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POLITICIZED AESTHETICS: GERMAN ART IN WARSAW OF 1938¹

Summary. This paper focuses attention on the reception of the exhibition “Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart”, which was inaugurated on April 23rd, 1938 at the Institute of Art Propaganda in Warsaw – an institution whose exhibition hall was considered a venue of crucial importance to the cultural policy of the Polish state. The presentation was organized in the framework of a cultural exchange between Poland and Germany which was initiated by an exhibition of Polish contemporary art mounted in 1935 at the Preußischen Akademie der Künste in Berlin.

I will present the response of the Warsaw public to the presentation of contemporary German sculpture within the context of traditionalist ideology which was promulgated in Poland as much as across Europe in the decades between the two world wars. Drawing on traditionalism, which heralded a prevalence of national cultural values strongly anchored in the past, I will question the relevance of its rhetoric to the artistic phenomena evolving under political pressure. It seems intriguing to juxtapose the accounts provided by Polish and German authorities from the art world in an attempt to grasp the semantic content of such categories as “the genius of the race”, as reflected in the 1930s’ critical discourse. Moreover, in order to reflect upon the concept of propaganda art – another key notion of the time – it is worth considering the response of Polish commentators to official exhibitions of other nation-states held in Warsaw in the 1930s.

Keywords: propaganda art, sculpture, interwar art, neohumanism, Nazi regime, neoclassicism, neorealism.

“Politicized Aesthetics” tackles the issue of diverse strategies for constructing national paradigms in the interwar Europe, in particular, in Central Europe. The quest for self-identification (being a reaction to the trauma of the Great War) found its expression primarily in those registers of the visual arts which were subordinated to the official cultural policy of the state, whether in a democratic system (France) or under a totalitarian yoke (Germany, Italy, the USSR) and authoritarian regimes (Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland) that were rising to prominence in the 1930s. The cultural identity of several nation-states (re)constituted after World War I in the central expanse and in the eastern territories of the Continent, was ideologically charged and politically manipulated on the one hand, and highly aestheticized on the other. It is worth emphasizing that, apart from the well-run exhibition circulation between the West and the East, a number of exhibitions presenting the officially sanctioned art of the particular Central European nations travelled to or had been

imported from other states in the region. The Warsaw of the 1920s and 1930s would serve as an excellent example of this cultural dynamism. A series of exhibitions from all over Europe was organized here (since 1930 presentations of French, German, Italian, British, Danish, Belgian, Russian, Ukrainian, Latvian and Estonian art were staged at the Institute of Art Propaganda), and reciprocally, a handful of Polish shows travelled to various venues in Europe: to Moscow, Riga, Tallinn, Budapest, Bucharest and Belgrade as well as to Paris, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin and Munich. The critical coverage of all these enterprises revealed the vagueness and imprecision of the key notions of the nationalist discourse, as it was reflected in the visual arts. Heatedly debated, perceived from diverse perspectives, and decoded differently, the idea of a nation’s self-definition was confronted with French, Italian and German art as much as with the artistic production of the Eastern European countries.

There was one basic issue that emerged from all the reviews in question: whether contemporary art,

when subordinated to extra-artistic ideologies, politically committed and tendentious, could still maintain its quintessential features, its ontological peculiarities and its purely artistic essence. Or to formulate it more precisely: whether it was possible for modern artists to reach the heights of creativity, to be innovative in the use of the plastic form and material, while conforming to the requirements of state patronage, accomplishing the iconographic programmes prescribed and complying with stylistic directives.

“Politicized Aesthetics” focuses on the reception of “Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart”, an exhibition which was inaugurated on the 23rd April 1938 at the Institute of Art Propaganda in Warsaw (Polish: IPS). Since its establishment in 1930, IPS had earned a reputation of a venue of crucial importance for the cultural policy of the Polish state. The presentation was organized as part of a cultural exchange between Poland and Germany which was initiated by an exhibition of Polish nineteenth and twentieth century art, staged in 1935 at the Preußischen Akademie der Künste in Berlin, and later on transferred to the Neue Pinakothek in Munich (it was also hosted in Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig, Dresden and Köln). Despite the anti-Slavic line of the NSDAP ideology, the prestigious exhibition spaces made available to the organizational body proved the support of the Third Reich rulers for the Polish-German enterprise. The most conclusive piece of evidence for the official backing was provided by Adolf Hitler himself, who participated in the opening ceremony in Berlin. The Chancellor was accompanied by the Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels and the Commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe, Herman Wilhelm Göring, among others. The Second Republic of Poland was represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Józef Beck and the Minister of Culture, Wacław Jędrzejewicz. Mieczysław Treter, the curator of the exhibition, outlined the history of Polish art in a catalogue essay reaching back to 966, the year that Poland joined the European family of Christian nations.² The propagandistic dimension of his comprehensive survey was obvious: Treter’s aspiration to make Germans aware of the artistic accomplishments of a whole bulk of Poles on the one hand, and on the other – to make the audience

acknowledge the anti-Russian bias of Polish politics in the past (epitomized by Jan Matejko’s monumental historical painting “Stefan Batory at the foot of Pskov” which served as a focal point of the exhibition). Presumably this strategy reflected also the current tensions in the diplomatic affairs between Poland and the USSR, and appeared convergent with the anti-Bolshevik propaganda of the Nazis. Undoubtedly, the enormous logistic effort on the part of the main organizer, the Society for Promulgation of Polish Art Abroad, visible in the sheer scope of the Polish presentation (which covered the period from the 1870s till the 1930s and encompassed 738 artworks by 150 artists) was rather impressive.

