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## ECOLOGICAL ART IN POLAND - CAN WORKS OF ART SHAPE RESPECTFUL ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATURE?

### SZTUKA EKOLOGICZNA W POLSCE - CZY DZIEŁA SZTUKI MOGĄ KSZTAŁTOWAĆ POSTAWĘ SZACUNKU DO PRZYRODY?

**Abstract:** The protection of the environment is possible only in society that is aware of the problems concerning nature and properly educated. Ecological education has to include all elements related to existence of human on the Earth. The art plays an important role in ecological education. Artistic performances can provide information concerning environmental problems and can shape respectful attitude towards nature. The aim of the paper is to investigate the relations of two apparently contradictory notions that are nature and culture and to present artistic activities representing ecological art (eco-art) in Poland, derived from discussed relations. The paper attempts to prove that in spite of the fact that the very phrase *nature and culture* emphasizes rather the difference of incompatible things and not the common aspects of two, natural and cultural domains interpenetrate, influence, and inform each other. Owing to the interdisciplinary research each domain gains in depth and interest. The article concentrates as well on the analysis of the particular works of art of some Polish artists creating ecological art who are: Jarosław Kozakiewicz, Teresa Murak, and Jerzy Dmitruk. Despite the fact, that the term ecological art is not precise and therefore its status is not self-evident and self-apparent, the unifying factor of all activities of discussed artists is their common inspiration. Their origin is derived from authentic need of people to prevent tragic condition of our Planet. The aim of all ecological artistic activities is the call for environmental protection and reflection that causes change of lifestyle of the recipients.

**Keywords:** eco-art, ecological education, nature-culture relation

**Abstrakt:** Ochronę środowiska przyrodniczego można skutecznie realizować tylko w społeczeństwie uwrażliwionym na przyrodę i przyrodniczo wyedukowanym. Edukacja prośrodowiskowa musi łączyć w sobie wszystkie elementy związane z egzystencją człowieka na Ziemi. Sztuka jako forma edukacji ekologicznej spełnia wiele ról. Oddziaływanie przez sztukę stwarza możliwości dostarczania informacji na temat problemów środowiskowych i kształtowania postawy szacunku do przyrody. Celem tej pracy jest zbadanie relacji, zależności i punktów styku dwóch przeciwstawnych z pozoru pojęć, jakimi są natura (przyroda) i sztuka, oraz omówienie wynikających z tych relacji zjawisk artystycznych, wpisujących się w nurt sztuki ekologicznej na gruncie polskim. Praca próbuje udowodnić, że, pomimo iż samo wyrażenie *natura i kultura* podkreśla raczej różnice niewspółdziałających ze sobą zjawisk, a nie wzajemnych zależności, te dwie dziedziny informują się nawzajem i wpływają na siebie. Koncentruje się też na analizie wybranych działań artystycznych polskich artystów, którzy tworzą dzieła o charakterze ekologicznym. Praca przedstawia takich twórców sztuki ekologicznej w Polsce, jak: Jarosław Kozakiewicz, Teresa Murak i Jerzy Dmitruk. Mimo że termin sztuka ekologiczna nie jest precyzyjny i ma charakter umowny, to wyżej wymienionych artystów i dzieła sztuki ekologicznej łączy to, że wypływają one z autentycznej potrzeby ludzi i ekologicznie trudnej sytuacji Ziemi. Celem artystów jest głęboko ekologiczny przekaz, będący wezwaniem do działań w obronie Ziemi oraz refleksją dążącą ku zmianie stylu życia odbiorcy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuka ekologiczna, edukacja ekologiczna, relacje natura-kultura

### Importance of art in ecological education

In the institutional and pro-ecological education the theoretical aspects of the relations between man and environment are widely discussed issues. However, the importance of shaping motivation and provoking emotions encouraging being active and creative in the domain of ecology is not sufficiently emphasized.

The only place where the protection of the natural environment can function is culturally educated and sensitive to nature society. Therefore, apart from education in school and family, the crucial issue is the constant stimulation of social sensitiveness to the environmental problems. The art, as widely understood notion, plays an important and unique role in this process.

