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THE THAW, OR WARMING IN KRAKÓW'S ARTISTIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS WITH THE WEST, AND CONSEQUENCES TO ART

As asserted in the *Introduction* to the book *Podróże artystyczne. Artysta w podróży (Artistic Travel. The Travelling Artist)*, “The phenomenon of artistic travel and the travelling artist remains an essential artistic and historical fact in the history of art.” Nonetheless, progress in research regarding travelling artists in the period analysed here (i.e. the second half of the fifties) is far from impressive. The recent Association of Art Historians’ publication, *Wędrowanie sztuki (Art on Tour)* illustrates this point. Its authors explore journeying in terms of work-related migration, grassroots art community development, or predefined field work outside the studio rather than travel-related exploration. Accordingly, in 2013, the Zachęta National Gallery of Art raised the previously unexplored theme of artistic travel during the so-called cold war. Speakers at the conference accompanying the exhibition *Map: Artistic Migrations and the Cold War* (curator: Joanna Kordjak-Piotrowska, November 30, 2013 – February 9, 2014), among other things, discussed the role of Paris and London, as well as the story of selected artists and art critics abroad. In this particular group of exhibition protagonists, only a few hailed from Kraków – those whose accomplishments had already become part of 20th-century art history, and thus described in biographies and/or monographs with a focus on their art

(consider Tadeusz Kantor, Andrzej Wróblewski, Maria Jarema) usually specifying dates, circumstances and artistic consequences of foreign travel. This is why I believe that it would be worthwhile for this paper to investigate the activity of lesser-known artists from the same circles, those who had been offered stipend opportunities to travel abroad shortly after graduating from Kraków's Academy of Fine Arts, for whom the aforementioned artists comprised commendable role models in terms of their aspirations. The young artists in question formed the so-called Nowohucka Group (also known as the Group of Five), and officially became Kraków Group members on March 8, 1961.¹ Notably, the works of artists from the Group of Five were shown at various exhibitions of the collective. They included the exhibition of the Group’s initiator Barbara Kwaśniewska (first collective exhibition), Danuta and Witold Urbanowicz, Julian Jończyk, Janusz Tarabęła, Jerzy Wroński, Lucjan Mianowski (first and fourth exhibition) and Jerzy Kałucki (fourth collective exhibition and a show in London). While having never declared affiliation with the Group of Five, Mianowski’s name was featured in the document proclaiming its formation in 1956 – this was due to the fact that immediately after the Group had been established, he took part in their first exhibition at the Dom

Plastyków (Art and Design Centre). I am taking the liberty to include him in this paper: not only did he learn and practice at the same Academy studios; he also (ever since the first mentioned exhibition) remained close to the Group of Five, among other things, by showing his works with them at a collective exhibit in June 1961, at the Krzysztofory Palace.

Before I proceed to explore specific developments and their outcomes, I would like to identify my field of study which spans three disciplines: twentieth century history of art, the sociology and the geography of art. Clearly, a focus on the lives and works of artists is self-evident only for the first field listed. An art historian would primarily point to the period spanning all researched phenomena: in the case of artists described herein, the period of the so-called Thaw. Its presence in the article's title is dual in purpose, firstly referencing the process of easing the rules imposed through the socialist state's cultural policy, for purposes described herein in terms of issuing permits and funding travel for art community members; secondly, the label afforded to the period from 1956 until 1960 by reference sources over several decades.² The period has not been identified and recorded with any great precision – similarly, there was no single genre that would classify the work of all contemporaneous artists, albeit most painters mentioned herein would choose matter painting as their preferred technique.³

Nonetheless, the travel theme identified does give rise to an obligation to employ terms typical for fields represented by the two other identified sciences. A sociologist would most certainly be interested in aligning travel with how artists functioned with regard to their essential reference group: the art community. In the context of travel explored herein, however, there is another motive expressed by sociologists focusing on institutionalised education. "Travel complements and augments the process of teaching art."⁴ Marian Golka writes in *Socjologia sztuki (Sociology of Art)*, listing an entire array of quotes from artists across the ages as proof in another publication

(*Nauczanie sztuki. Cele-formy-metody; Teaching Art. Objectives-Forms-Methods*).⁵ Furthermore, the capacity of artists to travel and their ability to circulate their works was influenced by their public acceptance of state cultural policy, in other words, by expressing worldviews and political beliefs aligned to the expectations of the state. Their public attitude was thus of fundamental importance for their acceptance as recipients of state funding (scholarships). The phenomena at hand can also be considered in the context of a ritual, as it were, expanding the scale of art circulation, and developing a sense of habit in art recipients in terms of recurring exploits with regard to overall direction and purpose.⁶ I had hoped for descriptions of artists listed by Marian Golka and Andrzej Osęka to reveal a motif identifying an artist on the road, or travelling artist – yet this did not happen, as in all likelihood prior to the founding of the academy of arts, the phenomenon had been naturally associated with artistic professions and not seen as noteworthy.⁷ Once the education system changed and the need for education *on the road* (at private studios or royal courts) vanished, artistic travel lost its attribute of a necessary condition to making an artistic career.

