

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Michalska, Julia, "Krakow delighted by mineral deposit," *The Art Newspaper*, June 2011

## Krakow delighted by mineral deposit

*Bank donates Miroslaw Balka's sculpture to city's new contemporary art museum*

KRAKOW. Krakow's Museum of Contemporary Art (Mocak), which opened at the end of last month (19 May), has received an unexpected gift from Polish bank PKO BP in the form of a work of art by Miroslaw Balka. The installation *7 + 1*, which was commissioned by the bank in 1998, is due to be unveiled at the museum on 6 June. Maria Anna Potocka, the director of the museum, said: "This donation is extremely important to us because Balka is such a well known artist." She added: "His work is highly valued in the market, so it would have been impossible for our museum to acquire one of his pieces."

The work consists of seven circular blocks of salt on a bed of salt powder. Balka, who often uses salt in his installations, said: "Salt can be seen as dry sweat or dry tears, a trace of effort or suffering. Although beautiful and perfectly aligned, it also shows weakness."

Mocak's location will add an extra poignancy to the work as the museum is on the site of Oskar Schindler's former factory in Zablocie, an industrialist area of Krakow. Schindler and his wife Emilie famously helped save some 1,200 Jewish workers from the Holocaust.

The bank's donation is the second major gift to the museum. Potocka, who has been campaigning for a contemporary art museum in Krakow for 30 years, gave her art collection upon her appointment as the director last year. Her collection consists of



Miroslaw Balka's *7 + 1*, 1998, in a Warsaw bank's lobby

700 works of predominantly Polish contemporary art, which she began assembling with the aim of transferring them to a museum in the future. "From the start, this collection was created for the museum. The artists knew that their work would eventually go to a new institution," she said. Potocka started her collection in the 1970s with works that artists

had abandoned after staging exhibitions at her former Potocka Gallery in Krakow. "At the time, conceptual art had no market value in Poland. It was an ugly manifestation of an idea, so artists would just leave them at the gallery. I slowly started collecting these works and found a place to store them."

Mocak, which officially

opened to the public on 19 May, is Poland's first purpose-built contemporary art museum. Half of the building's total cost, PLN80m (\$28.5m), was covered by the European Union (EU). While the EU can subsidise the building of a museum, it does not

“The museum is on the site of Oskar Schindler's former factory”

contribute towards a museum's maintenance costs or acquisitions programme. Without the recent donations, the museum would have opened with only 50 works in its collection.

Other museums in Poland are less fortunate when it comes to acquisitions. Additional modern art museums are planned for Wroclaw and Warsaw, with financial help due to come from the EU. Both museums are likely to rely on temporary exhibitions to attract visitors rather than their collections. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Wroclaw, which is due to open this autumn, has 400 works in its collection, while the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, due to open in 2014, boasts 60. Funding from Europe also helped expand the Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz, which has Poland's largest collection of 20th- and 21st-century art with over 17,000 works. ■

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