

Photography at the Polish auction market

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Abstract

The article analyses the state of the photography auction market in Poland on the basis of the sales in the period from the first photography auction (1996) until the end of 2011. The data allow the reader to discover the scale of this market (turnover, number of items sold), characteristics of purchased objects (price records, average prices, popular artists and periods) and the difficulties encountered when studying this phenomenon. The conclusion contains predictions on the further development of this market.

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Introduction

- [1] Photography functions in many situations and contexts, which is why the photography market encompasses various phenomena. The demand for photography is wide-ranging, from the press and books through advertising and daily life to science and art. As a result the photography market offers very much variety – from amateur family pictures to works of great masters. Also the ways of selling and distributing photography are varied.¹ One of them are auctions, where physically existing objects are offered, usually treated as works of art and purchased mostly by collectors and institutions such as museums.
- [2] The phenomenon is relatively young, because for more than one hundred years of photography's existence the print itself did not represent a significant market value. It was a kind of *half-product*, used for making reproductions in newspapers and so on. The print market, independent from the market of studio and press photography, has been developing on a major scale since late 1960s.² Of course, prints were bought and sold

¹ Dominique Sagot-Duvaurox, "Quels modèles économiques pour les marchés de la photographie à l'heure du numérique?," in: *Culture Visuelle* 7 June 2010, <http://culturevisuelle.org/regnum/2010/06/07/quels-modeles-economiques/> (accessed 5 September 2012).

also earlier,³ but it was only the belief that they may be treated as works of art in their own right which made them appear on a growing scale in venues previously reserved for art trade (galleries, auctions, art fairs), hence achieving ever higher prices. A significant factor for the emergence of this market was the practice introduced in the United States and Western Europe in the 1970s and 1980s to specify the circulation (edition) of a photograph,⁴ thanks to which the purchaser knows how many identical prints were made.⁵

[3] When we leave aside the occasional 19th-century auctions,⁶ the first auction focused exclusively on photography took place in 1952 in the New York Gallerie Swann.⁷ In the 1960s and 1970s auctions started to be organised by such auction houses as Sotheby's, Christie's, Philips (now Philips de Pury & Company) and Drouot,⁸ which – alongside with many other auction houses in the world – continue this practice until today.

[4] Despite the significant growth of the market which occurred in the last quarter of the century, photography still accounts only for a fraction of the global art market and the prices are lower than for paintings. The Polish photography (and generally art) market is incomparable in scale and importance with Western markets, which results largely from Polish history – it was only from 1989 that the art market could develop freely, so it understandably remains many years behind Western markets. Moreover, the Polish population is much less wealthy and the artists are of mostly local renown. There are more factors influencing the Polish photography market but they would require a separate treatment. They include unsatisfactory state of research on the history of Polish photography, which is generally known to a narrow group of experts,⁹ bad condition of

² Nathalie Moureau, Dominique Sagot-Duvaurox, "La construction sociale d'une marché: le cas du marché des tirages photographiques," in: *L'économie des conventions, méthodes et résultats*, François Eymard-Duvernay, ed., vol. 2, Paris 2006, 45-60, here 46.

³ Laura Boyer, "Collectors," in: *Encyclopedia of nineteenth-century photography*, John Hannavy, ed., New York 2008, 309-312.

⁴ Magdalena Ignaczak, "Jak kolekcjonować fotografię," in: *Art & Business* 9 (2001), 54-59, here 54. Additionally, in the photography trade terms are functioning which indicate the date of making and the author of the print, such as *Vintage Print*. See, for example, Z. Zegan, "Kategorie fotografii w kwalifikowanym kolekcjonerstwie prywatnym i muzealnym," in: *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Edukacja Plastyczna*, 3 (2005), 35-37.

⁵ For one of the basic features of most photographic techniques is the possibility of multiplication. An exception is the situation when the positive (in the case of the positive-negative techniques) was destroyed or the photograph was made in a positive technique (eg. daguerreotype). So prints (positives) are not the only *kind* of photography functioning on the market but they constitute an overwhelming majority.

⁶ Boyer, "Collectors," 309-310.

⁷ Nathalie Moureau, Dominique Sagot-Duvaurox, "La construction du marché des tirages photographiques," in: *Études photographiques* 22 (2008), <http://etudesphotographiques.revues.org/index1005.html> (accessed 5 September 2012).

⁸ Lindsey S. Stewart, "Auction houses and dealers," in: *Encyclopedia of nineteenth-century photography*, John Hannavy, ed., New York 2008, 95-97, here 96; Nicole Penciolelli, *Approche du marché de la photographie de collection*, Paris 1989, 15.

⁹ See Tomasz Ferenc, *Fotografia: dyletanci, amatorzy i artyści*, Łódź 2004.

the photography magazines market, a limited number of experts and specialists on photography and a too narrow outreach of the Museum of History of Photography in Krakow.¹⁰

- [5] It is difficult to ascertain when photography entered the Polish auctions; individual items appeared in a rather haphazard way in auctions of books, engraving or painting¹¹ at least since the 1980s.¹² The first two auctions in Poland selling only photographs were organised by the Association of Polish Artists Photographers (ZPAF) in 1996 and 1997 but as the turnover was not satisfactory, no further auctions were staged.¹³ It was only in 2003 that the auction house Polswiss Art undertook a similar initiative and Rempex followed suit in the same year. Despite a significant interest of the media in the Polswiss Art event¹⁴ it proved ephemeral (although next year there was a charity auction of photographs, it did not generate such an interest¹⁵). But the Rempex auctions have been continued, organised once or twice a year in cooperation with the Artinfo.pl website under the name *Fotografia kolekcjonerska* [Collectors' Photography].¹⁶
- [6] Since 2005 photography auctions are also held by the Łódź auction house Rynek Sztuki. In 2007 ZPAF returned to auctions, organising four events of this kind until 2010. One auction was held by Desa Unicum (2009) and the ARTon Foundation (2010). Individual photographs also appear at various auctions (for example, of young art) in all major auction houses. They are also sold at antiquarian, charity, internet and gallery auctions.

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Auction offer

- [7] The offer of photography auctions in Poland so far has been variegated, from anonymous daguerreotypes from mid-19th century and *cartes de visite* made in popular ateliers through works of classics and avant-garde artists to photographs made by young creators. Auctions held by Rynek Sztuki, with the most homogenous offer, are an

¹⁰ The Walery Rzewuski Museum of the History of Photography in Krakow exists since 1986. It collects both photographs and photographic equipment, presented at the permanent exhibition and temporary displays. In fact it is the only place of this kind in Poland, for the Museum of Photography in Warsaw (a branch of the National Museum) established in 2010 exists only formally. But the undoubted potential of the Krakow museum remains unexploited.

¹¹ Janusz Miliszkiwicz, Marika Kuźmicz, "Fotografie z zyskiem," in: *Rzeczpospolita* 148 (2008), D7; Katarzyna Urbańska, "Towar: fotografia," in: *Zabytki. Heritage* 8 (2008), 72-75, here 72.

