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“LOOKING BACK” – AN ARTISTIC TENDENCY IN POLISH INTERIOR DESIGN AROUND 1910*

Throughout the first decade of the 20th century, the decorative art of different European circles seemed to be somewhat overburdened with innovative secessionist forms and started to trend towards tradition and historical styles. This was also connected with various nations' pursuit of roots and identities, and with attempts to base their national styles on historical forms. Many German and Austro-Hungarian designers turned to Biedermeier, which is a complex phenomenon already discussed in the literature¹. Polish design at the turn of the 20th century also demonstrated paraphrases of Biedermeier, as was discussed in a separate text². At the same time, around 1910, there could be noticed references to the styles of Louis XVI, Empire, and Louis Philippe or to other styles

of the 18th and 19th century decorative arts. Most artists did not copy old decorations or forms but sought to create their own interpretations or to combine them in an eclectic way. These inspirations were combined with fairy tale-like, colourful orientalism. This tendency can be observed in the work of Viennese and Parisian designers. This article discusses this trend in Polish design of the early 20th century. To illustrate it, I compare the interiors and furniture designed by Henryk Uziembło, Ludwik Wojtyczko and Karol Frycz with those of French and Austrian designers.

Referring back to the past, “looking back” in decorative art can be seen in the works of the Vienna Workshops artists. It emerged especially after 1907, when the master of the minimalist form who repeatedly would reject decoration, Koloman Moser, had left the Workshops. “The revenge of the ornament”, after years of purist Quadrastil, could already be seen in the interior of the Brussels Stoclet palace, designed by Josef Hoffmann (1905-1911). The interiors are dominated by massive furniture covered with intarsia, leather or quilted textiles; what was unusually decorative was the floors, wallpapers, wooden and marble wall facings as well as some almost abstract mosaics by Gustav Klimt. After 1909, Hoffmann clearly turned to classical forms, examples of which are the Ast and Skyra-Primavesi villas in Vienna and the country villa of the Primavesi in Winkelsdorf. Their furnishings were a development of the style visible in the Stoclet palace. The interiors were filled with massive, carved and upholstered furniture, wooden or marble wall facings, patchworked carpets, multicoloured curtains and wallpapers, etc. These designs were the heralds of art déco. The ornament triumphed around 1910 in ceramics, metalwork, jewellery and textiles designed by Hoffmann, Carl Otto Czeschka,

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¹ See: *Biedermeier. The Invention of Simplicity*, ed. by H. Ottomeyer, K. A. Schröder, L. Winters, Ostfildern, 2006; *Biedermeier. Art and Culture in the Bohemian Lands 1814–1848*, ed. by H. Brožková, R. Vondráček, Prague, 2010; W. O. HARROD, ‘Clarity, Proportion, Purity, and Restraint: The Biedermeier and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Modernism’, *Centropa a Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts*, 2010, no. 2, pp. 106–127; Ch. LONG, ‘Adolf Loos and the Biedermeier Revival in Vienna’, *Centropa a Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts*, 2010, no. 2, pp. 128–140.

² A. WÓJCIK, ‘Parafrazy biedermeieru w meblarstwie polskim początku XX wieku i w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym’, *Journal of the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art*, 2019, no. 234, <https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2019/0234-wojcik-PL> (dostęp: 12.10.2020).





1. Henryk Uziembło, the design of the living room in the Adolf Oppenheim villa in Sosnowiec, 1906, phot. courtesy of the Suffczyński family

Michael Powolny, and Eduard Josef Wimmer-Wisgrill. Around that time, multiplied, geometrized, tightly space-filling floral ornaments appeared. Artists did not abandon abstract geometric decoration, but rather gave them illusionistic forms. Around 1915, the Vienna Workshops further developed its decorative forms. This trend was started by a new, younger generation of designers who joined the Vienna Workshops in the 1910s. They distanced themselves both from the tendencies prevalent at the beginnings of the Workshops and from functionalism. Designers such as Dagobert Peche were not afraid to reinterpret old styles, to exaggerate furniture proportions, to move to the limits of logic, to combine contrasting shapes (for example, rigid, geometrical forms with curves, the stiffness of wood with the softness of quilted fabrics); they did not emphasize furniture components, but blurred its borders, “wallpapered” it with multiplied motifs like a wall, not spatial objects; they used lush ornamentation inspired by ancient styles, and the decorations were stylized and rescaled³.

Approximately at the same time, and happening likewise in Paris, designers searched for new inspirations. These arrived with Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes, which performed in Paris from 1908. The scenography and costumes, designed by Leon Bakst and Aleksander Benois, combined fascination with Middle Eastern, ancient, old Russian and Asian arts. Owning to this, such shows as “Oriental Fantasies”, “Fire Bird”, and “Scheherazade” could reflect the fairy tale-like atmosphere of the imaginary Orient. The Ballets Russes exerted a great impact on ladies’ fashion and Paul Poiret’s designs; it also made a certain mark on interior design – intense colours were more often used, and there also appeared a fashion for private interiors filled with comfortable, low sofas and chaises longues, and for soft carpets, carelessly tossed cushions, multi-coloured wallpapers and textiles,

³ See W.J. SCHWEIGER, M. BRAUSCH, Ch. BRANDSTÄTTER, *Wiener Werkstätte. Art et artisanat 1903–1932*, Bruxelles, 1983; W.J. SCHWEIGER, *Art nouveau à Vienne. Le wiener Werkstätte*, Paris,

1990; *Dagobert Peche and the Wiener Werkstätte*, ed. by P. Noever, H. Egger, New York–New Haven, 2002; C. KLEIN-PRIMAVESI, *Die Familie Primavesi. Kunst und Mode der Wiener Werkstätte*, Wien, 2006; G. FAHR-BECKER, *Wiener Werkstätte 1903–1932*, Köln, 2015; *Yearning for Beauty. The Wiener Werkstätte and the Stoclet House*, ed. by P. Noever, V. Doufour, E.F. Sekler, Ostferrn–Ruit, 2016.



