

Justyna Budzik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3530-0647>
Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland
Justyna.budzik@uj.edu.pl

Perspectives on Art in the Reflections of Polish Émigré Writers

The article presents an overview of the perspectives on art taken by Polish émigré writers who either settled in the United States or Canada, or who lived on the North American continent for a period of time. The author juxtaposes the reflections on art of Polish émigré poets such as Anna Frajlich, Andrzej Busza and Waław Iwaniuk, as expressed in their poetry, with the understanding of art as presented in the American essays written by Julia Hartwig and Wojciech Karpiński. Though their texts belong to separate literary genres, together they create a more complex overview of reflections on the special relationship between a piece of art and a writer contemplating it. In this study the author examines the correlation between visual perception and visual thinking of each writer and focuses also on the idea of visual imagination.

Keywords: Polish émigré writing, art, visual perception, visual thinking

In his collection of poems titled *Dalsze okolice* ("Farther Surroundings"), published in 1991, Czesław Miłosz turned to art by writing about William Turner, John Constable and Jean Baptiste Camille Corot. He conflated his reflection on artistic expression with a philosophical trope and a question about the condition of the contemporary world and of the work of art

which — unlike its creator (the artist) — transcends the boundaries of time and always stands above it. The poet commented as follows:

— Any form — says Baudelaire —
 Even the one created by man,
 Is immortal. Once there was an artist
 Faithful and diligent. His studio
 Burnt down with everything he had painted;
 He was executed. No one heard of him.
 But his paintings stand above time. On the other side of the fire.
 (Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, 990)¹

Interestingly, this statement is divided into five separate parts — A conversation, Mr de Balzac, Turner, Constable and Corot — and it might have been influenced by the poet's visit to the Yale University Gallery, which Miłosz himself suggested at the beginning of this poem by mentioning that he was sitting near the gallery and talking with Brodsky and Venclova at the end of the millennium.

In this paper, I primarily aim to present an overview of the perspectives on art taken by Polish émigré writers who either settled in the United States or Canada, or who lived on the North American continent for a period of time. My objective is to juxtapose the reflections on art of Polish émigré poets such as Anna Frajlich (born in 1942), Andrzej Busza (born in 1938) and Waław Iwaniuk (1912-2001), as expressed in their poetry, with the understanding of art as presented in the American essays written by Julia Hartwig (1921-2017)² and Wojciech Karpiński (1943-2020). Though their texts belong to separate literary genres, they complement one another perfectly and together create a more complex overview of reflections on the special relationship between a piece of art and a writer contemplating it. In my analysis, I assume that for each author presented in this study, the perception of art, broadly conceived, was shaped by different life circumstances. Above all, this was influenced by the writers' individual predispositions regarding how they decoded and interpreted visual (artistic) signs and inscribed them into their own life experiences. It is my intention to examine the correlation between visual perception and visual thinking of each writer by referring to the formula "I can see it", which was expressed by Anna Frajlich in one of her interviews. Therefore, my methodology is based, on the one hand, on the understanding of image as proposed by Rudolf Arnheim, who broadly

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the poems I cite are my own.

² In Hartwig's case, I also comment on one of her poems.

elaborated on the correspondence between visual perception and visual thinking in his monograph titled "Visual Thinking", and — on the other — on the idea of visual imagination which may be linked to the conception of sensory image, as defined by J.J. Wunenburger. The former methodological approach corresponds mainly to the ways in which Anna Frajlich, Wojciech Karpiński, Julia Hartwig and Waclaw Iwaniuk perceive art, while the latter refers to Andrzej Busza's ways of viewing it. At each stage of this study, I am going to analyze how the aforementioned writers experienced art and what determined their idiosyncratic ways of viewing it and thinking about it. I take into consideration the biographical contexts that are closely linked to this paper's main topic, which — for this reason — are going to be presented in more detail, in order to showcase the evident influence that they must have exerted on the writers' perception of art, as well as on the ways in which they contemplated it. Therefore, I have divided my analysis into two separate sections. In the first one, I recall some biographical facts from the lives of the writers whose works I am about to analyze. In the second one, I study the ways in which art was commented on — from multiple perspectives — by each of the writers. Although Czesław Miłosz's reflections on this phenomenon are considered a significant point of reference, they are not the main frame of my analysis. This derives from the fact that his unique understanding of art has been the subject of extensive studies³, and, as such, it is far better known than Busza's, Frajlich's and Iwaniuk's commentaries. This is despite the fact that their poetry has been widely discussed by literary critics, particularly regarding their émigré writing. For example, in the case of Iwaniuk, this aspect of his poetry has garnered little critical attention. Even when it has been mentioned in academic papers or monographs, it is usually presented alongside other prominent themes in Iwaniuk's poetic oeuvre, such as the loneliness of exile and the feelings of homelessness and uprootedness in one's adopted land.

The lyrical works which are the subject of analysis here can be seen as examples of classical ekphrases, works comprised of ekphrastic elements or poems which display a poetic hypotyposis. All in all, they are part of a rich tradition of poetic ekphrasis present in both Polish and Anglo-American literature. In the former, it can be found in the works of Zbigniew Herbert, Stanisław Grochowiak, Tadeusz Kubiak, Wisława Szymborska and Kazimierz Wierzyński, and in the latter, the most evident and oft-cited examples were provided by John Keats, Wystan Hugh Auden, John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Marianne Moore, Adrienne Rich and William Carlos Williams.

