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“The World of Tomorrow”
or “The World of Yesterday”?
The Image of an Independent
Nation at the 1939 New York
World’s Fair

ABSTRACT

Poland’s presence at World’s Fairs between the World Wars is a special issue in that, after a long absence on the map of Europe, the country had the opportunity to show its industrial and cultural achievements in the international arena as an independent exhibitor for the first time. Thus, this event always had a very important political dimension. Its symbol was the Polish pavilion presented in Paris in 1925, but no less important was the pavilion at the New York World’s Fair in 1939. Although it was a success at the world expo, it was overshadowed by the tragic consequences of the outbreak of World War II almost from the beginning. From today’s perspective, it is worth looking at this object, to evaluate its foundation and ultimate significance, as well as to reflect on the difficult concept of national art, in addition to tracing the fate of the pavilion.

KEY WORDS: world’s fair, world’s expo, New York World’s Fair, Polish pavilion, Brotherhood of St. Luke, Jan Cybulski

STRESZCZENIE

„The World of Tomorrow” czy „The World of Yesterday”? Wizerunek niepodległego narodu na Wystawie Światowej w Nowym Jorku w 1939 r.

Obecność Polski na wystawach światowych w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym to zagadnienie o tyle szczególne, że po długiej nieobecności na mapie Europy po raz pierwszy kraj ten miał szansę pokazać swoje osiągnięcia przemysłu i kultury na arenie międzynarodowej jako niezależny wystawca. Wydarzenie to miało więc bardzo istotny wymiar polityczny. Jego symbolem jest pawilon polski zaprezentowany w Paryżu w 1925 r., nie mniej ważny jednak okazał się pawilon na wystawie nowojorskiej w 1939 r. Choć na światowej ekspozycji odniósł sukces, niemal od początku znalazł się w cieniu tragicznych następstw wybuchu II wojny światowej. Z dzisiejszej perspektywy warto przyjrzeć się temu obiektowi, by ocenić jego założenia i ostateczną wymowę oraz zastanowić się nad trudnym pojęciem sztuki narodowej, a także prześledzić dalsze losy pawilonu.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: wystawy światowe, Wystawa Światowa w Nowym Jorku, pawilon polski, Bractwo św. Łukasza, Jan Cybulski

The 1939 New York World's Fair was the last event of this kind before the outbreak of World War II. It was part of a series of international exhibitions, traditionally opened on 1 May, initiated in 1851 by the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London.¹ Poland was among the countries invited to participate. After the previous successes (and controversies) at the world exhibitions in Paris in 1925 and 1937, the country was once again given the opportunity to present its achievements and proposals in various fields of industry, science, and art. With regard to the problem of national independence as a project and experience, the analysis of the Polish pavilion's exhibition at the World Exhibition in New York, as opposed to the Parisian world fairs, will lead us more towards the concept of "experience" than "project." This article provides a summary of the Polish exhibition, in particular the section on visual arts, its ideological aspect and an evaluation from today's perspective.

1 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski na nowojorskiej wystawie światowej (1939-1940)*, Warszawa 2013, p. 34.

The New York World’s Fair was fueled by the slogan “The World of Tomorrow,” which indicated a future-oriented direction, optimism and an opportunity for change, for the first time so strongly expressed at such an event. The United States had just risen from the economic crisis that had started with the famous “Black Thursday” of 1929. The New Deal, launched in 1933 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a program of economic and social reforms aimed at counteracting the effects of the crisis, had already brought the first results, which could be presented in the context of the extremely ambitious expo project.² At that time, New York City was seeing the effects of both the crisis and Roosevelt’s reforms, therefore seeming both poor and rich.³ Americans needed a strong incentive for recovery and delineation of new roads to progress. The initiators of the event, Joseph F. Shagden and Edward F. Roosevelt, responded to this stimulus by proclaimed the slogan of the World’s Fair for “happiness, hope and profit.”⁴

The leading creators of the exhibition were the architect Norman Bel Geddes, Donald Deskey, the architect Stefan Voorhees and industrial designers: Walter Darwin Teague, Henry Dreyfuss, and Raymond Loewy. Grover Aloysius Whalen was Chairman of the committee.⁵ The exhibition was attended by many outstanding artists of international renown, as evidenced by the presence of such names as Alvar Aalto, Salvador Dali, or Oscar Niemeyer.

