

GLASS PAINTING IN CONTEMPORARY PODHALE

MONIKA GOLONKA-CZAJKOWSKA

INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY

It is now hard to imagine Podhale or its artistic centre – Zakopane, without all the glass paintings decorating its restaurants, galleries and places of religious worship. This type of art was revitalized in the 1950s by a group of scholars enamoured with highlander culture and later supported by institutions dealing with protecting and promoting so-called ‘modern folk art’ in post-war Poland. Today glass painting belongs to the artistic landmarks of Podhale, making it the largest centre of vitrocromy in Europe. Its continuing presence in the region is regarded by the public as an evidence of the vitality of highlander tradition in Podhale. Folklore scenes painted on glass, especially the highly popular images of brigands, are purchased by tourists and act as symbols of the fascinating and exotic highlander culture. Regional activists perceive glass painting as a permanent and valuable element of their native heritage, which ought to be protected and included into the curriculum of regional education. The mimetic character of this genre provides the medium for presenting an imaginary picture of the highlander, giving artists and recipients a tool for creating a kind of a stereotypical self-portrait. The associations glass painting evokes (*old, permanent, unchanging*) clearly point to its mythical significance and incorporate it into the broader trend of invented traditions – a phenomenon which has recently entered a stage of dynamic development in Podhale.

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Obecnie trudno sobie wyobrazić Podhale, a zwłaszcza jego turystyczne centrum Zakopane, bez malowanych na szkle obrazków, które zdobią restauracje, galerie czy obiekty sakralne. Malarstwo to, zrewitalizowane w połowie ubiegłego wieku przez grupę ekspertów i pasjonatów góralszczyzny, intensywnie stymulowane w kolejnych latach przez instytucje, zajmujące się programowo opieką i popularyzowaniem tzw. współczesnej sztuki ludowej w powojennej Polsce, dziś jest wyróżnikiem Podhala, czyniąc z niego największy ośrodek vitrocromii w Europie. Jego obecność na tym terenie interpretowana jest w potocznym odbiorze jako świadectwo niezwykłej żywotności artystycznej tradycji górali podhalańskich. Dla turystów namalowane na szkle folklorystyczne sceny, a zwłaszcza cieszące się wciąż największą popularnością wyobrażenia zbójników, są znakiem fascynującej ich egzotycznej kultury góralskiej. Przez działaczy regionalnych malarstwo na szkle postrzegane jest jako trwałe i niezwykle cenny element własnego dziedzictwa, które powinno być otoczone szczególną ochroną i włączone w program regionalnej edukacji. Co ważne, mimetyczny charakter tej sztuki daje także okazję do wizualizacji wyobrażeń o własnej grupie, czyniąc z niej skuteczne narzędzie do stworzenia swoistego stereotypowego autoportretu. Towarzyszące tej twórczości konotacje, zwłaszcza temporalne (*dawny, trwały, niezmienny*) wskazują więc wyraźnie na jej mityczny wymiar i wpisują ją w szerszy nurt tradycji wynalezionej – zjawiska, które dzięki intensywnej pracy lokalnej społeczności regionalistów, przeżywa na Podhalu w ostatnim czasie niezwykle dynamiczny rozwój.

Key words: folk art, art, regionalism, invented tradition, Podhale.

INTRODUCTION

Painting on glass belongs to the most original artistic landmarks of contemporary Podhale. This art is a unique phenomenon in Polish culture, as it still lives and is undergoing dynamic changes, contrarily to many other types of the so-called folk art revitalized after the Second World War. Despite the label of 'folklore', paintings on glass are created for purchasers from the city by artists who mostly live in urban areas. It has fallen out of fashion as an ends of scientific peregrinations or political manipulations and is sometimes criticised for its schematism, repetitiveness, commercialism and lack of authenticity, yet it still has a group of devoted aficionados. Perhaps the most interesting is the fact that the art of glass painting is now returning to Podhale, from whence it started to spread more than one hundred years ago.

Glass painting appears in many sub-regions of Podhale, especially in Zakopane, which has played the role of the cradle and the national centre of this type of art for more than half a century. Paintings on glass may be seen primarily in public edifices – churches, galleries and restaurants, i.e. places that feature in typical tourist itineraries. For this reason, the group of recipients of such art includes not only the relatively small set of collectors, but also many visitors coming to the Tatra Mountains. Bought as souvenirs, glass paintings travel to various regions of Poland. They are transferred to urban context, where they share the fate of old paintings housed in museums, becoming semiophores,¹ reminders of somebody's stay in the mountains or of Podhale folklore. In the Tatra Museum, paintings on glass created by local artists after the World War II are displayed alongside 19th century works, as examples of the artistic culture of the region. Contemporary paintings may be purchased in studios and galleries of Zakopane – the latter house works both by amateur and professional painters. Paintings on glass are also an element of interior design in many restaurants and inns with regional food, which mushroomed after 1989. Hung next to embroidered bodices, shepherds' axes and bells, they provide a folklore-style backdrop for the culinary spectacle. Paintings on glass may also be seen in places of worship. The role they play there is the closest to their original function. One example of such art are the Stations of the Cross painted in the 1970s by Ewelina Pęksowa, now to be seen in the oldest church in Zakopane, located in Kościeliska Street in Pęksowy Brzyzek. The paintings harmonize with the 19th century wooden interior so perfectly that most visitors are convinced that they constitute a part of the original design.²

¹ Semiophores are objects taken out of their original context, robbed of their former function and given a new, different meaning. Collected and displayed as exhibits, they represent the invisible, which may mean the *sacrum*, past or future events, exotic lands, etc. (Pomian 1996, 36).

² The idea for replacing the old chromolitographs in the church in Pęksowy Brzyzek with paintings on glass was put forward by Hanna Pieńkowska (art historian and restorer) and Ewelina Pęksowa. The Stations of the Cross were placed in the church in 1973.

