

*Camilla Larsson*

SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY

[HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0009-0002-3535-192X](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-3535-192X)

## Entangled History between Semi-Peripheries: Magdalena Abakanowicz's Fibre Art on the Swedish Art Scene circa 1970<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article examines what role Sweden, as a presumed periphery in Northeastern Europe, played at the turn of the 1960s when Magdalena Abakanowicz and her fellow Polish artists working in fibre material broke new ground moving away from traditional tapestry by working with complex three-dimensional forms. Using the method of a history of crossing, *histoire croisée*, the article shows how exhibitions with Abakanowicz's fibre art served many interests at the time, the artist's own creative development and international career, Swedish art institutions eager to display current experiments in soft environments, the burgeoning Swedish cultural policymaking, and larger structures of cultural diplomacy. The article thus proposes to understand the relation between Sweden and Poland as two semi-peripheries, where the dominant narrative of modern art stemming from Western centres influencing the rest was, in many ways, circumvented.

**Keywords:** Magdalena Abakanowicz, fibre art, Swedish exhibition history, entangled history, cultural diplomacy

The biography of Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930–2017) reveals a rich history of exhibitions and travelling all over the world.<sup>2</sup> From 1967, she

---

1 The research for this article has been funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

2 For an extensive biography compiled by J. Dally see *Magdalena Abakanowicz. Fate and Art. Monologue*, ed. P. Gribaudo, 2nd ed., Milan, 2020, pp. 234–245.

regularly exhibited in Sweden, in group exhibitions, solo presentations, and, unusually, as a foreign artist she also received a public commission in 1971. Considering that her artworks were large-scale sculptures and experimental installations made on site and requiring infrastructure from curators and institutions, it raises questions about the role of events in Sweden in Abakanowicz's artistic practice, the nature of her network, and the reception of art critics. In addition, from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, exhibition titles, catalogue essays, newspaper notices, interviews and reviews have framed the art with headings that refer to the nation state. Formulations from newspaper notices and reviews such as "Polish tapestries", "Polish world art [...]", or "world-famous Polish shows [...]" were common.<sup>3</sup> This leads to further questions about how to understand the contacts between the Polish artist and the Swedish art scene, which were established at a time when Europe was seemingly divided into an Eastern and Western bloc. The national framework does not only have geopolitical connotations but it is also active in the narration of art history. From a Swedish perspective, Paris was the undeniable centre during modernism and beyond, which raises further questions about how the cross-border contacts between Poland and Sweden, two countries on the edge of Europe, can be understood.<sup>4</sup>

This article explores Magdalena Abakanowicz's exhibition history in Sweden with emphasis on the first three survey exhibitions she took part in and her first three solo presentations, all made around 1970. These events are important to research because she was most active in the area at that time, and it will therefore give new insights into her early period working in organic fibre materials. This unexplored history of Abakanowicz will add to current research raising questions of artistic milieus, collaborations, and the artist's position on a larger international art scene, challenging the prevailing narrative of Abakanowicz as a single author creating an aesthetic revolution.<sup>5</sup>

3 "Polsk världskonst till konsthallen" [Polish World Art to the Kunsthalle], *Arbetet*, 12 December 1966; M. Stensman, "Polska gobelänger" [Polish Tapestries], *Arbetet*, 25 January 1967; C. Duke, "Världsberömd polska visar textilsulptur" [World-famous Polish Shows Textile Sculptures], *Länstidningen Södertälje*, February 1970.

4 J. Sjöholm Skrubbe, "Routes and Ruptures. Swedish Artistic Mobility in the Early Twentieth Century", *Art@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, p. 21–22.

5 R. Boger, *Magdalena Abakanowicz og Norge: Stilskaper eller frigjørende forbilde? En drøftelse av Abakanowicz' betydning for norsk tekstilkunst 1960–1980*, MA thesis, Oslo, 2010; A. Jakubowska, "The 'Abakans' and the Feminist Revolution", in: *Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture*, eds. S. Bru, L. Nuijs, B. Hjartarson, P. Nicholls, T. Ørum, H. Berg, Berlin–Boston, 2012, pp. 253–265; M. Boot, "Like a Flaming Comet: The Rise of Magdalena Abakanowicz in the Netherlands", *Textile*, 2018, 16, no. 4, pp. 378–385; M. Jachufa, "Crafting an Art Practice. The Postwar Polish Art Scene" and M. Moskalewicz, "Knots. Abakanowicz and the Polish Art Scene in the 1960s" both articles in: *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, eds. A. Coxon, M.J. Jacob, London, 2022, exh. cat. Examples of papers at *Abakanowicz Today: New Encounters with the Artist and Her Work*, research symposium, Tate Modern, London, 12–13 May 2023, organized

## International art in post-war Sweden: an unwritten, entangled history

This article builds on what art historians Katarina Wadstein MacLeod, Marta Edling, and Pella Myrstener call a “rich stream” of artists being part of international exhibitions in Sweden during the post-war period, 1945–1980.<sup>6</sup> They show how heterogeneous the field of art exhibitions were and point out that this has gone unnoticed in the written art history due to tendencies to afford attention to Western European and North American art by focusing on exhibitions in major museums.<sup>7</sup> A related observation of the specific period is that art in general was understood through the lens of national belonging.<sup>8</sup>

Notable, among their findings, is that art from the Nordic countries made up half of the exhibitions, a majority of which showed Danish artists, closely followed by art from France. More unexpectedly, the archival research also brings forth that many of the exhibitions showed art from Eastern Europe where Polish participation stands out particularly at certain venues.<sup>9</sup> This shows that Sweden, in the Northeastern part of Europe, was made up of horizontal relations between many different geographical axes crisscrossing the presumed Cold War divide, complicating previous attempts to write exhibition history.<sup>10</sup> This article looks at Abakanowicz’s exhibition history in Sweden as a case with the aim to investigate how the presence of her art can be understood within the context of Sweden at the turn of the 1960s, being part of the welfare society built up at the time, where new municipal art galleries and public art played a crucial role, and, to investigate what role those events played in her artistic development.

Abakanowicz’s art in Sweden is also a case of artistic transfers between Poland and Sweden. Two countries that exist on the margins of Europe, mentally and geographically far from the art metropolises of Paris and New York, but also inherently different as nations. This case offers a fresh contribution to research on cross-border relations and on modern art that seeks to replace hierarchical concepts of stylistic diffusion from presumed centres to presumed

---

by *Abakanowicz Arts and Culture Charitable Foundation*: S. Altmann, “Catalysts of Fibre Work: The Impact of Abakanowicz’s Art and *Projekt Art Magazine* on Fibre Art in the GDR”; D. Crowley, “Abakanowicz and the Alibi of Use”; A. Jakubowska, “Occupation: Textile Artist. Positioning Magdalena Abakanowicz in the Art Field of 1950s State-Socialist Poland”.

6 K. MacLeod, M. Edling, P. Myrstener, “Exhibiting in a European Periphery? International Art in Sweden during the Cold War”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, pp. 128–129.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

8 P. Myrstener, *Konst i rörelse. Tillfälliga utställningar med internationell konst i Sverige 1945–1969*, forthcoming PhD thesis, Huddinge.

9 Wadstein MacLeod, Edling, Myrstener, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

peripheries.<sup>11</sup> This article asks how one can speak of contact between two semi-peripheries with no clearly defined power hierarchy.<sup>12</sup> The most evident differences are that Poland was controlled by the Soviet Union and had a long history of occupation by foreign powers, while Sweden was non-aligned and had experienced almost two hundred years of peace and thus cultural stability and economic growth prevailed. This difference in modern history can be one reason why there is a larger population of Poles living in Sweden than vice versa and the economic conditions can also be one major explanation to why more Polish artists exhibited in Sweden than the other way around. After World War II there was an expansion of temporary exhibitions with international art in Sweden. Myrstener identifies factors that influenced this tendency, such as museums had empty spaces that needed to be filled quickly, the general art audience was interested in contemporary art outside of the home country, and art and culture were becoming a tool in emerging cultural policy-making and cultural diplomacy.<sup>13</sup>

As this article investigates archives of different art institutions, maps out contacts between individuals and analyses how art was disseminated and understood, entanglement is not only a useful word to describe textile art, but it is also a concept with methodological implications. I use the concept of “entangled history” or “history of crossing”, discussed by social historians Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann as *histoire croisée*.<sup>14</sup> Exhibitions are the main objects of study and the concept of entanglement is used to investigate how meaning-making was generated within the exhibitions for individuals, institutions, for the burgeoning process of cultural policy-making, and for larger structures of cultural diplomacy, as well as for the artist herself. In the case of Abakanowicz in Sweden, her art was exhibited at the Nationalmuseum, the national gallery of Sweden, municipal galleries in Lund, Södertälje, and Malmö, Kulturhuset and Liljevalchs konsthall, the two municipal galleries in Stockholm and in museums specialising in craft and design such as Röhsska Museum of Design and Craft in Gothenburg, as well as the Region of Stockholm, which commissioned art for hospitals. Entangled history has

11 P. Piotrowski, “Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde”, in: *Europa! Europa! The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. S. Bru, P. Nicholls, Berlin, 2009; I. DaCosta Kaufmann, C. Dossin, B. Joyeux-Prunel, *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Ashgate, 2015; *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, eds. B. Hock, A. Allas, New York-London, 2018; A. Öhrner, “Exhibiting Contemporary Art in the Early 1990s Nordic-Baltic Realm”, *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2.

12 This is in line with art historian A. Ring Petersen sketching a semi-peripheral Nordic perspective as an attempt to pluralise and deconstruct the hegemonic position of the West, using the margin to implement a double perspective of being both insider and outsider, A. Ring Petersen, “Global Art History: A View from the North”, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2015, 7, no. 1.

13 Myrstener, *op. cit.*

14 M. Werner, B. Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison. Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity”, *History and Theory*, 2006, 45, no. 1, pp. 30–33.

developed out of a need to go beyond methods of comparisons, often used when writing national history, and circumvent the trap of methodological nationalism, that is to take nationality as something already given and therefore an unproblematic container to build research on.<sup>15</sup> In this article Sweden and Poland are understood as larger frameworks, constructions marked by the geo-political situation of the time.

