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A FIRECRACKER, A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL? THE FIRST POLISH PROGRAMME OF RESIDENTIAL STAYS FOR ARTISTS IN THE US

A Filmic 'Love Story'

The story of art residency described here begins like the screen-play of a melodrama. Let us imagine a Polish woman emigrant who, in the early nineteen-sixties, finds herself, slightly against her will, in the US. Her name is Ewa Janina Pelczar, she possesses an uncommon beauty and arrives there at behest of her brother. The latter had gone missing during the Second World War, but was found in Chicago, to which, immediately after re-establishing his connection with the family, he brought his parents.¹ In the sixties, they are already people of an advanced age, so help is required in his care of the parents. He, therefore, writes to his sister, who was born in Lvov in the thirties, and

is a student in Łódź at the time, has an interest in art and design, and is rather ill-disposed towards permanent settlement on the other side of the Atlantic. In Poland, she would have to abandon her budding career of an applied art designer, her carefully constructed network of contacts in elite Warsaw society, and a partner. Her sense of duty, nonetheless, wins.

Despite her poor command of English, Pelczar starts studying at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and strives to devote herself to design. She is hardly successful, so – like a majority of emigrants – she takes up an array of unrewarding jobs. Then, she becomes a secretary to two medical doctors. The wife of one of the doctors takes a liking to her, so, seeking company, takes her shopping, introduces Pelczar to her friends

and into the milieu of the American middle class. Here, the plot twists, since at a certain point – like the Cinderella story – Pelczar meets Walter Pape, a milk industry tycoon. Older than Pelczar, Pape falls in love with her and they are married in 1965. Pelczar takes her husband's last name and begins to appear in the arts (as well as in Polish diaspora) milieus as Eva Pape, or Ewa Pape. She moves to New York. Having substantial funds at her disposal and a network of connections, she decides to take up organising exhibitions, primarily of Polish artists. It would be difficult to overestimate her role in promoting Polish art in the US: she organised tens of exhibitions (from the Primitivists to the neo-avant-garde), initiated donations or sales of works by Polish artists to large art institutions (including MoMA and the Alcoa Collection of Contemporary Art).² In the seventies, she headed (and later co-headed) an art gallery in Los Angeles, and, most pertinent to the context of this text, she made a significant contribution to establishing the art residencies that are the subject of this text.

Specificity of the Kościuszko Foundation

In order to capture the specificity of this enterprise, it is worth noting that up to this point the Kościuszko Foundation had seldom financed the stays of visual artists in the US, and then only sporadically. The Foundation was officially established in 1925, on the initiative of Stephen Mizwa, who had emigrated from Poland as a child under the name of Szczepan Mierzwa. He later became a lecturer in economics at Drake University and a social activist interested in matters of the Polish diaspora. One of flagship ventures of the organisation was then and, to this day, remains the Kościuszko Foundation Chopin Piano Competition, organised since 1949. Another crucial project was the 1959 publication of their English-Polish dictionary. The institution also sponsored other publishing initiatives, e.g. bilingual comic books, published in Poland in the seventies, describing

the beginnings of the Polish state. A note-worthy element of the activities of the Foundation was their involvement in a campaign against jokes about Polish people, popular in the sixties and seventies in the US, the so-called 'Polack jokes,' as well as, similarly, but much later, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, their condemnation of the use of the phrase, 'Polish concentration camps,' in the American public debate.

These are only several instances of the institution's wide range of activities. Many more could be enumerated;³ however, the Foundation dealt chiefly in a broadly understood popularisation of Polish culture and science in the US as well as regularly sponsored exchanges of American youth and academics of Polish origin to Poland. It has also been organising reverse exchanges, dedicating a considerable portion of its funds to visits from Polish physicians, physicists, chemists, economists, philosophers, historians and, obviously, musicians, to support their stays in American research units, to engage in lectures and meetings in centres of Polish diaspora as well as concerts. Until the seventies, representatives of the visual arts had been missing from those circles; this was most probably related to the personal interest of Mr. Mizwa, the long-standing president of the Foundation, who seemed to have a profound fascination with classical music. Emphasis ought to be placed on the fact that activities of the institution were consistently apolitical in character. Amidst Poles invited to the US in various periods, people of disparate social, political and ideological provenance could be found, e.g.: Karol Wojtyła (a cardinal of Roman Catholic Church and the future pope), Jacek Kuroń (an activist and one of leaders of left-wing oriented anti-communist movement), Stanisław Mackiewicz (a conservatist and pro-monarchist dissident), or Władysław Bartoszewski (a dissident and journalist). Neither did the Foundation hesitate to collaborate in production of various cultural projects with the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, which distinguished this milieu sharply from, e.g., the Polish diaspora that had settled in the UK. Nevertheless, the ideological pluralism or apolitical stance sometimes became a subject of allegations

