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The album we are now presenting to the readers and art lovers has been long-awaited and badly needed, especially in recent years. It shows the most valuable works from the collection of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, and it is meant to compensate, at least in part, for the lack of a full catalogue of the collection. Since such a catalogue will take some more time to complete, we have decided to present at least the most valuable pieces in the collection of the oldest museum of this kind in Europe. The idea of showing the most interesting fragments of the collection is not new; it is implemented in museums around the world in the form of permanent displays, providing a survey of the best and most popular works. Such displays, known in English as *highlights*, periodically reorganized, occupy only a small portion of the exhibition space, while the rest is devoted to thematic exhibitions based on the museum's own collections, or to temporary exhibitions invited from other museums in Poland and abroad. Similar surveys are provided by the publications containing the reproductions of the highlights of the collection – its most valuable and attractive pieces.

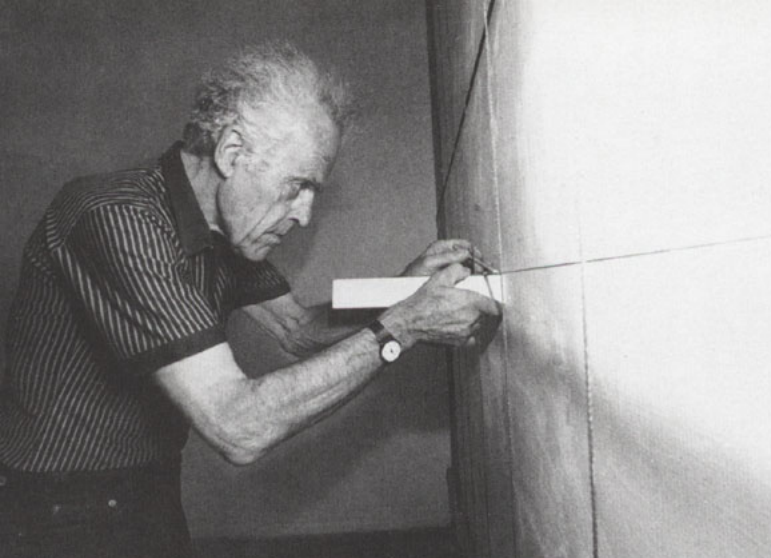
Every selection is arbitrary and involves some evaluation. This refers both to exhibitions and to publications. Usually there is one person responsible for taking the decisions. In our case, the selection (still arbitrary) of 111 works from the rich collection of the museum is the result of team work. The selected works have one thing in common: they are unique in one way or another. Many of them are the only examples in Polish collections of the work of such excellent artists as e.g. Georges Vantongerloo, André Masson, Theo van Doesburg or Lyonel Feininger. Others are particularly important for their artistic value (the works of Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński - to mention only those two names).



Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź is renowned especially for its collection of 20th century art. We can truly boast of the richest and most comprehensive set of works of modern art in Poland. I would like to point out, however, that although for this reason we are often regarded as a “museum of modern art”, we also possess some important works of older art, coming both from the original donation of the Bartoszewicz family, and from later donations and purchases. The present publication includes some examples of such works, less frequently associated with our institution, by Polish and foreign artists.

Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź is now closing a certain important period in its history: 2005 and 2006 mark the anniversaries of its founding and of the formal donation of the International Collection of Modern Art assembled by the “a.r.” group. This seems the right time to look back at what has been achieved, and into the future, at the Muzeum's place in the new century, and in the new geopolitical situation in Europe. One of our priorities is the implementation of the projects addressed to Polish and foreign artists and critics for whom the Muzeum should be an important partner, and to the community (local, Polish and European), for the sake of which we are safeguarding, conserving, expanding, researching, and displaying the art treasures given to us in trust. We hope that our work, of which the present publication is but one result, will bring enjoyment and satisfaction to all concerned.

