

Krystyna Znojewska-Prokop (4 March 1958 – 19 September 2024)

Krystyna Znojewska-Prokop studied art history at the Catholic University of Lublin in the years 1977–1983. She wrote her master's thesis, entitled 'Pierrot in Polish and foreign painting', under the supervision of Prof. Andrzej Ryszkiewicz and defended it in December 1983. She completed a student internship at the Painting Storage Rooms at the National Museum in Warsaw (1981) and was employed there in January 1983, even before obtaining her master's degree in art history. She devoted her entire professional life to this institution.

She gained her initial professional experience as an assistant in the Painting Storage Rooms under the supervision of Anna Tyczyńska. The seven years that she spent there, eventually as an assistant professor, allowed her to gain in-depth knowledge of the museum's collection of Polish and European paintings. Returning from her extended parental leave in September 1993, she took up a position in the Department of Polish Painting, and was promoted to curator in 2004.

Krystyna Znojewska-Prokop's scholarly interests focused on Polish painting. She specialized in issues associated with Academicism and Romanticism. The oeuvres of such artists as Witold Pruszkowski, Artur Grottger, Józef Simmler and Henryk Rodakowski were particularly close to her heart, but she was equally fond of more avant-garde painters, such as Ferdynand Ruszczyk, Edward Okuń or Jan Ciągłyński.

As the curatorial supervisor, she monitored the transfer to the National Museum in Warsaw of monographic exhibitions of Henryk Rodakowski (1993) and Ferdynand Ruszczyk (2002), organized by other museums.

She contributed biographical notes and catalogue entries on paintings for numerous exhibitions at the National Museum in Warsaw and in other Polish and foreign museums. Her perfect understanding of the concept of popularizing art even in the smallest museum centres, serving little more than their local communities, is confirmed by a series of exhibitions of works from the National Museum in Warsaw collection she organized at the Regional Museums of Ostrołęka (1985, 1986) and Piotrków Trybunalski (1987, 1999), as well as at the Museum in Łowicz (1995). Their themes varied, including landscape painting, paintings related to the Napoleonic era, self-portraits by Polish artists, and images of children and childhood in Polish painting.

Her contribution to research projects devoted to the comprehensive study of the oeuvres of Aleksander Gierymski and Józef Brandt in connection with their monographic exhibitions prepared at the National Museum in Warsaw is inestimable. The subject of her research were works of these painters which are currently considered lost, and the results were published in the catalogues accompanying both presentations.



photo Anna Lewandowska

In the course of her work, Krystyna demonstrated insight in searching for and analyzing source information, as well as brilliance in formulating hypotheses and conclusions. She was characterized by a particular meticulousness in conducting the often arduous and not always fruitful archival research.

Research linked with the study of Polish paintings dating from the period between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century and lost as a result of the war in the years 1939–1945 formed an important chapter in Krystyna Znojewska-Prokop's scholarly output. Together with Anna Tyczyńska, she prepared a study commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage under the title *Straty wojenne. Malarstwo polskie. Obrazy olejne, pastele, akwarele utracone w latach 1939–1945 w granicach Polski po 1945 / Wartime losses. Polish painting: oil paintings, pastels, watercolours lost between 1939–1945 within post-1945 borders of Poland.*¹

The subject of the authors' research were lost artworks originally belonging to national, municipal and regional museums, financial, scholarly and artistic associations, state,

communal and ecclesiastical institutions, and private collections. The catalogue, published in Polish and English, includes only those artworks that could be identified on the basis of iconographic documentation (photographs, reproductions, prints). Its first volume encompasses 442 paintings, the second, 295.

Its preparation was preceded by meticulous research conducted on the basis of archival files on lost works (made available by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Polish Cultural Heritage Abroad and later by the Cultural Heritage Department), catalogues and reports on war losses issued by museum institutions or other state institutions, as well as documentation gathered by art collectors, including archival photographs of artworks, records in various inventories, bills of purchase, and witness testimonies.

