Agnieszka Rosales Rodriguez

Aleksander Gierymski and the Macchiaioli

Tracing the connection between Aleksander Gierymski's art and the aesthetics of Italian Macchiaioli may be rated among the obsessive practices of modern art history, which insists on searching for the European origins behind the Polish painter's vision (**figs 1–2**). While 19th-century historiography doggedly strived – often against common sense – to demonstrate the independence of the Polish school, which was supposed to depart from the beaten track of copying foreign influences in the name of manifesting its national character, contemporary researchers seem to pursue a similarly determined effort to discover its cosmopolitan aspects. The appeal of deep relationships or even unconscious affiliations between Polish art and European tendencies is on the rise, especially if they reveal the hitherto hidden avant-garde potential of the Drawing Class graduate, who – on account of his sojourn in Paris – becomes almost like Courbet, Monet or Cézanne. This regimen of modernity, imposed first by critics and later by art history, often removed the values of academic education from the picture and assumed that art developed by way of sudden transformation, revolutionary rejection of existing traditions and dissent. In fact, more often than not, the process of change was organic, and consisted in assimilating visual strategies resulting from the same ambitions and experience rather than ready-made solutions.

Nineteenth-century Italy was undergoing a dynamic process of national rebirth and transformation on the rising tide of the Risorgimento movement, which culminated in the unification of the country. Consequently, it did not generate an artistic hub that could compete with Paris in terms of being a grand international centre. However, given that art history sees the development of 19th-century painting as an evolution towards Impressionism, Italian painters have become categorized as its prophets. The 20th-century promotion of the Macchiaioli, undoubtedly coupled with the success of the French movement, resulted in establishing the position of these Italian artists as peripheral forerunners. The confrontation of Aleksander Gierymski's works with those of the Tuscan painters was driven, on the one hand, by megalomania, which imposed a cosmopolitan interpretation of the Pole's actions and on the other, by the paintings themselves, in both cases exploring light as well as the social and artistic radicalism of the Realist movement. The background of the "smudgers" provided a common point of departure: most of them were graduates of Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, as a result of which their later experimentations took on the nature of anti-academic opposition towards the educational standards of this institution (in terms of both form and subject matter). The simplicity of motifs (**fig. 3**), the everyday nature of portrayed situations, compositions and persons – in the oeuvre of Gierymski and the Italian Realists alike – allows one to formulate a set of deft comparisons, highlighting their shared perception of paintings (e.g., Silvestro Lega, *Gabriggiana*, c. 1888, private collection and Aleksander Gierymski, *Boy in the Sun*, 1893–94, The National Museum in Wrocław). In fact, the first comparisons of Gierymski's works with contemporary Italian art emerged with the Pole's 1955 exhibition in Palazzo Grassi in Venice – its reviewers underlined the influence of their compatriots on the

eclectic formula employed by the Polish painter.[1] Gierymski's "powdered" Impressionism, with an emphasis on costume, brought to mind the works of Mose Bianchi,[2] named alongside such painters as Tranquillo Cremona, Daniele Ranzoni or Emilio Gola. Stefan Kozakiewicz suggested analysing the artist's relationship with the Macchiaioli and Giovanni Segantini: "Gierymski's work on the *Arbour* seems to be closely associated with these earlier experimentations on the Italian territory."[3] In 1962, the influence of the Italian milieu of the 1870s and 1880s on Gierymski was signalled in the catalogue of the National Museum in Warsaw's jubilee exhibition.[4] In the artist's monograph, Juliusz Starzyński compared the *Arbour* (The National Museum in Warsaw), which was painted in Rome, with Silvestro Legi's *Pergola* (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan), indicating the Pole's potential artistic inspirations.[5] Consequently, the canvas which Gierymski finished in Warsaw – the beginning of his plein-air painting – is presented as the result of being influenced by the painting and experience of the Macchiaioli.[6]

