

## I “Central Industrial Region – a Painter’s Reportage 1938.” Rafał Malczewski’s Industrial Landscapes from the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw

“Lend an ear, lend an ear: – I will tell you about the Polish Magnitogorsk, the Polish Magnitogorsk. Lend an ear, lend an ear. I will talk about numbers, about facts. No need to get all made up in literary devices. We used to joke that Russian writers were ordered ‘Litsom k Kroliku!’ and for a week they would write solely about the need to multiply rabbits in kolkhozes. We are all standing – all of us who were there – ‘with our face to the Central Region.’ We used to laugh and go our separate ways when they wanted to make us face one slogan or another. However, here our eyes witnessed the transformed surface of the earth, our ears heard the hammering of pile drivers, our hands touched steel and iron.”<sup>1</sup>

The visual oeuvre of Rafał Malczewski is most frequently associated with images of the mountains, in particular with landscapes depicting various views of the Tatras. Most exhibitions<sup>2</sup> featuring the artist’s works presented these very representations – even the monographic exhibition prepared by Dorota Folga-Januszewska<sup>3</sup> was limited to this dominant subject in his art. The curators entirely ignored two cycles of industrial landscapes: “Black Silesia” from 1934–35 and “Central Industrial Region” from 1938, which represent an important turning point in Malczewski’s art and demonstrate how political events may determine visual arts. With hindsight, it is these very cycles that may turn out to be the most interesting and intriguing part of Malczewski’s oeuvre. The industrial landscape was a new subject in Polish painting. It was no coincidence that this happened in late 1930s – a time when the economic crisis was drawing to a close and state authorities attached considerable importance to matters of security and defence. Images of mines, ironworks and industrial plants represent a type of landscape, but their message is different, infused with ideological overtones. They were created to participate in the propaganda process of the government of the Second Polish Republic. They glorified the growing strength of the Polish state, which was concerned about the militarization of

<sup>1</sup> Melchior Wańkowicz, *Sztafeta. Książka o polskim pochodzie gospodarczym* (Warsaw, 1939), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> The only exception is the exhibition referring to the 1938 one, prepared by Anna Król, “Rafał Malczewski. Central Industrial Region – a Painter’s Reportage 1938,” Regional Museum in Stalowa Wola, 2008–09, but it was more of a visual display than an exhaustive compendium of information on the subject. COP is the Polish abbreviation for the Central Industrial Region.

<sup>3</sup> Dorota Folga-Januszewska, vol. 1: *Rafał Malczewski*, vol. 2: *Zakopane w czasach Rafała Malczewskiego*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw; Tatra Museum in Zakopane; The National Museum in Krakow; Silesian Museum in Katowice; The National Museum in Szczecin, 2006–07 (Olszanica, 2006).

neighbouring countries and tried to brace itself for the impending armed conflict. Malczewski accepted the patronage of the state. His stay both in Silesia and in the Central Industrial Region was financed by government circles. The subsequent exhibition, which took place at the Institute of Art Propaganda, was also covered by the ministry's patronage, while reviews appearing in pro-government press mainly highlighted the propaganda values of this new art.

Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, the Minister of Treasury and founder of the port in Gdynia, developed a four-year investment plan for the years 1936–40 together with Paweł and Władysław Kosieradzki. On 4 February 1937, the plan to construct the Central Industrial Region was approved by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland. This was the most important economic investment of the time (with an enormous budget), which was supposed to repeat the spectacular success of the Gdynia port in terms of economy and propaganda. It was given priority treatment and was aimed at increasing the defence potential of the state as well as industrializing poor, agricultural and overpopulated areas. Such lands encompassed 15 per cent of the territory of the country, with 18 per cent of the total population. The area was situated in the borderland of the three former partitions, stretching from the foot of the Carpathians to the catchment area of the Vistula, the San and the Dunajec. It was composed of parts of the following provinces: Kielce, Krakow, Lublin and Lviv. The plans to merge them into a new administrative unit (with Kielce, Radom and Rzeszów), whose capital was to be Sandomierz, were cut short by the outbreak of the war. The area in question is the so-called security triangle, which – thanks to its central location – was to safeguard the energy needs of future industrial plants and housing estates. It was removed both from the Russian and the German borders (Silesian mines and ironworks were in danger of a direct aggression, as a result of which the deliveries of energy resources to the rest of the country would cease immediately). This is why it was regarded as an appropriate location for strategic facilities. Furthermore, there were gas and oil deposits in the region (Krosno–Jasło Basin), which were envisaged as an alternative to Silesian coal in case of a military conflict. This is why the construction of a network of gas pipelines was treated as a priority for the security of the state.