To understand how the exhibitions came about, documents and correspondence from archives have been studied, along with texts published in exhibition catalogues, folders, or distributed as hand-outs. The art critical reception has been studied in newspapers as well as magazines devoted to arts and crafts. To differentiate the result, there will also be comparison between Abakanowicz's fibre art exhibitions and her fellow artist Tadeusz Kantor's (1915–1990) exhibitions in Sweden.<sup>16</sup> Kantor exhibited extensively in Sweden, but worked in the medium of painting, drawing, sculpture, and around the mid-1970s he became world renown for his work in theatre. This comparison is crucial to investigate how artists were perceived differently due to what they made artistically, fused with their national belonging. Here we will see how entanglement of artistic idioms and national belonging create different interpretations. One main result is that what is considered Polish in Sweden is many things, depending on the artist, artistic expression, time and place of the art institution and the recipient, and it was valued differently. This is by no means unexpected. It is nevertheless a finding that needs to be differentiated to understand how art is valued and how national belonging is constructed in different times.

## Magdalena Abakanowicz's early years in Poland and abroad

From the 1980s onwards Abakanowicz had solo exhibitions and was commissioned to make site-specific works in Europe, America, and Asia.<sup>17</sup> She had what one could say the world as her workplace. In her writings she talks about being alone both as a child growing up in a noble family in the countryside during Nazi occupation as well as in her hard work as an artist.<sup>18</sup> Following this narrative she might have become world-famous all by herself. Nonetheless,

---

15 S. Neunsinger, "Cross-Over! Om komparationer, transferanalyser, *histoire croisée* och den metodologiska nationalismens problem", *Historisk Tidskrift*, 2010, 130, no. 1.

16 C. Larsson, "The Politics of Appearance: Tadeusz Kantor Exhibiting in Sweden 1958–2014", *Sztuka i dokumentacja*, 2022, p. 85.

17 Dally, op. cit., pp. 234–245.

18 Art historian B. Rose uses quotations from Abakanowicz and unfolds the artist's autobiography, B. Rose, *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, New York, 1994. Critical and contextual readings of this narrative in J. Ingot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz. Bodies, Environments, and Myths*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 2004.

her early work and career cannot be understood without her fellow artists Wojciech Sadley (born 1932), Jolanta Owidzka (1927–2020), Barbara Falkowska (born 1931) and Krystyna Wojtyna–Drouet (born 1926), who together with other textile artists made up what has been called the “Polish tapestry school”. Other individuals working with textile art in Poland and elsewhere have been instrumental, such as Krystyna Kondratiuk the founding director of the Museum of the History of Textiles in Łódź [now Central Museum of Textiles], and the French artist Jean Lurçat and collectors and art lovers Pierre and Alice Pauli, who in different constellation established the Centre international de la tapisserie ancienne et modern, or CITAM, the International Tapestry Biennial in Lausanne, and Galerie Alice Pauli.<sup>19</sup>

The tapestry biennial started in 1962 and quickly became an international forum for experimental fibre art. In the first edition, works of 59 artists from 17 countries were exhibited, including Sweden and Poland.<sup>20</sup> Magali Junet, curator of the Fondation Toms Pauli in Lausanne, describes the contribution by the Polish artists as “total freedom of expression” regarding the material they used and the way they had woven their artworks, free from traditional cartoons that were transferred by professional weavers.<sup>21</sup> Many of their works were rough reliefs, made of non-traditional materials such as sisal, rope and horsehair. The biennial adopted a national representation system, and in the first edition Abakanowicz represented Poland together with Sadley, Owidzka, Ada Kierzkowska (1926–2016) and Anna Śledziewska (1900–1979), and works by Maria Łaszkiwicz (1892–1981) and Wojtyna-Drouet were displayed in public areas outside of the main exhibition.<sup>22</sup> Before Abakanowicz art was shown in Sweden her name had occurred in Swedish papers in the context of her participation in the Lausanne Biennial.<sup>23</sup>

During Abakanowicz’s time at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, from which she graduated in 1954 with a diploma in weaving from the department of painting, art historian Michał Jachuła points out that the studios of Eleonora Plutyńska (1886–1969), Anna Śledziewska and Mieczysław Szymański (1903–1990), taught their students respect for the use of traditional weaving techniques beside the knowledge of how to dye, use organic materials, and primarily urged them to experiment.<sup>24</sup> In 1961, after some years working with

19 M. Junet, “Abakanowicz and Lausanne: The Path to Fame”, in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm | Metamorphosis*, ed. M. Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, exh. cat., 2018, p. 85.

20 The other participating countries were France, Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, the USA, Canada, and Japan, *ibid.*, p. 87.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

22 M. Kowalewska, “Mapping New Meaning”, in: *From Tapestry to Fibre. The Lausanne Biennials 1962–1995*, eds. G. Eberhard Cotton, M. Junet, Milan, 2017, p. 159.

23 T. Lundgren, “Gobelinbiennal i Lausanne”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25 June 1967; E. Zweigbergk, “Bildväv med och utan bild”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 15 July 1967.

24 Jachuła, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

painting on fabric, Abakanowicz started to weave and found what Jachuła calls an “artistic home” in the Atelier Expérimental de l’Union des Artistes de Polonais, an independent studio run by Łaskiewicz.<sup>25</sup> Here Abakanowicz’s woven works started to take a three-dimensional shape and would later move from the walls out into the space.

As the Polish textile artists were praised internationally, group exhibitions started to be organised in Poland and abroad, like the *Modern Polish Tapestries* touring in Germany, Austria, Holland and Switzerland during 1964–65, and in Norway *Moderne polsk billedvev* was arranged at Kunstindustrimuseet in Oslo in 1965.<sup>26</sup> Abakanowicz was also included in international surveys of the latest developments in fibre art, like Stedelijk museum’s *Perspectief in Textiel* and *Wall Hangings* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, both in 1969.<sup>27</sup> It is in this larger context that the early exhibitions in Sweden circa 1970 can be positioned as we will see how they were part of paving the way for her artistic expansion while also serving the interests of Swedish art institutions and cultural policymakers.

These group exhibitions developed into solo presentations abroad, such as *Magdalena Abakanowicz’ arbeider i vev*, at Kunstindustrimuseet in Oslo in 1967.<sup>28</sup> From 1968, plans for her first solo in Sweden started to grow and around 1970 she took part in no fewer than three survey exhibitions with Polish fibre art in the country. The surveys were organised at a time when Swedish art and design museums and municipal galleries also paid attention to the domestic fibre art that developed new large-scale formats under public commissions, even if most Swedish textile artists continued to work flat against walls.

## Magdalena Abakanowicz exhibiting in Sweden: an overview

The exhibitions in Sweden lasted almost 30 years of Abakanowicz’s lifetime, starting in 1967 and ending in 1996.<sup>29</sup> The article will focus on her first six public events when she worked with weaving and different fibre materials,

---

25 Ibid., pp. 150–151.

26 Ibid., p. 91 and J. Gola, “Magdalena Abakanowicz: A Biographical Outline” in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm | Metamorphosis*, ed. M. Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, exh. cat., 2018, pp. 271–273. In *Moderne polsk billedvev* 26 Polish artists were participating with 40 artworks and Boger has pointed out that information on this show is scarce, and she only mentions the name of Abakanowicz, Łaskiewicz, Sadley and Owidzka. See: Boger, op. cit., p. 37.

27 Junet, op. cit., pp. 97–99.

28 Boger, op. cit., pp. 38–39.

29 Solo and group exhibitions in chronological order in Sweden during Abakanowicz’s lifetime: *Moderna gobelänger och aktuell grafik från Polen [Modern Tapestry and Graphic Arts from Poland]*, Lunds Konsthall, 15 Jan–5 Feb 1967; *Magdalena Abakanowicz / Textil*

starting with three survey exhibitions followed by a chapter on three solo events. During this time, professional contact with art historians and museum curators Eje Högestätt (1921–1986) and Dag Widman (1924–2003) developed. The first six events were followed by exhibitions that showed her sculptural practice, developed in materials such as burlap treated with resin, wood, steel, iron and bronze, shaped into human-like figures.

Letters and telegrams in archives of the above-mentioned Swedish museums and galleries attest to how the exhibitions took shape between the artist and curators. Most extensive and lively correspondence can be found between the artist and Högestätt and Widman.<sup>30</sup> They sent letters to plan production and delved into artistic and curatorial matters. Documents were also sent to Desa – the Polish State Enterprise for Works of Art and Antiques.<sup>31</sup> These documents testify to the larger framework of the relation between the two countries. The official relations between Sweden and Poland during the preceding decade of the 1960s and 1970s were marked by the Cold War but they were also shaped by an older history with the common border of the Baltic Sea giving way to exchanges of individuals via politics, religion and culture.<sup>32</sup>

After World War II, many of the Polish refugees in Sweden left the country, but some years later a new influx began due to the newly polarised political landscape.<sup>33</sup> In a survey article, literary scholar and specialist in Swedish-Polish relations Andrzej Nils Ugglå states that in Sweden, Polish organisations of various kinds had collected and spread knowledge of the Polish language and culture since 1918.<sup>34</sup> During the Cold War period the interest in Polish cul-

---

*skulptur / Textile Environment*, Södertälje Konsthall, 1–30 March 1970; *Moderna polska textilier [Modern Polish Tapestry]*, Röhsska Museum of Design and Craft, Gothenburg, 10 Oct –14 Nov 1971; public commission, *Black Brown*, Huddinge Hospital, 1971–72; Collection Exhibition, Kulturhuset in Borås (inauguration of the Cultural House) 1975; *Abakanowicz. Organic Structures*, Malmö Konsthall, 26 Feb–11 April 1977; *Malmoe*, Malmö Konsthall, 20 March–3 May 1981; *Textil skulptur: ur 12e internationella textilbiennalen i Lausanne 1985 [Textile Sculptures: From 12th International Textile Biennale in Lausanne 1985]*, Liljevalchs konsthall, 11 April–25 May 1986; *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, Kulturhuset in Stockholm, 31 Aug–13 Oct 1996.

30 For a compilation of Abakanowicz's correspondences with curators, gallerists, and other collaborators, see *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Writings and Conversations*, eds. by M.J. Jacob, J. Dally, Milan, 2022.

31 Desa was established in 1950, dealing in the trade of works of art and antiques by the ordinance of the Minister of Art and Culture and Ministry of International Trade. The organisation had showrooms all over Poland and according to Jachuła they are equal with cultural institutions exhibiting art. In the 1970s Desa had around sixty galleries and at the end of 1990s it was privatised, Jachuła, op. cit., p. 200.

32 A.N. Ugglå, "Polacker", in: *Det mångkulturellt Sverige. En handbok om etniska grupper och minoriteter*, eds. I. Svanberg, H. Runblom, Stockholm, 2nd ed., 1990, p. 294.

