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“Polish Artist – Artist from Poland?” The Question of National Identity in the Study of Artists from Poland in France at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries: The Example of Simon Mondzain

National identity or identification is defined as a sense of separateness from other nations, shaped by nation-building factors such as national symbols, language, national colors, awareness of origin, national history, blood ties, attitude towards cultural heritage, culture, territory, national character, and national awareness.¹ The latter can be understood at the individual level as a sense of belonging to a particular nation. At the collective level, on the other hand, it is a sense of cultural and ethnic ties with an awareness of historical continuity. A sense of national identity is particularly visible during crises, for example when a nation loses its independence and attempts to regain it, as happened during the partitions of Poland. It also acquires a different dimension and caliber during confrontations with other national groups, for example, as a result of leaving one's own

¹ Cf. A. Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni* [National cultures at their roots], Warsaw 2005.

national group for an extended period of time when traveling abroad or, even more so, during emigration.

A special form of emigration was the overseas travel of Polish artists, which intensified during the partitions of Poland, especially at the end of the 19th century. “Departures to follow art,” particularly to France, their causes, course, and consequences, both for artists and their work, have been a topic I have been interested in for many years. The question of such concepts as, for example, “Polish artist” – “artist from Poland,” the importance of the connection with the culture of a non-existent country for the personality and visual imagination of painters of Jewish origin, the criteria for determining in other countries the identification of artists as “Polish” in relation to the subject matter and form of their works, which was vivid and important to my research, seemed to me to be resolved by adopting the empirical criterion.² It was not necessary to justify the choice of this criterion, which was based on an individual’s declaration – in word or deed – of belonging to a particular cultural circle. The broad scope of my basic research, which was aimed at identifying artists functioning abroad who were associated with the Polish cultural circle, justified this approach according to the principle that excess is better than insufficiency.

The available literature on the history of art lacks a concrete proposal for a theoretical concept of national identity in the situation of emigration. A breakthrough in the process of opening of the Polish history of art to émigré artists was the exhibition “Polish Painting in the Ewa and Wojtek Fibak Collection”³ organized in 1992. Its title referred to the Polishness of the works of art – Polish paintings – and consequently to the Polishness of their authors. When describing in the introduction to the exhibition catalog the history of the collection and its focus on the interwar period, Władysława Jaworska writes of the creation by the Fibak couple of “the

² Cf. E. Bobrowska-Jakubowski, “Les artistes polonais en France 1890–1918. Communautés et individualités” [Polish artists in France 1890–1918. Communities and individuals], doctoral dissertation, Université Paris 1, Paris 2001, published in part as E. Bobrowska-Jakubowska, *Artyści polscy we Francji 1890–1918. Wspólnoty i indywidualności* [Polish artists in France 1890–1918. Communities and individuals], Warsaw 2004.

³ Cf. *Malarstwo polskie w kolekcji Ewy i Wojciecha Fibaków. Polish Painting in the Ewa and Wojtek Fibak Collection*, Warsaw 1992.

largest collection of works by Polish and Polish-Jewish painters of the Ecole de Paris.”⁴ Agnieszka Morawińska also emphasizes the presence of works by Polish and Polish-Jewish artists, whose contributions to the history of Polish art have been met with interest by art historians since at least the 1980s.⁵ However, she does not delve into the nuances of national identification of Polish-Jewish artists. Relatively recent publications, such as *In Search of Shape, Light, and Color*⁶ and *Gallery of Polish Masters. Painting, Drawing, Sculpture from the Collection of Krzysztof Musiał*,⁷ seem not to have taken this problem into account at all. They assign intuitively, or perhaps rather traditionally, all artists to the Polish national group.

