

Abakanowicz / Hansen **Bionics**



Magdalena Abakanowicz
University of the Arts
Poznan

Prof. Magdalena Abakanowicz

The patron of our university is widely known for her works displayed at the permanent exhibition in London's Tate Modern (Embryology from 1980) and the most expensive work in the history of Polish auctions (Caminando from 1999, belonging to the collection of the tragically deceased American actor Robin Williams). Searching for a creative path in the 1960s, the artist's woven forms 'came off' the walls and appeared in three-dimensional space. Abakans – suspended, monumental organic forms permanently changed the understanding of the concept of installation and brought the artist the main prize at the São Paulo Biennale in 1965.

These objects were created under the conditions in which the artist lived in Soviet-controlled Poland: in one room and with limited access to materials, the artist weaved soft objects from threads pulled from abandoned ropes and old docking lines thrown ashore by ships. Abakanowicz's active use of techniques rather associated with the craft tradition is the main theme of her works, which represent the tension between hard and soft, as well as the monumentality and the scarcity of means. A decade later, a reflection on dangers resulting from the progressive degradation of the natural environment became an inseparable element of her works.



Convinced that art cannot be learned and that rules are the enemies of imagination, Abakanowicz created a studio that offered a space for experiment, individual research and the development of a creative personality. Posing questions and stimulating students to do their own research in the area of topics proposed in the classes were more important than formulating a programme determining a strictly defined direction of the studio. Abakanowicz wanted to show her students a broader view of reality. Observations, for example, of branches cut by the road made it possible to understand the essence of objects and forms shaped by nature.





Among the main areas of research carried out at Abakanowicz's studio was the issue of space, which the artist herself called 'the problem of a string' – which 'is always three-dimensional'. The horizontal workshops conducted so far, during which utility fabrics had been made, were changed into vertical workshops and weaving frames. The limitations and control that the artist herself experienced while studying during the Stalinist period also became the leading themes of her works.

Abakanowicz treated her students as subjects and partners because she disagreed with the tendency to subordinate an individual by preventing their free development and shaping their own identity, which was typical of totalitarian regimes. The artist allowed each student to build a structure in their imagination, encouraged them to take risks and, based on her knowledge of technology and materials, taught them to think in terms of visual arts, not just weaving. In the photo: A furniture form created in the Abakanowicz's studio by Yokiko Nobusawa in 1979, recorded in the university yard on a 16 mm film with a borrowed camera.



Oskar Hansen

In 1958, Oskar Hansen and his team presented a pioneering concept at the international competition for the Auschwitz Monument. The Road was devoid of any vertical signs and reduced to an asphalt path seventy meters wide that led from the camp barracks to the crematorium. As Auschwitz survivors were unable to identify their suffering with such an abstract expression of memory, the project of the Polish architect of Finnish origin was rejected. At the second stage of the competition, which took place the same year in Paris, the chairman of the jury, British sculptor Henry Moore called Hansen's project 'exceptionally wonderful', but he was forced to reject it and invite the teacher and his colleagues to cooperate with the Italian team. However, Hansen withdrew his project, seeing no possibility of combining it with the figurative, sculptural proposal of the Italians.

