

| The Gallery of Polish Art Under the State Art Collections. From Idea to Realisation

The first idea to create a national art gallery emerged already with the inception of Polish museology, its leading, albeit not only, proponent being King Stanisław August. It was a notion that would return throughout the following centuries, in various scale and under different names, yet never coming to fruition.¹ At the threshold of Poland regaining independence in 1918, none of the existing and publicly accessible art collections in Poland was state-owned, and their caretakers had at their disposal neither the financial resource nor the physical premises to make it possible to gather and exhibit a canonical collection of Polish and European art.² There was no long-term collecting strategy in place, the outcome solely resulting from donor whim. Though the existing collections did attest to the existence of a Polish national culture, the picture that they presented deviated from what the newly reborn country was in need of. A return to the idea for a national art gallery seemed obvious, though its materialisation transpired to be arduous and protracted.

The first evaluation of the state and needs of Polish museology was carried out in 1914 during the 1st Congress of Polish Museum Representatives in Krakow,³ to be further expanded on at the 1920 and 1921 Congresses of Polish History and Art Museum Association Delegates in Poznań and Krakow. One of the participants and speakers was Mieczysław Treter (1883–1943), an art historian, lecturer, curator at the Lubomirski Museum in Lviv, and author of the 1917 monograph *Muzea współczesne. Studium muzeologiczne* [Contemporary museums. A museological study].⁴ His short text on the presence of contemporary art in Polish museums

¹ Among the most noteworthy were the Gallery of Polish Artists and Things at the Mielżyński Museum in Poznań (1881), the Contemporary Gallery of the National Museum in Krakow (1879–83) and the collection held by the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in Warsaw. See, i.a., Aldona Tołysz, “Piękny pomnik narodowy. Z dziejów kształtowania się muzeum artystycznego na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej,” in *Studia o muzealnej pamięci na ziemiach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej do roku 1918*, Tomasz F. de Rosset, Aldona Tołysz, Małgorzata Wawrzak, eds (Toruń, 2020), pp. 157–86 [with further bibliography therein]. For more on the subject of art collections in Polish lands before 1918, see Tomasz F. de Rosset, “By skreślić historię naszych zbiorów”. *Polskie kolekcje artystyczne* (Toruń, 2021).

² One exception was the building of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Poznań, seized from the Germans.

³ Rules and Regulations of the Polish Museologists Delegation (1914), see Bogusław Mansfeld, *Muzea na drodze do samoorganizacji. Związek Muzeów w Polsce 1914–1951 / Museum on the path towards selforganization. The Museum Association in Poland 1914–1951*, Appendix 1: Statuty Związku Muzeów w Polsce (Warsaw, 2000), p. 136. Biblioteka Muzealnictwa i Ochrony Zabytków. Seria B, vol. 102.

⁴ Mieczysław Treter, *Muzea współczesne. Studium muzeologiczne. Początki, rodzaje, istota i organizacja muzeów. Publiczne zbiory muzealne w Polsce i przyszły ich rozwój* (Kyiv, 1917). Reprinted in 2019 in the series *Pomniki Muzealnictwa Polskiego*. On the activity of Mieczysław Treter, see Diana Wasilewska, *Mieczysław Treter – estetyk, krytyk sztuki oraz “szara eminencja” międzywojennego życia artystycznego* (Krakow, 2019); Małgorzata Wawrzak, “Mieczysław Treter (1883–1943) – prekursor muzeologii polskiej,” *Muzealnictwo*, vol. 60 (2019), pp. 273–84.

was effectively the first post-war concept for a national gallery, as the author himself made known in the subtitle of a speech delivered in 1920.⁵ "In the current circumstances," he wrote, "it is difficult to find in any Polish museum materials appropriate for being able to learn about art of the present day, be it foreign or Polish."⁶ The author argued for the expansion of the existing art collections in Lviv, Krakow, Poznań and Warsaw, in tandem with the establishment of a Gallery of Contemporary Art modelled after German (Berlin, Munich), French (Paris) and Russian (Moscow) institutions. Contemporary art was to engender an increase of knowledge on domestic art and to spread information thereon in Poland and throughout the world: "I believe the establishment of a Gallery of Contemporary Art in Poland to be an immensely important vision for the country, and for the capital of Warsaw in particular. Above all – and I place all the emphasise on this – for social, economic and national prestige reasons."⁷ Such an institution was to gather art "from the death of Matejko to the present day," with consideration for all contemporary art disciplines: easel painting, decorative art, architecture, sculpture, prints, theatre and applied arts, as well as documentation on the evolution of all of these fields. Presented in the Gallery were to be permanent and temporary exhibitions, though a museum building would not be a priority, as, in the author's opinion, "one that is temporary and not ideally suited is better than none at all."⁸ Treter indicated that the best way to amass a collection would be state-funded purchases and long-term loans from private collectors: "[I]f a primordium of the Gallery emerges, however modest at first, in just a few rooms, it will become a protoplasm out of which in short order a mighty organism will develop. [...] If in the future we succeeded to create a department of foreign art in this gallery – not only through purchase but via exchange – we would acquire, by way of comparison, a recognition of native characteristics and a sense of the objective value of our art within the whole of world art."⁹

It appears that Treter's concept failed to find fertile ground. While 1921 saw the drafting of a proposal for a State Museum Council to serve as an advisory organ for the direction of state museum policy (with the following year's appointment of central and regional Museum Councils and the establishment of the State Collections Directorate to oversee the management of public assets, mainly art collections), the authorities appeared to be short of the necessary imagination to be able to begin amassing a contemporary art collection in an organised manner. Moreover, the Ministry of Art and Culture was dissolved in 1922, with its duties handed over to departments operating under the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education.¹⁰

⁵ Mieczysław Treter, "Muzea polskie wobec sztuki współczesnej (projekt Polskiej Galerii Sztuki Współczesnej w Warszawie)," in *Pamiętnik I i II Zjazdu Delegatów Związku Polskich Muzeów Historyczno-Artystycznych w Poznaniu w r. 1921 i w Krakowie w r. 1922*, Feliks Kopera, Wojciech Stanisław Turczyński, eds (Warsaw, 1924), pp. 25–34. In 1919, Treter prepared an "outline for a museum organisation concept in Poland", though, due to the lack of source materials it is difficult to determine how a gallery of Polish art would have fit in. See id., "Organizacja zbiorów państwowych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej," *Wiadomości Archeologiczne*, vol. 7 (1922), pp. 3–33.

⁶ Treter, "Muzea polskie...", op. cit., p. 26.

⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰ According to Art. 2 of the Decree on the Establishment of the Ministry of Art and Culture (Dz.U. z 1918 r. nr 19, poz. 52) [Journal of Laws dated 1918 no. 19, item 52], among the responsibilities of the 1918-founded Ministry of Art and Culture was the management and care of art, fine literature, historical property, art museums and theatres as well as the aesthetic education of the nation. See Maria Rogoyska, "Z dziejów mecenatu artystycznego w Polsce w latach 1918–1930," *Materiały do Studiów i Dyskusji*, no. 3/4 (19/20) (1954) p. 135; *Ministerstwo Kultury*

Less than two years after delivering his aforementioned speech, Treter went on to publish a short concept on the organisation of state collections, in which he shifted the emphasis from contemporary art to Polish collections: "it depends only on our good will that, for example, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw a grand, *sui generis* Polish Museum is created – a 'Museum' in the noblest and utterly modern sense of the word – that would bring to the world the glory of our country and our artistic culture!"¹¹ This was the first in a whole series of concessions made in the following years with regard to the concept of the gallery devised via the workings of the State Collections Directorate, of which Treter served as director until 1924 (fig. 1).