- *Mirosław Borusiewicz*
- Translation: *Alina Kwiatkowska*



Minich also implemented the policy of planned purchases. Appreciating the importance of the international collection, he complemented it with the works of the Formists and the Surrealists. He purchased the works of the members of the Artes group from Lvov, and the paintings of Andrzej and Zbigniew Pronaszko, August Zamoyski, Leon Chwistek, Mieczysław Szczuka, and Teresa Żarower. He also made



valuable purchases of older art. This group included the famous painting by Henryk Rodakowski – the portrait of his mother, as well as paintings by Piotr Michałowski, Aleksander Gieryski, Leon Wyczółkowski, Jan Stanisławski, Józef Pankiewicz, Tadeusz Makowski, Olga Boznańska. The collection was also enriched by the valuable donations from Karol Eiser and Jakub Brat-Kon.

The harmonious development of the museum was arrested by the outbreak of World War II. Between 1939 and 1945 the museum remained under German administration. The collection of modern art was labelled “entartete und jüdische Kunst”; some of the works were destroyed or lost, but most of them survived the war.



In 1945 Marian Minich began to re-assemble the collection. The museum obtained a new building, a former palace of the Poznańskis family; it offered much more exhibition space, although it did not satisfy the requirements for a modern museum building. The new permanent display of the collection was opened on 13 June 1948. It ranged from Gothic art, through Northern and Italian Renaissance, Baroque painting, Polish art from the 17th to the 19th century, to modern art. The presentation of modern art started with a room of facsimile reproductions of the Impressionists and Post-impressionists, then the viewers could see the works of the Formists, the Colorists, the Expressionists, the Cubists, the Futurists, the Constructivists, and the Surrealists. The display ended on a high note – in the Neo-Plastic Room, whose design had been commissioned by Minich from Władysław Strzemiński. Minich had planned for the arrangement of the rooms to illustrate “the evolution of style towards an increasing subjugation of the shapes of reality to universal shapes, up to and including non-objective art.”



The display did not last long. It was closed by the authorities on 1 October 1950, as incompatible with the principles of Socialist Realism. The Neo-Plastic Room was destroyed. In the subsequent years, only a few modern works were ever shown to the public. They gradually began to return after 1956, but it was only in 1960 that a new gallery of 20th century art was created, and the Neo-Plastic Room was reconstructed by Bolesław Utkin, who also designed a similar room for Strzemiński's *Unistic compositions*. Marian Minich based the arrangement of the gallery on the previous display from 1948, adding some new purchases.

Henryk Rodakowski (Lwów [Lviv] 1823–1894 Cracow)

Portrait of the Artist's Mother, 1853

Oil on canvas; 134 x 95 cm

Signed bottom right: *H. Rodakowski / 1853*

Henryk Rodakowski, who had first dreamt of becoming a history painter, became famous as the foremost 19th-century Polish portrait painter. To some extent his dream was fulfilled because the traditional hierarchy of painting categorised as “history painting” any kind of painting on solemn, sublime subjects, The *Portrait of General Dembiński*, for which Rodakowski was awarded the Grand Gold Medal at the Paris 1852 Salon, the first Pole ever to win the distinction, may certainly be categorised as such. The artist's early portraits of his family predate his studies in Vienna; this is also true of the first small watercolour portrait of his mother painted in 1841.

Rodakowski's training in the studio of Leon Cogniet gave him an excellent command of workmanship, but his portraits of that period (*Portrait of Jules Holtzapfel*, 1846; *Self-portrait*, 1849) primarily testify to his aspiration for making the psychological characterisation of his sitters more profound, which was the quality of his mature work. He remained in Paris till 1867.

