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The Organic Quality of Visual Form: The Artistic Bond between Zdzisław Ruszkowski and Henry Moore¹

Zdzisław Ruszkowski (1907–1991) was a Polish painter who has largely been neglected in the historiographical discourse in his native land, yet who stood out among the Polish émigré artists thanks to, among others, the fact that he came into artistic interaction with Henry Moore. Wiesław Juszczak stated that Moore was one of those artists who in the 20th century had achieved an “incontestable greatness”.² How did Ruszkowski, who had settled in England, meet Moore? The painter thus recalled his contacts with the sculptor, whom he had met through the collector of his works, Maurice Ash:

When I was painting in Kentish Town Mr and Mrs Ash were staying in Great Hal-
lingbury, quite close to Much Hadham. They were good friends of Henry Moore, and
through them I struck up an acquaintance with the sculptor. The idea of a living per-
son surrounded by sculptures fascinated me [...]. I went to sketch at Moore's studio
a number of times. I did several drawings of the swirling hollow shapes of the sculp-
tures and of Moore moving between them. Finally I decided on a composition in which
the vertical centre consisted of a figure of Moore and the chimney of his cottage. The
centre was surrounded by the wavy shapes of the sculptures. To accentuate the rhythm
of the shapes I painted the sculptor with folded hands.³ (Fig. 1)

- 1 The current essay was written within the framework of the research project entitled “Pamięć i widzenie: paradygmaty realizmu w sztukach plastycznych Polski i Europy 1919-1939”, financed by National Science Centre funds allocated on the basis of decision no. DEC-2012/07/B/HS2/00300.
- 2 W. Juszczak, “Verklärung”, in: *Mowa i moc obrazów. Prace dedykowane Profesor Marii Poprzęckiej*, Warsaw, 2005, p. 265. I was fortunate to have developed my research skills and intellectual interests under the guidance of Professor Wiesław Juszczak, who is one of the greatest Polish humanists of our times. Being in no way able to match his vast erudition, the perspicacity of his mind and his talent to interpret artistic phenomena independently from any methodological vogues and in even the most unexpected cultural contexts, I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Juszczak by means of this modest essay on the painterly oeuvre of Zdzisław Ruszkowski.
- 3 *The Paintings of Ruszkowski with an introduction by Michael Simonow*, London, 1982, p. 50.



Fig. 1. Zdzisław Ruszkowski, *Henry Moore in his Studio* [Henry Moore w pracowni], 1954, oil on canvas, 99.1 × 119.4 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

The painting described above, entitled *Henry Moore in his Studio*, dates from the year 1954, i.e. the beginning of Ruszkowski's artistic career. It is not impossible that the organic visual form, which was idiomatic of Moore's sculpture, fascinated Ruszkowski only fleetingly; but it may also have been deeply assimilated and integrated with the painter's own morphological explorations. In search of the truth of the case, it is necessary to review Ruszkowski's biography, as he is an artist well-nigh forgotten in Poland, while in Great Britain, where he lived for fifty years, he has been relegated to the margins of art history.

Born the son of the painter Waław Ruszkowski, he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow in 1929. He had been taught by Wojciech Weiss, Józef Mehoffer, Stanisław Kamocki and Władysław Jaroński, and was a member of the colourist group "Pryzmat". In 1935 he left for Paris, where he stayed until the outbreak of the Second World War. His Parisian years were filled with *plein air* painting sessions in the south of France, with physical work at the building site of the Trocadero for the 1937 Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne, with studies of the Old Masters at the Louvre, the carrying out of a fellowship granted by the French government thanks to a recommendation from two ex-Fauves, Othon Friesz and Albert

Marquet, participation in the Salon des Indépendants (1937) and the Salon des Tuileries (1938), as well as in an exhibition of Polish artists at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune (1938). His earlier fascination with Van Gogh's expressive colour and audacious texture was replaced by an enchantment with Cézanne and the structural logic of his paintings. In 1939, Ruszkowski enrolled in the Polish Army in Brittany; after the collapse of the French front, he travelled through the Pyrenees, Portugal and Gibraltar to join the Polish armed forces that had been reconstituted in Scotland. There, in 1941, he married Jenifer McCormack, an Englishwoman serving in the British Army. Their children, a daughter, Anna (1942), and a son, Krzysztof (1944), were born in Edinburgh. Ruszkowski focused on portraying his family; his works were exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy of Art and the Scottish National Gallery of Art. He perceived scenes from family life through the prism of the intimate poetics of Pierre Bonnard. In 1944, the Ruszkowskis moved to London to settle at Jennifer's parents' house at Hampstead Heath.⁴

