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## Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Nagel: Two Exhibitions of “Progressive Artists” at the Zachęta in the Framework of Cultural Cooperation with the German Democratic Republic

In 1950, in the framework of collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (Komitet Współpracy Kulturalnej z Zagranicą, KWKZ), the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, CBWA) hosted two exhibitions of the oeuvre of German artists: Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Nagel.<sup>1</sup> These exhibitions were a part of a programme of cooperation with the German Democratic Republic which had been developed by the Committee. This cooperation can be considered to have officially commenced in the year 1950, when the treaty concerning the recognition of the established frontier between the People's Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic was signed in Zgorzelec/Görlitz. From then on, as the official propaganda proclaimed, the two countries were bound by a “brotherly friendship”.<sup>2</sup>

The Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries was active in the years 1950–1956; it was attached to the Chairman of the Council

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1 The present article was written as part of the research project entitled “Historia wystaw w Zachęcie – Centralnym Biurze Wystaw Artystycznych w latach 1949–1970” [The History of Exhibitions at Zachęta, the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, in the Period 1949–1970] conducted within the framework of the National Programme for the Development of Humanities at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, no. 0086/NPRH3/H11/82/2014.

2 More on the relations between the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR in: *Ideologiczna współpraca. Władze wobec środowisk opiniotwórczych w PRL i NRD* [Ideological cooperation. The authorities vs. the opinion-forming milieus in the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR], eds. S. Ligarski, K. Ruchniewicz, D. Wojtaszyn, Wrocław, 2016.

of Ministers as the institution responsible for Poland's cultural relations abroad. The area of the Committee's activity was very broad; apart from planning and control of cultural exchange and cultural policy, it included strictly practical tasks, such as the preparation and coordination of art exhibitions. During the period of the Committee's activity, many exhibitions were hosted at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw and in a total of about one hundred other institutions. The programme of the exhibitions organised by the Committee reflected the state policy and focused on cooperation with countries of the Eastern bloc. Cultural exchange with Western countries as conducted in the framework of the Committee was treated instrumentally; it was possible as long as the given exhibition was critical towards the West and towards the capitalistic system; in short, if it could be described as "progressive".<sup>3</sup>

Exhibitions at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions presented the output of recognised artists; they gathered crowds of viewers and were described in detail both in the specialist and popular press. Selected artists were "propagandistically favourable"; their oeuvre was assessed from the point of view of social involvement and described as realistic and progressive. The selection of works and the related art criticism highlighted those aspects of the artists' output which were in agreement with the doctrine of Socialist Realism. The exhibitions were linked by the person of Otto Nagel, who acted as the commissioner<sup>4</sup> of Kollwitz's exhibition.

Otto Nagel (1894–1967) had been active as a painter before the war and was already then involved in politics. After the Nazis took power, he was subjected to harassment; in 1934 he was prohibited from working in an atelier (*Malverbot im Atelier*) and from exhibiting his works,<sup>5</sup> and in the year 1936/1937 he was imprisoned in the KZ Sachsenhausen concentration camp.<sup>6</sup> After the war he was one of the founders of Kulturbund der DDR. He received several

3 For a detailed discussion of the exhibition-organising activities of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, see Karolina Zychowicz, "Exhibition-Organising Activity of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries (1950–1956) on the Example of Selected Exhibitions at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions" (in the present volume of *Ikonotheka*).

4 According to the documents from Ministerium für Kultur (signature: DR 1/6008, Ministerium für Volksbildung, Hauptabteilung Kunst, Referat Bildende Kunst, 9272/2, Abteilung Kulturelle Beziehungen zum Ausland, 24.05.1951) Nagel was nominated as a person responsible for installation of the exhibition and a representative of Ministry. It was underlined that he is also a member of Akademie der Künste and a chairman of association of artists as well as Kollwitz's former friend and expert on her art. Nagel was the author of the text for the catalogue and a speaker at the vernissage.

5 K. Hoge, *Selbstbildnisse im Angesicht der Bedrohung durch den Nationalsozialismus, Reaktionen diffamierter Künstler auf die nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik*, doctoral dissertation supervised by Prof. Dr. Dietrich Schubert, Kunsthistorisches Institut, Heidelberger Universität, 2004, p. 48, permanent link: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-opus-52028 [accessed 8 July 2016].

6 M. Braun, *Kulturinsel und Machtinstrument. Die Akademie der Künste, die Partei und die Staatssicherheit*, Göttingen, 2007, p. 91.

state awards. In the period 1956–1962 he was the chairman of the GDR Academy of Fine Arts (Deutsche Akademie der Künste / Akademie der Künste der DDR) in Berlin. Nagel and Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), who had also suffered Nazi repressions, were friends.<sup>7</sup> After her death Nagel became the guardian of her legacy. Kollwitz's posthumous exhibition in Warsaw in 1951 laid the foundations for Nagel's cooperation with the Zachęta and with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, which resulted in his solo exhibition organised three years later.

The documents of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries pertaining to the exhibitions from GDR, which are extant in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw,<sup>8</sup> contain statistical and financial records which make it possible to trace the Polish-German exhibition activities of the Committee as seen against the background of similar cooperation among other countries of the Eastern bloc. Data from the financial report for the years 1950–1956 indicate that the costs of GDR's cooperation were second-largest after costs incurred by cooperating with the USSR,<sup>9</sup> the latter being treated as a priority. The financial report for the years 1950–1953, in turn, indicates that the number of exhibitions brought from the GDR to Poland was equal to that of Polish exhibitions shown in the GDR, i.e. three exhibitions.<sup>10</sup> Cooperation in the years 1955–1956 again brought the same number of exhibitions on each side, four, and the same number of exhibition sites – six (in cases when one exhibition was shown in more than one locality).<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the set of documents pertaining to the activities of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries contains sketches of speeches given during exhibition openings, for instance the speeches of Stefan Heyman, the GDR ambassador in Warsaw, in which – much in the spirit of the

7 K. Hoge, op. cit., p. 54. See also: O. Nagel, *Die Selbstbildnisse der Käthe Kollwitz*, Berlin, 1965, p. 76.

8 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signatures 234, 258, 152, 175, 153, 35, 16.

9 The USSR: an expense of 131.500, the GDR: 120.000. The next largest expenditure is on Czechoslovakia, 74.000. Data from the financial report: documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 234 (organizacja wystaw artystycznych KWZ w latach 1950–57, plany, sprawozdania, wykazy, korespondencja) [organisation of art exhibitions by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries in the years 1950–57, plans, reports, inventories, correspondence], 1950–1956, p. 86.

10 According to the documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, the following exhibitions were received in Poland: *Käthe Kollwitz, Plakat i karykatura polityczna z NRD* [Poster and political caricature from the GDR], *Wystawa prasy niemieckiej* [Exhibition of the German press], and the following were sent to the GDR: *Polska i jej młodzież* [Poland and its Youth], *Wystawa książki i ilustracji książkowej* [Exhibition of Books and Book Illustration], *Plakat* [Poster], *Odbudowa* [Reconstruction].