2. André Mare, the living room of the "townsman", the Autumn Salon, Paris, 1919, after: "L'Art Décoratif", 29, 1913, p. 94

and dim lights. Such designs (see "Art et Décoration", 36, 1914–1919, p. 183) were created in "École Martine", founded by Poiret in 1911, after his journey to Vienna, Brussels and Berlin, during which he made himself familiar with the Vienna Workshops and viewed the Stoclet Palace.

A breakthrough in French design was made during the Paris 1910 "Autumn Salon" by a set of nine interiors created by German artists: Bruno Paul, Theodor Veil, Otto Bauer, Paul Ludwig Troost, Paul Wenz, Adalbert Niemeyer, and Richard Riemerschmidt, among others. The German artists had been invited to Paris after their exhibition in 1908 in Munich, which had made a great impression on French delegates. The German designers' interiors were characterized by simplicity, elegance, and harmony of elements; furniture and decoration forms subtly referred to the styles of the Louis Philippe, Biedermeier, and the Empire style. French critics attacked these German artists for copying old styles and using too intense colours. There could be sensed a fear of Germany triumphing over France in the decorative arts. It was this superiority of German designs over already anachronistic French art nouveau that pushed young designers to search for inspiration in French artistic handcraft as well as in the latest artistic trends. These young artists soon became known as

the "colourists" (coloristes). The circle included such artists as André Mare, Louis Süe, André Groult, Paul Huillard, Paul Iribe, Paul Follot and others. Cooperating with each other, the "colourists" designed complete furnishings where intense, bright, often contrasting colours were the dominating element. In short, the artists created atmospheric places. Colour was used to rejuvenate earlier forms of historic furniture. In interior design, they advocated noble, classic geometrization and simplicity, so they intentionally referred to classicism and the Empire style; yet they also had an interest in comfort and freedom, hence references to the Louis Philippe style. References to French folk motifs were not uncommon. Textiles, cushions, ceramics, and trinkets filled out interiors. Thus, designers created a slightly eclectic whole whose aim was to present in a modern way the heritage of French artistic crafts. In 1912, Süe founded "Atelier Français". In the pages of "L'Art Décoratif" (27, 1912) André Véra announced that "Atelier" would be seeking to create the French national style in decorative art and to answer the demand for luxurious but not ostentatious designs. The style was to be based on the French decorative art of the mid- to late 18th century and on that of the early and middle 19th century. Artists associated with "Atelier" presented their interior designs at the 1912 "Autumn Salon" in the famous Maison



3. Henryk Uziembło, the music salon in the Dłuski sanatorium in Kościelisko-Zakopane, 1909, phot. courtesy of the Jagiellonian University Museum

Cubiste. In 1919, Mare and Süe transformed “Atelier” into “Compagnie des Arts Français”.⁴

In early 20th century Polish design, there could be noticed a protest against the commercialized version of art nouveau. Wavy lines, fluid shapes, and pastel colours were associated with something foreign, which went against the needs of Polish applied art. The press, for example, wrote that in the West “furniture of strange shapes is being created, with wavy lines, of a certain characteristic rhythm, in dim, faint, uncertain colours. This is already commonly known as the English style, the modern style and, most strangely of all, the Secession style (...) all [this work] rather timid in effect, as if misty in tone, crawling, faded, anemic, with lines morbidly elongated and pretentiously mannerist, unappealing to Polish artists who have felt the need for stoutness,

health, energy and honesty.”⁵ An especially strong opposition to such forms could be noted among the artists of the Polish Applied Art Society, founded in Cracow in 1901. These artists turned towards folk art; they were also inspired by Biedermeier style. The two influences were to emphasise Polish distinctiveness and to lead to the emergence of a vernacular style.

At the same time, some interior and furniture designers’ works revealed a fascination with colour and experiments with the forms of earlier furniture. This phenomenon is an interesting niche among trends noticeable on the Polish artistic scene. However, Polish designers did not strive to refer to the Polish handicraft in its heyday; their aim was not to create a distinctive vernacular style; they rather brought to their work the element of experimentation with forms and colours and a freedom of inspiration from different forms and styles. This movement in interior design generated an atmosphere of freedom and lightness, and therefore in Polish interiors this was used to decorate living rooms, restaurants, cinemas and

⁴ See N.J. TROY, ‘Toward a Redefinition of Tradition in French Design, 1895 to 1914’, *Design Issue. History. Theory. Criticism*, 1, 1984, no 2, pp. 53–69; idem, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France. Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, New Haven, 1991; F. CAMARD, *Süe et Mare et Le Compagnie Des Arts Français*, Paris, 1993.

⁵ T. JAROSZYŃSKI, ‘Wystawa krakowskiego Towarzystwa sztuki stosowanej’, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 1902, no. 41, p. 803.



4. Ludwik Wojtyczko, the living room in Antoni Suski's apartment in Kraków, 1909, phot. courtesy of Graphic Art Room, the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków

theatres. The Polish designs were often stylistically similar to the French and Austrian ones, which is to be discussed further. This clearly demonstrated that Polish designers sought to follow the latest trends in European capitals.

