

WITOLD JURKIEWICZ

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Department of Fine Arts
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SUMMARY OF PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Description of activities in artistic, teaching and
organizational work

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'W. Jurkiewicz', located at the bottom right of the page.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

WITOLD JURKIEWICZ

Master's degree in pedagogy
Pedagogical University in Bydgoszcz
27.11.1981r.

Qualification theses of I - st degree
in the field of visual arts discipline art. graphics
Faculty of Graphics and Painting at the Wladyslaw Strzeminski Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz
Doctoral thesis: Document Subjective
09.05.1997r.

Since 1987 to 1989. an assistant
Since 1990. to 1997. a senior assistant
Since 1998. to 2008. as a lecturer
Since 2008. to this day the position of senior lecturer
The Department of Fine Arts Intermedia at the Faculty of Fine Arts
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun

In compliance with formal requirements, I submit a set of photographic works entitled:
"SIGNS OF REMINISCENCE AND IDENTITY OF EASTERN BORDERLANDS" as aspiring to
fulfill the requirements indicated in art 16, section 2 of the Act of March 14th, 2003 on academic
degrees and academic titles, as well as on degrees and title in the scope of arts
(Dz. U. [Official Journal] no. 65, item 595 as amended).



PHOTOGRAPHY – SELF-REFLECTION – ATTEMPT OF A DEFINITION

Looking back with the perspective of many years I realize that my photography has often been a difficult dialogue with the reality surrounding us. Honesty towards my own work and myself has been both sustenance and a guide on this journey.

I am aware that to remain faithful to my way of observing is always a challenge that transcends the literal and symbolic meaning. All of my creativity I surrender to photography, whose chief feature is its intricately woven possibility of representing the world since the beginning of my artistic path.

The thought of reaching the goal without shortcuts was always on my mind. I try to keep my work to reflect this kind of bond that is between me and my surrounding reality. I am aware that, if I lose this, I will also lose point of focus.

Photography is a mystery and a bridge – connecting an image to fleeting, often elusive moments. Photography, as well as any art form, is linked closely to the internal and external life, which can not be clearly determined.

I believe there should be no ready-made prescriptions, canons and diagrams defining a style. If it were so, artists would not exist, there would only be craftsmen. Artistic creation is derived from our emotional and intellectual state of mind and commitment. Therefore, the principle, that photographic value is primarily determined by an authors' chosen style of viewing reality, still continues to be applicable.

I don't see photography as a direct reflection of reality, rather I believe it is really a reflection of our emotions while recording observed reality. Photography treats this reality fragmentarily, in terms of time, space and viewing direction. The captured image is so arbitrary, that it is hard to say that the image reflects reality. Photography actually reflects how we perceive this reality.



PHOTOGRAPHY - BEGINNINGS

Photography has been part of my life from an early age. My first camera as a teenager was a Smiena 8 and later I used a Zorka S. I recorded family events, festivities, weddings, funerals, processions, interiors, courtyards, Prussian architecture of the old Masuria, which was the location of my childhood and school years.

Prof. Stefan Wojnecki evaluating my artistic achievements associated with these qualifying for Master's degree, wrote:

"Witold Jurkiewicz was a child prodigy of Polish photography. He began photographing at the age of 13 years. In retrospect, his early works retain their value. They show the world well-known from the incredible associations, revealing hardly visible wealth of coexistence of the different behaviors. The author himself admits that now he can not take photographs the same way as he used to. I think this statement is a half-truth, because his subsequent artistic activity tells a different story. The groundbreaking exhibition of polish photojournalism, 1-st National Review Sociological Photography took place in Bielsko-Biala in 1980. This is where Jurkiewicz presented his photographic essays of everyday life. This exhibition was the pinnacle of polish photojournalism, far ahead in exposing the truth of being so advertised today in the West Lithuanian or Russian achievement ".²

In recognition of my chosen creative path and motivation for further activity, I received the Jan Bułhak award for outstanding creative achievements in the field of photography, presented in 1997 by the Board of the Association of Polish Art Photographers in Warsaw.