Gierymski had already been described as an artist willing to continually confront his works with Nature as well as old and contemporary art by Stanislaw Witkiewicz.[7] There is no denying the validity of this claim. However, no analysis penned by the Polish critic even mentioned any of the former regulars of Caffè Michelangiolo. In the heroic phase of the development of the Tuscan movement, at the turn of the 1850s and 1860s, it was represented by: Giuseppe Abbati, Cristiano Banti, Odorado Borrani, Vincenzo Cabianca, Vito d'Ancona, Serafino De Tivoli, Giovanni Fattori, Silvestro Lega, Raffaello Sernesi, and Telemaco Signorini. None of these artists are referenced on the pages of Aleksander Gierymski's vast correspondence. Although it is not fully preserved, the existing letters are devoid of even the scantest account of museums and galleries he visited. The lack of commentaries on contemporary Italian art (apart from a late mention of Segantini),[8] balanced with enthusiastic remarks about Old Master paintings the artist saw in Venice, does not preclude such a contact. Here, though, it would be worth deliberating on the possible circumstances of this meeting.

The Gierymski brothers first visited Italy in May 1871. Their trip was centred on Venice (they spent a few days in Verona and Vicenza), which beckoned the young artists with the charm of 16th-century painting. Their subsequent stay in Rome between November 1873 and (most likely) June 1874 was already marred with Maksymilian's advancing illness. When he

[1] "Mostra Bellotto-Gierymski," *Emporium*, Ann. 61, no. 730 (October 1955), pp. 177–83.

[2] Leonardo Borgese, "Bernardo Bellotto – matematico della pittura," *Corriere della Sera*, Milan, 20 September 1955.

[3] Stefan Kozakiewicz, "Pokłosie weneckiej wystawy Bellotta i Gierymskiego," *Sztuka i Krytyka*, no. 1 (1957), p. 166.

[4] *Sztuka warszawska, od średniowiecza do połowy XX w. Katalog wystawy jubileuszowej zorganizowanej w stulecie powstania Muzeum 1862–1962*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 1962).

[5] Juliusz Starzyński, *Aleksander Gierymski* (Warsaw, 1967), p. 18.

[6] Jerzy Malinowski, *Imitacje świata. O polskim malarstwie i krytyce artystycznej drugiej połowy XIX w.* (Krakow, 1987), p. 132.

[7] Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Aleksander Gierymski* (Lviv, 1903), p. 168.

[8] *Maksymilian i Aleksander Gierymscy. Listy i notatki*, collected, arranged and with a preface by Juliusz Starzyński, preparation for print and commentaries by Halina Stępień (Wrocław–Warsaw–Krakow–Gdańsk, 1973), p. 344.

was not taking care of his brother, Aleksander walked around the Eternal City.[9] However, in a surviving letter written in early 1874, the artist complained about barely knowing Rome, and only having visited Campagna – a region preferred by painters for artistic journeys and landscape studies since the previous century – once, at the beginning of Maksymilian's sickness.[10] After his brother's death, Gierymski would continue travelling to Rome, adding variety to his journeys with excursions to the south or brief trips to Warsaw. Gierymski began work on the *Arbour* in September 1875, embarking on laborious open-air studies. According to a letter he wrote to his sister, he painted on every sunny day from ten o'clock until four.[11] In this crucial moment of his career – crucial in terms of his plein-air experience rather than artistic achievements – there is no historical trace that would prove that Gierymski's struggles with natural light, an important source of his artistic formation, stemmed from his knowledge of the output of the Tuscan movement. After all, the Macchiaioli milieu, which formed in Florence in the late 1850s, was not an institutionalized body and did not employ a uniform aesthetic system or doctrine. The theoretical foundations of this movement were formulated ex post, inspired by the achievements of young French art.[12] Art history would go on to emphasize these connections, highlighting the sketchy, spontaneous, impression-based character of Macchiaioli paintings, focusing on plein-air sketches and – rather tellingly – passing over the fact that they were different to paintings finished in the studio. In his article "Cose d'Arte," published in 1874 in *Il Risorgimento*, Telemaco Signorini – one of the leading figures of this milieu – indicated 1862 as the end of the group's activity. Incidentally, in this very year they were dubbed Macchiaioli – a name that would later lead to misunderstandings as to the essence of their artistic ambitions. Their activity, presented by Signorini and Adriano Ceccioni as anti-academic revolt (even though these "apostates" were educated in state institutions, and Giovanni Fattori even became a professor at Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence in 1869) was characterized by a lack of predefined procedures and stylistic diversity. The Macchiaioli combined their reluctance to studio work with an enthusiasm for 16th-century Italian painting tradition, Titian and Tintoretto, and involvement in the creation of reborn national art. The rebels identified with pro-independence ideals, in the name of which they reached for the Italian sources of art on the eve of the country's unification. They were equally familiar with French art – whether owing to the collection of Prince Anatole Demidov or to the accounts of fellow painters who travelled across Europe. At the beginning, the practice of these young artists was characterized by their attempt at creating a poignant light and shade effect (*chiaroscuro*), obtained through masses of colour transferred to canvas during open-air sessions devoted to painting oil studies, which eliminated detail to maintain the unity of composition. Their aim was the effect (*effetto*), a term used by Italian critics interchangeably with *macchia*, which was not a patch in the sense of *touche divisée*, but in the sense of a broad, spontaneous

