

For immediate release

ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI

March 16–April 14, 2018
24 Grafton Street, London

Private view: Thursday, March 15, 6–8 PM

Special event: Luc Tuymans on Andrzej Wróblewski, Tuesday, March 20, 6:30–7:30 PM



Mother with Dead Child, 1949. Oil on canvas. 47 ¼ x 35 ½ inches (120 x 90 cm).
Collection of Grazyna Kulczyk. © Andrzej Wróblewski Foundation. www.andrzejwroblewski.pl.

David Zwirner is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by Polish artist Andrzej Wróblewski (1927–1957) at the gallery's 24 Grafton Street location in London. This will be the first solo presentation of his work in the United Kingdom.

Now considered a leading figure in postwar Polish art, Wróblewski's short but prolific career encompassed painting, works on paper, and prints. Often drawing from Poland's sociopolitical atmosphere in the wake of the Second World War, Wróblewski's singular practice is characterized by a unique blend of figuration and abstraction. On view will be a group of key paintings and a wide-ranging selection of works on paper detailing recurring subjects throughout the artist's oeuvre.

Shortly after moving from his hometown of Vilnius to Kraków in 1945, Wróblewski concurrently enrolled in the painting and sculpture program at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts and the art history program at Jagiellonian University. At this time, Kapism, or Polish Colorism, was the leading style at the Academy, emphasizing color over subject matter. Wróblewski made a few works in accordance with this mode, but soon found the style to be limiting. Never fully conforming to the Academic approach or to the pervasive style of communist-era Socialist Realism, Wróblewski developed an experimental formal language to address wartime trauma and its effect on the human condition.

In 1948, at the age of twenty-one, Wróblewski started his *Chauffeur* series, a body of work characterized by its sparse use of color and the presence of an anonymous driver, his back turned to the viewer. *Blue Chauffeur* (1948), the first painting in this series, is made up of three distinct fields of color that order the composition: white, red, and blue—the latter of which was frequently used by Wróblewski to denote death. Throughout his career, Wróblewski completed many double-sided works, a method he deliberately applied to paintings and works on paper. Conceived as two parts of a larger whole, these works typically deal with opposing subjects that complicate and advance the meaning of the work on either side, a strategy that allowed Wróblewski to convey multiple narrative and stylistic possibilities. On the opposite side of this painting, Wróblewski executed *Liquidation of the Ghetto* (1949), a contrasting image densely populated with figures in signature hues of blue. Made around the time that Wróblewski cofounded the Self-Educational Group, a student organization created in response to growing dissatisfaction with the Academy, these paintings mark a shift in his subject matter toward the individual and his psychic life.

Wróblewski began his seminal *Execution* series one year later. In a number of works from this series, Wróblewski has narrowed in on people lined up against a wall in the moments directly before or after their execution by the Nazis. In a related drawing entitled *[Sketch for Executions]* (1949), a man, woman, and child in the foreground stiffly hold hands as they await their imminent fate. Their clothes are rendered in color, differentiating them from the group of armed men in the background, whom Wróblewski has depicted in simple black outlines. Wróblewski often created distinct visual markers such as this one to illustrate the differences between perpetrators of violence and their victims.

In a departure from this format, *Mother with Dead Child* (1949)—an additional painting from this series and among his best-known works—addresses the subject of execution in more intimate terms. In this work, an infant clutches his mother in a somber embrace. Wróblewski has used blue once again, this time to mark the difference between a person of this world and one who has recently departed from it.

