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# Large Polish Art Exhibitions in France: 1900 – 1977 – 2019

After the national uprisings in Poland in 1830 and 1863, Paris became the main artistic and intellectual centre outside of the historic territory of Poland, a place where Polish people flocked in search of learning and contacts. The French capital was a true cultural crucible since the 19th century and offered incoming artists freedom to create and exhibit their work. The numerous and varied groups making up the Polish artistic colony on the banks of the Seine all strove to organise a presentation of Polish art, which was of particular significance on account of the fact that the Prussians' defeat of the French in 1871 and the subsequent formation of a united German state all but extinguished any chance of Poland regaining its independence in the foreseeable future, which would prove to last for half a century. The 1900 World's Fair would open the eyes of political decision-makers and art lovers alike to just "how important for individual countries was the national aspect, shaped at the turn of the century by the need to bolster national identity for some, by a struggle for independence for others, or by a yearning to solidify newly-won independence for others still. The work of art became a reflection of political ambitions."[1] Adolf Basler (1876–1951), a Polish-Jewish critic active in Paris, wrote in 1912: "The fact is that there are more than 200 Poles working in Paris: painters, sculptors, and decorative artists; that in the span of a year one sees up to a thousand Polish works in Parisian exhibitions (public or private); that some of these are acquired by French and foreign museums; and that works of Polish art are acquired for and encountered in first-rate private collections in Europe and America with increasing frequency. But an even more interesting phenomenon is the growing influence of French art on the youngest generation of Polish painters and sculptors."[2]

In 1900, an immense challenge faced the organisers of the first exhibition of Polish art, titled *Exposition rétrospective d'œuvres des peintres polonais 1800–1900*, which took place in May of that year at the gallery run by the prominent art dealer George Petit (1856–1920) (**fig. 1**).[3] Though the Polish Artistic-Literary Circle, operating in Paris since 1897, lobbied

[1] Eleonora Jedlińska, *Namiętności ducha, czyli sztuka narodowa na Powszechnej Wystawie Światowej w Paryżu w 1900 r.* [online], <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/8088-239-3.12>, [retrieved: 4 June 2020].

[2] Adolf Basler, "Sztuka polska w Paryżu," *Sztuka*, vol. 1 (1912), [Lviv], p. 65.

[3] See <https://kpbc.umk.pl/Content/212466/Gromadzenie_POPC_005_34_HD_010.pdf>, [retrieved: 20 July 2020]; F.T. [Florian Trawiński], "Exposition rétrospective d'œuvres des peintres polonais (1800–1900)," *Bulletin polonais littéraire, scientifique et artistique*, nº 142 (1900), pp. 122–24; Adolf Basler, "La peinture polonaise," *La Revue Blanche*, vol. 22, mai–juillet–août 1900, pp. 63–64; Ewa Bobrowska-Jakubowska, *Artyści polscy we Francji w latach 1890–1918. Wspólnoty i indywidualności* (Warsaw, 2004), pp. 65, 83–86; Anna Wierzbicka, *We Francji i w Polsce 1900–1939. Sztuka, jej historyczne uwarunkowania i odbiór w świetle krytyków polsko-francuskich*

for works by Polish artists to be shown at the World's Fair in a separate pavilion,[4] the event's organisers, pressured by the French government, did not grant their approval.[5] The exhibition in Georges Petit's gallery on rue Godot-de-Mauroy near the Madelaine church was of a historical retrospective nature, opening with pieces by Aleksander Orłowski and closing with works by Jacek Malczewski and Leon Wyczółkowski. A total of 92 works was shown. After France's defeat in the war against Prussia in 1870–71, the matter of autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland vanished from the political plans of the French and English governments, and so, Polish intellectuals living abroad took it upon themselves to demonstrate the existence and distinctiveness of the Polish national school. The exhibition was essentially a private initiative of Cyprian Godebski (1835–1909), an esteemed Polish sculptor living in France,[6] and several other intellectuals. With the help of Edward Raczyński, a landowner and art collector from the German partition, Godebski set out to select works for the show in Polish territory. The decision to stage the exhibition at Petit's gallery proved to be an excellent one as, after 1881, the gallery had become an important venue for the exhibition and promotion of non-academic modern art. The paintings, drawings and prints shown in 1900 came predominantly from private collections in France and Poland.[7] "Variétés artistiques" in the April 1900 issue of *Bulletin polonais littéraire, scientifique et artistique* featured a commentary on the exhibition: "Poles yearn to give testimony to the fact that the nation, which in this century is deprived of all its rights, has nonetheless become neither Russian, nor Austrian nor Prussian, and that it has been stripped of nothing but its political autonomy. [...] Collectors, however, wished to present to the assembled committee a set of works by Polish contemporary artists, in doing so, hoping to prove that Poland as a country produces art reflecting our nation's vitality."[8]

The foreword to the exhibition's catalogue was penned by Maria Loevy (1854–1927), an author, painter and columnist known chiefly for her involvement in the European feminist movement and publishing mainly under the pen name Szeliga.[9] Because of her educational

(Warsaw, 2009), pp. 35–39; Tomasz F. de Rosset, "La présence des collections polonaises : expositions, donations aux musées, marché d'art" in id., *Un aspect du patrimoine parisien : les collections polonaises (1795–1919)*, traduit du polonais par Emmanuel Lajus (Toruń, 2010), p. 102; *Świadectwa obecności. Polskie życie artystyczne we Francji w latach 1900–1939. Diariusz wydarzeń z wyborem tekstów*, part 1: 1900–1921, selection, ed. and forward by Anna Wierzbicka (Warsaw, 2012), pp. 21–34; Eleonora Jedlińska, "Namiętności ducha, czyli sztuka narodowa na Powszechnej Wystawie Światowej w Paryżu w 1900 r." [online] in *Acta Artis. Studia ofiarowane Profesor Wandzie Nowakowskiej*, Aneta Pawłowska, Eleonora Jedlińska, Krzysztof Stefański, eds (Łódź, 2016), pp. 178–84, <http://dspace.uni.lodz.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/22754/167-184%20Jedlinska.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, [retrieved: 18 June 2010].

[4] The 1900 World's Fair in Paris (14 April – 12 December). The organisers of this huge event offered 59 countries the possibility of showing their exhibits in dedicated national pavilions, with 40 countries opting to do so.

[5] Bobrowska-Jakubowska, op. cit., pp. 80–81.

[6] Ewa Bobrowska, "Środowisko artystów polskich we Francji w latach 1900–1995," *Czasopismo Zakładu Narodowego im. Ossolińskich*, vol. 8 (1997), p. 66. The Polish Artistic-Literary Circle, however, published a brochure containing a list of works by Polish artists shown at the 1900 World's Fair, see *Catalogue des artistes polonais à l'Exposition internationale universelle de 1900 à Paris. Avec deux plans indiquant la disposition des sections étrangères dans le grand Palais des Beaux-Arts* (Paris, 1900).

