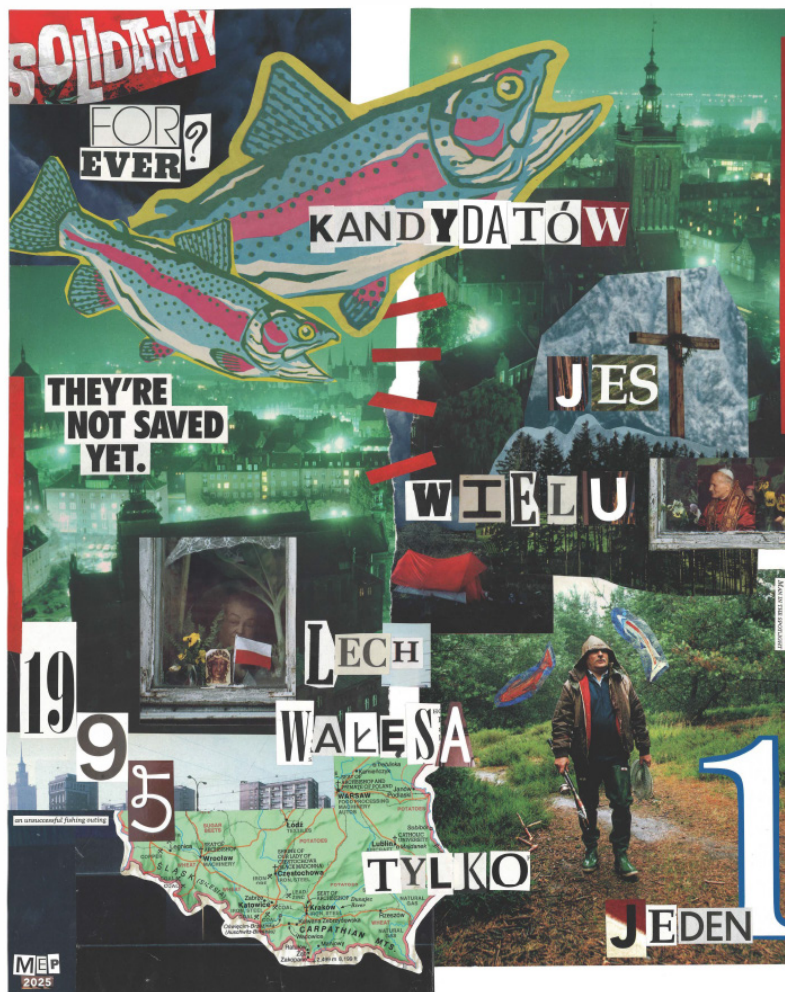


Fisher of Men

by Margot Elena Pullen



Fisher of Men (2025) is a 15"×20" collage on paper. It is primarily put together from a 1988 *National Geographic* magazine, a Democratic Socialists of America brochure, and alt-weekly newspapers.

In 1980, striking workers on Poland's Baltic coast won the right to form an independent trade union, *Solidarność*. With Lech Wałęsa, a shipyard electrician, at its helm, *Solidarność* developed an innovative plan for worker control of production before the communist government imposed martial law in 1981. While the union played a key role in the country's transition to democracy, it mostly abandoned its early ideas of democratic, self-managing workplaces. As president from 1990-1995, Wałęsa oversaw Poland's transition to a market-based economy and the privatization of its state-run enterprises.

Fisher of Men explores the absence of *Solidarność* as a significant electoral force in the 1990s, even as its most famous face was leading the country. I took inspiration from Lawrence Goodwyn's history of *Solidarność*, *Breaking the Barrier*, and the "don't panic, organize!" school of fish graphic, where many small fish are able to collectively threaten a much larger fish. The piece features the skylines of Gdańsk and Warsaw, and the slogan from Wałęsa's unsuccessful 1995 presidential campaign: "Kandydatów jest wielu, Lech Wałęsa tylko jeden" (There are many candidates, but only one Lech Wałęsa). Wałęsa himself appears with his fishing gear after an unsuccessful fishing outing. The fish motif and union-organizer-as-fisherman echo Jesus's call to his disciples to become "fishers of men" and reflect the importance of religious imagery to *Solidarność*. Here, "tylko jeden" (only one) represents Wałęsa's isolation in a changing political environment and his use of a union-cultivated public persona in electoral politics. It asks, who gets to individually represent an organization that is definitionally collective? What happens when a democratic, worker-led movement wields power?