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Inspiration with Antiquity in Polish art around 1900s

Artistic inspiration with antiquity in Poland dates back to at least the Cracow Renaissance in the 16th century. Royal patronage, in the 17th century of king Jan III (Sobieski) and in the 18th century of king Stanisław August (Poniatowski) indicates that Polish culture was permeated with antiquity. In the first half of the 19th century there were two artistic communities, each with a different relation to antiquity: late-classicist in Warsaw, with sculptors Paweł Maliński, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, painter Antoni Brodowski and architect Antonio Corazzi, who gave the town a strong classicist touch and at the Vilna University — romantic, with prophetic poets Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and eminent painter Kanuty Rusiecki. The Polish artists met in Rome, creating a national colony. In the second half of the century, several painters cultivating the theme scope of antique were associated with the colony, some of them educated at the St. Petersburg Academy, like Henryk Siemiradzki, and sculptor inspired by antique sculpture Wiktor Brodzki.

Around 1900, antique art became among Polish artists the basis for formal experiments related to neoclassicism — a strong trend in Polish painting and sculpture, remaining in opposition to impressionism and, later, expressionism. The sources of these phenomena can be traced to the works of eminent Cracow painter and writer Stanisław Wyspiański, and sculptor Henryk Glicenstein, the most important representative of the new generation of the Polish colony in Rome.

Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907), a student of Jan Matejko in Cracow School of Fine Arts, in a series of drawings to Homer's *Iliad* (1896/1897) with rich stylization of lines and ornament rooted in Art Nouveau, created a new type of shaping of characters and the space of the work. Inspired by the paintings of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, he introduced new forms of representation which he described as sculpting quasi-metopes of Greek temple, shaping artistic language heralding the art of the 20th century. Scenes were captured in the manner of reliefs, with the space of the painting flattened to the foreground. The artist filled the surface of the work evenly, revealing essential elements as if by a close-up. Characteristic is the rhythmic of representations, in which, as Zdzisław Kępiński analyzed, “vertical and horizontal, roundness of the silhouette's profiles or clarity of straight lines, convexity or planeness create vivid contrasts here” [5, p. 86]. Figures of synthetic shapes, sometimes deliberately exaggerated, subjected to deformation and flattening, introduce dynamics and expression, evoking a state of deep emotional response. Antique costumes, weapons, shields form a decorative structure of the work. Scenes of the cycle, in fact limited to motifs of *Iliad*, Book 1, as the motif of *Apollo playing the lute on Olympus* (1897, ill. 130), as well as *Agamemnon rises against Achilles and*

Menelaus (1896) constitute Wyspiański's lecture on historiosophical, hermetic concept of initiation into the essence of the truths of the world whose manifestation were the mysteries of Eleusis.

Henryk Glicenstein (1870–1942), born near Łódź, a student of Wilhelm von Rümmer at the Munich Academy, explored antiquity themes in his sculpture. His work evolved from academic, salon sculpture (*Arion*, 1895), through inspiration with the art of Auguste Rodin (*Grievance of Orpheus*, 1900) to “linear style” with a large sense of space and perspective (in relief, like *Narcissus*, 1901), shaping of characters with long lines and broad planes, lending them the valor of monumentality. In the representations of ancient characters (*Oedipus*, around 1901), or characters connected with Jewish tradition (famous *Sleeping Messiah*, 1905, *Bar Kokhba*, around 1906) he was inspired by the classic Greek sculpture (and the work of Michelangelo), creating male characters full of latent force or female grief-stricken figures (expressive *Niobe*, about 1906 or static, monumental *The lonely*, before 1908). Some of Glicenstein's antiquating female nudes are distinguished by the hair stylization (*Immolation*, about 1906), which somewhat resembles Elie Nadelman's studies of heads, with whose work he must have been familiar [7, p. 217–223; 10].

