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## KATARZYNA KOZYRA. AN ARTIST IN THE ART FIELD. A CASE STUDY

**Abstract.** The purpose of the paper is to present the artistic accomplishments of Katarzyna Kozyra as a representative of critical art in the context of her position in the art field. The analysis was expanded to her relationship with the audience, based on a chain of artistic communication exemplified by the *Nude Study* sculpture of 1991.

In March 2021, a study on the reception of modern artworks was carried out in the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. The respondents were asked to view and to interpret, among others, the *Nude Study* by Katarzyna Kozyra of 1991. To confront the general understanding of the work and to verify the efficiency of artistic communication, a free-form interview with the artist was also carried out, where she presented her own interpretation of the study. The artist's responses and opinions of the audience became the research material quoted here. The analysis disclosed consistency of the message and even though the answers did not overlap closely with the artist's intention, they were fully accepted by her. The interview also offered an impetus for reflecting on the position of the artist in the art field and her relationship with the agents in the field. It turns out that the artist is clearly dominated by the political field which affects her functioning in the art field.

The results above may offer an inspiration for further research on the creative activities of other artists, who may struggle with completely different problems and create different layouts in the art field.

**Keywords:** critical art, Katarzyna Kozyra, art field, reception of art, artistic communication.

### 1. Works and controversies

Katarzyna Kozyra is one of the leading representatives of critical art in Poland. Throughout thirty years of her activities, she has created numerous video-installations, video-artworks, photographs and performances. The artist utilises

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and combines diverse techniques, often reaching for the art of new media. The resulting works are the outcome of in-depth observations of the current standards and the Polish reality. In her projects, the artist negates various social, cultural and political phenomena, including the concept of sexuality, disease or death in the political discourse (Rottenberg 2020). She shows old age and emaciated body that is usually deprived of a place in the limelight (Borkowski, Mazur, Branicka 2007). Her works, as well as the works of other artists who are active in the current of critical art, breach the borders of the taboo, thus sparking controversies and sometimes stirring up extreme emotions of the public. Their exhibitions are often held in an atmosphere of a scandal, they encounter opposition of right-wing politicians and publishers, there are attempts at censoring them, and sometimes even court actions are brought with respect to the offence of religious feelings or demeaning of the national symbols. Such attacks also bring popularity to the authors of the provocation. As excommunicated artists, the creators and their works become recognizable and strengthen the position of art in the social discourse.

Katarzyna Kozyra rose into fame with her graduation piece titled the *Pyramid of Animals* prepared at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. This installation quickly pigeon-holed her as a modern art scandalmonger. The piece consists of four taxidermy animals arranged atop of one another: a horse, a dog, a cat and a rooster. It was inspired by the Brothers' Grimm fable *The Musicians of Bremen*. In the fable, the animals run away from their owners who plan to kill them for different reasons. After wandering for a long time, the characters reach a hut where robbers are staying. To drive the bad people away, the animals scare them with loud noises. Thanks to a simple trick, they manage to find a place for themselves where they can live together till the end of their days. Referring to this story, Kozyra points to the violence that man engages in towards animals. To prepare the installation, the artist used the previously killed cat and dog. On the other hand, the horse and the rooster were destined to die. Even though animals are killed by people on a mass scale and the fate of the horse selected by the artist was in principle predestined, the use of the animal for the artistic project stirred controversy and doubts of ethical nature.<sup>1</sup> This resulted from the fact that the artist used bodies of animals the killing of which is not accepted in the Polish culture. They are euthanised in exceptional situations. Apart from the bodies of animals conserved by a taxidermist, an additional significant element of the installation was a video of the horse being put to sleep shown on a small monitor. The characters from the Grimm fable manage to get away from death and they eventually prevail over man. However, the mare in the video is not a creature from the fable and her fate is cruel. Or rather, it is similar to the fate of hundreds of other horses that are destined for slaughter. However, this process is covert and not

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<sup>1</sup> The ethical side of the *Pyramid of Animals* was challenged by, among others, Dorota Łagodzka, who contested the allegation that the ban on killing animals for art was tantamount to censorship or interference in integrity of an artwork (Łagodzka 2011b).

