

| The Gallery of Polish Design at the National Museum in Warsaw

The history of the National Museum in Warsaw's collection of Polish design reaches back to the year 1978, when the museum's director, Stanisław Lorentz, approved the museum's takeover of the collection belonging to the Institute of Industrial Design (IID). The person who spearheaded that initiative was the soon-to-retire Wanda Telakowska, the driving force behind several post-war institutions working to promote design. Starting out in 1946, Telakowska devoted herself to bringing artists into the production process, advocating for them to be involved in the manufacture of mass-market goods of everyday use, first through the Production Aesthetics Supervision Bureau and later, from 1950, the IID. By the late 1970s, the IID's impressive archive of designs, models and prototypes for furniture, textiles, glassware, ceramics and a range of other objects had grown into a museum-worthy collection but was in danger of being broken up and dispersed. Finding a home at the National Museum, the IID collection would become the seed for the Modern Design Centre, today a part of the National Museum in Warsaw's Collection of Modern Art. Named as the centre's first keeper was Hanna Chwierut-Jasicka, who managed it for many years and grew it with the addition of examples of Polish design from the early 20th century up to current times, some of which were provided directly by factories while others were acquired through contact with artists, design studios and art schools. Joining the centre's collection in 1995 was an assortment of unique textiles, ceramics, glassware and metal pieces which had been acquired by the National Museum even before the centre's inception. Currently, the collection numbers more than 25 thousand pieces in all and continues to be expanded systematically.

Since its inception, the centre's curators have worked to ensure a permanent exhibition for the collection's contents. However, due to the lack of a suitable space at the museum, for many years only select sets of works were presented in a long string of temporary shows,¹ and

¹ Some of the more noteworthy exhibitions organised or co-organised by the NMW Modern Design Centre (with information on accompanying publications in parentheses): *Wzornictwo Przemysłowe w 40-lecie PRL*, Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, Olsztyn, 1984 (exh. cat., Olsztyn, 1984); *Wanda Zawadzka-Manteuffel. Szkło. Ceramika. Tkanina. Grafika*, Xawery Dunikowski Sculpture Museum at Królikarnia (a division of the National Museum in Warsaw), 1994 (exh. cat., Warsaw, 1994); *Spółdzielnia Artystów „ŁAD” 1926–1996*, Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, 1997, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź, 1997/98 (accompanying pub., Warsaw, 1997); *Plutyńska: prace ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie i Centralnego Muzeum Włókiennictwa w Łodzi*, Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, 1998 (exh. cat., Warsaw 1998); *Polska biżuteria artystyczna z lat 1949–1950 ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, Museum of Goldsmithing, Kazimierz Dolny, 1999 (exh. cat., Warsaw, 1999); *Rzeczy pospolite. Polskie wyroby 1899–1999*, The National Museum in Warsaw, “Manggha” Centre of Japanese Art and Technology, Krakow, “Zamek” Culture Centre, Poznań, 2000–1 (exh. cat., Warsaw, 2000); *Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego w poszukiwaniu tożsamości we wzornictwie*, Institute of Industrial Design in Warsaw, 2001 (exh. cat., Warsaw, 2001); *Kolekcje wzornictwa. Odsłona pierwsza*, Poster Museum at Wilanów

the centre's warehouses were set up so as to allow easy access to the collection for interested scholars and researchers. With hopes for a Polish Design Gallery simmering for many years, it was finally the success of the exhibition *We Want to be Modern. Polish Design from 1955–1968 from the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw* (2011) that urged the museum's administration to take action toward putting together a permanent exhibition. The collection's curators – Anna Maga, Anna Demska, the late Anna Frąckiewicz (d. 2016), and Kaja Muszyńska (since 2017) – were faced with the difficult task of telling the story of Polish design from the turn of the 20th century to the present in a space no larger than 300 square metres. The long-awaited opening of the Gallery of Polish Design came on 15 December 2017. On display are 400 objects, most of them from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw with only the exhibit of early-century decorative art being supplemented with important items on loan from the Masovian Museum in Płock, the National Museum in Krakow, the Ethnographic Museum in Krakow and private collections.