The Directorate was established in 1922 as a unit overseen by the Ministry of Public Works. In an overview of its activity, we read that it was created "in connection with the then-recently-initiated re-evacuation and restitution of works of art and national memorabilia from Russia and the restoration and arrangement of official landmark interiors."¹² Already by then, the collection included contemporary works: "The Inventory of the State Collections Directorate includes about 6000 historical assets in Warsaw and Wawel Castle in addition to the contents of the Castle [Royal Castle in Warsaw] and Łazienki. In this are about 400 items to be the foundation of a gallery of contemporary Polish art."¹³ The oversight and recovery of collections by virtue of the Treaty of Riga (1921)¹⁴ did not preclude the possibility of building an own collection or following through on the concept devised and championed by Treter for an autonomous administration-research institution overseen by the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education (1923).¹⁵ Theoretically, after the planned two years of restitution efforts, an own collection would give the State Collections Directorate a new identity. In all certainty, Treter accepted such a timeline, even symbolically alluding to the king's original idea: "besides these rich collections of art whose purpose was to adorn royal interiors, amassed by Stanisław August with the help of his artists as harmonious pieces in a spatial set, besides the clearly already existing museum departments (casts, miniatures, gems, numismatics, medals, prints, and natural and archaeological specimens), also created at the Castle was to be a 'Contemporary Museum' (Musée Moderne) according to the king's original design; the king had deliberated on it even in the final years of his reign though he

i Sztuki w dokumentach 1918–1998, foreword by Andrzej Siciński, selected by Andrzej Siciński, Adam Grzegorz Dąbrowski, Jerzy Gmurek (Warsaw, 1998), p. 23; Dariusz Marciniak, "Ministerstwo Sztuki i Kultury Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w latach 1918–1922," *Rocznik Łódzki*, vol. 63 (2015), pp. 91–105. A "reorganisation" of the Ministry was under consideration in government circles from 1920, which was a source of frustration for each successive minister and one of the reasons for the lack of long-term programmes for the support of art and culture institutions.

¹¹ Treter, "Organizacja zbiorów państwowych...", op. cit., p. 6.

¹² Notation, c. 1924, State Art Collections Management, TS, Archive of New Records, Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education (further: AAN, MWRiOP), ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7071, folio 4.

¹³ Ibid. On the activity of the State Art Collections, see Wanda Wojtyńska, "Działalność Państwowych Zbiorów Sztuki," *Kronika Zamkowa*, 1–2 (49–50) (2005), pp. 193–220; ead., "Państwowe Zbiory Sztuki w Zamku Królewskim w Warszawie," in *200 lat muzealnictwa warszawskiego. Dzieje i perspektywy. Materiały sesji naukowej, Zamek Królewski w Warszawie, 16–17 listopada 2005 roku*, Andrzej Rottermund, Andrzej Sołtan, Marek Wrede, eds (Warsaw, 2006), pp. 139–60.

¹⁴ See, i.a., Andrzej Jakubowski, "Restytucja i repatriacja polskich zabytków i dzieł sztuki z Rosji Radzieckiej po 1921 r. Artykuł XI traktatu ryskiego," in *Polskie dziedzictwo kulturowe u progu niepodległości. Wokół Towarzystwa Opieki nad Zabytkami Przeszłości*, Piotr Jamski, Ewa Manikowska, eds (Warsaw, 2010), pp. 93–125.

¹⁵ See, i.a., Proposals for the regulation of agendas concerning state museum policies and the management of state collections, organisational constitution of the State Collections of the Republic of Poland, regulations for the Management of the State Collections, TS, MS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7071, folios 10–152, esp. folios 95–98.

could not see to the ultimate realisation of that beautiful intention.”¹⁶ In a report on his activity in 1923, Treter did not distinguish any specific efforts connected with the establishment of an art gallery, limiting himself only to a cryptic mention of designing “a series of projects pertaining to the general organisation of the State Collections.”¹⁷ At that time, the collection grew with the acquisition of individual works, though no information exists as to whether their selection was the outcome of a collecting strategy devised for the gallery. It is also difficult to determine to what degree Treter had been involved in the decision-making.¹⁸ In the early years of the Directorate’s operation, it seemed that the vision for a contemporary gallery proposed by him was feasible. However, mounting difficulties connected with the unregulated situation of administration and premises ultimately forced Treter to step down from his post, though the project itself was not terminated.¹⁹

In 1925–27, Treter’s successor was Wojciech Stanisław Turczyński,²⁰ who tried to carry on Treter’s policies, especially concerning the restitution of assets from Russia, an arduous and lengthy process.²¹ At the same time, items for a gallery were selected from the Directorate’s

¹⁶ Mieczysław Treter, *Zbiory państwowe w Zamku Królewskim w Warszawie. Doba St. Augusta a czasy dzisiejsze* (Warsaw, 1924), p. 9.

¹⁷ Report on the activity of the Director of the State Collections and his personnel, 24 November 1923, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7071, folios 168–70.

¹⁸ Problems connected with the collection started to be pointed out especially after Treter’s resignation: “The purchase of works for the collection is, simply put, a waste of state money; other than a few objects of real value, which could be counted on one hand, purchased are heaps of objects without any serious worth to fill more and more cupboards. For these accomplishments, made over his five-year tenure, the senior museum clerk [Kazimierz Brokl – AT] has recently been promoted to the post of director of state collections. To this end, it was necessary to “part ways” with the previous director, Dr Mieczysław Treter, who was widely known for his great energy. Unfortunately, he had not been able to learn humility and acquiescence, and on top of that he had a silly ambition for useful work,” see “Ponury stan muzealnictwa polskiego. Wygodna śpiączka departamentu sztuki. Jak się marnują pieniądze publiczne,” *Wiadomości Literackie*, no. 23 (1924), p. 3.

¹⁹ Until the selection of a new director, named as interim director was Kazimierz Brokl. In the opinion of Diana Wasilewska, the reason for Treter’s resignation “were the failed attempts to fight for the autonomy of the office and for the possibility to bring together all museum matters under one department at the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education,” and “the impossibility of executing submitted proposals.” See Wasilewska, *Mieczysław Treter...*, op. cit., pp. 12, 300. This is confirmed by the words of the man himself, who in 1923 wrote: “For more than a year, a whole series of my proposals aiming to regulate the agendas of Official State Buildings Management, and in particular the State Collections Directorate, tied to the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, were considered by a variety of factors; I even issued a published paper on the subject (“Organisation of State Collections in the Republic of Poland,” with consideration for foreign legislation, where this has been regulated long ago and very successfully), though I was given no concrete reply,” and a little further, “Not being able to take responsibility for either the general condition of the state collections and the methods of their management or a rational and normal course of action in my purview (still undefined, coincidentally), I ought to step away from my duties and hand in my resignation.” See Mieczysław Treter, letter dated 30 June 1923, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7091, folios 108, 109. After his resignation, in 1926 Treter took over as the head of the Society for the Propagation of Polish Art among Foreigners (TOSSPO). See Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito, “TOSSPO – propaganda sztuki polskiej za granicą w dwudziestolecu międzywojennym,” in *Sztuka i władza. Materiały z konferencji zorganizowanej przez Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk w dniach 30 XI–2 XII 1998 roku w Warszawie*, Dariusz Konstantynow, Robert Pasieczny, Piotr Paszkiewicz, eds (Warsaw, 2001), pp. 143–55.

²⁰ Wojciech Stanisław Turczyński (1887–1960), in the years 1909–12 was a research worker in the art and archaeology collections room at Jagiellonian University, an assistant up to 1919, a staff member in the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education Department of Art, and later director of the State Collections.

²¹ Its symbolic conclusion was the *State Collections Restitutions Exhibition* held in 1929 on the initiative of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education in the Baryczka house: “The two-year period for the Commission to complete its work, determined by the Treaty of Riga, was exceeded more than three-fold, but the exhibition now open at the Baryczka house includes only the outcome of museum-historical property restitutions with a display of the last batches of works arriving in the summer of 1928,” see Witold Suchodolski, “Zarys

collection. The first mention of a gallery of Polish art appears in 1925 in a draught of a response to a questionnaire on the organisation and activity of the State Collections. According to that document, the State Gallery of Polish Art was part of the 1st department of the collection residing at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, its holdings made available to the public daily from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.²² It is difficult to come across any other accounts on the subject, most likely because the assortment initially remained in the shadow of the collection residing in the Royal Castle's state rooms. Opening in 1926, the gallery envisioned to illustrate the functioning of the State Collections Directorate had an effect opposite to its intended purpose: "instead of well thought-out and arranged rooms, we encountered an ordinary and most-pedestrian assortment of paintings, an assortment that no art merchant would ever put together today."²³ On the basis of surviving documents and publications, we know that in 1925 the collection included works by artists like Wacław Borowski, Olga Boznańska, Józef Brandt, Antoni Brodowski, Józef Czajkowski, Stanisław Czajkowski, Julian Fałat, Eugeniusz Geppert, Artur Grottger, Stanisław Kamocki, Roman Kramsztyk, Konrad Krzyżanowski, Aleksander Lesser, Leopold Loeffler, Jacek Malczewski, Jan Matejko, Józef Mehoffer, Piotr Michałowski, Stanisław Noakowski, Aleksander Orłowski, Józef Peszka, Andrzej Pronaszko, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Władysław Skoczylas, Ludomir Ślodziński, Władysław Ślewiński, Zofia Stryjeńska, Karol Tichy, Wojciech Weiss, Leon Wyczółkowski and Stanisław Wyspiański. Among the few sculptures were pieces by Henryk Kuna, Konstanty Laszczka, Ludwik Puget and Wacław Szymanowski²⁴ (fig. 2).

