

Curators:

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Exhibition design:

Miśka Miller-Lovegrove with the cooperation of  
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Exhibition graphics:

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International communication:

Paulina Shearing / The National Museum in Warsaw  
and Anna Pietrzyk-Simone / Young Creative Poland

# WE WANT TO BE MODERN

Polish Design 1955–1968  
from the Collection of  
the National Museum in Warsaw

**4 FEBRUARY – 17 APRIL 2011**

**The National Museum in Warsaw**

This pioneering exhibition of ca 180 objects from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, featuring the most important examples of Polish design, rarely seen in the West, will explore the significance of the objects of everyday use in shaping modernity and the modern Polish identity emerging during the post-thaw period. The collection of post-1945 design in the National Museum in Warsaw is the best in Poland, and the exhibition will benefit from it, showing a whole range of applied arts of the period, including ceramics, glass, textiles, furniture, and other household objects, periodicals, photographs, and films. Apart from its focus on the purely aesthetic values of the objects presented in glass cases, the exhibition will also be showing “social lives” of the works on display, namely the ways in which those objects were represented in periodicals and films promoting modern forms of life, and the ways in which they were used by real consumers in private interiors of the socialist Poland. This aspect of the exhibition will be enhanced by a multimedia presentation of various features of the material culture of the post-thaw Poland, with a range of film clips of the period.

The exhibition presents one of the most exciting periods of Polish design, between the political thaw of 1955 and the social changes brought in 1968. Spanning just over 10 years, the period gave rise to an abundance of daring experiments that made a lasting impact on design for years to come.

It was the political thaw that led to a sudden, new embrace of Modernism. However, for the most eminent designers, such as Roman Modzelewski or Teresa Kruszevska, it did not mean resorting to an earlier mechanical constructivism, but rather a new art of organic forms, paralleling the work of Alvar Aalto or Charles and Ray Eames. After socialist realism, abstract painting was particularly attractive for artists and part of the viewers. Abstract art was identified with freedom. Design embraced this idiom as well, and patterns on ceramics often followed the aesthetic of art informel and matter painting. Ceramic glazes of rich colours resemble paint thickly applied to canvas. The second half of the 1950s saw the production of a series of the most sophisticated chairs, such as those designed by Teresa Kruszevska, Maria Chomentowska, and Jan Kurzątkowski.



Despite a wide interest in new synthetic materials, which were the result of scientific research, access to them was limited in Poland. Even so, several designers, such as Roman Modzelewski and Czesław Knothe, did produce pioneering furniture from synthetic fibres at the end of the 1950s. In furniture experiments, metal frames were filled with metal netting, nylon cord, straw or wicker. The end result could evoke more of a sculpture than a piece of furniture.

The organizers will share their knowledge during a number of events (lectures, study days, film screenings) accompanying the exhibition.

Exhibition in cooperation with Young Creative Poland, an initiative by Miśka Miller- Lovegrove and Anna Pietrzyk-Simone to promote Polish design.

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For a detailed programme of the events accompanying the exhibition (meetings and workshops with designers, film screenings, musical events), visit our website at: [www.mnw.art.pl](http://www.mnw.art.pl)

The photographs are available at:

<ftp://ftp.mnw.art.pl>

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Roman Modzelewski, armchair, 1958