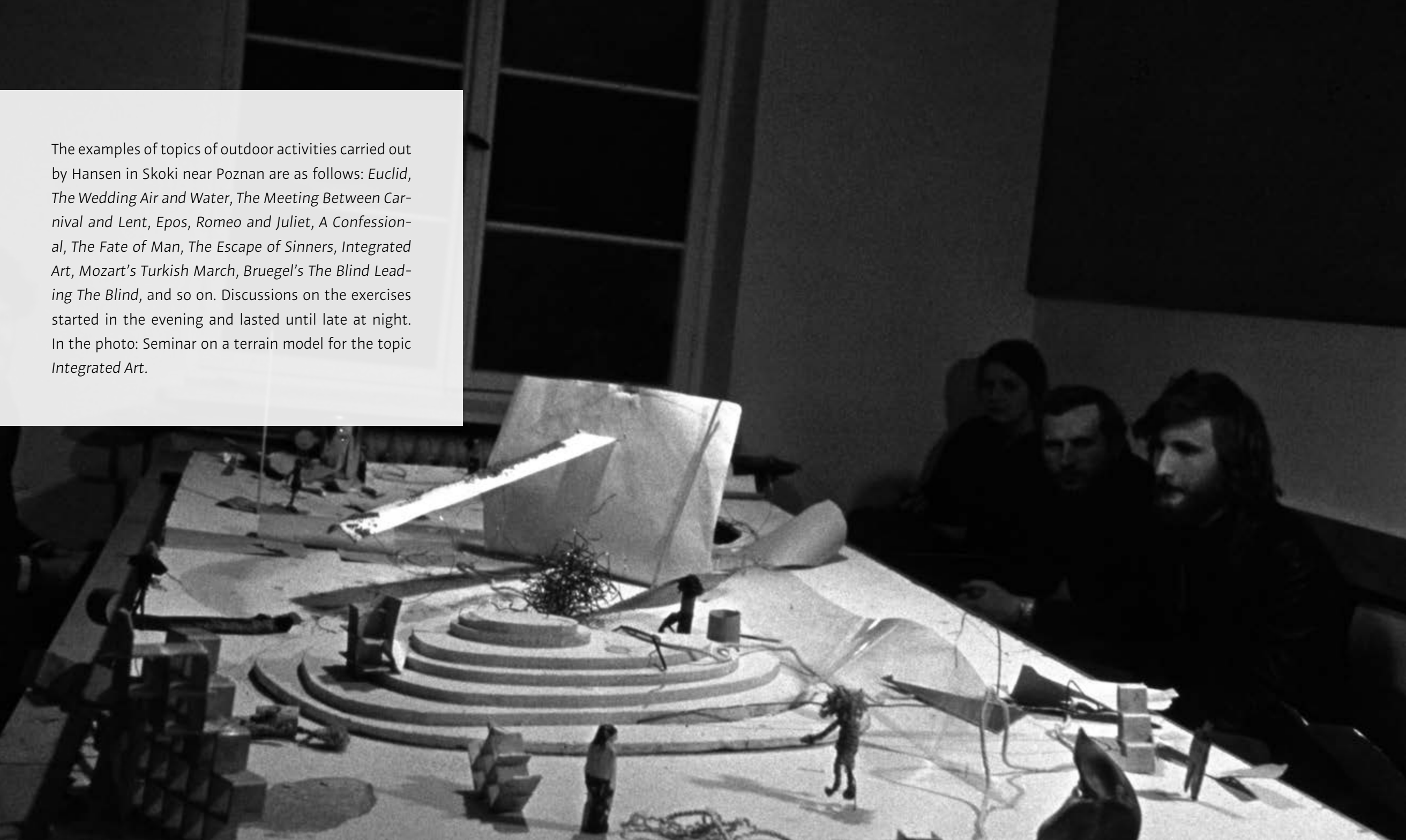
The Road was the earliest implementation of Hansen's 'Open Form' concept, and a response to both the modern criticism of a monument as a 'sign on a pedestal' and the formula of public sculpture. His proposal assumed an innovative concept of commemoration, consisting of an intervention in public space, an intervention developing over time, where the main role was reserved for a viewer. Workshop classes in the Open Form convention were conducted by Hansen in the 1970s at the UAP Open-Air Student House in Skoki near Poznan in 1972.



