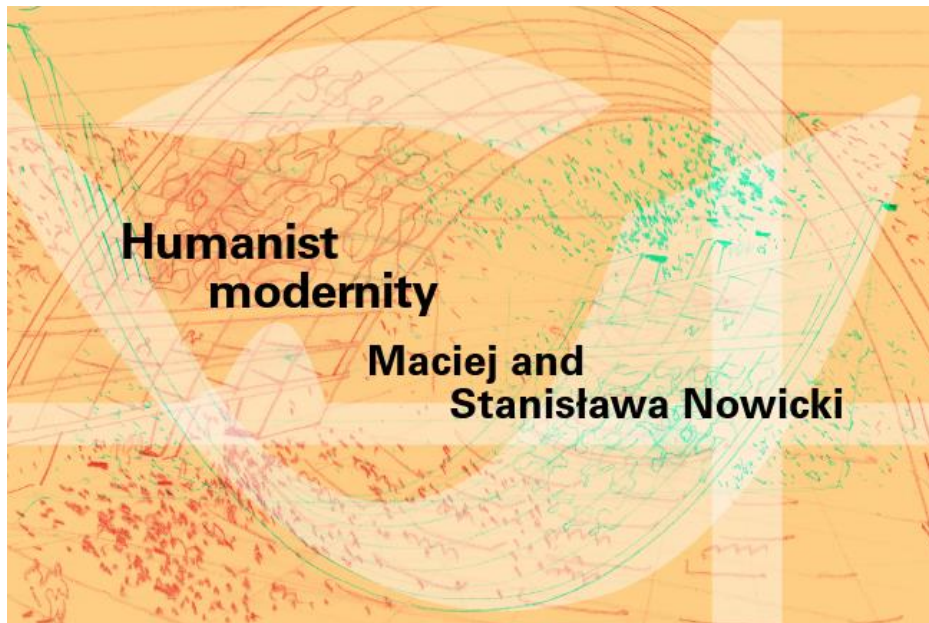


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**Exhibition on *Humanist modernity*
to Open at the Center for Architecture**

October 1, 2026–March 27, 2027

Presented in collaboration with the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning in Poland, this exhibition showcases the work of Stanisława Sandecka-Nowicka and Maciej (Matthew) Nowicki, two significant figures in the history of American and Polish architecture.

New York, NY, July 1, 2026 — The Center for Architecture is excited to present *Humanist modernity*, curated by Kacper Kępiński, Deputy Director of the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning in Warsaw, Poland. Named for a concept developed in the 1940s by architects Maciej (Matthew) Nowicki and Stanisława Sandecka-Nowicka, *Humanist modernity* explores their vision of modernism as a human-centered approach to design—one

concerned with understanding who a building is really for, and how it binds a human being to the space around them. The exhibition follows this idea across their work and asks what their architecture offers us today.

The first exhibition to present the Nowickis as equal partners in a shared body of work, it explores a practice that bridges drawing, building, graphics, and structure, across Europe, America, and India. While Nowicki died tragically at age 40 when his plane crashed as he returned from a job site in India, several years later Sandecka-Nowicka went on to become the first woman in the United States to be appointed as a full professor of architecture when she was appointed as such at the University of Pennsylvania in 1963. She taught fundamental design principles until her retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1977 and received the American Institute of Architects medal in 1978 for her lifelong influence on the profession.

“They signed their early work together, drawings and buildings alike, as a single shared practice,” said Kępiński. “The record kept Maciej’s name, and this exhibition gives the work back to both.”

Writing in the Warsaw journal *Skarpa* in 1945, Maciej proposed that “linking architecture to the human being for whom it is designed may be understood as the humanism of our art.” He argued that this humanism has two faces that seem to contradict one another—we build for the changeable human, whose habits, work, and institutions are remade every few decades, and at the same time for the unchangeable human, whose bodily proportions, perceptions, and deepest needs have remained constant since the first days of history. Humanist modernism, in their hands, worked as a way of understanding the architect’s responsibility toward people and toward the world being built.

“With this exhibition, we are asking how to build responsibly for a place, a climate, a community,” said Kępiński. “Seventy years ago, the Nowickis treated structure, landscape, and the human body as a single problem. That work reaches us now as a living method, one we can still put to use.”

