

The usefulness of art is the theme of this year's exhibition following the Maria Dokowicz Competition. The theme refers to fine arts and design arts, which are the main areas of artistic activity developed at the Poznań University of Arts (UAP). The theme introduces us to the discussion about the features of contemporary creative activities, revealing various points of view and ideas concerning usefulness. It presents creative activities as being useful for society and culture.

Useful does not always mean practical. Usefulness is a method of solving social problems, as well as of improving, optimizing and simplifying things. It also stimulates community thinking and coexistence. Usefulness activates perception and draws attention to useful and useless things often complementing the search in a valuable and inspiring way. It concentrates on universal values and gives creative solutions. Usefulness is not only a rush to achieve commercial successes and multiply egoistic attitudes. It is a conscious experiment that combines science, technology and art, and changes the way in which people function in the present-day world, where technical skills and craftsmanship are of course important, but original, advanced solutions and creative interpretation are of much more significance. Institutions impose certain rules on art, define its boundaries and establish image norms. Their non-observance often makes art invisible in the area of creative activity. *Everything that functions in a system as a unity receives this unity from the system itself* (Niklas Luhmann).¹ Every attempt at making a work of art popular is based on calculations and rankings used for benchmarking. Consequently, the potential individual features of a particular field of art are lost. Artistic activities may be conducive to the development of the market, but they

¹ Więcej o autopoiczności w *Pisma o sztuce i literaturze*, Niklas Luhmann, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2016 (my translation).

must meet relevant requirements. The same applies to scientific research. Funds are granted only for the projects whose results are measurable and can be applied in practice. Some studies are about making ground-breaking discoveries, but they are not necessarily cost effective and their results are not always relevant.²

In any art school, craftsmanship is the foundation of creation, but artistic activities focus primarily on the search for risky concepts leading to changes in the understanding of an object's function, man or the environment, and encourage the creation of new forms of representation.

It is only by acquiring the skills of creative thinking and by mastering craftsmanship that an artist can achieve excellent results.

Usefulness triggers open, creative activities where the author's features are often replaced with co-operation and universality. Frequently, however, their accessibility is limited by their individual characteristics that narrow the audience.

Useful activities serve certain goals. Emerging artefacts change or add something to reality. If they refer to the environment/everyday life, they usually play some social roles. There are no autonomous, pointless creative activities. Even art based on emotions and intuition has its useful therapeutic purpose or aims at expressing emotions, which can be best expressed by art.

The achievements of art in the twentieth century (the avant-garde, thought and presentation breakthroughs) have often made it difficult to distinguish art from life. Ordinary, everyday objects become works of art and vice versa, art enters other areas of life (social, scientific, political). Open criticism allows curatorial works of art, such as arrangements, descriptions of works and the

² *Gdyby Einstein żył w dzisiejszych czasach nie miałby szans na zdobycie dofinansowania* ... p. 170, in: *Utopia regulaminów. O technologii, tępcie i ukrytych rozkoszach biurokracji*, David Graeber, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2016, (my translation).

conceptualization of ideas to be a form of creative expression.

Usefulness can be transferred to other areas using methods, such as sampling or change of destination, while maintaining practical functions, or vice versa. The subject of the exhibition concerns activities relating to the problems of perception, conversion of ideas and the aesthetic analysis of images, essential for the organization of the practical structure. In such considerations, usefulness shows us the ways to organize an image in the context of fine arts and design.

Questions about usefulness refer to the function of art in terms of circumstances and needs. Jerzy Ludwiński points out that the change in the way we evaluate and look at art is subtle.

*Perhaps, we do not deal with art today. Simply because we missed the moment when it turned into something completely different, which we cannot name. However, it is certain that what we deal with today has more opportunities.*³

Applied art as a creative activity serves to democratize activity. It breaks the division between the creator, the work and the passive audience, and reduces isolation by losing individual characteristics. Creative and design practice is not just about widening reality, but, above all, it stimulates the senses through spatial, formal and semantic changes. It also improves our interpretation skills by encouraging us to discover multiple ideas and by familiarizing us with different ways of thinking. Introducing changes to art through repetition serves to confirm facts and to strengthen subjective viewpoints that depend on the context. Current

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Jerzy Ludwiński w *Sztuka w epoce postartystycznej i inne teksty*, Poznań: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Poznaniu, 2004, (my translation).

activities (Art 1: 1)⁴ focus even more intensely on mimesis. They are a distant voice repeating the images/tautologies of reality without transforming them. Objects are somehow appropriated from the real world, which makes them ontologically invisible. The creative copy of reality (Art 1: 1) is a unique thought, which cannot be prototyped because it concerns a single fact. It reduces the artificiality of the situation by being a fact. By changing its meaning, an ordinary object acquires the characteristics of a work of art and its usefulness is tested in a different imaginary structure of reality. It redirects the artist's message through a new broadcasting system and thus changes a viewer into a participant. In this way, parallel realities are created, helping to develop new, structurally more practical solutions. The authorship of the work is less important, the distance between the viewer and the creator is reduced - the artist often becomes a viewer and the viewer enters into a deep interaction with the work. Both temporal and spatial dependencies are irrelevant; neither the beginning nor the end is indicated. This kind of artistic activity liberates emancipatory power, because it is not subject to the market mechanisms of neoliberal capitalism. The disappearing autonomy of art results in the reduction of the comfortable buffer that gives the creator a 'shelter'. This buffer also marginalizes artistic activities by treating them as insignificant 'art for art's sake'. Taking responsibility for a work of art involves a risk of rejection or omission, which also enables deeper involvement. Usefulness is dealt with in various fields of art. If this value is exposed in a straightforward manner, its perception and interpretation depend on the context and the author's message. The viewer becomes a 'user' and stimulation through a work of art allows adopting

⁴ *W stronę leksykonu użytkownika*, Stephen Wright, Warszawa: Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana, 2015, (my translation).

different perspectives, searching for new opportunities and taking actions without definitional identification.

*What is emerging now cannot be defined and described by reference to what was happening when the field of art had a clearly defined and separated space among other areas of activity.*⁵

⁵ Jerzy Ludwiński, *Ibidem*, (my translation).