

ART THERAPY THROUGH NONREPRESENTATIONAL ART: ABSTRACT PAINTING BY THE FEMALE RESIDENTS OF STROŃSKO VILLAGE.

Jadwiga Agata Kalużewska

The Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology University of Łódź,
3/5 Lindleya Str., 90-131 Łódź, Poland [extramural PhD]

Corresponding author e-mail: a.kaluzewska@gmail.com

S u m a r y. The article discusses abstract painting workshop held in a small village of Strońsko, located in the Łódź Province. The project had the character of an anthropological experiment using the language of contemporary art, far from any associations with Polish folk culture. The workshop was attended by 21 women of all ages (15–70). The information collected based on interviews and statistical data highlighted current problems common among country women: loneliness, unemployment, lack of education, lack of financial means to undertake attempts to acquire new professional competences (e.g. Internet access), alcohol related diseases, depressive disorders, domestic violence, lack of financial means for private medical intervention in case of emergency or chronic conditions. Many of these problems remain unresolved due to the misconstrued/misevaluated sense

of shame and social rejection that is deeply rooted in social awareness. The article discusses the importance of occupational therapy through art and to prove the advantages of introducing the language of abstraction as the most effective element of releasing emotions through the use of unconventional tools and the workshop. Using the language of abstraction not only improves the competences of participation in the perception of contemporary art, but, above all evokes the potential of creative energy, intensifies the process of creative and logical thinking, encourages reflection and provides satisfaction, thus increasing the self-esteem of the participants in art therapy.

K e y w o r d s: abstraction, art therapy, painting, countryside

Painting in its essence does not have to be a pictorial message, but it is always a form of human spiritual life.

Prof. Stanisław Fijałkowski

At the Unicum *Young Art* auction held on 17 April 2018 at 7 p.m. at Desa, out of 86 paintings by young artists featured there, 21 were nonrepresentational (abstract or abstracted). Works that proved most popular among buyers were those with a clear message and realistic or geometric form, evocative of the art déco style,

which had recently gained considerable popularity due to the “rediscovery” of the works by Tamara Łempicka, a painter of Polish origin. The prices of representational paintings that realistically reflected or imitated reality, for example surrealistically, exceeded the amounts offered for abstract paintings manifold.

It would be untrue to say that in the last thirty years abstract art has been treated as a niche, presented on the occasion of group exhibitions of contemporary art, however, nonrepresentational painting remains outside the main trends of interest of artists, exhibition organizers and art dealers. This is certainly the result of the slow development of the post-1989 art market based on commercial values, quite often relying on the popular perception, omitting or neglecting the aspect of the perception of a work of art in terms of its intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects.

The breakthrough came in 2017 declared the Year of the Avant-Garde in Poland, when major centers such as Łódź, Poznań, Warsaw and Kraków organized series of conferences, exhibitions, performances and museum classes dedicated to a broader audience, presenting a wide range of avant-garde phenomena with its century-old tradition in architecture, painting, graphic art, photography, industrial design, theatre, film arts and literature.¹ Most of the exhibition projects that presented painting as part of the “Avant-Garde Festival” included works by groundbreaking Polish artists of the interwar period, representing the main directions of modern art – Expressionists, Formists, Lviv Surrealists, Constructivists and Abstractionists.² There is no doubt that the popularization of the works of the present avant-garde has had an impact on the propagation of art, especially nonrepresentational art. However, in order for art galleries to fill up with viewers, the process of learning and consolidating the codes of perception should be resumed, both through education and

popularization of abstract art, also outside large agglomerations.

The perception of abstract art has been an important element of the education process at the primary and secondary level for decades, yet it is still a complex issue for artists and gallery owners, exhibition curators and cultural animators, as well as for potential viewers, who regard it as reserved for elites capable of competent reception.