THE ORIGINS

It is widely assumed that the development of glass painting in Podhale started in the year 1947, when the first courses in painting on glass were organized. Professor Antoni Buszek, a renowned and acclaimed artist connected to the Cracovian Workshops (*Warsztaty Krakowskie*) and the 'Rhythm' group (*grupa RYTM*),³ was sent to Podhale by Janina Oryżyna from the Ministry of Culture and the Arts to complete a special assignment. Buszek was not only a specialist in the field of the technology of artistic craft, known for popularising such sophisticated techniques as fabric and pottery decoration, but also a highly skilled art teacher. The latter talent proved particularly important for the beginnings of glass painting in Zakopane. Two of his nine students – Helena Roj-Kozłowska and Zofia Roj-Gąsienica, became professional painters. The participants of the second course, organised in the School of Wood Industry (*Szkoła Przemysłu Drzewnego*), included Jan Jachimiak, the most avant-garde Podhale glass painter in the 1950s and 1960s. The work of this first generation of post-war artists quickly gained recognition throughout Poland, mainly due to various forms of state patronage. They were shown at travelling exhibitions of Polish folk art and provided the artistic setting for state ceremonies of the time.

It is no coincidence that the origins of contemporary painting on glass can be traced back to late 1940s and associated with people such as Buszek or Miklaszewski. After the turmoil of the war, many institutions which had protected and supported the development of folk arts and crafts in 1920s and 1930s, tried to continue their mission in the new political and economic circumstances. These organisations included the Society for Promoting Folk Industry (*Towarzystwo Popierania Przemysłu Ludowego*) and the *Ład* cooperative from Warsaw. The interwar Polish ideology and methodology of protecting folk art as a timeless national value (such views were expressed by Witkiewicz, Warchałowski and Jastrzębski) was adjusted to the post-war situation and the new cultural policy of the socialist state. The division line marking the transition from the activity of individual organisations to state patronage is 1949, when the Centre for Folk and Artistic Craft (Cepelia) was founded. For the next forty years, this institution coordinated all economic activity related to folk art e.g. by assuming

³ The Cracovian Workshops (*Warsztaty Krakowskie*) – an association of painters, sculptors, architects and craftsmen founded in 1913 in Cracow. The aim of its creation was to endeavour to improve the quality of craftsmanship on the basis of traditional folk handicraft in Poland. The institution ran its own workshops dedicated to weaving, dyeing, pottery making, furniture making, leather crafting, toy making, bookbinding and metalworking.

Rhythm (*RYTM*) an association founded in 1922 by a group of decorative artists from Warsaw, whose work was inspired by Polish folk art, especially glass paintings, sculptures and woodcuts, but also folk handicraft from the region of Podhale. The most prominent members of this group included: Władysław Skoczylas, Zofia Stryjeńska, Maja Berezowska, Eugeniusz Zak, Rafał Malczewski.

patronage over all forms of folk arts and crafts and by popularising handicraft – it organised courses for artisans, created a network of well-qualified suppliers and sales markets in cities (see: Drozd-Piasecka and Paprocka 1985, 239–240). In the region of Podhale Cepelia organised Pattern Workshops in Zakopane (*ZWW – Zakopiańskie Warsztaty Wzorcowe*), which employed hundreds of local artisans.

One of the pre-war cultural programme coordinators, Janina Oryńczyna, called painting on glass “the smithy of artistic talent”. The idea for starting courses of glass painting in Zakopane was one of the results of a long-lasting fascination with Podhale culture and art. It was also greatly influenced by the tradition of art teaching in Podhale, which improved after 1945 due to the active participation of the artists which settled in the region during the occupation and immediately after the end of the war.⁴ Despite the radical change in the political system and the official monopoly of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the interest in Podhale folk culture and handicraft continued after the war, as evidenced by the fact that Zakopane was the place chosen to house the first post-war meeting of art scholars and culture programme coordinators specialising in folk art.⁵ It is no coincidence that the group of professor Buszek’s students included Helena Roj-Rytardowa (Kozłowska), a regional activist known for her pre-war initiatives, a person with much creative potential, artistic sensitivity and organisational skill.⁶

Although only a few participants employed glass painting in their future works, the first courses teaching the technique resulted in a dynamic development of glass

⁴ The most prominent ones were Maria Bujakowa, Antoni Kenar, Wanda Gentil-Tippenhauer and Krystyna Szczepanowska. M. Bujakowa, an artist and teacher, was born in 1901 in Kołomyja and settled in Zakopane in 1945. As the principal of the State Vocational School (*Państwowa Szkoła Zawodowa*, later transformed into the Technical College of Weaving – *Technikum Tkactwa Artystycznego*) she introduced courses in embroidery on wool and making colorful linen lace; she was in charge of the artistic section of the ZWW and initiated the production of artistic fabrics in the “Samopomoc Chłopska” cooperative. The painter and skier W. Gentil-Tippenhauer, born in 1899, came to Zakopane in 1925 and decided to settle there during the occupation. She was an active member of the Zakopane branch of the Artists’ Association, Cepelia and the ZWW.

⁵ The conference organised by the Central Institute of Culture in May 1947 took place in Zakopane. The aim was to discuss issues connected with Polish museology and the protection of the relics of folk culture. One of the resolutions included the following passage: “It was deemed essential to purchase unique objects and artefacts of folk culture in order to place them in museums and display during propaganda exhibitions or use as a visual aid for newly-founded artisan workshops”.

