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Wobec współczesności

TEXTILE ART
In the face of contemporary times



Uniwersytet Artystyczny
im. Magdaleny Abakanowicz
w Poznaniu

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Attention! Textile! **From the Textile** **Department to the** **Tapestry Studio at the** **State High School** **of Fine Arts in Poznań**

The medium of textile has been present at the Poznań school of fine arts since the outset of its existence. Initially situated in the area of artistic craftsmanship, the methodology of teaching this discipline has changed over the decades, reflecting the processes occurring in the system of arts education, the structure of the school, and art itself. The dynamic of change was associated with the emergence of outstanding creative personalities in Poznań, such as Władysław Roguski, Lucjan Kintopf and Magdalena Abakanowicz. These artists created and developed educational curricula in the area of weaving, which, after yearslong relegation to the field of applied arts, gained the status of an autonomous field of art in the second half of the 20th century. This sketch seeks to examine this revolution through the lens of institutional history and the attendant reforms of

the educational system, carried out at the Poznań school in conjunction with the ever-changing situation in contemporary art.

From the School of Decorative Arts to the Academy of Fine Arts

In the first two years after its inauguration in November 1919, the School of Decorative Arts in Poznań gradually expanded to include other departments. The development of respective disciplines at the Poznań school, which was initially located in the area of crafts, was one of the key problems faced by its successive directors and presidents, a state of affairs that continued virtually through the 1990s. When describing the history of foundation of the State High School of Fine Arts in Poznań in a publication released in 1970 to celebrate the school's fiftieth anniversary, Professor Zdzisław Kępiński recalled a convention held in Poznań in 1919 to discuss the plans for arts education in Poland, which determined to profile the Poznań institution in the aforementioned way due to pressures from the Cracow academic community:

The congress supported the need to establish an art school, though in doing so it yielded to the prestige-driven ambitions of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, which took such offense that in granting the status of academy to the former Warsaw School of Fine Arts, it expressed the view that Poznań would be better off with a practical school for specialists in the fields of “ornamental sculpture”, furniture making, printing and artistic photography, rather than with training artists seeking to enchain art capable of articulating and laying down the essential foundations of the human mind and emotionality. Such an evaluation won favor with the central authorities of the [Polish] state¹.

Related to the history recalled by Kępiński is the conviction, still valid in the 1970s, about the inferiority of crafts to the so-called fine arts. The struggle in this field, which played out immediately after World War I, i.e. in the early days of Polish statehood, for many years positioned the Poznań school in the field of applied arts, which were treated at the time not only as less significant but also “less” creative than painting or sculpture². Although cultural development programs after World War I emphasized the importance of crafts in Poland, it was to remain essentially

» 1 Z. Kępiński, “Historia uczelni”, in: *Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych w Poznaniu. 1919–1969*, Poznań 1971, p. 9.

» 2 The intricate history of terminology and classification in the field of arts and crafts was described by Kinga Szczepkowska-Naliwajek in *Dzieje bada nad dawnym rzemiosłem artystycznym w Polsce 1800–1939*, Toruń, 2005, pp. 9–21.

at the service of industry. Thus, when announcing the establishment of the School of Decorative Arts in Poznań in 1919, the prevalent assumption was that the school would attract “the more intelligent youth to crafts and train them as assistants and foremen”³.

Even the first educators at the Poznań school, the excellent sculptor Marcin Rożek or the graphic artist Jan Jerzy Wroniecki, who was a member of the “Bunt” association, as well as the painter Frederick Pautsch, hired as the school’s president in 1920, had much greater ambitions than to establish a school with a purely utilitarian profile, whose students would practice in the “fields of ornamentation, related to the needs of life and supported by manufacturing in the school studios”⁴. As recalled by his sister, it is clear that, immediately after World War I, Rożek intensely sought to found a school of fine arts in Poznań⁵, rather than a mere ornamental school in the mold the German Kunstgewerbeschule. After accepting a position in Poznań in 1924, Friedrich Pautsch opened a special class at the school, where students would be educated in the art of the so-called “pure painting”. Accounting for the significance of this gesture, the *Dziennik Poznański* daily stated that “the school expands its activities beyond the scope of strictly decorative, applied art”⁶, adding that it was precisely painting that constituted “a completely autonomous [field of] art”. At that time, as Professor Bronisław Bartel noted in his paper on the origins of the Poznań school, artists were troubled by such notions as “pure art,” “art for art’s sake” and “applied art”, which, argued Bartel, “some people did not want to consider as art”⁷. Perhaps for reasons related to disagreement with the adopted profile and curriculum of the school, its initiators, including the aforementioned Marcin Rożek and Bronisław Preibisz, resigned from their positions after just one year⁸. Having spent four years in Poznań, Fryderyk Pautsch likewise left the city, taking up a professorship and subsequently serving as president of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow⁹. At the time of his departure, the Poznań school

» 3 “Państwowa Szkoła Sztuki Zdobniczej w Poznaniu”, *Wiadomości Artystyczne* 1919 nr 1/2 (listopad), p. 23.