In his book *Sztafeta. Książka o polskim pochodzie gospodarczym* [Relay. A book on Poland's economic march], Melchior Wańkowicz wrote: "COP – the Central Industrial Region – was called into existence by industrial factors. Consequently, its assumptions result from an active attitude towards industrial matters and a passive attitude towards agricultural matters. This is why the shape of the COP was determined by the concern over finding natural conditions for the development of mining and processing industries as well as a concentric location with respect to the most endangered borders of the state. After all, our neighbours are doing exactly the same."<sup>4</sup> Wańkowicz's book is one of the most outstanding, even model examples of propaganda and agitational works from the period of the Second Polish Republic. It begins with a description of five travels around the country from 1937–38.<sup>5</sup> A considerable part is devoted to the establishment and formation of the Central Industrial Region and, additionally, to the success of the Gdynia port. It also contains enthusiastic descriptions of possibilities opened by the exploitation of mines and industrial facilities in Zaolzie (eastern part of Cieszyn Silesia),

<sup>4</sup> Wańkowicz, *Sztafeta*..., op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> Melchior Wańkowicz's first publication on the subject was a book entitled *C.O.P.: ognisko siły – Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy*, (Warsaw, 1938). The fact that two reissues appeared in the very same year testifies to its enormous popularity. Its 165 pages became a prelude to another book, which was to become Wańkowicz's springboard to true fame and cement his position as the master of propaganda documentary.

which had just been "regained" from Czechoslovakia to popular excitement. Despite the vast number of quoted statistical data, the book does not become monotonous. It is written in a very dynamic language, which is accompanied by an interesting graphic design composed of documentary photographs and photomontages by Mieczysław Berman (a total of 386 illustrations).<sup>6</sup> The book gained enormous popularity already at the time of its publication, while its author was said to write "eulogies about the myth of the Central Region." This is described by Iwona Luba: "The publication was noticed by the critics and even hailed as the first Polish industrial reportage with an innovative literary form. The brochure was clearly of a propaganda and political nature. Therefore, government press underlined the professionalism, accuracy and pioneer character of the reportage."<sup>7</sup> Luba also notices that "*Sztafeta*... is a propaganda jewel of the Sanation government, its economic achievements and involvement in processes of modernizing the state."<sup>8</sup>

Wańkowicz saw the enormous work put into creating modern industrial plants, and even entire towns (Stalowa Wola) on infertile lands. However, he made almost no mention of other writers and artists who supported the difficult process of carrying out the new industrial project. He referred to Rafał Malczewski only once, what is more: in the context of protecting the cultural environment of Sandomierz.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the vision created by the writer was so evocative that Malczewski published a rave review of the book: "Wańkowicz involves the reader in the scope of industrial matters with devilish dexterity. I find it hard to use dry and pompous words to describe this ripe and delectable book, whose style, like a lively melody, lightly weaves its way and flutters among steel beams, girders and towers. *Sztafeta*... stimulates like a drug; the solid graphic design assists this promenade across the length and breadth of our industrial matters, catching live, at the source, the strength and energy wherever the power of our nation – the true one – is formed."<sup>10</sup>

The Central Industrial Region was divided into three parts: A – raw materials (Kielce), B – supply (Lublin) and C – processing industry (Sandomierz). All towns which became the subject of Malczewski's works are located in part C. These are images of industrial plants (Rożnów, Stalowa Wola, Mielec, Mościce) and views of towns that testify to the cultural role of the region (Sandomierz, Czchów, Koprzywnica). The cycle depicting selected COP investment projects was composed of 19 oil paintings and 26 watercolours. It was shown, for the first and only time, at the exhibition "Central Industrial Region – a Painter's Reportage 1938," which was opened to the public on 7 December 1938 at the Institute of Art Propaganda (IPS) in Warsaw. This event was accompanied by a collective catalogue, which also contained information on other exhibitions taking place at the same institution and at a similar time. That is why Malczewski's exhibition corresponds to catalogue nos 47 to 91. The exhibition was opened by the Minister of Industry and Commerce Mieczysław Sokołowski, which leaves no doubt as to how important it was for the government in propaganda terms. Everything was carefully

<sup>6</sup> A reprint of the book was published in 2012 by Prószyński i S-ka.

<sup>7</sup> Iwona Luba, "Stalowa Wola – 'Miasto zniszczonej tęsknoty.' Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy w propagandzie słownej i wizualnej ostatnich lat II Rzeczypospolitej," in *Miasto Stalowa Wola. Unikutowy zespół urbanistyczno-architektoniczny z końca lat 30. XX wieku*, Anna Sieradzka, scholarly ed. (Stalowa Wola, 2008), p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Ead., *Duch romantyzmu i modernizacja. Sztuka oficjalna Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw, 2012), p. 60. COP is mostly referred to on pp. 198–208.

