Museums of a Stateless Nation, between History and Art

Polish National Museums in the Nineteenth Century

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In his 1996 publication, the American researcher Allan Wallach mentioned two preconditions for the establishment of national museums in the nineteenth century:

> The first precondition is that there must be a centralized state power that has the ability to create and sustain national institutions. It follows that when such power exists, particular institutions and groups may claim national status and in some situations may be capable of designating themselves 'national', but their claims will, in the long run, be of relatively little consequence without the state's imprimatur. Second, the state must experience a need for a national gallery and a national collection. Needs of this sort vary, but they fall into two broad categories: the need to address a national audience, that is, to represent the nation to itself in a particular form and thus play a role in shaping it as, what Benedict Anderson calls, an "imagined community", and, second the need to address an international audience and thus represent the nation in relation to other nations.[1]

Wallach admitted that it is not always possible to identify these two conditions, especially because the beginnings of national museums were often independent from state initiatives, in particular when the state did not exist. Such was the case for the key Polish museum institutions in the nineteenth century: their origins lay in grassroots projects undertaken by individuals, associations, and, if the political situation allowed it, municipal and regional authorities. These museums developed at different paces – sometimes struggling with significant financial problems, sometimes altering their originary principles and visions for the future. To use Wallach's words, before 1918 they lacked the "state's imprimatur". Therefore, Polish museums expressed "the need to address an international audience and thus represent the nation in relation to other nations" to a much lesser extent than comparable institutions in other countries. The primary goal of the former was to unite Polish society and provide it with information on Polish history, culture, and art.

1 Wallach 1996, 113.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the historical territory of Poland was divided among Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Each of these countries had its own laws and policies towards Poles: take, for example, the policies of Russification and Germanization implemented by the Russian and German authorities in their respective territories and, contrastingly, the autonomy granted to Polish Galicia in Austria-Hungary after 1860. Despite the differences between the regions, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Poles founded museums that were perceived to be 'national', whether on a *de facto* basis – as attested by publications and written sources from the period – or because they had the word 'national' in their very name.[2]

Although early initiatives to create museums with the designation 'national' were undertaken in Poland as early as the eighteenth century,[3] actual national museums (or institutions considered to be such) only emerged after 1870. The latter consisted of: the *Musée National Polonais* (Polish National Museum) in Rapperswil, Switzerland (opened 1870), the *Muzeum im. Mielżyńskich w Poznaniu* (Mielżyński Museum in Poznań, 1881), the *Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie* (National Museum in Krakow, 1883), the *Muzeum Narodowe im. Króla Jana III we Lwowie* (King Jan III National Museum in Lviv, 1908), and the *Muzeum Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie* (Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw), which was called after 1916 the *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie* (National Museum in Warsaw). The institutions in Lviv[4]

2 In this article I discuss institutions that, in the nineteenth century, functioned in the capacity of a national museum either directly, i.e. by including the 'national' component in their name, or indirectly by invoking the term in literature, private communications, or the press. In nineteenth-century Poland (understood to encompass the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1775, i.e. before the first partition of Poland, currently within the borders of Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Latvia) over 500 museum institutions existed. Some did not go beyond the design phase, and others were very short-lived. They were established by Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, Germans, and Ukrainians, and their character varied – from museums associated with educational, religious, scientific, artistic, and industrial groups and institutions, to local museums, which were important for shaping regional identities. Museum institutions with various profiles were also established by Polish emigrants (Rapperswil, Rome, Lucerne, Chicago, Paris, Brussels). The list of museums operating in Poland before 1918 is published on the website of the research project "*Muzeum w polskiej kulturze pamięci*" (Museum of Polish Memorial Culture): http://muzeumpamieci.umk.pl/?page_id=74. The summary of the project can be found in Rosset, Tołysz, Wawrzak 2020.

3 The first (uncompleted) project of establishing a national gallery (*Proyekt Galleryi Sztuk wyzwolonych Narodowey*) was conceived by Józef Salezy Ossoliński in 1785, before the final collapse of Poland (see Ossoliński 2020, 71–96). In the years 1848–1850, a rather ephemeral private museum in Dresden was created by a collector, Maciej Wodziński. His widow named the institution the Wodziński National Museum. However, the collection was quickly transported from Dresden to Paris and incorporated into the collection of the Polish Library. See Rosset 1993, 1–46; Adamska 2007, 477–498.

4 The King Jan III National Museum was created in Lviv in 1908 in a tenement house on the Market Square. The house had belonged to the Sobieski family in the eighteenth century, frequently hosting the Polish king Jan III Sobieski. As it required a thorough renovation at the beginning of the twentieth century, only a modest collection of historical memorabilia connected with King Sobieski was displayed before the outbreak of World War I. It developed into a full-fledged institution after 1918. See Czołowski, 1911, 5.

and Warsaw[5] fall beyond the scope of this article, as their activities did not fully develop until the interwar period. For a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon in question, I will supplement this list with references to smaller museum institutions throughout the text.

The most important Polish national museums were established in large urban centres, namely in regional capitals (i.e. Poznań, the capital of Greater Poland in the nineteenth century within the borders of Prussia, and Krakow, the main city of Galicia in the nineteenth century within Austria and later Austria-Hungary), but also in other nations (i.e. Rapperswil in Switzerland). They were founded by city authorities, learned societies, or private collectors. The fact that the museums were established and managed by various entities made their activities very diverse.