» 4 Ordinance of the Chief Minister of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment dated December 15, 1926, Archives of Modern Records, call no.. 5355, p. 20.

» 5 See J. Mulczyński, *Poznańska Zdobnicza*, Poznań 2009, p. 17.

» 6 “Kronika. Państwowa szkoła sztuki zdobniczej w Poznaniu,” *Dziennik Poznański*, 1919, nr 244, 22 października 1919, p. 2.

» 7 B. Bartel, “Historia rozwoju szkolnictwa artystycznego w Wielkopolsce w okresie od 1919 do 1939 roku”, 1959, reprinted in J. Mulczyński, *Poznańska Zdobnicza*, p. 712.

» 8 See Ibid. Tellingly, the first most talented students of the Poznań school, such as Tadeusz Kulisiewicz and Waclaw Taranczewski, promptly left the city and moved to art schools with full-fledged training in “fine arts”, with the former enrolling in the Warsaw academy and the latter studying in Cracow.

» 9 In turn, Pautsch’s time as the school’s president was crowned by the success achieved by professors and students at the 1925 International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris, where

educated students in four departments (Decorative Painting and Stained Glass, Graphic Arts and Bookbinding, Ceramics, and Textiles), as well as the so-called General Course.

In the interwar period, the development of the school's curriculum was undoubtedly significantly influenced by its next director, Karol Zyndram Maszkowski, who managed the school for the next thirteen years. During his tenure as president, the school was further expanded to include the Faculty of Metal Sculpture, Bronzing and Jewelry (1925/1926) and the Faculty of Interior Design (1927/1928). Maszkowski spearheaded the reform of the school's curriculum, also tightening the bonds between the university and industry, where future alumni would find employment. However, summarizing this period years later, Zdzisław Kepiński noted that the general awakening of artistic life in Poznań at the time resulted in "an increase in artistic ambitions, exceeding the purely practical orientation of school curricula and the emancipatory reflexes"¹⁰. This sparked a an outpour of students, many of whom were moving to the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw to pursue "purely artistic majors promising one to develop one's overall creative horizons"¹¹.

As early as the 1930s, the issue of applied arts' "inferiority" to fine arts, along with the role of universities in art education, was the subject of discussions held by Karol Maszkowski with the Director of the Art Department at the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment, which supervised the Poznań School of Decorative Arts. The problem of linking the curriculum to industry, and that of the independence of applied arts, were evident, e.g. in the proposal to introduce commodity science into the curriculum, which was taught at trade and artisanal schools. It also reverberated in the press attack fielded by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Poznań, resulting from the perception that the university posed significant competition to the merchant industry¹². In both cases, contended Maszkowski, the ornamental school was fundamentally different from trade, industrial and artisanal schools on account of it being "a school of artistic kind"¹³. Its relationship with the industry was limited to adding an artistically creative, new, fresh and original element thereto¹⁴. Importantly, in the context of the subsequent evolution of the

the school garnered 189 awards: 36 Grand Prix prizes, 60 gold medals, and 31 honorary diplomas.

» 10 See Z. Kępiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

» 11 *Ibidem*.

» 12 See the letter from Stanisław Szulc, dated September 28, 1931, Archives of Modern Records, call no.. 5355, p. 193.

» 13 See Karol Myszowski's letter to the Director of the Art Department, dated November 17, 1931, Archives of Modern Records, call no. 5355, p. 178.

» 14 *Ibidem*.

Poznań school and the reforms of its curriculum, Maszkowski emphasized the value of creative experimentation with respect to honing the form and technique of the work, but also drew attention to the artist's individuality and freedom with regard to creativity, which he claimed should not be hindered by any external conditions:

For it is the artist who constitutes the factor creating new forms, adding new, refreshing elements to human production, without which there would be no progress of human culture, hence the artist is the most valuable factor in civilization and culture¹⁵.

