**PRESS RELEASE**

**GASK to host exhibition of Polish independent art of the 1980s**

*On 27th May, the Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region opens a survey of Polish independent art of the 1980s titled* Uncensored*. The exhibition shows the Polish equivalent of the era’s Czech unofficial art scene, which in Poland responded to the reality of Solidarity and the imposition of martial law (1981–1983). Though deeply rooted in the historical context, this socially engaged art still feels current today. The exhibition shows works by around sixty artists who, out of protest against martial law, boycotted the cultural policies of the Communist functionaries of the Polish People’s Republic. It is held in collaboration with the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw and the Polish Institute in Prague.*

The situation on the Polish cultural scene in the 1980s was unique. Most of the country’s leading artists identified with the social awakening that accompanied the struggle for freedom associated with the mass strikes of August 1980 and the founding of the nationwide independent labour union Solidarity. Concessions on the regime’s part enabled increased civil liberties and a reduction in state censorship. The proclamation of martial law by the Polish Communists under dramatic circumstances on 13th December 1981 marked a sudden end to this period, known as the *Carnival of Solidarity*.Despite the fact that this day ushered in a time of mass repression, the Communist regime failed to stifle the spirit of freedom, which thus laid the foundations for Poland’s change of regime in 1989. After the events of December 1981, many artists showed their solidarity with the suffering society by refusing to cooperate with official state structures and boycotting the Communist authorities’ cultural policies.‘*For artists, it was important to find unofficial ways to publicly share their art.* *One of the first and highly original ways of doing so were the so-called ‘suitcase exhibitions’ for which artists created small paintings or smaller versions of their larger works that could then be carried in suitcases from one person’s home to another for art exhibitions that the ever-present censorship couldn’t touch*’, says exhibition curator Tadeusz Boruta. The independent art movement soon found a venue for public exhibitions in the Roman Catholic Church, which was an important social force during this time and opened itself up to artists who were boycotting the Communist regime. As a result, countless works of art, literature and music were made away from the prying eyes of censorship. Such works were created by artists who manifested their independence with an awareness that only independent culture can express the basic human experience that is the yearning for freedom.

*Uncensored* is an attempt at sharing with audiences the phenomenon of Poland’s independent culture movement of the 1980s. The exhibition at the Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region is divided into seven thematic sections, whose titles are inspired by the names of important independent exhibitions from the 1980s or by important works of art made during this period (*Stifling Situation; Orange Alternative; The Suitcase Exhibition; The Cenacle; Toil; Floral Cross; Against Evil, Against Violence; The Sign of the Cross; Prison Painting; Mad Dog on a Green Background*). *Uncensored* not only takes a comprehensive look at visual art made during this period of Communist oppression, but also includes period photographs, posters and documentation of anti-regime happenings, suitcase exhibitions in their original form, independent theatre and much more. The exhibited works not only reflect the state of the individual and society during this time of repression, but also show important events such as the murder of the priest and ‘chaplain of Solidarity’ Jerzy Popiełuszko and peaceful protests involving the laying of floral crosses in public, during one of which three people were shot and killed.

*Uncensored: Polish Independent Art of the 1980s* runs at GASK from 28th May to 17th September 2023. It is curated by Tadeusz Boruta in collaboration with GASK curator Richard Drury. The exhibition’s opening will take place at 4pm on 27th May in front of the Gallery 4 exhibition space and will be followed a concert by Polish guitarist and singer Lech Janerka. A series of accompanying lectures, film screenings and public forums will be held at GASK, the Václav Havel Library and the Ponrepo cinema. A Czech-English guide booklet and (towards the end of the exhibition) an English catalogue are being published to accompany the exhibition.

*The exhibition is held under the patronage of Mgr. Petra Pecková, Governor of the Central Bohemian Region. The project has received financial support from the Czech-Polish Forum, a grant programme run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.*

GASK – Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region is located in the former Jesuit College in Kutná Hora. It is an art institution focused on collecting and exhibiting 20th- and 21st-century art.