

## **RYSZARD WINIARSKI: GAMES. GORINCHEM 1976**

On 5 June 1974, Princess Beatrix officially opened an international Symposium in Gorinchem, the Netherlands, initiated by the artists associated with the town: Marinus Boezem, Ad Dekkers and Edwerdt Hilgemann. The idea of the event came into being as a result of reflections about the role and function of art in contemporary society, including the possibility to tap its potential in public space creation. The Symposium concept consisted in making certain parts of the city available to invited artists, who in cooperation with local factories and enterprises had to design on-site and subsequently make sculptures or spatial installations. The artists were not restrained with any pre-set topic or technique. Projects were to be executed as a result of direct contact of artists with the town, the region and its inhabitants. Apart from artists-organisers, the Symposium participants included: Getulio Alviani (Italy), Ad de Keijzer (the Netherlands), Kenneth Martin (England), Christian Megert (Switzerland), François Morellet (France), Lev Nusberg (Russia), Uli Pohl (Germany), Karl Prantl (Austria), Zdeněk Sýkora (Czechia), herman de vries (the Netherlands). Poland was represented by Ryszard Winiarski, who was recommended for participation in the Symposium by herman de vries<sup>1</sup>. Both artists met for the first time in 1969 in Poland. That moment marked the beginning of their many years' friendship and mutual fascination with artistic activity. After herman de vries Winiarski often repeated: "Objectivisation is important as an element of my interests in visual information. As a consequence, an attempt to eliminate not the human but the personal factor in my compositions has emerged. Therefore, I have reached for fortune." Both of them simultaneously developed concepts of using fortuitous and random actions. Winiarski by creating black and white *areas*, de vires – collages, titled *random objectivations*.

In Gorinchem, Ryszard Winiarski was the single participant to prepare two projects, under the joint title "Geometry in a Landscape." The first one made a use of a five-element set of solids of equal volume: a sphere, cube, cylinder, cone and pyramid. Made on a monumental scale of wood and covered in polyester, white forms were complemented the landscape. Mounted on a green river embankment, they trigger the sense of astonishment and insecurity in the viewer by disturbing the everyday naturalness of the terrain. An inspiration for the project was the rule of an iceberg, which shows only one seventh of its volume above the water surface, while the remaining six sevenths are submerged. The visible part of the sculpture is only its fragment. The whole of it encompasses an imagined area, moves into a space controlled by creativity.

The second project was composed of two spatial sculptures of steel and aluminium, each of which made of connected modules being cubes sized 250x250x250cm. The created structures were partly immersed in water so that each of the sides could be visible, and

painted in black and white fields, so characteristic of Winiarski, whose arrangement was determined by the artist at random using a die. Both these works by Winiarski, similarly to most of the pieces that were created as part of the Symposium, can be still viewed today in Gorinchem.

The Symposium was a very important event with significant implications for Winiarski. It was there that he attracted attention of art critics and theoreticians, met interesting artists, with whom he could share his interest in geometry, fortune, viewer participation. Apart from herman de vries, the oeuvre by the French artist François Morellet<sup>2</sup>, who also used the geometry rules for creating emotionally neutral works, became a significant point of reference for Winiarski. Similarly to the latter, Morellet employed objective random variables, in particular records and numbers from the telephone directory (*Random Distribution of 40,000 Squares Using the Odd and Even Numbers of a Telephone Directory, 50% blue, 50% red*, 1963). Beginning at the Symposium, important friendship and many years' collaboration connected Winiarski with Ewerdt Hilgemann<sup>3</sup> – and artist and a teacher, a lecturer at the Academie van Beeldende Kunsten in Rotterdam. Later for many years they organised frequent exchanges of their students and shows of their studios, at various locations, among others in Warsaw, Elbląg, Chełm, Kraków, Radom. It is also through Hilgemann, by developing his contacts with the circle of artists met during the Symposium in Gorinchem, that Winiarski joined the “international studio of constructivist art” in 1977, together with which he participated in numerous exhibitions, i.a. in Varese (1977)<sup>4</sup>, Helsinki (1978)<sup>5</sup>, Zagreb (1979), Łódź (1981), Klein Sassen (1985)<sup>6</sup>, Munich (1985).