Ruszkowski's first one-man exhibition was organised at the Roland, Browse and Delbanco Gallery in London in 1948. The exposition underscored his predilection for Post-Impressionist morphology in painting: a decoratively treated field of colour locked in a Nabis contour, as well as a reinterpretation of Pierre Bonnard's and Édouard Vuillard's models with the concurrent introduction of a colour dominant in the representation. In the same year, however, Ruszkowski began to draw his inspiration from Dutch realism, thus restoring volume and natural colouring to his forms.⁵ The rhythm of transformations in his pictorial vision accelerated. Already landscapes painted in the 1950s in Cornwall, which show parts of the rocky shore and fishing villages, present a new view, or perhaps conceptualisation, of nature. Some critics perceived it as a monumentalised and universalised vision of modest motifs; a vision that exceeded the boundaries of what was local and specific to geo-cultural placement.⁶ An image filtered through the painter's own memory was produced in his atelier; it grew autonomous there, losing its mimetic character in favour of a chromatic composition with the plane of the canvas as its departure point. The human figures, most often seen against a fading daylight, were empty of biological vitality, turning into ashy phantoms seemingly burnt from the inside out (Fig. 2). Their dimensionality was rendered by means of chiaroscuro contrasts and by shades of grey, whereas their "skin" resembled the texture of weathered rock. In addition to modulations of the colour range enclosed between the extremes of black and white, Ruszkowski's compositions embraced touches of deep and saturated tones; yet he never yielded to the temptation

4 M. Simonow, *Ruszkowski 1907–1991: Catalogue of Paintings and Sculptures from the Simonow Collection (Art et Caractère)*, Lavaur, 2007, pp. 33–36.

5 L. Talbot, "Insight into an original", *HAM&HIGH*, 28 January 1983, p. 2.

6 A. Hammer, "Roland, Browse and Delbanco", *The Architectural Review*, 1952, no. 664, p. 4.



Fig. 2. Zdzisław Ruszkowski, *Butcher's Shop* [Sklep mięsny], 1951, oil on canvas, 111.8 x 66 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

of savouring colour and always retained the logic of the chiaroscuro (Fig. 3). In a 1954 portrait of Henry Moore in his atelier, the sculptures surrounding Moore, which refer to the idols of archaic cultures, are rendered in an animistic mode, with an expressive volume and threateningly intense inner dynamism. According to Józef Czapski, the manner that is typical of Ruszkowski's mature art, with volumes modelled by the contrasts of distinctly separated chromatic fields and by contoured areas of light and shadow, owed much to Moore's art.⁷ Later, this modelling acquired a more fluid form and the lines became more flexible, referring to the organic shapes of Moore's sculptures.

In the early 1960s, Ruszkowski formulated a theory of "aureolism", whose fundamental tenet is the observation that when opposing colours are brought together, they evoke a third colour, which forms a sort of aureole at the meeting line. Ruszkowski materialised this nimbus of light and fixed its form and colour, thus making it a constructional component of a painting. This aesthetic conception was derived from diverse experiences, which included the internalised perception of nature and the lessons learnt from both old and contemporary masters: Philipp Otto Runge's theory of colours, Vincent van Gogh's principle of suggestive colour, Paul Cézanne's tectonics of a painting and the decorativeness of Pierre Bonnard's canvases. In the light of Ruszkowski's aesthetic rules, a well-composed painting contained an autonomous light because it was an independent reality imbued with its creator's sensual and emotional memory.

⁷ J. Czapski, "Niespodzianka" [Surprise], *Kultura* (Paris), 1982, no. 11, p. 118.



Fig. 3. Zdzisław Ruzzkowski, *Women in Mousehole Harbour* [Kobiety w porcie Mousehole], 1951, oil on canvas, 65.4 × 80.6 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

These views crystallised during Ruzzkowski's study trips to Cyprus, Venice and Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. A clear caesura emerged in his oeuvre in Venice in 1955: the black colour acquired a particular importance in the chromatics of his works. From then on, areas filled with black, most often the silhouettes of gondolas, were sharply distinct on the canal's surface shattered by colourful reflections into vibrant, pulsating motes; the canal was most often seen from an elevated viewpoint, radically limited by narrow framing. The immanent dynamism of water was emphasised antithetically by the painting's "narrators", their figures motionless like stone statues.⁸ Considering the long artistic tradition of representing the Venetian cityscape as brightly lit by the sun, these fragmentary views of tourist attractions are truly astonishing.⁹ Yet, as was noted by Stephen Bone, in Ruzzkowski's Venetian paintings the black colour did not suggest darkness but, on the contrary, surprisingly successfully evoked the effect of strong light.¹⁰ Just as unexpectedly, the light of the dying day and the twilight aura are peculiar to the artist's Spanish landscapes from 1956, which are dominated by green, black