¹² For example, at an auction which had a nature of a performance, at the Mała Galeria ZPAF in 1985, a photograph from which is published in: *Czas zapamiętany. Mała Galeria 1977-2006*, Warszawa [2007?], 26. I wish to thank Marek Grygiel for this information, acquired in April 2011.

¹³ Maciej Łukasiewicz, "Zamiast Kossaka," in: *Rzeczpospolita* 70 (2001), E2.

¹⁴ Adam Mazur, Marek Grygiel, "Sztuka, czyli towar," in: Adam Mazur, *Kocham fotografię*, Warszawa 2009, 36-41, here 36.

¹⁵ AKT, "Krótka," in: *Gazeta Wyborcza. Stołeczna* 212 (2004), 6.

¹⁶ Until 2005 under the name *Aukcja Fotografii*, from 2007 to 2008 – *Polska Fotografia Kolekcjonerska*, since 2009 – *Fotografia Kolekcjonerska*.

exception; these are photographs of *decorative* nature (landscapes, nudes) made by young or less known artists.

- [8] Because of the short pedigree of the photography market the secondary market has not yet developed fully. Agnieszka Gniotek, co-organiser of the first three auctions from the cycle *Polish Collectors' Photography* (Rempex and Artinfo.pl), claims that most articles at the early auctions came from the artists themselves or their families. The secondary market gradually emerged and although at recent auctions within this cycle most items were still acquired from the artists themselves or their inheritors, about 30-40 percent came from the secondary market. Such a situation results also from the fact that institutional sellers are not very active, because museums rarely use the possibility of selling objects from their collections¹⁷ and financial institutions (for example, banks) are only beginning to establish their art collections. Initially this market *void* caused the appreciations to be excessive – because of the lack of points of reference – which in turn enlarges the turnover of post-auction sales. Although now appreciations are usually adequate, owners of the auctioned items are still pressing for increased asking prices.¹⁸
- [9] Besides auctions focused exclusively on photography we should take note of auctions held by antiquarians, for photographs form a significant part of their offer. Undoubtedly a large part of these items have a documentary rather than artistic character but it is not a rule.¹⁹ Including them in our analysis may seem wrong but it is not my job or aim to judge arbitrarily which photographs are artistic and which are not, even assuming that such an appraisal would be possible²⁰ (as Sylvie Pflieger and Dominique Sagot-Duvaurox correctly say, no one questions the fact that some photographs are works of art and most of them are not – but the whole problem is how to differentiate the former from the latter.)²¹ So I will only say that just as at auctions of paintings, engravings or sculptures we are dealing with masterpieces and with poor, imitative works of little value, also in the case of photography you can encounter true works of art and mass-produced photographs following the same pattern.²² So in my analyses I will take into account the results of all photography auctions in Poland, with all the above reservations kept in mind.

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¹⁷ See the Museum Act from 21 November 1996, Dz.U. 1997 nr 5 poz. 24 (art. 23).

¹⁸ I wish to thank Agnieszka Gniotek for this information, acquired in June 2012.

¹⁹ For example the Krakow antiquarian bookstore Rara Avis sold many photographs by Jan Bułhak, Edward Hartwig or Henryk Hermanowicz.

²⁰ See *Artysta czy rzemieślnik? Galicyjskie zakłady fotograficzne przełomu wieków XIX i XX*, Kraków 2001; Elżbieta Matyaszewska, "Artysta czy rzemieślnik? Czyli o Walerym Rzewuskim," in: *Zabytki. Heritage* 9 (2008), 28-31.

²¹ Sylvie Pflieger, Dominique Sagot-Duvaurox, *Le marché des tirages photographiques*, Paris 1994, 35.

²² The difference being that in the case of photography even the most banal and unoriginal take may be valuable as a record of its era, documenting the past.

Accessibility of auction results

- [10] Results of photography auctions allow us to make calculations and analyse the market but in the case of Poland their accessibility is incomplete. First, auction results are regularly published only by the *Art & Business* magazine²³ but they usually do not cover events held outside auction houses (for example, charity auctions). The fullest data are presented by the *Artinfo.pl* website but it is not an ideal instrument.²⁴ And the auction houses themselves usually publish on their websites the results of recent auctions but not those from several (or more) years back. Acquiring auction results from ZPAF is also not easy.²⁵ So it would undoubtedly be useful if results of all hitherto photography auctions were published in one volume,²⁶ especially that their number is not forbiddingly large.
- [11] The second problem is connected with conditional sale, that is when the price of an item gradually comes down below the asking price and the first bidder conditionally becomes its owner. The sale may be concluded only when the original owner agrees to the lower price. But it does not always happen.²⁷ What is more, there are similar situations with items sold at auctions governed by the traditional system, which are not always purchased after the auction,²⁸ which distorts the results (pushing them upwards). So acquiring a real picture would only be possible if only concluded transactions (and post-auction sales) were published.
- [12] Things being so, the following analyses are of necessity based on uncertain and probably incomplete data. In the tables and graphs below I took into account results published in the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl* as well as on the *Artinfo.pl* website. In absence of other sources this is the only possible, although imperfect, solution. I collected 3185 auction results in Poland from the period 1996-2011, which I analyse in the following sections of the article. There are no data to compare these analyses with, for as far as I know, the Polish photography market has been more extensively described only in three as yet unpublished works²⁹ and isolated information on, for example, annual

²³ Additionally in the beginning of each year *Art & Business* publishes summary results from the previous year – *Auction yearly*. Auction results were also published by the periodical *Sztuka.pl* (previously *Gazeta Antykwaryczna*), the last issue of which appeared in September 2010.

²⁴ Searching for the results of earlier auctions is difficult.

²⁵ Generally accessible are only the results of auctions from 1996 and 2010. Obok Gallery, now organising these auctions, does not collect such data at all (I wish to thank Anna Wolska, the gallery's curator, for this information, acquired in November 2011).

²⁶ As is partly the case with painting (*Malarstwo na aukcjach w Polsce: ceny 1990-1997*, Sławomir Bołdok, ed., Warszawa 1991; *Malarstwo na aukcjach w Polsce: ceny 1998-2000*, Sławomir Bołdok, ed., Warszawa 2001; *Malarstwo na aukcjach w Polsce: ceny 2001-2004*, Sławomir Bołdok, ed., Kraków 2005) as well as books and maps (*Katalog notowań aukcyjnych książek i kartografii: sezon pierwszy: wrzesień 2001– czerwiec 2002*, Paweł Podniewski, ed., Warszawa-Siedlce 2003).

²⁷ Tomasz Lewicki, "Rekordowy rok," in: *Sztuka.pl* 2 (2008), 54-55, here 54.

²⁸ *Malarstwo na aukcjach w Polsce: ceny 2001-2004*, 8.

