



# Marta Tarabuła and her pioneering gallery in Kraków

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“I was sitting on a stone throne in the garden of the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni with five dollars in my pocket and I dreamed that one day I would be like Peggy”, Marta Tarabuła is telling me about her youthful fantasies [Fig. 1]<sup>1</sup>. We are sitting in the Archive of the Zderzak Gallery, in a flat-turned-office inside an interwar tenement house in the centre of Kraków, on Aleja Słowackiego. The walls are hung with late Gothic and early Renaissance paintings by Italian masters of the Trecento and Quattrocento periods (Taddeo Gaddi and Carpaccio among others), as well as the latest discovery – a carved crucifix, probably chiselled by Veit Stoss, a German sculptor active in Kraków in the late 15th century. The reception hall, for a change, features canvases of modern classics, including a large abstract canvas by Stefan Gierowski (b. 1925), a Polish modernist painter. Tarabuła has never really resembled Peggy Guggenheim as she has never been eccentric; if compared to post-war American tastemakers, she would be closer to Betty Parsons, with her more subdued elegance and her endless enthusiasm and courage in finding young talented artists. Like Parsons, Tarabuła ran her gallery for exactly 36 years and many artists owe their debut to her. She admired Peggy Guggenheim’s ability to find great artists and works, her strong personality, independence, distancing herself from her wealthy uncle Solomon and, of course, the wonderful collection she had managed to amass. However, comparisons to Western art dealers are somewhat pointless: although they did provide inspiration within the universal

1. “I dreamed that one day I would be like Peggy” – Marta Tarabuła in Venice. Photo: courtesy of Zderzak Gallery archives, Cracow



<sup>1</sup> I interviewed Marta Tarabuła on 18 December 2021. The paper was presented at the Association for Art History Annual Conference, 6–8 April 2022, Goldsmith, University of London (session: *Born from the Margins: Women Gallerists Creating New Markets, 1800–1990*).



<sup>2</sup> See Jarosław Modzelewski. *Wywiad-rzeka-Wisła*, Talk P. Bazyłko, K. Masiewicz, Warszawa 2013, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> In 1980s Tarabuła presented overtly political works such as *Portret generała Jaruzelskiego* (Portrait of General Jaruzelski) formed of papier-mâché by Dorota Brodowska, or a performance by Włodzimierz Pawlak (with the artist beating a life-size puppet of a policeman with a baton).

<sup>4</sup> *Top 200 Collectors*, [https://www.art-news.com/art-collectors/top-200-profiles/?filter\\_top200year=2020](https://www.art-news.com/art-collectors/top-200-profiles/?filter_top200year=2020) (access date: 30.03.2022); E. Winkleman, *Selling Contemporary Art: How to Navigate the Evolving Market*, New York 2015.

circulation of art (which expressed power relations condemning the periphery to a perpetual “not yet” – something which we still did not know in the 1980s Poland), Tarabuła operated in a completely different socio-political reality. She had no money, but – as the daughter of artists – a significant cultural capital instead.

Nowadays, it has to be patiently explained to the new generation, for whom Poland belonging to the European Union is a given, that the community, so important to Zderzak, was not a media fact in the 1980s, and that the surprising social energy – which at that time spurred people into action – did not translate into grants, subsidies and projects, and thus could be completely spontaneous. Today, the success of the artists promoted by Zderzak is measured by auction results and, for some, the potential of the once subversive energy has faded. Today, Jarosław Modzelewski – who had many exhibitions at Zderzak and was associated with it from the beginning – is called the painter of the new bourgeoisie<sup>2</sup>, a class very slowly being reborn in Poland after the times of real socialism. Although these days Tarabuła consistently refuses, as she says, to play politics<sup>3</sup>, the art she exhibited was rebellious, feisty and mocking, connected with political changes and the spirit of freedom and optimism brought by the “Solidarity” movement. And her collection of Polish art of the 1980s is undoubtedly one of the best in the country.

The Polish art market has been developing rather slowly since the fall of real socialism. To date, there are no global “top collectors” in Poland, and the closest places where they can be found are Germany (Berlin, Heidelberg, Künzelsau, Munich), Ukraine (Kyiv), Finland (Helsinki) and Russia (Moscow). Grażyna Kulczyk, the only Polish woman on the ARTnews list, moved along with her collection from Poland to Engadin in Switzerland<sup>4</sup>. Although aspiring attitudes and attempts to play the market game in Poland are plentiful, there are also many art activists who believe that the semi-peripheral situation of the art market is extremely beneficial, as the market is a part of broader mechanisms that integrate art into systems sustaining social and economic inequalities, while supporting the conservative principles of art at the same time. For better or worse, only a few Poles are on the lists of the so-called mega-galleries: Mirosław Bałka (White Cube) certainly the longest, and also Wilhelm Sasnal and Monika Sosnowska (Hauser&Wirth), Ewa Juszkiewicz (Gagosian) and Erna Rosenstein, deceased in 2004 (Hauser&Wirth). The latter, although she moved to Warsaw after the World War II, belonged to the Kraków Group, a nationally famous association of artists ideologically led by Tadeusz Kantor, a painter and world-renowned theatre director. Marta Tarabuła’s father, the painter Janusz Tarabuła, was also a member of the Kraków Group. Thus, from her childhood Tarabuła moved in one of the most vibrant artistic circles in Poland. And it was in Zderzak that Wilhelm Sasnal, one of the most recognisable Polish painters today, made his debut (1999).

“I have never thought of art in terms of selling” – Tarabuła says to me<sup>5</sup>. She adds, not unironically: “I didn’t know art was for sale”, which reminds us that, in fact, she started her work in the times of real socialism, when the art market was virtually non-existent. In the 1980s, when Tarabuła was perceived as “an idealistic young art historian”, her gallery was conceived “to clearly express an overall sense of clash with the official culture”<sup>6</sup>.

Tarabuła started her work in 1985 with a place for meetings and exchange of ideas and presentation of paintings in mind<sup>7</sup>. She found such a place in the attic of an unfinished house. At that time in Poland martial law had already ended (1981–1983), but the rule of Wojciech Jaruzelski and the protracted agony of the old USSR-dominated system of power continued. State art institutions were being boycotted, as the broken consensus between those in power and the society was not fully rebuilt until the breakthrough of 1989. However, in order for people to meet in a group larger than a few individuals, an application had to be made to and permission obtained from the state censor’s office. The same permit procedure applied when it came even to the smallest print (e.g. invitations). Zderzak operated illegally from the start<sup>8</sup> and used word-of-mouth advertising; the exhibitions were closed down after about three days, and laundry was hung in the gallery room to cover up any traces of illegal activity. These traces were, however, being sought by the militia. The “Solidarity” trade union, the engine driving political and social change, was still illegal, although its chairman, Lech Wałęsa, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at the end of 1983. Due to an acute economic crisis the shelves in shops were almost empty and people had to wait in long queues to buy food. Young graduates either tried to emigrate or found themselves in various low-profile state jobs. Money was meaningless, because all the salaries were low and money could buy little anyway. So it was all about surviving and finding time for fun, friendships, love and various pleasures. Zderzak was created precisely on the wave of enthusiastically building an independent and by all means diverse circulation of culture (both church-affiliated and secular, connected with private dwellings) and confirming through being part of it that almost the entire society was in fact against the authorities. It was then, without the knowledge of the Western concept of participatory art, that the idea of participation as more important than the idea of a traditional exhibition in a professional gallery space became a reality. At the same time, although raising a stink and hosting art events appealed to Tarabuła, as a student of art history it bothered and even irritated her that almost no one in the independent art circuit paid any attention to the quality of the works. Good faith and noble intentions seemed to suffice, especially in the church exhibitions that were popular at the time. Meanwhile, not only was the form of the works painfully clichéd, but the iconography persistently repeated the stereotypical set of motifs centred on national suffering: prison



<sup>5</sup> These words can be easily called into question. Very soon, as early as 1989, Tarabuła chose a market model for her gallery. Paradoxically, however, she chose art that was not considered saleable.

<sup>6</sup> G. Sedia, *Poland’s Artful Revolution*, 4 May 2010, <http://www.krakowpost.com/2063/2010/05> (access date: 30.03.2022).

<sup>7</sup> More information about so-called “independent art” of the 1980’s: *Galerie lat 80*. [exhibition cat.], Zachęta Gallery, Ed. T. Rostkowska, R. Niekrasz, Warszawa 1990; J. Banasiak, *Proteuszowe czasy. Rozpad państwowego systemu sztuki 1982–1993: stan wojenny, druga odwilż, transformacja ustrojowa*, Warszawa 2020.