Nearly 60 countries presented themselves at the Fair. The first to accept the invitation was the Soviet Union, whose pavilion went down in history as one of the largest and most expensive. The Third Reich refused to participate in the project on the grounds of lack of sufficient financial resources, in fact preparing for the war that was about to begin.⁶ In fact, as it soon turned out, the New York World’s Fair, full of optimism, hope for development and a better tomorrow in its assumptions, was marked by the stigma of growing political conflict, which ultimately put an end to all the ambitious plans.

Americans invested over 27 million dollars in the project. Queens district and its Flushing Meadows, an uninteresting, wet, polluted area on

2 Ibidem, p. 38.

3 J. Winiewicz, *Co pamiętam z długiej drogi życia*, Poznań 1985, p. 108, cited in: K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 38.

4 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 39.

5 A.M. Drexlerowa, A. Olszewski, *Polską i Polacy na powszechnych wystawach światowych 1851-2000*, Warszawa 2005, p. 248.

6 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 40.

the Flushing River was chosen as the location for the event.⁷ Thanks to the World Trade Organization, this unattractive area turned into a center of the latest technologies. The designed space was based on a system of radial aisles spreading from the theme center. The area was decorated with diverse vegetation on top of modern water and light installations. In addition, the whole event was to be accompanied by music.⁸

The grand opening of the World's Fair, which took place on 30 April, attracted crowds. It was attended by members of the US government, President Roosevelt, representatives of the Congress, House of Representatives, state governors, state dignitaries, and a representation of foreign countries. Roosevelt and Whalen came up with speeches. There was also a US Army and Navy parade accompanied by groups of representatives of individual countries dressed in their national costumes.⁹

The architecture of the exhibition pavilions was characterized, as it was the case at the World's Fairs in Brussels in 1935 and Paris in 1937, by a great variety of forms, typical of the 1930s. The style carried reminiscences of classicism through monumentality of forms or art déco, but at the same time it presented many modern solutions, above all the American streamlined shapes, which dominated industrial design for decades to come.¹⁰

The division into geographical and thematic exhibition zones was a novelty. The zones were entitled: Amusement Area, Communication and Trade, Social Affairs, the Food Zone, Government Zone, Production and Distribution Zone, and Transportation Zone. In the center there were two major structures: a three-sided obelisk dubbed the Tylon and the Perisphere, a huge rounded structure bringing obvious associations with the globe. They were designed by architects Wallace K. Harrison and J. Andre Fouilhoux.¹¹ It is noteworthy that the two exhibitions, which presented futuristic visions of cities, were named *Democracy* and *Futurama*. The first of these was located in the Perisphere and presented the image of a 2039 city by Dreyfus. The second one, designed by Geddes, was part of the exhibition of the popular General Motors pavilion and was an image of a 1960s city accompanied by a presentation of American technological innovations.¹²

7 Ibidem, p. 41.

8 Ibidem, p. 42.

9 Ibidem, p. 49.

10 A.K. Olszewski, *Wystawa nowojorska w 1939 roku. Program i realizacja*, in: *Wystawa nowojorska 1939* [Conference papers], Materiały z sesji naukowej Instytutu Sztuki PAN Warszawa, 23-24 November 2009, ed. J.M. Sosnowska, Warszawa 2009, p. 16.

11 Ibidem, p. 16.

12 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 56-57.

The Second Polish Republic was to present itself against all these impressive modern wonders of technology, architecture and industry. Although very young, it already had positive experiences with world exhibitions. Poland’s situation was not the easiest one. Its only 20-year history had been turbulent enough. In addition, Poland was in an extremely difficult geopolitical position, and due to certain controversial political decisions, it had a weakened reputation in the eyes of other countries. Nevertheless, participation in such a prestigious event gave Poland a chance to improve its international image.¹³ After the last exhibition in Paris there were rumors of particular interest in Polish architecture among Americans.¹⁴ Moreover, participation in the Fair organized by such an industrially and technologically developed country as the United States was associated with prestige, which would be difficult to give up for the ambitious Second Republic. In connection with the acceptance of the invitation, a number of institutions were established to be responsible for the preparation of the Polish pavilion.

