
The Creative Didactic Activity of Outstanding Artists, Graphic Arts Teachers in Poland

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ABSTRACT

This study is of a historical nature, representing an attempt to reconstruct the educational work of several outstanding Polish creators of artistic and applied graphics. It is assumed that the teaching work characterized by an artist's attitude to the student in the Master-disciple relationship, supported by the example of the Master's own work, results in the development of the student's creative aptitude. The article presents, of necessity in a fragmentary manner, the teaching work (and students' opinions) of artists, who - in respecting their students' individuality and creating an atmosphere of benevolence and esteem - supported the development of their talents. The profiles of selected artists are presented, including: W. Skoczylas, E. Bartłomiejczyk, H. Tomaszewski and J. Szancer in an attempt to demonstrate that these outstanding artistic personalities, were, as it turns out, also eminent teachers in the Polish artistic education movement of the twentieth century.

INTRODUCTION

In the XXth century, the development of psychology as a science resulted in attention being paid to the role of creativity and imagination in the development of personality (Popek, 2010). Moreover, researchers were aware of the crucial role of these issues in terms of their effects for the development of civilization. Nowadays, imagination is a recognized component of creativity, viewed as a special, spontaneous, creative force. An analysis of the psychological and pedagogical literature concerning creative activity points to the theorists' and researchers' multi-faceted interest in the issues of imagination (Tarasiuk, 2013). For the artistically gifted, a high level of creative thinking, its flexibility, as well as an exuberant imagination, is typical. Perceptual sensitivity, visual memory, eye-hand coordination and manual dexterity should also be developed in the teaching process in art schools. The adepts of such schools are creators, hence the specific ways of artistic education. The role of the teacher is the most important in artistic education. Artists working

as teachers in higher education, are known as the creators of art. It is rare, however, for their teaching to be documented. This study is an attempt targeted at the reconstruction of the educational work of a few outstanding creators of Polish artistic and applied graphics. The study is of a pedagogical-historical character and concerns the methods applied by teachers-masters, graphic artists designing books, their creative attitudes towards the didactic process and their influence upon their students.

In the interwar period an intensive development in art schools took place. During this period, the teaching of applied graphics crystallized at the academic level, reaching very high artistic status unusually quickly. Undoubtedly, the primary cause for this was the educational work of a unique group of artists, creators of Polish applied graphics. The most outstanding graphic artists - teachers active in Warsaw - were, among others: Edmund Bartłomiejczyk (1885-1950) and Władysław Skoczylas (1883-1934)¹. In the postwar People's Poland, education in applied graphics was related to the activity of many professors, among others: Henryk Tomaszewski (1914-2005), Jan Marcin Szancer (1902-1973) and Janusz Stanny (1932-2014). At least some of the methods used by the teaching artists to develop the creative abilities of their students and their artistic skills are worth recalling.

CREATIVE TEACHING OF GRAPHICS. EMINENT ARTISTS – TEACHERS. THE INTERWAR PERIOD

The Department of Graphic Design at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts (SSP), later the Academy of Fine Arts, was organized and directed between 1922-1934 by Władysław Skoczylas. Therefore his activity is important, not only because of the quality of organizational and programme changes in teaching that he introduced, but also due to the measures taken for graphics to become an independent discipline: "The workshop with all the equipment was located in the basement. There modern Polish graphics was born, this black and white art, whose echo, thanks to its high level, spread throughout the world" (Sopoćko, 1989). Skoczylas knew and predicted the value of the art of reproduction, its capacity and mass character, and he announced a new "graphic era" of the arts. Its implementation happened through individual creation and outstanding teaching activity. Together with his students, he worked to disseminate graphics and to instil a culture of arts. These activities were jokingly called "a xylographic storm".

