

Jan Kazimierz Kapera

MIECZYŚLAW JAKIMOWICZ (1881 –1917)

Mieczysław Henryk Jakimowicz was born on May 17th, 1881 in Warsaw, as the only son of Michał Jakimowicz and Maria Rejment. He was a nephew of the famous Polish writer, Władysław Stanisław Reymont, Noble Prize winner in literature in 1924, a cousin of the well known architect, Konstanty Sylwin Jakimowicz. Mieczysław Jakimowicz completed five year 2nd Gymnasium in the capital city of Warsaw. During that time for a few months he attended drawing classes at the Adam Badowski School. By the end of 1904 Jakimowicz married Jadwiga Gottlieb, a sister of his close friend Leopold Gottlieb, a painter. In July 1905 their only daughter Zofia was born, who was later a wife of Ignacy Bujak of Zakopane. Mieczysław was very active in the underground cultural and literary movements under Russian occupied part of Poland. He traveled often and during one of his winter trips from Warsaw to Krakow, with forbidden books, he developed pneumonia and in aftermath the tuberculosis. It was his uncle Reymont and aunt Katarzyna Jakimowicz who supported him for years in his artistic studies, trips to Italy and France.

From 1900 to 1907 he studied, with many intervals, in the School of Fine Arts in Krakow. In the first semester of 1900/1901 he attended a drawing classes of Prof. Leon Wyczółkowski, and received “A” grade for the drawings from antiquity and a prize for the best composition. In the second semester of 1900/1901 and the first semester of 1901/1902 he end up in the studio of Prof. Józef Unierzyski. He befriended Karol Frycz and Konstanty Brandel there. Again, for his drawings of antique figures, heads, and life

models, and for nocturnal drawings, he received all “A” and was praised for composition.

He sold some of his works for 30 guildens. In 1902/1903 he was registered into the class of Prof. Józef Mehoffer, but did not attend, or only sporadically. Similarly, in the first semester of 1903/1904 and 1907/1908 he was rarely present in the class of Prof. Teodor Axentowicz.

He started to exhibit his works in 1902 - "Self-portrait" and "At Dusk" (O zmroku) – at IV “Sztuka” (The Arts) exhibit in Krakow. He was active in the Brotherhood Assistance Society (Towarzystwo Bratniej Pomocy) at Academy of Fine Arts. Together with his friends from academy, they arranged a public lecture to commemorate a 10th anniversary of Jan Matejko’s death; they wanted, unsuccessfully, get some funds to build a monument for the famous Polish painter. His studies at the academy were constantly interrupted by his failing health. He traveled to Italy in November of 1902. He stayed in Florence where he wanted to extend his knowledge of graphic techniques, especially lithograph. He spent a summer of 1903 and 1904 there. In May 1903 he created his "Prelude” (Preludium). He got there in touch, through Reymont, with Polish miniaturist, Bogusław M. Adamowicz, with whom he came back to Poland in 1904. From 1903 he kept sending his works to all most important art shows of TPSP in Krakow and Lwow, and TZSP in Warsaw, where in 1904 he received the 2nd Prize for the composition “Hands” (Ręce)

The artist, quiet and modest, has been at the same time one of the five (next to Leopold Gottlieb – initiator of the “Group of Five” (Grupa Pięciu), also called “Norwid Group”, established in the Fall of 1905, Vlastimil Hofman, Jan Rembowski, and Witold