<sup>9</sup> Wańkowicz, *Sztafeta*..., op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Rafał Malczewski, "Pisarz w C.O.P.-ie," *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 16 (1939), p. 17.

prepared, even the date of the event had a symbolic meaning: "The artist had planned his exhibition with considerable notice: he wrote a letter to the IPS Management asking for a room to present an exhibition of his paintings as early as on 2 January 1938. Upon receiving word that he was assigned a room towards the end of 1938 or at the beginning of 1939, he reminded in writing that he had requested a November date already back in the summer, to coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of regaining independence."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the ministry purchased eight paintings from the exhibition, which were destined to decorate the side banquet room of the future Main Railway Station in Warsaw (the unfinished building was burnt down in September 1939 and the paintings were most likely destroyed).<sup>12</sup>

The year 1938 became a breakthrough for Malczewski both in terms of his personal life (final separation from his wife and relationship with Zofia Mikucka, who accompanied him during his stay in COP) and the change of style and artistic subjects. The origins of the cycle were not only associated with a state commission, but also with the search for new inspirations and the need to leave Zakopane for personal reasons. This situation is described by Folga-Januszewska: "Around 1935, Malczewski – aware of his marriage to Zakopane and tired of the local milieu – begins to look for other sources of inspiration than the mountains. He travels around Poland a lot. He visits Silesia, the Świętokrzyski province (Central Industrial Region), the Beskid Mountains and Hutsul Land in search of new sources of paintings. He creates many so-called 'industrial landscapes,' innovative in their approach and succinct construction. There is a trace of the USSR-born socialist realism in this phenomenon, but it is perceptible only in the choice of the subject matter: the form of these compositions is deeply individual and – from an artistic point of view – represents a new experience for the artist himself. However, the presentation of industrial landscapes at exhibitions is laden with political and propaganda overtones."<sup>13</sup> Apart from socialist realism, another important source of Malczewski's inspiration was undoubtedly the social realism programme, introduced in the USA in late 1930s as a reaction to the difficult material situation of artists during the Great Depression. This was part of the Works Progress Administration project introduced by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The programme was successfully implemented in the 1930s and 1940s and mostly involved government commissions for wall decorations of public buildings.<sup>14</sup> Information on the subject appeared in Polish press, but the impact of American achievements was considerably smaller than Soviet art, which was the main area of interest and inspiration for Polish artists working on government commissions, including Rafał Malczewski.

Malczewski was in the COP between May and November 1938. Apart from the visual presentation of the assets of the new industrial areas, he also published a series of literary reportages in *Gazeta Polska* devoted to this journey.<sup>15</sup> The artist was mainly focused on reproducing, with

<sup>11</sup> Luba, *Stalowa Wola...*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the subject, see Dariusz Konstantynów, "Dekoracje Dworca Głównego w Warszawie. O sztuce monumentalnej końca lat trzydziestych XX wieku," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, Ann 69, nos 3–4 (2007), p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> Dorota Folga-Januszewska, "Malczewski i mit Zakopanego," in ead., *Rafał Malczewski*, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> The main representatives of this movement were: Ben Shahn, Reginald Marsh, Moses and Raphael Soyer, William Gropper and Isabel Bishop, as well as documentary photographers: Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and George Biddle.

<sup>15</sup> They were published on Sundays in the summer of 1938; these include, in particular: *Mościce-Zdrój*, of 3 July; *Podróż Nocą*, of 10 July; *Betonowe dziwo*, of 14 July.

a reporter's precision, industrial objects and the natural landscape which underwent incessant, destructive transformation. Some of the plein-air sketches would later serve to create large format paintings in the privacy of his studio, meticulously copied onto the canvases (e.g., the watercolour and painting depicting Mościcki's Towers). "When he set out across Poland – as he himself wrote – in search for new sources of fascination, Malczewski created a separate genre, almost unknown in Polish art: magical industrial landscape. He was inspired by new economic and sociological phenomena that formed part of the politically-controlled enthusiasm for change, but he arrived at an entirely non-propaganda form of painting. Pylons, factory floors, turbines, mines and mountain tops are transformed into theatrical scenes – a play of colours, shapes and forms – a curtain of reality that the author draws with his way of seeing. Framing, cutting, perspective games and the cool, calculated composition of the planes seem to turn them into stills from a film, a staged reportage; the author shapes them in line with his own terrifying vision of these places."<sup>16</sup>

