

ubu

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POLISH AVANT-GARDE, 1920 – 1945

April 9 – May 16, 1998

Henryk Berlewi, Mieczyslaw Berman, Janusz Maria Brzeski, Karol Hiller, Julian Lewin, Kazimierz Podsadecki, Henryk Stazewski, Wladyslaw Strzeminski, Samuel Szczekacz, Mieczyslaw Szczuka, Stefan Themerson, Stefan Wegner, Teresa Zarnower

Ubu Gallery will present an exhibition of work in various media highlighting the **Polish avant-garde** between the two World Wars. Timed to coincide with the major exhibition of the proto-modernist metaphysical portraits of Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz at the Robert Miller Gallery (March 31 – May 2, 1999), Ubu's show will feature the work of Janusz Maria Brzeski, Wladyslaw Strzeminski, Stefan Themerson, Mieczyslaw Szczuka, Jerzy Janisch, Kazimierz Podsadecki, Mieczyslaw Choynowski, Henryk Stazewski, Aleksander Krzywoblocki, Henryk Berlewi, Mieczyslaw Berman, Karol Hiller, Teresa Zarnower, Katarzyna Kobro, and others. The exhibition will include collage, photography, painting, graphic design, posters, and sculpture along with the most comprehensive collection of Polish avant-garde books and periodicals ever offered for sale.

The country's first post-World War I art movement, "Formism," was oriented toward the future and toward modernity with close connections to both Cubism and Expressionism, while simultaneously embracing a style based on Polish folk tradition and the literary works of the Romantics. By 1923, Constructivism—related to but quite different from the Russian movement evolving at the same time—became the dominant artistic style. By 1925, the broad Constructivist movement (which was now known as "Blok" after the name of the organization's periodical)—led by Szczuka and Zarnower—became split between the followers of these two and the most dynamic personality of the period, Strzeminski.

By 1925, Strzeminski and Katerzyna Kobro formulated the theory of "Unism" while Szczuka and Zarnower (loyal followers of the Russian, Tatlin) postulated the theory of "Utilitarianism" through their editing of the Communist publication *Dzwignia*, which stressed the social and political role of art. It was also at this time that the circle of Constructivists was enlarged by a group of professional architects who formed a new periodical and group, *Praesens*, in which they strove to integrate all the plastic arts under the banner of "Functionalism." By 1929, as the "happy twenties" came to an end, the Constructivist group—now under attack not only from the right but also from the young artists stressing proletarian realism—had dwindled to the point where it consisted only of Strzeminski and a few of his followers in the city of Lodz. Now calling themselves the "Group a.r.," they were interested primarily in the social aims of art and the rules of typographic composition.

Throughout the decade of the 1930s, with the economic crisis affecting Poland as it did all of Europe, Constructivism and the rest of the Polish Avant-Garde took on a decidedly pessimistic tone, having never achieved the success of its sister movement in the Soviet Union. In Russia, there had developed over 40 "Museums of Artistic Culture;" in Poland, only Strzeminski's great Lodz Collection of Modern Art was established. Utopia was not achieved and as hoped, Constructivism did not provide the engine for social change, hence losing its relevancy.