²⁹ Anna Bednarek, *Rynek fotografii w Polsce*, M.A. thesis, Jagiellonian University, 2011; Anna Diduch, *Rynek fotografii artystycznej w Polsce 1997-2010*, M.A. thesis, Warsaw University, 2011; Katarzyna Sagatowska, *Trh umělecké fotografie v Polsku*, B.A. thesis, Slezská univerzita in Opava,

turnover at photography auctions appears only incidentally, usually without a wider comment or explanations.³⁰

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Turnover and number of items sold

- [13] As the diagrams below reveal,³¹ until 2003 photography was largely absent at auctions; if we leave aside the two ZPAF auctions from 1996 and 1997, only a few pictures a year were sold. The year 2003 saw a break-through, for the two above-named auctions held by Polswiss Art and Rempex took place but it turned out that an attempt at creating demand through advertising and marketing measures was not quite successful, for in the two successive years the turnover and number of items sold fell significantly. Despite that the situation improved, for neither the turnover nor the number of items sold returned to pre-2003 levels. In the two last years we have been observing a decline, especially of turnovers in auction houses, which is probably connected with the global economic crisis.
- [14] The presented data show that the photography market in Poland is small and accounts for an insignificant part of the entire art market, which in 2011 recorded the turnover of about 48.4 million PLN (c. 11 million euro – eds.).³² According to Maciej Gajewski, in 2011 photography constituted 1% of the turnover of the Polish art market and 2% of the number of transactions but he took into account only auction houses (he put the turnover at 266.04 thousand PLN and the number of transactions at 104).³³ Even adding the remaining auctions would not significantly increase photography's share in the art market. But contrary to what may seem this situation is not markedly different from the global one – in 2011 photography accounted just for 1.6% of the entire auction turnover in the world.³⁴ Also comparing price records reveals an inferior position of photography against other art disciplines: while the most expensive painting sold at an auction (Edvard Munch's *The Scream*) fetched the price 119.9 million dollars,³⁵ the most

2010 (accessible at: http://www.itf.cz/dokumenty/fpf_bp_2010_trh-umelecke-fotografie-v-polsku_sagatowska_katarzyna.pdf).

³⁰ Eg. Maciej Gajewski, "Rok 2011 na polskich aukcjach – podsumowanie," in: *Art & Business* 2-3 (2012), 176-179; Janusz Miliszkiewicz, "Rodzina utrwalona w obiektywie," in: *Rzeczpospolita* 301 (2009), D7; Wojciech Niewiarowski, "Koniec konkursów piękności?," in: *Art & Business* 3 (2007), 16.

³¹ The category of *other* auctions encompasses all auctions not belonging to the first three groups, including Internet auctions organised by auction houses (especially Rempex) and on-line charity auctions.

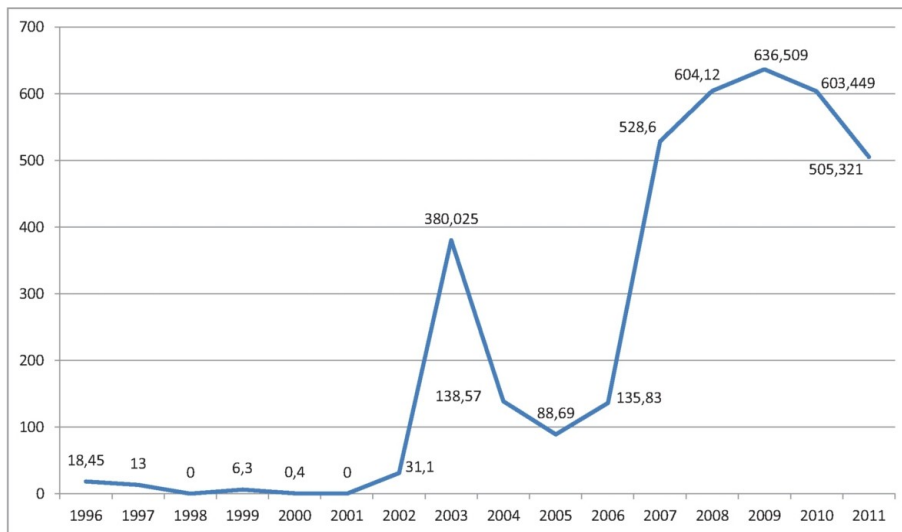
³² Gajewski, "Rok 2011 na polskich aukcjach," 176.

³³ Gajewski, "Rok 2011 na polskich aukcjach," 177-178.

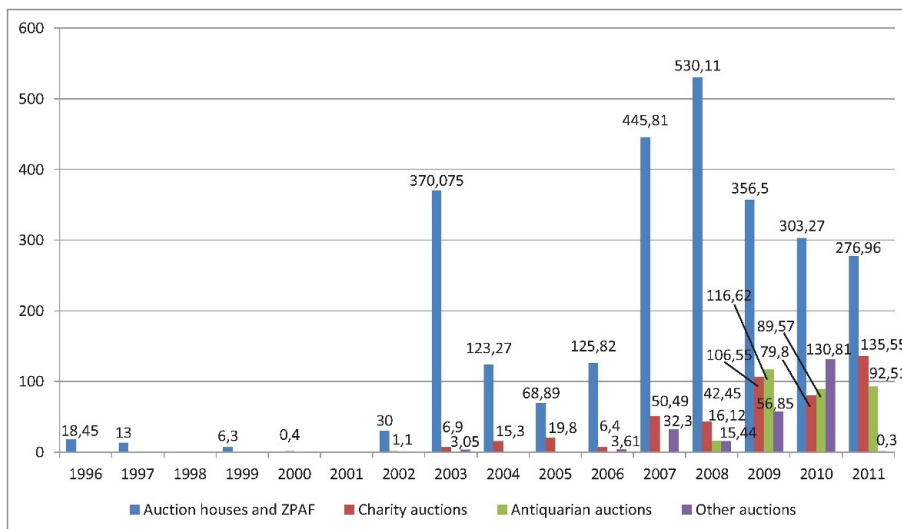
³⁴ *Art Market Trends 2011*, 12, http://imgpublic.artprice.com/pdf/trends2011_en.pdf (accessed 5 September 2012).

