

IKONO THEKA

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Introduction

The history of art as a history of exhibitions is an already well-recognised research perspective which allows us to focus on the specificity of artwork constellations as presented to the public in a given cultural situation. This research methodology draws on contemporary interest in galleries' exhibition policies, curatorial strategies and exhibition design techniques. Simultaneously, questions posed as part of the exhibition history fall within the methods of researching the history of art criticism, or the history and aesthetics of reception. The current issue of *Ikonotheke* is devoted to the history of exhibitions in Polish art institutions presenting the works of Polish artists abroad and those organised from the beginning of the 20th century until the first decade of the 21st century. Inspiration for this theme came from the research project titled "The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970", which was conducted by the Institute of Art History at the University of Warsaw, in the framework of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities as instituted by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014). The five essays included in this volume were written by members of the research team: Marek Czapelski, Weronika Kobylińska-Bunsch, Iwona Luba, Stanisław Welbel and Karolina Zychowicz. One of the subjects of their analysis was the chronology of the Central Bureau's exhibitions as a reflection of the institution's policy. The history of exhibitions can also be considered as a point of departure for redefining the geography of Polish art history and the art geography of the whole region, taking into account its local significance as well as the political circumstances of international cultural exchange.

The volume opens with two essays on design and architecture exhibitions. Katarzyna Adamska discusses early 20th-century apartment interiors as presented in two exhibitions of the Polish Applied Art Society (1902 and 1908) in the building of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (currently known as the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art). Marek Czapelski's essay brings us back to the same gallery but moves us in time. After World War II, the Zachęta building became the site of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions. One of its first initiatives was to organise two celebrated exhibitions: the First National Exposition of Architectural Design (1951) and the First General

Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland (1953). The next three essays reveal some institutional and political contexts of international exhibitions in late-1940s and 1950s Poland. Karolina Zychowicz summarises her research on the archives of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, which was active in the years 1950–1956 and responsible for organising over one hundred presentations of international art in Poland. Petra Skarupsky focuses on the cultural consequences of the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance that was signed by Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1947, while Stanisław Welbel investigates the political aspects of Käthe Kollwitz's and Otto Nagel's exhibitions that were presented in Poland in the first half of the 1950s.

We would also like to present to our readers research studies on exhibitions of Polish art travelling abroad in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Iwona Luba discusses four presentations of avant-garde work by Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro which were organised in the years 1956–1957 in the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibition, at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw, Galerie Raymond Creuze and the Denise René Gallery in Paris. Konrad Niemira reveals some of the political contexts of an unprecedented event in Polish post-war artistic life, i.e. of the *15 Polish Painters* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1961). The history of exhibition encompasses an interest in the strategies of presenting diverse art media. Two texts included in the current issue of *Ikonotheke* are devoted to the medium of photography. Weronika Kobylińska-Bunsch discovers the return of Pictorialism, which was a movement in fine-art photography of the late 19th century in Polish post-war exhibitions. Kamila Leśniak investigates some aspects of the celebrated photographic exhibition *The Family of Man* that was initially presented in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and travelling until the year 1962 to numerous countries in the West, the Far East and to the Eastern bloc. Katarzyna Matul's essay examines the aesthetic and institutional status of the poster, which was originally an advertising medium that became a museum exhibit. Two Polish exhibitions – *Spring Salon* (1946) and *Sculpture in the Garden* (1957) – delineate the scope of Anna Maria Leśniewska's research interest in the medium of sculpture and the strategies of its presentation.

Sketched in the current volume of *Ikonotheke*, the history of exhibitions also addresses the issue of how the "canon" of post-war Polish (and world) art was shaped over time. Krzysztof Kościuczuk examines two exhibitions, *Voir et Concevoir* and *Critics' Picks*, which accompanied the 11th Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) that was organised in the People's Republic of Poland in 1975. The volume closes with Agata Jakubowska's view on the first Polish exhibitions of women's art that were organised in 1978 and the cycles curated by the contemporary Polish artist Izabella Gustowska which fall within the modern phenomenon of collective exhibitions embracing works by female artists.

Gabriela Świtek

Katarzyna Adamska

An Apartment as a National Issue: On the Exhibitions of the Polish Applied Art Society at the Zachęta Gallery in 1902 and 1908

The Polish Applied Art Society (Towarzystwo Polska Sztuka Stosowana; henceforward: TPSS), founded in Cracow in 1901, began its activity by diagnosing a crisis in culture. We live in hideous boxes, our tastes have become pretentious, we are enfeebled – they wrote. The lack of ease in expression, which is so characteristic of the modern human, testifies to a debilitation of our will and our capability for self-determination. Since the greatest influence on personal development may be attributed to everyday surroundings, any reform ought to begin with changes in the living space. One of the co-founders of the Society, Jerzy Warchałowski, offered the following advice:

Let us burn or discard all the eyesores and the superfluous, useless furnishings in which we live; all those tacky folding screens, stools, lampshades, coverings, shelves full of knick-knacks, fripperies, plush cords, undusted festoons, counterfeit Louis- and Empire-style pieces, made-up habits, silly fads and pretentious trinkets. Who cannot do otherwise should make do with pinewood furniture, but made according to personal needs and comforts, in line with personal thought and will. May people of moderate means no longer emulate lords of the land or clothe themselves in imitations of royal styles, but create an honest, artistic environment out of their own circumstances and preferences.¹

How, then, should people shape the space around them and distinguish authentic needs from artificially imposed fashions? The solutions put forward by the TPSS were to justify consumer choices in the national vein. The Society intended to offer advice on how to make purchases in order not to diminish the value of identity. In that period of European history, the language of economy became one of the means for describing the subjectiveness of the developing nations. The market – which is still believed to reflect the most

1 J. Warchałowski, "Polska sztuka stosowana" [Polish applied art], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1908, no. 6, p. 106.

“natural” collective needs – appeared to testify to their tastes and desires, their imagined community of will. Stanisław Witkiewicz, who analysed the same issues that the TPSS did, could therefore prove the organic connection between the Zakopane style and the needs of the nation simply by stating that from the very beginning the demand for Zakopane-style items exceeded the supply.² Thus, the matter of using local design in applied art appears to be related to the development of an international economy, the challenge of competition and the search for expressing identity within this framework.

The two exhibitions organised by the TPSS at the Zachęta Gallery in the first decade of the 20th century focused on these very issues. Interestingly, each of them was designed with very different methods of exhibit presentation. A comparison between the two serves as an illustration of the changes in the perception of living space, reception practices and their connection to commercialism. In this context, the present article shall discuss the layout of the exhibitions and the critical categories that were prevalent in the related press reviews.

Assemblages and dioramas of domesticity

The TPSS exhibition opened at the Zachęta in 1902 was dominated by “assemblages of isolated objects”³ – a phrase used by Richard Etlin in his description of the exhibition in Turin that was organised in that same year. The Italian exhibition juxtaposed two types of presentational “rhetoric”, i.e. that of museum spaces and that of commerce. The former used traditional means such as display cases, whereas the latter lured visitors with carefully arranged interiors – “dioramas of domesticity”.⁴ The same principle is visible in the differences between the two TPSS exhibitions which constitute the topic of the present analysis. The exhibition space at the Zachęta in 1902 did indeed feature a number of niches for displaying furniture, yet these were designed to be viewed by a motionless visitor standing as if in front of a painting. Mieczysław Limanowski, who offered a critical opinion of the exhibition, took note of this impression: “spoon holders were treated as daubs of substance and nailed to Buczacz tapestries (nonsense)”.⁵ One of the niches was filled with a regular composition of papercuts and fabrics placed against a dark, uniformly-coloured

2 S. Witkiewicz, “Styl zakopiański – pokój jadalny” [The Zakopane style – dining room], in: S. Witkiewicz, *Wybór pism estetycznych* [Selected texts on aesthetics], ed. J. Tarnowski, Cracow, 2009, p. 263.

3 R. A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture (1890–1940)*, London, 1990, p. 29.

4 M. O’Neill, “Rhetorics of Display: Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau at the Turin Exhibition of 1902”, *Journal of Design History*, 2007, no. 3, pp. 210–213.

5 M. Limanowski, “Zakopane na I wystawie TPSS” [Zakopane at the 1st TPSS exhibition], *Przegląd Zakopiański*, 1902, no. 7, p. 66.



Fig. 1. Niche with exhibits from the “Folk art and artefacts of wooden architecture” section at the TPSS exhibition at Zachęta in 1902, photo by Łukasz Dobrzański, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/5

background (Fig. 1). Numerous specimens of similar items were placed next to one another; pieces of furniture were often arranged in a row, facing the viewer (Fig. 2). The surface of the furniture was also used as a display space for an array of unrelated items – the exposition was composed of intricate compositions of exhibits rather than models of specific rooms (Fig. 3). The underlying idea was to arrive at a symmetrical, aesthetically deliberate layout that reduced the presented items to their visual form. The very same principle was applied during the Exhibition of Industrially Applied Art that was organised in Warsaw in 1881⁶ and then twenty years later in the design of the booths of furniture manufacturers displaying their products at the international exhibition in Glasgow (Fig. 4).

By 1908, however, the TPSS was no longer the same organisation that had designed the first exhibition at the Zachęta. The activity of its members was

6 *Album dzieł sztuki zastosowanej do przemysłu z wystawy urządzonej przez Muzeum Przemysłu i Rolnictwa w Warszawie 1881 roku* [Album of artworks applied in the industry from the exhibition at the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in Warsaw, 1881], Warsaw, 1883, Fig. 96.



Fig. 2. “Folk art and artefacts of wooden architecture” section at the TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta in 1902, photo by Łukasz Dobrzański, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/1



Fig. 3. Niche with exhibits from the “Folk art and artefacts of wooden architecture” section at the TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta in 1902, photo by Łukasz Dobrzański, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/4



Fig. 4. Stand of James Campbell & Co. at the Glasgow International Exhibition in 1901, http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/images/century/bh12a26_283.jpg [accessed 30 November 2015]

becoming increasingly specialised – most of them were experts in applied art and not artists dabbling in the field in order to broaden the array of means of artistic expression. The organisation also underwent some personnel changes. Włodzimierz Tetmajer, for instance, was among the Society's founders and had helped design the first exhibition in 1902 alongside Jerzy Warchałowski, yet by 1909 relations between the two had become antagonistic enough to involve a duel.⁷ The authority of established specialists in applied art and honorary members of the TPSS also began to fade. Wyspiański died in 1907 and one year later the ailing Stanisław Witkiewicz left for Lovran. In the meantime, Jerzy Warchałowski introduced and promoted new experts, e.g. architects from the circles of the Werkbund that had been established in 1907. When Warchałowski became the editor of *Architekt*, the periodical started to feature

⁷ The conflict arose from a disagreement about the historical landmarks of Cracow. No blood was spilt in the confrontation. See "Estetyczna wojna" [Aesthetic war], *Nowiny*, 27 October 1909.

a growing number of citations from Paul Schultze-Naumburg, an active member of the *Heimatschutz* movement. In 1909 the Technical and Industrial Museum in Cracow published a Polish-language version of *Kunstgewerbe und Architektur* by Hermann Muthesius, who was a reformer of artisan education in Germany and a proponent of the revival of arts and crafts. The translation was the work of the president of the TPSS.

The first exhibition organised at the Zachęta by the TPSS could be regarded as a meeting of two conflicting sides (Warsaw was stereotypically perceived as rational and commerce-oriented while Cracow was viewed as the “cradle of Polish national identity”), yet in 1908 the division was no longer as striking. Some members of the TPSS, such as Edward Trojanowski, Karol Tichy and Józef Czajkowski, were working at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw at the time. The emphasis on utilitarian properties, craftsmanship and the social significance of art in the programme of the Academy may, in turn, be attributed to the influence of Muthesius’s views as expressed in his publication.⁸ Thus the Society had a lasting impact on artistic circles in Warsaw, and this time Warsaw was not following the lead of Cracow but shaping its own culture of habitation.

One of the symptoms of fundamental changes in the perception of architecture that Muthesius had mentioned in his book was a new formula of displaying items that was employed, for example, at the exhibitions in Darmstadt in 1904 and in Dresden in 1906. The focus of the exposition lay not in specific exhibits but in comprehensively designed interiors. These were “exhibitions of houses, not stools, sideboards, cushions and so on”,⁹ which served as an illustration to the groundbreaking conclusion that architecture is an art related to space. The TPSS also rejected the simple perception of an exhibition as a display of exhibits. The exhibition in 1908 focused on categories of living space and interior (replacing that of style and ornament). In order to emphasise the relations between aesthetics, function and the material of which a given item was made, the exhibits were placed as if in an open-air museum, i.e. in their actual, natural surroundings (as opposed to an abstracted museum space). The ceilings in the halls on the upper floors of the Zachęta Gallery were deliberately lowered and the rooms themselves were divided into smaller interiors in which spaces of an apartment were arranged.

In the early 20th century such “natural habitats” were an increasingly frequent presence at various exhibitions. The so-called *interieurs* became an indispensable feature of ethnographic exhibitions. Dioramas were also included in natural history museums, although initially these featured animals from very different geographical environments. The TPSS already had some experience

8 A. Demska, A. Frąckiewicz, „Sztuka stosowana w Szkole Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie w latach 1904–1939”, in: *W kręgu sztuki przedmiotu. Studia ofiarowane profesor Irenie Huml przez przyjaciół, kolegów i uczniów*, ed. by Maria Dłutek, Warsaw, 2011, pp. 291–292.

9 H. Muthesius, *Kunstgewerbe und Architektur*, Jena, 1907, pp. 19–20.



Fig. 5. Dining room of Stefan Dziewulski and Antonina Maria Dziewulska née Natanson, designed by Ludwik Wojtyczko, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/16

in designing such an installation, as some of its members were involved in the preparation of “a Cracow dwelling, almost a room furnished as an *interieur*, and exceedingly handsome”¹⁰ at the National Museum in Cracow.

With their second exhibition, the TPSS spared no effort to maintain the illusion of domesticity, caring about such details as window curtains, potted plants on windowsills, food on the table (Fig. 5) and papers scattered about on shelves. One aspect that proved to work in favour of the organisers was the anachronistic architecture of the Zachęta building, whose interior is lit mainly by light coming in through windows in the side walls – Warchałowski suggested that overhead lighting should be avoided at exhibitions of furniture as it ruins the mood of domesticity.¹¹ Searching for measures to reinforce the impression of “cosiness”, the TPSS could also draw from the long tradition of German *Wohnstuben*, which was one of the more popular elements of arts and crafts exhibitions since the one in Munich in 1876. The chief designer involved in the preparation of this exhibition was Gabriel von Seidl, who was also the author of the German chamber at the Turin fair. Stefan Muthesius noted that these exhibitions were meant to present not works of art but entire lifestyles; visitors did not come there looking for historical knowledge but for sensual impressions and immersion in a distinct

10 “Z Muzeum Narodowego” [From the National Museum], *Czas*, 1903, no. 294 (evening edition), p. 1.

11 J. Warchałowski, *Wnętrza i meble* [Interiors and furnishings], Cracow, 1920, pp. 5–6.

atmosphere related to a given model of living expressing the culture of their forebears.¹² It may be argued that the above-mentioned changes in exhibition design indicate the development of a phenomenon that Jonathan Crary labelled as “a model of the human subject in which perception is no longer conceived in terms of the classical model of acquiring knowledge but is instead synonymous with the possibilities of motor activity”.¹³

The assemblage-like arrangement of items at the 1902 exhibition offered no spatial or tactile experience to the visitor, prompted no questions regarding the functionality of the pieces and did not encourage him to try them out to see if they were comfortable. And although the exhibits presented by the TPSS in 1908 could not be touched, their spatial arrangement created the impression of tangibility and evoked sensations that the audience knew from elsewhere. Corroboration for this assumption may be found in press reviews, the analysis of which facilitates the identification of a fundamental change in the parlance of design criticism. In 1902 the language was dominated by categories used to describe representational art, in line with views reinforced by the profound influence of such personages as Rudolf von Eitelberger, the director of the Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna. The quality of the line and colour of artistic craft was meant to teach aesthetics and to constitute a gateway to higher art.¹⁴ At the end of the first decade of the 20th century this approach was overshadowed by the increasingly prominent tendency to ascribe moral value to aesthetic choices. In accordance with the burgher principle of *mehr sein als scheinen* (more substance than semblance), the tradition of architectural historicism was denounced as “parvenu deceit”,¹⁵ while the authenticity of a given lifestyle became the sought quality. New display methods, postulating a deeper involvement of the audience, were introduced to serve that purpose. The following sections of this article shall illustrate this on the basis of press

12 S. Muthesius, “The ‘altdeutsche Zimmer’, or Cosiness in Plain Pine: An 1870s Munich Contribution to the Definition of Interior Design”, *Journal of Design History*, 2003, no. 4, pp. 269–290.

13 J. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, Cambridge MA, 2001, p. 352.

14 The relevant discussion between Zenon Przesmycki and Eligiusz Niewiadomski, held in the context of the 1902 exhibition by the TPSS, was described by Irena Huml in her work entitled “Zachęta eksponuje sztukę stosowaną (wokół wystawy 1902 roku)” [The Zachęta exhibits applied art (on the 1902 exhibition)], in: *Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych. Materiały z sesji* [Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts: Session materials], ed. by J. Sosnowska, Warsaw, 1993, pp. 59–66. See also M. Rampley, “Design Reform in the Habsburg Empire: Technology, Aesthetics and Ideology”, *Journal of Design Reform*, 2010, no. 3, pp. 249–250.

15 G. Bandmann, “Der Wandel der Materialbewertung in der Kunsttheorie des 19. Jahrhunderts”, in: *Beiträge zur Theorie der Künste im 19. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. von H. Koopmann, J. A. Schmoll gen. Eisenwerth, Frankfurt am Main, 1971, p. 133. Cf. T. Nipperdey, “War die Wilhelminische Gesellschaft eine Untertanen-Gesellschaft?”, in: idem, *Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte*, Munich, 1986, p. 174.

materials pertaining to both exhibitions and shall present the changes in the context of early 20th-century views on methods of influencing the consumer.

1902: *pêle-mêle*

The second exhibition by the TPSS, opened at the Zachęta Gallery on 30 September 1902, may be described as a fiasco. Its reviewers noted the paramount importance of the development of applied art yet considered the exposition unsatisfactory. This was due to the fact that TPSS members and the intended audience represented two different approaches in terms of the function of exhibitions and the favoured critical categories. Organising an event of this type at a time when controversies surrounding the Zakopane style had not yet abated must have been an unrewarding task. Stanisław Witkiewicz himself condemned the enterprise as undermining the significance of the Zakopane style;¹⁶ another of its champions, the already mentioned Mieczysław Limanowski, became involved in a debate with Jerzy Warchałowski that was published in *Przegląd Zakopiański*. The debate focused on the issue of the first TPSS exhibition that had been organised at the National Museum in Cracow – the very same set of exhibits, with minor changes, was later presented at the Zachęta. Limanowski claimed that “the impact of the only valuable items presented at this exhibition, namely those from Zakopane, was much belittled”.¹⁷

On the other hand, an even more significant number of reviewers stated that the Zakopane-style exhibits were overrepresented at the exhibition which, in their estimation, suggested a biased and simplified view of folk arts and crafts. Some even claimed that the entire exhibition was devoted to art “from the Tatra regions”.¹⁸ This opinion cannot be regarded as fully accurate, since the list of exhibits indicates that items from the Podhale region constituted ca. 17% of all objects on display and that the TPSS attempted to present a relatively diverse image of “indigenous” art. The exhibition featured items from the entire Kingdom of Poland and the regions under Austrian rule. The catalogue mentions, for instance, the vicinity of Cracow, the Kuiavia and Kurpie regions, Łowicz, Sieradz, effectively all governorates from Kielce to Vilnius, but also Upper Silesia, Austrian Silesia and the Duchy of Teschen. This diversity reflected the dense network of ethnographic collections (both institutional and private¹⁹)

16 “The name of the Zakopane style was removed from the catalogues of the exhibition by the Polish Applied Art Society and replaced with the label ‘contemporary efforts’, which instantly reduced our entire oeuvre to floundering, fruitless efforts [...]”, S. Witkiewicz, op. cit., p. 264.

17 M. Limanowski, op. cit., p. 66.

18 *Kurier Poranny*, 1902, no. 272, p. 1.

19 The owners of all exhibits were carefully listed in the catalogue, see *Katalog II-ej wystawy krakowskiego Towarzystwa Sztuki Stosowanej* [Catalogue of the 2nd TPSS exhibition], Warsaw, 1902.

that existed at that period, even though the organisers of the exhibition made no attempt to explain the lack of items from lands under Prussian administration.

The heterogeneity of the exhibits made it more difficult for the audience to assess the content of the exposition. Confusion surrounded the exhibition; opinions varied even as to the number of sections into which it was divided. Press reviewers expressed uncertainty regarding the primary subject of the exhibition – was it devoted to history, ethnography, the Zakopane style, national styles or arts and crafts? The weekly *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza* was asking whether “this is supposed to be an exhibition of ethnographic material, bringing together items produced in the past (Slutsk sashes) or at present [...] among common people? Or is it a general arts and crafts exhibition of items in the indigenous style [...]”.²⁰ The TPSS assembled exhibits matching all of these categories. A substantial portion of the exhibition was taken up by *kontusz* sashes, whose connection to the multitude of exhibited examples of folk arts and crafts remained unclear to the visitors. The above-mentioned folk items, in turn, included Easter eggs, household objects and garments, but also photographs of wooden architecture (this section took up nearly 60% of the exhibition). The section labelled as “Contemporary Efforts”, in turn, was much smaller than expected. Among other exhibits, it included a desk by Wojciech Brzega, a Sèvres porcelain tea set designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz, the famous model of the Pod Jedłami villa rejected from the Galician pavilion at the Paris fair in 1900, but also less known designs by Józef Witkiewicz promoting the style of Kuiavia and Masuria,²¹ as well as pieces of furniture designed by the TPSS members. In her article for *Bluszcz*, Zofia Seidlerowa noted that the title of the exhibition was therefore inaccurate:

Although the Cracow Society elected to call the exhibition they organised very generally as “applied arts”, I shall be bold enough to offer a word of correction. The section of the exhibition devoted to applied arts is actually exceedingly modest, while the majority of the items amassed by the Cracow Society is composed of highly valuable ethnographic material, works of folk art and examples of Polish wooden architecture.²²

What is more, the bilingual catalogue of the exhibition contained no explanatory notes pertaining to the items – a flaw that was noticed by Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz.²³ The publication consisted of a rather unwieldy list of numbered exhibits adorned with several vignette frames inspired by folk

20 Rzemieślnik, “Wystawa sztuki stosowanej w Warszawie” [The exhibition of applied art in Warsaw], *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza*, 1902, no. 38, p. 299.

21 See “Nowy styl swojski. Rozmowa z p. Józefem Witkiewiczem” [The new native style. A conversation with Józef Witkiewicz], *Życie i Sztuka*, 1902, no. 41, pp. 424–425.

22 Z. Seidlerowa, “Wystawa Krakowskiego Towarzystwa sztuki stosowanej” [The exhibition of the Cracow society of applied art], *Bluszcz*, 1902, no. 43, p. 512.

23 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, “Nasza sztuka stosowana” [Our applied art], *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1902, no. 45, p. 556.

ornamentation.²⁴ Despite the criticism, the items were not listed in an entirely random order but according to the region of origin – the division was not, however, marked in the catalogue layout. In her review for *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz wrote:

Published with much attention to external form, the catalogue nevertheless fails to fulfil its function, which is to make it easier for visitors to regard the items on display. The catalogue does not divide the exhibits into specific groups, but assigns them ordinal numbers in an entirely random fashion. At the exhibition itself visitors also need to devote much time and attention in order to arrive at some necessary logical pattern of the display.²⁵

The exhibition did not conform to the expository model the audience came to expect, as its organisation did not resemble that of museum exhibitions – the items were said to be “mixed up *pêle-mêle*”.²⁶ This was not conducive to isolating a “logical pattern” accordant with what was known about styles at that time, i.e. observing supra-regional similarities in ornamentation that were intended to prove the historical uniformity of Polish art. Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, for instance, found the decorative motifs from Zakopane interestingly similar to those from Samogitia, while Zofia Seidlerowa noted the resemblance between Kurpian and Silesian art. Both reviewers agreed, however, that the chaotic layout of the exhibition hindered an analysis of this kind. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz was also interested in comparing the degree to which the folk motifs were present in the works of artists, yet the spatial arrangement of the exhibits did not emphasise that either. In some sections of the exposition, items from various regions were grouped according to their function – “spoon to spoon, lace to lace, chest to chest”,²⁷ as Limanowski ironically observed (Fig. 3). In his view, such a layout erased all traces of the connection between the Zakopane style and art from the Podhale region. He proposed that specimens of highlander arts and crafts be displayed next to the designs by Witkiewicz and alongside figures from Władysław Matlakowski’s publication in order to explain the “logic behind the Zakopane style”.²⁸

Thus, the disputes regarding the 1902 exhibition revolved primarily around the spatial arrangement of the items, as it was not in line with established views on the history of the Zakopane style and did not offer favourable

24 According to a note in *Kurier Warszawski*, 1902, no. 270, p. 4, the catalogue was accompanied by more than ten illustrations, yet I was unable to corroborate this information.

25 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, op. cit., p. 556.

26 Albertus, “Wystawa sztuki stosowanej” [The exhibition of applied art], *Życie i Sztuka*, 1902, no. 43, pp. 430–431.

27 M. Limanowski, op. cit., p. 66.

28 M. Limanowski, “O Zakopane na I wystawie Tow. Polskiej Sztuki Stos. w Krakowie” [Zakopane at the 1st exhibition of the Polish Applied Art Society in Cracow], *Przegląd Zakopiański*, 1902, no. 10, p. 96.

conditions for systematising ethnographical knowledge. Jerzy Warchałowski addressed these issues and refuted Limanowski's accusations in *Przegląd Zakopiański*:

In principle, the exhibition was not intended to [...] tutor artists, but to "bedazzle" them with fresh and new material which, if it struck a chord within them, must have held something of their own bloodline [...]. As far as visitors are concerned, that first exhibition aimed to inspire them to provide enthusiastic and wholehearted support for our endeavours. Thus, a strictly geographical arrangement of the items would not have fulfilled that aim.²⁹

The TPSS wished to arrive at an expositional model which would, first and foremost, amplify the emotional and aesthetic impact of the exhibits. Warchałowski explained that, educational as it may have been, he could not display sketches next to the chests that had inspired them, as this would diminish the expressive power of the artistic designs. In his estimation, works on paper paled in juxtaposition with full-dimensional objects which, in turn, would not look favourable under large-scale drawings. Moreover, the designers of the exhibition sought to break away from the method of creation that was prevalent in native applied arts which, in turn, did not necessarily have to be based on "the common denominator in style" or on superficial copying of decorative motifs. Defending the TPSS exhibition, Edward Trojanowski added that the "character lies in the shape, never in *leluja* motifs or hearts glued to the surface of teacups".³⁰ Indigenouness was to be sought in the manner of emotional influence as effected by basic artistic means and not by simple imitation of folk decorative patterns.³¹

By experimenting – still ineptly – with methods of exposition, the TPSS wished to avoid ingrained habits of perception, i.e. comparative and historical analysis of ornaments. Although still prevalent in popularising articles published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, this approach was already under criticism based on Gottfried Semper's theory of the origins of style.³² Early attempts at defining

29 J. Warchałowski, "Alarm z powodu I wystawy TPSS w Krakowie" [The upheaval regarding the 1st TPSS exhibition in Cracow], *Przegląd Zakopiański*, 1902, no. 9, pp. 83–84.

30 E. Trojanowski, "Pierwsza wystawa Towarzystwa Polska Sztuka Stosowana" [The first exhibition of the Polish Applied Art Society], *Czas*, 1902, no. 25 (evening edition), p. 1.

31 This paradigm shift in the theory of architecture and applied arts was analysed in a slightly different context by Marta Leśniakowska, "Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz (1881–1958) i styl zakopiański" [Jan Koszczyc Witkiewicz (1881–1958) and the Zakopane style], in: *Stanisław Witkiewicz. Człowiek – artysta – myśliciel* [Stanisław Witkiewicz: the man – the artist – the thinker], ed. Z. Moździerz, Zakopane, 1997.

32 A meaningful example may be found in the article entitled "Źródła stylu zakopiańskiego" [Sources of the Zakopane style] by the painter Julian Maszyński, published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1901, no. 8, pp. 145–146. Maszyński noted the following: "Upon comparing the similarities between the Zakopane style with these 17th-century relics [from Lublin], I hypothesised that at that time the style was widespread in the

their collective standpoint as undertaken by the TPSS members referred to the categories introduced by Semper, thus constituting the first steps in the realm of discourse of functionalism and truth to materials. In their view the character of an object ought to be associated not with the ornamentation which covers it but with its shape and the strength of expression stemming from the method of processing the material and adjusting the form to the substance, which, in turn, was to be emphasised by juxtaposing items with a similar function. The unsuccessful exhibition was therefore an attempt at finding ways of display that would amplify this emotional effect and lead to new ways of describing applied arts.

1908: where are the roosters?

In accordance with the new expectations, the audience of the 1908 exhibition was much more impressed by the charming rooms of the apartments than by pieces made by Józef Mehoffer and examples of traditionally displayed arts and crafts, i.e. designs of polychrome ornaments and stained glass, posters, tapestries, woodcuts, book covers and illustrations, but also works of the Warsaw School of Photography.³³ It was repeatedly emphasised that the rooms arranged in the exhibition space had “a pleasant, residential air”.³⁴ Interestingly, the exposition recreated actual interiors from the apartments of well-known personages.³⁵ Particularly strong emotions were inspired by Władysław Reymont’s study designed by Edward Trojanowski – *Lato* was then being published in instalments in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*. The exhibition showcased one more interior from Reymont’s Warsaw home, namely the dining room by Józef Czajkowski. The same designer was the author of the hall from the apartment of the President of Cracow, also presented at the Zachęta. Other works from Cracow included furniture owned by Tadeusz Żeleński and his

entire country and that its remnants survived only in places where they were not ousted by the drive towards modernity, new styles and new fashions”. It was such opinions that Marian Wawrzeniecki responded to by clarifying that Zakopane was not a cultural enclave that had engaged in any international trade, arguing that the striking similarities in regional folk ornamentation stem from the methods of processing wood and the limited spectrum of effects that could be produced with the appropriate tools. See “Wyjaśnienie w sprawie stylu zwanego zakopiańskim” [A word of clarification regarding the so-called Zakopane style], *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1902, no. 35, pp. 435–437.

33 See the catalogue *Wystawa Krakowskiego Towarzystwa „Polska Sztuka Stosowana”*, Warsaw, 1908.

34 “Ze sztuki” [On art], *Kurier Warszawski*, 1908, no. 32, pp. 4–5.

35 The 1902 exhibition also featured this element – furniture from the study of Karol Potkański, item 257, in: *Katalog II-ej wystawy krakowskiego Towarzystwa Sztuki Stosowanej*, op. cit., p. 37.

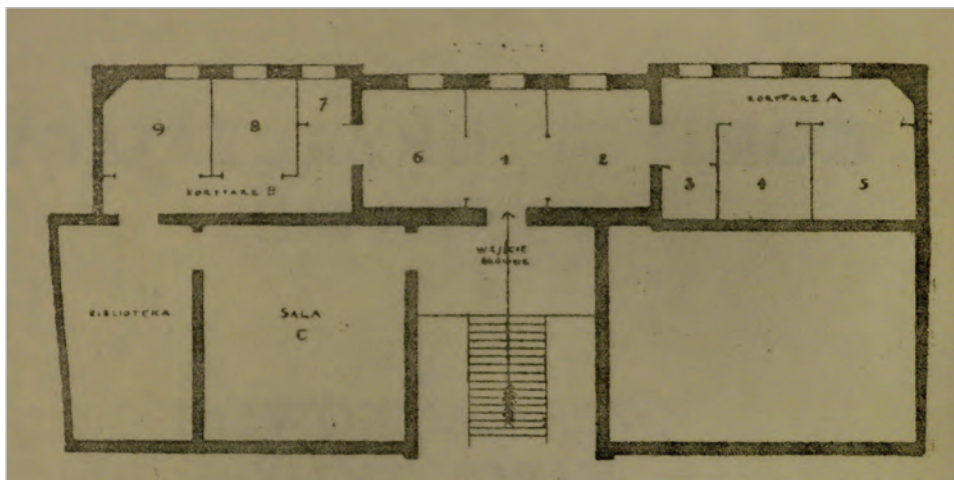


Fig. 6. Floor plan of the 1908 TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta, after: *Wystawa Krakowskiego Towarzystwa „Polska Sztuka Stosowana”*, Warsaw, 1908, p. 5

Key:

1. Antechamber, designed by Karol Tichy
 2. Władysław Reymont's study, designed by Edward Trojanowski
 3. Fragment of a room in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Żeleński, designed by Stanisław Wyspiański
 4. Dining room of Mr. and Mrs. Dziewulski, designed by Ludwik Wojtyczko
 5. Bedroom of Mrs. Leon Papieski, designed by Edward Trojanowski
 6. Antechamber from the apartment of the President of Cracow, designed by Józef Czajkowski
 7. Fragment of the living room of Mr. and Mrs. Żeleński, designed by Stanisław Wyspiański
 8. Władysław Reymont's dining room, designed by Józef Czajkowski
 9. Room with decorative works by Józef Mehoffer
- Corridors A and B displaying "miscellaneous items"
 Room C: prints and decorative designs

wife Zofia, while the Warsaw interiors were represented by a dining room from the home of Stefan Dziewulski and Antonina Maria née Natanson, designed by Ludwik Wojtyczko, and the bedroom of Maria Papieska née Berent, outlined by Edward Trojanowski (exhibition plan: Fig. 6).

Jerzy Warchałowski speculated that visitors coming to the Zachęta would ask in astonishment "Where are the roosters?",³⁶ thus expecting to see a typical exhibition of folk ornamentation, while the "quotational" method of drawing inspiration, typical of national styles, had already been abandoned; for example, the desk designed by Wojciech Brzega (Fig. 7, on the right) presented at the exhibition in 1902 combined the constructional elements of many different types of objects from the Zakopane region: the legs were modelled after those of a decorative table (Fig. 3), whereas the top section

³⁶ J. Warchałowski, "Polska sztuka stosowana" [Polish applied art], op. cit.



Fig. 7. “Contemporary Efforts” section at the 1902 TPSS exhibition at the Zachęta, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/3

resembled kitchen appliances such as shelves and spoon holders. In 1908 such an approach was already deemed unacceptable. The table designed by Edward Trojanowski for Reymont’s apartment (Fig. 4) evoked equally clear associations with Zakopane, yet the effect was achieved only by the use of characteristic notches which emphasised the features of the material and drew attention to significant elements of the construction – anticipating the crystal shapes of “native” *art déco*.

The audience of the second TPSS exhibition spoke using the same language as that of the members of the Society; the categories of function and truth to materials had already become familiar to a more general public. Reviewers commented on both the harmony of colour and proportions (in line with traditional formal analysis) and on the logic of construction or the choice of material; thus, pieces of furniture were still described by means of terms known from analyses of painting and visual arts; this, however, did not prevent the critics from identifying new issues. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, for instance, found Czajkowski’s design of a dining room “rather unfortunate” in terms of colour, yet interesting in the “linework”. In her description of Papińska’s bedroom (Fig. 8), the reviewer noted that the decoration did not match the material used (“motifs borrowed from some ancient works of art from Babylon or



Fig. 8. Bedroom of Maria Papieska née Berent (fragment), designed by Edward Trojanowski, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/14

Assyria, with no consideration for the difference in material”) and suggested that the ornaments should be adjusted to fit “utilitarian needs”.³⁷

The modernist form of the furniture was no longer contested. In 1902 the scantiness of references to folk art in furniture design by Trojanowski and Tichy was noted with reproach and regarded as proof that this style was not “national” enough. The reviewers of the next exhibition, however, appreciated the fact that the designers had avoided the temptation to copy motifs directly. The new style was recognised as containing Biedermeier, “manorial” inspirations,³⁸ identified, as it would seem, not as a result of an analysis of the form but – as the organisers of the exhibition expected – through “empathising with” and feeling the “atmosphere” of the entire composition. Eligiusz Niewiadomski highly praised the exhibition, writing that the furniture on display evoked “half-forgotten sunny memories of early childhood”

37 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, “Polska sztuka stosowana” [Polish applied art], *Bluszcz*, 1908, no. 9, pp. 92–93.

38 Such associations could be corroborated by comparing photographs from the exhibition and the designs for the manor in Opinogóra as published in the 9th annual publication by the TPSS.

and contained something “of those pleasant times when our grandmothers – then still young and beautiful – sat at the spinet and sang that memorable song about Philo to comely lancers”.³⁹

The review in *Świat* was similar in tone. The rooms at the exhibition supposedly “made one want to stay and live there”.⁴⁰ The audience took pleasure in succumbing to impressions and interpreting the mood evoked by each of the interiors. When looking at Reymont’s study, Adolf Nowaczyński felt “creative serenity and peaceful prosperity”, hypothesising that such furniture transforms a writer from a “flying Dutchman” into a “settled citizen”.⁴¹ Skorobohata-Stankiewicz appreciated the careful planning of the room’s layout, placing herself in the position of its occupant:

The author of *The Peasants* must feel tranquil and serene when surrounded by such unobtrusive harmony of quiet, gentle hues with slightly cold, blueish undertones. The furniture is rather heavy in shape, straight-backed semicircular armchairs, a sober round table and close to it – almost within arm’s reach – two beautifully comfortable book-cases of grey-coloured wood decorated in the Zakopane style. The entire room seems sombre, focused and conducive to intellectual pursuits.⁴²

It must, however, be noted that all remarks on the comfort of furniture or its “bourgeois unseatability” – a phrase used by Nowaczyński in reference to Wyspiański’s furniture – were made on the basis of visual impressions. Inviting as the display space may have seemed, the neatly arranged furniture could not be sat on, as it was protected and closed off by museum lines (Fig. 9). Thus the actual possibility of viewing the exhibits was rather similar at both the TPSS exhibitions. What changed was the repertoire of descriptive categories and the model of exhibiting, which brought to the foreground those features of the items on display that had hitherto remained unnoticed. These attempts at employing notions of a new paradigm illustrate how the logic of construction and functionality became elements of “tectonic” aesthetics.⁴³

39 E. Niewiadomski, “O polskiej sztuce stosowanej i jej przyjęciu w Warszawie” [On Polish applied art and its reception in Warsaw], *Witcz*, 1 May 1908, pp. 364–365.

40 W., “Wystawa krakowskiego Tow. ‘Polska Sztuka Stosowana’” [The exhibition of the Polish Applied Art Society from Cracow], *Świat*, 1908, no. 5, p. 19.

41 A. Nowaczyński, “‘Sztuka stosowana’ w Warszawie” [‘Applied art’ in Warsaw], *Prawda*, 1908, no. 6, p. 70. In fact, Reymont rarely made use of his Warsaw apartment, having spent the first years of the 20th century abroad. His letters and writings contained no reference to the interior presented at the Zachęta, yet it might be surmised that it suited his tastes and needs, as well as his ideas on what the workplace of a proponent of nationalist ideas should look – given the fact that he was said to write clad in a lounging robe from Zakopane. See J. Tabencki, *Reymont w Otwocku*, Otwock, 2005, p. 4.

42 Z. Skorobohata-Stankiewicz, “Polska sztuka stosowana” [Polish applied art], op. cit., p. 92.

43 On debates regarding the relation between function and style in modernism, see M. Bushart, *Adolf Behne, Walter Gropius und die Stildebatte*, in: *Nation, Style, Modernism*,



Fig. 9. Władysław Reymont's study, designed by Edward Trojanowski, Cracow, Main Library of the Academy of Fine Arts, Print Room, signature 13343/15

The audience gradually learnt to notice and label them and to identify them – to use contemporaneous expressions – with rationality, robustness, energy, hygiene, boldness, fraternity or vitality. This created a particular set of associations for constructional clarity and simplicity of form, which shaped what Zofia Skorobohata-Stankiewicz labelled as “the ethics of decorative arts”.

Schaufenster-Qualität

The organisation of the first exhibition by the TPSS at the Zachęta was affected by animosities between Warsaw and Cracow, the analysis of which may perhaps be useful in presenting a broader context for contemporaneous discussions regarding the layout of the exhibitions. The Warsaw periodical *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza* accused the exhibition's organisers of “provincial machinations”; the time for submitting works allegedly amounted to only five days while the

eds. J. Purchla, W. Tegethoff, Cracow–Munich, 2006, pp. 201–220 and F. Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1997, no. 4, pp. 438–451.

criteria of assessment were deemed unclear.⁴⁴ In response to such criticism, *Kurier Poranny* explained that the entries could qualify if “they did not show signs of imitating foreign art”⁴⁵ – in other words, they were judged on the basis of their originality, understood according to the new marketing strategy which was then being introduced in various centres of artistic industry. Jerzy Warchałowski clarified this approach by referring to Muthesius’s view that a recognisable national style translates into economic success.⁴⁶ In practice, the application of academic rules of good taste and the principle of *mimesis* to applied arts led to copying foreign products; domestic art could only compete with those in terms of price. It was therefore deemed advisable to search for aesthetic originality – the reform of artistic and vocational education in Germany as postulated by Muthesius was meant to institutionalise manufacture that would be free of imitation. From then on, a craftsman’s choices were to be inspired not by drawings but by his knowledge of the material.⁴⁷

Such ideals were not propagated during courses at the Warsaw Museum of Crafts and Applied Art that were promoted by *Gazeta Rzemieślnicza*. The periodical’s opinion on the TPSS exhibition most likely came from the representatives of the museum. To them, copying reputable models constituted the basis for the “aesthetic amelioration” of Warsaw’s arts and crafts, which entailed a “philological” knowledge of historical styles that was in line with the positivist philosophy equating good taste with civilisational development. Bolesław Prus had frequently voiced his opinion on applied arts, arguing that the quality of domestic products could be improved through systematisation of knowledge regarding existing styles. He stated that one of the more comprehensive pattern books – for instance *La composition décorative* by Pierre-Henri Mayeux – should be translated into Polish so that people working in the “domain of ornamentation” could answer the needs of the market with full professionalism.⁴⁸

The collection of the Museum of Crafts and Applied Art, which was intended to serve this very purpose, resembled what Warchałowski referred to as *Schreckenskammer*.⁴⁹ The photographs show a repository of knick-knacks representing a wide array of styles from various epochs (Fig. 10). A sleigh decorated with a Neo-Rococo motif stands next to a chair from Zakopane, a cabinet for displaying porcelain vessels, some weaponry and an *all’antica* vase

44 Rzemieślnik, op. cit., p. 299.

45 *Kurier Poranny*, 1902, no. 257, p. 2.

46 J. Warchałowski, *O sztuce stosowanej* [On applied art.], Cracow, 1904, pp. 9–10. Cf. H. Muthesius, op. cit., p. 142.

47 J. V. Maciuika, “Art in the Age of Government Intervention: Hermann Muthesius, Sachlichkeit, and the State, 1897–1907”, *German Studies Review*, 1998, no. 2, pp. 285–308.

48 B. Prus, *Kroniki*, compiled by Z. Szwejkowski, Warsaw, 1964, vol. 13, p. 329.

49 Warchałowski used the term in his criticism of a Lvov exhibition of ecclesiastical art, which was similar in character. J. Warchałowski, “Wystawa kościelna we Lwowie” [Exhibition of ecclesiastical art in Lvov], *Architekt*, 1909, no. 8, p. 140.



Fig. 10. Collection of the Warsaw Museum of Crafts and Applied Art, after: *Dziesięciolecie Muzeum Rzemiosł i Sztuki Stosowanej 1891–1901*, Warsaw, 1902

supported by a female figure. Further in the background one can see small copies of the Venus de Milo and the Farnese Hercules – tools for educating in accordance with classical ideals and thus useless in the search for originality. Warchałowski borrowed the German term denoting a collection of bad examples from the exposition designed by Gustav Edmund Pazaurek for the Landesgewerbemuseum in Stuttgart and modelled after the Chamber of Horrors exhibited at the London Museum of Manufacturers. Pazaurek, a member of the Werkbund, had introduced a classification of kitsch based on principles of Muthesius's tectonic art. Categories such as *Material-Pimpeleien*, *Hochzeitsgeschenke-Kitsch* or *Hurra-Kitsch* (e.g. a stein in the shape of Bismarck's head) were used to stigmatise illogical construction and disregard for the properties of the material or the functionality of the items, and thus to propagate the "sincerity" of expression and rational needs.⁵⁰

Thus, the rather trivial discord between the organisers of the exhibition and the circles of Warsaw's craftsmen may be portrayed against the background of wide-ranging discussions regarding the role of applied arts. The criticism formulated in the parlance of the German *Kunstgewerbe* circles introduced moral considerations into the discussion on the form of the commodities and their

⁵⁰ G. E. Pazaurek, *Geschmacksverirrungen im Kunstgewerbe*, Stuttgart, 1919 (first edition 1909).

manufacture as well as on the methods of exhibiting them. The stakes were high, since the new way of designing interiors – “sincere, with no claptrap, no duplication” – was to lead to the emergence of a “stronger culture”.⁵¹

Jerzy Warchałowski wondered, therefore, how simple designs could compete with a “shop window hung with trinkets”,⁵² which drew the attention of passers-by, with the trivial attractiveness of the hitherto prevailing models of arts and crafts. The primary recipients of applied arts should have no longer been sought among sophisticated gallery-goers, but among the crowds in the street, as they were hungry for novelty and susceptible to marketing tricks. Thus, a movement aimed at the restoration of crafts strove to change the habits of the consumers and to introduce a new style into the realm of commerce. The early years of the 20th century were a period of an intense struggle against *Schaufenster-Qualität*. This term was used by Georg Simmel to indicate the connection between the form of an item and the principles of free-market economics. He associated the appearance of the aesthetic surplus with competition and the prevalence of supply over demand.⁵³ This led to attempts at distinguishing a product from all others by making it more visible via the simplest means available: a more complex form, greater concentration of the ornaments, more vivid hues, etc.

Such practices were apparent in design, leading to the above-mentioned “horrors”, as well as in architecture, at various kinds of exhibitions both domestic and international. A model criticism of these was expressed by Warchałowski in his review of the Exhibition of Industry and Agriculture organised in Częstochowa in 1909. He accused the architects of “non-constructural patterns”, of using motifs associated with brick or stone edifices to wooden ones, of “illogical formwork” and of obscuring the functions of buildings with an unclear form. He also railed at “the aesthetics of advertising” which manifested itself, for instance, in “seas of flags” or constructions such as “the inevitable kiosk made of barrels”.⁵⁴ The same features were mentioned in the debate regarding the aesthetics of shop windows – another topic in which Warchałowski was keenly interested. Commentators advised that displays be arranged in a more tasteful manner, since a cluttered window made even quality goods appear cheap and tacky. “Outlandish” ideas such as building obelisks or pyramids of canned fish or boxes of soap were fiercely criticised; it was argued that such effects may seem impressive to some yet do not conform to the modern tendency towards displaying each item individually by exposing its basic properties. Recounting the progress that the Germans had made

51 J. Warchałowski, “O sztuce stosowanej”, op. cit., p. 106.

52 Ibid., p. 1.

53 G. Simmel, “Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung”, *Die Zeit* (Wien), 25 Juli 1896, p. 60. On Simmel’s impact on the Werkbund, see F. J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War*, New Haven–London, 1996, e.g. pp. 52–54, 64–66.

54 J. Warchałowski, “Z powodu wystawy w Częstochowie” [In reference to the exhibition in Częstochowa], *Architekt*, 1909, no. 10, pp. 179–180.

in this respect, the Berlin correspondent of *Przegląd Tygodniowy* stated that “one should most of all strive for harmony between the form and the character of the items on display. Bolts of cloth used to be arranged in pillars, piles and pyramids, which testified to the skill of the decorator but fell short of demonstrating the use of linen, batiste or velvet”.⁵⁵ Warchałowski summarised his thoughts in this respect by stating that chaos, tumult and gaudiness tire onlookers with too many stimuli and ruin their tastes.⁵⁶

This may be perceived as a twisted reply to Karl Marx’s proposition regarding a “clear and rational” form reflecting the utilitarian aspects of everyday life and supplanting the falseness upon which the fetishism of commodities is based.⁵⁷ The commercial means that had developed in the 19th century were already deemed distasteful, whereas “clarity and systematicity” seemed appealing. These were the new methods of drawing attention, a form of advertising which “beckons the busy passer-by with its siren song, making him stop for a moment”.⁵⁸

A cursory look at the list of owners of the furniture displayed in 1908 at the Zachęta shows that the interiors presented at the exhibition came from the apartments of the intelligentsia, mainly members of the Warsaw elite. The remarkable nature of such a solution becomes apparent when the exposition is compared to the exhibition of Architecture and Interiors in Horticultural Surroundings that was organised in Cracow in 1912. It featured model apartments, perfect examples aimed at various social groups. The exhibition in Zachęta, in turn, offered a glimpse into the house of the burgher, even though limiting access to such interiors belonged to the more important methods of maintaining the social hierarchy. The organisers’ choice of display, infringing on crucial distinctions between the private and the public, was justified by the noble ideal of propagating the national culture of living.

It is therefore possible to isolate the moment in time in which the aesthetics of everyday objects (commodities) began to be associated with a certain set of morals. The dining room in the home of the young Dziewulski⁵⁹ couple or the bedroom of Leon Papieski’s⁶⁰ wife testified to a distinct consumer approach that emerged in early 20th century in connection with the development of the

55 T., “Konkurs wystaw sklepowych” [The shop window contest], *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, 1902, no. 35, p. 432.

56 J. Warchałowski, “Z powodu wystawy...”, op. cit., p. 178.

57 K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 81, quoted after: T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, London, 1988, p. 18.

58 T., “Konkurs wystaw sklepowych”, op. cit., pp. 431–432.

59 Stefan Dziewulski was a lawyer and an economist famous for his patriotic and charitable activity. See *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, vol. 6, pp. 176–177.

60 Papieski was a lawyer and a committee member of the Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts [Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych]. The son of an industrialist from Słuck (*PSB*, vol. 25, pp. 169–171), he legitimised his social status not only by his education and professional work but also by his impeccable taste.

international market and the search for new strategies for fighting off competition. By purchasing products of local interior design, the patriotic intelligentsia wished to support the economic sovereignty of their nation and to portray their reluctance in following fashions in interior design as a question of ethics. Sincerity of expression and originality of style were meant to indicate the autonomy of taste, thus legitimising the sovereignty of the entire nation as possessing a distinct character and preferences. The rational simplicity of construction was a metaphor for non-pretentious mores that were free of the artifice of the upper classes. As Warchałowski observed, “combating artifice” and putting a stop to the mindless tendency to follow fashion would cause consumers – who had acted like mannequins – to regain the strength of will that was lost to modern people who were unable to show boldness in shaping their reality.⁶¹ For this reason, applied art was perceived as the “anvil on which characters are forged”, and new methods of displaying exhibits were to reinforce this influence.

(Translated by Julita Mastalerz)

Abstract

Towarzystwo Polska Sztuka Stosowana (TPSS) organised two exhibitions at the Zachęta Gallery. Their aim was to shape the national culture of living and to propagate ornamental design inspired by indigenous motifs. The 1902 exposition was arranged in accordance with the traditional perception of arts and crafts, which disregarded their function and construction in favour of the external form. New critical categories, borrowed from the language of functionalism and from ideas regarding living space as developed by the German *Kunstgewerbe* circles, induced the members of the TPSS to arrange their 1908 exhibition differently – as fully designed interiors rather than groups of independent items. Similar changes were then observed in the of shop-window design and in commercial expositions. The fact that they were explicated in terms of ethics reveals a combination of consumerism, aesthetics and morality characteristic of the early 20th century.

61 J. Warchałowski, “O sztuce stosowanej”, op. cit., pp. 8–11.

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Towards Socialist Architecture: Architectural Exhibitions at the Zachęta in the Years 1950–1955

The First National Exposition of Architectural Design (Pierwszy Ogólnopolski Pokaz Projektów Architektury, henceforward: OPA, 22 January – 28 February 1951) and the First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland (Pierwsza Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej, henceforward: PWA, 8 March – 22 April 1953) are unquestionably worthy of attention as important elements of the process of implementing Stalinist principles of the organisation of architects' professional lives. The two exhibitions reveal important aspects of Socrealism in Poland: the practice of institutional coercion and arduous attempts at coordinating the postulated modernisation and economic rationalisation of Polish architecture with an ideologically correct image of its history.¹

In June 1949 the National Party Meeting of Architects (Krajowa Partyjna Narada Architektów) initiated the implementation of Socrealism in Poland. It issued a resolution which was soon to become an official document of the Association of Polish Architects (Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, henceforward: SARP) and which announced the nearest future as a period of intensive "enhancement of the ideological level" of all architects, including "academic youth".² This obligatory education was to be accompanied by rigorous promotion of the methods of collective labour. Based on competition and productivity leadership, the collective labour system had recently been introduced among architects and was being implemented at the state design bureaus that had been established in late 1948. Controlling

1 This essay was written in the framework of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities as instituted by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, entitled "The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970", no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014.

2 On the sessions, see W. Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy realizmu socjalistycznego" [Ideology in the architecture of Warsaw in the period of Socialist Realism], *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 1996, vol. 22, pp. 236–238.

and assessing the current output in architectural design, as well as introducing a re-interpretation of Poland's entire architectural heritage which would conform with Soviet models, were to be important elements of this new professional reality.³

The resolution postulated the "enhancement of cooperation [...] through the designers' participation in production meetings at construction sites". This formula is noteworthy, because it signified the mandatory introduction of a strictly production-oriented approach to architecture, thus transplanting to Poland methods of worker management of production units which had been introduced in the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s. Organisational innovations introduced in the course of the following months made the programme more specific.⁴

One of these innovations was the establishment, in the early 1950, of the Committee for the Coordination of Warsaw Design Bureaus (Komitet Koordynacyjny Biur Projektowych Warszawy) – a body that was external to and independent from the existing institutions. Headed by Bohdan Garliński, the Committee essentially took over the initiative concerning the "periodical showing of design projects with their subjection to public assessment in the form of a display".⁵ This meant "a display of ongoing projects not subjected to any quality selection, [...] material taken directly from the architectural drawing boards, but [viewed as] the subject matter for a production meeting".⁶ The term "exhibition" was consistently avoided, because it was reserved for displays which had a full ideological message.

The new organisational model was launched by the Display of the Works of Warsaw Design Bureaus (Pokaz Prac Biur Projektowych Warszawy, 14 May – 1 June 1950, curated by Zenon Buczkowski).⁷ It included a lecture session with programmatic papers and a debate during which, according to a critical opinion issued soon after, "the participants avoided opportunities for self-criticism".⁸ Yet this was only the beginning of the struggle for "Polish Socrealist architecture". This was symbolically underscored by the venue of the show, i.e. the Warsaw University of Technology. On the one hand, this location

3 The text of the resolution: *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną. Materiały z Krajowej Partyjnej Narady Architektów odbytej w dniu 20–21 czerwca 1949 roku w Warszawie* [For Polish Socialist architecture. Materials from the National Party Meeting of Architects on 20–21 June 1949 in Warsaw], Warsaw, 1950, pp. 215–216.

4 *Proizvodstvennye sovesaniâ*, in: *Bol'shaâ sovetskaâ ènciklopediâ*, vol. 34, Moscow, 1955, pp. 637–638; W. Zagorulkin, P. Mieńko, D. Perepełkin, *Stale narady wytwórcze* [Regular production meetings], Warsaw, 1961, pp. 7–8.

5 B. Garliński, *Architektura polska 1950–1951* [Polish architecture 1950–1951], Warsaw, 1953, p. 205.

6 "Pierwszy Ogólnopolski Pokaz Projektów Architektonicznych w Zachęcie" [The First National Exposition of Architectural Design in Zachęta], *Stolica*, 1951, no. 2, p. 8.

7 B. Garliński, op. cit.

8 B. Garliński, *Kolektywna ocena projektów...* [Collective assessment of the designs], p. 3.

assured that students would attend, on the other, it underlined the status of the new architecture as art *in statu nascendi*, i.e. still awaiting the point when its creators would mature and achieve true mastery.⁹

The First National Exposition of Architectural Design (OPA, 1951)

Locating the OPA, the next all-inclusive event, in the Zachęta building was thus a very significant gesture. The grand edifice, completed in 1900, was home to one of Poland's oldest institutions concerned with the organisation of exhibitions; hence it constituted a perfect place for propagandists to accentuate the postulated alliance of architecture and the visual arts. The fact that this exhibition space, unquestionably prestigious and available to a broader audience, had been selected signalled that, in spite of all the reservations, the Coordination Committee was satisfied with the course of the transformations taking place in architecture and that it considered them worthy of being presented to outsiders.

The curator of the show, the outstanding architect Jerzy Hryniewiecki, had undeniable experience in organising exhibitions (he had been, among others, the Chief Architect at the Recovered Territories Exhibition in Wrocław in 1948) and was familiar with matters of construction materials and prefabrication. He could, therefore, be considered a guarantor of the show's attractiveness, as well as an expert in the area of its theoretical leitmotifs; the artistic issues no less than the technological advances and economic concerns regarding architecture and the construction industry.

Hryniewiecki's intent was that the arrangement of the exhibition's interiors convey the atmosphere of a working meeting in an architectural design bureau. The setting included a drawing board on which there stood a model of Warsaw's leading Socrealist enterprise – the residential estate called Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa (MDM). Most of the design drawings were densely, slightly chaotically positioned on walls and double-sided boards (Figs. 1–2). Numerous chairs placed in the middle of exhibition rooms brought to mind office meetings and thus alluded to the collective character of design assessment. This stylised atmosphere of mass production in an architectural office was interrupted by small tables (probably intended for the more important participants of those meetings) placed along the walls and the carefully positioned plaster models of sculptural decorations and pieces of ornamental mouldings, which were strongly reminiscent of still-life models and which created the

⁹ For reflections on the appraisal and evaluation of the exhibited designs, see W. Baraniewski, "Ideologia w architekturze Warszawy...", op. cit., pp. 243–244, 247.

Pojęcie efektywności

Powstaje problem wyboru kierunku działalności inwestycyjnej, powstaje problem, co budować, powstaje problem kryteriów dla oceny założeń projektowanych i projektów. Dawne kryteria rentowności, kryteria rentowności poszczególnego zakładu, czy całego przedsiębiorstwa — stały się nieistotne. W gospodarce socjalistycznej stałe i niezmiennie, we wszystkich działaniach realizujemy założenia polityczne. Decydujący jest nie interes poszczególnej inwestycji, poszczególnej dziedziny produkcji, czy zespołu zakładów produkcyjnych, ale interes całego społeczeństwa, interes oceniany z punktu widzenia realizacji socjalizmu. „Problemy budownictwa były u nas zawsze nie tylko problemami gospodarczymi — mówi Mołotow — ale i problemami polityki. I to jest zrozumiałe. Jutrzejszy dzień socjalizmu zależy przede wszystkim od osiągnięć budownictwa, które prowadzimy dzisiaj”¹⁾

Z punktu widzenia ekonomiki nie wystarczy kryterium rentowności; zastępujemy je przez pojęcie efektywności. Powstaje pytanie, co rozumiemy przez efektywność inwestycji. Dlatego podaję próbę definicji: przez efektywność inwestycji rozumiem ich przydatność z punktu widzenia realizacji założeń planu produkcji, usług i poprawy bytu mas pracujących. I dlatego winniśmy ustalić, jakie kryteria charakteryzować będą przydatność inwestycji. Czy kryteria prawidłowo sformułowane mogą być właściwą dla ostatecznego rozstrzygnięcia? Tak, ale tylko z punktu widzenia techniczno-ekonomicznego. Natomiast ostateczne rozstrzygnięcie musi być skontrolowane pod politycznym kątem widzenia.

Czy ekonomia ustaliła definitywnie metodę efektywności inwestycji? Niestety, jeszcze nie. Dyskusja na te tematy toczy się w fachowej prasie radzieckiej, w radzieckich instytucjach naukowych. Zabierają głos najwybitniejsi specjaliści, wypowiada się Akademia Nauk. Dyskusję tę podjęli również ekonomiści polscy. Między innymi, na grudniowym zjeździe ub. r. prof. Bronisław Minc podsumował wyniki dyskusji i wysunął postulat opracowania dla każdej inwestycji 14-tu kryteriów charakteryzujących jej efektywność. Na ich podstawie można scharakteryzować i ocenić poszczególne warianty projektowe.

1) „Woprosy Ekonomiki” Nr 10/1950, str. 18.

Od góry:

Ekspozycja gmachu biurowego przy ul. Marszałkowskiej. Autor arch. M. Leykam.

Ekspozycja Miernikowskiej Dzielnicy Mieszkaniowej.

Fragment pokazu z modelem MDM na pierwszym planie.

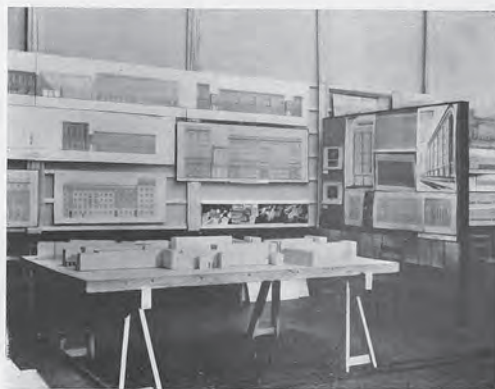
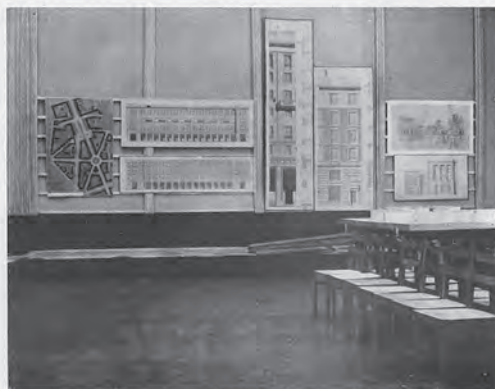


Fig. 1. Part of the display, OPA 1951, after *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, p. 171



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Niestety, kryteria te są rozpracowane jedynie w stosunku do inwestycji produkcyjnych. W stosunku do interesującej nas dziedziny budownictwa ogólnego teoria nie wypracowała jeszcze systemu kryteriów. Ale nie jesteśmy zupełnie bezsilni w stosunku do tematu. Nasiłenie budownictwa i różnorodność dyspozycji spowodowała konieczność opracowania szeregu norm programowych, a więc standardów osiedlowych, budynkowych i pomieszczeniowych, przestrzennych i wyposażeniowych. Ich uzupełnieniem są normatywy projektowe. I to są pierwsze stosowane kryteria dla oceny efektywności budowy, opracowane przez praktykę. W oparciu o ten dorobek proponuję wprowadzenie następujących 7 kryteriów dla oceny efektywności inwestycji nieprodukcyjnych.

Kryteria dla oceny programu.

Programy przestrzenne wyposażeniowe

Standardy przestrzenne i wyposażeniowe wyznaczają poziom zaspokojenia potrzeb jednostkowych. Celem przeanalizowania standardów wszelkiego rodzaju inwestycje budownictwa ogólnego rozbijamy na dwie grupy:

- a) sprzężone z inwestycjami produkcyjnymi,
- b) obsługujące bezpośrednio poprawę warunków bytu klasy pracującej.

Inwestycje sprzężone warunkują realizację planu produkcji. Muszą być zrealizowane. W związku z powyższym możemy powiedzieć, że górna granica standardu wyznacza stosunek globalnej sumy środków postawionych do dyspozycji przez plan na pokrycie danej potrzeby do zapotrzebowanej ilości jednostek w zakresie inwestycji sprzężonych. Powiększenie ilości jednostek użytkowych celem poprawy warunków bytowania klasy pracującej przy zmniejszeniu standardu jest celowe, o ile uzyskamy w ten sposób poprawę warunków bytowania mas pracujących i równocześnie uzyskamy wartości, które dłuższy czas mogą służyć ekonomice socjalistycznej.

Od góry:

Fragment pokazu **rozbudowy N. Świata.**

Fragment pokazu **Domu Wojska Polskiego.**

Fragment pokazu **Ośrodka Szkoleniowego w Ursynowie.**

Fig. 2. Part of the display, OPA 1951, after *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, p. 172

relaxed aura of an artists' café.¹⁰ Owing to this combination of conventions, the exhibition's setting did not exude the gravity that was typical of Socrealism; in fact, it could be treated as an illustration to a contemporary description of Hryniewiecki's personality as provided by the writer Leopold Tyrmand: he was "a brilliant and witty intellectual", one of the "few wise procrastinators who cautiously and effectively resisted" the combination of "coercion and bribery" that was skilfully practised by the Communist authorities.¹¹

Yet, from the point of view of propaganda, the undeniable merits of the exhibition's visual arrangement were less important than the set of events that accompanied it, whose selected excerpts, as well as related reports, were published in the press.¹² In comparison with the earlier Display of the Works of Warsaw Design Bureaus, the programme of papers presented at the OPA was far larger. At the opening, Juliusz Żakowski, the Deputy Minister for Construction, delivered an ideological speech, in which he sketched out the postulated image of Socialist architecture: it was to make creative use of the heritage of Polish culture and, concurrently, to resist the cosmopolitan trends that had been cemented during the inter-war period. Żakowski's speech and the supplementary paper by Marcin Weinfeld clearly indicated the expectations of the authorities and the exhibition organisers as to the direction that the subsequent open debate was intended to take, namely, that it was to provide a comprehensive critique of the formal and ideological value of the exhibited designs.¹³ An archetype of this formal analysis was provided by the paper *Zagadnienia plastyczne architektury* [Visual issues in architecture] by Bohdan Urbanowicz.

The central topic of design assessment was accompanied by a set of papers relating to a side issue, that is to economic matters.¹⁴ The presentations by Michał Kaczorowski and Ludwik Tylbor indicated that, in the future, strong emphasis would be put on lowering the costs of construction in all areas – from

10 One of the pertinent reference points may be *Latona*, a café which operated during the German occupation in the courtyard of the house at Nowy Świat 35 in Warsaw, furnished for Jerzy Blikle by the architects Maciej Nowicki and Bohdan Pniewski, the sculptor Józef Klukowski and the painter Jacek Żuławski. Cf. M. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski – warszawski architekt XX wieku* [Bohdan Pniewski: the architect of 20th-century Warsaw], Warsaw, 2008, pp. 174–175.

11 L. Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954. Wersja oryginalna* [A diary of 1954. The original version], Cracow, 2011, p. 280.

12 The largest set of materials was published in *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, an issue devoted to the exhibition.

13 Unfortunately, Weinfeld's paper did not survive in the original version. The published version was edited *ex post*, with the addition of topics from the public debate. In his summing-up speech, Roman Piotrowski referred to the original version of the paper.

14 Namely: Michał Kaczorowski's *Ekonomika projektowania architektonicznego* [The economics of architectural design], Ludwik Tylbor's *Ekonomia projektowania na odcinku konstrukcji* [The economics of construction design], Jerzy Hryniewiecki's *Materiały budowlane* [Construction materials].

the exploitation plan through the design solutions to the production costs. This decrease was to be achieved through the introduction of mandatory norms and standards as well as administrative instructions and, in the long run, by means of innovative construction methods and materials (e.g. pre-tensioned concrete). In view of the private sector, which had effectively been eliminated from all large construction endeavours in the People's Republic of Poland, the limitations enforced by the state authorities were of crucial importance to the designers. Only special, monument construction projects were to be exempt from the rigorous economic requirements; hence it was clear that the majority of designers taking part in the debate would come across this system in their everyday work. Jerzy Hryniewiecki's paper stood out among those dogmatic speeches. Instead of focusing on centralised management in the construction industry, Hryniewiecki stressed the necessity of adjusting the designers' way of thinking to new technologies. His approach can be seen as the heritage of the pre-war avant-garde, even though the latter was emphatically criticised during the debate, and his assertion that construction must be conducted "faster, cheaper and better"¹⁵ seems to harbingers one of the central slogans of the thaw that was to take place under Khrushchev. The OPA can thus be viewed as the point when the architectural community and the public were made aware that the construction industry in the People's Republic of Poland was to be ruled by the principles of technocratic economics.

The programmatic presentations were followed by a three-day debate.¹⁶ One day was reserved for a debate conducted by students matriculated at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Technology.¹⁷

During the debate several generalised assertions relating to topics of aesthetics and ideology, which referred to the introductory papers, were accompanied by numerous explications delivered by the authors of the exhibited designs. It is worth noting that comments concerning urban planning were usually formulated without referring to the Stalinist newspeak. Essentially, however, matters that did not involve the dominant issue, i.e. the ideology, were marginal in the debate.

Another remarkable point is that economic issues were also marginalised during the debate. Only Bohdan Pniewski reminded the audience that "the construction industry is limping"¹⁸ and criticised the government-imposed

15 J. Hryniewiecki, "Materiały budowlane" [Construction materials], *Architektura*, 1951, no. 5/6, pp. 184–185.

16 The course of this debate is known from the discussion in *Architektura* and from notes made by Józef Sigalin. See *Architektura*, *ibid.*, pp. 203–208; J. Sigalin, *Warszawa 1944–1980. Z archiwum architekta* [Warsaw 1944–1980. From an architect's archive], vol. 2, Warsaw, 1986, pp. 413–417.

17 "Dyskusja młodzieżowa na I Ogólnopolskim Pokazie Projektów Architektury" [Youth debate at the First National Exposition of Architectural Design], *Architektura*, *ibid.*, pp. 209–211.

18 B. Pniewski, a voice in the debate, *Architektura*, *ibid.*, p. 207.

obligation to economise on construction materials. It is possible that some inconvenient statements from the debaters were suppressed; neither can it be ruled out, however, that at this stage only a practitioner having a firmly established professional standing and currently involved in various construction projects, such as Pniewski (who, incidentally, was the target of slight but frequent barbs thrown by the debaters), was able to assess the scale of the problems which the bureaucratic limitations and supply restrictions would cause in the architects' everyday work.

In addition, the debate revealed an interesting – and unintended – result of the OPA. This nationwide event was certainly intended to facilitate a quick and effective introduction of the Socialist doctrine in the entire country; the architects working in the capital, being the most familiar with its principles, were to spearhead its implementation. However, it was the achievements of the Gdańsk circle of architects that gained considerable attention. Thus the OPA became one of the first post-war opportunities for comparing the work of various centres and thus made it possible to diverge from the strictly Warsaw-centred model of presenting architecture.

Finally, the event was closed by professional assessment of the exhibited designs as conducted by four Advisory Committees created by the SARP. This, of course, amounted to a modification of the practice of production meetings, whose participants were obliged to take part in the decision-making process regarding the subsequent course of work. The competencies of the Committees were delineated, not very systematically, following the criteria of technology/construction, function and aesthetics, which caused some chaos and resulted in the reports being repetitive.¹⁹ Incidentally, one has the distinct impression that many of the committee members were not unhappy with this, because this way they could avoid issuing blanket assessments of the exhibited works.

It is also remarkable that it was the committee headed by Józef Sigalin that issued the most detailed assessment of the architectural designs, with their systematic appraisal according to the criteria developed by its members, which also included strictly ideological matters.²⁰ Sigalin was a pre-war Communist who had stayed in the Soviet Union during the war and was thoroughly acquainted with the realities of an architect's work under the Stalinist system. At the time of the exhibition, he was energetically climbing the ladder of the professional hierarchy and was greatly interested in displaying his involvement at a prestigious meeting – and, indeed, six months later

19 The Advisory Committees were for the office buildings and high-rises (chaired by Marcin Weinfeld), frame construction buildings (chaired by Józef Łowiński), buildings of public use (chaired by Jan Koszczyc-Witkiewicz) and complexes of urban architecture (chaired by Józef Sigalin). B. Garliński, *Architektura polska 1950–1951*, op. cit., pp. 206–207.

20 J. Piłatowicz, *Józef Sigalin*, <http://www.ipsb.nina.gov.pl/index.php/a/jozef-sigalin> [accessed 15 December 2015].

he was nominated the chief architect of Warsaw. Assessments formulated by the remaining three committees were more concise.

This gesture of professional loyalty was contrary to the intentions of the exhibition's organisers and may have influenced the tone of dissatisfaction that was distinctly heard in the speech of Roman Piotrowski, the Minister for Construction, which summed up the meeting. He charged the majority of the programmatic presentations with not having appropriate persuasive power and the debates with having an insufficiently positive programme for the future. He explicitly stated that the members of the audience occasionally expressed "sentiments that were contrary [to the exhibition's ideological line – M. C.]."²¹ Thus, according to Piotrowski, they questioned the fundamental aim of the exhibition, the papers and the debates, i.e. the necessity of "breaking with certain architectural trends that [...] hinder progress in architecture, thereby making it more difficult for us to fulfil our tasks of fully aiding the society in its struggle to build Socialism in Poland" and "demonstrating the need to refer to the architectural past as the expression of the continuity of our national culture".²²

The exhibition's postulational character, as expected by Piotrowski, was better expressed by the peculiar restrictions imposed on the textual and visual information regarding the exhibited designs, which is evident in the source publications, than by the debate itself. Even the very fact that the "production meeting" status of the show lowered the rank of the exhibited works is symptomatic – the works thereby ceased to be exhibits, which may have made the idea of publishing their catalogue easier to abandon. A hundred and thirty-six designs were exhibited; only less than ninety can be identified on the basis of the available materials, and only half of those were presented on photographs published in the press.

Significantly, the ideological control imposed after the exhibition was not tantamount to the verbal *damnatio memoriae* of the particularly hotly criticised works; it was limited to the elimination of all relevant illustrative material. Thus, designs which had repeatedly been mentioned in the press lost their concreteness and became no more than ideological models of an error in the course of creative work.

What was sentenced to oblivion, however, were the names of the architects who had authored the criticised works: Stanisław Kolendo, Zbigniew Ihnatowicz and Jerzy Romański.²³ It seems to me that it is precisely these

21 "Przemówienie ministra budownictwa miast i osiedli inż. arch. Romana Piotrowskiego na I Ogólnopolskim Pokazie Projektów Architektury w Warszawie" [The speech of the Minister for City and Residential Estate Construction, Roman Piotrowski M. Eng. (Arch.), at the First National Exposition of Architectural Design], *Architektura*, op. cit., p. 167.

22 Ibid.

23 The author of one of the most often and most vehemently criticised designs, i.e. the Institute of Industrial Chemistry in Warsaw, was never mentioned (it was Stanisław Kolendo M. Arch.); the names of Zbigniew Ihnatowicz and Jerzy Romański, the authors

three architects, as the anonymous “pupils of Le Corbusier”, who became the true victims of the public debates which took place at the OPA. Marek Leykam, although criticised during the show, was treated far more leniently in comparison: his statements were published, one of his designs was reproduced (although one that was very conservative in its form). In his case this was more of a show-trial: a very public process of compelling a celebrated architect to reform and to correct his line.

The illustrative materials from the OPA published after the elimination of the “Corbusier leanings” constituted a handbook, so to speak, of architectural and town-planning solutions which were acceptable and permissible under Stalinism and which were intended to lay the foundations for future Socialist architecture in Poland. The presence of diverse variants of decorative architecture in the manner of Auguste Perret was tacitly accepted, despite the declared emphasis on the role of references to tradition and the more or less literal re-workings of various motifs, details and the entire compositional schemata evoking Classicist, Renaissance and Baroque styles. With regard to themes, in turn, illustrative materials published in the press highlighted the rich programme of endeavours undertaken by the People’s Republic of Poland in the areas of public buildings, with particular emphasis on the role of scientific, cultural and educational institutions in the architectural landscape of the newly established state. Interestingly, the OPA did not include any model design that would fully exemplify this message. Maybe that is why one of the articles referring to the OPA is illustrated with a reproduction of a not exhibited drawing by Jan Knothe showing the Central Cultural Centre (Centralny Dom Kultury) in Marszałkowska Street.²⁴

This sanitised yield of the OPA as the model “production meeting” that demonstrated the introduction of the Socrealist doctrine into Polish architecture was promoted nationwide via a cycle of Regional Architectural Shows (Regionalny Pokaz Architektury, RPA), which were initiated in 1951 as per the decision of Roman Piotrowski, the Minister for City and Residential Estate Construction.²⁵

Thirteen such shows took place over the spring and summer of 1951: in Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Kielce, Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Olsztyn, Poznań, Rzeszów, Szczecin and Wrocław.²⁶ During each show, papers modelled

of the Central Department Store, which was equally criticised but much less frequently mentioned in the published summaries, were also overlooked.

24 (JKM), “Wizja Warszawy przyszłości. Pokaz budownictwa” [A vision of the future Warsaw. An architectural show], *Żołnierz Wolności*, 1951, no. 36, p. 4. Knothe’s drawing came from the album by Bolesław Bierut *Sześćioletni plan odbudowy Warszawy* [The six-year plan of the reconstruction of Warsaw], Warsaw, 1951.

25 B. Garliński, *Kolektywna ocena projektów...*, op. cit., p. 7.

26 This is the number given in Bohdan Garliński’s detailed report, including the list of shows (idem, *Architektura polska 1950–1951*, op. cit., pp. 208–209). Texts published later, during the exhibition, mention thirty-three regional shows in the years 1950–1952.

on those delivered at the OPA were given out and criteria for the assessment of the exhibited works were devised. In addition, a group of fifteen designs that had been favourably assessed at the OPA was exhibited at each of the shows, parallel with the same number of works by the local architects.²⁷ An additional goal of the Regional Architectural Shows was to select materials for an ensuing event which was to be crucial to “the raising of architectural output towards Socialist Realism”.²⁸ This event was the national conference of architects, accompanied by a comprehensive exhibition.

The First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland (PWA, 1953)

Preparations for this event, which was initially planned for October 1951, began relatively late, i.e. in May of that year. The SARP was nominally the exhibition organiser, but the enterprise had certainly been arranged in answer to a command coming from the Party authorities, possibly inspired directly by the Soviet leaders. This is indicated by the fact that both the concept of the event and its date have obvious counterparts in other countries of the Eastern bloc.

In October 1951, a congress of the Association of Hungarian Architects took place at the National Museum in Budapest and was accompanied by an architectural exhibition. Two months later, in December of the same year, a German Congress of Architects took place in East Berlin, at a similarly prestigious venue, i.e. in the Parliament and the seat of the National Front of Democratic Germany – and it was also accompanied by an architectural exhibition. The events in Hungary and in East Germany were both international, with guests coming mainly from the Eastern bloc, but the latter event was also attended by West-German architects. In Czechoslovakia, in turn, in the palace U Hybernů in Prague, a large exhibition entitled *Architektura v českém a slovenském národním dědictví* (Architecture in the Czech and Slovak national heritage) was opened in 1951.²⁹

This is most probably an error, as a total of seventeen regional shows took place in this period, plus the two shows that are discussed above, i.e. the Display of the Works of Warsaw Design Bureaus in 1950 and the OPA.

27 B. Garliński, *Kolektywna ocena projektów...*, op. cit., p. 8; designs exhibited at the OPA enumerated in: idem, *Architektura polska 1950–1951*, op. cit., pp. 208–209.

28 Garliński’s phrase used in the description of the programme of the national exhibition. *Program Wystawy Architektury 1952* [Programme of the architectural exhibition 1952] dated 26 November 1951, documents pertaining to the Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland, the SARP Archive.

29 *Fragen der deutschen Architektur und des Städtebaus. Referate gehalten anlässlich des ersten Deutschen Architektenkongresses in Berlin, Dezember 1951*, Berlin, 1952; W. Durth, J. Düwel,

The need to organise the Polish exhibition quickly and effectively was urgent, so it is not surprising that the position of the commissary was entrusted to Bohdan Garliński, who had already proved himself an able organiser and a man who understood the ideological obligations faced by the new architecture. In late May he presented the concept of an exhibition divided into three parts: the didactic (i.e. historical) section, which was to amount to ca. 30% of the programme, the contemporary section, which was to present around one hundred post-war designs and completed projects, and the youth section (10% of the programme).

The plan included placing greater emphasis on design selection and detailed delineation of themes (which were to be a synthesis of the past with the present and technological progress) than it had been done at the OPA. Marcin Weinfeld was appointed the supervisor of the contemporary section, Jan Zachwatowicz of the historical section, and Zbigniew Karpiński of the youth section.

The programme making the concept of the exhibition more specific was written by Garliński in the autumn of 1951. In this programme, he delineated a plan for arranging the contemporary section around the following issues: home, work, culture, science and education, health and hygiene, public use, sport, physical culture and relaxation, administration.³⁰

Thus the speed and efficiency of collecting materials for the most important part of the exhibition, i.e. the contemporary one, from various architectural centres was of key importance. The already mentioned Regional Architectural Shows, whose direct organiser had been Garliński, proved very helpful. Since he was very active as the commissary of the national exhibition, by the summer of 1951 it may have been expected that the set deadline would be met. However, unforeseen problems arose, one of them being the lack of a guaranteed budget; at one point Garliński considered putting a stop to the preparations altogether. Ultimately, towards the end of the year a more restricted programme was accepted and the date of the exhibition and the congress was set for the middle of 1952; but even this date was later postponed, more than once.

The question of the venue was crucial. The Zachęta building was considered from the very beginning, but the organisers wanted to acquire exhibition halls in the National Museum and, after this plan fell through, in the newly finished edifice of the Parliament. The Zachęta was finally settled on, and the

N. Gutschow, *Architektur und Städtebau der DDR. Die frühen Jahren*, Berlin, 2007, p. 250. E. Prakfalvi, *Magyar építészet 1945–1959. Periodizációs vázlat*, in: *Modern és szocreál. Építészet és tervezés Magyarországon 1945–1959*, ed. Z. Fehérvári, V. Hajdú, E. Prakfalvi, Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, Budapest, 2006, p. 14; E. Prakfalvi, P. Ritoók, "Socialist in content, national in form. Searching for national forms in the Hungarian architecture of the mid-1950s", *Autoportret*, 2010, no. 3, pp. 68–69; *Architektura v českém a slovenském národním dědictví*, Osvěta, Praha, 1952.

30 *Program Wystawy Architektury 1952*, op. cit.

exhibition designers appointed, only in May of 1952. The team: Kazimierz Muszyński, Mieczysław Piprek and Roman Dutkiewicz, was responsible for the exhibition itself, while Michał Kokozowow, Tadeusz Iskierka and Jerzy Wasilewski were entrusted with the preparation of the formal reception area: the main hall, the staircase and the environs of the building.³¹

The Chief Executive of SARP wished that both the exhibition and the planned National Council of Architects take place at the Zachęta, which caused further delays. A date that was feasible and, as it turned out, would be kept was established only in November of 1952. In addition, it proved impossible to hold both events in one place; the Council of Ministers Palace was selected as the venue for the meeting of the National Council of Architects.

The fact that the exhibition opened with a delay of a year and a half evidently resulted not only from financial difficulties, but also from the indifference, or perhaps even objections, with which both the Ministry of Culture and the Parliament Chancellery regarded the needs and ambitions of the architects' milieu. It seems that the architects lacked strong political support from the highest authorities, who may not have been entirely convinced that the milieu was sufficiently prepared for such a prestigious event; for instance, one gets the distinct impression that the success of ideological propaganda as exerted by the Regional Architectural Shows held in 1951 was viewed with some scepticism. The shows revealed the inadequacies of the provincial architectural centres; this triggered the reform of the Regional Show formula in 1952. Only four shows were held in that year, but they were much larger (389 designs in total). Also, they were located in the main architectural centres of the regions, i.e. in Gdańsk, Cracow, Poznań and Warsaw, which facilitated ideological supervision.³²

In fact, throughout the entire, long period of preparations the organisers of the shows were plagued by the fear of selecting wrong designs. Designs selected for a Regional Show or recommended by the architectural bureaus (the latter procedure concerned only pre-1952 designs) had to pass through several stages of the process of approval, the ultimate sanction being the decision of the Chief Executive of the SARP.³³

31 Originally, the design was to be prepared by Jerzy Staniszkis, but he was abroad at the time. A letter of the Exhibition Committee to the Parliament Chancellery dated 25 February 1952; a note from the Chief Executive of the SARP to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party dated 29 August 1952, documents pertaining to the Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland, the SARP Archive.

32 B. Garliński, "Regionalne Pokazy Architektury 1952" [Regional Architectural Shows 1952], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 3, pp. 77–84.

33 B. Garliński, "Uwagi o Pierwszej Powszechnej Wystawie Architektury" [Notes on the First General Exhibition of Architecture], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 5, p. 140, third page of the cover.

