

Press Release

MARIA BARTUSZOVÁ

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

14 October – 15 November 2025

Preview: Tuesday 14 October, 6-8 pm



Maria Bartuszová, *Untitled*, 1982 © The Archive of Maria Bartuszová, Košice

The subtlety of my existence and the subtlety of my strength and brevity of life, alongside the hope I have in the importance and meaning of everything (including my own existence), the way I think and what I do, and the resulting optimism of the 'Butterfly Effect', the meteorological discovery of Edward Lorenz whereby the flutter of a butterfly's wings can cause a cyclone.

Maria Bartuszová

Following the critically acclaimed retrospective curated by Juliet Bingham at Tate Modern in 2022, Alison Jacques presents a solo exhibition of work by pioneering Slovak artist Maria Bartuszová (b.1936, Prague; d.1996, Košice). The title of the show, 'The Butterfly Effect', is taken from an entry in one of Bartuszová's unpublished diaries in which she describes how small changes in life and nature can lead to major shifts and unpredictable consequences. Bartuszová's work reflects how life and art are interconnected with nature's cyclical processes, expressing how we are all part of a complex and symbiotic ecosystem. The exhibition is realised in collaboration with the Estate of Maria Bartuszová, which was established by the

artist's daughters Anna and Veronika Bartuszová, and her granddaughters Soňa and Sofia, to preserve and share the artist's legacy. A catalogue raisonné, edited by Gabriela Garlatyová, Curator of the Archive and the Estate of Maria Bartuszová, was published in 2022.

This exhibition spans three decades of Bartuszová's practice, presenting early works from the 1960s through to the 1980s. Many of these intimate sculptures allude to nature from a female perspective: sprouting seeds, wheat grains, raindrops, and trees in the wind. As Gabriela Garlatyová writes in the catalogue raisonné, in these works, Bartuszová confronts and embraces the transient cycle of a living organism, from germination, birth and growth to disintegration and eventual decay; interconnected with her own emotional experiences. Throughout her secluded life, Bartuszová was little known outside of the local Czechoslovak context, but she continually experimented to create her own unique sculptural identity. Her life was lived through World War II, isolation under totalitarianism and in a society which often overlooked women artists. Still, Bartuszová took on public commissions to support herself financially, and managed her household and young family alongside her studio practice.

This exhibition tells the story of Bartuszová's groundbreaking sculptural experimentation, including a process she referred to as 'gravistimulation'. Inspired by an experience with her daughter Anna when playing outside with an inflatable ball, Bartuszová began her radical process of casting with condoms and balloons. Filled with her own breath, Bartuszová poured liquid plaster inside the inflated material, shaping it using pressure, often submerging and manipulating the rubber vessels underwater. The resulting organic and biomorphic forms, moulded through compression and sometimes by binding the hardening plaster with string, become symbols of human vulnerability and the constraints that limit the potential of living things within a finite lifespan. In other works, Bartuszová introduced organic material including tree branches, rocks and stones which she gathered on walks in the Slovak Ore Mountains and on the banks of the Hornád river, near Košice. She embedded these into her wall-based sculptural reliefs, and created forms in which the plaster is squeezed through and constricted by the weight of the found rocks. In the 1960s and 1970s, Bartuszová also cast in aluminium and bronze, and later in the 1980s, she incorporated man-made materials such as Perspex, utilising its transparency as a poetic metaphor for frozen water or melting snow. In one rare sculptural relief included in the exhibition, she incorporated colour by painting the surface blue.

Bartuszová's fascination with nature and the sensuality of organic forms extended to participatory work. Her multi-part, haptic sculptures were first introduced into workshops for blind and partially sighted children, where they could be handled and felt, taken apart and put back together. These symposiums were organised and documented by art historian and photographer Gabriel Kladek who, as Juliet Bingham wrote, 'captured the young participants' joyful exploration of the sculptures'. Frances Morris, then Director of Tate Modern, observed in her catalogue text for Maria's retrospective, she 'understood sculpture as a sustenance for the imagination and as a stimulant to both sight and touch'.

The later works on show from the 1980s emphasise themes of fragility, fertility and motherhood, as Bartusová wrote: 'In the quiet of depression / in the depression of the quiet / I am waiting hidden in the shell / of an egg to be born again'. During this decade, she introduced a new process she referred to as 'Pneumatic Casting', often using much larger meteorological balloons, which harnessed the effects of air pressure, allowing her sculptures to transition into fragmented and hollow forms. The metaphor of the egg, a form which first emerged in her earlier work, is perforated and many of her sculptures from this period resemble empty cocoons and broken shells. Through these works, Bartusová sought to capture the precarity of life, channelling her internal feelings of personal crisis with external threats to the environment and the world around her, as she wrote 'a tiny void full of a tiny infinite universe'.

Maria Bartusová was born in Prague in 1936 where she studied ceramics at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design. In 1963, she moved with her husband, the sculptor Juraj Bartusz, to the Slovakian industrial city of Košice. In her lifetime, she did not exhibit outside of Eastern Europe but after Bartusová died in 1996, her work was shown in documenta 12, Kassel (2007) curated by Ruth Noack, bringing international museum interest. Subsequent exhibitions included group exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (2010) and mumok, Vienna (2010) and inclusion in the 59th Venice Biennale, The Milk of Dreams curated by Cecilia Alemani (2022). In 2014, Bartusová had her first solo museum survey 'Provisional Forms' at the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw (2014) followed by a major retrospective at Tate Modern (2022) which travelled to the Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2023).

Bartusová's work has been acquired by major museums internationally including Tate, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava; Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Vienna and the Museum Susch, Switzerland.

Forthcoming Exhibition: : 'Roy Oxlade', Preview: Tuesday 25 November 6-8pm

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