

“Once merry Country turns to Ashes”

Totalitarianisms in
non-professional Art



The aim of this exhibition is (but not only) to show the crimes committed by cruel war criminals during World War II. Works by non-professional wood sculptors will help us to do so. Each work contains references to a specific event, a place, a time and the people involved: victims and perpetrators. Through the use of a simple artistic form that is understandable for every viewer, the exhibition is a historical source and an authentic, credible testimony. The uniqueness of the presented exposition lies in the joint presentation of the totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin. In this respect, it is the first such exhibition in the history of folk art.

Why should the art of Polish non-professional sculpture in particular make its contribution to confront us with this painful subject?

This question can be answered with a quote by the Pulitzer Prize-winning American-Polish journalist of the "Washington Post":

"No pictures mean less understanding"

Anne Appelbaum

All the presented works of art were created by non-professional Polish artists, both men as well as women.



Christ as a Signpost

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 37 cm

The sculpture shows the "Pensive Christ" who to this day grieves over the martyrdom of those times and appeals to us, the next generation, of "Never again!". An interesting motif is Christ's leg resting on a skull. Iconographically, it can be assigned to the forefather of original sin, Adam, who — according to legend — found his final resting place on Golgotha and experienced his resurrection and redemption through Jesus' death on the cross.

Pensive Christ

Stanisław Suska 2004

polychromed wood, 27 cm

The Christ depicted here is shown as a Pole in striped camp uniform and represents the fate of thousands upon thousands of compatriots who had to experience the hell of the concentration camps. For the Poles, the figure of the tormented Son of God thus became a symbol of individual experience of suffering during the war, which was characterised by camps, deportation, forced labour and death.





Fatum

Bogdan Oczeretko

varnished wood, 42 cm

The wild animal attacks the man unexpectedly, and he finds himself helpless against it. Its physical and mental balance is disturbed, which is shown to us by the inclined posture. The eyes are closed, asking for the HOW COME and WHY. The fatum makes the man lose ground under his feet, his hands seek support. Only the wild beast called totalitarianism was able to expose people to such afflictions.

Devilish Hitler

Anna Padoł 2006

polychromed wood, 37 cm

The work depicts Adolf Hitler, who, while exercising his bestial rule, was never able to resist the evil tempting him. The sculpture clearly shows the phenomenon of evil as a tool for exercising power. This work is painted in black and symbolizes the darkness of National Socialist reality.



The Devil's Quartet

Norbert Gliński 2013

polychromed wood, 34 cm

This work shows a round of death-bringing like-minded people, which can be understood as a dance of demons. As the history of the 20th century should show, each individual member of this quartet was so severely guilty that until today only few legal remedies have been called upon to punish the crimes committed. Attempts have been made in Germany, but in today's Russia an attempt to bring the perpetrators to justice has hardly succeeded. The darkness of Hades, illuminated only by the glow of infernal fire, shows us what it really might have looked like in the minds and hearts of these demons during their lifetime.

On the upper level we can recognize Lenin (1870-1924), Marx (1777-1838), Hitler (1889-1945) and Stalin (1878-1953).





Gypsy

Krzysztof Grodzicki 2013

relief, polychromed wood, 62 x 43 cm

According to the former "racial theorists", the "inferior" peoples included not only Slavs and Jews but also — as they were then called — Gypsies. A "gypsy woman" picked up somewhere becomes a victim of rape and robbery by the "master human".

Arm Wrestling

Andrzej Wojtszak 2014

polychromed wood, 38 cm

Thanks to the use of adequate symbols and colours, the artist makes it easy for us to immediately identify the two diabolical beings in this depiction as Hitler and Stalin. The viewer gets the impression that arm wrestling is like an entertaining social game. In reality however, this muscle play of the two tyrants claimed a total of around 50 million lives. Of central significance here is undeniably the white eagle. Whatever the outcome of the arm wrestling of the two — the heraldic bird is in any case wounded, plucked and fatally hit.





Comrades in Arms at the Anvil

Jan Kowalczyk 1994

polychromed wood, 39 cm

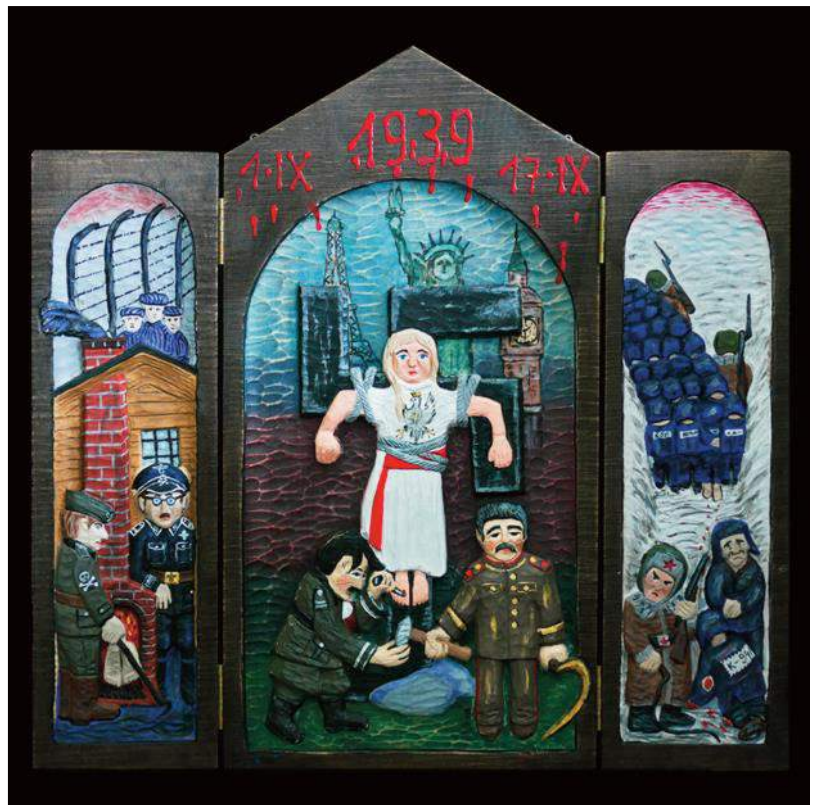
The sculpture shows the two cruellest criminals of the 20th century: Hitler and Stalin, as they carry out their diabolical activities. The sculptor has succeeded in a memorable manner to give similar physiognomies to both the Generalissimo Stalin and Private Hitler. Only the moustache, the colour of the uniforms and the emblem attached to each of them make it possible to recognise who is who.

The Year 1939

Jan Kowalczyk 2013

triptych, polychromed wood
67 x 35 cm (57 x 17 cm)

In the middle, we see the Polish nation dying on a swastika-shaped cross. The left side shows us a concentration camp where Reichsführer SS Himmler, inspects the progress of the so-called Final Solution to the Jewish question. On the right wing we see a Polish couple dressed in cotton wool jackets and earflap caps, who will be taken to the camp with the number K 941. The dates of the attack on the Polish state (1.IX.1939 by Nazi Germany and 17.IX.1939 by the Soviet Union) are highlighted in blood-red.



Hunting for Poland

Grzegorz Król 2014

relief, polychromed wood, 52 x 27 cm

The state of Poland — symbolised by the white-and-red clothing of mother and child — sees itself inescapably caught in the grip of both the brown and the red dictatorship. The sculptor shows the victims, who are caught in the crossfire, a possible chance to get out of this situation safely, namely to turn to Our Lady of Częstochowa for help. This icon illustrates the exorbitant importance of the Madonna of Częstochowa as the central sacral patriotic figure in Polish Catholicism.



Pacification of Skalka Polska

Grzegorz Król 2014

relief, polychromed wood, 50 x 28 cm

The work presents a scene from May 11, 1943. Houses were set on fire, so that their inhabitants fled into the open air, where they were then fair game for the gendarmerie, armed to the teeth. There is no escape for those locked up in the barn. The gasoline canister indicates what will happen in a few seconds. The cross in the middle of the village symbolises the suffering of the humiliated nation.





Lupus est homo homini

Jan Skóra

polychromed wood, barbed wire, 54 cm

Mankind "owes" the invention of barbed wire to the Americans, whose cattle breeders in the 19th century came up with the idea of locking their cattle in securely fenced pens. The artist titled his work after the words of the ancient Roman comedic playwright Titus Maccius Plautus (c. 250 BC - c. 184 BC)

"Lupus est homo homini – Man is wolf to man".

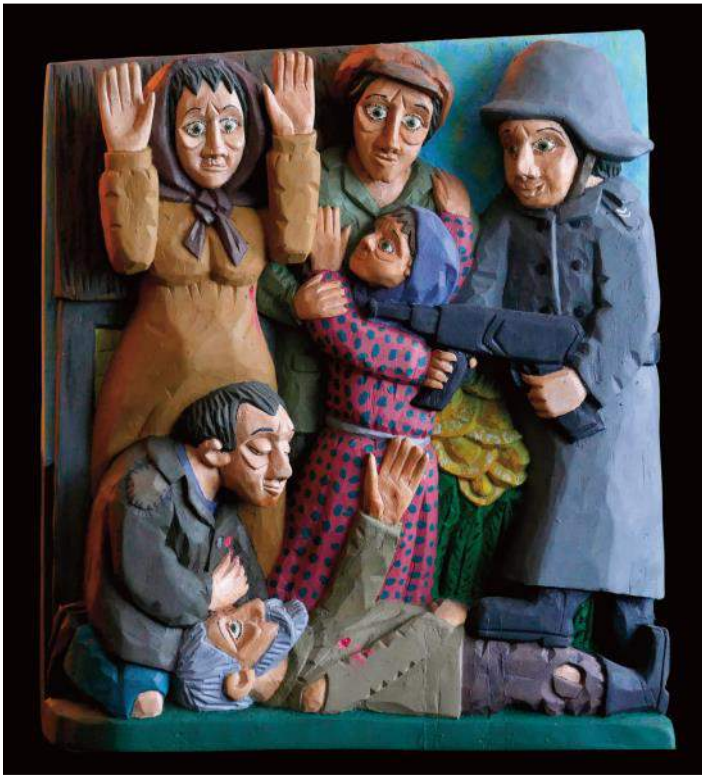
Raid

Jan Kowalczyk 2011

polychromed wood, 35 cm

On the front, our gaze is drawn both to a group of people and to the bonnet of a truck bearing the insignia of the occupier and the names of those destinations where the Nazis operated their notorious death camps. The back is left as a smooth, polychromed surface. Red symbolises the fire of the crematoria, black death and the mourning for the gassed victims, of whom only skeletons will remain.