In order to provide the fullest possible overview of the history of Polish design, its specificities and major themes, the gallery is organised according to two narrative lines: a chronological course and a thematic one consisting of three main areas: design for industry, design for children and folk-inspired design. The gallery's spatial design by Paulina Tyro-Niezgoda and Piotr Matosek (Studio Matosek/Niezgoda) underscores the division with the use of contrasting colours: the chronological section is presented on a white background while the accompanying thematic line unfolds against a graphite grey hue. Individual time periods are distinguished with illuminated lines. The chronological section is also supplemented with groupings of furniture on platforms in the centre, while space and conservation limitations mean that some of the items are displayed inside drawers. The narrative is brought to life with the help of multimedia (photographs, films and other archival materials) adding historical context to the objects in display. For clarity and impact, there is an animated projection which traces the stylistic changes transpiring in various design fields over time.

Visitors to the gallery can see some of the most interesting works of Polish artists and designers from the turn of 20th century to the present day. The choice of objects was a difficult one not only on account of the limited space but also due to the wealth of design work arising over the last century. The gallery's creators wanted above all to demonstrate how the items on display fit into reality over the decades and how they defined an era's shifting styles. To this end, the gallery features items that made it into mass production, stood the test of time and became household fixtures, as well as outstanding pieces by Polish designers which never saw production, existing as designs, models or prototypes known only to design enthusiasts yet still indicative of the potential in Polish design.

We show the early days of Polish design through the example of the pursuit of a national style as a visual expression of communal identity, intended to consolidate the nation divided by the partitions for more than a century, by identifying and accentuating the unique traits that distinguish it from others. The most vivid embodiment of that idea became the Zakopane Style shaped by Stanisław Witkiewicz and his associates. Because Witkiewicz worked on the assumption that the Tatra Mountains preserved a pure Polish form of architecture and

(a division of the National Museum in Warsaw) (Warsaw, 2007); *Ale zabawki!* The National Museum in Warsaw, 2008 (exh. cat., Warsaw, 2008); *Chcemy być nowocześni. Polski design 1955–1968 z kolekcji Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, The National Museum in Warsaw, 2011; “Zajezdnia Sztuki” Museum of Technology and Transport in Szczecin, 2011/12; Gdynia Municipal Museum, 2012; Museum voor Moderne Kunst w Arnhem, 2012 (exh. cat., Warsaw, 2011).

ornamentation, he based the Zakopane Style on elements characteristic of Podhale Region building and craftsmanship tradition. Its vibrant forms not only influenced other regions in the country but also solidified the identity of Podhale Region art locally. The style dictated the aesthetics of homes but also utilitarian objects like furniture (e.g., a chair designed by Witkiewicz on display in the gallery) or ceramic goods (e.g., a tableware set designed by Jan Szczepkowski). Other significant phenomena in 20th-century applied arts are illustrated through objects designed by artists affiliated with the “Polish Applied Art” Association (1901–13) and the Krakow Workshops (1913–26), who called for a revival of artistic handicrafts and for improved mass manufacture through the involvement of artists in the design process (the exhibition features bedroom furniture designed by Karol Tichy and “zydel” chairs by Wojciech Jastrzębowski, as well as batiks and forged metal vessels from the Museum of Science and Industry). Artists connected with Polish Applied Art worked in a variety of handicrafts fields, from furniture to textiles (mainly kilim tapestries), graphic art, poster art and interior design.

A set of photographs from the 1912 Exhibition of Architecture and Interiors in a Garden Setting in Krakow illustrates the phenomenon of the so-called manor style, a unique interpretation of the traditional design ethos of the Polish nobility, which had a significant influence on the look of Polish buildings and interiors for decades to follow. Photographs also relate the success of Polish artists at the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, whose interiors on display there represented a style that can be understood as a Polish take on art deco. While modern thanks to its geometric, expressionist and cubist elements, the Polish exhibition in Paris was at the same time firmly rooted in tradition, resulting in a new artistic formula widely embraced as fittingly representative of the newly independent country. Of the other important currents from the interwar period, two are represented in the gallery. The earlier and more traditional one, born in the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, is illustrated here with some excellent examples of the work of the “Ład” Artists Cooperative (1926–96), who arrived at a unique mixture of modernity and tradition creating objects of functional simplicity with native accents. The second one, an avant-garde style associated with the Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology, is represented in the gallery by Bauhaus-inspired chrome-plated tube furniture that once resided in the Presidential Residence in Wisła and a pair of colourful triangular tables inspired by Dutch neoplasticism by the Warsaw brand MEKO. The picture of Polish interwar design is rounded out with jacquard textiles and kilim tapestries by Julia Keilowa as well as with the classic *Kula* and *Płaski* tableware sets from the Ćmielów Porcelain Factory and mass-production glassware from the Niemen Glass Company.

