

OVERVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Anna Plewka

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Overview of professional and academic achievements

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date of birth: March 27, 1970

Diplomas, academic and artistic degrees

diploma – master of fine arts degree

Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Faculty of Interior Design

date awarded: May 31, 1996

diploma – doctorate degree in film arts, in the area of photography

awarded by Direction of Photography and TV Production Department at the Leon Schiller National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź

date awarded: October 6, 2009

title of the doctoral dissertation: Interactions of Light in Modern Interior Design

Previous and current employment in academic and artistic institutions

Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw

Faculty of Interior Design

January 1996-September 30, 1998 – assistant lecturer, fixed-term employment contract

October 1, 1998-March 31, 2011 – assistant lecturer, permanent employment contract

Since April 1, 2011 – assistant professor

Since May 2010 – collaboration with **University of Ecology and Management,**

Faculty of Architecture, in the field of Interior Design

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■ INTRODUCTION

Many of us, back in the 1990s while we were still students did not part with a camera. The reasons were various: notes from travels, sketches of everyday life, documentations of projects, scale models, objects of architecture, and completed works. I was lucky to discover the magic of the enlarger when I was a child, and the darkroom was my quiet place when I was a student at the Faculty of Interior Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

The last twenty five years have been a time of immense technological development; when I was a student I used the most basic analog reflex cameras, later, however, the change followed and I started working with the digital medium. I was interested in space in photography. Black and white photographs and black and white television were omnipresent and natural in everyday life. I collected postcards with pictures of architecture and landscapes. Color seemed to me artificial then, I associated it with unnatural ORWO photographic films, past their sell-by date. I would draw, as all pre-schoolers did, and it was always pure pleasure which I remember even now when I look at my adolescent daughters who do the same.

I decided not to apply to a secondary school of fine arts since it was said that a comprehensive secondary school would provide better education, and to make my life more difficult I was in a grade with an extended curriculum in biology and chemistry. The decision to study at the Faculty of Interior Design arose from frequent visits at my mother's work, while playing truant, at the Warcent design office situated in the Warsaw district of Praga. Perspective drawings and photographic documentations of housing districts inspired me to aim at the Faculty of Interior Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. It has always been the most interesting place where I can fulfill myself, it is an environment with an unusual artistic and intellectual blend of teachers from different academic and artistic backgrounds. Studying made me richer in new experiences in designing different objects and creating images. The first year was based on concepts of forms and abstract subjects. Then, as it is now, a camera was a sketchpad, and photo notes facilitated the designing process. After the third year at the Academy I focused on furniture design at Prof. Wójcicki's Workshop. In 1996 I graduated with honors; apart from scale models I made furniture in a scale of 1:1, and a diploma project *The Meeting* – five chairs and a table. Theoretical master's thesis *Vienna Workshop*, written under the supervision of dr Józef Mrozek, was on Art Nouveau.

I have been associated professionally with the Faculty of Interior Design since 1995. Back when I was a student I received an offer to work as an assistant-trainee for dr hab. Jacek Szczechura at the Psychophysiology of Vision Workshop. After graduation, in September 1996, as a result of a competition I was employed as an assistant lecturer at Prof. Zbigniew Wójcicki's Furniture Design Workshop where I had done my diploma. I worked there in 1996-2001, until Prof. Wójcicki retired. Then I worked as an assistant lecturer: Perspective Drawing with Prof. Marek Kosmulski, and Landscape Architecture with dr Elżbieta Myjak-Sokołowska until 2006.

Since simultaneously I followed my own photographic dreams and passions, in 2006 I was entrusted with taking over the Photography Workshop at my home Faculty. Until then I had combined interior design and photography; I had had a few individual and group exhibitions. First, the already existing Photography Workshop underwent modernization according to M. Rzepiejewska's design and I supervised the renovation works. It was a large-scale project: apart

from conversion, new equipment was purchased and a studio based on mobile flashes was created. It was the first modernization since the Photography Workshop at the Faculty of Interior Design at ul. Myśliwiecka in Warsaw was established.

In the first year of the Workshop's operation (2006), before I took it over, it had been entirely analog. After the extensive renovation and modernization works conducted on the initiative of the then and the present Dean, Prof. ASP Bazyl Krasulak in 2006, however, the studio at the Faculty of Interior design started operating in another, new capacity. Having the new, modernized Workshop under my care I wanted to expand its technical equipment. At that time many analog darkrooms disappeared from higher schools of technology, and even higher schools of arts. Creating documentation with analog methods seemed too complicated since it took longer and was more expensive. It should be also mentioned that usually design departments in Poland do not have dedicated workshops of similar nature, and a photographic studio is associated more rather with fine than applied arts.

At one point I faced a dilemma: what should be done with the analog darkroom, trendy and not trendy at the same time, interesting but seemingly slowing down the process of project documentation. We decided to successively increase the digital arsenal, at the same time preserving the traditional darkroom for all keen students. This decision turned out to be the right one: after some time, in 2010 the *filtr* AW Academic Club was set up, and its members were able to fulfill their analog passions in that darkroom.