made by representatives of different Polish émigré milieus, e.g. that of the Paris *Kultura*.⁴

A certain interest in the visual arts from the Kościuszko Foundation can be observed only in the mid-sixties, when Eugene Kusielewicz became assistant to its president. This coincides – probably not accidentally – with the development of Eva Pape’s curatorial activities. The Foundation archive contains a letter from Paul C. Denney, Jr., a lecturer at the Iowa Wesleyan College, dated to the October 7, 1965, addressed to Stephen Mizwa. It includes a request for information about English-language book-length publications on Polish art. Replying on behalf of Mizwa, in a letter of the October 11 of that year, Kusielewicz points out two (a book by Irena Lorentowicz that I am unfamiliar with and an equally mysterious UNESCO publication), while also emphasising a definitive dearth of other, similar items on the English-speaking book market. The situation – as well as, perhaps, many others – must have caught Kusielewicz’s interest, since, in March 1968, he sent a semi-official letter to Stanisław Lorenz, the director of the National Museum in Warsaw at the time, claiming that the Foundation has been ‘bombarded with demands for information about Polish painters and painting,’ as well as asking if he could receive copies of books concerned with Polish art, classical and contemporary, from the Museum. On the occasion, he added – which demonstrates the specificity of the period relations between the US Polish diaspora and the state authorities – that he would rather have avoided any intermediation from the Polish government in satisfying his demand, while the thought of the ministerial bureaucracy’s slow pace of work had previously deterred him entirely from any conceivable completion of the task. One point which demonstrates the poor relations at the time between the US Polish diaspora and the Polish state authorities is Kusielewicz’s statement, in his letter, that he would prefer to avoid any interaction with the Polish government in his request for these books. In addition he refers to the ministerial bureaucracy’s slow pace of work which had deterred him from expecting any outcome should he have approached them in this matter.

It seems, however (although these are merely my suppositions), that a key role in persuading Kusielewicz to broaden the scope of the Foundation activities to the visual arts was played by Eva Pape (and, perhaps, her husband’s money and connections). Letters preserved in the Foundation archive, exchanged between them in the seventies, testify to an intimate relationship between the Papes and the Kusielewiczs. While their subject matter – exhibitions, her collection and art events organised by Eva Pape with the Foundation – also points towards her firm determination in promoting Polish art in the US. Regardless of whichever motivations or whatever persons influenced Kusielewicz’s decision, his commitment in this respect was significant enough for him to explore the possibility of co-producing with the Polish National Television a series of documentaries dedicated to Polish artists in the United States. When Kusielewicz became the president of the Kościuszko Foundation in 1971, Polish visual artists started becoming regular recipients of the Foundation’s scholarships. It was precisely during his term of office, or almost throughout the decade of the seventies, that the institution was inviting Polish artists to the US with the highest frequency in its history. Since the eighties, the scholarships have been awarded to visual artists ever more rarely. I will, however, return to this point later.

Westbeth – Cheap, Unsafe and...