However, one can observe two main areas of interest for Polish national museums in the nineteenth century: national (Polish) history, on the one hand, and Polish art, primarily contemporary painting, on the other. In some cases, like that of Rapperswil, the dominating elements of the collection were connected with historical elements that, at least initially, were also sentimental, nostalgic, and emotional in character. This sentimentality bespeaks the institution's intended influence on viewers. Elsewhere, the wish to exhibit and promote Polish art prevailed over the interest in objects related to national history (i.e. the Mielżyński Museum in Poznań). And certain museums underwent an evolution in their declared status, from that of a national gallery of painting to that of an institution attempting to show various aspects of Polish culture (National Museum in Krakow). The present analysis of the activity of these museums will focus on the discourse accompanying their creation, the goals set by their founders, and the curation of their exhibitions.

The History of Poland: From Nostalgic Vision to Scientific Collection

Interest in Poland's past, strengthened by the will to preserve and protect historical relics from being dispersed and destroyed, had guided Polish collecting efforts since the loss of independence. Initially, in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was private collectors who assembled historical artefacts. One of the first such figures was Izabella Czartoryska née Flemming (1746–1835), who created the *Świątynia Sybilli* (Temple of the Sybil) and the *Dom Gotycki* (Gothic House) in Puławy to display national treasures. The two buildings accommodating the aristocrat's collections are considered by some researchers to constitute the first Polish museum.[6] The Temple of the Sibyl housed weapons and memorabilia of military heroes along with items from the crown treasury and the treasury of the

5 The National Museum in Warsaw was officially established during World War I (1916). It included, among others, the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, which had existed in Warsaw since 1862. It was established as one of the educational institutions accepted by the Russian authorities under the "Public Education Act in the Kingdom of Poland", having been approved by Tsar Alexander II. It was a government institution under the control of the Ministry of Public Education of the Russian Empire. In 1898, its management was taken over by the city of Warsaw. The museum had no permanent home for more than half a century. See Masłowska 2002.

6 Żygulski 2010, 169.

Wawel Cathedral chapter in Krakow, the former seat of the Polish kings. Meanwhile, the holdings in the Gothic House were universal, with relics of famous figures from European culture and works by Old Masters.[7]

However, it was only after 1870 that collecting such relics became more institutionalized and ceased to be solely the domain of private collectors. Upon the establishment of the museum in Rapperswil – on the private initiative of Count Władysław Broel-Plater (1806–1889), an insurgent and émigré activist – the need to preserve historical memorabilia was emphasized. Broel-Plater had settled in Switzerland because the country welcomed Polish emigrants fleeing persecution by the tsarist authorities for having participated in national uprisings. Initially a private endeavour, the museum was subsequently transformed, according to its founder's wishes, into a public institution, operated by an émigré foundation under the supervision of a committee comprising both emigrants and Poles living under the foreign occupation. In 1869, Broel-Plater signed a lease agreement with the authorities of Rapperswil to occupy a medieval castle overlooking the town, with a term of ninety-nine years. The Polish National Museum officially opened within its walls on 23 October 1870.[8]

The intellectual rationale for using the word 'national' in the name of the museum reflects how the term 'nation' was understood at the time. In his essay "What a Nation Is and What It Needs to Exist", published in the *Album of the National Museum in Rapperswil* in 1872, the philosopher and activist Karol Libelt distinguished "nation" from "the closely related words: state, country, homeland", listing six features that he believed constituted the former: "tribalism, faith, language, customs, and rites, native and scientific education, the whole historical past".[9]

Libelt's definition was partly reflected in the construction and exposition of the Rapperswil museum. Initially, the collection was dominated by the library, which contained rich archival materials, including the correspondence and autographs of Polish kings and other historical figures. The 'Antiquities' section consisted of items from archaeological excavations (donated by the Society for the Advancement of Arts and Sciences in Poznań), weapons, and a significant collection of historical memorabilia. In the 'Art Collections' section, one could find portraits of kings and famous Polish men of state, along with other paintings, watercolours, and "photographs of works by the most distinguished Polish artists".[10] Broel-Plater prided himself on the diversity of the museum collection. In the text he authored on the occasion of the opening, he referred to the *Germanisches Nationalmuseum* (Germanic National Museum) in Nuremberg as a model of a private foundation that had been transformed into a public institution.[11] Indeed, Rapperswil – with its archaeological, historical, artistic, and even ethnographic artefacts (both originals

7 On the collecting activity of Izabella Czartoryska née Fleming, see above all Żygulski 2009; Jurkowska 2014 (includes an extensive bibliography of the previous studies); Mencfel 2021.

8 On the museum in Rapperswil see Bąbiak 2010, 142–151; Rosset 2005, 188–191; Janik 2010; Pomian 2016, 53–57.

9 Libelt 1872, 46.

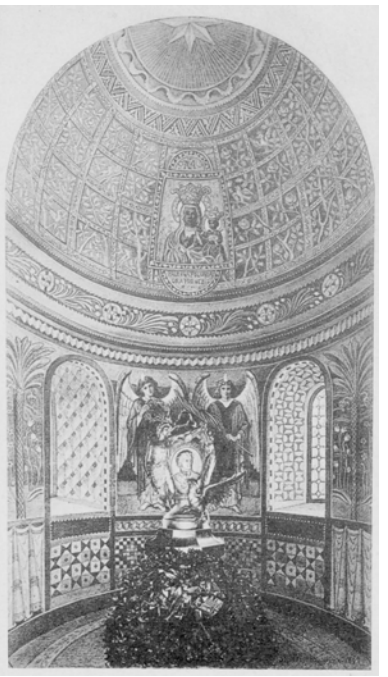
10 Broel-Plater 1872, XVI.

