

**REMEMBRANCE, RECONSTRUCTION, RESTITUTION:  
EXHIBITING RESCUED WORKS OF POLISH AND  
POLISH-JEWISH ARTISTS (1945-1949)**

By

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how, in the aftermath of World War II in Poland, artworks were personified as victims and displayed to signify the destruction of national culture. The thesis focuses on two exhibitions: *Warsaw Accuses* in the National Museum in Warsaw in 1945, and on the traveling exhibition *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*, organized by the Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts in 1949. Examining two cases, I explore the themes of remembrance, cultural reconstruction and art restitution in regard to Polish and Polish-Jewish culture in the immediate post-war period.

The analysis of exhibitions has two main layers. Firstly, I analyze their social and political context. Secondly, I focus on the social biographies of displayed artworks to reveal how different meanings were ascribed to them after the war, and the ways in which they were reinterpreted. I identify two methods of art restitution—one carried out “from above” by the state institutions, and one “from below” by the Jewish organization—to argue that after the war the urge to preserve the past became a crucial issue not only in relation to lost human beings, but also material heritage.

My object-oriented approach reveals ways in which the Polish and Polish-Jewish culture was reconstructed and perpetuated between 1945 and 1949. I show how the discussed displays of “rescued” artworks, which I consider the prototypes of restitution exhibitions, were expressions of the post-war construction of collective victimhood. My analysis shows the important place of national culture in post-war Poland and traces the attempts to reconstruct Jewish culture and to create a new Jewish identity in the ethnically homogeneous communist state.

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## Introduction: living people and dead objects

In the morning of May 3, 1945, to the surprise of the audience gathered in the courtyard of the devastated National Museum in Warsaw, dancing water from the fountain sparkled in the sun for the first time in years. As there was no running water, a hidden museum employee had to pump the water manually.<sup>1</sup> Among the sea of ruins, in the presence of the puzzled spectators, the museum's first post-war exhibition opened to the public. The exhibition displayed more than nine hundred artworks from the national collection, from ancient artefacts and medieval icons to modernist sculptures, many of which were crumpled, fractured and broken.<sup>2</sup>

In October 1946, while the rubble still covered the streets of the former Warsaw ghetto, a group of Jewish survivors, artists, and art historians gathered in the studio of sculptor Natan Rappaport to discuss an organization to resurrect Jewish culture. Amidst the models for the planned monument to the Ghetto heroes, they soon agreed that to “mine cultural valuables from the Jewish ruins” and to salvage artworks of Jewish artists which survived turbulent years of war, were some of its key missions.<sup>3</sup> Before the organization ceased to exist on the wave of unification that targeted Jewish cultural institutions in 1949, the collection of artworks gathered in only few years was displayed and celebrated by exhibitions in Warsaw and several Lower Silesian cities.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Kotańska, “Dokumentacja fotograficzna wystaw: ‘Warszawa wczoraj, dziś, jutro’ (1938 r.) i ‘Warszawa oskarża’ (1945 r.) w zbiorach Muzeum Historycznego m. st. Warszawy,” (“Photo Documentation of the exhibitions: “Warsaw Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” (1938) and “Warsaw Accuses” (1945) in the collection of the Historical Museum of Warsaw”), *Almanach Muzealny* 2 (1999): 305; Robert Jarocki, *Rozmowy z Lorentzem* (Conversations with Lorentz) (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 300.

<sup>2</sup> Dariusz Kaczmarzyk, “Pamiętnik wystawy ‘Warszawa oskarża’” (The Diary of the Exhibition ‘Warsaw Accuses’), *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XX*, 1976 (Yearbook of the National Museum in Warsaw): 599.

<sup>3</sup> Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts / Di yidishe gezelschaft tsu farshpreytn kunst: An Attempt at the Continuation of Jewish Artistic Life in Postwar Poland, 1946–1949” in *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, eds. Elvira Grözinger and Magdalena Ruta (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 77.

These two early displays of artworks “rescued” from being stolen or destroyed, organized in Poland between 1945 and 1949, are from two post-war exhibitions: *Warsaw Accuses* (*Warszawa Oskarża*) organized in National Museum in Warsaw in 1945 and the traveling exhibition of *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* (*Uratowane dzieła sztuki artystów żydowskich*) from 1949. Both exhibitions displayed artworks created prior to 1939 to celebrate them, but also to represent the loss and destruction of Polish or Polish-Jewish culture during the Second World War. The two exhibitions differed in scale and status of the organizing institution, but they shared the same idea. Both personified objects and presented them as symbols of national culture that had become “victims of the war.” Using the two exhibitions and two kinds of practices related to art restitution, I will explore how after 1945 the urge to preserve the past became a crucial issue not only in relation to lost human beings, but also material heritage.

My thesis draws on the works of scholars, who wrote about the history of immediate post-war years in Poland, with a special emphasis on cultural reconstruction and Polish-Jewish history.<sup>4</sup> In case of both exhibitions, my research relies both on the primary sources and secondary literature. My study of *Warsaw Accuses* uses the works on the history of the exhibition and of the Warsaw’s national museum in general,<sup>5</sup> as well as on pieces which discussed the exhibition in the context of post-war spaces and ruins.<sup>6</sup> In my analysis of the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*, I drew on the work of Polish scholars who discussed the history of Jewish cultural

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<sup>4</sup> For example: Anna Cichopek-Gajraj’s study *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–48*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, (The Great Fear. A Popular Reaction to Crisis), (Warsaw: Znak, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Aleksandra Przeździecka-Kujałowicz, “*Warszawa oskarża*” muzeum zgruzowstałe i jego pierwsza wystawa (“Warsaw Accuses” Museum that Came Back from the Ruins and its First Exhibition), unpublished MA thesis, University of Warsaw Art History Department, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Agata Pietrasik, “Budowniczywie ruin: reprezentacje zburzonej Warszawy w rysunku i wystawach lat 40.” (“Constructors of Ruins: Representations of Ruined Warsaw in Drawings and Exhibitions from 1940s.”), *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 11 (2015); Michael Meng. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011).



institutions after the Holocaust,<sup>7</sup> and of Polish-Jewish art history.<sup>8</sup> Overall, this study contributes to the field by investigating strategies of re-contextualizing art and the nuances of meaning for Polish and Polish-Jewish art in the aftermath of World War 2.

## Approach to the subject

In the brochure accompanying the *Warsaw Accuses* exhibition, the museum director Stanisław Lorentz described the display as “the community of martyrdom of living Polish people and dead objects - the material exponents of Polish culture.”<sup>9</sup> This statement encapsulates several layers that are important for my thinking about the relation between exhibitions, objects and collective identity, and can serve as an introduction to this section, in which I will reflect on my approach, and the concepts behind it. Lorentz described the peculiar community that constitute the exhibition and juxtaposed its two different parts in opposition to each other. For him, living people and dead objects jointly manifested his nation’s suffering. He not only described the artworks in the museum as dead, as if they could ever be alive, but also denominates them as exponents of national character.

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<sup>7</sup> Agnieszka Żółkiewska, *Zerwana przeszłość: Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej inteligencji twórczej; Pomoc materialna i organizacja ze strony CKŻP (A Broken Past: Post-War Jewish Creative Intelligensia; Material Support and Organization of Central Committee of Polish Jews)* (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2017); Magdalena Tarnowska, “Plastycy żydowscy w Warszawie i Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych 1946-1949 – “Praca na rzecz ocalenia dziedzictwa kulturowego i odbudowy środowiska artystycznego Żydów polskich” (Jewish Visual Artists and Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts 1946-1949. Activities to preserve the cultural heritage and restore the artistic milieu of the polish Jews), *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Kielcach* 27 (2012); Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts.”

<sup>8</sup> Jakub Bendkowski, Mikołaj Getka-Kenig (ed.), *Józef Sandel. Art history and the fight for memory*, exhibition catalogue (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 2016); *Polak, Żyd, artysta. Tożsamość a awangarda* (Pole, Jew, Artist. Identity and Avant-garde), ed. Jarosław Suchan, (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> “Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie Urządzonej przez Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy wespół z Muzeum Narodowym w Warszawie Maj-Czerwiec 1945” (Warsaw Accuses: guide-book to the exhibition arranged by the Office of Reconstruction of the Capital together with the National Museum in Warsaw May-June 1945) *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XX* (1976): 643.

Following this logic, this thesis speaks about the displays of art by focusing on objects: asking questions about their afterlives after 1945 and the meanings which were ascribed to them. I am concerned with the notion of community – the interactions and relations – of objects and people who denominated them as symbols, in this case, of national suffering. I am interested in how the objects were utilized as a part of historical narrative and ascribed to the imagined community.<sup>10</sup> As biographies of humans and artworks are inseparably tied together, I am interested in objects and people – namely, art historians who dedicated their post-war careers to research, rescue and preservation of respectively Polish and Polish-Jewish artworks, but also the exhibition’s audience, journalists or people in positions of power.

My theoretical approach for understanding the relations between humans and objects in these exhibitions, derives from three main sources. Firstly, I draw on the history of art exhibitions and art collections. Secondly, I look at the material turn in the humanities, with its non-anthropocentric post-humanist paradigm, which calls into question the opposition of dead objects - living humans. Finally, as this thesis concerns the displays of artworks used to commemorate the past, to speak about their role and function I will use some of the vocabulary introduced by cultural memory studies.<sup>11</sup>

The discussed exhibitions belong to two realms of exhibition-making: they were temporary displays of artworks, and at the same time presentations of institutional collections, therefore representing ‘museum culture.’<sup>12</sup> Since the first museums appeared, they transformed from the private cabinet, and collections developed as a sign of social status to modern public

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<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg, Sandy Nairne (eds.), *Thinking about exhibitions*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 2. See also: Daniel Sherman, Irit Rogoff, *Museum culture: histories, discourses, spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

institutions.<sup>13</sup> Gradually public museums and their collections became an essential part of the bourgeois public sphere devoted to education and the preservation of artistic heritage.<sup>14</sup>

In both cases, the objects were assembled and arranged according to an subjective schema. A temporary art exhibition is the moment when the social, political, and economic forces that shape artistic milieus come together.<sup>15</sup> Some temporary art exhibitions with their rebellious character changed the course of art history, while others were used to legitimize the regime of political power. From salons to biennales, regardless of their social function and origin, each exhibition can reveal something about the society in which it takes place – from its taste to its political dynamics.

This thesis is a study of two temporary exhibitions. My decision to juxtapose them derives from the fact that they both represent the genre of a restitution exhibition, defined by Reesa Greenberg as “a new museum genre emerging after World War II in relation to the return of art and cultural property spoliated by the Nazi regime.”<sup>16</sup> As I will explain, they are not identical with what this term will mean in the subsequent decades: the exhibited objects were rescued or reclaimed shortly after the Nazi occupation ended, and the exhibition was not concerned with the legal implications of looting and restitution. However, similarly to the contemporary restitution exhibitions organized popularly from 2005 on, by representing a selection of rescued works, they represented the immense number of artworks that were lost. As Greenberg notes, in restitution exhibitions “the focus is on the act of restitution or the need for restitution rather than on aesthetic considerations, though these may be included.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, both exhibitions shared the idea of displaying rescued or salvaged artworks, which

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in 18th-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History: Volume 1: 1863-1959* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Reesa Greenberg, “Restitution Exhibitions: Issues of Ethnic Identity and Art,” *Intermédialités 15* (2010):105.

<sup>17</sup> Reesa Greenberg: “Restitution Exhibitions:” 105.

survived, and the emotional dimension of that experience was no less important than their material or artistic value. I argue that the discussed exhibitions can be described as prototypes of restitution exhibitions.

There exists an abundant body of literature dealing with the representation of the atrocities of Second World War in visual arts, from the problem of representation itself to the question of the affective power of war-time visual testimonies.<sup>18</sup> Other scholars have committed their careers to exploring the representations of war in historical museums' displays.<sup>19</sup> However, the concern of this thesis is different, since the vast majority of the artworks displayed in *Warsaw Accuses* and in the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* did not initially represent the atrocities of war. Most of the artworks that I will write about were created between the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the late 1930s. I am interested in how after 1945 the meaning of war-time experience was projected on the artworks, and how they become *orphaned*, that is deprived of their original meaning.

I intend to trace the ways in which *orphaned* artworks were rescued, and adopted by art historians, and became incorporated into narratives about art, identity and war. The term *orphaned* in the context of visual culture appeared initially in relation to film and was later adapted to photography.<sup>20</sup> In the context of film, orphaned relates to “neglected, lost, damaged, hidden, excised, rare, unique, odd, experimental, ephemeral, and utilitarian productions.”<sup>21</sup> Orphaned denotes visual material acquired literally ‘by chance’ or found – be it in a garbage

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<sup>18</sup> See for example: Daniel H. Magilow, Lisa Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); Sybil Milton, “Art of the Holocaust: A Summary” in *Reflections of the Holocaust in Art and Literature*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (City University of New York: New York, 1990), 147-152.; Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Muchitsch ed., *Does War Belong in the Museum?* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Ewa Stańczyk, “Recycling the Orphan Photograph: The New Life of Jewish Objects,” *Visual Studies* 31 (2016): 65.

<sup>21</sup> Dan Streible, “The State of Orphan Films: Editor’s Introduction,” *The Moving Image* 9 (2009): x.

can, flea market, or as a forgotten part of a museum archives.<sup>22</sup> I acknowledge that the discussed works were not anonymous often also the origin and provenance were known, and they have undergone the process of institutionalization and historical analysis. Still, I argue that through being incorporated in exhibitions, these “orphans” were re-appropriated and assigned with new meanings, just like found footage or orphaned photography.

Thus, I offer a close reading of two similar, yet very different art exhibitions. They are connected by the idea of displaying rescued artworks, which survived and by the fact that the emotional dimension of that experience was no less important than their material or artistic value. They differed by the scale of the enterprise, its form and time and realization. *Warsaw Accuses* was a spectacular display of more than 900 organized by major national institution, whereas the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* was a presentation of 62 pieces and prepared by essentially three people. While 1945 and *Warsaw Accuses* marks the beginning of the new post-war reality, the 1949 of the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*, already belongs to the time commonly described as Stalinism.<sup>23</sup> I discuss the dynamics of the period set by the two dates in the subsequent chapter, but first let me elaborate on my motivation for juxtaposing two exhibitions, which is threefold.

Firstly, although I acknowledge their differences, I argue they can be both interpreted as early restitution exhibitions, and thus be analyzed in a common frame. Secondly, by looking at the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*, and its travel to the Lower Silesia I intend to capture the attempt of rebuilding Jewish culture in post-Holocaust Poland in the wider frame that reaches beyond the omnipresent narrative describing the life of Jewish survivors solely through the

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<sup>22</sup> Japp Guldemon, “Found Footage: Cinema Exposed,” in *Found Footage. Cinema Exposed*, eds. Marente Bloemhevel, Giovanna Fossati, and Jaap Guldemon, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and EYE Film Institute Netherlands, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> In Polish historiography, Stalinism refers to the short period between 1948 and 1953.

lenses of anti-Semitic violence and inevitable emigration.<sup>24</sup> I intent to overcome this ahistorical perspective that projects subsequent migration on the Jewish life in the late nineteen-forties, and to shed light on people dedicated to bringing Jewish culture back from oblivion. Thirdly, I believe that the two cases can illuminate each other and problematize the notions of Polish and Jewish culture in the immediate post-war period. Namely, they show how was Polish-Jewish identity manifested and interpreted by the artists and the collectors prior to 1939, and subsequently how the works were subsequently interpreted through the lenses of the Holocaust.

The category of Polish-Jewish identity is not fixed but can be elastic and be manifested in different constellations of hybridity.<sup>25</sup> Amos Funkenstein's essay *Dialectics of assimilation* was written against the dichotomies between authentic and acquired elements of Jewish culture which as the author claimed, has always been constructed as an outcome of interaction and exchange.<sup>26</sup> Funkenstein assumed that certain cultural features that were absorbed from outside the Jewish tradition can become its marker, for example, through being practiced by Jewish academics, writers, artists or politicians. Following this idea, the author of *The Jewish Century* Yuri Slezkine, treated the Jewish involvement in communist societies as one of the forms of modern Jewish assimilation, just like Peter Gay did with psychoanalysis, or the modern literary novel.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This approach was particularly inspired by Anna Cichopek-Gajraj's *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia*.

<sup>25</sup> As Amos Funkenstein writes, "the question: what is original and therefore autochthonous in Jewish culture, as against what is borrowed, assimilated and therefore of alien provenance - that question is more often than not wrong and ahistorical. We rather ought to look for originality in the end product, not in the origins of its ingredients. The end product, no matter which sources fed into it, is original in some respects if it is unlike anything in its environment." Amos Funkenstein, "The Dialectics of Assimilation," *Jewish Social Studies* 2 (1995): 10.

<sup>26</sup> Amos Funkenstein, "The Dialectics of Assimilation:"10.

<sup>27</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Peter Gay, *Freud, Jews and Other Germans: Masters and Victims in Modernist Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

“I am only a painter and what has painting to do with being a Jew?” Max Lieberman famously observed, addressing the issue at the core of this thesis.<sup>28</sup> I do not believe there is such thing as Jewish art, only the art of Jewish artists, but the intersections of artistic work and identity politics are worth studying especially in such a moment as post-Holocaust Poland.<sup>29</sup> A close reading of art history can reveal nuances about the constructed identity of artworks, artists and collections. Jewish participation in the historical and cultural formations of the region raises the question of the Jewishness of Central European modernism in general. For example, taking into consideration that Jews played a central role in the historical and cultural formations of the Central Europe, the question is whether there is any modern art than does not bear Jewish influence.<sup>30</sup> Of course, all art created by Jewish artists in different circumstances is in some way Jewish as it belongs to the Jewish people and their history, but other will claim that that there is no Jewish art as we are not able to determine any essential stylistic artistic feature.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of this thesis, rather than determining what is Jewish in visual arts, I am interested in tracing the moments when constructed identities of Polish or Jewish art intersect, overlap or can exist in parallel. The question is, under which conditions a certain artist could have been considered as being inherently Jewish? Take two examples: the work of an assimilated Polish-Jewish artist who never thematized his Jewishness, and the collection of works of non-Jewish artists gathered by a Jewish entrepreneur as a means of assimilation. Which example would be more representative to enter the collection of the Jewish museum, or, which one can tell us more about the historical circumstances and intersections between art, identity and national history?

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Tom Sandqvist, *Ahasuerus at the Easel: Jewish Art and Jewish Artists in Central and Eastern European Modernism at the Turn of the Last Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 10.

<sup>29</sup> See for example: Tom Sandqvist, *Ahasuerus at the Easel*; Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Tom Sandqvist, *Ahasuerus at the Easel*, 54.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

My focus on artworks as such, rather than on certain of art-historical styles or movements, derives from the developments following the so-called material turn in humanities, with its notions of the social life of objects and objects' biographies, and the anthropologically informed approach to the production of knowledge and meaning. This "returns to things" in the humanities and social sciences, which was initiated in the late nineteen-eighties and has developed since, has drawn researchers' attention to objects, understood as social actors who can initiate causal events and effects in their surroundings. Arjun Appadurai introduced the concept of the "social life of things." He argued that things have social life of their own and proposed to observe the *flow* of things – how they are circulated, acquire value and become commodities.<sup>32</sup> Following him, cultural theorists proposed to focus on objects and their social life in order to illuminate the entanglements within networks of reception, collection, and display.

The idea that things have social lives does not imply that they have consciousness, but it calls for a recognition of their socializing function. As Ewa Domańska observed: “they solidify interpersonal relations, they participate in the creation of human identity at the individual and collective levels, and they mark its changes.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, my object-centered approach is not so much focused on the materiality of the object, but on its relevance as evidence of social relationships.<sup>34</sup> To my concern with objects I add the interest in context, people and experience.

As proposed by Igor Kopytoff, it is not only possible, but even necessary to write an object's biography, as “biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-63.

<sup>33</sup> Ewa Domańska, “The Material Presence of the Past,” *History and Theory*, 45 (2006): 340.

<sup>34</sup> Karen Harvey ed., *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process,” in *The Social Life of Things*, 67.



In contrast to human biography, the object's biography does not break off with death. Perception and meaning of the object are transformed through exchange, and it is the sum of social relationships that constitutes the object.<sup>36</sup> Once the object is 'born,' it is involved in sets of relationships, and it 'dies' when these relations cease to be valid.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, object biographies are non-linear, as the object undergoes a series of different lives and afterlives. Objects become alive within certain clusters of social relationships, which may be inactive at other points in time and space.<sup>38</sup>

Importantly, I decided to use some of the vocabulary introduced by the scholars of non-anthropocentric (or post-humanist) humanities, not for the sheer sake of using it. My choice is informed by the language of the sources – the way in which art historians conceptualized the exhibitions. Their notions of community, of a bond between humans and non-humans, recall of the contemporary theories of Arjun Appadurai, Igor Kopytoff, Bruno Latour, and Ewa Domańska, informed by technological development.<sup>39</sup> The metaphors of life and death of things used by cultural theorists since the 1990s are surprisingly similar to the language that protagonists of this study, Stanisław Lorentz and Józef Sandel, used in the late 1940s. Both art historians observed the wartime destruction of human life and dignity, but also of architecture and visual arts, and committed their lives to preservation and research. As I will explore in subsequent chapters, both used a similar language in which grief went hand in hand with the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Jody Joy, "Reinvigorating object biography: reproducing the drama of object lives," *World Archaeology* 41 (2009): 540.

<sup>38</sup> Jody Joy, "Reinvigorating object biography:" 544.

<sup>39</sup> As Ewa Domańska explains, "questions concerning the status of relics from the past, relations between the human and the nonhuman, the organic and the inorganic, between people and things and among things themselves, are of fundamental importance not only for reconceptualizing the study of the past, but also for the future of a world that involves technologies such as cloning, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, biotechnology, and transplantations using animal organs and biotronic implants." Ewa Domańska, "The Material Presence of the Past," *History and Theory*, 45 (2006): 338. See also: *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); "Materializing Ethnography," theme issue of *Journal of Material Culture* 9 (2004); ed. Victor Buchli, *The Material Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

personification of objects as victims, or survivors. The questions of the primary or secondary agency of objects, addressed by scholars interested in post-human perspective remains relevant when we try to determine whether the objects “rebel” against the roles and interpretations that were forced upon them.<sup>40</sup>

I follow scholars who orient their research towards things that talk,<sup>41</sup> but I am also interested in people, institutions and situations that made them talk in the processes of memory creation behind displaying rescued art. This thesis follows the objects within the interpersonal and institutional dynamics of the exhibitions, asking if and how they were utilized for political purposes, in the socio-political circumstances of immediate post-war Poland, Warsaw and Lower Silesia.

Ultimately, exhibiting art served a purpose which was political and moral, rather than aesthetical. The driving imperative of displaying rescued art in the aftermath of war was connected to formation of cultural memory, as described by scholars such as Aleida and Jan Assman.<sup>42</sup> I ask how the artworks which survived the war were harnessed for a constructed narrative, to constitute cultural memory as defined by Jan Assman: “The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.”<sup>43</sup>

The post-war exhibition-making that I discuss in this thesis can thus be conceived as a

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Martin, “Agents in Inter-Action: Bruno Latour and Agency,” *The Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 12 (2005): 283-311.

<sup>41</sup> See for example, ed. Lorraine Daston, *Things that talk: object lessons from art and science*, (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> While I refer to the scholars from the Western academic tradition of memory studies, there exists a whole body of work related to memory, identity and history of ideas from other regions. For example, separate tradition of “memory studies” exists in Poland. See: eds. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); for the discussion of Polish tradition of memory studies see: Kornelia Kończal, Joanna Wawrzyniak, “Provincializing memory studies: Polish approaches in the past and present,” *Memory Studies*, 11 (2017): 391-404.

<sup>43</sup> Jan Assman, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique*, 65 (1995): 132.

mediation between social and cultural memory.<sup>44</sup> Or, as a process in which the amorphous mass of artworks which Aleida Assman describes as “storage memory,” was made into significant “functional memory” through the operation of rescue and subsequent public display.<sup>45</sup> Once the war came to an end, as Tony Judt notes:

we leave the history of the Second World War and begin to encounter the myth of that war, a myth whose construction was under taken almost before the war itself was over. Everyone had an interest in this affair, the context of which ranged from private score settling to the emerging international balance of world power. Indeed, it was the years 1945–1948 that were the moment not only of the division of Europe and the first stage of its postwar reconstruction but also, and in an intimately related manner, the period during which Europe’s postwar memory was molded.<sup>46</sup>

Significantly, both displays provide an insight into the postwar process of constructing a collective victimhood. The displayed works, damaged or described as “accidentally rescued” or “saved,” embodied the post-war distinguishing and distancing oneself from those who had been the enemy, and consequently: the emotional and political necessity of judicial purge and retribution.<sup>47</sup> In this context, the work of art served as an “ideal victim” – innocent, mute, unable to respond to violence, which calls for a spokesperson to tell its story and thus, claim the recognition of the victimized group.

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<sup>44</sup> Aleida Assman, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 125.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,” in eds. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 296.

<sup>47</sup> See for example: Benjamin Zachariah, “On Not Understanding the Stranger: Histories, Collective Victimhood and the Futility of Postcolonialism,” in *Cultural Politics and Identity: the Public Space of Recognition*, eds. Barbara Weber, Karlfriedrich Herb, Eva Marsal, Takara Dobashi and Petra Schweitzer (Berlin: Lit, 2011), 101-116.

## Thesis structure

The present thesis consists of this introduction, three chapters, and conclusions. In the first chapter, I will shed a light on the struggle for memory during and after WW2 and locate the two exhibitions in a larger context. To do so, I will use three R words, which I consider crucial for this period. Firstly: remembrance, as the subject of my thesis concerns not only art exhibitions, but more importantly, quests to commemorate and fight for memory through displaying objects. I will explain how memorialization and remembering became crucial stakes during the Second World War and were a core point of political and intellectual debates during the postwar years. Secondly: reconstruction, as post-1945 Poland was to a large extent a country of ruins, in a physical, moral and cultural sense. Thirdly: restitution, as the meaning of “rescued artworks” in the title of my topic is broad, and it deserves explanation and elaboration. I will elaborate on the metaphorical, political and legal meanings of “rescuing art” and identify its two different types: “restitution from above” as in case of Stanisław Lorentz and National Museum, and “restitution from below” as in the case of the Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, and Józef Sandel.