Prestigious

One of Kusielewicz’s first moves with the aim of organising arrivals of Polish artists, was to rent premises in a building called Westbeth. This place has achieved, a near-cultic status among Polish authors over the years. An interesting report was penned by Piotr Korduba, who describes the building in the following manner:

Westbeth is an artist house situated in the West Village neighbourhood on Lower Manhattan, a non-profit housing community

composed of five combined buildings. ... They were erected in the early 20th century as a location for laboratories concerned with image and sound transmission (Bell Telephone Laboratories). ... In the 1960s, a decision was made to transform the complex, with the support from private donations, into a set of apartments and studios for artists. It was a pioneering idea at the time and the first adaptive reuse of such large post-industrial spaces for residential purposes in the United States. Richard Meier was entrusted with the task ... the architect transformed its interiors into 383 studio-apartments, including also common spaces, a gallery and facilities to rent. ... According to a New York Times report from May 1970, 150 painters, 49 sculptors, 27 photographers, 29 writers, 26 musicians, 38 actors, 18 dancers, 14 filmmakers, 11 playwrights, 7 poets, 9 composers, 7 architects, 7 scenographers, 7 engravers, 3 designers, 4 graphic artists, 5 artisans, 4 theatre directors, hundreds of children and a plethora of animals moved in.⁵

Admittedly, Kusielewicz could not have chosen a better location to accommodate Polish artists. Low rents (110-190\$) resulted in a situation in which “at the very moment the first lodgers moved in, the Westbeth apartment, the waiting list was as long as a thousand people,”⁶ which suggests that either the Kościuszko Foundation was extremely fortunate, or it had made use of its wide influence to secure an apartment. By 1972, therefore, the institution became a tenant of one of the premises at Westbeth.

Currently, the immediate vicinity of Westbeth – the windows of which overlook the Hudson River and New Jersey – is a home to people such as Calvin Klein, Julianne Moore or Annie Leibovitz, and the area is peaceful. In the seventies, however, this was not the case. West Broadway had not yet become an art district, there were butcher shops and meat wholesalers in the neighbourhood. Throughout the day, the place was noisy, and prostitutes, thieves and other criminals came out at

night. One protagonist of Korduba’s report recounts: “When we moved in, my musician husband handed his trumpet over to me from our window straight to our car, because he worried that if he were to walk down the small stretch of the street with it, it would have been stolen.”⁷ Nonetheless, cheap flats attracted artists and the building had such renowned residents as, for example, Diane Arbuse (who lived there until her death by suicide in 1971) and Merce Cunningham, who had a studio there. The list of residents was closed in 2007, and now their majority is composed of the children of those who had been the original occupants. Until this day, also, the Kościuszko Foundation has maintained their premises there. It provides a residence not only for artists but is also subtle to other scholarship holders or private individuals.

Which Polish art makers stayed there? No official register of artists who received scholarships from the Foundation was kept, with the exact same lack of record keeping that pertained in every other profession. A list of artists (and all the other individuals) arriving in the US on scholarships from the Foundation can be reconstructed on the basis of several types of sources. One may be correspondence with the Foundation authorities (however, very few letters of this sort have been preserved), bills, receipts and other accounting records (there are very few of those as well, records kept refer to no more than the last twenty years), or *The Kościuszko Foundation Newsletter*⁸ – which is the most valuable source, albeit also often imprecise – which, yearly, published lists of scholarship recipients, indicating the purpose for which the funding was granted. However, we are facing two fundamental issues here. First, until the late eighties, information about grant-recipients was published for an academic year. Hence, we are informed about arrivals in, for example, 1973/74, 1974/75 etc. Theoretically, this should cover a time period extending from autumn of one year, e.g. 1973, until the summer of the next, 1974. Nevertheless, in numerous instances, it is difficult to ascertain whether a given person arrived already in the autumn of 1973, or only in the winter of 1974 (or, in practical terms,

already during the following financial year). Such events did sometimes occur, since – and this is the second issue – scholarship holders did not arrive at a specified time, and their stays were sometimes rescheduled. The list of artists arriving for their scholarships ought to be corrected on the basis of other sources, which is not always feasible. Chances of a precise reconstruction of the list are also further reduced by the very financial structure of the Kościuszko Foundation, which operates a number of funds created by different donors and divided into various programmes. The two most significant programmes, which contributed to funding scholarships for artists, were those named after Sanislav Chylinski and Alfred Jurzykowski. Scholarships awarded as part of those programmes were recorded by the newsletter. Nonetheless, it sometimes happened that artists had their stays sponsored by other funds, so their names appear in the correspondence, for example, but they are absent from the newsletter records. And, to further complicate the question, the list of scholarship holders also includes artists whose names do not appear in the Foundation authorities' official correspondence. In such cases, when a particular artist is no longer living, it is difficult to verify if they turned up at the residency. Issues with establishing the list arise already with reference to the first scholarship recipients and continues as a model situation for the decade. Based on the newsletter, we know that the first scholarships in visual arts were awarded for the 1970/71 period; the decision must, therefore, have been made at least a year before Kusielewicz assumed the office of president. The scholarships were awarded to Krzysztof Bielec, Paweł Bielec, Wiesław Borowski, Tadeusz Łapiński, Bogdan Skupiński, and Marian Warzecha.⁹ Since Skupiński and Warzecha also appear among the recipients a year later,¹⁰ one can assume that their arrival was postponed by a dozen months. Also, Wiesław Borowski, who received the scholarship once again in 1989, disappears from the records for twenty years. In an official letter to Eva Pape of the November 4, 1975, Eugene Kusielewicz lists fourteen artists, who turned up in New York in the years 1971-75, and three who