discussed. The *Pyramid of Animals* addresses the issue of death, which is a part of the human existence, but it remains non-conscious, often marginalised or even ousted from the social discourse. According to the artist, the true image of death is falsified for the sake of manipulated and retouched reality. The brutal treatment of animals by people is often suppressed or ignored. Nobody presents the process of culling cows or chicken publicly, yet tasty meat intended for consumption is advertised everywhere. Death evokes anxiety and discomfort only after it has been stripped bare and shown to the public. Putting an animal to sleep and skinning it is a macabre and shocking view. By showing the procedure of killing an animal, the artist forces the viewers to see the entire act, which causes discomfort. Paradoxically, the final artwork is aesthetic and visually attractive, just like the view of aromatic roasted meat is appetising and beckoning. The artwork also addresses the issue of animals' fate after death and their utilitarian treatment by people: clothes, shoes and bags are made of their skin. Thus, it is not surprising that the work was, on the one hand, interpreted as an ecological manifesto, advocating protection of animal rights: "Why are we offended when a dog is killed, but the fate of thousands of pigs does not concern us? Why should an artist be guided by different rights than a butcher?" (Stańczyk 2011: 7). On the other hand, Kozyra was accused of actions that violate the borders of morality. Deciding to complete her graduation piece, she contributed to the killing of a specific animal, she participated in and even initiated the killing. The fact that others contribute to the suffering does not absolve us when we decide to commit the same deed. Hence, justifiability of artistic activities that breach the rights of animals or other people is questionable. The opponents of the piece noted that the "absolutisation of the concept of liberty (of art) should not lead to the negation of liberty (of animals)" (Łagodzka 2011a: 10).

Since that moment, the majority of Katarzyna Kozyra's initiatives have met with sharp polemic. The artist challenges the existing stereotypes and criticizes the socio-political discussions. Her subsequent works were set in the realm of cultural taboos and stereotypes embedded in daily life (Radkiewicz 2010). Bodies presented in her works are subject to rigorous control. The issues of corporeality and death have become even more important for Kozyra in effect of her own experiences. In the work *Olympia*, the artist used her own body, emaciated by chemotherapy. Her half-reclining pose alludes to the composition of Édouard Manet's painting. Also the title of the piece stresses the relationship with the Impressionist work, which in consequence channels the mode of interpretation of the contemporary piece. As opposed to the beautiful and attractive 19th century model, Kozyra shows her nudity in the context of a disease. The work undermines the traditional forms of presenting a nude body, especially a female one in artworks usually created by men. As a rule, nudes showed young and firm bodies. Saggy skin of old women could rather be an expression of their sinful life, evil nature or impending death (Eco 2007). Critical voices in the case of *Olympia* concerned the author's exhibitionism and use of own disease for causing a sensation.

The works of Katarzyna Kozyra usually meet with equivocal evaluations. On the one hand, numerous prizes and exhibitions testify to the appreciation for Kozyra's actions and position them within the realm of legitimate culture. In 1997, Kozyra received the 'Paszport Polityki' prize as the most promising artist. Two years later, she was given honorary mention when she was representing Poland at the 47th Venice Biennale. Kozyra is a laureate of numerous prizes and international scholarships, while her works are presented in museums and galleries all over the world. On the other hand, the artist's works, on account of their nature, may be included in the area of limited cultural production, while each of her projects has been accompanied by as many positive as negative opinions and expressions of opposition against her creativity. Some politicians and Catholic Church authorities accused her of demeaning religious symbols in the *Blood Ties* (Szylak n.d.). An application to the public prosecution office was submitted by Province Governor Michał Kasiński, who accused the artist of "demeaning the object of religious worship, i.e. the cross for Christians and the crescent for Muslims" (*Oprotestowane więzy* 1999: 7). A spokesman for the Polish Episcopate, the authorities of the city of Gdynia, Gdańsk and the Polish Red Cross also expressed their protest. Ethical doubts were also raised by the *Bathhouse* (1997) and the *Men's Bathhouse*, presented at the Venice Biennale in 1999. The material, recorded with a hidden camera in a public bathhouse in Budapest, showed intimate behaviour and habits of people frequenting the premises. The artist entered the zone intended for women as one of the bathers. To enter the men's bathhouse, she dressed up as a man and attached facial hair and genitals. Two paintings are displayed at the beginning and at the end of the recording: *The Turkish Bath* (1862) by Ingres and *Susanna and the Elders* (1647) by Rembrandt. The installation raised controversy, because the material was recorded without anybody's knowledge and permission (Szabłowski n.d.). In an interview carried out for the needs of the study, the artist noted that today this type of project would not have been possible. Protection of personal data and image is so strictly observed that probably her work could not have been presented in the official artistic circulation. Interestingly, Kozyra acknowledged that irrespective of the modern limitations, she would still re-do her project, but limiting its presentation to the group of most trusted persons. Hence, the artist still believes the concept to be morally correct and valuable, and it is only the restrictive legal standards that are controlling her artistic freedom. Most probably, the reactions of the conservative milieu in the recent years have sensitised her to the consequences of violating a cultural taboo. The author of the *Pyramid of Animals* is still surprised by the violent reaction of the audience to her graduation piece. Most probably, the society was not (and possibly is still not) ready for such bold creative activities at that time (Zydorowicz 2005). Yet also the artist herself was not capable of or did not wish to take the consequences of her decisions into account and failed to see that she would stir such strong opposition.