The second and third chapters are devoted to the exhibition *Warsaw Accuses* organized in the National Museum in Warsaw in 1945, and the exhibition of the *Rescued Words of Jewish Artists*. In each case, the analysis has two main layers. First is the social and political background of the exhibition, the idea behind it, its realization and reception. I will discuss the activity of cultural institutions of different kinds and status and shed light on their principles and challenges. The second layer focuses on the objects displayed in the exhibitions. I discuss exhibited artworks not from the perspective of art history but focus on their social biographies to reveal how different meanings were ascribed to them and how they were interpreted for the purpose of the historical or political narrative.

In the last part, the conclusions of this thesis will be followed up with the narratives of persons, objects and institutions described in chapters two and three. Although I am mostly concerned with a narrow selection of events during four years that followed 1945, I will argue that the mediation between collections, identity and memory reaches much further and that, even though human protagonists of this study are long dead, the objects still live on in variety of contexts.

# 1. Remembrance, Reconstruction, Restitution, 1945-1949

## 1.1 War and the fight for memory

In the face of the destruction that the Second World War brought to Poland, not only survival and sovereignty but also memory and remembrance became important: leaving a trace of the dark history to next generations became a driving imperative for many individuals, groups and institutions. In this chapter, I will explain the attempts to prevent the war from erasing national memory.<sup>48</sup> In the following pages, I will describe how war was also a fight for survival of culture in both symbolic and very practical sense, such as securing the material heritage. I will explain how this struggle continued after 1945, to create a context for introducing two ways of postwar art restitution carried out by Stanisław Lorentz and Józef Sandel respectively.

The most celebrated, and perhaps the most heroic, case of a fight for preserving memory during the war, was the so-called “Oneg Shabbat” archive:<sup>49</sup> documentation of the life in the Warsaw Ghetto and of annihilation of Polish Jewry prepared by the group led by the historian Emmanuel Ringelblum.<sup>50</sup> Part of the archive, excavated in September 1946 after most of its authors had perished, serves as a major source of Holocaust research to this day. It was exactly

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48 Jan Assman, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” 135; See also: Aleida Assman, “Transformations between history and memory,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 75 (2008): 49-72.

49 Oneg Shabbat was a secret group operating in Warsaw Ghetto from 1940, documenting the life, struggle and death of the Jewish people during the German occupation in Warsaw and beyond. The archive was initially conceived as a documentation center, a place for collecting materials of various provenance. Collected in it documents, diaries, historical, economic, literary, about social issues, as well as graphics and paintings, and Ringelblum's personal notes and essays. See: *The Warsaw Ghetto Oneg Shabes-Ringelblum Archive. Catalog and Guide*, eds. Robert Moses Shapiro, Tadeusz Epsztein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2009); Samuel D. Kassow, *Who will write our history?: Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). Similarly, Polish Underground State recognized the importance of remembering the turbulent time, and kept records of military operations, collected materials for the future works and contributed historical content to the underground press. Namely, Military Historical Bureau (Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne) was devoted to this purpose.

50 Emmanuel Ringelblum (1900-1944) – Polish-Jewish historian, educator and social activist, creator of the underground archive of the Warsaw Ghetto.

the feeling of urgency in recording the present, against oblivion and forgetting the committed crimes that drove the “Oneg Shabbat” members.

Just as the war-time crimes of Nazis towards humans, were documented with a great importance, so too were those committed against culture and heritage:<sup>51</sup> not only to preserve the memory but to create a blueprint for the future restitution and reconstruction.<sup>52</sup> German occupation resulted in relocating and looting Polish cultural heritage on a massive, unprecedented scale. Museums and palaces were searched by commissions of museum employees and trained scientists with expertise in art history who were looking for valuable possessions.<sup>53</sup>

The actions to secure collections, and later to prepare for post-war restitution, started as early as 1939, both by institutions trying to preserve national treasures and individuals concerned with their belongings. Polish museums tried to secure and hide the objects to prevent them from being destroyed or stolen and transported West.<sup>54</sup> Private collectors wanted to secure their

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51 As Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz explains, the Nazis aimed at complete destruction of both Polish and Polish culture: Contrary to the procedure in the German Reich and the occupied countries of western and central Europe (including Czechoslovakia and Hungary), in Poland and, up to July 1941, in the newly occupied eastern territories, the Nazis purposefully destroyed and looted not just Jewish and ‘enemy’ property but to a high degree also State, communal as well as private property owned by non-Jews. Apart from the economical dimension of ruthless exploitation, these activities had an ideological purpose: the destruction of Polish culture together with the annihilation of Polish intelligentsia (teachers, priests, free professions and so on), as well as forced resettlement of large groups of Polish society served the Nazi aim of enslaving all Poles and using them as merely cheap labour in the grand plan of conquest. However severe the oppression and exploitation of the general populace of the occupied Polish regions, it was not a planned genocidal-type expropriation and extermination of an entire community, as in the case of the Jewish citizens. Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property in Post-War Poland,” *Art Antiquity and Law* vol. XIV, Issue 2 June (2009): 149.

52 For the details of Nazi plunder of looted art treasures from Poland, see for example: Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa* (London: Macmillan 1994), 57.

53 The special looting unit, SS Einsatzkommando Paulsen (for the so-called Sicherstellung der Deutschen Kunst- und Kulturhistorischen Denkmälern securing the German Art and Cultural Monuments) was active in Poland since 1939. See: Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 57. See also: Jonathan Petropoulos, “Art Historians and Nazi Plunder”, *New England Review*, 21 (2000): 5-30.

54 For the protection and rescue of art in Warsaw, see: Tomasz A. Pruszek, “Zabezpieczanie i ratowanie dzieł sztuki w Warszawie wobec zagrożeń w okresie II wojny światowej” (Protecting and saving works of art from the perils of World War II in Warsaw), *Almanach Muzealny* 8 (2014): 191-219; For the case of National Museum in Krakow, see: Diana Błońska, “W obliczu kataklizmu. Zabezpieczenie zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie przed pierwszą i drugą wojną światową” (Facing Disaster. Protection of the art collection of the National Museum in Krakow before the First and the Second World War), *Dzieje Najnowsze, Rocznik XLIX* (2017): 27-53.

collections from confiscation, and many of them moved them, or at least parts of them abroad prior to 1939.<sup>55</sup> For others, the solution was to deposit their artistic possessions in the collections of public institutions.<sup>56</sup> As I will explain later, some of them never returned to their owners and enriched the storehouses of the Polish state.<sup>57</sup>

Once the war broke out, individuals and groups meticulously documented the looted treasures of national culture, precious art and books, hoping that it would help to trace it and ultimately get it back once the war is over. Registration of cultural losses in Poland was possible due to the joint efforts of the government-in-exile in London and the Polish Underground State.<sup>58</sup> The publications such as *The Nazi Kultur in Poland* (1942, published 1945)<sup>59</sup> or *Cultural Losses of Poland: Index of Polish Cultural Losses During the German Occupation, 1939–1944* (1944),<sup>60</sup> tried to sum up the effect of the occupation for Polish material culture using reports delivered by the Polish underground and public sources.<sup>61</sup>

Scholars who cooperated with the government in exile documented the destruction, created plans for reconstruction, and gave visibility to what was happening in Poland to the audience abroad. Speaking about the volume *Cultural losses in Poland* published in 1944, its editor and

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Lesser Gieldziński and Benjamin Mintz, see: Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz, “The History of Judaica and Judaica Collections in Poland Before, During and After the Second World War: An Overview” in eds. Julie-Marthe Cohen, Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, *Neglected Witnesses: The Fate of Jewish Ceremonial Objects during the Second World War and After*, (Amsterdam: Jewish Historical Museum, 2011), 137.

<sup>56</sup> Among others Bronisław Krystall and Leopold Bienthal deposited their belongings in National Museum in Warsaw, Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz, “The History of Judaica and Judaica Collections,” 147.

<sup>57</sup> I elaborate on the fate of the Jewish collections in chapter 4.

<sup>58</sup> Marek Sroka, “‘Nations Will Not Survive Without Their Cultural Heritage’ Karol Estreicher, Polish Cultural Restitution Plans and the Recovery of Polish Cultural Property from the American Zone of Occupation,” *The Polish Review* 57 (2012): 3-28.

<sup>59</sup> *The Nazi Kultur in Poland*. By several authors of necessity temporarily anonymous (London: Polish Ministry of Information by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1945).

<sup>60</sup> *Cultural Losses of Poland. Index of Polish Cultural losses during the German occupation 1939-1944* (London: Polish Ministry of Information by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1944). Reprint Karol Estreicher, *Straty kultury polskiej pod okupacją niemiecką wraz z oryginalnymi dokumentami grabieży* (*Losses of the Polish Culture Under German Occupation with Source Materials*) (Kraków: Pałac Sztuki Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Sztuk Pięknych, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Marek Sroka, “‘Nations Will Not Survive Without Their Cultural Heritage.’” 9.



leading figure in documenting the losses Karol Estreicher<sup>62</sup> explained the aim as “to give a complete picture of looting and destruction to those, who, at international conferences, will decide on cultural compensation (...) This book has an immediate practical purpose, namely to provide a compilation of Polish evidence ready for the end of the war, to facilitate the restitution of whatever may still be recovered.”<sup>63</sup> He also expressed his appreciation for all those who “watched the activities of the Germans in Poland, often at the risk of their own lives, and sent reports to London.”<sup>64</sup>



Figure 1. National Museum in Warsaw after the war.

1945. Source: the webpage of the National Museum.

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<sup>62</sup> Karol Estreicher Jr. (1906-1984) was a Polish art historian, writer and bibliographer, director of Museum of Jagiellonian University between 1951-1976. He was a son of Karol Estreicher, bibliographer and the creator of bibliografia Polska.

<sup>63</sup> *Cultural Losses of Poland. Index of Polish Cultural losses during the German occupation 1939-1944* quoted in Marek Sroka, “Nations Will Not Survive:” 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

The authors of *Nazi Kultur in Poland* stated that “Art collections and relics at manor-houses and country residences have doubtless been in great part destroyed, particularly in territory incorporated in the Reich,” adding that “the confiscation of collections belonging to persons of Jewish origin would need a chapter to itself.”<sup>65</sup> Although the scale made it impossible to record the full picture of what was done to the Jewish possessions, *Black Book of Polish Jewry* written by Jakub Appenzlak<sup>66</sup> and published in New York in 1943, gave an overview of the gigantic scale of losses.<sup>67</sup> The reports of Appenzlak, just like those by Karol Estreicher gave an indication of the many Jewish art collections and libraries that were destroyed. Those documents were later used in the identification and distribution of the object recovered by Allied forces and still serve as important source in the provenance research.<sup>68</sup>

The local attempts to register and document looted material were largely concentrated in Warsaw and its National Museum.<sup>69</sup> Documents about Nazi plunder were collected there under supervision of Stanisław Lorentz.<sup>70</sup> “I did it quite publicly,” recalled Lorentz, “I commissioned

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<sup>65</sup> *The Nazi Kultur in Poland*. By several authors of necessity temporarily anonymous (London: Polish Ministry of Information by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1945), 112; quoted in Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property:” 153.

<sup>66</sup> Jakub Appenzlak (1894-1950) was a journalist and editor of *Nasza Trybuna*, chair of the Jewish Association for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, and a Zionist activist and a husband of Paulina Appenzlak, the editor of the Warsaw-based, Polish-language Jewish women’s weekly newspaper *Ewa*, an advocate of contraception and women’s reproductive rights. See: Joanna Godlewska, “Polski Żyd: Jakub Appenzlak jako krytyk teatralny,” (Polish Jew: Jakub Appenzlak as Theatre Critic), *Pamiętnik teatralny* 1–4 (1992): 127–134; Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*, trans. Abe Shenitzer (Syracuse, N.Y., 2003).

<sup>67</sup> Jacob Apenszlak (ed.), *The Black Book of Polish Jewry. An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry Under the Nazi Occupation* (New York, 1943); Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property:” 144.

<sup>68</sup> Still, those works remain some of the most relevant sources for those researching provenance, history of pre-war Jewish collections (Apenszlak listed particular collectors and characterized their belongings) and wartime losses of visual arts. See: Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowitz, “The History of Judaica and Judaica Collections in Poland,” 160.

<sup>69</sup> The museum functioned as Stadtmuseum and was closed to the public.

<sup>70</sup> For my generation, Professor Stanisław Lorentz was a lighthouse illuminating the horizon and pointing the ways for lives of young people, adepts of art history, museology and conservation.” writes Andrzej Michałowski about Stanisław Lorentz, who was and still is, one of the most iconic figures of the Polish art history and museology. Born in 1899, graduate of Warsaw University, Lorentz was leading the National Museum since 1936. He fulfilled his role during WW2, being actively involved in the protection of National Heritage. After 1945, Lorentz expanded the National Museum, participated in promoting Polish art abroad and was a teacher to numerous generations of art historians and museum professionals. See: Andrzej Michałowski, “Stanisław Lorentz (1899-1991)”, *Muzealnictwo* 34 (1992), 102. During the war, Stanisław Lorentz was in charge of two Units of Underground State dealing with cultural losses: Museums and Collections Group operating in the Department of

inventories of various groups and collections, and officially I said that it was for Schellenberg (the German museum commissioner). The museum workers, except for the more initiated ones, generally did not know that by making different catalogs and filling out the cards, they were compiling lists of works looted by the Germans.”<sup>71</sup> Of all the countless attempts to salvage the important parts of Polish culture, perhaps the most famous is the so-called Pruszków action - evacuation of works of art, archives, manuscripts, and architectural documentations to the nearby Pruszków from destroyed city after Warsaw Uprising.<sup>72</sup> A separate fascinating story can be told about books or archival documents related to architecture salvaged from the wartime Warsaw. Jan Zachwatowicz<sup>73</sup> and his collaborators managed to salvage pre-war inventories and measurements of buildings<sup>74</sup> that proved more than useful for the post-war reconstruction of the city.<sup>75</sup>

Once the disastrous years came to an end, the question emerged of how the war should be remembered. Already in 1944, shortly after the Red Army liberated Lublin, Majdanek was

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Education and Culture, and of the cultural section of the committee of Revindication and Reparations. See: Marek Sroka, “Nations Will Not Survive:” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Jarocki, *Rozmowy z Lorentzem*, 204.

<sup>72</sup> After the failure of the Warsaw Uprising, a group of circa two hundred individuals led by Lorentz, participated in the evacuation of works of art, books and manuscripts from the burning capital. They traveled daily to the ruined city to prepare and in various ways, transported precious objects to Pruszków. See: Tomasz A. Pruszek, “Zabezpieczanie i ratowanie dzieł sztuki w Warszawie: 214.

<sup>73</sup> Jan Zachwatowicz (1900-1983) was a Polish architect, professor of the Warsaw Politechnik, restorer of architecture. As Małgorzata Popiołek notes he was “the organizer of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office and Poland’s chief state conservationist, who had already begun his career as an architect before the war. Due to his rhetorical skills and political connections, he managed to integrate the reconstruction program of Warsaw’s monuments into the propaganda program of the socialist party” See: Małgorzata Popiołek, “Warsaw: A Reconstruction that Began Before the War”, in: *Post War Reconstruction: The Lessons for Europe. A Symposium at the Lebanese American University*, (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2019), 45.

<sup>74</sup> Piotr Majewski, “Nasze było dla nas bezcenne... Ochrona dóbr kultury w działalności Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego (1939-1945)” (What was ours was invaluable to us... Preservation of cultural heritage as part of the Polish Underground State operations 1939–1945), *Muzealnictwo* 58 (2017): 16.

<sup>75</sup> See: Małgorzata Popiołek, “Warsaw: A Reconstruction that Began Before the War”, in *Post War Reconstruction: The Lessons for Europe. A Symposium at the Lebanese American University*, (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2019): 44-52; Stanislaw Dziewulski and Stanislaw Jankowski, “The Reconstruction of Warsaw,” *The Town Planning Review* 28 (1957): 210.

turned into the first commemorative museum.<sup>76</sup> Between 1945 and 1948,<sup>77</sup> as scholars such as Zofia Wóycicka discussed, the social memory of World War II was not yet canonized and was a subject of many narratives and differing ideas.<sup>78</sup> Although some of the issues such as Soviet occupation remained largely a taboo from the beginning, other things were still possible to discuss and negotiate.<sup>79</sup> That was the case of debates surrounding the Death and Concentration Camps, as described in detail by Zofia Wóycicka, Jonathan Huener or Michael C. Steinlauf.<sup>80</sup>

The case of the commemoration of Auschwitz after 1945 illustrates the dynamics of this period, which led to what Wóycicka described as *arrested mourning* – the monopolization of the wartime narratives by the Polish communist state, and subsequent deemphasis on Jewish suffering and victimization.<sup>81</sup> In this interpretation, the camp was primarily a place of Polish martyrdom, its victim “prisoner who was not a helpless victim but a resistance fighter, a hero, a martyr suffering and dying for some higher good, like the Polish nation, the Catholic faith, or socialism.”<sup>82</sup> After 1945, the wartime memory was negotiated between institutions such as the Polish Union of Former Political Prisoners, the Central Committee of Polish Jews, and institutions of political power (Polish Socialist Party, Polish United Workers' Party). The mission to remember and document the Holocaust was taken up by, among others, the Jewish

<sup>76</sup> For the information about the first years of Majdanek Museum, see: Krzysztof Banach, “Działalność wystawiennicza Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku w latach 1944–2014” (The exhibition activity of the Majdanek National Museum 1944-2014), *Zeszyty Majdanka* XXVI (2014): 273.

<sup>77</sup> The year marks the fusion of the Polish Workers Party and the Polish Socialist Party.

<sup>78</sup> Zofia Wóycicka, *Przerwana Przerwana żałoba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944–1950*. (Arrested Mourning. Polish Conflicts Around the Memory of the Nazi Concentration Camps and the Holocaust 1944-1950) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio 2009), 239.

<sup>79</sup> See for example, Marci Shore, “Jezyk, Pamiec i Rewolucyjna Awangarda: Kształtowanie Historii Powstania w Getcie Warszawskim, 1944-1950” (Language, Memory and Revolutionary Avantgarde. Formation of the History of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising), *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 188 (1998): 44.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration* (Athens: Ohio University Press 2004); Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

<sup>81</sup> After the liberation, Auschwitz was to become a place of commemoration of Jewish and international victims, but soon it was employed in the Polish martyrdom narrative, which dominated in Stalinism. It is very meaningful, the first permanent exhibition was opened on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the first deportation of Poles, on the June 14, 1947. For the Jews the camp was the symbol of the great tragedy of Holocaust, but in the Polish consciousness, as Władysław Bartoszewski explained, the camp was set up “primarily to destroy the most prominent elements of the Polish nation.” Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics*, 29.

Historical Commission established in liberated Lublin in 1944, which for three years collected testimonies and sources operating in several Polish cities and pioneered the historiography about the Holocaust.<sup>83</sup>

Now, let me turn to the role of Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, ŻTKS)<sup>84</sup> and its chairman, an important protagonist of this study, the art historian Józef Sandel.<sup>85</sup> After spending most of the war years in Lvov, Vilnius and Turkmenia, he wanted to contribute to the commemoration of murdered Jews as soon as he came back to Poland in 1946. It is fair to say that he was a moving force behind the ŻTKSP, in which he worked together with Ernestyna Podhorizer-Zaikin<sup>86</sup> (later his wife), Henryk Eljowicz<sup>87</sup> and others.<sup>88</sup> Apart from the daily activities of the organization in

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<sup>83</sup> See for example: Olga Kartashova, *Holocaust history between liberation and Sovietization: the publications of the Central Jewish Historical Commission in Poland 1945-1947*, MA Thesis, Central European University, 2017. [http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2017/kartashova\\_olga.pdf](http://www.etd.ceu.edu/2017/kartashova_olga.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> The Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts had been an important institution devoted to the promotion of the works of Jewish artists before the war, and was revived in October 1946 by Natan Rappaport, Chaim Hanft, Rafał Mandelzweig, Mieczysław Berman, Zofia Rozenstrauch and Józef Sandel. The latter, who had just returned to Poland after spending the war in the USSR, became the leading figure and chairman of the organization. The society engaged in helping artists who survived the Holocaust (which at first had been the most burning issue), developed a collection and organized individual and group exhibitions, including *The Exhibition of Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*. The Society existed with a break during the war from 1923–1950. Its most important tasks included the promotion of Jewish art by organizing exhibitions, lectures, courses, accompanying events such as balls and auctions of works of art, as well as publications of catalogues and press articles. By 1939, forty collective and twenty-five individual exhibitions took place. See: Agnieszka Żółkiewska, *Zerwana przeszłość: Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej inteligencji*, 95; Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts,” 77.

<sup>85</sup> Józef Sandel (1894-1962) was an art critic, art dealer and art historian. Born in Kolomyia, during the Great War he was in the Austrian Army. He was a member of the communist party. Between 1929-1933 he run a gallery in Dresden, where he presented works of leftist artists. After 1933 he emigrated: lived in Yugoslavia and Poland, where he was involved in the activities of ŻTKSP. After spending war in Turkmenia, Sandel came back to Poland in 1946 to re-establish ŻTKSP and became its leader. Between 1949 and 1954, he was a coordinator of the art museum of the Jewish historical institute. Agnieszka Żółkiewska, *Zerwana przeszłość: Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej Inteligencji*, 232; Erna Podhorizer-Sandel, “Wspomnienie o Józefie Sandlu (W 10 rocznicę śmierci)” (A memory of Józef Sandel on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of death), *Biuletyn ŻIH* 85 (1973): 111-119.

<sup>86</sup> Ernestyna Podhorizer (1903-1984, Ernestyna Podhorizer-Zaikin, later Podhorizer-Sandel) was a graphic artist and art critic. Before the war she graduated from the faculty of mathematics and natural sciences of the Liviv University, and was a high school teacher associated with leftist circles. After the war worked as a secretary of the ŻTKSP, later an employee of Jewish Historical Institute. A widow of Vyacheslav Zaikin, university lecturer. In 1950 she married Sandel, his colleague in the ŻTKSP. In 1969 she was appointed head of the Museum of the JHI.

<sup>87</sup> Henryk Eljowicz (1896-1969) – between 1946 and 1949 he was a secretary of ŻTKSP. Later in his life he worked in Desa auction house. He was a brother of Maksymilan Eljowicz, a painter murdered in Treblinka. See: Agnieszka Żółkiewska, *Zerwana przeszłość: Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej Inteligencji*, 234.

<sup>88</sup> Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts,” 80.

supporting Jewish artists, collecting art, and organizing exhibitions, Sandel also started to collect materials for a book that listed and commemorated Jewish artists murdered in the Holocaust, which was finally published a decade later.<sup>89</sup> It is important to emphasize this context of Sandel's exhibition making, collecting art, and information about deceased artists. All of them should be considered, as "art history and the fight for memory," as Jakub Bendkowski and Mikołaj Getka-Kenig put it.<sup>90</sup> I will elaborate on Sandel's work in collecting art in the last section of this chapter, and in the third chapter I will discuss the exhibition *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* as an example of ŻTKSP's activity.



Figure 2. Józef Sandel and Ernestyna Podhorizer.

Circa 1950. Source: Central Jewish Library, online collection.

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<sup>89</sup> Józef Sandel, *Umgekumene yidishe kinstler in Poylen* (Jewish artists in Poland who perished) (Varshe : Farlag Yidish Bukh, 1957), two volumes.

<sup>90</sup> Jakub Bendkowski, Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, *Józef Sandel. Art history and the fight for memory*.

With all the preparations of documenting the art looted by the Nazis during the war, after 1945 numerous initiatives were taken to recover what was lost. The material prepared by art historians served as a starting point for the register of the losses drawn up in the Office of Revival and Compensation operating within the structures of the Ministry of Culture and Art, and was used by the Polish restitution missions seeking cultural goods. Again, Karol Estreicher was a central figure in those efforts, due to his involvement in the Commission for the Protection and Restitution of Cultural Material (so-called Vaucher's commission).<sup>91</sup>

In 1945, Estreicher decided to return to Poland, and to engage in restoration of material culture, despite the criticism of some London's emigres who did not see the point of engaging with the communist state. Starting in November 1945, he went on restitution missions in the American occupation zones, to bring back works canonic for Polish culture such as masterpieces of gothic sculpture: e.g. Veit Stoss's altar and the Madonna of Kruźlowa.<sup>92</sup> Due to his cooperation with American military authorities, a train-size cargo of recovered objects arrived in Poland in April 1946, met by the celebratory atmosphere and governmental representatives. From December 1946 to December 1948, Estreicher went on seven similar restitution missions, recovering, among others, a collection of paintings from the Warsaw Association of the Propagation of Fine Arts "Zachęta." However, some of the recovered objects turned out to be problematic in face of changing political climate of Poland. Marek Sroka describes the case of the portrait of Józef Piłsudski painted by Stefan Norblin,<sup>93</sup> recovered from the Central Collecting Point in

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<sup>91</sup> Writing about commission's preparatory work, Lynn H. Nicholas states „only one country was already prepared: the infatigable Karol Estreicher of Poland had made such a list, not always accurate, based as it was on the rawest intelligence, but certainly impressive in its revelation of the massive dislocations of his nation's patrimony” Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 277.

<sup>92</sup> Iris Lauterbach, Fiona Elliott, *the Central Collecting Point in Munich: a new beginning for the restitution and protection of art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2018), 139-142.

<sup>93</sup> Marek Sroka, “‘Nations Will Not Survive Without Their Cultural Heritage’ Karol Estreicher, Polish Cultural Restitution Plans and the Recovery of Polish Cultural Property from the American Zone of Occupation,” *The Polish Review* 57 (2012): 20.

Munich.<sup>94</sup> Despite its artistic and historic value, after its return to Poland the portrait had to be hidden, as Piłsudski was considered an anti-Russian reactionary, a figure against the principles of the new political system.