11 Ibid., XV.

and copies of various kinds) – echoed the founder's deep interest in the Nuremberg museum, which displayed all traces of German culture: texts, prehistoric artefacts, works of art, etc.

How did the museum present its collections, and, consequently, how did it construct its narrative and seek to affect its audience? The very entrance to Rapperswil Castle revealed the character of the collection.[12] The lintel of the gate leading to the castle courtyard was decorated with stone busts of the Polish king Kazimierz the Great (r. 1333–1370) and Queen Jadwiga (r. 1384–1399), as well as with the coats of arms of Poland and Lithuania (fig. 1). A mausoleum containing the heart of Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817), the hero of the Polish fight for independence, was created in a small chapel on the ground floor of the structure (fig. 2).

Fig. 1 (left): View of the gate of the Polish National Museum in Rapperswil, before 1906;
Fig. 2 (right): Mausoleum with Tadeusz Kościuszko's heart, Polish National Museum in Rapperswil, postcard published by Kunstverlag Th. Zingg, before 1906.

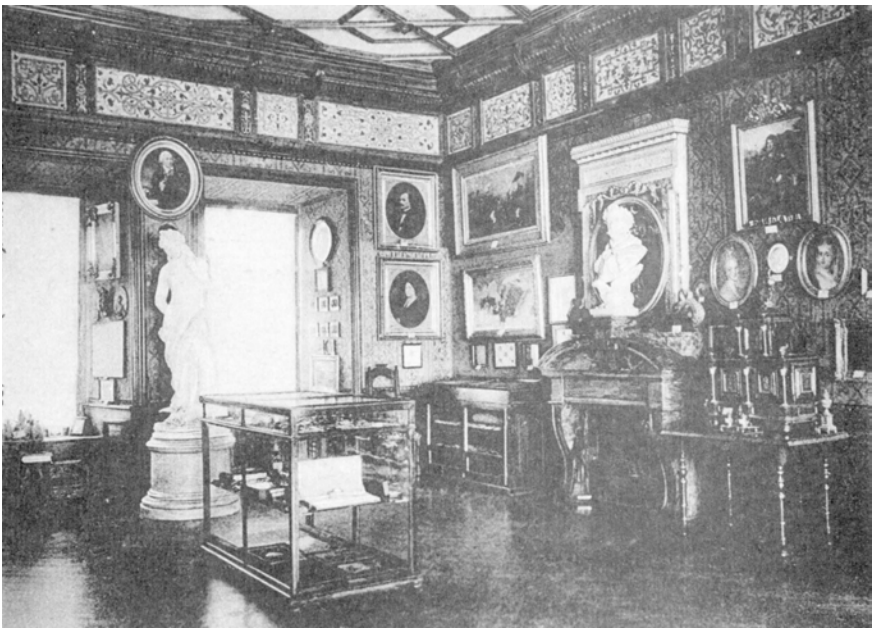


The exhibitions therein incorporated various items of ancient and recent memorabilia: visitors to the exhibition halls could see busts of Polish poets, military men, and heroes of the uprisings, alongside souvenir objects, such as a tablecloth given to King Jan Sobieski (r. 1674–1696) by the inhabitants of Gdańsk, or an 1832 letter of support from the English people to the Polish nation – with 100,000 signatures on a series of conjoined

12 Description of the Rapperswil Museum interiors based on museum catalogues ("Catalogue" 1872, "Le Musée national" 1909) and preserved photographs.

parchment sheets measuring over 36.5 metres in length. On the first floor of the museum, one could find the Portrait Room, containing primarily portraits of Polish kings, poets, politicians, and emigrants, as well as display cases housing mementoes of famous historical figures (fig. 3). On the same floor were the Uniform Room, presenting mainly the uniforms of the Polish army, and the Armoury, with old as well as modern weapons. The museum had further rooms, such as Tadeusz Kościuszko Hall, featuring mementoes of the hero arranged around the bed in which he died; Nicolaus Copernicus Hall, displaying portraits of the astronomer alongside editions of his works; and Friends of Poland Hall, which housed items related to foreigners supporting the Polish efforts to regain independence, among them Charles de Montalembert, George Washington, and Giuseppe Garibaldi.

Fig. 3: View of the portrait room of the Polish National Museum in Rapperswil.



The installation sought to affect the viewer mostly on an emotional level. Playing a major role in that respect were mementoes (mostly personal items) of heroes who had fought for independence. Rather than conveying knowledge about the history of Poland, the exhibition presented only selected historical events, often in a non-chronological order. Those responsible for the curation highlighted the subject matter and protagonist of each work rather than tracing historical development over time. Indeed, the exhibition was intended to shape the emotions of the recipients rather than to transfer knowledge. This atmosphere, evoking the sentimental and romantic collecting of historical items, was openly criticized in the Polish press already by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1911, Polish intellectuals, in particular the writer Stefan Żeromski, who had worked as a librarian in Rapperswil in the 1890s, accused the museum managers of malfeasance,

including the removal, mishandling, and damaging of collection items as well as the fabrication of new items.[13] In the 1911 brochure *For the Future of Rapperswil*, Żeromski called for a display that would meet the requirements of a "modern historical museum".[14] Many years would elapse before any institution in Polish territory would meet these demands. While almost every museum in Poland had a department dedicated to historical memorabilia,[15] none of them could be described as a coherent, well-thought-out and systematized collection that would shape knowledge about the past.

