



JERZY

NOWOSIELSKI



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Girls on a Ship (detail), see pp. 114–115**Jerzy Nowosielski in the studio, 1968**





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SELECTED EVENTS FROM
THE LIFE AND WORK OF
JERZY NOWOSIELSKI

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I AM A MAN
OF THE
CROSSROADS

The question of who we are and how we perceive ourselves is one of the fundamental questions that has accompanied humanity since the beginning of our existence. The need to identify our surroundings and identify ourselves with “something” or “someone” is a phenomenon typical and characteristic of man.

Identity

is defined primarily in relation to other people, social groups, cultural circles and religious beliefs. This becomes particularly important in its formation in the context of a multicultural society, in which the individual is constantly situating himself or herself in relation to others. One's place of birth is another factor that significantly affects a person and encourages certain actions. These courses of action seem to be the natural choice and a consequence of that origin. Growing up in a particular place saddles us with a baggage of experience that has an impact on our entire lives. Every place is special, it has its own *genius loci*, a watchful spirit that makes a space unique. ■

Jerzy Nowosielski was born in Kraków, shortly after Poland regained its independence after 123 years under the Partitions implemented by Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The place where he came into the world and grew up, the historical moment, the political situation at that time and its social and cultural diversity became important factors in shaping the personality and, above all, the creative identification of the future artist. The country in which Nowosielski was born was a multinational, multicultural, multi-faith state, in its essence at the crossroads between the East and West of Europe. The location was conducive to strong ethnic diversity and the presence of numerous national minorities; it is estimated that these minorities made up about 30% of the population of the entire country at that time. It is difficult to unambiguously estimate the proportions of the various peoples inhabiting the territories of the Republic of Poland at that time, but it is known that these included populations of Ukrainian, Jewish, Belarusian, and German origin. Poland was the border between the culture of the East and the West, and the mosaic of nationalities that resulted from this situation was the direct cause of many problems and open conflicts, while also opening up the possibility of contact with different cultures, faiths, customs, and traditions. The coexistence, interpenetration, and assimilation of various elements contributed to the formation of a one-of-a-kind and unique cultural structure, especially visible in the eastern territories. It was difficult and painful, and at the same time beautiful and unique; it also allowed the development of interesting phenomena in the field of art, culturally and ideologically enriching the people who grew up at that time and shaping their personalities. ■

From an early age, Nowosielski was keenly aware of the issue of religious and ethnic diversity. The story of this artist is a story of the interesting and complex fates of people coming from families of different faiths, from areas where cultures of different regions intersect. His father was of Lemko origin, originally from the Sanok area. Most importantly, he was deeply connected to his Uniate religious community. In Poland, the Uniates were defined as followers of the Greek Catholic Church, also sometimes called the

Uniate Church, which was established in the Republic after the conclusion of the Union of Brest in 1596. His mother came from a Catholic, Polish family with Austrian-German roots. Of course, this caused tensions and conflicts, which as Nowosielski said, were painful for him especially in his childhood. From his earliest childhood, he spoke two languages, Polish and Ukrainian, which greatly influenced the subsequent expansion of his horizons. Over time, however, he came to the conclusion that he was grateful to fate for this diversity and origin. As a child, he “secretly” made his way to Wiślna Street in Kraków together with his father to the Greek Catholic Church, where he was baptised. His father sang in the local choir, and young Jerzy participated in truly artistic musical experiences. “I owe it to my family home that I am a man of the crossroads. In fact, I grew up in two cultures at the same time: Eastern Christian, Slavic and Roman Catholic, Polish,”¹ the artist states. ■