<sup>8</sup> For some time the gallery was affiliated with the Association of Art Historians.



<sup>9</sup> See **M. Tarabuła**, *Zrób to sam. Galeria Zderzak na tle ruchu lat osiemdziesiątych*, [in:] *Pokolenie '80: polityczny protest? artystyczna kontestacja? Niezależna twórczość młodych w latach 1980-89* [exhibition cat.], 2010-2011, National Museum in Kraków, Ed. **T. Boruta**, Rzeszów 2012, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> See **A. Baranowa**, *Zderzak i nowa sztuka*, "Res Publica" 1987, No. 1, pp. 134-135.

<sup>11</sup> See *Grupa Krakowska: 1932-1994* [exhibition cat.], 15 April - 15 May 1994, Zachęta National Gallery of Contemporary Art, Ed. **T. Rostkowska**, Warszawa 1994.

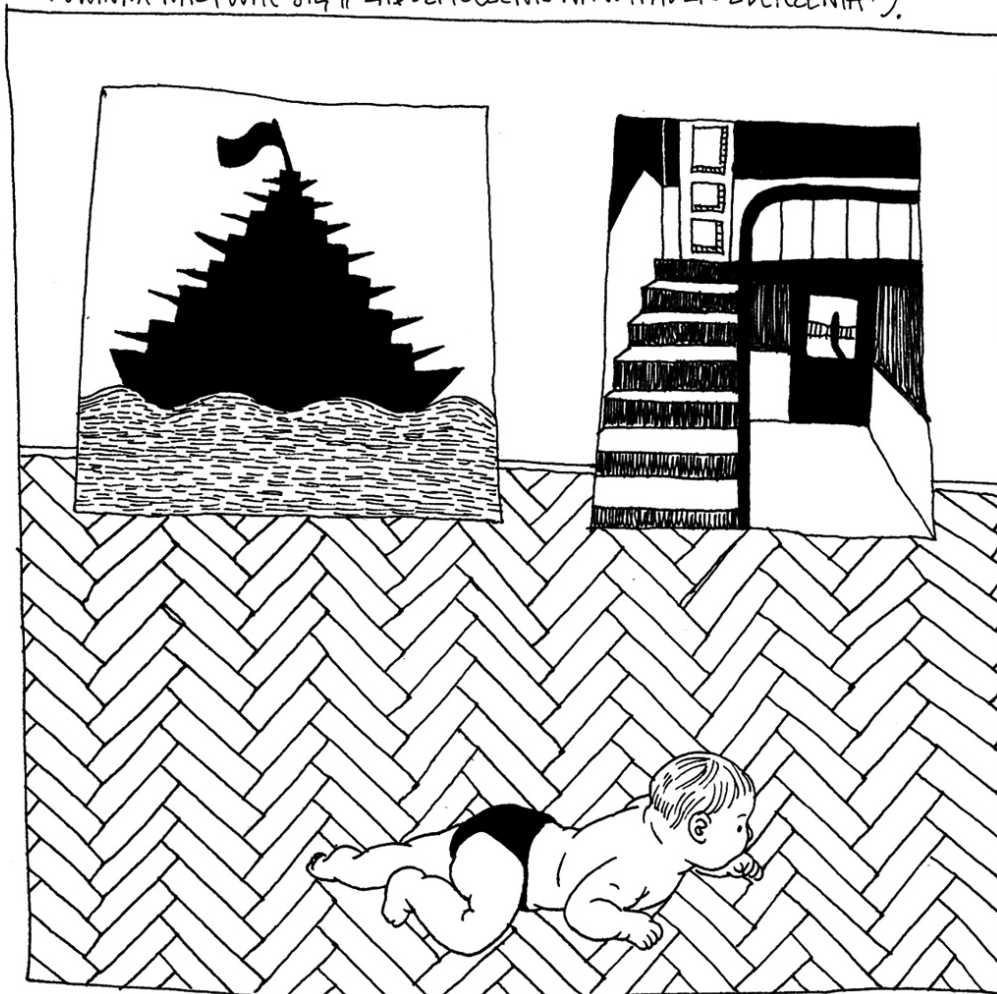
bars, tattered draperies, crowns of thorns, crosses made of flowers, V-for-victoria finger gestures, and ghostly landscapes<sup>9</sup>. So there could only be one decision: if good art – and not just crosses and bars – was something that Tarabuła wanted to see, she had to take responsibility for the selection and set up a gallery herself. This way, the idea of the anarchic do-it-yourself became the seed of the later capitalist self-made-woman. Looking at the paintings in churches, Tarabuła had the impression that she was looking at the same image over and over again and that she was in some sort of a vicious circle where nothing would ever happen. Meanwhile, the point was precisely to make something happen and break out of the circle of impossibility.

The space for the gallery was found in a house belonging to the Tarabuła family. It was a single-storey brick house, which was occupied by quartered tenants (who lived in the assigned rooms in the house in accordance with a state decision). In this situation, the Tarabuła family decided to build an additional floor. Marta's father, a painter, set up a studio on the first floor for himself and in the other unfinished part (an unheated 5 m high attic, about 40 m<sup>2</sup>) Marta opened a gallery<sup>10</sup>. She invited her friend Bettina Bereś, also a daughter of artists, to join her in this venture. However, Bettina withdrew from the cooperation rather quickly as she took up painting herself (her first show was actually at Zderzak in 1986), and she definitely did not want to take part in the commercialisation of the gallery. Marta's and Bettina's parents – Janusz Tarabuła (b. 1931), as well as Jerzy Bereś (1930-2012) and Maria Pinińska-Bereś (1931-1999) were artists belonging to the Kraków Group. Certainly, their artistic background had a much bigger influence on both Marta and Bettina than their studies at the Jagiellonian University. In fact, art history lectures at that time reached more or less the beginning of the 20th century, although the charismatic figure of Professor Mieczysław Porębski, critic, art writer and friend of the artists from the Kraków Group, was not without significance. The Kraków Group was officially approved by the state in 1956, i.e. three years after Stalin's death and the start of cultural changes in Poland which discontinued the obligation to paint in the style of socialist realism. It was a kind of grassroots organisation, an association bringing together only local artists (with a few exceptions)<sup>11</sup>. Marta and Bettina decided to do things differently: the artists they invited to Zderzak were mainly from outside Kraków, especially from Warsaw. Firstly, Tarabuła and Bereś did not want to exhibit their parents' art, and secondly, they were fascinated by figurative art – the expressionism of the 1980s, considered an uninteresting anachronism by their parents' generation. Marta, like Peggy Guggenheim, had no desire to copy her family's artistic ideas and wanted to follow her own, independent path. Also, in her opinion, the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts, which produced new graduates every year, was extremely conservative, and the graduating artists were part of the martyrdom movement, at times somewhat spitefully called Catholic realism.



2. Jarosław Modzelewski, Marek Sobczyk, *Das Gebet des Deutschen Pfarrer oder Bleistift Probe*, 1984, tempera, paper, 292 × 288 cm; deposit of the Egit Foundation. Photo: courtesy of Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw

-Z CZEONKAMI „GRUPPY” SPOTKAŁYSMY SIĘ W GALERII „DZIEKANKA”  
PRZEZ GODZINĘ ŚMIALI SIĘ Z NASZEGO POMYSŁU I NAZWY „ZDERZAK”.  
(SOBCZYK STWIERDZIŁ, ŻE NAZWA JEST KOMPROMITUJĄCA I, ŻE GALERIA  
POWINNA NAZYWAĆ SIĘ „ZABEZPIECZENIE NA WYPADEK ZDERZENIA”).



- W PEWNYM MOMENCIE JAROSŁAW MODZELEWSKI POWIEDZIAŁ, ŻE MA MALUCHA  
I ZABRAĆ NAS DO SIEBIE (GODZIE PO PODŁODZE CZOŁGAŁ SIĘ MALUTKI JASIO)  
I POKAZAŁ NAM SWOJE OBRAZY.

NASTĘPNEGO DNIA, W PRACOWNI SOBCZYKA, ZDECYDOWALIŚMY, ŻE JEGO  
WYSTAWA BĘDZIE PIERWSZA.

There was a lot of it at the exhibition “Against Evil, Against Violence”, which opened in March 1985 in the St. Maximilian Kolbe church in Kraków’s Mistrzejowice district and was dedicated to Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, murdered by members of the Security Service in 1984. However, in Tarabuła’s opinion, its traditional religious iconography was disrupted by one surprising and truly bizarre image with an even stranger German title *Das Gebet des Deutschen Pfarrer, oder Bleistift Probe* (The Prayer of a German Priest, or a Pencil Test, 1984 [Fig. 2]). It was also astonishing that the picture was painted in tempera on a huge sheet of paper (292 × 288 cm), and so was the fact that it was created by two painters – Jarosław Modzelewski and Marek Sobczyk<sup>12</sup>. It looked so different from all that prevailing in Kraków that Tarabuła wanted to meet the painters and exhibit their works in her home town. “I thought art was over until I saw this painting”, as she will tell me years later.

