

## **CULTURE IN THE TIME OF THE PRESIDENCY**

**From 4 to 9 February, Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery will host the exhibition *CULTURE IN THE TIME OF THE PRESIDENCY* – a recap of the largest cultural events held abroad in honour of Poland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

The events held under the *I, CULTURE – International Cultural Programme of the Polish EU Presidency 2011* were seen by over 19 million people throughout the world. Inspired by the overwhelming interest enjoyed by these many projects, which were organised by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute for international audiences abroad as well as in Poland, the idea arose to present the most noteworthy elements of the *I, CULTURE* programme in an event at Zachęta Gallery. Yet, an exhibition alone would have allowed only a summary of past events, neglecting the equally interesting present and future. For viewers to become fully immersed in the project, they must become active participants. So, in hope of encouraging such participation, we have prepared a number of workshops to enhance and accompany the exhibition. Everyone who visits Zachęta Gallery will have a chance to join the artists in reflecting on what has already taken place and in looking ahead towards the future.

Zachęta Gallery is a place symbolic to both politics and culture. Hence, it is an ideal venue for posing some important questions on the significance of the presidency to Poland, and more so, for contemplating the future of the European Union and culture's relevance within it. It is a setting that not only permits but also encourages inquiries directed at policy concerning the future of culture; the future of the artists themselves, since it is to their talents that we owe the success of the presidency. If today we allowed tax ordinances to diminish their material position, we would surely lose one of our major sources of pride and damage the Polska brand.

### **What can the public expect?**

Already at the threshold of the gallery, audiences will be provoked by the neon piece titled *Cókiarka (sic!)*, which aims to shed light on issues that are current and universally relevant. Inside, visitors will be able to listen to poems by Czesław Miłosz in 10 different languages, including such exotic tongues as Japanese and Chinese, and to watch film footage documenting the *I, CULTURE Orchestra* concert tour, *Planet Lem*, the *I, CULTURE Puzzle*, *Fossils & Gardens*, and *Exploratory Music from Poland*. To round out the video programme, Zachęta's screening room will host a presentation of films from the series *Guide to the Poles*.

This retrospective on the successes of the "cultural presidency" will be accompanied by a series of workshops. Among these is a lesson in theatre conducted by the actors of Teatr Biuro Podróży to complement their play *Planet Lem*. Also scheduled is a motion workshop called *I, CULTURE Puzzle inspirations* led by Urszula Skośkiewicz, the coordinator of the *I, CULTURE Puzzle*. Youngsters and adults will have a chance to take part in music workshops titled *Play with the I, CULTURE Orchestra* and *Fearless sound*. During the *Polish gadget* workshop, young minds will be able to ponder what a good symbol for Poland would be and what they like about their homeland, as well as what foreigners think of Poland.

Finally, for all those interested in cultural diplomacy and in the behind-the-scenes work during preparations for the *I, CULTURE* project, there is a meet and greet with the team of organisers.

**More on the workshops and sign-up info at:**

**[www.iam.pl](http://www.iam.pl), [www.culture.pl](http://www.culture.pl), [www.zacheta.art.pl](http://www.zacheta.art.pl) and [warsztaty@iam.pl](mailto:warsztaty@iam.pl)**

The many publications and multimedia materials issued during the presidency will be available for viewing in a mediotheque designed by Tomasz Rygalik for the interior of the BOZAR in Brussels, where it functioned alongside *The Power of Fantasy* exhibition. Additionally, select exhibition catalogues will be available at the Zachęta book shop.

This exhibition at Zachęta may be the largest event to summarise the effects of the cultural presidency, but it is not the only one. Starting from 1 February, an outdoor exhibition will grace the fence surrounding Łazienki Park in Warsaw. Photos from three pillars of the project – the *I, CULTURE Orchestra*, *Planet Lem*, and the *I, CULTURE Puzzle* – will be on display along the park's Aleje Ujazdowskie boundary. The exhibition will run throughout the month of February.

And that's not all! This spring will see a truly media-worthy event that will resonate beyond just the city of Warsaw – Julita Wójcik's *Rainbow* in Plac Zbawiciela Square. The artist's city space installation previously adorned the square in front of the European Parliament in Brussels for several weeks. But earlier, in February, visitors to the exhibition/workshops at Zachęta will be invited to join Julita Wójcik's *RAINBOW Artistic Handicrafts Cooperative* and help create a new supply of multicoloured flowers for the vibrant arch.

### **A short story of the presidency**

The International Cultural Programme of the Polish EU Presidency 2011, under the tagline 'I, CULTURE,' was carried out as a mandate of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and became the largest promotional project in the history of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. Poland's first-ever presidency of the EU Council was an ideal opportunity to develop the Polska brand and to foster the country's favourable image in the international arena as a modern and unique nation with a rich heritage and burgeoning contemporary culture. It was the perfect chance to present Poland as a creative enclave of Europe. Although the presidency happened to coincide with a period of difficulty for the European Union, i.e. the economic crisis, Poland still managed to capture the attentions of the media and of an audience of 19 million. The influential Flemish magazine *Knack* declared that the Polish government made wonderful use of the country's assets in the field of culture, heralding Polska as "A brand to be trusted" in the title of the lengthy article. The presidency's cultural programme consisted of more than 400 events held in 10 capital cities: Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Kyiv, London, Madrid, Minsk, Moscow, Paris, and Tokyo. It was realised in collaboration with foreign partners, Polish culture institutions and branches of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs – embassies, consulates and Polish Institutes. Yet, the crucial role in the programme's inception and execution was played by the artists who took part.