Nowadays in Poland there is continual development of public and private collections of contemporary art within the repositories of museums, galleries and art centres. Additionally, both the collections that have existed for several decades and those started recently are being digitized. It should be emphasized that intensified documentation of pieces of the most current art is urgent in general, and in Poland it is also a matter of catching up. This activity is being carried out on the initiative of both regional and national levels of administration. What is more, during the last decade new museums of contemporary art were established in Poland, which made it one of their major objectives to create new collections. New functional buildings for the purpose of their activity were also built at that time. Some culture associations put in their programmes the principle of finding a proper home for their newly collected artefacts.

The range of accumulation of artefacts change with time, influenced by transformations of social life and of art itself, i.e. of its purposes, content, form, contact with the viewers and the way it reacts to everyday life. Contemporary art expresses, or at least heralds in, the characteristics of the present culture. It can be found in galleries, where it is displayed but rarely bought, or in private collections, which reflect the taste and opinions of their owners, but not very often in museums, where it could be accumulated in some representative order and on a regular basis. Thus, it is either not comprehensible or, more often, not discovered on time, and soon sinks into obscurity.

Andrzej Wróblewski (1927-1957)
Interior, 1956
gouache on paper, 30x42 cm
Exhibition in The Collection of Pakoů, Polish art
Private collection of Antoni Michalak. Photo Foundation of Andrzej Wróblewski
Art keeps adapting to the IT revolution, so some alterations in the methods of collecting and presenting artefacts must appear, too. Nowadays, the artefacts themselves are examples of digital art, moving pictures, or electronic media, and the digital database is becoming a key type among databases in general. The most alarming problem within artistic life in Poland in the 20th century was the lack of regular accumulation of the latest artefacts, which led to losses that were impossible to recover. The ministerial programme entitled the National Programme for Culture “Signs of Time”, started in 2004 and planned to last till 2013, yet abandoned earlier, was a reaction to that long-standing negligence. It was supposed to support the production, accumulation, cataloguing and promotion of contemporary art in Poland, as well as to create a network of interdisciplinary museums of contemporary art (Public Information Bulletin of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage 2004). Its ultimate goal was to create one representative collection of contemporary art based on the regional collections. The purchase of artefacts was funded by the central and local governments and sponsors. But in 2008 the programme was closed. Nevertheless, all the collections purchased during the programme still exist, and the majority of them keep developing.

**Collecting Modern Art in Poland**

The phenomenon of collecting artefacts in Poland dates back to the epoch of King Stanisław August Poniatowski (1732-1798). He was one of the greatest patrons and sponsors of artists in the history of the Polish state. This means that the habit of collecting art in Poland is barely 250 years old (Kowalska 2010). The King’s collection included paintings, engravings and sculpture pieces that were to serve as educational aids in the Academy of Fine Arts. In the Plaster Casts Hall copies of the most famous antique and modern sculpture pieces...
were accumulated, and in the Illustrations Hall there were around 100 thousand illustrations and engravings bound in the albums decorated with the royal coat of arms. The number of books amounted to 15,580 volumes in 1795, and equally rich were the collections of gemstones and copies of the most renowned cameos and intaglios, coins, models of machines and various scientific instruments. The sub-collection of pictures was the most precious one, and in the last years of the King’s reign included 2,200 objects. Soon, the Polish intellectual elite, coming from the rich magnate families of Potocki, Czartoryski, Lubomirski, Rzewuski, Ossoliński and Chodkiewicz, followed the monarch’s tracks, and gradually many of their collections of pieces of art and cultural monuments became the basis for the public museums. It often happened in other European countries, too, like in France (the Louvre in Paris, 1753), Russia (the State Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, 2nd half of the 18th century), Great Britain (the British Museum in London, 1753), Austria (the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, 1781), and Spain (the Museo del Prado in Madrid, 1819). The difference was that in Poland the transformation into the public institution took place a century later, i.e. in the 19th century (the National Museum in Poznań, 1857; the National Museum in Warsaw, 1862; the National Museum in Kraków, 1879). The condition of the above-mentioned collections was a consequence of the owners’ individual experiences as well as of the tragic historical events on Polish lands. Further, the recurring trait of the phenomenon of establishing private or public art collection in the 19th and early 20th centuries was the general (with rare exceptions) lack of interest in modern art. That means that time was the important valuation criterion in the verification of artefacts. Consequently, Polish museums started to accumulate the current art pieces and establish divisions of modern art very late. In the National Museum in Warsaw, modern artefacts started to be gathered occasionally since the 1880s, while the first comprehensive programme on creating the modern collection appeared no sooner than in 1932. The Museum in Kraków involved itself in the accumulation of modern art after the generous donations of sponsors such as Feliks Jasieński and Janina Stanisławska. But it still had no programme for complementing the repository with modern art, and thus it was not enriched with other modern pieces until the 1950s. In the National Museum in Poznań, the first isolated pieces of modern art appeared in the repository during the interwar years, but the collecting programme and the proper department of modern art did not come into existence until the years 1952-1957. When the Museum in Wrocław was opened in 1948, it was allowed to purchase only objects from the pre-war period, a rule that was applied up until the end of the 1950s. Nevertheless, step by step also smaller regional museums started their divisions of modern art, e.g. the Upper-Silesian Museum in Bytom (in the mid-1950s), the

