**The Polish Sky**

The efforts of the Pomorskie Voivodship government have brought to you a work of art that is important to our identity. This way, on the Centennial of Poland’s independence, we will pay homage to all those who helped regain and maintain Gdańsk and Pomerania’s independence and their Polish identity. I hope that generations of Polish men and women will look at the *Polish Sky* in future centuries.

Mieczysław Struk

Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodship

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The idea for a patriotic painting at the Polish Gymnasium Middle School in Gdańsk goes back to 1938. The artists who took up the challenge of painting the ceiling of the school auditorium were Bolesław Cybis and Jan Zamoyski. The monumental 100 sq. m fresco was complemented with wall paintings by Stefan Płużański and Mieczysław Jurgielewicz. Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, the Germans took over the school building and destroyed all the parts of the painting. Everything was hacked off and plastered over in order to preclude any reconstruction.

Recreating the *Polish Sky* has become possible only today. The task was taken up by a team of staff and students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk. It was difficult because few photographs and documents showing the original painting have survived. The artists searched for photographs and descriptions online, in libraries and archives. They would often find fragments by chance, looking through old issues of illustrated magazines from throughout Poland. In-depth analysis, photograph quality enhancement and specialist software made it possible to piece together 99 percent of the *Polish Sky* from only slightly over a dozen rediscovered photographs which the team used to create first a black and white sketch and then a colour drawing. Printouts to scale helped to plot the painting on to the ceiling.

Precisely recreating the colour-scheme was a separate challenge. To this end, the Gdańsk team of artists went to Warsaw because in the 1930s the painters of the *Polish Sky* made another fresco there which has survived to this day. An examination the Warsaw painting made it possible to establish the type and tints of the paints used by Cybis and Zamoyski.

*This is how the Polish Sky was made in 1938*

*(archival photograph from the Bolesław Cybis family collection)*

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The reconstruction work took nine months, from August 2017 to April 2018.

The *Polish Sky* was recreated by:

team manager – Prof. Jacek Zdybel

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Both the renovation of the building and the recreation of the historical painting were funded by the Office of the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodship.

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**The Polish Gymnasium Middle School in Gdańsk** (from 1935 the Józef Piłsudski Gymnasium Middle School) was founded by the Polish Educational Society in Gdańsk, owing to the efforts of people like the writer Stanisław Przybyszewski and funding from the Polish community. It was housed in the former barracks in Am Weißen Turm 1 (now ul. Augustyńskiego 1). The school was officially opened on 13 May 1922.

This was the only Polish middle school in the Free City of Gdańsk. Over half of the students were the children of Polish officials working in Gdańsk. The curriculum included Polish language, history and culture. On the other hand, the schoolyear was similar to that followed in Germany at the time, beginning on 1 April and ending on 31 March (with a summer break in July and August). The education at the Gymnasium took nine years, but the first final exam took place as early as in 1927.

The school’s development was largely influenced by Jan Augustyński, who served as principal in 1925-1939. With his organisational skills, the Gymnasium acquired a number of excellently furnished classrooms and laboratories. The highly-qualified Polish teaching staff also provided a high quality education. Some of the teachers, such as Marcin Dragan and Władysław Pniewski, were active scholars and writers. The Gymnasium operated until 29 August 1939.

After World War II, the building became home first to the Gdańsk Technical Science School, then to the Mechanical-Electrical Technical College and a Lifelong Learning Centre. In 2014, the Pomorskie Voivodship Marshal’s Office purchased the building from the city. Following a thorough overhaul and conversion of the rooms, it now houses departments of the Voivodship Marshal’s Office.

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**What you can see in the *Polish Sky***

***Polish Sky* is an allegorical painting. The artists did not want to show battles or wars, but tried to discover and illustrate the spirit of the Polish national identity through painting. To express the values that every Pole has been instilled with and revered since their childhood. The idea for it to be a rendering of the sky was inspired by the ceiling where the painting was to be made.**

The 102.5 sq. m fresco by Cybis and Zamoyski shows a fragment of the sky visible above Poland. By analysing the shape and arrangement of the Milky Way on the plafond, it was found to be the sky from August 1937.

The sky’s Polish nature is also determined by the constellations named by Polish astronomers. The painting features such celestial objects as the constellation *Scutum Sobiescianum*, or Shield of Sobieski **(17)**, named so by the astronomer Hevelius in honour of the Polish king and the victory of the Polish Army in the Battle of Vienna; there is also the *Taurus Poniatovii*, orPoniatovski’s Bull **(14)**, named by Marcin Poczobutt-Odlanicki in honour of King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski. The artists also attempted to give a Polish facet to the constellation Hercules **(13)**, whose face is reminiscent of an Early Medieval warrior from the time of the Piast Dynasty with huge, handlebar whiskers.

The centre of the painting features Mother Poland, *Mater Polonia* **(A)**, in a white gown and a red sash that covers her thighs. Next to her sits a white eagle **(B)** with raised wings: the defender and guardian that looks her in the face. Surrounding them is an entire composition based on the form of a cross with an elliptical garland of very young beautiful girls in colourful fairy-tale and period costume. This is an apotheosis of joy, beauty, youth and recently regained independence.

Right next to *Mater* *Polonia* are the personifications of industry, trade and agriculture **(C)**: girls holding a factory, a ship and a wreath of grain, respectively. Above *Polonia*’s head are three other figures surrounding a harvest wreath which symbolises Poland’s affluence and peaceful stance. The central group is completed with four allegorical female figures outstretched like the arms of a cross.