[7] Though it is not possible today to identify all of the works, many of them have been identified on the basis of the list contained in the catalogue.

[8] "Variétés artistiques," *Bulletin polonais littéraire, scientifique et artistique*, nº 141 (15 avril 1900), p. 109; see also: Jedlińska, op. cit., pp. 180–81 [quotes from original French sources have been translated from Polish translations by Simon Włoch; henceforth in this article, the translator is credited with initials].

[9] She used many pseudonyms, most frequently Maria Szeliga (fr. Marya Cheliga) or Maria Szeliga-Loevy. In the years 1904–08, as well as in 1911 and 1913, she exhibited her work at the Salon des indépendents in Paris.

work and socialist sympathies, Loevy had emigrated to France in fear of persecution by the Tsarist authorities and quickly thrust herself into the fight for women's rights. She was a very well-known and beloved personality with extensive contacts and respected political views, as well as a great patriot fully devoted to the Polish cause. In her foreword, she writes: "As a dismal consequence of Poland's political situation, Polish artists are prohibited from showing their work in a national pavilion at world exhibitions and are unable to demonstrate to the world the unique traits of their creativity or the immense vitality of their spirit."[10] As Szeliga writes, the exhibition at Georges Petit's gallery was a protest by a fervent group of Polish patriots against diplomatic chicanery (*combinaison diplomatique*) that became a seductive call to arms and a patriotic obligation to be taken up for the subjugated homeland.[11] She goes on to say that the exhibition attests to the determination of Polish artists and journalists who had settled in France.

With an absence of any photographic documentation, the sole sources of information on the exhibition's concept are the inventory of works included in the catalogue and surviving press reviews and shorter write-ups concerning the event. Shown in Paris were works by the leading artists of the time: Piotr Michałowski, Artur Grottger, Henryk Rodakowski, Jan Matejko, Maksymilian and Aleksander Gierymski, Józef Chełmoński, Anna Bilińska, Józef Brandt, Olga Boznańska, Jacek Malczewski, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, Henryk Siemiradzki and Józef Pankiewicz.[12] Not limited to artists based in Paris, the selection also included works created in Munich, Petersburg, Vienna and, most importantly, ones made by artists still in Polish lands. What immediately jumps out is the wealth of subjects, the diversity of stylistic associations and the multitude of artistic individuality. It was important for the exhibition's architects to showcase the creative genius of the nation, which, though split up among the three partitioning powers, continued to cherish its Polishness as the supreme and uniting factor, whose greatest representatives – poets, writers and artists – preserved the tradition and national spirit most fully manifest in the Polonaises and Mazurkas of Chopin, the print series of Grottger and the poetry of the great Romantic bards.

Unfortunately, it is not possible today to fully decipher the list of works shown in Petit's gallery as the information contained in the catalogue reveals no more than the names of the artists and the works' titles. There is, however, a group of paintings that we recognise easily, among them Henryk Rodakowski's *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*,[13] Jan Matejko's *Wernyhora* and *The Mounting of the Sigismund Bell at the Cathedral Tower in Krakow in 1521* (**fig. 2**),[14] and two paintings by Józef Brandt – *Welcome to the Steppe* and *Alarm*.[15] These are all well-known

[10] *Exposition rétrospective d'œuvres des peintres polonais 1800–1900, du 1er avril au 25 mai*, Galerie Georges Petit [Paris, 1900], 12, rue Godot-de-Mauroy, p. 3 [transl. S.W.].

[11] Ibid., p. 4.

[12] Ibid., pp. 6–36.

[13] 1853, oil on canvas, 134 × 95 cm, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, inv. no. MS/SP/M/45/.

[14] It is not known which version of *Wernyhora* was shown in Paris. A sketch from 1875 (oil on panel, 36.5 × 29.5 cm, inv. no. 184599 NMW) resides at the National Museum in Warsaw, and the final version from 1883–84 (oil on canvas, 290 × 204 cm, inv. no. MNK-II-a-433) at the National Museum in Krakow. *The Mounting of the Sigismund Bell at the Cathedral Tower in Krakow in 1521*, 1874, oil on panel, 94 × 189 cm, inv. no. MP 441 NMW, The National Museum in Warsaw.

[15] The catalogue lists a painting titled *Adieu au Steppe* (p. 20, cat. no. 5). Most likely, the painting in question is one of three versions of *Welcome to the Steppe*, see *Józef Brandt 1841–1915*, Ewa Micke-Broniarek, Krystyna

works. The Paris exhibition also included Anna Bilińska's *Self-Portrait*, provided by the National Museum in Krakow[16] and a now-obscure painting by Olga Boznańska titled *Mother*, which the artist sent to the Women's International Exhibition in London that same year.[17] Also worth noting is a painting by Aleksander Gierymski identified in the catalogue as *Guichet du Louvre*, which we know to be a version of his *Louvre at Night*, painted in 1891.[18]

The organisers of the exhibition in Georges Petit's gallery selected works by many contemporary artists exhibiting concurrently at the 1900 World's Fair. In doing so, they intended to stress that even though Polish art was relegated to the Russian, Austrian or French pavilions, its sources of creative inspiration lay squarely in the artists' Polishness. In her aforementioned foreword to the catalogue, Maria Loevy consciously cites the category of the national spirit "whose creative force seems to be inseparable from the tradition and reminiscence of the homeland."[19] In addition to Jan Matejko's original paintings, recalling Poland's glorious past were also print reproductions of his *The Union of Lublin* and *The Sermon of Piotr Skarga*. Also very much reflective of the Polish spirit were the paintings of Józef Chełmoński, such as the famous *The Capercaillie Hunt*[20] and *In Front of an Inn* (**fig. 3**)[21] (also shown at the Louvre-Lens), as well as compositions by Juliusz Kossak, Juliusz Fałat, Maksymilian Gierymski and the Warsaw scenes of Aleksander Gryglewski. The Polish art exhibition at the Petit gallery was also seen by its organisers as a demonstration of the French influences and inspirations in Polish art of the 19th century (Piotr Michałowski, Teofil Kwiatkowski, Aleksander Gierymski and Józef Pankiewicz).

The exhibition made quite a stir, especially in the Polish and émigré press. Opinions were mixed on account of varying political views: for the old wave of emigrants still centred around the Hôtel Lambert, the show was proof of the existence of a "Polish school," while many socialists believed that it lacked outstanding pieces and had an excess of mediocre ones, offering a poor image of Polish artists in the 19th century.[22]

In 1975, Warsaw's Zachęta Galley hosted an exhibition titled *Romanticism and Romance*,[23] whose excellent reception from the Polish public inclined the nation's leaders to have it

Znojewska-Prokop, eds, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw , 2018 (Warsaw, 2018), vol. 2, pp. 94–100, cat. no. I.69–I.71. As stated in the catalogue, the other Brandt work is *L'Alarme à l'étable*, painted in two versions, both produced before 1896, see *Józef Brandt 1841–1915*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 276–77, cat. nos I.234 and I.235.