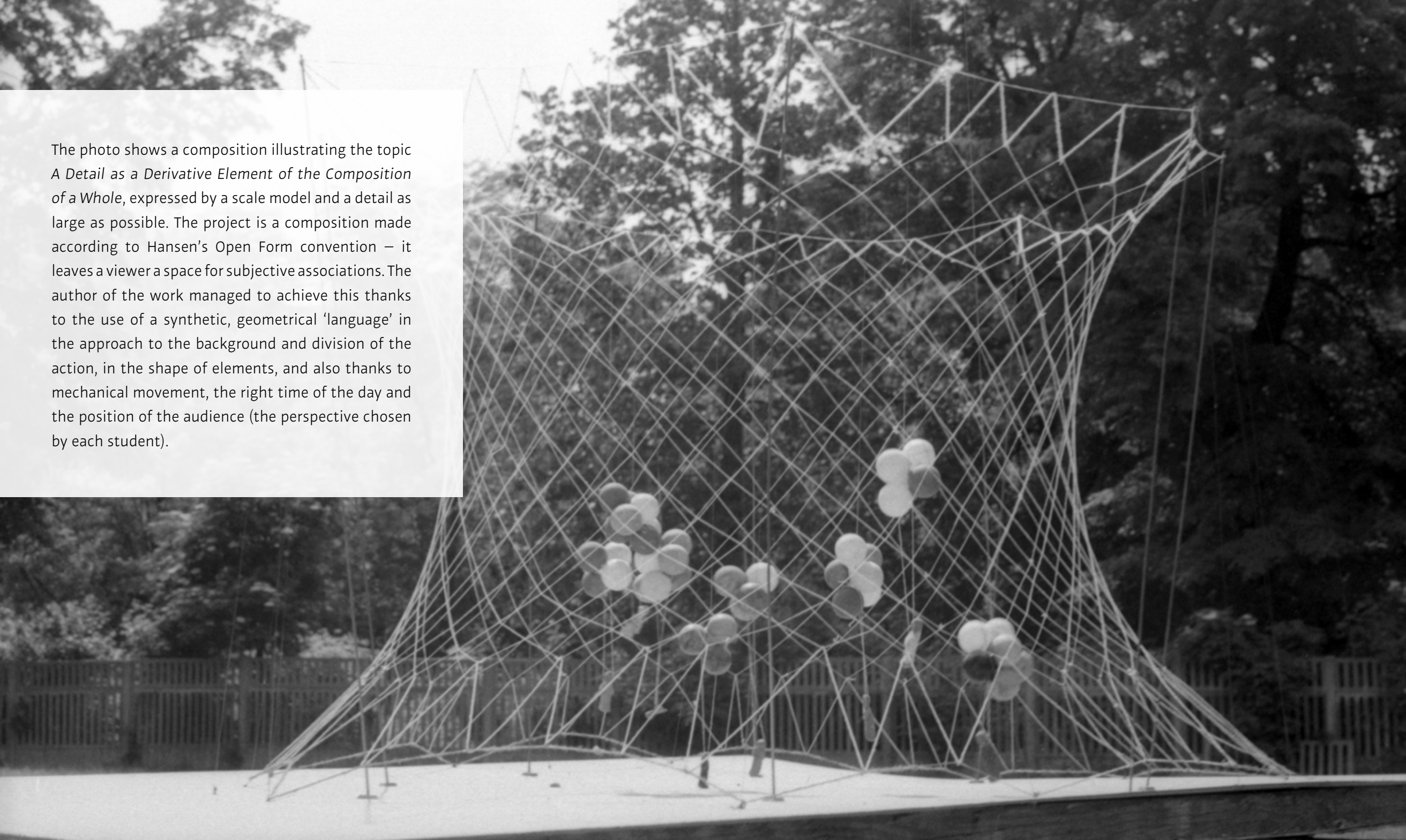


There were no starting topics for outdoor classes in the Open Form convention. They appeared and changed depending on the vision of the terrain – the ability to associate possibilities offered by a random image of nature. The first movement, like the didactic programme in Hansen's studio, responded to the existing situation. Each of the following movements was an attitude to the preceding movements – a reference or denial, pointing to something, asking a question. In the photo: Activities of a group of Norwegian and Danish students during an outdoor game in Skoki.

The examples of topics of outdoor activities carried out by Hansen in Skoki near Poznan are as follows: *Euclid*, *The Wedding Air and Water*, *The Meeting Between Carnival and Lent*, *Epos*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Confessional*, *The Fate of Man*, *The Escape of Sinners*, *Integrated Art*, *Mozart's Turkish March*, *Bruegel's The Blind Leading The Blind*, and so on. Discussions on the exercises started in the evening and lasted until late at night. In the photo: Seminar on a terrain model for the topic *Integrated Art*.