8 H. J. Read, "Roland, Browse & Delbanco", *Art*, 24 November 1955, p. 5.

9 E. Newton, "Ruzzkowski and Hayden", *Art News and Review*, 12 November 1955, p. 3.

10 S. Bone, "A Polish Artist in London", *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 November 1955, p. 4.



Fig. 4. Zdzisław Ruszkowski, *Sperlonga Bay at Sunset* [Zatoka Sperlonga o zachodzie słońca], 1962, oil on canvas, 109.2 × 91.4 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

and brown hues tinged with orange and rendered in a sombre gamut reminiscent of El Greco's palette.

The light fixed in the contours and in the colour patches also resembles the marinas painted by Edvard Munch and Emil Nolde, even though those are more dramatic in expression than Ruszkowski's paintings. Ruszkowski created powerfully expressive landscapes in 1962, in the Italian fishing village of Sperlonga, most often seen from a high cliff in the light of the setting sun (Fig. 4). In these landscapes he attempted to transpose the changeable nature of the sea, the movement of waves and the play of light reflections into painterly qualities by scattering motes and specks of colour, those light-filled "snakes and commas of turquoise", as Czapski wrote,¹¹ on the surface of the water. The roots of this 20th-century formula of luminism reached back, as Ruszkowski himself pointed out, to William Turner and Claude Monet – masters of capturing the rays of light gliding the water surface. Yet Ruszkowski accentuated the painterly substance as being equal to the remembered optical impression and the mental experience.¹² Alicja Drwęska put it aptly: "His intuition, sensitivity and imagination transform a grey patch of mundane life into a costly, glittering painterly and poetic matter".¹³

11 Czapski, op. cit., p. 118.

12 Z. Ruszkowski, "Aureolism: A Theory Concerning Painting", in J. P. Hodin, *Ruszkowski. Life and Work*, London, 1966, pp. 65–66.

13 A. Drwęska, "Zdzisław Ruszkowski", *Dziennik polski i dziennik żołnierza*, 14 November 1955, p. 3.

Ruszkowski produced portraits, still lifes and nudes based on aureolist aesthetics. He transformed female nudes – seen in the light of dying embers in the fireplace, painted from models whose features are never distinct – into luminescent bodies. In the narrow frames of still lifes set in dark interiors, fluid contours of objects delineate the areas of light and shadow, merging into constellations of almost unrecognisable, synthetically rendered forms. Ruszkowski periodically abandoned intimate topics in order to immerse himself in the harsh climate and wild nature of the British Isles, to explore the arena of a violent clash between the elements of sky, water and earth. In 1960 he established an artistic retreat in an old house at Loch Maree in Scotland. There he painted concise, zoned landscapes, in which the lake reflected the luminosity of the sky, the clouds materialised like the abstract patterns of tapestry, and the flat silhouettes of the hills resonated with the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Ruszkowski found his subsequent retreats at Lyme Regis in Dorset – in the very heart of the Jurassic Coast, as well as at Ashprington by the Dart and in Ireland (Fig. 5). In 1976 he derived hedonistic pleasure from the beauty of the southern landscape in remote corners of Greece, where he recalled from memory the compositional solutions used by the Nabis, with their landscape's background obscured by a decoratively treated grid composed of tree trunks and branches; these visual effects had been borrowed from Japanese woodcuts. The narrow crescent of the beach on the Greek island of Spetses, to which Ruszkowski travelled in the spring of 1980,¹⁴ runs almost vertically up the compositional frame, towards the blue line of the horizon; it is like the trimming of a tapestry into which the strip of boggy ground overgrown with bushes and crowned with the openwork tops of olive trees has been transformed. The profusion of patterned planes, reminiscent of Vuillard and Bonnard – again a compositional effect adopted from Japanese aesthetics – is here instrumental to a vision of Mediterranean nature motionless in the lazy midday heat. By then, the chiaroscuro contrasts had disappeared from Ruszkowski's art, his compositions were ruled by chromatic accords and counterpoints, and the tones acquired by shadow were as resonating as those of light.