Baptised

in the Greek Catholic Church, Nowosielski felt a sense of belonging to this community. At the same time, as he himself has repeatedly said, since childhood he had a feeling that his true religion was Orthodoxy, which in his opinion was more authentic, original. Shortly after passing his school leaving exams in October 1942, he entered the novitiate at an Orthodox monastery. It is very difficult to determine what were the direct reasons for such a decision. Nowosielski himself almost half a century later commented on his decision: “I’d had these kind of cravings since childhood, I was fascinated by the liturgy of Orthodoxy, I thought that I would find myself in this world, that I could somehow humanly and spiritually realise myself there... but it was still a childish-youthful faith, which had to be lost as I grew older and matured, in order to then return to these matters in a different way”². During his novitiate at the Lviv *lavra*, or monastic community, of St. John the Baptist in the Kaiserwald or shortly after, he lost faith in the metaphysical sense. “I knew one genuinely true atheist – I was one for a few years. I myself went through the experience of a living feeling of the non-existence of God. Just as the feeling of God from the burning bush is alive, so can the feeling of God’s non-existence be alive. It happens very rarely, it is something very liberating, bordering on euphoria. This experience of the living feeling of the non-existence of God has given me so much. If I hadn’t gone through this, I wouldn’t be who I am. However, this can only happen at a very young age, when a person still has his whole life ahead of him, and the feelings are very vivid...”³. ■

¹ Z. Podgórzec, *My Christ: Conversations with Jerzy Nowosielski*, Łuk Publishing House, Białystok 1993, p. 104.

² K. Czerni, *The Bat in the Temple. A Biography of Jerzy Nowosielski*, WAM Publishing House, Kraków 2018, p. 79.

³ Z. Podgórzec, *My Christ...*, *ibid. ibid.*, p. 63.