³⁵ Mark Hughes, "Edvard Munch's *The Scream* sells for record \$119.9 million," in: *The Telegraph* 3 maja 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-news/9242478/Edvard-Munchs-The-Scream-sells-for-record-119.9-million.html> (accessed 5 September 2012).

expensive photograph (Andreas Gursky's *Rhine II*) cost almost 28 times less (4.3 million dollars).³⁶

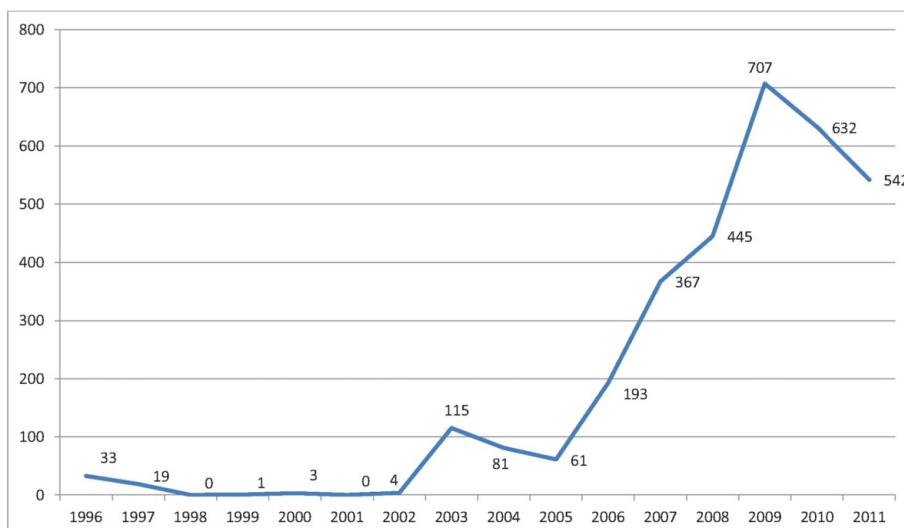


1 Turnover of photography auction sales in Poland in 1996-2011 (in thousands of PLN). Source: the author's calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl* (*Gazeta Antykwareczna*) as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website

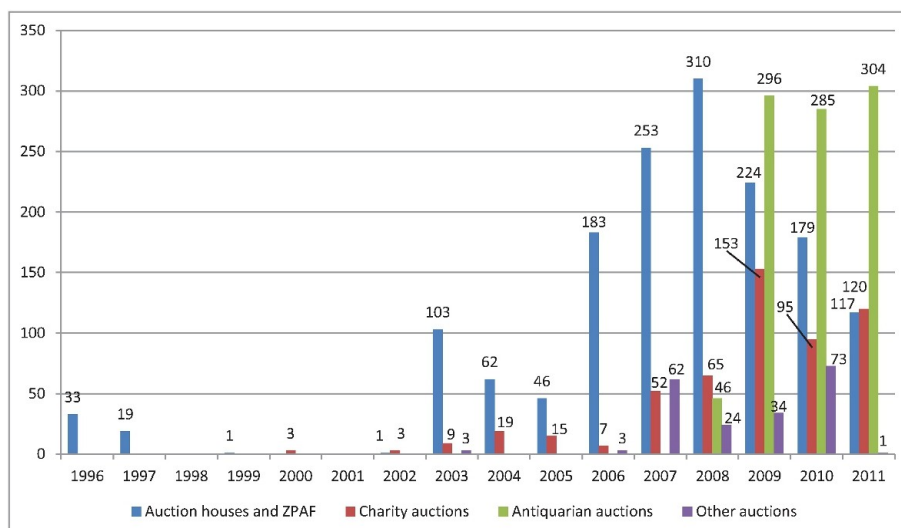


2 Turnover of photography auction sales in Poland in 1996-2011 divided between venues (in thousands of PLN). Source: the author's own calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl* (*Gazeta Antykwareczna*) as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website

³⁶ Florence Waters, "Why is Andreas Gursky's Rhine II the most expensive photograph?," in: *The Telegraph* 11 November 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/8884829/Why-is-Andreas-Gurskys-Rhine-II-the-most-expensive-photograph.html> (accessed 5 September 2012).



3 Number of photographs sold at auctions in Poland in 1996-2011. Source: the author's own calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website



4 Number of photographs sold at auctions in Poland in 1996-2011 divided between venues (in thousands of PLN). Source: the author's own calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website

[15] As the diagrams show, photography's share in auctions outside auction houses was relatively big, especially in terms of the number of transactions. Of all photographs sold in 1996-2011 at auctions in Poland 72.31% went under the hammer at auction houses and ZPAF, 12.59% at charity auctions, 8.53% at antiquarian auctions and 6.57% at other auctions. As we can see, the Polish market is so small that when we omit photographs sold outside auction houses, we are ignoring almost half of the purchased objects.

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Price records

[16] In comparison to the price record quoted above, namely Gursky's photograph, the price of the most expensive photograph sold at a Polish auction was several times lower. Although all price records have to be approached with caution, they allow us to ascertain which authors are valued the most by the buyers, ready to pay the biggest sums for their works. Such rankings for paintings are published relatively often but I have never encountered a ranking of photographs auctioned for highest prices in Poland.

Nr	Author	Title (notes)	When taken	Date of the auction	Organiser of the auction	Asking price (in PLN)	Realised price (in PLN) ¹
1	Witkiewicz Stanisław Ignacy (Witkacy)	<i>Kolaps przy lampie. Autoportret</i> [Collapse by a Lamp. Self-portrait]	1913	2003-09-24	Polswiss Art	0	135 000
2	Hiller Karol	<i>Kompozycja heliograficzna (V)</i> [Heliographic ⁱⁱ composition]	Befo-re 1934	2011-12-06	Rempex	50 000	50 000
3	Avedon Richard	<i>Suzy Parker and Gardner McKay</i>	1956	2003-09-24	Polswiss Art	0	25 000
4	Cartier-Bresson Henri	<i>Grande Arche de la Défence, Paris</i> ⁱⁱⁱ	1989	2003-09-24	Polswiss Art	0	23 000
5	Kossakowski Eustachy	<i>Panoramiczny Happening Morski, zrealizowany przez Tadeusza Kantora</i> [A Panoramic Maritime Happening, executed by Tadeusz Kantor]	1967	2009-11-25	Rempex	29 000	23 000 ^c
6	Hiller Karol	<i>Kompozycja abstrakcyjna</i> ^{iv} [Abstract Composition]		2002-12-18	Rempex	6300	21 000
7	Witkiewicz Stanisław Ignacy	<i>Self-portrait</i>		2007-10-24	Rempex	4000	21 000
8	Dłubak Zbigniew	<i>Kolekcja – System</i> [Collection – System]	1978	2007-11-28	Rempex	19 000	20 000
9	Dłubak Zbigniew	Para fotografii z cyklu <i>Asymetria</i> [A couple of photographs from the Cycle <i>Asymmetry</i>]	1986	2008-05-29	Desa Unicum	15 000	20 000
10	Hiller Karol	<i>Kompozycja heliograficzna (XXIX)</i> [Heliographic composition]	ok. 1936-1937	2004-04-04	Agra Art	5200	20 000
11	Beksiński Zdzisław	<i>Kompozycja</i> [Composition]	1959	2011-12-06	Rempex	19 000	19 000