One such representation is undoubtedly *The Dam Is Growing. Rożnów* (fig. 1), which is included in the IPS exhibition catalogue under no. 48. Its dimensions – 115 × 150 cm – render it one of the largest works on display at the exhibition. The painting belongs to the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (inv. no. MPW 1809 MNW), but for many years it figured under a wrong title. One of the numerous articles written by Malczewski<sup>17</sup> featured a black-and-white illustration that corresponded to the work at hand. Based thereon, the title of the painting was changed: in 1954 (year of acquisition),<sup>18</sup> it was erroneously entered into the inventory as *Porąbka. Dam on the Soła River* and retained this title until 2013. The Rożnów Dam was depicted in several works, but this one seems special. It attracts the eye with a particularly dynamic frame and selection of highly contrastive colours (the dominant hues are intensive, even aggressive greens). The consistent tight framing (bringing to mind a quick, accidental shot from a photographic camera) and reduced composition also add to the evocativeness of the work. The entire picture is flooded in life-giving sunlight, which highlights the atmosphere of joy associated with the birth of new life. However, the formal means were not to everyone's liking; some researchers saw the colour palette of the painting and its flat, "poster-like" composition as a weakness of the artist: "The great panoramic shots depicting the construction of the Rożnów Dam, showing immense heaps of concrete, are unpleasantly cold and dispassionate in their linear, flat form and rectangular, dead colour scheme. [...] A dreary account as if made by a camera obscura, views which are not even journalistic, as they lack any life, far removed from the vibrant descriptions penned by Wańkowicz, who also touched upon this subject, yet with a decidedly different result."<sup>19</sup>

In his innovative visual reportage, the artist strongly reduced the presence of man, his traces are almost entirely erased. In spite of the vibrant colours, the mute landscape overwhelms the viewer with its coldness and emptiness. The lack of man means the victory of the machine – an ideal device which operates on its own, having already annexed the natural landscape. Fragmentary views of nature merely act as a background, they form the scenery of

<sup>16</sup> Folga-Januszewska, "Malczewski i mit...", op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> Malczewski, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> The painting was donated by the Office of the Council of Ministers, so it might have formed part of a group of eight paintings purchased in 1939 to decorate the Main Railway Station in Warsaw.

<sup>19</sup> Stanisław Potępa, *Rafał Malczewski* (Tarnów, 2006), p. 304.



this representation. The emotional coldness emanating from the painting was associated with shortcomings in the artist's technique, which was interpreted as one of the negative aspects of the entire cycle: "Given the poor painting technique, the emotional dissociation from the subject results in works which are dead, works whose painterly misery is almost desperate."<sup>20</sup>

The dam on the Dunajec in Rożnów<sup>21</sup> (erected between 1935 and 1941) was one of the key points in the design of the entire industrial region, mainly on account of the monumental scale of realization (550 metres long and 32.5 metres high, foundations going 17 metres deep into the ground). This was where high-power electricity was to be generated, which was to completely satisfy the needs of the new industrial plants. The momentum of the construction was vividly described by Wańkowicz: "Work was in full swing. The plan was made to construct water reservoirs and a hydroelectric power plant. 27 reservoirs are to be made in the Vistula river basin. 19 reservoirs – in the Dniester river basin. Water which used to advocate anarchy, which used to swell and flood once in four years, will now gleam inside them, waiting for man's beckoning. [...] The Rożnów reservoir is to be the largest of such containers. The engineer is erecting a dam across the basin, 20 metres deep into the ground and 30 metres high above the surface. This monstrous amount of concrete with a total height that almost equals the tower of St Mary's Church [in Krakow], 500 metres long, 30 metres wide at the base; these 380,000 square metres of concrete – this is an equivalent of 300 giant six-storey tenement houses, this is the entire Marszałkowska Street populated with such tenements from the Union Square up until the Saski Gardens."<sup>22</sup>

The second task of the Rożnów Dam was to regulate the river and counteract floods (construction of a retention reservoir), which often happened along this section; the last great flood of July 1934 was the direct reason for launching the construction. The dam was erected across the "Rożnów loop," in a valley with the meandering river at the bottom. The resulting retention reservoir (Rożnów Lake) was to be the largest in the Second Polish Republic. As the work was not finished until 1941, Malczewski's painting presents the construction site at an advanced stage of completion. Wańkowicz also perceived the military benefits associated with building a hydroelectric plant, which mostly consisted in generating energy from other sources than coal: "Coal? – It is 250 kilometres away from our Central Region. Coal. It is located on the very border of Germany. It's as if someone's heart was located on top of his chest rather than inside it."<sup>23</sup>

The second work which – with a high degree of probability – may be associated with Rożnów is a watercolour entitled *The Dunajec near Rożnów* (no. 35 in the IPS exhibition catalogue; inv. no 184479 MNW; **fig. 2**). It is a sketch for a painting<sup>24</sup> of the same title which shows a ship moored at the shore or wharf of the basin, probably with a mooring winch or port crane. The entire image is dominated by three elements: the abyss of the waters, mountains and overcast sky. All of the above are rendered in a grey-green-lilac colour scheme. Contrary to the optimistic nature of *The Dam Is Growing, Rożnów*, which was an apotheosis of human

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> See Wańkowicz, C.O.P.:..., op. cit. One of the chapters is entirely devoted to the Rożnów investment.

