

ART AS AN ESCAPE FROM TECHNOLOGY



Prof. Andrzej Jajszczyk

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We talk with **Prof. Andrzej Jajszczyk** about his encounter with the historic ethnic group of Slovincians, his friendship with film director Andrzej Wajda, and his fascination with Japanese culture.

Do you think there is a relationship between art and science? Can technology serve as a tool driving this relationship?

ANDRZEJ JAJSZCZYK: Art is an expression of creativity, imagination, or a combination of both. Similarly, we may describe technology as a sub-field of the arts, since creating it requires these traits. In a sense, art is the result of the application of certain skills, which happens to have aesthetic values. I have written about many dimensions of the relationship between art and technology, such as technological artefacts as artworks, technology as a means of expression in art, technology as the subject of art and technology used in the documentation and conservation of artworks, in an article entitled *Technology vs. the Manggha Centre* published alongside the annual report of the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in 2006. In summary, many technological artefacts can be categorized as artworks purely in view of their aesthetics, for example architectural elements or vehicles. Many products available today have been carefully designed, therefore we are surrounded by beautiful furniture, electronics and other trinkets.

Since our earliest days, humankind has been using technology when making art. Musical instruments require the use of technology, from the simplest drums and string instruments to state-of-the-art electronic instruments. It's also impossible to imagine modern music concerts without microphones, amps, huge speakers, and lights. Technology has also played a crucial role in the development of painting and sculpture. It opens up fields previously exclusive to traditional methods of depicting images, now competing with photography and the increasingly popular video installations. Without technology there would be no cinema or computer animation.

Artists have always been fascinated by technological artefacts, with the two fields intertwining for centuries. It's difficult to say whether Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of machines are works of art or an

engineer's sketches. Myriad artworks depict technological achievements such as buildings, bridges and means of transport.

Using technology for the documentation and conservation of artwork is invaluable. Virtual reality systems allow us to admire items which cannot be exhibited directly for conservation reasons, and even to "visit" digital reconstructions of items which no longer exist. And the Internet gives billions of people all over the globe access to countless artists and their works.

You are a professor of technical science – where does your interest in art stem from?

My parents, in particular my father – an officer in the air force – were interested in architecture and art. We had many books at home, we visited museums, I went to an art club. I was heavily influenced at my high school in Poznań, in particular by trips and activities at the school's Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society club and its photography club. Both were run by the terrific chemistry teachers Maria Wallis – she had a great mind and a great heart. One of my friends was Roman Słowiński, the most talented photographer at the club and now Vice-President of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Both clubs also set me off on an incredible adventure with folk culture. In the summer of 1968 I joined a group of friends for a bicycle camp in a rural area of Pomerania between lakes Gardno and Łebsko, inhabited by a West Slavic tribe known as Slovincians. We were asked by the Museum of Central Pomerania in Słupsk to spend time with them to collect information and artefacts. There were only a handful of Slovincians remaining in the area; their language and culture somehow survived for hundreds of years despite being something of an enclave among Germans, and they were almost entirely wiped out during the Second World War and post-war turmoil. This made them, especially older people, very distrustful of outsiders.

This made it difficult to conduct any ethnographic research, yet time was fast running out if we were to record any remnants of the language or collect information about the lives and customs of this shrinking population. The museum came up with the idea of sending teenagers to try to befriend the community, and it worked. The local fishermen, beekeepers, and farmers were happy to talk to us and sometimes allowed us to record them speaking. We noted down Slovincian words, mainly relating to local traditions and customs. Our new friends gave us things such as tools they no longer used – fishing tackle, glass floats for netting, wood and metal ice skates they used in winter to reach their fishing grounds in the local lakes, straw beehives. We handed them over to the Open-Air Museum of Slovincian Villages in Kluki, a branch of the Museum of Central Pomerania. We were allowed to keep some of the treasures, and we used them and the many photos we took as exhibits at a large exhibition held at our high school after the summer. It really was the final moment to capture the remnants of this culture, because in the early 1970s the remaining Slovincians moved away to Germany as part of a campaign of reuniting families.