## 2. Creative process

If Kozyra is not fully aware of the potential consequences of her performances, one should try to determine what she is guiding by when proposing the selected means of expression. Along with the progressing autonomisation of the art field in the course of history, the utility of art has started to give way to its autotelic nature. When the concept of “art for art’s sake” has emerged, the form of expression and the artistic creativity started to prevail over the content and the form of a work. The artists were no longer looking for inspiration and subjects in the surrounding reality, but in their own emotions and experiences. They incorporated them into the creative act. The next step was engaging oneself, i.e. one’s body and experiences, in the process of work creation in an explicit mode. Kozyra also carries out such activities by participating in her own performances, acting in them and experiencing directly. In *Olympia*, she presents her own body subjected to chemotherapy. She loans it and uses it as artistic material. In the *In Art Dreams Come True* project, she assumes various roles and analyses the topoi of femininity. Oftentimes, the artist uses quotations and references classic works of art, thus joining the meta-discourse on art. Her works could be analysed in the context of the “sociology of subjects”, i.e. in the perspective of common threads and motives appearing in the works of art and interpreted depending on the socio-genetic factors. Such approach was used by Pierre Francastel, followed by Anna Matuchniak-Krasuska (2017), who analysed the borrowings of motives in the works of Jerzy Duda-Gracz. However, such analysis would require a separate paper. The artist, when asked about the creative process, conceded that creation was a certain task for her that she undertakes. When she becomes interested in something, she wishes to delve into the subject. Ultimately, “the creator is a person who notices the new features of the world and is the first to be able to talk about them in a convincing mode” (Golka 1996: 62). Searching is her inner necessity. Wishing to delve into an issue of interest, she analyses a specific subject and expands her horizons. Marian Golka called it “expansion of the human world” (Golka 1996: 65), which leads to the unveiling of senses or hidden meanings. The artist describes the process of expanding the relationship with the reality using the following words: “I am starting to look at a subject in a completely different way than when I did when I came up with it and also differently than when I started working on it”. The analysis of a selected subject is a form of self-development. The means of expression and the modes of showing the result of prior reflections are chosen later. In opposition to the initial stage of her career, today the artist knows that ultimately the recipients of her communications will be the audience to whom its content is addressed. Her relationship with the audience is conscious. Kozyra notes that on the one hand, her art may have negative impact on some (as confirmed by the protests and expressions of opposition against violation of moral borders in art), but she is also aware that for many recipients, projects

of this type may be positive, which is testified by the messages and comments that she receives. This is greatly ennobling for her, as “confirmation of the value of a creative process is its impact on people’s lives” (Golka 1996: 63). In line with the artist’s intention, art may perform a cognitive function in her case. In her projects, she wishes to explore issues that an average man does not have the opportunity or the time for learning about. The recipient has, according to her, an possibility to discover new senses of the surrounding reality, while her art should contain an educational value, just like literature or cinematography.

### **3. *Nude Study* – critical interpretation**

Often equivocal assessment of Kozyra’s work makes the case study of her artistic accomplishments cognitively valuable. In March 2021, the author commenced studies aimed at learning the course and the determinants of reception of modern art. The studies were carried out in the Zachęta National Gallery during the *Sculpture in Search of a Place* exhibition, where traditional (interview, survey, observation) and modern (oculography) research techniques were used. In the first place, the research participants were asked to view six designated works with the use of special oculars registering the movements of the eyes. After viewing the works of art, a free-form interview was held; the author had a list of information that was sought; in the course of the interview, the viewers’ impressions, their aesthetic preferences, opinions about the artworks and the mode of interpreting them were verified. A free-form statement of the recipient was followed by the test part of the study. Every respondent completed a survey verifying the level of cultural activity and then did a test of aesthetic disposition and artistic competence, which showed the capacity for treating the works in the autotelic category and the level of knowledge about art. Even though full results of the study are not the subject matter of this paper, one of the works selected for the analyses was the *Nude Study* by Katarzyna Kozyra of 1991. To confront the general understanding of the work and to verify the efficiency of artistic communication, a free-form interview with the artist was also carried out, where the artist’s interpretation of the work was presented. Juxtaposing the artist’s intentions with the comments of the respondents allowed for investigating the entire chain of artistic communication (artist – artwork – recipient), which is discussed in this paper. The conversation also addresses the issue of the artist’s place in the art field, her relationship with other artists, mediating institutions and organisations subsidising artistic projects. The effects of reflections above will be presented in a further part of the text.

The discussed piece was shown in a room titled *Human*. In the curator’s intention, the artworks presented there referred to the issue of corporeality and sensuality. The entire exhibition was unified by a slogan written on the gallery

wall: “Although we use the most advanced technologies, we are constantly dependent on our sensory system, emotions, the resonance instruments that are our bodies and senses”. It is worth noting that the work was placed right next to Alina Szapocznikow’s *Herbarium* of 1972, i.e. a series of deformed imprints of the human body, characteristic for the works of this artist. The curator purposefully combined these two works to attract attention to the compositions using the motif of corporeality. A commentary to the exhibition written by Szapocznikow in the 1970s may, in principle, refer to the works of both artists:

Through the imprints of the human body, I am attempting to solidify the fleeting moments of life, its paradoxes and absurdity in the transparent polystyrene [...]. Of all the manifestations of the ephemeral, the human body is the most vulnerable, the only source of all joy, all suffering and all truth (Szapocznikow 1972, according to Leśniewska 2021: 42).



