"FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT"

According to the dictionary, "more appearance than substance" means to pretend until you succeed. Under this brazen title, a couch talk was held with deputy director and curator Rita Kersting on October 15 at Museum Ludwig, where a cool beer and a social media quiz on counterfeiting were offered. Read more:

"Under the motto "Fake it till you make it!" they [Forgers and their enablers] legitimize their actions and completely ignore how much they harm the artists with their fakes.

With the same nonchalance with which this serious topic is addressed in the museum, the sentence could be applied back onto the exhibition organizers:

"Under the motto "Fake it till you make it", they legitimize their actions, completely ignoring how much they harm the Ludwig Collection and thus the artists.

Open letter to: Dr. Yilmaz Dziewior Director of the Museum Ludwig Heinrich-Böll-Platz 50667 Cologne

Dear Dr. Dziewior

In light of the discussion sparked by you and Ms. Rita Kersting in the press about attributions of the Ludwig Collection of the Russian avant-garde, there seems to be a need for clarification. We will thus take the opportunity to demonstrate the authenticity on the most discussed work by Popova, as a representative example, and to illustrate the one-sided approach of the investigations and their selective publication.

LJUBOV POPOVA "PAINTERLY ARCHITECTONIC"

In addition to the classic work description, three main criteria apply to art historians. If the work is listed in the standard catalog raisonné/monograph, the technical examinations have shown that the pigments and canvas date from the period, and there are exhibition proofs or publications. The work by Popova meets all those criteria.

1. Technical analysis has shown that the Popova dates back to that time

The technical analysis carried out in 1999 clearly showed that the <u>pigments as well as the canvas date from the time around 1920 and that the work is authentic.</u>

<u>"The detected pigments were common at the time.</u> In 1999, zinc white and barium sulfate, cadmium red, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue and leg black were detected as pigments, and both proteins and oil were detected as binders." (Museum Ludwig catalog page 57, footnote 11)

2. Popova monograph contains illustrations and descriptions of the work:

The Popova is listed and illustrated in the Popova monograph by the undisputed Popova expert, Dimitry Sarabianov, which is the only one valid to date.

3. Popova is included in 15 exhibitions including the 1991/92 retrospective:

Popova has been shown in 15 exhibitions to date and has been featured in their catalogs, including the Popova retrospective in 1991/92, which is still the most important retrospective of Popova in the West today.

Detailed refutation of the Popova reassignment

First of all, it should be mentioned that <u>all the documents that positively document the work are nowhere</u> <u>mentioned in the exhibition catalog</u>. These extensive dossiers and documents have been available to the Museum Ludwig in their archives for years.

With the technical examination of 1999 clearly confirming the authenticity of Popova's work, and with the complete technical analyses commissioned by the museum having never been made available, it is fair to say that the remaining arguments are based on visual observations. Thus, we will address these topics accordingly.

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

The technical analyses of Museum Ludwig are to this day not provided. Reference is made to studies with infrared reflectography with comments on the application of paint and brush technique. However, footnote 11 on page 57 of the exhibition catalog contains the following note, which proves that the technical analyses of 1999 clearly show that the pigments originate from that period:

<u>"The detected pigments were common at the time</u>. In 1999, zinc white and barium sulfate, cadmium red, ultramarine blue, cobalt blue and leg black were detected as pigments, and both proteins and oil were detected as binders." (Ludwig catalog p. 57, footnote 11)

In the absence of any evidence to the contrary from the Museum Ludwig and without full disclosure of the complete respective technical investigation results, it must be assumed that the technical analyses commissioned by the Museum Ludwig also state that ...

- all pigments used are from the period
- the image carrier / canvas is from the time
- a possible C14 radio carbon analysis did not yield deviating results
- possible radiographs have not yielded a different result
- possible spectral analyses have not yielded a different result

Information on these research results, which clearly confirm the authenticity of the Popova, is available to Museum Ludwig, but is only mentioned indirectly and partially in a footnote in the exhibition catalog.

BRUSH STROKE / TEXTURE

The authors of the catalog (restorer Mandt and curator Kersting) contradict themselves several times in their assessment of Popova. On page 56 of the exhibition catalog, for example, it is correctly stated that Popova's brushwork varies greatly from picture to picture. Despite this statement, however, it is argued on the same page that this is proof of the lack of authenticity of the subsequent Popova work?

