

## SUMMARY

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 ART EXHIBITIONS IN WARSAW  
 AS AN INSTRUMENT OF THE ARTISTIC POLICY  
 PURSUED BY THE AUTHORITIES  
 OF THE POLISH KINGDOM FROM 1815 TO 1830

The Constitutional period of the Kingdom of Poland (popularly known as the Congress Kingdom), stretching between the Congress of Vienna and the November Rising, takes a prominent place in the history of Polish art. It was precisely at that time that modern forms of Polish artistic life flowered to an unprecedented degree, enabling access to the fine arts to broad masses of the population and making the fine arts an integral element of both the public and private spheres, which underwent a process of democratisation in the period. An undertaking of particular importance in this regard was the institution of periodic public exhibitions held in Warsaw, which on the one hand enabled the non-artists to become familiar with the results of academic education (incidentally, the exhibitions were affiliated with the University of Warsaw), among others, and on the other hand, was a factor that stimulated the development of art criticism in the press. The inaugural exhibition, staged in 1819, was at the same time the first such event in the history of art on the area of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The existing literature dealing with the Warsaw exhibitions boils down actually to just one monograph, being the monumental edition of historical sources entitled: *Warszawskie wystawy sztuk pięknych w latach 1819–1845* [The Warsaw fine arts exhibitions in the years 1819–1845] (that is, including also a few showings held in the post-November-rising period which, however, are another matter), published under the editorship of Stefan Kozakiewicz, who was also the author of an extensive introduction to the work. The book came out in 1952, as the first volume in the State Institute of Art series of *Źródła do dziejów sztuki polskiej* [Materials to the history of Polish art], which initially followed a clearly Marxist line of evaluating historical phenomena. The origins of the series stemmed from a belief that there was a need to 'make an ingenious reference to socially progressive, revolutionary periods from the past', which would encourage better 'research and development of Polish socialist realist art'. Hence the interest in phenomena that were related to social democratisation (that is, in Marxist terms, the 'progress' and 'revolutionism', which in the sphere of art were supposed to be manifested under the guise of the development of realist forms). From this point of view, as Andrzej Ryszkiewicz had written in his review of the book, it would be hard to find a better topic than, precisely, the Warsaw exhibitions of that period: after all, they were 'one of these new superstructure institutions established by the capitalist system of the Congress Kingdom

that was being formed, developed and modernised in this period'.

While analysing the origins of the idea of exhibitions in that particular place and time, Kozakiewicz also pointed up to the economic and social motivations associated with the increasing development of the capitalist order. While emphasising the affinity of art exhibitions with the industrial ones, which were instituted by the same act (and were to take place simultaneously), the scholar wrote that 'the new economic and social circumstances had played, by their very nature, an important role also in the emergence of art exhibitions as an institution that enabled an economic exchange of the works of art'. 'The propagation of aesthetic values' was, in his understanding, a natural outcome of the democratisation of Polish post-feudal society, typical of capitalism, as a result of which 'culture ceases to be the privilege of the rich and the property of the court: it encompasses broader strata of urban intelligentsia stemming from the bourgeoisie and nobility'.

The present author does not question Kozakiewicz's key thesis about the close relationship between the Warsaw exhibitions and the social democratisation, as he considers it not only convincing but deserving to be further developed as well. Regardless of the fact that the Marxist way of interpreting the past was forced upon Polish art history of the mid-twentieth century by political factors (and, unlike for example in France, Great Britain or the United States, it was not on a par with other methodological proposals in the scholarly discourse), there is no denying that it is precisely to Marxism that we owe a number of pioneering treatments that analyse art as a social phenomenon. The critical heir to this specific way of thinking about art is the currently flourishing cultural approach which stimulates a more profound and nuanced analysis of the relationships between artistic culture and the socio-economical circumstances in which it was developed. The socio-political status of artistic phenomena and their relationship to contemporary ideologies or hierarchies stands at the centre of interest of cultural art historians. It is not the mere problem of the influence of social processes on the development of art (that is, the issue that Marxists were concerned with) that constitutes the main object of their research, because their interests focus primarily on the analysis of the role played by art in these processes. While sharing this approach towards analysing art, the present author intends to reconsider the problem of the function of exhibitions as acts of promotion and to demonstrate that the available documentary material (the same that was at Kozakiewicz's disposal) substantiates different proposals to be put forward and consequently allows to consider the exhibitions differently – not merely as artistic or economic phenomena, but also as purely political ones. It must be remembered that exhibitions were the government's initiative and were organised under the auspices of the authorities of the Kingdom of Poland. The politicians who stood at the helm of the 'resurrected' Polish state then and who initiated the exhibitions, are shown

in Kozakiewicz's narration as enlightened and far-sighted gentlemen whose actions were in keeping with the progressive spirit of the time and closely related to the advances in the economic situation (implicitly, in this way accelerating the dialectic development of Polish culture, from feudalism to capitalism and then to socialism). The present article, however, shows that the problem of the motivations of the government of the Polish Kingdom behind its initiative and the issue of patronage of the Warsaw exhibitions may be problematised still further, if we ask not about the aim of the exhibitions (a question already answered by Kozakiewicz), but about the aim of promoting art in that particular place and time (and who benefited from that), and furthermore, about the purpose of promoting art using such an idiosyncratic tool as exhibitions (assuming that the authorities were not allowed to foster or, for that matter, initiate such activities on a honorary basis, but, above all, had to take into account the well-being of the 'resurrected' state and the welfare of the society seen from this point of view). By setting the organisation of the exhibitions (e.g. the composition of the juries and their decisions) and the contemporary critical discourse dealing with them (legal acts and critical reviews) in their specific political and socio-cultural context, the present author was able to put forward a claim that the democratisation of the access to art by means of public exhibitions was in the service of the conservative agenda of the government's spearheads of a progress of civilisation, and was intended to keep the democratic changes under control. The academic ideal of art, whose promotion was the aim of the exhibitions, may be interpreted as a *sui generis* instrument of symbolic control over the society which, as a result of unavoidable reforms (introduced for political reasons) acquired more freedom in the public sphere. The exhibitions can be seen as a sign of an increase in the self-appreciation of the then nascent public opinion but also as an instrument of constraining it within the limits of the, after all still conservative, social order.