

**The Realist Kapism of Janusz Strzałecki (1902–1983) – the social and political background of the artist’s life and work.**

In my PhD thesis, I present the artistic, social, and political activities of Janusz Strzałecki, a figure barely known to the majority of art historians. Strzałecki’s life coincides with pivotal events in the field of Polish art and his oeuvre stands out against the background of changes and various socio-economic, artistic, and political contexts. Strzałecki was influential, but also an idealist. The shifts in his private life, and particularly both formal and informal relationships with women, had an important bearing on the development of his artistic work. His partners were often also artists, devoted to emancipatory values, and as such undoubtedly had great impact on the painter’s life and work. For this reason, I highlight the feminist themes in the biographical sketches of Janina Przecławaska, Jadwiga Strzelecka, and Maria Papa Rostkowska.

The thesis consists of four parts. The first part contains the introduction, outline, and a summary of research methods and sources. In the second section, I discuss the painter’s multi-generational family and the idea of “a family home”, which is essential for understanding his artistic identity, which was inextricably linked to tradition. Strzałecki came from a family of painters, art conservators, and restorers from Warsaw. His grandfather Antoni Jan Strzałecki (1844-1934) established the successful family business—the largest company of its kind in the Kingdom of Poland. He expanded his father's collection of works of art to more than 200 paintings, including the famous royal portraits: Bartłomiej Strobel’s depiction of Władysław IV, Daniel Schulz’s Jan Kazimierz and Maria Ludwika and Marcello Bacciarelli’s Stanisław Augustus. He also collected hussar armour. His brother, Wandalin (1855-1917), was a renowned painter and worked in Poland, St. Petersburg and Munich.

In the third part of the thesis, on 120 pages, I present Strzałecki’s biography. He was born on 3 May 1902 and died on 30 March 1983. After graduating from secondary school, he enrolled in Warsaw’s School of Fine Arts under the supervision of Professors Krzyżanowski and Pruszkowski. In July 1920, he and his brother volunteered to join the army. They fought in the Polish-Bolshevik war; his 16-year-old brother Stanisław was killed. During his studies in Warsaw, Strzałecki became friends with Tadeusz Piotr Potworowski, and in 1922 they began studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. Along with other students, inspired by professor Józef Pankiewicz, Strzałecki dreamed of visiting Paris. In 1923, a group of young

painters established the Parisian Committee. Their group – which would later become known as the Kapists (from K. P./Komitet Paryski, i.e. Parisian Committee) – was one of the most important artistic groups of the interwar period. A year later, they left for the French capital and began their “adventure with post-Impressionist painting.” In addition to Janusz Strzałecki, his wife Janina Przećławska-Strzałecka and Tadeusz Piotr Potworowski, the Paris Committee also included Dorota Berlinerblau-Seydenmann, Seweryn Boraczok, Jan Cybis, Hanna Rydzka-Cybis, Józef Czapski, Józef Jarema, Artur Nacht, Jacek Puget, Stanisław Szczepański, Marian Szczyrbuła, and Zygmunt Waliszewski.

The artists were influenced by post-Impressionist art and inspired by the paintings of Paul Cézanne and Pierre Bonnard. They went to *plein-air*s in the south of France near Marseille. Kapists’s work was exhibited, among others, in Galeria Zak in Paris and Galeria Moos in Geneva, and in Poland their last joint exhibition was presented in 1938 in Poznań's “Salon 35”. Most members of the group returned to Poland in 1931. Strzałecki remained in Paris until 1937. Since the birth of his son Ryszard in September 1925, he has worked to support his family – under the pseudonym Jast, he illustrated the “Femina” and “Vogue” fashion magazines. During this period, the field of fashion began to change rapidly – female designers were increasingly more independent, the style of illustration took on the features of art deco, and there emerged a new kind of recipients of fashion. In order to describe these changes, I used the term hybrid modernism. Although working for fashion magazines has had a negative impact on Strzałecki’s painting, this aspect of his career is interesting in the general context of the mechanisms of the art field. Strzałecki divorced Janina Przećławska, and met his second wife Jadwiga Mańkowska – sister of Magdalena, the wife of Tadeusz Piotr Potworowski. Both were countesses, great-granddaughters of Jan Henryk Dąbrowski. Jadwiga worked in a medical clinic for Polish emigrants in Paris.