The *Portrait of the Artist's Mother*, representing Maria Rodakowska, née Singer, was painted during the several months of Rodakowski's stay in Lwów in 1853. Presented at the Paris 1853 Salon, it had enthusiastic reviews of the French critics, including Prosper Mérimée and Théophile Gautier, proudly cited in the Polish press. Those writing about the portrait saw the influence of the old masters, Flemish painting, notably van Dyck. Delacroix, who admired the portrait, valued it higher than the *Portrait of General Dembiński* awarded the Gold Medal a year earlier; the great French painter recorded in his *Diary* under 8 April: “I left earlier to see artists who had invited me. What sorrowful suffering, what incurable cases of insanity! The expedition gave me the sole pleasure, and a great one, of seeing a true masterpiece. Rodakowski's *Portrait of his Mother ...*”

Henryk Rodakowski

Art researchers share the opinion even today and consider the painting a highlight of portraiture. They see the painting both as the utmost achievement of realism and the culmination of Romanticism. It may well be that the masterly balance between the characteristics of both periods, to which all the formal qualities are subordinated, the ideal blend of the individual and universal features is what raises the portrait to the rank of a masterpiece. The artist counterbalances the realistic, faithful rendering of the face, hands and lace details with the synthetic, generalised rendering of the silhouette merging with the neutral background lacking in a single object by which the whereabouts could be identified. The predominant factor is the exceedingly subtle expression of the sitter's personality, with special stress on her gentle, tender nature. Intimate and monumental at the same time, it is a portrait of Maria Rodakowska as well as that of Woman and Mother; it comes from the study of nature just as well as emotions and ideas.

Aware of how many works of art have slipped into oblivion or been subjected to re-evaluation, we may nevertheless presume that Henryk Rodakowski's portraiture and the *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* have withstood both.

- Marta Ertman
- Translation: Joanna Holzman

Portrait of the Artist's Mother 1853 32



Fernand Léger (Argentan 1881 – 1955 Gif-sur-Yvette near Paris)

Two Profiles, 1926

Oil on canvas; 80 x 60 cm

Signed bottom right: *F. LEGER / 26*;

inscribed by hand on the reverse: *Les deux profilie / F. Léger. 26*

Fernand Léger never declared his affiliation with Cubism. Still, as Mieczysław Porębski points out, “it took some time for both Picasso and Braque to regard themselves as Cubists, too”. Despite that, as Porębski further observes, it was those three painters that “discovered new, Cubist spatiality, with the consequent techniques, morphology, and iconography of a truly universal, all-encompassing range.” Léger was in his element in modernity, he derived inspiration from it all his life, and he also had a hand in determining its new look. It was some time before he achieved success, but when it came, it was worthy of a discoverer.

He was called a peasant’s son, a cunning Norman, a shrewd observer. He was not interested in obtaining an education; he gave up a job at an architect’s office to become a painter in Paris. He settled in an artists’ colony called La Ruche [Beehive], where young artists without means could work in modest conditions. He also attended the School of Decorative Arts and Académie Julien; his works initially showed the influence of Impressionism. He found his own way after he had seen a large exhibition of Cézanne’s paintings in 1907, admired the works of Douanier Rousseau, and discussed art with Robert Delauney and other inhabitants of La Ruche, and with the workers at the nearby abattoir. In 1910 he was already showing his works at Kahnweiler’s gallery, along with Picasso and Georges Braque. He took part in the famous exhibitions of the Cubists in Moscow and Berlin, and in the meetings at Jacques Villon’s, leading up to the historic exhibition *Section d’Or* [The Golden Section] in 1912, which brought together the followers of Cubism – the admirers of Cézanne’s architecture and geometrical discipline. The dominant element of Léger’s paintings before 1914 were objects reduced to increasingly simple geometrical figures – cylinders, cones, polyhedrons – with characteristically clear contours and intense colouring.

Fernand Léger

During World War I, in which he fought (until he was gassed at Verdun), Léger was fascinated with the construction of the war machinery, and after he was demobilized in 19016, he started introducing into his paintings other products of industrial civilization: buffers, gear-wheels, tugboats. This iconography, in which the human figure also appeared like an automaton or a mannequin, dominated the “mechanical” period and reinforced what would become the artist’s constant need to reach directly into the transient, raw reality. Contrasting his “conceptual realism” with traditional “visual realism”, the artist also offered new morphology – sharp contrasts, clear divisions, multiplied rhythms, simple colours – in his static, often monumental compositions of “objects in space” or later “figures in space”. He was thoughtfully and deliberately developing his own forceful style, which made critics call him both a “primitive painter” of modernity and a modern classic.