Pacification

Stanisław Suska 2009

relief, polychromed wood, 38 cm

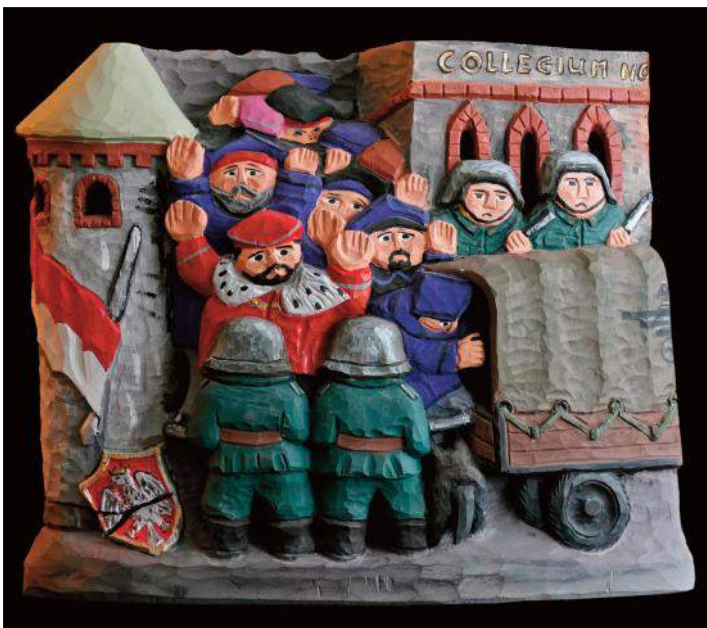
The village of Lidice in the Czech Republic became a symbol of pacification. It was razed to the ground in retaliation for the assassination of Richard Heydrich (1904-1942). The depiction leaves it open whether there will be five dead here or a still "merciful" deportation to forced labour or to a concentration camp.

Sonderaktion Krakau

Jan Kowalczyk 2011

polychromed wood, 37 cm

The event, which is reproduced here, has gone down in Polish history of the occupation period as "Sonderaktion Krakau". It took place on 6 November 1939 and was aimed at the academic staff of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. The 183 scientists, who were recognised and renowned in professional circles, were rounded up under kicks and blows from rifle butts and then loaded onto the trucks provided to take them to Montelupich Prison in Krakow.





Pacification of Michniów

Jan Kowalczyk 2011

polychromed wood, 37 cm

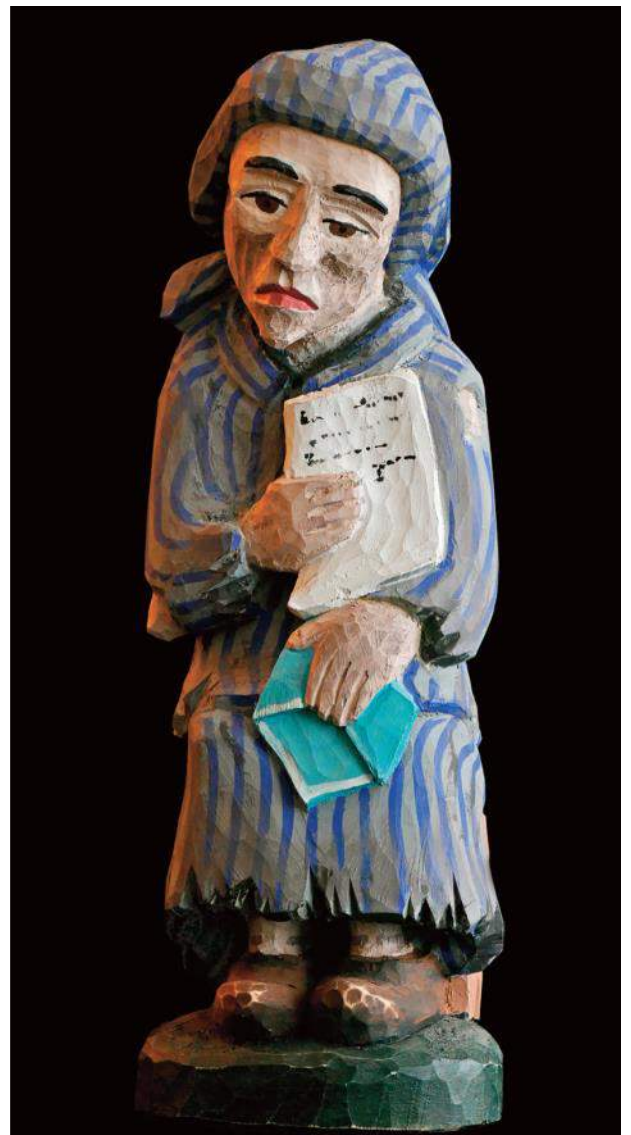
The events of 12-13 July 1943 claimed over 200 victims, the youngest of whom had lived for just nine days. The farmer woman holds the body of her son or husband like a pietà. Flames flicker on the wooden construction of the house, fire-fighting is useless in this situation. It is more important to save human lives. The pedestal frieze indicates those places where armed units of the occupier have also carried out "pacifications".

Longing

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 37 cm

In the women's concentration camp in Ravensbrück, mail was always distributed on Saturday afternoon after returning to the accommodations. Once a month a protective custody prisoner was allowed to receive or send out a censored mail item. Despite exhaustion, sadness and hopelessness, the woman's face shows some kind of gratitude for the message she received.

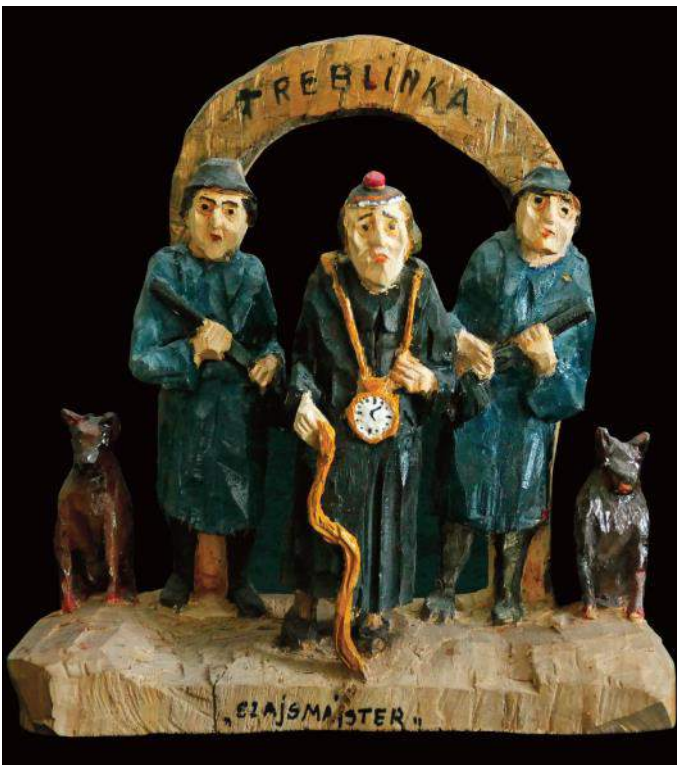


Scheissmeister

Roman Śledź 2015

polychromed wood, 29 cm

The "Scheissmeister" had to watch over the toilets, which made him a joke figure. He had to wear a gown, the headgear had a coloured pompon and around his neck he wore an alarm clock as a time measuring device. In his hand he held a whip as a symbol of exercise of power over his fellow sufferers, which was used if they exceeded the prescribed time of one minute to relieve themselves.



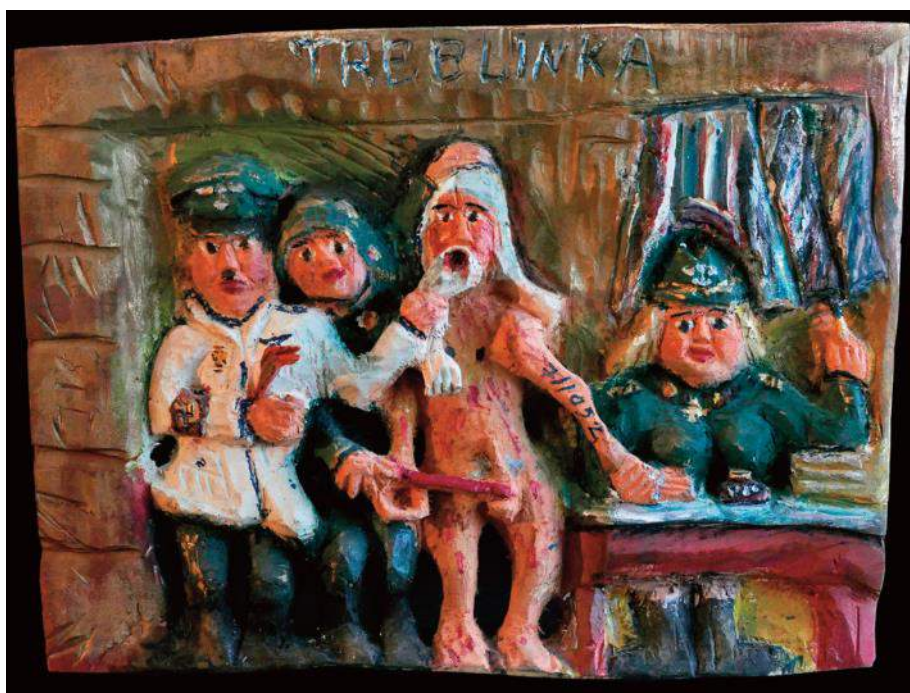
Treblinka

Krzysztof Grodzicki 2013

relief, polychromed wood, 54 x 41 cm

On the back of this work the following inscription can be found:

"A Jew from the Warsaw Ghetto is in Treblinka. Doctor Mengele pulls out his golden teeth. Using a needle, the woman pierces the Jew's forearm with the camp number. The SS-member was a master of tattooing in the camp. In addition, the soldier next to Mengele checks whether the Jew is circumcised. Striped prisoner uniforms hang above the SS woman."





