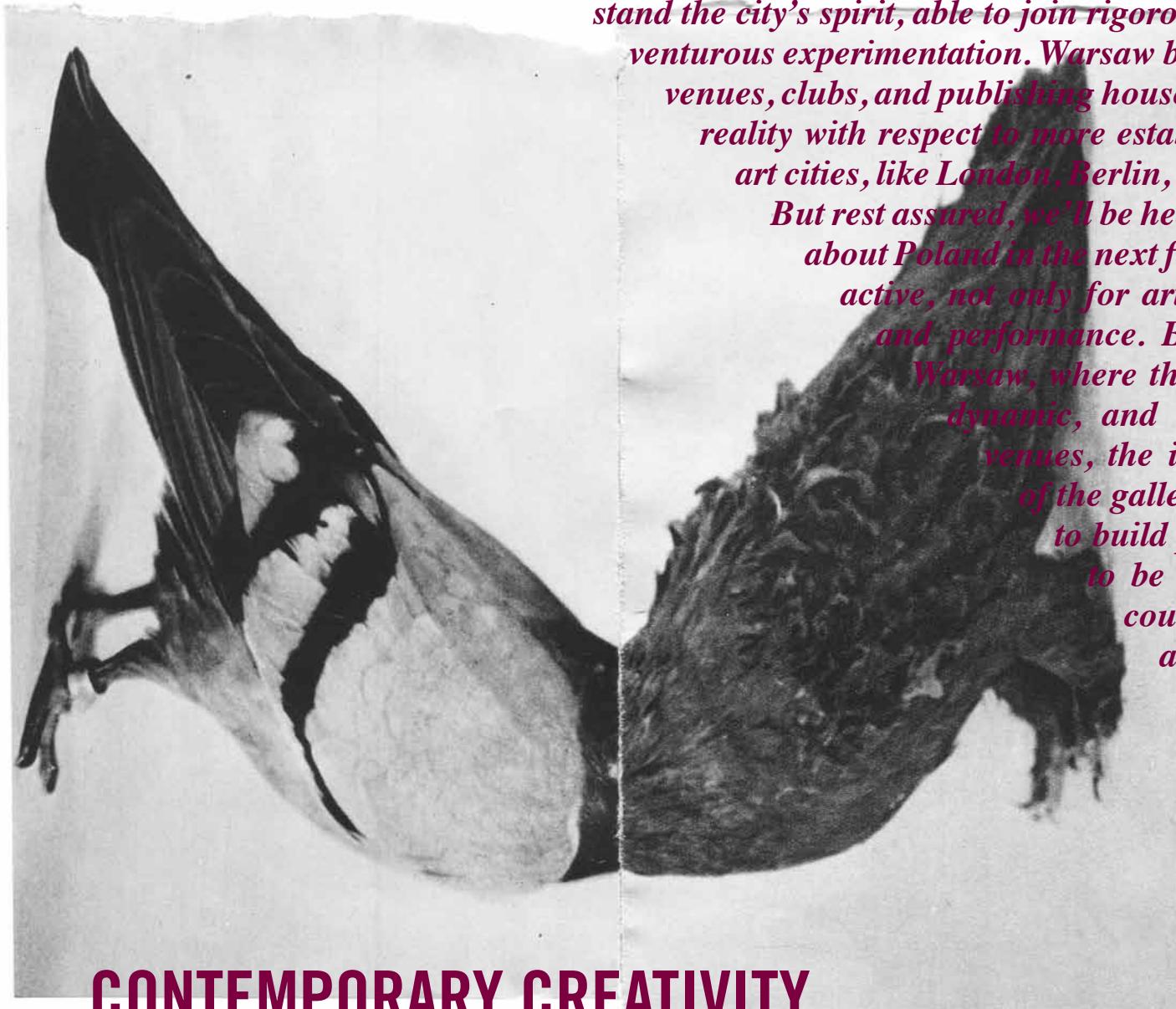


It's not love at first sight . . . you won't find that sensuality or high-tech glam of Asian metropolises. Warsaw has the charm of a reticent, somewhat detached woman, at first denying herself then asking for more at just the right time. Cafes in modernist train stations, theatres transformed into bookshops, and gradually you begin to understand the city's spirit, able to join rigorous planning with adventurous experimentation. Warsaw boasts of galleries, art venues, clubs, and publishing houses: an out-of-the-way reality with respect to more established international art cities, like London, Berlin, Paris, and New York. But rest assured, we'll be hearing more and more about Poland in the next few years. Lodz is also active, not only for art but also for design and performance. But let's get back to Warsaw, where the scene is lively and dynamic, and besides institutional venues, the informal atmosphere of the galleries shows the desire to build private collecting yet to be invented, seeing the country's political past and its emerging capitalist economy.