Léger had many contacts with Polish painters dating back to La Ruche. In 1928 he designed the cover for a book of poems by Jan Brzękowski. He advised and supported the periodical *L’ART CONTEMPORAIN* (The Contemporary Art) edited by Brzękowski and Nadia Chodasiewicz-Grabowska, once a student of Strzemiński and then of Léger. Many Poles also studied at different times at his private Modern Academy. In 1931, Léger donated two of his paintings to the International Collection of Modern Art of the “a.r.” group, including the one entitled *Two Profiles*.

Although it is a relatively small painting, *Two Profiles* creates an impression of a monumental mural composition. It works as a visual sign, concise as regards its content and synthetic in form, as if it were deliberately intended for a public space. This may be explained by the fact that it was created at a time when the artist was passionately involved in mural painting. He may have intended this composition to end up as a mural, too. Its monumentalism is a result both of its morphology, and its characteristic iconography. Obliterating the traditional opposition between figure and ground, Léger introduces a vertical, rhythmical, contrasting arrangement of discontinuous, multiplied planes and outline profiles. He uses the forms and colours provoking associations with industrial, heavy, rough, city landscape, in which emotionless, silhouetted and contoured human profiles interpenetrate fragmentary, apparently machine-made shapes and mouldings. When we analyze this painting, we can understand the artist’s words: “I am glad when they tell me: ‘Léger, you are at home in the street.’”

• *Zenobia Karnicka*

• Translation: *Alina Kwiatkowska*



Two Profiles 1926

Władysław Strzemiński (Mińsk Litewski 1893 – 1952 Łódź)

Unistic Composition 9, 1931

Oil on canvas; 48 x 32 cm

Unsigned

Only a few Polish artists figure in the history of 20th-century world art, but Władysław Strzemiński is certainly one of them. Credited with Unism, the most original Polish art theory, and one of the prime movers of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, he was an artist whose work, ranked among the highest achievements of the first half of the 20th century, anticipated many later trends and continues to inspire successive generations of young artists.

As pointed out by Mariusz Tchorek in a paper presented on the centenary of the artist's birth on the analysis of his [Strzemiński's] argument with the entire European painting tradition, in his most important lecture on Unism, the hero of modernism sought to build, or rather rebuild the mystic concept of an image as a painterly organism, in which he did not shadow Arp's footsteps, but followed the profound spiritual tradition with which he might have had contact at home in Mińsk and Wilno [Vilnius]. Strzemiński defended the autonomy of painting or flatness of paintings because, in the depth of his soul, he felt [painting] could be traced back to the time of temples, and he was aware of the continual threat of desacralisation, or dismemberment, as he might say. Tchorek is the first author to suggest that Unism should be understood not in the context of Mondrian or Malevich though it would be justified on the ground of Strzemiński's historicism, but with reference to the innate qualities of the creator of Unism, in the context of the artist's mutilated body, his sense of extirpation, and his profound relation with Katarzyna Kobro. Leaving Strzemiński's Utopian fantasias, the construction of a new social order, out of account as a by-product, Mariusz Tchorek puts forward what may be a most currently interesting point, namely: what counts in Strzemiński for us today is his personal sense of the significance of the innate qualities of painting, which may be understood as the spatial expression of the sacred. Strzemiński claimed that the innate qualities of painting were: a flat quadrilateral of the canvas and a limiting frame. The picture, he said, presents nothing, it is merely an image of itself.

