

# Vita brevis, Ars longa – applied art and modernist architecture in Poland: Transformation of approach to applied art and contemporary protection

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*Vita brevis, Ars longa – applied art and modernist architecture in Poland: Transformation of approach to applied art and contemporary protection*

The main aim of the present paper is to present the latest achievements in the process of protection of the applied art which was a part of post 1950s architecture in Poland. During the period 1945–1990 many buildings were adorned with different applied art forms: sgraffito, wall paintings, mosaics and other art techniques. The research focuses on the transformation of the society's approach to applied art after a period of neglect and different forms of protection. In many cases applied art forms like mosaics and ceramic artworks became longer lasting elements than the architecture which they originally adorned. After the demolition of modernist constructions, artworks are frequently transferred to new architecture. That process proves that *vita (architecturae) brevis, ars longa*.

Keywords: architecture, applied art, modernism, art, mosaic

## Introduction

After 1945, a new communist regime had been established in Poland. The political situation in the years 1945–1989 changed several times with periods of not only political, but also economic crises, which influenced the life of society. However, in all these periods, one means of the self-legitimization of the regime was the state patronage of art and architecture. State and local governments became the only founders of new forms of architecture. During that period the aesthetics changed several times. The first period, straight after the Second World War, was completely dominated by the socialist realism movement, an official communist state ideology, which had an impact on all art and architecture forms. It lasted until the end of the 1950s and in terms of architecture there were two streams which dominated the landscape of Poland's cities.

One was the reconstruction of old town districts completely destroyed during the war – both state and regional capitals like Warszawa, Poznań, Gdańsk and Wrocław but also smaller ones like Olsztyn, Opole, Jelenia Góra Inowrocław and Białystok. In all of those cities a new vision of the old town was introduced. Buildings were partially reconstructed or stylized in the shape of historical tenement houses with slightly changed pre-war urban layouts. All were adorned with new forms of applied art: sgraffito, mural and wall paintings or combinations of these two techniques. Such actions with new decorations adapted to old tenement houses started in the 1930s and continued as a conservation technique after the war even in those old town districts

which survived the war almost intact (Kraków, Lublin, Gliwice, Toruń). Wall paintings and murals were adapted to the historical backgrounds of facades and were usually much stylized in historical forms. Sgraffito, which was one of most popular and economical techniques, was much more daring. Artists who designed the sgraffito decorations used not only historical ornaments, but were also influenced by the new modernist movement in abstract art and used several geometric, abstract ornaments, combined with traditional iconography. Mosaic as a form of applied art decoration of tenement houses was rare and was mostly introduced outside main market areas, which had less strict conservation rules. Political propaganda was not the subject of these art forms or was more subtle than outside the old town districts, although social realism style representations also appeared, but mainly in interiors.

Other forms adhered to a second stream of architecture in Poland in the 1940s to 1960s, social realism, which appeared outside the old town districts. Usually, new buildings were stylized in Stalinist neo-classical exteriors or reduced, interwar modernist forms. The applied art which decorated the main public spaces and facades of these pieces of architecture usually had traditional iconographic images, closely related to political propaganda, or had purely decorative purposes. Mosaic and ceramic structures were more common techniques of decoration than wall paintings. Sgraffito techniques were also popular although also followed the rules of socialist realism and propaganda. The subjects of art were typical of the official state policy in art – social realism, and the depiction of revolutionists,<sup>1</sup> farmers and workers arranged in compositions derived from nineteenth-century academic genre paintings. Such works appeared mainly in major cities where new districts were designed (in Cracow – Nowa Huta and in Warsaw in the new MDM districts). Other representations of still life, floral and animal depictions were also made in all techniques and were approved by communist officials as the decoration of facades and interiors.

At the beginning of the period, in the late 1940s, all such iconography was based on purely academic, realist forms. Towards the end of the sixth decade iconography became much more abstract. Also, in Poland the political situation after circa 1960 had changed. The communist state allowed for much more freedom in art. All old forms of architecture were abandoned and the same happened in applied art. Modernist forms of architecture were fully introduced and the applied art which adorned new structures was also made in more experimental techniques. Ceramic tiles, new forms of mosaics (not from glass tesserae but from shattered glass or ceramic fragments), metal works or such new techniques as “piropiktura” dominated over mural paintings. Iconography was also changed. Figurative representations were mostly abandoned and replaced by more abstract images or completely abstract decorations. Political propaganda was completely abandoned or reduced to a subtle level – presenting the state as a patron offering state funding for beautiful art for all social strata in public buildings and spaces.