The photo shows a composition illustrating the topic *A Detail as a Derivative Element of the Composition of a Whole*, expressed by a scale model and a detail as large as possible. The project is a composition made according to Hansen's Open Form convention – it leaves a viewer a space for subjective associations. The author of the work managed to achieve this thanks to the use of a synthetic, geometrical 'language' in the approach to the background and division of the action, in the shape of elements, and also thanks to mechanical movement, the right time of the day and the position of the audience (the perspective chosen by each student).




Bionics

Bionics, which has been conducted for almost 45 years at the Poznan artistic university, is a didactic method that combines postulates regarding the social tasks of design and its responsibility for the state of the environment, which affects and determines the quality of human life. Developing the ability to read forms, structures, functions, processes and meanings is the basis of the studio's programme. Especially today, taking into account the threats related to the degradation of the natural environment and the detachment of man from nature, bionics is a search for positive solutions and shaping a new model of future civilisation.

Students in the Bionics Studio conduct research and studies on how to solve particular problem in nature. Their projects are carried out in the broadest possible context of the relationship. Their own interpretations of biological, constructional, psychological, social and cultural meanings form a material that is subject to attempts of synthesis. The abstracted elements or content concerning a given problem are translated into the language of technological forms and spatial objects. The search for harmony between what is rational and experimental, and what is beautiful and human, shapes the intellectual horizon of future designers.