Henryk Goldszmit

Henryk Graczyk 2005

polychromed wood, 28 cm

Aren't they adorable, the little ones? Are they perhaps brothers and sisters or not? And who is the adult? Only few people know the name Goldszmit. The name by which this man then became known was Janusz Korczak. He was, as the Polish priest and folk art lover, Jan Twardowski (1915-2006), put it, *"Probably one of the most heartfelt sages to have paid homage to the child"*.

Janusz Korczak

Tadeusz Adamski 2008

polychromed wood, 38 cm

We see Janusz Korczak in the circle of his pupils. The colourfulness of the group, which is supplemented by toys, refers to the cheerfulness and uninhibitedness of childlike love of life and suggests that the children immediately forgot their play when their "old doctor" appeared, in order to feel his personal closeness. As orphans they needed an attachment figure like those children who grew up in a family. We may assume that this sculpture reminds us of better days in Korczak's and the children's lives. The fact that the children here are not yet stigmatised by the wearing of the yellow badge probably confirms the correctness of our assumption.



Free Ride to Death

Jan Kowalczyk 2005

polychromed wood, 45 cm

The vivid colours indicate the children's joy of participating in the trip. On the other side of the sculpture, the atmosphere unfortunately changes, enthusiasm turns into a sense of danger, and the colour turns to grey. The wide open eyes on the faces express confusion and ossification. The railroad tracks symbolize the journey to death, and the green light gives the imaginary train a signal: free road to the gas chambers in Treblinka. Dark grey smoke comes out of the chimney. The children are not aware of the danger of the situation. But their guardian, Janusz Korczak, is with them on the last day of their life, on August 5, 1942.



The Treblinka Uprising

Jan Kowalczyk 2011

polychromed wood, 36 cm

The Treblinka Uprising took place on August 2, 1943. Of the approximately 840 prisoners, several hundred died in combat and nearly four hundred managed to escape. Looking at this relief, we can see a broken sign with the town's name and the station clock. There was a designated prisoner in the camp to paint markings imitating a regular railway station. The clock always showed the same time, and information boards showed the tracks where non-existent trains from class 1 to 3 departed from. There was also information on where the waiting room was.



On the Gallows

Józef Stańczyk 2014

polychromed wood, 33 cm

In the foreground, we can see how the well-fed SS personnel with the equally healthy kapo out the death penalty against a defenceless prisoner. Special attention should be paid to the woman in SS uniform, as Polish non-professional sculpture has almost never shown representations of SS women, who were often more brutal than their male colleagues.



Block 11 and the Death Wall

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 35 cm

The artist managed to show the Block of Death and the so-called Death Wall in Auschwitz by means of a double relief. The front side shows us one of the countless executions that were carried out in the courtyard of Block 11. On the bricks we can see the numerous numbers of prisoners who were murdered in this place. Behind each number there is the fate of a specific person. The reverse side of the sculpture shows the front of the death block.





Hunger

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 32 cm

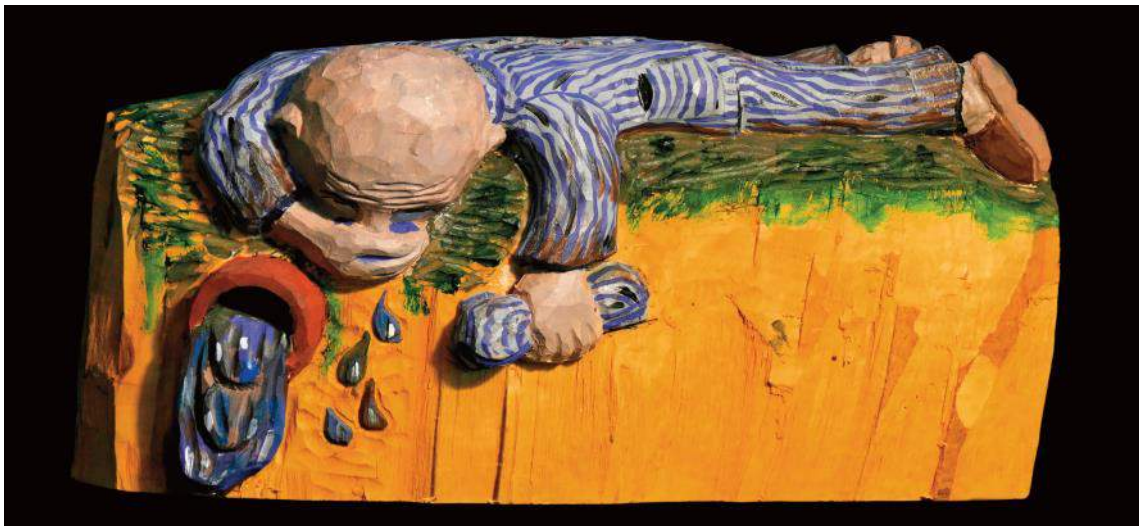
In the concentration camps hunger was, among many other methods, one of those used to dispose of human life in an almost cost-free way. Our picture shows a scene of two prisoners at a waste bin. The colours of their triangles indicate the reason for their imprisonment. The one with the red triangle is a political, the other one an antisocial prisoner.

Thirst

Jan Kowalczyk 2012

polychromed wood, 18 cm

This work introduces us to one of the worst psychological and physical ordeals that we humans can suffer, thirst. It shows a prisoner who cannot resist the urge of thirst and tries to drink sewage despite the danger of being shot. He has taken the cap in his hand to be on the safe side, because its possible loss, caused by the lying position, would have entailed an inevitable punishment.





Bread

Jan Kowalczyk 2014

polychromed wood, 36 cm

In the scene shown here, which, as can be seen, takes place in the freezing cold of winter, a loaf of bread has been found at a "political". For the prisoners suffering from constant hunger, an additional bread ration was considered a lucky event of the highest degree, so that the artist could not help but use the gold colour to emphasise the value of the loaf of bread.

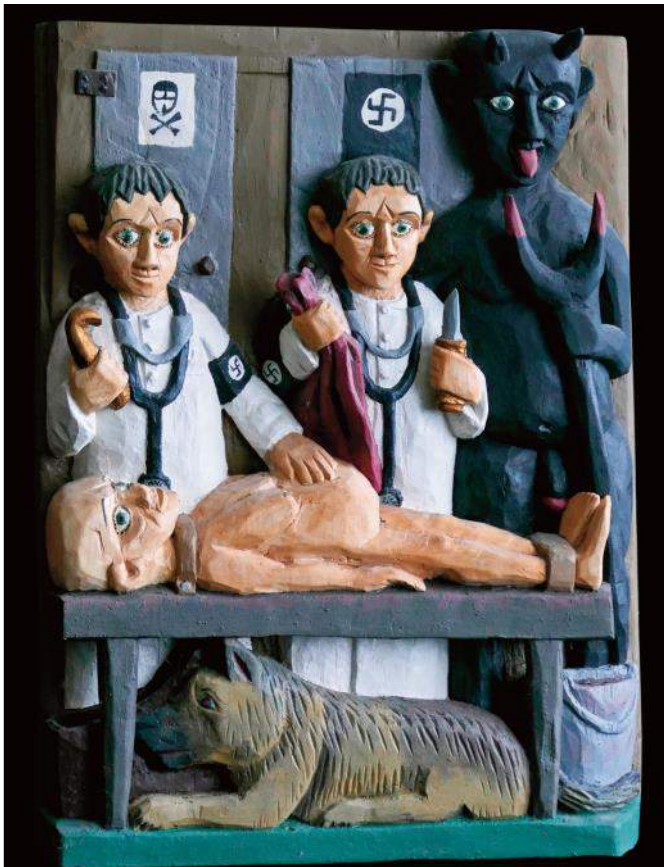
Playing Children

Jan Kowalczyk 2011

polychromed wood, 27 cm

Here we can see two boys on a beater, on which there lies a self-made doll, that can be identified as a Jewish person by the armband. The boys are playing flogging. One of them is armed with a stick. His playmate whispers something into his ear. Perhaps he counts the number of blows to him.





Medical Experiments

Stanisław Suska 2011

relief, polychromed wood, 45 cm

Here the artist replaces the staff of Asclepius, a symbol of healing, with a swastika, a skull and crossbones, symbols of destruction and death. The "treatment room" is not visible from the outside because the shutters are locked. A pregnant woman is fixed on the operating table, undergoing a pre-natal surgical procedure that is probably not accompanied by anaesthetics. It is known that concentration camp doctors also carried out experiments on human fetuses.

Waste Bin

Jan Kowalczyk 2017

polychromed wood, 34 cm

The mother's breasts are strangulated so that the baby will be denied food. The infant lies defenceless on soiled rags. The mother looks at it, powerless and in despair. Mengele gloats through the peephole of his office door over the agony of mother and child on whom he performed his so-called "scientific experiments". It is only a matter of time before the starved corpse of the new-born will end up in the medical waste — according to the inscription on the bucket. The reverse side, kept in complete black, symbolises the night on earth and does not need any additional commentary.





Stanisław Grzesiuk

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 44 cm

With the depiction shown here, the sculptor of this work creates a memorial to a prisoner named Stanisław Grzesiuk (1918-1963). Grzesiuk spent his short life in the Czerniaków district of Warsaw. In pre-war Warsaw, he was considered a musical protagonist of street folklore. He joined the Polish resistance at an early stage. He spent five years in the camps Dachau, Mauthausen and Gusen.