The key person was Commissioner General Stefan Ropp, Director of the Poznań International Fair. Unlike the organizers of Paris exhibitions, Jerzy Warchałowski and Lech Niemojewski, he was in no way connected with the world of art, but his greatest and irreplaceable asset was his vast experience in organizing such projects.¹⁵ The design of the Polish pavilion envisaged two main objectives. The first of them was to show that Poland, despite many opinions, was not a country that was founded in 1918, but one that regained independence then. It was therefore necessary, despite the guiding slogan of the American Exhibition, refer to the pre-partition Polish history, with an emphasis not on martyrdom, but in historical moments of glory, the events that allowed Poland to play a significant role in the history of Europe, and which accentuated the deep-rooted democratic traditions of our country.¹⁶ The opinions of that time clearly expressed a need for the pavilion to fulfill its propaganda mission.¹⁷ The second objective was to present not so much the industrial achievements of the Second Republic as its trade offer, hoping for new trends and products exports and a chance for obtaining new loans.¹⁸ The first goal was achieved

13 Ibidem, p. 60.

14 L. Niemojewski, *Polska na wystawie w Nowym Yorku*, “Architektura i Budownictwo,” 1938, Iss. 3, p. 75.

15 P. Korduba, *Stefan Ropp – komisarz generalny polskiej wystawy i elementy jej organizacji*, in: *Wystawa nowojorska*, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

16 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

17 S. Zamecznik, *W antrakcie*, “Architektura i Budownictwo,” 1938, Iss. 3, pp. 85-86.

18 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 71.

primarily through the visual setting of the Polish pavilion and the art presented there.

One may wonder if the assumptions of the Polish pavilion chosen by the organizers were indeed successful. The exhibition committee were well aware of who would be the main recipient of the Polish exhibition: in the case of the United States, it was necessary to focus primarily on the expectations of the American Polonia. It was undoubtedly easier for Polish emigrants to find a point of reference in the historical concept of the exhibition, which had no signs of nostalgia, but hopes to regain the former power. For many representatives of the American Polish community, it was the first opportunity to see their country's representation at an international event after the restoration of independence.¹⁹ In a short text for the *Architektura i Budownictwo* magazine, Commissioner General of the exhibition of 1937, Lech Niemojewski, wonders: "Can Poles show something more than memorabilia that would move the emigrants longing for the old country on the other hemisphere?"²⁰ and he thinks that the answer seems to be yes. Although Polish achievements in industry and technology could not in any way compete with what the Americans had in store, we could show "this tradition, this culture, this poetry of a good, true quality"²¹ across the ocean, which countries with shorter histories lacked. The aspect of the centuries-old tradition, which the United States and many European countries may envy us in various fields, was repeatedly emphasized in the opinions about the Polish exhibition, and it was clearly what its makers emphasized the most.

At the New York World's Fair, the Polish pavilion was assigned a quite satisfactory location, opposite Italy, and away from the dominant USSR pavilion, so it was not threatened by strong competition from other representations. The requirements were as follows: the pavilions could occupy a maximum of 75% of the allocated area, the exhibition spaces should have one storey and a height not exceeding 21 meters, a tower could reach a maximum of 36 meters (but eventually the Polish one was higher), and the rooms had to be illuminated only with artificial light. The pavilion was to include: the representative part, the science and art department, the tourism department, the top Polish production department, the export trade fair department, a Raclawice Panorama (an idea which was eventually abandoned, rightly so in the opinion of some, as it would be naive to believe that this panoramic painting could dazzle the American public),²²

19 Ibidem, p. 72.

20 L. Niemojewski, *Poland at the exhibition*, op. cit., p. 75.

21 Ibidem, p. 76.

22 S. Zamecznik, *W antrakcie*, op. cit., p. 87.

a restaurant, utility rooms and a three wagon railway train. The project also include the surrounding greenery and water.²³