12	Kwiek Przemysław	<i>Kompozycja białoruska</i> [Belorussian Composition, 18 photographs]	1999/2001	2008-11-26	Rempex	24 000	18 000c
13	Gromadzki Bronisław	Album na negatywy Kodak (188 negatywów) [An Album for Kodak Negatives (188 negatives)]	ok. 1910?	2008-11-26	Rempex	16 000	16 000
14	Lindbergh Peter	<i>Christy Turlington, L.A., American Vogue</i>	1988	2003-09-24	Polswiss Art	0	14 000
15	Pajewski Jakub	<i>Julia</i>	2002	2004-12-12	Polswiss Art	12 000	14 000
16	Zangaki	Album (50 fotografii) [An Album (50 photographs)]	ok. 1870-1880	2008-06-11	Rempex	13 500	14 000
17	Lach-Lachowicz Natalia	Bez tytułu (12 fotografii) [Untitled (12 photographs)]	1970	2009-04-29	Rempex	9500	13 000
18	Exiff Exilentia	<i>Ecce homo</i>	2009/2010	2010-04-28	Rempex	6500	12 000
19	Kulik Zofia	<i>Deseń VIII Morris 16-1</i> [Pattern VIII Morris 16-1]	2007	2008-11-26	Rempex	12 000	12 000
20	Kulik Zofia	<i>Deseń VIII Morris 16-1</i> [Pattern VIII Morris 16-1]	2007	2011-12-06	Rempex	12 000	12 000
21	Waśko Ryszard	<i>Jane Doe's session</i>	2006/2008	2008-11-26	Rempex	12 000	12 000
22	Saudek Jan	<i>The meeting at the river Elbe</i>	1945	2010-12-15	Rempex	15 000	11 000
23	Waśko Ryszard	<i>Coco Chanel. Mademoiselle? No 3</i> from the cycle <i>I am telling you a secret</i>	2004	2007-04-15	Agra Art	11 000	11 000
24	Eidrigėvičius Stasys	<i>Pomiędzy czerwienią i bielą</i> [Between the Red and the White]	2001	2002-05-18	Sztuka	10 000	10 000
25	Exiff Exilentia	<i>Love dies always before</i>	2008/2009	2009-11-25	Rempex	6300	10 000
26	Rytka Zygmunt	<i>Obok sztuki, Meeting – Copenhagen, Gliptoteka</i> [Besides Art]	1991	2010-11-23	Rempex	8000	10 000
27	Sokołowski Juliusz	<i>Miasto Warszawa_Most Średnicowy_wiosna 2000</i> [The City of Warsaw_Railway_Bridge_Spring 2000]	2000/2008	2010-11-23	Rempex	9800	9800
28	Kantor Tadeusz	<i>Fotogram – Kompozycja czarno-biała</i> [Photogram – a Black-and-White Composition (from a Kantor film; a frame and a CD included)]	1957	2007-04-25	Rempex	9000	9000

29	Kantor Tadeusz	<i>Fotogram 2</i> [Photogram 2 (description as above)]	1957	2007- 04-25	Rempex	9000	9000
30	Kantor Tadeusz	<i>Fotogram I Fotogram 2</i> [Photogram 2 (description as above)]	1957	2007- 04-25	Rempex	9000	9000
31	Lehnert & Landrock	Album <i>Meine Mittelmeer Reise</i> (32 photographs)	ok. 1913	2009- 04-29	Rempex	9000	9000
32	Truszkowski Jerzy	<i>Reversed repetition</i>	1997	2008- 11-26	Rempex	9000	9000
33	Truszkowski Jerzy	<i>Angst von Sorge</i>	1990	2008- 11-26	Rempex	9000	9000
34	Waśko Ryszard	<i>A corner</i>	1976	2010- 10-28	Fundacja ARTon	n.d.a.	9000
35	Lach- Lachowicz Natalia	<i>Sztuka postkonsumpcyjna</i> [Post-consumption Art]	1975	2008- 11-26	Rempex	12 500	9000c
36	David Jiří	<i>Krzysztof Kieślowski</i> from the cycle <i>Concealed Image</i>	1990-1995	2010- 04-29	Desa Unicum	8000	8500
37	Golliszewski J.M.	<i>Edward Krasieński.</i> <i>Exhibition at the Appendix Gallery</i>	1992	2009- 11-25	Rempex	3200	8500
38	Gloeden Wilhelm von	<i>Sycylijski chłopiec</i> [A Sicilian Boy]	1900	2003- 09-24	Polswiss Art	8000	8000
39	Smoczyński Mikołaj	<i>Trzy punkty w przestrzeni</i> [Three Points in Space]	1990	2007- 11-21	Rempex	7000	8000
40	Murak Teresa, Rembieliński Mateusz	<i>Krzyż pielgrzymi</i> [Pilgrims' Cross]	2008-2010	2010- 12-15	Rempex	10 000	8000c
41	Pierzgalski Ireneusz	<i>Plaża</i> [A Beach]	1972	2007- 11-28	Rempex	11 300	8000c
42	David Jiří	<i>Roman Polański</i>	1991-1995	2011- 12-06	Rempex	9500	8000c
43	Sosnowski Zdzisław	Bez tytułu [Untitled from the cycle <i>Goalkeeper</i>]	1975- 1977/2009	2010- 04-28	Rempex	11 000	8000c
44	Sosnowski Zdzisław	Bez tytułu [Untitled from the cycle <i>Goalkeeper</i>]	1975- 1977/2009	2010- 04-28	Rempex	11 000	8000c
45	Gomulicki Maurycy	<i>Olimpiada</i> [Olympics]	1996	2011- 12-06	Rempex	9000	8000c
46	Horowitz Ryszard	<i>Park Avenue</i>	1986	2006- 02-09	Desa Unicum	7900	7900
47	Pierściński Paweł	<i>Ziemia</i> [The Earth]	1965/1967	2011- 12-06	Rempex	4500	7500
48	Gierałtowski Krzysztof	<i>Nicole Orzechowska</i>		2004- 09-09	Polswiss Art	7300	7300
49	Waśko Ryszard	<i>Portret pocięty</i> [A Slashed Portrait]	1971-2006	2008- 05-29	Desa Unicum	6000	7000

50	Drtikol František	<i>Akt z kołem</i> [Nude with a Wheel]		2011-12-14	Rempex	7000	7000
51	The Krasnals	<i>Polka podnosząca Meteoryt z Papieża 21:37</i> [A Polish Woman Lifting a Meteorite off the Pope 21:37]	2011	2011-11-19	Aukcja Wielkiego Serca	100	7000

ⁱ The letter "c" by the realised price means an item sold conditionally.

ⁱⁱ The terms *heliographic* and *heliograph* used in the article refer to a technique created by Karol Hiller and called *heliografika* in Polish. See Karol Hiller, 1891-1939. *Nowe widzenie: malarstwo, heliografika, rysunek, grafika*, Marcin Bauer, Jacek Ojrzyński (eds.), Łódź 2002.

ⁱⁱⁱ The correct title is *Rue Mouffetard* and the date is 1954. See Mazur, Grygiel, *Sztuka, czyli towar*, 36.

^{iv} The catalogue description in the Artinfo.pl base says that this work was made in the photogravure and not heliographic technique. But these terms, similar in Polish, were probably confused.