Polish designers were constantly in contact with foreign artistic centres. Henryk Uziembło was a graduate of the Viennese Kunstgewerbeschule; in the years 1903–1904 he resided in Paris, where he studied at Académie Julian and at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière under Eugène Grasset, among others; his studies in design continued in London at the Kensington Museum.⁶ Karol Frycz did his degrees at the Polytechnic in Munich, Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna under Alfred Roller, Koloman Moser and Felician Myrbach, the Herkomer Art School in London and at Académie Julian in Paris in 1911.⁷ Contemporary French design trends could also be studied in “Art et Décoration”, “Art Décoratif”, „Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration”, „Die Kunst”, „Innendekoration”, „Das Interieur”, „Kunst und Kunsthandwerk”, „Kunstgewerbeblatt”, and „The Studio”,

all of these being periodicals subscribed to, for example, by The Science and Industry Museum of Kraków. The latest trends in interior design were also noticed by the Polish press. In 1914, in the Warsaw periodical “Świat” (“The World”), there appeared a text entitled “An apartment à la mode. Postimpressionist and futurist interiors.” In it, the author gave a slightly ironic account of the latest Paris trends in interior and furniture design. He claimed that since Paris fashion had been influenced by Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, and since Paul Poiret had begun to promote a new dress cut, interior designers, too, had started to search for appropriate backgrounds for these creations. “Świat” wrote: “this new style is a mix of epochs and artistic currents”. It combined elements of the Vienna and Munich Secession movements, Aubrey Beardsley’s work and that of Chinese and Japanese arts; additionally, interior designs were influenced by avant-garde currents in painting, by cubism and futurism. The correspondent admitted that certain contrasting colour schemes and simplified furniture forms produced interesting effects. Then the author described some interiors illustrating the trend. They were filled with furniture painted in intense colours; the walls matched the furniture; lamps and chandeliers were in the shapes of balls and bowls; items from

⁶ B. POLICHA, *Henryk Uziembło: nowe informacje życiorysowe, zagadnienie malowideł ściennych i dekoracji wnętrz*, MA diss. Jagiellonian University, Kraków, 2010, pp. 20–21.

⁷ See L. KUCHTÓWNA, *Karol Frycz*, Warszawa, 2004.



5. Karol Frycz, the restaurant hall in The English Hotel in Warsaw, 1912, after: *Historia hotelu Angielskiego w Warszawie i opis pobytu w nim cesarza Napoleona I w 1812 r.* (*The history of The English Hotel in Warsaw and l'Napoleon I's visit to it in 1812*), Warszawa 1914

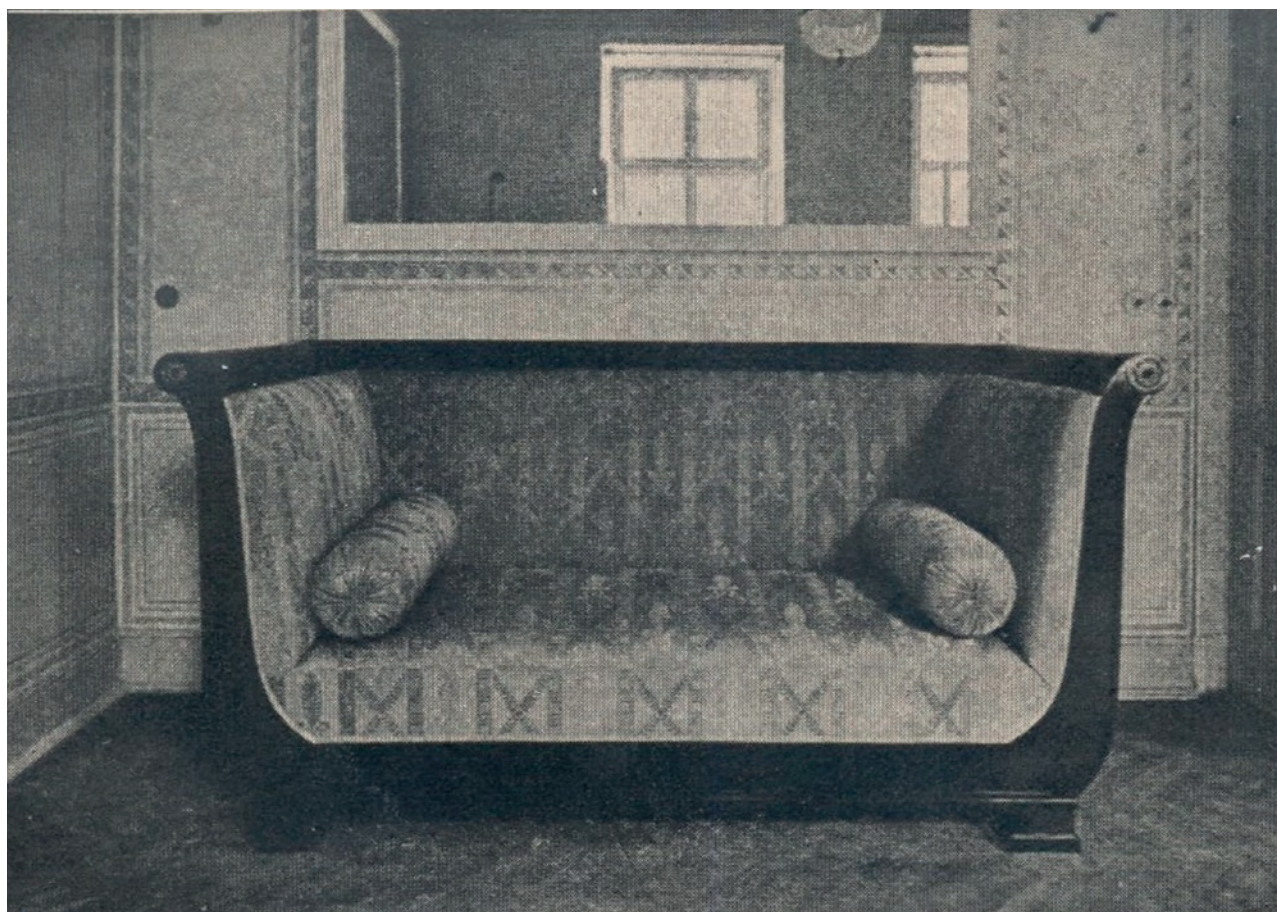
the Far East were also present. The text was accompanied by three illustrations probably from Paris fashion journals. They showed interiors with checked floors, low sofas decorated with colourful cushions, lamps in the shapes of bowls, the furniture being variations on the styles of Louis XVI and the Empire, and small, irregular wall paintings. The interiors were shown occupied by ladies in fashionable dresses.⁸