⁶ In the interwar period, H. Roj-Rytardowa (Roj-Kozłowska) (1899–1955) was one of the most spirited cultural activists of the region. Having graduated from the school of lace-making in Zakopane, she went on to organize a regional theatre group which staged her own plays (among them there were shows with music and dancing, e.g. *Janosik*, *Legenda*, *Podhale*). Together with her husband, Mieczysław Rytard, Roj-Kozłowska set up several folk bands in Podhale. Her interest in regional culture led her also to write a number of short stories (in dialect), ethnographical monographs and press articles. After the war she started to work for the Tatra Museum and as a field correspondent of the Ministry of Culture and Art, dealing with conservation and purchase of ethnographical materials from Podhale.

painting. Characteristically for the period, the formal and iconographic aspects of glass painting developed in two dissimilar directions. On the one hand artist had to conform to the official doctrine of socialist realism, but, on the other, still created private works in accordance with their own philosophy and artistic preferences. This is the reason why contemporary museum collections of post-war art contain both very interesting pieces, visibly inspired by traditional folk paintings on glass in terms of form and subject matter, and works of a very different kind. The latter type includes mostly paintings made to be shown during the so-called exhibitions of “art for the working masses”, which were often organised in the 1950s. Such works depicted predominantly subjects of social concern: scenes of daily life in the countryside – e.g. *Digging for spuds*, *Milking* or *Transporting hay* – or civilisational changes brought by the new political system and propagated by slogans such as *Electrification of Villages*, *Countryside Education*, *The Six-Year Plan*. This trend was also represented by history painting, with works of art depicting the so-called progressive struggles of the Polish peasantry. In case of Podhale glass painting, the trend produced works with titles such as *The Insurrection of Kostka-Napierski* or *Lenin among Highlanders* (to commemorate his visit in Poronin).

The good fortune of post-war folk painting was cut short by the sudden death of its most energetic activist, Roj-Rytardowa, in 1955. Roughly at the same time, following the political changes of October 1956, artists started to move away from socialist realism and topics of political concern. This transition is perfectly visible in the work of Jachimiak, who turned, with much success, to colourful abstract paintings. In late 1950s and early 1960s the works of two of Roj-Kozłowska’s students, Helena Roj-Ciaptakowa and Zofia Roj-Gąsienica, underwent an interesting development; other artists, both professional and amateur, also made individual attempts at revitalising the style, yet the next stage of popularisation of glass paintings from Zakopane did not begin until nearly ten years later.⁷

THE CONTEST

The second stage in the history of post-war glass painting in Zakopane began with the Contest of Glass Painting in Podhale, organised by the Tatra Museum in Zakopane in 1968. The inhabitants of the region interested in participating in the event could attend courses in painting on glass in their local culture centres and schools.

⁷ H. Roj-Ciaptakowa started to deal with glass painting in 1953, to help her aunt, Roj-Kozłowska, who was already gravely ill. Her paintings from this period depict mostly genre scenes, modelled after the works of her aunt. After the death of Roj-Kozłowska, Roj-Ciaptakowa started to collaborate with Helena Średniawa.

Ultimately, the contest had thirty eight participants, twenty one of whom were painters from Zakopane. The remaining competitors lived in the neighbouring towns of Kościelisko, Bukowina Tatrzańska, Nowy Targ and Biały Dunajec. The entries were divided into two categories: those submitted by folk artists and those created by professional painters. In both cases the subject matter of the works included traditional religious iconography and local folklore – dance, music, traditional activities, elements of a wedding ceremony and – as usual – various aspects of highlander brigand culture. The first prize in the category of folk artists was given *ex aequo* to Roj-Ciaptakowa for paintings on religious subjects and regional genre scenes, and to Władysław Walczak-Baniecki, a novice painter who submitted more than ten works depicting traditional sacral themes and folklore scenes. The awards in the category of professional works went to Ewa Fajkosz, Zofia Stokowska and Maria Weltuzen. The paintings of the latter were an interesting take on the style of Byzantine icons.

A retrospective analysis reveals that for several artists valued and acclaimed for the next thirty years, the contest in Zakopane was the direct stimulus to take interest in the technique of ‘vitrochromy’.⁸ The debuting artists included Ewelina Pęksowa, who had previously dealt with sculpture and wooden decorative objects.⁹ However, her entries for the contest had little to do with the naive folk style based on the traditional motives of folk painting on glass, so characteristic for her later works. Her contest entries *The Crucifixion* and *Madonna with the Child* were, she admits, simply well-made copies of icons painted on glass instead of wood. The Zakopane contest was the official debut of Walczak-Baniecki, who had been carefully prepared by Helena Średniawa, then curator of the Tatra Museum. In the decade following the contest the artist managed to refine the subject matter of his works and develop an increasingly original and tasteful colour palette.¹⁰ Another artistic discovery of the contest was Zdzisław Walczak, who previously decorated souvenirs for ZWZ. The paintings created under the supervision of Jan Jachimiak included one depicting the Madonna with the Child, which may be considered the portent of the characteristic features of Walczak’s later works. These include elaborate ornamentation and a tendency to exaggerate, much stronger than in other artists. The thick contours, full lips, rich ornamentation and thick hatching became the trademarks of Walczak’s work, as was the tendency towards a realistic depiction of human anatomy.

Many participants of the contest found a loyal supporter in Średniawa, who for many years acted as their advisor both in terms of art and marketing. It is no coin-

⁸ Vitrochromy (*witrochromia*) – a term used by prof. Jan Hopliński to denote a technique of painting on the back side of a glass panel with cold paint.

⁹ E. Pęksowa had her debut in Zakopane during an exhibition of local folk art organized by the Podhale Association in 1966, where she presented her sculptures and plates decorated with intarsia and inlay.