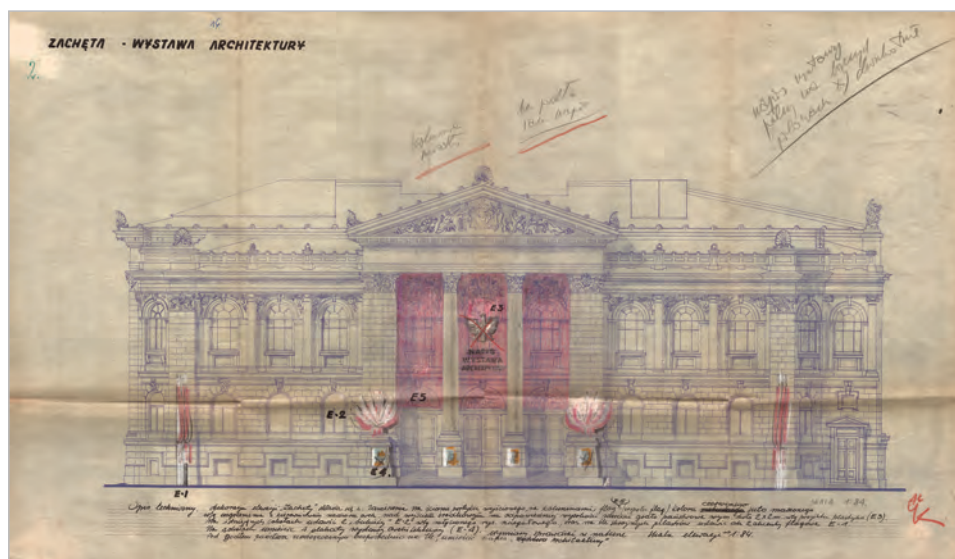


Fig. 3. Design for the decoration of the Zachęta for the PWA, 1953, photo: the SARP Archive, Warsaw

The ceremonial opening of the exhibition, held on 8 March, was fairly modest and the comments in the press were brief and rather reserved. This propagandist reticence was certainly caused by official mourning, as Stalin had died three days earlier (incidentally, the city of Katowice was renamed Staliność a day before the exhibition's opening; it proved impossible to change the name in the already published catalogue).³⁴

The exhibition itself, however – despite the earlier financial difficulties – was prepared meticulously and with considerable flair, at least for the realities of the day. Zachęta's edifice was decorated on the outside and the exterior decoration also included an inscription made up of three-dimensional letters placed along Królewska Street from the Ogród Saski side; flower parterres were to be set up on the patch of greenery in front of the edifice (Figs. 3–5).³⁵

On their way to the main exhibition halls on the first floor, visitors symbolically retraced the path of the ideological education that Polish architecture had acquired in the preceding five years. Excerpts from fundamental documents of the era, namely from the Resolution of the National Party Meeting of Architects from 1949 and the new statute of the SARP from 1951, were displayed on the ground floor (Fig. 6). Quotations from Lenin, Bierut (Fig. 7)

³⁴ It is now impossible to find the names of the officials who attended the opening.

³⁵ A design for the arrangement of the square in front of the Zachęta, documents pertaining to the Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland, the SARP Archive.



Fig. 4. Decoration of Królewska Street for the PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

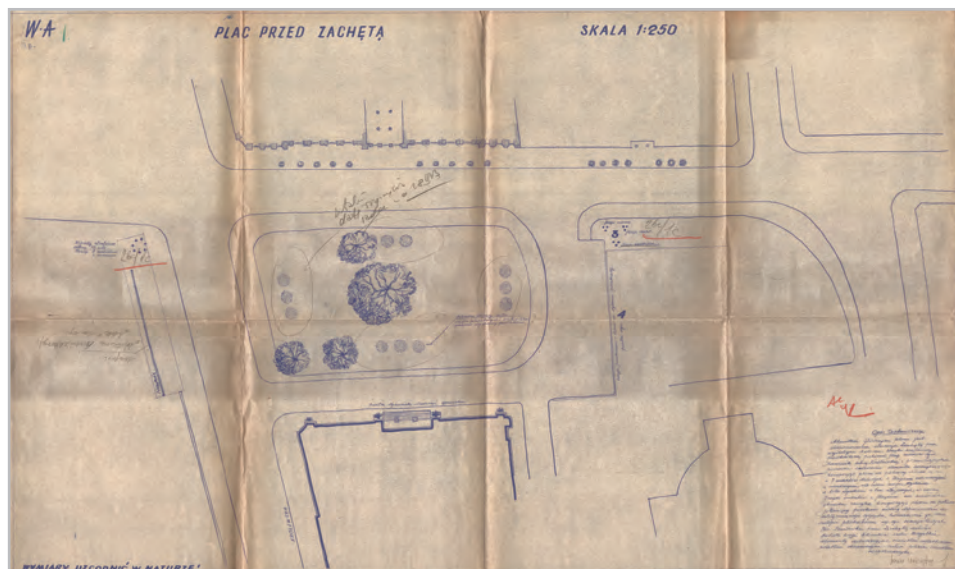


Fig. 5. Design for the decoration of Zachęta's front lawn for the PWA, 1953, photo: the SARP Archive, Warsaw

Fig. 6. Placard with a quotation from the SARP statute, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



and Stalin were to be seen on the mezzanine (no iconographic record of the last placard seems to have survived). This theme culminated with placards bearing the names of architects who had won national art awards, which were placed in the hall of the first floor.

The implemented plan of the main section of the PWA differed from the initial concept. The idea of arranging the contemporary section around current issues was abandoned; instead, each exhibition room focused on the architecture of some region of Poland (Fig. 8). The historical section was not set off spatially, as had been planned. Materials that had been collected for this section were also divided according to region and exhibited in rooms containing contemporary designs.

The main section of the PWA occupied seven exhibition rooms on the first floor. The largest one, namely the Matejko Hall, was devoted to Warsaw and the region of Mazovia. The neighbouring Narutowicz Hall was the Hall of Honour and focused on the Polish-Soviet friendship, but in fact it was also filled with designs from Warsaw. The third-largest room (Room No. X on plan) focused on Lesser Poland, and the much smaller room (No. IX on plan) on Greater Poland. Silesia, Pomerania and Podlachia, the last one including the Łódź area, occupied the three rooms of the front enfilade (Nos. VI, VII, VIII

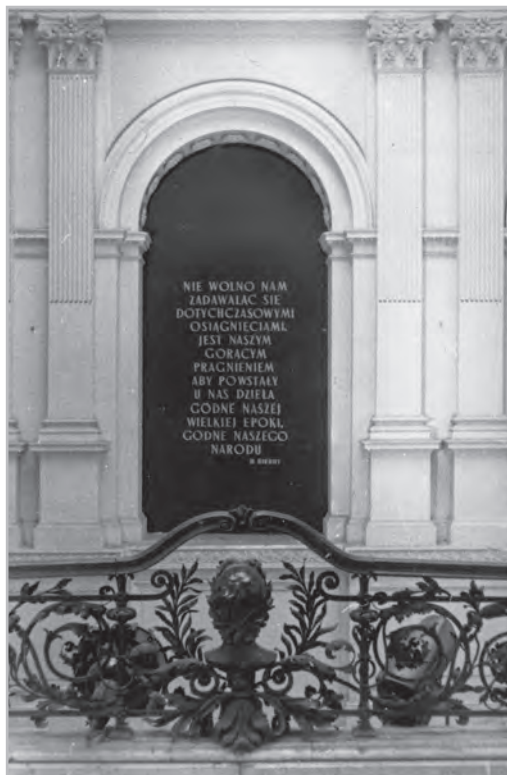


Fig. 7. Placard with a quotation from B. Bierut, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

on plan). The initial conception for the youth section was retained; it was located on the ground floor.³⁶

When explaining the change of conception, Garliński emphasised that the regional arrangement was more attractive to the general public and that it facilitated making comparisons among the achievements of various circles. He also admitted – with surprising frankness – that too few designs of residential and industrial buildings had passed all stages of the process of approval for separate sections to be formed.³⁷

Another reason that may be added here is the fundamental conflict between the initial conception and the Socrealist vision of architecture as great art, which was forcefully promoted at the exhibition. The proposed thematic

³⁶ Very little is known about the Youth Room; it was not included in the catalogue record. Only one review mentions, albeit very generally, the designs exhibited in this room: "This is where the best diploma designs by young architects have been grouped. The vast range of topics is noteworthy. There are designs for residential and industrial architecture in large cities and designs for tiny, delicate country houses at summer resorts". (Ant), "Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej" [The exhibition of architecture in the People's Republic of Poland], *Wola Luda*, 1953, no. 69, p. 5.

³⁷ B. Garliński, "Uwagi o Pierwszej...", op. cit., third page of the cover.

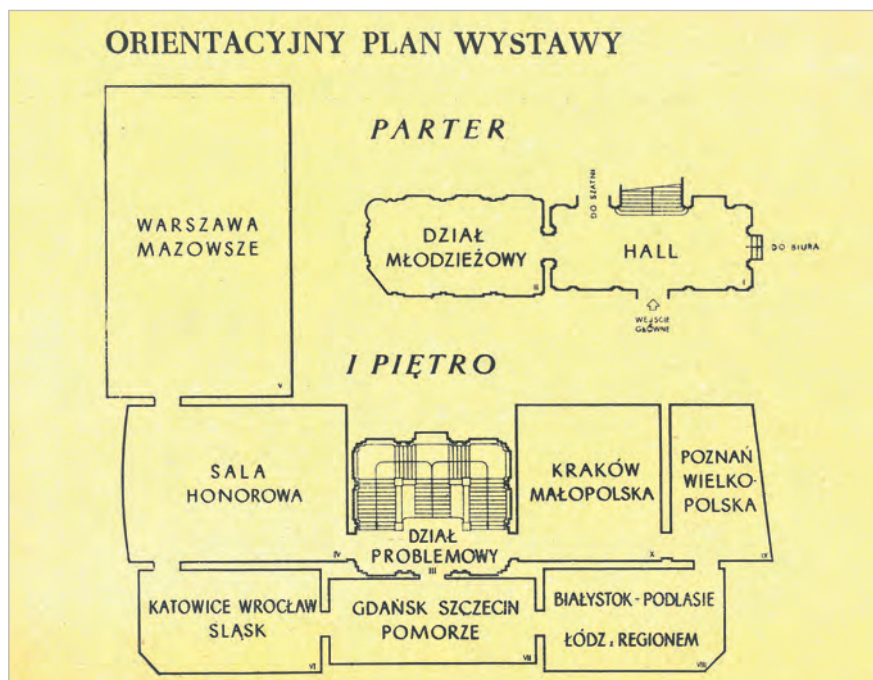


Fig. 8. Ground plan, PWA, 1953 (after *Pierwsza Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej* [The first general exhibition of architecture in the People's Republic of Poland], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta, Warsaw, 1953)

arrangement resembled the manner of ordering the material at industrial exhibitions or fairs. In addition, creating the arrangement according to current issues could provoke undesirable associations with the scientific aims of the architects of the Modern Movement who were ritually condemned as “Formalists and Constructivists” and who emphasised the analytic, all-inclusive and technical nature of the work of an architect and town planner. The “CIAM grille”, a systematising method of presenting the issues under discussion which had been introduced in 1949 at the 7th International Congresses of Modern Architecture in Bergamo, is worth mentioning in this context.

The aim of the PWA, however, was to present architecture not as a field of expert knowledge, but as an expression of the culture of a society engaged in building Socialism. To achieve this aim, it was necessary for architecture to be “endorsed by the working masses, by all the nation”.³⁸ Roman Piotrowski pointed out in his suggestive statement that in order for the exhibition to

³⁸ The introduction by the Minister for City and Residential Estate Construction, Roman Piotrowski, in: *Pierwsza Powszechna Wystawa Architektury Polski Ludowej* [The First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People's Republic of Poland], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta, Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, Warsaw, 1953, pp. 7–8.



Fig. 9. The Matejko Hall, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

overcome the difficulty posed by the “attachment of the works of architecture to the ground” – a feature that limited their influence, thus making it less than general – it was necessary to “present the exhibits realistically” and to offer a selection of the most characteristic contemporary and historical works.

In order to fulfil this postulate, numerous models of both old and recently designed construction projects were turned into one of the key elements of the exhibition.³⁹ Contemporary and historical edifices and urban complexes, set side by side on nearly identical plinths and visually similar to one another because of their structure, were intended to impinge on the visitors’ awareness as carriers of the regions’ architectural identity made cohesive by the continu-

³⁹ Models of the following new construction projects can be recognised at the exhibition: Warsaw – the Palace of Culture and Science, the Marszałkowska Residential Estate (MDM), the Praga II estate, the Parliament building, the Grand Theatre, the National Bank of Poland, the Central Station; Gliwice – the Biprohut office block; Kalisz – the nursing academy; Katowice – Inland Revenue building; Cracow – the centre of Nowa Huta (two models); Łódź – the University Library, the National Theatre; Rzeszów – the Tourist’s House; Zakopane – the Tourist’s House; Moscow – the Polish pavilion at the All-Soviet Agricultural Exhibition. Models of historical edifices that can be recognised: a plaster cast of the column from Strzelno; Gdańsk – the Town Hall tower; Poznań – market square with the Town Hall; Szydłów – the town plan model.

ity of historical tradition. This all-encompassing, suggestive image of the past as integrated into the present culminated in a placard located in the Matejko Hall (Fig. 9). In the centrepiece was a photograph of Józef Sigalin presenting “construction plans for Socialist Warsaw” to Bolesław Bierut, members of the government and members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party. It was surrounded by photographs of historical buildings (on the left-hand side) and new construction projects (on the right-hand side); this was to suggest an ideological connection between the Łazienki Palace, the castle in Baranów Sandomierski, Poznań’s Town Hall, the Wawel Castle or the Collegium Maius and such architectural projects as the Parliament building, the Marszałkowska Residential Estate, the East–West Freeway (Trasa W–Z), the industrial complex of the Passenger Automobile Factory (FSO) in Żerań, or the Party House complexes in Warsaw or Kielce. Taken all together, these projects were an apotheosis of the causative power of Bolesław Bierut, “the first architect of the country” and – considering that the entire PWA was arranged by region – the projects underscored the countrywide supremacy of the mission of building (or rebuilding) Warsaw.

The same theme was underlined by the Hall of Honour. It focused on the aspirations of the new authorities to legitimate power, alluded to by the wall decoration with the bust of Bierut seen against the background of a draped white-and-red flag and an excerpt from the Party’s ideological statement: “People’s democracy must acknowledge the vast heritage of progressive creators in all areas of Polish culture; it must refer to the progressive, humanistic and democratic tradition present in our culture” (Fig. 10). The most prestigious components of the new city centre were proposed as an architectural embodiment of this thought: the Palace of Culture and Science (designs and photographs), the Marszałkowska Residential Estate (placards and a model), the Party House (a photograph) and designs awarded in the contest for the Central Square of Warsaw (Fig. 11). It was precisely during the spring of 1953 – while the PWA was in progress – that the steel skeleton of the Palace of Culture and Science was being raised and the growing structure appeared against the city’s skyline for the first time. It constituted a peculiar, dynamic illustration to the causative power of the new authorities as declared at the exhibition – an illustration which, being anchored in the space of a city ruled by these authorities, lent them credibility. Today it is difficult to say whether this was intentional; after all, the exhibition’s opening date was postponed several times.

In keeping with the Socrealist principle of an unbreakable connection between architecture and the visual arts, the exhibition included contemporary figural sculptures with an iconography typical of the era, photographs of decorations from the already completed projects (e.g. the MDM estate) and copies of elements and architectural details from historical monuments, the most striking of which was the plaster cast of a Romanesque column discovered in 1946 in Strzelno (Fig. 12).



Fig. 10. The Hall of Honour, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 11. The Hall of Honour, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 12. Plaster cast of the column from Strzelno, the Greater Poland Room, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

A large-scale photograph of the Renaissance gate of Brzeg Castle, which was located in the Silesia Room, constituted an important element of the exhibition's programme. As the gate was decorated with sculpted portraits of Polish kings and the Piast rulers of Silesia, it evidently contributed to confirming the Polish presence in Lower Silesia from the perspective of art history (Fig. 13).

It is symptomatic that, apart from this one example, the programme did not include ancient monumental figural sculptures. The preferred variety were old edifices devoid of a message and ornamental motifs, as well as the works of artisans, such as the wooden chest in the Greater Poland Room. The intention was probably to avoid an undesirable and potentially problematic iconography, e.g. Christian motifs. The already mentioned column from Strzelno was one of the very few religious elements in the otherwise almost entirely secular vision of Poland's past, as proposed by Jan Zachwatowicz. Churches were avoided, also on photographs of historical monuments – the First Republic was represented mainly by residences and royal foundations and by urban architecture. Special attention was paid to Classicism in the Warsaw milieu, including the era of the Congress Kingdom, which made it possible to accentuate the programme of constructing monumental public buildings (Fig. 14).



Fig. 13. The Matejko Hall, in the background a photograph of Brzeg Castle in the Silesia Room, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

The historical narrative ended on edifices constructed in the 1830s. This was probably caused by the dialectic approach to history and art according to which the formation of modern-day capitalism had begun in that period.⁴⁰ Also, it would be wrong to overlook a phenomenon which went beyond Stalinism, i.e. the profound dislike for historicist styles that had been current in the latter half of the 19th century, which was then prevalent in architects' milieus. Even Henryk Marconi or Franciszek Maria Lanci, architects whose high standing was never questioned in the period of Socrealism, were in dis-favour at the exhibition.⁴¹

40 During the National Party Meeting of Architects in 1949, Jan Minorski said: "The collapse of the Empire style and the coming of eclecticism are inseparably linked with the emergence and development of a contemporary capitalist society". J. Minorski, *Oblicze współczesnej polskiej twórczości architektonicznej* [The face of contemporary Polish architectural output], in: *O polską architekturę socjalistyczną...*, op. cit., p. 66.

41 Their status is additionally confirmed by the fact that the edifices they had designed in Warsaw were rebuilt after the war damage; also, the series "Mistrzowie Architektury Polskiej" [The masters of Polish architecture] published by the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning included a monograph on Lanci.



Fig. 14. The Matejko Hall, part of the historical display, PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

In fact, more architects were conspicuously absent. Garliński's initial plan, conceived in 1951, included the legacy of the inter-war period and the first years of post-war reconstruction. Ultimately, however, the oldest 20th-century building to be exhibited at the PWA was most probably the Party House in Warsaw, designed in 1947. In this way such architects as Jan Heurich Jr. and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz disappeared from the programme.

The exhibition included only one of those luminaries of Polish architecture of the first half of the 20th century who were acknowledged in the period of Socrealism, namely Stanisław Noakowski. His sketches were displayed among the students' drawings in the youth section and his drawings of imaginary buildings in the style of the Polish Renaissance adorned the exhibition's catalogue. Noakowski, who had presented a suggestive vision of the national past and fulfilled the role of a mentor of future creators, perfectly matched the Socrealist idea of education in the field of architecture (as long as the churches, which he had often drawn, were ignored).

The contemporary section of the PWA was, of course, intended to create new leading lights. The main focus was on Bohdan Pniewski, the only architect to be honoured by having three models of his designs displayed, namely the Parliament building, the Grand Theatre and the National Bank of Poland. The others were Wacław Rembiszewski (six designs that he had authored or co-authored

were on display), Jan Bogusławski (six designs), Zygmunt Stępiński (six designs) and the team of the “Tigers”, i.e. Waław Kłyszewski, Jerzy Mokrzyński and Eugeniusz Wierzbicki, who was, incidentally, the then-chairman of the SARP (five designs).⁴² All of these architects, with the single exception of Rembiszewski, came from the Warsaw milieu; it is, therefore, quite obvious that the identity of the new Polish architecture was still determined in the capital.

The absence of designs by Marek Leykam, whose output had been hotly debated at the OPA two years earlier, is noteworthy. It may be treated as a symbolic failure, although of a very peculiar kind: the architect did not become a model object of ideological re-education – a process that was greatly favoured in the Stalinist system.

Even more interesting, perhaps, is the general question: Regardless of the stability of the fundamental ideological programme and formal solutions, to what extent did the PWA change the vision of Polish Socialist architecture as endorsed at the OPA?⁴³ One new element was certainly the more emphatically marked historical legitimisation, indicated by the effort to present this architecture as a dialectically correct continuation of progressive traditions. It brought about further effects: in his statement published in *Stolica*, Jan Zachwatowicz underlined that “referring to the progressive traditions of bygone days [...] contemporary architecture also evinces tendencies towards regional variations”.⁴⁴

Zachwatowicz’s works should, of course, be understood not as a statement of fact, but as a postulate, and, worse still, not an easy one to realise, because it was contrary to the logic of the organisational transformations that were then being implemented in architecture. The rich traditions of some regions were often not reflected in the contemporary achievements of the local milieus. Zachwatowicz himself was circumspect in talking about the difficulties caused by the fact that the areas covered by particular design bureaus were inconsistent with Poland’s historical geography. Garliński openly complained that he had an insufficient amount of material to arrange some regional rooms, whereas the part devoted to Warsaw and Mazovia was outsized. The exhibition’s programme tried to cover up these inequalities by combining the achievements of fairly distant regions in one room; for instance, the justification for putting Podlachia and the Łódź area together was that their capital cities, both being “neglected working-class centres”, were deemed similar.⁴⁵

42 When it comes to the number of exhibited placards, the record was set by Sigalin’s team, which had designed the East–West Freeway and the Marszałkowska Residential Estate.

43 It must be noted that at the PWA, similarly to the OPA, only some 30–40% of the exhibited designs were published.

44 “Regionalizm w architekturze. Rozmowa z patronem działu historycznego prof. J. Zachwatowiczem” [Regionalism in architecture: interview with the supervisor of the historical section Prof. J. Zachwatowicz], interview by M. S., *Stolica*, 1953, no. 13, p. 8.

45 S. Gawłowski, “Wystawa architektury w ‘Zachęcie’” [The exhibition of architecture at the “Zachęta”], *Słowo Powszechne*, 1953, no. 63, p. 4.



Fig. 15. The Pomerania Room,
PWA, 1953, photo: Zachęta –
National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

As far as can be judged on the basis of the surviving iconographic materials, the local character was more strongly marked in the northern-Renaissance motifs evident in the designs proposed for Gdańsk and its environs (Fig. 15) and in the architecture of the Podhale region.

The postulated regional character of architecture was in clear opposition to its typicality, which was strongly promoted at the PWA. The exhibition included several designs on widely differing themes: from an office building through a school and residential blocks to a summer pasture cowshed and a building for storing beehives over winter. These had mostly been produced in design offices that were active in Warsaw, so they were placed in the Warsaw and Mazovia Room. This reflected the existing centralisation of the system of producing and distributing technical documentation. The local context was impossible to consider in these circumstances; typical designs intended for mass implementation were described as “universal”, meant to introduce a “distinctively national harmony”.⁴⁶

This grandiose language is not surprising; typicality was one of the determining categories of the aesthetic of Socrealism. In his report at the 19th Con-

46 A. Ciborowski, “Co to jest projekt typowy” [What a typical design is], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 2, p. 55.

gress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in 1952, Georgy Malenkov rather curiously explained typicality as “the sharpening of the image of reality”.⁴⁷ Yet at the same time this language inadvertently revealed that the regionalism of architecture in the Stalinist period was superficial. Implementing typical designs had a practical aspect; it was one of the ways of alleviating the results of structural flaws in the construction industry.⁴⁸ In the realities of Poland in the year 1953, typicality may be considered an attempt – if a very ineffective one – to achieve an “escape forward”, i.e. to lower costs and to lessen the input of construction materials into consumption enterprises (which included the construction of non-productive buildings). One of the pertinent methods was the implementation of construction norms in typical projects, and these norms were being energetically worked out at the time. Besides, the design for a residential building made of hardboard, which was exhibited at the PWA, is a testimony to the cutback programme of construction from locally sourced or waste materials as undertaken in 1953. This indicates that the importance of economic matters, which were present at the OPA only as a series of papers, had considerably increased in the meantime.⁴⁹

It is obvious that the PWA revealed some tensions between components which together constituted the offered vision of the future Socialist architecture. The arrangement of material according to regions in a way confirmed the prestige and professional standing of the conservators who, having deftly adjusted themselves to the current rhetoric, cemented the status of historical heritage as an element that symbolically subjugated the future.⁵⁰ This,

47 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socrealism. Polish art in the years 1950–1954], Cracow, 1991, p. 18; B. Groys, *Stalin jako totalne dzieło sztuki* [Stalin as a total work of art], translated by P. Kozak, Warsaw, 2010, p. 76; T. Gryglewicz, *Komunizm w sztuce polskiej* [Communism in Polish art], <http://www.omp.org.pl/artukul.php?artukul=162> [accessed 20 May 2016].

48 The so-called typical sections of residential buildings appeared in the Soviet architecture in the 1930s. They were not only a manifestation of the search for optimal planning solutions, but also an attempt to effectively distribute the relatively small cadre of architects and to lighten their workload, especially since architects were then especially needed for the by then already ongoing programme of industrial enterprises. See L. Tomaszewski, “Budownictwo i urbanistyka w ZSRR” [Construction and urban planning in the Soviet Union], *Architektura i Budownictwo*, 1931, no. 7, pp. 259–260.

49 This seems to echo the approach of Milyutin, who recommended mass construction from cheap materials (N. Milûtin, *Socgorod* [The Socialist City], Moscow, 1930, p. 61). His proposal was not followed, however, at least not at the level of official statements, and Milyutin himself lost his position and influence in the 1930s, D. S. Hmel’nickij, «*Socgorod*» Nikolaâ Milûtina v kontekste sovsckoj istorii [Milyutin’s “Socialist City” in the context of Soviet history], http://archi.ru/lib/e_publication_for_print.html?id=1850569826 [accessed 10 May 2016].

50 The process of the conservators’ milieu’s adjustment to slogans proffered during the ideological offensive of Socrealism is described by Piotr Majewski in *Ideologia i konserwacja. Architektura zabytkowa w Polsce w czasach socrealizmu* [Ideology and conservation. Historical architecture in Poland in the period of Socrealism], Warsaw, 2009, esp. pp. 149–152.

however, made it more difficult to present those components of the exhibition which, from the ideological point of view, were its key part, i.e. the new designs. In accordance with the Modernist myth of regeneration, the new designs were supposed to always occupy a privileged position in relation to the monuments of the past.⁵¹ Also, at the PWA the public and official image of Stalinist architecture as mainly a fine art began to be questioned for the first time. The harbingers of the unconcealed technocracy that was to dominate the official discourse of the Polish construction industry in the following decade appeared at the PWA.

The exhibition at the Zachęta was very popular with the public, which is only in part explained as resulting from the efforts of propaganda since it was seen by fifty thousand visitors, of which only four thousand took part in the guided tours.⁵² This interest seems understandable, considering that the visitors were members of the post-war world – still only a few years old – in which new ideas in architecture and urban planning seemed to have a great power to cause change. Efforts to respond to this interest are evident on both sides of the Iron Curtain (see the *Festival of Britain* in 1951).⁵³

In the reality of a totalitarian Communist country it was impossible to count on a public debate regarding the proposed vision of architecture in the newly constructed Poland that would be ideologically unconstrained and free from ritualised formulas; this had already been proved by the OPA. Reports from the exhibition and the accompanying reviews in the daily press were mostly conventionalised – and surprisingly few in number.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, it would be difficult to overlook the fact that Stalin's death managed to cause, if only to a limited extent, a change in the tone of some statements concerning the PWA. This is evident already in the appraisal of the exhibition as delivered by the team comprising Zdzisław Mąceński, Tadeusz Zieliński and Adam Kotarbiński during the First National Council of Architects, which finally took place on 12–15 April.⁵⁵ The questions posed in the appraisal, namely: "Which designs are good? Which designs suit the requirements of Socialist Realism?", were typical of the architects' production meetings in recent years; but the answers to these questions deviated from the

51 P. Juskiewicz, *Cień modernizmu* [The shadow of modernism], Poznań, 2013, pp. 66–67.

52 "Odpowiadamy na pytania w sprawie Powszechnej Wystawy Architektury" [Answers to questions concerning the General Exhibition of Architecture], *Stolica*, 1953, no. 21, p. 10.

53 B. Conekin, *"The Autobiography of a Nation": The 1951 Festival of Britain*, Manchester, 2003.

54 Of all the popular, non-specialist press, *Stolica* published the most varied material, which included interviews with the section supervisors and with Bohdan Pniewski.

55 Known from the summary published in: "Krajowa Narada Architektów. Referat o wystawie" [The National Council of Architects. Paper on the Exhibition], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 7, pp. 172–174. Bohdan Pniewski, who also participated in the team's work, was not mentioned. M. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski...*, op. cit., p. 333.

patterns of criticism which by then had already been entrenched. The review was not dominated by a vision of architecture that was typical of Stalinism; a subjectivist approach to both the architect as a person and to the works of architecture is evident instead. Policies already implemented in the construction industry were censured in the conclusion. Also noteworthy is the condemnation – based on the legacy of Functionalism and out of necessity delivered in a rather veiled fashion – of the superficiality and inconsistency of the Socrealist design practice.

According to the published materials, the attitudes expressed in this review did not prevail at the Council. The debaters generally toed the line of Stalinist ideology; visitors from countries of the “people’s democracy” were especially compliant. Yet it is worth stressing that critical remarks were expressed by some Poles, e.g. by Stanisław Juchnowicz, who pointed out that the façades of new buildings in Nowa Huta were being left unfinished.⁵⁶

Even the resolution of the National Council of Architects, although filled with ideological formulas, contains passages referring to the organisational problems that plagued the architectural milieu in Poland (e.g. bureaucracy and the weakness of these milieus in smaller centres) and also to the unsatisfactory quality of the architects’ work (e.g. the failure to use new materials and construction methods, the insufficient quality of typical designs). Considering the acute problems faced by the milieu, the call for “architectural excellence” as found in the resolution sounds like a plea for supernatural aid and is a testimony to the Stalinists’ desperate powerlessness and their attempts to rally in the face of the growing difficulties.⁵⁷

The most telling indication of the coming re-evaluation of the architectural discourse is an essay that appraised the residential architecture designs exhibited at the PWA.⁵⁸ It contained a fundamental critique of the manner of presenting the designs at the exhibition. The charges concerned the superficiality of these presentations and their focus on empty visual effects with a concurrent disregard for the arrangement of interiors. Thus the accusations were directed against the organisers, who preferred typically Socrealist idealised and suggestive sketches, and the authors of the designs, who were accused of belonging to the “achievement-oriented elite” of architects (Zygmunt Stępiński and members of the “Tiger” team were mentioned by name).⁵⁹ In addition,

56 “Krajowa Narada Architektów. Zagadnienia regionów” [The National Council of Architects: the issue of the regions], *Architektura*, *ibid.*, p. 183.

57 “Rezolucja Pierwszej Krajowej Narady Architektów” [The resolution of the First National Council of Architects], *Architektura*, 1953, no. 5, pp. 113–114.

58 Z. Malicki, A. Uniejewski, “O projektach mieszkaniowych na I Powszechnej Wystawie Architektury Polski Ludowej” [On the residential architecture designs at the First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland], *Miasto*, 1953, no. 5, pp. 16–19.

59 On the particular nature of Socrealist architectural drawing, see W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska...*, *op. cit.*, the chapter entitled “Mistycyzm architektury” [The mysticism of architecture], pp. 42–58.

the authors of the essay, Zaslław Malicki and Andrzej Uniejewski, criticised the flawed conception of monumentalism, which they called the “trombone style”. They did not dare to issue a fundamental critique of the Marszałkowska Residential Estate (MDM); instead, they levelled the accusation of “a boundless surfeit of detail coupled with some clumsiness in its application” against the new design of the Młynów estate in Warsaw. In fact, their general criticism of the way of making allusions to tradition by “attaching a piece almost exactly copied from the Wawel Castle, from Krasiczyn or from the faraway Florence to the wall of a residential block” referred to the basic way of designing architecture in the period of Socrealism.

This essay put the manner of presenting designs at the exhibition and the quality of the functional solutions applied therein in the centre of attention, and in this way it denounced the constituting components of the vision of Polish Socialist architecture. Thus it anticipated the argumentation which would be typical of the “thaw” criticism. It did not use the language of production meetings; it opened the path towards a debate that would culminate during the National Council of Architects in March of 1956.⁶⁰

Hence, from the point of view of the organisers, the exhibitions of architecture hosted by the Zachęta, as well as the vision of the future Poland which they were intended to create, suffered a total defeat. It cannot be ignored, however, that many of their key elements played an important role in the subsequent decades. The ideas of typicality and standardisation which had been brought to the fore at the PWA would return, reformulated, after a few years’ break to become an important component of the policy implemented in the construction industry from 1959 until the collapse of Wiesław Gomułka’s administration.⁶¹ The Regional Architectural Shows, in turn, lost their ideological function and subservience to the central event and underwent a telling correction of their name; as Regional Architectural Reviews, they became an important recurring event at many centres; at some of them they are held to this day.

Regardless of its considerable ideological load, the PWA certainly played a positive role in popularising historical architecture. It was noted during the exhibition that visitors were very interested in display cases containing various pertinent books (which, incidentally, were not on sale).⁶² It has been reported – although this may be a slightly exaggerated account – that the publishing

60 On the “thaw” discussions in the architectural milieu, see W. Baraniewski, *Odwilżowe dylematy polskich architektów* [The thaw dilemmas of Polish architects], in: *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [Thaw: art ca. 1956], ed. P. Piotrowski, exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Poznań, Poznań, 1996, pp. 129–132.

61 Uchwała nr 285 Rady Ministrów z dnia 2 lipca 1959 r. w sprawie przyjęcia tez dotyczących typizacji w budownictwie [Act no. 285 of the Council of Ministers dated 2 July 1959 on the acceptance of theses regarding typicality in the construction industry], *Monitor Polski*, 1959, no. 70, item 365.

62 “Odpowiadamy na pytania...”, op. cit., p. 10.

programme triggered by the PWA resulted in the publication of many valuable volumes. The monumental *Architektura polska do połowy XIX wieku* [Polish architecture until the middle of the 19th century] by Jan Zachwatowicz may be considered one of these.⁶³ The series “Mistrzowie Architektury Polskiej” [The masters of Polish architecture] began to be published in 1952 and, over the following four years, developed into a set of monographs which at the time constituted a vast achievement on behalf of the scholarly milieu.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

Exhibitions of contemporary designs accompanied by their public criticism and assessment by a commission were meant to be a tool in implementing Socrealism in Polish architecture – a process which had been announced in 1949. The First National Exposition of Architectural Design (OPA, 22 January – 28 February 1951), housed in the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art building in Warsaw, was one of the most widely advertised events of this kind. Its discussion exposes the peculiar atmosphere of these events, the strategies of persuasion and instruction as employed by the organisers in relation to ideological and aesthetic issues, and the reactions of the architects participating in the debates, who generally tried to avoid the aggressive tone of the polemic. In addition, the primacy of technocratic economics, which was later to become one of the key elements of policies concerning the construction industry in the People’s Republic of Poland, was first revealed at the OPA, if only still in the background.

The exhibition at the Zachęta, treated as a production meeting in progress, was to be a preparatory stage for a sweeping exhibition that would present an all-inclusive vision of both historical and contemporary Polish architecture. Such an event accorded with the universal schemata of rituals of social life structured in keeping in line with Stalinism, but the path to the First General Exhibition of Architecture in the People’s Republic of Poland (PWA, 8 March – 22 April 1953) turned out not to be easy. Problems concerning its financing and venue, as well as the lack of political support, resulted in its opening, in the Zachęta building, soon after Stalin’s death. In general, the exhibition’s arrangement followed regional divisions, i.e. both the historical and contemporary material were arranged according to region. An analysis of this plan reveals that it was profoundly ill-suited to the realities of producing architecture in the state-owned design offices when the emphasis on typicality was increasing.

The initial stage of the critique of Socrealism is also inseparably linked with the PWA; the essay appraising the exhibited designs as delivered at the First National Council of Architects in April 1953 must be considered the first text of this kind.

Both the OPA and the PWA are, above all, reminders of the practice of institutional coercion and of the ideological approach to history that were typical of Stalinism. At the same time, however, it should not be forgotten that the exhibition of 1953 resulted in the publication of a series of valuable publications concerning history and art, while the Regional Architectural Shows, instituted in order to select designs to be exhibited at the PWA, evolved into recurring events which in some centres are still organised today.

⁶³ J. Zachwatowicz, *Architektura polska do połowy XIX wieku* [Polish architecture until the middle of the 19th century], Warsaw, 1952.

Karolina Zychowicz

ZACHĘTA – NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WARSAW

The Exhibition-Organising Activity of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (1950–1956) Based on the Example of Selected Exhibitions at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions

The last few years have brought about the increasing interest of Polish scholarship in art history and the history of exhibitions,¹ resulting from the ever more importance being ascribed to the role of both the exposition and the curator. Bruce Altshuler, the author of *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions That Made Art History*, points out that while researching the history of exhibitions it is possible to find forgotten materials and little-known publications, long hidden in archives and libraries, which might expand or correct our knowledge on events that were organised in the past.² It would be difficult not to agree with his assessment. The documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (Komitet Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą, KWKZ), an official agency active in the years 1950–1956, which is currently

1 The present article was written as a part of the research project entitled “Historia wystaw w Zachęcie – Centralnym Biurze Wystaw Artystycznych w latach 1949–1970” [The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970] conducted within the framework of the National Programme for the Development of Humanities at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for the years 2014–2017, no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014. On Polish research on the history of exhibitions, cf. e.g. the reconstruction of and book on the First Exhibition of Modern Art in Cracow in 1948 (*I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej pięćdziesiąt lat później* [The First Exhibition of Modern Art fifty years later], eds. M. Świca, J. Chrobak, Cracow, 1998) or the anthology of texts *Display. Strategie wystawiania* [Display. Strategies of exhibiting], eds. M. Hussakowska, E. M. Tatar, Cracow, 2012.

2 B. Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions That Made Art History. Volume I: 1863–1959*, London, 2008, p. 7.

deposited at the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw,³ constitutes an invaluable source for a Polish scholar. The Committee's activity has so far received little scholarly attention. In her article "Działalność Komitetu Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą w latach 1950–1956" [Activity of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries in the years 1950–1956],⁴ Anna Lisiecka presented a general outline of how this institution operated, but she did not concentrate on the Committee's activity in the field of exhibition organisation.

Yet an analysis of the Committee's documentation, which contains a series of detailed reports produced during the period of Stalinism, reveals a variety of interesting facts and figures that allow us to determine the character of exhibition organisation in Poland in the first half of the 1950s. In the six years of its existence, the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries organised around a hundred exhibitions.⁵ The aim of the current essay is to outline the Committee's exhibition organisation programme. Only selected – although it seems the most essential – issues have been signalled here. I would like to present a review of the exhibitions hosted in the main building of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA), i.e. at the Zachęta, by placing them in the context of other exhibitions that were organised by the Committee.⁶ In addition, it must immediately be noted that a larger number of exhibitions was planned to be hosted at the Zachęta, but this proved impossible for lack of space.⁷

3 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, file no. 175, signatures 1–274.

4 A. Lisiecka, "Działalność Komitetu Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą w latach 1950–1956" [Activity of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries in the years 1950–1956], in: *Przebudować człowieka: komunistyczne wysiłki zmiany mentalności* [To remodel a man. Socialist efforts to change people's mentality], ed. M. Kula, Warsaw, 2001, pp. 203–260.

5 These were exhibitions of Bulgarian and Romanian architecture, contemporary art from the Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, Romania and Hungary, exhibitions illustrating the building of a new political system in various satellite countries of the USSR and presenting their folk art, exhibitions of the art of Communism-friendly artists from beyond the Iron Curtain (mainly from England, France, Italy and Mexico) and – towards the end of the Committee's existence – shows illustrating selected artistic phenomena in the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland; exhibitions of Indian and Iranian art were also brought in. Foreign exhibitions included mainly historical and contemporary Realistic painting in the countries of the Eastern bloc, as well as graphic art, illustration, poster and photography from beyond the Iron Curtain.

6 Exhibitions shown at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions were later often transferred to other centres: Lublin, Łódź, Poznań or Wrocław. In addition, reports lodged in the Archives of Modern Records reveal that institutions parallel to the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries were active in other countries of the Eastern bloc; they most probably presented a similar set of exhibitions.

7 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 16, p. 198.

At this point it is once again necessary to refer to Altshuler, as he emphasised that images showing the display are the most important tool in researching the history of exhibitions.⁸ The events in question are difficult to reconstruct because, in the Polish context of the first half of the 1950s, documentation of the entire exhibition space was rarely made. Only from today's perspective, i.e. the perspective of researchers on the history of exhibitions, we are able to equally appreciate what was exhibited and how it was exhibited. In reference to the exhibitions discussed herein, the pertinent principles of cultural policy and the reception of these events in art criticism and in the recollections of eyewitnesses become much more important.

Photographs of only some of the exhibitions organised by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries have survived. It seems that none of the shows was designed in an innovative way. Their appearance was rather traditional, reminiscent of the pre-war exhibitions; although the works were not hanging all the way up to the ceiling (as had been done in the traditional salon system which developed in 18th-century France and spread over continental Europe, Russia and Great Britain⁹), they were closely spaced, with not enough distance between them to be viewed in a convenient manner. In the case of exhibitions organised by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, we may speak of Socialist Realist methods of exhibiting art: paintings or sculptures had to refer to the aesthetics of 19th-century Realism, and the character of the exhibition designs also had to relate to that period and out of necessity omitted the achievements of the avant-garde. Before the war, Europe had seen propagandist exhibitions from the Soviet Union or Fascist Italy that made use of avant-garde solutions in the area of exhibition design.¹⁰ Mary Ann Staniszewski highlights the fact that the situation changed radically after the 2nd World War; the only place where experiments concerning exhibition techniques were conducted were industrial design shows.¹¹ Hence the events discussed herein, which were an expression of the cultural policy of a Communist state, at the same time constituted a part of a wider European trend.

The foundation and principles of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries

The new Act on the Organisation of Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries came into force on 18 July 1950. Its first article read: "In order to maintain

8 B. Altshuler, op. cit., p. 7.

9 Ibid., p. 16.

10 M. A. Staniszewski, "Installation Design in Italy and the Art of Propaganda", in: eadem, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at Museum of Modern Art*, London, 2001, pp. 50–57.

11 Ibid., p. 57.

and advance cultural cooperation with foreign countries, and especially to enhance cultural cooperation with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the countries of popular democracy, the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries attached to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers is hereby established [...]”.¹² The range of tasks assigned to the newly founded institution was extremely broad: to plan and maintain cultural relations with other nations; to keep foreign recipients abreast as to Poland’s social, cultural and scholarly life; to work on proposals referring to Poland’s participation in international events related to issues of art, science, technology and sport; to organise international cultural events in the country; to guide and look after foreigners coming to Poland in respect of cultural issues. The aim behind founding the Committee is flawlessly summed up in a note from 1955, which informs us that one of the key achievements of the institution was that it centralised, expanded and politicised artistic exchange.¹³ Not all plans associated with the Committee came to fruition; it was remarked that the range of tasks assigned to this institution in the Act related to the entire cooperation between the People’s Republic of Poland and foreign countries and was thus, in fact, too broad.¹⁴

The activities of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries – similarly to those of other institutions that operated in the People’s Republic of Poland during the Stalinist period – were under tight control. The Committee’s contacts with foreign organisations could be conducted solely through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and invited guests were under total control. *Tymczasowy statut Komitetu Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą* [The temporary statute of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries] proclaimed: “The existing multi-directionality in the area of, for example, inviting foreign delegations by various institutions, does not allow for sufficient planning, for making appropriate propagandistic use of their visit, and especially does not guarantee their proper supervision as regards politics”.¹⁵ It was therefore decided to close all other agencies intended to conduct foreign cooperation that existed at ministries and other public institutions. The Committee took over the tasks of the foreign cooperation offices at the Ministry of Culture and Art and at the Ministry of Education, as well as the tasks of the Associations for Friendship.¹⁶ It was to promote not only the cultural achievements of the People’s Republic of Poland, but also those of the USSR and of the other countries of the Eastern bloc.

As has already been mentioned, organising exhibitions was only one among

12 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 1, p. 1.

13 Ibid., p. 236.

14 Ibid., p. 241.

15 Ibid., p. 27.

16 With the exception of the Association for Polish-Soviet Friendship and the Association for Friendship with the Greek Democracy.

a multitude of tasks assigned to the Committee for Cultural Cooperation. Reports for the year 1953 contain complaints that “greater panache in the area of exhibition organisation is stymied by the lack of appropriate spaces, especially in Warsaw”.¹⁷ An office concerned solely with exhibitions was established only towards the end of the Committee’s existence. On 22 November 1954 the General Secretariat issued a decision that “an Independent Department for organising and coordinating all issues arising from the Committee’s tasks in the area of exhibition organisation” would be established as per 1 December 1954.¹⁸ The tasks of the newly established department included supervising the appointment of the exhibition’s commissioner, supervising the technical organisation of the display, translating and editing materials to be published in the catalogue, preparing relevant cost estimates and preparing a register of guests to be invited to the opening.¹⁹ Its other duties involved drafting the annual plan of exhibitions and issuing quarterly reports regarding completion of this plan.

Cultural exchange with the Soviet Union and with other countries of the Eastern bloc, with whom culture-related agreements had been signed, was the most energetic. As for countries beyond the Iron Curtain, contacts were maintained solely with the “progressive and democratic artistic and scholarly milieus”, i.e., to translate this newspeak into today’s language, with milieus that were involved in the operation of Communist parties.²⁰ The Committee’s reports bluntly stated that with respect to those countries, political and propagandistic factors were of far greater importance than strictly artistic ones. To cite a note from 1955: “Quite different is the state of affairs in the area of cooperation with the capitalist states, where the lack of any prospect of making precise plans causes this exchange to be erratic and uneven. [...] In many cases, while inviting foreign artists the Committee’s Bureau makes the political significance of the projected enterprise its first priority and treats professional artistic issues as only secondary”.²¹ All that can be added is that, despite the above, attempts were made to prevent some events from happening because the artistic quality of the proposed artworks was low.²²

17 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 9, p. 22.

18 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 1, p. 205.

19 Ibid., pp. 205–206.

20 Ibid., p. 179.

21 Ibid., p. 235.

22 Cf. e.g. Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 18, p. 27.

Exhibitions of art from the Soviet Union

Exhibitions of art produced in the Soviet Union were, for obvious reasons, the central point of the exhibition programme proposed by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation. However, a review of the extant materials pertaining to events organised at that time clearly reveals that Soviet art did not dominate the enterprise. Art produced in countries of the Eastern bloc was shown in a much greater quantity, and in each case the similarity of those countries' art to Polish art was emphasised.

In 1951 the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA) hosted the first Polish exhibition of works by Soviet artists. Its propagandistic dimension is confirmed by the membership of its honorary committee, which included, among others, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Aleksander Zawadzki, Chairman of the Association for Polish-Soviet Friendship Edward Ochab, Ambassador of the USSR in Warsaw Arkadiy Alexandrovich Sobolev, Undersecretary of State at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers Jakub Berman, Minister of Foreign Affairs Stanisław Skrzyszewski, and Minister of Culture and Art Stefan Dybowski. Two posters promoting the exhibition were printed; one contained a reproduction of a painting in colour, which in those days was a rare occurrence (Fig. 1). The introduction for the catalogue, entitled "Pierwsza wystawa prac plastyków



Fig. 1. Poster for *Wystawa prac plastyków radzieckich* [Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists], 1951, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 2. *Wystawa prac plastyków radzieckich* [Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists], 1951, a view of the exhibition – staircase with a sculptural portrait of Joseph Stalin, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

radzieckich” [The first exhibition of works by Soviet artists], was written by the General Secretary of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation, Jan Karol Wende. It also included a text by the leading representative of Socialist Realism in Poland, Juliusz Krajewski, entitled “Humanizm sztuki radzieckiej” [The humanism of Soviet art], and an essay by Olga Mikhailovna Malashenko, an art historian from the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, who provided a step-by-step analysis of the method of Socialist Realism.²³

An inspection of the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art Archive reveals that this is one of the most fully documented exhibitions. A set of photographs clearly shows how propagandistic the tone of the display was. The setting did not differ much from those organised by the pre-war Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts; the paintings were traditionally arranged and potted ferns were often placed in spaces between the exhibits. Only the staircase was decorated with a sculptural portrait of Josef Stalin, its plinth surrounded with flowers and with Polish and Soviet flags (Fig. 2). To the left hung a placard with a quotation from Vladimir Lenin: “Art belongs to the people. It must have its deepest roots in the broad masses of workers. It must be

23 O. M. Małaszenko, untitled, in: *Wystawa prac plastyków radzieckich. Malarstwo – rzeźba – grafika* [Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists. Painting – Sculpture – Graphic Art], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1951, p. 13.

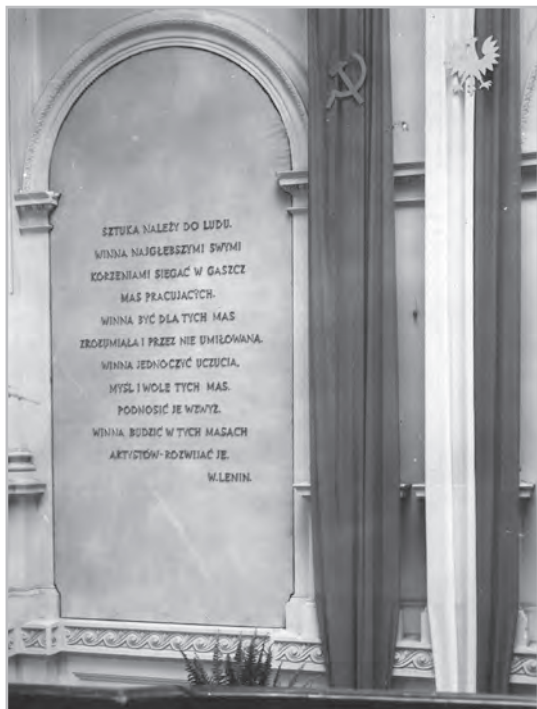


Fig. 3. Wystawa prac artystów radzieckich [Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists], 1951, a view of the exhibition – staircase with a quotation from Vladimir Lenin, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

understood and loved by them. It must unite the feelings, thoughts and will of these masses. It must uplift them. It should awaken the artists in them; it should develop them” (Fig. 3). The plinths of sculptures representing Stalin which stood in the exhibition halls were also surrounded by flowers (Fig. 4). A small table in the corner, surrounded by three chairs and with a memorial book on top, is also worth noting; this was an obligatory element of every exhibition held at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in the 1950s.

The *Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists* was a huge enterprise and became a model for exhibitions pertaining to countries of the Eastern bloc. Not only Socialist Realist strategies of displaying art were imitated, but, above all, the iconography of the exhibited paintings and sculptures. The core of the works shown at the first Polish exhibition of works by Soviet artists were canvases from the all-Soviet exhibitions in the years 1947–1950. Their topics revolved around the activities of Lenin and Stalin (e.g. *Lenin przemawiający na III Zjeździe Komsomotu* [Lenin speaking at the 3rd Conference of the Komsomol]) and their great mutual friendship, the Soviet people’s love for their leader, the struggle for peace, the building of the new system, the active involvement of Soviet youth in Communism and the new Soviet landscape. Another frequent topic were the portraits of Soviet activists, e.g. Molotov, and the “heroes of labour”.



Fig. 4. *Wystawa prac plastyków radzieckich* [Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists], 1951, a view of the exhibition, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Exhibitions of art from countries of the Eastern bloc

One of the first shows to be organised by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions was the exhibition entitled *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic art – Sculpture (Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba, 1951)*. It was characterised by a high artistic quality; this was even emphasised on the poster, which announced the “exhibition of an outstanding German artist” (Fig. 5). It encompassed a total of 66 graphic works, 5 drawings, 7 sculptures and 12 reproductions (exhibiting reproductions was a very frequent practice in those days). Kollwitz had died in 1945, so her oeuvre was open to manipulation. This was pointed out already by Jacek Woźniakowski: “Graphic works of Käthe Kollwitz, an artist posthumously turned into a precursor of Socialist Realism, came to us quite frequently [...]”.²⁴ It is worth adding that in Poland a similar thing had happened to the

24 J. Woźniakowski, “Nieznany czar Zachodu. Odszukiwanie kontaktu” [The strange charm of the West. Searching for contact], in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki. Warszawa, listopad 1984* [Polish art after 1945. Materials from a session of the Association of Art Historians, Warsaw, November 1984], Warsaw, 1987, p. 116.

Fig. 5. Poster for the exhibition *Käthe Kollwitz, 1867–1945. Grafika – rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 1951, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



oeuvre of Felicjan Szczęsny Kowarski,²⁵ who was pronounced to have been an precursor of Socialist Realism.

Kollwitz's work was described as "progressive"; this term was applied to all pro-Communist artists, also those from beyond the Iron Curtain. The catalogue contains an anonymous text which, among others, informs us that after the Revolution in Russia, Kollwitz produced a series of works in support of that country, and that in 1927 she went to Moscow to attend the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Soviet rule. The dramatic aspect of her art and its non-compliance with the optimism required by Socialist Realism were equally emphasised.²⁶

The man responsible for the shape of Käthe Kollwitz's exhibition was most probably Otto Nagel (1894–1967), one of the artist's close friends and, after her death, the guardian of her legacy. A solo exhibition of his own works took place at the Zachęta four years later. It consisted of about 90 oils and pastels dating from the pre- and post-war period. The tone of the reviews

25 M. Lachowski, *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945–1960* [The Moderns after a catastrophe. Art in Poland in the years 1945–1960], Lublin, 2013, p. 68.

26 Untitled, in: *Käthe Kollwitz, 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic art – Sculpture], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1951, pp. 5–6.

was critical.²⁷ The documents of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation contain an interesting description of the German artist, who came to the opening of his own exhibition: "Prof. Nagel refused the offer of visiting the National Gallery or the Institute of Industrial Design, saying that after his recent visit to Moscow he was replete with artistic experiences. But he very much liked the meetings with artists, partially considering those meetings to be a tribute paid to his art. He was also very fond of emphasising who he is, how many and what posts he holds, what distinctions he has been awarded, and who he meets".²⁸

The profile of exhibitions of art from countries of the Eastern bloc is easily discernible. In 1953 the Zachęta hosted an unusual exhibition – not of art, but of propagandistic photography. *New Albania on the Path to Socialism* (*Nowa Albania na drodze do socjalizmu*) was a problem-oriented show reporting the history and life of the Albanian people. The prose-writer and translator Anna Milska, who in 1950 published her impressions from a journey to Albania under the title *Shqiptarija – ojczyzna górskich orłów* [*Shqiptarija – the land of mountain eagles*], was designated to write the introduction to the catalogue. "The first Albanian exhibition in Poland illustrates Albania's ever-increasing material and cultural prosperity. It offers an image of the first years of the Five-Year Plan: 1951–1955", explained Milska.²⁹ The arrangement of the display was planned as follows: 1. Introductory information on the People's Republic of Albania; 2. History of the liberation movement; 3. Struggle with the Fascist occupation forces; 4. The People's Albania on the path to Socialism: a) industry, agriculture; b) science, culture and art c) the Albanian army; d) the Five-Year Plan; e) friendship with the Soviet Union and countries of the people's democracy; f) the Albanian people in the struggle for peace.

The Committee for Cultural Cooperation prepared similar exhibitions referring to other countries of the Eastern bloc, also ones held outside the Zachęta building. In 1953 the residents of Cracow enjoyed an exhibition *Hungary on the Path to Socialism* (*Węgry na drodze do socjalizmu*) held at the Palace of Art. The following year, the Historical Museum in Warsaw hosted the exhibition *The Democratic People's Republic of Korea* (*Koreańska Republika Ludowo-Demokratyczna*), and the Silesian Museum in Wrocław and the Polish Army House in Warsaw hosted the exhibition *Ten Years of Free Bulgaria* (*10 lat wolnej Bułgarii*).³⁰

Other events planned by the Committee were shows of art produced in

27 I. Witz, "Malarstwo Otto Nagla" [Otto Nagel's painting], *Życie Warszawy*, 1955, no. 141, p. 3.

28 D. Żmij, *Sprawozdanie z pobytu profesora Nagla z małżonką* [A report from Prof. Nagel and his wife's stay in Poland], 5 June 1955, Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 152, p. 38.

29 A. Milska, untitled, in: *Nowa Albania na drodze do socjalizmu* [New Albania on the Path to Socialism], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1953, p. 8.

30 *Sztuka obca w Polsce 1944–1960* [Foreign art in Poland 1944–1960], typescript, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art Archive.



Fig. 6. *Wystawa sztuki Rumuńskiej Republiki Ludowej* [Exhibition of Art from the People's Republic of Romania], 1952, a view of the exhibition – staircase with a portrait of Joseph Stalin, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

all of the countries of the Eastern bloc. These exhibitions were intended to confirm the thesis that the aesthetics of Socialist Realism was a logical consequence of the realistic tendencies that had been developing in those countries throughout past centuries. The *Exhibition of Art from the People's Republic of Romania* (*Wystawa sztuki Rumuńskiej Republiki Ludowej*) was shown in 1952.³¹ The number of exhibited caricatures was considerable in comparison to exhibitions from other countries, and the author of the introduction explained that they “enjoyed great popularity in Romania”.³² Examples of Romanian folk art were exhibited but not included in the catalogue. The introduction emphasised that “in Romanian folk art a Polish viewer will find many traces of kinship with Polish folk production from the Podkarpacie and Podhale regions”.³³

The exhibition design was similar to that of the *Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists* in 1951. The display occupied “6 large halls”.³⁴ In the staircase, an oil portrait of Josef Stalin hung against the background of a draped fabric (Fig. 6).

31 An exhibition of Romanian graphic art (*Wystawa grafiki rumuńskiej*) took place in 1955.

32 Untitled, in: *Wystawa sztuki Rumuńskiej Republiki Ludowej* [Exhibition of Art from the People's Republic of Romania], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1952, p. 6.

33 Ibid., p. 7.

34 “Otwarcie Wystawy Sztuki Rumuńskiej” [Opening of the exhibition of Romanian art], *Kurier Codzienny* (Warsaw), 1952, no. 195, p. 3.

Portraits of the general secretaries of the Communist parties of Poland and Romania were placed on both of its sides. Below were flowers and the flags of the People's Republic of Poland, of the People's Republic of Romania and of the Soviet Union. Stefan Henel commented: "The folk costume section literally overflows with colours, ornamental motifs and rich compositions. With a feeling akin to envy we realise that Romanian folk costume design shows much greater artistic inventiveness than ours"³⁵ (Fig. 7). Józef Grabowski did not omit to add in his review that Romania had long been appreciative of its folk art production and that a museum devoted solely to it, called the Museum of National Art, had been established in Bucharest.³⁶

Exhibitions of folk art of the Soviet Union's satellite countries were organised relatively often (in those days exhibitions of professional and folk art were organised together; only later was the folk art relegated to ethnographic museums). The year 1953 witnessed the *Exhibition of Bulgarian Folk Art* (*Wystawa bułgarskiej sztuki ludowej*) at the Zachęta and the *Exhibition of Folk Art of the GDR* (*Wystawa sztuki ludowej NRD*) at the National Theatre in Warsaw. These were later complemented by the *Exhibition of Hungarian Folk Art* (*Wystawa węgierskiej sztuki ludowej*) at the Radziwiłł Palace (1954) and the *Exhibition of Chinese Cut-outs* (*Wystawa wycinanki chińskiej*) at the Palace of Culture and Science (1956).³⁷

The *Exhibition of Bulgarian Folk Art* consisted of two sections. The first section contained exhibits dating from the 19th and 20th century (Fig. 8): folk costumes, embroideries, woodcarvings, paintings on wood, wooden utensils, metalwork, jewellery, musical instruments, weapons, maps, models of Bulgarian folk houses and objects connected with the practice of folk customs; the second section embraced industrial crafts and decorative art dating from after 9 September 1944:³⁸ clothing, embroideries, fabrics, carpets, woodcarvings, wooden utensils, pottery, metalwork and drawings on wood. The exhibition ended with an industrial design section, i.e. folk fabrics and embroideries used as models in the textile industry and designs for interiors in the Bulgarian style.³⁹

The Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries conducted a vigorous exchange with China, as manifested by, among others, the *Exhibition of art and craft from the People's Republic of China* (*Wystawa rzemiosła artystycznego Chińskiej Republiki Ludowej*) organised in 1954. It has been recorded

35 S. Henel, "Barwy i sztuka Rumunii" [The colours and art of Romania], *Express Wieczorny*, 1952, no. 203, p. 3.

36 J. Grabowski, "Sztuka ludowa Rumunii" [Folk art of Romania], *Słowo Powszechne*, 1952, no. 230, p. 4.

37 Then at the Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Bydgoszcz and in the Lublin Museum.

38 The day on which the Red Army entered the country and the Communists seized power. In the Communist period it was celebrated as a national holiday.

39 In addition, the *Exhibition of Bulgarian Graphic Art and Illustration* [*Wystawa bułgarskiej grafiki i ilustracji*] was organised in 1956.



Fig. 7. *Wystawa sztuki Rumuńskiej Republiki Ludowej* [Exhibition of Art from the People's Republic of Romania], 1952, a view of the exhibition, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 8. *Wystawa bułgarskiej sztuki ludowej* [Exhibition of Bulgarian Folk Art], 1953, a view of the exhibition, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

that the display was designed by the artist Maria Jarema, a close collaborator of Tadeusz Kantor. She had participated in three Exhibitions of Modern Art (in 1948/48, 1957 and 1959) and then, during the period of Socialist Realism, she withdrew from the artistic community.⁴⁰ The Committee's documentation yields an interesting piece of information on this event: "It must be noted that organisation of the exhibition went slowly and with much difficulty because the arrangement designed for this exhibition by the management of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions did not suit the Chinese conception [for it]. The arrangement of the exhibition was entirely redesigned only upon the command of the General Secretary of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Ambassador J. K. Wende, and in keeping with his recommendations; the final design wholly satisfied the Chinese side. These negotiations were very aggravating to the Chinese because the management of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions did not abandon its plans easily, treating the Chinese and the exhibits in a condescending manner".⁴¹

The *Exhibition of Chinese Woodcuts* (*Wystawa drzeworytu chińskiego*, Fig. 9) opened in 1954, also at the Zachęta. This is how it was described by Urszula Pomorska: "Small, because it consists of only 74 woodcut works, this exhibition showcases the last five years of Chinese output in this area and amply demonstrates that Chinese artists energetically react to all manifestations of contemporary life in their magnificent free country".⁴²

A vast review of Czechoslovakian art took place in the year 1952. It was a mammoth undertaking; over 600 works documenting the development of Czechoslovakian art from 1848 onward were gathered in seven exhibition halls (Fig. 10). The function of the commissioner of the *Exhibition of Czechoslovakian Art of the 19th and 20th Century* (*Wystawa sztuki czeskosłowackiej XIX i XX wieku*),⁴³ which was transferred from Leningrad, was entrusted to the art historian Dr Miroslav Míčko.⁴⁴ In a lecture given during the vernissage, he characterised the stages of development of this art.⁴⁵ The high status of the event is confirmed in a review by Jerzy Zanoziński:

40 M. Hermansdorfer, untitled, in: B. Ilkosz, *Maria Jarema 1908–1958*, exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Wrocław, Zachęta – The Gallery of Contemporary Art, Wrocław, 1998, p. 10.

41 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 111, p. 3.

42 U. Pomorska, "Z pracowni Li Liczangu w Pekinie" [From Li Lichang studio in Peking], *Express Wieczorny*, 1955, no. 157, p. 3.

43 In 1950 the Committee brought the *Exhibition of Czech Painting* [*Wystawa malarstwa czeskiego*] to the Central Bureau of Art Exhibition's pavilions in Sopot, and in 1955 the *Exhibition of Czechoslovakian Applied Graphic Art* [*Wystawa czeskosłowackiej grafiki użytkowej*] to the Zachęta.

44 Miroslav Míčko (1912–1970) – a Czech critic, theoretician and historian of modern art.

45 "Otwarcie wystawy sztuki czeskosłowackiej" [Opening of the exhibition of Czechoslovakian art], *Życie Warszawy*, 1954, no. 100, p. 1.



Fig. 9. Poster for *Wystawa drzeworytu chińskiego* [Exhibition of Chinese Woodcuts], 1954, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw



Fig. 10. Poster for *Wystawa sztuki czechosłowackiej XIX i XX wieku* [Exhibition of Czechoslovakian Art of the 19th and 20th Century], 1954, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

The exhibition has been meticulously prepared. Its Czechoslovakian organisers did not stint on the best works of early art which adorn the great museums of their homeland. Thanks to this, the retrospective section of the exhibition allows us to become entirely well acquainted with the history of realistic art in Czechoslovakia during the past century. The contemporary section seems to be somewhat overshadowed by the retrospective one, even if only because it contains a far smaller number of exhibits. A visitor coming to the exhibition for the first time is struck by the fact that painting is not preponderant over sculpture, which is usually dispatched [to exhibitions] in small numbers and as small specimens due to transportation difficulties. [...] Finally, the thorough scholarly background of the exhibition is worth emphasising. Two publications: the beautifully edited, richly illustrated album and the catalogue, greatly facilitate our tour around the halls of the Zachęta and allow us to orient ourselves in the accumulation of exhibits gathered therein.⁴⁶

Zanoziński subtly suggested that the artistic quality of the works held in the aesthetics of Social Realism did not equal the quality of art that had been produced in the Czechoslovakian nation during the 19th century.

Vestigial information regarding the arrangement of the exhibition is found in *Życie Literackie*: “Works which constitute the pinnacle of Czech art in the second half of the 19th century are exhibited in the main space, the Matejko Hall. [...] The subsequent halls contain exhibits from the turn of the 19th century and from later years, when the influence of Impressionism becomes evident”.⁴⁷

The *Exhibition of Ukrainian Art* (*Wystawa plastyki ukraińskiej*) in 1955 is worthy of interest as well; it was the only exhibition showing the achievements of just one Soviet republic to be organised in that period.⁴⁸ Its organiser, however, was not the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, but the Ministry of Culture and Art and the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (*Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków*, ZPAP); this may have been a harbinger of the Committee’s gradual decline. The ideological principles behind this event are expounded in a typescript extant in its documentation:

Spiritual kinship between our nations is particularly obvious in that most characteristic form which is folk art. Suffice it to look at the magnificent works of Ukrainian and Polish folk art – the colourful carpets, embroideries, fabrics, pottery, sculptures in wood, murals etc. – to find how close the art of the Polish and Ukrainian nations are, and how vast their shared, mutual influence. We can observe the same process in professional art: in painting, graphics and sculpture.⁴⁹

46 J. Zanoziński, “Wystawa sztuki czechosłowackiej” [Exhibition of Czechoslovakian art], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1954, no. 19, p. 8.

47 “Wystawa sztuki czechosłowackiej XIX i XX w.” [Exhibition of Czechoslovakian Art of the 19th and 20th Century], *Życie Literackie*, 1954, no. 18, p. 8.

48 I am grateful to Dr hab. Gabriela Świtek for bringing this to my attention.

49 A typescript included in the materials referring to the exhibition held in the documentation department of the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art.

Similar phrases were also used regarding the exhibitions of Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian or Hungarian art; generally, of art produced in the countries of the Eastern bloc.

Exhibitions of art from beyond the Iron Curtain

In the first half of the 1950s, the Western artists most often exhibited in the countries of the Eastern bloc were those from France⁵⁰ and Italy,⁵¹ owing to the strong position of the Communist parties and the well-developed cultural policy in their homelands. Westerners involved in the Communist ideology were also present in the Polish artistic life of the era, e.g. the Londoner Paul Hogarth⁵² or the American William Gropper;⁵³ their works were shown at the *Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Progressive Artists* (*Wystawa prac postępowych artystów plastyków*) at the Zachęta (1954).

The *Exhibition of Contemporary French Art* (*Wystawa współczesnej plastyki francuskiej*, 1952) was one of the shows that was central to the Committee's cultural policy. It was dominated by the French Socialist Realists, but it also included works by the Modernists – Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger and Henri Matisse. The authorities were trying to prove in this way that artists in Communist countries were not being harassed at all and that Western art which did not conform to the aesthetics of Socialist Realism could, in fact, be seen in the Eastern bloc. A monographic study of this exhibition is already in existence, so I will only point to the issues that were not mentioned therein.⁵⁴

The Zachęta's documentation contains no photographic records of the exhibition, but material extant in the National Film Archive enables us to partially reconstruct the arrangement of the display and the scale of the exhibited works. This material is particularly interesting, since it reveals the quality of the Modernists' presence within the framework of this exhibition. Analysing this event today, art historians underline solely the fact that the Modernists, especially Picasso, were exhibited. It is, however, interesting how the Modernist

50 Cf. D. Berthet, *Le P.C.F., la culture et l'art. 1947–1954*, Paris, 1990.

51 Cf. J. J. G. Gutiérrez, "The Politics of Abstract Art: Forma 1 and the Italian Communist Party, 1947–1951", *Cercles. Revista d'Història Cultural*, 2012, no. 15, pp. 111–135; A. R. Duran, *Painting, Politics and the New Front of Cold War Italy*, Farnham, 2014.

52 Cf. D. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins in Postwar Britain*, Durham–London, 1997.

53 Cf. *People are my Landscape: Social Struggle in the Art of William Gropper*, <http://library.syr.edu/digital/exhibits/g/Gropper/case2.htm> [accessed 27 January 2015].

54 Cf. K. Zychowicz, *Paryska lewica w stalinowskiej Warszawie. Wystawa współczesnej plastyki francuskiej w CBWA w 1952 roku* [The Paris Left in Stalinist Warsaw. An exhibition of contemporary French art at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw], Warsaw, 2014.

works, which were dominated by the large-format canvases of the French Realists, merged into the general character of the exhibition.

Materials collected in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw have yielded a note indicating that the person mainly responsible for the shape of this exhibition was André Fougeron. It reads: "The largest event as regards exhibitions prepared by the Department is unquestionably the exhibition of contemporary French painting, to which our political and artistic powers attach great importance. Also the French progressive organisations evince great interest in it. The outstanding French painter André Fougeron has been designated responsible for the effort on their behalf".⁵⁵ The archive materials do much to explain this situation, as many scholars have pointed to Ryszard Stanisławski as the curator of this exhibition.⁵⁶

The *Exhibition of French Artistic Textiles* (*Wystawa francuskiej tkaniny artystycznej*) was on show at the Zachęta in late 1953 and early 1954. If the Committee's documentation is to be believed, the "French painters submitted a request for an exhibition of French textiles to be organised".⁵⁷ The Ministry of Culture and Art proposed that the building of the Institute of Industrial Design be the venue, but ultimately the exhibition was hosted by the Zachęta. The *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski* newspaper reported that "35 pieces of artistic textiles made in the renowned weaving centre of Aubusson following designs by contemporary French painters were on show in 3 large exhibition halls".⁵⁸

The Modernist textiles were arranged against a neutral background and in a distance, thus allowing the audience to view them in a convenient manner (Fig. 11). The exhibition was entirely outside the framework of the Socialist Realist aesthetics. This is confirmed by Hanna Szczawińska's review in the *Tygodnik Powszechny* weekly: "The first impressions of the viewer dazed by the charm of the colour combinations, by the shouting of abstract and surrealist compositions, may bring to mind flowers... which have spoken out loud".⁵⁹ This one and only truly critical text (the other reviews mostly summarised

55 Cf. *Sprawozdanie z pracy Wydziałów Krajów Różnych za miesiąc grudzień 1951 r.* [Report from the work of the Departments of Diverse Countries for the month of December, 1951], Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 18, p. 54.

56 K. Murawska-Muthesius, "How the West Corroborated Socialist Realism in the East: Fougeron, Taslitzky and Picasso in Warsaw", *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 2003, no. 2, p. 319; eadem, "Paris from behind the Iron Curtain", in: *Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900–1968*, ed. S. Wilson, exhibition catalogue, Royal Academy of Arts, London; Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, London, 2002, p. 254.

57 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 267, p. 111.

58 "Francuska tkanina artystyczna na wystawie w 'Zachęcie'" [French artistic textiles on show at the Zachęta], *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski* (Bydgoszcz), 1953, no. 297, p. 5.

59 H. Szczawińska, "Francuska tkanina artystyczna" [French artistic textiles], *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1954, no. 3, p. 9.



Fig. 11. *Wystawa francuskiej tkaniny artystycznej* [Exhibition of French Artistic Textiles], 1953/1954, a view of the exhibition, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

the history of French textiles) tells us that the exhibition “unfortunately does not include large textiles of a more monumental nature. It does not include them simply because those gigantic textiles, being very costly, are produced solely on commission and are difficult to be loaned out for an exhibition. Nevertheless, we have been shown some larger pieces [...]”.⁶⁰ It is worth adding that echoes of this event are found in Leopold Tyrmand’s diary from 1954; the writer shared Szczawińska’s view: “The magic of the colour, intelligence of the contents, stunning perfection of the draughtsmanship, esprit, creative fantasy, subtle emotiveness; one could continue this catalogue endlessly or write simply: true Art”.⁶¹

The catalogue of the exhibition of French textiles opened with an essay by Léon Moussinac, a theatre, film and applied art critic, one of the leading French intellectuals linked with the Communist movement in the first half of the 20th century. Moussinac pointed out both the strengths and weaknesses of the French textile art: “Artists who designed textiles in the 14th and 15th century found a generally understood form of artistic expression. Their successors in the 20th century have no less great ambitions; yet for their form of artistic expression to possess the same virtues they will have to continue growing

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶¹ L. Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954: wersja oryginalna* [Diary 1954: the original version], edited and introduced by H. Dasko, Warsaw, 1999, p. 42.



Fig. 12. Poster for *Wystawa prac postępowych artystów plastyków* [Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Progressive Artists], 1954, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

independent of painting”.⁶² The author of the second essay in the catalogue was Ryszard Stanisławski. He was aware that the textiles were Modernist in style, so he felt compelled to justify their presence in the People’s Republic of Poland: “Not touching upon the issue of their topics, which, as has already been stated, may have been determined by the requirements of the environment, it seems that the undertaken topics are in many cases expressed by means of a form that is not always close to the realistic form. The decorative character of textile does, in fact, call for a special licence, but perhaps not in order to transgress it”.⁶³ A reviewer from Wrocław (to where the exhibition was moved) added: “The opinion prevalent in private conversations was that organising such an exhibition during the period of the struggle for Socialist Realism was strange and harmful”.⁶⁴

The *Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Progressive Artists* (*Wystawa prac postępowych artystów plastyków*, Fig. 12), one of the largest reviews of Western-European graphic art to be held in Poland after the war, took place in 1954.⁶⁵ It can be considered a summary of the exhibition-organising policy implemented by the

62 L. Moussinac, untitled, in: *Wystawa francuskiej tkaniny artystycznej* [Exhibition of French artistic textiles], exhibition catalogue, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1953, pp. 8–9.

63 R. Stanisławski, untitled, in: *Wystawa francuskiej tkaniny...*, *ibid.*, p. 17.

64 *Sprawozdanie z wystawy francuskiej tkaniny artystycznej we Wrocławiu (5.XII.53)* [Report from the exhibition of French artistic textiles in Wrocław (5 December ‘53)], Zachęta – National Gallery of Art Archive, 20/868.

65 The exhibition was also presented at the National Museum in Poznań and, interestingly, in the Jerka Village House of Culture (Kościan County, 25 April – 2 May 1954). Cf. the



Fig. 13. Poster for the exhibition *Renato Guttuso. Obrazy i rysunek* [Renato Guttuso. Paintings and drawing], 1954, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries with respect to artists from beyond the Iron Curtain. This is because almost all of the artists who had exhibited in Poland in the first half of the 1950s were present there as well. In the introduction to the catalogue, Andrzej Jakimowicz explained the character of the show: “A clear factor that unites the works exhibited here is the ideological cause, the issue of the artists’ stance in that struggle for peace and social justice which is now enfolding the entire world. It is precisely this criterion of ideological contents that constitutes an entire novelty in the field of international art exhibitions”.⁶⁶ Here, again, the realistic character of the works was mentioned: “The exhibition shows that, wishing to convey the fiery contents of his protest and the zeal of his belief to other people, an artist reaches this aim most accurately when he makes use of the unambiguous, simple and intelligible message of a realistic artistic statement”.⁶⁷

One more exhibition that was very important to Polish artists took place in the same year: *Renato Guttuso. Paintings and drawings* (*Renato Guttuso. Obrazy i rysunek*, Fig. 13). Guttuso, just as André Fougeron, was a painter who

documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 273, p. 3.

66 A. Jakimowicz, untitled, in: *Wystawa prac postępowych artystów plastyków* [Exhibition of the oeuvre of progressive artists], exhibition catalogue, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1954, s. 3.

67 Ibid., p. 5.

abandoned art inspired by Picasso's painting and turned towards more intelligible representations; hence his work was often exhibited in the countries of the Eastern bloc.⁶⁸ The exhibitions of Fougerson and Guttuso were of key importance to the formation of Polish art in the 1950s; the oeuvre of the iconic figure of Polish art, Andrzej Wróblewski, is an example.⁶⁹

Guttuso's works were arranged in two large exhibition halls at the Zachęta; the exhibition contained 30 paintings and a few dozen drawings dating from the two previous years (with the exception of the canvas *The Battle of Ponte dell'Ammiraglio*, painted in 1951–1952). These works included only one still life and a few landscapes; other works focused on workers on strike, peasants or miners' wives. Hanna Szczawińska reported that "interesting observations are yielded by heated debates caused by the exhibition of works by the Italian artist Renato Guttuso. The biting tone of these debates, which have appeared in the visitors' book, and the great number of entries therein, are the best indication of how interesting the problem of Guttuso's output is and how much we have been in need of such an exhibition. It is good that our habitually cautious Realism is confronted with such a strong creative passion [...]"⁷⁰ Afterwards the exhibition was moved to the Lublin Castle. A report that describes the typically Socialist Realist manner of displaying works of art is worth noting: "Thus, in the first hall, where a prominent decorative accent and the flags had also been placed, there were such paintings as *The Death of a Hero*, *Greece 1952*, *Occupation of the Uncultivated Lands of Sicily*, *Wives of Sulphur Miners*, *Wives of Workers on Strike* and *The Unemployed*. [...] All of the exhibition halls were decorated with cut flowers and potted shrubs".⁷¹

In 1955 the Zachęta hosted one of the most important exhibitions of foreign art in the entire history of the People's Republic of Poland – the *Exhibition of Mexican Art* (*Wystawa sztuki meksykańskiej*), which was prepared by the National Front for the Visual Arts (Frente Nacional de Artes Plásticas, FNAP) in Mexico (Fig. 14).⁷² Jacek Woźniakowski described this event, together with the exhibition of French painting in Cracow in 1946, as "the two most important foreign exhibitions to take place [in Poland] in the early post-war period",⁷³ which "aroused feverish commotion and reactions among painters more or less similar to Delacroix's reaction to Constable (influenced by the Englishman's palette,

68 On Guttuso's connections with politics, cf. e.g. A. Potts, "Realism and Materialism in Postwar European Art", in: *Renew Marxist Art History*, eds. W. Carter, B. Haran, F. J. Schwartz, London, 2013, pp. 400–419.

69 J. Woźniakowski, op. cit., p. 116; J. Ilkosz, "Malarstwo realizmu socjalistycznego w Polsce" [Socialist Realist painting in Poland], in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku...*, op. cit., p. 210.

70 H. Szczawińska, "Guttuso", *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 1954, no. 19, p. 8.

71 I. Iskrzycka, *Sprawozdanie z organizacji wystawy prac Renato Guttuso* [Report from the organisation of the exhibition of Renato Guttuso's works], Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 271, p. 2.

72 Two versions of the poster for this exhibition are in existence.

73 J. Woźniakowski, op. cit., p. 116.



Fig. 14. Poster for *Wystawa sztuki meksykańskiej* [Exhibition of Mexican Art], 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

the French master reportedly repainted *The Massacre at Chios*)”.⁷⁴ Woźniakowski was of the opinion that the Polish audience had overestimated both exhibitions, considering them a presentation of the most recent trends in art, while in reality they showed phenomena which by then had already been well established. At the same time he highlighted the influence of the Mexicans’ oeuvre at the Arsenal show a few months later.⁷⁵ The exhibition is also important to European art history in general. After the exhibition closed, Frida Kahlo’s canvas *The Wounded Table* (1939/1940) got lost during its transport to Moscow. This was the largest painting to have ever been produced by Kahlo;⁷⁶ it constituted an expression of her feelings caused by her husband Diego Rivera’s infidelity and had been presented at the Fourth International Exhibition of Surrealism organised in Mexico City by André Breton.⁷⁷ A few years ago it was one of

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ This is a colloquial name for this exhibition, from the place where it was held; the official name was *Przeciw wojnie – przeciw faszyzmowi* [Against war – against fascism]. It was organised in 1955 in the framework of the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students in Warsaw. Some scholars consider it to be a symbol of the so-called thaw, which was then in progress in the Polish artistic life.

⁷⁶ Cf. <https://vimeo.com/album/2152181/video/53733440> [accessed 19 February 2016].

⁷⁷ http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/surr/hd_surr.htm [accessed 19 February 2016]. Diego Rivera also participated in this exhibition, although neither of them ever officially joined the Surrealist movement.

the protagonists of the *Gallery of Lost Art* project, which consisted in preparing a catalogue of famous works of art that had been destroyed or lost during the past hundred years.⁷⁸

The exhibition was a colossal enterprise, as highlighted by the fact that the introduction to its catalogue was penned by the general secretary of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Jan Karol Wende (who had earlier prepared the preface to the *Exhibition of Works by Soviet Artists* album). He rightly stressed that “it is for the first time that the multitudes of Polish art lovers [...] have the opportunity to become directly acquainted with such a broad range of Mexican art”.⁷⁹ The Mexican side sent to Poland not only examples of contemporary art, but also a retrospective section illustrating the development of graphic art from the 16th century onwards.

The exhibition had been in the planning stage since 1952.⁸⁰ A letter from the Ministry of Culture and Art explained that “owing to the lack of an appropriate venue in Warsaw, we are unable to organise a display of Mexican art that would occupy ca. 3000 m². Instead, the Ministry offers to accept a part of the Mexican exhibits – a half of them – and to leave the selection of topics (folk art or painting and other disciplines of the visual arts) to be decided by the Mexican side”.⁸¹ Interesting information has been located in the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: “After Siqueiros⁸² had returned from Poland, he began, together with a group of the local progressive artists – out of their own initiative – a campaign to send the exhibition of Mexican art – which is to be shown in Paris from May to July of this year – to countries

78 <http://galleryoflostart.com/> [accessed 28 January 2016].

79 J. K. Wende, untitled, in: *Wystawa sztuki meksykańskiej* [Exhibition of Mexican Art], exhibition catalogue, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1955, p. 5.

80 It would be difficult to assume that a work by Frida Kahlo (Lev Trotsky’s lover) could have been shown at this exhibition in 1952, i.e. while Stalin was alive. In 1940 Trotsky had been assassinated in Mexico, upon Stalin’s orders. I am grateful to Dr hab. Gabriela Świtek for bringing this circumstance to my attention.

81 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 256, p. 19.

82 Siqueiros visited Poland in 1951. Cf. a report from his stay – documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 206. It reads: “This was the first time I saw Siqueiros’s works and I must admit that they seemed to me like ornaments in hell, terrible dreams that had been given a shape. His art, with no restraint at all, full of symbolism and allegories, very formalistic and at the same time full of strange expressiveness, truly frightened me at first. [...] But to come back to the report; having seen the Krajewskis’ atelier, we visited Prof. Kokoszko, who showed some of his interesting works to the visitors, and then Prof. Bylina, who was busy working on some historical painting. Siqueiros expressed his admiration, but I do not think that it was an honest one. Our art does not speak to him even 10 percent as much as our nature, landscape, the rebuilding of Warsaw, and even architecture do” (pp. 4–5). Under the same signature there is also an interesting report from Diego Rivera’s stay in Poland in 1956.

of the Socialist camp. The delegation that went to the Art Department in regard of this matter was headed by Siqueiros and Diego Rivera. This delegation obtained permission to send the post-Paris exhibition to one of the Socialist countries on condition that the Art Department receives an official invitation. Siqueiros and Rivera notified the Republic of Poland's legation of this, asking them to have a relevant letter to be sent by the Polish side as soon as possible".⁸³

Mexican art of the 20th century was famous for its murals, but these were impossible to bring. Juliusz Starzyński argued, however, that "no less important is the powerful blast of monumentality and drama, which is the fundamental feature of this art – discernible also in easel painting and in graphic art in all its manifestations, regardless of the technique and format".⁸⁴ The lacuna was filled by means of documentation, i.e. photographic enlargements of Mexican murals, chiefly by José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Apart from the works of art, 60 reproductions, 50 monographic studies on art, illustrated catalogues, magazines and newspapers were also displayed.

