



The Themersons
Pioneers of the Polish Avant-Garde

RCM Galerie

The Themersons

Pioneers of the Polish avant-garde

12 March - 12 May 2026

RCM Galerie

ON PAPER, ON CANVAS AND ON FILM

Two artists in Paris once more

Franciszka Themerson, born in Warsaw, 1907 – 1988
and Stefan Themerson, born in Płock, Poland, 1910 – 1988

The two avant-garde artists, Franciszka and Stefan Themerson whose exhibition we celebrate at RCM galerie, are no strangers to Paris. They lived in Paris during the late 1930s. Their publishing company, Gaberbocchus Press, was celebrated in 1956 by La Hune in St Germain with an exhibition throughout the bookshop, and for many years, they were both members of the 'Collège de Pataphysique.' Also, their 1932 film about the tragedy of Europe made in 1931 and called Europa could have been seen at the Pompidou.

Even though they lived in London, Paris was a part of their lives.

They were both filmmakers, but Franciszka was primarily a painter and stage designer, and Stefan a writer. Their work together resulted in the publishing company, Gaberbocchus Press (1947 –79), as well as the first London club for artists and scientists to meet, called the Common Room (1957 – 59). The history of this club, which has just been published as a book, will be in the exhibition.

The exhibition concentrates on Franciszka's work not only on canvas or with pen and ink on paper, but also on her design for the first international exhibition of computer art: Cybernetic Serendipity at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1968. Apart from the first design for the poster and cover of the catalogue, reissued by Studio International, one can see the evidence of her interest in the relationship of art and technology, usually treated with humour and demonstrating inventions, missing even now in the real world.

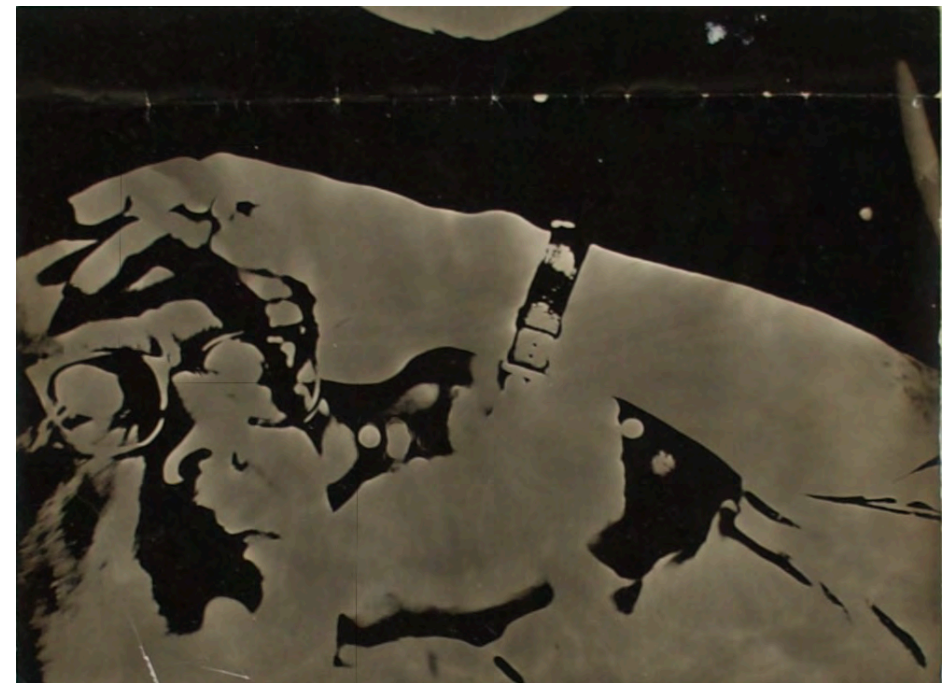
Line is of the essence in these works, also lightness of touch and the possibility that an image can have several meanings.

Even though they lived in London, France was very much a part of their lives, and this is their first exhibition at the RCM Galerie.

