

Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź

Doctoral Dissertation

“Unique Sort”

Textile and unique table objects collection

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Fig. 1. Summer 1995, private archive, photo: Sławomir Sadrak

Prologue

Recollection I

I am eight, maybe nine years old. Propping myself up with frail arms, I try to climb onto the sideboard that stands next to the window in the living room. It is a three-storey vault. On the lowest shelves, which are locked with doors and have handles in the shape of ornamental keys, lie neatly arranged china. Plates, platters and vases - crockery that is used only for special occasions. The target of my climb is the bookcase standing on the top floor. Those of the books that attract me most are beyond the reach of my short arms. They are not children's books. I won't read them, but the temptation to at least look at the covers is too strong. To get to the top, I have to traverse one more level. The second floor has three glass shelves. When I put my feet on the narrow sideboard top, I have to balance on my toes like a ballerina. In my mind I hear my mother's voice 'Why are you climbing up there, you'll fall and hurt yourself yet!'. I stare for a long time at the objects standing on the glittering sheet - carefully selected souvenirs and trinkets collected over the years. First, my attention is drawn to a 'family' of small swan-shaped figurines. I admire their slender transparent necks, climbing upwards from bubbles of heavy coloured glass. They seem to be the height of gracefulness and elegance. I know they are fragile and I shouldn't touch them, but in a burst of courage I take one in my hand. I gently run fingers over the cold glass body. The underside of the figurine is rough and dull, different from the rest of the swan. This contrast is pleasing to the touch. I inspect the other six or seven to see if they look similar, then carefully put one by one back in their designated places. When I lift my gaze to the highest shelf on this floor, I see porcelain cups. On each of them above the coloured strip are some symbols I know from playing cards. I don't completely understand why someone placed them on the porcelain, but the strange juxtaposition intrigues me. The golden ear attracts my hand like a magnet. I gently take it with two fingers. I peek inside.

On the bottom, there are several baby teeth. I don't know which are mine and which are my brother's....

Introduction

A deep understanding of one's own inspirations and artistic goals is crucial in the quest to consciously guide the creative process. Engaging in a dialogue with oneself, analysing one's motivations and recognising one's emotions are, in my opinion, essential to improving one's craft and creating more authentic works. Self-reflection also requires the utmost discipline and honesty.

In a collection of artworks made for my doctoral thesis entitled “Unique Sort” , I refer to autobiographical themes. Following Karenann Boyle Crep, the research perspective I have adopted can be called autoethnographic. Creativity in this paradigm is based on elements drawn from the experiences of everyday life. Autoethnographers anchor projects in their own individual perspective, and similarly treat interpretations of museum artefacts, which they read both within the exhibition context and their function outside of it¹.

I decided to adopt the dissertation model cited by Paulina Brelińska, in which “artistic activity is treated as research and can be defended as a self-contained work in which theory and practice are closely intertwined”². Both, the form of the following dissertation and the themes addressed in it have matured over a long period of time and evolved in parallel with the process of making the artworks. Below, I will try to indicate in a clear way the most important reasons for its final content and form.

I draw inspiration from the heritage of the region in which I was born, the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. I wanted to recognise and identify my own personal traces of memory, which in a broader perspective would gain a more universal, symbolic meaning.

The title “Unique Sort” refers to the designation of porcelain that has been produced in a limited series³. The reason for this classification of a product is sometimes a manufacturing defect or the use of a special recipe. However, this emblem does not deprive the object of its utilitarian function; on the contrary, it gives it a unique dimension. The term can be taken metaphorically. My unique sort is the family - a collection of similar individuals,

¹ Boyle Crep K., *Autoetnografia artystyczna: jak otworzyć drzwi do nieograniczonej twórczości artystycznej?*, [in:] The AutoEthnographer Literary and Arts Magazine, 2023, <https://theautoethnographer.com/artistic-autoethnography-artifacts/> [accessed 01.04.2024].

² Brelińska P., Małkiewicz-Daszkowska, Reznik Z., *Z krajobrazu badań artystycznych* [in:] Notes na 6 tygodni online version, <https://nn6t.pl/2021/03/01/z-krajobrazu-badan-artystycznych/> [accessed 01.04.2024].

³ The signature Polska Fabryka Porcelany “Specjalny Gatunek” Ćmielów was used after 1930. <https://theoldstuff.com/pl/sygnatury-porcelany/124-sygnatury-na-porcelanie-i-ceramice/48-sygnatury-cmielow> [accessed 10.06.2024].

each with unique characteristics. When I was a child, my mother used this term pejoratively, usually to emphasise the faults of one of the family members. For me, the phrase carries more meaning, and I have taken its metaphorical dimension as a starting point to reflect on the symbolic and nostalgic power of ordinary-unusual everyday objects.

The eponymous collection of artworks is based on the metaphor of returning to the family home, and with it personal memories associated with the table, the tablecloth and the porcelain dishes. The collective and private memory stored, in every touch of the family table, has been depicted in installations made using industrial and unique techniques of artistic and design expression (computer embroidery, cyanotype on porcelain, wax casting). The reference to the memory of the idyllic land of childhood finds a place in the metaphor of the “magic garden”, the centre of which is a photograph from a family album, which is the main source of the narrative axis of the entire series (Fig. 1).

Central to my contribution remains an analysis of the symbolic context of the family home as a space remembered from childhood. One of my goals is to investigate the tradition of decorating table linen elements used in the Świętokrzyskie region (based on the artefacts from the Ethnographic Museum in Tokarnia). I base my artistic and design activities on the re-use of porcelain waste from the Ćmielów factory (cullet and plaster moulds). The subject of the doctoral collection is a metaphorical table landscape, consisting of both unique tableware and coordinated textile installations.

Structure of the work

The following dissertation consists of four chapters in which theoretical reflection is intertwined with artistic representation of the process. I consciously do not hide behind the “screen of objectivity”⁴, as Joanna Bielecka-Prus writes:

"Both the research process and its artistic representation are one of many possible ways of selecting and interpreting data. The researcher, like the artist, is overtly creative and active in the research process, aware of his or her role, actions and the impact he or she has on the social environment and the artefacts created. In the case of ABR⁵ it is possible to speak of two types of reflexivity that can appear in the same creation. The first type is confessional reflexivity, which takes the form of autoethnography, and the second, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, epistemological reflection on the process of knowledge production"⁶.

⁴ Bielecka-Prus J., *Badacz jako artysta, artysta jako badacz. Założenia metodologiczne działań artystycznych w procesie badawczym ABR (art-based-research)*, [in:] 'PSJ', vol. 16, no. 2, p. 23.

⁵ Abbreviation for Artistic based research, a study based on the creative process.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24.

The entirety of my thesis is therefore a manifestation of the confessional reflexivity mentioned above, enriched with critical issues concerning the positioning of my artistic and design activities, within the broader context of contemporary art and the history of traditional design in the Świętokrzyskie region.

The first chapter of the dissertation contains an analysis of the meaning and cultural function of the table and tablecloth, with particular emphasis on the Polish folk tradition at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. I also look at examples of contemporary artistic and design realisations addressing the topic.

The next section is dedicated to porcelain. I outline the history of the Ćmielów factory and describe its contemporary design significance. I introduce the context of reusing waste and give examples of “material memories” design. I also explain how I understand the concept of “sentimental recycling” and its relevance to my work as a whole. In chapter three, I lean into the topos of home and garden as places remembered from childhood. I consider how these spaces can stimulate the senses in the context of extended haptics⁷.

In between each chapter, I evoke my own reconstructed memories and images of my family home. These were an important source of visual tropes and atmosphere present throughout the series. The last part is a record of the stages of work on the “Unique Sort” collection and its description, indicating the techniques, materials and symbolism used. The dissertation ends with a summary and conclusions of the research and artistic process carried out. Throughout the dissertation, in order to accurately describe the above-mentioned issues, I practise methodological eclecticism, using concepts not only from the history of art and design, but also from sociology, ethnography or cultural studies.

⁷ I adopt the definition of extended haptics described by Marta Smolińska, who, in addition to the sense of touch, also includes hearing, taste, smell, balance and kinesthetics in the multisensory perception of art. See Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona ZMYŚL DOTYKU W SZTUCE POLSKIEJ DRUGIEJ POŁOWY XX I POCZĄTKU XXI WIEKU*, Kraków 2020.

Recollection II

It's Friday, On the clock hanging in the kitchen the clues are approaching 7 pm. My mother and I are about to begin our weekly ritual. I sit at the large rectangular table standing almost in the middle of the kitchen. The light from a tea lamp is reflected in the glass of the window. From under the long cloth spread on the table top, the steady breathing of a dog can be quietly heard. The familiar jingle of the Radio 3 playlist echoes from the speakers. We do this every week - mum bakes the cake, I assist her. We listen to music together. There are times when I sit down at the table with a drawing block and pencils, which is also the case today. Mum removes a large, heavy pastry board from the wall. When she lays it on the countertop, this one takes up more than half of the entire space. Against the glass in front of me, I place a postcard with a reproduction of Wyspiański's painting "Sleeping Staś". I want to sketch it. I like the flowing lines on the boy's shirt, they change thickness and colour in a fascinating way - I strain with all my might to make my drawing similar to the original. Mum mixes the dough ingredients one by one. The whole table moves slightly from kneading. I can smell the flour, eggs, butter and cream. On the radio, Marek Niedźwiecki's voice announces the next places on the charts. The cake goes into the oven. Mum joyfully twirls in time to the music. I feel myself getting tired. I put my arms on the table and fold down my head.

I close my eyes and fall asleep to the smell of cake coming out of the oven. From the speakers of the radio I hear Leonard Cohen's In my secret life. In the drawing lying next to me on the table, my Staś is sound asleep....

Chapter I

Table and tablecloth – functions and meanings

The Greek symposium became a model for gatherings around a common table, where eating and conversation acquired a ritual character. Cultivating a belief in the symbolic power of the table, it gave humans emotions a moral value and affirmed communal identity. Feasting with family and friends has always been a significant element of social life, influencing the development of culture⁸. In the preface to the publication “The Table of the Future”, the authors describe the object as “one of those things that combines the experience of everyday life with the extremely rich symbolism of thought and action”⁹. Both in the realm of utilitarian objects and in the symbolic layer, the table can be interpreted in many ways. The design variety of its forms makes it possible to expand and diversify its functions.

Massimo Montanari lists several basic purposes of the table. The first is related to the affirmation of group membership. This applies both to the family and to the wider community who, by sharing a place at the table, cement a collective identity¹⁰. In most homes, the table constitutes the centre of family life, the focal point of internal domestic communication¹¹. As Mariola Tymochowicz points out, “The kitchen table has taken on special significance, as it is the place where everyone talks best – family members and invited guests”¹². This was also the case with the kitchen table in my parents' house. I remember the massive wooden legs, bitten off over the years by the successive dogs and cats my mother took in. The smell of freshly ironed linen on the table and a pastry board so large that its edges protruded beyond the edge of the worktop. My memory paints a vivid landscape arranged from objects: jugs, cups, fruit, notebooks with homework, kitchen scales, stacks of magazines and newspapers. A table drawn like a map, a collection of traces of everyday activity. We furnish this piece

⁸ Staszczak Ciałowicz M., *Kluby kolacyjne jako element kosmopolitycznej kultury, która łączy ludzi*, [in:] *Kuchnia i stół w komunikacji społecznej Tekst, dyskurs, kultura*, ed. W. Żarski in collaboration with T. Piasecki, Wrocław 2016, p. 433.

⁹ *Stół przyszłości*, edited by A. Kucner, M. Wasyluk, Olsztyn 2017, p. 5.

¹⁰ Montanari M., *Medieval Tastes: Food, Cooking and the Table*, translated from Italian by B. Archer Brombert, New York: Columbia University Press 2015, p. 211.

¹¹ Kaprzyk M., *Dekonstruowanie tradycji. Stół w narracjach filmowych najnowszego kina hiszpańskiego* [in:] *Kuchnia i stół w komunikacji społecznej Tekst, dyskurs, kultura*, ed. W. Żarski in collaboration with T. Piasecki, Wrocław 2016, p. 563.

¹² Tymochowicz M., *Funkcje stołu w kulturze tradycyjnej*, [in:] *Kuchnia i stół w komunikacji społecznej Tekst, dyskurs, kultura*, ed. W. Żarski with the collaboration of T. Piasecki, Wrocław 2016, p. 445.

of space with everything we consider most important or most beautiful at any given moment. Monika Zawadzka aptly observes that, in fact, what we consciously and unconsciously place on the table has always been a reflection of our idea of creating a domestic atmosphere:

“In a peasant's cottage, there was always bread wrapped in linen in the middle of the table - under threat of punishment, with the convex side upwards - as well as a holy book and a cross with Christ hanging on it. What do we put on our urban, representative tables today? Different things in different homes: flowers in a vase, small trophies from our travels, atmospheric candles, a bowl of fruit or sweets, table-books or exclusive magazines to represent the designed identities of ourselves. In spite of their clear differences, there is a common logical rule that binds these objects together - they all play an important role in the home and in one way or another reflect the atmosphere of domesticity that is important for the inhabitants”¹³.

The tablescape is therefore a reflection of the emotional interiority of the household members sitting around it.

Also the tablecloth as an everyday object can be counted among those that do not remain invisible. When setting the table one usually pays careful attention to the colour, type of fabric or ornament decorating the tablecloth. As Zawadzka notes, the deeply imprinted in the subconscious traces of bourgeois culture determine the need for a snow white tablecloth, which is a symbol of perfection:

"In the case of the most important festivals, the tablecloth must invariably be woven of a noble, pristine white cloth, which - through the meaning of untouched fabric - refers directly to the image of perfection and divinity and to the cultural injunction to give these spheres the best quality available"¹⁴.

In this dimension, the aesthetic function of the tablecloth flows seamlessly into symbolic meaning.

At its origins, the tablecloth was only intended to fulfil a utilitarian role related to feasting. The earliest references to the use of a piece of cloth as a “catcher” for the remains of the food eaten and to protect the table from soiling, come from the records of the Latin poet Martialis, from around 100 AD¹⁵.

¹³ Zawadzka M., *Stół jako domownik* [in:] *Wokół stołu Monografia Wydziału Architektury i Wzornictwa Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Gdańsku*, ed. Sławomir Fijałkowski, Gdańsk 2014, p. 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Knisely T., *Handwoven Table Linens: 27 Fabulous Projects From a Master Weaver*, Lanham 2017, p. 3.

