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Odessa–Warsaw–Wrocław. Artistic, Design, and Pedagogical Activity of Władysław Wincze (1905-1992)

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ABSTRACT

Władysław Wincze was born in 1905 in Odessa to a family of Polish origin. It was there that he took his first steps in the field of visual arts. In 1922, he moved to Poland, where he completed his studies in painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Gradually, however, his main area of interest became applied art, especially furniture design and interior architecture. His individual design style was inspired by the models of the “Ład” Artists’ Cooperative. It was characterized by simplicity of form, functionality, and references to folk art. After 1945, Wincze initially remained associated with the “Ład” Artists’ Cooperative. In the new postwar realities, his creative work focused on designing inexpensive, multifunctional wooden furniture adapted to small apartments. In 1948, he also began working as a pedagogue at the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław. He was the founder as well as a long-time professor and dean of the Faculty of Interior Architecture. At the same time, he taught furniture design classes. He was a great authority for students and colleagues as an artist-designer and lecturer. For many years, he also made wider social circles aware of the basics of aesthetics in design in the press, writing about the importance of the beauty of the material, structure, and purposefulness for the quality of the design and the industrial product based on it. His artistic and design activity in the fields of furniture making, interior architecture, and architectural painting continued successfully until the late 1970s. It overcame both the doctrinal limitations of socialist realism and the problems with access to appropriate materials resulting from the problems typical of a socialist economy. It was an attempt to establish an equal dialogue with contemporary trends in world design. His projects were widely implemented in Wrocław, Lower Silesia, and other regions of Poland. His furniture, during the communist period, stood out for its durability and multifunctionality. Dozens of recognized Polish interior architects and designers were trained in his studio. He died in 1992.

Keywords: Władysław Winczem; Odessa; Poland; Wrocław; art education; furniture design; interior architecture

INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, during the subsequent stages of the industrial revolution, the importance of applied design increased. Lecturers and graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts were among the first to create designs for objects intended for individual or mass production, as well as furnishing and arranging interiors. Based on both their artistic and technical competences, they were able to give the products or interiors they designed features that combined functionality, aesthetics and ergonomics. The following text is a story about one of the pioneers of Polish functional design and interior design, Władysław Wincze.

BEGINNINGS – ODESA (1905-1922)

Władysław Wincze was born in 1905 in Odessa. He grew up in a Polish intelligentsia family with patriotic traditions. His father, Konstanty Wincze, worked in railway administration, and his mother, Maria née Kulesza, ran her own dental practice. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century’s, Odesa was one of the largest and most important cities of the Russian Empire. It was also an important center of Polish life. On the eve of the First World War, it was home to about 25-30 thousand Poles, who played a significant role in the city’s social and economic life. Polish social, cultural, educational, and charitable societies, churches, bookstores, libraries, newspapers, enterprises, and economic organizations were active there [1:4–9].

In 1920, Wincze completed his studies at the M. S. Panchenko Gymnasium, which he had begun under Tsarist rule and finished in Soviet Russia. He then enrolled in the State Art School in

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Odesa (Государственные Художественные Мастерские). Under the guidance of Grzegorz J. Komar, he acquired his first painting skills and knowledge of art. A year later, in 1921, at the age of sixteen, he won a poster competition organized by the Council of People's Commissars. As he recalled years later: *"I painted two sketches. In one, I depicted a worker in overalls with rolled-up sleeves ready for work. His right hand rested on a hammer; in his left, he held an open book. In the background was a setting red sun, from which regular rectangular rays spread. In the other sketch, there was a peasant woman. In her right hand she held, of course, a sickle, and in her left an open book. The background was similar. (...) To my astonishment and horror, I received the first prize"* [10:2–5].

These over two-meter-high boards were displayed at Catherine Square, in the very center of the city. As he later recalled: *"For a few days I strutted like a peacock. (...) Until one day I looked at my work with less clouded eyes. I saw the utter misery of this wretched piece. Shame, deep shame flushed through the last fiber of my poor being. (...). Never again! I swore and kept my word"*. He received his honorarium for the commission a few months later, during hyperinflation, when, as he put it, it was enough for two packs of cigarettes and a box of matches [10:13–14].

