

Wanda Czełkowska: Art is not Rest
Muzeum Susch
15 July – 3 December 2023
Vernissage: 15 July, 15:30 – 19:00



Wanda Czełkowska , "Temat" ("Theme"), 1970–1971, black & white photography.
Courtesy of Wanda Czełkowska Studio; photo: Wanda Czełkowska.

Running from 15 July to 3 December 2023, Muzeum Susch presents ***Wanda Czełkowska: Art is not Rest*** the first institutional retrospective dedicated to the post-war contemporary Polish artist Wanda Czełkowska (1930-2021) outside her native country. The exhibition brings together a selection of her most monumental and never before seen artworks created throughout her practice, featuring sculpture, photography, drawing and painting that have been restored in close collaboration with the artist's estate. The exhibition's ambition reflects Muzeum Susch's founding mission to spotlight women artists and rigorously establish a matrilineage in art history.

Czełkowska was first and foremost a sculptor. She used the simplest of materials in her work - plaster, wood, bare canvas or rusty steel – and believed that 'Art comes out of thoughts, exclusively'. She worked in relative isolation to contemporary societal movements, believing that it was detrimental to both art and society and essential to avoiding oversimplification. She was part of a generation of artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain that moved from informal to minimalism and conceptual art, demonstrating enquires about the political sense of the dematerialisation of object observed in the 1960s and 1970s.

Wanda Czełkowska: Art is not Rest showcases a constellation of the artist's major works addressing three key themes in the artist's practice; 'The Body', 'The Mind' and 'The Space'. The title is taken from notes by Czełkowska and reflects her stance of art as demanding.

'The Body' explores Czełkowska experimentations to free herself from the realistic representation of the human body. While artworks in this section may be perceived as figurative, it actually heralds one of the most radical turns in the artist's work, highlighted through the first reconstruction of the monumental installation *Absolute Elimination of Sculpture as a Notion of Shape* (1972–1995). Comprised of 66 large flat concrete, prefab plates in two varying shades, it covers the floor and walls of Muzeum Susch's largest gallery space. Moving through it, the viewer becomes part of the work by physically occupying the space within it.

The second chapter, 'The Mind' celebrates Czełkowska's view that the idea was the centre of artistic creation. As a young artist, Czełkowska was conflicted by the intellectual pursuit of being an artist, almost choosing to pursue a career in philosophy instead, she was taken by the relationship between

space and time. She was a well-read artist that positioned intuition and intelligence at the centre of her artistic research. 'The Mind' presents Czełkowska's use of the head as a motif throughout her practice. The artist was a self-taught intellectual, particularly interested in French schools of thought. The head motif was used to address the idea of the *anima* – the mind in motion – and of the human brain as a driving force behind art through the kinetic sequences of paintings and drawings. Works in the section include *The Table* (1971), a large-scale installation of 18 abstract, hollow sculptures reminiscent of busts.

The final chapter, 'The Space', considers Czełkowska's position as a sculptor and her interrogation of the issues of space from wide ranging perspectives; varying from the physical space of sculpture experienced by the viewer to the works echoing the expanding space of the universe. This chapter includes *Black Frieze* (1968-1969, 1971-1973, 2021), another one of Czełkowska's key monumental works that the artist worked on until the end of her life. It was last exhibited in 1990 and is composed of black panels mounted into a polyptych with electrical lights.

The exhibition ends with *room of one's own*, a tribute to the space that the artist lacked throughout her career from the experience of recurrently having to move studio throughout her life. These limitations did not stop Czełkowska from creating works monumental in scale and ambition despite facing administrative bans on using her apartment for sculpting. Here, visitors will find Czełkowska's self-portraits and representations, coming full circle to the beginning of the exhibition's narrative – the body.

On the exhibition and Wanda Czełkowska, Muzeum Susch's founder Grażyna Kulczyk says "I am very happy to present a monographic exhibition of Wanda Czełkowska. It is my deepest belief that after her exhibition at Muzeum Susch, her first solo show outside her native Poland, she will join a championed group of avant-garde women artists. Czełkowska's body of art deserves global recognition without any doubts due its complexity, brave form and challenging art experiments. Wanda Czełkowska was one of the woman artists who did not want to wave a feminist flag, rather she cut her own place in the artworld by showing individual, intellectual strength, bravery and simply beauty similar to the already recognized artists Magdalena Abakanowicz and Alina Szapocznikow. Wanda Czełkowska is one of these artists who is known in Poland but a stranger to the world. After being overlooked for decades, I am sure that her artworks will be unveiled to be a real gem for curators, collectors and art aficionados, and also the wider global public."

Wanda Czełkowska: Art is not Rest at Muzeum Susch is guest curated by Matylda Taszaycka and is made possible with the collaboration and support of the artist's estate. The exhibition is also accompanied by a performance programme. While Wanda Czełkowska was not a performer, it is possible to perceive a strong interest in movement in her sculptural work. It gained a conceptual dimension from the 1970s onwards when she eliminated the notion of form in favour of open space and the viewer's body took the place of the representation of a body in sculpture. In the exhibition at the Museum Susch, this space becomes a stage for new performances curated by Joanna Lesnierowska, curator of ACZIUN, Muzeum Susch's dedicated choreographic program.

