

# ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI

TO THE MARGIN AND BACK





# **ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI**

**TO THE MARGIN AND BACK**

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[1] *Museum*, 1956

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# FILE UNDER SEMI-ACTIVE

## Charles Esche

In the rich and elaborated world of archive classification systems, certain terms have come to be used to designate the status of a particular set of records or historical artefacts. The precise formulations are sometimes in dispute, varying between language and culture, but in general they divide into three discrete elements. Passive or inactive records are those that are no longer consulted but are needed in order to give legitimacy to the whole archival system and therefore must be preserved. Active records are those that are in constant use, with additions and subtractions being made on an almost daily basis. In between these falls a category of records that we can call semi-active here, for the sake of clarity. Such records are intermittently accessed, mostly to confirm current trends, but occasionally they can still be used to alter established narratives or reordered as new priorities come to light. These semi-active archives are therefore caught in a twilight world, not fully subject to debate, they are still in a state before their meaning becomes forever fixed and any passionate disputes about their status is forgotten. However, the objects and papers in them are precisely the documents on which any radical rewriting or new construction of the present moment have to be built. It is only by accessing the semi-active that the direction of active archives can be significantly recast and new histories that alter the present be recorded.

In art historical terms, Andrzej Wróblewski's work falls neatly into this semi-active state. Neither ignored nor widely celebrated beyond his home country, Wróblewski's untimely death more than fifty years ago means that his oeuvre has been closed long enough for his reputation to have gone through the initial swings of fashion and politics to survive intact and begin to gain wider recognition. His paintings, drawn so directly from the conditions and difficulties of his post-second world war environment, seem to vibrate anxiously, in tune with changes in the external world of his time, marking the political or social limits of his location in central Europe and the expectations of art that would then have applied. Seen from today, he appears almost as an image sampler, able to satisfy many different kinds of spectator, from those craving the avant-garde to others content with social realism. As far as we know, Wróblewski himself seemed to stay above the fray of these fights, concerned with his own life and work whilst having a very well-calibrated sense of what was happening and how to respond to it in his own engaged and yet autonomous way. In 2010, looking back at such a figure working at a moment in history and geography when patterns were being set anew, his work perhaps gives us a last chance to shake that semi-active archive of the post-war cultural scene before it becomes too settled. His images and biography help us to ask again about the effect of

the war years on Europe as a whole, rather than considering the western or eastern half separately.

It is for this latter reason above all that Wróblewski's exhibition seems such an important one for us to present now at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. The Netherlands has many of its own unhealed wounds from the Second World War that still open up at the slightest touch. The art of the immediate post-1945 period in western Europe struck out on its own peculiar path, seeking through a return to colour and free, abstract form to confront the demons of fascism and to renew the social spirit. Wróblewski chose another, related path that tried to depict the trauma of war more directly, whilst also offering abstract and even exotic moments of escape. Now, when the consequences of acts of war are once again discussed in European parliaments, his work offers some interesting counter propositions to the idea of free expression in the American zone of Europe and how a personal art might address the aftermath of occupation and destruction in a more overtly politically controlled context.

As part of our eighteen month long programme entitled *Play Van Abbe*, this solo exhibition of Wróblewski's work represents the first international presentation of an artist that we believe will be of growing significance in the future. This task has been repeatedly important to the museum throughout its history and in the process we have made the first museum exhibitions of work by Donald Judd, Douglas Gordon, Lee Lozano and Allan Kaprow, amongst many others. *Play Van Abbe* is a programme that wants to offer our publics both interesting exhibitions in themselves and reflections on the means through which art is produced, discovered and presented in the public sphere of the museum. In this sense, Wróblewski's solo exhibition serves to raise questions about recognition, geographic margins and the consequences of ideological ignorance during the forty years of the Cold War.

# TO THE MARGIN AND BACK

## Magdalena Ziółkowska

The contemporary museum is a complex cultural formation. It operates as the keeper and administrator of fundamental cultural objects, tasked with providing knowledge about items in its custody. However, it also serves its own critical self-interest, contributing to its development as an institution where objects are intended to acquire higher aesthetic and financial significance over time. Being at the same time a medium of socio-political engagement and ideological persuasion, a museum's organisation is conceived according to metaphoric and metonymic representational orders through which it constructs its own systems of value. The broad spectrum of visions, imitations, replicas, effigies or representations of the world, produced by a museum in this way, makes its users (viewers and visitors) witnesses to the development of contemporaneity as a concept that transfers the experience of the collection of objects to the here and now. Such constructs always refer to what is located beyond the physical boundaries of the objects, and — if viewed alone — they function as a broader means of knowledge production in terms of classification systems, historical narrations or axiological spheres.

In the sense of this meta-discourse, the museum becomes a present day *theatrum anatomicum*, a display of the dissection of the human condition in the twenty-first century. Specific anatomy lessons are conducted not only through the use of the artist's body of work as an entity that is opened wide by the museum, but increasingly on the human body itself, in the form of often excluded, marginalised or repressed figures, through which museums seek to represent reflections on otherness or to address the issues of social exclusion. In addition, the artist's physical existence serves as a source of multiple identities for the museum, becoming an object for public inspection in the anatomy theatre.

“We know that man possesses an overwhelming power resulting from the efforts of his mind and his hands. At the same time, we have learned to identify the human skeleton and internal organs: we can imagine disassembling the human body like a watch” — wrote Andrzej Wróblewski on the occasion of the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* held in Kraków in 1948. *To the Margin and Back* — Wróblewski's first international solo exhibition, organised over fifty years after his death, is a classic example of such a dissection. Being a form of personal autopsy, the exhibition offers the means to question the artist's individual engagement with social and political reality, proposing different vantage points.

Wróblewski did not succumb to the lure of the socialist realist doctrine, officially proclaimed in Poland in 1949. His earliest woodcuts, such as *Train*

*Station* (1945) or *Ball* (1946), are a record of his migration from Vilnius to Kraków in the last months of the Second World War and an acute social study of individual characteristic types that reappear in the later ‘social contrasts’ (1949) series. Those images, massive human shapes bordering on the grotesque, were accompanied by a commentary labelling certain features as negative or positive and involving a description of ‘foreign’ facial types — which testifies both to the artist’s lifelong interest in the human character, masks and social roles, as well as the significance of the war and the mental struggle shared by every individual under a social or political regime. Wróblewski’s early and consistent depiction of the violence of war presented in eight paintings from the *Execution* series (1949) and a number of sketches, remained in striking contrast to other artistic positions after 1945, which sought either to discard the social experience or to recapture a childlike innocence as a way of reviving the creative potential. Wróblewski’s formula of ‘direct realism’ shows images in a state of crisis. At the age of twenty-two the artist was not afraid to depict reality in an untypical manner, and directly confront the demons of the past. This was accomplished by literally starting from the position of ‘total destruction’, which made it possible to revise and reformulate the conventions of depicting the traumatic past, and to express it through individual experience whilst deploying modern visual language. “Everything in these paintings is on the surface and calls out about joy and strength using the simplest phrases” — noted the artist on the occasion of the Kraków exhibition. At the same time Wróblewski introduces a metaphorical level by presenting groups of characters such as Don Quixote, Juggler, Zampano and others originating from *commœdia dell’arte*, which could be seen in relation to Ricoeur’s ‘wounded subject’. Such ‘exhausted subjectivity’ can also be traced in the figure of the Artist appearing throughout Wróblewski’s oeuvre, a persona which carries a certain degree of disorders typical of the above-mentioned characters. Behind the veil of irony, all these characters can be seen to represent feelings of social alienation, uprootedness and incomprehension about the potential role of art in the new post-war reality — also a reference to the prominent art academies that reinforced the supremacy of the *kapizm* movement in the late 1940s.

*To the Margin and Back* can be seen against the backdrop of Wróblewski’s journeys in western Europe in 1947 and Yugoslavia in 1956 which shaped his artistic idiom, his early repatriation from Vilnius to Kraków with his mother and brother, various train travels to the countryside and trips to the Tatra mountains, a place he was eventually found dead. The constant feeling of being on the move, engaged in aimless motion, was linked to his increasing isolation and disillusionment with the political agenda of 1950s Poland. In a notebook from 1957, Wróblewski wrote what is one of the most startling and extraordinary artistic statements of its time — *Confessions of a Discredited ‘Former Communist’*. This critical assessment of the prevailing ideology and its shattered illusions is stunning in its simplicity.

Within the wider context of *Play Van Abbe, To the Margin and Back* is an example of the purposes and techniques to which a solo museum exhibition might be put. In Poland, where Andrzej Wróblewski has long been a crucial artistic figure, the relentless attempts to define his attitude and position as an artist have constantly returned him to the complex environment in which he was bound to exist. Here, outside that framework, his background is both explained and reduced in favour of an encounter with the works themselves and with Wróblewski's personal narrative.

\*

In this publication, we have attempted to give a rounded account of Wróblewski's life and works. The volume includes two critical texts addressing his artistic practice: a historical analysis of early works written in 1968 by Andrzej Kostołowski, and a study of late works by Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska. These are accompanied by a historical statement by the artist and photographer Zbigniew Dłubak. The essential part of the book offers a comprehensive selection of the artist's writings (most of which were published in Polish as press articles, ranging from critiques aimed at the system of fine art academies to comments and remarks on exhibitions), as well as private notes, short texts, film scripts and letters. We hope this book will offer an international readership an in-depth look at Andrzej Wróblewski for the first time in English, allowing a new public to discover his works and their impact on the art history of Cold War Europe.

**1**

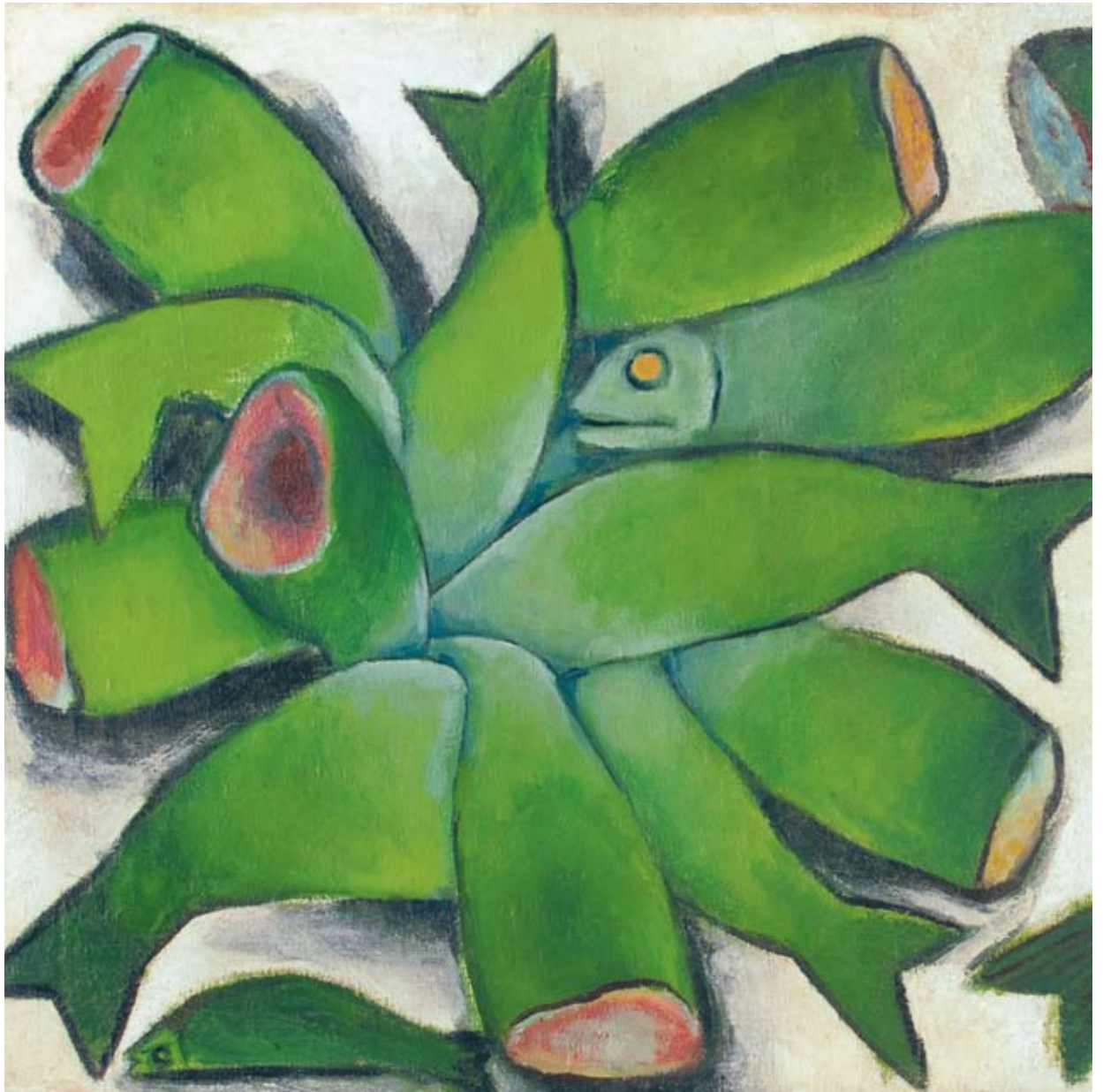
## 25.01.1948

(...) Spring in January. The sun warmed up the soil exposing grass beneath the dirty snow, clean and dry, like a skeleton gone white with rain. Crystal sky. Telegraph poles stand along the ribbon of the road surrounded by cubes of houses, like chess figures on a multicoloured board. A locomotive is an ultra-compacted object. The metal body of a bus leaves clear refined flashes in the air. They write that the earth is becoming increasingly warm and that we're living on a volcano. Perhaps it's the sun coming closer and warming our sphere, releasing humidity onto the surface. The earth perspires! Each colour perspires, swollen with richness. Setting one foot in the mud I observe anxiously if the sinking shoe will pull in my leg towards the centre of the earth.

Because the sun is round, all the things on the earth — poles, houses, fields — are angular. Man is inscribed into a sophisticated set of lines. As a motif a group of people is surprisingly unfamiliar to the earth, especially when they are moving in relation to telegraph poles; their autonomy is frightening, they might just as well forget and, continuing straight ahead, leave the earth and march into the skies.

If a road is a ribbon spread across a sheet of a field limited by muddy incisions on the earth's surface, then a streamlined Chevrolet gliding along that road, becoming bigger or smaller with the distance, has a damn loose contact with the earth.

A.W.







[2] *Painting About the Horrors of War, 1948*

# COMMENTARY ON THE 1<sup>ST</sup> EXHIBITION OF MODERN ART

1948

(This text, amongst others, was used to guide groups of workers through the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art*)<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

1.

The aim of modern painting in Poland is to depict everything that is important in our era in a painterly manner. However, this aim could not be achieved through the use of painting as we know it thus far. I am sure you are familiar with the works of Kossak or Matejko.<sup>2</sup> They represent naturalism. These artists depicted the most appealing and important issues of the time: scenes from Polish history and the romantic adventures of Polish cavalrymen, presented just as a poet or historian described them.

Nowadays we are thinking of something different, we are faced with something different, and are preoccupied with other matters.

The world has become extremely complicated. We know that man possesses an overwhelming power resulting from the efforts of his mind and his hands. At the same time, we have learned to identify the human skeleton and internal organs: we can imagine disassembling the human body like a watch. Therefore we know that every object consists of atoms, in which matter creates links as loose as the planets in the universe. Physicists even say that matter is no more than a form of energy. Astronomers surprise us with the distances between stars, and frighten us with the possibility of catastrophe.

What do men do in the face of all these achievements in contemporary science? Do they lose courage? Are they content with the power of their minds? If directed by the wrong men, the power of our minds could lead to catastrophe. Yet this is not a reason to lose courage or to become passive. Living men want to counteract this situation. We know that only a collective fight against evil, and the combined shaping of character through work, can prevent our achievements turning to sorrow. For this reason it is not enough to become aware of earthly dangers and to feel one's own worthlessness in the face of the universe, one needs to deal with it using the means available: the will to live, the ability to cooperate for the sake of a common good; resistance to the influence of evil men and evil ideologies; one needs to find support in one's own work. Without work man becomes an egoist with his head in the clouds. A sense of effective work helps us to continue, an awareness of the great successes of collective effort keeps our spirits high.

2.

Everyone is aware of these issues, which a painter wants to present in his own way. However, the methods used by Matejko and Kossak no longer suffice. To paint a landscape, characters, or a city — is not enough. One needs to demonstrate the greatness of the world, to paint a man as known by modern biology, an object that we know to be more void than matter. We want to depict the conclusions reached a moment ago: we want our paintings, hanging in common rooms or factory halls, to raise the spirits with their lucidness, to help in everyday toil with their colourfulness. We want them to provide a truly reinvigorating rest. We want to paint a picture that will help differentiate between good and evil. So that it will be like the smile of a child or the roar of a parade on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. We want to paint pictures that will make you think, like the wise words of a man you respect. We do not hide dangers. On the contrary, we want you to remember war and imperialism, the atomic bomb in the hands of the wrong men. We paint unpleasant pictures like the smell of a corpse. We also paint those that make you feel the presence of death. Our paintings will let you take a look inside man, and see the weaknesses against which you must defend yourselves. Some works will make you feel the strength of the temptation to fall into the oblivion of drugs, vodka or debauchery. We do not hide anything. We trust that you are diligent and will choose well. And we can also illustrate this choice with a painting — one that will be joyful and sensitive. (...)



[3] Participants and organisers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art, 1948. Front, left to right: Andrzej Cybulski, Ali Bunsch; sitting: Janina Kraupe, Jerzy Tchórzewski, Erna Rosenstein, Jadwiga Maziarska, Jadwiga Umińska; standing: Tadeusz Brzozowski, Jerzy Malina, Marek Włodarski, NN, Tadeusz Kantor, Maria Jarema, Jan Tarasin, Andrzej Wróblewski, Marian Szulc, Mieczysław Porębski, Kazimierz Mikulski, Maciej Makarewicz, Zofia Gutowska, Jerzy Nowosielski; upper row: Marian Sigmund, Kazimierz Wojtanowicz.

## MODELS

(...)

Wróblewski — adjacent to the wall. The model is based on two ideas: firstly, there is a decorative structure composed of concave and convex surfaces. Then, the work is made in such a way as to emphasise its static nature, as if it consisted not of parts of barrels but of rock fragments or bricks. For this reason the upper elements occupy a horizontal position and seem less heavy, whilst those below are vertical and positioned so that they support the centre of the 'construction' in the most logical way.

(...)

Wróblewski — the Free-Standing Model. This one (...) is expressionist, yet it feels rigid and unpleasant. It stands on two legs, in the 'at ease' position. Rather than a torso, one sees a tangle of guts, which finish with the red rectum. A long neck, covered with pipes, grows from the belly. Higher up is a pair of eyes, elongated from constantly looking in the opposite direction. (...)





[5] *Emotional Content of the Revolution, 1948*

## PAINTINGS

(...)

Wróblewski — his paintings are coarse; visible from a distance, their lucidity is striking on closer inspection. Each sphere or fish is more concrete than the real object: the viewer's head. Everything in these paintings is on the surface and calls out about joy and strength using the simplest phrases. (...)

1 This text, amongst others, was used to guide groups of workers through the 1<sup>st</sup> *Exhibition of Modern Art* (19 December–18 January 1948) at the Palace of Art in Kraków. The sections 'Models' and 'Paintings' in the text were Wróblewski's personal statements on the works presented in the show. [M.Z.]

2 Juliusz Kossak (1824–1899) — painter, draughtsman and illustrator who specialised in historical themes. Jan Alojzy Matejko (1838–1893) — painter, draughtsman, appointed director of the School of Fine Arts in Kraków in 1873; considered the finest representative of historicism. Lived and worked in Kraków. [M.Z.]





# REMARKS ON MODERN ART

Zbigniew Dłubak

1948

(Paper delivered at the opening of the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* in Kraków)

Against the backdrop of our economic and social transformation, the notion of new art is not only remarkably topical, but, due to the theoretical foundations of the transformations that are taking place, it should be analysed from the beginning. It is difficult to imagine drawing accurate conclusions about the further possibilities of our artistic life without revising the current obligatory views on the phenomena that have taken place in the field. This is due to the fact that perhaps the greatest confusion of judgments, and the greatest range of values, can be observed in the realm of visual art.

The current *Exhibition of Modern Art*, which provides the most complete representation of the phenomenon since the war, invites consideration on more than the mere quality of these achievements. In view of this exhibition, both artists and viewers must ask themselves the question: what happens next? Yet before answering, it is necessary to carry out a critique of the whole visual arts phenomena in Poland at this time. It is important to define the basic layers that make up current Polish art. Even a cursory observation allows us to distinguish three basic lines of development: the first is painting originating from the Munich school, the tradition of Brandt, Matejko, Siemiradzki, up to the 'Independents' of today,<sup>1</sup> the second comprises all that developed from impressionism and post-impressionism in painting, represented at present by the *kapizm* movement,<sup>2</sup> the third consists of all that we call 'modern art' or 'avant-garde'. One need hardly mention the many intermediary possibilities, as these are always present, instead, we should focus on the fundamental tendencies and most typical phenomena. Besides, the mere fact of adopting genealogy as the criterion makes the principle of this division clear enough, so that the aforementioned intermediary possibilities will not distort the general image.

If we were to assess the usefulness of particular lines of development with regard to the needs of current life on the basis of their achievements in this field thus far — we would be disappointed. None of the efforts to date has produced a satisfying harmony with the demands of the time.

If the methods that involve choosing an already existing phenomenon in art and finally preparing it for reality have not yielded any results so far (not to mention the occasional nature and risk of such methods which, considering the issue at stake, would be enough to disqualify them completely) we are only



left with one option: an analysis of the developmental potential of particular layers of Polish art and the selection of such a group of phenomena which, being unsatisfactory today, issues a guarantee of development and thus a possibility of searching for ways towards reality.

Like every other facet of life, art history consists of periods that succeed each other in a systematic manner. The inexorable logic of visual art's development, the law of causality that binds subsequent periods into a chain of succession, gives us the key to systematise the ensuing phenomena, even if they occur simultaneously. Contemporary painting, represented by the 'Independents' continues along a line that long ago gave birth to impressionism. It is a tail, which, rather than being developed, is dragged across the peripheries of lively, changing and evolving art. All elements of this painting, which once made it possible for impressionism to mature (even if it also produced its contradictions), have now faded, lost the power that previously provided a reason to confront them; they no longer irritate nor stir creative protests. This happened decades ago and will not reoccur. Especially since impressionism — the period that immediately followed has already ended, constituting a closed phase now expressed by a particular aesthetic canon.

The impressionism in question found its reflection in our current artistic situation in the form of a phenomenon commonly known as *kapizm*, which continues in the footsteps of impressionism. The complete failure of this line of development, even in the area that provided a direct stimulus to its existence, i.e. the quality of colour, points to a closure, a depletion of all possibilities of development. It points to the need to oppose this aesthetic canon. Yet here as well, the matter is already settled. Impressionism was followed by cubism, which developed in opposition to the earlier artistic movement. Hence *kapizm* does not develop, it continues as a chronological rather than historical phenomenon. For this reason Polish visual art should discard this layer in the course of building a new artistic approach.

The artistic avant-garde — rooted in the experience of Polish *formizm*<sup>3</sup> and later explorations — remaining under the influence of surrealism, does not offer a definite programme. The call to explore is not merely an ornament of manifestoes. The course of development of modern art in Poland demonstrates a range of phenomena so varied that the integrity of artistic endeavours and the possibilities of further changes are beyond doubt. For the time being, the danger of ossifying is not a threat. The art we are expecting, even if it comes as a contradiction to modern painting, will evolve from that painting and will not be an arbitrary reference to a certain period in art history. Instead, it will constitute a step forward, a step that will spring from the basis of modern art — history knows no way back. However, this leap forward can only take place when the turning point has been reached, and following the complete crystallisation of avant-garde art.

So far we have managed to identify the necessary approach for the future development of painting. Now we need to become aware of the direction we

should follow to find an answer to the question posed in the introduction of this text.

To date, the dominant culture (therefore art as well) has been the property of the owning classes. This means that the owning classes have been both the consumers and patrons of art, financing it, providing inspiration, and influencing it with their ideology.

The culture of the oppressed classes has not developed to its full extent. Some phenomena, such as folk art, are proof of the expressive capabilities of these classes. However, economic conditions have prevented them from fully developing or exerting major influence on the general course of art's development. The exploited classes have only been involved sporadically in the great march of art, either by providing talented individuals who were immediately declassified, or by using the leftovers of that art, which gave birth to an absurd situation: the emergence of a particular need for kitsch, chromolithography, and all kinds of mass-produced pseudo-artistic rubbish. Such is the art used to educate the proletariat, and such is the art that it lives on. This is the same proletariat that possesses great developmental potential, the class that enters this phase of history as a factor for overwhelming social revolt. The class for which action opens a new chapter in the history of mankind, ending the phase when one man controlled another, and opening the possibility for an unhindered blossoming of life.

Unlike the experience of previous classes, the rise to power by this class was not preceded by a long period of increasing economic supremacy. On the contrary, working class victory was achieved using bare hands and without the landowner's support. Having achieved this victory, the working class is equally unequipped in facing the problem of addressing and continuing the great output of humanity in the field of art. Thus, the working class is confronted with the substantial task of lifting itself from the level of petit-bourgeoisie culture to one that would enable it not only to consume the existing phenomena, but also to place the mark of the new social reality on culture.

However, before this great historical process of lifting the culture of the masses yields results, for the sake of the taste of these masses (which is in fact foreign to them), it is forbidden to destroy unquestionable achievements. Instead of returning to a wooden plough, granted it is the only tool familiar to a peasant, one teaches him how to drive a tractor — that is the essence of socialism.

Modern visual art equates precisely with this tractor. However, it must be used for positive and creative ploughing, rather than crushing the foundations of new social life. Artists must take up the challenge posed by the great move of the masses towards the higher level of culture. Through the careful understanding of the theoretical foundations of this new life and through practical social and political activity, they should once again shape the content of their consciousness, which in turn should translate into their work. The meeting of the line of art's development with that of lifting the cultural



[8] 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art, 1948, main hall of the Palace of Art. In the background are works by Janina Kraupe, Jerzy Nowosielski, Zofia Gutkowska and Kazimierz Wojtanowicz.

level of the broader masses can — though only by the mutual influence of these factors — yield a new socialist art: the art of socialist realism. Obviously it makes no sense to provide any recipes at this stage. It is merely possible to point to certain developmental phases and historical shifts.

Outlining these optimistic perspectives on modern art gives a certain, albeit modest, idea of its capabilities. In this light it may seem surprising that such art is often described using the general term of formalism — contrary to other areas of visual art. However, the opposite is true. It is often said that formalism represents the dominance of form over content. Apart from the fact that it would be impossible to compare the mutual quantitative relation between such incommensurable elements, such categorisation is itself incorrect, since it assumes the existence of pure form and pure content. I presume that even the worst idealism of today does not put matters in such a way.

The issue should be viewed historically. An era, or historical period, is a sequence of events that make up the definition of that era. A moment exists at which the sum of events is reached and an epoch lends itself to description. If even the smallest element in the description is missing, a developmental potential still exists, i.e. there is a need to locate the missing element. However, when the sum of ingredients is complete, there can be no further development along existing lines. In the history of art, this culminating point marks the fulfilment of a certain aesthetic formula that governs a given period. Until that point, artistic practice consisted of the search for that formula, now it consists of applying it. Mincing around is no longer work. We are entering the phase of formalism. Each era has its formalist phase.

Coming back to the current condition of Polish visual art, one should note that, apart from the developmental necessities which indicate that it is correct to take the avant-garde as the basis of further endeavours, the issue is of even higher importance if — in the light of the above considerations — we

should say that the painting of the post-impressionist and post-Munich school is now entering the formalist phase.

Therefore, modern visual art provides the basis for future practice. However, even now we can discern two tendencies amongst modern artists. Only this division provides a clear explanation of the situation. Analysing the issues of socialist realism we mentioned that artists embarking on the path towards the new art are required to actively and consciously participate in political and social life. The division amongst the avant-garde painters runs along ideological lines, cutting across it like a barricade. It is clear that an idealist stance, seeking support in the dying capitalist world does not offer the possibility of going beyond what has already been achieved in visual art. For artists with an idealist position, the development of a modern era in art has come to an end — they are facing the spectre of a fruitless phase, the spectre of formalism.

Appreciating the role of economic and social transformations taking place in our country, and playing an active part in political life, a group of modern artists has formed in Warsaw taking Marxist dialectical materialism as its foundation.

The above remarks were taken from discussions and debates concerning art that took place within the group. They constitute part of the agenda that brought the artists together.

Taking part in the current exhibition, they appreciate the fact that it represents a crossroads — one path, a *cul de sac*, leads unavoidably towards formalism, the other, which these artists are set to follow, provides unlimited opportunities for progress. We trust that we will not march alone.

1 Munich school [Szkoła monachijska] — a term used to describe Polish artists who had been educated and had lived in Munich between 1830 and 1900. The key figures were Józef Brandt (1841–1915), Maksymilian Gierymski (1846–1874), Aleksander Gierymski (1850–1901), Julisz Kossak (1824–1899). The group of Polish Independent Artists, renamed *Zachęta* group in 1957, brought together artists associated with the pre-war circles of the Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts. The group held its first exhibition in 1947 in Warsaw, its members identified the revival of national art in breaking all ties with the West and following the historical-realist tradition of Polish nineteenth century painters, such as Jan Matejko (1838–1893), Józef Brandt or Henryk Siemiradzki (1843–1902). [M.Z.]

2 Polish colourism, or *kapizm* (from *KP* standing for *Komitet Paryski* — Paris Committee) was a tendency in painting which came to prominence in the late 1920s attributing paramount importance to issues of colour. Its representatives — a group of students that emerged

around Józef Pankiewicz (1866–1940) — influenced by French impressionism and post-impressionism, travelled to Paris in 1923 founding the Paris Committee. They studied modern art extensively in the galleries of the Louvre, establishing a department of Kraków's Academy of Fine Arts in Paris in 1925. In 1931 the group returned to Poland dominating the prominent positions of artistic life. Amongst the group's most eminent members were: Jan Cybis (1897–1972), Józef Czapski (1896–1993) and Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa (1897–1988). [M.Z.]

3 *Formizm* — Polish literary and artistic avant-garde movement established in Kraków in 1917 and known as the Polish Expressionists until 1919; the group which disbanded in 1922, operated also in Warsaw and Lviv. Its members included: Tytus Czyżewski (1880–1945), Zbigniew Pronaszko (1885–1958), Andrzej Pronaszko (1888–1961), Konrad Winkler (1882–1962), August Zamoyski (1893–1970), Jan Hrynkowski (1891–1971), Tymon Niesiołowski (1882–1965) and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1885–1939). [M.Z.]



# STATEMENT ON THE 1<sup>ST</sup> EXHIBITION OF MODERN ART

Modern art, according to its authors, is realist. The remarks below serve to explain its approach to reality.

1. For the sake of comparison, I should characterise traditional realism. This makes a distinction between form, that is, technical difficulties in imitating nature, and content, meaning an event or situation that one imagines using as a starting point in the painting. Such realism consists of making references to literature, popular amongst the elites who consider painting to be illustration. This kind of realism is intermediate since the emotional or ideological content of a painting only stems from a scene that has been imitated, making it only partially dependent on the method of imitation. It is also limited, as it only shows such content that can be expressed using specific examples from nature (or life). Finally, traditional realism does not fulfil the important social role of art, namely, it does not develop the artistic sensitivity of the viewer.
2. Before I move on to discuss the expanded notion of realism, I would like to remind everyone that post-impressionist tendencies remain on the margins of realist art. Their aims are confined to a purely formal exploration. One should not expect any possibility of development on their part, not even the ability to adjust to the current social situation. This is due to the fact that these tendencies, much like traditional realism, are based on a distinction between form and content.
3. Expanding the notion of realism is necessary for our times. There is a necessity for a theoretical explanation of art that will, and already does, express the here and now. Art becomes one of the accomplished facts of the new culture, preceding theory and criticism, which still operate the traditional, narrow notion of realism. Marxist theorists, such as [György] Lukács in his *Questions of Marxist Culture* [Zagadnienia kultury marksistowskiej], oppose realism in its extreme naturalist form.<sup>1</sup> They also oppose formalist tendencies. However, the statements they put forward are extremely general and boil down to a call for addressing the new viewer and a new reality.
  - a) As stated above, traditional realism is intermediate due to its distinction between the form and content of a painting. Therefore the possibility of direct realism suggests itself.

It constitutes one of the foundations of modern art. We no longer study a man in order to render him in a gesture that might express a desired mood. We express this mood directly, using all available artistic means. Yet it is still inaccurate, since the mood we wish to express is simultaneously a vision of a painting we wish to execute. One could ask what, in fact, happened to realism, which, as we know, consists in some way of imitating reality. As a matter of fact, this relationship of imitating exists in the aforementioned direct realism in the following way: the artist expresses his era by living in it. His internal evolution is inevitably conditioned by the life of the society to which he belongs. He no longer illustrates literary content, which used to express the era; instead, he creates autonomous visual content, where the theme is inseparable from the form that expresses the era in a more accurate way. It would be impossible to think of imitative realism at a time when the scope of known phenomena has grown to include the macrocosm of astronomers and the microcosm of physicians, when industry creates new realities that go beyond the emulative means of earlier realism.