However, the aim of this study is to explore the Polish critical reception of the German reciprocal exhibition to the 1935 spectacular overview of Polish art; a rather delayed response which resulted in a – much more modest – presentation of contemporary German sculpture (accompanied by a small number of drawings by Arno Breker, Georg Kolbe and Richard Scheibe). The critical discourse of the Warsaw commentators and a few German narratives concerning the exhibits will be examined within the context of the traditionalist ideology which was promulgated in Poland as much as across Europe in the decades between the two World Wars. Drawing on the assumptions of traditionalism, which heralded the prevalence of national cultural values strongly anchored in the past, I will question the relevance of this rhetoric for the artistic phenomena evolving under political pressure at the time. It seems intriguing to juxtapose the accounts provided by the Polish and German authorities of the art world in an attempt to grasp, at the cross-section of diverse axiological and historiographic perspectives, the semantic content of such terminological constructs employed as “the genius of the race”, “national spirit” and “national style”. Moreover, in order to reflect upon the category of propaganda art – another key notion characteristic of the time – it is worth considering the response of Polish commentators to the official exhibitions of other nation-states that were held in Warsaw, one of the most astonishing events being the artistic presentation of the Soviet Union, inaugurated in March 1933.

When evaluating the artistic quality of the Soviet exhibition, the vast majority of the Warsaw critics provided a negative response to the issue of compatibility between the ideological dogmas and the aesthetic value in contemporary Russian art.³ The presentation was supposed to showcase revolutionary art, which would be radically avant-garde and inextricably connected with the Bolshevik upheaval. However, instead of achieving this goal, it presented proletarian art, depicting the victory of the Communist regime in a realist convention. Moreover, it was perceived by the Warsaw commentators as an eulogy to the newly established socio-political order. Being aware of the deep ideological imprint left on the Soviet art, as well as being confronted with the formula of realism prescribed and imposed by the political decree, the critics denounced the rhetoric and phraseology employed by the Communist ideologists.

The issue of correspondence between political slogans and the fine matter of art re-emerged in the coverage of the 1938 German exhibition. The political resonance of the event was all the clearer, being held under the auspices of the Ministry of Propaganda of the Third Reich and under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki, and even more so with the support from high-ranking state officials, including: Herman Göring, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Bernhard Rust on the German part; the Prime Minister of the Second Republic of Poland, Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski, and The Minister of International Affairs, Józef Beck, on the Polish side. The leading sculptor of the Reich, Arno Breker, was the exhibition's curator responsible for the selection of 117 sculptures of 37 artists, who represented various cultural centres: Munich, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Darmstadt, Dresden, Bremen, Stuttgart, Hanover, Frankfurt am Main and Breslau – to name but the most important.⁴

The introductory essay in the catalogue – a lavishly illustrated and elegantly designed bilingual publication issued in Berlin (Fig. 1) – was authored by Werner Rittich, the editor-in-chief of the monthly “Die Kunst im Deutschen Reich”. While faithfully following the statements that the Führer included in

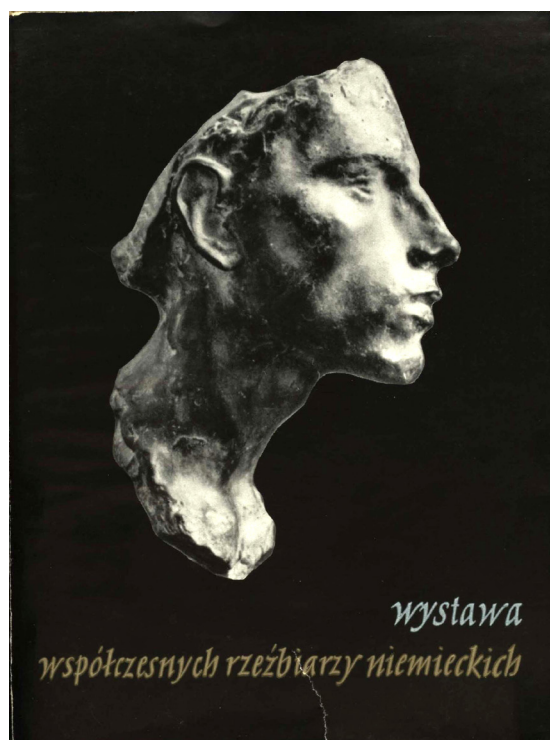


Fig. 1. Cover of the exhibition catalogue “Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart”, Berlin 1938

the inaugural speech held at the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst in Munich in 1937, Rittich announced full subordination of culture to the Nazi regime and the purification of art (whose imperative was to express national identity) of any alien influences. Consequently, he stigmatized the legacy of artists representing both Expressionism and the Neue Sachlichkeit which diagnosed the moral and social crisis of the Weimar Republic:

“Auch im Kunstleben ergab sich die Notwendigkeit, volks- und wesensfremde Einflüsse, die offen oder versteckt politischen Anarchismus trieben oder unterstützten, auszuschalten. Was sich vor der Machtübernahme im deutschen Kunstleben vorgedrängt und staatliche Unterstützung gefunden hatte, konnte in seiner Gesamtheit keinen Anspruch darauf erheben, zur deutschen Kultur gezählt zu werden. Es stand in der Haltung und in Inhalt im Widerspruch zu allen jenen Werten, die durch die kulturelle Tradition unseres Volkes und durch die Eigenheiten des deutschen Menschen bedingt sind.”⁵

The essay also quoted the Führer's statement, which endowed art with preeminent importance, by comparing it to a "sublime mission bordering on fanaticism".⁶ Rittich emphasised that the officially sanctioned style of the Third Reich was to be based on realistic figuration and solid craftsmanship. Although he admitted, that a homogenous style had not been fully formed yet, he emphasized this sublime component and the unique rendering of spiritual qualities in German art. Moreover, he projected the tasks assigned to sculpture onto the future:

"Wir müssen ihre [Bildhauern – IK] Leistungen abwarten, um darüber urteilen zu können, ob die Plastik in unserer Zeit einen einheitlichen Stil findet. Die Voraussetzungen dafür sind gegeben; die Bildhauerkunst, die seit dem Zeitalter des Barock ein isoliertes dasein geführt hat, hat nun nach Jahrhunderten in Deutschland wieder die Möglichkeit, mit der Architektur zusammen in großem, Generationen überdauerndem Maße einem Zeitgefühl und einer gemeinsamen inneren Haltung Ausdruck zu geben."⁷

Warsaw commentators, just like Rittich, recognized several idioms of realism in the artworks demonstrated at the exhibition. The majority of them, however, did not capture the spiritual dimension in the German paradigms of realism, even though Rittich insightfully explained the evocative capacity of his native sculpture:

"Gemeinsam ist ihnen [Bildhauern – IK] aber, daß sie sich mit der realistischen Wiedergabe nicht begnügen, sondern sich bemühen, in ihrem Werk eine innere Vorstellung sichtbar werden zu lassen. Ob die Figuren in statischer Ruhe eine Vorstellung von Kraft, Schönheit und Charakter geben, oder ob sie durch eine bedeutsame Gebärde eine symbolhafte Bedeutung Erlangen; ob die Bildnisse mit dem äußeren Abbild des Dargestellten auch seine charakterlichen Eigenschaften oder seine Bedeutung als Persönlichkeit offenbaren, oder ob sie durch Betonung des Allgemeinen typenschaufend wirken; ob in dem Tierbild das Wesen des Tieres zum Ausdruck kommt oder ob es in monumentaler Steigerung zum

Heraldischen hin stilisiert wird: die Naturform ist zwar überall der Ausgangspunkt der Gestaltung, aber sie erhält im Werk eine seelische Erhöhung, deren Grad in den Titeln vieler figürlichen Bildwerke nur angedeutet wird."⁸

Nonetheless, while analysing the morphological and expressive qualities of the works on display, Zofia Norblin-Chrzanowska denominated the exhibits as "shallow realism", void of emotional content.⁹ In stark contrast, Mieczysław Skrudlik perceived the artistic output in Nazi Germany as "harmonious, powerful and spiritually expressive".¹⁰ Yet, he could be counted among the very few Polish apologists of the National Socialist normative aesthetics. Rittich, on his part, underlined the harmonious integration of contemporary German plastic arts with architecture, which, as he asserted, was an inherently Germanic characteristic.

"[...] die Plastik am Bauwerk nicht als eine Zutat aufgefaßt wird. Unsere gegenwärtige Architektur fordert sie zu ihrer eigenen Vollkommenheit; bei der Planung der Bauwerke wird sie bereits als gleichwertiger Partner berücksichtigt. Die einheitliche Wirkung von Architektur und Plastik, der Gleichklang, der sich in der Klarheit dieser Bauwerke und dieser Plastiken offenbart, ist allein schon ein Werturteil für unsere Bildhauerkunst" – would vaguely explain the interrelation between sculpture and architecture the catalogue essay's author.¹¹