Leszek Sobocki
(1934–)  
A coffin portrait, 1998  
oil on metal, diameter 60 cm  
Exhibition in The District Museum in Toruń  
The Collection of Pakulski. Polish art.  
Private collection of Antoni Michalak.  
Photo by Antoni Michalak
According to data from 2005, in the repositories of 45 Polish museums that own the artworks coming from the 20th and 21st centuries there are 578,130 modern objects (Folga-Januszewska 2005). Drawings, prints, posters and sketchbooks add up to 267,270 objects; photographs amount to 155,108 items; there are also 34,538 paintings, 31,954 designed objects and 12,482 pieces of sculpture. The biggest collection of modern art, accumulated on a regular basis since 1932 as a fully separate modern collection, is in the possession of the National Museum in Warsaw (148,805 objects). It is respectively followed by the collections of the National Museums in Poznań (39,154 objects), Kraków (30,454), Gdańsk (19,954), and Wrocław (18,260), further by the Silesian Museum in Katowice (13,874) and the Lublin Province Museum (10,955). Coming to the smaller institutions, it is worth mentioning the Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum in Bydgoszcz (9,305), the Upper-Silesian Museum in Bytom (8,089), the Museum in Chełm (1,690), the collection of Socialist Realism art in Kozłówka and the collection of the Jacek Malczewski Museum in Radom. Especially devoted to modern and contemporary art, the Museum Sztuki in Łódź gathered 9,500 objects.

The presentation and promotion of modern art in Poland constitutes a mission of the Polish national institution for culture named Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw (Zachęta Home Page). Its history started in 1860, when in times of the Congress Poland the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (in Polish: Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych, TZSP) was set up with the initial
goal of organizing exhibitions, purchasing artefacts for the national collection, and supporting young artists. It was the first institution established on Polish soil for the particular ties purpose of presenting recent art, and whose major activity was that of creating the modern art collection. During WWII, the repository of the institution was moved to the National

Włodzimierz Pawlak (1957–)

*The key to Malewicz*, 1995

oil on canvas, 120x100 cm

Exhibition in

The District Museum in Toruń

_The Collection of Pakołi. Polish art_

Private collection of Antoni Michalak,

Photo by Antoni Michalak
Museum in Warsaw, where it stayed and became the core of the present Gallery of Polish Art. The institution itself was dissolved in 1949 (in 1990 it was re-established as the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts attached to the Zachęta Gallery). The Central Bureau for Art Exhibitions (in Polish: Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA) was created in its place, which for many years afterward accumulated works of Polish artists (pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centralne_Biuro_Wystaw_Artystycznych). Nevertheless, that very activity remained collateral to the major activities pertaining to preparing exhibitions and providing education. After the political changes of 1989, CBWA underwent a gradual reorganization, finally to be replaced in 1994 by the Zachęta State Gallery of Art. In 2003, the latter was given the status of national cultural institution and was renamed the Zachęta National Gallery of Art. Its permanent collection includes exclusively works of Polish modern art - painting, sculpture, installations, photographs and films. In its Department for Documentation, the Zachęta Gallery archives one of Poland's largest collections of catalogues and records referring to the post-war history of Polish art and artists, i.e. personal files and other documents on over 30,000 artists, and a photographic archive (with digital photos, reversal films and negatives) of exhibitions organized in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art and the Kordegard Gallery (a branch of Zachęta) since 1950.