I described in more detail the development of the Workshop since at present I dedicate most time to photography of spaces and it is connected with design form. I present the description of my professional work connected with AFA here since it is inextricably connected with my development and activities at the Academy, independently of teaching.

In the meantime, in 2009 I defended my doctoral dissertation *Interactions of Light in Modern Interior Design* at the Direction of Photography and TV Production Department at the Leon Schiller National Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź, under the supervision of Prof. Mariusz Dąbrowski. I had had numerous interior designs in my achievements by then. I photographed those projects to be included in my portfolio. I came to realization that I was transitioning from being an interior designer into an observer photographing her own ideas. With time I started watching works of other creators, too. It was not only about the interior and structure; at first photographing a human and than searching for light and a form were an escape, breaking away from architectural matter.

I came back to photographing architecture as a result of deliberations connected with designing which is meant to make the world beautiful. A reversal and searching for interiors from the past followed. This direction, I think, helps me understand and binds me with not only the space I have been living in for years but with my roots as well.

■ DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK

Project interior

The scope of my creative interests focus mainly on the architecture of Polish interiors of post-war era from Mazovia. Most of them were created in the reality of the Polish People's Republic, without the assistance or credit of interior designers. A photo essay is more of an aesthetic impression than a realistic document here, it constitutes a series of searches and reflections, a journey through selected dwellings from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, situated in the territory of Mazovia. A series of photographs is accompanied by a commentary referring to each individual home. The interiors are connected with stories of people who took years to furnish and organize them. The common feature of the photographed houses is the organization of the interiors in the past, lack of innovation, devastation, sometimes desolation or absence of a design project. As a result of various twists of fate some dwellings underwent gradual deterioration. The degradation of the interiors has been visible in each case, although the degree may vary. The photographic project was carried out for several years, with breaks, and it consists of photographs of interiors in selected locations. The photographic record is a collection of images of selected and disappearing Mazovian houses. The project includes interiors of detached houses on farms and of buildings in small towns. The research subject focuses on the interiors of selected buildings only, not their external form.¹

In my photographic undertakings I ask questions and search for answers – how did people live in a space arranged on their own, without the assistance of an interior designer? To what extent did the errors in arranging the interior influenced the dwellers' quality of life? From an interior architect's point of view it seems certain that there always must be errors when one arranges the interior "on their own." When inspecting the furnishings of interiors from the years past many factors should be taken into consideration: the owners' financial capabilities of that time, openness to innovation and novelties from the city (and perhaps from abroad), or natural perception of color and composition. Photographing selected interiors enabled me to understand the aura of existing places with history in the background, or even to sense a scent of multi-generational households. It is the scent that impacts a visitor's general impression, unfortunately a photograph will not convey a scent. The project required time, a proper color temperature of the ambient light, emotions developing between me, the author, and another person, the owner of the space which I wanted to know, to seize, to tame.

A selected interior has been analyzed according to the following pattern: the description of the dweller (to the extent it has been possible, usually it is scarce), the description of the predominant style, the state of preservation of the furnishings and decorations, the depiction of beauty and ugliness of the house. It is also an observation, artistically-wise, of the interiors and reference to other examples presented in the photographs, and then an original esthetic interpretation and addressing existing trends. The motif evoking reflection is pondering on the beauty and ugliness of objects, interchangeability of both qualities, and their perception, so varied. As for the dwellers: during the photographic stage of the project the contact with the owners was from very good to impossible (some places had not been inhabited for a very long time). When I take a photograph in an interior I also visualize the person or the family living there.

Being interested in taking photographs in interiors existing for a long time and esthetic searches are connected with being interested in interiors with history in the background, it is based on the acquired theoretical knowledge (history of the interior architecture), previous profession studied connected with creating residential interiors, affection for controversial combinations of details of the furnishings, and fondness of watching and registering light, colors, and space in photography. The source of my photographic experiments and theoretical interpretations is curiosity of human life and surrounding objects. The starting point is ugliness and its variations which are perceived, interpreted, and told differently in every interior. The final photographic effect suggests a shift in the perception from ugliness to beauty.

The photographed buildings are located in one region of Poland, they are, however, spread in across Mazovia. The searches bind me with attempts at reaching the locations which connect me with history, allow me to remember. Unfortunately, many interiors disappeared sometime in the 1990s. Photographs allow for preservation of excellent frames as well as those whose attractiveness lies not in the fine interior design. Some spaces are interesting in themselves, others are offensive in their imperfection, imitation, and they seem to be an attempt at replacing a refined detail of the furnishings with a so-called fake. I am also interested in everyday life of a family, including its functioning in the kitchen space, frequently thrifty in design and limited in functionality. For comparison: in the second half of the 20th century interiors in rural kitchens were more modest but they incorporated other purposes – there were feasts, councils, children’s baths, or neighbors’ meetings taking place there. The hearth as a place where meals were prepared gave physical warmth but it also brought household members together. It seems totally different when compared to a modern kitchen in the urban space, where the work surface is well thought out, ergonomic, “cold”, and surprisingly often – rarely used. In the past, in rural interiors there were also so called “trzeciaki” – unused rooms, although tidy and decorated with devotional items.