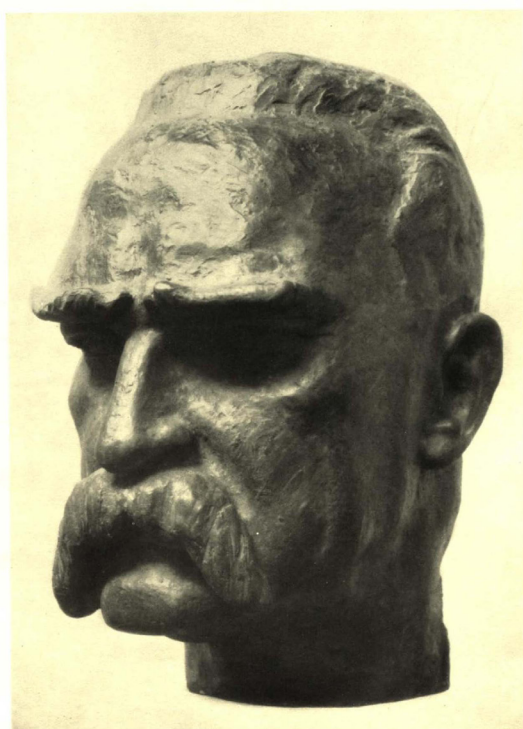
Although the phenomenon itself had not been exemplified at IPS, this marriage of artistic disciplines was also acclaimed by Polish reviewers. After all, several Polish critics had become acquainted with the monumental architectonic complexes erected by the Nazis, especially on the occasion of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.¹² Many commentators saw a device modelled on ancient architectonic principles and medieval constructions in the subordination of the plastic arts to architecture. Yet, the desire to merge the visual arts with architectonic space was regarded as a transnational tendency spreading

across Europe in the interwar period. The Warsaw exhibition comprised casts of a few sculptures which were to reinforce the Nazi political rhetoric while decorating the courtyards of public buildings: Arno Breker's "Prometheus" placed at the main entrance to the Ministry of Propaganda was the best example.¹³ However, the case of the site-specific sculpture featured in the altered conditions of a "white cube" did not surface in the Warsaw critical discourse. The matter was only mentioned by Tadeusz Pruszkowski who had a chance to examine the sculpture of the Berlin Olympic stadium in 1936.¹⁴ He focused on the raw texture of Kolbe's works, pointing out that owing to their monumental format those sculptures were destined to be perceived outside of the gallery space.

Different shades of positive and negative assessment of the German exhibition could be traced in the Warsaw press; all in all, pejorative overtone prevailed.¹⁵ On the other hand, the presentation was covered in a flattering manner by the German-written journals available in Poland. The propagandistic goal of the event was obvious, regardless of

the desire expressed at the opening ceremony by Hans von Moltke, the Ambassador of the Reich, to build a cultural bridge between the two nations. The visual sign of the cultural bond was to be found in the juxtaposition of the sculpted portraits of both nations' leaders: a posthumous effigy of Józef Piłsudski executed by Josef Thorak¹⁶ (Fig. 2), and the head of Adolf Hitler sculpted by Arno Breker (Fig. 3). As a result, the synthesizing rendering of the commemorative portrait of Piłsudski – the First Marshal and the Statesman of the Second Republic of Poland – was contrasted with a veristic imitation of Hitler's facial features. In reference to the symbolic overtones of Thorak's work, Jan Kleczyński, a prominent art critic, found the overt expression "of the spiritual power of the creator of new Germany" striking and forceful.¹⁷ The bulk of the reviewers, however, assessed both works as aesthetically poor and expressionless.

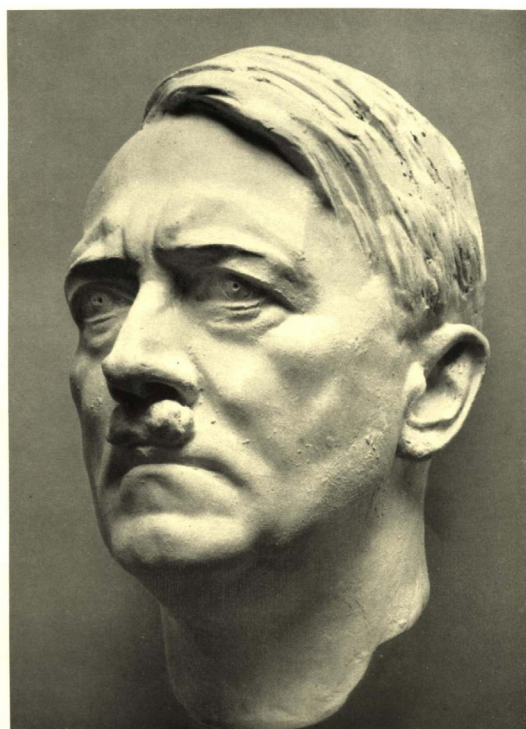
Submitting the language of sculpture to the discipline of propaganda was all the more apparent to Polish critics, as many commentators still remembered the first exhibition of modern German art



Josef Thorak

„Piłsudski”, popiersie

Fig. 2. Josef Thorak, Portrait of Józef Piłsudski, bronze cast, reproduction from "Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart"



Arno Breker

Popiersie „Führera"

