

POLAND

Pot-boilers of Soc-Modernism

BY MAX CEGIELSKI

Since the fall of the socialist system in 1989, the Polish authorities have regularly been destroying any artistic traces of the old regime, making no distinctions between Socialist Realism and Socialist Modernism although very different. This is how Supersam - the 1962 architectural master piece of Jerzy Hryniewiecki - was demolished in 2006 and that the frescoes and wall paintings and mosaics of Edward and Gabriel Rechowicz are also subject to the same fate here and there. Artists and architects protests have not changed anything to this phenomenon in which ideology and real estate profits work together.

A tram stop in the very heart of Warsaw: thousands of residents of the nation's capital transfer to the metro here and pass under the scaffolding, surrounding the construction of a new office building. The fence proudly announces: It's Going to be a Good Day, if you rent office space at Centrum Marszałkowska. On his website, the property owner promises top quality of life and work, appropriate for the 21st century, owing to the rooftop gardens and an ideal location. A year ago, the Sezam Cooperative Department Store that used to occupy this spot was demolished. It had been part of the urban complex comprising several high-rise residential towers and large stores, known as the East Wall, built along the city's main thoroughfare, the Marszałkowska street - facing the Palace of Culture and Science on Plac Defilad.

The Sezam store was opened in 1968. Its ground floor walls were covered with narrow, green-yellow ceramic tiles, forming a wavy pattern. A neon sign was placed above the main entrance, its form as modernist as that of the building. Since 1992 this simple shape has been spoiled by the post-modernist aluminum and glass extension of the first-ever McDonald's restaurant in Poland. The venue was officially opened by Jacek Kuroń, then the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, because the company subsidized his aid program for the poor. Various local celebrities and artists participated in the opening ceremony. In the final years of its existence, Sezam - just like other buildings in the city center - turned into an advertisement billboard. Large-format banners covered the front wall, names of cheap Italian clothing brands shone on the roof, and the corner held a huge screen, flashing video commercials. When the demolition started, watching the building's crumbling and dirty mosaics and the equally dilapidated - even though thirty years younger- premises of the fast-food restaurant, I asked again the questions that were so powerfully raised by Filip Springer: "If this is meant to be good architecture, why has it gone to the dogs? If it has indeed go

awry, then why do I like it so much? And what exactly does good mean in that case? Is that a subjective assessment, or an objective verification?” Springer wrote on the late, socialist modernist buildings in his book titled *Źle Urodzone* (Wrongfully Born): “This term reflects the pedigree of these buildings. They were born in bad times, difficult, painful, botched and lousy. And if that was not enough, when that time passed, they were only associated with the substandard socialist quality. Sometimes they were also labeled ‘totalitarian’, and this must have meant their banishment. And such was the fate of the best buildings of that era - we have forgotten them, stopped caring about them, did not look in their direction anymore. They did exist, but were invisible for us. They reappeared for a moment only, when we had to deal with them.” And deal we did, mostly when they were about to disappear, just like the Sezam. The developer who is building the new office complex on the spot, the embodiment of another wave of modernization, promises that the original neon sign, preserved before the demolition started, will be placed in the arcades. In the beginning of 2018, when the project will have been ‘put in operation’ - as the capitalist lingo for architecture and buildings goes - we will see whether this big developer is true to his word. If not, the neon sign has a chance to become part of the Neon Museum, where a group of enthusiasts fixes and puts on display neon light adverts of the Marxist era economy, when free competition was unheard of.