Visitor experience at the Rapperswil museum was informed by the emotionally charged, nostalgic atmosphere. A comparable mode of presenting the past could be found in the exhibitions that, in the mid-nineteenth century, acted as substitutes for museums and enjoyed great popularity and attendance. These were large undertakings involving Poles from all three partitions (i.e. Prussia, Austria, and Russia). The most important such events were the *Exhibition of Antiquities and Art Objects* in Warsaw in 1856, the *Exhibition of Antiquities and Art Monuments* in Krakow at the turn of 1858 and 1859, and the monumental *Jubilee Exhibition* of King Jan III in Krakow in 1883 celebrating the 300th anniversary of the victorious battle of Vienna against the Turks. These represented first opportunities for the general public to see treasures from private collections, usually aristocratic ones, that were normally accessible only to a limited, elite audience.

The earliest exhibition among them, organized in 1856 in Warsaw, pronounced the following aims: "to collect as many national historical monuments as possible, to open a temporary museum, to publish a critically organized list, indicating current location and owner of a given item, to revive interest in this rather neglected part of historical research".[16] In the first two months, the exhibition was visited by about 2,000 people. This was considered a success in Warsaw, which had never hosted a similar event.[17]

The exhibitions presented relics in picturesque and decorative arrangements.[18] Emphasis was placed on recalling particularly victorious and glorious moments in history. The crowning achievement of this approach was the jubilee exhibition of 1883, the arrangement of which resembled a theatrical performance. Atmosphere was created mainly through effects of spotlighting to bring out the glow of jewels and metal weapons. The accompanying guidebook oriented the viewer as follows:

> At the entrance from the Market Square to the Cloth Hall, we see bronze cannons of the Potocki family, covered with a green patina of time. Having defeated the Turks,

13 Żeromski et al. 1911. Details can be found in Szyndler 1977, 131–159.

14 Żeromski et al. 1911, 16.

15 Some examples are: the Museum of the Polish Scientific Society of Toruń, the collections of the Poznań Society for the Advancement of Arts and Sciences, the Lublin Museum in Lublin, and numerous sightseeing museums established after 1906 by the Polish Sightseeing Society, especially in the Kingdom of Poland while under Russian rule. Amassing historical memorabilia was also a marked trend among private collectors in Poland, including aristocratic families such as the Raczyński in Rogalin, the Działyński in Kórnik, the Tarnowski in Dzików, and the Krasiński in Warsaw.

16 Anonymous 1857, 4.

17 Podczaszyński 1857, 13.

18 See Kłudkiewicz 2011, 102–121.

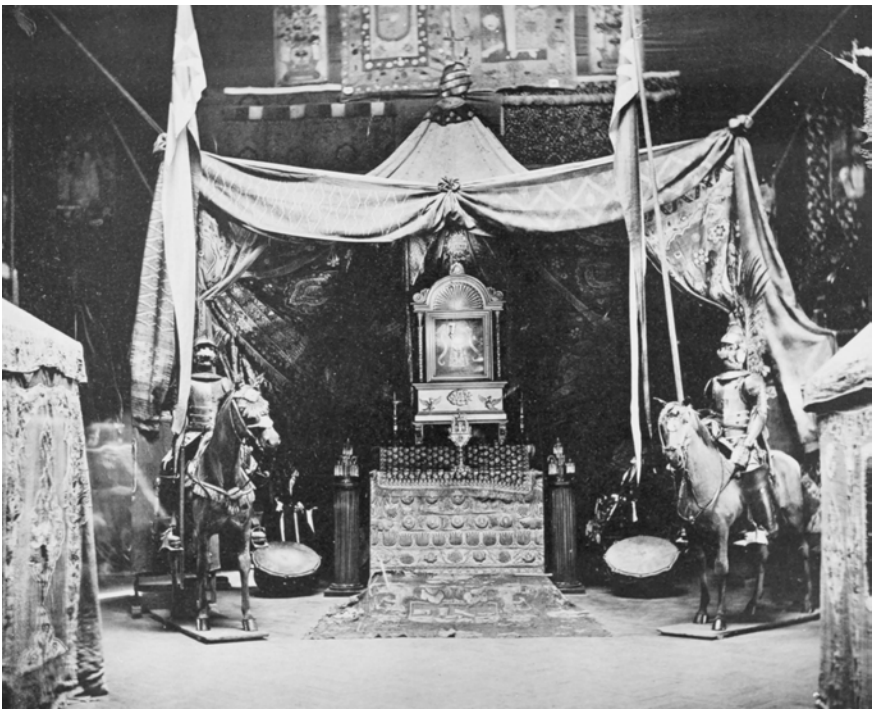
> they represent the gateway to the sanctuary dedicated to the memory and veneration of the hero [...]. The door opens. We are facing a large, high, elongated hall that occupies only half of the floor. This room without windows, or rather with its windows covered, is illuminated by full light from above. At our feet, there is a smooth shining floor. We can see the bright glass cases standing in a long row in the middle and four cabinets in the corners, concealing the most precious items [...] [fig. 4].
>
> Finally, far in the still solemn shadow, through the open door, you can catch the glimpse of a little lamp burning in front of an altar with the palladium of the Viennese expedition, the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin Mother, closing the whole and ending the perspective [fig. 5].[19]

Fig. 4: View of the main hall of the Jubilee Exhibition of King Jan III in Krakow.