Organisers of the artistic travel exhibition *Map: Artistic Migrations and the Cold War* (mentioned above) at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art suggested a clear take on travel from a geographical perspective. The phenomenon's spatial (or territorial) analysis was expressed in the visualisation of the titular map, and discussions employing the phrase 'migration,' however overstated.⁸ My paper will primarily focus on three locations: Kraków (and, indirectly, Nowa Huta⁹) as a permanent location; and Paris and London – metropolises visited by artists and hosting exhibitions of their works. I will also reference the artists' birthplaces.

The Thaw in Travelling

In the context of the 1996 exhibition *The 'Thaw.'* *Polish Art ca. 1956* at the National Museum in Poznań, Piotr Piotrowski somewhat critically declared, "After the socialist realism intermission, artists began travelling to Paris to visit *Art Informel* exhibitions, which had by that point lost their fresh touch."¹⁰ Tadeusz Kantor, whose works were obviously shown at the *The 'Thaw'* exhibition, had already 'organised' a passport for himself as early as 1947, arriving in Paris via Switzerland. Following in Kantor's footsteps and following his advice, Maria Jarema (known also as 'Jaremianka,' which is how fellow artists would call her – translator's comment) went travelling to Paris for three months, having previously tasted the climate of the 'Mecca of artists.'¹¹ Kantor had in a way blazed the trail for Jaremianka by having attended the 1955 Theatre Festival¹². Already under the new circumstances of the Thaw, in the autumn of 1956, she resubmitted scholarship applications. Her application was accepted after several months; she was given a scholarship, reimbursement of medical expenses, and permission to take twenty artworks with her; she would later offer them to friends or sell them to art galleries. When in Paris, Jarema visited exhibitions and permanent museum collections, maintained old and established new contacts, and – obviously – painted. Some Group members had already been abroad by then – others, like her, took advantage of scholarship-funded travel. Her stay in Paris coincided with an exhibition showing some of her works opening at the Musée National d'Art Moderne. This brief account of Jarema's journey is included as a symptomatic example for the older generation of artists (debuting before World War II) who were able to travel thanks to Ministry of Culture and Art officials' awareness of their accomplishments.¹³

While travel scholarships were most certainly a form of reward and recognition, they were not the only path to temporary stays abroad. Artists could also be part of foreign delegations, e.g. accompany Ministry of Culture

and Art officials, travel on invitation by foreign institutions, or take part in cultural exchanges – notably, however, prior to 1958 the latter were organised chiefly under agreements entered into by local art unions, and only involved opportunities to travel to such countries as the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Romania, Hungary, Korea and Mongolia. Exchanges requiring no foreign currency advances, all costs covered by participants themselves, were recorded separately. The names and destinations of artists travelling abroad were always recorded in *Biuletyn Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków* (*Newsletter of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers*).¹⁴ The contemporaneous realities of the socialist state's cultural policy merit a concise commentary at this juncture; whenever planning to travel, artists were confronted with a strict set of rules. This was a period of frequent structural changes within the Ministry of Culture and Art. In 1948, ministerial structures were expanded to include an Office for Foreign Cultural Relations; two years later, its activities were suspended, related competencies entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office reinstated in 1957. Yet the gradual post-1956 unfreezing of international relations was key to the process of awarding foreign scholarships to creators and researchers of culture.

In the year 1957, the scholarship campaign was experimental in nature: in all probability driven by a wish to make up for all the 'lost' years, the Ministry awarded multiple foreign scholarships – yet thwarted by foreign currency restrictions, it found itself unable to deliver stipend contract obligations already by the fourth quarter of that year. Consequently, Minister Karol Kuryluk issued a relevant Ordinance of March 18, 1958, regulating the form and manner of scholarship approval and stipulating new criteria.¹⁵ He further explained in an accompanying memorandum that while the volume of scholarships would be reduced, time spent abroad by scholarship recipients would be extended.¹⁶ Applications could be submitted to the Minister by authors' unions, artistic associations, institutions of science and culture reporting to the

Ministry, and directors of relevant organisational units at the Ministry. The Office for Foreign Cultural Relations handled all organisational affairs for scholarship recipients. The aforementioned Ordinance stipulated that particularly talented individuals should be considered as candidates potentially valuable to Polish cultural evolution in view of their considerable artistic and academic achievements. No mention was made with regard to themes or chosen artistic style – consequently, persons whose travel plans had been previously obstructed because they did not engage in art conforming to state cultural policy could count on being included as well. Nonetheless, in this particular aspect the Thaw did not last long: the subsequent Ordinance of February 21, 1959 proclaimed by the new Minister Tadeusz Galiński made the scholarship application procedure much more complex, bureaucratising approval proceedings.¹⁷ It also mentions the selection procedure of candidates for scholarships awarded by foreign authorities and institutions. Twelve artists travelled under the new procedure in 1959 – very few, given the overall membership of the Association (over 4,000), and, as previously mentioned, considerably fewer than in 1957 or 1958 (103 and 26 visual artists with approved travel scholarships, respectively).

