

DARIUSZ KONSTANTYNÓW

Gdańsk, Instytut Historii Sztuki UG

## *'Christian Dirce' by Henryk Siemiradzki in St Petersburg and Moscow (1898)*

The reception of Henryk Siemiradzki's painting *Christian Dirce* (1897, Warsaw, National Museum) in St Petersburg and Moscow is discussed; the canvas was presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Exhibition of the Association of St Petersburg Artists (St Petersburg, 15 February - 31 March; Moscow, 6-24 April 1898) as well as at the First Folk Art Works Exhibition (St Petersburg, 3-10 September 1898). *Dirce* was the major exhibit at both events; some opinions were even voiced that it outshone the rest of the display. The presentation of the painting that was the latest work of Henryk Siemiradzki, who continued to be highly esteemed in Russia, evoked a vivid reaction among the public, as well as art critics. Judging the enthusiastic reception of the beholders, the abundance of comments, and dynamic as well as heated debates on Siemiradzki's canvas by both experts and painting lovers, it was claimed by some that no art piece had inspired as much interest nor had been the subject of such passionate discussions and arguments for at least a decade. When speaking of *Dirce*, most commentators obviously focused on the painting's content. What mattered most for the work's reception was the fact that it suited the literary predilections of the public who often viewed painting through literature (Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis* recently translated into Russian was at the time extremely popular). Among the voices evaluating the painting it was the critical ones that could be best heard (e.g. Pyotr Gnedych, Vladimir Stasov, Nikolay Mikhaylovsky); these claimed that *Dirce* showed "no real life", "featured lifeless figures", did not psychologically do justice to the participants of the painted tragedy, while treating the subject superficially, and lacking any more profound reflection, any "idea". Basically, the only critic to unwaveringly defend the painting was Aleksandr Amphitiatrov who presented his views in polemics with Gnedych.

When analyzing the formal aspects of the painting, critics called it anachronistic (Siemiradzki was criticized for having remained indifferent to the achievements of plein-air and Impressionistic painting) and pointed to numerous technical defaults (e.g. blurring the limits between the foreground and the background or errors in figures' anatomy). While in St Petersburg and Moscow, *Dirce* found as many admirers as it did critics. Some, even noticing certain flaws of the painting, convincingly claimed that the artist "had once again demonstrated his unusual artistic temperament and painterly talent" and that his latest work eclipsed his earlier paintings, even the most outstanding ones, like *Nero's Torches* or *Phryne*. They regarded *Dirce* to be "an event in the history of our painting", a "powerful work" impressing beyond words, mesmerizing the beholders and transferring them "to the ancient Rome era". They did not only rank it among "the best Siemiradzki's works", but also among the most outstanding paintings that had been seen at Russian exhibitions in the recent years. The story of *Dirce* in St Petersburg and Moscow clearly shows that despite extended and radical criticism, Henryk Siemiradzki continued to be one of the major figures in Russian artistic life at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the kind of painting he practiced had passed the moments of its greatest glory and was being attacked by both the followers of orthodox realism and fans of its more modern version, as well as "decadents", Siemiradzki's work succeeded in focusing much attention. Crowds flowed in to see it at all the three exhibitions presenting *Dirce*, while critics analyzed it extensively, wrangling over the painting itself and Siemiradzki's art in general. However, the success of *Dirce* was merely a faint echo of what Siemiradzki had enjoyed in 1877 when he showed his *Nero's Torches* or in 1889 when he presented his *Phryne*.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

AGATA WÓJCIK

*Kraków, Wydział Sztuki, Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. KEN*

## *Polish Applied Arts Society and Renewal of Polish Graphic Design in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

The influence of the Polish Applied Arts Society (TPSS), active in 1901-13, on Polish graphic design is discussed. The goal of the Kraków TPSS was to “promote passion for Polish applied arts, facilitate their development, and introduce them into industry”. One of the branches of the Society’s activity was to support typography, as TPSS were very particular about the artistic and technical quality of all of their own prints (exhibition posters and catalogues, graphic layout of their publications, membership tickets, postcards, etc.), and held contests for designs of posters, logos, bookplates commissioned by social, cultural, and commercial institutions. It was thanks to TPSS that Karol Frycz, Józef Czajkowski, Edward Trojanowski, Franciszek Bruzdowicz, Kazimierz Brzozowski, Henryk Uziembło, Antoni Procajłowicz, Jan Bukowski and many others had an opportunity to implement their designs. TPSS displayed their accomplishments in graphic design in exhibitions organized in Kraków in 1902 and 1903, as well as in Warsaw in

