The "Abakans" and the feminist revolution

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In March of 2007, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles hosted an exhibition titled *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, which was described as "the first comprehensive, historical exhibition to examine the international foundations and legacy of feminist art, [that] focuses on the crucial period 1965-80, during which the majority of feminist activism and artmaking occurred internationally".[1] One of the intentions of the curator, Connie Butler, was to shatter the canon of feminist art, comprising almost exclusively American artists, by including "women of other geographies, formal approaches, sociopolitical alliances, and critical and theoretical positions".[2] Among the 120 female artists invited to the exhibition was Magdalena Abakanowicz. Shown was her *Abakan Red* (1969), a work from a series of large pieces of woven sisal made in the late 60's/early 70's and named *Abakans* after the artist.

Abakanowicz was an artist who never belonged to the feminist art movement. Her inclusion in this exhibition devoted to the ties between art and feminism was a result of, as can be surmised from the construction of the exhibition, as well as from remarks appearing in the publications accompanying it, certain feminist aspects detected in her *Abakan* works. These aspects were highly varied. For one, it was acknowledged that Abakanowicz belonged to a group of female artists "working from vastly different cultural referents [that] have been empowered by ideas of earth, mother, and Amazon and inspired by their iconography".[3] Her *Abakan*

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1 *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, curator: Connie Butler, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Mar.-Jul. 2007 (The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, Sept.-Dec. 2007; P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, Feb.-May 2008; Vancouver Art Gallery, Oct. 2008-Jan. 2009). *About the Exhibition*, 2007. <http://www.moca.org/wack/?cat=2>

2 Cornelia Butler, "Art And Feminism. An Ideology of Shifting Criteria", in: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Cornelia Butler & Lisa Gabrielle Mark (ed.), Los Angeles - Cambridge, Mass. 2007, 16.

3 The exhibition was not organised chronologically but thematically and divided into sections titled: Goddess, Gender Performance, Pattern and Assemblage, Body Trauma, Taped and Measured, Autophotography, Making Art History, Speaking in Public, Silence and

Fig. 1: Magdalena Abakanowicz, "Red Abakan", 1969, at "Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution" exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007, © MoCA LA.

Red, which – as stated in the exhibition guide – "confronts the viewer with its mass and raw presence", was placed in a thematic group of works presented under the title "Goddess".[4] Secondly, a strong relation between the woven form of the works and the female body was identified. We read in the catalogue: "The Abakans' tactility and scale suggest a relationship to the human body, while the form of 'Abakan Red' (1969), a red circle roughly thirteen feet in diameter featuring a central vertical split that reveals protruding folds, has been compared to that of a vagina".[5] Thirdly, it was finally acknowledged that these works have much in common with the works of Abakanowicz's contemporaries of the post-minimalist movement – Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, and Eva Hesse – also present in the exhibition.[6]

The inclusion of *Abakan Red* in this exhibition devoted to the connections between art and feminism and its inscription in different interpretational contexts can surely revive discussions on the subject of the Abakans, or perhaps even on Magdalena Abakanowicz's body of work.

Noise, Female Sensibility, Abstraction, Gendered Space, Collective Impulse, Social Sculpture, Knowledge as Power, Body as Medium, Labor, Family Story.

4 *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution gallery guide.* <http://www.moca.org/wack/?p=193>

5 Jenni Sorkin, "Magdalena Abakanowicz", in: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, 209.

6 "The Abakans resonate with the organic and sensual works of contemporaries such as Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, and Eva Hesse". Sorkin, "Magdalena Abakanowicz", 209.