Fig. 3. Arno Breker, Portrait of the Führer, bronze cast, reproduction from "Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart"

held in Warsaw in February 1929. That presentation, curated by Alfred Kuhn, captured the internal dynamics of German art the development during the course of forty years, from Impressionism, through Expressionism and Abstraction, to New Objectivity. The Warsaw public was acquainted with over 600 works – sculptures, prints and drawings – executed by 75 artists (some were of non-German descent): Max Liebermann, Max Slevogt, Lovis Corinth, Käthe Kollwitz, Franz Marc, August Macke, Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein, Erich Heckel, Otto Müller, Ludwig Meidner, Oskar Kokoschka, Oskar Schlemmer, Paul Klee, Emil Orlik, Lyonel Feininger, Willi Baumeister, Otto Dix, Georg Grosz, Max Beckmann, Rudolf Schlichter, Karl Hubbuch and Alexander Kanoldt, as well as sculptors: Ernst Barlach, Georg Kolbe, Karl Albiker, Renée Sintenis, Max Esser, Ernesto de Fiori, August Gaul, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Edwin Scharff and Richard Scheibe, to mention but the most important names. Mieczysław Sterling, an influential art critic, perceived the systematic rendering of the exhibits and the overall logical structure of the display as a reflection of the vitality and strength of the German spirit, which is particularly sensitive to novelty in art.¹⁸ He praised the government's support for a broad range of artistic trends, and emphasized the German aspiration to express national identity in art, especially the attempt to overcome the French dominance in modern culture. In his view, this was best exemplified by the German impressionists, Corinth and Slevogt, and by the most prominent expressionist, Emil Nolde whom he labelled as "urdeutsche Meister", a truly Germanic artist, heir to the Gothic mysticism. By comparison to French Cubism, in the abstract compositions of the constructivists, i.e. Baumeister and Schlemmer, Sterling noticed an original attempt to grasp the structure of the universe. Furthermore, the critic argued that the artists of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, when juxtaposed with the work of Utrillo, seemed to create a unique reality, parallel to everyday experience. Sterling also did not overlook the element of grotesque and caricature in the works of Grosz and Dix, a component alien to French neorealism. Ultimately, he realised that German idiosyncrasy consisted in exaggeration and dissonance of

form and colour, in repudiation of the concept of beauty. Thus, the critic proved vulnerable to Kuhn's slogan proclaiming that "the national spirit is best epitomized in art".¹⁹ Nevertheless, owing to the diversified selection of the artistic material and its diachronic rendering, overall, the propagandistic aspect of the 1929 exhibition appeared indistinct.

By contrast, in 1938 none of the Polish critics had the least doubt that the criteria for the selection of exhibits for the presentation, were overtly politicized and ideologically biased, and complied with the principle heralded by Joseph Goebbels: "Der Künstler muss politisch sein!"²⁰ Those who regarded the exhibition as an embodiment of threats resulting from political totalitarianism did not hesitate to draw an analogy between the art of the Third Reich and that of the Soviet Union. Just as they had done with reference to the Soviet exhibition, here, likewise, they compared the programmatic declarations with artistic practice, examining the aesthetic canon of National Socialism. What they found most intriguing was the issue of national art and Germanic idiosyncrasy. Hence the inquiry put forward by many: had a national style crystallised in Nazi Germany that reflects the distinctiveness of the Germanic race, the spiritual essence of the nation and the era?

It was evident that the aesthetically most valuable part of the exhibition comprised of sculptures executed by representatives of the older generation, who had matured artistically before 1933, most often under the impact of Rodin; the names mentioned in this context included: Georg Kolbe, Fritz Klimsch, Fritz Behn, and Hermann Hahn.²¹ Moreover, the sculptural vocabulary of Kolbe's associate, Richard Scheibe, as well as that of Karl Albiker and Fritz Koelle, were not fully aligned with the norms of National Socialist aesthetics based on classicizing realism²² (Fig. 4). Even some of Thorak's works, particularly the elongated, asthenic figure of the "Standing Woman", seemed inconsistent with the ideal of a woman celebrated in the Third Reich. Thus, the German idiosyncrasy appeared to be morphologically heterogeneous. While analysing the formal qualities of German sculpture, the critics discovered its stylistic eclecticism. Apart from the classical, Roman and Renaissance revivalism



Richard Scheibe

Jutrzenka

Fig. 4. Richard Scheibe, *Dawn*, bronze cast, reproduction from "Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart"

imposed by the Nazi dogma, they also pointed to the stimuli derived from the Egyptian sculpture, Greek antiquity, Italian Quattrocento, and French art of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.²³ Recognising the impact that the classicising formulae of Aristide Maillol, Charles Despiau, Émile Antoine Bourdelle and Joseph Bernard had on the imagination of the German sculptors, and the extent to which the latter depended on the Latin artistic tradition, Mieczysław Wallis concluded that Germany once again, as in the 18th and 19th centuries, became "a province of France".²⁴ Even if one considers Wallis's diagnosis biased and demagogic, one has to admit that a tinge of the French taste is graspable in the German works. Apart from the ancient Greeks and Michelangelo on the one hand, and Adolf von Hildebrandt on the other, contemporary experts do confirm the impact of Rodin, Maillol, Despiau and Bourdelle on the leading German sculptors of the Third Reich.