While Estreicher was a leading figure in the search for Polish art in the American zone of occupation, others were looking for works hidden and left behind by the Nazis on the territory of the new Polish state. One of the “treasure hunters” was Stanisław Lorentz (fig. 5). As early as in February 1945, after being called to Lublin,<sup>95</sup> he became the head of The Supreme Directorate of Museums and Monuments Protection (Naczelna Dyrekcja Muzeów i Ochrony Zabyków), operating on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and was responsible for all national museums and heritage. During the war hundreds of artworks looted from the National Museum in Warsaw, as well as from other institutional and private collections, were transported to Lower Silesia. The information about departure points of those transportations served as a starting point for the restitution mission carried out from Spring 1945 onwards. Lorentz went on his first trip on May 28. From Wrocław he went to Legnica, and twenty other towns in Lower Silesia, reached as far as Poznań in Western Poland, and went back to Warsaw.<sup>96</sup> Of course, he was not alone, and while some of the people were searching in the West, other similar missions were carried out on Pomerania by Michał Walicki.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Central Collecting Point in Munich was the central place of collection and storage of works of art looted by the Nazi regime. See: Iris Lauterbach, Fiona Elliott, *the Central Collecting Point in Munich: a new beginning for the restitution and protection of art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute 2018).

<sup>95</sup> Lorentz was appointed by Wincenty Rzymowski. For the history of Lublin government, see for example George H. Janczewski, “The Origin of the Lublin Government,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 120 (1972): 410-433.

<sup>96</sup> Alina Kowalczykowska, “Wrocław 1945 – Z Albumów Stanisława Lorentza” (Wrocław 1945 – from Stanisław Lorentz’s Albums) *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej* XXV (2016): 50. See also: Jarosław Robert Kudelski, “Rewindykacja dóbr kultury na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945-1949,” (Revindication of cultural property in Lower Silesia 1945-1949) *Kwartalnik Historyczny Rocznik CXXXIII* (2016): 71-94.

<sup>97</sup> Michał Walicki (1904-1966) was an art historian, professor at the Warsaw University of Technology who worked in the National Museum and participated in the restitution missions. During the war Walicki was also involved in the Polish Underground. See also note 340.



From 1945, Lorentz was granted great power – he could immediately promote someone for the museum director or claim practically any goods for the museum needs. Despite his high position and respect among the Poles, during his search for looted art he had to constantly negotiate with the Soviets. From the official subsidies, Lorentz purchased bottles of vodka and cigarettes, as gifts to the Soviet commanders of towns – it was their decision to let the art be taken back to Warsaw or elsewhere.<sup>98</sup> In some cases, he was late and arrived to the rooms emptied by the Soviets while trucks full of art were on the way East.<sup>99</sup>

On the first day of June 1945 Lorentz wrote a letter to his wife Irena, giving a glimpse of the speed and development of the mission. “I spent Friday in Katowice, Saturday in Gliwice, on Sunday - I arrived in Opole on the Oder, today - I was in Pszczyna. I have almost full information that several wagons with the Warsaw collections are standing at the station in Świdnica, south of Wrocław. I go there tomorrow with the assistance of 3 militiamen, but it's pure formality, because it is completely safe and everywhere you can drive safely.”<sup>100</sup> Ten days later, when he uncovered the major collection of precious works from the collection of his museum, he wrote again announcing the triumph: “It’s a great success! We have found and temporarily secured over 500 cases from the collections of the National Museum - probably everything they took after the uprising (...).”<sup>101</sup> Importantly, his findings included canvases of Jan Matejko, the most celebrated Polish national nineteenth-century painter who depicted groundbreaking moments in Polish history. Later a spacial displayed in the National Museum’s central hall celebrated the findings (fig.4).<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Stanislaw Lorentz, to Irena Lorentz 11 June 1945 quoted in Alina Kowalczykowa, “Wrocław 1945,” 52.

<sup>99</sup> Stanislaw Lorentz, to Irena Lorentz 11 June 1945 quoted in Alina Kowalczykowa, “Wrocław 1945,” 51.

<sup>100</sup> Stanislaw Lorentz, to Irena Lorentz 11 June 1945 quoted in Alina Kowalczykowa, “Wrocław 1945,” 47.

<sup>101</sup> Stanislaw Lorentz, to Irena Lorentz 11 June 1945 quoted in Alina Kowalczykowa, “Wrocław 1945,” 46.

<sup>102</sup> Alina Kowalczykowa, “Wrocław 1945,” 52.



Figure 3 Truck with recovered art in front of the Museum.

Soldiers standing in front of the museum, 1945. Inscription on the truck can be translated as: [art] looted by Germans, returns to Warsaw. Source: Album of Stanisław Lorentz, archive of Alina Kowalczykova. Courtesy of Alina Kowalczykova

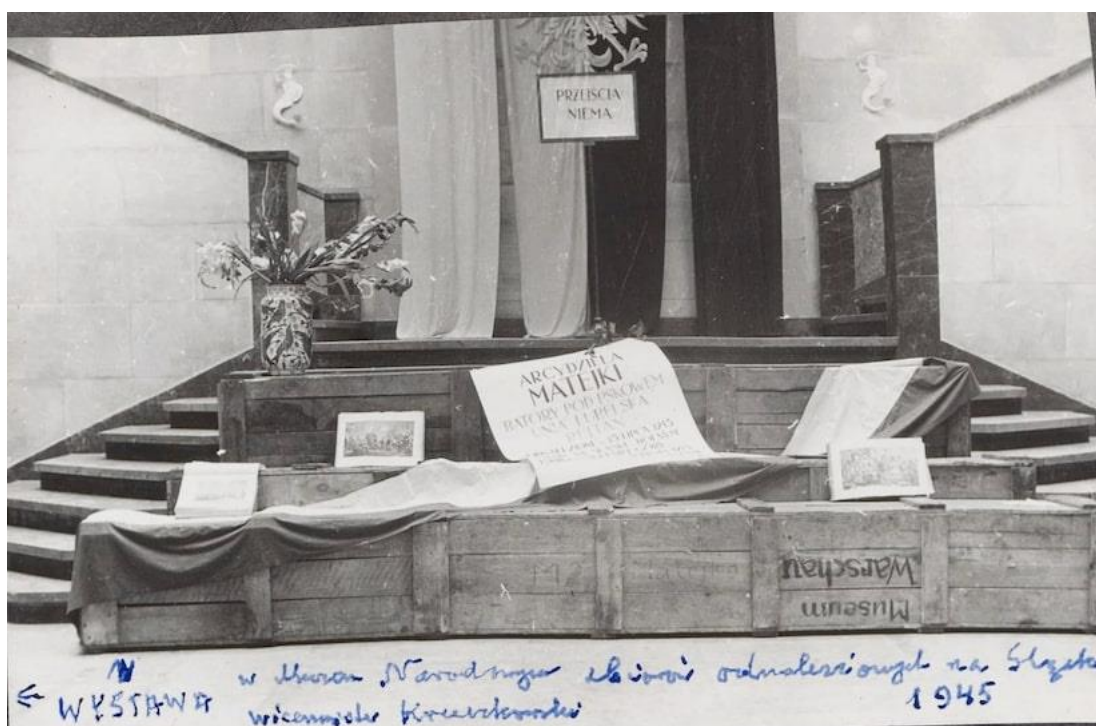


Figure 4. Recovered chests presented in the hall of National Museum

1945. The poster presents “masterpieces of Matejko.” The chest signs “Museum Warschau.” Source: Album of Stanisław Lorentz, archive of Alina Kowalczykova. Courtesy of Alina Kowalczykova



Figure 5. Restitution mission in Lower Silesia.

1945, Stanisław Lorentz standing first on the right. Source: Album of Stanisław Lorentz, archive of Alina Kowalczykowa. Courtesy of Alina Kowalczykowa



Figure 6. Restitution mission on the way.

Source: Album of Stanisław Lorentz, archive of Alina Kowalczykowa. Courtesy of Alina Kowalczykowa

## 1.2 “Rescued art:” two kinds of restitution

Artworks were, and sometimes still are, perceived as the war’s last prisoners. As the editors of *Nazi-Looted Art and Its Legacies* write in the introduction, “the fight for the restitution symbolized the battle for remembering and reconstructing of stolen lives of individuals and communities.”<sup>103</sup> Restitution is directly connected to the feeling of justice. “I love you very much and I would like to get back, but I must do everything for our collections to return – it is a great point in my life. Then, the most important obligation will be filled” wrote Lorentz to his wife, explaining the moral imperative that drove him.<sup>104</sup> However, it would be naïve to simply accept Lorentz’s sense of justice as universal, as many of his decisions can be considered controversial. For example, he not only took art to its original place, but also enriched Warsaw’s collection with precious findings that before WW2 had belonged to the Germans and conceived it as a just act of compensation.<sup>105</sup> Justice in the case of post-war restitution was and to this day remains a problematic issue, both from moral and legal side.<sup>106</sup>

All those operations carried by Estreicher, Lorentz, Walicki and many of their collaborators, can be described a **restitution from above**. I use this term not to diminish the great and absolutely heroic contributions of individuals, which made recoveries possible. By restitution

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<sup>103</sup> Andreas Huyssen, Anson Rabinbach, Avinoam Shalem, “Nazi-Looted Art and Its Legacies: Introduction,” *New German Critique* 130 (2017): 2.

<sup>104</sup> Alina Kowalczykova, “Wroclaw 1945,” 47.

<sup>105</sup> Stanislaw Lorentz to Irena Lorentz, 11 June 1945 quoted in Alina Kowalczykova, “Wroclaw 1945,” 52.

<sup>106</sup> Some of the discussions and controversies after 1945 included question of whether program for the replacement of looted or displaced property was to be accomplished at the expense of “the cultural heritage of the German people.” See: Marek Sroka, “‘Nations Will Not Survive:’” 26. The editors of *Nazi-Looted Art and Its Legacies* address some of the issues in debates about restitution that still remain relevant: “One consequence is that a host of unanswered questions has emerged on what constitutes ‘looted art.’ Do looted works include only those directly confiscated or acquired by theft or ‘Aryanization,’ as some museums have claimed, or do they include coerced acquisitions more broadly conceived? Can the original owners be identified? By what legal procedures can restitution be affected? And, should the discussion be restricted to looted European art only?” Andreas Huyssen, Anson Rabinbach, Avinoam Shalem, “Nazi-Looted Art and Its Legacies,” 4. Another unresolvable dilemma was addressed, among others, by Tony Judt: “what good does it do to restore property when you cannot return to tens of millions of people the loss of opportunity and liberty they suffered after 1948?” Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,” in eds. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt, *The Politics of Retribution in Europe*, 311.

from above I understand that these operations were state-organized and were rooted in a legal system, as in the case of museum collections coming back to the original institutions. By the term from above, I also understand the support that they received, in form of human resources, finances, legal and military assistance, and the fact that those operation were ultimately carried out for the state. Both Lorentz and Estreicher were representing the state institutions and held important public functions. Objects recovered by them returned to major national institutions and were utilized for the hagiographic narrative of the Polish state.

I would like to consider the other kind of restitution and rescue of artworks, which links to the symbolic, rather than legal sense of rightful ownership. After the Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts (ŻTKSP), was established in October 1946 (referring to the tradition of its pre-war predecessor) from the beginning it was clear that collecting art of Jewish artists would be one of its key aims. The draft of the statute project mentions an ambitious goal: “search and purchase of all works of Jewish visual artists, murdered during the war by the fascists and fallen in fight with them.”<sup>107</sup> Although the sentence did not enter the statute in this form, on November 6, 1946 the board of ŻTKSP agreed to place there more general “restitution of the works of Jewish art.”<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, the board also made it clear that ŻTKSP is the only decisive body in when it comes to art, and it categorically forbid local Jewish committees to spend funds on art, with no consultation with them.<sup>109</sup>

This kind of restitution, which for the purpose of this thesis can be described as **restitution from below**, did not refer to a legal process,<sup>110</sup> but to the metaphorical sense of rescuing, as bringing object back to the Jewish community. “It would be a pity if this painting was lost for

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<sup>107</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/2, 1.

<sup>108</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/2, 3.

<sup>109</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/2, 4.

<sup>110</sup> Archive material suggests, that ŻTKSP was involved also in the legal process of restitution, but the successfulness of those operations remains unclear. Archive of the ŻIH art department, folder 1 „Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts,” mentions “legal expenses” in the monthly costs.

the Jewish ownership” stated an official from the Voivodeship Jewish commission in a letter, trying to find funds to purchase expensive portrait of a Jew by Maurycy Gottlieb, for their institutional collection.<sup>111</sup> The common agreement in ŻTKSP was built on a conviction that works of Jewish artists belong to the Jewish people and should be secured for “the Jewish ownership.” Thus, the rescuing in that sense implied economic transaction – buying art, which was created by Jewish artists from antiquarians, private individuals, or, if they were lucky enough, to receive donations. The information about Sandel seeking the works of Jewish artists spread by the word of mouth, and some of the individuals contacted ŻTKSP to sell the pieces. Sandel exchanged letters with the collectors and antiquarians (some of whom, like Stanisław Pochwalski, he visited regularly), and traveled to places such as Łódź, Krakow, and Kazimierz.

However, the two kinds of restitution-practices overlapped, and ŻTKSP did receive some support from the state and benefited from their actions. First of all, part of the funds for the activity of ŻTKSP came from the Ministry of Culture. Secondly, once national institutions encountered collections of Jewish books or Judaica, they handed them to Jewish organizations.<sup>112</sup> In October 1946, at one of the first documented meetings of the post-war board of the Society, a honorable member and a representative of the Jewish Religious congregation, Fiszel Zylberberg spoke about his meetings with Stanisław Lorentz. Lorentz informed Zylberberg that “some of the objects” from the Bersohn’s collection are kept in the Museum, and in the museum in Poznań there are “artworks of a Jewish character and content.”<sup>113</sup> Mentioned objects were easy to recognize among other things stored in the institution, as they came from the collection of Bersohn Museum of Jewish Antiquities,<sup>114</sup> they

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<sup>111</sup> AŻIH, Archive of the Art. Department, folder nr 1 „Obrazy grafika rzeźba” p. 96. (xero copy of the letter to the Central Jewish Historical Commission from October 12 1946).

<sup>112</sup> For example, 20,000 Hebrew and Yiddish manuscripts, incunabula, books and archives, partially from the Warsaw Central Judaic Library and from the Breslau Jewish-Theological Seminary, that were discovered in 1947 in Wrocław, handed to Jewish Historical Institute.

<sup>113</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/2, 3.

<sup>114</sup> Mathias Bersohn’s Judaica Museum or Bersohn’s Museum of Jewish Antiquities was opened in Warsaw in 1910, as the first museum in the Polish lands dedicated to researching and documenting the Jewish past. Its

were probably Judaica or ceremonial objects, and not paintings which caused way more trouble to identify. Despite the willingness of Lorentz to collaborate, Zylberberg was unable to agree on anything, as he was acting as private person, not representing the ŻTKSP (which by that time existed only for a while) and having no institutional support. Possibly, this situation was one of the impulses to address the problem of restitution more frequently. “We, who are alive, have a holy duty to fight, so that the inhumane fascist crime never happens again. (...) Now we have a heavy burden to carry - we need to collect souvenirs, everything that has survived of the work of our artist-martyrs” explained Sandel in April 1948.<sup>115</sup>

The ambitious plan of “search and purchase of all works of Jewish visual artists” soon encountered obstacles. One was of course constant financial shortages (due to the insufficient funds, many of the pieces of Jewish painters “got out of hands” of ŻTKSP<sup>116</sup>), along with problems with identifying the works and communication with public institutions. The lack of collaboration happened in the case in Bielsko, where Sandel went with a purpose of restitution of the Jewish art from the museum’s collection in January 1947. When he arrived in the museum, he was not allowed to even see the collection and going to see voivode governor in Katowice also did not bring any result.<sup>117</sup>

The problem was lack of knowledge, as Sandel stated that it is easier to reclaim books than paintings, because simply “not only Jews were collectors of Jewish art.”<sup>118</sup> Due to this fact, it was hard to say whether the painting or a sculpture “had been in Jewish possession, or its owner had been a Pole.”<sup>119</sup> He once stated that actually “Poles bought more Jewish artworks than the

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collection consisted of Judaica and Antiquities, and it was seized by the Germans in 1940. See: Renata Piątkowska, “‘Skarby naszej przeszłości’ Muzea żydowskie w Polsce” (“Treasures of Our Past:” Jewish Museums in Poland), *Studia Judaica* 32 (2013): 3-45.

<sup>115</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/22, 85.

<sup>116</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/21, 80.

<sup>117</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/2, 5.

<sup>118</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/2, 5.

<sup>119</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 351/2, 5.

Jews did.”<sup>120</sup> It was impossible to determine whether it was a Pole or a Jew that actually possessed the work of Jewish artist before the war. But even if it was, the restitution of individual Jewish property was an issue barely addressed by the policies of post-war Poland. In most cases, ŻTKSP was deprived of any legal claims to obtain the works of Jewish artists from public institutions.

In his description of post-war restitution of individual Jewish property (or its lack) Michael Meng notes: “few other issues reflect Poland’s abandonment of its Jewish population more starkly than that of Jewish property. No social, legal, moral, or political pressure existed that called for returning it.”<sup>121</sup> In general, the state did not disrupt the war time redistribution of wealth, as it did not allow the restitution of individual Jewish property. While returning all Jewish property would have conflicted with the ideological demands of Communism, the reasons were utilitarian, rather than ideological. Avoiding the issue meant building a new society and forgetting about the anti-Semitic violence and the plunder of Jewish property by the Poles. Individual restitution would have deprived Poles of precious goods during a time when citizens needed material resources, and communist authorities – their public support. Add to that post-war antisemitism, fear and violence: while Jewish organizations in Germany pushed the issue of restitution, Polish Jews were more concerned with security and ultimately – survival.

The seizure of Jewish property became legitimized and coded into legal system. The first law on “abandoned and deserted properties,” that declared Jewish property as “heirless” and “abandoned” was passed in May 1945,<sup>122</sup> and continued with later acts in 1946 and 1947.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/2, 30.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Meng. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish*, 49

<sup>122</sup> Michael Meng. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins*, 51.

<sup>123</sup> Cieślińska Lobkowitz: “For the takeover of Jewish property by the Polish State administration, the decisive step was a decree of 8th March 1946 concerning “abandoned and formerly German property” (*majątki opuszczone i poniemieckie*), anticipated in 1945 by a series of similar regulations. According to this decree, all such property became State property. The expression ‘abandoned’ primarily meant so-called ‘ownerless’ Jewish property. The



New, moral economy appeared, which justified the war time and postwar appropriation of Jewish property. In a nutshell, it can be described by the new linguistic expression —*mienie pożydowskie*. “The Polish prefix ‘po’ indicates the leaving behind of something that is now gone; the expression translates as ‘formerly Jewish property,’ and thus legitimizes the seizure.”<sup>124</sup>

However, some exceptions appeared, and in 1945, and 1946 the tiny amount of individual Jewish property was returned. The change of decree in 1946 allowed direct heirs to reclaim their property through the legal means. Meng notes that it is impossible to determine how many Jews actually filed claims and of them how many then got their property back, but it is clear the number was very low. Not only because of the tiny number of those who were able to make a claim in the first place. The law restricted claims to only close relatives, and those who had lost direct heirs were automatically disadvantaged. Suggestion to broaden the family members, was rejected based on the fact that extending it would place too much property in the hands of a small group of Jews and could potentially lead to outbursts of anti-Semitic violence. Another reason for a small number of claims was that “a large number of Jews who stayed resettled in western Poland, taking over ‘former German property’ rather than lodging claims for their homes located elsewhere in the country.”<sup>125</sup> Finally, the legal process of going through the courts required time and money.

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deadline for individual claims was set for 31<sup>st</sup> December 1947 (later extended to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1948), after which the unclaimed property became State property. Considering the post-war chaos, this deadline was completely unrealistic and seems particularly cynical towards the Holocaust survivors. As for the legal regulation on inheritance of 8th October 1947, which limited the circle of heirs to the closest relatives, [Jan] Gross is right: Since Jewish religious communities (*Izraelickie gminy wyznaniowe*), the kehillot, had ceased to exist as legal entities and there existed no successors determined by law, the same fate was dealt to the overwhelming majority of Jewish organizations and associations, since the majority of Polish Jews and their descendants had been killed, ‘formerly Jewish property’ represented a sizeable body of real estate which *de facto* was placed under the control of the local State administration. Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property,” 159.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Meng. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins*, 50.

<sup>125</sup> Michael Meng. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins*, 52.

During the war, collections of books in Yiddish or Hebrew were burned, dispersed and allowed to decay, and Judaica, ritual objects made of silver, were either sold as they were or melted for scrap.<sup>126</sup> As the already-mentioned publication *Nazi Kultur in Poland* described it “the confiscation of collections belonging to persons of Jewish origin would require a chapter to itself.”<sup>127</sup> Art collections belonging to Polish Jews, which are the interest of my thesis, were either confiscated by the Nazis before they were sent to the Ghetto (depending on quality the works were disposed, sold or appropriated for museum), dissolved or ‘aryanized.’ Art historian and provenance researcher Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz describes several cases of galleries of art and antiquities which became a property of Polish employees of the Jewish owners who either successfully fled Poland or were sent to the Ghettos. Analyzing the Warsaw art market, Cieślińska-Lobkowicz points to the “art market fever” which appeared between 1942-1944 as an outcome of the creation of the Ghetto and its subsequent extermination.<sup>128</sup> She illustrates her article with one example, to better understand the processes of changing Polish-Jewish ownership of art collections:

Mr M was a wealthy Polish entrepreneur before the war. He used to be a good customer of the greatest Polish pre-war art dealer Abe Gutnajer of Warsaw. In 1940 Gutnajer with his family moved to the ghetto. He hid his collection on the city’s ‘Aryan side’ (outside the ghetto), probably with the help of Mr M. According to Gutnajer’s instructions, Mr M was expected to sell the objects from Gutnajers’ collection successively, and to send him money (or food or other necessities) to the ghetto. Supposedly, it would not be unethical if Mr M were to receive a provision for his services, taking into account the risks and potentially difficult situations he had to deal with. On 21st April 1942, one day before the so-called Great Deportation action from the Warsaw ghetto, Abe Gutnajer and his family were brutally murdered. Mr M however continued to be active on the art market. After the war in 1945 he opened his Kunstantiquariat in Warsaw, claiming that his own pre-war collection luckily had survived and so he could successfully start his post-war business.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property,” 152.

<sup>127</sup> *The Nazi Kultur in Poland. By several authors of necessity temporarily anonymous* (London: Polish Ministry of Information by His Majesty’s Stationery Office 1945), 112, quoted in Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property,” 153.

<sup>128</sup> Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property,” 155.

<sup>129</sup> Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property,” 155.

The story of this collection, which raises a question of an ethical nature, is only one example of how artworks could change their owners in the course of WW2 and after 1945 ended in the hands of antiquarian as a product for sale.

Most works that entered the collection of ŻTKSP were purchased by the antiquarians or private people, and there were variety of ways in which those individuals could have come to possession of the works. As I mentioned, some Jews simply trusted their belongings to Poles, many shops were aryanized together with their stored items, and the beginning of the resettlement to the Ghettos the Jewish population was able to trade apartments with non-Jewish population and sell some of their possessions as to obtain funds. Next to legal (though ethically debatable) ways in which Poles acquired Jewish art collections, it is clear that there were numerous instances of appropriation, violence and plunder, but their scale is impossible to assess.<sup>130</sup> While it would be unfair to consider that all of the people that sold art to Sandel were potential beneficiaries of Jewish deaths, the possibility is as high as in the case of any object, which exact war-time provenance is unknown. Here, however, we must remember not to equate the works of Jewish artists with collections that belonged to the Jews, for at least two reasons. Firstly, Jewish art collections were often built as a sign of assimilation, and because of that frequently consisted of works of Polish non-Jewish artists. Secondly, that the works of Jewish artists had belonged to the collections of non-Jews, which were not looted or confiscated.

Having in mind all of this, it is important to see the post-war activity of ŻTKSP and their urge to collect works of Jewish artists not only in the light of the great destruction of war. I argue that the appropriation of the Jewish property by individuals and the Polish state, and the

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<sup>130</sup> See for example, Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvests. Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). The scope of research concerning Polish violence towards Jews and appropriation of their possessions is limited, but it broadens steadily. Recent developments include eds. Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski* (Night without End: The Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland), (Warszawa: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2018).

subsequent lack of sufficient policy regarding the return of Jewish property after 1945, constitute a crucial context for ŻTKSP's mission to collect the "rescued works" created by Jews.

### 1.3 Conclusion

Both the National Museum and the ŻTKSP in its own way participated in the reconstruction of culture in devastated post-war Poland. The standard and scope of Sadel's activity obviously differed from state-supported restitution missions. While Stanisław Lorentz together and Izabela Czajka-Stachowicz<sup>131</sup> were driving across Lower Silesia looking for the looted possessions in the company of armed military, Józef Sandel had to postpone or cancel trips to places such as Kazimierz Dolny, a center of pre-war Jewish artistic community, because it was not a safe place for a Jew to go alone. While Lorentz came back to Warsaw with a few hundred looted paintings, Sandel bought singles pieces from his trips. However, I argue that both kinds of practices – state-run restitution mission carried by Lorentz, and modest but heroic attempts of ŻTKSP to create a collection of art for the resurrected Jewish community – in fact shared the same core. Gathering the heritage of the past was an attempt to reconstruct and preserve culture for the future. Thus, it is necessary to frame activities of Lorentz and Sandel as part of a fight for memory characteristic to the postwar years. In the following chapters, I will explore how the "rescued" artworks were made into public exhibitions that celebrated and strengthened the two communities, state-supported Polish or minority Polish-Jewish.

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<sup>131</sup> Izabela Czajka-Stachowicz (1893-1969) was a Polish-Jewish writer, muse of artists and a prominent figure of the pre-war artistic community in Warsaw. She survived Warsaw Ghetto and joined the communist resistance (AL) in 1944. In 1945 she worked in the militia in Katowice and participated in restitution missions to Lower Silesia. According to rumors, in a revolver holster she wore cigarettes, lipstick and powder. Shortly after the work with Lorentz she came back to Warsaw, where she continued to write books and articles. Her mysterious figure (she described many parallel versions of her biography) still inspires writers.

