

I am very honored and grateful to the city of Amersfoort and director Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen for allowing me to present my work in this unique art environment; this spiritual shrine of birthplace of one of the greatest contributor and visionary of the 20th century art Piet Mondrian.

Tracing my memory, I will try to share with you my personal autobiographical reflection about my relationship to the artist Piet Mondrian, who was an instrumental figure in my artistic journey. The director--Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen--of the Mondrian Museum first saw my work at the Museum of Modern Art in Hunfeld, Germany. It is one of the very unique collection in the world for Constructive Concrete Art. Ms. Ankie de Jongh-Vermeulen was intrigued with my personal involvement with Dutch artists. She had asked my friend, Director Gerard Blum, if I would be interested in doing a one-man show at the Mondrianhuis Musuem. The exhibition would consist of a connection between Piet Mondrian, Harry Holtzman, and me. Along with my exhibition, I would also display some documentation which Harry had left when Irena Hochman and I created an exhibition at the Carpenter + Hochman Gallery in 1984 on 420 West Broadway, New York City.

Pertaining to my artistic background, I was raised and educated in Central Europe. I was influenced by European modernists, such as and K. Malewicz, W. Strzeminski and K. Kobro and especially P. Mondrian. After I have graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, I went to Paris, then New York. I have to admit, ever since my student days, Piet Mondrian has always been my guide. I still remembered how excited I was to find the physical location around Gare Montparnasse of his famous studio at 26 rue du Depart in Paris--which was demolished around 1940. After a stay in Paris, I was exiled and had to immigrate to New York City in 1970 with the help of my friend (later my wife) Irena Hochman, where I tried once again to locate the chronology of the Mondrian paintings and how it surfaced in the New York art scene. The first place where the Mondrian painting was shown was in the Brooklyn Museum, 1926: The International Exhibition of Modern Art. It was from the private collection of Katherine Dreier, the founder of Société Anonyme. The second Mondrian exhibition was at the Gallatin Collection at the New York University Library on Washington Square in 1934. It was there where Harry Holtzman saw an original Mondrian painting for the first time. He fell madly in love with it. After he told me this story, I went in search for all the possible studio locations of Mondrian where he has done incredible things in just a few short years. I learned that his first studio was at 353 East 56 Street (at 1st Avenue), and I ran there for a look, but was disappointed to find that his house did not exist anymore because of the urban renewal. I learned more about Mondrian and went further to find information about the last studio at 15 East 59 Street. Once again, I was disappointed to find that the house was demolished and memories of Mondrian

had dematerialized. In its place, they have erected an anti-esthetic, modernistic building, and located the Playboy Club. (Some time later, the Mondrian Restaurant was opened on the ground floor of the Playboy Club. Instead of hanging an artwork and paying homage to Mondrian, they put up a gigantic Henry Moore print instead.) I felt stranded, washed away, and lost after this experience, for there is not a single physical memory left besides the great masterpieces in the Museum of Modern Art.

From early years on, one more moment was stuck in my memory. After immigrating to New York in 1970, through endless searching and viewing New York City galleries, I came across the prominent Denise René Gallery and fell in love with a Mondrian print. I asked the gallery director if I could acquire this print and pay for it in installments. Today, the print is hanging in my studio, reminding me of my artistic journey.

A few years later, when I was living on the border of Brooklyn and Queens, I accidentally found out that Mondrian was buried in the Cyprus Hill Cemetery. Together with my wife Irena, we decided to find his grave to place on his headstone yellow tulips to display our respect. It was difficult to locate his tombstone, since the groundskeepers' at the cemetery had no idea who Mondrian was. After much searching, we were finally led to his plot. We were expecting something monumental and noticeable, but all we saw was a field filled with hundreds of common headstones. This was not possible! We were depressed and disappointed to find how real life had treated such a great international visionary. When I was preparing my exhibition at the Mondrian Museum in Amersfoort, Holland, I happened to overhear a guide leading a group of American tourists near the museum. She pointed to the museum and said, "Piet Mondrian was born in this particular house, and he died and was buried in *Pere Lachaise*." I smirked to myself at this comment, since I knew for sure that he was not buried in Paris, but in Brooklyn, New York.