Undoubtedly, Arno Breker was fascinated with Rodin.²⁵ Yet, during his stay in Paris, from 1927 till 1931, he befriended Despiau, an adherent to

the new classicism, and in this sense, an anti-Rodinesque rebel.²⁶ Furthermore, some of Breker's works reflected the classicizing idiom of Jacques Louis David and the romantic sculptural formula of François Rude.²⁷ Maillol and Bourdelle have been investigated as interpretational contexts for Breker's sculptural vocabulary as well.²⁸ Although Georg Kolbe formed his artistic stance in the shadow of Rodin,²⁹ being also influenced by the neoclassicism of Hildebrand, he ultimately did create an idiosyncratic style.³⁰ Karl Albiker fell under the spell of both Rodin and Maillol, oscillating between the patterns established by those two incompatible masters.³¹ Fritz Klimsch and Adolf Wamper also appeared to be indebted to Rodin.³² Not only had several of the sculptors acknowledged by the Nazi regime, trained in Paris at various stages of their careers (e.g. Kolbe, Albiker, Klimsch, Paul Schulz, Ernst Seger, Milly Steger), but also a few exhibitions of Rodin and Maillol were staged in Berlin, Bremen, Dresden, Hannover and Leipzig in the early twentieth century.³³ Therefore one can only wonder whether it was that Mieczysław Wallis had some specific knowledge about the German artists' education and contacts in France or perhaps he had a piercing sight, an acute mind and large aesthetic erudition. Alongside the French neoclassicists of the 1920s and 1930s, some reviewers mentioned Constantin Meunier as a source of influence, apparently with regard to the proletarian iconography of Fritz Koelle.³⁴

To many commentators it seemed obvious that the purposeful eradication of the "degenerate art" resulted in the eliminating of the specifically Nordic qualities from the German visual arts, the ones that had been best exemplified in the German Gothic and hence constituted the roots of Expressionism. "Clearing modern German sculpture of the elements supposedly alien to it, in truth cleared it mainly of all that was creative, genuine, and brave in it, of what accounted for its distinct national facet", remarked Wallis.³⁵ Paradoxically, however, the over-emphasised gesture and petrified movement characteristic of the German statuary was regarded by some critics as the legacy of Expressionism.³⁶ In the opinion of others, the academic aspect of moderate

classicism, which was praised in the Reich, deprived the sculpture of its national trait; it erased the memory of the masterpieces of Dürer, Grünewald, and Holbein.³⁷ By repudiating the tradition of Gothic cathedrals and the accomplishments of Riemen-schneider, Pilgram, and the Vischers' workshop, the Nazi doctrine rejected stylistic tendencies which were genuinely German.³⁸ It was agreed, that the diverse idioms of realism, which were recognized in German sculpture, ranged from veristic accuracy in portraiture, through classicizing academic idealization of the human figure, up to decorative stylization of animal shapes. Moreover, a combination of naturalistic depiction and flickering textures of impressionist provenance was also noted. In order to emphasise the syncretistic character of some sculptures, Jerzy Hulewicz coined new phrases: when analysing Scheibe's work he would write that the artist "impressionises classicism", when dealing with Kolbe he would say that the artist "impressionises the Renaissance".³⁹ As a result of these observations, the vast majority of critics found it virtually impossible to indicate a range of morphological features that would be sufficiently homogenous to connote the notion of style, national style in particular.

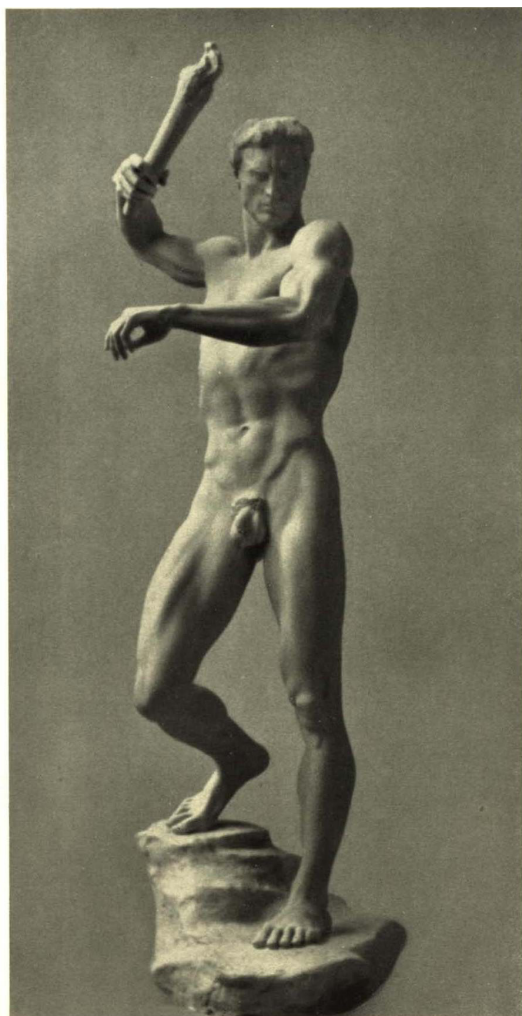
As much as the Soviet exhibition proclaimed the cult of a robust proletarian, the German display substantiated a paradigm of yet another secularized religion: the cult of a healthy Aryan, i.e. a naked, muscular, and superior human being. The apparent physical and mental characteristics of the Nordic race were to be enhanced by the monumental scale of the statuary, whereas the theatricalization of gesture and the expression of pathos were to evoke the victorious spirit of the Germanic people⁴⁰ (Fig. 5). In the statue of Prometheus by Arno Breker (the focal point of the display), Adam Czermiński saw the "threatening dormant power of Germania, which has not been activated yet. The magnificent torsos of men, the powerful shapes of the German Brunhildas – this is the German population that will yield the god of war – a Wotan still to be sculpted. The prototype of this power and strength emanating from the human body is to be seen in Prometheus, dominating the whole gallery of exhibits. It is he, this German Prometheus, who is carrying the new fire in the form of a burning torch to mankind. Fire or war?" – the critic would rhetorically ask⁴¹ (Fig. 6). For Czermiński, the decoratively stylised animalistic sculpture was the embodiment of the same tendencies (Fig. 7): "a 'tiger on the move', symbolising unleashed power. Strong dense muscles,



