

# Karol Radziszewski Filo



# KAROL RADZISZEWSKI, FILO

EAF presents *Filo*, a survey exhibition by Polish artist Karol Radziszewski. The exhibition features a rare collection of photography, publications and ephemera tracing, one of the first underground queer magazines in Central and Eastern Europe, founded by the Polish activist Ryszard Kiesel.

Kiesel began publishing *Filo* in 1986 in response to Operation Hyacinth, a nationwide operation by Poland's Ministry of Internal Affairs in which the Secret Services focused on intimidating, persecuting and sanctioning sexual minorities. Its name is a Polish phonetic writing of the Greek word philo (friend, beloved), which Kiesel used to address his friends and lovers in encrypted letters. The magazine published articles on legal rights and sexual health, as well as homoerotic content and letters from its readers. Initially printed via photocopiers and distributed informally amongst friends, it was used to establish semi-public conversations on politics and sexuality through printed matter.

The dissemination of *Filo* was made possible by relatively relaxed social attitudes towards queer identities in Poland compared to other Eastern Bloc countries in the 1970s and 80s. This was in part due to the decriminalisation of homosexuality by The Second Polish Republic in 1932, a law that was overturned by Nazi Germany and later disregarded by the communist government.

The exhibition presents materials developed against a backdrop of state censorship and highlights queer cultural histories in Poland before, during and after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Original publications and readership correspondence are displayed alongside Kiesel's research, which informed *Filo's* editorial content. This includes Kiesel's photographs and travel logs of journeys across the communist states, including Poland, Romania, the former Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, Bulgaria and East Germany, documenting spaces of public desire including cruising sites, bars, bathrooms and bathhouses. His accompanying notes detail names, addresses and directions to locations, revealing the expanse of queer cultural life within the perimeters of the Eastern Bloc.

In this show, Radziszewski presents the archive alongside a selection of paintings from his ongoing series, *The Gallery of Portraits*. The works portray historically significant queer people from Central and Eastern Europe who faced discrimination or persecution, because of their views on sexuality, identity and politics, or were overlooked in mainstream canons of queer history. The works are hung in a format mimicking how portraits of influential politicians, writers and scientists were presented in public institutions across the Eastern Bloc, a style used to enforce communist propaganda.

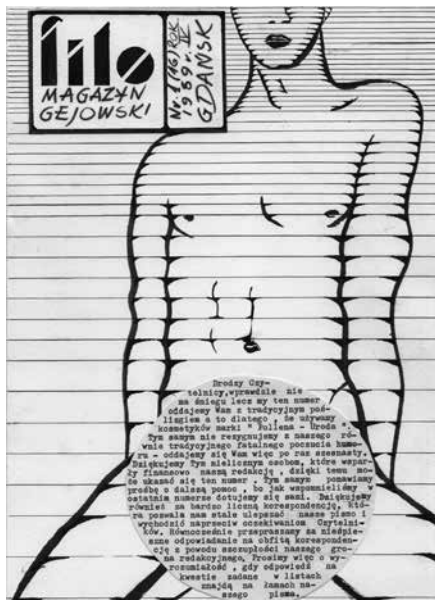
*Filo* places two sets of artistic and historical materials in dialogue to explore methods of queer knowledge production emerging from Central and Eastern Europe. The exhibition attempts to reconstruct and reintroduce cultures and representations of sexual difference that emerged from the complex social and political context of Poland during and after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc. It focuses on guerilla publishing tactics as a tool for transgression and emancipation, highlighting the diversity of queer cultural experience in the region.

The exhibition is accompanied by a programme of talks and performances with artists and historians from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. These will seek to broaden the investigation into historical and contemporary queer cultural histories in the region, and will be staged across the summer at Auto Italia and Edinburgh Art Festival.



Karol Radziszewski (b. 1980, Poland) is a multidisciplinary artist, working across film, painting, photography and installation. His research practice cross-references cultural, historical and political records with a specific focus on queer discourse in Poland. In 2015, Radziszewski founded the Queer Archives Institute, which is dedicated to the research and presentation of queer archives from Central and Eastern Europe. Radziszewski's recent solo and group exhibitions include the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2023); Between Bridges, Berlin (2023); Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2022); Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz (2021); Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana (2020); CCA Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2019); Tokyo Photographic Art Museum (2019); VideoBrasil, São Paulo (2016); Wrocław Contemporary Museum (2012). He has participated in several international biennales, including PERFORMA 13, New York; 7th Göteborg Biennial; 4th Prague Biennial and 14th Baltic Triennial.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The archival material, descriptions, and shot lists are provided jointly by Karol Radziszewski and the Queer Archives Institute.