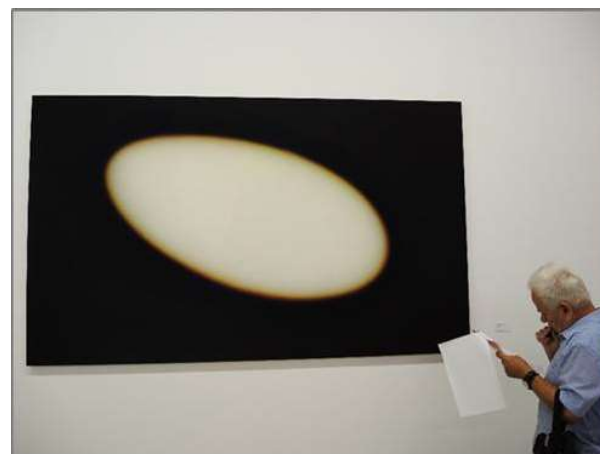


Fig.1: Resident of Strońsko village at the exhibition “And What About That Abstraction?” S. Gierowski Foundation, Warsaw, 2017, photo J.A. Kałużewska

The majority of visual arts events in Poland, despite the constantly improving structure and the opinion of specialists, are assessed to a large extent from the point of view of their commercial success, such as audience attendance.

Abstractionism is popularized by private foundations, such as the Stefan Gierowski Foundation in Warsaw. Last year's (2017) exhibition entitled: “And What About That Abstraction?” showcased 70 works completed in 2015–2017. The exhibition aimed to present the latest trends among the attitudes of Polish Abstractionists, however, in the opinion of critics it demonstrated the secondary nature of solutions, mostly revealing abstract visions on the *foundations of the history of abstraction* [15]. Exceptions include academic centers, such as *Jan Kochanowski Institute of Fine Arts* in Kielce, where geometric abstractionism is subject to scholarly analysis, by organizing international conferences and monitoring the innovativeness of

¹ <http://culture.pl/pl/artykul/rok-2017-stulecie-awangardy-w-polsce>

² The largest projects included: “The Power of the Avant-Garde” (Kraków, Szolayski House, Kraków National Museum Branch), which consisted of works by key figures of the international avant-garde, including the Abstractionist Kazimierz Malewicz, and Polish avant-garde artists: representatives of the groups Bunt, BLOK, Praesens, the a.r. group. and the Krakow Group; the exhibition project of the National Museum in Poznań “Hans Arp and Polish Art”, the Museum of Art in Łódź; the monographic exhibition of the works of Katarzyna Kobro and Władysław Strzemiński prepared for Museo Rein Sofia in Madrid; the National Museum in Warsaw continued family workshops: “Modern Art for Beginners”, “Art of circles and squares”, “Gallery of contrasts”.

the search for artists who represent this trend in Poland and abroad³

In September 2016, the International Scientific and Artistic Conference "Geometry in Discourse – Discourse in Geometry", entitled "Grid", devoted to a new phenomenon in art – discursive abstraction,⁴ is an example of the still current area of intellectual infiltration of artists, but also, and perhaps most of all, of following the creative thought behind an ever-changing reality. However, abstract art is still an area alienated from the mainstream interests of the general public.

What is therefore the exact nature of the problem of contemporary perception of abstractionism? In an attempt to answer this question, the author refers to the analysis of the structure of perception of a work of art, which has a multidirectional form, along with the current, rapid progress of civilization, including the interpenetration of cultures in the global space, going beyond the simple reading of the content and reaction to the form of visual artistic message.