³ More in: Dryglas-Komorowska; Fiut.

As defined by Adam Dziadek, ekphrasis is a literary work that comprises certain meta-lingual characteristics that "(...) lead us directly to a specific painterly, sculptural or architectural piece of art. Often, a text takes its title from a piece of art (...) or the title appears in the subtitle of a poem or in its verses" (Dziadek, 50). I also consider texts that Dziadek identifies as poetic ekphrases. These works use elements describing a piece of art, often leaving clues that directly connect the text to a specific artwork. For example, the title and description in W.H. Auden's *Musée des Beaux Arts* clearly link it to Brueghel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus". Similarly, the title of Frank O'Hara's poem, "On Seeing Larry Rivers' 'Washington Crossing the Delaware' at the Museum of Modern Art", leaves no ambiguity about its subject (Dziadek, 51). Seweryna Wysłouch's conclusions on our understanding of ekphrases resonate in a similar fashion. The scholar notes that "(...) in an ekphrasis, a description is a basic poetic means that aims 'to paint with words'" (Wysłouch, 50). W.J.T. Mitchell's reflections provide a more general understanding of the nature of ekphrasis. The author of the seminal monograph "Picture Theory" notes that "ekphrastic poetry is a genre in which texts encounter their own semiotic 'others'; those rival, alien modes of representation called the visual, graphic, plastic or 'spatial' art" (Mitchell, 156).

Last but not least, in this paper I also focus on poems which may be defined as hypotyposis, as they employ a description which only "(...) indirectly evokes a piece of painting and encourages the reader to define the criteria to help them find the painterly traits in a text without resorting to a simple analogy" (Dziadek, 76).⁴

This analysis embraces all of the cases of "ekphrastic encounters" and aims to decode the perspectives from which Polish writers view art, which, as Miłosz says, is safely located "on the other side of the fire".

Biographical contexts

Czesław Miłosz and Waclaw Iwaniuk, two men from the same generation (Miłosz was only one year older), arrived on the North American continent almost at the same time, but in completely different circumstances. Miłosz's first American period began in 1945, when he accepted the Polish communist government's offer to be cultural attaché at the Consulate General in New York and subsequently the second secretary of the Embassy of

⁴ More about ekphrasis in: Bilman; Cheeke; Grodecka; Heffernan; Wysłouch.

the Republic of Poland in Washington.⁵ His American period came to an end around the year 1993, when he returned to Krakow for good. Iwaniuk's situation in the 1940s was completely different. The author of "Evenings on Lake Ontario, From My Canadian Diary" (originally written in English) and dozens of collections of poems published since the 1930s in Poland, Paris, London and Toronto was part of the war migration; he actively participated in World War II.⁶ After the war, Iwaniuk lived in Great Britain, but in 1948 he decided to move to Edmonton, Alberta, and a year later, he settled down in Toronto. His émigré period actually never ended — the author of "Evenings on Lake Ontario" never returned to Poland.

The circumstances in which Andrzej Busza left his birthplace of Krakow do not coincide with the émigré biographies of Miłosz, Iwaniuk and Frajlich. In 1939, when he was less than a year old, Busza left Poland with his mother and her brother, Wit Tarnawski (one of the first translators of Joseph Conrad from English into Polish). Travelling through Romania and Cyprus, the family arrived in the Middle East (Palestine). Busza spent nearly eight years of his childhood there, after which the family decided to emigrate to Great Britain — London. Once in London, Busza attended primary school and went on to pursue a degree in English Philology at University College, London. This British period was significant for him as a poet, as in London, Busza and other Polish émigré writers formed the *Kontynenty* ("Continents") poetry group.⁷ Then, in 1963, he made his first fully autonomous decision to emigrate to Vancouver, where one of his close friends and poets, Bogdan Czaykowski, had already settled. They were offered posts at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver: Busza at the Department of English Language and Literatures and Czaykowski at the Department of Slavic Studies.

⁵ In the early 1950s, Miłosz decided to break with the Polish communist regime and applied for asylum in France. He returned to the United States in the early 1960s and assumed an academic post as a lecturer in Polish literature at the University of California in Berkeley.

⁶ In the wake of World War II, Iwaniuk terminated his consular internships in Buenos Aires and in 1939 he joined the *Samodzielna Brygada Strzelców Podhalańskich* (Independent Podhale Rifle Brigade) in France. He went on the warpath with General Maczek's First Division in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. His war trauma was further exacerbated by his imprisonment in Figueres and the Miranda de Ebro camp.

⁷ Bogdan Czaykowski, Adam Czerniawski, Bolesław Taborski, Janusz A. Ihnatowicz, Jan Darowski, Mieczysław Paszkiewicz, Ewa Dietrich, Maria Badowicz and Ludwik F. Buyno also belonged to the *Kontynenty* poetry group.