**Figure 1.** *Nude Study* (1991), wire, modelling clay, cabinet: glass, wood

Source: <https://zacheta.art.pl/pl/kolekcja/katalog/kozyra-katarzyna-akty-anorektyczki-2/galeria> (accessed: 25.01.2022).

The *Nude Study* is a set of seven sculptures made of modelling clay and fastened to the bed of plywood or chipboard. The work was created during the time of her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and refers to the artist’s interest in corporeality, which is also manifested in her later works, along with the desire of refuting the current standards of beauty in the patriarchal society. The artist decided to create a series of small-size compositions made of modelling clay. However, this series clearly diverges from the classical presentation of nudity. In this case, the organisms are subjected to certain decomposition. The formed figures present the outlines of dismembered trunks which make up disturbing human portraits. Corporeal deformity interested Kozyra already during her student times. Encumbered with the experience of anorexia and bulimia, she focused on the control and exploitation of an organism. When, during her studies, she met a girl who also suffered from eating disorders, she decided that the new friend would be a model for her project. The outcome was the study of the anorectic nude. Metal wires sticking out from the clay shapes highlight the fragile skeleton of the figure. The presented figures are contorted, shrunk and sick, as if they were at a stage of decomposition. The absence of the head additionally adds a disturbing overtone to the presented creature. The figures seem to disappear and are slowly absorbed into the background.

#### 4. Author's interpretation

To analyse the entire process of artistic communication, both the general reception of the viewers and the author's interpretation of the work were examined. The collected testimonies allowed for checking the consistency of the sender's intentions with the mode of reception of aesthetic impulses by the recipients. As follows from the artist's account, the work was a form of a student exercise. As the students were free with respect to the form of the project, Kozyra decided to bring her friend to the class. The woman suffering from anorexia seemed to be the ideal object for practising the body structure. Protruding bones and ribs were clearly visible under the skin. However, it turned out that among students only Kozyra was interested in the model. She started to sculpt the figure with passion; meanwhile, other students did not believe her figure to be aesthetic and did not accept her as the model. According to the artist's recollections, only she created the small figures with engagement and zeal. The minute form and plastic material allowed for quick and spontaneous action. In assumption, each of the sculptures was meant to focus on a different dimension of the body: bones, veins and muscles. It turns out that the first one from the left (Fig. 1) is a synthesis of all the other ones. Previously, the sculptures were arranged in a different order, yet the sequence has no greater significance for the artist. For the purpose of the exhibition, she arranged them in a configuration that seemed interesting for her.

Initially, the work resulted from a creative urge and fascination with the human body, while the exhibition presentation was not taken into account. However, the figures were combined into a series for display purposes. Next, the entire series was put inside a glass cabinet, which the artist jokingly called the "coffin of Snow White" even though the intention was clearly pragmatic and meant to protect the sculptures from damage. On account of the material, the installation is very fragile and could easily be damaged. To make the composition more dramatic, the artist spilled some red ink on one of the figures, which was meant to suggest blood. As she noted ironically: "It looks like a bird after an accident". The artist admitted that initially she did not consider this installation to be an artwork. It was only when she saw the lively and positive reaction of her professors that she realised the value of her work. The authority of her mentors instilled the project with the status of an artwork: "I sussed that they had a value because one of my professors wanted to have them for himself. He wanted me to give them to him as a gift. So I sussed out that there was something in them. That they were great. And I did not give them to him". When asked about her ideas about the reception of the work by the gallery audience, she assumed that the figures would evoke negative emotions and aversion, which was hard for her to understand as she personally considered them fascinating. She also noted that a nude usually evokes more traditional associations – as an aesthetic projection of the female body. The recipients of art are accustomed to such silhouettes when admiring classical Greek statues or mythical figures by Bernini.



On the other hand, her presentation may shock, surprise and cause discomfort. As noted earlier, Kozyra shows the aspects that usually do not function in the realm of visibility or are in opposition to the visual form embedded in the tradition.

## 5. General reception of work

According to the interviews carried out with the members of the audience in the Zachęta Gallery, the ability to read the *Nude Study* is much deeper than the author expected, as in a predominant majority, the respondents engaged in metaphorical interpretations. The free-form interview carried out with the respondents was aimed at identifying their interpretations and the reception of the work. In result, thirty-five reception testimonies were received. Separating the elements of the process of art reception, the respondents' sensual perception was checked, aesthetic impressions, interpretation and evaluation of sculptures. For the purpose of analysing the compiled information, three aspects of work interpretation were separated: semantic, formal and emotional.