33 Ibid., p. 296.

34 Ibid., pp. 299–300.



ture declined compared to the war years.<sup>35</sup> Overall the growth of Polish exile culture was neither uniform nor dynamic, according to Uggla, but marked by political disagreement depending on if one worked with the Polish government or not.<sup>36</sup> The Polish government acted via organisations both in Poland and in Sweden such as Desa and the Polish Institute in Stockholm, founded in 1973, and the ones who acted independently or in direct opposition to the government worked with exile groups or with underground artists in Poland.<sup>37</sup> Polish exile culture was also marked by conflicts between ethnic Poles and Polish Jews.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, there was no unified call for Polish arts and culture from a Polish-Swedish audience within Sweden.

Under the leadership of Władysław Gomułka, 1956–70, the border politics softened.<sup>39</sup> Officially what was needed to bring over Polish artists was a formal invite, even if the bureaucracy was still complicated and time-consuming. Art exhibitions also involved costs for research trips, production for new artworks, transportations, and bringing artworks over national borders meant contact with customs and excise institutions, which regulated exports as well as temporary exportation. This means that even if Gomułka made crossing the border easier, curators and artists still needed support to realise their artistic visions and therefore had to involve official organisations with their own agenda. During the 1970s, the Swedish labour movement and parts of Swedish cultural life actively pursued a discussion around the fact that Poland was a Soviet-ruled dictatorship.<sup>40</sup> During the mid-1970s, there were collaborations between the Polish opposition and Swedish organisations.<sup>41</sup> Officially, the

35 Ibid., p. 300.

36 Regarding Abakanowicz status in Poland, art historian M. Moskalewicz mentions that because Abakanowicz did not partake in the boycott of official cultural event after 1981 imposition of Martial Law in Poland, it alienated many of her peers from her, but I have not found any explicit mentioning of similar feelings from individuals in Sweden, earlier or at later date, Moskalewicz, op. cit., p. 32.

37 One example of independent initiatives was the festival *Polska Munkaveln och ordet* [The Polish Mouth Calf and the Word] at the gallery Maneten in Gothenburg in May 1981, partly organised by Polish photographer and writer Joanna Helander (born 1948) living in Sweden since the early 1970s, Polish art critic Tadeusz Nyczek, and Håkan Persson, curator at Maneten, different exhibitions were organised and textile artists such as Anna Bednarczuk and Ewa Korczak–Tomaszewska participated.

38 Uggla, op. cit., p. 301. Research on Polish Jews in Sweden is being conducted by Martin Englund at Södertörn University in collaboration with Nordiska Museet, for more information see <https://minnen.se/tema/vi> [accessed 22 August 2023].

39 Uggla, op. cit., p. 297.

40 *Det började i Polen. Sverige och Solidaritet 1980–1981*, ed. F. Eriksson, Huddinge, 2013, pp. 9–11 and p. 25.

41 M. Heino, B. Törnquist–Plewa, “Svenska stödkommittén för Solidaritet. The Swedish Support Committee and Independent Polish Agency in Lund”, in: *Skandinavien och Polen. Möten, relationer och ömsesidig påverkan*, ed. B. Törnquist–Plewa, Lund, 2007, pp. 25–58. Polish Summary.

consultation revolved around labour law issues, but for those involved it also included other political areas. The content of the letters between Abakanowicz, Högestätt and Widman evolves only around work, and if they exchanged any thoughts on the political situation, they saved it for personal meetings.

Officially, Sweden and Poland with heads of states Olof Palme and Edward Gierek, 1970–80, had a good relationship, which, however, would harden with the rise of the incipient Solidarity movement around 1980.<sup>42</sup> The introduction of Martial Law in December 1981 meant that travel to Sweden almost completely ceased, but the number of Poles who stayed increased significantly.<sup>43</sup>

Human geographer Thomas Lundén describes the general attitude of the Swedish foreign policy during the Cold War decades as follows: while national independency in countries such as Namibia, Nicaragua, Palestine, and South Africa was supported officially and with enthusiasm, the relations with the immediate neighbourhood around the Baltic Sea was characterised by cautiousness.<sup>44</sup> Support for cultural exchanges was steered by Svenska Institutet [the Swedish Institute], an institution for cultural and public diplomacy founded in 1945 and reorganised in 1970 as a state-financed institute.<sup>45</sup> And, as Lundén points out, the Swedish Institute was formally but only indirectly linked to the Swedish government and it is often “far from clear” how the decision order ran and the institute appeared as more independent than it was.<sup>46</sup> Sweden used tools of soft diplomacy, which meant that the country performed diplomacy through value attitudes and by means of non-governmental organisations and civil society to handle cultural relations with Poland.<sup>47</sup>

## Three early survey exhibitions with Polish fibre art in Sweden

The three survey exhibitions, *Modern Tapestry and Graphic Arts from Poland* at Lunds konsthall in 1967, *Poland Weaves in Freedom* at the Nationalmuseum in 1970, and *Modern Polish Tapestry* at Röhsska in 1971 share many main features, such as a similar selection of artists, the artists worked with textile in a modern, free way, they represented tendencies within the country of Poland, and they had established themselves on the international forum that attracted critical and public attention. The following chapter will look closer

42 Eriksson, op. cit., p. 23.

43 Uggla, op. cit., p. 297.

44 T. Lundén, “Turning Towards the Inland Sea? Swedish ‘Soft Diplomacy’ Towards the Baltic Soviet Republics Before Independence”, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2021, 47, no. 3, pp. 1–2.

45 “Vår historia” [“Our History”], <https://si.se/om-si/var-historia/> [accessed 20 June 2023].

46 Lundén, op. cit., p. 3.

47 Ibid.

at these three exhibitions to examine both similarities and differences, As we will see, the exhibitions at the Nationalmuseum and Röhsska were made in collaboration with Desa, while Högestätt seemed to be more independent in navigating the Polish art scene.<sup>48</sup>

Högestätt was the first director of Lunds konsthall, a municipal art gallery in the university town of Lund in southern Sweden that opened as early as 1957. Högestätt acted as director between 1957–67 and one of the last exhibitions he curated was *Modern Tapestry and Graphic Arts from Poland*.<sup>49</sup> During the planning process in 1966, Högestätt attended the International Graphic Art Biennial in Krakow, and on his way there he passed through Warsaw and discovered the work of Abakanowicz, Zofia Butrymowicz (1904–1987), Janina Dobrzynska (1906–2003), Falkowska, Kierzkowska, Owidzka, Sadley, Śledziewska, and Janina Tworek–Pierzgalska (1933–1983).<sup>50</sup> In the exhibition catalogue, he describes being astonished by the expression of the artworks and wanted to learn more about these artists and add them to the upcoming show with graphic art. Polish graphic art and posters had been exhibited regularly in Sweden since the end of the war and had been well known for their high quality, but what Högestätt experienced in the realm of textile was something new and bold for him.<sup>51</sup>

In shorter newspaper notes and reviews, *Modern Tapestry and Graphic Arts from Poland* was highlighted as a “different kind of tapestry exhibition”.<sup>52</sup> The fact that Abakanowicz had participated in both the Venice Biennial and the newly started Lausanne Biennial was mentioned under the heading “Polish World Art to the kunsthalle”. I will come back to the label “world art”, as it is interesting that early on she was seen as an artist of the world as well as being Polish, because other Polish artists were “only” Polish in the eyes of the Swedish critics, even if they had international careers like Abakanowicz did.

One Swedish writer predicted that the show would “cause great surprise because of its originality” where the textile works were more reminiscent of sculptures than wall-hung tapestries.<sup>53</sup> The art critic Mailis Stensman wonders if Polish textile was rarely seen in Sweden because the domestic textile

---

48 In an interview Högestätt talks about relations with the Swedish cultural attaché in Warsaw crucial in reporting on current tendencies within Polish tapestry art. See “Polsk världskonst...”, op. cit.

49 *Moderna gobelänger och aktuell grafik från Polen*, Lunds konsthall, 15 Jan–5 Feb 1967.

50 C. Duke, “Världsberömd polska visar textilsulptur”, *Länstidningen Södertälje*, February 1970 and E. Högestätt “Introduction”, in: *Moderna gobelänger och aktuell grafik från Polen*, Lund, 1967, exh. cat., no pagination.

51 Examples of exhibitions with Polish posters and graphic art: *Polsk affischkonst [Polish Poster Art]* at Röhsska Museum for Design and Craft, 1966 and *Aktuellt från Polen. Grafik och affischer i Konstmuseet [Contemporary from Poland. Graphic and Poster Art in the Art Museum]*, Gothenburg Art Museum, 1971.

52 “Polsk världskonst till konsthallen”, op. cit.

53 “Levande skulpturala bonader på Konsthallens polska expo”, *Arbetet*, 10 January 1967.

art was flourishing.<sup>54</sup> Stensman highlighted Abakanowicz, Sadley and Tworek–Pierzgalska as she thought they stuck out compared to others whom she considered more traditional. The contribution by the three was characterised as “powerful and serious which distinguished Polish art”. She also reviewed the exhibition in the design magazine *Form*, where she puts Abakanowicz even more at the forefront as the most innovative among the exhibited artists.<sup>55</sup> Even if Abakanowicz was the most acclaimed in the reviews, the same magazine did not publish an article on her until 1970 when she had her solo exhibition at Södertälje Konsthall. Sadley, on the contrary, was featured in *Form* as early as in 1968. This means that many other Polish artists working with textile and exhibiting together in these early surveys were given attention by the Swedish art critics at the time.<sup>56</sup>

Overall, Swedish art critics emphasised the sculptural side of Polish textile art, from wall-hung tapestry to free expressions in three dimensions. What was also highly valued by the critics were artists that weaved by themselves and experimented with different fibre materials. Alongside Sadley, Tworek–Pierzgalska and Łaskiewicz, Abakanowicz was by far the most mentioned artists.

In the early 1960s Högestätt was already the *primus motor* for experimental international art happenings and exhibitions at Lunds konsthall.<sup>57</sup> Wadstein MacLeod shows that the artists Högestätt worked with testify to his ability “to win the artists’ trust, because he was a good listener and could offer them artistic freedom”.<sup>58</sup> She also points out that he had his strongest networks in the local art circuits of southern Sweden, in France and in Poland.<sup>59</sup> Högestätt’s interest in Polish art and culture was most probably favoured by his Polish wife Apolonia. Her maiden name was Byrska and she was born in 1920

54 M. Stensman, “Polska gobelänger”, *Arbetet*, 25 January 1967.

55 M. Stensman, “Polska gobelänger”, *Form*, 1967, 4, pp. 260–263. *Form* is the oldest magazine devoted to design still being published in Sweden, founded 1905 by Svenska Slöjdföreningen [the Swedish Society of Crafts and Design] and covers arts and crafts, industrial design, and debates issues on housing and public space, “Form”, Nationalencyklopedin, [https://www-ne-se.till.biblextern.sh.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/form-\(tidskrift\)](https://www-ne-se.till.biblextern.sh.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/form-(tidskrift)) [accessed 8 August 2023].