Wojtkiewicz) rebellious youngest painters from the circle of “Sztuka”, who dare to challenge its dictatorship and, dominant at the time, naturalism. Gottlieb, in his article in “Critique” (Krytyka) in 1905 called exhibits organized by “Sztuka” – “a failure”, and asked “Why such artist, as: Pieńkowski, Jakimowicz, Hofman, Wojtkiewicz, Hochman are ignored only because, they are looking for their own ways to express their feelings and thoughts?” As their masters, Malczewski and Wyspiański, they were searching for inspiration in literature, stating, that there are no boundaries between arts, and they were striving toward synthesis of painting, poetry, music, and theatre. Even with unified program, with time passing by, each of the artists from the group developed own way of expression, individual style, more or less influenced by others. Artistic form has not been a goal of their search, but only a tool to show inner feelings, to express the soul: “What really strikes in all these paintings is the strong emphasis on psychological view of the person, underlining it, sometimes, even with a harm to external form ... they are not satisfied with painterly painting, but they are rather searching for ways to express their own souls, than studying surrounding nature, which helped them only as a means of creating a language to express the deepest emotions”, wrote art critic and admirer of “Group of Five”, Jan Piotrowski, in the “Illustrated Weekly” (Tygodnik Ilustrowany) in 1906. He participated in the shows of “Group of Five” in Warsaw, Krakow, and Lwow, but really warm greeting he got from Austrian and German art critics after the shows in Viennese Secession (1906), Berliner Salon of E. Schulte (1906/07), and in Viennese Salon of A. Pisko (1908).

Polish critics were mostly flattered with the work of painters of “Group of Five”, including Jakimowicz. But there were, as always, some voices of criticism, as: “Infected by symbolist hydra, [Jakimowicz] similarly to Gottlieb, remains under her spell.

Studies, called “Prolog” (Prolog), “King-Spirit” (Król-Duch) are drawing puzzles, which surely nobody will feel obligated to explain”, or in another article: “Jakimowicz’s mannerists, monotonous visions attract with their mysteriousness. This mood is rather made up, than being felt, so they do not possess any higher artistic value.” But already in 1907, Władysław Wankie, wrote in the “World” (Świat) against all those imputations: “The art of “Group of Five” is well mature, as is the art of each of its members. They all have developed their own goals and tendencies. They all connected as members of the same group by exceptional, as for our circumstances, artistic feeling of style.” Even warmer, especially about Jakimowicz’s art wrote critics in the West. “Balance, in the range of artistic expression, has been achieved exclusively by Mieczysław Jakimowicz, who fixes ethereal impressions mixed with images of reality and those transpired from other dimensions, in his delicate dissolved drawings” wrote Karl M. Kuzmany in “Die Kunst für Alle”. Berliner “Boersen Courier” reported about the exhibit in Salon of E. Schulte that: “In all paintings of “Group of Five” there is a strange kind of melancholy visible, which interact with brilliantly pointed out intellect. We can see here spiritual people, that look at the world from behind the white glasses, as they would like to show to us a strange kind of mysteries of spirit, at the same time hiding their own faces. Sometimes melancholy and depression is shown with pathos, or in Satanism of Przybyszewski, otherwise in clowns grotesque and childish jokes”. “Vossische Zeitung” critic “on the first place in the group mentioned the name of Mieczysław Jakimowicz, who, in his dark cardboards in the gray shade, presented many different ideas in his compositions of heads, covered with thick mists and lighted often just by single beam of light. Strange mood of symbolism and mysteriousness blows from

those compositions full of spirituality, which are artistic creations of the first-rate talent.”

From 1906 Jakimowicz run for the Prince Czartoryski stipend. He received it finally for the years 1910-11, with help and protection of Jacek Malczewski and Olga Boznańska.

In January 1907, together with other members of “Group of Five” he exhibited over a dozen or so works in the Salon of E. Schulte in Berlin, subsequently in Düsseldorf and Köln, and in the fall the same year “Strange Eyes” (*Les yeux etranges*) and “Over the Paschal Candle” (*Nad gromnicą*) in Warsaw’s TZSP. In the winter of 1907, with support of his Uncle Reymont, who tirelessly promoted his nephew work everywhere, Warsaw’s TZSP bought one of his works. In January and February of 1908 he took part in the show of “Group of Five” and Polish sculptor, Roman Lewandowski, in Viennese Salon of A. Pisko. In March four works from this exhibit he sent to the spring show of Munchener Secession. In the summer of 1907 he was treated for the tuberculosis in Rymanów Zdrój.