### 5.1. Semantic interpretation: understanding the content of the work

The respondents see slender figures, skeletons and shapes in Katarzyna Kozyra's work, which they identify as a woman or potentially as a child. There were also associations with foetuses, and even with a miscarriage. The respondents referred to the macabre pro-life posters placed in the urban space by activists, which are, in consequence, also functioning in the social awareness. The arrangement of the body was identified with the foetal position. There were also references to medical experiments. Given the layout of the composition, the respondents often suggested that the installation showed a certain evolutionary process and the sequence of the bodies created a series, where the form was struggling to emerge from the matter. In reference to prenatal associations, the work would purport to show birthing, yet charged with suffering and struggle.

I have associations with the evolution of humans from textbooks, the hominid, the Australopithecus. [...] these figures are also facing one way, which gives me the impression that they are heading somewhere (man, 34 years of age).

Thus, nobody interpreted the work as a series of separate figures, where each illustrates anatomical positions of the same person. The mode of presentation suggested interpretations that became consistent in the group of respondents.

Another aspect that became visible in the respondents' interpretations is the issue of corporeality, which is strongly resounding in the work. Rickety structures highlight the fragility and the suppleness of the figure. However, these are always tormented bodies, stressing the fragile and uncertain condition of man.

I am interpreting it as a decomposition of man, maybe as leaving, dying and as fragility of the human life (man, 32 years of age).

In line with the artist's suspicions, turpist shapes rather brought to mind decomposition than a classical sketch showing the beauty of the human body. The respondents attracted attention to the fact that the work was quite a contradiction of the typical understanding of a nude. One of the respondents, using a play on words, said that he would rather call it a death study. The respondents also associated the work with the process of dying, return to the soil, destruction and disappearance of the body, with bones and viscera protruding from it, delimited by the structures of wires. The layout of the bodies also resembled archaeological excavations of ancient tombs, and there were three references to the victims of the catastrophe in the ancient Pompeii. Furthermore, the work evoked thoughts about war, genocide or even the Holocaust. The impressions were intensified by a fragment of the work coloured in red, which – combined with the outlines of the figures – made the respondents think about blood.

I see incomplete figures, more massacred than attaining a certain entirety. This is somehow convulsive and hurting, because the blood appears here, if this is blood, but I assume that the red is an archetype, there is no doubt about it (woman, 44 years of age).

## 5.2. Formal interpretation of the work

Some respondents noted certain accidental and impressive traits in the form, which they assessed as the advantage of the artwork. Their remarks are confirmed in the account of the artist, who described her activities as dynamic. The speed of work was dictated by the heated modelling clay, which was hardening in the process. However, for some respondents (four persons) sketchiness was a drawback. The outlines of the figure were deemed incomplete and not intended for display in a gallery. It was assessed that it was only a creative trial and not a fully-fledged artwork.

I have an impression that this is an exercise, I would not consider it an artwork, an independent piece of work (man, 41 years of age).

[...] I would not consider it a complete work, but a study for a photograph or something like this. Or some sort of an exercise, not as a final artwork, but an act of learning the human body. Actually, I am not sure if it should be exhibited in a gallery (man, 25 years of age).

In their interpretations, the respondents often drew attention to the form of the work, which harmonises with the subject matter. The ultimate body deformation is perceptible, whose shapes are arranged in almost abstract compositions. In contrast to the artist's fears, the respondents stressed the beauty of the form, which is aesthetic in its execution.

This is aesthetic torment, which means that the sculptures are aesthetic, but they are tragic in their expression of being (woman, 44 years of age).

The artist's skills and careful execution were also appreciated. The texture, considered non-uniform and intriguing, seemed interesting. The material from which the work was made has divided the respondents into the advocates and the opponents of modelling clay. Some had positive associations with children's creativity – this argument was listed by persons who had children. On the other hand, the negative evaluation indicates the modelling clay as an unattractive mass used for infantile play.

### 5.3. Emotional interpretation

Kozyra's work evoked quite consistent emotions in all the respondents, irrespective of the evaluation of aesthetic qualities of the work. The enumerated features included: poignant, moving, unpleasant, shocking, intriguing, ambiguous or nostalgic. Three persons claimed that the work in general was inspiring and offered "food for thought", while three other persons admitted that they would like to have it at home.

I could have one of the figures by Kozyra, because for me, this is art in its pure form (woman, 44 years of age).

There were also sporadic critical voices. Five persons indicated the work as least interesting, not revealing and not provoking any thoughts. Two persons admitted their general bias against the artist and her works which, according to them, rely on shocking and force the respondents to experience strong emotions.

This is a type of artwork that is meant to influence me, but it does not. I am not in favour of this type of emotional blackmail. I appreciate the form, but I have a long-lasting problem with the art of this artist who likes to dazzle and to shock in a hysterical way. It distances me right away, because I dislike this type of energy (woman, 36 years of age).