Kapo

Jan Kowalczyk 2015

polychromed wood, 47 cm

The Italian word kapo means head. A kapo was someone who anatomically had a head, but who hardly felt compelled to use it to think. The labour prisoner, lying on the ground and completely battered, has fallen into the hands of a rage-filled kapo who, as a sadist, wants to be able to show victims.





In the Wire

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 34 cm

The phrase “going into the wire” meant that a prisoner committed suicide by throwing himself into the electrically charged camp fence. The creator of this depiction made use of the symbol of a pietà to show how an individual, through no fault of his own, can end up in a victim role and die in it.

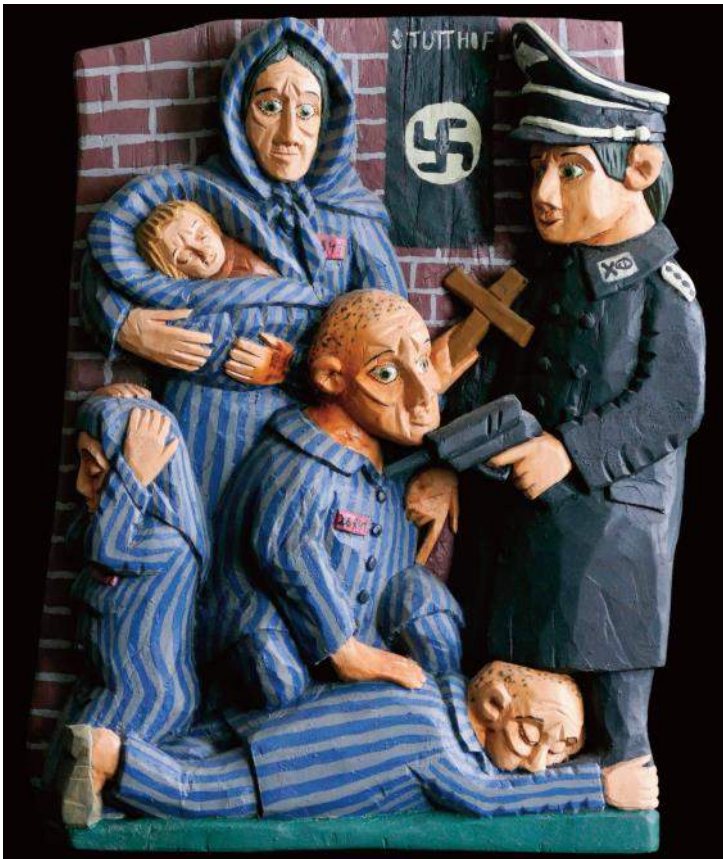
Christmas in a Concentration Camp

Roman Śledź 2010

polychromed wood, 30 cm

Wherever people of faith come together to celebrate the birth of Christ, God is also present. Even under the most abominable conditions in the concentration camps, there was a commitment to hope and the practice of living faith in God’s existence, even when death hovered over everyone as a constant threat — like the sword of Damocles.





Stutthof

Stanisław Suska 2009

relief, polychromed wood, 40 cm

When the camp began operating in September 1939 under the name of Stutthof Civilian Internment Camp, it immediately began interning Polish priests, whom the Nazi occupiers had made it their absolute duty to eliminate. The artist deliberately chose this threatening scene from everyday life in the camp, in which a pastor carries out his priestly service to others despite his own threat.

Easter in a Concentration Camp

Roman Śledź 2010

polychromed wood, 31 cm

This artist is considered the most theological among non-professional wood sculptors in Poland. A believer knows that life also brings some experience of suffering — theologically called Passion — and he understands death in connection with redemption. The inmates are gathered around the altar on which Christ gives himself in the form of life-sustaining bread during the celebration of the Mass. The line on the front reads: “The Holy Agony and Resurrection of Jesus in the Concentration Camp”.



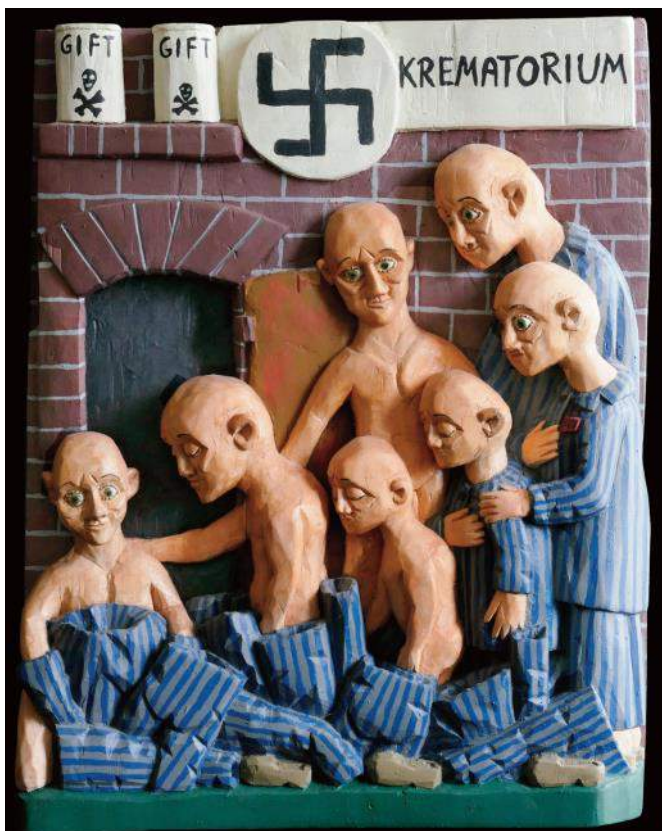
The Camp Orchestra

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 31 cm

The camp orchestra is cleanly dressed and its members look well-fed, while the ragged labour column is shown as the exact opposite. Almost every camp had a prisoners' orchestra. The orchestra, often positioned at the camp gate, played when the columns marched off to work or returned. The prisoners had to sing so-called camp anthems. There was a Buchenwald anthem, a Treblinka anthem and a Börgermoor anthem.





Gassing

Stanisław Suska 2009

relief, polychromed wood, 42 cm

After the prisoners had undressed and entered the gas chamber which was disguised as a shower room, they were locked in it and poisonous Zyklon B crystals were poured through roof hatches. They developed into a deadly asphyxiation gas when they came into contact with air. After about 20-30 minutes, the prisoners died. The corpses were then burnt on huge stakes in the open air. Later, cremation ovens were acquired. Before being cremated, the gold teeth of those killed were pulled out, after which the ashes were used, among other things, as fertiliser for the surrounding SS landscape farms.

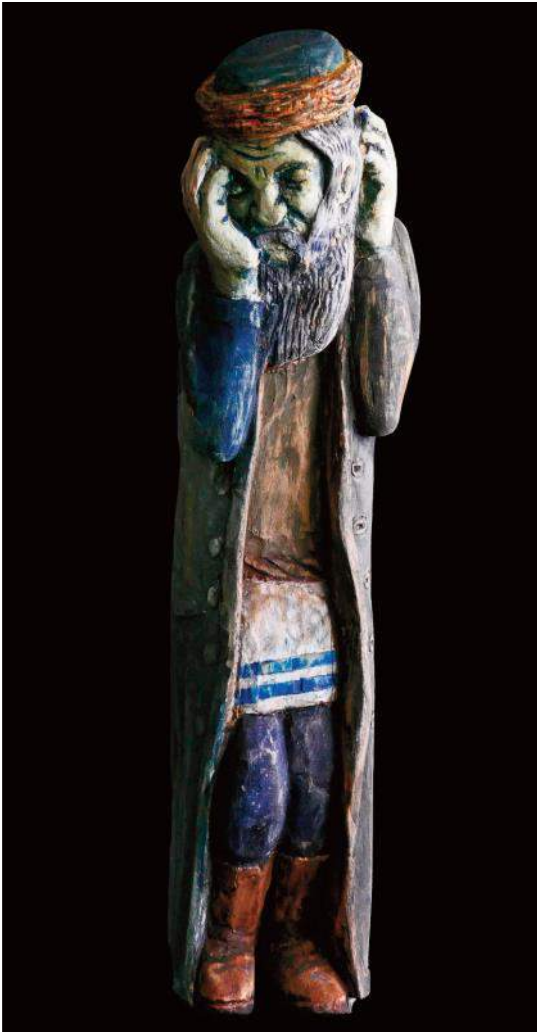
Stocking Stuffing Commado

Włodzimierz Ostoja-Lniski 2014

polychromed wood, triptych, 128 x 32 cm, (64 x 32 cm)

The format of a folding altar was chosen to depict this scene. On the left wing we recognise a group of Jewish women who volunteered to set up a darning and knitting commado during morning roll call. The middle section of the triptych shows us a scene in which the women with their working materials, instructed by the SS men "transformed" into railway personnel and additionally guarded by dogs, unsuspectingly board the wagons to get to the fictitious workplace. The unbelievable end of this macabre crime is depicted on the right wing. All these women, who thought they were getting a relief from their daily camp life by voluntarily reporting to the stocking stuffing commado, ended up in the incinerators of the Stutthof camp. When closed, the work depicts the Star of David and a barbed wire.





Hasid in Despair

Henryk Patejuk 2014

polychromed wood, 46 cm

On the basis of the clothing characteristics, it is easy for us to define the tormented as a Hasidic Jew of the eastern Polish Shtetl of that time. One characteristic of the dress code of the Hasidim was the so-called gartl, a girdle. In view of his impending death in the gas chamber, the Hasid probably had a dialogue with Yahweh and asked him how he, his God, could allow such a fate. One cannot help but have the impression that one is encountering a Job figure of the 20th century.

The Braid

Jan Kowalczyk 2012

polychromed wood, 48 cm

We see three Jewish women in front of the gas chamber, who were made to believe until their last breath that they would have to undergo a disinfection bath because of the camp hygiene regulations, which is credibly underlined by the visibly attached shower head above the gas chamber door. The women obediently removed their clothes, starting with the headscarves. This is followed by the removal of the body hair. The pouring of the Zyklon B crystals was always done by SS members wearing gas masks.