Anna Frajlich and her husband Władysław Zając were part of the March '68 wave of emigration. This was undeniably an unwanted experience due to political circumstances, which left its mark on the lives of many Poles of Jewish descent at the time. Travelling through Vienna and Rome, Frajlich and her husband finally immigrated to New York, which remains their home. The decision to leave their homeland was quite reluctant, as this experience is described in Frajlich's family correspondence – an important testimony of her family's life.⁸

In her case, the process of adapting to the United States progressed gradually and, after some time, New York finally became her "boat and haven"⁹, though it was chosen out of necessity. She pursued her writing career and published dozens of collections of poems and literary criticism there, combining this activity with her academic duties. From 1981 to 2016, she was employed as a lecturer and subsequently as an assistant professor of Polish literature and language at Columbia University, New York.

By contrast, the American experiences of Julia Hartwig and Wojciech Karpiński bear no resemblance to the émigré scenarios of Busza, Iwaniuk and Frajlich. During their stays in the United States, they worked in academia and conducted scholarly research. As beneficiaries of the International Writers Programme, Hartwig and her husband, Artur Międzyrzecki, arrived on the North American continent in 1970 with the aim of conducting lectures and classes at American universities. They stayed there until 1974.¹⁰ This scenario, which was not burdened with a typical émigré experience, must have affected the way she perceived and described the United States. At the same time, it undeniably influenced her own reflections on art, including the perspectives she took on it as a visitor, not as an exile.

Wojciech Karpiński was in the United States when Martial Law was imposed in Poland. At the beginning of 1982, he was lecturing at Yale University

⁸ Frajlich commented on their situation as follows: "None of us wanted to leave Poland. We hoped to wait out "the March storm" and continue to build our life in Poland, where we considered ourselves full-fledged citizens, despite the intense propaganda against us. Our perspectives changed when we read that anonymous and ominous notice issued by PAP (Polish Press Agency), which stated that departure applications to Israel would be taken into account 'on the same basis' only until a certain date" (Frajlich, *Wiedeń...* 6). I also discussed it in: Budzik, "Refleksje artystyczne".

⁹ One of Anna Frajlich's collections of poems written in Polish has been published under the title *Łodzią jest i jest przystanią* / "A Boat and a Haven".

¹⁰ Hartwig would later return to the United States only as a guest, to visit her daughter – an experience she describes in the poem titled *W podróży* / "On the Road" (Hartwig, *Wiersze...*, 77-78).

in New Haven. It was then that he made the decision to stay abroad, but he chose to live in France. In the 1990s, he visited the United States, giving a series of lectures on Polish émigré literature (University of Texas) and literature in exile (New York University). His academic and scholarly visits might be considered shorter versions of the writer's American life, but similarly to Hartwig's experience, they were not burdened with the acute sense of exilic loneliness experienced by many Polish writers on American soil.

These five different biographical scenarios which tied the writers to the United States or Canada for life, or at least for some period, must have affected their sense of identification with the new geographical and cultural space. "Breathing" some order into "the new world", as Stanisław Barańczak called the United States (Barańczak, 220), also involved searching for some order in oneself, which was a gargantuan task for Waław Iwaniuk in particular. Each of them tried to fulfil this goal through an individual plan. Czesław Miłosz initiated his dialogue with the new place by issuing a clear declaration:

I am here. These three words contain all that can be said – you begin with those words and you return to them. Here means on this earth, on this continent and no other, in this city and no other, and in this epoch I call mine, this century, this year (...). I would need the ability to communicate my full amazement at "being here".

(Miłosz, *Visions...*, 3)

The process of building a new "inner landscape" in a foreign context might have been facilitated by the American and Canadian nature. This idea manifests itself in the poetry of Czesław Miłosz, who commented on it in the essays in *Widzenia nad Zatoką San Francisco* / "Visions from San Francisco Bay", in his poem titled *Do Robinsona Jeffersa* / "To Robinson Jeffers" and in the part of his *Traktat poetycki* / "A Treatise on Poetry" (titled *Natura*) / "Nature". Waław Iwaniuk took a similar approach to this idea as he described it in his Canadian collection of poems, "Evenings on Lake Ontario". The same attitude resounds in poetry created by other Polish émigré writers, such as Florian Śmieja, Bogdan Czaykowski and Kazimierz Wierzyński. These are only the most evident and oft-cited examples of the writers who tried to build a special relationship with their new surroundings by turning to nature, which they considered a mute translator of the adopted land and an intermediary between a person and a new space.¹¹

¹¹ Ligeza noticed that the process of symbolic restitution of the émigré writers' native landscapes can be successfully completed with the help of new, foreign ones, as they are often observed by newcomers with fascination (Ligeza, *Kanada...*, 110).

This symbolic dialogue between a human and a foreign setting can also be facilitated by the arts, particularly painting. This is, in fact, a consistent feature of the poetry and prose of all the writers discussed in this paper. Art symbolically participates in the process of adapting to a new space and, at the same time, becomes a significant element in the complex trajectory of the writers' varying needs, as well as their subjective ways of viewing the surrounding world. Moreover, these reflections on art are modified by the writers' exceptional biographies, which were often marked by multiple geographic dislocations and an obvious psychological and emotional burden associated with them. Nevertheless, as shown in my analysis, the act of changing places of abode could also be positively valued in a number of cases, as it gave the writers an opportunity to contemplate works of art in various places in Europe and North America. Their memories of those multinational artistic encounters would resurface years later in poems and essays written in the United States and Canada.