However, it is worthwhile to point out that the present re-contextualisation of the Abakans is carried out at the expense of a de-contextualisation. By this I mean that the context in which the Abakans functioned during the period in question (the years 1965-1980, which the exhibition covers), i.e. the fiber-art movement, is omitted entirely. Although the beginning of a short text on Abakanowicz appearing in the WACK! exhibition catalogue cites her as "leading figure in the international fiber-art movement", this fact was later ignored.[7] Instead, a small yet symptomatic error appeared – the text's author claims that the Gold Medal Abakanowicz won at the 1965 São Paulo Art Biennial "solidified Abakanowicz's international reputation as *a sculptor*". [my emphasis – A.J.][8] After showing *Desdemona* – a truly innovative textile – at the biennial, Abakanowicz was awarded the prize in the category of applied arts partly on account of the type of material used, but also due to its closeness to what was prevalent in the field of art textiles at the time.[9] This rather cemented her position as an avant-garde weaver and not as a sculptor.

The fact that Abakanowicz's involvement in the fiber art movement, as opposed to sculpture, is not pursued, can be explained by taking on the present-day point of view, in which the hierarchy of these two fields has been undermined, if not altogether eliminated, largely thanks to feminist artists who actively opposed it in the 70's. It also seems that, generally, in the literature on the subject of art, the relation between high and low, i.e. art and craft respectively, enjoys rather limited interest. This is especially true with respect to weaving, which, in the realm of contemporary art, is even overshadowed by crochet and embroidery. This undermines our ability to discover new and interesting phenomena which remain unexamined. Here, this concerns the tensions appearing in the art world around the year 1970; tensions between fiber art and high art, which were crucial to Abakanowicz but completely ignored in the narrative initiated at the WACK! exhibition. Yet, this tension has nevertheless been present below the surface even in the proposed comparisons of the Abakans with the then-emerging works of the likes of Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, and Eva Hesse.

The comparison of Abakanowicz to Bourgeois, Hesse and Benglis is interesting in itself, yet it is worth keeping in mind that a Polish artist living in Warsaw was being compared to artists living and working in New York (Benglis, however, being the only American; Bourgeois being French and Hesse German). These three artists worked in related spheres. They

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7 Sorkin, "Magdalena Abakanowicz", 209.

8 Sorkin, "Magdalena Abakanowicz", 209.

9 In the *fine arts* category, Poland was represented by, among others, Erna Rosenstein, Władysław Hasior and Jerzy Tchórzewski.

were all invited to participate in the same exhibitions. For the sake of example, we can recall that Bourgeois and Hesse met at Lucy Lippard's exceptionally significant exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* (Fischbach Gallery, 1966) and later at another exhibition organised by the same curator, *Soft and Apparently Soft Sculpture* (American Federation of Arts, 1968). Hesse and Benglis both appeared at the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition put on by Marcia Tucker and James Monte at the Whitney Museum in 1969. I mention these three particular exhibitions because they were the key to defining that which is now termed post-minimalism. They displayed works which broke down the rigors of minimal art – by the use of soft materials, amorphous shapes, and references to the body, expression and an openness to metaphoric interpretation. All of these are characteristics which can be seen in the Abakans. Yet, Abakanowicz was not invited to any of the above mentioned exhibitions. She was showing her Abakans in New York at the time, but at *Wall Hangings*, an exhibition organised in 1969 at the Museum of Modern Art by Mildred Constantine, curator of architecture and design, and the textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen. The exhibition showcased pieces by artists working in the field of fiber art who were introducing revolutionary changes into the medium and had ambitions (as did the curators) to push their work into the realm of "high art".

One thing that is especially interesting to the context of this article is the fact that the only review of the *Wall Hangings* exhibition was written by Louise Bourgeois; and it wasn't favourable.[10] The review's most revealing sentence, "The pieces in the show rarely liberate themselves from decoration…", indicates the author's exceptionally strong conviction as to art and decoration being at odds. This is further explained later in the review: "A painting or a sculpture makes great demand on the onlooker at the same time that it is independent of him. These weaves, delightful as they are, seem more engaging and less demanding. If they must be classified, they would fall somewhere between fine and applied art".[11] This review clearly demonstrates that these artists, whom we today place side by side, functioned on opposite sides of the clearly defined boundary between high art and textile/fiber art in the late 60's.