Since the beginning of its existence, the area of perception of nonrepresentational art has been a field of investigation and exploration for both artists and art theorists. The understanding of the process of changes in the creation and reception of a work of art from representational to abstract begins with a turn towards the history of conditions for the formation and shaping of subsequent trends that give rise to contemporary art. Like many avant-garde theatrical, ballet, literary, musical and other ideas, the departure from the traditional, realistic presentation of content was a response to the stagnation of cultural development in European societies at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, entangled in socio-economic and political crises, progressive secularization, and simultaneously participating in unprecedented

civilizational progress, as well as the development of science and technology [2]. New means of expression used in visual arts reflected a rebellion against the ossified ideas of universally prevailing academicism (faithful, classical depiction of reality), socially acceptable as a comprehensible image of the surrounding world. As early as the first exhibition of Impressionists (Paris, 1874), shocked the public, despite overwhelming criticism resulted in an evolution in the perception of painting as merely documenting and recording reality. Its distinct character led to deeper analyses of the physiological process of perception of colors, resulting from research into the physical properties of light [1, 6]. The process of dressing the imitation of nature in the artist's own interpretation and, above all, of acceptance of the experiment that was initiated by the Impressionists gave rise to successive stages in the development of methodological and substantive research in visual arts. An unquestionable contribution to the development of new formal solutions in painting at the expense of documenting reality was made by the improvement of the process of developing and preserving photographic images, as well as the construction of the first daguerreotype in 1839 by Louis Jacques Daguerre [13]. From Neo-Impressionism (the concept of divisionism), through Fauvism and then Orphism, Neoplasticism (*De Stijl*) and Unism, artists were able to confront emerging algorithms based on the study of optical phenomena, broadening the spectrum of their search for consequences of perception, such as: adaptation to color, simultaneism /relativism of colors, the emergence of the phenomenon of afterimage, and finally the impact of color on the psyche, a feature used for example by first Expressionists and then Abstractionists. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the unity of creative expression is co-created by both the object and the artistic program/theory [3, 11, 8, 14].

New trends that emerged in the twentieth century art were based on the search for individual artistic autonomy, the source of which was both consistent intellectual exploration and creativity that reflected controlled emotions, reactions and individual expression. It should be noted that the time of progress and formation of Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and abstract art in Western Europe was associated not only with artist's strongly marked individuality, but also with the dissemination and emphasis on the

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⁴ Geometry in Discourse, Distinguished by Professor Wiesław Łuczaj from the Institute of Fine Arts of the Jagiellonian University. Discursive abstraction refers to the phenomena of everyday life, to statistical research, social behavior or even music. Zdanowicz 2016].

subjective perception of the work by the viewer. This new kind of perception was a response to the challenges of the time, and the language of art in its many versions kept pace with the progress of civilization changes [16]. Abstractionism in its geometric form, especially in Eastern Europe, was the voice of a socio-political revolution, national liberation uprisings, and a synthetic language of the new order. (In post-revolutionary Russia, artists such as Larionov, Goncharova, Lissitzky, Rodchenko or Malevich, in Hungary – Moholy-Nagy, and in Romania – Brâncuși). Both geometric and spontaneous abstractionism, created through evolution, were influenced by many changes in contemporary art, as were the individual artistic paths of abstract artists, which usually began with academic work [16, 17].

It should be remembered that from prehistoric times to this day one of the key features of perception has been the symbolic message of color, stemming directly from nature and referring to the cultural code. Color often emphasized the magical power of an artifact (object or item) that performed a ritual function both in primitive and contemporary cultures. Similarly, marking out symbolic content by means of color by painters, as well as the subjective perception of the viewer, provoked experiences not only mystical. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this ideal was pursued by two representatives of the extreme trends within Abstractionism: Wassily Kandinsky (spontaneous abstraction) and Piet Mondrian (geometric abstraction). At the same time, the works by both artists were groundbreaking in the sense that they were consistently devoid of any non-painterly meanings. And even though Kandinsky used diverse and abundant artistic means in his work, while Mondrian opted for straight lines and synthetic, geometric planes of pure color, the two artists focused on the inner experience of the work.

