

ON THE ROAD WITH jah: Fluxus, Food and Fun

How do you plan a trip thousands of miles away with very little time to decide if it will work or not? You call your travel agent, tell her what you need from her, and then go about contacting all your friends in Poland, Germany and Italy by e-mail to see if they can put you up, meet you, talk to you, visit with you all within the parameters of four weeks? And Lufthansa came through, which allowed me to contact my book friends in Düsseldorf, Unica T in Frankfurt, the Polish Artists' Union in Warsaw, the Book Art Museum people in Lodz, my friend, book artist Angela Lorenz, in Bologna, and the International Association of Art Critics who made it possible to rationalize such a trip, since they were holding their Annual Congress in Warsaw and parts Poland! And it has been twenty years that I have wanted to visit Poland. Now was the time!

I had to return to the East because of the opening of part of the *Women of the Book* show at the University of Pennsylvania Special Collections on the 18th of June! Since the Congress began on 30 May, it all seemed to work out, even a few hours in Manhattan to see my friend Sara Garden Armstrong's show at the John Gibson Gallery and rest for a couple of hours between planes. New York had pouring rain, but it felt good to be in New York for even a few hours. But thereby hangs a tale.

Lufthansa had new planes, beautiful airbuses which accommodated not casts of hundreds but a few hundred people, comfortable, beautiful in flight, with a great crew which accommodated one's every wish. It gave me time to ease into the trip, while reading the *New Yorker* magazine—the one dedicated to Saul Steinberg who had recently passed away. Adam Gopnik, the wonderful 29-year-old genius writer, wrote a eulogy “to die for” and Steinberg's love of umbrellas was revealed to me as well. I felt finally away from the tensions and pressures of planning the trip, getting my affairs in shape, cleaning the house and packing. I finally got to sit down and read the very current issue of the *New Yorker*! Wow!

DUESSELDORF

I arrived in Düsseldorf at 6 a.m., an unlikely time for anyone to be at the airport, since it was also a holiday in Germany. So I took a taxi to my hostess' house, Anna Grassl (a partner in the Book Art Gallery) which was full of light, flowers and art, and so many books. After a two-hour nap to recoup the rhythm of the place, I arose, had breakfast and went over to Renate Mergemeier's home to sip tea in her

glass enclosed sun porch. Then off to Takako Saito's studio (she, the famous Japanese Fluxus artist, who decided to settle in Düsseldorf 20 years before and who would be celebrating that event on 28 May. But alas, I could not be there for the performance, because I was to be firmly ensconced in Warsaw on that date.) And Takako's studio was amazing. Housed in a former steel mill, artists now have been given live-in studios, and hers was large, full of an array of works of art with an homage to Charlotte Moorman, painted stones, heads, boxes for the performance which she was making by hand from teeny white cubes to very large ones, which would cover her and from which she would leap to begin her performance along the river and then float those cubes down the river on 28 May. The cubes each had a different sound so that it would be a very Cage-like performance.

Here is a most sensitive artist who uses everything she eats as material for books, everyday materials become pages of the book, such as dandelion and potato skins, magnets, papercuts which she did in 1984, with backgrounds made in 1998-99. There is a sound book with beads that she made as a birthday book.



We then went out to a café for pirogues and wine and then off to the Book Gallery, which was founded by Renate Mergemeier along with Anna Grassl, featuring Takako's retrospective of mostly bookworks. Each bookwork was a sensitive, poetic feat, mostly of found objects, handmade paper, chess pieces, and even a coat of mixed media, which she wore at the opening. I looked around the Bookbinding Studio and was stunned by the amount of different jobs that were being done. This was a humming business, each client being treated as a very special customer and each job idiosyncratic as well.

We then took a walk along the Rhine, for the city is divided by this beautiful river with several bridges, walkways, open spaces which have been mapped out as a park, dominated by the new glass Provincial City Hall, large than life and much larger than Philip Johnson's Crystal Cathedral or the Ford Foundation Building. It is a unique experiment where all the utilities are recycled, and the building is self-sustaining,

rented to the Provincial government. Yet along the riverfront were design studios, chic bars with high-tech furniture, furniture showrooms, and three Frank Gehry buildings, one in titanium, one in brick and one in stone. What a surprise to see a home boy in Germany, and such beautiful buildings still unfinished. On the other side of this bank was a houseboat (3-stories) in which newly arrived immigrants are placed, one room to an immigrant, because of the shortage of housing. Supper was in a pub where *spargel* (white asparagus) and beer were the order of the day. And this was only Day One.

This next day it was cool, and by that time, my voice had gone. Something about recycled air in the plane or something like that. So since I was on my way to Frankfurt, being in a train and quiet was not such a bad idea. Of course, a few hours away, Frankfurt was warm and sunny, and Unica T met me and took me to their studio, an amazing five minutes away. In this architect-designed studio there was an animation studio, a printing studio, an exhibition design office, an editing (film) studio with a full kitchen and everything to make a creative team work better. With a toast of cava (sparkling wine from Spain) to celebrate belatedly my birthday, we went to dinner at an Iranian restaurant with Professor Roland Siegrist of the Hochschule in Mainz, who was planning a big Mail Art exhibition to honor the 500th anniversary of Gutenberg. He was delightful, charming, humorous, using all the techniques of advertising which Madison Avenue had taught the world, including a pencil inscribed with "Johannes Gutenberg – Man of the Millennium" to commemorate the great occasion. We plotted together how to do the mail art for Gutenberg, a kind of love letters to Gutenberg which will be explained more at length in this or the next issue of Umbrella. Dessert was saffron ice with pistachios—to die for! Just a hint at what was in store for me in the realm of "ice cream".

