

Małgorzata Stępnik

Title: *Vox populi* - politicians as art critics.

Topic addressed : the concept and history of populism, particularly in the cultural field

Statement: The main aim of this paper is to analyze and compare the "critical" statements of Polish politicians, accompanying the events of the memorable March 1968 (among others, politicians responsible for the censorship of Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady* directed by Kazimierz Dejmek), and today's political discourse over art in Poland - widely present in both traditional and social media, and highly polarized along partly lines.

Abstract:

There is some truth in the famous phrase by Joseph Beuys: "Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler" ("Every human is an artist"). And, everyone may feel a need to formulate "aesthetic" judgments over art, to become an "art critic" for a while... Nevertheless, when a politician feels such a "calling", it may bring fatal consequences to the artworld. A politician, whose narrative is always calculated to achieve a clearly defined propaganda goal, not infrequently takes on a role of a tribune (*tribunus plebis*) - either designing an aesthetics of the future (connected to utopian eschatologies of all sorts), or nostalgically advocating for a return to the old, presumably - better times and their (historical) art forms. An important aspect here is the way in which politicians - playing "art critics" - redefine the notion of *realism*: from socialism as proper and comprehensible for "the masses", as an antithesis to the "bourgeois formalism", to realistic aesthetics propagated by today's right-wing populists.

The main aim of this paper is to analyze and compare the "critical" statements of Polish politicians, accompanying the events of the memorable March 1968 (among others, politicians responsible for the censorship of Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady* directed by Kazimierz Dejmek), and today's political discourse over art in Poland - widely present in both traditional and social media, and highly polarized along partly lines. Despite the contrasting ideological positions, however, the tone of these statements sometimes becomes quite convergent. Moreover, the additional aim of this paper is to point to the possible strategies applied by artists under oppression, e.g. "inverting the terms of oppressive discourse" - the strategy widely described and conceptualized by Manuel Castells.

Biography:

Małgorzata Stępnik – PhD Hab. in Philosophy; PhD in Sociology; an assistant professor at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, a lecturer in aesthetics and sociology of art. She is a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), the Polish Institute of World Art Studies and the Nordic Association for Art Historians. She is an author of two monographs and numerous articles dedicated to modern and postmodern aesthetics and its ideological/political contexts.