In his analysis of the Cracow edition of the show, Konrad Winkler pointed out that "this art is unquestionably realistic if, not guided by orthodox pedantry, we consider every representation of the world that is intelligible and conforms to reality to constitute Realism". He also added that "F. Kahlo's surrealist composition entitled *The Wounded Table* and a few half-realistic and symbolic works do not spoil the impact of this show".⁸⁵ An important piece of information as to the character of this show is given by Jerzy Olkiewicz: "Another interesting feature of the entire exhibition is the colour of the paintings; with all their revolutionary nature, with the strong emphasis on contents, the Mexican painters do not cease to be good painters".⁸⁶

The year 1956 witnessed two exhibitions which portended the disintegration of the exhibition policy implemented by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation. In their case, the novelty was the seeming absence of ideological contents. Yet these exhibitions by no means referred to the newest Western trends; it was decided to focus on safe topics: the historically well-established phenomena in German graphic art and the oeuvre of an artist who moved outside the current tendencies in the world's art. The former was the *Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Graphic Artists from the Federal Republic of Germany* (*Wystawa prac grafików z Niemieckiej Republiki Federalnej*, Fig. 15). In his introduction to the catalogue, Jan Białostocki assured that "the exhibition is enlightening and interesting as one of the first, after many years, opportunities to become

83 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 256, p. 21.

84 J. Starzyński, untitled, in: *Wystawa sztuki meksykańskiej...*, op. cit., p. 12.

85 K. Winkler, "Plastyka meksykańska" [Mexican art], *Dziennik Polski*, 1955, no. 71, p. 3.

86 J. Olkiewicz, "Kwiaty i piszczele" [Flowers and shinbones], *Dziś i Jutro*, 1955, no. 9, p. 8.



Fig. 15. Invitation to *Wystawa prac grafików z Niemieckiej Republiki Federalnej* [Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Graphic Artists from the Federal Republic of Germany], 1956, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

acquainted with the current output of artists from the Federal Republic of Germany”.⁸⁷ The exhibition encompassed graphic works from various periods, but only three works by artists from the young generation, ones born in the years 1917–1923 (i.e. Otto Eglau, Hildegard Peters and Christa von Schnitzler-Croissant), were included.

In the same year the Committee introduced *Woodcuts and Sculptures by Robert Hainard* (*Drzeworyty i rzeźby Roberta Hainarda*). The art of this Swiss artist focused mostly on painting and sculpting animals; it is, however, worth noting that his views were leftist and that he belonged to the “Connaitre” organisation in Geneva.⁸⁸ The idea behind organising this exhibition in Poland is evident from a letter that came from the Polish legation in Bern: “Hainard would like to spend at least 6 weeks in Poland, at his own expense, which he explains in detail in his letter. On our part, we wholeheartedly support

⁸⁷ J. Białostocki, untitled, in: *Wystawa prac grafików z Niemieckiej Republiki Federalnej* [Exhibition of the oeuvre of graphic artists from the Federal Republic of Germany], exhibition catalogue, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 1956, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 264, p. 46.

Hainard's request; he appears to be a decent man, a bit of an eccentric. We would all the more like it to happen since the Swiss press is now (after the conference of ministers) writing much about the impossibility of having a cultural exchange with our countries, about the Iron Curtain coming down and so on. We would like to ask for the decision to be taken quickly and, if possible, for it to be a favourable one".⁸⁹ Elsewhere, it was added: "We also emphasise that our rejection would offend the initiator of this exhibition, Mr. Bouffard, who has been conducting a large propagandist campaign in favour of our country".⁹⁰

During this period, the exhibition's commissioner is increasingly more often mentioned in pertinent information.⁹¹ It initially belonged mainly to the artists. Interestingly, the commissioner of three of the above events (*Exhibition of Mexican Art*, *Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Graphic Artists from the Federal Republic of Germany*, *Woodcuts and Sculptures by Robert Hainard*) was the painter and graphic artist Roman Artymowski, who for many years had been a lecturer in graphic arts in Baghdad and who was also involved in writing about art. He was the commissioner of exhibitions of Polish art abroad many times, arranging exhibitions and writing introductions to catalogues.⁹² It is worth noting, however, that this function was soon taken over by art historians. The term "commissioner" (in Polish: *komisarz*) was used practically until the end of the People's Republic of Poland; this was connected with, among others, the dominance of French culture in Poland at that time (cf. the French term *commissaire d'exposition*).

Summing up these observations on exhibitions organised by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, it should not be forgotten that many of them were hosted abroad. The branches of art that were most

89 *Wyciąg z pisma poselstwa PRL w Bernie* [Summary of the letter from the People's Republic of Poland legation in Bern], documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 264, p. 2.

90 *Notatka dla Ambasadora w sprawie zorganizowania w Polsce wystawy prac graficznych i rzeźbiarskich Roberta Hainarda (Szwajcaria)* [Note to the Ambassador on re-organising the exhibition of graphic and painted works of Robert Hainard (Switzerland) in Poland], documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 264, p. 51.

91 The range of a commissioner's duties can also be found in the Committee's documentation, e.g. in the documents referring to Robert Hainard's exhibition. These included being present at the unpacking of the exhibits, collecting and editing the catalogue materials, accepting texts, selecting the poster and illustrations for the catalogue, collaborating in the preparation of the catalogue, poster and invitations, supervising the design of the display and the concept for decoration design, being present when the report was written out after the dismantling of the display, and helping to prepare the press conference. Cf. documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 264, p. 5.

92 B. Kowalska, "Roman Artymowski", in: *Roman Artymowski 1919–1993, akwarele*, exhibition catalogue, State Art Gallery in Łódź, Łódź, 1996, p. 6.

often exhibited outside of Poland were poster and graphic art. This is how this fact was justified in a document referring to an exhibition of graphic art which was intended to be exhibited in the United States of America, South America and Canada: "Limited opportunities for propaganda in the abovementioned area region force us to resign from showing problem-oriented exhibitions there and to place the main emphasis on art-oriented ones. Being typically art-oriented, an exhibition of graphic art would nevertheless acquaint the population of those countries with life in the People's Republic of Poland due to the undertaken topics".⁹³

Organising foreign exhibitions was not an easy task. One of the Committee's employees reported:

Worth emphasising is the fact that the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries does not have sufficiently qualified personnel to responsibly prepare exhibitions intended [to be shown] abroad. This is done in a "cottage industry" system, with the aid of one specialist consultant who visits the Committee once a week (sometimes even more rarely). In these conditions, it is difficult to deal with the overload of accumulating issues and to put the exhibition department on a level which it deserves to be at due to the serious propagandist and political role of our exhibitions and their outreach towards the masses. And it must be stated that Polish exhibitions [hosted] in capitalist countries find many attentive recipients and are highly regarded not only in the progressive, but even in the bourgeois press.⁹⁴

Documents located at the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art Archive indicate, however, that in reality the foreign exhibitions were organised by the Bureau's staff members: "A serious complication in the attempt to put the central system of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in order is the issue of foreign exhibitions organised by the Central Bureau outside of their own service plan and budget, on commission from the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries and with its money".⁹⁵

On the whole, the idea to centralise the entire cultural exchange with foreign countries turned out to be a utopia. In 1955, the Ministry of Culture and Art offered a proposal to decentralise the exchange and to dissolve the Committee for Cultural Cooperation.⁹⁶ The related conference took place on 6 May 1956;⁹⁷ the decree was valid as per 31 December of the same year.

93 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 234, p. 60.

94 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 9, p. 38.

95 *Uwagi do schematu organizacyjnego CBWA* [Comments to the organisational model of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions], 1950–1957, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art Archive, signature 12/1.

96 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 1, pp. 215–216.

97 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, signature 2, p. 33.

The decision was validated as follows: "The large quantitative increase of exchange, the considerable broadening of the geographical and thematic scope of intellectual contacts – all of this suggested either a very severe increase in the workforce requirements of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries or the liquidation of this agency and passing on its tasks to individual departments, institutions, etc."⁹⁸

At this point it would be worthwhile to offer a general characterisation of the policy of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries with regard to exhibitions. Foreign exhibitions prepared by this agency were intended to justify the state's cultural strategy as based on promoting the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, a style which programmatically referred to 19th-century Realism and its historical traditions. Art produced in the aesthetics of Socialist Realism was to show the postulated image of reality; hence it could not be critical of it and had to be optimistic in spirit.

Attempts at justifying the presence of Socialist Realism in Poland were based on references to the native tradition. Juliusz Starzyński specified two points in Polish art that may have influenced its formation: the so-called Bourgeois Realism of the late 15th and early 16th century, and the harbingers of the so-called Critical Realism of the second half of the 19th century.⁹⁹ The concept of "Critical Realism" functioned mainly in literary criticism; it was coined by Nikolay Chernyshevsky and popularised by Maxim Gorky to describe a realistic trend in Western literature of the first half of the 19th century which was interpreted as critical towards the bourgeoisie in the period of triumphant capitalism. This concept was to constitute the origin for Socialist Realism; in fact, it was the central element of its tradition. However, interpreting Socialist Realism as a successor to Critical Realism was not permitted, because the latter was represented by bourgeois writers, who pointed out detrimental social phenomena, but either responded to them by creating various utopias or failed to propose any optimistic perspectives for the future.¹⁰⁰ A similar strategy was applied with reference to exhibitions of art produced in the countries of the Eastern bloc; these would encompass the local version of Socialist Realism plus 19th-century painting that could be described as "Critical Realism".

In addition, it was essential to associate the concept of "Socialist Realism" with art produced in the countries of the Eastern bloc. The output of artists from Western Europe or from the United States would often appear

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

⁹⁹ J. Starzyński, "Z zagadnień realizmu w tradycjach malarstwa polskiego" [On Realism in Polish painting traditions], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1951, no. 1, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ A. Makowski, "Realizm krytyczny" [Critical Realism], in: *Słownik realizmu socjalistycznego* [Dictionary of Socialist Realism], eds. Z. Łapiński, W. Tomasiak, Cracow, 2004, pp. 257–260.

in exhibition halls or be discussed in magazines. The form of their works was often very different from the character of the paintings and sculptures which were representative of Polish art; hence Jan Lenica explained that in relation to these artists, it was only possible to talk about broadly understood realism, i.e. not about imitating objects, but about the “moral climate” of their works.¹⁰¹ This, however, was already in the twilight of Socialist Realism’s supremacy in Polish art and the definition of Realism that had been valid in the period of the “mild revolution” was slowly being returned to (before the introduction of Socialist Realism in the year 1949, Realism was interpreted very broadly, mostly as a conception that modernises itself parallel to reality).

Bringing to Poland exhibitions of folk art from the “fraternal” countries of the Eastern bloc was an important element of the policy of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation. As observed by Piotr Korduba, what occurred in Poland in the period 1949–1956 was “an instrumental inclusion of folk art in the social and cultural remodelling of the country in the Socialist spirit”.¹⁰² Włodzimierz Sokorski, the foremost theoretician of Socialist Realism in its Polish edition, wrote the essay “O właściwy stosunek do sztuki ludowej” [In favour of the correct attitude towards folk art]. Its tone should be familiar by now: “We are reaching for those invaluable treasures of folk culture which were an expression of its social distinctiveness and of the social protest against the cosmopolitan art of the small bourgeoisie, and we desire to merge this living, powerful current of the folk masses into the new national culture of Socialism [...]”.¹⁰³

It should not be forgotten, however, that the period of Socialist Realism in Poland was characterised by an inner dynamics. Exhibitions shown in late 1953 and in 1954 already heralded the slow departure from the requirements of Socialist Realism. The last exhibitions to be prepared by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries did not fit the principles of its policy – their political dimension was no longer as clear-cut as had been in the case of earlier events. In the Soviet Union, the doctrine of Socialist Realism was obligatory until the death of Stalin in 1953, and the first changes were to be observed three years later, after Nikita Khrushchev’s speech at the 20th Party Congress. Similar processes took place in the Polish artistic life. History came full circle, in a sense, because as the aesthetics of Socialist Realism was being abandoned, the post-war debate on the diversity of the forms of Realism was retuned to. The concept of Realism was broadened once again. In 1954 Juliusz Starzyński, one of the leading theoreticians of Socialist Realism

101 J. Lenica, “Proste i okrężne drogi” [Straight and winding roads], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1954, no. 7, p. 8.

102 P. Korduba, *Ludowość na sprzedaż: Towarzystwo Popierania Przemysłu Ludowego, Cepelia, Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego* [Folksiness on sale: The Association for Supporting the Folk Industry, Cepelia, Institute of Industrial Design], Warsaw, 2013, p. 264.

103 W. Sokorski, “O właściwy stosunek do sztuki ludowej” [In favour of a correct attitude towards folk art], *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 1949, vol. 2, p. 133.

in Poland, made a statement concerning the “broadly understood tradition”, in which he permitted Polish artists to make use of the artistic explorations of the Impressionists and of Picasso.¹⁰⁴ To him, Picasso was a representative of Realism regardless of his use of deformation, because his art was characterised by the authenticity of feeling.¹⁰⁵

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

The documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, which was an official agency active in the years 1950–1956, is currently deposited at the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw and constitutes an invaluable source for any Polish scholar interested in the history of exhibitions. It contains large amounts of interesting data which make it possible to ascertain the character of Polish exhibition-organising activity in the first half of the 1950s. In the six years of its existence the Committee organised ca. one hundred exhibitions. The essay concerns exhibitions hosted in the main building of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, i.e. the Zachęta. Foreign exhibitions prepared by the Committee were intended to justify the state’s cultural strategy based on promoting the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, which programmatically referred to 19th-century Realism and its historical traditions. Exhibitions of art produced in the countries of the Eastern bloc presented the local version of Social Realism plus 19th-century painting that could be described as “Critical Realism”. Bringing to Poland exhibitions of folk art from the “brotherly” countries of the Eastern bloc was an important element of the Committee’s policy, as in the years 1949–1956 attempts were made to use folk art in the process of remodelling the country in the Socialist spirit. The Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries was established in 1950 in order to centralise, expand and politicise artistic exchange. On the whole, however, the idea to centralise all of the cultural exchange with foreign countries turned out to be a utopia. In 1955, just as the so-called thaw was beginning, the Ministry of Culture and Art offered the proposal to decentralise the exchange and to dissolve the Committee.

104 J. Starzyński, “Od Courbetta do Picassa czyli o perspektywach sztuki nowoczesnej” [From Courbet to Picasso, or on the perspectives of modern art], *Materiały do Studiów i Dyskusji* [Materials for studies and discussions], 1954, no. 3–4, p. 27; idem, “Tradycja szeroko pojęta” [Tradition broadly understood], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1954, no. 16, p. 4.

105 J. Starzyński, “Sztuka wieczyście młoda” [The eternally young art], *Materiały do Studiów i Dyskusji z Zakresu Teorii i Historii Sztuki, Krytyki Artystycznej oraz Badań nad Sztuką* [Materials for studies and discussions on the theory and history of art, art criticism and research on art], 1955, no. 1–2, pp. 140–164.

Petra Skarupsky

“The War Brought Us Close
and the Peace Will Not Divide Us”:
Exhibitions of Art
from Czechoslovakia in Warsaw
in the Late 1940s

In 2005 Piotr Piotrowski published his book *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty* (*In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*),¹ which came to be the fundamental guide to the history of art in Central-Eastern Europe. The method proposed by Piotrowski, which he termed “horizontal art history”, constitutes an attempt to revise the obligatory narrations and to pinpoint the peculiar nature of this region. In his study *O horyzontalnej historii sztuki* [On horizontal art history], Piotrowski criticised the fact that the approach to the geography of art in which artistic phenomena occurring in Western Europe are considered to be the basis, the norm and the origin has so far not been revised.² Focusing attention on relations between the “centres” and the “peripheries” is to facilitate the deconstruction of the hierarchical and universalistic canon. The “horizontalness” as postulated by Piotrowski refers to, among others, the need of making the geography of art more dynamic. The task of critical geography is to pinpoint the relations between artistic centres³ and to underline the differences in comparison with the “Western idiom”.⁴ Not only relations between particular artistic centres, but also the directions taken by the artists’ interests are of key importance here.

The book *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty* focuses on circles of avant-garde artists who tried to retain as extensive independence of contacts and methods of

1 P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Poznań, 2005. Cf. idem, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, London, 2009.

2 P. Piotrowski, “O horyzontalnej historii sztuki” [On horizontal art history], *Artium Quaestiones*, 2009, vol. XX, p. 60.

3 Ibid., p. 29.

4 Ibid., p. 17.

presenting their output as was possible in the face of the oppressive system. Horizontal art history aims to deconstruct hierarchical art history, according to which art produced on the peripheries (in this case in Central-Eastern Europe) constitutes an adaptation of models worked out in the art metropolises (in the West).⁵ A critical stance towards the “centre vs. peripheries” relationship is one of the pillars of research on art in Central-Eastern Europe. Mariá Orišková has pointed out that both sides are responsible for the fact that the region has been marginalised in the “universalistic”, Western discourse.⁶ Eastern-European critics offered an image of art which was simplified and firmly dominated by the “dissident paradigm”; this narration was then copied in Western Europe. Focusing on the “dissident” character of art produced in Central and Eastern Europe makes it possible to highlight some phenomena which are not widely known and yet important in art history, but this approach cannot be applied uncritically.

In his book, Piotrowski observes that both the Polish and Czechoslovakian artistic milieus “did not operate in mutual isolation”.⁷ He also underlines that the meeting of the milieus was facilitated by, among others, the *Arguments 1962* (*Argumenty 1962*) exhibition at Krzywe Koło Gallery in Warsaw.⁸ A closer look at the issue of exhibitions of the Czechoslovakian artists presented in Poland has proved fruitful,⁹ as my research has revealed that thirty-five exhibitions of art produced in Czechoslovakia, i.e. an average of one exhibition per year, took place in Warsaw in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland.¹⁰ Almost all of these exhibitions, both collective and solo ones, were accompanied by the publication of catalogues. Other source materials documenting the organisation of these exhibitions have survived as well. Also, these were not only propagandist exhibitions of government-supported art or ones intended to emphasise the cultural policies of both states. In the following essay I shall concentrate on two collective exhibitions that presented art from Czechoslovakia in the first years after the 2nd World War as examples of cultural cooperation conducted by two different institutions involved in the organisation of exhibitions.

5 Ibid., pp. 59–73.

6 P. Piotrowski, *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* [Agoraphilia. Art and democracy in post-Communist Europe], Poznań, 2010, p. 17.

7 P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty...*, op. cit., p. 89.

8 Ibid.

9 The essay is based on a section of an M.A. thesis entitled *Wystawy sztuki z Czechosłowacji w Warszawie w latach 1945–1989* [Exhibitions of Czechoslovakian art in Warsaw in the years 1945–1989], supervised by Dr hab. Gabriela Świtek and presented at the Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw, in November 2015.

10 The calendar of exhibitions was determined mainly on the basis of materials available at the National Museum in Warsaw and at the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art. The entire activity of the Czechoslovakian Culture Centre cannot be reconstructed due to the absence of data. Most probably exhibitions directly connected with various festivals were also organised in Warsaw, yet not all of them could be retrieved.

Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance (1947)

Despite the conflicts between Czechoslovakia and Poland, which were mainly caused by issues of borders and national identities, questions of cooperation in the area of culture were regulated as early as in the first years after the 2nd World War.¹¹ The first draft of a treaty on culture was signed in February, and the Association for Polish-Czechoslovakian Friendship was established in Warsaw the following year.¹² In March of 1947 Poland and Czechoslovakia signed the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance,¹³ in which, among others, they undertook to develop and strengthen cultural cooperation. The signing of the treaty was motivated – much in the spirit of contemporary propaganda – by the Slavonic countries’ need to unify in the face of any potential German aggression. The treaty reads: “The President of the Republic of Poland and the President of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, striving to assure the peaceful development of these two Slavonic countries which, sharing a border with Germany, have during their entire history been victims of German rapacity [...], have for this reason decided to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance”.¹⁴

The Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Czechoslovakia was signed in July 1947.¹⁵ Among others, the articles of the agreement referred to the commencement of efforts to establish an Institute of Polish Culture in Czechoslovakia and an Institute of Czechoslovakian Culture in Poland; each institution was to promote the culture of its own country in the other. Another postulate referred to supporting academic and artistic exchange; scholars, artists, journalists, librarians, members of museum staff and students, including art history students, were selected to be sent for summer training visits.¹⁶ Both sides undertook to facilitate contacts between members of the scholarly and artistic milieus and to cooperate in “obliterating the detrimental consequences of anti-Slavonic

11 Cf. A. Szczepańska, *Warszawa–Praga 1948–1968. Od nakazanej przyjaźni do kryzysu* [Warsaw–Prague 1948–1968. From a mandatory friendship to a crisis], Szczecin, 2011, p. 201.

12 Ibid., pp. 201–202.

13 Układ o przyjaźni i wzajemnej pomocy między Rzeczpospolitą Polską a Republiką Czechosłowacką, podpisany w Warszawie dnia 10 marca 1947 r. [Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Czechoslovakia, signed in Warsaw on 10 March 1947]; *Dziennik Ustaw* 1948 no. 7 item 47, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU19480070047> [accessed 20 June 2015].

14 Ibid.

15 Umowa o współpracy kulturalnej między Rzeczpospolitą Polską a Republiką Czechosłowacką, podpisana w Pradze dnia 4 lipca 1947 r. [Agreement on Cultural Cooperation between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Czechoslovakia, signed in Prague on 4 July 1947], *Dziennik Ustaw* 1948 no. 47 item 346, <http://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/du/1948/s/47/346> [accessed 21 June 2015].

16 Cf. A. Szczepańska, op. cit., p. 226.

German propaganda in the area of scholarship and culture".¹⁷ Article 3 of the treaty contained an undertaking to support art exhibitions and to intensify efforts for radio stations to include productions on the art of the neighbouring country in their programmes.¹⁸

The Czechoslovakian Centre of Culture and Information operated from 1947, and the Polish Centre of Information opened in Prague in 1949.¹⁹ In 1950 the "Nové Polsko" Centre of Culture and Information opened in Bratislava.²⁰ The aim of these institutions was political, mainly to spread propaganda. Window displays at the Polish Centre of Information were connected with anniversaries of the October Revolution or the signing of the treaty of Polish-Czechoslovakian friendship.²¹ Also celebrated were the birthdays of Josef Stalin or Klement Gottwald, the Czech Communist politician who was promoted as the "Father of the Nation" and who became the president of Czechoslovakia in 1948. The opening of the Polish Centre of Information was filmed by the Polish Film Chronicle.²² The Centre's library was reported to contain "a selection of the best books published in the Polish language" and recent magazines (*Trybuna Ludu* is discernible in the newsreel's frame). One method of building the feeling of brotherhood was by emphasising the linguistic proximity. The Chronicle's narrator noted that "reading in Polish is not much of a problem to the Czechs". The institution was to serve "the cause of increasing the closeness of brotherly nations"; consequently, the rule was to underline kinship in various areas and to overlook the ticklish issues.

Another effect of signing the agreements was the emergence of associations promoting cooperation between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Association for Cultural Cooperation with Poland was instituted in Czechoslovakia as early as in 1945. In the following year the Commission for Culture founded the Association for Polish-Czechoslovakian Friendship, which embraced sections responsible for organisation, propaganda, culture and art, sport and tourism, economy, a youth section and a women's section.²³ The Association for Cultural Cooperation with Poland was established in 1947 and the Polish-Slovak Association in 1948.²⁴ The Academic Association for Polish-Czechoslovakian Friendship, instituted in Poznań in 1948, cooperated closely with the Czechoslovakian Association for Cultural and Economic Cooperation with Poland.

17 Dziennik Ustaw no. 47, op. cit., p. 952.

18 Ibid., p. 953.

19 A. Szczepańska, op. cit., p. 236.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., p. 237.

22 *Polski Ośrodek Informacyjny w Pradze* [Polish Information Centre in Prague], sequence: Czechosłowacja, PKF 49/07, Kronika, 1949, Polska, <http://www.kronikarp.pl/szukaj,-18850,tag-689417,strona-3> [accessed 12 July 2015].

23 A. Szczepańska, op. cit., p. 229.

24 Ibid., p. 228.

Not only newly established but also well-established institutions began to initiate contacts between Poland and Czechoslovakia. As early as in November 1945, the Association of Polish Architects (Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, SARP) sent two representatives, Michał Ptac-Borkowski and Jerzy Milan Sobiepan, to Czechoslovakia, where they gave papers on the topic of the rebuilding of the ruined Warsaw. According to a report published in *Stolica*, their presentations riveted the attention of the Czech people and the press, which extensively reported on the devastation of Poland's capital. A few months later, Czech architects came to visit Poland.²⁵

The propagandist activities focused mainly on highlighting the positive connections between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The aim was to alter the tone of the relationship which until then had been dominated by territorial conflicts that had been considerably inflamed by Poland's annexation of Zaolzie, i.e. trans-Olza Silesia, in 1938 and also by the situation of the minority groups – the Czech and Slovak minorities in Poland and the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia.²⁶ The scholarly and cultural milieus, in turn, experienced purges and repressions. In Czechoslovakia, opponents of the Communist Party were being excluded from public life; this especially concerned journalists, writers, playwrights and radio reporters.²⁷ The number of artistic and cultural organisations was reduced and culture-oriented magazines were closed. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia actively promoted cultural propaganda and the building of a "Socialist culture". Among the Czechoslovakian institutions involved in controlling culture and spreading cultural propaganda were the Ministry of Information headed by Václav Kopecký, the Ministry of Education, Science and Art, the Section for Culture and Propaganda of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (the so-called "Kultprop"), the Central Bureau for Music and Art, the Theatre and Drama Council, and the Association of the Artistic and Cultural Service Staff.²⁸

In researching Czechoslovakian art it is also crucial to consider issues of ethnicity. The state was instituted in 1918 as a product of a conception known as "Czechoslovakism", which was aimed at "bringing closer" the Czechs and the Slovaks,²⁹ although the essential differences between these two nations must not be forgotten. Until the end of the 1st World War, the Czechs, Moravians and Silesians (and the minority groups) lived in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and enjoyed some political autonomy.³⁰

25 "Zbliżenie kulturalne polsko-czeskie" [Polish-Czech cultural relations get closer], *Stolica*, 1947, no. 12, p. 8.

26 A. Szczepańska, op. cit., p. 11.

27 J. Knapík, *V zajetí moci. Kulturní politika, její systém a aktéři 1948–1956*, Praha, 2006, p. 20.

28 Ibid., pp. 23–29.

29 C. S. Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia: The Making and Remaking of a State, 1918–1987*, Princeton, 1988, p. 133.

30 E. Stein, *Czecho/Slovakia: Ethnic Conflict, Constitutional Fissure, Negotiated Breakup*, Ann Arbor, 1997, p. 26.

In his book *Czecho/Slovakia*, Eric Stein pointed out that in the Czech part a civic society, a national culture and political awareness had managed to evolve.³¹ The Slovaks, however, remained under the Hungarian rule and were subjected to Hungarisation, which was especially strong in the 19th century. A private conversation with a Czech scholar related by Stein may serve as an ironic illustration of how deeply the differences were lodged in the national awareness of both the Czechs and the Slovaks:

“What is the Slovak nation?”, asked a Czech academic with a twinkle in his eye. “They have no distinct language, no hero, no myth, no literature, not even a saint.” His statement was clearly intended as a bon mot and a hyperbole. In reality, the Slovaks had already had under the Communist regime a complete education system, an entrepreneurial class, a press, and a layer of intelligentsia and artists, although greatly influenced by, and much thinner than, the Czech counterpart.³²

In the inter-war period, most Slovaks supported the idea of a joint Czechoslovakian state, but the Slovakian independence movement was also developing. In 1939 Slovakia separated from the Czech Republic and, with the support of the Third Reich, created its own state, which then joined the Pact of Steel. After the 2nd World War, tensions between the Czechs and the Slovaks still existed in Czechoslovakia. Two subsequent constitutions (from the years 1948 and 1960) limited the Slovaks’ autonomy and their influence on state affairs.³³ At this point, it is sufficient to note that the titles of exhibitions presented in Poland before and after the 2nd World War reflected the changing political situation. In 1927 the National Museum in Warsaw hosted the *Exhibition of Czechoslovakian art* (*Wystawa sztuki czeskosłowackiej*). After the war the term “Czechoslovakian art” still predominated in the titles of collective exhibitions, but from the early 1970s onwards the ethnic distinctiveness was increasingly often highlighted, for instance in *Czech and Slovak contemporary graphic art* (*Czeska i słowacka grafika współczesna*) (Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw, 1973) or in the already mentioned *Czech and Slovak painting 1947–1987* (Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw, 1987).

In 1946, still before the signing of the treaties between the two states, the National Museum in Warsaw presented an exhibition entitled *Czechoslovakia 1939–1945* (*Czechosłowacja 1939–1945*).³⁴ It was prepared by Czechoslovakia’s propagandistically minded Ministry of Information.³⁵ Earlier, in 1945, a similar Polish exhibition, entitled *Warsaw accuses* (*Warszawa oskarża*) was shown

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 29.

33 Ibid., pp. 26–27.

34 *Czechosłowacja 1939–1945* [Czechoslovakia 1939–1945], exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Warsaw, Prague, 1946.

35 Some materials bear the title *Czechosłowacja 1938–1946* [Czechoslovakia 1938–1946]. Cf. *ibid.*

in Prague and Brno.³⁶ *Czechoslovakia 1939–1945* was a presentation of photographs showing, among others, the atrocities committed by the German army, the Slovak partisans preparing for the uprising of 1944, and the Red Army's welcome in Prague). In the archival material of the Polish Film Chronicle documenting the opening of this exhibition in Warsaw the chairman of the Czechoslovakian delegation is quoted as saying: "The war brought us close and the peace will not divide us".³⁷

The catalogue of the *Czechoslovakia 1939–1945* exhibition contains a passage written by Klement Gottwald: "The only certain guarantee of their [the Czechoslovakian people's – P. S.] freedom and sovereignty is a strong, brotherly alliance with the Soviet Union and the other Slavonic states, and [the fact] that no one shall ever dare to infringe this alliance".³⁸ Gottwald's text also includes the postulate of "purging" Czechoslovakia of the German minority.³⁹ The process of constructing a feeling of concord between Poland and Czechoslovakia meant, among others, their uniting against a common enemy, i.e. Nazi Germany. The justification for the turn towards Moscow was the assumption that both countries were thus returning to their Slavonic roots. The author of a review from the exhibition published in *Stolica* emphasised the similarities in the course of the war years in Poland and in Czechoslovakia. He also stated that a visitor to the exhibition viewed it with "a certain feeling of envy"⁴⁰ that was caused by a greater "sense of realism" displayed by the Czechs during the war (Prague was not destroyed to the extent that Warsaw was) and by the fact that they had "more cold blood, which we are in need of". The propagandist effect of the exhibition was also mentioned, with the suggestion that considering this aspect "might do us good".⁴¹

36 *Warszawa oskarża* [Warsaw accuses] was the first exhibition to be organised by the National Museum in Warsaw after the war. It popularised the general awareness of the scale of the war's destruction. It was later presented in Chorzów, Katowice, Prague, New York, Paris, Sofia, Brno, Vienna and Budapest. See *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960* [Polish artistic life in the years 1944–1960], ed. A. Wierzbicka, Warsaw, 2012, vol. 1, p. 138, p. 70.

37 *Otwarcie wystawy w Warszawie* [The opening of an exhibition in Warsaw], sequence: Czechosłowacja 1938–1946, PKF 46/37, Kronika, 1946, Polska, <http://www.kronikarp.pl/szukaj,17746,strona-1> [accessed 24 May 2015].

38 K. Gottwald, "Nowe wolne życie wyzwolonej Czechosłowacji" [The new life in liberated Czechoslovakia], in: *Czechosłowacja 1939–1945...*, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

39 Ibid.

40 "Czechosłowacja w latach 1938–1946" [Czechoslovakia in the years 1938–1946], *Stolica*, 1946, no. 2, p. 7.

41 Ibid.

Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art (*Współczesna grafika czechosłowacka*, 1947)

On 1 September 1947 the exhibition entitled *Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art* (*Współczesna grafika czechosłowacka*) opened at the National Museum in Warsaw (Fig. 1).⁴² It was a response to the exhibition *Contemporary Polish Graphic Art* (*Współczesna polska grafika*, Czech: *Současná Polska Grafika*), which had been on show from May to June 1947 in Prague.⁴³ This presentation of graphic art in Czechoslovakia was prepared by SCUG “Hollar”, an association of Czech graphic artists that had been in existence since 1917, by the National Museum in Warsaw and by the Foreign Cooperation Office (*Biuro Współpracy z Zagranicą*). It was under the “elevated protection” of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zygmunt Modzelewski, the Minister of Culture and Art, Stefan Dybowski, and the ambassador of the Republic of Czechoslovakia in Poland.

The narrative of the exhibition encompassed the period from the end of the 19th century to the 1940s. Regardless of the title of the exhibition, which features the word “Czechoslovakia”, in the catalogue Czech and Slovak graphic art were discussed separately. Only nine out of about seventy exhibited artists were Slovakian; these were Orest Dubay, Ľudovít Fulla, Eugen Lehotský, Cyprián Majerník, Dezider Milly, Imro Weiner-Kráľ, Ernest Zmeták, Adolf Hofmeister and Antonín Pelc.⁴⁴ The all-encompassing diversity of topics, formal aspects and graphic techniques used by the artists, their technical virtuosity and the high artistic quality of the exhibited works were especially emphasised. The techniques presented at the exhibition included lithography, copperplate etching, woodcut (also coloured woodcut), drypoint, etching, mezzotint, linoleum printing and drawing. The late 19th century was described as “the revival of Czech graphic art”. Mentioned as its representatives were artists associated with Realism, Art Nouveau and Symbolism, who created vedutes, landscapes, fairy-tale imagery and decorative portraits: Vojtěch Preissig (1873–1944), Tavo František Šimon (1877–1942), Viktor Stretti (1878–1957), Jaromír Stretti-Zamponi (1882–1959), Jan C. Vondrouš (1884–1956), Karel Vik (1883–1964), František Kobliha (1877–1962) and Anna Macková (1887–1969).

42 After the exhibition closed in Warsaw it was transferred to Łódź, then to Poznań, Katowice, Bydgoszcz, Cracow, Toruń, Bydgoszcz again, and finally Białystok. Each showing lasted for about a month. *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960*, vol. 1, 1944–1947, ed. A. Wierzbicka, op. cit., p. 468.

43 *Współczesna polska grafika* [Contemporary Polish graphic art] exhibition was presented in Prague, Berlin, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, the Hague, Brussels, Ghent, Vienna and Rome. *Ibid.*, p. 558.

44 See *Współczesna grafika czechosłowacka* [Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art], exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1947.

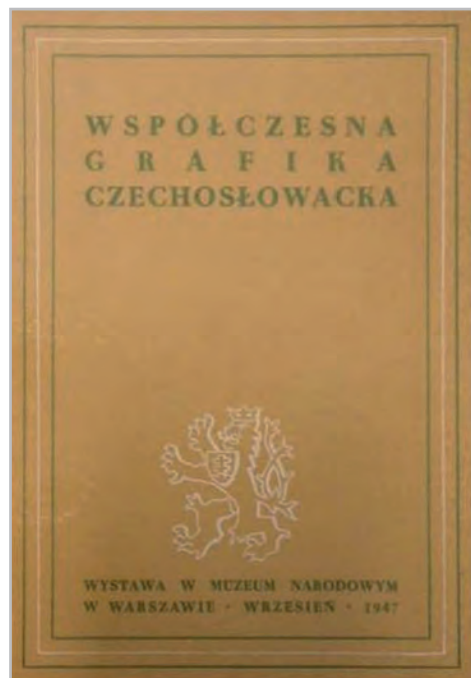


Fig. 1. *Współczesna grafika czechosłowacka* [Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art], exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1947

Emil Filla (1882–1953), an outstanding representative of Czech Cubism, was presented as “the pioneer of avant-garde trends in Czech art who, after six years’ imprisonment in German camps, has returned to creative work”.⁴⁵ Max Švabinský (1873–1922) was called a “national artist” whose oeuvre was “a marker of development in modern Czech graphic art”.⁴⁶ Švabinský was also presented as the mentor of the young generation of artists who “are successfully upholding the good reputation of Czech graphic art at home and abroad”.⁴⁷ Švabinský’s successor in the graphic art studio of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague was Tavík František Šimon. The new generation of graphic artists was based on Švabinsky’s and Šimon’s pupils. Their output was described as Realism; the oeuvre of Ludmila Jirincova exemplifies their work.⁴⁸ In the exhibition catalogue the Czech graphic artists’ topics of interest were divided into three sections: social topics (work in factories, mines and construction sites or scenes from the everyday life of the working class), Czech provincial landscapes, and “poetical Realism”, whose representatives were mainly concerned with book illustration.⁴⁹

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 7.

48 Ibid., p. 8.

49 Ibid.

The fact that the youngest generation of artists was included in the narration of the *Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art* exhibition is interesting. Their output was divided into two large groups: the work of the first group displayed “traces of suffering in the bygone years”; the other concentrated on formal issues, which found their place at the exhibition as the “new realism of the new social system”.⁵⁰ This also encompassed topics of mundane human existence and the man/machine relationship that had been undertaken by the artists. The second group included works by František Hudeček (1909–1990), Jan Kotík (1916–2002), Kamil Lhoták (1912–1990), Antonín Machourek (1913–1991), Václav Sivko (1923–1974), Jan Smetana (1918–1998) and Karel Souček (1915–1982). Most of these artists belonged to Group 42 (Czech: *Skupina 42*), which was active in the years 1942–1949 and which embraced avant-garde artists and writers. The Group’s theoreticians were Jiří Kotalík (later the director of the National Gallery in Prague) and Jindřich Chalupecký.⁵¹ Group 42 did not have a clearly defined programme; its members shared the belief in the importance of creative freedom and originality. The artists were interested in the mundane life of the metropolis; hence they undertook such subjects as factories, railway stations or lamp-lit night streets.⁵²

Slovak graphic art was described separately in the catalogue, even though, as has already been mentioned, the exhibition included the works of only nine Slovak artists. The rhetoric of the texts included in the catalogue is typical of the period; it reflects the echoes of ethnic conflict and transformations of the political system. For instance, the catalogue contains information that Slovak artists “since the liberation in 1918 have been fast catching up on what they had lost during the period of oppression and now they are contributing in equal measure to the development of Czechoslovakian graphic art”.⁵³

Young Czechoslovakian Art (*Czechosłowacka młoda plastyka*, 1948)

The subsequent exhibition of graphic art from Czechoslovakia opened in Warsaw on 6 June 1948 (Fig. 2). Entitled *Young Czechoslovakian Art* (*Czechosłowacka młoda plastyka*), it was shown at the Young Artists and Scientists’ Club

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵¹ Group 42 comprised František Hudeček, Kamil Lhoták, Jan Smetana, Jan Kotík, František Gross, Jiří Kolář, Bohumír Matal, Jan Smetana, Karel Souček, Ladislav Zívř, Miroslav Háek, Jiří Kotalík, Jindřich Chalupecký, Ivan Blatný, Jan Hanč, Jiřina Hauková and Josef Kainar; <http://www.artlist.cz/skupiny/skupina-42-3846/> [accessed 5 July 2015]. Cf. *Czech Modern Art 1900–1960*, ed. L. Bydzorska, Prague, 1995.

⁵² See *Współczesna grafika czechosłowacka* [Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art], op. cit., p. 9.

⁵³ Ibid.

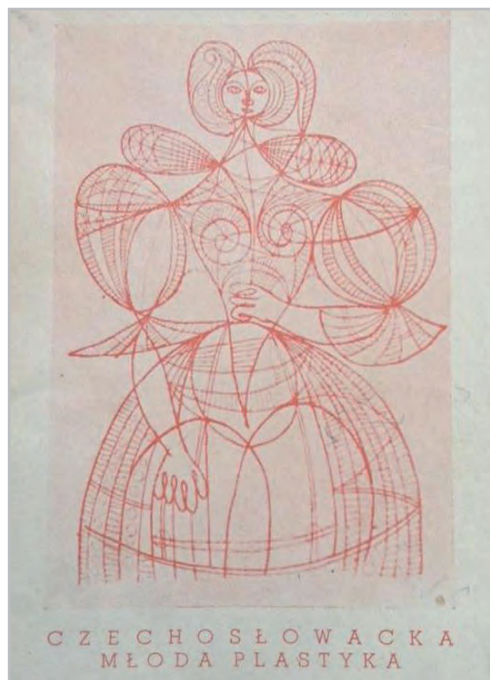


Fig. 2. *Czechosłowacka młoda plastyka* [Young Czechoslovakian Art], exhibition catalogue, Young Artists and Scientists' Club, Warsaw, 1948

(Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców) whose painting section was supervised by Marian Bogusz.⁵⁴ The idea for the exhibition was suggested by the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków).⁵⁵ A presentation of Polish art entitled *Young Polish painters* (*Młodzi malarze polscy*, Czech: *Mladi Polští Malíři*) opened in Prague in 1948.⁵⁶

54 The Young Artists and Scientists' Club was instituted in 1947. It embraced representatives of various disciplines and artistic approaches. Marian Bogusz supervised the painting section, to which Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Lenica, Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz-Rogoyska, Henryk Stażewski, Bogusław Szwacz, Ignacy Witz and Marek Włodarski belonged. Stefan Krygier, Hanna Orzechowska, Władysław Strzemiński, Stanisław Wegner and Alfred Lenica cooperated with the club. Cf. M. Kurzac, "Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców (1947–1949). Dyskusje i polemiki na temat nowego modelu sztuki nowoczesnej" [Young Artists and Scientists' Club (1947–1949). Debates and polemics on the new model of modern art], *MODUS. Prace z historii sztuki*, 2002, III, p. 53. See also A. Pietrasik, "Antagonizm w polu sztuki: działalność Klubu Młodych Artystów i Naukowców (1947–1949)" [Antagonism in the area of art: the activity of the Young Artists and Scientists' Club (1947–1949)], in: *Zaraz po wojnie* [Right after the war], eds. J. Kordjak, A. Szewczyk, Warsaw, 2015, pp. 216–227.

55 L. Bielska-Tworkowa, "Wystawy w K.M.A. i N." [Exhibitions at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club], *Nowiny Literackie*, 1948, no. 26, p. 7.

56 The Polish exhibition in Prague consisted of forty works by thirty-one artists, among whom were Jan Betley, Marian Bogusz, Janina Brosch-Włodarska, Helena Cygańska-Walicka, Maria Jarema, Tadeusz Kantor, Kazimierz Mikulski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Rafał Owidzki, Bogusław Szwacz, Hanna Zaremba-Cybisowa, Leokadia Bielska-

The exhibition hosted by the Young Artists and Scientists' Club presented the oeuvre of the leading members of the post-war Czech avant-garde rooted in the tradition of Surrealism.⁵⁷ It embraced the output of thirteen artists: Orest Dubay (1919–2005), František Gross (1909–1985), František Hudeček (1909–1990), Viliam Chmel (1917–1961), Josef Istler (1919–2000), František Jiroudek (1914–1991), Jan Kotík (1916–2002), Kamil Lhoták (1912–1990), Evžen Nevan (1914–1967), Zdenek Seydl (1916–1978), Václav Sivko (1923–1974), Jan Smetana (1918–1998) and Ernest Zmeták (1919–2004). One of the thirteen, Josef Istler, was an important figure in the history of Polish-Czech relations. He most probably had had long-standing contacts with Marian Bogusz, since also in the 1960s he had exhibited his works at the Krzywe Koło Gallery, which was directed by Bogusz.⁵⁸ It must also be added that, with time, Istler would increasingly distance himself from the tradition of Surrealism, abandoning it in favour of abstraction.⁵⁹

Nine artists from the above list participated in both the exhibition at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club and in the earlier one, i.e. the *Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art* exhibition at the National Museum in Warsaw. These nine artists were the Czechs: František Hudeček, František Jiroudek, Jan Kotík, Kamil Lhoták, Zdenek Seydl, Václav Sivko and Jan Smetana, and the Slovaks: Orest Dubay and Ernest Zmeták. They presented different works at each exhibition, which may indicate that they perceived the show at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club as complementary to the one at the National Museum. The fact that the same artists presented their works in both places demonstrates that in researching art history in Central-Eastern Europe, it would be imprudent to exclude from our area of interest exhibitions organised in the framework of official cultural exchange.

It is also worth emphasising that the *Young Czechoslovakian Art* exhibition had not been prepared in Czechoslovakia and dispatched to Poland as a ready-made show. The Czech and Slovak artists who were to present their works at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club were invited to Warsaw. Greeting them, Professor Aleksander Rafałowski from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw commented that both exhibitions were tantamount to an act of exchanging ratification documents:⁶⁰ they constituted the moment

-Tworkowa, Maria Ewa Łunkiewicz, Zbigniew Pronaszko, Aleksander Rafałowski, Henryk Stażewski, Jonasz Stern, Marek Włodarski and Jerzy Wolff. After the exhibition closed in Prague it was transferred to České Budějovice and Karlovy Vary. *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960*, 1948, vol. 2, ed. A. Wierzbicka, op. cit., p. 255.

57 P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty...*, op. cit., pp. 46–50.

58 Istler participated in the *Argumenty 1962* exhibition. Cf. *Galeria Krzywe Koło. Katalog wystawy retrospektywnej* [Krzywe Koło Gallery. Catalogue of the retrospective exhibition], ed. J. Zagrodzki, National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1990, p. 107.

59 P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty...*, op. cit., p. 50.

60 (wr), "Walka o nową treść w sztuce malarskiej – na wystawie młodych plastyków czechosłowackich" [A struggle for new contents in the art of painting – at the exhibi-

when artistic cooperation between the Czech, Slovak and Polish milieus became a reality.

In a interview given in 1989, Zbigniew Dłubak reminisced that he and Marian Bogusz had first met a group of Czechoslovakian artists during the war, namely in the Mauthausen concentration camp:

A kind of surrogate artistic life existed in the camp. Apart from the Poles there were Czech artists there, Spanish artists... We organised meetings, exhibitions, we held long conversations. Bogusz and I managed to get out of the camp before the official repatriation and we returned to Warsaw via Prague. Our short stay in Prague was nevertheless very important. Because of our camp connections we had many friends there, and we also encountered Czech Surrealism for the first time. A little later, this fact proved extremely profitable.⁶¹

Bearing in mind the wartime connections between the artists from Poland and from Czechoslovakia, as well as the exhibitions of Czechoslovakian graphic art hosted soon after the war by the National Museum and the Young Artists and Scientists' Club, it must be emphasised that the thaw of the 1960s was by no means a beginning, but rather a continuation of links between the Polish, Czech and Slovak avant-garde. References to Czech Surrealism in Polish art, as well as the durable personal friendships, may well have resulted from the Polish creators' contacts with art produced in Czechoslovakia. Tracing the history of exhibitions makes it possible to outline these contacts, and information found in the catalogues enables us to investigate the exchange of views between the circles of Polish, Czech and Slovak artists.

The aim of the exhibition was to familiarise Polish viewers with the oeuvre of three Czech avant-garde groups: Group 42, Group RA and "Seven in October".⁶² Group RA was the focus for a circle of young artists who functioned as "young Surrealists"⁶³ who were not connected with the early, i.e. pre-war, Surrealism (in contrast to members of Group 42). Group RA included the painters Josef Istler, Bohdan Lacina, Václav Tikal and Václav Zykumnt, photographers Miloš Koreček and Vilém Reichmann, and writers Ludvik Kundera and Zdeněk Lorenc.⁶⁴ The catalogue of the *Young Czechoslovakian Art* exhibition emphasised the connections of contemporary Czechoslovakian art

tion of young Czechoslovakian visual artists], *Życie Warszawy*, 6 June 1948, no. 154, in: *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960*, 1948, vol. 2, p. 139.

61 *Galeria Krzywe Koło. Katalog wystawy retrospektywnej*, op. cit., p. 27.

62 The "Seven in October" group (Czech: *Sedm v říjnu*) was instituted in 1939. Its members were Věra Gabrielová Fragnerová (1919–2002), Václav Hejna (1914–1985), František Jiroudek (1914–1991), Pavel Kropáček (1915–1943), Josef Liesler (1912–2005), Jan Rafael Michálek (1915–1989), Arnošt Paderlík (1919–1999), Václav Plátek (1917–1994) and Zdeněk Seydl (1916–1978), <http://abart-full.artarchiv.cz/skupiny.php?Fvazba=seznam-clenu&IDskupiny=150> [accessed 2 October 2015].

63 P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jaty...*, op. cit., p. 49.

64 Ibid.

with Surrealism and Cubism, which it was supposed to synthesise, deriving its topics from the tradition of Surrealism and the “visual logic of construction” from Cubism.⁶⁵ Three Slovak artists, namely Dubay, Chmel and Zmetak, were presented as linked with the folk tradition. The Czechoslovakian avant-garde was described as a “progressive force” which, owing to the innovative form and focus on topics of everyday life, was firmly embedded in the development of Socialism.

Conclusion

The interval between the two exhibitions, i.e. *Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art* at the National Museum and *Young Czechoslovakian Art* at the Young Artists and Scientists’ Club, was just a few months, as the former had opened in September of 1947 and the latter in June of 1948. Yet the exhibitions were also divided by a tragic event in Czechoslovakia – the coup d’état that resulted in the Communists assuming undisputed control over the country’s government. The coup, then officially known as “Victorious February”, took place in early 1948 and initiated a period of severe censorship and increased control over cultural life.

In his book *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty*, in the chapter referring to the years 1945–1948, Piotr Piotrowski describes the Hungarian, Czechoslovakian and Polish avant-garde of the era⁶⁶ and analyses the European School in Hungary, the tradition of Czech Surrealism, and the First Exhibition of Modern Art and the Cracow circle in Poland. In practice, each of these milieus is described in isolation from the others. Piotrowski considers the Czech avant-garde to be representative of the native, pre-war tradition, and also to be the milieu placed at the fore in contacts with Western Europe. He recalls *Art Tchécoslovaque*, an exhibition organised in 1946 by Galerie La Broëtie in Paris. The exhibited artists came from Group RA and Group 42, and the vernissage “attracted the Paris elite”. Piotrowski also mentions Group RA’s exhibition in Hungary in 1947, which was instigated by the European School.⁶⁷

Piotrowski presents the Czech avant-garde as operating in opposition to the new political system and as “a remedy [...] to years of Socialist indoctrination”.⁶⁸ In his view, “after the Communist coup d’état in Czechoslovakia [...], the avant-garde tradition (including Surrealism) again (after the period of the Nazi occupation) became the officially condemned art and [was] not exhibited in public”.⁶⁹

65 *Czechosłowacka młoda grafika* [Young Czechoslovakian Art], exhibition catalogue, Young Artists and Scientists’ Club, Warsaw, 1948, p. 6.

66 P. Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jałty*..., op. cit., pp. 37–65.

67 Ibid., p. 49.

68 Ibid., p. 50.

69 Ibid., pp. 49–50.

Let it be emphasised once again that the *Young Czechoslovakian Art* exhibition, which displayed the oeuvre of two generations of Surrealists, opened at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club in Warsaw a few months after the coup d'état in Czechoslovakia. It constitutes one of the last examples of relative freedom the country enjoyed until the year 1948. Yet the fact that such exhibitions did take place at all encourages art historians to rethink and revise the currently accepted “trajectories” of the activity of the avant-garde milieus in Central-Eastern Europe in the first years after the 2nd World War.

In addition, more caution should be exercised in assessing the issue of the artists' “programmatic opposition” towards the new system. As has already been emphasised, the same artists presented their works at the National Museum in Warsaw and at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club. The exhibition hosted by the National Museum had been prepared by SČUG “Hollar”, which means by the artists, not only by a government institution. Attempts at including avant-garde art into the new, Socialist system are evident in the catalogues of both exhibitions. However, it must be remembered that incorporating an artist's work into the ideology of the new system may have been a condition under which his works would be presented abroad. The repressions were increasing, forcing the creators to make very difficult choices. A detailed analysis of individual artistic choices during the period of political repressions is not central to this essay. However, a comparison of the conceptions and the selection of works presented at the exhibitions organised at the National Museum in Warsaw and at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club reveals with all certainty that Polish artists and Polish viewers were given the opportunity to familiarise themselves not only with the most recent works of art produced in Czechoslovakia but also with their authors.

A critical analysis of art produced in one country of the Eastern bloc as exhibited in another country of that bloc enables an art historian to outline a section of the history of artistic life which did not necessarily have to reflect the character of the official social and political relations in that given period. *Young Czechoslovakian Art* was on show at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club – and the authors of the exhibited works were invited to its opening – after the coup d'état in Czechoslovakia in 1948. In the period of “normalisation” in Czechoslovakia, which was marked by severe repressions, the National Gallery in Prague sent the exhibition *Czeski kubizm* [Czech Cubism] (1981) to the National Museum in Warsaw. An investigation of the circumstances in which the exhibitions were exchanged yields a very complex image of artistic life, and the analysis of texts published in the exhibition catalogues reveals how the interpretations of avant-garde art were dominated by the language of the official propaganda.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

In his book *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty* (*In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*), Piotr Piotrowski mentioned that Polish and Czechoslovakian artists were not working in mutual isolation and that they had opportunities to meet, for instance at the *Arguments 1962* exhibition in Warsaw in 1962. The extent, nature and intensity of artistic contacts between Poland and Czechoslovakia during their coexistence within the Eastern bloc still remain valid research problems. The archives of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art which I have investigated yield information on thirty-five exhibitions of art produced in Czechoslovakia that took place in Warsaw in the period of the People's Republic of Poland. The current essay focuses on exhibitions organised in the late 1940s. The issue of official cultural cooperation between Poland and Czechoslovakia was regulated as early as in the first years after the war. Institutions intended to promote the culture of one country in the other one and associations for international cooperation were established soon after. As early as in 1946, the National Museum in Warsaw hosted an exhibition entitled *Czechoslovakia 1939–1945*. In 1947 the same museum showed *Contemporary Czechoslovakian Graphic Art*. A few months after “Victorious February”, i.e. the coup d'état carried out by the Communists in Czechoslovakia in early 1948, the *Young Czechoslovakian Art* exhibition opened at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club, a Warsaw gallery supervised by Marian Bogusz. It showed the works of leading artists of the post-war avant-garde, and their authors were invited to the vernissage. Nine artists participated in both exhibitions, i.e. at the National Museum and at the Young Artists and Scientists' Club. A critical analysis of art produced in one country of the Eastern bloc as exhibited in another country of that bloc enables an art historian to outline a section of the complex history of artistic life. Archival research yields new valuable materials that make it impossible to reduce the narration to a simple opposition contrasting the avant-garde with official institutions.

Stanisław Welbel

ZACHĘTA – NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WARSAW

Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Nagel: Two Exhibitions of “Progressive Artists” at the Zachęta in the Framework of Cultural Cooperation with the German Democratic Republic

In 1950, in the framework of collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (Komitet Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą, KWKZ), the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA) hosted two exhibitions of the oeuvre of German artists: Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Nagel.¹ These exhibitions were a part of a programme of cooperation with the German Democratic Republic which had been developed by the Committee. This cooperation can be considered to have officially commenced in the year 1950, when the treaty concerning the recognition of the established frontier between the People's Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic was signed in Zgorzelec/Görlitz. From then on, as the official propaganda proclaimed, the two countries were bound by a “brotherly friendship”.²

The Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries was active in the years 1950–1956; it was attached to the Chairman of the Council

1 The present article was written as part of the research project entitled “Historia wystaw w Zachęcie – Centralnym Biurze Wystaw Artystycznych w latach 1949–1970” [The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970] conducted within the framework of the National Programme for the Development of Humanities at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014.

2 More on the relations between the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR in: *Ideologiczna współpraca. Władze wobec środowisk opiniotwórczych w PRL i NRD* [Ideological cooperation. The authorities vs. the opinion-forming milieus in the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR], eds. S. Ligarski, K. Ruchniewicz, D. Wojtaszyn, Wrocław, 2016.

of Ministers as the institution responsible for Poland's cultural relations abroad. The area of the Committee's activity was very broad; apart from planning and control of cultural exchange and cultural policy, it included strictly practical tasks, such as the preparation and coordination of art exhibitions. During the period of the Committee's activity, many exhibitions were hosted at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw and in a total of about one hundred other institutions. The programme of the exhibitions organised by the Committee reflected the state policy and focused on cooperation with countries of the Eastern bloc. Cultural exchange with Western countries as conducted in the framework of the Committee was treated instrumentally; it was possible as long as the given exhibition was critical towards the West and towards the capitalistic system; in short, if it could be described as "progressive".³

Exhibitions at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions presented the output of recognised artists; they gathered crowds of viewers and were described in detail both in the specialist and popular press. Selected artists were "propagandistically favourable"; their oeuvre was assessed from the point of view of social involvement and described as realistic and progressive. The selection of works and the related art criticism highlighted those aspects of the artists' output which were in agreement with the doctrine of Socialist Realism. The exhibitions were linked by the person of Otto Nagel, who acted as the commissioner⁴ of Kollwitz's exhibition.

Otto Nagel (1894–1967) had been active as a painter before the war and was already then involved in politics. After the Nazis took power, he was subjected to harassment; in 1934 he was prohibited from working in an atelier (*Malverbot im Atelier*) and from exhibiting his works,⁵ and in the year 1936/1937 he was imprisoned in the KZ Sachsenhausen concentration camp.⁶ After the war he was one of the founders of Kulturbund der DDR. He received several

3 For a detailed discussion of the exhibition-organising activities of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, see Karolina Zychowicz, "Exhibition-Organising Activity of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (1950–1956) on the Example of Selected Exhibitions at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions" (in the present volume of *Ikonotheke*).

4 According to the documents from Ministerium für Kultur (signature: DR 1/6008, Ministerium für Volksbildung, Hauptabteilung Kunst, Referat Bildende Kunst, 9272/2, Abteilung Kulturelle Beziehungen zum Ausland, 24.05.1951) Nagel was nominated as a person responsible for installation of the exhibition and a representative of Ministry. It was underlined that he is also a member of Akademie der Künste and a chairman of association of artists as well as Kollwitz's former friend and expert on her art. Nagel was the author of the text for the catalogue and a speaker at the vernissage.

5 K. Hoge, *Selbstbildnisse im Angesicht der Bedrohung durch den Nationalsozialismus, Reaktionen diffamierter Künstler auf die nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik*, doctoral dissertation supervised by Prof. Dr. Dietrich Schubert, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Heidelberger Universität, 2004, p. 48, permanent link: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-opus-52028 [accessed 8 July 2016].

6 M. Braun, *Kulturinsel und Machtinstrument. Die Akademie der Künste, die Partei und die Staatssicherheit*, Göttingen, 2007, p. 91.

state awards. In the period 1956–1962 he was the chairman of the GDR Academy of Fine Arts (Deutsche Akademie der Künste / Akademie der Künste der DDR) in Berlin. Nagel and Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), who had also suffered Nazi repressions, were friends.⁷ After her death Nagel became the guardian of her legacy. Kollwitz's posthumous exhibition in Warsaw in 1951 laid the foundations for Nagel's cooperation with the Zachęta and with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, which resulted in his solo exhibition organised three years later.

The documents of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries pertaining to the exhibitions from GDR, which are extant in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw,⁸ contain statistical and financial records which make it possible to trace the Polish-German exhibition activities of the Committee as seen against the background of similar cooperation among other countries of the Eastern bloc. Data from the financial report for the years 1950–1956 indicate that the costs of GDR's cooperation were second-largest after costs incurred by cooperating with the USSR,⁹ the latter being treated as a priority. The financial report for the years 1950–1953, in turn, indicates that the number of exhibitions brought from the GDR to Poland was equal to that of Polish exhibitions shown in the GDR, i.e. three exhibitions.¹⁰ Cooperation in the years 1955–1956 again brought the same number of exhibitions on each side, four, and the same number of exhibition sites – six (in cases when one exhibition was shown in more than one locality).¹¹

In addition, the set of documents pertaining to the activities of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries contains sketches of speeches given during exhibition openings, for instance the speeches of Stefan Heyman, the GDR ambassador in Warsaw, in which – much in the spirit of the

7 K. Hoge, op. cit., p. 54. See also: O. Nagel, *Die Selbstbildnisse der Käthe Kollwitz*, Berlin, 1965, p. 76.

8 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signatures 234, 258, 152, 175, 153, 35, 16.

9 The USSR: an expense of 131.500, the GDR: 120.000. The next largest expenditure is on Czechoslovakia, 74.000. Data from the financial report: documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 234 (organizacja wystaw artystycznych KWZ w latach 1950–57, plany, sprawozdania, wykazy, korespondencja) [organisation of art exhibitions by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries in the years 1950–57, plans, reports, inventories, correspondence], 1950–1956, p. 86.

10 According to the documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, the following exhibitions were received in Poland: *Käthe Kollwitz, Plakat i karykatura polityczna z NRD* [Poster and political caricature from the GDR], *Wystawa prasy niemieckiej* [Exhibition of the German press], and the following were sent to the GDR: *Polska i jej młodzież* [Poland and its Youth], *Wystawa książki i ilustracji książkowej* [Exhibition of Books and Book Illustration], *Plakat* [Poster], *Odbudowa* [Reconstruction].

11 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 234, op. cit., pp. 34, 86.

political rhetoric of the era – the need for “mutual cooperation and the building of friendship” was underlined.¹² In the period when Kollwitz and Nagel’s exhibitions were being organised in Warsaw, cooperation with the GDR stood high in the hierarchy of priorities in Poland’s cultural policy; this must be considered especially interesting in view of the still-recent traumas of the 2nd World War. Cultural cooperation between the People’s Republic of Poland and the GDR was a key issue for both states. From the point of view of the GDR, it actually legitimised its existence, as opposed to that of the Federal Republic of Germany.¹³ In short, the initial task of the GDR’s cultural policy was solely to underline Germany’s responsibility for the war crimes; in the later period this goal was replaced by the emphasis of Germany’s domestic struggle with Nazism. The class-related interpretation of Nazism diluted personal, individual responsibility. In Poland, in turn, cooperation with the GDR was treated instrumentally, i.e. as a method of underlining Poland’s input in fighting Nazism.¹⁴

The policy of cultural exchange with countries of the Eastern bloc was very carefully planned. In the cooperation with the Western countries, it was occasionally allowed to implement shorter-term and more flexible policies planned in reaction to the changing political situation.¹⁵

In the current text I would like to focus on the conceptions behind the exhibitions of the oeuvre of Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Nagel, i.e. the works presented there and the behind-the-scenes aspects of their organisation. I would also like to analyse the reviews and texts that accompanied the exhibitions. My aim is to outline the reception of both events on the basis of a discussion of the reviews as a form of discourse analysis¹⁶ and to attempt to discover the position of the two exhibitions in the context of cultural life in the 1950s, especially in the perspective of Socialist Realism, which enforced a distinct interpretation on the oeuvre of both of these artists.¹⁷

12 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 258, (wystawy prac artystów plastyków z GDR w Polsce w latach 1952–1956. Referat, katalog, wycinki prasowe, fotografie) [exhibition of works of artists from the GDR in Poland in the years 1952–1956. Lecture, catalogue, press cuttings, photographs], 1952, 1956.

13 See M. Saryusz-Wolska, *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka* [Collective and cultural memory. The contemporary German perspective], Cracow, 2009, pp. 7–38.

14 See R. Żytyniec, “Rola Polski w antyfaszystowskiej polityce pamięci GDR (1949–1972)” [The role of Poland in the GDR’s anti-Fascist policy of memory (1949–1972)], *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2015, no. 2 (355), pp. 176–205.

15 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 35, ob. nacz. Tarska, 1955–1956 (annotated: secret), p. 24.

16 See *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. J. P. Gee, M. Handford, Oxon–New York, 2012.

17 See R. Mason, “Cultural Theory and Museum Studies”, in: *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. S. Macdonald, Oxford, 2011, pp. 17–33.

The “progressive” Käthe Kollwitz

The exhibition entitled *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture* (*Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba*) was held from 20 June to 21 July 1951. A total of ninety works were exhibited: 66 graphic works in various techniques, 5 drawings, 12 reproductions and 6 sculptures; one sculpture was shown only on two photographs (Figs. 1–8).

After the Zachęta show the exhibits were presented at the Fourth Festival of Art and Design (IV Festiwal Plastyki) in Sopot. The festival took place between 1 July and 20 September 1951 and encompassed exhibitions pertaining to the protection and conservation of historical monuments, an exhibition of folk-inspired graphic art related to the Cepelia Central Bureau for Folk Crafts, an exhibition of Aleksander Gierymski's works, and regional exhibitions of artists and photographers. Also presented were selected works from the national exhibition *Artists in the Struggle for Peace* (*Plastycy w walce o pokój*). The fact that the exhibition was included in the programme of the Sopot festival indicates that the enterprise was propagandistically meaningful. It also shows how the exhibitions initiated by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries operated; they were intended to tour the country.

The range of the Zachęta event was highlighted by the guests gathered at the vernissage, among whom were the Minister of Culture and Art Stefan Dybowski, Deputy Minister Włodzimierz Sokorski and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Edward Ochab.¹⁸ Speeches were given by Otto Nagel and Juliusz Krajewski. The fact that Juliusz Krajewski had been invited is significant, since he was the leading artist of Polish Socialist Realism, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, a winner of prizes at national exhibitions of art and design, chairman of the Committee for the Programme of Academic Education in Art (Komisja Programowa Wyższego Szkolnictwa Plastycznego) and, in the years 1949–1952, President of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków, ZPAP); he had also been awarded several state decorations.¹⁹ Official speeches point to the way that Kollwitz's posthumous exhibition was represented: as precursory to Socialist Realism (by Krajewski) and as attaining its own position in particular political circumstances (by Nagel): “The former presented an account of the artist's work, while the latter emphasised his friendship with her and the significance of the exhibition in the process of building the friendship between the GDR, the USSR and the People's Republic of Poland”.²⁰

Accompanying the exhibition was a catalogue (Fig. 9) containing a list of works, eight reproductions, a selection from Kollwitz's memoirs entitled

18 *Trybuna Ludu*, 22 June 1951, ed. F, no. 172.

19 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socialist Realism. Polish Art in the Years 1950–1954], Cracow, 1991.

20 *Kurier Codzienny*, 21 June 1951, ed. A, no. 170.

Fig. 1. Käthe Kollwitz
1867–1945. *Grafika – Rzeźba*
[Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945.
Graphic Art – Sculpture],
20 June – 21 July 1951,
Central Bureau of Art
Exhibitions, Warsaw, a view
of the exhibition (in the
foreground *Nie wieder Krieg!*
[*Never Again War!*], 1924,
poster), photo by Stanisław
Wdowiński / PAP Archive



Figs. 2–4. Käthe Kollwitz
1867–1945. *Grafika – Rzeźba*
[Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945.
Graphic Art – Sculpture],
20 June – 21 July 1951,
Central Bureau of Art
Exhibitions, Warsaw, a view
of the exhibition, photo by
Stanisław Wdowiński /
PAP Archive





Fig. 5. *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Call of Death*, 1936, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive

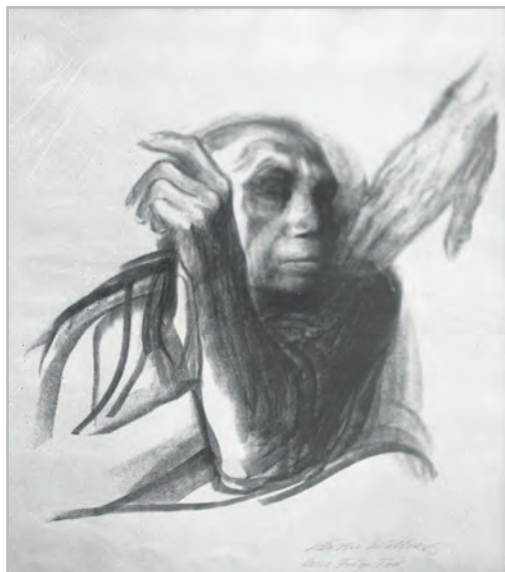


Fig. 6. *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Germany's Children are starving!*, 1924, lithograph, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive





Fig. 7. Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. *Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Demonstration*, 1930, lithograph, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive

Käthe Kollwitz w pamiętnikach i listach [Käthe Kollwitz in diaries and letters] (no information as to the author of the selection or the translator has been given and there are no source footnotes) and an unsigned preface written by Urszula Pomorska, which was a digest from her longer article that had been published in *Przegląd Artystyczny*.²¹

Kollwitz's works selected for the exhibition dated from the years 1892–1938. The main exhibits were two graphic cycles, *The Weavers* from 1897 and *The Peasant War* from 1903, as well as the graphic work *Nie wieder Krieg!* (*Never Again War!*) from 1924 (Fig. 10); of all the exhibits, this one was the most often reproduced in the press, with the intention of underlining the artist's political concerns and to incorporate the show into the narration referring to the development of peaceful relationships between Poland and the GDR. The title phrase, *Nie wieder Krieg!*, had been the principal motto of pacifist organisations since 1919. The figure of a boy with an outstretched arm was inspired by the boy with a pistol as seen in Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* from 1830²² or, according to different sources, by an incident from 1920 when, during a demonstration in Weimar, a young member of the Social Democratic

21 According to a footnote to the article: U. Pomorska, "Wystawa dzieł Käthe Kollwitz w warszawskiej 'Zachęcie'" [Exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz's works in Warsaw's "Zachęta"], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1951, no. 4, pp. 3–11.

22 R. Hintz, *Käthe Kollwitz: Graphics, Posters, Drawings*, New York, 1981.



Fig. 8. *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *For Greater Berlin*, 1912, poster, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński /PAP Archive

Party, Max Westphal, reportedly shouted out the phrase “Nie wieder Krieg!” with his one arm raised; he had lost the other arm during the war.²³ Kollwitz’s work was used as a poster for Youth Day in 1924 and became a signature image of pacifist movements. It is worth noting that the poster’s peaceful intent is expressed only by the motto printed in the background;²⁴ if these words were replaced, the composition might as well serve as a poster calling people to muster for war.²⁵

The selected graphic cycles were intended to represent that aspect of Kollwitz’s oeuvre which was crucial to the Warsaw exhibition, as they contained works which focused on socially involved topics, not works with more personal or symbolic contents. The cycles of drawings, sculptures and graphic works created after 1914 under the impact of Kollwitz’s war experiences and death of her son suited the anti-war message of the exhibition. The authors of the volume *Käthe Kollwitz and the Women of War* (2016) point to the motifs of

23 Cf. an article by a Kollwitz specialist, Claire Whitner, <http://blog.yupnet.org/2016/06/02/never-again-war-kathe-kollwitz-in-america/> [accessed 31 October 2016].

24 The slogan was translated in the exhibition catalogue as *Nigdy więcej wojny!* [Never Again War!], the text of the poster reads: “We do not want war ever again. The Conference of Young People from Central Germany, Leipzig, 2–4 August 1924”.

25 A. Moorjani, “Käthe Kollwitz on Sacrifice, Mourning, and Reparation: An Essay in Psychoaesthetics”, *MLN. Comparative Literature*, 1986, vol. 101, no. 5, pp. 1110–1134.

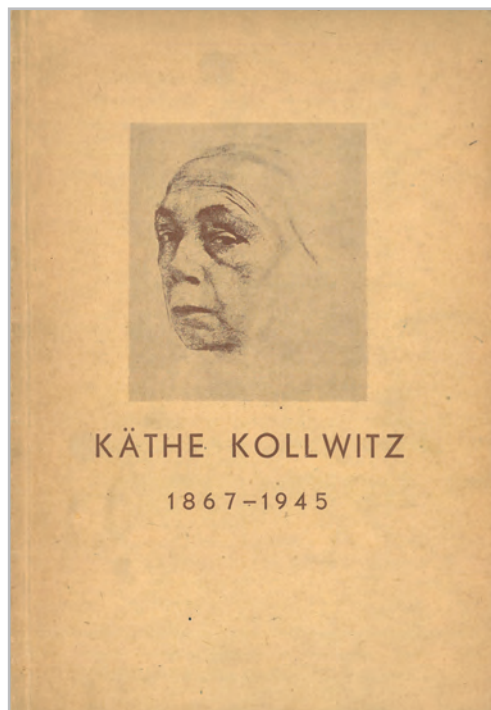


Fig. 9. *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, catalogue cover, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

women in Kollwitz's output, especially those of a mother and a widow (referring to her own life);²⁶ these were not highlighted in the exhibition shown at the Zachęta over six decades ago. This approach, situating Kollwitz's works in the historical and political, not symbolic or personal reality, contributed to her entire output being for a long time perceived as "progressive", socially conscious, pacifistic and universal. Telling evidence of this by now established perception is the fact that in 1993 an enlarged copy of Kollwitz's sculpture, made by Harald Haacke and entitled *Pietà* or *Mutter mit totem Sohn* (*Mother with her Dead Son*), was placed in the Neue Wache in Berlin as a memorial to all victims of the war and Nazi terror. This was a political decision – and it raised great controversy because of the sculpture's unclear message which encompassed both the murdered and the fallen, and because of the Christian iconographic motif, the *Pietà*, which replaced the universal, non-figurative memorial by Lothar Kwasnitza from the times of the GDR.²⁷ Another issue pointed out during the debate on Kollwitz's sculpture in the early 1990s was the personal nature of this work and Kollwitz's relationship with her son, who went to the 1st World War front because of her encouragement

26 See *Käthe Kollwitz and the Women of War: Femininity, Identity, and Art in Germany During World Wars I and II*, ed. C. C. Whitner, New Haven CT, 2016.

27 S. Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870–1997*, London, 1998, p. 91.



Fig. 10. *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945.*
Grafika – Rzeźba [Käthe Kollwitz
 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture],
 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central
 Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw,
Nie wieder Krieg! [Never Again War!],
 1924, poster, photo by Stanisław
 Wdowiński / PAP Archive

and with her approval.²⁸ Despite the controversies, the enlarged sculpture was installed in the Neue Wache. The debate occasioned by this decision focused on the manner of commemorating, on the universality of symbols and on the responsibility for the commemoration of the victims of the war and the Holocaust and the historical narration about them. This debate in some sense resulted in the establishment of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.²⁹

To return to Kollwitz's exhibition in Warsaw in 1951: in his text published in *Nowa Kultura* Otto Nagel described Kollwitz's graphic cycles and outlined the context in which they had been made.³⁰ The key to the exhibition was an attempt to present Kollwitz as a "progressive" artist and at the same time a Realist. The term "progressive" demarcated the perspective and was the common denominator for most exhibitions organised by the Committee for

28 H. W. Pickford, *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art*, New York, 2013.

29 S. Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity*, London, 2001, pp. 136–155; W. Pięciak, *Niemiecka pamięć. Współczesne spory w Niemczech o miejsce III Rzeszy w historii, polityce i tożsamości (1989–2001)* [German memory. A contemporary debate in Germany on the place of the Third Reich in history, politics and identity (1989–2001)], Cracow, 2002.

30 O. Nagel, "Kaethe Kollwitz", *Nowa Kultura*, 1951, no. 26 (66), p. 8.

Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries; it defined the approach which in the Committee's documents was called "political cognisance".³¹ In the context of the Warsaw exhibition, Kollwitz's oeuvre was described in terms that highlighted its up-to-date character. Wishing to stress its applicability to the present time, Otto Nagel (or the translator of his text) went as far as to coin the pleonasm "the current present" (in Polish: *aktualna terażniejszość*): "Afterwards, many single pieces were made whose subject matter was taken from the current present. The progressive artist Käthe Kollwitz considered it her duty to stand on the side of those exploited and poverty-stricken in a system based on injustice, and to declare herself a spokeswoman for their cause".³² In the text written for the exhibition catalogue Nagel focused on pointing out the direct connection between Kollwitz's biography and her works, which he treated as illustrations to historical events such as the war. In this approach her works were viewed literally; their symbolical character, referring to the human condition or to private issues linked with a personal tragedy, was entirely disregarded. Treated as realistic representations of concrete persons, human types or social classes, her works would approach the canonical tradition of Socialist Realism. This is how Kollwitz's exhibition was perceived by Jacek Woźniakowski; as an effort to incorporate her oeuvre into Socialist Realism: "The graphic works of Käthe Kollwitz, an artist posthumously turned into a precursor of Socialist Realism, came to us quite frequently [...]"³³

The perception of Kollwitz's works as relevant to the present time during the early years of the People's Republic of Poland explains how her entire oeuvre was recognised and incorporated into the discourse of Socialist Realism. In the case of Kollwitz, it would not be an interpretive overstatement to see her achievement, especially during the 1951 exhibition, in the light of Socialist

31 See the documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, GDR (Wymiana kulturalna. Przyjazdy. Programy oraz sprawozdania z pobytu w Polsce. Artystów – muzyków, zespołów wokalnie – muzycznych, teatralnych, plastyków, naukowców, delegacji pedagogów i architektów, literatów, dziennikarzy, charakterystyki gości) [Cultural exchange. Arrivals. Programmes and reports from sojourns in Poland. Artists – musicians, vocal/musical ensembles, theatre companies, visual artists and designers, scientists, delegations of pedagogues and architects, writers, journalists, descriptions of the guests], 1955, signature 152.

32 O. Nagel, op. cit., p. 8.

33 J. Woźniakowski, "Nieznany czar Zachodu. Odszukiwanie kontaktu" [The strange charm of the West], in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, listopad 1984* [Polish art after 1945. Materials from a session of the Association of Art Historians, November 1984], Warsaw, 1987, p. 116. Quoted after K. Zychowicz, "Exhibition-Organising Activity of the Committee...", op. cit. Among the numerous exhibitions of Kollwitz's works cited generally by Jacek Woźniakowski, worth mentioning is the exhibition of her graphic art that was shown in the University Library in Wrocław as a part of the *Sztuka walcząca* [Fighting art] cycle, which also included works by Georg Gross and Frans Masereel. See *Przegląd Zachodni*, 1951, no. 9–10, Poznań, p. 265.

Realism. Rooted in the historical realities of the day, the exhibition may be perceived as a peculiar interpretation of Kollwitz's oeuvre. The interpretive approach proposed herein owes much to the achievements of such scholars as Bruce Altshuler or Jens Hoffmann, who attempt to write art history from the perspective of the history of exhibitions.³⁴ They perceive exhibitions as events that shape the discourse of art history and as a research perspective which makes it possible to see not the work itself, but its much broader social and, above all, political context. In their approach it is the exhibitions, and not separate works, that constitute the main subject of research as the moment of mediation and meeting between the artist, the curator, the work, the public and politics. Kollwitz's oeuvre may be discussed in various contexts, for instance in the light of Modernism or in the feminist perspective.³⁵ It is, however, significant that a research perspective that evolved in the first decade after the war survived in the popular awareness, and in the reception of Kollwitz's work, for a long time.

A comparison of the two principal texts associated with the exhibitions, written by Otto Nagel and Urszula Pomorska, is very informative in this respect.³⁶ Nagel attempted to show Kollwitz mainly as his friend, a person whom he had known just as well as he knew her art and for this reason felt entitled to interpret it and present it to others. He focused on a description of the works and their literal interpretation, which he supported with anecdotes. He did not situate her oeuvre in any artistic context; the only background and the key to understanding it were Kollwitz's "revolutionary disposition, sensitivity and emotiveness, her existential experience and inspiration from Gerhart Hauptmann's *Weavers*".³⁷ Let us explain at this point that Kollwitz had been personally acquainted with Hauptmann, having met him in London in 1886. Her perusal of his play *The Weavers* provided her with a socially involved theme and resulted in a series of illustrations, on which she worked in the years 1893–1897. The weavers' revolt in Silesia took place in the year 1844, but Kollwitz considered the moment she had read *The Weavers* as one of the milestones in her creative career; the one that made her sensitive to reality. Reinterpreting historical events as current, she transposed them to modern conditions (the mode of interpreting her oeuvre as current in the light of Socialist Realism is thus rooted in Kollwitz's own stance). Émile Zola's novel *Germinal* was of similar importance to her work and also gave rise to

34 B. Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume 1: 1863–1959*, New York, 2008; J. Hoffmann, *Show Time: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, London, 2014.

35 C. Schönfeld, C. Finnan, *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, Würzburg, 2006.

36 U. Pomorska, "Wystawa dzieł Käthe Kollwitz w warszawskiej 'Zachęcie'" [Exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz's works in Warsaw's "Zachęta"], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1951, no. 4, p. 6.

37 O. Nagel, op. cit., p. 8.

a series of illustrations. Alexandra von dem Knesebeck comments on this literary aspect of her creativity, underscoring the role of text and Kollwitz's attempts to transpose it into the graphic medium.³⁸ An exchange of letters with Hauptmann³⁹ and their subsequent collaboration arose from her work on *The Weavers* cycle; for instance, Hauptmann contributed the text for the catalogue of Kollwitz's drawings.⁴⁰

In contrast to Nagel, Urszula Pomorska presented Kollwitz's output against the background of art history and juxtaposed it with German Expressionism. She was critical in her assessment of those works which she considered to have been affected by Expressionism. The environment that had shaped Kollwitz, as well as the conditions resulting from her gender, which Pomorska presented as characteristic and beyond Kollwitz's control, served as an explanation for her artistic stance:⁴¹

Those works in which [Kollwitz] restricts the experience to individual, personal emotionality; those in which her female sensitivity reaches a nearly hysterical spasm, enforce on her the form of Expressionistic depiction. In those works, however, in which she closely approaches the great cause of the proletariat, she finds simple, direct measures of the purest art. [...] Let us not forget that the artist has lived her whole life in conditions of capitalist oppression. For her, the figure of the worker is still imbued with a hint of tragedy; faced with this topic, her sensitive emotions occasionally mutate into a typically feminine, excessive passion.⁴²

Pomorska pointed out that Kollwitz's works did not fully conform to the methods of realistic depiction; she criticised the symbols used by the German artist, for instance the figure of Death, and the not-literal-enough compositions, for instance the etching *Death and a Woman* (Fig. 11). She described Kollwitz as following the artistic fashions of the late 19th and early 20th century and as copying or imitating Symbolism; she considered these works to be the least interesting in Kollwitz's oeuvre. In Pomorska's view, the simpler the means Kollwitz used, the better her work was. Pomorska also believed that the spare

38 A. von dem Knesebeck, "Die Bedeutung von Zolas Roman *Germinal* für den Zyklus *Ein Weberaufstand* von Käthe Kollwitz", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1989, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 402–422.

39 *Würdigungen und Briefe von Käthe Kollwitz und Gerhart Hauptmann*, eds. E. Hilscher, U. Hilscher, Berlin, 1987.

40 *Abschied und Tod. Acht Zeichnungen von Käthe Kollwitz. Mit einem Geleitwort von Gerhart Hauptmann*, Berlin, 1924.

41 It must be remembered that texts accompanying the exhibition were written in specific historical conditions; hence they must be read critically. I quote here a long passage, however, because in addition to the then-requisite language referring to the class struggle, it offers a perspective incorporating Kollwitz's oeuvre into women's art and uses stereotypical terminology referring to the sensibilities that were then believed to characterise this art.

42 U. Pomorska, "Wystawa dzieł Käthe Kollwitz...", op. cit., p. 6.

Fig. 11. *Käthe Kollwitz*
1867–1945. *Grafika – Rzeźba*
[*Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945.*
Graphic Art – Sculpture],
20 June – 21 July 1951,
Central Bureau of Art
Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Death*
and a Woman, 1910, soft
varnish and etching, photo
by Stanisław Wdowiński /
PAP Archive



form made Kollwitz's prints "nearer to the concerns of the people", as shown by the lithographs *Bread!*, *A March*, or *We Defend the Soviet Union*. With such a literal approach, the worker presented in her works was not a symbol; the universalistic or metaphorical character of the work was eliminated and the prints became simply portraits of workers. Everything that did not fit the perspective of Socialist Realism had to be explained one way or another: "Her oeuvre is a reflection of an approach to life that, although revolutionary, is typical of the intelligentsia. This art is not yet the art of the proletariat; it is an art about the proletariat [created] to shake the conscience of the bourgeoisie. Let us remember, however, that with all her progressiveness, [Kollwitz] is still a product of an environment in a bourgeois system".⁴³

Both Nagel and Pomorska remarked on the poignant and pessimistic meanings found in Kollwitz's works. This did not fit the Socialist Realist approach at all. It was bad enough that her works, according to Pomorska, seemed overfilled with symbols; worse still, their pessimism made them distant from the recipient who, after all, should perceive in them a positive picture of "the struggle to build a new society and himself".⁴⁴ Pomorska explained this as due to the artist's "insufficient awareness", and Nagel as due to her desire to

⁴³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁴ E. Kal, "W stronę bohatera pozytywnego" [Towards the affirmative protagonist], in: eadem, *"Tęgo się nie krytykuje na kogo się liczy". Polska krytyka artystyczna okresu realizmu socjalistycznego* ["You don't criticise who you're counting on". Polish art criticism in the period of Socialist Realism], Słupsk, 2010, pp. 65–68.

achieve the intended effect: the recipient, shaken by her works, was supposed to rebel and turn into a “warrior worker”.⁴⁵

Most of the exhibition’s reviewers commented on Kollwitz’s pessimism. The author of an article in *Głos Robotniczy* explained that her “sadness-making” arose from “the era of capitalist oppression and the horrors of the war, during which the artist lost her son. The viewers of the exhibition may be consoled by the present generation’s love of peace and by the strengthening of freedom and the democratic system”.⁴⁶ Kollwitz’s eighteen-year-old son died in 1914 on the front in Flanders; this event changed her standpoint to a pacifist one. It must be emphasised, however, that before her son’s death Kollwitz’s attitude towards the war was by no means clear-cut; the young man volunteered for the army with her encouragement and against the will of his father.⁴⁷ In the preface to the catalogue, Urszula Pomorska proposed an interpretation of the works from the 1930s in the light of Kollwitz’s impressions from her visit to the Soviet Union; this explanation echoed in press articles as well. Those later works were praised the most enthusiastically as “telling of the triumphant march of Socialism”⁴⁸ and, consequently, as the most optimistic and therefore the best.