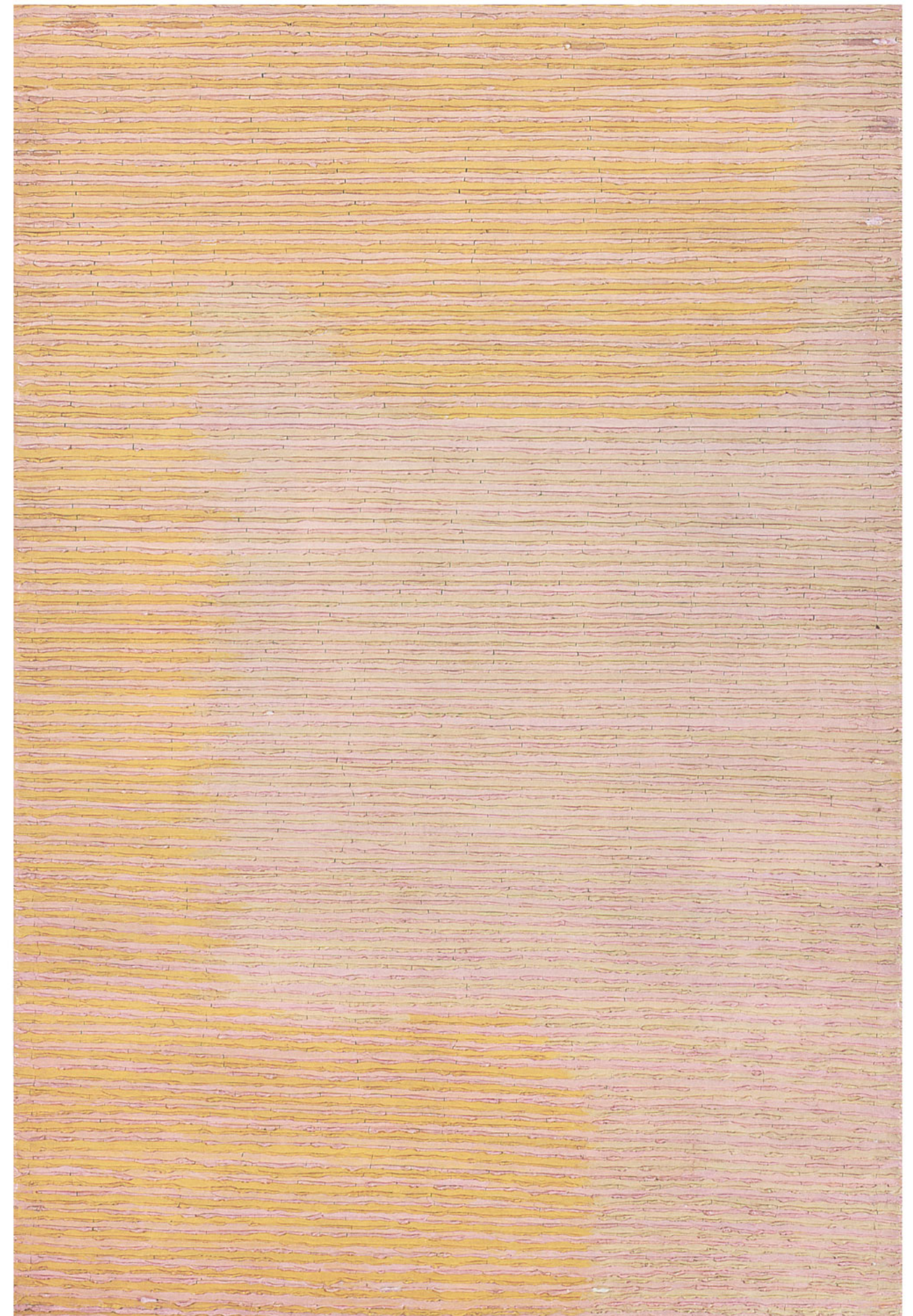
The artist gave visual shape to Unism in his *Unistic Compositions*, the early, flat ones, painted in 1924–1929, and the mature, textural and monochromatic ones, painted in 1931–1934. The latter especially are astonishing, not so much for their radically abstract form as their complete artistic values which can be seen in the monochromatic textures emerging from his colourful palette. These are images of the process of creation, of the painting of painting, images devoted to the very essence of painting. They are as mysterious as the process itself. Among them, *Unistic Composition 9* (the number does not come from the artist) has a special meaning for us here in Łódź, as the painting was chosen by Strzemiński for the "a.r." group's International Collection of Modern Art, in the assembling of which he was engaged. It was also a painting of the rank of a symbol: not only was abuse lavished at it by contemporaries, but it was literally assayed by a visitor to the Municipal Museum of History and Art in Łódź in 1938, as preserved in the Museum records.