Since the exterior world of art invades human inner life, the works of art enable the enrichment of human existence. However, each work that is by intention a work of art can be treated as such, only if it has the power of influencing the audience and giving aesthetics satisfaction. The work deprived of this power is "dead" and "without meaning" [1]. The true works of art influence the spectators and transmit some values as well as signal various problems, among others ecological. In this perspective, art provides information on ecological problems and shapes respective attitude towards nature. Nevertheless, the sense of ecological art lies not only in provoking superficial and subjective emotions related solely to aesthetical sensitiveness to the natural beauty, but also in moral and practical implications. Ecological art should motivate to ecological actions.

The term ecological art means neither specific movement nor style in the history of art nor some particular formal artistic operations. It has a very wide meaning and consists of many styles, movements and artistic tendencies.

**We can speak about ecological art when it causes a reflection on the relation between man and nature.** The consequence of this reflection is awareness of an appropriate place and a role of man in the natural world as a partner in a dialogue with nature [2]. Eco-art constitutes an artistic reflection and expression of truths on human existence. It helps to understand and to familiarize with them.

### Nature and nature

The situation of Polish language is profitable, because it has two words *przyroda* and *natura* instead of only one in English *nature*. By saying *przyroda* Polish people mean the group of natural objects, while when they say *natura* they mean the cause of *przyroda*, in other words: the active creative force [3]. English possesses only one word *nature* to designate the two meanings mentioned - above. In Polish *natura* obtains some spirit and awareness. That means that *natura* is something that is beyond man natural environment. *Natura* causes permanent growth of the particular natural components. Therefore, the philosophical aspects can be found in the ecological works of art. Apart from ecological rehabilitation, the fundamental purpose of ecological art is to act as a catalyst for the experiences leading to influence mind and spirit [4].

### Beginning of ecologically oriented art-land art

From the dawn of time nature, as widely understood notion, has always been the source of inspiration. The world of nature, which surrounds man and of which he is an integral part, has always been the point of reference for many artistic actions. In this perspective, ecological art has always existed. However, the term ecological art itself was introduced as late as at the beginning of 21st century. The actions that are direct inspirations for eco-art are related to land art that was characterized by particular interest in natural issues. As the name itself indicates, the terrain and material of artistic actions of land art is the land (or earth) and the other natural materials, such as sand or stones. The presence in open-air, immense size and monumentality are the characteristics of land art works of art.

*Spiral Jetty* (created in 1970s) was the work canonized as the epitome of land art.

*Spiral* was located in the north arm on the Great Salt Lake in Utah in the USA. Using black basalt rocks and earth from the site, the artist created a coil 1500 feet long and 15 feet wide that stretches out into the translucent red water.

Interestingly enough, at the height of its popularity, the work no longer existed as a physical object, but rather as an idea and a media object disseminated through film, photography and drawings. However, it has to be mentioned that the natural processes that destroy *Spiral* fascinated its author as an integral part of his work of art [5].

### Presentation of some Polish ecological artists

This work presents the works of the Polish contemporary artists, who create their art under the common denominator - the ecological message of their works. These artists are: the architect Jaroslaw Kozakiewicz - in many aspects similar to land art artists, the artist Teresa Murak who uses in her works natural materials (mainly lady's smock) subjected to constant changes, and the painter and graphic Jerzy Dmítruk also not indifferent to ecological issues.

Similarly to the land art artists Kozakiewicz creates monumental works. The artist questions the frontiers between architecture and sculpture and between nature and culture [6].

His *Oxygen Towers* are meant for a large city that is to say, to a place where there is a scarcity of green areas and that is full of cramped development.