After Maszkowski's death in 1938, it was Lucjan Kintopf, a specialist in artistic weaving, particularly the jacquard technique, who succeeded him as the president of what was renamed the Institute of Visual Arts shortly before World War II. The outbreak of war caused the suspension of teaching activities, which resumed in 1945 in a completely new reality. In the post-war period, until the mid-1960s, the Poznań school, renamed the State Higher School of Fine Arts, struggled with the stigma of its original specialization in crafts. The school's subsequent development in this area was eventually determined by the so-called Mangelowa's reform¹⁶, carried out in 1950, which distinguished between art colleges educating in the area of fine arts and those specializing in applied arts. At the same time, however, the division sanctioned by Mangelowa's reform not only failed to keep up with the changes that were already taking place in contemporary art at the time but was likewise unsuccessful in diminishing the ambitions of art colleges to deal with "pure" painting or sculpture, even within the permitted thirty percent quotas. At the same time, the only two Academies of Fine Arts in Poland still operated their respective faculties of Interior Design and, in the case of Cracow, also the Faculty of Industrial Forms (from 1964 onwards).

When recounting the history of art education in Poland at the end of the 1960s, Rudolf Krzywiec, ceramicist and professor at the Poznań school, stressed that the conflicts flaring up at Polish art colleges in the post-war period were fueled specifically by the administrative incorporation of applied arts departments into the Academy of Fine Arts, as well

» 15 Karol Maszkowski, letter dated November 18, 1931, Archive of Modern Records, call no. 5355, p. 188.

» 16 In 1950, a so-called "reform" was carried out at the behest of Irena Mangelowa, who served as deputy director of the Department of Art Education at the time. Art colleges were divided into units specializing in "fine" arts and schools of "applied" arts. Those that taught "applied" arts were limited to a single selected specialization. The State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań, which from now on was to deal with furniture making, was to limit itself to teaching sculpture only. The teaching of graphics, textiles and painting was eliminated. The lone faculty that continued to operate for the next dozen or so years was the Faculty of Interior Design.

as the academic ambitions and the pursuit of “fine” arts, evident at the public art colleges¹⁷. Encapsulating this problem was the biography of the first president of the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań, Professor Stanisław Teisseyre, who in 1950, after the liquidation of the Faculty of Painting and Graphic Arts, left Poznań for the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, where the Faculty of Painting was still in operation. He did not return to Poznań until fifteen years later, implementing important changes to the curriculum with the help of an outstanding faculty comprised of professors invited from various arts centers across Poland¹⁸.

Interestingly, even as recently as the 1990s, the Poznań school had to fight for its due recognition as “a real art school”, to use Kępiński’s 1970 term¹⁹. Recounting the school’s efforts to obtain the status of an Academy of Fine Arts, which eventually proved successful as late as 1996, Prof. Wojciech Müller recalled that, much like in 1919, these efforts met with protests from the Cracow academy:

We need to make it clear: nothing was given to us, we were after this, and it took two years of work. At that time the label of Academy was considered an ennoblement. [...] It was not so much the ministry, but the Warsaw environment, people from the Academy there who were against us, although the President himself, Adam Myjak, was not, blocking the Senate resolution disapproving of our Academies. In Cracow, a similar resolution was passed, as the Cracow Academy objected to Higher Schools being named Academies²⁰.

That same year that, despite the objections of the Cracow academy, saw the transformation of the State Higher Schools of Fine Arts in Poznań into an academy, the privilege was also accorded to the State Higher Schools of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, Wrocław and Łódź.

Faculty of Textile Art

The decades-long struggle for the full-fledged “artistic” status of the Poznań school was linked from the very beginning to the problem of situating applied arts in the field of crafts. In this context, it is worth looking at the transition that occurred at the Poznań school in the teaching of

» 17 R. Krzywiec, *Materiały do historii rozwoju formy organizacyjnej szkół kształcenia plastycznego*, Wrocław 1969.

» 18 See “Jak braliśmy Sowietów. Ze Stanisławem Teisseyre’em rozmawiał Jarosław Maszewski”, *Zeszyty Artystyczne* no. 19, 2010, pp. 4-5.

» 19 Z. Kępiński, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

» 20 “Nieustanny rozwój. Z Wojciechem Müllerem rozmawia Justyna Ryczek,” *Zeszyty Artystyczne* no. 19, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

textile art, which in the second half of the 20th century gained the position of an autonomous field. This evolution, although it would be more apposite to call it a revolution, was marked by the presence and creative activity of outstanding professors, who perceived fabric as a medium with unique potential. One can merely attempt to reconstruct the premises of the first educators in charge of the faculty on the basis of surviving archival curricula, press mentions and sparse recollections. A much broader body of material has survived in the case of the postwar period. The most interesting collection dates from the time after 1965, when the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture, i.e., the faculty of art (rather than design) of the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań, saw the establishment of Professor Magdalena Abakanowicz's Tapestry Studio.