Slaughterhouse, 1963,
oil on fibreboard, 88 × 66.5 cm



Gymnasts, 1952,
oil on canvas, 49.5 × 59.5 cm



Composition with Two Women, 1954,
oil on canvas, 135 × 100 cm



Two Women in Lingerie, 1975,
acrylic on canvas, 90 × 80 cm

Nude in a Swimming Cap, 1976,
oil on canvas, 120 × 100cm

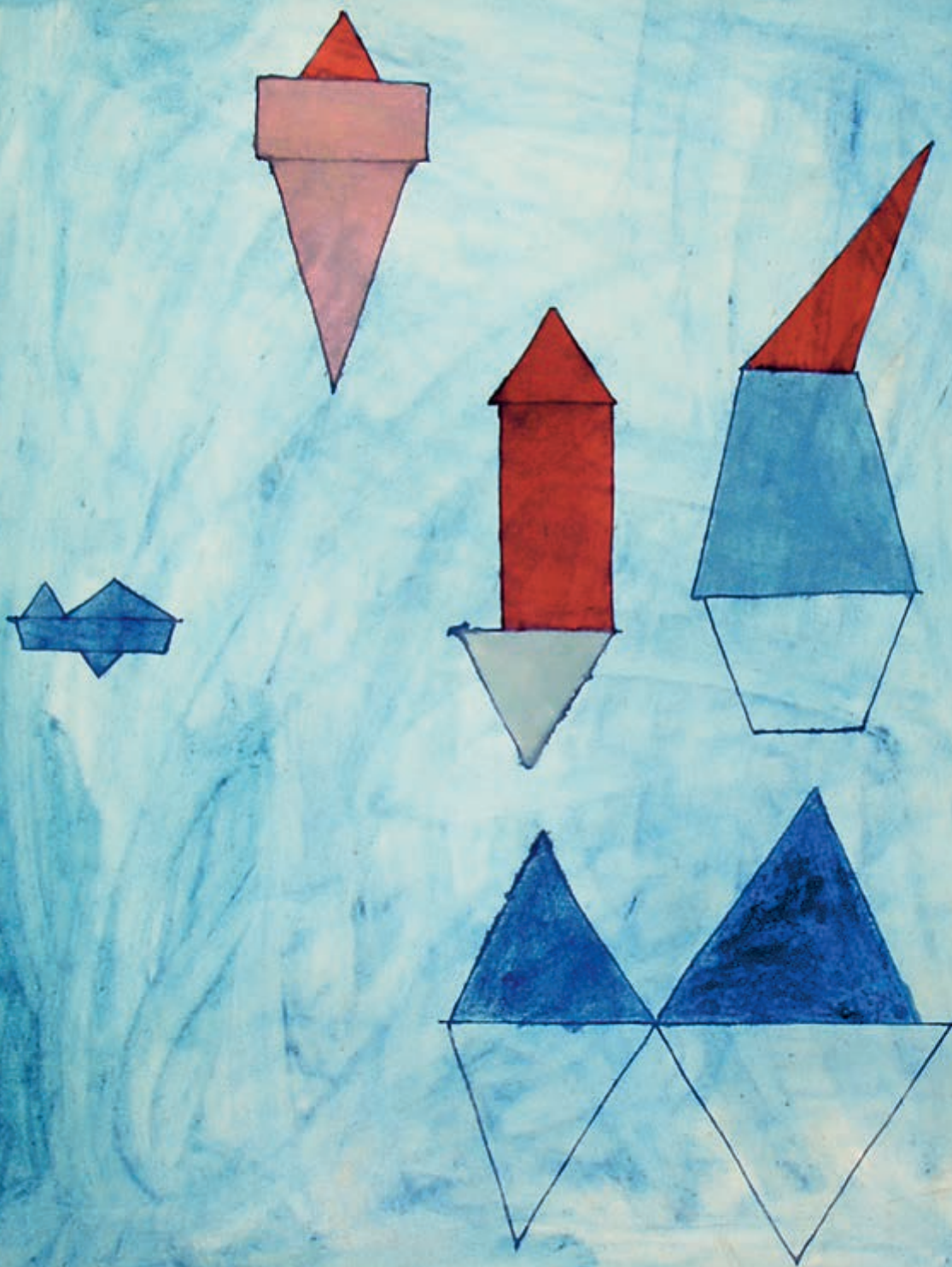






Monograph of a Stranger, 1991,
oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm

Memories of Egypt, 1992,
oil on canvas, 75 × 120 cm



150

Abstraction (on the reverse side Nude), [1947],
India ink, watercolour on paper, 28.2 × 25.5 cm



Fire, [1952],
India ink, watercolour on paper, 18.5 × 12.4 cm

September 1962

Nowosielski returns to Kraków permanently. He moves in with his wife to a house at 19 Józef Narowski Street which was built in the 1950s by his parents. From then on, his studio is located here, and it is here that he will live until his death.

1 October 1962

He is entrusted with the painting studio at the Kraków Academy of Fine Arts (ASP). His work as an educator will last until 1993.

23 September 1963

He becomes a full-time associate professor at the Faculty of Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

12–30 November 1963

An individual exhibition dedicated to the work of Jerzy Nowosielski is held in London's Cassel Gallery.

1965

He works on the design and realisation of the altar for the Redemptorist Church in Kraków. At the same time, he creates polychromes in the Roman Catholic Church in Warsaw-Jelonki.

1 January 1965–30 September 1968

He serves as head of the Department of Drawing and Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts (until the reorganisation of the faculty in October 1968).

1966

The Austrian-Polish society in Vienna organises an individual exhibition of works by Jerzy Nowosielski in Galerie in der Biberstrasse Ausstellung.

1966–1968

He works together with the team of Adam Stalony-Dobrzański and Bolesław Oleszka on polychromes in the Orthodox Cathedral of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God in Wrocław. He is also involved in the creation of interior design and the design of furnishings such as stained glass, furniture, and liturgical vestments.

1969

Nowosielski begins to act as the head of the Easel Painting Studio at the Department of Painting and Drawing of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków.

April 1970

In the refectory of the Kraków Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Szpitalna street, an iconostasis donated by Nowosielski is unveiled, one which was transferred to Kraków from the Orthodox Church in Orzeszków, where it had not been accepted by the parishioners.

1972

Jerzy Nowosielski becomes co-author of the design for the Orthodox Holy Trinity Cathedral in Hajnówka (the former Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas). He develops the colours of the façade and the polychrome of the church. Numerous designs by the artist have been preserved which did not meet with full acceptance and were never realised.



Jerzy Nowosielski in his studio, Łódź, 1958



JERZY NOWOSIELSKI

repeatedly asked himself artistic questions about the origin of his art. All of his painting is an attempt to answer questions about identity. The artist created an individual and unique style, a way of painting which consisted of many elements that give it its unique and original feeling. Among the many factors that play a role in this, it is enough to recall the artist's place of origin, its multiculturalism, the society surrounding him, his interesting family, and his fascination with the icon as a work of art and with the rites of Orthodoxy.