

### Polish Posters 1945–89

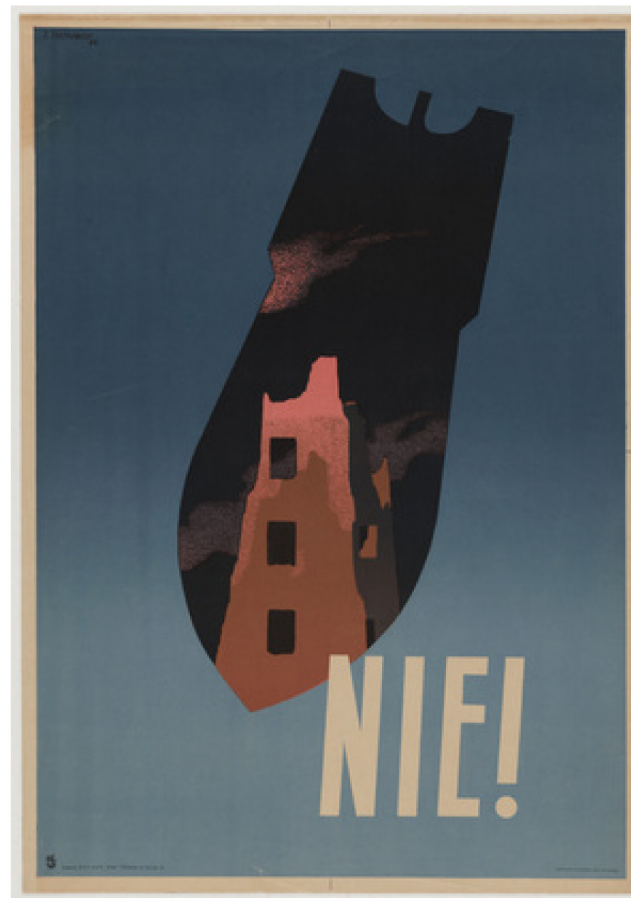
May 6–November 30, 2009

Architecture and Design Galleries, third floor

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In the Cold War era the vitality of the Polish Poster School attracted international attention and admiration. Although state controlled, the posters—which are characterized by sophisticated imagery and surreal tendencies—often carried powerful, oblique commentaries on the designers' political surroundings. This exhibition presents a selection of posters from MoMA's collection that typify the striking look and bold spirit of Polish poster design from the 1940s through the 1980s.

*Organized by Juliet Kinchin, Curator, and Aidan O'Connor, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design.*



Tadeusz Trepkowski. Nie! (No!). 1952. Lithograph, 39 3/8 x 27 5/8" (100 x 70cm). The Museum of Modern Art. Gift of The Lauder Foundation, Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Fund

**EXHIBITION EXAMINES POLISH POSTERS OF THE COLD WAR ERA FROM THE MUSEUM'S COLLECTION**

***Polish Posters 1945-89***

May 6–November 30, 2009

The Philip Johnson Architecture and Design Galleries, third floor

**NEW YORK, April 29, 2009**—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Polish Posters 1945–89***, a selection of 24 works drawn from the Museum's collection of posters from the Cold War era of the Polish Poster School, which attracted international attention and admiration. Drawing on a rich Central European tradition in graphic arts, designers like Henryk Tomaszewski, Roman Cieślewicz, Jan Lenica, and Franciszek Starowieyski developed a sophisticated visual language characterized by surreal and expressionist tendencies, a bold use of color, and macabre, often satirical humor. Polish posters were generally created to promote cultural events—opera, theatre, films and exhibitions. These posters' images frequently contained explicit evocations of violence and sexuality and appeared at a time when there was little or no advertising. The Communist state maintained a strict censorship policy and monopolized the commissioning and distribution of all printed media in that period, yet bureaucratic patrons colluded in turning a blind eye to the oblique but powerful critical commentaries contained in many of the posters. On view May 6 through November 30, 2009, the exhibition is organized by Juliet Kinchin, Curator, and Aidan O'Connor, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

Of all the Eastern Bloc countries, Poland maintained the most consistent and broad-based resistance to Soviet control—from the hard-line Stalinist years (1945-53), through the so-called "Thaw" after 1956, to the rise of the "Solidarity" movement (1980-89). The violence that erupted in different parts of the Soviet Bloc in 1956, 1968, and in 1989 was linked to events in Poland. Hostility to the Communist party and the regime was never far below the surface and was easily read into all forms of entertainment. Posters were among the most topical and subversive means through which Polish designers expressed their opposition to the state apparatus.

Examples on view include Tadeusz Trepcowski's dynamic bomb and building composition for *Nie! (No!)* (1952), which captures the memory of the devastation wrought by World War II; Roman Cieślewicz's *Wieżien (The Prisoner)* (1962), which contains a figure constrained with an armored shell and suffocating from an eruption of flames and blood, for a production of Luigi Dallapiccola's opera; Jan Lenica's *Wozzeck (Woyzeck)* (1964), which uses a psychedelic aesthetic

to convey the psychological torment that resonated in the atmosphere of escalating tension within the Communist Block; and Franciszek Starowieyski's *Lulu* (1980), which depicts a hybrid figure comprising a bird's head and wings with a naked female torso that is simultaneously erotic and macabre. In 1985, Starowieyski was the first Polish artist to have a solo exhibition at MoMA.

Accompanying the exhibition is a 40-minute documentary entitled *Freedom on the Fence* (2008), directed by Andrea Marks with Executive Producer Martin Rosenberg and Producer Glenn Holsten). This film features interviews with leading designers such as Henryk Tomaszewski (1914-2005) and Wiktor Gorka (1922-2004) recorded shortly before their deaths, discussion of several of the posters on display, and archival film footage that vividly conjures up the urban and political context in which these posters first appeared.