Elissa Auther writes in her highly interesting book *String Felt Thread. The Hierarchy of Art And Craft in American Art* about three groups of artists working in the late 60's/early 70's who traversed or aimed to traverse this boundary.[12] She analyses American art, but the same could be said about the European art scene. The first group were the artists classified as fiber

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10 Louise Bourgeois, "The Fabric of Construction", *Craft Horizons,* March 1969, 31-35.

11 Louise Bourgeois, "The Fabric of Construction", 33.

12 Elissa Auther, *String Felt Thread. The Hierarchy of Art And Craft in American Art*, Minneapolis-London 2010.

artists – experimenting with materials, liberating themselves from the loom and creating three-dimensional works by which they hoped to distinguish themselves from craft. The second group were artists falling under process or post-minimalist art, who, seeking new materials so as to push the frontiers of sculpture, often reached for resources used by fiber artists, valuing, among other things, their un-artisticness. The third group were feminist artists, who politicised the opposition between high and applied art and linked it to the oppression of women and of everything considered feminine (as will be discussed later). Abakanowicz belonged to the first group, while Bourgeois and Hesse, with whom she is compared, belonged to the second group. As Auther writes, these groups "occupied different locations within the art world's complex network of power relations governed, in part, by the application of the term craft in this period".[13] In this context, Bourgeois's review of the *Wall Hangings* exhibition, in which Abakanowicz took part, is wholly understandable. It also becomes clear that their respective positions in the art world were vastly dissimilar.

Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930) reportedly dreamed of studying sculpture but was not accepted in the studio she had chosen.[14] She took up weaving, and in 1949 began her studies in Sopot. After one year in Sopot she transferred to Warsaw's Academy of Fine Arts, where she studied in textile studios: Anna Śledziewska's Jacquard studio, Maria Skoczylas-Urbanowicz's textile printing studio, and Eleonor Plutyńska's hand weaving studio. Abakanowicz achieved her diploma in Plutyńska's studio and in the painting studio of Marek Włodarski in 1954. After completing her studies, the artist worked for roughly one year at the "Milanówek" Central Natural Silk Plant – a silk products factory – where she designed neckties, among other things. She also worked with the "Ład" Interior Design Co-operative, for which she designed textiles. At this time she started producing her large-format decorative *panneaux* on canvas – vibrant with colour, they depicted an imaginary world filled with fantastic flora and fauna.

Towards the end of the 1950's, Abakanowicz met some avant-garde artists from the circle of Henryk Stażewski and Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, with whom (especially the latter) she became friends. From that point on she would be a frequent visitor to the flat of Stażewski and Łunkiewicz (and her husband Jan Rogoyski), which in those days functioned as a salon of sorts. It was a place of meetings, discussions and artistic interventions, with Stażewski and Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska constituting a spe-

13 Elissa Auther, *String Felt Thread*, xxi.

14 Joanna Inglot, *The figurative sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: bodies, environments, and myths*, Berkeley CA 2004, 24.

cific link to the pre-war avant-garde (both were born in 1894; Stażewski – one of the leading figures in Polish constructivism, Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska – Poland's lone purist). The environment they fostered was exceptionally influential and played an important role not only in creating Poland's post-war avant-garde, but also in shaping the work of artists functioning essentially on the peripheries (as was Abakanowicz's position). One of the regulars of this salon, Roman Owidzki, later recalled, "We made her loathe those colorful flowers!" referring to the shift in colour and especially form appearing in Abakanowicz's work.[15]

Equally significant for Abakanowicz was her joining the Artistic Weaving Experimental Studio at the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (of which she was a member, like the decided majority of artists during the era of the People's Republic of Poland). This was a studio established by weavers who were active before the war, located in the home of its leader, Maria Łaszkiewicz. Its mission was "To search for new technical/studio concepts in order to achieve desired effects and new forms of artistic expression".[16] Abakanowicz found herself among artists who were beginning to see weaving as increasingly autonomous and were gradually distancing themselves from the textile industry.[17] Along with several of these artists, Abakanowicz took part in the Lausanne Biennale, starting with the inaugural exhibition in 1962. The contributions of Polish artists were already drawing attention at the first biennial. The day after the vernissage, André Kuenzi wrote in the *Gazette de Lausanne*: "The Polish submissions are especially interesting [...] The weaves from that country show us artists who are not only technical masters but, above-all, are spilling over with inventiveness, courageously expressing their ideas with grace and delight. These are the works which surprised us the most and forced us to reflect on the fact that certain forms of contemporary art can be expressed very well through the techniques of weaving".[18]