The articles about and reviews of the exhibition emphasized the almost theatrical effect of the exhibition space. The tendency to frame Polish history as a nostalgic spectacle – with emphasis on the feats of the heroes, the greatness of past victories, and the pain of successive defeats – continued for much of the nineteenth century. A change in approach to historical presentations in museums occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, as is well illustrated by the case of the National Museum in Krakow, to which I return later in this text.

19 "Zabytki" 1884, 1.

Fig. 5: View of the altar of the Viennese expedition at the Jubilee Exhibition of King Jan III in Krakow.



Polish Art: From Patriotism to Lectures in Art History

The second key area of activity in Polish national museums was Polish art, especially contemporary art. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the use of the term 'national gallery' in Polish texts was associated with universal collections, which were intended to include works of Polish artists. Such was the plan for the *Galeria Sztuk Wyzwolonych Narodowa* (National Gallery of Liberal Arts) designed in 1785 by Józef Salezy Ossoliński. It was to contain examples of artworks from the Polish as well as European schools of painting.[20] A similar idea was expressed in 1859 by Count Seweryn Mielżyński, a collector of the work of Old Masters. He used the name 'national gallery' to describe his collection of European paintings, to which he added a modest number of Polish works from the holdings of another collector, Baron Edward Rastawiecki.[21] However, the first two public museums in Poland that either officially or unofficially designated themselves as 'national', the Mielżyński Museum in Poznań (1881) and the National Museum in Krakow (1883), clearly highlighted the evolution of Polish painting, and especially contemporary painting, in their display.

20 See note 3 above.

21 Kłudkiewicz 2017, 112–142.

This interest in Polish art of the past and present was associated with the 'discovery' of the so-called Polish school of painting in the mid-nineteenth century. Related discussions among writers and people of culture triggered a frantic search for the historical traces of Polish art.[22] Concern with the historical development of Polish painting coincided with an unprecedented flowering in Polish arts. The period saw the simultaneous collecting of works of the so-called Munich school – a colony of Poles who were graduates of the Munich Academy or other private schools and studied under German artists in the city – as well as of the nineteenth-century Polish artist Jan Matejko and his students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. In addition, an artistic movement called Young Poland found favour among collectors: the term broadly refers to artists active at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in association with the symbolist (above all Jacek Malczewski and Stanisław Wyspiański), secession, and expressionist movements. The second half of the nineteenth century also marked the beginning of Polish art criticism, which thereafter developed rapidly.

Therefore, the nature of the interest in Polish art, definitely more pronounced for painting than for sculpture, was primarily historical. Searching for traces of the first artists of Polish origin (initially engravers, then painters), formulating research methods, and establishing foundational concepts together laid the groundwork for the historiography of Polish art. Moreover, this initial historical perspective on Polish painting affected judgements of Polish contemporary art, as was evident already at the inception of the Mielżyński Museum in Poznań, considered then to be the first Polish national gallery.

It is worth quoting the speech of Wawrzyniec Benzelstjerna Engeström, writer, social activist, and secretary of the Poznań Society for the Advancement of Arts and Sciences (the association that had commissioned the Mielżyński Museum), on the day of the institution's opening, in 1881:[23] "The door opening before us leads to the only national gallery in Poland, a gallery of Polish artists. Its sole task and purpose are to research and present the history of our aesthetics".[24] He continued with an enthusiastic assessment of

22 The first essays and texts on the question of the Polish school of painting appeared in the 1840s (an 1842 essay by the poet Seweryn Goszczyński entitled *On the need for national Polish painting* and an 1850–1857 outline of the history of Polish art presented by Edward Rastawiecki in the *Dictionary of Polish painters*). The most famous text of this period was the dissertation *Polish Art* by Julian Klaczko, an émigré historian and journalist who denied the existence of Polish art. See Rosset 2014, 24–43.

23 The Society for the Advancement of Arts and Sciences in Poznań assembled collections from its very establishment in 1857. At first, they were not large and, most importantly, not available to the public due to the lack of a suitable location. The decisive years for the society's collection were 1870–1876. It was then that Seweryn Mielżyński, an aristocrat collector, donated Edward Rastawiecki's collection, which he had purchased for this specific purpose, to the museum together with a plot of land and a fund for the construction of a building. After the donor's death, his collection of Old Masters was also given to the society. Due to legal regulations in Prussia, which prevented the society from having a legal personality, in 1876 the association made an agreement with the donor's heir, Józef Mielżyński. He leased Mielżyński's collections to the society until they could be legally acquired. Thus, the Mielżyński Museum came into being. It functioned legally as a private museum managed by a scientific society until 1916. On the Mielżyński Museum, see Kłudkiewicz 2018, 99–112.