The Faculty of Textile Art at the Poznań School of Decorative Arts was established in the academic year 1921/1922, i.e., in the third year of the school's operation. It was situated on the second floor of a tenement house owned by Kazimierz Kużaj, at 12 Woźna St.²¹. In the early 1930s, Director Karol Mieszkowski sought permission from the Ministry to acquire new space to facilitate further development of the growing unit, which was headed by Władysław Roguski at the time. Before World War II, the Faculty of Textile Art was part of the so-called Special (Workshop) Faculties. The curriculum included weaving kilims, tapestries, sheared carpets, batiking, painting, fabric printing, appliqué-making, embroidery, and artistic costume design²². Studying at the faculty at the time were twenty female students. Back then, the plan was to expand the space to set aside a separate design studio, independent from the workshop rooms, which were host to the weaving, cooking and dyeing of raw materials.

Heading the faculty was Władysław Roguski, a prominent painter and textile designer, who attempted to develop a new national textile style based on patterns derived from folk art²³. Roguski was affiliated with the Poznań-based "Świt" group and the Warsaw-based "Rythm" association. The kilims of his design referenced his oil paintings, both in terms of the formal aspects of compositional structure and the subject matter of the scenes depicted. They revealed inspirations drawn from the glass-painting technique, especially in the sections featuring radially spreading lines, which appeared in many of his paintings. A student of Mehoffer and Pankiewicz, Roguski as an educator paid attention to his students' individual

» 21 Letter from Karol Mieszkowski to the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment dated June 13, 1932, Archive of Modern Records, call no. 5355, p. 58.

» 22 Program of the State School of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry in Poznań, Archive of Modern Records, call no. 5355, p. 116.

» 23 I. Luba, *Dialog nowoczesności z tradycją. Malarstwo polskie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Warszawa 2004, p. 52.

predispositions and “creative imagination”²⁴. Roguski’s interest in folk art translated not only into his own work, but also into the textile art curriculum at the Poznan school. His students would therefore copy folk motifs from the ethnographic department of the Wielkopolska Museum as part of their classes, as mentioned by a reviewer of an exhibition at the School of Decorative Arts in Poznań in 1927²⁵. Roguski’s second area of creative activity was religious painting. One of the artist’s favorite motifs was the figure of the Madonna, which he often patterned after glass paintings from the Podhale region and Slovakia²⁶. The students of his studio also carried out numerous church commissions, crafting banners and liturgical paraments²⁷.

In 1929, the General National Exhibition in Poznań featured the piece *Annunciation*, composed by H. Burdzińska²⁸ according to a painting by Professor W. Roguski, and woven by students of the Textile Department instructed by Helena Czerniak. The work on the composition lasted several months. As was common practice at the time, Roguski did not make his textiles himself, but only designed them. Thus, he would first create a painting, followed by its transfer onto cardboard, and it was only then, based on such design, that a textile piece would be created in the workshop²⁹. Interestingly, if one examines the press review dated November 1929, which reported on the purchase of the Annunciation kilim for the collection of the Wielkopolska Museum after the exhibition, it turns out that even back then the assessment of a work of art executed using the weaving technique was problematic, to say the least. The brief mention of the purchase illustrates several important issues concerning the changing status of textile art over time.

Originally, *Annunciation* was to be showcased in the School Department at the Governmental Palace, which hosted shows by art schools under the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment. However, a reviewer for the *Dziennik Poznański* daily reported that Roguski’s kilim had been “ingloriously banished” from the building:

Now, a certain “kilim”, or so they called it, presented at the General National Exhibition, has been subject to some strange vicissitudes.

» 24 J. Mulczyński, *Poznańska Zdobnicza*, op. cit., p. 355.

» 25 W. Lam, “Wystawa Szkoły Sztuki Zdobniczej w Tow. Przyj. Sztuk Pięknych”, *Dziennik Poznański* no. 137, June 18, 1927, p. 7.

» 26 I. Luba, op. cit., p. 114.

» 27 H. Majkowski, “Oglądamy wystawę Szkoły Zdobniczej”, *Nowy kurier* no. 151, July 4, 1935, p. 4.

» 28 Such a caption was attached under the kilim on display at the exhibition.

» 29 Thirty years later, Magdalena Abakanowicz likewise departed from this method of work, altering the perception of textile art.

It pictured the Annunciation, and its design was that of a tapestry rather than a kilim, its coloring was pale and seemingly faded, and the movements of the hands and sweet visages of the woven figures graceful. Originally intended for the School Department by the Director of the Decorative School, it was disqualified and rejected by the Director of the Art Department himself, Mr. W. Jastrzebski [...]³⁰.