Honza Zamojski, *Victory #1, #2, 2010*, paper collage, 15.5 x 18.5 cm.

CONTEMPORARY CREATIVITY SPEAKS POLISH

words_ *Lorenza Pignatti*

all images courtesy Leto Gallery, Warsaw, and artist Honza Zamojski

soundtrack_ *Krzysztof Komeda, Pushing the Car from the film Cul-de-Sac directed by Roman Polanski in 1966.*



Honza Zamojski, *Untitled / Pigeons #1*, 2010, paper on paper, 12 x aprx. 13 x 9 cm.

There are many museums present in the city, such as the Centre for Contemporary Art and the Museum of Modern Art, whose definitive, extraordinary location will be inaugurated in 2015, near the Building of Culture and Science (a sort of Stalinist Gotham City). There are also private foundations and galleries like the Foksal gallery Foundation, Raster Gallery, Czarna, Profile, Leto, Krytyka Polityczna (not just a gallery but a cultural center/publishing house that organises concerts, presentations, and performances). Plus clubs, publishing houses, artist studios, and unconventional stores present in the Prague quarter, making this an up-and-coming art city. The only part of the city that survived World War II bombings is precisely the Prague quarter, today a hot spot, where abandoned factories (like the Fabryka Trzciny Art Center) are transformed into prime locations for fashion shows, concerts, and performances.

Among the most important, internationally recognized Polish galleries (present at fairs like Frieze, Art Basel, Fiac) there's Raster, founded as a magazine in the early 1990s then turned into an art space. Raster invented *Villa Warsaw*, a week dedicated to performances, events, and encounters in different places across the world that unite artists from ten international galleries including Zero... of Milan, Jan Mot of Brussels, and Hotel of London. The latest edition was held at Reykjavik last year. Raster's informal and inviting atmosphere contrasts with the stylistic minimalism of the Foksal gallery Foundation. Established in 1997 to house the Foksal archive, an avant-garde public gallery founded in Warsaw in 1966 with a courageously conceptual program for back then, it is a commercial venue that proposes the most *à la page* Polish artists (Paulina Olowska, Pavel Althamer, Monika Sosnowska, Anna Molska, and Robert Kusmirowski) and follows the line-up of The Avantgarde Institute. The former house-studio of artists Edward Krasinski and Henryk Stazewski where the Foksal intervened with a glass pavilion offers a breathtaking view of the city, in which concerts, conferences, and interventions by emerging artists and Art Academy students take place.

Some more recent venues include Czarna, Leto, and Profile. "The nascent Polish art scene, Wojciech Bakowski, Konrad Smolenski, Maurycy Gomulicki, Honza Zamojski, and Bianka Rolando," according to Marta Kotakowska from the Leto Gallery, "works with heterogeneous languages like publishing, new media, animation, music, performances to distance themselves from the country's (demanding and important) past and immerse themselves in contemporaneity."

Recollections of the past are also present, as with the neon work by Maurycy Gomulicki dedicated to Oranzada, the only sparkling beverage available before the fall of the Berlin Wall, installed in the Kepa Potocka Park in Warsaw. Paulina Olowska also seems afflicted by a sort of vintage nostalgia for the many neon signs that were once present in the city; not only does she portray them in her paintings, but she salvages and restores them as well.

Instead, the Laura Palmer Foundation proposes actions, shows, performances in Warsaw's old stadium, which twenty years ago became a post-communist ghost, market, and multicultural location, a melting pot of Vietnamese immigrants and Russian merchants. Equally iconoclastic is the Bec Zmiana Foundation which proposes projects that are "completely experimental . . . with public funds." A recent project of theirs involves various artists investigating the idea of disappearance by creating sculptures and projects that, in effect, give life to nothing other than a guided itinerary of withdrawal.

A provocation (of withdrawal, that is) which aims to contradict the awareness of the changes underway on the Polish art scene, where artists, gallerists, and cultural operators know that Warsaw and Poland will soon land on the international map of creativity.