## 6. Reception in the context of the exhibition

Six persons drew attention to the correspondence between the work of Katarzyna Kozyra and the casts of Alina Szapocznikow, placed above it. Not only a similar form, but also the texture and the subject matter that are in an interaction were noted. A common thread was also the oncological experience of both artists. Almost all of the six respondents had higher education and scored highest results in the aesthetic disposition test. Thus, the ability to note the correlation between the works confirmed the respondents' sensitivity. It is interesting to note that only two of the aforementioned respondents also scored high results in the test checking the level of art knowledge, which would indicate that mindfulness is an ability that

does not require familiarity with the history of art. A close correlation between the two works was also mentioned by the curator of the exhibition.

It seemed to me that the trace of a person, the imprint of a person, everything that is related to it, may be expressed not only by evoking a certain figure or the trace of the figure, but also via a fragment, a photograph, through naturalism or verism. There is verism in Szapocznikow's work, while here [in Kozyra's work], I would see a reference, which I always associate with certain fragmentariness, yet based on a trace.

## 7. Artist with respect to the field of reception

By providing the artist with opinions about her work, the author of the study became a mediator in the artistic communication. Artists usually do not have the opportunity of confronting the testimonies of reception compiled in this manner. In this case, Kozyra had the chance of learning about the reception of her work. The artist listened to the comments with great interest and enthusiasm, while critical opinions were accepted in a neutral way. She agreed with the remarks and the observations of the respondents. She even seemed to be content with the quoted answers. The recipients' impressions turned out to be accurate and close to the author's intention. The artist was positively surprised by the information that the respondents could see the aesthetic dimension of the modelling clay figures. As mentioned earlier, the artist – through her actions – wishes to share her ideas about the world with the audience, while the cognitive function is the vital role of art for her. On the other hand, among other tasks of art which, according to her, may be important for the audience, she listed the aesthetic and the hedonistic function, which overlapped with the respondents' declarations. She was amused by the proposal of calling the sculpture the *Death Nude*. Kozyra acknowledged that when giving a title to an artwork, it should be remembered that it is a part of the work and should not narrow the mode of its understanding. It should be extensive enough to allow the viewers for their free interpretation. Thus, she appreciated the quoted association, but concluded that such title would limit her artistic communication.

Artists can have diverse attitudes to the recipients of their work. However, due to the fact that they are the last link in the chain of artistic communication, they usually create with a thought about them. When asked about it, Katarzyna Kozyra acknowledged that when looking for subjects interesting to her, she is guided by the choice of concepts that seem interesting to her. However, at the moment of preparing the form of expression, she does think about the audience – the recipients of the work. Thus, she accounts for the mode of presentation and its form to make the communication effective. Beauty makes the work more interesting and engaging for her. Thus, it is understandable that the artist takes care of the aesthetic aspects of execution. According to her, an installation should

look aesthetic because beautiful items which have, in line with Wallis' distinction, soft aesthetic values, are pleasant in reception. "I always try to make it visually attractive, because the effect is better. Even if the content is hard to swallow, but when something is visually attractive, then you, so to speak, enter via the back door". Mere conceptual processing of an issue is not sufficient for her. The need to share it is so strong that the stage of showing it to others is a form of completion of a creative act. However, it must be admitted that a work does not always have the impact that the artist intended it to have. The respondent, specifying it, imposes own interpretations and assumptions. Nevertheless, in the process of creation the artist creates an *ideal* recipient in his/her imagination (Golka 2008: 175), who would interpret his/her work in a mode closest to the intended one. Kozyra, when asked who could be the addressee of her works and who comes to the exhibitions, in the first place listed her friends and acquaintances, i.e. the closest group in the field of reception. Then, she also enumerated people who are interested in her works and follow her artistic accomplishments. As the last group, she mentioned people for whom her works are provocative and who are "waiting for sensation". Who, according to Kozyra, considers her works controversial? First of all, these may be religious people, but she primarily meant people whose religiousness is rather manifested in the reproduction of ritual religious practice than in conscious delving into the idea of Christianity. For bigots, her works may be iconoclastic. Such reactions may be evoked by her performances/processions, i.e. *Madonna from Pelago* and *Madonna from Regensburg*. The performances consisted of a group of participants carrying a sedan chair with a figure of Virgin Mary with Kozyra's face, lead by a Maestro dressed up as a cardinal with a rat's mask. Another group that may condemn her actions are the conservatives "who wish to instil some virtues".<sup>2</sup> The last group listed by the artist were the traditionalists convinced about the justness of their opinions who are, according to her, opposing any activities escaping a conservative mode of thinking. Kozyra also noted that the reception of her works abroad is different; it is more free and does not raise so many controversies. These recipients recognize the artistic convention and do not interpret her actions as insulting or shocking.

Reluctance to art, especially modern art, may be caused by a lack of understanding of its assumptions and intentions of the artist. Ortega y Gasset noted that the assumptions of the modern art are not addressed to all recipients. Its complexity and character may make it difficult to internalise and thus render it less attractive (Ortega y Gasset 1980: 279). However, Kozyra assumes that her works are "as easy as pie"; they have a clear message and do not require familiarity with the history of art. Reception of artworks should, according to

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<sup>2</sup> Here, the artist referred to the words of Paweł Skrzydłowski, Ph.D., advisor to the minister of education, Przemysław Czarnek, who declared that one of the goals of the Polish schools is to reinforce the female virtues. His statement raised multiple comments and criticism among representatives of leftist milieus and opponents of the present government.