The French direction of foreign relations during the Thaw merits mentioning as well – so-called French Government stipends are most frequently mentioned as circumstances allowing young artists' foreign travel.¹⁸ While a pertinent agreement on scientific and cultural exchange had been entered into by and between Poland and France as early as 1947, it remained a 'dead letter' (theoretical) law throughout Stalinist times. Respective contacts were reinstated pursuant to a memorandum signed by both parties in February 1958.¹⁹ Issues of customs clearance for the carriage of artworks abroad were regulated in the year 1959 as well – single copies of artworks by members of individual Association of Polish Artists and Designers sections were customs-exempt. It was also agreed that each artist shall have the right to

take a set of his or her works when travelling abroad, provided that the Association was duly notified, and pursuant to a permit by the Ministry and art conservation authorities.

While not in any way associated with or required by scholarship award procedures, regular travel practices included writing letters to acquaintances back home, as well as delivering reports and talks on return, publishing articles, and showing works created abroad and/or inspired by foreign experiences. Art-related travel circumstances apart, non-professional private events equally well-known to the Kraków community were held as well, such as Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Stangret's wedding ceremony planned for Kantor's successive stay in Paris in the spring of 1961.

Every journey and subsequent account by a well-known artist encouraged and motivated others. Kantor, Jaremińska, Stern or Marczyński's travels were a guiding beacon for the younger generation, letting them know that it is worth their while to live abroad, however briefly, or even take a trip to see things only shown in poor-quality magazine reproductions. Regrettably, even after 1955 it was far from easy to secure permission for travel, passport or funding – the latter condition indispensable to young artists, unless they had their own money or had relatives abroad ready to take them in. The group of artists born in the early thirties included Kraków-born Marian Warzecha, a 1957 graduate of the Faculty of Stage Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, who joined the aforementioned artists as co-founder of the Second Kraków Group. I am mentioning him herein as a representative of the Group of Five generation and contributor to foreign episodes, albeit in a different part of Europe: in Rome, where (in emulation of Kantor, as it were) he married Teresa Rudowicz.²⁰ Notably, this was a private trip rather than travel in the framework of a scholarship, which obviously does not mean that the artists did not engage in admiring, seeking inspiration in, or creating art in daily life. This, however, was an isolated case of a person so young, immediately embarking on a long journey.

The Twilight of the Thaw. Young Artists in Travel

Before exploring the history of other 1956-57 graduates of artistic faculties at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, I should offer a brief description of their pre-academic years: only Janusz Tarabęła was born in Kraków, the others grew up elsewhere and chose Kraków as their place of residence. Danuta Urbanowicz arrived from the whereabouts of Radom; Witold Urbanowicz spent his childhood years in the so-called Eastern Borderland; Julian Jończyk was born in Szczekociny and went to school in Sosnowiec; Jerzy Wroński hailed from the village of Biskupice near Lublin; Lucjan Mianowski was originally from Strzemieszyce and went to school in Będzin; Jerzy Kałucki was born in Lviv, Barbara Kwaśniewska in Warsaw. To individuals not born in Kraków, their origins also meant that after the relative stability of university years, they had to face a difficult period of securing permanent residential quarters. Settling locally was both a challenge and artistic exploration theme for the young artists, all around 25 at the time. The motif was most intensely examined by Lucjan Mianowski (see e.g. *Przeprowadzka (Moving House)*, lithograph, 1957; *Mieszkanie anioła (An Angel's Flat)*, oil on canvas, 1959; *Czarne wnętrze (Black Interior)*, collage, 1958). The artist's studio, back in "old" Kraków, in a tenement house at Kościuszki Street, was a theme also reflected in paintings by the Urbanowicz duo, who would soon thereafter marry (Witold Urbanowicz, *Srebrny (Silver)*, 1959, Danuta Urbanowicz, *Murek (Wall)*, 1959/60, both works: mixed technique). Young Academy of Fine Arts graduates would gradually become self-sufficient. Nowa Huta would become the place of residence – and, accordingly, artistic work – for five artists (Jończyk, the Urbanowicz duo, Wroński and Mianowski). While it would soon (in 1951) lose its independent municipal township status, it is noteworthy that when travelling abroad, all five would be leaving a young district, then in the throes of dynamic development and generally considered modern, though unfinished.