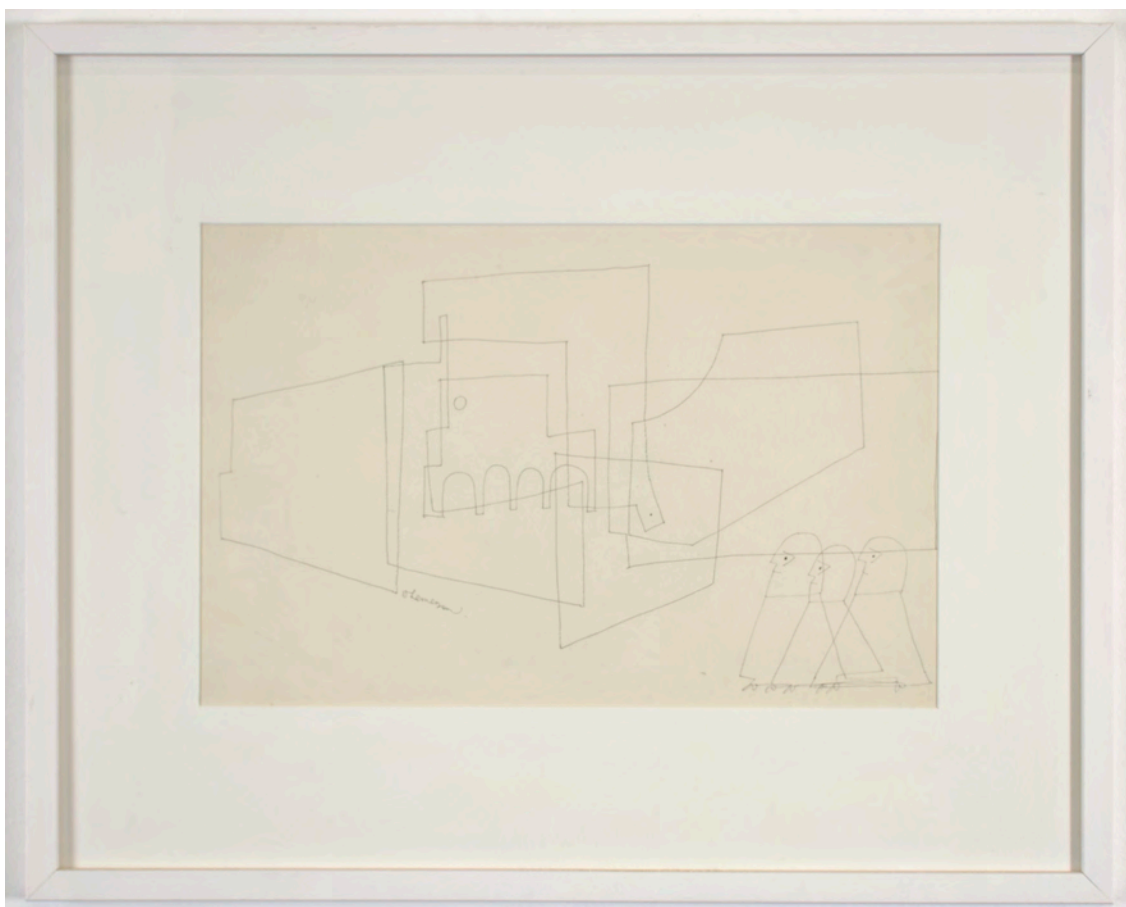
--Jasia Reichardt



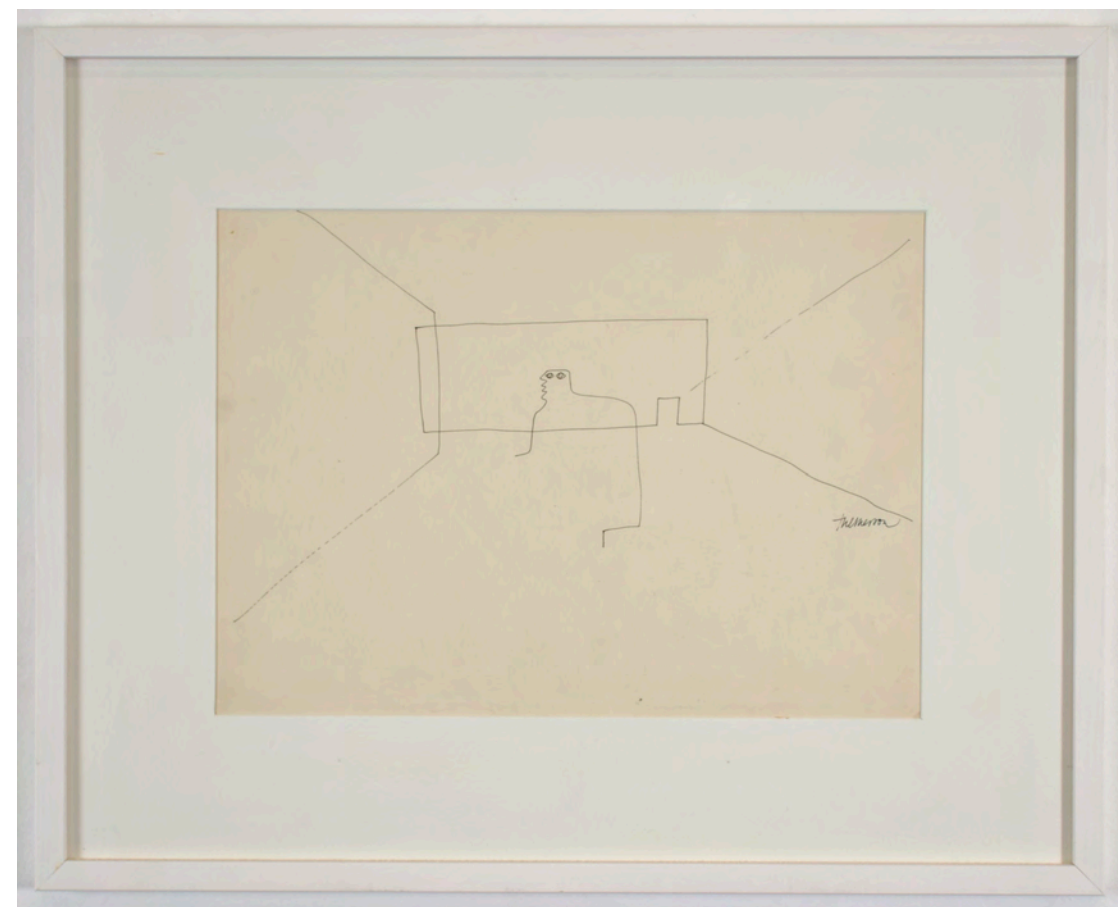
Stefan Themerson
portrait of Franciszka Themerson, c 1930
gelatin silver print
17.5 x 21.5 cm



Stefan Themerson
self portrait, c 1930
gelatin silver print
17.5 x 21.5 cm



Franciszka Themerson
Three figures with architecture, 1957
pen and ink on paper
24 x 39.5 cm