Misunderstanding was inscribed in Strzemiński's biography and he had to grapple with it from the very beginning. Intended for military service as a boy, while a student of the [Czar] Nicholas War Engineering School in St Petersburg, he took part in meetings and talks organised by the cadets' literary circle. Maimed for life in World War I, he devoted himself to art during his long convalescence. He went through the experience of the October Revolution with its great expectations and even greater disillusionment in its wake. He fled Soviet Russia with sculptress Katarzyna Kobro, his wife and artistic partner, to the young independent Poland. Here he was unremittingly active for thirty years as an artist, an organiser of artistic life, teacher and publishing author. He was a member of the Polish avant-garde groups Blok and Praesens, and he was among the founding members of the "a.r." group. He had wide contacts with the lead of European modernists and was a member of the international Abstraction-Création group. He turned almost all of his surviving oeuvre over to the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.

Frequently at odds with those in his close surroundings, he persevered in his defence of the new art, and violently against the involvement of art in politics. Charged with formalism, he was dismissed from the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Łódź in 1950.

Besides *Unistic Compositions*, he left series of paintings including *Architectural Compositions*, 1926–1929; *Seascapes and Łódź Townscapes*, 1931–1934; *Abstract Compositions*, 1933–1934; and *Solar After-images*, 1948–1949, in addition to series of drawings, including war drawings, all unique works, and unlike any others.

- *Zenobia Karnicka*
- Translation: *Joanna Holzman*



Unistic Composition 9 1931

Paul Klee (Münchenbuchsee 1879 – 1940 Muralto-Locarno)

Stars Above the Earth, 1913

Ink on paper; 17 x 10.2 cm

Signed bottom left: Klee 1913. 175, Die Gestirne Über den Dingen

Paul Klee was a Swiss painter, musician, and poet. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, settling in Germany in 1906. To complete his art education, he travelled in Italy, and spent some time in Paris. In Germany he joined the group Der Blaue Reiter, and he took part in their exhibitions. In 1914 he visited Tunisia, which had a decisive influence on his work – until then, he had used mostly watercolours and inks, but after his trip, his fascination with intense colours made him turn to oil painting. In 1920, the Goltz Gallery organized a large exhibition of his works, consisting of 360 pieces. Four years later, Klee's works were shown for the first time in New York. In the same year, Alexei Javlensky, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger and Paul Klee founded the group Die Blauen Vier, whose accomplishments were promoted in the United States by Emma Schayer – “Galka”. Between 1920 and 1931 Klee taught at the Bauhaus, and in 1931-33 at the Academy in Düsseldorf. In 1933, as a declared opponent of the Nazi violence and terror, he left Germany and returned to Switzerland.

