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DIRECTOR ZOFIA GOŁUBIEW (1942–2022)

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*I have always perceived working in museum curatorship first of all as service: service to the collections and people. And I have not changed my perception in this respect.*¹

I met Ms Zofia Gołubiew in 1992 when she headed the Department of Modern Polish Painting and Sculpture at the National Museum in Krakow where I was just beginning my first job as a conservator of art works. To a young staff member a curator and a department head in one of the largest Polish museums was an individual you treated with respect and with natural reservation. Started like this, our acquaintance lasted and developed for three decades. Not only did my respect for Zofia Gołubiew remain, but actually it was boosted the more closely we cooperated and the more effects of her subsequent actions and decisions I could see. As for the reservation, in turn, it quickly evaporated, since anybody who knew Zofia can confirm that she was an open individual, very direct, and capable of winning people over.

Born in Krakow on 20 April 1942, Zofia Gołubiew bonded the rest of her life with the city. In 1972, she graduated in art history from the Jagiellonian University. Having initially planned to become a modern art critic, she wrote her first reviews for the *Kultura* weekly. These drew attention of Prof. Zdzisław Żygulski who offered her a job at the National Museum in Krakow (MNK) in 1974. The offer accepted, that is how the bond of Zofia Gołubiew with the oldest Polish public museum, which was to become her career destiny and a 'shared home' in her own words, started: she worked there uninterruptedly for 41 years until she retired on 31 December 2015.

She began working as an editor for the Museum's publishing house (1974–1980), and more importantly, until the end she remained an editor of choice, which she owed to her mother, a Polish teacher who taught us respect for the language and its rules.² Museum employees clearly recall her famous green ballpoint-pen with which she used to write her endorsements and factual comments, but also corrected

mistakes or added a missing comma on all kinds of papers and documents which reached her desk.

Subsequently, in 1980–1996, she headed the Department of Polish Modern Painting and Sculpture, curating exhibitions, like e.g., *Tadeusz Kantor. Painting, Sculpture* (1991) or the 'amazing' one: *Matejko's Presence* (1993). In 1996, she was assigned Deputy Director for Education and Academic Matters, to become the Director of MNK in 2000, as recommended by Tadeusz Chruścicki who resigned then. Eight subsequent director, Zofia Gołubiew was the first woman to hold that position in over 140-years' history of MNK. The beginning of the new Director's position coincided with entering a new millennium, the fact that was reflected in Director Gołubiew's framework programme. *In my programme I have decided to continue the tradition worked out by the generations of my predecessors, but to introduce a certain kind of a reform. We are living in new times, which implies a new economic and media situation. It is my duty to adjust the Museum's activity to the requirements of the 21st century.*³

The combination of tradition with reforms quite naturally resulted from the professional convictions of Zofia Gołubiew and her personal qualities. To her as a museum curator who later became a director what mattered was Museum's wise continuity, the history of many generations and actions, both the strategic ones resulting from the Museum's Charter, but also the individual ones characterizing her preceding directors, with Feliks Koper at the head, and Tadeusz Chruścicki, particularly close to her and her friend. Apart from her clear declaration that *I always tried to learn from them, analyse their directorship, of which each was characterized by its peculiar specificity respective of the given times*,⁴ she also demonstrated her respect for her predecessors symbolically, in her office, where she did not alter the décor it had featured during Director Chruścicki's time; all she did was put Director's Koper's desk inside; painted by Fryderyk Pautsch, Koper's portrait was always there visible at a central spot.

When acting, she was hardworking, committed, constantly seeking new challenges. When making decisions, she was courageous, determined, and often uncompromised. She would consult most decisions collegially, but was also ready to make decisions fit for a director dictatorially. Following her principle: *you can be scared, but you must not chicken out*, she knew how to overcome stereotypes, alter habits, and go beyond set museum limits, yet, on the other hand, she did not yield to ephemeral trends or fashions. The motto she used to repeat a lot to us ran: *if you do something, do it well*, which she expected both from herself and her staff.