5 The highest priced photographs at Polish auctions in 1996-2011. A ranking prepared by the author on the basis of auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl* (*Gazeta Antykwaryczna*) as well as the Artinfo.pl website

[17] The highest priced Polish photographs are above all the classical ones such as Stanisław Witkiewicz (Witkacy). This artist is known not only in Poland but also abroad;³⁷ it is worth noting that in 2011 his self-portrait was sold in New York for 52.5 thousand dollars.³⁸ Such high prices certainly reflect also the very small supply of his photographs.³⁹ The same holds for Karol Hiller⁴⁰ (since 1996 only four of his heliographs have been sold at auctions⁴¹), an artist of undoubted renown, compared to such artists as Man Ray or Christian Schad.⁴² Items connected with Tadeusz Kantor are highly appreciated, such as print-outs from his tachist film and the photograph of Eustachy Kossakowski with *A Panoramic Maritime Happening*. Highly ranked are also pictures by another *contemporary classic*, Zbigniew Dłubak, closely followed by Zdzisław Beksiński. Among other authors we can find living artists, members of the middle-aged generation, such as Jakub Pajewski or Juliusz Sokołowski. A number of the highest-priced photographs were made by foreign artists of world renown (Richard Avedon, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Peter

³⁷ For example, as one of few Polish photographers he has his biography in the *Encyclopedia of twentieth-century photography*, Lynne Warren, ed., New York 2006.

³⁸ Self-portrait from 1912-1914, sold on 4 October 2011 at the auction *The Arc of Photography: A Private East Coast Collection* at Philips de Pury & Company.

³⁹ The Artinfo.pl website base contains only two self-portraits by Witkacy – both have been sold and can be found in the above table under the numbers 1 and 7.

⁴⁰ Janusz Miliszkiewicz, Cezary Pieczyński, "Najwięcej płacimy za odbitki autorskie," in: *Rzeczpospolita* 160 (2008), D7.

⁴¹ Three of them are in table 5 and besides articles sold, listed in the table with record prices, only one object found a buyer: *Kompozycja heliograficzna – Rodzi się epoka*, Rynek Sztuki, 24.10.1999, asking price: 3,1 thousand PLN, realised price: 6,3 thousand PLN.

⁴² Włodzimierz Nowaczyk, "Gra w obrazy. Fotografia XX i XXI wieku z kolekcji Cezarego Pieczyńskiego," in: *Uśpiony kapitał. Fotografia XX wieku z kolekcji Cezarego Pieczyńskiego*, exhibition catalogue, Warszawa 2010, 13-21, here 15-16.

Lindbergh, Jan Saudek) or foreign members of the younger generation (Jiří David, Exilientia Exiff). The ranking contains few old photographs. Besides the self-portrait of Witkacy these exceptions are a picture by Wilhelm von Gloeden and three albums, with one lot containing many prints, so the price of an individual photograph was low.



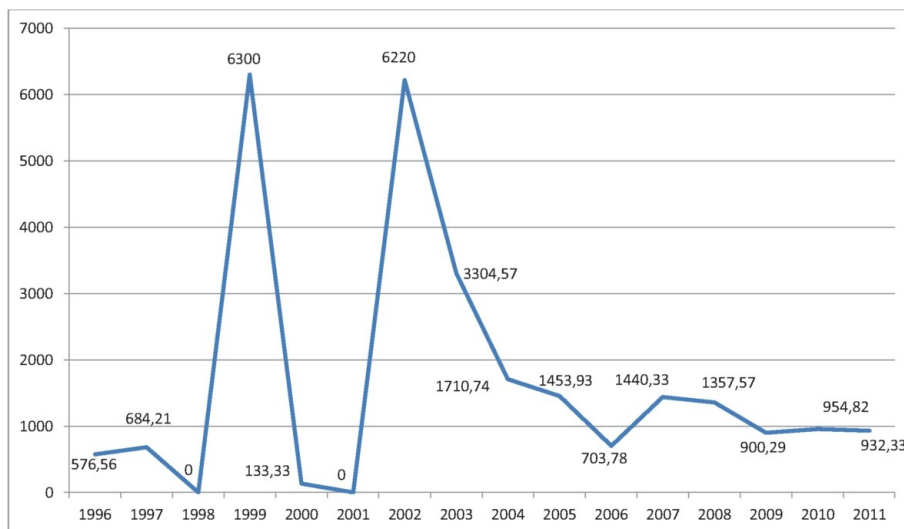
6 Karol Hiller, Heliographic composition (V), before 1934, heliograph on paper, vintage print, unique print, 22,8 x 18,8 cm. Sold on 6 December 2011 at the Fotografia Kolekcjonerska auction (the photograph from the Auction House Rempex archive, published courtesy of the author)

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Average prices of photographs

[18] High prices in the graph below are reached only by selected items, with the average price being lower. The prices were subject to significant fluctuations but it must be added that in 1999, 2000 and 2002 the number of recorded transactions was so small that the results can hardly be considered representative. The very high average from 1999 was leveraged by just one photograph – Hiller's heliograph. And in 2002 the distortion of the average price was due to five prints, one of which (by Stasys Eidrigėvičius) cost 10 thousand PLN and another (again by Hiller) sold for 20 thousand PLN and they had a disproportionate impact on the average price. In 2003 we observe an individual peak (the auctions in Polswiss Art and Rempex), after which the average price fell and largely stayed within the 700-1700 PLN bracket. It should be remembered that these sums are produced on the one hand by works sold at auction houses for several thousand PLN and

on the other hand by photographs traded at antiquarian bookstores, rarely exceeding a few hundred PLN.



7 Average prices of photographs at Polish auctions in 1996-2011 (in PLN). Source: the author's calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website

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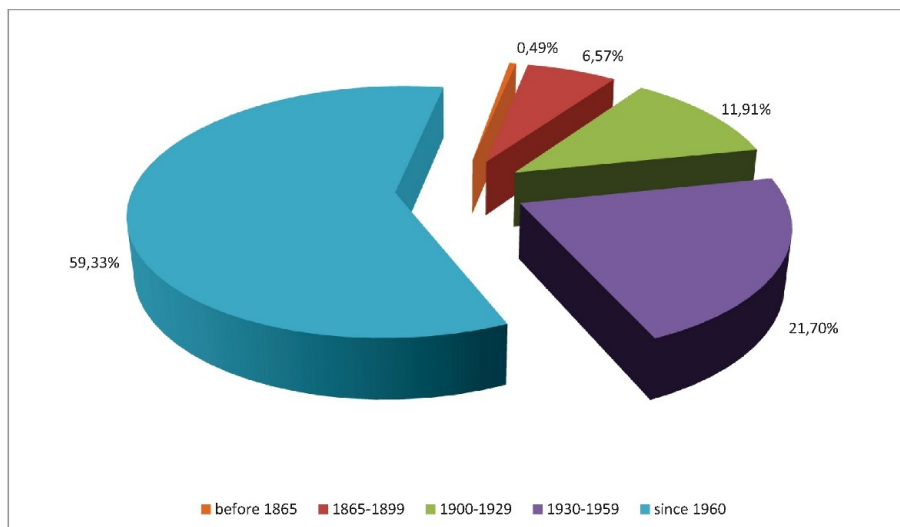
When the sold photographs were made

[19] The above ranking of the most expensive photographs in Poland gives only a partial picture of the preferences of photography buyers. It is quite difficult to answer the question what kind of works and by whom are the most valued and sought after. It is relatively easy to establish the periods in which the items sold at auctions were created,⁴³ as shown on the diagram below.