As it subsequently turned out, the picture showed, among other things, the persecution of the Security Service, as the pencil test meant piercing the prisoners’ ear drums with a spike, in order to force them to “tell on” their friends. Modzelewski’s and Sobczyk’s fellow student’s father experienced this type of torture. However, it was not the content – completely illegible at first glance and without additional commentary – but the form that was a revelation to Tarabuła: the strange figures seemed to have been carved out of a wooden peg and, due to their bizarre awkwardness, gave the impression that they ended up on display purely by accident. Although the groundbreaking painting (currently in the depository of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw) was also about martyrdom, it showed it in a completely unobvious way: on the left side of the painting was a man in a wheelchair with a hairstyle resembling that of a Japanese samurai warrior, on the right stood an upright man turning his head towards the disabled man, with a priest kneeling between them. The picture was painted when Modzelewski and Sobczyk, its authors (now classics, whose works are in museum collections), were on a scholarship in Germany. According to the artists themselves, the tortured figure in the wheelchair is Polish, and the standing figure is German. Thus, the whole work refers not only to communist persecution, but also to the awkward position of Eastern Europeans in which Polish artists found themselves during their stay in Germany, where they felt “disabled” of sorts<sup>13</sup>. This in turn included a bitter awareness of “our geopolitical conditions”<sup>14</sup>, which, in the 1980s, caused not melancholy in the young artists, but ironic laughter, vulgar language filled with sarcasm and black humour – a blasphemous carnival, in a word. The point was not to pretend that there was no reason for bitterness, but also not to allow this reason – being between the battering rams of the East and the West – to become a justification for the mood of victimisation, melancholy and lack of agency. The enrapture with the image triggered a chain reaction: since there are such surprising im-

3. Helena Siemińska in Jarosław Modzelewski’s studio, Marta Tarabuła chooses painting for a planned exhibition; a drawing from Siemińska’s comic book *Zderzak na skróty 1985–2015* (Kraków 2015). Photo: courtesy of Zderzak Gallery archives, Cracow



<sup>12</sup> See J. Balisz-Schmelz, *Which Polish? What Neue? What Wilde? Provincialisation of the Centre – Centralisation of the Province on the Example of the Düsseldorf Papers by Marek Sobczyk and Jarosław Modzelewski*, “Quart” 2020, No. 3, [https://quart.uni.wroc.pl/pdf/57/q57\\_06\\_Balisz.pdf](https://quart.uni.wroc.pl/pdf/57/q57_06_Balisz.pdf) (access date: 29. 08. 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Jarosław Modzelewski, Marek Sobczyk, “Das Gebet des Deutschen Pfarrer oder Bleistift Probe”, <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/kolekcja/praca/modzelewski-jaroslaw-sobczyk-marek-das-gebet-des-deutschen> (access date: 30.03.2022).

<sup>14</sup> M. Tarabuła, *op. cit.*, p. 94.



4. Helena Siemińska, vernissage at Zderzak Gallery; a drawing from her comic book *Zderzak na skrót* 1985–2015 (Kraków 2015). Photo: courtesy of Zderzak Gallery archives, Cracow

ages, we need to create a place to show them, precisely in Kraków, where it seems that art has already come to an end.

The investigation into *Das Gebet des Deutschen Pfarrer, oder Bleistift Probe*, which led Tarabuła and Bereś to leave Warsaw and meet Modzelewski and Sobczyk [Fig. 3], the authors of the painting, proved remarkably fruitful. Since 1982 the artists were part of a six-person collective called Gruppa (other members were Ryszard Grzyb, Paweł Kowalewski, Włodzimierz Pawlak and Ryszard Woźniak). Bettina and Marta jointly decided that the first show would be Sobczyk's solo exhibition, but later on Zderzak successively presented all the members of the Gruppa. During the first vernissage, the invited guests listened to the artist's *Extending Sexual Perspectives* lecture and, in addition, a short speech was made by Tarabuła about the risks taken by her, the artist making his debut in unknown surroundings, and the audience. These words turned out to be prophetic in that the painters from the Academy of Fine Arts attending the exhibition made downright embarrassing corrections to individual paintings, explaining to Sobczyk what had been painted wrong and how it should be changed to create a good painting.

The first exhibition opening was above all a meeting of different artistic circles, completely incompatible with each other [Fig. 4]. This is why Tarabuła came up with the name Zderzak (Bumper) – as she recalled on the occasion of the gallery's 30th anniversary, the circumstances of coining this name were closely linked to the decision to present what was contemporary in art: "If we are to bump new art into Kraków, let it be Bumper [Zderzak]"<sup>15</sup>. As the gallery's "mascot" and signboard, she hung the bumper of an old, family-owned Volkswagen over the entrance, because she wanted the name to derive from a specific object rather than from a generalised abstract symbol. Moreover, "bumper" is a word that definitely cuts itself off from the pathos of church opposition and the newspeak of the authorities. Also – visible in the poetry of the time – the return to simple, ordinary words became one of the burning needs of many artists of the generation. Zderzak deliberately did not undergo the legal procedure of institutional registration, which required the consent of the Minister of Culture. In all likelihood, it would not have received permission to operate, as the premises did not meet the requirements of a cultural institution. Moreover, neither Tarabuła nor Bereś held a diploma in art history at that time, and licensed activity required diplomas and qualifications. From the very beginning, Zderzak had its own logo (invented by the art dealer on the train when she was on her way to a meeting of the Gruppa artists [Fig. 5] that appeared as a stamp [Fig. 6] on gallery prints issued bypassing censorship (which was only lifted in 1990<sup>16</sup>). The stamp was made of linoleum, but its coarse appearance suggested that it had been cut out from a potato, which still gives Zderzak's prints bearing this logo the aura of underground culture of the 1980s. Both invitations and catalogues were initially



<sup>15</sup> H. Siemińska, *Zderzak na skrót* 1985–2015. *Słynna galeria w komiksie*, Kraków 2015, p. 151.

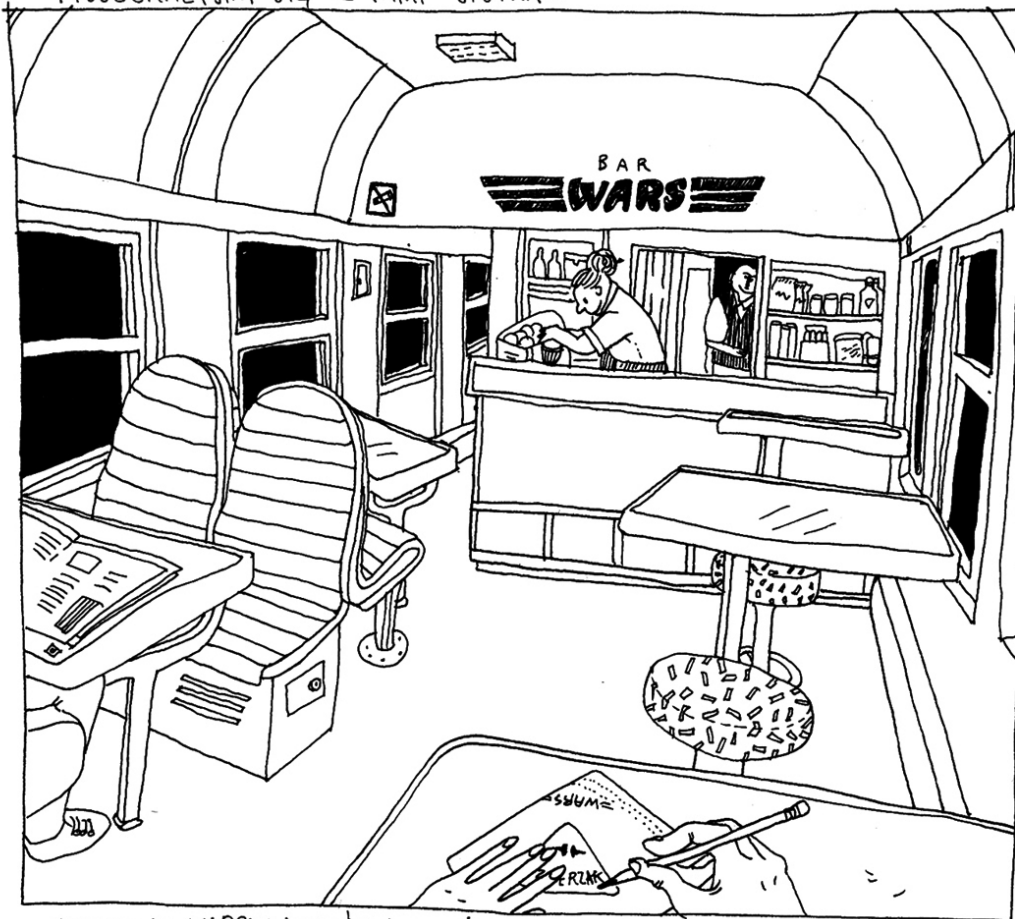
<sup>16</sup> See J. Dąbrowski, A. Demenko, *Censorship in Polish Art after 1989: Art, Law, Politics*, Transl. Ł. Mojsak, A. Sobczak, Ontario 2019.