¹⁰ Some of Walczak-Baniecki’s works depict traditional themes: *The Flight into Egypt*, *The Last Supper*, *The Resurrection*, *Deposition of Christ* and portraits of saints.

cidence that folk painting on glass had its heyday in mid-1970s, just as the Ministry of Culture and Art came up with the initiative promoted with the slogan “Folk Culture – a Benefit to the Nation” (1972–1975), which also encompassed folk visual arts (Zawistowicz-Adamska 1976, 32). Many folk art contests were organised under its auspices and even after the initiative had finished. Painting on glass was a permanent element of these events – it had a separate contest category and even separate competitions. The entries, often acquired by museums, were shown in Poland and abroad as representative examples of Polish folk art. Today the largest collection of glass paintings may be seen in the Ethnographical Museum in Toruń, primarily due to the endeavours of Aleksander Błachowski, the initiator of many contests and a major post-war activist promoting the development of “contemporary folk art”. Extensive collections are also held by the State Ethnographical Museum in Warsaw, the Ethnographical Museum in Cracow, the Władysława Orkana Museum in Rabka and the Tatra Museum in Zakopane, which has for a long time acted as the patron of local artists.

TWO TRENDS

Looking at glass paintings in museum collections and the many galleries in Zakopane, one quickly realises that this medium is very popular, but heterogeneous with regard to artistic quality. There are two basic trends the differences between which stems from dissimilar artistic principles of the creators. The first type is represented by the numerous professional and amateur artists living in Podhale, who treat the medium as the starting point for their own artistic experiments. Some of these painters look for their topics and technical solutions in the long tradition of European glass painting, yet treat the models only as a source of inspiration. Examples of such art can be found in the works of Andrzej Gałek, Maria Veltuzen, Jan Kosiński, Adam Słowiński, Władysław Trebunia-Tutka and many other artists from Podhale. There are also artists who, though painting on glass, choose their subject matter and artistic forms independently of tradition. This group includes Irena Makowej, the author of abstract graphic compositions and Ewa Fajkosz, whose works have a painterly, expressive style.

Zofia Fortecka and Anna Liscar may be counted among the most interesting authors of the generation who started their careers in 1980s. Despite drawing inspiration from similar sources and choosing similar (religious) topics, each of these painters has managed to achieve very individual means of artistic expression. The style of the crucifixes and miniature altarpieces created by Fortecka refers to early Western-European paintings on glass, especially 14th- and 15th-century portable triptychs and crosses, decorated with glass panels at the bottom. The artist employs two types of composition – either putting the work together from small decorative pieces of glass, as in a mosaic, or creating a narrative cycle of several micro-paintings. Her works are always easy to

identify due to the dark and saturated colours, brightened by subtly painted golden reflections and the detailed graphic style of the miniature, multi-layered compositions depicting scenes from the Old and New Testament. The latter of the mentioned artists, Liscar, also employs biblical motifs, but uses entirely different artistic techniques. She often abandons the symmetry and regularity of composition characteristic for glass painting for a looser arrangement of elements in the scene. The lines are subtle and smooth and the details restricted to the necessary minimum. The mood is achieved mainly through colour, which plays an essential role in Liscar's paintings. She often uses modest, sombre combinations of yellows, blues and greens that, coupled with the delicate linework, create a melancholy harmony.

The second trend in contemporary painting on glass is represented by what may be called modern folk art.¹¹ The region of Podhale has a special place in Polish culture as a kind of symbolic space. The fact that so many artists live there and create paintings on glass determines the way such art is received by the society and the attitude of the artists, who see themselves as the heirs of the artistic tradition of Podhale highlanders. Contemporary paintings on glass may follow the convention of 19th-century folk paintings, but they have a different function and a different circle of recipients. All contemporary Podhale painters who have gained the status of folk artists are very versatile and share a deep devotion to the highlander tradition of their ancestors, which has, to a great extent, compensated for the official postulate of the 'peasant nature' of modern folk art.¹² In the search for their individual means of expression, these artists consciously choose to employ the convention of folk art and the traditional repertoire of iconography.¹³ They are well-read, knowledgeable in history and the main trends

¹¹ According to A. Jackowski, the term 'works of modern folk art' refers to objects in folk style, i.e. either copying a traditional model (e.g. embroideries, painted eggs) or similar to folk style (e.g. souvenirs for tourists) and also to "sculptures and paintings the style of which has been deemed 'folk' by ethnologists, acclaimed and continued in the works of other artists [...]". The third group includes, among other things, contemporary glass paintings from Podhale. The author remarks that such art is still alive only due to external support, since there is no demand for it in its native environment (Jackowski 1991, 190). More information on the attempts to define contemporary folk art may be found in *Dyskusja nad zakresem pojęcia sztuki ludowej* (1967), Piwocki (1975, 131–132).

¹² Most artists dealing with glass painting belonged to the Association of Folk Artists, (*Stowarzyszenie Twórców Ludowych*), founded in 1968 r. After their portfolio had been reviewed by a special committee who attested that the work conforms to the stylistic criteria of folk art., the members of the association were granted the right to treat art as their official profession, participate in exhibitions and fairs, and legally sell their works.

¹³ One of the most detailed concepts of the role of contemporary folk artists was presented by Maria Chodkowska. Her analysis of the structure of the said role, defined as a system of interrelated characteristics of unequal importance to its continuation and development, led her to distinguish three basic features. The necessary characteristics of a folk artist were: an emotional bond with the countryside, a degree of knowledge of contemporary and historical problems of rural areas, creating art mostly due to psychosocial needs, an individual character of the artistic forms, "adjusting the subject matter of the

of European glass painting, and have all mastered the medium. Most of the painters from the circle find their inspiration in 19th-century works of art now kept in museum collections. Such influences are clearly visible both in mass-produced souvenirs and in the more refined works of famous artists – Ewelina Pęksowa, Jolanta Pęksowa, Barbara Walczak-Dziadzio, Janina Jarosz, Anna Pitoń and the late Władysław Walczak-Baniecki and Zdzisław Walczak. The tendency to apply traditional models manifests itself in the form and subject matter of the works. Painters employ a well-defined contour in black or brown and sometimes use two different hues for drawing outlines: flesh is drawn in umber (brick-colour) whereas all other elements are black. Such a technique may be observed e.g. in the works of Stanisława Czech-Walczakowa, Ewelina Pęksowa and Jolanta Pęksowa. They consciously aim at simplifying or even deforming the depicted shapes. The colouring is mostly flat, the only texture provided by typical folk technique of hatching using bold, decorative lines. The composition usually has a vertical symmetry axis, which creates the effect of simplicity and transparency. As in the case of historical painting, much importance is given to ornamentation, chosen from the wide array of traditional plant motifs. These defining features of contemporary glass painting were mentioned by one of the greatest artists from Zakopane – Walczak-Baniecki: *Paintings on glass ought to be simple, without embellishments or overabundance of any kind, as this just does not go well with the medium.*¹⁴