Art from multiple perspectives

One perspective that an émigré writer (or one who has lived outside their native country for some period) may take on art can be defined as mixed. This idea hinges on two different assumptions. On the one hand, the writer tries to overcome a feeling of acute loneliness and a sense of not belonging to their new space by seeking consolation in art contemplated in galleries and museums. On the other, this perspective facilitates the process of gaining a positive outlook on their new location. In the latter case, the émigré space (or foreign land temporarily inhabited by the newcomer) is no longer considered a place of banishment, since the writer begins to view it as a space of intimate encounters with art, which had previously been quite inaccessible to them or existed only as poor-quality reproductions in books or art catalogues. As such, Miłosz's "I am here" might also be seen through art, which symbolically initiates the process of appreciating new and previously disparaged circumstances. Through art, the writer may take a more optimistic view of their experience of exile because it places them in a new context.

These assumptions also correspond with Anna Frajlich's émigré situation. In one of the interviews I conducted with her, she confessed that the opportunity to see so many wonderful masterpieces in New York's museums (Frajlich has lived in the near vicinity of the Metropolitan Museum of

Art for many years) “stirred her blood”.¹² The poet commented: “(...) the fact that I can see it... When you see it, it is completely different from reading about it.”¹³ In the same interview, she explained: “I can see it, but I would not be able to draw it, so I write about it.”¹⁴ It is this visual and aesthetic relish that provided the inspiration for two poems: *Po wystawie Chagalla* / “After Chagall’s Exhibition” and *Ogrody Moneta* / “Monet’s Gardens”,¹⁵ which are examples of texts composed as a lyrical hypotyposis. In the former, it is far from apparent which of Chagall’s paintings she may have had in mind. The author might have based all the imagery on Chagall’s “Over the Town”, though she left no trace or description of this piece of art in the poem.¹⁶ Frajlich chose one of these paintings to make a very intimate confession. In this way, art becomes a metalanguage, through which the poet communicates with the loved one and symbolically sets herself within the frames of a painting. Her declaration “I can see it” refers not only to the sense of excitement evoked by a certain piece of art, but also to the artistically reconstructed image of the poet and her beloved. In other words, artistic imagery intermingles with the private sphere, and the act of perceiving a work of art transforms into the act of thinking of oneself and looking at oneself in the new circumstances — at a time that is still to come, which Frajlich described in the following manner:

We will surely not fly
into the red sun over Vitebsk.
I will not become a bride,
and you — a crazy fiancé.
Instead, we will sit somewhere
quietly
in a café
on the terrace

¹² The poet discussed this experience in an interview conducted by the author of this study on 6 May 2022 in New York.

¹³ This thought was expressed in the same interview on 6 May 2022.

¹⁴ This thought was expressed in the same interview on 6 May 2022.

¹⁵ It ought to be noted that Frajlich’s oeuvre contains other ekphrastic poems. See, among others: *Braque wystawa retrospektywna* / “Braque a Retrospective Exhibition”, *Kobiety Renoira* / “Renoir’s Women”, *Georgia O’Keeffe (epitafium)* / “Georgia O’Keeffe (epitaph)”, *Kanon* / “Canon”, *Dama z łasiczką prosi wielkiego mistrza o konterfekt* / “Lady with an Ermine Asks the Master for a Portrait”.

¹⁶ Ligeza suggested that in this poem, we can find references to several paintings of Chagall (Ligeza, *W samym oku...*, 204).

where one little tree will make a forest
 (...)
 and no one will even guess
 that the world
 revolves
 around you.

(Frajlich, *Przeszczep...*, 143)

According to Rudolf Arnheim's philosophy of image, visual perception activates visual thinking. The scholar explained this interdependence in the following manner: "It seems that there are no mental processes which cannot be found – at least in theory – in perception. Visual perception equals visual thinking" (Arnheim, 23). In Frajlich's case, this type of thinking was linked to her most private and intimate life experiences, which she filtered through painterly images. We may say that her own visual experience refers literally to the *eye* in a state of excitement, as it beholds remarkable works of art. A close look at art symbolically encourages the viewer to gain acceptance of their new location and of oneself as observed from this new perspective.

This way of viewing art was familiar to Wojciech Karpiński, who also focused on the "predispositions of the eye". In his *Amerykańskie cienie / "American Shadows"*, Karpiński – an art critic and connoisseur – described the impressions and emotions evoked by his American encounters with art. In the book, these sometimes interweave with his own descriptions of masterpieces he admired in many museums in the United States (e.g. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum, Frick Collection, Steward Garden Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, Yale Center for British Art, Sabarsky Gallery). Undeniably, one of the most intriguing traits of his essays, which reveal ekphrastic characteristics, is the author's fascination with the visual recording of every single detail he noticed while standing in front of a piece of art. In his texts, he emphasizes that what mattered most was the fact that "I can see this". At the same time, the writer's reflections on art were broadened by his detailed commentaries on the act of seeing works of art and looking at them, or – to put it differently – on the way in which he employed his eye in order to see and understand more. In his essays, he confessed: "I look at Rembrandt again" (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 66), "I go downstairs and I return to the same encounters with art, but I am no wiser" (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 67), "When I could not hold my gaze on Rembrandt, I would turn to Vermeer" (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 66), "I have finally seen Rembrandt's Saint Catherine" (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 68).