In a text published in the materials of a scientific session devoted to the problems of identity, titled *Pole, Jew, Artist. Identity and the Avant-Garde*, Jerzy Malinowski, writing about artists of Jewish origin who left the Polish territories and went abroad, states succinctly: “Almost all of them (except Soutin, who did speak Polish) identified themselves as Polish artists by participating in Polish exhibitions in France and in Poland.”⁸ Malinowski does not explain what it meant specifically to “identify oneself” as a Pole. Thus, he adopts an empirical criterion, seeing no need for a deeper justification for such a decision. Also the commissioners of the exhibition on Polish immigration to France titled “Polonia. Des Polonais en France de 1830 à nos jours”⁹ faced the problem of defining the body of the exhibition and opted for an empirical criterion.

⁴ W. Jaworska, “Kolekcja żywa” [Living collection], in: *Polish Painting in the Ewa and Wojtek Fibak Collection*, p. VIII.

⁵ Cf. J. Pollakówna, *Malarstwo polskie między wojnami 1918–1939* [Polish painting between the Wars 1918–1939], Warsaw 1982 (biographical notes prepared by Wanda M. Rudzińska).

⁶ H. Bartnicka-Górska, J. Szczepińska-Tramer, *W poszukiwaniu kształtu, światła i barwy* [In search of shape, light and color], Warsaw 2005.

⁷ M. Nowakowska, ed., *Galeria mistrzów polskich. Malarstwo, rysunek, rzeźba z kolekcji Krzysztofa Musiała* [Gallery of Polish Masters. Painting, Drawing, Sculpture from the Collection of Krzysztof Musiał], Łódź 2011.

⁸ J. Malinowski, “Awangarda żydowska w Polsce” [Jewish avant-garde in Poland], in: J. Suchan, ed., *Polak, Żyd, artysta. Tożsamość a awangarda* [Pole, Jew, artist. Identity and the avant-garde], Łódź 2010, p. 26.

⁹ J. Ponty, ed., *Polonia. Des Polonais en France de 1830 à nos jours* [Polonia. Poles in France from 1830 to our time], [exhibition catalog], Cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration, Paris, March 2–August 30, 2011, Paris [2011].

The empirical criterion is based on statements, verbal or written, or actions taken by a person, indicating his or her national preference. There are numerous examples of such choices. One of them is the declaration of nationality to the authorities of the country of settlement. However, it depends not only on the will of the person concerned, but, most importantly, on the laws of the country of settlement, which distinguish, or not, between citizenship and nationality. Another criterion may be the adoption of citizenship of the country of settlement, which can be interpreted as a desire to disconnect from one's own roots. Naturalization, however, depends on the country's regulations, as well as practical considerations that may prompt individuals to apply for it. In some cases it may be a matter of negating one's roots and spiritually integrating with the country of settlement; in others it is a necessary step on the way to regularizing one's own status in relation to the authorities of the country of settlement and in no way determines one's sense of nationality one way or another. In France in the early 20th century, naturalization was a privilege to which veterans of battles for their adopted homeland in the ranks of the French army, for example, were entitled. A special, though not decisive, criterion may be the use of language, both of the country of origin and the country of settlement, and the relationship between the two. Another possible indicator is participation in exhibitions or campaigns described as national, such as membership in national associations operating abroad or participation in exhibitions that have the adjective "Polish" in their name. The relationship between an artist's national identity and the nature of his or her work can be an important issue. However, this problem, which is closely related to the concept of national art (national style), is beyond the scope of our analysis. The national character of the *oeuvre* of a specific artist does not seem to depend solely on the author's sense of nationality, which, moreover, is not constant and fluctuates depending on the historical moment or the political situation.

As already mentioned, the intensification or planned action to intensify the sense of national identity becomes apparent during crises. Such crises arise due to threats to the existence of a specific nation (Poland in the period immediately preceding the partitions and under the partitions), its creation (the United States in the first period of its history), or

its reconstruction and consolidation (such as in the process of unification of Italy or Poland after it regained its independence in 1918). Countries whose national existence rests on a solid historical foundation and has not succumbed to major threats do not show any particular tendency to emphasize their national identification.

