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TAMARA ŁEMPICKA – THE QUEEN OF ART DECO

When hearing the phrase "art deco", most may think of Lana Del Rey's song with the same title. In her 2015 release, the pop singer uses the art deco period as a metaphor for living life to the fullest and enjoying every moment with someone special. The style flourished at a time when the world was recovering from the First World War, and people wanted to forget their worries and immerse themselves in this new aesthetic movement. While the song remains a good interpretation of what art deco was, we must not limit ourselves to this one connotation. It would be a shame to forget about one of the most important representatives of this style.

Tamara Łempicka was born in 1889, in Warsaw and decided to become a painter at her sister's suggestion. Largely inspired by Jean-Auguste Ingres, she combined soft cubism with a neoclassical style. Łempicka is known for her portraits of wealthy aristocrats and highly stylized female nudes. She was exactly like the women in her paintings: cold, selfish, emancipated, even promiscuous. The Polish painter not only had the ability to express art deco on canvas but also embodied the style herself. She looked like a movie star, and she loved being mistaken for the iconic actress, Greta Garbo. Łempicka would photograph herself carefully posed and draped in diamonds, and then send the photos to the press, as she understood that art requires effective advertising. She truly could have been an inspiration for Lana Del Rey's song which has the underlying message that life is short, and we should make the most of it by taking risks.

„I do what I want and I hate doing what I have to do“, Łempicka once said.

To this day "Autoportrait in a Green Bugatti" remains her most popular painting. The artist poses as a femme fatale - an independent, liberated, attractive and sometimes dangerous woman. This image is emphasized by her red lips, short hair and a come-hither look cast down from half-closed eyelids directed at the viewer. By portraying herself in a Bugatti - a fast, elegant and modern vehicle - the artist placed herself in a sphere dominated by men. No wonder that the painting became a symbol of the bold art deco movement. Furthermore, Łempicka paid homage to Futurism, characterized by its fascination with speed, technology, and urban life. She used a sculptural, geometrized composition which can be seen in most of her paintings.



Autoportrait in a Green Bugatti, 1928

The artist aptly combined cubist forms with a classical touch, creating a fusion between tradition and modernity.

Tamara quickly became a role model for the liberated woman of the 1920s. Some called her "a promoter of perverse art", but her paintings continue to have an amazing impact on the way women are viewed by society. Łempicka managed to create and maintain the image of an ambitious woman having all the necessary features to become a symbol of her times.

„HILMA AF KLINT & PIET MONDRIAN: FORMS OF LIFE”

When recently visiting a temporary exhibition located in the Tate Modern Museum, in London, I was intrigued by the fact that even though most of their exhibitions are free, this one was limited.

The exhibition, available from the 20th of April until the 3rd of September, is named after two people; 'Hilma Af Klint & Piet Mondrian: Forms of Life'. Af Klint and Mondrian were born only ten years apart, and grew up in different countries.

While they were still developing each of their individual styles, the world was rapidly changing, along with technological advancement. To run away from that, they both explored the possibilities of abstract art. What shocked me was that, although they did not know each other, their art was unusually similar. This glaring resemblance is clearly shown and displayed throughout the whole exhibit.

The exhibition is divided into eleven rooms, each of them showing the development of different techniques and motifs - starting from nature then moving on through metamorphosis, dynamic colours, geometries and religion, ending on a room called „The Future” which summed up their life's work. It displayed works such as The Ten Largest by af Klint.

At the centre of the exhibition there is a room called "The Ether", which is inspired by the nineteenth century notion of an invisible energy connecting all things. Although the room was spectacular, the one that caught my attention the most, was one called „New Old Geometries”. Not only because of how well af Klint captured her change from spirals and symbolic forms to increasingly geometric shapes and planes of solid colour in her painting of two opposite swans engaged in conflict, but especially, because of one of the quotes that reminded me of a book I read recently - „Ferdurdurke” by Alexander Fredro. The quote helped me understand the concept even better.

