

## *Lechośław Lameński*

INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY,  
THE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN

### *Give the IPS to Szukalski:* Stanisław Szukalski's Bid for the Institute of Art Propaganda

The Kornel Makuszyński Museum, located in Villa Opolanka at 15 Tetmajera Street, is a branch of the Dr Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane. It is one of two biographical and literary museums in the capital of the Polish Tatra Mountains, the other being the Jan Kasprowicz Museum at the Harenda. The Kornel Makuszyński Museum was established in 1966 based on collections donated by the writer's second wife, Janina Gluzińska-Makuszyńska, whom he had married in 1927.

Kornel Makuszyński (1884–1953) was a writer, essayist, theatre critic and one of the most popular authors of books for children and young people (including *120 Adventures of Matolek the Billy-Goat*, *The Two Who Stole the Moon*, *Satan from the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade*) who had spent his youth in Lvov. In the turbulent years of the First World War he was deported with his family (i.e. his wife Emilia née Bażeńska, who died of TB in 1926) deep into Russia, from where he initially returned to Lvov and then settled in Kiev, where he stayed until 1918. When Poland regained its independence, he came to live in Warsaw. From 1934, Zakopane was his “home away from home”.

Among the many manuscripts housed at the Museum there is a modest, three-page-long missive, an appeal of sorts, bearing the heading: *Give the IPS to Szukalski* [IPS dać Szukalskiemu, signature: AR/096/MT/KM, k.119–120]<sup>1</sup>. This unsigned and undated document was certainly authored by Stanisław Szukalski (1893–1987), better known as Stach from Warta Szukalski, the charismatic leader of a group named the Tribe of the Horned Heart, a.k.a. the Szukalian Tribe Bearing the Horned Heart Coat of Arms,<sup>2</sup> which was active in the

1 I wish to express my gratitude to my Ph.D. student, Aleksandra Szacho-Głuchowicz M.A., who chanced upon Szukalski's manuscript and, being aware of my fascination with this extraordinary artist, informed me of its existence. I also owe much gratitude to Dr Zdzisław Moździerz from the Tatra Museum who provided me with invaluable information and inventory data regarding the manuscript in question.

2 “Szczep Rogate Serce” a.k.a. “Szczep Szukalszczyków herbu Rogate Serce”. The names of groups, organisations, official and unofficial bodies will be translated here, with the

years 1929–1936. Szukalski was the infamous hero of the greatest social and artistic scandals that shook artistic circles, mainly in Warsaw and Cracow, in the inter-war period.<sup>3</sup>

We do not know where or when the artist and the writer had met; it is not impossible that they have never met at all. Yet if such a meeting did occur, it was most probably in Warsaw, because it seems that Szukalski had never managed to visit Zakopane. Also, it could not have taken place earlier than in mid-June 1936, most probably after the unexpected closure of an exhibition of works by Szukalski and the Tribe which was housed by the Institute of Art Propaganda [Instytut Propagandy Sztuki, IPS for short] in Warsaw. The exhibition, opened on 30 May, closed a day later (sic! on 1 June) in an atmosphere of an unbelievable scandal caused by Stach from *Warta*'s abusive speech and the contents of his equally discourteous foreword that had been published in the catalogue of the exhibition. In both of his texts the artist attacked the late co-founder of the Institute, Władysław Skoczylas, and its current administrators Bohdan Pniewski and Wojciech Jastrzębowski, accusing them of being incompetent, of not comprehending modern art, and especially of working against its interests by promoting worthless art.<sup>4</sup>

Possibly, however, Stanisław Szukalski never met Kornel Makuszyński in person and sent his missive to the then very popular writer in the hope of winning his support in his own bid for control over the Institute of Art Propaganda. The contents of his letter is as follows:

Give the IPS to Szukalski

Every year, the IPS and Zachęta exhibit as large a flood of misbegotten botches as a proportional number of works creatively contributing to the Country – that is, percentage-wise, they are equal in their activity, because it is not the number of institutions that yields a better Creat-action<sup>5</sup> but a given number of creators. If the halls of

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original names referenced in the footnotes or in parentheses, not only for the sake of clarity but also in order to give the reader a sense of Szukalski's linguistic agility (translator's note).