56 Relevant parts of the 1968 issue no. 4 devoted to Polish art and design and textile art include D. Wroblewska, “Wojciech Sadley” and G. Lundahl, “Tre polska textilare” text about Grupa 5 (Abakanowicz, Butrymowicz, Kierzkowska, Owidzka, Sadley). In the 1970 issue no. 3 B. Sydhoff published “Abakanowicz”.

57 K. Wadstein MacLeod, “Superlund: Lunds konsthall och det centrala i det periferia”, *Periskop*, 2018, 20, pp. 91–109; K. Wadstein MacLeod, “Troubling Peripheries: Pierre Restany and Superlund”, *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 2021, 90, 1, pp. 13–24; K. Wadstein MacLeod, *From Fluxus to Fest. International Art in Lunds konsthall, 1965–67*, Huddinge, 2022, pp. 137–138.

58 Wadstein MacLeod, *From Fluxus...*, pp. 111–112.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

in Krakow.<sup>60</sup> She was catholic and joined the resistance movement during the Nazi occupation and after being sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp when her group was discovered, she managed to flee to Sweden via the Red Cross. Apolonia ended up in southern Sweden where she met Eje Högestätt. They married and moved to Lund, and regularly travelled to Poland to see their family and for business. Even if Högestätt's exhibition programme was separated from current politics, Apolonia received a medal in 2008 for her engagement in humanitarian aid to Poland from 1981 onwards, which means that they both had insights into the socially urgent and politically repressive situation in the country.<sup>61</sup>

With *Modern Tapestry and Graphic Arts from Poland* Abakanowicz had established a presence in Sweden with one well-attended and reviewed exhibition (Fig. 1).<sup>62</sup> Already the year after the exhibition in Lund, in 1968, Högestätt invited Abakanowicz to have a solo presentation at Södertälje Konsthall, about to be built in the smaller city of Södertälje 40 kilometres south of Stockholm. Because of her busy schedule, they had to postpone the exhibition until 1970. By that time two other survey shows were also ready to open at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm and at Röhsska Museum of Design and Craft in Gothenburg.

These two surveys were similar kinds of group exhibitions as the one in Lund, highlighting Polish fibre art. Both museums collaborated with Desa. Dag Widman, keeper of the department of Applied Art at the Nationalmuseum and Göran Axel-Nilsson and director of Röhsska, travelled to Poland to visit artist studios recommended by Desa. It is hard to tell exactly from archived documents how these collaborations were set up, but one can read in the correspondence about everything from Desa contacting the Swedish museums, to arranging and paying for the research trips. Desa also signed agreements with the museums for entire exhibitions, regulating participating artists, lists of works, insurance, transport and sale prices.

During late autumn of 1970, *Abakanowicz. En konfrontation* [*Abakanowicz: a Confrontation*] and a survey *Polen väver fritt* [*Poland Weaves in Freedom*] were on display at the Nationalmuseum and Butrymowicz, Jaroszynska-Pachucka, Tworek-Pierzgańska, Łaskiewicz, Owidzka, Sadley and Stephan took part.<sup>63</sup> Documentation of the exhibition shows that many of the large-scale tapestries hung close to the walls while Sadley's net-like pieces with ripped up

60 Att överleva. Röster från Ravensbrück, *En lärarhandledning*, Lund, 2006, pp. 18–19. [https://www.kulturen.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Ravensbruck\\_Lararhandledning.pdf](https://www.kulturen.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Ravensbruck_Lararhandledning.pdf) [accessed 11 July 2023].

61 M. Haykowski, "Polskie odznaczenia za szwedzką pomoc humanitarną", *Polonia*, 1 January 2008, <https://www.poloniainfo.se/artykul.php?id=921> [accessed 15 July 2023].

62 Abakanowicz's *Golden Zlota* was also acquired by the city of Malmö; "Mellanhedsgången får polsk gobeläng", *Arbetet*, 18 February 1967; "Polsk kvinnlig professor lockade fullt hus i Lund", *Arbetet*, 13 February 1967.

63 *Polen väver fritt*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1970, exh. cat.







**Fig. 2.** Exhibition catalogue for *Polen väver fritt* [*Poland Weaves in Freedom*], Nationalmuseum 1970. Photo: Alexandra Larsson Jacobson.

holes, Owidzka's GAMA-series with many free-hanging parts building up an impressive tableau, and Jaroszynska Pachucka's abstract three-dimensional forms and rudimentary human like figures created accents in the space. Even if Abakanowicz is not mentioned in the catalogue for the survey, one of her free hanging fibre sculptures called *abakans* can be seen in the documentation.<sup>64</sup> In correspondence between Widman and Abakanowicz they discuss the possibility for the museum to acquire *Abakan Orange* (1968) which they did and it is most probably that piece that is on display, hovering in one of the corners behind Sadley's intricately knitted nets.<sup>65</sup>

The catalogue gives the reader a good impression of the contemporary Polish art scene with a historical background on influences from Oriental weaving techniques from Kilim and Flemish techniques (Fig. 2).<sup>66</sup> Helena Lutteman, curator at the Nationalmuseum and editor of the catalogue, like many of the art critics reviewing the survey in Lund, emphasises the importance of the Lausanne Biennial and she compares the Polish artists' presentation

<sup>64</sup> Photographic documentation, Archive Nationalmuseum.

<sup>65</sup> After Abakanowicz increased the price, *Abakan Orange* cost USD 6,000. See letters from Abakanowicz to Widman, 30 December 1970, Archive Nationalmuseum. Parts of the GAMA-series by Owidzka were sold to Hushållsseminariet för blivande textillärare i Umeå [Seminar for textile teachers in Umeå]. All sales were taken care of by Sveagal-leriet. Archive Nationalmuseum.

<sup>66</sup> H. Lutteman, "Polsk textilkonst" and "Polsk bild i aktion", in: *Polen väver fritt*, Stockholm, 1970, exh. cat., p. 2 and pp. 14–16.

with the Swedish one with Einar Forseth (1892–1988) and Lars Gynning (1920–2003) who participated with “rather traditional weaves”. She also refers to an article in *Form*, the 1968 exhibition catalogue of Władysław Hasiór (1928–1999) at Moderna Museet, and a theatre performance at the City Theatre in Stockholm, an intricate cross-referencing that shows how Lutteman positioned the show in a web of Polish events taking place in Stockholm. The collaboration with Desa and the Polish Cultural Ministry was mentioned by the director Bengt Dahlbäck in the foreword, giving the official, national collaboration a prominent position.<sup>67</sup>

On 21 September 1970, a letter from Desa was sent to Göran Axel-Nilsson, director at Röhsska, saying that they tried to contact the museum but without success. With some help from the Polish Embassy in Stockholm, they reached out a second time because they had “gladly” heard about the museum’s forthcoming plan to exhibit Polish textile artists and they thought it was both “important and purposeful” that the museum had contact with Desa, who would facilitate the preparations. One initial concrete offer was to cover the costs of the hotel and food for a five-day research trip.<sup>68</sup>

In the final selection of *Modern Polish Tapestry*, Abakanowicz exhibited with Butrymowicz, Łaskiewicz, Teresa Muszynska (born 1937), Owidzka, Tworek–Pierzgalska, Agnieszka Ruszczyńska–Szafranska (born 1929), Sadley and Stephan.<sup>69</sup> Documentation shows how most works were single large-scale weavings that hung close to the walls, with works by Abakanowicz and Sadley displayed in the room, filling up the whole space between the ceiling and the walls.<sup>70</sup> The Lausanne Biennial was mentioned in the printed matter, and the group of artists were singled out as the most central of those working in the cross-section of classical tapestry and free expressions.<sup>71</sup> The museum also acquired works to their collection, i.e. Abakanowicz’s *Abakan Brown* (1969) and Ruszczyńska-Szafranska’s *Kolidia 70*.<sup>72</sup>

It is impossible to say if Axel-Nilsson would have made the same exhibition without Desa, but even if the organisation had single-mindedly invited itself, the guidance and knowledge of the staff in Poland would have been well received by the museum director.<sup>73</sup> The first secretary of the Polish Embassy, Jan Gorzelancyk, opened the show and it serves as a good example of how

67 B. Dahlbäck, “Polen väver fritt”, in: *Polen väver fritt*, Stockholm, 1970, exh. cat., p. 1.

68 Letter from Desa via the Polish Embassy in Stockholm to Göran Axel-Nilsson, 21 September 1970, Archive Röhsska Museum.

69 Exhibition contract between Röhsska Museum and Desa, signed 12 May 1971, Archive Röhsska Museum.

70 Photographic documentation, Archive Röhsska Museum.

71 Press release, 6 October 1971, Archive Röhsska Museum.

72 The museum acquired *Abakan Brown* for around SEK 23,000 and *Kolidia 70* for SEK 3,470. See a document from Röhsska to the Swedish customs, Archive Röhsska Museum.

73 Report to the Board of Röhsska Museum written by Göran Axel-Nilsson, May 1971, Archive Röhsska Museum.



two organisations working nationally manifested their relations during public ceremonies. One may compare how Desa proactively established contact with Röhsska with Thomas Lundén's research on how the Swedish Institute acted more passively in line with Sweden's soft power cultural diplomacy.

Looking at the three larger survey exhibitions of Polish fibre art in Sweden as an entangled history we can see how the exhibitions have a different significance for the actors involved. In the very late 1960s Abakanowicz struggled with breaking out of the category of textile art that she found too narrow, but even so she took part in the Röhsska exhibition 1971. One year later she secured a more prominent position in a solo presentation at the Nationalmuseum, as will be discussed soon. So, even if the surveys were not events where she directly developed her artistic language, they gave benefits such as opportunities to expand her professional network, to confirm her international reputation, and to sell her artworks.

