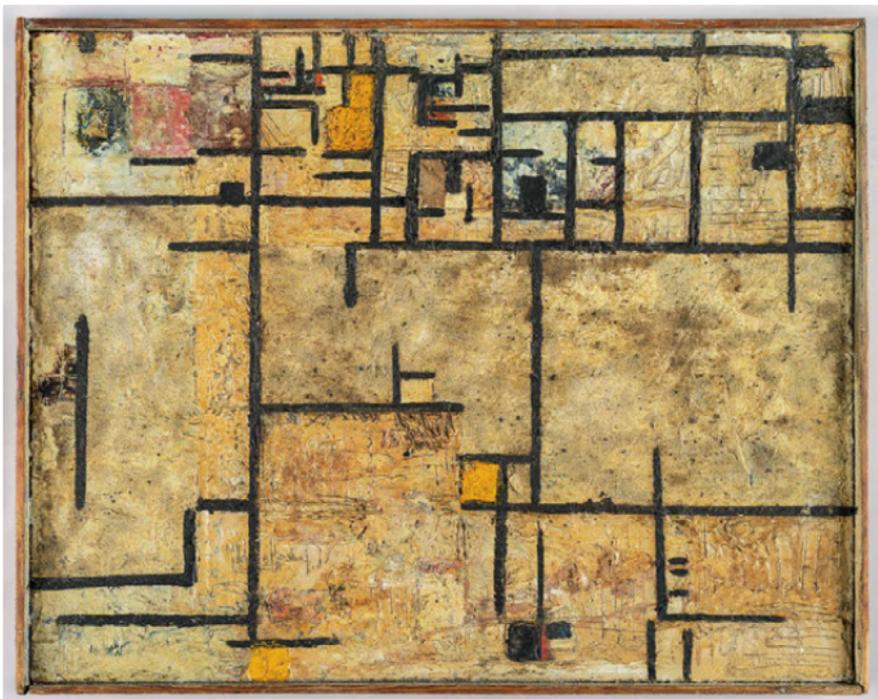


**ms<sup>2</sup>**

Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź  
Ogrodowa 19  
msl.org.pl

**LEOPOLD  
BUCZKOWSKI  
GLIMPSES OF HISTORY,  
FLEETING IMAGES**



*The Year 1939. Machine Guns, 1961.*  
Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

# LEOPOLD BUCZKOWSKI

---

Leopold Buczkowski (1905–1989) is known as a writer, author of seminal literary works, such as *Czarny Potok* (1954) (English-language edition: *Black Torrent*, 1970), *Pierwsza świetność* [The first splendour] (1966), or *Oficer na nieszpiorach* [An officer at the vespers] (1975). His prose is characterized by a proneness to collage, that is, the combination of different narrative fragments. Scholars emphasize the documentary aspect of Buczkowski's literary works and the way they draw on the poetics of the film script. The structure of these works is bound up with a reflection on history perceived as a domain of uncontrollable destructive forces clashing with each other; as a sequence of processes of unpredictable courses and outcomes.

Less known, however, is Leopold Buczkowski's visual-arts oeuvre. It is a body of work that is markedly diverse in terms of subject matter and style, and highly ingenious in the choice and combination of techniques. As an artist, Buczkowski works with drawing, photography, graphic and water-based techniques, oil

technique, or collage. At a later stage, he sculpts, mainly in wood. As in prose, his visual artworks possess a fragmentary quality, as if they were extracted from some kind of a story.

Many voices can be heard in Buczkowski's diverse body of work, which has to do with the multicultural reality of Podolia in the 1930s. A land of his childhood and youth, inhabited by Poles, Ukrainians, and Jews, and destroyed by the war, it was depicted by Buczkowski in his early novels and many of his visual artworks. The impossibility of reconstructing this bygone world in memory means that his work gradually acquires a meta-artistic quality, combining literary experiments with investigations in the field of the visual arts.

# RECORDS OF LIFE IN PODOLIA

---

Leopold Buczkowski's drawings from the 1930s depict the landscape, architecture, and inhabitants of several localities in Podole (Podolia): Krzemieniec (Kremenets), Podkamień (Pidkamin), Wiśniowiec (Vyshnivets), and Poczajów (Pochaiv). They were made at a time when the artist lived in the village of Nakwasza (Nakvasha) in the Ikva (Ikva) river valley near Podkamień, and which he left only in 1944. The "Valley of

Happiness" (Dolinoszczęсна) described by Buczkowski in his first novel, *Wertepy* [Rough terrains] (completed in 1937 and published ten years later), was modelled on this area. After the war, the artist turned the drawings into collages and arranged them into several dozen panels, accompanying some with captions. The works reflect a strong need to document reality, present both in his literary work and the visual-arts one.