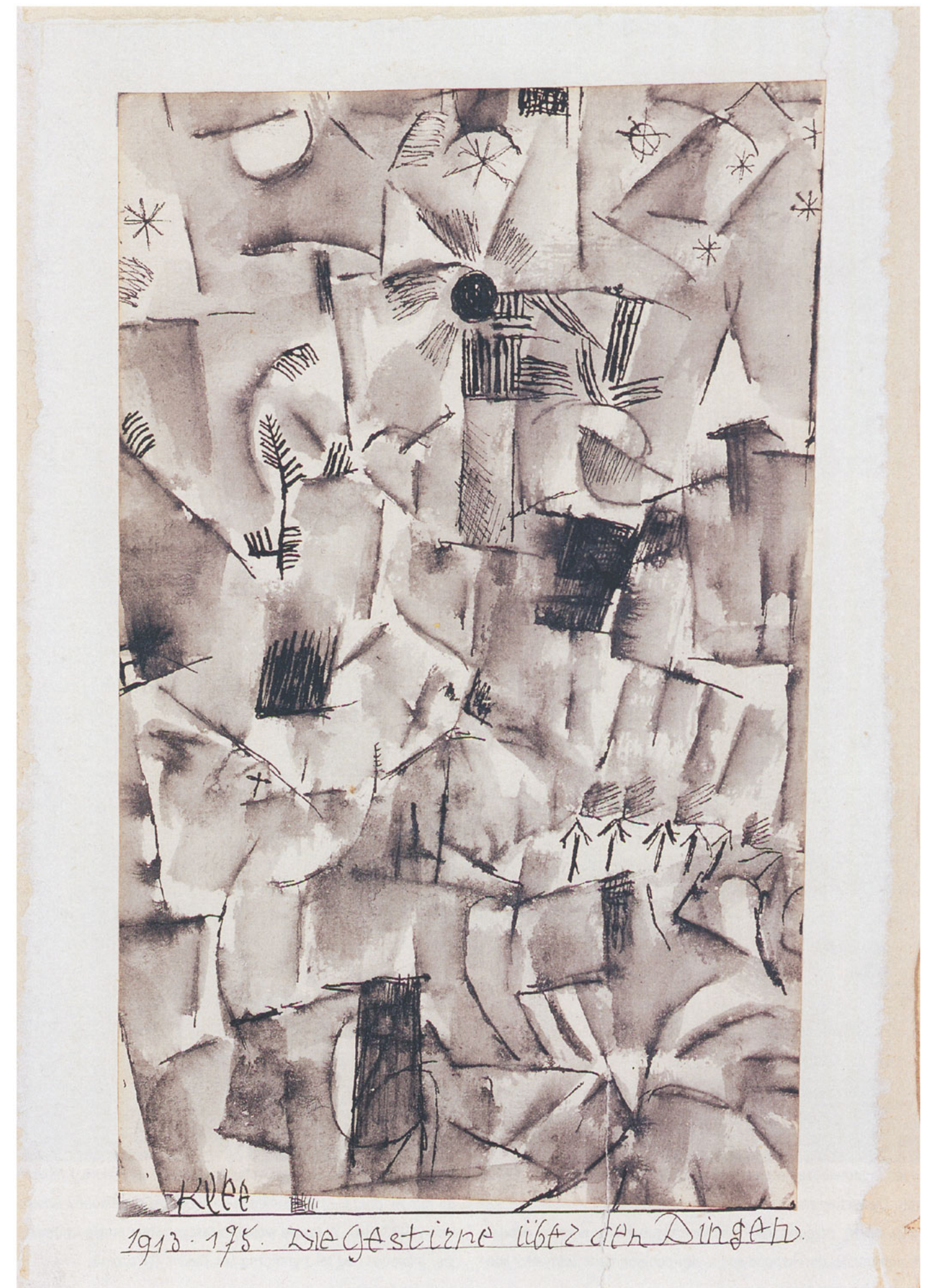
Klee was an extremely orderly painter. He kept a notebook in which he wrote down his observations on colour and various painting techniques, as well as his experiences as a teacher. He also kept a detailed inventory of his works, their inventory numbers consisted of the year and the successive numbers of the works created in that year. These were followed by the title, a detailed description of the technique employed, and a number indicating the category of the work, as determined by the artist. After 1925 Klee changed the system of classification, presumably at the insistence of his dealers, who did not want the buyers to know how many works the artist was producing in a year. At his death, the total number of works in his catalogue approached nine thousand.