Undertaken in 1927 was a series of actions intended to change the image of the State Collections Directorate, some of the most significant of which were to join in the effort to bring the holdings of the Polish Museum in Rapperswill to Poland, to open an art library²⁵ and to organise a temporary exhibition of own holdings in the Baryczka house owned by the Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past. The last of these initiatives was especially important in the story of the future Gallery of Polish Art.²⁶ Holding patronage over the exhibition *Polish Art in State Collections* (24th exhibition of the Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past) was First Lady Michalina Mościcka and Minister of Religious Faiths and Public Education Gustaw Dobrucki.²⁷ In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue,

rewindykacji polskiego mienia muzealnego z Rosji na podstawie traktatu ryskiego," in *Wystawa rewindykacyjna zbiorów państwowych. Wybór dzieł sztuki i pamiątek narodowych odzyskanych z Rosji na podstawie traktatu pokojowego w Rydze* (Warsaw, 1929), p. 9.

²² State Collections of the Republic of Poland, appendix to no. 1022/25, MS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7071, folios 202-05.

²³ Józef Czajkowski, "Polityka sztuki w Polsce. Z powodu otwarcia wystawy Zbiorów Państwowych na Zamku Królewskim," *Warszawianka*, no. 87 (1926), p. 3. In his article, the author clearly references the resignation of Treter, who unlike his successor, possessed "the necessary competences and strength of character."

²⁴ See *Katalog Galerii Sztuki Polskiej* (Warsaw, 1932).

²⁵ The establishment of the Library of Art was one of the statutory objectives of the Ministry of Art and Culture headed by Zenon Przesmycki. After the ministry's dissolution, the library passed into the management of the State Collections Directorate. From 1924, it resided in the Tin-Roofed Palace and it opened to the public in 1927. See Leopold Binental, "Biblioteka Sztuki," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 46 (1922), p. 740; "Otwarcie Biblioteki Sztuki," *Polska Zbrojna*, no. 69 (1927), p. 7.

²⁶ Different names for the gallery appear in the press and documents. For the sake of clarity, in the article I use the name Gallery of Polish Art in reference to the collection built under the State Art Collections.

²⁷ The honorary Committee included Mieczysław Treter, by then already serving as Director of the Society for the Propagation of Polish Art among Foreigners. In charge of the exhibition's organisation and execution

Turczyński wrote: "In the great deal of work on the organisation of national life there ought also to be room, time and funds for uniting and showcasing the great artistic heritage of bygone centuries and for the systematic collection of contemporary artists' work into a single whole. The beginning of this effort is a *fait accompli*. Over the last ten years, chiefly on account of the need of government support for living artists – by way of purchase of their work, acquired has been a series of outstanding contemporary works: sculptures, paintings and prints. [...] In this fashion, the state collection has welcomed a department that is to be the seed for the future State Gallery of Polish Art."²⁸ The exhibition was met with considerable praise, not only for its skilful and well-planned arrangement but also for the works themselves, most of which had been previously unknown to the greater public.²⁹ Included were works by middle and younger generation artists like Eugeniusz Arct, Bolesław Cybis, Zdzisław Czermanski, Tytus Czyżewski, Henryk Grunwald, Gizela Hufnagłowa (Arctowa), Bronisław Jamontt, Edward Kokoszko, Felicjan Kowarski, Henryk Lewensztadt, Rafał Malczewski, the brothers Efraim and Menasze Seidenbeutel, Zygmunt Waliszewski and Wacław Wąsowicz. Added to the collection were paintings by Michalina Krzyżanowska, Józef Pankiewicz, Fryderyk Pautsch, Zbigniew Pronaszko, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Kazimierz Sichulski and Jan Stanisławski. Among the works purchased for the sculpture collection were pieces by Xawery Dunikowski, Stefan Karny, Franciszek Strynkiewicz, Jan Szczepkowski, Edward Wittig and August Zamoyski.³⁰ Usually single works were acquired for the collection, with newer works by individual artists added in subsequent years.

The State Collections Directorate's collecting of contemporary art was motivated by prestige. In the capital of the newly reborn country until nearly the end of the 1920s there existed no public collection that could showcase the latest products of Polish art. The National Museum's Gallery of Polish Painting, opened in 1922, was a testament more to the foresight of its art collector donors than to the efforts of its management at the time,³¹ and individual purchases could not change that. Nor was that the aim of the museum itself. As Juliusz Starzyński³² wrote: "the National Museum's chief mission inarguably lies in broadening knowledge on art

were Wojciech Stanisław Turczyński and Kazimierz Brokl from the State Collections Directorate and Władysław Kłyszewski from the Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past.

²⁸ Wojciech St. Turczyński, *Sztuka polska w zbiorach państwowych. Katalog XXIV wystawy Towarzystwa Opieki nad Zabytkami Przeszłości* [...] (Warsaw, 1927), p. 8. In concluding, the author expressed hope that "the idea to open a State Gallery of Polish Art in Warsaw will soon cease to be a pipe dream and will turn into action, which will surely find vehement support from government factors as well as from cultural spheres in society." See *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁹ "The former Ministry of Art and Culture took on the initiative, today further carried on by the art department of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, of gathering the most outstanding works in the domain of visual arts by currently living artists as well as from the entirety of the 19th century. Created in this manner was a now impressive set of excellent works of Polish painting and sculpture, which is the substance of the Society's current exhibition." See "Wiadomości bieżące [Nowa wystawa w kamienicy Baryczków]," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 123 (1927), p. 2; see also Wacław Husarski, "Sztuka polska w zbiorach państwowych (wystawa w kamienicy Baryczków)," *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 23 (1927), p. 460.

³⁰ See *Katalog Galerii Sztuki Polskiej*, *op. cit.*

³¹ The collection included works from the collections of Dominik Witke-Jeżewski, Ignacy Baranowski, Leon Franciszek Goldberg-Górski and Franciszek and Józefa Krzyształowicz.

³² Juliusz Starzyński (1906–74) was an art historian, director of the Art Propaganda Institute, in 1937–39 an employee of the National Museum in Warsaw, professor at the University of Warsaw, organiser and director of the State Art Institute in Warsaw, and later of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

of the past and thereby in nurturing aesthetic sensitivity and cultural awareness at large.”³³ Meanwhile, the collection of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, while wonderfully documenting art of the late 19th century, in no way represented newer currents despite its exhibiting activity. It was thus necessary to devise a state patronage model that would make it possible to fill in these gaps. Serving that purpose was supposed to be the 1927-founded State Collections Purchase Committee as well as mechanisms of financial support for artistic activity being discussed in government circles. The outcome was the National Culture Fund, which could regularly enrich state collections via purchases. Turczyński was certainly aware of the opportunities afforded by these solutions, though it was not he who brought about the creation of the gallery but Alfred Lauterbach, a ministerial advisor in the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education’s Department of Art,³⁴ who as a staff member in the Department of Art often participated in State Collections Directorate committees and was very well acquainted with its nature and the difficulties it struggled with (fig. 3).

For Lauterbach, the State Gallery of Polish Art was one of the main challenges facing the State Collections. The new director tried to combine the exhibiting activity promoted by Turczyński with efforts to regulate the legal situation of his institution and to raise the level of the projects it carried out, which in turn had been Treter’s calling card. Established under the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education in 1930 was the State Art Collections, which replaced the State Collections Directorate and retained a scope of activity analogous to its predecessor’s.³⁵ Work began on regulating purchases for state collections,³⁶ while the Department of Culture and Art at the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, in agreement with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, took the decision to establish the Art Propaganda Institute, whose mission supplemented, and to a degree overlapped with, the aspirations of the State Art Collections.³⁷ The Art Propaganda Institute’s temporary home became the Baryczka house, which enabled the financially troubled Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past to keep the building, which otherwise might have had to be put up for sale, and to continue, now under the auspices of the new institution, the exhibition activity

³³ Juliusz Starzyński, “Galeria malarstwa polskiego,” *Kultura* [supplement to *Express Poranny*], no. 3 (1931), p. 2.