After 1932, Strzałecki joined French left-wing organizations and worked in the Trade Union of Polish Artists in France. In 1935, he returned to Poland. Until World War II, he stayed with his wife and daughter in Zakopane. Later, during the occupation, Strzałecki lived in Kraków. He was actively trying to save his friends. He joined “Żegota”, and his wife ran an orphanage in Warsaw and saved the children of her Jewish friends. After the war, they both received the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

In September 1945, Strzałecki co-founded the State Institute of Fine Arts in Sopot (PWSSP). He became its first rector. In 1946, he travelled to Paris on a French government scholarship. While there, he wanted to establish a fine arts reproduction studio that would copy

the works of master painters from the Louvre. He remained in France until February 1950. His wife died in Paris. During that period, socialist realism was introduced in Poland. Since 1953, he has been a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. His partner was the emigration artist Maria Rostkowska, who in 1957 went to Paris, met the art critic San Lazzaro and became a sculptor. She became friends with the newly-acquainted artists – Marc Chagall, Sonia Delaunay, Hans Arp, and Marino Marini. Following a socialist realism episode, Strzałecki returned to a style of painting inspired by Paul Cézanne – one he was fascinated with before the war. He painted portraits and still life paintings, he drew a lot, worked as a set designer and created a sgraffito dedicated to Frycz Modrzewski at the main square in Lublin. During the last eight years of his life, he reconstructed Marelli Bacciarelli and Jan Bogumił Plersch's plafond *Apoteoza Geniusza Polskiego i Pokoju* [Apotheosis of the Polish Genius and Peace] in the Old Audience Room at the Royal Castle in Warsaw.

In the final part of my thesis, I discuss selected research problems. I was particularly interested in issues related to citation, inspiration, repetition, and the paradigm of realism, as well as reproduction or copying. The main research paradigm I discuss in the thesis is realism in Strzałecki's work. In my view, it is related to the traditional painting of his ancestors. Strzałecki, as I argue, matured to realism – the aesthetics closest to his predispositions. Although he is considered to be a socialist realist painter, the in-depth research on his work allows me to demonstrate the ambiguity of this assessment. Following an analysis of the artist's involvement in socialist realism, I attempt to show that his was rather a world-view engagement that resulted from his party membership rather than a choice of a specific style. The 20th century has shown more clearly how social and political changes have affected the field of art. They were the driving force of change, regardless of how we assess them today. I also pay attention to Strzałecki's links to decision-makers in the Ministry of Culture and Art. They dated back to his activities during the occupation and translated into the trust that Strzałecki was granted in the initial post-war period. On the other hand, works he created after returning from Paris, at the time when socialist realism was being implemented, reflected the complexity of the problems present in art at that time. In my attempts to demonstrate this, I emphasize the artist's institutional relationships within art universities on the example of the State Institute of Fine Arts in Sopot and the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. It is also worth noting that Strzałecki's a-paradigmatic repetition of Cézanne's painting was influenced by the feelings of melancholy—the artist's temperament has shaped his creative choices.

In the final section, I conclude that Strzalecki's artistic autonomy is displayed in the realistic works closest to his aesthetic predispositions and artistic education. His attempts to modernize painting resulted in a regression, because – as I demonstrate throughout my thesis – he was not able to break with tradition. In Strzalecki's work, I was able to discern a number of concealed meanings and investigate their sources. In my attempts to understand them, I realized that the artist's self-determination was paradoxically revealed within a certain sense of security.