In 1922, Wincze passed his Russian secondary school examination, and in November of that year, together with his family and other repatriates, he left for the reborn Poland. He always remembered Odesa as the place of his first fascinations with painting, poetry, music, and the warm sea: *"I felt how the roots were being torn out of the soil in which I had grown. The void left behind me lasted nearly forty years; until in 1958 I once again encountered the beloved land of Odesa and old friends (...) It was a terrible leap for me – from the romantic lyricism of Odesa to the sight of real human poverty. With pain, my roots were torn away"* [4: 14].

IN INTERWAR POLAND AND UNDER GERMAN OCCUPATION (1922-1945)

After arriving in Poland in 1922, he had his secondary school diploma recognized, and three years later passed two entrance examinations – for the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and the Faculty of Architecture of the Warsaw University of Technology. He abandoned the latter after three years. At the Academy of Fine Arts, he studied in the painting studios of Karol Tichy and Tadeusz Pruszkowski. During his studies, he also became fascinated with folk art, which proved to be the foundation of his later interest in applied art. He became a recognized expert on Hutsul art and the artistic director of the Society for the Promotion of Folk Industry. In 1929, he organized an exhibition of Hutsul handicrafts at the General National Exhibition in Poznań. Perhaps the most important influence on his further artistic career was his contact with Wojciech Jastrzębowski, who led the interior architecture studio at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. To him, Wincze owed his understanding of the importance of composition in visual work. After obtaining a diploma in painting, he was employed as an assistant in Józef Czajkowski's studio of composition of solids and planes. In 1932, he married Irena Jankowska [4:17–23; 32–45; 55–67; 97–104; 6:12–20; 10:6–18].

In May 1935, together with Prof. Jastrzębowski, he prepared the artistic setting for the funeral ceremonies of Marshal of Poland Józef Piłsudski and later developed the design for the reconstruction of the military cemetery at Rossa in Vilnius. In 1936, Jastrzębowski also invited him to the "Ład" Artists' Cooperative, which brought together many professors and graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. Designing furniture, he gradually moved away from painting. Over time, he developed his own individual design style, eschewing ostentation, characterized by simplicity of form, functionality, and references to Polish folk art. At that time, Wincze increasingly

worked on interiors and furniture, sacred paintings, and wall compositions. In 1936-1937, he designed furniture and decorative paintings for the common room in Rapperswil Castle in Switzerland, leased by the Polish state [6:28–31].

In 1930-1931, Wincze completed the officer cadet school of horse artillery in Volodymyr-Volynskyi. He took part in the September Campaign of 1939. The occupation did not interrupt his artistic activity. Initially, in order to support his family, he designed simple camp beds for the “Społem” Union of Cooperatives. Together with Olgierd Szlekys, he designed, on private commission, original pieces of utilitarian-decorative furniture. From 1939 to 1944, Wincze was an officer of the underground Home Army (Armia Krajowa). He took part in the Warsaw Uprising. He experienced personal tragedy when, during the bombing of the city, his daughter was killed and his wife partially lost her eyesight. After the fall of the uprising, he was imprisoned in POW camps in Germany [4:104–12; 6: 35–54; 10:25–26].

IN THE POLISH PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC (1945-1989)

After the war, Wincze worked for a time in the Ministry of Industry. He also joined the management of the reactivated “Ład” Cooperative. At that time, the Cooperative focused on designing cheaper, multifunctional furniture adapted to small apartments and made from less expensive domestic wood. These included folding couches, adjustable shelves, folding tables, and shelf-beds. They also designed and arranged interiors of rebuilt offices and public buildings. Wincze also worked at the Design Office of the Central Administration of the Timber Industry. There, he was engaged in efforts to improve the quality of Polish furniture design by preparing model designs of interiors and furniture intended for industrial production. In 1946, he moved from Warsaw to Kłodzko in Lower Silesia. At that time, he served both as director of the “Ład” Cooperative and as head of its Lower Silesian workshops. Unable, under the growing pressure of socialist-realist trends, to reach agreement with the authorities on the profile of production, he resigned in 1948 both from his ministry job and from the position of director of “Ład” headquarters. However, until 1950 he remained head of the “Ład” workshops in Kłodzko and Polanica [3:250–251; 4:14–117; 123–124; 130–139; 5:55–56; 67–74; 6:57–66; 7:217; 10:27–34].

In 1948, Wincze came to Wrocław at the invitation of Eugeniusz Geppert, organizer of the State Higher School of Fine Arts. Initially appointed as associate professor, he began organizing the Faculty of Interior Architecture. First, he took over the management of the university’s workshops, and then, on their basis, in 1950, he established the Faculty of Wood and Metal, which was later transformed into the Faculty of Interior Architecture. He became its first dean and served in this role until 1972. At the same time, he taught furniture design [8:149].