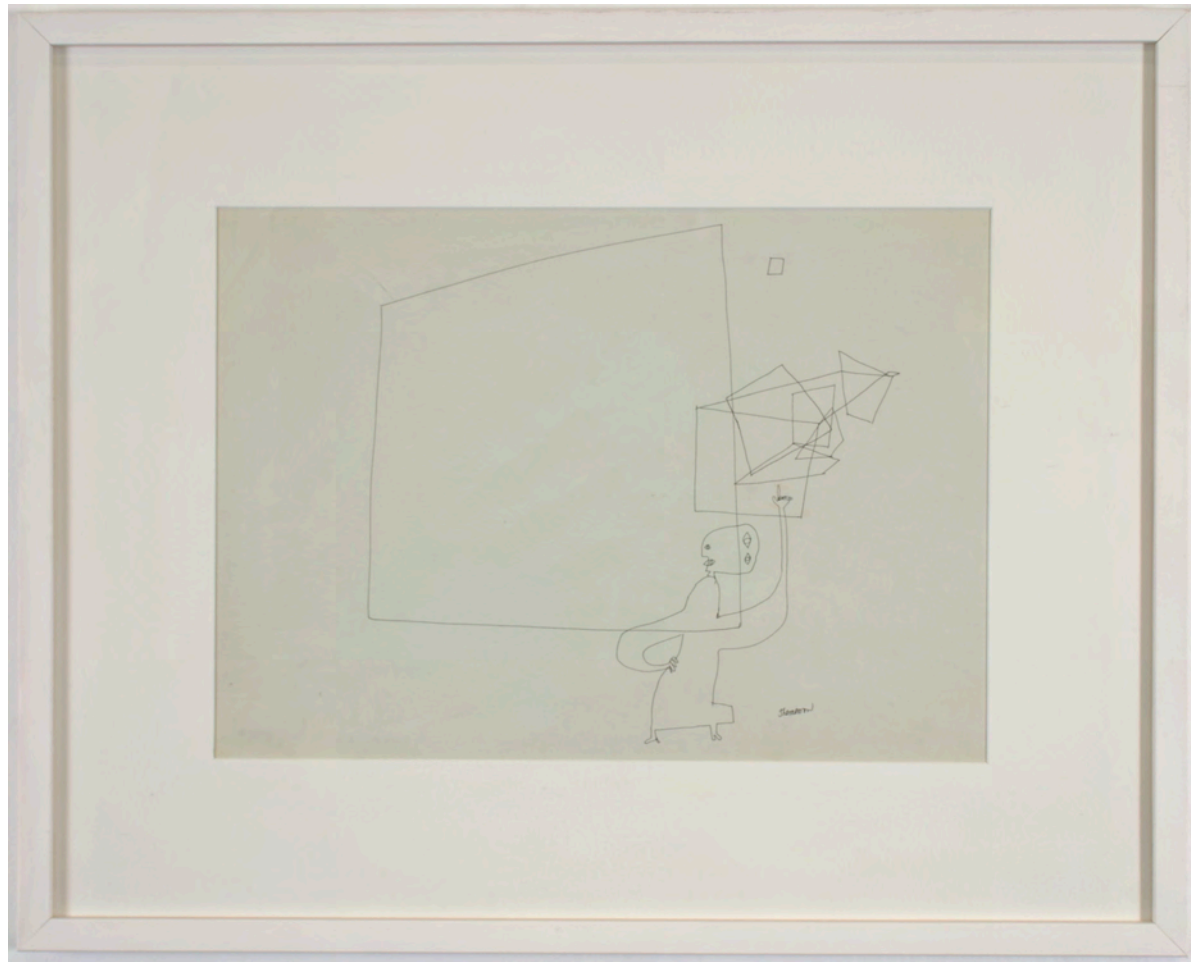
Franciszka Themerson
Room, 1959
pen and ink on paper
25.5 x 35.5 cm



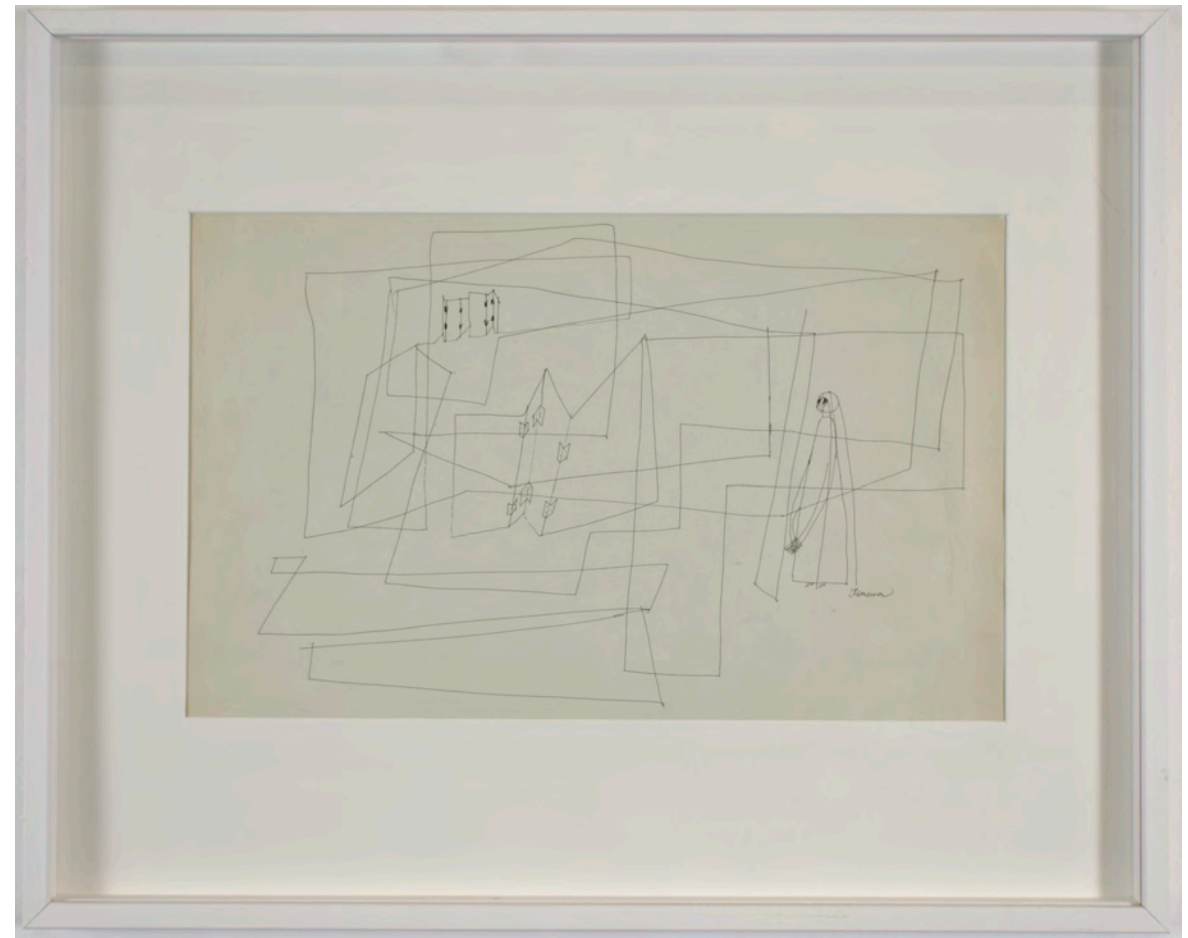
Franciszka Themerson
Tall building; two men above, five men below, 1956
pen and ink on paper
35.5 x 25 cm