<sup>22</sup> Id., *Sztafeta*..., op. cit., pp. 72–73.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> *Mountainous River Landscape (Rożnów)*, oil on paperboard, 70 × 101 cm, inv. no. MPW 1814 MNW (former no. 184471 MNW), held at the NMW until 2000 as a deposit of the author.

labour, this is a fundamentally different vision. Here, mechanical equipment seems to be assimilated with the omnipotence of nature, which subjugates and neutralizes it. All the more so as the work not only lacks the presence of any human being, but even any traces thereof. It is a vision of a timeless void, a picture of an extinct civilization, which left behind only immaterial traces, as well as a visualization of a sad reflection in which the artist expresses his nostalgia for the lost wilderness contaminated by man. Such digressions form only a small part of the cycle. The work could not be used for propaganda purposes and was probably created with a different objective in mind.

Malczewski also hailed the plant erected in Mościce – a town named after Ignacy Mościcki, whose technological solutions were used there. "We have just visited the plant – this powerful climb towards God, for how else could one name the human genius which uses air and water to produce solid matter that makes new life grow in the fields. God does it on the roots of papilionaceous plants, in the smile of a summer's day. Man, on the other hand, has to surpass himself, pile up the dangerous world of machines. We have seen the ten huge, huge – six metres at the base, 17 metres tall – absorption towers of President Mościcki's system."<sup>25</sup> The NMW collection includes the painting *Mościcki's Towers. Mościce* (inv. no. MPW 3840 MNW; **fig. 3**), which was included under no. 55 in the IPS catalogue. It also features a drawing (which is missing from the IPS catalogue) entitled *Interior of a Factory Floor in Mościce* (inv. no. Rys.W.13137 MNW; **fig. 4**), which is identical with the painting, so it must have been a sketch for it. This situation shows that the artist did not change the composition when transferring it from his sketchbook onto the canvas. This is an example of particular consistency in using the reportage technique, in which compliance with the factual representation is a fundamental value. The painting depicts the interior of an industrial plant with two monumental granulation containers occupying the majority of the canvas, thus described by Wańkowicz: "They are rising up like colossi in the empty floor."<sup>26</sup> The scene is constructed using pure, vivid colours, emanating an atmosphere of optimism. Next to one of the containers, the painter placed a small, sketchy outline of a man. Juxtaposing the tiny figure with the giant container underlines the scale of the plant; it also reiterates the hierarchy of values, according to which everything is subordinated to the industrial project, while the human being becomes a cog in the efficiently operating machine.

Mościce was created to house the State Works of Nitrogen Compounds, constructed in the years 1927–33 (in 1951, the district was incorporated into Tarnów). The project was initiated by the world-famous chemist and subsequent President of the Second Polish Republic, Ignacy Mościcki. It was not by chance that between 1930 and 1935, the enterprise (at that time combined with the State Works in Chorzów, also depicted by Malczewski in the "Black Silesia" cycle<sup>27</sup>) was managed by Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski. The 670 hectares hosted the plant and a housing estate designed with particular attention to green leisure areas for its inhabitants (which is not visible in *Mościcki Towers. Mościce*, but the infrastructure of the housing estate was still under construction when the painting was created). The facility produced and exported to over 60 countries such products as: ammonium sulphate, calcium cyanamide, nitric acid, compressed

<sup>25</sup> Wańkowicz, *Sztafeta...*, op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>26</sup> Id., *C.O.P.:*..., op. cit., p. 104. Mościce was also singled out as a separate chapter.

<sup>27</sup> I.a., *Condensators in Chorzów (Sunday)*, 1934, oil on canvas, 115 × 92 cm, The Silesian Museum in Katowice, inv. no. MŚK/SzM/422 and *Condensators in Chorzów*, 1934–35, watercolour on paper, 53,5 × 72 cm, The Chorzów Museum, inv. no. MCh Szt 1413.

hydrogen, compressed oxygen, hydrochloric acid and ammonium nitrate. The main production units were granulation (absorption) towers; there were ten of them in the facility, each had a diameter of six metres at the base and was 17 metres high. Wańkowicz attempted to outline the complicated principle of their operation: “We are leaving the Mościce halls, passing underneath some giant plate rotating at the bottom of the tower. This is a granulation tower. So as to ensure that the nitrate solution does not solidify into one lump, but instead immediately takes on a form that is useful for the farmer, it is sprinkled in the several-storey tower. Before the hot nitrate rain falls to the bottom of the tower, it solidifies, cooled with the cold air. The finished agricultural product is transported from the rotating bottom of the tower. The chips are thrown up, knives are raking out, cold air is rushing through the axis of the moving base.”<sup>28</sup>