Around 1906, in Polish art, there appeared interiors whose features were convergent with those of French “colourists” designs. Designers used intense, contrasting colours and repeated and geometrized patterns in textiles; they filled interiors with numerous items and trinkets, and furnished them with comfortable upholstered furniture which sometimes loosely referred to earlier styles. This tendency was evident in Henryk Uziembło’s design of a music room, dated 1906, produced for the banker Adolf Oppenheim’s villa in Sosnowiec (fig. 1). Unfortunately, it is known only from a black and white reproduction. The whole of the interior was filled with furniture, textiles, trinkets and paintings. The heart of the room was the

grand piano; additionally, Uziembło furnished the room with a set of upholstered furniture – striped and dotted couches and armchairs. The interior also included a table, a bookcase, a jardinière and a cabinet. The floor was covered with a carpet with a pattern different from that of the upholstery. The walls had wainscoting on their lower surfaces and polychrome on the upper ones. Paintings hung on the walls; the doors and windows were covered by heavy curtains. From the ceiling, there hung a large chandelier with crystals. The whole was completed by such details as vases with flowers, trinkets, and a bust. The interior presented an eclectic mix of patterns, objects, and details, giving the impression of a comfortable living room that had been created by the inhabitants, adding furniture over many years, rather than having been designed by an artist. Uziembło’s design could be compared with interiors created a few years later and presented in the Autumn Salon in Paris, for example with a living room design by André Groult (1910) or with André Mare’s living room of “the townsman” (1912, fig 2).⁹

⁸ ‘Mieszkanie à la mode. Postimpresjonistyczne i futurystyczne wnętrza’, *Świat*, 1914, no. 16, p. 13.

⁹ A. DUNCAN, *The Paris Salon, 1895–1914*, vol. III: *Furniture*, Woodbridge, 1996, pp. 267, 429.



6. Karol Frycz, a couch in The English Hotel in Warsaw, after: *Historia hotelu Angielskiego w Warszawie i opis pobytu w nim cesarza Napoleona I w 1812 r.* (*The history of The English Hotel in Warsaw and Napoleon I's visit to it in 1812*), Warszawa 1914

Uziembło continued to develop this style in his subsequent interior designs. In 1909, he completed a design for a music room in the Dłuskis' sanatorium in Kościelisko-Zakopane (fig. 3).¹⁰ The room comprised two sections, a concert area with a grand piano and a reception area. The interior became a variation on the theme of classicism with a note of folk art, all of suffused in intense, warm colours. The furniture was of very simple form, delicately referring to classicism by means of the Ionic column motif, volutes, and palmettes. The furniture was varnished white, and its upholstery was yellow. Yellow walls were decorated with polychrome in orange and gold. Wavy lines, originating indecorative folk art, divided the walls into rectangular spaces filled with motifs of classical wreaths and compositions inspired by bunches of peacock feathers. Their brightness was intensified by a panel of stained glass showing motifs of stylized peacock feathers in orange, copper yellow and pink. The sheen of the colours was emphasized by the items completing the interior décor, by chandeliers, wall lamps with strings of glass beads, and

mirrors between the rooms, as well as by a gilded bronze fireplace grate and a mosaic above the fireplace.

In 1909, in Kraków, Ludwik Wojtyczko, an architect associated with the TPPS, designed a living room furniture set for Antoni Suski (fig. 4). The designer created an interior full of comfort, loosely referring to earlier art. Some of his furniture is housed in the Historical Museum of Kraków. The set comprised two parts, one lighter and one heavier; in the living room there was also a grand piano. The space near the door was occupied by the furniture set with heavier forms; it comprised two couches, two armchairs, a small round table, a jardinière and a large mirror. The wood was painted black, which contrasted with the light upholstery. With its quilted upholstery, the furniture seemed soft and cosy. In these furniture pieces, Wojtyczko consistently repeated a few elements which casually referred to classicism. In the armrest supports, he used the motif of stylized capitals, he finished the table legs with volutes in the upper parts, which were also repeated in the jardinière; the bookcase was decorated with a medallion and ribbons. Wojtyczko subtly used imitations of intarsia, decorating the armchairs, for example, with the motif of double geometrized leaves. The other part of the furniture set was installed near the window. It comprised a gondola stool, four chairs, a table, and a jardinière. The seats were

¹⁰ M. REINHARD-CHLANDA, 'Witraże w sanatorium dra Dłuskiego w Zakopanem', in: *Witraże secesyjne: tendencje i motywy*, ed. by T. Szybisty, Kraków, 2011, pp. 62–76.



7. Paul Follot, the boudoir furniture, La Société des Artistes Décorateurs exhibition, 1910, after: "L'Art Décoratif" 1910, no 136, p. 133

quilted and upholstered just like the bolsters in the armrests. Volutes appeared in the bends of the chair backrests and in those of the gondola stool armrests. The furniture was lent softness not only by quilting but also by the volutes and arched shapes used in backrests and armrests. The table, which had no decorations, had a soft edge line. Wojtyczko broke this softness by the minimalistic character of the other furniture pieces which lacked decorations, as illustrated by the jardinière and the mirror frame. Unfortunately, it is not known what the colours of the upholstery and the walls were. The interior was completed by a chandelier and wall lamps, delicate, frilly window curtains, plant pots and paintings. Wojtyczko's furniture could be compared with that of Paul Iribe – with the Nautil armchair (1913), a bergère from Jacques Doucet's apartment (1913), or the two chairs from the Berlin Bröham Museum (1913, 1914). Like Wojtyczko, Iribe used quilted upholstery to cover almost the whole of a furniture piece and the volute motif; and through intarsia and ornaments he subtly referred to earlier styles.