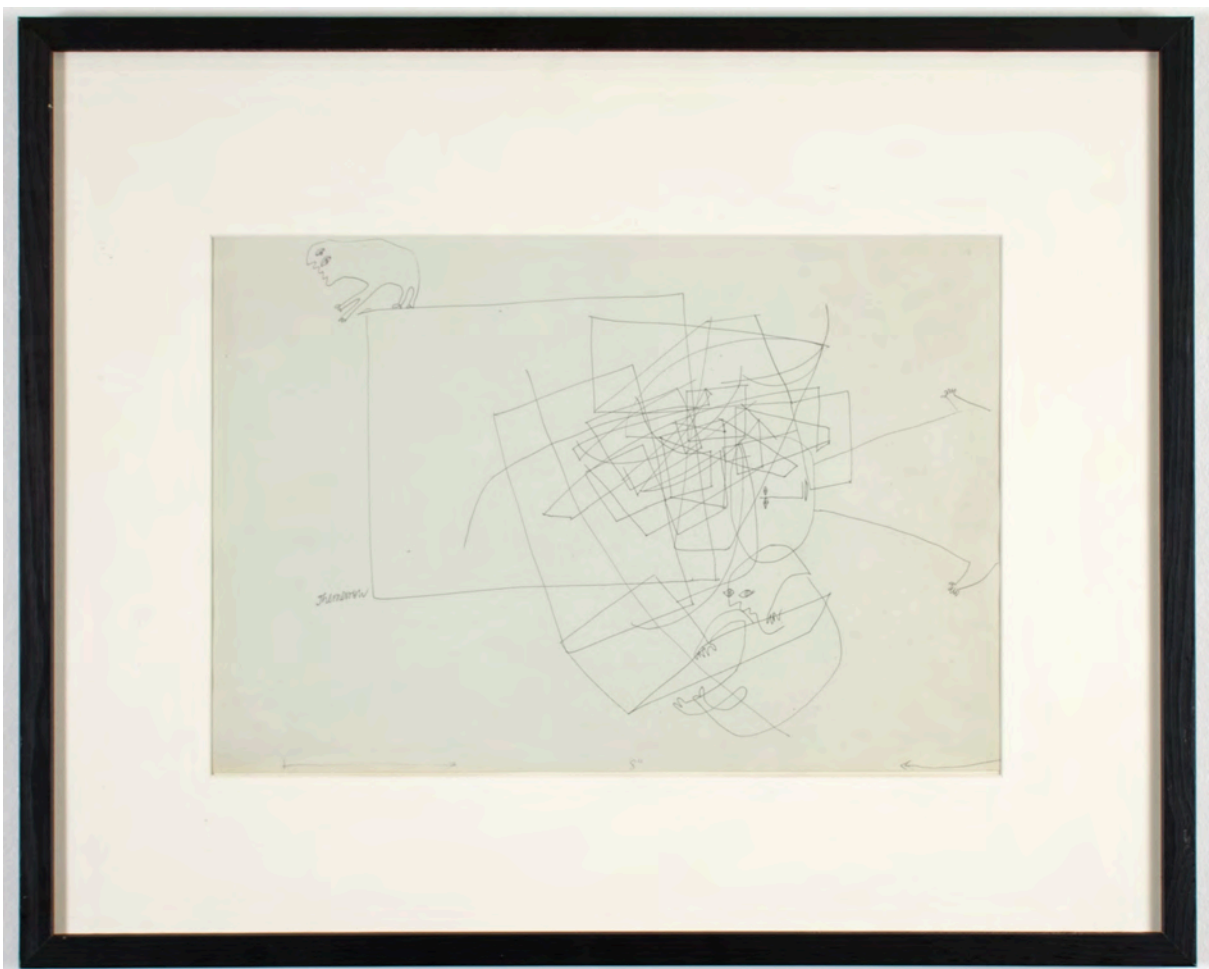
Franciszka Themerson
Three men with building blocks, 1956
pen and ink on paper
35.5 x 25.5 cm



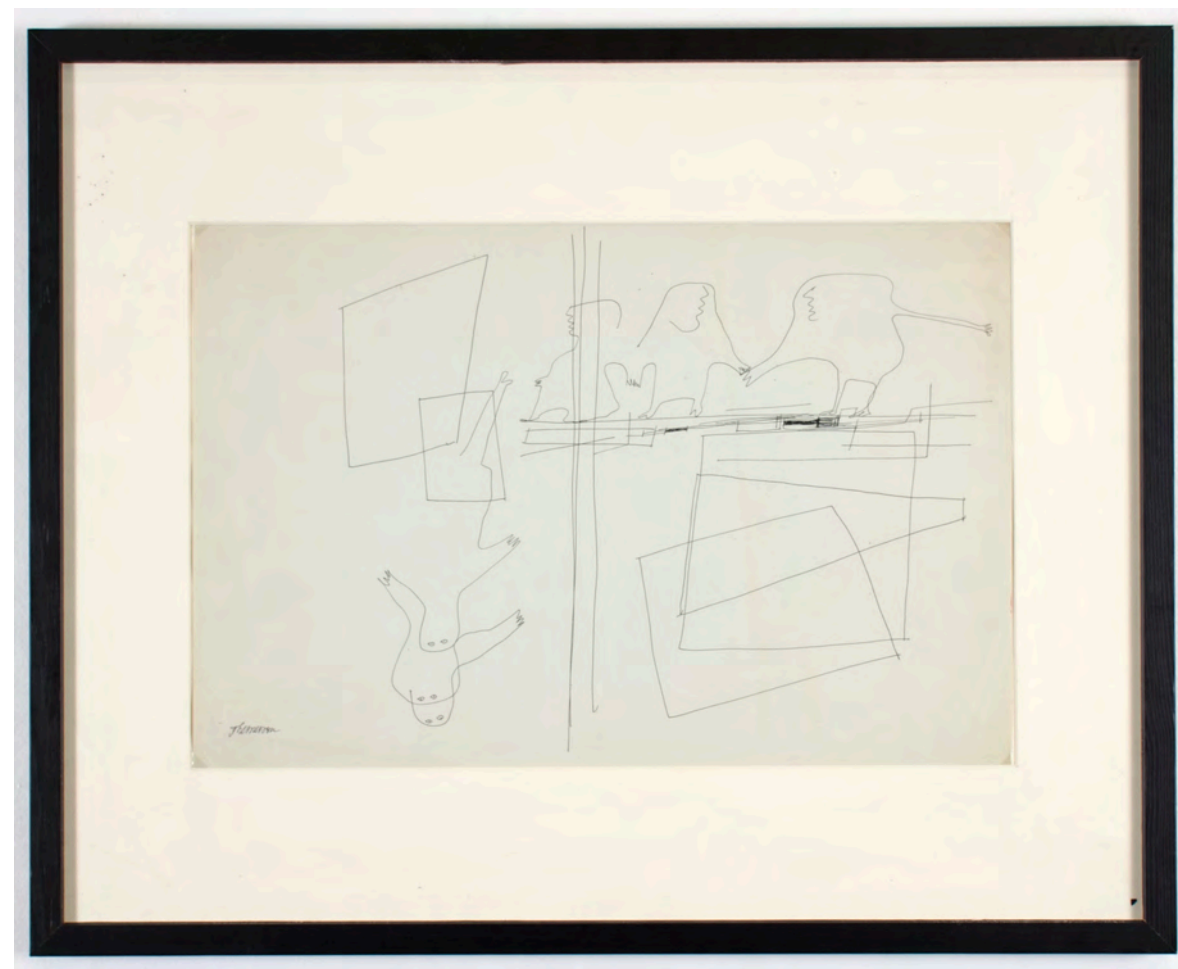
Franciszka Themerson
Man explaining the planes, 1959
pen and ink on pale grey paper
25 x 37.5 cm