were about to arrive (the complete list provided in Kusielewicz's letter of the November 4, 1975: 1971-1972: Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Dobkowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, Teresa Rudowicz, Marian Warzecha, Stanisław Wiśniewski; 1972-1973: Roman Opalka, Ryszard Winiarski; 1973-1974: Witold Masznicz, Janusz Przybylski, Stefan Żechowski; 1974-1975: Franciszek Starowieyski, Feliks Szyszko; 1975-1976: Jan Berdyszak, Zdzisław Jurkiewicz (awaiting arrival), Marta Kramer (awaiting arrival), Henryk Ziembicki (awaiting arrival). But then, again, the newsletters of the period feature artists not listed by Kusielewicz. They are often figures who did not make a particular mark on the history of Polish art, their monographs are not in existence, they are sometimes dead, and any access to people capable of verifying the truth of the information is difficult, if not impossible. Neither later records, nor the aforementioned letter bear any mention of Krzysztof Bielec and Paweł Bielec, so they are likely not to have arrived. All in all, it is highly probable that none of the artists listed above arrived in 1970 and 1971. However, thanks to Kusielewicz's letter, we do know that, for the academic year 1971/72, Zbigniew Dłubak, Jan Dobkowski, Zbigniew Gostomski, Teresa Rudowicz, Marian Warzecha, and Stanisław Wiśniewski were invited, and certainly arrived in New York. Numerous other sources provide additional confirmation of the fact. It was these artists who were the first residents of the Kościuszko Foundation to stay at Westbeth.

The Moving Spirit and the Tacit Advisor

Eva Pape might not have become the purported moving spirit of art residencies in Westbeth if not for the person of Jagoda Przybylak. And it can certainly be claimed that without Przybylak's contribution, the residencies would have had an entirely different character. Both women had met in Poland in the late fifties. Jagoda Przybylak, an architect by education, was intensely invested in photography and maintained excellent social relations with numerous young artists from Warsaw. It was precisely due to these connections,

that Eva Pape gradually came to make the acquaintance of the Polish art milieu, particularly that of Warsaw, both before her emigration and later, when she visited Poland from the US. Thus, she became acquainted with the *crème de la crème* of the current local neo-avant-garde, including: Edward Krasiński, Ryszard Winiarski, Roman Opalka, and numerous other, equally significant artists. An essential factor in this exchange is that Jagoda Przybylak travelled regularly to New York, and based on her knowledge of trends in the art of the time, she could advise Eva Pape on matters of visual art. Most important for the topic of this paper is that her presence in New York in the period and her role as an unofficial advisor to Eva Pape, makes Jagoda Przybylak a valuable source of knowledge on the initial period of residencies at Westbeth and the outsets of the Kościuszko Foundation scholarships for visual artists.

If we take a closer look at the list of arrivals, Jagoda Przybylak's influence is plainly evident. Among the names listed by Kusielewicz, there is a predominance of representatives of the Warsaw milieu, with slight touches from Krakow. Moreover, many are connected to the Foksal Gallery, or the milieu in which Przybylak, too, was socially engaged. This leads to the question of the criteria adopted by the Kościuszko Foundation in awarding its grants. Przybylak's memoirs feature the motif of consultations both ladies undertook – noteworthy, at Przybylak's explicit request – with art critics and historians, among which she mentions: Bożena Kowalska, Maria Bogucka and Janusz Boguski, and Ryszard Stanisławski, the director of the Museum of Art in Łódź at the time. No documents have been preserved in the Foundation archive that could point to communications with the four individuals. The consultations, therefore, must have been held informally and taken place directly during Jagoda Przybylak's and Eva Pape's sojourns in Poland.