"In Popova's painting, the brush technique varies considerably." (Ludwig catalog p. 56)

"A direct comparison with the painting in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection shows <u>clear differences in the application of paint and brushstrokes</u>. (Ludwig catalog p. 56)



Thyssen-Bornemisza (Ludwig catalog p. 55)



Museum Ludwig, Cologne (Ludwig catalog p. 54)

In addition, the exhibition catalog uses the surface structure as a whole as an argument for why the work in the Ludwig Collection differs from other Popowa works. The exhibition catalog (page 57 / footnote 11) refers to the Gerner-Beuerle technical study of 1999, but the text does not quote Gerner-Beuerle. Instead, the Museum Ludwig's own interpretation is used, which states that the works in the Ludwig Museum do not have a vivid surface.

"However, it does not show a vivid surface as it can be found, for example, in the painting in Madrid".

In complete contrast to this, the research report that Claudia Gerner-Beuerle <u>wrote in 1999</u> on the <u>Popowa work in the Ludwig Museum</u> states that it is <u>precisely this work that possesses a vivid surface</u>:

"The <u>surface is extremely lively</u>. Parts with a physical character and a striking brushstroke stand next to smooth, glossy and thinly painted zones".

On the one hand, the information in the exhibition catalog is contradictory with regard to the various applications of brushwork and remains without any comments by the authors in the exhibition catalog. On the other hand, the reference to the surface structure is in complete contradiction with the content of the cited 1999 research report. On the contrary, all arguments of the 1999 research report clearly speak for the authenticity of Popova's work and are not quoted at all or are wrongly quoted in the exhibition catalog.

THEMATIC REPETITION

On page 56 of the exhibition catalog, it is rightly emphasized that Popova worked in series, but at the same time it is claimed that there is no single example for the repetition of a motif. If one follows the argumentation of the two authors, the proof of the authenticity of another Popova from the Gmurzynska Gallery in the Ludwig Collection is on page 50 in a direct comparison with a work from the collection of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg on the opposite page 51. In this comparison it becomes clear that both works by Popova (as far as the motifs are concerned) are almost completely identical.

"Popova has worked in series for her pictorial concepts, <u>but for an almost identical repetition...there is not a single example</u>." (Ludwig catalog page 56)



State Russian Museum (Ludwig catalog p. 50)



Museum Ludwig, Cologne (Ludwig catalog p. 51)

Information on the clear repetition of a motif (as can be seen in the illustrations of the Museum Ludwig catalogue) is not mentioned in writing in the exhibition catalog.

VERTICAL / HORIZONTAL

In the exhibition catalog and in the exhibition, the Popova work is erroneously shown horizontally instead of the correct vertical representation. Probably on the assumption that a horizontal presentation would facilitate a direct comparison with the horizontally arranged work from the Thyssen Collection.

It completely ignores the fact that historically the work has always been exhibited vertically, and has been shown vertically in the monograph of the most renowned Popova expert Dimitry Sarabianov and in all previous publications.

Only John Bowlt and Nicoletta Misler, in their publication on the Thyssen Collection, had reproduced the work horizontally, without further justification and solely for optical reasons.



Thyssen-Bornemisza (Ludwig catalog p. 55)



Museum Ludwig, Cologne (Ludwig catalog p. 54)

"A painting called Painterly architectonics in the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, is almost identical in size, formal configuration and color-scale (fig.4), although it is normally displayed and reproduced vertically" (Bowlt and Misler)

The orientation of a vertical picture to a horizontal work, which fundamentally changes the composition, is in no way justified in the exhibition of the Ludwig Museum. One only finds an indirect reference in the exhibition catalog to the illustration in the Thyssen catalog.

There is no indication in the Museum Ludwig exhibition catalog as to why a picture that has been conceived and exhibited vertically from the very beginning and which is shown vertically in the Popova monograph, should be shown horizontally.

NUMBERING ON THE BACK SIDE

In their comparison of the two Popova works in the Thyssen Museum and the Ludwig Museum, the authors Kersting and Mandt refer to markings on the back of the work in the Thyssen Collection. It is noted that the work in the Thyssen Collection, for example, has a numbering system, whereas that in the Ludwig Museum does not.