[9] Ewa Micke-Broniarek, "Aleksander Gierymski. Timeline," in *Aleksander Gierymski 1850–1901*, exh. cat., The National Museum in Warsaw (Warsaw, 2014), p. 83.

[10] Letter to Prosper Dziekoński [1874] – *Maksymilian i Aleksander Gierymscy. Listy i notatki*, op. cit., p. 144.

[11] [1875], ibid., p. 196.

[12] The theoretical assumptions were formulated in the 1870s by Diego Martelli, a friend of the Macchiaioli, in Italian magazines (such as *Il Risorgimento* and *Gazetta d'Italia*). As cited in: Norma Broude, *The Macchiaioli: Italian Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1987), p. 278.

painterly gesture and sketching forms through colour.[13] These young artists found fault with academic paintings on account of the lack of natural light and contrasts visible in plein-air sessions, moderated with a gradation of tones elaborated in the studio. Paradoxically, their innovative formula was rooted in the academic practice of creating quick sketches in various techniques, the so-called *mezza macchia* – studies in but two tones, which highlighted the contrast of light and dark parts, eliminating the colour progression. One achievement of the Macchiaioli was to use this experience to construct simplified landscapes. Yet already in the early 1860s, as demonstrated by Norma Broude,[14] the movement experienced a shift towards a more lyrical treatment of light. As the artists wrote in their manifesto published in *Gazzettino delle Arti del Disegno* (January 1867), a weekly magazine established by Martelli to promote new art: "Following Champfleury, we declare that we are not systematic, dogmatic, scholastic or united under a common banner; we simply love *sincerità nell arte*."[15] The ever more influential example of the Barbizon School also played a significant part in the transformation of Italian art, backing the Florentine painters' experimentation. Already in 1855, having just returned from the universal exhibition in the capital of France, Neapolitan painters Domenico Morelli, Saverino Altamura and Florentine artist Serafino de Tivoli described the effects of Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps' painting as well as the landscapes and animalistic scenes created by Constant Troyon and Rosa Bonheur, motivating their companions from Caffè Michelangiolo to create open-air sketches and experiment with tones. The 1860s were marked by the Barbizon influence, sustained by the Florentine painters' trips to Paris: Signorini, Cabianca and Banti first visited it in 1861. This in-depth *aemulatio* resulted in the search for a sincere depiction of Nature – aided by the sensitive eye of the camera – as well as a harmonious light arrangement and an expressive texture of the painting. The most important venue for exhibiting the young artists was the Promotrice in Florence – a private association of artists and patrons which organized annual exhibitions, serving as a forum of independent art and an alternative to official, state-controlled academic exhibitions. However, the artists did not use a common denomination, nor did they set up their own exhibition cooperative, like later the Impressionists. Individually, they were exhibited, among others, at the *Esposizione Nazionale* in Naples in 1877, *Prima Esposizione Internazionale di Quadri Moderni* in Florence in 1880, or *Esposizione Nazionale* in Rome in 1883. When Gierymski settled in Rome, it had been almost a decade since they last functioned as an organized group, with each artist pursuing his own career path. De Tivoli left for England in 1864, Sernesi died in 1866, and Abbati – in 1868. Since 1861, the circle would meet at Diego Martelli's estate in Castiglioncello. Cabianca moved to Rome in 1870 (becoming one of the famous regulars at Caffè Greco), but in 1873 left for Paris, where d'Ancona had lived since 1867. Signorini and Banti also frequently travelled abroad. They were not displayed together until 1905 at the exhibition titled *Arte Toscana: Prima Esposizione*. The posthumous success of the Macchiaioli was due to their solo exhibition at the Società delle Belle Arti in Florence in 1910. It was there that the sketches – treated by the