„Those granted the gift of seeing more deeply can see beyond form, concentrate on the wondrous aspect hiding behind every form, which is called life”

- Hilma af Klint, 1906



Hilma af Klint and Piet Mondrian were, as we would now call it, posthumous. They weren't appreciated during their years of living, only after their death, did their work start to be seen by society. This is especially true for Hilma, who as a woman, was not given any credit during her lifetime.

Although the exhibition is no longer open, I hope this summary convinced you to seek out more information about the remarkable works of Hilma af Klint and Piet Mondrian.



"BE YOURSELF" - A THEATRICAL EXPERIMENT

A REVIEW OF "EWELINA'S CRYING" AT TEATR ROZMAITOŚCI

What does it mean to be yourself? That's quite a cliché question that, nevertheless, you have probably thought about at least once in your life.

What if you were asked to "play" yourself? Would you behave like yourself?

Would you be "more" of yourself - exaggerating all of your characteristics, repeating phrases you like to use or constantly talking? Would you behave the way you see yourself or would you reproduce stereotypes made about you by others?

These are the questions that prompted Anna Karasińska, the director, to create the play "Ewelina's crying". Despite what the title suggests, the play is not dramatic - it's calm, built around conversations between the actors. Still, it has philosophical undertones.

The idea is simple: there are four actors on the stage, each plays a random, "normal" person. However, as that normal person they have to play the actor. For example, a famous Polish actor, Adam Woronowicz, plays an everyday guy who is trying to play Woronowicz. Hence, actors are limited by ideas, gossip and stereotypes about themselves. They play themselves the way others see them.



Adam Woronowicz

Being in the theater, you start to reflect upon who you are. There are moments full of absurdity, when the actors look at who they are in a "structural" way.

They break down their personalities to the smallest elements, asking themselves "if I have been offended, do I shout, cry, walk out? How should I react?" Watching the play, you begin to understand the immense power you have over yourself. Your personality is not something constant - you are creating it every second, with each decision you make.

An intellectually stimulating, theatrical experiment, lasting only an hour, "Ewelina is crying" is a play you should watch this weekend.



WEST SIDE STORY AND 21ST CENTURY ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

One of the styles of filmography in the 21st century is mixing genres and returning to old themes in order to create new stories. An example of such a mixture is Steven Spielberg's 2021 movie *West Side Story*, where the author connects the genre of a musical with Shakespeare and the Latin culture. The story works as a modern interpretation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and follows two rival gangs in New York City: the Sharks and the Jets.

From the beginning of Spielberg's movie, we can observe tension grow between the Sharks and the Jets, as they fight for territory within the city. The prejudiced views of the gang members come to light: the white, American Jets are repulsed by the Puerto Rican, brown Sharks that are starting to control New York City. The movie also follows the troubled main characters, Tony and Riff (the Jets) and Bernardo and Chino (the Sharks), who wish to be seen as good people, even as they struggle to make ends meet and escape their dark past.

The most crucial metamorphosis in the movie is the change of the character of Tony, one of the most important members of the Jets, who decided to change for the better. After serving time in prison he changes his opinion on the Sharks and relationship of the two gangs, and is against the aggression, assaults and murders. Unfortunately for Tony, the final fight that culminates the movie escalates quickly and Tony is forced to choose between his moral reservation against murder and his loyalty to his gang.

Another trope intriguing to observe is Tony and Maria's love story. On a ball that was organised to connect the two gangs, all members of the Sharks and Jets make sure not to achieve that goal. The only exception is Tony and Maria, whose eyes meet across the ballroom. Nevertheless, the romance of the two is strictly opposed by others, as it would be unacceptable for a Jet, Tony, to fall in love in Maria, a younger sister of Bernardo, the leader of the Sharks. Tony's love for Maria really shows his change and maturity, as he tries to learn Spanish for her, as before, when he was a proud Jet, he would make fun of the Spanish accent.

The musical is filled to the brim with allusions to the original *Romeo and Juliet* storyline. *West Side Story* is



about a forbidden romance between two members of opposing gangs, which is just like the Montagues and the Capulets. What really drives home the connection between Shakespeare's play and the musical is the conversation on the balcony between Tony and Maria, taken directly from Shakespeare's tragedy: Maria - 'I forgot why I called you.', Tony - 'I will wait 'till you remember'.