Group initiator Barbara Kwaśniewska was the first to leave and settle in Paris permanently in the autumn of 1958. While not having received an Academy Diploma, she began studying in Paris under Johnny Friedlaender at his studio. Julian Jończyk made tenacious efforts to stay in touch with her. In fact, it is his foreign travel that remains best-documented, thanks to his profuse correspondence with other members of the Group. We know that he completed his curriculum in June 1955, passing the final exam one year later before the State University Diploma Committee at the Faculty of Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. In the spring of 1956, he was issued written permission to travel abroad and continue university studies, conferred upon him in recognition of his academic accomplishments at the Faculty of Painting by Professor Czesław Rzepiński, Rector of the Academy of Fine Arts at the time.²¹ The aforementioned favourable circumstances notwithstanding, Jończyk could travel to Paris on a French Government stipend only in November 1960, as the original permission did not include funding for the endeavour. The artist's letters penned over his four Parisian months allow certain conclusions regarding his pursuits. Financial matters remain at the forefront: the purchase of canvas panels took up a sixth of his entire scholarship. Jończyk's other activities included visiting exhibitions; already familiar with matter painting debuts – his own and his friends' – in Kraków (Krzysztofory Palace, February-March 1960, Second Group exhibition; and International Press and Book Club, Nowa Huta, September 1960, third exhibition), he followed local matter paintings with great interest as well. Having viewed an École de Paris exhibition, he reported on the works he had seen to Jerzy Wroński in great technical detail, attaching his own sketches to the description. He was equally enraptured by classics of modern painting at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, a location he had, as mentioned above, known only from albums or magazines. Following in Jaremińska and Stern's footsteps, he was quietly planning to journey

to Italy as well.²² Several days later, he would summarise his opinions on current art in a letter to Janusz Tarabęła: “These are, simply, symptoms of extraordinary vividness – ranging from terrible kitsch to good-quality art.”²³ He believed that the former included, among other things, collections and montages of ready-made objects; today, we would refer to them as assemblages and associate them with new realism. On the other hand, he considered experimenting with motion, a hugely interesting topic, given its potential suitability for theatre or architecture. He also focused on the genuine local art market, a phenomenon he could not have experienced in Poland, while declaring himself to be painting “for posterity (usually for pleasure).”²⁴ Yet Jończyk’s primary quests in Paris involved traditional art. He lavishly contemplated Jean Dubuffet’s retrospective in another letter he penned one month later. “Everything I had rather enjoyed at gallery exhibitions has now become ludicrous. [...]” He goes on to add, “I am completely broken.”²⁵ His correspondence included general observations as well: “All things considered, Paris is ugly – yet it does have a certain something that escapes definition, palpable only after one has spent some time here. A certain rhythm, things slight and elusive – living in Paris has its own special charm.”²⁶

Danuta Urbanowicz would follow in Jończyk’s footsteps – yet she left nearly two years later, in late 1962. Awarded a similar stipend for one month, she extended her stay to eight months thanks to Mateusz Grabowski, a gallery owner in London who purchased several of her paintings.²⁷ One year later, Witold Urbanowicz travelled to Paris as well, staying four months. Of the three artists, only Danuta was successful in organising a solo show of her works in the Chinese quarter, at La Galerie Mouffe. She was offered another show at the Galerie Lara Vincy but she would have to stay longer in Paris – or have her works brought over from Poland.

The intensity of her activities can be compared with Lucjan Mianowski’s travel in the framework of a scholarship. In all likelihood,

Mianowski had ‘earned’ his time in Paris by having graduated with honours from the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, his Diploma in lithography supervised by professor Konrad Szrednicki; and with a Sopot Biennial award he received in 1957. His stay, or rather two stays – in the years 1959-1960 and 1963-1964 – were distinctly educational in nature, the artist continuing his studies at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, in Professor Pierre Clairin’s lithography studio. The first French Government stipend brought him a show at the Parisian Librairie Celtique (1959), the second one – at the Galerie Lambert (1964). His continued studies offered him an opportunity to explore Europe further: already by the early 1960s, he had temporarily stayed and worked in Denmark, Sweden and France and elsewhere. One might ask why the others did not travel as well to perfect their skills and establish new contacts. The answer is rather simple: having married and raised families, Wroński and Tarabęła had slightly different priorities at the time.

The Artistic Outcomes of Travel

Before I proceed to discuss the issue, let me quote Tadeusz Kantor; this particular utterance became legendary in the community. He was giving a talk at the Krzysztofory Palace immediately upon returning from Paris; Janusz Tarabęła, attending the address (November 1958), heard him say, “Ladies and gentlemen, new lands have been discovered,” and shared the news at once with all colleagues.²⁸ One may justifiably assume that Kantor was referring to matter painting, one of the many varieties of *art informel*. Roughly one year later, Jonasz Stern returned from Rome; commentators on changes in Polish painting would also interpret his return as influential in terms of inspiring or enhancing the genre of painting in his home milieu.²⁹ One can therefore be assured that interest in new forms of creating art had preceded the time of the Group of Five travelling to Paris on stipends. Young artists did not have to be exposed to works by

Burri or Tàpies – reproductions easily available in art magazines – to introduce early technological novelties in 1959, especially as textured paintings (including those by Jadwiga Maziarzka or Jan Lebenstein) had been shown at exhibitions in Poland already. The young were swift to assimilate such observations with their own explorations based on the memory of places they had encountered themselves. Many years later, Jerzy Wroński – having never left Kraków during the Thaw – would offer excellent and detailed explanations of these interdependencies: “My bas-reliefs have much in common with the nature of spaces I was brought up in – the gently undulating fields and sandy roads ...”³⁰ Yet this is not the crux of this paper in terms of the development of Matter painting in Poland. One should rather be asking whether visiting Paris might have affected the evolution of art created by young painters at the time.