The exhibition is also accompanied by a monograph featuring contributions from wide ranging authors across different generations and backgrounds that contextualise Wanda Czełkowska's practice within post-war international discourses, such as abstract and conceptual art, feminist practices, human body and its relation to the space. Authors include: Emilie Bouvard, Mathieu Copeland, David Crowley, June Geddes Antonina Gugąła, Amelia Jones, Charlotte Matter, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Agnieszka Tarasiuk, Matylda Taszycka and Sarah Wilson. The book is part of a series of monographs by Muzeum Susch and Skira dedicated to the rediscovery of women artists who have been neglected by the main discourses and canons of art history. It will be published in mid-July 2023 and available for purchase at the Muzeum Susch store or online via Skira.

Assistant Curator: Antonina Gugąła

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Notes to editors

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Listing details:

Exhibition dates: 15 July – 3 December 2023
Vernissage: 15 July, 15:30 – 19:00
Address: Muzeum Susch, Surpunt 78, CH-7542 Susch, Switzerland
Tickets: Regular 25 CHF/ reduced 20 CHF *
Website: www.muzeumsusch.ch
Instagram: [@muzeumsusch](https://www.instagram.com/muzeumsusch)

About Wanda Czełkowska

Wanda Czełkowska (1930-2021) was a prominent figure of the Polish avant-garde whose work, until recently, has gone largely unnoticed. She trained at the Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow, from 1949-1954 and was an active member of the Krakow Group from 1967-1982 (whose other fellows included for example Tadeusz Kantor, Maria Jarema and Erna Rosenstein). Czełkowska played an influential role in the development of conceptual art in Poland and received numerous awards for her work. She was honored with the 'Award of the Critique and Artistic Information Section' by the Association of Polish Journalists in Krakow for her spatial project, *Absolute Elimination of Sculpture as a Notion of Shape* (1973) and was twice awarded the scholarship of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (2001, 2012). In 2016, the National Museum in Warsaw organized a major retrospective of her work: *Wanda Czełkowska: Retrospection*, followed by an international symposium. Czełkowska's oeuvre spanned various mediums, including sculptures, installations/environments, paintings, drawings and photographs.

About Matylda Taszycka

Matylda Taszycka is Head of Research Programmes at AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions where she leads initiatives and directs research on women artists from the 19th and 20th centuries. Among other things, she is in charge of the planning of conferences in partnership with museums and universities, as well as the coordination of the AWARE Prize for women artists. A graduate from the École du Louvre in Paris, she worked at the Monnaie de Paris, before joining the Polish Institute of Paris as Head of Visual Arts.

Matylda Taszycka is also an independent curator and art critic.

<https://awarewomenartists.com/en/>

About Muzeum Susch

Being simultaneously a site of contemplation, research and intervention, MUZEUM SUSCH opened in January 2019 as a space for debate and research. Founded and created by Grażyna Kulczyk, the Polish entrepreneur and long-term supporter of contemporary art, it is specifically (but not exclusively) informed by a deep understanding of woman artists and seeks an emotional connection to art as a matrilineage of the sometimes omitted, overlooked or misread. The museum is housed in an extraordinary campus located on the site of a 12th-century former monastery and brewery in Susch, a remote town on the ancient pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in the Engadin valley of the Swiss Alps. The multi-faceted project comprises over 1,500 m² of gallery spaces which show site-specific and permanent artworks, and a regular program of curated, temporary exhibitions.

About Grażyna Kulczyk

Grażyna Kulczyk is an entrepreneur and art collector, whose endeavours have made her Poland's most successful businesswoman. In 2004, after many years of running activities in art and philanthropy sectors, Ms. Kulczyk set up her cultural flagship venture: Art Stations Foundation CH, housed across the carefully restored and extended 8-hectare, former industrial complex, Stary Browar (Old Brewery) in Poznań (Poland), which has received numerous Polish and international awards. In 2015 she started the construction of the Muzeum Susch in Switzerland, which opened its doors in 2019. It has quickly become one of the most important museum institutions in Switzerland and is largely recognized across Europe for its dedication to international modern and contemporary art. Art Stations Foundation CH also houses a Residency Program and the Instituto Susch dedicated to global feminist Research, Conference and Publication programmes.

Ms. Kulczyk's areas of interest and art commissions combine a number of themes as development of new technology and start-ups working to change the world. She is particularly engaged in supporting entrepreneurship among women as well as the equal presence of women in STEM. From 2012 to 2018, Kulczyk supported Tate as a member of the International Council and Russia and the Eastern Europe Acquisitions Committee. She joined the board of the Modern Women's Fund Committee of the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2015, and has been a board member of Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw for almost 10 years. Ms. Kulczyk has been recognized as one of the 200 Top Collectors in the world by Art News magazine.