[13] Giancarlo de Cataldo, "Les Macchiaioli, une introduction," in *Les Macchiaioli 1850–1874 : des impressionnistes italiens ?*, exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay et de l'Orangerie (Paris, 2013), no. 13–14.

[14] Broude, op. cit., p. 5.

[15] *The Art of All Nations 1850–1873. The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics*, ed. Elisabeth Gilmore Holt (New York, 1981), p. 336.

artists as a preliminary stage of work – were first shown to the public, gaining recognition as stand-alone, pioneer and most avant-garde works.[16]

In 1876, Gierymski embarked on a number of short trips to Naples, Anzio, Tivoli, Florence, Bologna, Venice and Siena, also wandering on foot around Tivoli. In the same year, Odoardo Borrani and Lega jointly inaugurated an art gallery in Palazzo Ferroni, which promoted new artistic trends in Italian and foreign art – yet the endeavour soon ended in a fiasco. Still, Gierymski's paintings created at roughly the same time – *Roman Inn* and *Playing Morra* (The National Museum in Warsaw) – reveal no traces of an encounter with the Macchiaioli, despite being inspired by Italian life. In 1876, Gierymski wrote from Rome that he felt like taking a trip through Florence to Venice: "to refresh myself with old paintings, which are entirely non-existent here [...]. I spent ten days there and on the road, benefiting immensely, I was up to my ears in Tintoretto and Titian. It was a thousand times better to go there than to some village to make studies... [...]."[17] Apart from plein-air work, what occupied Gierymski the most were his studies of Italian Renaissance heritage, which is also reflected in his art: although still marked with a search for manner, at times academically paraphrasing the style of Old Masters and following academic discipline, it was also infected with the need for truth and overthrowing conventions. However, this stylistic indecision does not testify to Gierymski's technical helplessness – on the contrary, it exposes his potential and demonstrates his education. An analysis of several works painted by Aleksander during his stay in Rome still reveals the experience of a painter educated in academic ateliers. In spite of their Italian subject matter, both *Playing Morra* and *Roman Inn* – exhibited and critically received in Warsaw – bear no resemblance to the Macchiaioli's visual impressions. They result from Gierymski's Munich studies, the smooth texture he admired in the art of Ernest Meissonier, a somewhat theatrical disposition of the figures, which testified to his academic courses of composition, the dark colour scheme and depth of colour achieved thanks to glazing. His brilliant plein-air studies for the *Arbour*,[18] with their masterfully polished flashes of lights, are far removed from the studies prepared by the Macchiaioli. As a matter of principle, the Italian painters strived to maintain an impression of freshness and spontaneity of a quick *étude* (*macchia*) in their finished works, which at this stage was usually thwarted by Gierymski through careful finish, compositional ingenuity and an analytical approach towards colour reflections. The difference between the creative visions of the Pole and the Macchiaioli may be brilliantly demonstrated by juxtaposing the *Arbour* with Silvestro Lega's *Pergola*. In terms of the spatial planning and rhythm of the figures, Lega's much smaller canvas was most likely inspired by Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*, as has been proved by Beatrice Avanzi. The connection between this painting and the predellas and *cassoni* painting of the Quattrocento, highlighted already by Aby Warburg, has since the 1920s been brought up by scholars who situated the Tuscan movement in the context of the revived interest in late medieval and Renaissance Italian art.[19] However, contemporary references to primitive artists were not a form of revivalism in the spirit of the Nazarenes, the religious message and ethos of German painters were alien to the Macchiaioli. Paintings by Fra Angelico,

[16] Broude, op. cit., pp. 266–67.

