

Summary

AGNIESZKA BAGIŃSKA / Where are the phantoms in the artists' atelier from? An attempt to interpret the cycle of paintings by Piotr Stachiewicz

The cycle *Phantoms in the Atelier* is probably the only artistic expression of Piotr Stachiewicz (1858–1938) on the topic of an artist and creation. Stachiewicz was famous most of all for his religious and genre scenes, press and book illustrations and separately edited graphic cycles of which *The Queen of Heaven. Legends about God's Mother* of 1893 is the best known. The discussed in this article cycle *Phantoms in the Atelier* was executed in two versions: the first was completed in 1883–1885 and the following one in ca. 1903. These dates seem to be important in Stachiewicz's life – they indicate the beginning and the peak of his artistic career. The cycle comprises five paintings entitled: *Muse, Irony, Melancholy, Doubt* and *Solace*. Each of them depicts an unreal character – a phantom in the artist's studio, and these are as follows: Fame, a jester, a genius, Fury and death.

The critics of those times had no doubt as the meaning of Stachiewicz's cycle is concerned. In a review of 1903, when the paintings were shown in Munich, it was stated that they depicted the eternal struggle of an outstanding individual with life obstacles. The phantoms were identified as outer elements which destroyed the artist's actions: jealousy, stupidity, lack of understanding. A thorough analysis of these pictures allows us to propose a hypothesis that the reality presented by Stachiewicz refers to the author's inner world – the crisis resulting from inability of creation. Every painting may be a metaphor of the artist's passivity which leads to his death as a creator.

Stachiewicz's work finds its place among popular in Polish painting at the turn of the 19th c. scenes of an artist's death in his studio. Here belong paintings that remain in realistic convention and fulfill a strong social purpose (e.g. Waclaw Koniuszko, *In the Atelier*, 1885) and symbolic presentations, in which, similarly to the discussed cycle, unreal characters appear (e.g. Jacek Malczewski, *Artist's Death*; Antoni Kamieński, *An Unfinished Work*, 1900).

In the context of Stachiewicz's immense artistic "fertility" and big popularity of his works, choosing the subject of creation crisis and the artist's death seems to be an ambiguous gesture, which is not confirmed by the painter's real situation. We can suspect that in the paintings the author, known from his numerous actions promoting his own art, made used the topic of an atelier so quick on the uptake only to make his artistic activity reliable. Just like in the case of a watercolour by Julian Fałat, *Two Worlds* of 1909, the cycle may be judged as the effect of following a popular convention, an expression of a peculiar game played by the artist with the audience.