

## Two Hundred Years of Polish Art Criticism – Introduction

The beginnings of Polish art criticism are associated with the organisation of the first public exhibitions of art, which took place in the years 1819–1822 in Warsaw (1819, 1821), Wilno (1820, 1822) and Kraków (1822).

These were anticipated by the publication in Paris of *Lettre d'un étranger sur le Salon de 1787* by Stanisław Kostka Potocki, which included an analysis of the paintings exhibited there, and lectures by Joseph Saunders, the first Professor of “the Literature of the Fine Arts” at the University of Wilno, among them *Discours sur l'influence et l'utilité des arts imitatifs*, delivered at the start of the academic year in 1810, and published in 1816.

The earliest public exhibition of a single painting, *The Farewell of Jan Karol Chodkiewicz to his wife Anna, née Ostróg, before the Chocim Campaign*, by Józef Oleszkiewicz, took place in Wilno at the turn of the years 1809 and 1810. Plans in the year 1812 to hold the first public university exhibition, organised by Joseph Saunders, were aborted as a result of the entry of French troops into Wilno.

Thus the large exhibitions of 1819–1822, referred to above, were the first to occasion a demand for art-critical appraisal. The names of Ignacy Kochanowski in Warsaw, and Michał Czarnowski in Wilno, inaugurate the history of Polish art criticism.

The beginnings of art criticism in other centres in the territories of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth are likewise associated with the earliest exhibitions of art, those organised by the Societies of Fine Arts / Kunstverein in Gdańsk (1836) and Poznań (1837), and also an exhibition in Lwów (1837). The founding of Societies of Friends of the Fine Arts in Kraków (1854) and Lwów (1866–1867), and the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Warsaw (1860), together with the rapid development of the press, particularly in Warsaw and Lwów, resulted in the establishment of circles of art critics, who included humanist graduates in philosophy (among them Henryk Struve) and journalists, as well as literary figures (including Józef Ignacy Kraszewski) and those with training in fine art (among them Stanisław Witkiewicz).

The present publication contains studies devoted to a variety of problems concerning art criticism, the political, social and national position of critics, aesthetic and technical questions, formal and stylistic analyses of works of art, and, finally, the interpretation of the work of artists. There is an emphasis on its origins at the beginning of the 19th century, hitherto little studied, and on the Lwów milieu at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The arrangement of the volume is essentially chronological. It has not, however, been the intention of the editors to connect the texts into a synthetic survey of art criticism in Poland.

The original intention took the form of a conference, which would have marked the participation of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies in more broadly defined commemorations of the anniversary. The authors of the texts are chiefly the participants and associates of this planned conference. Unfortunately the Covid pandemic made such a conference impossible, and the present publication constitutes the main outcome of these activities.

Since the inception of the Institute, art criticism and thinking on art has been one of the fundamental areas of its research and publishing activities. In 2007 it organised in Toruń the conference *Dzieje krytyki artystycznej i myśli o sztuce / The History of Art Criticism and Thinking on Art*, whose texts were published in Warsaw in 2009, and included numerous essays on Polish and European criticism of the 19th and 20th centuries, introduced by a history of the research on the subject. The “Pamiętnik Sztuk Pięknych / Fine Arts Diary” and the series “Studia o Sztuce nowoczesnej / Studies on Modern Art” have included many articles devoted to art criticism and art critics ([www.world-art.pl](http://www.world-art.pl)).

This volume contains a *Selected Bibliography*. This is presented in two thematic sections, separated by the years 1939–1945. This facilitates access to discussion of questions of the history of Polish art criticism and its present state, going beyond traditional boundaries in the case of such examples as that of critic-curators of exhibitions. Together with publications dealing with theoretical questions, it also includes anthologies and collections of writings by critics, as well as studies devoted to them.