The fate of the photographed architecture is varied. There is no common type characterizing the owners of those places. Some buildings have been deserted for such a long time that the memory of people using them has been lost. The common denominator of these photographs might be an unplanned concept of creating those spaces without a previous design. During the photo shoots, and later analysis and metamorphosis of the material one slips into a reverie over the passing of time and longing for selected architectural objects. There is also nostalgia for the furniture and furnishings which arrived in the Mazovian village in the post-war years but before Poland’s transformation. Photo walks in selected residential spaces made it possible to record both vacant and inhabited interiors. In the former the architectural space still exists, it is, however deprived of function and its usefulness gradually disappears. Some of the depicted objects wear signs of damage, on others traces of former esthetics of interior design are still visible.

The presented photographic project is a several years long series of art works, based on digital technology, which shows less known interiors, usually with rich and hidden history.

The lack of intentional arrangement of the interior in the current sense of the meaning of interior architecture is a separate feature of some objects. Architectural designs not infrequently existed as a basis of the building’s construction, but the interiors, however, were fitted at the owner’s discretion. I may recall the contrast between two realities since

when I started studying at the Academy, one year people, out of scarcity, organized all construction materials through bribes, and then, in the following years the “Bartycka” shopping mall was built in Warsaw; on the one hand there was the scarcity of the Polish People’s Republic forcing people to organize things as special favors, on the other hand, there was a shopping mall from another world, stores offering a wide selection of interior finishing materials for apartments and houses.

Mass production from some factories was replaced by other products, modern, carefully manufactured, evoking western modernity. At the close of the Polish People’s Republic era the care in manufacture of furniture was less and less visible. It is worth mentioning William Morris’s words: *We lost touch with the culture of our ancestors and we are at the mercy of thousands contradictory caprices and demands.*² Morris was deeply negative about everything that was connected with a machine, he hoped the wave of mass consumption of items for interior decoration would be stopped. The photographs below present my own attempt at searching for design implementation carried out by artists and artisans almost 100 years after Morris’s words. The photographs do not contain details of “luxurious interiors” in the meaning of the richness of objects many Polish pre-war households were furnished with. I mean here modernist details of modern buildings from the 1930s on the one hand, and heavy, period furniture from the end of the 19th century. We will not see it in the photographs, mainly because they did not survive the last war or they were never in those interiors. Many households were completely plundered during the Nazi occupation and shortly after the liberation. Furniture and other furnishings were usually stolen.

Selected interiors, apart from the devastated ones, are simple in décor, which might be connected with the owners’ modest means, others are lavish, which arose from the need to emphasize social status and display luxury. It is worth considering what luxury is today and what it was in the past decades. Was luxury ergonomics and functionality or was it refinement, or even extravagance? Did functionality collide with bad taste after World War II? Are furnishings pre-war handicraft products or results of mass production of the Polish People’s Republic era, so scarce then? The post-war period in design may be roughly divided into the earlier years, when furniture was mass produced in high quality, and the later years, when the quality of mass production was low. In the 1960s, 1970s, and later wooden furniture was replaced with that made of veneer covered chipboard, and in cheaper versions of industrial products finished with paper veneer imitating a selected type of wood. It was practically a miracle to be an owner of a French polished, larch veneered wall unit or an automatic washing machine in 1980. At present designs from half a century ago are of great interest. There is a growing appreciation of the widely understood Polish People’s Republic past – from the end of the last war to the Poland’s transformation period around the year 1990. Valuable insights, research on culture and architecture of Polish interiors are published. Interest of collectors exceed collecting, they verge on the so-called vintage style. Searching for old, stylish furniture is not only about heavy veneered pre-war items, but also rarities from our own native ŁAD factory. Various interior design magazines outdo one another in creating decors from pre-war furniture, combining it with new accessories in a modern setting, e.g. architectural concrete, in order to produce an interior filled with interesting furniture, full of various details appropriately arranged for photographs. Styling photographs and editing in digital darkroom are a separate element of complete vision of creators who provide a product for an interior design magazine.

In my account the arrangement is austere, existing. Since the interiors are not always inhabited, a common denominator has been adopted – a human as a strong point in a photograph does not appear. The focus is on what people created, where they lived, and what they left. A house is a place of returns, calmness (?), and mysteries – a sanctuary of intimate family life. Photographic record refers to structures, including a residential house in Kiełpin, residential houses in Łomianki, Kazuń, Wólka Proszowska, and Wilków Polski. All buildings are situated in different parts of Mazovia. My loose inspiration in my searches was Zofia Rydet's *Zapis Socjologiczny* [Sociological Record], although we differ in photographic methods. Analog, monochromatic photography from 1950-1980 presents the subjects differently from digital photography, susceptible to manipulation by graphic software. In Rydet's project, apart from earlier photographs of architecture of Polish rural areas, there are also interiors photographed at the beginning of the 1980s, when interior designers' specialized services were known, however not to all social groups.