In 1937, tenders for the design of the Polish pavilion started. The jury awarded individual candidates points from 1 to 5 in various categories assessing, among others, the architecture, interiors, concept, entrance and exit solutions and compatibility with the environment. As a result of the competition four cash prizes were awarded, and one project was accepted for purchase. The first award was received by Stefan Osiecki, Lucjan Piętka, Jerzy Skolimowski, and Eugeniusz Szparkowski in collaboration with Waław Hryniewicz. The third place was awarded to the project by Jan Cybulski, Jan Galinowski, and Feliks Szczęśny-Kowarski. Although the sum of points awarded to them was lower than the projects that won the first and second prizes, it was the only proposal that received the maximum 5 points in the “Architecture” category.²⁴ It is difficult to indicate why the winning design was not implemented. The lack of sufficient information suggests that the visual attractiveness of the pavilion was decisive, and probably, economic and technical considerations prevailed, the former in particular due to the relatively small budget allocated to the construction of the pavilion.²⁵

The winning design was changed many times, but in the final version there was a single-storey rectangular building, 10 meters high, raised in the central part, with side wings with loggias, with a façade finished in smooth, elegant sandstone and the most important element – the golden tower at the entrance, thanks to which the pavilion was long remembered by the visitors. The 18-storey tower was an openwork truss reminiscent (as an historical allusion) of a medieval tower, covered with gilded shields in a shape similar to rectangles with truncated corners and concave sides and decorative bumps. The interior of the pavilion had two entrances, and the main gate was stylized as a Gothic city gate, above which the Polish national emblem was placed.²⁶ As usually happens in such cases, the choice of design of the pavilion also met with harsh criticism. At the stage of preparation, there were voices of doubt whether the Polish pavilion will be able to impress anyone at all.²⁷ As it turned out, its simple, smooth form with distinct accents making reference to medieval architecture gained

23 Konkurs powszechny nr 95 na projekt szkicowy Pawilonu Polskiego na Światowej Wystawie w Nowym Jorku w 1939 r., “Architektura i Budownictwo,” 1938, Iss. 3, p. 77.

24 Ibidem, pp. 77-80.

25 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 67.

26 Ibidem, p. 84.

27 D. Konstantynów, *Polską w „Świecie Jutra”*. O wymowie ideowej pawilonu polskiego na wystawie światowej w Nowym Jorku, in: *Polskie zaplecze*, op. cit., p. 92.

recognition from the audience and distinguished itself from the other buildings.²⁸

Originally, the pavilion was complemented by a statue depicting Tadeusz Kościuszko, but eventually it was opted for an equestrian statue of King Władysław Jagiełło harmonizing with the character of the tower.²⁹ It was designed by sculptor Stanisław Ostrowski much earlier, in 1909, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald, but remained in design phase since. After 30 years, the work on the monument was resumed, and the artist proceeded to it enthusiastically. The Jagiełło statue was cast in bronze in Italy, using the traditional lost wax method. Also, the figure of the king was presented in a very traditional way, with attention to detail, with faithfully rendered armor and facial features. The three-meter statue stood in front of the entrance on a four-meter tall pedestal with an inscription saying “Poland,” but devoid of information that the person depicted is King Jagiełło. The signature was abandoned since, as it was thought, the king who defeated the Teutonic Knights and victoriously held two crossed enemy swords over his head could unnecessarily provoke and exacerbate the already strained Polish-German relations. When the work was about to end, Ostrowski was even pressured to convert the sculpture into an image of Bolesław the Brave, but the artist refused, claiming that even Michelangelo himself would not have been able to do it.³⁰ Ultimately, however, due to the fact that in April 1939, Adolf Hitler broke the non-aggression treaty with Poland, Polish Ambassador Józef Potocki explained the meaning of the Jagiełło monument at the official opening and, although it was not said directly, the audience felt the analogy between the Battle of Grunwald and the contemporary political situation.³¹

The Polish Pavilion was opened on May 3, 1939, three days after the official opening of the Fair, which was naturally related to the celebration of the anniversary of the Constitution of May 3. It presented 11,000 items that came to America on the “Batory” ship.³² The central room of the pavilion was the Hall of Honor, where the exhibition entitled *The Past and the Future of Poland* was presented. The Hall of Honor, according to Szczęśny-Kowarski’s plan, was a stylistically integral whole with the gold tower. Its authors were architect Stefan Listowski, painter Jan Sokołowski, and sculptor Józef Klukowski. The decoration of the Hall, according to

28 A. Chmielewska, *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski według twórców działu polskiego*, in: *Polskie zaplecze*, op. cit., p. 67.