Unfortunately, the pattern composition of ceramic tiles is irrecoverably gone, but architectural specialists - such as Paweł Giergoń, author of the book *Mozaika Warszawska. Przewodnik po plastyce w architekturze stolicy 1945-1989* (Warsaw Mosaics. A Guide to the Artistic Elements in Warsaw’s Architecture 1945-1989) – know that it was made by little-known artist, Tadeusz Błażejowski. Was he just an obscure art maker at the service of the ideological apparatus of the socialist state, which meant that his work could be thrown away? Was not the whole Sezam department store, although ‘gone awry’, worth preserving? Why in Warsaw alone, besides the Sezam, were at least six cinemas with polychrome details, reliefs and mosaics and several food joints with similar interior decor destroyed? The elegant pavilion building of the ‘Chemia’ state enterprise was completely demolished, along with its painted panels. At least two department stores with glass and wall paintings were rebuilt and altered; various compositions in buildings of post offices and bookstores were covered with paint. Each of the large Polish cities suffered irreversible loss of buildings constructed between 1945 and 1989, including their artistic interior decorations. Paweł Giergoń wondered: “How come it came to this? Was it because this art was believed too young to approach from an art history perspective? Or, perhaps, the reason was its peculiar nature, which some dubbed ‘pot-boiler’ and considered to be work unworthy of a true artist?”

SUPERSAM – Super Shop

The same company, which is investing in Centrum Marszałkowska complex, owns Plac Unii City Shopping, located a bit farther away downtown. This shopping mall, catering for relatively wealthy customers, is surrounded by office buildings. The main, tallest building

houses the headquarters of one of the world's major banks, and its office spaces have been embellished with a collection of contemporary Polish art, bought by the foundation run by this financial institution. The foundation is acquiring works by renowned artists and by young, but already well-known, creators; it supports the largest, most prestigious art event: the Warsaw Gallery Weekend. All this is done in the name of Corporate Social Responsibility. Was social responsibility lacking when the Supersam - the most outstanding late modernist building in the Polish People's Republic - was being demolished? No trace, not even the symbolic neon sign, was left of the building, which, along with its interior décor, is considered by the historians of architecture to be a work of art.

The decision to construct it in 'priority mode' was made by the National Council of the Capital City of Warsaw in 1960, in the very beginning of the so-called "small stabilization" - a relative political 'thaw' that followed Stalin's death. The authorities no longer insisted on the aesthetic doctrine of socialist realism, and artists were allowed to travel to Western Europe again. Many of them went to Brussels in 1958, to participate in the Universal Exhibition, where they saw famous architects, such as Le Corbusier, combining concrete and glass with various types of wall decorations. Polish designers quickly reverted to the visual language of modernism, which many of them had practiced before World War II. Abstract art, considered, since 1948, to be a product of the morally compromised West, was again displayed in museums and art galleries. Cubist-style patterns dubbed 'Picassos' appeared on curtains, umbrellas, wallpapers and dresses. Polish economy, no longer under the obligation to achieve rapid industrialization, was slowly and gradually overcoming the crisis caused by wartime destruction. The Supersam was meant to be its flagship store, the calling card of "socialism with a human face", and that is why it needed an appropriate building.

The design work was entrusted to a team led by a famous architect, Jerzy Hryniewiecki, born in 1908. The skill of the experts working with him, such as Waclaw Zalewski, made it possible to create a pavilion with a curved roof, with no inner pillars, supported by a system of ropes and stays. "Glass, aluminum, air and light. That is what this newest Warsaw's gem has been built of" enthused the Polish Film Chronicle, using the language of modernity and not that of socialism.

This spectacular but 'cold' architecture had to be complemented by decorative elements. Three artists were commissioned by Hryniewiecki to create this work: Hanna and Gabriel Rechowicz and their friend and co-worker Edward Krasiński, who, with his Blue Line works, was soon to become one of the most important Polish conceptual artists. The Supersam building must have really impressed Rechowicz, who expressed his delight in an interview, saying, "It looks like a whale's fin or a leaf, hugely enlarged, gorgeous." Geometrical painting by Rechowicz filled the whole free space of the wall above the 'Frykas' ('Delicacy') bar, which occupied half of the pavilion. Next to the 'Frykas', in the passage to the main store, next to a coffee bar, there was a wall embellished with a stone mosaic and a fresco, most probably laid by the artist's wife and co-author of his numerous works, Hanna Rechowicz. The huge

