

Joanna A. Tomicka (22 January 1959 – 16 March 2024)

Joanna Tomicka was born in Warsaw; it is there that she went to school and university, and built her professional career. Owing to her parents – Ryszard, an architect, and Zofia, an artist working with gifted youth – Joanna grew up in a creative environment in which culture and art played a vital role. She had an aptitude for music, and at the age of six she began learning the violin at Emil Młynarski State Music School No. 1. She had very good marks in both music and general education subjects, and performed in many youth concerts at the National Philharmonic. Her participation in the National Polish Language Competition at the provincial level secured her automatic admission to Nicolaus Copernicus High School No. 33 with English as the language of instruction. As her interests solidified, she took part in the 1st National Art Competition in the fine arts category, reaching and completing the final stage. Having graduated from high school in 1977 with a silver medal for exemplary academic achievements, she began her studies at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Art History. In 1985, she successfully defended her master's thesis titled 'Relations between Ovid's "Metamorphoses" and emblems in the 16th and 17th century in graphic art', written under the supervision of Professor Jan Białostocki. That same year she took up a position at the National Museum in Warsaw, in the Department of European Prints, where she would remain for the rest of her working

life, progressing through the successive stages of a museum professional's career – from assistant (1985) to curator (1996). She retired in 2023. In recognition of her long years of work and academic achievements in research relating to printmaking, she was awarded the Silver (2013) and Gold (2022) Cross of Merit.

Joanna's professional interests revolved around early European printmaking (French, Italian, English, Flemish, Netherlandish and Dutch) with specific focus on areas such as emblems, typography, the reception of antiquity, collecting, and the work of Rembrandt. She continued to expand her knowledge and improve her qualifications through scholarships at the Warburg Institute (University of London), the British Academy, the Centre for Emblem Studies (University of Glasgow), the British Museum, Leuven Universiteit (Flemish Community), Houghton Library (Harvard University), the Princeton University Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, enrolling as a full-time student in the Doctoral Programme at the Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences (1990–1994), and participating in research visits to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, and the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London. She gave presentations at numerous scientific conferences both in Poland ('*Curiosité?* – A Matter of Interpretation, the Interpretation of Matter. On Iconography and Technology in



photo Krzysztof Załęski

Graphic Arts between the 16th and 18th Century', at the conference 'Curiosità, or the Peculiar Concept', Warsaw, 2011; 'Liber pulcher. Examples of Elegant 16th-Century Typography from Paris and Lyon' at 'For the Role of the Book in Art History', Kraków, 2012) and abroad (i.a., 'Ovidian "Metamorphoses" of the Queen of the Sins', the Warburg Institute, University of London, 1994; 'For Independence and the Common Good. General Stefan Dembiński, Cavalryman, Collector, Benefactor' at the international conference 'Les collections et les collectionneurs polonais hors de Pologne', Polish Library in Paris, 2017).

As a highly regarded researcher she was invited to collaborate with numerous academic institutions from abroad. She was part of a project titled 'The Union Catalogue of Emblem Books', aimed at creating a corpus of emblematic books chosen from the foremost collections in the participating countries (McGill University in Montreal, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels), and helped organize the first international conference on emblem studies in Poland (University of Wrocław, 1995). As part of her long-standing collaboration with the team behind the

successive volumes of Hollstein's catalogue *German Engravings, Etchings, Woodcuts 1400–1700*, *Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings, Woodcuts 1450–1700* and *The New Hollstein*, she conducted queries and verified the attribution, classification and dating of prints and publications in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. She was particularly fond of meetings of the CODART community, comprising curators of Dutch and Flemish art from around the world. On the website of the association, of which she was a member since 1998, she wrote about her fascination with printmaking, Professor Białostocki's influence on her career choices, and her contact with eminent experts. She also shared her thoughts on the role of museums and the future of research on printmaking, as well as her experiences working on exhibitions and participating in ten CODART congresses.¹

For twenty years, Joanna lectured on the history of European prints from the fifteenth to eighteenth century to students of the Faculty of Graphic Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and art history students at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University.

She was the academic editor of numerous catalogues, also publishing several series of prints as thematic collections for the Digital National Museum in Warsaw and compiling over 250 notes on engravings by such prominent artists as Jacques Callot, Jean Le Pautre, Abraham Bosse, Claude Mellan, Gérard Edelinck, Lucas Cranach, Lucas van Leyden, Heinrich Aldegrever, Cornelis Cort, Hendrick Goltzius, Giorgio Ghisi, Hieronymus Hopfer, Stefano della Bella, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Lucas Vorsterman, and the engravers of the so-called school of Rubens. Yet the artist she devoted the most attention to was Rembrandt. It was on her initiative – with the cooperation of Anna Kozak and other researchers associated with a number of museums and libraries in Poland – that the National Museum in Warsaw organized an exhibition titled *Rembrandt. Drawings and Prints in the Polish Collections* (2006) and published the corresponding catalogue (2009), which presented new findings on the dating and attribution of the master's engravings. Rembrandt's prints were on display once again in 2019 as part of an exhibition and catalogue titled *Rembrandt in Person. Rembrandt van Rijn. Prints from the Collection of*

the National Museum in Warsaw, held in tandem with an exhibition showcasing works by another eminent artist: *Bruegel in Company. Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Prints from the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw*.

Joanna continued and broadened her research on the topics addressed in her master's thesis by preparing a pioneering exhibition focusing on the reception of antiquity in early-modern European graphic art, the first such exhibition to be held in Poland. Titled *Ars Mitologica. Issues Concerning Reception of Greek Myths. Ancient Ceramics and Sculpture, European Graphic and Decorative Art of 16th to 19th Centuries* and organized at the National Museum in Warsaw in 1999 (preceded by a smaller, introductory exhibition called *Greek Myths. Mythological Motifs in European Graphic Arts between the 16th and 19th Century* held at the Regional Museum in Chełm in 1997), it explored the various uses of mythological themes in illustrations, allegories, symbols, ornaments and portraits. As the author of the introductory essay and all of the notes, Joanna focused on describing diverse interpretative traditions (i.a., Christian, allegorical, Stoic and Neoplatonic). The exhibitions she helped organize at the National Museum in Warsaw and other museum institutions, as well as their corresponding catalogues, constituted an important aspect of

her scholarly output. Among these, especially significant was the publication *The Admirers of Prints and their Collections in the National Museum in Warsaw* (2006), in which Joanna presented a collection of prints bequeathed by General Stefan Dembiński, thereby introducing the distinguished collector into academic literature.

Joanna inspired respect with her moral stance, and was a person of impeccable integrity. She held herself and others to very high standards, and was a diligent and conscientious scholar, excellent at collaborating with others on exhibitions and publishing projects. As a superior, she was kind and helpful. Until her deteriorating health forced her to switch to remote work, she was involved in all integration activities for the museum's staff – group trips to view exhibitions, special events, holiday meetings and social occasions. She was a wise, warm-hearted person with an excellent sense of humour.

During one particular exhibition, I was given a book by Joanna with a dedication reading *Sine amicis vita tristis esset* – 'Life would be sad without friends'. The passing of friends indeed reminds us of this truth.

Anna Grochala

Translated by Julita Mastalerz

NOTES

¹ *Curator in the Spotlight: Joanna A. Tomicka Curator of European Prints, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie in Warsaw* (April 2023), https://www.codart.nl/spotlights/joanna-tomicka/?fbclid=IwAR3bQaszdlDwljDYehWNZRLz5AsqYckJMOUQmOL7XxF8QNUpw_Tau5goYTg [retrieved: 15 Feb. 2025].