From the 1960s until the 1980s, Ruszkowski's repertoire of topics was dominated by landscapes and nudes. He produced multicoloured pictorial tissues serving as backgrounds for softly painted naked bodies of "generous, sturdy harridans", to render Stanisław Frenkiel's phrase in English.¹⁵ These nudes referred to the masterpieces of the Venetian Renaissance, to the archetypal Arcadia, and in the modern art tradition, to the "odalisques" by Henri Matisse and Pierre Bonnard. Translated into the language of painting, a female body posed against the background of a decorative fabric or enclosed in the dense rhythm of the silhouettes of holiday-makers at a beach was turned into

14 L. Talbot, "Ever the optimist", *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 24 October 1986, p. 2.

15 S. Frenkiel, "Ruszkowski", *Wiadomości* (London), 10 December 1972, p. 4.



Fig. 5. Zdzisław Ruszkowski, *The Forest [Las]*, 1967, oil on canvas, 127 × 101.6 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

a paradigm of aesthetic beauty and an exemplification of a dialogue with the great tradition of European culture. At the same time, Ruszkowski's female nude was a personification of the forces of nature and a testimony to his fascination with the beauty of life. This is because his aureolism was a means to capture the equilibrium between the self-referential character of modernist painting and the joyous affirmation of the world.

The question to ask at this point is how Ruszkowski's art was received in the British Isles. He was perceived there mainly as a thoroughly modern painter, even though not entirely allied with the mainstream trends.¹⁶ He was seen as a follower, although never an imitator, of Bonnard's and Matisse's Post-Impressionism on the one hand, and as an heir to the Expressionist stance of Edvard Munch and Oskar Kokoschka on the other.¹⁷ He was also noted as an artist who was capable of recapitulating European artistic traditions, and as a syncretic painter who was able to reconcile the great traditions of the North and South and to fuse into a coherent whole the colourist sensibility of the Venetians, Titian and Veronese, with the mystic luminism of Rembrandt.¹⁸ He was principally considered a descendant of Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin

16 R. Berthoud, "Painter in a world of his own", *The Times*, 10 March 1978, p. 4.

17 P. Rouve, "Of taste and trance", *Art News and Review*, 20 March 1958, p. 3.

18 L. Berryman, "Zdzislaw Ruszkowski. Gillian Jason Gallery", *Arts Review*, 1986, no. 21, p. 2.

and Maurice Denis, although Goya and Daumier were also mentioned as his artistic forebears.¹⁹

In less than a decade after he had settled at Hampstead Heath in London in 1944, Ruszkowski was recognised by commentators of the artistic scene as one of the most important British artists of the era (his Polish origins, always respectfully mentioned, did not hinder his being qualified as British).²⁰ He repeatedly exhibited his works at the prestigious Roland, Browse and Delbanco Gallery, at Leicester Galleries and Centaur Gallery, and was invited to participate in the collective exhibitions of the London Group at the Royal Academy (1946) and at New Burlington Galleries (1954); he took part in presentations of British art in Paris, e.g. at the Musée d'art moderne in 1946. In 1966, the Leeds City Art Gallery hosted a large retrospective of his work; the reviews were enthusiastic. He had some patrons on a par with those of the Renaissance: Tom Laughton, Maurice Ash and Michael Simonow, whose collections of his works were the largest.

In order to describe Ruszkowski's position in the artistic and intellectual milieu of Polish émigrés in Great Britain, it is necessary to bring up the names of two artists whose work is highly valued in Poland and who, having emigrated to Great Britain, struck up a friendship there, namely Tadeusz Piotr Potworowski and Marek Żuławski. Since they were never in close or friendly relations with Ruszkowski, the art of each will be referred to in the current discourse as an arbitrarily selected interpretative context that is not meant to demonstrate their having any influence on one another or as sharing any goals. The two artists are recalled in order to emphasise Ruszkowski's idiosyncratic approach, with French Post-Impressionism as its starting point (the case of Potworowski and Żuławski is similar here), whereas the point of arrival was (quite differently than for Potworowski and Żuławski) a formula of expressive decorative painting in which light solidified in the painterly substance yet lost nothing of its value as a conveyor of spirituality. References to Żuławski and Potworowski are, in my opinion, more useful in locating Ruszkowski on the map of artistic activities in the Polish émigré milieu than his membership in the Society of Polish Artists in Great Britain (from 1956 onwards called the Association of Polish Artists in Great Britain, APA), a body whose aim was to develop a joint tactic, to organise exhibitions and promote its members' work; it accentuated the shared cultural tradition of its members, but did not obstruct their creative freedom with any common artistic programme. Constituting this triad of artists will, I hope, help to change Ruszkowski's status in Polish art historiography, in which he has not received due recognition (not to say that he

19 M. Bohusz-Szyszko, "Wystawa Zdzisława Ruszkowskiego" (Exhibition of Zdzisław Ruszkowski), *Dziennik Polski i Dziennik Żołnierza*, 3 March 1948, p. 3; E. Newton, "At the galleries", *The Guardian*, 20 April 1963, p. 4.

