

## Art Out of the Bloodlands: A Century of Polish Artists in Britain

Exhibition dates: 28 June - 17 September 2017



Marek Żuławski, *Poland First to Fight*, 1939, poster, Private Collection, courtesy the artist's estate

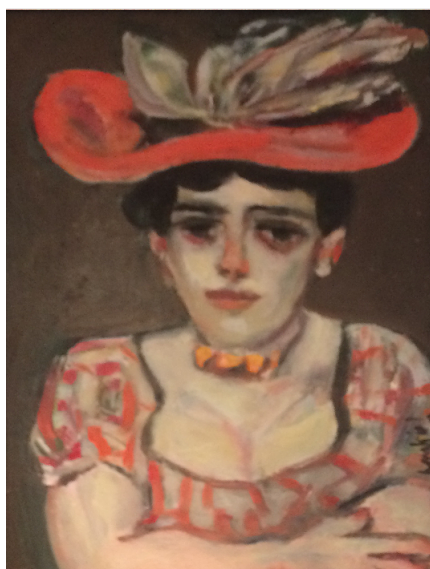
This is Ben Uri's second exhibition in its series on refugee and migrant artists, highlighting the Polish contribution in Britain over the last century. This focus is particularly apt as the community approaches its millionth citizen, the largest migrant group in Britain and, as next year, Poland celebrates a century since it regained its independence as a nation state after 123 years.

The exhibition presents narratives of the Polish community in Britain, and Poland's recent turbulent history, through the lens of art. It traces complex stories of Polish-born artists who fled successive regimes, were variously persecuted, imprisoned and interned, crossed continents – or, today, have made positive choices to come to Britain to study or to develop professionally.

The exhibition brings together a century of artworks and archival material by both celebrated and lesser-known Polish-born artists, selected from the Ben Uri Collection and from Polish institutions, galleries and private collections. Paintings, posters, prints, drawings, cartoons, book illustrations, film and sculpture explore issues of identity and migration, whilst intersecting with formal art historical developments, ranging from expressionism to Pop Art.

Featured artists from the Ben Uri Collection include: Jankel Adler, Henry Glicenstein, Isaac Lichtenstein, Leopold Pilichowski and his wife, Lena Pillico, Adriana Świerszczek, Alfred Wolmark; cartoonist and caricaturists: George Him, Ralph Sallon and Mark Wayner; and Holocaust survivors: Roman Halter, Josef Herman, Shmuel Dresner and Alicia Melamed Adams (the last remaining student of Bruno Schulz). Herman is represented by two recent and important acquisitions which pay homage to Goya's Black Paintings and memorialise the fighters for the Warsaw Ghetto.

Featured artists from other collections include: Janina Baranowska (who studied with David Bomberg at Borough Road), Marian Bohusz Szyszko, founder of the Polish School of Art in London; Henryk Gotlib; Stanisław Frenkiel; Zdzisław Ruszkowski; Feliks Topolski; Second World War pilot, Slade graduate and gallery owner, Jan Wieliczko; and Marek Żuławski. Many are highlighted in Douglas Hall's important publication, *Art in Exile, Polish Painters in Post-war Britain* (2008).



Stanisław Frenkiel, *Woman in a Red Hat*,  
oil on canvas, Private Collection



Stanisław Frenkiel, *Incantations*, 1993,  
oil on canvas, Private Collection

Furthermore, given Poland's singular contribution to graphic arts in the twentieth century, posters, book covers and illustrations by designers such as Romek Marber, Jan Pieńkowski and W. R. Szomański, are also displayed.

Magdalena Skupińska, Magda Błasińska and Maja Ngom, from the Royal College of Art, and Hanna Puskarz from the London College of Fashion represent Polish students graduating at the highest level in Britain, whilst video artist Maciej Jędrzejewski recently held his first solo show in Brick Lane, London, E1.