29 D. Konstantynów, *Polską w „Świecie Jutra”*, op. cit., p. 93.

30 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., pp. 103-105.

31 D. Konstantynów, *Polską w „Świecie Jutra”*, op. cit., p. 94.

32 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., pp. 113-115.

the organizers’ wishes, was supposed to refer to the Wawel renaissance, so it was decided to use a coffered ceiling. The Hall was divided into three parts. The right side represented Poland of the past, the middle part – the present one, and the left side – its future.³³

On the left, there were pseudo-ancient cartograms designed by Stanisław and Maciej Nowicki and Tadeusz Piotrowski, that proudly (and rather exaggeratedly) illustrated the contemporary significance of Poland on the map of Europe and the world (the themes of the representations were: the geopolitical axis of Poland, industry in Poland, Poles in Central Europe, Poles in the world, and the role of Poles in the world). Above the cartograms there was a fresco by Bolesław Cybis depicting the Central Industrial District and Gdynia³⁴ – obvious achievements of the Second Polish Republic, which should not have been omitted.

In the middle, the most dignified part, separated by a balustrade designed by Henryk Grunwald, there was a stained-glass window by Mieczysław Jurgielewicz entitled *Risen Poland*, showing the personification of the Risen Poland with a sheaf and a sword accompanied by personifications of professions, and in the upper part – Mary the Gate of Dawn, in the lower part – a white eagle and two groups of soldiers. In front of the stained-glass window there was a sculpture, also by Ostrowski, depicting Józef Piłsudski leaning on a saber,³⁵ well known for its later version found in the Belvedere in Warsaw. At the foot of the Piłsudski monument, a replica of St. Maurice spear was placed in a showcase, along with the marshal’s baton donated to the Commandant by the army after the victory over the Bolsheviks.³⁶ These artifacts, as well as historical documents presented in the showcases in the right-hand part of the room, were supposed to be tangible proofs of the glorious events presented in the exhibition³⁷ so that no one would have any doubt that it conveyed facts and not a poetic vision.

On the right-hand side wall, there were seven paintings by artists from the Brotherhood of St. Luke, an art group which referred to the tradition of the old masters, and cared greatly about the quality of the works, using traditional techniques. For this reason, they seemed to be the most suitable for the depiction of historical themes. The order was entrusted to 11 painters of the group. Arbitrarily, the following topics were provided to them to work on: Bolesław the Brave, Christianization of Lithuania,

33 Ibidem, p. 128.

34 A. Chmielewska, *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski*, op. cit., p. 69.

35 Ibidem.

36 D. Konstantynów, *Polską w „Świecie Jutra”*, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

37 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 144.

the Jedlna Charter, the Union of Lublin, the Warsaw Confederation, the Battle of Vienna, and the Constitution of the 3rd of May. The representations had to be clear and readable, visually attractive, and tailored to a mass audience. The artists presented preliminary sketches, but they did not meet with enthusiasm. They were accused, above all, of a lack of uniform character, which was due to the fact that they were created by various painters whose styles, although similar, were nevertheless individual. In order of the works to be accepted, they needed to be harmonized in terms of style. This requirement led to a rather unusual painting experiment, which was the joint work on all seven paintings signed by all the 11 artists (Bolesław Cybis, Bernard Frydrysiak, Jan Gotard, Aleksander Jędrzejewski, Eliasz Kanarek, Jeremi Kubicki, Antoni Michalak, Stefan Płużański, Janusz Podoski, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, and Jan Zamoyski), each of them in fact made a part using his best skills.³⁸ The paintings were made in a traditional tempera technique on board or canvas, which allowed the artists to obtain bright, vivid colors. The paintings were certainly legible or understandable for both Polish and foreign viewers. They showed the most important events in the history of Poland, as testimonies not only to its victories and power (after all, only the *Battle of Vienna* referred to fighting – and that was for the sake of defending Christianity), but also to the modern system of centuries-long democracy, the adherence to the values which, although traditional, have not lost their relevance. However, the works were not accepted without a word of criticism. The St. Lukas painters' works were accused of rigidity, conservatism and stylistic reference to the early Italian Renaissance, not having much in common with the theme of the images.³⁹ In addition to the paintings, also tapestries by Mieczysław Szymański were displayed. They depicted the history associated with King John III Sobieski, and had previously found recognition at the exhibition in Paris in 1937.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the general reception was positive in most cases and the Polish pavilion was not accused of focusing too much on history at the event directed at progress and modernization.⁴¹