Form, in the narrow sense, is nothing but the separating line between surfaces of colour. That is its outer meaning. But it has also an inner meaning, of varying intensity, and, properly speaking, FORM IS THE OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF THIS INNER MEANING. (...) SO IT IS EVIDENT THAT FORM-HARMONY MUST REST ONLY ON A CORRESPONDING VIBRATION OF THE HUMAN SOUL; AND THIS IS A SECOND GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF

THE INNER NEED. [Kandinsky, 1912, 66–67]

(...) – And if you recall what I said to you then about flatness and the straight line and principally about relations, you will have an idea of how this great feeling of repose could be shown plastically. – It is true ... The natural appearance was entirely in the background, nothing was rounded, everything looked flat and straight, and (...) the constant relation was emphatic. But do we always have to look past nature in order to achieve a conscious contemplation of peace? – We ought not to look past nature, rather we should look through it; we ought to see more deeply, our vision should be abstract, universal. Then externality will become for us what it really is: the mirror of truth (Mondrian 1919–1920).

Apart from the theory of colors, another area of exploration for avant-garde artists was space in painting. It was no longer enough to create an illusion of the third dimension, to depict space on the flat surface of the canvas; the challenge was to return to taking into account the metaphysical space, inherited from the objects of primitive peoples' art as well as sacred art. What Mondrian called conscious contemplation is a way to reach peace and truth, and thus to achieve a kind of catharsis; for Kandinsky the idea of Abstractionism is to move the human soul, which succumbs to an inner necessity by contemplating a painting full of the harmony of forms and color.

Just as one hundred years ago, today's perception of contemporary art is based on many aspects of sensual and intellectual cognition. *The perception of an artwork is an active process of abstracting an ordered structure from the formless* [19]. By subjecting the semantic (also in the case of Abstractionism!) and the formal aspect to verification and subjective evaluation, the viewer creates his or her own axiological level, which determines the value of the work. Both levels become the sum of the artist's and the recipient's energy. It should be noted that in the era of progressing digitalization and universal access to information, direct contact with any form of art has become very limited and thus very much weakened.

Subjectively, the area of influence on the viewer, as well as the unlimited artistic resources available to artists, predispose abstract art to

timeless cultural peregrinations, using the meaning of their codes or omitting them. The acceptance is contingent upon the viewer's readiness to perceive this kind of art, even if he or she is not competent or deprived of direct contact with an abstract work, as it is the case in the remote provincial regions.

Abstract Paintings of Strońsko Residents. A Case of Social Art Therapy. "Abstract in May"

What is a creative attitude? Much is said about the ability to create the existing world, to transform it in the visible, sensual, cognitive and spiritual spheres. A creative attitude can be fully realized in the area of metaphysical experience and not only on the empirical level. For decades, participation in art has become a space supporting the processes of treatment and rehabilitation of mental, neurological and physical disorders, as well as a therapy in social environment.

The scope of the author's interests, both as an artist and an educator, are visual arts. For the last twelve years the author has been animating creative activities in the Strońsko village in the Łódź Province (GPS coordinates, Strońsko: E18°48'0278, N51°32' 17.323'). She carries out the projects using both traditional and modern disciplines, such as painting, sculpture, graphic art, photography, but also installation, performance, happening and video-art. While realizing ideas of individual art therapy as well as group activities, she uses her own experience of the process of creating art objects of non-representational nature. Recognizing the advantages of this type of creativity, the scope of the extensive craft at the creative stage, the variety and availability of techniques, and the possibility of releasing creative energy, not burdened with the requirement of reproduction, she tries to popularize the language of abstraction as a means of dealing with the very essence of creation, stimulating self-reflection and exchange of insights for everyone who wants to participate in such an action. The goal is the process of creating an object of abstract art without being burdened with a reference to the aesthetic scale, the final effect [9].