- b) It would seem that the above 'immediateness' of modern art can only be realised with reference to one statement — that of addressing the new reality. However, charges of its incomprehensible nature remain in force: the new, unprepared viewer is not addressed.

Here lies a fundamental mistake. It is assumed that for a visual illiterate abstraction is less legible than a naturalist painting. I cannot claim to be absolutely correct in my assertion but no research exists to settle this issue. We hear of various negative reactions to modern art on the part of workers and peasants, but we tend to forget other reactions, just as we tend to forget about surrealist elements found in the art of the dilettantes. Apart from this, we should take into consideration the modern apparatus of art propaganda, which has hitherto been used to popularise [Jan] Matejko amongst the masses.<sup>2</sup> Using this apparatus to propagate modern art could completely change our notion of its communicative value. Finally, theory proves that sensitivity to the immediate effects of form and colour is more widespread than the ability to read a naturalist painting.

Therefore, the question of modern art's communicative value remains open.

The question of its realism, that is, its close connection to reality, seems close to a positive conclusion. (...)

I consider my tasks as a painter to be as follows:

1. I try to make a painting work in the most effective way, meaning it be captivating and directing the viewer to a specific experience.
2. I want the painting to work unambiguously, meaning the content of the experience is in accordance with what I expect, and is the same for each viewer.
3. I create such mental conditions so that the executed painting will have an optimistic effect. I believe that such effects can be attained when a painting is consciously constructed using forms with positive character (plain and completely geometrical shapes), and vibrant colour with simple hues. Moreover, a painting that works optimistically is based on a generalising approach to reality, where observations occur like ideas on the basis of what is common to particular phenomena. I avoid that which is accidental and uncommon.
4. Since, in organising my work, I am free to define the scope of observed material — I try to draw it from the most ordinary aspects of life, as common to as great a number of people as possible. Thus, I work with the most everyday phenomena (sky, houses, fish), the most popular colours, the most satisfying moods (a sense of strength, happiness), and finally, the most basic of forms.

(...)

1 György Lukács, *Zagadnienia kultury marksistowskiej*, "Nowiny Literackie", 45/1948. Not translated. [M.Z.]

2 See: footnote 2, p. 21.











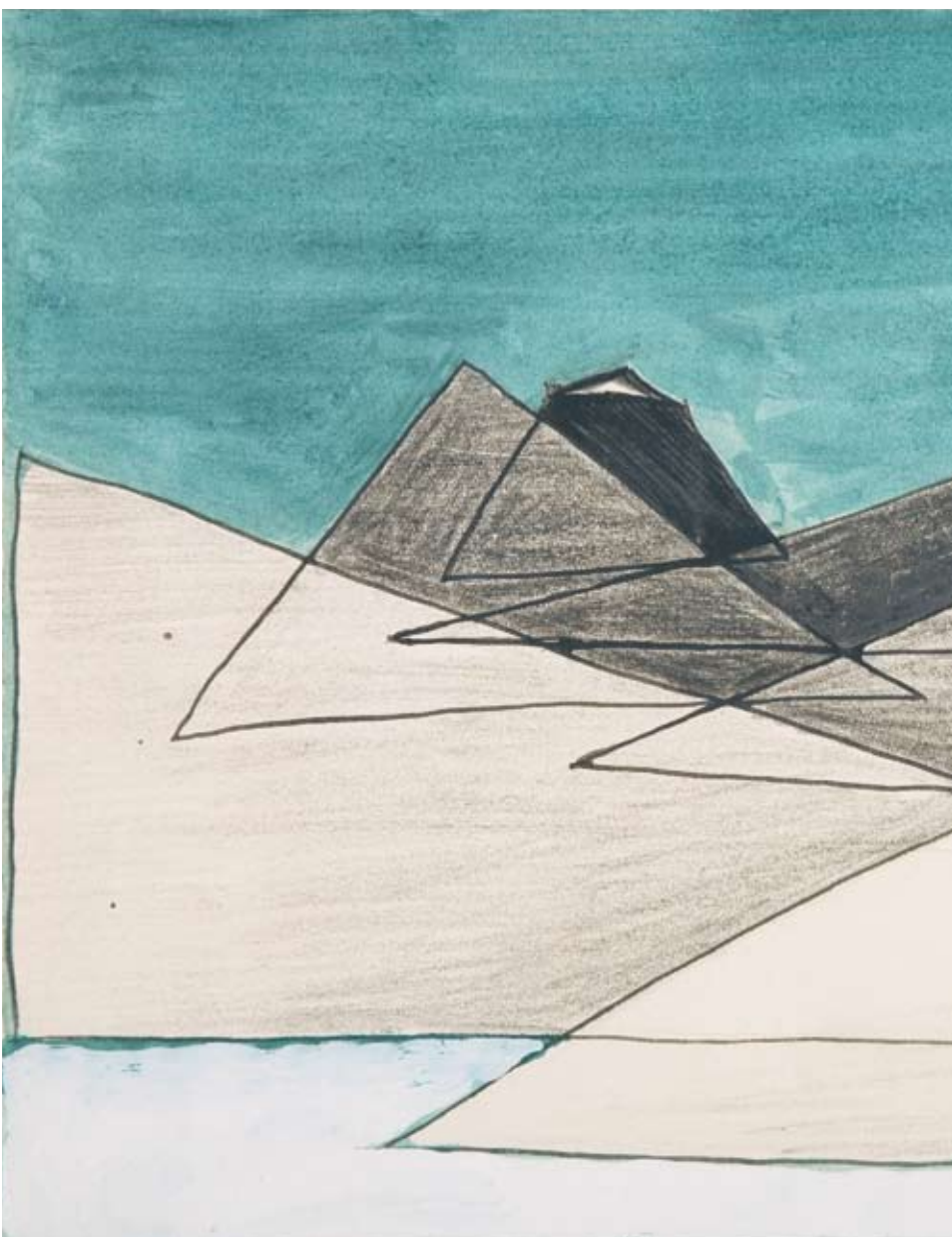


A man does not consist of a measurable number of elements and organs, and the needs of this incommensurable part should be satisfied every now and then; there is no reason to pursue the absolute consistency of the external construction of one's life, as this is the 'privilege' of inanimate objects, crystals and skyscrapers and nothing more. Even a stellar system possesses a certain temperament. Therefore I can lock myself up, and more importantly, I want to do it, and since I want to do it at this moment this means it is good specifically for me.

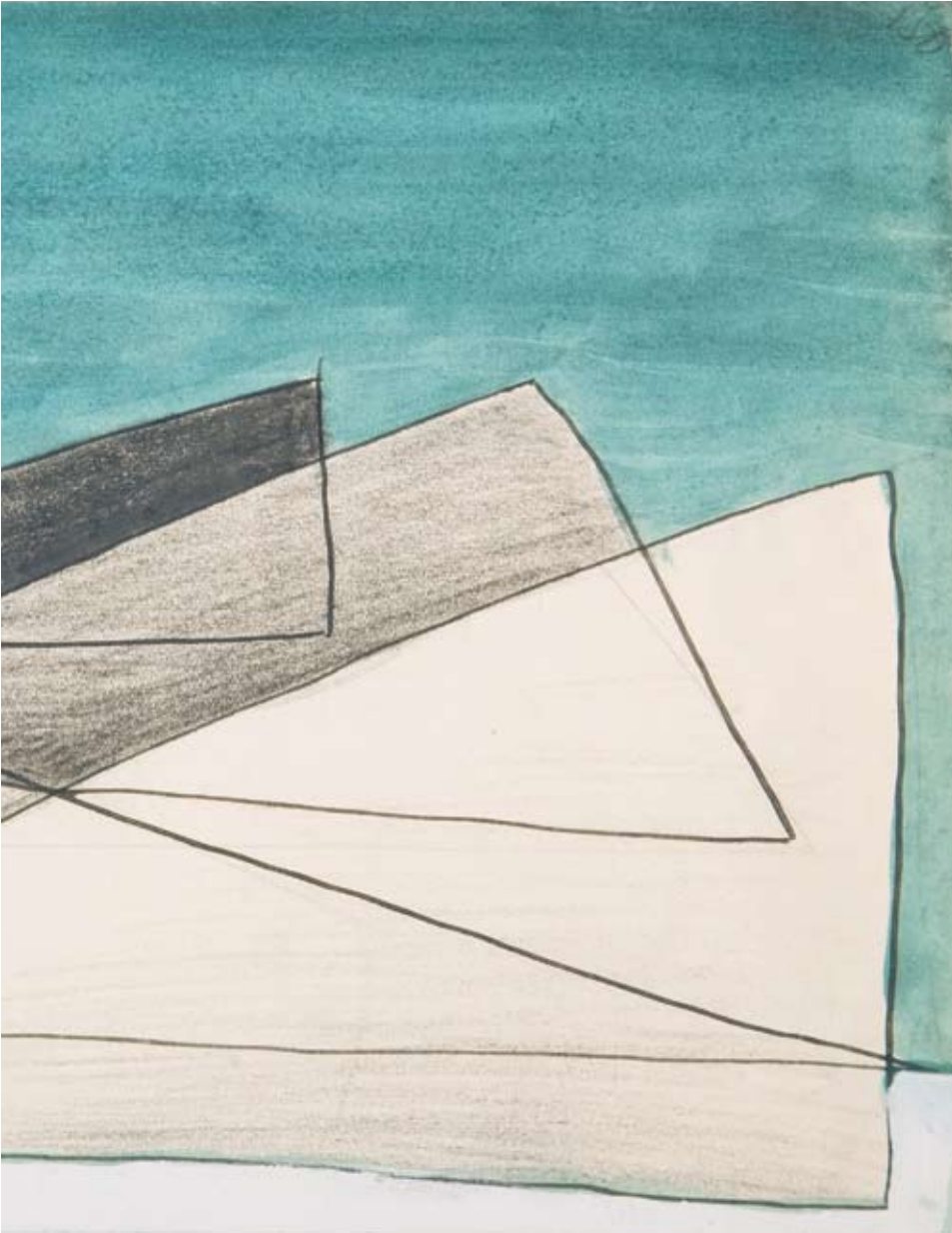
I am only bothered by the discrepancy between my plans for life and their realisation. It seems that I am a dreamer; I need to be on my guard so that the creative kick of life with my leg does not turn into a kick delivered by life (it would be difficult to talk of a leg in this case).

A.W.









[14] *Abstract Composition (Triangles)*, 1948–1949

# FROM STUDIES ON THE ŒUVRE OF ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI. THE PERIOD BEFORE 1949

Andrzej Kostołowski

1968

Perhaps more than any other research conducted by art historians, papers on recent art are prone to subjective judgment. However, apart from their potential subjectivism they possess one quality: they serve as a seismograph, a trace of events embedded in the same mental sphere as the object under scrutiny. That said, the current paper makes no pretence at full objectivity, at the same time the aim of such an objective approach is overtly stated. (...)

Whilst analysing and presenting Wróblewski's oeuvre I found it relevant to emphasise its ideological affinity with the artist's writings and whenever possible to give the immediate critical reaction to exhibited works. Although, as far as critical analyses are concerned, Wróblewski's works did not receive a great many contemporary reviews, highlighting these seems even more important in the context of twentieth century art research, of which meta-language critique constitutes a fundamental aspect.<sup>1</sup> The only paper on Andrzej Wróblewski's oeuvre, written by A. Zaniewski, was never published, whilst the emphasis its author placed on aspects of biography, combined with his essayist streak, places it within a category of its own, irrelevant to the basis of the current discussion.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the writing about Andrzej Wróblewski (most of which appeared after his death, rather than in his lifetime) there are a number of academically proven theses. Hence, statements such as those by Mieczysław Porębski<sup>3</sup> or Andrzej Wojciechowski<sup>4</sup> could be treated as more than a mere echo of criticism. Apart from a handful of voices that denigrated the kind of artistic practice represented by Wróblewski, the artist came to be considered as one of the greatest individuals in twentieth century Polish art.<sup>5</sup> It was the high artistic value of his works that provided the immediate stimulus for this study.

Andrzej Wróblewski was born in Vilnius in 1927 where he lived until 1945. Already in his early years, having experienced the initial enjoyment connected with using crayons or pencils, he was subject to the pedagogical discipline of his mother Krystyna, a renowned graphic artist and student of Ludomir Sleńdziński<sup>6</sup> — a representative of classicising precisionist painting who set out to revive the tradition of the Italian renaissance masters and at the same time remained under the influence of some of the Russian artists from the St. Petersburg school. I would like to dwell for a moment on Sleńdziński since it seems that his personality indirectly affected Wróblewski's individual path

of study. Information from Stanisław Woźnicki and Tadeusz Dobrowolski states that Sleńdziński “took up the decrees of old masters, and was the first to substitute the spot technique in oil painting and sanguine drawings, for the so-called form-oriented technique. He bestowed colour with luminous and intense quality by applying subsequent layers of pure colour, subjecting them completely to the visibility of shapes.”<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the achievements of the impressionists, Sleńdziński inculcated his students with a classicising and cold approach to art. Krystyna Wróblewska preserved the canon of her master in her early prints. Though later she put emphasis on the expressive aspect of her works, the element of classical accuracy of proportions, which prevented her from overly extensive deformations, as well as the beauty of the graphic ‘linear quality’, were to remain in her art forever. Teaching her son Andrzej, and introducing him to the path of visual interpretation of the world, she passed on this idea of accuracy, the emphasis on precise definition. This was already manifest in the boy’s earliest drawings, works that illustrate how the child’s freedom was inclined towards restrictive thinking based on the rules of ‘classical’ proportions. Perhaps the intellectual predisposition of the focused and disciplined young artist fostered this development. Yet the truly individual element of the young Andrzej Wróblewski’s visual thinking, one supported by his mother (in whose own work the storyline played a crucial role) consisted of a distinctive drive towards narrative and literary quality. His first works are comments on school reading by Henryk Sienkiewicz or Waław Gąsiorowski: battlegrounds with hordes of warriors, or ‘allegorical’ scenes.<sup>8</sup> These images surprise us with the artistic abilities of their creator, abilities that allowed him to operate autonomously using narrative and situational shortcuts.

Despite the visual qualities of these drawings, it was only the following series of works that were artistically mature. These were graphic prints and woodcuts, which began their development in 1944. Here, the seventeen-year old artist exhibits a mastery of workshop practice and attentiveness. Working under the tutelage of his mother he executed studies that remain to a certain extent dependent on the graphic works of Krystyna Wróblewska. Aside from narrative thinking, relatively accurate proportions and an intriguing approach to shaping the space of a print (by introducing various focal points that make it possible to separate subsequent planes), the original, and to some extent already highlighted characteristics of the artist, are already noticeable. These consisted of a peculiar ‘emphasis’ on the visual statement — an urge towards shortcut and synthesis, attempts at characterising a particular narrative situation by showing the most typical aspects of objects or events. The form is plain and unadorned, the juxtapositions of black and white are categorical, expressive, the hatching thrifty, its ornament not dominating. If in the work *Ball* [Bal] (1946) we encounter hatching, it is used consistently in different ways, forming an essential component in the structure of the work. It is no longer accompanied by other ‘colliding’ elements.

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Wróblewski's prints from 1944–1946 constitute a dense series where works stereotypical in terms of themes (though often offering extremely interesting formal solutions), for instance: *Gulliver* [Guliwer], *Don Quixote* [Don Kichot], *Last Judgement* [Sąd Ostateczny] or the *Expulsion from Paradise* [Wypędzenie z Raju], are accompanied by such titles as *Viaduct* [Wiadukt], *Drunkards* [Pijacy], *A Man* [Człowiek], *Train Station* [Dworzec], *Booth* [Kiosk], *Street* [Ulica], or *Ball*. The works related to literature (often involving religious motifs) often use a particular metaphor to highlight their themes, which gives room for poetic or surrealist associations, as in the woodcut *Don Quixote* where the massive body of a bull appears in the sky, floating down onto the knight. The second body of works betrays a particular interest in reality. *Ball* shows two groups of people: one observing as if isolated, and the other directly participating in the events. *Dance* [Taniec] shows a dancing couple: an ordinary man accompanied by an ordinary woman. Whilst the work *Train Station* seems to provide an account of the situation in Poland from 1945–1946. At the station platform where a particular focus is placed on notices and signposts, a group of repatriates appears. It is in this work that Wróblewski conveys his own experience as a young man, himself a repatriate who knows the heated atmosphere of the first days following liberation.

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This invasion of reality is not surprising, though often thought-provoking, sad and painful. Wróblewski had already experienced events that were to shape his psyche. Whilst still a child he witnessed the loss of his father, thus remaining an attentive witness to the events of the wartime occupation. The family left for Kraków in 1945, a journey that also had dramatic significance.

In his early prints Andrzej Wróblewski, whose oeuvre could be divided into thematic series, established sequences of works he would often continue until



his death. *Train Station* would later be developed into a painting, its ideas and themes reappearing in works that depict waiting individuals surrounded by signposts and notices. *Dance* would give birth to the much-used motif of a couple: a man and a woman providing an abundance of associations. In fact, those iconographical ‘sequences’, being a dominant tendency in the artist’s body of work, are similar to film stills that allow the presentation of the same motifs that change with time. The artist was thought to have once said:

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I like (...) the kind of practice that consists not of creating individual masterpieces, but a certain succession of works, which, taken together, constitute and are the equivalent of today’s masterpiece.<sup>9</sup>

Remembering Wróblewski’s certainty and clarity, as well as a literary leaning in the content of his earliest visual statements, we should now attempt to reconstruct the situation in which the young artist found himself after being admitted to Kraków’s Academy of Fine Arts. From the outset, Wróblewski’s academic learning was marked by disenchantments. Being a student of painting he fell under the influence of the Kraków professors who saw their artistic mission as quite different to that of their colleagues in Vilnius where Wróblewski’s mother and his first teacher took their lessons. The professors of the Kraków Academy, as post-impressionists, expected an artist to execute sensory and impression-based works. Works in which the content is considered irrelevant and boils down to nothing more than the shaping of painterly matter with reference to colour and sophistication. They created paintings that were governed by the inherent laws of their internal structure. The outside world merely provided a ‘frame’ that allowed for subjective solutions to works that simultaneously reveal the ‘manner’ in which they were shaped. In their understanding, the inner world of a painting encompasses symbolic accents and overtones that rise from intellectual considerations. In spite of calling upon the authority of Bonnard or Vuillard, what they adopted from post-impressionism often amounted only to its external and most sensory-oriented side. Initially Wróblewski attempted to conform to the programme of the ‘post-impressionist’ Academy. His efforts in executing still lifes or nudes, taken up between 1946 and 1947, with a preference for the seemingly static and relatively intellectual works of Zbigniew Pronaszko,<sup>10</sup> illustrate an attempt at attaining an academic correctness. Needless to say, creating sensory and purely impression-based art came with great difficulty.

Along with his artistic gift, Andrzej Wróblewski’s interest in artistic theory and history, as well as his earlier humanistic ambitions, led him towards university education. Studies in art history at the Jagiellonian University, taken up in 1945, produced outstanding results. Wróblewski proved to be amongst the leading students who practically earned an opportunity for professional employment in the field — a chance of becoming an art historian and scholar. However, the idea of developing his own art proved stronger, preventing the artist from abandoning his painterly practice. Despite adversities at the academy, he decided that painting would be his primary occupation.

Leaving for the Netherlands in 1947, where he became acquainted with both recent and historical art, Wróblewski consolidated his interest in art that had little to do with superficiality or the sole presentation of the sensory. He found two tendencies to be exceptionally stimulating and of particular interest, information to which he testified in his memoirs. The first of these was represented by the painters of *De Stijl*, whom Wróblewski considered to be a revelation about the possibilities of an art of 'limited relations'. The other tendency was embodied in the works of Marc Chagall. During his stay in the Netherlands Wróblewski visited the artist's solo exhibition in Amsterdam.<sup>11</sup> An account of his immediate thoughts on the exhibition can be found in an article he published in "Artistic Review" [Przegląd Artystyczny].<sup>12</sup>

Expressing his admiration for the art of the great painter, Wróblewski wrote the following lines:

There exist two 'ways of access' to each kind of artistic practice. Systematic work yields professional knowledge, whilst a 'short circuit' of inspiration — the incommensurable suggestive force of a work. Official art strives to combine the former with the latter. Primitive (folk) or exotic art owes its value to inspiration. The extremely rare phenomenon of the 'official primitive' consists in drawing upon inspiration, in conjunction with an as if 'involuntary' use of professional knowledge of artistic circles.

This statement carries a critique (albeit hidden) of aspiration that does not extend beyond the level of 'professional knowledge', a critique of the position of the 'professional' painter, an ideal alumnus of an academy such as the one in Kraków shortly after the war.

Specific painterly works revealing Wróblewski's interests came into being immediately after his experience of ambitious European art. Geometry prevails in the works from early 1948. From fleeting, abstract sketches, often resembling copies of works by van Doesburg or other Dutch constructivists, to elaborate watercolours or gouaches, structurally based on the observations of the 'microcosm' of algae, or the 'macrocosm' of celestial bodies, through to synthetic oil paintings that employ all of the above tendencies in order to emphatically express the idea of works that are extremely simple formally, yet carry numerous layers of meaning. When compared to the prints from 1944-1946, as well as to the 'school year painting' (1946-1947), these works are fully mature, representing the final stage in the development of new concerns, and in spite of basing them on the achievements of the European avant-garde, original in meaning. Wróblewski was saved from following the schematic footsteps of the *De Stijl* artists by a certain dose of lyricism and (perhaps all too literal) metaphors, as well as the fact that he did not pursue geometrisation in his oil paintings and gouaches to the full extent — exploring the notion of the 'unfinished', displaying an urge to combine the 'picturesque' with geometrical pattern, or last but not least, a particular aspect of a game, a folk-like approach to employing such elements as colour spheres

[14]



[16] *Sky Above the Mountains*, 1948

or rings filled with structurally uniform divisions. No wonder then that the artist himself wrote: “Everything (...) is on the surface and calls out, in the most simple phrases, about joy and strength using the simplest phrases”.<sup>13</sup> Wróblewski’s ‘abstract’ oil paintings from the period are often made using thin paint smoothly, showing no desire to ‘endear’ or overwhelm the viewer with particular technical effects. I stress the artist’s approach, as it remains in complete opposition to the post-impressionist practice of his then professors: Eugeniusz Eibisch and Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa, painters who considered the texture and thickness of the paint used to be of paramount importance for the shaping of impressive and ‘richly’ harmonised paintings.<sup>14</sup> The space in Wróblewski’s ‘abstractions’ is governed by the presence of two planes: the uniformly shaped background, and the circular elements that either step forth or remain hanging in the air. In terms of composition, the works, when compared with Polish art of the time, are often captivating in their rejection of ideas for the construction of paintings that stem directly from landscape studies or still lifes — these compel the viewer to focus on specific parts of a canvas that pile up horizontally, emphasising various elements positioned in the ‘balanced’ areas determined by the golden ratio or symmetrical divisions. In these works Wróblewski represents the ‘structuralist’ composition where rings or spheres make up a set of uniform elements seen on a specific scale and creating a built-up field, which does not draw attention to any specific part. The artist is attracted to arranging the pre-ordered elements into rhythmic patterns, each of them working with all its specificity, colours being vivid and evenly applied in a poster-like manner.

In spite of calling the aforementioned works abstractions, Wróblewski seems attached to symbolism and the metaphorical understanding of such elements





as spheres, which signify celestial bodies. At the same time, according to the artist, complete compositions are to express themes with even further associations. Wróblewski named one such work *Emotional Content of the Revolution* [Treść uczuciowa rewolucji]. When compared with the works of other young Kraków-based artists from the period (Tadeusz Brzozowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Nowosielski and Maria Jarema),<sup>15</sup> who in their call for ‘abstraction’ opposed the post-impressionist approach to art, Wróblewski was perhaps the most radical, and represented the most clear-cut ideology of painting, in contrast to other artists who often hesitated in choosing the path of their artistic development. Apart from greater economy, which at times reached the level of asceticism, the artist’s works differ from those of Kantor or Jarema in their unique focus on the issue of a lack of motion. Whilst it is common knowledge that dynamism plays an important role in the example of works by Kantor or Jarema, if we were to highlight any aspects of motion in Wróblewski’s abstractions, these would be the unhurried rotations, moments of passing, majestic moves or repositionings. Even Nowosielski’s *Pigeon House* [Dom gołębi], with its structural construction based on diagonals, seems dynamic. If any associations come up in an analysis of Wróblewski’s ‘abstract’ works, they are with Klee, who employed geometrical elements with great ease and similar metaphorical charge. Naturally, one should not confuse Klee’s ‘scientific’ and ‘analytic’ forays with work by Wróblewski, teeming with synthesis and generalisations. However, in spite of the differences Wróblewski shares the same idea of rebellion against the post-impressionist canon (or cultivates a direct link to the most fundamental art, as in the case of Nowosielski), as Kraków’s ‘modern’ artists. It was no accident that Wróblewski, along with a group of young artists, participated in the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* (1948–1949), where he mostly exhibited his ‘optimistic’ works: *Earth* [Ziemia], *Sun and Other Stars* [Słońce i inne gwiazdy], *Sky* [Niebo], *Construction* [Budowa], *Sunken City I* [Zatopione miasto I] and *Emotional Content of the Revolution*, as well as three spatial models. The latter (regrettably missing), were an intriguing example of the use of a set of pre-existing elements such as water taps in order to create sculptural compositions of an abstract nature. Here, structures consisting of identical elements also become important. Speaking of Wróblewski’s optimism at the time we should not forget to stress the fact that the year 1948 is distinctive for the spiritual strength and enthusiasm that accompany the painter’s practice. Never again would one sense the hope with which Wróblewski approached his works in that specific year, at the age of twenty-one.

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*Earth* is amongst the ‘abstract’ paintings of the time. It depicts a sphere in a space, its interior is mosaic-like and colourful, its centre illuminated. The sphere is ‘lonely’, set in an empty and distant space the disturbing aura is further emphasised by the composition of the painting, which determines the asymmetrical location of the sphere. It remains in stark contrast to the surrounding space. *Sun and Other Stars* features a play of elements marked by cold or warm colours of various degrees of intensity. For example, some of

the warm spheres radiate intensely others focus their warmth inside. Others still, seem to glow with a cool, neon-like, pure white or blue. In Wróblewski's works celestial bodies seem to become psychic entities, centres of energy. Abstraction thus becomes a form of metaphorical thinking. In other works the 'microcosmic' elements become objects submerged in water, whilst the 'macrocosm' comes closer to the earth, being depicted in relation to its fragments: the buildings of a city. Air — sky, buildings — earth, sea — water: nature reveals its elemental divisions, which always remain as a significant background for the objects depicted in subsequent works. As in the *Marriage* [Małżeństwo] series (1956–1957), which once again reminds us of the existence of the sky, however, this time it is bisected, wounded by spindle-shaped forms, the same that seem to painfully tear the characters depicted in a 1957 gouache *Him and Her* [On i Ona].

In three crayon drawings from 1948, *Sky — Morning* [Niebo — poranek], *Sky — Noon* [Niebo — południe] and *Sky — Evening* [Niebo — wieczór], unusual celestial bodies appear in the sky above a sequence of rectangles and triangles that allude to the existence of a dense urban development: spheres and rings of different sizes. Suspended in space they seem to be signs with varying strength of effect. Some are constructed towards the centre, emphasising their internal structure. Others, through their rays, exert their effect towards the exterior. Arranged in a manner that makes one aware of the essence of their similarities and differences, they constitute elements of a visual game. Since they are actually associated with a particular and unusual situation in which a set of mysterious and indecipherable signs appears in the sky, the works suggest a symbolic situation that calls for a search for underlying meanings.

*Sunken City I*, an oil painting from 1948, is perhaps one of the first out-  
standing works by the artist. It is often noted that Picasso's oeuvre included [18]  
paintings that summarised a particular period of research, masterpieces  
that seemed to comprise of a whole range of problems addressed in previous  
works for which partial solutions were sought.<sup>16</sup> Amongst these groundbreaking  
masterpieces were for example: *The Acrobat Family*, *Les Demoiselles  
d'Avignon*, or *Guernica*. Wróblewski, though not matching the Spaniard in  
significance, was likewise 'changing' and his practice involved periods where  
certain developments were summarised in one essential oil painting in order  
to proceed in a completely different direction in the next works. *Sunken  
City I* seems to be one of Wróblewski's first masterpieces. The distinct and  
geometrical contour of a metaphorical city contrasts with water of alternating  
colours that forms the background against which soft contoured fish appear,  
their volume seems to break away from the surroundings. They slip out, swim-  
ming, oval and slippery. This universe, cold and filled with silence, hides in  
its depths the drama of a dead city. In another oil painting, *Painting About the* [2]  
*Horrors of War* [Obraz na temat okropności wojennych], fish, violently pulled  
from the water, killed and cut — provide a forceful and concentrated example  
of silent destruction.<sup>17</sup> Extremely simple with regard to form, the internal

structure of the painting is far from random. The vertical division of the work into two parts results in two seemingly distinct arrangements of elements: to the left are the tightly cramped bodies of fish radiating from the centre, whilst to the right severed fragments or whole bodies of fish lay isolated from each other — a dense mass and isolated individuals. Congestion suggests a violent concentration, and calm existence is separated from other existences. The ‘abstract’ structuralist organisation of the work is emphatically accompanied by specific content. At the start of 1949 the artist decisively returns to ‘figurative’ painting.

The frequent recurrence of the fish motif in Wróblewski’s early work means that we should consider its ‘symbology’. Juan Eduardo Cirlot writes that a fish is a psychic being or a ‘penetrative motion’ connected with a heightening power. There also exists a close symbolic relationship between the sea in which the fish swims and the *magna mater*.<sup>18</sup> Following Schneider, the same author reports that the fish is the mystic Ship of Life.<sup>19</sup> The nature of the symbolic meaning of the fish, which is the last sign of the zodiac, is twofold in its essence. Firstly, due to its spindle-like shape, in certain realms of magic the fish is considered as a “bird of the netherworld”.<sup>20</sup> Such a relationship might be traced in the *Sunken City I*, where submerged fish float above the dead metropolis. On the other hand, if we follow Cirlot the scene with cut fish would become extremely meaningful if we consider that here the fish appear as a symbol of secondary significance, embodying the relationship between heaven and earth.<sup>21</sup> Severed fish would thus become vectors that are cut across, testifying to a certain crisis of ideas. Noting the almost obsessive candour of Wróblewski’s work we could also interpret his symbols (as in this particular case) in terms of his individual mental life. Assuming the symbolic nature of Wróblewski’s art, a characteristic that would develop further in his later practice, we might consider the dramas of his works as the artist’s own, whilst the optimism radiating from certain works (solar abstractions) as personal joy at particular moments of his life. There is also the domination of the pessimistic approach, coming to the fore after 1948, which (as in the example of the cut fish) highlights issues of death, destruction, annihilation or abandonment.

[18]

In the autumn of 1948, Wróblewski’s renewed interest in the everyday, and the attempt at transposing its elements into visual works, was accompanied by further conflicts at the Academy. Rejecting the call for sensory perception of the world he seems to have followed the conclusions he drew from the work of Chagall. Thinking that he had already mastered the elementary craftsman’s skills in the field of painting he set out to become an official ‘primitive’. Folk, primitive, popular art and cheap ‘kitsch’ attracted him as a result of the values he raised in his text on Chagall. Already in 1948 he wrote:

Considering folk art, we should not seek complex formal systems, such as can be found in the total oeuvre of each outstanding artist. If any systems are to be traced, they are heterogeneous. The proper domain of primitive (and thus also folk) art, is the

individual expression of a given work in which visual elements, utterly individual and encountered on a single occasion, are the inner forms of a psychic 'eruption' — a curious vision of the labyrinthine brain of an illiterate.<sup>22</sup>

In another later passage from the text, Wróblewski would stress the role of amateur-painters, claiming that:

as far as the countryside primitive is concerned, it constitutes a closed developmental cycle connected with the currently fading cultural isolation of the country — whilst it seems that the theme-oriented painting of workers and office workers, which gave up on the experience of the purely formal currents of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is capable of intense development.<sup>23</sup>

At that time, Wróblewski often voiced his thoughts on primitive and folk art, and this interest was to remain an inseparable element of his practice.<sup>24</sup>

The tangible influence of 'primitivism' produced further works in 1949. Rejecting the path towards aestheticism represented by other modern artists in Kraków, Wróblewski drew upon all of his powers as a 'primitive' to brutalise, purposefully employing elements of the 'naïve', and at the same time retaining the idea of a clear and immediate visual expression.

Thus there are the *Nudes* [Akty] and *Models* [Modelki] from 1948 and 1949. The *Nudes* were executed by Wróblewski in the studio of Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa. These are not only studies testifying to the artist's mastery of anatomy, characterised by general form and emphasised by drawing. The paintings depict ordinary, ugly women, frequently obese, with uneven proportions. The viewer is presented with an image of an anti-aesthetic, exhibitionist universe, inhabited by people devoid of masks and shown in all their ugliness.