³⁴ Jan Alfred Lauterbach (1884–1943) was an art historian, a clerk in the 3rd Department of Historical Monuments and Museums at the Ministry of Art and Culture, later an employee of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, member of the State Collections Purchase Committee, in 1928–37 Director of the State Art Collections, “currently [1938] one of the most outstanding experts on contemporary art in Poland.” See Mateusz Mises, *Polacy-chrześcijanie pochodzenia żydowskiego* (Warsaw, 1938), vol. 2, p. 77; Jan Lauterbach, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/6/3925. Both in official documents and in his own publications, Lauterbach used only his middle name.

³⁵ Directive of the Council of Ministers of 7 February 1930 on the Management of the State Art Collections (M. P. 1930, 46.74). State buildings continued to be under the care of the State Art Collections. See *Przewodnik po Zamku Kr. w Warszawie* (Warsaw, 1930).

³⁶ “Wywiad z prof. Wład. Skoczylasem Dyrektorem Departamentu Kultury i Sztuki w Ministerstwie WRiOP” [14 July 1930], *Czas*, no. 160 (1930), p. 4.

³⁷ Both institutions conducted exhibition activity. Yet, it quickly became apparent that the Art Propaganda Institute’s organisational potential surpassed the capabilities of the State Art Collections. The establishment of the API met with generally positive responses, though voices of scepticism did also appear: “We don’t need an Art Propaganda Institute. Baryczka house should have been left to serve the purpose it was built for. Meanwhile, more control should have been placed on purchases made by Mr Lauterbach for the Warsaw Castle.” See Varsoviensis, “O rzetelną kulturę i prawdziwą sztukę,” *Dziennik Poznański*, no. 172 (1930), p. 6; see also Joanna Sosnowska, *Materiały do dziejów Instytutu Propagandy Sztuki (1930–1939)* (Warsaw, 1992).

for which the old-town building had come to be known over the years.³⁸ In the subsequent years, the Institute moved into an exhibition hall at Saxon Square, with its former premises, in a rather natural progression, taken over by the State Art Collections (fig. 4).

As it had been for the Art Propaganda Institute, the choice of the Baryczka house was a temporary solution. Still in 1929, Lauterbach wrote in a letter to the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education: "The hope of receiving a suitable space in the Royal Castle in Warsaw for the painting and sculpture gallery appears to be increasingly illusory," at the same time indicating that possessing a state art museum or at least a gallery of national art was a necessity and would benefit the country's prestige.³⁹ In his opinion, the collection numbering about 400 paintings and sculptures should have been exhibited and systematically grown to resemble analogous collections in Paris or Berlin. Lauterbach also advocated for the construction of a dedicated building for the gallery, and if not that, then for at least an exhibition pavilion near Skaryszewski Park or the lease of one of the pavilions of the National Museum and Polish Army Museum being built at the time on Aleje Jerozolimskie. "Of the three above options, I believe the last one to be the most beneficial, on condition that the National Museum agrees to the merger of Polish artworks, which ought to be acknowledged as the foremost museological priority, as the gathering of Polish art from the National Museum and possibly the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts in a single pavilion under state supervision would create a serious and impressive gallery of Polish art."⁴⁰ Lauterbach gives the same argumentation in an undated memorandum: "These collections are mutually complementary, while none of them alone constitutes a complete whole without gaps. To merge the three collections into a single whole, in a single space under one management, would be a tremendous accomplishment – it would immediately make a great gallery of Polish art."⁴¹ Following that line of thinking, he argued that the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education should co-finance the construction of one of the four pavilions being built for the National Museum in Warsaw, to be turned into a Polish art gallery, in exchange for assets from the National Museum and the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts to be provided on long-term loan. Not losing its holdings, the first institution would thereby receive significant financial support, and the second a space for organising exhibitions, occupied by its collection, while the State Art Collections would manage the State Gallery. "I see no other options, as the construction of a dedicated building by the State would be considerably more costly, would require a suitable plot of land to be found, and would therefore render

³⁸ "This institution, having the aim of centralising art propaganda activity and setting that activity at a suitably high level, was established thanks to the efforts of the organisational committee consisting of Dir. Skoczylas, Mr. Jerzy Warchałowski and the editor Stanisław Wojnicki, as the result of conferences conducted in the past year with leading Polish artists by the former director of the department of art Prof. Jastrzębowski." See "Wiadomości bieżące [Instytut Propagandy Sztuki]," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 166 (1930), p. 2; K.W., "Instytut Propagandy Sztuki," *Polska Zbrojna*, no. 284 (1930), p. 9. The need for the institute to be established was voiced in, i.e., a memorandum of the Polish Arts Club from 1928. See Joanna Sosnowska, "Instytut Propagandy Sztuki 1930–1939," in *Sztuka lat trzydziestych. Materiały z sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Niedzica, kwiecień 1988 r.* (Warsaw, 1991), pp. 235–36; see also Rogoyska, "Z dziejów mecenatu artystycznego w Polsce...", op. cit., pp. 185–89.

³⁹ These arguments comply with those put forth by Treter in 1922. See Alfred Lauterbach, Concerning a location for the premises of the state gallery of Polish art, 1 February 1929, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7058, folios 219–21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., folio 220.

⁴¹ Alfred Lauterbach, Memorandum on the State Gallery of Art, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/8/7058, folios 17–18. The text is undated, but based on information therein we can surmise it comes from 1930–32.

the entire project unrealistic. Meanwhile, the construction of the pavilion in question by the city, without the State's involvement would be disadvantageous for further museum policy objectives."⁴² But before Lauterbach's vision could be put into execution, it was decided to organise a permanent exhibition temporarily in the Old Town Market Square.

The gallery's grand opening took place in 1932, attended by President Ignacy Mościcki, representatives of national government and people from the art world. Prepared at the time was also a short catalogue covering all of the collection's items. In a brief overview of the gallery's history, a fundamental change in its profile was pointed out: "Polonica and retrospective art have given way almost entirely to works of contemporary art, with the majority of this department's holdings acquired in the last four or five years. The change in purchase policy was the result of not only the State's desire to support contemporary artists, [...] Here, the State has a complementary role in the creation of a contemporary gallery modelled after the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris or similar ones in Berlin, Rome and other capitals. This is the profile to be had by the State Gallery of Polish Art. A small retrospective department is to serve only as a foundation for and bridge to contemporary art."⁴³ At the time, the collection numbered 417 items in total, 42 of them sculptures (34 on display) and 375 paintings and drawings (258 on display). "The closer we get to today," wrote Stefania Porhorska-Okołów in her review, "the more characteristic becomes the selection of works by a given artist. We encounter Fałat, Chełmoński, Wyczółkowski, and Juliusz Kossak only cursorily. There is no shortage of youngest artists. [...] The sculpture section is almost exclusively contemporary artists. Prints are represented richly and diversely."⁴⁴ Konrad Winkler, in turn, stressed that "to the extent that the main mission of the National Museum indisputably lies in broadening and cultivating knowledge on art of the past and cultural awareness in general, the State Art Collections firmly and skilfully ought to one day become the foundation for a great contemporary art museum reflecting Polish artistic output from the era of regained statehood"⁴⁵ (fig. 5).

Władysław Skoczylas's review mainly focussed on the strategy of acquiring works directly from artists. "For the above reasons, the character of the Gallery of Polish Art as a whole, in comparison to analogous collections at the National Museum and the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, is that of extraordinary contemporariness. This is today the largest and, in terms of quality, best assortment of contemporary art, of living Polish art."⁴⁶ In his lengthy description and analysis of the gallery's collection, the artist and recent director of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education's Department of Art (1930–31) repeatedly underscores the gallery's value in relation to his own vision. Skoczylas pointed out the need, among other things, for the comprehensive representation of contemporary art from the previous three decades and for collaboration with the National Museum. "In this way," he writes, "having determined a specific period that separates the two collections, it could be possible to begin to supplement them accordingly, and in the future, when the one reasonable reconciliation of the two competing institutions comes to pass, i.e., their integration, they will

⁴² Ibid., folio 18.

⁴³ *Katalog Galerii Sztuki Polskiej*, op. cit., pp. 5–6.