windows of the 'Frykas' bar (cutting glass panes of such dimensions led to many problems, the panes cracked both during their installation and on the opening day) had to be shaded against the sunlight. The enormous printed fabric (the Rechowicz team was soon to become specialists in that area, too) was probably designed by Krasiński. Today, art historians are not certain who in the trio was the true author, because the artists, who lived together, frequently stood in for one another under various contracts. Team work was typical for architects too, as they were not allowed to run their private firms, but had to work in various teams and design offices. Only photographs remain of the artistic interior decoration: the curtain fabric must have been thrown away first, as it deteriorated rapidly under the influence of substances produced by the kitchen which fed thousands of customers. The fresco by Rechowicz disappeared in the early 1990s, either removed or covered by plastic panelling, when 'Frykas' was replaced by another McDonald's restaurant, the second one to be opened in Warsaw. The bar with the mosaic on the wall was converted into a store selling baby prams. Even if the artwork by the Rechowicz duet had only been screened by colorful plaster panels, they disappeared forever when the whole building was demolished in 2006.

We know them from stories and from black-and-white photographs. The pictures of such spectacular buildings as the 'Supersam' were commissioned works by the most outstanding artists, among them Zbyszko Siemaszko, Tadeusz Rolke or Eustachy Kossakowski (who also documented the spatial sculptures and the blue line experiments by Edward Krasiński). All three of them, as well as many others, were masters in their field, not just photojournalists. Their photos were published in Poland magazine, designed for export and promoting top-level Polish culture; in the Warsaw-based Stolica magazine; and in Projekt, the magazine of architecture and the building industry. That is why our view of the past is based on the extremely attractive, elegant black-and-white photographs, carefully composed and shot, which rouse nostalgia and melancholy. Was the 'Supersam' really as beautiful as the photographs lead us to believe? During our interview, Hanna Rechowicz mentioned that food in the 'Frykas' bar was disgusting; the press reported that the gorgeous roof was leaking within ten years of the store's opening. When the subsequent waves of economic crisis struck Poland, there was a permanent shortage of goods, citrus fruits that "hit the market" on the opening day reappeared only on special occasions, e.g. before parliamentary elections. 'Supersam', just like 'Sezam' and other buildings of the East Wall, was designed in a grand manner, but the quality of construction works left much to be desired. In the Polish People's Republic, under its centrally planned and controlled economy, there was always a shortage of something: cement at one time, glass or screws at another, so it was not possible to properly implement ambitious designs.

The people who frequented these buildings on a daily basis used to treat them as a permanent element of difficult everyday reality, and not as architectural gems. In early 2006, the website sztuka.net, run by Paweł Giergoń, an expert on architecture and visual arts of the Polish People's Republic, launched a campaign collecting signatures against the plans to demolish 'Supersam'. Thousands of people signed the petition. Simultaneously,

an application was filed to have the building listed as a historical monument and the status of late modernist architecture was the topic of a heated debate in the media. The owner of 'Supersam', the Społem Consumers' Cooperative, which planned to profitably sell the land plot following up all the buzz, commissioned an expert opinion which stated that the gorgeous roof was rusty and threatened to come down. If collapse was imminent, why was the store still operating, wondered the defenders of the building, who presented other results, which suggested that Zalewski's structure was still in relatively good shape and could be repaired at a moderate cost. The 'Supersam' owners decided to follow wrong assumptions from the expert opinion, and the general public was denied access to technical details of the study. The Społem Cooperative, together with the investor, hired a public relations agency, which persuaded Warsaw residents that demolition was necessary. The spin-doctors arranged for the publication of numerous texts challenging the value of the building, and put pressure on journalists. Politicians also got involved in the conflict, on both sides, and the Province Conservation Officer initiated the procedure of listing the building as a historical monument. The proponents of demolition claimed that 'Supersam' was a soc-realist building, just like the Palace of Culture and Science (which had been offered to the city by the Soviet authorities and whose demolition was also advocated by several right-wing politicians). The conflict got so heated that those in favor of renovation started receiving threats. At the end of the year, the Conservation Officer unexpectedly dropped the procedure to have the building listed as a protected historical monument, and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage finally closed the case, despite numerous appeals against that decision. After that, 'Supersam' was demolished almost instantly, just before Christmas, and for the next four years the plot stood vacant. The dispute was based on simple economic reasoning: for the landowner it was more profitable to sell a whole, large plot in prime location than to renovate a pavilion surrounded by vacant, unused space. The whole discussion was tainted by ideological issues and attitudes towards the building's socialist past. The Ministry of Culture finally decided that a symbol of the 1960s was not an appropriate heritage item, and therefore was not worth preserving. A very distinct feature of the debate was that the eclectic, historical style of soc-realism, which praised, on canvas and in architecture, the "workers and peasants alliance", was thrown together with 'Supersam', built in a strictly soc-modernist style.