The social environment of Strońsko⁵ is characterized mainly by peasant background,

primary or vocational education, although the majority of women are secondary school graduates and 4% hold a university degree. However, in the process of research (25 anthropological interviews run by the author) all respondents demonstrated very limited knowledge about art or did not have any at all. Shortcomings in this area dated back to their primary education. Despite many mechanisms "civilizing" the anthroposphere of Strońsko, such as education, experience working away from home, copying life models based on the media (also, a gradual shift away from regular religious practice that once constituted the cultural tradition of the village), based on conversations and observations, it seems that village residents still strongly identify themselves with folk culture [5]. Moreover, the present rediscovery of old traditions and folk rituals is perceived by the villagers as "cult/fashionable" and one's membership in this unique cultural sphere is slowly becoming ennobling. In this environment, so far from contemplating works of contemporary art, there is a potential for perception of art in general. Despite the lack of craftsmanship tradition and the manifestation of creative impulses in the form of folk art, memories and attempts to reconstruct ceremonial visual art are present, such as the making harvest wreaths, stage scenery for nativity plays and others. Everyday observation of the rural environment has become a source of knowledge about the current situation of women living in rural areas. The most moving was the loneliness of elderly women and their helplessness in the face of everyday life, so vastly different from the old, traditional rules of social life, the disappearing world view, the new cultural order created by the mass media. The author has listened to many women who are now forced to take care of their cottage on their own, having taken over all duties, including land farming itself, due to the economic emigration of their partners, who had gone abroad. Another serious social problem is the fact that adolescent children, including boys, are raised by single women, who are sometimes not fully aware of how profound

⁵ Strońsko, a village located in the Zapolice commune, district of Zduńska Wola, Łódzkie province, population

124 women, 135 men, number of beneficiaries of Social Welfare benefit – 6, beneficiaries of the Commune Family Support Program – 1 woman, 2 men, the Commune Program for Countering Family Violence and Protection of Victims of Family Violence – 1 woman, 1 man. Data from the Office of the Commune in Zapolice, 31 December 2017.

negative consequences can have. The increase in the requirements necessary to perform everyday duties is not adequate to the level of knowledge gained in the educational process [7]. The progressing digitalization, development of new technologies in agriculture and in the processing industry, the bureaucratization of life, the development of electronic communication and, at the same time, the lack of educational opportunities for economic, logistic or family reasons are all causing a sense of frustration as a result of the lack of chances for employment⁶ or with losing a job⁷. As a result of the social situation and environmental pressure, neither men nor women benefit from modern systems and mechanisms providing support from local government institutions or, for example, religious associations, which result in the ever-increasing

⁶ In the structure of unemployment in rural areas, just like in urban areas, women predominate. At the end of 2016, there were 324,400 women living in rural areas registered as unemployed (45,5% of the total number of registered women) and 279,200 men (44,8% of the total number of registered men). (...) At the end of 2016 there were 116 unemployed women in rural areas out of every 100 unemployed men in rural areas, 113 in urban areas. *The situation of women and men on the labor market in 2016*, Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy, Department of the Labor Market, Department of Analysis and Statistics, Warsaw, 2017, p. 1.5.

⁷ Women stay unemployed for much longer than men and, as a result, are more likely to be no longer entitled to benefits. The factors that determine this situation to a large extent are caring for dependent family members, but also women's lower confidence in their skills and chances in the labour market. Moreover, they usually look for a job much closer to where they live and, although they are willing to work for even lower wages than men, they cannot find employment. (...) Working as a farmer, women are usually partners of men in farm work or non-agricultural business activities (family firms). Nevertheless, in most cases the traditional division of labor and family responsibilities is still respected (in agriculture, the traditional division between men's and women's work is still maintained). Domestic work is generally the domain of women. In certain family situations (widowhood, husband's disease, single life), a woman can be the sole manager of an agricultural holding. It should be noted that the salaries of women living in rural areas with similar levels of professional competence and education are generally lower than those of women living in urban areas. The unemployment rate is also higher, even in the case of higher education.