The NMW collection also includes a watercolour entitled *Interior of a Factory* (inv. no. 184510 MNW), which figures under no. 81 in the IPS catalogue (fig. 5). The sketch was hastily executed by the artist. It is a study for the painting *Mościce Pipeline* held at the National Museum in Szczecin (inv. no. MNS Sp 1005). In all likelihood, the depicted facility is a detail of a floor with absorption towers, but showing a smaller part of the frame, thanks to which it is more detailed than the previous representation.<sup>29</sup>

One of the main functions of the Central Industrial Region was to make industrial production independent from coal mined in Silesia in case of an armed conflict with the Third Reich. Natural gas, sufficient deposits of which were located near Jasło, became an alternative source of energy. The geological conditions of natural gas occurrence are related to the presence of oil deposits, which at that time stirred the imagination of the average citizen. Wańkowicz captured it very accurately: “The energy which renders COP largely independent from coal is natural gas. Gas is closely linked to oil. What is more, oil is a key matter for defence. Therefore, one cannot write a book on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary [of independence – translator’s note] and not write about oil.”<sup>30</sup> This important element of the entire economic system was depicted by Malczewski in his painting *Pipeline in the Fields* (inv. no. MPW 4060 MNW; fig. 6), which was entitled *Gas Pipeline* in the IPS catalogue (no. 60). Approximately 300 km of the Gorlice–Jasło–Krosno–Ostrowiec pipeline had been built until 1938. The painting presents the scene of burying pipes in the fields and uncultivated lands. A photograph showing a similar image is to be found in Wańkowicz’s book with a description: “Driving for miles on end, we see an endless pipeline, like a line, running at the side of the road, not yet buried in the ground.”<sup>31</sup> The landscape is reduced to the basic elements, as a result of which one has the impression of emptiness in the representation. Looking closely, it is possible to discern the outlines of workers employed at the pit. Their scale brings home the monumental space of the entire composition. This is another of Malczewski’s works in which man is just one of the elements of representation – and, what is more, not the most important one. He seems to disappear in the landscape. In this

<sup>28</sup> Wańkowicz, *Sztafeta...*, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>29</sup> Mościce also inspired later artists: one of the most renowned is undoubtedly Wilhelm Sasnal, who was also born and brought up here. Fascinated by the industrial landscape, whose elements he reduced to synthetic, abstract forms, he several times returned to the subject of the city and its industrial facility, with which his family and friends were professionally associated. The result were characteristic landscapes, such as *Mościce I* and *II* created in 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Wańkowicz, *Sztafeta...*, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>31</sup> Id., *C.O.P....*, op. cit., p. 98.



particular case, the artist placed more emphasis on the natural scenery than on the industrial elements of representation. One has the impression that what the viewer is facing here is the abandoned subject matter of Malczewski's former studies: the landscape which brought him fame and recognition, favourable reviews and medals at national and international exhibitions.<sup>32</sup> Instead of mountains and hills, we see the new, perfectly flat landscape of an endless valley, limited solely by the horizon, which is approached by the construction. The title pipeline merely serves as a pretext to depict the magnificent emptiness of the landscape. When comparing this painting with earlier works of the artist, one of the critics saw "a composition full of charm and simplicity," which has the gift of magically impacting the average viewer, and noticed that "This style approaches the German 'new objectivity' – at the exhibition, only *Pipeline* also succumbs to such tendencies."<sup>33</sup> Without a doubt, the painting stands out against the rest of the cycle. Both the style and the toned-down colour palette recall the atmosphere of the artist's earlier landscapes and some works from the "Black Silesia" series;<sup>34</sup> it is a return to the rejected romantic aura, which does not serve propaganda purposes.

The NMW collection also includes a watercolour depicting the pipeline (inv. no. 184463 MNW); it may be identified as the work figuring in the IPS catalogue under no. 66 or 67 – *Gas Passage through Jasiołka River* or *Gas Passage through Wistoka River* (both rivers are close by; Jasiołka flows into Wistoka in Jasto). It shows (fig. 7) a detail of a landscape, in which a pipeline emerges from the ground and runs next to a metal bridge structure towards the other side of the river. The scene is rigorously framed, the entire composition is subjugated to the structure of the pipeline, other elements are merely chance additions, enhancing the impression of modern, fast-moving life. This scene may be regarded as a typical example of reportage art: suddenly capturing a fragment of an event, which does not purport to provide exhaustive information. Highlighting one element renders it more important and shifts the viewer's focus to a detail, which might have otherwise escaped his attention.