In my project, beside the preserved interiors' there are also images of spaces stripped of architectural tissue where there remained guesses, assumptions, and ideas of the whole. Detritus as a waste is preserved, inscribed in the surrounding nature. It refers to the ruins in Kazuń Nowy and in the village of Wilków Polski. The sites are presented in the order according to the key preserved/devastated or, alternatively, beauty/ugliness, from luxury to scarcity. The rooms I was attracted to most are the kitchen and the living room, or the sitting room. In different periods and in different social groups this room fulfilled various functions. The organization of the kitchen was completely different in earlier interiors than in those from later periods. The general division of the photographed subjects is into rural and urban architecture.

The house in Kiełpin is a cottage built at the beginning of the 20th century. It has a roofed over porch, a small vestibule, and two rooms. One room is connecting; it is a small kitchen with a dining area, the other room is both stately and functions as a bedroom. The aged owner who has been dead for many years used to say that the cottage was built before World War II. This photographic report took place in 2011. When I was taking the photographs I accepted the owner's hospitality, and she herself had been living with her family in a newer building situated nearby. The house had been deserted as it had been used in the past. All furnishings, including ornaments, had been left untouched. The arrangement of furniture seemed random, or perhaps the owners had only cared about the intuitively functional arrangement? The items were gathered in the post-war time, they came from different factories, or perhaps they were salvaged, and a little worn-out. The uninhabited house, without central heating and proper ventilation in winter, looks like a part of an open-air ethnographic museum, except that its interior is authentic. The items there, once, after the war, luxurious, now seem to be old curiosities.

The multi-family house in Łomianki was built in the 1970s. Thanks to the owners' openness and hospitality I managed to take a lot of different shots. The house from the exterior does not distinguish itself in a particular style or it does not look as if its design was made especially for this building. The inside feels frozen in time. The furniture, once "luxurious", was bought in a furniture shop or custom ordered directly at the carpenter's. The quality of decorating materials was meant to emphasize luxury, it resulted from the owners' financial capability and their care for the final effect. Such residential areas were previously described as *residences perfectly imitating antiques*³. The luxury of the decades past – an oak wood kitchen and a microwave oven, the furniture's French polish put together with

artificial flowers provide stage design inspirations. Then excellent technology of furniture manufacture allowed for the items' existence for years, it made the owners' give up replacing the furnishings and conducting major redecoration works in the house.

The desolated house in Kazuń Nowy is a wooden building built at the end of the 19th century by German settlers. The owners might have been descendants of the Mennonites whose former church from 1892 is situated 2 kilometers away. Kazuń Nowy was one of the three Mennonite centers in Mazovia. I did not manage to discover the reason why the house had been abandoned dozens of years ago. The structure of the building probably suffered not in the last war but it was a consequence of the last inhabitants' neglect. The creeping destruction might have also happen in consequence of the users' death. The photographs were taken in 2011 when the house was in significant decay. I found the site left by, as I could assume, homeless visitors. Old furniture from the 1950s had already existed in symbiosis with nature, the ceilings and floors were completely destroyed. At the time I was taking the photographs the building was in significant disintegration, with visible traces of burning, and a leaking roof. Virgin Mary statues and religious pictures were lying next to many used syringes. In 2018 the building succumbed to total destruction, melting into greenery of the Vistula River landscape.

The house in the area of Wilków Polski is situated on the route from Warsaw to Secymin. It has an open main entrance and an exit onto an overgrown garden. The building has not been inhabited for a long time. I learned from a villager's story that the building had been used in the past by an Evangelical school, then it was a Polish school after the war, and then it was a residential building. By 2011 it had not been used for a long time, there were visible traces of devastation. As in the other buildings, there are layers of wallpaper on internal walls, and visible but worn-out ornaments. Individual layers are like pages of an album – each shows a different story connected with an unspecified point in the past. The space there has been cleaned out of furnishings therefore the interior seems a little flat. The colors of the walls and the floor, and the scents remind about interpenetration of acts of man and nature. The light and the open space evoke the feeling of melancholy. The interior tells about people, their absence and anonymity. I interpret the ugliness of the living space as a series of flat, coloristic images of an abandoned structure.

The desolated cottage in Wólka Proszewska was built in the 1970s, and consisted of many elements which had been transferred and assembled. The furnishings are modest, without ornaments, except for religious pictures. The building consists of a vestibule, a kitchen combined with a dining room, then a bedroom, a so-called "trzeciak", and a pantry. The furniture visible in the photographs gives [...] *an uplifting sense of owning things possessing emotional significance* [...].⁴ The interior design is a blend of styles. The cupboard and the bench visible in the photographs were hand-made by the owner. There is also furniture perhaps purchased in a nearby furniture shop, a tile stove made by a local stove-fitter, and hand-made rugs. The wallpaper was glued directly to wooden boards. There are religious symbols everywhere, which helps keep the faith that God shall never leave this place.