Since the early 1990s, i.e. since Zachęta became an independent institution, the well-thought-out policy of acquisitions of objects through purchase was launched for the first time, as well as the procedure of regularly organizing and cataloguing its collections. The accessioning refers mainly to works of the Polish contemporary artists that once exhibited in Zachęta, and the works that were created within the gallery’s projects organized on the spot or outside the seat of Zachęta (e.g. in the Polish Pavilion at the 55th International Art Exhibition - la Biennale di Venezia). At present, the collection has more than 3,600 objects, including more than 700 paintings, nearly 80 video art works, almost 100 pieces of sculpture and installations, and quite an impressive collection of works made on paper.

On 20 December 2002, the International Collection of Contemporary Art was opened in the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle (in Polish: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski w Warszawie, CSW) (Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle Home Page). The collection’s mission is to respond actively to any new phenomena in contemporary art. Its content includes largely the works displayed in nearly 600 exhibitions that have been organized by the institution since 1990. Currently, the collection has around 600 works authored by over 130 artists (csw.art.pl/index.php?action=kolekcje). It indicates the multiplicity of trends within the art created during the last two decades. The institution itself, set up in 1985, is the place of creation, presentation and documentation of con-temporary art in all its aspects.

Since the beginning of its existence, the CSW has contained a functioning Documentation and Information Department (in Polish: Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Informacji) (cswart.pl/index.php?action=dokument; Muzeum Zamku i Szpitala Woskowego na Ujazdowie Home Page; Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle Home Page). The basic purpose of the department is to create, catalogue, describe, and share with the general public the inter-disciplinary collections of informa-
Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń
Photo by Piotr Kożurno

Logo of Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń
Photo by Piotr Kożurno
tion on Polish contemporary art made after 1945. The collections are organised in three separate archives: Archive on Artists (currently over 230 of them), Institutions and Periodic Art Events; Photo Archive; and Video Material Archive (in Polish: Wideoteka), containing films on fine art, films with documentation of exhibitions and performances, as well as works within the video art and animation (csw.art.pl/index.php?action=archiwum).

The extensive sub-collection of documentation includes exhibition catalogues; prints and press information on artists, galleries and their projects; photographs and video records. Certain foreign artworks are also recorded. The department also stores information on digital data media and within the rich database Bi-Art, which deals with contemporary authors, art groups, events and institutions (csw.art.pl/index.php?action=dokument).

Furthermore, the department provides with the information service on the contemporary art galleries in Poland, in which it gives not only the basic information on the galleries' contacts but also presents their programme summaries, description on the forms of their activity and the fields of art they are interested in, and the outlines of their history (Galerie sztuki współczesnej w Polsce Home Page). It is worth adding that many of those galleries collect artefacts and mention it on their official websites, and the fields of their interest are reflected there in photographs of works they once exhibited.

In 2005, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw was set up (Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie Home Page; pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muzeum_Sztuki_Nowoczesnej_w_Warszawie. It is aimed at presenting the output of and changes in Polish art from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries in the international context, as well as presenting the latest significant phenomena within the field of visual arts, film, theatre and music, and finally, supporting outstanding artists. The museum carries out research projects on the history of contemporary art, successively developing its offering to the general public concerning visual arts, graphic and industrial design, and architecture. Currently, the key task of the museum is to accumulate artefacts for the collection that will go on display in a new building. In 2008 the museum started to compose its permanent collection (www.artmuseum.pl/kolekcja.php?l=0&id=kolekcja_artysci). The network of the museum's partner cultural institutions is being arranged with the participation of Polish and foreign members. In cooperation with TV station “TVP Kultura” the museum will make a series of film documentaries on selected artists and art phenomena. In its current building (with a floor area of 35,000 m²) apart from the exhibition halls (covering 30% of the area) and two stages of the “TR Warszawa” theatre there are also two lecture halls, two bookshops, a spacious library, a reading room with a self-service collection of books, and an education centre (Miasto Stożeczné Warszawa 2010).