- 3 Two of my books focus on Szukalski and the Tribe: *Stach z Warty Szukalski i Szczep Rogate Serce* [Stach from *Warta* Szukalski and the Tribe of the Horned Heart], Lublin, 2007; Stanisław Szukalski, *Teksty o sztuce i wypowiedzi polemiczne oraz korespondencja z lat 1924–1938* [Texts on Art, Polemical Statements and Correspondence from the Years 1924–1938], selected, ordered and introduced by Lechosław Lameński, Lublin, 2013. The interested reader will find there confirmation of all of the most essential facts from Stach from *Warta*'s life and work as mentioned in the current essay.
- 4 This issue was not mentioned in the book *Materiały do dziejów Instytutu Propagandy Sztuki (1930–1939)* [Materials for the History of the Institute of Art Propaganda], selected, edited and with an introduction by Joanna Sosnowska, Warsaw, 1992, due to the character and design of this publication. It is discussed in detail, for obvious reasons, in my book *Stach from Warta Szukalski i Szczep Rogate Serce*, op. cit., pp. 152–162.
- 5 In Polish: *twórczyn*, a neologism compounded from the words *twórczy* [creative] and *czyn* [action] (translator's note).

both institutions are booked for a year and a half in advance with awaiting exhibitions, this is because every mediocrity is accepted.

Creat-action is always the same; there is no conservatism or modernism in it, because all that which is created by the genius of productive individuals constitutes Creat-action. Let us assume that Zachęta predominantly exhibits conservative botches; why, then the IPS exhibits modernist filth – while all that is worthy of being looked at and emotional enough to move – that is to say, Creat-action – is the same in one and the other institution, for the same is the attitude of the consuming Public – Creat-action, namely the Art that today is not described by any definition, is divided not by its own judgements about itself, but by the reactions of the Public towards it, and in which building the botches of dilettantism or the works of Creat-action are exhibited does not make any difference to the Public – a Botch is a botch even if it has been bought by one of the ministries or has been awarded a national prize. A slice of brawn is a slice of brawn no matter whether it is cut thinly or thickly, it remains brawn until it is digested, and what it becomes after that even the hysterians [sic] of art can do nothing about.

Thus it comes to pass that this assertive, content-oriented Art, malevolently called a literary one, which I have named Creat-action, by the creative eunuchs, does not have its own home in the world – it is compelled to rub its loins in any digested brawn, to yield to ignominious blasphemies against the craft of the apostles, there was no place in edifices intended for visual culture and it is pawed by the dirty fingers of the panders of spiritual libertinism, those basest creatures who spread disease like gutter rats, professional critics who make their living from the debasement of Culture.

This Creat-action has no niche of its own where aura of communion between the giver and the consumer might reign – where the creator of tangible works incarnated in a form, where the translator of ethereal human dreams and yearnings into the tangibly human speech might come face to face with them whose dreams and yearnings he expresses and conveys to history.

This must be put an end to, so that the most sincere creators and the angels of the spiritual kingdom clad in mundane flesh are given the occasion to commune with the consumers of their cordial gifts without the insulting [an illegible word] of the cheap dealers in fraudulent foreign stuff and the sellers of local rot.

There is no reason why the capital or other cities should not each have two or three institutions promoting exactly the same pseudo-artistic mediocrities – let therefore each of them serve different functions, then we shall come to terms with this waste of state funds for both institutions – two to 3,000 thousand zloty of the monthly stipend to the IPS is a heavy reckoning in the face of state deficits, and the unsuitable people in that institution only multiply the losses incurred by culture and public trust.

Because the Institute of Private Harassment, this is the IPS, is managed by irresponsible pseudo-artists who give nothing creative of themselves. Because they print programmes, as for mine and the Horned Heart exhibition the number of two thousand copies for the sum of 1,140 zloty, and three days later, having of their own free will issued them, they burn them or drown in the river likewise of their own free will – Because they did it solely on the instigation of Mr Pniewski, in order to bolster the rotting reputation of Mr Jastrzębowski to the detriment of the State Treasury, just so, because such was their desire.