16 This is the version from 1887, oil on canvas, 117 × 90 cm, The National Museum in Krakow, inv. no. MNK-II-a-211. The artist donated the painted to the National Museum in Krakow in 1893.

17 Inre Kiralfy, *Official Fine Art, Historical and General Catalogue, Woman's International Exhibition*, Exhibition Building, Earl's Court (London, 1900), p. 38, cat. no. 1574.

18 *Aleksander Gierymski 1850–1901*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 2014), pp. 218–19, cat. no. 110.

19 "Exposition rétrospective...," op. cit., p. 2 [transl. S.W.].

20 1890, oil on canvas, 92 × 72 cm, Museum of Śląsk Opolski, inv. no. MSO/S/461.

21 This may be a work painted in Paris in 1877, oil on canvas, 71 × 174.5 cm, The National Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. MP 1050 MNW.

22 Wierzbicka, op. cit., pp. 36–38; *Świadectwa obecności...*, op. cit., pp. 22–34.

23 *Romantyzm i romantyczność w sztuce polskiej XIX i XX wieku. Wystawa w salach Zachęty CBWA w Warszawie*, October–November 1975; exhibition at BWA Contemporary Art Gallery in Katowice, January–February 1976 [academic ed. Janusz Wałek; ed. Zofia Gołubiewowa]; Ministry of Culture and Art, The National Museum in Krakow, Association of Polish Artists and Designers (Krakow, [1975]).

presented in France as well. Opening at the Grand Palais in Paris two years later was the grand exhibition *L'esprit romantique dans l'art polonais XIX^e–XX^e siècles*, produced by Marek Rostworowski and Jacek Waltoś.[24]

The central idea rendering the Paris exhibition different (compared to previous art exhibitions of a similar subject matter organised abroad) was the premise that Polish art's uniqueness stemmed from Romanticism, whose presence and persistence (for nearly two centuries) entrenched "certain stereotypical images of extraordinary power and endurance in which Poles to this day see themselves as if in a mirror [...]."[25]

Appearing in the exhibition's catalogue was its primary supposition: "In the Polish artistic tradition, the Romantic period holds a dear place as the centre of public, scholarly and artistic interest."[26] The authors deemed Romanticism to be the dominant current in Polish art of the 19th and 20th centuries. Moreover, for the "phantom nation" pilgrimaging through a succession of patriotic uprisings, Romanticism "became an important historical opportunity and a source of hope."[27] According to Mieczysław Porębski, one of the chief consultants in the concept of this exhibition, Romanticism emerged in Polish art as a necessary phase in historical and artistic evolution, and was the final phase in the formation of the national image, much like the Grand Siècle in France. Porębski believed that "Polish Romanticism was to become something like a Poland-wide psychoanalytic séance – an attempt to find a lost own identity [...]."[28] All that transpired in Polish art after 1860, that is, after the end of Romanticism, defined as a specific historical and literary era, had its roots in Romanticism.

The existing critical material concerning this interesting exhibition concentrates mainly on the conception of Romanticism and its ongoing presence in Polish art. The concept for the exhibition, both in the Warsaw original and the Parisian reconstruction two years later, sparked numerous controversies on account of its creators' reliance on the category of Romanticism, which, in fact, was not itself on show in the exhibition. The only representative par excellence of this current was Piotr Michałowski, who existed on the fringes and was utterly unknown in 19th-century Poland. Instead, the more than 200 works gathered in the Grand Palais tended to show "patriotic-martyrologic visionariness" in Realist, Academic, Symbolist and Expressionist manner.[29]

The exhibition was divided into seven sections: "Furor," "Liberty," "The Artist and His Phantasms," "Eros," "Thanatos," "Nature," and "The Universe." On display were 206 works – paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints – making it the biggest exhibition of Polish art ever mounted in France. Visitors to the Grand Palais encountered many outstanding and splendid works from various public and private collections, ranging from Piotr Michałowski

[24] Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, March–June 1977.

[25] Mieczysław Porębski, "Polska romantyczna" in id., *Pożegnanie z krytyką* (Krakow–Wrocław, 1983), p. 226. A French translation of the article was published in the catalogue for the exhibition *L'esprit romantique dans l'art polonais XIX^e–XX^e siècles*, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, March–June 1977, [n.p.].

[26] Tadeusz Chruścicki, "Avant propos" in *L'esprit romantique dans l'art polonais XIX^e–XX^e siècles*, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, March–June 1977, [n.p.] [transl. S.W.].

[27] Porębski, op. cit., p. 223. (A French translation of the article was published in the catalogue for the exhibition *L'esprit romantique...*, op. cit.).

[28] Ibid., p. 224.

[29] Mieczysław Porębski, "Refleksje po wystawie 'Romantyzm i romantyczność w sztuce polskiej'" in id., *Pożegnanie z krytyką* (Krakow–Wrocław, 1983), p. 230.

and Artur Grottger to Tadeusz Kantor (1915–90) and Stefan Gierowski (b. 1925). The writ-large understanding of Romanticism and the utterly imprecise category of Romance cited by the exhibition's creators allowed them to bring together one hundred and fifty years of Polish art in one grand display of artistic personages. Marek Rostworowski, one of the curators, wrote: "The guiding premise of this exhibition was to show that Romanticism's impact on Polish art has not waned and continues to be felt today. This current is less about artistic tendencies or means by way of which reality is interpreted than about a general attitude to life, nature and the universe, which the artist strives to expand and process via their own ambitions and dreams, which inevitably leads to tragic conflicts."[30]