The missing numbering is used as a further indication of a questioning of the Popova work in the Ludwig Muse-um, and as proof, reference is made to the entry in Sarabianov's Popova monograph and quoted in extracts:

"At least thirty works with this title were shown at the posthumous exhibition of 1924 alone, and the Vesnin-Aksenov list includes forty-four [...]".

Therefore, it should be demonstrated that Popova's works from the series of "Painterly Architectonics" should without exception have such numbering. In order to support this thesis, the complete text of Sarabianov is deliberately shortened. The complete text reads:

"At least thirty works with this title were shown at the posthumous exhibition of 1924 alone, and the Vesnin-Aksenov list includes forty-four. To this list must be added those works that are not on the list, since they were sold by the artist during her lifetime".

In other words, there were numbered and unnumbered works from the series of Painterly Architectonics, depending on whether they were exhibited and provided with the corresponding exhibition number or sold directly from the studio without an exhibition number, as Gerner-Beuerle explains in her 1999 research report:

"Objects that have already been sold at the time of Popova's inventory and are therefore no longer available, remain without a number. (Claudia Gerner-Beuerle, Vergleichende Studien zur Maltechnik von Ljubow Popowa, PhD. thesis, Fachbereich Restaurierung und Konservierung von Kunst und Kulturgut der Fachhochschule Köln, Cologne 1999, p. 84)

In the Museum Ludwig exhibition catalog, it is further noted that the Cologne painting, unlike the painting from the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection, does not have a numbering on the reverse side that refers to Popova's own list of works or the Vesnin/Aksenov list, and that there are no references to another painting in ORANGE AND BLUE in either list:

"On the other hand, the Cologne picture does not bear a number" (Ludwig Catalog, p. 168)

"In both lists there is also no reference to another painting with the information of the color scale ORANGE AND BLUE" (ibid.)

However, it is a fact that the Popova exhibition catalog of the State Tretyakov Gallery Moscow <u>lists 15 works</u> of "Painterly Architectonics". Of these, only 4 works have a numbering on the back, which refers to the Vesnin/Aksenov list mentioned by the Ludwig Museum. Of the <u>15 works</u>, only 2 works have a reference to the color of the work in the title.

The Vesnin/Aksenov list of the authors of the exhibition catalog should also be submitted for the documentation. This would indeed be an important contribution, since both this list - as is well known - has never been published to date and the private list from Popova herself is considered lost.

The deliberately incomplete citation of Sarabianov's entry, contrary to the information in the exhibition catalog, clearly indicates that Popova sold works without numbering on the reverse side during her lifetime, thus creating a completely different body of evidence. The same applies to the alleged absence of another work in ORANGE AND BLUE on the lists. If out of 15 works only 2 works contain a reference to the color, 13 works have no reference to the color.

RED PRIMER

In the exhibition catalog you will find the following note:

"In the course of a screening of eight paintings by Popova in 1999, the red ochre grounding, some of which remains visible to the naked eye, was already recorded as a deviation..." (p. 168)

And this is cited as an indication in comparison with other Popova works that have a white ground. What is not mentioned, however, is the fact that with reference to the use of red ochre, among other things, in the aforementioned 1999 study, this very Popova work is clearly listed as an original Popova.

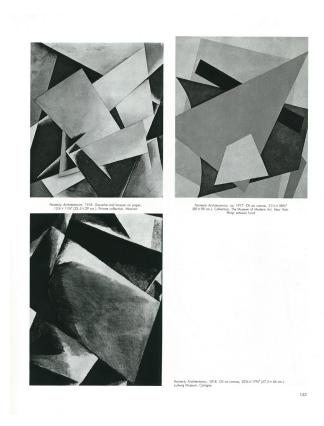
Furthermore, it should be noted that in various other works by Popova in public collections there are widely varying uses of colors and application of paint including primer. Gerner-Beuerle also points this out in her 1999 study:

"In addition, an <u>inhomogeneous application method as well as a varying composition of the primer can be observed</u> throughout." (Gerner-Beuerle, p. 86)

Despite better knowledge, the Museum Ludwig catalogue does not include contain any information that confirms the authenticity of Popova's work in the aforementioned 1999 study and explicitly mentions varying compositions of the primer.