A part of the gallery is dedicated to the first decade after the Second World War – a period when Poland was feverishly rebuilding after the war and when the communist system was being put into motion. The widespread poverty of that difficult decade necessitated frugality – inexpensive and easily-available raw materials and the simplest production methods were in high demand. Shown in the gallery is a varied collection created by Wanda Telakowska under the tagline “Beauty, every day and for all.” Visitors to the gallery can admire the creativity of Krystyna Tołłoczko-Różyska and Józef Różyski, who produced unique accessories from carefully selected and exquisitely worked twigs and pegs. Arising from waste materials (wood cuttings, linen, homespun fabric and leather scraps) were handbags, shoes and belts – inexpensive, stylish and striking. Shown alongside these “cheap” accessories is an assortment of more traditional jewellery by Jadwiga and Jerzy Zaremski, Ludmiła and Ryszard Rohn, Stefan Płuzański and Mamert Celmiński made from low-grade silver, white metals, amber and semi-precious stones. A similar intentional simplicity and frequent reference to tradition

also characterises objects of everyday use. In this section, we present a number of mock-ups and prototypes from the late 1940s and early 1950s which were tested for mass production. Remarkable clothing textiles designed by Władysław Strzemiński, as unistic as his painting work, represent the avant-garde. This is juxtaposed with Socialist-Realism, which in applied art found its fullest impact in official interiors and furniture. Proving to be an interesting complement are some commemorative handkerchiefs and photographs from the 5th World Festival of Youth and Students in 1955 in Warsaw. The colourful and eye-catching festival decorations designed by a team of artists from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Art betrayed a new and decidedly neo-Socialist-Realist style heralding the arrival of a new era.

The second half of the 1950s and the 1960s were an extremely prolific period in Polish design, spawning a plethora of excellent designs, many of them making it into mass production and finding widespread use. This creative explosion was a result of the political “Thaw,” which brought an openness to the outside world, contact with contemporary art and hope of change for the better. Making their debut was a new generation of artists, educated after the war but mentored by figures from the pre-war milieu of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts. A very striking and today frequently referenced style took form under the influence of the art world of that time: abstract painting and sculpture. Most characteristic of this period were soft organic forms redolent of the microscopic world, full of ellipsoidal and kidney shapes. The petite and lightweight plywood chairs designed by Maria Chomentowska, Teresa Kruszevska and Jan Kurzątkowski are characterised by smooth lines and fluid corners. Bright and vibrant colours were often mixed to contrasting results: for example, furniture designers eagerly combined pale seats with dark legs and vice versa and spaces were filled with furniture of various colours or with multi-coloured upholstery. Designers strove to create freer forms through the use of new technologies and materials like PVC, fibreglass and epoxy resin – as in the case of Roman Modzelewski’s armchairs – or polyester glass laminate like in a chair by Aleksandra Kucza. While the above examples never saw mass production, modern and curvilinear forms did reach consumers in side tables and armchairs with rope or plastic tubing woven onto frames of bent metal rods.

Poland’s dazzling and very popular variation of 1950s style was to a large degree shaped by the Institute of Industrial Design. In the second half of the decade, the institute’s Screen-printing Workshop produced printed fabrics designed by artists in its employ. These fabrics stood out for their fresh and attractive patterns composed of sharp, vibrant colours with dark and jittery lines. Patterns were often borrowed from abstract paintings like those of Joan Miró, Paul Klee or Jackson Pollack.

Also playing an important role was the institute’s very well-equipped Ceramics Workshop, which produced prototypes for porcelain and porcelite factories as well as limited series of goods for retail: vases, tea and coffee sets, tableware, platters, bowls, ashtrays, etc. These were designed by a talented team of artists including names like Danuta Dusznik, Zofia Przybylska, Zofia Galińska and Jadwiga Adamczewska-Miklaszewska. The ceramic goods they designed came in unusual, organic and often irregular shapes. Lubomir Tomaszewski also favoured simple forms allowing a product to be shaped in a single mould and without affixed appendages, an excellent example being the teapot from the *Ina* set, whose spout and handle extend fluidly from the teapot’s body and thus underscore the malleability of porcelain.