To better understand the concept behind the *L'esprit romantique dans l'art polonais XIX^e–XX^e siècles* exhibition, it is worthwhile to look into the critical commentary provided by Józef Czapski (1896–1993), a painter and writer who spent most of his life in Paris as member of the artistic and Polish émigré milieus, as well as an extraordinary witness of history.[31] "My first impression upon entering the first room," writes Czapski, "– Podkowiński's *Frenzy*. A nightmare for painters of my generation and a model of bad painterly literature. Right by the entrance to the second room, the whole wall is occupied by Napoleon in a robe-like snow-white uniform, his face inspired and his eyes cast firmly skywards. Napoleon – saintly, lordly, ascending to the heavens. [...] Look, Frenchmen, how we adore your Napoleon! Further on, cramped like in a shop during a sale, the walls filled to the ceiling with poor works, bad works, outright kitsch, which suffocate and smother the ones worthy of display."[32] The artist's critical and acerbic opinion was largely down to his artistic education and his own work. Czapski, a very keen observer and greatly sensitive to colour, could not fathom the choices made by the exhibition's creators, believing that painterly criteria had been flouted. In his view, an exhibition built around national themes in light of the absence of true Romantic painting in Poland, could not be comprehended in France, the birthplace of Delacroix, Ingres, Corot, Degas and Cézanne.[33] He believed that what weighed the show down severely was the inclusion of "poor" works by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz and Strzemiński the "adamant and pure Unist, and dear friend of Malevich."[34] Czapski criticized the choice of works spanning no less than one hundred and fifty years, their assortment into different groups, categorisation according to "bombastic" themes like "furor," "liberty" and "time," and thus the "arbitrary confinement" of praiseworthy works in categories that limited them. Though extremely critical of the exhibition's concept, which he believed illegible to foreign viewers, Czapski did note that "[...] this whole exhibition, with its Matejkos, its dreams and nightmares, its Young Poland fervour and form that is so often lame – this, yet, is my biography too, our collective biography."[35]

[30] M.R. [Marek Rostworowski], [n.p.] [transl. S.W.].

[31] A veteran of the Polish-Russian War of 1919–39, a soldier in the September campaign of 1939, a prisoner of USSR prisoner and labour camps after the German invasion of Poland, from 1941 a soldier of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR (Anders' Army). After the Second World War, he settled in Paris, where he cofounded the leading émigré magazine Kultura. Published in 2018 was an expansive biography on Czapski authored by the American Eric Karpeles: *Almost Nothing: The 20th-Century Art and Life of Józef Czapski* (New York, 2018).

[32] Józef Czapski, "Romantyczność w Grand Palais" in id., *Patrząc*, [with illustrations by the author, compiled and afterword by Joanna Pollakówna] (Krakow, 1983), p. 339.

[33] Ibid., p. 340.

[34] Ibid., p. 341.

[35] Ibid., p. 344.

The exhibition *Poland 1840–1918. Painting a Soul of a Nation* (25 September 2019 – 20 January 2020), mounted at the Louvre-Lens by The National Museum in Warsaw in partnership with the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, was a vast retrospective of Polish art from Romanticism to the Young Poland movement.[36] The difficulty of this undertaking stemmed from the fact that its intended audience was almost entirely unfamiliar with Polish and East-Central-European history, that French audiences know little about our artistic heritage and that Polish artists are very humbly represented in European and American museums. The exhibition commemorated the centenary of Poland's regained independence and the centenary of the Polish-French accord on emigration and immigration (1919). It was no accident that the show was put on in the Nord region and Pas-de-Calais, which is inhabited by a large contingent of descendants of Polish emigres, of whom nearly 300 thousand had arrived there in 1919–29. Polish traditions live on in the region, with the native language and culture still widely cultivated. The history of this community was the subject of an accompanying photography exhibition at the National Museum in Warsaw presenting this "little Poland" and the lives of compatriots living in the mining regions of northern France as preserved through the lens of Kasimir Zgorecki (*Kasimir Zgorecki. Photographier la "Petite Pologne" 1924–1939*). The suggestive and persuasive masterpieces of Jan Matejko and Jacek Malczewski that have shaped our thinking on the generations-long fight for independence shown in the modern interiors of the Louvre satellite museum (**fig. 4**) presented a stark contrast to the unique, pathos-free documentation of Poles' reality abroad, with its local colour, captured in the subdued language of black-and-white photography. That contrast even more forcefully accentuated the impact of the paintings, which found appreciation in France for their artistic class, virtuosity, inventiveness and originality in the present day as much as they had in the 19th century. Reviews of the exhibition appeared in the pages of numerous influential magazines, including *Le Figaro*, *La Connaissance des Arts*, *Le Journal des Arts*, *Beaux-Arts*, *La Tribune des Arts* and *L'Œil*. "The Louvre-Lens shows how Polish identity was shaped by paintings in the 19th century," commented Éric Biétry-Rivierre.[37] In all, nearly 250 reviews of the exhibition were published in France. Perhaps, another effect of the exhibition, and an original one at that, was the huge mural inspired by Jan Matejko's *Stańczyk* [Renaissance Polish Royal Court Jester] painted by the street artist Pascal Bouyart, aka PBoy, in Paris's third arrondissement (*Contemplation of the Red Jester*). As Luc Piralla-Heng Vong writes in the exhibition catalogue, the retrospective was an occasion to remind the French public about artists who had been highly appreciated and awarded many medals at the Paris Salon in 1850–1914.[38] Among those enjoying the greatest triumphs and success in the French capital were Jan Matejko, Henryk Rodakowski, Józef Chełmoński, Anna Bilińska and Olga Boznańska. The exhibition had a superlative design courtesy of Mathis Boucher, who cleverly arranged the grand entrance in a manner recalling the spirit of the World's Fairs and the 20th-century Polish national pavilions (**fig. 5**). The spacious halls offered a perfect setting in which to admire the large-format paintings of

[36] The exhibition was part of the NIEPODLEGŁA 2017–2022 international cultural programme coordinated by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. It was presented under the honorary patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda and the President of the Republic of France Emmanuel Macron.

[37] Eric Biétry-Rivierre, "La Pologne, ce rêve peint" [online], *Le Figaro*, 30 novembre – 1 décembre 2019, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/arts-expositions/la-pologne-ce-reve-peint-20191129>, [retrieved: 8 November 2020].

[38] Luc Piralla-Heng Vong, "Les Salons des Polonais 1850–1914" in *Pologne. Peindre l'âme d'une nation*, Iwona Danielewicz et al., eds, exh. cat., 25 September 2019 – 20 January 2020, Musée du Louvre-Lens (Gand–Lens, 2019), p. 59.

Brandt, Matejko, Rodakowski or Wojciech Kossak, all expertly lit. Other spaces were outfitted with amphitheatre-like wall arrangements – with raised floors for the public from which to view the "mosaic" of pictures hung according to the 19th-century fashion (**fig. 6**). Prepared for the show was an audio guide as well as a rich educational programme, wall texts with information in three languages: French, English and Polish, and multimedia presentations like monitors showing Polish landscapes and music by the Polish composers Chopin, Moniuszko and Szymanowski. Also appearing as part of the visual arrangement was a map illustrating Poland's political and territorial changes from the end of the 18th century to 1918, when the country regained statehood.