If we were to refer, on the other hand, to the list of artists mentioned by Kusielewicz, we observe a great variety, which becomes even more evident, when we scrutinise the list of artists invited until this day. This is reminiscent of the Foundation's previously discussed ideological pluralism,

transpiring in inviting such disparate figures as Stanisław Mackiewicz and Jacek Kuron. In the case of the visual arts, the pluralism is manifest on at least four levels. First, artists awarded the scholarship represented very different artistic strategies, from graphic arts (Jan Lenica), through textiles (Barbara Maryńska), to performance art (Krzysztof Zarębski) or multimedia art (Izabela Gustowska). Second, they presented the whole array of political attitudes, from indifference (Andrzej Pityński) to membership of the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) (Zbigniew Dłubak). The differentiation also concerns the position of invited artists in the art milieu: we encounter here consummate celebrities, artists recognised already in the seventies (Franciszek Starowieyski) and individuals barely known both then and now. Fourth, the artists selected by the Foundation included individuals producing extremely interesting, ambitious, experimental work as well as authors of pieces which were, so to speak, imitative or conservative. It is worth adding, in this context, that there are occurrences of artists who, today, are valued or even considered contemporary classics, but who did not receive a scholarship or a grant. This was the case with Tomasz Ciecierski who, in a letter to Kusielewicz of the September 3, 1974, incidentally, written in two versions – in perfect Polish and in broken English – asks for funds to cover travel costs to his exhibition in New York. If he received any money at all, it was certainly not part of the two leading programmes mentioned above: his name is not to be found in the newsletters.

Staying in New York

The Kościuszko Foundation gave the money without any restrictions on how recipients should spend their time. It did not organise studio visits, meeting, consultations etc. The scholarship residencies were not formalised: it was up to those arriving how they organised their time. Certainly, in the seventies, a significant role was played by the above-mentioned Jagoda Przybylak, who, whenever she was around, performed the role of minder and guide. Interestingly, the first artists

to arrive in New York were disappointed that Eva Pape was not to be found there. The curator lived, then, in Los Angeles where she ran an art gallery. Young Warsaw artists felt let down by the fact, as they had been expecting that, thanks to Pape, they would get to know potential collectors or gallery owners. Pape, of course, assisted the artists, but not through facilitating their direct contacts with representatives of the local artistic milieu, but rather by organising exhibitions or lobbying buyers and institutions maintaining their own collections. In any case, due to such a free nature of the stay, it is difficult to give a precise description of the things particular art-makers did or focused on. Sometimes, the newsletters provide information that a given artist was awarded the scholarship for 'acquainting themselves with current trends in American art.' True as it certainly was, the justification is no more than a glib formula, typically included in grant applications, which, in fact, may mean anything whatsoever.

In the seventies, the residential stay lasted three or four months. If we calculate the amount received from the scholarship, it turns out that it equals 7\$ of spending money per day. Despite the sum being far from impressive in New York terms, artists residing in Westbeth tightened their belts as much as they could to bring some of their money back home. The fact is mentioned both by Jagoda Przybylak as well as by Krzysztof Zarębski, one of the scholarship recipients whom I managed to interview.¹¹ The purchasing power of the dollar in comparison to the Polish złoty must have, doubtlessly, been a powerful motivation; to the extent that (according to Jadwiga Przybylak) a number of artists in the seventies decided to take the sea passage. The journey lasted ten days, but it cost much less than a flight and helped to keep some of the money.