She began the implementation of her director's programme by searching answers to the basic questions: what do today, in the 21st century, the words 'museum', 'national', 'in Krakow' mean? As a result, MKN's mission was edited, and in 2001, it was entered into the institution's Charter, for the first time in the Museum's history. At the same time, she identified goals which we should achieve in the dynamically changing world, where a museum stopped being merely a temple of art, while a subsequent museum fashion wave brought about public's new expectations targeted at seeking attractive places to spend leisure at. Director Gołubiew understood it perfectly well, and was convinced that museums should meet the new challenges, obviously representing adequate quality. From the very beginning she insisted on making MKN open and friendly in various forms and to a broad and varied range of the public.

For theory to become practice, some conditions had to be fulfilled. One of the key ones was for the technical installations of the Museum buildings in all its branches to be entirely failure-free. The poor state of the edifices resulted first of all from the historical underfinancing, this not allowing for any larger-scale renovations, despite her predecessors having tried hard. Importantly, MKN is housed in a dozen or so historic buildings each of which required renovation or modernization.

Today we can safely say that over the 15 years of her running MKN as Director she achieved that ambitious goal. Apart from determination and persistence, and the support of the Museum team boasting strong professionalism, a great role in this respect was also played by the new geopolitical circumstances and Poland's admission into the EU. Zofia Gołubiew took a full advantage of this historic moment. In 2007–13, MKN acquired financing amounting to over 100 million PLN, which together with the subsidies flowing from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage as well as the Social Committee for the Restoration of Krakow's Monuments allowed to finance projects whose number and range put MKN at the position of a leader among museums in Poland.⁵ Under her directorship the renovation and modernization of almost all Museum's edifices was conducted, e.g., Szolajski Tenement House, Palace of Bishop Erasmus Ciołek, Jan Matejko's House, Sukiennice Gallery, Granary, Emeryk Hutten-Czapski Museum, and the Józef Czapski Pavillion was raised.

Although the list of the renovation projects is really impressive, confirming the unprecedented scale and quality of investment under Zofia Gołubiew as Director,⁶ there still remained several unaccomplished projects, the major one being the renovation of the Museum's Main Building and the raising of the Centre for Collection Conservation and Storage.



1. Director Zofia Gołubiew in front of MNK's Main Building, 2015, Photo Archive of the National Museum in Cracow

As already said above, the Director insisted very strongly on the Museum being maximally friendly and accessible to our guests. She wanted MNK's door to be always open, both symbolically, and physically. The latter was a source of polemics, since such a situation could disturb conservatory conditions in the Museum interiors. The debate with argumentation usually ended up in a compromise, namely the door was wide open, however, additional protections were fixed, for example an air screen or glazing. Importantly, all MNK's branches were made accessible to visitors with impaired mobility and people coming with prams.

However, the major condition to secure the implementation of the Director's programme was an adequately selected and organized team of co-workers. Perfectly aware that the evolution of museum staff is based on a growing variety and professional specializing, she resorted to the knowledge and experience of long-standing employees from various departments, at the same time establishing new structural units where specialists were employed. What is more, she wanted very much for all MNK's employees to feel equally appreciated, always emphasizing that *our institution is based on several 'pillars': the technical, economic, administrative, marketing, security departments, and not only on the work of curators, educators, or conservators. To me everybody was important: from a cleaning lay and that watching over the galleries up to deputy directors.*⁷



2. Director Zofia Gołubiew in the course of the renovation of the Sukiennice Gallery, preview of the „On the Fence Gallery”, 24 July 2008, Photo Archive of the National Museum in Cracow