Presented in the Louvre satellite in Lens were paintings and works on paper by masters like Stanisław Wyspiański, Artur Grottger, Leon Wyczółkowski, Maksymilian and Aleksander Gierymski, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, Wojciech Weiss, Witold Wojtkiewicz and many more – a total of 124 works from public institutions like the National Museum in Warsaw, the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the National Museum in Krakow, the National Museum in Poznań and the Raczyński Foundation at the NMP, Wawel Royal Castle, the District Museum in Toruń, the Polish Library / Historical-Literary Society in Paris and the Louvre, as well as from private collections. The initiative for the show came from the management of the Louvre-Lens, Director Marie Lavandier and Deputy-Director Luc Piralla-Heng Vong, who in 2017 had visited the national museums in Warsaw and Krakow. Interestingly, what caught the French curators' interest was the national aspect of Polish art, its ideology, the obsessive returns to the historical trauma that was the fall of the grand Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the approach to patriotism as a religion, in which myth mingled with history.[39] Conversely, they also took note of Polish artists' tenacious search for motifs that galvanized and consolidated that ideal union. Artistic manifestations of the national cause in Polish territory, wiped off the European map at the end of the 18th century, were particularly intense as art became a substitute for lost freedom, a condition already stressed by 19th-century critics. In the work of Rodakowski, Kapliński and Matejko, Maxime Du Camp saw evidence that "Poland is not yet lost."[40] The kind of national engagement typical in countries under foreign control, threatened with the loss of statehood or faced with repressions became the primary *raison d'être* of painting, a declaration of the objective held dear by several generations of artists, many of whom were personally involved in the armed revolts against the ruling powers. The need to express autonomy from other nations and the search for a national style was, nonetheless, a universal tendency which also resonated clearly in the architecture of the second half of the century via references to the mighty past. This way of thinking, i.e., the drive to glorify ethnic distinctiveness, culminated in the national pavilions at the 1900 World's Fair.

Seen through outside, European, eyes, Polish painting was a vehicle for patriotic content as it exhibited an apologetic, prophetic and retributive function with a perverse and mythogenic force, standing shoulder to shoulder with great Romantic literature in bringing national history into the sphere of the sacred. It extoled prophecies and took up a historiosophic mission as it embraced the Romantic ideas of messianism and palingenesis. As if belying

[39] Maria Janion, "Artysta romantyczny wobec narodowego 'sacrum'" in *Szuka XIX wieku w Polsce. Naród – Miasto. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki Poznań 1977*, Halina Lisińska, ed. (Warsaw, 1979), pp. 15–29, here: p. 21.

[40] Maxime Du Camp, *Les Beaux-Arts à l'Exposition universelle et aux Salons de 1863, 1864, 1865, 1866 et 1867* (Paris, 1867), pp. 305–06.

the failures befalling the successive liberational uprisings, the second half of the century was a period of profound artistic highs. The art of Matejko, Brandt, Malczewski, Wyspiański and Grottger engaged in the ideological movement to build collective historical memory, to foster a sense of togetherness and to bolster national awareness, though the nation itself was not a cohesive and stable whole but a dynamic and, to a certain extent, utopian composite thanks to the tradition of the socially, ethically and religiously diverse Commonwealth. Such a perspective was propagated by noble class known as the "szlachta," a narrow social group which enjoyed full civil rights as well as considerable political and economic power. Integrating this diverse class was the Sarmatian myth, one of the chief codifiers of Polish identity,[41] which espoused the ideal of "golden freedom." Polish, Lithuanian and Ruthenian magnates all believed themselves to be Sarmatians, as did members of the lower nobility and even some educated commoners.[42] The Sarmatian position also materialised in a reverence for tradition (including traditional Polish costume, which, *nota bene*, was highly Oriental in style) and religious values, an attachment to indigeneity and an aversion to foreignness. As the Romantics believed, it was enough to reject imported influences for the "true" Polish national character to be able to shine in all its glory.[43]

The genesis and definition of the nation, of the community in which individuals feel united thanks to material and spiritual factors, remains a contested matter among scholars. According to some, this is an imagined community, the product of awareness crystallising in the upper classes[44] and a modern construct associated with the processes of modernisation and industrialisation, which necessitated cultural uniformity and spawned tendencies for inventing tradition.[45] "In the 19th century, everything shapes nationhood," wrote the French historian and national issues scholar Patrick Cabanel.[46] Modern anthropology acknowledges that ethnic identity applies to origin as well as cultural practices,[47] and the national ideology is a collection of images and symbols.[48] Though contemporary nationalism, frequently treated as a substitute for religion,[49] is a product of the 19th century, which we refer to as the "age

[41] Michał Łuczewski, *Odwieczny naród. Polak i katolik w Żmiącej* (Toruń, 2012), p. 100.

[42] Maciej Forycki, "*Finis Poloniae* ou la persistance d'une nation privée d'État" in *Pologne 1840–1914...*, op. cit., p. 19.

[43] Andrzej Wierzbicki, *Spory o polską duszę. Z zagadnień charakterologii narodowej w historiografii polskiej XIX i XX wieku* (Warsaw, 2010), p. 151.

[44] Tomasz Kizwalter, "Zmierzch kultury staropolskiej a początki nowoczesnego narodu" in *Zmierzch kultury staropolskiej. Ciagłość i kryzysy (Wieki XVII–XIX)*, Urszula Augustyniak, Adam Karpiński, eds (Warsaw, 1997), pp. 104–12.

[45] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction. Inventing Traditions" in *The Invention of Traditions*, Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, eds (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 13–14. See also: Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (New York, 1982); Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni* (Warsaw, 1996).

[46] Patrick Cabanel, *Paysages de la nation* in Jean-Yves Andrieux, Fabienne Chevallier, Anja Kervanto Nevenlinna, *Idée nationale et architecture en Europe 1860–1919* (Rennes, 2006), p. 29 [transl. S.W].

[47] Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, "Etniczność" in *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy*, Michał Paweł Markowski, Ryszard Nycz, eds (Krakow, 2012), p. 409.

[48] Łuczewski, op. cit., p. 65.

[49] Piotr Krakowski, "Nacjonalizm a sztuka 'patriotyczna'" in *Nacjonalizm w sztuce i historii sztuki 1789–1950*, Dariusz Konstantynów, Robert Pasieczny, Piotr Paszkiewicz, eds (Warsaw, 1998), p. 15.

of nations," the concept of the national spirit (*Urvolk, Volksgeist*) arose out of Enlightened Romantic German thought. In his *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (1784–91), Johann Gottfried Herder, considered the father of nationalism, historicism and ethnology, made no distinction between the nation and the people (*das Volk*). He pointed out that this is an ethnic community connected by historical experience, laws and language. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, meanwhile, proposed the concept of *Urvolk* – a nation destined for greatness due to a sense of shared identity, culture and history. The term *Volksgeist* was popularised by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837).