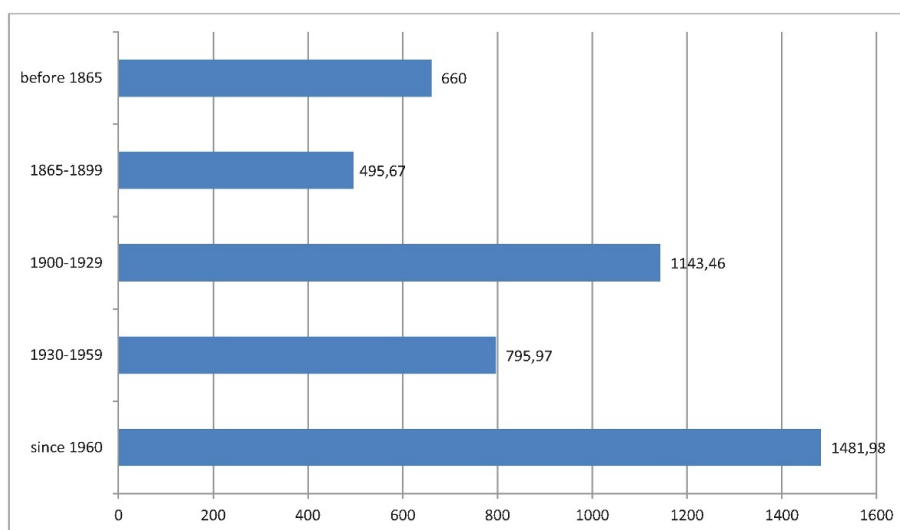
[20] It is noticeable that the number of prints sold is related to their age. The oldest photographs have been selling in the smallest numbers and the youngest ones in the biggest. 20th-century photography accounts for roughly 93% of the market. But these figures have to be approached with caution, for they do not say what percentage of the whole offer from a given period was sold. In other words, slightly more than 7% for 19th-century photography accounts for a small part of the market but this may result not only from a small demand for pictures from this group but also (or perhaps even above all) from a small supply. So it would be advisable to relate the data presented here to the number of unsold photographs, that is to the entire auction offer, but because of the large number of auctions and poor availability of catalogues it would be a difficult if not impossible task. But it is obvious that with small supply and large demand, that is when the buyers are especially eager to purchase a given product, they are ready to pay more.

⁴³ Out of 3185 objects I took into account 2267 were marked with a date of making, which made it possible to put them into one of five categories (the categories based on: Pflieger, Sagot-Duvauroux, *Le marché des tirages photographiques*, 110-113).

So we should expect an increase in prices. Average prices of photographs from the five categories quoted above are presented in the graph below.



8 The age of photographs sold at auctions in Poland in 1996-2011. Source: the author's calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website



9 Average prices of photographs sold at auctions in Poland in 1996-2011. Source: the author's calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website

[21] As we can see, 19th-century photography not only sells poorly but also the prices are the lowest. The earliest photographs group contains just 17 items, of which only two exceeded one thousand PLN. Generally speaking, 19th-century photography is cheap (according to commentators - too cheap⁴⁴) and high prices are fetched only by extraordinary works (made by well-known authors, artistically unique, rare, etc.). The

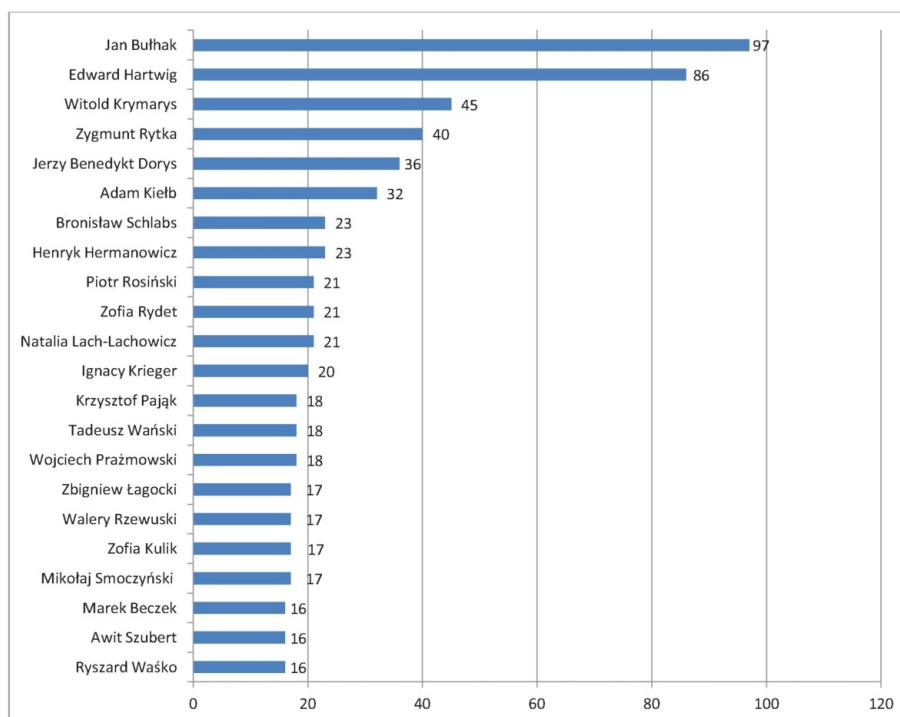
⁴⁴ Agnieszka Gniotek, "Hit rynku sztuki," in: *Puls Biznesu* 231 (2007), 14; Miliszkievicz, Kuźmicz, "Fotografie z zyskiem," D7.

most expensive are photographs from early 20th century and the period after 1960; pictures from 1930-1950 are situated in-between.