## 2. *Warsaw Accuses* (1945)

### 2.1 National Museum in the city returned from obliteration.

In the morning on May 3, 1945, the National Museum in the Polish capital was the place to be, as major local and national politicians gathered for the opening of *Warsaw Accuses* together with a crowd of citizens. Among the prominent guests were the head of the State National Council Boleslaw Bierut<sup>132</sup> and the prime minister Edward Osóbka Morawski,<sup>133</sup> president of Warsaw Stanislaw Tołwinski,<sup>134</sup> the ambassador of USSR Wiktor Lebiediew<sup>135</sup> and various ministers.<sup>136</sup> The speakers condemned the occupation and praised the efforts put into the brave new star of the Polish capital. "This is not just a matter of rebuilding a certain amount of cubic meters of buildings, bridges, kilometers of roads; this is a matter of the continuity of our cultural life, and thus, of the maintenance of industrial and agricultural production, our science and art, the work of social organizations and schools." stated the minister of reconstruction Michal Kaczorowski.<sup>137</sup> On the dramatic poster, the exhibition's title was accompanied by three crosses and a funeral-like wreath, which I will discuss in the last section of this chapter (fig. 14).

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<sup>132</sup> Boleslaw Bierut (1892-1956) was a Polish communist politician. After spending part of the war in the USSR, in 1943 he was sent to Poland to join the leadership of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). From 1944 to 1947 he headed the State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa, KRN).

<sup>133</sup> Edward Osóbka Morawski (1909-1997) was activist and politician. Active in Polish Socialist Party (PPS) before World War II, and after the Soviet takeover of Poland. After 1944 head of the Lublin-based Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego). Between June 1945 and February 1947, he was the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of National Unity (*Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej*).

<sup>134</sup> Stanislaw Tołwinski (1895-1969) was a socialist politician and activist, between March 1945 and May 1945 president of Warsaw.

<sup>135</sup> Wiktor Lebiediew (1900-1968) was a Soviet diplomat, between January 1945 and March 1951 an ambassador of USSR in Poland.

<sup>136</sup> *Życie Warszawy* (123) 5.05.1945.

<sup>137</sup> Michal Kaczorowski, "Przemówienie wygłoszone w czasie uroczystości otwarcia wystawy 'Warszawa oskarża' w dniu 3 maja 1945" (Speech from the Opening of the Warsaw Accuses Exhibition 3 May 1945) in *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, XX (1976), 597.

*Warsaw Accuses*, organized jointly by the Museum and the Capital Reconstruction Office in a partly devastated building,<sup>138</sup> commemorated the lives of murdered art historians, curators, museum professionals, and (in this case, more importantly) the precious artefacts and artworks from the museum collections that were lost, looted or damaged during the War. In eight rooms, the organizers decided to exhibit damaged heritage together with photographs of the ruined city, documents and plans for the reconstruction. It is important to point that although the title and the subject of the exhibition pointed to one city, from the beginning it was clear that it concerned the whole Polish nation, its spirit, culture, and identity. During his speech, president Tołwinski, on behalf of the city solemnly trusted the National Museum to the state.<sup>139</sup>

The major goal of the exhibition was to present the destruction of Polish culture not as a mere side effect of German occupation, but rather as a vital part of Nazi politics.<sup>140</sup> In the catalogue accompanying the event, Museum Director Stanisław Lorentz described the exhibition as a “the community of martyrdom of living Polish people and dead objects - the material exponents of Polish culture.”<sup>141</sup> In this chapter, I will elaborate on the nature of this community, composed of human and non-human actors of the museum space.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, I will elaborate on the motivation behind organizing the exhibition, and place it in the context of post-war cultural policy in Poland. Last but not least, I will address the fact that in the exhibition practically did not address the existence and destruction of Polish-Jewish culture.

The exhibition started already before the building: with the water flowing of the fountain and the monument of Jan Kilinski, saved from destruction by Stanislaw Lorentz, placed in front of

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<sup>138</sup> The Capital Reconstruction Office (Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy – BOS) was an institution established in 1945 to plan and supervise the reconstruction of the demolished city.

<sup>139</sup> Zofia Petrow, „Notatka prasowa i głosy prasy,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XX* (1976), 655.

<sup>140</sup>“Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie.”

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Bruno Latour. *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. (Oxford university press, 2005).

the museum.<sup>143</sup> But one could argue that the whole city was an exhibition, and the museum an object on display.

Warsaw, as David Crowley notes, “is famously known as a city which returned from obliteration.”<sup>144</sup> In relatively short time, from a vast sea of rubble with only a few islands formed by standing buildings, the city became a modern socialist capital. The German invasion in 1939, retaliation for the Ghetto Uprising in 1943, and revenge for the Warsaw Uprising the following year all led to as much as 75% of the city being destroyed. Many Polish, and European cities suffered destruction during WWII, but unlike most of them, in Warsaw it took the form of a deliberate, planned operation. Of all the cities and towns ruined, Warsaw was the most heavily damaged Polish city. Of the 25,498 buildings before the War in the western part of the city, less than five percent, 1,223, remained. Of 31 Warsaw monuments, 22 were completely destroyed.<sup>145</sup> Stanisław Lorentz’s register of destroyed sacred and secular objects with a historic value counts 674 items.<sup>146</sup> Tons of rubble on the streets were both the dominating motive in a landscape, and a major challenge that the capital raising from the obliteration had to face.

Nevertheless, in December 1944, the communist authorities decided that immediately after the liberation Warsaw should restore its status of a capital, despite the economic situation of the country and the amount of rubble that needed to be cleared.<sup>147</sup> Early in 1945 social and cultural life was restored in Warsaw and the first attempts to bring back liveable conditions were

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<sup>143</sup> Monument to Jan Kiliński, a shoe maker and commander of Kościuszko Uprising in 1874, was erected in 1936 and taken down in 1942. Due to the efforts of Lorentz, the monument was not destroyed and survived the war in the storage of National Museum.

<sup>144</sup> David Crowley, “Memory in Pieces: The Symbolism of the Ruin in Warsaw after 1944,” *Journal of Modern European History* 9 (2011): 354.

<sup>145</sup> Stanisław Lorentz (ed.), *Walka o dobra kultury. Warszawa 1939–1945 (Fight for the Cultural Assets)* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970).

<sup>146</sup> Stanisław Lorentz (ed.), *Walka o dobra kultury*.

<sup>147</sup> Stanisław Dziewulski and Stanisław Jankowski, “The Reconstruction of Warsaw,” *The Town Planning Review* 28 (1957): 210.

taken.<sup>148</sup> When speaking about the immediate post-war period, one must also keep in mind the complex, contradictory character of that time and its great dynamism in regard to political developments, emotions, or population movement. It was the time of happiness of the liberation and enthusiasm for reconstruction on the one hand, and of constant uncertainty and despair on the other.<sup>149</sup>

## 2.2 Mission of the exhibition

Stanisław Lorentz, who had been the director of the Museum since 1936 and remained at the position during the war, supervised the team assembled from members of the Bureau of the Reconstruction of the Capital and the Museum's staff.<sup>150</sup> As the exhibition guide states, its aim was not to organize another display of national martyrdom. The organizers' mission was to

present the common experience in an objective perspective, to show the meaning of the catastrophe amid the chaos of ruins, to expose the enemy's intentions. This is why with this exhibition Warsaw does not complain, nor lament, but before the tribunal of nations: WARSAW ACCUSES.<sup>151</sup>

In an article in the 1946 calendar devoted to the martyrdom of the capital, the author explained that the show's aim was to illustrate how the "German Barbarian" aimed to destroy the cultural wealth, and the past of the Polish nation.<sup>152</sup> As the text explains, through the attack on the

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<sup>148</sup> Stanisław Dziewulski and Stanisław Jankowski, "The Reconstruction of Warsaw," 210.

<sup>149</sup> The terms such as "Country of People in Motion," "Great Fear," "Limited civil war" and "Slept-through revolution" have been used to describe the dynamism of the immediate post-war time. All of them refer to certain dynamism, when it comes to politics, emotions, or population movement. See: Andrzej Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej (Slept-Through Revolution. An Exercise in Historical Logic)* (Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014); Krystyna Kersten, "Forced Migration and the Transformation of Polish Society in the Postwar Period," in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, eds. Phillip Ther and Ana Siljan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, (The Great Fear. A Popular Reaction to Crisis), (Warszawa: Znak 2012).

<sup>150</sup> Biuro Odbudowy Stolicy - *Bureau of the Reconstruction of the Capital* was an institution established on 14 February 1945 to rebuild Warsaw from the devastation of war.

<sup>151</sup> "Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie," 651.

<sup>152</sup> *Kalendarz Warszawski na rok 1946. Rocznik poświęcony Warszawie, cierpieniom i bohaterstwu stolicy, Warszawie wczorajszej, dzisiejszej, Warszawie jutra* (Warsaw Calendar for 1946. Yearbook Devoted to Warsaw,



material culture, the occupant's aggression was directed towards all kinds of social groups responsible for its production: "the kind of material objects which contain the result of the creative work of the spirit of the Nation, the thoughts of the most eminent minds, the full flight of the artist's imagination, and finally the labour of the craftsman and worker, who gave material shape to the conceived sculptures."<sup>153</sup> As the author notes, the point of the exhibition was to add another chapter to the story about Treblinka, Majdanek and Oświęcim. To consolidate in the collective memory a "series of visions about the ruins of the Capital, about the martyrdom, the wandering of the Polish things – the product of Polish thought, science and art."<sup>154</sup>

The exhibition reflected on the Museum's important role, both as a place which represented pre-war modernization of proud independent Poland, and as a place where the national culture was almost destroyed during the War.<sup>155</sup> As I explained in the first chapter, before the war many collections were deposited in National Museum, and after September 1939 it became a place from where valuable pieces were taken further to the German Reich. The introduction exhibition guide explained the criminal activity of art historians Dagobert Frey and Kajetan Mühlmann.<sup>156</sup> Once the war started, "thousands of exhibits were transported through its walls, taken away by the invader before deportation to the west" read the introduction.<sup>157</sup> As Mühlmann arrived to the National Museum in 1939. "His job now was to inventory the thousands of works of art being jammed into repositories at the National Museum in Warsaw,

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Suffering and Heroism of the Capital, Warsaw of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow) (Cracow: Towarzystwo Gniazd Sierocych w Warszawie, 1945), 33.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> The introduction focused also on the building itself – a monumental modernist edifice designed by Tadeusz Tolwinski and Antonii Dygat and completed only in 1938.

<sup>156</sup> See: Jonathan Petropolous, "Art Historians and Nazi Plunder," 1,8.

<sup>157</sup> "Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie," 643.

and the Wawel in Cracow, classify them according to quality, and take the best to safe storage areas so that Hitler could decide what he wanted.”<sup>158</sup>

To use Lorentz’s words, the Institution not only suffered the greatest losses of all of the Polish museums, but it was forced to witness the martyrdom of the Capital’s culture. “Our Museum is also one of the main actors of this tragedy, whose story is being told in its walls. This was the fate of the National Museum, but also the fate of other surviving collections and libraries of Warsaw.”<sup>159</sup> The exhibition accused German scholars who selected and participated in the organized destruction of Polish culture. Differently than on the occupied countries of western and central Europe, in Poland and, till 1941, in the newly occupied eastern territories, the Nazis purposefully looted and destroyed, and not only property of Jewish citizens but also that of non-Jews, as well as the state and communal. Universities and special research units methodically prepared through many years that preceded the War, and researched museums, institutions and archives. This co-existence and collaboration of science and crime was seen as a part of the Nazi plan to examine and precisely select the most valuable part of the culture for annihilation. The process of selecting and endowing objects with meaning, which lies at the heart of museum-making, was also the core of the project to annihilate Polish culture.<sup>160</sup>

From the early days of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 Stanisław Lorentz kept a chronicle of the National Museum that was exhibited in one of the rooms (Fig. 7). He was probably guided by the feeling of proximity of death as the city was in flames, and prepared two versions, long and short, hoping that at least one would survive. In the chronicle, he described the days of looting, devastating the museum interiors and burning the furniture. “I thought that notes would be used

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<sup>158</sup> Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa*, 68.

<sup>159</sup> “Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie,” 651.

<sup>160</sup> Daniel Sherman, Irit Rogoff, *Museum/Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1994).

after the war to reclaim stolen items, that the guilty parties would be punished for damages to be obtained. But the chronicle has remained only a document” he recalled later.



Figure 7. Display in the *Documentation Room*.

In the middle, the chronicle of the National Museum written by the director Lorentz during the uprising, behind them Heryk Kuna’s *Three Marias*. Photographer unknown, from the archive of the National Museum.

Here it is important to mention the twofold aim of the exhibition, as described in the exhibition guide. First it was the reconstruction of the destroyed museum, and broader – of the national culture, as it was “necessary to rebuild symbols, without which the nation cannot exist.”<sup>161</sup> And second aim was not only about restitution, but also compensation, because „the whole German nation needs to bear the punishment for the crimes. Therefore, the exhibition called for the “compensation in museum treasures (...). Not only treasures removed now or in the past from Poland, because these are not enough, but also the treasures of universal culture. The exhibition gives irrefutable evidence that the Germans do not have the moral right to protect them.”<sup>162</sup>

<sup>161</sup> “Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie,” 651.

<sup>162</sup> “Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie,” 651.

## 2.3 Destruction on display

The exhibition space was divided thematically into seven parts. The display in the hall commemorated “archaeologists, archivists, librarians, ethnographers, art historians, conservators and museologists who fell in defense of Polish culture, died in battle, tortured in prisons, broken by the war, lost without a trace.”<sup>163</sup> The collection of ancient art was displayed in the *Egyptian* room; the *Documentary Room* gave insight into the wartime fate of the museum and its collections through textual documents and archives. The *Castle Room* focused on the dramatic situation of the iconic Royal Castle, the destruction of which was a major tragedy and a symbol of aggressor’s policy. In the *Room of The Office of the Reconstruction of the Capital* remaining parts of Warsaw monuments were displayed together with Zofia Chomętowska’s and Edward Falkowski’s photographs of the pre- and post-war city.<sup>164</sup>

The most valuable works which survived in the collection, like the pieces of Rembrandt and Jan Matejko were shown in the *Museum Room*. Among the surviving valuable treasures, was Matejko's 1879 canvas depicting symbolic scene from 1325: Władysław I (Władysław Łokietek) breaking the arrangements with the Teutonic Knights (Fig. 8).<sup>165</sup> Besides it, three paintings by Rembrandt: two of them had been taken away by the Germans from the National Museum, and were later discovered in the undergrounds of Wawel Royal Castle in Krakow. The third canvas, *Portrait of a young man*, originally from the gallery of paintings in Łazienki,

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<sup>163</sup> Dariusz Kaczmarczyk, „Pamiętnik wystawy Warszawa Oskarża,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* XX (1976), 602.

<sup>164</sup> Zofia Chomętowska (1902-1991) was one of the most significant Polish female art photographers of the interwar period. She was an aunt of with Edward Falkowski (1913-1998), who after the war was also active as a press photographer.

<sup>165</sup> The coronation of Władysław I Łokietek (Ladislas the Elbow-high, 1306-133) in 1320, symbolically marked the end of the division period in Poland. It was the second, and as it proved, the successful attempt to construct a consolidated kingdom, the Corona regni Poloniae. Łokietek. Matejko’s painting depicts the scene from Brzeszcz Kujawski (1325), when Łokietek refused to peace with Teutonic Knights on their conditions. See: Norman Davies, *God's playground: a history of Poland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 60.

was stolen and offered in a private gift to the General Governor Hans Frank by the Warsaw Gestapo in November 1939.<sup>166</sup>

But above all, the most spectacular and iconic was the *Destruction Room*, where more than three hundred fractured, damaged or broken museum objects were shown. I believe that it is there that “the community of martyrdom of living Polish people and dead objects” developed to the greatest extent. The journalist of *Polska Zbrojna*, the magazine on military and military history, described the space as follows: “We are looking at the beautiful painting of Czachórski (...) scarred with a knife (...) we look at the lacquered antiques (...) we see ragged invaluable fabrics, broken ancient weapons, shattered Greek and Etruscan vases, crushed Egyptian alabasters (...) Finally, the brutal hands of the Nazis even reached for the Egyptian mummy, which survived four thousand years (...) In a glazed display case lies a Polish book, on which the German thug defecated.”<sup>167</sup>



Figure 8. Matejko's painting in the the *Museum Room*.

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166 Dariusz Kaczmarczyk, „Pamiętnik wystawy Warszawa Oskarża,” 655.

167 *Polska Zbrojna*, 25.5.1945 quoted in *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XX* (1976), 656.

Display of Jan Matejko's *Władysław I the Elbow-high* breaking the arrangements with Teutonic Knights displayed the Museum room. Photographer unknown. Source: archive of the National Museum in Warsaw.

Curtains divided the *Destruction Room* into two parts. The curatorial strategy, as Agata Pietrasik notes, was based on the idea to reconstruct the omnipresent landscape of chaos inside the building.<sup>168</sup> Once the demining and clearance of the museum space was done, the rooms, were arranged and violated again as if the Nazi troops had just left minutes ago. Still, despite the dramatic outlook, Jerzy Zagórski, who reviewed the show, appreciated its optimistic expression, which made the viewer feel in a museum, not among the rubble.<sup>169</sup>



Figure 9. *Destruction Room*.

Photographer unknown, from the archive of the National Museum in Warsaw. Above the opened wardrobe in “Danzig Style,” inscription: this is what they left. On the right, the composition of Jan Mass with “Germanic Methods of War.”

<sup>168</sup> Agata Pietrasik, “Budowniczości ruin: reprezentacje zburzonej Warszawy w rysunku i wystawach lat 40.” (“Constructors of Ruins: Representations of Ruined Warsaw in Drawings and Exhibitions from 1940s.”), *Widok. Teorie i praktyki kultury wizualnej* 11 (2015).

<sup>169</sup> Jerzy Zagórski, “Warszawa oskarża”, *Odrodzenie* 26 (1945) quoted in Agata Pietrasik, “Budowniczości ruin.”



Figure 10. Display in the *Destruction Room*.

Photographer unknown. On the left, empty frames and display of methods of looting. Source: archive of the National Museum in Warsaw.

The first part included information about the destruction in libraries and archives of Warsaw, each of them marked on a city map hung on the southern wall. Inscriptions informed visitors of the gigantic scale of the tragedy.<sup>170</sup> The informative part, including orders to remove historical literature from libraries and the list of books ordered for destruction, was supplemented with dramatic objects: the urn with ashes collected in the Żałoski Library decorated with a Polish flag, and a shelf with ashes from the Krasieński Library. “What the Love to the Nation Had Collected, the Invader’s Hatred Destroyed” (*Co miłość narodu zebrała, nienawiść najeźdźcy zniszczyła*) shouted the inscription above the collection of spared graphics.

The second part reflected on the destruction of artworks from Warsaw collections. The Northern wall bore Jan Maass’s composition (fig. 9), which illustrated “Germanic Methods of War.” “Rome 410, Głogów 1109,<sup>171</sup> Teutonic Order 1226-1410, Reims 1914, Warsaw 1939-

<sup>170</sup> Information included: 250,000 books from the National Library, 400,000 books from Public Library, as well as the collections of the Military Library, and Krasieński and Zamoyski Libraries.

<sup>171</sup> The source mentions date 1009, but most surely it was 1109, as it was the year of the legendary Siege of Głogów.

1945, Gdańsk – 1945, Poznań 1945.” Similar to Matejko’s *Władysław I the Elbow-high breaking the arrangements with Teutonic Knights*, it was an example of seeing the German aggression in a broad historical context - a strategy which became part of the nationalist legitimization of communism in Poland after 1945.<sup>172</sup> The Soviet tanks, to which the communists owed their power, were unable to provide them with a legitimization.<sup>173</sup> Historian Marcin Zaremba described how communists turned to the nationalist discourse in search for legitimization. They put the unity of the nation at stake and tried to convince the public that the lasting of communist system was a mean of ensuring it. In this way, a paradox appeared. Authorities installed by Stalin did everything they could to destroy those considered to be the bearers of the pre-war traditions, but the official discourse that they produced meant the appropriation of old right-wing nationalist ideas.

The display of Matejko’s paintings, references to historical conflict with Teutonic Knights and to the Piast Dynasty, were of course much more than just mourning of cultural values. Between 1945 and 1948 references to Piasts became common and over-used with ceaseless mentioning of Bolesław I the Brave’s legendary boundary makers on Oder, and the children who took part in the Battle of Głogów in 1109. However, it is important to see the Piast-Mania of late 1940s as more than just simple tool for legitimization. Although the communists were very conscious and knew how to use the knowledge produced by Polish historians, the interest in Piasts was not solely imposed from above. It was also justified both in historical tradition and social need.<sup>174</sup> Period of 1945–1948 witnessed series of events and propaganda aimed at nationalist legitimization,<sup>175</sup> but, after 1948 and the referendum “won” by the communists, the scale of these

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<sup>172</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce (Communism, Legitimation, Nationalism. Nationalist Legitimation of Communist Power in Poland)* (Warszawa: Trio, 2005).

<sup>173</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, 136.

<sup>174</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, (Warszawa: Trio, 2005), 165.

<sup>175</sup> The most spectacular was the Recovered Territories Exhibition, organized in Wrocław in 1948, as part of the propaganda attempts to legitimate the newly established western borders. Here, the historical presence of Piasts



actions started to decrease.<sup>176</sup> Gradually, “the nation” was not used so often and eventually became not the central notion of communist rhetoric.<sup>177</sup>

The exhibition displayed art, but in the same time worked as a narrative historical exhibition, as it told the story of looting historical works (fig. 10). The inscription “They Stole - They Destroyed – This is What They Left” (*Wywozili – niszczyli to po nich zostało*), stood above a spectacular collection of damaged artworks: a number canvases of great Polish painters, including Jacek Malczewski,<sup>178</sup> Władysław Czachórski,<sup>179</sup> Wojciech Weiss,<sup>180</sup> Juliusz Kossak,<sup>181</sup> and Olga Boznańska<sup>182</sup> – all of them cut, torn or crumpled (fig. 11). The display included a provisional chest full of paintings with one of them used as a lid, rolled canvases, and sacks with books prepared for transport. The press information described the methods of art looting displayed in museum:

boxes, sacks, several paintings piled together, and empty frames hanging above them. A shocking impression is exerted by broken, and decayed furniture, sculptures, ceramics and armour. (...) In the middle of the room there is a glass case with the reproductions of the most famous masterpieces of Jan Matejko, exported or damaged by the German barbarians. One cannot resist the impression that only a fundamentally demoralized and internally ill German nation could get to such a brutal destruction of monuments of culture. Let us look at this famous painting by Czachórski, riddled with a bayonet, or on the trapped and cut paintings of Podkowiński, on the portraits full of holes, on the animal-like destruction of Malczewski's painting.<sup>183</sup>

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in Lower Silesia was of a special significance. I elaborate on the exhibition in chapter 4, on the occasion of the censorship of the

<sup>176</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, 183.

<sup>177</sup> For example, the name of newspaper *The Voice of the Nation*, was changed to *The Life of Częstochowa* in December 1947.

<sup>178</sup> Jacek Malczewski (1854-1929) – one of the most highly acclaimed national painters of Poland, associated with the Young Poland movement. Considered as a pioneer of symbolism in Poland, in his art evoked the tradition of Romanticism.

<sup>179</sup> Władysław Czachórski (1850–1911) was a painter, representant of academic style.

<sup>180</sup> Wojciech Weiss (1875-1950) was a painter, part of Young Poland movement.

<sup>181</sup> Juliusz Kossak (1824-1899) was a painter and master illustrator who specialized in battle scenes.

<sup>182</sup> Olga Boznańska (1865–1940) was a painter, associated with French impressionism.

<sup>183</sup> Zofia Petrow, “Notatka prasowa i głosy prasy,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XX* (1976), 655.

Each of the artefacts, saved or excavated from the museum's storeroom or from rubble of Warsaw, was both a sign and a symbol.<sup>184</sup> Objects, as Susan Pearce writes, just like "other messages", function as a sign when they stand for the whole of which they are an essential component. Or, they function as a symbol, when they represent the elements, to which they do not hold actual relations. However, the objects have the ability to be simultaneously signs and symbols, by carrying "the true part of the past into the present, but also to bear perpetual symbolic reinterpretation, which is the essence of their peculiar and ambiguous power."<sup>185</sup> Thus, each of the objects from the *Destruction Room* represented particular events – looting, fire or bombardment – and at the same time they had all become symbols of an injustice, barbarism and war. The white ash of the burned book was so familiar to Stanisław Zagórski: "we know it from our homes, from the rubble in which we were looking for our private life."<sup>186</sup> Displayed objects represented not only the museum's collection, but all of the material possessions affected by the War.

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<sup>184</sup> Edmund Leach, *Culture and communication: the logic by which symbols are connected* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>185</sup> Susan M. Pearce, *Museum, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993): 27.

<sup>186</sup> Jerzy Zagórski, "Warszawa oskarża", *Odrodzenie* 26 (1945) quoted in Agata Pietrasik, "Budowniczy ruin."



Figure 11. Damaged paintings in the *Destruction Room*.

Photo by Zofia Chomętowska. A pile of paintings displayed in the Destruction Room. Among others, in the middle-right, Władysław Podkowiński's *Portrait of Women*, which used to belong to a dr Goldberg. Upper corner of the painting covered by Franciszek Kostrzewski's dark composition *Fire in the Village*. Above the pile, Jacek Malczewski's piece. Source: the archive of the National Museum in Warsaw.

As I have already mentioned, Stanisław Lorentz wanted the exhibition “to present the common experience in an objective perspective.”<sup>187</sup> By displaying the artefacts, Lorentz attempted not only to commemorate them, but to use them to *objectify* the experience reaching beyond the museum and its collection. To objectify is to give expression to an abstract notion, feeling, or ideal in a form that can be experienced by others<sup>188</sup> or to present as an object; make

<sup>187</sup> “Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie,” 651.

<sup>188</sup> “Objecify” in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objectify>.

objective; externalize. By using the community between humans and objects, and personifying the latter, the exhibition attempted to strengthen the power of emotions by ascribing them to items.