Where is Jahwe

Henryk Patejuk 2010

polychromed wood, 34 cm

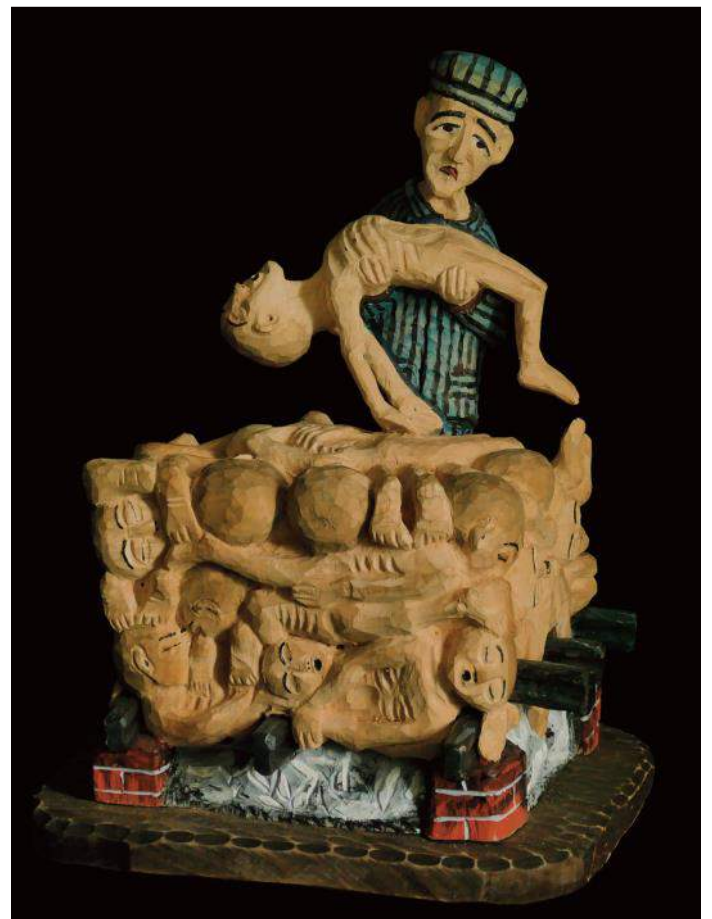
Here the artist presents us with his brother in faith desperately calling on God. The raised arms and the fear-filled gaze refer to a complete surrender to the extermination programme to which the Nazi ideology was committed.

The Stake

Jan Kowalczyk 2013

polychromed wood, 47 cm

The sculpture shows a prisoner of the Sonderkommando, whose members were assigned to all activities related to the gassings. He is busy carrying the corpses of those who were still alive just half an hour ago and stacking them on the stake. To guarantee the oxygen supply, the firewood was stacked on a grate made of worn-out railway tracks and doused with an accelerant.





St. Teresa Benedicta a Cruce Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 34 cm

Edith Stein was born into a wealthy family in Breslau on 12 October 1891. After her conversion to Catholicism, she became a Discalced Carmelite and adopted the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. The creator of the scene has positioned the nun, accompanied by two members of the Sonderkommando who act as angels of death, on a pedestal surrounded by barbed wire fences. Edith Stein was gassed at Auschwitz on 9 August 1942 and raised to the honours of the altar under the pontificate of John Paul II on 11 October 1998. In 1999 she was named Patroness of Europe.

Railway tracks in Sobibór Henryk Patejuk 2015

polychromed wood, barbed wire, strips,
39 x 21 cm, 45 x 17 cm

Both objects belong to the genre of assemblage. The artist has used the following materials here: a board as picture surface, pieces of strips, barbed wire and paint. They represent the Sobibór extermination camp, where 250,000 Jews died within one and a half years. It was only thanks to the prisoners' uprising on 14 October 1943 that the extermination machinery was stopped and the camp dismantled. Afterwards, the entire area was ploughed and planted with trees to cover up all traces.





Sobibór Uprising

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 34 cm

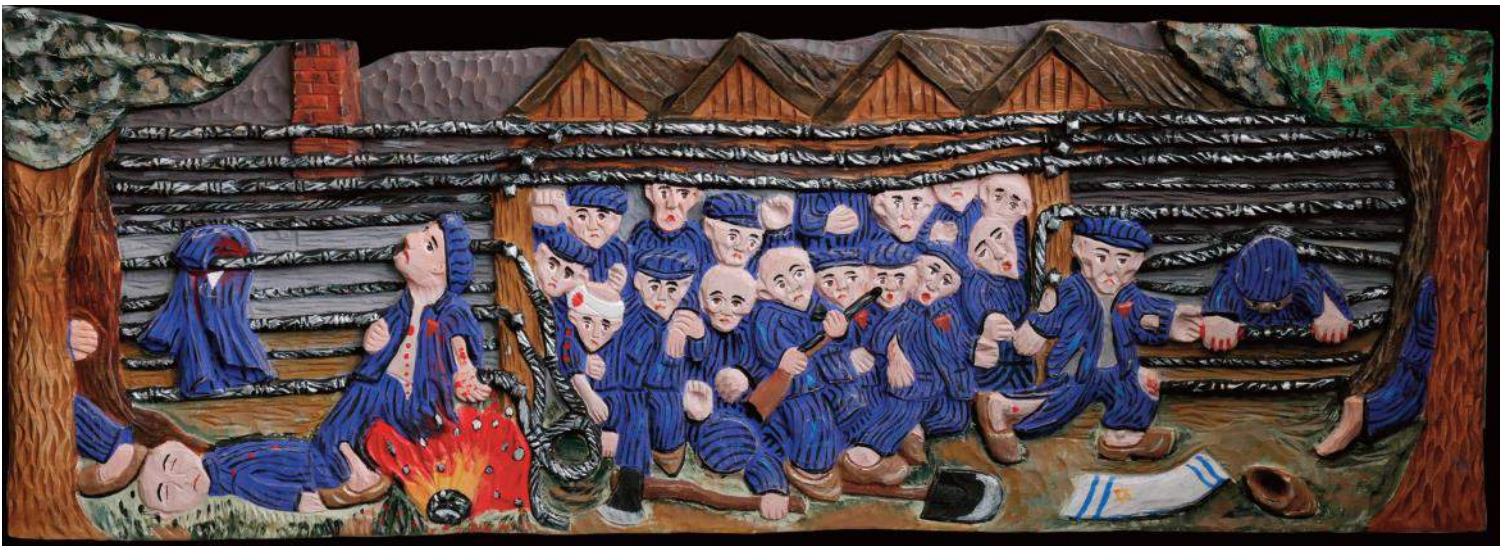
With this work, the sculptor has created a lasting memorial to the heroes of the uprising in the Sobibór camp. Better to die honourably in armed combat than to go defenceless into the gas chambers, that was the motto of the preparatory committee, which was deliberately kept small. The actual reason for the uprising were rumours that had been circulating for a long time about the dissolution of the camp and the consequent killing of all Jewish prisoners.

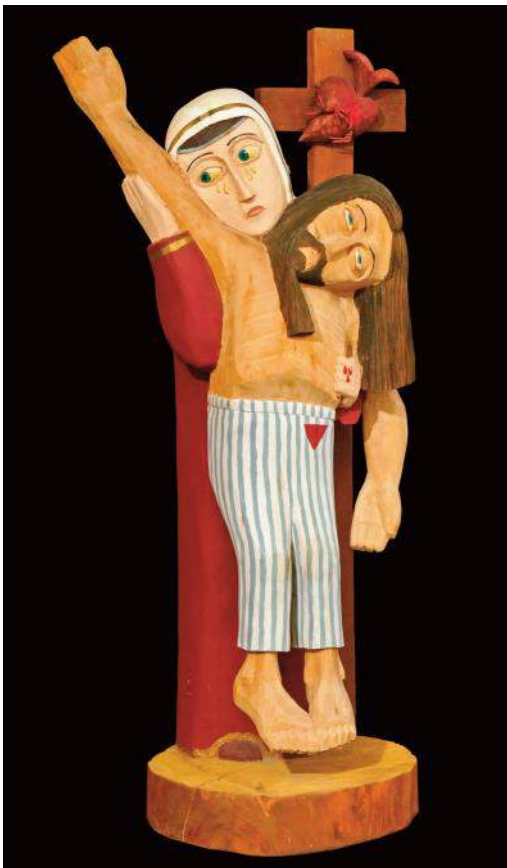
14 october 1943

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, relief, 95 x 30 cm

While watching this work, you get the impression that you are looking at a journalistic photograph. The artist shows us the escape of prisoners, which took place after the outbreak of the uprising in the Sobibór camp on 14 October 1943, shortly after the roll-call at 5 p.m. In the background we can see a chimney, barracks, barbed wire, mines and fighting insurgents, many of whom are wounded and killed.





Our Lady of Sorrows

Henryk Graczyk

polychromed wood, 69 cm

The artist sees in the Polish prisoner, recognisable by the red triangle, on the one hand his tormented compatriot, on the other hand also the Pensive Christ, who here stands for the torment of an entire people. The veneration of the Mother of God as the mother of all those who suffer elevates Mary to the sacred and patriotic figure that she is for Polish Catholicism.

Irena Sendler

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 27 cm

The relief is dedicated to a silent heroine, Irena Sendler, who was able to bring 2,500 children out of the Warsaw Ghetto. We see the "Mother of the Children of the Holocaust" (as she was called) carrying the children in a handcart to safety on the "Aryan side". Stawki Street, located on the grounds of the Warsaw Ghetto, where the so-called Umschlagplatz (*German: reloading point*) was situated, was from 22 July 1942 the place where the Jewish residents destined for extermination in the death camps began their final journey. On the back, the Star of David and a locked door point to the ghetto compound, which was hermetically sealed off from the outside and which none of the residents could leave so easily. In 1965, Irena Sendler was recognised as "Righteous Among the Nations" by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem.