Abakanowicz was considered especially interesting from the very beginning. After the first biennial, where she showed *Composition of White Forms*, Abakanowicz had her first exhibition abroad in Galerie Dautzenberg in Paris, which would represent her from that point on. Her *Desdemona* shown at the second biennial was hailed as "the masterpiece of the

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15 Joanna Inglot, *The figurative sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz,* 35.

16 *Założenia* [*Premises*], Archive of the Central Museum of the Textile Industry, Łódź.

17 For more of this subject, see Irena Huml, *Współczesna tkanina polska* [*Contemporary Polish Weaving*], Warsaw 1989.

18 Irena Huml, *Współczesna tkanina polska*, 30. Promotion of Polish weaving in the West was handled by a Swiss art merchant who was enamoured with it, Pierre Pauli (General Commissioner of the 1st Biennial). He organised the exhibition "Contemporary Polish Textile Art," which was shown over a two-year period from 1963 in various European counties.

2nd Biennial".[19] That same year (1965), Abakanowicz was awarded the Grand Prix at the São Paulo Art Biennial, which, as stated earlier, solidified her position as an especially interesting figure in the realm of fiber art.

That year, a subsequent solo exhibition was organised for her in Poland (the previous, her first, took place in 1960). This exhibition is noteworthy because it demonstrated how strongly Abakanowicz wanted to detach herself from fiber art by that time, even though she was garnering such great successes in the field. The show was titled *Exhibition of Tapestries by Magdalena Abakanowicz*, but Włodzimierz Borowski, the author of a short essay for the small catalogue, used nearly his entire text to assert that, "the 'domain' of tapestry is no longer sufficient in characterising her work and its level". Włodzimierz Borowski, it is worth mentioning, was then a young critic associated with the circle of Stażewski and Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, who would go on to open the Foksal Gallery – one of the first neo-avant-garde galleries in the People's Republic of Poland. Another critic from this camp, Hanna Ptaszkowska, wrote a review of the exhibition in which she stated that "the latest weaves by Abakanowicz [...] in many ways break open the boundary which separates applied form from autonomous form".[20]

Despite her critical acclaim, Abakanowicz had not yet crossed the divide between fiber art and high art. It was not because she was unwilling. Rather, as we can read in the already mentioned book by Elissa Auther, such a crossover was impossible at the time. At least, it was impossible from Abakanowicz's position in fiber art. It would have been quite different if she had been part of the feminist art movement; if she had really taken part in the feminist revolution. This option was in fact not out of the question, as she had almost literally brushed up against it in Los Angeles in the 70's.

In Los Angeles in 1971, several connected events took place which constituted a sort of culmination point in the revival and revolution of fiber art. The University of California Art Gallery hosted a group exhibition titled *Deliberate Entanglements. An exhibition of Fabric Forms* (curator: Bernard Kester), which was accompanied by a several-day-long symposium called *Fiber as Medium*. Magdalena Abakanowicz and Sheila Hicks, both of whom took part in the exhibition and symposium, also showed their works at solo exhibitions: Abakanowicz at the Pasadena Art Museum (curator: Eudorah Moore, *The Fabric Forms of Magdalena Abakanowicz*), and Hicks at California State College at Fullerton. At that time, California, and especially Los Angeles, was becoming a hotbed of feminist activity in the

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19 Irena Huml, *Współczesna tkanina polska*, 34.