1902 and 1908. What turned to be extremely successful was the Kraków typography exhibition in 1904, held by the Society in cooperation with Kraków’s National Museum. Its goal was to: “present the degree of artistry in Polish contemporary typography, emphasize the aspiration to give Polish typography works a unique character, and give an overview of the artistic application of native motifs”. TPSS established cooperation with Kraków printing houses of Anczyc, Jagiellonian University, Władysław Teodorczuk, National Printing House, as well as those of Marchlewski in Munich and Piotr Laskauer in Warsaw. Moreover, the Society had their own lithography workshop that graphic artists used for artistic experiments. They also purchased a lithography press, stones, paints, and paper from the heirs of Czesław Ciosłowski and placed them in the edifice of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts. Eventually the TPSS “graphic station” ended up at the Academy of Fine Arts.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

ANNA WISZNIEWSKA

*Warszawa, Instytut Sztuki PAN*

## *Polish Decorative Arts Society – Attempt to Transfer the Achievements of the “Kraków Workshops” to Warsaw*

The circumstances of the foundation, programme goals, and the main accomplishments of the Polish Decorative Arts Society are described. The Society was set up in late 1913 by a group of artists, craftsmen, and so-called “fans” (mainly representatives of Warsaw’s middle class) who cared for the development of Polish decorative arts. The main initiator to form the Society was Natalia Boberówna, an artist educated in Kraków, and skilled at intarsia and encrustation. Next to her signature on the Society’s Statue there are 80 of other founding members, among them e.g. His Eminence Archbishop of Warsaw Aleksander Kakowski; Matylda and Henryk

Grohman, manufacturers and art patrons; Władysław Tatarkiewicz, a philosopher and art historian; the collector Stanisław Ursyn Rusiecki; Franciszek Ejsmont, a painter and director of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts; the ceramicist Stanisław Jagmin; the painter Edward Trojanowski; the bronze worker Felliks Łopieński.

The statute of the Society reads that its goal is “to support (...) Polish artistic craftsmanship in the broadest possible range” and to aim to “create original expression in the executed objects, while aiming at bestowing upon them a genuine yet native quality”. Efficiently fulfilling these goals, the Society began its activity

with launching its own shop, accompanied by a permanent exhibition of artistic industry. Located in the former Zamoyski Palace in Kraków, the shop offered works of the already acclaimed artists: e.g. ceramicist Stanisław Jagmin; Zofia Szydłowska; the Czar-kowskis, from the Czechowski-Wojnacki workshop; kilim rugs from the “Zakopane” Company, textiles from Antonina Sikorska’s workshop. Among the displaying artists there appeared, however, new names, such as the most highly appraised Natalia Boberówna, Maria Karczewska, and Maria Śliwińska.

It was keeping in contact with other similarly profiled organizations that constituted one of the most important goals of the Society. Thus soon after its foundation, since already in 1914, it established cooperation with the Kraków Workshops and offered their products in its shop (e.g. kilim rugs, batiques, and toys).

Apart from its commercial activity, the Society held decorative arts displays and contests. An extremely successful example of this can be seen in the exhibition of Polish decorative arts display held at Warsaw’s Baryczka House, which allowed to select exhibits for the 1925 International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris. Moreover, the Society were the ones who organized the sales of Polish craft during the Paris Exhibition, this having proved extremely successful: the Polish stall designed by Karol Stryjeński, with a highlanders’ band playing in front, was extremely popular with the public, while its attendants impressed everybody with exquisite manners. The participation in the Paris show was the Society’s last recorded activity. Its decline may have been caused by Natalia Boberówna quitting, and possibly the emergence of a new organization, namely the ŁAD Artistic Cooperative.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

MAŁGORZATA OMILANOWSKA

*Warszawa, Instytut Sztuki PAN*

## *Kalisz Rebuilt after the Destruction of 1914*

The destruction resulting from the military actions during WW I caused in numerous countries aroused in many heated debates which were to verify views on the rebuilding, reconstruction, and the limits of interference into a monument, widespread before the outbreak of the war. For the circles of Polish conservators and architects, the benchmark in the discussions on urban planning as well as on the reconstruction of the lost monuments was for the next hundred years to be found in the example of Kalisz whose historic centre was significantly destroyed in the first days of the war, and whose reconstruction became the subject of interest of both Polish architects and social activists, as well as German occupation administration already during the war.