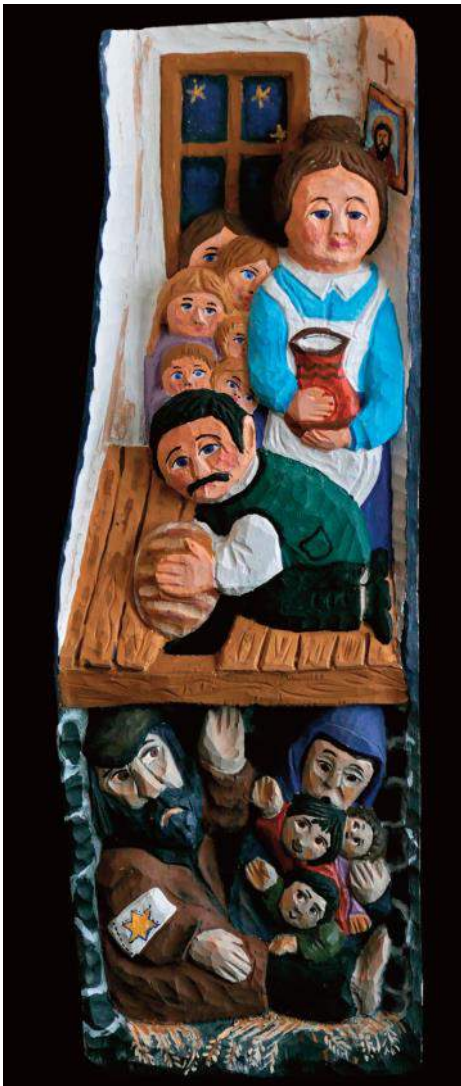
The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Jan Kowalczyk 2013

polychromed wood, triptych, 40 x 160 cm (40 x 80 cm)

The left wing of the triptych shows the event of 1 November 1940, when at 4.05 a.m. the forced resettlement of the Jewish population to the Warsaw Ghetto began. It is still dark outside, and a Jewish family, torn from their sleep, is brought into the ghetto in a great haste. Quickly they are allowed to take the necessary things, there is hardly time to close the cupboard doors. In the middle section are Jews who, on 19 April 1943, offered armed resistance to the SS units whose task was to liquidate the Jewish residential area. Above the heads of the insurgents we see the tzaddik, a pious scholar, saying the Kaddish. The right side shows residents of the "Jewish residential area" boarding the train to the Treblinka extermination camp.





In the Hideout

Jan Kowalczyk 2012

polychromed wood
relief, 53 cm

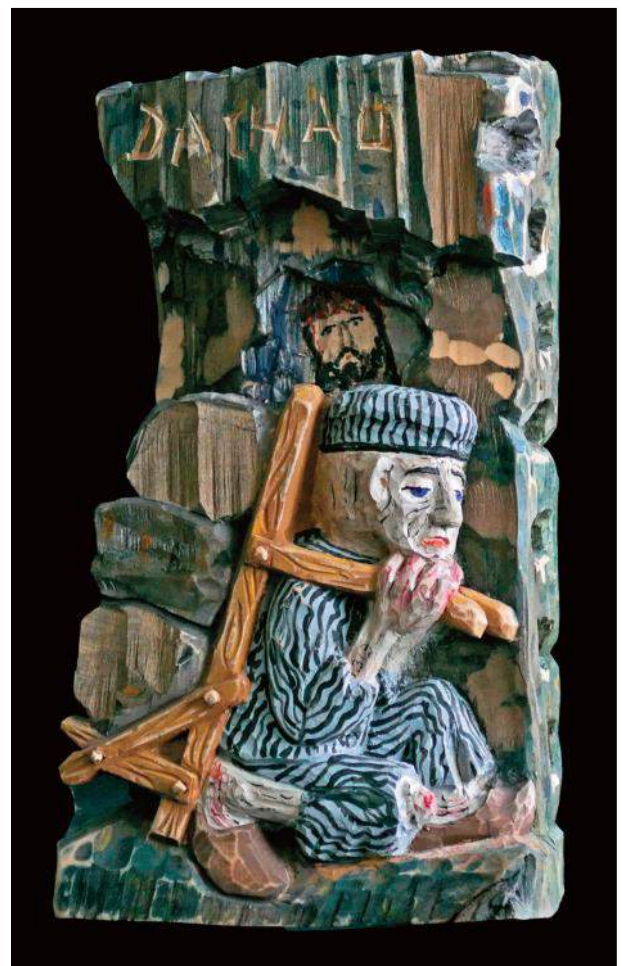
Many Polish citizens risked their own lives to hide Jewish countrymen. The upper part of the relief shows us the living area of a Polish family with many children. The crucifix and the image of Christ on the wall refer to their religious denomination. Under the floor is the hiding place that provides safety for a Jewish family of five. Through the opening, not only vital food but also a light of hope enters the shaft.

In the Quarries

Jan Kowalczyk 2012

polychromed wood, 35 cm

The sculpture shows the young priest Ignacy Ludwik Jeż (1914-2007) during forced labour in the Dachau concentration camp quarry. The distorted face and the bloodied hands and knees testify to inhuman excessive demands. In 1945 the camp was liberated by the Americans. In 1972 Father Jeż was ordained bishop and appointed ordinary of the diocese of Koszalin-Kołobrzeg.





Pregnant in Ravensbrück

Jan Kowalczyk 2012

polychromed wood
relief, 56 cm

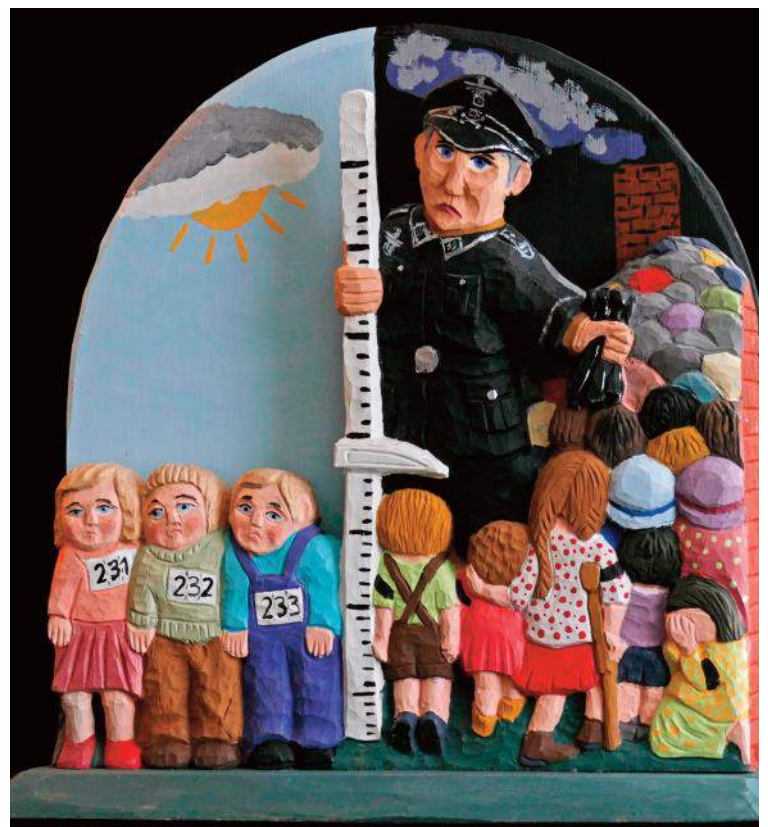
The event depicted here refers to the 12th chapter of the Revelation to John, in which the struggle between good and evil is narrated. Mary, mother of the Saviour, symbol of good and redemption from decay in our world, is attacked by the dragon, the symbol of evil. The pregnant woman who has fallen into the hands of Satan is a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Germanization

Jan Kowalczyk 2011

polychromed wood
relief, 40 cm

What this relief shows in a beautifully coloured setting was less colourful in reality. Thousands of Polish children had to experience such selections at that time. Blond hair colour, blue eyes and the corresponding body measurements decided which child was allowed to continue living. On the right, a boy stands on tiptoe at the measuring pole to make himself appear taller. Above, we see the darkened vault of heaven with the chimney of a crematorium, where death awaited children who did not conform to the "Aryan tables".





In the Ruins

Eugenia Skibińska 1994

polychromed wood, 30 cm

The Warsaw Uprising broke out on 1 August 1944 and lasted 63 days. It was the largest armed uprising against an occupier in the Second World War, which unfortunately ended in defeat. What followed was the complete destruction of the Polish capital. The scene shows us the rescue of an injured youth supporter of the fighting by a paramedic.

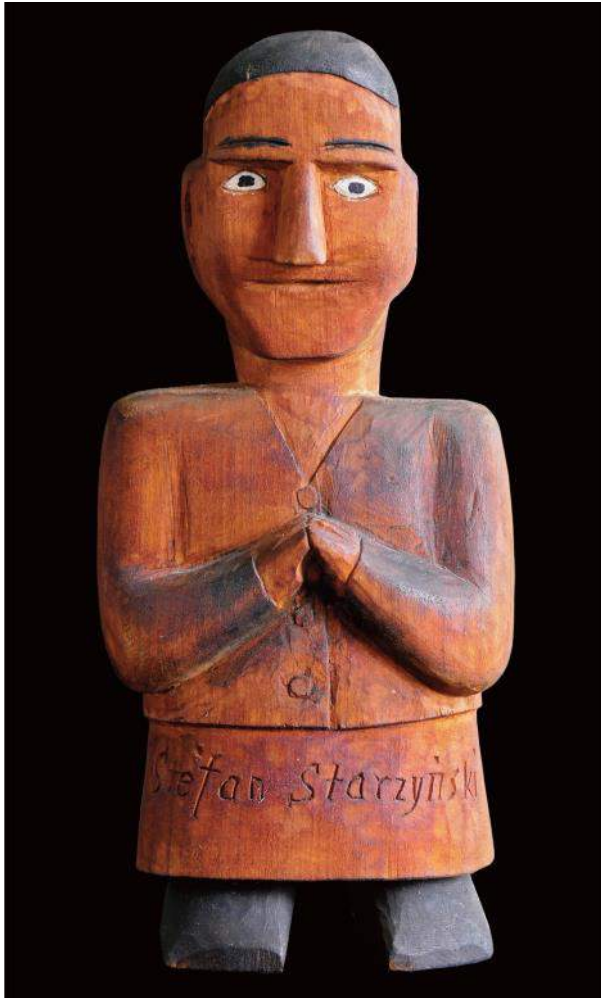
The Warsaw Uprising

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 37 cm

To this day, Poles regard the Warsaw Uprising as the most important, heroic and at the same time tragic period in the history of the Polish capital and its inhabitants. In the foreground we see a shield covering the fighter, decorated with the capital's heraldic figure, the Warsaw Siren. The raised sword of the siren shows the occupier that he will not surrender without resistance. On the left you can see the letter P running out as an anchor, which is an abbreviation for Polska Walcząca ("Fighting Poland"). The text on the base is the opening line of a battle song composed during the Warsaw Uprising called "Hymn of Mokotów".