incidence of depression-related diseases and seeking solace in addictions. The observation of women in Strońsko has produced an idea to carry out joint activities in the field of visual arts as a therapeutic activity. One of author's first experiences was teaching an abstract painting workshop in a small village where she currently lives. It is very difficult in the rural environment to enforce an attitude that would give rise to the acquisition of an ability to create what is found and to transform it into an artistic statement. Before organizing the painting workshop, she made a preliminary analysis based on conversations and observations. However, she believes that it is the intuitive rather than substantive assessment of the current state that plays a fundamental role. The key to success was to encourage local women to follow through with the idea. While talking to them, I pointed out the advantages of working in a group, learning about new areas of life and culture, pointing to the reference to the tradition of consolidating rural women at work, performing rites, taking part in rituals. Most of the women gladly agreed to the idea of creating art, at the same time criticizing the poor cultural offer of the community center. The workshop titled *Abstract in May* and held over the period of two days was attended by 21 women aged 15–73, who were willing to take part in the experiment. The result of the activities was an open-air exhibition of large format painting works by the participants, displayed in the historic park in the center of the village.

The assumption of abstract art is to isolate thought and image from the area of associations between real forms and entities. Initially, the content of the works that were to be created during the workshops was unclear. In the introduction above, it was explained that the key would be to feel and then visualize in a symbol: a spot, a line, a geometric figure, and so on.

The main topic of the workshop was the question: "What is love?" The proposed topic was meant to provoke participants to make an abstract image: a reference area, an emotional state, a confrontation between the prose of life and the mysticism of love. Creating an image that is to be abstract does not, in fact, differ from the pattern of intentional thinking. The subject from which we abstracted - the feeling of love - was an issue, a thought, an impression. The love of spouses, the intruding jealousy, everything I love - my space, my village, me, my husband, my family. The subject embodied all that seems to be most

important to every woman. I decided to offer the residents of the village an additional opportunity in the form of a workshop of creating paintings on fabric, in the batik technique,⁸ and at the same time liberating them from the schematic approach that comes with the knowledge of traditional techniques. Taking into account the lack of practical preparation and at the same time the enhanced emotional state of the majority of women participating in the event, the author assumed that the format of 200cm x 160cm of each image will provoke them to release potential expression, to give in to the instinct and internal voice, and thanks to the language of abstraction the image, which imitates reality, will not be a mental barrier that might overwhelm the participants. The expressiveness of a work of art is created through the artist's more or less conscious use of the so-called "emotional effect", i.e. the media of emotional values inherent in particular colors and color phenomena [18].



Fig. 2. Participant of the "Abstract in May" workshop, Z.S. aged 69, Strońsko, photo J.A. Kałużewska

What is particularly moving about each of the paintings today is the purity of colors. Even

⁸ Batik - a painting technique consisting in successive application of wax and bathing the fabric in dye, which only stains places not covered by a layer of wax. The waxing and dyeing process can be repeated several times for special effects. (...) Batik is a technique that has been used for generations and is most popular in Indonesia and other Asian countries, where animal skins are used most often to form batik positions. In 2009, Indonesian batik was included on the list of the immaterial heritage of humanity. Source: www.wikipedia.pl

though the painters could use multiple tints, thus combining colors, creating complementary shades, speaking in a specific tone, or limiting the color, most of them decided to make use of the pure colors available to them, only occasionally opting for derivatives. Most of the paintings consist of planes with some minor elements. However, it is difficult to refer the output of the workshop participants solely to an intuitive act, which is not subject to control, and with time also to self-criticism. Not without significance is the fact that women painted in a community of some kind, and so while the paintings have individual character, however, they are characterized by similar solutions.

Anthropological aspect

Are the shapes and colors dictated by well-established cultural symbolism?

This is certainly evidenced by the attribution of the shades of red to the symbolism of love, while yellow used in the paintings could be related to the color of light, glow or flame. In secular culture red is a deep-rooted symbol of passion, love, fire and energy. During the painting, the participants spontaneously expressed their associations, citing: fire of love, explosion of feelings and ardor of love, giving abstract images warm tones. At this point, it should be mentioned that the specificity of the colors used in the symbolism has its direct behavioral source. Many scientists relate the physical properties of light to medical practice by proving that color has a direct impact on our behavior, mental and physical health. A sense of color determines our actions.