M.T.: - JAK TO W KRAKOWIE, PLOTKA ROZESZŁA SIĘ BEYSKAWICZNIE I NA WYSTAWIE PAWLAKA  
POJAWIŁ SIĘ TAKI TŁUM, ŻE BALISMY SIĘ, ŻE ZAWALAŁ SIĘ SCHODY.



WKRADŁ SIĘ TAM TEŻ DZIENNIKARZ „GAZETY KRAKOWSKIEJ”, KTÓRY NAPISAŁ PÓŹNIEJ  
BARDZO ENTUZJASTYCZNĄ RECENZJĘ, PODAJĄC ADRES, NASZE NAZWISKA I WSZYSTKO.

M.T.: - OD ZNAJOMYCH Z WARSZAWY DOWIEDZIAŁAM SIĘ, ŻE MODZELEWSKI I SOB CZYK RAZEM Z CZTEREMA KOLEGAMI, SĄ NAJBARDZIEJ ODJECHANymi STUDENTAMI ASP I NAZYWAJĄ SIĘ GRUPPA. RAZEM Z BETINĄ BEREŚ WSIADĘSI MY DO POCIĄGU I POJECHAŁEŚMY SIĘ Z NIMI SPOTKAĆ.



- SIEDZĄC W WARSIE POMYŚLAŁAM, ŻE GALERIA MUSI MIEĆ CHYBA JAKIŚ SZYLD -  
- WZIEŁAM SERWETKĘ I OŁÓWEK I NARYSOWAŁAM DWA BUFORY - JAK MIĘDZY WAGONAMI - PODPISAŁAM "ZDERZAK" I OBRYSOWAŁAM TRÓJKĄTEM.

PÓŹNIEJ POPROSIŁYŚMY JERZEGO BERESIA, ŻEBY NAM TO WYRYTOWAŁ I ZROBIŁ PIECZATKĘ, ALE POMYLIŁ SIĘ I TO CO MIAŁO BYĆ W POZYTYWIE BYŁO W NEGATYWIE I ODWROTNIE. DLATEGO LOGO KOJARZY SIĘ KAŻDEMU Z CZYMŚ INNYM.



5. Marta Tarabuła designs a wordmark for her future gallery on the Cracow-Warsaw train; a drawing from Helena Siemińska's comic book *Zderzak na skrótach 1985–2015* (Kraków 2015). Photo: courtesy of Zderzak Gallery archives, Cracow

6. Zderzak's stamp. Photo: Ł. Stokłosa, courtesy of Zderzak Gallery archives, Cracow

homemade but over time the quality of the catalogues improved considerably. It became clear that Zderzak had become a refuge for those who, as Tarabuła herself put it years later:

wanted to escape from the reservation of Polish art “in a completely unknown direction”, who were led by irony, imagination and laughter, who saw before them a huge mountain of absurd and, in order to face it, looked for a new language [...]”<sup>17</sup>.

Zderzak exhibitions were attended i.a. by Zofia Gołubiew, head of the Modern Polish Painting and Sculpture Department at the National Museum in Kraków (and later its director). Thanks to Gołubiew, works by Grupa members found their way into the museum's collection, but they were bought directly from the artists<sup>18</sup>. Gołubiew herself explained years later that the intermediary between the artists and the museum was not Zderzak, but visits to Warsaw studios “over a cup of tea, more often over some alcohol”<sup>19</sup>. Marta Tarabuła knew nothing about the museum purchases. Zderzak switched over to selling exactly in 1989 – a time of social and political change. But before Tarabuła started selling paintings, she would occasionally buy them if she had enough money from her various odd jobs, including giving French lessons. She bought her first painting in 1986. It was a canvas *Nie mówię, nie widzę, nie słyszę* (I Do Not Speak, I Do Not See, I Do Not Hear) by Włodzimierz Pawlak, who was 29 years old at the time. He had graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw a year earlier, and in the meantime – in order to make a living – he was renovating flats, i.a. in Paris<sup>20</sup>.



<sup>17</sup> M. Tarabuła, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> In 1986 the National Museum acquired *Błękitny kwadrat na błękitnym tle. W hołdzie obrońcom Pałacu Zimowego* (Blue Square on a Blue Background. A Tribute to the Defenders of the Winter Palace, 1983) by Paweł Kowalewski, *Zabijanie świni* (Killing the Pig, 1983) by Modzelewski, and in 1987 *Topielec* (A Drowned Man, 1983/1984) by Sobczyk and *Czarny pancernik* (Black Battleship, 1981) by Modzelewski; the latter two purchased from the authors. See *Salon letni. Sztuka lat 70-tych i 80-tych w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie*, Ed. Z. Gołubiew, A. Król, Kraków 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Z. Gołubiew, “Masakra” czy “Łąka”. *O kolekcji sztuki niezależnej w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, [in:] *Pokolenie '80. Niezależna twórczość młodych w latach 1980–89* [exhibition cat.], December 2010 – 2011, National Museum in Kraków Ed. T. Boruta, Kraków 2010. Incidentally, Gołubiew took joy in deceiving the censors, as – with the consent of the museum director who was a party member – she played tricks with the titles of the canvases she bought, choosing names for them that were as neutral as possible and only loosely connected with the real, anticommunist content, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the censorship.

<sup>20</sup> See *Już trudno. Z Andą Rottenberg rozmawia Dorota Jarecka*, Warszawa 2013, p. 84.



<sup>21</sup> J. Michalski, *The Art Market in Poland 1985–2005: Practice and Experience*, Kraków–Berlin 2005, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> See *idem*, *Krytyk jako dzieło sztuki. Utwory z lat 1985–2019*, Kraków 2019, p. 442.

<sup>23</sup> M. Tarabuła, *Undo. Kwestionariusz produktów i usług*, [in:] *Mistrzowi Mieczysławowi Porębskiemu uczniowie*, Ed. T. Gryglewicz [et al.], Kraków 2001, pp. 369–370.

<sup>24</sup> Jarosław Modzelewski. *Wywiad–rzeka–Wisła...*, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> See Ł. Gorczyca, „Polski szyk” i klasa średnia. Działalność wystawiennicza Andrzeja Bonarskiego w latach 1986–1991, [in:] *Odrzucone dziedzictwo. O sztuce polskiej lat 80.*, Ed. K. Sienkiewicz, Warszawa 2011, p. 30, 36, 38; 40, footnote 1.

<sup>27</sup> M. Kitowska–Łysiak, *Pomiędzy starym i nowym romantyzmem*, [in:] *Pokolenie '80. Niezależna twórczość...*, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 116.

After 1989, when Zderzak became a commercial gallery, there was no such thing as loyalty to the gallery and mutual agreement on exclusive cooperation. This meant that on many occasions the owner of Zderzak was simply double-crossed by the debutant artists whom she had sought out with her unfailing eye and organised exhibitions for. It frequently happened in the 1990s that collectors seeing paintings on display at Zderzak contacted the artist directly, and the latter would withdraw the painting from the exhibition despite the agreement, seeing nothing wrong with it: “Such were the post-communists habits”<sup>21</sup>. In the next generation such habits did not change as artists often treated the gallery as a place for good advertising, not informing that some objects are multiples and – despite the exhibition in Zderzak – engaging in self-marketing and selling works directly from the studio<sup>22</sup>. Tarabuła spoke of similar disloyalties, and although she did so discreetly and without giving names, it was common knowledge that it was about Sasnal<sup>23</sup>. Gruppa’s cooperation with Zderzak was meandering in its nature as well: Zderzak was never given exclusive rights when it came to business issues. The most faithful friend was Modzelewski, who had as many as 21 solo exhibitions at Zderzak, including his last one in 2021, the year when the gallery’s operations came to a halt.