In his teaching Skoczylas acquainted students with graphic techniques and with "the style of work drawn from the materials and the tools" (Wallis, 1934, p. 52). It was a preparation for independent, individual and creative work. As a way of achieving this assumption, he accepted individual compositions on any subject. "He rejected mindless

¹ Stanisław Ostoja-Chrostowski (1897-1947), Waclaw Radwan (1887-1962), Bonawentura Lenart (1881-1973), Adam Półtawski (1881-1952) should also be mentioned.

copying of nature and copying of patterns" (Wallis, 1934, p. 16). The selection of topics served this purpose; portraits of saints, illustrations of beliefs, rituals, folk sayings, proverbs and legends dominated. He emphasized the need for ornamentation. Ornament and repetition of decorative motifs were often inspired by folk patterns. Over time, the students adapted materials and tools to the intended formal effects, among which textural qualities and colour value were in the lead. The Master respected the individuality of the students and encouraged them to be independent without duplicating existing representations (Wallis, 1934, p. 19-22). The outstanding student of Skoczylas, Konstanty Sopoćko recalls:

"I remember well the hard-hewn face, powerful physique of the professor, his short lectures and concise corrections. He was a man of few words. The better his guidance could be remembered. With a warm but firm voice he taught how we should fall in love with a piece of smoothed wood, with a polished copper plate, and how to make friends with chisels and burins" (Sopoćko, 1989).

After four years of Skoczylas' work at the Warsaw SSP, the first exhibition of the art society „Ryt” [„Etching”], associating mainly his students, was presented. The level of this display confirmed the new approach to graphics and the deliberate and consistent implementation of the ideas permeating his teaching. Among the students, interest was growing mainly in wood engraving, but the master himself introduced the broader arcana of graphic arts to the students.

"The workshop of Skoczylas (...) is perfectly conducted. First and foremost, all the techniques have been equally taken into account. Wood engraving gained a greater autonomy, became free from the cut line classically carried (...) lithography uses crayon drawing and ink very freely, and we see the great results achieved with *ossa sepiæ* and wash (painting). In etching and related techniques the hints of the professor, leading his students by combining different techniques on the same plate, could be seen" (Siedlecki, 1931).

A consistent approach to these assumptions resulted in individuality in the work of graduates of the Faculty of Graphic Arts.

"It was as if Władysław Skoczylas, sensed the increasing importance of graphics, when he devoted all the energy and pedagogical talent to his beloved profession (...). He loved art and was able to inspire young talents with this love of his" (Chrostowski, 1986, p. 133).

The Master of wood engraving brought the artistic milieu together, and he regularly exhibited students' work to the community of Warsaw (Woydyno, 1924, pp. 192-195; see Bart-

nicka, 1975).

From mid-October 1926, Edmund Bartłomiejczyk was appointed lecturer in applied graphics at the SSP. He was an artist with great professional and didactic experience and his artistic personality accounted for the formation of the graphical skills of students until the end of the interwar period.

"The applied graphic design studio led by Professor Edmund Bartłomiejczyk, solves the problems of a book, a book cover and any graphic image associated with multiplication on paper and exhibits works created very diligently and perfectly. A student is taught book aesthetics there, making texts and illustrations such as wood engravings, which is, to a certain extent, a repetition of the historical development of a book, which originates from woodcuts and texts cut in wood before a text was broken into individual letters and began to be composed in rows and columns on a complete page of a book. In this studio, illustration of poems and book printing in the lithographic process are also used, which again provides the advantage that a student deals with the qualities of black-and-white and colour values of illustrations and text, and learns the harmony of merging these two elements. Stickers and covers for books are full of useful invention and of aesthetic solutions in colours. The most difficult to find there is a good solution for letters and a drawing: the two elements fight with each other on a plane, because one of them has a predetermined form – a letter - whose integral part is the content, while the second – a drawing – is of any form" (Siedlecki, 1931).

The wide creative interests of the artist in conjunction with applied graphics also enriched the students' experiences. Bartłomiejczyk's teaching work at the Warsaw SSP was based on a study execution of a small number of tasks. The realisation of the exercise lasted up to six months and it usually required that several versions of the task be explored. At the start of the task the professor demanded as many designs as possible. He selected one of the designs at the beginning, explaining the choice. The student completed the task in the chosen graphic technique. During its development, the task was subjected to repeated corrections, in which the professor activated the individuality of the student, without imposing solutions. He pointed out that each of the presented ideas could be used adequately to refine the chosen version. These ideas often represented the next stages in the work towards the completion of the task. This was the method of using art forms and attempting to differentiate various solutions in guiding the development of graphic techniques. During the first year of specialization in Applied Graphics, students were expected to realise a project for the design of packing paper as their first topic. There then followed a period of developing experience with the use of the lettering, for example, in

creating a logo or a poster on a chosen topic in small format. The second year of specialization required the student to complete a project in relation to books. He/she was expected to design book-jackets and to develop expertise in the typographical layout of pages, ornaments and pictures. Chosen themes were frequently executed as large-format posters. The layout of a book was most frequently chosen as the subject for diploma work. The professor allowed other subjects, if they could be justified formally and in terms of the topic.