The house in Janówek was built in the 1940s. It is a wooden cottage, still inhabited by 98-year-old Filomena. The interior shows old and new details, freely combined. In the vestibule there is a few dozen year old cupboard, probably manufactured by Wolsztyńska Fabryka Mebli. In the bedroom area there is another, pre-war cupboard, and there are

simple, modern in form pine wood chairs next to it. The photographs hanging in the bedroom area show the family members from the early 20th century. The building has not been renovated for a long time and it wears traces of many years of use. The kitchen and the dining area are in the center of the house. The furnishings and decorations have been collected for years. There is a quaint, almost theater like ambience here. The disarray and the lady of the house's cheerfulness fill the interior with charm. Some pieces of furniture have been repurposed and relocated, and ended up in the house's vestibule. The decorations fill all the interiors with color.

The old house in Łomianki, apart from being a residential building, is where the oldest hair stylist in Łomianki used to reside. Mr. Rurka's house was built in the 1950s. The ancient hair stylist worked professionally till the end of his days. There are unusual collections of various objects inside, passionately collected by the owner, creating a blend of different decorating styles. For an interior designer such diversity would be unacceptable, but an interior is perceived differently assuming that it is a stage-like design. The house, so rich in details which connect us with the history of the past decades will soon be demolished. Each detail of the dwelling links us to a distant point in the past. *We are therefore inscribed into a house, and it not only reflects who we are but it reminds us about it as well. As a rule, there are not many keepsakes in Polish homes.*⁵

My observations reveal that apartments and houses have been undergoing constant modifications for a few dozen years. In one instance of generational change in the house most furnishings were thrown away, starting with refurbishment of the kitchen, the bathroom, and then the guest room, the bedrooms, and the children's bedrooms. And here comes a thought: do pragmatic reasons dictate such actions, or is it the desire to cut off from the past, to reset? Practical use of the existing space suggests throwing away everything that is old and worn out. And this is what happens, some, however, keep the remains of the furniture to recycle, modernize, or retouch. One thing has remained the same throughout the years: in homes of the intelligentsia there have always been shelves with books.⁶

*Design is for shaping an idea of how to perceive objects.*⁷ Looking at photographs of interiors evokes a question whether design was of such importance. And yet, the shape of objects spoke about their personalities. Photographs show differences in the standard of interior decoration of different interiors, tastes in décor, choice of furniture and furnishings. It signifies a different level of knowledge, artistic awareness, taste, and financial capabilities, which influence the arrangement of the space. The meaning of the word "design" may probably be associated with artistic knowledge and enlightenment of the household members. In the presented interiors there are decorative elements (photographs, paintings) in rooms with a formal function. The kitchen is usually arranged very sparsely. A kitchen countertop as understood now is practically non-existent. It seems that actions connected with meal preparation were made difficult by lack of functional furniture. Large families shared a small common area. Purchasing furniture and furnishings was a different issue. The attitude of people at that time was to furnish a house for life (completely different to what it is now). *Objects which were with us for years could be perceived as a reflection of our own experience of the passing of time. Nowadays our relations with possessions seem much more meaningless.*⁸ Some furniture was inherited, and in peasant families there were examples of carpentry – furniture was not only designed but made as well within the family's capabilities on the basis of artisan and esthetic experience passed from generation to generation.

Ambient light is the dominant element in most photographs. The intended contrast and side lighting intensify the sense of space. The illumination seeping from the outside through cracks and holes in the structures is significant in emphasizing the distance between individual planes and highlights selected parts of the interiors. The season of the year and the time of day are not to be disregarded since they are of assistance in presenting the architectural tissue. The photographs are digital and the post processing allows for achieving the desired color temperature. The selection of objects was connected with individual search of design-wise ideal (or perhaps undesigned) space which was the starting point to create photographic images. The process of taking photographs was also about the search for mutual relations of color and light in interior architecture.

The photographs were taken both in interiors I had already been familiar with and in completely new ones as well. The human was always the magnet attracting me to a new site, and in case of abandoned buildings it was curiosity about what was left by the owner. The photographic project has been going on since 2010 and it is an open activity. So far people's kindness enabled me to depict many places. There were also instances when I gave up taking photographs due to the anxiety and prejudice of the owners reluctant towards me, a documentalist, and even reluctant to discuss photography inside their house.

*Scarcity may make the simplest things become luxury. It is much more difficult to achieve it in the time of plenty.*⁹ Indeed, the meaning of the words "luxury" and "scarcity" changes when watching these interiors. I imagine that in the situations when I was refused photo opportunities the reason was the embarrassment arising from want.

Conclusion

The photographic project concerns interiors which were mostly created without a prior design. A question arises in each interior: what did a home use to look like? These places still exist, quite randomly, in family homes and in travels. They are "modernized" to various degrees, they are clusters of collections from 1930s to 1990s. The French polish of wall units compete with cheap veneer of "temporary" furniture bought in discount shop chains. In houses and apartments from dozens of years ago traces of many generations' creations and amateur interior decoration consisting in random arrangement of available things are visible. It is also a tale of passing of time, devastation, theft, abandonment of places which used to be a space of family bonds. Photographs are images of human activity, a record of how our ancestors lived, and a proof that there have been changes in predilections and functional choices in the arrangement of space. The images show the influence of human activity and natural and cultural value, they show a fraction of what we leave.

