



*ARS HOMO EROTICA* Exhibition  
National Museum, Warsaw, Poland  
June 11 - September 5, 2010  
curated by Pawel Leszkowicz, Ph. D.

The exhibition *ARS HOMO EROTICA* in Poland's National Museum in Warsaw will present over 200 artworks from antiquity to the twenty-first century: Greek vases with frolicking youths, male nudes by the "old masters and mistresses" of sculpture and painting, contemporary LGBTQ art. Although lesbian and gay art has belonged to the canon of museology since the 1970s, there has not been yet such a comprehensive exhibition of homoerotics in any world museum. It is also the first show of the queer art of Central and Eastern Europe.

The exhibition is a multimedia project queering the cultural history, art and museum collection of Central and Eastern Europe. The works to be presented are selected from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw; pieces will also be shown by the invited artists: David Cerny of the Czech Republic, Anna Daucikova of Slovakia, S&P Stanikas of Lithuania and many others. The artworks will form a survey of the history and contemporaneity of culture and sexuality from the point of view of the homoerotic imagery. *Ars Homo Erotica* is then a pioneer and innovative exhibition in Eastern Europe which will explore the tradition and current situation of homosexuality here - important, but hidden and often excluded.

In *Ars Homo Erotica* the art of "old masters and mistresses" from the National Museum in Warsaw will be juxtaposed with the contemporary art of Central and Eastern Europe. Since the fall of Communism (and with a number of art-historical antecedents!), the trend of gay and lesbian art has developed here. It functions in the very center of social and political struggle for LGBTQ rights, freedom of expression and democracy. The aims of the exhibition are

scholarly and educational: to examine the tendencies of queer art in the context of art history and of current politics and society.

In this way, an objective of the National Museum in Warsaw is to participate in the topical processes of civil society and in creating the art of democracy. That is why the exhibition is embedded in cultural history, but leads to the world politics of human rights.

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The exhibition focuses on the subjects crucial to art and the society of sexual diversity. The sections of *Ars Homo Erotica* include: homoerotic Classicism, male nude, iconography of male couples in mythology, Saint Sebastian, lesbian imaginarium, transgender/androgyny, the time of the struggle and archive.

**Homoerotic Classicism:** the Greek and Classicist male nude – beautiful, heroic and sensual – forms the foundation of art history and of homoerotic code. That is why a gallery of Classical sculptures will be presented in the main hall of the National Museum.

**Male nude:** formerly, the male nude constituted the rudiments of academic education and a central genre of art; it was marginalized in the twentieth century. In the art of Communist Poland, the male nude was very restricted and censored as pornography. Only in the critical art of the 1990s has the male nude returned fully, often as scandal and frequently censored. The genre triumphs in contemporary gay and feminist art as a “subversive medium.” Censorship and restrictions on the erotic and attractive male nude in the second half of the twentieth century resulted from its identification with excluded homosexuality and from homophobic repression. Just as the female nude has formed the foundation of heterosexual art, so the male nude formed the foundation of homosexual art.

**The iconography of male couples** in mythology: explicit homoerotic themes in art history will be presented in the representations of Zeus and Ganymede, Apollo and Hyacinthus, Achilles and Patrocles. Allusions to some man-man physical contact in dynamic, sensuous or sadomasochistic mise-en-scene: Hercules and Antheus, David and Goliath, Gigantomachia. The mythical iconography will be juxtaposed with the contemporary art depicting erotic and amorous compositions of male bodies.

**Saint Sebastian:** the martyr is the most frequent iconographic image linked with the homosexual code in art history: this representation allowed to show the ecstatic and penetrated male body and, at the same time, to allude to persecutions. A number of examples from the collection of the National Museum and works by contemporary artists will illustrate the traditional theme.

**Lesbian imaginarium:** historical and mythical subjects in historical art with lesbian motifs (Sappho, Diana, Nymphs) will be juxtaposed with contemporary lesbian photography and video. The two icons of lesbian culture, Sappho and Greta Garbo will be linked with lesbian/feminist graffiti on the streets of Buenos Aires and with the found footage video of women's/homoerotic themes in the painting of art history. Nineteenth-century portraits of friendship between women and lesbian scenes-copies in the style of Courbet and contemporary art from Central and Eastern Europe (Anna Daucikova and others) will be shown.

**Transgender/androgyny:** the representation of subjects and works related to going beyond the borders of genders and to androgyny

which are present both in myths and in the contemporary performance of gender and in social experience.

**The time of struggle:** the presentation of artworks about political conflicts around lgbt rights in Central and Eastern Europe with examples of visual social campaigns and video installations which document the attacked parades of equality.

Archive: an architectural installation of the film and theatre archives of (post)modern lgbtq culture, including posters from the Museum of Posters and an interactive queer library.

**Pawel Leszkowicz**, Ph. D., is lecturer at the Department of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. His texts have been published by Routledge, New York University Press, *ARTmargins*, *Obieg*, *Artium Quaestiones*, *Kunst und Kirche*, *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, *Zagadnienia Naukoznawstwa*, *Die Tageszeitung*. He authored books *Love and Democracy. Reflections on the Homosexual Question in Poland* and *Helen Chadwick. The Iconography of Subjectivity*, published by a scholarly press Aureus in Cracow. He conducted research at the Courtauld Institute of Art. in London and, as a Fulbright scholar, at the New School for Social Research in New York. His exhibitions *Love and Democracy* and *The Empire of the Senses* were presented in Poznan under the aegis of Poznan's Academy of the Fine Arts. His exhibition *GK Collection* reinterpreted works from Jacek Malczewski and Bruno Schulz to Andy Warhol and Katarzyna Kozyra. The second edition of his show *Love and Democracy* and *Vogue* took place in Gdansk's Center for Contemporary art Laznia. Dr Leszkowicz has authored a number of scholarly and popular texts on LGBTQ art and entries in the Encyclopedia of the Polish Scientific Publishers and in the publications of the Polish Academy of Sciences.