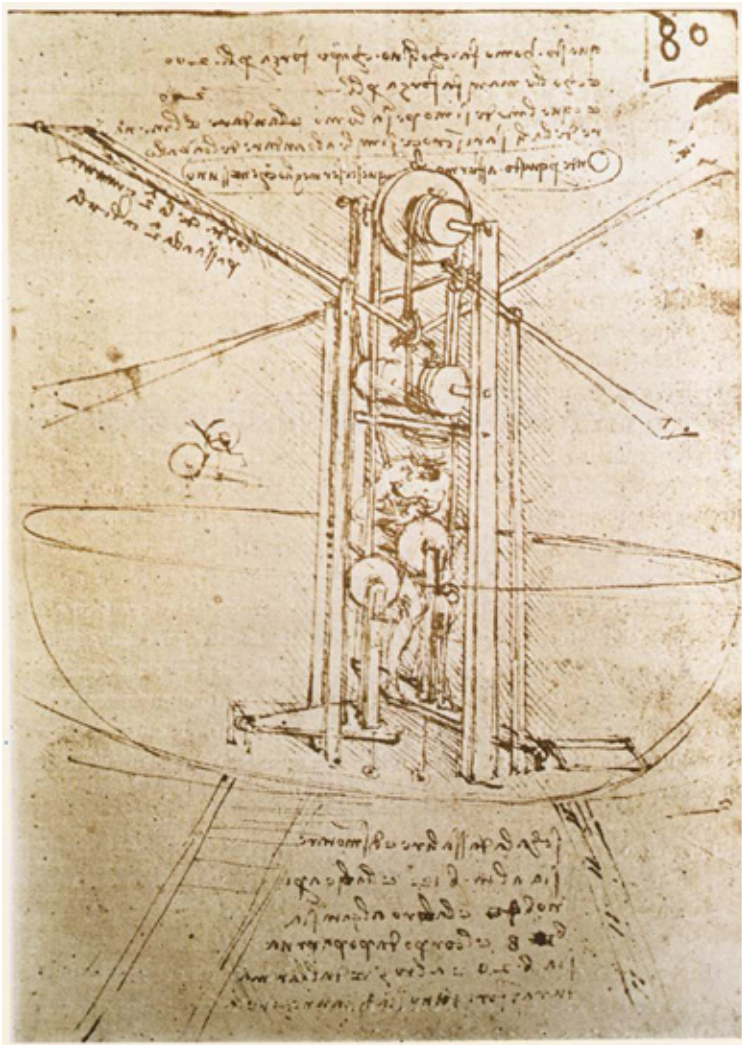
My experiences from the villages of Kluki, Smółdżino, Gardno, Izbica, and Smółdziński Las fueled my fascination with ethnography. I was seriously considering studying ethnography at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań to join the strong research group led by Prof. Józef Burszta. My interest in exact science won over in the end, and I enrolled at the Poznań University of Technology.

My interest in art has been heavily influenced by my friend Janusz Pałubicki. He graduated from the Faculty of Art at the Adam Mickiewicz University and was an active member of the opposition during the days of the first Solidarity trade union and martial law in the early 1980s. We visited many largely unknown places in the Wielkopolska region – churches, manor houses, castles – and Janusz talked extensively about art. We noted down the condition of the buildings and listed important elements which were preserved. At the turn of the 1970s, Janusz used these documents to prepare a social register of the condition and fittings of fading historic buildings in Wielkopolska.

These days I am able to admire many beautiful artworks in all corners of the globe during holidays and business trips.

You are actively involved with museums, exhibitions and art more generally. What drives this, and what do you get out of it?

It's certainly driven by my interest in art including architecture and urbanism. Since I moved from Poznań to Kraków in 1999, I have been getting to know my new home. I published a series of articles in the local press where I critiqued certain aspects of Kraków's



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development. Since then I've been invited to various discussions about the Małopolska region's capital, including ones concerning art in particular, and I've met professionals from artistic circles. As an outsider, I proved to be a valuable contributor to debates, bringing no professional or personal hang-ups, especially given that I could share my opinions about various art exhibitions, in particular of contemporary art, which I've visited all over the globe. I was invited to sit on the board of the Kyoto – Kraków Foundation, and I later became a member of its management committee. I served a term as Member of the Board at the National Museum in Kraków, working alongside people such as Maria Dzielska, Jan Ostrowski, Stanisław Waltoś and Franciszek Ziejka. Currently I'm delighted to be a Member of the Board of the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology.