Elie Nadelman (1882–1946), a sculptor from Warsaw, active in Paris and New York, brought to the world of art original values, shaping new classicism, affecting cubism, art déco and American modernism. He briefly studied at the Warsaw School of Drawings, however, the most important school proved to be independent studies on his own of the ancient sculptures in Munich Glyptothek and the Louvre in Paris. Since 1905 he executed sculptures and drawings, usually limited to the head and nude. His output comprised sculptures, inspired by the classical and Hellenistic Greek sculpture, especially the work of Praxiteles and Boetos of Chalcedon. Probably the earliest was the standing nude *The suppliant* (around 1905). An ideal Greek type of women, with elongated face with straight nose, narrow mouth, deep setting of the eyes and carefully arranged, stylized curls of hair, sometimes with closed eyes, grinning pensively, submerged in dreams, became the subject of numerous sculptures and drawings (*Woman head*, c. 1910–11; *Head of a girl*, c. 1910–11). Between 1911–1912, the artist published manifestos, stating “the logic in the design of forms” “meaningful” and abstract ones, composed of curved lines, in conformity or in contrasts to each other as the basis of art. He drew volumetric face compositions, in which the arrangement of concave and convex forms led to the proto-cubist concept of face geometrization, created with circular, “sculptural” forms (*Head of woman*, c. 1905–1906). These works of Nadelman heralded cubism. Visiting his studio in summer 1908, Picasso, next to the drawings, could have seen the proto-cubist *Head of a boy* (1907–1908), defined by a system of concave and convex forms. This sculpture is often collated with the cubist *Head of Fernande Olivier* (1909). Nadelman was the author of the first abstract sculpture – an oval form suggesting a head, composite with other form supporting it, similar to the fungus (presented only on special request during the exhibition of the artist's works at the Galerie Druet in 1909). In addition to these works, he also executed bronze sculptures from about 1906–1907. Starting with the *Head of a boy* (c. 1912–1913), he would juxtapose synthetic, geometrized features of an elongated face with decoratively arranged haircut, modernizing the canon of Greek sculpture. Between 1912–1913, he introduced motion into the “mannerist” female and male nudes of elongated

proportions and intended artificial pose (*Standing nude*). Instead of nudes at times appeared representations of women in robes (*Draped female figure*, 1912–1913; Ill. 132). The studies of heads executed at that time had a high degree of geometrization, manifesting itself in a combined system of eyebrows and oblong nose as well as narrow eyes and mouth slits (*Head of a boy*, c. 1912–1913; *Head of woman*, c. 1912–1913). Starting since 1911, he created terracotta sculptures inspired by figurines from Tanagra (*The Four Seasons*, 1911). The relief *Autumn* (around 1912) and sculpture *Horse* (1914), in which the artist operated with abstract, smooth, wavy lines, herald art déco [6; 7, p. 2–11; 4]. “The Code of Construction” of forms created by Nadelman influenced many artists working in Paris. Among them were two artists working together, Eugeniusz Zak and Jerzy Merkel.

In the work of Eugeniusz (Eugene) Zak (1884–1926), coming from Warsaw and working in Paris, is preserved an undated (presumably from around 1910) *Head of a woman*, strictly referring to Nadelman’s “volumetric” heads, consisting of geometric arrangements of circular or oval forms. Zak used this study of “perfect” face (after closing his early “Breton” period) to create a series of images of women — in a half-smile, immersed in dreams, with the head “completed” by a stylized arrangement of twining hair. In turn, Nadelman’s type of standing nudes was used by Zak to compose idyllic southern landscapes with the theme of bathing women (*Woman bathing*, 1913; Ill. 131), with a strict composition of geometrized motifs of rhythmicized conical hills of moderate height and planes of water, enlivened by stylized silhouettes of trees. In a different version, the resting woman against a bay in the background resembles a character from ancient sarcophagi (*Woman under a tree against the background of the bay*, 1913). In the painting *Song of Pan* (1912), on the background of identical bay and hills appears a rhythmicized couple in embrace, to whom the little figure of an idol plays a love song. Zak’s idyllic compositions presenting, among others, pairs of lovers or young women revealed discordance between the timeless beauty of the southern, human-friendly landscape and a sense of transience, symbolized by the motifs of ruins and old buildings (*Old castle*, 1913). After the antiquating stylization, in his works appeared inspirations with the painting of Chinese medieval Song dynasty, but the canon of “Nadelman’s” characters remained unchanged (*Idylle — awakening*, 1921; *Woman*, c. 1922). His works from that period heralded art déco [3; 9, pp. 45–67].

Adolf Basler, an eminent Polish critic working in Paris (1878–1949), pointed also to the important role that Zak had in the genesis of neoclassicism: “This return to the great museum ideals was started [...] by Zak seeking the laws of construction of large forms, decorative solution of the composition on the plane, in one word, the essence of the style in the works of old masters. With his works that showed no direct talent, perhaps being too speculative, however marked with high culture and innate great taste, Zak inspired many young painters to more serious and deeper understanding of the painting composition” [2, p. 65].

Jerzy (Georg) Merkel (1881–1976) from Lwów, a graduate of the Cracow Academy, since 1909 created in the convention of archaizing classicism. *Girl with a pitcher* is distinguished by the stylization of long, simplified contour line, geometrization of facial features, circular breasts and cylindrically rendered hands. The drawing *Nude and semi-nude* (1912), of “antique-Greek” stylization, reveals the influence of Nadelman, who, according to the artist, was the strongest inspiration for the young generation of Polish artists in Paris before 1914.