It was then moved to the Palace of the Arts and hung in the hall of the Warsaw-based “Rytm” association, of which the author was a member. According to the reviewer, who did not conceal his disapproval of the fact, putting it on display at the association should be treated “as the first promotion of said kilim”³¹. The second was the purchase of the piece for the collection of the Wielkopolska Museum, for an amount equivalent to a painting that the museum had also acquired for its collection. Listing the various acquisitions, the reviewer stressed that the museum had allocated a rather modest sum for its purchases, namely as little as 28,000 Polish złotys, of which it had spent as much as 6,000 złotys on applied art. To no avail were the director’s explanations that the money spent had been allocated in full for the purchase of art supplies for the students of the Poznań school.

This brief press mention demonstrates that, at the time, an object made in the weaving technique was generally perceived as less valuable than a painting or sculpture. On the other hand, the fact that the work was transferred from the School Department to the Palace of the Arts testified to the latter’s appreciation of the artistic qualities of *Annunciation*, which thus avoided statutory relegation to handicraft and was exhibited together with other pieces produced by artists affiliated with the “Rytm” group; thus, it was put on equal footing with paintings or sculptures. At the same time, the case of *Annunciation* shows that even back then certain pieces emerged which disrupted the rather rigid division between fine and applied arts, and that any such rigid classification was far from self-evident already in the early years of the 20th century.

Characterizing modern Polish textiles in the late 1930s, Lucjan Kintopf, president of the Poznań school since 1938, noted that “our modern weaving—for it should be dubbed as such—began around 1902, and that with a kilim”³², one woven in Włodzimierz Pohlmann’s workshops in Kielce. Kintopf recognized it as the first “artistic kilim”, emphasizing the

» 30 W. Lam, “O zakupach Muzeum Wielkopolskiego”, *Dziennik Poznański*, vol. 71, no. 271, November 23, 1929, p. 3.

» 31 *Ibidem*.

» 32 L. Kintopf, “Dział nowoczesny”, in: *Sztuka tkacka w Polsce. Dawna i współczesna* [exhibition catalogue], Warszawa 1938, p. 52.

artistic merits of the work, designed by painter Franciszek Bruzdowicz. Interestingly, the painterly panache typical of the art of kilim weaving led Kintopf towards what would be the source of a revolution in the field of textile art in the postwar period, i.e., towards thinking about “the search for technique-related forms”³³, rather than the subject of representation or the reproduction of a pre-drawn pattern. Delineating the various types of modern textiles in the 1930s, Kintopf already drew the reader’s attention primarily and precisely to the qualities of the material and the opportunities afforded to artists by the fabric itself:

1927 saw the emergence of a new type of fabric with a warp and weft effect, whereas traditional kilims only enabled a simple weft effect. These new fabrics were made on jacquard machine looms using a technique similar to the Slutsk sash technique. The thread could be made of linen, wool, linen and wool, or silk. It was an extremely complicated technique, limiting the painterly capacities, though it did instead enable the application of a wealth of technical qualities. The drafted motif becomes complicated, as the colors fade in comparison with the kilim, but the whole is nonetheless charming in its own colorful greyness³⁴.

The school’s transformation into the Institute of Visual Arts in 1938 entailed its reorganization and transformed it into a specialized college. Kintopf’s perception of weaving as a field in which material played a dominant role undoubtedly influenced the renaming of the Faculty of Textile Art to the Faculty of Textiles, and the attendant expansion of its educational program. In addition to classes devoted to tapestry- and kilim-making, the Faculty now featured an industrial textiles studio, as well as classes in clothing design and trainings in cutting and tailoring techniques³⁵. As per the schedule for the 1938/1939 academic year at the Faculty of Textiles, currently kept at the Archives of Modern Records, Władysław Roguski taught subjects such as Nature and Nude Study, Design, Costumology, and Dying Technology and Practice. Workshop courses were assigned to Irena Czerniakowna (weaving) and Irena Jezioranska (embroidery), who additionally taught a course in the Science of Materials. The program also included the study of Lettering Composition, lectures on Art History and Development of Art Forms, as well as courses in Occupational Hygiene,

» 33 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

» 34 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

» 35 See Z. Kępiński, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Accounting and Calculus, and lectures on Industrial Legislation³⁶. A schedule was also drafted for the 1939/1940 school year, which was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. According to the document, the scope of courses would further expand to include additional subjects such as Nature Study in Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, Graphic and Etching Design, Cutting and Modeling Science and Science of Materials, as well as Weave Theory, Embroidery and Lace Technique and Loom Science³⁷.