Years later, Modzelewski called the exhibitions of young Warsaw painters at Zderzak groundbreaking precisely because Zderzak was an entirely private initiative, not reliant on any state subsidies. At the same time, it was also a novelty that Zderzak wanted to trade in such art, because in Warsaw at that time “no such thing took place”<sup>24</sup>. Another positive element of the exhibitions at Zderzak turned out to be encountering the community of young authors [Fig. 7], especially art historians [Fig. 8]. Meeting Jan Michalski, an art historian, led to – as Modzelewski recalled – artists finding their intuition in his writing, and as a result learning a lot about themselves<sup>25</sup>. Years later Andrzej Bonarski, a businessman, art dealer and curator, author of the famous exhibitions of the 1980s – “Co słycać” (What’s Up, 1987) and “Nowi Rosjanie (The New Russians, 1988) – also regarded Zderzak as a great support, not only in intellectual terms<sup>26</sup>. Bonarski arrived in 1986 from the United States (“mythical America”<sup>27</sup>) and it was so appealing that even then Gruppa did not think about any loyalty to the art dealer who was promoting them, because they believed that Bonarski would organize an exhibition for them in New York, and at the same time they had heard about the record prices of contemporary painting at auctions at Sotheby’s and Christie’s<sup>28</sup>. In 1989, in cooperation with Bonarski, Zderzak presented two Soviet artists, Yuri Leiderman, a Ukrainian who now lives in Berlin, and Konstantin Latyshev, a Russian, at the “Higher Pilotage...” exhibition. It was the only foreign exhibition in the 1980s. But there was no money to be made from it and Bonarski did not manage to sell new art either, on which he commented: “Like a foolish primrose, I simply peered out



7. Stanisław Urbański, *About the New Painting and the New Gallery*, "Gazeta Krakowska" 1986, No. of 7 May

of the snow too early"<sup>29</sup>. He, too, wanted to operate in the market and, despite more extensive experience than Tarabuła, failed due to a lack of conditions that were only slowly taking shape. Tarabuła, thanks to her extraordinary persistence, was able to turn the position of a "foolish primrose" into a firm position as an art dealer and curator.

She went to her first international fair in 1993, to Hamburg. It was thanks to Rudolf Zwirner, who had travelled to Kraków, and later to Moscow and St. Petersburg, searching for artists and galleries from Eastern Europe. Tarabuła did not manage to sell anything at the time, which she did not consider a failure, as the trip to Hamburg turned out to be an interesting adventure. The genuine enthusiasm of the newcomers from the West to Kraków was often coupled with astonishment that there were no white bears strolling the streets of Kraków. Both newcomers from the East to the West as well as those from the West to the East had a long way to go to understand each other. At the turn of 1989 and 1990, Richard Demarco from Edinburgh also went on an exploratory tour of Eastern Europe. Zderzak was also frequented by Rafał (Rafael) Jabłonka, who ran a gallery in Cologne selling works by American and German contemporary artists. Although he was not interested in Polish art, he occasionally funded scholarships for artists from Zderzak. In later years, Zderzak



<sup>29</sup> A. Bonarski, statement in: *Dyskusja „Kuratorzy i marszandzi. Od sacrum do rynku sztuki”*, [in:] *Odrzucone dziedzictwo...*, p. 46.



<sup>30</sup> J. Michalski, *The Art Market...*, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

was present mostly in Germany, regularly participating in Art Forum Berlin (since 1996), and fairs in Frankfurt and Cologne, as well as in Madrid, Stockholm, Paris, Vienna and Chicago. In turn, the gallery's artists were shown at important international exhibitions (São Paulo Biennale, Manifesta). The unluckiest event turned out to be the Frankfurt Fair:

where elegant Germans treated us [i.e. Polish participants] as if we were invisible [...]; we felt like the ethereal children in Andersen's fairy tale. [...] The stand next to us was owned by a friendly young Dutch gallery-owner who made a fortune selling the art of Neue Wilde [...]. That was when we realized that we are not destined to make a fortune<sup>30</sup>.

However, it soon turned out that Zderzak became somewhat of an ambassador of young Polish culture in Germany and a much more efficient one than state institutions at that. German contacts proved important for a variety of reasons. When Zderzak organised an exhibition of Andrzej Cisowski's paintings in 1986, the artist learned from Tarabuła that similar paintings were done by A. R. Penck. A short while later Cisowski finished his studies in Warsaw and went to Düsseldorf, precisely to Penck, for further studies. As a result, in 1991 an exhibition of German artists "Aus der A.R. Penck Klasse" took place at Zderzak.

The gallery started with a national fair, the 1989 Bytom Contemporary Art Fair, on which occasion Zderzak produced its first English-language leaflet and advertised with the following slogans: "New original sensibility. Imagination. Irony. Liberty. New aesthetics. Different taste. Works with increasing value. Artists with increasing prestige". The fair was a success as some works of young expressionists were sold to museums and the earned money finally made it possible to rent premises in the city centre. When the money ran out, continuing business operations was contingent on a series of accidents. For instance, a Japanese businessman visiting the gallery was so taken with it that he made a donation of "400 dollars and a bamboo back-scratcher"<sup>31</sup>. The next fair in Poznań was not so fruitful: Zderzak sold one small painting and many contemporary art postcards and the owner earned just enough to buy sandwiches and beer. The commercial beginnings required a great deal of determination and faith, as the idea of selling young artists' works simply did not fit with the logic or priorities of the transformation period [Fig. 9–10]. Only the later debuts of young Kraków painters at Zderzak can be called a success (Wilhelm Sasnal in 1999, Marcin Maciejowski and Rafał Bujnowski in 2000). It is worth adding, however, that Tarabuła showed installations, objects, performances, photographs and post-conceptual art by artists who are quite well established today (debuts by Oskar Dawicki, Joanna Rajkowska, Cezary Bodzianowski). In 1992, she showed Marcel Hager and Stefan Heidenreich's

exhibition “Displacement: Objects ‘displaced’ from Documenta IX in Kassel”, which displayed allegedly stolen elements of an exhibition by artists such as i.a. Lothar Baumgarten, Ilya Kabakov as religion-fetishes. In this case, of course, she was not counting on a sale; the idea was to provoke discussion. Tarabuła built her authority primarily on encouraging debate, introducing into public circulation not only new works, but also new ideas and works by deceased artists who had been marginalized for various reasons (often political).

Previously, under real socialism, art in state galleries was not supposed to arouse controversy and social unrest. Moreover, there was only state-controlled circulation of contemporary art, monopolised by the DESA company. At the end of the 1970s, at a time of market liberalisation, the first private galleries were allowed to open, but the prosperity quickly collapsed during martial law. A new slump came after 1989, when it was believed that culture should finance itself. The impoverished museums stopped buying works and the Artistic Work Support Fund along with many initiatives to support the so-called independent culture was dissolved. In the 1980s, the black market flourished. As Michalski recalled:

For US\$ 50 one could get a big quality painting by a young popular artist, for US\$ 100–200 a painting by a recognized painter. The cost of living at that time was ca. US\$ 20 per month<sup>32</sup>.

However, the worst was yet to come with the difficult transition to a market economy implemented by Leszek Balcerowicz’s reforms. Old enterprises went bankrupt and structural unemployment became a problem. Spectacular business careers began, but arrivistes would start with buying luxury residences and Mercedes cars – and finish there. Meanwhile, Zderzak was barely getting by. Since the time when in 1985, due to a lack of funds, Sobczyk brought his paintings to Kraków on a cargo train arriving at 3 a.m. and then used a milk cart to transport them from the station to the gallery, not much changed in the 1990s.

As the editors of the “Szum” magazine assessed, even throughout the 1990s, contemporary art was still at odds with the market, because although the appropriate social, economic and political conditions had already emerged, there was a lack of both expert knowledge and cultural competence, as well as civilisational continuity typical of stable democracies<sup>33</sup>. However, the owner of the Zderzak gallery recalled with melancholy the peculiar reluctance to treat art in commercial terms – reluctance derived not only from real socialism, but also from the years of contesting and boycotting state-run galleries in the 1980s. Ever since she decided to sell, she has viewed it as a mission. However, the community considered this a betrayal of ideals, as the sense of collective solidarity and the concept of art not translating into market value were both strong at the time.



<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Banasiak, *5,356,000 albo rynek w peryferyjnym polu sztuki*, “Szum” 2013, No. 2, <https://magazynszum.pl/5-356-000-albo-rynek-w-peryferyjnym-polu-sztuki> (access date: 30.03.2022).