Through the exhibitions the museums and municipal art galleries manifested how they were in tune with their time and had the ability to act quickly, showing the latest most internationally celebrated artists. To make sure the audience would not miss how renowned the artists were, it was clearly stated many times in the printed matter. Looking at the surveys from a larger perspective, the artists are grouped together not only by their artistic materials and techniques but also as a national phenomenon, which resonates well with how leading actors worked, like the grand old biennial in Venice and the up-and-coming one in Lausanne. From the Polish side, Desa and the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic were actively involved in the two last events using art as examples of the excellence and liberal attitude of the country at large. This shows, in line with Werner and Zimmermann, that the perspective of entangled history goes beyond set categories of scale such as macro and micro and shows how different spatial categories interact. The perspective makes us aware of how exhibitions can be understood as a set of dynamic interrelations.<sup>74</sup>

The survey at Röhsska stands out in one respect. It was part of a bigger Swedish-Polish event called *Polska dagarna i Göteborg* [*Polish Days in Gothenburg*].<sup>75</sup> The event took place between 14–24 October in 1971, promoting Polish culture and commerce for a Swedish audience. A document testifies to the event's broad range, presenting culture, industrial innovations, and food, together with a military parade and a trade conference.<sup>76</sup> In this context Röhsska was part

---

74 Werner, Zimmermann, op. cit., pp. 43–44.

75 In a letter, Å. Norling acting for the City of Gothenburg gives a short background to the event, as follows: when the Polish Ambassador visited Gothenburg in 1970, the head of the city council took the initiative to suggest a week of promoting Polish culture and commerce, letter dated 15 May 1970, Archive Gothenburg Art Museum.

76 Gothenburg Art Museum and the municipal art gallery showed the group exhibition *Aktuellt från Polen* [*Contemporary from Poland*] with paintings and sculpture in the art gallery and graphic art and posters at the museum. Desa was also involved in setting up

of a local event with national key features and the museum most probably gained from being a player among the other cultural and trade institutions in the city, getting extra marketing and reaching out to new audiences. One note and one review in the local press highlighted the event, which illustrates the appeal of this larger national framework.<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, Röhsska associated themselves with commercial and foreign cultural diplomacy. Art historian Maija Koskinen discusses these kinds of events as part of how nations in the “Cold War climate” interacted through culture. Koskinen put emphasis on the double nature of such events, as potential bridges that could increase mutual understanding in a divided world, but they could also, as she puts it: “[...] subvert and corrupt hearts and minds, depending on who was making the assessment”.<sup>78</sup> Being part of an exhibition that later on was included in the programme for the *Polish Days* might not have meant anything for Abakanowicz and the other artists, but for the Swedish audience the artworks were given an extra dimension as a bearer of a version of Polish culture that the authoritarian Polish state wanted to promote to foreign populations in order to appear more liberal.<sup>79</sup> This can never be seen as a neutral act.<sup>80</sup>

## Magdalena Abakanowicz’s three large-scale events in Södertälje and Stockholm

By the late 1960s Abakanowicz was an artist that Swedish art critics and curators found important because of her experimental approach to fibre materials and her way of pushing the conventions on how the materials could be handled spatially. Her way of working can be labelled with art and design historian Cilla Robach’s umbrella term *free form* [*fri form*]. It refers to textile artists bridging traditional materials and techniques of handicraft with fine art, where one of the features is that the beholder could have the impression

---

these exhibitions. The whole event was inaugurated by the Minister of Foreign Trade, K. Olszewski, 14–15 October 1971, and dinners and cocktail parties were arranged, Archive Röhsska Museum.

77 “Tre polska evenemang”, in: *Handelstidningen*, 9 October 1971 and K. Ekholm, “Polsk textilkonst”, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 25 October 1971.

78 M. Koskinen, “Artistic Novelties or Political Tool?”, *Art@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, p. 141.

79 For an analysis on how the Polish government acted as more liberal than they were during the Gierek era through modern art abroad forming opinions, see K. Prykowska–Michalak, “Years of Compromise and Political Servility – Kantor and Grotowski during the Cold War”, in: *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, eds. C.B. Balme, B. Szymanski–Düll, London, 2017, pp. 198–200.

80 Koskinen points out that art and art exhibitions might not be effective weapons, but they did and still have a role in diplomatic tool kits, Koskinen, op. cit., p. 149.

that the works were made by a person not educated technically or a child.<sup>81</sup> Robach examines the 1960s in Sweden and shows that expressions of free form are a blind spot in the written history of Swedish design and craft that has a strong focus on the legacy of functionalism. This means that craft and design that stood out from this tradition have been left rather under-researched without any proper place in neither the history of craft nor art. Textile artists working in this free manner, like Sten Kauppi (1922–2002), Kaisa Melanton (1920–2012), and Margareta Hallek (born 1932), emerged as exceptions.<sup>82</sup> For Swedish textile artists, who worked and found interest in radical expressions in fibre, as well as for an interested audience, Abakanowicz's large-scale experiments were reasonably appreciated events when she worked on site with rope and immersed the audience in woven pieces at Södertälje Konsthall, Nationalmuseum, and Huddinge Hospital at the turn of 1960.<sup>83</sup>

At Södertälje Konsthall, Högestätt made sure Abakanowicz could stay for a longer time of three weeks because he knew she wanted to experiment in the exhibition space.<sup>84</sup> In March 1970 the solo presentation *Magdalena Abakanowicz / Textil skulptur / Textile environment* opened at the two-year-old art gallery.<sup>85</sup> Photographs of the installation show how Abakanowicz transformed the space with thick ropes, loosely joined together in knots, and woven parts that hung freely in the space, casting dramatic shadows on the walls and floor.<sup>86</sup> The building of municipal art galleries and cultural houses was part of a national modernization policy, within the public housing reform called the "Million Homes Programme". The programme was implemented between 1965 and 1974 by the governing Swedish Social Democratic Party to ensure the availability of affordable, high quality housing for all Swedish citizens.<sup>87</sup> When standards of living rose during the 1960s, the Social Democrats successively developed a cultural policy with similar ideas of equality and accessibility to art. Words such as "modernization" and "artistic quality" were used

---

81 C. Robach, *Formens frigörelse. Konsthantverk och design under debatt i 1960-talets Sverige*, PhD thesis, Stockholm, 2010, p. 20.

82 Ibid., pp. 303–315.

83 A study based on interviews should be made to understand more fully whether and how individual textile artists were influenced by Abakanowicz and her fellow Polish artists, compared to Runa Boger's study in Norway – Boger, op. cit.

84 Letter from Högestätt to the Polish Ministry of Culture, 13 January 1970, Södertälje City Archive.

85 Besides the solo exhibition with Abakanowicz, the city of Södertälje acquired the sisal woven piece *Abakan 32* (1968) for SEK 6,750, Art database city of Södertälje [accessed 10 October 2021].

86 Due to copyright to the photographic documentation, there is no coherent documentation at Södertälje Konsthall, but images of the installation can be found in *Magdalena Abakanowicz. Organic Structures*, Malmö, 1977, exh. cat.

87 T. Hall, S. Vidén, "The Million Homes Programme: A Review of the Great Swedish Planning Project", *Planning Perspectives*, 2005, 20, no. 3, pp. 301–305.

and one of the goals was to “counteract the negative effects of commercialization of culture”.<sup>88</sup>

*Textile sculpture / Textile environment* was composed of more than eighteen artworks. Thirteen were works for space and five of them were wall works, shipped from Poland in co-operation with Desa, and then, new works were made on site during the installation period.<sup>89</sup> This is an aspect not to be overlooked. Abakanowicz’s invitation was open, and she could work freely on site. The exhibition was one of her earliest installations that the audience could enter, and one of the earliest events where she used rope, found in the shipping industry.<sup>90</sup>

The catalogue was printed on thick brown coloured paper with images of artworks as black silhouettes, that corresponded graphically with the exhibition (Fig. 3; Fig. 4).<sup>91</sup> In the catalogue, Abakanowicz underlines that the works are “compositions with textile materials”, “neither related to historic textile art nor sculptural structures, but objects in space compact and soft at the same time”. In Högestätt’s introduction and in excerpts from published articles, emphasis was on the work in an international art context, comparing her to Picasso but also mentioning fellow textile artists such as Sadley, a Croatian Jagoda Buić (1930–2022), and two Americans Lenore Tawney (1907–2007), and Claire Zesler (1903–1991). The catalogue delivers a clear message to the audience: Abakanowicz is a free visual artist pushing the boundaries of what was known internationally in the arts by introducing fibre materials in site-specific environments. Compared to the catalogues made by Nationalmuseum and Röhsska there is no contextualization made positioning Abakanowicz in the Polish arts and craft history, which is more in line with how the artist herself choose to conceptualise her practice as more distanced from other fellow artists.

Parallel to the work in Södertälje, the Nationalmuseum started to plan *Poland Weaves in Freedom*. Widman met Abakanowicz for the first time during her stay at Södertälje. In the catalogue he writes that he really wanted to include her in the exhibition so when she proposed working on site and exhibiting alone, he agreed to let her do an exhibition within the exhibition with the title *Abakanowicz. A Confrontation*.<sup>92</sup> To manifest the “experiment”,

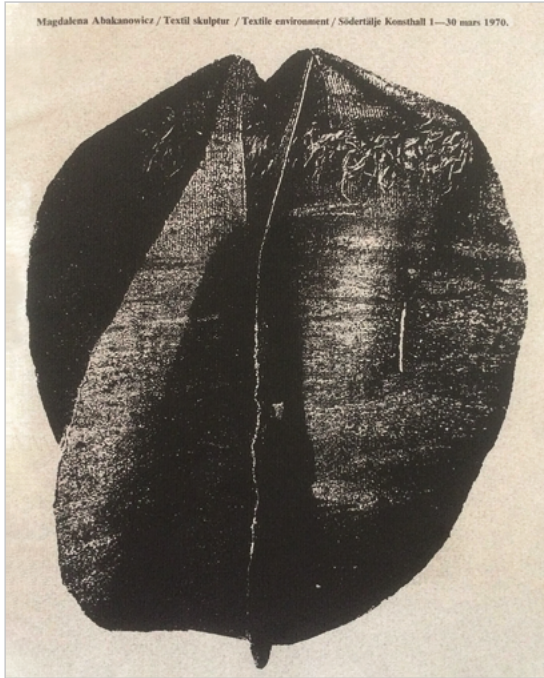
88 1974 years Cultural Proposition (proposition 1974:28).

89 Letter from Desa to Högestätt confirming that they would be part of the exhibition and the possible sale of artworks, with Södertälje Konsthall paying for the shipping, 16 September 1969, Södertälje City Archive.

