

The materialization of this paper is a collaboration across time, bodies, continents, species, and languages between Sarah Beth Woods, Marta Kowalewska, and Małgorzata Markiewicz. Woods and Markiewicz are visual artists practicing in the expanded field of sculpture and textiles, as well as professors in visual art departments. Woods is a Guest Lecturer in the Art Department at Wheaton College, IL and Markiewicz is an Assistant Professor at Media Art Institute at Pedagogical University of Cracow. Kowalewska is an art historian, academic teacher, writer, and Chief Curator for the Central Museum of Textile, Łódź, Poland.

I had the pleasure of meeting Marta Kowalewska during the summer of 2021 in Krakow, Poland, I was visiting the country for two distinct purposes; to visit my Great-Grandparent's homeland, previously West Pomerania, Prussia, a great source of pride to the maternal side of my family known as Vorpommern. My Grandmother kept close ties with our family in Berlin, and without these important family connections much of our history would have been lost. This history informs my current, socially engaged research project, *Land by the Sea*, leading to many questions about the historical process of Americanization. My second reason for visiting Poland was to visit Małgorzata Markiewicz, the artist whose work, *Medusa*, I had exhibited July 15- Oct.31, 2021 at Triangle, my project space located on the outskirts of Chicago, in the Riverside Landscape Architecture District, in Riverside, IL, a small village steeped in the notoriety of Frederick Law Olmsted and suburban nostalgia.

Krakow is beautiful, it has remained unscathed after many world wars. It feels like an ancient city, the Jewish Quarter lonely and exploited for the enjoyment of tourists. My stay in Krakow was short, and I was looking to head back north to Warsaw. Kowalewska graciously offered me a ride, under the precursor that I was not bothered by her large, elderly Polish Greyhound; exhausted, yet regal and poised, like an ancient Egyptian statue, occupying most of the back seat of her newer model Honda. It rained heavily for most of the day and into the evening. When we were not on back roads, traveling slowly through idyllic, pastoral villages, we were on the highway. Large portions of the sound barriers looked to be constructed of glass or clear plastic and in truly Polish fashion, the windows in these barriers were affixed with large vinyl stickers in the shape of a bird, as to ward off any potential collisions. Polish Culture understands the inherent value of nature and thoughtful interspecies exchange.

The following day Kowalewska picked me up from the Communist-era high rise where I had been staying in Warsaw, and gave me a tour of the Central Museum of Textile in Łódź (pronounced Woot-ch.) The English translation of Łódź means boat, and the city is known as a prewar textile-manufacturing hub. Markiewicz was one of the guest co-curators for the exhibition *Open*

*Departments/Closed Departments (2020-2021)*, and I was able to see *Medusa* in all her hand-made splendor, constructed from green, black, white, and grey sheep wool, as well as linen, hemp, and wool yarn that was hand-dyed at the Central Museum of Textiles. Basia Śliwińska, co-curator and author of the text written for the *Medusa* exhibition at Triangle, Riverside, IL writes, “Slowly, persistently, intentionally, from March 15, 2020 and over the seven months of the Covid-19 health emergency, Medusa’s crocheted body emerged, spreading with its fifteen meters long tentacles into the space, first Markiewicz’s home in Kraków, Poland, and then into her studio. Markiewicz—similarly to Penelope waiting for her husband, Odysseus, to return, and by day, weaving a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, which she unraveled by night—created not a cloth but her-story narrativized by the motion of her hands and released into versatile private and public spaces. She took time to interlock carefully selected yarn in a process of slow labor at a steady pace. Time was passing yet standing still as the making was sometimes disrupted by the necessity to unravel the crochet stitch and repeat the process, imbuing the emerging Medusa’s body with the circumstances of its creation. Markiewicz’s Medusa enacts Donna Haraway’s ‘tentacular thinking,’ mutually beneficial relationships and symbiotic solidarity across species and spaces, insisting on responsibility and response-ability to all living bodies. Her masked face allows for any woman, every woman, to become Medusa. Masks are often strategic devices in activist artistic and guerrilla groups such as Guerilla Girls or Pussy Riot, they amplify wearer’s anonymity and articulate metaphorical invisible positions and silencing in society. They also enable the collective subject to emerge via a multitude in solidarity and cultivate responsibility and response-ability. Medusa becomes a plural body, limitless and moving away from centralized patriarchal narratives.” Śliwińska goes on to quote Haraway and the ways in which “tentacular arachnid create interlaced trails,” Medusa is physically and conceptually connected to all living things, the embodied concept of Haraway’s ‘Chthulucene: *becoming-with*’, evidenced in Markiewicz’s accompanying film where she walks through the grass and forest, her body constructed from natural fibers: wool, hemp, and linen. Śliwińska (2021); Haraway (2016)