Because by such wayward conduct the manipulators from the Institute of Private Harassment insult the Public, which is the Nation of Warsaw, and have disqualified themselves as adults of underdeveloped, or perhaps unsuitable, talents and social aims – Because they compromised themselves before the Society and by their presence compromised an institution intended for social benefit – Because their conduct towards

a creative man who is one of those rare individuals that give meaning to such Institutions by exhibiting there his hard-won Creat-action.

Because they were compelled by my tactic to reveal themselves to the Public and the State for what they are – and after their guise has been discovered, I have shown the true essence of their intentions and methods, and thus they made it easy for us to decipher the initials “I.P.S.” as the Institute of Private Harassment.<sup>6</sup>

By their inattention to the results and negligence of a law that I have discovered, namely = It is most difficult for many fools to fight one, and most easy for one wise man to fight many! They have already caused a state institution to incur severe financial loss and now it is being publicly boycotted for its disrespect towards the Society by wilfully closing the exhibition for private reasons and by harassing a creative man and an effective pedagogue.

I therefore propose that the Ministry of Den[ominations] and Publ[ic] Enl[ightenment] give the current IPS to me to turn it into a Creat-place and house exhibitions of Creat-action.

Since the Creat-action suffices to fill no more than that great Hall at the Institute – that hall shall be enough to every month, all the year round, exhibit the purely content-oriented efficiency of our visual art.

In order to truly introduce a transformation in the domain of Art, there must be one programme and one decision – committees never produce a revival, because they represent an average sample of intellectual mediocrity.

I propose that this institution be given to me. By exhibition only the creative work of creative artists, this institution shall become a synonym for a new definition of Creat-action – since today Art dares to include charlatanism – the Public shall understand that whatever is exhibited in the Creat-place would be the exponent of the definition of “what is Creativity”?

Apart from that great exhibition hall, all the other rooms shall be turned into the Creat-place. For sculpture, painting and architecture – Young sculptors, already known for exhibitions, have already volunteered to work with me as pupils in the Creat-place – Stryjeński’s former students have also volunteered – pupils from the Warsaw Acad. of F. A. wish to get allocated, apart from that many unattached young people come in with their desire to learn. At the same time ones from the Polytechnic are signing in to the sculptural/architectural section. Here the village self-taughts will get further training.

Works for public exhibition will be selected by me in order to avoid the “rough” system and to exclude works that should be exhibited only at Zachęta or not at all.

Works by the most perfect artists will be exhibited together with works by amateurs from the villages, from the basic schools, to honour creativity on the basis of its ability to stir emotions and not technical perfection.

All of you, my partisans in the fight for the Revival, the living fellow citizens, people who like me deeply feel the need to transform inertia into life, send Mr Minster your demand and your support in writing, so that he gets a big mail sack every morning at breakfast and Stach from Warta gets the IPS for the Creat-place.

Creat-action must have the right of citizenship in the Liberated Fatherland!

So much from Stanisław Szukalski. With his characteristic nonchalance, emphasised by an exotic syntax and a style full of convoluted neologisms, he

6 Szukalski is consistent in interpreting the initials “IPS” (Instytut Propagandy Sztuki) as meaning “Instytut Prywatnej Szykany” – the Institute of Private Harassment.

called for support for the only true art, which he named Creat-action [*twórczyn*]. In his interpretation it was to be an assertive and content-oriented art (which the hostile critics, the “creative eunuchs” and other creators called a literary art) – an art that would be empty of conservatism or modernism, i.e. illusory values that were energetically, and entirely erroneously, promoted by both the IPS and Zachęta in the exhibitions they organised with money unlawfully taken away from taxpayers. Hence, in his opinion, these two harmful institutions should be closed. Meanwhile, the art of the Creat-action, in order to be able to develop properly, must be granted a house of its own. The former seat of the Institute of Art Propaganda, a pavilion at Królewska Street in Warsaw, could be made to serve that purpose. Szukalski proposed that its largest hall should house, every month and all year round, cyclic exhibitions of Creat-action. They were to keep to a single, strictly enforced programme (naturally, one prepared by Szukalski himself), implemented in the framework of the Creat-place [*Twórcownia*], i.e. a didactic method that was obligatory, from autumn of 1929, for the members of the freshly established Tribe of the Horned Heart. This method included producing only figurative compositions, always from memory and on mandatory subjects (preferring the very early-medieval and pagan past of the Polish nation), initially exclusively in pencil until perfection of technique and expression was reached, and preferably on small-sized, square sheets of paper.