Parisian period, from the spring of 1908 till the early summer of 1912, besides the great amount of work and many exhibitions, was a time of constantly deteriorating health of the painter. He often traveled to resorts at the Atlantic Ocean to repair his failing lungs. Late summer and fall of 1908 and 1909 Jakimowicz spent at Sables d’Olonne. In August of 1910 they visited Reymonts, who came from Poland, and spent time together in Saint Palais, near Royan. They lived in the Villa “Marthangel”. Reymonts left to Poland by the end of August, Jakimowicz stayed longer, probably till the end of September. Artist worked during this time on his new works for the Salon d’Automne. Summer and fall of 1911

they spent in Villa “Laurier” in Yport les Bains, near Havre. Spring 1912, feeling particularly sick and weakened by tuberculosis, he lived in Villa “Belgarde” in Arcachon, near Bordeaux; then he was a guest of Mr. & Mrs. Wanda and Andrzej Toczyłowski, where he lived for a while and then, in May, returned to Paris.

In Paris, by the Seine, this unusual dreamer attracted attention of one of the greatest Polish painters, Olga Boznańska. He found in her a great friend and a great supporter. In 1908 he painted he portrait, which was reproduced in Warsaw’s “The Arts” (*Sztuka*), in 1914. In 1908, through protection of Boznańska, he received some badly needed money from Association des Etudiants. In 1910 she finished painting his portrait, which was included into an Exhibition of Contemporary Art in Lwow, in 1913.

As many Polish artists living at this time in Paris, he spent long hours in his Parisian studio at Campagne Premiere. As soon as in 1908 he showed “At Dusk” (*O zmroku*) and “Interior” (*Wnętrze*) in Salon d’Automne. Next year, he sent his works, e.g. “Strange Eyes”, to Viennese Secession. In Paris however, in the salon Societe Nationale des Beaux-Arts, he showed “Hands”, “Sadness”, “Self-portrait”, and “Pilgrim”. In July of 1910, in the same salon, French Ministry of Education acquired his “Strange Eyes” to the collection of Musee de Luxembourg. “Warsaw Courier” (*Kurier Warszawski*) reported from Paris: “French Ministry of Education, which every year acquires outstanding works of art for Parisian museums in salon of Societe Nationale de Beaux-Arts, bought a painting “Strange Eyes” of Polish artist, Mieczysław Jakimowicz, for the collection of Musee de Luxembourg. As yet, there was only one painting by Polish artist, Olga Boznańska, acquired by Musee de Luxembourg. Mieczysław Jakimowicz, former member of the

Krakow's "Group of Five" attracted attention of the Parisian critics with subtlety of his work. His pictures are evidence of a great original talent, and a technical virtuosity; each work of this appreciated artist possesses visionary qualities, achieved through serious themes and subtle execution; if we could use this term, we could call his works "silent". They filled with stillness, quietness, and endless melancholy; no without the reason one of the French critics pointed out that "Jakimowicz paints human souls."

He was one of many Polish artists who were looking for an inspiration in the artistic capital of the world. He must have known oeuvre of other artists, as Melania Muttermilch, since 1902 a member of Societe Nationale de Beaux-Arts, Eugeniusz Żak, living in Paris since 1902, students of Józef Mehoffer from Krakow's Academy: Tadeusz Makowski, Waclaw Borowski, Tytus Czyżewski, Roman Kramsztyk, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, who lived there from 1910 to 1911, Waclaw Zawadowski, who relocated to Paris in 1910, Henryk Weyssenhoff, or sculptor Waclaw Szymanowski, literary people: Kornel Makuszyński, Antoni Lange, Michał Muttermilch, Tadeusz Grabowski, to mention just few names. In 1911 he was elected a chairman of the plastic arts section of the Polish Literary and Artistic Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Literacko-Artystyczne) in Paris. Four works: "Strange Hands", "On the border of the two Worlds", "Pilgrim", and "Portrait of an Unknown Woman" he showed in the exhibition of Polish painters associated with Paris in Galeries Jose Dalmau in Barcelona. Exhibition lasted from May to June of 1912. It was accompanied by an illustrated catalog with an introduction by Michał Muttermilch. Besides Jakimowicz, their works showed: Olga Boznańska, Leopold Gottlieb, Eugeniusz Żak, Antoni Buszek, Stanisława Centnerszwer, Witold Gordon, Roman

Kramsztyk, Melania Muttermilch, Józef Makowski, Elie Nadelman, Józef Pankiewicz, Stanisław Rzecki, Jan Rubczak, and Felicja Szerer.