A similar situation came about in the same period in other communist bloc states: Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where politics allowed for more freedom in art. However, in the case of the German Democratic Republic, Albania and the Soviet Union, in which the regimes were continuing social politics, iconography derived from social realism forms still dominated in applied art. And although new modernist forms were introduced in architecture, social realism applied art was incorporated in facades and interiors and in many cases became

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<sup>1</sup> Such depictions in the case of Poland were rather unique. For example, one such rare example is a mosaic in Warsaw’s Empik building at Nowy Świat 15/17 St with a mosaic of Władysław Zych and his wife Wanda – the building and artwork were in 2022 inscribed into the register of monuments.

the focal points of all important urban areas representing new socialist cities.<sup>2</sup>

Economic crisis and the collapse of socialist states in the late 1980s changed the whole situation. During the last decade of the twentieth century the state funding of applied art became rare, especially in Poland. Many buildings changed function, and lots of modernist structures were neglected. In that period in Poland the applied art which was used for the decoration of facades and interiors was not viewed in the common social awareness as valuable, due to its association with the previous period's aesthetics. Recent decades have brought a turnaround in approaches to applied art. Old town districts have been renovated with all applied art forms since the 1990s. However, contemporary times have different needs in terms of the functions of modernist architecture. Also, modern needs have proven many modernist buildings to be unsuitable in the face of new economic requirements (the thermal management of the buildings or the remedying of deterioration of constructions due to more than a decade of neglect), and the renovation of a modernist building with no aesthetic quality has no sense from an economical point of view. That, however, does not apply to the art used for the decoration of architecture in Poland's previous political system. A generational change has brought about also a change in social awareness. Society has started to appreciate the applied art of the 1950s–1980s and several actions to protect that heritage have been undertaken. The present paper focuses only on various actions towards the conservation of the modernist-period (post-1950s) applied art performed in the current decade.

### Current research

Applied art in Poland's post-1945 period has recently become a field of study. However, the subject is not well known internationally. The largest publications on art and architecture in post-communist states do not include Poland's applied art from that period.<sup>3</sup> In Poland's scientific circles, due to the very broad spectrum of material, there are several scholars who are focusing only on local, regional forms. One of the most important works on applied art in Southern Poland was created in 2015, by the curator of the National Museum in Cracow, Bożena Kostuch.<sup>4</sup> In that study Bożena Kostuch noticed an absence of preserved archive documentation on applied art in state archives and museums. Her research was based also on private documentation from artists' studios, rare archive and museum documents and press publications from the times of the creation of the artwork. In many cases some archive documentation is preserved in regional branches of SARP (Association of Architects). Original publications from the period of creation of art in communist Poland were rare. One of them is Irena Huml's book.<sup>5</sup> Applied art – both of the social realism period and modernist architecture in Warsaw – was described and catalogued in Paweł Giergoń's book edited by the Museum of Warsaw Uprising in 2014.<sup>6</sup> A monograph on life and important work of the artist

<sup>2</sup> For example in the case of Albania, one of the key structures of the urban composition of Tirana's Skanderbeg Square – the National History Museum – has one of the largest mosaics in the social realism style as a major part of its architectural composition. Also, in Berlin's new communist districts designed in the Alexanderplatz area, many buildings were decorated in similar way, one of the most important being the modernist high rise building Haus des Lehrers with a mosaic and mural frieze of Mexican and social realism iconographic genesis.

<sup>3</sup> CHAUBIN, Frédéric. *CCCP. Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed*. Koeln: Taschen, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> KOSTUCH, Bożena. *Kolor i blask. Ceramika architektoniczna oraz mozaiki w Krakowie i Małopolsce po 1945 roku*. Kraków: Muzeum Narodowe, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> HUML, Irena. *Polska sztuka stosowana XX w.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> GIERGOŃ, Paweł. *Mozaika warszawska. Przewodnik po plastyce w architekturze stolicy 1945–1989*. Warszawa: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego, 2014.

Tychy was published in 2021 by Patryk Oczko,<sup>7</sup> one of the first works dedicated solely to one artist. The subject of applied art as a problem of the decoration or colour of modernist or reconstructed structures of old town districts has appeared in monographies resulting from several international conferences dedicated to these matters<sup>8</sup> or to Polish cultural life in that period.<sup>9</sup>

The problem of sgraffito decoration in terms of iconography, materials and conservation has been tackled in several works.<sup>10</sup> Generally, that technique of decoration with wall painting dominated in old town districts or new constructions made in the early 1950s and became very rare in the following years, where an evolution towards more geometric forms might be observed.<sup>11</sup> Mosaic as a decoration of applied art also underwent an evolution, with changes to the materials used in its construction and aesthetics being combined with new techniques. Only a few examples of old mosaic techniques can be observed in the old town districts, in which glass tesserae or ceramic tiles were used. The iconography and forms of expression were traditional. From 1951, a new state enterprise – Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych (PSP) – practically had a monopoly on public orders for art.<sup>12</sup> New forms of mosaic, in which artists started in the next decades to use shattered glass, stone, larger parts of ceramic tiles or new experimental techniques and technologies like piropiktura (a new technique invented by Helena and Roman Hussarski,<sup>13</sup> which literally means fire-paintings) or metal decorations combined with ceramic materials, became very varied. Bożena Kostuch noticed that in public debate of the 1960s mosaic as an art form was evaluated more highly than wall paintings, having similar colour palettes and more enduring colours over time. This serves to explain the popularization of the technique in both representative (offices, department stores, restaurants, hotels, galleries etc.) and housing architecture.<sup>14</sup>