KLINGSPOR MUSEUM, OFFENBACH

The book arts are alive and well in Offenbach, housed in the Klingspor Museum, which is situated in a completely rebuilt villa which had been bombed during World War II and destroyed. Luckily, the collection was with the Klingspor family and then given to the City of Offenbach as a gift, with collections of Werkman, Schwitters, Futurist, Bauhaus, Rudolph Koch, Masareel, all 20th century books and bindings personally owned by Karl Klingspor, an industrialist who had a massive printing business. He also had an eye for what was important in the 20th century as far as books are concerned. He collected even great bindings, was a patron of the famous Rudolph Koch who was a teacher and influenced a whole generation in the making of fine typography and graphics. The emphasis in the collection is on exhibitions, handwritten books and 20th century

typography. But the director, Christian Scheffler, has no budget and no staff. He does buy a few small press books and children's books, but the collection is still a jewel and should be visited by any and all book lovers. There are also large posters (Mucha and the rest) as well as graphics.

In Offenbach, I also visited the studio of Thomas Dahmen who had spent a great deal of time in Scotland and his work was beautiful, prolific and playful. Then it was suggested that since this was the 150th birthday of Goethe and Frankfurt was celebrating his birthday (I saw in English on a huge wall, "Happy Birthday Johann" and it was signed by Deutsche Bank), I went to Goethe's house and visited the countless small rooms on three floors as well as the beautiful library. In fact, that evening we went to the Museum of Handwerke (Decorative Arts), designed by Richard Meier, and a predecessor of the Getty Center, in order to see the interpretative exhibition of one poem by Goethe (his most famous) and then hear a concert by young contemporary composers dedicated to Goethe. It was a smashing success and then we went out for drinks with the director of the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz, Eva-Maria Hanebutt-Benz, who told us of the renovations being made in the Museum, and the transfer of many of the exhibitions next door at the Church assembly rooms to continue programming, until the extension is finished by next year, the anniversary of Gutenberg.

The throat was still bothering me, but I went off to visit two of the artists who were part of Unica T in the "countryside", a short ride by train, and went through book after book which made up the *Second Encyclopedia of Thun*, a joint project to take 10 years. It is the Second Encyclopedia where the text acts as the thread which entwines itself in the artists' work. 50 volumes will be produced over the next 10 years. Ines v. Ketelhodt and Peter Malutzki aim to focus their energies and talents on mastering this enormous undertaking, an 18th century vision of a comprehensive world portrait. The collection of individual chapters and their inter-relationship become vital to the work. There will be volumes containing texts by famous authors as well as by unknown people, texts in different languages, many photographs, plates and original material from old and new books, comics, maps, etc. The whole spectrum from A to Z will be illustrated in the 50 volumes. Included are such volumes as *Atlas*, which includes a text by Borges, including linocut figures traced through the gradient lines of a pseudo map. *Buch* was assembled from spreads taken from 50 different books, some old, some new. Subjects range from lyrics, novels, tales, factual works, atlases, photo books, etc. Each copy is unique, as each receives its individual page spread from the original book, much like Borges' *The Library of Babel*, in which there are not, in the whole vast Library, two identical books. Letterpress and design by Peter

Malutzki. For more information, contact Ines v. Ketelhodt, Austrasse 7, D-61440 Oberursel/Ts., Germany. E-mail: Unica_T@compuserve.com or Peter Malutzki, Hochstrasse 12, D-56112 Lahnstein, Germany. After a trip back to Frankfurt, I see why people live out in the suburbs and work in perhaps cramped studios, but at least have peace and quiet, fresh air and nature. It was thoroughly cathartic.

A trip to the **Deutsche Bibliothek**, one of two National Libraries, the other in Leipzig, allowed me to see stunning contemporary architecture in which the library is lit by natural lighting in an inventive way, has comfortable furniture and spacious reading rooms and nooks and crannies. It is a humming library with more than 7 million books, and many stations for laptop and desktop computers, and especially the German Exile Archive from 1933 - 1945, wired and hooked up to other archives, celebrating the lives of literati, artists, historians, poets, and so many more who had to escape Germany to save their lives. There is a permanent exhibition of portraits of these people who led another life in another land. And the research into a past almost destroyed goes on. The only problem with this vast building where the technical staff is completely away from the patrons in a multiplicity of buildings is that there is no air-conditioning, and it was a hot and sticky day.

I packed and then we went out to a typical Frankfurt restaurant, featuring apple wine and quark cheese and wonderful potatoes, all outdoors, and crowded too. Each restaurant has painted walls and is characteristic of the Frankfurt area. We then went off to the station, where the Polish conductor of the train told me and others that our car was non-functional and we would be moved to another car, a much better car with couchettes, and I had a room to myself for the night and the day. Next door was a family (father and son) from Switzerland going to Poland to attend his son's marriage to a Polish girl, and another Swiss man who had a bed and breakfast in his hometown and was going to Poland as he has for many trips. It was a full moon, a beautiful night, and we had so much fun. I read, slept, and awoke to coffee and Poland, endless farmland, with occasional contemporary churches rising from the agricultural environment. The only dynamic architecture that I saw from then on was churches and more churches in each village, town or farm. And trying to learn Polish was fun—we could make out "Coca Cola" and that is about all. We finally learned the words for "track" and "train" because we passed so many stations. It was warm and sunny throughout Poland, and very green.

WARSAW

We traveled through Poland all day, arriving finally in Warsaw at 5 p.m. My friend, Radek Nowakowski, a book artist and musician, was waiting for me along with Gayle Wimmer, professor at University of Arizona in Tucson and doing research in Poland for the past five months. She has been coming to Poland since 1971 and is fluent in Polish. They did not know they were waiting for the same person, but we met, changed money, and then were whisked to my hotel in the center of Warsaw. I took my friend Alicja Stowikoska, the head of Polish Artist's Union, my host in Warsaw, as well as a book artist and Radek for drinks—and what would you know that we sat in front of a shop entitled "Pasadena" and had drinks or ice cream or whatever. I left them because I had a date to go with Gayle to a Friday night Sabbath meal, and I would not have given that up for the world. We entered the home of a family in which the candles were lit, the meal was beautiful and vegetarian, and the ice cream was delicious for dessert. The father is a philosopher and spokesman for the Jewish (small) community in Warsaw, even speaking with the Dalai Lama and soon to be in conversation with the Pope, who was about to come to Poland. The wife, a converted Jew, did paper cuts of great skill and also helped to restore the tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in the ghetto. Their sons were charming and handsome, and the evening was a very special event for me.