The latter term, according to art historian David Crowley, first appeared in specialist literature in the 1990's. It meant modernism, but executed under the system of government contracts in socialist countries. This was an idiom of modernity, used in the architecture of Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of the 20th century, according to historian Łukasz Galusek, who attempted to give the term a neutral connotation. Crowley also noted, "What is really striking about this wave of research is that much of it is being conducted by people who are too young to have a personal relationship to the material culture of late socialism, and so there is no sense to why they would have to justify it. In many ways, it is something like a discovery of a strange or unknown land within their own country." Springer

is certainly representative of this generation. Art historian Paweł Giergoń and myself, being older, remember 'Supersam' from the last decade of socialism. As a little boy, I used to go shopping there with my grandmother. This huge space, with its high ceiling and the brutal, powerful shapes of its supports, made a strong impression on me. Unfortunately, since the time of system transformation, when the compromise between the opposition and the authorities led to the first free elections in 1989, the new liberal government and most of the society rejected all the symbols of the socialist past. They paid no heed to the differences, which were pointed out not only by art historians, but which, most importantly, were visible to the naked eye of each relatively sensitive recipient. Polish society was hungry for freedom and capitalist consumption, it paid no attention to demolition and destruction, but only looked forward, towards the future. The "soc" prefix was seen as deprecatory, although Crowley reminds us that modernism, in its socialist manifestation, was bound to the ethos of architects and their work as serving the public good. Those models did not disappear in 1945 when Poland, liberated by the Soviet Army, became a socialist country; or in the years 1948-49, when the pressure of Stalinism introduced soc-realism. This ethos vanished in 1989, after the system crumbled. The utopian, humanistic message of late modernism as socially benevolent architecture, ensuring good living conditions not only for the elites, was egalitarian and socialist to the bone.

Such was the understanding of the 1960s and 1970s buildings among the Polish architects and part of the public: as the concrete embodiment of modernity, accessible for every citizen of the peripheral country, which was still in the process of rising from post-war damage. The office buildings and the retail center, which replaced 'Supersam', were designed by an outstanding architect, professor Stefan Kuryłowicz. However, this project was guided not by democratic ethos, but by simple economic calculation.

The Peasant's House (DOM CHŁOPA)

The Rechowicz couple is thought of nowadays as one of the most interesting creators of mosaics and frescoes, which bore their distinctive style. Maria Leśniakowska, a historian of architecture, describing their works at the 'Dom Chłopa' (Peasants' House) hotel, told me that they introduced elements of organic abstraction and informalism into their compositions. The whole body of work bore the mark of a fairy-tale surrealist spirit, which Gabriel Rechowicz (Gaber) also used in his paintings and book illustrations. The artists entered the hotel in 1961, invited by its lead designer, Bohdan Pniewski (who, like Hryniewiecki, had been in the profession since before World War II). The concept of a hotel emerged in 1912, when members of farmers' associations started collecting funds for the construction of a building that would offer convenient accommodation to Polish farmers visiting the capital. No wonder that the authorities representing the "workers-peasants alliance" decided to make this idea come true, fifty years later.