According to Szukalski's plan, the remaining rooms of the liquidated IPS were to be assigned to house the Creat-place. Apart from the members of the Tribe (the ones who were most advanced artistically and the dearest to his heart), its pupils would be those students of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts and the Warsaw Polytechnic who would be interested in the Creat-action and unable to see a place for themselves at either of those fossilised academies. The programme of education would encompass mainly sculpture and architecture, i.e. those domains in which Stanisław Szukalski expressed himself the most readily and the most creatively.

Yet Stanisław Szukalski's missive is rather general and mysterious. He did not specify which artists he esteemed and which he considered uncreative; the only name to be mentioned was that of Stryjeński. The artist in question was Karol Stryjeński and, in fact, Szukalski meant his students from the Timber Industry School in Zakopane who, in order to become truly creative artists might – nay, should – continue their study of sculpture at the Creat-place.

In this case, the works of which Polish and foreign artists did Stanisław Szukalski intend to show at the exhibitions he would organise at the former seat of the Institute of Art Propaganda? Which of his contemporaries and artists representing the earlier eras (especially the 19<sup>th</sup> century) did he esteem and consider worthy of attention? Many and very diverse names – mainly of painters, surprisingly, but also of sculptors – were mentioned in the numerous essays he published in the press, in his introductions to catalogues, and, above all, in his programmatic declaration entitled *Atak Kraka. Twórcownie*

czy *Akademie* (Cracow 1929), as well as in his extensive correspondence. However, these names could hardly serve as a basis to recognise a coherent and programmatically justified whole, one that would emphasise either the separateness or originality of Stach from Warta's conception. It is equally clear that Szukalski's choices and personal preferences were characterised by non-progressive conservatism. His penchant for figurative art (painting) with a strong contents stratum and a solid technique, and his dislike of anything avant-garde, especially of French origin, are also evident.

It is clear from his many statements that Szukalski considered three painters, i.e. Jan Matejko and two of his pupils, Stanisław Wyspiański and Jacek Malczewski, to be the leading Polish artists; he regretted that their talents "did not leave stylistic heirs or imitators who would express themselves in some similar manner of approaching or transposing form".<sup>7</sup>

Jan Matejko, the father of Polish historical painting, was especially dear to Szukalski not only because the latter had studied in the years 1909–1913 at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, which had had "Master Jan" as its director for two decades (1873–1893) but – perhaps most of all – because some of his paintings showed events that had happened in the early Middle Ages, an era which Szukalski considered especially significant because, in his opinion, it had not been tainted by foreign artistic influence and brought the blossoming of purely Polish art. Also, Jan Matejko's paintings were full of details and refined ornaments, which the rebellious Stach from Warta Szukalski was also fond of using in his works, most of all in his sculptures.

Stanisław Wyspiański, in turn, Szukalski seems to have esteemed for his penchant for decorativeness, for his tendency to fill entire spaces of walls with geometrical and floral ornaments, as he did, for instance, in the design for the polychromes in the interior of the Franciscan church in Cracow. Szukalski reasoned that if only Wyspiański had not been as modest as Szukalski himself, if only he had displayed more self-assurance, he would have been recognised much earlier by his contemporaries. He also would have "contributed far more to improving the state of affairs in the cultural Cracow and would have chased the swindlers, dealers and calculating rogues away from our national temple, while he himself would have produced far more of his works for Poland".<sup>8</sup>

Szukalski's attitude towards Jacek Malczewski, in turn, was definitely emotionally charged, because he had known him personally during the period of his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Surprisingly – especially given his well-known dislike for the Academy's professors – he respected him

7 S. Szukalski, *Atak Kraka. Twórcownie czy Akademie* [The Krak's Attack: Creat-places or Academies?], Cracow, 1929, p. 7.