[17] Letter to Prosper Dziekoński [1876], as cited in: *Maksymilian i Aleksander Gierymscy. Listy*..., op. cit., p. 304.

[18] *Aleksander Gierymski 1850–1901*, op. cit., cat. nos 43–51.

[19] Beatrice Avanzi, "Les macchiaioli et le quattrocento. Une modernité aux origines anciennes," in *Les Macchiaioli 1850–1874 : des impresionistes italiens ?*, op. cit., p. 134.

Paolo Ucello, Piero della Francesca, but also Giotto, Filippo Lippi and Domenico Veneziano were supposed to provide a purely visual stimulus for lucid and static compositions, spatial order and a luminous harmony of colours. When quoting the inspiring authority of Lippi, Benozzo or Carpaccio, Signorini underlined the potential of old art in the development of emotional sincerity, love of Nature and an innocent, ascetic attitude.[20] It follows that studying the masters of Quattrocento led to a synthetic vision, the *serenità* effect, achieved through luminous tones in the images of spaces flooded with light. On the other hand, Gierymski in the 1870s pursued intense, rich tones and a depth of colour achieved through glazing – his point of reference was the tradition of sensuous Venetian colourism, which came to the fore in *Italian Siestas*. These canvases (held at the National Museum in Warsaw and the Silesian Museum in Katowice) are painted with many layers, with broad brush strokes, visible abrasions and a thick, coarse texture. Lega's synthetically depicted *Pergola* is marked by a visual uniformity, a primitive-like lightness, transparency and static character adapted to a contemporary scene devoid of any traces of an anecdotal narrative or descriptive character. The question of how to convey natural light, which so deeply occupied the Polish artist and found such an amazing outlet in studies for the *Arbour*, resulted in a painting that exemplifies compromise – not only as a result of being created in the artificial light of the studio, at the expense of losing the freshness of the studies. Independent plein-air experimentations and a persistent analysis of the structure of light and colour were weakened by the commercial intention of painting a fashionable, high-society costume work. The selection of the subject matter could have been inspired not so much by Lega's scene as by the success of Rococo *Zopf* paintings of his older brother Maksymilian, Meissonier's 18th-century *fêtes galantes* or their contemporary academic versions created by Artur von Ramberg and Alfred Stevens. Rococo scenes were a popular international painting style at the time, with Pio and Arturo Ricci specializing in them in Florence. The academically trim parts of faces and costumes, testifying to Gierymski's impeccable technique, as well as the theatrical, flirtatious atmosphere of the painting were designed to be popular on the market. This refined aspect of the Polish painter also comes to the fore when juxtaposing the *Arbour* with a work by Cristiano Banti (*Alaide Banti in the Garden*, private collection, Florence) or *The Artist's Garden* painted c. 1872 in Granada by Mariano Fortuny (Museo del Prado, Madrid). Fortuny,[21] a fashionable Catalan painter, was greatly successful at manufacturing 18th-century scenes in costume when he worked for Goupil in Paris, before abandoning his patron to paint according to his artistic needs. Gierymski must have been dissuaded from this interpretation of artistic freedom by the financial problems that troubled him. Yet perhaps the impression that if the artist had been in a different financial situation, he would have explored the optical matters that interested him rather than trying to ingratiate himself with the public is rooted in the 19th-century myth of an author locked in an unrelenting conflict with society.

Even if Gierymski did come into contact with works created by the Macchiaioli during the several years he spent in Rome, and found out about the innovative movement during his Roman meetings at Caffè Greco, nothing seems to indicate that this event should be treated as a discovery, artistic revelation or turnabout that thoroughly transformed the artist. During

[20] As cited in: Broude, op. cit., p. 5.