In the United States, Karpiński existed outside his own context as an exile, so the contemplation of art was not connected, in his case, to the process of identifying with the cultural and geographical space. This enabled him to adopt the privilege of an observer, who — as he said in one of his texts — arrived to “(...) greet the new Vermeer and to say hello to the old ones” (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 83), and also to “get caught up in the circle of enchantment prompted by decisive lines of art” (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 151). The writer visited the temple of art to find aesthetic excitement and to indulge in an artistic interpretation of the world. Finally, he searched for confirmation of the idea that “painting reaffirms life” (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 110). Looking at art from this perspective is interconnected with the act of contemplating the world and human existence as mirrored in visual expression. Interestingly, for this writer, the paintings created by American artists also reaffirm American life. This idea particularly manifests itself in Saul Steinberg’s works, which offer an original interpretation of what America is and encourage the viewer to re-examine or verify earlier assumptions or conclusions. Karpiński commented: “Steinberg broadened how I perceive America. His art exists on so many tangled, yet not blurred levels (...), his story of a man — of Steinberg — thrust into the new and old world, into America, into dozens of Americas” (Karpiński, *Amerykańskie...*, 104). Moreover, the author had an internal need to seek tension in art. A painting seen from this perspective may also tell a story about America. Works created by Edward Hopper, Georgia O’Keeffe and Mark Rothko resonate with similar impressions. Some of them — like Hopper’s depictions of the American drama — have already been perfectly verbalised by Czesław Miłosz in one of his ekphrastic poems, in which he wrote:

Oh, what sorrow unaware of being sorrow!

What despair unaware of being despair!

A career woman, with suitcases next to her, is sitting
on a bed half naked, in a red slip; her hairstyle is
impeccable. In her hand, a piece of paper with numbers.

Who are you? — nobody will ask; she doesn’t know either.

(Miłosz, *Wiersze...*, 1157)¹⁷

¹⁷ The original title of the poem — *O! Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Pokój hotelowy, Thyssen Collection, Lugano* / “*O! Edward Hopper (1882-1967), Hotel Room, Thyssen Collection, Lugano*”.

To conclude, although the formula "I can see it", as expressed in relation to art, is present in both Anna Frajlich's and Wojciech Karpiński's works, it should be interpreted in different ways. For Frajlich, it is often related to the author's introspective journey through her past and present life, which the art symbolically reaffirms, whilst for Karpiński it should be understood in a more universal sense – where the writer observes through the artistic lens not only the private sphere, but also the surrounding world, and his visual perception, prompted by artistic creation, interacts with his own visual thinking and the process of individual understanding of human existence.

By comparison, Julia Hartwig's approach to art, as perceived from the perspective of the private and public paradigm, is definitely more connected to her search for artistic representations of her own life (Hartwig, *Dziennik...*, 120). She conflated aesthetic impressions with personal reminiscences and suggested that without them, the special relationship between human and art would be incomplete (Hartwig, *Dziennik...*, 119). What seems most interesting in Hartwig's close-ups of art is her idiosyncratic way of initiating a dialogue between an artwork and her own poetry. In her diary we read: "My contact with a painting depends, to a great extent, on how inspiring it can be in a poetic sense" (Hartwig, *Dziennik...* 120). This way of thinking was close to Nabokov, who, as Karpiński recalled in his other collection of essays, *W Central Parku* / "In Central Park", believed that "(...) a piece of art is always addressed to an individual and challenges their sensitivity" (Karpiński, *W Central...*, 66). Although Hartwig's essayistic reflections on art do not refer to specific paintings, her poetry mainly comments on works she saw in European galleries. One such example is her poem titled *Uciekając przed angielską wycieczką, w Orangerie oglądam boudoir Matissa* / "Running away from the English Sightseeing Group, in Orangerie I look at Matisse's Boudoir". It feels as if this poem was read out in front of the painting, in its presence, as the author focused on describing the situation immortalized on the canvas. In fact, it is difficult to resist the impression that Hartwig was trying to bring the painted moment into the present day; at the same time, she symbolically transcended the frame of the painting to become a mute and invisible part of it or a silent observer of the moment that has elapsed. In this way, the author became part of a temporal paradox. Hartwig commented on this as follows:

This must have been a summer day with a touch of colour.
On the table, a striped tray cloth and a bouquet of wilted anemones.
Two ladies, one half hidden behind a tulle curtain,
the other resting in a sunbed.