The next day Warsaw was mine to explore, and so I passed the Zacheta which was to be the place of registration for the Congress the next day to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier with its ceremonial stances every hour on this great Square, which was preparing for the Pope's visit with a stage set being built right in front of the National Theater and room for thousands if not a million people. I wended my way past bookstores to the Old Town, a reconstructed Old Town with wonderful iron logos for each shop, painted facades on buildings, a walled and gated section all reconstructed, and lots of tourists. There is also a Museum of Literature, from which windows wafted the music of Chopin from a piano. [One of the annoying things about Poland is its desire to emulate things in the West and someone must have told them that we love to hear music wherever we go, and so there is Muzak or satellite music in every public place: the hotel, the train station, bookstores, just any public place—and it is disturbing even to those who make phone calls, etc.] There are also casinos in hotels—all revenue which becomes a support mechanism for cultural events and even religious events such as a Sacred Music Festival in the Cathedral, which was sponsored by Lot Airlines. There are times, however, when you can ask the management to cut down the volume, and especially in restaurants, they are

delighted to comply. And Poland is very wired. Everyone has a cellular phone, and they use them walking, riding, and perhaps in private places too. That night the full moon kept me up all night, and I was not unhappy. It was a good feeling.

On 30 May, Sunday, I went to the Contemporary Art Gallery Zacheta to register, where I met Swedish critics, critics from Barbados, etc. Because we had some free time, some of us went to the Ghetto to actually see the monument to the Ghetto Uprising. There a handsome older gentleman approached me, asking me whether I knew where Mila 18 was located. He had read the book by Leon Uris, and decided to show the young man next to him where it was. I had the map and showed him where I thought it would be. It was the only building left upright after the Ghetto uprising. This man, who was on his second trip to his homeland in 50 years, was showing his son his roots. I remarked to his son how fortunate he was to have a father alive and willing to share his past with him. He confirmed how lucky he was.

Poland is a country of paradox. With an economic program that has brought financial progress to a country that certainly had been living under the shadow of Communism for so long, Poland still lives with its history and the marks of that World War II regime are everywhere, from Joe Stalin's gift to Warsaw, an oversized towering building which makes every citizen and visitor seem ant-like in comparison, now called the Cultural Center but which is as far from culture as you can get, to the oversized roads that seem to make crossing to the other side the greatest obstacle to circulation of people. Yet the young people are buying hip hop clothes, shaving their heads, wearing T-shirts with UCLA and Winnie the Pooh and the Simpsons with great aplomb. On the radio you hear Madonna and all the rest and the only difference you can see is that they speak Polish.

With a Ministry of Culture that takes its responsibility seriously and someone like **Anda Rottenberg**, who made this Congress so successful, we saw an amazing selection of museums and galleries to indicate that the visual arts are alive and well and living in Poland. The older artists seem to have accumulated information and experience to temper their new work with the memories of the old. **Sofia Kulik**, the Polish representative at the last Venice Biennale, creates a visual data bank of black and white images she culls from older art and then pieces them together into large wall-size murals consisting of small black and white photos. With a design of almost a kind of tapestry or carpet, these taken as a whole are patterned art made of individual parts which tell

a story about culture past and present. The studio of **Magdalena Abakanowicz**, in a bourgeois neighborhood, is a delicious counterpoint to the regime she had to represent when she was the selected artist by the Communist government to go abroad and represent her country in exhibitions and Biennales. This amazing woman sculptor is now represented at the Metropolitan Museum on the roof garden through late fall and at the sculpture garden at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Her generosity with great cocktails [vodka of course] and homemade treats was balanced by a slide lecture on her work with great zest and passion. She is a national treasure indeed.

The National Museum is housed in a bleak stone building with a large collection of Polish art going back to 1862, including **Tadeuz Kantor's** *Man with an Umbrella* (1949), which caught my eye, among other paintings. The young curator of contemporary art told us that within 3 years there would be a new extension to the Museum, housing the contemporary collection. A little later in the day, my friend and I went back to the Ghetto to put flowers on the monument, saying Kaddish (the prayer for the dead) for all my friends who lost relatives there in the Warsaw Ghetto, and then we visited all the trailing stones which marked the feats of Jews and Christians alike to help the Jews when they were relegated to the Ghetto. It was a sobering experience, visiting the monument to the Jews as well as feeling the vibrations of the place, with a green meadow in front of the monument, as well as the bunker monument just a sliver of what it once was, and I could hear the hum of voices from years past, surviving, plotting, strategizing to live, just to live. In the Umschlagplatz monument in Warsaw, where the first names of all the Jewish men were carved into the marble, as well as the names of all the Jewish women, I paid homage for this was the site of the Deportation Point from whence all the Jews were sent to the Concentration Camps. Even the Pope paid homage here a week later.

Then of course, there were visits to palaces which have become museums of great note. In a Palladian style palace, called Krokarnia, we attended an opening of *The North - The South: Transcultural Visions*, which included work by Bill Viola as well as Bruce Nauman. Under a full moon with the stars as a canopy, we ate a sumptuous meal and felt miles and years away from the contemporary art inside the museum.

At the Contemporary Art Center in the Ujazdowski Castle there was a wonderful opening of the exhibition *Conceptual Reflexion in Polish Art* with heavy emphasis on conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s, as well as bringing it up to the present time. Included was an installation by Poznan-based artist Johanna Hoffman who created a dark room with light-

sensitive books and the sound was a heartbeat throughout the room. It was a stunning addition to the conceptual show. This Contemporary Art Center covers music, dance, films, video hosting 300 projects annually with artists from all over the world including John Cage, Frank Gehry, Lynn Herschman, Alison Knowles, Matt Mullican, Joseph Kosuth and many more. This castle was reconstructed only in 1974 and completed in 1981. The space is huge and on many floors.

A fascinating exhibition called *Fauna* appeared at the Zacheta Gallery, with the theme of animals in almost all the work, which allowed Barry Flanagan of England, Nedko Solakov from Bulgaria and countless other artists to commune with artists from all over Europe to address the subject of animals with great joy, wit and intelligence. This show, conceptually designed by Mikhail Minidlin, a Russian curator, art critic and director of the State Center of Contemporary Art in Moscow along with a young curator at the Zacheta, Magdalena Kardasz, made a very popular show in a marble palace with Russian and Polish artists delighting the public of all ages. And this second edition extended the show into Poland and international artists.