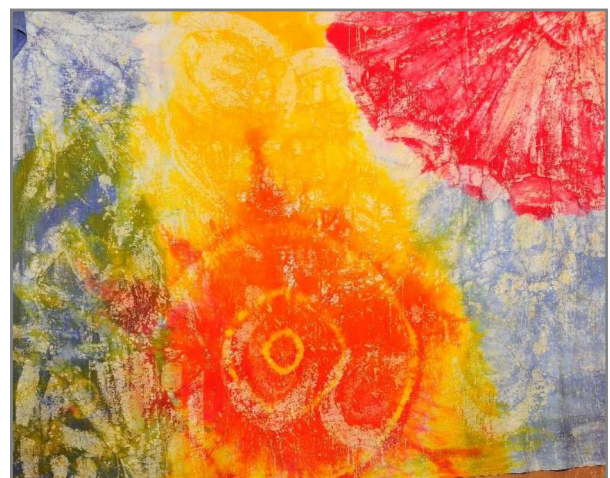


Fig.3. Participant: A.P. aged 40, *My Love*, “Abstract in May” workshop, batik, photo: J.A. Kałużewska

The paintings created in Strońsko were dominated by circular forms situated centrally or constituting the dominant element of the composition. Perhaps it is due to the fascination with spherical shape of the Sun, the Moon, stars, light and space. The surfaces of the circles were usually filled with red, pink, orange. Surrounding them was a space in cool hues: blues, violets, greens. Blue and shades of violet usually symbolize space and sky, corresponding to such emotional states as: hope, safety, relaxation and peace. According to the accounts by the authors of the paintings, blue was supposed to symbolize the state of harmony and tranquility. Perhaps the intersection of two worlds: earth–warmth and heaven–coolness, subconsciously used in the paintings, is also meant to convey the theme of transition; the existence of two states which accompany and testify to the essence of love, transformation, departure from earthly matters to spiritual ones [10].



Fig.4. Participants of the “Abstract in May” workshop, Strońsko, photo J.A. Kałużewska

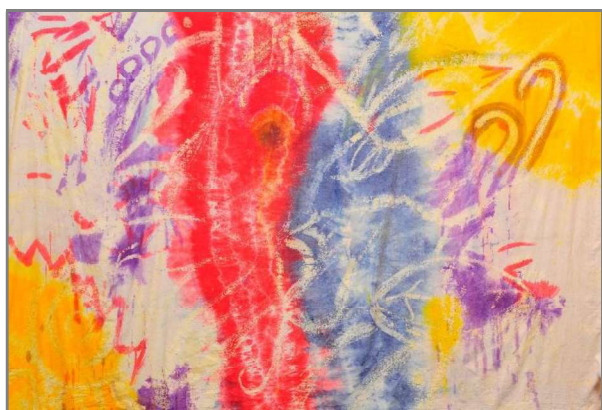


Fig. 5. Participant: B.O. aged 32, *My Life*, batik, “Abstract in May” workshop, Strońsko, photo B. Kałużewski

As far as the colors and shapes used in the paintings are concerned, it is possible to speak of sacralization of the theme of love in reference to everyday life. Most images are dominated by the hidden symbolism of love towards another person. In spite of the assumed departure from iconography such as heart, two pigeons, lips, drops of blood or tears, some abstract symbols appeared.

The paintings include circles, points and spirals. The male element appears in many of the statements. The pictures show phenomena and feelings associated with love; they are symbolized in the form of spots and planes: irregular or aspiring to regular, parallel vertically to one another, parallel horizontally, diagonal, intertwined, situated centrally on the background of another spot or plane, closing the composition. Lines: straight, parallel, curved, broken, radially arranged. Points - brush strokes as well as small lines, crosses, triangles and other shapes outlined by the contour. The shapes, aside the color, emphasize emotions: harmony evoked by nostalgia and happiness, but also uncertainty, longing, a sense of upcoming conflict or betrayal. Perhaps it is worth mentioning here the individual impressions of the artists, determining their actions in terms of the shapes and colors used. According to Jacek Zieliński, every work is based not so much on “intellectual speculation” as on artistic intuition [12, 18].

