

EXHIBITION DATES

PRESS CONFERENCE

Thursday | 13.3.2025, 11:00 a.m.

OPENING

Friday | 14.3.2024, 7:00 p.m.
without registration, free entry

EXHIBITION PERIOD

15.3.2025–6.7.2025

CONTACT

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OPENING HOURS

Tue 2–6 p.m.
Wed through Sun 11 a.m.–6 p.m.
Thurs 11 a.m.–7 p.m.
closed on Mondays, except public holidays

PRESS

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PRESS TEXT

ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW

BODY LANGUAGES

15 MARCH TO 6 JULY 2025

With the second institutional solo exhibition in the German-speaking area to be dedicated to the Polish sculptor ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW (1926 Kalisz, PL – 1973 Passy, FR), BODY LANGUAGES offers a rare opportunity to get to know the oeuvre of one of the most fascinating artists of the twentieth century who, in spite of her innovative artistic output, has only become known internationally in the last two decades. The central focus of Szapocznikow's sculptural and graphic works is on the human body, through which she uncompromisingly thematizes the fragility of existence and the paradoxes of life. Her untiring investigation of unconventional sculptural practices, materials, and forms assures her a status as one of the pioneering female sculptors who—alongside Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, and Eva Hesse—made fundamental contributions to an expansion of the sculptural.

BODY LANGUAGES brings together more than 80 sculptures and drawings and investigates Szapocznikow's work from the mid-1950s until shortly before her early death at the age of 46. The central focus of the exhibition is on the sensorily disquieting and humorously provocative oeuvre, which the survivor of the Holocaust develops during her most experimental phase from the mid-1960s onward in Paris, in the context of occurrences in contemporary art and with regard to her own biographical experiences. The exhibition traces out the artistic path taken by the sculptor, who began working in a traditional, figurative style and attained international visibility with her so-called *objets maladroits* ("awkward objects") out of unstable and amorphous forms. Casts of what are most often zones of her own body become the trademark of her sculptural practice.

Numbering among Alina Szapocznikow's best-known series of works are *Lampe-bouche* (Illuminated lips, 1966) und *Sculpture-lampe* (1970). These seductively staged works from casts of sensitive bodily zones are hybrids of sculpture and objects for everyday use. As if upon a flower stalk, red-colored lips, breasts, buttocks, and sculpted phalluses grow into floral formations which, as functioning lamps made of polyester resin, shine from within and, in the expanded field of sculpture of their era, assert themselves in an eccentric and self-confident manner. With these provocative forms, Szapocznikow—just as in her series *Dessert* (1970–1971)—alludes to the female body as an attractive commodity in the context of mass production and consumer society. The fragmented body is both sculptural material and the subject of her work.

Already as an established sculptor in Poland, Alina Szapocznikow begins to deconstruct the wholeness of the human figure with works such as *Eksumowany* (Exhumed, 1955/1957)—a tribute to the Hungarian activist László Rajk, who was murdered in 1949 under the Stalinist dictatorship—, *Pnąca* (Climbing, 1959) and *Maria Magdalena* (1959–1960). In the Paris of the 1960s, her oeuvre arises in an encounter with Surrealism and the contemporary movements of Nouveau

Réalisme and Pop Art. She starts to integrate machine parts into her sculptures—as in the larger-than-life-sized sculpture *Machine en chair* (Fleshy Machine, 1963–1964) or in her famous assemblage *Goldfinger* (1965). She expands the spectrum of her sculptural material through the inclusion of personal photographs, media images, and pieces of clothing. Experiments with new industrial materials such as polyester and polyurethane, which up to then had been used primarily for the production of household- and industrial goods, offered Szapocznikow new compositional options and opened the possibility of systematizing the process of making bodily impressions. From that point on, duplicated casts of bodily parts constitute the most crucial building-blocks of her artistic vocabulary. For example, in the works *Soliter (Samotny)* (Soliter [Solitary]), *Nemrod (Sinobrody)* (Nemrod [Bluebeard]) und *Noyée (Plongée)* (Drowned [Plunged]) (each 1968) of the *Expansion Series*, in which casts of the belly of her female friend or of a woman's upper body seem to be sinking into a mass of black, amorphous polyurethane. These pieces are early examples of her work with the rapidly spreading plastic polyurethane, which introduces unpredictability as a productive component of her sculptural practice. The direct reference to the body and the malleability of the material are further elaborated in her *Fotorzeźby* (Photosculptures, 1971), in which she arranges objects shaped in her mouth out of chewing gum and has them be photographed like traditional sculptures. There is an eye-catching interest in the provocative offhandedness of the form casually created in everyday life. Arising at the same time as the *Expansion Series* are further **Belly Sculptures in Carrara Marble**, in which these familiar bodily zones are given a seemingly abstract form through enlargement or diminution as well as through daring acts of stacking.