(Hartwig, *Zobaczone*, 79)

Frajlich's, Karpiński's and Hartwig's ways of viewing art are based on first-hand experience in which an observing 'I' openly declares "I can see it". It was equally important for them to build a close relationship with a piece of art by visiting galleries and museums where visual perception stimulates visual thinking. These encounters facilitate the process of translating art into words, which has also been noted by Barbara Fisher, as she wrote in her "Museum Meditations": "Poets, like artists, approach the museum as an arena of perception. (...) They enter the provinces of the visual arts as observers, admirers and interlopers, and they often talk about their encounters through an established mode in their own medium – ekphrasis" (Fisher, 2). This means that temples of art, such as museums and galleries, may serve as muses for poetic and essayistic meditations, which often take an ekphrastic form. Although this scenario proved to be true in the case of Frajlich, Karpiński and Hartwig, it does not manifest itself in the same manner in every émigré writer discussed here.

Andrzej Busza, for example, takes a different approach to art. The experience of the eye contemplating art in a gallery (in this writer's poetic oeuvre, it is difficult to find direct references to a specific art exhibition or museum) is far from evident in Busza's case, as he focuses mainly on visual imagination.¹⁸ His own life philosophy is based on the idea of viewing the world through an image mainly derived from the writer's imagination, which relates to his own iconosphere, as defined by Mirosław Porębski in his seminal book *Ikonosfera*.¹⁹ This way of viewing reality is no longer primarily based on the formula "I can see it", understood as an act of looking at a work of art at a specific moment in time. It should be linked, primarily, to J.J. Wunderburger's idea of a complex sensory image which, as proposed by the scholar, "embraces all types of perceptive impressions, (...) extends to all forms of sensuous intuition" (Wunenburger, 12). As found in Busza's first collections of poems, *Znaki wodne* / "Water Signs" and "Astrologer in the Underground" (originally written in English), it may even be triggered

¹⁸ Busza spoke about this during an interview conducted by the author of this paper on 15 May 2022.

¹⁹ Mieczysław Porębski defined iconosphere as "(...) a sphere in which new visual and sound images are being born all the time (...). It encompasses both the stimuli that form a natural order of the world, as well as those that signify the order artificially created by man. As a whole, it (iconosphere – J. Budzik) pulsates with colours and shapes, reverberates with sounds and murmurs, and brings heat, smell and taste sensations (...) as a whole, the iconosphere is noticed, remembered and meaningful both in its natural and civilisational diversity" (Porębski, 18).

by a short, unimportant event or occurrence registered by memory. Although sensory images in Busza's early poems do not derive from painterly art, they are often deeply rooted in surrealistic imagery, sometimes evoking André Breton's poetry, which can be found, for example, in his works *Szkoło* / "Glass" or *Owoc żywota* / "Fruit of Life".²⁰ In other words, we may say that this type of image gradually leads the poetic persona to an image within the painting. This fact is especially apparent in Busza's latest collection of poems, *Ekfrazy* / "Ekphrases", which includes pieces devoted to Surrealist paintings.²¹ In one of his works, he focused on a piece of art created by British Surrealist painter and writer Leonora Carrington, whose dream-like artistic visions are located in theatrical settings, guarded by magical, ethereal, otherworldly women. In her bizarre paintings we find portraits of women filled with extraordinary masculine, even wild energy, which Carrington featured in such works as "Inn of the Dawn Horse". Meaningfully, Busza offered the following verbal rendition of this painting:

A silver-grey twilight pervades the drawing room. On a blue stool
sits a woman in jodhpurs
with a tousled mane.

She looks out of the window at a milk-white steed that is galloping
through a pine wood.

In the corner, on a green wall, hangs a rocking horse.

There's a knock on the door.

A gravid hyena glides in, followed by a pungent stench of carrion.

The animal fawns on the woman, who strokes her dark-brown muzzle.

(Busza, *Ekfrazy...*, 15)²²

Busza's Surrealist art gallery is enhanced by his ekphrastic poems, drawing from works by Remedios Varo and Frida Kahlo. His poem "Sąnok" derives from the same type of imagery, based on catastrophic visions that bear resemblance to Zdzisław Beksiński's paintings. In his poems, the author attempts to conflate images created by the visualizing mind with his fascination for a piece of art he might have seen in an art book. It is worth noting that Busza's imagination is most inspired by paintings with catastrophic content, haunted by fear and uncertainty, which corresponds with the poet's gnostic attitude to life. The same can be said about his

²⁰ I also discussed it in: Budzik, "Liryka..."

²¹ I also discussed it in: Budzik, "Malarskie..."

²² Translated from Polish by Andrzej Busza. The Polish title of the poem — *Gospoda porannego konia*.

literary fascinations — he values the highly symbolic, imbued with fear, visual imagery found in Joseph Conrad's prose²³ or in Leonora Carrington's short stories published in "The Debutante". His poetic imagery also reveals some expressionistic features, as if the poet were trying to perceive reality from Edvard Munch's perspective (as seen in his poem *Der Schrei der Natur*) or one of Paul Klee's paintings (*Insula dulcamara*). In another of his poems, "Storm Sketch" (originally written in English), Busza not only revives one of the most recognized painterly visions of Van Gogh, but he also verbally recreates the post-Impressionistic sense of anxiety, vividly expressed by the painter in his work titled "Wheatfield with Crows".