To talk of Warsaw without telling you about history would be unrealistic. There is a shadow of the Holocaust everywhere. Lest we forget is not just for the Jewish population, but for all of Poland. The shadow of this horrible chapter in history is everywhere tracing the commemorative plaques on many many buildings citing facts and figures and people who were killed, or helped assist in the resistance or uprising in the ghetto, or visiting the monuments which commemorate an event or a person or the whole reaction to Hitler's grand plan. Ironically, I was with two Swedish critics as we saw the memorial monument to the Jewish Ghetto, made of Swedish marble designated by Hitler to be used for the memorials in all countries as he finished off the Jews. The irony was very sharp as we looked upon the monument surrounded by a large green meadow. The art that is made by Jewish and Christian artists alike is touched, tinged and tainted at times by the memory of the past. You don't have to be Jewish to have been affected by your history here, and thus, it continues to appear in photography, sculpture, installation and so much more.

Meanwhile, the Polish Artists Union has sponsored since 1994 a series of exhibitions of book arts, including book illustration; the Polish artists are very great illustrators, especially for children's books as well as artist books and book objects. The show at the National Library in Warsaw was whimsically installed on cardboard boxes, large enough

to set up end to end to create pedestals for these wonderful bookworks. Under the leadership of Alicja Slowikowska and Radek Nowakowski, the book artists are determined to find venues to show their evolving book art and make a contribution to the growing audiences as well as artists throughout the world who are creating works of art in book form in ingenious ways. They go to book fairs in Frankfurt, Leipzig, New York, London and other venues to in order to exhibit and demonstrate once again that Poland has made an important contribution in this field. Yet without critics and without collectors, there is a problem. They do promotion, but there are no sales.

We had an amazing array of nationalities represented at the Art Critics' Congress—the Ivory Coast, Barbados, Taiwan, Thailand, Croatia, ex-Yugoslavia, Bratislava, Ireland, Norway, Soviet Union, and many more. Most of the sessions were held in the Authors' Association, a building where the heads of kings were found hidden in the cellar after World War II and were adhered to the facade. It was an elegant building, close to the big "blue building" which Sony had constructed over the site of the Big Synagogue of Warsaw which was completely decimated in that war. Close to it is the Jewish Historical Institute, which is trying to recover the history that was destroyed of the largest Jewish community in all of Europe, all obliterated. There is a large bookstore, and they are in the process of renovating their exhibitions. That same day I spoke to two curators from Bratislava who gave me a brochure on a deeply moving work of art created by Anne & Patrick Poirier for *Memory of a Place* at the Center of Contemporary Art of the synagogue of Trnava, an installation evoking the tragedy of the Holocaust in relation to the destiny of Jewish families of the city of Trnava. In the space once housing the synagogue proper, in which the balcony was set aside for the women, and the main space was for the altar and the men, the Poiriers had 3000 tear-like glass flasks hanging down from the ceiling, representing the 3000 people of Trnava who were killed by Hitler during the Holocaust. At the end of the sanctuary where the Torah was housed, there is a red sheer curtain against a fuschia colored wall, and the shadows of the "tears" make large impressions on the side walls. Lest you forget! It was a very moving description, and only if I could have visited Bratislava to see such an installation.

That night on the way to the Castle, which is a completely reconstructed building once the home of the King, but now a museum showing the very gilded rooms in which the King held court, we passed a church where, because it was the eve of Corpus Christi, they were hoisting a head of crucified Christ onto the facade of the church, using a new synthetic material. They were using a cherry picker to put the pieces

together to make a completed sculpture. The process was as impressive as the finished product. And the reception in the Castle along with a guided tour was accompanied once again by fine food and drink.

The next day I went to the Gallery Foksal, which was the headquarters of the avant-garde in Poland founded by Tadeusz Kantor and his friends and still going strong today. So much history happened within those walls that they have done a volume on that history, and it merits the world's attention, for this gallery showed cutting edge art even in the midst of the Communist regime. And we had excellent papers on body and art, the gaze, and then we went to the Subway to see a wonderful exhibition of blown-up photographs placed where advertising would ordinarily be positioned, curated by Tomasz Tromsazewski (our host in the Subway) and Juliusz Donajski with the work of Maria Zbaska, who has taken photos of the life of young people. This kind of "public art" is now sponsored by the Outdoor Media Services, the Metro itself, Eclipse Poland, and other sponsors, which is the custom now (they took it from us) to get sponsors for any art event you can imagine. You can see it at www.ddg.com.pl or galeria@ddg.art.pl

Of course, wherever you went, you realized that the Pope was coming to town. My hotel became the headquarters of the Vatican Press Office, and access to certain elevators was cut off due to security, etc. As a result, the Pope's visit was in fact a huge event for all cities and towns which he would visit. He certainly is a home boy! Large elevated altars were set up for him, banners, posters and announcements were everywhere, and the anticipation of his visit was pre-eminent. However, he was to arrive after we would have left, except for the group going to Gdansk, who I understand saw his entourage including several ambulances leaving Gdansk for the countryside where he was to give his first Mass.

We arrived at the Radziwill Palace in Nieborow, the home of that family which was so predominant and rich, before it lost its wealth in the 19th century. (Jackie Kennedy's sister married Prince Radziwill, if you remember). As a result, the Palace was taken over by the Ministry of Culture, and thus was saved from the bombing during the war, because it belonged to the State, and the Germans wanted to hurt individuals much more than the State-owned property. The Palace, guest house for such dignitaries as the Queen of England and George Bush, was elegant, had Delft-tile furnaces in each room (because there was a workshop on the grounds where the tiles were made by Dutch artisans), and period furniture. The grounds were extensive with two

lakes, ancient sculpture, and the quiet and peace of an exquisite natural setting.