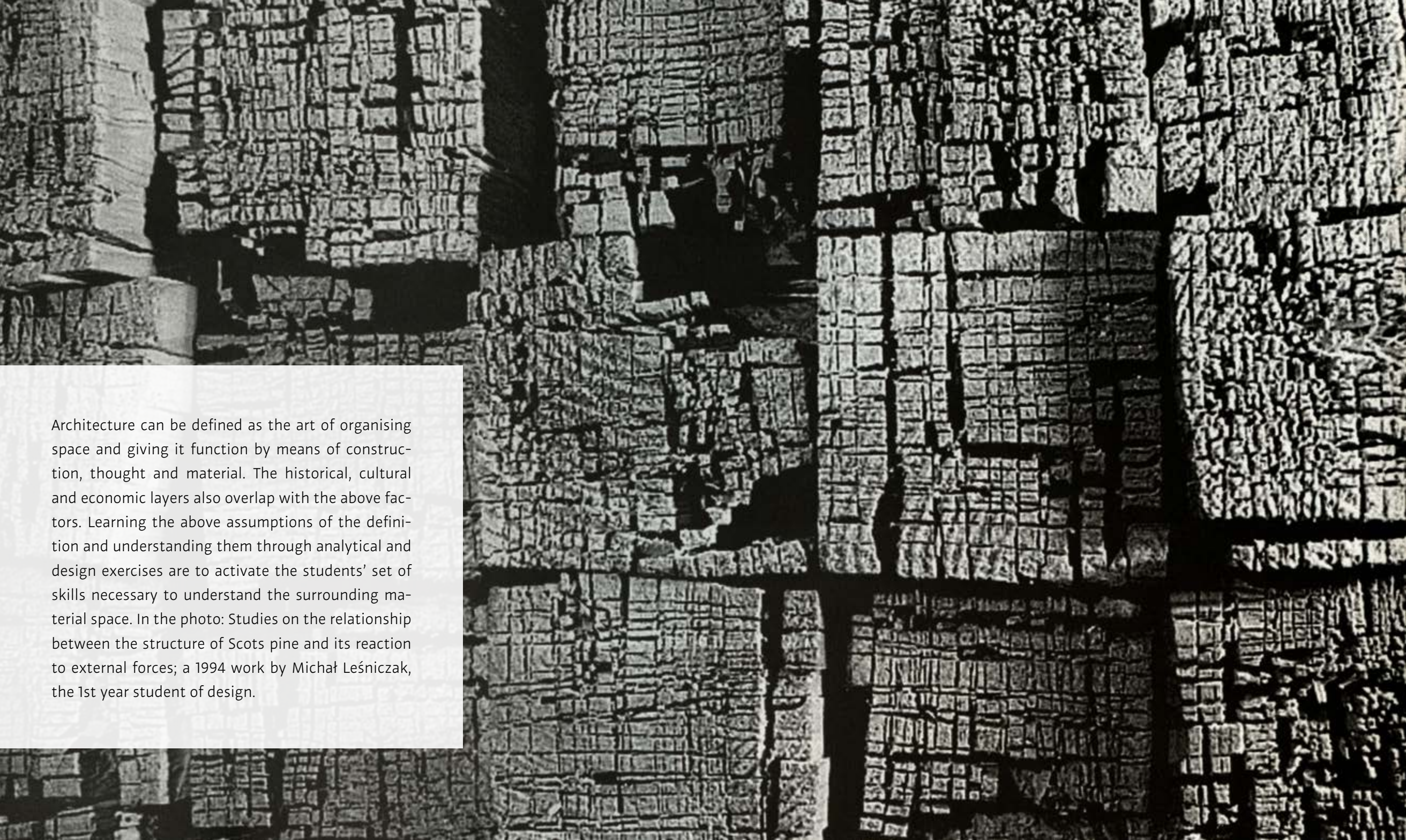


A photograph of a forest floor. In the foreground, a large, flat rock is covered in bright green moss. On top of this rock sits a small, white, rounded object, possibly a piece of wood or a small animal. In the background, another mossy rock is visible, and the forest floor is covered with fallen leaves and grass. The background is filled with many thin tree trunks, some with moss, and a dense canopy of leaves.

The topics implemented in the Bionics Studio broadly deal with the study of design problems and are inspired by forms and phenomena from the world of nature (an inexhaustible source of inspiration in terms of form, construction and simplicity of performing functions), geometry (spatial reference relations) and scale (reference of space and object to humans in an ergonomic context). The aim of education in the studio is to teach students to develop their own individual design-analytical methods / procedures as processes of conscious creation specific for design and other types of design activity. Each such process is defined by a student's individual characteristics, such as sensitivity, intellectual level and the developed abilities to understand construction issues.



Classes in the Bionics Studio involve individual work with a particular student as a specific personality, taking into account their individual predispositions, knowledge, imagination and a specific baggage of experiences. Topics evolve into design solutions, allowing each student to discover their own way of searching, synthesising conclusions and verbalising them in objects created in a specific scale and material. Students are encouraged to carefully observe the surrounding reality. In the photo: Outdoor activities in Skoki near Poznan.



Architecture can be defined as the art of organising space and giving it function by means of construction, thought and material. The historical, cultural and economic layers also overlap with the above factors. Learning the above assumptions of the definition and understanding them through analytical and design exercises are to activate the students' set of skills necessary to understand the surrounding material space. In the photo: Studies on the relationship between the structure of Scots pine and its reaction to external forces; a 1994 work by Michał Leśniczak, the 1st year student of design.

Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts Poznan (UAP) is the leading institution of higher education in the field of fine arts in Central and Eastern Europe.

The school was established as a result of a community action of the people of Poznań. At the very beginning, it operated under the name School of Decorative Arts. Its establishment was a result of a pro-independence attitude, the idea of working for the prosperity of the whole nation and the need to shape artistic culture and applied art.

Currently UAP is Poland's biggest institution of higher education in the field of fine arts and the only one that was granted the status of a university. University is committed to the idea of pluralism and interdisciplinarity of teaching. It is reflected in the curriculum in the form of our flagship idea - the so-called studio of free choice.

In 2017 we hosted 60 rectors and representatives of institutions of higher education in fine arts from all over the world. It was the first time ever that The European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) organized its Leadership Symposium in this part of Europe.



Magdalena Abakanowicz
University of the Arts
Poznan



Contact

Filip Żuchowski, PhD

II Bionics Studio

filip.zuchowski@uap.edu.pl

Piotr Grzywacz

Public Relations Office

piotr.grzywacz@uap.edu.pl

Magdalena Abakanowicz
University of Arts Poznań
Al. Marcinkowskiego 29
61–745 Poznań
Poland

office@uap.edu.pl

uap.edu.pl

Author / Idea

Filip Żuchowski

Design and typesetting by

Maciej Kozłowski

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Page 10, 11, 12, 14, UAP Archive

Page 13, *Academy of Fine Arts and Design Poznan.*
Departament of Bionics in design. (page 50)



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