The Romans, who often ate their meals in a reclining position, used various lengths of linen napkins. The Spartans before them used pieces of rolled thin dough for the same purpose. When it came to the use of cloth with a tablecloth function, the Romans were the pioneers. During feasts, they used nappa, small pieces of linen cloth used to wipe their hands. They placed mantels - larger pieces of fabric that served as napkins - on the backs and seats of armchairs. Over the years, the mantels became longer and longer, and the eating position changed from lying down to sitting. For centuries, the fabric of first choice remained linen¹⁶.

The history of art suggests many examples of depicting feasts in which the tablecloth as a prop plays a significant, also symbolic role. Looking at the flagship of these painted by Leonardo da Vinci ("The Last Supper"), Tom Knisely appreciates how, thanks to the artist's capture of the table setting, we can imagine fifteenth-century feasting rituals¹⁷.

Nowadays, the functions of the table and tablecloth have been reduced mainly to utilitarian and aesthetic ones. Pointing to the causes of changes in interior design in the 20th century, Olga Mulkiewicz Goldbergowa emphasises that the degradation of the table to a piece of furniture designed solely for consumption purposes was combined with the division of space into an everyday one – the kitchen – and a representative one – the living room¹⁸. The table emerged in a form that still functions successfully in many homes today – a large one, set in the central part of the room. Its function is to bring the family together for communal meals and thus to delimit the dining room space¹⁹. As Massimo Montanari aptly states: "That the dining table is one of the best places for communication – perhaps the ideal place where the desire to communicate with loved ones is expressed with ease and freedom – is so evident and readily apparent that it needs no historical confirmation"²⁰.

¹⁶ Smith W., D.C.L., LL.D., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* John Murray, London 1875, online version, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Mantele.html [accessed 27.03.2024].

¹⁷ Knisely T., *Handwoven Table...*, op. cit. s. 4.

¹⁸ Mulkiewicz-Goldbergowa O., *Przemiany urządzenia wnętrza współczesnej izby wiejskiej*, [in:] 'Polska Sztuka Ludowa' 1967, r. XXI, no. 2-3, p. 132.

¹⁹ Kopaliński W., *Opowieści o rzeczach powszednich*, Warsaw 2018, p. 213.

²⁰ Montanari M., *Medieval Tastes: Food...*, op. cit., p. 211.

I.I Table and tablecloth in traditional Polish culture

Analysis of the collection of table textiles from the Ethnographic Museum in Tokarnia

During the preparation of the following dissertation, I repeatedly encountered a problem arising from my chosen creative strategy, based mainly on my personal experience. Ewa Nizinska writes:

“As we know, autobiography is not a direct reflection of reality, but a certain construct, a way of presenting one's life in a desired form. The process of telling an autobiography has important functions: it is a method to 'rework' one's life, to put past events in order, to re-analyse and interpret them. Thus, it allows one to return to the past and encounter a world that belongs to it, a world that no longer exists.”²¹

The constant reference to one's own (deceptive) memory therefore runs the risk of making a hermetic statement. The idea of returning to the family home as the “land of childhood”, is a vision that stimulates the imagination, but is not conducive to grounding the work in a broader historical context. In order to widen my own research perspective, I decided to embrace the notion of home, not only as a literal family nest, but also a larger geographical area – the region. Thus was born the plan to base my projects on museum artefacts that I could place in my own imagined space of the Świętokrzyskie countryside, which would be a sample broader than just personal objects from the family archive. To this end, in May 2022 I went on a research visit to the Museum of the Kielce Village in Tokarnia.

Established in 1976, the Ethnographic Park in Tokarnia (Chęciny County) is a time – stopped document of the life in Świętokrzyskie villages. It is the implementation of the scientific assumptions of the ethnographer and researcher of traditional Polish folk culture, Professor Roman Reinfuss. The plan of the park reproduces the typical settlement layout of villages from various subregions: Świętokrzyskie Mountains, Kraków-Częstochowa Upland, Sandomierska Upland and Nida Basin²².

Thanks to the kindness of the curators, I had the opportunity to see forty-seven textile objects (tablecloths, napkins and runners) and thirty porcelain vessels from the museum's storehouse. I also visited most of the exhibits in the village huts arranged on site (including one relocated from Ćmielów (Fig. 2.)).

²¹ Nizinska E., *Rzeczy nostalgiczne o powrotach do krainy dzieciństwa*, [in:] *Ludzie w Świecie przedmiotów, przedmioty w świecie ludzi*, ed. A. Rybus, M.W. Kornobis, Warsaw 2016, p. 76.

²² <https://mwk.com.pl/o-muzeum/park-etnograficzny-w-tokarni> [accessed 22.05.2024].



Fig. 2. Interior of a house from Ćmielów, Museum Ethnographic Park in Tokarnia, author's own photo

The analysis of the exhibits enabled me to identify characteristic ways of decorating tablecloths and table textiles from the Świętokrzyskie region. The oldest of the analysed artefacts dated back to 1915, while the newest ones were produced in 2013. I can summarise my conclusions as follows: the leading technique of textile decoration is flat embroidery. In most cases it is done by hand, often combined with finishing the edges of the tablecloth or napkin with a beading. The main decorative motif is flowers, especially roses, peonies and field flowers. Fabrics in plain weave, cotton and linen in light colours (white or broken white) predominate.

An emblematic example is the elaborately embroidered cream-coloured cotton tablecloth (Fig. 3.). The sheet of linen is trimmed at the edges with a decorative gold band. The entire surface of the fabric is covered with a stylised floral and plant motif. The cross-stitch embroidery was made with thick woollen threads in burgundy, white, green, pink, yellow, brown and beige. The main decorative motif consists of four flowers arranged in the shape of a cross. The corners of the tablecloth are decorated with cross-stitch embroidery²³.

²³ The description of the object comes from the archive system of the Museum of the Kielce Village; I received access to the catalogue courtesy of the head of the museum's collections department, Mr Łukasz Poniewierski.



Fig. 3. Embroidered cotton tablecloth with a floral motif from the collection of the Museum in Tokarnia, author's own photo

As in this case, on the surface of most of the napkins, simplified geometric forms of flowers, in symmetrical repetitive arrangements, build definite compositions (Fig. 3).



Fig. 4. Detail of embroidered textiles from the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Tokarnia, author's own photo

Floral motifs depicting peonies and roses, which are repeated as a pattern reproduced on historical pieces of tableware from Ćmielów (Fig. 5.), directly served as an inspiration to decorate the porcelain part of the collection. Also important were the lace doilies (Fig. 6.), the forms of which are alluded to in the fabric made using the computerized machine embroidery technique.



Fig. 5. Porcelain from Ćmielów with floral motifs, left: platter with handles 1870 - 1887, right: dessert plate 1870 - 1887, photo: Janusz Podlecki ²⁴



Fig. 5. Lace fabrics from the Ethnographic Museum in Tokarnia, photo. own

²⁴ Source of illustrations: B. Kołodziejowa, Z. M. Stadnicki, *Zakłady Porcelany Ćmielów*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Kraków 1986.

I left the museum in Tokarnia with a deep conviction that the textiles I had seen were charged with great emotional value. Being there, I felt very strongly the symbolic dimension of the objects. The effect of the artefacts was further enhanced by the meticulous historical reproduction of the interiors. Both the table itself and all the objects gathered around it are seen by Piotr Wasyluk as “historical space, a carrier of individual and collective memory”²⁵. In the case of this object, the possibility of symbolising both private memories and a wider collective experience is very clear. As a special place frozen in time, the museum motivates reverie and introspection. The association of the interiors of an open-air museum with a sacred space comes naturally in this context.

Referring to the thought of Eliade Mircea Danuta and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz write about the analogy of the domestic table and the altar: “The house and the temple are thus one and the same,” writes the author of *The Phenomenology of Religion*, “the house of the deity”. Also the altar and the focus are the same thing - the altar is in the temple, the table and the focus of the gods. Just as the table is the altar in the house and the bonfire it is a particularly sacred place”²⁶. Mariola Tymochowicz, emphasising the importance of the table as a piece of furniture of extraordinary significance in Polish culture, also draws attention to its sacred function: “The table in traditional culture was a piece of furniture that was treated exceptionally, as it served as a household altar until the end of the 19th century throughout Poland, and even longer in the eastern and southern parts of the country”²⁷. According to Jakub Bułat, the table, thanks to its belonging to the order of the sacrum, served to communicate with the beyond. It was a ritual attribute in initiation situations, as well as closing certain stages, e.g. the passage to “other world”, “At the table a dying person was sometimes seated for the last anointing and confession”²⁸. The so-called “Holy Corner”, of which the table was a key element, was the only place in the whole house where all the attributes of religious worship were located. It cemented the message of the faith and piety of the household. The table transformed the space from the order of the profane into the sphere of the sacrum²⁹. Its protective significance was also important. The wide range of apotropaic properties was determined by a number of rituals. The protection of the inhabitants from the destructive forces of nature was to be ensured by placing the table

²⁵ Wasyluk P., *Przedmiot i metafora. Stół jako byt autentyczny* [in:] *Stół przyszłości*, Olsztyn 2017, p.19.

²⁶ Benedyktowicz D., Benedyktowicz Z., *Symbolika domu w tradycji ludowej (cz. 1)*, [in:] *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty*, vol. 44, z. 3, p. 51.

²⁷ Tymochowicz M., *Funkcje stołu...*, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

²⁸ Bułat J., *Przestrzeń sakralna domu wiejskiego albo okno i stół*, [in:] *'Konteksty'* 1990, no. 4. p. 30.

²⁹ Ogrodowska B., *Zwyczaje, obrzędy i tradycje w Polsce. Mały słownik*, Warsaw 2001, p. 141.

in front of the house in an emergency situation such as a fire or other natural disaster³⁰. The setting also played a significant role in bringing prosperity to the household. In the spring, the Christmas tablecloth was used as a cloth to store grain for sowing. This was to help bring a fertile harvest³¹.

Although the table as a symbolic object has now lost many of its traditional meanings, it is still an object of interest to designers, artists and cultural researchers. It continues to successfully perform integrative and social functions³². In my view, a table is much more than just a piece of furniture. It's an object that triggers memories of all the people with whom you've shared a seat with.



Fig. 6. The sacred corner, exhibition at the Ethnographic Museum in Tokarnia, author's own photo

³⁰ Tymochowicz M., *Funkcje stołu...*, op. cit, p. 443.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 444.

³² *Ibid*, 445.

I.II Table and tablecloth in contemporary art and design – selected examples

Antoni Starczewski – Our daily table.

Antoni Starczewski's work is difficult to classify unequivocally. Analysing the artist's achievements, Janusz Głowacki notes: "In the atmosphere created around Antoni Starczewski's work, one senses – as if under the surface – a question circulating about the place of this work in a particular field of art. For graphic designers he is a graphic artist, for sculptors he is a sculptor, and for weavers he is a weaver³³". More important, in my opinion, than the classification of the field itself, between which the artist fluently manoeuvred over the years of his activity, is to establish the core of the idea that was reflected in almost all his works. The aforementioned Janusz Głowacki uses the statement "dualism of universal order and personal individuality"³⁴. This idea, in my opinion, is fully realised in Starczewski's series of works entitled. "Tables".

His fascination with the uniqueness of the forms of everyday objects such as fruits and vegetables began in the 1970s. While shopping at the market, the artist personally selected potatoes, apples and carrots, which he later used as moulds cast in porcelain. This is how Marta Kowalewska describes the process:

"At first, he painted them with white paint. By standardising the colour, any features that made the forms different - protrusions, furrows, imperfections or even size - were accentuated. This effect prompted the artist to make porcelain casts on a scale of 1 : 1, creating sets of elements that he could use in installations. With great precision, he arranged them in even rows on tables covered with snow-white, starched tablecloths³⁵".

According to the information Kowalewska cited from the artist's diary, the inspiration for the use of the table form came from the memory of Christmas Eve and Easter table settings, "which could be walked around from all sides"³⁶. Starczewski thus played with the image of tradition recorded in the collective memory. His porcelain 'tableware' became a symbol communicating the uniqueness of each of the vegetables used - elevating to the rank of works

³³ Głowacki J., *Głosa do twórczości Antoniego Starczewskiego*, [in:] *Sploty Idei*, ed. Ewa Latkowska Żychska, Marta Kowalewska, Łódź 2016, p. 62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Kowalewska M., Musiał G., *Komplementarność aktów twórczych*, [in:] *Transpozycje Antonii Starczewski*, Łódź 2022 pp. 56.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

of art, the commonplace potatoes or carrots consumed by most Poles at the everyday table. I also see in this action a touch of the artist's keen sense of humour, a joke on the routine and repetitiveness of life.