Szapocznikow was constantly aware of the fragility of human existence, a central theme of her work. She was exposed several times to existential threats—from internment in a concentration camp to life-threatening illnesses. In 1960, Szapocznikow is diagnosed with breast cancer. Memory, trauma, and transitoriness become increasingly the focus of her art, both in the late series *Souvenir* and in her *Tumor* sculptures which, made of polyester resin and augmented with photographs, newspapers and gauze, give unrestrained expression to the foreign element in her body. In an awareness of her approaching death, she creates from 1971 her final series of works entitled *Herbier* (Herbarium) and consisting of casts of her own body and that of her son Piotr. As skin-like coverings, the flat reliefs made of polyester resin are reminiscent of the previous presence of the human body, evoke past instances of being touched. In resemblance to a collection of dried and pressed plants, these works are sculptures of memory which mirror Szapocznikow's lifelong endeavor to imbue evanescence with permanence through an expanded understanding of sculptural form.

Alina Szapocznikow investigated the languages of the body, its vulnerability, vitality, and eroticism. "I am convinced that of all the manifestations of the ephemeral the human body is the most vulnerable, the only source of all joy, all suffering and all truth," said the artist in 1972. Her oeuvre bears witness to her deep trust in being able to find forms that outlive the present; today her works are just as visionary as at the time of their creation.

Curated by Ute Stuffer and Prof. Dr. Ursula Ströbele. An extensive catalogue is being published by the Verlag für moderne Kunst with contributions from Jo Applin, Griselda Pollock, Dietmar Rübél, Marta Smolińska, Sarah Wilson et al. A collaboration between the Kunstmuseum Ravensburg and the Musée de Grenoble.

Institutional solo exhibitions (selection)

“Alina Szapocznikow: Human Landscapes”, The Hepworth Wakefield, Wakefield and Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden (2017/2018);
“Alina Szapocznikow: Body Traces”, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2014);
“Alina Szapocznikow: Du dessin à la sculpture”, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2013);
“Alina Szapocznikow: Sculpture Undone”, 1955–1972, WIELS Centre d’art contemporain, Brussels, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2011-2013).

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAM

Thursday, 27.3., 6:00 p.m.

In Dialogue with Prof. Dr. Ursula Ströbele

Co-Curator and Prof. of Art History, HBK, Braunschweig
Joint Tour of Exhibition

Thursday, 10.4., 6:00 p.m.

In Dialogue with Dr. Julia Wallner

Director, Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck
Joint Tour of Exhibition

Thursday, 15.5., 6:00 p.m.

In Dialogue with Luisa Heese

Curator for Contemporary Art, Kunsthalle Mannheim
Joint Tour of Exhibition

Thursday, 3.7., 6:00 p.m.

“Sensually Abject: Materiality with Alina Szapocznikow”

Lecture in German by Prof. Dr. Charlotte Matter

Laurenz Assistant Professor of Contemporary Art, University of Basel

Thursday, 5.6., 26.6., 5:00 p.m.

Guided Curatorial Tour

With generous support from

PHOTO CREDITS

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Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, with *Pnąca*, 1959, and *Maria Magdalena*, 1959-1960, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, with *Sculpture-lampe VI*, 1970, private collection, Switzerland, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, with *Trudny wiek*, 1956/1984, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, with *Tumeurs accumulées II*, 1970, and *Grand tumeur II*, 1969, Muzeum Narodowe w Wrocławiu, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Exhibition view ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW. BODY LANGUAGES, Kunstmuseum Ravensburg, 2025, with in the foreground *Fiancée folle blanche*, 1971, Pinault Collection, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Wynrich Zlomke



Alina Szapocznikow working on her sculpture *Grands ventres* for Elle Magazine, Querceta Quarries, IT, 1968, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Alina Szapocznikow Archive, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Loevenbruck, Paris, photo: Roger Gain



Alina Szapocznikow, *Sculpture-Lampe XI*, 1970, T&C Collection, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Fabrice Gousset, Courtesy Loevenbruck, Paris



Alina Szapocznikow, *Goldfinger*, 1965, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth



Alina Szapocznikow, *Trudny wiek*, 1956/1984, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth



Alina Szapocznikow, *Untitled (from the series "Paysage humain")*, approx. 1971-1972, Private Collection, Paris, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Fabrice Gousset, Courtesy Loevenbruck, Paris



Alina Szapocznikow, *Noyée (Plongée)*, 1968, Private Collection, Munich, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Stephan Höck



Alina Szapocznikow, *Sculpture-Lampe X*, approx. 1970, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Todd-White Art Photography, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth



Alina Szapocznikow with her work *Torso*, Atelier Malakoff, FR, 1966, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Alina Szapocznikow Archive, Courtesy The Estate Alina Szapocznikow | Loevenbruck, Paris, photo: Marek Holzman



Alina Szapocznikow, *Fotorzeźby*, 1971/2007 (detail), © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2025, Courtesy The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow | Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris | Hauser & Wirth, photo: Roman Cieślęwicz

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