The collected photographic notes act not only as a document which is supposed to objectively present the state of things and the history of the selected objects. In the original interpretation the ambience, captured through the ambient lighting and the colors of the interior, recording of the space here and now, play significant role, namely the light, the color, the contrast. The optics is of significance here, use of long exposures and large depth of field. The selected parameters allow for capturing images in natural light, often adverse. Digital post processing means working with .raw files whose modification tempts with interpretation at the verge of a lie. Digital adjustments, however, enable to soften coloristic fireworks which may appear quite accidentally.

There is one more thing to reflect upon: old non-designer interiors are endearing with their beauty even though they are not arranged in a well-thought-out way. The beauty does not stem from the lack of designing work; personally I do not adhere to amateur designs. Esthetic value arises from preservation of unique objects, although they are not always designer items and their combination is sometimes random. Some interiors have already been so devastated that human activity is not visible even in a slightest form of designing of ongoing destruction. The combination of elements from various design generations may sometimes seem questionable, it is, however, where the charm of the spaces playing the main part in my images lies.

I take digital photographs, with a reflex camera (full frame) and short-focus lenses. The final artistic effect of the photographs is currently achieved by means of Adobe PS software – the so called digital darkroom. I wanted to overcome restrictions of the perception of the human eye connected with high contrast of adjacent surfaces, namely bright illuminated patches and dark elements of the furnishings.

The photo exhibition Project interior was held at the Apteka Sztuki Gallery in Warsaw in February 2018, and it consisted of twenty six works (inkjet prints, block-mounted) of different sizes, from 30 x 30 cm to 40 x 60 cm. The differences in size and aspect ratio result from decisions concerning specific shots. Project interior spans eight years of work, the photographs were taken with four reflex cameras with different matrixes and potential for modifications in a digital darkroom. The sizes of individual photographs are: three 40 x 40 cm, four 50 x 30 cm, ten 40 x 60 cm, two 30 x 30 cm, one 50 x 40 cm, three 40 x 30 cm, two 50 x 35 cm, and one 40 x 50 cm.



Anna Plewka

■ OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

Evangelical cemeteries near Łomianki

Evangelical cemeteries in the territory of Gmina Łomianki have been captured in my photographs three times so far. I started this project in 2009, and each consecutive exhibition incorporated new photographs. Because of lack of memories and knowledge of people who now live in the gmina, I started going deeper into my interests, combining photographic reports with interviews with elderly inhabitants. I did not plan an exhibition at first, but to understand the subject and to register the existing status. I was irritated by the omnipresent indifference to the devastation of the gravestones, some of them were historic monuments. The uniqueness of those places lies in the fact that the space connected with the aggression of the Prussian invader is now almost invisible. The area of Dziekanów Leśny went under the Prussian rule only after the Third Partition of Poland.

From the very beginning the exhibition had controversial reception due to confusing the German settlers at that time with the Nazis during the World War II. My objective was to draw the local community's attention to three cemeteries: in the territory of Kampinos Forest (Puszcza Kampinoska), in Dziekanów Leśny, in Łomianki Górne, and in Kępa Kiełpińska. The cemetery in Dziekanów Leśny is closest to me, also spiritually – I remember this place from my childhood and from family stories. The cemetery in Łomianki Górne is much smaller and it has been devastated. I discovered the graveyard in Kępa Kiełpińska quite late and I got there thanks to the kindness of the inhabitants whose property surrounds the site.¹⁰ The cemeteries were destroyed after 1945. At the exhibition I presented photographs of selected gravestones or their fragments with preserved inscriptions. I kept a specific esthetics of the prints: they were uniform, monochromatic, 50x50. Lack of color stemmed from the artistic convention I adopted as a common denominator of the works which had been taken with various equipment (digital cameras, travel compact cameras, a reflex camera, and a 6x6 Flexaret). A few photographs depict the remains of gravestones found in the brushwood in settlements situated along the Vistula River, dozens of kilometers away from Dziekanów Leśny.¹¹ I was looking for permanent traces of people long dead who used to live in the neighborhood, being aware of the complicated Polish-German relations after World War II. The account of the opening of the first exhibition is available here: <https://vimeo.com/37077380>. What is left from the Evangelical cemeteries is a reminder that, similar to neighboring gminas situated at the Vistula River, there were settlements of the colloquially called *Olędrzy* [Hauländer] there. The only traces of their inhabitants – the German settlers, apart from few preserved houses, are the cemeteries, the remains of people who lived and worked here for some 140 years.¹² The consecutive exhibitions were expanded with new photographs of gravestones from other Evangelical cemeteries in Mazovia. At the latest exhibition at CJNJ at ul. Czerniakowska in Warsaw the current state was presented, and a discussion about the devastation and revitalization of similar cemeteries in Poland followed.

The biggest and the most devastated cemetery in Dziekanów Leśny was revitalized with the effort of Stowarzyszenie Nasze Łomianki [Our Łomianki Society] and the works were completed in 2016.