Franciszka Themerson
New architecture
pen and ink on tinted paper
25 x 38 cm



Franciszka Themerson
New architecture
pen and ink on tinted paper
25 x 38 cm



Franciszka Themerson
New architecture
pen and ink on tinted paper
25 x 38 cm



Stefan Themerson,
photogram, 1928
gelatin silver print mounted on card
25 x 35 cm



Stefan Themerson
Untitled, 1928-29
gelatin silver print on paper
30 x 21.5 cm



Stefan Themerson,
photogram, circa 1930
gelatin silver print
25 x 35 cm



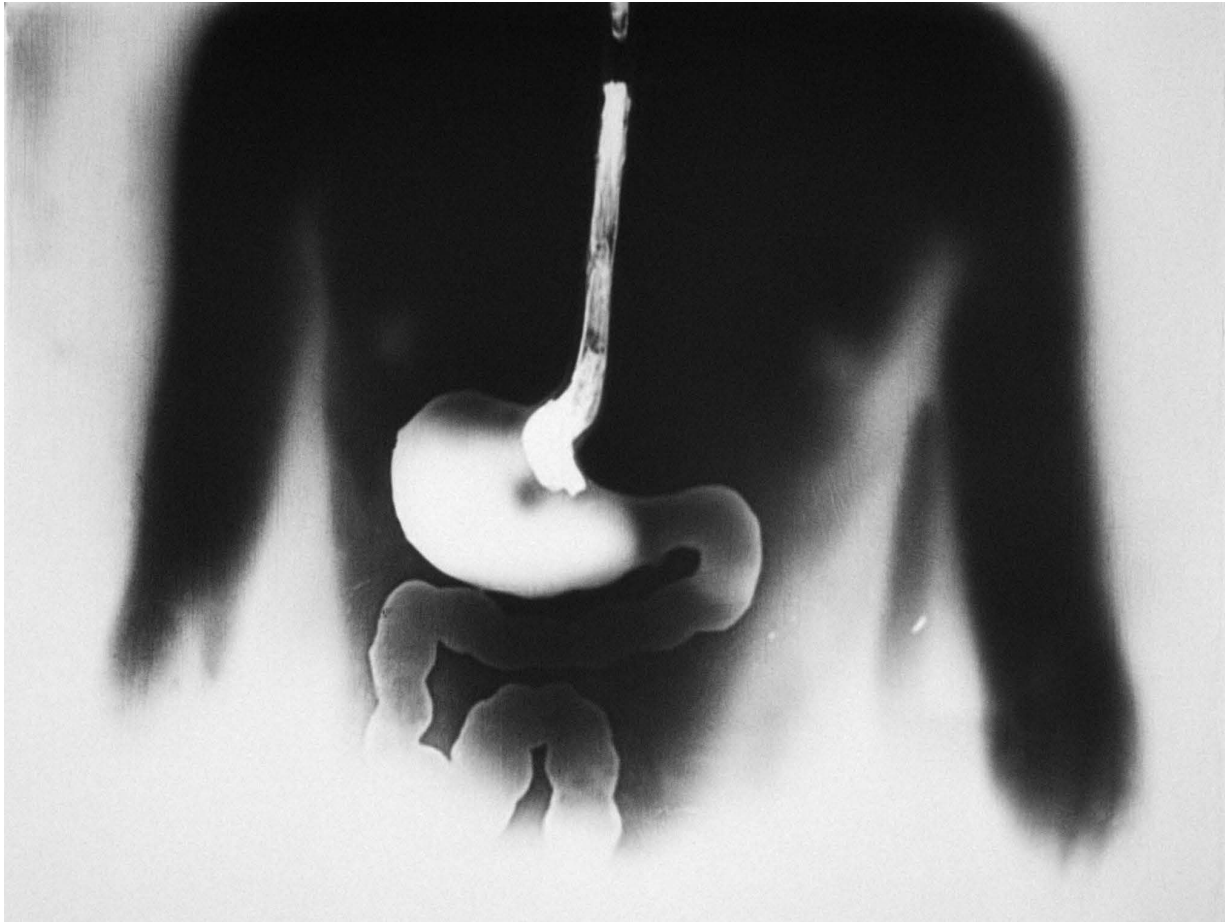
Stefan Themerson,
photogram, 1933
gelatin silver print
35 x 25 cm