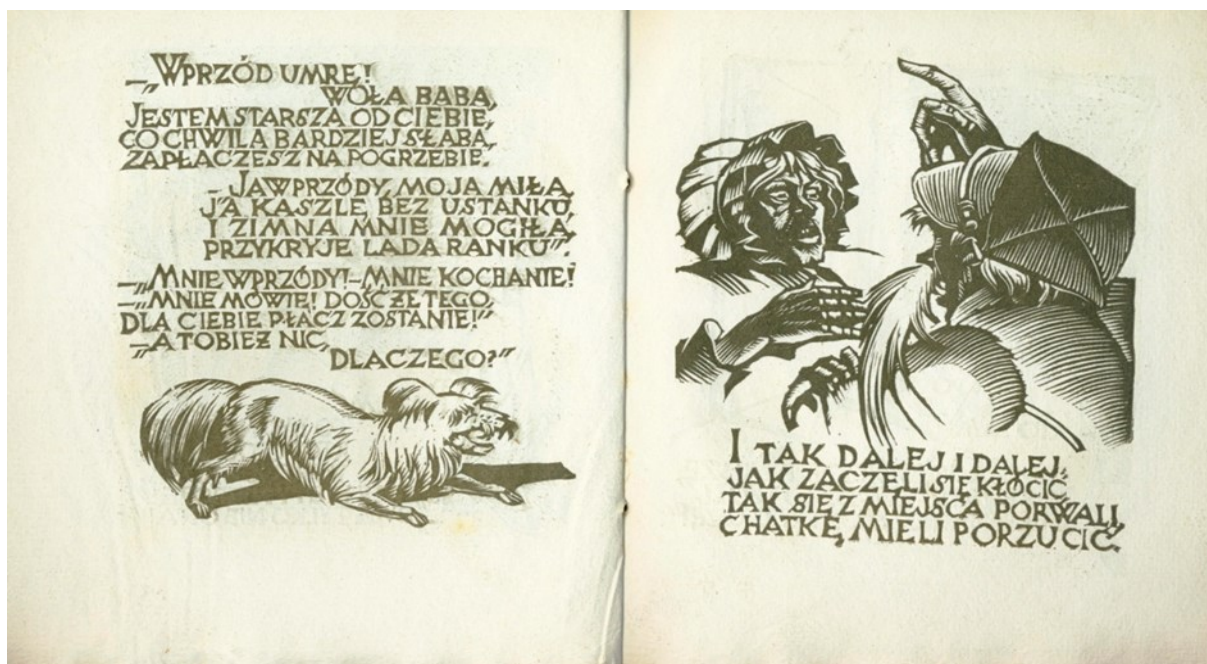


FIGURE1 Bartłomiejczyk, Kraszewski Dziad i baba.

Bartłomiejczyk was characterized by more than a cordial approach to his students. His expertise, but above all, his kindness, his attitude - that of an educator, a guide in life, is emphasized in the memoirs of his students. "He was a balanced teacher, he really knew how to assess the merits of students.

"He was not indifferent to their needs and difficulties in life. His good-natured friendliness and warmth, as well as a cheerful disposition, won him popularity and the sincere attachment of young people; in their language he was simply called „Bartek”. Tricks were played on „Bartek“, his name day was celebrated sumptuously at the academy, but everyone rushed to him for advice and help in difficult situations and with their troubles" (Grońska, 1984).

The correction of work plays a great role in artistic education.

"During corrections he discussed a great deal, he did not impose his own style, trying to bring out and develop the individuality of the student. He treated students equally, but - assessing their aptitude and capabilities - he individualised and dispensed the dif-

faculty of tasks accordingly. He had a cordial and amicable relationship with students, a cheerful disposition and also an exceptional conscientiousness and responsibility in carrying out his professorial duties. His interest in students and contact with them was not limited to corrections only. He encouraged them and emphasized the need for overall intellectual development, while the atmosphere of trust and friendly intimacy created by him, predestined him for the role of a trustee in the personal troubles and worries of young artists. He remained in close contact with former students after their graduation, caring about their work, providing advice and sharing his wealth of experience" (Grońska, 1984).