Spielberg is certainly not the first (nor the last) director to adapt Shakespearean plays to modern-day cinema. However, *West Side Story* is the movie to remember, as it weaves through pieces of Latin-American culture and gang symbolism into the typically Eurocentric and proper Elizabethan literature. It is the story of generations of violence, and groundless prejudice, but also, the story of boundless love. And from the beginning of the movie, not even knowing the plot, you can feel like watching a 21st-century version of Shakespeare.



ESTHER MAHLANGU'S TRIBAL ART WITH A MODERN TWIST

Esther Mahlangu was born in 1935 on a farm near Middelburg in Mpumalanga in South Africa and has been painting for almost 70 years now. Since then, her work has had a large historical and cultural impact on the global appreciation of South African Ndebele art, bridging the gap between traditional practices and contemporary design.

She was brought up in the tradition of the Ndebele tribe and was taught how to paint by her grandmother and mother at the age of 10. Mahlangu's artistic flair emerged, when she underwent the traditional Ndebele practice. The custom, in which young women are cloistered from society for a few months, teaches them the traditional craft. One of the practices used by the Ndebele was decorating walls with designs rendered in coloured clay. These influences inspired her work later in her career when she began painting on canvases.

Mahlangu's art consists of complex, often geometric, designs that represent patterns found in murals painted on the sides of Ndebele homes. Apart from the design's aesthetic appeal, it has a cultural significance that serves to emphasise her distinctive Ndebele identity. Mahlangu's art also demonstrates her fascination with direct sequences and arrangements she observes in her surroundings. The characteristic symmetry, proportion and straight edges of Ndebele decorations are done by hand without the help of rulers and squares.

With time, Mahlangu's practice began evolving to adorn found objects, such as war helmets, motorbikes or mannequins while still including the signature Ndebele visual language.

One of the most famous examples is BMW Art Car 12 from 1991. BMW commissioned Esther Mahlangu to create an Art Car to mark the end of apartheid in Africa. By painting the BMW 525i, she has passed her tribe's traditional means of expression onto an object of contemporary technology. The contrast created by putting together the traditional art of South Africa and machinery, captures the viewers attention. Ndebele designs were also reproduced in 1997 on the tails of British Airways planes and more recently, the Fiat 500.

Recently, she worked together with the musician John Legend to design the colourful and bold Belvedere bottle,

inspired by the campaign's four values: security, support, change and unity.

Esther Mahlangu joins Belvedere as a passionate supporter of the fight against the spread of AIDS. This partnership has provided enough funding to support over 30,000 HIV-positive women with access to life-saving treatment to stop the transmission of HIV to their babies.



As a famed South African artist, Esther Mahlangu was the first Ndebele artist to transfer the traditional craft from the exterior of homes, to the canvas, and eventually, consumer products. Her work has also inspired many other artists to bring the Ndebele style to everyday objects.



