
Diana Wasilewska / Józef Czapski's "Influences and national art" in view of the argues about principles of the epoch

The 1930s in Polish art criticism is a period of distinct changes in approach to art. On the one hand, the death of the avant-garde was announced triumphantly – as too difficult, too hermetic and too distant from an everyman's needs, and this combined perfectly with a strong turn towards neohumanism, tradition and justification of a thing rejected by the avant-garde. On the other hand, the Kapist milieu and related with it critics, supported by the Constructivists from Łódź despite many different artistic concepts, stubbornly defended innate features of artefacts, staying afar from subordinating art to any non-artistic aims. As a result of a struggle between these two main positions, on pages of the journals of those times one could follow violent disputes and quarrels full of sophisticated and often abusive rhetoric.

This is why Józef Czapski broke a mighty storm by publishing in 1933 in "Droga" [Road] monthly his article *Influences and national art*, in which he announced the necessity of reevaluation of the country cultural legacy and the need of "opposing all storms of influences". He was severely punished for "profaning" Matejko by taking all painterly values out of his art. The heart of the argument was not the master's very oeuvre but the attitude of the antagonists towards national art and foreign, mostly French, influences on it. On both sides of the artistic barricade similar objections were expressed – about localism, following out-of-fashion streams and anachronism. Only the rhetoric was similar, the views were totally different. The defenders of national art, critical about art on the Seine and any "avant-gardisms", vote for engaged art, which justified an object and refers to Polish folk tradition. Whereas the Kapists stressed the painterly aspects of works of art, and they wanted to see Polish art as a partner of Western art, open to influences and being a co-builder of modern European art.

These two attitudes, impossible to conciliate, predominated the artistic press in the 1930s, and returned later, in a slightly different form and another political reality, in the post-war discourse on art and artists' social duties.