*Filo* is commissioned and produced by Edinburgh Art Festival, in partnership with Auto Italia. Events supported by Baltic Culture Fund.

Publication texts by Milda Batakyte, Edward Gillman and Karol Radziszewski.

Copyedited by Jay Drinkall.

Production assistance:

Tze Yan, Clara Wong and Rachel Routledge.

# VITRINES

## Vitrines 1 and 2

Ryszard Kisiel founded *Filo* in reaction to Operation Hyacinth, an anti-gay militia campaign led by Poland's Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1985 and 1987. During this time, the Civil Militia of the People's Republic of Poland in cooperation with the Secret Service collected information in a nationwide campaign that sought to blackmail and sanction homosexual men.

As this policing campaign was rolled out across Poland, Kisiel began collating, producing and disseminating queer materials from his home in Gdansk and sharing it with friends using photocopying technologies. He adopted the name *Filo* as the publication's title, derived from the Ancient Greek *philos*: an adjective meaning dear or loved, and as a noun friend, boyfriend or acquaintance. It was also used colloquially by Kisiel in his correspondence to address friends and lovers.

The first two vitrines in the exhibition contain original notes, drawings, design materials and photographs, produced by Kisiel and *Filo*'s founding editorial team. This includes planning early publication layouts and logo designs for the publication's first issues, which were self-published and disseminated unofficially amongst networks of queer men.

## Vitrine 3

Ryszard Kisiel emerged as a key countercultural figure in Poland's queer underground during the 1980s. His artistic output focused on experimental photography of private queer parties in domestic spaces. Kisiel was particularly interested in Le Cabaret Travestis, a culture of cross dressing popular in queer cultural circles in France. He began staging photoshoots in Poland with friends and lovers in 1985–86. The images were collaboratively produced, with the subjects of the images creating costumes for the photographs, and Kisiel designing erotic underwear as an artistic project.

The subjects of the photographs have remained anonymous over the past three decades. These images have been held exclusively in Kisiel's personal archive and were never published in *Filo* to ensure the protection of queer people. They have only been made public in recent years.

#### **Vitrine 4**

*Filo* was initially produced during a period of state censorship in communist Poland. All print material produced at this time required authorisation from the Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk, the Polish Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows, before being published. This government body was founded by the Communist Provisional Government of National Unity in 1946 and remained in place until the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc in 1990.

Authorisation was required for all printed matter with a circulation of over 100 copies, including wedding invitations and obituary notices, and the government controlled access to most photocopiers and printers. In the early years of *Filo*, Kisiel produced fewer than 100 copies of the magazine, exploiting a loophole to disseminate the magazine. Friends would duplicate copies and provide him with envelopes and post stamps so that *Filo* could avoid censorship laws and reach a wider readership across Poland and further afield.

#### **Vitrine 5**

The editors of *Filo* welcomed informal correspondence from its readership and provided a post box number to send letters to the editors. People across Poland sent extensive messages, including suggestions for editorial content, personal feedback on past issues and amateur drawings and artworks exploring key LGBT issues. This display shows a snapshot of this extensive correspondence, with original notes and drawings sent in by queer people who were reading *Filo* in the 1980s.

#### **Vitrine 6**

Kisiel's interests encompassed wider forms of homosociality. Using a medium format camera, he produced homoerotic imagery and visited cruising sites where gay men would meet and socialise across Poland and the Eastern Bloc.

This began in the late 1970s through trips across Poland. Travelling by train, Kisiel visited major Polish cities including Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź, Katowice and Wrocław, as well as the smaller provincial towns of Płock, Radom and Słupsk. Sites he visited included beaches, bathhouses, toilets and bars. He began documenting these and created detailed directions – including names, addresses, directions,

opening hours and entrance costs – that were shared through informal networks and partly published in *Filo*.