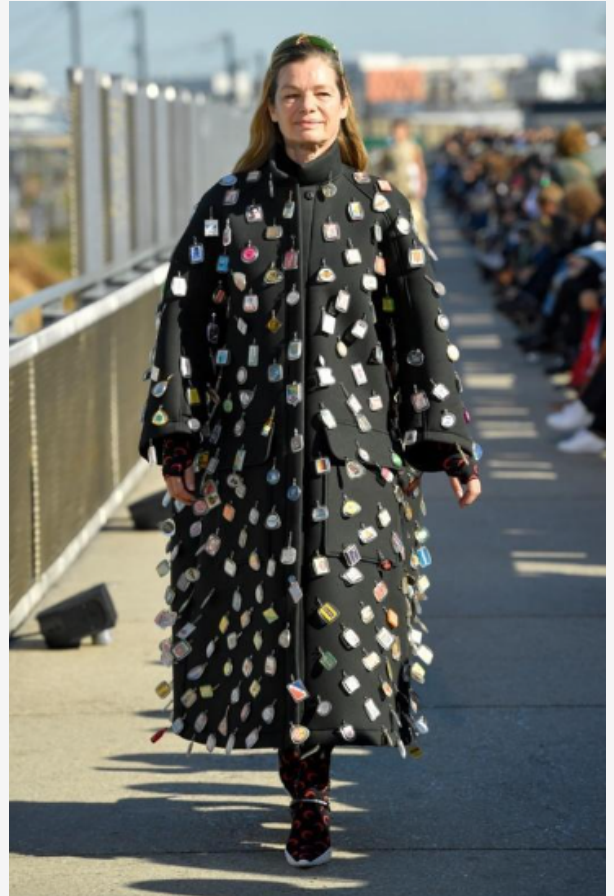
THE FASHION OF SUSTAINABILITY

Given the recent climate crisis, making fashion environmentally friendly has never been more important. While the industry remains divided between slow and fast fashion, sustainability should be the main concern. Many up-and-coming designers, such as Marine Serre or Beate Karlsson are on a mission to make the next generation of art more environmentally friendly.



Fast fashion and overconsumption are rising issues in the world of fashion. They are triggered largely by social media influencers, who decrease the duration of trends. Beate Karlsson, known for making controversial collections commenting on problems within the fashion industry, made a collection for AVAVAV FW23, where the clothes fell apart on the runway.

The act was up to interpretation, however, many said it was symbolic of the poor quality of clothes that large, unethical corporations, such as SHEIN or Temu produce. Karlsson focuses on making sustainable, zero-waste clothing to ensure that customers get high-quality clothing and protect the environment.



Another great example of sustainable fashion is Marine Serre. The young designer started a promising career after graduating from La Cambre with high honors and winning the 2017 LVMH Prize for Young Fashion Designers. She currently has her own brand where she makes clothing out of atypical, upcycled materials, such as trash, other clothes, and recycled fabric. Some examples include her Keychain Collector Bell Coat or the patchwork midi skirt made of scarfs, where she showed her creativity in repurposing other items as clothes. Serre is an advocate for sustainable fashion, which is her main selling point to the new generation (Gen Z).

Sustainability and fighting against fast fashion are extremely important, especially when trends come and go faster than ever, and many clothes are made unethically. High fashion has a way of commenting and dealing with it like no one else and should strive to lead by example

PROPAGANDA AND TALKING FISH: SOVIET ANIMATION!

While the Soviet Union is generally known for its control over the arts and the imposition of the Socialist Realist style, animation was a medium that allowed a little more expressive freedom, and underwent many stylistic transformations across its development as an art form. Come along for the ride: we (the Soviet we, as opposed to the royal we) offer a brief introduction to Soviet perspectives on art, and how animation in the USSR evolved despite the regime's control.

Early Soviet animation, like in other countries, began in the Interwar period. During Lenin's rule abstract and innovative art was promoted - it went hand in hand with the idea of progress and exploration that the advent of communism presented itself as. Hence, a dominant science-fiction movement would continue throughout the regime. Simple styles focusing on shape rather than detail, such as constructivism, were adopted into animation. Propaganda, of course, was ever-present, propelled by novelties in art and creative exploration. The 1920s saw the avant-garde combined with sci-fi and the mocking of capitalism, resulting in pieces of animation like *Interplanetary Revolution*, in which greedy capitalists are sent into space, never to come back. Crude and fast-paced, it's confusing to the modern viewer if we stop paying attention for a few seconds, but the humour carries over even 99 years later. In one scene a Soviet revolutionary is in a spaceship, and the star on his hat, to the soldier's consternation, flies off to join those outside the rocket's window.

(If the Soviet Union still existed today they might have made another version called *Undersea Revolution*, containing submarines instead of spacecrafts.)



Figure 1: "*Interplanetary Revolution*," 1924. a caricature of a bloated capitalist being sent to Mercury.