What is unusual here is this positive meaning of *objectification*, so rare in the context of WW2. When speaking about the War, “presenting” or “treating as an object” usually refers to inhumane conditions and industrial-like machine of death. For example, according to Wolfgang Ernst, victims of Auschwitz were treated as objects in a museum:

In the concentration camps the normally supplementary process of musealization was performed in real time, when the dead bodies were searched for hidden valuables, gold teeth, and women’s hair. What the liberating Allied armies were confronted with when entering these camps was heaps of such objects and storerooms.<sup>189</sup>

However, in the case of *Warsaw Accuses*, objects functioned not as something lower or worse than human beings, but rather as carriers of memory, and of truth alternative to humans.

The exhibition offered a peak into the biographies of particular artworks, as the introductory text explained, it displayed the “main lines of life and death of Warsaw archives, libraries and museums during the German occupation.

The exhibits, centered in the Museum, depict these events in a silent and yet shocking way.”<sup>190</sup>

In the great hall of the museum, next to the city coat of arms, were displayed two of Bernardo Bellotto’s depictions of Warsaw.<sup>191</sup> Canaletto’s paintings, so dear to the spirit of the city, were presented at the beginning of the exhibition not only due to their subject or artistic value. They also represented a rescued possession, that was nearly lost due to the activity of Frey and

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<sup>189</sup> Wolfgang Ernst, “Archi(ve)textures of Museology,” in *Museums and Memory*, ed. Susan Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>190</sup> “Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie,” 651.

<sup>191</sup> Bernardo Belotto or Canaletto (1721-1780) was a landscape painter and vedutista. From 1768 he was the court painter of Poland’s King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski.

Mühlmann.<sup>192</sup> Canaletto's paintings depicting the vision of old Warsaw, had been transported by the Germans to Krakow. They survived the journey to the west, and were discovered in Wawel undergrounds, to gloriously return to decorate the hall of the National Museum. Stanislaw Lorentz in a poetic description recalled:

We remember this cloudy October day of 1939, in which a Wrocław scholar walked quickly through museum rooms assisted by Gestapo officers. In the dark corner, between the piled-up heaps of pitch, one could hear his soft, dull voice expressing the joy of finding the chests with Canaletto's paintings, which he immediately allocated for export. The loss of this cycle for the Capital, the cycle of the most beautiful portraits of her street life, could be the same as the later burning of the archive of Old Warsaw. (...) We deliberately bring it to the front of the exhibition as a testimony to the first act of violation and the reminder of the beauty of Warsaw architecture so dear to our hearts.<sup>193</sup>

The head of Adam Mickiewicz, ripped from the rest of the statue, was a particularly illustrative example of the destructive force that shattered Warsaw's heritage (fig. 12). Accompanied by and the information about its fate, and the two photographs of the statue before and after it was knocked down. The sculpture of the poet whose life and art personify the idea of romantic nationalism, constitutive to Polish identity, was a work of Cyprian Godebski, erected on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mickiewicz's birth in 1898. Funded by the community of Warsaw citizens, it was later broken to pieces in late 1944. Discovered by the restitution mission in Reich, it returned to Poland 1945, and was to be re-erected five years later.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> See: Jonathan Petropolous, "Art Historians and Nazi Plunder."

<sup>193</sup> "Warszawa Oskarża: Przewodnik po Wystawie," 648.

<sup>194</sup> I will explore this subject briefly in the last part of this thesis.

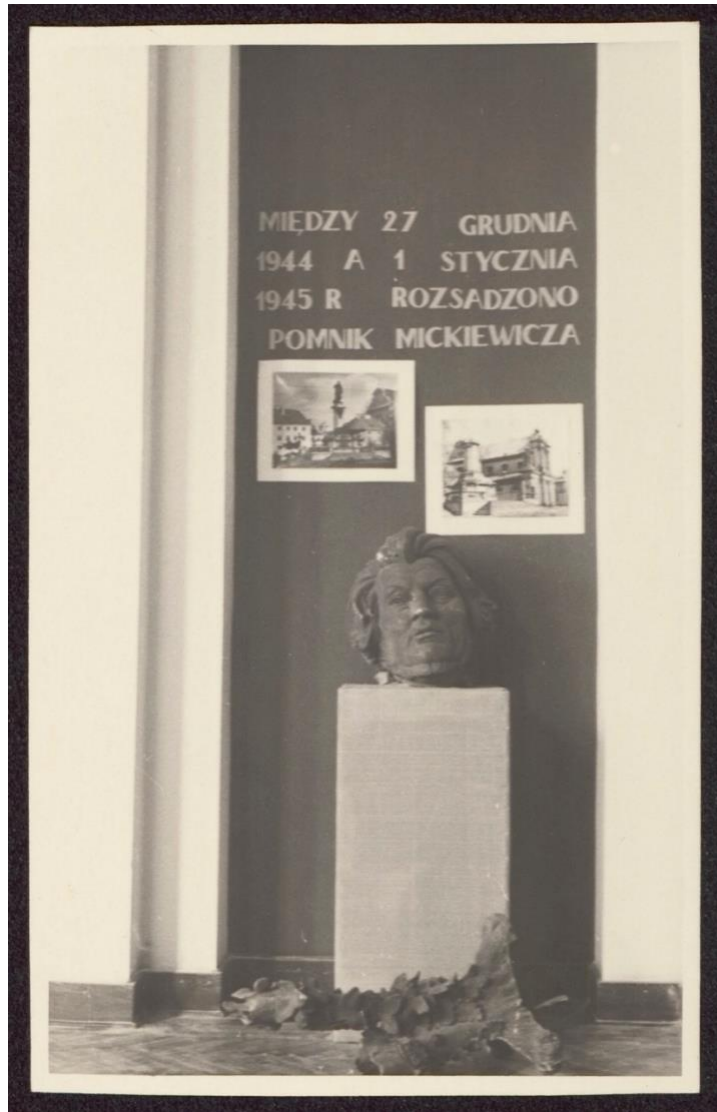


Figure 12. Head of Adam Mickiewicz's statue.

Above the head, photos of monument before the destruction. Source: archive of the National Museum.

## 2.4 Reception and editions outside of Warsaw

For most of the journalists who wrote about the exhibition in an every-day press, it was not about the historical or scientific value as much as about emotions towards objects. What was also noticed, was that the national past was recovered:

Today in the Museum Rooms, when we look at the objects ripped out of the annihilation, each of which represents a precious molecule of the past epochs – read the 1946 calendar - apart from many other thoughts and feelings, we experience a refreshing relief. It has been rescued, it has been returned to the

past, and it will serve the future. For us, the residents of the city of rubble, this is a new feeling.<sup>195</sup>

The event, which mourned the city and encouraged its reconstruction, became a landmark in the museum's history and a spectacular success - official statistics mention 435,000 visitors, in a city at that time officially inhabited by 378,000.<sup>196</sup> It is possible that the number was overstated, but the fact is that the exhibition attracted crowds of Warsaw citizens. For the first time in years, they were capable of attending a presentation of this kind, strengthening the national spirit and spectacularly introducing the atmosphere of enthusiasm. It is also not that surprising that the number of audiences exceeded population of the city, as the exhibition was not only meant for the Polish audience, but also for the visitors

The event was actively promoted by the politicians as a central point of the resurrected Warsaw and a tool for spreading internal and international propaganda. Apart from the famous day when Lorentz guided Dwight David Eisenhower through the exhibition<sup>197</sup> the archival documents reveal the emotional voices of the groups of the soviet military, academics and hospital workers of who visited the display. A group of pilots left the museum convinced of "greatness and ancientness of Polish Nation's culture."<sup>198</sup> Although the message of the exhibition was made clear through text and graphics, the groups were made to feel that it was artworks that had spoken to them. As Red Army soldiers put it, displayed things told them "a lot about the brotherly Slavic nation."<sup>199</sup> Most of the Soviet visitors emphasised the anger that

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<sup>195</sup> *Kalendarz Warszawski*, 33.

<sup>196</sup> Anna Kotańska, "Dokumentacja fotograficzna wystaw," 306.

<sup>197</sup> In the summer of 1945, General Eisenhower flew to Warsaw for a few hours from Berlin. The program of stay included a visit to the exhibition "Warsaw accuses" at the National Museum. Stanisław Lorentz, "Notatka o wizycie generała Eisenhowera" (Note on General Eisenhower's Visit), *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie XX*, 1976: 598.

<sup>198</sup> MNW, Arch 1070b, p. 4.

<sup>199</sup> MNW, Arch 1070b, p. 12.

they felt and pan-Slavic alliance. Some stated that they “accused the barbarians together with the Polish Nation.”<sup>200</sup>



Figure 13. Dwight D. Eisenhower visiting the museum.

Dwight D. Eisenhower walks through the *Destruction Room*, 1945. Source: online collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

After Warsaw, the exhibition was shown in Poland and abroad. It was promoted by the authorities and it widely served as a means of cultural diplomacy.<sup>201</sup> It visited Katowice, Kielce, Kraków, and Chorzów, as well as was presented in Paris, during the UN conference in London,<sup>202</sup> and in the Library of Congress in Washington, where Walter Gropius gave the opening speech. Besides maintaining diplomatic relations with other countries, it was also a means to collect money for the reconstruction of the city. Another surprising character of the traveling exhibition was that despite presenting dark history, it also promoted included maps

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<sup>200</sup> MNW, Arch 1070b, p. 1.

<sup>201</sup> Cultural diplomacy, as described by Ien Ang, Yudhishthir Raj Isar and Phillip Mar, is “a governmental practice that operates in the name of a clearly defined ethos of national or local representation, in a space where nationalism and internationalism merge. See: Ien Ang, Yudhishthir Raj Isar & Phillip Mar, “Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest?,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21 (2015): 367.

<sup>202</sup> “‘Warszawa oskarża’ na I ej sesji O.N.Z. Z., (‘Warsaw Accuses’ on the First United Nations’ Session) in *Kurier Codzienny*, nr 8, 8.01 quoted in Aleksandra Przeździecka-Kujałowicz, “*Warszawa oskarża*” muzeum zgruzowstale i jego pierwsza wystawa (‘Warsaw Accuses’ Museum that Came Back from the Ruins and its First Exhibition), unpublished MA thesis from the Art History Department, University of Warsaw, 2018, 56.



of interesting sites, and promoted Poland as a tourist destination.<sup>203</sup> The editions of the exhibition outside of Warsaw were mostly focused on photography and infographs, and barely included any artworks.<sup>204</sup> However, as the documents suggest, limited number of books and paintings appeared in the exhibitions in London and in Washington's Library of Congress, including canvases by Władysław Czachórski.<sup>205</sup> The case of photographer Zofia Chomętowska illustrates the reality beyond the enthusiastic atmosphere of post-war reconstruction. Chomętowska travelled with the exhibition to London in 1946, and since she was not very enthusiastic about the future of the communist country, decided not to come back. She got married in order to stay in London, and once her children joined her, together they emigrated to Argentina.<sup>206</sup>

## 2.5 Jewish Warsaw Accuses

Although *Warsaw Accuses* carried a clear message about the destruction of Polish culture and of the urban fabric of the Polish capital, at the same time it remained suspiciously silent on another topic. *Warsaw Accuses* was not an exhibition devoted to the commemoration of the victims of Nazi occupation, neither Poles nor Jews it was about culture, in its material and immaterial form. Therefore, the audience walking through the corridors of the museum was not reminded of the fact that humans, art and architecture perished together with the annihilation of the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>207</sup> But let the numbers speak for themselves: as Michael

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<sup>203</sup> “‘Warszawa oskarża’ i ‘Polska’ w Londynie, Paryżu i za oceanem” (‘Warsaw Accuses’ and ‘Polska’ in London, Paris and Overseas), in *Głos Ludu*, 345 (1945). Quoted in Aleksandra Przeździecka-Kujałowicz, 57.

<sup>204</sup> Anna Kotańska, “Dokumentacja fotograficzna wystaw:” 304.

<sup>205</sup> Archive of the National Museum in Warsaw, Arch 1070d, 57.

<sup>206</sup> Anna Kotańska, “Dokumentacja fotograficzna wystaw:” 304. See also: *The Chroniclers. Zofia Chomętowska, Maria Chrzęszczowa. Photographs of Warsaw 1945-1946*, ed. Karolina Lewandowska, (Warsaw: Fundacja Archeologii Fotografii 2011), 299.

<sup>207</sup> Jacek Leociak, Barbara Engelking, *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

Meng notices, the exhibition included only one photo of ruined Muranów – the historical Jewish district, out of fifty-six about Warsaw’s destruction.<sup>208</sup> And among the 931 displayed objects, one cabinet with ten items was devoted to presentation of Judaica. “Jew”, “Jews” or “Jewish” are the words that do not appear in the exhibition guide at all. The Ghetto destruction is mentioned in one sentence, as a part of Nazi attempt to transform entire architecture of Warsaw. The Polish capital accused the occupant of destroying its culture, but in the accusation, the city mysteriously forgot about Jewish culture, art and architecture, flourishing in its borders since ages.<sup>209</sup>

Here, I would like to go back to the exhibition poster – three crosses accompanied by a wreath and ribbon (fig. 14). Aleksandra Przeździecka-Kujałowicz links the motive of three crosses to the two sources.<sup>210</sup> First, to the biblical scene, and the crosses on Calvary on the day Jesus Christ was crucified. Secondly, it refers to the traditional Easter-time decoration of the churches in Warsaw, which during the occupation became a symbolic place for visual manifestation of patriotic Poles. The symbolism of three crosses on a poster was probably recognizable by the people of Warsaw, something that they could refer to easily. But, above all, it was Catholic symbolism, that linked the martyrdom of the city to the martyrdom of the Christ. Despite the attempts to make the exhibition express the universal voice of the city, the common identity of Warsaw, and of Poland, was represented by the cross. It was specifically Polish, Catholic Warsaw that accused the Germans “before the tribunal of nations.”

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<sup>208</sup> Michael Meng. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins*, 70

<sup>209</sup> Significantly, it was not the only case of overlooking the Warsaw Ghetto in art and culture of that time. Elżbieta Janicka makes similar observation in her analysis of Aleksander Krajewski’s novel *Stones for the Rampart* (*Kamienie na Szaniec*, also translated as *Stones on the Barricade*). Krajewski’s novel told the story of members of the underground paramilitary Polish Scouting Association. It was published by the Polish underground press in July 1943 and again in July 1944, just before the Warsaw Uprising. In both editions, as Janicka notes “occupied Warsaw is a city without a ghetto. Occupied Poland - a country without Jews.” While it carefully focused on the struggle of the Polish Underground, it ignored the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. Only after the war, some of the fragments about persecution of the Jews were incorporated to the subsequent editions of the book. See Elżbieta Janicka, *Festung Warschau* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2011), 391.

<sup>210</sup> Aleksandra Przeździecka-Kujałowicz, “*Warszawa oskarża*” *muzeum zgruzowstale...*, 40.



Figure 14. Poster of *Warsaw Accuses*.

Source: *Kalendarz Warszawski*, 33.

But looking from another angle, the Jewishness, even if not expressed, was embodied in the exhibition and remnants of museum's collection. The Polish-Jewish culture of interwar Poland was in fact something that to a large extent constituted the character and possessions of National Museum. This nuances of the *National in Warsaw Accuses* come to light only after a close look at displayed objects and their individual histories.

For example, two sculptures shown *in the exhibition*, marble figure of a woman *Jutrzenka* (Morning Star) and a bronze *Trzy Marie* (Three Maries, Fig. 7) were works of Henryk Kuna, a prominent sculptor and an assimilated Jew.<sup>211</sup> Kuna influenced the discussion of finding the

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<sup>211</sup> Henryk Kuna (1897-1945) was a prominent sculptor educated in Krakow and Paris. After he came back from France he was worked on important functions in artistic institutions and associations. From 1936 he led the sculpture department at the University of Stefan Batory in Vilnius. After the Second World War he was appointed

national style of newly established Polish state as a part of artistic group Rhythm (Rytm), which maintained close ties with liberal intelligentsia and the government.<sup>212</sup> He chose to be baptised as an adult, and his sculptures were not any more Jewish than they were Polish, Catholic, modernist or art deco. In the interwar Poland, however, they were Jewish enough to become a target of the anti-Semitic press. As Renata Piątkowska explains in her article on the right-wing criticism of Rhythm, the conservative press addressed his racial foreignness and although he was recognized as a great artists, critics wondered about the Polishness of his talent.<sup>213</sup>

Kuna's works displayed in the immediate post-war years illustrate the complex problems of artistic identity that this thesis deals with. Before the war, his sculptures decorated the Central Jewish Library, but Kuna was assimilated to the great extent – some of his wife's family did not even know he was Jewish, because it was just not an issue. In *Warsaw Accuses*, his work stood as an example of Polish modern sculpture, bearing no trace of his ethnic origin. However, only three years later one of Kuna's pieces was displayed on the exhibition organized by the Jewish Society for Encouragement of Fine Arts (ŻTKSP), The Exhibition of Works of Jewish Artist Martyrs of the German Occupation of 1939–1945.<sup>214</sup> There, his piece was displayed in the context of not only Jewishness, but also martyrdom. Actually, Kuna was not murdered in

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a professor of monumental sculpture at the University of Nicolaus Copernicus in Torun, however, he died before taking the position. He exhibited in international exhibitions and his sculptures were commission for public spaces.

<sup>212</sup> Rhythm (1922-1932) was one of the most important artistic groups of the interwar period. It did not have a unified program but was influenced and promoted aesthetics of folk art and art deco, as well as neo-classicist tendencies that rejected impressionism or formalist avant-garde. Its most significant moment of triumph was International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts. Among others its members were: Eugeniusz Zak, Roman Kramsztyk, Henryka Kuna, Zofia Stryjeńska, Ludomira Slendziński, Władysław Skoczylas. See: David Crowley, *National style and nation-state: design in Poland from the vernacular revival to the international style* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 69; Marek Bartelik, *Early Polish modern art: unity in multiplicity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 44.

<sup>213</sup> Renata Piątkowska, "Ugrupowanie Rytm w zwierciadle krytyki prawicowej" (Rytm Group in the Mirror of Right-Wing Criticism) in *W kręgu Rytmu. Sztuka polska lat dwudziestych* (In the Circle of Rhythm. Polish Art of the Twenties) ed. Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito (Warszawa: Neriton 2006): 153.

<sup>214</sup> AŻIH, Wystawa dzieł żydowskich artystów plastyków męczenników niemieckiej okupacji 1939- 1945, katalog wystawy, Warszawa kwiecień – maj 1948. (*The Exhibition of Works of Jewish Artist Martyrs of the German Occupation of 1939–1945, exhibition catalogue*).

the Holocaust, but he died in 1945, due to his poor health but that was not an obstacle in incorporating him into victimhood narrative.

The origins of Kuna's *Morning Star* that stood on *Warsaw Accuses* in 1945 are even more interesting. It was commissioned in 1921 by Bronisław Krystall - art historian, collector and art patron from the wealthy family of Jewish merchants of Warsaw.<sup>215</sup> Lifetime friend and a patron of the National Museum, throughout the years Krystall donated works and money to the institution. In November 1918, when his wife Izabela Krystall died from the infection, after cutting her lip with the jagged glass, Bronisław commissioned Kuna to create a portrait of his beloved. Although the version of the work did not meet his expectations, it marked the beginning of the long-time relation of the patron and the artist. In the 1930s Krystall was planning to create a sculpture gallery for his collection, but the hostile environment and religious differences made it impossible. In September 1939 most of the sculptures from his collections were transferred to the National Museum and deposited by the owner under the code name J.R, which successfully prevented them from the confiscation.<sup>216</sup>

Krystall's activity might have been the most famous, but he was not the only Polish-Jewish collector actively taking part in building up artistic scene in Warsaw and subsequently enriching the collection of the National Museum. Similarly, the *Portrait of Women* painted by Władysław Podkowiński and displayed in *Warsaw Accuses*, used to belong to the collection of

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<sup>215</sup> Bronisław Krystall (1884-1983) was an art historian, patron and collector from a family of wealth merchants. Before the war he collected art and supported as well as the National Museum in Warsaw. After Stanisław Lorentz called for donations to the collection in 1938, Krystall was the only, and generous donor. During World War II, Krystall and his closest family went to the ghetto. He managed to escape but majority of his family died. He was close to the idea of broadly understood ecumenism but did not change his religion and remained close to Judaism. After the war he financed cleaning and organizing of the Jewish cemetery. He remained devoted to the Warsaw Museum, and after his death his collection enriched the institution. See: Milena Woźniak-Koch, "Bronisław Krystall. Warszawski kolekcjoner i mecenas sztuki" (Bronisław Krystall. Warsaw Collector and Art Promoter) in *Bronisław Krystall. Testament, katalog wystawy* (Bronisław Krystall. The Will. Exhibition catalogue), eds. Krzysztof Załęski, Katarzyna Mączewska, (Warsaw: National Museum in Warsaw 2015), 79-109.

<sup>216</sup> *Bronisław Krystall. Testament, katalog wystawy*, 25.

a doctor Goldberg, probably dentist Leon Franciszek Goldberg-Górski.<sup>217</sup> Discussing the collection of Krystall, Milena Woźniak-Koch points to the group of similar Warsaw-based Jewish collectors such as Goldberg-Górski, Gustaw Wertheim, Jakub Glass, Eugeniusz Lewnsternato, and asks on-point question about the extent to which the obsessive collection of Polish art by the intelligentsia of Jewish origin was associated with the need for national self-identification.<sup>218</sup>

Here it is important to add a point about the fate of the Jewish art collections deposited in the National Museum before 1939. Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz states that Lorentz and his collaborators “behaved towards Jews and their property during that occupation in an exemplary manner. (...) Immediately after the war and during the period of Warsaw’s rebuilding, works saved by the museum that were known to have been owned by Jews were to be returned to the owners who had survived.”<sup>219</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

Despite the fact that *Warsaw Accuses* gathered objects as diverse as ancient artefacts, gothic sculptures, books and 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings of Rembrandt, Canaletto, and variety of Polish artists, it considered them all under the umbrella term of Polish national heritage. The museum display commemorated the deaths of art historians and the destruction of art and architecture, but it also strongly expressed the ties of Polish national to Catholic tradition. The nationalist tone of the accompanying text as well as the selected artworks explored the anti-German

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<sup>217</sup> Object’s record from the National Museum in Warsaw: Władysław Podkowiński, *Portret Kobiety*, 1891, MP4652 MNW.

<sup>218</sup> Milena Woźniak-Koch, “Czy tylko proveniencja?: o metodologii i narratologicznym ujęciu w badaniach nad kolekcjonerstwem na przykładzie kolekcji Bronisława Krystalla” (Only the Provenience? About the Methodology and Narrative Perspective in the Collection Research on the Example of the Bronisław Krystall’s collection), *Muzealnictwo* 57 (2016): 84.

<sup>219</sup> Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property,” 163.

sentiment and served to legitimate an aggressive compensation policy, of which Lorentz was an advocate. Through the emphasis that was put on Matejko's canvases, or on the symbolism of cross depicted on the poster, the exhibition universalized the Polish-Catholic tradition as the heritage of Warsaw, somehow overlooking its former multi-ethnic character.

However, I argue that despite the fact that *Warsaw Accuses* did not use the word Jewish even once, the National culture celebrated by the display was in fact constructed of Polish-Jewish influences, both in terms of individual artists, and wider social phenomena such as interwar art collections build up as a sign of assimilation. Willingly or not, a museum full of paintings that once belonged to private collectors, became a monument to also their efforts and to the whole strata of society that disappeared from the Polish land.

What *Warsaw Accuses* seemingly overlooked, or failed to put into words – the destruction of the Jewish-Polish art and works that survived “ripped out from the Holocaust” - was the subject of another exhibition put on display four years later: the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* (*Uratowane dzieła sztuki artystów żydowskich*). I will elaborate on this in the following chapter.

### 3. *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists (1949)*

#### 3.1 **The Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts**

The Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, ŻTKSP)<sup>220</sup> was established in October 1946. Its statute mentioned nine main points,<sup>221</sup> these ranged from the very general—“encourage the love and interest in art among the Jewish population,” “care of the visual artist,” and “education of the Jewish youth”—to the more specific such as “creating a collection of Jewish art,” “restitution of the works lost during the war,” and “organization of the exhibition of Jewish art.” The Society organized individual exhibitions of Jewish artists,<sup>222</sup> but in this chapter I will focus on those presenting works by multiple creators. I will particularly discuss the one exhibition mentioned in the chapter title, which not only met the purpose of education and promotion, but also presented the outcomes of the Society’s activity in restitution and collecting.

In April 1948, an exhibition bearing the long title *The Exhibition of Works of Jewish Artist Martyrs of the German Occupation of 1939–1945 (Wystawa dzieł żydowskich artystów plastyków męczenników niemieckiej okupacji 1939- 1945)*, was opened by Józef Sandel at the headquarters of the Jewish Historical Institute (fig. 15, 16). The exhibition was a tribute to the achievements of Jewish art and presented 105 works by fifty-seven artists, rented from both private and institutional collections.<sup>223</sup> The exhibition presented 105 paintings by 58 artists that

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<sup>220</sup> See footnote 84.

<sup>221</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/1.

<sup>222</sup> ŻTKSP organized two individual exhibitions: one of Rafał Mandelzweig in 1946, and the second of Lea Grundig in 1949. Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Art,” 83.

<sup>223</sup> The catalogue identified to collections as follows: the ŻTKP (16); the ŻIH (16+5); the CKŻP (14); the Joint Distribution Committee (9); the National Museum in Warsaw (10); private persons (33); others (2) *Wystawa dzieł żydowskich artystów plastyków męczenników niemieckiej okupacji 1939- 1945, katalog wystawy, Warszawa kwiecień – maj 1948*. Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, *Who Owns Bruno Schulz? The Changing Postwar Fortunes of Works of Art by Jewish Artists Murdered in Nazi-Occupied Poland, International Conference organized by the Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of Cultural Assets of WWII in Prague 21-22 October 2015*. Available online: <http://lostart.org.ua/en/research/476.html>.



were “accidentally saved.”<sup>224</sup> As Sandel explained in the catalogue, the exhibition was meant as a warning against the possibility of the Holocaust happening again, but also a promise to reconstruct the lost world in a new communist Poland.<sup>225</sup> On the occasion of the exhibition, Sandel also published an article in which he indicated the tasks for Jewish artists, often in a notably propagandistic tone. As a role model to follow, he recognized the artistic attitude of Roman Kramsztyk—a representative of the assimilated intelligentsia—who in the face of the tragedy of the nation abandoned his “bourgeois style of paintings” and started to commemorate the tragedy of the Polish Jews in the ghetto.<sup>226</sup>



Figure 15. The Works of Jewish Artist Martyrs of the German Occupation of 1939–1945.