Stefan Starzyński

Sczepan Mucha 1974

stained wood, 30 cm

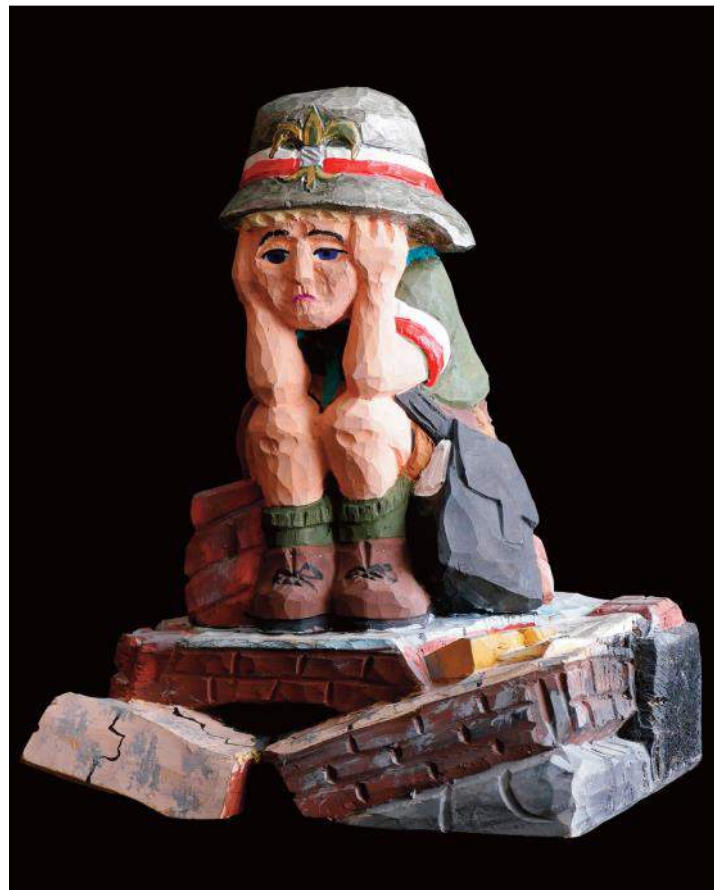
Stefan Starzyński (1893-1939), was the mayor of Warsaw when the Wehrmacht invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. In numerous radio speeches he made passionate appeals to the citizens of Warsaw to persevere and not to lose faith in the power of resistance. With the capitulation of Warsaw on 28 September 1939, Starzyński became a co-founder and at the same time a leading member of the Polish resistance movement. On 27 October 1939 he was captured by the Gestapo and imprisoned in the notorious Pawiak prison. He died by being shot at the end of December 1939.

Little Insurrectionist

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 27 cm

Not far from the Barbican Gate in Warsaw's Old Town stands a monument of a special kind. It shows a child soldier with a rifle strapped around his neck and a steel helmet that is far too big. There were about 2,000-3,000 such child soldiers. They acted as messengers and postmen, but were also assigned to firefighting work or caring for the injured. When looking at this sculpture, the similarity to the original monument of the "Little Insurrectionist" is striking.





General Emil August Fieldorf

Jan Kowalczyk 2014

polychromed wood, 37 cm

Fieldorf occupied high-ranking military leadership positions in the First World War, in the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921 as well as in the Second World War. As leader of the underground organisation "KEDYW", he was responsible for sabotage and reprisal actions against the Nazi occupiers. What made his fate particularly tragic was his deportation by the Soviets to a labour camp in the Ural Mountains, from which he returned in 1947 but was then arrested by the Polish Ministry of Public Security in 1950 on charges of shooting Soviet Russian partisans and sentenced to death.

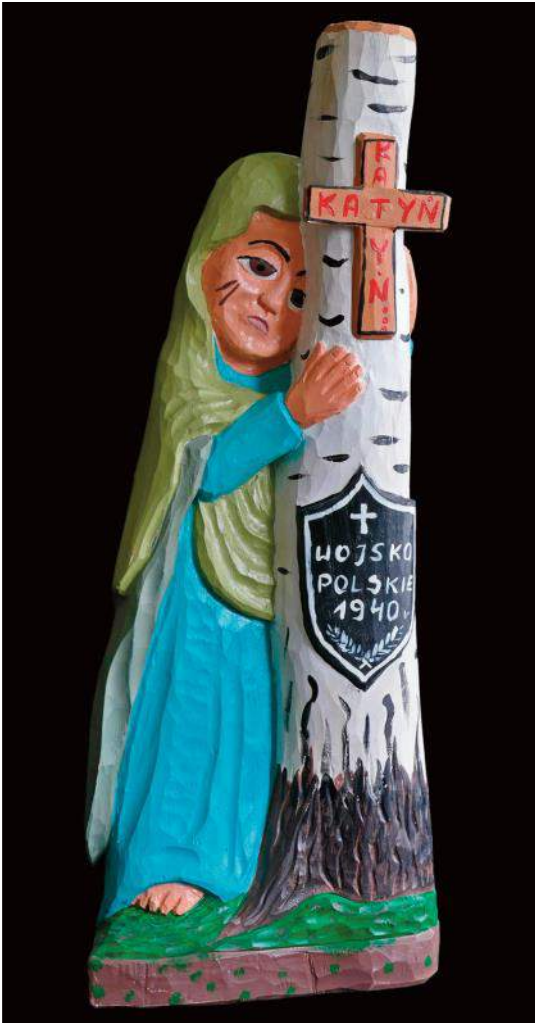
Katyń

Stanisław Suska 2011

polychromed wood
relief, 35 cm

Katyń is considered a synonym for a killing crime of at least 21,768 citizens of Poland (including 10,000 officers) committed by the NKVD of the USSR in the spring of 1940. For years, the Soviet administration tried to blame this mass murder on the Nazi German side. Polish officers had been arrested and held in an Orthodox church in Kozielsk before being transported in cattle cars to Katyń near Smoleńsk.





Our Lady of Katyń

Jan Kowalczyk 2008

polychromed wood, 45 cm

This sculpture depicts the Sorrowful Mother in a Polish cemetery, lamenting the tragic fate of the Polish military elite in Katyń. The veneration of the Mother of God has strong historical roots in Poland, dating back to the 17th century. In 1656, Mary was raised to the rank of Queen of Poland. Exactly 300 years later, the Polish episcopate under its then Primate Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński (1901-1981) renewed this vow.

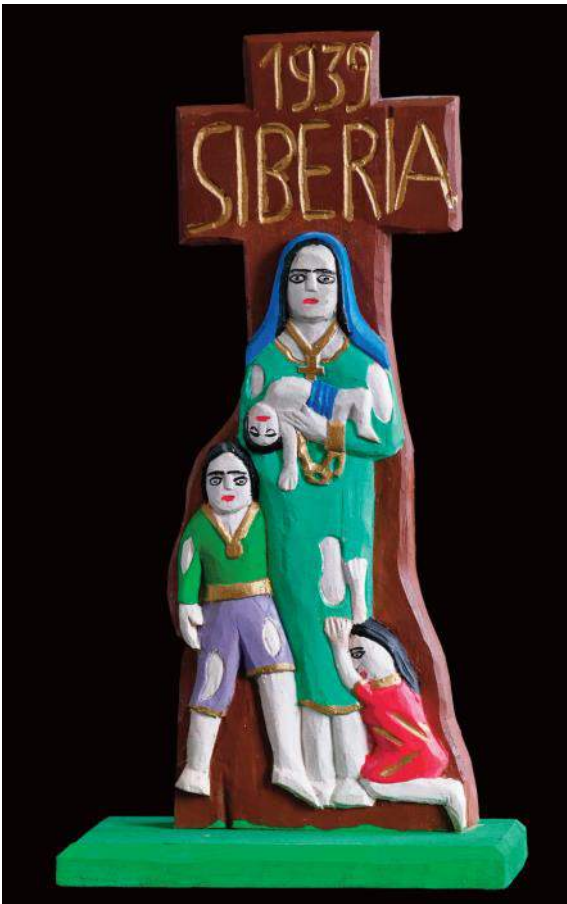
Dragged off to the Gulag

Jan Kowalczyk 2003

polychromed wood, 48 cm

With Soviet Russia's invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939, the long chapter of the enslavement and mass liquidation of the Polish population in the gulag system began. The stigmata of the man set in the colour red symbolise the martyrdom of Christ and refer to the Polish suffering of the exiles of those years. The woman at his side is reminiscent of the Sorrowful Mother.





Children in the Gulag

Piotr Kożuch 2003

polychromed wood, 37 cm

A particularly sombre chapter is that of the (not only) Polish children in Soviet Russian labour camps. The relief depicts a woman bound with chains looking after a group of children. The ragged clothing is meant to remind us of the material hardship that banishment brought with it. The term "Siberia" was already a synonymous with forced labour, violence and death in Tsarist times and remained so until Soviet times.