Anton Grauel

Wieczór

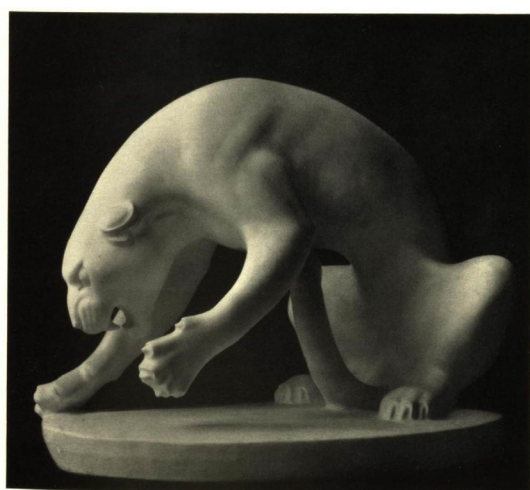
Fig. 5. Anton Grauel, *Evening*, bronze cast, reproduction from "Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart"



Arno Breker

Prometeusz

Fig. 6. Arno Breker, *Prometheus*, bronze cast, reproduction from "Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart"



Fritz Behn

Lampart podrażniony

Fig. 7. Fritz Behn, *Irritated Leopard*, marble, reproduction from "Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart"

determination, will, a terrifying evil muzzle – this is an image of what this dormant power can become once it is set free and set in motion. Another memento can be seen in the sculpture of the 'teased leopard', ravaged, twisted with anger, with the front limb raised to attack. Can the figures of these royal animals personify the awakening and eruption of the forces hidden in today's classical, 'peaceful' Germany?" – wondered Czermiński.⁴²

In general, though not unanimously, the reviewers agreed that contemporary German sculpture was exemplary of technical perfection. Some critics praised the mastery of the craft that was demonstrated mainly by the older generation of artists.⁴³ The positive perception of the German sculptors' technical skills was convergent with Rittich's conviction that technical dexterity and the respect maintained for the intrinsic qualities of the material stood out as the idiosyncratic features of German sculpture. Yet, being aware of the "truth to material" principle, which was highly regarded in Poland as much as throughout the Europe of the 1930s, it was difficult to consider these traits specifically German.⁴⁴

The majority of critics asserted, as in the case of the Soviet exhibition, that harnessing art to the totalitarian yoke eliminated artistic experimentation and ultimately eradicated the sculptors' inventiveness, degrading the art of sculpting to mere craft.⁴⁵ "Art in the service of politics, acting according to its commands and within defined boundaries has always been a clumsy instrument. Art under dictatorship is simply nonsense"; such was the review for "The Morning Daily", summing up the author's impressions under the meaningful title: "The Missed Shots of the Propaganda".⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that the most insightful commentators, who were engaged with the question of politicized aesthetics and the ideological appropriation of art conducted by state authorities, foreshadowed in many respects the present day state of knowledge on the cultural policies of the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes.⁴⁷ Using the analytical and descriptive terms peculiar to the critical narratives of the 1930s, the Warsaw critics did reveal the rhetorical dimension of propaganda art, its instrumental function, its servility to political aims and its goal of legitimising political power.