A separate, small group of works in the cycle are images of towns located within the COP. Their main function was to present the cultural role of historical urban centres, which represented a symbolic counterpoise to the modern industrial vision. In this case, the romanticism of an urban landscape, highlighting the role of historical buildings, was also used by Malczewski for propaganda purposes. One perfect example of the above are images of Sandomierz. They were to recall the historical importance of the town and encourage viewers to discover the tourist potential of the area. In the 1930s, state authorities placed more and more emphasis on fostering tourism. In propaganda terms, tourism meant promoting the beauty of Polish nature and architectural monuments commemorating the history of the country. They were to remind citizens of the proud past of the Republic of Poland and the 1000-years-old foundations of the current state. The choice of Sandomierz, which appeared in the majority of Malczewski's works, was not accidental. This particular town was to become the capital of the new province, which was to encompass all lands of the Central Industrial Region. The collection includes

<sup>32</sup> I.a., small silver medal at the General National Exhibition in Poznań in 1929; award of the Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Education for the painting *October* given at the IPS November Salon in 1930; gold medal for the painting *Spring in the Mountains* at the International World Exhibition of Art and Technology in Paris in 1937.

<sup>33</sup> Stanisław Rogoyski, [s.t.], *Nike*, no. 2 (1939), pp. 170–71.

<sup>34</sup> Such as: *Illegal Coal Pits*, 1935, oil on canvas, 80 × 98 cm, The Chorzów Museum, inv. no. MCh Szt 1365; *Industrial Landscape – Slag Heap*, watercolour on paper, 51 × 67 cm, The Chorzów Museum, inv. no. MCh Szt 616.

two very similar watercolours depicting Sandomierz. They may be identified as: *Towards Sunset. Sandomierz* (inv. no. 184478 MNW; **fig. 8**), which figures in the IPS catalogue under no. 69 and *Port in Sandomierz* (inv. no. Rys.W.11595 MNW), which is listed in same under no. 68. These are views of the town seen from the other side of the river. They show a panorama of the historical old town built on the steep Vistula escarpment. The only difference in both works is the presence (in the first) of a raft with a fisherman on the river.

Art critics were not unanimous in their assessment of Malczewski's works. In most cases, their attitude depended on their political worldview and the publication in which the review was to appear, although negative opinions were more prevalent.<sup>35</sup> Most found fault with the technical shortcomings visible in the works as well as the inadequacy of using the "poster technique" and garish colour combinations: "[...] is the proof of the ultimate downfall of this once talented artist. Rafał Malczewski expressed the industrial subject matter in such a sloppy and tacky form that the renowned COP is choking and glaring with a cacophonous nightmare of postcard-like colours."<sup>36</sup> The above statement was supported by the artist's monographer, Stanisław Potępa, who was also one of the critics of the cycle. However, his attitude was undeservedly severe: "The cycle was welcomed by 'reviewers' of all pro-government, pro-state newspapers, but professional critics, who had hitherto approached Rafał Malczewski's art with a critical, albeit usually genuine recognition, either ignored the COP cycle or explicitly described it as a misunderstanding. The artist concludes the interwar period in his oeuvre with the disaster of an artistically ill-considered cycle; he is lost in illustrative imitativeness, most often producing verist watercolours."<sup>37</sup> Potępa concludes: "By taking up the subject of COP, Malczewski undoubtedly wanted to maintain his position in the country, but it was a complete washout. All oil paintings in the cycle breathe an air of impassive coldness, sometimes even vacuous impotence."<sup>38</sup>

The technical shortcomings of Malczewski's art resulting from the lack of formal artistic education<sup>39</sup> were noticed already by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, who was also one of the first critics to write about the painter: "The only non-artist painter and representative of hyperrealism I see today is the little acknowledged Rafał Malczewski."<sup>40</sup> However, he saw these deficiencies as a virtue rather than a fault. Authors of negative opinions were used to Malczewski's mountain landscapes. In fact, they equated his art with this subject only, as if denying him the right to depict anything else in his works. They valued the lyrical and romantic aura of the paintings, but could not accept the change of subject and style, regarding them as a creative regression. They demonstrated a complete lack of understanding for the new artistic concept, succumbing to the rule that – if an artist does something well and to everyone's contentment – he has no right to introduce any changes. They were simply outraged by the audacity of the

<sup>35</sup> I.a., Michał Weinzieher, "Ostatnie wystawy w I.P.S.-ie," *Nasz Przegląd*, no. 353 (1938); Jerzy Hulewicz, "Wystawa w I.P.S. Krańce zygzaków," *Kurier Poranny*, no. 351 (1938); Konrad Winkler, "Ostatnie wystawy," *Pion*, nos 51–52 (1938).

<sup>36</sup> Ludwik Stradun, "Wystawa w I.P.S.-ie," *Sygnaty*, no. 60 (1939).

<sup>37</sup> Potępa, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>39</sup> Rafał Malczewski did not graduate from an art school, neither did he ever enrol on any studies in this respect. He learned everything from his father, Jacek Malczewski. Therefore, he may be regarded as self-taught.