Details of the stages of the final shape of the reconstruction of Kalisz being crystallized are analysed, also including the first initiatives of the German occupation authorities and of Warsaw architects; moreover, the history of the architectural competition to rebuild Kalisz held for Polish architects, formulating legal regulations allowing the reconstruction, as well as the credit meant to support the rebuilding project are discussed. The process to formulate the final plan for rebuilding the city elaborated by Helmuth

Grisebach, as well as vicissitudes of the design of a new Kalisz Town Hall are described; the 1918 competition to design the new Town Hall failed to yield the winner, following which works were carried out for two years on the design of Stefan Szyller, this to be finally rejected.

Analyses undertaken in Polish literature on the reconstruction of Kalisz were conducted from the perspective of negating the actual contribution of German architects, urban planners, and administrators. Meanwhile, the preliminary research of the sources clearly demonstrates that their involvement was extremely important, if not decisive for the final shape of the reconstructed city. The final urban layout for Kalisz’s reconstructed city centre was executed in the design office headed by Helmuth Grisebach, though it was being finally shaped with the participation of Polish urban planners who grounded themselves on competition designs, these in turn subjected to many suggestions formulated by the Berlin Bopst&Caro Office. The debates on the construction law, the urban plan of the reconstruction of the old town, and the architectural form of tenement houses and the Town Hall were participated by both Polish and German members of the local government and administration of various levels.

Interpretatively, it has been possible to create in Polish professional literature the myth of the Polish character of reconstructed Kalisz, although actually all the proposals and designs unambiguously referring to the Polish national style were rejected in the course of debates. The Poles were dreaming of resuscitating a truly Polish town that Kalisz was in their imagination, while the Germans

wanted to reconstruct the city annexed into their territory referring to the local urban tradition co-created by German architects and urban-planners. The final urban and architectural shape of the centre of Kalisz turned out to be the sum of the knowledge, experience, and creativity of the participants in the multi-stage process of shaping it.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

MICHAŁ MYŚLIŃSKI

*Kraków, Instytut Sztuki PAN*

## *Characteristics of Polish State Hallmarking – European Genesis of the Local Mark*

Having regained independence in 1918, the government of the reestablished country was faced with the necessity to establish Polish hallmarking administration, unifying the hallmarking systems operating for 123 years on the territories that had previously formed part of the Russian, Austrian, and Prussian partitions. A symptom of this change can be found in the set of Polish hallmarking from ca 1920/21, finally introduced as of 1 January 1922. The features of the marks, applied to this very day with minor changes only, present an effigy of a woman in a scarf (silver) and a hussar in a helmet (gold), these augmented with a letter referring to the

city where the Assay Office is located, and with appropriate figures defining the standard of fineness. Polish hallmarking constitutes a peculiar „resultant” of the marks applied in Russia and Austria: what they have in common are such characteristic elements as the hallmark shape, the figures filling them, marking for the town where the Assay Office is located, as well as the standard of fineness. This operation allowed to introduce in Poland a new system of hallmarking that is obviously clear on the territories of the former partitions. There are, however, no records that would permit to see any symbolic or historical meanings in Polish hallmarking.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

ANNA AGNIESZKA SZABLÓWSKA

*Warszawa, Instytut Sztuki PAN*

## *Outside the Catalogue. Polish Artists from France Participating in the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish National Fine Arts Exhibition (1950)*

The display of Polish artists living in France that accompanied the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish National Fine Arts Exhibition in 1950, previously unrecorded in literature, is discussed. Since their names were not included in the official exhibition catalogue, and they did not draw the attention of the regime reviewers, the fact that such display took place has disappeared from the panorama of Polish artistic life. Meanwhile,

digitalized negatives from 1950-54, recently described, to be found in the Photography Archive of the Polish Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, include, among others, 22 photos documenting that forgotten event (reproductions of works as well as an overview of the National Museum room that was allocated to their display). The records come from the initial stage in the Institute's activity (then still named