In this series of works, not only the anti-aestheticism but also the programmatic, populist naïveté — as if drawn from a small town fair or streets of worker's suburbs — constitute an important element of artistic ideology. In the work *Two Married Women* [Dwie mężatki] vivid colours mark elements of the women's clothing. The characters are painted in a manner that makes them appear as if they were posing at a small town photographic studio. The naïve precision with which the painter works is not in conflict with the generalised form, always important in his practice. In the painting *Waiting Room — the Poor and the Rich* [Poczekalnia — biedni i bogaci], which carries a symbolic-patriotic meaning connected with the elections ("3 × Yes" written on the wall of a waiting room with seated passengers, and the red flag of the stationmaster behind the window), colour serves to juxtapose two groups of characters.<sup>25</sup> One of them, the 'rich', is rendered in the 'cheapest', most kitschy, combinations of colour: sharp yellow contrasted with pink. The remaining parts of the work are subject to the rule of green and blue, Wróblewski's favourite combination of colours at that point. In time, the specificity of the characters' individual existence in such works as *The Walk of*



[18] *Sunken City I*, 1948

*the Lovers with the Sun* [Spacer zakochanych ze słońcem] and *Married Couple with a Bouquet* [Młoda para z bukietem], or various versions of the theme that illustrates the presence of a dead man amongst the living, yields to the simplicity of the ordinary existence of those who make up the masses. What takes place is the gradual loss of individualism, and a move towards archetypal people in the works of the artist who develops a certain canon of a person based mostly, though not only, on research into folk culture of the urban proletariat. The forms of the canon originate from works of Mexican painting in which Wróblewski had taken an interest in 1949. A drive towards the monumental (already manifest in the abstract works), as well as the extreme economy of artistic means: sharp juxtapositions of large colour surfaces emphatically defined by drawing, where chiaroscuro appears merely to modify subsequent planes — all these elements can be traced to the œuvre of Orozco or Siqueros. Moreover, a certain type of ‘Mexican’ appearance with strongly accentuated eyebrow ridges, nose and lips, as well as protruding cheekbones, also steers us towards Mexican mural artists.

An example of an exceptionally monumental work, both generalising and summarising a certain stage of the artist’s development, is the *Blue Chauffeur* [9] [Szofer niebieski], which, considering its content, constitutes the very first link in a series of studies devoted to the same theme, which was to be continued almost to the end of the artist’s life: a man driving a vehicle. Due to its direct and emphatic form, *Blue Chauffeur* is a ‘primitive’ work. It is extremely spare in terms of colour, the use of which in subsequent areas (symbolically interpreted by the artist), serves to underscore the painter’s vision. The black and blue man, his back turned towards the viewer, personifies concentration. The blue environment of the cabin — representing the vehicle’s reliance



[19] *Untitled, sketch for Surrealist Execution, 1948–1949*

on the driver's intentions, the car's obedience to the chauffeur's will. The hot red of the emotional sky on the horizon seems to signify a dangerous all-encompassing air of experience, which the chauffeur pursues with persistence and attention. The whiteness of the road stands for the monotony of pure speed. Only a handful of European artists were able to convey such a weight of expression and symbolic power as Wróblewski did with the use of white, blue and red in his work.<sup>26</sup> If we recall some of Chagall's solutions in relation to colour, as seen for example, in *The Fallen Angel* or *The Blue Circus*, we would be able to comprehend how 'faithful' the cold blue of the surroundings is, how the self-incinerating emotional red 'descends' from the sky, whilst the green element 'lifts up'.<sup>27</sup> The composition of the *Blue Chauffeur* conveys a deliberate gap, a void, which seems unsettling from the point of view of a traditional composition. The eye perceives only the abstract, swirling combinations of overlapping lines that make up an optical construction, which escapes deep into the painting. The lines and the outline of the speedometer occupy the left, blue side, constituting a much weaker compositional element than other areas of the painting and thus hindering the 'harmonious' perception of the work — all in keeping with the artist's intentions. The form of the seat seen on the lower-left side, and the blue frame of the cabin, which constitutes a complete closure of the painting, draw the viewer into the work, forcing him to occupy the space of the vehicle driven by the metaphorical chauffeur.

[9]

In 1949 an atmosphere of change developed at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts. Wróblewski's efforts to find individual artistic expression through content came close to the ideas represented by two newly admitted students: Andrzej Wajda and Konrad Nałęcki.<sup>28</sup> Discontent with the overly 'formalist' programme of the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, they left for Kraków.<sup>29</sup> Yet the situation they faced at that Academy did not satisfy them either, to their minds the painting propagated by post-impressionists had no chance of influencing the masses. Their passion for social issues called for new artistic formulas. Their critical stance towards the Kraków Academy was expressed in the article *Voice of the Young Visual Artists* [Głos młodych plastyków], published in the periodical "The Village" [Wieś] in 1948. Amongst other things the text stated that "the current teaching methods at the Academy



[20] Shooting of the citizens of Bydgoszcz, 9 September 1939, Old Town Square in Bydgoszcz

ensure a high level of ‘technical’ skills, required for easel painting — a form of visual work *that loses its reason for existence in the face of the new objectives of art* — the objectives of *general visual education of the new mass consumer*. Yet an objective is not yet a commission.”<sup>30</sup> The authors call for a revision of the views on the essence of artistic creation and the abandoning of Józef Pankiewicz’s rules.<sup>31</sup> They suggest:

- 1) that art should express reality,
- 2) that artists should work with specific themes (pointing to such examples as *The Exhibition of the Recovered Territories* [Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych], *The Olympic Contest* [Konkurs Olimpijski], or portraits of Stakhanovites),
- 3) that artists should develop an outlook on life.

They highlighted the developing students’ organisation — the Union of Academic Art Circles [Związek Akademickich Kół Artystycznych], which could offer a new approach to the objectives of painting, expand the self-educational agenda and launch an offensive in the field of socio-political education.<sup>32</sup>

In the same magazine, Wróblewski voices his opinion on a similar subject, proclaiming his support for reforms at the Academy.<sup>33</sup> His opinions, which follow the same line as his predecessors, seem more bold and emphatic. He states, amongst other things, that “the Academy, as a form of institution of higher education, is burdened with conservatism”, as well as that “painting in today’s society is a means of education and equal to literature, music and theatre, it draws its material and defines its aims on the basis of the social life that it serves.”<sup>34</sup> It was the enthusiasm for reforms and social issues that brought the young artists together. In 1949, they defined themselves as the Self-Educational Group of the Academic Union of Polish Youth [Zespół Samokształceniowy Związku Akademickiego Młodzieży Polskiej], which soon became a hotbed of intellectual revolt at the Kraków Academy. Apart from Nałęcki and Wajda, the group included Wróblewski, Witold Damasiewicz, Andrzej Strumiłło and Przemysław Brykalski.<sup>35</sup>

Writing about the Self-Educational Group one cannot fail to mention the origins of the idea for this artistic faction. It stemmed from a conscious decision to draw upon Mexican models. Wróblewski had produced much enthusiastic writing about Mexican graphic art, emphasising the working methods of the local artists:

Mexican visual artists not only set out to shape society ideologically, but also developed adequate working methods by introducing teamwork and rallying together a group known as the Workshop of Popular Graphic Art (...) Work on a collective piece starts in the studio of Popular Graphic Art with a group discussion during which the political and historical value of a prospective work are addressed. Then a specially appointed technical committee proceeds to collect historical, literary and photographic documents relating to the subject.<sup>36</sup>

If we examine the practice of Kraków's Self-Educational Group, we can easily draw an analogy between their methods and those of the Workshop of Popular Graphic Art. The young artists from the group viewed their work in the same manner as the Mexicans, placing emphasis on the social significance of their practice, hunting for archive documents (a significant example being the alleged modelling of Wróblewski's *Executions* on a photograph depicting an actual shooting in Bydgoszcz in 1939), working collectively and correcting each other's pieces. Wajda, Nałęcki and Wróblewski put forward joint proposals for themes (war, the destruction of societies and individuals, racial discrimination, etc.). They created paintings where certain motifs from Mexican art could be traced back to particular works (e.g. in Nałęcki's *Bloodbath in St. Louis* [Krwawa kąpiel w St. Louis] the head of a woman from an advertising poster appears amongst characters participating in the dramatic events, which brings to mind Orozco's *Katharsis*, a fresco from 1932).

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Before long Andrzej Wróblewski stepped forward as the leader of the group. His activity at the Academy, which evolved from passive resistance to a rebellious movement, came hand in hand with the copious reviews he wrote for daily papers. To quote some headlines: *Marvellous Idea, Inferior Execution — a Commentary on Kraków's Exhibition 'Work'* [Wspaniała idea, słabsze wykonanie (na marginesie krakowskiej wystawy pt. "Praca")] — *Mexican Graphic Art as an Example of Revolutionary Art* [Grafika meksykańska jako przykład sztuki rewolucyjnej], *Exhibition of Works by Amateur Artists, Members of the Trade Unions, in the House of Culture* [Wystawa prac plastyków — amatorów, członków Zw. Zawodowych w Domu Kultury], *An Overview of Contemporary Visual Art, Exhibition of Ludomir Sleńdziński and the 'Nurt' Group* [Z plastyki współczesnej, Wystawa Ludomira Sleńdzińskiego i grupy 'Nurt'], *Painter, Tutor, Man (Posthumous Exhibition of Paintings by Kowarski)* [Malarz, pedagog, człowiek (wystawa pośmiertna obrazów Kowarskiego)].<sup>37</sup>



On the one hand Wróblewski popularised new and historical art in these articles and reviews, and on the other he voiced his enthusiasm for an increasingly visible artistic tendency that was making its retreat from ‘formalism’, greeting the expansion of realist and educational art. Ideologically involved in the cause of building socialism, a member of the Academic Union of Polish Youth, supported by political circles, the artist used writing to solicit enthusiastic support for art with a political content and lucid form. He intentionally pointed to the monumentalist Szczęśny Kowarski and the classicist Sleńdziński as the forerunners of such practice at the same time identifying certain noteworthy formal models in the output of the members of such groups as *Nurt* and *Sztuka*.<sup>38</sup>

Fascinated by Mexican art and Soviet socialist realism — examples of ideology combined with form and content — Wróblewski looked for such visual works that would suit the aforementioned criteria. Moreover (which is where not only Wróblewski’s consistency, but also the originality of his views become manifest — even more so if contrasted with the opportunist statements made by other painters at the time), he identified the correct way forward for the new, socialist art, with references to Polish, national and folk culture and threads of amateur and popular art understood in a ‘modern’, i.e. populist, way and addressing the urban proletariat. Wróblewski approached the idea of implementing art that would be “national in form and socialist in content” with absolute enthusiasm and spared no effort to align it with Polish cultural and social reality. Comparable aspirations (though not supported by theory and devoid of such a conjunction of meaning as ‘national’ and ‘popular’) were demonstrated by other members of the group, Andrzej Wajda being



a particular example. Wajda's ideology, which at that point came very close to that of Wróblewski, would be tested not so much in painterly works as in his later films.

In Wróblewski's article on Mexican graphic art one stumbles upon a sentence that seems to summarise his aspirations at that time: "In the eras that make history, life is grand enough to be beautiful as it is."<sup>39</sup> Seeing himself at a historical turning point and believing in the new system and new society with a trust worthy of a romanticist or visionary, Wróblewski creates paintings that burst with ideological passion.

The blue-green-brown painting *Train Station in the Recovered Territories* [Dworzec na Ziemiach Odzyskanych], from 1949, shows a group of people gathered against a wall on which hang various notices and signs. This is a further development of an earlier idea on the theme taken from the woodcut *Train Station*. In this populist work the extremely lucid characters, arranged in a clear way and depicted with deliberate primitivism, were made alike in terms of scale, uniformity of clothing and in their faces, which were based on similar proportions. Looking at the work, we are convinced of an inseparable connection between Wróblewski's monumental painting and his theoretical reasoning at that time. A piece of the artist's writing testifies to the fact that he attributed the greatest value to works where an idea for a theme was of paramount importance, a "mental shortcut, which expresses ideological content".<sup>40</sup> The ideological content of this particular painting is the situation of people at a crossroads, where their fate is already decided. Formally speaking, the work, much like his earlier paintings, from the abstractions to the *Blue Chauffeur*, emphasises a way of defining a space that comprises two visual planes — an already characteristic feature of Wróblewski's art. The background is treated more generally as if to provide a stage for characters and objects occupying the foreground. Whilst it is the foreground that draws us into the game, the background appears to infinitely extend it. The dualism

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of the planes is accompanied by the double symbolism of Wróblewski's works. Owing to its elementary divisions, the background forms a group of cosmic symbols, external forces read through the subjective situation of people and objects in the foreground. The object-symbols and character-symbols placed in the foreground are focused, introvert centres of energy, which seem to step to the front of the canvas striking up an intense conversation with the viewer, becoming intermediaries and carriers of ideology.

The most poignant series of works, and at the same time the one that Wróblewski was most affected by is *Executions* (autumn 1948 and 1949), made as an immediate response to the ideological beliefs of the Self-Educational Group. At that point in time the group made an attempt at incorporating war themes into painting. Participating in the group's endeavour, Wróblewski chose the motif of the *Execution* as the most distinctive characteristic of people in Poland at the time of occupation. Copious drawings and studies precede the series, which consists of eight paintings. In terms of content, the artist consistently resolves his previously determined goals, one of which refers to showing people put to death, men cut in half, facing a firing squad. Since the early nineteenth century the execution, which in art history became tantamount to the martyrdom theme already found in the iconography of Christian art, has become the most dramatic confrontation between man and violent forces — forces that are being destroyed by forces that destroy. This archetypal motif, characteristic of a number of approaches in art history, was articulated in Goya's *Execution of the Defenders of Madrid*, Manet's *Execution of the Emperor Maximilian*, or Picasso's *Massacre in Korea*.<sup>41</sup> Wróblewski, whose theme refers to this tendency, performs a fundamental transformation of the established motif. The Polish artist's *Executions*, which continue the idea of a confrontation between forces, have another effect. In most cases the figures of the executioners are removed from the scene (the psychological 'extension' of the painting's theme means that the executioners are forced to appear as imagined figures). The viewer seems to replace the position of the executioner. Thus, the artist achieves maximum focus, resolving a specific violent dialogue with the viewer, and at the same time rendering an overwhelming impression of the hopeless waiting of the convicts.

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One more assumption accompanies the *Executions*, and this is based on capturing the line between life and death and expressing it most accurately with the use of visual language. Already the artist's work showed exceptional emphasis on contrasting living and dead characters or exposing a dead man amongst the living. The artist even developed his own code of symbols according to which the whole character (including face and hands) was depicted in blue. The presence of such an individual in a painting was to serve as a powerful reminder of someone who had physically ceased to live but whose character continues to exist in the memory. An analogy with a painting by Petrov-Vodkin *After the Battle* [После боя] from 1923 suggests itself: In this the artist placed people painted in blue alongside living characters in the



foreground (portrayed with the use of colour). This was a symbolic way of depicting the dead soldiers 'still present' in the thoughts of those who survived on the battleground. Blue, a colour that has stood for night and death in art since ancient Egyptian times is willingly revived with the same meaning in late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernism where the meaning of blue continues.<sup>42</sup> Amongst Wróblewski's earlier works one can often find images of a mother holding a dead son or a wife with a dead husband — the living and the dead. Needless to say that in terms of personal content, the artist, being semi-orphaned, conveys his own family situation and that of his mother — a widow. In terms of iconography, the theme is of crucial importance in Polish art after the Second World War, and it was to purposely play an important role in the cinematographic ideas of some Polish filmmakers. In Wajda's *Speed* [Lotna] we witness a newly married couple and (by the use of a symbolic situation) it seems obvious beforehand that the husband, serving in the light cavalry, is soon to die. The obsession of mothers who lost their sons was conveyed by Tadeusz Makarczyński in his short film *The Night* [Noc].<sup>43</sup> One need not reach for Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry to see further examples, since other fields of Polish culture, including literature, are alive with similar instances where these themes are used.<sup>44</sup> Above all, Wróblewski remains a painter and as a result the themes he uses are accompanied by a formally considered execution. Basing this on surrealist associations the artist consciously works to unsettle the viewer, however, he also expands on the work's symbolic layer, subjecting it to a certain formalisation he sets the canon and develops a symbolic language based on a way of thinking that is characteristic of Orozco for example. The most simple, and at the same time monumental and typical characters and objects, become symbols of precisely defined meaning, which taken together make up works subordinated to a single supreme idea. In wall paintings by Orozco, who began his career as a journalist-illustrator, one finds characters in situations that illustrate more than ideas of national and social liberation. Depending on placement within the composition, men painted by him are frequently confronted with others in a violent and provocative way often with a healthy dose of satire. For the sake of emphasising the message of the work, the Mexican artist fiercely distorts man as a symbol. Even though the dynamic of Orozco's works is far from that of Wróblewski, the range of monumentalism, rawness, an inclination to anthropological symbolism, and the role of deformation (still respecting some deeply rooted classical arrangements), moves the Polish artist closer to the Mexican mural painter's way of thinking.

Wróblewski's interest in the possibility of depicting the moment of death (strongly manifested before the artist's own death in 1957) led him to develop such behaviours as the need to learn the expression on a man's face before death, as if following the advice of Prince Myshkin from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, who, as we remember, stated that if he was to be a painter he would paint the human expression that precedes death. Wróblewski made studies of faces, the expression of which could convey the impression of frightening

terror. In order to do this he reached for various historical materials including a photograph of a group of men a moment before they were shot to death in Bydgoszcz (1939). As a result the paintings from the *Execution* series developed a certain set of facial features with pinched, sunken cheeks, and eyes that no longer see the surrounding world. Apart from drawing upon historical photographic sources, as previously mentioned the expression references a certain type of Mexican face.

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What is the exact moment of ‘dying’? The artist seeks to answer this question in his sketches that depict the ‘disintegration’ of a man, the breakdown, the twisting around his own axis, the disturbance of his very essence — resembling the mechanical destruction of an object. In a man facing a firing squad, Wróblewski seems to notice only the features of an object. He poses the following question: what is the difference between a man and an object? The answer is the same as that provided by the Nazi theses, which claimed that an *Untermensch* does not deserve the name of a man, he is only an object, the destruction of which would amount to no more than breaking a mannequin for example. A problem worthy of Camus that was solved by a painter using means that reach back to literature and yet emphasise the issue of visual power.

Amongst the paintings that summarise the ideas of executions there are three that are particularly worthy of attention.

*Execution IV (Execution Against a Wall)* shows two characters against a red brick wall. The scale employed allows the men to affect the viewer with the substantial volume of their bodies and their simple clothing. Their ordinary appearance deprives them of individuality. Hands tied behind their backs they die with dignity. One of the men, blue and with a twisted torso, is standing in a gust of air, which is demonstrated by his windswept hair and ruffled cuffs, the man symbolises death and passing away. The other character is a young man with an intense gaze, his lips pressed together. He wears the red tie of a communist, which emphasises the ideological topicality of the work. The space within the painting exerts its effect by pushing forward aggressively, forcing the position of the characters in the foreground and simultaneously contrasting them with the surface of the red brick wall — a wall that deprives them of humanity, enclosing the characters and cutting off their escape.

*Execution V (Execution with a Boy)* is perhaps the most anti-aesthetic piece in the series, juxtaposing blue, green and white. As a result of its intense, gloomy chill and ‘naïveté’ of form, the painting is one of Wróblewski’s most extreme works up to that point. Three characters: a naked boy, whose shadow is cast sharply against the wall, a person wearing ordinary clothes and without a shadow, his head cut off by the upper edge of the canvas, and in the foreground the remains of a dismembered, destroyed man, depicted sharply, statically, as if exhibited. Such a painting, with tremendous emotional power, does not easily lend itself to analysis. The viewer is placed in the position of the executioner and (similar to the situation in the cabin of the vehicle driven

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by the metaphorical chauffeur in *Blue Chauffeur*) is consciously treated by [9]  
Wróblewski as a partner in an ideological dialogue. There is no doubt that this  
art is socially committed.

*Execution VIII (Surrealist Execution)* is the work that best summarises the [27]  
whole series. Six characters: one — the shadow of a child, two men focused  
and waiting, with ‘Mexican’ features that express dignity and the will to  
overcome the deadly terror, and three characters in the course of annihila- [25]  
tion, yet the latter do not fall apart as in *Execution V*, instead they twist  
vertically and horizontally. This is a reference to the lethal convulsion. Their  
outfits are plain and useless, their feet bare, and hands clasped, in the gesture  
of solidarity with dying comrades (resembling René Clément’s *The Battle of  
the Rails*), and finally there is the shadow. The meaning of the shadow as a  
significant element that contributes to emotional tension is inescapable. In  
one of the loose notes from the period that referred to sketches for the *Execu-  
tions*, Wróblewski strongly stressed which characters would possess a shadow  
and which should not. Though the artist’s code is not always in line with  
Apollinaire’s poetic statement that a man loses his shadow before death, the  
significance of whether or not a shadow accompanies a character is of equal  
symbolic meaning to that of the poet.<sup>45</sup> The ideological convergence between  
Wróblewski and Apollinaire can be further emphasised since a few years  
later the Polish artist placed the poet at the heart of his intellectual explora-  
tions, going as far as creating works that provided a visual commentary on  
Apollinaire’s œuvre.

If we were to summarise the group of works made by Wróblewski in 1949  
we might stress their deep social significance and thematic focus. Formally  
speaking, when compared to the ‘abstractions’ from 1948, we are dealing with  
a move away from the ‘structuralist’ gaze and a return to more conventional  
visual relations known from figurative art (gravitation towards the lower part  
of a painting, applying parallel divisions of ‘horizontal’ perception). The  
gradual intensification of the meaning of colour, space and object, connected  
with the urge to establish a dialogue with the viewer, leads to compositional  
solutions of aggressive character, which offer the possibility of poster-like  
(i.e. immediate) reaction. Seen from such a point, *Executions* could be said  
to have continued the tendency to depict centres of energy (in this case the  
characters) against the backdrop of a captivating space (which here becomes  
more and more symbolic in contrast to the ‘neutral’ space from 1948).

The year 1949 concludes the first chapter of Andrzej Wróblewski’s work. At  
the age of twenty-two he demonstrated a complete autonomy of thinking, and  
great visual originality in the context of Polish art of the period.

- 1 Mieczysław Porębski, *Granice współczesności. Ze studiów nad kształtowaniem się poglądów artystycznych XX wieku*, Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków 1965, p. 12.
- 2 A. Zaniewski, *Andrzej Wróblewski — malarz ideolog*, until 1994 the manuscript was in the custody of Krystyna Wróblewska, the artist's mother (1904–1994).
- 3 Mieczysław Porębski, *Andrzej Wróblewski. Wystawa pośmiertna* (exh. cat.), Palace of Art, Kraków 1958. Reprinted in the volume *Pożegnanie z krytyką*, Kraków 1966, pp. 35–41.
- 4 Aleksander Wojciechowski (1922–2006), the most ardent scholar of Wróblewski's oeuvre, whom he considered as an embodiment of his own theses, published a number of essays and critical works on the artist. The first critic who paid attention to Wróblewski's oeuvre, publishing an article on his socialist realist paintings was Szymon Bojko (b. 1917) in "Przegląd Kulturalny", 1954, issue 38. In the artist's lifetime his work was discussed by Ignacy Witz (1919–1971) — cartoonist, poster designer and art critic, Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990), Barbara Majewska (b. 1933), art historian and art critic. In fact it was only the posthumous retrospective exhibition of the artist's oeuvre held one year after his death that brought about the first wave of intense interest in his work. Wróblewski's name was often quoted in the following years in critical analyses of the art of the People's Republic of Poland, his position in the development of Polish metaphorical painting was also highlighted in the context of a historical exhibition addressing this theme (*Exhibition of Polish Metaphorical Painting* [Wystawa polskiego malarstwa metaforycznego], Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw, December 1962, exh. cat.), where Wróblewski's works occupied an important location. Wróblewski also gained a position in the general overviews of Polish art. Wojciechowski places Wróblewski against the backdrop of new figurative developments in international art, whilst Juliusz Starzyński (1906–1974) mentions the artist in the sequence of most important achievements in Polish art that bestow it with international character. Another phase of interest in the artist is marked by the exhibition in Poznań accompanied by an academic session on the life and oeuvre of Wróblewski. This second wave of interest brought, on the one hand, a number of statements by Andrzej Osęka (b. 1932), and on the other, conscious references to Wróblewski's work made by the artists from the Kraków group *Wprost*.
- 5 Bohdan Drozdowski, *Julian Przyboś. Z cyklu: Rozmowy z pisarzami*, "Życie Literackie", Kraków 1958, issue 325.
- 6 Ludomir Słędziński (1889–1980) — painter and sculptor, a representative of New Realism, working in Vilnius, Kraków and Warsaw. [M.Z.]
- 7 Tadeusz Dobrowolski, *Nowoczesne malarstwo polskie*, vol. 3, Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków 1964, p. 207. Writing about Słędziński and his connection with the St. Petersburg school of painting one might stress the ideological relationship between the art of the Polish painter and the practice of the Russian artist Kuzma Sergeevich Petrov-Vodkin (1878–1939) who combined the precision of form with a symbolic approach (not emphasised as much by Słędziński). *The Bathing of the Red Horse* (1912), or another painting by the artist *After the Battle* (1923) are works that are strikingly similar in their expression to some of Wróblewski's achievements. Here I would like to note a particular issue relating to the mentality of the painters, calling for an examination of the whole development of painting that was traditional in form but containing 'contemporary' overtones, seeming to be parallel to certain efforts by the surrealists and 'magical realists'. Indeed, important centres of this painting genre were located in Russia, and certain efforts by Vilnius-based painters could be seen as its offshoot, and, last but not least, that both the monumentalism of Felicjan Szczyński-Kowarski (1890–1948) and a certain group of socialist realists in the USSR, like Alexander Deyneka (1899–1969), were deeply rooted in that seemingly dry, academic, classicising and, above all, intellectual approach to nature.
- 8 Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) — novelist, writer, one of the most popular authors at the turn of the nineteenth century; Wacław Gąsiorowski (1869–1939) — writer, journalist, author of novels referring to the Napoleonic epics or November Insurrection in Poland. [M.Z.]
- 9 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Z notatek, Andrzej Wróblewski. Wystawa pośmiertna*, op. cit., p. 3.
- 10 Zbigniew Pronaszko (1885–1958) — painter, sculptor and stage designer. One of the professors at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. [M.Z.]
- 11 In the artist's diary from his travels in the Netherlands there is no writing to testify that he actually saw Marc Chagall's exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum. It is certain however, that he was familiar with the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, with a preface by Chaj Goldstein and introduction by Hans L. C. Jaffe. Wróblewski wrote his article nearly a year and a half after returning from Amsterdam. [M.Z.]
- 12 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Marc Chagall*, "Głos Plastyków", Kraków 1948, 9, pp. 100–101. The article was printed with a note from the editor: "Being in complete disagreement with the author's views on Chagall's painting, we present the article below due to its unquestionable value."
- 13 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Commentary on the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art*, manuscript 1948. [M.Z.]
- 14 Eugeniusz Eibisch (1896–1987) — painter and draughtsman; Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa (1897–1988) — painter and representative of the *colourist* movement in art. Both were professors of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. See: footnote 2, p. 28. [M.Z.]
- 15 Maria Jarema (1908–1958) — member of the Kraków Group [Grupa Krakowska] established by the students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, which later centred around the clandestine theatre of Tadeusz Kantor. Jerzy Nowosielski (b. 1923), Tadeusz Brzozowski (1918–1987), Maria Jarema, and a number of other painters later formed the Second Kraków Group [Druga Grupa Krakowska], which officially took its name in 1957, yet referred to the tradition of the Group of Young Visual Artists [Grupa Młodych Plastyków] established in 1946. [M.Z.]
- 16 Alfred Barr Jr., *Picasso. Fifty Years of his Art*, New York 1946, p. 36.
- 17 Also known as *Fish Without Heads* [Ryby bez głów], in the collection of the Muzeum Lubelskie in Lublin. [M.Z.]
- 18 Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, New York 1962, p. 101.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Sztuka prymitywna*, "Przegląd Artystyczny", Warsaw 1948, issue 8–9 (32–33), p. 8.
- 23 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Wystawa prac plastyków amatorów, członków Związku Zawod. w Domu Kultury*, "Gazeta Krakowska", Kraków 1949, issue 51, p. 6.
- 24 For other noteworthy essays and statements by Wróblewski on folk, amateur and primitive art see: *Sztuka plastyków amatorów*, "Wies", Warsaw 1949, issue 25 (204), p. 11; *Nowe elementy polskiej plastyki*, "Echo Tygodnia", Kraków 1949, issue 10, p. 5; *Ekelandia* (po filmie La Strada), manuscript, Kraków 1957, published in this volume as *Ekelallanda* (after seeing the film La Strada) in accordance with the original spelling from the manuscript, property of the artist's family. [M.Z.]
- 25 The writing refers to the People's Referendum held in Poland in June 1946, often referred to as the "Three Times Yes". The three questions asked by the authorities referred to: abolishing the upper house of parliament; the nationalisation of basic national industries and the consolidation of post-war authority within the constitution; the consolidation of the western border of Poland. The communist authorities used the referendum to gauge their popularity and, as a result of an unsatisfactory

- response, manipulated the official results adopting a more aggressive position towards the opposition. [M.Z.]
- 26 Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Z dziejów malarstwa pejzażowego od renesansu do początków XX wieku*, Warsaw 1965, p. 110.
- 27 Franz Meyer, in his monograph *Marc Chagall*, New York 1963, p. 504, writes about two of the artist's works *Dance* and *The Blue Circus*, which together form a diptych: "Each painting is composed according to a different background colour: *The Blue Circus* takes the midnight blue as its basis, while *Dance* radiant yellow — there exists a visible contrasting symbolism of colours, denoting day and night, the sun and the moon."
- 28 Andrzej Wajda (b. 1926) and Konrad Nałęcki (1919–1991) — filmmakers with earlier education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, members of the Self-Educational Group. [M.Z.]
- 29 Aleksander Wojciechowski, "Młoda plastyka polska", op. cit., p. 17.
- 30 Konrad Nałęcki, Andrzej Wajda, *Głos młodych plastyków*, "Wieś", Warsaw 1949, issue 43, p. 3.
- 31 Józef Pankiewicz (1866–1940) — painter, initiator of the Polish colourism movement and influential professor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. See: footnote 2, p. 28. [M.Z.]
- 32 Konrad Nałęcki, Andrzej Wajda, *Głos młodych plastyków*, op. cit., p. 4.
- 33 Andrzej Wróblewski, *One More Word on the Art Schools* [Jeszcze raz w sprawie szkół plastycznych], "Wieś", Warsaw 1949, issue 43, p. 3. The text is published in this volume.
- 34 Ibid., p. 11.
- 35 Witold Damasiewicz (1919–1996), Andrzej Strumiłło (b. 1927), Przemysław Brykalski (1929–1995). [M.Z.]
- 36 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Grafika meksykańska jako przykład sztuki rewolucyjnej*, "Echo Tygodnia", Kraków 1949, issue 24, p. 5. In 1949 an exhibition of Mexican graphic art toured Poland. This attracted considerable attention to Mexican art on the part of magazines.
- 37 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Wspaniała idea, słabsze wykonanie (na marginesie krakowskiej wystawy pt. "Praca")*, "Trybuna Ludu", Warsaw 1949, issue 134; *Grafika meksykańska...*, op. cit., p. 5; *Wystawa prac plastyków — amatorów...*, op. cit., p. 6; *Z plastyki współczesnej. Wystawa Ludomira Sienkiewicza i grupy 'Nurt'*, "Echo Tygodnia", Kraków 1950, issue 10 (48), p. 4; *Malarz, pedagog, człowiek (wystawa pośmiertna obrazów Kowarskiego)*, "Echo Tygodnia", Kraków 1950, issue 2 (40), p. 3.
- 38 Association of Polish Artists *Sztuka*, founded in Kraków in 1897, its members included some of the most eminent Polish artists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, amongst them Teodor Axentowicz (1859–1938), Józef Chełmoński (1849–1914), Julian Fałat (1853–1929), Jacek Malczewski (1854–1929), Józef Mehoffer (1869–1946), Jan Stanisławski (1860–1907), Leon Wyczółkowski (1852–1936), Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907). Up to 1950 the association held over 100 exhibitions in Poland. *Nurt*, a group of twenty artists founded in Kraków in 1949, its members, operated within the realist idiom employing a variety of media and submitting works to official exhibitions. The group failed to gain a wider recognition. In 1950 Andrzej Wróblewski published press reviews of exhibitions organised by these groups, drawing considerable attention to the realist tendency present in their works. [M.Z.]
- 39 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Grafika meksykańska...*, op. cit. p. 5.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Jan Białostocki, *Teoria i twórczość, O tradycji i inwencji w teorii sztuki i ikonografii*, Poznań 1961, p. 159.
- 42 Mieczysław Porębski, *Modernizm i modernizmy*, a paper delivered at a session of the Association of Art Historians, Kraków 1967.
- 43 Tadeusz Makarczyński (1918–1987) — scriptwriter and director of documentary films. [M.Z.]
- 44 Tadeusz Różewicz (b. 1921) — poet, playwright, scriptwriter and author of novels. [M.Z.]
- 45 Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Poet Assassinated*, Matthew Josephson (transl.), New York 1994, p. 66.

**2**

(...) new realism is revolutionary in relation to naturalism and formalism.\*  
It is founded on emotional and political values offered by fundamental painterly means, such as line, shape, space, colour, and rhythm of composition. The advantages of new realism can be summarised in three ways:

1. It is clear for everyone, since everyone is sensitive to colour and form.
2. The subject (content) is expressed immediately, without references to heterogeneous intellectual content.
3. Such a way of expressing content, based on emotional reactions and the most straightforward associations, makes it possible to convey subjects that are both extremely broad, deep and new.\*\*

\*) impressionism is an example, a formalist movement *par excellence*, other instances include post-impressionist movements (particularly pointillism) as well as cubism, pre-war abstraction and its certain post-war forms.

