

Stories of the Ear for children

Zachęta National Gallery of Art

19 March — 15 May 2011

www.zacheta.art.pl

No doubt you are wondering why an art gallery is showing *Stories of the Ear*. Why is it not 'stories of the eye'? Don't you generally LOOK at different things in a gallery, not listen to them.

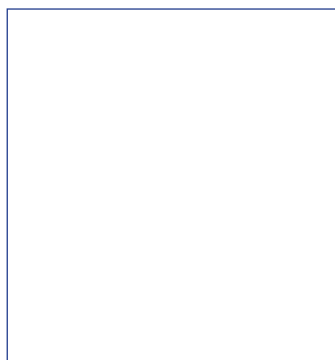
Well, this exhibition is an exception. In it, you will be able to listen to and look at strange things. Paintings that contain different sounds, drawings of waves of sound which don't look at all like the waves of the sea, trembling sheets of paper and light signs that look like something out of *Star Wars* but which are traces of a hand that 'speaks'. Strange, right? To get a grip of what's going on in this chaos, let's start from the beginning — in other words, in our case from the EAR.

The Ear. A difficult thing to draw. Small children generally don't draw ears, concentrating on other details: big eyes, hair, clothes . . .



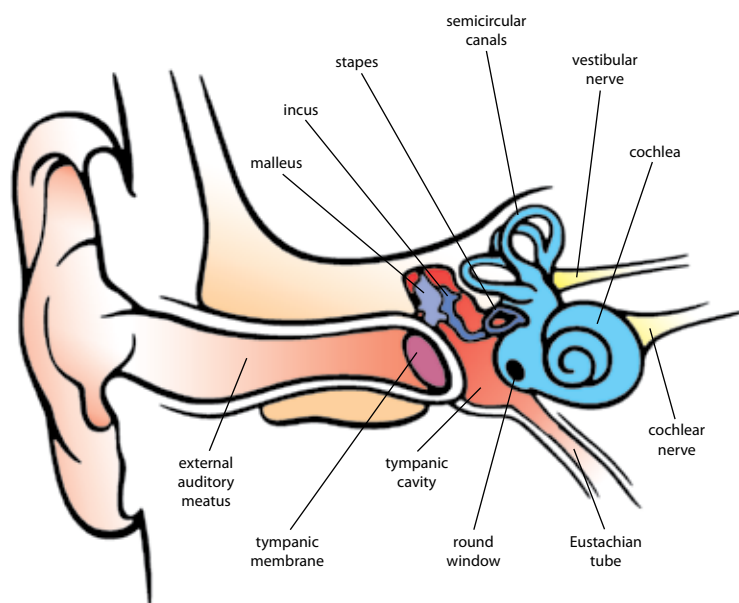
They usually draw ears in a very simplified way.

And how do you draw ears?



drawings: Teoś Grynberg

For the ear, or rather the whole hearing apparatus is an unusually complicated part of the body. What we see is only its external part — the auricle. Do you know that each of you has inside the head an internal and external ear? (Anyone who has had an ear infection, no doubt is well aware how deep the pain goes!) But do you know that in the ear we have a **canal, drum, trumpet, stirrup, anvil** and a whole host of other 'equipment'.



on the basis of: <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ucho>

When all these elements are working well, we can hear even the most delicate rustling sound. If one of the parts malfunctions, then we do not hear so well. Some people, as a result of different illnesses, lose their hearing completely. Still others are born with a complete inability to pick up acoustic stimuli, in other words with deafness. If we lose one sense, others, such as vision, smell or touch, become sharper. People who cannot hear can perceive sounds in other ways:

'My name is Łukasz. I am 18 years old. I go to an Upper School with an arts' profile. I have not been able to hear since I was six months old. Without hearing aids I only hear very loud sounds, for example, the sound of a great bell, a drum, a car horn, the barking of a dog or a very loud shout. Once I woke up in the night. I was frightened. There was a terrible storm. I could hear the thunder, but couldn't hear the rain. **I hear, or perhaps rather I feel infra-sounds and vibrations. When an orchestra plays loudly, I feel a beating in my chest and the trembling of everything that I touch.**