11 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 234, op. cit., pp. 34, 86.

political rhetoric of the era – the need for “mutual cooperation and the building of friendship” was underlined.<sup>12</sup> In the period when Kollwitz and Nagel’s exhibitions were being organised in Warsaw, cooperation with the GDR stood high in the hierarchy of priorities in Poland’s cultural policy; this must be considered especially interesting in view of the still-recent traumas of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Cultural cooperation between the People’s Republic of Poland and the GDR was a key issue for both states. From the point of view of the GDR, it actually legitimised its existence, as opposed to that of the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>13</sup> In short, the initial task of the GDR’s cultural policy was solely to underline Germany’s responsibility for the war crimes; in the later period this goal was replaced by the emphasis of Germany’s domestic struggle with Nazism. The class-related interpretation of Nazism diluted personal, individual responsibility. In Poland, in turn, cooperation with the GDR was treated instrumentally, i.e. as a method of underlining Poland’s input in fighting Nazism.<sup>14</sup>

The policy of cultural exchange with countries of the Eastern bloc was very carefully planned. In the cooperation with the Western countries, it was occasionally allowed to implement shorter-term and more flexible policies planned in reaction to the changing political situation.<sup>15</sup>

In the current text I would like to focus on the conceptions behind the exhibitions of the oeuvre of Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Nagel, i.e. the works presented there and the behind-the-scenes aspects of their organisation. I would also like to analyse the reviews and texts that accompanied the exhibitions. My aim is to outline the reception of both events on the basis of a discussion of the reviews as a form of discourse analysis<sup>16</sup> and to attempt to discover the position of the two exhibitions in the context of cultural life in the 1950s, especially in the perspective of Socialist Realism, which enforced a distinct interpretation on the oeuvre of both of these artists.<sup>17</sup>

12 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 258, (wystawy prac artystów plastyków z GDR w Polsce w latach 1952–1956. Referat, katalog, wycinki prasowe, fotografie) [exhibition of works of artists from the GDR in Poland in the years 1952–1956. Lecture, catalogue, press cuttings, photographs], 1952, 1956.

13 See M. Saryusz-Wolska, *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka* [Collective and cultural memory. The contemporary German perspective], Cracow, 2009, pp. 7–38.

14 See R. Żytyńiec, “Rola Polski w antyfaszystowskiej polityce pamięci GDR (1949–1972)” [The role of Poland in the GDR’s anti-Fascist policy of memory (1949–1972)], *Przegląd Zachodni*, 2015, no. 2 (355), pp. 176–205.

15 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 35, ob. nac. Tarska, 1955–1956 (annotated: secret), p. 24.

16 See *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. J. P. Gee, M. Handford, Oxon–New York, 2012.

17 See R. Mason, “Cultural Theory and Museum Studies”, in: *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. S. Macdonald, Oxford, 2011, pp. 17–33.

## The “progressive” Käthe Kollwitz

The exhibition entitled *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture* (*Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba*) was held from 20 June to 21 July 1951. A total of ninety works were exhibited: 66 graphic works in various techniques, 5 drawings, 12 reproductions and 6 sculptures; one sculpture was shown only on two photographs (Figs. 1–8).

After the Zachęta show the exhibits were presented at the Fourth Festival of Art and Design (IV Festiwal Plastyki) in Sopot. The festival took place between 1 July and 20 September 1951 and encompassed exhibitions pertaining to the protection and conservation of historical monuments, an exhibition of folk-inspired graphic art related to the Cepelia Central Bureau for Folk Crafts, an exhibition of Aleksander Gierymski's works, and regional exhibitions of artists and photographers. Also presented were selected works from the national exhibition *Artists in the Struggle for Peace* (*Plastycy w walce o pokój*). The fact that the exhibition was included in the programme of the Sopot festival indicates that the enterprise was propagandistically meaningful. It also shows how the exhibitions initiated by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries operated; they were intended to tour the country.

The range of the Zachęta event was highlighted by the guests gathered at the vernissage, among whom were the Minister of Culture and Art Stefan Dybowski, Deputy Minister Włodzimierz Sokorski and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party Edward Ochab.<sup>18</sup> Speeches were given by Otto Nagel and Juliusz Krajewski. The fact that Juliusz Krajewski had been invited is significant, since he was the leading artist of Polish Socialist Realism, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, a winner of prizes at national exhibitions of art and design, chairman of the Committee for the Programme of Academic Education in Art (Komisja Programowa Wyższego Szkolnictwa Plastycznego) and, in the years 1949–1952, President of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers (Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków, ZPAP); he had also been awarded several state decorations.<sup>19</sup> Official speeches point to the way that Kollwitz's posthumous exhibition was represented: as precursory to Socialist Realism (by Krajewski) and as attaining its own position in particular political circumstances (by Nagel): “The former presented an account of the artist's work, while the latter emphasised his friendship with her and the significance of the exhibition in the process of building the friendship between the GDR, the USSR and the People's Republic of Poland”.<sup>20</sup>

Accompanying the exhibition was a catalogue (Fig. 9) containing a list of works, eight reproductions, a selection from Kollwitz's memoirs entitled

18 *Trybuna Ludu*, 22 June 1951, ed. F, no. 172.

19 W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka polska w latach 1950–1954* [Socialist Realism. Polish Art in the Years 1950–1954], Cracow, 1991.

20 *Kurier Codzienny*, 21 June 1951, ed. A, no. 170.



**Fig. 1.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, a view of the exhibition (in the foreground *Nie wieder Krieg!* [Never Again War!], 1924, poster), photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive

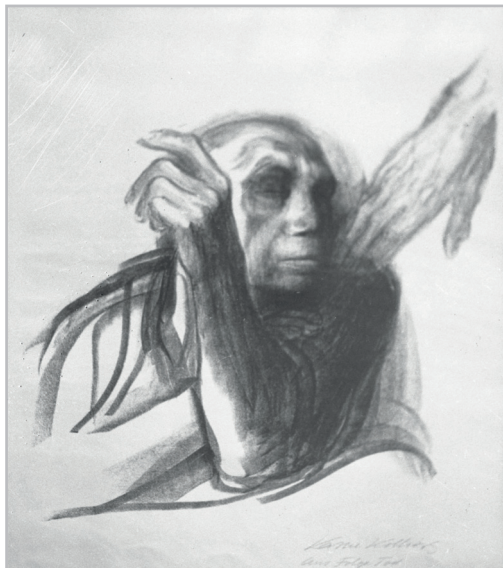


**Figs. 2–4.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, a view of the exhibition, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive





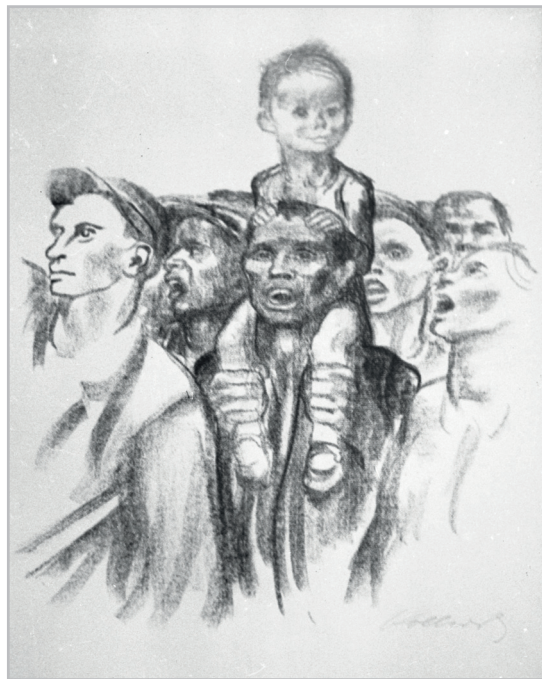
**Fig. 5.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Call of Death*, 1936, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive



**Fig. 6.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Germany's Children are starving!*, 1924, lithograph, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive







**Fig. 7.** Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. *Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Demonstration*, 1930, lithograph, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive

*Käthe Kollwitz w pamiętnikach i listach* [Käthe Kollwitz in diaries and letters] (no information as to the author of the selection or the translator has been given and there are no source footnotes) and an unsigned preface written by Urszula Pomorska, which was a digest from her longer article that had been published in *Przegląd Artystyczny*.<sup>21</sup>

Kollwitz's works selected for the exhibition dated from the years 1892–1938. The main exhibits were two graphic cycles, *The Weavers* from 1897 and *The Peasant War* from 1903, as well as the graphic work *Nie wieder Krieg!* (*Never Again War!*) from 1924 (Fig. 10); of all the exhibits, this one was the most often reproduced in the press, with the intention of underlining the artist's political concerns and to incorporate the show into the narration referring to the development of peaceful relationships between Poland and the GDR. The title phrase, *Nie wieder Krieg!*, had been the principal motto of pacifist organisations since 1919. The figure of a boy with an outstretched arm was inspired by the boy with a pistol as seen in Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* from 1830<sup>22</sup> or, according to different sources, by an incident from 1920 when, during a demonstration in Weimar, a young member of the Social Democratic

21 According to a footnote to the article: U. Pomorska, "Wystawa dzieł Käthe Kollwitz w warszawskiej 'Zachęcie'" [Exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz's works in Warsaw's "Zachęta"], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1951, no. 4, pp. 3–11.

22 R. Hintz, *Käthe Kollwitz: Graphics, Posters, Drawings*, New York, 1981.



**Fig. 8.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, *For Greater Berlin*, 1912, poster, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński /PAP Archive

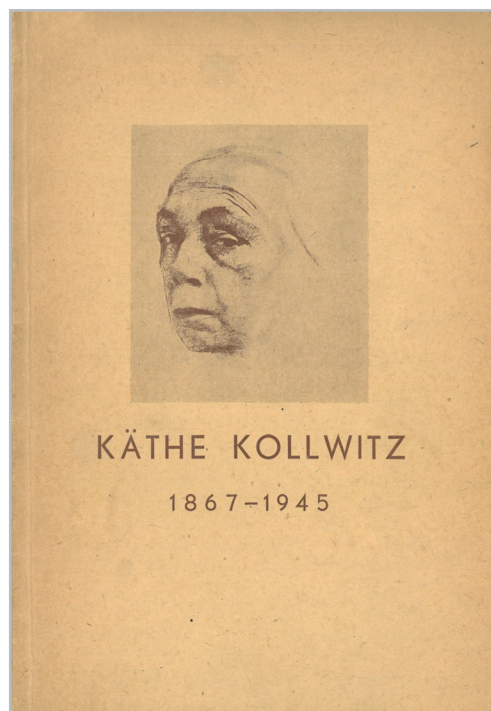
Party, Max Westphal, reportedly shouted out the phrase “Nie wieder Krieg!” with his one arm raised; he had lost the other arm during the war.<sup>23</sup> Kollwitz’s work was used as a poster for Youth Day in 1924 and became a signature image of pacifist movements. It is worth noting that the poster’s peaceful intent is expressed only by the motto printed in the background;<sup>24</sup> if these words were replaced, the composition might as well serve as a poster calling people to muster for war.<sup>25</sup>

The selected graphic cycles were intended to represent that aspect of Kollwitz’s oeuvre which was crucial to the Warsaw exhibition, as they contained works which focused on socially involved topics, not works with more personal or symbolic contents. The cycles of drawings, sculptures and graphic works created after 1914 under the impact of Kollwitz’s war experiences and death of her son suited the anti-war message of the exhibition. The authors of the volume *Käthe Kollwitz and the Women of War* (2016) point to the motifs of

23 Cf. an article by a Kollwitz specialist, Claire Whitner, <http://blog.yupnet.org/2016/06/02/never-again-war-kathe-kollwitz-in-america/> [accessed 31 October 2016].

24 The slogan was translated in the exhibition catalogue as *Nigdy więcej wojny!* [Never Again War!], the text of the poster reads: “We do not want war ever again. The Conference of Young People from Central Germany, Leipzig, 2–4 August 1924”.

25 A. Moorjani, “Käthe Kollwitz on Sacrifice, Mourning, and Reparation: An Essay in Psychoaesthetics”, *MLN. Comparative Literature*, 1986, vol. 101, no. 5, pp. 1110–1134.



**Fig. 9.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, catalogue cover, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

women in Kollwitz's output, especially those of a mother and a widow (referring to her own life);<sup>26</sup> these were not highlighted in the exhibition shown at the Zachęta over six decades ago. This approach, situating Kollwitz's works in the historical and political, not symbolic or personal reality, contributed to her entire output being for a long time perceived as "progressive", socially conscious, pacifistic and universal. Telling evidence of this by now established perception is the fact that in 1993 an enlarged copy of Kollwitz's sculpture, made by Harald Haacke and entitled *Pietà* or *Mutter mit totem Sohn* (*Mother with her Dead Son*), was placed in the Neue Wache in Berlin as a memorial to all victims of the war and Nazi terror. This was a political decision – and it raised great controversy because of the sculpture's unclear message which encompassed both the murdered and the fallen, and because of the Christian iconographic motif, the *Pietà*, which replaced the universal, non-figurative memorial by Lothar Kwasnitza from the times of the GDR.<sup>27</sup> Another issue pointed out during the debate on Kollwitz's sculpture in the early 1990s was the personal nature of this work and Kollwitz's relationship with her son, who went to the 1<sup>st</sup> World War front because of her encouragement

<sup>26</sup> See *Käthe Kollwitz and the Women of War: Femininity, Identity, and Art in Germany During World Wars I and II*, ed. C. C. Whitner, New Haven CT, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> S. Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870–1997*, London, 1998, p. 91.



**Fig. 10.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945.*  
*Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz  
 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture],  
 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central  
 Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw,  
*Nie wieder Krieg!* [Never Again War!],  
 1924, poster, photo by Stanisław  
 Wdowiński / PAP Archive

and with her approval.<sup>28</sup> Despite the controversies, the enlarged sculpture was installed in the Neue Wache. The debate occasioned by this decision focused on the manner of commemorating, on the universality of symbols and on the responsibility for the commemoration of the victims of the war and the Holocaust and the historical narration about them. This debate in some sense resulted in the establishment of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.<sup>29</sup>

To return to Kollwitz's exhibition in Warsaw in 1951: in his text published in *Nowa Kultura* Otto Nagel described Kollwitz's graphic cycles and outlined the context in which they had been made.<sup>30</sup> The key to the exhibition was an attempt to present Kollwitz as a "progressive" artist and at the same time a Realist. The term "progressive" demarcated the perspective and was the common denominator for most exhibitions organised by the Committee for

28 H. W. Pickford, *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art*, New York, 2013.

29 S. Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity*, London, 2001, pp. 136–155; W. Pięciak, *Niemiecka pamięć. Współczesne spory w Niemczech o miejsce III Rzeszy w historii, polityce i tożsamości (1989–2001)* [German memory. A contemporary debate in Germany on the place of the Third Reich in history, politics and identity (1989–2001)], Cracow, 2002.