And it was with that team of people, consolidated over the years, that she kept introducing evolutionary, albeit at time *revolutionary in spirit* changes which confirmed the modern character, and in other situations the avant-garde one of MNK's activity. Naturally, not everybody and not always supported the changes, or were equally willing to become involved in their implementation. Most usually, however, it was possible to convince that majority, as was in the case of the Open Museum, when *not all the actions [...] were straight away approved of by the employees, particularly the research ones. The change in museum curators' mentality and their understanding of the requirements of the new times, however, occurred very quickly, and soon it was their ideas that inspired a multitude of new excellent projects.*⁸ Nonetheless, it was this unaccomplished vision of the team where *we all museum employees become one big family, where we understand and appreciate one another. And this in a way female attitude* was most often her response to the question: has there been anything you failed in?⁹

When enumerating the most important organizational changes we have to begin with 'democratizing' the model of managing the Museum: at the beginning of Zofia Gołubiew's term of office as Director, she established a Director's College. Another major step were the changes in the sphere of research; as a result of the latter, in 2010, the Minister of Science and Higher Education assigned the status of a research unit to MNK, the first museum in Poland to have received it. Another process of significant relevance was the restructuring of the collection departments: in the place of

21 earlier departments, 12 were created. This allowed to conduct much more versatile research based on the divisions into historical periods, and not like before into art disciplines. A pioneering decision was the establishment of the Department of the Collection Conservation and Storage. As part of this change, Zofia Gołubiew made one of her 'revolutionary in spirit' decisions accepting the division of responsibilities in the domain of caring for the collection proposed by her deputies. As a consequence, museum exhibits were in the physical care of conservators and store clerks, and not like before in the care of museum curators.

One could continue enumerating other structural novelties, such as e.g., establishment of the Exhibition and Publication Department, Fundraising Section, Customer Service Office, IT Section, or establishing the Lab of Analysis and Non-destructive Investigation of Heritage Objects (LANBOZ), employing, apart from conservators, also physicists and chemists, including the first foreigners in MNK's history. Next to the New Sukiennice Project and Marc Chagall's Exhibition, the latter was regarded by the Director to have been one of the three accomplishments she was the most proud of.¹⁰

Exhibitions are always the forefront activity of every museum: the best visible brand product that museums offer to their public. Also in this area the new times determined the necessity to change. As for the permanent galleries, the Director was aware that MNK, similarly as many other museums was not a *Louvre and cannot afford to simply hang up paintings.*¹¹ Although respective galleries transformed,

e.g., the 19th-century Polish Art Gallery (2010), the actual incentive to launch talks about a thoroughly new concept to present the Museum's own collection was the 2013 beginning of the works on the alteration and modernization of the Museum's Main Building. A team was established: based on the ideas supplied by employees of different departments, its members prepared a framework concept how to tell the story of art and culture in Poland over centuries. Regrettably, this was the task the Director was unable to finish, despite the advanced work and her dreams to *complete this scenario, planning to dedicate most of 2016, the last year of my planned work for the Museum. After the years of relentless struggles for financing, conducting numerous uneasy renovations and investment as well as administrative works, such a factual conceptual work would be a mere satisfactory pleasure to a museum curator.*¹²

If looking at temporary exhibitions the fact that the Museum was catching up on the spirit of the times could be seen in maintaining the traditional high quality of the factual and arrangement preparation on the one hand, while showing a new approach on the other: an approach as to a multi-task display project supervised by a coordinator, and implemented by a team of specialists responsible for respective tasks. As a result, multicontextual, and in a sense untypical exhibitions were mounted, however *not merely for the sake of this untypicality, but because we want to say something through this unconventional form. We have been consistently extending the understanding of a museum.*¹³ An important principle followed in those exhibitions was to prepare displays based on genuine pieces and a balanced use of multimedia: fashionable, yet quickly losing attractiveness.