Socialist realism, which we may call the trademark Soviet style, was imposed on artists by Stalin in the early 1930s, and until Khrushchev's takeover it would remain as the official art style. It depicted idealised scenes from everyday Soviet life (so, for example, it did not feature the never-ending queues to shops). For animation this meant that the former experiments with abstraction and constructivism were over, and a new age of folk magic dawned on the industry. Cartoons from this era are more alike to what we are familiar with today than those made in the 20s. As nationalism rose and the Soviet Union closed in on itself instead of exporting revolution elsewhere, themes of folklore and history made their entry into animation. As the medium came to be associated with children, old fairytales were remade to reflect communist values, mocking royalty, foreigners and whomsoever the Soviet Union disliked at the moment.



Figure 2 - "*In a Certain Kingdom*," 1957, after Stalin but in the same style.

Studio Soyuzmultfilm, founded by sisters Zinaida and Valentina Brumberg, led the Soviet industry of animation, practically monopolising it. Stories like *Emelya and the pike* were refashioned (Fig. 2) to fit Soviet audiences, and the art became smoother, more realistic, using the rotoscoping technique for effective tracing. Backgrounds, too, were beautiful and realistic. The studio's films, some reaching feature length, gained international recognition, unlike much other material coming out of the Soviet Union. Walt Disney used *The Humpbacked Horse* to teach his animators.

In the 40s, for obvious reasons, militarism entered animation alongside the redoubled patriotism. Stories of Russian military leaders reached audiences. Depicting invading Nazis



Figure 3 - "The Humpbacked Horse" (1947)

as brutal and animalistic (with good reason), they encouraged resistance and compliance with Soviet authorities in the collective effort to win the war.



Figure 4 - "Fascist Boots Shall Not Trample Our Motherland," 1941, animal caricature of the Nazi regime traipsing across Europe.

The Khrushchev Thaw (1956-64) broke out of Stalinist conventions as restrictions on art lifted. Art took a breath of fresh air after decades of being stifled by Stalin. Animators developed their personal styles as opposed to that of Soyuzmultfilm as a whole, resulting in the reintroduction of the simplistic and abstract. Brezhnev, the next leader, though more conservative than Khrushchev, did not reinforce Stalinesque controls on animation and art. Possibly because by the end of his career as General Secretary he no longer understood what these youths were getting up to with their motion picture.

Satire crept in, like *The Man In The Frame* (1966) by Fyodor Khitruk, that mocked the narrow worldview of bureaucrats -



Figure 5 - "Well, Just You Wait!"

something certainly still relevant today. That era produced some famous cartoons like *Well, Just You Wait!* that children still recognise today. In more artistic terms, new styles took hold. Coming from America under the influence of LSD, psychedelic art threw Soviet animation for a quite literal spin. Cartoons like *Wow! A Talking Fish!* and *Hedgehog in the Fog* are mesmerising to watch, and you can still find them on Youtube (with English subtitles if you can't speak Russian).



Figure 6 - *Wow! A Talking Fish!*

The world of animation that came out of the Soviet Union is as diverse as it is fascinating. In the last decades of the regime, art was no longer under such strong restrictions, and more expression was allowed. As under communism things didn't need to sell very well to get made, it led artists to explore wild and eccentric ideas that we don't often see coming from today's big studios. This here is just a brief overview, so I encourage you, the reader, to dive into the world of Soviet animation for yourself!

THE IDOL, OR "THE WORST TV SHOW OF THE YEAR?"



"What an embarrassment"

"This was like watching a large budget porno"

"Truly truly terrible"

The summer has finally come to an end, and I am glad to say, so has the Idol.

The expectations from Sam Levinson and Abel "The Weeknd" Tesfaye were high from the beginning. The sprawling anticipation for "show of the summer" turned out to be nothing else but an idle waste of time. From Britney Spears to Amy Winehouse, the promise of truth behind pop star tragedies transformed into a grotesque satire with a giant budget. We were given a masterpiece of nothingness, boredom and controversial failure.