Later on, by coincidence, Irena and I met Harry Holtzman, who had buried Mondrian. We were first introduced to Harry at an opening for Bridget Riley, a British Pop Artist, at the Neuberger Museum in January of 1979. After exchanging a few words, the subject of Mondrian was brought up, we mentioned to Harry that Mondrian was a hero of ours and that we had visited his grave a number of times. Harry lifted the upper part of his bifocals to get a better look at us. We learned that 1940, when Holtzman was a young artist, he sponsored Mondrian's immigration to America, supported him by finding him an apartment, paid his rent, and also introduced him to the artistic world. Through Holtzman, Mondrian was enriched by the arrival of the other wartime exiles. Among them were André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, and Fernand

Léger. Holtzman continued to support Mondrian until the artist died in 1944, and became the sole heir to the Mondrian estate in New York.

In the fall of 1984, Irena opened the Carpenter + Hochman Gallery in the heart of SoHo, New York. We couldn't think of a better way of showing our admiration for our hero or indicating the gallery's aesthetic than to ask Harry for permission to show the last works of Mondrian. We had developed a friendship with Harry and felt that through Harry's reminiscences, we seem to have met Mondrian in person as well. Also, around that time, Harry invited us to come to his studio in Lyme, Connecticut, to see his new work. Irena and I visited him often, and as his body of work grew, she agreed to exhibit it in the spring of 1987 at her gallery. After twelve years of work in collaboration with the art historian Martin S. James, the collected writings of Piet Mondrian entitled: *The New Art-The New Life*, was published. We didn't realize, when we brought the book on the 31st of May, 1987, for Harry to sign, it would be the last time we saw our friend. Harry was very happy to receive us, and he was thrilled when I asked him to sign my copy. He had inscribed: *Tadeusz Myslowski, my friend, In memory of the future*. These simple words were forever inscribed in the book and in my life. Although his writing was frail, the power of the words made an incredible impact, and thus giving me the reason to dedicate my exhibition at Mondrian's birthplace--in memory of Piet Mondrian and Harry Holtzman.

The purpose of my exhibition, in a small way, is to prolong the memory and pay homage to Harry's dedication and endurance of helping Mondrian sustain in the New World. Harry celebrated Mondrian's achievements as a visionary thinker and leading the European abstract artists of the 20th Century Modernist. Harry had unselfishly sacrificed his own artistic endeavors in order to support Mondrian's achievements.

Throughout the years, I began to fully realize the significance of Harry's contribution. We could observe the influence of Mondrian's artwork in fine and applied art, painting, sculpture, architecture, urban planning, furniture, fashion, graphic design, and the every day environment. Without Harry's preservation of documents, we would not be able to fathom the origins of the design that is a part of us. If Harry hadn't recorded the last Mondrian encounter, the world would have lost all the connecting parts of the purity of the abstraction that is the Mondrian's signature. We are grateful that Harry had extended the new generation and the generations to come complete Mondrian critical writings and documentation in the form of film and blueprints of his three-dimensional works as the last artistic statement. Mondrian's 15 East 59th Street studio can now be reconstructed, complete with the color schemes which had been preserved by Harry since 1944 for future analytical criticism.

My dear friend Harry, we are grateful for what you have done for the art world. God Bless you wherever you are.

Recollecting my interest in Mondrian art, it goes back to my early years in 1960, when I attended Liceum Sztuk Plastycznych in Lublin, also later at the Academy of Fine Art in Krakow. Those formative years were especially important to me. Thanks to the teachers who had brought me their awareness to Piet Mondrian's artwork, they had opened my eyes to the realistic works of Mondrian. The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the Polish culture was submerged in romantic esthetic essence.

The artistic paintings of this realistic period had characterized the beauty of the Eastern European Polish landscapes. It represents the character of the ever-changing topography, the season, and the climate. There is a symbiotic aesthetic closeness between Western Dutch Mondrian landscapes with the Eastern Polish landscapes. The identities of those Polish artists of the period in particular are forever engraved in my memory: Jozef Chelmonski, Jan Stanislawski, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, Leon Wyczolkowski, and Stanislaw Wyspianski. They were synonymous with the tranquil European landscapes of the time.

Today, I recall and realized how Krakow and the Academy of Fine Art were enconced with the early realistic and romantic paintings of Piet Mondrian. It depicted the early Dutch landscapes, which was similar to Poland's sensibilities and, as a student, I was greatly taken by his paintings. The beauty of his paintings opened the window for me to another world, as it was very difficult for a student to travel abroad and experience the physical splendor of another culture. I longed to visit the Haags Museum where they housed a majority of Mondrian's paintings. I realized my dream many years later.