Kozyra, take place on an emotional level and the condition of full experience is tolerance and an open mind. In such case, even lack of acceptance does not preclude certain reflection. On the other hand, bias and negative attitude narrow down, as she claims, the viewers' cognitive potential. Her remark seems to be justified. Among the respondents, there were answers acknowledging that the dislike of the artist influenced their negative reception of the work.

I do not like her due to many reasons and maybe that is why I immediately went "Oh, this" [with disappointment, author's note]. [...] first of all, I saw it and after I have read it, obviously something clicked...

## **8. Artist with respect to the art field – conflict within the field**

In line with the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, a field is a social space where constant competition among field agents takes place, who have economic, social, cultural or symbolic capital at their disposal. The stake in such conflicts are certain goods and interests. The art field where the artist is positioned is a system of relationships of tension and cooperation with other creators, critics, curators, buyers, gallery owners, collectors, patrons and the audience. The field is an "internally structured system of positions" occupied by individual agents (Matuchniak-Krasuska 2010: 41). Many artists compete for specific goods (audience, funds, scholarship, exhibitions) the amount of which is limited. This tends to be a cause of conflicts, even though as noted by the artist, some milieus (for example in Kraków and Gdańsk) are able to get integrated and to act jointly. Even though nowadays it happens in smaller circles, Kozyra forecasts that artists will slowly become united on a larger scale. Their cooperation will rely on mutual support, sharing of equipment, space for work or exhibitions, as well as presenting their works in narrow circles. Social capital in the form of a network of artist friends will turn out to be very important for the entities in the art field. This tendency will result from numerous limitations which the artists are facing these days. In spite of the fact that Kozyra is a well-known and established artist in the milieu of artists and critics, she is also struggling with limitations that hinder her activities. The very first problem listed by her is the financing of art. Institutions subsidising artists are at a privileged position. When deciding to finance their operation, i.e. having economic capital at their disposal, they inflict symbolic violence against the dominated artists. And yet economic capital is indispensable for the performance of artistic projects. Wages of assistants (operators, editors and graphic artists) have to be settled. This is their professional work and the artist says: "We are trying to pay one another, as far as possible [...]. I would not dare suggest doing it 'for free', because how long can you go on working for free?". The situation is additionally aggravated by the dependence of the art field on the political field (Matuchniak-Mystkowska 2018). The state still

continues to be one of the greater patrons of culture in Poland. The opinions of the present-day decision-makers are greatly distanced from the ones presented in the works of Kozyra. Her art may be controversial or even vulgar for the conservative milieu: “My foundation filed ten or even more applications and got nothing. Simply nothing”. Yet the problems are not Kozyra’s controversial activities. The foundation also submits projects on behalf of other artists. However, the sole name of the artist excludes an opportunity for a subsidy: “Because here we have ‘Katarzyna Kozyra’ and this is all that matters”. Apart from it, in her opinion, the possibilities of culture funding have been greatly reduced in the last years. However, taking quite privileged and well-established position of the artist into account, the source of income could also be sale and lending of her existing works. Yet for Kozyra, financing of new projects is more important than purchases of her previous works. According to her, creation of new ideas is much more interesting and developing; in the first place, they are developed conceptually, and then she is searching for ways to cover the costs of their performance. Foreign subsidies, artistic residences and private patronage offer hope in such situations. The artist lists two examples: Atlas Sztuki and Piotr Voelkel.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, not only coverage of execution costs is problematic for the artist. Another obstacle is the absence of exhibition venues ready to present critical art (Bychawska-Siniarska, Głowacka 2014: 61–69). Dependant on public subsidies, museums and galleries are unwilling to show it: “In my opinion, you can no longer show exactly what you want in the galleries. And definitely not in the institutions”. Besides, Kozyra notices the insufficient number of exhibition institutions, “there are not too many possibilities of showing your stuff in Poland. But there are countless artists”.

An additional limitation that is clearly perceptible in her career is discrimination on account of sex. This is a manifestation of symbolic violence, which she has come across since her studies. It becomes a major problem during cooperation with executors of her works, who dictate how a given item or exhibit should be executed. She says ironically and with irritation: “In general, men know better”. Circulation of art and income from art is also less advantageous for women, because when a gallery decides to exhibit the works of men, then also the prices for their works are higher than for the works of female artists. Unequal treatment on account of sex is also experienced by gallery owners. During important transactions, it turns out that they are not adequate business partners: “Female gallery owners simply have to ask their husbands or male friends to participate in large deals, because collectors would not buy anything from women for a large sum and they prefer to talk to men”. As it turns out, this phenomenon has also been functioning among the older generation collectors, who more willingly buy an artwork from a man than from a female assistant.

