

# ARTNEWS

## 'WHERE THE EARTH SPILLED OUT INFERNAL FIRE': ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW AT ANDREA ROSEN

BY *Sarah Douglas* | 12/04/15



Installation view.

COURTESY ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY

With all of the attention being paid to women artists—both at Art Basel Miami Beach and at the all-woman show at the Rubell Collection in Miami—and to figuration (the Deitch/Gagosian exhibition in the Wynwood District), it's worth throwing the spotlight on an exhibition that is up for just one more day back in New York.

On view at [Andrea Rosen Gallery in Chelsea](#) through Saturday is the most significant exhibition of the late Polish sculptor Alina Szapocznikow since her MoMA survey three years ago. (Rosen began representing the estate earlier this year.)

Szapocznikow made her work after surviving three concentration camps, suffered from tuberculosis, and died of breast cancer in 1972 when she was only 46. The MoMA exhibition, which traveled to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, brought greater awareness of her work in the United States, and to that work's connection to better-known artists like Eva Hesse.

At Rosen, the large main gallery has sizable sculptures that find their contemporary echoes in the work of artists as varied as Sarah Lucas and the late Robert Gober. In a smaller back is a group of Szapocznikow's illuminated lamp pieces, which combine phallic forms with figures and petals. They are humorous and incisive. Rosen has taken the bold step of displaying one of them on a low plinth, so that it looks as though it is growing out of the floor.



1 Alina Szapocznikow, *Illuminowana [L'illuminée] [Illuminated Woman]*, 1966-1967.

Pieces often look like they are in the process of melting or dissolving—the MoMA exhibition was called “Sculpture Undone.” As Adam Symczyk memorably wrote about one of Szapocznikow's sculptures in *Artforum* in 2011, “The sculpture is a space oddity, bloating in the most peculiar way in a vacuum that knows no directions. The body itself is the vehicle.” In Szapocznikow's work, the body is always the vehicle, in one way or another.

Here is my favorite story about Szapocznikow. She wanted to create an ice skating rink in the crater of Vesuvius. “This human gesture, by posing a challenge to nature, tames and bewitches it, bending it to our whim,” she wrote in a document describing the unrealized project. “The futility and playfulness of the gesture belie its great importance.” There would be “a party atmosphere,” with music and colored snow. “Man will come to play where the earth recently spilled out infernal fire.”

And if the volcano erupts? “If one day during a figure skating competition the Peggy Fleming of the moment performs her moves in the field in the iced-over crater, and if we, spectators awed by her prodigious and trivial pirouettes, are swept away by a sudden eruption of lava, fixed for eternity like the Pompeiians—then the triumph of the instant, of the transitory, will be complete. A fleeting instant, a trivial instant, such is the only symbol of our terrestrial passage.”