State Institute of Art), established in late 1949 in order to conduct the ideological offensive promoting Socialist Realism in all the spheres of art. Apart from consolidating the ideological superstructure, the institution essentially focused on the methodical recording of displays, particularly of the four Polish National Fine Arts Exhibitions in 1950-54 of key importance to the regime. The source is unique in the sense that it does not only record all the displayed works, but also some selected pieces which did not pass through the qualifying round, or just like in the case of the discussed paintings, were making a guest appearance. The names of the artists from Paris, unmentioned in official releases, are provided in a relevant archival inventory (in alphabetical order): Alfred Aberdam, Jan Ekiert, Tomasz Gleb, Stanisław Grabowski, Irena Hassenberg (Réno), Zofia Kulażyńska-Couret, Katarzyna Librowicz, Glika Milbauer, Mela Muter, Stefania Ordyńska-Morawska, Felicja Pacanowska, Lily E. Paśławska, Maria Rygier,

Mieczysław Wojtkiewicz. This constitutes an interesting “untold” story of the first stage of forcing through Socialist Realism and of frantic attempts made to transfer the Soviet display policy to Poland. It is a moment full of organizational contradictions which can be clearly seen in inviting the compatriots living in Paris, namely within the “hostile” realm of Western culture, to this first manifestation of Socialist Realism. Their small-sized canvases, dominated by large-format Socialist Realism output, remained almost completely unnoticed, despite presenting the domain of Polish painting today considered as one of major importance. The analyzed display actually was the only collective exhibition of paintings from the École de Paris circle held in Communist Poland. Over forty years had to pass for the next one to take place only in 1992, namely after Poland’s transformation, instigating great interest of both art historians and collectors in the works of Polish artistic migrants, particularly those living in Paris.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

ANNA KOSTRZYŃSKA-MIŁOSZ

*Warszawa, Instytut Sztuki PAN*

## *Furniture in a Stately Interior in the 1950s. The Office of the Council of Ministers in Warsaw*

The 1950s constituted an interesting period in the history of Polish stately interiors, since in the course of WW II all the interiors that had performed such a function were destroyed. Bearing in mind the new ideology in place in Poland and designers rooted in the pre-war period, an interesting situation developed that favoured the change with parallel attempts to preserve the pre-war forms.

The interiors offering an exemplary course of such change can be found in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, at 1/3 Ujazdowskie Avenue, Warsaw, and its furnishing. Raised in 1903 after the design of Wiktor Junosz-Piotrowski, the building was demolished as the result of September 1939 warfare and the Warsaw Uprising except for the northern wing. In December 1946, the decision was made to rebuild the edifice, in the course of which all the interior divisions were thoroughly altered. Stanisław Odyniec-Dobrowolski was the architect responsible for the reconstruction yielding 20 stately rooms and offices of 20 members of the Council of Ministers, with two additional conference rooms seating 200 and 800 respectively.

The interiors were designed by Jan Bogusławski, so far mentioned as the only interior designer (his was also the wood panelling, doors, and even door handles). Moreover, in 1948-49, he designed two sets of furniture: of light birch and less frequently ash wood, and the other of most frequently dark mahogany or dyed birch echoing designs from the 1930s.

The most interesting set is the interior of the Prime Minister’s office featuring classicizing form. Its outstanding element are full-body sculptures of animals placed at the base of each leg of the tables and the desk, as well as the front legs of the seats. They were sculpted by Stanisław Sikora, Bogusławski’s collaborator from before WW II. The desk is adorned with eagles with outstretched wings, the armchairs feature owls, while the small round table is decorated with squirrels. Not so full-body flying pigeons shown in the bas-relief seen from above and carrying little twigs in their beaks, placed on the truncated corners of the frame or also bas-reliefs of pigeons touching each other with their breasts and ornamenting the back part of the chair back-rest moulds rank among the ornaments eagerly used in

the 1950s. With this reduced symbolism: flying eagle, wise owl, or hard-working squirrel, completed with the pigeon symbolizing peace, Bogusławski must have intended to emphasize the character of their location. Apart from the symbolic reference to the venue function, the designs of these pieces of furniture did not introduce any new forms in cabinet making, prolonging those of the 1930s. Also the second dark-mahogany type of furniture designed by Jan Bogusławski constituted a continuation of the pre-war forms referring to geometric stylization and classicist forms.