\*\*) on the whole, new realism would differ from formalism by its extra-aesthetic content, and from naturalism (or old realism), by formalist means of expression. It could be considered a development analogous to a certain form of surrealism, with the exception of quality of content and its clearness, both being a result of another type of viewer.

A.W.





# ONE MORE WORD ON THE ART SCHOOLS

1948

Nowadays all forms of artistic education bear the mark of *kapizm*.<sup>1</sup> This is a Polish variation of French impressionism when in decline. Such a genealogy is somewhat disturbing, and analysis of the group's output yields critical conclusions. To begin with, (1) their doctrine is pure formalism; the artist is expected to express spatial and chiaroscuro elements of reality using colour, and to respect the general decorative character of the canvas. Then (2) the working methods, which lead to accusations of being anti-social: to produce accurate analytic work, the painter removes everything that is not directly related to the doctrine. The method deprives the painting of topicality by removing it from reality and not addressing the viewer in its use of colour. Finally, the aforementioned formalism of the doctrine (1) and anti-social working methods (2) lead to an inability to fulfil specific social commissions (3) — and, as a result, of eliciting no response whatsoever amongst society. Salon exhibitions by members of the artist's union where the majority of the work is capitalist painting only produce pessimistic reflections on the uselessness of 'easel painters' in today's society.

The academy, as a form of institution of higher education, is genetically burdened with conservatism. It is founded on the following principle of training for painters: a young and talented student should make extensive study of the art of the older generation. On the one hand, he will learn a certain working discipline, which is common to all eras, and on the other hand, he will find a point of departure for his own development in the *œuvre* of his professors, which, in turn, will preserve the logical evolution of schools of painting.

This idea might have been correct during periods of stability for the societies or classes that the art served. It might have been correct when art was socially isolated and its development was completely autonomous. In contemporary society painting is a means of education and, as with literature, music and theatre, it draws its material and defines its aims on the basis of the life of the society it serves. For the following reasons, an artist's education cannot consist solely in making him privy to art that has just reached its peak and is becoming academic: the development of art is an expression of the development of a society, not a discrete evolution; new art is determined not by the obsolete art of a past era, but by the current social context; in our situation, *kapizm* is art that has reached its peak — a direction shaped in the interwar period which, as I have attempted to demonstrate, is completely against society.





[30] *Group of Students*, 1950

Apart from its traditional role of making artists 'privy' to particular issues, the academy of today should fulfil duties dictated by the moment: it should foster contact between the students and society, it should teach the student how to include the life of society in the scope of his own artistic interests. The academy should be an institution that facilitates student contact with all types of art, from the most ancient to the most recent. It should also support experiments, create as broad a circle of colleagues as possible, and teach responsible public and professional attitudes at an early stage. I do not feel capable of providing any kind of approximate list of issues that should be changed. Instead this article seeks to draw attention to the issue of the reform of the academy. The programme of that reform is a future task for authorities and tutors on the one hand, and for students themselves (particularly the section that is more aware; members of the Academic Union of Polish Youth [ZAMP]) on the other.



The artistic ideology of the group was one-sided, its radicalism came rather close to the ideologies of bourgeois avant-garde movements.

(...)

Practice demonstrated that in turning against formalism we failed to abandon all foreign formal conventions: every now and then falling into primitivism, naturalism or expressionism. Whilst avoiding all stylisation we developed a complete disregard for technical skills, and voluntarily gave up an important weapon in a painter's struggle for the most evocative expression of a particular theme (ideological content).

A.W.

# VISUAL ARTISTS IN SEARCH OF THE CORRECT PATH

1950

The *1<sup>st</sup> National Exhibition of Visual Arts* does not have a central theme, yet it was the ideological stance of our artists that has yielded a theme, namely: man of the People's Poland.<sup>1</sup>

All major art centres, along with a substantial percentage of artists from each of them, are being represented in the exhibition.

What meaning does the exhibition have for society and for the artists themselves?

The meaning of the exhibition for society consists of: firstly, establishing contact with art, secondly, raising awareness (through artistic understanding) of the current developmental stage of our society, thirdly, establishing cooperation between social agents, artists and critics alike, in order to unmask the errors of our art.

Establishing contact between society and art is not a clichéd phrase. Formalist and elitist art of the interwar period did not teach the working masses how to make use of art, reserving it for 'high society'. We are now overcoming the formalist and petit bourgeois encumbrances in artistic practice and fundamentally altering the function of art, placing the artist in front of multiple viewers and in the service of lively and direct participation in the current life of society. The exhibition marks the first attempt at fulfilling this duty. Society witnesses the lively art of today, the best work that our painters, sculptors and graphic artists can offer. Certainly it is not flawless and is sure to have its own deviations. In many cases one can spot the (more or less palpable) penetration of formalist artistic means into a realist theme. But these flaws mean nothing compared to the fact that Polish visual art has taken its first steps into the area of realism, reaching out towards working people and speaking to them about themselves.

Herein lies the actual meaning of the exhibition. By fulfilling its role as realist art, the body of exhibited works offers a certain understanding of current reality. Already, through the versatility and extensive presence of rural and worker's themes, the exhibition uses artistic means to demonstrate the great contribution that the aforementioned circles made towards the common effort of building socialism in Poland. The interpretation of the character of the working man, such as it develops in a range of professions, with its common characteristics of militancy, strong ethics and patriotism in professional work, can and will be a highly educational experience for today's viewer. Finally, drawing attention to fundamental phenomena



[31] *At the Rally, 1950–1951*

of the new social system is sure to clarify and consolidate individual observations, paving the way for further individual development; I mean here particularly such phenomena as cooperation between workers and peasants, comradeship between older and younger professionals, competition in work, working beyond the prescribed norms, teamwork, support for the country by the cities, and various forms of popularising culture.

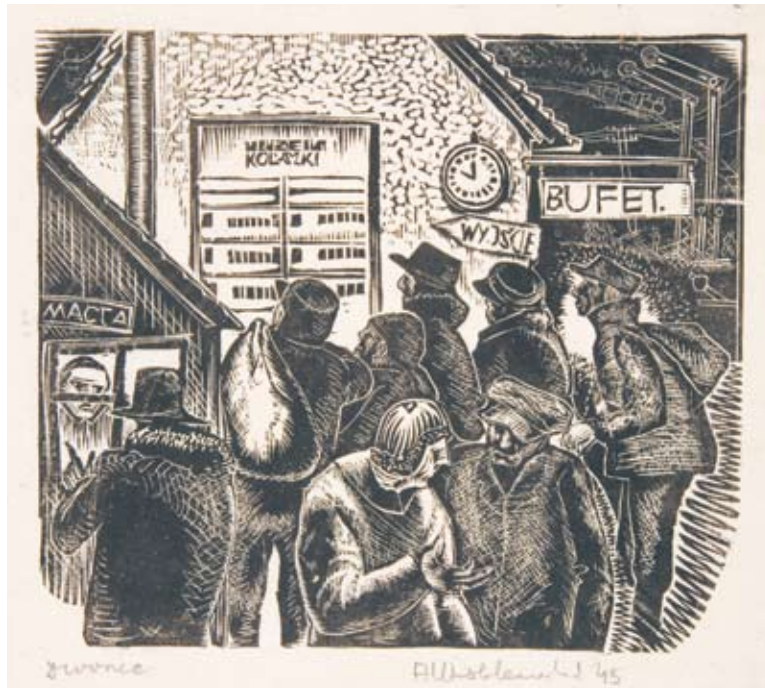
Naturally, in many cases it will become evident that the artist was too late, that he lags behind actual life and should learn quite a lot from the worker and the peasant before he sets out to help them. This should be openly stated, and is the meaning of the third moment found in the exhibition: creating possibilities for a comprehensive debate about the paintings in the context of the practical effects they exert. The debates should involve criticism of all ideological fallacies and all formal errors.

That said, the meaning of the exhibition for the artists themselves is already clear. The period of preparation preceding the exhibition was one of intense self-development, focused chiefly on overcoming the old formalist encumbrances, as well as current imperialist influences of an alien and poisonous nature. The exhibition itself, the confrontation with the works of their peers, the selection of works and their comprehensive discussion, are sure to bring about a thorough revision of each artist's practice so far, eventually leading to self-criticism and awareness of past mistakes. Following the exhibition, it should become clear to everyone how art can affect the broad masses and what responsibilities this places on the visual artist.

1 The text refers to the *1<sup>st</sup> Polish Exhibition of Visual Arts [OWP]*. Held in 1950 in Warsaw's National Museum, the show marked a series of events propagating socialist realism. Amongst the artists submitting works were: Wojciech Fangor (b. 1922), Aleksander Kobzdej (1920–1972) and Wróblewski himself. Whilst many

participants of the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* of 1948, including Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990) and Maria Jarema (1908–1958), withdrew from the official circuit, others, such as Jerzy Tchórzewski (1928–1999) tried to conform to the new requirements. [M.Z.]





## [SOCIAL CONTRASTS — DIVISIONS]

### NEGATIVE

fat,  
swollen (lower lip),  
eyes circled with shadows,  
eyebrows / thin,  
dry,  
dull-clerk-like,  
lipless,  
drugs,  
'heartless',  
an official — representative of Sanation<sup>1</sup>  
foreign racial types: particularly prone to receding chin.

### POSITIVE

light,  
open,  
possibly complete,  
harmonious,  
muscled face / worker's muscles,  
no unnecessary fat,  
ugly facial features,  
dropping lower lip / forehead,  
apart from that a model representative of his race.

<sup>1</sup> Sanation — (Latin *sanatio*: healing) a political group that held power in Poland from 1926 to 1935. Their agenda included moral restoration and aiding public life in Poland. In that period, through a number of legislative bills, the role of parliament was diminished for the sake of government and the president. Following defeat in the September campaign of 1939 supporters of Sanation came under heavy criticism and were removed from official posts in the Polish government in exile. [M.Z.]





Satisfying specific social commissions can take place exclusively in the field of realist painting, and conversely, only realist painting can exert social effects in today's Poland.

(...) In the current phase, the call for lucid realist painting in the field of social commissions is understood by some as an 'agreement' to produce kitsch, whilst others see it as a call that could be adequately addressed by a mere change of themes.

A.W.







[37] *Bloody Sunday* 1905, 1953–1954

# TO BE OR NOT TO BE IN THE POLISH UNITED WORKERS' PARTY

1956

PRO	CONTRA
<u>feeling of creativity</u>	health condition
stimulating atmosphere	peace
promotion (broadly understood)	gradual individual work accompanied by all kinds of material difficulties
materials for artistic activity	
respect from people whom I respect	<u>enemy at home (double life)</u>
opportunity to develop skills and themes	pressure from discontented individuals
	political coercion
circle of Don Quixotes and reactionaries ←	→ circle of careerists
	↻ respect from people (whom I don't respect)
otherwise: suicide on the payment plan (life of a man forced onto the margins)	otherwise: sooner or later I'll end up artistically or physically exhausted
otherwise: considering the misanthropy and hatred towards fellow colleagues — a gradual personal decline	one way or the other they must acknowledge my values









# CONFESSIONS OF A DISCREDITED 'FORMER COMMUNIST'

1957

My current outlook and political stance have been founded upon a conviction that the present-day assessment of Stalinism is false, and that the nationalist-communist tendencies (including local models of socialism), illegitimately employ terminology that surpasses their ideological and factual level.

1.

The assessment of Stalinism (assumption: Stalinism is necessary, etc. — Leninism). The ease with which several years of political and social activity on an immense scale are being judged as an error, and its authors considered fools or traitors, is truly astonishing. Critically, discussion of the subsequent points put forward by critics of Stalinism would result in the following:

- a) The accusation of criminal activity. This accusation is more or less impossible to dismiss; one could only point to the fact that analogous criminal activity takes place in all countries with strong authorities, whilst in turn, every country in a critical situation, be it economic or political, must have strong authorities;
- b) The accusation of acting against society could be dismissed in a number of ways:
  - 1) By demonstrating that every valuable programme of social renewal is by definition unpopular, as it needs to subordinate individual interests to those of the masses;
  - 2) By using the information above [no. 1] to draw critical conclusions in relation to the masses rather than the doctrine;
  - 3) By understanding that the prerequisite for the existence of any kind of social ideology with a practical programme for its implementation, is the existence of a division between the natural course of evolution and one that is consciously approved of and organised. The role of national socialism or communism (the theory of the individual path) consists precisely in returning and identifying political and social activity against the backdrop of natural evolution. The bulk of society will always stand for natural evolution, since *ex definitione* it remains its only and exclusive author (natural evolution results from individual aspirations existing in a given society).

However, in order to embark on the path of natural evolution one does not need a Marxist agenda. One needs propaganda agendas only as much as using them is a natural component in the functioning of the authorities seen within the framework of natural evolution. Thus, a Marxist programme could not be spontaneously supported by society — with the exception of special periods that are mere moments in the eyes of history (The Great October Revolution).

- c) The accusation of corrupting people, of terror, fear, secret reports, inhuman superior-morality: if one carries out a programme that is different from the natural social evolution and, to a certain extent, grows beyond the conditioning that constitutes natural evolution — what takes place then is a phenomenon separated, in one way or the other, from natural conditioning in every facet of life. Assuming the engagement of the whole of society for the sake of future generations, the Marxist programme is as inhuman as that of the Nazis, which assumes the subordination of mental stimuli to stimuli of a patriotic and imperious nature. Furthermore, it is just as 'inhuman' as the programme of each reform movement, which has taken as its basis a conscious divergence from natural evolution (granting the movement the possibility of using political authority to implement its agenda). It should be said that the Marxist programme ranks highest in the hierarchy of programmes for the repair of both the world and society, since it belongs completely to the types of programme calculated to achieve immediate political realisation of these aims. Compared to others, this programme is the only one to set the lofty aim (the only one that could justify 'inhumanity' in practice), namely, the prospective good of all mankind. Herein lies the justification that allows those who carry out the programme to commit actions that constitute the subject of the aforementioned accusations;
- d) The accusation of disregarding actual capabilities that forces the programme onto the track of constant self-restraint, which results in a contradiction with its own assumptions.

Rather than accusation, this is a statement of fact. In our eyes the Marxist ideology became a utopian social system. One could take this fact as ever-valid evidence of the utopian nature of all efforts geared towards, for example, accelerating natural evolution. We could also state that it is still too early for mankind to consciously direct its own evolution. This issue is open to dispute. Certainly it would be worth examining the process of self-restraint of communist activities. Curiously enough, it turns out that the first instance of self-restraint was the outbreak of the Great October Revolution,

since on that day (in that situation) conditions existed that prevented the outbreak of world revolution. In the years that followed, the necessity of abandoning world revolution led to the idea of building socialism in capitalist surroundings (Lenin). The gradual limitation of the communist movement that eventually led to it being merely a Soviet (Russian) phenomenon, dates back to that day. Was this self-limiting process unavoidable? Perhaps holding an international attitude was possible. Yet it emerged that 'freezing' the revolutionary process until it could encompass all nations was a psychological impossibility. When ideology is incarnated into political practice it no longer develops as a partner (a friendly partner, focused on communicating) for the evolution of the 'political body' of the ideology. Whilst the revolutionary laws of that body are already conditioned by the laws that fall well within the notion of the 'struggle for life' of social organisms, laws are nothing more than the rules of natural evolution. Therefore, the discussed accusation is stating the obvious: that the Marxist (communist) movement, having adopted a Russian body, in effect died from the gradual self-limitation of ideology. Other factions of the movement (communist parties in the West) preserve its traditions because they remain in opposition, or have a purely theoretical stance. However, the western offshoot is also dead, inasmuch as cultivating communism deprived of an actual desire for capturing the masses and seizing power is an entity kept alive by artificial means by capitalist society, since the natural-evolutionary division of posts in that society still has vacancies for the jobs of intellectual christs, a business not managed by the Church due to its highly physical and political existence.

At this stage, the movement of communist-patriots (Poland, Yugoslavia, etc.) is difficult to summarise. However, it seems there is a movement of supporters of natural evolution, to use the popular term.

NOTE: In order to avoid accusations of fetishising 'natural evolution', I would like to make clear that I reserve the right to use the term with reference to such a broad theoretical area, since every government, every party, movement, or ideology, that does not try to, and does not go beyond the (almost traditional) social role it occupies, belongs entirely to natural evolution as far as its political body is concerned; the disputable thoughts and theories they represent, if not applied to a greater extent than that required by the natural social role (in other words, without applying the maximum agenda), should never be considered as social phenomena understood in this way, nor any kind of phenomena from the category of social programmes.

2.

This said, one could ask what kind of political and ideological conclusions can be drawn from such a critique of Stalinism. The conclusions are as follows:

- a) Relativism and liberalism that are based on the assumption that every ideological and political tendency is an actual reflection of the interests of the social group it represents (meaning for that particular group) is correct. At the same time no tendency of this kind could be absolutely correct — either in philosophical terms or for the whole of mankind or any specific nation. It is possible, and often the case, that all tendencies in a given society have common elements, such as the call for the political sovereignty of a nation. However, we should remember that these shared elements, as well as those common to all ideologies across the world (which are also possible, e.g., the affirmation of man), have a character that is limited (confined to their common social area), and relative (in relation to perspectives on the further development of humanity). Thus, neither ideologies, nor their common elements possess anything that would have the character of a norm and could justify the disruption of natural social conditionings, etc. There is no ideology nor any of its elements that could legitimise actions in conflict with the personal will of man — all substantial and more general social endeavours could only be the result of group and individual interests.
- b) A hierarchy of the elements of various ideologies exists. This hierarchy is created by positioning ideological elements, both in the areas of social and global evolution, as well as in a temporal perspective. And so, for example, the currently topical element of patriotism is clearly limited in time, and must rank lower in the hierarchy than that of general equilibrium and justice in relations between human beings.
- c) With reference to the above, the extent to which a man lives with a particular ideology becomes a matter of choice; this choice is no longer made on the basis of a sense of partnership with any of the existing ideologies or their representatives, but on the basis of social function, or, simply put, one's profession: an individual can turn ideological belief and action into (one of) his social functions, however, this will not entitle him to any kind of domination over those who made other choices whilst deciding on the aims of their social functions. Let us take the following example: if X thinks about ideological and political matters instead of me, then I develop my internal life in an anti-programmatic way for him, in this sense,

according to the principle of the division of functions — social specialisation — we both possess equal rights.

- d) Nonetheless, one should not be blind to the psychological fact that an awareness of the relative nature of an ideology might not be aligned with practicing it to the full extent. Again, this difficulty could be overcome by means of social specialisation: X consciously becomes more stupid for me, turning into a one-sided ardent enthusiast of an ideology, which makes him suitable to fulfil certain social needs, whilst I on the other hand, consciously live in the state of being placed at the margin of a functioning social group, precisely because I am specialised in analysing and stating the relative nature of socially important mental and ideological habits. In a properly functioning society, X and I would not occupy an equal position, however, it would be impossible for X to destroy me.

NOTE: I am aware that I take the position of the people I fought against during the Marxist offensive, the oppositionists who stood for the freedom of the individual. I am able to resolve this contradiction in the following way: I have worked for the only objective that I believe could and should revoke individual freedom, that is to say, the good of all mankind achieved in a scientifically proven way.





**3**



(...)

We should settle the date for a **MULTIARTISTIC EXHIBITION** [wystawa wieloplastyczna], the term is extremely original, and embraces both the visual arts and the multiplicity of reality.

It could be successfully presented abroad:

German: Die vielplastische Ausstellung

French: Exposition beaucoup-plastique

Italian: Esposizione delle multi plastici

Czech: Víceumělecká výstava

Russian: Vystavka raznogo stroya

We should establish a group of **MULTIARTISTS** (Wajda, Borowczyk, Lenica, Tarasin, Gaba, Szapocznikow and me<sup>1</sup>) and set up the **MULTIARTISTIC EXHIBITION COMMITTEE** at the Council of Culture.

Generic term: Multiart

The artists: multiartist

His children: multichildren

Abbreviation: MA

The slogan: 'Through Multiart to the MASSES'. (...)

A.W.

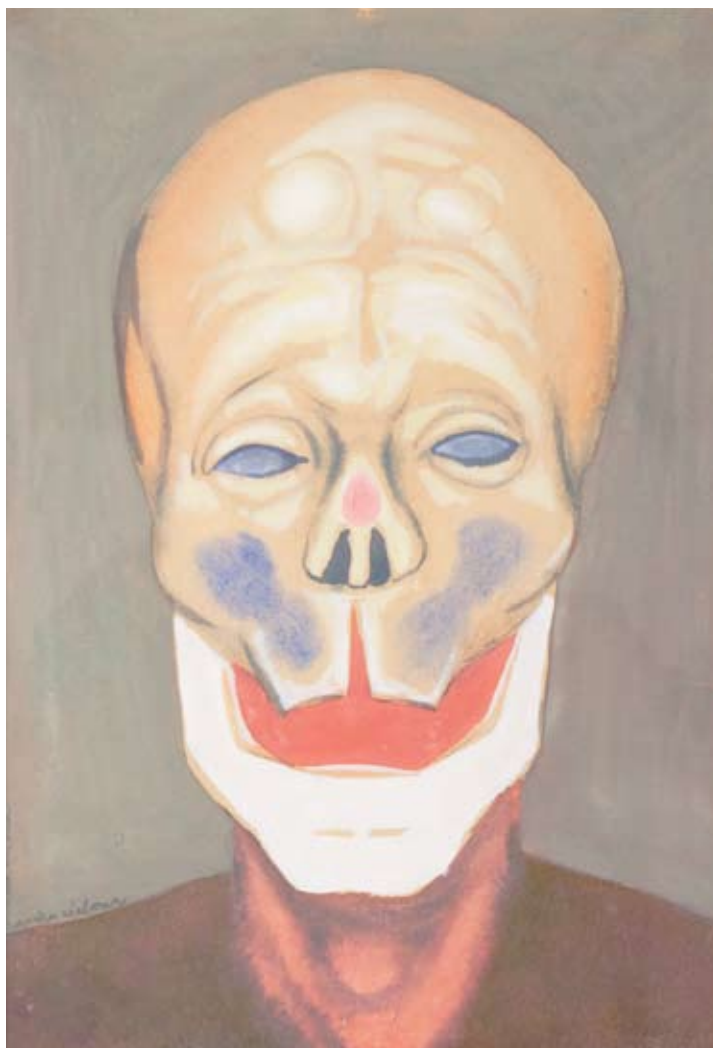
1 Andrzej Wajda (b. 1926) — film and theatre director, one of the eminent characters of Polish cinema, his works frequently draw upon themes from painting and literature; Walerian Borowczyk (1923–2006) — artist, scriptwriter, author of animated and feature films, member of the Polish school of poster art; Alfred Lenica (1899–1977) — painter, founder of the group *4F+R* (Form, Paint, Texture, Fantasy + Realism) [Forma, Farba, Faktura, Fantasyka + Realizm], later an active participant in discussions at the Krzywe Koło Gallery in Warsaw; Jan Tarasin (1926–2009) — painter, graphic artist, draughtsman, photographer and essayist; Gaba [Gabriela Obremba] (1927–1997) — painter, studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków and Warsaw, the ex-wife of Andrzej Wajda; Alina Szapocznikow (1926–1973) — sculptor, draughtsman, studied in Poland and France, one of most eminent Polish woman artists.

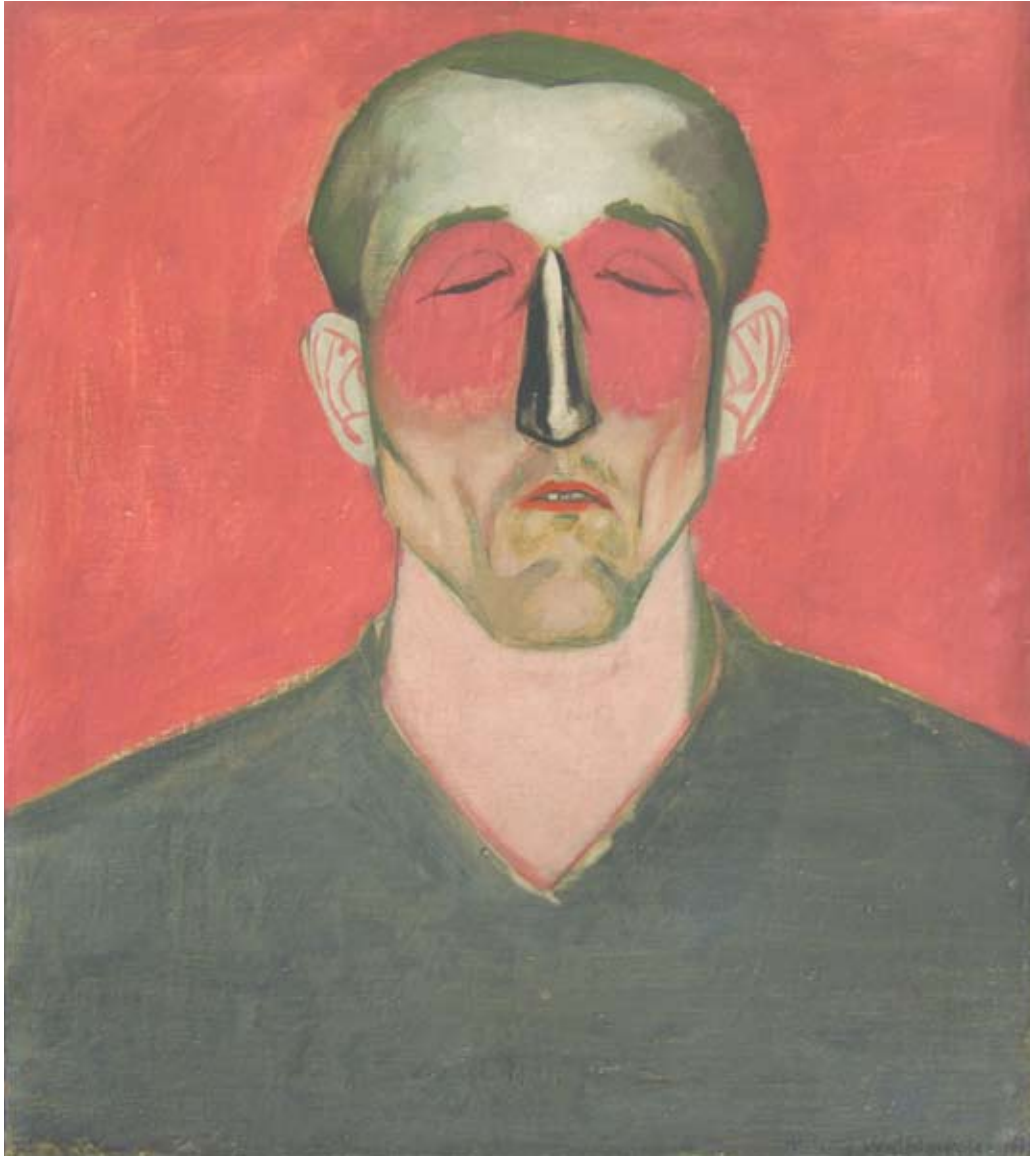












# BODY AND MELANCHOLY. THE LATE WORKS OF ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI

Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska

2009

## THE THAW

The events that took place in Poland throughout the year 1956 — from the workers' strikes in Poznań in July to the taking of authority by a new faction led by Władysław Gomułka, who enjoyed popular support, in October — mark one of the key moments in Polish post-war history: the heyday of the so-called thaw.<sup>1</sup> This short yet extremely tangible period of political and social change that led towards a loosening of the communist grip coincided with the revival of Andrzej Wróblewski's artistic activity in the last two years of his life — the most intriguing and certainly the most original individual in Polish art of the time. The painter's extremely abundant and multifaceted output from the period, interrupted by his sudden death in March 1957, will be the focus of this text.

The radical rejection of the Stalinist 'era of mistakes and deviations' by the new faction, and the changing approach to internal affairs that ensued and led to granting socialist realism a 'human face', included a liberalisation of cultural policy. This made the development of modern art in accordance with current tendencies across the world possible. Polish artists were granted a margin of freedom, which allowed them to undertake independent activities, raising awareness of the international situation. The changes brought about a visible revival in Polish artistic life — new galleries were launched (in particular Krzywe Koło in Warsaw and Krzysztofory in Kraków),<sup>2</sup> as well as magazines (with "Artistic Review" [Przegląd Artystyczny] playing the crucial role)<sup>3</sup>; a number of artistic groups were either founded or revived (including the Second Kraków Group and Warsaw's Group 55)<sup>4</sup> and avant-garde theatres were established (Cricot-2 and Theatre in Tarczyńska Street).<sup>5</sup>

It came to be conventionally accepted that the beginning of the thaw in Polish artistic life was marked by the opening of the *Exhibition of Young Art* [Wystawa Młodej Plastyki], mounted in Warsaw's Arsenal on the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students. The exhibition, which opened on 21 July 1955 under the slogan "Against the War, Against Fascism", is still a matter of dispute amongst scholars who differ in their assessment of both its artistic value and historical role.<sup>6</sup> However, regardless of that, the exhibition constituted a visible symptom of a loosening grip on cultural policy. After years of socialist realist hegemony this was the first time in Polish artistic



life that an official presentation featured such a degree of poetics different to those of socialist realism, whilst at the same time upholding the official mechanisms of selection in terms of the works as well as the artists.

The Arsenal exhibition also played a significant role as a stage for the debut of artists who were to become eminent individuals in Polish art in the following decades.<sup>7</sup> At the same time it exposed the sometimes naïve ideas its participants held about modernity, along with their poor knowledge of Polish pre-war avant-gardes and recent European art. Paradoxically, the young artists — who grew up in the Stalinist social system and rebelled against the ideologisation of art — only had at their disposal those means made available by institutions of artistic education at the time, with curriculums conforming to the valid doctrine. This was the reason for the somewhat poor quality and awkwardness of a number of exhibited works noted by critics. The paintings on view, located between realism and expressionism, which referred either to the experience of war or described the mundane, unattractive reality of everyday life, offered a demonstrative contradiction to the programmatically optimistic vision of the world of socialist realism. The Arsenal formula of ‘modernity’ — anachronous in relation to the circuit of unofficial activity (such as that of the Kraków studios of Maria Jarema or Tadeusz Kantor)<sup>8</sup> — generated a wave of criticism accompanied by a debate on the shape of Polish ‘modernity’.

The essentially new quality of Polish artistic life in the late 1950s lay in aesthetic pluralism. However, the period was also characterised by a visible lack of trust towards all manifestations of realism and all forms of artistic ‘engagement’ that were too-readily associated with the doctrine of socialist realism. Abstraction became the dominant poetics and the synonym of artistic modernity, particularly *informel* painting — often adapted quite superficially — perceived as the “perfect embodiment of the freedom of expression, and a sign of participation in the world’s most advanced contemporary art”.<sup>9</sup> As Piotr Piotrowski notes, the formula of modernist practice, which bound art in the chains of aestheticism declaring a lack of interest in external life (politics), fitted perfectly with the strategy of the authorities at the time. The method of ‘control and discipline’ proved a more effective means of exerting power than direct repressions used in the Stalinist period.<sup>10</sup> The beginning of the thaw marked a turning point in the practice of a great number of Polish post-war artists — both those who yielded to the doctrine of socialist realism and those who chose silence, giving up on participation in official artistic life. Many of the declared (sots) realists seemed to have rejected the realist formula as if turning overnight towards various forms of abstraction. Others — like the painters from the circle of Tadeusz Kantor — continued the explorations they had already begun in the 1940s, at the time presented at the renowned *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* in Kraków (1948–1949). For the first time in years there was an atmosphere of creative excitement: possibilities of confrontation, exchange of views and last but not least, of international travel.<sup>11</sup>

The thaw also marked a turning point in the artistic biography of Andrzej Wróblewski, who had made a series of dramatic attempts at conforming to the official doctrine in the past by creating monumental socialist realist canvases striking in their awkwardness and forced form.<sup>12</sup> For Wróblewski “Every participation in life, even a crippled one, was better than observation, better than occupying the position of a viewer”.<sup>13</sup> This desire to be at the heart of historical events was strongly rooted in the artist, and the need to be a participant rather than observer, along with the decision to align himself with socialist realism that stemmed from this position, resulted in a feeling of internal dilemma and absence, as well as a number of years of creative impasse. [37]

## THE PAINFUL OBSERVER

The political breakthrough that took place in the mid-1950s contributed to a deep crisis in the artist’s vision of the world. Unlike the majority of society, Wróblewski did not share the euphoria of the thaw, on the contrary, for him the exposure of the sinister character of the communist dictatorship meant the collapse of ideas he had believed in and a feeling of genuine personal failure. His hopes for a social and political revolution had failed along with those for art that would constitute an inseparable element and would be “clear, thematic and for the masses”, abolishing social inequalities. Wróblewski was “up to the hilt in mud, but his art testifies to this fact — he knew about that. Small-size works on paper depict stark failure — there is neither moral victory nor higher taste. It seems that he was the only one who reached the bottom in these gloomy times.”<sup>14</sup>

The artist maintained his characteristic and extremely critical attitude towards the surrounding reality. He expressed his negative assessment of the current social and political situation, amongst other thoughts, in a letter to his friend Andrzej Wajda in 1956 where he described his idea for an exhibition:

The first of a series of exhibitions takes Aragon’s poem as its motto: “I Hear the Voices of the Dead” and depicts the responsibility we all take for all those who either died or grew fat in the name of socialism. The exhibition will oppose the thoughtlessness of the thaw period and the loss of all aims in life except for food and entertainment.<sup>15</sup>

Wróblewski’s approach seemed not far from what the writer Tadeusz Konwicki called the stance of a ‘painful observer’.<sup>16</sup> The latter, coming from Vilnius like Wróblewski, represented it himself, seduced by the communist ideology. “(...) It was a catastrophe of my thinking, naïveté, expectations and situation (...) All of a sudden everything collapsed (...) I fell to the bottom. I was there, along with party functionaries and sinners,”<sup>17</sup> Wróblewski responded to the revisionism of the thaw with a text, which already carried a pinch of irony in the title, *Confessions of a Discredited ‘Former Communist’*



[51] *Funeral*, 1957

[Wyznania skompromitowanego „byłego komunisty”]. It was an attempt at defending the lost ideas and explaining his own position adopted in the early 1950s.