Untitled, from a series of drawings from Podole (Podolia), 1930s.  
Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

# PHOTOGRAPHS

---

Complementing Buczkowski's pre-war drawings is a collection of photographs. They are of an ethnographic nature, recording the occupations and customs of Podolia's multiethnic and multicultural community from the vantage of one of its members. Parting with entrenched conventions of depicting the countryside, they offer genuine insights into

rural everydayness: unposed figures relating with each other, sometimes in movement. The photographs show different types of people and a complex social structure. Buczkowski's interest in photography was revived at the turn of the 1960s when he documented street life on the occasion of his visits in London, Paris, and Vienna.



*Untitled*, from a series of photographs from Podole (Podolia), 1930s.  
Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

# WARTIME DRAWINGS

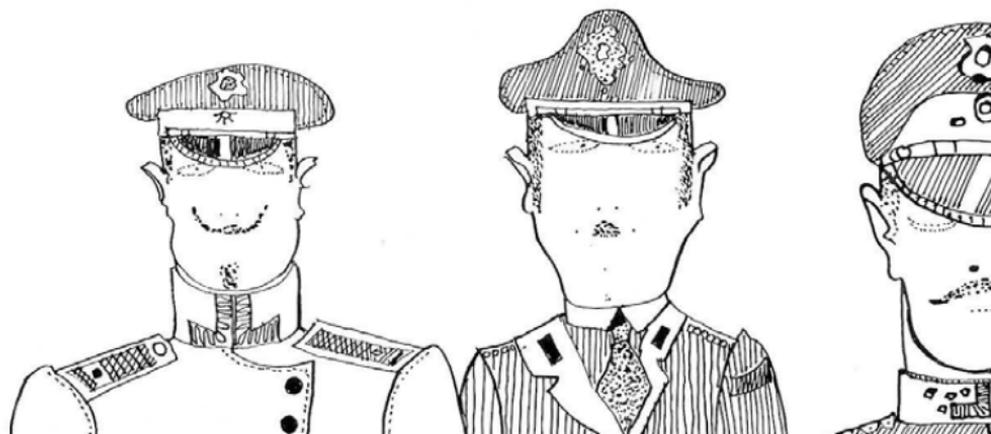
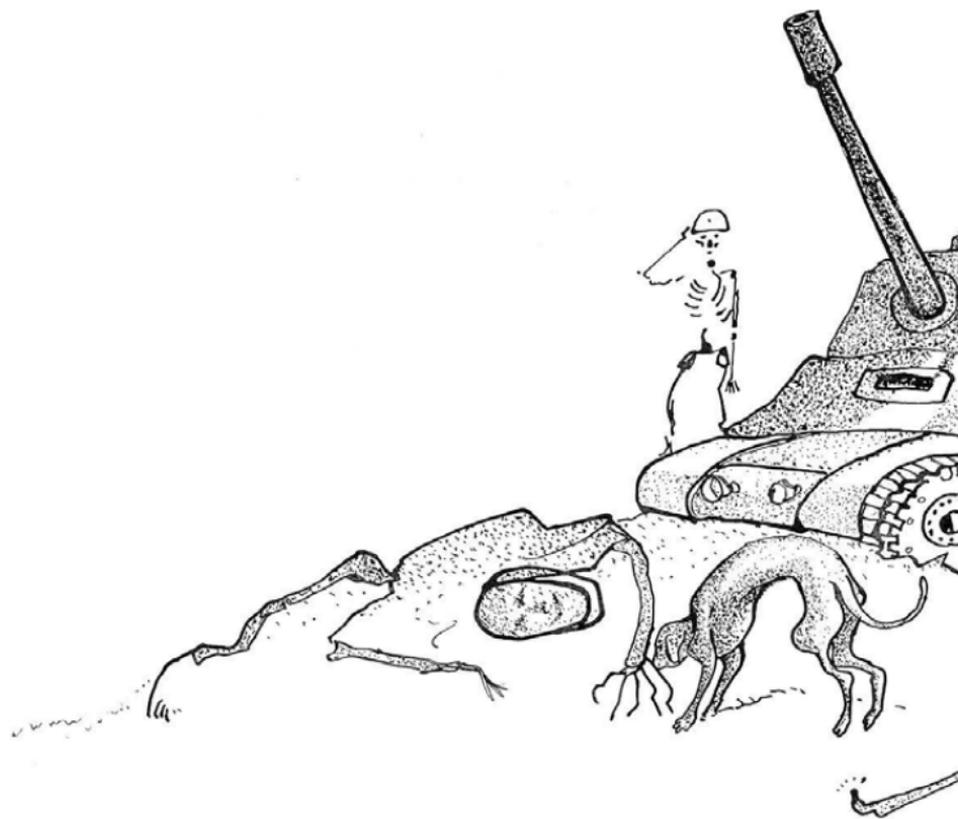
---