In old town districts the latter technique of mosaic with shattered glass fragments and ceramic structures appeared occasionally (Opole – corner of ground floor of tenement house at Krakowska/Franciszkańska Street; Olsztyn – oriel decoration of the 1900s tenement house in the western frontage of Old Town Market; Sokolowsko and Gliwice – a few decorations of

<sup>7</sup> OCZKO, Patryk. *Franciszczek Wyleżuch*. Tychy: Urząd Miasta Tychy i Muzeum Miejskie w Tychach, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> JAGIELLAK, Anna, SWIĄTEK, Paulina [eds]. *Policchromie i sgraffita na fasadach ośrodków staromiejskich odbudowanych po 1945 r. : Kreacja i konserwacja : Materiały Krajowej Konferencji z okazji 35-lecia napisu Starego Miasta w Warszawie na Liście światowego dziedzictwa UNESCO, Warszawa, 24–25.09.2015*. Warszawa: Miasto Stołeczne Warszawa, Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> STROŻEK, Przemysław. *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960. Tom 4. Rok 1950*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Liber pro Arte”, 2012; KESLING, Katarzyna, STACEWICZ-PODLIPSKA, Joanna. *Polskie życie artystyczne w latach 1944–1960. Tom 5. Rok 1951*. Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> BALIŃSKA-CIEŻKI, Dorota, WRÓBLEWSKI, Sebastian. Sgraffito - zdobnictwo elewacji w XX w. jako wyraz ideologii, mody i autorskich pomysłów. In: GAWĘCKA, Barbara Maria, JANKOWSKI, Aleksander [eds]. *Studia z historii sztuki polskiej XIX-XX wieku : ikonografia malarstwa religijnego czasów porządków : kolor w architekturze historycznej*. Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2017, pp. 241–271; DOLEŻYŃSKA-SEWERNIAK, Ewa. *The façade decorations of the tenement houses in Olsztyn's Old Town before and after the Second World War*. In: *Color Research and Application*. Vol. 44 no. 4, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> WRÓBLEWSKI, Sebastian. Nowa sztuka w nowym społeczeństwie : wybrane aspekty sztuki towarzyszącej architekturze z drugiej połowy XX wieku w Polsce. In: PERINKOVÁ, Martina, NEDVĚD, Martin [eds]. *Architektura v perspektivě 2016 : sborník příspěvků z mezinárodní konference*. Ostrava: VŠB - Technická univerzita Ostrava, 2016, pp. 243–252.

<sup>12</sup> GIERGONĀ, *Mozaika warszawska...* p.11.

<sup>13</sup> KOSTUCH, *Kolor i blask...* p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> KOSTUCH, *Kolor i blask...* pp. 17–18.

the nineteenth-century tenement houses – all made in the 1960s) and usually it is omitted in publications on applied art from those cities, focusing on sgraffito and wall painting techniques. Since circa 2010 many newspaper and internet publications on single art objects have appeared focusing on the problem of the protection of art neglected, forgotten or threatened with destruction along with the rest of modernist buildings it adorns. Applied art has also been described in popular publications on post-war architecture in Poland.<sup>15</sup>

### Modernist heritage: Transformation of views

After 1990, architecture from the previous period was generally regarded as “old fashioned”. Many structures underwent renovations and modernizations which changed their architecture. Society wanted new daring architecture from the new era, so old buildings associated with the period of communism were in many cases neglected. Applied art which decorated the exteriors and interiors was also regarded as belonging to that previous aesthetic period and was in many cases covered by new materials or destroyed. Bożena Kostuch in her work presented many such examples of lost artworks.<sup>16</sup>

After the political transition, many former factories and offices built in the modernist period had their access restricted or were closed. Buildings which were owned by companies no longer had any contemporary purpose and during recent years have been destined to face demolition. In many cases a typical modernist structure offers no economic justification to be renovated. There are several reasons for which it might be better to demolish an old building and replace it with new architecture: the costs of both the renovation of inner infrastructure and the thermal management of buildings are the most common hurdles; however, the deterioration of constructions due to more than a decade of neglect has also in many cases been impossible to overcome. Especially in the case of buildings with no aesthetic architectural quality there is no need to protect deteriorated buildings. Many companies' buildings were designed as typical projects, used several times in different locations, so they do not represent high quality modernist architecture. However, quite a different approach is required with unique architecture designed by eminent architects or with daring design solutions. The importance for culture of that architecture has been underlined by architecture historians since the beginning of the current century. Applied art was always an integral part of such designs and underlines the “uniqueness”. The new generation, which grew up in modern Poland, has no bad associations with the previous period's art and architecture so a new interest in an “old-fashioned”, nostalgic aesthetic appeared. With that interest a realisation of the need for the protection of preserved architecture and applied art also arose. Due to the actions of many local, regional societies, many modernist buildings and applied art forms are currently protected by law and are conserved.