Figure 16. Works of Jewish Martyrs, Catalogue Cover

The cover of the catalogue accompanying of the Exhibition of Works of Jewish Artist Martyrs of the German Occupation of 1939–1945.

<sup>224</sup> AŻIH, *Wystawa dzieł żydowskich artystów plastyków męczenników niemieckiej okupacji 1939- 1945, katalog wystawy*, Warszawa kwiecień – maj 1948.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> Quoted in Magdalena Tarnowska, “Plastycy żydowscy w Warszawie,” 74.

The next exhibition organized by the ŻTKSP, the *Exhibition of the Salvaged Works of Jewish Artists*,<sup>227</sup> took place in Warsaw from 29 August to October 1 1948.<sup>228</sup> In the following spring a similar exhibition (*Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*) went on to visit five cities in Lower Silesia. In Warsaw, the pieces from the ŻTKSP collection were supplemented by artworks rented from the National Museum, and the American Joint Distribution Committee.<sup>229</sup> In the case of the traveling exhibition the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*, the pieces were not rented from institutions or individuals: the display presented the collection of ŻTKSP, which Józef Sandel was able to gather in the first years of its activity.

This exhibition had a wider thematic scope: not only works by artists who were murdered, but all those pieces that survived the brutality of the war and had been purchased by the ŻTKSP. The focus shifted from biographies of artists to the fate of artistic works. In the next sections of this chapter, I will reflect on the the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*, consider the idea behind it, and contemplate its processes, locating it in the reality of postwar communist Poland and of Lower Silesia, as a center of post-Holocaust Jewish life. Through the examples of particular works and their creators, I will describe how the exhibition and the people behind it—Józef Sandel, Ernestyna Podhorizer, and Henryk Eljowicz—contextualized and interpreted the display of ŻTKSP’s collection. Lastly, I will discuss who the audience of the exhibition were, and how it was perceived.

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<sup>227</sup> Interestingly, first in the letter between Sandel and Jerzy Borejsza the exhibition was titled as “the exhibitions of martyrs” or “artists murdered by German occupation.” Later it was called “the exhibition of salvaged works of Jewish visual artists murdered during German occupation” e.g letter of Sandel to the World Congress of Intellectuals from August 20, 1948. AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/23, 28; a letter to the National Museum, 361/23, 30.

<sup>228</sup> The exhibition was prolonged several times. AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/23, 9,33.

<sup>229</sup> The exhibition in Warsaw included works Jan Gotard, Feliks Frydman, Roman Kramsztyk and Julia Keilowa from the collection of the National Museum, and pieces from the American Joint Distribution Committee including Henryk Barczynski, Rybak, Maurycy Trebacz, Samuel Hirszenberg, Maurycy Minkowski, and Leon Lewkowicz. AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/23, 39,42.

## 3.2 Jewish Art in Polish Lower Silesia

The choice of location for the traveling exhibition was not coincidence, but an attempt to reach the wider Jewish population living outside of major cities such as Warsaw or Łódź. After the Polish borders were shifted westward due to the 1945 Potsdam agreement, most of the former German territory of Lower Silesia was incorporated into Poland. Or—as the communist propaganda claimed—the country finally acquired the eternally Polish territories that had always belonged to it. The area became a center for Jewish life in the post-Holocaust period, as thousands of the repatriated Jews who returned from the Soviet Union settled down in its major cities, Wrocław and Dzierżoniów, as well as in villages. Lower Silesia was one of the most—indeed one of the very few—friendly places where the Jews were able to begin a new life, not disturbed by the hostility of the local population.<sup>230</sup> Before anti-Semitism and nationalist politics from the Polish communists led to the end of the community, Lower Silesia had been envisioned as the place of rebirth of Jewish life in Poland, or even as an alternative to Palestine.<sup>231</sup> However, the lifespan of post-war Jewish society was limited, as most of the settlers emigrated to Israel in the late 1940s, or later in 1968.

Before elaborating on the character of the exhibition, I need to mention that at that time organizing such a show was not obvious, as the approach of communist authorities towards the Jewish cultural institutions changed. In summer 1948, Wrocław witnessed *The Recovered Territories Exhibition* (*Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych – WZO*), the largest attempt to legitimize the former German lands within the borders of the new Polish state by exhibiting the achievements over three years (1945-1948), from agriculture and industry to culture and art.

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<sup>230</sup> See for example: Robert L. Cohn, “Israel in Poland: a forgotten moment in postwar history,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 44 (2011): 70–80; Agnieszka Ilwicka, “Grand Illusion? The Phenomenon of Jewish Life in Poland after the Holocaust in Lower Silesia,” *The Person and the Challenges* 4 (2014): 97–125. On the anti-Semitism in post-war Poland see: Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz; An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>231</sup> Robert L. Cohn, “Israel in Poland,” 73.

Shortly before the opening, during the “political verification” state officials pointed to several ideological shortcomings and defects of this gigantic propaganda enterprise.<sup>232</sup> The officials criticized the lack of emphasis on the Polish Worker’s Party, and on the Soviet Army’s role in the liberation, as well as the overly positive evaluation of individual farming, and the wrong picture of Polish-German relations.<sup>233</sup>

Special measures of censorship and repression in the *Recovered Territories Exhibition* were directed at the Jewish Pavilion. Two weeks before the official opening, the pavilion organized by the Central Committee of Polish Jews, which was planned to praise Lower Silesia as the centre for the settlement of Jews repatriated from the Soviet Union, was excluded from the fair, then destroyed and thus never shown to the public.<sup>234</sup>

The censorship of the Jewish Pavilion in the *Recovered Territories Exhibition* can be easily located in the wider context of historical developments in late 1940s, and in the political strategy of Polish communists, which aimed for the complete unification and control of Jewish culture and political activity. From 1948, Poland saw a gradual implementation of socio-economic, legal and cultural educational tools of an assimilationist character, and means of subordination of the religious congregations to secular committees. Institutions which

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<sup>232</sup> Recovered Territories Exhibition (*Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych or WZO*) organized by the Polish authorities in Wrocław, lasted for hundred days from 21<sup>st</sup> of July to 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1948. The exhibition presented the achievements of three years of reconstruction and development of the territories gained by Poland from Germany after 1945. It was the first propaganda event of this kind, unprecedented for many years that followed. The audience was confronted with materials about natural environment and history of Recovered Territories, which were meant to justify its belonging to Polish state and represent the ages-long struggle and fight with the German “occupant”. As art historian Agnieszka Szewczyk notes, the level of emotional and intellectual manipulation of the propaganda was pushed to its’ limits and set the patterns for agitation for upcoming years. The exhibition, besides being an exceptional example of communist propaganda, was also a quality event in the history of the large-scale exhibitions, which was noticed by both local and international press. „Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych”, *Zaraz Po Wojnie. Katalog Wystawy* (Just After the War. Exhibition Catalogue), eds. Agnieszka Szewczyk, Joanna Kordjak, (Warszawa: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2015), 312.

<sup>233</sup> Jakub Tyszkiewicz, *Sto wielkich dni Wrocławia. Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych we Wrocławiu a propaganda polityczna Ziem Zachodnich i Północnych w latach 1945- 1948* (Hundred Great Days of Wrocław. The Recovered Territories Exhibition and Political Propaganda of Western and Northern Land), (Wrocław: Arboretum, 1997), 121.

<sup>234</sup> Bożena Szaynok, “Krótka Historia Pawilonu Żydowskiego” (The Short History of the Jewish Pavilion), *Odra* 36 (1996), 20.

previously had been under the realm of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, were nationalised.<sup>235</sup> It is important to note that the disappearance of autonomy of the Central Committee of Jews meant the disappearance of the unique cultural-national autonomy of Jews in post-war Poland in general.<sup>236</sup>

Now I come to an important point which illustrates the complexity of displaying Jewish art in Poland at the verge of Stalinism. While the Jewish pavilion in WZO was censored, the *Exhibition of the Salvaged Works*, not only took place in Warsaw but was presented in the frame of the World Congress of Intellectuals (*Światowy Kongres Intelektualistów w Obronie Pokoju*) which took place from 25 to 28 of August in Wrocław.<sup>237</sup> Following the congress, the international guests were transferred to Warsaw for an elegant reception,<sup>238</sup> and on the 29 or 30 August they visited the ŻTKSP's exhibition.<sup>239</sup> Interestingly, the congress, organized by

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<sup>235</sup> August Grabski, "Działalność Frakcji PPR w CKŻP" (*Activity of PPR Faction in CKŻP*) in: August Grabski, Grzegorz Berendt, *Między Emigracją a Trwaniem. Syjoniści i komuniści żydowscy w Polsce po Holocauście* (*Between Lasting and Emigration. Zionists and Jewish Communists in Poland after Holocaust*), (Warszawa: Jewish Historical Institute, 2003), 7.

<sup>236</sup> As August Grabski notes about the Central Committee of Polish Jews, never before and never after in Polish history, another minority had been granted this sort of extensive national and cultural autonomy. It consisted of autonomy of representation, freedom to gather, freedom of speech, armed self-defence, relative freedom of movement and freedom to contact international Jewish organizations. Up until 1949, there was a network of local sub-committees of CKŻP. The formal position of the CKŻP and its weight in the Jewish community was strong and indicated a significant level of independence. This special status of CKŻP, as Grabski puts it, was remarkable especially in the context of limited democracy in Poland. See: August Grabski, "Działalność Frakcji PPR w CKŻP," 11.

<sup>237</sup> The World Congress of intellectuals organized in Wrocław in August 1948, with many important Western European intellectuals attending including Pablo Picasso, Bertolt Brecht, György Lukács, Fernand Léger, was organized by Jerzy Borejsza to "present socialist Poland as a land of open cultural debate." This goal however "was crushed by the speech of the Soviet delegate, the novelist Alexander Fadeyev, who condemned the whole of contemporary Western culture as fascist and decadent, as a result which some of the Western participants left the congress in Protest." Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Mónika Baár, and Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond, Part I: 1918-1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 309; See also: Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918-1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 270-273.

<sup>238</sup> Marci Shore provides an interesting description of this evening: "Following the congress in Wrocław there was an elegant reception in Warsaw, where the men were dressed in dark suits and Pablo Picasso was among the guests. It was late August in Warsaw and the French poet Paul Éluard grew hot, he took off his jacket, and later his shirt, and proceeded to parade around "with the naked, wonderful torso of an athlete." Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 273.

<sup>239</sup> Renata Piątkowska, "Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts," 83.

Jerzy Borejsza to present Poland as a centre of open intellectual debate,<sup>240</sup> was part of the same WZO exhibition where the Jewish Pavilion was not allowed to be displayed. Therefore, Sandel's exhibition took place in a very particular moment, when the terms of what can or cannot be displayed changed together with the approach of the communist authorities towards the Jewish cultural institutions.

Why was the Jewish pavilion in WZO censored, while important guests visited the exhibition organized by ŻTKSP in Warsaw? My assumption is that the pavilion was unacceptable as an expression of cultural autonomy, and the exhibition in Warsaw which ultimately condemned the terrors of war fit well the anti-fascist pro-peace communist discourse. In fact, when Sandel first proposed to organize the exhibition of the works of Jewish artists for the guests of the congress,<sup>241</sup> Borejsza responded without enthusiasm that art alone "would have a too weak effect."<sup>242</sup> Because of that, the ŻTKSP's art exhibition took place, but only as part of the wider programme for the guests of the congress, which included a visit to the museum of Jewish martyrdom, and a guided tour through the ruined ghetto district. Clearly, the martyrdom was emphasized above art.<sup>243</sup>

In early February 1949, Henryk Eljowicz, an employee of ŻTKSP, departed with sixty-two artworks from the institutional collection that formed the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* (fig.

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<sup>240</sup> Jerzy Borejsza (1905-1952) was a communist activist, writer and editor, born as Benjamin Goldberg to a Polish Jewish family. Borejsza was "the most international of Polish communists" as Czesław Miłosz put it, and the "king of the press" in post-war Poland. "Borejsza had the ambition as well as the cultural capital to attract the intelligentsia to the new system, offering collaboration to prominent non-communist intellectuals as well. In a programmatic text from late 1945, he wrote about a "mild revolution" – a revolution that continues the Jacobin ideals of radical Enlightenment, but at the same time renounces terror. (...) Borejsza's position began to falter with the growth of socialist realist requirements in culture. His last great enterprise was a congress of intellectuals in defence of peace" which ultimately was a failure. Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina, Mónika Baár, and Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe: Volume II: Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond, Part I: 1918-1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 309.

<sup>241</sup> About different names of the exhibition see note 232.

<sup>242</sup> Letter of Jerzy Borejsza to Jozef Sandel from August 3, 1948. AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/35, 64.

<sup>243</sup> In the context of this thesis, it is noteworthy that Stanisław Lorentz and the National Museum were helpful in the organization of the exhibition for the intellectuals from the World Congress. National Museum not only rented artworks from its collection, but also cabinets for the display. AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/24, 30.

17). Initially, the exhibition was meant to travel to seven towns, but due to financial limitations the number was limited to five.<sup>244</sup> In three months, the exhibition visited Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, Świdnica, Wałbrzych and Legnica, attracting 10,500 visitors.<sup>245</sup> Agnieszka Żółkiewska rightly suggests that taking the exhibition to Lower Silesia was an attempt to please the communist authorities by presenting the Society's activity to a wider audience.<sup>246</sup> In the process of centralization of Jewish cultural institutions under the Jewish Association for Culture (ŻTK) that started in 1947, a criticism was raised as "the Society (ŻTKSP) has accomplished a lot, but little in the direction of promoting art among the Jewish masses."<sup>247</sup> The traveling exhibition was the first and the last attempt to popularize ŻTKSP's activity, as in October 1949 it was disbanded and its collection handed over to the Jewish Historical Institute. I will come back to these events in the last part of this thesis.

The quest to break free from the limitations of the art world and reach out to workers—indeed, all those outside of the big-city intelligentsia—is manifested also in the language used to describe the exhibition, which is popular and emotional rather than historical or professional. From the existing documents, it is clear that the main instigators of the exhibition (Sandel, Podhorizer, Eljowicz) were motivated to organize it both as people who recognized the great loss of precious cultural artefacts, and as Jews, feeling a close connection to a number of artists who did not survive the war.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Wrocław: 6.02-28.02, Dzierżoniów: 6.03.27.03, Świdnica: 3.04 -24.04, Wałbrzych 8.05.-29.05, Legnica 6.06-27.06. AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/5, 1.

<sup>246</sup> Agnieszka Żółkiewska, *Zerwana przeszłość: Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej Inteligencji*, 77.

<sup>247</sup> Renata Piątkowska, "Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts," 88.

<sup>248</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/4. *Memorial of 203 Jewish painters, 20 sculptors, 13 architects and all historians of art. Who were murdered by the German occupants.*

For Sandel, the exhibition was an example of how a once-disgraced culture was resurrected, how “the crumpled and broken Jewish art” rose from the rubble.<sup>249</sup> It celebrated and commemorated objects and presented them as victims of the war, as not only the artists but also their works were the victims of extermination.<sup>250</sup> The exhibition displayed sixty-two artworks by Jewish artists,<sup>251</sup> but in fact, by presenting a group of existing artworks, it referred to all those pieces that were destroyed and could not be shown.

The exhibition consisted of works acquired in the few years preceding the exhibition, and thus it also showcased the activity of the ŻTKSP. The display of artworks was also the display of the hard work that the organization performed under the leadership of Józef Sandel: the restitution of numerous works and the composition of collection. The pieces were collected or bought with subsidies coming mostly from CKŻP (and therefore, from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) but also the Polish Ministry of Culture, or occasional donors.<sup>252</sup>

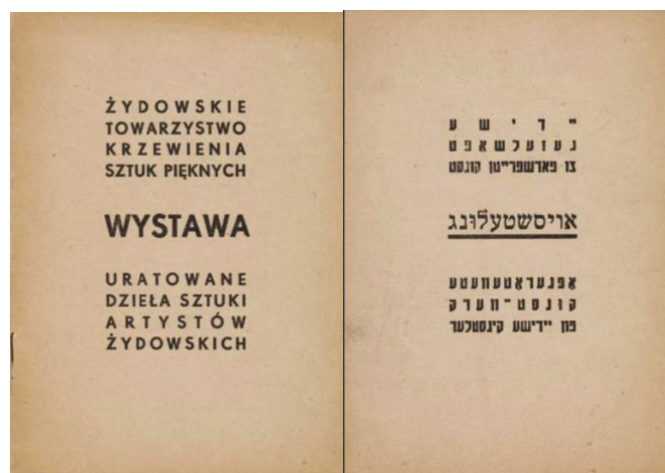


Figure 17. *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* – catalogue

Cover of the catalogue of the exhibition in Polish and Yiddish.

Source: online repository of the Jewish Historical Institute

<sup>249</sup> AŻIH, *Katalog "Wystawa uratowane dzieła sztuki artystów żydowskich"* (Catalogue of "The Exhibition of Rescued Works of Jewish Art").

<sup>250</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/4. *Memorial of 203 Jewish painters, 20 sculptors, 13 architects and all historians of art. Who were murdered by the German occupant.*

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Renata Piątkowska mentions the case of SPOŁEM (Together) cooperative, which donated a one-time subsidy for the “rescuing and searching for remnants of Jewish art in Poland.” Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts,” 87.



During the first opening on February 6 in the Jewish school in Wrocław, Józef Sandel, accompanied by the representatives of the local authorities and social and cultural institutions, praised the creativity of the Jewish nation.<sup>253</sup> As he put it, the splendid art created by Jewish hands proved the ultimate falsification of the superstition circulated by the Nazis, as if Jews were incapable of creating art and beauty.

Sandel's stand was clear not only on Jewish culture, but also on Polish nationalism. In the last sentences of his speech, he emphasized the location of the exhibition, and ascribed a great meaning to this ancient Polish city, Wrocław, which was meant to soon "become a center for progressive Polish and Jewish culture."<sup>254</sup> Soon, Sandel left for Warsaw and Eljowicz stayed in Silesia, frequently reporting on both positive and negative developments there.<sup>255</sup> Kamil Kijek identifies the paradox that made the Jewish survivors not only obey, but actively participate in the nationalist discourse of Polish authorities that eventually led to their exodus:

The paradox of the time was that precisely in the years when interwar discrimination was abolished, when for the first time the Polish state openly declared its fight with antisemitism, it demanded an even stronger "symbolic submission" from the Jews than before. Jews who wanted to stay in Poland had no choice but to obey this call. Integration and acceptance of Jews into Polish society longed for by the former for so long, in post-1945 Poland assumed their participation in the construction of a nationalist language that in the long run made them victims of symbolic exclusion.<sup>256</sup>

Jewish minority existed in monoethnic Polish state, defined and unified by the ethnic cleansing. The ethnic unification became a tool to unite and reign devastated Poland, after its borders changed. Poland gained of formerly German territory in the north and the west and loss of the prewar territory in the east. The Polish state and Polish society together laid the foundation of

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<sup>253</sup> *Mosty* 292 (1949): 7.

<sup>254</sup> *Mosty* 292 (1949), 7.

<sup>255</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/5, 10.

<sup>256</sup> Kamil Kijek "Aliens In The Lands Of The Piasts: The Polonization Of Lower Silesia And Its Jewish Community In The Years 1945–1950" in *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe: Shared and Comparative Histories*, ed. Tobias Grill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018): 255.

the postwar national solidarity by ethnically cleansing the country.<sup>257</sup> The multinational, multiethnic society of Poland ceased to exist not only due to the war, but the processes that followed, with expelling over eight million Germans and German Poles, along with over half a million Ukrainians and Byelorussians.

One needs to bear in mind that the exhibition took place two years after the deadliest pogrom in Polish post-war history— the one in Kielce on July 4, 1947— which triggered a wave of emigration and undermined the idea of Jewish settlement.<sup>258</sup> Shortly after the Pogrom in Kielce, Samuel L. Shneiderman spoke to a carpenter in Łódź, who expressed the uncertainty of the future existence. As he explained “Here we make chairs and benches (...) but in our homes we sit on suitcases.”<sup>259</sup> In one of the letters also Sandel stressed the difficult atmosphere which he observed after the arrival to Poland: “The first months were generally most difficult, mainly psychologically, although there was also great emotion: new slogans of democracy were exceedingly stimulating for us. If only it were not so that at time Jews were murdered in ambushes and if only there was not the tragedy of Kielce.”<sup>260</sup> In 1947, he was generally positive and full of hope: “currently the country is not to be recognized. Everywhere stabilization is felt, banditry has almost been eradicated.”<sup>261</sup> But it soon turned out, that not only street violence, but also politics of the state stood in a way of the resurrection of the vibrant and diverse Jewish culture.

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<sup>257</sup> David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006).

<sup>258</sup> See: Jan T. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland*, or more recently: Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego*, (Under the Course: A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2018].

<sup>259</sup> Samuel L. Shneiderman, *Between fear and hope* (New York: Arco, 1947), 183.

<sup>260</sup> Józef Sandel in a letter to Isaac Lichtenstein from 30 May 1947, AŻIH, CKŻP, 303/XIII/204, 204 quoted in Renata Piątkowska, “Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts,” 91.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.3 Exhibited art, its provenance and identity

The exhibition presented a variety of works that differed in both style and time of creation, mirroring the rich Jewish contribution to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Polish art history. However, in the face of the great tragedy of the Holocaust, all those tendencies, movements, and groups were collected under the singular category of “Jewish Artists” and exhibited together. As a result, the exhibition created by Sandel juxtaposed works by forward-looking liberals and traditionally-oriented artists—those active in artists’ groups together with non-Jews, and those who felt their artistic identity could be developed only with other Jews. It included the works of former masters from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Maurycy Gottlieb and Samuel Hirszenberg, and the modern and avant-garde artists such as Eugeniusz Żak, Marcel Słodki, Roman Kramsztyk. A close look into the histories of some of the displayed works reveals the dynamism and diversity of the artificial group created by the Nazi extermination and its commemoration. In an article in the Jewish newspaper *Opinia*, printed after its opening in Legnica, Ernestyna Podhorizer described the exhibition:

Several dozen works created by artists – Jews – are gathered here. Displayed in this confined space as if in a small universe, are the pearls of feelings of dozens hearts filled with beauty pulsating vividly. Although they stopped beating, they gave us the reflection of their inlets. Shocked, we look at those vibrant images pulsating with the blood of their creators. Their memory and their works will remain alive and will be transmitted to those that will come after us, and they will pass it on.<sup>262</sup>

What united the displayed works was not only the origin of the authors, but also figurative, realist style of most of them. The exhibition displayed portraits, everyday scenes or occasional landscapes, but formalist tendencies did not find a place there. Looking at the displayed pieces, one could hardly recognize any features that can be considered as inherently Jewish, e.g. Jadwiga Sperling’s *Landscape of the Tatra Mountains*, with its twisted river running through

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<sup>262</sup> *Opinia*, 28 March 1949.

a snow-capped valley,<sup>263</sup> or a nude with a woman on a red chair painted by none other than Maksymilian Eljowicz, the brother of Henryk, one of the exhibition's organizers.<sup>264</sup>

It is easy to blame the choice of realism on the time period in which the exhibition took place, determined by the Party's condemnation of formalism.<sup>265</sup> However, it would be a misconception to assume that Sandel entirely subordinated his taste to the leading doctrine or was forced to focus on realism. On the contrary, he had always been close to realism, or German *Neue Sachlichkeit* while he ran a gallery in Dresden. By the 1930s, Sandel was already working on a German-language work describing the impact of socialism in art.<sup>266</sup> Throughout his life he maintained a friendship with Lea Grundig, who was a member of Association of Revolutionary Visual Artists of Germany and a lifelong advocate of engaged realism (fig. 11).<sup>267</sup> Little wonder, then, that he also maintained his devotion to realist art. However, he did not limit ŻTKSP's focus only to this kind of art: he wanted to gather as many and as diverse works as possible and collected also the works completely foreign to the socialist realist principles.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> MŻIH A-14.

<sup>264</sup> Eljowicz Maksymilian, *Akt kobiecej (stadium)*, MŻIH A-16.

<sup>265</sup> For the discussion on Socialist Realism and Modernism in Central Europe after 1945, see for example: Piotr Piorowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 33-57.

<sup>266</sup> Ernestyna Podhorizer mentions that in Dresden around 1931, Sandel wrote *Einfluss des Socialismus auf die plastische Kunst*, but the work was destroyed during the war. See: Ernestyna Podhorizer, "Wspomnienie o Józefie Sandlu w 10. rocznicę śmierci," 114.

<sup>267</sup> Lea Grundig (1906-1977) was a German-Jewish painter and graphic artist. In 1930 both she and her husband, painter Hans Grundig (1901-1958) joined the Association of German Revolutionary Artists. Already in the 1930s, they were imprisoned for anti-Nazi activities. During the Nazi Period, Lea emigrated to Palestine, and Hans was incarcerated. After World War II, Lea rejoined her husband in Germany. Lea and Hans knew Sandel from Dresden, as both of them exhibited in his gallery Galerie junge Kunst. In 1949 Lea came to Warsaw, and had an exhibition of her works organized with the help of Sandel. See: Batya Brutin, "Lea Grundig: duality between political and Jewish identity - 1933-1939," in *Art in Jewish Society*, eds. Jerzy Malinowski, Renata Piątkowska, Małgorzata Stolarska-Froina, Tamara Sztyma (Warszawa: Polish Institute of World Art Studies, 2016), 231-238.

<sup>268</sup> While Sandel clearly valued engaged, realist art, he wanted to preserve as wide spectrum as possible. As Renata Piątkowska notes, although he was a prewar communist and a member of the Workers Party, "tried above all to save the works of Jewish artists, independent of their class background or of modern works full of isms." Renata Piątkowska, "Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts," 90.



Figure 18. Lea Grundig, Ernestyna Podhorizer, Józef Sandel, 1949 in Warsaw.

