

PRESS RELEASE

The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw opens its new main exhibition space on the bank of the Vistula river with the exhibition entitled “The Beguiling Siren is Thy Crest”.

March 25th - June 18th

Address: Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie 22, Warsaw

Opening of the exhibition 25th of March, 12.00h

Free entry

MUZEUM

museum of modern art in warsaw

The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw opens in its new premises on the banks of the Vistula with an exhibition entitled “The Beguiling Siren is Thy Crest”. It delves into the cultural connotations of Warsaw’s symbol, and its universality in the context of creating a modern urban identity. Those visiting the newly opened pavilion can view historic materials – works of art and artefacts – as well as creations of modern artists inspired by the mythological siren. This exhibition, the first ever of this scale to discuss the siren, aims to portray and activate her potential as a symbol. It combines different takes on hybridity, national identity and mythology.

The relocation of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw to the banks of the Vistula, near the iconic Mermaid monument by Ludwika Nitschowa, presents an opportunity to take a closer look at this seemingly familiar hybrid. In recent years the city’s inhabitants have begun to rediscover the river and the Parliament declared 2017 the year of the Vistula. Boulevards, envisioned by XIX century writers, start appearing on its left bank, while a path through the wilderness runs along the right – something the city is rightly proud of. The Museum now focuses on the siren, fish-woman armed with sword and shield, a warrior woman, widely accepted symbol of Warsaw’s inhabitants.

A retelling of themes connected with the siren is an unconventional answer to the mounting crisis of a language detached from reality, as well as the appropriation, reduction and contortion of symbols themselves. Thus the Museum – an institution of modern art – reaches into deeper layers of culture, analysing a seemingly familiar figure. The exhibition consists of nearly 150 pieces by artists both domestic and foreign, historic objects and a selection of documents and manuscripts concerning Warsaw’s coat of arms. The collected iconographic material portrays the symbol’s rich history, from antiquity to modern times.

The title of the exhibition is a quote from a poem by Cyprian Kamil Norwid (one of the great Polish romantic poets), who addresses Warsaw by means of a personal invocation (“capital of my youth...”) and formulates a reminder that the mythological siren was originally a dangerous hybrid of a human and animal (specifically a bird with a woman’s head), that lured sailors to their doom. The poet calls upon the origins of Warsaw’s coat of arms to explain his multifaceted relationship with the city. This quote proved deeply inspiring to the exhibition’s creators.

Depictions of the siren have changed so often over the centuries, that the one thing they all have in common seems to be her dualistic, hybrid nature: she is both human and animal. Appearing on Warsaw’s medieval coat of arms is – surprisingly – a half-man, half-dragon figure. The image of the fish-woman became prevalent as late as the beginning of the 18th century. The exhibition focuses on this diversity of forms. The birdlike siren is depicted (among others) in Pablo Picasso sketches, the collages of Anglo-American surrealist

Penny Slinger or the paintings of Dorota Jurczak. Sirens are accompanied by other hybrids, eagerly depicted in the second half of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century, in the Symbolism period, in the works of Jacek Malczewski, Waclaw Szymanowski, Félicien Rops. Reflected in their art is a crisis of the bourgeoisie and the very rules of language. Depicting hybrid forms fulfils eccentric fantasies, symbolically breaking the suffocating norms of society. The avant-garde movements of the 20th century find in the Siren their own symbol of emancipated sensuality. This is evident in the works of surrealist Dorothea Tanning, Leonor Fini, and Louise Bourgeois.

The motif of the siren activates queer themes as well, for instance in Wolfgang Tillmans famous photograph "Lutz, Alex, Suzanne & Christoph on the Beach" or the sculpture "Him" (by Danish duet Elmgreen & Dragset), which depicts the Copenhagen Little Mermaid as a man. Selected works reflect on the economic crisis, as well as Anthropocene – a new epoch in Earth's history, shaped by man (Liz Craft and her "Spinster" or Jerzy Szumczyk's outdoor installation). Anne Uddenberg installations present the motif of the siren in a different, modern light of perfecting the human condition and nature through technology (transhumanism). Aleksandra Waliszewska's drawings, on the other hand, provide a glimpse into dark phantasies dwelling under the skin of a city by the river. Although this artist draws inspiration from historic works of art, she explores very modern fears of the unknown and of the city: a system complex enough to birth its own mythologies. This many of Waliszewska's drawings of sirens were never on display before. The accompanying program will also feature Agnieszka Smoczyńska's film "The Lure" – an 80s-stylized tale of two Vistula-dwelling sirens, awarded at Sundance festival 2016. The siren must be heard – that's why the whole exhibition is enveloped in the voice of Juliana Snapper, an American artist, who sings underwater. Her submerged opera was performed in Warsaw, at the Palace of Culture's swimming pool, in 2010. The Mermaid of Warsaw is a symbol that doesn't bind forcefully, but organises the community while allowing it to remain diverse.

