

Marek Oberländer - born in 1922 in Szczercz near Lviv. The period of his youth ended quickly with the death of his father, whom Oberländer adored. It marked the beginning of a life full of worries, hunger and loneliness. In 1939 he was conscripted into the Red Army, accused of attempted desertion, and was sent to hard labour in a mine in the Urals. The war took his family away from him, giving in return a nightmare of memories and serious health problems that haunted him for the rest of his life. After the war, he returned to Poland and entered the High School of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Two years later, he began his studies at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. Disillusioned with his studies, he sought the field for reflection on the true meaning of art in discussions with his colleagues. Oberländer took the initiative to organise a large joint exhibition. The National Exhibition of Young Visual Arts 'Against War, Against Fascism' was launched on 21.07.1955 at the Arsenal. The works exhibited by Oberländer, especially the oil 'Stigmatised', triggered an avalanche of discussion and affected the reception of his work for many years. The artist was completely disregarded by the jury, to which the public reacted vividly; he was awarded a special prize by the editors of the weekly magazine *Po prostu*, with which he began to collaborate, and he also opened his own gallery, *Salon Wystawowy*, which he ran until 1961. Oberländer made his debut by depicting the suffering of the Jewish people. By the time 'Stigmatised' had become a replacement for Oberländer's name, the artist himself, having gone through a phase of reckoning with his past, had abandoned occupation themes and divested himself of personal references. After "Arsenal", he travelled extensively in Poland making drawing reports with J. Kuśmirek - observations noted directly from nature. He was interested in the peculiarities of landscape and people - regionalisms and typicalities, "faces like trees, faces like stones, hands like roots, roots like hands, roots like faces". The artist's main source of income at this time was illustrations for magazines and his work as an editor (including *Przegląd Kulturalny*, *Nowa Kultura* and *Współczesność*). Oberländer's first works were characterised by strong expression. Towards the end of the 1950s, he began to move away from a realistic understanding of the human figure, subjecting it to increasingly strong, synthesising transformations. The condensed organicity of his figures was peppered with psychological charge. 1959/64 produced a rich gallery of bizarre insect-like silhouettes with more or less restless contours and large eyes, firmly set in a triangular head impaled on a rachitic neck. The delicately, as if nervously inked figures, present almost exclusively with the outline of the spine, are interspersed with a series of strong, compact and fleshy-coloured figures. In 1962, he began working for 'Zwierciadło' and soon became its graphic director. In the 1960s he took part in numerous exhibitions - in Wrocław, Warsaw, Zakopane, Amsterdam, Copenhagen. An exhibition in Stockholm in 1963 brought the artist success. His good financial status allowed him to travel to Paris, where he had a heart attack soon after his arrival and another one a year later. Oberländer remained in France for the rest of his life. In 1964 he opened his exhibition at the gallery *La Soleil Dans La Tete*. Due to ill health, guided by doctor's recommendations, he left for the south of France. The artist settled in Nice, and in February 1965 he exhibited gouaches, oils and drawings at the *Galerie la Vieille Echoppe* in St. Paul de Vence. He took part in the 3rd *Côte d'Azur Visual Arts Festival* at the *Musee de St. Paul de Vence*. He became friends with Witold Gombrowicz. Between successive heart attacks, he worked intensively. He opened up to nature, and after 1966 produced many landscapes. While in Aix-de Provence, he noted: "I saw the sky for the first time". He also painted "a lot of music". In May 1969 he married his long-time partner Halina Pfeffer. For the rest of his life, Oberländer painted mainly in watercolours. The scales and expression were most varied - sometimes violent, sometimes lyrical and always, conveying momentary states of consciousness and mood. Persistently, though through different paths, the artist strove for harmony with nature. The oft-quoted accusation that he lacked his own style did not worry him at all. It was not style that he fought for in art, but the freedom of creative expression. In spite of his numerous clashes with plastic matter, he himself enjoyed such freedom. The continuity of Marek Oberländer's biography was torn apart by two white spots. The first was the war years, according to his friends, perhaps the most significant for his artistic profile. The second was the Nice period. Despite his formal transformations, Oberländer's name remains synonymous with terrible suffering - as an artist and as a human being. However, when he shared his despair, he did so not in order to spread hopelessness, but in order to expel the destructive memory of the past and make it easier for others to deal with their own drama. Oberländer's personal tragedy is his inability to harmonise absolutely with the Great Nature. This is what he seeks at every stage of his work. In 1978 he came to Paris, where he had another heart attack and was sent to a sanatorium near Nice, where he died.

The works on show are a gift from Halina Oberländer