The writer's unique perception of art is intricately connected to his peculiar understanding of the multiplied image, which often derives from his own imagination. In his poetry, the "I can see" formula refers to a special coexistence of artistic images and the images created in his mind, which often occur in the poet's imagination independently of any painterly stimulus. In either context, Busza focuses on imagery loaded with an alarming emotional charge, expressing his existential state of mind. Small wonder that one of his collections of poems is titled *Niepewność* / "Uncertainty".

Before concluding, we should also refer to the work of Waław Iwaniuk, whose reflections on art might be seen as the truly emotional testimony of a man deeply entangled in his traumatic biography. This context seems to have profoundly shaped his perception of human existence in all its dimensions and forms. Life after the catastrophe of war exerted a major influence on his emotional state. To describe it, Iwaniuk dramatically confessed: "Don't touch me, I am full of snakes" (Iwaniuk, *Ciemny...*, 50), and in the conclusions to the same poem, he added: "I live like a mirror / with my face to the past" (Iwaniuk, *Ciemny...*, 50). Jan Wolski has noted that for this poet, the war "(...) causes total destruction in both the material realm and (...) the spiritual life of a man" (Wolski, 69). It is impossible to free oneself from the images of annihilation which haunted the poet's memory. In these hopeless circumstances, not even art is capable of becoming a space of oblivion.

Iwaniuk continuously sought aesthetic catharsis, and this is why he turned to art. Unfortunately, there was no escape from the past, and the art of which Iwaniuk wrote so symbolically confirmed this assumption. It is worth noting that the poet did not purposefully choose paintings loaded with negative, pessimistic, catastrophic, or horrifying overtones, nor did he exclusively turn to pieces of art that express a feeling of anxiety or uncertainty. In other words, it did not matter if the writer was looking at the

²³ More in: Busza, "Conrad's European..."

paintings of Fra Angelico, Van Gogh or Mondrian, since in each case he filtered these paintings through the catastrophic images that his memory had recorded. In his case, aesthetic escapism was not likely to liberate the mind from war images. Iwaniuk's perspective significantly differed from those of the other writers mentioned in this paper. It could be said that Iwaniuk insisted on contemplating art through war images, in the sense that the image he could see by looking at a painting did not correspond with the exact artistic representation. Instead, it would revive catastrophic memories from the battlefield. The same type of visual thinking would symbolically reappear, in Iwaniuk's case, even with regard to paintings that do not allude to pain, drama or suffering. The poet clearly confirmed these assumptions in two of his art-related poems: *Mondrian – Kompozycja Nr 1* / "Mondrian – Composition No 1" and *Mondrian – Kompozycja Nr 2* / "Mondrian – Composition No 2", where he reflected on the works of this representative of Neoplasticism through the lens of death and things that had perished in various circumstances. The poet offered the following comment:

I am interested in the inner part of his lines
 More than a drama of the so-called "life".
 Not the one that lives but one that perishes.
 Shape when it transforms into being out of shape
 And space into being out of space
 In the crucifixion of the suffering squares.
 How much I would like to be his landscape,
 Walk in funeral blackness on sharp edges.

(Iwaniuk, *Ciemny...*, 52)

His personal tragedy also manifested itself in the poem *Widziałem obrazy Van Gogha* / "I Have Seen the Paintings of Van Gogh" (Iwaniuk, *Wybór...*, 66-67), in which pessimistic reflections were further deepened by an ecclesial confession: "I have seen dead images, covered with scars / I have seen images in desolate stiffness / I have seen twisted souls" (Iwaniuk, *Wybór...*, 66-67).

Wacław Iwaniuk – a poet of dark times – saw art from the perspective of his own pain and the tragedy of a man in constant search of liberation from the images of the traumatic past. Although he sought consolation in artistic expression, this effort was futile, as all he could see in art was inevitably burdened with grief and pain. His visual perception and thinking were forever haunted by the catastrophic past.

Busza, Frajlich, Hartwig, Iwaniuk, Karpiński and Miłosz — each of them would initiate separate dialogues with art. In each case, it can be seen as an essential element of their negotiations with their new spaces. This peculiar “interlaced parlance” (in Polish — *mowa wiązana*)²⁴, as Miłosz used to call it, could facilitate the process of identifying oneself with an “unwanted” place. More importantly, it revealed a strong correspondence between visual (artistic) perception and visual thinking, in which the “I can see” formula balanced between public and private images (as in the case of Frajlich, Hartwig, Iwaniuk and Karpiński), or derived from a sensory image created by imagination, which gradually transformed it into an image in art (as in the case of Busza). For all the writers presented in this paper, entering the sphere of painting was a very intimate experience, often related to their existential fears and uncertainties.

Painterly acts, as Miłosz stated, remain “on the other side of the fire”. For each writer, they existed in a unique way. They were always analyzed in terms of one’s own biography, artistic preferences and needs, and it is through them that writers were able to express their own, new, different “poetic self”.