MONOGRAPHS

The picture is listed and illustrated in the Popova monograph by the undisputed Popova expert Dimitry Sarabianov. Sarabianov published about 300 books on the Russian avant-garde and was himself an important collector of Popova.



Information that Popova's work is in the only valid monograph by the leading Popova expert, Sarabianov, as an original work by Popova is not included in the Museum Ludwig catalog.

FRENCH AND ENGLISH VERSION OF THE MONOGRAPH

The Popova monograph by Dimitri Sarabianov was first published in the West in France by *Philippe Sers* Éditeur Verlag. In this first edition, the Popova picture from the Ludwig Collection on page 153 was erroneously referred to as the work from the Thyssen Collection. An oversight by the publisher, which was corrected by Thames and Hudson in the following 1990 edition. On page 153 of the English edition, the Popova work from the Ludwig Collection is printed with the correct description of the Cologne work, see illustration under Monograph.

From this <u>simple printing error</u> by the French publisher, which was corrected in the subsequent English edition, <u>the authors of the Museum Ludwig catalog attempt to suggest that there is some doubt about the correctness of the monograph entry</u>. Thus, the following insinuation is made in the Museum Ludwig catalog:

"...In the catalog entry, an error in the artist's monograph from 1990 is also corrected. It contains a vertically aligned black-and-white image of the Cologne painting, but with the wrong measurements and the indication "Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection"..."

Information indicating the corrected printing error and the correct representation of the Ludwig image in the Sarabianov monograph in the final English version are not included in the Museum Ludwig catalog.

EXPERTS

The renowned expert Vasily Rakitin, who was the most important advisor of George Costakis, the most important Russian avant-garde collector, has confirmed the authenticity of the Popova painting.

Information on Rakitin's confirmation of Popova's authenticity is not included in the Museum Ludwig catalog.

EXHIBITIONS

Popova's work has been shown in 15 exhibitions and illustrated in exhibition catalogs.

This was also the case in the Popova retrospective at the beginning of the nineties, which is still the most extensive in the West today.

- "New Acquisitions Museum Ludwig", Museums of the City of Cologne, Cologne 1979; o.S
- "From Painting to Design; Russian Constructivist Art of the Twenties", Galerie Gmurzynska, Cologne 1981; p. 57 & with illustration
- "Vanguardia Rusa 1910-1930. Museo y Colección Ludwig", Fundación Juan March, Madrid 1985; p. 127 & cat no. 130
- "Russisk avantgarde 1910 1930 fra Museum Ludwig, Cologne og andre museer", Louisiana Museum, Humblebaek 1985; color illustration p. 37 & cat no. 123
- "Russian Avant-garde 1910-1930th Collection Ludwig, Cologne", Museum Ludwig, Cologne 1986; p. 118 & color illustration p. 118 & cat no. 135
- "From Revolution to Perestroika: Soviet Art from the Ludwig Collection," Kunst-museum Luzern, Lucerne 1989; p. 75 & cat no. 54
- "De la Revolució a la Perestroika. Art soviètic de la collecció Ludwig," Palau de la Virreina, Barcelona 1989; color illustration p. 75 & cat no. 54
- "From Revolution to Perestroika: Soviet Art from the Ludwig Collection", Saint Stephen 1989/90; S. 190 & Farbabbildung S. 75 & Kat-Nr. 54
- "From Revolution to Perestroika. Soviet Art from the Ludwig Collection", State Museum, Luxemburg 1990
- "Från Revolution to Perestrojka. Sovjetisk konst ur Sammlung Ludwig", Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm 1990; p. 184 & color illustration p. 61 & cat no. 52
- "Ljubov Popova", Museum Ludwig, Cologne 1991; No. 68, p. 176, illustration without page number, the exhibition was shown the following year in the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid;
- "Russian avant-garde in the 20th century: From Malevich to Kabakov. The Ludwig Collection", Museum Ludwig, Cologne 1993; p. 174.176 & color illustration p. 176 & cat.-no. 223
- "Masterpieces of the Museum Ludwig", Nara Prefectural Museum of Art 1995; p. 162 & color illustration p. 97 & cat.-no. 50
- "Kasimir Malevich. Work and Effect", Museum Ludwig, Cologne 1995; p. 226 & color plate p. 151 & cat.-no. 125
- "A slap in the face to public taste: Cubo-Futurism and the dawn of Modernism in Russia", Museum Ludwig, Cologne 2009-10

Information on the 15 exhibitions of Popova's work and the Popova retrospective, which is still the most extensive in the West, is not included in the Museum Ludwig catalog.