Although France is a multinational country, it is difficult to find items in the literature on French art history that analyze its "Frenchness." The history of French art easily and gracefully absorbs or assimilates the artists living in the country's territory, especially those who have been successful. Moreover, the latter rarely object to such incorporation. It is difficult to find a museum in France dedicated exclusively to French art, as if it did not need confirmation of its unique nature and distinctiveness from others. Not coincidentally, however, there are many museums of national American art in the United States, from the Smithsonian American Art Museum, through the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Minnesota Museum of American Art in Saint Paul, the New Britain Museum of American Art, to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art that was opened in 2011. Literature devoted to American national art is also abundant,¹⁰ as if the young nation still needed elements that will cement its cohesion and strengthen its and its art's sense of identity. In the case of Poland, museums bearing the adjective "Polish" in their name are located abroad, for example the Polish Museum in Rapperswil and the Polish Museum in Chicago. Established by Polish émigrés, they were intended to satisfy their need for national identity and identification among strangers. They continue to fulfill this role, albeit to an increasingly lesser extent, to this day, enabling Polish immigrants to cultivate traditions and show their distinctiveness to other national and ethnic groups in the country of settlement.

The complexity of the national and cultural situation of partitioned Poland at the end of the 19th century, which gave rise to increased depar-

¹⁰ "One of the most American traits is our urge to define what is American. This search for a self-image is a result of our relative youth as a civilization, our years of partial dependence on Europe. But it is also a vital part of the process of growth"; cf. L. Goodrich, "What is American – in American Art?", *Art in America* 1958, no. 3, pp. 18–33. This article initiated a rich literature on the American character of American art.

tures of artists from the occupied territories to France, is a well-known matter. The Polish state, which was a multinational, multicultural, and multilingual organism in the pre-partition period, ceased to exist politically. The partitioning powers sought to integrate the conquered populations by methods that were as simple as they were drastic: they denationalized and imposed, often brutally, their own identity (Germanization and Russification). The Austrian partition was an exception in this regard, but only after 1866, when Poles were granted certain political and national freedoms. The national identity of a Pole, and even more so of a representative of one of the national minorities living in the territories of the former Polish state, was complicated due to the country's partitions. The situation for those going abroad, especially for a longer stay, became even more difficult and complex. Whatever their sense of nationality, after all, they held a passport issued by one of the partitioning states and were treated as such by the foreign administration. In a foreign environment, national identification became the more important, the more difficult assimilation or integration was for linguistic and cultural reasons, due to the strangeness of the environment, its traditions, customs, and mores. As a result, national or ethnic enclaves were formed by immigrants who spoke the same language and had similar experiences. Not only did they provide their residents with a sense of security, but also had an economic rationale, allowing them to share maintenance costs. An excellent example of such an enclave was the tenement house at No. 9 Campagne Première Street in the Montparnasse district of Paris, inhabited by numerous newcomers from partitioned Poland.¹¹

The famous La Ruche also played a similar role, not only for Poles, but also for foreign visitors, mainly from various parts of Central and Eastern Europe.

During the partition period, France fostered Polish independence tendencies. This positive attitude changed at the end of the 19th century. The

¹¹ It was inhabited at different times by, among others: Feliks Antoniak, Zofia Baudouin de Courtenay, Zofia Billauer-Węgierekowa, Janina Broniewska, Antoni Buszek, Zenobiusz Leopold Cerkiewicz, Waclaw Teofil Husarski, Michał du Laurans, Zofia-Jadwiga Raczyńska, Jan Rubczak, and Zofia Segno.