Source: Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

The majority of the artists included in the exhibition were not only of Jewish origin, but also considered themselves a part of Jewish culture and were seen by others as integral to it. The Maurycy Gottlieb's<sup>269</sup> self-portrait, repainted by his brother Marcin in 1887, was surely one of the key elements of the exhibition, as there was no better artist to represent the tradition of Jewish painting (fig. 19). Gottlieb was an important figure, considered to be the first Polish artist to implement Jewish subjects into his practice. Interestingly, the painting came into the possession of the Society in 1947 after Sandel bought it from Natan Gross, a renowned director and documentarist of the post-war Jewish community in Poland.<sup>270</sup> The painting, depicting a handsome Gottlieb in oriental costume, was ideal not only due to its author, but also its content.

<sup>269</sup> Maurycy Gottlieb (1856–1879) - realist painter, student of Jan Matejko known as the father of Jewish art.

<sup>270</sup> MŻIH, A-439, Natan Gross (1919-2005) was a filmmaker, director and writer, author of Yiddish documentary cinema. E.g. *Unzere Kinder* (1951) and *The Jewish People Live* (1947).

The young artist was portrayed during the masquerade in his house in Vienna, but this outfit invoked a fascination with the Oriental origins of the Jews.<sup>271</sup>



Figure 19. Maurycy Gottlieb's *Self-portrait*

Gottlieb's self-portrait in Arab Dress. Copy by Marcin Gottlieb painted in 1887. Source: Central Jewish Library, online collection.

Figure 20. Samuel Hirszenberg, *Boy on the Window*.

Date unknown. Source: Central Jewish Library, online collection.

<sup>271</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn provides a useful commentary about this painting: „This was one of his best-known paintings – the original has been lost, and only a copy, made after Maurucy's death by his younger brother Marcin, has survived. (...) he painted himself in a costume worn at fancy dress party held at the Kunstlerhaus in Vienna in 1877. Dressing up in oriental costume was certainly not unusual in those times, and some famous Europeans–Byron and Flaubert, for example– were painted and photographed in Arab gear. (...) Gottlieb has chosen here an Arab identity, more specifically Bedouin, which is to take the fashionable interest in the East rather far. This self-portrait in Arab dress is a very radical image, for it calls to mind not the 'golden age of Iberian Jewry, whose positive image in the Jewish world was celebrated in the Moorish synagogues of Central and Eastern Europe, but rather the eccentric behavior of some Jewish settlers in pre-World War I Palestine, who dressed in the Arab fashion in order to express their rootedness in the oriental land of their ancestors.” Ezra Mendelsohn, *Painting a People. Maurucy Gottlieb and Jewish Art* (Lebanon: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 109.

See also: Magdalena Tarnowska, “Wizja Palestyny w malarstwie Adolfa Behrmana - pomiędzy Orientem a Syjonem” (Adolf Behrman's Vision of Palestine) *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Kielcach* 26 (2011): 133-150.

This was not the first time that Gottlieb became not only a subject of admiration, but also an object of symbolic appropriation, harnessed for the needs of historical narrative. As Natasza Styrna notes, Martin Buber called him the harbinger of new Judaism, and Nahum Sokolow denominated him as a national Jew in every aspect, even “despite himself.”<sup>272</sup> Ezra Mendelson describes in detail the ways in which Zionists tried to appropriate Gottlieb for their political narrative after he passed away in 1879 and make him a symbol for their beliefs, “a nationalist artist *avant la letter*, an inspiration for the new national Judaism.”<sup>273</sup>

Gottlieb’s work influenced a whole generation of Jewish painters: for example, Samuel Hirszenberg,<sup>274</sup> whose works were also on display (among others, *A Boy on the Window*, and *Dancing Jews*) (fig. 20). He became known for his paintings depicting Jewish religious life in the academic style. Hirszenberg’s works expressed concepts of Zionism, and aimed to define Jewish national style. However, his paintings displayed in the exhibition—bought by Sandel for the Society in 1948<sup>275</sup>—came to transmit a different message. Ernestyna Podhorizer, in an article written for *Mosty* on the occasion of the exhibition opening in Legnica, proposed a complete interpretation of the displayed works, which married the commemoration of the Jewish culture lost in the Holocaust to the class struggle.<sup>276</sup>

This interpretation emphasized that Samuel Hirszenberg was not only talented, but someone who was “born and grew up in poverty in working class Łódź, and in his art he depicted the inhuman exploitation of both a Jewish and a Polish worker.”<sup>277</sup> Although he was not a victim of fascism, Podhorizer notes that in 1908 he fell victim to another tragedy, and “died from a

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<sup>272</sup> Natasza Styrna, “The Influence of the Zionist Ideology on the Jewish Artistic Millieu in Krakow, 1904-1939,” *World Art Studies* 3 (2010): 224.

<sup>273</sup> Ezra Mendelson, *Painting a People*, 173.

<sup>274</sup> Samuel Hirszenberg, (1865–1908) - heavily influenced by the realistic painting of Jan Matejko, studied also in the Royal Academy of Arts in Munich. In 1907 emigrated to Palestine.

<sup>275</sup> MZIH, A-69.

<sup>276</sup> *Mosty*, 14 June 1949.

<sup>277</sup> *Mosty*, 14 June 1949.

proletarian disease—consumption.”<sup>278</sup> The Marxist reinterpretation of the Jewish artistic canon went further, as Podhorizer listed courageous artist martyrs: Jan Gotard,<sup>279</sup> Henryk Barczyński,<sup>280</sup> and others who got to know the “effects of the rule of capitalism and its bloody butcher —fascism.”<sup>281</sup> These Jewish artists, she claimed, used their talent to serve the causes of the working class and progress. Their displayed work served as a reminder and a motivation for the fight to maintain peace and a democratic People’s Poland, which would guarantee the resurrection of Jewish life from the ruins.

Bruno Schulz’s<sup>282</sup> works entered the collection in 1947, bought in Łódź from a Mr. Zaderecki.<sup>283</sup> The exhibition included two works on paper: his self-portrait from 1919, and *Grotesque*, an illustration to his novel *Sanatorium pod klepsydrą* (The Hourglass Sanatorium) depicting a man with a barrel organ standing in a courtyard.<sup>284</sup> Zaderecki sold Sandel more of Schulz’s works, but it is no wonder that the historian decided to display only those two. Explicitly sexual compositions with naked bodies such as *Frivolous Women* or *Women Sadists* did not fit the expression of educational exhibition targeted to a wide audience including schoolchildren.<sup>285</sup>

In the case of Schulz, the tragic Jewish narrative was ascribed to his work only because of his death, as neither his life nor his art was easy to interpret in terms of Jewishness. Carol Zemel explicitly warns against putting Schulz into any category labelled “Jewish culture,” as his person was an expression of the landscape of diversity, which consisted of “Jewish Jews” (as

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<sup>278</sup> *Mosty*, 14 June 1949.

<sup>279</sup> Jan Gotard (1898-1943) was a painter, member of Brotherhood of St. Luke (Bractwo Świętego Łukasza).

<sup>280</sup> Henryk Barczyński (1896- 1941) was painter, graphic artist, member of Yung Yiddish group.

<sup>281</sup> *Mosty*, 14 June 1949.

<sup>282</sup> Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) – writer, and visual artist. He was one of the most important prose writers of the interwar period, although he published only two books: *Cinnamon Shops*, and *The Hourglass Sanatorium*.

<sup>283</sup> MŻIH A-460.

<sup>284</sup> MŻIH A-514.

<sup>285</sup> MŻIH A-738, A-461.



described by Celia S. Heller),<sup>286</sup> non-religious Jews, urban Jews, rural Jews, socialist Jews, Zionist Jews, and so forth.<sup>287</sup> Like many of his contemporaries, he was invariably characterized by a dual identity typical of all minorities.<sup>288</sup> As Zemel notes, in his nuanced work Schulz was more Polish than Jewish, but his Jewish origin became the reason for his death at the hands of the Germans, and subsequently for his art to be labelled as such.<sup>289</sup> Stefan Chwin notes that the artist did not want to be considered as a Jewish writer at all, and demonstrates that Schulz's literary works lack any nostalgic view of the shtetl, and that this view was only projected on his output by an ahistorical interpretation through the lens of the Holocaust.<sup>290</sup>

Later in 1949, *Opinia* published Podhorizer's article on Schulz's work and life, illustrated with his art.<sup>291</sup> Importantly, the role of Sandel and Podhorizer in promoting Schulz's work under Stalinism forms another interesting context: arguably it was their work that maintained the interest in Schulz's art before Jerzy Ficowski became its main advocate and promoter.<sup>292</sup> While Podhorizer wrote the article, Sandel collected materials for the publication and Eljowicz travelled with two of Schulz's works in Lower Silesia, the artist already became a "mythical hero of Jewish tragedy" or "a symbol of Jewish nostalgia."<sup>293</sup> Since then, it became impossible to read or look at his work without thinking of his death, as Podhorizer's emotional comment on his self-portrait illustrates (fig. 21):

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<sup>286</sup> Carol Zemel refers to Celia S. Heller's work *On the Edge of Destruction*, see: Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

<sup>287</sup> Carol Zemel „*My, Żydzi polscy...*”: *tożsamości artystyczne Brunona Schulza*, (We, the Polish Jews... Bruno Schulz's Artistic Identities) in: *Polak, Żyd, artysta. Tożsamość a awangarda*, Jarosław Suchan ed., (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi 2010), 143–144.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Stefan Chwin, "Dlaczego Bruno Schulz nie chciał być pisarzem żydowskim (o 'wymazywaniu' żydowskości w 'Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą' i 'Sklepiach cynamonowych')" (Why Bruno Schulz Did Not Want to Be a Jewish Writer), *Schulz/Forum* 4 (2014), 20.

<sup>291</sup> Erna Podhorizer-Zajkin, "Pamięci Brunona Schulza, literata i artysty malarza" (In the Memory of Bruno Schulz, writer and painter), *Opinia* 50 (1949), 20.

<sup>292</sup> Jakub Orzeszek's article explores and interprets the post-war encounters of Sandel and Podhorizer with the art of Bruno Schulz. See: Jakub Orzeszek, "Projekt książki umarłych" (The Book of the Dead: A Project), *Schulz/Forum* 11 (2018): 143-152.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

A frail, nervous man stands in front of an easel in his atelier, full of paintings. And in front of my eyes yet another image emerges: of a street in Drohobycz. The Nazi approaches the man on a bright day and without a word raises a revolver, shoots Schulz and kills him. And here lies the gifted artist, and his brain, which drew these beautiful literary works and novels full of finesse, hardens from the bullet stuck in it .<sup>294</sup>



Figure 21. Bruno Schulz, *Self portrait*

Created in 1919. Source: Central Jewish Library, online collection.

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<sup>294</sup> *Opinia*, 28 March 1949.



Figure 22. Jonas Stern, *In the Bunker*

Reproduction from the catalogue of *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*. Source: Central Jewish Library, online collection.

For Sandel, almost every painting was “shrouded in the final breath of its creator,” and was followed by a “halo of the artist’s martyrdom,” but he also expressed a deterministic approach in which all Jewish history led to the Holocaust. Sandel read art history backwards, stating that perhaps artists such as Henryk Glicenstein,<sup>295</sup> Jerzy Merkel,<sup>296</sup> Leopold Gotlib,<sup>297</sup> and Artur Markowicz<sup>298</sup> “feared the visual world of light” as “they sensed the nadir of the twentieth century and the specific situation in which the Jews would find themselves.”<sup>299</sup> In his view, the realist painter Markowicz, who died in the early 1930s, “dreamed of liberal bourgeois justice,”

<sup>295</sup> Henryk Glicenstein (1870-1942) – sculptor and graphic artist, active mostly in United States, where he emigrated in 1928. During 1907-26 his works were presented five times at the Venice Biennale.

<sup>296</sup> Jerzy Merkel (1881-1976) – painter active mostly in Vienna, where he was a member of the Hagenbund and the Secession

<sup>297</sup> Leopold Gottlieb (1883-1934) – modernist painter, brother of Maurycy.

<sup>298</sup> Artur Markowicz (1872-1934) – painter and graphic artist, studied under Jan Matejko, known mostly for numerous pastels of street scenes in the historic Jewish Kazimierz in Krakow.

<sup>299</sup> *Mosty*, 12 March 1949.

and painted naïve, religious Jews who trust their God and Emperor, but was not able to “notice that the flood of Hitlerism drew closer to the country.”<sup>300</sup>

Following this interpretation, the paintings—which once represented a particular style, tendency, or artistic movement—lost their qualities in order to become “Holocaust objects” as defined by Bozena Schallcross: objects of affect that are imbued with meaning and inscribed with memories.<sup>301</sup> In that sense, artworks are similar to the jewelry, clothes or shoes of those who perished in war, objects well known from Holocaust museums that constitute the most persuasive metonymy of the atrocities.

The vast majority of the art pieces was created prior to 1939, but there were few exceptions. For example, Jonasz Stern’s<sup>302</sup> linocut prints from the series *Lviv Ghetto*, created in 1945 and 1946 (fig. 22).<sup>303</sup> Stern was a Holocaust survivor, and his work was not “rescued” as all the rest but was created after the war and implemented in the exhibition as a visual testimony. Here again, Stern’s belonging to Jewish culture is a complex matter that developed in time. As Jerzy Malinowski, the best Polish expert on Jewish art notes, the criteria of describing artist as Jewish should be twofold: an artist either publicly defined himself as a Jewish artist or belonged to Jewish cultural Institution.<sup>304</sup> Following those criteria, it would be hard to label Stern as Jewish. For Stern’s biographer Anna Markowska, he was a Polish artist of Jewish origin:

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<sup>300</sup> *Mosty*, 12 March 1949.

<sup>301</sup> Bozena Schallcross, *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).

<sup>302</sup> Jonas Stern (1904-1988) – a painter, before the war member of the communist party, imprisoned for his political engagement. During the war lived in the Lviv Ghetto, and survived mass execution. Renowned for his dark abstract compositions.

<sup>303</sup> Agnieszka Dulęba, „Przy świetle księżycy, na przelaj” Relacje z ocalenia Jonasza Sterna w kontekście odbudowy polskiego życia artystycznego w drugiej połowie lat 40. (‘Under the Moonlight, Upstream’. Evidences of Jonasz Sterns’ Survival in the Context of Rebuilding the Polish Artistic Life in the Second Half of the 1940s), *Miejsce 2* (2016), 48.

<sup>304</sup> Jerzy Malinowski, *Malarstwo i rzeźba Żydów polskich w XIX I XX wieku* (Painting and Sculpture of Polish Jews in 19 and 20 century), (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2000), 3.

Stern's pre-war belief in a universal, negotiable code of standards, not based on any national or ethnic background let him to temporarily believe that those standards were fulfilled and embodied in the USSR. As we also know he was soon disillusioned, however. Before World War II Stern did not like to be either a Jewish or a Polish artist, blood and national criteria were something repellent and distasteful for him. But after the war he referred to Yiddish culture alluding to a specific tradition which on the Polish soil – contrary to Israel – was a symbol of modernization, hybridization and opening-up, as it took into account a broad cultural context and was not devoted to looking for unadulterated origins or fundamental background.<sup>305</sup>

The identity of the exhibited artists was retroactively constructed due to their victimhood, as if the Jewishness was constituted by being an object of Nazi persecution. While Maurycy Gottlieb was known as a Jewish artist, to consider others solely through their ethnicity is more problematic. Eugeniusz Żak<sup>306</sup> came from an assimilated family and was a protestant, and as many other Jews of the École de Paris, he did not emphasize the adherence to Jewish traditions.<sup>307</sup> Marek Szwarc, brought up in the spirit of Zionism, cultivated secular Jewish culture based on non-religious identity, to finally go back to religion and convert to Catholicism after the War.<sup>308</sup>

### 3.4 Reception and audience

The articles and short commentaries about the exhibition appeared in daily and weekly newspapers of various types: press with a distinctive working-class character and obvious propaganda undertones, more nuanced titles that gave greater space to culture, and Jewish press with a certain political orientation. Usually, the daily press published brief information about

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<sup>305</sup> Anna Markowska, "Reconstructing Community: Jonasz Stern's Art After Holocaust," in *Jewish Artists and Central-Eastern Europe* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2010), 387.

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<sup>307</sup> His work Boy's head included in the exhibition was bought in 1948 from Pochwalski. MŻIH, A-301. Jerzy Malinowski, "Awangarda żydowska w Polsce" (Jewish Avant-Garde in Poland) in *Polak, Żyd, artysta. Tożsamość a awangarda* (Pole, Jew, Artist. Identity and Avant-garde), ed. Jarosław Suchan, (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2010), 25.

<sup>308</sup>

the opening, repeating the general description. Occasionally, longer in-depth articles were published, elaborating on the character of works or interpreting them; however, those pieces were often written by Sandel, Podhorizer, or Eljowicz.

In *Trybuna Robotnicza* (Workers' Tribune), a short fragment signed as E.P (possibly written by Ernestyna Podhorizer) informed readers about the opening in Wałbrzych with the participation of the local authorities and representatives of cooperatives, schools, and workplaces.<sup>309</sup> At the opening Sandel emphasized the contribution of Jewish artists to world art, and appealed for the execution of the will of artist martyrs, whose artworks demanded a fight for world peace. The paragraph-long article was not extensive, as *Trybuna* usually devoted more space to art directly related to the communist doctrine: reporting on exhibitions of labor champions, or reprinting ideological texts such as “Why does the Soviet nation oppose formalism in art?”<sup>310</sup>

“Humans cease—art is eternal. Reflections of this kind come to mind while viewing outstanding works, rescued and collected at the exhibition.”<sup>311</sup> The reflective author of the regional newspaper *Słowo Polskie* (The Polish Word), which reported on the exhibition's opening in Wrocław, noticed how the exhibition room encapsulated “a huge bulk of the history of painting, from the nineteenth-century Munich school to the Parisian school.”<sup>312</sup> The author linked painters to the Polish tradition, recognizing Maurycy Gottlieb as a prematurely died student of canonic historical painter Jan Matejko,<sup>313</sup> and called the exhibition “a revelation” as the European names were rarely exhibited in the region. But the article did not overlook the

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<sup>309</sup> *Trybuna Robotnicza*, 13 May 1949.

<sup>310</sup> *Trybuna Robotnicza*, 14 May 1949.

<sup>311</sup> *Słowo Polskie*, 11 February 1949.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> Jan Matejko (1838–1893) was a Polish painter known for monumental paintings of notable historical Polish political and military events.

tragic narrative and stated that since most of the artists died at the hands of the Nazis, their art remained as a seed of further artistic development of the Jewish nation.

The reports and letters composed by Henryk Eljowicz give a glimpse into the number of visitors and—maybe more importantly—the characteristic of organized groups that visited the exhibition, composed mostly of workers and schoolchildren. A report from Legnica from June 6–20 tells of the visits of groups from Jewish Dormitory (28), ORT (12),<sup>314</sup> construction cooperative (45), “Model” cooperative (45), “Unity” cooperative (65), craftsmen union, soap cooperative (16), as well as schools: Hebrew school (30), pedagogical high school (19) Crafts Gimnazjum (35), and a group from Poalei Zion (27).<sup>315</sup> Usually school youth constituted the majority of the organized visitors, but the fact that here it was children and workers deserves a closer elaboration on the local context.

On the one hand, we may not attach particular meaning to this characteristic –groups of people from state institutions were simply forced to attend a cultural event. But the fact that Jews worked in cooperatives and visited the exhibition of rescued Jewish art, is related to the news forms of the identity of Polish-Jewish youth in post-war Lower Silesia. The Jewish community, employed in productive sector of the economy and working for the benefit of the

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<sup>314</sup> ORT, the organization of the Development of Craft and Agricultural Creativity among the Jewish population in Poland began its activity in Dzierżoniów in 1946. The main task of the organization was to organize workshops, courses, establish schools to spread professional knowledge. In addition, the ORT branches organized cultural events, led libraries and community centers. In addition, the Dzierżoniów branch had its own farm. In Dzierżoniów in 1946, the ORT ran four branches, and in 1948 - already 12. In October 1950, the ORT headquarters was dissolved, and local branches ceased to operate. ORT had its origin in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, where it was established with a mission to support craft as the more “productive” occupation of Jews than money loaning and service. Active in Poland among other countries in the inter-war period, ORT re-established its activity in the country in 1946, with 8 branches mostly located in Lower Silesia. It opened a network of schools, encouraged Jewish cooperatives and self-help. For further information about ORT in Poland and Europe, see: ORT in Yivo encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/ORT>, For the further history of ORT and its ideological agenda, see “Changing ideologies of artisanal ‘productivisation:’ ORT in late imperial Russia” in *East European Jewish Affairs*, 39 (2009): 3-18.

<sup>315</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/5, 6

state as a result of the *produktywizacja* policy, also maintained ties with the tradition and culture.<sup>316</sup>

Despite its propagandistic tone, the film *Der Yiddisher Yishev in Nidershlezye (The Jewish Settlement in Lower Silesia)* realized in Dzierżoniów two years before the exhibition by Natan Gross whom I mentioned earlier, gives a glimpse into everyday life of Jewish communities of Lower Silesia (fig. 23).<sup>317</sup> The film, narrated in Yiddish by Jakub Rotbaum, is a fifteen-minute enthusiastic report, which presents every-day life of the new inhabitants,<sup>318</sup> and presents a series of scenes about Jewish professional activity in factories and cooperatives, and subsequently depicts the lively Jewish cultural and religious life. Finally, it ends with a clear political demonstration of Jews agitating for the Polish right to the newly acquired lands.

The film is divided in two almost equal parts: one on the factories and cooperatives, and the second depicting cultural and religious activity. The film presents a Jewish Kitchen organized by the Poalei Zion party, the Jewish religious congregation in Dzierżoniów, and a variety of cultural organizations: the People's House in which the theatre circle perform the Jewish folk dance performance, Jewish Theatre in Wrocław, and the sport club in Bielawa, where a group of young men and women perform gymnastics. The education of the youth, as the narrator says, is the best way to provide stability of the *Yiddisher Yishev*. This social context places *the Rescued Works* in the wider project of Jewish culture in socialist Poland, in which the workers were meant to share their time between hard work and cultivation of tradition and culture.

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<sup>316</sup> For the details of *produktywizacja*, see for example Piotr Kendziorek, *Program i Praktyka Produktywizacji Żydów Polskich w Działalności CKŻP (Program and Practice of Productivisation of Polish Jews in the Activities of CKŻP)*, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2016). The issue is also discussed in English by Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence*, 194.

<sup>317</sup> Kinor was founded in 1946 by the Goskind brothers and continued the pre-war tradition of Jewish cinema. Between 1946-1950, it produced full-length and short films. Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia*, 189.

<sup>318</sup> Jakub Rotbaum (1901–1994) was a theater director, actor, and painter who worked in Warsaw, Vilnius, and New York. See: Jakub Rotbaum in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*. [http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Rotbaum\\_Jakub](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Rotbaum_Jakub).





Figure 23. *Der Yiddisher Yishev in Nidershlezye*, fill still. Jewish miners standing in front of the map of Polish Lower Silesia. Source: Youtube

According to the official report, the audience was very keen to visit the exhibition. “Numerous statements of visitors to the exhibition, - the report reads - from painters as well as working intelligentsia and workers, testify to their great appreciation for this event.”<sup>319</sup> However, the correspondence between headquarters of ŻTKSP and Henryk Eljowicz reveals that the quest to attract workers and school children to the exhibition was actually a constant struggle for attention.

Making the schools come to the exhibition was not easy, but sometimes paid off, for example in Dzierżoniów, where due to his efforts and negotiations with local officials, all the schools visited the exhibition.<sup>320</sup> One of the challenges was to fit all the presentations of the exhibitions within the school period before the holidays start.<sup>321</sup> But as much it went somehow with schools, the workplaces caused more trouble. Eljowicz tried to communicate with the

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<sup>319</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP, 361/5, 1.

<sup>320</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/5, 21.

<sup>321</sup> AŻIH, ŻTKSP 361/5, 32.

inspectorate and the board of the union, only to attract more people,<sup>322</sup> mostly after numerous phone calls only a handful of employees came to see the art. As Eljowicz put it, despite the fact that the number of workplaces in the area was considerable, the amount of visitors was not.<sup>323</sup> Similarly in Świdnica, to get schools was easy, but “with the workers’ mass we do not have that many chances.”<sup>324</sup> In one of the letters to Warsaw, Eljowicz openly reported that “the workers do not express any interest at all.”<sup>325</sup>, and bitterly concluded that “the wide audience has absolutely no interest” in the visual arts.<sup>326</sup>

His letters also reveal the scope of hardships of Eljowicz: struggles with technicalities, organization, attendance, as well as the local people and institutions. “One must remember once and for all, not to ever rely on all those *people of culture*,” he writes<sup>327</sup> “You have no idea how slow and clumsy all the workers of culture here are,” he states in other letter to Warsaw, and cannot imagine to leave the exhibition under the supervision of the locals.<sup>328</sup> Also the contact with the press was not the easiest: some of the journals completely ignored Eljowicz, others printed his own text only after he reminded them multiple times.<sup>329</sup> Finally, when the tour comes closer to an end, he writes from Świdnica: “I don’t know what you plan with this exhibition further is, comrade Sandel, but I must admit I am nervously exhausted with this work.”<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 29.

<sup>323</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 21.

<sup>324</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 29.

<sup>325</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 30.

<sup>326</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 16.

<sup>327</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 21.

<sup>328</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 21.

<sup>329</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 22.

<sup>330</sup> AŹIH, ŹTKSP 361/5, 30.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The traveling exhibition organized by ŻTKSP in the spring of 1949, was a special constellation in which the past – the heritage of the Jewish culture salvaged from destruction – was confronted with the new social and political reality of post-war Poland. The exhibition, organized as an attempt to reach the Jewish population in Lower Silesia, was also a chance to presents the achievements of ŻTKSP in collecting works of Jewish artists.

The exhibition was a celebration and commemoration of Jewish artists in the ethnically unified Poland, where the Jews were only legally recognized minority, and where their culture had to be subordinated to the principles of ideological doctrine. The exhibitions also exemplified, how an artificial group was created first due to the Nazi persecution and later because of the common victimhood. The works presented in the show were gathered not according to the aesthetics, but the origin of their author. Paradoxically, in was an art exhibition in which style, movement, and artistic choices were only secondary.