30 O. Nagel, "Kaethe Kollwitz", *Nowa Kultura*, 1951, no. 26 (66), p. 8.



Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries; it defined the approach which in the Committee's documents was called "political cognisance".<sup>31</sup> In the context of the Warsaw exhibition, Kollwitz's oeuvre was described in terms that highlighted its up-to-date character. Wishing to stress its applicability to the present time, Otto Nagel (or the translator of his text) went as far as to coin the pleonasm "the current present" (in Polish: *aktualna terażniejszość*): "Afterwards, many single pieces were made whose subject matter was taken from the current present. The progressive artist Käthe Kollwitz considered it her duty to stand on the side of those exploited and poverty-stricken in a system based on injustice, and to declare herself a spokeswoman for their cause".<sup>32</sup> In the text written for the exhibition catalogue Nagel focused on pointing out the direct connection between Kollwitz's biography and her works, which he treated as illustrations to historical events such as the war. In this approach her works were viewed literally; their symbolical character, referring to the human condition or to private issues linked with a personal tragedy, was entirely disregarded. Treated as realistic representations of concrete persons, human types or social classes, her works would approach the canonical tradition of Socialist Realism. This is how Kollwitz's exhibition was perceived by Jacek Woźniakowski; as an effort to incorporate her oeuvre into Socialist Realism: "The graphic works of Käthe Kollwitz, an artist posthumously turned into a precursor of Socialist Realism, came to us quite frequently [...]".<sup>33</sup>

The perception of Kollwitz's works as relevant to the present time during the early years of the People's Republic of Poland explains how her entire oeuvre was recognised and incorporated into the discourse of Socialist Realism. In the case of Kollwitz, it would not be an interpretive overstatement to see her achievement, especially during the 1951 exhibition, in the light of Socialist

31 See the documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, GDR (Wymiana kulturalna. Przyjazdy. Programy oraz sprawozdania z pobytu w Polsce. Artystów – muzyków, zespołów wokalnie – muzycznych, teatralnych, plastyków, naukowców, delegacji pedagogów i architektów, literatów, dziennikarzy, charakterystyki gości) [Cultural exchange. Arrivals. Programmes and reports from sojourns in Poland. Artists – musicians, vocal/musical ensembles, theatre companies, visual artists and designers, scientists, delegations of pedagogues and architects, writers, journalists, descriptions of the guests], 1955, signature 152.

32 O. Nagel, op. cit., p. 8.

33 J. Woźniakowski, "Nieznany czar Zachodu. Odszukiwanie kontaktu" [The strange charm of the West], in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, listopad 1984* [Polish art after 1945. Materials from a session of the Association of Art Historians, November 1984], Warsaw, 1987, p. 116. Quoted after K. Zychowicz, "Exhibition-Organising Activity of the Committee...", op. cit. Among the numerous exhibitions of Kollwitz's works cited generally by Jacek Woźniakowski, worth mentioning is the exhibition of her graphic art that was shown in the University Library in Wrocław as a part of the *Sztuka walcząca* [Fighting art] cycle, which also included works by Georg Gross and Frans Masereel. See *Przegląd Zachodni*, 1951, no. 9–10, Poznań, p. 265.



Realism. Rooted in the historical realities of the day, the exhibition may be perceived as a peculiar interpretation of Kollwitz's oeuvre. The interpretive approach proposed herein owes much to the achievements of such scholars as Bruce Altshuler or Jens Hoffmann, who attempt to write art history from the perspective of the history of exhibitions.<sup>34</sup> They perceive exhibitions as events that shape the discourse of art history and as a research perspective which makes it possible to see not the work itself, but its much broader social and, above all, political context. In their approach it is the exhibitions, and not separate works, that constitute the main subject of research as the moment of mediation and meeting between the artist, the curator, the work, the public and politics. Kollwitz's oeuvre may be discussed in various contexts, for instance in the light of Modernism or in the feminist perspective.<sup>35</sup> It is, however, significant that a research perspective that evolved in the first decade after the war survived in the popular awareness, and in the reception of Kollwitz's work, for a long time.

A comparison of the two principal texts associated with the exhibitions, written by Otto Nagel and Urszula Pomorska, is very informative in this respect.<sup>36</sup> Nagel attempted to show Kollwitz mainly as his friend, a person whom he had known just as well as he knew her art and for this reason felt entitled to interpret it and present it to others. He focused on a description of the works and their literal interpretation, which he supported with anecdotes. He did not situate her oeuvre in any artistic context; the only background and the key to understanding it were Kollwitz's "revolutionary disposition, sensitivity and emotiveness, her existential experience and inspiration from Gerhart Hauptmann's *Weavers*".<sup>37</sup> Let us explain at this point that Kollwitz had been personally acquainted with Hauptmann, having met him in London in 1886. Her perusal of his play *The Weavers* provided her with a socially involved theme and resulted in a series of illustrations, on which she worked in the years 1893–1897. The weavers' revolt in Silesia took place in the year 1844, but Kollwitz considered the moment she had read *The Weavers* as one of the milestones in her creative career; the one that made her sensitive to reality. Reinterpreting historical events as current, she transposed them to modern conditions (the mode of interpreting her oeuvre as current in the light of Socialist Realism is thus rooted in Kollwitz's own stance). Émile Zola's novel *Germinal* was of similar importance to her work and also gave rise to

34 B. Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume 1: 1863–1959*, New York, 2008; J. Hoffmann, *Show Time: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, London, 2014.

35 C. Schönfeld, C. Finnan, *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, Würzburg, 2006.

36 U. Pomorska, "Wystawa dzieł Käthe Kollwitz w warszawskiej 'Zachęcie'" [Exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz's works in Warsaw's "Zachęta"], *Przegląd Artystyczny*, 1951, no. 4, p. 6.

37 O. Nagel, op. cit., p. 8.

a series of illustrations. Alexandra von dem Knesebeck comments on this literary aspect of her creativity, underscoring the role of text and Kollwitz's attempts to transpose it into the graphic medium.<sup>38</sup> An exchange of letters with Hauptmann<sup>39</sup> and their subsequent collaboration arose from her work on *The Weavers* cycle; for instance, Hauptmann contributed the text for the catalogue of Kollwitz's drawings.<sup>40</sup>

In contrast to Nagel, Urszula Pomorska presented Kollwitz's output against the background of art history and juxtaposed it with German Expressionism. She was critical in her assessment of those works which she considered to have been affected by Expressionism. The environment that had shaped Kollwitz, as well as the conditions resulting from her gender, which Pomorska presented as characteristic and beyond Kollwitz's control, served as an explanation for her artistic stance:<sup>41</sup>

Those works in which [Kollwitz] restricts the experience to individual, personal emotionality; those in which her female sensitivity reaches a nearly hysterical spasm, enforce on her the form of Expressionistic depiction. In those works, however, in which she closely approaches the great cause of the proletariat, she finds simple, direct measures of the purest art. [...] Let us not forget that the artist has lived her whole life in conditions of capitalist oppression. For her, the figure of the worker is still imbued with a hint of tragedy; faced with this topic, her sensitive emotions occasionally mutate into a typically feminine, excessive passion.<sup>42</sup>

Pomorska pointed out that Kollwitz's works did not fully conform to the methods of realistic depiction; she criticised the symbols used by the German artist, for instance the figure of Death, and the not-literal-enough compositions, for instance the etching *Death and a Woman* (Fig. 11). She described Kollwitz as following the artistic fashions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and as copying or imitating Symbolism; she considered these works to be the least interesting in Kollwitz's oeuvre. In Pomorska's view, the simpler the means Kollwitz used, the better her work was. Pomorska also believed that the spare

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38 A. von dem Knesebeck, "Die Bedeutung von Zolas Roman *Germinal* für den Zyklus *Ein Weberaufstand* von Käthe Kollwitz", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 1989, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 402–422.

