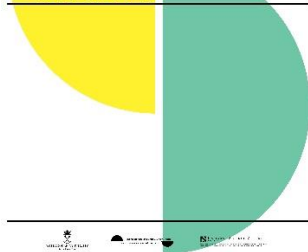


**(UN)ACCIDENTAL
TOURISTS:
POLISH LITERATURE
AND VISUAL CULTURE
IN SOUTH AFRICA IN
THE 20TH AND 21ST
CENTURIES**



Call for papers

TOWARDS A HORIZONTAL ART HISTORY: POLISH AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN VISUAL CULTURE AND SOUTH AFRICAN ARTS

Research seminar

22 November 2024

Centre for Transnational Literary Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow

Research seminar organised within the framework of the research project
“(Un)accidental Tourists: Polish Literature and Visual Culture in South Africa in the 20th and 21st Centuries” funded by the
National Science Centre

While it is possible to write a history of “encounters” and cross-pollination between Polish and Central European literature and South African literary production in the 20th and 21st centuries, it seems that the same cannot be achieved with regard to the visual arts. The latter appear to remain in a domain where neither creative dialogue between Polish and South African art nor any kind of network between Central European and South African artists has been established and effectively sustained. The reasons for this state of affairs are manifold and include: an antagonistic relationship between the apartheid-governed Republic of South Africa and the communist/state-socialist countries of the “Second World”, which incapacitated both institutional, as well as personal forms of communication; a largely peripheral status of Central European and South African art vis-à-vis the major centres of modern art; inhabiting different art temporalities which generated heterogenous artistic fields – the kinds that developed their own taxonomies, hierarchies, frameworks, and aims. Perhaps the most apt illustration of the mutual disinterestedness of both parties regarding each other’s artistic production in the second half of the 20th century can be found in the Cape Town-based Iziko South African National Gallery, one of whose rooms houses a curious painting of what appears to be a forced exile of the Poles from the burning city of Tarnopol attributed to one Wawrzyniec Zupnik. However, this image does not testify to any form of dialogue between Polish and South African art and their respective histories. On the contrary, mistakenly titled, undated, showcasing a scene which holds no meaning for the gallery’s South African viewers, and created by an unknown artist (both to South African and Polish art historians), the painting with its confusing “presence” in the Iziko South African National Gallery implies a “non-history” of creative encounters and cultural transfer between Poland and South Africa in the field of the visual arts. Yet, it also alludes to the painting’s (currently dormant) role in unearthing the shared “potential history” of Polish and South African art.

Is it possible to identify more manifestations of such a “potential” Polish-South African art history – despite the fact that they might be hardly discernible, often concealed in depleted archival resources or simply unacknowledged in official and personal repositories? What kind of history would that be? Will it always be a history of unrealised possibilities or, on the contrary, a history that could be unearthed and documented despite being patchy, often one-directional, full of gaps and omissions, and well-hidden in various personal and institutional archives? Do other Central European countries have a similar history (or histories) of “encounters” with South African visual culture? How is it different from/similar to their encounters with art from other countries of the Global South? Are the core ideas of Piotr Piotrowski’s influential theory of “horizontal art history” based on an anti-vertical, de-centred, and non-binary model of cultural exchange between various “margins” or “peripheries” and their respective art histories the best instrument to describe the relationship between Polish and Central Europe visual culture and South African arts?

We invite proposals that will attempt to answer the above questions and address the issue of cultural transfers in the field of visual arts between Poland, Central Europe and South Africa. Suggested themes include but are not limited to:

- Polish-South African / Central European-South African horizontal art history
- potential vs. actual art history
- South African art in Polish and Central European collections / Polish and Central European art in South African collections
- trajectories of cultural transfers between Poland, Central Europe and South Africa
- art and visual culture in the times of the Cold War / apartheid
- international art centres and new artistic geographies
- the art of the margins / peripheries and their encounters
- decolonisation of Polish/Central European art history and collections
- representation of Central Europe in South African visual culture / representation of South Africa in Central European visual culture
- Central Europe and South African visual imaginary
- transgenerational memory of Central Europe in South African arts
- Litvak visual heritage in South Africa
- reception of Central European visual culture in South Africa
- transnational affinities and solidarities
- South African and Central European “comradeship”
- South African artists in Central Europe / Central European artists in South Africa.

Proposals for 20-minute presentations, consisting of a brief biographical note (including academic title and institutional affiliation) and a 150-word abstract, should be sent to robert.kusek@uj.edu.pl by **30 September 2024**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 7 October 2024.

Organisers:

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RESEARCH CENTRE FOR TRANSNATIONAL LITERARY STUDIES

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Upcoming research seminars:

2025 (Un)Accidental Tourists: South African Writers and the Poles