References

- Arnheim, Rudolf. *Myślenie wzrokowe*. Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz Terytoria, 2011, Podręcznik Humanisty.
- Barańczak, Stanisław. *Wiersze zebrane*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2007.
- Bilman, Emilie. *Modern Ekphrasis*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2013.
- Budzik, Justyna. “Liryka Andrzeja Buszy wobec myśli nadrzeczywistej.” The article will be published in 2025 in *Tematy i Konteksty*.
- Budzik, Justyna. “Malarskie pogranicza Andrzeja Buszy.” *Perspektywy kultury*, vol. 4, no. 39, 2022, pp. 331-347, <https://czasopisma.ignatianum.edu.pl/pk/article/view/2316/2184>. Accessed: May 14, 2025.
- Budzik, Justyna. “Refleksje artystyczne w polskiej liryce emigracyjnej. Przypadek Anny Frajlich.” *Er(r)go. Teoria-Literatura-Kultura*, vol. 1, no. 50, 2025, pp.185-204, <https://journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/ERRGO/article/view/17174/14750>. Accessed: July 7, 2025.
- Busza, Andrzej. *Conrad’s European Context*. Leiden: Brill, 2024, Conrad Studies.
- Busza, Andrzej. *Ekfrazy*. Toronto: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, 2020.
- Cheeke, Stephen. *Writing for Art: Aesthetics of Ekphrasis*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.

²⁴ *Mowa wiązana* is the title of a book by Czesław Miłosz.

- Dryglas-Komorowska, Ewa. "Czesław Miłosz wobec malarstwa Edgara Degasa." *Archiwum Emigracji*, vol. 1, no. 18, 2013, pp. 7-21, <https://doi.org/10.12775/AE.2013.001>.
- Dryglas-Komorowska, Ewa. *Miłosz a malarstwo*. Toruń: Jagiellońskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2019, Monografie Kolegium Jagiellońskiego.
- Dziadek, Adam. *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2011.
- Fischer, Barbara K. *Museum Meditations. Reframing Ekphrasis in Contemporary American Poetry*. New York-London: Routledge, 2006.
- Fiut, Aleksander. "Męczeństwo i ziemskie rozkosze. W poetyckiej galerii Miłosza i Herberta." *Zmysł wzroku, zmysł sztuki. Prywatna historia sztuki Zbigniewa Herberta*, vol. 2, edited by Józef M. Ruszar, Lublin: Gaudium, 2006.
- Frajlich, Anna, Felicja Bromberg, and Władysław Zając. *Po Marcu. Wiedeń, Rzym, Nowy Jork*. Warszawa: Biblioteka Midrasza, 2008.
- Frajlich, Anna. *Łódź jest i jest przystanią*. Szczecin-Bezrzecze: Wydawnictwo FORMA, 2013.
- Frajlich, Anna. *Przieszczep. Wiersze zebrane*. Vol. 1, Toronto-Szczecin-Bezrzecze: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, Wydawnictwo FORMA, Fundacja Literatury imienia Henryka Berezy, 2022.
- Frajlich, Anna. *Przieszczep. Wiersze zebrane*. Vol. 2, Toronto-Szczecin-Bezrzecze: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, Wydawnictwo FORMA, Fundacja Literatury imienia Henryka Berezy, 2022.
- Grodecka, Aneta. *Wiersze o obrazach. Studium z dziejów ekfrazy*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009.
- Hartwig, Julia. *Dziennik amerykański*. Warszawa: Zeszyty Literackie, 2015.
- Hartwig, Julia. *Wiersze amerykańskie*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2002.
- Hartwig, Julia. *Zobaczone*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 1999, Biblioteka Poetycka Wydawnictwa a5, vol. 32.
- Heffernan, James A.W. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Iwaniuk, Waław. *Ciemny czas. Poezje*. Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1968.
- Iwaniuk, Waław. *Wybór wierszy*. Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1965.
- Karpiński, Wojciech. *Amerykańskie cienie*. Warszawa: Zeszyty Literackie, 2013.
- Karpiński, Wojciech. *W Central Parku*. Warszawa: Zeszyty Literackie, 2010.
- Ligeza, Wojciech. "Kanada polskich poetów. Szkice z natury." *Polska poezja na obczyźnie. Studia i szkice*, edited by Zbigniew Anders, and Jan Wolski, Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2005.
- Ligeza, Wojciech. "W samym oku cyklonu jest żrenica ciszy. O liryce Anny Frajlich." *Drugi nurt. O poetach polskiej dwudziestowiecznej emigracji*, edited by Wojciech Ligeza, Szczecin-Bezrzecze-Toronto: Wydawnictwo FORMA, Fundacja Literatury imienia Henryka Berezy, Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, 2024.

- Miłosz, Czesław. *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. Translated by Richard Lourie. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1975.
- Miłosz, Czesław. *Wiersze wszystkie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2011.
- Mitchell, William J.T. *Picture Theory*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Porębski, Mieczysław. *Ikonosfera*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1972.
- Wolski, Jan. *Wacław Iwaniuk. Szkice do portretu emigracyjnego poety*. Toronto-Rzeszów: Polski Fundusz Wydawniczy w Kanadzie, 2002.
- Wunenburger, Jean-Jacques. *Filozofia obrazów*. Translated by Tomasz Stróżyński. Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2011.
- Wysłouch, Seweryna. "Ekfrazja czy przekład intersemiotyczny?" *Od tematu do re-matu. Przechadzki z Balcerzanem*, edited by Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, and Agata Stankowska-Kozera, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2007.
- Wysłouch, Seweryna. *Literatura a sztuki wizualne*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994.