### Protection of applied art: Renovation and transition

“Currently, the most vital legal regulation dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage in Poland is the Act of 23 July 2003 on the protection and care of monuments”.<sup>17</sup> That act also

<sup>15</sup> CYMER, Anna. *Architektura w Polsce 1945–1989*. Warszawa: Centrum Architektury Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, 2019; SPRINGER, Filip. *Księga zachwytyń*. Warszawa: Agora SA, 2016, pp. 27, 74, 345–347, 413–415.

<sup>16</sup> KOSTUCH, Kolor i blask... pp. 145–150, 282–307, 325–333, 380–381, 446–447, 468–477.

<sup>17</sup> DWORZECKI, Jacek, NOWICKA, Izabela, URBANEK, Andrzej, KWIATKOWSKI, Adam. Protection of national heritage in the light of the applicable law and the actions provided in this area by police in Poland. In: *Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo*, 4/2020. pp. 180–181; *Act of 23 July 2003 on the protection and care of monuments Journal of Laws of 2003*, No. 162, item 1568.

describes the means of protection of contemporary heritage. In case of old town districts, applied art on architectural facades could be protected by the inscription into the register of monuments as part of an urban layout or as an individual monument. In both cases any action is supervised by the local monument conservation office. (Some urban structures are also inscribed on the list of National Monuments, or in case of Warsaw represented on the UNESCO World Heritage List).



**Fig. 1:** Interior mosaic by Krystyna Zgud-Strachocka in Kijów Cinema in Cracow after restoration. General view and detail. 2016. Fot. Author

Modernist architecture could be inscribed into the register of protected monuments with all applied art forms as a coherent design, so any renovation action also has to be supervised by the local office of the state monument conservator. There are several cases in which a whole building with applied art has undergone a complete renovation after it was inscribed into the heritage monument register or shortly before that. One of the most elaborate designs is the Kijów Cinema in Cracow, designed by Witold Cęckiewicz with Jerzy Tombiński, Andrzej Kozłowski, Mieczysław Wrześniak, Adam Turczyński, Krystyna Strachocka-Zgud, Jerzy Chronowski and Jarosław Kosiniak in 1960–1967.<sup>18</sup> The inscription into the register was made in 2016.<sup>19</sup> However, in 2014, that modernist architecture was renovated, with changes made to the front façade window which had originally been designed to exhibit the spectacular mosaic wall in the main hall. The mosaics both in the hall and on the rear elevation were cleaned and renovated.<sup>20</sup> The interior mosaic is one of the greatest of its kind in Poland and since renovation has been covered with a special protective layer of a substance which is graffiti-proof. The mosaic is a masterpiece created by Krystyna Zgud-Strachocka in 1965.<sup>21</sup> It is an artwork of 325 m<sup>2</sup> surface made with ceramic, glazed tiles of semi relief forms. The author wanted to express the depth and beauty of space and used blue, turquoise and green patina colours which contrasted with the modernist white exterior and was visible especially in the night-time views through the façade window. The tiles were manufactured by the “Kamionka” cooperative factory of Łysa Góra near Brzesko, as were many other mosaic tiles from the southern Poland region and Cracow (Fig. 1). The external mosaic on the rear façade was

<sup>18</sup> <https://szlakmodernizmu.pl/baza-obiektow/kino-kijow/>. Accessed June 10th, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, accessed June 10th, 2021, [https://www.nid.pl/pl/Informacje\\_ogolne/Zabytki\\_w\\_Polsce/rejestr-zabytkow/zestawienia-zabytkow-nieruchomych/stan%20na%2030.09.2020/MAL-rej.pdf](https://www.nid.pl/pl/Informacje_ogolne/Zabytki_w_Polsce/rejestr-zabytkow/zestawienia-zabytkow-nieruchomych/stan%20na%2030.09.2020/MAL-rej.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> SURÓWKA, Karol. *Legendarna mozaika z Kina Kijów w nowej odsłonie*. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <https://www.radio-krakow.pl/wiadomosci/krakow/legendarna-mozaika-z-kina-kijow-w-nowej-odslonie/>

<sup>21</sup> KOSTUCH, *Kolor i blask...* pp. 202–209

designed by the architect himself in 1967 with typical factory-produced ceramic tiles, and in 2014 was also renovated and covered with impregnate.<sup>22</sup> A spectacular iconographic, mosaic image of a circular red sun on the elevation was contrasted with the white geometric solids of the architecture (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Rear façade of *Kijów* by Witold Cęckiewicz after restoration. 2016. Fot. Author