One of the few press comments, apart from Pomorska’s text, to situate Kollwitz’s oeuvre in the framework of a broader artistic tradition is found in an article published by *Tygodnik Powszechny*: “Käthe Kollwitz, a painter of proletarian poverty and the mutiny of the oppressed, is the leading representative of the so-called German Expressionism in visual arts, which is also represented by such artists as Pechstein, Nolde, Kokoschka or the ‘Die Brücke’ (A Bridge) group”.⁴⁹

A reviewer from *Sztandar Młodych* went in the direction pointed out by Urszula Pomorska. He criticised Kollwitz’s early period, in which “the element of struggle” was absent, and praised her “development” revealed by the graphic cycles, although he noted that the workers’ struggle presented therein was not organised: “The *Peasant War* cycle closes this line of development, showing her better understanding of the essence of the proletarian struggle. In this cycle the artist is already aware that the power of the proletariat lies in the unity of interests of all the oppressed and that this power cannot be destroyed by a temporarily incurred defeat”.⁵⁰ The reviewer emphasised the significance of

45 O. Nagel, op. cit., p. 8.

46 K. Chylińska, *Twórczość buntu i walki (Wystawa prac Käthe Kollwitz w „Zachęcie” warszawskiej)* [The art of revolt and struggle (An exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz’s works in Warsaw’s “Zachęta”)], *Głos Robotniczy*, 3 July 1951, ed. A, no. 181. The article was reprinted verbatim in *Głos Koszaliński*, 4 July 1951, no. 182.

47 H. W. Pickford, op. cit., pp. 100–103.

48 “Grafika w służbie proletariatu” [Graphic art in the service of the proletariat], *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 19/20 August 1951, no. 229.

49 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 9 July 1951, no. 26.

50 Z. W., *Sztandar Młodych*, 11 July 1951, ed. 27B, no. 164.

Fig. 12. *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, a view of the exhibition, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive



the exhibition as a “link in the building of friendship between the People’s Republic of Poland and the GDR, of which Käthe Kollwitz dreamed, but which she did not live to see”.⁵¹ Stanisław Hen from *Ekspres Wieczorny* described the exhibition in a similar tone: “Käthe Kollwitz died on 22 April 1945, on the eve of the liberation, not having seen the time when the new democratic Germany arose, supported by the aid of the Soviet Union. That Germany for which she had fought with all her sensitive soul of a progressive artist”.⁵²

An interesting perspective was adopted by Marian Turwid in his review of the exhibition in *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski* that was published in Bydgoszcz. He recalled that he had had the occasion to see Kollwitz’s works in Berlin and that now, years later, he could return to them at the exhibition at the Zachęta. He was greatly impressed with them, just as he had been the first time – but only now, seeing them again, did he notice how much they were underpinned by the artist’s personality: “The simplicity and directness of her creative statement is utterly convincing. Because this is not only a great artist that is speaking to us, but also a wise, profound, very warm and kind

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² S. Hen, “Kaethe Kollwitz w ‘Zachęcie’” [Käthe Kollwitz at the Zachęta], *Ekspres Wieczorny*, 18 July 1951, no. 195.

person”.⁵³ This seems to be the most personal statement referring to the exhibition; also Kollwitz’s career is seen here in an uncharacteristic way: her true talent was to have been appreciated, in defiance of the critics and the authorities, by “the simple folk of Berlin”.⁵⁴

Interestingly, most reviews do not contain any references to the sculptures presented at the exhibition. One of the surviving photographs (Fig. 12) indicates that they were positioned on plinths placed in the centre of the hall. They were thus very visible; the six sculptures (one of them presented only in photographs) constituted an essential part of the show. In the full version of her text, Urszula Pomorska assessed Kollwitz’s sculptures as inferior to her achievements in the area of graphic arts. It seems that this view was accepted and not much attention was paid to her sculptural works. Photographs documenting the exhibition prove that its setting was extremely simple. Works on paper hung in regular intervals, aligned to the bottom edge, in identical frames with white mounts. No attempt had been made to evoke a more dramatic feeling, either by means of the way of hanging the works or by the lighting; the prints were arranged in the gallery space in an entirely neutral fashion. The whole tragic aspect of the exhibition, its pessimism and depressing mood, which were so emphasised in the texts, was lodged in the prints themselves. Yet the reality that was external to the exposition must not be forgotten; the show took place a mere six years after the conclusion of the war, in a Warsaw that was still being rebuilt from ruins.

Otto Nagel – “a eulogist of Wedding”

The exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz’s oeuvre and his visit to Warsaw in 1951 gave Otto Nagel the opportunity to initiate contacts and collaboration that led to the organising of his solo exhibition, which was held in 1955 at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (25 May – 12 June, Fig. 13) and at the Lublin Museum (24 June – 24 July), as well as a few days of a study visit to Poland. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue containing a list of works, selected reproductions and an introduction by Helena Krajewska (Fig. 14). The exhibition encompassed ninety works: 19 oils and 71 pastels. The works dated mostly from the pre-war period and the war years; only nine or eleven works (three were undated) came from the post-war period. The name of the exhibition commissioner has not been recorded.

Nagel’s exhibition was the second, after Käthe Kollwitz’s, solo exhibition prepared in collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with

53 M. Turwid, “Sztuka Käthe Kollwitz” [The art of Käthe Kollwitz], *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski*, 1 July 1951, no. 180.

54 Ibid.



Fig. 13. *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna* [An exhibition of Otto Nagel's paintings. The German Democratic Republic], 25 May – 12 June 1955, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, exhibition poster, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Foreign Countries. The press reported: “The opening of the exhibition was attended by, among others, the Minister of Culture and Art Włodzimierz Sokorski and the General Secretary of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries Jan Karol Wende. The status of the event was underscored by the GDR state award for Otto Nagel and by his numerous titles: deputy chairman of the German Academy of Fine Arts and chairman of the German Association of Visual Artists”.⁵⁵

The form of the exhibition and its reception are known from press reviews and materials pertaining to the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries that are extant in the Central Archives of Modern Records. Helena Krajewska's introduction locates the exhibition in a series of propagandistically significant events organised by the Committee. Similarly, Käthe Kollwitz's exhibition and its reception in the press can be summed up by the word “progressive”, referring primarily to the topics of the works.⁵⁶ The form of Nagel's works was occasionally criticised as too detailed

⁵⁵ “Otwarcie wystawy Otto Nagla w ‘Zachęcie’” [The opening of Otto Nagel's exhibition at the Zachęta], *Ekspres Wieczorny*, 26 May 1955, no. 124.

⁵⁶ H. Krajewska, *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna* [An exhibition of Otto Nagel's paintings. The German Democratic Republic], exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1955, p. 3.



Fig. 14. *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna* [An exhibition of Otto Nagel's paintings. The German Democratic Republic], 25 May – 12 June 1955, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, exhibition catalogue, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

or monotonous. What was uncommon, and very different than in the case of Kollwitz, was the manner of constructing the legend of the artist as “a son of the proletariat, a worker who, before he began his artistic career, was raised in isolation, unpolluted by the formalism of bourgeois art”.⁵⁷ This tale is repeated in the majority of longer reviews, with more or less detailed descriptions of Nagel's difficult childhood in Wedding, the working-class district of Berlin.⁵⁸

The borough of Wedding (which after the war was in the French zone) and its residents were one of the more frequently repeated motifs in Nagel's paintings. Nagel was often presented in opposition to the Berlin milieu; his oeuvre was described as related to “current problems instead of experimenting with the empty form and sterile contents”.⁵⁹ Reviews from the Warsaw exhibition occasionally mention Nagel side by side with Heinrich Zille (1858–1929), a German graphic artist, painter and photographer whose work focused on depicting Berliners in an often critical and socially involved manner, or with Hans Baluschek (1870–1935), an artist also associated with Berlin, whose

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ E. Sztekker, “Otto Nagel – malarz proletariackiego Berlina” [Otto Nagel – the painter of proletarian Berlin], *Po prostu*, 12 June 1955, no 24.

⁵⁹ H. Krajewska, op. cit., p. 3.

realistic prints and paintings portrayed the city proletariat.⁶⁰ Yet it was Käthe Kollwitz who was discussed as being inseparably paired with Nagel. Urszula Pomorska, who called him “an ardent eulogist of Wedding”,⁶¹ perceived his output in this very context; she viewed his exhibition as a continuation, so to speak, of Kollwitz’s.

Nagel was the embodiment of a fighting worker. His works were exhibited in Wedding inns, and the artist himself was banned from art salons; hence his works could become “a weapon in the class struggle”.⁶² This was the manner in which they were represented in contemporary criticism, often making use of a text from the German magazine *Rote Fahne* in which Nagel’s oeuvre was described as follows: “These are paintings which cause such pain that one wants to scream aloud. It is a lament, an accusation, a manifesto... Thus paints a man of profound convictions... Nagel should think hard on his talent and his calling. There is no class struggle on Parnassus”.⁶³ Apart from the “class struggle” and “progressiveness”, another keyword used to describe Nagel’s work was “intensity”. He was praised for being intense, but he was also criticised for it. Some reviewers charged him with the fact that the exhibition was addressed to Berliners, who would perhaps recognise the views of their city;⁶⁴ the residents of Warsaw might find his art tedious and a source of rather monotonous emotions. Portraits showing “intense depictions of workers painted by a worker” would have been considered more interesting.⁶⁵

Apart from making the standard pairing with Kollwitz, the author of an article in *Przegląd Kulturalny* compared Nagel’s work with the art of Renato Guttuso or André Fourgeron, whose works could be seen at the *Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Progressive Artists* (*Wystawa prac postępowych artystów plastyków*, 1954) at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions and at Guttuso’s solo exhibition (1954, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions and the Lublin Museum).⁶⁶ In the article published in *Przegląd Kulturalny*, Nagel’s post-1945 output was assessed unfavourably as “stiff, lacking the main motor of the class conflict or compassion for the human lot, too optimistic and not realistic enough”.⁶⁷ These long quotations from reviews are included here to compensate for the absence of any photographs from the exhibition. The comparisons and juxtapositions referring to Nagel’s oeuvre allow us to learn how his art was

60 K. Hoge, op. cit.

61 U. Pomorska, “Żarliwy piewca Weddingu” [An ardent eulogist of Wedding], *Ekspres Wieczorny*, 8 July 1955, no. 135.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 I. Witz, “Malarstwo Otto Nagla” [Otto Nagel’s painting], *Życie Warszawy*, 15 June 1955, no. 141.

65 Ibid.

66 See K. Zychowicz, *Paryska lewica w stalinowskiej Warszawie* [The Paris Left in Stalinist Warsaw], Warsaw, 2014.

67 *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1955, no. 26.

presented. A short review from *Sztandar Ludu* published in Lublin reveals the perspective assumed in order to view Nagel's paintings – a perspective which was actually more important than the paintings themselves. Having read the essays by Krajewska and Witz, the author of this review had been convinced that Nagel's paintings were pessimistic and depressing; but, to his surprise, he did not find such paintings in the exhibition. In his opinion, the works were "optimistic; even though they depict the harshness of life in a working-class district, they make us see good people there, and the greyness and gloom are a thing that shall pass".⁶⁸ In this interpretation, it is this very "optimism and faith in people that make Nagel a proletarian painter".⁶⁹

Materials extant in the Archive of Modern Records document the exhibition and Nagel's short study visit to Poland. The artist met Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, whose exhibition in the GDR took place in the framework of the exchange organised by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries. He also had a meeting with a delegation of artists from Cracow and paid a visit to the main seat of the Association of Artists and Designers. In Warsaw and in Cracow he went on guided tours of the historical monuments; he saw the operetta *A Night in Venice*; he visited Zakopane and went on a hike up Chochołowska Valley. According to a detailed report from his visit related to the exhibition, "the artist willingly went to meetings, but avoided exhibitions and cultural events".⁷⁰ This report is essential because it informs us that "artistic supervision over the exhibition" belonged to Nagel. It also gives us a behind-the-scenes view of how the Committee functioned and what tasks were assigned to tour guides. The author of the report provides a portrayal of her guest that is surprisingly different from the one offered by the media and from his official biography as a worker-painter:

Several times he said about himself: "we, the crème de la crème", "we, the top echelon". Initially, as I gathered, his intention was to obtain a larger sum of money in addition to the allowance. Even the GDR embassy intervened as to this issue. After Nagel had been paid his fee for artistic supervision over the exhibition, for one day the guests talked less about their own importance, position and income, but the very next day, obviously out of habit, the whole rigmarole began anew [...].⁷¹

Kollwitz's exhibition was crucial to the presentation and reception of Nagel's paintings; his later art was viewed in the light of her graphic output. In addition, Nagel's works – for instance *Spring in the Wedding District* (1934, Fig. 15),

68 "Nad malarstwem Ottona Nagla" [On Otto Nagel's painting], *Sztandar Ludu*, 2–3 July 1955 (Lublin), no. 153.

69 Ibid.

70 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 152, file: Impreza nr 329, NRD, pkt. 73, *Sprawozdanie z pobytu w Polsce profesora Nagla z małżonką* [A report from Prof. Nagel and his wife's stay in Poland], D. Żmij, p. 38.

71 Ibid.

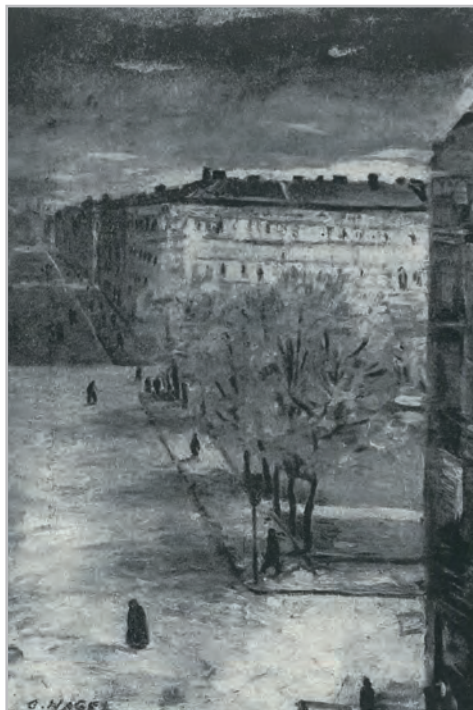


Fig. 15. Otto Nagel, *Spring in the Wedding District*, 1934, oil on canvas, in: *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Winter in the Suburbs (1939) or *Judenhof* (1942, Fig. 16) – were not perceived as cityscapes, but as images of the working-class area of Berlin. It is not by accident that such works as *The First Shift* (1930) or *A Young Communist* (1932, Fig. 17), i.e. ones referring directly to the work ethos and the character of people portrayed by Nagel, had also been selected for the exhibition. This reception is, to some extent, the effect of Nagel's own strategy, as he styled himself not only Kollwitz's friend and guardian of her collection, but also the continuator of her legend. In the reception of Nagel's art in the People's Republic of Poland, this image of the artist was consistently used to construct his perception as a rebel painter, a fighting worker and a proletarian revolutionary, but at the same time as a man anointed by an outstanding woman artist of the preceding generation. His "undeniable talent" was confirmed by the many awards, decorations, titles and high offices in the GDR art institutions which he held in the 1950s,⁷² to which he referred, perhaps ironically, during his study visit to Poland.⁷³

⁷² For more on Otto Nagel's role in cultural politics and his status in art and the culture institutions of the GDR, see M. Braun, *Kulturinsel und Machtinstrument: Die Akademie der Künste, die Partei und die Staatssicherheit*, Göttingen, 2007.

⁷³ Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 152, file: Impreza nr 329, op. cit.

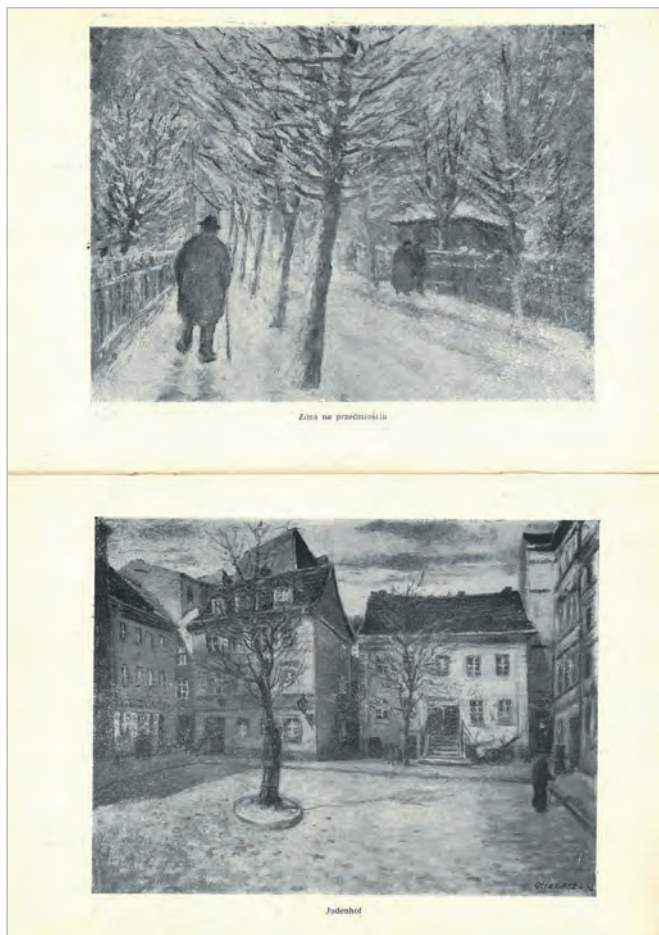


Fig. 16. Otto Nagel, *Winter in the Suburbs*, 1939, oil on canvas; *Judenhof*, 1942, oil on canvas, in: *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

These two exhibitions not only represent a typical image of the cultural policy and cooperation between the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR, but also serve as a case study showing the approaches in the reception and art criticism marked by Socialist Realism. The selection of works to be exhibited and the conception of showing her as a socially conscious artist were the key to Kollwitz's exhibition at the Zachęta, whereas the key to the exhibition of Nagel's paintings was the involvement and attitude of Kollwitz as his mentor. In conclusion, Jacek Woźniakowski's already quoted comment that Kollwitz was posthumously turned into a precursor of Socialist Realism is worth recalling again. The fact that her oeuvre was perceived in the context of Socialist

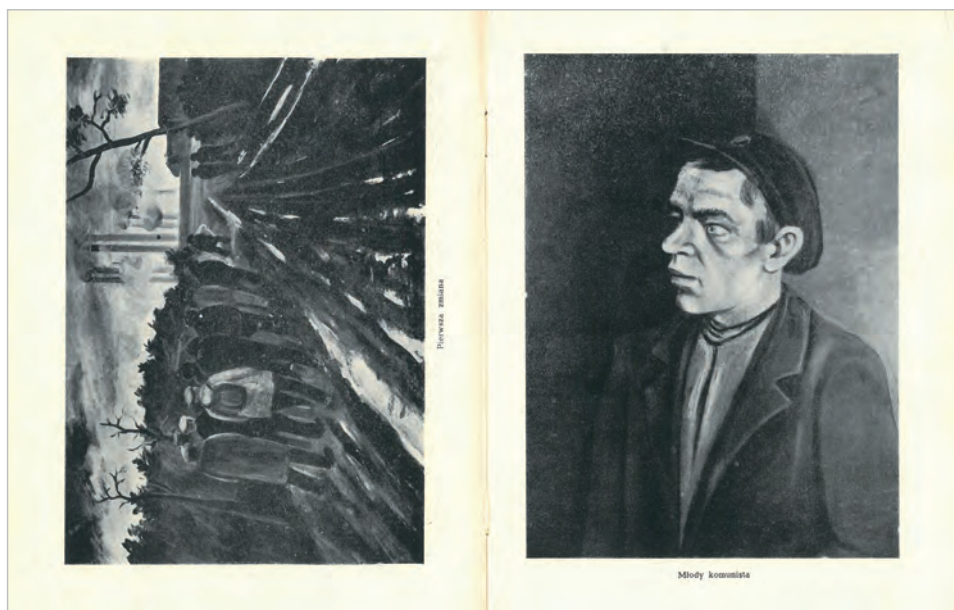


Fig. 17. Otto Nagel, *The First Shift*, 1930, oil on canvas; *A Young Communist*, 1932, oil on canvas, in: *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Realism is a symptom of the process of making it applicable to current needs. In 1951 and 1955, Kollwitz and Nagel were presented in Warsaw as “progressive” artists and thereby incorporated into the propagandistic principles of a programme in which the political situation imposed a very distinct shape on exhibitions as much as on the accompanying publications.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

The essay focuses on a discussion of two exhibitions hosted at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw that were organised in collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries. This Committee, which existed in the years 1950–1956, was an official agency responsible for Poland’s cultural relations with foreign countries. Its programme reflected the state policy and focused on cooperation with countries of the Eastern bloc. The events discussed in the essay were organised as part of the cooperation with the German Democratic Republic; they were solo exhibitions of the work of two German artists, Käthe Kollwitz in 1951 and Otto Nagel in 1955. They were linked by the person of the painter Otto Nagel, who, being the guardian of Kollwitz’s legacy, acted as the commissioner of her posthumous exhibition. The essay contains a critical analysis of the texts published in the catalogues and of other printed matter associated with the exhibitions as well as an analysis of related press reviews.

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Kobro and Strzemiński: Łódź – Warsaw – Paris (1956–1957)

In the course of just one year, from December 1956 to December 1957, the avant-garde oeuvre of Władysław Strzemiński and his wife Katarzyna Kobro was presented at no fewer than four exhibitions.¹ The first and second of them were organised in Poland, i.e. in Łódź and Warsaw, respectively;² the third and fourth were organised in Paris. The response from both the Polish and foreign press was vigorous. The exhibitions profoundly influenced the Polish artistic milieu and became an important element of the history of contemporary art and the history of exhibitions in Poland. Yet an exploration of archive materials concerning those exhibitions yielded surprising results, one of them being the discovery that they very nearly might not have taken place at all.

In late June and early July of 1956, both Łódź and national newspapers published the following announcement:

The Organising Committee of Władysław Strzemiński's Posthumous Exhibition appeals to the interested parties to provide all [types of] materials illustrating the life and activity of the late artist. All pictures, reproductions, drawings, publications, photographs, architectural designs loaned for the duration of the exhibition (December 1956) will be returned afterwards. The Committee is also asking that relevant biographical materials be sent.

- 1 This essay is based on research conducted in the framework of the National Programme for the Development of Humanities at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, "The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970" research project, no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014.
- 2 The official title was "Pośmiertna Wystawa Prac Władysława Strzemińskiego i Katarzyny Kobro" [The Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobro's Oeuvre] but, earlier, at the stage of preparations it was described as "Wystawa Strzemińskiego i Jego Grupy" [The Exhibition of Strzemiński and His Group] and later as "Wystawa Pośmiertna Władysława Strzemińskiego" [The Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński]; hence the text contains a variety of titles according to the chronology as suggested by the extant archival materials and publications.

Please send all records, materials, pictures, etc. to the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Łódź Division, 65 Piotrkowska Street.³

This announcement suggests that all that was being planned was a monographic exhibition of Strzemiński's oeuvre, i.e. without Kobro; the documentation of the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA) does not entirely confirm this, however.⁴ A close analysis of this documentation clearly shows that the course of events was both dynamic and surprising. The situation was highly complex already at the outset.

In the history of Polish art, and of Polish culture in general, the year 1956 is perceived as a very clear political caesura – the starting point of a “thaw” that reflected the political thaw in Poland's internal and foreign affairs. However, it would be wrong to forget that it was only on 17 April of that year that Strzemiński's sworn enemy, Włodzimierz Sokorski, was recalled from the post of the Minister of Culture and Art. A true “thaw” in Poland's politics and culture was possible only after the events of October 1956.

The first official preliminary of exhibitions for the year 1956 that was submitted by the Łódź Division of the CBWA and approved by the central office in Warsaw contains no exhibitions of works by either Strzemiński or Kobro. A detailed preliminary of exhibitions planned for the Centre of Art Propaganda contains “Architectural designs by Oplustil M.Eng.”, entered under number 9 with the dates 10 November – 2 December.⁵ It might therefore seem that at that time Strzemiński's exhibition was not being envisioned at all.

In answer to the motion sent by the Łódź Division of the CBWA dated 4 January 1956, no. 54/56, Gizela Szancerowa, the director of the CBWA, accepted the proposed changes in the plan of exhibitions for the second half of the year 1956. This is the first time that the plan mentioned the “Posthum[ous Exhibition] of Strzemiński and his group” to be held at the Centre of Art Propaganda, with the attached dates: 3 December – 31 December 1956.⁶ The answering letter reached the Łódź Division on 18 January 1956. Thus the Exhibition of Jerzy Oplustil's Architectural Designs disappeared from the preliminary of exhibitions for 1956 and was replaced by the Posthumous Exhibition

3 “W związku z wystawą pośmiertną Wł. Strzemińskiego” [In connection with Wł. Strzemiński's posthumous exhibition], *Głos Robotniczy*, 1956, no. 155, p. 10; cf. e.g., untitled, *Życie Literackie*, 1956, no. 28, p. 12; untitled, *Kronika*, 1956, no. 14, p. 10.

4 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, Dept. of Publications and Documentation 1956–1957, “Wystawa Katarzyny Kobro i Władysława Strzemińskiego XII 1956 – I 1957”, unpaginated.

5 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 87, Dept. of Education and Propaganda, “Instrukcja dotycząca dokumentacji wystaw plastycznych oraz plany wystaw plastycznych 1951–1960”, file no. 2/1, unpaginated.

6 Ibid.

of Strzemiński and His Group,⁷ entered under December.⁸ So it was only in January of 1956 that Strzemiński's name appeared in the altered list of exhibitions planned for that year.

Interestingly, the engineer Jerzy Oplustil was not assigned any other date for his exhibition, but he did become a member of the Organising Committee for Władysław Strzemiński's exhibition, actively participated in its meetings and organisational work and, in addition, turns out to have been the co-author of the exhibition's design.⁹ Jerzy Oplustil had closely collaborated with Strzemiński in the years 1947–1952; they had conducted numerous joint architectural projects, especially between the years 1947 and 1949. In designing interiors and furnishings, Oplustil readily cooperated not only with Strzemiński but also with his students from the State College of Fine Arts (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych, PWSSP) in Łódź.¹⁰ These details about Jerzy Oplustil suggest that when his name was entered into the preliminary, it booked, so to speak, the dates for Strzemiński's exhibition until the coming of the real thaw in the cultural policy of the People's Republic of Poland, i.e. until a favourable political signal was received. This signal would mean that the Polish United Worker's Party gave its permission for the presence of the avant-garde on the official art scene and also allowed Strzemiński to return to his due place in contemporary art history. The entire process of preparing his posthumous exhibition in Łódź was conducted with extreme caution, as is well attested to by the statements of the committee members entered in the minutes from their meetings. The reasons why organising this exhibition had to proceed cautiously were twofold: firstly, the political situation in Poland was still uncertain; secondly, some very influential Łódź milieus viewed Strzemiński with particular disfavour.

Various factors complicated the process of organising an exhibition of Strzemiński's oeuvre, and not only in Łódź. Significantly, as late as in September of 1956 it was still impossible to move the exhibition to Warsaw; this was clearly stated by Gizela Szancerowa, the director of the CBWA. Her statement in this matter was entered in the minutes as follows: "Director Szancerowa said that Strzemiński's show in Warsaw in '57 is out of the question, so the best, most meticulously prepared exhibition is to be held in Łódź".¹¹ Bolesław

⁷ See note 2.

⁸ In answer to a letter from the Łódź Division L.dz. 23/56 dated 12 January 1956; the letter arrived at the Łódź Division on 21 January 1956. One of its two copies bears a handwritten note in red pencil (*prace w Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, pismo 248*); *ibid.*

⁹ *Katarzyna Kobro. Władysław Strzemiński*, exhibition catalogue, The Centre of Art Propaganda, Łódź, December 1956 – January 1957, Łódź, 1956, p. 2; exposition design: Marian Bogusz and Jerzy Oplustil.

¹⁰ More in: J. Oplustil, *Z kręgu Strzemińskiego* [From Strzemiński's circle], Warsaw, 1991.

¹¹ Minutes from the meeting of the Organising Committee of Władysław Strzemiński's Exhibition, dated 21 September 1956 at 11 a.m., p. 1; State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, *op. cit.*

Utkin added: "A very good selection must be made".¹² For this reason, all possible efforts were made to prepare the Łódź exhibition with the greatest care; it was treated as a first-priority task. After the period of Stalinism – and after Strzemiński had been excluded from the artistic milieu and, generally, all professional life and sentenced to civil death (which resulted in his death, at the age of just 59, less than three years later) – the Łódź milieu began evincing a strong need not only to restore his good name to Strzemiński, but also, perhaps mainly, to expiate his elimination from the artistic life. A posthumous exhibition of Strzemiński's oeuvre, and, after a closed-door debate at the meeting of the Organising Committee, also the oeuvre of his wife Katarzyna Kobro, was to constitute this expiation. The couple had functioned as an inseparable artistic team until at least the final days of the Second Republic of Poland, jointly creating their main artistic projects (e.g. "Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego" [Spatial composition. Calculations of the spatio-temporal rhythm]) and educational projects (the inclusion of art history and drawing in the curricula of secondary schools and adult education courses). They had also jointly participated in the international art scene, establishing the a.r. art group and the a.r. Library, and finally creating the a.r. International Collection of Modern Art (Figs. 1–2).

The minutes from the meetings of the Organising Committee indicate that the issue of including the works of Katarzyna Kobro in Strzemiński's exhibition was a point of discussion. In conclusion, it was decided that the achievements of both artists would be celebrated; but the decision whether to present their works together or in separate exhibition spaces proved difficult. The minutes contain a note that their works would be exhibited separately. Yet a unique recording of the National Film Archive (Filmoteka Narodowa) shows Kobro's sculptures exhibited together with Strzemiński's paintings¹³ (Figs. 3–4). A part of their oeuvre cannot be considered separately. Large passages from *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego*, a text co-authored by Kobro and Strzemiński, complemented the works at the exhibition and in the catalogue to Strzemiński's *Kompozycje architektoniczne* [Architectural compositions].¹⁴ Members of the Organising Committee, who were mostly people closely associated with Strzemiński and in many cases well acquainted with both him and his wife, were obviously unsure as to how to deal with the issue of the couple's separation in 1947 as a result of their experiences during and immediately after the 2nd World War, which had proved disastrous to their marriage. Despite their final separation and the rupture of any private links, Kobro and Strzemiński retained deep respect for each other as artists. The Neoplastic Room, an exhibition space at the Museum of Art

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957, 6'36".

¹⁴ *Katarzyna Kobro...*, op. cit., p. 25.



Fig. 1. Julian Przyboś, Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, 1929, archival photograph, Museum of Art in Łódź



Fig. 2. The a.r. International Collection of Modern Art, 1931, archival photograph, Museum of Art in Łódź



Fig. 3. Part of the exhibition, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobra – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:37:33:08)



Fig. 4. Part of the exhibition, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobra – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:39:36:16)

in Łódź which Strzemiński had designed in 1948, i.e. soon after the couple's separation, constituted his tribute to *Kompozycje architektoniczne*, Kobra's wide-ranging artistic achievement in the field of sculpture. He placed her spatial compositions in the focal point of the Neoplastic Room, with paintings by



Fig. 5. The Neoplastic Room, 1948, archival photograph, Museum of Art in Łódź

the leading members of 20th-century European avant-garde in the background (Fig. 5). The organisers of their posthumous exhibition in 1956 most probably considered Strzemiński's concept a very important reference point; this will be discussed later. The Neoplastic Room was destroyed in 1950 – the Museum of Art in Łódź did not exhibit avant-garde art during the period of Socialist Realism and during the initial stages of the thaw. An overwhelming majority of extant works by both Strzemiński and Kobro remained in the collection of the Museum of Art in Łódź – kept in storage, just as the surviving works from the a.r. International Collection of Modern Art. At the time the exhibition was beginning to be organised their state of preservation was lamentable. Stefan Krygier reminisced:

In 1956, upon the initiative of Julian Przyboś, plans arose for a large posthumous exhibition of Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro to be held in Łódź. Together with Professor Stefan Wegner and Julian Przyboś, I took part in the talks on organisational issues at the Museum of Art in Łódź. At one point Julian Przyboś expressed the desire to see the collection at once. Having entered the basement, we saw the paintings, dusty, dirty and with the glass broken, lying scattered on the floor. Our first impulse was to transfer the collection to a ground-floor room. Never again did I see Julian Przyboś in such a state of agitation as when he was helping to carry the works.

He was incensed because the situation we had discovered in the basement most probably touched him personally. The “a.r.” collection, as well as the works of Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro, were an integral component of the idea which he had been fighting for, which he had helped to create, when before the war he had taken part in the creative avant-garde movement.¹⁵

Curiously, the Museum of Art in Łódź did not propose that the Strzemiński and Kobro posthumous exhibition be organised. It might seem that this would have been the most appropriate place to do so, also for reasons of logistics: most of the works presented at that exhibition had come from its collection. The deciding factor may have been political reasons – the lack of permission from the authorities or even an outright prohibition – or purely personal issues. An indisputable answer may prove impossible to find, since the archive of Marian Minich PhD, the director of this museum (in 1934–1939, 1945–1965), was destroyed in the early 1960s.¹⁶ It is known for a fact that in the year 1956 he personally joined the meetings of the exhibition’s Organising Committee¹⁷ and that he authorised the loan of a large number of both Kobro’s and Strzemiński’s works to be exhibited in Łódź, then in Warsaw, and afterwards also in Paris.

From the formal point of view, the Organising Committee of Władysław Strzemiński’s exhibition included Ryszard Stefańczyk, Stefan Wegner, Bolesław Utkin, Stefan Krygier, Jerzy Oplustil, Lech Kunka, Jakobina Strzemińska, Nora Szczepańska, the painter Tadeusz Roman (officially responsible for organising the exhibition as the director of the Łódź Division of the CBWA) and a young historian of art, Janina Ładnowska. All of them were associated with the Łódź artistic milieu and were mostly painters – mainly Strzemiński’s former students who were linked with the State College of Fine Arts in Łódź.¹⁸

Many other persons actively participated in organising the exhibition. The catalogue’s imprint records each person who was responsible for some area of work:

Script design: Marian Bogusz

Exposition design: Marian Bogusz, Jerzy Oplustil

“Teoria widzenia” exposition design: Stefan Krygier, Lech Kunka, Jerzy Mackiewicz

15 S. Krygier, “Jakim go znałem...” [As I knew him...], *Sztuka*, 1986, no. 6, p. 27.

16 Information received from Ms. Paulina Kurc-Maj, director of the Department of Modern Art, Museum of Art in Łódź.

17 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, Dept. of Publications and Documentation 1956–1957, “Wystawa Kobro i Władysława Strzemińskiego XII 1956 – I 1957, Protokoły posiedzeń Komitetu Organizacyjnego wystawy pośmiertnej Władysława Strzemińskiego”, unpaginated.

18 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, Dept. of Publications and Documentation 1956–1957, “Wystawa Kobro i Władysława Strzemińskiego XII 1956 – I 1957, Protokoły posiedzeń Komitetu Organizacyjnego wystawy pośmiertnej Władysława Strzemińskiego, posiedzenie z 3 IX 1956”, unpaginated.

Graphic design for the catalogue: Stefan Wegner

Graphic design for the poster: Lech Kunka

Invitation: Stanisław Fijałkowski

Text selection: Stanisław Fijałkowski, Antoni Starczewski, Bolesław Utkin

Photographs to be reproduced: Eugeniusz Haneman

Photographs for placards: Jerzy Mackiewicz

Overall coordination: Stefan Wegner

Unless otherwise noted, the exhibits are owned by the Museum of Art in Łódź and were made available courtesy of its Director, Marian Minich PhD.¹⁹

The catalogue included the essays *Nowatorstwo Strzemińskiego* [Strzemiński's innovativeness] by Julian Przyboś and *Wspomnienia biograficzne* [Biographical recollections] by Stefan Wegner,²⁰ as well as a bibliography of Strzemiński's oeuvre as prepared by Irena Treichel in cooperation with Wanda Polakowska²¹ and a bibliography of Kobro's oeuvre as prepared by Bolesław Utkin.²² Other persons, such as the already mentioned Gizela Szancerowa or Henryk Stażewski, who had once belonged to the a.r. group and still remained faithful to geometric abstraction, also attended the committee's meetings.

The origins of the Łódź exhibition are not known, but we may hypothesise that its inception was linked with the changes that were taking place in the artistic milieu of Łódź, including at the State College of Fine Arts from which Strzemiński had been dismissed in January of 1950. His dismissal was decreed by the then-Minister of Culture and Art Włodzimierz Sokorski with the acceptance of the college's authorities, then chaired by Stefan Wegner, who himself was dismissed soon after. The only one to protest against Strzemiński's dismissal, which occurred in rather dramatic circumstances, was Professor Roman Modzelewski. Strzemiński had already been excluded from the Association of Artists and Designers (Związek Artystów Plastyków) in Łódź two years before, under the pretext of not having a diploma from any college of art. The political situation in Poland made it possible for the resentful bigwigs of the Łódź artistic milieu to remove Strzemiński and to cut him off from all means of supporting himself, thus indirectly leading to his untimely death in December of 1952.²³

In 1956 Roman Modzelewski held the post of the rector of the State College of Fine Arts and returned Professor Stefan Wegner to his former position

19 Katarzyna Kobro..., op. cit., p. 2.

20 J. Przyboś, "Nowatorstwo Strzemińskiego" [Strzemiński's innovativeness], in: *ibid.*, pp. 3–11; S. Wegner, "Wspomnienia biograficzne" [Biographical recollections], in: *ibid.*, pp. 12–17.

21 Katarzyna Kobro..., op. cit., pp. 56–67.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

23 Library of the Museum of Art in Łódź, R. Modzelewski, *Odpowiedź na referat prof. Fijałkowskiego pt. Głos w dyskusji nad referatem prof. Modzelewskiego zatytułowanym „Twórca samotny”* [In answer to Prof. Fijałkowski's paper "A voice in the debate on Prof. Modzelewski's paper entitled 'The lone creator'"], typescript, p. 26 ff.

– with the full support of the college's Senate, but to the great dissatisfaction of Minister Sokorski, who demanded that Wegner be removed again. The Senate unanimously voted to leave Wegner be and the minutes from the meeting were passed on to the minister. The storm died down and Wegner remained.²⁴ Stefan Krygier and Lech Kunka were employed at the State College of Fine Arts that same year. Stanisław Fijałkowski was already working there as Professor Modzelewski's assistant. After the period of Stalinism, artists from the circle that had once been close to Strzemiński were returning to their normal creative work and activity in the milieu. Four of the above were among the co-organisers of Strzemiński's posthumous exhibition in Łódź.

Bearing in mind the prestigious quality of the exhibition which was intended to return Kobro and Strzemiński their due position in the history of the European avant-garde²⁵ – or, in fact, the history of modern art in Europe – the organisers attached great importance to the smallest details of the exposition and the catalogue, from the script and the selection of works and theoretical texts to the visual arrangement of the whole. The minutes from the committee meetings, as well as the final effect, i.e. the exhibition and its catalogue, make this immediately obvious. The concept for the entire exhibition relied on an attempt to present Strzemiński's artistic and theoretical output as a coherent, homogeneous work. The script was produced by Marian Bogusz and Jerzy Oplustil. At that time Bogusz was a noted Warsaw artist of the young generation; in his work he analysed problems of space.²⁶ He was one of the initiators of Group 55 (1955) and of the Krzywe Koło Gallery (1956). In 1947 he had helped to establish the Young Artists and Scientists' Club (Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców) to which he invited, among others, Władysław Strzemiński and the young painters and designers from his circle, usually students of the State College of Fine Arts in Łódź. He was also active as a stage designer. Jerzy Oplustil, as has already been mentioned, had collaborated with Strzemiński and a few of his students in the late 1940s, designing the interiors of civic buildings and exhibition pavilions.

24 Ibid., p. 27.

25 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, Dept. of Publications and Documentation 1956–1957, "Wystawa Kobro i Władysława Strzemińskiego XII 1956 – I 1957. Protokół posiedzenia Komitetu Organizacyjnego Pośmiertnej Wystawy Władysława Strzemińskiego z dnia 21 IX 1956", p. 3.

26 In the text *Konfrontacje 1960* [Confrontations 1960], printed in the catalogue of the exhibition under the same title, Aleksander Wojciechowski thus described Bogusz's artistic explorations in the mid-1950s: "Marian Bogusz. Five years ago, during the exhibition of 'Group 55' in which Marian Bogusz participated, the issue of space evident at the forefront of his work was pointed out. It was said that this was an imagined, 'philosophical' space, filled not with objects but with thoughts. It was at the same time a real space; but its realness was present in the same sense as our psychological, intellectual experiences are real"; quoted after *Galeria Krzywe Koło* [The Krzywe Koło Gallery], catalogue of the retrospective exhibition, National Museum in Warsaw, July – September, Warsaw, 1990, p. 71.

The organisers of the Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobro's Oeuvre wanted to create an exhibition which would show the *opus magnum* of both of these artists in a comprehensive, suggestive and visually very attractive way, i.e. one that would be very innovative and worthy of the Neoplastic Room. After years and years of crude, incredibly boring Socrealist exhibitions, where the artistic quality of the displayed works was usually dismal and the ideological message was fed to the audience in spades, they wished to surprise the viewers with a first-rate quality, freshness and a modern outlook of the exhibition. This was a considerable challenge, since the Centre of Art Propaganda had at its disposal only a small space that was not easy to divide and where it would prove difficult to house – and display satisfactorily – a substantial number of works. In addition, the author of the design had to take into account the financial and material resources as well as the fact that time was limited.

The assumption of the exhibition's script was to present the entirety of Strzemiński's oeuvre, i.e. his works of art and the theoretical texts that complemented them and were an integral component of the show and the catalogue. Kobro's and Strzemiński's innovativeness was shown in the script and emphasised by the scenery, i.e. the exposition design. The exhibition opened with photographic reproductions of works by Kobro and Strzemiński, as well as of those by European artists: Hans Arp, George Braque, Theo van Doesburg, Fernand Léger, Kazimierz Malewicz [Kazimir Malevich],²⁷ Piet Mondrian, Pablo Picasso and Georges Vantongerloo.²⁸ Thus, Kobro's and Strzemiński's oeuvre was presented in the broader context of the European avant-garde and as being in full partnership with it, not just influenced by it. This is reflected by the following record from a discussion held during a meeting of the Organising Committee:

Under discussion was the issue of Strzemiński's attitude to the past and to contemporary art.

Citizen²⁹ Krygier suggested that large-format reproductions should not be displayed, but that Strzemiński and Kobro should be shown against the background of e.g. Malewicz and Mondrian.

Citizen Stażewski praised the idea of [placing] black-and-white reproductions in the hall, emphasising that the character of a reproduction should be retained. The exposition is to be complemented by a frieze of reproductions of Arp's to show the differences and analogies between the two artists.

Citizen Wegner said that Strzemiński and Kobro are to be amongst those artists, not

27 In this essay, the Polish spelling (Kazimierz Malewicz) is used, following the spelling in the quoted press articles; the transliteration from Russian is Kazimir Malevich (translator's note).

28 Given in the same order as in *Katarzyna Kobro...*, op. cit., p. 18.

29 The title *obywatel* = citizen (abbreviated to *ob.*) was at that time customarily included in official documents, sometimes with an additional title, e.g. "citizen judge", "citizen director" (translator's note).



Fig. 6. Part of the exhibition, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kbro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:37:40:20)

derivative of them. They must be shown as being on a par with, e.g. Picasso and others. The author of the exposition pointed out that the reproductions in the hall will signal the atmosphere of Strzemiński's and Kbro's work. All comparisons and analogies will be [placed] on pulpits, there being reproductions of, for instance, Strzemiński's side by side with Malewicz's. The texts are to be very brief, so as not to suggest that the West [is] first and [only] then Strzemiński.

Oplustil M.Eng. remarked that it would be best not to force conclusions but to show the works.³⁰

The detailed script, signed by Bogusz, stated that the exhibition would occupy (a) the entrance space, placing Kbro's and Strzemiński's oeuvre in the context of the European avant-garde, (b) the main hall, "a display of the works in the chronological development of the oeuvre", and (c) the small hall, devoted in its entirety to "Wł. Strzemiński's chief theoretical work *Teoria widzenia* [The theory of vision]". Openwork screens divided the main hall into seven spaces: 1. the Cézanne period, 2. the Cubist period, 3. the Neoplastic (Spatio-temporal) period, 4. the Unist period, 5. Hyper-realism, 6. oil paintings (space and sun), works which are today known as Afterimages and/or solar compositions, and 7. paintings and compositions from the final period (Figs. 6–8). In each of these spaces, the works were complemented by Strzemiński's theoretical

30 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, Dept. of Publications and Documentation 1956–1957, "Wystawa Kbro i Władysława Strzemińskiego XII 1956 – I 1957. Protokół posiedzenia Komitetu Organizacyjnego Pośmiertnej Wystawy Władysława Strzemińskiego z dnia 21 IX 1956", p. 3.



Fig. 7. Part of the exhibition, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:38:42:00)



Fig. 8. Relief sculptures at the Egzotyczna Café, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:40:54:12)

texts. The exhibition in the small hall, which focused on *Teoria widzenia*, had a “separately devised script”.³¹

The exhibition space was limited, so it was decided to place the paintings on the walls and on screens made of a metal frame with nylon threads

³¹ Ibid., unpaginated.

stretched vertically inside (Fig. 9). The colour scheme of the frames was to correspond to the colour scheme of the paintings placed in them, and the openwork was to divide the space yet to concurrently open it up. This solution was accepted most probably as a reference to the concept of the Neoplastic Room; at the same time the idea of organising the space by means of colour and not a solid barrier or a space-enclosing wall was a continuation of the notions expressed by Kobra and Strzemiński in the text of *Kompozycja przestrzeni* [Spatial composition] and in Unism as realised in sculpture. Most of Kobra's best works that were still extant came from this very period. Only a few surviving black-and-white photographs show Kobra's sculptures positioned on surfaces painted in a way which suggests that the colour continued in the space of the sculpture placed on the meeting line of those colourful spaces (Fig. 10). The colour scheme of the exhibition frames matched that of the paintings hanging therein; hence, by analogy, it may be assumed that it comprised the primary colours of red, yellow and blue, arranged in a contrasting manner and making the spatial composition complete. Owing to its correspondence with the colour scheme of Mondrian's works, the interior was called, slightly inappropriately, neoplastic.

The Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobra's Oeuvre is invaluable as the first attempt at creating a catalogue of both extant and lost works by both Kobra and Strzemiński, their locations in museum collections and in private possession, and their state of preservation, which, as has already been shown, reflected their status during the previous decade. In addition, it was an incentive to commence work on Strzemiński's biography and a bibliography of texts by Strzemiński and Kobra – a bibliography which, unfortunately, even today is often considered incomplete. Also, from the very beginning the exhibition was conceived as a place where the public would finally, for the first time, become acquainted with Strzemiński's treatise *Teoria widzenia* as a text that crowned his artistic, didactic and intellectual activity. Despite some inaccuracies and errors, most of them impossible to avoid, the authors of the exhibition "organised an immensely interesting exhibition in a way that had never before been seen in Łódź".³²

Yet the Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobra's Oeuvre had many other contexts and levels of meaning as well. Certainly one of those was the expiatory nature of the show. It was underwritten by the Association of Artists and Designers [Związek Artystów Plastyków] in Łódź, the same one that in 1948 had rejected Władysław Strzemiński as its member, thus excluding him from the official art scene and by the same token depriving him of all means of supporting himself in the period 1950–1952, i.e. after his disgraceful dismissal from the State College of Fine Arts in January of 1950. The fact that Strzemiński had been the co-creator and *spiritus movens* of

32 E. Etler, "Lekcja Władysława Strzemińskiego" [A lesson by Władysław Strzemiński], *Kronika*, 1957, no. 1, p. 3.



Fig. 9. Part of the exhibition, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:38:07:17)

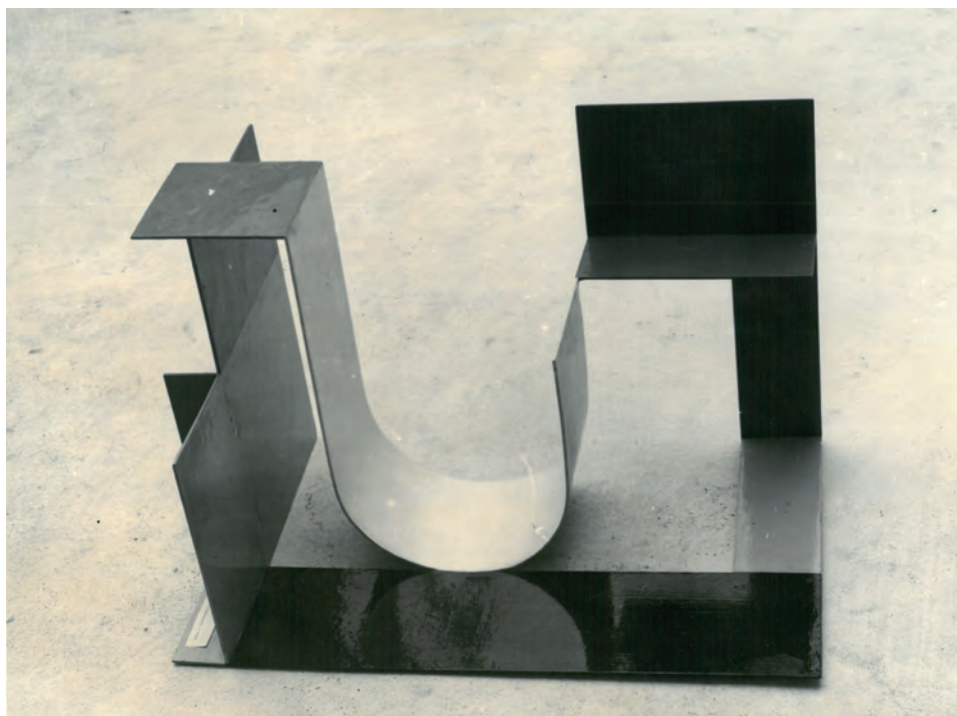


Fig. 10. Katarzyna Kobro's *Kompozycja przestrzenna* [Spatial composition] at the exhibition, archival photograph, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art

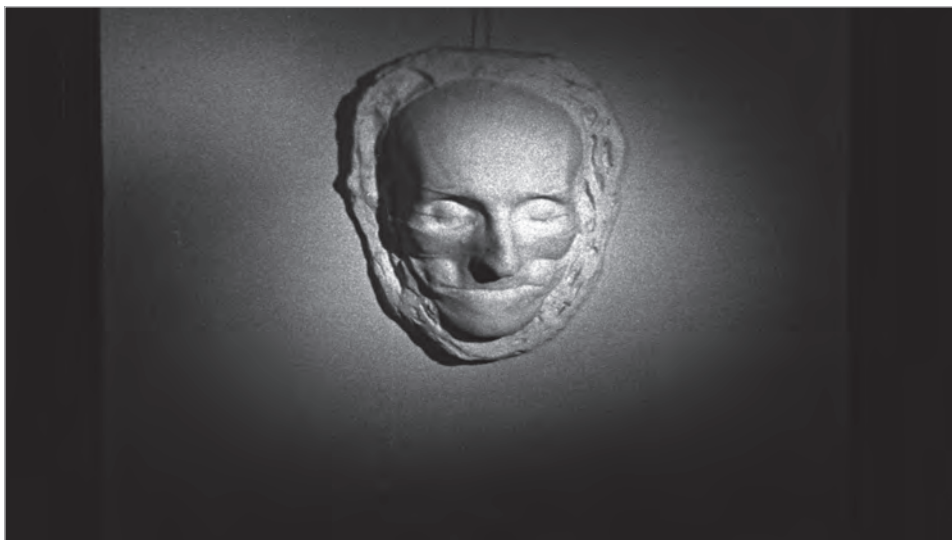


Fig. 11. Death mask, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kbro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:39:56:09)

the Polish Artists and Designers Trade Union in Łódź in the 1930s and that in the years 1945–1946 he had actively participated in its work was conveniently forgotten. The fact that in 1932 Strzemiński became the first-ever laureate of the prestigious City of Łódź Artistic Award was overlooked. After the 2nd World War he was among the initiators and creators of the State College of Fine Arts in Łódź and he designed an innovative curriculum for the college, with the aim of training its graduates for collaboration with the industry. He taught at the college from its inception until his dismissal. Some of its lecturers – including the former colleague who had contributed to his dismissal – and Strzemiński's former students became members of the exhibition's Organising Committee. This endeavour opened entirely new opportunities to them; for instance, it offered Stefan Wegner and, for entirely different reasons, Strzemiński's ex-students Stefan Krygier and Lech Kunka, who had resisted Stalinist oppression, a chance to return to the artistic milieu. It also launched the artistic careers of some of his other ex-students, for instance Stanisław Fijałkowski. Soon they had their own exhibitions at the Łódź Division of the Bureau of Art Exhibitions and the works of some of them were shown at its other divisions. It must be emphasised that the exhibition of Kbro's and Strzemiński's works constituted a very important contribution of the Łódź creative milieu to the revival of unfettered art in Poland after over six years of relentless domination of Socialist Realism and of ideological control over artists and their art. In the period of the thaw, abstraction was perceived as synonymous with both freedom and modernity. For this very reason, in the latter half of the 1950s abstraction in all its forms became almost ubiquitous



Fig. 12. The exhibition's title placard, the National Film Archive, no. 11311, *Wystawa Kobro – Strzemiński w Łodzi*, Łódź, 6 January 1957, camera operator Zbigniew Skoczek, 1957 (11:39:48:00)



Fig. 13. Invitation to Kobro's and Strzemiński's exhibition in Łódź, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art (also: State Archive in Łódź, Modern and Contemporary Art Section at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences)

in Polish art.³³ The fact that Strzemiński's death mask was placed in the first room, right by the entrance, was especially significant; this gesture gave the exhibition the overtone of a posthumous tribute. The same message was expressed by the fact that the exhibition was termed a "posthumous" one (and it must be noted that it was termed as such from the very beginning); this pointed to its gravity and, in a sense, imposed the direction of the viewer vs. the work relationship (Fig. 11).

The Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobro's Oeuvre at the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions opened on Sunday, 16 December 1956, at twelve noon. It was housed in the Centre of Art Propaganda, no. 4 Park Sienkiewicza (Fig. 12). The invitation lists three co-organisers: the Polish Artists and Designers Trade Union, the Organising Committee and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Fig. 13). Attendance was 12,350 viewers in total, of which 7,300 came during the first twelve days at the very end of the year 1956 and a further 5,050 during the first thirteen days of the year 1957.³⁴ It was seen by, on average, 608 viewers a day, which was not a bad result at all, considering the avant-garde radicalism of both artists' oeuvre and their many years' absence from the artistic milieu of Łódź. The last time Strzemiński had taken part in an exhibition of the Artists and Designers' Trade Union was in 1946, whereas Kobro ceased exhibiting her works after the war and did not participate in the artistic life at all. With regard to attendance, the exhibition held fifth place among all fifteen exhibitions organised in 1956 by the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions. Bearing in mind that the reception of avant-garde works, and especially their theoretical explication, after the insipidity of Socialist Realism was not an easy thing, the result must be considered a major success.

When exactly the option of moving Kobro's and Strzemiński's exhibition to the capital arose remains a mystery. Housed in the Zachęta building of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw, it was open to the public from 18 January to 10 February 1957. Just as in Łódź, the exposition was designed by Marian Bogusz and the poster was designed by Lech Kunka. A total of 170 exhibits were on display.³⁵ The surviving documentation held in the State Archive in Łódź and in the Institutional Archive of the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art contains no information as to when and in what circumstances the decision was taken to show the exhibition in Warsaw, but it could not have been earlier than in late autumn, after the events of October 1956. The

33 Cf. I. Luba, "The Faces of Socialist Realism and Subsequent Liberalisation in Polish Painting", in: *Behind the Iron Curtain. Official and Independent Art in the Soviet Union and Poland 1945–1989*, Warsaw, 2010, p. 84.

34 State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 87, Dept. of Education and Propaganda, "Instrukcja dotycząca dokumentacji wystaw plastycznych oraz plany wystaw plastycznych 1951–1960", file no. 2/1, unpaginated.

35 Katarzyna Kobro: 12 sculptures, 1 painting on glass; Władysław Strzemiński: 77 paintings, 79 watercolours and drawings, 1 print.

scheme came to fruition owing to the combined efforts of the organisers of the Łódź exhibition, with the special involvement of Gizela Szancerowa as the director of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions and, above all, of Julian Przyboś. Three decades later Stefan Krygier recalled: "After Strzemiński's death, J. Przyboś was the greatest promoter of his art. He contributed to the transfer of Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobro's exhibition to Warsaw. I regret that the beautiful and very involved speech that Przyboś gave at the vernissage in Zachęta was not recorded".³⁶ It is very probable that this speech was similar in spirit to the first essay Przyboś had written about Strzemiński in the period of the thaw, in autumn 1955, entitled *Wnioski i propozycje* [Conclusions and proposals]. He wrote:

[being] turned towards the future, Strzemiński, an innovator and precursor, was aware that in the history of art (just as in the history of any other human activity) there was no *return*, and there could not be. Aiming at a universal art, he pointed to new ways of bringing painting back to its social function. [...] The universality of visual art will rely not on one picture, tiny or huge, being seen by many or very many people, but on the whole human environment being shaped like a picture. One will live in a picture, so to speak. This is the concept of the universality of art as Strzemiński foresaw in his books and realised in his art. Art is no longer ceremonial and exceptional; every quotidian thing becomes art.

The "Espace" group, which consists of architects, engineers, painters, sculptors, furniture makers etc., is currently promulgating and attempting to effectuate similar ideas in France. They, too, have the artistic integrity of people's quotidian lives in mind. Similarly, but not as profoundly as Strzemiński and his group, they are trying to combine all types of artistic activity into a single universe of art, one that is not divisible into types. [...]

But in art, we must rely on – creativity, that is on our own effort, not someone else's. Our own, which means [set] at that highest level of visual awareness which our most outstanding contemporary creators have reached; those who did not imitate anyone else's painting, but, walking in the world's artistic avant-garde, shared in the making of that creative advance which in France, for instance, gave birth to Picasso, Léger and the "Espace" group, in Poland to Strzemiński [and] the "Praesens" group, in Mexico – to Rivera and his comrades' murals.³⁷

From the perspective of political history, the exhibition at the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, later transferred to Warsaw, institutionally sanctioned and conferred a very high status on both Kobro's and Strzemiński's art, art theory and other actions intended to promote avant-garde art in Poland, for instance their founding the a.r. International Collection of Modern Art and the last outburst of Strzemiński's creative freedom – his designing the Neoplastic Room at the Museum of Art in Łódź. In fact, official recognition by means of having the exhibition housed in Zachęta, which

36 S. Krygier, "Jakim go znałem...", *Sztuka*, 1986, no. 6, p. 27.

37 J. Przyboś, "Wnioski i propozycje" [Conclusions and proposals], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1955, no. 43, p. 3.

at that time was Poland's chief exhibition space devoted to modern art, was a value in itself.

Moreover, the exhibition of Kobro's and Strzemiński's works in Warsaw opened up entirely new perspectives on official cultural cooperation between circles rooted in opposing political camps, i.e. socialist Poland on the one hand and the Western countries, France and Holland, on the other; this will be discussed later. It was also a crucial step towards one of the boldest and most radical gestures made by the current authorities, i.e. sending the exhibition abroad, outside the Iron Curtain – and to Paris, no less, the very heart of avant-garde art – as an exhibition project that was to promote the Polish avant-garde under the official patronage of, jointly, two government departments: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture. This gesture was politically significant, both abroad and in the country, but it also indicated a very telling reversal of the direction in artistic relations along the Warsaw–Paris line that was rooted in the situation of the Polish art scene. Soon, and quite unexpectedly, Kazimierz Malewicz was to become the key figure in this new and surprising political *volte-face*.

In the 1950s artistic investigations in Poland were dominated by the imperative of modernity.³⁸ Geometric abstraction deriving from Constructivism clearly indicated that the avant-garde art that had developed in Poland in the early 1920s, with inspiration coming from, among others, Strzemiński, was continued. Tadeusz Kantor and the youngest generation of painters were trying to place *art informel* in opposition to the avant-garde and to promote the former as truly modern. Yet while they were trying to implant *art informel*, imported from Paris, on home ground, the organisers of the posthumous exhibition of Kobro's and Strzemiński's oeuvre, with Julian Przyboś and Gizela Szancerowa at the forefront, presented the output of the Polish precursors of abstract art, artists who had helped to create the European avant-garde, to the Paris audience, and not once, but twice. First, a total of twenty-two works by Kobro and Strzemiński were on loan at the exhibition entitled *50 ans de peinture abstraite* at Galerie Raymond Creuze in Paris in May 1957 (Galerie Creuze, Salle Balzac, Paris, du 9 mai au 12 juin 1957), where they represented Polish art;³⁹ the second, far more prestigious exhibition to be held in Paris

38 I. Luba, "Imperatyw nowoczesności (w sztuce polskiej lat 50.)" [The imperative of modernity (in Polish art of the 1950s)], in: *Wizje nowoczesności. Lata 50. i 60. – wzornictwo, estetyka i styl życia* [Visions of modernity: the 1950s and 1960s – design, aesthetics and lifestyle], Warsaw, 2012, p. 9.

39 *50 ans de peinture abstraite. Exposition internationale organisée à l'occasion de la publication du Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite par Michel Seuphor aux Editions Fernand Hasan*. Galerie Creuze, Salle Balzac, Paris, du 9 mai au 12 juin 1957, Editeur Paris: Galerie Creuze, 1957, exhibition catalogue, Préface de Michel Seuphor, Paris 1957; cf. The International Exhibition of Non-objective Art, France, Paris, Galerie Raymond Creuze, May 1957, two exhibitors from Poland (K. Kobro, W. Strzemiński), twenty-two exhibits (13 paintings, 7 sculptures, 2 drawings); in the press: "Ze świata" [World news], *Kronika*,



Fig. 14. A press cutting: the article by J. Przyboś with the same photograph of Denise René, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art

was *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlewski, Stażewski* which was presented at the Denise René Gallery.⁴⁰ Originally planned for the period of 22 November – 22 December 1957, it was prolonged until 10 January 1958 because of its great success with the viewers.⁴¹ Its rank and popularity resulted from several factors, the most important being the inclusion of works by Kazimierz Malewicz. They were presented in Paris for the first time, acquired for the exhibition thanks to the efforts of the Polish diplomatic services and the gallery owner herself. Denise René was at that

1957, no. 10, p. 11; *Rocznik CBWA* [Annual of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions] 1957, Warsaw, 1957, p. 61.

40 *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne*, exhibition catalogue, ten reproductions, introductions by n. Jean Cassou, Julian Przyboś, Henryk Berlewski, Warsaw, 1957; Exhibition: *Precursors of abstract art in Poland*, France, Paris, the Denise René Gallery, curator: Julian Przyboś, poster design: Marian Bogusz, December 1957; five exhibitors, forty-four exhibits (25 oils, 9 watercolours, 7 sculptures, 3 drawings); *Rocznik CBWA*, *ibid.*; <http://www.deniserene.com/8.html>.

41 (S. Dr.), "Francuzi byli zaskoczeni wysokim poziomem polskiego malarstwa abstrakcyjnego. O ocenie wystawy w Paryżu rozmawiamy z Henrykiem Stażewskim" [The French were astonished by the high quality of Polish abstract painting. We speak with Henryk Stażewski about an assessment of the exhibition], *Kurier Polski*, 1958, no. 6, p. 4.

Fig. 15. Invitation to the *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne*: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlewi, Stażewski exhibition at Galerie Denise René, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art



time an unquestionable authority in the field of avant-garde art, with special interest in geometric abstraction (Fig. 14). Works exhibited in her gallery were the best of the best; this was where the rankings of artists were made.

The exhibition *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne*: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlewi, Stażewski was organised “sous le haut patronage de Monsieur S. Gajewski Ambassadeur de Pologne” (Fig. 15). The Honorary Committee included members of the international cultural elite; the vernissage invitation contained the names of “Jean Cassou, conservateur en chef du Musée d’art moderne à Paris; Marian Minich, directeur du Musée municipal à Lodz; W. Sandberg, directeur du Musée municipal à Amsterdam; Jean-Paul Sartre; Tristan Tzara; Claude Bourdet; Julian Przybos”.

The opening of the exhibition at the Denise René Gallery in Paris took place on 15 November 1957 (Figs. 16–17). Its origin was commented on in the Polish press: “The idea to organise this exhibition was born at the International Exhibition of Abstract Art, which was opened in Paris in May of this year. A painting from the *Architectural Compositions* series exhibited therein aroused such great interest that the Denise René Gallery offered to hold an exhibition of Polish abstract painters”.⁴² Henryk Stażewski was more con-

⁴² State Archive in Łódź, set 2400, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Łódź, signature 296, Dept. of Publications and Documentation 1956–1957, “Wystawa Katarzyny Kobro i Władysława Strzemińskiego XII 1956 – I 1957”, press cutting, unpaginated.



Fig. 16. Poster of the *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlew, Stajewski* exhibition at Galerie Denise René, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art

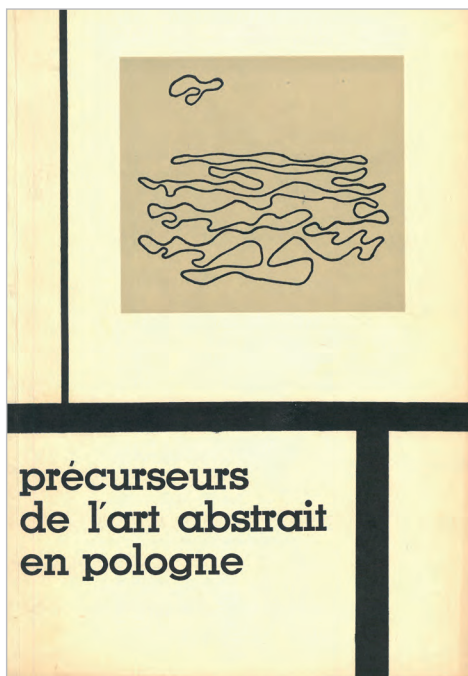


Fig. 17. Cover of the catalogue for the *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlew, Stajewski* exhibition at Galerie Denise René, Documentation Department, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art

crete in speaking about her contribution: “The owner of the gallery endorses only the art of pure abstraction. We are grateful to her for her aid in organising the exhibition, as she has made the exhibition rooms available to us free of charge, while to rent such a space in Paris would have cost around half a million francs”.⁴³

Reports from the exhibition which were published in the Polish press accentuated – following in the footsteps of Przyboś in this – the thirty-five-year history of the avant-garde in Poland and the contribution to it that had been made by the artists exhibited at the Denise René Gallery. These artists were emphasised as being equal partners to the luminaries of the European avant-garde and as sharing with them the glory of being precursors of non-objective art: “The creative individuality of these artists is attested to by, among others, the fact that they were not only precursors in Poland, but also initiators of

43 (S. Dr.), op. cit., p. 4.

new trends in abstract art worldwide".⁴⁴ Kazimierz Malewicz was mentioned in the same context: "The Warsaw public became acquainted with the works of Wł. Strzemiński, a disciple of K. Malewicz, at the exhibition in Zachęta in January of this year. His principles of abstract painting were realised in spatial sculptural compositions by Katarzyna Kobro".⁴⁵ The significance of the exhibition as a breakthrough in awareness of Malewicz's art in Western Europe was underlined by Andrzej Turowski in his monograph *Malewicz w Warszawie: rekonstrukcje i symulacje* [Malewicz in Warsaw: reconstructions and simulations], with special emphasis on two of its aspects:

The Paris exhibition may be viewed as a fact which ended [...] the tale of Malewicz in Warsaw and began his work's new existence in the wider world. In this sense, the exhibition acquires an entirely different meaning. On the one hand, it seems to accomplish, posthumously, Malewicz's plan of travelling to Paris [...]. A journey of life which would have made true the utopia of the modernist artist's universalism. On the other hand, [...] the exhibition was organised at a moment [...] of a peculiar interlock between the political and the mercantile situations in which Malewicz's oeuvre had been trapped earlier, and then would be trapped again. I have in mind here two facts which, although not equal in terms of scale, were identically important with regard to the approach adopted herein. The first of them was the "Polish thaw", a short period of de-Stalinisation during which all discourses pertaining to modernity and abstraction acquired a political meaning as a symbol of freedom.⁴⁶

As the second of these facts, Turowski points to the purchase of a collection of Malewicz's works which he had left in Germany in 1927 during his suddenly interrupted journey to Paris – it was bought for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam by its director Willem Sandberg.⁴⁷ The recently discovered set of official letters exchanged at the ministerial level in 1957 allows us to see these two aspects as being intertwined.⁴⁸

Paradoxically, the exhibition *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne* at the Galerie Denis René in Paris was the first-ever official show of the Polish avant-garde to be held abroad and organised by a state institution, i.e. the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, under the patronage of the ambassador of the People's Republic of Poland in France. This is not altered by the fact that Julian Przyboś, who was the instigator, co-organiser and promoter of the Paris

44 "Polscy prekursorzy abstrakcjonizmu w Paryżu" [Polish precursors of abstractionism in Paris], *Życie Literackie*, 1957, no. 46, p. 11.

45 Ibid.

46 A. Turowski, *Malewicz w Warszawie: rekonstrukcje i symulacje* [Malewicz in Warsaw: reconstructions and simulations], Cracow, 2002, pp. 220–222.

47 Ibid., pp. 222–223.

48 Institutional archive of the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Precursors of abstract art, Letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Department of the Visual Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Art dated 19 June 1957, BM Nr DPI.565/1319/Og/57 re: exhibition of avant-garde artists in Paris, duplicate: Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions.

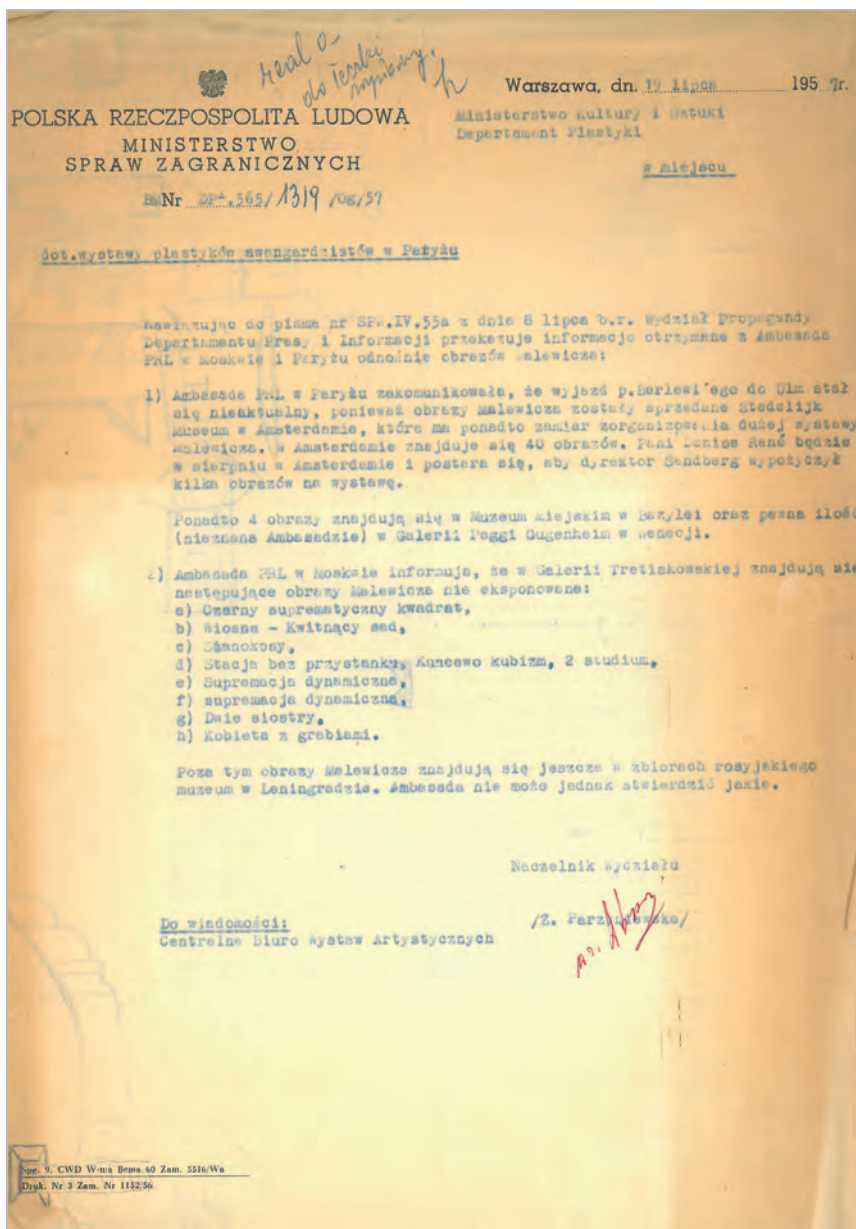


Fig. 18. Institutional archive of the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, precursors of abstract art, letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Department of the Visual Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Art dated 19 June 1957, BM Nr DPI.565/1319/Og/57 re: exhibition of avant-garde artists in Paris, duplicate: Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions

exhibition, had numerous private contacts in the Paris art world. It was also the first, and so far the only, exhibition in which Kazimierz Malewicz was explicitly described as a Pole and placed in the context of the emergence and later development of the avant-garde in Poland. The institutions involved in arranging the loans of Malewicz's works for this exhibition were the Ministry of Culture and Art (Department of the Visual Arts), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Propaganda Division of the Press and Information Department) and its subordinate Polish embassies in Paris and Moscow.⁴⁹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperated with the owner of the Paris gallery, who reportedly personally arranged the loan of Malewicz's works from the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam: "Mrs. Denise René will be in Amsterdam in August and will persuade Director Sandberg to loan a few paintings for the exhibition"⁵⁰ (Fig. 18).

That the works of Kazimierz Malewicz were presented – for the first time in the West, in the capital city of France – thanks to the efforts and under the aegis of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the period of the post-Stalinist thaw, and, in addition, that this happened a few weeks before their presentation at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (29 December 1957), was a gesture that held much meaning to European and even world-wide public opinion, as noted by the French press. René Barotte wrote in *L'Intransigeant*:

Pour la première fois un groupe d'artistes d'avant-garde, indifférents au "Credo" esthétique du Kremlin, a pu passer le rideau de fer. Il s'agit de cinq chercheurs polonaise: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlewi, Stażewski. Ceux-ci, dès 1913, ont pose les bases d'un art abstrait très rigoureux don't les jeunes chercheurs actuels se sont inspires largement.⁵¹

Behind the Iron Curtain, and especially in the Soviet Union, exhibiting works by Malewicz was not only impossible, it was not even dreamt of. Let it be recalled that in early 1956, when the Organising Committee of Strzemiński's posthumous exhibition was formed, its presentation in Warsaw, in the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, was out of the question; this had been expressly stated by its director Gizela Szancerowa. In other words, political consent was lacking. During the few short months of 1957 the situation changed dramatically.

By the same token, efforts aimed at the twofold recognition of Malewicz's status ended in success. Turowski wrote about the posthumous completion, after thirty years, of Malewicz's journey to Paris.⁵² This also meant the completion, after thirty-five years, of a different circle and a symbolic fulfilment

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 R. Barotte, "D'une galerie a l'autre", *L'Intransigeant*, 1957, no. 182.

52 A. Turowski, op. cit., pp. 220–223.

of Strzemiński's dream: the repatriation of Kazimierz Malewicz. This had been the aim of Strzemiński's efforts from the moment of his own arrival in Poland. This is confirmed by the editorial in *Zwrotnica* from 1922, referring to Strzemiński, who "recently returned from Russia, where he took an active part in the local art scene. In a letter addressed to our Editors he asks us to make every effort to bring Mr. Malewicz, our compatriot, who apparently holds one of the leading positions in the Russian art world, back to Poland. We bring this issue to the attention of the Department of Culture and Art".⁵³

In his first text, entitled *O sztuce rosyjskiej. Notatki* [On Russian art. Notes] and published in Poland in November 1922,⁵⁴ Strzemiński presented Malewicz's artistic personality and oeuvre with esteem, emphasising his Polish origins and at the same time his great input into the development of Russian art:

The foundation for the existence of the new Russian art are the works of Malewicz – an artist of immeasurable greatness – a giant who shall rule the fates of art for centuries to come. Where Picasso stopped at the very beginning of the path and turned back – this is exactly where Malewicz went on and finally came to the only possible starting point for an era – to Suprematism as a system of combining abstract elements into an organic whole arranged in accordance with an objective law.⁵⁵

It is worth noting that in this essay Strzemiński quoted from memory large passages from Malewicz's texts.⁵⁶ He also noted the immense creative potential of Katarzyna Kobro, about whom he was the first to write: "[T]he most talented of the young people, the sculptress Kobro; her Suprematist sculptures are a phenomenon on an European scale. Her works are a true step forward, a seizing of yet unconquered merits; they do not imitate Malewicz, but constitute a parallel creation".⁵⁷ He closed the argumentation of his essay with a noteworthy insight that Kobro and Drewin were "the only faithful inheritors of Malewicz's spirit".⁵⁸

As has already been stated, only thirty-five years after a letter regarding this issue was published did Strzemiński's efforts come to a symbolic fulfilment

53 [Editors], note to the text: W. Strzemiński, "O sztuce rosyjskiej. Notatki" [On Russian art. Notes], *Zwrotnica*, 1922, no. 3, p. 79.

54 W. Strzemiński, "O sztuce rosyjskiej. Notatki", *Zwrotnica*, 1922, no. 3, pp. 79–82; *Zwrotnica*, 1923, no. 4, pp. 110–114. The text is illustrated with the first Suprematist works by Kazimierz Malewicz to be reproduced in Poland.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 114. In the summer of the following year, 1924, Strzemiński married Katarzyna Kobro during a religious ceremony held in Riga. This allowed Kobro to come to Poland legally, to creatively cooperate with her husband and to enter the milieus of both the Polish and European avant-garde.

on the international scene – owing to the endeavour undertaken by the Ministry of Culture and Art in close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of Poland.⁵⁹ This was made possible due to the efforts of the Organisational Committee of Władysław Strzemiński's Post-humous Exhibition at the Centre for Art Propaganda in Łódź in early 1956. The organisers of the *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne* exhibition returned Malewicz to the realm of art history in Poland, thus completing the mission that Strzemiński had begun in the year 1922.

Strzemiński, an engineer (a graduate of the prestigious St. Petersburg Nikolaevsky Engineering School) and an artist unyielding in his drive towards artistic freedom, had put Malewicz's oeuvre in opposition to the opportunistic "manufacturers" whom he diagnosed with astounding precision:

The manufacturing trends are a point of compromise between the new art and the governors of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic]. Only because of the profits which the government circles expect from it is the existence of new art allowed. In Russian conditions, art exists only as the official art or it does not exist at all. [...] And this is it. The further development [of what had been] initiated by Malewicz was almost entirely stopped due to pressure from Lunacharsky, who supported the manufacturers because of the material needs of the RSFSR and did not understand the flimsiness of their manifestoes.⁶⁰

Strzemiński's bitter diagnosis came over two decades before all of Central-Eastern Europe was plunged into the dark age of Stalinism, with its doctrine of Socialist Realism that had no room for any artistic or aesthetic compromises or concessions, and for ideological ones even less so, not to mention any artistic freedom. The fact that the creative output of the two precursors of the avant-garde was presented in Paris by two government departments of the People's Republic of Poland, with the honorary patronage of its ambassador in France, during a period of the political thaw was a sign of a great (if short-lived) transformation in the Eastern bloc – regardless of the propagandistic effectiveness of this emancipative gesture in the West.

The immense success of the *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne* exhibition was widely reported in the Polish press; the Łódź papers especially emphasised the success of Strzemiński's works.⁶¹ As confirmation of this the author of the report, Jerzy Oplustil, quoted passages from two Paris reviews: "It is an exhibition of vast ambitions and powerful theories that are capable of filling

59 Kazimierz Malewicz came to Poland only once, with a short visit in 1927; more on this visit in "Malewicz w Polsce" [Malewicz in Poland], *Zwrotnica*, 1927, no. 11, p. 1; A. Turowski, op. cit., esp. pp. 108–210.

60 W. Strzemiński, "O sztuce rosyjskiej. Notatki", *Zwrotnica*, 1923, no. 4, pp. 113–114.

61 (J.O.) [Jerzy Oplustil], "Ogromny sukces wystawy Strzemińskiego w Paryżu (Inf. własna)" [The great success of Strzemiński's exhibition in Paris (special report)], *Głos Robotniczy*, 1957, no. 289, p. 1.

the void" in *ARTS (Letris Spectacles)* of 27 November,⁶² and "This exhibition is more than a success. Over a thousand people, including many luminaries of the French cultural scene, M. Aragon, M. Tristan Tzara, Jean Cassou, Jean-Paul Sartre and others, organised and participated in the opening of the exhibition at the Denise René Gallery at Champs Élysées in Paris". He also stressed that not only the French, but the Western-European press in general had published enthusiastic opinions about the show. "So the exhibition did not fail to meet the hopes that accompanied its inception and is a grand event both in Poland and in France",⁶³ concluded Oplustil. The response to it was forceful indeed. The following is an excerpt from a review *Modern Art at the Polish Embassy* by Yvonne Hagen, published in the *Art and artists* column of *The International Herald Tribune*:

Kazimierz Malewicz, famous in the history of modern art. For his "Suprematist" canvas of a white rectangle on a white background, and for his compatriots, each precursors of modern plastic idioms, are being honored by the Polish Embassy with an exhibition of their works at the Denise René Gallery, 124 Rue La Boetie.

"If Mondrian organized space, Malewicz discovered it", explains Berlewi. It is plain, at any rate, that no one man is responsible for any discovery, as each invention is a follow-through, step by step, of earlier developments working up to it.

The present event is a proud documentary exhibition of Poland's role in creating new visual and plastic conceptions. All highly intellectualized artists, with training in the sciences and architecture, Malewicz, Kobro (the lone sculptor), Strzeмиński, Berlewi and Stazewski each shows us his individual path toward the future.⁶⁴

Hagen not only appreciated the importance of the presented art and the approach of each of its creators, but also pointed out that the exhibition had been organised under the auspices of the Polish embassy in Paris, which she had even noted in the title.

Reviews published in the Paris press gave the *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne* exhibition a very high ranking as an official seal of approval given to avant-garde art under conditions of the political thaw. The fact that this art was being promoted in the West by an official diplomatic agency of the Socialist Polish state was also appreciated. Furthermore, it was a clear green light for modern art, for Polish émigré artists such as Berlewi and also for further exhibitions of politically independent Polish art to be held abroad. The rank and meaning of this political and cultural signal were without precedent in their day, both in the West and in Poland. Viewed from the historical perspective of today, they are truly invaluable. In addition, the fact

62 Ibid. The original passage: "Grandes ambitions et grandes théories, pour combler un vide implacable" – R. Charmet, "Cinq expositions cubistes et abstraites illustrent la poursuite de l'impossible", *ARTS*, 1957, no. 182.

63 Ibid.

64 Y. Hagen, "Modern Art at the Polish Embassy", *The International Herald Tribune*, 27 November 1957, p. 7.

that Malewicz's output was shown in Paris for the first time – and in the context of Polish art – is of major importance. It must be remembered that hardly a year and a half earlier exhibiting Strzemiński's works in Łódź had been out of the question for political reasons, and the works of Malewicz, Kobro and Strzemiński were disintegrating in the storage rooms of both Polish and Soviet museums, with the Iron Curtain keeping them firmly away from Western galleries.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

From December 1956 to December 1957, no fewer than four exhibitions presenting the oeuvre of Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński were organised: the Posthumous Exhibition of Władysław Strzemiński's and Katarzyna Kobro's Oeuvre, shown first in Łódź (16 December 1956 – 14 January 1957) and then in Warsaw (18 January – 10 February 1957), and two exhibitions in Paris: *50 ans de peinture abstraite* at Galerie Raymond Creuze (9 May – 12 June 1957) and *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne: Malewicz, Kobro, Strzemiński, Berlewi, Stażewski* at Galerie Denise René (22 November 1957 – 10 January 1958). All received a strong response, both in Poland and abroad. Research focused on these exhibitions has brought some surprising results. None of them had been planned until 1956, and only after the events of October 1956 was it possible to show the works of Kobro and Strzemiński in Warsaw in 1957. The exhibition at the Łódź Division of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions was prepared with exceptional care and is immensely important, as it occasioned the first attempt at preparing a catalogue of both Kobro's and Strzemiński's works, of Strzemiński's biography and a bibliography of texts authored by Strzemiński and Kobro. In addition, it was there that Strzemiński's treatise *Teoria widzenia* first came to public attention; it was published only two years later. The exhibition was transferred, quite unexpectedly, to the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw, which was the chief institution involved in exhibiting modern art in Poland; this gave official sanction and a considerable status to the oeuvre of both avant-garde artists. The exhibition entitled *Précurseurs de l'art abstrait en Pologne* became, paradoxically, the first-ever official exhibition of Polish avant-garde art to be held abroad and organised by a state agency, i.e. the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, under the aegis of the ambassador of the People's Republic of Poland in France. It was also the only exhibition in which Kazimierz Malewicz was regarded as a Pole and presented as belonging to the history of art in Poland; the mission initiated by Strzemiński in 1922 was thus completed. The institutions involved in arranging the loans of Malewicz's works for this exhibition were the Ministry of Culture and Art, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its subordinate Polish embassies in Paris and Moscow. This was the first time that the works of Kazimierz Malewicz were presented in the West, thanks to the efforts and under the aegis of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the period of the post-Stalinist thaw; notably, this happened before their presentation at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (29 December 1957).