Another characteristic feature are the fixed iconographic models taken from traditional painting on glass. The works depict mostly religious scenes – various representations of *Madonna with the Child*, *The Holy Family*, *The Crucifixion*, *The Pietà* and portraits of saints with typical attributes. This conventionalisation of subject matter has become the cause of some misunderstanding and even open criticism of this type of art, since originality is nowadays considered as one of the most important criteria of artistic assessment. Cavilers seem to forget the fact that schematisation and repetition of certain representations, resulting from employing models typical for the medium, is one of the characteristic features of glass painting. After all, painting on glass used to be a kind of artistic handicraft, where works were often created in stages by all members of the family. On the other hand, many painters have high aspirations and try to rid themselves of the label of the picturesque ‘folk artist’.

works to issues crucial to traditional or contemporary rural society, though not necessarily related to it”. According to Chodkowska, features which make a person more effective in the role of folk artist include “rural parentage, catering to the artistic needs of different types of audiences, versatile methods of work, employing forms or subjects related to the cultural heritage of one’s native region, marketing one’s works in one’s own environment”. Other characteristics included the time of artistic debut, age, gender, education, place of residence, marital status, material situation, participation in activities related to the development of folk culture (Chodkowska 1986, 94–95).

¹⁴ An excerpt from an interview with Walczak-Baniecki conducted in December 1997. Author’s own material.

THE CIRCLE OF GLASS PAINTERS IN PODHALE

Without breaking with the convention of folk art, Podhale painters consciously strive to develop their individual, unique styles by experimenting with the form, technique and even the framing of their work. Each of them tries to expand the traditional repertoire of motives, introducing new representations of popular subjects, presenting entirely different imagery. For example, the paintings of Walczak-Baniecki are easily recognisable for their flowing linework and unusual colouring based on interesting, harmoniously matched hues. He combined dark backgrounds with warm red, muted green, off-white and brown, often adding some golden glaze. Walczak-Baniecki's most original works include series of monochromatic paintings, e.g. the orange, green and lilac cycle. His preferred subject matter was unusual representations of religious scenes – like the evocative, lyrical paintings of *Madonna and the Child* in a crib, *Madonna Bathing the Child*, *Highlander Madonna* in regional attire, or the multi-figural *Nativity* with highlander musicians. He also liked to paint new motifs related to local folklore, especially highlander brigands.

The works of Ewelina Pełksowa, the most famous and acclaimed contemporary glass painter, always have a perfectly balanced colour palette and a dynamic, decorative composition. Her artistic inspiration comes from the Carpathian folk tradition of painting on glass, especially the Transylvanian style. The red or (less frequently) off-white background contrasts with deep blues, muted greens and a range of brick reds. The author employs the same convention of folk tale, where the figures of the parents of mankind, saints or brigands are always accompanied by fantastic creatures, birds, enormous flowers and peculiar trees. As in historic paintings on glass, there is an additional decoration of gold flecks, discreetly added to details of the attire, background and ornaments, usually in the form of waves, scales, dots or stars. Pełksowa's most famous works include multi-figural spatial compositions depicting the biblical scenes of *Creation of the World*, *Paradise*, *Nativity* and *Final Judgment*, inspired by Romanian glass painting.

The paintings of Zofia Gašienica-Roj (died 1981) are characteristic for their expressive simplicity. The emphatic linework, the distinct yet delicate contour, the limited colour palette based on the contrast between two dominant hues (e.g. black and red, black and purple) coupled with a tendency to use large patches of flat colour make the paintings appear delicate and airy. This effect is often reinforced by the clear, almost ascetic composition, usually including full-body figures with intricate details and austere ornaments on the background (most often consisting of a single tulip flower with leaves, a circular rose and a pomegranate fruit). Apart from traditional religious scenes, the artist paints new types of images, characteristic for glass painting from Zakopane, such as *Madonna with the Child* in a crib. Her typical works also include folk genre scenes – weddings, sheep herding, local festivals and family rituals.

The mood of the works of the late Stanisława Czech-Walczakowa is entirely different. They seem very cheerful and decorative, mostly due to the bold colouring – saturated reds, blues, lemon yellows, pale greens – and the vivid floral ornaments painted with no stencil, often in broad brushstrokes. The human figures are short and squat, placed in the centre of the composition and lined with a thick contour. The eyes are expressive; the faces always accented with round splashes of blush. The shape of the clothes is modelled with strong hatching, which adds to the decorative effect of the ornamental background. The subject matter of Czech-Walczakowa's works is inspired by Polish Marian iconography – both official (*The Black Madonna*, *Pokrov* of the *Mater Misericordiae* type) and folk (*Our Lady of Candles*, *Our Lady of the Herbs*, *Our Lady of the Flowers*).

Another artistic personality is Bronisław Bednarz, a painter and sculptor living in Skrzypne, whose works are easily distinguishable for its humour, novel ideas and unorthodox takes on traditional subjects. His artistic means for creating the emotional mood of his works include thin contours, simple forms, modified proportions, clear composition and dark colour palette. His depiction of Archangel Michael presents a dramatic battle between the leader of God's army and a repulsive and frightening devil, whereas the scene with the Holy Family radiates peace and happiness.