I fail to observe any major watershed in Jończyk’s art, the artist mesmerised and intimidated by Dubuffet’s paintings. The collage cycle titled *Confetti* that he painted immediately upon returning, was but an extension of his intimate 1960 *Interiors (Wnętrza)*. Pondering the entire course of Jończyk’s career in retrospect, one might detect consequences of travel and a critical approach to multiple expressions of modern-day art in the fact that the artist began gradually abandoning painting in favour of experimenting with motion in space (performance) and light. A much better measure of ‘travel-related’ change is offered by contemporaneous studies and experimentation by Danuta Urbanowicz and Lucjan Mianowski – their stays in Paris were the longest. In Danuta’s case, post-university works include the cycle *Pleśnie (Moulds)*, and paintings *Wall*, 1960, and *Przejście (Gateway)*, 1959. The painter was seeking inspiration in the haptic cognisance of her immediate surroundings. In *Moulds*, fabrics and other glue-infused materials became a uniform plastic mass resembling the title-referenced deposits. They may well have brought *art informel* associations to mind, albeit with the riot of colours missing. She created her

next series in the attic-studio at Kościuszki No. 48, her workplace for around 10 years. One of the preserved works – *Wall* – is a chunk of wall plaster against a background of hardened lace, the latter pronounced in a subtle bas-relief effect. Introduced a year later, *Epitafia (Epitaphs)* greatly differed from the previous works. Logic and brightness took over in compositions of non-painting materials, their structure somewhat imprecise. Pieces of corroded or flaky enamel-covered steel were coupled with swathes of thick cloth and joint compounds, their sandy texture clearly visible. Composition divides would usually run along lines parallel to edges of paintings, a distinct centreline of symmetry mirroring the parallel projection. The artist gradually expanded her array of fabrics to include soft textiles, shreds and scraps of lace, knitted fabrics, tassels, and embroidery. This is the technique she employed, among others, in the cycle *Gry (Games)*, which includes the paintings *Zestawienia materii (Combinations of Matter)* and *Układy pionowe (Vertical Arrangements)*, both dated 1962. The purpose of individual pieces in her works is akin to that of materials used by Braque and Picasso in their collages: to construct the object-image, enhancing its texture and colour. On the other hand, the compositional discipline and eschatological titles suggest that this was no simple or intentional application of non-painting substance, with its *vanitas* symbolism concealed in the very essence of degraded matter. What, therefore, had Urbanowicz’s stay in Paris yielded? No spectacular change, that is unquestionable: while her Parisian compositions had also included similar ready-made materials, the possibility of picking up delicate lacework and ornamental steel pieces at local flea markets drove the artist to experiment. She began creating ‘soft’ fabric paintings; regrettably, they have never been returned to Poland, their titles suggesting no literary tropes (*Obrazy – Images*). Yet they are visibly larger in format, richer in shade, and inspired by geometry. Urbanowicz herself would write many years later that while her intent had been to abandon array centrelines, the materials

themselves forced her to adopt a specific discipline in composition. She also attempted to sneak in figurative motifs (torsos and heads) – yet that particular trope in her oeuvre would become more intense only post - 1967.³¹ Interestingly enough, the joints between individual materials – seams, welds, rivets, nails – are distinct in all her Parisian works. These elements may be associated with the experience the artist had developed in Professor Jacek Puget's sculpture teaching studio, and/or her brief stage design episode at the *Widzimisię* puppet theatre in Nowa Huta – yet first and foremost, they may well be interpreted as a metaphor of manual labour well done. Consequently, were I to attempt a laconic description of the direction followed by Urbanowicz in her genre, I would be inclined to use phrases such as 'improvement' and 'perfection.'

Mianowski's case, given his successful debut, was rather similar. Prior to his graduation, during plein-air work, he had discovered provincial themes, he gradually began expanding to include landscapes and Nowa Huta *petit genre* scenes. His paintings and prints from the series *Małe miasteczka nie są nudne* (*Small Towns Are Not Boring*) comprise a mix of a dismal yet grotesque vision of socialist realism in an unfinished district, with a hint at positive emotions – artists were given an opportunity to settle down there, after all. His images include the simple places in which he and his colleagues were mentally rooted. It goes without saying that he was connected with the contemporaneous matter painters of Kraków through a sensitive perception of detail; yet Mianowski's frames usually encompass entire objects and silhouettes, including a repertoire of exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. He would only become more attentive to the matter of objects (buildings) when in Paris, translating them to the language of graphic art. Immediately upon graduation, Mianowski was discovered as a promising printmaker with a passion for lithography – offset printing in stone which he would soon replace with zinc sheet metal. This was the direction of artistic development he decided to focus on in Paris. His attempts would be duly

