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### **The Birth of Polish Modern Art from the Spirit of Folklore**

The mythical birth of Polish avant-garde took place exactly one hundred years ago. In Cracow a group of artists manifested the new, progressive tendencies in art during The First Exhibition of Polish Expressionists (since 1919 they were known as The Formists). That term, expressionism, was used in a sense that was quite common in Central Europe during the second decade of the 20th century, namely as a fusion of groundbreaking movements of the first Avant-garde (compare the circle of Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm*). The same usage can be observed in the Polish territories.

Since the earliest stages of Formists' career folklore accompanied modern art. An interest in folk art of Polish young modern art reached a culminating point during the exhibition of 1917, when in The Palace of Art, among the modernist paintings or graphics, the traditional glass painting made by Gorals (Polish Highlanders) was displayed. Folklore became thereby a programme component of Polish modernity, which had some prefigurations in the 19th century, especially at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (compare a crucial role of Stanisław Wyspiański in Cracow – who became a professor for many Formists – and his interest in primitive culture of Lesser Poland's countryside).

The gesture of Cracow artists opens a discussion about nature of Polish modernity and modernity in general. In many narrations about European modernism a case of primitivism takes a pivotal position. Non-European sculpture helped at the beginning of 20th century to transgress boundaries of classical modernism and abandon realistic imitation of nature. An experience of primitive sculpture of Oceania or Africa were unknown to the Polish modernists. What performed that role there was the culture and painting of Polish Gorals.

Formism as an incoherent movement had no sharp and clear aesthetic categories and according to that its intellectual and style panorama creates a pluralist picture. Leading term, which can be observed in the Formists' oeuvre and theoretical statements, is anti-naturalism. Following an art history discourse is to discover that the mentioned glass painting played a role as a catalyst of new tendencies.

In today's reception their art seems fully avant-garde (in comparison to western "-isms"), apart from that, a classical element (in an anti-avant-garde sense) can be discovered. Formists' classicism embodies a great tradition of the 19th century, which finds its crowning achievement in Paul Cézanne's oeuvre, who surprisingly became the father not only to classical tendencies in art of first decades of the century, but anti-classical and iconoclastic as well. The works of one of the most important painters from this circle, Zbigniew Pronaszko, show perfectly the dialectics of rebellion and tradition. Pronaszko, in his classical (avant-garde) period, used two main roads. Once it was a road of classicism, another time it was a way of expressionism (in an anti-naturalist meaning). Those dialectics characterise in the best way the paradox of Polish modernity, from among other categories. Many other trains can be undertaken from here: the case of Polish Romanticism's continuation, the inheritance of so-called Young Poland, the inspirations coming from other disciplines (for example theater, science), the reception of western and eastern "-isms". Primitivism of Gorals' art belongs to them and constitutes one of the most important myths.

My intention is to investigate the constructs that stay behind the paradigm of Formists' primitivism in artworks, art theory and in the vision established by art history as a discipline. Already in their manifesto texts, Formists had no clear vision and now dual attitude is observed in the art theory. Likewise, art history sees the primitivism of formism in many ways. The examination of art works' visuality do not bring the definite results as well. All of them create the unique myth about the birth of Polish modernity