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<sup>3</sup> A Polish entrepreneur, patron of cultural and educational projects, founder of foundation Vox-Artis Promocja Polskiej Sztuki Współczesnej i Designu.

In spite of all these obstacles, to retain her position in the field and to acquire funds necessary for operation, the artist decided to become independent and has set up her own foundation. Creativity supported by subsidies and scholarships has turned out to be the basis for functioning in the art field (Możdżyński 2015). At the same time, it imposes the mode of organisation of agents in the field. Acquiring legal personality, the artist received the opportunity to apply for funds to carry out her own and other artists' projects: "You have to try [...]. You have to organise yourself on your own – own foundations, own associations [...] in this way, you can go on and do useful things". Already during the studies, Kozyra started thinking of "how to stay afloat" and struggling with the lack of support from the masculine milieu, she decided to do everything on "her own account". At the present moment, the artist is making use of her experience and position in the field to support young artists. Her foundation is extremely active, while professional obligations related to it are greatly engaging. Due to this, she has limited time for her own artistic activities and development of ideas. She notices: "There is always some disruption". Kozyra, striving for consistency in the artistic field, is struggling with numerous difficulties which are limiting her actions: financial, political and organisational. An interesting research area would definitely be an analysis of activities of other Polish artists, which may be struggling with completely different problems. The collected material would offer a fuller picture of the situation of women in the field of contemporary art.

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## KATARZYNA KOZYRA – ARTYSTKA W POLU SZTUKI STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

**Abstrakt.** Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie działalności artystycznej Katarzyny Kozyry w kontekście jej pozycji w polu sztuki, a także przeanalizowanie jej relacji z widzem w oparciu o łańcuch komunikacji artystycznej na przykładzie rzeźby *Studium aktu* z 1991 roku.

Katarzyna Kozyra to jedna z czołowych polskich artystek nurtu sztuki krytycznej. Porusza tematy uznawane za społeczne tabu, otwarcie mówi o śmierci, chorobie, kruchości ciała czy stereotypach kobiecego ciała funkcjonujących w sferze publicznej. Dlatego jej działania bywają postrzegane jako kontrowersyjne. Zgodnie z terminologią Pierre’a Bourdieu Kozyra tworzy sztukę krytyczną, przez co należy do pola ograniczonej produkcji kulturalnej. Jak sama przyznaje, niektóre instytucje sakralizacji kulturalnej jej nie uznają, a niektóre, jak krytycy sztuki i galerie, traktują ją jako uznanego twórcę i umiejscawiają ją w polu kultury prawomocnej. Do jej świata społecznego należą również sponsorzy, właściciele galerii, inni znajomi artyści oraz oczywiście odbiorcy. To ci ostatni stanowią niezbędny element w komunikacji artystycznym, potwierdzający społeczną wartość dzieła.

Aby sprawdzić sposób rozumienia i interpretacji sztuki współczesnej, w marcu 2021 roku zrealizowano badania recepcji dzieł na wystawie *Rzeźba w poszukiwaniu miejsca* w warszawskiej Galerii Zachęta. Respondentów poproszono o obejrzenie m.in. pracy Katarzyny Kozyry *Studium aktu* z 1991 roku. W wyniku rozmów z odbiorcami oraz przeprowadzonych testów powstał obraz potocznego rozumienia dzieła.

Aby skonfrontować odbiór uczestników oraz sprawdzić skuteczność komunikatu artystycznego, przeprowadzono również wywiad swobodny z artystką, która przedstawiła interpretację odautorską studium. Wypowiedzi artystki nagrane podczas wywiadu stały się materiałem badawczym cytowanym w niniejszym artykule. Konfrontacja intencji autorki z komentarzem widzów pozwoliła zbadać pełen łańcuch komunikacji artystycznej (artysta – dzieło – odbiorca). Analiza wykazała spójność komunikatu oraz możliwość odczytywania intencji emocjonalnych artystki. Chociaż interpretacje nie

pokrywały się wiernie z jej zamysłem, to liczne koncepcje i interpretacje dodatkowo wzbogaciły sens pracy i zostały w pełni zaakceptowane przez autorkę.

Rozmowa stała się również przyczynkiem do refleksji nad miejscem artystki w polu sztuki, jej relacjami z innymi twórcami, instytucjami mediatyzującymi i organizacjami dotującymi projekty. Okazało się, że artystka, choć w pewnych kręgach ceniona i rozpoznawalna, wyraźnie zdominowana jest przez pole polityczne, co ostatecznie wpływa na jej funkcjonowanie w polu sztuki.

Powyższe wyniki mogą być inspiracją do przeprowadzenia dalszych badań na temat działalności twórczej innych artystek, które być może mierzą się z zupełnie innymi problemami i tworzą odmienne układy w obrębie pola sztuki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka krytyczna, Katarzyna Kozyra, pole sztuki, Pierre Bourdieu, percepcja sztuki, komunikacja artystyczna.