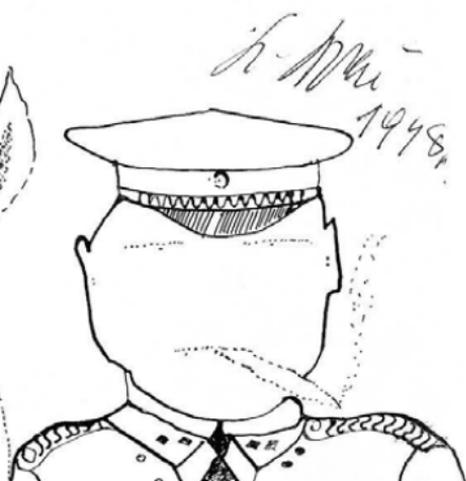
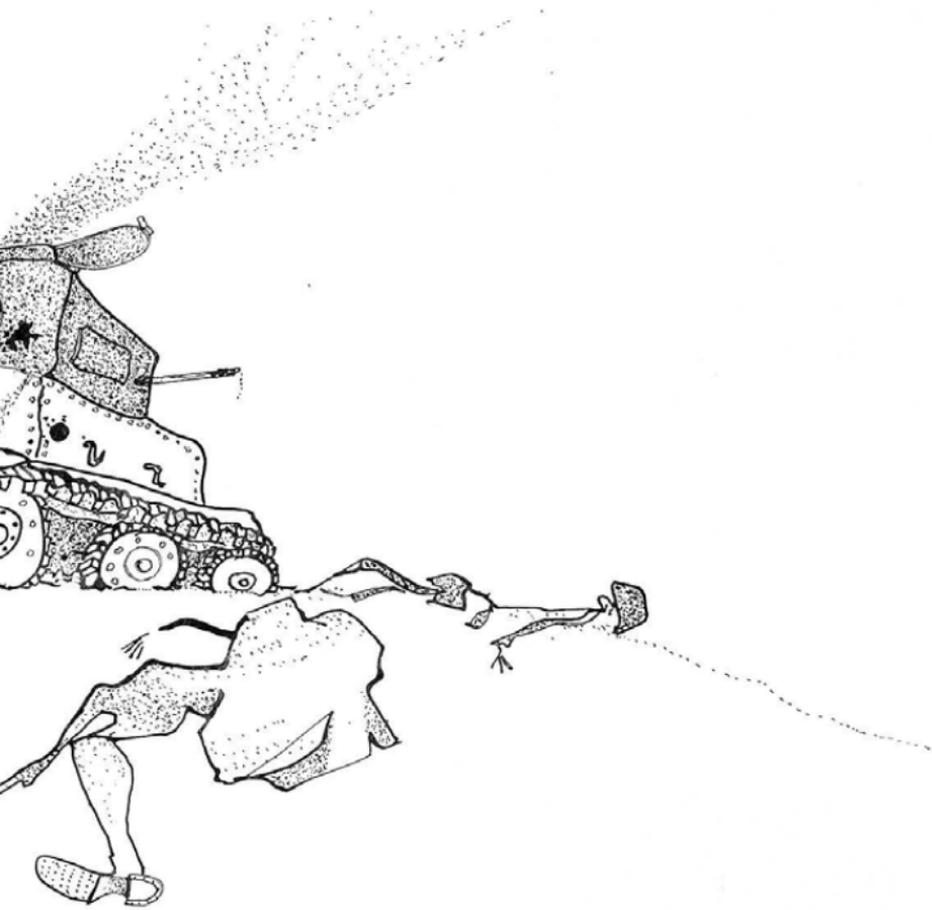
Leopold Buczkowski witnessed the events of the Second World War first from the perspective of a Podolian and then, from 1944, as a refugee who found shelter in the Warsaw district of Żoliborz. The wartime experience impacted fundamentally on his literary and artistic work. The war irrevocably destroyed the multicultural reality of the south-eastern region of the Polish Republic. The hell of constant mortal danger became a daily fact of life. This led Buczkowski to widen the range of artistic means. Redefining the role of the writer and artist, he complemented the realistic convention with elements of deformation that enhanced and intensified the expression of the image. His drawings from the time evoke an atmosphere of horror and dreadful circumstances,

showing a reality subjected to military oppression – a world of brutal violence exerted on the civilian population by automated figures.



