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The Witkacy Collection and Exhibition at the Museum of Middle Pomerania in Słupsk¹

The Collection²

In effect the Witkacy Art Collection at the Słupsk Museum came into being in 1965 when the Museum purchased 110 works consisting of 109 portraits and 1 composition executed in pastel from Michał Białynicki-Birula (pic. 1), who was the son of Theodore and Helena (pic. 2). Dr. Theodore Białynicki, a doctor and a painter, was in attendance and 'scientifically' observing whilst Witkacy undertook his famous 'experiments' with various stimulants. Today, it may seem unbelievable, but in the mid-sixties a Witkacy portrait could be purchased for the equivalent of one month's salary of either a newly quali-

¹ This article was originally presented in summary form at Witkacy 2010 in Washington D.C. and has been revised and translated by Kevin Anthony Hayes.

² All of the 38 images used in this article are also to be found in the Annex. The editors and publishers wish to express their profound gratitude to the Director of The Museum of Central Pomerania in Słupsk, Mieczysław Jaroszewicz and the Curator of the Witkacy Collection Beata Zgodzińska for their continued support and extension of permission to reproduce the images to which this article refers.

fied teacher or a junior museum assistant; however, it should be added that this was a very small amount in post-war Poland. In 1973 the collection grew by 14 in number; these were received from the collection of Józef Jan Głogowski (pic. 3). He was an engineer and an amateur photographer, who was also responsible for a series of photographs of Witkiewicz. In the following year the museum bought an additional 40 items from Witkacy's dentist, Włodzimierz Nawrocki (pic. 4). According to their agreement, Nawrocki provided dental treatment in exchange for portraits depicting Nawrocki and various members of his family. Subsequently, a further 14 portraits were acquired in the form of a bequest made by Jan Leszczyński (pic. 5). Leszczyński was a philosopher and one of the first editors of Witkiewicz's work. This group of portraits also includes items from the collection of Modesta Zwolińska, who was the sister of one of Witkacy's favourite models, Nena Stachurska (pic. 6–8). Presently, the Słupsk collection consists of 254 works by Witkacy. The earliest of these is an oil painting entitled *Italian Landscape* (pic. 9) completed in 1904, and the latest completed work is a pastel entitled *Portrait of Jadwiga Netzel*, which was finalised on August 15th in 1939 (pic. 10). All phases of the artist's work are represented at the Museum: the Youthful Period (pic. 11), the Russian Period (1914–1918) (pic. 12), the Formist Period (1918–1924) (pic. 13) as well as the period of work at *The "S. I. Witkiewicz" Portrait Painting Firm* (Firma Portretowa "S. I. Witkiewicz") (1925–1939).

The core of the collection consists of more than 210 portraits from the era of the Portrait Painting Firm. All the basic types of portraits are represented in the collection. These include the following: A (pic. 14), B (pic. 15), B + d (pic. 16), C (pic. 17), D (pic. 18), E (pic. 19), and B + E (pic. 20). All of these are defined in the Rules of the Portrait Painting Firm first published in 1928 and again in 1932; the Rules were also featured in many other publications following the 'war. There are also various combinations of types, for example, E + B + d or B + D. Among the people portrayed are some very well-known figures from the world of art and culture from inter-war Poland. These include: the writer Irena Krzywicka (pic. 21), the writer Michał Choroński (pic. 22), the translator Kazimiera Żuławska (pic. 23), the painter and writer Rafał Malczewski (pic. 24), and the writer and translator, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (pic. 25). Additionally, numerous figures from the military sphere are featured. These include portraits of high ranking officers: General Janusz de Beaurain (pic. 26) and General Kazimierz Sosnkowski (pic. 27), Colonel Ludwik de Laveaux (pic. 28) and Father Col. Jan Humpola (pic. 29), who served as Chaplain to the last pre-war Polish President, Ignacy Mościcki.

The collection also includes 19 drawings, which were primarily completed in the 'twenties and 'thirties (pic. 30–31). Originally, these drawings were not intended for public display. Among the charcoal drawings, the portrait of actress Irena Solska is most noteworthy (pic. 32). Irena Solska was one of Witkacy's first amours, and she became the prototype of Mrs. Acne – the main character of Witkacy's youthful novel, *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo or The Demonic Woman*. This was published for the first time in 1972.

The collection is complemented by six oil paintings, which includes Witkacy's earliest known self-portrait from 1906 (pic. 33). There are also some interesting early landscapes (pic. 34). Especially noteworthy are three pastel compositions, which include *Lady Macbeth* of 1933 (pic. 35), and the *Australian Landscape* of 1918 (pic. 36), which recollects the 1914 expedition undertaken with Bronisław Malinowski. In 1914, Witkacy accompanied Malinowski to the Congress of the British Association for the Advancement of Science which was held in Adelaide, Australia. This entailed a two week stay in Ceylon as well as an exploration of Western Australia. Witkacy was commissioned as draftsman and photographer for the duration of the expedition. Interestingly, there are also four menus designed by Witkacy for a well-known ball in Zakopane (pic. 37–38).

Exhibition

In addition to paintings and drawings by S. I. Witkiewicz, the museum also has a collection of archival material. This includes post-cards written to friends, single letters, pre-war photographs as well as manuscripts and typescripts. Of particular interest here are the archives of first edition books complete with handwritten dedications. This collection also includes photographs relating to performances and set designs for Witkacy's plays. These have been regularly exhibited in Poland since 1956.

The exhibition is set out in two halls located on the second floor of the Pomeranian Dukes' Castle, which is the headquarters of the Museum of Central Pomerania. The first permanent exhibition opened in May 1982, and the present one opened in September 1988. Approximately, 125–130 works of art are permanently on display. The exhibition is partially changed every twelve months or so.

The exhibition reflects the character of the collection; it is, therefore, dominated by portraits completed in pastels on coloured paper. Almost all of the portraits are notated. The notations can be broken down as follows: the artist's signature, the type of portrait and the date of execution. This infor-

mation is accompanied by defining abbreviations including what influences he was either under or not under. The majority of these abbreviations have been decoded. Some portraits are completed with certain comments, such as “The Colonel became awkward” or “Dishonest sketch.”

Oil paintings, pastel compositions, and two charcoal portraits, as well as other drawings and portraits and compositions are all on display. An archive of selected works, including letters, postcards, editions of books from before the war, supplement the collection. The work is displayed in chronological order from the Youthful, Russian period to the Formist period; those from the Portrait Painting Firm Period, on the other hand, are exhibited according to type.

Recently, an added element to the collection is the enlarged photographs of locomotives from Witkacy’s film negatives taken sometime between 1899 and 1900 and enlarged photographs of *Pulling faces* from Jan Józef Głogowski film negatives from the ‘thirties.

The exhibition also includes a relatively brief commentary in five languages: English, French, German, Italian and Polish. These provide basic information about the biography of Witkiewicz, the history of the collection, the characteristics of the permanent exhibition, and an explanation of the abbreviations.

Abstract

This article describes the development of the Witkacy Collection in the Słupsk Museum. It details the original acquisitions in 1965 and the subsequent additions to the collection. While most of the exhibit consists of portraits, the author explains that other artistic works have been added to the collection, including drawings and oil paintings. In addition to the art works, the museum also maintains archival documents including postcards, letters, manuscripts, typescripts, and first editions.

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