

**"One to Watch"**  
**Paulina Olowska**



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Paulina Olowska was born in Gdansk, Poland, in 1976 and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in her hometown, as well as at the Art Institute of Chicago. While consistently incorporating painterly techniques, each of Olowska's solo outings — whether in Munich, Amsterdam, London, or New York — has been a drastic departure from the show preceding it.

Olowska reconfigures media without much subtlety. Positioned at the juncture of literature and performance, her 2002 painting *X* documents an earlier performance of the artist spelling out poems through gestures, letter by letter. Other multimedia collisions occur in her most recent exhibition, *Attention à la Peinture*, at Cologne's Galerie Daniel Buchholz. With a couturier's precision, Olowska carefully cuts out clothing patterns from abstract canvases — the first of her career — and displays the finished apparel alongside the gutted paintings. The exhibition's wall text, taken from the autobiography of '30s fashion icon Elsa Schiaparelli, proposes high fashion as a weapon against conformism for women living in Soviet Russia.

*Attention à la Peinture* highlighted several of Olowska's favored motifs: the burden of the past, specifically manifest in the stifling atmosphere of communist Poland; creativity as a liberating force; and the open beauty of women. Perhaps her most well-known show is *Hello to You Too*, a nine-painting series celebrating female sensuality. In the oil-and-collage work *Pauline Boty Acts Out One of Her Paintings for a Popular Newspaper*, she pays tribute to the stunning Pauline Boty, a British pop artist who attracted great criticism for her overtly sexual work. In *Nova Scena*, Olowska's 2007 solo show of painted collages at New York's Metro Pictures, the artist trolled the '60s propaganda war between the Soviet Union and the United States for sparks of creativity from her native country. The utopian smiles of liberated young women appear beside pages from *Ameryka* and *Soviet Life* magazines. Many of these works resemble their subtractive counterpart, *décollage* — a form itself rooted in a grassroots protest.

Ołowska's contribution to the Berlin Biennial pays a long-overdue tribute to the late Zofia Stryjenska — a Polish artist whose decorative motifs were appropriated by the communist state and mass-produced without her permission. Though her work was at times ubiquitous, it rarely bore her name. At the Schinkel Pavillon in the biennial, Ołowska selects a number of state-produced items adorned with Stryjenska's designs, and displays them alongside historical documents that pertain to the all-but-forgotten artist. In addition, she exhibits a suite of paintings in Stryjenska's black-and-white, folkloric style.