Photo exhibitions concerning the subject of the devastated gravestones:

2012 - *Cmentarze osadników niemieckich w gminie Łomianki* [Cemeteries of the German settlers in gmina Łomianki]

2012 – *Niepamięć* [Oblivion]

2013 – *Lecz ja wiem, Odkupiciel mój żyje - cmentarze osadników niemieckich Łomianek i okolic* [For I know that my Redeemer liveth – cemeteries of German settlers in Łomianki and its neighborhood]

2017 - *Niepamięć i przywoływanie* [Oblivion and Evoking]

Announcement and account of the exhibition which took place in Centrum Lutheranum in Warsaw in 2012:

<http://www.trojca.waw.pl/44-serwis-informacyjny/w-parafii/643-ewangelickie-cmentarze-lomianek-i-okolic.html>

<http://www.trojca.waw.pl/44-serwis-informacyjny/w-parafii/652-lecz-ja-wiem-ze-moj-odkupiciel-zyje-wystawa-o-cmentarzach-gminy-lomianki.html>

Account of the exhibition which took place in the vault of a former Camaldolese church in Warsaw in 2013:

<http://www.lasbielanski.pl/content/cmentarze-osadnik%C3%B3w-niemieckich-w-gminie-%C5%82lomianki-fotografie-anny-plewka>

Account of the opening of the exhibition which took place at the J.N. Jeziorański Center in Warsaw in 2017:

<https://waw.asp.waw.pl/2017/08/01/niepamiec-i-przywolywanie-cmentarze-osadnikow-niemieckich-lomianek-i-okolic/>

The history of the area was also presented at two artistic and academic conferences; the latest was international. The conferences in Zakopane: KRAJart took place in 2011 and 2013.

Specific information on my participation in conferences, published papers, and multimedia presentations during conferences has been included in the list of artistic and academic achievements. The exhibitions drew attention of the local Society which led to the revitalization of one of the three cemeteries. The cemetery in Dziekanów Leśny has undergone significant transformation.

Information about the first exhibition:

https://lomianki.info/news/dokumenty/2014_06_27_1403868994.pdf

Interactions of light in modern interior design

Reference to my doctoral thesis here is to emphasize my connection with photographing interiors. Being curious about interiors has broadened the scope of my artistic interests and

experiments, it has transferred me from the present to the past of architectural tissue. Then, searching for light in architecture led me to photography. The motifs of light, painting and photography, and architecture have for centuries been interweaving in religious beliefs, philosophy, poetry, and literature. Following D. Hockney's footsteps in analyzing Caravaggio's paintings, I discovered the way in which great masters used natural ambient light and how they lit their subjects. Many times a painting is the only evidence of existence in the past of innovative architectural solutions. Thus it is an image of architecture which disappeared in fires destroying cities and towns, it is an illustration of developing history of understanding the space shown by means of perspective. Photography joins all these areas, and light is the biggest element linking them. Light is an invaluable gift allowing us to construct space in the mind. Seeing is not a process limited to registration, it is also an individual interpretation of the perceived reality, connected with the imagination of the person who watches. It is so also in the photography of architecture, which in no way can be described as documentation.

Through photography I started looking at interior design a little differently, I saw problems which had previously been meaningless or too obvious, both functionally and esthetically. Because of physiology a human being perceives only a small fragment of the surrounding space, while photography allows for a wider perspective. A human eye does not discern small anomalies, e.g. symmetry, which are visible in a photographic image. Architecture theoreticians express a view that *"we divide interiors into those controlled by men and those that control men."*¹³ In my doctoral dissertation I intentionally focused on the former and I narrowed my research to residential interiors. The way they look and the arrangement of their functions changed over the centuries. Knowledge of it has been documented with photographs, and earlier with paintings and drawings. I have chosen interior design as a subject of my photographs because, to quote T. Broniewski: *"The interior is [with some exceptions] the objective of architecture."*¹⁴ In my work I had to go back a dozen or so and several dozen centuries to find out how architecture was developing, to examine the role of light in development of interiors. Development of various civilizations made it possible to build multi-storey buildings equipped with a sewer system as well as to build simple structures of reed and clay or adobe houses. The access to the light inside was limited at first due to high or low temperatures and because of structural reasons. With the development of the art of building, technology allowed for more light in the interior, and the significance of light in the emerging art of photography was decisive. The development of technology had an impact on a change of habits and lifestyle. Before, the lack of natural light made people go to sleep after dusk, while electricity made it possible to extend human activity till late at night. Progress in science and new discoveries were the engine of changes in construction technology and the way of "understanding" the interior in which subsequent generations lived.

It has been assumed that *"[...] philosophy declared an evaluative hierarchy of different kinds of art, placing a border between fine arts and applied arts [...]"*.¹⁵ Photography is a static form of creation whereas designing is artistically a more dynamic process. Designing is understood as an activity requiring time; it is work stretched in time. For a painter, the designing process may seem little intuitive. The way of looking at a problem often depends on the profession. It is extremely difficult to objectively evaluate a work, esthetically I – as an interior architect – would look at the object as a project. In interior photography I do not focus, however, on elements of the design but on the final effect which I captured in an image. As an author of interior designs many a time I "took over" the interiors, collecting them into my portfolio (as if they indeed were mine). Photographing interiors I appropriate images created within them captured in a particular moment. Distant and inaccessible spaces may through an image become, in a sense, "a property" of the photographer, and then the owner of the photograph. Photographing

individual frames of architecture I collect its fragments captured in images.