The original director of the series, Amy Seimetz, left the project with around 80 percent of the six-episode series completed. HBO responded to the revelation by stating that The Idol will undergo a substantial creative revision, as well as changes to the cast and staff. There was no justification for the change, except some claims that Tesfaye believed the show was leaning too far towards a "female perspective."

According to a Rolling Stone article, the Idol was supposed to tell a story of a wrecked actress who falls victim to an exploitative industry figure and fights for her agency.



Instead, it turned into a demeaning love tale with a phony message that some crew members even regarded as disrespectful. They further exposed Sam Levinson's insulting persona as a director and shared multiple sources who took on a collective animosity and hostility towards the creators of the show.

Levinson's response, however, was quite different than one would expect. His reaction was of the all-press-is-good-press: it appeared he'd accomplished the provocation he so desperately sought. "When my wife read me the article, I looked at her and I just said, 'I think we're about to have the biggest show of the summer,'" he explained at the Cannes Film Festival.

The plotline of the show has not progressed past the "victim" stage in its portrayal of Jocelyn (the main character played by Lily Rose Depp). It contains a complete lack of any artistry, the focus is on the starlet's body and her self-destructive tendency, as indicated by a fondness for slim cigarettes and masochistic kinks which truly disgusted the show's audience.

After only five episodes, we're left with the driest squib of an ending. I've spent five agonizing hours watching a troubled pop artist be miserable while organizing a tour with a group of people resembling a 21st century cult. Throughout the entire series, my screen has been filled with stripped naked people, incessant moaning and poorly written monologues. HBO spent millions of dollars to provide us with overly sexualised women, a complete lack of plot and an acting debut of "The Weeknd" - although, I am not sure if I can call it acting in the first place.

The initial idea behind The Idol could have actually made it "the show of the summer", nevertheless, once Levinson and Tesfaye took the reins the fate was sealed. So, if you haven't gotten a chance to see it, I would recommend happily moving on into true cinematic masterpieces.

POETRY

The Day Will Come
The Day will come
When we will face The Prophet
We shall be released
Riding on His golden charriot

The Day will come
When we slay our enemies
Our Land shall be free
From torment and hunger

The Day will come
When we defeat the Dark
The Sun shall emerge from the horizon
There will be dawn again

I dream of The Day
Of lanterns and forgiveness
The Prophet's Word
Will be our guidance

--

I speak Thy name
Like a pastor calls out to his god
I pray to Thee every night
Skinning my knees against gravel

I am a gatherer of Thy dust
A preacher of Thy gospel
I see Thee in moments of silence
I hear Thee in the pit of my chest

In my neck, let there be light
Behind my nails, let there be soil
In my mind, let loose all inhibition
With my love, sharpen Thy sword

My Love, call me forth
Come before Thy poor seeker
My illness grows in my sleep
As from Thee, I await Salvation

The Day will come
When we face The Prophet
We shall be released
Riding on His Golden Charriot

The Day will come
When we leave our captivity
Our hearts shall know rest
In the name of new Freedom

The Day will come
When we defeat the dark
The Sun shall emerge from the horizon

There will be dawn again

I dream of The Day
Of love through equity
The Prophet's Word
Will be our guidance

Author's comment:
**Thoughts on queerphobia and the distorted
ideas of love and faith in Polish society.**

POETRY

SERENE SATIRE OF MY
FLAWED AFFECTION; 2

I never offered
fervent desire to fill the void
naivete, so conspicuous
transcended over a puzzle they warn
to avoid
curiosity, so peculiar
your choice to renounce my past
the very own masochist
knew it wouldn't last
perhaps, I saved you from mesmerism
you could never tame
perhaps, I can take the blame
a faux, a lie
and the damage done

I'm stuck in the middle
of this riddle
you live within
of a venomous snake and the skin of a woman
so pure in its existence
or just over its epidermis-
the top layer of the skin
the coat with exposure to
those stiff fingers pushing and pinching your chin
hammering your amour propre pin by pin
and making your foolish dunce-like head spin
stop spinning or
Promise me that you won't grieve,
when I take french leave