8 Idem, *Górne Cięcie Rozbohuzowanemu Bawolcowi na Wawelu (W związku z głosem Pana Bohusza w ankiecie o pracach Szukalskiego w „Kurierze Codziennym”)* [An Upper Cut to the Buffalo of Wawel (In Connection with the Statement of Mr Bohusz in the Poll on Szukalski's Works in *Kurier Codzienny*)], a pamphlet, 2 June 1929, p. 1.



as his mentor and had produced at least one drawing of him: a demonised portrait of the author of *Melancholy* and *Vicious Circle*. When the young Szukalski clashed with Konstanty Laszczka, who taught him sculpture and attempted to compel the rebellious and confrontational student to incorporate Laszczka's corrections in his work, it was Jacek Malczewski who had poured oil on the troubled waters and made it possible for Szukalski to continue his studies. This may have been the reason why his son, Rafał Malczewski, was one of those artists who, in Szukalski's view, deserved a state prize for his work.

Szukalski's attitude to the third of Jan Matejko's pupils, Józef Mehoffer, was certainly enthusiastic regarding his early output, dating from the Young Poland period, and entirely negative regarding his mature works, especially those executed in the inter-war period.

As regards the early art, i.e. the High Middle Ages, in Szukalski's view only Wit Stwos (Veit Stoss) merited attention, even though he was not Polish – he hailed from Nuremberg. Yet Polish art owed to him the masterpiece of woodcarving: the main altar in the Marian Church in Cracow, which Szukalski, captivated by the virtuosity and precision of rendering anatomical details and elements of attire, unreservedly admired.

The list of artists contemporary to Szukalski, whom the rebellious Stach from Warta respected and esteemed, thus speaking of them with enthusiasm, is just as short. One of them was Zofia Stryjeńska. The "princess of Polish painting"<sup>9</sup> seems to have won him over because the themes of her very decorative works referred to Poland's distant past, namely to the age of the Piast dynasty. Szukalski met her in 1925, at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris. Both had been invited to participate in it by the commissioner of the Polish section, Jerzy Warchałowski, both exhibited their works there and both were tremendously successful, receiving the most important prizes.

It was probably there that Szukalski met Zofia's husband, the architect Karol Stryjeński, who, being the director of the Timber Industry School in Zakopane, came to Paris to exhibit toys made by its students. The international jury expressed a very high opinion of the exhibits, and from that time on Szukalski admired the effects of Karol Stryjeński's didactic work, as he had succeeded in training rough Highlander boys to carve in wood, making use of their inborn manual skills. It was only a pity, Szukalski thought, that after they finished school they would vanish, because the most gifted of them most probably wasted away their sensitivity and diligence during worthless studies at the Warsaw or Cracow academies of fine arts. Nevertheless, until the end of his long and eventful life Stanisław Szukalski did not change his

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9 This epithet was first used by an anonymous author in: "Zofia Stryjeńska w Warszawie. U księżniczki malarstwa polskiego. Wywiad specjalny 'Wiadomości Literackich'" [Zofia Stryjeńska in Warsaw. A Visit to the Princess of Polish Painting. *Wiadomości Literackie*, special interview], *Wiadomości Literackie*, 1924, no. 7, p. 1.

high opinion of Karol Stryjeński's didactic achievements and the quality of his wife Zofia's art.

Vlastimil Hofman, Szukalski's senior by twelve years, was a pupil of Malczewski whom Szukalski liked so much. In the years that Stach from Warta was studying at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, this Symbolist painter conducted evening drawing classes. It was probably then that the two met, and perhaps even struck up a friendship, because two decades later (in 1930) Hofman painted Szukalski's portrait as King Krak, while its sitter was of the opinion that, in the horde of Cracow's *soi-disant* artists, "among those many craftily allied swindlers there is at the most one talent, Hofman's [...]"<sup>10</sup>

As for artists younger than him, Stanisław Szukalski was for a while moderately impressed with the graphic works of Tadeusz Kulisiewicz and Tadeusz Cieślewski, Jr., both of whom were members of the Ryt group. Yet it must be noted that in the early 1930s Tadeusz Cieślewski, Jr. was outright fascinated with Szukalski and his personal vision of teaching art in the framework of the Great-place [*Twórcownia*].