24 Engeström 2020, 321–322.

the artworks once belonging to the aristocrat, antiquarian, and collector Edward Rastawiecki, on which the museum collection was based: "From Rastawiecki, we have acquired a rich national gallery, and the only one so well-formed in Poland, a gallery of paintings by artists, both native and foreign, who worked and settled in our land, together with an invaluable and unique collection of Polish prints – a complete national museum".[25]

Next, Engeström emphasized the educational function of displaying Polish artworks. In doing so, he drew analogies between the condition of the art of a nation and that nation's history and development:

> The sense of beauty, the idea of art and love of art, in short, the sense of aesthetics in the nation is the most eloquent testimony to the development of social civilization; it is, if I may say so, the most wonderful bloom of a carefully cultivated and developed spirit, the embodiment of social thoughts and concepts, and, I can venture to say, just like a healthy mind is in a healthy body, a beautiful soul is a place where beautiful thoughts, aspirations, sense of beauty and desire for beauty are born. The moral development of social concepts and feelings is reflected in the national aesthetics, which is the most telling assessment and philosophical feature in the history of peoples. Looking at the history of nations from a research perspective, we can see that in every age their spiritual development, decline, collapse, or growth are inseparable from the history of art, the rise and fall of national aesthetics.[26]

The Mielżyński Museum was unofficially referred to as the National Gallery. Characteristically, while the museum housed a collection of European paintings – namely, a collection of Old Masters that had been assembled by Mielżyński, along with historical memorabilia and prehistoric artefacts and natural specimens – the term 'national' was used primarily in relation to the Polish paintings. The gallery of Polish artists was also the first section of the museum to have a corresponding catalogue published, in 1888/1889.[27] But it was the collection of Polish paintings that was first made available to the public.

The *Galeria artystów i rzeczy polskich* (Gallery of Polish Artists and Works) was opened in May 1881 on the top floor of the society's premises. The design concept for the interior envisioned forty marble busts of distinguished Poles: scientists, artists, writers, patrons of art, and generals from the Napoleonic Wars and the November Uprising.[28] Ultimately, these plans did not come to fruition. However, the gallery stood adjacent to the society's meeting room, which contained images of nineteenth-century men of culture and science in a kind of "Valhalla of scholars from Greater Poland".[29]

The large gallery was specifically designed for exhibition purposes, being lit from above and terminating on its west end in an apse-like, polygonal space. The person who conceived the arrangement – presumably Engeström – focused not so much on the artistic value of a given artwork but rather on the subject matter it depicted. The exhibition was thematic, but it also bore traces of a symbolic, patriotic, and historical narrative.

25 Ibid., 320.
26 Ibid., 321.
27 Erzepki 1888/1889.
28 Ostrowska-Kębłowska 1982, 51.
29 Wojtkowski 1928, 253.

Around a centrally placed portrait of Mielżyński, the generous patron of the museum, the western wall was covered with portraits of Polish kings, such as Stanisław August (r. 1764–1795) and August II (r. 1697–1706, 1709–1733), as well as of other historical figures (fig. 6).

Fig. 6: Pawel Boczkowski, The Main (or 'Apsidal') Wall of the Gallery of Polish Artists and Works, Mielżyński Museum in Poznań, woodcut printed in watercolour, 1883.

This composition was augmented with mythological and allegorical scenes, genre scenes, and landscapes; the installation concluded with monumental caricatures titled *The History of Civilization* by Maksymilian Antoni Piotrowski. Supplementing the two-dimensional works on view, the room contained busts of famous Poles, along with models of important local monuments including the Statue of the First Piasts in the so-called Golden Chapel in Poznań Cathedral (partly funded with contributions from Poles in the mid-nineteenth century) and Poznań Town Hall, a Renaissance building from before the time of Prussian reign. Additionally, in 1889 a plaster model of the Gniezno Door was embedded in the walls of the room. The bronze door is an outstanding work of medieval artistic craftsmanship made for the cathedral in Gniezno, the first capital of Poland. Thus, despite the declaration that the Gallery was to serve as a historical review of Polish art, its first exhibition concentrated not on the artistic but the historical value of artworks, that is, on their subject matter. The arrangement was designed according to theme rather than chronology.

Changes in the installation took place at the beginning of the twentieth century when the collections were enlarged by individual works by Jan Matejko, Jacek Malczewski, and Juliusz Kossak, famous and recognizable artists who explored historical, contemporary, and symbolic topics connected with Polish culture. The person behind the new arrangement of the painting collection was its restorer Bolesław Erzepki, a historian and linguist. He introduced a chronological order following national schools, a trend extant in public galleries since the eighteenth century and, by the nineteenth, widespread and almost obligatory. Another revival in the gallery's history came in 1914 with the employment of a new curator, the young Vienna-educated art historian Szczęsny Dettloff. Under his care, the collection was not only expanded but also conserved, examined through a scholarly lens, as well as documented in photographs.

Recalling the final years of the Mielżyński Museum's existence before Poland regained independence, Dettloff remarked: "The gallery was no longer outside the interest of the public, who recognized ever more clearly how important the place was for the artistic culture of our region".[30] Most importantly, the gallery began to serve its intended purpose of showing the history of Polish art, with reference to both the current state of scholarly knowledge and the tenets of modern museology.

Re-examining the two quotes that bracket the history of the Mielżyński collection before 1918, from Engeström's inaugural speech to Dettloff's reminiscences in the interwar period, one may notice a significant change in the attitude of the curators. Engeström's statements were mostly declarative. In his view, the aim of the gallery was to educate the public in aesthetics, and the paintings were intended to reflect the spirit of the nation. An exhibition showing the historical development of Polish art came into being only in the early twentieth century, during the First World War. Consequently, Dettloff, who continued to rearrange the collection, emphasized that the audience could – finally – appreciate the importance of the gallery for the cultural development of society. What he had in mind was not only the aesthetic education of the viewer but also advancing academic knowledge on the history of Polish art.