World War II stunted the school's further development, including the projected expansion of the Faculty of Textiles. In 1940, the Nazis executed Władysław Roguski, who headed the department until the outbreak of war, at the Fort VII concentration camp. After the school's reactivation in 1945, Lucjan Kintopf, who had fought in the ranks of the Home Army and participated in the Warsaw Uprising, returned to Poznań. Working in modest conditions, he began to reorganize Department of Weaving, incorporated into the Faculty of Sculpture and Interior Design in the academic year 1946/47. Unfortunately, the aforementioned Mangelowa's reform, under which successive educators were transferred to other localities on official business, forced Kintopf to move to Łódź, where he joined the Department of Weaving of the Faculty of Industrial Design at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in 1950. While there, he ran a jacquard design studio, where he combined his interest in technology with designing and considering the functional applications of textiles³⁸. Similar premises must have driven him in reforming the Faculty of Textiles in Poznań, as can be seen in the expansion of the program to include courses in technological and historical knowledge, combined with workshop and design classes.

After Lucjan Kintopf left the Poznań school, starting from the academic year 1951/52, teaching in the field of textiles for the next several years was limited classes conducted at the Weaving Studio by Maria Ostrowska, a teacher of auxiliary subjects who had completed a weaving course before the war and practiced at the Artists' Cooperative "Ład"³⁹. The marginalization of textile art was accompanied by the removal of all the workshop equipment owned by the former Faculty of Textiles to the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Łódź⁴⁰:

» 36 Weekly program of courses and lectures for the academic year 1938/39. Faculty of Textiles, in: *Wydział Sztuki – szkolnictwo artystyczne – szkoły plastyczne miejscowościami w kolejności alfabetycznej*, lit. P. – materiały Państwowego Instytutu Sztuk Plastycznych w Poznaniu (t.II), Archive of Modern Records, call no. 2/14/0/8/7045, p. 120.

» 37 Weekly schedule for the academic year 1939/40. "Wydział Włókienniczy", in: *Wydział Sztuki ...*, op. cit., p. 141.

» 38 See *Lucjan Kintopf - mistrz żakardu i jego uczniowie*, [Exhibition catalogue, Central Museum of Textiles in Łódź], Łódź 2015.

» 39 Biographical note in *Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych w Poznaniu*, op. cit., p. 75.

» 40 Z. Kępiński, op. cit., p. 28.

For the Poznań school, “Mangelowa’s Reform” spelled the horrors of artistic ruin and organizational collapse. Suffice it to recall that at the opening of 1951/52 [academic year], the number of students at the school dropped to 106, which was half the number for 1949/50, when it educated a total of 204 students⁴¹.

Tapestry Studio

A profound change in the curriculum that restored textile art to its rightful place in the school structure was introduced by another reform, implemented a mere fifteen years later. In the meantime, however, a significant change in textile art, which vanished from the Poznań school for more than a decade, occurred mainly thanks to the milieu of young weavers associated with the Experimental Artistic Weaving Studio run by Maria Łaskiewicz in Warsaw’s Bielany district. They were part of the generation of artists of the so-called Polish School of Textile Art⁴², which helped textiles gained the status of an autonomous field of art. Joining Łaskiewicz’s studio after her graduation was Magdalena Abakanowicz, invited to Poznań in 1965 by the then president of the school, Professor Stanisław Teisseyre. Abakanowicz was a graduate of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, receiving her diploma in 1954 in the textile studio of Professor Anna Śledziwska. While studying, she encountered professors Mieczysław Szymański and Eleonora Plutyńska, who instilled “in their students a love of material, a perception of fabric as a form of artistic expression”⁴³, encouraging experimentation with various fabrics, including those that had not been used as weaving materials before.

The experience not only influenced Magdalena Abakanowicz’s oeuvre, which developed intensively starting in the early 1960s, bringing her first international successes, but was also fundamental to her subsequent didactic work at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań. Her appearance in Poznań coincided with events of major importance to the advancement of her own artistic career. First, Abakanowicz caused a huge stir in 1962 when she presented her monumental, abstract *Composition of White Forms* at the First International Biennale of Textiles in Lausanne. In 1965, she received a gold medal for her organic relief textiles with a convex, textured surface at the São Paulo Art Biennale. The idea of drawing Abakanowicz to Poznań was tied to a plan that envisioned

» 41 Ibid., p. 27.

» 42 The studio was launched in 1951 at the Warsaw District of the Association of Polish Artists in Warsaw.