The case of Tadeusz Pruszkowski, a painter, art critic and pedagogue, was different. This professor of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts (renamed the Academy of Fine Arts in 1932), who was very popular and much liked by his students, was the initiator of the summer open-air painting sessions in Kazimierz Dolny; their main participants were his students from the Society of St. Luke. Szukalski initially considered him one of the three most important "founding father" instructors of the new Polish art (the other two were the above-mentioned Karol Stryjeński and Wojciech Jastrzębowski). Yet as time went by, Szukalski's attitude towards Pruszkowski changed for the worse. Having admired the results of his teaching in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he later came to detest and scorn him, repeatedly expressing his feelings in public. His dislike extended to include Pruszkowski's pupils, especially the members of the Society of St. Luke, whom he derisively called Baby Lukes, and the members of Group Four – the Baby Fours. This, however, did not prevent him from appreciating the works of some of them, especially those of Bolesław Cybis, Jan Gotard and Antoni Michalak, with whom he even corresponded. In addition, he shared with the members of the Society their fascination for the beauty of Kazimierz Dolny's landscape and its picturesque architecture; he actually bought a house in its vicinity, in the tranquil Męcimierz, where he stayed several times during the 1930s.

As for the large group of Pruszkowski's remaining pupils, Szukalski did not deny Teresa Roszkowska (who, like him, was captivated by Kazimierz Dolny) and Michał Bylina the right to function on the Polish art market.

Szukalski's acquaintance with Wojciech Jastrzębowski was far more turbulent. In the years 1935–1938, Jastrzębowski, an artist and pedagogue who

10 Idem, "Na Dom Geniuszów" [Against the House of Genius], *Krak* 1, 1930, no. 2 (June), p. 2.



mainly worked in the fields of graphic art and applied arts, was a senator during the Polish Parliament's fourth term of office. After a momentary fascination with his achievements, especially in didactics (Jastrzębowski was appointed professor of applied arts at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts in 1923), Szukalski very quickly came to hate him. The reason for this was Stach's belief that it was precisely such men as Jastrzębowski – old, devoid of ideals, but unfortunately the wielders of power in the county's leading cultural institutions – who had contributed to the fact that in the 1930s he, Szukalski, was hounded by critics and hence was unable to obtain any commission for a monument in Poland. In June 1936, Jastrzębowski (then an influential member of the Institute's council) sued Szukalski for abuse and defamation after the resounding scandal caused by the unexpected closure (not more than two days later) of an exhibition of works by Szukalski and the Tribe of the Horned Heart at the Institute of Art Propaganda pavilion and the concurrent incineration of its catalogues. Stach from *Warta* lost the lawsuit and the Regional Court in Warsaw sentenced him to three months' detention and a fine of 500 zloty with a three-year suspension.

Yet Stanisław Szukalski's sharpest criticism was levelled at the Cracow artist milieu, especially at artists associated with the Academy of Fine Arts in this city who, in his view, had entirely needlessly made it the stronghold of French art in Poland. This art was, according to Szukalski, entirely worthless and yet, unfortunately, increasingly popular in Poland, thus making it impossible for native art, unsullied by foreign influence, to emerge and develop.

No wonder, therefore, that Szukalski advised that the Academy be closed and its edifice at the Matejko Square sold. After all, he asked, how much

does it annually cost the State to maintain this breeding ground of swindlers and lunatics, including the salaries of the so-called "professors", fuel, lighting, serving staff, renovations, models, taxes, scholarships for lickspittles? What have been the maintenance costs since its inception? But who would report them to me? Who would open the ledgers? They are guarded by a caste of swindlers, who profit from this state of affairs.