expressed in the cycle *Katedry* (*Cathedrals*) of the early sixties. His *Katedra Miasto* (*Cathedral – the City*, 1960) carries the visible mark of an individual's enchantment with a metropolis. The fine proportions of the Notre Dame cathedral, in the shadow of which Mianowski would explore the art of the West, would define the rhythm of divisions in his other works in the cycle – even once pinnacles were replaced with bulbous domes (*Katedra ikonograficzna*, *Iconographic Cathedral*, 1961, lithograph), naves and fissures of the transparent façade filled with figures from the crowd, living or dead (*Katedra wykopalisko*, *Cathedral – Excavation*, 1961, lithograph). The artist also created dwelling-related prints, on the margins, as it were, of the principal cycle: consider *Mieszkanie Anioła w Paryżu* (*The Flat of an Angel in Paris*, 1960), a formal and ideological extension of the earlier *Black Interior* (1958) and *An Angel's Flat* (1959).

To summarise this particular trope, one may definitely conclude that this generation, only able to travel once the Thaw had reached artistic circles, was already well prepared (in terms of content viewed, read and heard) for what they should pay attention to in Paris. With favourable conditions, they could all spread their wings and make Paris their own studio. Critically referred to as capitalist consumerism in the propaganda of poorer socialist states, the affluence of receiving countries (France, Italy) was conducive to experimentation and technique improvement. Other ancillary factors included the absence of censorship and the free market ambience, the latter a shred of hope for even the tiniest profit.

Young Painters' Works at Foreign

Exhibitions

“An artist’s position in the community is best captured through the geographical reach of his or her oeuvre,” Aleksander Wallis pointed out in the 1964 sociological study of artistic life in the early days of socialist Poland.³² While he attributed clear symptoms of snobbery to such attitude, it did not prevent him from declaring that “the success of an artwork beyond its native territory is a litmus test of the scale and standing of its artistic value.”³³ No wonder that all Polish painters, age notwithstanding, dreamed of their works being shown by a highly regarded gallery in a reputable foreign centre. Even participation in collective exhibitions, usually considered of lesser significance, could spike jealousy among colleagues in the art community. Individual artists’ plans and aspirations notwithstanding, members of all sections were also supported by the Association of Polish Artists and Designers, abetted and supervised by the Foreign Exhibitions Committee of the Minister of Culture and Art.

Other advantages of such activity included the artists’ physical presence when their works were shown, especially on opening nights, all providing ample opportunities for making new contacts. Maria Jarema’s case of 1957 is sufficient proof of how important and rare it was to obtain ministerial permissions to take works abroad. Alternative solutions involved creating works locally with the use of whatever was available or affordable, with intent to show the finished pieces (and potentially sell them, allowing the artist to stay abroad for a longer time). Consider Danuta Urbanowicz. Her work was made easier by the fact that she frequently decided to reuse her materials.

There was one other option for artists to make a name for themselves in Western Europe, or even further afield: sending works to be shown on exclusive invitation by foreign institutions. In the case of the group of artists from Kraków, two such developments are noteworthy, both slightly outside the framework of the Thaw timewise (1962). One

involves their works having been shown as part of a travelling exhibition of the Kraków Group in the US (*The First American Exhibition of Polish Painting by the Kraków Group*), the other – a show in London in April. The latter proved to be much more significant to the Group’s history. Invitations were most probably extended in view of the artists having joined the Kraków Group, and not least because West European art dealers and critics had had the opportunity of viewing young artists’ works when visiting Poland in September 1960 for the Seventh Congress of the AICA, International Association of Art Critics, especially at the Group of Five exhibition at Nowa Huta’s International Press and Book Club.

Titled *Artists from Poland*, the exhibition at the Grabowski Gallery was open to visitors from April 25 until May 19, and was warmly received by English and Polish critics, as evidenced by 11 reviews. Wroński, the Urbanowicz duo and Tarabuła apart, other abstract artists – Tadeusz Dominik, Jan Lebenstein, Leon Śliwiński, Jerzy Kałucki and Henryk Stażewski – showed their works as well. The reviews were understandably interesting, offered outside Polish territory and thus unencumbered by ideological censorship. One review referred to these works with a phrase explicitly evoking past times: “socialist abstractionism,”³⁴ whereas Stanisław Frenkiel criticised socialist realism and post-impressionists in harsh terms in an article in the cultural weekly *Wiadomości*, describing the former as “slowly giving up the ghost since the October mutiny,” and the latter as “having grabbed lead positions in artist unions, exhibition juries and art academies...”³⁵ Comments of the kind would have been out of the question in the Kraków press. It is also intriguing that despite the artists themselves not having been present at the exhibition, commentators were relatively well-informed of their achievements back home; they even quoted from the catalogue of the second collective Group exhibition at the Krzysztofory Palace, referencing artist’s commentaries probably provided for purposes of the London show.³⁶ In emulation of