20 Hanna Ptaszkowska, "Gobeliny Magdaleny Abakanowicz [Magdalena Abakanowicz's Tapestries]", *Kultura*, 1965, 15, 9.

fields of visual arts and arts education. In 1970, Judy Chicago had established the Feminist Arts Program at Fresno State College, and one year later relocated it to the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), where she began to work with Miriam Schapiro. In 1971, they, along with their students, started the *Womanhouse* project – a joint installation located in an abandoned house (it was open to the public from 30 January to 28 February 1972). The project was rightfully lauded by Arlene Raven as having "helped create a ripple effect of feminist sensibility through the next two decades".[21] In addition to this high profile event, there was a series of other smaller initiatives in Los Angeles which fostered an environment conducive to women's creativity and to interpreting various activities from a feminist perspective. And so it happened with the exhibitions of Magdalena Abakanowicz's works, both the group exhibition *Deliberate Entanglements* and the solo show. In her analysis of the exhibition's reception, Joanna Inglot remarked that "a number of viewers and critics were indeed captivated, […], especially by her evocative sexual imagery, seen as referring to wombs or earth goddesses. […] the local critics and audiences also viewed these works as an explicit manifestation of women's art and female sexual identity".[22]

Faith Wilding, a participant in the Feminist Arts Program, recalled many years later that she had visited the Abakanowicz exhibition several times. She herself was a student of weaving, first learning it at a Paraguayan commune, where she lived for some time, and later studying under Walter Nottingham in Wisconsin. The work she made as part of the *Womanhouse* project – *Crocheted Environment* (*Womb Room*) – was a type of delicate mesh of yarn strewn around the space in such a way as to form a separate chamber/shelter. She didn't employ any direct visual reference to the *Abakans*, but the connection becomes apparent when we see a photo of Wilding sitting inside her enclosure and hear her relate that, after having visited the Abakanowicz exhibition, there "remains a fantastic memory of entering womblike red woven space".[23]

Of course, Abakanowicz was aware of the popularity her work enjoyed among feminist artists. She mentioned it on numerous occasions. However, in her statements we find no trace of interest in the work of female artists created and exhibited in Los Angeles. She surely would not

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21 Arlene Raven, *Womanhouse*, in: *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, Norma Broude & Mary D. Garrard (eds.), New York 1994, 61.

22 Joanna Inglot, *The figurative sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 66.

23 Faith Wilding cited in: Glenn Adamson, "The fiber game", in: *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 5, 2007, 2, 154-176 and in: *HighBeam Research*, January 29, 2011. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-175874493.html>