Małgorzata Markiewicz, *Medusa*, 2020. 10' x 15' Digital print on fabric.

Markiewicz's most recent work, *Pimoa*, is the collaborative knitting and crocheting of a web-like form, being created remotely with Polish weavers who were solicited through a Facebook page called 'The Visible Hand,' established during the pandemic to provide work for stay-at-home mothers and elderly women, or *Pajeczyc Grandmothers*, an endearing term related to the kinds of crafts they produce. There are several different types of webs and nets at play here, through the structure of the artwork, the internet, and the connectedness of communal making.

*Pimoa*, like much of Markiewicz's work is inspired by two historically important Polish textile artists, Eleonora Plutyńska, and her internationally renowned student, Magdalena Abakanowicz. Plutyńska is highly regarded for bringing the ancient Polish double-warp technique into the vernacular and onto artist's looms, with a contemporary element added, using embedded cultural meaning and knowledge in unparalleled and revolutionary ways. "Plutyńska searched for and found peasant weavers who were familiar with the ancient weaving technique, and employed them to teach young generations, also at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw."



Małgorzata Markiewicz, *Pimoa*, 2021. Collaborative crocheted and knitted wool

Plutyńska bridged the gap between folk artists and young artists studying at the academy. Kowalewska (2018) “She cherished a strong belief that folk culture is truly fundamental, infused with genuine values, and consequently enduring enough to withstand turbulences both in arts and even on the political and social scene. Frackiewicz (1998) “She did not limit herself to the expertise and experience she gained at the School; she went much further, looking for non-academic sources of knowledge, seeking beauty in nature and in ever-green folk culture. Frackiewicz (1998)



Professor Eleonora Plutyńska (second from left) with weavers in Wasilówka in Podlasie Region, Poland. Beginning of 1960s. Photo: Irena Jarońska. Archives of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

Much of Plutyńska's work brought her to remote villages in North-Eastern Poland, one being the region of Podlasie, to study woolen Janów rugs. Kowalewska (2018) This rich cultural region borders current day Russia, Lithuania, and Belarus, strongly influenced by the presence of Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, and Tatars. The tight-knit communities of folk weavers in the Podlasie region embed their well preserved, multicultural folklore into the patterns of Janów rugs, often referencing the last remaining parts of the primeval Białowieża Forest, sharing stories that illuminate the forests as autonomous, living, breathing beings.

Eleonora Plutyńska's most widely received student was the Polish sculptor and textile artist Magdalena Abakanowicz, who has been highly influential to Małgorzata Markiewicz's textile-based work. Abakanowicz was widely recognized for her "Abakans," art critic Michael Brenson writes, "Like all of Abakanowicz's cycles, the 'Abakans' lean outward, away from what they might appear to represent, into psychology and history toward fundamental links

between human beings and nature that are always waiting to be recognized and explored by the imagination. Brenson, (1995)

Important, multicultural legacies and values are made visible through Eleonora Plutyńska's research, textiles, and teaching, Małgorzata Markiewicz's processes and artworks, Marta Kowalewska's curation and writing, and Magdalena Abakanowicz's textiles and sculptures. Through their works we see a beautiful cultural lineage at work, highlighting inherently Polish cultural values found in beauty, nature, connection, and acts of reciprocity, legacies that have helped shape the trajectories of textiles and fiber art within global, contemporary, and post-modern art worlds and beyond.

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