A young woman, a teacher at a nearby school, interpreted while painting: (...) - *Some form ... There were supposed to be stripes, negative. They were supposed to show my bad mood. Zigzags like teeth. I had the idea of this anger. Upset, frustrated with life.* One of the oldest participants commented on her painting: (...) *It was me and my Heniek, like two hearts or shrubs...* Another young woman said: (...) *I was married one year ago. What I painted was an explosion of positive feelings. This orange and the surrounding red spread further...* The explosion of emotions and creative energy appeared in most participants of the workshop. Enthusiasm developed gradually as they got used to the technique of making their paintings. With time, it transformed into a unique festive atmosphere.

Analyzing abstract paintings created in Strońsko, one feels that they confirm Kant's thesis

about the need for autonomy of aesthetic attitude and “selfless appreciation”, especially since in the author’s opinion beauty in this particular case refers not only to the final effect, but also to the uniqueness of the process of creation itself.

The act of individual and joint transformation of the canvas surface into an object of art and the act of transforming oneself into a creator of a different, separate “reality” is sufficient for me to consider the whole project and its outcome as predisposing to a step into the world of art.

The course of workshop and the results could not have been fully predicted. It was a creative action in process, a happening of a kind. From the author’s point of view as an event animator, the meeting resembled a festival, a meeting of women participating and creating in a magical atmosphere. Perhaps this meeting was unintentionally a response to confirm the presence of art; Play, Festival, Ritual? [4].

Both me and the painting women were accompanied by the feeling of discovering the mystery of creating, as well as building a community. This feeling carried over to the opening of the outdoor exhibition, organized in the historic park of Strońsko. The opening was attended by the whole rural community and invited guests. We gathered by the campfire and a lavishly set table. Today, the paintings speak from the perspective of a different experience; an accomplished thing. As subjects of research, they constitute a complex and multithreaded area of analysis.

Many projects carried out in Strońsko⁹ in the field of popularization of culture and art, especially in its contemporary aspect, include organizing workshops, exhibitions and open-air painting events, trips to museums and galleries where modern art is presented, including abstract art.

The author believes that the non-quantifiable but extremely valuable effect of participation in such trips is not so much improved level of education of rural inhabitants but rather their intuitive, yet committed, participation in the reception of works of art and the desire to repeat experiences related to this

process. This may be evidenced by an excerpt from an anonymous survey carried out during the exhibition.



Fig.6. Residents of the village of Strońsko at the exhibition “And What About That Abstraction?” S. Gierowski Foundation, Warsaw, 2017, photo J.A. Kałużewska



Fig. 7. Residents of the village of Strońsko at the exhibition “And What About That Abstraction?” S. Gierowski Foundation, Warsaw, 2017, photo J.A. Kałużewska

The respondent is :

Female, 42, profession: shop assistant.

Do you like the exhibition “And what about that abstraction?” Please give reasons for your answer.

Yes. Because I really like images that don't show you everything ready, as it is.

Please choose the image you like the most? Please give reasons for your answer.

Title: **Chinese 3**, Author: **Jan Pamula**, **You can't tell if it's a painting or a sculpture.**

⁹ Implementation of projects devoted to popularization of contemporary art is also one of the statutory activities of the ART AFFERA Foundation, which I established in 2013. The institutionalization of my social activities facilitates the use of EU funds.

Everyone sees something different. My daughter saw a padlock and I saw a door to our house.

There is a rainbow above the door, so our house is cheerful and happy!

CONCLUSIONS

A specific example of the impact that cultural participation had on the local community is the fact that about two years ago women living in Strońsko established the “Charm of Strońsko” Association, which reconstructs and archivizes old local folk songs. They also started a singing group. The Association members are almost 90% identical with the list of participants of “Abstract in May” workshop.

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