

Summary

PIOTR CYNIAK (University of Warsaw) / “Paradise lost” and “fierceness reserve”: artists in Kazimierz on the Vistula

Kazimierz Dolny is undoubtedly one of the most mythologized Polish towns. The complex mythology of this place is due to the unprecedented popularity of the Vistula resort among interwar artists and writers. Myths created by painters, graphic designers and writers obscure and often even falsify the image of pre-war Kazimierz. This article is an attempt to demythologize the interwar discourses concerning the small town on the Vistula river. Comparing the images and graphics created at that time with selected photographs and prose fragments, one can realize what in fact Kazimierz Dolny was at that time. Belonging to a group of poor shtetls, immersed in deep stagnation, it was immortalized in texts and artworks as the painters’ “paradise lost”. The multidimensional aestheticisation of poverty as part of the aesthetics of picturesqueness resulted not only in the beautification of buildings depicted by the artists, but also in the de-individualisation and dehumanisation of the inhabitants of the town. Looking through the rose-tinted glasses of the picturesque seekers, the artists closed their eyes to the evidence of unimaginable poverty in which most of Kazimierz’s inhabitants lived. In addition, the interwar novels and periodicals contain a wide range of formulations typical of the orientalizing discourse. People of art who came to Kazimierz played a collective performance here, the subject and matter of which was their everyday life. The orientalizing discourse of power, which manifested itself in the artistic masquerade, paintings and literary texts, reached its culmination in statements testifying to the discursive appropriation of the town by representatives of the urban intellectual elites.