⁴⁴ Stefania Porhorska-Okołów, "Sztuka współczesna góruje nad retrospektywą. Galeria Sztuki Polskiej w kamienicy Baryczków," *Kurier Czerwony*, no. 62 (1932), p. 3.

⁴⁵ K. [Konrad] Winkler, "Galeria Sztuki Polskiej w kamienicy Baryczków na Starym Mieście II," *Polska Zbrojna*, no. 137 (1932), p. 7.

⁴⁶ Władysław Skoczylas, "Państwowa Galeria Sztuki Polskiej w kamienicy Baryczków," *Gazeta Polska*, no. 76 (1932), p. 7.

create a splendid whole.”⁴⁷ He was not alone in seeing the fusion of the two collections as an opportunity for the growth of a contemporary art collection. In all likelihood, Skoczylas was familiar with Lauterbach’s vision and his article shows that he supported it.

In its first year of operation (1932/33), the gallery was visited by nearly 7,000 people, which was not a bad result in comparison to the Royal Łazienki’s 25,000 annual visitors.⁴⁸ In 1934, the attendance grew to 9,565 but then dropped in the years 1936–37, when 5,647 people visited the gallery, including 122 organised trips.⁴⁹ Providing a certain picture of the arrangement of works inside the gallery in the year of its opening is an overview of the rooms with inventory numbers of individual works. The artworks were distributed throughout the premises, in the vestibule, in the stairwell, and in the hallways and rooms on the first, second and third floors.⁵⁰ Acquisition records for 1932–35 list more than 80 paintings, nine sculptures and over 100 prints.⁵¹ In later years, information on the gallery comes sporadically, with little to reflect Lauterbach’s efforts to elevate the institution’s stature. To a limited extent, Lauterbach’s work is illustrated by documents preserved at the Archive of Old and New Records and at the National Museum in Warsaw.⁵² Due to the incompleteness of the records, we can only surmise that Lauterbach tried to interest the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education in his vision, which he managed to do in 1934. In correspondence concerning the strategy for integrating the collections,⁵³ it is stated that “in charge of the unified collection, and in particular the prints room, numismatics room and painting gallery, is the director of the National Museum, who in matters related to purchases, exhibitions and arrangement of the collection will determine the course of action jointly with the director of the State Art Collections and with a delegate of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education.”⁵⁴ And further on: “In case of the contract being terminated by the City Council, the State Treasury is to receive, in compensation for its

⁴⁷ Ibid. Lengthy reviews of the opening appeared in the pages of other magazine as well, see W.H. [Wacław Husarski], “Galeria Sztuki Polskiej w kamienicy Baryczków,” *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, no. 16 (1932), p. 253; Jan Kleczyński, “Państwowa Galeria Sztuki Polskiej,” *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 120 (1932), p. 16.

⁴⁸ The gallery was open daily from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with the exception of Tuesdays.

⁴⁹ Society for the Protection of Monuments of the Past letter, no. 51/37, 16.04.1937, Special Collections, Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (further: IS PAN) Library, 1132-II 15, book 2, folios 1, 2 [n.p.].

⁵⁰ The State Gallery of Polish Art opened on 12 March 1932, MS, Special Collections IS PAN Library, ref. no. 1132-II 15, book 2, folio 14.

⁵¹ Register of works purchased for State Art Collections Management in 1932–33; List of works of art purchased by the Management of the State Art Collections [1933, 1934, 1935]; Purchases made by the Management of the State Art Collections 1935/6, TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 212–17a; see also AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7001, folios 397–462.

⁵² It is not a complete set – besides the aforementioned statements by Lauterbach in 1929–32, it also covers documents from 1935–38. The source has been studied by Wanda Wojtyńska, whose work concentrates on the activity of the State Art Collections in the context of the Royal Castle. The author also includes a short history of the Gallery of Polish Art. See Wojtyńska, “Działalność Państwowych Zbiorów Sztuki...,” op. cit.; ead., “Państwowe Zbiory Sztuki w Zamku Królewskim...,” op. cit. The herein article is thus something of an addendum to that research.

⁵³ I base my assumption of the discussion beginning already in 1934 on a note dated 8 January 1935 sent by Minister Jędrzejewicz to Mayor Starzyński, which reads: “In relation to the content of our several conversations on the completion of the construction of the National Museum in Warsaw and the merger therein of the whole of the state and city collections, I take the liberty of passing on a note on the future museum’s organisational theories,” [“Dear Mr. Mayor”], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7006, folio 407. In later letters, 1935 is given as the beginning of the discussion.

⁵⁴ The Case of the National Museum. Theories [Ministry of Education], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7006, folio 399.

partial financing of the construction of the National Museum building, a part of the building as described in the contract [of a volume of 15,000 m³ – handwritten annotation], equivalent to the sum paid, to serve as a space for the state collection, or barring that, a refund of the sum paid.”⁵⁵ Talks on the project to integrate the collections were held between Mayor of Warsaw Stefan Starzyński and Minister of Religious Faiths and Public Education Wacław Jędrzejewicz. Yet, we can say with a fair dose of certainty that all of the remarks from the Ministry side were in fact provided by the director of the State Art Collections, even though most likely the role of that institution as a management body of the Gallery was no longer being taken into consideration. Supporting this is information in the contract regarding the National Museum management’s superior role with regard to the integrated collection, which was not how Lauterbach had envisioned it in his memorandum (fig. 6).

Most of the surviving draught contracts concerning the merger of the collections are not dated, with the time of their draughting occasionally being suggested by a year mentioned in the contract or, more often, by handwritten corrections and annotations shedding light on successive arrangements made between the parties. A rough draught for a contract prepared in 1935 on the basis of the initial principles stipulates that, in exchange for the one-million złoty subvention for the construction of the museum provided by the State Treasury (represented by the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education), to be disbursed over 10 years, the district (*gmina*) was to commit to providing a “suitable residence” for the state collection in the new building as a long-term loan. The duration of the use of the space, and thereby of the loan, was set to fifty years with an option to extend the contract with the need for further subventions being provided.⁵⁶ In the fourth quarter of the year, submitted was a draught contract between the Minister and the *Gmina*, according to which the agreement was to enter into force in the 1936/37 budget year. The situation changed diametrically in late 1935, however: “In light of the drastic change of financial circumstances and the State Treasury’s inability to finance the construction of the National Museum, a new draught agreement for the merger of state collections and the National Museum collection has been prepared with the intention exclusively to initiate rational museological policy in Warsaw via the integration of simultaneously existing collections.”⁵⁷ The new draught contract, approved by Director of the National Museum Stanisław Lorentz,⁵⁸ was prepared in late November 1935. In comparison to the first draught, the new version saw modifications to the stipulations concerning the state subventions, which were to cover the costs of scholarly research on the collection, and other changes intended to limit the influence of the State Art Collections on collecting and exhibition policy, including the space earmarked for the state collection.⁵⁹ On

⁵⁵ The Case of the National Museum. City Council’s remarks on the theories, TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7006, folio 397.

⁵⁶ Outline of contract between the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education and Warsaw City Council on the location of the state art collections, TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 32–34.

⁵⁷ The National Museum. Contract [annotation], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folio 45a.

⁵⁸ Stanisław Lorentz (1899–1991) was a conservator, museum worker, and in 1935–82 director of the National Museum in Warsaw. On his work, see, i.a., “Przeszłość przyszłości...” *Księga Pamiątkowa ku czci Profesora Stanisława Lorentza w setną rocznicę urodzin*, ed. committee: Andrzej Rottermund, Dorota Folga-Januszewska, Ewa Mücke-Broniarek (Warsaw, 1999).

⁵⁹ Contract between the State Treasury acting via the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education on one side, and the *Gmina* of the City of Warsaw represented by the City Council on the other side, TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 46–48.

the basis of this contract, the Ministry proposed a number of changes, including the replacement of the phrase “handover of the state collection” with “deposit of the state collection,” and with additional emphasis placed on the necessity of insuring the collection (at the Ministry’s expense). Defined was the amount of the subvention to cover the use of the space, with the research and supervision over the state of the collection being delegated to a representative of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education.⁶⁰ The merger process was to last until the end of 1938. Work on this draught contract most likely lasted until early 1936, as that was when the merger grounds were issued, to be submitted to the minister after the contract’s approval by city authorities.⁶¹ Yet, this version of the document was never signed.