In 1975, Antoinette de Stigter, who co-organised the 1974 Symposium, opened Kunstcentrum Badhuis in Gorinchem: a contemporary art gallery where she decided to present individual exhibitions of all Symposium participants. The exhibition of Ryszard Winiarski was held in 1976. Antoinette de Stigter wrote the following in the booklet accompanying the exhibition:

“winiarski belongs to the group of artists that chose - from the imaginable to unimaginable amount of possibilities in art - for a controllable result. when deciding the rules, his imagination starts; the final image results from the process of realization. therefore, it's logical when he accepts the game element, or even - as in this show - chooses 'game' for a subject, that he arrives at a "collective artwork", as he calls it himself. his game is always simple, never complicated, yet the variety of possibilities is vast. using this working method, winiarski clearly aims for a demystification of the artist: not the genius, but the supplier of ideas for personal and collective creativity”

The exhibition in Gorinchem was the fullest accomplishment of Winiarski's concept, formulated and executed by him in the 1970s, as the so-called “Game Parlours.” In the context of the artist's earlier persistent explorations in the area of system and chance art, “Games” appeared in 1972 for the first time, as a manifestation of the necessary synthesis of

rules. Winiarski indicated that the idea emerged from the need to overcome misunderstandings and demonstrate the process of creating his paintings: “I struggled with the people’s manner of perception of my works, which was contradictory to my intentions. At a few exhibitions, I would present boards next to the paintings and write down the rules of the games like a maniac to explain the programme. Their aim was to make people realise that there was something else behind the paintings, something that prevents an emotional reception. I figured out that I had to make an important turn, that overcomplicating the programme would not lead to conquering new areas of art.” In the “Game Parlour”, the viewer no longer had to rely on the structure of the paintings to guess the rules from which they resulted. Winiarski proposed his public to actively participate in the process. He enabled them to build visual objects similar to those of the artist’s. The painting fields which earlier had been artistically arranged were replaced by plain boards, places for games. The exhibition in Gorinchem showed seven games designed by the artist, which were constructed based on the classical canon of board games, both strategic ones and games of chance.

The idea, chosen and applied by Ryszard Winiarski, so tight and thoroughly practical, developed into a programme with highest intellectual qualities. It serves the artist as a means of communicating his willingness to assume one of the most significant functions in the contemporary art, one called MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL by Prof. Stefan Morawski.

“Intellectual because it attempts to present one or another construct, striving for its maximum disclosure and forcing the consumer to follow the meanders of reasoning, relying to a large extent on the viewer’s good will and effort. Moral because the principal reason for action and the driving force is not so much intellectual entertainment but rather the wish to trigger a state of doubt, permanent uncertainty in the consumer and himself, the will to continually ask new questions on his artistic path.”

Ania Muszyńska

Spectra Art Space curator

<sup>1</sup> **herman de vries** (born 1931) – Dutch artist, botanist by education. According to the artist’s manifesto concerning the lack of hierarchy with reference to nature and art, he always writes his first name and surname in small letters. His career began in the 1950s, he was associated with the artist movement “Zero”. In 1998 he received an award from the Dutch government for his lifetime achievements. In 2015, he represented the Netherlands during the Biennial in Venice.

<sup>2</sup> **François Morellet** (1926 – 2016) – French artist, painter, sculptor, author of light installations. He played an important role in the development of geometric abstraction. His early works alluded to the minimal art and conceptualism. Compared to the great classics of the American art, such as: Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella and Sol Lewitt.

<sup>3</sup> **Ewerdt Hilgemann** (born 1938) – German artist, author of numerous sculptures in the public space. His works can be found, among others, in Amsterdam, Delft, Gorinchem, the Hague, Rotterdam in the Netherlands, in Los Angeles and New York in the USA, in Berlin, Hüfeld, Ingolstadt in Germany, or in Elbląg in Poland. He has been living and working in the Netherlands for years.

<sup>4</sup> Sul Concetto di serie, Secundo Simposium del Centro internazionale di studi d’arte contruttiva, Varese – Bergamo – Mantua, 1977

<sup>5</sup> Maximal – Minimal, International Workgroup for Constructive Art, Helsinki, 1978

<sup>6</sup> Arbeitskreis for systematic constructive art | dla sztuki systemu i konstruktywizmu, Kunststation Kleinsassen, 1985