Visitors walked from the Hall of Honor into the Hall of Arts and the Hall of Applied Arts. The Hall of Arts, designed by Konstanty Danko and Stanisław Kucharski, contained mainly paintings representing various artistic circles. The fresco by Jan Henryk Rosen entitled *Great figures of the Polish past* was exhibited there, bringing the same message as the Hall of Honor. There were individual works from the Brotherhood

38 Ibidem, pp. 95-100.

39 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 100.

40 Ibidem, p. 145.

41 Ibidem, p. 149.

of St. Luke, artists of the previous generation such as Jacek Malczewski or Olga Boznańska, Wojciech Weiss from Krakow, in addition to the representatives of the *Rytm* circles and the Formists – for example, Tymon Niesiołowski and Andrzej Pronaszko.⁴² Its overview of Polish art was very conservative, opting for the traditional means of expression, omitting the constructivist avant-garde as associated with communist circles, but also international enough that it was devoid of originality that would identify it as a modern Polish art, as a national art, determinants of which were really still sought after. This choice was dictated by the pavilion’s concept that referred to the history and traditions, but also partly by the expectations of the recipients (the Americans were not devotees of the new European trends).⁴³

The next room, devoted to applied arts, was designed by Jerzy Hryniewiecki, Jan Kurzątkowski and Andrzej Stypiński. It comprised mainly interior design by Jan Bogusławski (*MP Room* and *Lady’s Room*), Barbara Brukalska (*Dining Room*), Kazimierz Prószyński, Włodzimierz Padlewski, and Tadeusz Piotrowski (*Hall*) along with Stanisław and Zofia Dziewulski (*Child’s Room*).⁴⁴ A competition was announced for the interior design, just like for the design of the pavilion, and although it was difficult to imagine the final effects of the implementations on the basis of the sketches, Bogusławski’s particularly interesting proposal was noticed already at this stage.⁴⁵ The other elements of the exposition hall were numerous products of contemporary artistic craftsmanship, such as furniture, ceramics, glass, textiles, metal products, book bindings or examples of regional craftsmanship. Their authors were mainly artists from the circles of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts.⁴⁶

The next rooms of the pavilion were devoted to individual sectors of science and industry. The Hall of Science yet returned to the topic importance of Poles in the world, this time focusing on the Poles in America. The exhibition included a series of portraits by Artur Szyk depicting the first Poles in America, a relief by Józef Klukowski *The First Polish Emigrants in America* and a fresco by Cybis, *The Polish Arms in the History of the United States*. Next, there was the Communications Room, opened by another fresco by Rosen, entitled *Poland of the future*. Its exhibition was not only about means of transport, but also aimed at promoting Polish tourist attractions. The following rooms were devoted to Poland’s achievements

42 Ibidem, pp. 150-155, 160.

43 A. Chmielewska, *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski*, op. cit., p. 78.

44 Ibidem, p. 72.

45 S. Zamecznik, *W antrakcie*, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

46 A. Chmielewska, *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski*, op. cit., p. 71.

at sea, issues related to social welfare, education, architecture and urban planning (here again, many examples of old architecture, such as the settlement in Biskupin, were shown as proof of the centuries-old tradition of Polish construction⁴⁷), Polish production, fabrics (designed by Irena Pokrzywnicka, where women's outfits inspired by Sarmatian fashion were presented), folk art (designed by Anna Pawlikowska and Lucjan Kintopf), and finally, forestry (a rotunda by Bogusławski with Elias Kanarek's frieze).⁴⁸