Steeped in 19th-century "spiritology," the term *l'âme d'une nation* in the subtitle of the *Pologne* exhibition, meaning the national spirit, being a category of Romantic historiosophy, and understood metaphysically, is therefore both a construct and a challenge exploring the active role of painting in the long process of national identity formation and the artistic vision of martyrology and glory. The term's impact becomes legible only in a panoramic perspective, in the assembly and collision of insightful images "of great strength and endurance, paintings most deeply rooted in Polish noble-intellectual consciousness and sentiment,"[50] such as the lonely gesture of Tadeusz Reytan shielding the betrayed homeland with his bare chest (**fig. 7**), the poignant melancholy of Sigismund the Old's royal jester (**fig. 8**) as he contemplates the fall of the Commonwealth, the tragic processions of generations of Siberian exiles and insurgents (**fig. 9**), Polonia bound in shackles and whirling in a cloud of dust over a wheat field, or the Hussar wings of a knight blowing a horn at the foot of the Tatra Mountains.

The Louvre-Lens exhibition invited reflection on the ways in which Polishness is manifested, and was an attempt to define the 19th-century imaginarium of symbols, figures, and normative constructs of national history. On the strength of these mythical and foundational images, art became a substitute for lost freedom and the artist a medium carrying out a lofty mission.

Contrary to general assumptions, patriotic 19th-century art was not always artistically conservative nor simplistic in its communication of historical content. It is enough to recall that the exhibition opened with three fundamental, and in some ways "foundational," works that set up the narrative: Jan Matejko's *The Fall of Poland* (*Reytan*), and Jacek Malczewski's *Melancholy* and *Inspiration*. The paintings introduced viewers to the complex causes behind the fall of the Commonwealth and led them into the symbolic dimension of the tragic struggles of the insurgents, and finally into the fate of the artist overwhelmed with the weight of national issues (**fig. 10**). The monumental canvas of Jan Matejko, who accepted the role of the symbolic *interrex* and brandished the sceptre of the Spirit King, the nation's leader,[51] in fact shows national sin and despair. It is a complex allegorical-moral interpretation of Polish history, one that aimed to settle accounts and didn't shy away from self-criticism, uncomfortable for the Polish elites, both laymen (with Sejm Marshal Adam Poniński front and centre) and clergymen, saddled with the blame for the country's dissolution. As we know, this pessimistic assessment of the causes behind the fall of the Commonwealth was rooted in the stream of thought propagated by the Krakow school of history. The public display of this painting, which had won a gold medal at the 1867 Paris exposition, was strongly opposed

[50] Maria Poprzęcka, "'Szczęśliwa godzina'. Malarstwo polskie około roku 1900" in *Sztuka około 1900 w Europie Środkowej. Materiały Międzynarodowej konferencji zorganizowanej w dniach 20–24 października 1994*, Piotr Krakowski, Jacek Purchla, eds (Krakow, 1994), p. 49.

[51] Kazimierz Wyka, *Matejko i Słowacki* (Warsaw, 1953), p. 42.

by the Polish aristocracy,[52] who saw it as a defamation of the Polish people. Matejko's portrayal of the drama of the first partition, largely indecipherable to foreign viewers, who fail to recognise the main players in the historical scene, met the expectations of the academic "machine" in its outstandingly directed and arranged narrative, emotional tension, expressiveness, meticulous choice of props and costumes, encoded meaningful details (like the burnt-out candle, the torn curtain, and the coin, like Judas's, rolling on the floor), powerful illusion, and, finally, its ethical message. Tadeusz Reytan – a member of parliament from Nowogródek who protested the partition treaty and became a defender of the Commonwealth's honour, could be seen as a universal Romantic hero, a champion of a lost cause. Depicting a traumatic historical turning point, the moment Poland was lost, this canvas plays a central role in the exhibition's narrative. In the symbolic space titled *Interregnum* opening the exhibition, it is confronted with a masterpiece by Matejko's student, Jacek Malczewski. His *Melancholy* (**fig. 11**), at once a portrayal of momentum and impotence, motivation and doubt, ecstasy and defeat – "this is Poland fighting and suffering, armed with scythes and crosses [...] with prayer and blasphemy, vigour and despair, with all that is the stuff of the nation's life in servitude," as the critic Stanisław Witkiewicz wrote.[53] Much like *Artist's Inspiration*, which neighbours *Melancholy* in the Louvre-Lens exhibition, the canvas addresses the problem of artistic creation, of the painter's imagination being trammelled by the phantoms of history, bound and beguiled by spectres from the past. "By design, oriented counter to social evolution, Romanticism transported the struggle into the domain of dreams and displaced the realities of life with an escape into a world of dreams. It displaced cultural growth and changing forms with the magic of words and dreams and the cult of bygone times [...]" – this is how the Polish avant-garde pioneer Władysław Strzemiński diagnosed the state of 19th-century Polish art.[54] What is significant is that the painting work of Malczewski and Wyspiański, both ardent admirers of Juliusz Słowacki, remains firmly in the domain of the Romantic tradition. Sadly, the latter was represented in the Lens exhibition with only one oil painting, *Planty Park in Krakow at Dawn* (*Planty with a View of Wawel Castle*). Missing from the show were some of his most iconic works, like the necrotic visions preserved in his stained-glass window cartoons for Wawel Castle showing spectral royal corpses, his tormented Polonia – a stained-glass window design for the Lviv cathedral, or his somnolent *Capsheves* commenting on the state of impotence and the wait for a resurrection. Meanwhile, the work of Malczewski, who was reared on the expressive and patriotic work of Matejko as much as on the martyrologic cartoons of Artur Grottger, was closer in spirit to the reverie of *Ball at the Hôtel Lambert in Paris* (*Chopin's Polonaise*) by Teofil Kwiatkowski. In fact, Malczewski inspired Wyspiański, who in his *Wedding*, mentions the plasticity of the former's contorted bodies, the symbolistic figures presiding over his fantasies, illusions and transcendental visions. In this manner, the exhibition traced a network of artistic interconnections and its interplay of artistic assumptions, which despite such diverse approaches, preserved a shared moral charge and a strong Romantic suggestiveness in the messages.

[52] Danuta Batorska, "The Political Censorship of Jan Matejko," *Art Journal*, vol. 51 (1992), no. 1, pp. 57–58.

[53] Stanisław Witkiewicz, "Jacek Malczewski" in id., *Pisma zebrane*, part 1: *Monografie artystyczne*, vol. 1, Jan Jakubowski, Maria Olszaniecka, eds (Krakow, 1974), pp. 466–67.

[54] Władysław Strzemiński, "Sztuka nowoczesna w Polsce" in id., *Wybór pism estetycznych*, Grzegorz Sztabiński, ed. (Warsaw, 2006), p. 98.