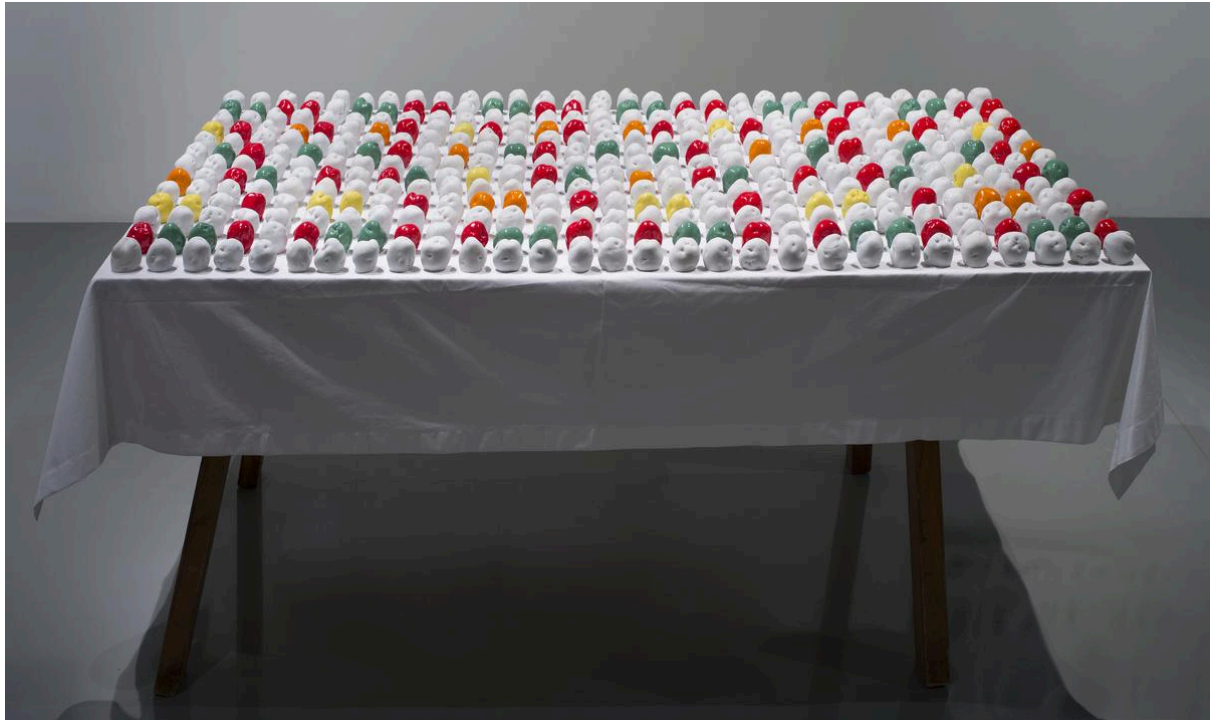


Fig. 7. Antoni Starczewski, "Table with coloured potatoes", 1973.³⁷

For the installation, Starczewski used not only porcelain, but also the most common and at the same time the most sacred of everyday props, a loaf of bread. In Polish traditional culture, in the context of which I tried to describe the meaning of the table in the previous chapter, bread is another extremely important symbol. Helena Stypa writes about its importance in Polish tradition:

"Most of us eat bread every day. Subconsciously, we try to prevent it from going to waste and being thrown away. We have probably seen some people kiss it with reverence or make the sign of the cross on it. When we pray, we ask for our daily bread. We greet the newlyweds with bread and salt. And we can't imagine a harvest festival without a large loaf of bread"³⁸.

³⁷ Illustration source: https://zasoby.msl.org.pl/arts/view/350?page_art_mcol=8&arts_martist=1 [accessed:26.05.2024].

³⁸ Stypa H., *O chlebie naszym powszednim - motyw chleba w kulturze i języku polskim*, [in:] *Apetyt na jedzenie. Pokarm w społeczeństwie, kulturze, symbolice na przestrzeni dziejów*, ed. J. Żychlińska, A. Głowacka-Penczyńska, Bydgoszcz 2018, p. 208.

I interpret the gesture of using a loaf as the building block of the installation as a literal glorification of the commonplace. Starczewski once again creates a narrative in which the protagonist becomes the food we all know so well.



Fig. 8. Antoni Starczewski, "Table with an arrangement of natural angelka and Poznan rolls", reconstruction of an assemblage from 1973 based on surviving photographic documentation, photo by Norbert Piwowarczyk³⁹.

³⁹ Illustration source:
<https://piklodzi.pl/art/wystawa/antoni-starczewski-idea-zapisu-linearnego-wystawa-czasowa-lodz/>
[accessed 26.05.2024].

In the very process of creating Starczewski's tables, Głowacki draws an analogy with the construction of traditional textile. He recalls how step by step the artist constructed each arrangement:

“Regardless of the type of objects they were filled with - whether they were porcelain potatoes, carrots or live bread rolls - the principle was the same. They were arranged in sequences, whose parallel axes were defined, like warp threads, by straight lines. To facilitate the building process itself, Starczewski used strings, on both sides ending in keys as weights”⁴⁰.

The table thus took on the role of a weaving frame, where the artist introduced objects – threads – on the white canvas of the warp – the tablecloth.

Throughout Starczewski's series of tables, I am struck by the idea that ordinary, unusual, everyday objects carry coded meanings that are deeper than those established in the collective consciousness.

⁴⁰ Głowacki J., *Głos do twórczości...*, op. cit. s. 63.

Anna Królikiewicz – multi – sensory tables.

Almost twenty years ago Anna Królikiewicz made a significant gesture. As she puts it herself, she “made her way from the artist's studio to the kitchen”⁴¹. This metaphorical and physical change in the artistic approach turned out to be very important for her further work. According to Marta Smolińska, the change in the order in which the artist's works have been created so far, and the transition from the sphere of oculocentrism to actions affecting all the senses is the key to interpreting her work:

“The installations, actions and objects by Królikiewicz and - which is not at all obvious - also their documentation show that perception is a haptic multisensory phenomenon, and that the separation of sensations related to individual senses is an artificial construct inherited from the era of sight-centrism, separating the eye above all from touch, taste and smell, and even hearing. The artist never serves us artistic fast food and in most of her realisations she does not dissect the sensations associated with the activity of one sense, but rather combines the potential of all of them in a sophisticated way”⁴².

The context of the multisensory impact of Królikiewicz's installations, which Smolińska links to the notion of extended hapticity, is not only an intriguing theoretical research trail for me, but also a point of reference for my own creative activities. The simultaneous stimulation of more than one sense (sight) in the viewer is one of the premises of my collection.

In a 2013 site-specific installation entitled “States of Concentration”, Królikiewicz builds an elaborate table space filled with props abandoned by household members. The theatrical mise-en-scène that the artist arranges can be compared to Piotr Wasyluk's statement describing the relationship between the table and the rules of drama: “According to the rules of dramaturgy, a table is a place where the constant change of staging is described by the constant interweaving of comedic and dramatic scenes, sad and cheerful, filled with emotional rapture or intellectual dilemmas”⁴³. The context of the place here is a butcher's shop that has been closed for years – a painfully mundane interior, turned by Królikiewicz into a time-stopped frame from someone's life. Smolińska draws attention to the aspect of depriving the viewer of the possibility of participating in an abandoned feast⁴⁴. The artist

⁴¹ Królikiewicz A., JA: POLE DO PRZEPISU* / STRATEGIA RESZTEK [in:] <http://miejmiesce.com/sztuka/ja-pole-przepisu-strategia-resztek/> [accessed 10.06.2024].

⁴² Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona ZMYŚŁ DOTYKU W SZTUCE POLSKIEJ DRUGIEJ POŁOWY XX I POCZĄTKU XXI WIEKU*, Kraków 2020, p. 160.

⁴³ Wasyluk P., *Przedmiot i metafora...*, op. cit. p. 20.

⁴⁴ Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona...*, op. cit. p. 167.

poured wax over the entire table, thus mummifying the dishes served on it along with the tableware and tablecloth. Under the layer of wax there is an irreversible process of preservation of both the food, the place in which it was served and the moment frozen in time⁴⁵. According to Anna Stonciwilk, “Królikiewicz allows the memory of a given place to become, as it were, part of the recipients themselves, who absorb it into their own interior”⁴⁶.

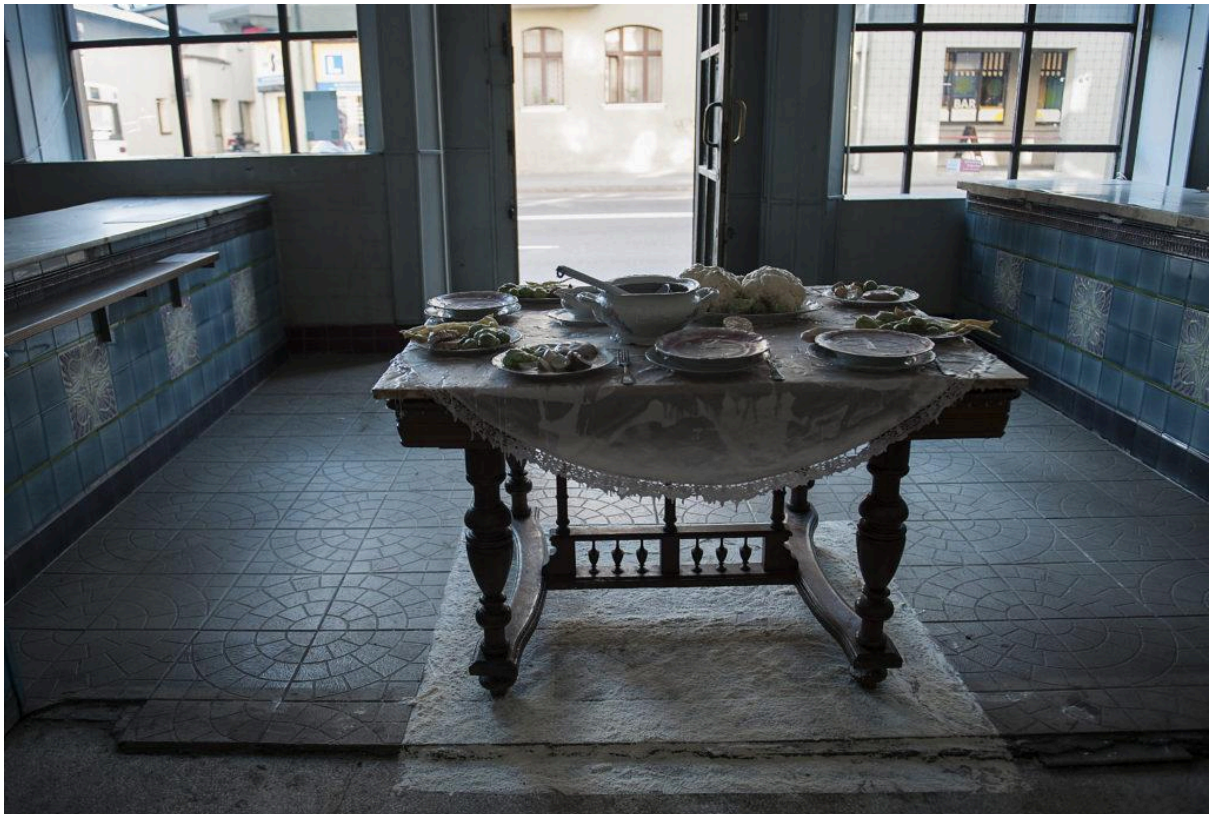


Fig. 9. Anna Królikiewicz, 'States of concentration', 2012, photo: Bogna Kociumbas⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Stonciwilk A., *Spektakle smaku* [in:] Anna Królikiewicz Międzyjęzyk, Sopot 2019, p. 161.

⁴⁷ Illustration source:

<https://noweidzieodmorza.com/pl/8498-anna-krolikiewicz-zminimalizowac-wizualnosc/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

The title states of concentration are not only a reference to the consistency, taste and smell of food preserved under a layer of wax, but a question about the state in which the viewer, experiencing the installation with all his senses, travels into the space of his own memory. The way in which Królikiewicz's works are based on impressions and emotional impulses is aptly described by Dorota Koczanowicz:

“The artist aims to stimulate a sometimes anaemic memory or to build from scratch an image of a place strongly marked by the presence of previous occupants. She does not propose a cognitive dialogue, an intellectual processing of sensory data, but a relationship resulting from emotional-empathic processes”⁴⁸.

Królikiewicz's art “comes from the belly”, it is a kind of portal to the memories subconsciously stored in the body, which are released in the process of sensual contact with the artist's works. When reading her actions in this dimension, the aspect of using the tradition of imagery characteristic of still-life representations seems extremely important. The great example of such a strategy is the installation “Table” from 2012.

As Marta Smolińska notes, Królikiewicz is clearly referring here to the tradition of seventeenth century Dutch painting. The composition is full of splendour, and the props used point to vanitas symbolism⁴⁹: “Raw fish, fish heads and bony skeletons, breadsticks and loaves of bread, partially emptied goblets, half-peeled lemons, soiled plates, cutlery and napkins testify that the feast has already taken place. Something irrevocably gone. We are late”⁵⁰. It is the inability to arrive on time, the loss of the chance to take part in the social ritual of feasting together at the table, that forms the axis of the story spun by Królikiewicz. Following Smolińska, I think it is also worth pointing out here the reference to the allegory of the five senses,

“Within which the subjects were imaged in such a way as to allow the viewers to produce sensations emblematic of the other senses when using only the sense of sight. This is because the experiences of the other senses, stored in the body, allow the sense of sight to evoke sensations belonging to the other senses on the basis of 'memory-pictures'. Thus, both in Baroque painting, associated with the theme of the senses, and in the contemporary multisensory installation by Anna Królikiewicz, sensory experiences are

⁴⁸ Koczanowicz D., *Pamięć podniebienia. Smak i Archiwizowanie tożsamości w instalacjach Anny Królikiewicz*, [in:] *Konteksty Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 2020/1-2 (328-329) p. 141.

⁴⁹ Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona...*, op. cit. s. 167.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

activated - memories of smells, sounds, reminiscences of touching textures, materials and the surface of things recorded in the body”⁵¹.

Although I have not yet had the pleasure of interacting with Królikiewicz's art live, it is a testament to her power and impact that my non-visual sensibilities have been activated, even through photographic and film documentation.

For the artist, the table is a vehicle, a stage and a tool for stimulating the senses.



Fig. 10. Anna Królikiewicz 'Table', 2012, photo by Michał Andrysiak⁵².

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Illustration source:
<https://noweidzieodmorza.com/pl/8498-anna-krolikiewicz-zminimalizowac-wizualnosc/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

Tim Parry – Williams tablecloth as heritage catalogue.

When describing the importance of tableware in the context of traditional twentieth-century domesticity, Władysław Kopaliński notes how important a role each element of the “table suit of objects” played:

“In an affluent family home, where many people sat at the table, everything that was used for the consumption of food and drink, and which was placed at the main meal of the day on the tablecloth covering the table and, after eating, washed and wiped, put back in the cupboard, was called tableware. Today, if we even know the name, we do not use it at all, or at most we apply it to a particularly valuable, elegant set of tableware: platters, vases, saucepans, porcelain plates, silver sugar bowls, crystal flacons, etc., and cutlery: forks for meat, fish, herring, tureen spoons, table spoons, tea spoons, compote spoons, coffee spoons, knives for meat, fish, fruit, etc.”⁵³.

British designer and artist Tim Parry Williams explores the theme of the table and tablecloth as a metaphor for the potential meeting place of historic and contemporary tableware. His jacquard fabric, *Dinner Service* (2023), is part of a larger project in which the artist looks at the tradition of the use of linen fibre, in the production of domestic textiles in Great Britain⁵⁴. The pieces of tableware emblazoned on the tablecloth are Williams' carefully selected ‘historic sideboard’ porcelain, glass and steel vessels from the collection of the Ulster Folk Museum in Northern Ireland. In a process of careful documentation, involving meticulous photography, of each object and its interpretation into the language of jacquard fabric, the artist made a gesture that can be likened to an intertextual translation. Here, the surface of the fabric has become a symbolic catalogue of material heritage and tradition.