8. Maria Morzuch after giving a lecture "New Painting in Poland", 28 October 1985, Zderzak Gallery, 23 Zagrody Street, Cracow; from the left: Maria Morzuch, Marta Tarabuła (dressed in white), Jerzy Hanusek, Ryszard Woźniak (sitting), Bettina Bereś, against the background of *Die Einsamkeit* (1984) – a painting by Jarosław Modzelewski and Marek Sobczyk. Photo: courtesy of Zderzak Gallery archives, Cracow

The creation of a market was therefore also hindered by the mentality<sup>34</sup>. Throughout the entire period of real socialism, the art was often treated as a space in which to hide from the grim reality. On the one hand, therefore, there was the romantic absolutisation of art and, on the other, it was fascinating to see new forms of interacting with art invented in the 1980s during the boycott of official state galleries. This new form of coexistence of artists, critics and viewers was the “gallery pilgrimage”<sup>35</sup> – touring sites which were often located in private houses. And since there was a curfew, if the discussion dragged on until after 10 p.m., one would stay in the host’s studio and continue the discussion until dawn.

Zderzak’s ethos was combined with a sense of the spirit of political change and its association with new, expressive and non-academic art. Tarabuła wrote her master’s thesis at the Jagiellonian University on the art of Neue Wilde and the trans-avant-garde – young Germans and Italians who, she believed, challenged the hegemony of American art. As she wrote about the specific situation of rebellion against the hermetic language of conceptualism: “The hunger for paintings was born in Europe”<sup>36</sup>. She added that “the wild” look for truth in emotions, not in theories. According to her, the movement of new painting expression in Poland was the result of the enormous energy of social and artistic resistance to martial law. “The paintings were like tents under which people gathered, rejoiced and told stories”<sup>37</sup>. Such painting has been described as driving “at high speed”<sup>38</sup>. According to Tarabuła, the generation of the Polish wild was brave and self-aware, avoided following in other people’s footsteps and rejected compromises. At the same time she did not appreciate the “puritan morality” of the avant-garde, opting for political indifferentism and withdrawal from involvement in public life. Tarabuła first wrote about the Neue Wilde trend in the second issue of the “Res Publica” magazine (1987)<sup>39</sup>. It was the first legal magazine of the democratic opposition in the countries of the Communist bloc. But the Zderzak gallery built its position not only on the spirit of rebellion, anti-academic sentiments and a sense of generational change. An important element of its activities was the reinterpretation of Polish post-war art history. It began by recalling Wanda Czelkowska (1990)<sup>40</sup> and then focused on the late artists: the political émigré Mieczysław Janikowski, who died in 1969 (1990)<sup>41</sup>, and Andrzej Wróblewski, who died in 1958 (1994). A particularly heated discussion ensued after Zderzak discovered and conserved the lost painting *Rozstrzelanie II* (Execution II) (1949) by Wróblewski. It was purchased for the collection of the National Museum in Kraków in 1994, which triggered a nationwide discussion and protests against the purchase of Soviet socialist realism style works for a respected institution. Bereś from the Kraków Group protested the loudest, which clearly shows the extent to which Zderzak broke away from everything that Tarabuła had been imbued with at home, where the ethos of the Kraków Group



<sup>34</sup> See J. Michalski, *The Art Market...*, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> M. Kitowska-Łysiak, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>36</sup> M. Tarabuła, *Żuje wszystko, co zobaczy. Uwagi o nowym malarstwie*, [w:] *eadem*, J. Michalski, *Cztery eseje o dzikości w sztuce lat 80.*, Kraków-Ryczów 2011, p. 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Legenda lat 80.*, [w:] M. Tarabuła, J. Michalski, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> J. Michalski, *Krytyk...*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> M. Tarabuła, *Żuje wszystko, co zobaczy*, “Res Publica” 1987, No. 2. “The new expression was presented as art corresponding to the new times – vital, greedy, flaunting, consumerist, individualistic”, writes J. Banasiak (*Proteuszowe czasy...*, p. 243), associating it with liberal politicians and authors brought together around the “Res Publica” magazine.

<sup>40</sup> See D. Jarecka, *Przeciw pomnikom*, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 1990, No. of 21 March; as well as *Sensacja w Zderzaku*, “Echo Krakowa” 1990, No. of 7 March; T. Fijałkowski, *Wydarzenie w Zderzaku*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 1990, No. of 8 April.

<sup>41</sup> See M. Hussakowska, *Stare poduszki – spotkanie po latach*, “Czas Krakowski” 1990, No. of 15 October; J. Madeyski, *Ułan potrafi*, “Depesza” 1990, No. of 29 October.

9. Włodzimierz Pawlak, *Albo rybka, albo pipka* (Damned if you do, damned if you don't) – a cover of the exhibition catalogue, 1986

was cultivated. Meanwhile, Bereś said that “The Zderzak Gallery has managed to squeeze kitsch into a Polish museum”<sup>42</sup>. For the artists of the Kraków Group, any similarities with the art of socialist realism were compromising. Today, after Wróblewski’s exhibitions at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (2010) and the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid (2015), one can appreciate the effort of publishing many articles, books and preparing exhibitions that Tarabuła and Michalski undertook to make Wróblewski’s fame worthy of his achievements<sup>43</sup>. Meanwhile, in 1994, with the money from the sale of a painting, Wróblewski’s widow was only able to buy herself a new washing machine and refrigerator and repair the hot water heater<sup>44</sup>. The purchase of subsequent pictures by Wróblewski proved to be a turning point: Zderzak finally had its classic and, what is more, since young artists promoted by the gallery were sincerely interested in him, it was possible to build a bridge between generations and show an interesting developmental line of Polish art. It was overlooked by older art historians for the same reasons Bereś considered the painting compromising: all realism was associated with socialist realism. Nevertheless, the young gained their controversial “ancestor” and became a part of an interesting chapter of Polish art which – according to the older generation – should not have happened at all. This defined Zderzak’s main objective for the following years: “to build a bridge between contemporary art and conservative Polish art collectors”<sup>45</sup>.

The closing of the gallery does not mean that Tarabuła has ceased her public activities. In fact, today she does so not only in the field of art, but also by engaging in philanthropy. There is a slow shift towards the creation of a museum as well. It is intended to be a combination of contemporary and old European art, purchased on the international market (in France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Spain and Italy). Another important gallery from Kraków, founded in 1989 by Andrzej and Teresa Starmach, took a similar path – that of presenting museum collections and focusing on already established artists. For years, Zderzak and Starmach Gallery competed and complemented each other on the Kraków art market: Zderzak mainly focused on finding young and unknown artists (although it also reinterpreted the past and pointed to the classics and masters of modernity), considering itself a generational gallery<sup>46</sup>, while Starmach focused primarily on what was already proven and recognised (including, to a large extent, members of the Kraków Group). The owners of both galleries are art historians, but their class backgrounds are different – Tarabuła is backed by a family history of art and nobility, while the Starmachs’ background is merchant-craftsman-bourgeois in nature<sup>47</sup>. Although it seemed irrelevant during the times of real socialism, it turned out to be important after 1989 when it came to using cultural capital. Andrzej Starmach – a merchants’ son – would never say that he did not know that art was for sale. The Starmach gallery is located in a spacious former Zucher Prayer House



<sup>42</sup> As quoted in: J. Hanusek, *Robak w sztuce*, Kraków 2001, p. 193.