The studies of women preceded a series of idyllic landscapes with geometrized conical mountains, sea harbors, stylized trees, into which he introduced characters of women and children (*Bathing women, Mother with children and a butterfly, At the end of the day*, all from 1912). These paintings carried symbolic content, subjected to the rules of symmetrical composition, decorative arrangement, geometrization of the background and stylization of the characters [9, pp. 88–99].

In the introduction to Merkel's works exhibition catalog at the Society of the Friends of Fine Arts in Lwów in 1913, Adolf Basler was probably the first to notice and define mutually opposing trends in the European painting of that time: the avant-garde of impressionist roots (expressionism and cubism), and archaizing neoclassicism, inspired by the Renaissance and works of Ingres and Puvis de Chavannes. As he wrote: "The struggle for art in our time is a struggle for discipline. The return to the great traditions in painting a guideline in the effort of the youngest, who ceased to be satisfied by the achievements of the impressionists, being purely external. The composition of the painting remained nonetheless chaotic. [...] Sacrificing [...] the rules of the composition, a time-honored tradition for centuries, painting over time had to come to a complete loss of style, it had finally to fall into total anarchy. And here in our time emerges a trend of a return to tradition with the pursuit of style, logical construction of the painting or sculpture, based on firm, mathematical laws. [...] In no opposition to the creative intentions of newcomers appear then the balancing trends, named neo-classical, as it is tried to fit the output of a given period into the forms established by the archaic styles. Such was the role played, in spite of his aversion to the romantics, by Ingres and his school, later by Puvis de Chavannes in relation to the impressionists, finally, in our time, such role, in relation to the Impressionist trend (expressionism and cubism) are trying to play the archaic painters who are resurrecting the laws of composition in painting" [1].

Around 1910, a significant repositioning of artistic attitudes occurred in the European art, which André Lhote called in 1919, after World War I, "a return to order" (*le rappel à l'ordre*). The contribution from the artists and critics from Poland was significant. The output of the group Rhythm, established, among others, by Zak in Warsaw (1922–1933) became a continuation of the trend, while in Paris it was the neohumanism, formulated in 1934 by the eminent Polish-Parisian critic Waldemar George (Jarociński), seeking its roots, among others, in the painting of Zak and Merkel.

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Abstract. Antiquity became in Polish art the basis for formal experiments related to neoclassicism also inspired by Puvis de Chavannes. The sources can be traced to the drawings to *Iliad* (1897) of Stanisław Wyspiański, with rich styling of lines, ornament and the human form rooted in Art Nouveau, as well as synthetic mythological sculpture of Henryk Glicenstein. Inspirations with Greek sculpture since 1905 led the sculptor Elie Nadelman to "volumetric" drawing compositions which resulted in the proto-cubistic geometrization of the face. Nadelman influenced Eugene Zak's and Jerzy Merkel's idyllic compositions presenting pairs of lovers or young women. It revealed discordance between the timeless beauty of the southern landscape and a sense of transience, symbolized by the motifs of ruins and old buildings. The type of ideal landscape with conical mountains, wide, misty water splashes, stylized silhouettes of trees and asymmetrical construction of the image, foreshadowed Art Déco.

Keywords: Antiquity; Polish art; art around 1900; neoclassicism; Art Déco.

Название статьи. Увлечение античностью в польском искусстве 1900-х годов.

Сведения об авторах. Малиновски Ежи — Ph. D., профессор, президент Польского института истории мирового искусства в Варшаве, заведующий кафедрами истории современного искусства и истории восточного искусства. Торуньский университет им. Николая Коперника, Sienkiewicza str., 29/31, Торунь, Польша, 87–100. jmalin@poczta.onet.pl

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Аннотация. Античность в польском искусстве стала основой для формальных экспериментов, связанных с неоклассицизмом и навеянных творчеством Пюви де Шаванна. Начало было положено иллюстрациями к «Илиаде» (1897), выполненными Станиславом Wyspiańskim, чья изысканная линейность, орнаментальность и манера исполнения человеческих фигур находится в русле стиля модерн, а также — философско-эстетическими скульптурами Энрико (Генрика) Глиценштейна на мифологические темы. Увлечение скульптора Эли Надельмана греками привело его к графически объемным композициям, а в итоге к протокубистической геометризации в изображении лиц. Влияние Надельмана ощутимо в идиллических композициях Евгения Зака и Ежи Меркеля, изображающих влюбленные пары или юных девушек. Такой подход выявляет диссонанс, возникающий между вневременной красотой южного пейзажа и ощущением быстротечности, которую символизирует изобразительный мотив с руинами и старыми постройками. Тип идеального пейзажа с коническими горами, широкими туманными водными потоками, стилизованными силуэтами деревьев и асимметричным построением изображения предвосхищал стилистику ар-деко.

Ключевые слова: античность; польское искусство; искусство 1900-х гг.; неоклассицизм; ар-деко.

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