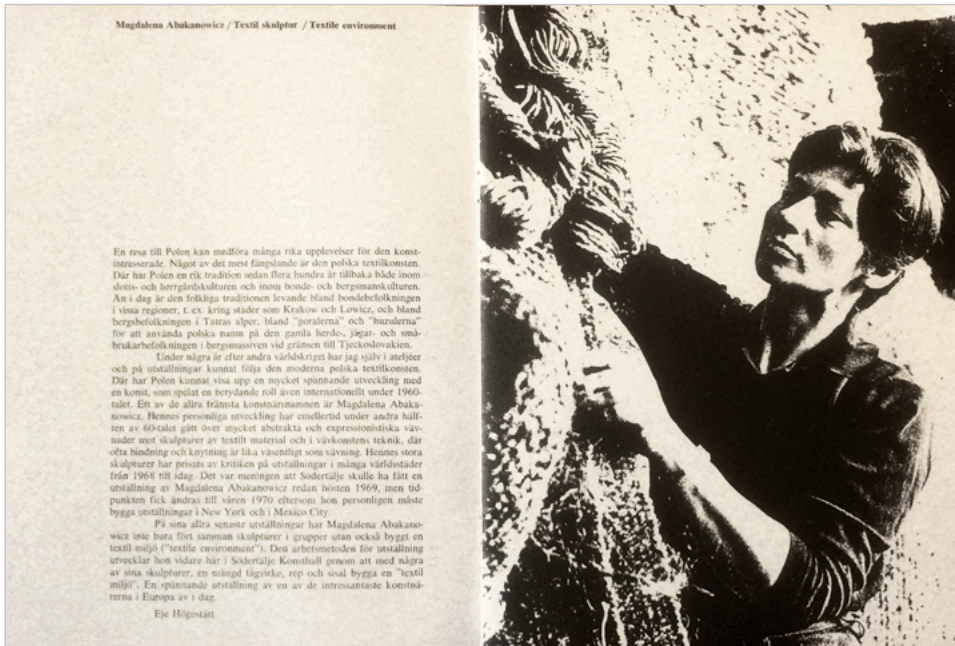
90 *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Writings and Conversations*, eds. M.J. Jacob, J. Dally, Milan, 2022, p. 98; Inglot, op. cit., p. 68.

91 Beside the introduction by Högestätt, the catalogue included three excerpts from current published articles by D. Wroblewska in *Opus International*, Paris (year not mentioned); J. Lenor Larsen in *Craft Horizon*, 1969; E. Billeter, Zürich, 1968 (journal not mentioned), and quotes by the artists about her process, *Magdalena Abakanowicz / Textil skulptur / Textile environment* (Södertälje: Södertälje Konsthall, Södertälje, 1970, exh. cat.

92 D. Widman, “Warszawa i april 1970”, in: *Polen väver fritt*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm 1970, exh. cat., pp. 4 and 14.



**Fig. 3.** Exhibition catalogue for *Magdalena Abakanowicz / Textil skulptur / Textile environment*, Södertälje Konsthall 1970. Photo: Alexandra Larsson Jacobson.



**Fig. 4.** Exhibition catalogue for *Magdalena Abakanowicz / Textil skulptur / Textile environment*, Södertälje Konsthall 1970. Photo: Alexandra Larsson Jacobson.

a poster was distributed inside of the catalogue of *Poland Weaves in Freedom*. Next to her portrait, Abakanowicz states her problem with textile art being degraded to craft, and that she wants to expose the viewer to the raw material in the process of becoming (Fig. 5).<sup>93</sup>

Photographs capture how the thick, rough rope was entangled into oversized knots hanging close to the floor and laid out with loose threads in heaps on short podiums.<sup>94</sup> In letters, Widman and Abakanowicz discuss the problem of making adequate documentation, and Widman asks Abakanowicz to spend more time in the collection of the museum, and come back later in December 1970 or January 1971, to continue their collaboration.<sup>95</sup>

Widman had been the keeper of the department of applied art since 1966 and before he had worked for Svensk Form [the Swedish Society of Crafts and Design]. Educated in art history, Widman wrote for the magazine *Form*, artist monographs, and survey textbooks on Swedish craft and design.<sup>96</sup> He has been acknowledged for modernising the department for applied art at the Nationalmuseum and to have given space to large-scale textile of which the thorough work with Abakanowicz is a good example.<sup>97</sup>

The two solo presentations gave Abakanowicz time and space to try out new materials and elaborate on them spatially. She was cautious to document her work on site for posterity given the temporary characters of the pieces, and a list of handwritten addresses to international actors working with art and textile was found in the Nationalmuseum archive with a letter where Widman lets Abakanowicz know that catalogues have been sent to her contacts.<sup>98</sup> Even if the Swedish exhibitions were most probably not attended by international key players these documents show that they were informed in writings and in photographic documentation. Seen in this light the exhibitions played a role in Abakanowicz's wider career.

In the Nationalmuseum archive, the last dated letter from Widman was sent on 31 December 1970, and no reply can be found. So, it seems that Abakanowicz turned down the proposal to continue her work at the museum, which most probably had to do with her busy schedule. Högestätt was good

93 *Abakanowicz en konfrontation*, exhibition poster, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1970.

94 *Magdalena Abakanowicz. Organic Structures*, Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, 1977, exh. cat.

95 Letters between Widman and Abakanowicz, 10, 11, 15, 18 November and 31 December 1970, Archive Nationalmuseum.

96 "Dag Widman", Nationalencyklopedin, <https://www-ne-se.till.biblextern.sh.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/dag-widman> [accessed 8 August 2023].

97 P. Bjurström, M. Boman, H.H. Brummer, E. Nordenson, "Dag Widman. Lysande museiman satte konsthantverket främst", *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 November 2003, <https://www.dn.se/arkiv/familj/dag-widman-lysande-museiman-satte-konsthantverket-framst/> [accessed 8 August 2023].

98 Ten names were listed among them: Mildred Constantine, Museum of Modern Art NY, Jack Lenor Larsen, Dr K.H. Hering, Dusseldorf Kunsthalle, and Dagmar Tucna, Prague, Archive Nationalmuseum.



# ABAKANOWICZ en konfrontation



Min utställning i Stockholm är den andra i en serie som jag ämnar visa på olika platser i Europa. Den huvudsakliga avsikten är inte bara att ställa åskådaren ansikte mot ansikte med verken, utan att göra honom uppmärksam på deras olika betydelse. Jag känner, att fastän vi uppfattar saker, saknar vi ofta förmågan att se dem som de verkliga är: våra svar är förutbestämda; våra känslor är associativa och låsta. Jag skulle vilja medverka till att få bort dessa vanor. Enligt allmänt accepterade regler klassificeras — och begränsas — det "textila" till konsthantverk. Min utställning vill protestera mot en så stel uppfattning. Min utställning i Stockholm är inte en kavalkad av utställningsföremål. Jag vill i stället visa råmaterialet i en avstannande rörelse, i en oavslutad process. I det ögonblick när möjligheten till förändring är som störst.  
Magdalena Abakanowicz 1970

#### MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ:

1930 föds i Warszawa  
1950—55 studerar vid Konstakademien i Warszawa  
1959—70 reser och utställer i Europa, Nord- och Sydamerika gör internationellt genombrott på biennalen i Lausanne  
1965 får guldmedalj på 8:e biennalen i Sao Paulo  
Magdalena Abakanowicz har tilldelats flera officiella polska utmärkelser och priser.

#### REPRESENTERAD I FOLJANDE MUSEER:

Nationalmuseum, Warszawa  
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Musée d'art moderne, Sao Paulo  
Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem  
Kunsthindustrimuseet, Oslo  
Kunsthalle, Mannheim  
Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund  
Musée des beaux-arts, La Chaux de Fonds  
Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zürich  
Nationalmuseum, Prag

#### SEPARATUTSTÄLLNINGAR:

1960 Galerie Kordegarda, Warszawa  
1962 Galerie Dautzenberg, Paris  
1963 Galerie d'art contemporain, Warszawa  
1965 Galerie Zacheta, Warszawa  
1967 Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne  
1967 Galerie d'art modern, Warszawa  
1967 Kunsthindustrimuseet, Oslo

1967 Vestlandske Kunstforening, Bergen  
1967 Stavanger Kunstforening, Stavanger  
1968 Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven  
1968 Trondheims Kunstforening, Trondheim  
1968 Helmhaus, Zürich  
1968 Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem  
1969 Groninger Museum, Groningen  
1969 Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam  
1969 Stedelijk Museum, Arnhem  
1969 Kunsthalle, Mannheim  
1970 Södertälje Konsthall

#### BIENNALER OCH INTERNATIONELLA SAMLINGSUTSTÄLLNINGAR:

1962 1er Biennale internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne  
1965 2e Biennale internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne  
1965 8e Biennale internationale, Sao Paulo  
1967 3e Biennale internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne  
1968—69 "Wall Hangings Exhibition" Museum of Modern Art, New York  
1968 34e Biennale internationale, Venedig  
1969 "Perspective in Textil" Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam  
1969 4e Biennale internationale de la Tapisserie, Lausanne  
1969 "Experiencias Artisticotextiles" Museo Espanol de arte contemporaneo, Madrid

#### MATERIAL:

150 kg 1-trådig 3/4 sisalgarn  
150 .. 4-trådig 3/4 sisalgarn  
165 .. 10 mm trossgarn  
600 .. grovre tågvirke  
Materialet är i aktivitet från 29.10—29.11 — villar sedan till nästa konfrontation då det åter bringas till aktivitet i annan form.