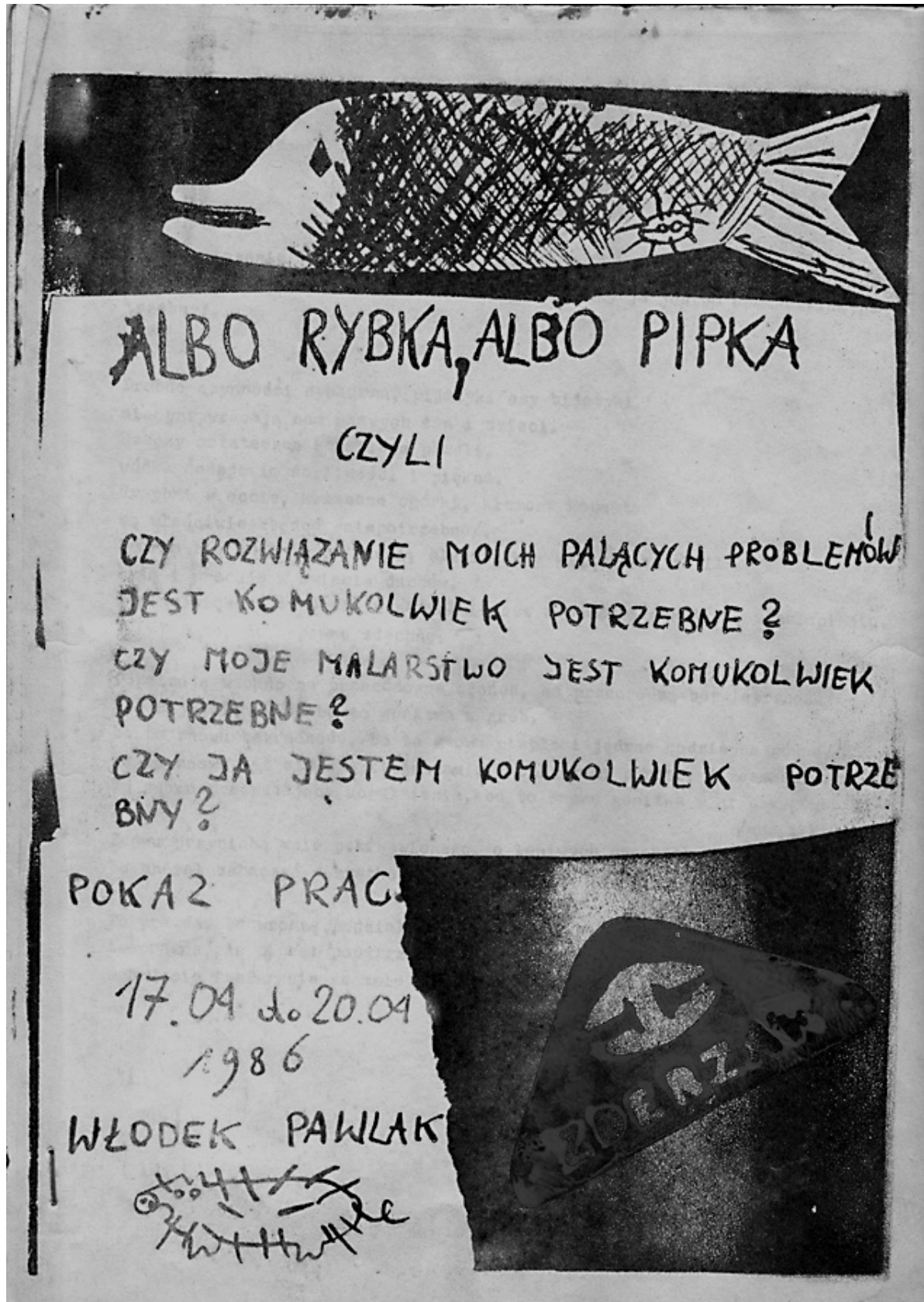
<sup>43</sup> See Andrzej Wróblewski *nieznany*, Ed. J. Michalski, Kraków 1993; *idem*, *Chłopiec na żółtym tle. Teksty o Andrzeju Wróblewskim*, Idea, Ed. M. Tarabuła, Kraków 2009.

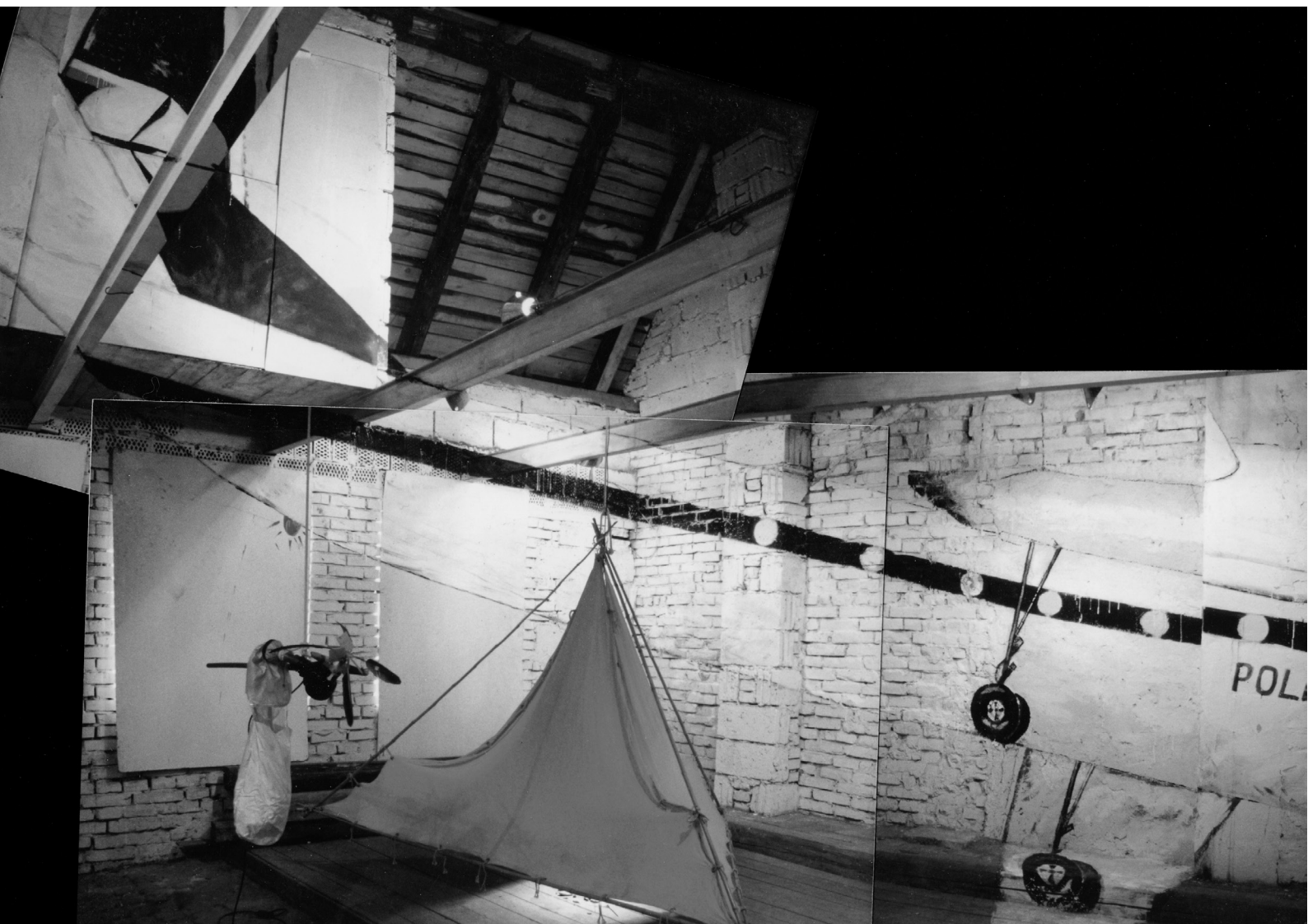
<sup>44</sup> See *idem*, *The Art Market...*, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> J. Rubiś, *Jestem podmiotem gospodarczym z cyklu “rozmowy przy herbacie”*, “Echo Krakowa” 1989, No. of 27-29 October.

<sup>47</sup> Emphasizing more the difference in the founders’ family pedigree than the difference in their commercial success can be perceived as an attempt to build a myth. But talking openly about money was not very popular among art historians of this generation, Starmach’s attitude seems very exceptional. “The negative attitude of the intelligentsia to art dealing did not change after 1989”, writes J. Banasiak (*Proteuszowe czasy...*, p. 237).





10. Łukasz Skąpski, *An-24*, installation and performance: wall painting of *An-24*, objects: *Orthomobile (Lust and Pride)* and *Tent of the Art Shaman (To the Sky by Kayak)*; *An-24 Suite for bass and machine* (a vacuum cleaner), 1986, Zderzak Gallery, 23 Zagrody Street, Cracow. Photo: courtesy of the artist

in Kraków, which was specially adapted in 1997, and the commercial success combined with high prestige is the result – as the competitor admits – of “the merchant traditions, excellent market identification and absolute professionalism”<sup>48</sup>. Tarabuła, after moving from the outskirts of Kraków (where her first gallery was located), rented her premises in the city centre (15 Grodzka Street – 1990; 4 Rynek Główny – 1990–1992; 1 Sławkowska Street – 1992–1997; 3 Floriańska Street – 1997–2019). Only the headquarters of the archive, established after closing the gallery, are located in her own premises. However, as a granddaughter of General Zygmunt Piasecki, she managed to regain (through purchase) a neo-Gothic manor house in Ryczów, not far from Kraków, which was confiscated during the communist coup. The Ryczów Palace foundation, established in 2010, plans to make the extensive collection of Zderzak’s art available there. Tarabuła was inspired by artistic ideals and an overwhelming desire to accompany one’s own time, that is, to capture what is currently happening. When she was studying art history at the Jagiellonian University, there were no classes on collecting and marketing art. The word “marchand” (the French name for a dealer) was commonly used because the education was geared towards the French culture; the Anglo-Saxon culture did not dominate the country until later. The knowledge gained from studies involved two names of Parisian art dealers at most: Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Leopold Zborowski. However, betting on contemporary art was the most suicidal strategy on the art market at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. After the fall of real socialism, the art of young artists – something that Zderzak bet on – was not being bought at all; capital was being invested in old and already recognised art. Therefore, when promoting young artists, Zderzak had to look for money outside of selling works of art. Fortunately, at the beginning of the 1990s, the importance it attached to its own publications was acknowledged “and more and more companies started to commission publishing services at Zderzak Gallery”<sup>49</sup>. Making a living from selling art remained an unattainable ideal for a long time.