20 S. Bone, "Paintings with a personality. Ruszkowski's strength and simplicity", *The Manchester Guardian*, October 29, 1957, p. 3; J. P. Hodin, "The Poetics of Ruszkowski", *Art News and Review*, 9 November 1957, p. 3.

remains forgotten), even though during his lifetime he was respected, praised and even lauded in Great Britain, his adopted homeland.²¹

The first to mention Ruszkowski together with Żuławski was Eric Newton, an enthusiast of Ruszkowski's art and a reviewer for "The Guardian", who applied to the work of both artists the category of a "Polish style".²² This was an attempt to define the national idiom in the Poles' artistic output, but the term "style", understood as a set of definite, repeatable and fixed morphological features in the art of a given period or trend, was in this case entirely irrelevant. Newton's observation though must be perceived in the context of the British art criticism of that time. In the case of exhibitions of Polish émigré art, commentators determinedly and consistently underlined its Post-Impressionist genealogy, perceiving the predilection for colour as the common denominator of these artists' work. The source of this tendency was sought, most correctly, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow, recalling that Bonnard was highly esteemed there.²³ Specific features of the Poles' art were thus equated with the stigma of Bonnardism;²⁴ whether correctly is another matter. This conclusion was adequate in reference to the impulses drawn by Ruszkowski and Żuławski from French art, but each of the artists adapted these stimuli in a way that was entirely his own.

Żuławski lived in Paris in the same years as Ruszkowski, i.e. from 1935 to 1937, but he was tempted, or perhaps pressurised, by French Post-Impressionism for a shorter period of time, as he had landed in England earlier than Ruszkowski. Yet the art of Żuławski and Ruszkowski demonstrates a number of analogies, even though just as many differences can be mentioned as well. Ruszkowski's painting, which is certainly an affirmation of Nature and Man, widely differed from the pained undertone of Żuławski's artistic vision – a vision that was entirely anthropocentric, focused on human fate in its religious, existential and social dimension.²⁵ Ruszkowski's apotheosis of life and family intimacy, as well as his pantheistic (although not underpinned by any religious system) approach to nature,²⁶ were very distant from the philosophical reflection on the timeless nature of evil and on religious humility in the face of suffering (archotypically prefigured by Christ), which was evident in Żuławski's imagery. Żuławski employed an expressive contour reminiscent of Georges Rouault which stands in opposition to Ruszkowski's colourful

21 J. P. Hodin, "Ruszkowski – A Master", *Arts Review*, 1968, no. 9, p. 4.

22 E. Newton, "Ruszkowski and Żuławski", *The Guardian*, 31 October 1960, p. 4.

23 R. Trilithon, "Zdzisław Ruszkowski", *The Arts Review*, 4–18 May 1963, p. 3.

24 R. Carline, "Round the art galleries", *Our Time*, 1948, no. 7, p. 2; J. P. Hodin, "Roland, Browse and Delbanco", *Art News and Review*, February 11, 1950, p. 2; L. Alloway, "The backward glance", *Art News and Review*, February 23, 1952, p. 3; E. Newton, "Ruszkowski and Hayden", *Art News and Review*, 12 November 1955, p. 4.

25 H. Pitoń, "Marek", in: *Marek i Jacek Żuławscy*, exhibition cat., National Museum in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, 2002, pp. 12–22.

