

Maria Wnęk and all her saints - Observations about the exhibition at Gardzienice Gallery in Lublin

Maria Wnęk i jej wszyscy święci - Uwagi na marginesie wystawy rysunków w Galerii Gardzienice w Lublinie

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Abstract

Maria Wnęk has left many works, most originated from the years 1973 – 1991 situated in the private collections, the galleries and museums in Poland and abroad. It is interesting that there is no extensive knowledge about her, and a similar situation is with other Polish *art brut* artists. Present in these works inspirations with the folk culture and iconic painting are probably no longer so surprising and original like 30 years ago, when they were created. The presence of the schizophrenic features in these artistic expressions is connected with the long-lasting psychotic process. The influences of folk culture characteristic for the Wnęk's region are not surprising.

The religiousness of Maria Wnęk connected with the traditions of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska is reflected in many of her works. The analysis of her creation, same as of the described earlier Edmund Monsiel's works, is the perfect lesson of psychopathology for the young psychiatrists and a very interesting subject for the art historians.

Keywords: schizophrenic artistic expression, art brut

Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia postać i dorobek artystyczny Marii Wnęk czołowej przedstawicielki polskiego nurtu art brut albo tzw. sztuki psychopatologicznej. Zawiera on analizę treści i kompozycji jej obrazów pokazanych na wystawie w Galerii Ośrodka Gardzienice w Lublinie. Maria Wnęk urodziła się 16 czerwca 1922 roku w Olszance, małej wiosce położonej koło Starego Sącza. Zmarła 12 kwietnia 2005 roku w Kobierzynie. W ostatnich latach życia przebywała w Specjalistycznym Szpitalu im. Babińskiego w Krakowie-Kobierzynie. Jej prace znajdują się w sławnej Collection de l'art. Brut w Lozannie, licznych muzeach zagranicznych i krajowych.

Słowa kluczowe: schizofreniczna ekspresja plastyczna, art brut

Introduction

Maria Wnęk was born on 16th June 1922 in Olszanka, a small village situated near Stary Sącz. She died on 12th April 2005 in Kobierzyn. She was from the rural large family. Maria Wnęk finished 4 years of a primary school and later in 1969 she was learning in the school for adults. She was a deeply religious person, a pilgrim and she participated in the church fairs. She particularly valued the cult of the Kalwaria Zebrzydowska where she for many times took part in the pieties and mystery plays of Way of the Cross. This is shown in the film of Andrzej Różycki projected during the time of the exhibition. She developed her talent of painting in 60's, in the Culture Centre (Nowosądecki Dom Kultury Kolejara) during the art classes led by Ewa Harsdorf. Maria got from Ewa nickname „Nikiforka” (after the artist Nikifor). During 80's her house in Olszanka was burnt down. Oversensitive from childhood, Wnęk avoided contact with other people and after the accident during her work (in the dairy) she retired. By the decision of a court Maria Wnęk has been

incapacitated due to the presence of psychotic symptoms in the form of auditory hallucinations, a sense of danger and lack of constant care from family. For a long time she was wandering, sleeping on railway stations and hallways of diverse public institutions. She rejected to take the room with a kitchen, requesting a flat near the church with four rooms, each with different purpose. She obtained a legal guardian who had to help her with the important for her life issues.

The last years of her life she spent in the hospital in Kraków-Kobierzyn. Her works are preserved in the famous Collection de l'art. Brut in Lozanna, in numerous museums in Poland and abroad [1].

The Analysis of the artistic works of Maria Wnęk

In her artistic expression She used tempera, oil paints, poster paints. The ground for her work were the scraps of paper, cardboard, plywood, sheet metal pieces, only sometimes canvas. She depicted on her paintings Jesus, Holly Mary, the Holy Trinity, there are also the

intentions and requests directed to God for the care of the world called „the resumes” („życiorysy”). They were put on the backside of the paintings and contains the cry for the help for the world, protection from miseries for herself and a long, sinless life for her with the opportunity to get into heaven after the death. The characteristic feature is filling the whole backside of the paintings with the text and signature: Nowy Sącz skr.p. 148 which is an address of Maria Wnęk, usually present in her works. In almost all her works there can be find her auto-portrait incorporated in a face, ex. Holly Mary or the virgin carrying the portrait of Lenin on the feretory [2].

The Composition of many of her drawings - *pozornie* open – is confined between the rims of the page, and the centre is a character establishing a hierarchy of the entire presentation. Except Jesus and Holly Mary, there are also all saints and the people from the closest surrounding, as priest, who usually invited her for his name day celebrations, bad neighbour, who, as the artist claimed, put the poison in Maria's shoes or the director of the gallery who organised the exhibition for the artist. The characters have strong and determined contour, they are set straight,

have almond-shaped eyes - similar to the icons. In the icon painting, eyes and look play an important role in the performances of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints. In fact, in the works of Wnęk the eyes are particularly exposed. They are generally immobile and frozen, the pupils are sometimes colourful and the eyebrows are contoured. The background of Wnęk's works are filled with leaves and flowers arranged in floristic ornaments. /*fot.1*/. In the exhibition at Gardzienice Gallery in Lublin there are works which show the lack of perspective, with the prevailing colours: red, yellow, green and blue in different shades.

The analysis of the paintings of this artist and her notes on the backside with the requests and messages may point out to the presence of the long-lasting process of a psychotic schizophrenic disease. We can find all the characteristic features of schizophrenic artistic expression. [3], ex. distortions of limbs, mainly hands, filling almost the whole background with the ornaments, and putting on the reverse of the works the texts with the clear missionary messages directed to and from God.



fot.1 /H.Welcz/

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