government of the Third Republic resented Poles for participating in the Paris Commune. In addition, the Franco-Russian alliance, concluded in 1892, did not allow the French government to support the Polish ambitions to regain freedom. Poles were carefully watched and kept under surveillance, but were allowed to carry out activities in France under national slogans, as long as they were not political, but only cultural in nature. The liberal attitude of the French authorities allowed émigrés from the Polish lands to establish the Polish Artistic and Literary Circle in 1897.¹² It brought together artists coming from different partitions and representing different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, and created a kind of common platform that unified them under the slogans of Polishness. The organization's members from the Russian partition included: Włodzimierz Nałęcz, Antoni Jan Austen, Michał du Laurans, Kazimierz Józef Dunin-Markiewicz, Jan (Jean) Mirosław Peské (Peske, Peszke), Stanisław Pstrokoński, Bolesław Nawrocki, Jan Chełmiński, Stanisław Bagieński, and Mela Muter (Maria Melania Mutermilch). Those from the Austrian partition were: Zygmunt Myrton-Michalski, Franciszek Siedlecki, Anna Gramatyka (married name Ostrowska), Stanisław Gałek, and Olga Boznańska. Frenchmen of Polish descent were also members of the Society; they included: Wincenty Kazimierz Dobrzycki,¹³ Alfred Świeykowski, and Andrzej Łapuszewski.

One of the main goals of the Society was to manifest the Polish artistic presence at the 1900 World Exposition in Paris, and when this proved impossible for legal reasons, to publish a catalog of works by Polish artists presenting their work at the Exposition, but scattered throughout the various pavilions.¹⁴ The catalog, provided with a cover in the Polish national colors,

¹² For a broader description of the Society's goals and activities, see: F. Ziejka, *Paryż młodopolski* [Young Poland Paris], Warsaw 1993; E. Bobrowska-Jakubowska, "Les artistes polonais" [Polish artists]; and E. Bobrowska-Jakubowska, *Artyści polscy* [Polish artists].

¹³ Wincenty Kazimierz Dobrzycki (1869–1913), Frenchman of Polish descent, painter, publisher of the magazine *Bulletin polonais*, participated in decorative arts exhibitions and Parisian salons, in particular the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1910 and the Salon of French Artists in 1911; he was a member of the Polish Artistic and Literary Circle (1898); should not be confused with Zygmunt Dobrzycki (1896–1970).

¹⁴ *Catalogue des artistes polonais à l'Exposition internationale universelle de 1900 à Paris. Avec deux plans indiquant la disposition des sections étrangères dans le grand Palais des Beaux-Arts; édité*

included more than a hundred works, presented in the Russian, Austrian, French, and international sections. Not having the right to a separate art pavilion for themselves at the Exposition, the Poles organized another exposition that brought together the Polish artists present in Paris at the time.¹⁵ The presentation took place at the Paris gallery of Georges Petit as a private initiative of the Society's president, Cyprian Godebski. According to the available sources, it was not particularly successful, although the aspect of Polishness was strongly marked there.

The great fluctuation of the Polish art colony, whose members made frequent trips between Poland and France, caused the Society to cease its activities in 1904. In 1910, the traditions of the first Polish society of artists were taken over by the Polish Literary and Artistic Society.

Due to its elite profile and strict selection of its members (it brought together only men over the age of 21 who were established in France), it did not fulfill the needs of most activists in the Polish art colony. Therefore, in 1911, the Society of Polish Artists in Paris was founded, which had a more open and democratic character and brought together artists of different national, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Its founders included visual artists Olga Boznańska, Henryk (Henri) Hayden, Mieczysław Jakimowicz, Tadeusz (Józef) Makowski, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Jan Rubczak, Eugeniusz Zak, Władysław Skoczylas, Henryk Kuna, Eli (Elie, Elias) Nadelman, Stanisław Kazimierz Ostrowski, and Edward Wittig. Even during World War I, when it was a kind of political manifestation, the Society organized exhibitions in which the adjective "Polish" was used in the title. Societies with a Polish character also served as a forum where artists, temporarily freed from the yoke of living under the partitions, could freely express their national sentiments. Although all political activity was excluded by

par la Société polonaise artistique et littéraire de Paris [Catalog of Polish Artists at the 1900 Paris Exhibition. With Two Plans Indicating the Location of the Foreign Sections in the Grand Palace of Arts; edited by the Polish Artistic and Literary Society of Paris], Paris 1900. The analysis of the motivations for which individual artists were associated with one pavilion or another is very interesting. However, this is not the right place to present it.