This attitude is legible across an unusually wide range of work: it moves from interwar Polish competitions, among them a mosque, sports and spa buildings, the Orzeł sports club, and the Laski complex for the blind, through the visionary postwar reconstruction of Warsaw, to the American projects: the Carolina Country Club, schools and campus studies, the master plan for the North Carolina State Fairgrounds, and its centerpiece, the Dorton Arena in Raleigh. Completed in 1953, the Arena’s cable-net roof, slung between two intersecting parabolic arches, was a structural breakthrough that influenced a generation.

The exhibition combines original and facsimile archival material with newly produced work, from architectural drawings and sketches— facsimiles of plans, perspectives, and concept sketches (including Dorton Arena and the UN Headquarters studies)—to photographs (vintage and reproduction prints documenting built and unbuilt projects, as well as portraits of the Nowickis), architectural models produced for the exhibition by Onimo and Marta Dachowska, posters and graphic work signed by both Nowickis, contemporary artworks (newly commissioned and loaned works responding to the Nowickis’ legacy: a textile collage and aquatic-plant models by

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Centrala, Nowicki's Garden, a 2025 textile work by Alicja Bielawska, a 2026 installation by Diana Lelonek, and Wiktor Dyndo's painting *Flaga*), and text and printed matter. Archival loans and reproductions are drawn from, among others, Centre Pompidou, the NCSU University Libraries, the UPenn Architectural Archives, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, Cranbrook Center for Collections and Research, Walker Art Center, Brandeis University, the Museum of Warsaw, the National Museum in Warsaw, and the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław.

Humanist modernity opened at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in January 2024, then traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina, the city of the Dorton Arena (2024); to the ZODIAK Warsaw Architecture Pavilion (April to July 2025); to the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław (from March 2026); and to the Government Museum and Art Gallery in Chandigarh (May to July 2026). Its presentation at the Center for Architecture returns the Nowickis to the city where so much of their American story took place.

In the late 1940s, Maciej Nowicki worked alongside Wallace Harrison, Le Corbusier, and Oscar Niemeyer to shape the United Nations Headquarters. With the planner Clarence Stein, he proposed a raised circular pedestrian platform for Columbus Circle that separated people from cars and reframed the intersection as a stage for city life. With Eero Saarinen, he developed the campus plan for the newly founded Brandeis University in Waltham, MA.

At a time when architecture is reexamining how to build responsibly—for people, place, and climate—the Nowickis offer a compelling precedent. Their work treated structure, landscape, and human experience as an interconnected whole, making *Humanist modernity* a timely conversation with architects and urbanists today.

“For the Nowickis, wind, water, sun, and planting were active materials, organizing space as concretely as any beam or column,” said Kępiński. “They carried this idea as much through their teaching as their buildings, into cities they never saw finished. They anticipated ecological thinking long before the term existed.”

The exhibition layout was designed by Only If, a New York City–based practice for architecture and urbanism, with Polish-American architect Karolina Częczeek serving as principal in charge. The design employs curtains and sculptural tables as the primary organizational elements of the exhibition. Textiles provide a backdrop for drawings, photographs, and texts while guiding visitors through the space. The tables, through their sculptural form, encourage a more intimate engagement with the exhibited material. The curtains draw inspiration from the Nowickis’ own graphic and textile work, as well as from a lineage of architects and designers who used fabric to define and articulate space, including Petra Blaisse and Lilly Reich. The result is a light-filled, atmospheric environment that reflects the ephemeral qualities and humanist sensibility at the core of Nowicki’s work.

The exhibition's visual identity is by Katarzyna Nestorowicz; the graphic design is a collaboration by Weronika Nowak, Karolina Częczeek, and Katarzyna Nestorowicz. The identity grew out of a question: how does one translate humanistic modernism into the language of visual design? Working within a palette drawn from the Nowickis' drawings, Nestorowicz set original sketches by Maciej and Stanisława Nowicki against geometric forms derived from the

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shapes of their buildings—structures that, in most cases, were never built. These forms are traces of unbuilt architecture that remain present as a visual layer running across the exhibition graphics, guide, and communications, giving the traveling show a consistent character carrying through from the United Nations and Wrocław to New York.

Exhibition Opening

Please join us October 1, 6–8pm at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Place, New York, NY for an [opening reception](#). From 5–6pm, members of the press are invited to a VIP tour with the curators (RSVP to lkim@aiany.org).