Yet another creative temperament may be found in the works of Zdzisław Walczak (died 2001), a painter much devoted to the highlander regional movement. Typical features of his are include the use of perspective (unusual in folk paintings on glass) coupled with the flat foreground, a nonchalant, sometimes grotesque depiction of stocky human figures, loud combinations of colours against a shaded, turquoise-blue sky. Walczak's love for Podhale folklore manifest itself in long series of paintings relating highlander tales and legends, the stories of the brigand Janosik and his men, the lives of shepherds in the Tatra Mountains, as well as on genre scenes showing old customs and ritual practices. Artistic experiments with perspective, chiaroscuro, dynamic poses and realism of depiction led to a conflict between Walczak and the circle of experts and authenticating committees. The criticism and the growing popularity of his works in the highlander community caused Walczak's style to develop in two separate directions. Some paintings, mostly those sent as entries to various contests, were intentionally simplified in terms of form and composition. The second type of works, sold to tourists and highlanders, included semi-realistic paintings with accurate proportions and foreshortenings. In his final years, artistic aspirations and a growing desire towards a more faithful representation of reality pushed Walczak in the direction of stylistic experiments. They resulted in series of realistic tempera and watercolour paintings depicting the traditional wooden architecture and the wildlife of Podhale. Asked to comment on these works, the author incessantly emphasised their documentary qualities and talked of his paintings as gifts for the future generations.

The mentioned group of artists had students and followers who solidified the new Podhale tradition of painting on glass. Jolanta Pęksowa, just as her mother-in-law

Ewelina, likes to draw inspiration from Slovakian glass painting. The characteristic features of her works are the very simple style which makes use of intentional deformation of the human figure to emphasise the folk and naive convention of the paintings. The ornaments are delicate and floral, often in the form of tulips, circles and multi-petalled flowers begirded with a white contour and surrounded with spiral flower stems. The typical colour palette is based on combinations of ultramarine, sand yellow, warm brown, dusky pink, off-white and green, subtly complemented with gold. The artist paints not only religious scenes, but also brigands, rituals and but the most characteristic motif in her works are hunting scenes. The work of Anna Pitoń is noticeably inspired by the style of her aunt and teacher Zofia Roj-Gąsienica. The painter uses flowing, thin contour lines, symmetrical hatching and delicate tone shading. The composition of her works is simple and orderly, usually including a centrally placed figure with round, delicate features. Most often the proportions of the bodies are accurate and the details of clothing faithfully represented. The ornament flanking the corners is very modest or not included at all. The colour scheme in Anna Pitoń's paintings is similar to that used by her aunt – it bases on the contrast between two dominant hues (black with red, pink, purple or orange). Apart from traditional Marian iconography and portraits of saints, the artist often paints scenes referring to local folklore. Another original painter belonging to the new generation that followed in the footsteps of their famous parents is Barbara Walczak-Dziadzio. She was taught by her father, Władysław Walczak-Baniecki, who let her into the secrets of painting on glass and creating a composition stylised after folk artworks. She had her very successful debut in 1983, when she became the runner-up of the contest in Rabka. Owing to a natural talent for drawing and a sense of colour, she quickly mastered the basic techniques and started to search for her own means of artistic expression. Her works began to feature new motifs, e.g. floating sets of birds and flowers; she ceased to use flat patches of colour circled with distinctive contour lines and substituted them with monochromatic shading. The artist often introduces gold and silver into the background, adding a decorative, metallic shine to her works. Zdzisław Walczak also trained his successor – in mid 1970s he started teaching Janina Jarosz, who later became his wife. The influence of her husband's works is still apparent in the colour schemes employed by the artist. The palette is based on combinations of contrasting hues – blue, pink, sapphire, light green, deep red and purple. In her work, Jarosz steers towards a realistic representation of the human figure, breaks with the static composition and introduces elements of landscape into the background. As in Walczak's paintings, the number of details is striking – the dress is intricately rendered, the architecture meticulous and the floral ornaments very elaborate. The subject matter oscillates around religious scenes, but the paintings are often illustrative in character, referring to local apocrypha and regional literature. The artist also made a series of *Polish Madonnas*, combining the Marian theme with national martyrology. Such

paintings are usually commissioned by individual customers or made for exhibitions. The artist herself treats them very seriously because, as she admitted, she may then “create something profound”, of high artistic value.¹⁵ The second type of Jarosz’s works are folklore scenes, produced in large numbers from a stencil. The painter refers to them as “pleasant souvenirs for tourists”, making it clear that she considers this type of activity handicraft, not art.

Naturally, the mentioned list of painters is not complete. There were many more artists in Podhale who tried their hand in glass painting in the last fifty years. However, the choice seems representative for the phenomenon of ‘contemporary glass painting’, both with regard to the nature of the social circle of Podhale artists and to the aesthetics of the works. It also uncovers the existence of a family tradition of glass painting, a custom born and consolidated within the last fifty years. In the case of glass painting, the ‘folk’ character of the art is a consciously chosen convention, inspired by the artistic tradition of the Carpathian Mountains and the region of Podhale.

“YOU HAVE TO GIVE TESTIMONY OF THE LIFE OF PODHALE”

A comprehensive description of the cultural contexts related to Podhale glass painting ought to mention one very interesting phenomenon that sets this artistic medium apart from other genres of contemporary folk art. The fact that paintings on glass have won recognition in their native environment, i.e. among highlanders, is often overlooked by critics who tend to focus on evaluating the aesthetics. Modern ‘vitrochromy’ paintings are enthusiastically received by local activists and the people of Podhale who consciously admit to be emotionally connected with their culture. In these circles, paintings on glass become a part of the regionalist discourse, a vital tool for creating an image of highlander tradition. Due to its mimetic properties, the medium may reflect, consolidate and modify the views on the artist’s own regional group, serving as an artistic self-description. What is more, glass painting is starting to become one of the main determinants of cultural autonomy, along with regional attire, music, architecture and dialect. It is apparent not only in the official program statements of the Podhale Association and speeches made by activists, but also by the presence of glass paintings in private interiors and by the comments of their owners.¹⁶ Hung in modern highlander

¹⁵ Excerpt from an interview with J. Jarosz conducted in 1999. Author’s own material.