In the words of the designer himself, “With this synchronous methodology, heritage and tradition, analogue and digital, coexist literally and metaphorically - at the same table”⁵⁵

Parry-Williams draws attention to the importance of ceramics and textiles as historically significant, but now dying, industries in Northern Ireland. The fact that unbleached linen yarn, recovered from the last spinning mill at Andrews Comber's Mill in Newtownards, which

⁵³ Kopaliński W., *Opowieść o rzeczach powszednich...*, op. cit. s. 36.

⁵⁴ The quote is from Tim Parry Williams' instagram profile https://www.instagram.com/p/C0CTL8vMVS5/?locale=pl&img_index=1 [accessed 01.04.2024].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

closed in 1997, was used for the textile, resonates symbolically in this context⁵⁶. The minimalist, refined form of the whole artwork, brings to mind the traditional patterned jacquard tablecloth, so familiar from family festive dinners. The post industrial context, however, lends the piece a nostalgic, if not even sad, tone. Williams sets his table, a remnant of tradition, inviting the audience to feast on dematerialised table settings together with the ghosts of their former owners.

What constitutes the strength of this modest representation is (as in the works of Starczewski and Królikiewicz cited above), the power with which it stimulates the viewer's imagination, with the help of aptly used metaphors, in a specific historical context close to the author.



Fig. 11. Tim Parry Williams 'Dinner Service', 2023, photo by Tim Parry Williams⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Illustration source: https://www.instagram.com/p/C0CTL8vMVS5/?locale=pl&img_index=1 [accessed 01.04.2024].

Chapter II

Porcelain – material and symbol

In modern times, we are increasingly moving away from material experiences in favour of their digital substitutes. The need for contact with real objects that evoke authentic responses and stimulate sensory experiences is growing in direct proportion to the technological development of touch screens. As Hanna Stauffer notes, ceramics as matter make it possible to see and “feel imperfections”⁵⁸. The growth of interest in handicraft embodied in the design revival of ceramics symbolises a sentimental longing for the traditional intimacy of touch⁵⁹.

Porcelain – “the most beautiful and noble variety of ceramics”⁶⁰, as Jan Davis calls it originated in China. It was held in extraordinary esteem in that country and treated on a par with other arts. Davis compares this kind of Asian fascination with ceramics to the European adoration of Renaissance painting and sculpture⁶¹. Although the methods of making porcelain, arrived in Europe hundreds of years ago⁶², the mystery of the technological alchemy behind the delicate body of porcelain vessels continues to fascinate artists and designers to this day.

Porcelain from Ćmielów has always been in my family home. I would also easily find it in all the homes of my neighbours, some of whom had worked at the factory for many years. Even though the association of the domestic table with the altar in the 1990s (in which my childhood falls) had long ceased to function vividly in the collective consciousness, the presence of porcelain tableware always evoked a sense of respect. The particular combination of semi transparent white and gold still evokes strong associations, with the most expensive domestic treasure.

Ćmielów is one of the oldest Polish porcelain factories still in operation. The documented beginnings of production date back to 1790, when a potter, Wojtas, established a small manufactory of earthenware in the area around the town. From 1804, a manufactory in Ćmielów, producing faience, appears in historical sources. Its owner and founder was Hyacynt (Jacek) Count Małachowski. This factory started producing porcelain around 1838.

⁵⁸ Stauffer H., *The New Age of Ceramics*, Berkeley 2016, p. 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Davis J., *Porcelana Europejska*, transl. L. Kuciński, Warsaw 1984, p. 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Porcelain production technology was developed in Europe in the early 18th century.

Today, Polskie Fabryki Porcelany “Ćmielów” and “Chodzież” S.A. continue to operate uninterrupted despite the many transformations and restructurings they have undergone over the years⁶³. Bolesława Kołodziejowa, in her monograph on the Ćmielów factory published in 1987, highlights the diverse range of the factory's production, but at the same time notes why this porcelain, has not lived to see a comprehensive historical and design study:

“The Ćmielów factory, following the example of nineteenth-century European factories, carried out utilitarian production intended for the broad social strata, so its products were characterised by solid workmanship and low prices rather than the high ornamental craftsmanship typical of eighteenth-century 'elite' production”⁶⁴.

Many of the designs that Kołodziejowa wrote about in the 1980s are now considered timeless classics, and sets such as the Rococo and Empire, still feature on tables in many Polish homes.



Fig. 12. Dishes from the Rococo Porcelana Ćmielów set.⁶⁵

⁶³ Information taken from the official website of Polskie Fabryki Porcelany Ćmielów i Chodzież <https://porcelana.com.pl/cmielow/brand/> [accessed 24.04.2024].

⁶⁴ Kołodziejowa B., *Porcelana Ćmielów*, Kraków 1986, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Illustration source: <https://www.cmielow-sklep.pl/> [accessed 24.04.2024].

The design development of Ćmielów's production line can be attributed to several designers, mainly active in the 1950s and 1960s. In the recently published book “Polish New Look”, Barbara Banaś mentions Wincenty Potacki as the most important of them. He worked as a mould designer in Ćmielów from 1955. He is the author of several dozen designs of the most popular services, including “Ada”, “Krokus” and “Goplana”. He also contributed his hand to the return of historical patterns. Thanks to his reconstruction of the original mould for the production of Rococo Sevres, this pattern is still manufactured today. The “Romantica” and “Pompadour” sets were also based on historical designs.



Fig. 13. Wincenty Potacki, “Ada” coffee service, 1970.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Illustration source:
<https://galeriazak.pl/pl/p/-Serwis-kawowy-Ada%2C-Wincenty-Potacki%2C-ZPS-Cmielow%2C-1970-r./5442> [accessed 26.05.2024].

Potacki was awarded many times, including at the “Ładne-Dobre-Poszukiwane” fair in 1964 in Poznań⁶⁷: “the jury awarded the gold medal to Wincenty Potacki's project Kubuś, presenting a modern form, although based on the age-old traditions of moulding coffee suits”⁶⁸. In addition to Potacki, I have to mention also Kazimierz Czuba, who specialised in designing silk-screen patterns, and Ewa Chodor, whose modelling designs Kołodziejowa describes as “compositions characterised by asymmetry and natural freedom in the spirit of modernist art, while the subtle colouring of the flowers harmonises beautifully with the noble background of white porcelain”⁶⁹. Nowadays, the most popular objects among porcelain collectors are those produced in Ćmielów in 1956-65, which are classified as porcelain chamber sculpture. The small figurines designed by Lubomir Tomaszewski, Hanna Orthwein or Mieczysław Naruszewicz are, according to Kołodziejowa, “the result of deriving from an excellent school of observation of nature, brought to a definitive knowledge of the most typical gestures, movements, and character of the model, allowing for simplification, which results from a perfect synthesis of form, and not only its stylisation”⁷⁰.



Fig. 14. Left: M. Naruszewicz, "Poodles", 1965, right: H. Orthwein "Gibon", 1958⁷¹.

⁶⁷ Banaś B., *Polski New Look. Ceramika użytkowa lat 50. i 60.*, Warsaw 2019, p. 188.

⁶⁸ Kołodziejowa B., *Porcelana Ćmielów...*, op. cit. s. 33.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 33.

⁷¹ Source of illustrations: Kołodziejowa B., *Porcelana Ćmielów*, Kraków 1986.

II.I. Sentimental recycling in contemporary art and design – selected examples

Marek Cecała – Mass production inspires individualism.

Today, the Ćmielów factory seeks to continue the tradition of working with artists through the Ćmielów Design Studio, founded in 2013 by Marek Cecała. Born and raised in Kielce, this artist spent his first creative years in Israel. His career flourished in the world capital of art – New York. Years later, he returned to his hometown to undertake the creation of the Design Centre in Kielce – an institution with global aspirations, no worse than such places in the West. This cooperation did not end positively for the designer. The Design Centre exists, but it is no longer its initiator who occupies the leading place there. However, Cecała did not give up his dream of reactivating the porcelain industry in the Świętokrzyskie region. The Ćmielów factory has gained a new design studio thanks to him. He states:

“My task is to build a new brand Ćmielów Design Studio and to show/show good Polish design in industrial porcelain. We run the studio on the factory premises - we experiment there and create a product that cannot be made on the production line. This is an added value for the porcelain factory. This is because we bring unique porcelain to the market, with a touch of the hand, as it were. We strive for the ĆDS brand to catch up with the latest trends in world design and actively participate in the export of Polish design⁷²”.

The motifs in Cecała's work that I would like to evoke in the context of my creative research are references to art history and history in general. The installation “Klepisko”, created in 2008, is an evidence of the artist's interest in the past and archaeology. As he himself describes: “this work is a new kind of use of archaeology, a paradox in which, as if on a film frame, the past and the present are simultaneously frozen”⁷³. Using clay as a means of artistic expression, Cecała refers to the *primaeval* tradition of building a house, a shelter. He puts an equal sign between the material he creates with today and its ancient uses. In addition to the extremely poetic value that this work undoubtedly carries, it also has, in my opinion, a critical dimension. It refers to the contemporary overproduction of objects and the neglect

⁷²<http://www.modusdesign.com> [accessed 28.03.2015].

⁷³Ilse-Neuman U., *The Free Library*. S.V. Stave: Ursula Ilse-Neuman discusses an installation by Marek Cecała, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Klepisko%3A+Ursula+Ilse-Neuman+discusses+an+installation+by+Mar+ek...-a0216961407> [accessed 01.04.2024].

of historical goods. The clay artefacts buried in the threshing floor are losing their form, deteriorating with every step of the viewers visiting the exhibition.



Fig.15. Left: Marek Ceuła, "Klepisko", 2008⁷⁴ , right: Marek Ceuła, "In Dust Real: Transformation WCL 7", 2005⁷⁵ .

In the projects "In dust real" and "Mutants", which have been ongoing as a process for over ten years, Ceuła once again reached back into history, this time focusing on specific examples of porcelain produced in European factories. Ideal, identical repetitive forms become objects of transformation. The designer situates himself in the position of a critic, questioning the mass image of beauty, a synonym for an aesthetic based on safe visual satisfaction provided by familiar designs. Accidental flaws, which would have been rejected in production, become the main value of the object. The mutants are given a new form, so it is a strategy of recycling and reinterpretation⁷⁶. The interference, however, is often so subtle that the boundary between what at first glance appears to be a designed element and chance becomes blurred. Jugs and plates fired for the second time in traditional kilns are covered in patina and smoke, the fire here being a symbol of time and transformation into something new.

⁷⁴ Illustration source: <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/marek-cecula> [accessed 26.05.2024].

⁷⁵ Illustration source:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O297228/in-dust-real-transformation-wcl-sculpture-and-base-marek-cecula/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

⁷⁶ De Waal E., *Marek Ceuła: to object*, [in:] Exhibition catalogue Marek Ceuła In dust real project 2003 - 2005 mutant 2000, Garth Clark Gallery, p. 3.

Monika Patuszyńska – porcelain orphans and bastards.

A creative strategy similar to Cecula's approach, which is based on recycling and reinterpretation of well known ceramic forms, is presented by Monika Patuszyńska. For many years, the artist has been experimenting with her own technique of deconstructing and reassembling cast forms. Porcelain objects created in her studio are characterised by great ambiguity, both formal and ideological. Describing the artist's working method, Agata Kiedrowicz compares it to looking inside a vessel – the body:

"Monica starts working with the forms themselves. She cuts, she saws, she smashes. To look inside, to get an idea of what the material wants. To look under the lining, to tear the smooth structure, to put her finger in the wound. He starts with the seams. They are the ones ceramists and technologists have been struggling with for centuries without success. The plaster mould from which the vessels are cast is divided into two parts. The porcelain, which will flow into the seam and then harden in the kiln, has a different structure to the rest of the vessel from the start. The seams are removed in further processing, they are considered a defect, a side effect of the whole process. - The seams were the first opportunity for me to look inside. A gap through which I could slip, enter and see," says the artist⁷⁷.

Patuszyńska thus reverses the order of traditional porcelain production. She is interested in what is regarded as error and chance. Imperfection in her works rises to the rank of aesthetic value. Marta Kołacz aptly observes that questioning the established idea of the perfection of a mass-produced object is crucial for the designer: "Patuszyńska poses a question to her audience about the perfection of form. What in the case of mass-produced products would be rejected by the public as a flawed design, in the author's designs intensified and multiplied has become decorative"⁷⁸.

In the project *Bastards & Orphans*, which develops over time (similarly to Marek Cecula's cited "In dust real"), Patuszyńska assumes the role of an archaeologist – a researcher of disused porcelain factories. This action, based on a profound reflection on the current state and future of Poland's industrial heritage, fully illustrates the artist's creative attitude⁷⁹. Her *Orphans and Bastards* are peculiar vessels created from moulds found in abandoned, disused factories. The designer combines shards from various spaces (including factories

⁷⁷ Kiedrowicz A., Patuszyńska M., Stadnik G., Klidzejs I., *Czas i ja robimy to samo*, [in:] 'Kukbuk' No. 35, 2018, p. 139.

⁷⁸ Kołacz M., *Nowe formy i strategie dla nowego millennium. Polska zastawa stołowa w latach 2001–2014. Próba analizy*, [in:] *Wokół stołu*, ed. Sławomir Fijałkowski, Gdańsk 2014, p. 92.

⁷⁹ Kołacz M., *Nowe formy i strategie dla nowego...*, op. cit. p. 99.

in Wałbrzych, Katowice, as well as Belgium or the UK), bringing to life hybrids not only of materials, but also of times and places⁸⁰. Disintegration and the evolution of form that accompanies the passage of time are therefore important themes for the artist.



Fig.16. Left: Monika Patuszyńska TransForms from the Bastards series, 2012⁸¹, right: Monika Patuszyńska, from the Genealogy series, 2021⁸².