¹⁵ *Exposition rétrospective d'œuvres de peintres polonais 1800–1900* [Retrospective exhibition of works of Polish painters 1800–1900], Galerie Georges Petit, Paris 1900.

statute, numerous conferences and meetings were devoted to discussions of national topics.¹⁶ Membership in the aforementioned societies was voluntary and was undoubtedly an evidence of identification with the Polish cultural circle.

Membership in societies of a Polish character did not prevent their members from actively participating in the international artistic life of the French capital, from making acquaintances and maintaining close contacts with representatives of other nationalities. There are well-known stories about friendship between Pankiewicz, Biegas, Makowski, and Simon (Szymon, Szamaj) Mondzain (Mondszajn), and artists and intellectuals of different nationalities, as well as about Boznańska's studio, which was a place for international, multilingual meetings. From my research to date, it appears that in the cosmopolitan environment of Paris, artists of Jewish origin interacted more easily and quickly with artists of the same background, but coming from other countries.¹⁷ Ethnic identity, based on a community of cultural and religious traditions, certainly played a special role. Even if artists of Jewish origin often left their ethnic group, whose strict traditions were at odds with the free creativity in the visual arts and prevented them from developing their talents, as was the case for example with Mondzain, in Paris they met similar "rebels" with the same roots, raised in the same traditions, which they opposed in the name of the same ideals of creative freedom. These artists were united by a "rebellious community." For newcomers from Central and Eastern Europe, the linguistic proximity provided by Yiddish was also important. According to Gail Levin, Jewish artists who came from Eastern Europe to the United States were distinguished by their cosmopolitanism. However, the researcher does not specify its origin, other than some kind of broadly defined openness that Jews or Judaism in general were supposedly characterized by. She merely states:

¹⁶ E.g. conferences: Stefan Abgarowicz, *Zbawienie Polski* [The salvation of Poland]; Edward Ligocki, *Projekty i prawdopodobieństwa* [Projects and probabilities], November 28, 1915; and M. Węgliński, *La Pologne et la future Société des Nations* [Poland and the future society of nations], November 4, 1917; and others.

¹⁷ Cf. E. Bobrowska-Jakubowska, *Artyści polscy* [Polish artists], pp. 301–302.

I include among Jewish artists those who share common cultural values, whether religious or cosmopolitan, which are equally considered Jewish – though the latter are usually considered more “modern.”¹⁸

Simon Mondzain¹⁹ is one of the more interesting examples of an artist with a complex sense of nationality. He was born in the Russian partition in a multinational, multilingual, and multi-religious town, which Chełm Lubelski was at the time, into the family of a Jewish saddler. He studied at a local cheder. His parents' opposition to the teenage Szymon's choice of a career as an artist, dictated by religious reasons, prompted him to run away from home. It was only in Warsaw that the young Mondzain began regular education in Polish. It is not known whether and to what extent he spoke Russian. He was also educated in Polish at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. We don't know whether he spoke German while studying under the Austrian partition either. He probably began learning French during his first visit to Paris in 1909. During his stay in Brittany in 1913, he wrote down his memoir in Polish. Among other things, he wrote in them about realizing his racial distinctiveness when he enrolled in a higher cheder at the age of seven:

A dozen or so little fellows sang, repeating word for word the story of Moses' death, of his blessing and curse, sang in low voice by our teacher. [...] Like Don Quixote, this was the first time I was declared a Jew [sic!].²⁰

The awareness of his membership in the Jewish community in the broader perspective is also evidenced by the following words:

¹⁸ G. Levin, “Świecka sztuka żydowska: tożsamość żydowska w świetle kosmopolityzmu” [Secular Jewish art: Jewish identity in the light of cosmopolitanism], in: *Polak, Żyd, artysta* [Pole, Jew, artist], p. 169.