MISQUOTED

Quote Rita Kersting: "The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: Twentieth-Century Russian and East European Painting" by John E. Bowlt and Nicoletta Misler is a fabulous pioneering feat. Following in-depth research into the collection, it is the first work to identify forgeries...This early publication already voices doubts about the authenticity of certain paintings in the Museum Ludwig collection, such as Liubov Popova's Painterly Architectonic..." (Ludwig catalog, p. 143)

Original quote John Bowlt and Nicoletta Misler: "A painting called Painterly Architectonics in the Muse-um Ludwig, Cologne, is almost identical in size, formal configuration and color-scale, although it is normally displayed and reproduced vertically..." (John Bowlt, Nicoletta Misler "The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection," London 1993, S. 250)

The information in the Museum Ludwig exhibition catalog is clearly wrong: There is no indication in "The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: Twentieth-century Russian and East European Painting" by John Bowlt and Nicoletta Misler that Popova's work "Painterly Architectonic" is being questioned or declared a fake.

CONCLUSION

The investigations, in particular the technical analysis of the Popova work commissioned by the Museum Ludwig, do not refute the "attribution" - that is, the authenticity or genuineness of the work - in any way. The work was created by Popova. It is undoubtedly a work of Popova from that period.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Nobody is against well-founded research, least of all those who have been seriously engaged with the Russian avant-garde for half a century. In an irresponsible media campaign, however, the Museum Ludwig has deliberately jeopardized the reputation and value of its unique collection of Russian avant-garde art.

The life's work and the reputation of the most important patron of post-war Germany, Peter Ludwig, is being massively damaged by the results of the investigation, which are still not transparent today. Peter Ludwig, who holds a doctorate in art history, had an impressive amount of specialist knowledge, owned one of the most important libraries on the Russian avant-garde and was in direct contact with the artist families, collectors and museums on site in Russia. No one who knew Peter Ludwig would describe him as gullible.

"Was Peter Ludwig too gullible? Kersting says he understood something of the Russian avant-garde, but he was no expert in this field." (Rita Kersting, Deputy Director of the Museum Ludwig, Welt, 25.9.2020)

It is irresponsible to describe the damage already caused in the press by a merely formal withdrawal of the exhibition title "Forgery" as merely media-effective, but in the legal sense as incorrect, indeed to trivialize it.

"Actually, the title should correctly read: "Originals and most likely not authentic works". Since we did not consider this a good exhibition title, we used the colloquial term fake. But you will not find any work in our exhibition that bears the word fake...". (Dr. Dziewior, SWR Kultur aktuell, 25.9.2020)

To accuse the experts who have been researching the Russian avant-garde for decades of bias is specious, especially when the museum arbitrarily sets the limit on which personal interests could lead to conflicts.

"There are a lot of experts in this field who represent different vested interests," she (Rita Kersting) said. "Museums are the right institutions to be advancing this research, because for us it's about scholarship, not commercial interests. " (New York Times, 30.09.2020)

THE BACKGROUND

The Russian avant-garde and its importance as one of the outstanding artistic movements of the 20th century is completely undisputed today. It has shaped an entire epoch. The Russian avant-garde pioneered abstraction and at the same time mirrored the technical achievements of its time. It has had a decisive influence on art history - even today: without Suprematism and Constructivism, for example, there would have been no Minimalism. The influence of artists such as Rodchenko on photography still continues.

One proof of the extraordinary importance and influence of the Russian avant-garde is the esteem in which the movement is held among artists. Such renowned masters like Donald Judd and Cy Twombly, for example, were early collectors of Russian avant-garde art at Galerie Gmurzynska. When Donald Judd was asked by the gallery at the time to exhibit his work alongside works by Malevich, he declared: "I would love to, but what would Malevich say? Such a homage to one of the central figures of the Russian avant-garde by one of the formative masters of Minimalism is an expression of the great respect that other artists of this generation had for Malevich and Suprematism.