I am aware that I take the position of the people I fought against during the Marxist offensive, the oppositionists who stood for the freedom of the individual. I am able to resolve this contradiction in the following way: I have worked for the only objective that I believe could and should revoke individual freedom, that is to say, the good of all mankind achieved in a scientifically proven way.<sup>18</sup>

The text corresponds in tone with the gouache *Funeral* [Pogrzeb] from 1956 (also known as *Funeral of a Communist* [Pogrzeb komunisty]), which could be seen as the artist's self-portrait. It depicts four characters — dummies with blue, round faces that resemble masks, holding a coffin with a male corpse, his hands crossed over his chest, clutching a star and a sickle. The dead man, stretched out in a transparent coffin, resembles the images of saints with their attributes that are used in processions. This 'ironic double-sided religious image' falls well within the series of representations in which the artist depicts himself as a dead man or one of the 'living dead'.<sup>19</sup> The irony (or self-irony) at work here is a strategy that Wróblewski often uses at this time, evaluating himself and his past. Both artistic procedures also serve as a peculiar form of self-cleansing. The aforementioned gouache provides a perfect illustration of the artist's situation during the thaw, as he viewed forsaking participation as becoming one of the living dead. The painter suffered a breakdown, devoid of support as an artist he felt 'barren', 'empty' and 'decayed'.

[51]

During the thaw the artist only created a few large-size canvases.<sup>20</sup> Amongst them was the painting *Mothers* [Matki] from 1955, shown in the exhibition at Warsaw's Arsenal, the work went unnoticed and failed to attract any awards.

[52]



[52] *Mothers*, 1955

The type of figurative painting advocated by Wróblewski caused distrust since it brought associations with the ostentatiously rejected socialist realism. At that time the pioneer of ‘new figuration’ in Polish art who continued experiments that began with the *Execution* series existed on the artistic margin. [25–27]

He contrasted the ‘thaw’ formula of modernity with his own artistic strategy, which in the introduction to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition of his drawings in 1956 he himself described as a ‘humble examination of life’.<sup>21</sup> This very strategy stemmed from an obsessive attachment to realism. Only a relationship to the real, not ideological, social or aesthetic could ensure salvation for both art and the artist.<sup>22</sup>

Enriching the ‘compromised language of figurative forms’ with new, deeply personal content, Wróblewski fashioned it into an adequate tool for describing the reality of the thaw. His thaw works served to expose the illusion, which fitted the strategy of ‘control and discipline’ of the then authorities that *informel* painting was a demonstration of freedom and artistic independence.<sup>23</sup> Gouaches and monotypes depicting phantom-vehicles: ships, buses or trams, suspended in emptiness, in a meaningless journey to nowhere served as the perfect illustration of a lack of movement, the state of stagnation and a pretence of freedom. [11] [12]

In works from the period the artist exposed the terror that hid beneath the veil of a seemingly prosaic life. The key problem he addressed was a sense of helplessness about the world and the disintegration of the psyche, making the humiliated man the central character of his works. Representations of the human figure — brutally deprived of humanity and demoted to the rank of an animal or an object exposed the mechanisms of repression employed by a totalitarian system, in this sense providing the continuation of a theme

already addressed by the artist in the late 1940s. Such a vision of reality can be found in the ‘queue’ series.<sup>24</sup> The motif of a ‘shop queue’ hastily sketched in a notepad, or ‘queues of people sitting’ in an office are subject to work by the artist, which makes the scene more and more unreal. The transformation resulted in the gradual disappearance of human features. Descriptions of subsequent phases of the metamorphosis of the human figure in the *Chairings* [Ukrzesłowienia] series can be found in Wróblewski’s draft of a screenplay of his film *Waiting Room* [Poczekalnia]:

Grabs a hand in a hand forcing himself to keep quiet (...) He begins to turn into a chair — others as well — THROUGH: disappearance from the head down; his shoulders become white and schematic; belly disappears; legs form a line (or become transparent)...<sup>25</sup>

The artist came to a set of ready visual solutions later deployed in paintings, gouaches and monotypes. The straightforward metaphor of a human-chair was an accusation levelled at his own reification, a protest against stripping him of his dignity, and of gradual annihilation through waiting and indifference.<sup>26</sup>

## HOMO MELANCOLICUS

However, it seems that the painterly formula developed by the artist at that time served above all as a tool for describing his own emotional state. The melancholy and feeling of internal breakdown, readily sensed in the letters and personal notes from 1949 onwards translated into Wróblewski’s artistic language. “Melancholy does not leave me, even though I keep working and the spring is coming” — he wrote in a letter to Anna Porębska.<sup>27</sup>

I am waiting for salvation  
from the closed circle of thoughts  
all of them leading to a conclusion  
that it’s not even worth lifting a hand  
not to mention struggling through life!<sup>28</sup>

On other occasions he admitted:

I was deeply fascinated with the thought that I could be whoever I desire to be — and yet I did not want to be tied to even the tiniest obligation that results from the fact of being unnecessary to someone.<sup>29</sup>

The expressions ‘cannot lift a hand’, ‘I am suspended’, ‘I pretend to be marching forward’, appear throughout his statements, and illustrate the artist’s mental state — passiveness, lack of power and will.<sup>30</sup> The experience of emptiness and feeling barren expressed in private notes determined the universe of images that found its way into the canvases, gouaches and graphic works. His output bears visible connection between the sphere of human





emotions and the body, along with its limitations. The emotional barrenness that Wróblewski suffered and which he described radiates from images of a wounded body or depictions of ‘himself’ as one of the ‘living dead’ (in such paintings as *The Lovers* [Zakochani] of 1956, or the gouache *Him and Her* [On i Ona] of 1957).

[53]

The living dead is a highly ambiguous metaphor; its interpretations lead us to various threads in the artist’s biography. “I constantly carry death with me”<sup>31</sup> — Wróblewski confessed in a letter to his wife in 1953, proving that he saw death as inseparable from his life and his body. He depicted death as a biological process, one that starts the day an individual is born, inscribed in our bodies, in every body, which is noticeable and becomes especially evident in a body marked by disease. Visualising death he usually reaches for the symbolic associations of colour. Blue seems to have particularly strong meaning in Wróblewski’s colour palette, being inseparably linked to death and passing on.<sup>32</sup> Putrid green plays a similar role, suggesting the process of bodily decay. The artist thus demonstrates the organic nature of the human body. Associations with decay are further emphasised by the thread of moral decay and corruption found in the artist’s poems and letters. Accusations against himself of despicable behaviour and bad intentions, depriving himself of any value,<sup>33</sup> and last but not least, self-disgust, are also a manifestation of a masochistic and self-destructive approach to oneself that is characteristic of melancholy.<sup>34</sup>

The rhetoric of the ‘living dead’ not only carries the experience of fragility and the imperfectness of one’s own body, but offers a more than adequate description of the artist’s situation who, by aligning himself with socialist realism, working against himself and suppressing his own creative needs, commits an artistic suicide. The metaphor, recurring in gouaches and paintings, seems to describe the fate of an artist who, having reached the very bottom of the socialist realist hell, returns after years of impasse in order to experience yet another moment of creative euphoria; to dive into life, find amazement in the beauty of the world and translate it into his painting.

The ‘living dead’, the enigmatic man ‘from beyond’ — the protagonist of the artist’s numerous paintings and gouaches, is a specifically melancholic character — a dweller in the ‘borderlands’ — suspended between life and death, still living, though already ‘determined’ (“Now I am already a man from beyond. (...) I’m still living, but I have already decided, I only seem to be what I once was”).<sup>35</sup> In the quoted letter to his wife the artist confessed: “I have lived — and my life is a SUICIDE on the PAYMENT PLAN”, on another occasion he added: “Life’s open way fills me with disgust — I have made all efforts to destroy my life.”<sup>36</sup> The gouache *The Dead* [Umarły] from 1956, the composition of which brings to mind the artist’s self-portraits from the same period (head with a small fragment of the torso in an empty space) could be seen as the essence of the melancholic *narcissisme de mort*, as described by the French psychoanalyst André Green (particularly in reference to the symbolic meaning of the colours used by the artist — violet being considered the colour



of melancholy).<sup>37</sup> The artist's obsessive preoccupation with death, including his own death, can also be traced through his private notes and poems.

Warm and pleasant state. I cool my head with my own breath. My blood is lazy,  
in a moment I will fall asleep never to wake up. Good morning.  
What did I dream about? Certainly — I dreamt that I died,  
never mind; we will have this pleasure again this evening  
we just need to live through the day — modestly, modestly!<sup>38</sup>

Spiritual states translate into a way of understanding, and the sensation of one's own body. The body, rendered in gouaches, watercolours and monotypes is dead, weak, inert, incapable of any action, but also harmless, since it is deprived of any protective layer — flayed. "Soul and matter, the 'inner self' and the outer layer in the artist's works appear to be acceptable."<sup>39</sup> The artist referred to the internal world as a 'fragile structure', which had its painterly equivalent in representations of bodies: hollow, fragile, depicted as a fragment or remnant.

Characteristic features of melancholy include inaction, weariness and stagnation — all of which Wróblewski mentions in the quoted fragment of a letter to his wife, these features also become the traits of characters in his paintings and gouaches, such as *The Queue Continues* [Kolejka trwa] or *Chaired Woman* [Ukrzesłowiona]. Those people do not have a say in their fate, submerged in torpor, sentenced to aimless waiting, continuing motionlessly on chairs to which their bodies gradually become similar. [70]

In his thaw works, Wróblewski further developed the issue of the reification of man, first addressed in the *Execution* series. This process can be seen to take place in a number of ways: in paintings that depict the transformation of a man into a chair or a stone, Wróblewski illustrates a mental state that Julia Kristeva described as the merging of the subject and the object.<sup>40</sup> This psychological process blurring the border between body and consciousness is a result of the humiliation and wickedness that stem from an experience of horror. In the thaw gouaches, the trauma of the Second World War overlaps with the experience of Stalinist terror and its visual, propagandist formula: socialist realism. [25–27]

## BODILY BORDERS VIOLATED

It seems that the key issue for Wróblewski's practice in the years 1955–1957 is his attempt at visualising the transformations of the body, metamorphoses, the removal of the border between existence and non-existence, between life and death. Wróblewski strives to capture this state of suspension, the 'in-between' moment. This problem also lies at the heart of his images of a 'limited' or 'botanic' man. In such monotypes as *Heart and a Rose* [Serce i róża] the artist depicted the metamorphosis of a human figure that developed plant-like features whilst retaining those of a human — Wróblewski captured [55]

the moment of transformation. The biological metaphors at work here — the identification of a body with a plant bringing to mind Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* — offer a perfect illustration of the artist’s mental condition: he came to see life, as is made evident in his private notes and letters, as vegetating, devoid of any real meaning.

I felt bad in the morning  
as if all the cells in my body  
were weak and still asleep  
they were unwilling to obey the orders from above  
orders to walk  
breathe  
or even think.<sup>41</sup>

Julia Kristeva notes that states akin to depression are characterised by the blurring of the border between interior and exterior. “It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s ‘own and clean self’ but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the abjection of its contents.”<sup>42</sup> “For even if our borderlander [the melancholic] is, like any speaking being, subject to castration to the extent that he must deal with the symbolic, he in fact runs a far greater risk than others do. It is not a part of himself, vital though it may be, that he is threatened with losing, but his whole life. To preserve himself from severance he is ready for more — flow, discharge, haemorrhage.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly Sigmund Freud, who employed the following terms in his descriptions of a melancholy individual: ‘wound’, ‘internal haemorrhage’, and ‘a hole in the psyche’.<sup>44</sup> It is that very wound, the cut, the hole, but not an empty place, that constitutes one of the obsessive themes of Wróblewski’s ‘late’ works, a motif that frequently returns in depictions of a human body: the series *Shadow of Hiroshima* [Cienie Hiroszimy], *Torn Man* [Człowiek rozdarty], or the shocking gouache *Torn Back* [Rozdarte plecy]. A body ripped apart serves as a metaphor for internal split, which, according to Freud, constitutes the essence of melancholy and is, as it were, inscribed in the nature of a melancholic individual. In the images of people — particularly those from the thaw period — the border between the inside and the outside of the body is removed. In the *Organic Portraits* [Portrety organiczne] the body is deprived of skin, whilst in the *Shadows of Hiroshima* the skin, cut or punctured, no longer guarantees safety and integrity, it ceases to serve its fundamental function. The body, devoid of skin, much like the psyche devoid of its ‘protective layer’, becomes harmless and prone to damage. This owes much to the fact that the external world is a “fragile construction which, if shaken with all might to test its durability, falls apart not even leaving a trace of dust.”<sup>45</sup> Most importantly, it also loses its psychological function — that of the space for, and the most fundamental means of, communication with another individual. Treated as a ground connecting the body and the world it constitutes the border between the inside and the outside. Skin enables the individual to sense, and be sensed by the Other. Wróblewski hints at the issue of a lack of communication owing to a lack of touch — one of the key motifs in

[44]

[63]







the artist's later work. The representations of a man and a woman in gouaches and monotypes from the period are striking for the distance separating the characters; their loneliness and isolation.<sup>46</sup> As skin restricts the borders of a subject so it also allows for the 'unequivocal' definition of a body as a coherent whole. The image of a man without skin thus refers to a situation in which the sense of identity is distorted. "It would be ideal for me to be reborn every day / I no longer remember who I am" — wrote Wróblewski in one of his poems. In the works from 1955–1957 the border of the body is being infringed in a more or less violent way. It becomes evident that the skin, transparent or torn, is not only an area of painterly concern, but one of the key metaphors for his whole oeuvre.

Wróblewski's awareness of his own illness and the constraints this involved<sup>47</sup> (the body itself was a means of imprisoning the individual) — the sense of estrangement from his own body and partial loss of control of his own physiology connected with epilepsy could have had a significant influence on the representations of the human body in his art. It is stripped bare of dignity and harmony, disintegrating and incomplete. Embarrassing bodily imperfections and physiological needs that an individual must face appear in the artist's poems and paintings as a source of humiliation.

The artist subjected the human body to a number of procedures, he marked it: either by tattoos or by mutilation. He often incised the body, creating characteristic spindle-shaped slits (*Shadows of Hiroshima*, *Chaired Woman*). [68] A wounded, mutilated body illustrates a state of suspension between life and death, the moment when life slowly oozes through the incisions and openings. The border between 'I' and 'non-I' is gradually removed.

The motif of the hollow human figure, similar to that in the aforementioned works by Wróblewski, can be found in the sculptures of Henry Moore (sketches of some of his works appear in Wróblewski's Yugoslavian notebook of 1956).<sup>48</sup> The human figure cut across with elongated slits also brings associations with Maria Jarema's monotypes from the 1950s.

The first vertical wound appears in *Torn Back* — a gouache from 1956. The [44] unfolded slices of skin expose the opalescent-black interior. An opening in the centre, the gaping wound, brings about sexual associations. Such an analogy was noted by George Bataille in his novel *Madame Edouarda*, the author claims that eroticism in itself is unconsciously seen as a tearing of the body (*déchirure*) comparing the female sexual organs to an open wound.<sup>49</sup> The mutilated body part is associated with a piece of meat hanging on a hook.<sup>50</sup> Wróblewski's *écorché* is thus situated between two important painterly traditions that stem from Rembrandt's oeuvre: the images of the 'anatomy lesson' and that of a flayed animal.<sup>51</sup>

Wróblewski highlights the 'flesh', a biological aspect of human existence but, as in many of his works, he combines eroticism and bodily sensuality with a

*vanitas* theme. The elegiac message of the gouache is further emphasised through an association with the body of the crucified Christ.

However, it is the horizontal incisions that dominate Wróblewski's works. Initially these take the form of wide, open wounds — their inside is black, violet-blue, or blood red. The latter reminds us that we are dealing with a living human body. In such gouaches as *Torn Man II*, the incisions become shallow and short. Their grey, fluffy contour makes them similar to clouds in the sky that surround a given character. They become less expressive, and through their rhythmical pattern attain a more ornamental character. At times it is the space surrounding a character that takes on human features: clouds that puncture the body start to resemble bleeding wounds, the sky becomes sinister and disturbing. Sometimes the line of the horizon cuts through the human body — yet another form of mutilation, this one breaking the human figure in half. The silhouette with a jagged outline loses its integrity and merges with the surrounding world. The skin is punctured, the interior of the body put at risk. The border between an individual and the surrounding is removed. In Wróblewski's gouaches and paintings nature undergoes a process of anthropomorphisation: the sky becomes a mutilated and bleeding body, though not devoid of eroticism. Clouds relate to sexual areas of the body, their shape similar to both female sexual organs and spread lips. In some gouaches the image is even more literal: a giant mouth separated from a face is seen drifting through a conventionally marked landscape in *Mouth* [Usta].

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The images of wounds and incisions recurrent in Wróblewski's practice are reminiscent of the poetry of Wróblewski's friend Tadeusz Różewicz who also studied art history at the Jagiellonian University after the war.<sup>52</sup> Both men, working in painting and poetry, have created extremely similar representations of the individual and his or her bodily features. Różewicz's poems from the 1940s and 1950s included the origins of a dynamic vision of a world that fell apart, juxtaposed with the human body. This body is described as fragmented, deformed, painful and partially existing. In Różewicz's poetry, all the evil and pain of the world is given a physical dimension: it consists of inflicting wounds and cutting the body. The wounds, slits and incisions that appear in Wróblewski's gouaches and monotypes could be interpreted through their anthropological meanings. Bodily mutilations served an important function in a number of cultures — both during initiations, as a rite of sacredness and transformation marking the changed status of a member of a community, as well as a visible sign of mourning.

One of the possible readings of the thaw incisions in Wróblewski's works is perhaps offered by an incident that took place a number of years earlier. The painting *Execution II* [Rozstrzelanie II] shown at the Poznań festival was destroyed during the exhibition: an unknown perpetrator made two horizontal incisions with a knife cutting across the figure of an old Jewish woman. Thus the wounds and incisions found in gouaches, monotypes and paintings made seven years later might be a symbolic form of mutilating an image.

## THE MAN WITHOUT SKIN

Wróblewski not only incises and amputates body parts; at times he flays them mercilessly, as in the *Organic Portraits*, which depicted the anatomical cross-section of a human body exposing the internal structure and organs. He addresses the theme twice: in an oil painting from 1956 and a monotype of the same year. The man in *Organic Portraits* is reminiscent of the Kraków study paintings and drawings of a model (created in the mid 1950s) who was captured by Wróblewski also sitting and with a similar expression, his eyes closed as if half-asleep. A man resembling an *écorché* — anatomical model, a museum exhibit, depicting the mechanisms that govern the human body is a character of ambiguous status, located on the margin between life and death, dead and yet still appearing alive. However, as far as modern *écorchés* are concerned they constitute a humanistic apotheosis not only for science but also for man and his body, whilst the *Organic Portraits* exposed his weakness, depicting him in a pose deprived of all dignity. Wróblewski himself admitted that knowledge of a man and his body, its limitations “can weaken our faith in him”, the mechanism of the human body is filled with imperfections — “could such a scaffolding of bones, holding muscles and organs, possibly inspire trust?”<sup>53</sup>

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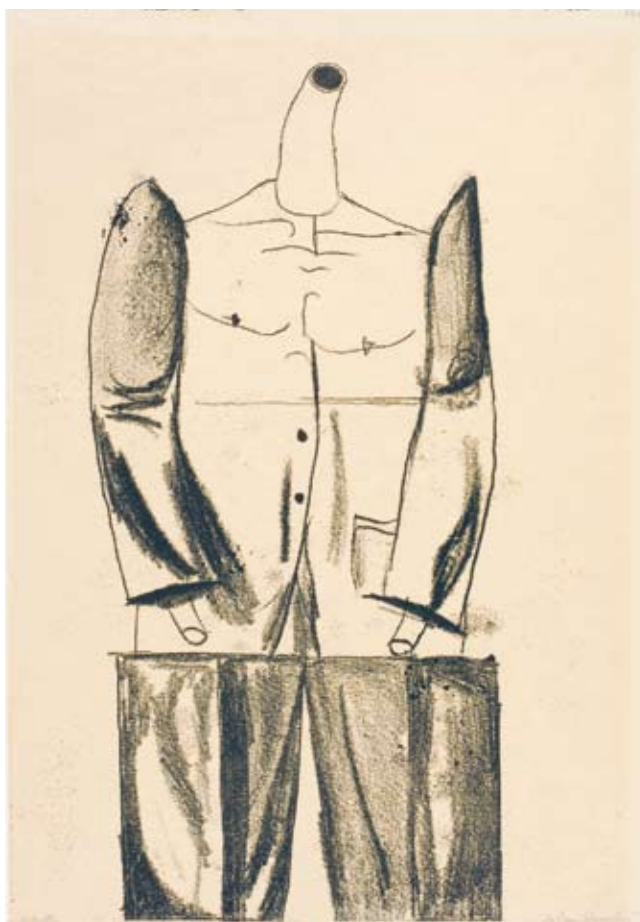
In *Organic Portraits* the human body is subject to an X-ray-like insight, making it transparent. “The image of a man in an X-ray photograph” — wrote Wróblewski in the *Commentary to the 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* — “is different to that in a family album. Does it make it less real? Reality is not confined to what we see on the surface. Is an artist’s imagination supposed to be worse or more poor than reality?”<sup>54</sup> In the texts accompanying the Kraków exhibition Wróblewski pointed to the realm of technology and science, particularly biology and medicine as a vital source of inspiration for a contemporary artist, thus relating to the paradigm of the pre-war avant-garde, which called for the combining of art and science. However, what science meets in an X-ray photograph of a human interior is metaphysics, since an X-ray photograph offers an immediate sign of human mortality. Looking at an image of the inside of one’s own body, like Hans Castorp we are peaking into our grave, able to see our own skeleton, which constitutes our posthumous image.

The X-ray film exposes the mystery of the patient’s interior.<sup>55</sup> The photograph is capable of capturing disease, officially recording it and thus turning it into a factual entity rather than an abstract notion.

## THE BODY DISMEMBERED

In the images of an ‘organic man’ the artist combines a quasi-scientific precision with a grotesque image of a human being. In the grotesque, the basic norms of existence such as one’s own identity or the immunity of the body, are violated, since the centre of a grotesque vision of the world, much like





the aforementioned paintings by Wróblewski, holds a degraded human being deprived of physical integrity.

The association with the myth of Marsyas, who was flayed alive, is too obvious here. From the renaissance onwards the history of the artist-martyr has been associated with the notion of self-sacrifice for the sake of art. It is also connected with the idea of the creative act seen as a symbolic 'flaying'.<sup>56</sup>

Those representations also hold various interconnected motifs, which become manifest in Wróblewski's late works. They betray an interest in the anatomy of the human body, which is disassembled into parts, subject to dissection. The dismembered body appears in later works as a metaphor for internal breakdown. Freud describes a melancholic subject as the disintegrated 'I', who could not be conceived of as a whole and who does not enter into any external relations. A melancholic — writes László Földényi, author of a study on melancholy — is among others, a melancholic because even in the smallest loss of an object he discovers the imminence of his own death.<sup>57</sup> "Discovering the threat and emptiness, the 'I' encounters its own finite nature, finding itself in the other that is dead. It experiences its own fragility and everything that surrounds it. In such a moment it seems that there is nothing constant and certain in the universe as every object and living thing are bound for the destruction that will come sooner or later."<sup>58</sup>

The thaw gouaches and paintings depict the fragmentation of the whole human body including the face, parts of which — eyes and mouth — become individual entities. Fragments of the human body, the lonely remains scattered across Wróblewski's gouaches, start to lead an autonomous existence. Their function is varied: displayed on plinths, at times they resemble museum exhibits (the works *Heads* [Głowy], *Head* [Głowa] and *Torso* [Tors]), or aids used in the academic studies of a painter. In Wróblewski's gouaches, studies of body fragments that fit well within the canon of artistic education, are transformed into symbols of physical fragility and transience. On other occasions, hands, heads, legs or torsos, severed from the body and enclosed within the framework of a painting resemble medical specimens, fragments of 'frozen life'. These representations make up a peculiar painterly *theatrum anatomicum*. They were perhaps inspired by the artist's visit to Leiden in 1947. He certainly visited the local university housing one of Europe's oldest medicine departments and might also have attended the *Theatrum Anatomicum* in Leiden.<sup>59</sup>

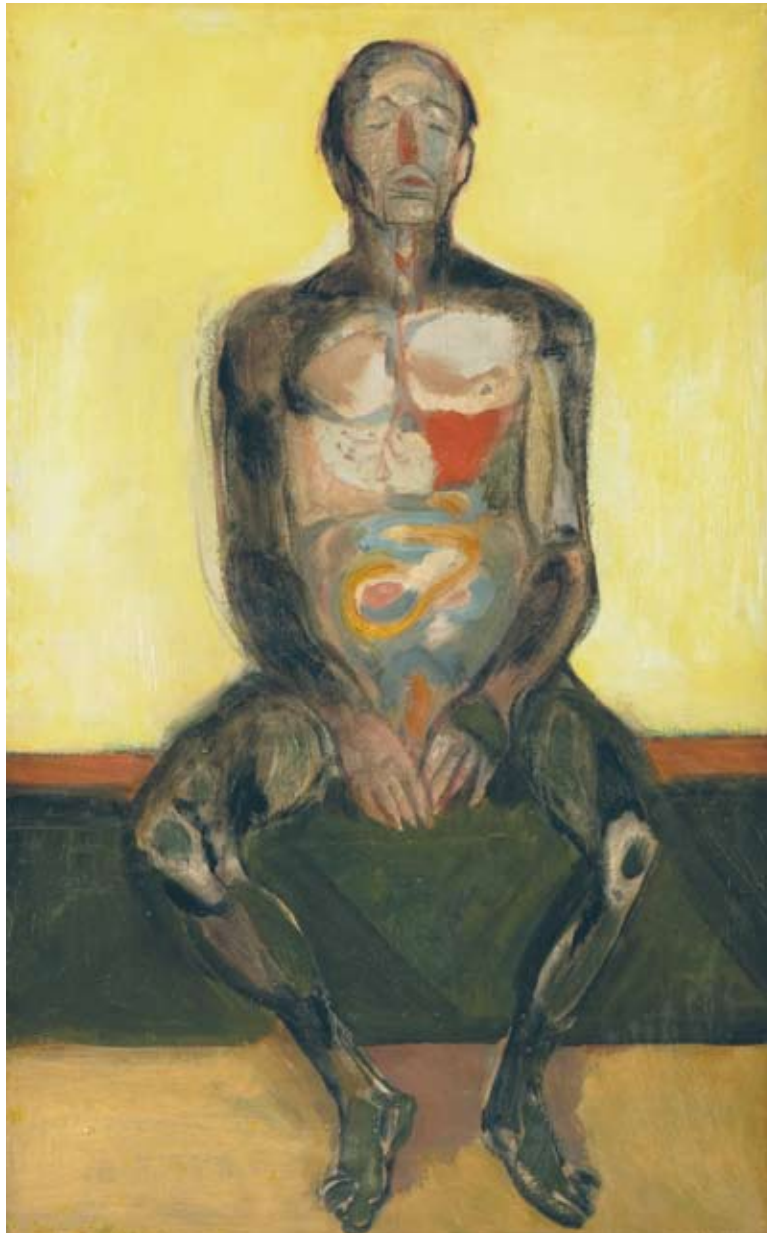
Depicting the open body, the artist exposed its mysteries, performing a detached observation of life's mechanisms. As with Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry of the period, he depicted a man's bodily nature from the perspective of its physiological processes, pointing to similarities between the human being and anatomical specimens, the 'stuffed skin' which 'does not love', 'does not feel pain', and is 'pitiful'.

Therefore, the described gouaches constitute another instalment of the peculiar 'anatomy lesson', where the body is incised, deprived of skin and then

disassembled into fragments.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the most immediate and at the same time grotesque association with the best known image of autopsy, namely Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, is to be found in the gouache *Museum* [Muzeum] from 1956.<sup>61</sup> Thus Wróblewski found his place in the modern tradition of anti-aestheticism, which considers Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* a pioneer work — depicting, contrary to the dominant canon, not the beauty of a body but the ugliness of its interior. In *Museum* the artist returns to the idea of the fragmented man first addressed in a series of gouaches and watercolours from 1948–1949 and later developed in the *Execution* series. However, rather than the dismembered figures found in some paintings from the series, the fragmented body is depicted here as a museum exhibit; located on the border between terror and ridicule, it becomes grotesque. There are other reasons that *Museum* is exceptional: it could be interpreted as a self-referential representation — an image of a crippled artist, a social outsider and beggar subject to critical judgement that constitutes a peculiar form of autopsy.

In Wróblewski's oeuvre the human body is broken into fragments in a number of ways. In the gouache *Young-Man-Segments* [Młodzieniec-segmetry] from 1956 the artist inscribed a male figure into the geometrical division of a surface, similar to the earlier work *Abstract Composition / Abstraction-Man* [Kompozycja abstrakcyjna / Abstrakcja-męzczyzna] from 1949 situated on the brink between abstraction and figurative painting. Like Leonardo's *homo ad quadratum*, the 'abstract-man' is an image of a body restrained by geometry, for whom a square or a grid of rectangles turns into a cage or prison. The oppressive element, the enslavement of a body is one of the founding aspects of the image of human physical nature in Wróblewski's oeuvre. Another realisation of that motif can be found in a 1956 gouache *Man-Abstraction* [Człowiek-abstrakcja] where the human figure is reduced to the most basic forms — four rectangles and a circle, its organic pulsating blue-grey bodily tissue enclosed within the rigid geometrical borders. Geometry provides a framework subduing all that is physical, in flux and biological. *Man-Abstraction* is another attempt at reaching the centre of the body, tearing off its external layer. It seems to be a 'subcutaneous' portrait of a man, symbolising internal disintegration and the fleeting nature of the body.

Body fragments also appear in the painting *The Tombstone of a Womanizer* [Nagrobek kobieciarza] of 1956. As well as a human figure reduced to the symbol of a cross, inspired by the form of Serbian tombstones that Wróblewski encountered during his trip to Yugoslavia, one sees severed female legs resembling votive objects suspended in the vicinity of a sacred image.<sup>62</sup> Alluding to the dual meanings of the female body part as votive offering and erotic fetish, the latter of particular importance to men, the artist creates an object-oriented vision of a female trophy. However, seen in the context of other examples of bodily fragmentation — such as those in the *Execution* series that refer to wartime trauma, the experience of seeing human corpses and





the actual decomposition of a body — the image of a dismembered leg attains increasing dramatic significance, becoming more than an erotic symbol.

## THE BODY CRIPPLED

The aforementioned and described representations of the fragmented body or bodily fragments seen in Wróblewski's œuvre are closely connected to images of human torsos, unsettling hybrids inhabiting the border between the discernable and indiscernible. This thread can be found, amongst others, in the gouache *A Cripple* [Kaleka] from 1956. Here Wróblewski presents a man forced onto the margins of society: spirit and energy are confronted with bodies that are weak, defective and useless. The clash of two worlds, the opposition of healthy and ill, is rendered by means of colour: the legs of the passers-by in the gouache have an extremely rich and vivid palette, whilst the human torso, devoid of legs and hands, is marked merely by a black outline, resembling a rock it melts into the background of the street and the greyness of the paper. It should be noted that in this work healthy bodies are also subject to fragmentation. Legs, adjacent to each other, form a colourful mosaic. Cut off from the rest of the body by the framework of the composition, they remind the cripple of his disability, yet at the same time they serve as a potential means of completion for his crippled figure. They constitute elements of a jigsaw puzzle where body parts could be assembled into a complete human figure.

In the late paintings, and particularly in the gouaches and watercolours, several hundred of which were executed by Wróblewski during the last two years of his life, one witnesses an unparalleled blossoming of colour.<sup>63</sup> At the same time a fresh and extremely rich palette becomes another important means for conveying a disintegrated vision of the world, and the human body in particular. Applied side by side, the spots of contrasting colours give an effect of internal incoherence to the seemingly solid human figure. The artist uses this procedure in some works from the *Zampano* series, yet it is taken to its extreme in the gouache *Zampano V*, where the figure of a muscled man resembles a colourful puppet made of bricks, which seems as if it could fall apart at any minute. Within the visibly marked outline of the circus performer's figure, his body is completely disintegrating.

