

## MUZEUM ŚLĄSKIE AND THE DETENTION CENTRE IN KATOWICE - A FEW WORDS ON COOPERATION

We are a part of a dynamically changing world – a world that is often full of anxieties and contrasts. In response to that, Muzeum Śląskie is committed to being a safe and open space where everyone is treated equally. Step by step, we are creating #naszemuzeum [#ourmuseum]. For us, it is a synonym of a place based on empathy and cooperation. We therefore wish to build a positive relationship between the museum and the visitors, we wish to undertake activities that are first and foremost a “meeting” which helps people better understand themselves and the reality that surrounds us. An important value that guides our museum activities is openness and accessibility for people with limited access to culture. One of the manifestations of such activities is cooperation with the Detention Centre [*Areszt Śledczy*] in Katowice that is coordinated by the Education Department. We have prepared a three-part programme in consultation with an educator dealing with cultural and educational matters - major Wojciech Brzoska.

The #naszemuzeum neon on the premises of Muzeum Śląskie (photo Michał Jędrzejowski/Muzeum Śląskie)

The first series of meetings was prepared with imprisoned women in mind. Once a month, we invited a small group of 3–5 persons who visited us together with major Wojciech Brzoska for themed tours of museum galleries. The thematic axis of the activities was devoted to women. Based on the collections of Muzeum Śląskie, the guides presented the history of woman’s activity in painting, theatre and regional culture. At first we assumed that the composition of individual groups would change – the imprisoned women were often transported to other detention centres or prisons due to pending criminal proceedings, whereas some of them would work or receive a prison furlough. However, it turned out that we managed to create a group of three people who were glad to participate in the activities every month, and owing to the efforts of the detention centre staff they could attend our museum tours, which then again allowed us to develop a relationship that encouraged friendly conversations on art and exchange of thoughts. From my perspective, one of the important moments of these meetings was when we were discussing a painting of St Barbara – the patron saint of prisoners, and one of the women said: “She is our patron saint.” It was a unique moment of identification, of an expression previously avoided and relating to an embarrassing information about oneself. It also turned out that once that part of the project was over, one of the women in particular enjoyed the visits to the museum so much that she would check what the museum offer was when she was granted a prison furlough and visited the museum with her nephew. The fact that the museum is a place people wish to come back to is very important to us. Especially since we know that none of the imprisoned women had visited Muzeum Śląskie before.

Themed guided tour at Muzeum Śląskie (photo W. Brzoska/AŚ Katowice)

The second stage of the project was addressed to men and took place at the detention centre. The employees of the Education Department proposed a series of workshop meetings thematically referring to the collections of the museum. That time it was not possible to create a regular group of several people due to the rotation of inmates that is characteristic of the detention centres. We did assume, however, that the meetings would not be cyclical and it would be possible to participate in them only once. We prepared, among others, art analysis workshops, painting workshops and regional workshops. Due to the fact that the groups were composed of only a few people, the contact with the participants was more contextual, we could learn more about their motivation behind them taking part in such activities. For instance, those who signed up for art-related activities did so sometimes out of curiosity, and sometimes because they were creating their own art within prison walls and they wished to ask about technical aspects pertaining to paints. One of the men was

making modular origami and wanted to know how to mix the paints so as to create a salmon colour. It was particularly important for him because he wanted to use this colour to paint the face of a paper figurine he prepared as a gift for his child. Another of the men who was making wood burnings, and even created a mural on one of the walls while serving his time, admitted that he came to learn how to mix paint colours because he had only used those that were offered in stores.

Art workshops in the detention centre (photo W. Brzoska/AŚ Katowice)

Art workshops in the detention centre (photo W. Brzoska/AŚ Katowice)

The third stage of the project was once again addressed to women. We attempted to prepare a cycle of performative workshop classes that would take place in the detention centre. A theatre group thus established was to initially work by means of creative activities on Jean Genet's "The Maids" and then present their results during the finals of a poetry competition which has been taking place in the Katowice detention centre for eleven years now. The selection of a work by Jean Genet was no accident either, since the writer himself served some time in the Katowice jail, the reminiscence of which may be found in another book of his entitled "The Thief's Journal". At the beginning, eight women took part in the activities – they were learning about the secrets of voice emission and stage movement, they also made their first attempts at text interpretation. Unfortunately, the fact that the detention centre is often a place of temporary arrest turned out to be a significant obstacle. Since most of the women were unable to partake in further meetings due to various reasons, the project was not finalized.

Theatre workshops in the detention centre (photo W. Brzoska/AŚ Katowice)

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A detention centre is a characteristically organized place – most of the people who find themselves there are subject to legal proceedings. Therefore, in contrast to correctional facilities, their stay there is often temporary in nature and, depending on the course of court proceedings, the rules governing how the inmates are to behave may differ very much, for instance, as regards communicating with one another. It is worth remembering about that while planning various activities, as cyclical meetings may prove to be hindered in such a case. The great advantage of such activities is the fact that they are mainly organized for small groups, which allows us to better understand the needs of the participants and their motivation. Owing to this, we can support the detention centre in its social rehabilitation activities and, above all, support the inmates during their often very difficult moments associated with separation, uncertainty as to their future and a certain form of life suspension. It is such forms of activities that give them a chance to find new ways of developing themselves and spending their free time, also once their punishment has ended.

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