The new building of the museum is to be built between 2013 and 2017. According to the vision of the museum's founders, it is to be the counterpart of the Centre Pompidou in Paris or the Tate Modern in London. The museum's permanent collection of contemporary art, accumulated through regular purchases, is to be completed by the date of the new building's inauguration. At present, on the museum's official website one can see the works of more than 60 authors. Since January 2008, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw conducts its activity at the temporary address in 3 Pańska St...
in Warsaw, in the immediate vicinity of the Palace of Culture and Science. In 2010 a design for the new building was introduced in the Palace of Culture and Science and on the Internet, but in May 2012 the Warsaw City Council broke off the contract with the architect Christian Kereza. The museum will spend the next four years in the former furniture shop “Emilia” in 51 Emilii Plater St in Warsaw. From 14 May 2013 until 6 January 2014, the museum’s collection (150 artefacts) is on display in the exhibition entitled “In the heart of the country” (in Polish: “W sercu kraju”) which addresses such issues as the globalisation of the history of art, the relationship between a city and contemporary artistic output, liberation narratives in art, construction of the past and of recent memory, language and ethics of modernity, social commitment of artists, and manifestations of spirituality.

The National Programme for Culture “Signs of Time”
The National Programme for Culture “Signs of Time” (in Polish: Narodowy Program Kultury „Znaki czasu”) and its achievements was conceived with the purpose of carrying out the National Strategy for the Development of Culture (in Polish: Narodowa Strategia Rozwoju Kultury) planned for the years 2004-2013. The strategy referred to contemporary art. Unfortunately, in 2007 the programme was incorporated into the cur-rently operational one and in 2008 it was clo-sed. The main principles of the programme pertained to creation, while relying on the re-gional collections, of the representative national collection of contemporary art, promotion of Polish contemporary art, restoration of the tradition of patronage of the arts, involve-ment of the public in activity for the benefit of culture and arts, making art be a medium of social communication and a platform for civil society development, and stimulation of development of the fine arts trade in Poland. The programme also mentioned the extremely important issue of educating, in the long term, the audience to respond to contemporary art. Thus educational and social aspects of the activities undertaken within the programme were treated with exceptional concern (Public Information Bulletin of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage 2004). The programme, within the scope of which the regional galleries Zachęta operated, had its message “Each time has its characteristic art” (in Polish: „Každemu czasowi jego sztuka”), which was acquired by each individual newly opened Zachęta gallery. It was a kind of imperative for the given institutions to build their art collections that would be a sign of the current time, i.e. they would include pieces of art that were to respond vividly, representatively, critically, ironically or positively towards life.

Within a year from the programme inaugura-tion, fifteen new grassroots organisations appeared with their own programmes of creating art collections (the exceptions were the Masovian and Podkarpackie Voivodeships, where already existing institutions received support from the programme, including Zachęta, CCA Ujazdowski Castle, the Museum of Modern Art, and the National Museum in Warsaw). In the 5 years the programme was in operation, the newly established organisations gathered over 1800 objects, including 21 works of foreign artists. There were over 70 separate exhibi-tions of their collections and one joint exhibi-tion of them all (see the programme's summary with the detailed lists of the collections' content in Jagodzińska 2010). Additionally, almost all the artefacts of the given collections can be seen online thanks to the
initiative of the organisations and through the access provided by the website of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Lublin (the bookmark Kolekcje lists the websites of all the given organisations, whereas the listed websites themselves present each organisation’s mission, contacts, list of artists it cooperates with, and the artefacts once on display.

Some of the organisations plan to acquire new buildings for their collections. Indeed, the programme “Signs of Time” included the objective of constructing new buildings or extending, modernizing or altering the existing ones so that they could serve as regional Interdisciplinary Centres of Modernity. In the end, that objective was never achieved. Nevertheless, the newly established associations and their collections started to initiate the development of new art institutions.

One of the obvious achievements of the programme was the establishment of the Centre of Contemporary Art (CoCA) Znaki Czasu in the town of Toruń in June 2008. The institution’s mission is to stimulate the development, dissemination, and promotion of contemporary art. The building of the centre is the first architectural project in Poland after 1939 that was created especially for the purpose of serving as an institution for contemporary art. The centre focuses on modern, intermedia and interdisciplinary forms of activity, comprehensive programmes, and international events.