Tellingly, even in Artur Grottger's Young Poland manifesto (1898), which marked out the path for a new, young and free art, there crop up national identity motifs in the form of "eagle wings," "a royal spirit," and "the fiery spirit of Adam Mickiewicz": "We demand of our art that it be Polish through and through – for if it loses that it will lose its power and value, its *raison d'*être."[55] The modernist programme still bore the hallmarks of Romanticism as it grew out of the Romantic legacy,[56] while the authority of the past remained a burden, an obligation to tradition and to identity endangered. On the other hand, as Romanticism fed the historical, rural and Slavic imagery of domestic artists, it spawned original narratives and structures in their canvases. Painting their mythical visions of the borderlands, Brandt or Chełmoński (awarded the Grand Prix at the World's Fair in 1889) followed in the footsteps of European plein-air painting; Aleksander Gierymski grappled with the Naturalists' and Impressionists' way of seeing, Ślewiński absorbed the Synthetist premises advanced by Paul Gauguin, Wojciech Weiss reflected on the starkness in Edvard Munch's work, and Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Konrad Krzyżanowski took inspiration from Arkhip Kuindzhi.

Consideration of the framework for this "early Polishness" (perhaps in response to the exhibition *Late Polishness* held in 2017 at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw, which asked questions on the form of Polish collective imagination after 1989) should not remove the European format of Polish art from view despite Polish art's preoccupation with history and mythic thinking.[57] It was precisely the French influence that ushered in the modern understanding of painting as a pure artistic (and not historiosophic) pursuit, espousing the autonomy of artistic expression. Polish-French relations were thus a second, "subdermal," subplot in the *Pologne* exhibition.

The essence of this Polishness was pinpointed mainly in the chivalric and noble universe of masculine and patriarchal models of heroism. This aspect was presented in the second section of the exhibition titled "National Mythology. The Glorious Past" addressing the treatment of Polish military and cultural triumphs in the paintings of artists like Jan Matejko, Józef Brandt, Juliusz Kossak, Teodor Axentowicz or Henryk Rodakowski (**fig. 12**). The individual subsections in this part of the exhibition dealt with: the Napoleonic myth – "Napoleon and Poland," and the Polish-French political and cultural links after the November Uprising – "Paul Delaroche and Polish History Painting" (**fig. 13**). Dealing with subject matter of this kind were paintings by Piotr Michałowski, Teofil Kwiatkowski, Józef Simmler, Wojciech Gerson, Jan Matejko and Wojciech Kossak. For context, the Louvre in Paris supplied the exhibition with Paul Delaroche's monumental canvas *The Children of Edward*, which was juxtaposed with Józef Simmler's excellent copy. Here, a separate space titled "Imaginary Antiquity" was allotted for Henryk Siemiradzki, who did not tackle Polish history directly but, as his contemporary critics believed, addressed the national situation by portraying Christian martyrs (sketch for *Nero's Torches*). The ruthless Roman Emperor was of course seen to be a prefiguration of the Russian Tsar, and Rome – Russia.[58]

The exhibition's third section visualised the development of modern martyrologic iconography and bore the title "The Drama of the Here and Now" (**fig. 14**). Works by Józef

[55] See Quasimodo [Artur Górski], "Młoda Polska," Życie (1898), no. 15.

[56] Kazimierz Wyka, *Modernizm polski* (Krakow, 1959), p. 158.

[57] Wiesław Juszczak, *Malarstwo polskiego modernizmu* (Gdańsk, 2004), p. 23.

[58] Tadeusz Sinko, *Hellada i Roma w Polsce* (Lviv, 1933), p. 177; Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito, "Wokół *Pochodni Nerona* Henryka Siemiradzkiego," *Rocznik Krakowski*, vol. 58 (1992), pp. 103–19.

Chełmoński, Maksymilian Gierymski, Jacek Malczewski and Artur Grottger (the famous *Polonia* series of photogravures based on Grottger's cartoons), addressed national revolts and repressions at the hands of the partitioning countries (e.g., exiles to Siberia) and presented the problem of ostracization and individual ordeals resulting from confrontation with the power apparatus. Taking shape very clearly here were two narrative idioms: late-Romantic visionariness with heroic rhetoric and unsentimental, non-theatrical naturalism forming a nearly documentary or eye-witness account.

The section titled "Community and Diversity" showed the ethnic and religious diversity in the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose vast territory was inhabited by Ruthenians, Lithuanians, Jews, Tatars, Karaites, Armenians, Germans and others, who cultivated their own languages, costumes, traditions and customs. The homogenous understanding of a nation proves problematic in this admixture of cultures as it hinges on an idealised construct or process and fails to describe the objective state of things. In this part of the exhibition, images of members of various groups, social strata and professional ranks were displayed side-by-side on a single wall – nobles in Old Polish outfits, labourers, artists and peasants (fig. 6). Given a special place were paintings portraying the folk traditions practiced in various regions of the Commonwealth (**fig. 15**). Folklorism and the world of folk mythology, one of the chief undercurrents in the work of Jacek Malczewski, also appeared in paintings by Włodzimierz Tetmajer, Aleksander Gierymski, Józef Chełmoński and Stanisław Masłowski. One area of intense artistic interest at that time were the borderlands but the regions of Podhale or Pokuttya in the Eastern Carpathian Mountains also captured many artists' imagination. The fascination with the everyday life of the Tatra Mountain highlanders and Hutsuls found its way into the paintings of artists like Władysław Ślewiński, Władysław Jarocki, Kazimierz Pautsch, Kazimierz Sichulski and Teodor Axentowicz and fuelled the idea of a mythical "exceptional Slavicness."[59] From the Romantic period onwards, the idealised peasantry, treated as source of strength and a moral pillar, a repository of sincere faith and authentic tradition, served as a source of hope for Poland's rebirth. Nevertheless, the idea of national solidarity, of lords and peasants fighting side-by-side in the name of independence, alive since the time of the Kościuszko Uprising (1794), was brutally lampooned in Wyspiański's *The Wedding* (1901). Oftentimes, peasants did not feel a part of the millennium-long tradition of the nation,[60] and any improvement in their social standing was seen as counterproductive by the landowners. As a consequence, the thinking on the peasantry continued to be defined by the paternalistic mentality of the intelligentsia.[61] With some exceptions, peasants began to gradually assimilate into the national community only in the second half of the 19th century, in a process that continued into the 20th century. Nevertheless, the emergence of the folk category in artistic considerations (and in art itself) can be deemed as a sign of democratisation.[62] Folk culture was also fertile ground for artist's explorations toward devising new styles.

Presented in the section titled "Exploring Landscapes" (**fig. 16**) were images of landscapes, which were seen as a vessel of patriotic nostalgia but also as a purely artistic challenge in the

[59] See Maria Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* (Krakow, 2006).

[60] Łuczewski, op. cit., p. 26.

[61] Tomasz Kizwalter, *O nowoczesności narodu. Przypadek polski* (Warsaw, 1999), pp. 258–68.