More designs in the character of this trend appeared in the Polish lands before the First World War. Two now-lost

sets of interiors, created in 1912 in Warsaw and in Kraków, are of note. In that year, The English Hotel in Warsaw was acquired by Józef Jordan, who decided to restore it to its original splendor. The origins of the hotel date back to the late 18th century; it was particularly popular in the early 19th century. In 1812, Napoleon Bonaparte was a guest here. The new owner hoped to recreate the atmosphere of this period. The idea of creating new décor in The English Hotel that would recall the turn of the 19th century had analogies in the French design. In 1909, the fashion designer Paul Poiret commissioned Louis Süe to design an interior for his company headquarters, located in the 18th century Hôtel d'Aguesseau in Paris. By using decorations based on classicism, Süe created an interior in harmony not only with the architecture but also with the dress cuts advertised by Poiret's firm.¹¹

The building remodelling was supervised by the architect Gustaw Goldberg. The interiors were designed by Kraków artist, scriptwriter and designer Karol Frycz, who

¹¹ F. CAMARD, *Süe et Mare et Le Compagnie Des Arts Français*, pp. 29–30 (as in note 4).



8. Karol Frycz, lady's sitting room in suburban mansion, "Architecture and Interiors in Garden Settings", 1912, phot. courtesy of the Jagiellonian University Museum

was associated with the TPSS. In the restaurant interiors, the architect introduced elements referring to the Empire style – moldings were shaped like laurel leaves and wreaths, and walls were divided into rectangular fields finished with a frieze showing Napoleonic imperial eagles supporting festoons of flowers and fruit (fig. 5). The polychrome was in light colours, additionally brightened by numerous mirrors. For the restaurant interiors, Frycz designed furniture which loosely recalled the period of the Empire. The main restaurant hall was furnished with chairs made of mahogany incrustated with ebony; the seats and backrests were covered with damask with golden yellow palmettes. A literal reference to the Empire style could be observed in the mahogany jardinières which used the motif of dark columns with bronze capitals and lion's paw shaped bases. A variation on the theme of the Empire was a double couch, a back-to-back one, crowned with a jardinière. Frycz gave it a very simple form, practically free of decoration; the only element referring to the Empire period was the pattern on the upholstery. The dark and light mahogany dresser, richly incrustated with ebony, recalled Biedermeier style furniture with its dark columns and gilded capitals. The main restaurant hall matched the

side halls, where the walls were painted pearl and finished with *en grisaille* and gilded friezes. To match the interiors, Frycz designed couches with spare decorations and bent armrests, upholstered with a textile in the colour of old rose (fig. 6). If in the restaurant halls Frycz made attempts to open a dialogue with the past, his imagination ran wild when he was designing the interior of the veranda. The upper parts of the walls were decorated with wall paintings showing stylized leaves; the lower parts were covered with Japanese mats. The veranda was furnished with bent wood and wicker furniture. The upholstery was made of a fabric designed in the Vienna Workshops. An intimate atmosphere was created by stained glass windows, table lamps in the fashion of Tiffany lamps, wall lamps and jardinières with flowers. Frycz's furniture designs for The English Hotel restaurant could be compared with similarly dated French works that echoed the styles of the early 19th century. In 1910, at the exhibition of La Société des Artistes Décorateurs, Paul Follot presented a living room furniture set richly inlaid and upholstered, which is a variation on the theme of the Empire (fig. 7). Léon-Albert Jallot's living room furniture set, shown two years later at the same exhibition, was even closer to Frycz's



9. Otto Prutscher, the boudoir, c. 1911, after: "Die Kunst", 14, 1911, p. 219

designs. The designs of couches by the two artists were almost identical.¹²

Frycz designed the lady's sitting room for the mansion presented at the 1912 Kraków "Architecture and Interiors in Garden Settings" exhibition (fig. 8). The furniture set was of an exuberant shape; in all the pieces, there can be found flexible, fluid, yet strong and determined lines shaping, among other things, the backs of chairs, bergère, sofas. In Frycz's furniture, contrasting combinations and intentionally altered proportions are common. The stout seats and the backrests of the bergère and armchair were contrasted with small legs. The legs of the table and jardinière were slender and narrowed downwards; additionally, they were contrasted with a strong apron. The motif connecting all the furniture pieces was a volute often combined with a decoration in the form of a curled twig or two overlapping twigs. The decorative element also included the upholstery fabric in floral patterns. The decorativeness of the furniture was emphasized by the arrangement of the room. The boudoir was full of fabrics, ceramics, lamps, candlesticks, cut flowers and pot plants.

Frycz's sources of inspiration can be found in the history of furniture making. However, he was not dogmatic

and was able to juggle influences with great skill. The form of the chairs resembles Chippendale chairs. Other seats – a bergère, a sofa, a wing armchair – are variations on the Biedermeier style. Frycz contrasted stable, stubby Biedermeier shapes with soft lines of ornament and cabriole legs. It can be assumed that the delicate legs of the table and the jardinière are inspired by Louis Philippe furniture.

Frycz's furniture can be compared with Otto Prutscher's boudoir (fig. 9). Prutscher experimented with Louis XV furniture forms. He highlighted the curves and flexible lines of his furniture pieces and juxtaposed this with upholstery made of flowery fabric. The whole interior is designed as a lounge filled with small furniture (tables, chairs, sofa, cupboard, mirrors, paintings, and candlesticks) creating the atmosphere of a feminine neo-rococo living room.¹³ Also similar to Frycz's lady's sitting room is Dagobert Peche's boudoir (1913), which is a variation on historical styles) – Rococo and Biedermeier. Peche used elements drawn from ancient art and stylized them. He contrasted elements of soft and rigid shapes, as exemplified by chairs with rectangular backs, but with cabriole and grooved legs, just as Frycz did. Peche contrasted the black lacquered furniture with gilded decorations inspired

¹² A. DUNCAN, *The Paris Salon*, pp. 194, 313 (as in note 9).

¹³ See "Die Kunst", 14, 1911, p. 219.