All but a handful of the featured works have been created in England – the new homeland - yet many retain symbols of Polish national identity, from Catholicism and the cavalry, to dark forests and traditional embroidery. Other images reflect prevailing art historical styles of the host nation – Znicz-Muszyński's distinctive palette and spiky composition recalls mid-century works by Graham Sutherland, whilst Zulawski's vivid female nude and unmodulated colour calls to mind Pop Art and the work of artists such as Alan Jones.

Taken as a whole, this two part exhibition documents and acknowledges the significant, distinctive and enduring contribution made to Britain's visual culture by the artists of its largest migrant community.

Curated by Rachel Dickson, Head of Curatorial Services, Ben Uri, the exhibition is accompanied by a full programme of related talks and events.

The exhibition has been supported by the Embassy of Poland, Polish Social and Cultural Association (POSK) and the Polish Cultural Institute.



### **Editors: Historical Note**

**Once Europe's largest country, with the continent's first written constitution, the multi-national Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth disappeared from the map in 1795 for 123 years, divided between Russia, Prussia, and Austria. Poland re-emerged as an independent state in 1918 - only to be partitioned again by Hitler's Nazi Germany and the USSR in 1939, remaining in the Soviet sphere of influence after the Second World War until 1989, when it regained sovereignty and re-established democratic governance, subsequently joining the European Union in 2004.**

**With London's special status as the former seat of the Polish Government-in-Exile for half of the twentieth century, and Britain's role as the country where many Polish migrants chose and continue to choose to settle, the exhibition will investigate the extraordinary story of a peripatetic nation which never gave up dreams of freedom, whilst proudly holding onto patriotic images steeped in its national history, culture and religion.**

The exhibition will be accompanied by an introductory text by Professor Anne White (Professor of Polish Studies and Social and Political Science, SSEES, UCL), exploring the broader cultural context of Polish migration to the UK.

Ben Uri Gallery and Museum, founded in the Jewish East End 100 years ago is the only art museum in Europe whose raison d'être is to address universal issues of identity and migration through the visual arts. Its collection of more than 1,300 works by 400 artists from 35 countries continues to grow and principally reflects the work, lives and contribution of British and European artists of Jewish descent, two thirds of whom are émigrés, interpreted within the context of 20th and 21st century art history, politics and society.

**Featured artists include:**

Jankel Adler	Małgorzata Łapsa-Malawska
Teodor Axentowicz	Isaac Lichtenstein
Janina Baranowska	Romek Marber
Magda Błasińska	Alicia Melamed Adams
Sławomir Blatton	Maja Ngom
Janina Bogucka	Moshe Oved (Edward Good)
Marian Bohusz-Szyszko	Jan Pieńkowski
Karolina Borchardt	Leopold Pilichowski
Andrzej Maria Borkowski	Lena Pillico
Caziel (Kazimierz Józef Zielenkiewicz)	Josef Piwowar
Joanna Ciechanowska	Piotr Potworowski
Stanisław Frenkiel	Hanna Puskarz
Henry Glicenstein	Zdzisław Ruszkowski
Henryk Gotlib	Ralph Sallon
Roman Halter	Magdalena Skupińska
Marthe Hekimi (née Marta Szostakowska)	W. R. Szymanski
Josef Herman	Adriana Świeraszczek
Maciej Jędrzejewski	Stefan and Franciszka Themerson
Josef Karpf	Feliks Topolski
Andrzej Klimowski	Mark Wayner
Włodzimierz Kołtonowski	Jan Wieliczko
Halina Korn	Alfred Wolmark
Adam Kossowski	Tadeusz Znicz-Muszyński
Andrzej Krauze	Marek Żuławski
Andrzej Kuhn	

**For high-res images:** please contact Helen Clegg [helenc@benuri.org](mailto:helenc@benuri.org)

**For further information:** please contact Rachel Dickson on [racheld@benuri.org](mailto:racheld@benuri.org)

**For associated events please see** [www.benuri.org](http://www.benuri.org)

Ben Uri Gallery & Museum, 108a Boundary Road, London, NW8 0RH.

Opening times: Mon–Fri 10am–5.30pm, Sat–Sun 11am–5pm

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