The pavilion was accompanied by a separate building in the form of a glass rotunda, which contained catering facilities: a restaurant, inn, bar, and café. The interiors and furniture were designed by Henryk Nowina-Czerny, and a plafond symbolizing *Poland's overseas export* was painted by Felicjan Szczęśny-Kowarski.⁴⁹ The inn aroused special curiosity. It was an exact replica of an authentic 16th century tavern – both in terms of decor, staff costumes and traditional, old Polish menu. Antoni Gordon, a steward from the ORP Batory, managed the premises. The restaurants were very popular, and they were open for a longer period than the pavilion itself.⁵⁰ And after the outbreak of WWII, when the fate of the Polish exhibition became uncertain for economic reasons, it was the restaurant that was able to support itself.⁵¹

The first season of the exhibition lasted until 31 October 1939, i.e. already after the outbreak of World War II. A break was made for the winter period, after which it was not expected to resume. However, it turned out otherwise. Not only was the exhibition in the Polish pavilion not closed, but it also gained additional space in the Palace of Nations, after the Soviet Union withdrew from the event. The Polish exhibition, entitled *The Republic of Poland. Exhibition. War Ruins!*, was complemented with photographs of the occupied country (thus, against the organizers' will, the exhibition gained an angle of martyrdom). It attracted not only the Polish community, but also other patrons, who expressed sympathy and solidarity with our country by visiting.⁵²

The Polish Pavilion was one of the most frequently commented works at the New York World's Fair. It enjoyed great acclaim primarily for its architecture. After the end of the exhibition, there was a motion to keep

47 *Architektura i urbanistyka w Nowym Jorku*, "Architektura i Budownictwo," 1939, Iss. 1, p. 38.

48 A. Chmielewska, *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski*, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

49 *Ibidem*, p. 74.

50 K. Nowakowska, *Pawilon polski*, op. cit., p. 87.

51 K. Nowakowska, *Losy polskich eksponatów na wystawie światowej w Nowym Jorku po wybuchu wojny*, in: *Polskie zaplecze*, op. cit., p. 142.

52 *Ibidem*, p. 143.

the gold tower as part of the park, which, according to the New York City Parks Commissioner, Robert Moses, was planned to be built in the post-war period. After the outbreak of the war, Ropp established the American-Polish Memorial Committee, which was to organize the redemption of the Jagiello Tower and Monument from the Polish government. The Committee managed to put up 1200 copper shields covering the tower for sale (the price of each of them was \$50), out of which only 300 were purchased. Finally, in May 1941, the tower was officially offered to the city of New York. However, the ongoing war and the United States joining it a few months later led to the abandonment of the park project and thus to the demolition of the golden tower. Similar plans concerned the fate of the Jagiello monument, which was also to remain a sign of the presence of the Polish pavilion in the Flushing Meadows. The statue, however, was more lucky than the tower, because it was placed on a new pedestal and moved to Central Park, a place where it could be better exposed, and where it is still located today.⁵³

The items from the exhibition could not return to Poland for obvious reasons. On the other hand, the exhibition committee, heavily indebted, did not have the means to maintain the pavilion, so it was decided to put the objects up for auction. The first one was held in cooperation with Polish Art Service in New York. A catalog was prepared by painter and graphic artist Maria Werten, who did her best in the introduction to advertise the Polish exhibits as effectively as possible. The catalog was divided into three sections: fine arts (including painting, sculpture and graphics), decorative art and folk art. At the auction, also the series of the Brotherhood of St. Luke paintings were offered. The next auction was organized by Croydon Galleries in New York. According to the title page of the catalog, items of furniture, equipment, silver, bronze, porcelain, books, folk art, textiles, electronic and industrial machinery, on top of optical and surgical equipment were put up for auction.⁵⁴ A large part of the exhibits was allocated to the collection of the Polish Museum in Chicago. Paintings by the Brotherhood of St. Luke and the tapestries went to the Le Moyne College in Syracuse.