Subsequent Storage Contract draughts prepared by the city specified points like deadlines for payment, for delivering the long-term loan, and for amendments to the museum’s constitution, originally formulated in 1933.⁶² The draught for the National Museum’s new constitution, completed in 1936, stipulated the establishment of a “gallery of contemporary art.”⁶³ The details of its establishment were described in a set of rules and regulations, according to which, “for the selection of items to be acquired in future by the Management of the State Art Collections, appointed will be a Committee which will select for placement in the building of the National Museum works of art: a) belonging to the previous era, b) of older deceased artists within a year of their death, and c) produced in the last 15–25 years.”⁶⁴ While the initial stance of the State Art Collections was that the state collection was to be presented in the new National Museum building, it was decided during work on the contract that the collection would be put on display in the building at 15 Podwale Street, which was to house a permanent exhibition of Polish and foreign art.⁶⁵ Reorganisation of exhibitions became possible in 1932 thanks to the completion of the first two wings of the National Museum’s main building.⁶⁶ According to the museum’s vision, the handover of the collections was to take place on the basis of a comprehensive catalogue draughted by the State Art Collections, and as far as possible in cabinets and display cases that would ensure their proper exhibition and protection. Like in the case of new acquisitions, foreseen was the right to carry out a selection in order to exclude items not of museum quality. Though two representatives of the State Art Collections were to sit on the Committee, such stipulations, justified from the perspective of the National Museum, cast doubt on the erstwhile collecting practices of the

⁶⁰ Contract between the Gmina of the City of Warsaw as the owner of the building and collections under the name of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, acting on behalf of the State Treasury, TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 52–54.

⁶¹ Grounds [26 February 1936], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folio 45.

⁶² Storage contract [city draft], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 55–59.

⁶³ The gallery was acknowledged as a separate department only in the third version of the draught, after remarks from the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, likely on the suggestion of Lauterbach. See Draught Constitution of the National Museum in Warsaw [versions I, II & III], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7006, folios 421–38.

⁶⁴ Regulations for the handover of the state art collection to the National Museum in Warsaw, AAN, MW-RiOP, Department of Art, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 121–22.

⁶⁵ Stricken from the contract was information on the handover “to the building [...] at 13/15 Al. 3 Maja”, see *ibid.*, folio 120.

⁶⁶ On the history of the building, see Piotr Kibort, “Na Skarpie. Gmach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie – historia projektowania i budowy w latach 1919–1938,” *Marzenie i rzeczywistość. Gmach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Piotr Kibort, ed., publication accompanying exhibition, The National Museum in Warsaw, 2016 (Warsaw, 2016), pp. 34–75.

State Art Collections and in all certainty did not make the negotiation process any easier. The content of the rules and regulations was not one of the main points of discussion and was approved in 1938 with minor modifications.⁶⁷ Quite different was the matter of the contract.

In June 1936, a "draught [contract] for final approval" was submitted to the legal department, which indicated a need to fine-tune certain points and, "on account of [...] the State's serious limitations in freely wielding assets in the value of one million złoty for the period of half a century," demanded that the wording of the contract be approved by the Attorney General's Office.⁶⁸ The General Attorney's Office's remarks were issued on 12 November 1936 and applied to nearly every point in the contract. The eight-page document pointed out the imprecise wording of clauses concerning the duration and conditions of the long-term loan, the regulations for works acquired in future years, the matter of objects excluded by the Museum, the conditions for the display and conservation of artefacts, the character and objective of the ministerial subventions, and the financial terms, including reproduction rights.⁶⁹ The in-depth analysis of the draught contract concluded with the following words: "The Attorney General's Office is not certain to what degree the signing of the contract would be beneficial for the State – and to what degree for the Gmina; in these remarks, the Attorney General's Office submits to the Ministry's consideration certain thoughts as to the contract's merit – leaving the decision on the matter entirely to the Ministry."⁷⁰ These remarks were not taken into consideration in the final draught of the contract.

To understand the further fate of the gallery, it is crucial to ask the question of who would benefit from the finalisation of the contract at that time. Just two days before the Attorney General's Office returned its analysis, the man who first proposed and later championed the merger, Alfred Lauterbach, expressed his own doubts on the process. In a letter dated 10 November 1936, he states: "The merger of the Gallery of Polish Art (Baryczka house) with an appropriate department of the National Museum in Warsaw is synonymous with the actual, though not legally binding, erasure of the State's entire seventeen-year legacy in this area."⁷¹ This was not about the merger of the collections itself but rather about ceding control over it to a city institution and, likely most importantly, the loss of institutional independence. Overseen by the State Art Collections, the Gallery of Polish Art as Treter and Lauterbach had envisioned it was to become an independent and prestigious institution akin to the Musée du Luxembourg. The new conditions for the integration eliminated that possibility, at the same time threatening the state collection with total subservience to the narrative of a municipal museum. And though the state would continue to grow the transferred collection via purchases, and though a State Art Collections representative was to sit on the committee,

⁶⁷ Regulations for the handover of the state art collection to the National Museum in Warsaw, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 128–29.

⁶⁸ Remarks of 1st Legal Division to no. IV Szt.m.dz.1476/36, 16 July 1936, TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folio 68.

⁶⁹ Analysing the contract, the Attorney General's Office pointed out possible problems stemming from imprecise wording, e.g., "is the commitment to not remove the works prior to the end of the duration of the contract, and thus the divestment of use of the state collection for a period of fifty years, not troublesome [...] for instance, in the event of a future intention to found a State Museum of State Art Gallery, etc." See *ibid.*, folio 84.

⁷⁰ To the letter dated 21 September 1936 no. IV Szt. 180-2/36, [12 November 1936], TS, AAN, WRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folio 90.

⁷¹ Alfred Lauterbach, On the merger of the collections, 10 November 1936, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folio 130.

there was little doubt that contemporary art, which to the National Museum was of secondary importance, would fail to elevate its status at that institution. Such an argument did not, however, make its way into Lauterbach's letter. The author pointed to the favourisation of the Warsaw museum at the expense of analogous institutions in Krakow, Lviv or Poznań, and to the validity of transferring Old Masters art to official landmark buildings and collections of print art and numismatics to the existing collections in the Prints Room of Piłsudski University (University of Warsaw) and the State Mint. Certainly, Lauterbach did not want a merger of the collections in the agreed-upon manner, but to the Ministry and the National Museum, such a solution was worthwhile. In transferring the collection, whose management outgrew ministerial competences, the Ministry would tidy up its administrative matters, while the National Museum would acquire a not insignificant collection of Polish art from the turn of the 20th century, which was useful in rounding out the gallery of Polish art already existing at the Museum, along with taking on a relatively small collection of contemporary art. Such a manoeuvre complied with Director Stanisław Lorentz's strategy for expanding the National Museum's holdings. The decision to merge the collections sealed the sale of the Baryczka house to the City Council in 1936, after which it would serve as the Museum of Old Warsaw.

The loss of the erstwhile home of the Gallery of Polish Art limited the bargaining chips in negotiations on the contract, putting the State Art Collections in a situation with no way out. With its eviction from its hitherto home, the only institution that could offer suitable conditions and display possibilities was the National Museum. The contract with the Ministry was almost ready and the State Art Collections' aspirations and strivings to one day create a museum of contemporary art remained outside of the realm of interest of officials. It cannot be ruled out that the contract's submission to the Attorney General's Office for consultation was Lauterbach's doing. It can also be presumed that he intervened at the Ministry, though no documents on the matter survive to this day. What we do know is that the head of the Department of Art, Władysław Zawistowski, stated in a January 1937 memo on the validity of the collections' integration, which was most likely a response to the accusations floated by the State Art Collections management, that "the merger [...] of the state art collection with that of the National Museum will allow it to be rationally made available to the public and, above all, will create a basis for further integration of collections in Warsaw."⁷² No later than January of that year, the Ministry sent a new draught contract to city officials along with a set of rules and regulations.⁷³ At the same time, the Undersecretary of State Jerzy Aleksandrowicz contacted the National Museum with a request to be granted use of space in the building at 15 Podwale Street, which could serve as the premises for a state gallery once the National Museum collection was moved into its new building.⁷⁴ In this manner, the State Art Collections lost not only its position of control but also its prestigious location in the new building, which

⁷² Władysław Zawistowski, Merger of the collections of the Management of the State Art Collections and the National Museum, [1937], TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 138; 160–62.