Closing this period I began the search for my own identity and roots. Artistic journeys from this point were to be focused on my family roots in the Eastern Borderland and Lithuania. Knowing the language gave my greater access within the Vilnius region, central Lithuania, Żmudź and Suwalkija. I photographed extensively forging a new path marked by personal signs and symbols. These became road markers in my relationship with the place, its history, culture and its ties to my family. This journey has allowed me to discover surprising new and unknown to me images which previously existed only in my memory and presumption.



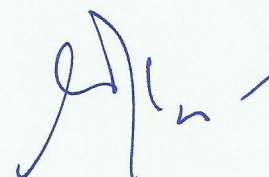
With age we perceive differently the passage of time. Life experiences and learned lessons are providing me with a proof that leads me to want to discover my own roots, the land of my ancestors. My late friend, Mariusz Hermanowicz, artist photographer, always urged me to return to the Borderlands, where he also discovered his ancestry.

The Polish-Lithuanian Borderland is a unique area worth of deeper acknowledgement and research. In this area aside from Polish people also lived cultural minorities such as Lithuanians, Belarusians, Jews, Tatars and Old Believers. This frontier mixture of cultures, customs and languages with their penetrating effects of different beliefs, have been preserved to this day in the existing Orthodox churches, mosques and synagogues. I am very intrigued by this area of coexistence of nations not only from the creative point of view, but also personally. I often ask myself - who am I? Polish, Lithuanian, or perhaps a Balt.

I am engrossed by the history of the Balts, Prussian - Lithuanian Yotvingians, who lived in the area between the rivers, Biebrza, Niemen, Leg, Šešupė and lakes, Śniardwy and Mamry in the Middle Ages. Their traces exist today not only in the ground, but they are present in the local dialect as well. I am fascinated by the living tradition and mystery of Borderland, legend of "mythical Lithuania". My desire to return to the country of my childhood, to the "little homelands" depicted by Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Konwicky or Milosz, increases in me with each journey.

Another area of my creative interests, closely associated with the first stage, is the Polish-Belarusian and Polish-Ukrainian borderland. After receiving an invitation from the Department of Cultural Studies of University of A.S. Pushkin in Brest, I was able to freely move in the closely guarded border areas. I made dozens of unique photographs in the land of historical events of the Second Republic of Poland.

Again I encountered traces of Polish identity and national heritage coexisting with the local customs, culture and religion. An example is the "mixed speech" and mixed religions, where families often celebrate Catholic and Orthodox observances. The unique presence of images of the Catholic and Orthodox icons in the present Orthodox church in Wistycze, which in times of XV - XVIII century was a Catholic temple of Cistercian order, is a proof that not everything has been irretrievably lost. They represent the last residue in the history of our multinational and multicultural "Borderland".

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SIGNS OF REMINISCENCE – IDENTITY OF EASTERN BORDERLANDS

The places I photographed in recent years seem to have a lot in common, although they are scattered over a vast area of north-eastern Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. I find in them similarities in the buildings, in the scenes of provincial life, elements of the landscape and appearance of people.

Images recorded during my travels speak of the past which has survived in various forms and profoundly affects the condition of the present time. Of course, many photographs can also function as documentation of traces of culture in the former eastern territories of the First and Second Republic, but I depend more on the overall reflection. The confirmation of this comes through the chosen method of presentation and means of expression, which provide a wider field of associations.

Many of my photographs are evocative of the paintings of the Romantic era, which often depicted ruins of churches and castles, appealing to the forces of nature or the value of a simple country life. Artists of that era wanted to take the lead in rebuilding the spiritual life. I agree with their position and believe in the constructive role of art.

The areas of my documentary work have been subjected to multiple wartime destructions and harassments against cultural and religious traditions. The gradual recovery currently taking place is creating a new facade, which is also an expression of the genuine needs of the local people.