In 2002 Krystyna Gmurzynska was the first person outside Russia to be awarded the Diploma of the Russian Minister of Culture Prof. Dr. Michael Shvydkoi. This in recognition and gratitude for Krystyna Gmurzynska's significant commitment, both to the study of 20th century Russian art and for her extensive exhibition activities.

Quote Prof. Dr. Michael Shvydkoi:

"It is not ministries or institutions that advance culture, but people like Krystyna Gmurzynska, who through their commitment bring our culture closer to other peoples, so that more understanding is created and prejudices are broken down."

The Gmurzynska Gallery has been dedicated to the Russian avant-garde for over 55 years - now in its third generation. The Gallery shares its great respect and passion for the Russian avant-garde with artists, leading experts, museum curators and collectors. In the course of the close cooperation with Galerie Gmurzynska, Peter Ludwig, one of the most important collectors of the post-war period and himself an accomplished art historian, was able to assemble today's "Sammlung Ludwig" in the 1970s and 1980s - a collection of the Russian avant-garde that is unique in the world and is of inestimable value today and could not be created in this way. In 1979, Ludwig acquired the Popova "Painterly Architectonic" from the Galerie Gmurzynska for DM 75,000. The current value is around 5 million Euro.

Krystyna Gmurzynska, born in 1949, is one of the only surviving contemporary witnesses who remembers the trusting relationship of her mother Antonina with Peter and Irene Ludwig. Advised by the museums head curator Evelyn Weiss, as well as its chief restorer Prof. Wolfgang Hahn, a close friend of the Ludwig's, it was from the very beginning of this collaboration the aim to bequeath the acquired works to the museum.

"She (Antonina Gmurzynska) not only showed and sold art, but also presented it in scientifically significant catalogs, some of which have become standard works of art literature. The Museum Ludwig now has probably the most extensive and best group of Russian and Soviet avant-garde art in the world. This is the fruit of the cooperation with the Gmurzynska family and their gallery. "(Peter Ludwig on April 28, 1991)

In this undertaking, which was so important for Peter and Irene Ludwig, they were not only guided by Prof. Wolfgang Hahn, who closely examined all purchases, other important advisors for the acquisitions of the Russian avant-garde were friends such as the Russian ambassador in Bonn, Semionov and his wife (himself a great connoisseur and collector of the avant-garde) and the famous collector George Costakis, as well as various experts such as his advisor and legendary art historian, Wassily Rakitin.

It is of course to be welcomed when scientific research on the Russian avant-garde is advanced and museums and collectors alike examine their holdings - also for authenticity: it is sensible and desirable to process the holdings in a scientifically honest, constructive manner. Galerie Gmurzynska has been committed to this task since its foundation.

However, a shocking example of how such a fundamentally desirable evaluation can fail was recently presented by the Museum Ludwig under the lurid title "Forgery". Accompanied by a destructive press campaign, the "investigation results" were presented in an exhibition with regard to the authenticity of selected works from the Ludwig Collection, among others. Contrary to the elementary principles of inclusive and constructive scientific discourse, you, as the person responsible for the museum, have concealed the results of technical analyses; the essential discourse has thus been prevented.

The complications of conflicting interests are clouding parts of the Russian avant-garde art market, and this also applies specifically to the current debate about the Ludwig Collection. It is neither our task nor our intention to point out the relevant interest groups and their motives, nor to defend the entire market; we can and will only speak for ourselves.

As a result, the scientific research of the Russian avant-garde and, beyond that, the reputation of Peter Ludwig and his outstanding collection continues to be damaged. In the final analysis the result is wrong: it can be excluded that Popova's "Painterly Architectonic" is a "fake".

SCIENTIFIC STANDARDS AND CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MUSEUMS

It is taken for granted that a museum and a government institution should more than meet the standards of their profession. However, the management of Museum Ludwig has not only shown a lack of respect for the proper scientific process and disregard for established museum procedures, but has also violated the binding standards for research institutions of the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft), and the "ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums" of the International Council of Museums, which you, Director Dziewior, have signed.

Appendix:

- Excerpts from the standards for research institutions of the German Research Foundation
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, des International Council of Museums

Gallery Gmurzynska, November 10th, 2020