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Much Ado About Nothing? Political Contexts of the *15 Polish Painters* Exhibition (MoMA, 1961)

The phenomenon of the post-war “triumph of American art” has been a bone of contention among art historians for nearly five decades. The man to open up this Pandora’s box was Irving Sandler in 1970. With a zeal worthy of an etymologist, he subjected the main trends of non-figurative art in the United States to formal analysis in his work *The Triumph of American Painting*.¹ Even though he was interested mainly in issues of art, Sandler did not hesitate to put forth a hypothesis concerning the “triumph” of American art over art that was being produced in Europe at that time; in this he followed in the footsteps of the New York art critics, with Clement Greenberg at the fore. Later scholars who were attracted to the same set of topics attempted to expand this vision to include political issues connected with Cold War politics. Max Kozoloff, Eva Cockcroft, Serge Guilbaut and other critics referred to Sandler’s work with some aloofness, but they agreed with him as to the concept of the “triumph” of the Americans and as to the “fact” that the centre of the world’s art had shifted from Paris to New York.²

Only recently has this “triumph” of American art that allegedly took place in the 1940s and 1950s been cast in doubt. Based on rich source material and modern-day research tools (e.g. the Artl@s database), Catherine Dossin has demonstrated that the worldwide triumph of American abstract expressionism in Europe may be considered to have happened only in the 1960s, when, after the success of pop-art, art produced across the ocean began to be increasingly

1 I. Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism*, New York, 1970.

2 See M. Kozoloff, *Renderings, Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art*, New York, 1969; S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, translated by A. Goldhammer, Chicago, 1983; E. Cockcroft, “Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War”, in: *Pollock and After. The Critical Debate*, ed. F. Frascina, New York, 1985, pp. 82–90.

highly regarded in Europe and to be considered a part of the canon. It must, however, be stressed that although Dossin's work convincingly undermines the imperialistic conception of the "triumph of American expressionism" in the 1940s and 1950s, it is itself not free from political manipulation.

Similarly to Kozoloff, Cockcroft or Guilbaut, Dossin has many times emphasised the role that Cold War politics played in shaping the strategies adopted by American institutions. Yet at the same time she ignores the role that countries from the other side of the Iron Curtain played in shaping the American policy on art. This is odd, since the main axis of the Cold War conflict, which all of the above-mentioned scholars consider the reason why the Americans actively promoted abstract expressionism as the paradigm of modernity, obviously ran not between New York and Paris, but between New York and Moscow.

There is another reason why the fact that Dossin's analysis marginalises the Soviet bloc is very curious indeed. After all, some exhibitions of American art that were presented in Western Europe were also shown on the other side of the Iron Curtain; a case in point is *Modern Art in the United States* in 1956, which, prepared for Vienna, could also be seen in Belgrade. Other exhibitions were prepared expressly with the Soviet audience in mind, e.g. the *American National Exhibition* was to be seen in Moscow in 1959.³ What the Americans used to see as a unified field for exercises in cultural policy, modern-day art historians seem to perceive as two independent political entities: the West and the East of Europe.⁴ The fact that the Eastern bloc is marginalised grows less surprising, however, when we remember that Dossin's research is underpinned by the belief that the two main centres of artistic life that existed in the 20th century were New York and Paris.

In this brief essay I would like to bring to recollection an event which amply demonstrates how central was the role which the countries of the Soviet bloc played in the American policy on art in the late 1950s. The topic of my interest is the exhibition *15 Polish Painters* that was presented at MoMA in New York in the year 1961.⁵ The exhibition was an unprecedented event not only with regard to Polish art, which had rarely been presented in America, but

3 Porter McCray, "American Tutti-Frutti", *e-flux*, 12/2014, no. 60, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/american-tutti-frutti/> [accessed 1 March 2015]; M. P. Kushner, "Exhibiting Art at the American National Exhibition in Moscow, 1959: Domestic Politics and Cultural Diplomacy", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 2002, vol. 4, no 1 (Winter), pp. 6–26.

4 See C. Dossin, "Mapping the Reception of American Art in Postwar Western Europe", *Artl@s Bulletin*, 2012, vol. 1, issue 1, pp. 33–39.

5 Besides New York, the exhibition could be seen in Ottawa, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Utica and Montreal.

with regard to Central-European art in general, as the contemporary American audience was effectively ignorant of it.⁶

The exhibition *15 Polish Painters* is remarkable also because it functions in Polish art history as a sort of a spectre. It is usually briefly mentioned as the “success” of one of the fifteen artists who exhibited their works there; in vain, however, would we seek a separate analysis of it in Polish specialist literature.

Eva Cockroft was one of the first critics to write about the *15 Polish Painters* exhibition. In her opinion, the mere fact that the exhibition had been organised was an achievement of the political goals of MoMA's programme, and hence a victory of the USA in Cold War cultural politics.⁷ Piotr Piotrowski attempted to add some nuance to this instrumental image by countering that Polish *art informel* derived from French, and not American, art.⁸ Piotrowski's counterargument suggests that the exhibition was a sort of a Trojan horse that MoMA's curators happily brought into their own citadel and which plainly demonstrated that, in reality, modern art was universalistic and not uniquely American in character. In the later years, Piotrowski slightly softened his ironic view of Cockroft's theory. In 2005, in his work *In the Shadow of Yalta*, he quoted Cockroft's views on the 1961 exhibition and indicated that the question which she had posed as to the influence of American politics on Polish art was problematic, yet at the same time he stressed that she had been correct in saying that the American interest in non-figurative art produced behind the Iron Curtain had a strong political overtone. Piotrowski's belief that “the truth lay somewhere in between” is repeated by Piotr Majewski in his book *Malarstwo materii w Polsce jako formuła nowoczesności* [The painting of matter in Poland as a formula for modernity].⁹ Also Jill Bugajski adopts a moderate approach in her essay on Tadeusz Kantor's career in America. Her text is particularly worthy of attention for another reason, as in contrast to Cockroft and Piotrowski, in writing about *15 Polish Painters* she referred to the sources, and it is on them that her interpretation is based. Bugajski quotes some official letters and memoranda from the documentation of the exhibition as held in the MoMA Archives, as well as press reviews.¹⁰ Her strategy is noteworthy,

6 A touring exhibition of Polish design, organised by Wanda Telakowska and Czesław Miłosz in 1948, is worth noting here.

7 E. Cockroft, “Abstract Expressionism”, op. cit.

8 P. Piotrowski, *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [The thaw. Art circa 1965], Poznań, 1996, p. 12.

9 P. Majewski, *Malarstwo materii w Polsce jako formuła nowoczesności* [The painting of matter in Poland as a formula of modernity], Lublin, 2006, pp. 20–21.

10 J. Bugajski, “Tadeusz Kantor's Publics”, in: *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, eds. P. Romijn, G. Scott-Smith, New York, 2012, p. 61. The performance that accompanied the exhibition *Podróżnicy* [Travellers] organised by Magdalena Moskalewicz at the Zachęta – National Gallery of Art in Warsaw (14 May – 21 August 2016): “On touring exhibitions. A performance/lecture by Porter McCray” is also worth noting. A performer under the pseudonym Porter McCray based his lecture, just as Jill Bugajski did, on memoranda extant in the MoMA archive.

since her ambition chiefly to fill a narrative lacuna, i.e. to bring to recollection an event which, once considered essential, was later relegated to the role of a minor piece in a puzzle made up of art and history.

* * *

Following Bugajski's strategy of a chronicler, in the following section of my essay I shall present the exhibition's development process and the political context in which this process unfolded. The current text expands the popular science article that Małgorzata Słomska and I published in the brochure *15 Polish Painters. Cztery obrazy najważniejszej powojennej wystawy sztuki polskiej* [*15 Polish Painters. Four images from the most important post-war exhibition of Polish art*].¹¹ The materials on which my research is based consist of, above all, large sets of documents held in the MoMA Archives in New York, the American Art Archives at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington and Ryszard Stanisławski's Archive which is currently held at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In my view, a presentation of this exhibition's development process will help to fill in the deplorable gap in research on artistic exchange between the USA and the Warsaw Pact countries.

* * *

Signed on 27 January 1958, a pact on cultural exchange known as the Lacy-Zaroubin Agreement envisaged a four-year course of cooperation between the Soviet Union and the USA in the field of culture and organisation of two large exhibitions. One of them, to be held in Moscow, was to present the culture of the United States;¹² the other, in New York, to present Soviet achievements. The exhibitions, inaugurated in the summer of 1959, concerned not only matters of culture but, perhaps above all, matters of industry, technology and lifestyle.¹³ It is noteworthy that not only impressive machines and consumer goods, but also modern art played a central role at both exhibitions. The American exhibition in Moscow, although not strictly art-oriented, may be viewed as another link in the chain of painting exhibitions organised by MoMA from 1952 and by the United States Information Agency (USIA) from 1953 onwards.

11 K. Niemira, M. Słomska, *15 Polish Painters. Cztery obrazy najważniejszej powojennej wystawy sztuki polskiej* [*15 Polish Painters. Four images from the most important post-war exhibition of Polish art*], Warsaw, 2015.

12 The curator of the art section of the exhibition in Moscow was Edith Halpert. See S. Reid, "The Exhibition of Art of Socialist Countries, Moscow 1958–9, and the Contemporary Style of Painting", in: *Style and Painting. Modernity and Material Culture in Postwar Eastern Europe*, eds. E. Reid, D. Crowley, Oxford–New York, 2000, p. 101.

13 F. C. Barghoorn, "America in 1959: As Seen from Moscow", *The Review of Politics*, April 1960, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 245–254.

After the Moscow exhibition, the Americans noted with interest that the Soviet societies shared the government's policies and highly valued a "heavily classical, traditional pattern in arts".¹⁴ Abstract expressionism was pronounced to be a symbol of the gap between the cultures of the capitalist United States and of Communist Russia; this must be understood as a great success of the campaign that had been fought for quite a few years by Alfred Barr and Clement Greenberg.¹⁵ In 1960 Frederick C. Barghoorn noted that the Kremlin accused American non-figurative art that the aim of its existence was to warp and deform the taste of the masses and that it was secretly managed by a lobby of millionaires.¹⁶ According to the Americans, abstract expressionism was unacceptable to the Soviets not only for reasons of propaganda, since it was impossible to express Socialist ideas in an abstract painting, but also for reasons of ideology.

In the years 1958 and 1959 the case of Poland occupied much space in American criticism concerning issues of the Soviet reception of abstract expressionism. Poland was one of the few states of the Warsaw Pact to be represented at foreign exhibitions not only by figurative painting, but also by art referring to broadly understood expressionistic abstraction and the painting of matter. A good example of the Polish presence in this area is the exhibition of twelve Socialist countries which opened in late 1958 in Moscow: the Polish section contained paintings referring to abstraction (just a few of them, of course). This fact was noted not only in the Soviet Union (the Polish press reported: "Such was the turnout in the Polish section that on the second day of the exhibition our section's Soviet consultant asked for permission to stretch out protective ropes at some exhibits, e.g. before the paintings by Adam Marczyński"¹⁷), but also in the United States. On 25 January 1959 the *New York Times* published the article "Moscow Astonished by Polish Modern Abstract Art"; commenting on the success of Polish art in Moscow, its author called the group of painters from Warsaw and Cracow "rebels with a cause" and considered them to be political revolutionaries. Another journalist who had a similar perception of Polish artists was Joseph Alsop, whose texts on Polish culture, written from 1958 onward for the *New York Herald Tribune*, were many times reprinted in other American weeklies.¹⁸

14 Ibid., p. 252.

15 Ibid.

16 Bearing in mind Nelson Rockefeller's personal involvement in MoMA's policies, the second charge must be considered fully justified. See *ibid.*, p. 253.

17 "Wystawa Polska w Moskwie. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Pawłowskim" [The Polish exhibition in Moscow. An interview with Andrzej Pawłowski], *Życie Literackie*, 1959, no. 5, a supplement to *Plastyk*, no. 30.

18 See J. Alsop, "Despite Regime, Polish Intellectuals Hold Freedom", *Eugene Register-Guard*, 9 June 1959, p. 5; J. Alsop, "Polish Artists Have a Sense of Historic Mission", *The Victoria Advocate*, 9 June 1959, p. 3; J. Alsop, "Poland's Painters Enjoy their Day's Lovely Light", *Eugene Register-Guard*, 4 June 1959, p. 7; J. Alsop, "New Hope's Pale Light Can be Seen in Warsaw", *The Victoria Advocate*, 13 June 1959, p. 3.

At more or less the same time, Polish painting that renounced the standards of official Soviet art began to appear in the United States. In 1958 works by Tadeusz Dominik and Jan Lebenstein were shown at the Guggenheim International Award Exhibition. In April 1959 *Time* magazine published an article on Tadeusz Kantor.¹⁹ Also in 1959, after Aleksander Kobzdej's success at the Fifth Biennial in Sao Paulo, preparations were begun for his solo exhibition in New York. In addition, American curators, museum specialists, critics and art dealers could encounter Polish art while visiting Paris, because this was where Polish artists receiving official grants were directed to (e.g. Tadeusz Kantor went to France in 1947 and 1955), and after 1956, if they were able to sell their works abroad, this was where they sold them.

The fact that the idea to organise an exhibition of young Polish artists associated with abstract art emerged in the year 1958 and in the United States should not come as an absolute surprise. After the thaw of 1956, young Polish art enjoyed a good reputation. In the journalism of the era its existence was understood as proof of continuing political resistance to Communism.²⁰ It was surrounded by an aura of "modernity" and non-conformism. Experts from the art world were also aware of young Polish art, especially of paintings belonging to the "painting of matter" current, as these were exhibited in Venice, Sao Paulo and New York.

The emergence of the idea to organise the exhibition is also not surprising considering MoMA's programmatic line. René d'Harnoncourt's term as MoMA's director, which had begun in 1949, was markedly Eurocentric, at least until the year 1960. In the period of 1956–1958, MoMA held mainly monographic exhibitions of European artists.²¹ An exhibition of Polish art, i.e. one not belonging to the world's canon and not known to the wider public, was exotic, of course, but not enough to be resisted by the Museum's supervisory board. This acceptance was certainly influenced by the political factor: after the exhibition of art from the Soviet bloc countries in Moscow in 1958, young Poles, as has already been said, were regarded as rebels whose works were a slap in the face to the Kremlin.

The concept for the MoMA exhibition was conceived by Porter McCray, the curator who had managed the MoMA International Program initiated in 1952. Jill Bugajski alleges that the idea behind its organisation emerged as early as

19 J. Lattes, "Adventurer in Poland", *Time Magazine*, 6 April 1959.

20 Joseph Alsop and Jean Lattes, as quoted earlier, wrote about it (for *Time*) in this spirit. The phrase quoted by *Time's* anonymous reporter on the occasion of the *15 Polish Painters* vernissage seems symptomatic as well: "For the mass of the people the stumbling block between themselves and the regime was their Catholicism. For the intellectuals it was abstract art". See "Polish Moderns", *Time*, 4 August 1961.

21 At this time MoMA hosted the exhibitions of Henri Matisse, Julio Gonzalez, Wassily Kandinsky, Auguste Renoir, Balthus, Edvard Munch, Pablo Picasso (who was not invited to the vernissage for political reasons), Marc Chagall, Joan Miró, Georges Seurat, Juan Gris, Jean Arp and the collective exhibition of German art.

in 1957, but any convincing confirmation regarding this seems difficult to find.²² McCray often acted in a very impulsive manner and the tempestuous history of the projects he managed clearly indicates that some decisions, even ones concerning very serious undertakings, were sometimes taken in a considerable rush.²³ This resulted, to a certain extent, from the fact that McCray had to deal with sensitive matters: the projects he carried out were strictly connected with the United States Information Agency's (USIA) policies and usually depended on subtle political games. It is therefore not impossible that the decision to organise the Polish exhibition was taken only in the first half of 1959, when it was already clear that after his journey to the Soviet Union Vice President Nixon would visit Warsaw. It was in Nixon's entourage that McCray flew to Poland on 2 August 1959. Another argument for moving the date of the emergence of the idea to organise the exhibition from 1957 to early 1959 is the chronology of the process of forming the young Polish artists' reputation in the United States: its key moment came in December 1958, when Polish artists exhibited their works in Moscow. It is unlikely that anyone in the States had thought of utilising the political context of Polish art before that date.

At the time when work on the Polish exhibition began, the art policy of the USIA and MoMA was already well defined. McCray had already worked on organising international art enterprises during the 2nd World War, in the Office of Inter-American Affairs, where his colleague was the future director of MoMA, René d'Harnoncourt. In that period, the Office of Inter-American Affairs was supervised by Nelson Rockefeller, who since the 1940s had been involved in the actions of MoMA (his mother was a co-founder of the museum) and in politics.²⁴ After the war, McCray was appointed by Rockefeller to supervise MoMA's touring exhibitions. His task was to prepare the contents and the logistics of exhibitions of American art which were to be presented abroad, and to import foreign exhibitions to the States. In addition, in the years 1954–1962 McCray was among the officials responsible for the American pavilion at the Biennial in Venice. We might even risk the opinion that at the institutional level his role was similar to that which, in the same period, Clement Greenberg and Alfred Barr played in developing the theory of modern art.

²² J. Bugajski, op. cit., p. 59.

²³ When in May of 1956 the *Modern Art in the United States* exhibition that had been organised by McCray was being closed in Vienna there arose an opportunity to transfer it to Belgrade. Initially, the project was discussed backstage. The Americans quickly wrote a letter to Marko Ristić, an official at the Department of Culture in Belgrade (and a Surrealist poet before the war). Ristić not only agreed, but very straightforwardly advised the Americans that if they wanted the exhibition to take place, they would have to act quickly. As a result, all of the formalities were completed in three days and the exhibition was transported to Yugoslavia with lightning speed. Cf. P. McCray, "American Tutti-frutti", op. cit.

²⁴ E. Cockcroft, op. cit., p. 84

Another similarity regarding these two critics is that McCray also tended to walk on thin ice. In the United States, abstract art was associated with Communism. In 1956, an exhibition entitled *Sport in Art*, which was in preparation in connection with the Olympic Games, was cancelled due to protests against the Leftist selection of the artists. In the same year the USIA attempted to censor the “100 American Painters” project. The 1959 exhibition in Moscow did not fail to cause heated debates either. The crux of the discussion was the intended role of non-figurative art in that exhibition. In the end, McCray sent to Moscow an extra shipment of traditionalist paintings and thus moderated the exhibition’s “modern” outlook. In order to evade the sensitive issue of the proportion between abstraction and figuration, exhibitions organised by the USIA and MoMA made use of the “tutti-frutti” approach and presented a broad overview of trends in art.²⁵

In Poland, Juliusz Starzyński, the curator responsible for including Polish art that referred to abstraction into the Moscow exhibition in 1958, was famous for having a similar approach. In 1959 Starzyński was appointed one of Porter McCray’s escorts during the latter’s stay in Poland. Together with Bohdan Urbanowicz from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, they tried to introduce McCray to the nature of Polish artistic culture.²⁶ McCray visited Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk and Sopot. He moved around mainly among a group of museum specialists and art critics, but he also met a few artists. In a letter written after his return to New York he noted that he had been very impressed by the exhibition entitled *Od Młodej Polski do naszych czasów* [From Young Poland to our times] that had been prepared by Starzyński and Irena Jakimowiczowa and which collected almost 350 items which collectively provided an overview of Polish modern art.²⁷

Initial decisions as to the profile of the planned exhibition were taken during McCray’s visit in Poland. The Americans declared that they would like to exhibit at MoMA the works of some eight to ten young Polish artists involved in non-figurative art. Already at this initial stage the Americans were discouraged from using such terms as “modern”, “avant-garde” or “abstract” painting.²⁸ The title of the exhibition was proposed by the Polish side; it would be numerical (“*n* Polish painters”), following the practice that was accepted worldwide at the time. In cooperation with Urbanowicz and Starzyński, McCray prepared a list of artists who were soon to be visited by Peter Selz, an American of German origin appointed to be the curator of the Polish exhibition.

25 P. McCray (performer), *American tutti-frutti*, e-flux, 12/2014, pp. 27–39.

26 Cf. a letter from Porter McCray to Louise Smith dated 30 October 1959, reprinted in: K. Niemira, M. Słomska, *15 Polish Painters*, op. cit., pp. 73–75.

27 Ibid., p. 74.

28 I owe this information to a conversation with Peter Selz held in November 2015.



Fig. 1. Peter Selz in front of the Ministry of Culture and Art in Warsaw, photo by K. Karpuszek

Selz had become MoMA's curator only a few months before. Apart from the Polish exhibition, he was at that time entrusted with the *Image of Men* exhibition project²⁹ and he supervised Jean Tinguely's project "Homage to New York" and a few smaller-scale enterprises linked with new art that was being produced in Europe.

In August 1959, when Porter McCray was in Poland, the decision that Selz would be coordinating the Polish exhibition project must have already been in force. This is because Selz went on tour to collect material for this exhibition at more or less the same time as McCray was meeting with the Communist officials. He viewed the works of Polish artists, among others of Aleksander Kobzdej and Tadeusz Kantor, in Düsseldorf, Amsterdam and Paris; in Paris he also had a meeting with Juliusz Starzyński.³⁰

He arrived in Poland only on 3 November 1959, assisted by the translator and photographer Kazimierz Karpuszek, who a few years earlier had been his

29 D. Raverty, "New Perspectives on New Images of Men", *Art Journal*, winter 1994, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 62–64.

30 A letter from Peter Selz to Porter McCray dated 5 November 1959, MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives, 690.3.



Fig. 2. Peter Selz with *Portret Teresy III* [Portrait of Theresa III] by Andrzej Wróblewski, photo by K. Karpuszek

student at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. On 4–7 November he was in Cracow, where he contacted the Cracow Group milieu gathered around Tadeusz Kantor. He also visited Andrzej Wróblewski's widow (Fig. 2). From 7 November he was in Warsaw. He mainly met with artists gathered around the Krzywe Koło Gallery that was being managed by Marian Bogusz, but he also became acquainted with the output of the "official" painters, e.g. Jan Cybis. A screening of Polish short films and animation was organised especially for Selz. It is also a matter of record that he made use of the archive of Polish artistic milieu that had been prepared by Juliusz Starzyński and his team.³¹ It seems that during his short visit Selz managed to get relatively good orientation in the complexity and special nature of post-war artistic culture in Poland. A comparison of his journey with the route taken by Virginia Field, an American curator who visited Poland in 1962, leaves us with the distinct impression that Selz went from studio to studio almost like a pilgrim, whereas Field's tour of Poland was made mainly from restaurant to restaurant.³²

31 I owe this information to a conversation with Peter Selz held in November 2015. It can be confirmed by Porter McCray's letter dated 30 October 1959, MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives, 690.3.

32 Field's report is as informative about food served in hotel restaurants as about art. See V. Field, "A Visit to Poland", *Art Journal*, spring 1963, vol. 22, no 3, pp. 158–166.

Selz's meticulous notebook and the list of artists he had visited demonstrate that the conception for the exhibition evolved during his journey. Selz visited not only painters, but also graphic artists and sculptors (e.g. Alina Szapocznikow and Alina Ślesieńska). Towards the end of his stay he prepared, with the aid of Zdzisław Kępiński, a list with an initial selection of artists to take part in the MoMA exhibition; it included the names of nineteen painters, three women sculptors and five graphic artists.³³

While compiling the list, Selz was most probably unaware that his selection went against the directive concerning art exhibitions that had been accepted a few months earlier by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. The Five-Year Plan regarding the development of various areas of economy and culture, which had been announced in Poland in 1959, in its part referring to culture introduced an obligatory proportion to be held at exhibitions, commonly described as 85% for figurative and 15% for abstract art.³⁴ Selz's list reversed this proportion. Even before he left Warsaw, the Ministry of Culture and Art signalled to him that the exhibition in the shape he had proposed could not take place and that, according to the People's government, the list should be modified by adding to it some well-received, "official" painters whose oeuvre had been created in the spirit of Realism, and some colourists. The pressure which the officials attempted to put on Selz indicates that the *Wytyczne Sekretariatu KC PZPR w sprawie polityki kulturalnej w dziedzinie plastyki* [Recommendations of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party regarding cultural policy in the field of visual arts], which had been written out in April of 1960, were not a dead directive issued only to defuse internal tensions and to mollify the Party's hardliners.³⁵ Attempts were made to put the decrees thereof, in this case its sub-point no. 2, into practice.³⁶ The object of the attack was "art detached from the problems of life, locked in the frame of aesthetic and formal investigations increasingly tending towards trends derived from the Western abstract currents or ones close to abstraction".³⁷

33 Untitled manuscript, MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives, 690.16. Kępiński's collaboration in compiling the list is confirmed by McCray's letter to Stanisław Lorenz from the National Museum in Warsaw, dated 4 November 1960, MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives 690.2.

34 A. Rottenberg, "Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki" [The Ministry of Culture and Art], in: *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1945–1960* [Artistic life in Poland in the years 1945–1960], ed. A. Wojciechowski, Wrocław–Warsaw–Cracow, 1992, p. 201.

35 Ibid., Appendix 10, p. 233.

36 Sub-point 2 reads: "[It has been decided] to revise the plan of exhibitions in the country and those organised by us abroad; to accept as a principle that works realistic [in style], ideologically and socially involved or figurative will be exhibited. Abstract works or works situated on the borderline of abstraction are to be treated as marginal. The same is to be accepted in the poetics of art publications"; *ibid.*, p. 234.

37 Ibid., p. 233.



Fig. 3. Peter Selz and Doreen Potworowski, photo by K. Karpuszko

For a few months after Selz's return to New York, the project for the Polish exhibition ground to a standstill. As late as in January of 1960, Starzyński was still trying to convince the Ministry to permit the exhibition to be organised in the shape proposed by Selz. In February, however, the Polish side announced that it was suspending its participation in the project.³⁸ The official reason concerned the proposed date for the exhibition: it allegedly clashed with the Chopin Contest that took place in Warsaw every five years; MoMA tried to set up a meeting between Kazimierz Karpuszko and the Polish consul in Chicago.

In March 1960 Selz got the idea that he would bypass the official level and organise the show in cooperation with the Krzywe Koło Gallery. But the gallery's animator, Marian Bogusz, dampened his enthusiasm by reminding him that Communist Poland operated along different lines than America: there were no private art galleries there. Krzywe Koło was financed by, and dependent on, the Ministry.

Between March and August 1960 the project remained in a state of collapse. An attempt to restart talks with Poland was made in late August. Karpuszko went to Warsaw first, and was joined by Selz on 2 September. Selz met with Zdzisław Kępiński and Stanisław Lorentz and tried to reschedule the opening

³⁸ A letter from Kazimierz Karpuszko to Ryszard Stanisławski dated 26 February 1960, Ryszard Stanisławski's Archive, Art Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, III/1-50.



Fig. 4. Peter Selz in Stefan Gierowski's studio, photo by K. Karpuszeko

of the exhibition. Memoranda sent by Selz to McCray after his return indicate that at that time the exhibition was planned to be called *13 Polish Painters of Today* and (most probably because of pressure from the Ministry) was to be created in cooperation with Lorentz and Kępiński, who were described as the art commissioners.³⁹ During the following month it turned out that the project was not viable because the Ministry was still opting for the “tutti-frutti” format.

It seems that it was more or less during this period that Selz began to develop a plan that was to allow him to bypass the Communist authorities. The actions of Beatrice Perry, the owner of a gallery in Washington DC who came from Washington to Warsaw in June 1960 – just when Selz's project had reached the deepest impasse – and bought some fifty paintings from Polish artists, may have been the impulse that suggested a solution to the curator's problem.⁴⁰ Considering the fact that Selz wished to exhibit around

³⁹ The term “art commissioner” also appears in McCray's letter to Stanisław Lorenz from the National Museum in Warsaw, dated 4 November 1960, MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives, 690.2.

⁴⁰ Perry's successful trip to Poland is interesting, also because it did not alter Kazimierz Karpuszeko's slightly condescending view of Perry's actions. In a letter to Ryszard Stanisławski dated 22 October 1960, Karpuszeko wrote: “Mrs. Perry – a very nice and affable woman – but she understands nothing as to the balance of artistic and

sixty works, Perry's success had demonstrated that it was possible to gather enough material while bypassing the official circles: the thing to do was to buy the paintings instead of leasing them. All one needed was funds. So, in December of 1960 Selz asked some American art dealers to send him photographs of Polish paintings they had in their galleries. He contacted Beatrice Perry at Gres Gallery in Washington, Arthur and Madeleine Lejwa at Galerie Chalette in New York and Kazimierz Karpuszek, who in the meantime had started working at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Chicago.⁴¹

Cooperation with the galleries proved frustrating, however. Both Perry and the Lejwas collaborated with the same Polish agent, Ryszard Stanisławski.⁴² Also, the Lejwas, who were very ambitious and important players on the New York art scene, always attempted to sign exclusive contracts with Polish artists, thus trying to make other gallery owners understand that they were the leading lights of the project. They even tried to persuade MoMA that its show should be supported only by one gallery – theirs.

In January 1961, Selz approached the Ministry for the last time, asking for its collaboration in organising the exhibition, but all he heard was the proposal to reschedule the project to 1963. Cooperation with the Ministry was therefore terminated and Selz went to Paris, in the hope that the private galleries there might hold the same interesting works by Polish abstract painters (most probably he primarily had in mind Galerie Lacloche and Galerie Lambert⁴³).

The decision that private American galleries would act as the intermediaries in organising the exhibition was taken in mid-January of 1961. Apart from the three earlier partners, i.e. Galerie Chalette, Gres Gallery and the Contemporary Art Gallery, Selz invited the Felix Landau Gallery from the west coast to cooperate. He gave the gallery owners photographs of paintings he had seen in Poland and which he wished to bring to the States for the exhibition. The galleries were to purchase the paintings through the intermediation of DESA, i.e. the Warsaw art dealing enterprise (with which Ryszard Stanisławski collaborated), and then to lend these works to MoMA. This arrangement promised

diplomatic powers in Poland [...] faced with her, I was ready to assume the post of an ambassador myself". Cf. K. Niemira, M. Słomska, *15 Polish Painters*, op. cit., p. 70.

41 Copies of Selz's letters to the gallery owners are held in the MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives, 690.3, cf. also a letter from Kazimierz Karpuszek to Ryszard Stanisławski dated 16 December 1960, Ryszard Stanisławski's Archive, Art Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, III/1-50.

42 Cf. letters from Kazimierz Karpuszek to Peter Selz dated 22 October 1960, 9 December 1960, Ryszard Stanisławski's Archive, Art Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, III/1-50. Stanisławski's Archive contains a separate file of letters described "GRES GALLERY | Karpuszek". Problems with cooperation are referred to in, among others, a memorandum dated 4 April 1961 sent by Selz to Alfred Barr, René d'Harnoncourt and Porter McCray, MoMA Archives, Exhb. Archives, 690.3. In our conversation Peter Selz confirmed information about Stanisławski's connection with both galleries.

43 See *Libella. Galerie Lambert. Szkice i wspomnienia* [Libella. Galerie Lambert. Sketches and memories], ed. M. A. Supruniuk, Toruń, 1997.

to be profitable. After the closing event the canvases – originally purchased for preferential, lowered prices – were to be returned to their owners with the MoMA exhibition sticker on their reverses. Afterwards they would function on the American market not as works of little-known artists from behind the Iron Curtain, but as works whose artistic quality had been confirmed by MoMA; this considerably raised their value.

It is difficult to say to what extent the fact that the exhibition was dependent on the support of the gallery owners influenced its shape. The fact that Selz not only presented his own selection of works to the art dealers, but also asked to be shown the works they already owned may be significant; it may indicate that the curator may have treated the art dealers as more than instrumental to his task. The removal of the women sculptors, Szapocznikow and Ślesieńska, from the list of proposed artists may be viewed not only in the context of alterations in Selz's concept for the exhibition but also as resulting from the logistic problems associated with the involvement of private galleries. Sculptures sold less well than paintings and their transport was more costly. For an art dealer, the purchase of a sculpture was more risky than the purchase of a painting; this may have affected the elimination of the two sculptresses from the list.⁴⁴

While the question regarding the sculptures is only a field for conjecture, it is beyond a doubt that the collages by Teresa Rudowicz and Marian Warzecha were included in the exhibition as a result of Selz's collaboration with American art dealers.⁴⁵ Selz could not have encountered either Rudowicz or Warzecha during any of his visits in Poland, as both artists were working in Italy at that time. It is improbable that he had seen any of their collages in either Cracow or Warsaw. In fact, he first saw the works by Rudowicz and Warzecha only as late as in April 1961, when the list of *13 Polish Painters* was already completed.⁴⁶ The collages arrived in a shipment of works acquired by the galleries and constituted a bonus: they had been purchased solely for commercial reasons. Selz was very impressed and decided to add them to the exhibition; thus, in May 1961 the title *13 Polish Painters* became *15 Polish Painters*.

44 In the late 1950s and early 1960s, transporting sculptures across the Atlantic was a considerable challenge, as is confirmed by Szapocznikow's unsuccessful attempt to launch her career in the United States. In 1960 Beatrice Perry contacted the sculptress and offered to exhibit three of her works in Washington, DC. The works were damaged during transport, but they were nevertheless shown at Gres Gallery's "Polish Painting" exhibition in December 1961. Perry managed to sell only one of them. Due to the financial risk and high costs, Szapocznikow ceased collaborating with American galleries until the 1970s. Cf. J. Gola, *Katalog rzeźb Aliny Szapocznikow* [Catalogue of Alina Szapocznikow's sculptures], Cracow, 2001, p. 94.

45 See: *Sztuka i jej okolice. Z Marianem Warzechą rozmawia Jarosław Suchan* [Art and its environs. Marian Warzecha is interviewed by Jarosław Suchan], in: *Warzecha*, catalogue, Cracow, 1996, pp. 15–16; a letter from Kazimierz Karpuszek to Ryszard Stanisławski dated 18 May 1961, Ryszard Stanisławski's Archive, Art Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, signature X/37-1.

46 Ibid.

The fact that the list of artists was altered several times and that two of them were added to it when even the catalogue was nearly finished clearly shows that Selz's conception for the exhibition was very fluid. Both the process of gathering the materials and the final effect indicate that he focused primarily on exhibiting those works of Polish art which – seen from the perspective of the United States – could be considered pertinent and up-to-date. The decisive factor was, first and foremost, dating. All of the works presented at the MoMA exhibition had been produced in the years 1956–1960 and the artists mostly belonged to the young generation: the youngest of them, Jan Lebenstein and Marian Warzecha, were thirty-one, the oldest, Tadeusz Kantor, was forty-six.

Two artists who stood out from this group of young artists were Henryk Stażewski and Piotr Potworowski (Figs. 5–7), whom Selz treated as the doyens of avant-garde.⁴⁷ Their works headed the exhibition and symbolically showed the young generation's connection with the two pre-war currents in Polish art: Stażewski represented Constructivism, derived from the art of Władysław Strzemiński and Kazimierz Malewicz, whereas Potworowski stood for the colourism of the pre-war Kapists.⁴⁸ This choice also referred to the two main roots of Polish non-figurative art, i.e. Paris and revolutionary Russia. Yet the works selected by Selz referred to the pre-war traditions only indirectly.⁴⁹

A special place at the exhibition was assigned to the works of Tadeusz Kantor and Jan Lebenstein (Figs. 8–9, 14–15). The former, as has already been stated, was considered a *pars pro toto* of young Polish art. Kantor often used the dripping techniques and in the eyes of the Americans was modern in the same sense as Jackson Pollock. Jan Lebenstein, in turn, had received a double award at the I Biennial of Young Artists in Paris in 1959, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s he was considered a rising star. He was made famous by his *Figury osiowe* [Axial Figures] in relief, which lay on the borderline between figurative and abstract art, and it was precisely the works from this cycle that Selz selected for the MoMA exhibition. A large group of works by Stefan Gierowski, Aleksander Kobzdej and Bronisław Kierzkowski (Figs. 10–11, 13) was situated close to the painting of matter. Tadeusz Brzozowski (Fig. 12) and Tadeusz Dominik represented the expressive current in

47 P. Selz, "Fifteen Polish Painters", in: *15 Polish Painters*, catalogue, New York, 1961, pp. 6–7.

48 Press materials accompanying the exhibition contained information that "the Paris Committee or 'Kapist', whose members migrated to Paris [...], particularly admired the work of Cezanne and Bonnard", https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/2873/releases/MOMA_1961_0088_86.pdf?2010 [accessed 30 October 2015]. The group was formed in 1923, and the Kapists' last joint exhibition took place in Warsaw in 1934. The trend survived the war; after 1945 works in the spirit of Colourism were produced by, among others, Jan Cybis and Eugeniusz Eibisch.

49 Potworowski's works were of gigantic size, which went against the Kapist formula of a painting intended for a bourgeois interior.



Fig. 5. Piotr Potworowski, *Łodzie rybackie w Rewie* [Fishing boats in Rewa], 1959, Grażyna and Jacek Łozowski's Collection



Fig. 6. Henryk Stażewski, *Biały relief na fakturalnym tle* [White relief on textured background], 1960, Starmach Gallery



Fig. 7. Henryk Stażewski, *Relief czerwony na białym i szarym tle* [Red relief on white and grey background], 1960, Starmach Gallery



Fig. 8. Jan Lebenstein, *Figura osiowa 6* [Axial figure no. 6], private collection



Fig. 9. Tadeusz Kantor, *Rori*, 1957, Anna and Jerzy Starak's Collection, photo by Maciej Jędrzejewski © Maria Kantor, Dorota Krakowska

Polish abstract art. Works by Teresa Pągowska could be seen as a distant echo of Potworowski's canvases, while those by Wojciech Fangor corresponded to Stażewski's. Jerzy Nowosielski, Jerzy Tchórzewski and the juxtaposed collages by Teresa Rudowicz and Marian Warzecha were presented as curios.

In a review of the exhibition written for *The New York Times*, John Canaday pointed out that Selz's project did not aspire to be a comprehensive overview of young Polish art.⁵⁰ At the very beginning of his text, Canaday noted that the Poles whose works were to be seen at MoMA were only slightly different from artists from any other part of the world. It is crucial that Canaday did not associate the universal quality of the artistic language used by the young

⁵⁰ J. Canaday, "75 Works by Contemporaries go on View Today at the Modern Museum", *The New York Times*, 1 August 1961.



Fig. 10. Stefan Gierowski, *Obraz LXXV* [Painting LXXV], 1959, Anna and Jerzy Starak's Collection, photo by Maciej Jędrzejewski



Fig. 11. Aleksander Kobzdej, *Południowy* [Southerly], 1959, private collection



Fig. 12. Tadeusz Brzozowski, *Fraucymer* [Ladies-in-waiting], 1959, private collection

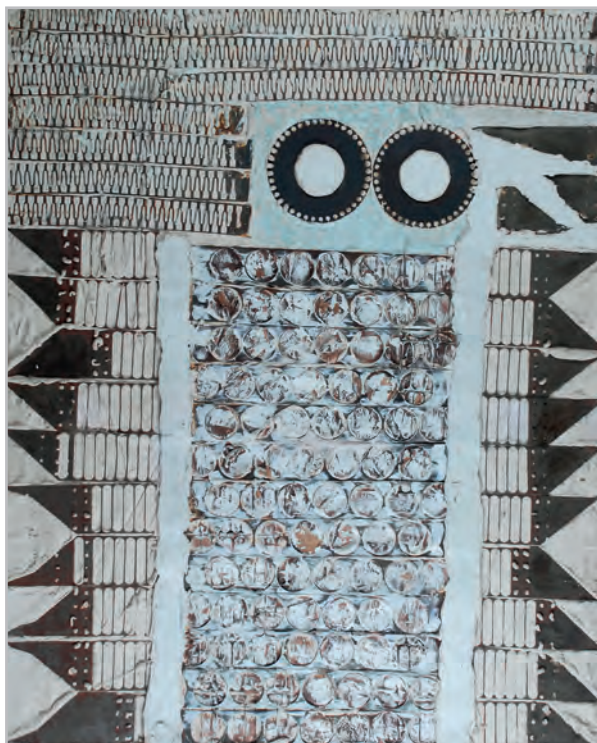


Fig. 13. Bronisław Kierzkowski, *Kompozycja nr 402* [Composition no. 402], 1959, Rempex Auction House Archive

Polish painters with American art, but simply with Western art. The only one of the fifteen artists who could have been viewed as slightly “Americanised”, i.e. Kantor, was described as mediocre.

The review of the exhibition in *Time* magazine was held in a similar tone: “Of all countries behind the Iron Curtain, Poland has most successfully kept alive its cultural ties with the West. One of the hardest roots has been the long Polish tradition of abstract art, some of whose practitioners date their conversions back to the days of early cubism and Russian constructivism”.⁵¹ It was said about the young painters that “they are swiftly aware of art events, whether in New York or Barcelona”. Also, the reviewer observed that in a country where being educated meant being fluent in French, the artists did not always manage to escape the elegant manner typical of the Paris School, but “if the splashy oils, crumpled collages and floating ambiguous forms often suggest bolder experiments by better-known painters in the West, the passion and verve behind the paintings is purely Polish”.

The last sentence clearly indicates the problem the American press had regarding the exhibition. The journalist, just like the curator,⁵² noticed the

⁵¹ “Polish Moderns”, *Time*, 4 August 1961.

⁵² P. Selz, “Fifteen Polish Painters”, in: *15 Polish Painters*, catalogue, New York, 1961, p. 11.

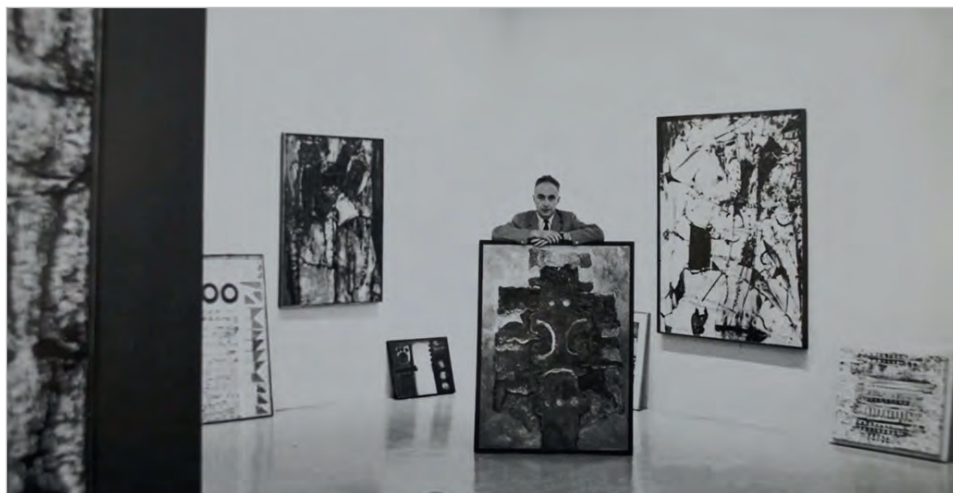


Fig. 14. Peter Selz working on the exhibition at MoMA, Peter Selz's Archive



Fig. 15. Peter Selz with works by Jan Lebenstein and Tadeusz Kantor, photo by Walter Daran, *Time*, 4 August 1961, p. 44

belongingness of Polish abstract art to Western-European art and, at the same time, its individual character. Yet in his eyes, the distinctiveness of Polish art was not based on formal innovations, but on aspects which went beyond the domain of art, i.e. its passion and verve; its energy. This clearly shows that what was assessed were not only the works of art as such, but also the emotions the critics had discerned in them. The plainly political aspect of the assessment of young Polish painting is equally obvious in an essay Selz wrote for the exhibition catalogue (which Bugajski described as “a masterpiece of political walking on eggs”⁵³).

Both the narration of the exhibition – which began with the “old hands”, i.e. Stażewski and Potworowski – and Selz’s essay which accompanied it strongly emphasised the role that the pre-war avant-garde had played in the formation of Polish modern art. Thus constructed, this narration suggested a continuity of artistic phenomena that had to be backed by an ideological and political continuity. In this approach, the existence of non-figurative art in Poland under the rule of the Polish United Workers’ Party proved that Communism – and the realist art associated with it – had been introduced into Poland artificially and did not express the “Polish spirit”. This spirit was presented as expressing itself most fully in non-figurative art. Thus, abstraction became a manifestation of not only emotional substance (as was in the case of Pollock or Wols), but also of substance, which Selz had described as “national”.⁵⁴

Selz’s belief in the existence of a Polish *Kunstwollen* seems to be the exhibition’s ideological axis. This essentially romantic conviction – in addition to political issues – seems to have stood behind his stubborn resolution to have abstraction as the key to the selection. Eliminating conservative realism (e.g. Kulisiewicz), the art of the colourists (e.g. Eibisch and Cybis), abstraction with a tendency towards cubism (Marczyński) or surrealism that was still alive in Poland (e.g. the works of Bogusz that had been created under the pressure of concentration camp trauma) from the exhibition made it possible to present a relatively homogeneous – although, of course, false – picture of young Polish art. Also, Selz’s selection is a manifestation of MoMA’s consistent but, at least from the perspective of European art of the era, already slightly conservative programme, in which abstraction was treated as the *pars pro toto* of modern art.

It is also noteworthy that Selz’s exhibition created a false opposition between the “young artists” presented therein and the non-presented (and, after all, unfamiliar to MoMA’s audience) “remainder” of contemporary Polish art; for instance, on the basis of works shown at MoMA in 1961 it would be very difficult to judge what exactly the young Polish artists were supposed to be rebelling against. By not showing anything that would have been a negative

53 L. J. A., “Polish Painters of the New Order”, *The Washington Post*, 22 October 1961, cited by J. Bugajski, “Tadeusz Kantor’s Publics”, op. cit., p. 62.

54 P. Selz, “Fifteen Polish Painters”, op. cit., pp. 5, 11.

reference point to the Polish “angry young men”, Selz obtained an image of their categorical isolation. In the case of some of the exhibited artists, e.g. Kantor, this was unavoidable, of course, as their art emphatically rejected the native tradition. In the case of others, e.g. Kobzdej, Gierowski and other artists who made use of the painting-of-matter formula, the issue seems more complex. This is because Polish painting of matter owes much to the tradition of Colourism, which Selz had clearly marginalised. It is not by accident that he selected Potworowski and his monumental abstract works to represent Colourism, instead of Cybis and his small-scale figurative compositions which were far more characteristic of this current. Through his choices, Selz consistently attempted to de-contextualise young Polish art, i.e. to show it in the context of avant-garde trends in art and, through this, to more strongly emphasise the correctness of its political reputation.

The turbulent history of its organisation, which was presented earlier in this essay, plainly shows that organising the exhibition in the “modern” form required a considerable amount of hard work, diplomatic machinations and financial expenses. The question arises as to why Selz, McCray and the MoMA supervisory board were so adamant about exhibiting Polish non-figurative art in New York. The efforts invested in organising the exhibition of Polish art at MoMA make it clear that this was not a whim of a few aficionados of modern art, but the result of a cultural policy that had been conceived broadly and higher than at the curatorial level.

The obvious context seems to be the reputation of Polish abstract painters, who in the United States were considered to be in opposition to the Communist camp. Hence the fact that their works were exhibited at MoMA could be understood as an American triumph: firstly, they confirmed the anti-Communist stance of the Polish intelligentsia, and secondly, they were exhibited to spite the Communists. In effect, one way to understand the exhibition would be as was done by Eva Cockcroft, who was quoted earlier, i.e. as a kind of political demonstration and the success of the Cold War policy of the United States.

Yet at the level of art the *15 Polish Painters* exhibition demonstrated beyond any doubt that Polish art of the latter half of the 1950s was leaning towards Paris. It would be hard to discern American inspirations in the exhibited paintings, perhaps with the exception of Kantor’s *informel* works and works by Dominik. On the other hand, even the most American of Polish painters, Tadeusz Kantor, may be viewed as a *par excellence* European artist. Writing about the reception of Tachism in Cracow, Mieczysław Porębski aptly observed that “it was closer to the experience of matter than that of gesture”, which means it was closer to Paris than to New York.⁵⁵

55 Mieczysław Porębski, cited in: K. Czerni, *Nie tylko o sztuce. Rozmowy z profesorem Mieczysławem Porębskim* [Not only about art. Conversations with Professor Mieczysław Porębski], Wrocław, 1992, p. 105.

In 1946 Clement Greenberg, having viewed an exhibition of French painting, smugly congratulated the American painters on their surpassing French artists (“now I see that we have good reasons to congratulate ourselves on being as good as we are”⁵⁶). A dozen or so years later, European art stirred up quite different emotions. In the late 1950s it was no longer viewed on the other side of the Atlantic as only a negative reference point; it became an interesting formula of modernity. In an interview, Selz himself cited curiosity as one of the reasons for organising the exhibition: in his view, the presentation of Polish art was intended to disprove the belief that “nothing good was happening behind the Iron Curtain”.⁵⁷

The fact that the *15 Polish Painters* exhibition came into being reveals that the approaches of New York art institutions in the late 1950s and early 1960s varied and that they cannot be limited to only one category, i.e. to the implementation of Washington’s Cold War policies. Yet the political aspect of the exhibition is, of course, indisputable. The curators did all they could to present Polish art as belonging to Western currents; hence the key to selecting the works. Their ambition was motivated by the belief that the abstract quality in art is grounded in its anti-totalitarian character. At the same time the American press, and Selz himself, did notice the individualistic element of the *15 Polish Painters*. The exhibition proved not only that Polish artists were creating art which opposed the Soviet standards, but also that this art could be both comprehensible and interesting to the Western viewer. The commercial success of some of the exhibited artists (Lebenstein, Kantor, Fangor, Kobzdej) in the United States shows that *15 Polish Painters* was not a one-off episode, but a symptom of a wider, although naturally short-lived, phenomenon.⁵⁸ Although to speak of a “triumph” of Polish painting would be an exaggeration, it is a fact that the exhibition presented in 1961 at MoMA proved that interesting things were happening in art – not only in New York, Paris or London, but also on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

56 C. Greenberg, “Review on the Exhibition Painting in France 1939–1946”, cited by M. J. Borja-Villel, “The Triumph and Failure of American Painting”, in: *Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and All that Jazz. 1946–1956*, ed. E. Capdevila, Madrid, 2007, p. 9.

57 Interview with Peter Selz, p. 37. The interview is available for consultation through the MoMA Internet site: https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_selz.pdf [accessed 1 March 2015].

58 On Kantor’s American career, cf. the already quoted Jill Bugajski. On Kobzdej, cf. K. Niemira, M. Słomska, *15 Polish Painters*, op. cit., p. 37. Lebenstein’s American career has not been researched so far; materials that may provide a starting point for the analysis are located in the archive of Galerie Chalette in the American Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

Abstract

The essay concerns *15 Polish Painters*, the now slightly forgotten, but once famous exhibition of Polish contemporary art that took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961. Initially, the exhibition was conceived as an expression of a thaw in relations between the United States and Poland, and it was organised at the diplomatic level. Organisational works began during Vice President Richard Nixon's visit to Warsaw in August of 1959. They were coordinated by Porter McCray (who was responsible for MoMA's touring exhibition programme) and Peter Selz (an art historian of German origin and a curator cooperating with MoMA). The Polish side withdrew from the project because of the abstract character of the works that Selz had selected and his disregard for the "official" artists of the People's Republic of Poland. The project was completed with the collaboration of American private galleries which bought the paintings in Poland and then loaned them to MoMA to be exhibited. The essay presents the behind-the-scenes history of organising the exhibition and its political context. It discusses the artistic message of the exhibition and the key used in the selection of its works. Finally, it touches upon the issue of Polish art's reputation in the United States and the question as to why the Americans, wishing to present modern art from behind the Iron Curtain, decided, of all the countries of the Soviet bloc, to focus on none other than Poland. The aim of the essay is to fill the gap in the historiography, since the *15 Polish Painters* exhibition is usually referred to only briefly and has never been the subject of a scholarly enquiry. The event seems worth recalling also because it adds a nuance to the still current – as was confirmed by Catherine Dossin's much-talked-of book, *The Rise and Fall of American Art*, 2015 – and yet schematic view that in the middle of the 20th century there existed only two art centres, New York and Paris, thus completely overlooking the distinct character of the countries of the Communist bloc.

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The Post-War History of Pictorialism as Exemplified by Exhibitions at the Zachęta and the Kordegarda (1953–1970)

Existing academic works examining Polish fine-art photography¹ in the 1950s and 1960s are most often based on an analysis of the debates that took place within professional circles and the views of specific artists as expressed in specialist periodicals published at that time.² Thus, the relevant literature primarily offers new interpretations of narratives constructed by the artists themselves – written assertions of their views on the theory and aesthetics of a photographic image. It must, however, be noted that these programmatic postulates were often at variance with the actual practices.³ What is more,

- 1 The term “fine-art photography” constituted the primary point of interest for artists in the period under analysis. For this reason, the phrase is used consistently throughout the present article, even though it ceased to function as a category in post-modern academic discourse. The phenomenon was seen in opposition to “press photography”, which was done on commission (and frequently entailed in-field cooperation with journalists) and subject to strict control and censorship due to the limited access to film and the fact that photographs were not developed by the artists themselves, but by laboratory workers employed by press editors. Press photography was thus a separate type of activity, one which could hardly be associated with artistic freedom.
- 2 The present article was written as a part of the research project entitled “Historia wystaw w Zachęcie – Centralnym Biurze Wystaw Artystycznych w latach 1949–1970” [The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970] conducted within the framework of the National Programme for the Development of Humanities (2014–2017), no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014. The present analysis is based primarily on source material found in the archives of the documentation department of the Zachęta gallery. These were compared with documents kept at the National Museum in Warsaw, the photography archive of the ZPAF and the Jerzy Lewczyński Institute in Warsaw.
- 3 This assumption was proved e.g. by Juliusz Garzdecki, who compared programmatic manifestos (which also changed as the years went by; the terms and concepts used in

diagnoses regarding the Polish photographic milieu are frequently based on a very particular source, namely the monthly magazine *Fotografia*.⁴ Its editor-in-chief, Zbigniew Dłubak, represented a modernity-oriented approach; the influence of the traditionalist Association of Polish Art Photographers (Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików; ZPAF) on the published material was limited.⁵ Urszula Czartoryska contributed articles on the history of art that presented a wider cultural context for artistic phenomena, and the periodical showcased various photographic forms (including abstract ones). Due to all of the above factors, an analysis of *Fotografia* projects an image of an artistic society enjoying a relatively high degree of autonomy. Consequently, it may be surmised that, after the short episode of persistent didacticism that was typical of Socialist Realism, in the decades preceding the emergence of Photomedialism this aspect of artistic activity was not forced to convey the propaganda messages that the authorities wished to present to the public.⁶

such documents acquired different meanings and could be interpreted differently by the artist) with their final execution by Zbigniew Dłubak; see J. Garztecki, *Próby myśli względnie uporządkowanych. Tezy estetyczne Zbigniewa Dłubaka* [Attempts at relatively organised thoughts. The aesthetic theses of Zbigniew Dłubak] – a typewritten manuscript kept at the Jerzy Lewczyński Institute in Warsaw. The surviving documents and visual material allow scholars to analyse the nature of the presented exhibitions and to form conclusions regarding their reception.

- 4 See K. Ziębińska-Lewandowska, *Między dokumentalnością a eksperymentem. Krytyka fotograficzna w Polsce w latach 1946–1989* [Between documenting and experimenting. Photography criticism in Poland between 1946–1989], Warsaw, 2014; L. Lechowicz, “Między politycznym bezpieczeństwem a polityczną poprawnością. Rozważania nad sztuką medialną w Polsce dekad powojennych” [Between political security and political correctness. Remarks on media art in post-war Poland], in: *Przestrzenie fotografii. Antologia tekstów* [Areas of photography; an anthology], ed. T. Ferenc, Łódź, 2005, pp. 155–160; J. Piwowarski, “Socjalistyczna w treści, narodowa w formie. Polska fotografia artystyczna w okresie socrealizmu na podstawie analizy prasy specjalistycznej z lat 1946–1955” [Socialist in content, national in form. Polish fine-art photography in the period of Socialist Realism presented on the basis of an analysis of specialist press 1946–1955], in: *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Edukacja Plastyczna: Fotografia*, 2011, VI, pp. 61–81.
- 5 M. Grygiel, “Wartości kontra komercja. Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Dłubakiem przeprowadzona w 1993 roku” [Values versus commercialism. A conversation with Zbigniew Dłubak recorded in 1993], *Fototapeta*, <http://fototapeta.art.pl/2001/dlb.php> [accessed 28 September 2015].
- 6 The opening date for the time brackets of the present analysis was chosen not only due to the historical caesura of the political thaw (external to artistic phenomena) but also due to the fact that 1953 was also the year when the much more conservative magazine *Świat Fotografii* was replaced by the new periodical *Fotografia*. The examination of the post-war history of Pictorialism ends with the year 1970 as the symbolic moment when the phenomenon of Photomedialism took root in the artistic scene of Poland (with the debut of a young generation of artists unfamiliar with the inter-war tradition), thus triggering changes in the reality of how gallery institutions functioned.

This seems to suggest that after the political thaw photographers enjoyed a high degree of freedom in their artistic expression. However, the present study represents a different research approach, inspired e.g. by the works of Bruce Altshuler⁷ and Kenneth Luckhurst,⁸ who postulated the re-orientation of art history away from biographical works focused on the individual subject towards a discipline understood as the history of exhibitions. The form of the present analysis was also influenced by Donald Preziosi's⁹ critical evaluation of museum institutions – his diagnosis regarding the political and ideological conditioning of museum space and its role in promoting a specific image of the state. Following the course set by the above-mentioned scholars, one may come to the conclusion that an analysis of the place that photography occupied in the official exhibition strategy implemented in the 1950s and 1960s in the prestigious Warsaw galleries of the Kordegarda and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (CBWA) may provide an interesting new contribution to the current state of research. A study based on an examination of the history of exhibitions may help to answer the question of whether all forms of photography were equally approved by the authorities at a time when the rules of cultural policy of the Polish People's Republic became more lenient. It also makes it possible to evaluate the degree to which autonomy and heterogeneity (features which may be associated with the magazine *Fotografia*) were legitimised through presentation in a state-owned, politicised public space.

A look into who was granted the privilege of an individual presentation in the halls of the Zachęta and the Kordegarda in the period in question reveals that although the doctrine of Socialist Realism was abandoned, the authorities preferred and promoted a new type of aesthetics which had emerged at the time. As far as the exhibition strategy is concerned, the form that gained the most popularity was photojournalism inspired by the notion of the "decisive moment" as introduced by Henri Cartier-Bresson.¹⁰ Practised in Poland (Edward Falkowski, Lucjan Fogiel, Alfred Funkiewicz, Adam Kaczkowski, Wiesław Prażuch, Zbyszko Siemaszko) and beyond its borders (Wacław Kapusto, Tadeusz Trepanowski, Maksymilian Wrocławski, Antoni Nowosielski),¹¹ the genre was based on the immanent realism of the medium. Its key

7 See the "trilogy" of Altshuler's works on this subject: B. Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th century*, Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1998; *Salon to Biennial. Exhibitions that Made Art History 1863–1959*, ed. B. Altshuler, London–New York, 2008; *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History 1962–2002*, ed. B. Altshuler, London–New York, 2013.

8 See K. Luckhurst, *The Story of Exhibitions*, London–New York, 1951.

9 D. Preziosi, "Brain of the Earth's Body: Museum and the Flaming of Modernity", in: *The Rhetoric of the Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, ed. P. Duro, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 96–110.

10 J. Kosidowski, *Zawód: fotoreporterzy* [Profession: photoreporters], Warsaw, 1984, pp. 28–31.

11 A full overview of photographic exhibitions, which in itself might become one of the works produced in the course of the National Programme for the Development of

features included recognition of the presented reality and the limited use of technical means that facilitated distortion of the image. Such photographs not only had an informative and documentative value (showing exotic locations such as Africa or China) but, more importantly, recorded and preserved the fleeting moments of everyday life. They offered a glimpse into various types of human activity and human interactions with the environment. Their principal value that captured the interest of the audience lay in the successful combination of the (more or less) fortunate composition of the frame with the narrative of the specific situation that was being recorded. These photographs were intended to present the observed reality as faithfully as possible; the frames could not be (or seem to be) artificially arranged. Artists associated with the genre shied away from the pictorial processes or strong, invasive retouching.

When analysing this issue, as Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska¹² did, in the context of the evolutionary concept of art and the dialectic system of the old versus the new, one must note that the realism ingrained in the nature of Polish photojournalism did not situate it on the side of the avant-garde. The genre stood in strong opposition to trends favouring interference in and modification of the image in the course of the darkroom developing process. Consequently, it shied away from experiments with form which, in my estimation, are inherently connected with the drive towards modernity, manifesting itself through contradicting the base properties of the material and the mechanistic precisionism of the camera. Photojournalism was regarded as a recipe for modernity at the time, as it followed Western models (*The Family of Man* exhibition, the works of the Magnum group) and opposed pictorial tendencies, yet, claimed by the politicised portrayal of socialist reality, it became a convention that fell into monotony.¹³ The emphasis on the “correct” exposure of the negative and processing of the prints, coupled with the artificially imposed

Humanities grant, would exceed the spatial constraints of the present work, as it would require an extended commentary.

12 K. Ziębińska-Lewandowska, op. cit., p. 165.

13 Photography inspired by Italian Neo-realism or the “Black Series” of Polish documentary (such as the works of e.g. Jerzy Lewczyński and Zdzisław Beksiński) ought to be regarded as a separate phenomenon. It is very often labelled as photojournalism, even though its origins, visual form and the underlying ideology (derived from Existentialism) situate it in a different realm of phenomena in art than the one that was represented by photojournalism at that time. On the presence of existential motifs in the works of Beksiński and others, see W. Kobylińska-Bunsch, “Peryferie w cieniu wojny i egzystencjalnej katastrofy – o metaforycznych obrazach prowincji w dorobku Zdzisława Beksińskiego i Jerzego Lewczyńskiego” [Peripheries in the shadow of war and existential disaster – on metaphorical images of the countryside in the oeuvre of Zdzisław Beksiński and Jerzy Lewczyński], in: *Regiony wyobraźni. Peryferyjność w kulturze XIX–XXI wieku. XIV seminarium metodologiczne Katedry Teorii Sztuki i Historii Doktryn Artystycznych KUL* [Regions of imagination. Peripheralness in culture in the 19th–21st centuries. The 14th methodological seminar in the History of Art Theory and Artistic Doctrines Department of the Catholic University in Lublin], ed. M. Lachowski, Lublin, 2016 (in print).

approach of the “humanitarian”¹⁴ optics of perceiving the human subject, led to photography becoming rigidly fixed, closed in an exceedingly hermetic form, which Adam Mazur described as “positive photojournalism”.¹⁵

The history of individual photographic exhibitions at the Zachęta and the Kordegarda reveals another trend, namely the return of Pictorialism,¹⁶ which had (perhaps too hastily) been regarded as outdated. At the time of the political thaw this genre may have seemed utterly disgraced; even before the grip of the system was loosened, Zbigniew Dłubak expressed severely critical views on photography which was not able to “go beyond impressionism”,¹⁷ pronouncing it a stalemate in the artistic discipline. What is more, in 1949, faced with the choice between promoting works that derived from Pictorialism and progressive attempts resembling those presented at the *Wystawa sztuki nowoczesnej* [Exhibition of Modern Art], the authorities decided to favour the former. Representational, figural images featuring a classical composition proved effective as a means of shaping the socialist consciousness of the masses. Unlike the metaphorical or slightly surrealist photograms,¹⁸ Pictorialist photographs seemed to entail a limited number of possible interpretations. Thus they complied with the basic stipulation of Socialist Realism – they were clear and comprehensible to the average person, all the more so given the

14 Z. Tomaszczuk, *Łowcy obrazów – szkice z historii fotografii* [Image hunters – essays on the history of photography], Warsaw, 1998, p. 54.

15 A. Mazur, *Historie fotografii w Polsce 1839–2009* [The histories of photography in Poland 1839–2009], Warsaw–Cracow, 2009, p. 221.

16 Pictorialism – a movement in fine-art photography that reached its peak of popularity in the late 19th century. The style strived to endow the resulting image with features of a painting. In principle, Pictorialists opposed images that were sharp in focus and constituted an ideal representation of reality. They approved of manipulating the images and adding unique features to the prints. The final effect of such free artistic expression was supposed to prove that the status of photography is not lower than that of other forms of visual art. The French model of Pictorialism (as represented e.g. by Robert Demachy and Constant Puyo) was adopted in Poland in the inter-war period and acquired special significance as one of the keystones of a programme formulated by the pioneer of Polish photography, Jan Bułhak (1876–1950). For Bułhak and his contemporaries, the notion of “native photography” gained the position of a well-established theoretical framework. Socially involved photography that showed the beauty of the country was consistently popularised by Polish publications. Due to its solid intellectual justification, the style enjoyed a more stable position in artistic circles than other (usually fleeting) trends. The rapidly gained supremacy of this “native”, Polish Pictorialism, with its atmospheric, blurry images conveying patriotic messages, could not be easily broken by foreign, uninvolved forms of modern photography.

17 Z. Dłubak, “Z rozmyślań o fotografice. Seria pierwsza” [Thoughts on photography. Series one], *Świat Fotografii*, 1948, X, p. 2.

18 The term “photogram” remains ambiguous in Polish literature. In the present study the term is interpreted as in foreign-language sources, i.e. as a photographic image made on light-sensitive material without the use of a camera. The term was used by artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and indicates the avant-garde origins of any given work.

fact that an appropriate title chosen by the artist or imposed by censorship ultimately fixed the place of any given image within the ideological framework.¹⁹ Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of Poland did not develop its own models of photography which would express the apotheosis of the new authorities; there was no new, codified set of aesthetic rules accordant with the cultural policies of the day. Instead, it tried to appropriate the pictorial models of perceiving an image, along with Bułhak's notion of recording the beauty of his native land. The patriotic programme of native photography,²⁰ with its supreme objective of promoting a positive image of the country, constituted a very appropriate model for post-war, politically-involved photography which was supposed to glorify the new reality. What did change was the subject matter. The emphasis, formerly placed on landscape or landmark photography, was shifted towards images presenting "contemporary people in their creative struggle for new forms of living",²¹ i.e. rebuilding the country and supporting the political system. For this reason, at the end of the 1940s, heroic images presenting the ethos of a working man started to appear even among the works of artists such as Edward Hartwig²² or Janina Mierzecka.²³ Very soon, however, the artistic milieu started to reject all attempts at imposing some artificially devised form of photography.²⁴ The rhetoric of political agitation was renounced, the worker/peasant subject matter abandoned and their visual medium, Pictorialism, seemed to have been utterly rejected in favour of photojournalism.

However, individual expositions presenting the works of the doyens of Polish photography, as co-organised by the CBWA and the ZPAF, indicate that

19 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socialist Realism. Polish art between 1950–1954], Cracow, 1991, pp. 121–122.

20 Bułhak's best-known publication on native photography was published as late as in 1951, yet the idea had been well established in Poland since the 1930s due to various lectures, programme manifestoes and publications written not only by Bułhak himself, but also by other photographers who supported his views. See J. Bułhak, "Ojczyzna bez fotografii i fotografia bez ojczyzny" [Homeland without photography and photography without a homeland], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, I, pp. 2–5; E. Czerny, "Fotografia ojczysta jako czynnik propagandowy i wychowawczy" [Native photography as a factor in propaganda and education], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, II, pp. 24–27; A. Wiczorek, "Myśl o fotografii ojczystej w Polsce" [Thoughts on native photography in Poland], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, VI, pp. 82–84; J. Bułhak, *Polska fotografia ojczysta*, Poznań, 1939.

21 E. Zdanowski, "22 lipca" [22nd of July], *Świat Fotografii*, 1950, XIII, p. 6.

22 See e.g. *Robotnicy i maszyny* [Workers and machines], 1948 (inv. no. DI 83251/27) or *Tempo pracy* [Pace of work], 1949 (inv. no. DI 96271/38) in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

23 See *Żniwa* [Harvest], 1948, inv. no. DI 83251/30 in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

24 As early as in 1950 Witold Dederko criticised the practice of theoreticians imposing ready-made models on photographers. See W. Dederko, "Fotografia przedstawia się na socrealizm" [Photography turns to Socialist Realism], *Świat Fotografii*, 1950, XVII, p. 2.

the criticism, which mostly involved suggestions that the so-called noble photographic processes should no longer be used,²⁵ did not prompt the artists to introduce dramatic changes to their preferred mode of expression. Irrespective of the post-war annexation of the pictorial aesthetics, the founding members of the ZPAF did not reject the traditions of the *Fotoklub Polski* [Polish Photography Club].²⁶ It may therefore seem surprising that this framework also encompassed solutions that could be regarded as modern. The lack of unambiguous external directives allowed the Pictorialists to continue implementing Buřhak's concepts and, as Lech Grabowski observed, to "contemporalise"²⁷ them, i.e. introduce individual changes. The analysis of the post-war history of Pictorialism as outlined in the present article indicates that the style offered a "safe haven" in which to make discreet attempts at breaking the sanctioned forms, aimed at the search for form and the utilisation of the associative potential of the produced effects.

Exhibitions focusing on the aesthetics of inter-war photography appeared in the Zachęta in 1954; they featured the works of Janina Mierzecka and Tadeusz Wański.²⁸ Having been educated in Lvov, Mierzecka remained faithful to the teachings of Henryk Mikolasch – the exhibition featured both pre- and post-war photographs created using noble processes. In the 1950s, Mierzecka was not interested in the potential of "pure photography", even though her earlier works showcased in the album entitled *Ręka pracująca* [The working hand] seem to resemble the aesthetics of New Objectivity. The emphasis on precision present in the 1939 publication, as well as the attention to detail and the tendency to change the scale of a given fragment of reality to show it outside of any context, were motivated by the wish to arrive at an accurate representation of skin problems that were associated with specific professional groups. They did not stem from a search for a more innovative

25 S. Sommer, "Czy techniki szlachetne?" [The question of noble processes], *Fotografia*, 1954, IV, p. 2.

26 Fotoklub Polski, active in the period of 1929–1939, was the first nationwide association of the most acclaimed photographers. It had a profound impact on the development of this artistic milieu in Poland, promoting photography as a discipline equal to painting. This being said, the conservative views of this organisation were not conducive to accepting or popularising avant-garde solutions. The members of the Fotoklub Polski liked to refer to Pictorialist aesthetics and to follow the canon established within that framework. Only 44 photographers were accepted to this hermetic, prestigious organisation; members included Tadeusz Cyprian, Henryk Mikolasch, Jan Sunderland and Tadeusz Wański. Jan Buřhak served as the first chairman.

27 This term was used by Lech Grabowski in relation to Janina Mierzecka's post-war works. See L. Grabowski, *Janina Mierzecka*, Wrocław, 1969, pp. 19–20.

28 The poster and invitations advertised this exhibition as *Photography works of Janina Mierzecka, Henryk Lisowski, Tadeusz Wański*, yet the analysis of the related press material indicates that the exposition was arranged as three individual presentations. The artists did not choose a unified range of subjects; each of them presented their own, independent set of photographs in their preferred aesthetic style.

form. The photographer²⁹ and her husband Henryk Mierzecki,³⁰ who worked as a doctor, stated that the photographs of hands afflicted by skin diseases serve primarily as an illustration for research focusing on dermatology and work hygiene. Thus they saw the photographs as utilitarian, documentative and “scientific” in nature. The fine-art pieces chosen for the exhibition from the heterogeneous set of Mierzecka’s works were rooted in pre-war traditions, especially the use of noble photographic processes³¹ such as bromoil, oil print process or gum bichromate.³² Mierzecka’s interest in endowing an image with an individual character through the processing of the basic material (in the inter-war period she compared the negative to a sketch which only served as the basis for designing the proper work of art)³³ bore fruit after the war, as she made gentle attempts at reformulating the Pictorialist concepts that were present in her earlier photographs. Choosing to depict relations between people and nature (*Powrót z kościoła*; Returning from church) or artefacts of cultural heritage (*Wrocław, fragment katedry*; Wrocław, a section of the cathedral), she modified the form, bringing it closer to the realm of the abstract.³⁴ The objects she photographed could, however, be recognised at least partially (*Duch lasu*; The spirit of the forest), which made Mierzecka different from the throngs of photographers who fell into the trap of making images based on “a collection of blotches and lines, helpless and unjustified in the realm of photography, as they are composed in accordance with the aesthetic principles of painting and emulate Informalist painting”.³⁵ The 1954 exhibition of Mierzecka’s works was the first hesitant step on the road towards changing the implications of using pictorial processes – in Mierzecka’s approach, such works

29 Mierzecka compared the photographs from the “Working hand” series to photographs depicting works of art. Although she did send them to, for instance, the salon of the Royal Photographic Society, they were in the category of images labelled as “scientific”. See J. Mierzecka, *Całe życie z fotografią* [A life with photography], Cracow, 1981, pp. 127–129.

30 H. Mierzecki, *Ręka pracująca* [The working hand], Warsaw, 1939, p. 6.

31 She propagated and defended such processes in various periodicals both before and after the war. See J. Mierzecka, *Luźne uwagi o nowoczesnej fotografice* [General comments on modern photography], Lvov s.d., pp. 2–4; J. Mierzecka, “Dlaczego techniki szlachetne” [Why use noble processes], *Fotografia*, 1954, VII, p. 2.

32 This information is based on Mierzecka’s own statement included in the catalogue of a jubilee exhibition. See *Janina Mierzecka w 90-lecie urodzin – wystawa fotografii* [Janina Mierzecka on her 90th birthday – an exhibition of photography], Warsaw, 1986, unpaginated.

33 J. Mierzecka, “Rozważania o gumie jako technice indywidualnej” [Thoughts on gum bichromate as an individual technique], *Fotograf Polski*, 1928, IV, p. 82.

34 Since no exhibition catalogue was published and the relevant press materials provide no information in this respect, it is now impossible to ascertain which works by Mierzecka were actually on display at the Zachęta in 1954. For this reason the present article refers to later photographs, which are the result of her search for artistic expression undertaken in the mid-1950s.

35 L. Grabowski, op. cit., p. 14.

were not an attempt at imitating painting techniques (which would be tantamount to dismissing photography as a less important artistic discipline), but a means towards implementing imaginative ideas for modifying the negative.

Another photographer presenting his works at the Zachęta at that time, Tadeusz Wański, also decided to continue the style he had developed in the inter-war period.³⁶ Photographs by Wański, who was enamoured of native landscapes, often feature a “fortunate and deliberate choice of staffage”;³⁷ the human figures depicted in the images are but a pretext for showing the beauty of a given scenery, be it architecture or landscape. In Wański’s works the homeland is presented as a mythical land untouched by time. He offers a photographic testimony of the “mythical kinship between mankind and the Earth”.³⁸ The photographs showcased at the Zachęta – *Zaczarowany zamek* [Enchanted castle], *Spotkanie w lesie* [A meeting in the woods] (Fig. 1), *Na zakręcie* [Around the bend] – were impressionistically atmospheric. The visual appeal of these images lay primarily in the harmonious, subtle chiaroscuro, distinctively blurred contours and soft lines. The critic reviewing the exhibition for *Słowo Powszechne* wrote that these features make the photographs lose the semblance of reality. Wański, a member of the Poznański Trójlistek group,³⁹ managed to create “fantasy-world images out of physically existing objects”.⁴⁰ Thus the common denominator in both Mierzecka’s and Wański’s exhibitions consisted in the need for sophisticated laboratory processing – the applied procedures altered and modified the images to give them a more painterly or pictorial form, yet in both cases made the finished works stand in opposition to naturalism. Consequently, although Pictorialism appeared to have been entirely discredited by its earlier connection with the official preferences of the ruling party, it proved to be a space in which modernity could slowly surface.

36 Z. Dłubak, “Trzy wystawy indywidualne” [Three individual exhibitions], *Fotografia*, 1954, III, p. 6.

37 *Katalog wystawy Związku Polskich Artystów Fotografików Delegatury Poznańskiej i indywidualnej wystawy fotografii Tadeusza Wańskiego* [The catalogue of the exhibition of the Poznań Branch of the Association of Polish Art Photographers and Tadeusz Wański’s individual exhibition], Poznań, 1954, unpaginated.

38 J. Bułhak, “Motyw rysunkowy a motyw malarski w krajobrazie” [A pictorial motif versus a painterly motif in a landscape], *Fotograf Polski*, 1926, X, p. 185.

39 Poznański Trójlistek [Poznań Trefoil] was the name used in the inter-war period to denote the non-formalised but nonetheless often uniform activity of three Poznań-based photographers – Tadeusz Cyprian (1898–1979), Bolesław Gardulski (1885–1961) and Tadeusz Wański (1894–1958). The phrase pointed to the ideological and formal analogies with the Viennese *Trifolium* with Hugo Henneberg (1863–1918), Heinrich Kühn (1866–1944) and Hans Watzek (1848–1903), who were interested primarily in making prints that resembled paintings (mostly using the gum bichromate method).

40 St. Sz., “Z warszawskiej Zachęty. Trzech fotografików i dwie techniki” [From the Zachęta in Warsaw. Three photographers and two techniques], *Słowo Powszechne*, 1954, XLV, p. 6.



Fig. 1. Tadeusz Wański, *Spotkanie w lesie* [An encounter in the woods], before 1958, gelatin silver print, current location unknown, after: Tadeusz Wański. *Wystawa pośmiertna. Katalog wystawy zorganizowanej przez Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików i Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych* [Tadeusz Wański. A posthumous exhibition organised by the Association of Polish Art Photographers and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions], ed. K. Lelewicz, Gdynia, 1959, p. 25

Pre- and post-war photographs were presented to the Polish audience once more in 1954, when the Kordegarda organised an exhibition of the works of Marian Dederko.⁴¹ A year later the same gallery showcased the photographs of his son, Witold. The exhibited works included photograms made without the use of a camera, photomontages, as well as one work that had utilised the Sabattier effect, which consists in the partial reversal of a negative to a positive image (this visually attractive effect appealed to Man Ray's taste). The choice of works, testifying to the extensive range of technical skills, showed Witold Dederko as an heir to the interests and artistic pursuits that had been initiated by his father. Marian Dederko had won acclaim in the inter-war period for his exceptional achievements in gum bichromate photography and was recognised as the inventor of a new method called "photonite" [in Polish: *fotonit*], which was hailed as a "protest against naturalism in photography".⁴² Marian Dederko's individual technique involved manual manipulation of a photographic image – the positive was heavily retouched with

41 Unfortunately, any details regarding the shape of this exhibition are impossible to ascertain.

42 W. Dederko, *Warsztat techniczny artysty fotografa* [The technical skills of a photographer artist], Warsaw, 1985, p. 159.

paint.⁴³ Inspired by criticism⁴⁴ of the trends of the day, he used the same means as the advocates of Pictorialism did (i.e. removing selected elements of the composition, adding rays of light or shadows), although the latter did not accept such radical changes in the style of the image.⁴⁵ It is therefore difficult to judge whether photonite could be regarded as innovative: on the one hand, the technique was inspired by geometrised, cubist and dynamic art, on the other, it retained the element of creative manipulation and the uniqueness of “painterly” prints – features that were rather far from the modernist set of artistic means. Jerzy Piwowski was correct in calling Dederko’s solution an important harbinger of modernity; in his opinion this was one of the factors that had prompted photographers to a debate on the need for changes and the possibility of expanding the means of artistic expression.⁴⁶ The same may be said of the post-war expositions⁴⁷ of Marian Dederko’s son Witold. He managed to introduce innovative, unique elements into works that fit the model of photography that was appropriate (neutral landscapes or apologetic views of Warsaw) and traditional (standard silver-based processes or gum bichromate). The fact that photographs made without the use of a camera or utilising the pseudo-solarisation effect were exhibited in an official gallery could be seen as an attempt at making the way for the avant-garde in gradual (not radical) steps by tipping the established balance of power in the artistic circle of photographers.

The year 1959 brought about an exhibition with extraordinary visual power. Two rooms at the Zachęta gallery were used to house a heterogeneous collection of works that differed in terms of subject matter, but almost always contained an element of artistic expression borrowed from the avant-garde set of technical solutions. Edward Hartwig presented landscapes and portraits that hovered on the verge of representational art – owing to the use of the

43 The technique consisted in retouching the positive image; after the changes had been made the image was printed again, which made it possible to get rid of any unnecessary details. For more specific information on the photonite process, see *ibid.*, pp. 158–160.

44 M. Dederko, “Krytyka a modernizm” [Criticism and modernism], *Miesięcznik Fotograficzny*, 1930, XI, p. 165.

45 This solution was criticised even by Antoni Wieczorek, who favoured modernist, sharp lines in photography. See A. Wieczorek, “Fotonizmowi do pamiętnika” [For the diary of photonism], *Polski Przegląd Fotograficzny*, 1930, XI, p. 221.

46 J. Piwowski, *Fotografia artystyczna i jej wystawiennictwo w Polsce okresu międzywojennego* [Fine-art photography and its exhibitions in Poland in the inter-war period], Częstochowa, 2002, pp. 27, 29.

47 The Kordegarda exhibited Witold Dederko’s works on two other occasions, i.e. in 1961 and 1965. The first of these expositions, entitled *Moja Warszawa* [My Warsaw], was a tribute to the capital city made on the 40th anniversary of the photographer’s artistic debut. The second presented a broad spectrum of works made using the gum bichromate technique. In 1965 Dederko showcased portraits, a fragment of a cycle focusing on Warsaw, as well as landscape and landmark photographs.

Sabattier effect and a high contrast which resulted in clean, austere images. In the inter-war period, Hartwig was counted among Bułhak's students; he avoided high contrasts by blurring his images with an atmospheric mist and taking care to include a wide variety of tones – an element which was crucial in the artistic programme of his teacher.⁴⁸ At the end of the 1950s, however, he decided to abandon this repertoire of forms and to limit his scale of tones. He started creating dramatic compositions featuring the bold use of two basic tones – black and white (Figs. 2–4). Hartwig's new works were simplified; he rejected the Pictorialist richness of fluctuant, soft shapes, and he justified his choice in the following words:

As years went by I tried to limit the visual form to the minimum, since I came to the conclusion that given the 'talkative' nature of photography, simplicity has crucial significance. For this very reason I changed the style of my work, but the results are, of course, achieved by purely photographic means.⁴⁹

The conclusions pertaining to the exhibition at the Zachęta were consistent – the reviewers agreed that Hartwig had truly mastered the technique: for him there is no "bad negative, in his alchemist's study he is able to conjure a masterpiece of composition and visual impact out of every single image".⁵⁰ However, the critics were less unanimous in their evaluation of the photographer's oeuvre. Wojciech Kiciński noted many assets of the exposition, but disapproved of the pseudo-solarised works:

The barely contained abundance of feelings, visual concepts and interest had some negative effect on his [Edward Hartwig's – W. K.-B.] work. The exhibition featured images that will certainly be counted among the legacy of Polish photography, but also photographs that bordered on ordinary kitsch. [...] In these cases Hartwig the artist was evidently led astray by Hartwig the technician.⁵¹

There is, however, no doubt that Hartwig's exhibition presented significant innovations in the style of landscape photography. Scenery designed around the synthesis and rhythm of black and white acquired in his works an unsettling, austere mood (especially the series entitled *Wierzby* [Willows]). Interestingly, when describing this aspect of Hartwig's oeuvre reviewers returned to the rhetoric that used to be associated with the classic works of Pictorialists. One critic noted that the crisp contour in Hartwig's images resembled "painting

48 M. Szymanowicz, "W kręgu fotografii piktorialnej" [Around pictorialist photography], in: *Jan Bułhak. Fotografik*, ed. Z. Jurkowlaniec, Warsaw, 2007, p. 139.

49 Z. G., "Wizyta u mistrza kamery" [A visit to the master of camerawork], *Żołnierz Polski*, 1959, XV, p. 6.

50 (LJ), "Edward Hartwig – alchemik światła" [Edward Hartwig – the alchemist of light], *Kurier Polski*, 1959, LXII, p. 4.