In her most recent artworks in the Genealogy series, Patuszyńska continues this theme by additionally enriching it with another key subject, interesting also for me – memory: “Memory as a mechanism that serves to interpret, not to recall facts”⁸³. In the description for the exhibition held in 2021 at the Centre for Polish Sculpture in Orońsko, Anna Podsiadły writes: “Genealogy tells stories about relationships and about memory, about assembling complex constructions out of fragments: fitting together, capturing and the difficult art of balance”⁸⁴. The artist brings to life objects – filters through which she pours her own memories and family stories, partly reconstructed, partly fabricated. She blurs the boundaries between the real and the fantasised and constructs her own porcelain family tree. What I particularly appreciate in Patuszyńska's work is her uncompromisingness in realising artistic vision. The artist balances with great grace between a critical attitude towards mass production and nostalgia for the golden times of the Polish ceramics industry (which may never really have happened).

⁸⁰ Kiedrowicz A., Patuszyńska M., Stądnik G., Klidzejs I., *Czas i ja...*, op. cit. p. 140.

⁸¹ Illustration source: <https://www.ceramicsnow.org/artworks/monika-patuszynska-transforms-plus/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

⁸² Illustration source: <https://nn6t.pl/2019/08/23/co-laczy-zamiast-dzielic/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

⁸³ Krasny A., *Opowieści zamknięte w porcelanie* [in:] Vogue Living, no. 03/2023, p. 111.

⁸⁴ Podsiadły A., *Genealogy Monika Patuszyńska*, [in:] <https://rzezba-oronsko.pl/wystawy/genealogia-genealogy/> [accessed 24.04.2024].

Justyna Smoleń – porcelain frise.

The feelings evoked by the porcelain vessel shattered in the “small cataclysm between the table and the sideboard”⁸⁵ are the brutality of its sharp edges juxtaposed with its fragile delicacy. It is a strong contrast comparable to the sight of disproportionately large, sharp teeth in the mouth of a small animal. In her works Justyna Smoleń uses broken porcelain figurines on the basis of which, as she says, she “creates grotesque–macabre sculptures”⁸⁶.

Once again, it is possible to speak of recycling in this case, but it is different, more private. Smoleń's action does not seem to be aimed at criticising the overproduction of industrial ceramics. It is rather an emanation of the artist's longing for the carefree time of her childhood, filled with kitschy trinkets collected in the first girlhood collections,

“There were elephants for luck and horses galloping, beautiful ballerinas... so that was my first collection. We would exchange individual pieces. We used to go to the general shop where you could buy candles, artificial flowers and just these figurines. They were definitely what we wanted most at the time. Today I approach these objects in a completely different way and I am very interested in how this kind of legacy from years ago works in our imagination and memory. What is left of it”⁸⁷.

The artist's childhood (like my own) was in the 1990s, a time full of “cheapness and rubbish”, colourful cards collected in a binder, ceramic cockerels or water pints brought home from the sanatorium. All these strange objects stored in memory now return, transformed and filtered through the artist's sensitivity and sense of humour, as sometimes scary and sometimes very funny “porcelain trifles”. The series of small sculptural collages, which the author refers to simply as figurines, are concise yet rich in content.

By means of a few cuts and apt juxtapositions of forms, Smoleń achieves the effect of amusing, astonishing and even disgusting the viewer. There is in this work both a lightness of reliance on chance and a great ability to aptly assemble meanings. My fascination with Smoleń's work (apart from a sense of generational closeness) stems from the fact that I myself make paper collage. The spatial forms brought to life by the artist are for me a very interesting

⁸⁵ Metaphor used by Bolesława Kołodziejowa, in the context of the short lifespan of porcelain *Porcelana Ćmielów*, p. 1.

⁸⁶ <https://justynasmolen.com/pl/> [accessed 25.04.2024].

⁸⁷ Koperda A., *Odwiedziny. Kolekcja MOCAK-u: Justyna Smoleń*, [in:]. <https://hygge-blog.com/odwiedziny-kolekcja-mocak-u-justyna-smolen/> [accessed 25.04.2024].

example of visual poetry. I find in it a kind of metaphor in the spirit of the work of my favourite poet, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński.



Fig. 17. Justyna Smoleń, works from the series “Figurines”⁸⁸.

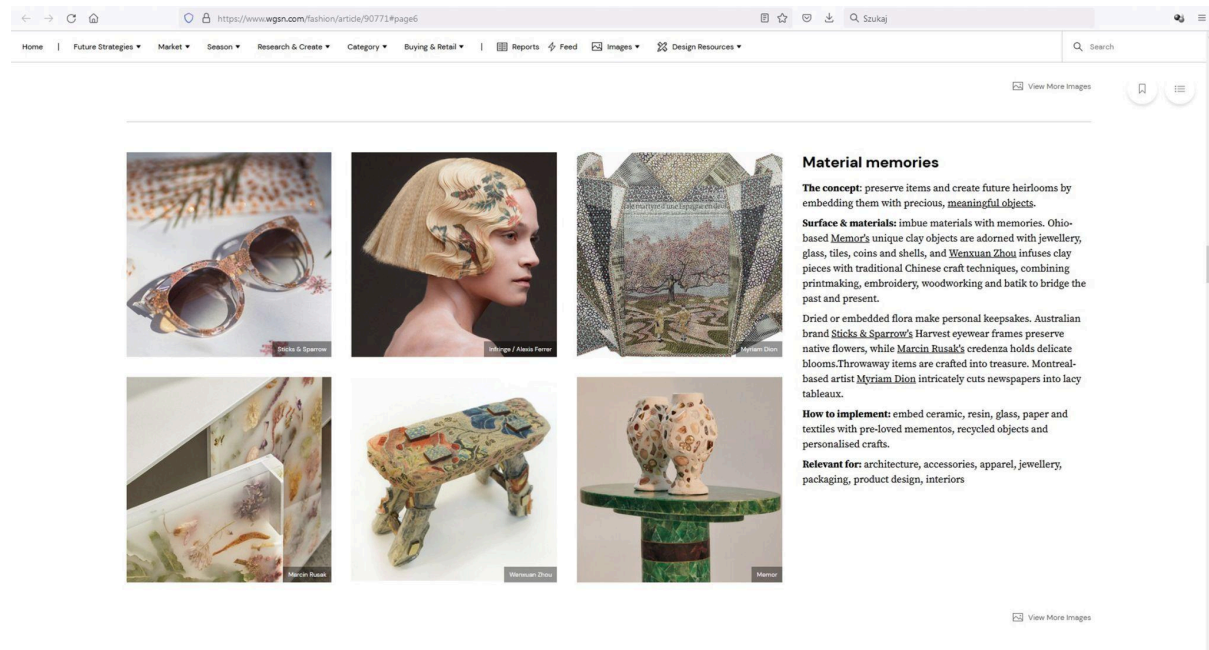
In my opinion, the works of all the artists cited above are characterised by a clear common denominator. Regardless of their individual creative practice, they reach for the reuse of both matter and history. They perform what I called 'sentimental recycling' in the introduction to the following dissertation. This term, although it has been present in the art and design space for a long time⁸⁹, was recognised as a trend by the international platform Worth Global Style Network in 2023. Identified as one of the trends centred around the reuse of objects and memorabilia from the family archive, it is directly linked to the pandemic 'homecoming'. In my view, it is an attitude that goes deeper than the superficial reprocessing of unnecessary trinkets or junk. It is a process in which the result in the form of a work of art and the intangible memory that goes with it form an inseparable history together. This kind of recycling can therefore subject not only matter but also memory. Writing about the material turn currently taking place in the humanities, Agata Rybus, referring to Marek Krajewski's

⁸⁸ Illustration source: <https://justynasmolen.com/pl/figurine/> [accessed 26.05.2024].

⁸⁹ Usually as an example of reusing items found at home.

theory, draws attention to the role of objects in the construction of collective and individual identity. Through the objects we produce, we define our own place in the world⁹⁰. The attempt to learn about and process, in the creative process, both the collective and individual memory of objects, can carry positive value in the form of establishing one's own artistic identity.

Fig. 18. Screenshot from the WGSN portal showing examples in the material memories stream⁹¹.



⁹⁰ Waszczyńska K., *Przedmowa* [in:] *Ludzie w Świecie przedmiotów, przedmioty w świecie ludzi*, ed. by A. Rybus, M.W. Kornobis, Warsaw 2026, p. 11.

⁹¹ Illustration source: www.wgsn.com/fashion/article/90771#page6 [accessed 01.10.2023].

Recollection III

It must be the summer of 1997. Mum and I are in the garden. We have a bag with us into which we pluck peony petals. The flower bush is bending under the weight of the dark pink blossoms. Mum takes one of the most magnificent ones in her hand and in one movement shakes almost all the petals out of it. I try to pick them from the grass, every last one. They are now more valuable than the most expensive treasure. We slowly pluck almost the entire shrub. When I reach into the bag, I feel a pleasant coolness and softness, the sensation is a bit like the touch of a cold hand on a hot day. I carry the scent of the flowers on my skin back home.

The next day I will put on a white dress and proudly scatter peony petals during the Corpus Christi procession. I am very worried, I am scared....

Chapter III

Home and garden – real places, imagined places

Modern and ancient rhetoric used the concepts of “topography” and “topothesia”, defined as, in turn: “a lucid and meaningful description of places, highlighting their qualities” and “a description of a place that is not in reality, invented by the poet”⁹². I would place my remembered and partly reconstructed image of the family home, somewhere between these two stylistic figures.

Beata Morzyńska-Wrzosek, analysing the motif of home present in the poetry of Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, emphasises the importance and symbolic rank of this theme in the writer's work: “One of those places - particularly privileged, existing, everyday, but idealised, endowed with a considerable dose of lyricism and sentimental emotion is home”⁹³. The image of the family home, passed through the filter of imperfect memory, appears as an idealised, safe and worryfree place. In his essay “The Family Home, the Oneiric Home”, Gaston Batchelard writes:

“The real world blurs before us as soon as we move with our thoughts to the home of our memories. What do the houses we pass on the street mean when we recall our family home (...) home is somewhere far away we have lost it, we no longer live there, we know - unfortunately - with certainty that we will no longer live there. Home then becomes something more than just a memory, it is the home of our dreams, the home of our dreams”⁹⁴.

On both a metaphorical and material level, the house, with its hidden objects, never ceases to intrigue cultural researchers. As an idea, it is close to philosophers, humanists and artists. In itself, it can be interpreted as a work that invites deep reflection. Through its connection to materiality, however, the house never remains a mere abstract entity⁹⁵. It carries with

⁹² Michałowska T., *Kochanowskiego poetyka przestrzeni wizja horyzontalna*, [in:] *Pamiętnik literacki*, LXX, 1979, z. 1, p. 3.

⁹³ Morzyńska-Wrzosek B., *Obraz domu szczęśliwego w liryce Konstanty Ildefonsa Gałczyńskiego* [in:] UKW Repository, <https://repozytorium.ukw.edu.pl/bitstream/handle/item/7053/Obraz%20domu%20szzcz%C4%99%C5%9Bliwego%20w%20liryce%20Konstantego%20Ildefonsa%20Ga%C5%82czy%C5%84skiego.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> [accessed 26.04.2024], p. 489.

⁹⁴ Batchelard G., *Dom rodzinny dom oniryczny*, [in:] *Wyobrażenia poetycka Wybór pism*, selection by H. Chudák, transl. H. Chudák and A. Tatarkiewicz, foreword by J. Blonski, Warsaw 1975, p. 301.

⁹⁵ Szewczyk J., *Rozważania o domu*, Białystok 2018, p. 13.

it deeply encoded cultural values, which Irena Bukowska Florienska links directly to the attitudes and memories she has brought from the family home: "These are the cultural values on which we rely, to which we refer. For in this concrete space many activities of a protective, existential, ordering and aesthetic, social-normative, customary, religious nature are carried out"⁹⁶. The image of the family home is therefore a thorough foundation for many areas of adult life. It is also not uncommon for objects that come from it to act as talismans.

The desire to return home, if only in one's thoughts or (as in my case) through the creative process, may stem from the need to understand the mechanisms and dependencies unconscious during childhood. This is how Jarosław Szewczyk describes this process:

"The understanding of the concept of 'home' is obvious to the child, but as the child matures, home becomes ambiguous to him or her and, at the end of life, incomprehensible. At first it does not require explanation, but as time goes on it becomes more and more compelling to try to understand its essence. These attempts have no end, as home constantly acquires new connotations. Home - one of the concepts closest to us - is thus a pretext for an incessant intellectual journey into the unknown"⁹⁷.

Home, as Szewczyk's words suggest, is a paradoxical concept. It is, on the one hand, a monolith of memory and, on the other, a constantly changing structure, dependent on circumstances and the passage of time. Of course, certain associations and tropes remain constant and fixed in the collective consciousness. According to the dictionary definition, the symbol of home means, in turn: "security, permanence, shelter, fortress, dwelling, own corner, household, householder, family, family nest, family line, dynasty, homeland; Universe, human body, treasury of wisdom, hospitality"⁹⁸. Already this short definition clearly illustrates how extremely distant meanings the house as a symbol carries. On the one hand, it is the most intimate close space, on the other hand, the entire universe.

When describing the meaning of home in traditional folk culture, Joanna and Zbigniew Benedyktowicz relate it to nature. Plants and trees, which are so important in many Christmas rituals (the Christmas tree on Christmas Eve is an example of this), symbolise the constant rebirth of the house-garden⁹⁹. This close connection between home and nature is particularly

⁹⁶ Bukowska Florienska I. *Dom rodzinny jako przestrzeń kulturowa*, [in:] *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne*, 2001, 5, p. 67.

⁹⁷ Szewczyk J., *Rozważania o...*, op. cit. s. 14.

⁹⁸ Kopaliński W., *Słownik symboli*, Warsaw 2012, p. 62.

⁹⁹ Benedyktowicz D., Benedyktowicz Z., *Symbolika domu. Literature and ethnography*, Kraków 2022, p. 104.

important and significant from my perspective. I was fortunate to spend my childhood in the countryside, in a house surrounded by greenery, in which activities determined by the rhythm of the seasons played an important role. Reflecting on the multi-faceted nature of the home, Jarosław Szewczyk notes a connection between a particular kind of nostalgia for home, which almost always contains a “natural element” and carries an unconscious “atavistic bond with nature”.¹⁰⁰

“If we explain nostalgia (especially the strongest nostalgia - for home), which we are accustomed to consider as one of the higher feelings and ascribe to it the loftiest rank, by the mechanisms of nature and include it in the category of biological atavisms (which in a way explains its extraordinary power), then what will home turn out to be? Also a mechanism of nature? A care mechanism? An expression of the need for security? A closed sphere protecting inner peace? So perhaps it will be one of the substitutes for the garden understood as a caring space, a protective space, an enclosed space? Or perhaps just one aspect of the garden?”¹⁰¹

The memories associated with the space of the garden remembered from childhood, which became one of the starting points for the following dissertation, are related to this particular kind of longing. The garden is an intermediate place between the known (the space of the house) and the unknown (the rest of the world), a kind of portal facilitating the transition from childhood into adulthood. According to Joanna Warońska-Gęsiarz, the garden space is the stage on which the rehearsal of adolescence takes place.