The issue of the Polish pavilion exhibits and their legal status was raised long after the war ended. The long-lived nature of the issue can be proved by the fact that in April 2018 the Museum of Polish History in Warsaw, which is under construction, received artifacts from the Polish exhibition at the New York World's Fair. The donor was Maria Starczewska-Lambasa, whose uncle, filmmaker Jerzy Starczewski, purchased the

53 Ibidem, pp. 142-144.

54 Ibidem, pp. 145-146.

artifacts at these auctions and kept them at his home in New York City, and then bequeathed his niece.⁵⁵ The largest exhibit purchased by Starczewski was one of three bells designed by Aleksander Borawski, made by the Ludwik Felczyński Foundry in Przemyśl, the so-called *Bell of the Fallen in the Fight for Independence 1914-1920* from the Hall of Honor, which the purchaser donated in 1948 to the Carmelite Church in Warsaw.⁵⁶ Starczewski's collections also included: Jan Bogusławski's table which is an element of equipment in the *Lady's Room*, ceramic dishes made by such artists as Julia Kotarbińska, Julian Mickun, Lucy Brzezińska, or Mieczysław Pawełko, regional crafts, mainly Podhale and Hutsul, fabrics, jewelry, utility items such as hunting shoes or binoculars, and book publications, including Jan Brzechwa's *Kaczka Dziwaczka* [A strange, strange duck] published by Jakub Mortkowicz and illustrated by Franciszka Themerson.⁵⁷

In the assessment of the Polish pavilion at the New York World's Fair, a comparison with the earlier world exhibitions in Paris in 1925 and 1937 seems inevitable. This task was undertaken, among others, by Agnieszka Chmielewska in the article *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski według twórców działu polskiego* [The past, present and future of Poland according to the creators of the Polish section] included in the materials from the scientific session of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, *Wystawa nowojorska 1939* [New York 1939 exhibition]. According to the author, the main idea of all three exhibitions was the same. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the Second Republic, after more than a hundred years of absence on the map of Europe, could set itself other goals at events such as world exhibitions than showing that Poland was a country that had recently regained its independence, but had a long tradition preserved in the consciousness of the nation despite the partitions. That is why all exhibitions of the Polish pavilions focused on showing, above all, such art and crafts, which would be clearly distinguished by their original character against the European background. This was probably the main reason why the more avant-garde artists whose work reflected international trends were never represented at the world exhibitions. Nevertheless, it seems that at the exhibitions of the 1930s, art did not occupy such an important place as at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1925. On

55 D. Porycka, *Obiekty z polskiego pawilonu Wystawy Światowej 1939 trafiły do Muzeum Historii Polski*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/obiekty-z-polskiego-pawilonu-wystawy-swiatowej-w-nowym-jorku-1939-trafily-do-kolekcji> (access: 30.01.2019).

56 K. Nowakowska, *Losy polskich eksponatów*, op. cit., p. 147.

57 *Eksponaty z Pawilonu Polskiego Wystawy Światowej w Nowym Jorku z 1939 roku wzbogaciły kolekcję Muzeum Historii Polski*, <http://muzhp.pl/pl/c/1945/eksponaty-z-pawilonu-polskiego-wystawy-wiatowej-w-nowym-jorku-z-1939-roku-wzbogacy-kolekcj-muzeum-historii-polski> (access: 30.01.2019).

the other hand, the state’s powerful ambitions, built on its glorious history and justified by its former greatness, were felt more strongly.⁵⁸ Perhaps that is why art itself ceased to present Poland’s artistic achievements, but became more of a tool for depicting political ideas. It follows that in this case we can speak of national art only in terms of the content conveyed, not the artistic means used. Such a solution was probably less risky, adapted to the mass audience, who, through the traditional forms of art, received a clear message, according to the authors’ assumptions. Nevertheless, from today’s perspective, it is primarily the 1925 Paris exhibition that is seen as the most successful in artistic terms, while the exhibition presented in New York, although it may come as a surprise, is rarely delightful.

Paradoxically, the motto of the world exhibition, “The World of Tomorrow,” ultimately had no optimistic overtones for Poland or for the rest of the world. For Poland, the “World of Tomorrow” meant occupation, renewed loss of freedom, and the greatest tragedy in its history. The plans for the future presented at the World’s Fair were buried in an instant. The fate of the World Exhibition in New York was mainly determined by politics. The Polish pavilion from 1939, by concentrating on showing the values connected with the centuries-old history of Poland, which was perceived as our greatest asset, became even more significant, since only a few months after the opening of the exhibition it turned out that the future of these values uncertain.

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58 A. Chmielewska, *Przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość Polski*, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

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