51 W. Kiciński, "Fotografika Edwarda Hartwiga" [The photography of Edward Hartwig], *Trybuna Ludu*, 1959, LXXXIII, p. 4.



Fig. 2. Edward Hartwig, *Taniec* [Dance], ca. 1958, no data on the photographic technique, currently in a private collection, after: III Auction of Contemporary Art, 15 March 2007, in Desa Unicum, lot no. 001, <http://www.desa.pl/pl/Aukcje/III-Aukcja-Sztuki-Wspolczesnej-15-mar-ca-2007-r./001.html> [accessed 28 September 2015]

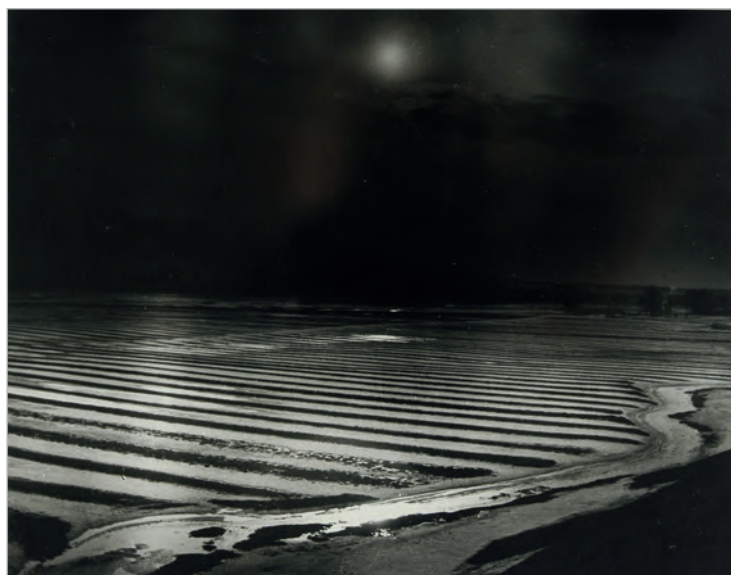


Fig. 3. Edward Hartwig, *Przedwiośnie* [Early spring], 1955, silver gelatin print, the National Library, signature F57310, <https://polona.pl/item/5947041/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

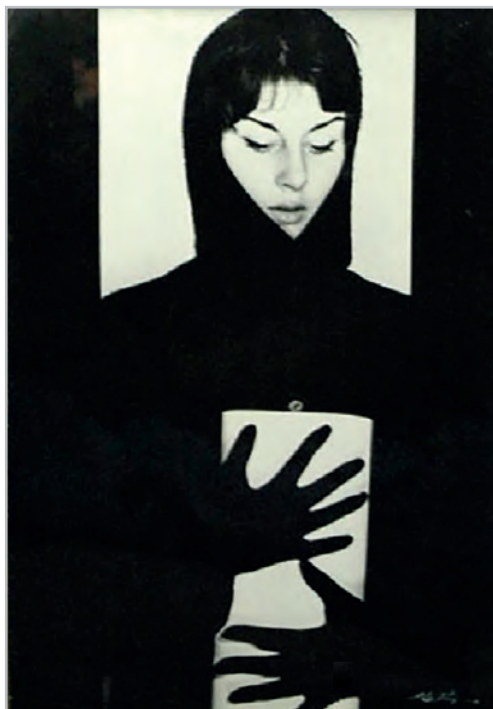


Fig. 4. Edward Hartwig, *Portret dziewczyny z rękawiczkami* [A portrait of a girl with gloves], 1950, gelatin silver print, in the collection of the artist's family, after: M. Plater-Zyberk, *Edward Hartwig (1909–2003). Fotografie ze zbiorów rodziny artysty i Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Katalog wystawy* [Edward Hartwig (1909–2003), photographs from the collection of the family and the National Museum in Warsaw], Warsaw, 2004, p. 85

with a camera lens” and even referred to his works as paintings.⁵² Kiciński, in turn, wrote a review that emulated the language of describing native photography – in his view Hartwig’s landscape style “aptly captures the features of Polish scenery, beautiful in its simplicity and reverie”.⁵³ Hartwig’s recipe for modernity could not break free from the yoke of patriotic duty. He was able to present works that went beyond the official visual doctrine in an official gallery such as the Zachęta due to the historical legitimisation of his style. Until 1959, Hartwig was perceived as an artist firmly rooted in pre-war traditions, the inheritor of Bułhak’s concepts. The subject matter appearing in photographic albums such as *Ziemia rodzinna* [Native land] (1955) consolidated that image. It should be emphasised that even after the success of *Fotografika* [Photographic art], published in 1960, Hartwig’s albums were often designed to showcase the beauty of Polish land and became export goods.⁵⁴ The same objective – to satisfy popular demand – was associated with Hartwig’s next exhibition, *Kartki z albumu Warszawa* [Images from the Warsaw album] which

⁵² H. K., “Malowane obiektywem” [Painted with a lens], *Sztandar Młodych*, 1959, LXII, p. 3.

⁵³ W. Kiciński, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁴ The albums entitled *Kraków* (1969) and *Warszawa* (1974) were published also in English and German.



Fig. 5. Edward Hartwig, *Widok. Panorama Warszawy* [Landscape. A view of Warsaw], 1968, gelatin silver print, the National Library, signature F.57279, <https://polona.pl/item/5946755/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

was organised in the Kordegarda in 1970. As Adam Johann⁵⁵ noted in the catalogue, the exhibition constituted a tribute to the city, paid on the 25th anniversary of its liberation. It was also a way to repay the debt of gratitude for the artistic prize of the capital city of Warsaw, which Hartwig had been awarded in 1961 for his outstanding achievements in photography. The exhibition was implicated in the politicised narrative of the capital city; images that offered an innovative, insightful look at Warsaw appeared alongside rather common, trivial motifs (Fig. 5). Attempts at using an innovative visual form to capture images of the capital city did not appeal to everyone, as evidenced by, for instance, the following opinion published in *Życie Warszawy*: “In a word, Hartwig’s Warsaw is more of an experience than a document. The question of whether such an approach benefits the audience must, however, be answered with a healthy dose of scepticism”.⁵⁶

55 *Wystawa fotografii Edwarda Hartwiga. Kartki z albumu “Warszawa”* [The exhibition of Edward Hartwig’s photography. Images from the Warsaw album], Warsaw, 1970, unpaginated.

56 Ibis, “Warszawa Hartwiga” [Hartwig’s Warsaw], *Życie Warszawy*, 1970, XIX, p. 5.

The anonymous reviewer was right to observe that in the vast majority of his works Hartwig rejected the documentative function of photography. The titles of the works identified the places where the photographs were taken, yet in many cases the formal means used to create the images made it impossible to determine the specific location; for instance, the dynamic effect in the photograph *Tunel – trasa W-Z* [A tunnel – the East-West Route] was achieved through a long exposure time and the decision not to use a tripod. The details of the resulting image are obscure; the moving vehicles are blurred, their lamplights distorted into shaky, elongated lines. Photographs such as *Warszawa – Barbakan*, in turn, referred to the poetics that had been developed by Hartwig in his earlier works – the effect of graphicalisation and increasing contrast: the image did not present the fortification in detail, showing only a dark outline of the outer wall. A presentation of images so different from photojournalist photography could only be possible owing to Hartwig's established status and the fact that the subject matter was (at least seemingly) engaging for the public and in line with the interests of the authorities.

The publication of Edward Hartwig's album *Fotografika* [Photography] coincided with the opening of a retrospective exhibition of Benedykt Jerzy Dorys's work, organised on the 35th anniversary of his artistic debut. The focal point of the exhibition, presented at the Kordegarda in 1960, was a series of photographs of prominent artists and people from cultural circles that had been initiated in 1948 on the ministry's commission. The exposition also included earlier works – images of celebrities made by Dorys in 1929–1939, which had brought him acclaim as a portrait photographer. Although the set of works from the 1920s and 1930s was not representative (many photographs from that period did not survive the war),⁵⁷ Dorys himself stated that he had learnt his skill from artists such as Zygmunt Szporek. It may therefore be surmised that he was familiar with the Pictorialist aesthetics.⁵⁸ He used softening filters and sepia tones, processed his portraits using techniques such as gum bichromate or bromoil.⁵⁹ However, the unwavering interest that the public showed for the posed photographs of dignitaries, actors and musicians – which brought the label *Foto-Dorys* commercial success – slowly started to overwhelm and discourage the artist. In several interviews Dorys admitted that he sometimes felt tired of the tyranny of stereotypes and artificiality associated with

57 L. Dobrzyńska, "Benedykt Jerzy Dorys. Portret utrwalony we wspomnieniach drugiego pokolenia" [Benedykt Jerzy Dorys. A portrait preserved by the memory of the second generation], in: *Dorys: między pokoleniami* [Dorys: between generations] ed. L. Dobrzyński, Warsaw, 2010, p. 10.

58 Dorys's own statement recorded in the documentary *Benedykta Jerzego Dorysa życie szczęśliwe* [The happy life of Benedykt Jerzy Dorys], directed by M. Kwiatkowska, 1980.

59 A. Johann, *Wystawa fotografii Benedykta Jerzego Dorysa „Kazimierz nad Wisłą 1931–1932”* [The exhibition of photographs by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys "Kazimierz nad Wisłą 1931–1932"], Kazimierz Dolny, 1983, p. 1.

arranged studio photographs.⁶⁰ As a means of escaping this style, he carried out a project entitled “Kazimierz nad Wisłą (1931–1932)”. The cycle, which involved taking candid photographs with a 135 mm Leica camera *en plein air*, was a vastly different enterprise than the time-consuming, carefully arranged portraits of celebrities taken in a studio. The exhibition at the Kordegarda marked the first time that the photographs from Kazimierz were shown to the public, almost thirty years after they had been taken.⁶¹ In his studio photography Dorys sought to present the model in the most flattering, idealised manner, yet during his walks around the city of Kazimierz he pointed the camera towards the most depressing, gloomy alleyways – perfect examples illustrating the bitter crisis. The series of expressive photographs showing ruin and poverty hiding behind the attractive townhouse facades was hailed as the first work of Polish photojournalism.⁶² As Adolf Rudnicki noted, Dorys had captured the “spirit of the moment”.⁶³ The Kazimierz series, which preceded the emergence of Italian Neo-realism,⁶⁴ inevitably caused a stir. The attractive, eye-catching portraits of famous people and the pioneering photographs from Kazimierz effectively overshadowed all other images presented at the Kordegarda exhibition. The reviews made no mention of the series of photograms entitled *Etiuda* [Etude] or of Dorys’s photomontages. In *Profil architekta K* [The profile of the architect K] (Fig. 6) and *Kwiaty* [Flowers] (Fig. 7), a traditionally developed high-contrast photograph was combined with a luxograph that had been made separately. *Kwiaty*, a rare example of Dorys’s still lifes, is composed of two images: the image of a plant and an optical outline of a flower blending with its structure. In this case, however, the avant-garde solution, i.e. direct contact of separate images, serves more as a decoration than as an element of surreal narration. On the one hand, Dadaist photograms originated from a fascination with discarded, used, accidentally encountered items; on the other, as ephemeral traces, they constituted an act of their dematerialisation.⁶⁵ The imagination of artists such as László Moholy-Nagy or Christian Schad revealed unexpected qualities of things which, incorporated into enigmatic compositions, became almost entirely unrecognisable, thus gaining new meanings. The creative potential of luxography also seemed fascinating to Tristan Tzara, who commented on Man Ray’s works with much enthusiasm: “what

60 R. Kłosiewicz, “Szaleństwo z Leicą w Kazimierzu” [Playing with a Leica around Kazimierz], *Fotografia*, 1977, VI, pp. 12–13.

61 Dorys made no prints out of these negatives but hid them; they were only found after the war. The exhibition in the Kordegarda included only a selection of the photographs – the series was not presented in its entirety until 1977.

62 J. Busza, “Pierwszy reportaż fotograficzny” [The first photojournalistic reportage], *Kultura*, 1977, XXV, p. 12.

63 A. Rudnicki, “Niebieskie kartki” [Blue paper], *Świat*, 1960, XLVII, p. 11.

64 J. Ficowski, “Wystawa fotografii B. J. Dorysa” [The exhibition of photographs by B. J. Dorys], *Nowa Kultura*, 1960, XLVII, p. 3.

65 S. Laxton, “Flou: Rayographs and the Dada Automatic”, *October*, 2009, CXXVII, p. 28.



Fig. 6. Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, *Profil Architekta K.* [The profile of the architect K.], 1955, gelatin silver print, the National Library, signature F.105626/IV, <https://polona.pl/item/1143571/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

was revealed is the power of a subtle and refreshing blaze that surpasses all constellations so pleasant to the eye”.⁶⁶ The dynamic, abstract effect which Tzara found so appealing is, however, absent in the works of Benedykt Jerzy Dorys. The visual precision of *Kwiaty* seems more akin to William Talbot’s “photogenic drawings” that recorded specimens of flora, or to Anna Atkins’s cyanotypes; the Polish photographers may have used an array of innovative methods, but without the intellectual concepts that had originally been associated with these techniques.

The above analysis, conducted from the perspective of exhibition history, makes an important shift in the significance of Pictorialism – from a topic on the margins of academic interest to a harbinger of modernity, and thus a central subject in the discourse on Polish photography in the post-war period. Rather surprisingly, it appears to be the slogan that legitimised the more innovative and modern forms of photographic art in official contexts of the day. The post-war history of Pictorialism indicates that the style attempted to break the impasse that could be observed in official photographic salons. Abstract photographs were published in *Fotografia* as early as in the 1950s,⁶⁷ yet – as Altshuler

66 T. Tzara, “Fotografia z odwrotnej strony” [The reverse side of photography], *Obscura*, 1988, II, pp. 14–15.

67 U. Czartoryska, “Abstrakcyjne fotogramy Andrzeja Pawłowskiego” [Abstract photograms



Fig. 7. Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, *Kwiaty* [Flowers], 1957, gelatin silver print, the National Library, signature F.105511/IV, <https://polona.pl/item/1140152/0/> [accessed 28 September 2015]

aptly observes – only by being present at an exhibition could they transform alternative art forms into messages directed at the wider public.⁶⁸ A periodical targeted at specialists and photography enthusiasts remained a much less significant medium. The artists mentioned in the article – Edward Hartwig in particular – had managed to smuggle a new method of photographic imaging into the official exhibition space and to use means of artistic expression that had avant-garde origins, justifying their actions by the “noble ideal of presenting our homeland to our nation and to the world in its most beautiful and most artistic guise”.⁶⁹ Luxographs, photomontages and pseudo-solarisations appeared among photographs that did not deviate from a style worthy of Ruszczyc’s paintings. The thick veil of noble photographic processes hid the will to transform images in original ways, leading to an almost complete rejection of figurativeness, the breaking of all connections with the factually

by Andrzej Pawłowski], *Fotografia*, 1957, VII, p. 164. The subject of abstractionism in photography was discussed e.g. by Zbigniew Dłubak. See Z. Dłubak, “Czy istnieje fotografia abstrakcyjna?” [Does abstract photography exist?], *Fotografia*, 1959, VII, p. 314.

68 B. Altshuler, *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Berkeley–Los Angeles, 1998, p. 8.

69 This is how Marian Dederko described the intentions of artists such as Wański, who stayed faithful to Bułhak’s ideals. See M. Dederko, “Fotografia ojczysta i krajowa” [Native and national photography], *Fotograf Polski*, 1938, III, p. 37.

photographed subjects and to the creation of new autonomous beings. It should, however, be emphasised that despite their search for unusual forms, the above-mentioned artists did not break away from the utopia of “things to look at”. The photographers discussed in the present article did not stray from the perception of photography as a “sworn” work on the wall of a gallery: a separate, complete, autonomous image to be enjoyed.⁷⁰ What is more, the seemingly neutral post-war Pictorialism was not entirely apolitical. The artists’ escape into landscape photography, the propensity for ornamentation and the choice not to offer radical comments on the current reality indicate that the attitude of the members of Fotoklub Polski ought to be described as disposed towards compromise.

(Translated by Julita Mastalerz)

Abstract

Existing academic works examining Polish artistic photography in the 1950s and 1960s are most often based on an analysis of the debates taking place within professional circles and the views of specific artists as expressed in the specialist periodicals that were published at that time. Such diagnoses are frequently based on a single and very particular source, namely the monthly magazine *Fotografia*. The pages of this periodical project an image of an artistic society enjoying a relatively high degree of autonomy. The present study represents a different research approach, inspired e.g. by the works of Bruce Altshuler and Kenneth Luckhurst, who postulated the re-orientation of art history away from biographical works focused on the individual subject towards a discipline understood as the history of exhibitions. Following the course set by these scholars, one may come to the conclusion that an analysis of the place which photography held in the official exhibition strategy implemented in the 1950s and 1960s in the prestigious Warsaw galleries of the Kordegarda and the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (CBWA) may provide an interesting and new contribution to the current state of research. A study based on an examination of the history of exhibitions may help to answer the question whether all forms of photography were equally approved by the authorities at a time when the rules of the cultural policy of the People’s Republic of Poland became more lenient. It also makes it possible to evaluate the degree to which autonomy and heterogeneity (features which may be associated with the magazine *Fotografia*) were legitimised through presentation in a state-owned, politicised public space. Conducted from the perspective of exhibition history, the analysis presented herein makes an important shift in the significance of Pictorialism – from a topic on the margins of academic interest to a harbinger of modernity, and thus a central subject in the discourse on Polish photography in the post-war period. Rather surprisingly, it appears to be the slogan that legitimised the more innovative and modern forms of photographic art in the official contexts of the day.

70 The crucial significance of the conceptual background for specific projects is situated among neo-avant-garde phenomena. In these circles, photography mostly served as a method for direct recording that was devoid of aesthetic connotations.

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The Family of Man in Poland: An Exhibition as a Democratic Space?

The monumental photographic exhibition *The Family of Man* (Figs. 1–2) that was presented in 1955 at the New York Museum of Modern Art was a phenomenon that continues to inspire generations of scholars.¹ It is perceived as a caesura and as the subject of a major controversy shaping the discourse of the photographic medium. It is also a significant example in the discussion on the Modernist exhibition models that are being implemented in modern museum spaces. As a visual narrative conveying a classically humanist message, *The Family of Man* is even discussed in paradigmatic terms – it testifies to the belief in a model of art as a universal language.² In the decades that followed, the exhibition was critically re-evaluated and interpreted in terms of “frame setting” and the paternalistic function of exhibitions and modern museums.³ In addition, its contemporary reception features the “father

1 The article is a modified and extended version of a section of the PhD thesis entitled *The Family of Man – recepcja wystawy w krytyce i fotografii* [The Family of Man – reception of the exhibition in photography and art criticism] that was presented at the Institute of Art History of John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in 2014.

2 See texts that are representative of this approach to exhibitions: R. Barthes, “The Great Family of Man”, in: *Mythologies*, translated by A. Lavers, New York, 2001, pp. 100–102; S. Sontag, *On Photography*, New York, 1977; A. Sekula, “Traffic in Photographs”, *Art Journal*, spring 1981, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 15–25.

3 This is a reference to the issue of the boundary/frame of a painting; see e.g. M. Popczyk, *Estetyczne przestrzenie ekspozycji muzealnej. Artefakty przyrody i dzieła sztuki* [Aesthetic spaces of museum exhibitions; artefacts of nature and works of art], Cracow, 2008, pp. 136–137, as well as a reference to the same issue discussed in terms of gender studies: M. Leśniakowska, “Biopolityczne ciało w środowiskach Stanisława Zamecznika” [The biopolitical body in Stanisław Zamecznik’s environments], in: *Wizje nowoczesności. Lata 50. i 60. – wzornictwo, estetyka, styl życia. Materiały z sesji „Lata 50. i 60. w Polsce i na świecie: estetyka, wizje nowoczesności, styl życia”*; Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, 15 kwietnia 2011 roku [Visions of Modernity. The 1950s and 1960s – design, aesthetics, lifestyle. Materials from the session “The 1950s and 1960s in Poland and abroad;



Fig. 1. A view of the exhibition [a reconstruction of the exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955], Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, photo by Romain Girtten, 2013, the archives of Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, Centre National de l'Audiovisuel, Dudelange, Luxembourg

figure”⁴ – a motif that is characteristic of Modernism and in this case identified with the creator of the exhibition, Edward Steichen, who was often regarded as the father of American Modernism.

While the origins and contexts of this exhibition have been thoroughly discussed by Western scholars,⁵ in Poland these issues have received little

aesthetics, concepts of modernity, lifestyles”; The National Museum in Warsaw, 15 April 2011], The National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, 2012, pp. 37–50.

4 A. Sekula, op. cit, pp. 91–92.

5 Increasingly advanced studies on Modernism conducted in the last 25 years have brought forth new subjects for analysis – more attention has been drawn to the creator’s intentions and to the meaning of his/her idea. See e.g. E. J. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: ‘The Family of Man’ and 1950s America*, Albuquerque, 1995; M. Berlier, “‘The Family of Man’: Readings of an Exhibition”, in: *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography*, eds. B. Brennen, H. Hardt, Champaign, 1999, pp. 206–241; *The Family of Man 1955–2001. Humanism and Postmodernism: A Reappraisal of the Photo Exhibition by Edward Steichen*, eds. J. Back, V. Schmidt-Linsenhoff, Marburg, 2004; B. Stimson, “Photographic Being and The Family of Man”, in: *The Pivot of the World: Photography and Its*



Fig. 2. A view of the exhibition [a reconstruction of the exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955], Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, photo by Romain Girtten, 2013, the archives of Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, Centre National de l'Audiovisuel, Dudelange, Luxembourg

attention. No attempt at a more comprehensive analysis of the exhibition's reception has ever been made, either in terms of the history of photography or in terms of the history of museum exhibitions. *The Family of Man* was mentioned in a number of works on the history of Polish photography, yet only as a cursory reference,⁶ even though several scholars have expressed the

Nation, Cambridge MA–London, 2006, pp. 59–104; L. Kaplan, “Photo Globe: ‘The Family of Man’ and the Global Rhetoric of Photography”, in: *American Exposures: Photography and Community in the Twentieth Century*, Minneapolis–London, 2005, pp. 55–80; F. Turner, “‘The Family of Man’ and the Politics of Attention in Cold War America”, *Public Culture*, 2012, no. 1, pp. 55–84; F. Turner, “The Museum of Modern Art Makes the World a Family”, in: *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*, Chicago, 2013, pp. 181–212.

- 6 A. Sobota, “Fotograficzny obraz społeczeństwa PRL-u” [A photographic image of society in the People’s Republic of Poland], in: *Polska fotografia dokumentalna na skrzyżowaniu dyskursów. Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej w dniu 2 IV 2005 z okazji wystawy Leonarda Sempolińskiego* [Polish documentary photography at the crossroads of discourse; materials from the session organised on 2 April 2005 during the exhibition of Leonard

need for a more thorough inquiry into the subject.⁷ Even less space has been devoted to this exposition in studies pertaining to Polish gallery exhibitions.⁸ The most detailed of the existing analyses were made in literature studies and pertain to a volume of poetry by Witold Wirpsza entitled *Komentarze do fotografii 'The Family of Man'* [Captions to the photographs in 'The Family of Man'] which was published in 1962. The book was, on the one hand, a testimony to the author's deep understanding of the exhibition as an element of the artistic and political reality of the mid-20th century and, on the other hand, a description of his original concept of poetic art.⁹ Works written by Western scholars testifying to a critical reception of this exhibition have become a point of reference in all of the above-mentioned disciplines. Apart from authors such as Allan Sekula and Susan Sontag, pride of place should be given to Roland Barthes, whose essay "The Great Family of Man" (published in his work titled *Mythologies*) has been treated as a point of reference by several generations of scholars. In recent years, the corpus of Western academic works on *The Family of Man* and its reception has grown significantly and now also includes works that are polemical to the above "canon" approaches.¹⁰ It may therefore be surmised that, given the incompleteness of knowledge on the subject and the lack of a more thorough analysis of the exhibition in the context of Polish history of art, a work focusing on the reception of *The Family of Man* in Poland is justified and needed. What is more, an examination of this topic requires that the scholar go beyond the history of photography and

Sempoliński's works], Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2006, pp. 78–79; A. Mazur, *Historie fotografii w Polsce 1839–2009* [Stories of photography in Poland 1839–2009], Cracow, 2009, p. 237.

7 A. Mazur, *ibid.*, p. 237.

8 One example comes from Tomasz Fudala, who offers a general reflection; *Przestrzeń między nami* [The space between us], exhibition catalogue, eds. T. Fudala, M. Zamecznik, The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Warsaw, 2011.

9 See J. J. Lipski, "Pamiętnik z okresu dojrzewania" [A diary from the period of adolescence], *Twórczość*, 1963, no. 6, pp. 68–70; J. Kwiatkowski, "Poezja infernalna" [Infernal poetry], *Życie Literackie*, 1963, no. 16, p. 9; A. Jaworska, "O Komentarzach do fotografii 'The Family of Man' Witolda Wirpszy" [On Witold Wirpsza's Captions to the photographs in "The Family of Man"], *Arkadia*, 2008, no. 23–24, pp. 84–111; T. Kaliściak, "Rodzina ludzka bawi się w zdjęcia, czyli pasożyt na wystawie", *Arkadia*, 2009, no. 25–26, pp. 145–150; G. Jankowicz, "Wirpsza i poetyka spojrzenia" [Wirpsza and the poetics of perception], in: W. Wirpsza, *Komentarze do fotografii 'The Family of Man'* [Captions to the photographs in "The Family of Man"], Mikołów, 2010, pp. 43–58; W. Pietrzak, "Anty-mitologia Witolda Wirpszy. Komentarz do 'Komentarzy do fotografii'" [Wirpsza's anti-mythology. Comments to the "Captions to the photographs"], *Ruch Literacki*, 2014, issue 4–5, pp. 505–515.

10 Examples include A. Azoulay, "'The Family of Man': A Visual Universal Declaration of Human Rights", in: *The Human Snapshot*, eds. T. Keenan, T. Zolghadr, Berlin, 2013, pp. 19–48; E. Turner, *'The Family of Man' and the Politics of Attention...*, op. cit.; S. E. James, "A Post-Fascist 'Family of Man'? Cold War Humanism, Democracy and Photography in Germany", *Oxford Art Journal*, 2012, no. 3, pp. 315–336.

enter the realm of the multifaceted relations between Polish modernity and Western Modernism. A closer look at the spatial arrangement of the exhibition, the origins of this arrangement and the historical and artistic features of its reception in Poland makes it possible to investigate issues that were significant to the artistic circle of photographers in the context of broader artistic and cultural processes.

An exhibition on an editing table

The exhibition *The Family of Man* (Figs. 3–4), which was composed of more than five hundred photographs grouped into thematic sections corresponding to phases in a person's life (birth, childhood, death), areas of human activity (e.g. work, play), social issues (e.g. famine, human rights), historical events (the 2nd World War) or ideas (e.g. love, religion), may certainly be described by means of the category of a “cinematic effect”, as delineated by Mieke Bal,¹¹ especially in relation to expositions based on the medium of photography. The exposition may be equated with a script or a storyboard which has its narrative climax – the photograph of a nuclear weapon test presented as a reversal film image and displayed in a darkened room.¹² The photographs showcased at the exhibition differed in size and were hung at varying heights. They were arranged in the gallery space according to their subject matter; the form that corresponded to the meaning granted the images a rhetorical function (e.g. a round, metal frame in the sequence depicting children dancing in a circle; a corridor passageway in the section devoted to death; isolated photographs of an atomic explosion, or a fallen soldier, the casualty of the Pacific War).¹³ Steichen developed the concept of the exhibition in cooperation with the poet Carl Sandburg by using specific poetic figures such as contrast (the juxtaposition of photographs conveying varying degrees of emotional tension), counterpoint (e.g. problematisation of the status of the oppressor and the oppressed that was observable in the war photographs – the sequence titled *Faces of War*), or reiteration (the motifs of music and childhood recurring in various configurations and combinations).¹⁴ The meaning of the cinematic narrative of *The Family of Man* was therefore designed to span from the simple

11 M. Bal, “Exhibition as Film”, in: *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, ed. R. Ostow, Toronto, 2008, pp. 15–47.

12 This is a reference to the first exhibition in New York; the manner of exhibiting this photograph varied. See E. Sandeen, *Picturing an Exhibition: ‘The Family of Man’ and 1950s America*, Albuquerque, 2010.

13 More on the significance of successive sequences in: *ibid.* Detailed data regarding the thematic and spatial arrangement of the exhibition may be obtained at the Centre National de l’Audiovisuel in Dudelange, *Draft for check list ‘The Family of Man’*.

14 Categories quoted after M. Bal, *op. cit.*, p. 21.



Fig. 3. A view of the exhibition [a reconstruction of the exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955], Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, photo by Romain Girtten, 2013, the archives of Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, Centre National de l'Audiovisuel, Dudelange, Luxembourg

humanist declaration that “we are all alike”¹⁵ to the complex mixture of symbols and themes rooted in the history of culture and revolving around the problem of the crisis of civilisation (the past tragedy – the 2nd World War, and the predicted one – the Cold War). It was probably the multi-layered nature of the exposition that prompted Georges Didi-Huberman to call it an elaborate montage in which “images of war and peace are ostentatiously juxtaposed”.¹⁶

This montage-like cinematic effect may still be experienced by modern audiences through the medium of the popular (and frequently reprinted) catalogue whose layout mirrors the structure of the exhibition (thematic sections, quotations) or through the reconstruction of the original exposition that is presented at the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel at the Clervaux Castle in

15 *Transcript of U.S.I.A. Seminar with Steichen, 27th April 1955*, p. 4, Steichen Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York, quoted after L. Kaplan, op. cit. p. 63.

16 G. Didi-Huberman, *Strategie obrazów. Oko historii 1*, translated into Polish by J. Margański, Warsaw–Cracow, 2011, p. 29; cf. the original, *L'Œil de l'histoire – Tome 1: Quand les images prennent position*, Paris, 2009.



Fig. 4. A view of the exhibition [a reconstruction of the exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955], Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, photo by Romain Girtten, 2013, the archives of Musée The Family of Man, Clervaux, Centre National de l'Audiovisuel, Dudelange, Luxembourg

Luxemburg.¹⁷ This being said, neither of these options is able to recreate the visual effect that was observed by gallery-goers in the 1950s; not only because of the decades of visual experience that separate us but also owing to the various technical details and factors associated with the locations in which the exhibition was reassembled. Such local variations of the exposition have been reconstructed only partially, thus making archival photographs, which may at times be difficult to obtain,¹⁸ the primary source of information on

17 One full exhibition set was presented to the Luxembourg authorities by the Museum of Modern Art; it has been on permanent display since 1994 (except for the years 2010–2013, when it was closed due to restoration work).

18 Many photographic archives were lost, destroyed or dispersed. This was also the fate of the archive of the Association of Polish Art Photographers (ZPAF; the archive was of crucial importance since this organisation had been responsible for bringing *The Family of Man* to Poland) and of the press materials which could have provided additional information on the arrangement of the exposition. The corpus of photographic documentation compiled by Adam Kaczkowski is now kept as a deposit at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and comes from the archive of Stanisław Zamecznik, who was

the exhibition's spatial impact. The reconstructed exposition in Luxembourg does, however, offer some idea as to the cinematic effect in Steichen's design which placed audiences within the universe of the narrative, subjecting them not only to rhetoric figures but also to intellectual stimulation under the guidance of the "director", i.e. the narrator (the already-mentioned father figure). The viewers were indubitably drawn into a suggestive visual apparatus which – mainly due to the expert use of the medium of photography – offered them the possibility to fully experience the presented reality, to identify with the depicted world and with other human beings. The exhibition took into account the emotional reactions of the viewers and their own perceptual and intellectual effort. Such an effect could be achieved thanks to the experience that had been brought in by Steichen and Herbert Bayer, whose cooperation influenced the spatial arrangement of the exposition as devised by Paul Rudolph.¹⁹

In 1942 the Museum of Modern Art housed another project by Steichen and Bayer – a propagandistic photographic exhibition entitled *Road to Victory*. In terms of exposition design it was a prototype for *The Family of Man*. The aim of the exhibition was to convince Americans that the decision to participate in the 2nd World War was justified. As early as in the 1920s, while teaching graphic design and advertising in Bauhaus, Bayer abandoned the traditional manner of displaying works of art, i.e. as a linear composition of exhibits placed at eye level. Adopting ideas developed by the philosophy and psychology of the *Gestalt* movement, Bayer assumed that the viewer ought to, in a way, design the exposition virtually. Thus, in order to stimulate the viewer's own awareness, exhibits were to be arranged casually, not only on walls or plinths but also below the viewers' feet or above their heads in order to help them create an "extended field of vision".²⁰ For instance, the *Road to Victory* exhibition was arranged in the form of a path; the viewer would follow the route set out by the designers that was surrounded by large-format photographs arranged at differing angles or hung from the ceiling. Thus, *The Family of Man* constituted the result of many years of experience and was even more

one of the designers of the Warsaw *Family of Man* exposition. Other photographs to which I was able to gain access come from various sources, such as the George Eastman Museum or the Archive of the Academy of Music in Poznań (the photographic legacy of Stefan Poradowski).

19 See e.g. O. Lugon, "Edward Steichen as Exhibition Designer", in: *Edward Steichen. Lives in Photography* [exhibition catalogue], eds. T. Brandow, W. A. Ewing, London, 2007, pp. 267–273.

20 This approach is apparent in the design of the German pavilion at the 1930 *Exposition de la société des artistes décorateurs* in the Grand Palais in Paris. Bayer worked on it in cooperation with Walter Gropius, László Mogoly-Nagy and Marcel Breuer; the design featured enlarged photographs of buildings placed above and below the eye-level of the average viewer. Bayer presented his ideas in an article written in 1937 but published after his arrival in the United States: "Fundamentals of Exhibition Design", *Production Manager*, 1939, no. 2, pp. 17–25.

suggestive in its message, as it pertained to universal subjects and the many aspects of human life throughout the world. The narrative structure of the exhibition, focused on developing awareness and engaging the viewers' perception, implicated the project in less-than-obvious contexts – especially when the exhibition was being shown around the world as a part of the United States Information Agency cultural propaganda programme, in which the Museum of Modern Art had a significant part to play.

Between the years 1955–1962, the exhibition was presented in numerous countries in the West, the Far East and even in the Eastern bloc. As many as eleven of its different variants (including three “American” and three “Japanese” ones) toured the world almost simultaneously. The creators of the exhibition (and the American authorities of the day) desired to show the exposition in such places of geopolitical importance as Berlin, Tokyo, Moscow or in the countries of Latin America. In each case, the dynamic but rhetorically structured arrangement of the exhibition gave rise to a different perspective of reception, a different tone of discourse and different controversies. In Moscow, for instance, where *The Family of Man* was on display in the summer of 1959 as a part of the National American Exhibition, the Soviet authorities protested against showing a photograph of a starving Chinese child taken in 1946 by George Silk. The image was removed, with Steichen's permission. In the same year a Nigerian student tore down several photographs depicting black men and women as an act of protest against portraying these people as being passive and primitive.²¹ The case of the Berlin exhibition was also exceptional, since – as may be surmised from Steichen's own comments – the original structure of the narrative pointed to Germans as being responsible for the 2nd World War (and for the extermination of millions of Jews) and placed this motif within the framework of the generally critical depiction of humankind and its propensity towards evil.²² Thus the fact that the exhibition was carefully directed was even more visible in the case of its local variants; such practices were tightly connected with the historical and political reality of that time.

When *The Family of Man* was presented in Poland in the autumn of 1959, first in Warsaw and then in Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Jelenia Góra, Cracow, Poznań and Dąbrowa Górnicza, its official reception was enthusiastic. The authorities, displaying an open, post-thaw attitude, heartily welcomed the exhibition which by then had already been shown in Moscow.²³ The voices of criticism

21 L. Kaplan, op. cit., pp. 76–77.

22 See S. E. James, op. cit., p. 328.

23 It should be noted that the exhibition was not brought to Poland directly from Moscow. Polish gallery-goers saw a different copy of the exhibition which came from Italy – Florence or Turin (according to *Synthèse et bilan de l'exposition, sa circulation à l'étranger*, ed. K. Gresh, computer printout, unpaginated, available at the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel in Luxembourg). This proves that the Polish photographer milieu had striven to bring the exhibition to Poland even earlier; the fact that *The Family of Man*

that appeared soon after the opening were rather general in nature. An essay by Urszula Czartoryska, for instance, reveals that the exhibition was instantly recognised as significant in the history of photography. Czartoryska was evidently familiar with Barthes's critical opinion and slightly mistrustful of the ideological background of the project.²⁴ When analysing Steichen's exhibition in the context of its long journey we should perhaps focus on the relation between aesthetics and politics, identified and expressed to a varying degree depending on the place and time in which *The Family of Man* was presented. Thus the phenomenon of the exhibition stems from a multitude of local narratives that differed from the one that was presented in New York.

An exhibition in the face of a social ideal

The Family of Man appears to follow the basic modernist model of an exhibition, both with regard to its origins and to the critics' opinion. The New York Museum of Modern Art may be regarded as typical due to its privileged geopolitical position and the crucial part it played in the cultural policy of the United States. It was a "social instrument" used to create and cultivate modernity.²⁵ *The Family of Man* ought to be perceived in the same categories. It was particularly suited for that task as it aspired to present a comprehensive view on the social and political reality. The museum context of the exhibition and its role in the history of modernism is sufficient for *The Family of Man* to be perceived as a space in which a political and artistic utopia came to be realised. The already-mentioned cinematic effect served to articulate the utopia in an attractive manner.

What content might fill this utopian model? It had the psychological effect of identifying with a different person that was presented at the exhibition through the medium of photography. This facilitated the process of working through the trauma of a civilisational crisis. What is more, the narrative formula of the exposition was meant to strengthen the ideal of a "democratic personality". As noted by Fred Turner:

was presented in Moscow might have finally sanctioned its presence in Warsaw. Cf. *Biuletyn Informacyjny ZPAF* [The Newsletter of the Association of Polish Art Photographers], 1956–1959, available at the ZPAF Library in Warsaw; esp. "Sprawozdanie organizacyjne ZPAF w roku 1959" [The organisational report of the Association of Polish Art Photographers for the year 1959], *Biuletyn Informacyjny ZPAF*, 1960, no. 42, pp. 18–19.

24 U. Czartoryska, "Biologia i sentymenty" [Biology and sentiments], *Fotografia*, 1959, no. 11, p. 540; the above-mentioned volume of poetry by Witold Wirpsza was published three years later.

25 D. Preziosi, "Modernity Again: The Museum as Trompe L'Oeil", in: *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. P. Brunette, D. Wills, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 141–150.

what most contemporary critics of *The Family of Man* overlook is that the exhibition asked visitors to practice the perceptual skills on which the development of democratic personalities – and thus the control of democratic societies – depended. In keeping with Bayer's extended field of vision, the makers of *The Family of Man* surrounded their audiences with images. At one level, each image offered a viewer a potential moment of identification. At another, however, the pictures acted as an ensemble, an array of images that visitors needed to rearrange within their own psyches. In the process of aggregating and organizing these images, visitors could, at least in theory, engage in a degree of self-formation not open to citizens of authoritarian regimes.²⁶

The issue of a “democratic personality” was widely discussed in the United States in connection with the sociological and psychological roots of Nazism, which was consequently perceived as an anti-utopia that had been realised.²⁷ Soon the same status started to be associated with another totalitarian system – Communism.²⁸ The Ford Foundation's annual report of 1950, referring to a letter to Henry Ford that had been written by René d'Harnoncourt (who was then working as the director of the Museum of Modern Art) mentioned an earlier version of the idea that became *The Family of Man*. The project was described as a “demonstration of this basic concept of a free society”, a “dramatic statement of faith in which our beliefs will be told by means of the faces, actions and achievements of free people from all over the world”.²⁹ The letter itself predicted that the exhibition would have an international impact and would “encourage others to participate in our struggle against thought control and the totalitarian state”.³⁰ The strictly political declarations skewed Steichen's humanistic rhetoric towards a utopian political vision. The views expressed by Turner, who wanted to perceive the exposition in the context of a democratic ideal being implemented in a dynamic exhibition space, curiously corresponded with the opinions of Ariella Azoulay, who saw the exhibition as an example of a “photographic civil contract” as realised in individual acts of perception, i.e. a “visual declaration of human rights”. This may arise from the distinct dialogue between the viewer and the photographed subject, independently of the officially imposed narrative, whose existence and frame-forming nature are now easy to notice.³¹ According to Turner's historical reconstruction, the dynamisation of space in the *Gestalt* spirit was to support political ideals and – declaratively – an individual's progress towards freedom.

26 F. Turner, “‘The Family of Man’ and the Politics...”, pp. 83–84.

27 Especially in reference to Max Horkheimer's views as expressed in the book *Dämmerung. Notizen in Deutschland* (1934) and to Theodor Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950).

28 F. Turner, “‘The Family of Man’ and the Politics...”, op. cit., pp. 55–84.

29 Ford Foundation, *Report of the Trustees of the Ford Foundation*, 27 September, 1950, p. 16, quoted after *ibid.*, p. 74.

30 R. d'Harnoncourt, *Letter to Henry Ford*, unpaginated, René d'Harnoncourt Papers, folder 85, Museum of Modern Art Archives, quoted after F. Turner, op. cit., p. 75.

31 A. Azoulay, op. cit., pp. 19–49.

Dynamic perception also has much significance in Azoulay's approach, yet in a different, more individual aspect. Mieke Bal's concept of an exhibition as a film stands in opposition to Modernism. In this framework, temporariness and motion make the viewers realise their own script that determines later parameters on the basis of which the story may be retold for their personal use. The syntax of an exhibition is affective in nature, owing to the medium of photography which has preserved the idea that art belongs to the realm of empathy.³² The complementary approaches described above may help explain the ambivalence of *The Family of Man*, in which the "disarmament" of political narration could proceed regardless of Steichen's intentions or institutional support. It remained the grounds for ideological annexation; set in an exhibition space, the ideal of individual freedom was realised within the framework of a democratic American utopia; characteristically for Modernist exhibition narratives, it fit into a predetermined model. How, then, did this ambivalent, political-and-non-political exhibition space function in Polish reality?

Reportage photography – and thus the exhibition entitled *The Family of Man* – fit the intellectual and psychological reality of the new stage of "Socialist revolution" that was being implemented in Poland at the time of the political thaw.³³ Although prior to 1959 it was known only through image reprints, the exhibition met the crucial demand posed by the critics of photography: it offered realism – understood both as a visual language and as an attitude towards social reality. What is more, it fulfilled the longing for Western modernity.³⁴ The true strength of Steichen's project, however, lay in the spatial arrangement of the exhibition; it may therefore be stated that Polish audiences became fully familiar with the exhibition only at the end of 1959 and that the earlier views on the exhibition, based on reviews and photographs, were to some extent revised. Urszula Czartoryska's essay exemplifies the shift in emphasis in the reception of the exhibition, i.e. from discussing the model of reportage photography or the qualities of the medium to the issue of displaying photographs. She wrote: "For several decades photographic exhibitions were sent around – yet nowadays they are often designed; for several decades they were a cluster of better and less good photographs – today they are becoming a consistent whole. [...] The model that thus far remains unrivalled is, naturally, *The Family of Man*, whose significance cannot be overestimated".³⁵

32 M. Bal, op. cit., pp. 15–43.

33 P. Juszkiewicz, *Od rozkoszy historiozofii do 'Gry w Nic'. Polska krytyka artystyczna czasu odwilży* [From the delights of historiosophy to 'a game of nothing'. Polish art criticism in the period of political thaw], Poznań, 2005, pp. 70–74.

34 See e.g. J. Bogucki, "Uwagi niefachowe" [Non-professional thoughts], *Fotografia*, 1955, no. 7, pp. 6–7; idem, "O fotografii martwej i żywej" [On photography dead and alive], *Życie Literackie*, 1956, no. 236, p. 11.

35 U. Czartoryska, "Polska w fotografii artystycznej" [Poland in fine-art photography], *Fotografia*, 1960, no. 11, pp. 367–368.

The spatial nature of this exhibition proved very attractive as an artistic solution and set a certain direction in presenting photographs and in the perception of how the display's arrangement influences the artistic and informative aspects of an exhibition. However, the fundamental question that needs to be asked is whether Polish critics and artists chose *The Family of Man* as a model for photographic exhibitions only due to Steichen's vision based on his experience with the Bauhaus or whether this decision was influenced by other, more local factors.

It seems justified to start the analysis of this issue by taking a closer look at the Warsaw edition of *The Family of Man*, whose spatial arrangement was created by Stanisław Zamecznik and Wojciech Fangor, two artists who had cooperated before.³⁶ This is the most thoroughly documented Polish variant of the exhibition, even though no design plans for any of the variants have survived. A section of the exposition's layout was reconstructed from photographs for *Przestrzeń między nami* [The space between us], an exhibition that was devoted to Stanisław Zamecznik and presented at the Warsaw branch of the Association of Polish Architects. The spatial arrangement of *The Family of Man* can therefore be experienced only indirectly, i.e. through photographs. Capturing the spatial effect of the exposition is thus less easy than placing it in a certain intellectual climate, especially since most of the critics wrote about the Warsaw variant.

In order to determine the extent of freedom that was given to Polish designers in arranging the exposition, we need to take a closer look at how the "ready-made" exhibition was actually assembled. *Przekrój* published the following excerpt from an interview with the curator of the exhibition, Adam Kaczkowski:

Sending the exposition over, the Americans wrote [...]: For the exhibition to be set up, ten people should work for ten days. Required materials include two kilos of two-inch nails, two kilos of one-inch nails and two hammers... The exposition weighs 6,500 kg and fits into 28 cabinets. The photographs are large in format and are properly framed. The larger ones weigh 200 kg each!³⁷

A large number of exhibits had the form of panels that were referred to as "photo-murals"; these were photographs (single ones or groups) affixed on wooden or aluminium panels that often had metal elements. The size of such exhibits varied from 9 cm×50 cm to 3 m×3 m.³⁸ The American instructions stated that three people were needed to assemble the exhibition – one

36 In Wrocław the same task was appointed to Jan Chwałczyk and Alina Rogalska (it could not be discovered who was responsible for the exposition in the remaining cities).

37 Anonymous, "Rodzina człowieka (rozmowa z Adamem Kaczkowskim)" [*The Family of Man* (an interview with Adam Kaczkowski)], *Przekrój*, 18 October 1959, no. 758, p. 8.

38 All of the information comes from materials from the Centre National de l'Audiovisuel in Dudelange, *Draft for check list 'The Family of Man'*.

to supervise the order and arrangement of the components and two physical workers. This suggests that the passage cited above presented a rather exaggerated view of the work required. The elements of the exposition, and the smaller photographs and panels, were designed to form a cohesive set that could be assembled and disassembled relatively quickly. What is more, the system was relatively flexible, thus making it possible to have it adjusted to different spaces:

Architectural planning for installation of each specific showing of *The Family of Man* is open to determination by each exhibitor. General gallery layout will depend upon available gallery space, the natural building layout along with possible construction of special partitions (to augment existing walls) as necessary to accommodate the total of 925 running feet required for display of the panels in their original sequence.³⁹

The set included all necessary technical elements; the organisers only had to provide nails of various types, hammers, measuring tapes and levels. If no better solution was available, the panels could also be hung by using nylon ropes, wires or cables. Changes that would influence the order of the panels and photographs could only be introduced to a limited degree – some modification was permitted within the thematic groups (as long as it was necessitated by the specific exhibition environment). It was therefore possible to divide one thematic section in space, for instance with partition walls (this was even advised due to the fact that “uniform” gallery spaces would have a negative effect on the dynamics of the message), as long as this did not disturb the linear sequence and the mutual links between photographs and citations. The ultimate goal was to convey a dramatic cinematic message and a carefully planned rhetorical effect. The people responsible for arranging the exhibition were therefore left with some degree of freedom, but only within a certain ideological framework; this corresponded with the democratic political ideal that was to be actualised in the exhibition space. The Warsaw variant of *The Family of Man* that was prepared by Zamecznik and Fangor bore much resemblance to the original American design (e.g. in its dynamics and diversity of formats and planes of display), yet it was even more innovative at the visual level. The display space was divided more clearly – with the organic-looking, undulating plywood walls that were so distinctive of Zamecznik’s designs. This solution favoured the “exploration of flowing, temporary, unlimited and endless space” and stimulated the viewer’s senses.⁴⁰ Zamecznik’s trademark system transformed the exhibition into an autonomous universe, making it independent of the spatial constraints of the Redutowe Rooms in the National Theatre. The Warsaw variant of this exhibition matched the broader artistic programme of the architect, who, given the limited opportunities for imple-

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ M. Leśniakowska, op. cit., p. 42.

menting avant-garde architectural concepts on a larger scale, created experimental structures in an ephemeral form.⁴¹

In 1959, before the throngs of Polish gallery-goers had the chance to see *The Family of Man* in the Redutowe Rooms of the National Theatre, Oskar Hansen wrote that Open Form “will be a space accordant with our complex and yet unknown psyche. It shall become so because we will exist as organic elements of this art. We will walk within and not around it”.⁴² This manifesto-like statement must be confronted with the dominant avant-garde paradigm in the perception of Polish exhibition art and architecture of the post-war period. The reference to the Open Form theory seems apt not only due to its being synchronous, but also given the fact that in the latter half of the 1950s Hansen collaborated with the designers of the arrangement for *The Family of Man*.⁴³ Zamecznik’s views corresponded to Hansen’s in some aspects, but contrasted in others, as was noted by Marta Leśniakowska in her analysis of the two architects’ approach to ideas propagated by Le Corbusier.⁴⁴ Both Hansen and Zamecznik assumed, however, that the new methods of arranging space influenced both moods and emotions; they considered the issue of the psychology of reception, which was also present in Bayer’s framework and was later developed by Steichen.⁴⁵ Characteristic features of Polish modernity included “immersing” the viewer in a visually attractive space designed to affect the conscious mind while also enabling the individual’s intellectual and emotional growth. “Zamecznik wanted the recipients of new art [...] to believe that the focal point was shifted from the artist to the viewer, who was no longer cast in the traditional role of a passive observer, but became an active subject of art”, wrote Leśniakowska in reference to the cinematic or theatrical effect created by exhibition spaces that had been designed in accordance with the new set of rules.⁴⁶ Obviously, *The Family of Man* – with its predetermined exposition reality – fell on an already familiar ground. However, it became the platform for introducing ideals that were functioning elsewhere into the

41 Ibid.

42 O. Hansen, “Forma Otwarta” [Open Form], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1959, no. 5, p. 5.

43 During the Second National Exhibition of Modern Art in 1957, Zamecznik, Fangor and Hansen cooperated to design a so-called “study in integrated space” at the Zachęta Gallery. The project consisted of a composition of curvilinear polychrome panels hung from the gallery ceiling and on ropes in front of the entrance to the building (a single blue module). The underlying thought was for the panels to unify both the interior and exterior; they were to be a “backdrop accentuating the visitors”, a manifestation of art integrated as the background of life. See O. Hansen, *Ku formie otwartej* [Towards the Open Form], ed. J. Gola, Warsaw, 2005.

44 M. Leśniakowska, op. cit., pp. 42–43.

45 The views of Le Corbusier and his followers differed from those of the Bauhaus school yet they had a number of ideologically similar elements. For more detailed information on the subject, cf. S. Buck-Morss, “The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe”, *October*, 1995, no. 73, p. 15.

46 M. Leśniakowska, op. cit., p. 46.

realm of strictly photographic exhibitions, which was an underdeveloped field at that time.⁴⁷ The exhibition may therefore be considered as a catalyst of the processes of modernisation in that respect.

The views of Hansen, Zamecznik and Bayer (and Steichen as well), which were similar in terms of assumptions, were based on a certain vision of an ideal society and free, creative individuals functioning within it. From the perspective of time, these views also proved similar with regard to the controversies they caused. They are perceived both as “hyper-democratic” and “totalitarian”. As Andrzej Szczerski observed, the difference between the “ideal of creating a social community” and a “system of social control” is vague and difficult to define. Hansen’s ideas followed the postulate of ideationalism that was characteristic of modernity, but also of post-Socialist thought.⁴⁸ Yet exhibition designs, modernist as they were, also appear to have been breaking away from ideological conditioning and becoming critical towards traditional methods of displaying art. Both architects wanted the exposition space to oppose mythologisation and to resist being overtaken by narrative figural concepts, to which *The Family of Man* certainly belonged. At the same time, their project expressed criticism against the political system in Poland; this was more visible in the case of Zamecznik, who disputed it openly.⁴⁹ Could they – paradoxically – have supported the narrative ingrained in other political categories? Given the reality of the People’s Republic of Poland, in which Zamecznik’s and Hansen’s views had developed and the “democratic” nature of the space designed by Steichen, we should perhaps consider the statement made by Grzegorz Kowalski, who thus reminisced about Hansen’s achievements:

As a young artist or, more generally, as a young man, I had practically no perspectives here. If I saw a chance for myself, to, so to speak, leave this camp – for I would not call it a ghetto – I saw it in intellectual development and in certain conceptual structures that would allow me to cultivate internal freedom. Open Form was one such possibility.⁵⁰

Thus, the above views ought to be regarded in a political context, with an emphasis on the fact that the approaches represented by Zamecznik, Hansen

47 One should not, however, forget Stanisław Zamecznik’s designs for earlier photographic exhibitions, such as *Warszawa oskarża* [Warsaw indicts] (1945) or *Pokój zwycięża* [Peace triumphs] (1950), which will be mentioned in a further section of this article.

48 This concept was crucial in Hansen’s views on architecture. “Such ‘ideationalism’ signified the active participation of architecture in the development of a new, egalitarian society of free people, in which individuals, being aware of their own worth, are able to cooperate with collective structures”; A. Szczerski, “Linearny System Ciągły i awangardowa utopia” [The Linear Continuous System and the avant-garde utopia], in: *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja* [On Oskar Hansen’s Open Form. Ideal – utopia – reinterpretation], eds. M. Lachowski, M. Linkowska, Z. Sobczuk, Lublin, 2009, pp. 85, 90.

49 M. Leśniakowska, op. cit., p. 46.

50 “Dyskusja” [Discussion], in: *Wobec Formy Otwartej...*, op. cit., p. 161.

and Steichen (as he was the one who adopted Bayer's strategy, analysed and developed it) were often discussed in the ideological context of socialism (Hansen) or liberalism (Steichen), with "systematism" being the common denominator for both.⁵¹ Their ideas – avant-garde visions of a sociological nature – referred to a certain social ideal and focused on people as active individuals. They functioned at the juncture between the needs of the community and the preferences of the authorities ("a democratic society" and "a democratic personality" in Steichen's framework; "an open society" in Hansen's). Hansen openly admitted that the Linear Continuous System – a large-scale implementation of the Open Form theory – would be realised because it "suited the common interests of the society and the authorities".⁵² Steichen's idea of a democratic utopia, never stated explicitly, but hidden behind slogans of all people worldwide being similar, was indeed actualised in Poland as an anti-systematic space, especially given Zamecznik's views and the ideologically ambiguous nature of Hansen's theory of Open Form. On the other hand, the hidden mechanism of supervising the audience, which was so distinctive of Modernism (developed by Steichen but also by Zamecznik and Fangor), was still present as a factor.⁵³ Perhaps the Warsaw version of *The Family of Man* should be regarded as a factor that reinforced the supervising nature of this exhibition. Even so, the stimulation potential of such an ideological fusion, which was at variance with the official narratives of the People's Republic of Poland, manifested itself in individual reception of the exhibition. This was confirmed by Ryszard Kapuściński:

Roughly at the time when I took my first steps in exploring the world, a memorable and significant event took place. In 1955 an exhibition entitled *The Family of Man* was opened at the New York Museum of Modern Art. [...] The exhibition and the entire philosophy that gave birth to this idea were groundbreaking in significance. It conveyed the message that the 20th century was more than an age of war, barbed wire and camps, destructive totalitarian systems, humiliation and death, but also a century of de-colonisation and democracy, an age which – owing to the effort of millions of people striving towards democracy and the development of global communication – for the first time in history saw the birth of the family of man. I was lucky to witness this period in time and felt the will to become its chronicler.⁵⁴

51 The issue of Hansen's "belief in the system" was analysed, e.g. in a discussion included in: *ibid.*

52 "*Linearny System Ciągły* [The Linear Continuous System], a discussion with Oskar Hansen, Mieczysław Porębski, Aleksander Wallis and Marek Holzman", *Projekt*, 1968, no. 2, p. 37.

53 M. Leśniakowska, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

54 R. Kapuściński, "Dlaczego piszę?" [Why do I write?], *Gazeta Uniwersytecka*, 1997, no. 5, pp. 12–13. Cf. the statements of photographers such as Jerzy Lewczyński, Zbigniew Łagocki and Ryszard Kapuściński. J. Lewczyński, "Zosia...", in: *Zofia Rydet (1911–1997). Fotografie* [Zofia Rydet (1911–1997). Photographs], exhibition catalogue, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Łódź, 1999, pp. 13–18; Z. Tomaszczuk, "O wystawach. Rozmowa

The facts that even these individual voices are rooted in a specific moment in time and that political systems openly appropriated *The Family of Man* for their own purposes remain a separate issue.

“A problem-oriented exhibition”

In her analysis of Steichen’s exhibition, Barbara Morgan coined the term “theme show”, which she defined as a new “photographic genre [...] which fuses science, photography, architecture, layout and writing into a compelling synthesis”.⁵⁵ Morgan’s words prove that the exhibition was carefully “directed”, designed for a large space and intended to achieve an almost total visual effect. These aspects situate it among the so-called “teaching machines”, i.e. propaganda exhibitions whose origins stretch back to the Russian avant-garde.⁵⁶ As has already been mentioned, due to the element of political involvement (which had much to do with the Museum of Modern Art), the exhibition may be perceived as a project related to the Modernist concept of a museum as a “social instrument” reflecting the relations of power in a given place.⁵⁷ The perception of institutional museum exhibitions of photographs in Modernist thought was consolidated by a number of crucial texts of art criticism, most of which were written in the 1980s.⁵⁸ According to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *The Family of Man* was the last in the series of propagandistic Modernist exhibitions that started in the late 1920s with avant-garde exposition projects by El Lissitzky. In the inter-war period, i.e. the golden age of illustrated magazines and reportage photography, El Lissitzky established a “new paradigm of a photographic exhibition” that was based primarily on adding an architectural and spatial aspect to the avant-garde strategy of photo-montage. By engaging their perception and imagination, viewers had to combine the fragments

z prof. Zbigniewem Łagockim” [On exhibitions. A conversation with Prof. Zbigniew Łagocki], *Kwartalnik Fotografia*, 2002, no. 9, pp. 68–70.

55 B. Morgan, “‘The Theme Show’. A Contemporary Exhibition Technique”, *Aperture*, 1955, no. 2, p. 24.

56 Cf. J. Świdziński, “Kategorie wystawiennicze” [Exhibition categories], *Projekt*, 1971, no. 1, p. 46.

57 M. Popczyk, “Sztuka w ryzach ekspozycji” [Art in the restraints of exposition], in: *Przestrzeń sztuki. Obrazy – słowa – komentarze* [The space of art. Images – words – comments], Katowice, 2005, p. 216; D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth’s Body: Museums & the Fabrication of Modernity*, Minneapolis–London, 1999; D. Preziosi, “Modernity Again: The Museum as Trompe L’Oeil”, in: *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, eds. P. Brunette, D. Wills, Cambridge, 1994.

58 B. H. D. Buchloh, “From ‘Faktura’ to Factography”, *October*, 1984, no. 30, pp. 82–119; the text was reprinted in the exhibition catalogue *Public Photographic Spaces. Exhibitions of Propaganda from ‘Pressa’ to ‘The Family of Man’, 1928–55*, eds. J. Ribalta, A. Jiménez Jorquera, Museu d’art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona, 2009, pp. 29–61.

scattered around their field of vision into a visually cohesive and meaningful whole. Thus this strategy relied on methods known from *The Family of Man* and Bayer's projects, i.e. magnifying photographs, combining them with spatial divisions and setting unusual angles to view them.

Lissitzky's new paradigm of a photographic exhibition was most readily adopted in totalitarian regimes. As Buchloh put it, "Thus, what in Lissitzky's hands had been a tool of instruction, political education and the raising of consciousness was rapidly transformed into an instrument for prescribing the silence of conformity and obedience".⁵⁹ Bayer's contribution to the development of monumental propagandistic expositions was also significant. His ideas brought popularity to exhibitions organised by the Third Reich, starting from *Die Kamera* from 1933, which had been modelled after the one in Stuttgart. Bayer designed the catalogue for it,⁶⁰ and its motto was provided by Joseph Goebbels: "[T]he experience of the individual has become the experience of the people, thanks solely to the camera". Analogies found in the already established visual language that was used in projects which differed in terms of ideology prove that in each case the analysis should include the political context and the possible mechanisms of persuasion.

The origins of the exhibition space of *The Family of Man* appear to be very clear; why then did Barbara Morgan find it problematic to define them and felt compelled to introduce a new term – that of "theme show"? One possible explanation comes from Jorge Ribalta, who wrote that after the 2nd World War this exhibition strategy became so popular that until the 1960s and even 1970s designers referred to it almost subconsciously. The combination of artistic and political factors, which was so characteristic of the avant-garde and defined the nature of these projects, was no longer relevant at that time. What is more, the 1940s and 1950s may be perceived as steeped in humanist discourse which created the illusion of a universal harmony that was free from social tensions and political antagonism.⁶¹ Avant-garde propagandistic exhibition projects were therefore cut off from their constructive features and reduced to visual and spatial solutions in which the element of manipulation was still present but hidden or "internalised".

The same set of phenomena could also be observed in Polish exhibition history. What may be regarded as the equivalent of a "theme show" was the term *wystawa problemowa*, i.e. a "problem-oriented exhibition", which was popularised in Polish photography criticism in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As Zbigniew Łagocki explained, "an exhibition of this type encompasses a set of photographs pertaining to a single issue. The exposition ought to be organised

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 54–55.

⁶⁰ J. Ribalta, "Introduction", in: *Public Photographic Spaces...*, op. cit., p. 19. Ribalta notes that this exhibition cannot be labelled avant-garde since it did not include the photo-montage and spatial tricks that are so characteristic of El Lissitzky's designs, but focused on realistic photographs and their monumental scale.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 23.

by one person, appointed by the Artistic Committee and tasked with personally choosing his or her collaborators. The name of this person should be visible in the exhibition space and mentioned in the press materials”.⁶² The above definition clearly suggests that what Łagocki understood under this term was very similar to Steichen’s design, as he acknowledged the significant role of the “director” or “directors” of such an enterprise and the presence of a “supervising” body responsible for the exhibition – in this case the “Artistic Committee”, i.e. a temporarily appointed group of competent individuals. This reveals the “utilitarianism” of problem-oriented exhibitions, the fact that they were subordinate to central planning and, consequently, that the choice of subjects (“issues”) and persons regarded as the most competent for the task was predetermined. Within this framework it is possible to notice the above-mentioned shift that made exhibition models with avant-garde provenance very susceptible to simple persuasive messages.

However, dismissing this phenomenon as a manifestation of propaganda servitude would be an oversimplification, especially given its complex origins. The critics emphasised the apparently modern or even groundbreaking features of such exhibitions (e.g.: “One may get the impression that, at the present moment, only problem-oriented and individual exhibitions with a uniform concept deserve the label of ‘contemporary forms of expression’ in modern photography”⁶³). Such progressive design solutions were expected at exhibitions of avant-garde photography, but also of reportage photography. The former group included many successful Polish projects (arguably the best example was *Pokaz zamknięty* [The closed show] by Zdzisław Beksiński, Jerzy Lewczyński and Bronisław Schlabs that was shown in 1959).⁶⁴ The emergence of problem-oriented exhibitions was the result of the need to reformulate the concept of photographic expositions and to change the understanding of photography as such, i.e. to include the aspect of how this type of art influences the viewer; an avant-garde premise which states that photography not only records but also offers explanations. As has been put by Łagocki:

In the light of the changes taking place in contemporary society, both in terms of culture and civilisation, it is obvious that one has to have something to say with one’s photographs. Authors will be judged for the message they want to convey and not for whether the photograph is rich in half-tones. It appears to me that this is what we have forgotten, lost in the dead-ends of superficial aesthetic thoughts pressed under the glass on photographic images.⁶⁵

The exposition design of *The Family of Man* was political in its origin, but it was also perceived as apolitical and relied on monumental photo-montages

62 Z. Łagocki, “Nowoczesność – problem stale aktualny (uwagi o wystawach)” [Modernity – a constantly relevant problem (remarks on exhibitions)], *Fotografia*, 1960, no. 3, p. 76.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

– a solution that was original to this formula. It became a phenomenon that complemented the Modernist vision of the medium in the Polish photography milieu.

The trust in the progressive nature of photography and its ability to keep up with civilisational changes, coupled with the belief in the Socialist system (which was reinforced by official rhetoric), were distinctive features of the ideological background of many Modernist projects in Poland. It is therefore not surprising that Łagocki, who had started as a photojournalist but, as a long-time member of the Association of Polish Art Photographers, was counted among the photographer artists of the post-war period, expressed a certain degree of longing for both avant-garde solutions (exposition design, mentioning formal methods used by avant-garde photographers; their photographic “sets”) and realistic reportage photography, also understood as a civil task. Łagocki was interested in avant-garde practices and, by perceiving photography as an art, he fits the paradigm of humanist photography which involves not only a number of characteristic formal solutions but also the belief that the medium can become an instrument of community-oriented social changes. One significant element in this context is that Łagocki associated this modern formula of arranging photographs into “sets” (which he almost equated with the label of “problem-oriented” exhibition) with both “ordinary” and “fine-art” photographers, i.e. with various approaches and methods. Thus the model was portrayed as a recipe for progress in photography as a whole, regardless of individual formulas. Such a perception of the medium may uncover unusual consequences, i.e. if we take into account Łagocki’s contribution to his organising the exhibition *Fotografowie poszukujący* [The seeking photographers] that was presented at the Galeria Współczesna in Warsaw in 1971. The exposition, which Łagocki prepared in cooperation with Zbigniew Dłubak, proved significant to the early development of photographic conceptualism.⁶⁶

A different view on “problem-oriented exhibitions” was expressed by Urszula Czartoryska, who saw *The Family of Man* as the “unrivalled model” for such expositions. She perceived them primarily as being educational and informative in character, although she recognised their connection with the development of exhibition art as such.⁶⁷ Czartoryska stated her views in an article that focused on one of the first Polish “problem-oriented exhibitions”, namely *Polska w fotografii artystycznej* [Poland in fine-art photography], which opened in 1960 at the Warsaw University of Technology and was organised by the Association of Polish Art Photographers. The exposition, designed by Henryk Lisowski, presented various aspects of community life in Poland. As with *The Family of Man*, the photographic materials (which mainly fit the genre of reportage) were divided into sections focusing on, for instance, industry, art,

⁶⁶ See J. Bogucki, “Fotografowie poszukujący” [The seeking photographers], *Projekt*, 1971, no. 4, p. 47.

⁶⁷ U. Czartoryska, “Polska w fotografii artystycznej”, op. cit., p. 367.

human life, children or landscapes. Sequences of photographs were arranged spatially into geometrically divided panels, which reinforced the connections between the images. Another interesting aspect is the set of examples to which Czartoryska compared this exhibition. Apart from *The Family of Man* she also listed the 2nd Bifota exhibition of photography in Berlin (organised under the motto *Socialism triumphs*), the Moscow exhibition entitled *Semiletka v deystvii*, and two Polish projects: *Ochrona przyrody w Polsce* [Nature conservation in Poland] and *Fotografia w służbie nauki i techniki* [Photography serving science and technology].⁶⁸ It is therefore difficult to shake off the impression that the context presented by Czartoryska clearly indicates the propagandistic nature of this exhibition formula.

This impression is further reinforced by a cursory look at the subject matter tackled in the official photographic exhibitions and albums at that time. The issue of the achievements of the state and the development of the People's Republic of Poland was addressed cyclically (e.g. on the 20th and 30th anniversary of its proclamation), as were progressive changes in specific cities (especially in Warsaw, which was being rebuilt from its ruins). Very often the exhibitions referred to Buřhak's concept of native photography. One example of the propagandistic aspect of problem-oriented exhibitions may be found in the project entitled *Poland through art photography* that was conducted by the Association of Polish Art Photographers (Związek Polskich Artystów Fotografików, ZPAF) in 1961 and presented in India. The exhibition was largely based on that reviewed by Czartoryska, as evidenced, for example, by the characteristic division into twelve sections arranged in a fixed order: wartime damage, reconstruction, children, culture, historical monuments, agriculture, sport, transport, landscape, folklore, tourism and industry. Each group of images was accompanied by a short description conveying a typical propagandistic message, for instance:

The Polish people stand firm in the defence of world peace. We have suffered the horrors of too many wars and know only too well the heart-breaking efforts of rebuilding our devastated country to do otherwise. We want lasting peace – for ourselves, for all mankind, for the whole world. We are ready to support any concept that promises better mutual understanding, mutual respect and international security. We stand shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet Union and all peace-loving countries.⁶⁹

On the other hand, the exhibition catalogue featured not only typically Socialist-realist images (such as *Pracownicy budowlani* [Construction workers] by Tadeusz Link), but also ones that were Pictorialist in their aesthetics (such as *Widok Wisły* [View of the Vistula] by Feliks Zwierzchowski), as well as photographs that were representative of “artistic reportage” (images of children by Paweł Mystkowski; a documentary photograph of Gdańsk

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 368.

⁶⁹ *Poland through Art Photography*, Warsaw, 1961, p. 14.

in ruins; images of religious processions; crowds gathered on the streets in October 1956). The ambitions and hopes expressed in Czartoryska's review become specific:

The Association of Polish Art Photographers has achieved a significant goal; it has proved that problem-oriented exhibitions ought to be organised, that they fulfil their role. It has also gained valuable experience for the future. Time will tell whether this interesting subject might be taken up again; whether we will live to see our own 'Little Family of Poles'.⁷⁰

Thus the innovative spatial design, both in terms of form and in content testifying to Modernist aspirations, was clearly interwoven with the objectives of the ruling party's propaganda. Czartoryska's text, which should perhaps be read "between the lines", appears to signal this duality, the union of modernity (and the wish to "humanise" and "socialise" the message) and the political reality in which such aspirations arose. This ambivalent situation is further emphasised by the fact that avant-garde exhibition designs had appeared in Poland long before Steichen's project. Innovative designs by Stanisław Zamecznik were presented to the public even in the period of Socialist Realism. These included the well-documented exposition for *Pokój zwycięża*, which was on show at the National Museum in Warsaw in late 1949 and early 1950.⁷¹ Danuta Jackiewicz, who reconstructed the exhibition for research purposes, wrote of a hall filled with "large-sized panels of glass framed in white or red", where "most photographs were hung [...] on transparent screens that seemed suspended in air, while the rest were placed traditionally on the walls".⁷² The exposition space also featured state emblems and political symbols, a portrait of Joseph Stalin, red draperies and banners with various slogans (e.g. "Long live Joseph Stalin, the leader of the international faction of defenders of the peace").⁷³ The exhibition surprised the critics with its avant-garde nature, yet its form, which emphasised the suggestiveness of the message, was uniformly appreciated: "[T]he input our working world brings into the struggle for peace draws a red line across the entire exhibition".⁷⁴ The "red line" binding elements of the design together resembles another avant-garde solution, one known, for example, from *Wystawa Mebli, Ceramiki i Tkanin* [An exhibition of furniture,

⁷⁰ U. Czartoryska, "Polska w fotografii artystycznej", op. cit., p. 370.

⁷¹ D. Jackiewicz, "U progu socrealizmu. Wystawa fotografii artystycznej 'Pokój zwycięża' w Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie w grudniu 1949 roku" [At the threshold of Socialist Realism. The exhibition of fine-art photography "Peace triumphs" presented at the National Museum in Warsaw in December 1949], in: *Socrealizm. Fabuły – komunikaty – ikony* [Socialist Realism. Narratives – messages – icons], eds. K. Stępnik, M. Piechota, Lublin, 2006, p. 506.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ R. Glinka, "Obiektyw w służbie pokoju" [The camera lens in the service of peace], *Związkowiec*, 1 January 1950, unpaginated.

ceramics and fabrics] in the Redutowe Rooms of the National Theatre (1957), in which a spatial form, usually a cornice ("beam") constitutes the basic constructional element.⁷⁵ Significantly, the subject matter presented at the 1950 exhibition, which was divided into three sections with problem-oriented titles (*No more war, Rebuilding from ruins, Peaceful work*), closely resembles the later arrangement of *Poland through art photography*. The latter was more diverse and lacked such blatantly political overtones, but both exhibitions indubitably shared the same scope of issues and had a similar propagandistic objective.

Modern models of exhibition design were used in Poland during a period when the influence of the Communist ideology was at its strongest. However, with each successive project the avant-garde origins of exposition designs – of which the architects were certainly aware – became increasingly less clear to the viewers. The models were perceived not as being strictly avant-garde, but as typical of the modernised language of visual communication, which, in turn, included the element of ideology, especially in reference to the public domain. The progressive form came to be identified with propaganda, but it did not evoke uniformly negative connotations.⁷⁶ This fact contributed to the dualistic reception of Steichen's exhibition, which was, on the one hand, perceived in the context of propagandistic projects and, on the other, as a work of art beyond the framework of persuasive messages.

In Poland, the pro-democratic (or anti-totalitarian) stance expressed by the creators of *The Family of Man* was felt, if not analysed in detail (one must not forget the "official" nature of such analyses). Similar concepts realised by Stanisław Zamecznik and Oskar Hansen, who also aspired to a certain social ideal, suggest that the artistic milieu was aware of the democratic aspects of Steichen's model. The combination of "democratising practices" (in the language of photographic images and the strategy of spatial arrangement) as presented in *The Family of Man* determined the Polish reception of the exhibition. This may, in my estimation, explain the popularity that *The Family of Man* enjoyed with Polish audiences and the significance it held for many authors, Ryszard Kapuściński among them. Fleeting post-thaw fads for Western novelties aside, it was now possible to forego official ideological discourse by constructing one's individual, "independent" story – even if this could only be done within the framework of a Modernist, "paternalistic" narration. Seen from the perspective of its reception, especially in countries with a political status similar to Poland's, *The Family of Man* appears to be the space for realising an artistic and social utopia and for stimulating the virtual needs of individuals. Visitors coming to see it at the National Theatre in Warsaw, the Palace of Fine Arts in Cracow or the Miners' House in Wałbrzych entered a space that was alternative to reality, but focused around fundamental issues. On the other hand, this seemingly autonomous reality was subjected to constant attempts

75 O. Hansen, *Ku formie otwartej*, op. cit., p. 189.

76 See J. Świdziński, op. cit., p. 46.

at ideological appropriation (both immanent, resulting from Steichen's "structured" narrative, and external, i.e. in the form of comments made by the authorities, as seen on the example of "problem-oriented" exhibitions). Both mechanisms functioned simultaneously, which suggests that, depending on very diverse contextual and subject-related factors, throughout the decades *The Family of Man* was perceived both in positive terms as a catalyst of the views on reality and in negative terms as an ideological manifesto. The metaphor comparing the exhibition to a film seems very apt in this context, since Steichen was very deliberate in his use of montage – a means that is cinematic, attractive and strictly related to the medium of photography. It is montage that allows the designer to control the narrative, but also makes it possible for viewers to deconstruct it in their individual perceptions and to shape alternative stories. In this sense, the exhibition triggers minor social processes and truly becomes the field of operation of a "photographic social contract".⁷⁷ The case of *The Family of Man* proves that one should not be hasty in categorising exhibition phenomena and draws attention to the anthropological aspect of space – which is, in fact, the backdrop of communication.

(Translated by Julita Mastalerz)

Abstract

The exhibition entitled *The Family of Man*, which was designed by Edward Steichen and presented for the first time in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, belongs to the most famous and most controversial photographic expositions of the 20th century. Usually perceived in the light of the anachronistic, West-centric vision of humanism, i.e. as an embodiment of Modernist views on photography, it constitutes a good example of the museum's influence as a Modernist "social instrument". However, contemporary theories in exhibition studies offer a more complex interpretation. The present work provides insight into this process by referring to the views of Mieke Bal (on the "cinematic effect" of photographic exhibitions, the narrative and relational aspect of expositions), Fred Turner (on the space of an avant-garde exhibition as the realisation of the political and social idea of a "democratic personality") and Ariella Azoulay (on exhibition space as a "visual declaration of human rights" and the field for a "photographic social contract"). The primary aim of the present article is to set *The Family of Man* within the framework of Polish exhibition practices. The complex origins of the American project can be traced back to avant-garde experiments with exhibition space conducted in the Bauhaus movement and in Soviet Constructivism (the psychology of perception, "photo-murals"); the analysis focuses on the political and propagandistic aspects. An analysis of the above issues provides the starting point for considering the significance and probable reception of the exhibition's spatial arrangement in the milieu of Polish architects and designers as well as its Polish variant as prepared by Stanisław Zamecznik and Wojciech Fangor. It was therefore useful to refer to Oskar Hansen and his theory of Open Form, as he cooperated with Zamecznik

77 A. Azoulay, op. cit., pp. 19–49.

and Fangor at the time. Models of avant-garde and Modernist “utopian thinking” are juxtaposed, thus making it possible to perceive the process of reception in the light of its effectiveness. The article also discusses *The Family of Man* as a model for projects with propaganda undertones, i.e. the so-called “problem-oriented exhibitions”. It mentions attempts at adapting Steichen’s design of exhibition space to the needs of the official narrative in the People’s Republic of Poland. Finally, it uncovers the ambivalent nature of the influence of *The Family of Man* and the dual status of the exhibition as both a propagandistic project and as an anti-systemic space supporting the ideal of a creative, free individual.

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The Transition to Art: Poster Exhibitions at the Outset of the Poster's Institutionalisation

After the opening of the First International Poster Biennial which was organised in June of 1966 at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA), one of the critics claimed:

The poster is a relatively fresh area of art; it is almost within our times that it has passed from being a purely utilitarian medium to a domain of art. Not wholly, of course; but everywhere in the world the number of posters of first-rate artistic quality, produced not by artisan experts of advertising but by talented artists, is increasing. While becoming a work of art the poster did not shed its original function: to advertise or to announce; its aesthetic qualities do not banish information, which results in the fact that a poster exhibition is also, to a greater degree than is the case with other art exhibitions, an overview of daily life in our civilisation.¹

What happened when the poster – originally an advertising medium – became an object of appreciation in museums? What criteria did it have to comply with in order to be acceptable on the walls of a temple of art? Did it necessarily have to give up its utilitarian function, its mass and reproducible character – or perhaps, on the contrary, the criteria of its originality² and rarity³ were not indispensable? And, finally, who had the power to give it the status of “high art”?⁴

1 (NIL), “Biennale Plakatu ‘66” [Poster Biennial ‘66], *Zwierciadło*, 26 June 1966, no. 26.

2 Melot defines the concept of originality as consisting of two parts: uniqueness and authenticity, M. Melot, “La notion d’originalité et son importance dans la définition des objets d’art”, in: *Sociologie de l’art*, ed. R. Moulin, Paris, 1999 [1986], p. 192.

3 Cf. R. Moulin, “La genèse de la rareté artistique”, in: idem, *De la valeur de l’art*, Paris, 1995, pp. 161–191; “L’un et le multiple, le contrôle de la rareté artistique”, in: *Sociologie de l’art*, eds. A. Blanc, R. Moulin, Proceedings from the international symposium in Marseille, 13–14 June 1985, Paris, 1986.

4 I am borrowing the terminology from K. Varnedoe, A. Gopnik, *High&Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 7 October 1990 – 15 January 1991, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990. The denominations

The First International Poster Biennial organised at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in 1966, and the creation, two years later, of the Poster Museum in Wilanów (as a department of the National Museum in Warsaw) were two key moments of the institutionalisation of this medium.⁵ This article attempts to analyse poster exhibitions held in the 1950s, i.e. in the period preceding the two events which are of major importance in the process of the poster's institutionalisation. During this period the interest of museum curators in this medium must be envisioned as always being underpinned by political and propagandist interests, and it is in this double perspective, i.e. cultural and political, that the transition of the poster to the status of a work of art will be analysed here.

A democratic art museum

The position of poster art after the 2nd World War was conditioned, as every part of the cultural and social life in Poland at that time was, by the country's new political situation. The Soviet government that had been implanted in Poland brought a new order and a strange culture to be imposed on the local customs. But the status of art was complicated by the similarities which existed between Communist ideals of the democratisation of art and the forward-thinking tendencies towards a more autonomous art which were widespread among Polish artists of the 1930s.⁶ From then on, the challenge lay in how to elaborate on the definition of art so that it would meet the new social and political demands. One particular function of the "new art" was to become a sort of education tool for the "aesthetically illiterate"⁷ public. Therefore, an everyday environment possessing a high artistic level needed to be created, with the roads, factories, social and educational centres and interiors of homes taking part in an awakening of the citizens' artistic sense. Art exhibitions were

of "major" and "minor" arts, as those used in the rest of this article, will serve to distinguish between the different artistic genres according to a traditional hierarchy, with painting, sculpture or architecture on the one hand and graphic arts, poster art, caricatures or illustrations on the other.

5 On the International Poster Biennial in Warsaw, cf. K. Matul, *Jak to było możliwe? O powstawaniu Międzynarodowego Biennale Plakatu* [How was it possible? The origins of the International Poster Biennial in Warsaw], Cracow, 2015.

6 Cf. W. Baraniewski, "Wobec realizmu socjalistycznego" [Facing Socialist Realism], in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki*, Warszawa, listopad 1984 [Proceedings from the Session of the Association of Polish Art Historians, Warsaw, November 1984], Warsaw, 1987, p. 179; *Sztuka wszędzie. Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 1904–1944* [Art everywhere. The Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, 1904–1944], eds. J. Gola, M. Sitkowska, A. Szewczyk, Warsaw, 2012.

7 Cf. S. Teisseyre, "Rola i zadania sztuk plastycznych" [The role and aims of fine arts], *Odrodzenie*, 29 April 1945, no. 22.

also supposed to express the new view of this democratic art – an art created mainly for the working classes – and therefore participated in the overthrowing of the traditional artistic hierarchy that was deemed characteristic of a capitalist system. The “minor” arts were placed at the same level as the “major” ones, all having to equally contribute to the citizens’ visual education. In this context it was necessary to rethink the role of the art museum as a part of the new political reality. During the interwar period the museum had been aimed at the elite; now, in Communist Poland, it had to open its doors to the masses. In 1945, in the journal *Kuźnica*, Kazimierz Majewski reviewed this new role of museums:

At this point we are concerned with just one issue: the usefulness of museums in pre-September Poland. Here, regrettably, one thing must be admitted: this usefulness was limited as to both quality and quantity. Before 1939, Polish museums, with a few exceptions, were elitist in character, as was in keeping with the then-current socio-political system of our state. So what are museums supposed to be like in this new, democratic Poland? [...] There are those who think that museums are to be a locus of aesthetic experiences (art museums) or to provide an impulse for cognitive effort (historical, archaeological or ethnographic museums); but there are also those who claim that museums are [...] to be a basic visual handbook for the broad masses.⁸

The need for culture to be socially useful within the new political context made the poster one of the privileged mediums for an exhibition. By its nature, a poster conveyed an idea, it spoke directly to the recipients, and it was suitable for mass production; all these traits made it a perfect medium for propaganda and for “education of the masses”. In addition, poster designers, increasingly more often referred to as the “Polish School of Poster”, were gaining increasing recognition worldwide, which encouraged the critics to enthusiastically impose the status of a work of art on the poster. These two factors, i.e. political and artistic, proved essential in the institutionalisation process of this medium in Poland. During the period of Socialist Realism, which had begun in Poland in 1949, the attributes of a poster (i.e. the intelligibility of its artistic language, the use of commonly understood metaphors, and its ability to elicit a desired response from the viewer) proved to be so important to the ideologists of the doctrine that they were afterwards applied to all disciplines of art.⁹

Thus the first exhibitions to be organised after the reopening of the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions were conceived to demonstrate the reversal in the traditional hierarchy of art with its order that was evidently characterised by the superiority of painting or sculpture. The following areas were

8 K. Majewski, “Muzea w nowej Polsce” [Museums in the new Poland], *Kuźnica*, 2 December 1945, no. 14, p. 5.

9 M. Sitkowska, “Plakatowa sztuka socrealizmu” [Poster art in Socialist Realism], in: *Oblicza socrealizmu* [Aspects of Socialist Realism], eds. M. Sitkowska, A. Zacharska, Warsaw, 1987, p. 19.

presented: caricature (*Radziecka karykatura polityczna w walce o pokój* [Russian political caricature in the struggle for peace], 23 July – 10 August 1951); books and illustrations (Ogólnopolska wystawa książki i ilustracji [National exhibition of books and illustrations], 25 September – 10 October 1951), and interior design and decorative art (I Ogólnopolska wystawa architektury wnętrz i sztuki dekoracyjnej [First national exhibition of interior design and decorative art], 26 May – 23 July 1952). Yet during exhibitions presenting these different artistic genres, categorisation of the genres followed the “painting, sculpture and graphic arts” pattern; cases in point are the very first exhibition, *Plastycy w walce o pokój* ([Artists in the struggle for peace], 18 September 1950 – 15 January 1951) or the three national exhibitions of fine arts (I, II, III Ogólnopolska wystawa plastyki) that were held in 1950, 1951 and 1952, which are major events in the history of Socialist Realism in Poland. Being a part of the last genre, the poster was therefore treated as minor and the creators of posters were featured only to a limited extent. In addition, they did not exhibit posters, but other types of artworks: oil paintings on canvas, drawings, gouaches¹⁰ or watercolours.¹¹

Feeling that poster art was being neglected not only by political leaders, but also by members of the art world, the Ministry of Art and Culture organised a debate entitled “The Contemporary Polish Poster”. It was held at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions on 1 December 1951 and attended by poster designers, critics and political leaders, including Włodzimierz Sokorski. The debate was the first major meeting to be dedicated to the poster since the implementation of Socialist Realism. Ignacy Witz, a poster designer, art critic, teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts and director of the Department of Graphic Art Editions (Departament Wydawnictw Artystyczno-Graficznych, DWAG),¹² opened the meeting with the assertion that since the establishment of Socialist Realism, the poster had been “neglected by the critics, by the artists, and by the Party”.¹³

10 At the First National Exhibition of Fine Arts Wojciech Fangor presented two oil paintings on canvas and Jan Lenica presented two gouaches, cf. exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, March – April 1950, pp. 25, 59.