About Curator Kacper Kępiński

Kacper Kępiński is an architecture critic and curator and Deputy Director of the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (NIAiU) in Warsaw. He writes on and curates around 20th-century and contemporary architecture, with a particular interest in how modernist ideas travel and what they offer the present. He is the curator of *Humanist modernity* and an author of its accompanying book, having contributed the central critical essay that develops the exhibition's argument.

About Exhibition Designer and Curatorial Collaborator Karolina CzęczeK

Karolina CzęczeK is a Polish-American architect, Critic at the Yale School of Architecture, and Principal of Only If, a New York City–based practice for architecture and urbanism. As Principal in charge, she led the design of the *Humanist modernity* exhibition, including its inaugural installation at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. CzęczeK also contributed to archival research and exhibition material about Nowicki's academic work.

Only If's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), M+ in Hong Kong, the Venice Architecture Biennale, and the UABB Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture in Shenzhen. The practice's projects have been featured in *The New Yorker*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Architectural Digest*, *Architectural Record*, *Architect Magazine*, *Interior Design*, *Wallpaper*, *Frame*, *Azure*, and *The Architect's Newspaper*. In 2022, Only If was named to *Architectural Record's* Design Vanguard and its work was nominated for the Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize. In 2020, *Domus* recognized Only If as one of the world's 50 best emerging architecture firms.

About Curatorial Collaborator Grzegorz Piątek

Grzegorz Piątek is an architecture critic, historian, and writer based in Warsaw, known for books and essays on the history of Polish architecture and the rebuilding of Warsaw. He collaborated on the curatorial concept and contributes biographical and contextual texts to the project. Author of the books: *The Temple and the Dumpster: Architecture for Life* (2025); *Starzynski. President from the monument* (2024); *Promised Gdynia* (2022); *Indestructible, Bohdan Pniewski – architect of the salon and power* (2021); *The best city in the world. Warsaw in reconstruction 1944-1949* (2020); *Sanator. The career of Stefan Starzyński* (2016). Recipient of literary and

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cultural awards, including the Literary Award of the Capital City of Warsaw, Polityka's Passport Award, the Nike Readers' Choice Award, the Kazimierz Moczarski Award, and the Jerzy Giedroyc Award.

Featured Artists

The exhibition includes newly commissioned works and contemporary interpretations of the Nowickis' legacy by:

Centrala (Małgorzata Kuciewicz and Simone De Iacobis) is a Warsaw-based architecture and research studio known for rethinking modernist heritage and the atmospheric, environmental dimensions of architecture. For the exhibition, they created a textile collage and models with aquatic planting, developed around the idea of Nowicki's Garden.

Alicja Bielawska is a visual artist working across textile, sculpture, drawing, and spatial form. For the exhibition, she created a new textile work (2025, collection of NIAiU) that reinterprets motifs drawn from both Nowickis' designs.

Diana Lelonek is an artist working at the intersection of art and ecology, known for projects that explore relationships between human and non-human nature. In this exhibition, she presents a 2026 installation that applies her own technique of making pigment and prints from the bricks of war-destroyed Warsaw, producing a collage print of Nowicki's plans for the city's reconstruction.

This Exhibition is Supported by:

Exhibitions at the Center for Architecture are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



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The exhibition is organized by the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, Warsaw, Poland, and co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.



Ministry of Culture and National Heritage
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About the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning:

The National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (NIAiU) is Poland's national institution for architecture and the public realm. Based in Warsaw, it brings the buildings, ideas, and people who shape how we live to the widest possible audience, from the icons of Polish modernism to the questions facing cities now. Through exhibitions, books, talks, and research, NIAiU takes architecture out of the archive and into public life, and carries Polish design to the world. Founded in 2017, it is a Polish state cultural institution. niaiu.pl

About the Center for Architecture:

The Center for Architecture, founded in 2003 by its partner AIA New York, engages local and international audiences with the value, impact, and wonder of architecture. Located in the heart of Greenwich Village, the Center for Architecture is also the home of the [American Institute of Architects New York \(AIANY\)](#), which cultivates an open, adept, and future-forward architectural community. Together, we advance the value and practice of architecture to promote just and sustainable communities.

Through exhibitions, public programs, educational initiatives, and our [Archtober](#) festival and platform, the Center for Architecture brings together architects, designers, students, and the public to foster collaboration within the design community while creating accessible opportunities for the public to experience and learn about architecture. Whether you're an industry professional, a curious visitor, or a student exploring the field, the Center for Architecture offers a space for connection, creativity, and critical conversation—empowering everyone to engage with the transformative power of architecture. centerforarchitecture.org