26 M. Chapman, "At the Leicester", *What's on in London*, 17 May 1968, p. 2.

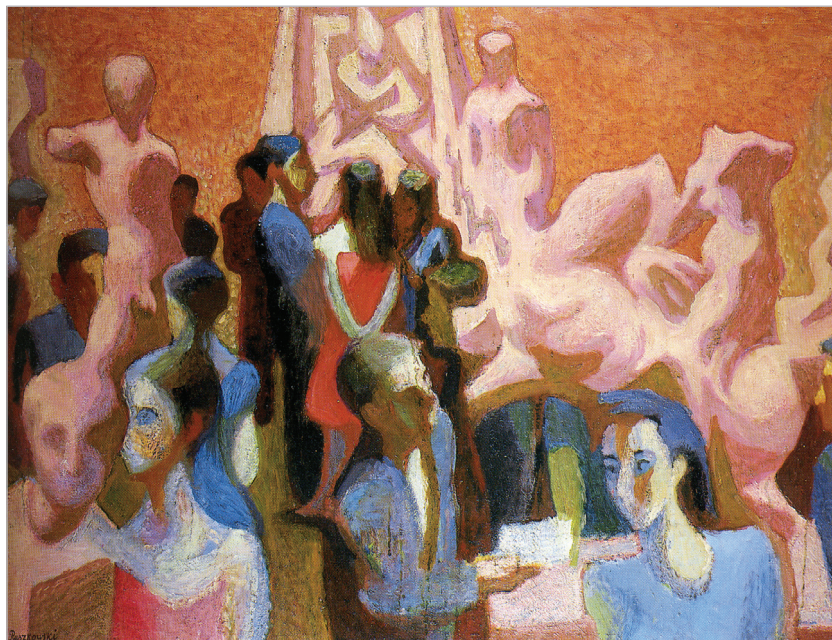


Fig. 6. Zdzisław Ruszkowski, *Interior of the National Gallery, Athens* [Wnętrze Galerii Narodowej w Atenach], 1976, oil on canvas, 101.6 × 129.5 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

aureolas surrounding the forms and to the tapestry-like decorativeness of his compositions (Fig. 6). Even the chromatic gamut of their canvases is different: Ruszkowski's vibrates with tones (despite the high proportion of black) and is rich in contrasts of colour and chiaroscuro, whereas the chromatic dominant in Żuławski's compositions is dark. Ruszkowski's multicoloured painterly substance differs widely from Żuławski's favourite counterpoints: black in opposition to red or grey-tinged white. The intimate aura of portraits painted by Ruszkowski, especially those showing his family and friends, puts them on the opposite end of the spectrum from Żuławski's monumental silhouettes that symbolise the alienation, depersonalisation and degradation of a human being in contemporary reality. Żuławski himself commented: "Since loneliness arising from an awareness of total isolation in a incomprehensible universe is the human lot, my paintings usually tell of human loneliness. They also express human transience against the background of the eternal scenery of indifferent Nature. My art is born from the dialectic conflict between Man and Universe".²⁷

27 Marek Żuławski. *Malarstwo, grafika. Dzieła ze zbiorów Muzeum Tatrzańskiego im. Dr Tytusa Chałubińskiego w Zakopanem* [Marek Żuławski. Painting, Printmaking, Works from the Tatra Muzeum in Zakopane], exhibition cat., Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, Częstochowa, 1988.

Kenneth Coutts-Smith interpreted Żuławski's painting as showing Man "in his essential isolation", trapped in his own body, and as rendering "incurable conflicts": those between man and man, man and nature, and man and God.²⁸ Ruszkowski, in contrast, was a "painter in love with life", as noted in *The Yorkshire Post* review on the artist's retrospective at the Leeds City Art Gallery.²⁹ What brought the two painters together, in turn, was their predilection for sensual painterly tissue, their focus on the tactile qualities of pigments and on modulating textural effects, and their concentration on defining forms that were essentially figurative. This is because what Ruszkowski and Żuławski had in common was, above all, the humanism of their attitudes, with the human condition invariably placed in the centre of attention.³⁰ "My painting is full of allusions", wrote Żuławski in *Studium do autoportretu* [Study for a Self-portrait]. "Its goal is to create a mood, a climate, an atmosphere that compels the viewer to meditate. I wish a painting to be more than an arithmetic sum of its elements; I wish it to be a symbol or a visual interpretation of an experience. I aim at expressing my approach to the world, at saying with painterly means something that otherwise cannot be said. I aim at creating a new image of a human being in the context of today".³¹

While both Ruszkowski and Żuławski were studying the art of the Nabis and the Fauves in the galleries of Paris, Potworowski, who some years earlier than they had managed to absorb, all at once, the lesson of Post-Impressionism, the vast collections of the Louvre and Léger's machinist Modernism, was already at work back in Poland, having established himself at an estate in Rudki and later in Grębanin. There he continued his explorations in the framework of the colourist doctrine of a symbiosis of colour, light and space. Fate would bring Potworowski and Ruszkowski closer to each other during the war, when they stayed first in Scotland, then in London, and then in Cornwall in the 1950s.