11 At the Second National Exhibition of Fine Arts Eryk Lipiński presented seven watercolours; cf. exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, December 1951 – February 1952, p. 49.

12 The Department of Graphic Art Editions (Departament Wydawnictw Artystyczno-Graficznych, DWAG), which would soon be renamed Graphics and Art Publishing House (Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne, WAG).

13 The typescript of the speech given by Ignacy Witz during the “Polski plakat współczesny” [The contemporary Polish poster] debate that was organised at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions by the Ministry of Art and Culture and by the Association of Polish Artists, 1 December 1951, Poznań, documentation from the Poster and Design Gallery, National Museum in Poznań (documentation filed by Szymon Bojko), pp. 1, 2. The text contains many corrections, crossed-out sections and marks which were most probably made by another person.

Thus far, not a single conference referring to poster art, not a single exhibition of posters has been organised in Poland, even though such exhibitions of Polish posters have been organised in many countries, both bourgeois ones and those of popular democracy [phrase amended to *ludowy*, i.e. 'people's' (countries)]. The poster has not been written about, the creators of posters have not been given aid in the form of sympathetic Party criticism, the tortuous paths taken by some artists have not been straightened.¹⁴

The meeting was thus intended to give the political leaders, critics and art historians a chance to catch up on the backlog they had created by marginalising the poster. Witz claimed equal importance for this medium as compared to other artistic genres in terms of art criticism, as well as in terms of historiography and museology.

In this context the First National Poster Exhibition [Pierwsza ogólnopolska wystawa plakatu], which was the first important presentation of the Polish poster to be held after 1945 and was organised at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in June 1953, was supposed to contribute to establishing the assumptions postulated by Witz.¹⁵ The exhibition was preceded by two debates organised at the Artistic Council meeting of the Graphics and Art Publishing House (Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne, WAG), which, as is revealed in a confidential note written in July 1953 and addressed to the Department for Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, "ended with [the participants'] arriving at an essentially identical view of the ideological and artistic value of the poster".¹⁶ Just as the National Exhibitions of Fine Arts [Ogólnopolskie wystawy plastyki], the First National Poster Exhibition was supposed to be an update on the production of posters since the implementation of the Communist system, and especially on the criteria of Socialist Realism as regarding the medium of the poster.

Yet these artistic criteria were not easy to specify. Socialist Realism was introduced in the 1930s¹⁷ in reference to literature and had never been defined as a true artistic movement or as an art theory.¹⁸ Its ideological and political dimension thrust upon art the imperative of fulfilling the mission of spreading propaganda and education, but the aesthetic guidelines remained very general. The idea of "art that would be Socialist in content and national in

14 Ibid., pp. 3, 4.

15 The organisational committee of the exhibition included Tadeusz Gronowski, Eryk Lipiński, Józef Mroszczak, Tadeusz Trepkowski, Roman Artymowski and Armand Vetulani.

16 A confidential information note, Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archives of Modern Records], Warsaw, Group: Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Department for Agitation and Propaganda, 1953, 237/VIII/61, p. 3.

17 The term "Socialist Realism" was introduced in the Soviet Union in 1932.

18 A. Baudin, *Les Arts plastiques et leurs institutions. Le réalisme socialiste soviétique de la période jdanovienne (1947–1953)*, Bern, 1997, p. 1.

form”, launched by Stalin in 1925, was to translate into iconography that was related to current events in the country, especially those representative of political leaders and “Socialist men”: workers, peasants, miners.¹⁹ Polish posters were supposed to imitate the “realistic” style of Soviet ones²⁰ and, above all, to avoid the pitfalls of “Formalism” and “Naturalism” – two keywords of this doctrine that often led to confusion.²¹ But the period of an unconditional obligation to create art in the “Soviet style” lasted only until the debate at the Council of State in October 1951.²² In fact, the implementation of Socialist Realism resulted in artistic uniformity of art and in its increasingly mediocre quality, often referred to as “schematism”.²³ Additionally, a conflict arose at the Academy of Fine Arts, where even artists faithful to the Communist party openly criticised Socialist Realism.²⁴ The political leaders quickly realised what the problem was and acted swiftly. They decided to reject the “Muscovite” faction, which consisted of such poster artists as Włodzimierz Zakrzewski, Lucjan Jagodziński or Hanna and Juliusz Krajewski, who advocated Socialist

19 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socialist Realism. Polish art in the years 1950–1954], Paris, 1986; A. Baudin, op. cit. ; J. Studzińska, *Socrealizm w malarstwie polskim* [Socialist Realism in Polish Painting], Warsaw, 2014.

20 D. King, *Revolutionary Posters. From Civil War to Socialist Realism. From Bolshevism to the End of Stalinism*, London, 2012; V. E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power. Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1997.

21 “Stalinist aestheticians defined Formalism and Naturalism as phenomena which, from the point of view of the doctrine, were negative; as two distinct variants of anti-realistic deformation. The naturalistic deformation (the ‘naked Naturalism’) was assumed to rely on excessive [...] attention to registering unimportant details, on the ‘vulgar’ copying of reality without interpreting it ideologically. The formalistic deformation, in turn, relied on the forced separation of form from the contents, on making the form absolute and subjective. The semantic field of the primary category of ‘Formalism’ included the following terms, which sometimes were treated as synonymous with it: aestheticism, decadence, art for art’s sake, experimentalism, vagueness, cosmopolitanism etc.”, G. Wołowiec, “Formalizm–naturalizm” [Formalism–Naturalism], in: *Słownik realizmu socjalistycznego* [Dictionary of Socialist Realism], eds. Z. Łapiński, W. Tomasiak, Cracow, 2004, p. 70.

22 On the premature end of Socialist Realism in the field of poster art (as compared to painting), see Z. Schubert, “Plakat” [The poster], in: *Odwilż, sztuka ok. 1956 r.* [The thaw. Art circa 1956], ed. P. Piotrowski, Poznań, 1996, pp. 121–128; A. Turowski : “‘L’école polonaise de l’affiche’ en question”, in: *L’affiche polonaise de 1945 à 2004. Des slogans et des signes*, eds. J.-C. Famulicki, M. Kurpiak, Paris, 2005.

23 “The term ‘formal schematism’ was used in Stalinist criticism to denote works of art which made use of too conventional means of expression or which featured too optimistic or, conversely, too pessimistic scenes devoid of individual expression. The ‘schematism of contents’, in turn, revealed itself in a too superficial approach to ideological contents and in the absence of an authentic ideological message”; G. Wołowiec, “Schematyzm” [Schematism], in: *Słownik realizmu...*, op. cit., pp. 311–312.

24 W. Włodarczyk, *Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie w latach 1944–2004: 100 lat Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie* [The Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in the years 1944–2004: one hundred years of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw], Warsaw, 2005.

Realism in its Soviet version, while giving tacit support to the trend in poster art represented by the “Formalist” faction, represented by Henryk Tomaszewski, Tadeusz Trepkowski, Wojciech Fangor and others.²⁵

Thus, compromising on the dogmatic (that is, Soviet) version of Socialist Realism proved beneficial to the political leaders. No longer forced to use graphic models that were foreign to their culture and artistic traditions, poster artists began striving to produce high-quality works that would nevertheless remain consistent with the Communist ideology. The artists of the “Formalist” faction were aware as to what kind of posters would be found acceptable. Wojciech Fangor mentioned in an interview that “the social and political posters had to be more understandable and concrete, and could not have many metaphors”. When asked if that was what the patrons demanded, Fangor replied: “Obviously. But we knew we had to create [posters] that way. I was a part of the Graphics and Art Publishing House and the Central Film Rental Agency (Centrala Wynajmu Filmów). The submitted posters, be they political, social or focused on safety at work, were made so that the people at the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party would not criticise them”.²⁶ At the same time the poster artists from the “Formalist” faction claimed an individual, subjective and artistic form that was unique to each artist, and this quasi-liberty of expression was the main issue during the debates organised in the 1950s.

Therefore, the First National Poster Exhibition [Pierwsza ogólnopolska wystawa plakatu] confirmed the ongoing changes, even though it was meant to present the best posters of Socialist Realism. The “Muscovite” faction was progressively losing its influence and, in parallel, the “Formalist” faction gained the trust of the political leaders. The “aesthetic” criteria proved to be important enough for the exhibition’s jury that the first prizes were awarded to poster designers who were often accused of having the “Formalist” approach: Henryk Tomaszewski, Tadeusz Trepkowski and Wojciech Fangor.²⁷ The second and third prizes were shared between the representatives of the “Formalist” and “Muscovite” factions: the second prize was awarded to Józef Mroszczak, Włodzimierz Zakrzewski and Tadeusz Gronowski, and the third prize to Lucjan Jagodziński, Eryk Lipiński, Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Tarasin.²⁸ Even

25 The adjectives “Muscovite” and “Formalist” are not used in contemporary historiography. The faction herein called “Muscovite” is sometimes called the “Krajewcy group” in the historiography. The name “Formalist” held a negative connotation, which is here erased by means of the quotation marks.

26 *Jak ktoś mógł na to pozwolić! Z twórcami polskiej szkoły grafiki rozmawia Janusz Górski* [How could someone have allowed that! The creators of the Polish school of graphic art in an interview with Janusz Górski], Gdańsk, 2011, p. 24.

27 The composition of the jury was not presented in detail in the exhibition catalogue.

28 Distinctions were awarded to Witold Chmielewski, Barbara Dutkowska, Wiktor Górka, Jerzy Karolak, Zbigniew Lengren, Jan Lenica and Olga Siemaszkowa, Ignacy Witz and Wojciech Zamecznik.



Fig. 1. Henryk Tomaszewski, *Ditta* (a poster for *Ditte menneskebarn*, Denmark, directed by Bjarne Genning Jensen, 1946), offset, 98 cm × 68 cm, 1952



Fig. 2. Henryk Tomaszewski, *Rewizor* (a poster for *Pewzop*, Soviet Union, directed by Vladimir Petrov, 1952), offset, 86 cm × 61 cm, 1953

though mainly the less experimental posters were awarded, their divergence from the current criteria of Socialist Realism, and the fact that they were influenced by Western art, were obvious.²⁹ This was demonstrated not only by the

²⁹ The first prizes were awarded to the following posters: Henryk Tomaszewski *Dla nich budujemy nowe szczęśliwe życie* [For them we are building a new and happy life] (1951), 22 lipca [22 July] (1951), *Ditta* (a poster for *Ditte menneskebarn*, Denmark, directed by Bjarne Genning Jensen, 1946), *Pod niebem Sycylii* [Under the Sicilian sky] (a poster for *In nome della legge*, Italy, directed by Pietro Germi, 1949) and *Rewizor* [The Inspector-General] (a poster for *Pewzop*, Soviet Union, directed by Vladimir Petrov, 1952); Tadeusz Trepkowski: *Nie* [No], *Chwała wyzwolicielom* [Glory to the liberators], *Warszawa* [Warsaw], *Dusze czarnych* [The souls of negroes] (a poster for *Hallelujah!*, USA, directed by King Vidor, 1929); Wojciech Fangor: *IV Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów* [The Fourth World Festival of Youth and Students] (produced with the aid of Jerzy Tchórzewski), *Strzeż tajemnicy wojskowej* [Keep military secrets], *Mury Malapagi* [The walls of Malapaga] (a poster for *Au-delà des grilles/Le mura di Malapaga*, France/Italy, directed by René Clément, 1949), and *Na dnie* [At the bottom] (a poster for *Donzoko (The Lower Depths)*, Japan, directed by Akira Kurosawa, 1957). In addition to the prizes for posters on display, four poster designers were specially distinguished for national awards: Tadeusz Gronowski received the Knight's Cross of the Polonia Restituta Order and Tadeusz Trepkowski received the Golden Cross of Merit – both granted by the Council of State.



Fig. 3. Henryk Tomaszewski, *Dla nich budujemy szczęśliwe życie*. *Dni Oświaty, Książki i Prasy, maj 1951* [For them we are building a happy life. Education, Books and Press Fair, May 1951], offset, 99 cm × 67 cm, 1951

culture-related posters, such as *Ditta* for the Danish film *Ditte menneskebarn*, or *Rewizor* [The Inspector-General] for the Soviet film *Ревизор* (Figs. 1–2), but also by propagandist works, such as Henryk Tomaszewski's *Dla nich budujemy szczęśliwe życie* [For them we are building a happy life], which received the first prize (Fig. 3). The tension which is evident in this poster – between representation and expression on the one hand and between the objective and subjective on the other – is similar to the tension which emanates from Surrealist art (Fig. 4). The representation is figurative (and therefore realistic in the meaning of the doctrine), but its realism is ruptured by the motif of the dove of peace, which is a visual materialisation of one of the girls' thoughts or dreams of happiness. Although recognised as a perfect example of Socialist Realism, this image is thus subtly subversive – it is opposed to the doctrine, whereas it reconnects with the entire tradition of representing an imagined reality that is well known from the history of art, from Gothic paintings to Surrealism.

Henryk Tomaszewski and Józef Mroszczak were also awarded prizes granted by the Council of State. Cf. *O plakacie. Zbiór materiałów z narad i dyskusji oraz artykułów poświęconych aktualnym problemom plakatu* [On the poster. A contribution to the current problems of the political poster: materials from meetings, councils and articles] (printed matter filed as a manuscript), p. 163.

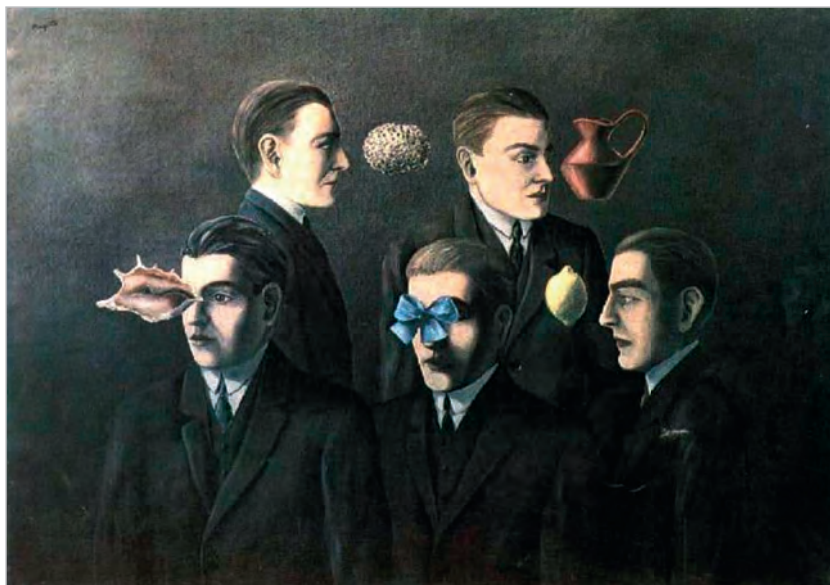


Fig. 4. René Magritte, *Les objets familiers*, oil on canvas, 81 cm × 116 cm, 1928

The Second National Exhibition of Illustration, Poster and Small-Format Graphic Art, 1955

While the First National Poster Exhibition took place in an atmosphere of calling the criteria of Socialist Realism into question, the speeches accompanying subsequent exhibitions of this medium predominantly focused on the potential reversal of the traditional hierarchy of arts. The Second National Exhibition of Illustration, Poster and Small-Format Graphic Art, organised at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in 1955, was commented on by Jan Białostocki – a historian of art and himself an author of posters – in an article “Sztuka potrzebna” [Useful art]. Białostocki argued that the division between painting – traditionally considered to be a durable art allowing artists to freely express themselves – and “utilitarian” and ephemeral graphic arts was just a construct which was outdated and, moreover, inadequate within the new social system. Furthermore, Białostocki regretted that posters were not being displayed in art museums, even though this “bright” art sometimes presented artistic values that were higher than in painting:

The National Gallery of Polish Art at the National Museum in Warsaw exhibits paintings by Studnicki, Taranczewski and Cybis; by Kokoszko, Zakrzewski and Bylina, thus closing the vast line of progress throughout history. Posters by Trepkowski or Tomaszewski are absent. Thus the division entrenched in the traditional approach is conveyed by the

fact that easel painting, regardless of its greater or lesser artistic quality, is considered worthy of being displayed in the halls of that pantheon of art – a museum – and that “utilitarian” graphic art, regardless of its greater or lesser artistic merits, is considered unworthy of the honour granted to “higher” or “pure” art.³⁰

According to Białostocki, the utilitarian aspect of the poster, which until then had prevented its artistic consecration, must no longer be considered an obstacle for it to achieve recognition as an art. On the contrary, being inseparably linked to everyday life, poster art had an advantage as compared to painting, whose disengagement regarding social utility of art would cause its crisis. Białostocki therefore saw no contradiction between the aesthetic aspect of the poster and its utilitarian function in the streets:

At the exhibition we see posters and book covers displayed as works of art, but, in fact, this is but our secondary contact with them. We have already encountered these works in their proper function: they have informed, persuaded, moved us. Viewing this display, I realised what a difference there was between the pictures which usually fill the halls of Zachęta and are painted to be exhibited, and living art, for which an exhibition is just a show of its might and a review before the subsequent creative phase.³¹

Even if art historians had not regarded the poster’s utilitarian function and its mass and reproducible character to be an obstacle to its entrance into art museums, the techniques applied in the creation of posters played an important role in its rejection. Michel Melot discovered that from the second half of the 19th century onward, ancient techniques were resorted to in order to confirm the originality³² of a multiple medium, such as printmaking.³³ In the case of the Polish poster after 1945, its valuation was based on its use of ancient techniques, i.e. painting and drawing. Photography, on the other hand, was linked to Western advertising, which the Polish poster had to distance itself from for ideological reasons. Even though in his article Białostocki remarked that in some cinematic posters photography was used well, he noted that “the best posters [were] constructed with painterly means”.³⁴ In an article on Henryk Tomaszewski, another art historian, Michał Walicki, confirmed the importance of this criterion in the process of the poster’s “artification”.³⁵ In his view, the photographic poster was a “dangerous competitor” that had wrongly replaced the painted poster. With these evaluation criteria in place, Henryk Tomaszewski’s works became the best examples of the poster as a work of

30 J. Białostocki, “Sztuka potrzebna” [A needed art], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 12–18 April 1955, no. 19.

31 Ibid.

32 M. Melot, op. cit., p. 192.

33 Ibid., p. 193.

34 J. Białostocki, op. cit.

35 *De l’artification. Enquêtes sur le passage à l’art*, eds. N. Heinrich, R. Schapiro, Paris, 2012.

art that was representative of the new design. During his career Tomaszewski undeniably achieved the highest possible artistic recognition amongst Polish poster designers,³⁶ and it is not insignificant that Białostocki considered him to be a “poster painter”.³⁷ For Walicki, the merit of Tomaszewski’s posters began, first of all, with their author’s “artistic vision, enamoured of contrasts and hints”, with his “sense of decorativeness, seasoned with a charming, playful and light sarcasm”, and with “the nobility and elegance of the curvature of the script, which masterfully enhanced the contents of the poster in terms of meaning as well as in terms of shape”.³⁸

Thus, despite Białostocki’s willingness to overthrow the traditional hierarchy of art and to allow the poster to enter art museums as a “useful art”, other criteria proved necessary for the poster’s transition to the status of art. In order to be seriously considered as a candidate for museum displays, the poster had to come closer to painting. In the same way its creators had to come closer to artists working in the “major” arts. The utilitarian aspect of the poster was overlooked, and the unity of the author with his creation was highlighted. This fact is best expressed by Białostocki’s observation: “Each of Tomaszewski’s posters, be it excellent, good or mediocre, speaks solely of its author, who in all the honesty of his talent and the richness of his artistic capabilities wishes to serve the artistic needs and always most diligently seeks the best path, most straightforwardly leading towards the goal”.³⁹ Raymonde Moulin remarked that already during the first industrial revolution, i.e. that of the 18th century,

to demonstrate the specificity of their product as compared to the artisanal product and at the same time as compared to the industrial product, artists sought to remove from their own practice the factor they had shared with the two other [groups], namely the utilitarian project: the philosophical theory of art as an endless finality justifying their survival.⁴⁰

The same principle governed the field of the Polish poster, which therefore became, to use Kant’s phrase, an “endless finality”.⁴¹ In this way the critics underlined the fact that the poster’s theme was no longer a pretext for Polish creators; by means of the poster they expressed their own artistic vision, just as a painter does through the intermediation of the picture. The work of art and the person would therefore be united in an indissoluble unity.

36 At the Zachęta exhibition Tomaszewski was awarded the first prize, i.e. 5000 zloty (tied with Jan Lenica). “Nagrody na wystawie ilustracji i plakatu” [Prizes at the exhibition of illustrations and posters], *Ekspresz Poznański*, 20 May 1955, no. 119.

37 J. Białostocki, “Henryk Tomaszewski”, *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 13–19 August 1953, no. 32.

38 M. Walicki, “Plakaty Henryka” [Henryk’s posters], *Nowiny Literackie*, 15 August 1948, no. 33 (73), year II, p. 4.

39 Ibid.

40 R. Moulin, “La genèse de la rareté...”, op. cit., p. 162 [translation mine – K. M.].

41 I. Kant, *Critic of Judgment*, translated by W. S. Pluhar, Indianapolis IN, 1987.

An examination of poster exhibitions held in Poland in the 1950s reveals the political and artistic contradictions accompanying the steps taken by the poster from the streets to the museum. While the Communist leaders claimed that it was equal in importance with other artistic genres, the reversal of the artistic hierarchy was far from being a fact. The poster ultimately found its place in museums; but in order to be seriously considered as a candidate for museum display, it first had to deny its utilitarian function and to emphasise its connection with painting.

Abstract

What happened when the poster, originally an advertising medium, became an object of appreciation in the museums of Communist Poland? What criteria did it have to comply with in order to be accepted into a temple of art, a museum? The article analyses poster exhibitions organised at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in the 1950s. During this period, the interest of museum curators, critics and art historians in this medium must be envisioned as always being underpinned by political and propagandist interests; the transition of the poster to the status of a work of art is analysed here in this double, i.e. cultural and political, perspective.

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Exhibitions of Sculpture as a Sign of the Spatial Shift: from *Spring Salon* to *Sculpture in the Garden*

In Polish art history, exhibitions of sculpture presenting a variety of its examples and with space seen as the sculptural material have very rarely been treated as a research subject that would reveal significant formal transformations and exhibition methods.¹ This essay focuses on exhibitions of sculpture that were organised after the 2nd World War and immediately after the period of Social Realism, i.e. in the era of the “thaw” in 1956. This period is particularly important considering the spectacular liberation of the creative spirit from governmental oppression which resulted from liberalisation of the political system. In that period, art defined through its cooperation with space became the domain not only of architecture or town planning, but mainly of sculpture. Only some of the exhibitions of sculpture held in Warsaw – where there was a consolidated artistic milieu and powerful institutional support for the organisation of exhibitions – have been selected here, in chronological order, taking under consideration unconventional attempts in the presentation of sculpture. What emerges is a diversified image of an intense formal experiment in this area based on avant-garde thought as expressed in the treatise *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego* [Spatial composition. Calculations of the spatio-temporal rhythm] (1931).² This essay is an attempt at presenting relations in the sculptural forms, in which the category

1 The essay focuses on one of the important themes that have been discussed in detail, with reference to the current state of research in both Polish and foreign publications, in Anna Maria Leśniewska's book *Nowe miejsce rzeźby w sztuce polskiej lat 60. XX wieku jako wyraz przemian w sztuce przestrzeni* [The new place of sculpture in Polish art of the 1960s as an expression of transformations in spatial art], published in the 4th volume of *Dysertacje doktorskie Instytutu Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk* [Doctoral dissertations at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences], Warsaw, 2013.

2 K. Kobro, W. Strzeмиński, *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego. Biblioteki „a.r.” no. 2* [Spatial composition. Calculations of the spatio-temporal rhythm. Item 2 in the a.r. Library], Łódź, 1931.

of space is a fundamental part of the research perspective. The exhibitions cited herein, which until now have usually been perceived in various studies as indirectly linked with the topic of sculpture – an example being *Studium przestrzeni* [A study of space] (1957) – have been used as research instruments to extend the boundaries of sculptural forms via extension into space.

Earlier research on the topics of sculpture and of exhibiting sculpture in Polish institutions has revealed a considerable difficulty in assessing the issues in question because of the scarcity of documentation and the lack of synthetic analyses. Consequently, this topic, as reviewed from the Polish perspective, is also absent from foreign publication; this state of affairs was aggravated by Poland's political separation from the Western world, which ended only in the year 1989. The presentation of exhibitions of sculpture from *Spring Salon* (*Salon Wiosenny*, 1946) to *Sculpture in the Garden* (*Rzeźba w ogrodzie*, 1957) is organised around an axis based on a presentation of forms which restructure a definite location in space and which do not refer to the surrounding landscape and are not linked to architecture; these forms delineate an autonomous sphere of artistic goals which establishes the essence of the influencing process. The surrounding open space reveals the public aspect of art as a new quality creating a permanent link between the work and its recipient. Places restructured by an artist are carriers of created meanings and sources of energy that enable the ideas contained in them to be propagated further. Sculpture was thus able to exceed the vision of its author as enclosed in its form and acquired the ultimate meaning depending on the external context which determined the conditions in which it functioned.

Spring Salon, organised by the Polish Artists and Designers' Trade Union in Warsaw in 1946, was the first nationwide show of Polish art, including sculpture, to be held after the war. Although it turned out to be a review of the achievements of Polish art of the inter-war period, it nevertheless offered "a possibility of magnificent development", while the intriguing "singularity and distinctiveness"³ found a problematic culmination in the First National Visual Arts Exhibition (I Ogólnopolska Wystawa Plastyki, 1950), which was already Socialist Realist. The rules of artistic composition following the principles of Social Realism were introduced and became a norm that was intended to bring about the "reestablishment of order in a world plunged into the chaos of the war, give art a meaning in the landscape of the post-war catastrophe, and concurrently to find the connection with artistic tradition".⁴ This tradition was expressed mainly through the concept of monumentality, which in the inter-war period concerned primarily the connection between sculpture

3 S. Teisseyre, "Wstęp" [Introduction], in: *Salon Wiosenny* [The Spring Salon], exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1946, unpaginated.

4 P. Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku* [The meanings of modernism. Towards the history of art in Poland after 1945], Poznań, 1999, p. 33.

and architecture. The promoters of the new authority made use of the condition of artistic awareness that was typical of the 1930s which helped them to fulfil the principles of cultural policy in practice. Of all the art of the 1950s, the results of this policy were the least visible in the area of sculpture. Those artists whose creative work had been formed by classicist traditions in sculpture essentially complied with the postulates of Socialist Realism if they were interpreted broadly.⁵

The Young Artists and Scientists' Club (Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców) (1947)⁶ was instituted by Marian Bogusz and Zbigniew Dłubak at Dom Wojska Polskiego in Warsaw. Its counterpart in Cracow was to be the Artists' Club,⁷ conceived as an association with a "socially and artistically progressive ideology".⁸ Its main aim was to "amalgamate the foundations of artistic creativity with contemporary scientific thought" and to "clearly define art's attitude to the ongoing social transformations".⁹ The First Exhibition of Modern Art (I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 1948) opened in Cracow as a result of cooperation between the two clubs. Its intention was to show the state of awareness of avant-garde artists by referring to achievements of science and technology. The exposition was divided into four sections: "photomontages", "images", "models" and "photographs". A very important role was ascribed to "spatial models illustrating the concepts of scale, spatial structure, movement,

5 Specialist literature pertaining to Social Realism is vast indeed. The scale of difficulties in reviewing Social Realism in Polish art and the motivations behind accepting it were analysed in detail by Wojciech Włodarczyk in e.g. *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Social Realism. Polish art in the years 1950–1954], Paris, 1986; idem, "Soc-realistyczny epizod. Warszawa 1933 – Moskwa 1958" [A Soc-realist episode. Warsaw 1933 – Moscow 1958], in: *Warszawa-Moskwa / Moskwa-Warszawa 1900–2000* [Warsaw-Moscow / Moscow-Warsaw 1900–2000], Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2004. Also recently in: *Za żelazną kurtyną. Sztuka oficjalna i niezależna w Związku Radzieckim i Polsce 1945–1989* [Behind the Iron Curtain. Official and independent art in the Soviet Union and in Poland 1945–1989], Warsaw, 2010, ed. P. Nowicki, the essay by P. Piotrowski, "Polska sztuka między totalitaryzmem a demokracją" [Polish art between totalitarianism and democracy], pp. 64–78, is also worth noting.

6 The Young Artists and Scientists' Club was instituted in May 1947; *Stała wystawa malarstwa nowoczesnego – część I* [Permanent exhibition of modern painting – part 1] and *Wystawa rysunków Marka Włodarskiego z lat 1929–1932* [Exhibition of Marek Włodarski's drawings from the years 1929–1932] opened in November; *Stała wystawa malarstwa nowoczesnego – część II* [Permanent exhibition of modern painting – part 2] opened in December.

7 The Artists' Club in Cracow was established by members of the Young Visual Artists' Group [Grupa Młodych Plastyków] in March 1948.

8 The draft of the statute of the "Artists' Club" association (typescript in M. Porębski's archive), in: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej. Pięćdziesiąt lat później* [The First Exhibition of Modern Art: Fifty years later], exhibition catalogue, Nowosielski Foundation, Starmach Gallery, Cracow, December 1998 – January 1999, Cracow, 1998, p. 79.

9 Ibid.

contrast, object-related inventiveness".¹⁰ They were to make it easy for visitors to perceive modes of visual influence as exercised by contemporary artworks. The theoretical statements of the authors of the exhibits referred mostly to issues of painting, but it was the spatial compositions that were to express the new language of art, i.e. they were to formalise the simplest structure. The visitors also found them the most attractive of all, as they "showed a world that belonged to an artist as much as it belonged to a scientist – a theoretician, or a technician – a practitioner".¹¹ The display included eleven spatial arrangements placed in various parts of the exposition;¹² this underlined the logic of possible solutions and the grammar of signs arranged in model expressions. Some of the exhibits were suspended in space, some stood on plinths. A recurrent element was a placard with information prepared by the organisers that explained the significance of these works; this, in fact, anticipated the installations in today's meaning of the term: "Spatial models collected in this room show how a modern artist perceives and solves the elementary issues of his artistic language: those of space, scale, matter and movement".¹³ In a text that was to be used to guide tour groups around the exhibition, Wróblewski described some of the models, with particular focus on the works of Bogusz. In the first room, the diversity of sizes and colours of free-hanging spherical forms among which the visitor could walk was used by Bogusz to create his own cosmic order – "a model of the universe".¹⁴ Touching any of the spheres put them all in motion and any interference in their order caused others to move rhythmically, thus demonstrating the phenomenon of resonance.¹⁵ The problem investigated in the second work was the contrast of two juxtaposed objects of different shape: one was a form made of precisely joined sections of circles made of metal, and thus open to space, the other was an organic, rough-textured lump: "[The] first rules the space with its curves; the other spreads uneasily, as if the space was crushing it".¹⁶

10 *Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Krakowie* [The Exhibition of Modern Art in Cracow] (typescript in M. Porębski's archive), in: *ibid.*, p. 82.

11 Anonymous, *Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej zorganizowana przez Klub Artystów w Krakowie* [Exhibition of modern art organised by the Artists' Club in Cracow], The Society of Friends of Fine Arts, Cracow, December 1948 – January 1949.

12 The list of exhibits mentions eleven "spatial models": Marian Bogusz (2), Tadeusz Brzozowski (1), Ali Bunsch (1), Tadeusz Kantor (2), Maciej Makarewicz (1), Jerzy Nowosielski (1) and Andrzej Wróblewski (3); the photographs have additionally revealed spatial models by Jadwiga Maziarska (1) and Marian Szulc (1). In the end, Kantor and Makarewicz failed to produce their designs.

13 "Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Krakowie" (typescript in M. Porębski's archive), in: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej...*, op. cit., p. 82.

14 A. Wróblewski, "Omówienie sal wystawowych. 3. Modele" [Analysis of exhibition rooms. 3. Models], in: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej...*, op. cit., p. 113.

15 See A. M. Leśniewska, "Przestrzenne poszukiwania Mariana Bogusza" [Marian Bogusz's spatial explorations], *Rzeźba Polska*, 1987, pp. 151–157.

16 A. Wróblewski, op. cit., p. 113.

Unfortunately, the First Exhibition of Modern Art – envisioned as the opening of a process of education in which the integrated elements of time, history and space would be the markers of a new perception and understanding of art and would offer a way towards acquainting the public with the achievements of contemporary artists – became the end of a yet uncompleted path. The recently ended period was summed up expressively by Maria Jarema: “Socialist Realism should have become a striving for simplicity. And what did it become? Imposed by non-artists, it ceased to have anything to do with art – it became a vulgarity botched by kitsch-makers”,¹⁷ she noted in 1952 and emphasised that “time lost to culture is lost tenfold; when halted for even a short time, culture retrogresses a long way back”.¹⁸ Socialist Realism forced an artist to carry out political slogans in practice and imposed modes of thinking aimed at reflecting reality as it was envisioned by the party. Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz commented: “Foreign models which they gave us to imitate [...] were repellent. [...] All was drowned in a mire of imitation and stylisation”.¹⁹ The only opportunity to implement one’s designs were the occasional commissions or competitions for monuments with clear and politically involved meanings.²⁰

Even the Young Art Exhibition (*Wystawa Młodej Plastyki*, 1955), organised within the framework of the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students,²¹ only slightly diverged from the annual national exhibitions that were staged in the period of Socialist Realism; this went contrary to the hopes that it would trigger a transformation in art, as well as in the manner of presenting sculpture. Its aim was made explicit during the Council of Young Artists; the ensuing appeal stated openly that “the exhibition is to build socialism”.²² The exhibition was thus not a breakthrough, but a continuation of former, Soc-Realist formal solutions, and the contribution of sculpture was practically

17 M. Jarema, “Z notatnika” [From a notebook], in: *Maria Jarema. Projekty i obrazy* [Designs and pictures], Inny Świat Gallery, Cracow, 1985.

18 “Z pracowni plastyków. Maria Jarema” [From the artists’ studios. Maria Jarema], *Życie Literackie*, 1956, no. 28, p. 5.

19 W. Baraniewski, *W kręgu Jarnuszkiewicza. W 35-lecie pracy pedagogicznej prof. Jerzego Jarnuszkiewicza* [In the circle of Jarnuszkiewicz. On Prof. Jarnuszkiewicz’s 35th anniversary of didactic work], Warsaw, 1985, p. 6.

20 See I. Grzesiuk-Olszewska, *Polska rzeźba pomnikowa w latach 1945–1995* [Polish monumental sculpture 1945–1995], Warsaw, 1995.

21 *Ogólnopolska Wystawa Młodej Plastyki, pod hasłem ‘Przeciw wojnie – przeciw faszyzmowi’. Malarstwo – rzeźba – grafika* [The National Young Art Exhibition themed “Against war – against fascism”. Painting – sculpture – graphic art], exhibition catalogue, Ministry of Culture and Art, Association of Polish Artists and Designers, Polish Organisational Committee of the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students, The Arsenal, Warsaw, July–September 1955. Cf. A. Krzywicki, *Postalinowski karnawał radości. V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów o Pokój i Przyjaźń, Warszawa 1955 r. Przygotowania – przebieg – znaczenie* [The post-Stalinist carnival of joy: the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace and Friendship, Warsaw 1955, preparations – course – significance], Warsaw, 2009.

22 M. Zenowicz, *Narada młodych plastyków* [The Council of Young Artists], p. 3.

negligible. The insipidity of forms and the equally unadventurous set of themes of the exhibited works were sadly evident. By giving the exhibition the theme "Against war – against fascism", the organisers automatically limited the range of works. Andrzej Jakimowicz wrote: "The motto of the exhibition is the fight for peace. Is it surprising, therefore, that when the topic of a work is hate, it is not concealed? [...] [The exhibition] is deeply optimistic; yet it is not a shallow cheerfulness of theme, [...] but its power and trust in the future".²³ The creators did not share the optimism of the organisers; neither did Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewiczowa, a member of the commission that approved works for exhibition and at the same time a reviewer whose task was to sum up the input of the young sculptors. "I am to write about sculpture, but this time it will be neither simple nor easy, because I think that at the current moment our sculpture has not found itself at the front line of the fight",²⁴ she wrote. She commented on the exhibited works – *Matka* [Mother] by Magdalena Więcek (1955), *Tajwan* [Taiwan] by Tadeusz Sieklucki (1955) and *Pokój zwycięży wojnę* [Peace will overcome war] by Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz (1955) – stressing the artists' "revolt against conventions" and their "conscious, controlled reflections".²⁵ Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewiczowa, a careful observer of the art scene, was perfectly aware of what was being produced in the studios of the young artists because at that time she was already working on a script for the exhibition entitled *Sculpture in the Garden* (1957).

The political situation was not favourable to art, but an exchange of creative ideas between artists continued regardless and works were exhibited at unofficial shows. There emerged informal groups referring to the views that had been aired at the First Exhibition of Modern Art (1948) and to the achievements of the interwar avant-garde. The first exhibitions of Group 55,²⁶ organised outside the official (i.e. institutional) structures, took place in the studio of the sculptress Barbara Zbrożyna²⁷ (Fig. 1), whose *Rzeka* [River] (1955) was at that time a composition that the critics most frequently commented on.²⁸ The soft, organic, intertwined shapes formally referred to Etruscan

23 A. Jakimowicz, "W tytule wystawy...", in: *Ogólnopolska Wystawa Młodej...*, op. cit.

24 J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, "Rzeźba na Ogólnopolskiej Wystawie Młodej Plastyki" [Sculpture at the National Young Art Exhibition], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1955, no. 3–4, p. 44.

25 Ibid.

26 Zbigniew Dłubak documented Group 55 events. His photographs, which document joint events and often show works which are no longer extant, compensate for the absence of a relevant catalogue or publications from the early period of the group's existence. In addition, the photographs reveal a small section of the social life that was an integral part of the young creators' artistic life. A. M. Leśniewska's archive.

27 Group 55's exhibitions in Zbrożyna's studio took place in January and May of 1955 and in April of 1956.

28 *Polska Kronika Filmowa* [Polish Film Chronicle], no. 22, 1956, *Grupa 55 – nowy zespół Malarzy i Rzeźbiarzy w Warszawie* [Group 55 – a new team of Painters and Sculptors in Warsaw] is a recording of the artists' meeting in Zbrożyna's studio on 10 May 1956.



Fig. 1. Group 55 Exhibition in Barbara Zbrożyna's studio, her *Rzeka* [A river] on the sculptor's stand, 1955, photo by Zbigniew Dłubak, Anna M. Leśniewska's archive

and pre-Columbian cultures; they derived from the same sources as the sculptures of Henry Moore, whose works would be displayed at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw only in late 1959.²⁹ The Exhibition of Works by Group 55 (1956),³⁰ which was at the same time the opening of exhibition rooms owned by the Art Section of the Krzywe Koło Club in Warsaw,³¹ initiated the career of the

29 *Wystawa rzeźb i rysunków Henry Moore'a* [Exhibition of Henry Moore's sculptures and drawings], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta, Warsaw, 15 October – 5 November 1959; Pałac Sztuki, Cracow, 15 November – 2 December 1959; National Museum, Poznań, 12 December 1959 – 3 January 1960; Museum of History, Wrocław, 13 January – 10 February 1960; Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Museum, Szczecin, 28 February – 31 March 1960. A full list of publications issued in connection with H. Moore's exhibitions in Poland in: "Rocznik 1959–1960–1961" [Annual 1959–1960–1961], Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, item 46, pp. 22–24; K. Murawska-Muthesius, "Dreams of Sleeping Beauty: Henry Moore in Polish Art Criticism and Media, post-1945", in: J. Beckett, F. Russell, *Henry Moore. Critical Essays*, Aldershot, 2003, pp. 195–220. Visual material recorded by L. Zajączkowski, *Rzeźby Henry Moore'a* [Sculptures by Henry Moore], Polish Film Chronicle, Warsaw, 1959, WFDiF Archive 44a/1959.

30 The Exhibition of Works by Group 55 took place on 30 June – 27 August 1956 at the Krzywe Koło Old Town Culture Centre.

31 The first Founding Meeting of the Art Section of the Krzywe Koło Club took place on 6 November 1955; in: IS PAN Special Collections, E. Garztecka's archive, item III, inv. no. 1960. Members of the Art Section were: Marian Bogusz (chairman), Zbigniew Dłubak, Kajetan Sosnowski, Barbara Zbrożyna, Alina Szapocznikow, Barbara Jonscher,

first “authors’ gallery” to be directed by Bogusz in cooperation with the members of Group 55.³²

Texts published mainly in *Przegląd Artystyczny* went hand in hand with a revival of the experiments carried out by the avant-garde artists of the 1920s and 1930s – a revival which was caused by the “thaw”. The process of transforming the conventional perception of sculpture, which was based on the inviolate principle of the solid viewed as a basis for composition, was reactivated parallel to formal investigations in painting. In essence, the transformations were directed against the paralysing, anti-creative didactic system which was then still in force in all departments of sculpture at all the art academies in Poland. In Warsaw, for instance, this system had been in use since the inception, in 1910, of the School of Fine Arts, which was later renamed the Academy of Fine Arts.

The Second Exhibition of Modern Art (II Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 1957) at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw summed up the artistic revival.³³ The exhibition encompassed “painting, sculpture and spatial art, as well as examples of experimental explorations in the field of photography and film projection”.³⁴ On display was *Studium przestrzeni* [A study of space] by Oskar Hansen, Wojciech Fangor and Stanisław Zamecznik. *Studium* was a system of freely positioned colourful planes which integrated the gallery space with its environment into a coherent spatial whole – the external with the internal – in keeping with the theories expounded by Hansen, the then-head of the Studio for the Composition of Solids and Planes at the Department of Sculpture of the Academy of Fine Arts.³⁵ The installation at Zachęta referred to Hansen’s solo exhibition, which had been shown slightly earlier at the “Po prostu” Salon in Warsaw,³⁶ where the artist presented his experience in defining the prospect

Roman Szczurkowski (organizational issues and exhibition exchange) and Ewa Garztecka, who mentions Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz as one of the initiators of the Art Section, in: E. Garztecka, “Krzywe Koło Gallery. Cultural Revival”, *Voice of Warsaw*, 1990, no. 40, p. 7.

32 Cf. J. Zagrodzki, *Zbigniew Dłubak i Grupa 55* [Zbigniew Dłubak and Group 55], exhibition catalogue, Museum of Art in Łódź, June–July 2003; idem, *Stefan Gierowski i Krzywe Koło*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Art in Łódź, October–November 2003; idem, *Stefan Gierowski*, Warsaw, 2005.

33 2. *Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej* [The Second Exhibition of Modern Art], Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, October–November 1957.

34 M. Porębski, “Pojęcie nowoczesności...” [The concept of modernity], in: 2. *Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej*, exhibition catalogue, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, October–November 1957.

35 See J. Gola, “Chronology/Kalendarium”, in: O. Hansen, *Ku Formie Otwartej/Towards Open Form*, Warsaw, 2005, p. 179; W. Włodarczyk, *Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie w latach 1944–2004. 100 lat Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie* [The Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in the years 1944–2004. The 100th anniversary of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw], Warsaw, 2005, p. 251.

36 Oskar Hansen. 1949–57. *Architektura – Malarstwo – Rzeźba* [Oskar Hansen. 1949–57. Architecture – Painting – Sculpture], Association of Polish Artists and Designers, Association

of “studying, or rather ‘creating’, new space”.³⁷ Hansen treated the interior of the gallery as “an airy, three-dimensional background which, on the principle of the contrast of shapes, accentuated the two-dimensional images positioned on plinths and the chiaroscuro form of the ‘active negative’ of architectural space”.³⁸ The principles of Hansen’s theory were initially published in *Przegląd Artystyczny* (1957): “by painting, sculpting or creating architecture we shape space”,³⁹ and then developed in the treatise *Forma Otwarta* [The open form] (1959).⁴⁰ The exhibition could be perceived as a study of the “open form”, in which Hansen demonstrated a harmonious coexistence of well-defined elements and revealed the factors of transformations that changed the density of space. He challenged the concept of a boundary between the air that surrounded a sculpture and the air contained within it; he pointed to its being a matter of convention. Works exhibited at the Zachęta included sculptures from the *Portret powietrza* [Portrait of air] (1956) and *Aktywny negatyw* [Active negative] (1957) cycles, which were intended as a synthesis of emotional states aroused by the display. Later, Hansen continued his investigation of the organic growth of structures in the changing dimensions of time and space by following this principle: “Repeating the same shapes in sculpture and architecture, sometimes repeating shapes that are similar and of identical sizes, and repeating the proportion accepted in architecture in sculpture both create a number of connections that unite sculpture with architecture and broaden the influence of sculpture to embrace the entire architectural environment”.⁴¹

The subsequent *Studium przestrzeni* (1958),⁴² done according to the same principles, was produced by Fangor and Zamecznik in the same gallery which had by then been renamed Salon Nowej Kultury. A system of images/signs positioned at right angles filled the interior, and the viewer became a part of the displayed work⁴³ (Fig. 2). The exhibition was accompanied by Fangor’s text:

of Polish Architects, “Po prostu” Salon, Warsaw, May 1957. The exhibition was announced via a sculptural structure made of rods positioned on the pavement in front of the theatre which housed the gallery; its author called it “Spike strip [Polish: *kolczatka*] – integration of the outside with the inside”, see O. Hansen, *Ku Formie Otwartej...*, op. cit., p. 139.

37 J. Soltan, “W linii rozwojowej...”, in: *Oskar Hansen. 1949–57*, op. cit.

38 J. Gola, op. cit., p. 139.

39 O. Hansen, “O własnej twórczości” [On one’s own oeuvre], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1957, no. 4, p. 26.

40 O. Hansen, “Forma Otwarta”, *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1959, no. 5, p. 5.

41 K. Kobro, W. Strzeziński, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

42 *Studium przestrzeni* [A study of space], W. Fangor, S. Zamecznik, exhibition catalogue, Salon Nowej Kultury, Warsaw, July–August 1958.

43 *Studium przestrzeni*, the environment constructed from W. Fangor’s optical images, emerged as the result of an accidental discovery. Fangor intended to paint double-themed works, i.e. ones in which the figurative signs (faces, hands etc.) were to be seen against the background of a set of disjointed forms with indefinite contours. Having painted



Fig. 2. *Studium przestrzeni* [A study of space], Wojciech Fangor, Stanisław Zamecznik, Salon Nowej Kultury, Warsaw, 1958, the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, photo by E. Kozłowska

The aim of this exhibition is to demonstrate spatial dependencies between images. I am not interested in what occurs in a single image, but in what happens between images. Images become anonymous elements of a set which begins a new life and discharges itself in real space. By selecting a path and a time, the recipient automatically becomes a co-creator of the work.⁴⁴

Space was treated as a natural sculptural material, one that gave the artist the largest creative options and that gradually replaced chiselling stone, working in wood and shaping soft forms in clay. The architecture of Zamecznik's exhibition was thus turned into a four-dimensional sculpture. This fulfilled

the backgrounds, he discovered that they influenced the space underneath the painting by changing it and making it active. The result was an illusion of space reaching from the painting towards the viewer. Fangor resigned from adding figurative elements to these canvases and later termed his discovery a "positive illusory space". The *Studium przestrzeni* exhibition included twenty canvases in varying formats. Only four of them hung on the walls, the others were placed on easels. Apart from *Studium przestrzeni*, in 1959 Fangor and Zamecznik held two more exhibitions focused on the issue of space – in Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. Cf. *Wojciech Fangor: Space as Play*, National Museum in Cracow, Cracow, 2012.

⁴⁴ The text accompanying the exhibition. The theoretical summary was also written by Zamecznik, who pointed out that it was not the images but the "tensions generated by them and their reception over time" that had become a creative instrument, "Sztuka przestrzeni" [The art of space], *Projekt*, 1961, no. 2, pp. 28–29.

the principles of Constructivist sculpture, in which the concept of a solid was abandoned and replaced by the “surrounding environment”.⁴⁵

Apart from the vision of new solutions offered by *Studium przestrzeni* (1957), other sculptors who exhibited their work at the Second Exhibition of Modern Art attempted to exceed the boundaries of a solid, and thus also those of the ruling convention; but they did so in the more limited, laboratory scale of gallery spaces. In his commentary to the exhibition, Wiesław Borowski wrote: “A contemporary sculptor does not have to be an abstract one. What he must do is create compositions exerting a visual emotion and characterised by a decisive attitude to space; he must conduct a thorough study of form; he must not avoid making use of new materials and workshop improvements which help to enhance the visual expression of the work”.⁴⁶ Among the exhibited works, Borowski singled out the “huge tripod with a tall, leaning torso”, i.e. *Mówca* [The Orator] by Stanisław Lisowski (1957), which he declared was “a composition that introduces the mood of the era of artificial moons and perfectly rules the large sphere of space which surrounded it”. He also focused on figurative works, i.e. on Ślesieńska’s “graceful and elegant” *Notre Dame* (1957), Tadeusz Sieklucki’s *Przestrzeń* [Space], “filled with the joy of unfettered movement”, the works by Tadeusz Łodziana “operating on pure form with beautiful rhythms and proportions”, and the works of Alina Szapocznikow, characterised by a “vast load of drama emanating from the depths of the solid”. The expressive works: *Kompozycja* [Composition] by Magdalena Więcek (1957) and *Grupa tragiczna, Marcinelle* [A tragic group, Marcinelle] by Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz (1957) merited a separate comment; Borowski perceived their connection with English sculpture, especially with that of Chadwick. Similarly to Katarzyna Kobro, Władysław Strzemiński and Oskar Hansen, Borowski considered the future of sculpture as lying in being “an element that organises functional open spaces (e.g. parks), or in merging with architecture conditioned by close cooperation between the sculptor and the designer”.⁴⁷

The Exhibition of Young Artists’ Painting and Sculpture (*Wystawa Młodego Malarstwa i Rzeźby*, 1957)⁴⁸ in Sopot focused on the methods used by the artists to introduce a form into open space. This time Bogucki’s attention turned to works by women artists: “In the ladies’ competition, Alina Szapocznikow seems to be at the fore. Her *Trudny wiek* [A difficult age] (1956) and *Ekshumowany* [Exhumed] (alternative title: *Rehabilitacja* [Restoring one’s good name], 1956)⁴⁹ are an amazingly harmonious combination of expressive

45 Ibid.

46 W. Borowski, “Nareszcie jest rzeźba” [The long-awaited sculpture has arrived], *Życie Literackie*, 1957, no. 305 (*Plastyka*, no. 15), p. 5.

47 Ibid., p. 5.

48 *Wystawa Młodego Malarstwa i Rzeźby* [Exhibition of Young Artists’ Painting and Sculpture], exhibition catalogue, Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Sopot, June–July 1957.

49 It is difficult to explain why the sculpture was given the same title (also in the double meaning) as had been used by Stefan Boss-Gosławski. In her book *Portret wielokrotny*

power with a sense of proper measure, and of an almost-realistic approach with a contents which is, for realism, extremely risky". At the same time, however, Bogucki worried that the audience may read the sculptures as "cheap eroticism" or "cheap macabre". The critic was equally circumspect in speaking about the other sculptresses: "With Alina Ślesińska, the disquiet of imagination and the impetuosity of feelings run slightly ahead of the conscious approach to shaping the sculpted form. This is probably the reason why she is at times unfinished in her character, not entirely consistent". Barbara Zbrożyna, in turn "surprisingly easily attained her 'jump into modernity'", according to Bogucki, who actually doubted that she had truly attained it, considering the outward similarity of her works to Moore's. Despite the attention he gave to the sculptresses, Bogucki was of the opinion that the only work worthy of note was Lisowski's *Matka* [Mother] (1956) – "a study of the female form consistent in its synthetic shape".⁵⁰ When reviewing Alina Szapocznikow's solo exhibition,⁵¹ Wiesław Borowski described her works as attempts at "exploding the solid form" and revealing the "undersurface strata". Although the forms "begin to crack", he wrote, "this is not at all a spontaneous shattering of a solid; if there is dynamism here, it is constantly tempered by intellect".⁵²

Studies that focus on the Polish sculpture of the 1950s highlight the special role which the exhibition *Sculpture in the Garden* (1957), curated by Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewiczowa, played in the artistic explorations of the time.⁵³ The exposition was arranged in the garden of the palace at Foksal Street in Warsaw, which had formerly been owned by Konstanty Zamoyski and which was, and still remains today, the seat of the Association of Polish Architects (Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, SARP). The exhibition summed up the then-current ideas concerning the individualistic creation of space and the shaping of new landscapes through art. Andrzej Jakimowicz stated that it "revealed the true range

dzieła Aliny Szapocznikow [The repeated portrait: works by A. Szapocznikow] (Poznań, 2008), A. Jakubowska explains why the sculpture was sometimes exhibited under the title *Rehabilitacja* [Restoring one's good name] – the artist was referring to the tragic death of Laszlo Rajk (1949) and the work was "a tribute to a victim of Stalinism whose good name had been restored; with time it stopped being associated with current affairs", p. 99. In the catalogue of her first solo exhibition, i.e. *Alina Szapocznikow*, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, September 1957, the artist herself dated the work *Exhumed* to 1956.

50 J. Bogucki, "Zapiski z podróży nie zagranicznej" [Notes from a journey not abroad], *Życie Literackie*, 1957, no. 289 (*Plastyka*, no. 7), p. 6.

51 *Alina Szapocznikow*, exhibition catalogue, op. cit.

52 W. Borowski, "Rzeźby Aliny Szapocznikow" [Sculptures by Alina Szapocznikow], *Życie Literackie*, 1957, no. 297 (*Plastyka*, no. 11), p. 5.

53 *Rzeźba w ogrodzie* [Sculpture in the Garden], exhibition catalogue, Association of Polish Architects, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, 18 September–October 1957, curator: Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewicz, participating artists: Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Stanisław Lisowski, Tadeusz Łodziana, Tadeusz Sieklucki, Alina Szapocznikow, Alina Ślesińska, Magdalena Więcek, Barbara Zbrożyna.

of issues present in sculptural creation more forcefully than any exhibition locked in the cages of showrooms or museum halls".⁵⁴ Today this exhibition is brought up mainly in the context of the output of Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz,⁵⁵ Szapocznikow,⁵⁶ Ślesińska,⁵⁷ Więcek⁵⁸ and Zbrożyna,⁵⁹ who have already been mentioned here, although Sieklucki, Lisowski and Łodziana took part in it as well. The artists proposed projects which attempted to integrate simplified figural forms and loosely defined organic shapes with the surrounding garden scenery. In his perceptive review, Aleksander Jackowski highlighted the difficulties faced by artists who until then had focused on a "perception of spatiality" that was "studio-oriented" and never confronted with nature; he also stressed that the impact of "identical sculptural compositions" changes when they are placed in "different spatial relations".⁶⁰ According to Jackowski, in *Grupa tragiczna, Marcinelle* [A tragic group. Marcinelle] (1957) and *Suka* [A bitch] (1957), Jarnuszkiewicz revealed "the dramatic nature of human affairs, the emotional experience from which a sculpture has grown". Lisowski, apart from the work *Matka* [Mother] (1956), already known from the Exhibition of Young Artists' Painting and Sculpture, presented the vertical *Kompozycja* [Composition] (1957), which was reminiscent of a long-necked exotic bird or a delicate flower; with its "slender silhouette embedded in the rhythm of trees" it became "an accent to compete with nature". The works of Łodziana, i.e. *Matka z dzieckiem* [Mother and child] (1957), raised on a tall plinth, and the horizontal, organic *Kompozycja* [Composition] (1957), relied in their form on the "balance of spatial relations" and on a "meticulously finished surface".⁶¹ Tadeusz Sieklucki presented the largest number of works; apart from *Kulista*

54 A. Jakimowicz, "Rzeźba w ogrodzie" [Sculpture in the Garden], *Projekt*, 1957, no. 5, p. 28.

55 Cf. *W kręgu pracowni Jarnuszkiewicza. W 35-lecie pracy pedagogicznej profesora Jerzego Jarnuszkiewicza* [In the circle of Jarnuszkiewicz's studio. On Prof. Jarnuszkiewicz's 35th anniversary of didactic work], exhibition catalogue, Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, 1985; *Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz. Rzeźby, medale i rysunki* [Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz. Sculptures, medals and drawings], exhibition catalogue, Kordegarda Gallery, Warsaw, 1990.

56 Cf. *Alina Szapocznikow 1926–1973*, exhibition catalogue, Zachęta Gallery of Contemporary Art, Warsaw, 1998; J. Gola, *Katalog...*; A. Jakubowska, *Portret...*

57 Cf. *Alina Ślesińska 1922–1994*, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2007.

58 Cf. A. M. Leśniewska, *Magdalena Więcek. Przestrzeń jako narzędzie poznania* [Magdalena Więcek. Space as a cognitive tool], Orońsko, 2013; *Magdalena Więcek. Działanie na oko* [Magdalena Więcek. Acting by eye], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2016.

59 Cf. A. M. Leśniewska, *Barbara Zbrożyna. Rzeźba* [Barbara Zbrożyna. Sculpture], Orońsko, 2006; idem, *Barbara Zbrożyna. Figury nasłonecznione* [Barbara Zbrożyna. Sunlit figures], exhibition catalogue, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 29 March – 18 May 2008.

60 A. Jackowski, "Rzeźba w ogrodzie" [Sculpture in the Garden], *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1957, no. 41, p. 6.

61 Ibid.

[Spherical] (alternative title: *Okrągła* [Round], 1955),⁶² aptly positioned in a niche of the hedge, *Kolarze* [Cyclists] (1955), which contrasted with the manicured lawn and was reminiscent of exotic plants,⁶³ and *Wioślarze* [Oarsmen] (1955), he exhibited the spherical forms: *Podparta* [Supported] (1956), *Krzywa* [Crooked] (1956), *Sprężyna* [A coil] (1956) and *Lutnia* [A lute] (1956), which demonstrated “the artist’s imagination, the constant need to formulate a spontaneous vision”.⁶⁴ Szapocznikow’s *Tors* [Torso] (1957), which was a “spatially compact, profiled solid”, contrasted with the “tiny, dynamic forms of the surrounding leaves and boughs”. Her *Młodzieniec* [Young man] (1957) – “a composition which ‘in itself’ may arouse various reservations” – revealed its “corporeality, acquiring a new visual sense” owing to its “perfect positioning in relation to the delicate, almost Impressionist part of the garden”. In Więcek’s sculptures, *Próba życia* [A trial of life] (1957) (Fig. 3) and *Kompozycja I* [Composition I] (alternative title: *Macierzyństwo* [Motherhood], 1957) (Fig. 4), the critic discovered “obstinacy and the effort of reaching one’s own authentic vision”.⁶⁵ For reasons that are now difficult to fathom, he did not discuss the works of Ślesińska and Zbrożyna. The expressively deformed figures of the lovers *Abelard i Heloiza* [Abelard and Heloise] (1957) by Ślesińska were spatially joined in a metaphorical embrace. The symbolic, organic forms of *Adam i Ewa* [Adam and Eve] (alternative title: *Erotyk I*, 1955) and *Rzeka* [A river] (1955) by Zbrożyna, already known from the Group 55 Exhibition, were similar in their individualistic expression. A new sequence of meanings was introduced by the expressive sculptures *Erotyk II* and *Erotyk III* (1955–1956), which imposed their emotional shape on the environment. The works of women sculptors referred to sensuality, thus very strongly pointing to the haptic and proxemic matters that were capable of being experienced in individual interaction.

The critics estimated *Sculpture in the Garden* to be the most important exhibition of the period: “For the first time [an exhibition] declared the new condition of sculpture and laid before it new tasks, concerning, above all, issues of sculpture’s spatiality, of which even the participants themselves were not always clearly aware”.⁶⁶ “The place offered various visual positions”, stated

62 Alternative titles given in the brackets indicate that the given sculpture was exhibited under more than one name. J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, “Tadeusz Sieklucki”, *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1957, no. 6, p. 22, mentions “Round formerly known as Motherhood”, which indicates an even earlier change of its title.

63 Ibid., p. 22.

64 A. Jackowski, op. cit.

65 Ibid.

66 W. Baraniewski, “Okolice odwilży” [Around the thaw], in: *Rzeźba polska 1944–1984* [Polish sculpture 1944–1984]. “Arsenal” Gallery of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Poznań, 20 September – 21 October 1984, exhibition catalogue, Ministry of Culture and Art, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Poznań, Poznań, 1984, p. 27.



Fig. 3. *Sculpture in the Garden.* In the foreground, the sculpture *Próba życia* [A trial of life] by M. Więcek, the SARP garden, Warsaw, 1957, Magdalena Więcek's photographic archive



Fig. 4. *Sculpture in the Garden, Kompozycja/Czas* [Composition/Time] by M. Więcek, the SARP garden, Warsaw, 1957, Magdalena Więcek's photographic archive

its curator, Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewiczowa, “and regarding spatiality – a sculpture must have a space, a field in which it is active, and light, changes in the lighting”.⁶⁷ This statement from 1984, in a critical text summing up post-thaw phenomena in sculpture, points to the necessity of considering the changing spatial conditions, of being aware of transformations in a form arising from the development of a relationship with the spatial sphere tending towards an installation. Yet in the year 1957 the curator's narrative and argumentation were absent, with the exception of remarks concerning the obvious connection with nature. Also, quite inexplicably, her synthetic study *Polska rzeźba współczesna* [Contemporary sculpture in Poland] (1958)⁶⁸ ignored crucial issues, that is her reflections on the exhibition of which she had been the curator and information on the co-designers of the exposition;⁶⁹ Jarnuszkiewiczowa

⁶⁷ Quoted after: *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁸ J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, *Modern Sculpture in Poland*, Warsaw, 1958; eadem, *La Sculpture polonaise Contemporaine*, Varsovie, 1958.

⁶⁹ The *Sculpture in the Garden* catalogue mentions the following as involved in preparing the exhibition: Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewicz – organisation; Jerzy Czyż and Wiesław Nowak – exposition design; Roman Cieślewicz – graphic design for the catalogue. Stanisław

limited herself to reports from the ongoing practice of sculpture that had already been published in *Przegląd Artystyczny*.⁷⁰ Comparing the condition of three-dimensional forms in galleries to that of large-scale monuments located in open space, she asserted that “monumental sculpture presented at exhibitions [was] increasingly better, more interesting, more varied, more insightful”. The “entire load of developmental explorations” was transferred, according to Jarnuszkiewiczowa, to studios, where creative experiments had a “less compelling”, workshop character. Artists unfettered by ideological limitations was able to “make various attempts on their own responsibility and in their own name”.⁷¹ Jarnuszkiewiczowa pointed out that the division between private creative discoveries, which were revealed occasionally at exhibitions, and conventional and conservative monuments was increasingly more evident; she noted that “until now there was no opportunity to explore new ideas nor objective conditions to develop them in concrete spatial situations, in direct contact with the audience”.⁷² The process of overcoming the limitations which sculpture had inherited after Socialist Realism was not yet finished at that time, and the works did not go beyond the still obligatory realistic conventions of the form and traditional methods of presentation. From today’s research perspective, *Sculpture in the Garden* is perceived as a source of installation art. It was the first exhibition in the post-war history of presenting sculpture to integrate the form and its setting into a homogeneous space and thus to express, on the one hand, the concept of making an exhibition more accessible to the viewer, and on the other, the concept of creating a heterogeneous anthropological space by developing a relationship with the viewers as persons located in a space which impinges upon their cultural awareness and/or the subconscious and on their individual psychological and physical condition. The experience of the viewers’ presence in space gave the exhibition as a whole the status and eminence of a work of art. An analysis of the relevant photographic documentation reveals the vigorous dynamics and concurrent monumentality of expression of the exhibited works. The power of illusion embedded in this imagery reveals not the forms, but the space inside and around them, which creates within the solid an “interior” open to various points of view. The documented forms have the power of enriching the

Zamecznik is not mentioned. Only the catalogue of his solo exhibition: *Stanisław Zamecznik 1909–1974*, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Zachęta, Warsaw, November 1973, confirms his participation in this event.

70 J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, “Z zagadnień rzeźby pomnikowej” [Issues in monumental sculpture], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1952, no. 4, pp. 24–26; eadem, “Rzeźba na Ogólnopolskiej Wystawie Młodej Plastyki” [Sculpture at the National Exhibition of Young Art], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1955, no. 3–4, pp. 44–59; eadem, “Pomniki” [Monuments], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1956, no. 1, pp. 24–28; eadem, “Zderzenie z odbiorcą” [Confronting the recipient], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1958, no. 3, pp. 2–12.

71 J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, „Pomniki”, op. cit., p. 28.

72 J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, *Modern Sculpture in Poland*, op. cit., p. 34.

viewer's awareness and arousing emotional and aesthetic responses. The photographs present the exhibitions as an "image", even though they show a set of objects in space; the photographs have concurrently registered, and thus penetrated, the interior and the exterior on both the micro and macro scale. By arranging the sculptures in the space of the garden, i.e. as being confronted with the natural world, and in correlation with the sensual spatiality of the viewers' bodies, Jarnuszkiewiczowa made their forms an integral part of the exhibition's narrative structure.

The vision on which Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewiczowa based her concept for the *Sculpture in the Garden* is, of course, linked with the treatise *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego*, but it is also necessary to remember the natural process of diffusion of the non-verbal message existing in parallel, at the same time but in various places, in radically different visions offered by the variety of artists. It is not certain whether Jarnuszkiewiczowa was familiar with the exposition theories proposed in Western Europe at the time; the kinship with the assumptions of painting exhibitions is noticeable and, from the point of view of the current analysis, does not rule out a direct connection. The solutions proposed by Jarnuszkiewiczowa were similar to those offered by Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965), an architect and sculptor who had collaborated with Marcel Duchamp. As an author of installation exhibitions,⁷³ Kiesler broke with the traditional modes of exhibiting objects in a gallery space. He was also the author of the theoretical *Manifeste du Corréalisme* (1947).⁷⁴ The fundamental trait of "correalism" was the achievement of a simultaneous correlation and coordination of the basic elements of the exhibition's structure by applying methods of presentation borrowed from the theatre. Its skeleton consisted of a disciplined set of architectural elements that transformed one into another, thus creating a continuum of components connected with the exhibition, such as sculptures or paintings, as well as components derived from verbal communication, e.g. mythology. He also introduced ideas derived directly from films and advertising. Via this heteromorphic approach he forced the viewer to take an active part in the integrated space, due to which art acquired an anthropological dimension. The idea of the Endless House⁷⁵ was the visual expression of the concepts of correalism, which at the same time fulfilled the Modernist idea of the total work of art as derived from Surrealism. It was a biomorphic, organically shaped solid and, concurrently, its metaphor which actualised a general system of cor-

73 Kiesler's first show, *Internationale Ausstellung Neuer Theatertechnik*, Vienna (1924); the gallery is discussed in *Art of This Century*, New York (1942).

74 *Manifeste du Corréalisme* was produced in 1947 in connection with *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at Galerie Maeght in Paris and later published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1949, no. 2, pp. 79–105; English version: "Second Manifesto of Correalism", *Art International*, 9 March 1965, no. 2, pp. 10–19.

75 See F. Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, New York, 1966. A model *Endless House* was made in 1959.

relations and incorporated the space of human experience in the deepest dimension of existence. Kiesler compared the structure of the Endless House to a sculpture, finding it an ideal form which, according to Dieter Bogner, functioned as “a seminal cell containing new possibilities for life”.⁷⁶ Kiesler ascribed a special role to space and to its persuasive function which made it anthropomorphic in order to reveal the crucial factor – the human presence. According to Bogner, the Endless House is “endless like the human body – there is no beginning and no end to it. The ‘Endless’ is rather sensuous, more like the female body in contrast to the sharp-angled male architecture. All ends meet in the ‘Endless’ as they meet in life. Life’s rhythms are cyclical”.⁷⁷ The idea of the Endless House was completely subordinate to the human dimension; the form and shape depended on the psychological and physical condition of the human being. The *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition became a field for experiencing human perception, following the notion that “it is the viewers that create the paintings”, which was shared by both Duchamp and Kiesler.⁷⁸

The catalogue for the *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition was an integral part of the show. It was a fully independent work by Roman Cieślewicz, whose later designs for art publications, periodicals and posters would amply illustrate all of the most highly appreciated aspects of design (Fig. 5). Similarly to the exhibitors, Cieślewicz was a young artist with an already impressive portfolio; at that time he was collaborating with Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne, the only important art publisher of the era. The catalogue was radically different from the traditional publications that accompanied exhibitions in the 1950s. The quantity of information was restrained; one page was assigned to each exhibitor and contained data regarding his/her art education, a photograph of a sculpture and a list of exhibited works. The exhibitors were required to state when and at which institution they had acquired their art education; this was to certify the young people’s art, to be a guarantee of their abilities. The photographs did not show the entire sculptures, only their details. The reader could get the impression that the camera’s shutter had closed automatically, *ad hoc*, without the participation of the photographer, to select one distinct picture from many. A sheet of white paper took on the role of the landscape background; Cieślewicz mounted details of sculptures on its surface as if he had wanted to show their structure, to enter the sculptures and to encourage the reader to view them; the goal was to rivet the reader’s attention. Cieślewicz also added arrows that pointed the reader’s eye to selected elements; he would adopt the same method later, in the year 1960 while working on the

76 D. Bogner, *Inside the Endless House*, in: *Friedrich Kiesler 1890–1965: Inside the Endless House*, exhibition catalogue, Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, Vienna, 1997, p. 19.

77 F. Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House* (part 2, note 116), op. cit., p. 136.

78 D. Daniels, *Points d’interférence entre Frederick Kiesler et Marcel Duchamp*, in: *Frederick Kiesler. Artiste-Architecte*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1996, p. 119.

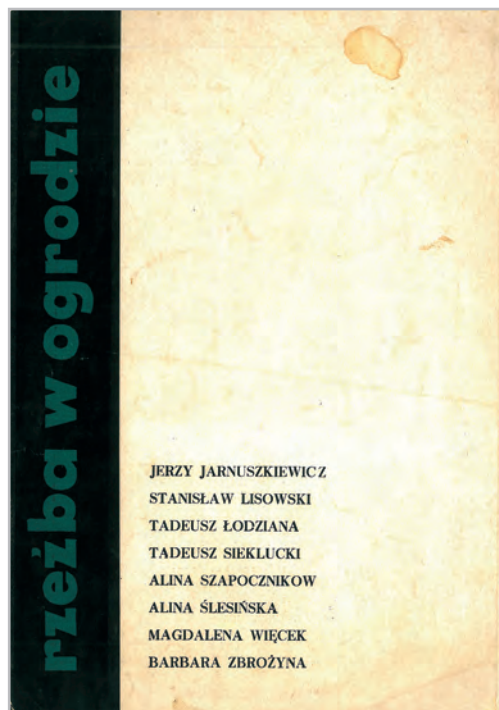


Fig. 5. Catalogue of the *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition, design by Roman Cieśliewicz

graphic design for the covers of the *Ty i Ja* magazine, in which the illustrations were as important as the information contained in the text.⁷⁹ The green colour of the letters on the cover, underlined by a black background in the title section and seen also between the otherwise monochromatic pages, symbolically referred to nature, to the garden in which the spatial spectacle of forms had been staged. The arrangement of the text was influenced by Władysław Strzemiński's theory of functional typography with its stress on the vertical/

⁷⁹ See K. Czerniewska, *Pragnienie rzeczy. Rozmowa z Teresą Kuczyńską* [Desiring things. An interview with Teresa Kuczyńska], in: <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/arttykul/3649-pragnienie-rzeczy.html> [accessed 14 July 2016]. The *Ty i Ja* magazine (1960–1973) was published under the aegis of the Polish Women's League and the expectations which it was expected to meet were clear; nevertheless, it included not only agony columns and culinary recipes, but also, regularly, reviews of freshly published books and Western films based on Western press materials. It thus created a new quality in the market of illustrated magazines; its target was the young intelligentsia yearning for the free world on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The founder of the magazine, Teresa Kuczyńska, commented: "I think this may have been a form of the anti-system policy of the Western countries: to allow us to transmit contents that would help to destroy communism. And our readers indeed started having various yearnings". The magazine was a window to broadly understood modernity, as it encouraged not simple imitation, but liberating creativeness.



Fig. 6. Catalogue of the *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition, design by Roman Cieślewicz

horizontal division of the surface that imposed order on the visual plan of the page; but Cieślewicz attempted to loosen this rigid scheme by letting in more light between the lines of the text and the surfaces of the illustrations. In addition, instead of the usual portrait photographs of exhibitors he made use of photographs of sculptors *en plein air* or at their work. The result was a collective portrait of a group of artists who turned out to be the most interesting sculptors of the “thaw” generation (Figs. 6–7).

The merit of the projects involving sculptural forms arranged in space as presented at *Sculpture in the Garden* and then at the Second Exhibition of Modern Art was later confirmed by solo shows in Warsaw. Sieklucki (1957) exhibited at the International Press and Book Club;⁸⁰ Szapocznikow (1957)⁸¹ at Zachęta; Więcek (1958)⁸² and Szapocznikow, Zbrożyna, Jarnuszkiewicz and Sieklucki (1959)⁸³ at the Krzywe Koło Gallery. The critics saw them as

80 *Wystawa rzeźb Tadeusza Siekluckiego* [Exhibition of Tadeusz Sieklucki's sculpture], exhibition catalogue, The Association of Polish Artists and Designers, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Club of the International Press and Books, Warsaw, 1957.

81 *Alina Szapocznikow*, exhibition catalogue, op. cit.

82 *Magdalena Więcek, Marian Bogusz, Stefan Gierowski*, exhibition catalogue, Krzywe Koło Gallery of Modern Art, Warsaw, 1958.

83 *Alina Szapocznikow, Barbara Zbrożyna, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Tadeusz Sieklucki* – sculptural studies, Krzywe Koło Gallery of Modern Art, Warsaw, February–March 1959.

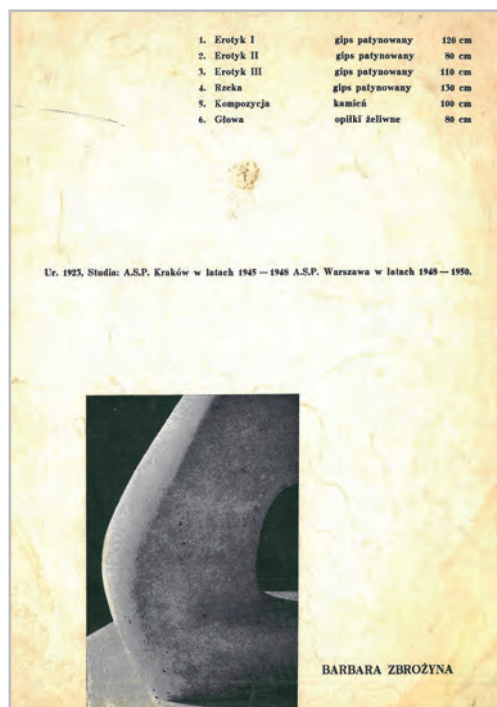


Fig. 7. Catalogue of the *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition, design by Roman Cieśliewicz

“the strongest and the most vigorous trend in our art”.⁸⁴ They took part in many exhibitions abroad.⁸⁵ The reviews underlined the “boldness and panache of these abstract compositions, which are on a par with the best achievements of Western-European modern art”.⁸⁶ In view of this enthusiastic response, the absence of a theoretical exposition of the concept governing this exhibition is surprising; Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewiczowa presented it only as late as in 1984. She defined five consecutive stages of the process of integrating a sculpture with space:

Stage 1 – “Making the solid spatial. It can be considered the first stage insofar as the sculpted object which is being modelled or constructed is still an independent one; but it is already objectified, either in its arrangement or in its structure. In contradiction to the traditional principles, the shape opens

84 Bg. [J. Bogucki], “Wystawa Nowoczesnych” [An exhibition of the Moderns], *Życie Literackie*, 1957, no. 301 (*Plastyka*, no. 13), p. 7.

85 Ausstellung Polnischer Künstler, Kunstsammlungen In Soest, April – Mai 1959. Later the exhibition moved to Bonn, Karlsruhe, Frankfurt, Essen, Bremen, Hannover and Düsseldorf. *Pologne 50 Ans de Peinture*, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire Genève, octobre – novembre 1959.

86 M. Bogusz, “Wystawa Galerii Sztuki Nowoczesnej ‘Krzywe Koło’ w Niemczech Zachodnich” [Exhibition of the Krzywe Koło Gallery of Modern Art in West Germany], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1959, no. 4, p. 20.

itself to the space here; it penetrates the space and the space penetrates the solid; the shape and the space infiltrate each other and remain in a constant interaction. The shape undergoes transformation in its spatial development, and thus also in time. The space is an element that shapes and is shaped at the same time”.

Stage 2 – “Deliberately putting a sculpture in contact with the surrounding space, integrating it with the site by finding the proper relations, and causing the scale and features of the site to condition its sculptural form”.

Stage 3 – “Broadening the field of action to include shaping the space itself by integration with it, by setting focus points, by filling it either with purely visual action or with meaning-oriented expression”.

Stage 4 – “The first step towards what tends to be called the ‘environment’. At this stage, organising the surrounding space is tantamount to creating situations that are meaningful in their spatial and temporal development, accompanied by the recipient’s active cooperation. The barrier of the sculpted object is surmounted; it is the shaping and directing of the entire spatial situation that becomes the sculpted object, and the situation takes over the burden of action”.

Stage 5 – “The concluding point, where the sculpture ceases to function as an independent object and a carrier of meaning, and the entire spatial arrangement becomes the sculptural object; this arrangement goes through a sequence of situations whose dramatic progress constitutes what we call the ‘contents’; this is the contents of the participating recipient’s experience”.⁸⁷

The above stages of the process of creating a sculptural space point towards the fundamental directions of artistic explorations. Delineated in the pioneering theory of art as expounded in *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu czasoprzestrzennego*, they were developed during the experimental exhibitions of the 1950s, including in *Sculpture in the Garden*, and later continued in urban or industrial spaces, e.g. during the Spatial Form Biennale in Elbląg (1965) or the Artists and Scientists Convention in Puławy (1966).

After *Sculpture in the Garden*, sculpture began to be perceived in reference to the way in which its place in the human environment was described. The emergence of places where the space was being actively created may be viewed as the emergence of spheres of spiritual energy which influenced the reception process. The emergence of new fields of art in the context of everyday life, as well as the sensual experience of a place – an experience that is shared by every person who lives, works or moves in the given area – produced the opportunity to personally create one’s environment.

An analysis of the above examples of sculptures produced in the period of the “thaw” reveals a clear inspiration from the abstract artistic language of Henry Moore and the English welder sculptors. The figural form as explored

87 J. Jarnuszkiewiczowa, “Granice pojęcia rzeźby” [Boundaries of the concept of sculpture], in: *Rzeźba polska 1944–1984...*, op. cit., p. 30.

by Moore derived from an anthropomorphic source devoid of ideological contents; in the Polish context of the time, such a figural form was the most communicative and legible visual sign. As if contrary to the proposals offered by the authorities, the figural sign – officially reserved for ideologically involved representations – was revived and re-used; “modernity” as expressed through the figural form was placed in a well-known scheme and thus became intelligible and expressive. After the *Sculpture in the Garden* exhibition, when creative individualities were recognised and the critics grew sure of their judgements, the trends began to separate and arrange themselves along the basic directions of exploration, i.e. towards simplified figuration or a freely developed dynamic structure. The experiments of the “welders” were rooted in that trend of “modernity” which in sculpture was effectuated as the new avant-garde, then still unintelligible and perceived as too odd. It must be noted that this state of affairs was analogous to the pre-war one, when the works of avant-garde artists were noticed but not understood; the parallelism in the emergence of new phenomena in sculpture and in their perception is clear here.

The substance of sculptures, and the issues related to it, as conveyed by the artists to the recipients in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were a logical continuation of the achievements of the pre-war avant-garde, whose fundamental goal was to organise the surrounding space, of the experiences gained in the 1940s and of the transformations of visual awareness that occurred after the year 1956. Modernity – an artistic and ideological orientation which ruled supreme in the period of the “thaw” – was expressed through spatial phenomena that were evident in the sculptural projects created by the youngest generation of artists, above all in those exhibited at the First Exhibition of Modern Art, Second Exhibition of Modern Art and in the natural surroundings at the *Sculpture in the Garden* show. These projects were complemented by projects carried out in combination with architecture, which embraced Oskar Hansen’s concept of the “open form”. The presentation of selected sculptural projects (some of which were also displayed at painting exhibitions) confirmed the potential involved in the diversity of approaches and demonstrated the methods of the gradual emancipation of sculptural substance – an emancipation directed towards its integration with space and ultimately towards a new perception of art by means of space, a turn which is currently known as the “spatial shift”.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

A selection of exhibitions of sculpture held between the years 1946 and 1957 illustrates the formal transformations and diversity of methods of exhibiting sculpted forms as identified through their manner of cooperating with space. The experiments, which commenced during the First Exhibition of Modern Art (1948) and were later creatively developed at the Krzywe Koło and Zachęta galleries, were based on ideas that had been formulated by K. Kobro and W. Strzemiński in *Kompozycja przestrzeni. Obliczenia rytmu-czasoprzestrzennego* (1931), produce a diversified picture of intense formal exploration of sculpture, with the category of “space” emerging as a crucial part of the research perspective. The integrated gallery space and the setting for a work of art – which during the *Sculpture in the Garden* show (1957) included outdoor space – defined a trend that was moving towards the concept of an installation. Exhibitions indirectly connected with sculpture, e.g. *Studium przestrzeni* (1957), were used as research instruments in the process of extending the boundaries of sculptural forms to include their reaching into space.

Krzysztof Kościuczuk

Looking Back at Looking Forward: Art Exhibitions in Poland for the 1975 AICA Congress

In early September of 1975 a crowd of over 140 individuals from 18 countries, including art critics, museum and gallery directors as well as representatives of artistic organisations, descended onto the capital of the People's Republic of Poland to tour the country in the last days of summer. From Warsaw to Cracow, to Wrocław to Łódź and back again, the programme tailored for the occasion was replete with meetings and discussions, but it also abounded with visits to art exhibitions. The 11th Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), organised in Poland under the watchful eye of Professor Juliusz Starzyński, sent ripples across the sea of local artistic life in the mid-1970s. Some of the presentations and works commissioned for that occasion made art history, others were soon, perhaps undeservedly, forgotten. In what follows, I would like to look at two presentations put together especially for that event: *Voir et Concevoir* (Widzieć i rozumieć) which was developed for Cracow's historic Cloth Hall, a part of the city's National Museum, by Mieczysław Porębski in collaboration with Andrzej Pawłowski, and the exhibition that came to be known as *Critics' Picks* (Krytycy sztuki proponują), which was held at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, known as the Zachęta, in Warsaw.

The surge of interest in art exhibitions as a research subject over the last two decades opened up a range of new perspectives from which to view and reassess both the existing art historical writing – including the resulting artistic canon – as well as the current exhibition-making practice. A leading scholar in the field of exhibition history, Bruce Altshuler, observed: “Those engaged in the study of exhibitions frequently come upon little-known documents that enrich, or even radically revise, our understanding of modern and contemporary art. [...] With the growing art historical interest in exhibitions and art world institutions, such documentation plays an increasingly important role in our understanding of the past. Scrutinising the historical presentation of art also illuminates our own experience, prompting a more nuanced

perspective on current artistic and curatorial practice”.¹ Accordingly, the aim of this overview is not so much to offer an in-depth reading of those exhibitions as to frame them within the context in which they originated, i.e. as official surveys of Polish art meant largely for international audiences.