⁷³ Letter Szt. 184/38 dated 17 January 1937, TS, NMW Archives (further: Arch. MNW), Organisational Records, ref. no. 314, folio 15.

⁷⁴ "After taking over the Baryczka house for the Gmina of the City of Warsaw, the Ministry encounters serious difficulties in finding a suitable space for the Gallery, while the second floor of the building on Podwale Street would suffice as a makeshift premises. [...] For the good of all involved, it is recommended to organise a new Gallery of Contemporary Art without delay." See Jerzy Aleksandrowicz, The space on Podwale Street, [27 January 1937], TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folio 244. The building on Podwale street was used by the National Museum from 1915.

it had worked for from the outset of the talks with the museum. The contract was accepted by Mayor Stefan Starzyński toward the end of January, with the approval for moving the State Art Collections and creating a new department called the Gallery of Contemporary Art in the building at 15 Podwale coming two months later.⁷⁵

The Ministry's additional handover for long-term loan of works "not having a special purpose" seemed like the best solution in this situation. However, because of the "begotten Gallery of Contemporary Art," which replaced the erstwhile Gallery of Polish Art, it was proposed for the State Art Collections to keep its museum-reference library and to expand its collection with the addition of literature on contemporary art.⁷⁶ This solution surely did not win the support of Lauterbach, though the archives contain no statements from him on the matter, probably because the Ministry put him on indefinite leave in June 1937. He was then transferred to the Department of Art and in May 1939 appointed an advisor on the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education's Central Board.⁷⁷ We can only surmise that the April 1937-dated proposal for appointments to the Committee for review of the State Art Collections inventory, consisting of central board members of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, the State Art Collections director and one or two experts, was an attempt to pacify the mounting rift between the management of the State Art Collections and the side of the Ministry and National Museum. In the terms for the appointment of the committee it was stated that "depending on the opinion of the Committee, the Management of the State Art Collections shall submit motions as to the destination of museum-quality works, with consideration for: a) the planned merger of collections at the National Museum in Warsaw; b) the opening of a dedicated gallery of Polish contemporary art (last 15 or 20 years); c) the elimination of surplus Polish contemporary paintings and sculptures with the aim of replacing them with foreign works; d) and the opening of a makeshift museum of foreign contemporary art."⁷⁸ The first of these points was of fundamental relevance while the rest

⁷⁵ "[...] fully appreciating the motives of the Minister and wishing to facilitate the creation of the Gallery, on account of its great significance to artists and the general public and to the National Museum, which in future will acquire works of museum quality from the Gallery of Contemporary Art, I hereby approve the provision of thirteen rooms on the second floor of the building at 15 Podwale Street to the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education for the purpose of organising therein a Gallery of Contemporary Art, upon the premises being vacated by the National Museum." See letter no. 359/S.Z./38 dated 31 March 1937, TS, Arch. MNW, ref. no. 314, folio 15. At the same time, also making attempts to receive use of the building for a potential Ethnography Museum was the Museum of Industry and Agriculture in partnership with Piłsudski University (University of Warsaw). A committee appointed by the mayor decided to turn the old museum building into a temporary home for the gallery and a permanent location for the Ethnography Museum. See also Report [18 March 1938], TS, Arch. MNW, ref. no. 314, folios 36–37.

⁷⁶ In October 1939, the library collection numbering approx. 8,000 books was relocated to the National Museum, letter from Jerzy Sienkiewicz to City Waste Management Office, 19 October 1939, Arch. MNW, State Art Collection Loans.

⁷⁷ Letter of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education BP-14407/37, dated 24 June 1937; Letter of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education BP-23278/37 dated 1 October 1937; Letter of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education BP-11587/39 dated May 1939, copies, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 2/14/0/6/3925, folios 184, 185, 188. The reason for Lauterbach's removal from the State Art Collections was likely his protestation of the merger of the collections. Thus seeming incorrect is Mieses's conclusion that "in June 1937 Lauterbach was dismissed from his post without any visible reason. Those in the know claim that he fell victim to [antisemitic] cleansing." See Mieses, *Polacy-chrześcijanie pochodzenia żydowskiego...*, op. cit., p. 77. Tellingly, in June 1938, Lauterbach became a member of the Polish Museums Union, not stating an affiliation with the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education. See *Protokół XIV. Zjazdu Związku Muzeów w Polsce odbytego w Sandomierzu w dniach 27–28 czerwca 1938 roku* (Kraków, 1938), p. 3.

⁷⁸ Władysław Zawistowski, Committee to review State Art Collections inventory, 29 April 1937, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 134–35. On the same day, Zawistowski appealed to the minister with a request

were concessions to the State Art Collections whose realisation was surely not among the top priorities. There are no minutes of the Committee meetings in the archival records today so it is difficult to ascertain if the verification as described did in fact take place and what the process might have looked like. It doesn't seem likely, however, that the committee's decisions would have affected those already taken by the Ministry. Subsequent versions of the draught contract are from May 1937. The changes introduced were cosmetic in nature, with the main conditions defined in previous years remaining unchanged (fig. 7).

The finalisation of the contract between the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, acting in the name and on behalf of the State Treasury, on one side and the City of Warsaw, represented by the City Council, on the other side did not take place until 29 January 1938. The agreement stipulated the "joining" of the State Art Collection with holdings of the National Museum, with retention of the existing ownership rights to the works. The duration of the long-term loan without the possibility to withdraw the works was set at fifty years from the moment of the final hand-over report being signed, with an option to extend it for another half century. Early termination of the contract was possible only after a certain point and with a notice period of two years, or in the case of the State Art Collections' assets not being made available to the public for at least one year. The Museum committed itself to exhibiting and properly storing all of the handed-over works, the State Art Collection vowed to grow the collection, and the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education pledged to disburse annual subventions in sums as high as the budget would allow.⁷⁹ Attached as an appendix to the contract were the rules and regulations governing the process of the collection's handover, according to which "for the selection of items to be acquired in future by the Management of the State Art Collection, appointed will be a Committee which will select for placement in the building of the National Museum works of art: a) belonging to the previous era, b) of older deceased artists within a year of their death, and c) produced in the last 15–25 years."⁸⁰ Neither the contract nor the rules and regulations obliged the Museum to show the State Art Collection in its entirety but allowed for the transfer of works by artists of the older generation to the Gallery of Polish Art being created by the Museum. The works by artists of the younger generation were to make up the collection of the Gallery of Contemporary Art.

Though the many years of discussions between the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education and the City Council, with the involvement of representatives of State Art Collections and National Museum management, were important to the artistic landscape of Warsaw, it does not seem like the details of the talks were common knowledge in the arts milieu let alone among the general public. When the Gallery of Polish Art opened in the Baryczka house, it seemed natural that, unlike the collections of the National Museum or the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, its small collection would allow the public

for permission to create a collection of foreign contemporary art, acquired, among other means, from exhibitions organised in Poland and through exchange. See Władysław Zawistowski, Gallery of foreign contemporary art, 29 April 1937, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 231–33.

⁷⁹ Contract dated 29 January 1938, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 117–20.

⁸⁰ Regulations for the handover of the state art collection to the National Museum, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7058, folios 127–28. Providing a certain picture of the scale of the merger is an undated list, according to which the State Art Collection holdings numbered nearly 58,000 items, including 1725 paintings (about 400 Polish), 60 miniatures, 807 prints and drawings, 502 sculptures (including fragments of ancient sculptures), as well as numismatics, a library, objects from the Krosnowski Foundation and works donated to the state by Leon Piniński. See List of works, TS, AAN, MWRiOP, ref. no. 14/0/7006, folios 410–11.

to get to know contemporary art. Yet, it could not compete with the exhibition activity of the Art Propaganda Institute, which operated on a large scale thanks to its effective organisation and high subventions. Soon thereafter, the position of the National Museum also changed with the 1932 opening of exhibitions in the new building and the 1935 reorganisation of its exhibitions and operating model, all of it thanks to excellent collaboration between the museum's vice director, and from 1936 director, Stanisław Lorentz, and the city, with Mayor Stefan Starzyński at the helm. The scant mentions of the State Art Collection holdings in the press are a telling sign of the collection's diminishing role and waning reputation. In 1935, Waław Husarski wrote that the collection consisted of "random, partly courtesy acquisitions from propaganda exhibitions of foreign art held in Poland, and for that reason there has never and cannot have been any plan to its growth. Moreover, as a result of the collection's lack of a home, these works are not accessible to the public."⁸¹ A longer write-up on "one of the least-visited and youngest museums," also referred to as "our own Musée du Luxembourg," penned by P. Wierzbicki, was published in *Kurier Poranny* daily in 1936. It focussed mainly on the gallery's physical premises. "How strange an impression make the steep stairs from the 17th century, above which the sharp colours of Kamil Witkowski's excellent post-Cezannism shout impudently,"⁸² writes the author, adding that only the long-term loan and exhibition of the collection in the new building of the National Museum would make for a worthy showcase of its virtues. Press mentions in the following years are rather sporadic⁸³ and do not cover the role of state-owned art collections or the idea to establish a national gallery (fig. 8).