Interacting with art takes me away from everyday problems, and being involved with the artistic world, in particular by participating in museum boards, gives me great satisfaction and brings me closer to artists and experts. As well as Manggha and the National

Leonardo da Vinci,
"Flying machine,"
ca. 1487,
Web Gallery of Art



GRZEGORZ MART, MANGGHA MUSEUM OF JAPANESE ART AND TECHNOLOGY

Manggha Museum
of Japanese Art
and Technology

Museum in Kraków, my other favorite places are the MOCAR Museum of Contemporary Art, the International Cultural Centre and the independent gallery *Otwarta Pracownia*.

I occasionally write about art, mainly reviewing exhibitions and other events and mostly aimed at my friends and family. Some of my articles have even appeared in print. All of them can be found on my website www.jajszczyk.pl.

**How did your adventure with Manggha start?
Have you always been a fan of Japanese culture?**

I first became interested in the culture and art of Japan when I first visited the country in 1990. To be perfectly honest, that trip was disappointing in many ways. I was expecting harmony between people, nature and architecture, and I found ugly, concrete, chaotic cities and disliked the crowds and the noise. But that's just a part of Japan's image. I gradually discovered enclaves of beautiful traditional architecture and gardens, and I learned how to understand the culture which is so different from our own. I admired buildings by contemporary Japanese architects and works by local engineers.

I first saw the distinctive building of the Manggha Museum in Kraków, designed by the acclaimed architect Arata Isozaki, soon after its completion. I'd stopped off in Kraków on my way back to Poznań from hiking in the Tatra Mountains. It was a cool, misty day. I stood at the foot of Wawel Castle and gazed over the Vistula at the looming, beautiful silhouette of the Centre of Japanese Art and Technology, funded by Andrzej Wajda and Krystyna Zachwatowicz-Wajda. I couldn't have dreamed that a few years later I would be so closely linked to the place.

The main event which led to this was a gathering at the special performance of *Hamlet*, directed by

Krzysztof Jasiński, at Kraków's STU Theatre. I met Andrzej Wajda over cocktails for artists and the audience after the show. We talked about Manggha, Japan, art. A few meetings later I was invited to join the board of the Kyoto – Kraków Foundation which provided the funding for the construction of the building I had been admiring a few years earlier.

The museum holds collections of art from Japan and other Eastern Asian countries, assembled by and donated to the city of Kraków by Feliks "Manggha" Jasiński. I was honored to be involved with the creation of other spaces at the Manggha complex, including the Japanese language school and the Europe – Far East Gallery. My ties with the Manggha Museum have also boosted my understanding of Japanese culture. Such an opportunity is available to all visitors to the museum, through exhibitions of early and contemporary Japanese art and its influence on artists from all over the globe, including Poland. And it's not just exhibitions: there are theatre performances, concerts, workshops, lectures and courses in tea ceremony and ikebana. All this has helped me understand Japanese culture much better when I visited the country again.

Members of the foundation's board include former Mayor of the City of Kraków and founder of Małopolska's branch of the Solidarity trade union Józef Lassota, director of the Manggha Museum Bogna Dziechciaruk-Maj, acclaimed architect Krzysztof Ingarden, art curator and historian Anna Król, veteran printmaker Ryszard Otręba, film historian Prof. Rafał Syska, publisher Henryk Woźniakowski, and former president of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal and former Polish Ombudsman Prof. Andrzej Zoll. Working alongside such great individuals is a fantastic intellectual experience. After a while I moved from the foundation's board to the management committee, where I now serve as vice-president. The foundation's first president was Andrzej Wajda, and the position was taken over by his wife Krystyna Zachwatowicz-Wajda after his death. We all work closely together and support talented students and the museum's activities.

My friendship with Andrzej and our long conversations have been one of the greatest things to have happened to me. Despite our age difference, our biographies are strikingly similar. Our fathers were both army officers, and we both spent our childhood in Radom – in fact I lived in the same apartment as he did! Andrzej waited there, as my mother also waited, for the return of their fathers, whose trail had stopped at the Soviet POW camp in Starobelsk. Now we know that they were both murdered by the NKVD in the Katyn massacre. And, to make the circle complete, in Kraków I now live on the same street where Andrzej – director of the movie "Katyn" – had spent some of the German occupation during WWII.

INTERVIEWED BY JUSTYNA ORŁOWSKA, PHD