

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW:
*SCULPTURE UNDONE, 1955-1972***

Artist Radically Reconceptualized Sculpture with Provocative Works Reflecting Themes of the Body

Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955–1972

October 7, 2012–January 28, 2013

Special Exhibitions Gallery, third floor

NEW YORK, October 2, 2012—The Museum of Modern Art presents *Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955–1972*, the first large-scale survey of the artist’s work in the United States, from October 7, 2012 through January 28, 2013. The exhibition brings together over 100 works including sculpture, drawings, photography, and archival and documentary material, drawing on loans from private and public collections, including major institutions in Poland. The exhibition is organized by WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, in collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. *Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955–1972*, is curated by Elena Filipovic and Joanna Mytkowska. MoMA’s presentation is organized by Connie Butler, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings.

A sculptor who began working during the postwar period in a classical figurative style, Alina Szapocznikow (Polish, 1926-1973) radically reconceptualized sculpture as an imprint not only of memory but also of her own body. Though her career effectively spanned less than two decades (cut short by the artist’s premature death in 1973 at age 47), Szapocznikow explored a wide range of sculptural approaches and left behind a legacy of provocative objects that evoke Surrealism, Nouveau Réalisme, and Pop art. The radical innovation of her practice and the way her work continues to speak with urgency merits art historical reexamination.

Born to a Jewish family in Poland, and having survived the concentration camps of World War II as a teenager, Szapocznikow studied sculpture in Czechoslovakia and eventually Paris. While working in Warsaw in 1951, her work in bronze and stone developed from Social Realist sculptures to more emotionally-charged, adventurous, and Expressionist works, explored in tandem with loosening political and cultural restrictions.

Beginning in 1962 and continuing after her move to Paris in 1963, Szapocznikow began exploring experimental material, such as polyurethane foam (an expandable material resembling lava that can be poured to create liquid forms), and casting parts of her body, incorporating the forms into her sculpture. Her tinted polyester resin casts of body parts, often transformed into everyday objects like ashtrays or lamps, such as *Lampe-bouche (Illuminated lips)*, c. 1966; her poured polyurethane forms such as *Stèle (Stele)*, 1968; and her elaborately constructed sculptures, which at times incorporated photographs, clothing, or car parts, such as *Untitled*

(*Fétiche VII*) (*Fetish VII*), 1971 and *Goldfinger*, 1965, are examples of the artist's increasing experimentation with the fragmented body. All remain as idiosyncratic and culturally resonant today as they did during her lifetime.

Her Tumors series, with its clustered orbs, recalls the body turned against itself by cancer (Szapocznikow was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1969). In *Tumeurs personnifiées* (*Tumors personified*), 1971, casts of the artist's disembodied face that morph into variously shaped lumps are scattered across the ground in a work that visually conjures cancerous growths and their invasion of the human body. Breaking from the conventions of display for traditional sculpture, Szapocznikow intended these personalized forms to lie on gravel at floor level. They reveal a sense of humor and playfulness even when dealing with direct references to her declining health.

As with many of her works from this time, *Souvenir I*, 1971, features photographs embedded in waxy polyester resin. In this case, an image of the artist as a smiling young girl is juxtaposed with one of a concentration camp victim. This is the first direct reference in Szapocznikow's work to the horrors of the Holocaust, a topic she seldom spoke about despite her first-hand experience as a camp survivor.

In Szapocznikow's final body of work, the *Herbier* (Herbarium) sculptures, she moved radically back to a reworked figuration, merging the body with the form and material of her sculptures. She created images of herself and her son, as seen in *Autoportrait – Herbier* (*Self-Portrait – Herbarium*), 1971, that appear flattened like shed skin on wood panels. These works are perhaps some of her most literal and vulnerable artistic statements.

The years explored in this exhibition, 1955 to 1972, span the artist's earlier career, when she produced work using traditional sculptural materials, through what is regarded as her experimental period, characterized by a pioneering use of non-traditional materials and forms. Szapocznikow experimented as much in two dimensions as in three, evidenced by the numerous prints, drawings and photographs she produced concurrently throughout her lifetime. This exhibition also showcases her works on paper, such as *Untitled* (From the series *Paysage humain* (Human Landscape), c. 1971–72, suggesting the roles these played in relation to her primary practice of object-making.

Well-known and highly influential in Poland throughout her career, Szapocznikow's work has been less known internationally, and much of the attention it has received has been largely infused with biographical determinism, disproportionately focused on the trauma of her concentration-camp experiences, recurrent ill health, and premature death. Spanning one of the most rich and complex periods of the 20th century, Szapocznikow's oeuvre responds to many of the ideological and artistic developments of her time through artwork that is at once fragmented and transformative, sensual and reflective, playfully realized and politically charged. At the center of her oeuvre is the body, most frequently her own—as Szapocznikow wrote in 1972, "I am convinced that of all the manifestations of the ephemeral the human body is the most vulnerable, the only source of all joy, all suffering and all truth . . ."

An examination of her body of work today places Szapocznikow alongside artists such as Lynda Benglis, Eva Hesse and Paul Thek, who were working in the same period and whose exploration of new sculptural methods and materials helped reimagine sculpture as it was traditionally understood.

PUBLICATION:

Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955–1972 is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication that offers a comprehensive overview of the artist's oeuvre. Essays by Elena Filipovic, Joanna Mytkowska, Connie Butler, Allegra Pesenti, and Jola Gola, reflect new scholarship on Szapocznikow, touching on key aspects of her practice and historical reception and contextualizing the artist's work for a wider audience. 9 x 10 1/2", 216 pages, 326 illustrations. Flexibound, \$45. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Mercatorfonds, Brussels. Available at the MoMA stores and online at MoMAStore.org. Available to the trade in the United States and Canada through ARTBOOK | D.A.P. and outside of the United States and Canada through Thames & Hudson.

PUBLIC PROGRAM:

Alina Szapocznikow: A Symposium

Friday, October 5, 2012, 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Theater 3 (The Celeste Bartos Theater), mezzanine, The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education and Research Building

Held in conjunction with the exhibition, this symposium presents new scholarship on Alina Szapocznikow's two-decade-long career. Long influential in Poland, Szapocznikow's compelling body of work, which synthesizes postwar European sculptural modes—academic, Social Realist, Expressionist, biomorphic abstraction, found-object, Neorealist, and Pop—is ripe for art-historical reexamination. International curators, scholars, and artists discuss postwar Eastern European art and Szapocznikow's position within it, her work viewed from a feminist perspective, her use of photography and works on paper in the context of her larger sculptural production, and her increasing influence on a younger generation of Eastern European artists.

Tickets (\$12; \$10 members and Corporate Members; \$5 students, seniors and staff of other museums) can be purchased online or at the information desk, the Film desk after 4:00 p.m., or at the Education and Research Building reception desk on the day of the program.

To pick up tickets purchased online, proceed to the Education and Research Building reception desk at 4 West 54 Street beginning at noon on the day of the program.

SPONSORSHIP:

Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone, 1955–1972, is organized by WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, in collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. The exhibition traveled to the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio. The exhibition is curated by Elena Filipovic and Joanna Mytkowska. Organized at MoMA by Connie Butler, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings

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No. 36

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Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org.

Hours: Wednesday through Monday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday.

Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). **MoMA.org:** No service charge for tickets ordered on MoMA.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs).

Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA Membership within 30 days.

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