A hypothetical location for the *Towers* is Tor Bella Monaca in Rome. The building comprises two irregular ovals, narrowing towards the bottom and truncated at the top. Placed next to each other, the oval parts resemble the shape of the human lungs. Since the oxygen-producing plants will be grown inside the objects can be treated as the roofed gardens. Each of the towers comprises a spiral surface that forms a walking path for the visitors. The building is a space of relaxation and contact with nature. What is more, it plays the role of an oasis in an industrial space. At the same time thanks to its fully glassed-in walls, the building remains open to the urban environment; therefore people are integrated with their surrounding [7]. *Oxygen Tower* is symbolic,

anthropomorphized architecture - similar to human organs. These operations - reminding of so-called *architecture parlante* (speaking architecture) - suggest by their form the function of the building. Kozakiewicz's architecture is inspired by the utopian projects of Etienne Boullée and Claude Nicolas Ledoux, but at the same time it is related to the contemporary ecological problems. In Kozakiewicz's project the identification of architecture with a human bodily organ (the lungs) is not based solely on morphological similarity here but, what is important, also on a similar physiological function - breathing. *Towers* address, crucial for the contemporary city, problem of breathing, which has been emphasized in their form and function, while being at the same time an attempt to resolve this problem. They constitute the city's lungs not only because they produce oxygen, but also because they become a place where one can take a break from the unified, overwhelming architecture of the city [7].



Fig. 1. Jarosław Kozakiewicz *Oxygen Towers* [7]

Teresa Murak is a very versatile artist, who works outside her art-room dealing with performance, happening, action and installation. Her art is distinguishable for the originality of her raw material, such as clover, charlock, grass, ivy and crop salad, but the signature of Teresa Murak's art is certainly lady's smock.

One of her performances was called *Procession*. It was a walk in Warsaw in a lady's smock coat.



Fig. 2. Teresa Murak *Procession* [8]

The action was a demonstration of freedom in the semi-reality of those times in Poland. However, most importantly, it was also a demonstration of plants which form a garden on the body of the artist. The picture shows the artist who communes with nature, surrounded by the artificiality of concrete and asphalt. The performance by Murak can be described by the sentence very meaningful for ecological art in general: *The artist cultivated the work of art* (the coat made of lady's smock). This junction of two apparently contrastive notions (one can cultivate something natural, whereas the work of art is artificial) suggests the links between seemingly distant worlds of nature and culture.

The art critic Andrzej Kostolowski said that: "the harvest that gathers the artist is to open our eyes to nature" [9]. In her works Murak explores natural rhythms and transformations and shows the process of life from germinating to dying. Therefore, the works of art come to being the same way as living creatures do: they are born and they die. Murak shows that everything is subjected to a common rhythm. Orders in nature correspond to orders in moral law.



Fig. 3. Jerzy Dmtryk *Sky above the Forest* [author's own photograph]

Jerzy Dmirtuk creates works on canvas or paper paying particular attention to the ecological problems. One of his works is a graphic from the series *Drzewa Objawień* (*Illumination Trees*) entitled *Niebo nad lasem* (*Sky above the Forest*).

The trees linked by the same trunk are presented on the neutral background. This trunk constitutes an area where the life is present: people, streets, everyday life is depicted. The trees are a symbolic representation of the possibility of the continuity of life. The graphic depicts the trunk of a tree as the only place where life exists. It is analogous to the situation on Earth where, similarly, life is possible only, because the trees and green plants exist. As the author claims the inspiration for the work the naïve graphics were representing the Holy Mother appearing in a tree trunk and illuminating the landscape. The title suggests the sky as an element of nature, but also connoting faith, paradise and happiness. The author implies that spirituality, nature and culture are inseparable, and that for noticing the beauty of nature one has to look at it as though it was the work of art. The graphic speaks about the landscape's spirituality. In pagan beliefs among folk people nature was regarded as an extremely important element of the world, but at the same time inseparably linked with the human ordinary life. Apparently, a tree is a common element of landscape, but, as *Sky above the Forest* indicates, it is an essential and fundamental fragment.

### Rèsumè

The inspiration for all the works discussed in the article is people need to express themselves confronted with the

tragic situation of Earth. Evidently, it has to be mentioned that the works discussed are only the chosen examples. Their purpose is an ecological message encouraging being active in order to protect our Planet as well as, what is extremely important, provoking reflection that causes the change of the recipient's way of life.

To put it philosophically, the artist appeals to emotions and creates a sign. The recipient's encoding of the sign enables him to participate in a dialogue with nature.

In this perspective, the work of art resulting from artistic action (*praxis*) provokes reflection (*logos*) that enables recipient's return to *praxis* that can be the ecological action and the change of bad living habits.

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