The National Museum in Krakow: From Gallery of Painting to Museum of Polish Culture

The history of the National Museum in Krakow, created and managed by the city authorities, illustrates how the understanding of the role and content of the national museum changed at the turn between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1871, Józef Dietl, the city mayor, wrote that the future national museum should contain historical paintings, ethnographic collections, and an armoury. Similar bold plans for the institution

30 Dettloff 1928, 473.

were outlined by the archaeologist Teodor Nieczuja-Ziemięcki in his 1878 publication *The National Museum in Krakow*.[31]

The idea of establishing a museum in Krakow belongs to a period that saw major revival in the city, beginning with far-reaching prerogatives and funds given to the Galician autonomy within Austria-Hungary after creating its legal structures in the years 1869–1873. This was followed by a movement to renovate and reconstruct the historical capital of Poland (such as efforts to preserve the old city, especially the Wawel building complex), coinciding with ambitious plans to modernize and expand the city. The prospect of a museum had already been discussed in Krakow for some time and was in harmony with the enthusiastic atmosphere of the city under the mayorship of Józef Dietl. Yet, the direct cause of the institution's creation was a gift by the painter Henryk Siemiradzki.

The year 1879 saw the fiftieth anniversary of the creative work of Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, a very popular writer, journalist, collector, and enthusiast of Polish history. The occasion was celebrated in Krakow with a gala dinner, which took place on 5 October in the renovated and rebuilt *Sukiennice* (Cloth Hall), a historic market at the centre of the Main Square. During the celebrations, Siemiradzki presented the city with his most famous painting, *Nero's Torches*, executed in Rome in 1876 and awarded a gold medal at the 1878 Paris Exposition. Inspired by Siemiradzki's spontaneous decision, a group of forty artists present at the event (including Stanisław Chlebowski, Juliusz Kossak, and Franciszek Żmurko) donated their works to the city.

Within two days, the city council adopted a resolution to establish the National Museum in Krakow. Nieczuja-Ziemięcki, one of the most active promoters of the idea, was appointed its first curator. Article 2 of the first statute of the National Museum in Krakow explicitly stated that: "The aim of the museum will be to present the whole historical and current development of art in Poland on the example of the collected items", while Article 4 specified that "Excavations of prehistoric objects and non-artistic relics are excluded from the collection".[32] The choice to limit the museum's interest to Polish art was certainly influenced by the sudden yet enthusiastic donations of artworks by Polish artists. To some extent, one can also see the statute of the museum as evidence of a well-thought-out plan to complement other museums in the city. At the time of the opening, Krakow had two such institutions, with quite different profiles. The first was the *Muzeum Przemysłowo-Techniczne* (Museum of Science and Industry), which contained a collection of older works of craftsmanship as well as contemporary applied arts. Created from the personal of Adrian Baraniecki, it was modelled on the South Kensington Museum (today the Victoria and Albert Museum), in London. The second was the private *Muzeum Książąt Czartoryskich* (Princes Czartoryski Museum), housing an excellent collection of European

31 The author presented a vision of an institution that would have the following units: painting and sculpture gallery; collection of drawings, watercolours, and graphics; a museum of medieval art; the Stoss Museum (a collection of copies of Veit Stoss's works); an archaeological museum; an ethnographic museum; a history museum; a numismatics collection; and the so-called Memorial Museum (in the words of Ziemięcki, a kind of Polish Valhalla, a collection of all memorabilia 'of our great people'). Nieczuja-Ziemięcki 2020, 273–281. On the origins of the National Museum in Krakow, see Kluczewska-Wójcik 2020, 187–208.

32 "MNK statute" 1881, 1.

Old Master paintings, ancient and medieval art, together with Polish objects and historical memorabilia from the aforementioned museum established by Izabella Czartoryska in Puławy.[33]

To expand, the museum relied mainly on donations, although over time a permanent subsidy from the city authorities enabled the formation of an acquisitions policy focused on the work of contemporary Polish artists. The installation in the Cloth Hall in Krakow, the first premises of the museum, showed all the works of the collection *en masse*. Despite the initial declarations that the display would only feature contemporary art, the overall vision came to be altered every few years. After 1883, some changes were initiated by the first director of the museum, Władysław Łuszczkiewicz. In 1889, the board of the museum outlined a new division of the collection into the following departments: 1. Contemporary Polish Art; 2. Post-Partition Art; 3. Medieval and Modern Polish Art (until the reign of the last king, Stanisław August); 4. Architecture (meaning fragments and plans); 5. Drawings and Watercolours; 6. Prints and Reproductions; 7. Medals, Coins, and Banknotes; 8. Engraved Gems; 9. Antiquities and Relics; 10. Adam Mickiewicz Memorabilia; 11. Foreign Art; 12. Library. The board also acknowledged that the new structuring of the museum was based on a large number of private gifts, "which the committee is forced to accept in whole in the hope that the extended collection will show what kind of donations will be sought in the future".[34] Several years later, the museum authorities justified ever more frequent violations of the museum's statute by accepting objects other than works of art:

> The statute excluded collecting memorabilia devoid of artistic features to avoid those of questionable authenticity. A relic may not always have a proof of origin, but as long as it is beautiful and meets the criteria of an object of art, it has the right to be placed in the museum. The management of the museum could not be guided by these regulations and accepted non-artistic objects. Regarding this provision, we have already made an exception for [the mementos of] Mickiewicz [...]. As a consequence, the public came to believe that the museum collects family keepsakes of people connected with recent periods of history. We were forced to accept them regardless of their artistic features, and the past year was particularly rich in this kind of generosity. Most of the souvenirs were related to Polish uprisings.[35]

The rooms of the museum were quickly filled with paintings, works on paper, sculptures, weapons, fabrics and other examples of applied art, together with numerous historical objects. From the 1890s, the museum tried to bring order to the installation by taking over other rooms in Cloth Hall and expanding its exhibition space. The main and largest hall was occupied by contemporary paintings, with Siemiradzki's grand work at the centre. However, the adjacent room, the so-called *Langerówka*, contained displays from the other departments: Old Masters, paintings of historical and memorial value, the most esteemed works of European art, and prints shown in cabinets. In 1891, two small rooms

33 On museums in Krakow in the nineteenth century, see Żygulski jun. 1998; Krzaczyńska 2013; Prokopovych 2018; Guichard-Marneur 2012.