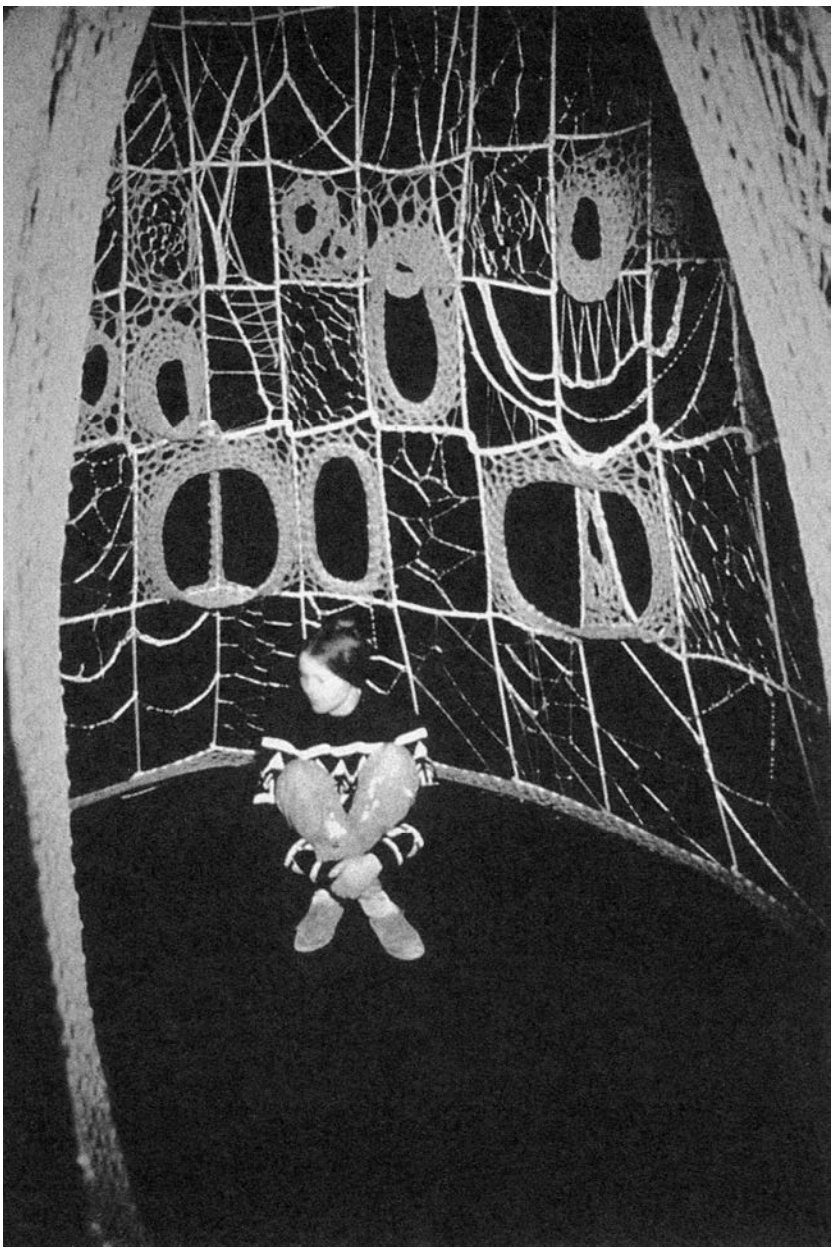

Fig. 2: Faith Wilding in "Crocheted Environment (Womb Room)", "Womanhouse" project 1972, © Faith Wilding.

have seen *Womanhouse* as it opened after her departure from the city, but we likewise find no mention of other events or of the feminist flurry having any special meaning to her. Abakanowicz never considered herself part of the feminist movement; she did not sympathise with it; and of her involvement in the WACK! exhibition she says: "It doesn't move me in a negative sense," adding, "I'm glad that, at this exhibition, the Abakan is again separate, ill-fitting. There is a section dealing with the erotic, a very contemporary kind, but it's created using a different language. The Abakan, although erotic, could not find its place there. That's enough for me".[24]

To better understand why there was no convergence, despite the similarities in undertakings at that time, between her and the feminist artists of those days, it is worthwhile to examine several issues a little more deeply. Firstly, the aim of *Womanhouse* was to thrust women's everyday household work into the realm of high art. Judy Chicago wrote in her autobiography that "Women had been embedded in houses for centuries and had quilted, sewed, baked, cooked, decorated and nested their creative energies away. […] Could the same activities women had used in life be transformed into the means of making art?"[25] Weaving was treated by them as an example of a woman's household task that was never appreciated as an art form. Neither Abakanowicz nor any of the artists from the fiber art realm exhibiting in California looked at their work in that way. They wanted to sever all associations their weaving may have had with decorative arts or craft.

Secondly, a characteristic trait of the Feminist Arts Program was to merge artistic activity with feminine experience and the female body, its form and rhythm. Feminist critics perceive it also in Abakanowicz. It is true that she said, "I like working the form with my hands. […] The movements of my hands correspond to the natural rhythm of my body, to my breath",[26] but she never associated this with her femininity, perceiving it to a much larger degree in terms of common humanity and treating the references to the body as more metaphorical than physiological. I suspect that this accounts for one of the reasons she was glad that *Abakan Red* was not located in the section devoted to the erotic at the WACK! exhibition. In this respect, her aspirations were consistent with the aspirations of the Polish avant-garde scene, with which she maintained contact in the late 50's and early 60's. In analysing the outlook of Stażewski, the leading fig-

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24 "Głód tłumu. Z Magdaleną Abakanowicz rozmawiał Jakub Janiszewski [The Hunger of the Masses. Jakub Janiszewski talks with Magdalena Abakanowicz]", *Wysokie Obcasy. Gazeta Wyborcza*, 483, 2008, 30, 9.