» 43 M. Kowalewska, *Rzeźbienie przestrzeni, w: Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm*, Faculty of Textiles to the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Łódź, Łódź 2018, p.14.

forming a teaching staff comprised of Poland's finest contemporary visual artists⁴⁴, devised by the Senate committee appointed to draft the reform of the Poznań school⁴⁵. By that time, Abakanowicz was already using textiles as a medium with extraordinary potential. She boldly experimented with weaving materials, continually seeking innovative formal solutions and new sources of inspiration.

In 1965, the Abakanowicz began to organize the Tapestry Studio, which had been established in the Faculty of Painting, Graphics and Sculpture in the Department of Painting and Color Issues in Architecture, reactivated three years earlier. At the time, she and Magdalena Więcek were the only women independently running their own studio. The studio became an enclave of creative freedom for several generations of students, whom Abakanowicz encouraged to further their own artistic explorations and pursue individual interests, which was an innovative pedagogical concept at the time. Recalling the period of her studies years later, Professor Anna Goebel noted that "at that time it was difficult to find a studio that would offer one such freedom of thought, creation, or simply openness," adding that Abakanowicz "never imposed anything on anyone, instead insisting that «We do not give out prescriptions here»"⁴⁶.

Studies at the Tapestry Studio were conceived as an additional major for students of the Faculty of Painting, Printmaking and Sculpture, who could elect it as a studio of their own choice. Abakanowicz designed the curriculum as a general framework, which she would then modify based on the interests of her students, with whom she eagerly engaged in discussions serving as a stepping stone for the assignment of topical tasks:

You could say that the curriculum was a kind of skeleton that filled out over the course of the academic year. I think it was an innovative approach. Of course, certain rules were in place. Technological knowledge, material knowledge was important, they are the foundation, after all. Aside from that, however, Abakanowicz enabled each student to structure it according to their own imagination⁴⁷.

In the surviving curriculum of the Tapestry Studio from the late 1970s, kept in the university archives, one can find a record of the complete individualization of assigned topics and their successive expansion,

» 44 See Z. Kępiński, op. cit., p. 35.

» 45 Poznań was home to a faculty comprised of the most outstanding contemporary artists, such as Waldemar Świerzy, Lucjan Mianowski, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Jerzy Schmidt and Zbigniew Makowski.

» 46 "Tu nie ma recept. Z Anną Goebel rozmawia Marta Kowalewska", in: *Abakanowicz. Metamorfizm...*, op. cit., p. 208.

» 47 Ibid.

proportionate to her discussions with students⁴⁸. This was crucial to Abakanowicz as an educator, which is why, replying to a student applying to the studio in the early 1980s, she wrote that one of the central themes in her courses was the question of the individuality of the human being⁴⁹.

Designed from scratch, Abakanowicz's new textile art curriculum was a complete novelty at the Poznan school. For the previous fifteen years, students at the Tapestry Studio had been taught to weave in purely utilitarian terms, designing kilims and jacquard or thread fabrics. With that in mind, Abakanowicz replaced horizontal looms, which were used to make utilitarian fabrics, with vertical looms and weaving frames. The new curriculum was an expansion and extension of her own creative pursuits. Thanks to her artistic achievements and the tremendous success she has attained in the field, the medium of textile has earned the status of a self-standing field of art. The consistent effort to liberate weaving from the realm of applied arts found its continuation in Abakanowicz's work with students. Thus, it was not accidental for her to note in one of her course programs that textile should have its autonomy and convey the author's individuality at the same time⁵⁰.

Newly enrolled students of the Tapestry Studio were introduced to the various weaving techniques, learned how to build and operate a tapestry loom and tapestry frame, weave warps by hand, dye their own raw materials, and tie knots. The curriculum also included exercises in basic weaving techniques, such as tapestry, kilim, quasar, carpet and macramé, along with flat, relief and three-dimensional techniques⁵¹. Students practiced vertical and horizontal compositions, as well as circular and diagonal forms⁵². In the following semester, they developed projects for specific architectural interiors, starting with mock-ups, followed by their fragmentary or wholistic implementation using a specific type of fabric. Abakanowicz's coursework also included tasks intended to help students study the properties of color, texture and the interaction of individual elements of a composition, as well as the influence of the surrounding environment on form and that of form on the surrounding environment⁵³.

» 48 Framework curriculum of Professor Magdalena Abakanowicz's Tapestry Studio for the academic year 1979/1980, Archive of the University of Arts Poznań.

» 49 The artist stated, "We are working with profound problems, human individuality. If you can come for one academic year you will be accepted". Magdalena Abakanowicz's letter to Sharon Gilmore dated May 3, 1982, typescript, Magdalena Abakanowicz Archives.