French leave
noun. a departure without
ceremony, permission, or notice

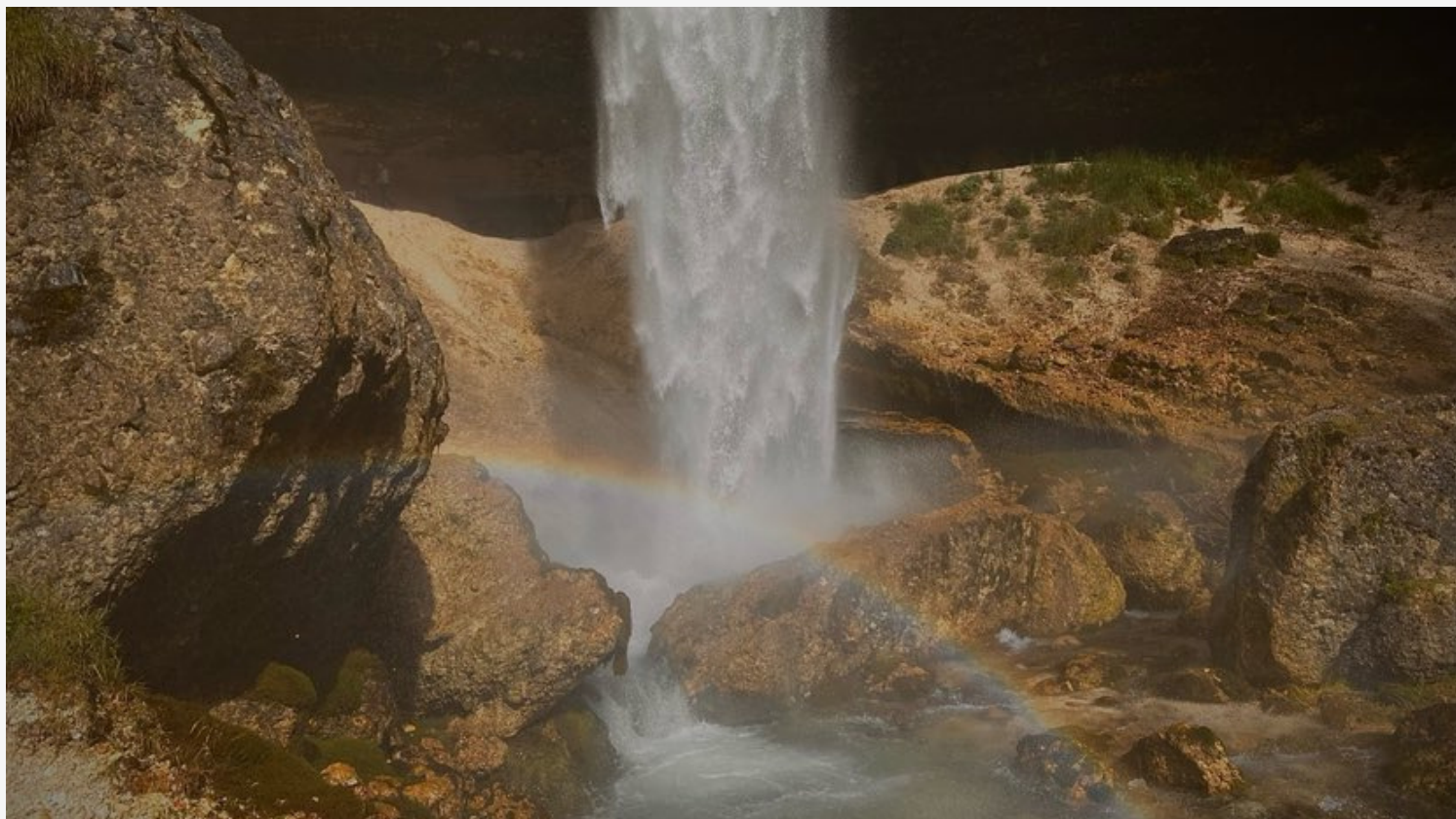


Natalia Tokarska









work of art magazine

MIKOŁAJ MARCHELEK