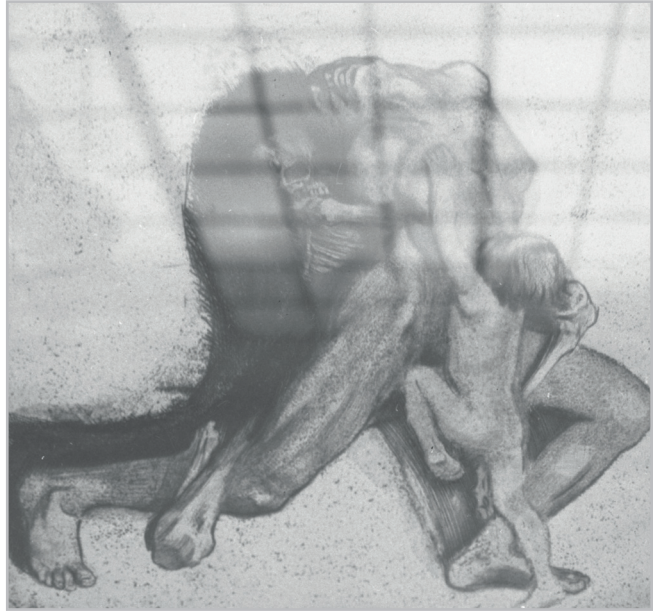
39 *Würdigungen und Briefe von Käthe Kollwitz und Gerhart Hauptmann*, eds. E. Hilscher, U. Hilscher, Berlin, 1987.

40 *Abschied und Tod. Acht Zeichnungen von Käthe Kollwitz. Mit einem Geleitwort von Gerhart Hauptmann*, Berlin, 1924.

41 It must be remembered that texts accompanying the exhibition were written in specific historical conditions; hence they must be read critically. I quote here a long passage, however, because in addition to the then-requisite language referring to the class struggle, it offers a perspective incorporating Kollwitz's oeuvre into women's art and uses stereotypical terminology referring to the sensibilities that were then believed to characterise this art.

42 U. Pomorska, "Wystawa dzieł Käthe Kollwitz...", op. cit., p. 6.

**Fig. 11.** Käthe Kollwitz  
1867–1945. *Grafika – Rzeźba*  
[Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945.  
Graphic Art – Sculpture],  
20 June – 21 July 1951,  
Central Bureau of Art  
Exhibitions, Warsaw, *Death  
and a Woman*, 1910, soft  
varnish and etching, photo  
by Stanisław Wdowiński /  
PAP Archive



form made Kollwitz's prints "nearer to the concerns of the people", as shown by the lithographs *Bread!*, *A March*, or *We Defend the Soviet Union*. With such a literal approach, the worker presented in her works was not a symbol; the universalistic or metaphorical character of the work was eliminated and the prints became simply portraits of workers. Everything that did not fit the perspective of Socialist Realism had to be explained one way or another: "Her oeuvre is a reflection of an approach to life that, although revolutionary, is typical of the intelligentsia. This art is not yet the art of the proletariat; it is an art about the proletariat [created] to shake the conscience of the bourgeoisie. Let us remember, however, that with all her progressiveness, [Kollwitz] is still a product of an environment in a bourgeois system".<sup>43</sup>

Both Nagel and Pomorska remarked on the poignant and pessimistic meanings found in Kollwitz's works. This did not fit the Socialist Realist approach at all. It was bad enough that her works, according to Pomorska, seemed overfilled with symbols; worse still, their pessimism made them distant from the recipient who, after all, should perceive in them a positive picture of "the struggle to build a new society and himself".<sup>44</sup> Pomorska explained this as due to the artist's "insufficient awareness", and Nagel as due to her desire to

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> E. Kal, "W stronę bohatera pozytywnego" [Towards the affirmative protagonist], in: eadem, *"Tęgo się nie krytykuje na kogo się liczy". Polska krytyka artystyczna okresu realizmu socjalistycznego* ["You don't criticise who you're counting on". Polish art criticism in the period of Socialist Realism], Słupsk, 2010, pp. 65–68.

achieve the intended effect: the recipient, shaken by her works, was supposed to rebel and turn into a “warrior worker”.<sup>45</sup>

Most of the exhibition’s reviewers commented on Kollwitz’s pessimism. The author of an article in *Głos Robotniczy* explained that her “sadness-making” arose from “the era of capitalist oppression and the horrors of the war, during which the artist lost her son. The viewers of the exhibition may be consoled by the present generation’s love of peace and by the strengthening of freedom and the democratic system”.<sup>46</sup> Kollwitz’s eighteen-year-old son died in 1914 on the front in Flanders; this event changed her standpoint to a pacifist one. It must be emphasised, however, that before her son’s death Kollwitz’s attitude towards the war was by no means clear-cut; the young man volunteered for the army with her encouragement and against the will of his father.<sup>47</sup> In the preface to the catalogue, Urszula Pomorska proposed an interpretation of the works from the 1930s in the light of Kollwitz’s impressions from her visit to the Soviet Union; this explanation echoed in press articles as well. Those later works were praised the most enthusiastically as “telling of the triumphant march of Socialism”<sup>48</sup> and, consequently, as the most optimistic and therefore the best.

One of the few press comments, apart from Pomorska’s text, to situate Kollwitz’s oeuvre in the framework of a broader artistic tradition is found in an article published by *Tygodnik Powszechny*: “Käthe Kollwitz, a painter of proletarian poverty and the mutiny of the oppressed, is the leading representative of the so-called German Expressionism in visual arts, which is also represented by such artists as Pechstein, Nolde, Kokoschka or the ‘Die Brücke’ (A Bridge) group”.<sup>49</sup>

A reviewer from *Sztandar Młodych* went in the direction pointed out by Urszula Pomorska. He criticised Kollwitz’s early period, in which “the element of struggle” was absent, and praised her “development” revealed by the graphic cycles, although he noted that the workers’ struggle presented therein was not organised: “The *Peasant War* cycle closes this line of development, showing her better understanding of the essence of the proletarian struggle. In this cycle the artist is already aware that the power of the proletariat lies in the unity of interests of all the oppressed and that this power cannot be destroyed by a temporarily incurred defeat”.<sup>50</sup> The reviewer emphasised the significance of

45 O. Nagel, op. cit., p. 8.

46 K. Chylińska, *Twórczość buntu i walki* (Wystawa prac Käthe Kollwitz w „Zachęcie” warszawskiej) [The art of revolt and struggle (An exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz’s works in Warsaw’s “Zachęta”)], *Głos Robotniczy*, 3 July 1951, ed. A, no. 181. The article was reprinted verbatim in *Głos Koszaliński*, 4 July 1951, no. 182.

47 H. W. Pickford, op. cit., pp. 100–103.

48 “Grafika w służbie proletariatu” [Graphic art in the service of the proletariat], *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 19/20 August 1951, no. 229.

49 *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 9 July 1951, no. 26.