This investigation was expanded in the 1980s. He travelled across the Eastern Bloc and created travel logs of journeys to the communist countries of Poland, Romania, the former Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, Bulgaria and East Germany. Through these journeys he produced a handmade book, titled the *Polish Gay Guide on the europeans socialists countries*, of which only one copy was made.

This atlas book is highly unique and exists as a psychosexual map of the queer Eastern Bloc. It includes Kisiel's handwritten notes reflecting on his experiences alongside information organised in chapters titled with the names of each country. Kisiel produced the book despite the danger of persecution in countries where homosexual acts were punished severely. Its creation was accompanied by correspondence with friends and lovers through the sending of photos of these cruising sites, with notes detailing how to find the locations and what to expect upon arrival.

## **Vitrine 7**

State censorship ended in Poland in 1990 in line with the fall of the Eastern Bloc. Gay and lesbian people quickly began creating and selling commercial magazines in mainstream newsagents and queer social spaces began opening in cities across the country.

The first commercial magazine was produced in Poznań and debuted in June 1990. Titled *Inaczej. Pismo mniejszości seksualnych* (Differently: Magazine of sexual minorities) was published between 1990–2002. This was followed by *Okay. Miesięcznik dla panów* (Okay: Monthly magazine for men) published 1990–93, and *Gayzeta Nie? Tak!* (Gayzeta: No? Yes!) published 1990–91, both produced in Warsaw.

*Filo* concurrently transformed from its origin as an informal underground publication into a commercial magazine under the leadership of a new editor, Piotr Płatkiewicz, who also used the pseudonyms Artur Jeffmański and Piotr Pelach. Its debut issue after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc was published in October 1990, with several of the first commercial issues published under

the heading *Filo. Miesięcznik kochających inaczej* (Filo: Monthly of Loving Differently).

The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc created opportunities for increased visibility of queer women in Poland, who had historically faced even greater social limitations than queer men. Although most commercial publishing was targeted at gay men, lesbian communities in Poland sought opportunities for representation by founding magazines.

In 1989 the Polish writer and editor Paulina Pilch joined *Filo*'s editorial team. The display includes an original article authored by Pilch in *Filo* issue no 23 (December 1990) with her profile of the queer Czechoslovakian tennis player Martina Navratilova.

In 1996 the OLA-Archives (Polish Lesbian Archives) was established and secured formal legal status as an association in 1998. Between 1997 and 2000 OLA published eight issues of *Furia Pierwsza* (Fury the First), a literary feminist lesbian magazine which was responsible for translating and publishing Judith Butler's work on gender and sexuality in Poland for the first time. The exhibition includes a copy of the lesbian magazine *Fioletowy Puls* (Purple Pulse) which was published in Gdansk between 1994–95.

During the 1990s *Filo* began to be published in colour and an enlarged A4 format. *Filo* issue no 92 (January 1998) saw the magazine published under a new title for the first time, with the name 'Facet' meaning 'Guy'. Its editorial content included homoerotic imagery, LGBT news and interviews, advice columns, horoscopes and personals. *Facet* was published until 2001. Alongside other LGBT magazines, it ceased publication as the internet overtook traditional print publishing.



# PAINTINGS

Karol Radziszewski

*The Gallery of Portraits*

(2020 – ongoing)

9 paintings, acrylic on canvas, 100 × 80 cm (each)

Works listed as displayed, left to right.

**Ljuba Prenner** (1906–1977) was a Slovene lawyer and writer born in Austria-Hungary. He was baptised Amalija Marija Uršula but adopted the name Ljuba in his early childhood and was known to have worn his hair in a shorter style and to wear men's clothes from an early age. Prenner moved to Ljubljana to study law after graduating high school in Belgrade. He joined the Osvobodilna Fronta (Liberation Front), an anti-fascist civil resistance movement. He gained a reputation for his work during the war supporting political prisoners, securing freedom for numerous Slovenes before the Nazi Party arrested him in 1944. His most famous statement as a writer was: 'I am Dr. Ljuba Prenner, not a man nor a woman.'