LODZ

In the city of Lodz, there is the International Artists' Museum, a museum without walls with a worldwide channel of community linking artists and intellectuals from various media through a chain of autonomous, locally-run art centers. Formed during the Construction in Process III [1990] in Lodz which saw its return to Poland after the collapse of Communism, this is the only independent museum in the world run directly by artists. Emmett Williams, a founding member of Fluxus, the American poet and artist, has been its president since that time, directing the museum with its moving trans-national events. The leading artists have been Kandinsky, Kupka, Gropius, Ad Reinhardt, John Cage, Joseph Beuys, Allen Ginsberg as catalyst. A number of offices around the world in Berlin, Bydgoszcz, Cardiff, Dublin, Eindhoven, Melbourne, Moscow, Paris, Tel Aviv, New York look to Lodz as its nerve center. The next *Construction in Process* will take place in Poland in 2000. Our host, Ryszard Wasko, made two different kinds of borscht for us and a vegetable soup, plus salads, breads, etc. It was a real home-like reception for us while their museum space was under renovation. They showed us a film made by his wife which told the history of the Artists' Museum.

Not far from Lodz is the amazing Centre of Polish Sculpture in Oronsko, 120 km from Warsaw. Surrounded by a vast park, the center is housed in a 19th century manor farm consisting of a restored palace, orangery and manor buildings. The family who founded it gave a house and a studio to Polish painter Joseph Brandt who set up the Oronsko Independent Academy in 1877. Here 200 artists from around the world come to study, create and execute works of art in sculptural form. Artists get housing, a studio, and specialists to help them make sculpture and realize their artistic projects whose only limits are space and properties of certain chosen materials. 60 technicians are at the artists' beck and call to work in plastic, stone, wood, bronze, ceramics or paper. Many of the works are left in the sculptural park as a permanent exhibit. Some artists have a live-in studio but have dialogue with their peers at meals and symposia. There is also a hotel for artists on the premises if one chooses not to do the work-live-in situation. There is also a Museum of Contemporary Sculpture, two smaller galleries called The Chapel and The Orangerie, broad meadows and ponds, and so much more. The exhibition we saw was one called *Models of the World*, a demonstration of the links between science and art, by two Polish artists and one from Finland, which was a poetic and

beautifully installed exhibition that remains an amazing resonant visual experience. The phenomenal fish-bake that they did for us was a ritualistic baking of the fish in black boxes over an open fire. What exquisite taste, what a delicacy! For more information, contact them at ul. Topolowa 1, 26-681 Oronsco, Poland. ph/fax: 48048)362-1916. e-mail: crporo@polbox.com

As far as Lodz is concerned, it has the largest collection of modern art in the world, second only to the Museum of Modern Art in New York with the International Collection of Modern Art as part of the Museum of Art in Lodz, founded in 1930-31 on the initiation of the a.r. [revolutionary artists or real avant-garde] group headed by Wladyslaw Strzeminski, an eminent Polish painter and art theoretician, a friend of Malevich. It gathered works by artists from everywhere in Europe including those who lived in Paris who were asked to give to the collection, such as Ernst, Calder, Arp, Leger, and many more artists which were not accepted by official museums. After the period of Social Realism, when none of these works were allowed to be exhibited, contacts and cooperation were renewed and many works of art by major artists were donated to the collection. By the end of the 1960s, the museum began to catch up with the gaps that had been enforced by the regime. As a result, works by Tadeusz Kantor, Roman Opalka, Abakanowicz, Wodiczko, Balka and many more were added to the collection, where many works have been lent to other institutions abroad and in Europe for shows. One of the great works in the collection is a body of work by Joseph Beuys, donated in 1981 by the artist himself with many works of art on paper as well as art objects and installations. After a visit to this museum, you learn how much you do not know about the history of art, even of European art. Sam Francis, John Baldessari, Chris Burden and many more Los Angeles artists have contributed widely to this collection. In fact, there is a Los Angeles-Lodz connection.

The Poles really know how to publish, and I came away with a library of catalogs, documents, artist books, and a myriad of other documentation to make the trip not as portable as I had wanted. Printing is good in Poland and these art organizations do their best to document, present and excite through the printed word. Of course, that brings up the problem of language, but English seems to be an alternative language, one that is used as an accompanying translated text for almost everything. I do not think it was especially for the art critics congress, but in fact for the larger art community. If you cannot come to Poland, you can in fact read about the art in English in their catalogs.

Another gift to us was a copy of the *Mare Articum*, the Baltic Art Magazine with a special issue dedicated to the Autonomy of Art, which is printed in English. It is impressive, illustrated both in black and white and color, and well designed. Its address is Pl. Zolnierza Polskiego 2, 70-551 Szczecin, Poland. e-mail: mlewoc@um.szczecin.pl

One of the most important interests of mine is artist books, and one of the reasons for coming to Poland was to visit Jadwiga and Janusz Tryzno, who direct *Correspondance des Arts*, a private foundation founded in 1980, situated in a monumental villa of a former industrialist, collector and patron of the arts before World War II. Located in the center of Lodz, the villa was chosen as the seat of the museum for its high cellars adaptable for printing and paper workshops and large rooms with 19th century interiors for concerts, meetings, and exhibitions and to keep the book collections in special cases. The library, in fact, was designed by Otto Wagner. The villa has been slowly renovated by the Tryznos in order to make it comfortable for a workshop, an exhibition space, and a papermaking shop. The Museum owns 600,000 different typefonts, a composing department and various typographic machines, equipment to make handmade paper and also bookbinding equipment, an offset press, and even computer equipment. Currently, the museum is trying to get the old bookbinding equipment from the Museum of Krakov, but also is on the lookout for all equipment available due to the upgrading and modernization of the printing business during the past two decades. It now owns 250,000 type matrices, some of which represent the Hebrew and Yiddish fonts which were used to publish Sholom Aleichem and other great Jewish writers. They own the first and the last matrix cutter ever manufactured. They are trying to maintain all their printing presses and machinery which are now antiques and relics of a past technology which no longer exists except in this museum, which is so sorely in need of a patron or endowment or a new government structure in Poland to support this jewel.

