

Zofia Rydet: *Sociological Record* 10 October 2025 – 22 February 2026

Opening this October at The Photographers' Gallery, as part of the UK/Poland Season 2025, *Sociological Record* is a landmark photographic project undertaken by Polish photographer Zofia Rydet. The series is a comprehensive documentary portrait of Polish domestic life which spans decades, eras, regions and cultures.

Starting in 1978, aged 67 years old, Zofia Rydet (1911-1997) set out on a mammoth task to photograph the inside of 'every' Polish household. Motivated by a desire to capture the ordinary, unsung populations, particularly of the countryside – but also covering towns and cities – Rydet would become increasingly obsessed with her mission to record the cultures and people that she sought out.

Rydet cut an unlikely figure on her field trips to different regions, a diminutive woman travelling by bus or with the help of friends who could drive her. Approaching households unannounced, she would knock and warmly introduce herself, asking those living there if they would like to take part in her project. Using a newly acquired wide angle lens and flash, Rydet was able to capture often darkened interiors of homes and their inhabitants in great detail. Asking her sitters not to smile and look straight ahead into the camera lens, her subjects are posed in their homes, rich in personal histories.

As the series progressed, Rydet would identify different categories within the *Sociological Record* such as 'Women on Doorsteps', 'Professions', 'The Ill', 'Road Signs', 'Windows', 'Houses' and 'Televisions'. She would also come to identify more philosophical themes such as 'Presence' – noting the omniscience of the Polish Pope John Paul II's image (inaugurated the same year Rydet started the *Record* in 1978) within Polish households. Others included 'The Myth of Photography' focusing on the central position and significance of family photographs within the home, such as traditional, hand-painted studio photographs of married couples in homes with little or no other decoration.

Through the cumulative interactions with her sitters, sometimes returning to households more than once over time, Rydet identified a change in her own personal and artistic journey and the role photography played within it. Creating over 20,000 images, many of which by the end of the project were never printed – *Sociological Record* is a monumental project and one of the most important achievements in 20th century Polish photography.

Rydet said of her hopes for the work: "Even if they don't publish it... this will remain, not art perhaps, but a document of the times." Rydet continued working on the *Record* until 1990, seven years before she died aged 86 years old.

This is the first substantial exhibition of Zofia Rydet's *Sociological Record* in the UK. It focuses on the small proportion of rare prints she made from the series in her home darkroom, including the significant 'People in Interiors' works, and other sub-series such as 'Women on Doorsteps' and 'Presence'. It will also feature ephemera from Rydet's archives and original

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publications. Polish filmmaker Andrzej Różycki's 1989 documentary film about Rydet, 'Endlessly Distant Roads', as well as Polish photographer Anna Beata Bohdziewicz's documentary portraits of Rydet at work will also be on show.

Zofia Rydet: Sociological Record is part of the UK/Poland Season 2025. It is produced by The Photographers' Gallery in partnership with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute (co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage), Poland, and the Zofia Rydet Foundation.

A new English catalogue will accompany the exhibition featuring texts by Zofia Rydet and 100 images from the Sociological Record series. Edited by co-curators of the exhibition, Clare Grafik and Karol Hordziej, image edit with the collaboration of Wojciech Nowicki. Produced by Lola Paprocki and designed by Brian Kanagaki / Kanagaki Studio. Co-published by The Photographers' Gallery and Palm* Studios, with support from the Adam Mickiewicz Institute.

Notes to Editors

For further information on exhibitions and print editions and for press images and credits/captions, please contact Robyn Deane robyn@margaretlondon.com or Phoebe Heins phoebe@margaretlondon.com.

About Zofia Rydet

Zofia Rydet was born in 1911 in Stanisławów, Galicia – then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, later Poland, now Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. The daughter of a Polish lawyer and judge who served the rural populations of the area, her first photographs were in the regions of south-eastern Polish borderlands.

Following the brutal and tumultuous occupation of Nazi Germany in World War II and the region's absorption into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, her family fled into the newly defined borders of Poland at the end of the war to Rabka and then Bytom in Upper Silesia. There she would focus on her passion for photography, as one of the few women members of the Gliwice Photography Society, which she joined in 1954. She met other avant-garde photographers, became a photography teacher and began sending her photographs to international and national competitions.

Her artistic career developed through many distinct but overlapping phases which included the seminal series and photobook *Little Man (Mały Człowiek)*, which drew on her many photographs of children taken during her national and international travels, highlighting humanist approaches to documentary photography and emphasising the complexities and challenges of childhood. Her long-standing surrealist collage series *The World of Feelings and Imagination (Świat uczuć i wyobraźni)* also marked an important expressive phase in her creative practice. *Sociological Record (Zapis socjologiczny)* would become her final and largest artistic project.

About Adam Mickiewicz Institute

The Adam Mickiewicz Institute (AMI) brings Polish culture to people around the world. Being a state institution, it creates lasting interest in Polish culture and art through strengthening the presence of Polish artists on the global stage. It initiates innovative projects, supports international cooperation and cultural exchanges. It promotes the work of both established and promising artists, showing the diversity and richness of our culture. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute is also responsible for the Culture.pl website, a comprehensive source of knowledge about Polish culture. For more information please visit: www.iam.pl.

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery explores how photography is connecting, captivating and radically changing our world today. The Gallery's programme and spaces – from exhibitions, talks, workshops and digital platforms, to the galleries, shop and cafe – all explore the beauty, complexity and future of photography. Right outside the Gallery, the very best of contemporary photography is shown for free, day and night, in Soho Photography Quarter.

Find out more at: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor information - The Photographers' Gallery

Monday – Wednesday 10am – 6pm

Thursday & Friday 10am – 8pm (Friday free from 4pm this summer)

Saturday 10am – 6pm

Sunday & Bank Holidays 11am – 6pm

Tickets - your ticket covers entry to all exhibitions on the day of your visit

£10 / £7 concessions (members go free)

Advance online booking: £8.50 / £6 concessions

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