

***ALEF.* Grzegorz Laszuk / Komuna
Warszawa**

curator: Tomasz Plata

Documentation submitted for the competition
for the curatorial project for the exhibition
in the Polish Pavilion at the
59th International Art Exhibition in Venice in 2022

CONCEPT

The starting point is a fantasy about an event that never happened, but could have happened.

Let us imagine that at the very beginning of the 1920s representatives of the Zionist movement in Poland approached the advertising company of Henryk Berlewi with a request that he – along with his associates, Aleksander Wat and Stanisław Brucz – prepare an advertising campaign promoting the ideas of the Zionism. The order assumes the development of full visual identification – creation of a logotype, appropriate typeface used in font designs, selection of colors. In addition, an important element of the project is to prepare a script for the propaganda musical – to be staged in one of the theaters in Warsaw. The addressees of the order are not selected randomly. Berlewi, in the second decade of the twentieth century an important representative of the so-called Jewish expressionism, a collaborator of the Jung Jidysz group, then runs an advertising company in which he tries to use his own avant-garde idea of mechanofecture. Wat is an important figure in the circle of futurists, just before collaborating with the classics of interwar theater (in 1929 he wrote the text of the first Polish theatrical fact-montage *Polityka Społeczna R.P.*, then staged by Leon Schiller).

In the Polish Pavilion in Venice, we want to try to implement this imaginary, non-existent scenario by Berlewi and Wat (as encouraged by the curator of the Biennale Cecilia Alemani to create alternative versions of the past and the present). The work will take the form of a large-format projection: an avant-garde video-musical entitled *Alef* (from the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet). The main literary material used will be Theodor Herzl's manifesto *The Jewish State*. The work will be presented using the technology widely used in contemporary advertising campaigns: on the LED screen covering one of the Pavilion's walls.

The idea of realization naturally fits into the most important motives of Grzegorz Laszuk's work to date. First of all, as one of the most recognized contemporary Polish graphic artists, Laszuk has long boldly transforms and reforms the practice of Polish graphic design (as a person responsible for years for the visual identification of such important institutions as TR Warszawa or the Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle). Secondly – *Alef* is a direct continuation of such productions made by Laszuk with the Komuna Warszawa theater group as *Design / Gropius*, *Atatürk or why I went to Istanbul*, *RE // MIX*. *Paradise: Now ?*, *7 songs about the avant-garde* or *Hannah Arendt: Escape*. In each of these performances, the central theme of Laszuk's work recurred: the question of the possibility of realizing a social utopia, building a new better world, the relationship between social utopias and artistic avant-garde, and the consequences of confronting utopian ideas with social concrete. The summary of these searches was the first large-scale video production of Komuna: the film *Lack of engagement in practice produces theoretical hallucinations*, shown in 2019 at MSN in Warsaw.

Alef's main ambition is to confront two versions of contemporary messianism, on the one hand the version hidden in the idea of a modern nation state, and on the other – the messianism of an artistic avant-garde who dreams of erasing the culture of the past and replacing it with a completely new one. Central to *Alef* will be

questions about the mutual relations of these two messianisms. Could the avant-garde have co-shaped the political reality of a modern state in any way, even by creating its visual codes? Could the appropriate symbol of the state (flag, set of colors) determine, or at least influence the systems of values prevailing in that state?

The background for this reflection will be the history of the symbols of the Zionist movement (and, consequently, the state of Israel). The blue and white banner with the Star of David, a symbol of the Zionist movement proposed in 1897 by David Wolffsohn, directly referred to the tallit, one of the basic objects used in the Jewish tradition for daily prayer. *Alef* will ask a provocative question: what would happen if an artist from the circle of the avant-garde emerging a moment later decided about the visual identification of the Zionist movement? An important context here will, of course, be the contemporary practice of shaping the images of countries with the help of carefully selected images and accompanying marketing slogans. In this dimension, it is difficult to imagine a better place for the *Alef* show than the Venice Biennale – with its tradition of national pavilions, where art invariably turns out to be an element of broader strategies for building the image of the participating states.

The authors of *Alef* will also want to refer to the works of outstanding 20th-century humanists who analyze and continue the tradition of Jewish messianism (including Benjamin, Scholem, Taubes). According to the suggestions of their contemporary interpreters (in Poland, among others, Bielik-Robson, Lipszyc), this messianism will be understood as a vitalist, affirmative movement, as a vision of “a different, greater life that does not expect fulfillment after death, but demands it while still alive”. So it will be a messianism clearly different from the best understood and assimilated messianism from the local Romantic tradition. One of *Alef*'s important stakes will be to show the similarities between messianic vitalism understood in this way and the idea of the artistic avant-garde on the one hand and the project of the Jewish State on the other.

SCRIPT

The idea is to place an LED screen in the central part of the pavilion in the format of approx. 12x4 meters. The interior will be darkened, the screen will be the only source of light. A looped film will be presented on the screen (about 20 minutes) – an adaptation of an imaginary screenplay by Berlewi and Wat. The film will be prepared in the computer animation technique, with the use of live actors' recordings (green box technique).