10. Henryk Uziembło, the entrance hall to the Uciecha cinema in Kraków, 1912, phot. courtesy of the Suffczyński family

by baroque ornamentation. Peche loved to use the decorativeness of fabrics – the sofa, armchairs and seats of the chairs are upholstered with quilted fabric.¹⁴

In 1912 one of the first cinemas in Kraków, called “Uciecha”, opened; its décor, which has not survived, was designed by Henryk Uziembło.¹⁵ In this interior, the designer continued to engage in the dialogue with earlier styles and to combine them with folk art inspirations. In this project too he employed intense colours. The small hallway, where the ticket office was, was painted in the colours of the autumn. Both the wainscoting and the ticket booth were made of dark wood. The interior was given warmth by a stained glass panel above the entrance door, showing a basket full of flowers and two peacocks against autumn leaves. The hallway led to the waiting lounge which was designed in light colours (fig. 10). The walls were painted light pink and the ceiling white; the

gold-silver frieze showed stylized volutes and motifs taken from folk decorations. The interior shone with bright colours, which was emphasized by numerous mirrors in oval and rectangular frames, chandeliers and wall lamps with crystal strings and. Uziembło furnished the interior with white couches, armchairs and stools. The furniture pieces had simple yet sophisticated forms harking back to earlier styles. The stable, wide seats and backrests were upholstered; lightness in the furniture was achieved by cabriole legs with palmette decorations, volutes placed at armrest ends and checked armrest supports. Uziembło’s designs were clearly inspired by style of Louis XVI. Owing to the light colours, clear wall divisions, mirrors and furniture forms, the whole interior was reminiscent of classicism. The design for this project, now housed in the Historical Museum of Kraków, includes more decorations of a classical nature; for example, the designer planned to use grooved column-shaped plinths for flower vases. The waiting lounge led to the cinema auditorium; one moved from light to a darker space. Uziembło had the room painted green and brown with touches of gold. The walls, segmented by pilasters, were covered by green polychrome resembling wall tapestries. The wall lamps between the polychromies were green, and so

¹⁴ Ch. WITT-DÖRRING, ‘Beyond Utility. Furniture and Interior Design’, in *Dagobert Peche and the Wiener Werkstätte*, p. 100 (as in note 3).

¹⁵ K. NOWACKI, ‘Wnętrze Henryka Uziembła’, *Krzysztofory. Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa*, 4, 1977, pp. 39–53.



11. Maurice Dufrêne, the living room, the Autumn Salon, Paris, 1914, after: "Art et Décoration", 35, 1914, p. 24/25

were the boxes. The screen curtain was brown. The interior was lightened by white-gold frieze and polychromies surrounding the chandeliers in the same colours. The waiting lounge in the "Uciecha" cinema could be compared with the designs of the Vienna Workshops artists after 1910, for example with Dagobert Peche's furniture, as well as with those of the French artists who were associated with colourism. An example is the living room designed by Maurice Dufrêne that was presented at the Autumn Salon in 1914, which was a variation on the theme of the Louis XVI style (fig. 11). This design also used intense colours – pistachio wallpapers and carpet, sapphire cushions and heavy curtains. Like Uziembło, Maurice Dufrêne used decorative chandeliers, wall lamps and painting frames.¹⁶

The furniture for the "Uciecha" cinema can be compared with Dagobert Peche's designs – the reception at the Austrian Pavilion at the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne (1914, fig. 12) and a ladies' sitting room at the Austrian Wallpaper, Lincrusta and Linoleum Industry exhibition at the Vienna Museum of Applied Arts (1913). Peche, like Uziembło, used white and combined it with the rich colors of the upholstery. Peche processed and enlarged

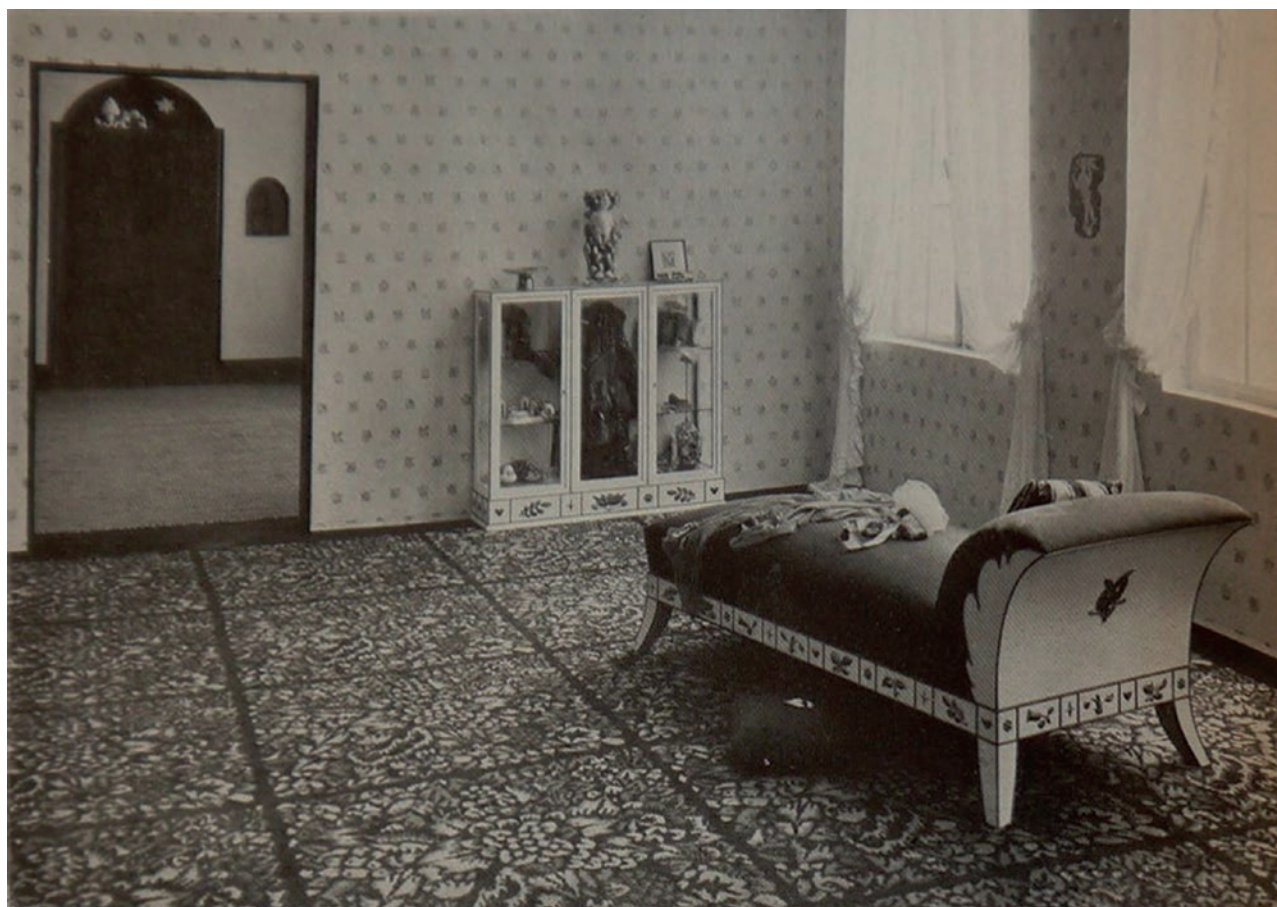
motifs taken from earlier art, often turning them into structural elements of furniture.¹⁷