The contribution of Bartłomiejczyk to the education of the younger generation of graphic designers, the so-called "utilitarians" is impressive and undeniable. His contribution to the search for new areas for the expression of wood engraving should be noted, as well as the search for new uses of applied graphics and extending the scope of its functions. The students of Bartłomiejczyk were able to follow his work, which has been successful in Paris, Poznań, Sofia. As the founder of The Circle of Advertising Graphic Artists he supported the debuts of his students, presenting their work at exhibitions in the years 1935-1938. The significance of Bartłomiejczyk as an educator of artistic youth was great. His disciples are the most eminent Polish book artists: Bohdan Bocianowski, Michał Bylina, Zofia Fijałkowska, Jerzy Karolak, Edward Manteuffel, Wanda Manteufflowa (Zawidzka-Manteuffel), Konstanty Sopoćko, Tadeusz Tuszyński and others.

THE PEOPLE'S POLABD YEARS

The Academy of Fine Arts (ASP) in Warsaw continued the tradition of graphic education in Poland. Applied graphics, as one of the disciplines developed gradually, stimulated by the scope of the needs of the growing statehood of the Polish People's Republic. The Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw revived its operations in 1945, functioning under the Act on academic schools of 15 May 1933 (Official Journal 1937, 52, 406). Ostoja-Chrostowski was involved in its rebirth as the first post-war Rector, only six weeks after the liberation of Warsaw, together with Edmund Bartłomiejczyk (Vice Rector from 14 June 1946, and Dean of the Faculty of Graphics).

In the environment of Warsaw, Henryk Tomaszewski's role in shaping the creative personalities of many artists-illustrators was important. His students were engaged in the creation of posters, graphic designs and illustrations. The Master introduced to the stylistics of illustration, the simplification of an artistic mark, the discipline of colour, once again highlighting the path taken by Polish artist-illustrators at the end of the 1930s. Much of this experience was derived from the studio of Henryk Tomaszewski, who attached great

importance to the unique and new solutions of the undertaken task, using artistic means. His method consisted of assigning the tasks, which were often abstract concepts, to future poster artists - and these were shaped above all by the intellectual sensibility, the ability of logical thinking and the imagination of the students. Tomaszewski's model of teaching, based on exercising and stimulating the intellect, seeking new solutions, eliminating stereotypes, not succumbing to any schemes and, above all, emphasizing the individual language of the designer, has become a specific interpretation of the Polish poster school. His synthetic artistic expression influenced a whole generation of students. An outstanding artist Janusz Stanny, referring to his Master - Henryk Tomaszewski says:

"during the later years of the Academy the strongest impression on me (...) was made by Henryk Tomaszewski, in whose poster studio a special atmosphere of mental ferment reigned. The tasks constructed by him, surprising, though defiant, were intended to provoke the adoption of an intellectual attitude towards their realization, could then have been treated as the boldest experiment, are now shrouded in legend" (*Sztuka*, 1989, 2).

In 1954 Jan Marcin Szancer was awarded the title of associate professor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. "Assessing his creative work with appreciation" - wrote Tadeusz Kulisiewicz - "as that of an artist and a teacher - I suggest that the academic title of associate professor be bestowed on Mr. Jan Marcin Szancer" (*Registry of the ASP in Warsaw*, KD 148).

His own programme for the Studio of Book Illustrations, realised in the fourth year of graphics studies, provided a number of illustrator tasks. *Diaries of Pasek*, *Memoirs of my time* by Niemcewicz, Cellini's *The Autobiography* were used for the tasks designed to introduce students to the specificity of the historical era and the history of culture and customs, allowing them to establish their own contemporary interpretation of a given era. Illustrating fairy tales and legends was an important task, developing the imagination and freedom of composition in form and colour. Later the students illustrated contemporary novels, applying modern formal solutions. Drama literature (e.g. by Słowacki, Witkiewicz, Zapolska) was the basis for successive practice, using either the characteristics of the epoch, or the author's own vision of the stage play. The next educational section was that of illustration for poetry. Fifth-year students were given a choice of topics, such as: *War and Peace*, *Life and Death*, *Moon*, *Warsaw*, *Mediterranean Culture*, *Nature Protection* and required to design an album. The task was to determine the contents and to select and compose the entire material with consultation from experts in the field. The aim was to allow the student to gain basic knowledge on complex editing issues: how to formulate the concept of a book properly and to determine the type of illustrations, format, typogra-

phy, cover and dust jackets. Students were expected to prepare a model of their chosen album (*Registry of the ASP in Warsaw, The file: Programy studiów Wydziału Grafiki* [Curricula of the Graphics Department]. 1955, pp. 1-2).