Interior photography:

- is a form of reliving architecture and an aid in experiencing it,
- enables isolating an individual point of view and presenting it to others,
- it is significant in interior design how the light has been planned, and photography is an attempt
- to capture that light in two dimensions while preserving the illusion of three-dimensionality.
- interior photography enables organizing to a considerable extent, and even geometrizing, the perceived space in one's imagination,
- I have found a common origin: the light which shapes interiors and the light enabling the development of photography, i.e. the period of a few hundred years BC, dated as the discovery of *camera obscura*.

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¹ The theoretical work was to a large extent presented at the artistic and academic international conference KRAJart 2017 in Zakopane. The subject of the conference was A SPECIAL ELEMENT IN THE SURROUNDINGS – TRACES. The title of the paper: "VESTIGES OF THE PAST IN OLD INTERIORS: THE ARCHITECTURE OF MAZOVIAN INTERIORS FROM THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY", ISBN 978-83-945484-1-4, pp. 257-266. An extended and updated version with photographs was then published: "Ślady przeszłości w starych wnętrzach – architektura mazowieckich wnętrz drugiej połowy XX wieku" ["Vestiges of the Past in Old Interiors: The Architecture of the Mazovian Interiors from the Second Half of the 19th Century"], MAZOWSZE Studia Regionalne nr 27/2018, Analizy i Studia / Analyses and Studies, Warszawa, pp. 123-137.

https://mazowszestudiaregionalne.pl/images/pdf/27/MSR_27_Plewka.pdf, [retrieved 19.01.19]

² Quoted after: Deyan Sudjic *Język rzeczy* [The Language of Things]. Wydawnictwo Karakter, Kraków 2013, p. 130

³ Sylwia Dobrowolska, Aleksandra Winerowicz, *Wnętrza mieszkalne lat siedemdziesiątych w Polsce*, Prace i Materiały IWP 1978, vol. 49, Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego, Warszawa, p. 42

⁴ *ibidem*, p. 129

⁵ Małgorzata Czyńska, *Dom Polski, meblościanka z pikasami*, Warszawa 2017 p. 119

⁶ *ibidem*, previously mentioned a number of times

⁷ *ibidem*, p. 58

⁸ *ibidem*, p. 22

⁹ *ibidem*, p. 104

¹⁰ One of the three Evangelical cemeteries in the territory of our gmina is situated among a clump of tall trees in Kępa Kiełpińska. Until the end of the last century the property belonged to a private owner. At the end of the 1990s the plot was bought by new owners who built a residential building there. Previously the area of the cemetery was unfenced and accessible to everybody, therefore some gravestones were destroyed. The cemetery is small, just a few gravestones with partially readable inscriptions in German. It is the only reminder of the German settlers who lived in the area of Kępa Kiełpińska probably at the turn of the 20th century. At present, the cemetery is quite squalid, and the plot owners are very kind. Since they lived here there has been no sign of interest of the families of those buried at the cemetery.

¹¹ It was a discovery of gravestones with inscriptions which were typographically different from our local gravestones. They were probably scattered as a result of maintenance work of some unknown stoneworker's shop. The remains of the gravestones were transferred to the cemetery in Dąbrowa Leśna.

- ¹² The history of the German settlers in our gimna is connected with the Prussian rule after the Third Partition of Poland in 1795-1807. In 1803 Fryderyk Poths, the steward of Łomianki, settled the first colonists on the wasteland flooded by the Vistula River in Kępa Kiełpińska. A year later the leaseholder of the estate, Antoni Trębicki brought colonists to Dziekanów belonging to the Łomna estate reclaimed from the Church. At the border with Kiełpin, near the woods, the village of Dziekanów Niemiecki (now Leśny) was established. The newcomers received settlements and land which were exempt from taxes for a dozen or so years. The area of the fields they farmed was twice the size of the Polish peasants' fields. Due to extensive cultivation and high farming culture the colonists grew rich and their descendants bought land in the neighborhood. The colonists were Protestant. Distance and difficult access to the Evangelical parish in Nowy Dwór caused the local village cemeteries to appear in the settlements. The oldest preserved gravestone in Dziekanów is from 1876, in Kępa Kiełpińska from 1895. Former inhabitants of German origin from Dziekanów Leśny, Kępa, and Łomianki were buried in the preserved remains of the old cemeteries. They were mainly people born there. They lived in the vicinity, and until 1939 created the local community with the Polish and Jewish populations. During the interviews a few elder inhabitants shared their traumatic experiences from the Nazi occupation time, when they witnessed their family and friends being killed by the neighbors. I also heard about peaceful coexistence of Poles and the German settlers.
- ¹³ Tadeusz Broniewski, *Historia architektury dla wszystkich*, ed. II, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 1980, p. 17.
- ¹⁴ ibidem, p. 17.
- ¹⁵ *Prze-myśleć estetykę* [Re-thinking Aesthetics, Rogue Essays on Aesthetics and the Arts], Arnold Berleant, Universitas, Warszawa 2007, p. 5

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