The Museum has had a number of exhibitions and collaborators in various book fairs as well. They have been seen in the US, in England and Ireland, in Germany, in France and in Israel. Renowned throughout the world, *Correspondance des Arts* is now looking to create a permanent collection of artist books with an emphasis on Polish artists first and then an extension of international bookworks as well. They are also creating a reference collection of books about books, the nucleus of which comes from the collection of the founders, Jadwiga and Janusz Tryzno.

The Museum of Book Art wants to place the book as an important part of Polish culture after World War II. The destruction of private presses, publishers and the tradition of the "the beautiful book" ceased to exist until the 1980s when the authorities allowed for private purchases of printing equipment. It took a long time to find out more about the emigration printing houses, and soon the Tryznos received enough acclaim to convince the director of the Library of the University of Lodz to see its collection of art books. With an exhibition in 1992, the Museum of Book Arts finally reached recognition and acclaim. Called *Books and Pages*, the exhibition launched the reputation of the Museum of Book Arts which is now looking for funding to allow it to continue its ambitious program. The Museum attracts bibliophiles and artists, as well as young people and students. The Tryznos fund the museum through their bookbinding, printing and design business, but this is never enough. The hope is to find grants to make the foundation stable. Its future is still not defined, depending upon its non-profit status, which is still to be determined by the State. Meanwhile, it continues in its efforts to make the "beautiful book" live again in Poland. The address is Correspondance des Arts, ul. Tymienieckiego 24, Lodz, Poland.

KRAKOV

In Krakov, the dominant artist is Tadeuz Kantor [1915-1990] designer, educator, performance artist, author of numerous texts on art, statements and manifestos, who in 1942 founded the Independent Theater, in 1945, the Group of Young Artists, the Club of Artists in 1948, the Cricot Theater in 1955 and in 1957, he co-founded the Cracow Group. This trip saw a number of exhibitions dedicated to various periods of Kantor's career, including one at the most viable commercial gallery in all of Poland, the Gallery Starmach, which seems larger than any gallery in Chelsea in New York City today.

In Krakov as well is the first privately owned gallery, the Gallery Potocka founded by Maria Anna Potocka, who has been showing artists since the 1970s in four different galleries, the nucleus of which will be included in the Museum of Modern Art in Niepolomice, an international collection consisting of works of art donated by artists including several hundred works in drawing, sculpture, objects, installations, video, audio works, photographs, films, etc. A library, collection of visual documentation, and collections of papers of the artists will also be part of this first museum of modern art to be established in Poland since World War II. The collection includes such artists as Eric Andersen, Marek Chlanda, Ken Friedman, Jochen Gerz, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Milan Knizak, Geza

Perneczky, David Rabinowitch, Daniel Spoerri, Petr Stembera, Peter Weibel and many more Polish artists.

Krakov is such a beautiful city, medieval in mood and in scale, surrounded at one time by a wall and gates, but these were destroyed by the Austrians, except for one gate and a piece of the wall. You hear footsteps, not car motors, and you hear people talking. There are galleries in astounding spaces downstairs in buildings—with arched roofs, stone walls, but art looks good in caves as well as museums. One of my favorite is the **Czartoryscy Museum**, which houses Leonardo's *Lady with the Ermine*, as well as Greek and Roman sculpture, genre paintings of Giorgione, a Rembrandt, and wonderful letters, manuscripts and ephemeral articles collected by a family that is still collecting and is still involved in preserving the collection and buildings. The churches themselves are museums, since there are so many of them. Many of the stained glass windows and altars such as the one in the Cathedral in Krakov were protected during the War in order to be preserved for posterity. And there are many galleries, the most prominent of which is the Andrzej Starmach Gallery, which hosted an amazing lunch for us and showed us Tadeusz Kantor paintings.

But Krakov also had a large Jewish population which was located in the Kazimierz section of the city. There were 5 synagogues and there are *still* five synagogues, and since it was Saturday there was no way to enter them. The Jewish community centers its activity at the Ariel café. There is also the renowned Singer café which has Singer sewing machines on each table, a reminder of the working Jewish population in that section of town. But Krakov is restoring the Kazimierz section with great skill. The cemetery of Krakov has on its outside wall a warning for people not to walk on the sidewalk, since the sidewalk covers the bones of those interred in the cemetery previous to the Communist decision to contain that cemetery as it is today. Asking that we walk on the other side of the street allows us to look at the wrought iron gate surrounding the square, which is a decorative flow of wrought iron Menorahs (candlestick holders) all around the square. The pictures of the Pope in the windows of the building reflect the Christians who live in the same area as the remaining Jewish community, which still has an active cultural program in the synagogues, showing films about World War II, etc.

If you want to know, Poland eats well. At least, we were offered wonderful food, wonderful fruit juices which are exported to the U.S. and they are natural and delicious, and great beer and vodka. Most of the wine drunk in Poland comes from Bulgaria and other European countries. But it

is given with great generosity and with beautiful presentations. A good time was had by all.

As I traveled first by train and then by bus through Poland, there is new housing mingled with the old Communist style of housing going up everywhere. There are new churches everywhere in the middle of farmland and in towns and valleys. And there are new woods, planted trees everywhere, to fill in the blanks left by the bombings. And women are smoking more than ever. And as I saw from the bus window, there was a wonderful shop called Parasolsky which I could not capture on film, a McDonald's almost everywhere as a token to Capitalism, but rarely frequented by adults, and mostly by children. (It is not cheap, but rather on the pricey side—American prices in a land where \$300 is the average monthly salary). And a Florida shark show was being featured in one small town.

What can I say to be in a new country, where the vocabulary is a matter of about 10 words for me, while there is a feeling of well-being as artists, a camaraderie, a continuous dialogue of intelligent discourse and even contention, that makes for an organic art community. The country is full of farmland, but it is fruitful in the cultural development of a post-war, post-regime country that is constantly inventing itself.