Hanna Rechowicz mentioned that Pniewski "had a problem with the patio walls, because

marble, which he originally planned, was too expensive. He asked us to think of a cheaper and more attractive material. My husband had the idea that stones, river-smoothed pebbles and cobbles, were so pretty and so easy to find everywhere that perhaps they would be satisfying for the architect and the client. Wall decorations were made of stones that were painted, combining the roughness of the material with the subtlety of frescoes. There were some ceramic elements made at Misiak's workshop, various elements were mixed." That was the informalist, haphazard material, taken from trash piles, degraded - and meticulously combined into a new whole. The mosaics remain until this day in the hotel's main entrance, in its patio and in some other rooms, even though their colors have faded due to oxidation. They are now partly covered by piping, plasterwork or are joined to plastic additions of the new era. After 1989, the new owners of the building did not have sufficient energy to fully destroy them. Perhaps they got scared of social protests after they had hammered down the mosaics by another author, Władysław Zych, which were placed near the main entrance. The works by the Rechowicz couple survived, if a bit dilapidated, in other locations: at the Warsaw School of Crafts (built in 1969, designed by architect Jerzy Gliszczynski), in the small 'Alinka' bar (1969) and in the cardiological sanatorium in Nałęczów (1972, again in cooperation with Gliszczynski).

Can we still see them because they were the best of all, and was the demolition, after all, guided by some logic of preserving the most valuable elements of national heritage created in the Polish People's Republic? Unfortunately, this is not the case. One of the best works of the artists' duo, decorating the walls of the swimming pool complex of the Legia Sports Club, done in 1967, was destroyed when the new stadium was built. However, quite a lot of the mosaic works remain, because the Rechowicz couple made a lot of them: this is simply statistics in action, indirectly tied to the fact that in the 1960s the couple became well-known artists, frequently featuring in the media. After 1989 they were forgotten and had to wait until 2011 to be in the spotlight again, when two exhibitions of their work were held, and two books were published: mine, *Mozaika. Śladami Rechowiczów (Mosaics. In the Footsteps of the Rechowicz Couple)* and the one by Klara Czerniawska Gaber *i Pani Fantazja. Surrealizm stosowany (Gaber and Ms. Fantasy: An Applied Surrealism)*.

The Fine Artist Versus the Visual Artist

In the introduction to the latter book, the author attempted a historical analysis of the definition of "visual artist", which is a key to evaluating art combined with architecture in the Polish People's Republic. Nowadays, all the decorative forms which complement the interior or facades of buildings are associated with the term "design". In post-1945 Poland, the name "visual artist" used to denote painters, sculptors and all other graduates of art schools and colleges of any rank who specialized in "functional forms", as opposed to "pure art". It seems that, after 1989, this clear division into artists and designers re-emerged, which meant that "visual artists" of the previous era were pushed down to a lesser position, not only politically,

but also in terms of the hierarchy of contemporary art. That is why corporate decision-makers were not interested in the “decorative works” at ‘Supersam’, even though today, in the same location, they keep one of the best collections of Polish art - fine art, tailored for an elite public.

The fact that Alina Szapocznikow, before she left for France and became a world-famous sculptress, managed to create a soc-realistic sculpture, which still decorates one of the buildings at Konstytucji Square in Warsaw, is treated as a folly of that era. The same goes for the op-art mosaics by Wojciech Fangor, which the artist used to decorate the ‘Warsaw Śródmieście’ railway station in 1963, before emigrating to the USA (parts of them can still be seen). It should be noted, however, that these two names, as well as non-related artists like the Rechowicz couple, are notable exceptions: most of the creators of mosaics, frescoes and similar forms did not create “pure art” to be shown in galleries or museums. And even if they did, history offers them nothing more than footnotes in books.

The book by Ewa Toniak, *Prace rentowne (Profitable Works)* has a very characteristic subtitle: *Polish Artists Between the Economy and the Art at the Time of the Thaw*. The author reminds the readers that after the Stalin’s death, Poland, although officially still socialist, saw a “rebirth of capitalism”, which, from a financial point of view, was very favorable for artists. The idea of aesthetics as a social value, to which the working masses were entitled, resulted in the emergence of numerous artists shaping the everyday ‘visuals’ of the People’s Poland. The state sponsored creative work, which, by the way, was what the artists’ associations demanded after 1945, still having in mind bad experiences within the pre-war, small, mostly private art market. The dream of the avant-garde of making art available to the masses was fully realized - but under the watchful eye of the authorities.