The later part of Wróblewski's oeuvre is marked by an intense period of production on paper, an essential medium for the artist. Here he documented a number of subjects including cityscapes, geometric abstractions, and landscapes from his travels. But perhaps his most significant works on paper were his studies of the human figure, sensitively rendered in fields of empty space. When facial features are articulated, the subject's gaze is often averted, hinting at impatience or absence. As art historian Noit Banai has noted, "In this extraordinarily precarious and plural historical moment, between the war's end and the advent of Socialist Realism as official cultural policy, Andrzej Wróblewski developed a language of radical corporality in which a subject's vulnerability to divergent relations of power was given tactile form."¹

Wróblewski's innovative approach to figuration—sometimes fusing human anatomy with geometric shapes, or foregrounding the figure in isolation—posited the body as a real and complicated subject, while also addressing the limits of its representation. The novel strategies he employed in the 1940s and 1950s would influence a younger generation of artists in Poland and abroad, including Luc Tuymans, who has commented on Wróblewski's and his own shared use of "the empty space, the void."² In 2010, Tuymans included Wróblewski's work in *The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe*, a group exhibition he curated at the concert hall and other venues in Bruges. Their work, along with that of René Daniëls, was also the subject of a three-person exhibition at Art Stations Foundation, Poznań (2014; traveled to Drawing Room, London), attesting to Wróblewski's continued relevance to contemporary art.

Andrzej Wróblewski was born in 1927 in Vilnius and died in 1957 in the Tatra Mountains. During his lifetime, Wróblewski was the subject of two solo exhibitions, one at the Polish Writer's Union, Warsaw (1956), and the other at Po Prostu Salon, Warsaw (1956). His work was also included in numerous group exhibitions, most notably at the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art, Palace of Arts, Kraków (1948). Posthumous solo museum exhibitions include those held at Muzeum Okręgowe im. Leona Wyczółkowskiego, Bydgoszcz (1964); Muzeum Narodowe, Poznań (1967); Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw (1968, 2007); Muzeum Archidiecezji Warszawskiej, Warsaw (1987); Muzeum Śląskie, Katowice (1993); Muzeum Narodowe, Kraków (1996, 2012); Muzeum Teatralne Teatru Wielkiego Opery Narodowej, Warsaw (2002; traveled to Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, Gorzów Wielkopolski; Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, Olsztyn; Centrum Sztuki Galeria EL, Elbląg; Galeria Miejska Arsenał, Poznań); Muzeum Rzeźby im. Xawerego Dunikowskiego, Królikarnia, Warsaw (2004); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2010); and Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2015; traveled to Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid).

The artist's work has also been featured in recent international group exhibitions, including *The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe*, Concertgebouw, Arentshuis, Memling in Sint-Jan, Stadshallen, and Grootseminarie, Bruges (2010); *DE. FI. CIEN. CY: Andrzej Wróblewski, René Daniëls, Luc Tuymans*, Art Stations Foundation, Poznań (2014; traveled to Drawing Room, London); *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945–1965*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2016); *The End of the World*, Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato (2016); and *Facing the Future: Art in Europe 1945–1968*, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow (2016–2017; in collaboration with BOZAR – Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels; ZKM | Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe; and ROSIZO State Museum and Exhibition Center, Moscow). In 2017, Wróblewski's work was included in Documenta 14 (Kassel and Athens).

¹ Noit Banai, "Experimental Figuration in a State of Exception," in *Avoiding Intermediary States: Andrzej Wróblewski (1927–1957)*, eds. Magdalena Ziółkowska and Wojciech Grzybala (Warsaw: Andrzej Wróblewski Foundation and Instytut Adama Mickiewicza; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2014), p. 225.

² Luc Tuymans, "Luc Tuymans in Conversation with Anda Rottenberg," in *DE. FI. CIEN. CY: Andrzej Wróblewski, René Daniëls, Luc Tuymans*, ed. Ulrich Loock. Exh. cat. Art Stations Foundation, Poznań, 2014. (Berlin: Distanz Verlag, 2015), p. 175.

For all press inquiries, contact

Sara Chan +44 20 3538 3165 sara@davidzwirner.com

Ashley Tickle +1 212 727 2070 atickle@davidzwirner.com

To RSVP for the March 20 event, contact

Irene McAllister +44 20 3538 3165 irene@davidzwirner.com

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