The curriculum prepared by Wincze combined theoretical and practical aspects. It included courses in art and architectural history, exercises in interior architecture, exploration of various artistic techniques, mastery of a course in the composition of solids and planes, materials science with particular emphasis on the construction and technology of wood, knowledge of achievements in domestic and global furniture design, as well as the development of skills in technical drawing. These elements led to practical workshop classes and the construction of spatial models or prototypes. The furniture and interior design course was based on assigning design tasks to students, carried out in the form of drawings and often also models. These were subject to critique, involving critical analysis of the material presented, often taking the form of an ideological-artistic discussion. The practical component was supported by the carpentry and smithy workshops, established in the first years of the Department of Wood and Metal [7:217–218].

As one researcher of his work wrote about his students' projects: *"Most of the furniture had a simple, solid structure and emphasized the decorative qualities of the wood material. The seats were upholstered with soft fabric and rested on a wooden frame structure of legs. Smaller tables with concentrically arranged supports supporting glass tops were lighter in form. The furniture was made using traditional carpentry methods, involving manual finishing and polished surfaces. The boards with interior designs visible in the photographs evoke historicizing forms or refer to folk traditions in the form of multi-armed chandeliers, wrought grilles, display cabinets, tables and chairs with turned legs, as well as woolen textiles and sets of ceramic vessels. The results of the young adepts' work were also clear evidence of their ability to use a variety of materials, particularly wood and metal, which can obviously be linked to the cooperation of students with the staff of both workshops. Both workshops – carpentry and metalworking – enabled design commissions from external institutions and establishments."* [7:219–221].

In the mid-1950s, the teaching staff of the Faculty of Interior Architecture was joined by some of Wincze's most talented students, graduates of that period. They went on to achieve numerous successes as artists and designers in various specialties, developing academic careers and eventually occupying leading managerial positions at the university [7:223–229].

At a time when foreign travel was almost impossible for Poles, Wincze presented popular Western European professional periodicals, obtained through contacts at the Institute of Industrial Design in Warsaw, to familiarize students with global design trends. These journals and lectures on foreign design achievements attracted more and more listeners, including from other faculties. However, they alarmed representatives of the communist party, who suspended them as undermining the "foundations of socialist morality." [2:269–270; 7:222–223].

As one researcher noted: *"In Wrocław, in numerous commissions for state institutions and in individual projects (mainly furniture), Wincze's artistic style took shape, confirming his roots in the 'Ład' Cooperative, with acceptance of functionalist simplicity (corresponding to Scandinavian style trends) and a peculiar constructivist precision of execution and aptness of aesthetic reduction – which he also transferred into his teaching, emphasizing to students the need to combine design drawing (on paper) with spatial modeling in workshop conditions. [...] Despite the austerity and formal minimalism imposed by economic criteria (cheapness and shabbiness of interiors), Wincze never forgot the need for 'beauty' – as he reminded in his texts (including his Conversations on Furniture Design) – demanding beauty of material, construction, purposefulness... And that is why his furniture stands out from the mass of production in communist times, being durable, multifunctional, and clearly imbued with artistic atmosphere (refined aesthetics of curves and roundings)." [9:12].*

In 1950, Wincze participated in the development of the interiors of the Fashion House in Wrocław. Between 1950 and 1953, he designed and executed numerous interiors of commercial establishments in the newly built model socialist city of Nowa Huta. These included cafés, restaurants, shops, hotel receptions, and even a luxury hairdressing salon [10:35].

In the years 1951-1953, together with his young collaborators, he arranged the interiors of the former Department and Institute of Immunology of the Medical Academy – the office of Prof. Ludwik Hirszfeld and the medical library on Chałubiński Street. At the turn of 1952 and 1953, he headed the team responsible for designing the interiors and furnishings of the heavily war-damaged building of the former Merchants' Association in Wrocław, which was adapted to serve as an officers' club for Soviet Army soldiers, later handed over to the Puppet Theatre. In that same

year, he also co-created the altar in the Church of the Holy Family and designed children's furniture called "Ladybird" and "Grasshopper." [2:271–272; 5:5; 7:221–222].