ON THE WAY TO ITALY

The 19-hour bus ride to Venice from Lodz opened my eyes to the beauty of the landscape. I was the only foreigner in the bus load of Poles going to Italy, and I didn't know where they were going to get off. Luckily, after many hours on the bus (we made a pit stop about every four hours), which allowed us to walk around, etc. I noticed that in the Czech Republic, there were using a terracotta colored aluminum roofing to simulate our tile roofs, probably manufactured there. Bananas and cherries were sold by the side of the road (it was early cherry season) and the sign read "Bana-Cash". The Czechs have a beautiful country, manicured landscapes, the old buildings look clean, the homes seem beautiful, there are horses, cows and pigs, and they are building freeways everywhere. I saw more road-building than anything else.

I also noticed that although there is the European Union, Poland has not joined it, so that customs at the borders meant a serious search and perusal of passports, etc. As soon as the hostess on board the bus realized I was a "foreigner" she asked whether I spoke any other languages, and I said English and Italian, so she spoke to me in English, telling me that she would let me know a half-hour before we reached Venice. It was a very long night. But at 5 a.m., I was the only one to get off the bus, and I owned

Venice—only for a short time, but I owned Venice in its silence and in its seductive beauty.

VENICE

I took the vaporetto to the Rialto Bridge, near where I would be staying for three days. The first thing I saw was the logo of an umbrella shop with three glass umbrellas nesting in each other (red, green and blue), and I was a happy tourist. The house we stayed in was 500 years old, and was centrally located to everything, especially the Venice Biennale, to which I was going. The air was soft, the sun hot, and the beauty of the canals made me lift my heart in happiness. I finally returned to bell'Italia after a long absence. I saw a great deal of art, and my old friends from the Art Critics' Congress, but the Biennale was full of Italians and other people who were not Press, who were not interested in the art, and we just couldn't figure it out. At any rate, the Japanese Pavilion was great (some butoh dancers came along from Japan to perform, thanks to Johnny Walker, an American who has lived in Japan for decades), and the Israeli Pavilion was all about the Holocaust, so being filled with Poland, I was deeply moved by the installation about children of the Holocaust, and the photos of Auschwitz. Ann Hamilton's installation in the whole of the U.S. Pavilion was poetic, and you can read about it in almost every art magazine in the U.S. and abroad. She is a friend of mine, so I felt especially pleased to see her and embrace her congratulating her on creating another magical work of art. The Polish Pavilion had a wonderful luncheon so I finally had my breakfast and lunch combined—Italian style, of course. The best art, however, in the Biennale is at the Arsenale, or Aperto where young Chinese artists, distinguished German video artists who do installations and Americans were in the great spaces of that place. It redeemed the "official" art at the Giardini. One of the outstanding exhibitions, interactive and loud, was an installation by Jue Chang of a "percussion instrument" comprising about 100 drums transformed from chairs and beds collected from different parts of the world. 60 "drum-batons" are available made from police clubs, fragments of arms and ammunition, stones, and all kinds of branches. The viewers can play with the instrument all during the exhibition, but at the opening, 3 Tibetan Buddhist monks were invited to play.

Russia participated grandly, especially with Komar & Melamid's series of photographs taken by a 7-year-old chimpanzee, taught by the artists to use various cameras during the summer of 1998. Mikki, the chimp, while using cameras without automatic focus, often changed the focus by touching the lens with his nose. The "impressionistic" work that resulted remind the artists of their nostalgic childhood

memories. **Bulgaria** announced with a postcard that after nearly 30 years absence from the officially participating countries of the Venice Biennale, the Republic of Bulgaria has announced that it is prepared to participate in the 2001 Biennale. And the **Royal Thai Pavilion** was a first, by setting up a teak platform on the lawn between several national pavilions and serving Thai beer to their participants. Word has it that Rirkrit Tiravanija had something to do with this performance!

Anna Banana was with me in Venice and in Verona, so it was wonderful to have such a wonderful traveling companion. We made the rounds, saw the art of Taiwan which was so moving that it brought tears to our eyes. There were three artists installed in the Palazzo dei Prigioni: an older artist, Buh-Ching Hwang, who made huge wall portraits (on the wall) using grasses and seeds, and then installed pods, seeds, funghi and natural phenomena on dishes on tables throughout the space, including a black table with black bottles on it in the corner. It was amazing walking up the stairs and coming upon such a significant mixed media installation, with a special emotion for the land and traditional values of an agricultural society. The next gallery had a younger artist, Chieh-Jen Chen, one who digitized older photographs of torture during wars at the turn of the century in which he superimposed his nude actors fleeing disasters in Chinese history, all done in black and white. And the youngest Taiwanese artist, Tun-Lu Hung, used kitsch and popular culture depicting sexy dolls in animated light boxes. And then Taiwan hosted a marvelous reception at the Café Florian on Piazza San Marco for the press, with Bellinis flowing and a good time was had by all.

VITTORE BARONI

I finally met the man, the great "mail artist" and catalyst for Incongruous Meetings. He came to Venice to visit with me for an afternoon, and I was delighted to finally know this American-speaking Italian who has been part of my vocabulary for at least two decades. I also met **Pier Mario Ciani**, who is a colleague of Baroni's who lives in Udine. Ciani also was meeting with the **Anonymous Astronauts**, a group of young and radical artists who were all around the Biennale passing around press passes as well as stickers saying "Only Those who Attempt the Impossible will achieve the absurd." They were located in the Oreste section of the Italian Pavilion in Space A, and they were giving out chunks of bread. Oreste is a group of Italian artists who have been working together with the aim of creating spaces of freedom and of action for ideas, inventions, projects for the past two years. Residency programs, workshops, web sites, meetings, trips live or e-mail conferences, books, theoretical discourses and public statements are part of their

program. One of their programs was the meeting and publication of the book, "How do I explain to my Mother that what I do is useful?" They have programmed conferences about creating a network among Italian artists and those artists abroad and so many other projects. For more information contact <http://undo.net/oreste> or to participate in their conferences click on forum. Their e-mail address is: oreste@undo.net for exchange of information and projects.