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## THE MACHINE-MAN

The *Organic Portraits* of the thaw period fit into the sequence of representations that portray a mechanical man, which had its roots in works from 1948-1949 such as *Torso-Abstraction* [Tors-abstrakcja] or *Composition-Man* [Kompozycja-człowiek] and which bring to mind the mechanical nudes of Fernand Léger.

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Wróblewski enthusiastically addressed the fact of how modern technology could inspire contemporary art in the quoted text accompanying the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art*:

The precision of machines and industry products gives them great importance in the eyes of a painter. A machine is no less beautiful or rich than a tree. On the contrary, its sequences of pipes, pistons and steel plates hold values, which could not be found in nature and which were dreamt of by the painters from the last century.<sup>64</sup>

Between 1948 and 1949 the artist created sketches of pipes, machines and cranes (some of them clearly anthropomorphic), which were later included in the so-called *Great Folder* [Wielka teka] (1948–1949).<sup>65</sup>

Wróblewski's *Spatial Model*, presented in the Kraków exhibition, also draws upon the analogy between the human body and the machine found in avant-garde art. The artist equipped the machine with human features, emphasising the similarities between mechanical construction and the human body. Later gouaches as *Man-Abstraction* (1956), depicting human figures arranged in an analogically vertical manner, make reference to the same spatial object. If in the spatial models the artist subjected a machine to anthropomorphisation, then in *Organic Portraits* it is the human organism that is turned into a machine: entrails, heart and ureter are depicted as a system of pumps and tubes. Increasing industrialisation has added the idea of a 'machine-body' to the range of modernist representations of man. However, in contemporary art the representations of human replicas: machines, robots or mannequins, go beyond their metaphorical meaning of the ongoing degradation of man in an industrial world, and also form a constant element of painterly illustrations of *mundus melancholicus*.<sup>66</sup> This happens because the melancholic

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consciousness turns away from human life in order to dissolve in the world of objects. *Anima tristis* is often associated with images of a technological universe. Similarly connected with the subject is the representation of a mutilated mannequin (seen in both versions of *Summer at the Academy of Fine Arts* [Wiosna na ASP] and *At the Rostrum* [Na mównicy]). Artificial man, a human mock-up being an intermediate form between human being and object — is an entity that clearly bears the mark of death since the temporary, fleeting and uncertain nature of existence, the suspension between life and death, are all inscribed in its nature. This motif is present in Wróblewski's works as yet another form of human reification.

## THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK

The problem of the loss of identity is also taken up in the *Heads* [Głowy] series from 1956–1957, which includes both male portraits and illustrations of the heads of female models. Representations of face masks, but also of the gradual disintegration of a face, are motifs that can be traced throughout the thaw gouaches and monotypes. The artist conceals characters' heads or removes them by fixing the compositional frame. At times the opposite is true — faces multiply achieving a disturbing effect, or figures turn their back to the viewer. In a number of works their facial features are blurred, eventually leading to their complete disappearance (as in the monotype *Head*). This is a means of making them anonymous, resembling heartless dummies. These works are an excellent example of the feeling of depersonalisation that accompanies melancholy. This blurring of boundaries between the human and surrounding world (as in the *Shadow of Hiroshima* series) conveys the sense of insecurity characteristic of melancholia and poses a question about the boundaries between 'I' and 'non-I'. [58]

There are a number of works in which Wróblewski used a mask to hide the human face: in such paintings as *Rainbow Head* [Głowa tęczęwa] and gouaches *Multicolour Head* [Głowa różnobarwna] or *Blue and Red Head* [Głowa czerwono-niebieska], the face is covered with make-up, which resembles that of a circus clown. The sad Pierrot was the most popular melancholic figure in nineteenth century art. A self-portrait in a mask or clown's outfit is not only a picturesque motif that reveals a fascination with the magical world of the circus depicted by Fellini in his film *La Strada*.<sup>67</sup> It is more than a grotesque rendering of one's own face, a caricature of oneself, it is also a means of metaphorically illustrating one's own profession and the role of an artist, and finally, also a metaphor for art. The works discussed in this text form part of a sequence of images of fragmented individuals that seem to illustrate verses from Różewicz's poetry: "I am not a whole / I was broken apart (...)"<sup>68</sup> In this case breaking the human figure is not achieved by interfering in its anatomy, but through the specific use of colour. The face as a symbol of identity is turned into an object, losing the fundamental features of an individual — it turns out to be a mask that falls apart, crumbles into pieces.



“(…) Any loss entails the loss of my being — and of Being itself. The depressed person IS A RADICAL, SULLEN ATHEIST.”<sup>69</sup> Julia Kristeva’s words offer a more than adequate description of the artist’s condition. One sees him as a man completely deprived of all the values that it would seem he should consider the most important.<sup>70</sup> He rejects the catholic practice inculcated by his mother, substituting it with communist ideology. However, the latter brings disappointment and a feeling of even greater emptiness.

Belief in the barren and empty nature of internal life translates into representations of a man and his body, which in the works from 1955–1957 take the form of a phantom, ghost or a shadow. In the case of Wróblewski such incomplete and illusory existence is common: we find it in images of outfits that take the shape of a human figure though they are empty inside, or fragmented bodies that reveal their hollow nature, flat as a sheet of paper.

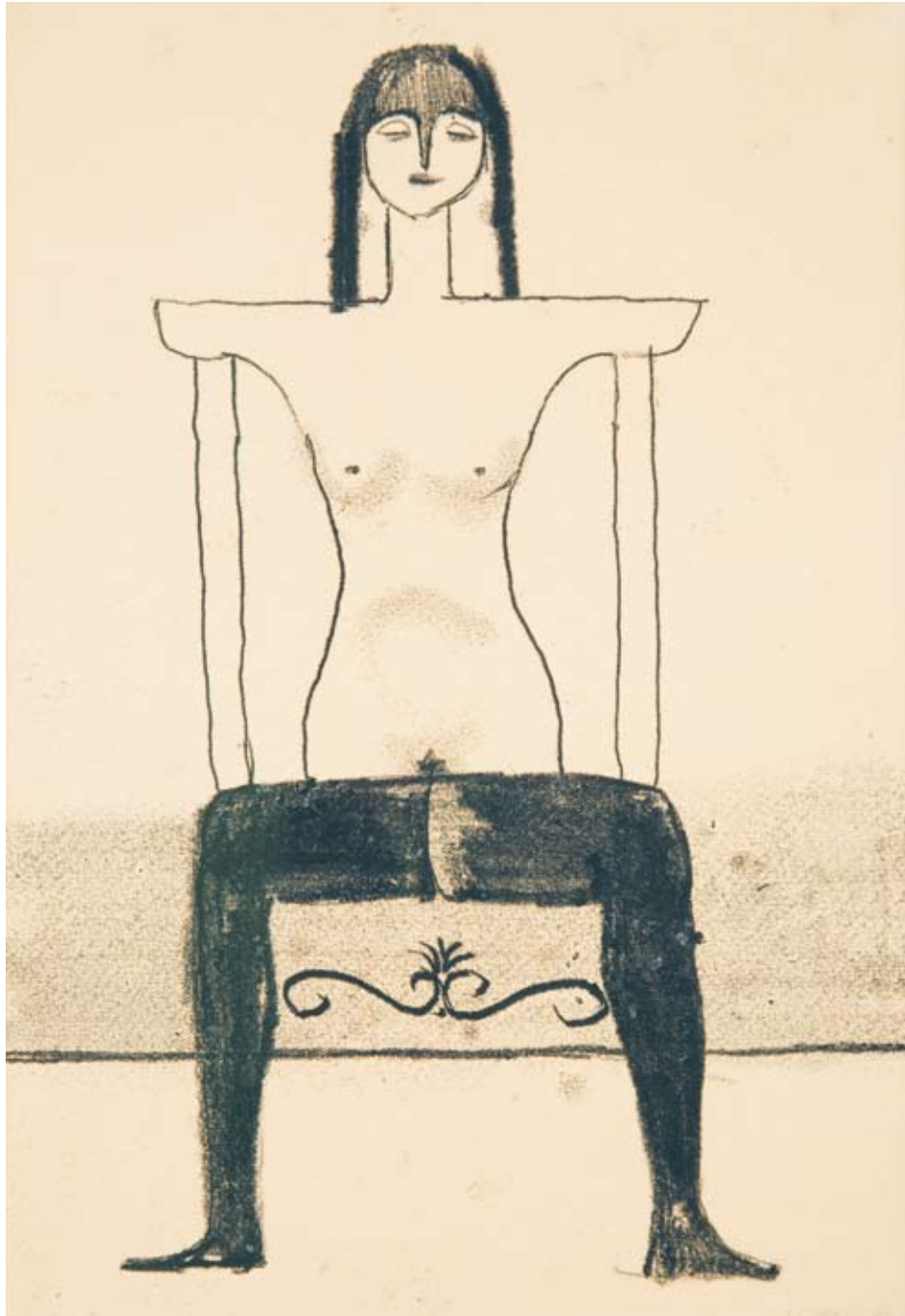
From a contemporary perspective the last two years of Wróblewski’s practice should be seen as a period when his art blossomed. Surprisingly there is a genuine flowering of colour in his watercolours and gouaches that contrasts with the mental state of the artist. In those last two years, he mainly expressed himself through small-size works on paper, creating only a handful of large-scale oil paintings. The modest dimensions of those works and their fragile ground, making them more susceptible to destruction than canvas, are meaningful factors. The choice of material is not only dictated by the most prosaic factors but also the lack of artistic materials resulting from a difficult financial situation, by physical incapacity and helplessness about which he wrote, and last but not least, a lack of confidence in his own artistic abilities.

Those intimate sketches ‘devoid of the once present power of idea’, devoid of faith in the effect of art, which not long ago was thought to help ‘differentiate between good and evil’, lacked real possibility for shaping moral approaches. For the first time, these works were created not for the sake of some future and society, but for the individual.

- 1 The title of Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *The Thaw* (published in Poland in April 1955), which was a reckoning with the period of communist rule, lent its name to an expression commonly used in all countries of the Eastern Bloc to refer to the period of political and social changes that followed Stalin's death in 1953.
- 2 Krzywe Koło Gallery — a gallery operating in Warsaw between 1955 and 1965 at the Old Town Cultural Centre [Staromiejski Dom Kultury], run by Marian Bogusz (1920–1980). The gallery was the first to be established after the war and, at the same time, a most eminent centre propagating modern art, which managed to attract a circle of avant-garde artists and critics. [M.Z.]
- 3 "Przegląd Artystyczny" — a magazine published from 1946, first in Kraków then in Warsaw, as a monthly and bi-monthly publication of the Association of Polish Artists [ZPAP]. [M.Z.]
- 4 Group 55 — founded in 1955 in Warsaw by the artists Marian Bogusz, Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005) and Kajetan Sosnowski (1913–1987) and Andrzej Zaborowski (1926–2002). Owing to the effort of the members of the group the Krzywe Koło Club and the Krzywe Koło Gallery were established at Warsaw's Old Town Cultural Centre. See: footnote 2. [M.Z.]
- 5 Cricot-2 Theatre — founded in 1955 in Kraków by Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Jarema (1908–1958). The name referred to the pre-war Cricot Theatre founded by Józef Jarema (1900–1974). A theatre in Tarczyńska Street was founded in 1955 in Warsaw by Miron Białoszewski (1922–1983), Bogusław Choiński (1925–1976) and Lech Emfazy Stefański (b. 1928), in whose private apartment the theatre had operated. From 1958 the theatre changed its name to Separate Theatre [Teatr Osobny] and operated in the apartment of Miron Białoszewski. [M.Z.]
- 6 Though signs of 'thaw' activity were to be observed earlier in Poland, the phenomenon of the artistic thaw is difficult to place within a strict historical framework. Recent research on the period tends to point to the year 1954 as the starting date, whilst 1960 or 1962 are considered end dates for the period. See: *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956* (exh. cat.), Piotr Piotrowski (ed.), National Museum, Poznań 1996.
- 7 The list of artists participating in the *Exhibition of Young Art* included among others: Izaak Celnikier (b. 1923), Waldemar Cwenarski (1926–1953), Jan Dziędziora (1926–1987), Marek Oberländer (1922–1978). They are currently referred to as the 'Arsenał generation'. Other artists, such as Wojciech Fangor (b. 1922), Jan Lebenstein (1930–1999), Jacek Sienicki (1928–2000), who did not work in the journalistic trend bordering on realism and expressionism, also had their debut in the exhibition. See e.g. *Rok 1955*, (exh. cat.), Iwona Luba (ed.), Królikarnia, Department of the National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw 2005; *Galeria Sztuki XX wieku. 1945–1955*, Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito (ed.), National Museum, Warsaw 2007.
- 8 Works by nine Kraków-based artists from the circle of Tadeusz Kantor during the years 1950–1954 were presented to the public in 1955 at the Kraków *Exhibition of the Nine* [Wystawa Dziewięciu] at the end of the year (which could be considered a more meaningful date in the context of the thaw). They testified to the continuity of the avant-garde tradition and its development in the Stalinist period. The participants of the exhibition: Tadeusz Kantor, Maria Jarema, Jadwiga Maziarska (1913–2003), Kazimierz Mikulski (1918–1998), Jerzy Nowosielski (b. 1923), Erna Rosenstein (1913–2004), Jerzy Skarżyński (1924–2004) and Jonasz Stern (1904–1988) — would form the nucleus of the Second Kraków Group established by Tadeusz Kantor in 1957 — one of the most important artistic groups in the history of Polish art after the Second World War.
- 9 Quoted from: Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*, London 2009, p. 67.
- 10 Piotr Piotrowski, *Polska sztuka między totalitaryzmem a demokracją*, www.culture.pl.
- 11 Paris remained the key destination for Polish artists at the time. In 1955 the city was visited by, amongst others, Tadeusz Kantor. Having returned, Kantor wrote his influential text *Abstrakcja umarta — niech żyje abstrakcja* considered a manifesto for Polish *informel* (published in 1957).
- 12 It should be noted that such paintings as *Three Women at a Meeting* [Trzy kobiety na zebraniu] (1952), though conforming to formal rules, were far from glorifying the system in their content.
- 13 Quoted from: Anna Markowska, *Definiowanie sztuki — objaśnianie świata. O pojmowaniu sztuki w PRL-u*, Katowice 2003, p. 104.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Quoted from: Andrzej Borucki, 'Własna wojna' *Andrzeja Wróblewskiego 1927–1957*, "Akcent", issue 1/1987, p. 143.
- 16 Tadeusz Konwicki (b. 1926) — Polish writer, scriptwriter and film director. [M.Z.]
- 17 Stanisław Bereś, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, Kraków 2003, p. 119.
- 18 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Confessions of a Discredited 'Former Communist'* [Wyznania skompromitowanego „byłego komunisty”], 1957, manuscript, property of the artist's family. The text is published in this volume.
- 19 See: Anna Markowska, *Definiowanie sztuki — objaśnianie świata...*, op. cit., p. 103.
- 20 This period was the focus of the exhibition *Przekształcenia. Andrzej Wróblewski 1956–1957*, Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska (ed.), State Gallery of Art, Sopot / Królikarnia, department of the National Museum, Warsaw 2004. See also: Anna Markowska, *Wielkie teraz, czyli o sztuce, Odwilż: sztuka ok. 1956 r.*, Piotr Piotrowski (ed.), Poznań 1996.
- 21 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Wstęp do katalogu rysunków moich, Wystawa prac Andrzeja Wróblewskiego* (exh. cat.), Warsaw 1956.
- 22 Waldemar Baraniewski, „Wszystko w obrazach jest na wierzchu...”, *Przekształcenia...*, op. cit., p. 2.
- 23 This paradox was noted by Piotr Piotrowski and mentioned in the introduction, as well as by Anna Markowska, see: *Wielkie teraz*, op. cit.
- 24 Andrzej Kostołowski, „O postawie i zaangażowaniu społecznym Andrzeja Wróblewskiego”, *Andrzej Wróblewski 1927–1957* (exh. cat.), Poznań 1967, p. 25. Initially the artist titled the works as *Waiting Rooms*.
- 25 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Waiting Room* [Poczekalnia], draft of a screenplay, quoted from: *Wróblewski nieznany*, Jan Michalski (ed.), Kraków 1993, p. 179. A fragment of the text is published in this volume.
- 26 The concept of exhausted people attending a meeting or waiting for something appeared in the artist's practice at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s in such works as: *Waiting Room — the Poor and the Rich* [Poczekalnia — biedni i bogaci] (1949) and *Three Women at a Meeting* (1952).
- 27 Andrzej Wróblewski, *List do Anny Porębskiej*, ca. 1949, quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski nieznany*, op. cit., p. 270.
- 28 Andrzej Wróblewski, manuscript, property of the artist's family.
- 29 Andrzej Wróblewski, *List do żony*, ca. 1953, quoted from: *ibid.*, p. 215.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- 32 Perhaps the symbolic meaning of blue in Wróblewski's work should not only be sought in painterly traditions but also in the artist's biography. The circumstances surrounding the death of Wróblewski's father seems to play an important role: Bronisław Wróblewski died of heart

- failure during a Nazi inspection of Wróblewski's home. The fourteen year old Andrzej witnessed the event. The image of his dying father undoubtedly left a lasting mark in his memory. Portraits of people whose faces gradually fade into blue (the artist often recorded the subsequent stages of that metamorphosis, as in a number of versions of the *Heads of a Model* [Głowy modelki]) could be a memory of that traumatic event.
- 33 See: Paweł Dybel, *Melancholia — gra pozorów i masek (koncepcja melancholii Sigmunda Freuda)*, "Świat Psychoanalizy", 1999, issue 2.
- 34 See: Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, transl. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia 1989.
- 35 Andrzej Wróblewski, manuscript, property of the artist's family.
- 36 Andrzej Wróblewski, ca. 1953, quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski nieznan*, op. cit., p. 215.
- 37 A melancholic individual is fascinated with death but also with himself, with his image and his 'dual' nature. This aspect is noted by Jean Starobinsky in his essay. See: Jean Starobinsky, *La Melancholie au miroir*, Paris 1990. One of Freud's students, Otto Rank, in a text titled *Don Juan et le Double* proves that at the roots of a fascination with one's own image lies a protective mechanism (he compares the fascination to a shadow one carries everywhere, which, as a figure of the soul, protects us from death). The French psychoanalyst André Green identifies two kinds of narcissism: *narcissisme de vie* and *narcissisme de mort*. In art these are manifest accordingly: in illustrations of oneself whilst alive and illustrations of oneself dead. See: *De la mélancolie*, colloque, 3–8 avril 2006, Paris, Jean Clair, Robert Kopp (eds.), Paris 2007.
- 38 Andrzej Wróblewski, ca. 1955, manuscript, property of the artist's family.
- 39 Izabela Kopania, *Obrazy „melancholii pozbawionej czaru”, Depresja* (exh. cat.), Arsenal Gallery, Białystok 2007 / Bunkier Sztuki, Kraków 2008, p. 89.
- 40 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. by Leon S. Roudiez, New York 1982. Also see: Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu and Demokracja i totalitaryzm*, www.culture.pl.
- 41 Andrzej Wróblewski, ca. 1955, manuscript, property of the artist's family.
- 42 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror...*, op. cit.
- 43 Ibid., p. 55.
- 44 See: Ibid.
- 45 Andrzej Wróblewski, *List do żony*, ca. 1953, quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski nieznan*, op. cit., pp. 215–216.
- 46 The oil painting *The Lovers* [Zakochani] (1956), in the collection of Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź is an exceptional case. [M.Z.]
- 47 The artist suffered from epilepsy. The illness could involve a feeling of embarrassment and social alienation and could have been one of the factors contributing to his depression.
- 48 See: *Szkicownik jugosławiński, Andrzej Wróblewski nieznan*, op. cit.
- 49 See: Sarah Wilson, *Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute. Art and Existentialism 1954–1955* (exh. cat.), Tate Gallery, London 1993, p. 27.
- 50 Wróblewski was not the only Polish artist at the time to address the theme of the human body seen as flesh. This theme also appears in the works of Izaak Celnikier (eg. *Lump of Meat* [Poleć mięsa] from 1956).
- 51 These images bring associations with the works of Francis Bacon, particularly such works as: *Triptych* (1972), Tate London; *Meatloaf* (1980), Tate London; *Figure with Meat* (1954), The Art Institute of Chicago. See: Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's studio*, London–New York 2005, chapter: *Meat*.
- 52 See: footnote 44, p. 67.
- 53 Andrzej Wróblewski, *Commentary on the 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* [Komentarz do I Wystawy Sztuki Nowoczesnej], manuscript 1948, quoted from: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej 50 lat później*, Marek Świca, Józef Chrobak (eds.), Kraków 1998.
- 54 Typescript from private collection, reprinted in the catalogue devoted to a reconstruction of the 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej 50 lat później*, op. cit., p. 114.
- 55 Tomasz Rakowski, *Ciało prześwietlone. Radiografia i jej magia, Metamorfozy ciała. Świadectwa i interpretacje*, Dariusz Czaja (ed.), Warsaw 1999, p. 168.
- 56 From the renaissance the act of flaying was interpreted as a symbol of an artistic process in general. Its essence consisted in *penetrare* and *scorzare*. During a creative act an artist performs a symbolic flaying, he or she splits and tears off the external layers in order to expose the secrets of nature hidden underneath the smooth surface of the marble. This is because all that is important, the 'truth', hides 'underneath the skin'. See: Fredrika H. Jacobs, *The Living Image in Renaissance Art*, Cambridge 2004.
- 57 László Földényi, *Melancholie*, München 1988, quoted and translated from: Wojciech Bałus, *Mundus melancholicus. Melancholiczny świat w zwierciadle sztuki*, Kraków 1996, p. 139.
- 58 Wojciech Bałus, op. cit., pp. 144–145.
- 59 The notes from the journey hold information about a day trip to Leiden and a short mention of a visit to the local university.
- 60 Titles of works by Wróblewski, now lost, could suggest similar themes: *Entrails* [Wnętrznoci] and *Foetus* [Plód]. Both monotypes dated 1957 were mentioned in the catalogue of the posthumous exhibition of 1958. See: *Andrzej Wróblewski. Wystawa pośmiertna*, Palace of Art, Kraków 1958.
- 61 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632, Mauritshuis, The Hague.
- 62 Wróblewski travelled to Yugoslavia in autumn 1956 with the critic Barbara Majewska. Inspired by Serbian sepulchral art he created a series of works titled *Tombstones* [Nagrobki] following his return.
- 63 The catalogue of the posthumous exhibition organised in 1958 notes over 400 works from the years 1955–1957 executed in gouache or watercolour.
- 64 Andrzej Wróblewski, typescript from private collection, quoted from: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej 50 lat później*, op. cit.
- 65 The folder comprises gouaches and watercolours: biological and geometrical abstractions, as well as studies of human figures rendered as cubes. The works from the *Great Folder* have been dispersed and are currently kept in private collections including that of the artist's family.
- 66 See: *Mélancholie: génie et folie en Occident* (exh. cat.), Grand Palais, Paris 2008.
- 67 More or less direct references to the world of the circus in Wróblewski's practice were certainly inspired by Fellini's *La Strada*. The film (first screened in Poland in 1956) made a tremendous impression on the artist. As a result, he created a series of gouaches depicting one of the main characters, the athlete Zampano. Notes from the film provided a point of departure for reflection on the role of an artist and his engagement, as well as coming to terms with the attitude Wróblewski adopted in the early 1950s.
- 68 Tadeusz Różewicz *Stripped Naked* [Rozebrany], 1956, from the volume *Forms* [Formy], Warsaw 1958.
- 69 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, op. cit., p. 5.
- 70 See: Jan Michalski, *Obietnica. Znaczenie Andrzeja Wróblewskiego jako artysty i krytyka dla współczesnej kultury polskiej*, "Znak", 1995, issue 9.





# WAITING ROOM

(Draft of a scenario from the sketchbook 1955–1956)

A long sequence in which the specially prepared walls of a waiting room pass by more and more quickly (the poster of an international airline, “do not spit on the floor”, an old political poster of the Polish–Soviet Friendship Society [TPPR] — then the set repeats itself again), moving lower [the camera] begins to capture the heads of people sitting *en face* in a row, after a while the people (like the set on the wall) begin to repeat themselves: a girl, an elderly man, an elderly man, a man.

They pass by more and more quickly as (the camera) moves lower (finally capturing only the legs and a spittoon that is also repeated, at a pace equal to a man walking/running. Finally a gong sounds. A direct shot of a door. Jump forward. The signboard of an institution. Jump forward. A door. Jump forward. The signboard of an institution. Jump forward. A door. Doorplate (director). Jump forward, and so on up to the level of the director’s office — working hours.

Jump forward. Immediate close-up of the face of a sleeping man, an office worker type, which occupies the whole screen. Interlude. Idyllic landscape. Parks where lovers meet. The camera focuses on a woman and follows her, flirting, having fun; she checks her watch. She leaves. The way to the institution is gradually less picturesque. The door of the aforementioned institution. Forward. She walks, entering an empty waiting room — the same walls seen in one panoramic sequence until the camera reaches a single chair. She sits down facing the screen. Jump forward. The aforementioned door to the director’s office. The woman. The door. The woman. The film freezes. It starts gently. In slow motion the woman places her handbag on the floor. Again. The film freezes. It starts gently. Repeated a number of times. Gradually the girl changes into a chair. Only her handbag is left. A text.

## INTRODUCTION:

Title: Waiting Room. Waiting. Common typeface and some explanation on enamel signboards.

Wall (an ultra-wall), a melody from the Mazovia region, (or Styrian folk dance, etc.) that plays faster and faster. As it reaches the maximum tempo — an ‘explosion’, silence, the wall begins to move faster and faster; as it reaches the pace of a walking man the next sequence begins.

#### HIGHLIGHTED (WAR EPISODE):

\*\*\*\* The man sits, a stork walks in front of him (all of this in the context of the waiting room), pecking, an infant — either appears or is brought by the stork [cut], a boy with a 'notebook'. The young man holds a document in one hand and a photograph of his fiancée in the other (which he shows to the viewers!), suddenly — [background music] the background of the waiting room disappears replaced by a coarse brick wall, in front of it:

- A The same four characters. Gunshots in the background either simultaneous or transposed (?). Accordingly: the girl drops her head in a sad way, she becomes grey then pink and her colour blends with that of the wall. For a moment the elderly woman stands in an extremely intense light. Close-up of her face, which is completely white, wrinkles emphasised, then the woman is incinerated like a shapeless dummy. The elderly man (standing to attention) slowly turns back and, his hands in the air, moves away into the distance. The wall in the background moves with him.
- B Four identical men (from I to IV referred to as 'man')
  - I. is gradually dismembered, the body parts are left on the ground! (or grass), his head alone, eyes still open, remains against the background of the wall.
  - II. The effect of death is conveyed by colour — nothing is left but ashes (rainbow illumination).
  - III. He moves into the distance — an elderly man.

The man — continued. Close-up of a still face. He is the only survivor. Walking (for the first time the camera is in motion!). He walks through the ruins of life-size toys (the toys are clearly visible! A giraffe with spots, a frog, somewhat separated from them is a worn grey teddy bear). It is getting darker. The sun sets (view of setting sun in fast forward). His footsteps (audible since he started walking) are heard very clearly in the darkness, rhythmically, he walks though mud, stopping for a moment by the teddy bear. He will also stop later. In the darkness on a slope below a view of murdered people, a raped woman, between them a girl leans over a book, an elderly woman waters an auracuria tree, an elderly man kneels by a dead body — the whole sequence is rather chaotic, the number of people appearing is somewhat sparse, then greater, then sparse again, eventually they disappear. The footsteps are slower, darkness, the glass wall of a fish tank emerges from the darkness. The footsteps stop. Seen very quickly: fish swim, water flows (fish on an invisible grating?), two hands appear from above, one of them, with an extraordinary wristwatch, holds a knife (the other one catches fish, whilst the first one cuts them

(the blood flows) by the head, near the tail, on the inside along their entrails. After one of the cuts the hands remove a dead child from the belly of a fish, a close-up, almost a microscopic shot of the mouth of that fish, zoom back, the hand throws the fish directly into the camera, the image is reversed, the fish falls at the feet of a boy from the previous sequence. A short scene with the boy. The young man from before reappears briefly. The background of the waiting room with all characters gradually returning. The characters are sitting, the young man turns into a man. A moment of chaos. Stop. He looks at the girl, she looks at him and they smile to each other in a straightforward and cordial way and return to their previous state. Stop. For some time now more signs have been appearing. After an exceptionally clear shot of the “no spitting” sign above his head (or next to him), the man [cut] [door closes with a squeak] sits. A scene like that in the beginning of the sequence except for the fact that it is completely still, only the signs are starkly visible, the enamel signboards still hang above, this time they are in bright electric colours. The signs rhythmically fade, one movement (e.g. the girl puts her handbag on the floor), the signs disappear except for the basic set visible against the wall (“no spitting”, “no smoking”, “wait”). Stop. The film ‘fades away’. People turn into chairs — a long tiresome process with repeats, background sounds: sighs, a gigantic yawn, the multiple sounds of a buzzing fly and a pen writing. Then a stop.\*

At a point when everyone expects the ending an almost completely naked girl lies down on the chairs, she lights up a cigarette and says: I’m bored.

THE END

[At the end two paintings with the following titles: *Chairing of a Man* and *Execution*.]

\*) this is when the camera moves showing a note ‘please enter alone’. A single finger (held vertically) opens the door. Enters. Inside there is a sculpture of Venus mutilated and wrapped like a fruit tree.

Or \*) The camera moves. The door says “Registration of Documents”. Suddenly a jump forward at an extreme pace: Document Registration Department — Director’s office — Department Director — Division X — Deputy Director — Head Director. The door opens. Empty hall. In the middle an elderly man, a vegetarian in a suit, wraps up the Venus statue having painted it white up to the hips (fruit tree). Note: Venus has a pink body — he wraps it with dried straw up to the breasts.



Or \*) The camera moves. Door. Someone (it is unclear who) attempts to open it. The door finally opens (and they emerge). A wave of sounds and colours of a big city flows inside.

Empty hall. The camera traces the walls. There is no exit. A puddle of ink in the middle of the floor.



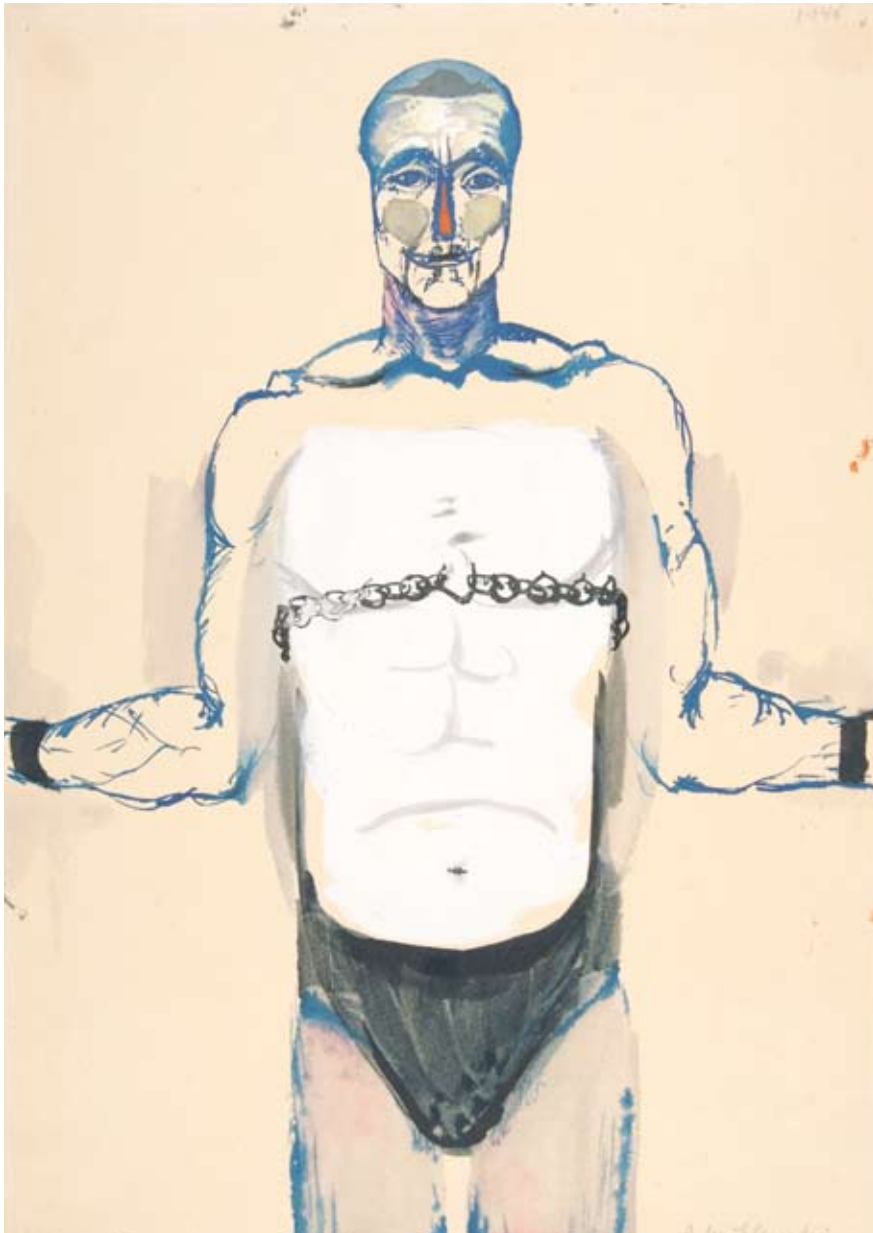




[70] *The Queue Continues*, 1956









# EKELLALAANDA

(after seeing the film *La Strada*, February 1957)

The idea: man, against his better judgement, does what seems right for him whilst hurting others. Nobody is guilty. Nobody's fate is better or worse. Everyone lives — and rejects all instinctive aims for the sake of other objectives of which they tentatively become aware. The 'madman' type combines opposing extremes in one personality. Rather than accumulating in the unconscious, everything is immediately expressed in action, making this action insane, as it is utterly inconsistent, contradictory, and devoid of any objective. Being mad is only possible if one refrains from a deep, single-minded, involvement in life and all the commitments this entails. A madman can be lonely as he himself plays the role of two contrasting personalities. Yet at the same time, he *must* be lonely, as otherwise his madness would leave him. The Zampano type — a biological monolith, functional and primitive (in relation to his own culture), is optimally developed (in relation to the mental processes he performs in his life). *La Strada* forces him to yield to the rebellious elements of his unconscious. This mental mechanism of magnificent construction, developed with the purpose of sustaining a particular personality, continues to operate (at the same pace) with the aim of destroying that personality.