In my photographs I present the signs of the past existing primarily in sacred buildings, monuments and public spaces, which are of interest mainly as symbols of elementary timeless human needs. I record poor chapels by village huts and crossroads as well as representative objects of lofty art.

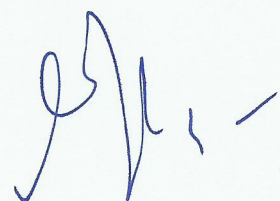
In many works I utilize an extensive depth of field and I spread it fairly evenly between the accents of the presented parts of the scenery, which creates additional layers for the existence of interrelated multidimensional views.



As well as motives of architecture and sculpture, also important to me is the theme of man and his relationship with nature, expressed through primary - almost archetypal - activities. The cultivation of the land, gathering crops, the usual situations of everyday bustle are as significant as the religious rites.

The places documented on my photographs are often the last of the unique, multiethnic and multicultural remnant of the Republic in the history of our continent. The images reflect the present appearance of the Borderlands, where there is still an atmosphere of mysterious and unique charm.

While discovering Polish identity and heritage, I reveal at the same time the existing heritage of Mazury, Prussia, Lithuania, Belorussia and Ukraine. Taking into account the considerations of my own identity, I realize that I am one of the representatives of the generation that is the heir to the landscape, culture and remembrance, which restores historical and personal continuity to this land and its people.



SUMMARY OF ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS

With many years of travel to places of my birth, youth and the country of my ancestors, I created personal collection of works², which I presented in the following exhibitions:

“BORDERLANDS - 2005 - 2008” – B & B Gallery - Bielsko Biala -2008

“PEOPLE / PLACES / SIGNS” – Regional Museum - Suwałki - 2013

“RETAINED TIME” – Gallery in the White Synagogue - "Borderland – Centre of arts , cultures, nations " - Sejny - 2014

“LOOKING AT THE BORDERLANDS” – Museum of History - Sanok - 2014

“SIGNS OF REMINISCENCE” – House of Polish Culture - Vilnius - 2015

Below are some quotes by the reviewers of my creativity:

Prof. dr. Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, Polish art historian and art critic:

"Jurkiewicz often emphasizes that photography is a way of life. His photographs are a truthful testimony of the astute observer of the surrounding reality, but also loaded with baggage of family experiences, which are the result of historical changes that have transformed and severed forever the continuity of tradition and attachment to the family of the Borderlands. His photographs are full of reflection and respect for the man, regardless of his own and his family's experiences. They confirm poetic look at the surrounding world, sensitivity to changing landscapes, on the passing of time and forgotten life experiences"³.

Eliza Ptaszyńska, art historian, curator of the Regional Museum in Suwałki:

"The trend of Jurkiewicz's photographic works is described by the art critics as "humanistic photography. The photographer looks at people, their lives and the environment with interest and without judgement. The scenes in the photographs by Jurkiewicz in the visual dimension are documentaries, but also, at first glance, they encapsulate deeper metaphorical or psychological meaning. We can sense the energy of life behind the realistically depicted. The artist looks at the world with careful tenderness. Reading it's emotions, approaching, without compromising the natural, intimate borders with man, and with nature he creates "intimate photographs" "⁴.



Andrzej Baturo, artist photographer, curator:

"The collection of photographs "Eastern Borderlands" brought fame to the artist. Witold Jurkiewicz was known as a versatile photographer. His works are characterized by a combination of landscape, social and creative photography. This diversity is exposing the unique atmosphere and climate of exhibitions Jurkiewicz is presenting. For the viewer they are difficult to define unambiguously, because the idea oscillates somewhere between documentary and creative photography. However, this unique feature is the charm of his photographs, his extraordinary sense of observation and poetic processing skills of reality and the ease with which he manages to extract the beauty enchanted in everyday things"⁵.