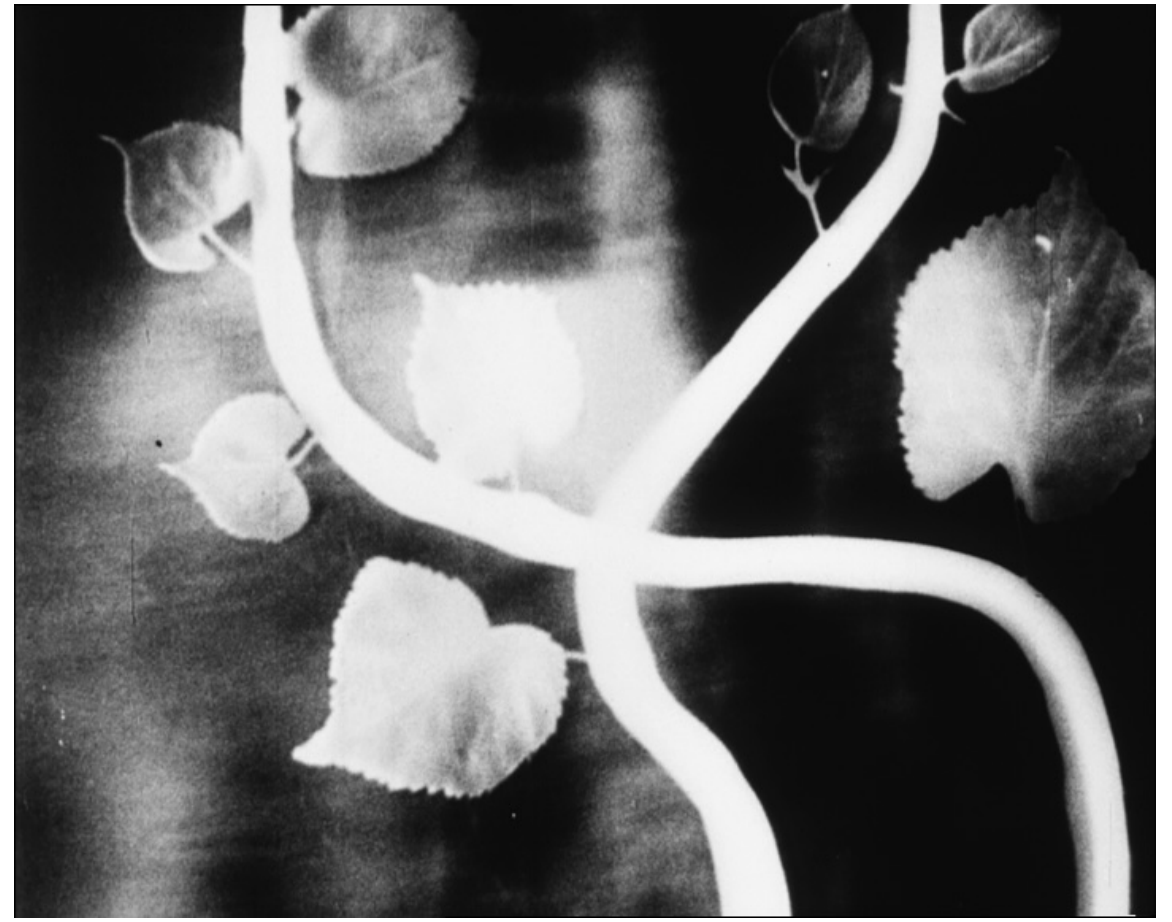
Stefan Themerson,
photogram, circa 1930
gelatin silver print
25 x 35 cm



Stefan Themerson,
photogram, circa 1930
gelatin silver print
25 x 35 cm



Still from the film *Europa*, 1931



Still from the film *The Eye and the Ear*, 1945

Cybernetic Serendipity

Serendipity

the faculty of making
happy chance discoveries by means of control and communication machines
both human and electronic

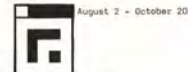
An exhibition

An exhibition demonstrating how you can use the computer and the technology to explore the world of art, literature and language.

computer-generated graphics
computer-generated films
computer-generated music
computer-generated images
computer-generated video
computer-generated animation

and
other
serendipitous
manifestations

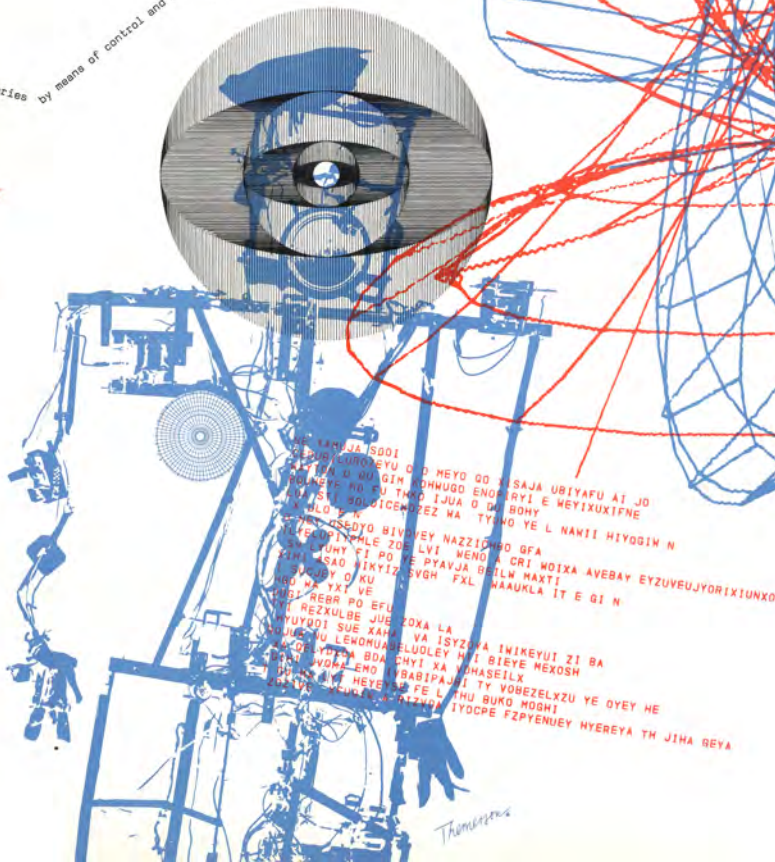
Institute of Contemporary Arts



August 2 - October 20

Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday 11 - 6
Wednesday, Friday 11 - 6
Sunday 2 - 4
Monday closed