**Marija Leiko** (1887–1938) was a Latvian stage and silent film actress. Leiko was particularly famous in Germany, Latvia and Russia. According to the historian Ineta Lipsa, Leiko was the most prominent non-heteronormative figure in Latvia at the time. Her lead roles included *The Diamond Foundation* (1917), *Kain* (1918), *Ewiger Strom* (1919), *Die Frau im Käfig* (1919) and *Lola Montez* (1919). She retired from acting during the transition from silent movies to talkies in the 1920s. Leiko returned to Latvia in 1933 when the National Socialist Party seized power in Germany. In 1935 she visited the Soviet Union and chose to stay in Russia, joining the house company of the Latvian State Theatre in Moscow. The theatre was closed through the 'Latvian Operation', a national police operation by The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) against ethnic Latvians in the Soviet Union between 1937–38. She was murdered in a killing field and buried in a mass grave in Butovo, Moscow.

**Ewa Hołuszko** (born 1950) is a Polish physicist, oppositionist and a leading member of the Polish social and trade union movement Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy 'Solidarność' (The Solidarity Movement). Solidarność played a vital role in overthrowing

the communist regime and Ewa, being one of the leaders, is recognised as a national heroine. She has been a prominent trans activist for over two decades and has faced significant obstacles fighting for equal rights in Poland against the country's conservative political elite, including attempts at removing her from the history of Solidarność, which began in line with her transition in 2000.

**Lesya Ukrainka** (1871–1913), a pseudonym for Larysa Petrivna Kosach, was a Ukrainian activist and writer. Ukrainka was also an active political, civil, and feminist activist. She authored numerous poems, essays and plays in Ukrainian in spite of total restrictions on speaking and writing Ukrainian under the Russian Tsarist autocracy. Ukrainka met the Ukrainian modernist writer, nationalist and feminist Olha Kobylianska in 1901. It is believed Ukrainka and Kobylianska were in a relationship. Due to Ukrainka's tuberculosis, the pair never lived together, however they maintained constant contact. Though a sexual relationship was never proven, their writing to one another has been described as passionate and homoerotic.

**Toyen** (1902–1980), born Marie Čermínová, was a Czechoslovakian painter, drafter, illustrator and member of the Surrealist Movement. The artist adopted the professional pseudonym Toyen in 1923, derived from the French word *citoyen*, meaning citizen. Toyen was known to favour gender-neutral terms and only spoke Czech in the masculine singular form. This interest in radical identity and anarchism ran through Toyen's artistic work, which paid significant attention to gender and sexual politics.

**Veronika Šleivyte** (1906–1998) was a Lithuanian photographer and artist. Šleivyte was the first photographer in Lithuania to document lesbian love and relationships. Her works include portraits of herself and her female lovers, and often studied the codes of patriarchy and self-identity amongst women in society. She was a founder of the first Women Artists' Society and later became its President.

**Imrich Matyáš** (1896–1974) was a Slovak activist and writer born in Czechoslovakia. Matyáš was one of the earliest activists in Czechoslovakia to fight for the equal rights of sexual minorities and the decriminalisation of homosexuality. He was a contributor to Hlas sexuální menšiny (Voice of the Sexual Minorities), the first

Czechoslovakian queer periodical. He authored a manual for gay people on how to defend themselves in the criminal justice system, which was published and distributed to members of Bratislava's queer community. At the end of the Second World War, the Czechoslovak government continued to criminalise homosexual acts. Imrich argued against the legislation and fought to convince state officials to remove it. Homosexuality was decriminalised in Czechoslovakia in 1961.

**Magdalena Rădulescu** (1902–1983) was a Romanian painter of Roma origin who lived and worked in France. She was married twice and had multiple affairs with both men and women. Rădulescu sought to return to Romania in 1972, then known as The Socialist Republic of Romania. However, she was refused entry by the Romanian Secret Police, known as The Securitate, due to criticisms of her sexual morality which was perceived as dangerously promiscuous. She resided in Nice, France until her death.

**Eugenij Ruban** (1941–1997) was a Belarussian chess player. Ruban scored second in the USSR Chess Championship in 1964, which was staged in Kyiv, Ukraine. He won the USSR Chess Championship in 1966, which was staged in Leningrad, Russia. The Dutch Chess Grandmaster and former resident of Leningrad, Genna Sosonko, claimed Ruben had lost the title of Master of Sports of the USSR because he had a criminal conviction for same-sex intercourse in a public space.