comments following the Group's show in Kraków, an anonymous London Chronicle reviewer of the *Gazeta Niedzielną* weekly, published for the local Polish community, wrote of the gravity of the young artists' proposals, contrasting their programmatic monochromatism and the process of shedding blackness with practices engaged in by older participants of the show.³⁷ In all of the lengthier interventions and similar to Polish critics, reviewers provided an abundance of detailed comments concerning the artwork's technique, seeking parallels to famous paintings from other parts of Europe, Spain in particular.³⁸ These comparisons were not the only courteous gesture extended to guests from Poland – further advantages began by inviting them to show their works at a Gallery established in 1958 in London's Chelsea district. Having been already accepted and recognised in Kraków, their accomplishments were revitalised in the context of Polish artists living and working in London, known to the Polish community in the United Kingdom, as well as other authors from around the world discovered by Mateusz Grabowski.

I believe that the young artists of Kraków would have subscribed to sociologist Marian Golka's statement that "artistic travel, spending time at a particular location is a blend of leisure, pilgrimage and academy,"³⁹ albeit they usually forfeited the first of the three for reasons of the limited time they were given in their metropolises of choice. They undertook a pilgrimage to places anointed by the permanent presence of artefacts known from stories and reproductions, to the cradles of modern art. As shown herein, they would have found it difficult to survive in the western world for any extended time, work with dignity or accept the art market rhythm as their own. By living alone – a significant circumstance, as they would usually stick together in Kraków – they surrendered any chance for creating even a sliver of a new community. Their scholarship travels took place several years after their momentous debuts in Kraków, bringing no change to the overall direction of their interests; Jończyk may be the sole

exception, given his substantial metamorphosis in later years. Working abroad in rented studios was conducive to experimentation, enriching their techniques and highlighting the quality and diversity of painting and printmaking – fields they had already selected for their work. They would revisit their scholarship travel destinations in later decades, having stabilised their position in Poland, found employment at universities, and/or established gallery contacts – yet they would return as inspiration-seeking tourists or guest artists at collective exhibitions.

Notes

¹ The Second Kraków Group was established after World War II. The consolidation of the group of the Moderns was finally resulted in the creation of the Second Kraków Group, which came to life as an association in May 1957. The new Kraków Group took as its headquarters the basement of the Krzysztofory palace, which housed a gallery and a coffee house. Members of the Group did go through various fascinations, including pop-art, the happening, or matter painting, the last one being associated with inclusion of the members of the Nowohucka Group, which was influenced by the informalism, in the Kraków Group.

² Piotr Piotrowski, "Odwilż / The Thaw," in *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r. / The Thaw. Art ca. 1956*, edited by Piotr Piotrowski (Poznań: MNP, 1996), 9-35.

³ Matter painting (French: Haute Pâte, lit. 'thick paste') also known as Matterism refers to a style of painting that emphasizes the material qualities of paint through heavy impasto. The style marked a return to impulses characteristic of abstract expressionism. Matterism first emerged in Paris in the 1940s in the work of Jean Dubuffet and Jean Fautrier. The style reached widespread popularity in the 1950s.

⁴ Marian Golka, *Socjologia sztuki* (Warszawa: Difin, 2008), 94.

⁵ Marian Golka, *Nauczanie sztuki. Cele - formy - metody* (Poznań: PWSSP, 1991), 52-53.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 136.

⁷ See: Marian Golka, *Socjologia artysty* (Poznań: Ars Nova, 1995), 57-89; Andrzej Osęka, *Mitologie artysty* (Warszawa: PIW, 1978).

⁸ "The titular 'migrations' pertain not only to the artists themselves and their official and semi-official foreign trips but also to the phenomenon of travelling works and wandering ideas. The time frame – arbitrarily adopted – begins in 1947 (the moment of intense cultural exchange, primarily with France, under an official scholarship programme) and ends in 1959 (the height of the 'expansion' of Thaw-era Polish modernism in the West)," accessed 19.01.2023, <https://zacheta.art.pl/en/wystawy/mapa-migracje-artystyczne-a-zimna-wojna>.

⁹ Nowa Huta was created in 1949 as a separate city near Kraków, on terrain repossessed by the Socialist government from the former villages of Mogiła, Pleszów and Krzesławice. It was planned as a colossal center of heavy industry. The city was intended to become an ideal city for Socialist propaganda, and populated primarily by industrial workers. In 1951, it became a part of the city of Kraków as its new district, and in the following year, construction of tramway connections was underway.

¹⁰ Piotr Piotrowski, "Odwilż / The Thaw," in *Odwilż. Sztuka ok. 1956 r. / The Thaw. Art ca. 1956*, edited by Piotr Piotrowski (Poznań: MNP, 1996), 9.