Dorothy Szomko-Osełkowska, art historian, curator of the Historical Museum in Sanok:

"The period of presenting the exhibition "Looking at the Borderlands" in our museum was the best in terms of attendance - the exhibition was visited by 26 680 people. I think this is a good result. I know that the exhibit was well received, raised a lot of excitement, visitors did not pass by these photographs with indifference"⁶.

¹ Prof. Stefan Wojnecki - Evaluation of the interview, artistic achievements and teaching by Witold Jurkiewicz, MBA., drawn up in connection with the qualifying degree in the field of visual arts, graphics and discipline specialty photography, initiated by the Council of the Faculty of Graphics and Painting Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz.

² Strona internetowa: <http://witoldjurkiewicz.zenfolio.com/>
<http://witoldjurkiewicz.zenfolio.com/exhibitions>

³ Prof. dr. Jan Wiktor Sienkiewicz, "SIGNS OF REMINSCENCE" in photography by Witold Jurkiewicz.

⁴ Eliza Ptaszyńska, "RETAINED TIME", by Witold Jurkiewicz in the White Synagogue in Sejny, op. Cit.

⁵ Andrzej Baturo, "EASTERN BORDERLANDS – 2005 - .2008"

⁶ Dorota Szomko-Osełkowska, curator, Museum of History in Sanok



EDUCATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS


After completing my First Degree qualifications, Professor Witold Chmielewski, Head of the Fine Arts Intermedia Department entrusted me with running the photography department. At that time I began developing new programs for graduate students. These programs were designed to familiarize students with the basic elements of traditional photography. Subjects included recording of three-dimensional space onto a plane, problems of recording time/motion and the relationships and contexts between recording, registration and interpretation of the photographs.

The process of basic and advanced methodology alluded to the classic photographic styles, such as portrait, nude, staged photography, advertising and documentary. Students consciously and creatively referred to traditional photography in order to develop their individual sensitivities in the perception of the world. Suggested topics of exercises became the starting point and a pretext for experiments and answers to the versatile and timeless concepts.

In connection with the establishment of a new direction at the Faculty of Fine Arts - Media Arts and Art Education in 2013, I developed a new curriculum including advertising and unique photography. I observed new generations of students who are fully digital carrying out with great interest the process of developing negatives and positive prints on light sensitive materials.

During the course of portraiture, I introduced the use of large format photography. Students first made large format paper negatives and then developed contact prints. Using this method, students achieved interesting results as in addition the texture of paper was also transferred to the images. These experiments are very inspiring and helpful in the discovery of new aspects of photography. In contrast to digital photography, these so-called historical classic techniques produce results unique in every print.

Since 2000, I have promoted 7 annexes in the field of photography to Master's degree candidates in the faculty of Fine Arts and Graphics , 15 undergraduate diplomas in photography at the Media Art and Media Art Education. I was also a reviewer for 21 theses.



As part of the photographic workshops, I completed 6 retreats for students titled "In the footsteps of Leon Wyczółkowski" which took place in Wierzchlas – an area of Old Polish Cedars.

From 2006 – 2012, I led a workshop in the former Tsarist apartments at the station in Aleksandrów, located on the former border of the Polish Kingdom with Russia and Prussia.

I was the main organizer of the project II Science and Art Festival in Toruń, called "Classified Image - The Image Declassified" (2002) and IX Science and Art Festival in Toruń , called "Alternative Photography On Unconventional Substrates" (2011).

I led photography workshops in Gołdap (2005) and in Guja Little (2012). I prepared the exhibition of my graduate students –“Situations of Light "(2013) “Knitted Graces" (2014), “United Waterways "(2014), and the collective exhibition of students' – “Faces of Photography" in the Gallery of the House of Muses in Toruń (2016).

In the future, my creative intention is to explore with students the ancient "Amber Trail " in the region of Kaliningrad and in the vicinity of the former Królewiec.

Witold Jurkiewicz

