s Court in the Royal Mile, of ten contemporary Polish artists, selected by Ryszard Stanisławski of the Łódź Museum; the other is tracing the history and philosophy of the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw from 1966 to the present day. It will be at the Demarco Gallery.

This document can be interpreted as a representation of the discursive order by which contemporary art was mediated. Schematically speaking, art institutions in Poland and Scotland were set in relation to each other in hierarchical

17 Noted in the margin, although the exhibition in Edinburgh was similar to that in Lausanne, it represented a changed institution. Due to internal conflicts in these times, Praszkowska and Tchorek left the gallery as well as the artists Krasiński and Stażewski. Cf. Anka Praszkowska, “Wspólny czas i wspólne miejsce. My in On. My i On. My i Ja. Ja i On. (proba rozwartosciens),” in Tadeusz Kantor z archiwum Galerii Foksal, ed. Małgorzata Jurkiewicz, Joanna Mytkowska, and Andrzej Przywara (Warsaw: Gallery Foksal, 1998), 439–52, 450, 452.

accordance. So, works of “pivotal” importance, by Witkiewicz and Stażewski, were presented in an official institution, the Fruitmarket Gallery, before being sent to the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, whereas contemporary art that, seemingly, did not bare the label of representing the Polish “character” was arranged in other institutions, at Gladstone’s Court and in the Demarco Gallery itself. Foksal presented a historiographical survey of its past activities, a history of the gallery to which Stażewski also belonged. This artist, though, was part of the “official program” as well. By positioning Stażewski on two poles of the exhibitional program, at least nominally, a link was established between official and “semi-official” entities. Correspondingly, among the artists selected by Stanisławski for Gladstone’s Court were Bereś, Kantor, and Krasiński, who also cooperated with the gallery. Thus, the archival construction of Foksal’s history presented at Demarco can be interpreted as a comment on the other exhibitions. The viewpoint from which this survey of Polish art in the twentieth century receives its coherence is represented as being located in the Foksal Gallery that, in turn, is framed by Demarco’s gallery. Because the works exhibited combine the artistic process in Poland of the twentieth century from past till present, a similar equation affects the institutional context. Thus, an umbrella is put up not only to “represent the . . . Polish visual art character,” but also to cover the institutional order of things. In this sense, the Scottish Arts Council, the Łódź Museum, and the Polish Ministry of Culture are conveying the consecrational power of legitimizing art to both the galleries.

Richard Demarco’s close liaison with the Polish Ministry of Culture, with Ryszard Stanisławski of the Łódź Museum of Art and Wiesław Borowski of the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw has produced a tri-partite contribution in which the official, the acceptable and the radical elements in Polish art meet on neutral ground.19

From this perspective, Demarco’s “neutral ground” appears as a benchmark of artistic processes in Poland.

In his review about the “Polish month in Edinburgh,” Paul Overy starts with the words: “This September was the fortieth anniversary of the Ger-

man invasion in Poland, and Britain’s somewhat tardy declaration of war two days later. In Edinburgh, Richard Demarco presented four exhibitions of Polish art for the Festival.”20 With this opening, Overy places his following deliberations in a political context. His favor is with Foksal, to which he attributes “the most interesting work today,” and in the exploration of “that area between drama and the visual arts” he recognizes something familiar.21 “[It’s] worth reflecting,” the critic concludes, “that much of the most interesting works in Britain today, like that of Stuart Brisley or Ian Breakwell, lies in that area too.”22 Thus, when Germany was at the beginning of the article, at the end it is Britain that stands next to Poland. This replacement appears as a metaphorical realization of the obligations that historically were undertaken “somewhat tardy,” as Overy says.23 It indicates the sociopolitical embeddedness of art processes and a symbolic order of governmental affairs. Thus, Foksal’s attendance in Edinburgh must be seen in a geopolitical context. As Borowski himself mentioned, these times were the “Gierek era.”24 The gallery was fully aware of this. However, now it was not Germany anymore—to take Overy’s example—that constituted an obstacle, but the problematic sociopolitical regime(s) in communist Europe.25 In this respect, the exhibition in Edinburgh, on “neutral ground,” can be interpreted as a tactical appropriation of Polish art and its separation from the Eastern Bloc. A good argument for this can be found in another of Overy’s surveys. “[It] is not entirely surprising that in its variety, international awareness, internecine aggressiveness and peculiar brittleness, the art scene in Poland reminds one most of Italy among Western countries.”26 This “Italianization” of Polish matters appears as a way of constructing familiarity in alien territory. Basically, Overy writes, “East Europe . . . remains unknown ground.”27 Foksal, though, functioned as a vehicle conveying the idea that Eastern Europe was, hypothetically at least, knowable, that it was part of a common
knowledge space. The “radical” art presented at the gallery was the “radix” of this idea.\textsuperscript{28}

For the gallery, cooperation with Demarco continued to be fruitful. From Edinburgh the exhibition went to the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow. The following year, 1980, this exhibition was presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and at the Project Gallery in Dublin.