¹⁹ See: E. Bobrowska, A. Winiarski, *Simon Mondzain. Mistrzowie Ecole de Paris* [Simon Mondzain. Masters of the Ecole de Paris], Warsaw 2012; a publication accompanying the exhibition of the artist's works at Villa La Fleur in Konstancin and later at the Chełm Regional Museum in Chełm.

²⁰ S. Mondzain, “Wspomnienie” [Memoir], in: *Simon Mondzain*, [exhibition catalog], Polish Institute, Paris; Zachęta Gallery of Modern Art, Warsaw; Silesian Museum, Katowice; Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw 1999, p. 17.

At that time a Zionist association was organized [in] Chełm. Thanks to it I got Jewish books [sic!] to read, and I understood that I was previously wrong to think that I am a downtrodden Jew who is the chosen son of a fanatic god, I understood both Muslims and Christians – Gentiles are people, and my earlier thoughts to become a rabbi and live only for God and paradise disappeared, I no longer saw that messiah from the Jewish legend who was supposed to come on a white horse, I saw another messiah and understood that it was necessary to create a soul for the downtrodden people.²¹

Mondzain himself wanted to take an active part in the “creation of the soul” of his nation through artistic activity, in defiance of Jewish fanaticism. He believed that Jews would help him achieve this goal. And indeed, to complete his studies he received scholarships and assistance, including from the Jewish community and patrons. At the same time, writing about his native Chełm, he had a sense of belonging to the Polish community and the threat of Russification:

[...] in general our town prospered mainly thanks to the large numbers of government officials sent there to Russify this town [...].²²

While in France after the outbreak of World War I, Mondzain joined the Foreign Legion as a volunteer. While serving at the front, he began to identify with the country that had offered him hospitality and whose freedom he was now fighting for.

This is evidenced, among other things, by a drawing made in 1915 under the influence of the tragedy that affected the cathedral in Reims, titled in Polish – *Katedra. Reims*²³ [Cathedral. Reims], which contains a dramatic commentary in the still clumsy French: *Je ne veut pas être tué par les Allemands*.²⁴ At the same time, Mondzain corresponded in Polish with another painter of Jewish origin, a friend from the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, Mojżesz

²¹ Ibidem, p. 18.

²² Ibidem, p. 16.

²³ S. Mondzain, *Katedra. Reims* [Cathedral. Reims], 1915, pencil, paper (a sheet from a sketchbook), private collection, Paris.

²⁴ “I don’t want to be killed by the Germans.”

(Moïse) Kisling, who was also staying in France. He maintained contacts with Poles and exhibited his works with them,²⁵ but did not participate in the activities of Polish societies, except during World War I, when he benefited from the support of the Fraternal Aid of Polish Artists. In 1917, he found himself in the ranks of the Polish Army formed in France, where he served as an interpreter. He signed the portrait of Kościuszko that he drew in Paris in 1919 for Dr. Stefan Mutermilch of the Pasteur Institute proudly as a Polish soldier.²⁶

In 1920, after demobilization, Mondzain was looking for his place in the world, but did not see it in the independent Poland. His trip to Chicago, where he worked for several months and organized an exhibition,²⁷ shows that France was not an obvious choice for him either. His correspondence with Eli Nadelman, a Polish-Jewish artist who had settled in America several years earlier, shows that Mondzain originally intended to stay in the United States permanently. However, he chose Paris²⁸ for artistic reasons. His service in the Foreign Legion and his wounds enabled him to obtain French citizenship in 1923. In the 1930s, he settled in French Algeria, which he left only in 1963 after the country gained independence. Did his naturalization and marriage to a French woman, the award of the Legion of Honor to him in 1932, and his lively participation in French artistic life make him 100 percent French and make him forget his other roots? In 1929 in Paris, he participated in the exhibition “L’Art polonais moderne” [Modern Polish art] at the Editions Bonaparte Gallery. In 1933, he had an exhibition in New

²⁵ *Tombola artistique au profit des artistes polonais victimes de la guerre* [Artist lottery for the benefit of Polish artists – victims of the war], Galerie des Artistes Modernes, Paris 1915; *Tombola artistique (peinture, sculpture, objets d’art) au profit des artistes polonais victimes de la guerre* [Artist lottery (painting, sculpture, objects of art) for the benefit of Polish artists – victims of the war], Gallery Bernheim-Jeune, Paris 1915–1916; *Quelques artistes polonais* [Some Polish artists], Gallery Barbazanges, Paris 1920.