50 Z. W., *Sztandar Młodych*, 11 July 1951, ed. 27B, no. 164.

**Fig. 12.** *Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Grafika – Rzeźba* [Käthe Kollwitz 1867–1945. Graphic Art – Sculpture], 20 June – 21 July 1951, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, a view of the exhibition, photo by Stanisław Wdowiński / PAP Archive



the exhibition as a “link in the building of friendship between the People’s Republic of Poland and the GDR, of which Käthe Kollwitz dreamed, but which she did not live to see”.<sup>51</sup> Stanisław Hen from *Ekspres Wieczorny* described the exhibition in a similar tone: “Käthe Kollwitz died on 22 April 1945, on the eve of the liberation, not having seen the time when the new democratic Germany arose, supported by the aid of the Soviet Union. That Germany for which she had fought with all her sensitive soul of a progressive artist”.<sup>52</sup>

An interesting perspective was adopted by Marian Turwid in his review of the exhibition in *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski* that was published in Bydgoszcz. He recalled that he had had the occasion to see Kollwitz’s works in Berlin and that now, years later, he could return to them at the exhibition at the Zachęta. He was greatly impressed with them, just as he had been the first time – but only now, seeing them again, did he notice how much they were underpinned by the artist’s personality: “The simplicity and directness of her creative statement is utterly convincing. Because this is not only a great artist that is speaking to us, but also a wise, profound, very warm and kind

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> S. Hen, “Kaethe Kollwitz w ‘Zachęcie’” [Käthe Kollwitz at the Zachęta], *Ekspres Wieczorny*, 18 July 1951, no. 195.



person”.<sup>53</sup> This seems to be the most personal statement referring to the exhibition; also Kollwitz’s career is seen here in an uncharacteristic way: her true talent was to have been appreciated, in defiance of the critics and the authorities, by “the simple folk of Berlin”.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, most reviews do not contain any references to the sculptures presented at the exhibition. One of the surviving photographs (Fig. 12) indicates that they were positioned on plinths placed in the centre of the hall. They were thus very visible; the six sculptures (one of them presented only in photographs) constituted an essential part of the show. In the full version of her text, Urszula Pomorska assessed Kollwitz’s sculptures as inferior to her achievements in the area of graphic arts. It seems that this view was accepted and not much attention was paid to her sculptural works. Photographs documenting the exhibition prove that its setting was extremely simple. Works on paper hung in regular intervals, aligned to the bottom edge, in identical frames with white mounts. No attempt had been made to evoke a more dramatic feeling, either by means of the way of hanging the works or by the lighting; the prints were arranged in the gallery space in an entirely neutral fashion. The whole tragic aspect of the exhibition, its pessimism and depressing mood, which were so emphasised in the texts, was lodged in the prints themselves. Yet the reality that was external to the exposition must not be forgotten; the show took place a mere six years after the conclusion of the war, in a Warsaw that was still being rebuilt from ruins.

## Otto Nagel – “a eulogist of Wedding”

The exhibition of Käthe Kollwitz’s oeuvre and his visit to Warsaw in 1951 gave Otto Nagel the opportunity to initiate contacts and collaboration that led to the organising of his solo exhibition, which was held in 1955 at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions (25 May – 12 June, Fig. 13) and at the Lublin Museum (24 June – 24 July), as well as a few days of a study visit to Poland. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue containing a list of works, selected reproductions and an introduction by Helena Krajewska (Fig. 14). The exhibition encompassed ninety works: 19 oils and 71 pastels. The works dated mostly from the pre-war period and the war years; only nine or eleven works (three were undated) came from the post-war period. The name of the exhibition commissioner has not been recorded.

Nagel’s exhibition was the second, after Käthe Kollwitz’s, solo exhibition prepared in collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with

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53 M. Turwid, “Sztuka Käthe Kollwitz” [The art of Käthe Kollwitz], *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski*, 1 July 1951, no. 180.

54 Ibid.

**Fig. 13.** *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna* [An exhibition of Otto Nagel's paintings. The German Democratic Republic], 25 May – 12 June 1955, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, exhibition poster, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

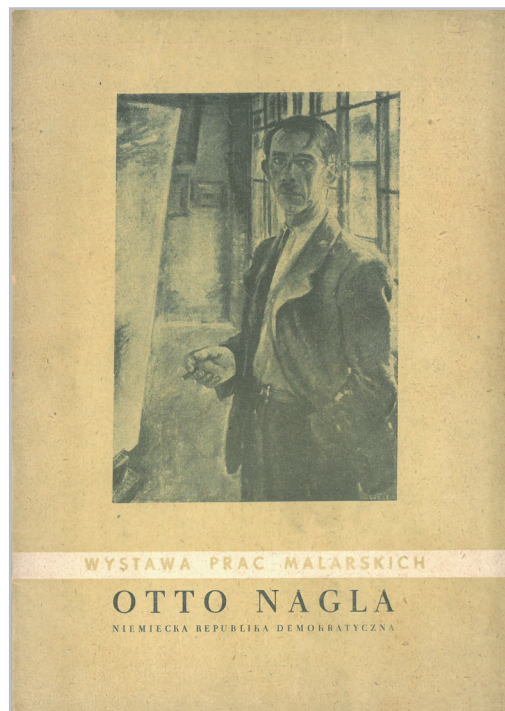


Foreign Countries. The press reported: “The opening of the exhibition was attended by, among others, the Minister of Culture and Art Włodzimierz Sokorski and the General Secretary of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries Jan Karol Wende. The status of the event was underscored by the GDR state award for Otto Nagel and by his numerous titles: deputy chairman of the German Academy of Fine Arts and chairman of the German Association of Visual Artists”.<sup>55</sup>

The form of the exhibition and its reception are known from press reviews and materials pertaining to the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries that are extant in the Central Archives of Modern Records. Helena Krajewska’s introduction locates the exhibition in a series of propagandistically significant events organised by the Committee. Similarly, Käthe Kollwitz’s exhibition and its reception in the press can be summed up by the word “progressive”, referring primarily to the topics of the works.<sup>56</sup> The form of Nagel’s works was occasionally criticised as too detailed

55 “Otwarcie wystawy Otto Nagla w ‘Zachęcie’” [The opening of Otto Nagel’s exhibition at the Zachęta], *Ekspres Wieczorny*, 26 May 1955, no. 124.

56 H. Krajewska, *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna* [An exhibition of Otto Nagel’s paintings. The German Democratic Republic], exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1955, p. 3.



**Fig. 14.** *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna* [An exhibition of Otto Nagel's paintings. The German Democratic Republic], 25 May – 12 June 1955, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions, Warsaw, exhibition catalogue, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

or monotonous. What was uncommon, and very different than in the case of Kollwitz, was the manner of constructing the legend of the artist as “a son of the proletariat, a worker who, before he began his artistic career, was raised in isolation, unpolluted by the formalism of bourgeois art”.<sup>57</sup> This tale is repeated in the majority of longer reviews, with more or less detailed descriptions of Nagel's difficult childhood in Wedding, the working-class district of Berlin.<sup>58</sup>

The borough of Wedding (which after the war was in the French zone) and its residents were one of the more frequently repeated motifs in Nagel's paintings. Nagel was often presented in opposition to the Berlin milieu; his oeuvre was described as related to “current problems instead of experimenting with the empty form and sterile contents”.<sup>59</sup> Reviews from the Warsaw exhibition occasionally mention Nagel side by side with Heinrich Zille (1858–1929), a German graphic artist, painter and photographer whose work focused on depicting Berliners in an often critical and socially involved manner, or with Hans Baluschek (1870–1935), an artist also associated with Berlin, whose

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> E. Sztekker, “Otto Nagel – malarz proletariackiego Berlina” [Otto Nagel – the painter of proletarian Berlin], *Po prostu*, 12 June 1955, no 24.