At the end of the 19th century, Paris was the leading site for the beginning of the modernist movement. It set up the stage for Mondrian's pure aesthetic abstraction. Only straight lines, right angles, the primary colors red, yellow and blue, and the three "neutral" colors white, gray and black were allowed. This purification of means was thought to free art from the randomness of natural appearances and the equally random subjectivity of individual expression. Elementary, geometric shapes were thought to constitute a language of "universal" forms that could be applied equally to all the plastic arts. Through the careful orchestration of such universal forms in perfectly balanced compositions, the artists and designers of De Stijl believed it possible to reveal the essence of all great works of art: perfect, universal harmony.

Going back to the middle 20th Century Polish art, analytical, geometric abstraction, art played a specific role in a difficult political period. It was a silence weapon, snaking around social realism and mainstream propaganda. The Polish abstract figuration artists used this particular geometric and artistic vocabulary to camouflage their expression of artistic freedom. In an struggle not to be intellectually defeated by political system, they used abstraction as a code to declare their freedom.

At the turn of the century, Paris was the foremost center for the abstract experiment movement. It set up the experimental stage for Mondrian's analytical abstraction. Piet Mondrian's art of Neo-Plasticism was selected as an esthetic value of the time and was accepted in the Polish art scene.

Leading Constructivist artist from Warsaw, Henryk Stazewski from the Group "Blok", was also a member of "Cercle et Carre" and "Abstraction-Creation" in Paris from 1925 to 1930. During this time, Stazewski, a friend of Kasimir Malevich, also worked along with Piet Mondrian in Paris and was instrumental in transferring vital information of this particular movement to his artist friends in Poland.

Around 1980, I visited Warsaw frequently, and I had the privilege of meeting Stazewski. He had given me his personal memories and his famous handwritten letters regarding his Parisian years, particularly around the time when he was working in Mondrian's bohemian artistic circle. Unfortunately, in 1988, at the age of 94, he died. He was the last of the Constructivists, and together with the Polish art world, I lost a mentor and a friend.

In 1921, two assistants of Kasimir Malevich, Wladyslaw Strzeminski, and Katarzyna Kobro, took Malevich's ideas of Suprematism from Russia to Poland. Strzeminski developed a variant of Constructivism that was distinguished from the ones found in Holland, Russia and France called Unism. Unism paintings were characterized by a uniform and homogenous paint surface and was "operated exclusively with the notion of space." They were also instrumental in opening the first Museum of Modern Art of the world in the city of Lutz in 1929. 111 international contemporary artists donated their works to the museum. Unfortunately, part of the collection was lost during the Second World War.

When Adolf Hitler came to power, he closed down the Bauhaus School. The Nazis attacked modernism, modern artists, musicians, writers, critics, historians found themselves under creative discrimination. Europe searched for a new independence and the promise of a better world. The only possible choice left was to seek emigration to America. The preferred destinations of artists were New York, Chicago, California, and Canada. These foreign artists brought with them their intellects and talents, and greatly influenced and contributed to the art scene in America. It made an enormous impact on the evolution of postwar art in this country.

Early in 1970 the American Minimal artist including Carl André, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Sol Lewit, Agnes Martin were trying to formulate their own artistic declaration of independence, but art cannot come out of nothing. Historically, it was always developed by other art. Art lives because of its influence on others. In a sense, each creative activity is an output of another art because the notion of art is always dynamic, never homogenous.

The American Minimal artists recognized in their art sensibilities connected to the early 20th century European movement, including the Constructivism and Suprematism of the Russian and Polish avant-garde, the Bauhaus in Germany, the DE STIL Movement in Holland, and Constructivism in Poland. American identified new spirit that looked back to the belief and tenets of pre-war European Modernism in order to renew a new sense and purpose on American soil.

On the occasion of my exhibition here at the Mondrianhuis Museum, I can re-acquaint my personal expression not only with a brief episode of the European history of the 20th Century, but also to integrate my experiences in both European and American culture. We, as artists, have this drive to positive charge our new visions and benefit by our contrasted cultural values.

Right now, I will lead you through the concept of my exhibition. After the museum had given the name: *Tadeusz Myslowski Cross For Piet Mondrian*, I specifically selected crosses to use as containers for interconnecting information between Piet Mondrian, Harry Holtzman, and myself. I arranged the three of us in chronological order, which I hope will help the viewer to better understand the intention of my presentation.

I would now like to share with you my private thoughts from when I was going through the process of assembling my exhibition.

Some time ago, around 1980, I created, in homage to Piet Mondrian and my friend Harry Holtzman (without him, "Victory Boogie Woogie" would never have been realized), an object which I never realized. Now I feel that the moment to do it has arisen, and, if the means exist, I would like to execute it as part of our exhibition, and, if possible, as a donation for permanent installation outside of Mondriaanhuys. Here is the concept: I designed a chair based on Mondrian's signature criss-crossed gridding process. It could be executed in various materials and scaled to accommodate outdoor or indoor situations. For me it is not mainly a functional object, however, but an icon, a concentration of the spirit of Mondrian. I visualize it in raw steel, concrete, or wood, painted the signature shade of Mondrian yellow.