²⁶ See: K. Prochaska, “Znaczący podarunek” [A meaningful gift], *Słowo Żydowskie*, November 13, 1998, pp. 18–19.

²⁷ *Exhibition of Painting and Drawing by William Simon Mondzain*, [exhibition catalog], The Arts Club, Chicago, June 5–19, 1920.

²⁸ See: a letter from S. Mondzain to E. Nadelman (Chicago) dated August 7, 1920, in: *Simon Mondzain*, p. 27.

York City at the International Exhibition of the College Art Association²⁹ in the Polish section. In 1935, he took part in the First Exhibition of the Polish Artists Group in Paris, held at the Beaux-Arts Gallery. During World War II in Algiers, he was the head of the Polish House established there. After the war, for personal reasons, he did not maintain any contact with his family in Poland. Political considerations also played a significant role: due to the separation of Poland from the Western world by the Iron Curtain, the affairs of his home country became distant to him. However, he was still writing in Polish in 1964,³⁰ and in the 1970s he happily received visits from Poles interested in his work. So it is clear that the artist's sense of nationality was "eclectic."

As already mentioned, one possible criterion for an artist's "Polishness" is the nature of his art. An artist's style is shaped under the influence of his or her studies, as well as the environment in which he or she lives in his or her youth. However, one only has to look at Mondzain's work, at his first known paintings, to see the influence of French painting, from Delacroix to Cézanne, the great masters of world painting, mainly of the Italian Renaissance, as well as Rembrandt and Goya. He probably owed this influence to the great artistic erudite and ardent Francophile, his Cracow professor Józef Pankiewicz, as well as to his contacts with French friends, such as André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck. The topics of Mondzain's works are entirely universal, they lack Polish or Jewish themes, with the possible exception of a witty drawing *Tańczący Żyd* [Dancing Jew]³¹ from the period of his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, provided by the author with a humorous commentary: "I wanted to draw a kneeling Catholic, but my noble background came out." The composition *Przebudzenie młodości* [The awakening of youth], otherwise known as *Toaleta*

²⁹ [Catalog of] international [exhibition of paintings], Rockefeller Center, New York City 1933.

³⁰ A letter from S. Mondzain to Irena and Andrzej Kramsztyk, in: *Simon Mondzain*, p. 58.

³¹ S. Mondzain, *Tańczący Żyd* ("Git Morgen panie Lejben") [Dancing Jew ("Good morning, Mr. Lejben")], approx. 1910–1913, pencil, paper (a sheet from a sketchbook), private collection, Paris.

panny młodej [The bride's toilet],³² can be interpreted in various ways. For example, one can see in it the story of Esther, which is very important for strengthening the sense of identity of the Jewish people. Mondzain was not a religious and practicing Jew. He was eager to explore the domain of Christian religion, as evidenced by his paintings dealing with St. Francis and the philosophical and religious content, such as in the painting *Duch zła* [The spirit of evil].³³ However, he admitted that he was greatly influenced by Judaism, in which he was raised. Mondzain in particular stressed the importance of early reading of "books, various fantastic stories about ghosts with a religious background, in order to take from them a living example of how to be a faithful Jew."³⁴

In 1913, already as an adult, he wrote:

I was so worried by the reality of these spirits that I can say that this affects me quite unconsciously to this day.³⁵

I quote these words to show how many different factors contribute to such a complicated issue as a sense of national identity. Mondzain's work was heavily influenced by the surrounding climate and landscape, first in France and later in French Algeria. He was fond of painting the sights of Algiers, its architecture and its peculiar cosmopolitan atmosphere, which was composed of European culture, especially French, the local exotic color of Arab culture, and the traditions of Sephardic Jews. The artist drew moderately from the local Arab folklore by introducing elements decorated with traditional ornamentation, such as pottery, in his still lifes. Several times he used the theme of odalisks. However, these interests were far removed from the Orientalist fascinations of such artists as Adam Styka.