<sup>59</sup> H. Krajewska, op. cit., p. 3.

realistic prints and paintings portrayed the city proletariat.<sup>60</sup> Yet it was Käthe Kollwitz who was discussed as being inseparably paired with Nagel. Urszula Pomorska, who called him “an ardent eulogist of Wedding”,<sup>61</sup> perceived his output in this very context; she viewed his exhibition as a continuation, so to speak, of Kollwitz’s.

Nagel was the embodiment of a fighting worker. His works were exhibited in Wedding inns, and the artist himself was banned from art salons; hence his works could become “a weapon in the class struggle”.<sup>62</sup> This was the manner in which they were represented in contemporary criticism, often making use of a text from the German magazine *Rote Fahne* in which Nagel’s oeuvre was described as follows: “These are paintings which cause such pain that one wants to scream aloud. It is a lament, an accusation, a manifesto... Thus paints a man of profound convictions... Nagel should think hard on his talent and his calling. There is no class struggle on Parnassus”.<sup>63</sup> Apart from the “class struggle” and “progressiveness”, another keyword used to describe Nagel’s work was “intensity”. He was praised for being intense, but he was also criticised for it. Some reviewers charged him with the fact that the exhibition was addressed to Berliners, who would perhaps recognise the views of their city;<sup>64</sup> the residents of Warsaw might find his art tedious and a source of rather monotonous emotions. Portraits showing “intense depictions of workers painted by a worker” would have been considered more interesting.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from making the standard pairing with Kollwitz, the author of an article in *Przegląd Kulturalny* compared Nagel’s work with the art of Renato Guttuso or André Fourgeron, whose works could be seen at the *Exhibition of the Oeuvre of Progressive Artists* (*Wystawa prac postępowych artystów plastyków*, 1954) at the Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions and at Guttuso’s solo exhibition (1954, Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions and the Lublin Museum).<sup>66</sup> In the article published in *Przegląd Kulturalny*, Nagel’s post-1945 output was assessed unfavourably as “stiff, lacking the main motor of the class conflict or compassion for the human lot, too optimistic and not realistic enough”.<sup>67</sup> These long quotations from reviews are included here to compensate for the absence of any photographs from the exhibition. The comparisons and juxtapositions referring to Nagel’s oeuvre allow us to learn how his art was

60 K. Hoge, op. cit.

61 U. Pomorska, “Żarliwy piewca Weddingu” [An ardent eulogist of Wedding], *Ekspres Wieczorny*, 8 July 1955, no. 135.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 I. Witz, “Malarstwo Otto Nagla” [Otto Nagel’s painting], *Życie Warszawy*, 15 June 1955, no. 141.

65 Ibid.

66 See K. Zychowicz, *Paryska lewica w stalinowskiej Warszawie* [The Paris Left in Stalinist Warsaw], Warsaw, 2014.

67 *Przegląd Kulturalny*, 1955, no. 26.

presented. A short review from *Sztandar Ludu* published in Lublin reveals the perspective assumed in order to view Nagel's paintings – a perspective which was actually more important than the paintings themselves. Having read the essays by Krajewska and Witz, the author of this review had been convinced that Nagel's paintings were pessimistic and depressing; but, to his surprise, he did not find such paintings in the exhibition. In his opinion, the works were "optimistic; even though they depict the harshness of life in a working-class district, they make us see good people there, and the greyness and gloom are a thing that shall pass".<sup>68</sup> In this interpretation, it is this very "optimism and faith in people that make Nagel a proletarian painter".<sup>69</sup>

Materials extant in the Archive of Modern Records document the exhibition and Nagel's short study visit to Poland. The artist met Tadeusz Kulisiewicz, whose exhibition in the GDR took place in the framework of the exchange organised by the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries. He also had a meeting with a delegation of artists from Cracow and paid a visit to the main seat of the Association of Artists and Designers. In Warsaw and in Cracow he went on guided tours of the historical monuments; he saw the operetta *A Night in Venice*; he visited Zakopane and went on a hike up Chochołowska Valley. According to a detailed report from his visit related to the exhibition, "the artist willingly went to meetings, but avoided exhibitions and cultural events".<sup>70</sup> This report is essential because it informs us that "artistic supervision over the exhibition" belonged to Nagel. It also gives us a behind-the-scenes view of how the Committee functioned and what tasks were assigned to tour guides. The author of the report provides a portrayal of her guest that is surprisingly different from the one offered by the media and from his official biography as a worker-painter:

Several times he said about himself: "we, the crème de la crème", "we, the top echelon". Initially, as I gathered, his intention was to obtain a larger sum of money in addition to the allowance. Even the GDR embassy intervened as to this issue. After Nagel had been paid his fee for artistic supervision over the exhibition, for one day the guests talked less about their own importance, position and income, but the very next day, obviously out of habit, the whole rigmarole began anew [...].<sup>71</sup>

Kollwitz's exhibition was crucial to the presentation and reception of Nagel's paintings; his later art was viewed in the light of her graphic output. In addition, Nagel's works – for instance *Spring in the Wedding District* (1934, Fig. 15),

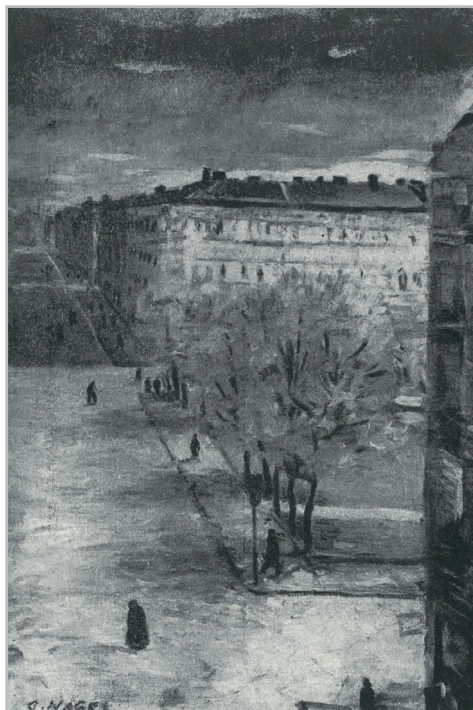
68 "Nad malarstwem Ottona Nagla" [On Otto Nagel's painting], *Sztandar Ludu*, 2–3 July 1955 (Lublin), no. 153.

69 Ibid.

70 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 152, file: Impreza nr 329, NRD, pkt. 73, *Sprawozdanie z pobytu w Polsce profesora Nagla z małżonką* [A report from Prof. Nagel and his wife's stay in Poland], D. Zmij, p. 38.