admission to exhibition and demonstrations
10p members
50p family film shows



KAPUJA SDOI
 KURUOYEU O O HEYO QO V SAJA UBIYAFU AI JO
 WU GIM OHWUO ENORIRI E MEYIXUFNE
 KU TMO IJUA O W BOHY
 SUI BOLDICEMREZ NA TYMO YE L NAWII HIYOGIN N
 SEEDYO BIVNEY NAZZIWO GFA
 MLE ZOE LVI WENO A CRI NOIXA AVEBAY EYZUVEYJYORIXIUNXO
 ASAO NIKYIZ SVGH FXL NAAUKLA IT E GI N
 O KU
 NI REBR PO EFU
 REZKULB JUE ZOXA LA
 LEWOMUHELULEY H I BIEYE MEXOSH
 BDA CHYI XA WOHASEILX
 ENO IYABIPAWI TY VORZELXZY YE OYEV HE
 HETVET FE L THU BUKO MOGHI
 IYODPE FZPYNUEY HYEREA TH JIHA GEVA

CYBERNETIC SERENDIPITY LECTURES

1968
August 2 - October 20, 1968
During the course of the Cybernetic Serendipity exhibition on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8pm at Rank House, The Mall, London S.W.1 a series of lectures will be held admission - 1/6 10s members - 5/6 or by arrangement season ticket - £3



Thursday August 8

Tuesday August 13

Thursday August 15

Tuesday August 20

Tuesday August 27

Tuesday September 3

Thursday September 5

Tuesday September 10

Thursday September 12

Thursday September 19

Tuesday September 24

Thursday September 26

Tuesday October 1

Tuesday October 8

Thursday October 10

Thursday October 17

Frank B. Rowle
Works in the fields of informatics, semantics, computational scientific investigation and the visual arts
REFLECTIONS ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCIENCE AND ART

Professor Herbert How
Composer and musicologist at School of Music at the University of Illinois
COMPOSING SHORT OUTPUT MUSIC

Conrad Ellis
Director of the Computer Music Network in the 1950s
MUSIC WITHOUT LINES

R.S. Thacker
Inventor of the first computer
THE FIRST COMPUTER TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND HIS MATHEMATICAL

Dr. Christopher Evans
Physicist and computer scientist
ON THE SCIENCE OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AT THE NATIONAL PHYSICAL LABORATORY
SLEEPING AND DREAMING

Ben Bell
Writer, journalist, broadcaster and cartoonist
IS MAKING A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF THE COMPUTER ON SOCIETY
TODAY IS ALREADY HERE

Professor R.S. Thack
of the Department of Mechanical Engineering
Some Early Design, London
ROBOTS IN THE SERVICE OF MAN

Dr. Gordon Rank
Computational physiologist and cyberneticist
Director of Research at System Research Institute,
COMING ON OFF AND ON

Sandra Parilla
Composer, first prize winner of the IFIP Congress
computer-generated music competition 1968
INCIDENTAL COMPOSING IN MUSIC AND ITS FORMALIZATION

Mr. A.C. Norton
Member of the use of computers
in the treatment of music and sound literature in general
THE COMPUTER AS AN AID TO LITERARY STUDIES

Flora Green
Editor and founder of the
Journal of Music Psychology in Education
THE COMPUTER IN MUSIC

Professor Richard Bales
of Brunel University, sociologist and cyberneticist
concerned with the application of cybernetics
and information theory to medicine and music
THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ART AND COMPOSING

Professor R.S. Thack
of the Institute of Computer Science in London
THE CONTRIBUTION OF COMPUTERS TO THE ART OF EDUCATION

Professor John Searl
of the Department of Psychology, Manchester University
SCIENTIFICS OF INFORMATION

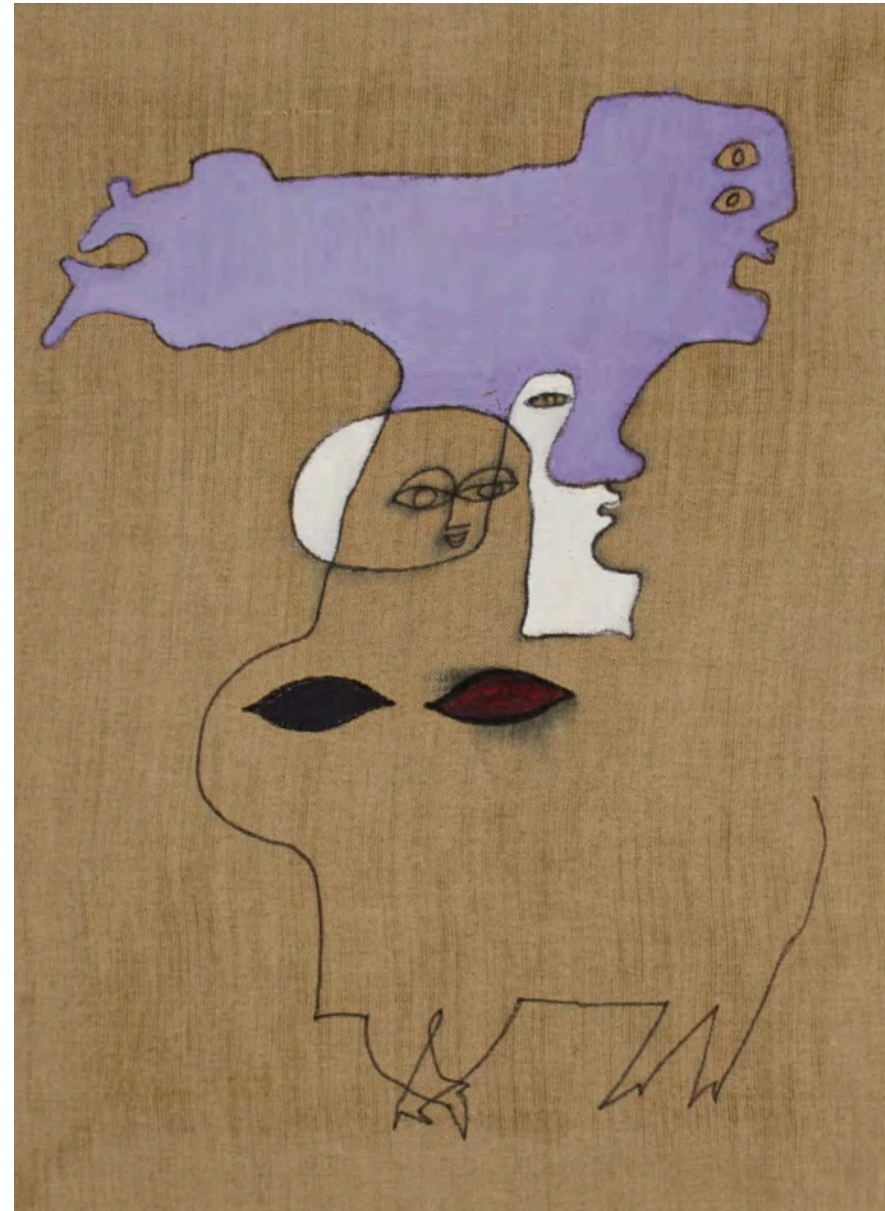
Professor Lionel Penrose
of London University
AUTOMATIC MECHANICAL SELF-ANALYSIS