FIGURE 2 Szancer, *Konopnicka Baśń o Krasnoludkach i Sierotce Marysi*.

Szancer's programme was modified over the years and it was adapted to individual students' needs. An inherent requirement - as Szancer claimed - for the creation of a sense of illustration is an extremely good understanding of the artistic intentions of the author of a given text and the ability of the graphic artist to sense these intentions. This, of course, requires the specific selection of individualities. No work of art can result from the random matching of creators, even the most valuable ones, who are strangers to each other in the aspect of atmosphere (Szancer, 1956, p.43). His exceptionally rich personality instilled in the students a desire for their own exploration, revived their interests and encouraged a variety of artistic activities.

In 1976, after the death of Jan Marcin Szancer, Janusz Stanny became the director of the Book Graphics Studio. Lech Majewski was his assistant. In subsequent years, under the artistic direction of Professor Stanny, this Studio played a particularly significant role in building the quality and identity of the Warsaw Faculty of Graphics and educating artists of remarkable creative dispositions. Characteristic, however, were the words of Professor Stanny concerning the decline in innovativeness of the students in the Books and

Illustration Studio at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts at the turn of the century: "Over the last few years I have noticed a slowdown of emotions. For example, tasks related to romantic literature trigger the objection that it is literary trash (...). Books lose out to television. Before the mass watching [of TV] students brought something of their own, now they reproduce television pictures like Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse" (*Guliwer*, 2004, 2, p.47, 50). The artist notes a decrease of creativity among students due to the reproduction of visual schemes from the media. In the years 1976-2001, in the studio conducted by Stanny, 159 students graduated with a specialization. Through their intensive work in the field of children's book illustration, many of them gained a permanent place in the history of the field. The Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts has continued this glorious tradition after systemic transformation. The names of the following artists-teachers deserve mention here: Janusz Stanny, Lech Majewski, who as a student of Henryk Tomaszewski extended the life of his master's teaching methods, improving them in his own work, Maciej Buszewicz, Grażyna Lange.²



FIGURE 3 Stanny de La Fontaine *Bajki*.

CONCLUSION

The personalities of eminent and creative graphic artists - teachers directly influenced the

²The Books and Illustration Studio, following the retirement of J. Stanny, was in 2003 taken over by Zygmunt Januszewski (1956- died 13.09.2013).

artistic development of young people in the master-disciple relationship. This relationship was marked by an exceptional atmosphere of kindness, which contributed to the development of natural artistic talents, retaining their individuality. Professional artistic education of a creative nature, developed dispositions towards creative thinking, artistic and perceptual skills as well as imagination - as documented in the presented examples of the tasks recommended for students. It has resulted in the successes of Polish graphic artists and it is still fostering their further achievements.

A research analysis of the teaching process and teachers' attitudes towards their students presented above confirms that the function of academic training was achieved at the highest level, both in the transfer of knowledge and skills and in educational formation, manifesting itself in the awakening of students' intellectual and creative needs. Teaching at this level is inextricably linked to the research work of the academic teacher, in this case with his creative activities in the area of graphic art. In the light of research the Master - Student relationship is irreplaceable in art education. The didactic activities of the artists - teachers presented often contradicts attitudes, which are nowadays common among university professors; as Zbyszko Melosik indicates: "(...the) university teacher ceases to be <<a master >> or <<a wise man>> is reduced to <<a tutor >> or even to a simple <<transmitter>> of the required knowledge and skills. In such a situation, a professor loses control over the objectives, methods and evaluation of education - all these become the domain of the employer and of the general – established by a university (and sometimes externally) - << procedures of education quality >>" (Melosik, 2008, p. 246).

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