Jag intresserar mig inte för vävanden (vävkonsten) i den traditionella formen. I termens professionella användning eller i dess inskränkta betydelse. Jag intresserar mig för vävtekniken bara så länge jag behöver den som stöd i mitt arbete. Jag har funnit ett material och en teknik som jag kan använda för att ge fast form åt och förverkliga mina idéer. Av trä gör man inte bara stolar utan också statyer. Det är på samma sätt med mig, jag söker i vävkonsten, i vävtekniken, de möjligheter som motsvarar mina föreställningar.  
Magdalena Abakanowicz 1969

Vad är viktigast, det färdiga verket eller den skapande processen? Magdalena Abakanowicz har velat ge oss ett ögonblick av tillblivelsen av ett verk, ett ögonblick då möjligheterna tycks många, men målet redan skymtar eller kan anas. Vi är glada att hon velat göra Nationalmuseum till skådeplats för ett ut, smitt ur sitt skapandes process och tackar henne för att hon kommit. Stockholm i oktober 1970  
Bengt Dahlback

# Stockholm 29.10 - 29.11 NATIONALMUSEUM

Fig. 5. Poster for *Abakanowicz en konfrontation* [*Abakanowicz a Confrontation*], Nationalmuseum 1970. Photo: Alexandra Larsson Jacobson.

at finding occasions for artists to materialise their artistic visions. As a member of the commissioning group for public art in hospitals in Stockholm, he included Abakanowicz in a public competition for a new hospital<sup>99</sup> being built between the city of Stockholm and Södertälje, in an area called Huddinge. When Huddinge Hospital was built in the late 1960s it was the most modern hospital in Sweden and the largest building project in Scandinavia.<sup>100</sup> In the grand entrance hall, four separate niches, 7 by 7 metres each, were to be fashioned with artworks built for the site.<sup>101</sup>

In the very Swedish line-up of artists, Abakanowicz stood out not only because she was from another country, but also because she responded to the assignment by transforming the whole space. Jan Nordahl (born 1934), a photographer and who would become a long-time collaborator of Abakanowicz, captured how the piece *Black Brown* made up an environment, inviting people to hide from the busy hospital in a dark, brown space with a warm orange centre.<sup>102</sup>

The fashioning of the hospital environment was proposed by a commissioning group of leading actors on the Swedish art and architecture scene.<sup>103</sup> In 1969 the group released *Huddinge Hospital. Principal Program for Art and Environment* which served as a tool to manoeuvre the whole fashioning. Formulations show how the group understood the way artists had started to work in relation to space. One can characterise this nascent Swedish art bureaucracy as caring strongly for the individual to meet and experience art well integrated with the built environment, with parallels to the formation of the national cultural policy, previously mentioned.

In art critic Beate Sydhoff's review of Abakanowicz's solo at Södertälje Konsthall, she, like previous critics, saw something unique, but at the same time something typical for a "Polish environment and problematic".<sup>104</sup> Sydhoff refers to the exhibition at Moderna Museet with Władysław Hasiór in 1968, and in her opinion the two artists "showed a freedom from the historical burden of Western European aesthetic tradition". Instead Abakanowicz, in Sydhoff's view, creates painful artworks because they remind us of what we miss

99 M. Romdahl, "Drömskog i sjukhusmiljö", *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 March 1972.

100 M. Ljungström, *Huddinge sjukhus - lika stort som Gamla stan*, <https://www.locum.se/om-oss/press/nyheter/2021/huddinge-sjukhus-historia/> [accessed 11 April 2023].

101 *Black-Brown* was selected alongside *Röd fågling* by Britta Kjellgren, *Resa i rymden* by Kaisa Melanton and *Vandring i markerna* av Ingegerd Möller-Nygren. SEK 275,000 were allocated for the commissions including the fee for sketches, *Principal Program for Art and Environment*, Huddinge 1969. According to the contract, Abakanowicz received SEK 72,000, Regional Archive Stockholm.

102 Nordahl and Abakanowicz became long-time collaborators and friends, Jacob, Dally, op. cit., pp. 102–111.

103 In 1977, due lack of space, a niche had to be cleared out and the artwork was destroyed on 14 January 2011 because of dirt and dissolution of the material and mould infestation. Database for the culture administration in Region Stockholm.

104 B. Sydhoff, "Textila rum av Abakanowicz", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22 March 1970.



in modern times, the proximity to nature and a loss of tactile experience connected to old craftwork.

The exhibition at Södertälje Konsthall also grabbed the local newspaper's attention with two acclaimed reports, using words such as "world-famous Pole" and "textile world art".<sup>105</sup> Yet not all art critics were unified in this kind of appreciative view. Voices were also raised that problematized the Polish art exhibited in Sweden. In the review of *Abakanowicz. A Confrontation and Poland Weaves in Freedom* at the Nationalmuseum, Poland was called a "textile world power" by art critic Stig Johansson.<sup>106</sup> He explicitly framed the exhibition in political terms, saying that "Polish art has become a fine export product, an exterior facade [...], but even if the cultural climate in Poland is special in relation to other Eastern states, it is hard not to imagine that artists need to consider certain political limitations". In earlier reviews on exhibitions with Polish painting in Stockholm with artists such as Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Krawczyk, Johansson and other critics also took a geo-political stance and questioned how free the artists could be living in an authoritarian country.<sup>107</sup>

In those reviews, the Polish artists were perceived as *only* being representatives of Poland, even if they had international careers like Abakanowicz and when being compared with artists from other countries, they were considered "belated" in relation to what had already been seen in Paris and France. Here we can see how mechanisms of a Western-Eurocentric hegemonic position were played out in the field of painting and aesthetic canons of styles, artists, and models of influence were connected to national belongings, discussed critically by art historian Piotr Piotrowski among others.<sup>108</sup> Even though, for Abakanowicz personally, the category of textile art and craft felt as an obstacle, in hindsight it can be understood as a gateway for her to become an internationally acclaimed artist, at a time when many textile artists broke free from old traditions.<sup>109</sup> In the minds of the Swedish art critics, Abakanowicz

105 C. Duke, "Världsberömd polska visar textilkulptur", *Länstidningen Södertälje*, February 1970; C. Duke "Ögats och handens äventyr", *Länstidningen Södertälje*, March 1970.

106 S. Johansson, "Sköna textila attentat", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 5 November 1970.

107 One example is S. Johansson, "Bra och prisbillig polsk konst", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1 October 1968, review of the exhibition *Fri polsk konst [Free Polish Art]* at Sveagalleriet [Svea Gallery] 21 Sept–13 Oct 1968, with artists such as Tadeusz Kantor, Bogus Balicki, Jerzy Krawczyk and Maria Hiszpańska–Neuman.

108 C. Bydler, "Piotr Piotrowski. In Memoriam", *Baltic Worlds*, 2015, 3–4, p. 12. In relation to women textile artists of Central and Eastern Europe, Piotrowski's critique has been scrutinised by Susanne Altmann showing that his revision also has blind spots regarding women artists who worked between disciplines and aesthetic idioms. See S. Altmann, "Disentangling. Women Artists in the Eastern Bloc Reinvent Textile and Fibre Art" in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm | Metamorphosis*, ed. M. Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, 2018, exh. cat., pp. 228–253.

109 Inglot, op. cit., p. 66; A. Coxon, "Every Tangle of Thread and Rope. Abakanowicz's Organic Environments", in: *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, eds. A. Coxon, M.J. Jacob, op. cit., pp. 65–66.

represented something new, free and belonging to a “world art” in comparison to her fellow artists working in the medium of painting. She became not only a point of reference for Polish textile art but also for visual art in general.

Even if Abakanowicz was by far the most mentioned and the most thoroughly analysed compared to other Polish artists exhibited in Sweden, it is again important to stress that she was not alone. Exhibitions on official levels organised by museums, municipal galleries, and artist-run initiatives testify to the myriad of presentations with Polish artists of different generations working with different artistic means.<sup>110</sup> Yet still, what stands out in the conceptualisation of Abakanowicz’s fibre art and the art critical reception of it in Sweden is how her artworks could appear in a larger international “world” context, addressing universal human issues. Swedish art critics can understand being a world-artist in at least two ways: one, having an international, that is a Western career and, two, being in tune with modern times, that is, being able to address a critique of what was considered inhuman conditions in respect to questions important for a growing environmental movement.

## Entangled Polish art in Sweden

This study has examined a Polish artist and her presence with art exhibitions and a public commission in Sweden with the ambition to show how this history has been crossed by many kinds of interests. Methodologically, in line with how historian Silke Neunsinger argues about the outcome of *histoire croisée* research, the study shows how actors from governmental and national organisations as well as national and local museums and galleries, and independent actors such as artists and art critics, interacted dynamically by shaping and reacting to exhibitions as public events at the turn of 1960.<sup>111</sup>

As the mediated history of post-war art has been oriented towards the West and tended to divide Europe and the world in two, the findings of this article, on the contrary, re-frame Sweden’s position in relation to the countries behind the Iron Curtain. The frequency of Abakanowicz and her Polish artist fellows’ exhibiting in Sweden and their thoroughness contradict prevalent ideas of a Cold War divide. Not one but three different, still similar in many ways, survey exhibitions of Polish fibre art were made in the country which means that curators and art institutions wanted to show what was about to become a turning point for tapestry and textile art in the European context regardless of country of origin. Individuals participating in these surveys gained different amounts of critical attention and their artworks were acquired by museums and public

---

110 Research for this article and for the above-mentioned field will be carried out through the project *Serious and with Poetic Powers: Polish Art in Sweden from the Cold War Period Up Until Today* funded by the Baltic Sea Foundation, 2023–2025.

111 Neunsinger, op. cit., p. 21.

collections. And, as Abakanowicz was eager to expand her practice to sculpture and installation she was proactive and as an equal she was met by willing attitudes from curators such as Högestätt and Widman, who saw a potential in her way of expanding the notion of textile art, craft, and visual art as such.

The initial proposal to see the larger context of Sweden and Poland as two semi-peripheries with no fixed power hierarchy, are confirmed by these relations as the collaboration between Abakanowicz and the two curators continued over time and over institutional borders. Additionally, on a contrary note, the enthusiasm from curators and critics were not equally prominent among Swedish artists in the studied material. It might be that other indications can be found when interviewing individuals, but statements from critics and curators rather point to the fact that few Swedish textile artists were influenced artistically by the Polish artists. Even though we must believe that the Swedish artists, like their fellow curators and critics, enjoyed taking part in what was happening abroad on the frontiers of the Lausanne Biennial and elsewhere. Inspiration can come from unexpected sources and not always manifest itself visually. Abakanowicz on her part saw Swedish textile art at the Lausanne Biennial and visited the collection of Nationalmuseum, but she also seemed not to have been artistically affected by her experience; still, she kept accepting invitations to exhibit and work in the country.

Even if individual curators and artists saw the potential to exhibit art across national borders under surveillance, positive attention was not given to all artists. This becomes evident when considering the artists' country of origin and aesthetic expressions, as the Swedish art world was, as art historian Annika Öhrner has pointed out, very much dominated by the narrative of artistic excellence stemming from metropolitan art influencing the so-called peripheries in a one-way direction which means that many artists have been forgotten.<sup>112</sup> However, this article reveals how Abakanowicz's way of working with fibre materials, immersing the spectators, paired with her international career, was received by the Swedish curators and critics as bold and innovative. And her artistic stance, which art historian Joanna Inglot calls her "idealist vision of transcultural unity", was in tune with ideas flourishing in Sweden, as most art critics saw her artistic work not only as modern, but so far ahead as to make critical, existential contributions to what these modern times had led to in terms of alienating humans from their natural origins on earth.<sup>113</sup> In Sweden, Abakanowicz was a "perfect match" because her practice coincided with the attitude of the larger cultural policy of the late post-war period, with the modernization and renewal of Swedish society. Her artworks corresponded well with what curators and critics sought for when galleries, cultural houses, residential areas and public premises were established.