As a result, the film focuses on the harsh quality of life, and the mental states and positions that are most unconscious, aimless, and 'disinterested': it strives to achieve that which we seek in primitive art, the inseparable link (joint appearance) between the most fundamental phenomena and the most primitive stimuli (fear, and the geometrical form in primitive art) with phenomena from the highest strata of culture: autogenous, unconscious artistry, concentration and accuracy of meaningful symbols. The establishment of such an ideology in our civilisation has a compensatory character: it consists of reversing the proportions that commonly exist in life, in the name of an individual who arrived at relativism by resisting the dominant majority. Therefore, rather than meaning what it appears to, the film is meaningful through its absences: it depicts the power of everyday life, demonstrating its rarely observed image. In such a situation, we can only draw limited conclusions, that relativism, though it may be the dominant element of many different ideologies, is not dominant in life and does not affect human actions on a daily basis. In this sense all works of art or theory that express relativism speak about the fact that, in relation to the everyday, such a position is irrelevant — on the contrary, an antagonistic position has to be of higher relevance. In this sense, each product of culture containing ideological



content (whether philosophical, moral, or psychological) that is active, stirring, and compelling, testifies to the fact that life is clearly different, opposite to the expressed argument. Thus, culture, as we understand it, cannot exist in a society that conforms to its own norms and guidelines. Perhaps East Asian and other prehistoric cultures have other, non-compensative characters.

Consistent relativism is difficult to imagine. Inconsistent relativism is 'biologism', 'intuitionism', sociological functionalism, et al. It consists of referring all issues of a contradictory nature to a retrospective reflection, giving up the task of laying down any 'guidelines' beforehand. Relativism relieves both the individual and the collective from their responsibility. Yet the relief is not real, it is evident that in the realm of collective action a sceptical approach to one's role in it does not influence the overall result. Therefore, it is impossible to imagine that the ideology of reasonable relativism and social functionalism that is widely propagated nowadays, by progressive Catholics in particular, can remain unchallenged for long. Thus, in the face of a new ideology of semi-religious character, the basis of individual freedom — the rejection of the "end justifies the means" principle — will easily turn out to be cowardly, petty opportunism. If we were to consider the whole history of Europe, from the mid-Middle Ages to Marx, as an example of reasonable relativism, the issue of what should be considered a beneficial factor in the period in question — relativism, or its opposites, would still be contentious. Which slogan should we consider more stimulating, "let us be but men, yet to a full extent", or, "let us be more than men, that is, more than the result of our common conditioning"? Relating the gist of the first phrase to European civilization, and the latter to that of Asia, assumes technological progress within the European realm. But the value of technological development is arguable. Its excessive progress, when confronted with the (fictitious) improvement of man (in an ethical and cultural sense), leaves a bad taste, which is the most common subtext used by many European intellectuals. On the other hand, Asian civilisation apparently needs to adjust to our technical development.











# CALENDAR

- 1927 15 June** Andrzej Krystyn Wróblewski was born in Vilnius, the second son of Bronisław Wróblewski (1888–1941) and Krystyna Wróblewska (1904–1994) née Hirschberg. His father was a professor of law and state theory as well as the dean of the local Stefan Batory University. His mother was a graphic artist. The Wróblewski house hosted many of the Vilnius intelligentsia.
- 1938** He began his education at the King Zygmunt August junior high school. During the war Wróblewski continued his education through clandestine courses organised out of school.
- 1941 26 August** Andrzej was witness to a Nazi search of his family house in the course of which his father died of a heart attack.
- 1944** Under the supervision of his mother — a former student of Ludomir Sleńdziński (1889–1980) and Jerzy Hoppen (1891–1969) founders of the ‘Vilnius school’ of graphic art — Wróblewski executed a series of nineteen woodcuts, these included: *Skull* [Czaszka], *Don Quixote*, [Don Kichot], *Wallenstein*, *Saint George* [Święty Jerzy] and *Drunkards* [Pijacy]. The works show a strong artistic sensitivity and skill.<sup>1</sup>
- 1945 February–March** Krystyna Wróblewska moved to Kraków, along with her sons Jerzy and Andrzej and a group of repatriates from Vilnius. The woodcut *Train Station* [Dworzec] testifies to the events of this time. Other woodcuts, including *Cart* [Wóz], *Monk* [Zakonnik] or *Own Ex-libris* [Ex libris własny] were produced that year.<sup>2</sup>
- 17 July** having made up for disparities in the curriculum, Andrzej Wróblewski obtained his *matura* leaving certificate at the Queen Wanda 10<sup>th</sup> National high school and junior high school. In October he began studies at two departments: Painting and Sculpture at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts, and Art History at the Jagiellonian University.
- 1946** At the Academy Wróblewski initially frequented the painting studio of Professor Zygmunt Radnicki (1894–1969) and then he moved on to Professor Zbigniew Pronaszko (1885–1958) whose practice was related to Polish colourism. This year he created his first oil paintings, most of which, such as *Still Life with a Jug* [Martwa natura z dzbanem], or *Still Life with Cherries* [Martwa natura z wiśniami] make overt references to the *kapizm* of his tutors.<sup>3</sup> The artist had his debut at the exhibition of the Discussion Circle [Kóło Dyskusyjne] in Kraków.<sup>4</sup>
- 1947 27 July** Wróblewski applied for and was granted a leave of absence at the university. In March he set out on the first of two journeys that proved crucial for his later work. Along with a group of students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and Kraków, he left for a three-month scholarship in the Netherlands as part of an exchange organised by World Student Relief.
- He extended his stay for another three months. In the Netherlands Wróblewski visited Wageningen, Arnhem, Nijmegen, Leiden, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, Delft, Groningen, Tilburg and The Hague. He also visited Copenhagen, Northern Germany, Sweden and Prague. Fragmentary notes, most of which describe places Wróblewski visited, and reflections on the educational system of the institutions he travelled to, are the evidence of the trip.<sup>5</sup> In Copenhagen, the artist visited, amongst others, the Academy of Fine Arts. He thus described his impression:
- (...) *Studies have no time limit. The students paint in a decorative, synthetic manner. They draw analytically, disassembling a solid into finer ‘cubes’ with mathematical regularity.*<sup>5</sup>
- His notes also carry a description of the Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam:
- (...) *Isolated, no final high school exams needed, it does not belong to any student organisations. Professors: naturalism, expressionism. Students: non-modernists.*<sup>7</sup>
- In Amsterdam Wróblewski visited the Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, Archaeology Museum and Rembrandthuis. It is likely that in the Stedelijk Museum he saw the exhibition of paintings by Marc Chagall, about whom he wrote his first text a year later:
- (...) [Chagall] *often painted a joyful married couple — himself with his wife, her temper lifting her up in the air. The poet — a man lying on the grass: listening to the pulse of the earth. The background of his paintings is dotted with the little houses of a small Russian town. In the belly of a mother — a child is waiting to be born. Chagall applied major spots of basic colour onto the canvas — red, blue, white — at times he lost himself in the naturalist description of a worn violin. ‘Lifelike’ flowers against the backdrop of grotesque landscapes and heads modelled with chiaroscuro, sticking out of the cubist planes of an abstractionist outfit. (...) I have the impression that we are dealing with a very specific form of output. In the case of Chagall, each painting commences and concludes a painterly career. It is to operate on its own, like a gothic cathedral.*<sup>8</sup>
- In Amsterdam the group of artists visited the studio of Constant Nieuwenhuys (1920–2005), one of the founders of the *CoBRA* group.
- 1948** Wróblewski completed his MA thesis in art history: *The Origins of Landscape Painting in Netherlandish Art from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Century*. The work was highly marked by the leading professor and Wróblewski was offered the post of assistant, a proposal he eventually declined. Following the holiday break Wróblewski applied for a year off from the Academy from 1948 to 1949 and was granted leave. His application was accompanied by a doctor’s certificate attesting to his poor health. Throughout the year he submitted a number of articles and reviews to the press.
- Amongst others, he saw films *Casablanca* by Michael Curtiz and *Last Stage* [Ostatni etap] (1947) by Wanda Jakubowska — a semi-documentary feature film telling the story of the martyrdom of Polish women in Auschwitz and the heroism of prisoners fighting for their dignity, and.

Towards the end of the year Andrzej Wróblewski officially made known his artistic views and opinions on the educational system at the Academy, as well as on the direction in which Polish post-war art had been developing. A considerable number of the artist's statements in the press, his notes and conversations with his colleagues from the Academy, testify to the fact that Wróblewski was convinced of a need to change the system. In his articles, he voiced a negative attitude to the current form of artistic education and the aesthetics presented by the professors at the Academy. He launched an open attack on the *kapizm* movement in the article *One More Word on the Art Schools* [Jeszcze w sprawie szkół plastycznych] published in the magazine "The Village" [Wieś] (issue 45, 21 November 1947).<sup>9</sup> In further texts, including the one published in "Artistic Review" [Przegląd Artystyczny] in 1950, Wróblewski recalled the period in the following way:

*The academic year 1948–1949 was perhaps the most difficult time for institutions of artistic education. As a result of formalist tendencies in teaching that grew intense throughout the last four years, a glaring contradiction between the academy and the life of the People's Poland arose. (...) A salient example of growing formalist tendencies in our artistic life was the Exhibition of Modern Art, which opened in Kraków in December of 1948.*<sup>10</sup>

Soon after Wróblewski confronted his professors:

*The then dean of Kraków's Academy of Fine Arts Professor E. Eibisch recalled that the young activists from the Academy invited him to a debate on painting. He attempted to explain his point of view. However, towards the end of the meeting, Andrzej Wróblewski turned to his colleagues with the following words: 'Sir dean here has his own reasons, and we have our own, according to which we will paint.'*<sup>11</sup>

Dean Eugeniusz Eibisch (1896–1987) answered Wróblewski's critical statement targeted at the academy as follows:

*I will not bother to speak about the article of Mr. Wróblewski. So far it has not happened that the young ones decide how the older ones should educate them. A young chick cannot decide how old hens should hatch eggs. It has been so, and it will stay that way.*<sup>12</sup>

### SELF-EDUCATIONAL GROUP

**October** along with Andrzej Wajda (b. 1926), Witold Damasiewicz (1919–1996), Konrad Nałęcki (1919–1991), Andrzej Strumiłło (b. 1928), Przemysław Brykalski (1929–1995), Ali Bunsch (1925–1985) and Barbara Gąsiorowska, the artist founded an informal Self-Educational Group. The group did not have a regular membership; most of its members had belonged to the Union of Polish Youth [Związek Młodzieży Polskiej].

*Since we have found ourselves in the current situation, we should educate ourselves on our own. Otherwise we will be forced into a stance by our Academy.*<sup>13</sup>

*The Self-Educational Group was established as a result of a growing ideological struggle within the Academy. Starting from the early years of Professor Eibisch as dean, the education in painting was exclusively kapizm-oriented. There was not much room left for the search for new ideologies and artistic forms. Therefore, this search took place 'illegally', it has been conducted by narrow circles of students, unable to exert immediate effect on the whole academy, that is, its numerous studios which do not communicate with each other.*<sup>14</sup>

Willing to act, the students mounted the first exhibition under the label of the Self-Educational Group. Nonetheless, they found it disappointing since the works on view (portraits, still lifes) did not fit well into the industrial interiors:

*(...) the thematic exhibition seems a valuable initiative in the field of visual arts. A salon show provides an accumulation of paintings, difficult to 'consume' even for a professional painter or a critic. It brings very little, if any, benefit to an unprepared viewer. Whilst in the case of thematic exhibitions the situation is revised. The theme is given beforehand – therefore a variable, which makes paintings different and disorientsates the viewer is eliminated. Yet the reform goes even further. We should imagine the social effects of such an exhibition as providing the viewer with a suggestive painterly interpretation of a given theme. We are thus dealing with a social effect similar to that achieved by the painting of Matejko and Kossak, who have forged popular representations of the characters and life of the noble Poland.*<sup>15</sup>

### 1<sup>st</sup> EXHIBITION OF MODERN ART

**December** The 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art opened to the public at Kraków's Palace of Art of the Association of Friends of Fine Arts [TPSP]. Tadeusz Kantor (1915–1990) described the preparation for the show in a letter to Bohdan Urbanowicz (1911–1994) responsible for artistic education in the Ministry of Culture and Art:

*The first room (to the side) will show life forms discovered by contemporary science (photographs of microscopic organisms, X-rays, space biology, etc.) and four (wedge-shaped) blocks of photographs and photomontages (2×2.30 metres), the character of the room is to be raw and focused (the forms will be in the centre of the space). In the second grand hall there will be a great number of chairs randomly placed, on several of these, folders with drawings and sketches, etc., the idea is that the experience of viewing will be more direct and active. On the walls will be paintings hung at varying distances from the wall, below them, propped against the wall wooden boards to which everyone can use pins to tack their watercolours, gouaches and drawings, projects, plans or ideas. In the same room, alongside the paintings will be models of theatre sets, posters, theatrical costumes, designs, etc. There will be an air of versatile creativity where image is the only common feature. The hall is to have the character of a studio, not a salon where exhibits are efficiently displayed for the sake of mere sale. The third room will house visual models (already in preparation), which will explain the complicated structure of a painting in another (three-dimensional) way. Apart from that there will be things that inspire each of us in our work: various 'found' and 'made' objects will serve to show that reality pulsates through the multiple visual layers of our paintings. We want to use the fourth room to juxtapose past and present. I doubt that our exhibition would be read differently than planned. Firstly, it is staged not with the aim of contemplating images but involving the viewer in the process of creating an artistic fact. Secondly, it is not concerned with the passive and rigid protection of acquired habits but with activity, movement and exploration, which gives space for the discussion of various possibilities, a struggle not for individual material positions, but for matters of art. Thirdly, if for example, the kapists failed to even lift a hand to take a position on the further development of art (they would rather occupy positions which sealed their fate), we show the possibility of devel-*



opment, which must be acknowledged even by those who disagree with us.<sup>16</sup>

Wróblewski participated in the exhibition with the following works: *Emotional Content of the Revolution* [Treść uczuciowa rewolucji] (the painting was hung in the hall, above the entrance to the first room), *Painting About the Horrors of War* [Obraz na temat okropności wojennych] (produced specially for the exhibition), *Sunken City II* [Zatopione miasto II], *Sun and Other Stars* [Słońce i inne gwiazdy] and *Earth* [Ziemia]. The artist also presented spatial models of wood and steel plates. It is likely that he also exhibited a folder with drawings and the painting *Sunken City I*.<sup>17</sup> On this occasion Wróblewski prepared *Commentary on the 1st Exhibition of Modern Art* in which he commented on the works in the exhibition, including his own paintings and models.<sup>18</sup> But during the exhibition Wróblewski withdrew from working with Tadeusz Kantor and other artists participating in the show.

In the second part of the year the artist painted amongst others: *Geometrical Abstraction in Grey* [Abstrakcja geometryczna szara], *Sunken City II* [Zatopione miasto II], *Sky Above the Mountains* [Niebo nad górami], *Blue Chauffeur* [Szofer niebieski] and *Biological Abstraction* [Abstrakcja biologiczna].

## 1949 EXECUTIONS

The first months brought paintings which addressed the theme of wartime trauma: Wróblewski finished *Execution VI (Execution with a Gestapo Man)* [Rozstrzelanie z gestapowcem] — painted on 16–18 January, *Execution VIII (Surrealist Execution)* [Rozstrzelanie surrealistyczne] — 30 January–2 February, *Execution I (Execution of Hostages)* [Rozstrzelanie zakładników] — 22–26 February, *Mother with a Dead Child* [Matka z zabitym dzieckiem] — 13–16 March, *Execution III (Execution of a Family)* [Rozstrzelanie rodziny] — 14–16 March, *Child with Dead Mother* [Dziecko z zabita matką] — 17–18 March, *Execution V (Execution with a Boy)* [Rozstrzelanie z chłopczykiem] — 5–12 April, *Execution IV (Execution Against a Wall)* [Rozstrzelanie na ścianie] — 18–20 May *The Liquidation of the Ghetto* [Likwidacja getta] — 20–24 May, *Execution VII* [Rozstrzelanie VII] 25–30 May, *Husband Killed in a War* [Mąż zabity na wojnie] (exact date of completion unknown), *The 'Poznań' Execution* [Rozstrzelanie „poznańskie”] — 29 July–4 August.<sup>19</sup>

## SOCIAL CONTRASTS

The second series of works produced that year consists of four paintings that focus on the issue of social contrasts: *Waiting Room — the Poor and the Rich* [Poczekalnia — biedni i bogaci] — 10–13 August, *Two Married Women* [Dwie mężatki] — 17–19 August, *Shopkeeper* [Sklepikarz] — 15–18 September, and *Sieg Heil!* — 18–21 September.

Other oil works from the year include the first illustrations of a young couple created in a Chagallesque manner, which would reappear later in Wróblewski's oeuvre: *The Walk of the Lovers* [Spacer zakochanych] — 18–22 January, *Young Couple with a Bouquet* [Młoda para z bukietem] — 25–29 January, finished between 18–21 February, the first oil *Self-Portrait* — 15–17 May and the *Train Station in the Recovered Territories* [Dworzec na Ziemiach Odzyskanych] — 10–15 September, where the artist portrayed his colleagues, amongst them Adam Hoffmann (1918–2001) and Andrzej Strumiłło.

**July** the artist asked for re-admittance to Kraków's Academy. The application was granted. During the academic year 1949–1950 Wróblewski frequented the studio of Professor Hanna Rudzka-Cybisowa (1897–1988), the first woman to be appointed professor of the Academy, who also represented the *kapizm* genre.

In the first half of the year Andrzej Wróblewski developed the rules of the Self-Educational Group formed in 1948. The shorthand report of the meeting of 7 May notes the following exchange under point no. 4:

*Discussion on the artistic programme of the anti-war exhibition:*

— *the accusation of backwardness levelled at the hitherto development of art. Does the accusation refer to the art of the interwar period and that after the war?*

— *response: the Programme should possess a social justification, taking the development onto a new level — the relation of theme to form, etc.*

— *the assessment of Soviet socialist realism: does it fulfil its social function (yes), does it fulfil the artistic function from the global point of view of the evolution of art (no?), is it because it is a result of work by people devoid of talent, or because it develops in a backward (from the formalist point of view) direction?*

*Note: similarity between icons and socialist realism: in both cases there exists a strong belief about the identity between an image and its subject (a painting is St. Nicholas and a painting is Stalin).<sup>20</sup>*

## THE ANTI-WAR EXHIBITION

In that period the Self-Educational Group developed an idea for a major exhibition. With this in mind, its members established contact with similar students' organisations from Łódź and Poznań. The joint exhibition was to serve as a form of protest and a struggle for socialist realism and progress. Andrzej Wajda later recalled:

*I clearly remember the time we sat in his apartment and he set down the following programme: We should make an exhibition about the struggle for peace. We should accept a common norm for paintings: 1.80×1.50 metres, or (...) 2×1.2 metres. This would be the first point. The colours should be specified, no nuances, etc. (...) He wanted an instant effect. And he dared to fight for his own place. He wanted the still wet paintings to be displayed at exhibitions or, better still, in the market square — not only in Kraków.<sup>21</sup>*

**23–28 October** the Self-Educational Group submitted seven paintings to the Polish Festival of Art Schools in Poznań [Festiwal Szkół Artystycznych], which was to lead to a 'reform' of artistic education. A separate exhibition organised by the group included two works by Andrzej Wróblewski: *Train Station in the Recovered Territories* painted on the back of the abstract composition *Emotional Content of the Revolution*, which referred to the journeys of repatriates returning from areas that constituted the eastern borderlands of pre-war Poland, but were incorporated into the Soviet Union after 1945. The second work was the only painting from the *Execution* series exhibited in the artist's lifetime, the 'Poznań' *Execution*.<sup>22</sup> According to Piotr Piotrowski:

*The Authorities hoped that by using the youth, precisely that youth which was tainted with war, which grew up in the axiological chaos caused by the experience of war humiliation and — as if due to this fact — was dejected with the communist ideology, they will be able to pacify the artistic academies, remove the old professors and*

saturate the teaching programmes with Marxist-Stalinist doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

The works of the Group met with disapproval and their authors were labelled as 'neo-barbarians'. The failure of the exhibition and the criticism levelled at the painters forced Wróblewski to publish the so-called self-criticism in 1950:

*The self-criticism of the team looks as follows: the key theoretical and practical error consisted in over-emphasising the issue of form in contrast to ideological content. (...) Further error — as far as the preparation of the exhibition is concerned — consisted of misinterpreting the issue of war. As far as the theme is concerned, our exhibition eventually failed to form a whole with a distinct ideological line — it was dominated by pessimism and the horrors of war causing fright. (...) On the other hand, the errors of the Kraków team stemmed largely from the narrow character and one-sidedness of the group. The same goes for the programme and system of institutions of artistic education; at a point where a more general reform is required the festival clearly exposed the aimlessness of one-off, partisan-like changes. The festival led to an agreement between a grassroots student initiative with the works and plans of the Ministry.*<sup>24</sup>

This year also brought many publications — reviews and articles devoted to art. Amongst others the artist wrote two major pieces on Mexican graphic art — a major exhibition of which toured Poland in 1949–1950. He also wrote about Greek and Roman art and Rembrandt.

**1950** Only eight oil paintings date from this year, chiefly monochrome portraits and nudes (*Portrait of a Man* [Portret mężczyzny], *Woman Nude Sitting* [Akt kobiety siedzącej] and *Study of a Male Nude* [Studium aktu mężczyzny]), which resemble sketches or student exercises. They testify to a regression in the artist's practice and an attempt at confirming the official developments of socialist realism.

Wróblewski also developed a number of prints, amongst others: lithographs *National Front* [Front Narodowy], *Three Colleagues* [Trzech kolegów].

He read Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma, Nights and days* [Noce i dnie] by Maria Dąbrowska, *Alien Shadow* by Konstantin Simonov, *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky and *The Fall of Paris* Ilya Ehrenburg.

**May** Wróblewski worked towards obtaining a scholarship for postgraduate studies in easel painting and lithography in the USSR. In a letter to Anna Porębska he wrote:

*(...) I do not know so far if I am going to USSR or not, though I could leave, I am sitting at home in anticipation of the news. My painting habit has become somewhat loose, and since I no longer consider myself a veteran soldier of realism, I think its time the young ones made a little effort.*<sup>25</sup>

In spite of positive recommendations from the dean of the Academy and other bodies, Wróblewski's application was rejected.<sup>26</sup>

Amongst the artist's loose notes from the period is a list of works for the scheduled thematic exhibition focusing on war and the initial years that followed:

*An exhibition (some 20–30 paintings) on the following subject: the Second World War and the years [19]45–[19]46. Part 1: war (executions), part 2: the post-war period (social contrasts).*

*Part 1 (war):*

1. *Big Surrealist Execution,*
2. *Execution of Hostages (repainted later),*
3. *Execution with a Boy,* [25]
4. *Husband Killed in the War,*
5. *Mother with Dead Child,*
6. *Child with Dead Mother (repainted),* [7]
7. *Big Execution,*
8. *The Liquidation of the Ghetto,*
9. *Execution Against a Wall,*
10. *Civilians During the War [Ludność cywilna w czasie wojny] (repainted),*
11. *Partisans (repainted),*
12. *Execution Bassanto Granto [Rozstrzelanie Bassanto Granto],*
13. *The first Execution repainted (with a Gestapo Man);* [26]  
*finished sketches and drawings,*
14. *[Entry crossed out],*
15. *Mother with Wounded Son [Matka z rannym synem].*

*Part 2 (first years after the war):*

1. *Train Station "3×YES" [Dworzec „3×TAK”],*
2. *Two Young Married Women [Dwie młode mężatki],*
3. *Train Station with Repatriates [Dworzec z repatriantami],* [32]
4. *Shopkeeper,* [35]
5. *Sieg Heil.*<sup>27</sup>

For the exhibition *The Youth Struggles for Peace* [Młodzież walczy o pokój] held in Warsaw's National Museum, Wróblewski submitted three works: *Nude* [Akt], *Meeting of the Union of Polish Youth Activists* [Zebranie aktywu ZMP] and *After the Parade* [Po pochodzie].<sup>28</sup>

In the academic year 1950–1951, Wróblewski became an assistant at the Academy, a post he occupied for four years.

**20 December** Wróblewski became a candidate of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR] at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. The Municipal Committee of PZPR in Kraków issued him with a candidate membership card with the number 0359433.<sup>29</sup>

**1951** The Self-Educational Group was disbanded. Wróblewski failed to communicate with other members. For the second time the artist applied for three-year's of postgraduate studies in the USSR — again the application was rejected. Between 5 and 18 August Wróblewski stayed in Berlin where he participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students.<sup>30</sup> During the stay he made a number of sketches in ink.<sup>31</sup> In relation to these, in October Wróblewski created his largest oil painting, 190×270 centimetres in size, titled *Youth Rally in West Berlin* [Zlot młodzieży w Zachodnim Berlinie] — the canvas, purchased by the Ministry of Culture and Art, depicts a clash with police forces entering West Berlin on 15 August 1951.

The artist read Stanisław Lem's *Astronauts*, Balzac by Stefan Zweig and saw Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* and Leonard Buczkowski's *Forbidden Songs* [Zakazane piosenki] (1946).

**6 December** Wróblewski graduated from the Painting Department of the Academy of Fine Arts, however, his graduation certificate bears the date 22 November 1952.

This year, apart from the monumental Berlin canvas the artist painted *Raymond Dien — Stopping of a Train Transport of Weapons to Korea* [Raymond Dien

— powstrzymanie pociągu wiozącego broń do Korei] and three landscapes.

**1952** Wróblewski's painterly output was still sparse. Through the year the artist produced eight oil paintings and sketches.

He read Bohdan Czeszko's *Generation* [Pokolenie], *Road Through Calvary* by Aleksey N. Tolstoy, *An Odyssey of the North* by Jack London, *Marriage* and *The Government Inspector* by Nikolai Gogol, *Father Goriot* by Balzac, *The Seventh Cross* by Anna Seghers and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift.

**August** at a holiday stay in Czchów he met his future wife Teresa Reutt (1927–1994), a student of classical philology and history at the Jagiellonian University.

Towards the end of the year he began work on a painting which related to the events in Vilnius eleven years earlier when Wróblewski witnessed his father's death: *Search – Arrest* [Rewizja – aresztowanie]. He continued to work on the piece in February and March of the following year.

**1953** Wróblewski produced socialist realist canvases including: *Union of Polish Youth Takes Command of the Airforce* [Związek Młodzieży Polskiej obejmuje szefostwo nad lotnictwem], *Russian Partisan* [Partyzant radziecki] and *Bloody Sunday 1905* [Krwawa niedziela 1905], as well as, during a month long holiday with *plein-air* workshops in Waganowice, four landscapes and several dozen works on paper.<sup>32</sup> He also prepared his last woodcut, the only one in his mature oeuvre, titled *Farewell* [Rozstanie], which depicts the artist and his wife.

Wróblewski created two series of works in ink: several works *Flood in the Netherlands* [Powódź w Holandii], which he presented at the *1<sup>st</sup> Polish Satirical Exhibition*, whilst in March the artist made seven ink works under the common heading *Mourning News* [Smutne wieści], which illustrates people's reaction to the news of Joseph Stalin's death (3 March).

**June** during a *plein-air* workshop in Nowa Huta the artist prepared several works that show the construction of a massive steel plant on the outskirts of Kraków.

The artist took part in the exhibition accompanying the 4<sup>th</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students in Bucharest. He presented the painting *At the Meeting* [Na zebraniu], for which he received a prize and an honourable diploma when he returned to Warsaw (19 September).

**19 September** Andrzej Wróblewski married Teresa Reutt in Kraków. In a letter to Wajda dated 10 October the artist wrote:

(...) *I'm not sure if I already mentioned that I got married and as a result I'm living with my wife for the time being, I feel neither external nor internal will to work...*<sup>33</sup>

**1954** Wróblewski made the oil painting *Break at Work in Nowa Huta* [Fajrant w Nowej Hucie], an account of the *plein-air* workshops in the summer of 1953 and one of the artist's finest socialist realist works. He also prepared a series of views across the rooftops of Kraków seen from a window of the Fine Arts Academy (a number of oil paintings and several works in ink), he also created gouaches and drawings that accompanied Apollinaire's writing.

The artist read *The Revolt of the Angels* by Anatole France, *The Threepenny Novel* by Bertolt Brecht and *The Ladies' Delight* by Emile Zola.

**10 May** Wróblewski's first son, named after his father, also known as Kitek, was born. Soon both the colour and subject matter of his works changed drastically. New works were primarily still lifes in bright hues: *Still Life with a Drawing* [Martwa natura z rysunkiem], *Peonies* [Piwonie], *Flowers* [Kwiaty], *My Shoes* [Moje buty]. There are many representations connected with motherhood: *Scales for Children* [Waga dziecięca], *Woman Feeding by a Balcony* [Karmiąca przy balkonie] and several dozen sketches of his wife and son.

The famous note entitled *To Be or Not To Be in the Polish United Worker's Party* [Być czy nie być w PZPR] is dated this year.

**1955** Early in this year Wróblewski created gouaches that refer to sports themes, mainly women's track and field athletics: *Women Gymnasts* [Gimnastyczki], *Women Archers* [Łuczniczki], *Fencing* [Szermierka]. In the autumn he prepared illustrations for the poem *Rosita* by Federico García Lorca and drawings for the poetry of Tadeusz Różewicz (b. 1921).

Wróblewski also produced oil paintings that focused on the theme of a woman: *Nude Woman Seen from Behind* [Akt kobiety stojącej tyłem], *Portrait of a Hunchbacked Woman on Red Background* [Portret garbatej z czerwonym tłem], *Hunchback Woman* [Garbuska], *Beach* [Plaża], *Young Mother with a Child* [Młoda matka dzieckiem], *Mothers* [Matki], *Mother* [Matka], as well as still lifes *Still Life with Folder* [Martwa natura z teczką], and landscapes *Landscape with High Sky* [Pejzaż z wysokim niebem], *Landscape – Rooftops in the Rain* [Pejzaż – dachy w deszczu]. Two canvases made that year, which are visibly different in terms of style, could be seen as marking the return to the artist's own painterly explorations, these are *Attention, Here It Comes!* [Uwaga, nadchodzi!] and *Mothers*. The latter was painted for the *Polish Exhibition of Young Art* in Warsaw's Arsenał, held under the slogan "Against the War, Against Fascism". Forty honourable mentions were awarded during the exhibition, however, Wróblewski's painting failed to meet the jury's expectations.

The artist read the manuscript of Władysław Strzemiński's *Theory of Vision* [Teoria widzenia], Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and *The Thaw* by Ilya Ehrenburg. He saw *M. Hulot's Holiday* by Jacques Tati and *Beauty and the Devil* by René Clair.

Wróblewski was presented with the medal of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland.

**24 September** the artist's twin daughters Marta and Krystyna were born. The growth of the family led to a deterioration in material conditions.

Andrzej Wajda attempted to help the artist by launching an effort to organise an exhibition of Wróblewski's works in the Polish Writers' Union [ZLP] in Warsaw. The exhibition of drawings opened in July of the following year.

**1956** The year marked a time of intense and fruitful painterly practice. Some thirty oil paintings and several hundred works on paper, which developed the themes of the oil paintings, date from that period. The artist also created series devoted to specific themes mainly using gouache.

At the beginning of the year Wróblewski produced a number of images of lost, lonely boys in empty interiors: *Boy on Yellow Background* [Chłopiec na żółtym

tle], *Boy* [Chłopczyk]. In January and February, the artist painted three well-known portraits of Ola Peterstein, a model from the Kraków Academy, titled: *Head of a Model I* [Głowa modelki I], *Head of a Model II* [Głowa modelki II] and *Head of a Model III* [Głowa modelki III]. Wróblewski also returned to the themes found in his early work from the years 1948–1949.

**January** the artist began work on *Walk of the Lovers* [Spacer zakochanych], which referred to a painting of the same title from 1949.