25 Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower. My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, Garden City NY 1975, 104.

26 Magdalena Abakanowicz cited in: Rich Mathews, "A Lausanne Notebook: Abakanowicz", *Fiberarts* 1977, 5, 39.

ure within this circle, Piotr Piotrowski points out that, after the war, he gradually, "neutralized the stance on art as a direct reflection of social and civilisational processes [...] in favour of concentrating on the issues of autonomous rights relating to the development of visual form".[27]

Thirdly and finally, Abakanowicz was different in her use of space and her positioning within this space as compared to other female artists. This becomes understandable if we once more compare her to Wilding. As Glenn Adamson writes, "Wilding refused to adopt the confidence and authority that Abakanowicz's work exuded; she simultaneously delineated the boundaries of the workspace, claiming the 'room of one's own,' and indicated the fragility of those boundaries".[28] For Wilding, as for the other participants in *Womanhouse*, arrangement of space was connected with creating a "room of one's own" for herself. For Abakanowicz the use of space meant, above all, freeing oneself from the walls (hanging textiles on walls was associated with a decorative function) and creating more sculptural forms. The above comparison, however, also points out something else – the way in which space was occupied. In the case of Wilding, it was delicate and in cooperation with other women. In the case of Abakanowicz, it was powerful, dominating and individual – "separate, ill-fitting", as she herself describes her *Abakan Red* at the WACK! exhibition.

Abakanowicz did not accept this invitation from feminist artists. Her stance, developed in Poland largely within the avant-garde scene, did not in any way cohere with their approach. While the feminists were trying to shatter the boundary between fiber art and high art, Abakanowicz was "only" trying to cross it. She was one of very few artists in fiber art to have succeeded, but it wasn't because she propelled her weaves into the world of high art, but rather, because her work changed in the 70's. She continued to use soft materials, but, firstly, she increasingly began to stiffen them, and secondly, she began to head more towards figuration, creating sculptural throngs of headless figures. These gradually began to gain esteem in the world of high art; especially after 1980, when Abakanowicz showed her sculptures at the Venice Biennale. 1982 saw the exhibition of her works at Musee d'art Moderne de la ville de Paris (no longer bearing the title "fabric forms") and at the Museum of Modern Art in Chicago (the exhibition would go on to tour the United States and Canada), which was the first to be accompanied by a large-scale catalogue.

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27 Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [*The Meaning of Modernism. Towards Polish Art History Post-1945*], Poznań 1999, 131. According to Piotrowski, this was not so much an escape from the reality of the People's Republic of Poland, but rather a reaction to it.