To conclude, I argue that the discussed exhibition is an example of post-Holocaust Jewish identify constructed through the collective victimhood. Moreover, the emphasis on martyrdom and the fact that the exhibition was meant to reach wide audience, was the reason why it could take place in Stalinist Poland in the first place. While cultural autonomy of the Jews was problematic for the authorities, the figure of Jewish victim was easier to accommodate in the official narrative. For Sandel, Podhorizer and Eljowicz, displaying collected works of Jewish artists was a mean of reconstructing the Jewish culture in Poland. But as it was the last exhibition carried by ŻTKSP, it became a symbolic epilogue to its activity.

## Conclusion: dead people and living objects

In this thesis, I showed how artworks go through a series of lives, as they are involved in changing sets of social relationships. As the title of the concluding part suggests, here I intend to reverse the contrast “living people and dead objects” described by Stanisław Lorentz, to which I referred in the introduction. I will do so to argue that it was the artworks that actually lived on long after those who engaged in their recovery had died. In the course of this conclusion I will assess how the focus on objects helped me to understand the historical dynamics of Poland in the immediate post-war period, and how the juxtaposition of the two exhibitions sheds a new light on each of them, as well as on the long-lasting reconstruction of Polish and Polish-Jewish culture. I showed how the discussed displays of “rescued” artworks, the prototypes of restitution exhibitions, may be considered as documents of their time, and expressions of the post-war construction of collective identity. But in the last pages of this thesis I propose to look not only at the outcomes of this research examining the two exhibitions, but also to touch upon the relations between humans and objects in the decades that followed. Therefore, I will go back to the three R words introduced in the first chapter in order to explore how the remembrance, reconstruction and restitution are part of processes, which went on after 1949 and are still relevant today.

The two art exhibitions examined in this thesis displayed artworks created prior to 1939 in the aftermath of WW2. In both cases, the exhibitions emphasized the fact that the artworks on display survived the war and therefore symbolized the destruction, and subsequent resurrection of national culture. The fact that these artworks were damaged, stolen or recovered from a loot (as in the case of *Warsaw Accuses*), or that they had been created by the Jewish artists and survived the Holocaust in a good shape (in the case of *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*),

constituted the main reasons for their display. Therefore, in both cases the biographies of the artworks were more important than their artistic value, style or movement they represented.

Examining biographies is helpful in seeing the society that constructs them: “a way to understand a culture is to see what sort of biography it regards as embodying a successful social career.”<sup>331</sup> For this thesis however, my focus was not on the “successfulness” of a particular biography, but rather its “usefulness.” I was interested in how the biography of an object can be useful for a national community, can be utilized as a symbolic glue, and can support or construct a common identity. What kind of artworks were considered important and worthy of being displayed in the aftermath of the horrors of war, and at the beginning of a new political system? What were these artworks, found in the Nazi storages, or bought from antiquarians, intended to signify?

First, let me return to the National Museum on May 3, 1945: to the symbolic scene of water flowing from the fountain in museum’s courtyard, as if from the spring of the capital’s life; to the museum rooms with hundreds of artworks carrying the marks of turbulent years, to the war time chronicle, to the names of art historians commemorated in the hall. And finally, to the atmosphere full of pathos, as the reconstruction of national culture began. The presence of the head of the State National Council Boleslaw Bierut, Prime Minister Edward Osóbka Morawski, and even the Soviet ambassador at the exhibition’s opening, made it apparent that the newly-appointed authorities were as committed to the idea of cultural reconstruction as art historians and architects. Was it just a spontaneous act of joy, a humanist appreciation of the triumph of universal culture over the nightmares of war? Surely, the collective enthusiasm of opening the exhibition in the ruined city was obvious. No doubts, there was the anger and rage of the citizens of the Polish capital towards the Nazi occupant that took numerous lives and destroyed

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331 Igor Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things,” 66.

the city's culture. But in order to understand the bigger picture, I propose to separate two things, namely, to distinguish the mission of cultural reconstruction passionately carried by groups and individuals from the fact that *Warsaw Accuses* was an exhibition celebrating Polish national culture, meaning its tradition and history. And not only did it take place with such importance but was also so strongly promoted by the authorities of the Soviet-backed Communist-dominated state.

Speaking about the immediate post-war years and the beginning of the communist rule, it is easy to oversimplify the picture and imagine two separate forces: those in favor of national sovereignty against those working for the benefit of the Soviet influence; or stated more simply, Polish patriots versus communists who favored non-Polish values.<sup>332</sup> However, it was the nationalist discourse that was, in fact, a key element in legitimizing communist rule. The new authorities, lacking the social mandate to rule, turned to the nationalist rhetoric and culture.<sup>333</sup> This becomes clear from the way in which artworks in *Warsaw Accuses* were made to talk.

By gathering objects to signify the wounded national heritage, the exhibition expressed the patriotic atmosphere of the liberated Polish capital. But it did more than that: it also heralded the important place of national culture in the first years of communist rule. It told the story of occupation, of deliberate destruction of libraries and archives, and of the looting of precious collections. The exhibition mourned the decapitated statue of national poet Adam Mickiewicz, and the destruction of the royal castle as the embodiment of Polish heritage. By 1949, the Mickiewicz statue was standing again. And it was not alone – among the monuments erected

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<sup>332</sup> A central construct of historiography about the 1940s stated that Poland was a place of a “civil war.” As Padraic Kenney notes “the term has been a standard trope of anti-Communist historiography (...). The two sides of the conflict, naturally are Communists and democrats, or Communists and ‘society,’ with the latter resisting the imposition of an alien worldview.” Padraic Kenney, “After the Blank Spots Are Filled: Recent Perspectives on Modern Poland,” *The Journal of Modern History* 79 (2007): 151.

<sup>333</sup> Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*.

and reconstructed between 1945 and 1950, nationalist themes considerably dominated over the socialist ones.<sup>334</sup>

*Warsaw Accuses* brought together patriotic paintings, ancient artefacts, canvases, and pieces of broken statues from different places and times, and treated all as one – the exponents of national heritage, once plundered by the Nazis, to be finally resurrected. As we notice from the poster depicting the three crosses of Golgotha, this resurrection is exactly when Polish-Catholic culture was universalized as the only relevant tradition of the capital, and perhaps of the whole state. As early as 1945, the deep engagement with traditionally regarded Polish heritage was at the very core of the post-war communist country that soon became ethnically homogenous. Through art, the first exhibition in the National Museum introduced the new, unified Poland where there was one national culture, in which Matejko, discovered by Stanislaw Lorentz and brought back to Warsaw, had a central place.

Lower Silesia, where Lorentz recovered treasures of national art so dear to the Polish patriots, was a stage of many parallel exchanges discussed in this thesis – such as population exchange, the expulsion of Germans and the subsequent settlement of Jewish communities repatriated from the Soviet Union. It was a place of restitution missions – of the search and triumphal recovery of paintings so iconic to Polish history, but also the region where Jewish post-Holocaust life was envisioned. It was there that the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* traveled to be displayed for the eyes of Polish-Jewish workers and schoolchildren.

On the one hand, the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* exemplified a project that never truly flourished: a Jewish community in Lower Silesia that gradually ceased to exist. Now we know, that the grand illusion came to an end, as the community had no place in post-war Poland

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<sup>334</sup> Thomas S. Gladsky, “Polish post-war historical monuments: heroic art and cultural preservation,” *The Polish Review* XXXI (1986): 157.

because of fear, grass-root anti-Semitism and nationalist state-policies. However, a close examination of *the Rescued Works of Jewish Artist*, as well as of the post-war activity of Jewish Society of Encouragement of Fine Arts, allows us to see the Jewish community in Poland not as doomed to fail, but as heroically trying to maintain its continuity. Similarly, the whole art collection of ŻTKSP gathered in the post-war years by Józef Sandel and his colleagues, from pieces donated and bought from Polish antiquarians and private people, serves as a document of that time. Or rather, as a monument erected to signify the Jewish culture in Poland cultivated against all odds.

Two kinds of art restitution described in this thesis – one carried from above for the glory of new Poland, and the second, conducted from below as an attempt to reconstruct Jewish culture – provide an insight into the historical moment when both realities were envisioned to be true: a vibrant Jewish community within a proud Polish state. In 1949, the Polish-Jewish minority could give expression to its wartime loss and persecution, but not to its cultural autonomy. Unlike the exhibitions of ŻTKSP's collection which were organized to express loss and tragedy, the Jewish Pavilion during the Recovered Territories exhibition was censored as it emphasized the separateness of the Jewish community in Poland too strongly.

My reading of the exhibition organized by ŻTKSP, and of the artworks that were displayed, points to an issue that reaches beyond the Polish-Jewish community in Lower Silesia, namely, to the ways in which a post-Holocaust Jewish identity was constructed. After the population exchange, the Jewish artists posthumously addressed the workers in a national narrative, based on common victimhood. Their voice was mediated by objects which were described as “salvaged” or “rescued” just because they had been painted by Jewish artists, and later incorporated in the collection of the Jewish organization. Clearly, all the artists were Jews, but was their art inherently Jewish? After the Third Reich ended, Jewish artists, both dead and alive



– including those who never artistically thematized and processed their ethnicity – were all grouped according to their Jewish origin.

The artworks displayed in the exhibition manifested that the rich and diverse cultural Jewishness, both in its contemporary and historical form, was reduced to a victimhood, or rather – to use a word so common in the communist dictionary – a martyrdom, as if murdered on the altar of a political struggle. The Nazi persecution became the formative force that retroactively and artificially created community.

But collective victimhood is a phenomenon much wider than post-Holocaust Poland. Almost fifty years after the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists* took place, Yuri Slezkine observed that the Holocaust was “the true source of late twentieth-century Jewishness. In a world without god evil and victimhood are the only absolutes. The rise of the Holocaust as a transcendental concept has led to the emergence of the Jews as a Chosen people for the new age.”<sup>335</sup> The exhibitions of ŻTKSP were meant to give voice to the voiceless, to commemorate the dead artists by displaying those works which survived. But in taking the role of spokesperson of victims, Sandel was confronted with the responsibility of such a constellation.

Sandel was the one who imposed victimhood on the voiceless artists, even those who never lived through the Holocaust. But the role of spokesperson also brings the responsibility of appropriating and instrumentalizing one’s suffering.<sup>336</sup> Historians, exhibition organizers and museum makers are custodians of, and consequently the sites of, collective memory. They are the ones who constitute it by writing objects’ biographies, ascribing them with meaning and identity, and consequently creating a community.

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<sup>335</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 370.

<sup>336</sup> Benjamin Zachariah, “On Not Understanding the Stranger,” 103.

This brings me to the more general problem of the social role that (art) historians are to play when confronted with questions of victimhood and suffering. By becoming spokespersons of collective victimhood, they are forcing a compulsory belonging – as it was in the case of the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*. They create a community that is as unified as it is artificial, and it brings the risk of not only simplification but also of ignoring the individual. Here, the danger is the same as it is in the case of any oppressed, or disempowered community, for which claiming victimhood is a condition for social recognition. This legitimation of community through victimhood creates a seemingly unproblematic and unified identity of the “model victim” in which the nuances, differences, and internal conflicts are put aside.

But let me get back to the protagonists of this study, as neither the human, nor the objects’ biographies ended with the exhibitions. During a wave of unification of Jewish institutions the Jewish Association for Culture (*Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kulturalne*, ŻTK) became the only organizer who took over the preservation and perpetuation of Jewish culture in Poland. In the case of ŻTKSP the bond with the tradition of pre-war organization worked for its disadvantage. ŻTKSP was dissolved and incorporated into the wider structure as an art department. With no ties to the prewar traditions, and without Józef Sandel in the governing body, ŻTK was to become the only meaningful organization governing Jewish culture in the subsequent decades. In September 1949 the collection of paintings, graphic works, drawings and sculptures became a part of the Jewish Historical Institute – just as Sandel advocated, so that the collection remained undivided.

Although Sandel was the one that merged Marxist beliefs with the deep engagement in art history, and in his work highlighted how Jewish artists criticized capitalist conditions, his place in the system of post-war Jewish institutions became more and more marginal. The art museum that he envisioned as a place for displaying the collection found no place in the Jewish

Historical Institute, which was instead devoted to the documentary aspects of commemorating the Holocaust. But unlike many Jewish intellectuals devoted to the preservation of Jewish memory in Poland, who left the country as the new regime settled down and the communists seized control and centralized Jewish institutions, he did not emigrate.<sup>337</sup>

In 1953, Sandel and his coworkers were dismissed from the institution, forced to leave behind the collection in which no one had real interest anymore. Some of the ŻTKSP's missions, as Renata Piątkowska notes, were fulfilled only years after the organization ceased to exist.<sup>338</sup> Sandel remained devoted to his scholarly work and research of Jewish artists. Finally, in 1957 he published the two volume *Jewish Artists Who Perished in Poland (Umgekumene jidisze kinstler)*. His next work *Art of Jews in Poland (Plastisze kunst baj jidn in pojln)*, was published only after his death, in 1964. After almost twenty years, Ernestyna Podhorizer came back to the Jewish Historical Institute, and as a director of its museum continued the work she had started with Sandel, commemorating his scholarly achievements.<sup>339</sup>

The look at two differing, yet related art exhibitions and at the trajectories of people and objects involved in them, which I proposed in this thesis, illuminates the historical polarities and tensions in the post-war Poland that continued after 1949. While references to the interwar legacy made the ŻTKSP and Józef Sandel problematic, the continuity with pre-war tradition was not an obstacle in the case of Stanisław Lorentz. His expertise, strength, personal connection, or ability to accommodate to the changing climate, enabled him to stay in his position through the long decades of communist Poland.<sup>340</sup> While the ŻTKSP was merged into

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<sup>337</sup> For example, Rachela Auerbach, a writer concerned with the problem of memory and visibility of the war-time destruction, and a promotor of Yiddish culture in Poland, left the country in 1948 when she saw no possibility of perusing adequate research. Karolina Szymaniak, "In the Ice Floe: Rachel Auerbach – The life of Jewish Intellectual" in Ferenc Laczo, Jachin von Puttkamer (eds.), *Catastrophe and Utopia. Jewish Intellectuals in Central And Eastern Europe in the 1930s and 1940s*, (Oldebbourg: De Gruyter, 2019), 318.

<sup>338</sup> Renata Piątkowska, "Jewish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts," 79.

<sup>339</sup> Erna Podhorizer-Sandel, "Wspomnienie o Józefie Sandlu," 111-119.

<sup>340</sup> Here, however is important to note that the politics of Stalinist period did not omit the National Museum. The best-known example is the trial of Michał Walicki, colleague of Lorentz and had also took part in restitution

the centralized structure of communist institutions that claimed no reference to the pre-war organizations, Stanisław Lorentz supervised a group of scholars seeking roots for state-legitimation much further in the history. In 1949, due to the proximity of the millennial anniversary of the Baptism of Poland, the government established the Department for Studies on the Origins of the Polish State, to conduct extensive research on the origins of the state of the first Piasts.<sup>341</sup>

Lorentz remained the director of the Museum and led the institution for almost half a century: through the toughest years of Stalinism and the thaw, up until 1981. Throughout the years, he built a network of museum institutions supervised by the National Museum and organized many prominent historical exhibitions in Poland and abroad.<sup>342</sup>

“During emigration I had time to think about the gigantic work of our Nation in rescuing, what an Englishman would call ‘National Heritage.’ I consider the dear Professor and his team, which he organized in such an exemplary manner, as the pioneers of this fight.” Stanisław Wachowiak, who cooperated with Lorentz during the war to secure art collections, wrote to him in a letter from Sao Paulo in August 1968.<sup>343</sup> “And regarding the Royal Castle” – he added – “BRAVO! After all, it is a matter of the whole Nation!” In this short, enthusiastic comment Wachowiak referred to the critical issue of the reconstructing Warsaw Castle. While the official decision of the reconstruction was made three years later, in 1971, a special unit dealing with

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mission in Pomerania and prepared Warsaw Accused. Walicki (1904-1966) was arrested in 1949 on false accusations and imprisoned for four years due to his wartime involvement in the Home Army conspiracy. As Aleksandra Guja notes, the unjust sentence he received was relatively low as for the standards of that time. Not only because of the lack of evidence against him, but because of the strong position he held in the scientific community and the reaction of this environment to his trial. Aleksandra Guja „Sprawa profesora Michała Walickiego (1949-1953)” (The Case of Professor Michał Walicki 1949-1953), *Teka Historyka*, 50 (2015).

<sup>341</sup> Adrianna Szczerba, “Powołanie kierownictwa badan nad początkami państwa polskiego” (Establishing the Department for Studies on the Origins of the Polish State), *Przegląd Archeologiczny* 65 (2007): 13-18.

<sup>342</sup> Among others, Lorentz supervised the exhibitions for the thousand years of Polish state, organized in Philadelphia (1967), Ottawa (1967), Paris (1969) and London (1970). See: Andrzej Michałowski, “Stanisław Lorentz (1899-1991):” 102.

<sup>343</sup> A letter from Stanisław Wachowiak to Stanisław Lorentz 9 August 1968 quoted in Alina Kowalczykova, “Wrocław 1945:” 68.

the restoration of the Castle's remaining parts had operated since 1956 and conducted a series of operations in the second half of the 1960s.<sup>344</sup> Wachowiak congratulated Lorentz on the next step in the reconstruction of what had been destroyed a quarter of a century earlier.

However, while this restitution of the grand symbol of the Polish state was finally on the horizon, at the same time, the chances to reconstruct Polish-Jewish culture were shattered. Only a few weeks earlier, during the same hectic summer of 1968, the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party Władysław Gomułka famously stated, "we do not want a fifth column in our country," marking the high-point of the anti-Semitic campaign.<sup>345</sup> The massive campaign run by Gomułka's nationalist government led to the emigration of thousands of Jews, and to the ultimate demise of the Jewish community and the dream of cultivating Jewish culture in post-Holocaust Poland.

The new wave of interest in Jewish culture emerged slowly two decades later, but this time, without the significant presence of Jews themselves. From the late 1980s on, non-Jews gradually embraced and enacted Jewish culture through education and culture, and later also through commerce and tourism.<sup>346</sup> Here, let me go back to the works that had been gathered by Sandel, which were alive one more time in the process of Jewish renaissance. A milestone exhibition Polish Jews (*Żydzi Polscy*) organized in the National Museum in Krakow in 1989 – a major sign of growing interest in Polish-Jewish history – included, among others, pieces once displayed as the *Rescued Works of Jewish Artists*: Hanryk Barczyński's *Portrait of a Girl*, Samuel Hirszenberg's *Boy on the Window*, Icchok Brauner's *Water Carrier*, and the famous

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<sup>344</sup> Jan zachwatowicz, „Odbudowa Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie: prace Komisji Architektoniczno-Konserwatorskiej Obywatelskiego Komitetu Odbudowy Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie” (The rebuilding of Warsaw's Royal Castle – works undertaken by the architectural section of the National Committee for reconstruction of the royal castle), *Ochrona Zabytków* 100 (1973): 13-20.

<sup>345</sup> Dariusz Stola “Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967–1968”. *The Journal of Israeli History*, 25 (2006): 175–201.

<sup>346</sup> Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Maurycy Gottlieb's *Self-portrait*, repainted by his brother Marcin, just to mention a few. Of all the Jewish artists that returned from oblivion in the 1990s onwards, the case of Gottlieb is particularly illustrative: even Polish president Lech Wałęsa was present at the opening of Gottlieb's grand retrospective in Tel Aviv.<sup>347</sup>

Did the objects from the former ŻTKSP collection finally break out from the compulsory belonging to a group defined by collective victimhood? Possibly, yes. As time passes, more and more pieces from Sandel's collection are celebrated as they should be, with studies and exhibitions that carefully study their nuances, as in the case of Bruno Schulz, who is interpreted now far beyond the martyrdom frame.<sup>348</sup> For example, Schulz's *Grotesque*, collected by Sandel in 1947, was exhibited in Paris in 2014 along with the works of important figures of the Polish avant-garde, and of a young generation of artists born in the 1980s inspired by surrealism.<sup>349</sup>

Not only particular artworks, but also histories of collections receive more and more attention. An exhibition opened in the autumn of 2014 *Salvaged. Collection of paintings, drawings and sculptures from the collections of the Jewish Historical Institute* was a reference to the way in which ŻTKSP gathered the artworks.<sup>350</sup> A subsequent display *Art history and the Fight for Memory. Józef Sandel (1894–1962) Founder of Jewish Historical Institute Museum* placed Sandel's life achievements of preserving art in the center of attention.<sup>351</sup> Similarly, also

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<sup>347</sup> Ezra Mendelson, *Painting a People*, 194.

<sup>348</sup> Due to the activity of the curators of the Jewish Historical Institute research, the artworks from the collection are researched and exhibited. For example, the artworks of Samuel Hirszenbeg and his brothers was a subject to an exhibition *Bracia Hirszenbergowie - w poszukiwaniu ziemi obiecanej* (Hirszenberg brothers - in search of the promised land) presented in Łódź in 2015 and Warsaw in 2017. See: *Bracia Hirszenbergowie – w poszukiwaniu ziemi obiecanej. Katalog / Hirszenberg Brothers –in Search of the Promised Land. Catalog*, Adam Klimczak, Izabella Powalska, Teresa Śmiechowska (eds.), (Łódź - Warszawa: Muzeum Miasta Łodzi, Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2017).

<sup>349</sup> The Night of the Great Season, exhibition curated by Martha Kirszenbaum in La Kunsthalle Mulhouse. February 19–May 11, 2014.

<sup>350</sup> *Ocalale. Kolekcja malarstwa, rysunku, rzeźby ze zbiorów Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego/Salvaged a Collection of paintings, drawings and sculpture from the holdings of the Jewish Historical Institute*, ed. Marta Budkowska (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2014).

<sup>351</sup> Jakub Bendkowski, Mikołaj Getka-Kenig, *Józef Sandel. Art history and the fight for memory*.

Bronisław Krystall's contribution to the collection of National Museum was recognized and celebrated with an exhibition organized in 2015.<sup>352</sup>

In the discussion of the two exhibitions, I touched upon a number of key issues not only in Polish or Polish-Jewish history: among them, the construction and reconstruction of collective identity, the urge to remember the past, and the relation between the majority and the minority culture. These concerns, I believe, are still our concerns. Neither the Remembrance, nor Restitution, which I addressed in the context of 1940s, are closed issues today. Frequent conflicts over war-time memory do not stop but escalate into diplomatic catastrophes.<sup>353</sup> Although recoveries of artworks stolen from public institutions are carried out by the Polish state,<sup>354</sup> similar projects for the pre-war collections of individuals remain largely absent,<sup>355</sup> or are misinterpreted and evoke anti-Semitic backlash.<sup>356</sup> Writing about the need for such a research program to reconstruct the contents of more pre-war collections, Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz writes that, as a result, “some objects would be restored to the heirs of their original, pre-war, Jewish owners.”<sup>357</sup> But while the question of ownership remains crucial for many, I

<sup>352</sup> Katarzyna Mączewska, Krzysztof Załęski eds., *Bronisław Krystall. Testament, katalog wystawy*.

<sup>353</sup> See for example: Daniel Schatz, “Poland must deal with its past —and return its stolen property,” *Newsweek.com* 23.5.2019; “Polish far-right marches in protest at US pressure for Holocaust restitution,” *Times of Israel*, 12 May 2019; Rafał Pankowski “The Resurgence of Antisemitic Discourse in Poland” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 12 (2018): 21-37.

<sup>354</sup> The Division for Looted Art operates under the Ministry of Cultural and National Heritage. Since 1992, the Polish Ministry of Culture has been collecting data on losses suffered by Poland during the Second World War. See: <http://lootedart.gov.pl/en/>. See also a recent story about artwork returned to National Museum: Kate Brown, “An American Couple Returned a Looted Painting to Poland. In the Process, They Became Unlikely Figures in the Country’s Fight for Gay Rights,” 13 May 2019 *Artnet News*, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/looted-art-gay-rights-poland-1542655>.

<sup>355</sup> Michael Bazylar and Szymon Gostynski note “In transition of its economy away from Soviet-style socialism (...) Poland is often viewed as a model for the other post-Communist states to follow. In the restitution arena, however, Poland is the laggard, and needs to look to its neighbors on how restitution can be achieved.” See: Michael Bazylar and Szymon Gostynski, “Restitution of Private Property in Postwar Poland: The Unfinished Legacy of the Second World War and Communism,” *The Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review (ILLR)* 273 (2018): 329.

<sup>356</sup> Karol Witenberg, Alan Charlish, “Polish far-right supporters protest against restitution of Jewish property,” *Reuters.com*, 11 May 2019 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-israel/polish-far-right-supporters-protest-against-restitution-of-jewish-property-idUSKCN1SH0HA>.

<sup>357</sup> Nawojka Cieślińska-Lobkowicz, “Dealing with Jewish Cultural Property.” 166.

agree with Cieślińska-Lobkowitz, who states that “ultimately, the most important restitution would be the long-overdue restoration of the common Polish-Jewish cultural memory.”<sup>358</sup>

My thesis leaves open perspectives for further research. The collections of public institutions such as the National Museum in Warsaw or the Jewish Historical Institute call for a careful study not only from the usual art historical perspective, but also from an angle that illuminates art’s social function, and therefore allows us to see the roles of culture and identity in post-war Poland. While this research sheds light on the life of the artworks for two meaningful exhibitions in the immediate post-war period, each and every one of their biographies remains a study of their own. Fascinating trajectories of people, whose lives were tied to objects, also call for a deep and critical study. While in parts of this thesis I juxtaposed the activity of Stanisław Lorentz and Józef Sandel, I believe a broad, comparative analysis of their biographies would shed light on different social realities of being an art historian in 20<sup>th</sup> century Poland. As representatives of the same generation, both were strongly influenced by the war-time experience and participated – each in his own way – in reconstructing postwar culture. As national identity is a relation to others, rather than inherent quality, juxtaposing different biographical trajectories enables one to see more. And, despite the fact that the initiatives of ŻTKSP and National Museum differed greatly, as well as the objects that they displayed, to consider them together is to look at their reality from a wider angle, and noticing the multilayered meanings carried by the artworks, “the ideal victims” of war.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid.



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