It is hard to list here the almost 500 temporary exhibitions held at MNK and other museums and institutions domestically and internationally under Zofia Gołubiew as MNK's Director. What needs to be emphasized is not really their number, but also the variety. In compliance with the assumption that *art is of total character, in-between genres, and constitutes a kind of synergy*,¹⁴ MNK proposed an enormous multicoloured range of those to their public. They included both monographs on Polish artists, e.g., *Zofia Stryjeńska* (2009), *Maksymilian Gierymski* (2014), occasion-celebrating exhibitions, e.g., *Stanisław Wyspiański's Enormous Theatre* (2007), issue-focused exhibitions, e.g., *Always Young! Polish Art around 1900* (2012), as well as cycles promoting contemporary art, e.g., *Living Gallery* or *Cracow Etchers*. The specialty of the Museum were also 'pleasant' displays, prepared mainly with the Museum's own resources, e.g., *Always at Hand. Hand-bags since the Middle Ages till Modernity* (2009) as well as displays of other art genres, for example fashion, e.g., *FASHION-able in Communist Poland* (2015), film, e.g. *Stanley Kubrick* (2014), architecture, e.g., *Reaction to Modernism. Architecture of Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz* (2013), photography, e.g. *Alexander Rodchenko: Revolution in Photography* (2012), or a comic strip, e.g., *Manga-Manggha- manga – Comic Strip Form and Animation in Japanese Art* (2001).

An important category were exhibitions of European art, e.g., *From Manet to Gauguin. Impressionists and Post-impressionist from the Musée d'Orsay* (2001), *Turner and the Elements* (2011). Their diptychs could be found in displays of Polish art mounted by MNK in foreign museums,

e.g., *Treasures and Artistic Collections: the Golden Times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth* held at the Madrid Royal Palace (2011).

The appreciation of the high quality and attractiveness of exhibitions prepared by MNK can be found in the numerous awards and honours,¹⁵ yet mainly in the hosts of visitors flocking to the National Museum in Krakow¹⁶ and highly appraising our displays.¹⁷

Also with respect to exhibition topics there remain some unfulfilled dreams of Zofia Gołubiew, particularly the unimplemented project of *the display of the art of Mela Muter as the third grand Polish female artist after Zofia Stryjeńska and Olga Boznańska who did have their shows at MNK. My dream was also to present in Poland the oeuvre of their American 'friend' Georgia O'Keeffe: an exhibition which was about to be put up, particularly as we definitely could not afford bringing works of another great American Edward Hopper, which had for years been another of my dreams.*¹⁸

Furthermore, it would be worth tackling, I think, two other spheres of the activity which moved MNK to the avant-garde of museum operations in the early 21st century. In 2000, we were the first Polish museum to participate in the research project which turned into the 'first harbinger' of international conservation cooperation, but also of acquiring European financing. The effects of MNK's participation in several dozen ones was the extension and professionalization of conservation, which did not only allow to raise the quality of care of our own collections, but to share our competences with other museums in Poland and abroad, e.g., the conservation of Ivan Mazepa's hetman's flag from the Historical Museum in Kharkiv (2007–2008), or the investigation of the painting *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo da Vinci from the collection of the Princes Czartoryski Foundation (2012). The professionalism of such activities has been appraised with various prizes and honours.¹⁹

The educational activity was another such sphere whose new dimension was introduced by museum educators and invited specialists, e.g., pedagogues, psychologists, artists, and which turned into another distinguishable MNK's hallmark, appreciated by the public and frequently awarded.²⁰ The Museum offered varied programmes catering for public of all ages, and one of its priorities was opening up to the people threatened with exclusion from cultural activity due to their impaired mobility, vision, or impaired hearing, or intellectual disability.

And last but not least, let us give one figure: 85.501; this stands for new acquisitions: purchased, received, acquired as deposits, which enriched MNK in 2001–2015.

The above is obviously an incomplete list of Director Zofia Gołubiew's accomplishments. However, when writing this tribute I tried to present those most characteristic of her directorship and relevant for the implementation of the programme she formulated in 2000 whose goal was to *adjust the Museum's activity to the requirements of the 21st century.*²¹ And we must admit that she worked really hard to achieve it. The 15 years under her as MNK's Director constituted a dynamic period of the institution's development. It was the time span encompassing numerous renovations and modernizations, organizational changes, and the introduction of innovatory solutions which have become



3. Ceremony of thanking Director Zofia Gołubiew for her work at MNK, Sukiennice 19th-century Polish Art Gallery, 10 December 2015, Photo Archive of the National Museum in Cracow

contemporary standards in Polish museology. The final result being enhancing MNK's brand, which confirmed the thesis that the National Museum in Krakow is one of the most important and modern Polish museums, known and well recognizable both within Poland and internationally.