In 1954, Wincze, together with Stanisław Pękalski and Aleksander Jędrzejewski, began work on the project of coloring the façades of Wrocław's Market Square and Solny Square. The comprehensive project, accompanied by a 1:250 scale model and over 200 detailed boards of solutions for all façades, underwent various phases of consultation with historians and conservators. After its final approval, the project was implemented at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s. This version of the coloring survived for thirty years, until the early 1990s, when the Market Square underwent another comprehensive restoration [2:272–273].

The achievements of the teachers and students of the Faculty of Interior Architecture from the first half of the 1950s did not prevent the threat of its closure. Along with the introduction of socialist realism into higher art education, top-down programmatic changes were also implemented at the faculty. One of the first victims was the subject *composition of solids and planes*, which was deemed a "manifestation of formalism of the rotten West." As Wincze recalled: "We were ordered to completely remove this discipline from our curriculum. We did, but only the name. We replaced it with vocational design, leaving the program unchanged." [11:2–3].

An anecdote has survived concerning Wincze's participation around 1953 in a programmatic meeting at the Ministry of Culture. During this meeting, a lecturer from the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party presented Soviet furniture designs as models to be emulated. These were contemporary interpretations of the nineteenth-century Russian Empire style. As one of the professor's students recounted: "*Years later, the professor recalled that he 'did not know what possessed him' to engage in a dispute with the speaker; taking the floor, he reminded the assembly that the Empire style, as the style of the First French Empire, had greatly impressed officers of the Russian army, which, in pursuit of Napoleon, reached Paris in 1814. Upon their return, they instructed their serf craftsmen to replicate the designs they had brought back in their baggage trains. Thus, the Russian Empire style was born. At this point, the professor asked: if we are to emulate this style, should we not turn directly to the French models... or even to the very sources of Empire, namely ancient Roman or Egyptian prototypes? The lecturer, of course, had no knowledge of any of this and became utterly confused; the meeting was adjourned, and the result of this imprudent polemic was not long in coming – the Ministry decided to dissolve the Faculty.*" [2:271–272].

Of course, other factors may also have influenced the decision to liquidate the faculty, including the Ministry's concept of transforming faculties of interior architecture into faculties of architecture training architectural engineers. Wincze was not a supporter of such a solution, believing that art academies should not duplicate the activities of technical universities, since they were not prepared for this in terms of staff, facilities, or technology. As expressing divergent views was not well regarded at the time, both contentious issues were entirely sufficient grounds for an administrative decision. Already in the process of formal liquidation, however, the Faculty of Interior Architecture fortunately survived thanks to the political "thaw" of autumn 1956 and the subsequent reversal of the ministry's decision [2:273].

At this point, it is worth mentioning Wincze's particularly warm and friendly attitude toward his students and younger collaborators. As a great authority for them as an artist-designer and lecturer, he did not shy away from jokes and close contact with the youth. Together with his wife, he gladly hosted staff and students in their summer house in the holiday village of Przemiłów near Sobótka in Lower Silesia. The celebration of Wincze's name day held there became a highly valued tradition of the faculty, an inseparable part of its functioning [11:3–4].

In 1957, Wincze was appointed associate professor. As dean, he sought to expand the teaching staff of the faculty and to introduce new courses ensuring the maintenance of a high level of education. An important step toward broadening the curriculum was the establishment, in 1962, of the Department of Industrial Design [7:246–248].

In the second half of the 1950s, Wincze's creative work revealed an interest in a new set of forms and technologies inspired by contemporary Western models. As one researcher of his oeuvre wrote: *"Soft organic forms, ellipsoidal shapes, rounded corners define an experimental series of chairs made of bent plywood, as well as drawn designs of seats in which, for the first time in his career, the artist employed two-colored synthetic materials."* [7:222].

In the spring of 1957, the Second National Exhibition of Interior Architecture and Applied Arts was held in leading Warsaw galleries, including the "Zachęta". At this exhibition, Wincze presented a complete interior furnishing design for a modern apartment, executed in prototype form. The display broke through the doctrinal constraints of socialist realism and was an attempt to establish an equal dialogue with contemporary tendencies in global design [2:274].

In 1963, Wincze, together with his team of assistants, designed the interiors of the reconstructed western part of the Wrocław art school building at Polish Square. The renovation and adaptation works included the main hall, staircase, three exhibition halls, the auditorium, library, and reading room, as well as the rector's office and the Senate meeting hall with a large round table and movable furnishings created according to Wincze's drawings [10:57–58; 7:–47].