» 50 Tapestry Studio curriculum, October-December, undated, manuscript, Magdalena Abakanowicz Archives.

» 51 Framework curriculum of Professor Magdalena Abakanowicz's Tapestry Studio for the academic year 1979/1980, Archive of the University of Arts Poznań..

» 52 Magdalena Abakanowicz's letter to Katarzyna Piatkowska dated September 23, 1978, typescript, Magdalena Abakanowicz Archive.

» 53 Ibid.

The fundamental change in thinking about textile as a medium was Abakanowicz's experience of weaving directly on the loom without prior design of the composition, acquired at the artist's studio in Warsaw, and the consequent abandonment of the two-stage process of creating the work and the resulting identification of the designer with the weaver. It all stemmed from the belief in the inexhaustible potential of the material, i.e., textile, which guided the artist throughout her work, determining specific formal solutions and the final shape of the fabric. Abakanowicz translated this practice into her teaching work. Students only made rough sketches of their compositions, interpreting them directly while weaving. They also made models of spatial forms, which they subsequently executed in full size. Already in the second half of the 1960s, Abakanowicz started working with organic sculptural forms made of various fibers and bristles, which interacted with the surrounding space through their presence. Hence, similar activities emerged somewhat naturally at the Tapestry Studio in Poznań. The curriculum included such problems as the impact of matter and color on the surrounding environment, the interrelationship of tensions arising between the created objects, and the psychological impact of structure on specific interiors⁵⁴.

After many years of Magdalena Abakanowicz's efforts towards the recognition of textile art as a full-fledged field of fine arts, the Tapestry Studio at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Poznań was transformed into the Textile Art Studio, a symbolic summary of the transformation that occurred in the field of contemporary art. The catastrophe of World War II resulted in the exhaustion of the potential of familiar vehicles of representation. Artists began to search for new ways of articulation, turning to hitherto unused materials, post-industrial waste or everyday objects, often simply due to the prosaic shortage of painting or sculpting materials. This process effectively nullified the boundaries of traditional artistic disciplines, exposing them for inadequacy and anachronism. The spatial works of Magdalena Abakanowicz, who was referred to as a weaver back then, did not fit any of the familiar categories, and at the same time, it was precisely thanks to this ambiguity that they remained unaffected by the language of the official regulations of the state totalitarian system of the communist period. Paradoxically, the field of applied arts enabled far more extensive formal experiments than other fields that were considered crucial in the process of shaping the new human. This period was of particular importance for the history of applied arts, precisely thanks to the creators of the Polish School of Textile Art. They were the first to achieve artistic freedom and to overcome what Julia Blaszczyńska dubbed

» 54 Framework curriculum of Professor Magdalena Abakanowicz's Tapestry Studio for the academic year 1979/1980, Archive of the University of Arts Poznań.

“the stereotypical perception of textile art as utilitarian objects”⁵⁵. Among them, a special place was occupied by Magdalena Abakanowicz, who was keen to showcase textile as a material equal to the likes of paint, wood or stone:

I wish to say: Attention! Textile! To pose the question: What is fabric? Can it be anything other than what we are used to⁵⁶? ●

Abstract

“Attention! Textile! From the Textile Department to the Tapestry Studio at the State High School of Fine Arts in Poznań” seeks to examine the process of changes in the textile art curriculum at the Poznań school of arts through the lens of the institution’s history and educational reforms, as well as in the context of the transformations that took place in contemporary art in the second half of the 20th century. The author points out that the medium of textile emerged at the Poznań art school at the very onset of its existence, highlighting that the methods of teaching this discipline, initially situated in the field of artistic craftsmanship, changed over the decades, reflecting the processes occurring both in the system of arts education, the structure of the school, and art itself. The dynamic of these transformations is presented in connection with the artistic stances and theoretical premises of the school’s professors such as Władysław Roguski, Lucjan Kintopf and Magdalena Abakanowicz, who created and developed educational curricula in the field of weaving at the Poznań school in historically significant periods. In this respect, a special role is attributed to Magdalena Abakanowicz, who helped change textile art into an autonomous field of art in the second half of the 20th century, after its long-standing relegation to applied arts.

Keywords:

weaving, University of the Arts Poznań, history of arts and crafts, teaching reforms, arts education

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» 55 J. Błaszczyńska, “Polska tkanina artystyczna i użytkowa drugiej połowy XX w. Ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem lat 70.”, *Człowiek i społeczeństwo*, vol. XLIII, 2017, p. 148.

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