[...] Reckon all the worries, periods of hunger, disappointments, tragedies, deaths, suicides, derailments, preying on the public, profaning art,<sup>11</sup> impoverishment of peasant parents, social downfall towards parasitism on the path of cultural obligation, and you shall agree with me that this is one of those great tragedies of which we remain unaware. Those who have died will not complain now, and those alive will put on brave faces because they are ashamed they allowed themselves to be led astray and their lives, which offered shining prospects to both themselves and to us because of their success, to be derailed.

We support this breeding ground of lunatics, because each time the elders raise their voices, squealing their protests and threatening to curse the "uncivilised" nation if it

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11 Originally: *rubczakowanie na publice* and *profanaszkowanie sztuki*. Szukalski created the verbs from the surnames "Rubczak" and "Pronaszko", and the reference is transparent. This translation renders only the underlying sense, not the wordplay (translator's note).

dared to close this “venerable institution”. They constitute “culture”, do they not? The likes of Pautsch, Jarocki, Sichulski (Ruthenians), Pieńkowski (drunkard), Weiss (pornographer)?

They hide behind Matejko while expunging his art, just as they tried to expunge Malczewski – although I have seen them shedding crocodile tears at Jacek’s funeral.<sup>12</sup>

Obviously Stach from *Warta Szukalski* was critical of Jan Rubczak, a painter and graphic artist, and co-founder of the conservative “Jednoróg” Guild of Visual Artists – a Cracow group, active in the years 1925–1935, which focused on questions of colour derived from France – as well as of the achievements of Andrzej and Zbigniew Pronaszko, the co-founders (in 1917) of the very energetic art group *Ekspresjoniści Polscy* (Polish Expressionists, later renamed the *Formists*); the group drew its inspirations mainly from French colourism and Cubism, trends which Szukalski profoundly hated. The *rubczakowanie* on the public and *profanaszkowanie* of art in Poland (since, according to Stach from *Warta*, there was no alternative art in Poland then) could lead only to the elimination of the vestiges of personality from the increasingly more imitative production of Polish artists.

But Szukalski was just as critical of Fryderyk Pautsch, Władysław Jarocki and Kazimierz Sichulski, who were interested in the culture and exotic customs of the Hutsuls, a highlander group settled in a part of the Eastern Carpathians, of Ignacy Pieńkowski, whose painting was strongly linked to French Post-Impressionism, and of Wojciech Weiss, whose art was deeply embedded in Young Poland symbolism and in the colourist tendencies of the 1920s and 1930s. All of them were professors of the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow.

The body of artists whom Stach from *Warta Szukalski* considered unworthy of attention included also, but not only, Tadeusz Cybulski (a sculptor), Mieczysław Dąbrowski (a painter, brother of Marian Dąbrowski, a journalist, founder of a press syndicate that published, among others, the *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*), Stanisław Kazimierz Ostrowski (a sculptor), Jan Piotr Rynkowski (a painter, graphic artist and theatre set designer), Jerzy Fedkowicz (a painter, a pupil of Wojciech Weiss), and two pupils of Konstanty Laszczka, Karol Hukan (a sculptor) and Stanisław Popławski (a sculptor and ceramist). The list also included Aleksander Rafałowski, the only representative of the avant-garde *Blok* and *Praesens* groups in this body of artists. In addition, neither Szukalski’s public statements nor his vast private correspondence show even a trace of his interest in those groups; as if the extreme avant-garde – especially abstract painting and the geometric trend within its framework – did not exist in the Polish art of the 1930s at all.