Director Gołubiew summed up her work in December 2015 when she was saying goodbye to 'her Museum'. *When I was taking the position I promised not to lose anything from this Museum's tradition, but also to lead the Museum into the 21st century, If we succeeded in doing this, it was only thanks to my colleagues. Working at a museum is always teamwork. It is the team, and not to director who takes credit for any success.*

Having retired, she did not really slow down. She worked on arranging her archive and continued to actively participate in the cultural life: as an observer, reviewer, or a knowledge-sharing expert. She succeeded in making her other dream come true: in 2021, she published the book: *Our Shared Home. The National Museum in Krakow in 2000–2015*. She stayed in touch with many MNK's employees. Although our careers parted, she was always interested in how we were doing, what we were up to. One of the last messages I received from Director Gołubiew was an email sent in late 2021 in which she wrote: *I would love to meet with you all, talk like in the old days, chat... Maybe in spring.*

For the moment, let me wish you Merry Christmas and happy 2022!

Regrettably, the spring meeting was never held. Zofia Gołubiew passed away on 9 March 2022. The Funeral Mass was held in St Mary's Basilica, and Director Gołubiew was buried in the Avenue of Merit in Krakow's Rakowicki Cemetery.

In her lifetime, Zofia Gołubiew performed some honourable functions, e.g., she was member of the Council for Museums and National Memorial Sites at the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (2000–2012) and of the Social Committee for the Restoration of Krakow's Monuments (2001–2002).

She has been awarded many medals and honours for her longstanding work which she treated as *great service* [...] to *my Krakow and my Museum*.²² Zofia Gołubiew received e.g., the following: 'Gloria Artis' Gold Medal for Merit to Culture (2005), Order of Princess Olga, 2nd Class (Ukraine, 2008), Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (2011), Royal Norwegian Order of Merit, Knight 1st Class (Norway, 2012); she has been chosen 'The Most Influential Woman of Lesser Poland' (2013), and in 2015, she received Krakow's Laurel of the 21st Century as well as the title of the 'Lesser Poland Resident of the Year' (2015).

Abstract: The tribute to Director Zofia Gołubiew (1942–2022) covers mainly the period when she ran the National Museum in Krakow in 2000–2015. Having begun her career at the Jagiellonian University, where in 1972 she graduated in art history, two years later she accepted the proposal to work at Krakow's National Museum (MNK), and this is how she started her relationship with the oldest Polish public museum which became her professional destination and 'shared home' at which she continued working uninterruptedly for 41 years, until she retired on 31 December 2015. She began as a publishing house editor (1974–1980), to subsequently run the Department of Polish Modern Painting and Sculpture (1980–1996); subsequently, she served as Deputy Academic and Educational Director (1996–2000), to finally become the Director of the National Museum in Krakow in 2000 (2000–2015) as recommended by Director Tadeusz Chruściński

retiring in 2000. The eighth Director of the institution, she was the first woman to hold the position in more than 140-year's history of MNK.

The 15 years under her as MNK's Director constituted a dynamic period of the institution's development. It was the time span encompassing numerous renovations and modernizations, organizational changes, and the introduction of innovative solutions which have become contemporary standards in Polish museology. The list of her professional accomplishments is long and impressive, although there have still remained some projects and dreams she was unable to accomplish. The latter, however, does not question the fact that the final result of Zofia Gołubiew's directorship was the consolidation of MNK's brand, confirming the truth entailed in the thesis that MNK is the most important and most modern of the Polish museums, easily recognizable both domestically, and abroad.

