



Magdalena Abakanowicz
Next is our skin

GRAY New York
Apr 29 - Jun 26, 2026

GRAY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GRAY is pleased to announce *Next is our skin*, an exhibition of work by the trailblazing Polish sculptor and fiber artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017). With a selection of work spanning four decades, from the 1960s to the 1990s, this exhibition examines the evolution of her practice and her continuous inquiry into the human condition. *Next is our skin* charts this line of inquiry through her use of materials—from the earliest works in fiber, such as *Szara*, an abstract weaving from 1965, whose natural sisal and horse hair protrude from the surface as if to animate the work, to the more disquieting figurative works in burlap and bronze from the 1980s and '90s. Abakanowicz's art represents the human struggle to maintain individuality against political and social oppression.

Spending her formative years under Nazi occupation and then Soviet control, Abakanowicz went on to develop a perturbing artistic vocabulary outside the modernist binary of abstraction and representation, opting instead for the use of organic shapes and materials. Abakanowicz became well known for her monumental *Abakans*, the eponymous sculptures that helped launch a new era of postminimalist art that engaged soft materials, seriality, and experimental modes of installation. Her desertion of the series in 1974—some of which had been included in the acclaimed *Wall Hangings* (1969) at MoMA, the first major exhibition of fiber arts and textiles—was seen by some as a radical shift toward figuration.

The enigmatic works on view at GRAY New York demonstrate the artist's lifelong ability to materially innovate while creating unnerving atmospheres. Headless figures, a recurring motif in Abakanowicz's practice, signify anonymity and the loss of reason under totalitarian regimes. Evidence of her early links to Constructivist artists is visible in *Next is our skin*, in the contrasting geometric structures and charged interplay between undulating natural materials and industrial rigidity. Abakanowicz's signature woven sisal appears like an unruly hairlike mass, while other figures disintegrate into textured valleys and muddy folds. Her bronzes,

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meanwhile, evoke stark permanence, a poignant counterpoint to her emphases on ephemerality, decay, and rebirth.

Opening during the twentieth anniversary of *Agora* (2006), her iconic public installation of 106 iron-cast figures in Chicago's Grant Park, *Next is our skin* will include a new essay published online by Mary Jane Jacobs, curator, writer, and professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. As Abakanowicz has said, "I am a historic being, like all of us. Like all of us, I carry within myself an ample portion of humanity prior to history."¹

ABOUT MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ

Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930, Poland, d. 2017) gained international recognition as a female artist working in the Soviet Union, and her influence in fiber arts profoundly expanded the impact of textiles as both material and concept.

Throughout Abakanowicz's adolescence, state repression haunted her artistic output. Her parents were part of the Polish resistance under Nazi occupation, where Hitler's doctrine of "Art for the Population" (*Kunst dem Volk*) resulted in the imprisonment and exiling of Poland's most innovative artists. During Communist rule, when the state defined acceptable modes of artistic production, Abakanowicz was trained in Social Realism at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sopot and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in the early 1950s.

Weaving presented a unique opportunity to create work less prone to regulations and censorship due to its longstanding association with decorative arts. Mentored by fiber artist Maria Łaszkiewicz, Abakanowicz smuggled her vocational training into a radical critique of authoritarianism and commentary on the human condition. Her work questions the role of the individual amidst the collective, rejecting the Soviet demand for functional, propagandistic art in favor of a primordial mysticism, or, in the artist's words, "a memory of the most ancient sensations and feelings."

¹ *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Writings and Conversations*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob and Jenny Dally, Skira Editore, Milan, 2022.

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Abakanowicz worked as a professor at the University of Fine Arts in Poznan, Poland, for twenty-five years, before a 1984 visiting professor position at University of California Los Angeles. After her first solo shows in the United States in the early 1980s, Abakanowicz and her husband Jan Kosmowski founded the Abakanowicz Arts and Culture Charitable Foundation, which, in 2022, began a collaboration with the European League of Institutions of Art to launch a program among fifteen arts universities throughout Ukraine.

Her work can be found in public collections internationally, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Illinois; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea; Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Texas; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Netherlands; the Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, New York, and many others.

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