Similar actions have been performed in other cities (Szczecin cinema building among them). Many interesting pieces of architecture have not been inscribed into the register despite having unique forms of design and unique applied art adorning their facades. Some, like the City House of Culture in Radomsko from 1968, have been renovated with respect to all applied art detail.<sup>23</sup> Others are awaiting the process of renovation and inscription for protection. In the case of Radomsko's building, new lighting highlighted the original mosaic tiles and semi-relief sculptures (Fig. 3). In Katowice, the pavilion of the Bureau of Art Exhibitions and Cepelia (now owned by the city) was designed in 1972 by Stanisław Kwaśniewicz and was decorated with an original mosaic and frieze by Teresa Michałowska-Rauszer and Jerzy Kwiatkowski.<sup>24</sup> Both the frieze, which is reminiscent of Antique figurative friezes, and the mosaic made of light green shattered glass need renovation, although both applied art forms are preserved well with only a patina of dirt visible. The pavilion will be protected with all its original layout and decoration by the inscription of all of the modernist complex of architecture in that part of city. The same technique of mosaic with the use of shattered glass but with more spectacular colours designed in vertical belts was utilised by Włodzimierz Ściegienny in 1968–1974 for Częstochowa's pavilion of the Bureau of Art Exhibitions and Cepelia.<sup>25</sup> The building still awaits renovation, and despite being a creation of one of the most eminent local architects and

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.bryla.pl/bryla/1,85301,16733647,Modernistyczna\\_mozaika\\_odzyskala\\_dawny\\_blask.html](https://www.bryla.pl/bryla/1,85301,16733647,Modernistyczna_mozaika_odzyskala_dawny_blask.html) accessed June 10th, 2021.

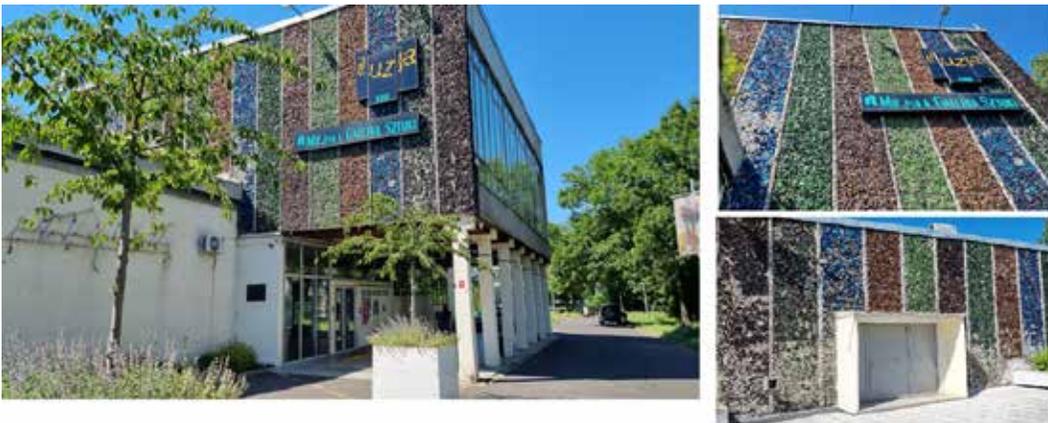
<sup>23</sup> <https://www.mdkradomsko.pl/>. Accessed June 10th, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> <http://bwa.katowice.pl/o-nas/historia-galerii/>. Accessed June 10th, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> MALEC-ZIĘBA, Emilia. *Korelacje architektury i sztuki w twórczości Włodzimierza Ściegiennego*. In: *Państwo i Społeczeństwo*. 2020 (XX) nr.3. pp. 70, 76–79.



**Fig. 3:** Radomsko – City Cultural Centre after the restoration of applied art forms. General view and detail of mosaic with new illumination which highlights the vertical composition of the mosaic. 2016. Fot. Author



**Fig. 4:** The Cepelia and Bureau of Art Exhibitions (now City Art Gallery) in Częstochowa. 2021. General view and detail of deteriorated façade mosaic by Włodzimierz Ściegienny. Fot. Author

artists,<sup>26</sup> it is threatened with demolition. Also, the mosaic is in a state of deterioration due to a lack of conservation (Fig. 4). The conservation of such mosaics – made from 3D fragments of shattered glass or irregular stones – requires much more complicated conservation work. Such mosaics are more vulnerable to climate. The base strata of the underlay, which is usually also welded, is the first part to repair. All the “pieces” of mosaic are more unique than typical tesserae and therefore harder to replace. However, modern techniques of conservation allow even complicated 3D mosaic surfaces to be covered with protective strata. In the case of more “typical” mosaics made from ceramic tiles or ceramic fragments, the glaze is usually damaged due to processes of deterioration. In communist times artists used factory made products of low technical quality (though even with the famous “Kamionka” tiles, after a few decades with no conservation the surface layer of glaze might be damaged). If the factory’s ceramic is

<sup>26</sup> The architect also created several other architectural forms with spectacular applied art in Częstochowa city including: the Archeological Pavillion of Lusatian Culture from 1965 – now replaced with a modern structure; the fountain of 1964 called Ms Kowalska – currently renovated; and the Palace of Weddings of 1987 – with recently renovated interiors. All his works were described in the 2005 album “Ars Longa – Vita Brevis” by his wife Karolina Ściegienny, who was also an eminent artist, co-working with her husband.

damaged it might be replaced with contemporary, similar fragments, and renovation works are sometimes supervised by the artists themselves (Legnica, Warsaw etc.).

