

## Rainbows Over Poland - September 1980

Submitted by root on Tue, 01/10/2012 - 14:31

The visit to Poland resulted from a visit by Andrzej Kostolowski (art historian and critic) with two performance artists to the Blackie in 1979. The invitation which came in July in 1980 was for Judy Bates (myself) to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> Plener Miastko entitled 'Little Activities in Art' to be held on 1<sup>st</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> September 1980 in Swieszyno.

The Polish Pleners of that time were forums for artists from Poland and the Soviet bloc countries, plus a few from European countries. Large factories and companies had their own holiday camps out in the country for their workers to use, and the Komisarz Pleneru was allowed to make use of such camps for the Pleners. Only artists were invited. Apparently, there was never any interaction with the public.

The Plener Miastko 80 was expecting many young artists from Poland as well as guests from Britain (two of us), Yugoslavia, Hungary and Holland. People would be presenting their work *"in the field of performance, installation, painting, and other forms of art making. At the same time we expect critics and art theoreticians will discuss some issues connected with 'little activities in art'."*

The plan was that I would attend the Plener for one week, leaving Liverpool early on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> September. I arrived at the Miastko camp at 10.30pm on the 12<sup>th</sup>, to be greeted by Andrzej with the news that "because of the political situation" the Plener would finish that Sunday, two days later. Jerzy Beres, one of the two artists who had visited the Blackie with Andrzej, (as Angela Carter writes, *"one of the most exciting artists working in the field of performance art in Poland, perhaps in the whole of eastern Europe at the moment..."*) had presented a performance that day during which he had burned the Polish flag. The local mayor was very nervous and had insisted on closing down the Plener. In any case, because of the political situation in Poland at the time - especially of course in the Gdansk shipyards - very few artists had even turned up for the Plener.

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September. The morning begins with a meditation and some sitar playing on the lake. This was followed by a poetry reading.

Jerzy's wife, Maria Pininska-Berès, showed slides of her *Rose & White* work, and Tomas presented the work of his five strong group who were exploring the nature of creativity as it occurred within the closed circle of the five. He refused - even briefly - to describe any of their works.

I then showed the 3 films I had taken with me: 'Education For All', 'Yours for the Taking', and 'On the Eighth Day'. Andrzej translated while I explained what was happening in the film. The films were greeted with great delight and enthusiasm, and there was much animated discussion, particularly about Education for All - would it work in Poland? How could they make it happen?

Taduesz then performed an action' up at the crossroads about context and conditions - the contexts in which artists find themselves whilst being bound up in their own individual, unchangeable (to him), conditions.

Later that evening, a discussion on the nature of art : what is the nature of the current form of art - after

Conceptual Art, what comes then? Minimalism? Nihilistic Art? Anarchistic Art?... I wrote in my diary "They are trying to discover what they should do in the current political upheavals, how they should get together - this is the main reason for the lengthy discussions that have gone on today."

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September - Eva woke everyone with a tirade in Polish: an invitation to attend a poetry reading in the woods. There was also to be a duel on the top road..

After lunch, plans were made for me for the rest of the week: we worked out a schedule and amended my leaflets by hand, but there were many problems as local authorities were very wary, now that word had got out of Jerzy's flag-burning.

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September - lots of travelling and a visit to the Krynchi Plener - a gathering of mainly leather-working artists, plus Magda, the art critic from the daily review *Kultura*. Magda and I led a discussion on the Polish Artists' Union and the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Wednesday and Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September - Gdansk, town of the shipyard strikes - walking down the main street of the mediaeval town-centre - a banner was slung across the street. It read *Tęcze nad Polską ...* and my name. It had been arranged for me to show the Blackie films again and hold the *Rainbows Over Poland* event - but in public this time.

We set up in the University Cultural Centre - the room was full, mainly young students, but others too. I showed the films, Andrzej translated again; people asked many questions. Then outside on the covered pavement, we set up tables with Pentel felt-tip coloured pens (new to Poland), paper, and books of examples of Blackie rainbow thoughts. University students from the film show came out and joined us, but many passers by stopped, asked questions, then sat down and drew for us. There were some of the usual cheerful rainbow ideas, but the Polish rainbows of Gdansk were mostly dark, depressing, and fiercely rebellious.

Judy Bates (now Gough)

Nov 2011

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