To-date all the designs of the stately rooms at the Chancellery have been attributed to Jan Bogusławski, however in the course of my research it resulted that a substantial part of them were authored by Zygmunt Szatkowski, the fact being testified to by the encountered archival records or signatures placed on furniture pieces. According to these the sculptor Czesław Woźniak cooperated with Szatkowski, while the furniture was made in the Bydgoszcz Furniture Factory in 1955.

Zygmunt Szatkowski was familiar with Bogusławski's output, which he admired, however his

pieces designed for the Chancellery merely 7 years later than Bogusławski's furniture were of a completely different character. Their characteristic features were the motifs of interlacing forming pointed-arch shapes or resembling rhombus. Among these furniture elements which only serve a decorative purpose, also those that have a symbolic meaning can be pointed to. The example of this can be seen in the desk and large tables each of which was decorated with caryatids placed in the arch of the legs. It may be assumed that they too only serve as decoration, though each figure is different and is holding different attributes. Their symbolic impact is confirmed by Szatkowski's comment written on one of the designs: "Warsaw Pact Caryatid design and execution sculptor Cz. Woźniak Poznan".

Both Jan Bogusławski and Zygmunt Szatkowski intended in their designs to point to the function of the place their furniture was destined to serve. Each did it in his own way: Bogusławski by slightly modifying the pre-war designs and Szatkowski by deriving models from Socialist Realism ideology, surprisingly alluding to forms of sacral art. Both designs were acceptable to the representatives of the then regime.

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*

## ELŻBIETA BŁOTNICKA-MAZUR

*Lublin, Instytut Historii Sztuki KUL*

### *David Smith's Sculptural Space Inscriptions*

According to Rosalind Krauss the greatest changes in modern American sculpture occurred in the 1930s and 1940s together with the introduction of the welding technique into artistic practice. David Smith, directly drawing from the accomplishments of the European Modernism, is one of the leaders among American innovators. Already at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, fascinated by the works of Picasso and González, he introduced iron and mechanical forging as well as welding techniques into his own sculptural forms. His works became a sculptural completion to the climax of American Modernism that can undoubtedly be seen in painterly abstract Expressionism.

It was through Clement Greenberg that Smith found himself in the epicentre of the theoretical argument between the American critic and Herbert Read, related to the superiority of optical values over tactile ones in modern sculpture. The English scholar regarded the works of Henri Moore as the most exquisite example of tactility. Greenberg, in turn, saw the

embodiment of what modern sculpture should be, spoken of in a Cubist collage, in the works of David Smith. It was to be sculpture giving up on the monolith of a compact solid, turned towards linear values and a peculiar two-dimensionality, up to then associated exclusively with painting.

Smith himself saw sculpture in a broad perspective of phenomena, not limiting his vision to linear or monolithic forms, or to closed or open ones. Through-out all his creative life he was simultaneously practising painting and drawing, while expressing this continuous discipline confrontation in a flat two-dimensional concept of sculpture constructed similarly as a painting, for which natural landscape served as the backdrop.

His oeuvre evolved from the structures from the 1930s, combining wood, wires, and other found objects, as well as the first electrically welded compositions, through war surrealistic sculptures imbued with symbolism, to lyrical and abstract forms on a much larger scale, from the mid-1950s onwards placed

within the open space around his Bolton Landing house and studio.

It is Smith's metal structures, presented in the light of Clement Greenberg's, Rosalind Krauss's, and the sculptor's own views that are shown and analysed. Questions such as sculptures' structure, reference to human figure, application of ready-made objects, as

well as the problems of colour and relation with space are tackled. All these aspects have a close reference to the issues of a peculiar two-dimensionality and optical qualities of the works of David Smith, the latter most frequently being openwork "sculptural space inscriptions".

*Translated by Magdalena Iwińska*