We can suppose that the principal purpose and the greatest desire cherished by those arriving in New York was to find a gallery, a collector or an institution that would agree to show their work, which might have allowed them to return or even settle there. Certainly, those desires were supported by Pape. We should add that, probably, the only

formal requirement from the artists on the part of the Foundation was the preparation of a report from their residency. If it happened that an artist had an exhibition, or their works were accepted or purchased by an institution, every such instance was scrupulously recorded by *The Kościuszko Foundation Newsletter*. There are, however, only a few of such published reports; they are also missing from the archive. One might, therefore, form the impression that either it was difficult to obtain such reports or rarely anything written there merited publication. A typical published report goes, more or less, as the following statement from Tomasz Tatarczyk:

Your grant let me become acquainted with the new trends of contemporary American and world art and gave me the opportunity to show my works in New York. (...) I could realize my plans in having an exhibition of my painting in New York. They were exhibited in two galleries: The Soho Center for Visual Artists, from January 14 to 20 February, 1988 (a two-man show) and in the Frank Bustamante Gallery, from January 19 to February 6, 1988 (a one man show). (...) I want to let you know that two of my works were chosen by curators of museum collections. One of them is at present in the Everson Museum of Art w Syracuse, NY, and the other in the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art w Ridgefield, CT. The period of my stay in the United States was a very important artistic and practical experience for me and I am sure it will have a great influence on my future painting creativity.¹²

When notes procured by editors appear, they sound, more or less, like the remarks concerning Roman Opalka's residency:

While here, the American art world was so impressed that he found a gallery which arranged to exhibit his works. Prior to having exhibited his works at the John

Weber Gallery, in Soho (N.Y.), he had already exhibited successfully in Poland, Italy and England. (...) His works have been acquired by many museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, in New York.¹³

Thus, we receive a formula which sketches an artist's profile and their successes, subsequently mentioning instances of recognition on the American market. A similar blueprint refers to many other artists presented in the newsletter. In Opalka's case, things might have not unfolded as fortunately if not for a certain accident. Jagoda Przybylak recounts that the period of Opalka's stay in New York coincided with his name day. The name's day party at Westbeth was supposed to have been attended by her female friends, who, however, did not turn up. On the following day, Przybylak phoned them to express her displeasure. One of the women, whose boyfriend was a New York sculptor, having a guilty conscience, decided to ask her partner to introduce Opalka to several gallery owners, as a recompense. As we have seen, quite effectively.

Eva Pape's assistance could be just as effective. We learn about it from a letter she sent to Janusz Przybylski.¹⁴ On the one hand, she sharply demands that Przybylski does not sell paintings to collectors behind her back and, on the other, she reminds him about sending two "recently promised" paintings she requires for an exhibition in an unspecified museum, a presentation for Polish National Television and for one channel of an American television. Przybylski would also have been happy to be included in an exhibition, about which we learn from a piece of correspondence between Pape and one of the Kościuszko Foundation board members, Walter Golaski, from July 1975. The curator writes there that 'before Kusielewicz became president, no visual artist had received a scholarship,' and since then, it was possible to invite and successfully exhibit such artists as: Warzecha, Dobkowski, Opalka, Masznisz, Winiarski, Gostomski, Przybylski, Starowieyski (sic!), Szyszko, adding that it was the *crème de la crème* of the Polish art world. It would be difficult

not to appreciate her efforts, exactly like the efforts of the Kościuszko Foundation, bearing in mind trends in the American art of the period. There is no concealing that despite the majority of artists invited in the 1970s having enjoyed the position of local stars of the neo-avant-garde in Poland, separated by the Iron Curtain, their output must already have seemed slightly outmoded on the American market. After all, they were not bringing novelties there like French artists several decades before them, but rather works which stylistically might have seemed somewhat derivative from the perspective of the Western world. Pape, organising exhibitions of Fangor or Stazewski, faced the task of competing with the rich output of American abstractionism and minimalism. Besides, it was not even a question of novelty of the medium or stylistics: art from Central Europe evoked no concrete associations, even when actions which could easily compete with the American avant-garde were proposed. Such was the case of Natalia LL, the Kościuszko Foundation scholarship holder for 1977. Despite her efforts, including meetings with Leo Castelli, among others, 'America was not ready for it,' to paraphrase the humorous title of Karol Radziszewski's film, dedicated precisely to her visit in the US.¹⁵

