

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW YORK, NEW YORK: It is with great sadness that Marlborough Gallery announces the passing of the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz. Abakanowicz died on April 20th in Warsaw, Poland. She was 86 years old.

Abakanowicz, with her distinct sculptural vocabulary and theatrical explorations of our collective history, is recognized as one of the most potent and unique voices in contemporary art. Her installations and sculptures are at once beautiful and unsettling, each is a reminder of the fragile nature of the human condition. The artist endured continuous trauma as a child living in occupied Poland during WWII, which prompted a lifelong awareness of existential concerns. Weaving and working with cloth so that her creations could be folded and hidden under her bed, Abakanowicz retreated into her own imaginary world. She said of that time, “When I was 12 in 1942, one could only escape from human cruelty inside oneself (into a world of dreams, imaginings.)” This kind of mental departure—self-defense against omnipresent propaganda and destruction—informed her artistic output for decades to come.



The artist with *Abakan Red* (1969), Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw, 1975.
Photo: Jan Nordahl, © Magdalena Abakanowicz

Winning the Grand Prize at the 1965 São Paulo Biennale was among the early achievements and recognition her work received. It was in 1962 that the artist’s massive hanging sisal sculptures, called *Abakans* were first exhibited, works which evoked female anatomy as well as a safe space such as the interior of a favorite childhood tree. Initially the works were considered “craft” as opposed to “art,” though when her *Abakans* were still talked about as weavings, the noted curator Mary Jane Jacob, in 1982 wrote of the artist that her “life and art has been a constant struggle, working against limitations—limitations in the accepted use of fiber materials, in the tapestry tradition itself, in the constricted spaces in which she has had to work, in every aspect of daily life in a bureaucratic and poor country. By its very existence, her art, in its stylistic and technical innovations and its sheer enormity, speaks out in defiance of every roadblock ever set before her.”

In addition to the well-known “Cycles” by the artist such as *War Games*, *Hoofed Mammal Heads*, *Coexistence* and the *Anonymous Portraits* and *Anonim* series, Magdalena Abakanowicz beginning in the 1980s channeled her deeply personal feelings about loss, isolation, displacement and regeneration

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into sculptures of crouching backs or standing, headless figures in burlap, and later, bronze. Shown in groups known as *Crowds*, the proud, marching beings displayed gouged surfaces created by the artist's fingers and nails. They became an expressionistic rendering in three-dimensional form of angst, aggression and strength. The artist said of her own sculptures, "Longings, disappointments, and fear teach me how to build their shapes. My imagination makes a choice."

During her lifetime, Abakanowicz had over 150 solo exhibitions in Europe, North and South America, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. She exhibited at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Jardins du Palais Royal in Paris and the Muzeum Narodowe in Poznań, to name just a few major museums. Among numerous prizes and distinctions, Abakanowicz received seven honorary doctorates from universities in Europe and the United States as well as the Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from France and Cavaliere dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana. She was also awarded the prestigious International Sculpture Center's Lifetime Achievement award in 2005 as well as the Grand Cross of Merit (Großes Verdienstkreuz mit Stern) from the Federal Republic of Germany in 2010.

In the past thirty years Abakanowicz developed a number of site-specific sculpture installations that incorporate multiple figures or elements of increased scale. Among these are *Negev* at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1987; *Space of Dragon*, Olympic Park, Seoul, South Korea, 1985; *Becalmed Beings*, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan, 1993; *Space of Unknown Growth*, Europos Parkas, Vilnius, Lithuania, 1997-98; *Unrecognized*, Citadel Park, Poznań, Poland, 2002; *Space of Stone*, Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey, 2003; and her last major public work, *Agora*, a sculptural group comprised of 106 unique cast-iron figures measuring over-nine-feet tall permanently installed in Chicago's Grant Park in 2006.

In 1989 she joined Marlborough Gallery where she presented twenty solo exhibitions. Her most recent show with Marlborough was at Marlborough Barcelona in 2016.

Abakanowicz's work can be found in numerous public collections including the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Illinois; Museum of Modern Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York; Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and the Sezon Museum of Modern Art, Karuizawa, Japan, among others.

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