

ARTSBEAT

by Staś Kmieć

Life Even in Death: An American Dream of Alina Szapocznikow's Artwork Re-Lived at Broadway

By Olga Zapisek

Art unlike human beings is a timeless, ever-changing, living thing that surpasses its creators even in death, giving a newfound life to the soul and memory of the maker's hand. And occasionally, only after the artist is laid to rest, does the artwork begin its journey into the realm of worldly appreciation - an appreciation that while in life was simply absent.

Henry Darger, El Greco, and Vincent Van Gogh were all artists who were underappreciated in their time, but made an incomparable impact on the art world and society of today. Among such names stands Polish sculptor, Alina Szapocznikow, whose existentialist and provocative pieces are only now coming to an understanding amongst viewers.

In celebration of Szapocznikow's unique vision arrives an exhibition of her entire "My American Dream" portfolio at NYC's Broadway 1602 gallery entitled "Alina Szapocznikow: My American Dream," showcasing that dreams do come true, even if, after death.

According to Broadway's curator and art critic, Anke Kempkes, Szapocznikow reached for the slightly unconventional through her extended notion of sculpture in the beginning of the 1970s.

"She explored new art forms such as a conceptual sensibility in form of works, which she presented as text/ideas in projects curated by Pierre Restany," Kempkes said.

"She also, in the same context, extended her work in the proximity to Earth Art. She had a special background for this as she worked all her life in the imposing and tough landscapes of the quarries. Szapocznikow was a genuine

avant-garde pioneer artist who set (and had to set) the terms for her achievements herself."

Yet Szapocznikow's claim to fame is more than just her eagerness for

So what can one expect when walking into the exhibit?

According to Kempkes, a devotion of one's time, to fully appreciate the first time U.S. debut of Szapocznikow's archived documents, which to date had been stored at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Poland. Edited both visually and content wise, the documents have been transformed into the original works that Szapocznikow worked on in the early 1970s, such as her "My American Dream" and "Vela Luka" projects.

"Apart from these exhibits there is a group of sculptures from the families of the "Souvenirs" from



Souvenirs (Christian Boltanski, Twiggy) 1967-70

Photo by Adam Reich.

Copyright: The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanislawski.
Courtesy of Broadway 1602, NY, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne

exploring the unknown, and stumbling into artistry beyond her time, but also the fascination with the human body and the capacity to convey this through her own obscure visual language.

According to Polish web portal Culture.pl, Szapocznikow's inspiration and appeal for the body came through her own *mêlée* with a fatal illness, which led to her expressionistic contemplation on the various changes the human form goes through. Exploiting human sexuality and showcasing what was already there, the darkened and animalistic nature of man is part of what Szapocznikow wished to bring across in her art - a mirrored look of us.

"The fearless revelation of the vulnerability and sexual power of the female body pushing the boundaries of what sculpture can present and express, as well as keeping an existentialist notion up to date," Kempkes said in explanation of what the artist was trying to convey through her valued artwork. "A special form of dark existentialist post-surrealism meeting the joyful and more affirmative sensibility of Pop art - in that sense a perfect fusion of East and West at the time."

the "Fetysz" series, "Stele" (1968) of the group of the black polyurethane sculptures, and a work from the series of the "Tumeurs" - all works, which have not been shown in the US, represent how multi-dimensional, and radical her sculptural experiments were in the late 1960s to early 1970s," Kempkes said.

"Then we show "Kaprys" (1967). A life size illuminated sculpture, which has not been shown for a long time, and has a very impressive presence," she added.

As to not leave the viewers hanging in bewilderment and confusion, the gallery, in accompaniment to the work, provides an exhibition guide with introductions for the archival projects, and translations of the key texts, to help aid in the interpretation of the work.

According to Kempkes, the viewers of the exhibition have thus far been enthralled at the sight of the second display of Szapocznikow's artwork at the gallery in the past two years, seeing it as "very exciting and exceptional, like a small museum exhibition." Moreover, Kempkes has noted that people are overwhelmed and exceptionally happy to finally see these works displayed



Sein en chiffon vert (Fetysz II) 1970-71

Photo by Adam Reich. Copyright: The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanislawski
Courtesy of Broadway 1602, NY, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne

What did have a biographical impact was her experience in the Holocaust, but she managed to transcend this complex into an interesting and genuine post-traumatic artistic vocabulary."

"You see this influence most directly in the "Souvenirs" where she often put a photo of a Holocaust victim into the polyester, even next to photos of friends, lovers, and celebrities (e.g.: Sophia Loren, Monika Vitti, Twiggy), and self por-

traits," she added. "It could be argued that if you want to see these works in the context of Pop Art, and would apply Warhol's concept of the shock paintings, Szapocznikow created here her own form of political Pop Art."

Though Szapocznikow's influences and interpretations of her artwork can be argued and added onto endlessly, one thing remains stagnant and untouchable, her invaluable addition to contemporary art,

across the ocean.

But how does Kempkes herself see the artwork of an artist whose historical, nationalistic, and personal revelations reflect hauntingly in her sculptures?

"I see Szapocznikow as quite individual and not so much defined by national identity," she said.

"Her immigration to Paris was very important as well and all the works we see here, and in the first show, are from this time which is not by coincidence as her most radical new interpretation of sculpture happened after 1964. She began to experiment with polyester to overcome the traditionalism of sculpture, and began to execute the body casts, which are like ready-mades of the body. Also the proto-feminist iconography deepened in this time.

and her silent suggestion of looking at one's inner persona and actions as if looking at the outward nakedness of oneself through the eyes of another.

The exhibition can be viewed now through December 11, 2010 at Broadway 1602.

For gallery opening hours and more information please visit <http://www.broadway1602.com> or call 001-212-481-0362.