As part of her research, Krystyna occasionally cooperated with the Department for the Restitution of Cultural Property operating within the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage structures. In addition, she conducted research aimed at identifying paintings of uncertain or unclear provenance. A few years before her retirement, she began researching artworks for a planned catalogue of Polish paintings in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. In addition to personally preparing several hundred catalogue entries, she was also the academic editor of this collective publication.

Calm, charming, yet highly organized and meticulous in carrying out every task entrusted to her, she was appreciated by her superiors and liked by her colleagues at the museum. She combined professional expertise, conscientiousness and reliability at work with a lively, almost youthful enthusiasm for art, as well as the passion of a museum curator interested in the latest methods of researching the provenance of works and in modern approaches to arranging exhibition spaces.

Krysia (the diminutive by which she was addressed and referred to at the museum) was an extremely friendly and modest person. She performed her daily duties with full commitment, even those that were tedious and unspectacular, such as conducting inventory checks or secretarial work for exhibitions, handling search queries and loans of artworks – tasks requiring

a great deal of effort, responsibility and availability, but not bringing the same satisfaction as that experienced by a museum exhibition curator. Certainly, the huge success of the wide-ranging exhibition *The End of the Century. The Art of Polish Modernism*, organized at the museum in 1996, would not have been possible without Krystyna's effort and commitment; on that occasion, she combined the role of exhibition secretary with that of assistant to its curators. In later years, she ran the secretariat for exhibitions prepared by Elżbieta Charazińska, curator of the Polish Art Gallery: *Jacek Malczewski. Return* (2000), *Józef Pankiewicz 1866–1940. The Life and Work* (2006). Krystyna was also the co-author of the show 'Stanisław Wyspiański. *The Wedding, November Night* on the stage, on the screen, in Television Theatre directed by Andrzej Wajda and with stage design by Krystyna Zachwatowicz', which accompanied the exhibition *Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907). Dedicated to the Artist on the Hundredth Anniversary of His Death* (2007), also curated by Elżbieta Charazińska.

The National Museum in Warsaw remained the only institution with which she was professionally associated. For forty years, she consistently set an example of fidelity to the principles and values that define the ethos of museum work. She was always guided by what was beneficial to the institution to which she devoted a significant part of her life. In 2013, she was awarded the Silver Cross of Merit for her services to Polish museology.

It is impossible to overlook Krysia's sensitivity to social issues. Together with her husband Krzysztof Prokop (who died in 2010), she was involved in charity work aimed at providing both material and spiritual assistance to the sick,

poor and disadvantaged. She was a member of the programme council of the 'Dla Polonii' Foundation, which supports Polish children from the former Soviet Union receiving secondary education at the St Stanislaus Kostka College in Wilanów. Modest and discreet, yet full of empathy, she also offered friendly help in difficult situations to many of the museum's employees.

Krysia was a genial, warm person, curious about the world and people. She enjoyed travelling and had a special fondness for Italy, its art, architecture, landscapes, nature and sunshine, but also its language and people. She had a cheerful disposition and liked to laugh and joke. She was able to remain calm and sensible even in the most dramatic situations that occurred in our life at the museum. While very demanding towards herself, she showed a great tolerance for the mistakes and weaknesses of others. The values she professed were defined by the Christian worldview and humanist ideals; from these sources sprang her fortitude, unyielding ethics, kindness and respect for others. Her deep faith in God helped her overcome life's adversities and gave her comfort and hope, even in her final battle with an incurable disease.

As I write this reminiscence and try to recall Krysia in my mind, I am once again captivated by her inner balance, kindness and thoughtfulness, her brilliant intelligence and lively sense of humour, sometimes tinged with a hint of good-natured mockery, as well as by her protective attitude towards her younger colleagues, whom she helped in a natural, unforced way to acclimatize to our museum reality.

Ewa Micke-Broniarek

Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz

NOTES

¹ The first volume of this study was published in Poznań in 1998, followed by a second edition with an appendix in 2007, translated by Marzena Rączkowska. The second volume was published in 2012 in Warsaw, translated by Thaddeus Mirecki.