This list could probably go on and on because, in truth, Stach from *Warta Szukalski* esteemed himself the most. He hated all Polish and foreign art critics without exception, calling them professional cretins, as well as historians of

12 S. Szukalski, “Sprzedać Akademię!” [Sell the Academy!], *Krak* 1, 1930, no. 4 (December), p. 4.

art, whom he scorned and denied them the right to judge his art (especially if they were to judge it disapprovingly). The other Polish artists he either accepted or attacked depending on the conception that was currently in his head. This was the case, among others, of Xawery Dunikowski, to whom he actually wrote one letter. This was in the early 1930s, i.e. after he had said, when speaking about Antoni Michalak in 1925: "I much respect him [Michalak] on the basis of just a few seeds, but from those I have inferred that there is something of a creative male in him. But I have no idea whether he, as a man-animal, has any grain of wisdom – This is rarer than talent. For instance Dunikowski, a great talent once, and today – a coin that disappears from the hand".<sup>13</sup>

As for foreign artists, one would be hard-pressed to find even a single artist, either a contemporary of Szukalski or one active in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, about whom he would have spoken or written in positive terms. The only exception was, perhaps, Auguste Rodin – Szukalski did not comment on his output, but it did leave a clear mark in his early works. Also the approach to form and material characteristic of Michelangelo Buonarroti, whom Szukalski adored, is evident in his works. But Buonarroti was a generally revered great master of early modern sculpture. The list of artists whom Stanisław Szukalski programmatically condemned and scorned is just as short and includes, almost exclusively, painters who were either French or connected with France. Paul Cézanne, generally viewed as the founding father of modern 20<sup>th</sup>-century painting, was a total and absolute nobody to Szukalski. He was just as critical of the two creators of Cubism, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. Maurice de Vlaminck, one of the leading figures in the Fauve movement, was also a big zero. Szukalski was equally unimpressed by the art of another Fauve, Kees van Dongen, and also of Raoul Dufy and Édouard Vuillard, who was one of the Nabis – artists about whom the Warsaw and Cracow critics, in reviewing exhibitions organised both abroad and in Poland, for instance in the National Museum in Warsaw, wrote with much enthusiasm throughout the 1930s.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Stanisław Szukalski could not accept that the Institute of Art Propaganda should continue its existence. Even though the Institute had been established just a few years earlier, in 1930, mostly in opposition to the Zachęta's exhibition policy, which was clearly conservative, Stach from *Warta* did not see much difference in quality between the two. As it is easy to guess, the aims elaborated in his missive were never carried out. His idea was too fantastic, too unrealistic, for anyone to be willing to pay attention to it. In fact, it is quite probable that no one – apart from Kornel Makuszyński, that is – ever had a chance to read this peculiar document.

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13 Szukalski's letter to Rev. Stanisław Szepietowski dated 25 April 1925, cf.: S. Szukalski, *Teksty o sztuce i wypowiedzi polemiczne oraz korespondencja z lat 1924–1938*, op. cit., p. 273.

And what about Stach from Warta Szukalski? In late 1936 he settled in Katowice, where finally a few of his sculptures were bought by the Silesian Museum thanks to the initiative of its director, Tadeusz Dobrowolski, and the voivode of Silesia, Michał Grażyński. He also received commissions for two monumental relief sculptures to be placed on the façade of the Museum, which was under construction at the time, and for two monuments intended for the city centre: *Wiecznica Baczności* [Eternity of Vigilance] and *Bolesław Chrobry* [Bolesław the Brave]. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Second World War interrupted this promising cooperation and put an end to any optimistic prospects. Nearly the entire oeuvre of Stach from Warta Szukalski was destroyed in the ensuing upheaval, while the artist himself returned to the United States, where he lived in relative obscurity for the rest of his life. He died in 1987.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

## Abstract

There is an interesting document in the collection of the Kornel Makuszyński Museum, which is a branch of the Tatra Museum in Zakopane. It is a three-page-long text written in the second half of the 1930s by one of the most controversial Polish interwar artists, Stanisław Szukalski (1893–1987), entitled *IPS dać Szukalskiemu* [Give the IPS to Szukalski], *IPS* standing for the Art Propaganda Institute. With his characteristic nonchalance, this remarkable sculptor, draughtsman, writer and art theorist, all in one person, recommended himself as director of the Art Propaganda Institute in Warsaw. Yet the eccentric Stach from Warta (which was Szukalski's artist alias) provided no information about the names of either Polish or foreign artists whose works he would display should he be granted this post; nor did he state why or for what reasons he would or would not display them. This paper introduces the curious contents of Szukalski's statement, which until now has remained unknown to scholars, and is an attempt to answer some of the above questions.