[21] Elisabeth Clegg believes that Gierymski referred to Fortuny, while an entire movement called *fortunismo*, employing 18th-century costume in genre scenes, emerged in Italian art of that time – Elisabeth Clegg, "Modernity in Alexander Gierymski's Painting," *Polish Art Studies*, vol. 13 (Wrocław–Warsaw–Krakow, 1992), p. 45. This subject is also brought up by Michał Haake – see *Figuralizm Aleksandra Gierymskiego* (Poznań, 2015), p. 214.

a visit to Naples in the summer of 1877, he might have seen the national exhibition (*Esposizione Nazionale di Napoli*) featuring Borrani, Fattori, Cabianca, Puccinelli, Signorini and D'Ancona, who received an award for his work *A porte chiuse*.[22] However, the works of "unknown" Italian painters must have appeared to him as the local variant of Realism, an example of solutions concerning landscape and genre scenes that matched his Munich experience. In other words, the Polish painter could find support for his experimentation in the stylistically unrelated works of the Italian innovators. However, in 1879 Gierymski left Italy to follow his own path. Entirely independently of the Macchiaioli, he took up the Jewish subjects initiated during his Warsaw period. In an earlier letter he wrote that he was going to Krakow in order to study Jews there. Between 1882 and 1886 Telemaco Signorini created a series of paintings from the Florentine ghetto. Like Gierymski, he was interested in the study of human types, detailed depictions of architecture as well as tonal and spatial effects. The naturalist motivation of the artists was aided by photography, which assisted them in their explorations[23] and served as an important stimulus for their painterly development. In 1874, Signorini mentioned its constructive role, discovered by the Italian artists already during their 1855 visit to Paris. This was one of the few voices that openly declared the revolutionary meaning of photosensitive images for the visual ideas of painters.[24] Yet the lack of similar manifestos should not be treated as puzzling, given the uncertain status of photography, which around the 1850s was suspected of mechanically reconstructing the world and weakening the creative powers of artists stemming from their imagination. Authors of the *I macchiaioli e la fotografia* exhibition catalogue emphasize the open dialogue between painting and photography. The latter was treated by the artists not only as an auxiliary tool or a medium that was perfectly suitable for capturing details, but also – in particular with reference to calotype – as the source of tonal solutions, the *ton gris*[25] made famous by Martelli, or finally the subject of their own artistic efforts. During their visits to Paris, the Italian painters had the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the work of French photographers such as Gustave Le Gray, Constance Alexandre Famin, Achille Quinet, Eugène Cuvelier or Charles Nègre. The future Macchiaioli could have seen the creative interrelationship between the experimentation of the Barbizon artists and *peintres-photographes*, who were motivated by the same yearning to convey the intimate character of Nature and the poetic atmosphere evoked by luminist effects. *École de Barbizon* seems to be the "introductory" and crucial lesson – in the formation of both the Italian painters and the Polish artist. For Gierymski, these French achievements would prove to be the most important artistic guideline already during his studies in Munich, at the 1st International Art Exhibition in 1869. Paintings by Théodore Rousseau, Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, Charles Daubigny, Jules Dupré, Constant Troyon, Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet, Édouard Manet and Gustave Courbet impressed the Gierymski brothers, inspiring them to pursue open-air studies. The different texture of the French painters' works must have been striking: the impressionism,

[22] See the website of Società di Belle Arti [online], [retrieved: 23 October 2015], at: <http://sba.it/it/cronologia-macchiaioli>.

[23] This was already emphasized by Nancy Troyer – see Nancy Troyer, *The Macchiaioli: Effects of Modern Color Theory, Photography, and Japanese Prints on Group of Italian Painters, 1855–1900*, PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1978, as cited in: Broude, op. cit., p. 102.

[24] As cited in: *I macchaioli e la fotografia*, exh. cat., Museo Alinari di Firenze, 2008–2009 (Florence, 2008), p. 77.