Upon return to Poland in the summer of 1912, Jakimowicz stayed for few months in Jaslo-Nieglowice. In the fall of the same year, from September 29th to October 10th, Lwow's Literary & Artistic Circle (Koło Literacko-Artystyczne) organized in Mikolasz Passage, individual show of his paintings and miniatures. It received very warm welcome, so the artist thought about settling in Lwow and opening an art school there. Reymont wrote to him: "As far as I am concern, an idea of opening an art school in Lwow, I cannot deny your kind of self-assurance, but maybe because of it, you may succeed." Unfortunately, deteriorating health of the artist prevented him from achieving that.

In January of 1913 Jakimowicz settled permanently in Zakopane, at Sienkiewicza 3, and later in Villa "Zawrat", where they opened a small boarding house. In the same year, at the Exhibition of Contemporary Art in Lwów, he showed "visionary heads full of grace", as "Self-portrait" and "Fallen Angels" (Upadłe Anioły). The latter, he sent later to Warsaw to be included into exhibit at TZSP. In the fall of 1913 he was invited by Tadeusz Rucinski to exhibit his works in the Salon of the Society of Polish Painters in Poznan. It was his last individual exhibit. He showed thirteen paintings. From Zakopane he made some unsuccessful efforts to achieve position of the professor of graphic arts at Warsaw School of Fine Arts. He even exchange some letters in 1914, encouraged by Reymont, with well-known graphic artist and art collector, Dominik Witke-Jeżewski, to whom he sent some of his works for reviewing.

During the final years he spent in the shadow of the Tatra Mountains he befriended many artists and literary people, like Stefan Żeromski and Kornel Makuszyński. With the author of the “Sinless years” he met in Paris, where Makuszyński continued his philosophical studies. They exchanged letters, and Makuszyński have had artist’s “Self-Portrait” in his collection. Artists and writers were those who were very close to the artists in his final years. And it was a prime company of the best Polish artistic society had to offer at the time. They were also flamboyant and liked having fun at Plonka or in famous Stanisław Karpowicz Café. Kazimierz Sichulski, friend from the Krakow’s Academy times, lived in Zakopane in the years of the I World War in Karpowicz’s Hotel on Krupówki Street. He paid for rent and board with his paintings, mostly caricatures of famous Poles visiting Zakopane. Great Polish actor, Ludwik Solski, persuaded him to do a whole series of caricatures of famous of the time. Such names must be mentioned, as: Axentowicz, Tetmajer, Witkiewicz, Żuławski, Żeromski, Makuszyński, and many others. They hung in the Karpowicz Café till ‘1970, and are now in Tatra Museum collection. In this great collection of characters sad, quiet, and modest Jakimowicz could not be overlooked and Sichulski painted him many times. At least four caricatures are known, three in National Museum in Warsaw, and one, from 1915, in Tatra Museum in Zakopane.

In the time of war, many artists found shelter in Zakopane. Pronaszko brothers, Andrzej and Zbigniew, have been working on the stage designs to Juliusz Słowacki’s “Lilla Weneda” and Stanisław Wyspiański’s “Legion” directed by Stefan Żeromski, close friend of Jakimowicz. Also, former member of the “Group of Five”, Jan Rembowski, was staying and working in Zakopane at the time.

Friends visited often a little Jakimowicz’s studio, always full of flowers, where they felt like in the different world and time, where no news about raging war could ever entered. They delivered newspapers to the artist, who was looking for the news about the end of the war and long awaited independence for his beloved Poland. He did not live to see it happened. He died on July 26th 1917 and was buried on Pęksowy Brzyzek cemetery in Zakopane. His quiet departure from life and from world where death, suffering, and pain became an every day reality, has past unnoticed, and stayed that way for almost a century to come.

Jan Kazimierz Kapera

New York 2005

Limited numbered edition of 200 copies

www.jkkfinearts.com