Łukasz Krakowiak, http://www.glusi.pl/fonogesty/opinie_u.html

Did you know that the great composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827), even when he began to have serious problems with his hearing, continued giving concerts and composing his wonderful symphonies, concerts, sonatas and overtures? At the exhibition, you can see fragments of Mauricio Kagel's film *Ludwig van*, in which the absence of sound makes us think of Beethoven's deafness. What for you is this lack of sound?

Zachęta for children not just in the gallery! Take a look at the website www.zacheta.art.pl and test out our new internet game!



At the exhibition, you will find works by contemporary artists: Anna Molska, Marcin Maciejowski, Bartek Materka and the group Twożywo. The works are made using different techniques typical of contemporary art. Here you can find installations, video, photography and painting. Some of the works seem silent. Try to listen to them and imagine all their possible sounds.

Paintings Full of Sounds. Marcin Maciejowski



Marcin Maciejowski, *Untitled (Lidka Topi)*, 2006, courtesy of Galerie Meyer Kainer Wien



Go to the painting *At the Cafe*.

How many people can you see in it?.....
What scene does it present?.....
What sounds can you hear in a café?.....

Is the painting noisy, or quiet?.....

And now look at the second work by Marcin Maciejowski.

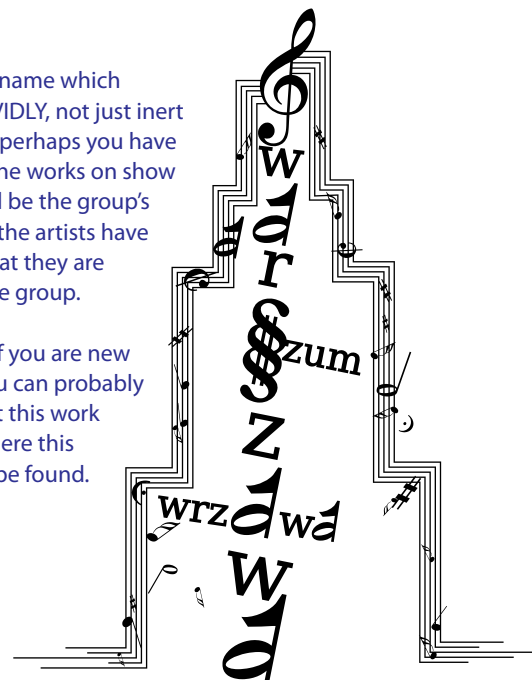
Where is this scene taking place?.....
What is this woman doing?.....
Is the painting noisy, or quiet?.....
The work is composed of two parts. In neither of them can we see the whole figure. Do you know why?
Marcin Maciejowski painted the picture on the basis of fragments of a video of his wife Lidka. Both paintings show stills/frames from the film.

Urban Sounds. Murals by Twożywo

At the beginning, let me explain a linguistic joke: for the word Twożywo is a deliberate pun. The artists (Mariusz Libel and Krzysztof Sidorek) are playing with words as there is no Polish word 'Twożywo': however, there is a word 'tworzywo' which sounds the same and means 'material' or 'substance'. So what the artists have done is keep the sound, but changed the spelling to get the English word 'Two' (they are an artistic duo after all!) and the Polish word 'żywo' which means 'quickly' or 'vividly'. As a result, you get

TWOŻYWO, a name which reads TWO VIVIDLY, not just inert substance. Or perhaps you have other ideas? The works on show in Zachęta will be the group's last works. As the artists have announced that they are disbanding the group.

I guess, even if you are new to Warsaw, you can probably work out what this work shows and where this building is to be found.