The process of the collection's handover can be traced on the basis of documents preserved at the National Museum, even in spite of their incompleteness.⁸⁴ It was carried out in two stages, the first taking place in the first quarter of 1938 and the second in May of that year. The surviving handover report from March 1938 covers 116 paintings, and bears the signatures of Maciej Masłowski, Jerzy Sienkiewicz, Antoni Wieczorkiewicz, Alfred Lauterbach and Stanisław Lorentz.⁸⁵ Only in May did information appear in the press on the relocation of the Gallery of Polish Art to the old home of the National Museum at 15 Podwale Street following

⁸¹ Waław Husarski, "Wystawa reprodukcji malarstwa francuskiego," *Czas*, no. 145 (1935), p. 3. This opinion differs fundamentally from those voiced in 1932. Surviving lists of artefacts in the State Art Collections holdings indicate an absence of foreign artists. Works of this kind were in fact acquired, but by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Military Affairs, and were most likely used to decorate government building interiors. Perhaps the author incorrectly deemed that this is synonymous with incorporation into the collection of the State Art Collections.

⁸² P. Wierzbicki, "Galeria polskiej sztuki u Baryczków. Poznajcie ojców i dziadów współczesnych naszych malarzy," *Kurier Poranny*, no. 93 (1936), p. 6.

⁸³ Announced in 1937 was the expansion of the permanent exhibition with new acquisitions, Warsaw, State Art Collections, see Union of Polish Museums. Memo no. 28. July 1937, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Still prior to the contract being signed, in September 1937, thirteen paintings by Jacek Malczewski and ten paintings and a folio of drawings by Jan Cigliński were put on long-term loan at the National Museum. Receipt no. 539; receipt no. 544, TS, Arch. MNW, State Art Collections Loans.

⁸⁵ Temporary handover report, [25 March 1938] TS, Arch. MNW, State Art Collections Loans. The handover of the collection took place on 21 March 1938, with the report signed four days later. Kept in the Museum's archives is also a handover report concerning the group of paintings from 25 April 1938, though it is unsigned. It has not been possible to locate the report on the handover of the first batch of State Art Collections works. As an aside, it is worth adding that in March 1938 the National Museum also received paintings from the S. Krosnowski collection and the Rapperswill Museum, as well as one painting from the deposit surplus. In June, the Museum issued a receipt for 37 crates containing sculptures from the Pac collection and fragments of early modern sculptures. TS, Arch. MNW, State Art Collections Loans.

the Museum's acquisition of the Baryczka house. "As a result of this," we read, "the Gallery is closed to the public. It will reopen following renovation work on the new space and once the collection is arranged therein."⁸⁶ The piece omits any mention of the agreement between the city and the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education, as does the Operations Report of the Warsaw City Council for 1936/37.

In the twenty-year interwar period, despite the various attempts and declarations, a Gallery of Contemporary Art akin to the Musée du Luxembourg never emerged. Besides the aforementioned State Art Collections gallery, there was, however, the Gallery of Polish Art that opened at the National Museum. Its curator and author of its 1938 catalogue was Jerzy Sienkiewicz. For obvious reasons, the works belonging to the State Art Collections, legally handed over in March 1938, were not included in the catalogue.⁸⁷ The modernisation of the old building at 15 Podwale Street was halted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Likewise, the attempts to bring the Luxembourg model to Warsaw in a *musée de passage*⁸⁸ came to nought, while the efforts initiated in the interwar years to open a national gallery fell into oblivion for years. As a result of warfare, some of the items in the State Art Collections holdings were destroyed or lost. Like thousands of other objects stashed in the National Museum's building on Aleje Jerozolimskie during the war, what survived of the collection joined the National Museum. Somewhat ironically, today the National Museum's collection consists of its own holdings along with the collection of the State Art Collections and that of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, which was put away for safekeeping in the museum's basement at the start of the Second World War. The dream of the incorporated collections of Polish art being put on display in the museum's main building finally came true, though the Gallery of Polish Art formed by the State Art Collections lay forgotten for years.

The collection of the National Museum today contains more than 160 paintings and sculptures attributed to the former State Art Collections.⁸⁹ For years, their status remained unclear, creating significant problems in their utilisation in permanent and temporary exhibitions, as was the case with most of the items incorporated into the museum collection after 1945. In 1973, museum officials appealed to the Ministry of Art and Culture to take a position on the matter of the collections put on long-term loan in the years 1916–48 by private individuals and no-longer-existing institutions.⁹⁰ The case of the State Art Collections resurfaced

⁸⁶ "Z miasta [Z państw. galerii sztuki polskiej]," *Kurier Warszawski*, no. 119 (1938), p. 5. A note with the same information was published in ABC newspaper. ABC, no. 134 (1938), p. 4.

⁸⁷ Handover report dated 21 March 1938 on the long term loan of the State Art Collection holdings to the National Museum, TS, IS PAN, ref. no. 1132-II 15, book 3, folio 56.

⁸⁸ The author of the first term is Tomasz F. de Rosset, of the second – J. Pedro Lorente. Both concern the relationship between art and the institution in which "prior to its ultimate consecration, each work must stand the test of time, shown only on exceptional occasions or concealed entirely in a storehouse." See Tomasz F. de Rosset, "Nowoczesny Muzeon Jerzego Ludwińskiego," *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici*, no. 41 (2011), p. 172. See also Jesus Pedro Lorente, *The Museums of Contemporary Art. Notion and Development* (Farnham, 2011), p. 38.

⁸⁹ Research conducted by me in 2015 in the NMW Department of Contemporary Art and in the collection of the Xawery Dunikowski Museum of Sculpture, indicates that the NMW collection contains 118 paintings and 45 sculptures from the State Art Collections. Due to the factographic nature of the article, it does not include an analysis of the State Art Collections holdings.

⁹⁰ "Wishing to formally normalise this artificial and incorrect status of long-term loans of which it is the de facto owner, the management of the National Museum in Warsaw appeals to the Minister with a request to transfer ownership to the National Museum of all objects formally to this day being the long-term loans of non-existent

in 1987 with a letter from the National Museum once again pleading for the regulation of the loaned objects' legal status, this time sparking the interest of the Museum and Collections Protection Management Board at the Ministry.⁹¹ Arguing the legality of the collection, the Museum pointed to changes leading not only to the elimination of districts (*gminas*) and territorial institutions, along with the absorption of their assets by the state (1950), but also to the nationalisation of the National Museum (1945). "In these circumstances, it must be acknowledged that works of art residing at the National Museum have become the property of the Museum; with the Museum being their sole holder. Unjustified and illegal, therefore, is the continued assertion that these items constitute a long-term loan of the State Art Collections, an institution that has ceased to exist in its previous form as a branch of the Ministry of Religious Faiths and Public Education."⁹² It appears that these arguments hit the mark with the central authorities, and in doing so put an end, now in a very different reality, to the decades-long merger of the two institutions' collections.

Translated by Szymon Włoch

institutions." Letter no. XXB-61/73, 7 May 1973, [unsigned copy, a/a], NMW Inventory Dept. The letter contains an annotation from a meeting of NMW caretakers from 30 September 1979, during which Director Lorentz announced the inscription of items from non-existent institutions into the museum's inventory.

⁹¹ Its content is the same as that of a letter from 1973, letter [XXVIII/36/87], 26 February 1987. In response, the Office of Museum Management and Collections Protection issued a letter requesting the provision of legal bases supporting the transfer of ownership of the objects to the NMW, the identification of the formal-legal encumbrances resulting from the artefacts' status and the provision of judgements concerning the legal heirs to the items on long-term loan, Letter ZMOZ-022-vIc-3/87. Issued in reply was a solicitor's opinion [signature illegible], all NMW letters, NMW Inventory Dept.

⁹² Ibid.