28 Glenn Adamson, *The fiber game*.

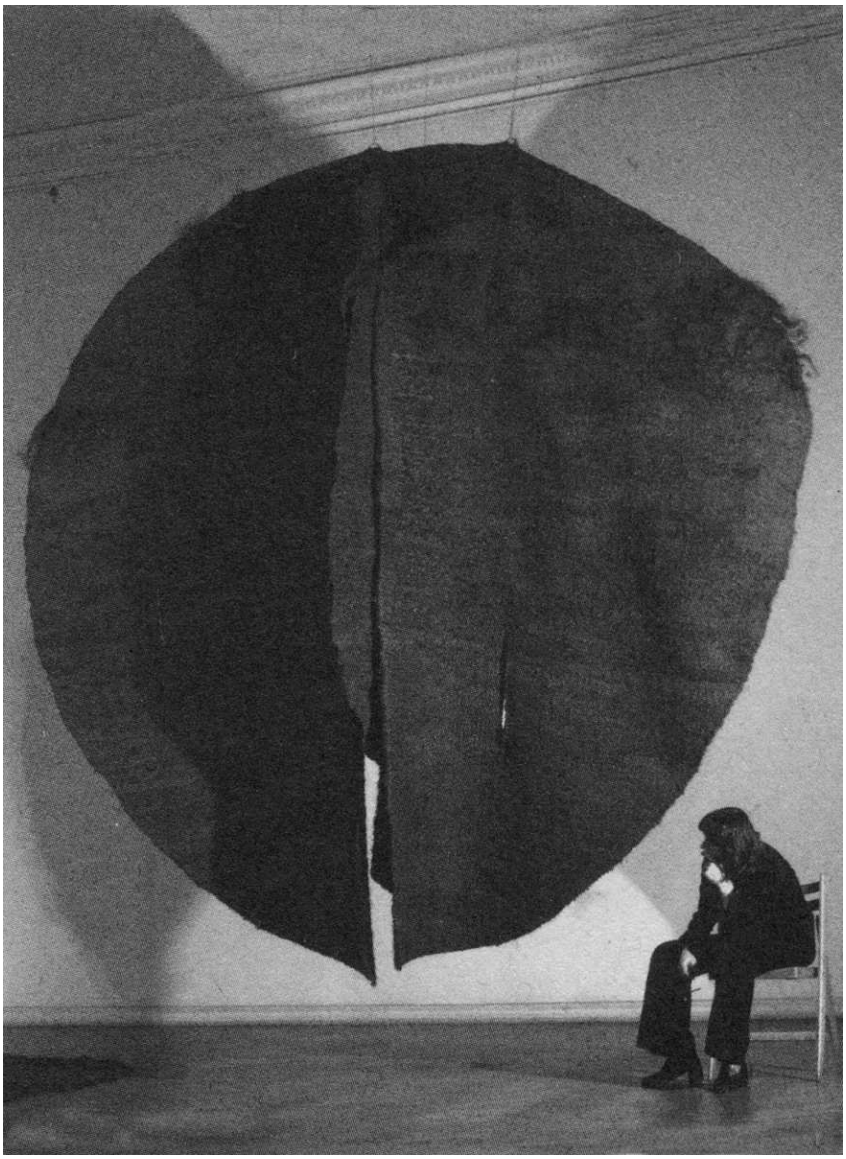

Fig. 3: Magdalena Abakanowicz with "Red Abakan", 1969, © Magdalena Abakanowicz

With admiration from the high art world coming her way, Abakanowicz gradually began to rewrite her artistic biography in such a way as to diminish as much as possible any connection she had to fiber art. To analyse this process would be to surpass the scope of this article, yet it is worth noting – for the sake of example – the list of exhibitions and awards found on the artist's internet site (www.abakanowicz.art.pl) or in her exhibition catalogues. These lists include only the dates and the names of institutions while omitting the exhibition titles – surely to avoid repeating the terms "tapestry" and "fabric forms", which often appeared in the titles of her exhibitions over the first 15 years or so.

The Abakans themselves took on an ambivalent character with this change. In the late 80's Abakanowicz wrote:

> The Abakans brought me fame around the world, but they weigh on me like a sin I can't admit to. Practicing weaving closes doors to the world of art. The world of art suddenly discovered me in 1980 when I showed ALTERATIONS at the Venice Biennale. [...] My new life is unfolding now; it justifies and interprets the ABAKANS, these soft sculptures, giving them the context of stone and bronze.[29]

Today, as the Abakans – especially *Abakan Red* – are becoming increasingly popular, Abakanowicz is not averse to owning up to them. However, she is also not inclined to any type of reenactment, which is popular among the female artists who were active and respected in the 70's.[30] Her distance to the Abakans remains, as is underscored by the photo next to her biography in the WACK! exhibition catalogue – she is not sitting close to the structure, or engulfed by it (like in one photo from the 70's), but is looking at it from off to the side. It is a picture which can be interpreted as an expression of her attitude towards both her involvement in fiber art and in the feminist revolution.

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29 Wojciech Krukowski et al. (eds.), *Magdalena Abakanowicz*, Warsaw 1995, 28.

30 In 1995 Faith Wilding recreated her *Crocheted Environment* (*Womb Room*), which had been destroyed along with the building in which *Womanhouse* took place.