The exhibition features the works of following artists:

Korakrit Arunanondchai, Evelyne Axell, Alex Baczyński, Zdzisław Beksiński, Louise Bourgeois, Eugène Brands, Agnieszka Brzeżańska, Bernard Buffet, Claude Cahun, Liz Craft, Edith Dekyndt, Christian Dietrich, Leo Dohmen, Drexycia i Abdul Qadim Haqq, Elmgreen & Dragset, Leonor Fini, Ellen Gallagher, Malarz Goltyr, Justyna Górowska, Zdzisław Jasiński, Dorota Jurczak, Ewa Juszkiewicz, Birgit Jürgenssen, Tobias Kaspar, Marek Kijewski, Aldona Kopkiewicz i Mateusz Kula, Łukasz Korolkiewicz, Gina Litherland, Jacek Malczewski, Witek Orski, Sylvia Palacios Whitman, Pablo Picasso, Krzysztof Pijarski, Aleka Polis, Agnieszka Polska, Karol Radziszewski, Joanna Rajkowska, Carol Rama, Erna Rosenstein, Tejal Shah, Franciszek Siedlecki, Tomasz Sikorski, Penny Slinger, Juliana Snapper, Franz von Stuck, project „Warsaw's Sirens" (Jacek Łagowski, Danuta Matloch, Katarzyna Opara), Alina Szapocznikow, Stanisław Szukalski, Jerzy Bogdan Szumczyk, Waclaw Szymanowski, Dorothea Tanning, Wolfgang Tillmans, Tunga, Anna Uddenberg, Aleksandra Waliszewska, Wojciech Wilczyk, Hannah Wilke, Ming Wong, Marcelo Zammenhoff, Anna Zaradny, Artur Żmijewski.

Colophon of the exhibition:

The exhibition "The Beguiling Siren is Thy Crest" was prepared by the curatorial team consisting of Sebastian Cichocki, Marta Dziewańska, Tomasz Fudala, Robert Jarosz, Magdalena Lipska, Joanna Mytkowska, Paweł Nowożycki, Łukasz Ronduda, Natalia Sielewicz..

Production: Katarzyna Białach, Michał Ziętek;

Exhibition projekt: Marcin Kwietowicz;

Graphic design: Paweł Olszczyński;

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Catalogue design: postNoviki

Catalogue's editor: Kacha Szaniawska

Collaboration: Kuba Antosz, Kalina Cukrowska, Zofia Czartoryska, Mateusz Maleszewski, Szymon Maliborski, Iga Winczakiewicz.

Practical information: the exhibition will be accompanied by: an educational offer, special events' schedule, performances, catalogue.

Siren on the Web: a virtual exhibition featuring not only records of the exhibits, but also their detailed descriptions; a guide of the exhibition for handheld devices. Available on 24th of March 2017.
www.syrena.artmuseum.pl

Directions: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, by the Vistula river, "Museum at the Vistula" in short, is located at Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie 22 st., behind the University of Warsaw Library, at Bohdan Grzymała-Siedlecki's Blvd by the Vistula; nearest subway station: Centrum Nauki Kopernik (Copernicus Science Centre). Commute by bus (lines): 185, 162, 105, 118; line 127 from the Central train station.

Museum opening hours: Tuesday-Thursday 12:00-20:00, long Fridays by the Vistula till 22:00, Saturday 11-20.00, Sunday 11:00-18:00. Closed on Mondays. The opening weekend hours are Sat. 25th of March 12.00-22.00, Sunday 26th of March 11.00-18.00 (subject to change)

„Museum on the Vistula” -the temporary exhibition pavilion by the Vistula river is designed by Austrian architect Adolf Krischanitz. The Museum pavilion is lent to the Museum free of charge by Vienna's Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation, founded in 2002 by Francesca von Habsburg. The foundation is dedicated to the popularization of experimental art and architecture.

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