“The garden is a backyard enclave of nature, one of the most important spaces of childhood. It is a place of play, of first contacts with nature, but also of awakening interest in what lies beyond the fence. For it is from here that one goes out into the world, and if there is a return, it will be by the same route. Growing up, after all, means taking further and more dangerous trips and crossing more boundaries. One usually grows out of childhood without noticing it. What remains are souvenirs and discarded toys, sentimental but alien. This is the space-time of the formation of the self. After all, this is where the personal axis mundi is found, emerging from stories heard and situations experienced.”¹⁰²

The garden is also a space that has a very strong impact on the senses. The taste and smell of fruit plucked from a bush as a child is, for some reason, unique and impossible to recreate ever later. The mechanism of olfactory memory stimulated by the sense of smell is described by Marta Smolińska:

¹⁰⁰ Szewczyk J., *Rozważania o...*, op. cit. s. 140.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Warońska-Gęsiarz J., *Z perspektywy dziecka Motyw ogrodu w opowieściach pisanych przez ocalonych z Shoah*, [in:] Rana. Literatura - Doświadczenie - Tożsamość, 1 (5) 2022, p. 2.

“Scents evoke memories and desires, which in turn influence our behaviour. They allow us to recognise our environment and surroundings. Smelling is the only sensory response that is directly linked to the limbic system of the human brain. In turn, it is in this area that emotions are formed and it is where memories are stored. Smells instinctively influence our decisions because the information they contain is not rationally filtered. In addition, we perceive olfactory stimuli faster than visual and auditory stimuli”¹⁰³.

So what is remembered through the stimulation of the sense of smell is engraved on the memory tablet much more strongly than images. Remembering is of course a very individual mechanism, but based on my own experience, the images recalled in my memory clearly indicate how much of a role smell can play in the process of encoding memories.

The remembered image of the house is elusive, a collage of sensory impressions, stored sounds and objects. I am able to make a fragmentary reconstruction of it, which has become the source of the visual and symbolic tropes in the collection of works described.

¹⁰³ Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona...*, op. cit. s. 169.

Recollection IV

Summer of 1995. I am six years old. It's probably June, maybe the end of May - the peonies and roses are in bloom. The sun is blazing, there is dust in the air and a sweet suffocating smell of flowers. We stand in the garden, dad, grandma and me. I'm wearing my favourite dress, the navy collar falling to my shoulders. Father asks us to line up for a photo, we kneel on the grass dry from the summer sun. The stalks tickle my bare legs. I hug my grandmother, smell her perfume, watch the gold locket she wears around her neck reflect the light. The sound of a shutter. Now my dad asks me to pose alone. I try to stand straight and not squint. A buzzing sound comes from a peony shrub that grows nearby. The sound of a shutter.

That day, my father took three pictures. In the last one there is neither my grandmother nor me, only the garden....



Fig. 19. The garden in my family home, private archive, photo: Sławomir Sadrak

“You look at the peonies,
you were once a fire,
The velvet breeze
cooled your pretty temples.
cut your leg,
the blood showed,
you won't be a queen,
just as mother wanted.”

Agnieszka Osiecka "Peonies"¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Song performed by Anna Szalapak, lyrics by Agnieszka Osiecka, *Sześć oceanów*, songs 1962-2013.

Chapter IV

“Unique Sort” Textile and unique table objects collection.

The series of artworks entitled “Unique Sort” consists of three installations, made in various techniques. My idea was that, despite the diversity of materials used, the whole should constitute a kind of coherent story, referring both to my experiences and memories, and to a broader symbolic context. I have divided the stages of work on the doctoral collection described below into issues related to symbolism, technique and form. This kind of systematisation of the issues taken up in the series seemed to me to be the clearest and allowed for a comprehensive analysis.

“A Table with peonies” – meaning

When, in May 2021, I stood in the courtyard of the Ćmielów factory staring at a heap of porcelain reflecting the sunlight, I experienced extreme feelings. On the one hand, extraordinary excitement, on the other, deep sadness. Similar experiences were described by Edmund De Waal in his book “The White Trail”, recalling a trip to China: “A heap of crusts stretches up from that point, a landscape of shatter removed from underfoot, a lexicon of all the ways in which a ceramic vessel can go wrong. It is not a heap, messy but discreet, it is a whole landscape of porcelain”¹⁰⁵. This graveyard of unsuccessful vessels that were not destined to play their table role filled me with a strange awe. The whiteness of the porcelain folded into a sacrificial pile, became for me a symbol of lost innocence. The sensations were heightened by the sound of more plates, platters and cups being unceremoniously thrown out of the factory's small window. The smashing like a shattering last scream.

I took away 60 kilos of broken porcelain and a few decomposed plaster moulds. I knew I wanted to use them, but at the time I had no idea how. The idea came from a family photo album. Revisiting a memory of the summer of 1995 and a bush of flowering peonies immortalised in a photograph taken by my father became the main impetus for building the installation.

¹⁰⁵ De Waal E., *Biały Szlak. Podróż przez świat porcelany*, transl. M. Cielecka, Warsaw 2017, p. 31.



Fig. 20. Porcelain factory in Ćmielów - waste cemetery, author's own photo

Peony flowers are among the first ornamental plants cultivated by man. References to their origin are preserved in China and date back to around 1000 BC. At first, the purpose of the flowers was closely linked to medicine, only later was their aesthetic value appreciated. By the 6th century AD, the peony had become extremely popular, becoming known as the “queen of flowers” and the national symbol of China. She was identified with feminine beauty, love, wealth and honour¹⁰⁶. In Europe, the first records of the peony date back to the eighth century BC. Homer and Theophrastus wrote about it. In the 6th century AD, the Benedictines were cultivating the flowers. The monastery gardens were full of “Benedictine roses”, as the peony was then called¹⁰⁷. Describing the symbolism of medieval gardens, Krystyna Pudelska and Anna Mirosław draw attention to the religious aspect associated with the peony: 'The royal peony was a special Marian flower. Due to its aesthetic qualities and pleasant fragrance, it was called the Holy Rose of the Virgin Mary. This had to do with the image of Paradise, where roses were supposed to grow without thorns¹⁰⁸. It was therefore a flower symbolising the ideal woman, beautiful (like a rose) and without flaws. Traditionally, the peony was also associated with rituals of care, especially concerning children. One of these was to bathe a girl in its petals for the first time in her life, “so that she would be beautiful and liked by the boys”¹⁰⁹.

According to the dictionary of plants in folk customs and rituals, the peony was widely used as a remedy for numerous conditions: chest pains, anxiety and depression, convulsions, wounds and skin injuries¹¹⁰. It was also believed that an infusion of its petals (due to the colour of the flowers) had a positive effect on the female reproductive system, regulating hormones and the menstrual cycle. Flowers that were consecrated during the Corpus Christi procession or Pentecost celebrations gained beneficial powers¹¹¹.

“The peony is among the herbs blessed in the octave of Corpus Christi, a garland of which hung on the outside wall of the cottage protects from lightning. Peony bouquets consecrated on Corpus Christi are burned in the chimney during storms or hailstorms to ward off misfortune.(...) During the wedding feast, the walls of the house are decorated

¹⁰⁶ Grabowska B., Kubala T., *Piwonie*, Poznań 2011, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* s. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Pudelska K., Mirosław A. *Symbolika średniowiecznych ogrodów przyklasztornych i ich roślinność* [in:] Teka Kom. Arch. Urb. Stud. Krajobr. - OL PAN, 2013, IX/2, p. 49.

¹⁰⁹ Kolodziejska I., *Podolskie zielniki. Praktykowanie wiedzy o roślinach na Podolu Wschodnim (Ukraina)*, Wrocław 2023, p. 126.

¹¹⁰ Kujawska M., Łuczaj Ł., Sosnowska J., Klepacki P., *Rośliny w wierzeniach i zwyczajach ludowych Słownik Adama Fischera*, ed. M. Kujawska, Wrocław 2016, p. 448.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* s. 449.

with a Christmas tree dressed in peonies. The people believe that on St John's night the peony blooms white and has the same power as the fern flower”¹¹².

Both the root and the seeds of the flower were also said to have the power to protect against charms and black magic and to bring solace in St Valentine's disease (epilepsy)¹¹³. Such broad symbolic meanings and magical and medicinal properties make the peony flower, in my opinion, an extremely intriguing ambiguous source of inspiration.

The image of the peony also appears in the history of art, especially in works of Chinese and Japanese art. There is also no shortage of poetic and literary references alluding to the image of the queen of flowers. Most significant for me, however, is the use of this motif in applied art. Traditionally, it appears mainly on Chinese ceramics but, as I wrote earlier, I also found traces of it on porcelain from Ćmielów. From an analysis of both the designs collected in Kołodziejowa's monograph and the collection of the museum in Tokarnia, it is clear that the peony motif was one of the most traditionally used decorations in Ćmielów. The peony, often depicted in the company of other flowers such as roses or carnations, was found on platters, plates, vases and cups. I decided to deconstruct this familiar and only seemingly trivial motif by decorating it with broken pieces of porcelain recovered from the factory. My idea was to refer to tradition, but at the same time to build meaning on a deeper symbolic level.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

Technique

Cyanotype is a traditional photographic technique, which I have used for this purpose. It allows the image to be fixed not only on paper, but also on other (also non-absorbent) substrates¹¹⁴. The process is based on the photosensitivity of iron compounds which, when exposed to uv rays and developed with water, oxidise to create an image in Prussian blue¹¹⁵. What attracted me to experiment with this technique was the direct action of light and water, a kind of alchemical magic. For me, cyanotypes are a physical record of an image frozen in time.

Historically, the technique was used to create maps, architectural plans, as well as herbariums and illustrations¹¹⁶. The direct use of floral elements is therefore a reference to the traditional purpose of cyanotype. The colour Prussian blue refers to the tradition of decorating porcelain with cobalt oxide¹¹⁷. The process of creating a cyanotype print on porcelain should be divided into several stages.

Preparation of materials for exposure.

I decided to use the petals and leaves of the flowers directly. In order to prolong their usefulness and enhance their transparency (which has a positive effect on the quality of the print), I subjected them to a drying process. Placed between the sheets of paper, the peony petals gained a remarkable delicacy and nuanced colour over time (Fig.21).

Light sensitive emulsion.

When preparing the emulsion base, I used a simplified recipe of a mixture of two chemicals, ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferrocyanide, dissolved in distilled water. Due to the water-resistant properties of porcelain, a third ingredient in the form of gelatine was needed to spread the emulsion on its surface, allowing the solution to adhere to the

¹¹⁴ Gryz P., *Cyjanotypia i kalotypia w artystycznej grafice cyfrowej*, Łódź, 2017, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Strożek P., *Cyjanotypia*, [in:] 'mgFoto magazine', no. 2(7), 2020, p. 27.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/anna-atkins-cyanotypes-the-first-book-of-photographs.html> [accessed 10.06.2024].

¹¹⁷ <https://www.oxfordclay.co.uk/blog-1/the-problem-with-the-colour-blue-in-pottery> [accessed 10.06.2024].

porcelain surface¹¹⁸. The prepared solution gave the best results after cooling and reheating after 24 hours (Fig.24).

Substrate preparation.

Before applying the emulsion to the substrate, it had to be thoroughly washed and degreased. For safety reasons, I also sanded all sharp porcelain edges (Fig.23).

Spreading the solution on the porcelain and laying out the pattern.

I spread the liquid solution on the porcelain with a deep tureen spoon. This was the most delicate part of the whole process, due to the fact that the thickness of the photosensitive layer largely determines the quality of the print. The thinner and evenly distributed the layer, the better the print. After many unsuccessful attempts, I managed to work out the optimal way to apply and dry the solution (Fig.25).

Exposure.

Initial attempts were made by exposing the development with sunlight. Unfortunately, due to the variability of atmospheric conditions and the shape of the porcelain (roundness and indentations), I was unable to achieve optimum conditions. I obtained much better results using an exposure lightbox made by simple means, constructed from a cardboard box and a uv lamp. The average exposure time was between 5 and 7 minutes, depending on the desired effect.

Developing the image.

Developing the image involved immersing the section with the exposed emulsion in water. First for 10 seconds to harden the solution, followed by a thorough rinsing under running water for about 30 seconds until the yellow suspension was visibly removed from the Prussian blue surface.

¹¹⁸ Gryz P., *Cyjanotypia i kalotypia*, op. cit. s. 13.

Drying and varnishing.

After rinsing, I dried each piece with a moderately warm stream of air and left it to dry completely in a dry and cool place. An image fixed with a cyanotype solution is not waterproof. In order for the porcelain pieces to become water repellent they had to be varnished. I made several attempts using different varnishes (natural shellac, acrylic varnish), as well as refiring the glaze. Unfortunately, it turned out that the glaze-covered and fired image disappeared from the porcelain surface. The compromise in this situation turned out to be acrylic spray varnish. Each piece was double-coated with a thin layer of varnish and re-sanded.

Detail gilding of selected elements.

I decided to apply gilding to selected elements using schlagmetal. I used acrylic glue and varnish with a semi-matte finish (Ill.26).

Form of presentation

The final result is about a hundred porcelain pieces. The overall composition is variable depending on the context and presentation. The horizontal form of the elongated long table I chose, measuring 75 x 450 cm, refers to the landscape. The covering in the form of pure white cotton fabric is reminiscent of a traditional tablecloth. The whole installation is a symbol of a bittersweet memory of the garden of childhood, frozen in time.

It is my meditation on the process of growing up, the passage of time, the loss of innocence and the fragility of beauty.



Fig. 21. The process of drying and candying peony petals, author's own photo



Fig. 22. The process of drying and candying peony petals, author's own photo



Fig. 23. Preparation of the porcelain, author's own photo



Fig. 24. Light-sensitive emulsion, author's own photo



Fig. 25. Laying out a pattern, author's own photo



Fig. 26. Gilding of selected elements, author's own photo



Fig. 27. Private archive, photo: Eligiusz Sadrak

"From deep within
the peony pistils - withdrawing
regretfully the bee."