One of the highlight achievements of the institute’s Ceramics Workshops were porcelain figurines by a foursome of designers with a background in sculpture: Henryk Jędrasiak, Hanna Orthwein, Mieczysław Naruszewicz and Lubomir Tomaszewski. Produced in 1956–65 in Polish porcelain factories, these pieces have gone down as some of the most iconic expressions of

the style prevailing in the 1950s and 1960s. In them we see the degree to which Polish sculptors had been influenced by the work of Henry Moore, whose sculptures were featured in a famous 1959 exhibition at Warsaw's Zachęta Gallery. The porcelain figurines created by the institute's designers exhibit a synthetic approach to the shape of forms having fluid contours and openings as well as an exceptional sense of proportion and abstract decoration. Their high artistic value justifies the term "intimate sculptures," which is often used in reference to these splendid objects.

Nearly all design theoreticians of the 1950s espoused the use of colour as a sign of vitality and modernity. Colour was thus an important distinguishing factor for design of that era; in textiles and ceramics alike, it tended to be dynamic, aggressive and joyful. Highly appreciated was the coloured glass designed in the 1960s by artists educated at the Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław, such as Zbigniew Horbowy, Wszewłód Sarnecki and Wiesław Sawczuk. These glass pieces saturated with vivid colours often alluded to products coming out of the leading centres of glass production – Scandinavia and Czechoslovakia.

Political changes and a new economic development strategy relying on loans from the West had a significant impact on Polish design in the 1970s. Domestic industry's new openness to the latest technological advances in the first half of the decade generated considerable economic growth while foreign licencing agreements enabled greater executive freedom for Polish manufacturers. All of this opened up a wider horizon of material and technological possibilities for designers. The comfortable standing of Polish glassworks resulting from significant export orders also ushered in new opportunities for designers. Working with industry provided a possibility to not only offer designs for mass production but also to see their work reach foreign markets. It brought greater freedom to experiment, too. Evidencing the sizeable success of this branch of Polish design is the number of successful glass projects – ones like Zbigniew Horbowy's work for the Sudety glassworks, Wszewłód Sarnecki's pieces for the Krosno company and those of Eryka and Jan Drost for the Ząbkowice glassworks. The period was similarly fruitful for certain ceramics factories, as exemplified by a highly popular porcelite set with decorations by Janina Aślanowicz produced by the Pruszków company or the stoneware of Bolesławiec.

In 1970s design we see a variety of harmonious stylistics. Minimalistic tendencies come through in the parallel lines and simple forms of the pressed glass *Conti* set designed by Eryka Trzewik-Drost or the *Wars* chairs of Zenon Bączyk; both were in mass production and both enjoyed widespread usage. Outlandish forms and colours characterised products produced especially in the second half of the 1970s, as seen in the orange *Tulip* chair designed by Teresa Kruszewska, the *Byk* armchair of Jan Kurzątkowski or the retro-styled *Telimena* of Czesław Knothe.

The late 1970s experienced an escalating economic crisis, a consequence of which was a severe shortage of goods and growing impoverishment among the population. Yet, despite the slowdown in production, design quality remained a priority for some. The gallery documents the success of Barbara Hoff, who not only designed fashionable clothes for young people but, in the face of numerous obstacles, was able to put them into mass production under the HOFFLAND brand. Meanwhile, on the other end of the fashion spectrum was the exclusive offering of Moda Polska (of which only a small selection is presented in the gallery). Toward the end of the 1980s, Krystyna Arska, Agnieszka Putowska-Tomaszewska and Viola Damińska from the Institute of Industrial Design teamed up with Ewa Socha-Dudek to devise a domestic interior design system that would yield harmony and flexibility in the arrangement of a diverse selection of individual elements. What resulted were sets of goods

that were complementary in their patterns and colours, like bedding sets for couples (“His” and “Hers”) or children’s bedding for hospitals and kindergartens. The project was mindful of décor as a whole, including the patterns used on wallpapers, ceramic tiles, rugs and decorative textiles. The idea was only partially executed and today remains an example of the frequent “missed opportunities” in the history of Polish design.