The Visual Aspects of Socialism

Poland’s appearance was supervised by the state institution called the *Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych (PSP)* (Department of Visual Arts). “This state institution was a national monopolist, in charge of all commissions for works of art to be placed in public spaces, from shop windows to design briefs for huge monuments. Orders for such works, coming from the government or other state institutions, were allocated by the directors of the PSP to artists who were members of the ZPAP. In the People’s Republic, commissions from the Department of Visual Arts were the primary source of income for almost all Polish artists who, upon graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts, decided to practice the artistic profession,” wrote art historian and critic Łukasz Ronduda. If someone was not a member of the Polish Visual Artists’ Union (ZPAP), he or she was formally not an artist, and so could not receive commissions from the Department of Visual Arts. To become a member one had to graduate from the Academy of Fine Arts, at least in theory. There were, however, numerous exceptions to the rule: neither the Rechowicz couple, nor their friend, Edward Krasiński, got their diplomas and yet, for many years, they lived on commissions from the

PSP - especially Gaber and Hanna. This was possible because membership at the ZPAP was granted also on the basis of the artist's biography and the number of works and paintings done. The Department of Visual Arts was meant to create, on the top-down basis, a modern and visually attractive world, which in the words of its official newsletter was defined as "humanization and the color palette for workplaces [...] developed on the basis of research in psychology, color theory and all work functionalities [...] Decoration of public squares, streets, building facades [...] filling the cities with colors [...] The Department of Visual Arts is responsible for improving artistic culture in society, and for the dissemination of contemporary art."

The Department of Visual Arts was also the place where much younger artists, representing the avant-garde of the 1970s, earned their living. When I asked Zofia Kulik, who at that time worked in the KwieKulik duo with her husband, about the mosaics and frescoes, she mentioned that buildings of the socialist era "had dirty floors, and the lighting was poor. Even if mosaics were pretty, they were lost in the overall mess and shabbiness." Her partner, Przemysław Kwiek, reminisced "Terrazzo, heavy doors which banged when closing, this is how I see these interiors. Artistic decorations were the aftermath of the revolution in Russia. The avant-garde artists designed visual reality, creating splendid works, which unfortunately quickly came to an end. People going to the cheap 'milk bars' were supposed to encounter real works of art. And suddenly, while eating your milk soup, you're looking at a mosaic, like the Romans or Greeks in their ancient palaces."

Kulik and Kwiek were members of the second generation of the avant-garde, which saw the artist's role a bit differently. Zofia and Przemysław engaged in the 'pot-boiler' work - this was the derogatory term they used for the commissions from the Department of Visual Arts - but, simultaneously, they built their own artistic and critical narrative, very conscious of being bound by the state control apparatus. The Rechowicz husband and wife team never referred to their works on mosaics and frescoes as 'pot-boilers'. They treated all their commissions very seriously and had a sufficiently strong position to imbue all their works with their signature style. At the same time, Gaber painted his surrealist, fairy-tale paintings, which have never, until his death, been shown in Poland. These images were a projection of the style that characterized his works in architecture, they did not constitute a fully separate area of "pure art".

The Economics of Modernity

In her book, Ewa Toniak supplied data on remuneration of artists working for the Department of Visual Arts. In 1959, those who earned more than 36 thousand Polish zloty per month accounted for 5.1% of all the artists cooperating with the Department. During that time, the average salary in Poland was around 1400 Polish zloty, while in 1973 - a little under 3000 Polish zloty. At that time, the Rechowicz team were working - as usual, the work was commissioned by the Department - on a mosaic for one of Warsaw's cafes. We