Uziembło's designs from the period just before the First World War also follow "looking back" tendency. This is illustrated by a 1913 design of a representative hall, preserved in the Historical Museum of Kraków. It shows an interior with a glazed ceiling, light pink walls divided by white Ionic pilasters; the crystal mirrors above the fireplaces and radiators, combined with numerous dark pink wall lamps, make the interior seem more relaxed. Similar designs loosely referring to classicism were presented by Uziembło at the exhibition entitled "Architecture and Interiors in the Garden Setting" in Kraków, in 1912.

In 1914, the furnishings for the interior of The Kraków Hotel in Lviv were created; the building is now a courthouse (fig. 13). The preserved hallway and staircase decorations give evidence of Uziembło's being inspired by earlier styles. The hallway was wainscoted and decorated with oval mirrors in frames with bows. The lower parts of the

¹⁶ See „Art et Décoration”, 35 1914, pp. 24–25.

¹⁷ Ch. WITT-DÖRRING, 'Beyond Utility. Furniture and Interior Design', p. 101 (as in note 14); Design, in *Dagobert Peche and the Wiener Werkstätte*, p. 101 (as in note 3); A. VÖLKER, 'Patterns and Colors. Peche's Design for Textiles and Wallpapers', in *Dagobert Peche and the Wiener Werkstätte*, p. 126 (as in note 3).



12. Dagobert Peche, Reception in the Austrian pavilion at Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne, 1914, after: "Die Kunst", 17, 1914, p. 467

staircase walls were covered with marble; the upper ones were divided into rectangular spaces filled only with classical medallions and garlands with cockades. Uziembło employed the popular French motif of a flower or fruit basket in stained glass in the staircase; it showed overstylized flower baskets with twigs hanging on garlands.

In 1919, in Kraków, the Bagatela Theatre was opened. Its creators planned to present a repertoire of light entertainment, comedy and farces. Uziembło, who had already showed his skills designing the Uciecha cinema, was commissioned to prepare the interior design. Undoubtedly the proprietors were hoping for another colorfully effective interior which would create an atmosphere of freedom and fantasy. For this reason, Uziembło once again used intense colours and loose references to classicism and folk art. The interior was destroyed in a fire in the 1920s, but it is known from photographs. In the hall, the polychromies on the walls loosely referred to classicism. The walls were divided by vertical stripes of volutes; in the upper part, there was a frieze showing in alternating palmettes and medallions. Above each entrance, there were polychromies presenting symmetrical vines forming volutes. Vines also decorated the door vaults. The ceiling was decorated by a medallion in its center filled with vines and surrounded by the motif of a fan. Classical too were

the ornaments on the mirror frames – the volutes and shells. Above the doors, Uziembło installed stained glass showing vases full of flower and garlands. The motif of the fruit basket, often employed by French designers, was used on the dining room chair backrests, among other places, by Paul Follot (1912); a similar motif of lower baskets was also used by Groult (1912–1914).¹⁸

The waiting lounge in the Bagatela Theatre also discreetly referred to classicism (fig. 14). Two colour zones, into which the walls were divided, were separated by a frieze of palmettes and volutes. Wall paintings showing stylized plant motifs were also found above the door; the upper part of the walls was decorated by a frieze. The ceiling was divided into panels on which bulbs were installed. The furnishings included couches, stools, mirrors and wall lamps. All of these loosely referred to classicism. The couches and the round stools were made of dark wood and upholstered with a navy-blue fabric. The furniture was of a very simple form; however, the rounded, narrowing legs with bulgy bases referred to the style of Louis XVI. The mirrors were divided by mountings shaped as lilies, palmettes, volutes and fans. The wall lamps, shaped like glass bowls decorated with little palmettes, hanging on strings,

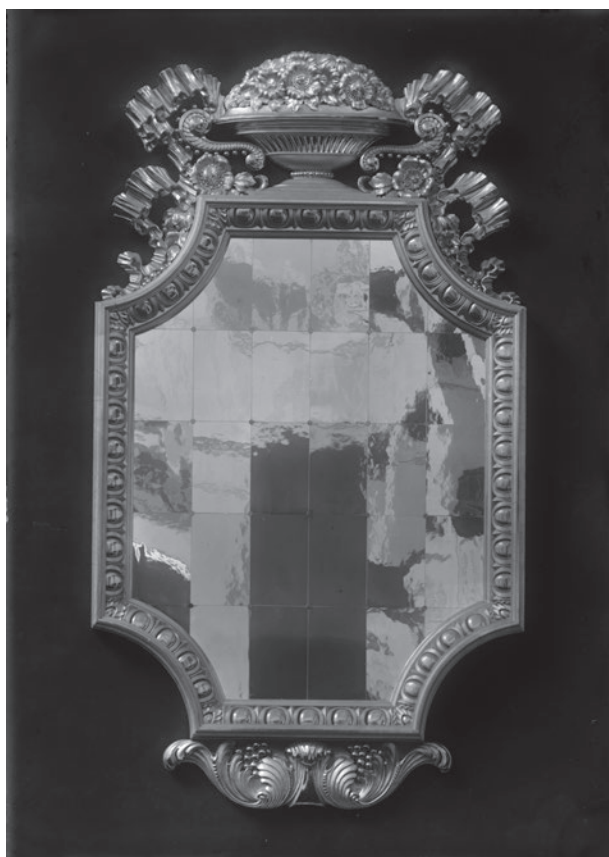
¹⁸ A. DUNCAN, *The Paris Salon*, pp. 201–202, 271 (as in note 9).