A rising level of social awareness allows the preservation of applied art forms in cases where the architecture is not unique, so does not have to be protected, but needs restoration and adaption to modern requirements, such as to contemporary thermal specifications. For example, in the Czestochowa school building (Szkola Podstawowa nr 21, Sabinowska 7/9 St.) of the 1930s, a thermo-isolation system was planned and a part bearing a mosaic of the local artist Stanisław Łyszczarz from the 1970s<sup>27</sup> was saved on the façade and “framed” with a new form (Fig. 5); although there were no legal regulations protecting the artwork the value of the mosaic was appreciated by officials and local society alike. A similar action with more modern additions being made to older architecture was performed in Tarnowskie Góry city. During the recent renovation of Tarnowskie Góry Cultural Centre, the main façade was largely rebuilt; however, this was carried out with the exposition of a mosaic by Stefan Suberlak from 1973,<sup>28</sup> which in its new architectural frame was highlighted and illuminated (a mosaic by Jan Nowak in the interior also being renovated and exhibited).



**Fig. 5:** *School façade mosaic by Stanisław Łyszczarz in Czestochowa after modernisation works. 2016. Fot. Author*

There is also in the Polish legal system a possibility for the protection by inscription into the register of heritage monuments only an applied art structure (“a movable monument” heritage register) and not the whole building with all decorations – however such inscription does not indicate the direct protection of the material form, especially in cases where the original owner of former factories or businesses does not exist or in the case of modernist buildings destined for demolition. In Kowary at the former carpet factory (closed in 2009) in 1978 a large 8 x 9 m applied art form was made under the direction of Stanisława Lewkowicz.<sup>29</sup> The façade mosaic was shaped as a sort of commercial – a carpet form – and is one made in a traditional form of ceramic tesserae of 2 x 2 cm in 18 colours (169,000 pieces). Thanks to local activists, the mosaic was inscribed into the communal evidence of monuments (a lower form of legal protection of monuments in the Polish system than the register which is supervised by the state through branch offices of the national conservator of monuments). Such form of protection does not directly have influence on the current state of protection. In the Kowary case, local society wanted to renovate the privately owned artwork, slowly deteriorating due to the weather conditions

and neglect; however, the current owner does not respond to requests. The biggest problem with the process of protection of applied art is usually in gaining the cooperation of the owners of business utility buildings in smaller cities. In larger cities the social awareness of the importance and value of art is high. Each new “discovery” of applied art, covered since

<sup>27</sup> <http://obiektynwiej.blogspot.com/2017/04/czestochowa-modernizm-u-stop-jasnej-gory.html>. Accessed June 10th, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> <https://tck.net.pl/wystawy/mozaika-2/>. Accessed June 10th, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.bryla.pl/mozaika-w-kowarach-w-gminnej-cwidencji-zabytkow-dywan-z-tysiecy-kolorowych-plytek-jest-piekny>. Accessed June 10th, 2021,

the 1990s, is announced in internet articles and press publications.<sup>30</sup> In smaller towns a lack of cooperation between owners and the conservator of monuments is visible. In Iłowa in 2017 the Lubuski Voivodship Conservator of Heritage Monuments registered the mosaic of a local supermarket;<sup>31</sup> however, the owner of the building appealed that decision. The following year the Polish Ministry of Culture upheld the decision of the conservator. The owner does not want to conserve the applied art and, despite the legal protection, the effect of neglect is visible. The mosaic is a unique frieze, curved on façades, with bas relief ceramic tiles attributed to Adam Sadulski (during the process of inscription no documentation was found, attribution being made based on style and form of art). The iconography of the image represents not only abstract forms but also medieval – fairy-tale silhouettes and fragments of the legend of St George. Due to a long period of neglect the glazed surface of the tiles has been damaged which is causing further destruction of the artwork.

Inscription into the register or evidence of only the applied art form limits the activity of the owner of the building; however, the conservator of monuments cannot object to the demolition of the whole building.

In such cases the most common practice is the transfer of the mosaic or other art form to a new location with conservatory documentation of the applied art in situ, conservation works and transport. In cases where a new location has not been decided upon, the mosaic stays in the storage of the state conservators of monuments office. For example, in Gdańsk's former Neptun cinema, after the demolition of the structure, a large (c. 600 m<sup>2</sup>) façade mosaic made by Anna Fiszer in the 1950s was cut off the walls and taken to such storage at the expense of the new investor who had demolished the modernist building.<sup>32</sup> The mosaic was preserved in good condition and was designed of 50 x 50 cm square concrete slabs with an abstract composition of yellow, white, black and grey colours, so de-assemblage was not a complicated process. The action had been initiated by local art historians.<sup>33</sup>

