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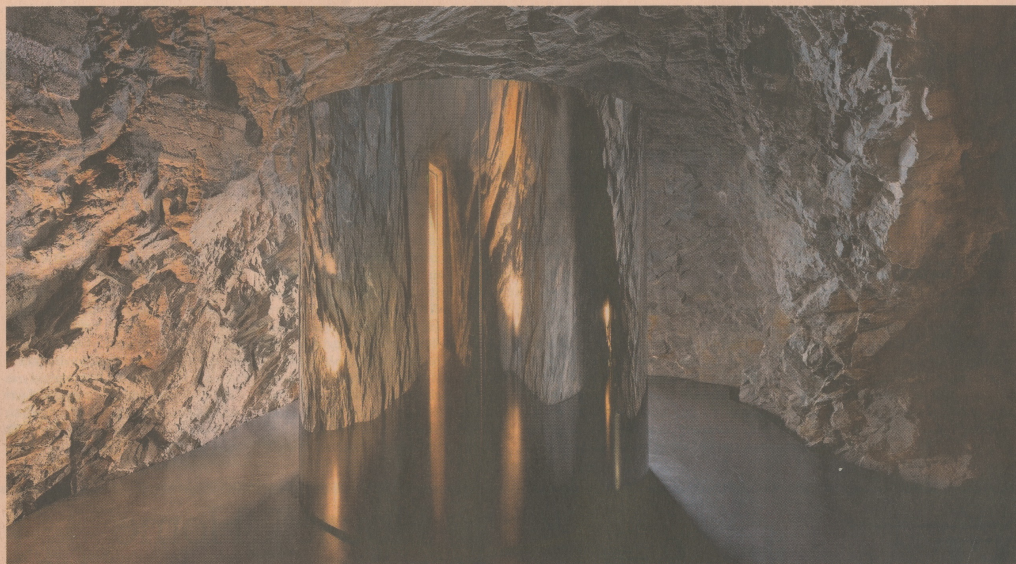
Businesswoman and art collector Grazyna Kulczyk has opened a new private museum in a tiny Swiss village. Caroline Roux reports

Until this year, the tiny settlement of Susch, perched in a valley in Switzerland's picture-perfect Engadin region, attracted only a few winter skiers and a smattering of summer walkers. In January, however, the village, with its population of 206, took up a rather more prominent position on the cultural map with the opening of a new private museum. Muzeum Susch will be showing contemporary art and running a year-round cultural programme, along with artist residencies and research grants, to further studies into women's roles in art and science. Its founder is the Polish businesswoman and art collector Grazyna Kulczyk, a proselytiser for both postwar Polish art, of which she has a considerable collection, and art by women, ditto.

Unsurprisingly, for a region so awash with wealth, Susch's more dazzling neighbours Davos and St Moritz have long been favoured by art dealers who like to camp out near their clients. Karsten Greve, Vito Schnabel, Robilant + Voena and Andrea Caratsch all have gallery outposts in St Moritz, and the ever-expanding Hauser & Wirth moved into a 450 sq m space opposite the Palace Hotel in December 2018. Last week Nomad, the roving high-end art and design fair, presented its annual pop-up in St Moritz in the chic patrician house of Chesa Planta.

At first, however, Kulczyk did not intend to open her museum in the region, although she has had a house in the nearby village of Tschlin for many years. She had been looking for a building, first in her home town of Poznan (where, until 2015, she ran an art and performance space in the former Stary brewery), then in Warsaw. But five or six years ago, she noticed an empty building as she was driving through Susch. "So I found the owner, and he was dreaming of selling as much as I was dreaming of buying."

She now concedes that if her mission is to bring greater attention to Polish artists, and more marginal women artists, then this is a good place to do it. "This part of the world has been a meeting



Mission to bring art to the valley

place for the bourgeoisie for centuries," she says. "And now it's a regular meeting place for the art world. If I want to support artists and promote them to collectors and museum curators, well, it's probably going to happen more easily here than in Poznan. I always say, art doesn't need money, but artists do."

Kulczyk is something of an academic

perfectionist, with a background in law and an acute entrepreneurial streak. She started visiting galleries and artists' studios when she was a student, and started collecting Polish artists in the 1980s with her late husband, Jan Kulczyk, with whom she ran a car import business. After the end of communism in 1989, she set up a her own successful

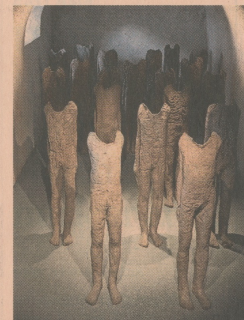
company importing bikes from Taiwan, which has made her independently wealthy, and in 1990 she bought her first international artwork.

It is this independence and wealth that has delivered a project that couldn't have emerged in any other conditions. Answerable to no one (bar the local planners), after acquiring the initial former brewery building, Kulczyk couldn't resist the one over the road – a 12th-century monastery. The two have been ingeniously linked by a tunnel that required the excavation of 9,000 tonnes of rock; at 1,500 sq m, the museum is four times the size it was originally intended to be.

The young local architects she employed, Chasper Schmidlin and Lukas Voellmy, spent five years on the project, uncovering a sequence of cellars and caves as they excavated below the road. In places, primeval walls of rock have left been exposed in these

subterranean spaces, and some still glisten with dripping water. Above, only the curving and uneven nature of the old walls identifies them from the smoother new ones. Ancient ceiling beams have been restored, their agedness intact, while new floors have been laid in planks of local larch (made by the village carpenter), which at 12m long seem to flow like fabric. Stones have been sifted from the river and ground down to create dark grey wall render. Such regional respect has delivered a building that feels embedded in its location.

Certain spaces have been ingeniously repurposed. An "ice tower", where beer would have been cooled, now contains a permanent work by Monika Sosnowska – a collapsing steel staircase that is 14 metres high. The hayloft has been turned into a decent performance space. Ten permanent installations, all owned by Kulczyk, are mostly dotted through the atmospheric cellars. Miroslaw



Balka's rotating drum of polished steel occupies one where trickling water leaves limy marks on a steel floor. Sara Masüger has filled a short tunnel with gooey-looking plaster formations that echo the Engadin mountainscape, an uncomfortably immersive experience in a narrow space.

In the opening temporary exhibition at Susch, which reflects on 70 years of female representation and with a daring amount of X-rated stuff among the artworks on show (this is conservative Switzerland after all), pieces from Kulczyk's 300-strong collection hang alongside loans from institutions, foundations and private collections (loans doubtless helped by her board positions at Tate Modern in London and MoMA in New York).

Her desire is to enhance the reputations of lesser-known artists by placing their work next to those with celebrity status, and to broaden the minds of other collectors, as well as curators, and even ordinary people like you and me. "There is a tendency to see the same artists again and again," she says.

To this end, Maria Bartusova's 1980s plaster works sit near to slashed canvases by Lucio Fontana, to whom Bartusova pays homage. In another room are works by Marlene Dumas and Maria Lassnig, as well as a 1970s oil painting by Teresa Pagowska, a little-known Polish painter whose highly sexualised portraits of women seem to hover between Schiele drawings and Sarah Lucas sculptures. This new museum is a quiet and dignified addition to an area where money can be very loud indeed.

*Inaugural exhibition runs to June 30
muzeumsusch.ch*



Clockwise, from main: Miroslaw Balka's 'Narcissussusch' (2018) and 'Flock I' by Magdalena Abakanowicz (1990), on show in Susch

Studio Stefano Graziani, Claudio Von Planta