Grupa Twożywo, mural design, 2011 (realised on building at Nutki St. in Warsaw)

What words can you read here? (Even if you don't speak Polish, you might recognise the name of a city in Poland going down the centre of the building. Then as you read across can you find two other words? Can you see 'szum' and 'wrzawa'. These are two Polish words that refer to sound. But one 'szum' is neutral, like 'sound' in English, while the other 'wrzawa' is negative, something like 'din' or 'racket' in English. Why do you think the artists put these words in this picture?)

What do some of the letters look like?.....

What is the outline of the building made out of?.....

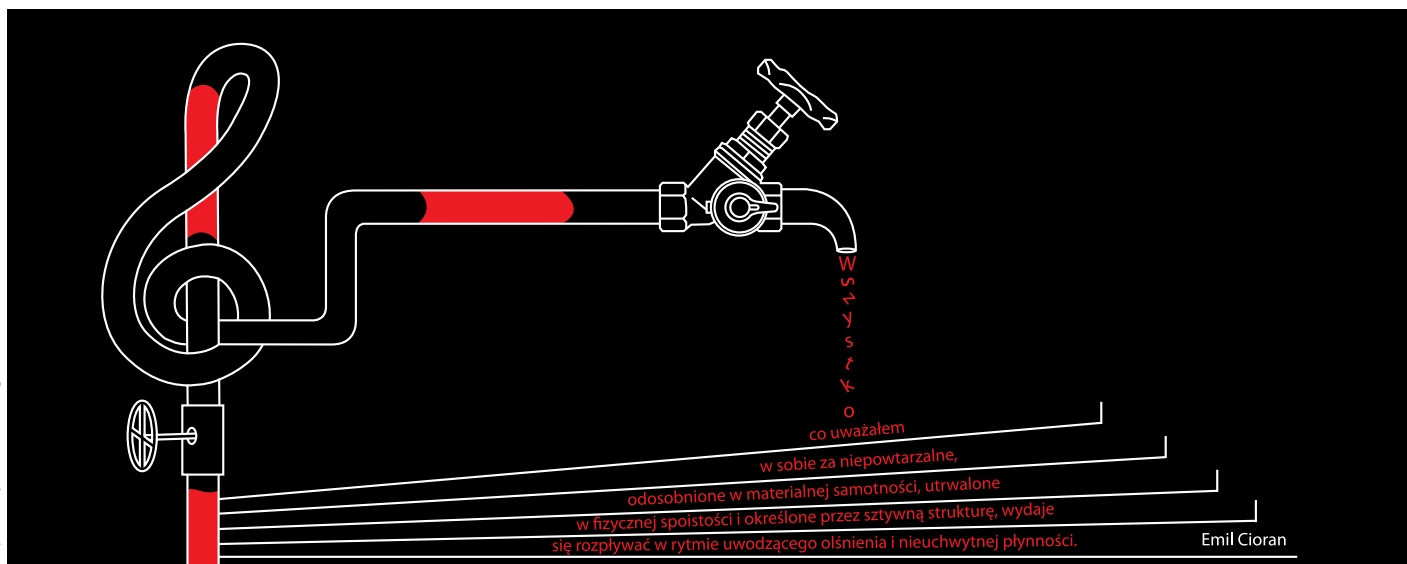
Have you ever stood at a crossroads in the centre of a city with your eyes closed? (on the pavement of course!) If not, try it and see if you make out the different sounds being produced around you. Is it sound (szum), or rather a racket (wrzawa)?

Look carefully at the big work by Twożywo.

What musical signs can you see in this work?.....

Out of the tap drop some Polish words associated with music.

Do you think of music when you hear water dripping or flowing from a tap?.....



Grupa Twożywo, mural design (Emil Cioran), 2011

Emil Cioran



Does Silence Exist? Anna Molska

Anna Molska's installation is based on a family story. The artist's grandfather Janusz Molski was a scientist who researched sound waves, amongst others in the Antarctic in 1966. With the help of various devices he succeeded in getting a short-wave connection between the Antarctic and Warsaw. The drawings that look like a kind of Christmas Tree without branches are oscillograms — a drawn record of sound waves.