¹⁶ The Program Manifest of the Podhale Association published on June 1st 1975 included an appeal to artists, imploring them to actively participate in protecting their native cultural heritage and in its creative development. The document was addressed to painters, sculptors, blacksmiths, carpenters, jewellers specialising in pins, leather-workers, wood-workers, embroiderers, weavers, musicians and storytellers (Deklaracja Programowa 1975, 8). Similar appeals were written e.g. to painters during the later conventions. Since 1984 the meetings of the association have often been accompanied by exhibitions of glass paintings. More information on this subject may be found in: Golonka-Czajkowska (2002).

houses, the folklore genre scenes acquire a new meaning, strengthening the collective memory of the heroic ancestors. Thus, the relatively new fashion for glass painting may be considered a manifestation of the characteristic, dynamic trend of searching for suitable forms of expressing the distinctiveness of one's local culture. These forms ought to be able to overcome the unifying pressure of globalisation and be a kind of a collage reconstructed from elements with different degrees of historical continuity.

Currently created works are treated by the general society as a permanent feature of cultural heritage, legitimised by 19th-century paintings which used to be brought to Podhale mainly from central and eastern Slovakia. Experts in regional studies consider the historic paintings, sometimes referred to with the dialect term *szkloki* ('glassies'), as an indispensable element of the interior decoration of a 'true', i.e. authentic, highlander home. Such an attitude creates a symbolic bridge across the rift between the past – the distant 'olden days' – and the present, and ensures the desirable quality of 'natural' continuity of tradition.¹⁷ In this context, contemporary folk painting is indeed a good example of 'invented tradition', a concept named and described by Eric Hobsbawm. The phenomenon takes the form of either referring to past situations or establishing a new 'past' by creating "a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature" (1983, 1). Their constant repetition is essential for inculcating certain norms and values in the community, though the historical continuity of these practices "is largely fictitious" (1983, 2). The ceremony at the 1st Congress of the Polish Highlanders in 2000 constitutes a good example. The unveiling of a statue of Władysław Orkan, the most famous regional ideologist, was celebrated with a gala in the market square of Nowy Targ. One of the points of the programme included children in regional attire presenting paintings on glass to the invited guests.

It has already been mentioned that the ability to visualise the ideological postulates made glass painting into a popular gift, presented at various ceremonies, not only those organised by the Podhale Association or highlander folk bands, but also during family occasions and religious holidays. In retrospect, it seems that the latter have been particularly effective in consolidating the custom of giving glass paintings as presents. The tradition began with the first visit of Pope John Paul II in Poland. From this moment on, paintings by Zdzisław Walczak, Ewelina Pęksowa and Janina Maślanka from Nowy Targ were often given to the Pope during his stays in Poland and brought to him to Vatican by groups of pilgrims from Podhale. Sometimes the paintings are also

¹⁷ The case of glass painting in Podhale is a good illustration of the process of inventing traditions that would counterbalance the continuing dissipation of cultural differences observable on the level of mass culture. Paintings on glass are a type of 'inventions' – in A. Hanson's understanding of the term. He views 'tradition' as "an invention constructed for contemporary purposes". Commonly involved in the development of authentic culture, inventions are "sign substitutions that depart some considerable distance from those upon which they are modeled, that are selective and systematically manifest the intention to further some political or other agenda" (see Hanson 1989, 899; Clifford 1988).

presented to family members living in the United States. For more than twenty years the most popular painter was Walczak, an artist with extraordinary creative imagination and temperament. Known and respected by members of the Podhale Association, he often took part in the organisation's activities by painting commemorative diplomas for official occasions. These works usually depicted a pair of dancing highlanders and the emblems of highlander culture (shepherds' axes, regional hats, basiolas, white-and-red ribbons) representative of the model of a highlander as a Pole and a romantic patriot. A similar, if more elaborate code was used in the so-called 'wedding paintings' commissioned in the 1980s and 1990s to be given as presents to newlyweds or married couples celebrating their jubilee. Both the commissioners and the recipients came from the same background of folk band members – i.e. a community which is consciously upholding certain elements of their ancestral folklore. The most important element of such paintings and the axis of their composition is the figure of the Madonna modelled after the icon from Częstochowa or on images related to local places of cult – *the Ludźmierz Madonna* known as the *Lady of the Podhale Household*, the patron of the Podhale Association, or *Holy Mary Queen of the Tatras* from the sanctuary in Rusinowa Polana.¹⁸ The background always includes a vertically arranged landscape with green fields, alpine forests and bared mountaintops. Another indispensable element of the symbolic message are white-and-red and white-and-blue bands with greetings (e.g. *God Bless the Newlyweds*), an individual dedication or a fragment of the Angelic Salutation (*Hail Mary Mother of God*) and the date of the wedding. The verbal information identifies the image, thus narrowing the number of possible interpretations and facilitating the correct denotation of the message. The band is sometimes topped with a highlander pin or, if the painting depicts the Madonna from Częstochowa, a crowned eagle. The latter image refers to the iconography of the Black Madonna as the Queen of Poland, the protectress of the nation, popular in devotional graphic arts since the second half of the 18th century (Kunczyńska-Iracksa 1978, 78). A variation of this image includes a wedding painting depicting a highlander couple kneeling at the feet of Holy Mary. Such representations are modelled on the devotional image known since the Middle Ages – a standing Madonna with the Child worshipped by the commissioners of the work. The inspiration with regional motifs and canon images of Western European religious art is clearly visible in another painting of Madonna with the Child, reminiscent of the Sistine Madonna by Raphael. The highlander style of the work is accentuated with the red and blue colours of the Madonna's robes and a *maforium* decorated with a stylised embroidery. The angel heads depicted over the halo are wearing highlander