Before coming to a general conclusion, a few words about some aspects that could not be considered here: (1a) The \textit{Exchange between Artists, 1931–1982: Poland–USA}, an exhibition, organized by Anka Ptaszkowska in 1982 in Paris, together with Pontus Hultén, and in cooperation with Foksal. Thanks to its “Swedish connection,” Olle Granath, director of Moderna Museet, suggested the gallery host an exhibition called \textit{Dialog}. Here, in 1985, works of Polish artists were exhibited alongside works of other European and North American artists with which the former wished to enter into spatial interaction. Thus, for example, Henryk Stażewski was presented in dialogue with Daniel Buren. Foksal’s other international experiences were the Art Frankfurt (1988 and 1991) and the Art Hamburg (1993). (1b) Another aspect, almost completely omitted here, is the exhibitions of foreign artists in Warsaw. Beginning with the solo exhibition by Lars Englund in 1967, there have been over thirty artists from abroad at the gallery. Among them are such renowned names as Art & Language, Christian Boltanski, Daniel Buren, Allan Kaprow, and Anselm Kiefer.\textsuperscript{29} (1c) Also, the contacts between Foksal and official cultural institutions, councils, and embassies of countries such as Germany, France, or Great Britain were not studied. (2a) The gallery’s archive is of great importance. It offers not only information about Foksal’s exhibitions and voyages, but also administrative correspondence. Additionally, it presents a specific material and haptic side of the gallery’s institutional endeavors. That is, it also bears auratic traces of geographic trajectories with a poietological dimension of their own that deserves further attention. The photographic works and documents in the archive are worth particular consideration. (2b) Before the initial Foksal group split up in 1970, the galleryists had discussed and, partially, agreed on the pronouncement of a new regulation for the institution. This “New Regulation for Cooperation with the

\textsuperscript{28} McCullough “Edinburgh Festival 1979,” 452.

\textsuperscript{29} As can be seen on the homepage of the gallery: http://www.galeriafoksal.pl/old/hist_p.htm.
Part III  ·  Gathering People

Foksal Gallery PSP” (Nowy Regulamin Współpracy z Galerią Foksal PSP), initiated by Ptaszkowska, seems to be close to some deliberations undertaken by the Situationist International (cf. in this regard also Borowski’s term “Pseudoawangarda” (see below)); it was not adopted, though.30 (2c) Furthermore, to what extent have Foksal’s international experiences intensified existing differences between the gallery and the Polish art community? In his text “Pseudoawangarda” (1975), Borowski ambivalently divides the Polish art world into “real” and “fake” avant-gardists; the author also argues in reference to the West, thus taking a viewpoint from outside Poland in order to segregate internal matters.31 (2d) Additionally, and viewed from a post-1989 perspective, it is worth examining to what extent this notion of institutional superiority affected the further history of the gallery and beyond. Primarily, this concerns the problematic relationship between the gallery and the Foksal Gallery Foundation (FGF) that was established in 1997, because the standing of the FGF amid the contemporary art community is not unambivalent. Here, too, a narrowing of discursive access possibilities is sometimes criticized. In this context, the FGF’s institutional contacts would be worth examining. Their genealogy partly reaches back to the gallery’s times. This seems to be the case with a former member of the FGF, Joanna Mytkowska, for example. Before she took up the position of director of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, she was curator at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. As has been shown, this museum established contacts with the Foksal Gallery many years ago.

Foksal’s international relationships were mainly built on personal contacts and the reputation they mediated. Contacts established in early times were cultivated and helped when organizing ventures in the following years. Consequently, Foksal’s network was expanding. In this context, it was DeMarco in particular who helped the gallery, but others did so as well: artists, museum directors and curators, collectors, art journals, etc.

Looking back at Lausanne and Edinburgh and considering the question of ideology, two main aspects have to be outlined. In Lausanne, political aspects were, at least explicitly, set aside in favor of a universalistic paradigm of cultural communication. Art as “science” and galleries as “observatories”

were two of the main devices that regulated this interchange. Thus, the Foksal Gallery was part of a symbolic order that perpetuated the notion of an aestheticized, socially detached knowledge production. This went hand-in-hand with the galleries’ self-perception as avant-garde. In Edinburgh, however, a more politicized interpretation was suggested by the exhibitional context. The political dimension of this event consisted, at first, in the historically connoted seizure of Polish art from the twentieth century and its trenchant reproduction as a galleristic projection, while official institutions were pushed to the margins. Ultimately, it was the galleries, Demarco and Foksal, that constituted the prevailing focal point, from which the synopsis received its coherence. Accordingly, the next step was a rhetorical appropriation of Polish art and its separation from the Eastern Bloc. Interestingly, this rendering of art was considered a “neutral” presentation. On both layers, therefore, Foksal functioned as a frame for detaching the presentation of art processes. Although the events, Lausanne and Edinburgh, differed in respect to the degree of politicization, a similar device for regulating the symbolic order seems to have been in operation: the idea of a scientific and neutral representation of contemporary art. Against all means of institutional decomposition that Foksal and others have undertaken, it was the paradigm of the White Cube that “crossed the border”—it “closed the gap.”