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- ⁶ Rittich, 16.
- ⁷ Rittich, 17.
- ⁸ Rittich 18.
- ⁹ Zofia Norblin-Chrzanowska, "Rzeźba niemiecka w IPS-ie." [German Sculpture at IPS]. *Świat* 21 (1938): 6.
- ¹⁰ Mieczysław Skrudlik, "Rzeźba niemiecka w Warszawie." [German Sculpture in Warsaw] *Goniec Warszawski*, 1 May 1938, 5.
- ¹¹ Rittich, 16.
- ¹² Tadeusz Pruszkowski, „Rzeźbiarze niemieccy w I.P.S.” [German Sculptors at IPS] *Gazeta Polska* 118 (1938): 7; Norblin-Chrzanowska, 6.
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- ¹⁴ Pruszkowski, 7.
- ¹⁵ Jerzy Wolff, "Wystawa współczesnej rzeźby niemieckiej," [Exhibition of Contemporary German Sculpture] *Prosto z Mostu* 22 (1938): 7; Leopold Strakun, "Entartete Kunst. Wystawa rzeźby hitlerowskiej w I.P.S-ie," [Exhibition of Nazi Sculpture] *Nowy Głos* 45 (1938): 7; Konrad Winkler, "Współczesna rzeźba niemiecka," [Contemporary German Sculpture] *Pion* 18 (1938): 5; S.P.O. [Podhorska-Okolów, Stefania]. "Rzeźba dzisiejszych Niemiec." [The Sculpture of the Present Day Germany] *Bluszcz* 19 (1938): 12.
- ¹⁶ Susanne Rolinek, "Der Bildhauer Josef Thorak als NS-Karrierist." In: *Politische Skulptur: Barlach / Kasper / Thorak / Wotruba*, ed. Martin Hochleitner and Inga Kleinknecht, exhibition catalogue, Landesgalerie Linz (Linz: Oberösterreichische Landesmuseen 2008), 77–98.
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- ¹⁸ Mieczysław Sterling, "Wystawa współczesnej sztuki niemieckiej w Warszawie," [Exhibition of Contemporary German Sculpture in Warsaw] *Wiadomości Literackie* 3 (1929): 3.
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- ²⁰ Ha. Jot., "Chybione strzały propagandy. Kilka uwag o wystawie rzeźby niemieckiej," [The Missed Shots of the Propaganda. A Few Remarks on the Exhibition of German Sculpture] *Kurier Polski* 125 (938): 6.
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- ²² Ciechomski, 120; Reinhard Müller-Mehlis, *Die Kunst um Dritten Reich* (München: Heyne Stilkunde), 109–147; Beate Eckstein, *Im öffentlichen Auftrag: Architektur und Denkmalsplastik der 1920er bis 1950er Jahre im Werks von Karl Albiker, Richard Scheibe und Josef Wackerle* (Hamburg: Kovac, 2005), 19–84.
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- ²⁴ Wallis, 5; Winkler, „Współczesna rzeźba niemiecka,” 5; Tytus Czyżewski, "Współczesna rzeźba niemiecka w

Notes

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- ⁴ The Warsaw event was an exceptional case in the context of Hitler's cultural policy, since the Chancellor focused attention on the native art arena, particularly on the "Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung" organized annually in Munich in the course of eight years, 1937–1944. Ines Schlenker, "Defining National Socialist Art. The First "Grosse Deutsche Kunstausstellung" in 1937" in *Degenerate Art. The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany, 1937*, ed. Olaf Peters, exhibition catalogue, Neue Galerie New York (Munich-London-New York: Prestel, 2014), 91.
- ⁵ Werner Rittich, "Deutsche Plastik der Gegenwart"

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²⁵ Hermann Leber, *Rodin – Breker – Hrdlicka. Die Entstehung der faschistischen Bildsprache und ihre Überwindung. Untersuchungen zu Entstehungsprozeß, politischer Bedeutung und Beurteilbarkeit des Kunstwerks* (Hildesheim – Zürich – New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998), 77–80, 109–128.

²⁶ Marmin, Michel and José Manuel Infesta, *Arno Breker. El Miguel-Angel del siglo XX* (Barcelona: Ediciones du Nuevo Arte Thor), 1976.

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³⁷ Wacław Husarski, „Wystawa rzeźby niemieckiej,” [Exhibition of German Sculpture]. *Czas* 114 (1938): 6.

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POLITIZUOTA ESTETIKA: VOKIEČIŲ MENAS VARŠUVOJE 1938 M.

Santrauka

Straipsnis nagrinėja parodą „Deutsche Bildhauer der Gegenwart“, kuri buvo atidaryta 1938 m. balandžio 23 d. Varšuvos Meno propagandos institute – institucijoje, kurios parodų salė buvo laikoma labai svarbia kultūros politikos vieta Lenkijos valstybei. Paroda buvo organizuota kaip kultūriniai mainai tarp Lenkijos ir Vokietijos, kuriuos inicijavo 1935 m. į Berlyną atvežta ir Prūsijos menų akademijoje eksponuota lenkų šiuolaikinio meno paroda.

Straipsnyje pristatomas Varšuvos visuomenės atsakas į naujosios vokiečių skulptūros pateikimą tradicinės ideologijos kontekste, kuris tarpukariu Lenkijoje buvo paskelbtas lygiai taip kaip ir visoje Europoje. Remiantis tradicionalizmu, kuris praeityje skatino griežtai nusistovėjusių nacionalinių kultūrinių vertybių dominavimą, straipsnyje keliamos abejonės dėl tradicionalizmo retorikos svarbos meno reiškiniams, kylantiems esant politiniam spaudimui. [Straipsnio] intriga yra sugretinti ir palyginti Lenkijos ir Vokietijos valdžios institucijų pateiktus pasakojimus apie meno pasaulį, bandant perprasti tokių sąvokų kaip „tautos genijus“ semantinį turinį, kuris atsispindėjo XX a. 4 dešimtmečio kritiniame diskurse. Be to, norint apmąstyti propagandinio meno konceptą, dar vieną pagrindinę laiko idėją tikslinga apsvarstyti Lenkijos komentatorių atsaką į oficialias kitų valstybių nacionalines parodas Varšuvoje XX a. 4 dešimtmetyje.

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Reikšminiai žodžiai: propagandinis menas, skulptūra, tarpukario menas, neohumanizmas, nacių režimas, neoklasicizmas, neorealizmas.

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