Bashō¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Bashō M., *140 Haiku*, selection and transl. P. Madej, Krakow, 2018, p. 5.

“A wax lace” – meaning

Bees have always been an integral part of the garden in my family home. The backyard apiary was first run by my grandfather and is now looked after by my uncle (immortalised in his self-portrait above il.27). I admire his commitment, passion and respect for the bees. The honey they produce together is not only delicious, but is for me a symbol of a deep connection with nature. The immediate motivation for the second in the series of installations was to honour the important work that the men in my family have done over the years.

Both beeswax and honey are unusually strongly characterised materials in traditional culture. As Barbara and Adam Podgórski state:

“For millennia, bees have been regarded as divine beings, endowed with reason and the capacity for social interaction. (...) The bee has 'always' been a symbol, of order, wisdom, good luck. And more importantly sexual purity, although also love, fertility and prophecy”¹²⁰.

All products of bee labour such as honey, putty, wax or even venom have unquestionable healing and therapeutic properties¹²¹. The prophetic attributes attributed to wax were reflected in the ritual of divination of the future, on St Andrew's name night. Hot wax poured over cold water solidified into organic shapes, which were then illuminated and their shading interpreted as harbingers of the future¹²². More often than not, the shapes were interpreted as objects related to the profession of the future spouse or their character traits, e.g. “a figure of a knight, a horse or a gun foretells marriage to a military man, a heart shape was interpreted as a sign of falling in love, tenderness and kindness of the fortune-teller and the imminent finding of a partner”¹²³. Another example of fortune-telling using wax was reading the future from small burning candles placed in egg shells or nut shells floating in a vessel of water. The vessel was moved to see whose shells came into contact with each other, which was supposed

¹²⁰ Podgórska B., Podgórski A., *Andrzejkowe wróżby. zwyczaje, obrzędy, przepowiednie.*, Wrocław 1999, p. 43.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Bykowski D., Wilde J., Siuda M. *Obrzędy, zwyczaje i leczenie niekonwencjonalne związane z woskiem pszczelim*, [in:] 'Humanistyka i Przyrodoznawstwo' 9, 2003, p. 191.

to herald a future marriage¹²⁴. Due to its organic, malleable nature, beeswax was also used esoterically. Its ability to hold fire and emit a pleasant aroma was important in magical ceremonies. As Daniel Bykowski, Jerzy Wilde and Maciej Siuda point out: “Most often wax was used in evocative magic, the action of which is based on the causal power of the performed rituals in the form of prayers, incantations, it was the wax candles that caused the intensification and concentration of the will of the person conducting the ceremony”¹²⁵. The above descriptions of folk rituals seem to confirm Marta Smolińska's statement that wax as a material was very often culturally associated with women¹²⁶. In this case with the figure of the fairy. Its magnetic nature is linked to the elusiveness and changeability of its form, as Smolińska writes:

“The power of wax is peculiar in that it gives the impression of being constantly in a state of transformation and change (...) It is optically processual, 'alive', as commented by Descartes, among others, who on the one hand complained about its fluidity, instability and changeability, but on the other hand pointed to its potential to provoke discussions about the body in a state of transformation¹²⁷”.

Wax as a plastic matter has been used in the arts for centuries. It is used in sculpture and casting techniques, as well as in painting, where it is used as a binder and as an ingredient in preservatives for paintings¹²⁸. Due to its hydrophobic and antibacterial properties, in ancient Egypt it was one of the most important ingredients needed in the embalming of corpses¹²⁹.

Wax is an ambiguous matter, fragile and susceptible to many external influences. It seems to be the complete opposite of porcelain, which, once fired in a kiln, sometimes remains unchanged for centuries. Observation of this contrast and the desire to change the familiar visual and material order, pushed me to experiment with wax and the use of a plaster mould, intended for casting porcelain. This resulted in the creation of an ephemeral 'wax fabric' which, on the one hand, is an expression of methodical repetitive casting work, but on the other, symbolises the changeability and uniqueness of the material used. Marta Smolińska, describing Jadwiga Maziarska's working process, in a way also sums up my experience of working with wax:

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona...*, op. cit., p. 21.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Bykowski D., Wilde J., Siuda M. *Obrzędy, zwyczaje i leczenie...*, op. cit. p. 188.

¹²⁹ https://pl.frwiki.wiki/wiki/Momification_en_%C3%89gypte_antique#google_vignette [accessed: 05.05.2024].

“In the process of desiccation, many forms change slightly, and the fingerprints and traces of the work of individual tools acquire an indexical and nostalgic dimension. Socrates compares memory to a wax tablet received as a gift from the muse Mnemosyne, on which - like a record - traces are imprinted, enabling fleeting memories to be recorded”¹³⁰.

Recovered from a porcelain graveyard, the plaster mould was intended for the casting of earpieces from cups marked with the factory number MT022 (Fig.29). This is one of the classic Ćmielów designs from the Rococo service. It now appears in a white version with discreet gilding, carmine paintwork and decoration alluding to the shape of shells and acanthus leaves¹³¹. The multiplied semi-circular form of the porcelain detail became the building block of the composition. The stages of the work, described below, explain the various decisions made and difficulties encountered along the way.

Technique

As reported by Paulina Pędziwiatr and Piotr Zawadzki:

“Wax is obtained by smelting it from withdrawn slices, de-stemming the cells and cutting out the wild growth. Wax melts at 63°C, solidifies at 62°C, loses water at 95°C to 105°C, and boils at temperatures above 300°C. Solar, steam and electric melters are used for melting. The wax must then be clarified to get rid of impurities”¹³².

The wax I used for this project came partly from my family apiary, the rest was purchased from beekeepers advertising their products on the Internet. As a result, I had a material available that varied in terms of colour and scent. I was very keen to make maximum use of the fragrant properties of the matter. The idea behind this installation is to stimulate not only the sense of sight, but also the haptic stimulation of smell.

Melting the wax

I began my work by colour grouping the material (Fig.28) and attempting to mix the wax to produce smooth tonal transitions. Melting took place in a small porcelain vessel placed in a water bath heated on an electric cooker.

¹³⁰ Smolińska M., *Haptyczność poszerzona...*, op. cit., p. 133.

¹³¹ Śniegulska-Gomuła M., *Od manufaktury magnackiej do przemysłu. Ceramika Ćmielowska w zbiorach muzeum narodowego w Kielcach*, Kielce, 2015, p. 152.

¹³² Pędziwiatr P., Zawadzki D., *Proces pozyskiwania i oczyszczania produktów pszczelich* [in:] VII Seminarium Studenckie Bezpieczeństwo w Inżynierii Procesowej, Tkaczew 2017, p. 104.

Preparation of the mould

I lubricated the previously cleaned plaster mould with a mixture of vaseline and glycerine, which made it easier to remove the casts without damage. Otherwise, the moisture- and water-absorbing plaster would stick to the wax surface. I placed a small piece of embroidery floss, an element reminiscent of traditional lace, inside each of the ear gouges in the mould.

Casting

After heating enough wax to fill the entire mould, I gradually poured the hot substance filling the various spaces. While the wax was setting, I prepared further portions of the material (Fig.30). I placed the pieces removed from the mould in a clean and dry place to cool completely. This process was very tedious and time-consuming. One of the biggest challenges proved to be maintaining consistent proportions when mixing the wax colours. Obtaining a large number of ears in a strictly defined colour scheme consumed many hours of work.

Form of presentation

After repeatedly arranging the whole of the elements in various compositional configurations, I decided on an arrangement in the form of an elongated ellipse measuring approximately 170 x 60 cm. This shape is reminiscent of classic lace tablecloths on the one hand, and on the other was dictated by an integral part of the installation, in the form of an old bathtub. Filled with water, the acquired “vessel with a history” alludes to the mystical wax divination rituals described above. The shape of the tub is ambiguous and can also be associated with the form of a traditional coffin. It thus opens up a path of interpretation related to the embalming power of wax. The ears, laid freely on the surface of the water, form an elaborate flowing lace. The impression of quilted taffeta is emphasised by delicate white threads. The meditative process of each time building a wax lace (Fig.31) is a very important part of the whole work. The changeability and processuality of organic matter is reflected in the possibility of modifying the presentation, depending on the conditions and context. The

installation presented outdoors, attracting bees with the scent of wax, acquires the dimension of an “insect table”.



Fig. 28. Different shades of beeswax, author's own photo



Fig. 29. Plaster mould MT022, author's own photo



Fig. 30. The process of casting wax ears, author's own photo



Fig. 31. Laying out a pattern, author's own photo



Fig. 32. Interior of the author's flat at the time of its purchase in 2017, private archive

"Lace is something like mirrors, it was made by hands that
 were young at the time of our birth, seem to us always
 the transmission or decision of many centuries, the great modern elaborations of landscapes fixed in
 the origins of what is now nothing more than a
 unadulterated delight."

J. Lezama Lima, *Paradise*¹³³,

¹³³ Lezama Lima J., *Paradise*, Krakow 1979, p. 13.

“A lace table” – meaning

The last part of the series is a lace made using the computerised machine embroidery technique. The entire installation consists of fabric and an old table - a piece of furniture I inherited from the previous owners of my current flat (Fig.32). Probably dating from the 1950s, the wooden round table is the third element, after the porcelain and the bathtub used in the wax installation, that symbolically connects the past with the present. It is a bridge between two images of home: the remembered and the present. My idea was to transfer the visual motif created from the wax, into a contemporary version of traditional embroidered lace.

Rosemary Shepard defines lace as 'an openwork decorative fabric in which the pattern of hollow spaces is as important as the solid areas'¹³⁴. This description of the technique precisely defines not only the fabric itself, but also its more metaphorical meaning relating to lace as a symbol of memory. My identity is simultaneously defined by all the remembered “homogeneous areas” and the forgotten “blank spaces”. Memories disintegrate and transform over time, and the structure of memory lace is changeable and uneven. The choice of this technique to illustrate the memory metaphor is, according to Dorota Koczanowicz, very apt; the author writes: “The metaphor of memory cannot be a compact fabric. The openwork fabric would fall apart into fragments, accentuating the destruction caused by the passage of days”¹³⁵. Camille Okhio notes that the technique itself is also difficult to systematise and study, due to its various variations. This is because, unlike other types of embroidery, traditional lace is not created using a backing - a base fabric. “Originally, the term 'lace' referred to fabrics in the form of a narrow braid, and later encompassed all forms of non-woven, knitted, crocheted and needlework openwork textiles”¹³⁶. Lace is therefore the least fixed of all decorative textiles. Its form is defined as much by what is embroidered as by what is missing.

¹³⁴ Shepard R., *Lace Classification*, Sydney, 2003, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Koczanowicz D., *Pamięć podniebienia. Smak i Archiwizowanie tożsamości...*, op. cit. s. 141.

¹³⁶ Okhio C., *The Enigmatic Power of Lace*, [in:] W Magazine online version, [accessed 05.05.2024]. <https://www.wmagazine.com/fashion/lace-fashion-threads-of-power-exhibition>.

Technique

Sketches and starting point.

I began work on the project with photographic and drawing sketches (Fig.33). Arranged into symmetrical and asymmetrical forms, I duplicated the wax casts using the tools available in the Photoshop graphics programme. The images thus generated became the basis for a later fabric report designed in the embroidery software Illustrator Tajima Dgml by Pulse (Il.34).

Working in Illustrator by pulse, first attempts of embroidery.

I was keen to design a form of the report that would not only allow it to be repeated seamlessly, but also be deconstructible. By changing the direction of the individual elements and their scale, the ear motif became less literal. Organic lines drawn in 2 mm satin stitch have built up a decorative symmetrical openwork form. Its streamlined shape may resemble a plant ornament. Due to the type of technique chosen and the technology used to produce it, it was very important that the skeleton of the openwork structure of the embroidery was made correctly. The first attempts made on the Tajima embroidery machine were unsuccessful. Too few stitches in the bottom layer of the design made it unstable when the backing was removed. After consulting with a technologist from Maxi Embroidery in Łódź, I reinforced the pattern with a 2mm backstitch and decided to make it on an industrial embroidery machine using a specialised backing that is removed under heat.

Embroidery

The fabric was embroidered in the form of four narrow strips, each seven metres long (Fig.35). In order to build up the desired form, I had to cut and reconnect each of them. I decided to disrupt the repetitiveness and impression of the mechanicality of the pattern by deconstructing it and arranging it freely. The resulting form measures approximately 350 x 120 cm.

Gilding

In order to refer to the gilding elements found on the porcelain, I decided to transfer them to the surface of the fabric as well. The accents in two colours of gold schagmetal were spread unevenly over the entire length of the openwork fabric (Fig.36.).

Form of presentation

The organic form of the fabric is presented as an installation located in the space of the wall, table and floor. It resembles a kind of large spider web slowly devouring a fragment of the interior. The colour of broken white I have chosen echoes the dusty starched lace found in museum collections. In the centre of the table is one of the plaster moulds – a sugar bowl lid, filled with golden liquid honey. This is the connecting detail between all three parts of the “Unique Sort” series.