**August** Wróblewski worked on a large canvas *Chauffeur* [Szofer], which took up the theme of the *Blue Chauffeur* [Szofer niebieski]. In this year (as well as early in 1957) the artist produced numerous gouaches depicting interiors of buses driven with lone drivers: *Chauffeur*, *Chauffeur with a Winter Landscape* [Szofer z zimowym pejzażem], *Chauffeur in a Bus* [Szofer w autobusie], *Chauffeur and Passengers* [Szofer i pasażerowie].

Wróblewski completed his significant works: *Laundry* [Pranie], and perhaps the best-known canvas *The Queue Continues* [Kolejka trwa], *Chairing I and II* [Ukrzesłowanie I, II], *Chairs* [Krzesła], as well as thematically convergent works on paper: several versions of *The Queue Continues*, or those which formally refer to the ‘chairs’ series: *Flirting Chairs* [Krzesła flirtujące], *Chairs* [Krzesła] or *Chaired Woman I and II* [Ukrzesłowiona I, II].

The gouaches address a number of themes: torn man / heads and skulls / hands and mouths / man of stone / Zampano – works depicting the character of Fellini’s *La Strada* / images of horses / imaginary landscapes / barges / cars.

The artist also explored the technique of collage, producing four works.

It is most likely at that time that Wróblewski read *Zhuangzi, the True Classic of Southern Florescence*, the 1953 edition.<sup>34</sup>

## EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS

**February** as a result of the help of Andrzej Wajda, the artist’s first solo exhibition was mounted in Warsaw’s Club of the Polish Writers’ Union. The exhibition featured thirty-six works on paper. These were mainly ink illustrations to Apollinaire’s *The Hills* produced in 1954, and to Lorca’s *Rosita*, as well as others, e.g. *Elysian Fields* [Pola Elizejskie], *Drunkards* [Pijacy] and *Rooftops* [Dachy]. The first exhibition was accompanied by a short introductory note written by the artist and later reprinted in the catalogue of his first posthumous exhibition in 1958.

## EXHIBITION IN THE “PO PROSTU” SALON

**September** another exhibition of Wróblewski’s painting opened as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Discussion Exhibition of the “Po Prostu” Visual Arts Salon in Warsaw’s Jewish Theatre. The presentation was organised as a result of efforts by the painter Marek Oberländer (1922–1978) who was connected with the ‘thaw period’ weekly “Straight Forward” [Po Prostu].<sup>35</sup> Amongst others the artist exhibited the following canvases: *Focused Portrait* [Portret skupiony], *The Queue Continues*, *Chairing* [70] and *Laundry*. The exhibition met with considerable interest on the part of the press and the critics, and was described as follows:

(...) *the painterly world of Andrzej Wróblewski is utterly different. It should be assembled and read in its distinct*

*elements. Taken on their own, none of his works so far seem convincing. The exhibits refer to a man seen not as he acts but as he exists – in a situation forced upon him by life: Focused Portrait, The Queue Continues, Chairing. The situation is modestly described by the attributes necessary to highlight a man and his problems. However, this literary vision, built upon pessimistic reflections on life, burdens the formally shallow paintings, becoming a pretentious and visually unjustified addition. The artist addresses a number of artistic issues simultaneously – that is, without a common ordering principle. This is the result of a strong attachment to the factual appearance of objects, which hinders the shaping of individual, truly visual forms, which in turn, also translates into content that is a painterly equivalent of life. Therefore, a character is subject to stylisation that consists of nothing more than simplification and an emphasis on its appearance, which results in caricature rather than significant artistic form (The Queue Continues). We are dealing with a similar situation in the artist’s use of colour, which often appears on the canvas without reason, failing to define anything. Again, there is no single principle governing the choice of palette, the genealogy of colour and its mutual blending. A break with the conventional aesthetic of colour should not be considered a principle, only a break in relation to a painting. This is best seen in the work The Queue Continues. The artist does not agree with the fact that painting should abandon social issues, making them the source of conflict in his works. Nowadays however, the undefined stage of formal explorations gives birth to a great number of supposed conflicts that obscure the content. Hanging of the Laundry [Wieszanie bielizny] one of the best paintings strikes the viewer with differing painterly quality in various sections. Alongside the intriguing silhouette of a young woman one sees the completely raw and banal elements of a character in the background, which unnecessarily attract attention to the areas of colour in the upper section of the painting, etc.<sup>36</sup>*

Another reviewer noted:

(...) *The artist has not yet come upon his own world, he did not find his own form, but at the same time he managed to avoid obvious borrowings. I have observed Wróblewski for eight years now. I remember his first steps at the 1948 Festival in Poznań where, along with a group of colleagues, he opposed the aestheticism of his professors: painting that was not committed and, generally speaking, academic. I remember him later, different with every passing year, changing yet always interesting. It should be noted that he was able to choose for himself from the painterly arsenal. (...) Wróblewski is an artist of considerable knowledge and skill. His search is not narrow-minded, his paintings constructed from a sequence of elements. One encounters both strong line, colour and spatiality as well as literary and narrative elements. The current stage of his exploration does not allow him to be fully consistent. By rejecting the old form in order to consciously render a contemporary image; he does not always manage to confront the difficult material. In the painting The Queue Continues, interesting from both an artistic and social point of view, one encounters sections that are impossibly raw, as if indigested. (...) The best work addressing our surrounding reality is the Chaired Woman. Far from cheerful, the work is nonetheless accurate. Chairing is the symbol of our times. A tired pregnant woman is seen waiting. She is sitting in an office, in a hospital queue, waiting for a certificate or for a director. Look around: how many ‘chaired’ women are there? How many times are we ‘chaired’ ourselves?<sup>37</sup>*

## YUGOSLAVIA

**30 October–23 November** Wróblewski, accompanied by Barbara Majewska (b. 1933), set out on a trip to Yugoslavia. They stayed in Belgrade, Ljubljana and Skopje. The artist visited numerous exhibitions and museums, amongst them the studio of Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962), Croatian-born sculptor who in 1947 emigrated to the United States, known for his boldly cut figurative monuments and reliefs. He met the founders of the group of young artists The December Group [Decembarska grupa] (1955–1960) such as Aleksandar Luković (b. 1924) and Zoran Petrović (1921–1996). Wróblewski was deeply impressed by the country and its art, copying into his notebook some of the works he encountered, such as Meštrović's crucifixions. Fascinated by Serbian stone tombstones, he painted *The Tombstone of a Womanizer* [Nagrobek kobieciarza] as well as a number of gouaches: *Tombstone-Woman* [Kobieta-nagrobek], *Red Tombstone* [Nagrobek czerwony], *Tombstone on Green Background* [Nagrobek na zielonym tle]. "Artistic Review" (issue 4/1956 p. 46–47) featured an article entitled *Yugoslavian Notes* [Notatki jugosłowiańskie].

*It was not only a trip in the atmosphere of the Polish October, but also a trip south.<sup>38</sup> Heading from the north in a flight over the climatic border, as the mountains unfolded towards another sea we saw the Mediterranean from the plane. There were other hill forms, other smells, flora, other kinds of light, other buildings and other people. The artist, coming from the north like many before him, had to yield to all of that. He was internally tense, afraid of the 'thoughtlessness of the thaw period', tormented by a feeling of betrayal. We talked and I did not share his mood in the slightest, certain that everything had opened in front of us, in front of Polish art. The unusual surroundings, far from the life we knew, had its influence: the Europeaness of Ljubljana, its wealth and tranquillity. Even at the 'Elephant' cabaret one could hear I love Paris in the moonlight... Whilst at the other extreme was the mystic land by Lake Ohrid in Macedonia, a large stretch of water surrounded by a garland of stone orthodox churches, or caves tunnelled in rocks, that held miraculous tales in mosaic, which – even if it depicted the Last Judgement – radiated with optimism.<sup>39</sup>*

**1957** Wróblewski produced several versions of portraits of a model from the Academy: *Head with Letters* [Głowa z literami], *Head of a Man* [Głowa mężczyzny] and *Head on Red Background* [Głowa na czerwonym tle]. He also prepared a number of images of a man sitting on a stool or a bench: the oil painting *Man on a Bench* [Mężczyzna na ławce] and gouache *Man* [Człowiek], which led to the outstanding *Organic Portrait* [Portret organiczny], a work unique in Polish art. At the same time the artist worked on paintings that stylistically continued the 'torn men' theme: *Woman* [Kobieta] and *Shadow of Hiroshima* [Cień Hiroszimy].

Wróblewski made eighty-four monotypes on paper in various sizes, approx. 30×20 cm and 30×42 cm (some forty of which are publicly known today), in which he revisited themes found in his earlier work including: *Fish* [Ryba], *Fish with Letters* [Ryba z literami], images of women: *Nude* [Akt], *Female Torso* [Tors kobiety], *Girl* [Dziewczyna], *Bust* [Popiersie], various versions of the torn, crippled man: *Organic Portrait*, *Stumps* [Kikuty], tombstones: *Tombstones* [Nagrobki], *Cemetery* [Cmentarz], as well as *Face* [Twarz], *Woman-Death* [Kobieta-śmierć], *Meeting* [Spotkanie], *Transformations* [Przekształcenia],

*Flower Pot* [Doniczka], *Violin* [Skrzypce] or *Ambulance* [Karetka pogotowia]. [66]

**23 March** the artist died during a solitary hike in the Tatry mountains.<sup>40</sup> His death is surrounded by a sense of mystery. Most likely Wróblewski collapsed and fell during an epileptic seizure, as a result of which he died of hypothermia.

- 1 See: *Andrzej Wróblewski. Wystawa pośmiertna* (exh. cat.), Palace of Art, Kraków 1958, pp. 69–70.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 See: footnote 2, p. 28.
- 4 *Andrzej Wróblewski. Wystawa pośmiertna* (exh. cat.), op. cit., p. 72.
- 5 Loose notes in the property of the artist's family.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 *Andrzej Wróblewski, Marc Chagall*, "Głos Plastyków", September 1948. The text was published with the following note from the editor: "Being in complete disagreement with the author's views on Chagall's painting, we present the article below due to its unquestionable value." Both the artist's notes from the trip to the Netherlands as well as the article itself bear no trace of the fact that the artist saw the exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum. Perhaps he was only familiar with the catalogue that accompanied the show.
- 9 The complete article is published in this volume.
- 10 *Andrzej Wróblewski, Praca samokształceniowa ZAMP (Związku Akademickiego Młodzieży Polskiej) i Kół Artystycznych na uczelniach plastycznych*, "Przegląd Artystyczny" 1950, issue 5–6.
- 11 Ewa Garztecka, *Andrzeja Wróblewskiego oglądanie życia*, "Trybuna Ludu", 25 February 1968.
- 12 According to a shorthand report of the meeting on the 9 December 1948; the property of Konrad Nałęcki, quoted from: Janusz Bogucki, *Sytuacja artystyczna w Polsce około roku 1950*, "Akcent" 1982, issue 4/10, p. 151.
- 13 Wróblewski's statement, as cited by Andrzej Wajda, quoted from: Andrzej Borucki, „*Własna wojna*” *Andrzeja Wróblewskiego 1927–1957*, "Akcent" 1987, issue 1.
- 14 *Andrzej Wróblewski*, quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski nieznan*, Jan Michalski (ed.), Kraków 1993, p. 268.
- 15 *Andrzej Wróblewski, Wspaniała idea, słabsze wykonanie (na marginesie wystawy „Praca”)*, "Trybuna Ludu" 1949, issue 134; although in the text the artist addresses a specific exhibition, his statements could be read in relation to exhibitions in general.
- 16 Tadeusz Kantor in a letter to Bohdan Urbanowicz, quoted from: *W kręgu lat czterdziestych*, part 2, Józef Chrobak (ed.), Kraków 1991, pp. 10–12.
- 17 The list of works in the exhibition includes items with the following names: *Earth, Sun and Other Stars, Sky, Construction, Painting About the Horrors of War, Sunken Cities, Emotional Content of the Revolution* as well as three spatial models (the document was reprinted in: *I Wystawa Sztuki Nowoczesnej 50 lat później*, Marek Świca, Józef Chrobak (eds.), Kraków 1998). Existing published photographs from the exhibition show only the following works: *Earth, Sun and Other Stars, Sky, Painting About the Horrors of War, Sunken City II* and two spatial models.
- 18 The text is published in this volume.
- 19 Source of dates: *Andrzej Wróblewski* (exh. cat.), Zachęta Gallery of Contemporary Art, Warsaw 1998.
- 20 Manuscript in the collection of Witold Damasiewicz, quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski* (exh. cat.), Zachęta Gallery of Contemporary Art, op. cit., p. 177.
- 21 *Wróblewski nieznan*, op. cit., p. 274.
- 22 *Andrzej Borucki, „Własna wojna” Andrzeja Wróblewskiego 1927–1957*, op. cit., p. 138.
- 23 Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu. W stronę historii sztuki polskiej po 1945 roku*, Poznań 1999, pp. 13–14.
- 24 *Andrzej Wróblewski, Praca samokształceniowa ZAMP (Związku Akademickiego Młodzieży Polskiej) i Kół Artystycznych na uczelniach plastycznych*, op. cit.
- 25 Anna Porębska, the wife of Mieczysław Porębski.
- 26 Note of 30 September 1950, quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski* (exh. cat.), Zachęta Gallery of Contemporary Art, op. cit., p. 179.
- 27 Quoted from: Jan Michalski, *Chłopiec na żółtym tle*, Kraków 2009, p. 233.
- 28 All works presented in the exhibition are lost. They are not included in the list of works made in 1958.
- 29 Quoted from: *Andrzej Wróblewski* (exh. cat.), Zachęta Gallery of Contemporary Art, op. cit., p. 181, reads: "On March 26 1956 the proper organ of PZPR reviewed the applications of all individuals interested in joining the Party ranks. The proceedings of the meeting inform that (...) upon consideration, the executive decided not to approve the resolution of the Basic Party Organization [P.O.P.] concerning accepting Comrade Wróblewski as a Member. From 1950, Comrade Wróblewski has neglected political work, refused to pay the party fees and, due to his lack of decidedness, did not write the application for accepting him as a member (...). The Executive of the Committee in Kleparz District [KD Kleparz] has thus decided to remove him from the Party candidate list".
- 30 Also known as *The Rally of Fighters for Peace* [Zlot Bojowników o Pokój].
- 31 Several dozen sketches 31.5 x 22.7 cm. In the property of the artist's family.
- 32 *The Union of Polish Youth Takes Command of the Air-force, and Russian Partisan* were shown in the *10 Years of Polish People's Army* exhibition held in Warsaw's Zachęta National Gallery of Art in 1953.
- 33 The letter to Andrzej Wajda, quoted from: Andrzej Borucki, „*Własna wojna*” *Andrzeja Wróblewskiego 1927–1957*, op. cit., p. 139. The recent collection of essays about Andrzej Wróblewski *Chłopiec na żółtym tle* (Kraków 2009) features a reproduction of a print signed by the artist with a different date of marriage: 12 September.
- 34 Jan Michalski, *Chłopiec na żółtym tle*, op. cit., p. 13.
- 35 The magazine was closed in October 1957, which led to student protests and riots in Warsaw.
- 36 Barbara Majewska, *Salon „PO PROSTU”*, "Przegląd Kulturalny", 23 September 1956.
- 37 Ignacy Witz, *Nowa wystawa „PO PROSTU”*, "Życie Warszawy", 18 September 1956, issue 223.
- 38 The Polish October, (also known as October 1956 or the Polish thaw), marked a change in the Polish political scene in the second half of 1956. The international situation, particularly the deaths of the Soviet Union's leader, Joseph Stalin, and of Polish communist leader Bolesław Bierut, weakened the conservative wing of the Party. Workers protests in Poznań showed people's dissatisfaction with their current situation. As a result, the reformers' faction, led by Władysław Gomułka, came to power. After brief yet tense negotiations with the Soviet Union, Gomułka was allowed to make several concessions resulting in wider autonomy for the Polish government. For the citizens of Poland this meant a temporary liberalisation of life in the country.
- 39 Barbara Majewska, *Poszukiwanie Andrzeja W.*, "Więź", June 2007.
- 40 The above date is reported on the artist's death certificate. Other sources also quote March 26 as Wróblewski's date of death.



# LIST OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

## OIL ON CANVAS

- Biological Abstraction* [Abstrakcja biologiczna], 1948  
120×90 cm, private collection. On the reverse of *Execution VI / Execution with a Gestapo Man*.
- Blue Chauffeur* [Szofer niebieski], 1948  
89×120 cm, private collection.
- Earth* [Ziemia], 1948  
90×120 cm, private collection.
- Geometrical Abstraction in Grey* [Abstrakcja geometryczna szara], 1948  
79.5×58.5 cm, Muzeum Śląskie, Katowice.
- Sky Above the Mountains* [Niebo nad górami], 1948  
90×120 cm, collection of Starmach Gallery.
- Sunken City I* [Zatopione miasto I], 1948  
89×119.5 cm, private collection.
- Execution VI / Execution with a Gestapo Man* [Rozstrzelanie VI / Rozstrzelanie z gestapowcem], 1949  
118×89 cm, private collection.
- Execution III / Execution of a Family* [Rozstrzelanie III / Rozstrzelanie rodziny], 1949  
120×89 cm, Vox Artis Foundation.
- Execution with a Boy* [Rozstrzelanie z chłopczykiem], 1949  
120×90.5 cm, National Museum, Poznań.
- Portrait of a Stakhanovite* [Portret przodownika pracy], 1951  
oil on cardboard, 64.5×51 cm, collection of the Museum of the Academy of Fine Art, Kraków.
- The Walk of the Lovers* [Spacer zakochanych], 1956  
85×61 cm, collection of Elżbieta and Jerzy Stelmach.
- The Queue Continues* [Kolejka trwa], 1956  
140×200 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.
- Chairing I* [Ukrzesłowienie I], 1956  
155×125 cm, National Museum, Kraków.
- The Lovers* [Zakochani], 1956  
170×100 cm, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź.
- The Tombstone of a Womanizer* [Nagrobek kobieciarza], 1956  
176×77 cm, Muzeum Okręgowe, Toruń.
- Head with Letters* [Głowa z literami], 1957  
79.5×55 cm, National Museum, Poznań.
- Man's Head on Red Background* [Głowa mężczyzny na czerwonym tle], 1957  
66×59 cm, Muzeum Okręgowe, Gorzów Wielkopolski.
- Organic Portrait* [Portret organiczny], 1957  
70×44 cm, collection of Elżbieta and Jerzy Stelmach.

## WORKS ON PAPER

- Don Quixote* [Don Kichot], 1944  
woodcut, 26×21.5 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Ball* [Bal], 1946  
woodcut, 11.5×11 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Dance* [Taniec], 1946  
woodcut, 7.2×4.7 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Juggler* [Żongler], 1946  
woodcut, 14.6×15.2 cm, private collection.
- Abstract Composition / Abstraction-Man* [Kompozycja abstrakcyjna / Abstrakcja-mężczyzna], 1948–1949  
watercolour, 22.6×22.6 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Abstract Composition (Triangles)* [Kompozycja abstrakcyjna (Trójkąty)], 1948–1949  
gouache, pencil, watercolour, 18.6×28.9 cm, property of the artist's family.
- A Man* [Człowiek], 1948–1949  
watercolour, 22.7×22.5 cm, collection of Maria and Marek Pileccy.
- Untitled* [Bez tytułu], 1948–1949  
watercolour, 29×18.5 cm, collection of Ego Gallery.
- Untitled* [Bez tytułu], 1948–1949  
watercolour, 28×18.5 cm, collection of Ego Gallery.
- Untitled (A Jacket)* [Bez tytułu (Marynarka)], sketch for *Execution* series, 1948–1949  
watercolour, 25.7×22.8 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Untitled* [Bez tytułu], sketch for *Surrealist Execution*, 1948–1949  
watercolour, pencil, 31.2×23.2 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Sky Above the City* [Niebo nad miastem], 1949  
gouache, ink, 31×41 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.
- Group of Students* [Grupa studentów], 1950  
litograph, 30.8×21.6 cm, property of the artist's family.
- At the Rally* [Na wiecu], 1950–1951  
watercolour, 13.9×10.4 cm, private collection.
- Striving Towards Excellence* [Dążenie do doskonałości], 1952  
ink, watercolour, 29.4×41.7 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Nowa Huta – Installation of an Element of the Great Furnace* [Nowa Huta – Montaż części Wielkiego Pieca], 1953  
ink, 29.6×41.8 cm, private collection.
- Installation of an Element of the Great Furnace (Nowa Huta)* [Montaż Wielkiego Pieca (Nowa Huta)], 1953  
ink, 41.8×29.6 cm, private collection.
- Untitled (Nowa Huta)* [Bez tytułu (Nowa Huta)], 1953  
ink, 41.8×29.6 cm, private collection.
- Farewell* [Rozstanie], 1953  
woodcut, 8×6 cm, private collection.
- Wilderness* [Pustkowie], 1955  
gouache, 29.6×42 cm, property of the artist's family.
- Houses on a Slope* [Domy na zboczu], 1956  
gouache, 29.6×42 cm, property of the artist's family.



*Green Skull* [Czaszka zielona], 1956  
gouache, 41.5×28.8 cm, collection of Elżbieta and Jerzy Stelmach.

*House and the Sun* [Dom i słońce], 1956  
gouache, 29.6×41.8 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Mountains* [Góry], 1956  
gouache, 30×40 cm, collection of Barbara and Tadeusz Czywczyński.

*Museum* [Muzeum], 1956  
ink, watercolour, 30×41 cm, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

*Standing Men* [Stojący], 1956  
gouache, 29.5×42 cm, collection of Barbara and Tadeusz Czywczyński.

*Torn Back* [Rozdarte plecy], 1956  
gouache, 42×29.5 cm, private collection.

*Torn Man II* [Człowiek rozdarty II], 1956  
gouache, 42×29.6 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Zampano VII*, 1956  
gouache, ink, watercolour, 41.7×29.5 cm, property of the artist's family.

*A Man* [Człowiek], 1957  
monotype, 42×30 cm, collection of Starmach Gallery.

*Black Barge* [Czarna barka], 1957  
gouache, 29.6×42 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Bust* [Popiersie], 1957  
monotype, 41.8×29.7 cm, collection of Starmach Gallery.

*Bust* [Popiersie], 1957  
gouache, 42×30 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Chauffeur and Passengers* [Szofer i pasażerowie], 1957  
ink, 29.6×42 cm, private collection.

*Dead Man* [Umarły], 1957  
gouache, 29.7×42 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Face* [Twarz], 1957  
monotype, 42×29.5 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Fish with Letters* [Ryba z literami], 1957  
monotype, 29.7×41 cm, private collection.

*Head* [Głowa], 1957  
monotype, 42×29.5 cm, Pakoska collection.

*Head* [Głowa], sketch for *Man's Head on Red Background* [Głowa mężczyzny na czerwonym tle], 1957  
gouache, ink, 42×30 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.

*Heart and a Rose* [Serce i róża], 1957  
monotype, 42×30 cm, collection of Starmach Gallery.

*Meeting* [Spotkanie], 1957  
monotype, 29.8×42 cm, collection of Starmach Gallery.

*Organic Portrait* [Portret organiczny], 1957  
monotype, 42×30 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.

*Shadow of Hiroshima I* [Cień Hiroszimy I], 1957  
monotype, 42×30 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.

*Skull on a Dark Background* [Czaszka na ciemnym tle], 1957  
gouache, 29.5×42 cm, property of the artist's family.

*Stumps* [Kikuty], 1957  
monotype, 42×30.2 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.

*Tombstone-Woman* [Kobieta-nagrobek], 1957  
gouache, 41.8×29.7 cm, Pakoska collection.

*Transformations* [Przekształcenia], 1957  
monotype, 41×30 cm, National Museum, Warsaw.

Titles of works on paper are in keeping with those given by Krystyna Wróblewska, the artist's mother, in 1957, whilst conducting an inventory of the collection in preparation for the artist's solo exhibition at the Palace of Art in Kraków (1958). The catalogue accompanying the exhibition features a list of titles, dates, and dimensions of the works.

For some works the English translation differs from that used in previous publications.

The works *Earth* and *Abstract Composition / Abstraction-Man* are exhibited according to a photograph from the artist's portfolio (currently in the possession of Gallery Zderzak, Kraków). The artist himself changed the way of exhibiting the painting *Earth* in his portfolio in relation to how the work was presented in 1948.

The intended position of the work *Emotional Content of the Revolution* featured in this volume is unclear. Most likely the current painting has been cut in half and its original size remains unknown. On the reverse of the canvas the artist painted the work *Train Station in the Recovered Territories*.

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- [1] *Museum* [Muzeum], 1956  
ink, watercolour, 30×41 cm, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, fot. B. Stawiarski
- [2] *Painting About the Horrors of War* [Obraz na temat okropności wojennych], 1948  
oil on canvas, 72×100 cm. Courtesy of the Muzeum Lubelskie, Lublin.
- [3] Photo of participants and organisers of the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art*, 1948. Front, left to right: Andrzej Cybulski, Ali Bunsch; sitting: Janina Kraupe, Jerzy Tcórzewski, Erna Rosenstein, Jadwiga Maziarska, Jadwiga Umińska; standing: Tadeusz Brzozowski, Jerzy Malina, Marek Włodarski, NN, Tadeusz Kantor, Maria Jarema, Jan Tarasin, Andrzej Wróblewski, Marian Szulc, Mieczysław Porębski, Kazimierz Mikulski, Maciej Makarewicz, Zofia Gutowska, Jerzy Nowosielski; upper row: Marian Sigmund, Kazimierz Wojtanowicz. Courtesy of the Starmach Gallery
- [4] Andrzej Wróblewski, *Spatial Model (Free-Standing Model)* [Model przestrzenny (Model wolnostojący)], 1948, bathroom geyser pipes, work destroyed. In the background is the model of Jadwiga Maziarska, wire and thread, in the collection of the National Museum in Kraków. Courtesy of the Starmach Gallery.
- [5] *Emotional Content of the Revolution* [Treść uczuciowa rewolucji], 1948  
oil on canvas, 128×198 cm, National Museum, Poznań, fot. A. Cieślowski.
- [6] *Sky* [Niebo], 1948  
oil on canvas, 90×120 cm. Courtesy of the Muzeum Wojska Polskiego, Warsaw.
- [7] *Child with Dead Mother* [Dziecko z zabitą matką], 1949  
oil on canvas, 119.5×70 cm. Courtesy of the National Museum, Kraków.
- [8] *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art*, 1948, main hall of the Palace of Art. In the background are works by Janina Kraupe, Jerzy Nowosielski, Zofia Gutkowska and Kazimierz Wojtanowicz. Courtesy of the Starmach Gallery.
- [9] *Blue Chauffeur* [Szofer niebieski], 1948  
oil on canvas, 89×120 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [10] *Fish with Letters* [Ryba z literami], 1957  
monotype, 29.7×41 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [11] *Chauffeur and Passengers* [Szofer i pasażerowie], 1957  
ink, 29.6×42 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [12] *Chauffeur with a Winter Landscape* [Szofer z zimowym pejzażem], 1957  
gouache, watercolour, 29.5×41.8 cm, National Museum, Warsaw, fot. P. Ligier.
- [13] *Abstract Composition / Abstraction-Man* [Kompozycja abstrakcyjna / Abstrakcja-męczyzna], 1948–1949  
watercolour, 22.6×22.6 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [14] *Abstract Composition (Triangles)* [Kompozycja abstrakcyjna (Trójkąty)], 1948–1949  
gouache, watercolour, pencil, 18.6×28.9 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [15] *Dance* [Taniec], 1946  
woodcut, 7.2×4.7 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [16] *Sky Above the Mountains* [Niebo nad górami], 1948  
oil on canvas, 90×120 cm. Courtesy of the Starmach Gallery.
- [17] *Geometrical Abstraction in Grey* [Abstrakcja geometryczna szara], 1948  
oil on canvas, 79.5×58.5 cm, Muzeum Śląskie, Katowice.
- [18] *Sunken City I* [Zatopione miasto I], 1948  
oil on canvas, 89×119.5 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [19] *Untitled* [Bez tytułu], sketch for *Surrealist Execution*, 1948–1949  
watercolour, pencil, 31.2×23.2 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [20] Shooting of the citizens of Bydgoszcz, 9 September 1939, Old Town Square, photograph in the collection of Leon Wyczółkowski District Museum, Bydgoszcz.
- [21] *Untitled* [Bez tytułu], sketch for the *Execution* series, 1949  
gouache, 67×90 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [22–23] *Untitled* [Bez tytułu], sketch for the *Execution* series, 1949  
gouache, 79×109 cm, two sides of one sheet, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [24] *Untitled (A Jacket)* [Bez tytułu (Marynarka)], sketch for the *Execution* series, 1948–1949  
watercolour, 25.7×22.8 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [25] *Execution V / Execution with a Boy* [Rozstrzelanie V / Rozstrzelanie z chłopczykiem], 1949  
oil on canvas, 120×90.5 cm, National Museum, Poznań, fot. A. Cieślowski.
- [26] *Execution VI / Execution with a Gestapo Man* [Rozstrzelanie VI / Rozstrzelanie z gestapowcem], 1949  
oil on canvas, 118×89 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [27] *Execution VIII / Surrealist Execution* [Rozstrzelanie VIII / Rozstrzelanie surrealistyczne], 1949  
oil on canvas, 129×198 cm, National Museum, Warsaw, fot. P. Ligier.
- [28] *Installation of an Element of the Great Furnace (Nowa Huta)* [Montaż Wielkiego Pieca (Nowa Huta)], 1953  
ink, 41.8×29.6 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [29] *Striving Towards Excellence* [Dążenie do doskonałości], 1952  
ink, watercolour, 29.4×41.7 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [30] *Group of Students* [Grupa studentów], 1950  
litograph, 30.8×21.6 cm, property of the artist's family, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [31] *At the Rally* [Na wiecu], 1950–1951  
watercolour, 13.9×10.4 cm, private collection, fot. P. Gacki / W. Grzybała.
- [32] *Train Station in the Recovered Territories* [Dworzec na Ziemiach Odzyskanych], 1949  
oil on canvas, 128×198 cm, National Museum, Poznań, fot. A. Cieślowski.

- [33] *Ball* [Bal], 1946  
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## THE AUTHORS

### **Zbigniew Dłubak (1921–2005)**

photographer, painter, art theorist, long-time editor of the "Fotografia" monthly, and one of the most eminent figures in Polish photographic circles after 1945. Dłubak had his photographic debut in 1947 with experimental works that referred to the avant-garde tradition of the interwar period. In the years 1947–1949 he was an active figure in the re-establishment of artistic life in Poland, at the same time remaining in active military service. He was a member of the visual arts section of Warsaw's Club of Young Artists and Scientists [Klub Młodych Artystów i Naukowców], where, in 1948, he had his debut solo photographic exhibition. A couple of months later he took part in the *1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition of Modern Art* in Kraków. In the years 1953–1972 he was the editor-in-chief of "Fotografia" magazine. He also collaborated with galleries in Warsaw, such as Krzywe Koło, Współczesna, Foksal and Remont, as well as in Wrocław: Permafo and Seminarium-Foto-Medium-Art.

### **Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska (b. 1978)**

graduated in Art History from Warsaw University, currently works in the Department of Graphic Arts and Contemporary Drawings at the National Museum in Warsaw. She has curated the following exhibitions: *Transformations, Andrzej Wróblewski 1956–1957* (State Gallery of Art, Sopot / Królikarnia, department of the National Museum, Warsaw 2004), *Existences. Polish Avant-Garde Photography in the Second Half of the 1950s* (National Museum, Warsaw 2005), *Andrzej Wróblewski 1927–1957. On the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Artist's Death* (National Museum, Warsaw 2007), *Marek Piasecki. Fragile* (Zachęta National Gallery, Warsaw 2008–2009). She is working towards her PhD thesis devoted to issues of the body in the work of Andrzej Wróblewski.

### **Andrzej Kostolowski (b. 1940)**

curator, art critic and theorist, professor and lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław and in Poznań. Author of a number of significant critical papers on art in post-war Poland, including pioneering texts about Andrzej Wróblewski one of which is published in this volume. In 1972, with Jarosław Kozłowski, he founded "NET", a platform for free exchange of thought. In the late 1960s and 1970s he was involved in conceptual art events in Poland. Author of numerous publications, including a volume of collected writings *Art and Its Meta-* [Sztuka i jej meta-], Poznań 2005, as well as texts in the magazines "Arteon" and "Format". He received the award of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for visual arts.

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Andrzej Kostolowski, *From Studies on the Oeuvre of Andrzej Wróblewski (1927–1957). The Period Before 1949* [Z badań nad twórczością Andrzeja Wróblewskiego (1927–1957). Okres do roku 1949], "Studia muzealne", 1968, issue 6, pp. 124–144. The text has been revised and edited with the author's permission.

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# COLOPHON

## ANDRZEJ WRÓBLEWSKI. TO THE MARGIN AND BACK

Van Abbemuseum  
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Cover image: view from the airplane during the trip by Andrzej Wróblewski and Barbara Majewska to Yugoslavia, October–November 1956, collection of Barbara Majewska.

Page 166: photograph of Barbara Majewska and Andrzej Wróblewski by Lake Ohrid, Yugoslavia, October–November 1956, collection of Barbara Majewska.









I want to step out of myself, go beyond,  
achieve the impossible, fulfil an exceptional task,  
realise a vision, create an absolutely convincing painting,  
build it with decisions.

Andrzej Wróblewski (1927–1957)

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