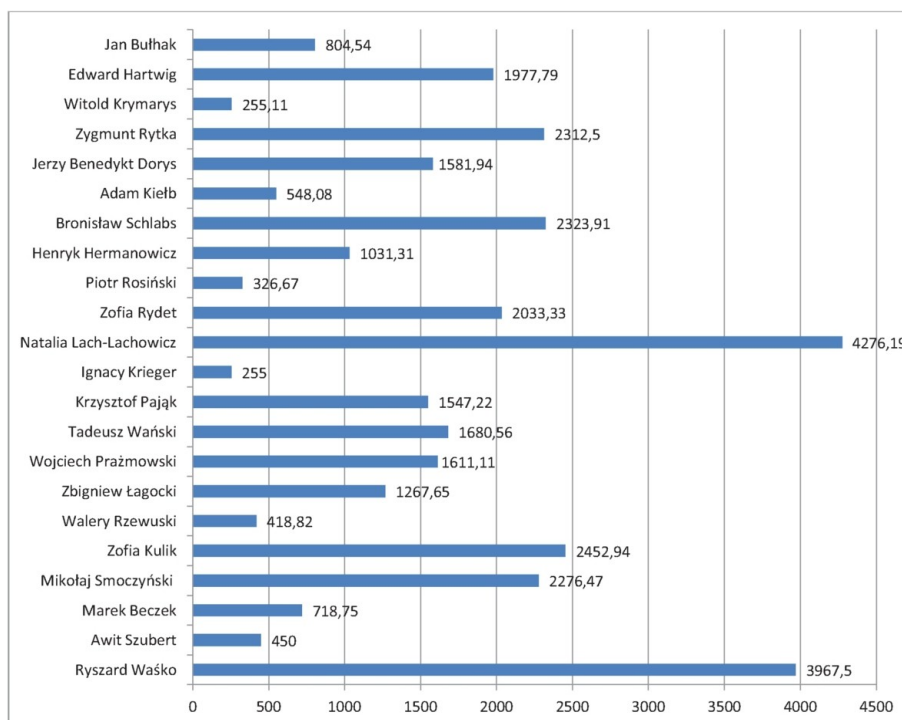
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Selected artists

- [22] Besides the highest prices it is also worth analysing the number of works sold by particular authors, presented in the graph below.
- [23] Two photographers whose works were sold in the highest number at auctions in 1996-2011 (Jan Bułhak and Edward Hartwig) left the rest far behind. The table also contains other *classics*: Jerzy Benedykt Dorys and Tadeusz Wański. There are also names of more avant-garde artists (Bronisław Schlabs, Natalia Lach-Lachowicz) and representatives of most recent photography (Witold Krymarys). We must remember that sometimes the supply of works by a given author has little to do with the demand or the significance of the author: the heliographs of Hiller may be mentioned here, now rarely present at auctions but realising high prices.



10 Photographers with the highest number of works sold at auctions in Poland in 1996-2011. Source: the author's calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the *Artinfo.pl* website



11 Average prices of works by photographers with the highest number of works sold at auctions in Poland in 1996-2011. Source: the author's calculations based on auction results published by the magazines *Art & Business* and *Sztuka.pl (Gazeta Antykwareczna)* as well as the Artinfo.pl website

- [24] Among the 22 artists included in the table the highest prices were realised by works of Lach-Lachowicz and Ryszard Waśko, with a significant advantage over the next authors. Pictures by representatives of 19th-century photography were the cheapest: Ignacy Krieger, Walery Rzewuski and Awit Szubert, as well as works by contemporary artists: Krymarys and Piotr Rosiński (connected with the auction house Rynek Sztuki) and Adam Kielb (selling exclusively through Desa Katowice).
- [25] The prices of works by artists analysed here are relatively stable and in 1996-2011 did not exhibit significant fluctuations (if we except a number of *bargains*, appearing around 2000 mostly at charity auctions). In the last 16 years we have been observing a generally upward trend but it does not regard all authors. The rise in prices is not significant and it seems that it mostly affects contemporary and avant-garde artists, such as Zygmunt Rytko or Waśko, and to a smaller degree such photographers as Bułhak.

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Conclusion

- [26] The Polish photography market still finds itself in the initial stage of its existence. Although you can read that *the epoch when photography was cheap, easy and accessible, has come to an end and photography is today a highly valued product*,⁴⁵ it would be a mistake to formulate too optimistic judgements – it is best illustrated by the

⁴⁵ Adam Mazur, "Inny Witkacy," in: *Dwutygodnik* 62 (2011), <http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artukul/2468-inny-witkacy.html> (accessed 5 September 2012).

fact that since last year only one auction (rather than two as before) from the cycle *Fotografia Kolekcjonerska* is held. But we must not forget that events of this type – today being a natural part of the art market – a dozen years ago had a pioneering character. And they are also more and more professional.

- [27] In this period an informal *arrangement* concerning photography auctions has developed. Of various – more or less successful – initiatives we spoke about above two undertakings emerged which are continued to this day and are organised regularly: *Fotografia Kolekcjonerska* and Rynek Sztuki auctions - but photographs are also present at many other auctions. Old photography, of mostly documentary value, is the domain of antiquarian auctions, where it realises relatively low prices (several hundred PLN). The so called *artistic* photography, both by the classics from the early 20th century and by later avant-garde artists, is sold mostly in auction houses, realising – especially in the case of the latter photographers – prices in the range of several (less often a dozen) thousand PLN. Works by representatives of the youngest generation are also present in auction houses and in charity auctions, where they fetch sums from several hundred up to a dozen thousand PLN. The auction house Rynek Sztuki specialises in a distinctive branch of the newest photography – pictures called *nice for the eye* by Janusz Miliszkiewicz.⁴⁶ But it is an exception, for the auction houses (Rempex) usually offer the most expensive objects. It is probably because of the price level and the enduring economic crisis that the sales at such auctions has been decreasing since 2008.
- [28] In recent years new phenomena and initiatives have appeared which support – although not always directly – the Polish photography market, such as photography festivals, new photography Galleries, foundations, for example Archeologia Fotografii [the Archeology of Photography Foundation] and unusual forms of sale.⁴⁷ But above all we must stress the role of displays of private photography collections (owned by Wojciech Jędrzejewski, Cezary Pieczyński, Grażyna Kulczyk, Stefan Okołowicz and others), which encourage new collectors and help them to overcome fears, strengthen the position of photography and help to discover works which are not normally accessible.
- [29] It is difficult to predict the development of the photography (and art) market in the coming years but we may expect that the modest scale of the photography market in Poland will not significantly change. Just as the prices of paintings, several times lower than in the West, the prices of photographs will not achieve a level even comparable to the Western ones. Gniotek seems to be correct in her assumption that the photography market in Poland will never be comparable to the painting market.⁴⁸ Perhaps in the future

⁴⁶ Janusz Miliszkiewicz, "Przystępne ceny, bogaty wybór," in: *Rzeczpospolita* 79 (2008), D7.

⁴⁷ Eg. the event Fotosprint – 4 December 2010, Solec Club in Warsaw, organisers: the Archeology of Photography Foundation and the *Exklusiv* monthly.

⁴⁸ Ireneusz Zjeżdżałka, Agnieszka Gniotek, "Sukces najtrudniej powtórzyć," in: *Fotografia* 24-25 (2008), 112.

individuals artists (especially contemporary ones) will manage to achieve a status similar to that of Wilhelm Sasnal or Mirosław Bałka but they will get high prices for their works only abroad. As long as the income of the Poles will remain lower than of the inhabitants of Western Europe and the USA and the significance of Polish photography will remain local, the Polish photography market will not significantly expand.

Translated by Tomasz Bieroń

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