On the basis of these photos, describe the landscape of the Antarctic.

What colours dominate? What sounds do you imagine?

.....

.....

.....

Can you arrange the letters below into the names of animals that live on that icy continent:

GUINNEP

LEAS

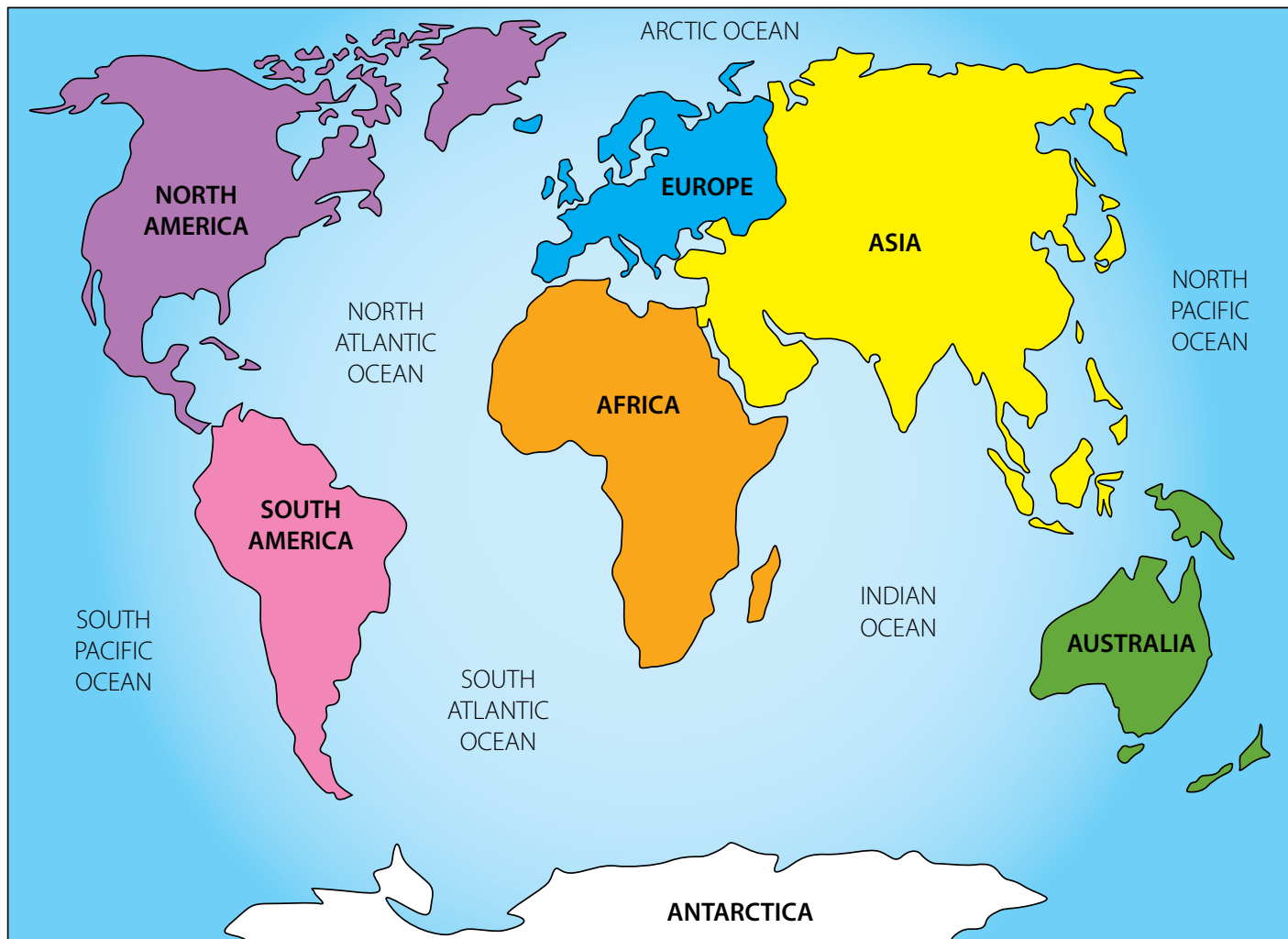
EHAWL

Draw the route of the journey from Poland to the Antarctic.