¹¹ She had previously visited Paris in the years 1937-38 accompanied by other Association of Polish Artists and Designers scholarship recipients and supported by funding from friends at the time. See: Agnieszka Dauksza, *Jaremianka. Biografia* (Kraków: Znak, 2019), 185-96, 330-31, 81-83, 500-41. In response to her first letter to the Ministry of Art requesting a foreign scholarship, Jaremianka received permission to travel to London, yet she did not find that satisfactory and ultimately did not go for reasons of currency shortages. One year later, she was promised funding for a scholarship in Paris, yet the proceedings were extremely lengthy and tedious. When she finally managed to travel, she also visited her brother in Rome.

¹² Piotr Juskiewicz, "Wyprowa po socmodernizm: Kantor w Paryżu w 1955 roku" / "The Quest for Socmodernism: Kantor in Paris in 1955" in *Artyści i Kraków. Studia ofiarowane Tomaszowi Gryglewiczowi / Artists and Krakow. Studies dedicated to Tomasz Gryglewicz*, ed. Jan K. Ostrowski, et al. (Kraków: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 2022), 143-150.

¹³ Other noteworthy members of the Kraków Group officially formed in 1956 include Erna Rosenstein, whose stay in Paris coincided with Jaremianka's (1947) and Jonasz Stern's (1949-1950). Paris apart, other travel destinations had begun appearing on artists' schedules during the Thaw. In 1959, Stern visited Italy (on a Ministry of Culture and Art scholarship); Tadeusz Brzozowski travelled briefly to Berlin and Dresden in 1956, and one year later – to Italy. He travelled to Paris in 1960, taking the opportunity to visit Switzerland and Vienna as well. In 1956, Jerzy Nowosielski journeyed to Italy in 1956, and to France in late 1958 / early 1959.

¹⁴ See: *Biuletyn ZPAP*, no. 2 (1959): 27-30; *Biuletyn ZPAP*, no. 4 (1960): 12.

¹⁵ *Biuletyn Ministerstwa Kultury*, 19.04.1958, no. 5, item 47, 4.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, item 58, 10-11.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, no. 5, item 47, 3-4.

¹⁸ Patryk Pleskot, *Intelektualni sąsiedzi. Kontakty historyków polskich ze środowiskiem „Annales” 1945–1989* (Warszawa: IPN, 2010), 19.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 110.

²⁰ He stayed in Rome from December 31, 1958 until mid-1960. See: Anna Budzałek, "Marian Warzecha – Zbiór otwarty. Oczami kuratorki," in *Marian Warzecha*, ed. Robert Wolak (Kraków: MNK, 2020), 11.

²¹ Marek Czeremański found Julian Jończyk's documentation in the Archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków when working on his M.A. thesis (*Obrazy i pokłady malarstwa w dorobku Juliana Jończyka – Paintings and Visual Layers in Julian Jończyk's Oeuvre*), supervising professor: B. Stano. He defended the thesis at the Institute of Graphic Art and Design of the Pedagogical University of Kraków in 2020.

²² Julian Jończyk, "List do Jerzego Wrońskiego, 20 listopada 1960," in *Malarstwo materii 1958-1963. Grupa nowohucka*, ed.

Marta Tarabuła (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 2000), 186-87.

²³ "List do Janusza Tarabuły, 28 listopada 1960," 187.

²⁴ "List do Jerzego Wrońskiego, 19 grudnia 1960," 190.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem, 189.

²⁷ See: *Danuta Urbanowicz. Obrazy*, (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 1993), Exhib. cat., 20-22.

²⁸ The event was referenced in numerous publications, i.e. Marta Tarabuła, "Kalendarium Grupy Nowohuckiej," in *Malarstwo materii 1958-1963. Grupa nowohucka*, ed. Marta Tarabuła (Kraków: Galeria Zderzak, 2000), 181.

²⁹ The issue of the ostensible sequence of these events was analysed by Marta Tarabuła in *ibid.*, 182.

³⁰ Jerzy Wroński, "Biała deska," *ibidem*, 172.

³¹ See: *Danuta Urbanowicz. Obrazy*, 21.

³² Aleksander Wallis, *Artyści – plastycy. Zawód i środowisko* (Warszawa: PWN, 1964), 78.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ "Polskie życie kulturalne. Gwasze Bohusza Szyszki. Artyści z kraju w Galerii Grabowskiego," *Orzeł Biały*, 3.05.1962, 8.

³⁵ Stanisław Frenkiel, "Spacer po galeriach," *Wiadomości [London]*, 10.06.1962, 4.

³⁶ A., "Konstrukcje i abstrakty z Polski," *Dziennik Polski [London]*, 7.05.1962, 5.

³⁷ J. Ch., "Artyści z Polski w Galerii Grabowskiego," *Gazeta Niedzielną [London]*, 13.05.1962, 5. See also: Maciej Gutowski, "Wiadomości plastyczne. Wystawa w Krzysztoforach," *Dziennik Polski*, 6.03.1960, 4.

³⁸ Marjorie Bruce-Milne, *The Home Forum*, 2.06.1962, 6.

³⁹ Golka, *Nauczanie sztuki. Cele - formy - metody*, 53.

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