

Foreword

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends, I wish to bring closer, with this short text, describing the years of my artistic work, what for me is important as an artist, what guides me from the beginning in my constant and to this day consequently lead long-time, partly also laborious actions, on my bumpy way filled out with attempts to discover my own artistic searches and reflexions springing from that.

I would like to mention, that all other texts included and published in this monograph refer only to my works created in the years from 1997.

For a start, some words about what interests and intrigues me in the work with wood, which captivates me for many years now and which I have chosen as the material for my entire artistic work and also about what the works are telling – in particular the “Wooden Panels”. My artistic considerations, during the last nearly 30 years, have concentrated upon exploring wood as a material, upon understanding its structure and the efforts to get a grasp of its essence, through which, I have managed at the same time to attain the possibility to celebrate the archaic in wood. Initially arose the question, which technical tools to process the material and to which extend are at the disposal of the artist? After thorough analysis, it seems to be clear to which degree the used tools leave behind visible traces in the actual structure of the wood. The material changes, in a certain sense, according to a given process of interaction from the outside. There comes a moment, where I intuitively begin to reflect on a possible interference into the wood, so that it does not, by doing so, lose its own identity. All this works in practice by knowingly introducing strict rules, which I impose upon myself, and which every artist should negotiate in his intended empirical dispute undertaken with nature. During the work appears usually a large scale of various rhythms, on the other hand, though, a certain kind of monotony is created at the same time. Thematising both of these phenomena, I am trying to emphasise this so occurring process, which surprises every time with a pulsating balance. Simultaneously, I am trying to introduce already earlier a certain geometry, filled with a down to earth manner, with which I had been constantly captivated already many years ago dealing with Minimal Art. On the other hand, I am very interested in the individual and unrepeatable weave of artificially created, but in a natural way functioning wooden surfaces, on which we can remotely detect traces of tool interference, which, in principle, is a negation of Minimal Art. This constantly taking place give and take, between me and the nature becomes somewhat a highly refined, thoughtful process of reciprocal exchange, being in principle the basis of my prior intended actions. Here open up to me in a rather unforeseeable way, but also not restricted by anything, entirely new and numerous layers of possibilities of previously unknown solutions. At first, this perfectly, as it seems, functioning and strongly detectable harmony acts seemingly rather monotonous. But in this moment, however, when on the bas-relief surfaces emerge suddenly and unexpectedly warm and eye-friendly colours, reminiscent of various shades of wood honey and ending on tones of silky charred wood and besides through the bark structures, manifold sorts of wood with their visible traces, incurred by the tool process, as also by the light reflexions emerging from them, the whole situation changes radically into a passionately living and strongly vibrating beautiful fairy-tale-like story. Some of the wooden panels, those of larger dimensions, the huge bas-reliefs reaching sometimes 10 m² of surface size, with their specific archaic wooden character, breathing and monumental, give evidence of their strong power and grandeur. These wall works are characterised first and foremost in their relation with the beholder through a strongly developed architectural order, as well as a large portion and tension of wood structure, enclosed in specific reciprocally acting concrete rhythms. The so originated, very peculiar constellation, opens up to me unmeasured possibilities for unearthing not infrequently entirely surprising, previously unknown forms of expression, allowing every time constant, relentless attempts of defining wood as a material. All this happens already for many years, giving me uninterruptedly for every next day much strength, joy and contentment from my creative work and gives hope for the future for yet many more discoveries and interesting artistic searches to come in the field of process art.

And now some words about me and my creative work also before 1997. I was born in 1950 in Gdańsk-Oliwa. It was also here that I took my A-levels at the fifth Lyceum. During the next four years, I persistently had been trying to enter the Sculpture Department of the State College of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, but without success, in spite of every time passing the entering examinations with very good success, because of the lack of free places, it was not meant to be for me to become a student at this time. In the years 1968 to 1971, I had been working, learning next to the already then famous Gdańsk sculptors Wiesław Pietroń and Wawrzyniec Samp, creators among others of the famous monument of the

Gdańsk massacre, exploring many secrets and getting to know valuable sculptural practices, which is very helpful to me to this day.

Eventually, after years of waiting, in 1971, and my nervous and very decisive intervention at the Ministry of Culture in Warsaw, I finally manage to gain the coveted status of a student. In my first year, I find myself in the sculpture workshop of Professor Anna Pietrowiec. At the same time, I had class in the workshop of material techniques of Professor Hanna Żóławska. The next four years, I spent in the sculpture and drawing workshop of Professor Alfred Wiśniewski. At the Sculpture Department classes were held simultaneously in the workshop of sculpture design in architecture and urban planning, lead by a great educationalist, whom I was hero-worshipping, my favourite professor, Adam Smolana, whom I owe very much to this day. I also took part, according to regulations, in the classes in the workshop for the design of small-scale sculptural forms of Zbigniew Erszkowski. These were wonderful years in which came true one by one, long awaited dreams.