In this sense, the attempt below seeks to shed light on the work of certain individuals as much as on the workings of some of the state institutions – acknowledging their privileged status, their will to experiment as well as their limitations and, last but not least, role in constructing the canon. All of them were active agents in the latter process, producing exhibitions that had the ambition of offering an overview of the art of the People’s Republic of Poland as well as heralding the directions of its future development. This said, an important point of reference for this outline is the call for the development of a “horizontal art history”, as set forth by Professor Piotr Piotrowski, according to which the dominant art historical narratives of the 20th century, created in particular in Western Europe and the United States, should be cast in a different light and subjected to critical reassessment by analyses of the phenomena that took place beyond the centres thus understood.²

The AICA Congress

In 1971 the authorities of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), in collaboration with the Polish section, made the decision to organise the 11th Congress of its members in the People’s Republic of Poland. The AICA, an institution operating under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), was launched as a result of two international assemblies that took place in Paris in 1948 and 1949. The Polish section of the AICA was established in May 1955 during a general assembly held in Oxford, at the initiative of Professor Juliusz Starzyński, who also became the section’s head.³ Starzyński (1906–1974), an art historian, was instrumental in shaping the state structures of art historical research in the post-war period, having paved the way for establishing the Art Institute of

1 B. Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial. Exhibitions that Made Art History. Vol. 1: 1863–1959*, New York, 2008, p. 7.

2 P. Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History”, *Umeni/Art*, 2008, no. 5, pp. 378–383. Also see idem, “Towards Horizontal Art History”, in: *Crossing Cultures. Conflict. Migration, and Convergence*, ed. J. Anderson, Melbourne, 2009, pp. 82–85; idem, “Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde”, in: *Europa! Europa! The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. S. Bru et al., Berlin, 2009, pp. 49–58; “On the Spatial Turn”, in: *Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe*, eds. C. Macel et al., Paris, 2010, pp. 212–215.

3 Letter of Juliusz Starzyński of 16 September 1960, Rennes, Archives de la Critique d’Art, FR ACA AICAI THE CON014 2/05. Also see the Bulletin of the Polish National Commission for UNESCO, Warsaw, 2014, pp. 25, 30.

the Polish Academy of Sciences where he served as the head, and remained an influential figure throughout his life.⁴ No more than three years after the Oxford assembly, the Polish branch was entrusted with the task of organising the 7th International Congress which, upon Starzyński's initiative,⁵ adopted the slogan "Art – Nations – World". The congress took place 6–13 September 1960 in both Warsaw and Cracow, and while its programme included visits to exhibitions, these, for the most part, did not feature specially commissioned presentations and involved tours of permanent displays at state museums and current exhibitions.⁶ (A notable exception was *Konfrontacje 1960*, a string of events held at the Krzywe Koło Gallery devoted to a number of different artists).⁷ The primary aim of the congress, however, was to reflect on the title theme through a series of discussions and papers prepared in response to a survey that had been sent to AICA members before the event.⁸

4 See S. Mossakowski, "Juliusz Starzyński", *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 1976, vol. XI, pp. 5–8; M. Leśniakowska, "Władza spojrzenia – władza języka. Juliusza Starzyńskiego obraz sztuki i jej historii", *Modus*, 2013, vol. XII–XIII, pp. 27–52.

5 *Bulletin of the 7th International Congress of Art Critics*, Warsaw, 1960, no. 1, unpaginated.

6 For a rare and in-depth analysis of this event, see T. Kodera, "'Art – Nations – World': The 1960 International Congress of the AICA in Poland and Discussions on the International Character of Modern Art", *Pamiętnik Sztuk Pięknych: Sztuka Polska 1945–1970* [Fine Arts Diary: Polish Art 1945–1970], 2015, no. 9, pp. 203–216. The author, following the approach proposed by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann in his *Toward a Geography of Art*, focuses on the congress as an event as well as on the accompanying debate as a means of understanding international trends in modern and contemporary art scholarship.

7 *Konfrontacje 1960*, organised by Marian Bogusz, Stefan Gierowski and Aleksander Wojciechowski and inaugurated on 8 September 1960, featured paintings by Marian Bogusz, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Tadeusz Dominik, Stefan Gierowski, Bronisław Kierkowski, Jerzy Nowosielski, Jan Tarasin, Jerzy Tchórzewski, Rajmund Ziemiński, and sculptures by Alina Szapocznikow, Alina Ślesińska, Magdalena Więcek. The event became arguably one of the key exhibitions hosted by the gallery. See A. Wojciechowski, "Konfrontacje 1960", in: *Galeria Krzywe Koło*, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Warsaw, 1990, pp. 71–77; *Konfrontacje 1960*, ed. A. Wojciechowski, Galeria Krzywego Koła, Starmiejski Dom Kultury, Warsaw, 1960.

8 Noteworthy initiatives addressed during the event included establishing an international centre for documentation concerning the beginnings of modern art which was to be launched by Starzyński under the auspices of UNESCO. See the *Bulletin of the 7th...*, op. cit. The 7th AICA Congress *L'art – les nations – l'univers* was reported on extensively by the professional periodical *Przegląd Artystyczny* which, at that time, carried the masthead "The Magazine of the State Institute of Art and the Polish Section of the International Association of Art Critics". An issue entirely devoted to the congress featured a selection of papers sent by AICA members in response to the questionnaire published by the Polish Section. The survey concerned three points: "Modern art as an international phenomenon", "Modern art as a result and expression of the multiple traditions and artistic tendencies of the different nations", "Modern art and the perspectives for the development of art of different nations". The responses, printed in Polish and in the original language, were dominated by French contributors, among them Jean Bouret,

Thus the congress of 1975 was the second AICA event in history to be held in Poland. Starzyński, still at the helm of the Polish section, set out to work on the programme of the assembly well before, hoping to not only generate a discussion among the participants but also to present a broad overview of the different phenomena taking place in Polish art. The common practice for AICA gatherings was to hold annual gatherings lasting from seven to twelve days in a different country each year. The congress in Poland followed a significant event: in 1974, for the first time, the organisation's members met in East Berlin and in Dresden, in the German Democratic Republic. The GDR section – established and accepted into AICA structures during the Polish congress of 1960 – now played host to an event that enjoyed hitherto unseen popularity,⁹ attracting over 180 attendees from across the world (the USSR, which officially did not belong to the organisation, sent four observers who presented three papers). During a closed session in Warsaw in 1974, Starzyński – one of the five Polish delegates to the East German congress – addressed his fellow members of the local AICA assessing the role of the hosts with the following words: “Possibly, this is a part of a broader effort carried out by the GDR that consists in surfacing, documenting and playing an exceptional role in the cultural field on the international arena”.¹⁰ In saying this, Starzyński saw the East German initiative both as a point of reference, a model, and competition. Noting the exceptional support enjoyed by the GDR section on the part of the state and municipal authorities, he emphasised: “We must present artistic issues of the highest quality. Which is not to say that the congress should be apolitical, it cannot be, and will not be such, by all means”.¹¹ The theme selected for the Polish Congress, which was “Art – Science – Technology as Elements of the Development of our Epoch”, echoed the current policy of UNESCO which connected the realms of culture, art, science and ethics.¹²

Starzyński, however, set out to follow the guidelines in papers and exhibitions in a more “content-oriented than declarative manner”, so as to offer participants an “anthology of the different themes of Polish visual arts of the 20th century”.¹³ It was his will to “eliminate the empty talk of conference

Pierre Couthion, Waldemar George, Jean-Clarence Lambert, Guy Weelen, Joseph Pichard, Georges Pillement, Michel Ragon and Pierre Restany, with one text by a German art historian, Franz Roh. This debate which, in some cases, embraced the concept of modern art as an international language was cut short with the end of the Polish Thaw – a political change in the mid-1950s triggered by the death of Stalin which came to a halt in the early 1960s. See *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1960, no. 2–3.

9 J. Starzyński, “Zebranie Sekcji Polskiej, 17.09.1974”, transcript, Warsaw, Special Collections, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, p. 11.

10 Ibid., p. 12.

11 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

12 Letter of the Polish delegate to UNESCO to J. Starzyński, 12 December 1973, quoted in: idem. Also see W. Balicki, J. Kossak, M. Żuławski, *Cultural Policy in Poland*, Paris, 1973.

13 J. Starzyński, op. cit., pp. 14, 18.

papers written beforehand” and to stimulate an exchange in a different field that led to the inclusion of exhibitions as a contribution in the debate on the shape of the current art.¹⁴

Professor Starzyński did not live to see the result of his efforts – he died in December 1974. At a meeting in February of the following year a new board of the Polish section of AICA was selected, with Władysława Jaworska as the head. Jaworska, working with Małgorzata Sobieraj and Anda Rottenberg, oversaw and implemented the congress plans that had been developed under Starzyński.¹⁵ The assembly itself was initially scheduled for May 1975, a date that was warmly received by the representatives of the Ministry of Culture (in all likelihood due to the accompanying celebrations of Labour Day). However, a vote of the AICA members in 1974 decided otherwise, with 127 in favour of pushing the date to September and only two willing to arrive in May. As a result, the 11th AICA Congress and the 27th General Assembly took place from 9 to 16 September in Warsaw, Cracow, Wrocław and Łódź, after which the delegates returned to Warsaw again. The event enjoyed an exceptionally high attendance, with over 140 delegates visiting the People’s Republic of Poland from 18 countries. Over 30 papers delivered at the time explored two broadly defined fields: the intersection of science, art and technology as well as the potential links between the social space and that of art.¹⁶ At the same time, a number of congress exhibitions embraced the concept of experiment to showcase the current artistic practices of the People’s Republic of Poland, hoping to tie their future to a broader international circuit.¹⁷ The first of them took place in Cracow.

14 Ibid., p. 16.

15 A. Rottenberg, “Recollections from the Congress”, *The Brooklyn Rail*, May 2014; A. Rottenberg, “Kongres AICA (Polska)”, *Projekt*, 1976, vol. 21, no. 1 (110), p. 58.

16 W. Jaworska, “Po kongresie AICA”, *Sztuka*, 1975, no. 6, pp. 1–2.

17 Other important exhibitions presented on the occasion included displays at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, among them a presentation of works by Alina Szapocznikow, the exhibition *Around Surrealism* organised by Mariusz Hermansdorfer at the National Gallery in Wrocław, and the international exhibition *Terra I* put together by Stefan Müller in the city’s Architecture Museum. Of these, only the latter has received sufficient attention of scholars. See *W kręgu nadrealizmu*, ed. M. Hermansdorfer, exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Wrocław, Wrocław, 1975; *Międzynarodowa Wystawa Architektury Intencjonalnej “Terra-1”*, Stowarzyszenie Architektów Polskich, Wrocław, 1975; S. Müller, “Terra I: Międzynarodowa Wystawa Architektury Intencjonalnej”, *Projekt*, 1975, vol. 20, no. 4 (107), pp. 45–51. Also see “Terra”, *Autoportret*, 2011, no. 2 (34), pp. 42–49; G. Świtek, “Spacesuits, Space Kitchens, Space Cities...”, in: *Kosmos wzywa – Cosmos Calling*, eds. J. Kordjak-Piotrowska, S. Welbel, Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, 2014, pp. 145–159. In 1974 Starzyński suggested organising three solo exhibitions of artists “who[se work] would be known in person by the majority of the participants and who gained international acclaim in the course of the last 15 years, that is between 1960 and 1974”. These were: Piotr Potworowski in Poznań, Alina Szapocznikow in Łódź and Aleksander Kobzdej in Warsaw. Lastly, one of the most interesting congress initiatives that failed to see the light of day was the exhibition entitled *Unidentified Art*, planned for Wrocław’s Hatzfeld Palace by Włodzimierz Borowski

Voir et Concevoir

One of the first exhibitions presented to the members of the AICA upon their arrival in Poland was *Voir et Concevoir*, or *To See and to Understand*, organised by art historian Mieczysław Porębski (1921–2012) in collaboration with artist and designer Andrzej Pawłowski (1925–1986)¹⁸ in the historic Cloth Hall, which was a section of the National Museum in Cracow. Porębski and Pawłowski were approached by Starzyński to develop a concept of the exhibition before 1974, and their proposal was considered among the congress' highlights from the outset (Starzyński even considered inaugurating the event in Cracow).¹⁹ The two produced a presentation which came to be remembered not for its scale but for its non-conventional approach to museum practice. The event brought together work by seven contemporary artists²⁰ in an unlikely setting of the museum's new permanent display of 19th-century art, unveiled to the public in June 1975. The new display, also the result of cooperation between Porębski, the institution's curator, and Pawłowski, involved not only a rehang-ing of the existing paintings, now presented alongside a selection of works from the museum's storage, but also the creation of a comprehensive environment based on historic presentations of art from the previous century gleaned from documentation.²¹ In this setting, complete with such elements as carpets and potted palm trees, the works would be 'perceived as though through the eyes of those original viewers'.²² The concept, Porębski later argued, while essentially focusing on Polish art, also sought to present the broad horizons of the 19th century as a period that was not confined solely to Poland.²³

It was against this historicising backdrop that Porębski chose to stage his exhibition proposal. "Welcoming the members of AICA to this historical and cultural centre of our city" – he addressed the audience at the opening – "in a building that has been the premises of the Cracow National Museum for

and Jerzy Ludwiński. See *Sztuka Niezidentyfikowana*, typescript, Warsaw, Archive of Włodzimierz Borowski, Museum of Modern Art. See also "Unidentified Art", in: *Notes From the Future of Art: Selected Writings by Jerzy Ludwiński*, ed. M. Ziółkowska, Eindhoven, pp. 45–48.

18 For more on Pawłowski, see *Andrzej Pawłowski 1925–1986*, exhibition catalogue, ed. J. Trzupęk, Katowice, 2002.

19 J. Starzyński, op. cit., p. 19.

20 The participants of the exhibition were Tadeusz Brzozowski, Stanisław Fijałkowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Adam Marczyński, Jerzy Nowosielski, Andrzej Pawłowski, Ryszard Wi-niarski. See *Voir et Concevoir*, exhibition leaflet, National Museum in Cracow, Cracow, 1975.

21 A. Olszewska, "Obecność prac humanisty. O Mieczysławie Porębskim w 2013", *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, 2013, vol. XXXVIII, pp. 23–24.

22 J. Madeyski, "Retro w Sukiennicach", *Życie Literackie*, 27 July 1975, no. 30; "Galeria Malarstwa w Sukiennicach na nowo urządzona w stylu retro", *Echo Krakowa*, 13–15 June 1975, no. 132, pp. 1–2.

23 M. Porębski, *Galeria Polskiego Malarstwa i Rzeźby XIX wieku w Sukiennicach*, guide, National Museum in Cracow, Cracow, 1991, p. 14.

over a century now, we introduce our guests to a certain framework of fixed traditions and significance. These are, essentially, visual frames. [...] Until recently, we were inclined to look at the legacy of the 19th century from one perspective only: that of a struggle for the autonomy of a painter's practice, an independence from iconographic trends and programmes of the day, and of developing a language of pure visual values. [...] Today, however [...] we are interested not only in its formal aspect but also, more and more frequently, precisely in the aspect of iconography. We learn not only how to see it but also to understand it [...] within a system of motifs, subjects and series exploring certain themes in which ideas, myths and obsessions central to the period were expressed. For Polish art, this fact was of special significance due to the role this art came to play at the time when the country lost its sovereignty, precisely in the 19th century. [...] This gave rise to the distinct and sophisticated character of the iconographic programmes pursued by our art, but also to the growing need to escape the vicious circle of venerated motifs and themes and to explore a set of more universal problems, to set foot on the solid ground of facts of a purely visual nature and, through them, to find a common language with the rest – if not the rest of the world then at least the rest of Europe”.²⁴ These opening remarks highlighted both the existence of the hosting institution as well as its underlying mechanisms which Porębski sought to alter, establishing links between the local practice and developments in other countries.

“I should say that the slogan, ‘To See and to Understand’, under which our exhibition was presented is rather accidental” explained Porębski in a text published later.²⁵ The watchword, the scholar went on to explain, appeared at the time when, together with Pawłowski, he started to consider the possibility of confronting the different ways of visualising the ‘intellectual substance’ of our times.²⁶ According to Porębski: “To see means to look and to teach people how to look, to encourage and even to force them to look; it relates to that specific kind of ‘emphatic presence’, to the visual and iconic aspect of the picture, to the sphere of the artists’ manipulations, of their independence and freedom”; while “to understand means to read, to decipher, and to decode. It is a process of reducing the picture to its ‘text’ that one must put in an appropriate context of things and ideas, and relate to implied individual and social meanings in order to explain its origin, conditions and limitations”.²⁷ Such was the reasoning that informed one in the original curatorial concept.

In practice, Porębski, acting on behalf of the museum, commissioned seven renowned contemporary Polish artists (among them Pawłowski),

24 M. Porębski, “Widzieć i pojmować”; a speech delivered at the opening of the exhibition, in: *Pożegnanie z krytyką*, Cracow, 1983, pp. 186–187.

25 M. Porębski, “Widzieć i rozumieć”, *Projekt*, 1976, no. 1 (100), pp. 62–63.

26 Another title considered for the exhibition was “Visual Thought”, J. Starzyński, op. cit., p. 21.

27 M. Porębski, “Widzieć i rozumieć”, op. cit.

to produce works for the recently redesigned permanent display which was engaged in the historical character and artistic tradition of the 19th century in a direct or less so manner.²⁸ The resulting contributions expanded on Porębski's concept of a permanent display transforming the museum into the site of an experiment: the geometric works of Ryszard Winiarski and Adam Marczyński stood in stark contrast to the *Four-in-Hand* by Józef Chełmoński depicting a cart drawn by four horses in full gallop (at times described as the pinnacle of Polish naturalism). Similarly, albeit in a different manner, the patches of vivid colour on Tadeusz Brzozowski's canvases seemed both at home and out of place in the otherwise toned-down museum hall. The austere interior in acrylic paint by Jerzy Nowosielski teetered between abstraction and representation, exuding an aura of mystical ritual. Two smaller canvases by Stanisław Fijałkowski, on the other hand, echoed academic painting in their scale yet carried a similar suggestion of hidden meanings that the viewer was meant to decipher. The three-dimensional, eerie human-like shapes in shades of red by Pawłowski echoed those of humans which had been cast in bronze several decades earlier and placed on plinths inside the room.²⁹ The most striking of these was perhaps the *Emballage of the Prussian Homage*, in which Tadeusz Kantor set out to confront the most eminent figure of Polish historical painting – Jan Matejko – by recasting the latter's monumental work completed in 1882 as a pale, “packaged” four-panel canvas with faint outlines of the figures, two of which bore features of Kantor's self-portraits.³⁰

There is a number of hints that Porębski was aware of the radical character of the project and the potential controversy it would stir among the broader public.³¹ Together with Starzyński they planned to educate potential visitors on the exhibition's character and to emphasise that it was “not a demonstration against Matejko or Chełmoński but a demonstration as such, an expression of our cult of tradition, yet one that is active rather than idolatrous”.³² Seen as a clash of new imagery with a wide spectrum of 19th-century works (of varying artistic quality and style, both outstanding and mediocre, academic and independent, pervaded with patriotic meanings or purely personal), *Voir et Concevoir* marked a rift in the traditional museum practice of the day. The institution not only acted as a patron, directly commissioning works from

28 R. Solewski, “Widzieć i rozumieć”, *Kresy*, 1997, no. 31, pp. 220–223.

29 “Widzieć i rozumieć”, Cracow, Archive of the National Museum, 71/280.

30 See K. Czerni, “Ambalaż ‘Hołdu pruskiego’ Kantora jako portret metafizyczny artysty”, in: *Ambalaż ‘Hołdu pruskiego’*. *Obraz Tadeusza Kantora w Sukiennicach*, Cracow, 2000, pp. 11–16; M. Porębski, “Ambalaże, ambalaże”, *ibid.*, pp. 5–10.

31 Indeed a controversy soon followed, as is testified in the museum's visitors' book, which is replete with comments denouncing the presence of contemporary works in the Cloth Hall rooms. Cracow, Archive of the National Museum, 3/rkp/ks.pam (I would like to thank Diana Błońska and Małgorzata Garlacz of the Archive for their help).

32 J. Starzyński, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

artists,³³ but was also transformed into a site of confrontation with current artistic traditions, which was a bold move at the time, both in the People's Republic of Poland and, possibly, in Europe.³⁴ At the same time, this gesture was only possible within the framework of the AICA Congress, which opened up the possibility to experiment in order to develop a progressive and dynamic image of Polish art – one that linked the past and the present.

Critics' Picks, or 30 Works for the 30th Anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland

The second exhibition, which was organised especially with the members of the International Association of Art Critics in mind and which I aim to explore in this paper, took place in Warsaw's Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, which is the present-day Zachęta – the National Gallery of Art. Its venue, however, as well as the ultimate shape it took, was not so much a matter of premeditated choice as a result of the unexpected circumstances surrounding the development of the exhibition's concept, which, I would like to argue, only reveals its innovative potential when framed in the context of the AICA event.

While the exact authorship of the original concept remains unclear, it is certain that the presentation in question was conceived as a highlight of the upcoming congress, in collaboration between Starzyński and the art critic Janusz Bogucki (1916–1995). Its idea was based on a survey, developed in 1973 and conducted later among the members of the national section of the AICA who were asked to provide a selection of 30 essential works of Polish artists created after 2nd World War and accompanied by a concise justification. Of the 30 individuals who were approached with the questionnaire, 20 responded with a list of works and one replied with a written explanation.³⁵ The ques-

33 Porębski also saw this role as a way of enlarging the Museum's collections of current art. See K. Czerni, *Nie tylko o sztuce: rozmowy z profesorem Mieczysławem Porębskim*, Poznań, 1992, pp. 177–179.

34 In an interview with Mariusz Hermansdorfer conducted by the author, this long-standing director of the National Museum in Wrocław noted that Porębski's decision was ground-breaking in the European museum practice of the day, "Interview with Mariusz Hermansdorfer", April 2015, in the author's archive.

35 Those who responded to the questionnaire were: Marceli Bacciarelli, Helena Blum, Janusz Bogucki, Szymon Bojko, Ewa Garztecka, Elżbieta Grabska, Irena Jakimowicz, Władysława Jaworska, Bożena Kowalska, Kazimierz Malinowski, Andrzej Osęka, Ksawery Piwocki, Andrzej Ryszkiewicz, Wojciech Skrodzki, Jerzy Stajuda, Juliusz Starzyński, Wiesława Wierzchowska, Aleksander Wojciechowski, Jacek Woźniakowski, and Jerzy Zanoziński. The individual to refuse to submit a list but to offer written feedback was Mieczysław Porębski. Those who abstained from or did not respond for any other reason were: Stanisław Lorentz, Jerzy Sienkiewicz, Mieczysław Wallis, Wiesław Borowski, Urszula Czartoryska, Andrzej Jakimowicz, Jerzy Ludwiński, Piotr Krakowski

tionnaire yielded a total of 590 entries which were then compiled into a list that reflected the popularity of particular artists by proportion.³⁶

Yet this singular method of arriving at a list of works to be exhibited was but the first step in a protracted process. The next projected stage consisted in presenting the results of this survey, i.e. the documentation, in a "preliminary exhibition" that was scheduled to take place at the Współczesna Gallery, run by Bogucki, to be followed by discussions at meetings and in the press which would serve as a basis for the final selection of 30 works to be showcased at a second exhibition set to open at the National Museum in Warsaw.³⁷

In July 1974, however, Bogucki ceased to be the director of the Współczesna Gallery which he had founded in 1965 and headed with his wife,

and Ryszard Stanisławski. "Krytycy sztuki proponują", Warsaw, Special Collections, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

36 The top 30 name listed were as follows, with the first number standing for the number of critics who voted for a particular artist and the second the total number of votes received by that artist (the sequence follows the one listed in the materials for the unpublished volume and the published leaflet): Zdzisław Beksiński 4 – 32; Tadeusz Brzozowski 18 – 21; Władysław Hasior 18 – 21; Andrzej Wróblewski 16 – 19; Jerzy Nowosielski 14 – 18; Józef Gielniak 16 – 17; Maria Jarema 12 – 14; Piotr Potworowski 12 – 14; Henryk Stażewski 13 – 14; Jan Lebenstein 10 – 13; Stefan Gierowski 12 – 12; Roman Opałka 8 – 12; Magdalena Abakanowicz 11 – 11; Zbigniew Makowski 11 – 11; Artur Nacht-Samborski 9 – 11; Gustaw Zemła 11 – 11 (with Wojciech Zabłocki 9 – 9); Jan Cybis 9 – 10; Tadeusz Kantor 10 – 10; Władysław Strzemiński 9 – 10; Alina Szapocznikow 9 – 10; Henryk Tomaszewski 8 – 10 (with Wojciech Fangor 1 – 1); Xawery Dunikowski 7 – 9; Stanisław Fijałkowski 9 – 9; Tadeusz Kulisiewicz 8 – 9; Jerzy Tchórzewski 8 – 8; Zbigniew Gostomski 6 – 7; Felicjan Szczyśny Kowarski 6 – 7; Wacław Taranczewski 7 – 7; Tadeusz Trepkowski 7 – 7; Mieczysław Wejman 6 – 7; Wojciech Fangor 5 – 6 (with Henryk Tomaszewski 1 – 1) (with Wojciech Zamecznik 4 – 4); Aleksander Kobzdej 6 – 6; Andrzej Strumiłło 5 – 6; Bronisław W. Linke 5 – 5; Henryk Morel 5 – 5 (with Piotr Pereplyś 2 – 2); Jerzy Panek 5 – 5; Józef Szajna 4 – 5; Walerian Borowczyk 4 – 4 (with Jan Lenica 1 – 1); Włodzimierz Borowski 3 – 4; Andrzej Pawłowski 3 – 4; design of the Treblinka Memorial: Franciszek Duszenko, Adam Haupt, Franciszek Strynkiewicz 4 – 4; design of the Auschwitz Memorial: Oskar Hansen, Zofia Hansen, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Julian Pałka, Lechosław Rosiński 4 – 4; Jerzy Rosołowicz 2 – 4; Jan Berdyszak 2 – 3; Marian Bogusz 3 – 3; Zbigniew Dłubak 3 – 3; Eugeniusz Eibisch 3 – 3; Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz 3 – 3; Zdzisław Jurkiewicz 2 – 3; Jerzy Krawczyk 3 – 3; Jan Lenica 3 – 3 (with Walerian Borowczyk 1 – 1); Adam Marczyński 3 – 3; Zbigniew Pronaszko 3 – 3; Adolf Ryszka 3 – 3; Kajetan Sosnowski 2 – 3; Jonasz Stern 3 – 3; Jan Tarasin 3 – 3; Ryszard Winiarski 2 – 3; Jerzy Wolff 3 – 3; Jerzy Bereś 1 – 2; Mieczysław Berman 2 – 2; Roman Cieślewicz 2 – 2; Waldemar Cwenarski 2 – 2; Jan Dobkowski 2 – 2; Andrzej Matuszewski 1 – 2; Lucjan Mianowski 2 – 2; Edmund Monsiel 1 – 2; Józef Mroszczak 2 – 2; Nikifor 2 – 2; Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa 2 – 2; Jacek Sempoliński 2 – 2; Leszek Sobocki 2 – 2; Franciszek Starowieyski 2 – 2; Bohdan Urbanowicz 2 – 2; Jacek Waltoś 2 – 2; Anastazy B. Wiśniewski 1 – 2; Stanisław Wojcieszynski (Wostan) 2 – 2; Stanisław Wójtowicz 2 – 2; Wojciech Zamecznik 2 – 2; Rajmund Ziemiński 2 – 2.

37 J. Starzyński, op. cit., p. 31.

Maria³⁸ – the future of the whole endeavour became uncertain. At that point, Bogucki and Starzyński began considering producing a lavishly illustrated volume documenting the process – printed by the RSW Prasa – Książka – Ruch publishing house³⁹ – as well as organising an “analytical exhibition” of some 500 works from which 30 would be selected in the course of an ensuing debate. An alternative scenario involved abandoning the idea of the preliminary exhibition altogether and publishing the results of the survey in the press to open up a discussion that would eventually yield a list of 30 works. Yet doing so, Starzyński noted, “would distort the original idea according to which the exhibition was to take shape in two stages”.⁴⁰

In a meeting that same year Starzyński observed that Bogucki had apparently lost “the will to make this exhibition”,⁴¹ insisting that he pursue the original concept of staging the preliminary presentation at the Współczesna Gallery as an external commissioner. The latter firmly refused to “do anything in the place he had to vacate”,⁴² and suggested that the initial exhibition be organised at the Współczesna Gallery without his involvement, or he himself could be involved in such work in a different venue. Alternatively, Bogucki suggested merging the two exhibition formats into a single presentation that would highlight the 30 top-ranking works and display the documentation meant for the initial show alongside it. At the same time, he indeed seemed reluctant to take up the initiative.

In an attempt to resolve the impasse, the RSW Prasa – Książka – Ruch publishing house, which was the administrator of a network of International

38 Bogucki submitted his resignation on 10 July 1974. See D. Jarecka, “Janusz Bogucki, the Polish Szeemann”, in: *Rejected Heritage: Polish Art of the 1980s*, ed. K. Sienkiewicz, Warsaw, 2011, pp. 13–14.

39 D. Kobielski, letter to B. Płaza, Deputy Director of RSW Prasa – Książka – Ruch, 3 October 1974, “Krytycy sztuki proponują”, Warsaw, Special Collections, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. The RSW Prasa – Książka – Ruch Publishing House agreed to produce an accompanying publication for the event still before 1974 and followed through with its development until the very last stage, including the mock-up (I would like to thank Bożena Kowalska for sharing this information).

40 J. Starzyński, op. cit., p. 32. Bogucki claimed, accordingly, that the broader preliminary exhibition, which would offer material for discussion, was more significant than the final presentation of 30 works (J. Bogucki, “Zebranie Sekcji Polskiej...”, op. cit., p. 42).

41 J. Starzyński, op. cit., p. 34.

42 J. Bogucki, op. cit., p. 41. It should be noted that Bogucki’s resignation in the face of the obstacles he faced as the head of the Współczesna Gallery can be seen in the context of his growing disillusionment with the possibility of pursuing the new role he envisaged for his venue following his visit to *documenta 5* in Kassel. In a memo from 31 July 1972, Bogucki wrote of *documenta* as an “attempt at forging new connections between art and society” linked to an effort toward “developing a new model, a new type of a gallery museum as an institution that not only assembles and makes available its collections”, Archives of Galeria Współczesna, Warsaw, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. See D. Jarecka, op. cit., pp. 13–14.

Press and Book Clubs operating across the country – and one of which was host to the Współczesna Gallery – came up with an offer of a different venue in Warsaw's Nowy Świat Street in which Bogucki could stage the exhibition on similar terms (with the financial backing of the RSW) and without the need to involve the gallery he had left.⁴³ Bogucki was also approached by a representative of the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions Zachęta with the suggestion to stage the exhibition there but was initially unable to decide due to the fact that, to his mind, the RSW as a supporting institution and designated publisher for the album would expect to host the exhibition as well.⁴⁴

However, following Starzyński's death in December 1974, Bogucki was left alone with the project that eventually found its way into the Zachęta, where it was presented as *Critics' Picks* (also frequently referred to as *30 Works for the 30th Anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland*). There, six gallery rooms showcased over 300 works by more than 80 artists who received two or more votes in the critics' poll, accompanied by documents (detailed lists and comments returned by each critic) displayed on the ground floor. Information on the number of votes received by each artist as well as the names of the critics selecting them was also provided alongside the works in the exhibition space. An additional poll was carried out among visitors to the Zachęta who were asked to indicate the most adequate response submitted by the Polish AICA members.

The resulting formula was thus a compromise between the two originally envisioned formats, i.e. that of a preliminary exhibition accompanied by documentation and the final selection of the 30 most significant works. Bogucki described his decision as follows: "Due to the fact that the same works frequently recurred in the responses of different critics, we [the organizers] have given up the idea of grouping the exhibits in sets reflecting the individual choices. Rather, works by a single artist proposed by different critics were presented together, with particular sets of works combined into larger wholes based on affinities with respect to form and ideas".⁴⁵

Therefore, as much as the initial survey sought to reveal the preferences of particular critics which provided information about their professional practice, the final presentation blurred those distinctions by focusing on strings of works by particular artists.

This arithmetic approach, which superseded the clear-cut personal selections, highlighted, perhaps unintentionally, a number of paradoxes. One of them was the response submitted by Wojciech Skrodzki who, having cast one vote on Józef Gielniak, cast the remaining 29 on Zdzisław Beksiński, as a result of which the latter received the largest number of votes in total and

43 Cz. Kałużny, "Zebranie Sekcji Polskiej...", op. cit., pp. 45–46.

44 J. Bogucki, op. cit., p. 55.

45 J. Bogucki, "Krytycy sztuki proponują", Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, Warsaw, 1975, pp. 5–10.

had his works presented in an individual room.⁴⁶ Similarly, due to the fact that on a number of occasions Bogucki chose to present works different than those indicated in the questionnaires (a choice that was dictated by availability as much as the ability to show them in a gallery space), several proposals did not find their way into the exhibition. Many of the critics' responses included works that did not fall into the general category of painting, sculpture or prints (among them were the retrospective exhibition of Włodzimierz Borowski, *Playing Field*, held at the Współczesna Gallery in 1972, the design for the Auschwitz Memorial of 1958 by a team led by Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz and Oskar Hansen, the performances of Tadeusz Kantor's Cricot 2 Theatre, the Polish Pavilion for the Brussels Expo 58 by Jerzy Sołtan and Lech Tomaszewski, and the decorative frieze designed by Wojciech Fangor for the World Festival of Youth and Students of 1955).

This point was driven home by Porębski, who was the only individual to respond to the survey with only an explanation, refusing to list specific works. His argument was as follows: "The last artworks of the 20th century as far as I can remember were Duchamp's *Large Glass* and *Compositions* by Witkacy [S. I. Witkiewicz]. [...] In the two decades between the wars and, more notably, the three decades after the [2nd World] War there were no other artworks. There was, however, practice that employed a variety of media, relying equally easily on painting, drawing and print as well as spatial planning, stage design, photography and film, spoken word, gesture, lifestyle. In this situation I find it difficult to reply to your survey. I could only point to the practice of certain artists that I find particularly significant in the realm of life as well as art".⁴⁷

Once again, Porębski's voice captured the essence of the survey as well as the resulting exhibition, exposing the assumptions that apparently guided both Starzyński and Bogucki – only cast in sharp contrast before the AICA crowd. An attempt at creating an inclusive, transparent selection process to paint an image of artistic life and production in the People's Republic of Poland exposed both the actual conditions and powers that were at play in its field as well as the paradigms that shaped the thinking of its actors. *Critics' Picks*, or *30 Works for the 30th Anniversary*... has remained largely and undeservedly forgotten as a project, also due to the fact that, following Starzyński's death, plans to publish the extensive volume documenting the whole endeavour stalled. The official reason for abandoning the publication project was dry and prosaic: a lack of paper.⁴⁸

46 Questionnaire of W. Skrodzki, "Krytycy sztuki proponują", Warsaw, Special Collections, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

47 Ibid.

48 Z. Juzwa, letter to A. Turniak, Secretary of the State Publishing House (KAW), 29 May 1976, "Krytycy sztuki proponują", Warsaw, Special Collections, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences.

Conclusion

In the paper above I set out to shed some light on the circumstances surrounding the development of two exhibitions commissioned for the 1975 AICA congress, framing them in a perspective that acknowledges the active role of the event in shaping their ultimate form. The strong emphasis that was put on experiment yielded a non-conventional exhibition, *Voir et Concevoir*, in Cracow, which re-examined the mode of exhibition-production as well as the framework of the institutional practice of a museum. In *Critics' Picks* in Warsaw the experimental formula was perhaps taken even further, yielding unforeseen results that, in turn, revealed the conditionings of art critical practice. In both cases the need to project a dynamic, inclusive and forward-looking image of Polish art was a driving factor in work on the exhibitions.

Abstract

The above text examines the 11th Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) organised in the People's Republic of Poland in September of 1975 upon the initiative of Professor Juliusz Starzyński, who was the head of the organisation's Polish Section. The congress, whose official theme was "Art – Science – Technology as Elements of the Development of our Epoch", marked the second AICA event in history to be held in Poland, and while Starzyński himself did not live to see the result of his efforts, the intent to commission a number of collateral exhibitions across the country – meant to serve as surveys of Polish art – was successful. Those attending the congress had the occasion to visit the cities of Cracow, Łódź, Warsaw, and Wrocław. The text takes a closer look at two of these exhibitions: *Voir et Concevoir* (Widzieć i rozumieć) which was developed for Cracow's historic Cloth Hall, a part of the city's National Museum, by Mieczysław Porębski in collaboration with Andrzej Pawłowski, and the exhibition that came to be known as *Critics' Picks* (Krytycy sztuki proponują), which was held at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, known as the Zachęta, in Warsaw. The concept of each, it is argued, was driven by a need for experiment. While the former exhibition came to be remembered as an innovative, if not radical, way of engaging the permanent museum display in which the highlights of Polish 19th-century art were juxtaposed with several new commissions by contemporary artists, the latter – the result of no less an experimental concept in which a group presentation was based on a survey conducted among local critics – remains largely forgotten – the upshot of a series of compromises, largely enforced by the political situation of the time. Exploring *Voir et Concevoir* and *Critics' Picks* as exhibitions in state institutions within the context of an international event, the paper seeks to shed light on the intersection of official artistic practices and politics in the People's Republic of Poland in the mid-1970s in an attempt to identify the key agents that were active in the field as well as the defining conditions of their activity – or, in other words, to ask the question as to what kind of official statements were made possible at the time and how they were motivated.

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Meetings: Exhibitions of Women's Art Curated by Izabella Gustowska

Exhibitions of women's art,¹ i.e. collective exhibitions which by definition embraced only works by female artists, are counted among the essential artistic phenomena of the 1970s. They were not a brand-new idea, of course, as similar exhibitions began to be organised in the late 19th century.² Since then, however, the reasons for putting special emphasis on women's art changed many times, as they were to a large extent dependent on how women's art, as well as women's position in society, were perceived in a given period. Exhibitions organised in the 1970s were inseparably connected with the feminist movement, which was then developing worldwide.³ This movement laid the ideological foundations for a new type of exhibition even when the female artists and curators of these shows did not consider themselves a part of it. The original strategic aims – which were present practically since such exhibitions had been instituted in the 19th century and derived from the female artists' perception of themselves as a professional group sharing similar problems – were still important. Yet, in addition, other issues, ones that had almost entirely been absent from such exhibitions in the past, gained in importance, the chief one being the community of experiences arising from being a woman. This, in turn, related to the subject-matter of the exhibited works, which very often pertained to female subjectivity, corporeality and spirituality, as well as to the social roles imposed on women and contested by them.

1 The essay is based on research carried out in the framework of the grant entitled "History of the exhibitions of women's art in Poland" (National Science Centre grant no. 2013/09/B/HS2/02065).

2 A monograph concerning this phenomenon has yet to be written. The book by Mary Pepchinski, *Feminist Space: Exhibitions and Discourses between Philadelphia and Berlin 1865–1912*, Weimar, 2007, is certainly one of the most interesting publications pertaining to the early exhibitions.

3 See e.g. J. Sorkin, "The Feminist Nomad: The All-Women Group Show", in: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, eds. C. Butler, L. G. Mark, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2007, pp. 458–471.

Several exhibitions and publications organised and issued in recent years have attempted to chronicle the connections between art and feminism and to anchor their history in the mainstream account referring to art.⁴ Archive research pertaining to those exhibitions and the analysis of their character are an important part of this tendency. Such research attempts, in relation to both the connections between art and feminism and to exhibitions of women's art, are still a novelty in the practice of art history and art-exhibition historiography in Poland. The current essay partakes in this research tendency by proposing an analysis of a similar phenomenon from the art scene in Poland: exhibitions of women's art curated by the Poznań artist Izabella Gustowska organised since the late 1970s until the present day (the first exhibition was in 1978, the most recent one in 2011). The essay presents the results of a primary enquiry into this thus far non-researched curatorial project (this is how I propose to perceive this cycle of exhibitions). It also offers an analysis of how the concept of creating exhibitions showing works by female artists only has evolved over time. What we are dealing with, after all, is an extraordinary project, considering that staging the exhibitions was not a one-off event but an action undertaken consistently, over a period of several years and in changing circumstances, by the same person. Additionally, it must be noted that the circumstances in question embrace not only the artistic development of the artist-cum-curator herself, but also the socio-political situation in Poland and the ongoing feminist debate.

The first Polish exhibitions of women's art were organised in the year 1978. The one entitled *Trzy kobiety. Ania Bednarczuk, Iza Gustowska, Krynia Piotrowska*⁵ (Three women. Ania Bednarczuk, Iza Gustowska, Krynia Piotrowska; Fig. 1) opened at the Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Poznań in February of 1978. In April of the same year, the exhibition *Women's Art* opened at the Galeria PSP Jatki in Wrocław.⁶ The character of these shows differed to some extent; a shared element was that they both presented works associated with the already mentioned themes; the manner of selecting the participating women

4 In addition to the aforementioned exhibition *Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, cf. e.g. *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism* (Museo de Bellas Artes De Bilbao, Bilbao, 2007) and *Rebelle. Art and Feminism 1969-2009* (Museum voor Moderne Kunst, Arnhem, 2009). An interesting analysis of the political dimension of those exhibitions is found in Hilary Robinson's "Feminism Meets the Big Exhibition: Museum Survey Shows since 2005", *On Curating*, May 2016, no. 29, <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-29-reader/feminism-meets-the-big-exhibition-museum-survey-shows-since-2005.html> [accessed 14 July 2016].

5 The exhibition was open 6–23 February 1978.

6 Both the Polish and English versions of the title are found in the literature on the subject.



Fig. 1. *Trzy kobiety*. Ania Bednarczuk, Iza Gustowska, Krystyna Piotrowska [Three women], exhibition catalogue, Galeria Arsenał BWA, Poznań, 1978, Izabella Gustowska's archive

artists was different. The Poznań exhibition was prepared jointly by three artists who were friends. All three were graduates of the State College of Fine Arts in Poznań; the first two were also employed at that college at the time. Years later Krystyna Piotrowska explained: "We discovered that we were exploring an entirely different set of themes than the gentlemen were and through this exhibition we wished to somehow document this community of ours".⁷ The exhibition held in Wrocław, in turn, was initiated and organised by Natalia LL, who decided to exhibit works by four women artists: Carolee Schneemann, Suzy Lake, Noemi Maidan and her own. This exhibition did not feature artistic collaboration, instead, it had an international character as it originated from Natalia LL's earlier endeavours, namely her participation in feminist exhibitions in Europe, her visit to the United States, her personal acquaintance with American artists, and the resulting desire to make the new artistic phenomenon of feminist art, and her own place in it, known in Poland.

Natalia LL failed to continue her actions aimed at promoting feminist art; the Wrocław exhibition remained her only endeavour of this kind. Not so in the case of the two out of three women artists who took part in the Poznań exhibition, namely Izabella Gustowska and Krystyna Piotrowska. The exhibition

⁷ Krystyna Piotrowska in the commentary "Kobiece rewolucje" [Female revolutions], by Aleka Polis, 2011, <http://www.obieg.pl/obiegtv/20909> [accessed 14 July 2016].

Trzy kobiety was a starting point for two cyclical exhibitions that they have been organising practically until today, entitled *Odbicia* [Reflections] and *Spotkania* [Meetings]. Works by Gustowska and Piotrowska, which reflect their continuing artistic dialogue and friendship, are jointly presented at *Odbicia*.⁸ *Spotkania*, in turn, are exhibitions prepared by Izabella Gustowska (initially in cooperation with Krystyna Piotrowska) presenting works of women artists whom she invites to participate.

Spotkania is not a closed, precisely defined cycle of exhibitions. At one point, Gustowska began to refer to the exhibitions under her curatorship entitled *Spotkania* with the additional word *Obecność*, i.e. presence, and successive numbers; after a while, however, she discontinued this practice. The resultant exhibitions were *Spotkania – Obecność I* (1987, Galeria Kontakt, Galeria ON, Poznań), *Spotkania – Obecność II* (1989, Galeria ON, Poznań⁹) and *Spotkania – Obecność III* (1992, Ethnographic Museum, BWA "Arsenał", Galeria ON, Poznań). It is mainly my own interpretative approach to select, from a number of exhibitions of which Gustowska was the curator,¹⁰ those where exclusively works by women were exhibited, i.e. the already mentioned *Trzy kobiety*, as well as *Spotkania – Obecność I* and *III*, *Presence IV – 6 Women / Obecność IV – 6 kobiet* (1994, Galeria La Coupole, Rennes) and *Osiem dni tygodnia* [Eight days of the week] (2011, Galeria 13 muz, Szczecin), and to analyse them under the joint title *Spotkania*. This approach is based on the observation that, in this case, Izabella Gustowska's actions comprise a consistent project. Even if the artist-cum-curator herself linked its separate elements only in some periods, the analysis carried out from the perspective of time and in the context of her artistic output clearly indicates that these exhibitions are stages of actions in support of women artists that are consistently being carried out by Gustowska. My preference for the title *Spotkania* [Meetings] and not *Obecność* [Presence] results not only from the fact that Gustowska herself tended to use it in the context of these events, but also from my conviction that their special character to a great extent relies on the recurrent gesture of creating an opportunity for women artists to meet, hence meetings, and to engage in a dialogue.

As has already been stated, the exhibition *Trzy kobiety* comprised works by three friends who had a clear perception of their output's distinctiveness in relation to art created by men and who wished to demonstrate this fact at an exhibition. The presented works focused on images of women, usually based on a photographic portrait or self-portrait. This was then transferred to a graphic medium (by Gustowska and Piotrowska) or to a textile (Bednarczuk), and transformed in such a way as to accentuate a slightly

8 These exhibitions were the subject of my paper given at the seminar *Historia wystaw sztuki kobiet w Polsce* [The history of exhibitions of women's art in Poland], 10 December 2015, Institute of Art History, Adam Mickiewicz University, Stary Browar, Poznań.

9 *Spotkania – Obecność II* presented sound art created by both men and women artists.

10 The full list is at the http://old.gustowska.com/index_pl.htm website [accessed 26 November 2015].

different aspect each time. One of the shared elements was the issue of everydayness and the ways of experiencing and recording everyday life, which Bednarczuk expressed by means of a hospital record card or a calendar, Piotrowska by references to her perception of her own reflection in the mirror, and Gustowska by turning her likenesses into memoranda (e.g. *Zmieniam się* [I am changing]).

Two reviews prompted by this exhibition indicate that this distinctiveness, which was so strongly felt by the artists, was not observed, or considered important, by everybody. It was noted by Jacek Juszczuk, who wrote: "Only women feel this kind of need for self-definition, which is to a large extent a form of self-irony that no artist of the other gender would be brave enough to attempt".¹¹ Sławomir Magala, in turn, in his analysis of features considered modern, i.e. their serial character, the combination of photography with other techniques, and the elements of body-art, which he had observed in the exhibited works, concluded that "the exhibition by three women, even more than an exhibition of 'women', exhibits certain tendencies in art tired of Hyper-realism and Popart".¹²

The artists themselves, however, clearly saw the point of organising exhibitions whose essence would lie in issues associated with the female experience, because in the year 1980 they organised a festival entitled *Sztuka kobiet* [Women's art] (Fig. 2). It was prepared only by Izabella Gustowska and Krystyna Piotrowska since Anna Bednarczuk, as Piotrowska would later recall, "chose a different path", which is to be understood as her departure from the issues of female identity.¹³ Gustowska and Piotrowska decided to extend their interests outside their own circle and the Poznań milieu and invited other women artists who focused on the topic of female identity: Natalia LL, Anna Kutera, Ewa Partum, Maria Pinińska-Bereś and Teresa Tyszkiewicz. Each participant presented a performance and exhibited some works. Similarly to the preceding exhibition, all of the presentations were linked with the topic of the portrait/self-portrait and the presentation of the female body; in addition, they pertained to women's status in society and to feminism; for instance,¹⁴ Ewa Partum presented a performance entitled *Kobiety, małżeństwo jest przeciwko wam* [Women, marriage is against you], Anna Kutera showed *Fryzury* [Haircuts] from the cycle *Sytuacje stymulowane* [Stimulated situations] (1978) with the slogan: "My haircut is my decision, not that of the glossy-magazine fashion dictators", Natalia LL showed photographs from her performance *Piramida* [Pyramid] with a record of her dream, Teresa Tyszkiewicz –

11 J. Juszczuk, "Anna, Izabela, Krystyna", *Gazeta Zachodnia*, 24 February 1978, p. 3.

12 S. Magala, "Trzy kobiety", *Sztuka*, 1979, no. 1, pp. 34–39.

13 Krystyna Piotrowska in an interview dated 30 March 2015.

14 A full analysis is currently being prepared by Ewa Tatar in her doctoral dissertation at the Art History Institute of the Jagiellonian University, supervised by Prof. Maria Hussakowska. A part of her research was presented at the seminar *Historia wystaw sztuki kobiet w Polsce* [History of the exhibitions of women's art in Poland], op. cit.



Fig. 2. View of the *Sztuka kobiet* exhibition, Galeria ON, Poznań, 1980, in the foreground Krystyna Piotrowska's work *Potwierdzam i zaprzeczam teorii ciężenia* [I confirm and deny the law of gravitation], Izabella Gustowska's archive

a sensual film *Ziarno* [A seed] (1980), and Maria Pinińska-Bereś – a group of her sculptures.

The exhibition *Sztuka kobiet* was housed at Galeria ON, which had been established in 1977 as a students' gallery under the auspices of the Socialist Association of Polish Students. In 1978 Krystyna Piotrowska became the gallery's director, joined in the following year by Izabella Gustowska.¹⁵ As many other galleries of this type, Galeria ON had a personalised programme. Writing about the operation of such galleries in Poland, Bożenna Stokłosa points out that authors' galleries, similarly to artistic groups, were "socio-artistic creations whose existence was aimed mainly at producing creative approaches and behaviours by means of mutual influence".¹⁶ The key role was played less by the art presentations addressed to an outside audience – which was the case

15 They directed the gallery jointly until Piotrowska's emigration in 1983, then Gustowska directed it alone until 1994.

16 B. Stokłosa, *Artystyczno-społeczna problematyka zrzeszeń plastyków w Polsce w latach 1946–1976 (grupy twórcze i tzw. galerie autorskie)* [Artistic and social issues concerning artists' associations in Poland in the period 1946–1976 (creative groups and the so-called authors' galleries)], doctoral dissertation, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences, presented in 1982.

of, for instance, the BWA, where the exhibition *Trzy kobiety* had been held – than by the artists' gatherings which offered an opportunity for a direct exchange of ideas. This was precisely the nature of the *Sztuka kobiet* exhibition at Galeria ON in 1980. The gallery was not only a place where artworks were shown – even though the exhibition was organised – but also a gathering point, a locus for social relations and cooperation. For this reason the event was often described by its initiators as a “festival”.

Sztuka kobiet was special, among other reasons, because Gustowska and Piotrowska arranged a meeting that transcended divisions within the milieu. They were not interested in the existing connections between galleries or groups, and the women artists they had invited came from diverse milieus. Some of them tended to meet one another at various events in the circles of the so-called Neo-avant-garde, but they did not meet Gustowska or Piotrowska there for these did not attend those events. With regard to issues of women's identity as undertaken in their works, these artists most often constituted isolated cases in their own milieus, because such issues were rarely pondered upon and often altogether ignored there. The Poznań meeting was an opportunity to bring these problems to the fore and to initiate a dialogue with other women artists who considered similar issues in slightly different contexts.

In that era the idea of sisterhood, understood as “a feeling of closeness and a sense of connection between women unrelated by blood, referring to the community of experiences arising from being a woman”,¹⁷ was crucial to the “female”¹⁸ and feminist actions undertaken worldwide as a part of the broader women's movement in the arts. The authors of the first significant (because it was widely read and reacted to) texts referring to sisterhood, i.e. Robin Morgan or Gloria Steinem,¹⁹ underlined that sisterhood was to be a counterpart to brotherhood, an alternative to this seemingly universal, but actually male-oriented social contract. Upholding the sisterhood constituted an element of the rebellion against male dominance. Initially, the dominant trends were separatist, i.e. aiming at constructing a distinct female culture, and essentialist, i.e. emphasising the homogeneity of female experience regardless of the differences between individual women. However, these trends were soon submitted to criticism which came from non-Western, non-white and non-heterosexual women, who were quick to point out the distinctiveness of their experiences.²⁰ In place of sisterhood as an expression of women's identity there appeared

17 A. Mroziak, “Siostrzaństwo” [Sisterhood], in: *Encyklopedia gender. Płeć w kulturze* [The gender encyclopaedia: sex in culture], eds. M. Rudaś-Grodzka et al., Warsaw, 2015, p. 511.

18 I put the word “female” in inverted commas to indicate that it refers here to actions undertaken by women, not actions possessing features considered female.

19 *Sisterhood Is Powerful. An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. R. Morgan, New York, 1970; G. Steinem, “Sisterhood”, *Ms.*, spring 1972, pp. 46–49.

20 See e.g. B. Hooks, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women”, *Feminist Review*, spring 1986, no. 23, pp. 125–138.

sisterhood as a political strategy: an element of actions undertaken by women having different experiences but partially convergent interests.

It would be difficult to consider the actions of Gustowska and Piotrowska, and then of Gustowska alone, as an actualisation of the idea of sisterhood, either in its initial, more essentialist perception or in its later, revised perception as a strategy. Gustowska and Piotrowska invited various women artists who were interested in similar issues; this could have potentially led to the emergence of some community – but this did not happen. Individualism prevailed and, as a result, it was a one-off event. Subsequent exhibitions prepared by Gustowska would not be directly connected with it and it would always be she, not any group of women artists, who would initiate them. No form of cooperation whatsoever emerged either during or after the event. Each artist exhibited her individual project. Only its initiators and organisers, Gustowska and Piotrowska, would later put up joint exhibitions, the already mentioned *Odbicia*. I analyse these in another essay,²¹ but one of their essential features is worth mentioning here. Although Gustowska and Piotrowska did not create joint artistic projects, they were featured in each other's works (especially Piotrowska in Gustowska's) and these works entered into a dialogue in the exhibition space. This was far less so at the exhibitions described here as *Spotkania* [Meetings]. In the first events that I include in this group, i.e. the already discussed *Trzy kobiety* and *Sztuka kobiet*, the distinctiveness of each artistic proposal was obvious from, among others, the way the catalogue was constructed. In both cases each artist had her own page, and these were folded into a joint publication (cf. Fig. 1).

The political situation in Poland in the early 1980s did not favour the development of "female" and feminist initiatives. As has been pointed out by the observers and researchers of the culture of that era, other issues came to dominate the public and artistic discourse.²² Yet the so-called "festival of Solidarity" in the year 1980 was a period of vigorous initiatives of a feminist nature and only the suppression of these freedom-fighting tendencies and, ultimately, the introduction of martial law put a stop to them. These events influenced the joint activity of Gustowska and Piotrowska as well. In 1984, Krystyna Piotrowska emigrated from Poland and settled in Sweden, where she soon became intensely active in the Swedish artistic milieu. Consequently, while the two women artists continued to exhibit their works jointly (*Odbicia*), their joint curatorial activities came to an end. In the later 1980s Gustowska, who all the while had been a director of Galeria ON, returned to organising exhibitions of women's art, but now on her own. Her participation in the

21 A. Jakubowska, "Nie siostrzeństwo a przyjaźń. 'Odbicia' Izabelli Gustowskiej i Krystyny Piotrowskiej" [Not sisterhood but friendship: Izabella Gustowska and Krystyna Piotrowska's "Reflections"], *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, autumn 2016, no. 15, pp. 71–78.

22 See e.g. E. Kondratowicz, *Być jak narodowy sztandar. Kobiety i Solidarność* [To be like a national flag. Women and Solidarity], Warsaw, 2013.

exhibition *Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn, Internationale Ausstellung aktueller Kunst von Frauen* organised at the MUMOK in Vienna in the spring of 1985 seems to have provided her with a new and important impulse.

The concept of the Vienna exhibition, which had been prepared by two female curators, Silvia Eiblmayr and VALIE EXPORT, relied on the conviction that the position of women artists had changed since the preceding decade.²³ The curators underlined that women were no longer the victims; hence thinking about art as a “medium of self-determination” was more important than the “aesthetics of resistance”, demonstrative protests or “ideological sincerity”. They still associated art with social change, as had always been done in feminist actions; but it was individualisation that was supposed to result in the liberation of society.

It is difficult to state unequivocally whether this manner of thinking about women's art influenced Gustowska's curatorial activities at that time or whether her thinking developed along the same lines autonomously and the Vienna meeting provided her with valuable support. In any case, the exhibitions she organised since the middle of the 1980s were conceptualised in a very similar manner. Emphasis on individual expression had already been seen in her (or rather, then, still “their”) earlier concepts. Compared with earlier exhibition projects, a difference is evident in two interrelated areas: the set of women artists who were invited and the subject matter they undertook. Gustowska made use of her sojourn in Vienna and the acquaintance she had struck there by inviting two women artists whom she had met there – Eva-Maria Schön from West Berlin and Adriena Simotová from Czechoslovakia – to Galeria ON for the next presentation of women's art that she prepared in 1987.²⁴ The other artists who took part in *Spotkania – Obecność I* [Meetings – Presence I] were Izabella Gustowska, Aleksandra Hołownia, Danuta Mączak, Anna Płotnicka, Krystyna Piotrowska, Anna M. Potocka, Joanna Przybyła and Lidia Zielińska.²⁵ Two facts are noteworthy: the set of names was entirely different than that at the *Sztuka kobiet* exhibition in 1980, and most of the artists had never been associated with women's issues or feminist art. This decision may have been influenced by the Vienna exhibition, where Polish women artists who had already participated in feminist exhibitions before and whom

23 VALIE EXPORT, “Vorwort”, and S. Eiblmayr, “Einleitungand”, in: *Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn. Aktuelle Kunst von Frauen*, exhibition catalogue, Museum Moderner Kunst / Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna, 1985, pp. 7–9.

24 In this period Gustowska allocated much space in the gallery's programme to art created by women. In 1986 (19 February) Eva Maria Schön (West Berlin) presented three cycles of drawings and a performance; (26 February) Teresa Murak presented a performance entitled *Pragnienie, czuwanie, czynienie* [Desire, vigilance, activeness]; (9 April) Anna Nawrot presented an installation entitled *Odczytanie* [A reading], and Irena Nawrot a work entitled *Małe i duże, wspólne i niczyje* [Small and big, shared and no-one's].

25 With a presentation of films by Márta Mészáros.



Fig. 3. Joanna Przybyła, *Rysunek* [A drawing], view of the *Spotkania – Obecność I* exhibition, 1987, Poznań, Galeria ON, Izabella Gustowska's archive

Gustowska expected to be there (e.g. Natalia LL, Maria Pinińska-Bereś), were absent.²⁶ Of course, the selection of participants had an impact on the subject matter represented at the exhibition. In contrast to the earlier meeting, the issues of female identity, the female body or the roles ascribed to women in society were no longer dominant. This does not mean that they were entirely absent but rather that they were far less obvious; for instance,²⁷ Joanna Przybyła exhibited a monumental installation entitled *Rysunek* [A drawing], which bisected the gallery; it was made of planks that continued as a drawing on the wall and as a reflection in a mirror (Fig. 3). Anna Płotnicka exhibited *Ciemna noc* [A dark night] – a “living installation” that was her dialogue with a tape-recording that went on as long as she was able to hold a flame in the palm of her hand. Krystyna Piotrowska exhibited monumental works from the *Lustra* [Mirrors] cycle, in which the precision of a photographic image is combined with its fragmentariness, thus referring to issues of memory and relationships with others as marked by distance.

²⁶ Izabella Gustowska in an interview dated 20 April 2015. The exhibited works were by Gustowska and by Jolanta Marcolla.

²⁷ For a full list of works and their short descriptions, cf. *Zeszyty Artystyczne*, a periodical of the Poznań PWSSP, the 1991 issue.

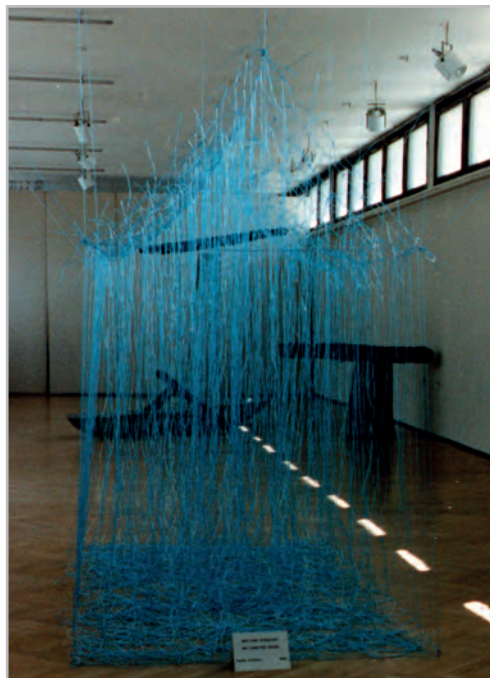


Fig. 4. View of the *Spotkania – Obecność III* exhibition, 1992, Galeria BWA Arsenal, Poznań, in the foreground Anna Kutera's work *Dom dla wyobraźni* [A house for the imagination], Izabella Gustowska's archive

It is worth stressing again that Gustowska was as interested in the getting together of the women artists as in their individual shows, or perhaps even more. In an interview with Grzegorz Dziamski she admitted that when she was organising *Spotkania – Obecność I*, the situation was more important to her than the exhibition. She explained:

A situation are tensions between several individualities, between what those people can offer others and what they can receive from them. An individual exhibition produces some tensions, too, but they are fairly one-sided: an artist offers more or less, receiving little or nothing in return. But in a situation such as *Obecność*, the relationships are many-sided, many-directional and more vigorous.²⁸

The successive gathering of women, *Spotkania – Obecność III* [Meetings – Presence III], took place in 1992 (Fig. 4). It was on the largest scale of all the exhibitions of women's art organised by Gustowska; it comprised three parallel shows held in three art institutions in Poznań: *19x1* at the Ethnographic Museum,²⁹

28 "Galeria ON – rozmowa Grzegorza Dziamskiego z Izabellą Gustowską" [ON Gallery: Grzegorz Dziamski interviews Izabella Gustowska], *Zeszyty Artystyczne* (Poznań), 1991, p. 51.

29 Participating artists: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Halina Chrostowska, Barbara Falender, Wanda Gołkowska, Izabella Gustowska, Aleksandra Jachtoma, Maria Jarema, Janina Kraupe-Świdorska, Ewa Kuryluk, Natalia LL, Danuta Leszczyńska-Kluza, Jadwiga

7x1 at Galeria BWA,³⁰ and 4x1 at Galeria ON,³¹ as well as a conference. The numbers in the title of each show indicate the number of women artists whose works were exhibited there.

The first of them, 19x1, offered an overview of women's art in the historical perspective. Although it did not reach very far back in time, it considered women artists of the older generation; some of them, e.g. Maria Jarema, had been active before the 2nd World War. The exhibition *Artystki polskie* [Polish women artists], organised by Agnieszka Morawińska at the National Museum in Warsaw in 1991, is an important context to this part of the exhibition. It was the first history-oriented exhibition of the works of Polish female artists, "women of diverse positions, who practised art in different times and with varying results".³² It was a *sui generis* counterpart to the exhibition *Women Artists 1550–1950* organised at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1977, where the curators proposed to focus on the social aspects and the way women artists functioned in the art world. Elżbieta Grygiel noted that "at first glance the [Warsaw – A. J.] exhibition resembled the outcome of stocktaking",³³ which had largely resulted from the desire to include as many women artists as possible, all of them worthy of being brought back to the viewers' awareness. Yet one of the key merits of the exhibition was that it presented the tradition of women's art. *Spotkania – Obecność III* did not have similarly ambitious scholarly or historical aims, but both of these elements, i.e. presenting the predecessors of contemporary women artists and leading the female creators out of the shadows of their more famous male colleagues, were important there as well. This exhibition, in turn, was based on the idea of exhibiting the works of three generations of women artists. In fact, works by some artists born in the 1940s and 1950s were shown not only at 19x1 but also at 7x1, but in these cases the "historical" exhibition included their older works and the other their more recent ones. The youngest artists, born in the following decade, were invited to the 4x1 section.

The subtitles of the sections of the exhibition underlined the importance of individuality; they seemed to be shouting out that all of those parts were dealing with individuals, not with a group of women (or artists) that would have anything in common. The individualistic approach was also reflected in

Maziarska, Zuzanna Pawlicka, Teresa Pągowska, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Krystyna Piotrowska, Alina Szapocznikow, Danuta Waberska, Magdalena Więcek-Wnuk.

30 Participating artists: Izabella Gustowska, Zofia Kulik, Anna Kutera, Natalia LL, Małgorzata Niedzielko, Krystyna Piotrowska, Anna Płotnicka.

31 Participating artists: Zuzanna Baranowska, Agata Michowska, Małgorzata Sufleta, Anna Tyczyńska.

32 A. Morawińska, "Artystki polskie" [Polish women artists], in: *Artystki polskie*, exhibition catalogue, National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, 1991, p. 9.

33 E. Grygiel, "Kobiety i życie, i sztuka. (Na marginesie wystawy „Artystki polskie”)" [Women and life, and art. (On the margins of the "Polish women artists" exhibition)], *Format*, 1992, no. 3–4, p. 39.

the text by Alicja Kępińska entitled *Bliskość bytu* [The nearness of existence] which was published in the catalogue and referred to the 7x1 show:

The art of each of the artists to whom this exhibition is devoted is rooted in one such world [the many worlds which we deal with – A. J.]. The contours of each of them are different, just as are different their planes of existence and the colours of the energy they emanate. [...] The worlds in which the art of the seven women artists is rooted are not contiguous, but neither do they collide. Presented together, they do not form any tangible whole.³⁴

Gustowska herself wrote in the catalogue: “I could say that for my basis I take the naïve notion of a diversity of sensibility, emotions, intuitions, biology, instinct and, finally, the feeling of power and independence”. But at *Spotkania – Obecność III* she mostly continued to present single narratives, whose distinctiveness she had already emphasised at the preceding *Spotkania*. Also, the subtitles – 19x1, 7x1, 4x1 – to a certain extent correspond to the title of the earliest exhibition discussed herein, *Three women* but, significantly, the focus on gender was lesser here even though the artists' gender was the criterion of selection. After all, neither the title of the whole event nor the titles of its sub-sections indicates that the exhibition concerned art produced only by women.

Interestingly, however, the exhibition's catalogue contained a sketch *Sztuka feministyczna – kronika wydarzeń* [Feminist art: a chronicle of events] by Grzegorz Dziamski. It opened with a definition as provided by Judy Chicago in 1979, in which she claimed that feminist art was an art deriving from female experience and it was neither a style nor trend in art; that it constituted an attempt at re-formulating the relationship between art and society, and that it was a transformation in one's perception of the world and oneself.³⁵ Gustowska never presented her exhibitions as belonging to feminist art; quite the opposite – in a short text included in the catalogue she wrote: “I believe that this art can exist without the burdensome feminist context”.³⁶ Yet the inclusion of this material indicates that this context was, in fact, important, especially considering that photographs documenting actions undertaken at *Sztuka kobiet* and *Spotkania – Obecność I* were reproduced between two pages containing the calendar of feminist actions. Gustowska's ambivalent approach to things that allegedly unite women, their manifestations in women's art and, above all, to feminism is noteworthy.

The question of the relationship between the exhibitions of women's art and feminism is currently a matter of wide-ranging debates.³⁷ These reflections

34 A. Kępińska, “Bliskość bytu” [The nearness of existence], in: *Obecność III*, exhibition catalogue, Poznań, 1992, no pagination.

35 J. Chicago, after: G. Dziamski, “Sztuka feministyczna – kronika wydarzeń” [Feminist art – a chronicle of events], in: *Obecność III*, *ibid*.

36 I. Gustowska, “...dlaczego?...” [...why?...], *ibid*.

37 See e.g. *On Curating*, special issue *Curating in Feminist Thought*, May 2016, no. 29; *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Curating and Art Exhibitions 1970–2010*, eds. A. Dimitrakaki,

are dominated by the issue as to which exhibition can truly be described as a feminist one, which is strongly associated with the conviction that it does not have to be an exhibition showing only the works of women artists or only feminist art. At the same time it is underlined that not every exhibition of women's art is automatically a feminist exhibition. What I find crucial is not the question whether Izabella Gustowska's exhibitions can be perceived as feminist or not; more important is the insight that by being focused only on women they were examined in relation to feminism – an issue that is mentioned by the curator herself and by those who commented on her work.

All of Gustowska's earlier exhibitions that belong to the *Spotkania* cycle as defined herein and which have been mentioned above were well received by the critics. This time the situation was not much different, yet new elements emerged in its reception which had not been equally pronounced before. The issue of distinguishing women's art was underlined far more strongly. Some critics, for instance Marek K. Wasilewski, who was associated with the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, repeated Gustowska's assumptions:

What is, today, the wisdom of creating distinctions within art into areas occupied by men and areas available to women? [...] This meeting was a search for tensions, shared fascinations and new energies. It was an attempt at showing women's art free of the burden of the feminist context. [...] Although the works of so many exhibiting artists must have diverse references, they evince elements of a shared sensibility.³⁸

Voices from the other side of the divide, so to speak, could also be heard, asking for, among others, clearer ideological involvement and a more manifest battle against stereotypes involving women's art. In fact, various exhibitions of women's art that were organised in Poland at that time were accused of being devoid of such ideological involvement, including the already mentioned exhibition *Artystki polskie* or the show *Żywioły* [The elements], whose curator was Kinga Kawalerowicz (1993, Dom Artysty Plastyka in Warsaw).³⁹ The same issue of the periodical in which Wasilewski's review of *Spotkania – Obecność III* was published also included a critical statement by Natalia LL who had aptly pointed to the catalogue's cover by Jacek Mosiakowski (Fig. 5) and stated that "he reduced the philosophical and sociological problem of women's art to the level of a cellar floor, showing two ladies' shoes against the crescent moon" and thus made the publication "an unconvincing endorsement of the feminist idea".⁴⁰

L. Perry, Liverpool University Press, 2013, or H. Molesworth, "How to Install Art as a Feminist", in: *Modern Women*, eds. C. Butler, A. Schwartz, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2010, pp. 498–513.

38 M. K. Wasilewski, "Obecność III", *Format*, op. cit., pp. 45–46.

39 See e.g. comments on the arrangement and catalogue in the already cited text by Elżbieta Grygiel or Ewa Toniak's article "Ogród Zosi" [Sophie's Garden], *Obieg*, 1993, no. 7–8, p. 65.

40 Natalia LL, "Na marginesie wystawy 'Obecność III'" [On the margins of the "Obecność III" exhibition], *Format*, op. cit., p. 47.



Fig. 5. Cover of the *Spotkania – Obecność III* exhibition catalogue, 1992, Poznań, designed by Jacek Mosiakowski

The emergence of such opinions may be explained by the fact that critical tendencies, including feminist criticism, were developing at that time in Polish art, criticism and history. Their promoters' viewpoint was that to present women's art on the basis of some intuitive feeling of a vague kinship (which Gustowska wrote about in the catalogue), i.e. without the ideological base related to feminism, was not enough. Gustowska, on the other hand, had always distanced herself from feminism, perceiving it to be a simplistic category that helped viewers interpret a certain type of art, but did not correspond to the complexity of its message. In this, among others, she differed from the curators of other exhibitions to whom she has sometimes been compared here, namely Natalia LL⁴¹ and VALIE EXPORT.

At the opening of the first of the exhibitions discussed herein, i.e. *Trzy kobiety*, waitresses dressed as Playboy Bunnies appeared among the invited guests, serving them, among others, gâteau in the shape of a woman's breast. On the one hand, this was, as Krystyna Piotrowska put it, "an ironic gesture towards the gentlemen – here you are, you got what you always want and now leave us in peace".⁴² On the other hand, it was an element that diminished

41 Natalia LL's attitudes towards feminism are very complex, but when organising her exhibition *Sztuka kobiet* in 1978 she clearly situated it in the sphere of feminist actions.

42 Krystyna Piotrowska in the commentary "Kobiece rewolucje", op. cit.



Fig. 6. Maria Pinińska-Bereś, *Pranie* [The laundry], a performance during the *Sztuka kobiet* exhibition, Galeria ON, Poznań, 1980, Izabella Gustowska's archive

the radicalism of their project by means of the two curators assuming the attitude of “cool gals”.⁴³ During the next exhibition, still prepared by the Gustowska/Piotrowska duo, the issue of feminism was approached directly, but in a markedly ambivalent statement. It was the performance *Pranie* [The laundry] by Maria Pinińska-Bereś, during which she laundered and then hung on a clothesline that surrounded her dishtowels bearing letters that formed the word FEMINISM (Fig. 6). The exhibitions *Spotkania – Obecność* as organised by Gustowska in the following years did not bring any extended reflection on the subject of feminism, but rather showed her growing reserve towards it. She was intensely involved in presenting works by women artists, also in the programme of Galeria ON under her direction, i.e. outside collective exhibitions, but she never assumed any politically involved or critical stance.

After *Spotkania – Obecność III*, Izabella Gustowska ceased organising exhibitions of women's art for several years. The only exception is an exhibition that was organised in the early 1990s, entitled *Presence IV – 6 Women* (1994, Galeria La Coupole, Rennes); it will not be discussed here, however, since

⁴³ That this strategy was effective is demonstrated by the fact that, in the already quoted review, Jacek Juszczak wrote about “our ‘feminists’”.



Fig. 7. Artists participating in the *Osiem dni tygodnia* exhibition, Galeria Sztuki 13 Muz, Gdańsk, 2011, Izabella Gustowska's archive

it involves entirely separate issues, e.g. the presentation of works of Polish female artists abroad.

The view on issues of women's art which Izabella Gustowska proposed in 2011 was essentially similar to that known from her earlier exhibitions. "Eight women, eight different narratives",⁴⁴ she wrote in the description of the exhibition (Fig. 7). Yet new content emerged as well. The exhibition *Osiem dni tygodnia* [Eight days of the week], which was housed at the Miejska Galeria Sztuki 13 Muz in Szczecin, presented Gustowska's own works and works by seven women artists much younger than herself, all of them linked with the Art University in Poznań in which Gustowska has been working since graduating in 1972. Artists who participated in this exhibition besides Gustowska were Marta Jurkowska (who graduated in 2003), Ada Karczmarczyk (2009), Aneta Ptak (2009), Marta Mariańska (2009), Zuzanna Pyda (2009), Sylwia Czubala (then in her final year of study at the Art University) and Magdalena Marciniak (2001). Gustowska returned here to the milieu-oriented (or: academy-oriented) criterion of selection that lay at the basis of *Trzy kobiety*, which had been her first exhibition of women's art and which she shared with Piotrowska and Bednarczuk. In this case, however, the relationship between Gustowska and the other artists was entirely different. She was not their university friend or an artist at the same stage of artistic development – she

44 I. Gustowska, *Osiem dni tygodnia*, information about the exhibition, Galeria 13 Muz, Szczecin, 2011, <http://digitalia11.13muz.eu/index.php/galeria/> [accessed 30 November 2015].

was a teacher who was offering her own narrative from the perspective of far greater experience.

Gustowska's work shown at that exhibition, entitled *Summer Time*, pointed to another aspect of sharing an exhibition with younger artists or of inviting them to co-exhibit. The work was a video-installation in which somewhat oneiric films playing out on monitors showed young women enjoying a rich array of fruit being consumed on a lovely summer day. Gustowska as the author of these films and Gustowska as the exhibition's curator seemed to have been equally charmed by their sensuality and vitality. In the description of the exhibition she wrote: "It may be worthwhile to immerse ourselves in the images, sounds and universes of these seven wonderful, independent young women, always hungry for new experiences in life and in art, whose works I recommend and whose group, despite my age, I discreetly join".⁴⁵ This exhibition clearly reveals Gustowska's increasing fascination with young women and their potential, energy and vitality; this fascination matches her unceasing interest in their artistic projects and personal plans, her considerate attention and supportiveness.

Many similar themes are evident in Gustowska's artistic project carried out in the years 2013–2015, entitled *Przypadek Josephine H...* [The case of Josephine H...]. The starting point for this project was provided by the persona of Josephine Hopper, the wife of the American painter Edward Hopper. She was a woman artist who today is known not for her own works but for being the female figure featured in her husband's paintings.⁴⁶ Bringing her back from obscurity, Gustowska did not focus on her art, but rather on her experience of being a wife to a painter. The heroines of her project are several women – primarily Josephine Hopper, then Gustowska herself, comparing her own situation and her decisions to those of Josephine, and several young women from New York, whom Gustowska observes, wondering whether they would share Josephine's fate or whether their lives would take a different turn. The film and video-installation⁴⁷ (Fig. 8) show several young women in their natural environments or in settings reminiscent of Hopper's paintings. Gustowska is also featured, sometimes as one of Josephine Hopper's contemporary incarnations, but mainly as a woman who looks at other women and then shows them in a gallery. This position is strikingly similar to that evident at the exhibition in Szczecin in 2011.

This connection between her activities as an artist and as a curator of exhibitions has practically been a permanent feature of Gustowska's work. Works

45 Ibid.

46 Gail Levin, a specialist on Edward Hopper, gave her the most attention. See e.g. "Writing about Forgotten Women Artists: The Rediscovery of Jo Nivison Hopper", in: *Singular Women: Writing the Lives of Women Artists*, eds. K. Fredrickson, S. E. Webb, Berkeley, 2003, pp. 130–145.

47 Presented at the Art Stations gallery in Poznań as part of the *Izabella Gustowska. Nowy Jork i dziewczyna* exhibition, 4 November 2015 – 7 February 2016.

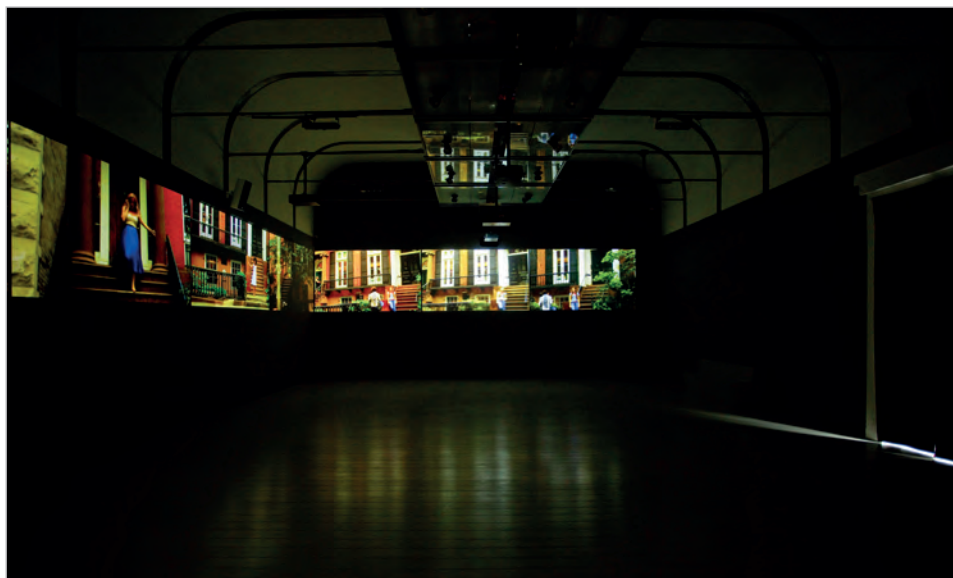


Fig. 8. Izabella Gustowska, *Gdzie jest ta dziewczyna?* [Where is that girl?], video installation at the *Izabella Gustowska. Nowy Jork i dziewczyna* exhibition [Izabella Gustowska. New York and a girl], Art Stations, Poznań, 2015, photo by B. Busko

which focused exclusively on women and on topics which very often involved relations between women were created parallel to curatorial activities relying on organising collective exhibitions in which only women participated. Already at the first exhibition of women's art, *Trzy kobiety*, apart from her self-portraits she presented a work entitled *Kobiety* [Women], a *sui generis* group portrait of disempowered women, which is perversely focused on their bodies, not on their veiled faces. At the exhibition *Sztuka kobiet* in 1980, Gustowska presented a film from the new cycle *Względne cechy podobieństwa* [Relative traits of resemblance], showing nearly identical twins playing with their resemblance. These twins were the heroines of the earliest elements of this cycle, produced from 1979 to 1990, for which the starting point was Gustowska's interest in, as she wrote, "the perversity of Nature itself, proposing a 'doubled object', copies which on the visual level are apparently perfect".⁴⁸ Subsequent elements of the cycle, which were produced more or less concurrently with *Sztuka kobiet*, explored the motif of twinship from another angle. Gustowska focused on the likeness of things naturally unlike. First she presented *Bliźniaczki zastępcze* (Surrogate twins, 1980), then *Bliźniaczość z wyboru* (Twinship by choice, 1981) (Fig. 9). The works Gustowska showed at two exhibitions in the *Spotkania – Obecność* cycle, in which Gustowska-as-curator ascribed the greatest impor-

⁴⁸ Izabella Gustowska at her website http://old.gustowska.com/index_pl.htm [accessed 30 November 2015].



Fig. 9. Izabella Gustowska, *Bliźniaczki z wyboru* [Twins by choice], from the *Względne cechy podobieństwa* cycle [Relative traits of resemblance], 1981, courtesy of Izabella Gustowska

tance to individual narratives, were similar in tone. In the place of relationships between women there appeared a focus on individual women and on diverse aspects of various existences. At *Spotkania – Obecność I* Gustowska exhibited an installation-cum-performance entitled *...99... (7 dni tygodnia)* [...99... (7 days of the week)], which referred to the fragmentary and transitory nature of the recording of a person's body, face and, consequently, everyday life. In *Spotkania – Obecność III* she exhibited works from the then-developing cycle *Sny* [Dreams], namely *Sny czarne* [Black dreams].

Exhibitions of women's art curated by Izabella Gustowska from 1978 onwards, initially in cooperation with Krystyna Piotrowska, had a consistent profile. They all emphasised the certainty of the essential closeness between women; a conviction which was deeply ingrained and unfailingly repeated regardless of the changing situation. Neither the passing of time nor changes in her personal or social life made Gustowska depart from her view, although she explored it with varying intensity. This closeness was always characterised very generally and vaguely. It did not concern a shared aesthetics, a shared position in society or a similarity of experiences – and yet it did concern a little of each. It was neither a symbiosis nor a strategic alliance, but rather a kinship that became evident only when sought. Gustowska's own role did not alter either. Her place in the art world – for instance in relation to other women artists – changed, but from the very beginning, i.e. from the exhibition *Trzy*

kobiety onwards, Gustowska placed herself in the position of both one of the women and of the person who had arranged a meeting of women – in the space of an artwork as much as in the space of an exhibition.

Spotkania is the longest-lasting and the most consistently carried out project enabling women artists to meet, but, paradoxically, not intended to consolidate them. The combination of a conviction that women share essential similarities with an emphasis on their individuality and on the separateness of their artistic proposals seems to have been of crucial importance to the project. Also central was Gustowska's distancing herself from feminist actions, and especially from their political dimension. *Spotkania* did not result in shared actions. An analysis of their influence on the oeuvres of women artists who participated in those meetings would require a separate essay, perhaps even more than one.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

Abstract

In February of 1978 the exhibition *Trzy kobiety. Ania Bednarczuk, Iza Gustowska, Krynia Piotrowska* opened at the Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Poznań. It became a starting point for two cycles of exhibitions that have been organised practically until today: *Odbicia* (Gustowska's and Piotrowska's joint exhibitions) and *Spotkania*. The essay focuses on *Spotkania*, i.e. exhibitions at which Gustowska (initially with Piotrowska) presented the works of invited women artists. These exhibitions were *Trzy kobiety* (1978, Poznań), *Sztuka kobiet* (1980, Poznań), *Spotkania – Obecność I* (1987, Poznań), *Spotkania – Obecność III* (1992, Poznań), *Presence IV – 6 Women* (1994, Galeria La Coupole, Rennes) and *Osiem dni tygodnia* (2011, Szczecin). To consider them a cycle and to analyse them under the joint title of *Spotkania* is the author's own interpretative approach based on the observation that, in their case, Izabella Gustowska's actions comprise a consistent project based mainly on the recurrent gesture of creating an opportunity for women artists to meet – hence the word *meetings* – and to engage in a dialogue.

Spotkania is the longest-lasting and most consistently carried out project enabling women artists to meet but, paradoxically, not intended to consolidate them. All of the exhibitions emphasised Gustowska's certainty of essential closeness between women. This closeness was always characterised, very generally and indistinctly, as a kinship that becomes evident only when sought. An analysis of the exhibitions leads one to the conclusion that the combination of the conviction that women share essential similarities with an emphasis on their individuality and on the separateness of their artistic proposals, coupled with Gustowska's distancing herself from feminism, are the reasons why *Spotkania* did not result in the emergence of any kind of community or in the undertaking of collective actions. The exhibitions remained as incidental meetings and their influence on the oeuvres of the women artists who participated in them is yet to be analysed.



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