The chronological section of the gallery concludes with examples of projects from the early stage of the post-1989 political transformation and a selection of works from recent years (intended to be updated). The dearth of space in the gallery has left the exhibition’s creators unable to present the finest achievements of contemporary Polish design in any form other than film. The prominence of furniture designs in this section of the exhibition reflects the healthy state of this branch of Polish industry today. In the early stage after the transformation, many furniture factories developed their potential by producing high-quality goods for foreign brands, over time increasingly building their own trademarks and taking advantage of the ideas of domestic designers. Many of these contemporary projects attest to the designers’ sensitivity to the notion of environmentally-responsible design, taking into account the benefits of recycling and accepting their place as an important element in prosocial initiatives (like the *Sheepad* coaster set by Welldone).

The chronological section of the exhibition is counterpointed by an overview of three areas that the curators believe to be important for a fuller understanding of Polish design history. The first of these is industrial design, whose roots in Poland reach back to the late 1950s, when domestic designers began working with the automotive, machine, electronics and other industries. Here, the designer’s job went beyond aesthetic concerns, necessitating from them engineering knowledge and technological discipline. Highlights here include Krzysztof Meisner and Olgierd Rutkowski’s body for the *Alfa* photo camera produced from 1959 onwards. Among the greatest commercial successes were the *Frania* washing machine, the *Bambino* turntable and the later (1979) more advanced projects of Grzegorz Strzelewicz, like the *Amator Stereo* and *Radmor OR 5100* radio receivers. The greatest hits of these decades proved to be the *Art* lighting system designed by Tomasz Andrzej Rudkiewicz and Bartłomiej Pniewski for the Wilkasy lighting company and a number of projects by the Ergo Design studio, whose *Alexis* slicer and *Crystal* kettle have been mainstays on the market for more than two decades. A model of the *Link* passenger train reminds us of the success of Bartosz Piotrowski, lead designer for the Bydgoszcz-based train manufacturer Pesa.

The second spotlighted theme is children’s design, an area that has always captivated Polish designers. The imagination and unconventional thinking of children was a source of inspiration for many outstanding designs for toys and multifunctional products tailored to the distinct needs of young users. From this design category requiring particular attentiveness to safety and hygiene, the gallery presents Teresa Kruszevska’s furniture for children’s hospitals, Maria Chomentowska’s school desk chairs and Władysław Wincze’s animal furniture. Finding great consumer interest were sewing patterns for children’s clothes from the 1950s and 1960s, like the highly popular home-sewing kits in which a pattern was printed directly on an included length of fabric to be cut out and sewn, or ready-made dresses, handkerchiefs and headscarves. Many years later, the children’s clothing brand Endo used similar designs on their high-quality cotton t-shirts. In the category of toys, highlights include the moveable wooden pieces of Antoni Kenar and his students: the future sculptors Władysław Hasior, Antoni Rząsa and Stanisław Kulon. Also noteworthy are several examples of contemporary toys produced by some very gifted designers: soft plush toys, wooden toy cars, puzzles and building blocks, and an array of utilitarian objects doubling as toys.

Many of the playthings have distinct folk roots, which makes them a natural transition to the last thematic section in the gallery, dedicated to folk-inspired design. From the late 1940s to the 1960s, Wanda Telakowska oversaw an initiative to produce goods through collaboration between artist/designers and traditional craftspeople. The idea behind this was to underscore the importance of local tradition and to imbue contemporary design with folk motifs. The outcome included printed fabrics with patterns influenced by Kurpie Region cut-outs, painted eggs or Żalipie Region paintings. A common trait of the textiles on display here is the flat, two-dimensional portrayal of the pattern's elements so typical of folk art. Designs to be used in mass production and test runs were produced by the Screenprinting Workshop of the Institute of Industrial Design and elsewhere. Designers discovered the beauty of old folk costumes and woven fabrics, and local artisans were invited to work on industrially manufactured items like wool clothing fabrics, which were later used in the fashion collections of designers like Grażyna Hase. The products of this collaboration between the Institute's professional designers and folk craftspeople retain their freshness and attractiveness despite the passage of time. Today, an interest in folk art is demonstrated by the popularity of products made of raw wood, wicker or felt, a case in point being the openwork coasters and *Mohohej! Dia* rug by Moho Design. This broadcloth rug, cut out in the shape of a blown-up Kurpie Region star with the use of modern laser technology, is displayed as it was intended by its creators – on the floor of the Gallery.

As it teeters on the boundary between art and utilitarian mass production, design is a creative discipline that impacts our daily lives more than any other. That must be why the Gallery of Polish Design enjoys such great interest among audiences of all generations. In embracing design, the National Museum in Warsaw has also embraced a wider audience range than ever.

Translated by Szymon Włoch