The centre's collection of contemporary art, started from scratch in 2007 and in constant development ever since, has encompassed around 480 exhibits and 39 deposits (including 30 objects owned by the Association of Friends of Fine Arts Znaki Czasu in Toruń) (on the website csw.torun.pl/dzialania/kolekcja-stala there is a file with a list of authors and their works, as well as a selection of 61 objects to see in larger files). It constitutes a representative selection of works that make up the general picture of contemporary art and reflect the complexity of the subjects addressed by it. Furthermore, the centre has launched the database Art baza, which now contains 50 biographies of artists connected with Toruń artistic life and the catalogue of works and collections of contemporary art that are in possession of stateowned, institutional or private repositories on the territory of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. The local character of the collection is only a basis for confronting the regional art with the international art phenomena. The core of the collection consists of works created in the 1960s and 1970s. They constitute a source of inspiration for contemporary artists and a basis for crucial art phenomena in the region.

It is also worth mentioning the Silesian Collection of Contemporary Art, which includes over 400 works of around 100 artists, many of whom come from that region. The collection is being developed in accordance with the scope covering conceptual, committed and critical art. From the start, the collection has been in the care of the Silesian Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Katowice (organized by Foundation for Silesia) (www.dlaslaska.pl/kultura_znaki_czasu.html).

The endeavour of collecting contemporary art has been launched as well in Kraków in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków MOCAK. The institution was set up on 1 February 2010, and its new building, with a display area of about 4,000 m2, was officially opened on 19 May 2011 (MOCAK Home Pa-
The mission of the museum is to present international contemporary art, educate, conduct research and publish in the given field of art. Thus, it will introduce the works of the last two decades, explain the sense of creating art by emphasizing its cognitive-ethical values and mentioning links with everyday life, and familiarize the audience with contemporary art.

Preparatory work has been undertaken to build the Wrocław Contemporary Museum (see design for the building on Bryla.pl). The institution was established on 10 February 2011, and on 2 September of the same year the museum started its activity at the temporary address in Strzegomski Square (Plac Strzegomski). Its final location will be in a modern building in the very centre of Wrocław in Purkyniego St. The museum’s programme includes the key activities of creating and presenting the international collection of contemporary art in the context of Polish and foreign art of the second half of the 20th century (Public Information Bulletin of the Wrocław Contemporary Museum). The collection contains works of contemporary artists from Wrocław and from the rest of Poland, starting from the 1950s. Additionally, it includes, as a deposit, a collection of the Lower Silesian Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts.

The Collection of Pakoń.
Polish art
in the District Museum
in Toruń
Private collection
of Antoni Michalak.
Photo by Piotr Kożurno

Development of digital databases of contemporary art in Poland
In the face of constant changes within art itself, the value of initiatives of cultural institutions and numerous associations in creating databases on artists and art groups within the fields of visual arts, music, film, theatre and literature cannot be overestimated (see centres of culture in Poland on Culture.pl). Therefore,
the CCA Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw presents on its official website the database titled “Visual Arts. Biographical Entries.” (in Polish: „Sztuki Wizualne. Sylwetki”) with biographies of artists and data on art groups’ projects (see information on the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle on Culture.pl Home Page). In June 2011, the number of biographies in its category of visual arts was 786, in the category of music 839, film 347, theatre 371, and literature 333; and the number of works of fine arts was 32.

Digital databases on contemporary art of the local character come into existence as well. One of them is the database on creators of culture in Toruń titled in Polish “Informator Twórców Kultury Torunia” (www.icimss.edu.pl/TKT/index.php). Prepared by the International Centre for Information Management Systems and Services (ICIMSS) and funded by the City Council of Toruń, it presents over 700 entries covering the years 1980-2013.

Another website dedicated to contemporary art is “artkontakt.pl” (Artkontakt.pl Home Page). It introduces outlines of hundreds of authors and makes it possible for the visitors of the service to create their private galleries. The website was started with the purpose of facilitating the possibility of presenting in one virtual place the collections of Polish galleries of contemporary art and is being developed continually. It presents collections of 17 regional galleries Zachęta, which came into existence in recent years within the National Programme for Culture “Signs of Time”, together with around 350 biographical entries of artists.

Works of Polish contemporary art can also be seen on the website of the Polish Culture Congress, held in 2009. In the bookmark titled “Icons of Culture” there is access to a few hundred works representing the output of Polish artists of the last two decades (Kongres Kultury Polskiej Home Page). The selection of works was made with the help of cooperating service curators. The website presents also the report on the museums in Poland with information about digitisation of their collections. The report notes that in the years 2005-2006 the database on the collections in Polish museums amounted to around 2 million records, and ultimately it is expected to reach the number of around 13 million records.
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