<sup>40</sup> Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, "Malarstwo (nie sztuka) Rafała Malczewskiego i tło jego powstania," *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 21 (1928).

painter, whose previous works were adored and generally praised: "These images from Rożnów, Mielec and Stalowa Wola, painted quickly and on a large scale – these gas pipelines, ferries, gravel pits, assembly halls, etc. represent broad painterly notes, jotted down live from nature, impetuous cut-outs from the land of development and future – executed with a splendid line and ample sense of the spatiality (of air). They are interesting, sometimes even beautiful – but devoid of the 'mystical' BEYOND – or ABOVE – realism that characterized those poetry-filled works, Malczewski's old paintings from his beloved Tatras."<sup>41</sup>

The artist himself refuted some of the critical voices, explaining that: "There was no time or distance for any kind of synthesis [...]"<sup>42</sup> This statement underlines the reportage nature of the works and the need to capture images in a sudden and often haphazard manner, although it is also an excuse of sorts and an attempt to escape the wave of criticism. One ought to admit that the propaganda importance of the works was noticed even by critical reviewers, as has recently been described by Iwona Luba: "It is worth noticing that even in the most unfavourable reviews – the criticism is aimed at the scarce artistic value of the cycle, and the resulting low impact the subject matter had on the viewer, rather than the planned propaganda nature of the works. Producing the cycle on commission of the authorities did not raise any objections either. In late 1930s artists basically demanded state patronage."<sup>43</sup> Luba also proves that paintings commissioned by the authorities "cease to perform a predominantly decorative or even informative function, gaining an ideological edge."<sup>44</sup> Propaganda functions were often analysed also in the context of the influence of Soviet art "[...] the new, emerging reality of Polish industry. In our context, this was without a doubt a pioneer's job. In total countries such subjects have been exploited for a long time, especially in the USSR, while the artists executing them are given a handicap by the authorities."<sup>45</sup>

Positive, even enthusiastic reviews could also be found, such as the one written by Mieczysław Wallis, who delights in the descriptions of lush colour combinations: "[...] we are joyfully shaken. The large patches of emerald and olive, blue and lilac on these paintings, crossed here and there by streaks of vivid red or yellow, affect us in an exuberant manner. [...] 'Steel,' 'poster-like' – this is said of Malczewski's paintings by the advocates of contemporary French colourism. [...] delights our sight with its fresh and vivid colour patches." He also notices the innovative form and subject and the departure from traditional representations of industrial buildings.<sup>46</sup> There is also the very interesting review by Tadeusz Pruszkowski, who suggests some possibilities of exploring a new type of art: "Rafał Malczewski set himself a beautiful task to visualize the COP. He criss-crossed and painted Sandomierz, Mielec and their surroundings. [He rendered] the emerging factories and workshops, dams, turbines and high-voltage networks with the same passion as a fellow battle scene painter [would paint] horse croups, swords, pikes and cannons. [...] The result is a greatly useful thing, a history of

<sup>41</sup> Nela Samotyhowa, "Przegląd ostatnich wystaw artystycznych w Warszawie. Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy Rafała Malczewskiego," *Praca Obywatelska*, no. 2 (1939), p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Interview published in *Expres Poranny*, no. 342 (1938), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Luba, *Stalowa Wola...*, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> Ead., *Duch romantyzmu i modernizacja...*, op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>45</sup> Rogoyski, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> Mieczysław Wallis, "Wystawy w I.P.S.-ie. C.O.P. Rafała Malczewskiego," *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 3 (1939), p. 7.

the Central Region authentically visualized through paintings. No photograph can convey it quite like Rafał. Neither photography nor even photomontage could similarly eliminate the superfluous and highlight the most vital. I have the impression that Rafał Malczewski would be extremely fit to design great industrial posters, I don't know whether he is exploited in that direction."<sup>47</sup>

The collection held at the National Museum in Warsaw, comprising three paintings and six watercolours, is the largest preserved set from the cycle "Central Industrial Region" by Rafał Malczewski. It is also one of the most important examples of works of art commissioned by the authorities of the Second Polish Republic, which wished to create and legitimize a vision of the country's success under their leadership. "The propaganda of economic success that was to be ensured by industrialized regions: COP, Upper Silesia backed with the energy industry of Zaolzie and, last but not least, the pride of the Second Republic – the port in Gdynia, was to confirm the nation in the belief that Poland was a rapidly developing modern country."<sup>48</sup>

Translated by Aleksandra Szkudłapska

<sup>47</sup> Tadeusz Pruszkowski, [s.t.], *Gazeta Polska*, no. 1 (1939).

<sup>48</sup> Luba, *Duch romantyzmu i modernizacja...*, op. cit., p. 162.