A comparison of the methods of transposing Cornwall's landscape into picture, as created by these two artists, reveals how their paths diverged, even though they had had the same starting point, i.e. Bonnardesque Post-Impressionism. Potworowski, to whom the paint's pigment, which he identified with light, was an essential carrier of meanings, would radically exceed the boundaries of Bonnard's formula of Intimism and decorativeness by moving towards an allusive abstraction. He owed this transformation to his profes-

28 M. Kitowska-Łysiak, "Marek Żuławski", 2008, http://www.culture.pl/baza-sztuki-pelna-tresc/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/eAN5/content/marek-zulawski [accessed 6 August 2013].

29 W.T.O., "Painter in love with life", *The Yorkshire Post*, 6 October 1966, p. 4.

30 E. Phelps, "Zdzisław Ruszkowski, Jablonski Gallery", *Arts Review*, 27 October, 1987, p. 3; M. Chapman, "Art and Artists", *What's on in London*, 22 February 1952, p. 3;

O. Blakeston, "Transcending the mode", *Art News and Review*, 20 February 1954, p. 4; M. Chapman, "Art and Artists", *What's on in London*, 18 November 1955, p. 4.

31 Marek Żuławski. *Malarstwo, grafika...* op. cit.

sorship at the anti-academic Bath Academy of Art in Corsham (1949–1958), which provided a breakthrough impulse to his artistic vision as well as to his close contacts with Peter Lanyon and Victor Pasmore, and, indirectly, also to the influence of the avant-garde St. Ives School. Ruszkowski would repeatedly return to Bonnard to rework or paraphrase his artistic tropes, and he would reveal in them new plastic meanings which occasionally would be antithetical to Bonnardesque conventions of representation. The reminiscences of the Nabis' synthetism would strengthen even further and the jarring chromatic contrasts derived from the Fauves would sharpen in his late work. Under the influence of the English avant-garde of the 1950s, Potworowski managed to reject the Post-Impressionist stigma and to liberate himself from the colourist canon of the Polish K.P. group (Polish: 'kapiści'); yet his appreciation for the structural logic of Cézanne's landscapes remained an essential impulse that led him towards a depiction based not as much on direct visual perception as on memory, which amalgamated the sensual experiences and filtered the observed reality through the artist's emotions. Similarly to Cézanne, Potworowski used geometrical figures: the circle, triangle and rectangle, as the basic modules of pictorial architectonics. Cézanne was a crucial reference point to Ruszkowski as well; it was Cézanne's artistic experiences, as well as his notes attesting to an incessant determination in seeking the essence of objects and of nature, that taught Ruszkowski to impart a perceptible structure on compositions whose painterly tissue pulsed with colour tones and whose contours had the fluidity of arabesques (Fig. 7). Even though they created their own artistic idioms, both Ruszkowski and Potworowski had absorbed Cézanne's influence deeply enough to develop a constant concern for the painting's structural quality. To both, the painting's ontological status consisted in capturing the play of light and colour in the pictorial space, and in imbuing the aesthetic experience with the element of their own personality and with the authenticity of their own experience. Both were intrigued by spatial manipulations and revelled in the freedom of using various, occasionally unexpected points of view on an interior or a landscape, and of integrating them in the compositional frame. Both painted their landscapes in an atelier, where notes and sketches from nature stimulated their memory. Both were painters of the sea, too, although their approach to the element of water was different.³² Ruszkowski focused on the highly stylised reflections decoratively arranged on the transparent or darkened surface of the water, while Potworowski tersely rendered the grimness and rapacity of the ocean.

In fact, the shared elements of their creative attitudes did not preclude the emergence of essential differences between the painting idioms that each of them had worked out already during the sojourn in Cornwall. The increasingly more refined harmonies which Potworowski derived from the limited palette

32 L. Berryman, "Zdzisław Ruszkowski. The Jablonski Gallery", *HAM&HIGH*, 6 November 1987, p. 4.



Fig. 7. Zdzisław Ruszkowski, *Steps in Lyme Regis* [Schody w Lyme Regis], 1977, oil on canvas, 91.4 × 61 cm, Abbaye de Flaran, France, Collection Simonow

of related colours; his toned-down chromatic contrasts; the pictorial space reduced to the plane of the canvas; the form close to a sign in its conciseness; the controlled painterly gesture; the faint skin-like texture; the fragments of grey sacks and nets pasted within the painterly matter – all of this was very different from the substantial heaviness of the colour patches in Ruszkowski's works, from his chromatic counterpoints and resonances, from colours sensitive to neighbouring tones,³³ from the ornamental planes placed additively in the compositional frame and, finally, from the tensions between the decorative flatness of the canvas and the illusive depth achieved by means of a reasoned configuration of colour areas and the diagonal compositional axes. The radical English avant-garde turned Potworowski's artistic vision towards abstraction, whereas the sculptural volume of forms painted by Ruszkowski was influenced by the biomorphic if abstract sculpture of Henry Moore.³⁴ In fact, some of Ruszkowski's landscapes and still lifes painted from the 1960s to the 1980s also approach close to abstraction,³⁵ but Ruszkowski never truly