We then went to see the Basquiat show at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa in Piazza San Marco and at the Museo Correr the Oldenburg Retrospective in the adjacent museum and then visited exhibitions of Native American artists mostly from California who were in a wonderful space near the Grand Canal at La Schola Gallery, including Frank LaPena, Kay Walkingstick, Simon Ortiz, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, Harry Fonseca, among others, as well as David Neel, a Canadian Kwagiutl artist who created a traditional dug out ocean-going canoe that matched the gondolas of the Venetians and other wonderful wooden carved masks in the San Stae space, called Walas-Kwis-Gila (Travels Great Distances) which was so beautifully restored as a gallery space. See <http://www.onedgeline.com>

By this time, you will have read all about the pavilions, the artists, the noise and the audioworks, especially the audio-portrait of Venice by Bill Fontana. But there were also protests against the war in Kosovo with a large folded broadside in four languages, as well as a stand in the Venice Biennale by WochenKlausur, asking for intervention for educational opportunities for Kosovo refugees. They gave out surprise bags for 40,000 lire donations for the education of Kosovarian refugees. Each bag contains a little present: trips to Austria, art books, wine, olive oil and fine vinegar, restaurant vouchers, gondola rides, magazine subscriptions, teddy bears and garden dwarves, all in a lottery.

VERONA

Lithuanian and Estonians artists were exhibiting in wonderful spaces during the Biennale shows, and there were also other thematic shows in ex-churches as well. Tourists are everywhere in Venice, in all colors, creeds and denominations. The tour leader either holds up an umbrella or some other vertical designation in order to have her group follow her or him. It is an endless line of tourist groups, mingling with the locals who speak Veneto so fast that I could hardly understand one word—and that is the dialect spoken in the area. We then took the vaporetto to the station, got on a train to Verona and arrived in this wonderful city rested, relaxed and ready to have a real shower and a wonderful apartment with a comfortable kitchen! The churches have all been restored in Verona, so that you can visit them and know what you are looking at,

and the layers of cultures that have built up the churches can be visited as well—Roman ruins, medieval remains and then the extant church with intarsiated choirstalls, ancient frescoes, passing Juliet's house (Romeo's girlfriend) and the Roman ruins so beautifully visible. Into the country to see the marble quarries where marble is actually worked on as an industry outside Verona. It's a big part of the economy. And picking the dark, ripe cherries and then eating them in the warm sunshine of a long summer day, one that stays light until about 10:30—now that's great living!

BOLOGNA

A quick trip to visit Angela Lorenz in Bologna allowed me to see how this bookmaker works, how her studio (a former stable) is functional and beautiful at the same time, created by her husband who is a miracle-maker, not only with his construction work, but also with his ice cream, which he makes with his brother in a wonderful Gelateria in Bologna where the best ice cream in the world is made—exotic flavors such as ginger, such as orange made from the oranges of Calabria shipped directly to the ice cream store, and the new flavor fennel—now I have to go back to Bologna to eat ice cream everyday for a week—different flavors and perhaps it might take a month to exhaust the menu. HmMMMM!

A train ride to Milano and then from Milano to Düsseldorf to pick up my plane was eventful, since I met a Pakistani businessman who had to walk three hours each day in Paris to his machinery show, because there were strikes that crippled the city; a German doctor trained in Italy who is married to another doctor who was in Kosovo helping the refugees; a man from Korea who works with Food for Hunger, who just came back from a week in Albania to help the refugees who criticized the U.S. for its misconceived strategies. I arrived in Düsseldorf in the morning to see the Book Gallery again, visit with Takako Saito and see the rest of her retrospective at the other gallery. She is an artist full of silent music and silent poetry. She makes everything herself, doing experiments with onion and saffron, or beet juice using these materials as media and using an iron or a candle to create texture on paper creating caricatured faces. Just as in her studio, she floated miniature chairs upside down on the ceiling, adhering them too the ceiling with chewing gum, which works the best, as she told me. She uses the simplest materials to make poetic work. She coats glass to frost it and leave a section clear. She made us a delicious Japanese dinner and afterwards went through her father's collection of matchbox art and found one umbrella piece for my collection. At 10:45 p.m., the sky was still light, there was a sliver of a moon above, and all was well with the world.

USA

The next morning I was on my way to Newark and then Philadelphia, where part of the *Women of the Book Show* was being opened the following night. Saw a most wonderful show of Dieter Roth's books and prints at the Moore College of Art in Philadelphia from the Albertina in Vienna. It is the only venue in the U.S. for this collection, and my friend Jan Voss opened the show with a wonderful talk. You can see some of it on <http://moorecollege.com/exhibitions> so if you want to explore Dieter Roth, it will be an important experience. The show ended at the end of July and there is \$45.00 catalog, published by Oktagon.

In New York, I saw the American show at the Whitney (Part I) and the great Surrealism show at the Guggenheim, and after the Surrealism show, there is nothing more to say. It was one of the great experiences of my life. An exhibition not only of paintings and sculptures and graphics, but also of letters, book layouts, drawings and all the ephemera that makes a movement become organic and alive! In addition, I found a wonderful tintype for the Umbrella Museum with a husband and a wife each with a closed umbrella at the Photographer's Place in SoHo and a perfect ending to a great trip. And then I came home to hundreds of e-mail messages and tubs of mail which took 6½ hours to open and sort. Never a dull moment. The trip was over, but I shall not be the same. Of course, I came home to screaming headlines of three Jewish synagogues in California's capital city, Sacramento, being torched, of which one, B'nai Israel, lost its complete library, except for the overdue books. It seemed so familiar after the memories of Poland's history, but it was happening now, in June 1999, in California!

It was a well choreographed trip that was full of surprises that were remarkable. Having explored new vistas, those vistas so full of history have touched my soul and I have been transformed. A vacation is not only a displacement of the body, but a successful "vacation" is one to vacate the mind and fill it with new experiences, new vistas, new perspectives, and refreshingly new friends. I would recommend to anyone to travel in May-June or September-October and not in the heat of the summer with the crowds, and to plan for all contingencies. Be flexible, be persistent, and increase your stamina, for physical strength is as much necessary as the mental stamina to take in all you see and experience. I also suggest using a credit card to change money, rather than carrying travelers' checks, since you get the best exchange and there are money machines almost everywhere. And be sure to wear great walking shoes. *Ciao* is such a wonderful word, because it means "hello" and "goodbye". I returned—looking backward and forward at the same time. *Do widzenia!*