have an invoice for the works: according to the preliminary cost estimate, for the 57 square meters of surface to be covered, the artists were to receive almost 33 000 Polish zloty, i.e. ten times the average salary. The authors of mosaics and frescoes in the Peasants' House and 'Supersam' were among the tiny group of elite contractors. At the same time, the younger generation, among them Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, were as poor as church mice. The prominent researcher Anna Markowska, whom Toniak quotes in her work, wrote that the breakthrough of the 'Thaw' in the late 1950s was not only a period shaping the identity of a generation, but also the time when elites that rejected plebeian, mediocre art had emerged. "The choice of the French modernism narrative (...) as the language of the so-called National Agreement was linked to a wish to supply cultural models, and with the hope of continuing Parisian influences, which were traditionally important for Polish art. Thus, this choice was based on a dream, and on the other hand, on the belief that the supply of art models was a mission of the intellectual elite." If that was, indeed, the case, then soc-modernism, both in architecture and in the visual arts, was not a truly egalitarian project, but rather its imposed imitation? Certainly, Poland's political history is closely tied to the history of its appearance. "Along with the deepening economic crisis of real socialism, Poland was progressively disappointed by real modernism. As architecture and urban planning were made subordinate to the state building industry and the bureaucratic apparatus, the failures in reforms of socialism and modernism were seen as mutually related by numerous Polish architects." These words by Łukasz Stanek, author of *Post-Modernism is Almost All Right*, help us understand why, in the 1990s, the post-modernist style, even that of the McDonald's bars, was seen as an expression of economic and ideological pluralism.

Paweł Giergoń, while fully aware of the everyday faults of socialism before 1989, wrote: "The works of visual art used in the architecture of that era are one of the most precious and valuable achievements of the previous political system." It is hard not to agree, especially when he adds: "As the system collapsed, this art lost its wealthy and only patron." For Giergoń, the history of mosaics and frescoes is "the image of the post-war reconstruction, doctrine-clinging, sometimes an astonishing artistic freedom, combined with living in the mainstream of events or in artistic isolation, almost always a delayed reception of new trends in international art and, most importantly, the bureaucratized, frequently absurd reality of the People's Republic."

The history of architecture and the visual arts forces us to change our understanding of the period between 1945 and 1989, which appears to be especially important nowadays, when the new right-wing authorities in Poland are trying to paint the past in radically unified, grim colors. On the other hand, if socialism in the 1960s and the 1970s was indeed a project created by the elites, at least in visual terms, we can be surprised neither by its complete rejection and demolition of its artefacts, nor by the current anti-elite rhetoric of the new democratically elected authorities.

Translation by Emmelene Landon

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- (1) Filip Springer, Źle urodzone: reportaże o architekturze PRL-u, Karakter, Cracow, 2011, p.7.
- (2) Filip Springer, op.cit, p. 7-8.
- (3) <http://neonmuzeum.org/>
- (4) Paweł Giergoń, Mozaika warszawska. Przewodnik po plastyce stolicy 1945-1989, Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, Warsaw, 2014, p. 162.
- (5) In Paweł Giergoń, op.cit., p.10.
- (6) In Paweł Giergoń, op.cit., p. 9.
- (7) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE6Qh3q9qMU>
- (8) Max Cegielski, Mozaika. Śladami Rechowiczów, WAB, Warsaw, 2011, p.24.
- (9) As told by David Crowley in „A land still undiscovered”, Herito, 17-18, (4/2014-1/2015), p. 12, <http://www.herito.pl/en/articles/a-land-still-undiscovered>
- (10) In David Crowley, op.cit, p.19.
- (11) Max Cegielski, op.cit. p.163.
- (12) Max Cegielski, op.cit., p. 164.
- (13) Including „Obrazy w architekturze” in Projekt Kordegarda, curated by Paweł Giergoń.
- (14) Ewa Toniak, Prace rentowne. Polscy artyści między ekonomią a sztuką w okresie odwilży, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Warsaw, 2015, p.15.
- (15) Łukasz Ronduda, „Neo-Avant-Garde Movement in the Security Service Files.”, Piktogram, 9/10, (2007-08), p.34.
- (16) Łukasz Ronduda, op.cit., p.37.
- (17) Max Cegielski, op.cit., p.246.
- (18) Ewa Toniak, op.cit., p.126
- (19) Markowska Anna, Dwa przełomy. Sztuka Polska po 1955 i 1989 roku, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń, 2012, p.166.
- (20) Łukasz Stanek, Postmodernism is almost all right. Polish architecture after socialist globalization, Fundacja Bęc Zmiana Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, Warsaw 2012, p.8.
- (21) Paweł Giergoń, op.cit, p.13.
- (22) Paweł Giergoń, op.cit. p.9.