33 M. Bohusz-Szyszko, "Wystawa Zdzisława Ruszkowskiego" [The Exhibition of Zdzisław Ruszkowski], *Życie* (London), 2 March 1952, p. 3.

34 E. Newton, "Colour, Space and Light", *Time and Tide*, 26 October 1957, p. 4.

35 M. Lewin, "Art", *HAM&HIGH*, 22 January 1983, p. 3.

suspended or questioned the elementary relation between nature and art and never gave in to the tendency to absolutise and autonomise painterly language. In his imagery, the human figure retains its integrity regardless of the environment in which it is presented, i.e. the northern or the southern landscape, the sections of a small town or of the intimate domestic and studio interior. Nor is the integrity of the human figure affected by the configuration of colour patches that form or deform it, while these patches may emanate light or absorb it; they may resemble a composition of stained glass or softly permeate one another; they may be granulated, lumpy, rubbed in; they may reveal or conceal the brushstroke. Ruszkowski, Żuławski and Potworowski were three émigré artists much respected in the British Isles, three painters with shared Post-Impressionist roots and divergent aspirations; yet it seems that the purely human, psychological and spiritual element was common to their creative stances, although each of them interpreted it differently.

In 1982, Józef Czapski recalled his first meeting with Ruszkowski, which had taken place fifty years earlier, soon after the painters of the KP group returned to Poland.³⁶ He noted Ruszkowski's isolation within the colourist milieu, which by then was already evident, and his focus on his own work. One of the reviewers of his retrospective at the Leeds City Art Gallery in 1966 speculated that the artist must have felt in Scotland, where a colourist trend had developed as well, as if he were among his own;³⁷ yet the reviewer could not but notice that the artist had retained his own, individual approach that was free from local borrowings. Ruszkowski was thus a personality possessed of a multicultural creative potential, an artist as Polish as he was British. As a painter, he never severed his link with France; yet neither did he submit to the demands of current artistic trends. He had created a formula of colourism that was rooted in the European tradition and yet idiosyncratic. The aesthetics he developed was based on syncretic tenets, but it synthesised artistic impulses in the unquestionably original idiom of 20th-century painting.³⁸ He came close to Schopenhauer's ideal of the "pure subject of cognition" who, freed from existential pain and fully focused on the aesthetic experience, in an act of contemplation reaches the Platonic essence of being.

(Translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz)

36 Czapski, op. cit., p. 118.

37 W.T.O., 1966, p. 4. P. Long with E. Cumming, *The Scottish Colourists 1900–1930: F. C. B. Cadell, J. D. Fergusson, G. L. Hunter, S. J. Peploe*, exhibition cat., National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh in association with Royal Academy of Arts, London–Edinburgh, 2000.

38 A. Drwęska, "Fiat Lux et Color", *Tydzień Polski*, 24 May 1975, p. 3.

Abstract

Zdzisław Ruszkowski (1907–1991), the son of a painter (Wacław Ruszkowski) and a graduate of the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts (1929), a member of the Pryzmat [Prism] group of Polish Colourists, left Poland for Paris in 1935. A dialogue with the old masters and with Bonnard's Post-Impressionism constituted the main formative stimuli for Ruszkowski in the late 1930s. After the outbreak of the Second World War, he enlisted in the Polish Army in Brittany. Upon the collapse of the French front he joined the Polish armed forces in Scotland and, from 1940 onwards, all fields of his activity were connected with Great Britain. In the late 1940s, Ruszkowski created an original pictorial morphology which referred to Post-Impressionism by enhancing the decorative qualities of the chromatic patch. Ruszkowski developed his idiosyncratic pictorial idiom in the landscapes he painted in Cornwall in the 1950s. His friendship with Henry Moore implied a more "sculptural" rendering of the pictorial form. The artistic bond with Moore entailed, in the early 1960s, a theory of aureolism which constituted a cornerstone of Ruszkowski's artistic practice. The aesthetic of "aureolism" which Ruszkowski developed until the end of his life embraced all of his previous experiences and fascinations.