Klee claimed that painting should not reproduce the visible, but render visible. He believed that nothing could replace intuition in art. The first “categories” that he introduced in the classification of his works numbers divided them into those painted from nature (category B) and those painted intuitively (category A).

Klee was a master of painting techniques, which he constantly enriched by experimenting with paints, pigments and grounds, establishing their mutual relationships. He created small-sized works, earning the name of “a painter of small formats”. He moved freely between figurative art and abstraction, between geometrical and organic forms. His paintings are full of humour; they present a sensuous and joyful world. His work cannot be confined to any contemporary trend in art – it is truly unique. Neither can it be described in general terms – every painting or drawing is different, with different line and colour scheme. Colour is very important; it ranges from pale to saturated hues – a full palette of extraordinary colours, juxtaposed with such intuition that no verbal rendering of a work will give it its due.

The work in the collection of Muzeum Sztuki was created as the 175th in 1913; the artist used ink and ink-wash. It presents a strange landscape, divided into small, irregular sections, slightly reminiscent of a grid of fields in a mountain landscape. Above it, a few crosses mark the stars. Besides the line, providing the outlines of the drawing, there are patches of washed ink, whose blackness has yielded so many shades of grey that even this monochromatic work can give one an idea of the artist's extraordinary sense of colour.

- Anna Saciuk-Gąsowska
- Translation: Alina Kwiatkowska



Stars Above the Earth / Die Gestirne über den Dingen 1913

Pablo Picasso (Malaga 1881 – 1973 Mougín)

Head of a Smoker, 1964

Crayons, pastels on paper; 65.5 x 50 cm

Signed bottom right: *Picasso 18.5.64. I*

“Those who attempt to explain paintings
usually go astray”

Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso is one of the best known painters of the 20th century. His native country was Spain – he was born in Andalusia, and studied in Barcelona and Catalonia. Many of his youthful works remained in Barcelona and are now presented at the Museum Picasso there. In 1900 Picasso went to Paris for the first time, and after 1904 he settled there for good.

Picasso's early work is divided into the blue period (1901–1904) and the pink period (1904–1906) according to the colour schemes of the paintings created at that time. In 1907 Picasso departs from his former lyrical representations – his *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is already a Cubist painting. The Cubists changed the approach towards art – they got rid of perspective, altered the form of presentation; it was now geometrized and thus seriously deformed. Above all, they revolutionized aesthetics – they rejected beauty, or rather everything that had been regarded as beautiful before. Thus Picasso and his colleague Georges Braque waged war on the society's aesthetic tastes, and at the same time introduced an art in which what counts is not the faithfulness of the representation, but the truth of the painting. Near the end of the 1920s Picasso abandoned Cubism, choosing his own way in art. He never gave up figurative painting. His canvases are full of representations of people and animals. Usually their shapes are distorted, geometrical, sometimes on the borderline of abstraction, although in different periods Picasso returns to realism.

Pablo Picasso

In 1937 he created *Guernica*, one of his most important paintings and one of the best known paintings of the 20th century. *Guernica* is a small, Basque town, bombarded during the Civil War in Spain by German planes. The destruction of the city and the death of its inhabitants became a symbol of war and annihilation, and the painting was an accusation of Fascism. It was shown at the Spanish pavilion during the *Exposition universelle* in Paris in 1937. Pablo Picasso's drawing was purchased for the collection of Muzeum Sztuki at the Leiris gallery in 1968. It shows the head of a man with a cigarette in his mouth. It is a schematic, contour drawing. The subject has been treated lightly, not very realistically: we can see the smoker's head simultaneously from different sides, as if disassembled and then reassembled again without regard for the natural order of elements.

As there are no paintings of Picasso's in Polish museum collections, this most famous painter of the 20th century is all but unknown in Poland. His drawing at Muzeum Sztuki may go a little way towards filling this gap.

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Head of a Smoker 1964