*Untitled*, from a series of wartime drawings, 1945, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź





Untitled, 1948/1960s, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

# HISTORICAL STUDIES

---



Untitled, from the *Historical Studies* series ("Prussian" panel), 1966, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

Works of a grotesque nature comprise a large part of Leopold Buczkowski's artistic oeuvre. Among those, a series of allegorical drawings can be discerned that highlight the contradictions of modern history. Presenting caricatural – humorous even – scenes involving figures from various historical eras and geopolitical contexts, some of them have been labelled by the artist as *Historical Studies* series. In a tongue-in-cheek manner, they expose the hypocrisy of conservative ideologies that obscure

vital issues affecting the life of individuals and whole societies.

Buczkowski's *Historical Studies* evoke various periods of modern history, focusing in the first place on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The panels comment on specific national contexts: French, Russian, British, Prussian, and Polish. Significantly, almost all works show figures clad in military uniforms. Militarism seems here to define the aesthetic norms of the given era.

# ABSTRACTIONS

---

Leopold Buczkowski's abstract paintings coincide – structurally and temporally – with a breakthrough in the development of modern painting. At the turn of the 1960s, the traditional model of the painterly work was being challenged. “The necessary picture or the possible one?” was one of the fundamental questions raised by artists at the time. Buczkowski's experiments from the period are focused on disrupting the stable structure of the painterly composition and undoing the organic unity of its elements in order to introduce tension between them.

In terms of composition, most of the works are based on the principle of tracing – differently every time – lines that define arrangements of shapes. The lines usually run alongside the edge of the painting, less frequently being diagonal, or, sometimes, curved. Standing out among Buczkowski's abstractions is a group of works produced by superimposing different painterly layers. The artist places fragments of canvas or rectangular pieces of plywood or fibreboard covered with lines or uniform colour on the ground, whereby the painterly composition opens up and the objectivity of the painting is emphasized.



*The Kitchen Adventure, 1965, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź*



*Untitled*, no date (1959-1971), Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

# SCULPTURES

---

From the late 1960s onwards, Buczkowski made wooden sculptures, installing them as a spatial arrangement in the garden of his house in Konstancin near Warsaw. While dialoguing with the stylistic tradition of folk art, the works utilize the properties of the material, their shapes being derived from the structure of the given piece of wood. Buczkowski sculpted human and animal figures. Most of the works are inspired by religious representations; a large group shows the Madonna with the Child.

In some, the sculpture itself is accompanied by found objects, usually military accessories, which lend the piece the character of an assemblage. One example of such a technique is *Madonna Executed*, with gun bullets pressed into her torso and eyes, a sickle into her arm, and both the Madonna and the Child wearing thorn crowns. Buczkowski often modified his sculptures and reworked their arrangement in the garden, turning their composition into an ongoing process.



# ms<sup>2</sup>

OGRODOWA 19

LEGIONÓW

GDANSKA

PRÓCHNIKA

1 MAJA

WIECKOWSKIEGO 36

# ms<sup>1</sup>

[msl.org.pl](http://msl.org.pl)

ms<sup>2</sup>

Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź  
Ogrodowa 19

LEOPOLD BUCZKOWSKI  
GLIMPSES OF HISTORY,  
FLEETING IMAGES  
29.10.2021-13.02.2022

Curator  
Paweł Polit

Exhibition design  
Jarosław Kozakiewicz

Graphic design  
Krzysztof Bielecki

Exhibition coordination  
Martyna Dec, Monika Wesołowska

Editorial coordination  
Andżelika Bauer

Text  
Paweł Polit

Editing  
Paweł Polit,  
Katarzyna Mądrzycka-Adamczyk

Translation  
Marcin Wawrzyńczak

© Muzeum Sztuki & Authors, 2021

Please see website for details about  
related events: [msl.org.pl](http://msl.org.pl)

**ms**  
Muzeum Sztuki

A cultural institution of  
the Łódzkie Region  
co-run by the  
Ministry of Culture,  
National Heritage and Sport



Ministry of  
**Culture**  
National  
Heritage  
**and Sport**  
of the Republic  
of **Poland**



region  
**łódzkie** ©

Patron of Muzeum  
Sztuki w Łodzi

**S** STARAK  
FAMILY  
FOUNDATION

Partner

opus / film