13. Henryk Uziembło, the staircase in The Krakowski Hotel in Lviv, 1914, phot. A. Wójcik



14. Henryk Uziembło, the waiting lounge in the Bagatela Theatre in Kraków, 1919, phot. courtesy of the Jagiellonian University Museum



15. Henryk Uziembło, the mirror in the Bagatela Theatre in Kraków, 1919, phot. courtesy of the Jagiellonian University Museum



16. Henryk Uziembło, the chandelier in the Bagatela Theatre in Kraków, 1919, phot. courtesy of the Jagiellonian University Museum



17. Louis Süe, Jacques Palyart, boudoir, the Autumn Salon, Paris, 1913, after: "Art et Décoration", 35, 1914, p. 27

were the most impressive element. The cafeteria was similar. The walls were painted dark yellow; the upper part of the walls was decorated by a palmette frieze. The furnishings included a simple counter, small tables and stools exactly the same as the ones in the waiting lounge. However, in the cafeteria, the furniture was varnished white and was not upholstered. Uziembło's design can be compared with a set of furniture for the Primavesi villa in Olomouc, created by Eduardo J. Wimmer-Wisgril (1917). The white bed, cupboard, table, chairs have simple forms and balanced proportions broken with delicate curves, for example of a backrest or legs, and with discreet ornamentation

filling the edges and legs of the furniture, reflecting loosely the furniture of Louis XVI's day.¹⁹

The main hall of the Bagatela Theatre was the artist's variation on the topic of classicism mixed with folk art or even with oriental influences (figs. 15, 16). All decorations were white and amaranth with touches of gold. Folk art references were observable in the polychromies in the upper parts of the walls and the ceiling; Uziembło used motifs of peacock feathers, beads, and hearts. This rich

¹⁹ C. KLEIN-PRIMAVESI, *Die Familie Primavesi*, pp. 132–135 (as in note 3).

ornamentation was contrasted with decorations recalling those of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The scene was a classical portico with double Ionic pilasters. The mirrors, hanging on the side walls, in golden frames lavishly decorated with ribbons and flower baskets, referred to the style of Louis XVI. Uziembło designed impressive lighting for the hall – on the side walls hung numerous wall lamps, on the ceiling, there were circles formed with bulbs. The five lantern-like chandeliers, with smaller lamps hanging from them, were especially impressive, and gave the interior an oriental character.

In designing the interiors of the Uciecha cinema and the Bagatela Theatre, Uziembło did not attempt to create spaces that were stylistically consistent but ones with a certain atmosphere of freedom. He eclectically blended various sources of inspiration in order to achieve a surprising, dazzling, slightly fairy-like effect. I feel that his designs could be compared with, for example, the boudoir design of Louis Süe and Jacques Palyart that was exhibited at the Autumn Salon in Paris in 1913 (fig. 17). This interior is also an eclectic fantasy, but this time on the Orient and the art of the 18th century, inspired by Léon Bakst's theatre designs. The couches and armchairs referring to the style of Louis XV were covered with a fabric with plant motifs; they contrasted with the striped wallpaper; and an effect of baroque splendor is created with mirrors, a large crystal chandelier and painted panneaux.²⁰

"Looking back" designers were permitted themselves to loosely blend inspirations, e.g. the style of Louis XVI, classicism, the Empire style, folk art, and oriental motifs. It was an artistic current that allowed artistic freedom and experimentation with colours, forms, and styles. It offered the opportunity to give a place an atmosphere that would emphasize its function or refer to its past. This was an ideal style to create private interiors such as living rooms and boudoirs or those having to do with entertainment and relaxation, for instance, cinemas and theaters. The Polish designs might be compared to the French and Austrian ones created at that time, which suggests that the Polish designers of the early 20th century were familiar with the latest trends and were able to follow them creatively. However, Polish designers did not aim to create a separate style. On the Polish artistic scene of the early 20th century, this tendency was a niche trend which did not continue in the interwar period. While at l'Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, in Paris, in 1925, France presented interiors designed by "colourists", who developed this style into art deco, Poland successfully exhibited interiors illustrating Polish art deco, which was inspired by folk art.

SUMMARY

Agata Wójcik

"LOOKING BACK" – AN ARTISTIC TENDENCY IN POLISH INTERIOR DESIGN AROUND 1910

The article presents a so far little discussed artistic trend in early 20th century Polish interior and furniture design, which was analogous to French and Austrian artistic phenomena. Its most distinguishing feature was that it combined various inspirations e.g. the style of Louis XVI, classicism, the Empire style, folk art, and East Asian motifs. The trend was characterized by intense and contrasting colours used both in wall and furniture decorations and in upholstery. It was an artistic current that allowed artistic freedom and experimentation with colours, forms, and styles. It offered the opportunity to give a place an atmosphere emphasizing its function or referring to its past. The furniture and interiors illustrating this artistic current can be found among the works of Henryk Uziembło (the Uciecha cinema, the Bagatela Theatre in Kraków), Karol Frycz (The English Hotel in Warsaw) and Ludwik Wojtyczko (the Suskis' salon in Kraków).

²⁰ F. CAMARD, *Süe et Mare et Le Compagnie Des Arts Français*, pp. 63–64 (as in note 4).