Robin Williams
computer system designer and Principal, Liverpool
at the Cambridge Language Research Unit
TALKING TO COMPUTERS

Franciszka Themerson
poster for the exhibition Cybernetic Serendipity,
1968



Franciszka Themerson
I'm all at sea, 1974
acrylic on unprimed canvas
25 x 17.5 cm



Franciszka Themerson
untitled, 1973
acrylic and ink on unprimed canvas
42 x 31.5 cm



Franciszka Themerson
Ascending or descending, 1973
acrylic on unprimed canvas
25 x 40 cm



Franciszka Themerson
Woman, surprised, 1986
oil pastel on paper
63 x 47 cm



Franciszka Themerson
Figure between red and blue
oil pastel on paper
64 x 49.5 cm



Stefan Themerson
three untitled drawings, c 1970
ink on paper
30 x 20 cm (appx)

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SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Franciszka Themerson (1907-1988)

Stefan Themerson (1910-1988)

Franciszka Themerson was born in Warsaw in 1907, the daughter of painter Jakub Weinles, and pianist Łucja Kaufman. She grew up in a world filled with art. She studied painting at Warsaw Academy of Art and graduated with honours in 1931.

Stefan Themerson was born in Płock in 1910, son of a family doctor. In 1928 he moves to Warsaw. After a year studying physics, he transfers to the School of Architecture at the Polytechnic. He abandons architecture for writing and begins experimenting with photography, photo-collages and photograms.

Franciszka met Stefan in 1929 and married in 1931. The Themersons played a major role in the history of experimental cinema and photography in 1930s Warsaw. Their significance for the development of the Polish avant-garde film is enormous.

They co-founded the Polish Film-makers' Co-operative in 1935. They edited and published its journal, *f.a.* (art film) in 1937. Visiting Paris and London in 1936/37, they met Moholy-Nagy, John Grierson, Len Lye and other filmmakers, and took their work back to Warsaw. In 1938 the Themersons moved to Paris, wanting to be at the heart of the art world. Two days after the start of the Second World War, they both volunteered for the Polish army. In 1940 Franciszka escaped by moving to London with the Polish government-in exile; Stefan served as a soldier in France, ending up in a Polish Red Cross hostel in Voiron, 1940-42. It was during this time that he wrote his first novel, *Professor Mmaa's Lecture*. After two years of separation, they were reunited in London in 1942. They made two more films, 1942-44.

In the event, the War had brought them to London permanently. Following their two last films, funded by the Polish Government in exile, they channelled these creative energies into making books together.

In 1948 the Themersons founded a publishing house: the Gaberbocchus Press. During the next 30 years they published over sixty titles, including first English translations of European writers (among them, Jarry, Queneau, Heine's *Versions and Perversions*), as well as the work of Jankel Adler, Apollinaire, Schwitters, Stevie Smith, Bertrand Russell — the list goes on. Gaberbocchus books were also celebrated for their original design.

Through the 1960s and 1970s, the Press also published Stefan's work — philosophical novels, poetry, essays and an opera, as well as the children's books they made together. The recurring focus of his works is on ethics, language, freedom, human decency. His books have been translated into eight languages.

Over the same years and until her death, Franciszka also pursued her independent life as a painter. Many major exhibitions of her work were held. As art director of Gaberbocchus, she designed and illustrated many of the titles. As a designer, she created an award-winning production of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* for the Stockholm marionette theatre in 1964, and drew a brilliant comic strip version of *UBU*, 1969/70. In 1979, Gaberbocchus Press was taken over by the publishing house De Harmonie in Amsterdam.

Franciszka Themerson died in London in June 1988, Stefan Themerson in September 1988.

There were many major exhibitions of Franciszka Themerson's art in: Gallery One, London (1957 and 1959); Drian Gallery, London (1963); Zachęta, Warsaw (1964); Whitechapel Art Gallery (1975); Nordjyllands Kunstmuseum, Aalborg, Denmark (1991); Royal National Theatre, London (1993); Imperial War Museum (1994); Kordegarda, Warsaw (1998); *l'étrangère*, London (2016); Łaźnia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdańsk (2019); Tate Gallery, London (2024); Ben Uri Gallery, London (2025).

Major exhibitions of the Themersons and the Gaberbocchus Press were held in La Hune, Paris (1956); Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, Poland (1981); La Boetie, New York (1993); Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (1996); Galerie Signe, Heerlen, The Netherlands (1998); Camden Arts Centre London (2016); Catapult, Antwerp, (2018); London Centre for Book Arts, (2025).



The Themersons in Franciszka's studio, c. 1960.