The transfer of applied art to new structures by new private or state firm owners and the adaptation of the structure of such artworks to new settings has recently become one of the major trends in contemporary architecture in Poland. In fact, we might observe an interesting trend in the designing of contemporary architecture adapted to the work of art instead of art adapted to the composition of architecture. One of the best examples of preserved applied art from the twentieth century arranged in a new composition is the new railway station in Oświęcim. For a long time railway stations were not sufficiently renovated and even with recent renovations there are some controversies. In Szczecin main railway station's hall only one mosaic was inscribed into the register and protected in the new renovation works while the rest of the applied art decorations on the pillars (1970s decoration of glass and ceramic mosaic tiles, stone pebbles and even sea shell done by Kazimierz Błonka) was covered by new

<sup>30</sup> BIAŁAS, Kamil. *Warszawa: podczas remontu baru mlecznego odkryli mozaikę z PRL*. 05.06.2021. Accessed: June 10th, 2021, <https://www.whitemad.pl/warszawa-podczas-remontu-baru-mlecznego-odkryli-mozaike-z-prl/>

<sup>31</sup> Lubuski Wojewódzki Konserwator Zabytków. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <https://www.lwzk.pl/web/item/show/id/1679>

<sup>32</sup> *Capital Park przekazał mozaikę Anny Fiszer z kina Neptun w Gdańsku*. Accessed: June 10th, 2021, <https://dziennik-baltycki.pl/capital-park-przekazal-mozaike-anny-fiszer-z-kina-neptun-w-gdansk/ga/9747352/zd/17775046>.

<sup>33</sup> MORITZ, Katarzyna. *Rusza rozbiórka mozaiki Anny Fiszer z kina Neptun*. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <https://www.trojmiasto.pl/wiadomosci/Rusza-rozbiorka-mozaiki-Anny-Fiszer-z-kina-Neptun-n98171.html>

elements despite the protests of local society.<sup>34</sup> A major mosaic was illuminated and installed in the modern interior. In Szczecin the building of the main railway station was not a modernist construction but was only redecorated in the 1970s, and a similar operation was performed in Bytom railway station. There, in the hall of the railway station from the 1930s, Kazimierz Gąsiorowski made a large mosaic on the side wall in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> The composition is abstract with distinct red squares made of glass contrasting with brown, white and black stones. An asymmetry was underlined by placing red parts to the right side of the mosaic and a contrast made between rectangular shapes and amorphous cloudy forms. In 2017 a renovation of the hall was performed with the cleaning of the mosaic, which became, as in Szczecin, a major artwork of the building focusing the interest of spectators. New decoration of the interiors was tailored to the horizontal composition of Gąsiorowski's work with stripes of wall panels and paintings of sharp straight lines making a contrast with the more amorphous composition of the mosaic (Fig. 6).

Kazimierz Gąsiorowski was also the artist who created in the same iconographic stylistics a mosaic for Oświęcim railway station in 1964–65.<sup>36</sup> The artwork of 4.6 m height and 24 m length weighed 100 tons and was designed for the modernist building rebuilt in 1962 by Karol Fojcik,<sup>37</sup> where it was displayed above the cash registers, opposite the entrance. The main façade was of glass wall, which also like in Cracow's Kijów cinema had allowed, before demolition, the exposition of internal artwork, which was not inscribed into the register of monuments but was saved during the process of the redesigning and rebuilding of the new railway station. The new building was opened in June 2020 and it is an original and spectacular, contemporary work of architecture closely connected with Gąsiorowski's art. The mosaic was 3D scanned and cut into four sections with the background. Conservation brought back the original colours after the cleaning. The artwork was created from black, grey and white stones and shattered glass in intensive red, black and white colours. Like in Bytom's artwork, it is mostly abstract in its composition (although in the case of Oświęcim the red part might have symbolic meanings and there is no strict rectangular composition of shapes but more cloud-like, smooth figures), underlining horizontal lines, which suits contemporary modernist buildings. The architect Paweł Kośmicki designed the new building with a perfect exposition of the mosaic, which is protected by roof shading. In the case of Oświęcim railway station there is another unique solution – a layout of greenery in front of the mosaic has been designed by the landscape architect Marzena Świtalska. The pattern of the greenery is carefully accordant to the composition of the mosaic. The new railway station has become an open-air gallery in which the applied art serves its original purpose – the public, egalitarian presentation of art – and is a spectacular architectural monument dedicated to the victims of the nearby Auschwitz German Nazi Concentration Camp (Fig. 7).

<sup>34</sup> URBANOWICZ, Witold. *Modernizowany Szczecin Główny: Mozaiki częściowo zasłonięte płytami*. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <https://www.transport-publiczny.pl/mobile/modernizowany-szczecin-glowny-mozaiki-czesciowo-zasloniete-plytami-51460.html>.

<sup>35</sup> GZOWSKA, Alicja. „Fabryki ruchu”. *Z problematyki dworców kolejnych w Polsce w latach 60. i 70. XX wieku*. Miejsce 2/2016. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <http://miejsce.asp.waw.pl/fabryki-ruchu-2/>.