¹⁸ For information on the iconography and cult of the figure from the sanctuary in Ludźmierz see: Skoczeń-Marchewka (1995), Bukowski (1991). On the cult and iconography of the Madonna from Rusinowa Polana see: Babraj (1988); copies of archive material compiled by father Benedykt Piotrowski from Małe Ciche, now kept in the Tatra Museum in Zakopane.

hats. The decoration of these paintings reveals an even stronger tendency to emphasise the regional nature of such art. Walczak uses not only the traditional set of plant ornaments known from 19th-century glass painting (roses and tulips) but also a realistic representation of the edelweiss flower, considered to be a “special symbol of the Tatra plants”. The motif of the edelweiss started to appear in highlander decorative art in the 19th century, under the influence of the so-called “Zakopane style” popularised by Stanisław Witkiewicz. Nowadays such decoration frequently appears on furniture, souvenirs and elements of female regional attire (bodices).¹⁹

The wedding paintings of Walczak, composed of easily decipherable, if not stereotypical images, created a specific mixture typical of the regional identity of contemporary inhabitants of Podhale. It combines patriotic symbols such as an eagle, a white-and-red band or Our Lady of Częstochowa with religious images of the Marian cult and elements of regional folklore, such as details of highlander attire or architecture and mountain landscapes. Such works of art illustrate the current mental image of highlanders as true Polish patriots and devout Catholics. This model may be considered a modification of the stereotypical concept of a Pole as a peasant and Catholic (Stomma 1986, 63). The illustrative nature of the paintings and their pastiche-like qualities appeal to the public, used to the realism and stereotypical lyricism of religious depictions (Chrzanowski 1989, 13–22). Ultimately, such art finds its way to modern interiors, becoming symbols of cultural identification and creating the new folklore of Podhale. They are placed on wall hangings in living rooms, over the bed (this is mostly true in the case of the wedding paintings) or – most typically – on the walls of the so-called private regional chambers. Similarly to American common rooms, such chambers are usually located in the basements of modern houses. Characteristic decorative elements – wooden panelling, fireplace, imitations of *tragarze* (load-bearing roof beams) – and furnishings – old *listwy* (long, narrow shelves), carved *zydła* (chairs), wooden chests, wall hangings, deer antlers, bear skins (often brought from the USA or Canada) and shepherd’s bells – transform these rooms into a semantically rich display space; a means for self-presentation for the owners. All these items are to evoke associations with brigand stories and the hunting tradition of highlanders. Paintings by contemporary Podhale artists are treated as stand-ins for historic *szkła*, which are currently unavailable on the market. They help reconstruct but a section of an ideal highlander home. A house like the one described in the poem by Stanisław Nędzia-Kubiniec, a poet from Podhale:

“On the other side of the hallway was the white room
(being always firmly bolted to keep the bairns out):
The peasant’s withdrawing room.

¹⁹ Detailed information on the motif of edelweiss in architecture may be found in Moździerz (1995, 50). On the motif of edelweiss in contemporary regional attire see: Trebunia-Staszal (2007, 82, 98).

The sun glided like a spider across the yellow logs
 Painting the saints' faces with a golden glow;
 The saints in the glass paintings, who under the carved ceiling, in a row
 Strolled on the chiselled cornice along the whole wall" (1949).

One final issue related to glass painting that ought to be mentioned is promotion of this type of art among the youth of Podhale. Such activities aim at popularising glass painting and, consequently, consolidating the view that it is a typically highlander genre of visual arts the knowledge of which belongs to the basic canon of regional education. Many schools in Podhale, communal culture centres and community clubs of the Podhale Associations offer courses in glass painting and organise contests and exhibitions. Older inhabitants of Podhale rarely mention glass painting when talking of typically highlander art (*we did not love it very much, and besides, none of us could paint; I do not own any* [glass paintings – author's note]), but the youth of Podhale begins to perceive this genre of painting as a permanent element of their native culture. The fact that glass painting was included into the canon of contemporary Podhale culture has changed the way works of the mentioned artists are received and judged. Their art balances between a mythicised image of the past and modern aesthetics shaped by mass culture. The most important criterion for evaluating such art is not the artistic quality of the works, but adherence to tradition, understood as upholding artistic customs of highlanders. The paintings of Pełkowska, Walczak-Baniecki, Walczak, Jarosz, Fudala and Maślanka may not be sought after by highlanders from Podhale, yet they are held in much esteem in the circle of regional activists. Father Tadeusz Juhas, the chaplain of the Podhale Association and an ardent supporter of glass painting, openly stated that

"Contemporary painting on glass is an achievement of regional tradition, a sign of progress; it is important that painters do not distance themselves from their cultural roots; people who live so close to nature incorporate beauty into the world they inhabit. [...] Even if their paintings lack refinement, they do not break with their roots, and this is important".²⁰

Thus, glass painting becomes an effective form of presentation of Podhale culture, testifying both at home and abroad to the vitality of the artistic talent of the inhabitants of the region, a feature which, for the last fifty years, has helped create an extraordinary, mythical image of the Podhale highlander in the Polish culture.

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²⁰ Excerpt from an interview with father Juhas conducted in July 1998. Author's own material.

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Author's address:

Monika Golonka-Czajkowska, Ph.D.
Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
Jagiellonian University
ul. Gołębia 9, Kraków 31-007, POLAND
e-mail: m.golonka@iphils.uj.edu.pl