Keywords: Zofia Gołubiew, National Museum in Krakow (MNK), MNK's Director, 19th century.

Endnotes

- ¹ 'Czuję się tak, jakbym opuszczała dom, w którym się wychowałam', *dziennikpolski24.pl* [Accessed: 15 May 2022].
- ² 'Zofia Gołubiew – Życie i twórczość' | Artysta | *culture.pl* [Accessed: 15 May 2022].
- ³ Zofia Gołubiew talking to Magdalena Huzarska-Szumiec, 'Ściana, gwóźdź i obraz – to już nie wystarczy', *Gazeta Krakowska*, 22 September 2000.
- ⁴ Z. Gołubiew, P. Wasilewski, *Nasz wspólny dom. Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie 2000-2015*, Kraków-Warszawa 2021, pp. 48-50.
- ⁵ P. Sarzyński, 'Z czym do narodu?', *Polityka*, 44 (2013), (p. 82); *idem*, 'Ranking polskich muzeów narodowych | Z czym do narodu?', *polityka.pl* [Accessed: 20 May 2022].
- ⁶ MNK's development projects were awarded on many occasion, e.g. the main prize in the 'Poland Is Becoming More Beautiful: Seven Wonders of the European Funds' Contest (2011), Sybilla Grand Prix 2013.
- ⁷ Z. Gołubiew, P. Wasilewski, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- ⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 31.
- ⁹ 'Czuję się tak, jakbym opuszczała dom, w którym się wychowałam...'
- ¹⁰ 'Zofia Gołubiew: Wiem, co jest ważne', *radiokrakow.pl* [Accessed: 20 May 2022].
- ¹¹ 'Zofia Gołubiew', *manageronline.pl* [Accessed: 20 May 2022].
- ¹² Z. Gołubiew, P. Wasilewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.
- ¹³ 'Rozmowa z Zofią Gołubiew: Jesteśmy cienką warstewką', *teologiapolityczna.pl* [Accessed: 15 May 2022].
- ¹⁴ See *Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie. Raport 2014-2015*, p. 6, https://media.mnk.pl/images/upload/pliki/Raport_MNK_2014-2015.pdf [Accessed: 20 May 2022].
- ¹⁵ For example in the Sybilla Contest for the Museum Event of the Year for the Exhibitions: *Jan Matejko. Opus Magnum* (2001), *Leon Wyczółkowski* (2002), *Following the Fashion over Centuries* (2003), *Around Veit Stoss* (2005).
- ¹⁶ In 2001-2015, MNK was visited by ca 7.300.000 individuals, and a record turnout was observed in 2015: 812,116 individuals; it was at the same time the highest turnout among the Polish national museums.
- ¹⁷ For instance, the first place in summing up museum events in 2009 of *Dziennik Polski* for the Exhibition *Zofia Stryjeńska 1891-1976*, the first place of the *Polityka* weekly rating and the *Dziennik Polski* rating for the most important museum event in 2012, and of the Marka Radia Kraków for the Exhibition *Turner and the Elements*, the first place in the *Polityka* weekly rating appraising collections and the contemporary activity of the largest museums in Poland (2013).
- ¹⁸ Z. Gołubiew, P. Wasilewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.
- ¹⁹ For example in the Contest for the Sybilla Museum Event of the Year: for establishing LANBOZ (2004), conservation of Ivan Mazepa's hetman's flag (2008). For the last, Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko honoured Director Gołubiew and conservators with state orders.
- ²⁰ E.g., in the Sybilla Contest for the Museum Event of the Year: *Tracking Europe* (2003), *Museum of Many Opportunities* (2008). MNK also received the 'Kids-Friendly Place' and the 'Senior-friendly Place' Certificates.
- ²¹ Zofia Gołubiew talking to Magdalena Huzarska-Szumiec, 'Ściana, gwóźdź i obraz... '.
- ²² *Laur dla Zofii Gołubiew*, *gosc.pl* [Accessed: 15 May 2022].

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