As could be expected, individual artists variously tackled their residential stays in the United States and made different uses of the opportunities that arose before them. There were those among them who decided to remain in the US or return there shortly after completing their scholarship period. Based on documents in the Kościuszko Foundation archive as well as interviews with Jagoda Przybylak and Mieczysław Rudak – a collector living in New York since the eighties and the owner of the Emart Gallery – it can be assumed that, from the Foundation scholarship recipients, three decided to permanently settle in the United States. These were (in temporal order of their residencies): Andrzej Pityński, Krzysztof Zarebski, and Barbara Maryńska. The former gained popularity, devoting himself to monumental sculpture in public space. His projects are often concerned with national subject matter, and

his hallmark work is, perhaps, the monument commemorating victims of the Katyń massacre, set in New Jersey. Krzysztof Zarębski settled in the US two years after his scholarship, in 1980, and took part in activities of the independent New York art scene, associating with the Rivington School Artists group as well as continuing his individual work, frequently showing his pieces in Poland. Barbara Maryańska, who arrived on her scholarship in 1987, in order to become acquainted with techniques of textiles production developed by Native Americans, also became integrated into the activities of the American art scene. She moved from textiles to painting and, currently, she also works as an exhibition curator and runs her own independent gallery in Beacon, a town north of New York, where she also lives.

Westbeth Once More?

If we take into account all the artists about whose scholarships we are informed through the contents of *The Kościuszko Foundation Newsletter* and we complement those with information from other documents, we can estimate that, since 1971, around seventy artists arrived in the US. In the space of nearly fifty years, two tendencies can be observed. Firstly, since the eighties, it is noticeable that, besides artists from Warsaw and Krakow, artists from other cities also appear, Poznań or Łódź, for example. Secondly, a decrease in the number of artists awarded scholarships is visible as well. While in the seventies about fifty artists arrived in the US, in the three following decades, there were merely twenty. For these reasons, this text resonates primarily with the first decade in which the Foundation started to finance residencies for visual artists.

Reasons for the decreasing number of scholarship recipients may vary; one of them is a change in the Foundation leadership: in the early eighties, Eugene Kusielewicz ceased to serve as the Foundation president, and his successors paid less attention to promoting this particular section of Polish culture. The niche character of

contemporary art determines the fact that it is more difficult to advertise Poland by visual art, without drawing on music, theatre or cinema. Another reason might lie in the fact that a decision was made by the next president of the Foundation to shift the emphasis: since the seventies, an informal association, the Pro Arte League, has been connected to the Kościuszko Foundation. Its members have been people, mostly women, who organised exhibitions, avocationally, and for charitable purposes, chiefly at the Foundation's seat on 65 East Street. As this was a fund raising exercise rather than a professional gallery event it was characterised by pieces whose quality left much to be desired, while one of the hallmark events of the associations became a fashion show, helping to raise funds for operations of the Foundation.¹⁶ This event might have stemmed from the institution's financial situation, the jumble, however, surely does little to support avant-garde art. The seventies were, therefore, a time when the Foundation opened up to actively supporting visual arts, which has become a permanent feature of its activities, but the number of art scholarship have been, subsequently, reduced, apparently shifting the emphasis to the activities of the Pro Arte League.

It is also worth noting that the premises in Westbeth – a place intended by Kusielewicz to serve artists – has stopped being used exclusively for this purpose. The place may operate sometimes as a residence for artists, these days, however, it is most often sublet for commercial purposes, in order to supplement the Foundation budget. Another reason might, arguably, be the fact that a large section of scholarship recipients – unlike in the seventies – does not stay in New York, but rather heads towards residencies in institutions in various corners of the US. The Foundation, in such cases, serves the sole role of residency sponsor, but is not obliged to secure an apartment. Hence, the artists turn up at Westbeth ever more rarely.

Numerous themes surface in this text which could be developed on a more general level and situated in a number of contexts: political, economic, migratory, or post-colonial. For many Poles, the perspective of spending several months

in the US still belongs to the fantasy of the quest for and conquest of Eldorado, despite the fact that economic disproportions between the two countries have, indeed, changed greatly in comparison to the potential of the People's Republic of Poland in the seventies. In a period when the Iron Curtain separated the two economic-ideological formations, leaving provincial Poland for an art residential stay in the capital of contemporary art, which New York was considered to be at the time, had a much larger weight than it has today. Staying at the 'capital' offered a glimmer of hope for an international career, but it was mostly related to opportunities of achieving or stabilising an artist's visibility of the art scene back in Poland. The times have changed and New York, the US or the West, in general, have ceased to play the role of the Promised Land in mass imagination. The living standards in Poland are gradually levelling with those in Western countries or, at least, the differences are not as vast as they were two decades ago. There is no censorship or information blockage to speak of any longer. Ever more often, Polish tourism loses its financial motivation and becomes a leisure or a cultural activity. The latter is especially true of artists, who go on art residencies globally.