<sup>36</sup> BIAŁAS, Kamil. *Mozaika ze starego dworca w Oświęcimiu uratowana. Ozdobi nowy dworzec*. 28.03.2020. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <https://www.whitemad.pl/mozaika-ze-starego-dworca-w-oswiecimiu-uratowana-ozdobi-nowy-dworzec/>

<sup>37</sup> KOSTUCH, *Kolor i blask...* pp. 406–407.



**Fig. 6:** Bytom – railway station hall after restoration with mosaic by Kazimierz Gąsiorowski. 2021. Fot. Author



**Fig. 7:** Oświęcim – new building of the railway station with mosaic by Kazimierz Gąsiorowski. 2021. General view and detail of restored artwork. Fot. Author

A new phenomenon in applied art from the twentieth century in which interior art or part of a façade becomes exterior art decoration or isolated artwork can be observed in other cases. For example, in Tychy,<sup>38</sup> the former ZEG (electronics for the mining industry) factory office building of 1969 was demolished in 2016. It was decorated with the most interesting artwork of Franciszek Wyleżuch (who created for Tychy several mosaics of his own design or with the cooperation of architects and artists, one of his artworks – the PKO mosaic – recently being destroyed), a mosaic which represented integrated circuits in the form of a colourful abstract, graphic composition. Franciszek Wyleżuch used ceramic tiles from the Kamionka Cooperative in bright colours, and arranged them in a three-dimensional system, creating a spectacular and unique artwork (the closest analogy of such architectural decoration being found in modernist Mexican architectural decorations of the same period). After the decision of demolition was

<sup>38</sup> *Socmodernistyczne mozaiki azulejo*. accessed June 10th, 2021, <http://tychy.3bird.pl/mozaiki.html>; OCZKO, Patryk. *Elektryczne układy scalone ułożone na cementowej zaprawie. Niezwykła mozaika w Tychach*. 60.07.2018. Accessed June 10th, 2021, <https://katowice.wyborcza.pl/katowice/7,162709,23639240,elektryczne-uklady-scalone-ulozone-na-cementowej-zaprawie-niezwykla.html>.

undertaken the precious artwork inscribed into the register of monuments was cut off the wall, conserved and transferred to a new location at the front of the school in Tychy (Zespół Szkół nr 4, al. Bielska) where it was arranged in the form of a free-standing wall-sculpture with information and night illumination. The new arrangement allows the artwork to be appreciated; however the presentation of that art as a free-standing sculpture in front of a parking lot does not fully do it justice (Fig. 8).

In Warsaw, one of the applied art forms from the former factory of lifts, which in fact was an almost beautiful abstract sculpture with mosaic decoration, created by Wanda Gosławska in 1968,<sup>39</sup> became an artistic pavilion in the inner courtyard of a new housing estate. Previously located in the hall entrance of a modernist structure it was important for its colourful accent. Gosławska used tiles of different shades of orange, blue, red, green and black on the heavy sculpture's surface. The artwork was not inscribed into the register of monuments; however, thanks to local society's action the private investor who built the new housing estate removed it from the walls of the demolished factory, conserved it and added a roof which turned it into a garden pavilion and also protects the artwork. Unfortunately, in its new form as a garden pavilion it is accessible only to the residents.



**Fig. 8:** Tychy. General view before transfer (lower right) and restoration works in 2016 and current exposition of artwork by Franciszek Wyleżuch in 2021 with renovated detail. Fot. Author

## Conclusions

During the last decade a transformation in the approach to modernist applied art heritage could be observed. In the Latin phrase “*vita brevis, ars longa*” an expectation that art will prevail is expressed. In fact, many cases of preserved applied art from the second half of the twentieth century have proven the “life” of the solid, concrete structures of the buildings for which that art was designed to be short. After the demolition of modernist constructions artworks are being transferred to new architecture and fragile and delicate art might last longer than the buildings themselves. However, that art heritage is also under threat. Giergoń, in his book of 2014, mentions two other mosaic forms which decorated the building apart from Gosławska’s artwork in Warsaw,<sup>40</sup> both of which perished in the demolition which took place after the book was published, and only Gosławska’s masterpiece survived in a much-changed form. Many other artworks were also destroyed. This evidences how quickly the modernist heritage could

<sup>39</sup> GIERGOŃ, *Mozaika warszawska...* pp. 354–357

<sup>40</sup> GIERGOŃ, *Mozaika warszawska...* p. 354.

be destroyed, deliberately or merely by neglect, so action must be continued with vigour for the documentation, legal protection and conservation of twentieth-century contemporary modern art.<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> In Poland's terminology the terms modern and contemporary in art are used interchangeably, as was mentioned by: NIEROBA, Elżbieta. National Museums and Museums of Modern Art in Poland – Competition for Domination in the Field of Museums. In: *Muzeologia a kultúrne dedičstvo*, 2/2018. p. 46

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