In the years of 1970 to 1972, I had been working on a model of the porch at No. 87/89 ulica Świętego Ducha, the stone sculpture was cut out and installed by the PKZ (Pracownie Konserwacji Zabytków in Gdańsk). In 1973, I take part in a competition launched by the rector of the State College of Fine Arts in Gdańsk for a sculptural work for the students and degree candidates of the college, winning the main prize worth 3000 Złoty, what in those times was not merely a financial support for a student. In 1975, I receive the third prize in a nationally launched competition for students and degree candidates of all fine arts colleges in Poland for a sculpture – organised among others by the Ministry of Culture in Warsaw. In the years of 1975 to 1976, I am working on the next model of a sculpture, which was installed on the sixth floor of the left side façade of the English House at No. 13/16 ulica Chlebnicka, the stone was cut out and installed by the PKZ in Gdańsk.

In 1976, I am finishing my studies, receiving my Master of Arts degree at the State College of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. Shortly after, I start working as a sculptor for the Pracownia Sztuk Plastycznych (PSP), for the Spółdzielnia Pracy Twórczej Polskich Artystów Plastyków (ARPO), as well as also for the Zakłady Artystyczne (ART) in Gdańsk, which goes on until August 1981. In the meantime, I receive many commissions for projects and realisations of so-called small-scale sculptural forms, statuettes, medals and many commemorative plaques. Commissioning parties were among others the Gdańsk shipyards, the Polish Ocean Lines (PLO), Navimor, the Gdańsk voivode.

In 1978, I receive an honourable mention in a competition for a sculptural work for the Fiction Film Festival, organised by the Wojewódzka Rada Związków Zawodowych in Gdańsk and the Zakłady Pracy Wybrzeża Gdańskiego. At this time, I become a member of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers.

In August 1981, shortly before martial law was introduced in Poland, I depart with my wife and my then six-year-old son for West Germany, where we have been living ever since.

In 1982, I become a member of the German Association of Visual Artists (BBK). During the first years of our stay in Germany, apart from sculpting, I was painting and drawing. In the years 1984-1988, I co-operate with the Galerie Mensch and the Hamburger Volksbanken. Among others, projects of medals, statuettes and their realisations come to fruition, e.g. for the Hauptkirche St. Michaelis in Hamburg, for Shell plc, for Beiersdorf, for Deutscher Ring. In 1985, after winning a competition, comes into being, commissioned by the Hauptkirche St. Jacobi in Hamburg, a large Christmas crib executed in mahogany wood. Shortly after, I receive also a commission for the addition of an historical oak plaque in the Institut für Holzwissenschaften (IHW) in Hamburg-Bergedorf.

In 1987, I take up, additionally, educational work at the adult education centre (VHS) in Hamburg in sculpture, which lasts to this day. Meanwhile, I am commissioned by the Panoptikum – the waxworks museum in Hamburg – to execute the head of Franz Josef Strauß.

In 1998, I am awarded, in a European contemporary art competition in Luxembourg, the main prize, the Prix du Jury in the Salon de Printemps '98, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture of Luxembourg. In 1991, the district council of Hamburg-Bergedorf buys a pair of figures in wood for the headquarters of the German Red Cross in Bergedorf, afterwards a further figure in wood. In the years 1998-1999, commissioned by the Union of Poles in Germany and the Polish expatriates in Hamburg, comes into existence the project and realisation, on the premises of the former concentration camp in Hamburg-Neuengamme, of the Polish monument *In Memory of the Poles Deported from the Warsaw Uprising in 1944* (executed in Strzegom granite). In the years 2011-2012 is erected, commissioned by the district council in Bergedorf, the *Monument Dedicated to the Memory of the Forced Labourers in Hamburg-Bergedorf*, project and realisation (concrete, stainless steel, bronze).

In 2012, comes into being in Hamburg-Bergedorf, in the premises at 81 Reinbeker Redder, the de Weryha Collection, and in 2016, the Friends organisation of the de Weryha Collection (Freundeskreis der Sammlung de Weryha e.V.) is founded in Hamburg, which counts today already more than 70 members.

In 2020, I am awarded by the Polish ambassador in Germany the *Commemorative Medal for the 100th Anniversary of the Polish Independence*.

In 2022, I win in Vienna the *Golden Owl Award* in the Visual Arts category, conferred by the Polish expatriate journal *Jupiter* – organ of the Klub Inteligencji Polskiej in Austria.

In the same year, my biographical entry is added to the 116th volume of the General Dictionary of Artists: The Artists of All Times and Nations (AKL).

My works are to be found today in museum collections in Poland, as well as in many international private ones, were also bought by art galleries and are shown for many years now on a regular basis in numerous individual and group exhibitions in Poland and abroad.

On a final note, I would like to admit, that, although, it is not easy for an artist to go through life, I know, that if I had the chance to take a similar decision, I would do the same. As I feel, long years of artistic sensations and struggles are waiting for me. I will still be cutting, breaking, splitting, in the hope of exploring further secrets, carefully hidden by this wonderful material, which is familiar to and accompanying men for thousands of years in good and bad.

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(Translation from Polish to English by Rafael de Weryha-Wysoczański)