Right now, the Mondrian Museum is fighting for the permanent installation of *Tadeusz Myslowski Chair For Piet Mondrian* at the gateway to Amersfoort, Holland, the city where Piet Mondrian was born.

The presentation of my portfolio, "Towards Organic Geometry," changes each time I exhibit it—depending on the possibilities of the gallery situation. For our exhibition, I was thinking of a logic based on the divergence of my process with Mondrian's. For example, Mondrian went from painting nature to the purity of the plus and minus. I started in the Utopia of his plus and minus. As I tried to follow him, however, I felt that I had to come home to nature. To show this

philosophical contradiction, I named my portfolio "Towards Organic Geometry." In contradicting each other's artwork, we entered the Abstract City through different gates. When I came to New York, I felt his presence and imagined that I walked the same paths. Now, I cannot believe that my path is taking me to the birthplace of Mondrian. I want our exhibition to show how we came to a shared aesthetic from opposite directions, like two opposite paths passing through the same territory.

Focusing on my slide light installation in one room at the Mondrian Museum, which I had created in 1979-80 when I was a studio artist at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center (which has now merged with the Museum of Modern Art). During this time, I had made light slides from the different prints in my portfolio, *Avenue of the Americas*, which I could project and develop a program of slides following a specific sequence. Again, the structure is like a visual library. These light slides are a bridge to another project called *Light Projection*, in which I intend to project the slides in P.S. 1 onto the ceilings and walls of various rooms. P.S. 1, which was built some time at the end of the 19th century, is past architecture, while the images being projected are present architecture. So when projected in P.S. 1, the relationship of the images to real architecture is one giving visual shape to the confrontation between past and present time and reality. Four slide projectors were hooked up together, which transfer the image simultaneously onto the walls of the room at P.S. 1. Thus we are to witness the synchronous co-existence of image and reality, the coincidence of natural and artificial light. The technical equipment is clearly visible in the room, so that the observer is easily able to discover how the image is being produced. The result is a non-material, light image with the walls acting as projection surfaces. It fills the room with projection movement.

Concerning *Manhattan Grid* (painted on synthetic tiles), I have selected sixty images from my portfolio *Towards Organic Geometry*, and I assembled them in one continuous block. I built up different configurations according to specific gallery sites. In this particular situation, I have installed my reversed pyramid in the corner.

The sixty 2-dimensional images from *Manhattan Grids*, were elevated to 3-dimensional columns which I had entitled: *Endless Columns*. To connect them organically, I installed the columns below the reversed pyramid in order to fulfill the corner space. As the corner intrigued me and what happened on the 11th of September, I decided to treat the structure as building materials. Some columns were physically standing, and some were laying on the floor, disassembled.

In the process of installing my exhibition, I wanted to include a collage piece I had donated to the first director of the Mondrian Museum many years ago. Unfortunately, we could not seem to recover the artwork. It must have

evaporated! The piece was a visual transcript of a story told by Harry of Mondrian's first sight of Manhattan.

The story goes as:

Some years ago, I was out walking with my friend Harry Holtzman, the man who helped Piet Mondrian to escape from Europe to the United States during the Second World War. Holtzman pointed to some banners in the sky and said, "When I first took Mondrian out walking in the city, he was struck by the sight of all the banners over the streets of Manhattan. He was more than struck, he was carried away."

In Manhattan's cosmopolitan neighborhoods, banners are strung in honor of the opening of a new business and to attract people to local street festivals.

This documentation is an homage to Mondrian's first joyous response to Manhattan, to its presence in his later work, and to the memory of it in Harry Holtzman's mind.

I also would like to save the piece from "Global Echoes" in which I collaborated with New York artist Robert Ryan, to be included in our show. Its approach to sound forms another opposite in the artistic paths of Mondrian and myself. Mondrian's artwork was directly influenced by the abstraction of jazz. In my case, the graphics in my book "Towards Organic Geometry" became a direct visual score for generating sound, and I would like to present this as an example in our theme of opposites. Zbigniew Bargielski, an avant-garde composer based in Vienna, has been creating music constructions from "Towards Organic Geometry" for some time.

Excerpt from the speech on the occasion of the exhibition Mondrian Museum, Amersfoort, Holland
September 29, 2001