

FOREWORD

The centenary of the Great Avant-garde of the early 20th century has inspired the whole artistic and cultural community in our country to celebrate this unique event.

The Great Avant-garde has become a field for multifaceted analyses of art theoreticians and historians who rescue the names of great artists, theoreticians, poets, and writers from obscurity. It is their unyielding attitude that has opened the eyes of the world to new phenomena. We are all the beneficiaries of the Avant-garde, which has permanently changed the way of thinking about form, function, and the role of art. It was the affirmation of independent thinking, pioneering ideas, and breaking fixed thought patterns. It drew inspiration from the achievements of technology and science and it aimed at changing social awareness. In the past, artists provided positive stimuli, but they also provoked their readers or viewers. Each period in the history of art can have its avant-garde. There may always appear charismatic creators, new social phenomena that will give high status to cultural changes, release new energy.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź is especially indebted to its patron Władysław Strzemiński – one of the founders of our school. He was an art theorist, an artist, an educator, a visionary who, giving unique character to our didactic profile, truly built the substantive foundation of the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź. It should be remembered that the idea of establishing the academy arose from the need to educate designers, highly sought after on the market at that time. Łódź was a city of dynamically developing textile industry, whose potential was to be enhanced by the specialist education provided at the Academy. It was Władysław Strzemiński who saw the need to combine the functional with the creative; he attached great importance both to the designers' expert skills and to their general art education. We owe the present educational profile of the Academy in Łódź to Strzemiński. Every designer who graduates from it is a thoroughly educated artist. The teaching methods developed by Strzemiński are still valid today.

The artist-painter Władysław Strzemiński was a pioneer of the Constructivist avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s in Poland. His activity had a huge impact on the Łódź artistic milieu. Let us mention his theory of Unism, which revolutionized the painting of that period, and situated the art of the Polish Great Avant-garde at the forefront of the world avant-garde. At this point we have to mention Katarzyna Kobro, the artist's life partner, but first and foremost one of the most

outstanding sculptors of the 20th century, whose creative stance is analysed today on par with the work of the most influential artists in the world.

Unfortunately, few of her modern geometric, abstract sculptures shaping their surroundings have been preserved. According to Kobro, "A sculpture should not be a composition of form enclosed in a solid, but rather an open spatial structure in which the inner part of the compositional space correlates with the external space. The energy of the successive shapes in space generates spatio-temporal rhythm." Following this, we can understand her art in the context of urban planning. This urban-planning way of thinking is evidenced, for example, by the project of a functional kindergarten, which we want to realize today, building a kindergarten according to Katarzyna Kobro's specifications. The exhibition *We, the successors*, at which our lecturers showed what their work inherits from the work of the artist, began the celebrations of the centenary of the Great Avant-garde.

The Polish avant-garde dates back to the interwar and early post-war period. Taking into account the situation in our country at the time, when it was building its structures after regaining independence, and later rebuilding itself after the Second World War, reluctantly embracing Socialist Realism, the emergence of this kind of trend was an expression of rebellion and an escape from realism. The avant-garde introduced controversial forms, distancing itself from figuration. It was the time of Strzemiński, Kobro, and the whole movement undersigning all of the new phenomena in art. We should keep in mind that the ideas of those artists were not accepted then. Only time has shown the innovativeness and creativeness of this search for new way of thinking about art and of the shift from the figurative to the abstract approach. It was them who created the concept of the avant-garde and gave it meaning.

This year one of the most important events at our Academy was the ceremony of awarding an honorary doctorate to Józef Robakowski. His oeuvre, including art photography and paintings, films, videos, objects and installations, takes after the artistic stance of his predecessors. He is an avant-garde artist of his time, going his own artistic path, not accepting compromises, challenging stereotypes. Robakowski is our icon in the field of new media, film and performance, and he is an internationally recognised artist.

Another part of the celebration of the centenary of the Great Avant-garde was the exhibition *Inter-Woven*, which presented the work of 12 Canadian professors. It was inspired by the combination of two fields of art – textile and graphic art, for which Łódź is well known in the world. The concept of the exhibition was formulated by Professor Derek Besant, an outstanding Canadian graphic artist and lecturer at the University of Calgary. The presented works are a combination of graphic art and textile design, which is also a strong point of the education at our Academy. The brilliant exhibition presented at the Kobro Gallery highlighted the idea of the convergence of these two fields of art.

One of the main events was also the conference devoted to the relations between the early and the modern avant-garde. It was entitled *The Avant-garde and the avant-gardes*, because one of its aims was to consider whether we can refer to the art of the late 20th and early 21st century using the term “avant-garde”. This issue requires both theoretical and historical reflection.

The conference was accompanied by the exhibition *The Avant-garde and the avant-gardes*, which evidences an interesting dialogue between generations. It can be seen at the Kobro Gallery, the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź. It is curated by Professor Monika Krygier, Professor Wojciech Leder and Professor Grzegorz Sztabiński.

We have also interested our students in the topic of the avant-garde, organising a student contest entitled *Hommage à l'Avant-garde*. The results of the contest are presented at the Gallery Hol.

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