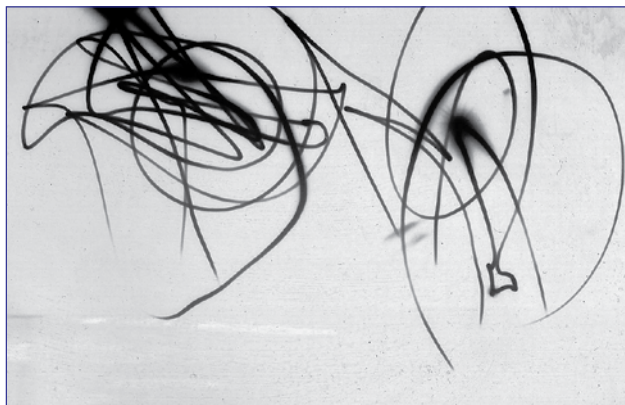
What means of transport did Janusz Molski use?.....

.....

.....



Does Movement Have Form? Bartek Materka



Bartek Materka, *Untitled (Words)*, 2011, private collection, photo courtesy of the artist

We were talking earlier about deafness. People who are unable to hear from birth also have problems with speech. It is difficult for them to understand what someone is saying to them and it is difficult for them to communicate in words what they are thinking. Fortunately, there is also such a thing as sign language — a system of signs, gestures and mimicry (movements of the face), through which people can communicate.

'A large part of the signs of sign language visually mimic the shapes of things which they refer to (e.g. cross) or give a shape to ideas which in themselves do not have a visual form (e.g. love). Sign language is in fact composed of many regionally or culturally differentiated systems. It is characterised by the fact that expressions do not change dependent on case, person or number — it is the sequence of signs that decides what a given phrase means.'

on the basis of <http://www.slownikmigowy.pl/index.php?p=1&sp=2>

Bartek Materka recorded the movement of the hands of people using sign language. These traces of light that look like abstract drawings are in fact the image of a particular word.

Besides sign language there is also **makaton** — a method of communication for disabled people. With the help of gestures and drawings it is easier to understand each other. Makaton was formed in the 1970s in Great Britain. The method was invented by Margaret Walker. The name of the method comes from the first letters of the names **M**argaret **W**alker, **K**athy **J**ohnston and **T**ony **C**ornforth — the people who worked together in creating this method.

on the basis of Kamila Kowalewska-Kasperek, Kamilla Pomorska, <http://www.zss103.poznan.pl/index.php?Strona=Publikacje&karta=32>

There are situations where even able-bodied people have problems with the transmission of information and communication — for example, when we are too far away from the person with whom we want to communicate, or when it is too noisy around us. What can we do then?

In such situations, we might find help in the International Signal Code, otherwise known as **Morse Code**. This code was created in 1840 by Samuel Morse and Alfred Vail. By using sounds, flashes of light, electric impulses or the signs commonly known as dashes and dots, it is possible to spell and thus communicate important messages.

And if you are at sea and fighting with pirates, then you have to know flag code. Each flag has its own meaning. For example:

	I have a diver under water; keep at a safe distance and go slowly
	Keep at a distance from me, I am manoeuvring with difficulty
	I have a fire and a dangerous cargo on board, keep at a distance
	Person overboard
	I need help

Perhaps you could invent your own code?



Stories of the Ear

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Do it Yourself a guide to each exhibition

the folder contains questions that will help you make your own interpretation of the works on show at the exhibition.

- take a folder
- find at the exhibition the works indicated with a coloured sign (where there is a coloured sticker on a work's title)
- ask yourself the question that corresponds to the coloured sticker