The north arm is an apotheosis of Peace **(D)**, the girls painted there release doves, which rise above the main figure. The opposite, south pole, is the apotheosis of War **(E)**. You can see a woman with her arm raised above her head in a gesture of despair rather than praise. The raging bull at her feet is reminiscent of St George spearing the dragon.

To *Mater Polonia’s* right, the eastern side has the *geniuses* of the Liberal Arts **(G)**: fine arts with a figure of Apollo Belvedere, music and poetry with a laurel branch. The west side, in turn, features the *geniuses* of Science **(H)**: philosophy with a book, physics with an hourglass, mathematics and astronomy. It is worth noting that astronomy is the only figure in the painting with their face turned towards the heavens rather than to the viewer.

The painting’s centre is surrounded by personifications of Poland’s regions and large cities that make up four groups arranged into an ellipsis. North-eastern Poland is represented by Białystok, Vilnius and Grodno **(J)**, southern Poland by with Lwów (now Lviv), Cracow and Katowice **(K)**, central Poland by Kielce, Warsaw and Lublin **(L)**.The group of regions and cities of western Poland, next to the coats-of-arms of the Poznań and Pomeranian regions, contains the coat-of-arms of Gdańsk **(M)**.

The corners of the composition depict the four seasons.

Interestingly enough, most of the figures in the *Polish Sky*, some fifty in all, are women. There are only two male infants and three adult men. The first of them is the beautiful Apollo Belvedere in the form of a marble figurine held by the *genius* of the fine arts. The second is Hercules, depicted as a warrior of Poland’s royal Piast dynasty, symbolising bravery. Then there is Perseus **(5)**, the indomitable young man with the head of Medusa **(6)** strapped to his belt. It is worth mentioning that Medusa’s head, always depicted as a monstrosity, here looks more like a sun with a peculiar smile. Another curiosity is the dove painted on Medusa’s shield, which unnaturally turns its head in order not to look her in the eye (even though they are covered with a tunic for the safety of the viewers).

During the fresco’s reconstruction, after the plaster has been stripped to uncover its original layer, it became apparent that the Germans had obliterated the traces of the original painting very thoroughly. The plafond’s entire surface had been practically hacked off. The workers left only a roughly five-centimetre edge behind. On this tiny, strip the Gdańsk artists managed to find a fragment of a single small star **(N)**. It was uncovered and is visible in the restored painting.

The surviving edge also made it possible to establish the colours which Cybis and Zamoyski used to paint the sky itself, one of the painting’s most important elements.

The ceiling fresco is complemented with the paintings on the auditorium walls. To the left side of the entrance, the artists painted the historical River Vistula waterway leading from Cracow to Gdańsk, while to the right is the railway from Katowice to Gdynia.

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**Constellations**

(1) Ursa Major or the Great Bear

(2) **Lynx** – a constellation introduced by Johannes Hevelius in order to fill in the gap between the constellations Auriga, or the Charioteer, and the Great Bear. It first appeared in his posthumous *Prodromus Astronomiae* published in 1690. The Lynx is one of the most difficult constellations to spot. Hevelius coined the name as a reference to the lynx’s eyes that the observer would need to find it.

(3) Leo

(4) Taurus

(5) Perseus

(6) The head of Medusa

(7) **Musca or the** **Fly** – one of the most interesting constellations in what is now known as the northern part of the constellation Aries. It was introduced in 1612 by Dutchman Petrus Plancius as Apes (the Bee). The German astronomer Jakob Bartsch later changed the name to Vespa (the Wasp) in his map from 1624. Johannes Hevelius renamed the constellation Musca, or the Fly. The name appeared in his posthumous 1690 atlas *Firmamentum Sobiescianum*. The constellation later became known as Musca Borealis in order to differentiate it from the constellation Musca Australis in the southern sky. Eventually, the northern Fly, unlike its southern cousin, was forgotten by astronomers

(8) Aries

(9) Cassiopeia

(10) Ursa Minor or the Little Bear

(11) Draco

(12) Cygnus

(13) Hercules

(14) **Poniatovski’s Bull** (Latin Taurus Poniatovii), a constellation named in honour of King Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski by the Polish astronomer and rector of Vilnius University Marcin Poczobutt-Odlanicki in 1777. It is made up of stars from the south-eastern part of the constellation Ophiuchus, the Serpent-Bearer, and the western part of Aquila the Eagle. Next to the Shield of Sobieski, this was the only constellation named after a real figure from Polish history. The name refers to the Ciołek, or Calf, coat-of-arms of the Poniatowski family.

(15) **Vulpecula or the Little Fox** is a faint constellation in the northern sky introduced in 1687 by the Gdańsk astronomer Johannes Hevelius. Initially, the entire constellation was called Vulpecula cum Ansere, or the Little Fox with the Goose (the goose was in the fox’s mouth). After the constellation was renamed Vulpecula, or the Fox, the Goose remained as the name of its brightest star: Anser.

(16) Aquila or the Eagle

(17) **Shield of** **Sobieski** (Latin Scutum Sobiescianum) is a constellation in the southern sky near the celestial equator. It is one of the smallest constellations. It was introduced by Johannes Hevelius in 1684 in honour of the Gdańsk astronomer’s most esteemed patron, King John III Sobieski, after his famous victory at the Battle of Vienna. It is one of the 88 modern constellations.

(18) Delphinus

(19) Pegasus

(20) Andromeda

(21) Corona Borealis