Residential stays as a way to make art have become highly popular in the past ten or twenty years. If we were to approach the activities of the Kościuszko Foundation in this manner, its work in the field of visual art could be described as the first residential programme for Polish artists to be established in the United States, and, perhaps, the first in the world. Yet, the history of residencies organised by the Kościuszko Foundation is not unlike a firecracker. From its vehement illumination in the mid-seventies, when several tens of artists appeared in New York, to a gradual dying-out and its later, humble glowing up to this day; in the last decade, only a few artists came to New York at the invitation of the Kościuszko Foundation, and the very existence of the programme is a little known fact in the social history of Polish visual arts. Nevertheless, this text is a brief overview which aims, above all, to delineate a basic factual account related

to the functioning of artistic scholarships within the activities of the Kościuszko Foundation and is focused only on its early stages. Studies situating the phenomenon – of migration or, simply, artists' travels – in the context of relations between cultural centres and peripheries, economic inequalities, censorship, or cultural memory, in reference to the discussed Foundation, might still be undertaken in future.

Audio:

Interview conducted by Łukasz Białkowski with Jagoda Przybylak: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/rozmowa-z-jagoda-przybylak-o-rezdydencjach-artystycznych-w-westbeht-w-nowym-jorku>

Interview conducted by Łukasz Białkowski with Krzysztof Zarębski: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/krzysztof-zarebski-opowiada-o-westbeth-i-początkach-pobytu-w-nowym-jorku>

Notes

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all information about Eva Pape come from Jagoda Przybylak, with whom I conducted an interview on the August 16, 2017 at her apartment in the New York borough of Brooklyn, in the neighbourhood of Greenpoint. A recording of the conversation is available at: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/rozmowa-z-jagoda-przybylak-o-rezydencjach-artystycznych-w-westbeht-w-nowym-jorku>.

² "The Remarkable Ewa Pape," *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 31, no. 9 (308) (1976): 6-7. Henceforth, *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* is abbreviated to *KFN*. All material taken from the source is anonymous.

³ For example, sponsoring, together with the Alfred Jurzykowski Foundation, the establishment of the Faculty of Geology, Geophysics and Environmental Protection at the AGH University of Science and Technology, Krakow, in the nineties, to the amount of 100,000\$.

⁴ A leading Polish-émigré literary-political magazine, published from 1947 to 2000 initially in Rome and then in Paris.

⁵ Piotr Korduba, "Dom starego hipstera (The House of the Old Hipster)," *Wysokie Obcasy*, 19.09.2015.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ The newsletter was not a typical one, publishing brief items of information about activities of the Foundation; numerous issues operated as a platform for public discussion, raising issues that were crucial to the US Polish diaspora, such as the aforementioned "Polack jokes" or polemical responses to allegations from the Paris *Kultura*.

⁹ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 25, no. 10 (1971): 2-3. Wiesław Borowski, in a direct conversation with the author of this article, pointed out that he appeared in New York several years later. However, he could not remember the precise date, while the preserved records remain silent on the subject of his presence there.

¹⁰ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 26, no. 10 (1972): 12.

¹¹ A recording of my interview with Krzysztof Zarębski is available here: <https://soundcloud.com/ukasz-bia-kowski-921729330/krzysztof-zarebski-opowiada-o-westbeth-i-początkach-pobytu-w-nowym-jorku>.

¹² Original spelling, *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 39, no. 4 (1988): 8.

¹³ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 31, no. 9 (1976-77).

¹⁴ The letter is in the Kościuszko Foundation archive, its date remains unknown.

¹⁵ Karol Radziszewski, *America Is Not Ready For This*, 2012.

¹⁶ *The Kosciuszko Foundation Newsletter* 43, no. 4 (1992-1993): 10.

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