---

112 A. Öhrner, *Barbro Östlihn & New York: Konstens rum och möjligheter*, Uppsala, 2010, PhD thesis, pp. 189–90.

113 Inglot, op. cit., p. 101.

## References

- “Dag Widman”, Nationalencyklopedin, [https://www-ne-se.till.biblextern.sh.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/1%C3%A5ng/dag-widman](https://www.ne.se.till.biblextern.sh.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/1%C3%A5ng/dag-widman).
- “Levande skulpturala bonader på Konsthallens polska expo”, *Arbetet*, 10 January 1967.
- “Mellanhedsgången får polsk gobeläng”, *Arbetet*, 18 February 1967.
- “Polsk kvinnlig professor lockade fullt hus i Lund”, *Arbetet*, 13 February 1967.
- “Polsk världskonst till konsthallen”, *Arbetet*, 12 December 1966.
- “Tre polska evenemang”, *Handelstidningen*, 9 October 1971.
- “Vår historia”, <https://si.se/om-si/var-historia/>.
- Altmann, S., “Disentangling. Women Artists in the Eastern Bloc Reinvent Textile and Fibre Art”, in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm | Metamorphism*, ed. M. Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, 2018, exh. cat.
- Att överleva. Röster från Ravensbrück, *En lärarhandledning*, Lund, 2006, [https://www.kulturen.com/wp-content/uploads/2011\\_November\\_Ravensbruck\\_Lararhandledning.pdf](https://www.kulturen.com/wp-content/uploads/2011_November_Ravensbruck_Lararhandledning.pdf).
- Bjurström, P., Boman, M., Brummer, H.H., Nordenson, E., “Dag Widman. Lysande museiman satte konsthantverket främst”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 November 2003.
- Boger, R., *Magdalena Abakanowicz og Norge: Stilskeper eller frigjørende forbilde? En drøftelse av Abakanowicz' betydning for norsk tekstilkunst 1960–1980*, MA thesis, Oslo, 2010.
- Boot, M., “Like a Flaming Comet: The Rise of Magdalena Abakanowicz in the Netherlands”, *Textile*, 2018, 16, no. 4, pp. 378–385.
- Bydler, C., “Piotr Piotrowski. In Memoriam”, *Baltic Worlds*, 2015, 3–4, pp. 12–13.
- Coxon, A., “Every Tangle of Thread and Rope. Abakanowicz’s Organic Environments”, in: *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, eds. A. Coxon, M.J. Jacob, Tate Modern, London, 2022, exh. cat.
- DaCosta Kaufmann, T., Dossin, C., Joyeux–Prunel, B., *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015.
- Dahlbäck, B., “Polen väver fritt”, in: *Polen väver fritt*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1970, exh. cat.
- Dally, J., *Magdalena Abakanowicz. Fate and Art. Monologe*, ed. P. Gribaudo, 2nd ed., Milan, 2020.
- Duke, C., “Ögats och handens äventyr”, *Länstidningen Södertälje*, 1970, 3.
- Duke, C., “Världsberömd polska visar textilsulptur”, *Länstidningen Södertälje*, 1970, 2.
- Eckholm, K., “Polsk textilkonst”, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 25 October 1971.
- Eriksson, F., ed., *Det började i Polen. Sverige och Solidaritet 1980–1981*, Huddinge, 2013.
- Gola, J., “Magdalena Abakanowicz: A Biographical Outline”, in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm | Metamorphism*, ed. M. Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, 2018, exh. cat.
- Hall, T., Vidén, S., “The Million Homes Programme: A Review of the Great Swedish Planning Project”, *Planning Perspectives*, 2005, 20, no. 3, pp. 301–328.
- Haykowski, M., “Polskie odznaczenia za szwedzką pomoc humanitarną”, *Polonia*, 1 January 2008, <https://www.poloniainfo.se/artikel.php?id=921>.
- Heino, M., Törnquist–Plewa, B., “Svenska stödkommittén för Solidaritet. The Swedish Support Committee and Independent Polish Agency in Lund”, in: *Skandinavien*

- och Polen. *Möten, relationer och ömsesidig påverkan*, ed. B. Törnquist-Plewa, Lund, 2007, pp. 25–58.
- Hock, B., Allas, A., eds., *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, New York–London, 2018.
- Högestätt, E., “Introduction”, in: *Moderna gobelänger och aktuell grafik från Polen*, Lunds konsthall, Lund, 1967, exh. cat.
- Inglot, J., *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz. Bodies, Environments, and Myths*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 2004.
- Jachufa, M., “Crafting an Art Practice. The Postwar Polish Art Scene”, in: *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, eds. A. Coxon, M.J. Jacob, Tate Modern, London, 2022, exh. cat.
- Jacob, M.J., Dally, J., eds., *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Writings and Conversations*, Milan, 2022.
- Jakubowska, A., “The ‘Abakans’ and the Feminist Revolution”, in: *Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture*, eds. S. Bru, L. Nuijs, B. Hjartarson, P. Nicholls, T. Ørum, H. Berg, Berlin–Boston, 2012, pp. 253–265.
- Johansson, S., “Bra och prisbillig polsk konst”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1 October 1968.
- Johansson, S., “Sköna textila attentat”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 5 November 1970.
- Junet, M., “Abakanowicz and Lausanne: The Path to Fame”, in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm | Metamorphism*, ed. M. Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, 2018, exh. cat.
- Koskinen, M., “Artistic Novelties or Political Tool?”, *Art@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, pp. 141–149.
- Kowalewska, M., “Mapping New Meaning”, in: *From Tapestry to Fibre. The Lausanne Biennials 1962–1995*, eds. G. Eberhard Cotton, M. Junet, Milan, 2017, pp. 155–171.
- Larsson, C., “The Politics of Appearance: Tadeusz Kantor Exhibiting in Sweden 1958–2014”, *Sztuka i dokumentacja*, 2022, pp. 77–91.
- Ljungström, M., *Huddinge sjukhus - lika stort som Gamla stan*, <https://www.locum.se/om-oss/press/nyheter/2021/huddinge-sjukhus-historia/>.
- Lundahl, G., “Tre polska textilare”, *Form*, 1968, 4.
- Lundén, T., “Turning Towards the Inland Sea? Swedish ‘Soft Diplomacy’ Towards the Baltic Soviet Republics Before Independence”, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2021, 47, no. 3, pp. 347–368.
- Lundgren, T., “Gobelinbiennial i Lausanne”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25 June 1967.
- Lutteman, H., “Polsk bild i aktion”, in: *Polen väver fritt*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1970, exh. cat.
- Lutteman, H., “Polsk textilkonst”, in: *Polen väver fritt*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1970, exh. cat.
- Magdalena Abakanowicz. Organic Structures*, Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, 1977, exh. cat.
- Moskalewicz, M., “Knots. Abakanowicz and the Polish Art Scene in the 1960s”, in: *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, eds. A. Coxon, M.J. Jacob, Tate Modern, London, 2022, exh. cat.
- Myrstener, P., *Konst i rörelse. Tillfälliga utställningar med internationell konst i Sverige 1945–1969*, forthcoming PhD thesis, Huddinge.
- Neunsinger, S., “Cross-Over! Om komparationer, transferanalyser, *histoire croisée* och den metodologiska nationalismens problem”, *Historisk Tidskrift*, 2010, 130, no. 1, pp. 3–24.

- Öhrner, A., "Exhibiting Contemporary Art in the Early 1990s Nordic-Baltic Realm", *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2.
- Öhrner, Ö., *Barbro Östlihn & New York: Konstens rum och möjligheter*, PhD thesis, Uppsala, 2010.
- Piotrowski, P., "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde", *Europa! Europa! The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. S. Bru, P. Nicholls, Berlin, 2009.
- Prykowska-Michalak, K., "Years of Compromise and Political Servility – Kantor and Grotowski during the Cold War", *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, eds. C.B. Balme, B. Szymanski-Düll, London, 2017, pp. 189–205.
- Ring Petersen, A., "Global Art History: A View from the North", *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2015, 7, no. 1.
- Robach, C., *Formens frigörelse. Konsthantverk och design under debatt i 1960-talets Sverige*, PhD thesis, Stockholm, 2010.
- Romdahl, M., "Drömskog i sjukhusmiljö", *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 March 1972.
- Rose, B., *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, New York, 1994.
- Sjöholm Skrubbe, J., "Routes and Ruptures. Swedish Artistic Mobility in the Early Twentieth Century", *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, 2, pp. 20–35.
- Stensman, M., "Polska gobelänger", *Arbetet*, 25 January 1967.
- Stensman, M., "Polska gobelänger", *Form*, 1967, 4.
- Sydhoff, B., "Abakanowicz", *Form*, 1970, 3.
- Sydhoff, B., "Textila rum av Abakanowicz". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22 March 1970.
- Uggla, A.N., "Polacker", *Det mångkulturellt Sverige. En handbok om etniska grupper och minoriteter*, eds. I. Svanberg, H. Runblom, Stockholm, 2nd ed., 1990.
- Wadstein MacLeod, K., Edling, M., Myrstener, P., "Exhibiting in a European Periphery? International Art in Sweden during the Cold War", *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2022, 11, no. 2, pp. 126–132.
- Wadstein MacLeod, K., "Superlund: Lunds konsthall och det centrala i det perifera", *Periskop*, 2018, 20, pp. 91–109.
- Wadstein MacLeod, K., "Troubling Peripheries: Pierre Restany and Superlund", *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 2021, 90, no. 1, pp. 13–24.
- Wadstein MacLeod, K., *From Fluxus to Fest. International Art in Lunds konsthall, 1965–67*, Huddinge, 2022.
- Werner, M., Zimmermann, B., "Beyond Comparison. Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity", *History and Theory*, 2006, 45, no. 1, pp. 30–50.
- Widman, D., "Warszawa i april 1970", in: *Polen väver fritt*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm 1970, exh. cat.
- Wroblewska, D., "Wojciech Sadley", *Form*, 1968, 4.
- Zweigbergk, E., "Bildväv med och utan bild", *Dagens Nyheter*, 15 July 1967.