Tarabuła’s generation was creating the art market and at the same time brought in a breath of novelty and the independent “Solidarity” movement. It was a generation that believed in rapid changes that would lead to “normality”, which the mythologised Western Europe was generally considered to be. On the wave of enthusiasm and joy at the collapse of the USSR and the country’s escape from its sphere of influence, the shady interests of the authorities and the opposition were overlooked. They, however, caused the collapse of thriving enterprises (in the area of broadly understood art: glassworks, ceramics plants, clothing and furniture factories, textile industry) and left people not only unemployed, but also without hope of finding another job. One could risk a statement that it was the former communist nomenklatura that became the earliest benefi-



<sup>48</sup> J. Michalski, *The Art Market...*, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.



<sup>50</sup> See M. Kościelniak, *Egoiści. Trzecia droga w kulturze polskiej lat 80.*, Warszawa 2018, p. 453.

<sup>51</sup> See 5 356 000...

ciary of the transformation. Tarabuła's generation learned about the misogynistic policy of the free state from younger researchers and activists, because they themselves tried to ignore it or simply did not want to see it. A wider discussion was sparked by Agnieszka Graff's book *Świat bez kobiet. Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym* (A World Without Women: Gender in Polish Public Life, 2001) that has been reissued several times. When I ask Tarabuła about the role of women artists in her gallery, she replies that she would simply choose good art, and pay no attention to gender. Yet at the same time, in the same conversation, Tarabuła emphasised that businessmen-collectors did not take her seriously – both when she went to fairs abroad and in Poland. They respected Starmach as a male art dealer, and snubbed her just because she was a woman. At times she was treated as a hostess. In another conversation it also emerged that although in 1997 Tarabuła was thinking of opening a Zderzak branch in Warsaw, the birth of twins in 1998 definitely and forever buried these plans. This ambiguous attitude of Polish women who grew up in the ethos of the 1980s opposition was described years later, with the pointed out replication of male–female stereotypes in the seemingly superstition-free countercultural milieu. The subcutaneous mechanisms of power were identified which, although not expressed in open regulations, produce the social parameters of what is utterable<sup>50</sup>.

Today, Zderzak is described as an “ethos” off-mainstream gallery, contesting the commercial art of late communist Poland, i.e. the salons of DESA, a state-owned enterprise selling works of art and antiques. And yet, although Tarabuła did accomplish so much, the editors of the Warsaw-based “Szum” magazine believe that Zderzak was not a groundbreaking gallery, because, firstly, it did not oppose the systemic restrictions typical of peripheral areas, and secondly, it did not succeed in defining art as an element of generational identity. Zderzak was thus deemed a gallery that had no modernising character, and its hybrid nature – neither fully avant-garde nor fully bourgeois – a form characteristic of the peripheral field of art<sup>51</sup>. According to “Szum”, non-peripheral galleries have only been created in Warsaw (Raster, Foksal Gallery Foundation). However, “Szum”'s diagnosis can be undermined by pointing out that it does not take into account local conditions, but only certain models considered appropriate: for it was precisely the hybridism of Zderzak that was its greatest asset, ensuring its popularity in various environments and the combination of various types of art.

So why is Zderzak a pioneering gallery? It can be assumed that if there had been no communism, Poland's pioneering gallery founded by a woman would probably have been the gallery of Halima Nałęcz, who had lived in exile in Great Britain since 1949 and opened the Drian Galleries in 1957 – exactly at the time when the Kraków Group was registered as an artistic association, without the possibility of selling artworks, of course. However, there were no Drian Galleries

in Kraków, and Zderzak initially became – to use Bonarski’s term – “a foolish primrose”, peeking from under the snow much too early. Fortunately, the owner had enough persistence and tenacity to survive the unfavourable times since the very idea of selling art was a pioneering one (although it may seem strange today). Tarabuła lived to see the conservative Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków begin to produce interesting graduates. Thanks to this – and a great eye and intuition – she brought about some unforgettable debuts by artists from Kraków, who soon became the most famous of their generation. However, before the Kraków artists made their debuts, by following what was happening in the capital Tarabuła managed to infuse the city with a breath of something fresh, new and different. Remaining true to the unusual aura of underground art circulation, with serious topics emerging from the sea of absurd, laughter and fun, without pompousness and big words, was the most important reason for the dealer’s perseverance. In building her gallery, Tarabuła transgressed her own ignorance and inability, but the boundary that could not be crossed was total artistic responsibility for what she exhibited, that is, what she picked out and what she pointed to. Her determination to create and arrange a place in her own way, without any prompting from anyone, was at stake. This determination may have been so compelling precisely because martial law indicated that there was no return to the past. Tarabuła herself speaks of her faithfulness to the groundbreaking times of the 1980s, using language that makes room for difficult choices, the dark origins of art and a personal struggle with history, rather than just the optimism of a new opening.

Martial law found Tarabuła in Paris, and the fact that she decided to return – unlike many of her colleagues who remained abroad – was because of the intellectual ethos of being in the country and taking action locally. One could say that her role as an organiser of cultural life was still within the concept of a Polish intellectual, a graduate of the prestigious Jagiellonian University. But certainly, organising cultural life in total separation from the state was definitely no longer part of the practices learned during almost five decades of real socialism. Zderzak was the first in the country to publish catalogues and other prints of excellent quality, e.g. postcards with contemporary art and posters designed as works of art by i.a. Marian Oslislo, later professor and rector of the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice. It was the first private gallery to develop a catalogue raisonné of a contemporary artist (Modzelewski), the first to show photography as art, and probably the first cultural institution in Poland that introduced educational classes for children. When it showed installations and performances, also as probably the first private gallery, it was clear that this was not done with sales in mind. Tarabuła’s ambitions, however, were greater. She aspired to explain to Poles their own history through art – to show both its forgotten paths as well as what was happening before our eyes, which would certainly have been missed



if it had not been for Zderzak. Tarabuła felt that she was an art dealer as well as a curator, and for her an exhibition became a form of critical expression. It was precisely this ambition that made Zderzak not only a pioneering gallery, but a completely unique one. Moreover, no other gallery exists which would evolve with the changing reality, reflecting the history of political transformations. This is the only private gallery in Poland that is rooted in the underground and political opposition, since all other commercial galleries in the country emerged only when the wave of transformation was in full swing.

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**Słowa kluczowe**

powstający rynek sztuki, Galeria „Zderzak”, kultura postkomunistyczna, Kraków, Marta Tarabuła, sztuka współczesna, sztuka lat 80. XX w., handel dziełami sztuki

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**Keywords**

emerging art market, Zderzak Gallery, post-communist culture, Cracow, Marta Tarabuła, contemporary art, art of the 1980s, art dealing

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## Summary

### **ANNA MARKOWSKA (University of Wrocław) / Marta Tarabula and her pioneering gallery in Krakow**

Marta Tarabula founded the Zderzak (Bumper) gallery in 1985. At that time she was in her mid-20s and had just graduated from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow where she had been studying art history. An artist's daughter, she had been deeply and inevitably involved in art since her childhood. However, in the 1980s Polish culture went underground because the society was strongly polarized due to the imposition of martial law (1981–1983). That is why Zderzak started as a gallery not supported by the national patronage and remained faithful to this idea even after the fall of the old regime and the democratization of the country. Although the gallery was initially conceived simply as a meeting place and a community centre, by the end of the 1980s Tarabula had already decided to create a commercial enterprise.

Tarabula set herself two goals which she has always been faithful to: firstly, to find and promote young promising artists and secondly, to inscribe debutants into the historical framework of post-war art. As a result of this second objective, Zderzak quickly built up its prestige in new political circumstances, influenced new interpretations in art history and contributed to the development of not only private but also national collections.

Tarabula's gallery, founded as a free and independent enterprise outside of state censorship, stimulated and shaped the imagination of an entire generation. Undoubtedly, its pioneering role in changing the art scene before, during and after the political transformation period following the collapse of the USSR is one of the most important and ambitious in Poland.