[25] Ibid., p. 17.

sketchiness and vibrating paint resulting from their attempt to capture atmospheric phenomena. The French lesson was successfully learned by Edouard Schleich, Carl Spitzweg, Adolf Lier and Wilhelm Leibl. In a letter written in 1874, Aleksander referred to the "thickly layered" French canvases as sketches, where a viewer used to the academic *fini* could not discern anything.[26] Authentic depictions of French villages and the forest of Fontainebleau were juxtaposed with lyrical light and shade effects and a broad array of romantic moods. The direct manner of feeling, simplicity and subdued colour scheme were far removed from the theatrical pretentiousness of spectacular Academicism. The new manner of painting landscapes invented by the Barbizon artists was the most important tool shaping the attitudes of 19th-century European landscape painters. The expressive orientation of the French landscape had a potent influence on Italian, Polish, Dutch and German painters alike. However, it manifested itself in taking over certain visual conventions rather than directly, passively copying specific paintings or photographs. Photography in Italy also developed under the impact of the French achievements, acting as an intermediary in bringing out the light-and-shade, expressive values of paintings. The Roman Caffè Greco became one of the venues of aesthetic debates, frequented by such important figures as Giacomo Caneva, Carlo Baldassare Simelli, and (in the 1870s) Vincenzo Cabianca. In 1859, Jules Jamin's study *L'optique et la peinture* (originally published in 1857 in *Revue des Deux Mondes*) was translated into Italian and published in *Rivista di Firenze e Bollettino delle Arti del Disegno*. Its main thesis – the impossibility to convey the complex character of natural light in a painting – could serve as an inspiration to use a photographic camera as an intermediary in capturing the light and shade of Nature.[27] The painters themselves usually took part in this process, taking photographs that served a documentary purpose and highlighted optical problems. Commercial photographs were also available on the market – John Ruskin, for instance, purchased them as *aide-mémoires*. A number of British artists encouraged by the critic went on to paint identical views of architecture, similar to Gierymski's late works.[28] Photography was an important source of inspiration for Signorini, who dubbed it the most beautiful invention of the 19th century.[29] Abbati's interest in photographic images is also documented (already in 1862 his friend Diego Martelli visited Nadar during his trip to Paris in order to purchase several photographs, probably entrusted with this task by the painter).[30] Cristiano Banti, who took photographs of his own, remained in contact with the foremost photographers of the era, while the paintings of Vincenzo Cabianca were compared in terms of their "effect" with Nègre's calotypes. Horizontal formats, which were preferred by the Macchiaioli and also employed by Gierymski at a later stage of his work, hitherto attributed to the influence of Renaissance predellas and decorative *cassoni* – may also be seen as an example of the reception of panoramic photographs.[31] In fact, these inspirations are not mutually exclusive. There was a photographic studio in Florence, which was run by brothers Romualdo, Leopold and Giuseppe Alinari, who belonged to the artistic milieu associated with Caffè Michelangiolo and specialized in views of Italian towns and historical sights. According

[26] *Maksymilian i Aleksander Gierymscy. Listy*..., op. cit., p. 144.

[27] *I macchaioli e la fotografia*, op. cit., p. 21.

[28] See *Pre-Raphaelites and Italy*, exh. cat., Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 2010 (Oxford, 2010).

[29] *I macchaioli e la fotografia*, op. cit., p. 20.

[30] Broude, op. cit., p. 128.

[31] Troyer, op. cit., p. 164.

to researchers, it was this inspiration with photography that led the Macchiaioli to soften their "effects," contrasts,[32] and introduce new composition types, such as the worm's-eye view. Influenced by this new medium, they retained the sharp, precise architectural drawing and a less distinct, slightly hazy form of human figures, which stemmed from copying photographs, where persons were blurred as a result of long exposure.[33] Photography had already been omnipresent by that time, and painting went to great pains to compete with it, trying to capture the urban landscape and bustle of the streets – but also the empty spaces, silent edifices and dignity of common people – with similar spontaneity. Italy, immortalized by both local and foreign photographers, revealed its heroic and idyllic character. The 2015 exhibition *Pathos und Idylle. Italien in Fotografie und Malerei. Sammlung Dietmar Siegert* at the Neue Pinakothek in Munich (which included such renowned artists as Giacomo Caneva, Carlo Baldassare Simelli, Luigi Sacchi, A. de Bonis, and a number of anonymous photographs), revealed numerous visual associations not only in the context of Italian art, but also broadly understood European Naturalism. This photographic pressure is also visible in the manner employed by Aleksander Gierymski to capture architecture, humans and motifs. Photographers immortalized fragments of buildings, but also empty park avenues (**fig. 4**), reflexes of light on stone walls and flora (e.g., Caneva's *Study of Roman Vegetation* from c. 1852 held in the Dietmar Siegert collection). Gierymski was susceptible to the same impulses that shaped contemporary Italian painting – after all, he painted the same or similar settings (**fig. 5**). However, his art not only corresponds to experiments pursued by Italians (such as, e.g., Giuseppe de Nittis), but could just as well be compared to Austrian, French or German artists.