In 1973–1974, Władysław Wincze coordinated artistic works within the framework of the revitalization of Wrocław's old town, including the Saxon Bastion. He was also responsible for the design of the décor of the "Reduta" café and the planetarium located there. His last public commission, carried out in 1975–1977, was the design of the common room of the House of Creative Work in Sulistrowiczki, Lower Silesia. In the designed interiors, Wincze returned to the prewar art deco style, evident in the carefully modeled geometric door panels and ornamental casings, radiator covers with herringbone compositions, and sophisticated wrought-iron chandeliers. With this choice, the artist aligned himself with the noticeable return to historicizing forms in Polish furniture design of the late 1970s. He also designed two private apartments in Wrocław [6:110–111].

In 1979, a retrospective exhibition of Władysław Wincze's work was organized at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław. It gathered dozens of pieces of furniture he designed, documentation of interior projects, and large enlargements of black-and-white photographs depicting completed interiors. After the exhibition, Wincze, who had formally been retired since 1975, gradually limited his teaching and organizational activity, handing over the leadership of the Department of Interior Architecture to one of his students. However, he continued to work in his studio. He died in 1992, after Poland regained full sovereignty and returned to a democratic system [2:283–284; 6:121].

SUMMARY

The effects of Władysław Wincze's activity have become one of the foundations of contemporary Polish interior architecture and applied design, especially in the field of furniture. Wincze's design aesthetics, developed among artists associated with the "Ład" Artists' Cooperative in the interwar period, were characterized by simplicity of form and functionality, as well as references to folk art. Despite the limitations related to the doctrinal and economic conditions of the Polish People's Republic, she entered into a dialogue with contemporary trends in world design. Over the decades, numerous furniture and equipment designs as well as interior designs by Wincze have been recognized and implemented. From 1948, Władysław Wincze was associated with the

State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław, where he created the Department of Interior Design, which focused on numerous design issues in the visual arts. It became one of the most important forges of Polish artistic and applied design in the second half of the 20th century.

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Одеса–Варшава–Вроцлав. Художня, дизайнерська та педагогічна діяльність Владислава Вінче (1905-1992)

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Владислав Вінче народився у 1905 році в Одесі в родині польського походження. Саме там він зробив перші кроки у сфері візуального мистецтва. У 1922 році він переїхав до Польщі, де закінчив навчання з живопису в Академії образотворчих мистецтв у Варшаві. З часом, однак, його головною сферою зацікавлень стало прикладне мистецтво, зокрема проектування меблів та архітектура інтер'єрів. Його індивідуальний стиль у проектуванні надихався зразками Спільки художників «Ład». Йому були властиві простота форми, функціональність і звернення до народного мистецтва. Після 1945 року Вінче залишався пов'язаний зі Спількою художників «Ład». У нових повоєнних реаліях його творча робота зосереджувалася на проектуванні недорогих, багатofункціональних дерев'яних меблів, пристосованих до невеликих квартир. У 1948 році він також почав працювати як педагог у Державній вищій школі образотворчих мистецтв у Вроцлаві. Він був засновником, багаторічним професором і деканом факультету архітектури інтер'єру. Одночасно викладав проектування меблів. Як художник-дизайнер і викладач він користувався великим авторитетом серед студентів та колег. Багато років він також знайомив ширші суспільні кола з основами естетики у проектуванні через пресу, пишучи про значення краси матеріалу, структури та доцільності для якості проекту й промислового виробу на його основі. Його художня та проєктна діяльність у галузях меблярства, архітектури інтер'єрів та монументального живопису успішно тривала до кінця 1970-х років. Вона додала як доктринальні обмеження соціалістичного реалізму, так і проблеми з доступом до належних матеріалів, що були типовими для соціалістичної економіки. Це була спроба встановити рівноправний діалог із

сучасними тенденціями світового дизайну. Його проекти широко реалізовувалися у Вроцлаві, Нижній Сілезії та інших регіонах Польщі. Його меблі в період комунізму вирізнялися міцністю та багатофункціональністю. У його студії здобули освіту десятки визнаних польських архітекторів інтер'єрів і дизайнерів. Він помер у 1992 році.

Ключові слова: Владислав Вінче; Одеса; Польща; Вроцлав; мистецька освіта; дизайн меблів; внутрішня архітектура