[62] Ibid., p. 261.

era of plein-air painting, as in the case of Juliusz Kossak, Józef Brandt, Józef Chełmoński, Jan Stanisławski and Leon Wyczółkowski. Views of the Ukrainian steppe stirred the Romantic imagination in their suggestion of the Polish borderlands myth[63] while the end of the century saw vistas of the Tatra Mountains, the Eastern Carpathian Mountains and winter scenes become increasingly popular. Highlighted in the exhibition were also several compositions relating to noble country estates ("The Home as the Bastion of Polishness"), which were regarded as places of patriotic edification where national customs were cultivated (**fig. 17**).

The exhibition's final section ("Towards Modernity") dealt with the enduring presence of Romantic notions and national symbols. Manifestations of Polishness did not stand in the way of searching for new modern forms or of artists demonstrating their embrace of a wealth of technical means, including colour, space and objects being treated in a more implicit manner. Malczewski, called "the painter of the Polish soul,"[64] opened up his paintings to the Freudian territory of sex and death as he employed gruelling contractions, disrupting the sense of space and reality with tight framing, bold colour combinations, geometric simplification of landscapes, and rhythmic composition in zones. The canon of Polishness made up of portrayals of Polonia, Stańczyk [Renaissance Polish Royal Court Jester], Polish Hussars or Wawel Hill (as in the work of Leon Wyczółkowski, Jacek Malczewski, Stanisław Wyspiański or Witold Wojtkiewicz – the *Polonia* series of drawings) was confronted here with the art of Wojciech Weiss, who took inspiration from the philosophy of Stanisław Przybyszewski, with the grotesque theatrical scenes of Witold Wojtkiewicz, whom Maurice Denis and André Gide discovered, and with the expressive natural visions of Ferdynand Ruszczyc. Polish artists who were educated in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Petersburg, Rome or Munich became exposed to and embraced international tendencies. Around the year 1890, encounters with French painting, Aesthetism, Japonisme, Synthetism, Nabism, and later Fauvism and Cubism, transformed the thinking on painting structure and on the aims of art, all of which considerably reduced artists' sense of patriotic obligation. Though the issue of the nation's lost independence, forged into a "permanent complex of the imagination,"[65] continued to occupy a central place in the Polish popular psyche, Polish art did not limit itself to a tone of patriotic mobilisation, grief or mysticism. Now, beyond national history inscribed in the realm of the sacred, it was possible to show images from outside of the magical sphere of "Polishness": like the orientalistic nudes of Franciszek Żmurko, the bucolic Roman views of Henryk Siemiradzki, the salons and costumes of Władysław Czachórski, the luminous efforts of Aleksander Gierymski, the erotic and intense visions of Władysław Podkowiński, and so on. In this regard, a model example would be the one "glaring absence" at the *Pologne* exhibition – Józef Pankiewicz, a close friend of Bonnard, Delaunay and Fénéon, and a great admirer of Cézanne who took up "the fight for pure painting,"[66] for the autonomy of artistic means. Towards the end of the century, becoming much more pronounced were attitudes maintaining that, in spite of Jan Matejko's example, art could be separate from love of the

[63] Daniel Beauvois, "Mit kresów wschodnich", czyli jak mu położyć kres" in *Polskie mity polityczne XIX i XX wieku*, Wojciech Wrzesiński, ed. (Wrocław, 1994), pp. 93–105.

[64] See Jacek Malczewski 1854 – 1929, exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay, 15 February – 14 May 2000 (Paris, 2000).

[65] Mieczysław Porębski, *Malowane dzieje* (Warsaw, 1962), p. 6.

[66] Elżbieta Charazińska, "Józefa Pankiewicza batalia o czyste malarstwo" in *Józef Pankiewicz 1866–1940. Życie i dzieło*, Elżbieta Charazińska, ed., exh. cat., NMW, 9 January – 26 March 2006 (Warsaw, 2006), pp. XI–XXVI, here: p. XI.

homeland, and that artistic individuality and subjective sensations were sufficient reasons to paint. The painterly formulae of Polish artists, even those firmly rooted thematically in the Polish imagination and literary tradition, answered to universal modernist impulses arriving from modern French, German, Russian and Scandinavian painting, and thereby to the artistic revolutions in light and colour, synthesis and expression, stylisation and archaization, the tendencies of ethnicism and regionalism, the search for a national style and the international *art nouveau* aesthetic. This is the context we must keep in mind when pondering the work of Polish artists like Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Mehoffer, Władysław Ślewiński, Władysław Jarocki, Kazimierz Sichulski, Olga Boznańska, Aleksander Gierymski or Józef Pankiewicz. Also diverging from the traditional understanding of the concept of Polishness was the painting work of the so-called École de Paris, a label applied to Polish artists settling in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century, including Mela Muter, Elie Nadelman, Eugeniusz Zak, Roman Kramsztyk, Gustaw Gwozdecki, Ludwik Markus (Louis Marcoussis), Leopold Gottlieb, Jan Rubczak and Tadeusz Makowski. As writes Elżbieta Grabska, these artists' relocation to France was a move toward freedom and, oftentimes, it was a way to "flee censorship, police and 'the provinces.'"[67] There, they drew inspiration from the work of Cézanne and the Cubists, Henri Matisse, Vincent van Gogh, Pierre Bonnard and Édouard Vuillard. The problem of defining the national *esprit* and of comprehending the Polish school was noted in 1907 by André Gide, who was fascinated with the original work of Witold Wojtkiewicz, an artist with a kinship to young French art, like that of Daumier, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and Bonnard[68] (**fig. 18**).

Nevertheless, what interested our French partners above all was rather the need for self-determination, the distinctiveness, the longing for a lost or perhaps imagined community, and the role of paintings in the codification of "places of memory" and in visualising emotions and imaginations. "In any individual belonging to a nation living in subjugation, the most common and the most enduring thought is and must be the thought of freedom and independence," wrote Stanisław Witkiewicz, summing up the efforts of generations of Polish artists.[69]

The exhibition *Pologne 1840–1918. Peindre l'âme d'une nation* (**fig. 19**) was honoured with a Sybilla Award for a 2019 Museum Event in the temporary exhibition category.

Translated by Simon Włoch

[67] Elżbieta Grabska, "Podróże w stronę wolności" in *Paryż i artyści polscy wokół E.-A. Bourdelle'a 1900–1918*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw, 18 February – 27 March 1997 (Warsaw, 1997), p. 14.

[68] André Gide, *Exposition Witold Wojtkiewicz*, Galerie E. Druet, Paris, 23 May – 5 June 1907. See Pierre Masson, "Pour un centenaire. André Gide et le peintre polonais Witold Wojtkiewicz," *Bulletin des amis 23 d'André Gide*, VII.43, p. 92.

[69] Stanisław Witkiewicz, "Jacek Malczewski" in id., *Wybór pism estetycznych*, with foreword, compiled and ed. by Józef Tarnowski (Krakow, 2009), p. 196.