Mondzain was not the only artist originating from the post-partition, multinational Poland who settled abroad and "broadened" his national

³² S. Mondzain, *Przebudzenie młodości (Toaleta panny młodej)* [The awakening of youth (The bride's toilet)], 1928–1938, oil, canvas, 109.5 × 120.5 cm, private collection, Paris.

³³ S. Mondzain, *Duch zła* [The spirit of evil], approx. 1930, oil, canvas, 195 × 148 cm, collection of Marek Roefler, Konstancin.

³⁴ S. Mondzain, *Wspomnienie* [Memoir], p. 17.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

identity. There are multiple examples of such people, especially among artists from national or ethnic minorities, whether Jewish, Ukrainian, or Lithuanian, but even among so-called "indigenous" Poles.

However, this does not allow us to identify any trend, other than to say that artists who went abroad, if they could not adapt and adopt the national identity of the new country, usually returned to Poland. Those who felt they were citizens of the world stayed abroad, taking advantage of the wealth of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism.

The example of Mondzain shows that the artists themselves approached the question of their identity in a flexible manner, in accordance with their actual situation and their attachment to the roots and traditions in which they grew up. Multiple national identities were natural to them. As Jarosław Suchan rightly pointed out in his article *Pole, Jew, Artist. Identity and the Avant-Garde*, one can feel one that belongs to multiple cultures, just as one can have multiple citizenships, come from mixed marriages, and have grandparents from four different parts of the world.³⁶

This leads to the following question: Does the question posed at the outset, "a Polish artist or an artist from Poland?" still make sense nowadays, in a situation of globalization of economics and art? Why do we ask it at all? Perhaps the problem we are discussing today is a relic of the communist era, when Poland seemed to be a culturally monolithic country, and researchers who grew up in its traditions applied the concept thoughtlessly, without taking into account previous historical periods, or applied it to situations and people to which it was completely inadequate. It is not just a matter of origin, but also the fact of living in a country other than one's home country, where naturalization and very desired integration often took place. The sense of Polishness of an émigré living abroad is different from that of a Pole living at home. This is reflected not only in the way of life itself, but also in the choice of topics and style of artistic work.

Working abroad, in inter- or multinational or Polish émigré communities, as well as taking up emigration related topics, made me sensitive to aspects of the sense of nationality of representatives of other nations. This

³⁶ J. Suchan, "Polak, Żyd, artysta. Tożsamość a awangarda" [Pole, Jew, artist. Identity and the avant-garde], in: *Polak, Żyd, artysta* [Pole, Jew, artist], pp. 14–15.

does not mean that I believe that we should give up the national approach and the inclusion of artists with different, not only purely Polish roots, in the Polish cultural circle, even if they themselves identified with it at any point in their lives. One would only have to accept the idea that the adjective “Polish” contains the potential for multiculturalism, multi-religiousness, and linguistic diversity depending on the historical period under discussion. In other words, the proper use and giving the proper sense to the word “Polish” would depend only on the self-discipline of researchers, who should use it in the proper historical context, enriching it with additional nuances and details, if necessary in the case of artists from national or ethnic minorities. The inclusion of such artists in the Polish cultural circle, and consequently in the history of Polish art, is particularly relevant to artists who “departed to follow art” abroad and remained there forever. In the vast majority of cases, if these artists have not reached the same fame as Picasso abroad, they are of no interest to anyone, either in their country of origin or in their country of settlement. It is important to make sure that they are not lost altogether in the discussion of the sense of identity and national affiliation, but, on the contrary, we should try to restore them to the multicultural Polish heritage.

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