71 Ibid.



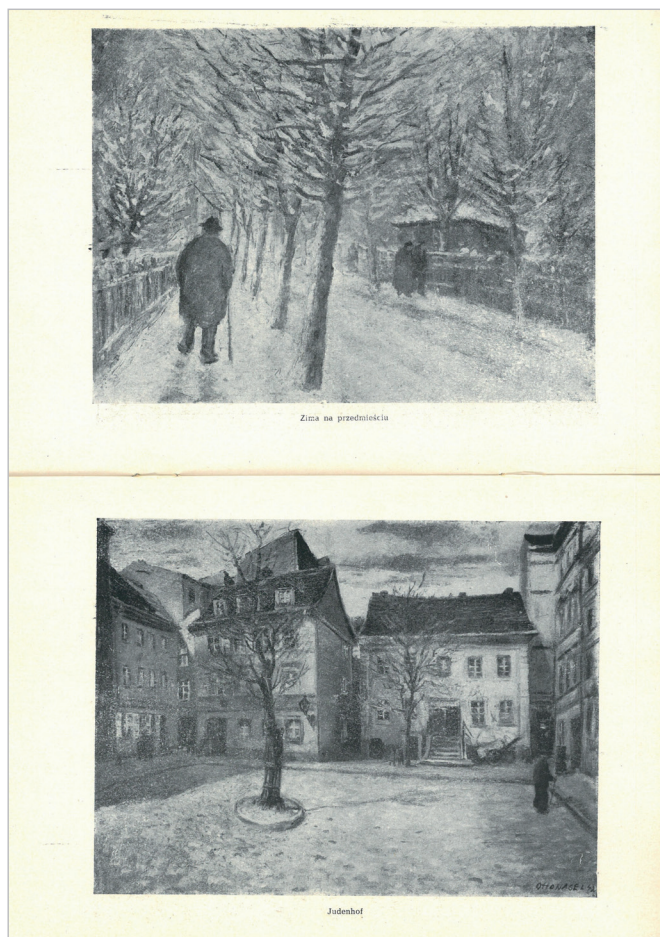


**Fig. 15.** Otto Nagel, *Spring in the Wedding District*, 1934, oil on canvas, in: *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

*Winter in the Suburbs* (1939) or *Judenhof* (1942, Fig. 16) – were not perceived as cityscapes, but as images of the working-class area of Berlin. It is not by accident that such works as *The First Shift* (1930) or *A Young Communist* (1932, Fig. 17), i.e. ones referring directly to the work ethos and the character of people portrayed by Nagel, had also been selected for the exhibition. This reception is, to some extent, the effect of Nagel's own strategy, as he styled himself not only Kollwitz's friend and guardian of her collection, but also the continuator of her legend. In the reception of Nagel's art in the People's Republic of Poland, this image of the artist was consistently used to construct his perception as a rebel painter, a fighting worker and a proletarian revolutionary, but at the same time as a man anointed by an outstanding woman artist of the preceding generation. His "undeniable talent" was confirmed by the many awards, decorations, titles and high offices in the GDR art institutions which he held in the 1950s,<sup>72</sup> to which he referred, perhaps ironically, during his study visit to Poland.<sup>73</sup>

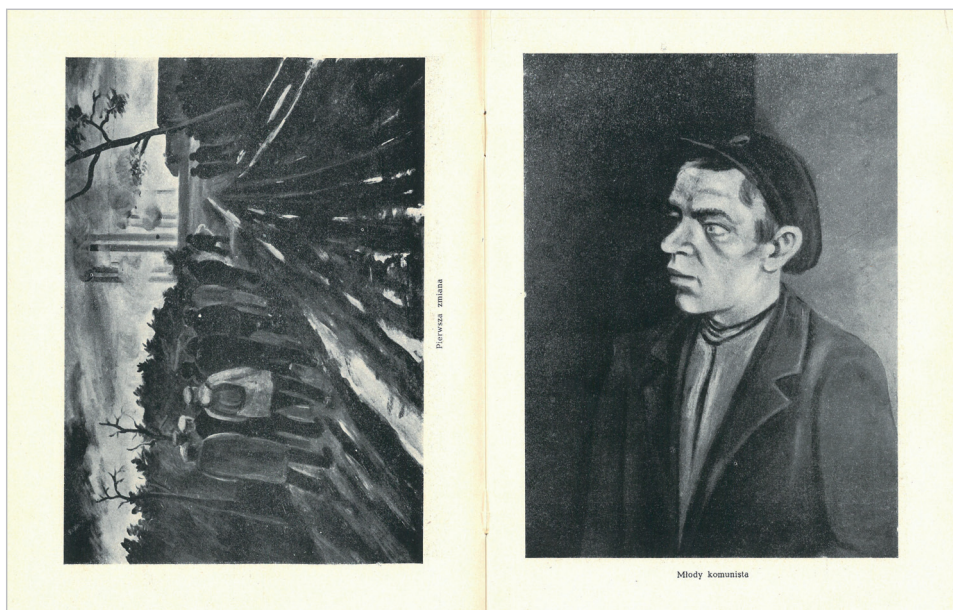
72 For more on Otto Nagel's role in cultural politics and his status in art and the culture institutions of the GDR, see M. Braun, *Kulturinsel und Machtinstrument: Die Akademie der Künste, die Partei und die Staatssicherheit*, Göttingen, 2007.

73 Documentation of the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries, Central Archives of Modern Records, signature 152, file: Impreza nr 329, op. cit.



**Fig. 16.** Otto Nagel, *Winter in the Suburbs*, 1939, oil on canvas; *Judenhof*, 1942, oil on canvas, in: *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

These two exhibitions not only represent a typical image of the cultural policy and cooperation between the People's Republic of Poland and the GDR, but also serve as a case study showing the approaches in the reception and art criticism marked by Socialist Realism. The selection of works to be exhibited and the conception of showing her as a socially conscious artist were the key to Kollwitz's exhibition at the Zachęta, whereas the key to the exhibition of Nagel's paintings was the involvement and attitude of Kollwitz as his mentor. In conclusion, Jacek Woźniakowski's already quoted comment that Kollwitz was posthumously turned into a precursor of Socialist Realism is worth recalling again. The fact that her oeuvre was perceived in the context of Socialist



**Fig. 17.** Otto Nagel, *The First Shift*, 1930, oil on canvas; *A Young Communist*, 1932, oil on canvas, in: *Wystawa prac malarskich Otto Nagla. Niemiecka Republika Demokratyczna*, exhibition catalogue, Warsaw, 1955, photo: Zachęta – National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Realism is a symptom of the process of making it applicable to current needs. In 1951 and 1955, Kollwitz and Nagel were presented in Warsaw as “progressive” artists and thereby incorporated into the propagandistic principles of a programme in which the political situation imposed a very distinct shape on exhibitions as much as on the accompanying publications.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

## Abstract

The essay focuses on a discussion of two exhibitions hosted at the Zachęta Central Bureau of Art Exhibitions in Warsaw that were organised in collaboration with the Committee for Cultural Cooperation with Foreign Countries. This Committee, which existed in the years 1950–1956, was an official agency responsible for Poland’s cultural relations with foreign countries. Its programme reflected the state policy and focused on cooperation with countries of the Eastern bloc. The events discussed in the essay were organised as part of the cooperation with the German Democratic Republic; they were solo exhibitions of the work of two German artists, Käthe Kollwitz in 1951 and Otto Nagel in 1955. They were linked by the person of the painter Otto Nagel, who, being the guardian of Kollwitz’s legacy, acted as the commissioner of her posthumous exhibition. The essay contains a critical analysis of the texts published in the catalogues and of other printed matter associated with the exhibitions as well as an analysis of related press reviews.