34 "National Museum in Krakow (MNK) report" for 1889, 1890, 5.

35 "National Museum in Krakow (MNK) report" for 1893, 1894, 9.

added to the museum displayed monuments and historical memorabilia donated by the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Krakow. Further private gifts were regularly incorporated, and ultimately the museum board conceded that the rooms "looked more like a warehouse than a systematic collection".[36]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the museum faced the challenge of redefining its vision for the collection and its future expansion. The director appointed after Łuszczkiewicz's death was Feliks Kopera, an art historian educated in Basel, Berlin, Florence, and St Petersburg. At the same time, Nieczuja-Ziemięcki resigned from the post of curator. The new management reorganized the museum in a legal sense by adopting a new statute in 1901 and in a spatial sense thanks to city's placement of the entire second floor of the Cloth Hall at the museum's disposal.

The new goals of the National Museum in Krakow were stated in Article 2 of the new statute of 1901: "The objective of the National Museum, in accordance with the new aspirational statute, is to use the collected specimens to present the state of art and culture in Poland in its historical and current development".[37] The document radically changed the wording of Article 4 concerning the collection:

> The museum will also strive to acquire products of the artistic industry, from all fields and techniques (any relics, whatever their form and purpose, relating to the life and cultural development of the past and conveying direct or indirect image thereof) [...]. These collections also include prehistoric excavations, folk art, and items that testify to the cultural development of the people. A separate department should contain personal memorabilia of distinguished national figures or people relayed to historical events.[38]

The new arrangement in the larger space focused on all kinds of items related to the history of Polish culture: works of craftsmanship and applied arts, handicrafts, historical objects, and national memorabilia. These were placed in the smaller rooms and corridors, since "smaller rooms are convenient to group the objects chronologically and create stylishly furnished chambers or culturally interesting spaces, such as alchemist laboratories, pharmacies, kitchens, prison cells, following the popular practice in the museums abroad".[39] In the largest hall, the items on view were divided into three separate modules: artefacts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, those from the eighteenth century, and those from the nineteenth century (fig. 7). In each section, works of painting, applied art, and material culture were presented according to the principle that "artefacts from the same period, regardless of type and technique, were grouped together".[40]

36 "National Museum in Krakow (MNK) report" for 1893, 1894, 12.

37 "MNK statute" 1901, 3.

38 Ibid., 3–4.

39 "National Museum in Krakow (MNK) report" for 1901–1902, 1903, 12.

40 Ibid., 12.

Fig. 7: Partial view of the exhibition from the room of monuments of the first half of the nineteenth century, National Museum in Krakow, 1902.

The changes reflected the expertise of Kopera, who sought inspiration in the latest arrangements at European museums of culture and history: in Basel, Göttingen, and Jena, at the *Historisches Museum zu Frankfurt am Main* (Historical Museum in Frankfurt on the Main) under the direction of Otto Lauffer, and subsequently at the famous *Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte* (Museum for the History of Hamburg).[41] He was also influenced by the concept of 'period rooms', popular in museums of industrial design[42] at the time and, last but not least, by discussions on museum exhibitions that ensued in Berlin at the turn of the century, sparked by the ideas of the art historian and curator Wilhelm von Bode.[43]

The art collection occupied three spacious rooms. The first one contained contemporary works of the so-called Young Poland movement; the second, called Siemiradzki Hall – largely representing academism – housed its namesake's paintings of religious and ancient subjects, including the famous *Nero's Torches*; the third, known as Matejko Hall, was dominated by the monumental works of Jan Matejko, alongside paintings by other artists from his generation (fig. 8).

41 See Deneke and Kahsnitz, 1977, 118–132; Miller 2013, 370–373.

42 Curran 2016.

43 Joachimides 2001.

Fig. 8: Matejko Hall in the National Museum in Krakow.

Kopera described the intended visitor experience generally as follows: "By beginning the museum tour in the Hall of Prehistoric Monuments and going through all the rooms one by one, up to Matejko Hall, one may get acquainted with the development of art and culture on Polish territory from the earliest times to the present day".[44] Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the National Museum in Krakow became the first Polish institution to attempt to create a comprehensive picture of the development of Polish culture, history, and art.

Final Remarks

In the nineteenth century, installations at Polish national museums remained largely under the influence of a patriotic and sentimental order. They appealed to the emotions of viewers, showed commemorative items, and staged paintings and works of art in a way that emphasized the works' connections with important events in the history of the nation. It was not until the end of the century that the tools of academic systematization came into use in art and history museums in an attempt to demonstrate the current state of relevant knowledge. Concurrently, this period saw the development of a new idea for the Polish national museum as a multi-departmental institution with many different collections, together presenting the historical development of Polish art and culture. The concept came to fruition in the stated mission of the National Museum in Krakow.

44 "National Museum in Krakow (MNK) report" for 1901–1902, 1903, 14–15.

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