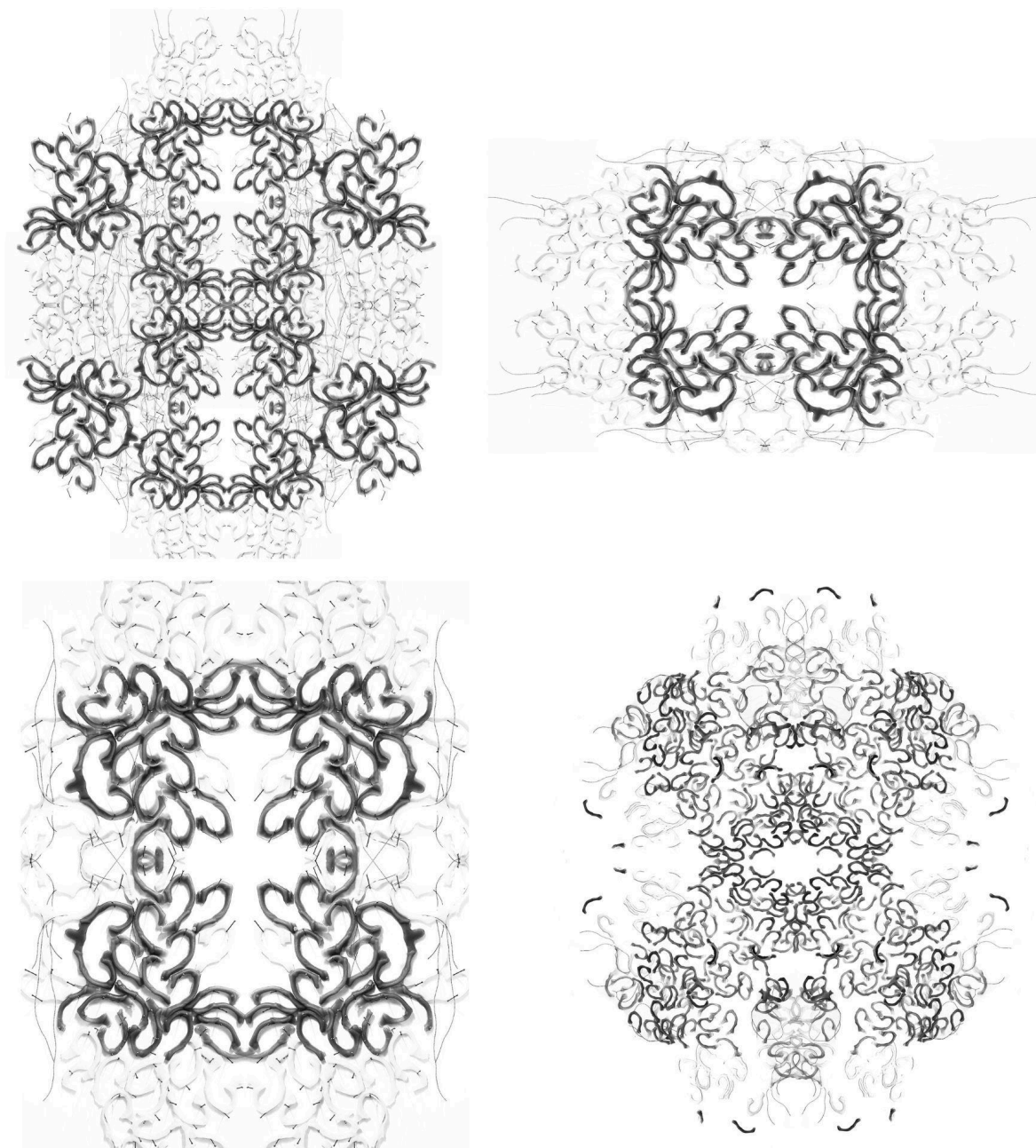


Fig. 33. sketches of the report's layouts, author's own photo

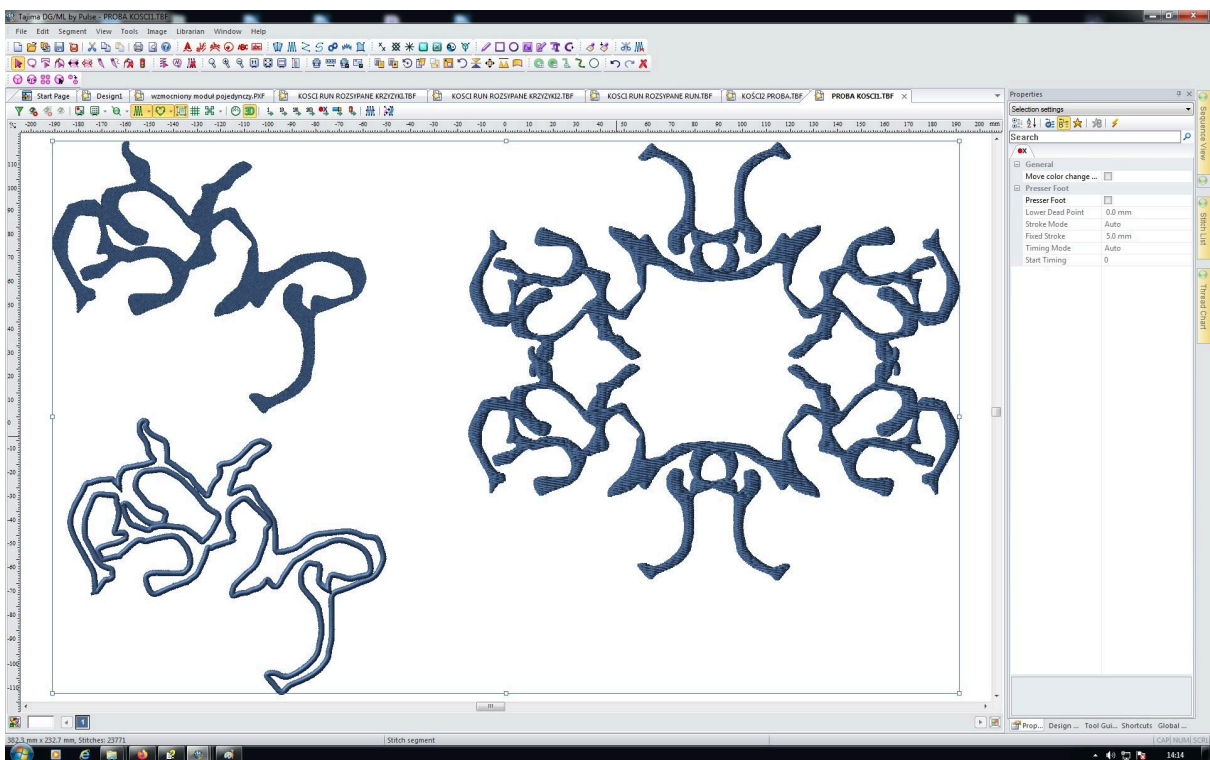
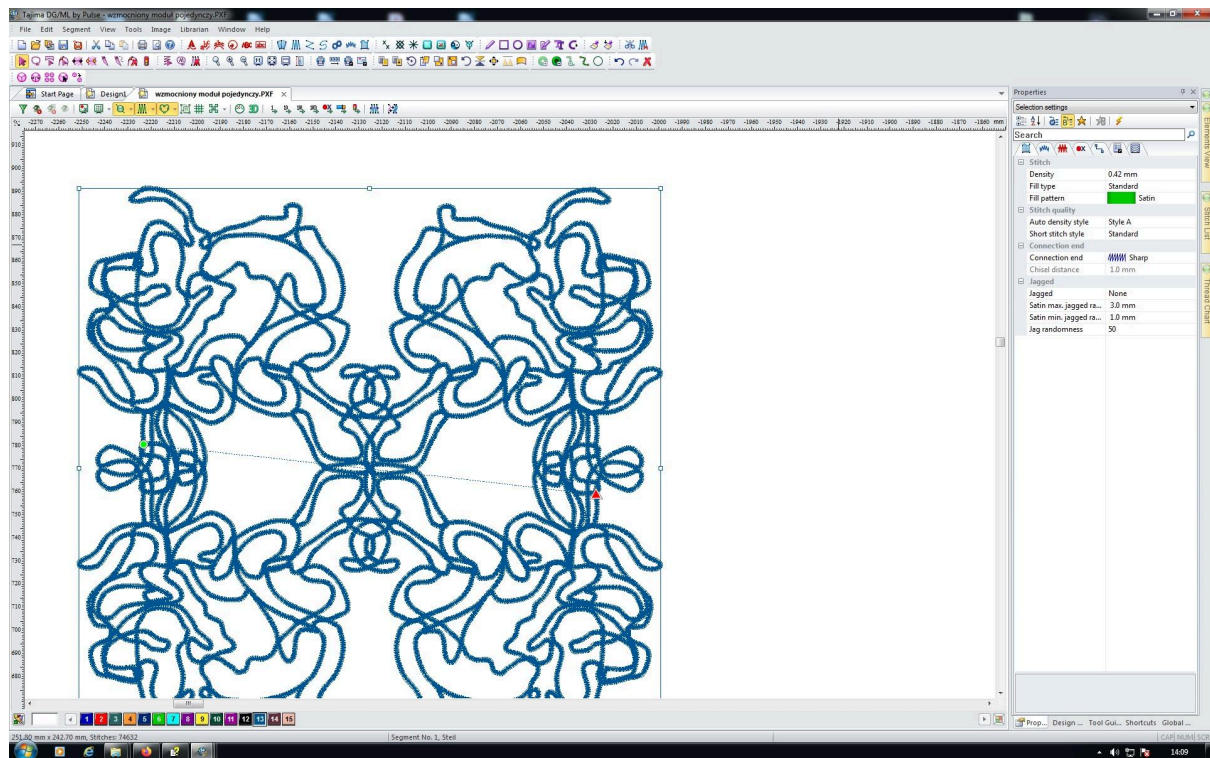


Fig. 34. Different versions of stitch fills in Illustrator by pulse, author's own photo

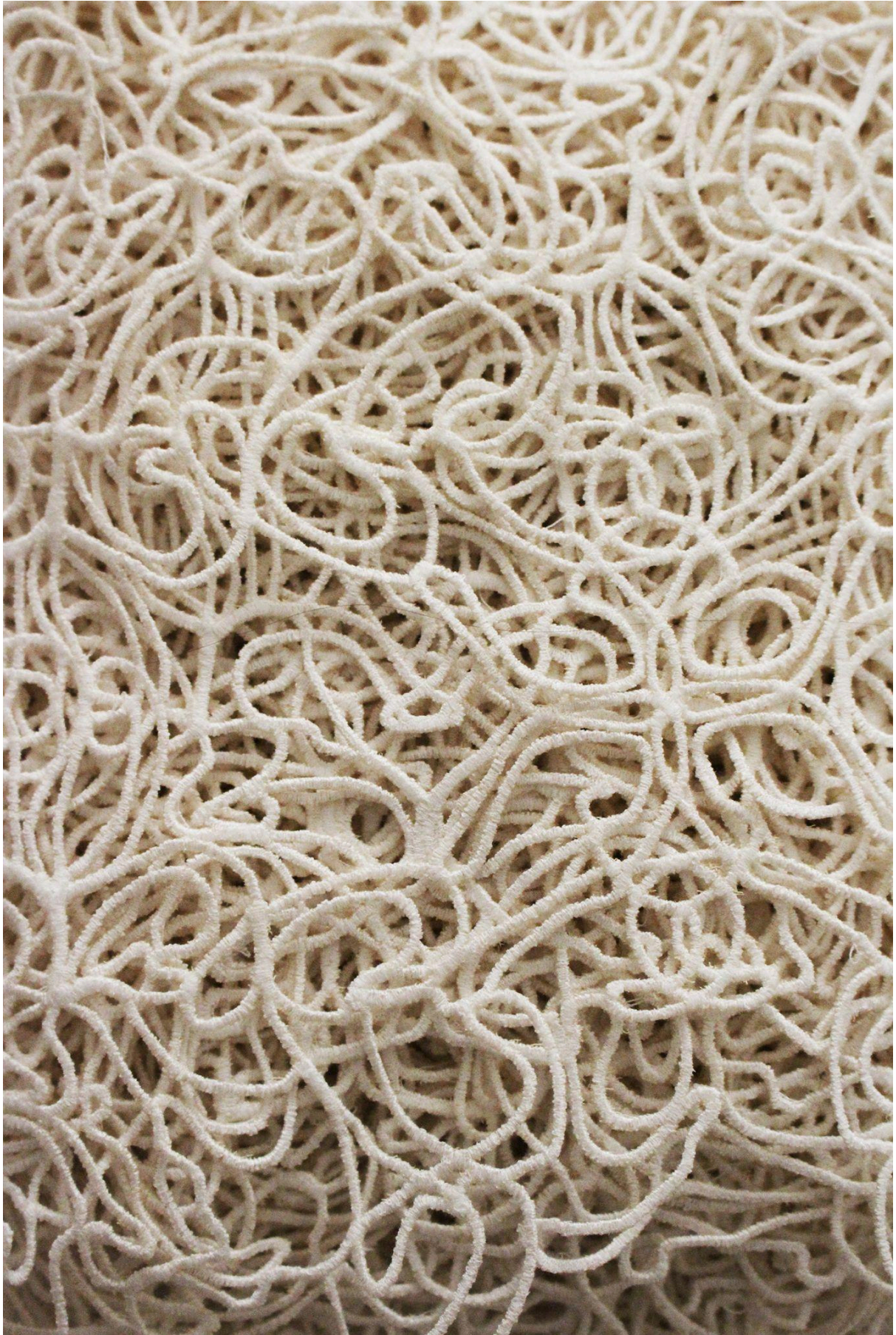


Fig. 35. Embroidered design, author's own photo



Fig. 36. Gilding of fabric details, author's own photo

Photographic documentation.



Fig. 37. "A table with peonies", 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 38. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 39. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 40. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 41. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 42. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 43. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 44. "A table with peonies", detail, 75 x 450 cm, cotton, cyanotype on porcelain, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 45. "A'wax lace", 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 46. "A'wax lace", 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 47."A wax lace",detail, 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 48..”A wax lace”,detail, 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 49..”A wax lace”,detail, 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 50. . "A wax lace", detail, 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 51..”A wax lace”,detail, 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 52..”A wax lace”,detail, 65x170 cm, antique galvanised tub, beeswax, embroidery thread, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 53. "A table with lace", 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 54. "A table with lace", 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M. Terka



Fig. 55. "A table with lace", detail, 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M.Terka



Fig. 56. "A table with lace", detail, 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M.Terka



Fig. 57. "A table with lace", detail, 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M.Terka



Fig. 58. "A table with lace", detail, 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M.Terka



Fig. 59. "A table with lace", detail, 350x120 cm, wooden table, plaster mould, honey, computer embroidery, photo by M.Terka

Conclusion

The collection “Unique Sort” reflects on memory and the process of remembering as a starting point in artistic and design work. All the resulting realisations draw on a personal image of my home as a place remembered from childhood. The research process, which was based on the creative work, was challenging above all due to the discovery of means of expression and tools that were completely new to me. The premise of the work was to create a collection that combines unique activities with contemporary industrial production techniques in a hybrid way. This goal was achieved mainly through the use of computerised mechanical embroidery techniques. The reuse of porcelain waste and casting moulds allowed me to minimise the production of new objects and placed my actions in the context of the material memories trend described in the work. I do not treat any of the installations as closed works; their open compositions and the suggestion of development and change over time are for me one of the most important elements of the whole presentation.

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