Before the Polish artist purchased a camera to take pictures on his own,[34] he could avail himself of what was available on the local market. His late works, in particular architectural views, are not just the product of photographic framing. He kept discovering new sources of this perception in his parallel activity of a draughtsman and illustrator: in 1885 he accepted a commission to create a series of Italian *polonica* drawings for *Kłosy* magazine, spending several weeks each in Padua, Bologna, Florence, Venice, Ferrara and Fiesole, before he settled in Rome. Owing to the laborious practice of architectural drawing, the painter gained an ability to meticulously reproduce detail and a draughtsman's precision – not to say pedantry – which in fact encumbered him as a painter. Contrary to the Macchiaioli, Gierymski was first and foremost fascinated with painterly renditions of the city and urban architecture, rather than the province. In 1895, when he spent several months in Rome, he painted a series of views from Villa Borghese and Villa Torlonia in Frascati. In the autumn of 1897, he wrote Władysław Wankie from Venice, admiring the picturesque architecture – in particular the San Marco Basilica. In fact, it could well be that the subject was a secondary matter, solely serving as a challenge for his masterful rendition of light and shade, soft dispersion of light in interiors, depth of shades and luminous glazings. The artist's academic habits relaxed only after his visit to Paris – and not owing to the enlightening example of the Macchiaioli. Bored with the Eternal City, he returned to Warsaw in 1886, but kept dreaming about moving to the French capital. In Aleksander's letters, Paris appears time and again as the source of long-awaited modernity,

[32] Ibid.

[33] Broude, op. cit., pp. 143–45.

[34] According to Anna Masłowska, Gierymski purchased Brandl's photo-revolver, having ordered it in 1885; unfortunately, there are no surviving photographs of the artist from that time – see Anna Masłowska, "Aleksander Gierymski i fotografia," in *Aleksander Gierymski 1850–1901*, op. cit., p. 58.

the place where his notion of art was transformed. It was only there that – confronted with independent French art, Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism – he wrote that he was more modern, and that "modernity consists of decisive colouring, applied almost at once, without straining the canvas with countless glazes, and painting in fresh colours, without pulling the picture apart, in order to extract its power and plasticity."[35] In the final years of his practice, the artist prepared a lot of open-air sketches, only returning to the light and shade convention in his representation of church interiors. His paintings created in the 1890s, albeit similar to some solutions employed by the Macchiaioli in terms of choosing the focus, have a different texture. This was where Gierymski experimented, covering entire surfaces with porous, matt, thin paint, dividing colour into small patches of basic colours, employing abrasions with a semi-dry brush or cuts with a sharp instrument in order to render the surface coarser and more shimmering.

Gierymski's methodical and analytical approach to painting, reinforced with a new awareness of this art that he gained in Paris, resulted from his disposition and perfectionism. Yet the artist succumbed to the same trends of positivist thinking as the Macchiaioli as he explored the limits of a naturalistic rendering of reality and the possibilities of painting in view of the eye-opening power of photography. Gierymski's artistic evolution – like that of the Italian painters – began with the discovery of plein-air work and the strong southern sun, which conditioned their abandonment of the traditional technique and new understanding of colour. Furthermore, the plein-air experience contributed to building a different model of the artist's relationship with Nature, and consequently the work of art itself: rather than a sum of his artistic reflections, it transformed into a matrix of his outlook. In the time of animated debates on the nature of human perception and the physiology of the human eye, Gierymski's "empty" landscapes – like illuminated fragments of the world captured by contemporary photographers – also represent depictions of the act of seeing, manifesting their eyewitness quality.

Translated by Aleksandra Szkudłapska

[35] As cited in: Witkiewicz, *Aleksander Gierymski*, op. cit., p. 145.