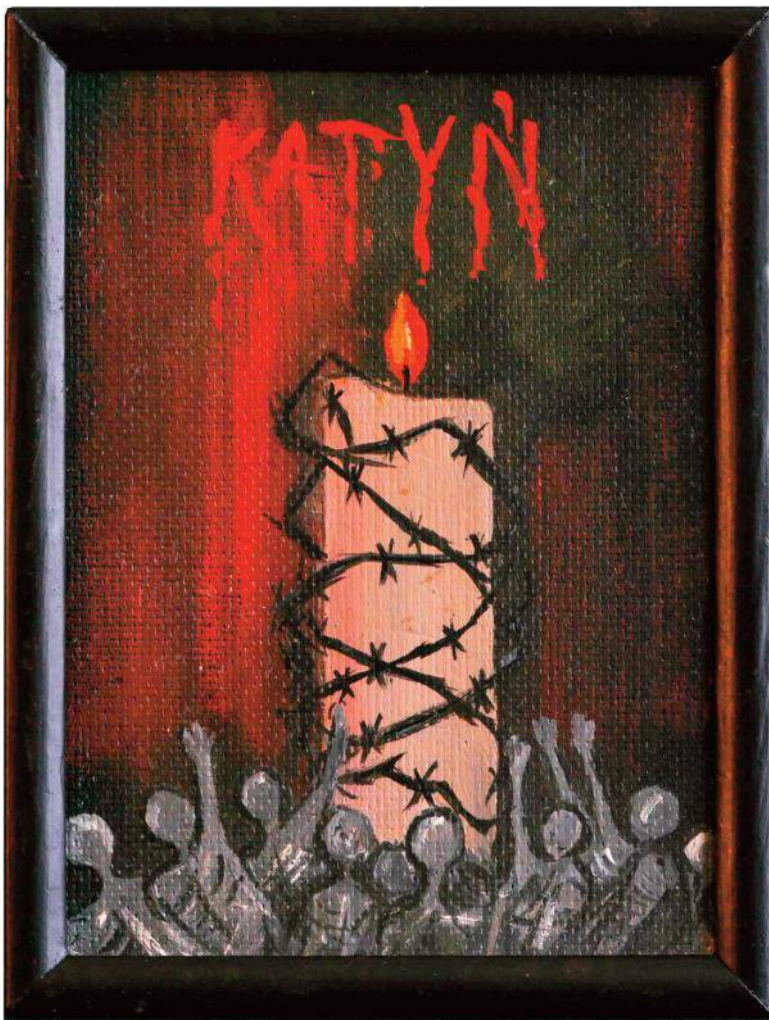
Poles in Siberia

Jan Kowalczyk 2010

polychromed wood, 24 cm

The artist has given the metal of the chains and the clothing of the frostbitten workers forced to cut wood a tingling white-silver colouring. The ice crystals visualise the barely bearable outside temperatures in Siberia. The icy cold prevents a necessary rest. The scene depicted is at the same time a metaphor of a numb humanity. The forced labourer's hands are folded in prayer for salvation. The chaining of the three suffering figures speaks for long years of unfreedom.





The Dead are calling Eugeniusz Izdebski 1994

acrylic on cardboard, 20 x 15 cm

With a few accentuations, the artist succeeds in visualising the tragedy of the mass murders of 1940. The red of the blood of the murdered officers overflows everything. The burning light of the candle crammed into barbed wire is to be interpreted as a metaphor for all those who entered the realm of death without being given a grave in the earth of their homeland. The cry for liberation from the yoke of the "Big Brother" was fulfilled neither in the years of banishment nor in the times of the communist rulers of post-war Poland. Hope was only fulfilled with the election of the Pope and the Solidarność events.

The two Crowns Rajmund Kicman 2014

colour glazed ceramics, 17 cm

According to tradition, little Rajmund Kolbe experienced an apparition of Mary as a child. Our Lady showed him two crowns, one white and one red. White means purity, red means martyrdom. She asked him which one he wanted and he chose both. Two angels kneel at the feet of the martyr. One offers him the white crown, the other hands him the red one and the striped convict garment with the number 16670. The palm branch enclosed is considered a symbol of martyrdom in hagiography. The fact that this work is made of ceramic makes it unique.





Blooming Rose in Auschwitz

Andrzej Wojtszak 2013

polychromed wood, 39 cm

The striped convict garment with the number 16670 clearly refers to Maximilian Kolbe. In his hands he holds a blossoming rose, which Christian iconography symbolically assigns to Mary, the immaculate Mother of God, without original sin. The inscription above the camp gate indicates the place of imprisonment.

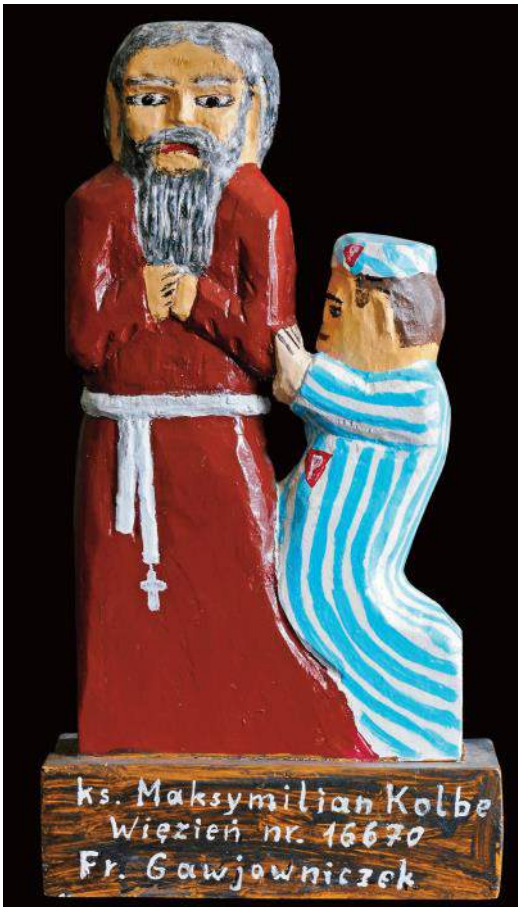
Father Kolbe and the Holy Spirit

Andrzej Wojtszak 2014

polychromed wood, 43 cm

According to Christian understanding, the dove symbolises the Holy Spirit. Where it is present, God's creative power is at work. Furthermore, the dove is an attribute of the following virtues: Chastity, Humility, Hope, Temperance and Concord. Maximilian Kolbe lived according to all these values.





Prisoner Number 5659

Józef Chełmowski 2007

polychromed wood, 40 cm

The kneeling prisoner is Franciszek Gajowniczek, for whom Maximilian Kolbe voluntarily handed himself over to certain death in the hunger bunker. The rescued man died of old age at the age of 94 on 13 March 1995. His grave is located in the cemetery of the Franciscan Monastery in Niepokalanów and is open to the public.

The End of July 1941

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 32 cm

At the end of July 1941, a prisoner escape occurred in the Auschwitz camp. As part of a reprisal action, Schutzhaftlagerführer Karl Fritsch had all the prisoners line up on the roll call square and declared that every tenth person counted would be sentenced to death. Franciszek Gajowniczek was one of the prisoners who were counted. Father Maximilian Kolbe then stepped out of line and offered to go to his death in place of the father of a family. The SS Hauptsturmführer accepted this exchange. Kolbe was led to the starvation bunker, where he was given a lethal phenol injection by an SS doctor on 14 August





Habit and striped Garment

Tadeusz Adamski 2009

polychromed wood, 30 cm

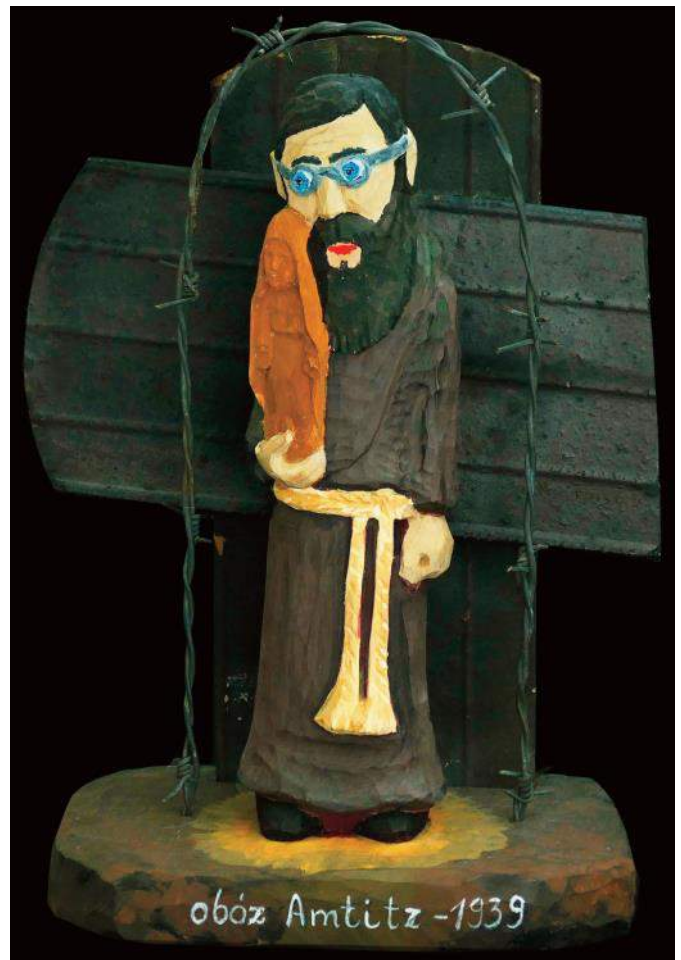
The sculpture depicts Maximilian Kolbe. Four attributes are characteristic of the martyr of Auschwitz. The habit indicates that he belonged to the clergy. The simply knitted rope identifies the wearer as someone who is committed to the virtues of temperance and discipline. In liturgy, the red stole symbolises martyrdom. The striped convict garment with the number 16670 symbolises Maximilian Kolbe's way of suffering in following Christ.

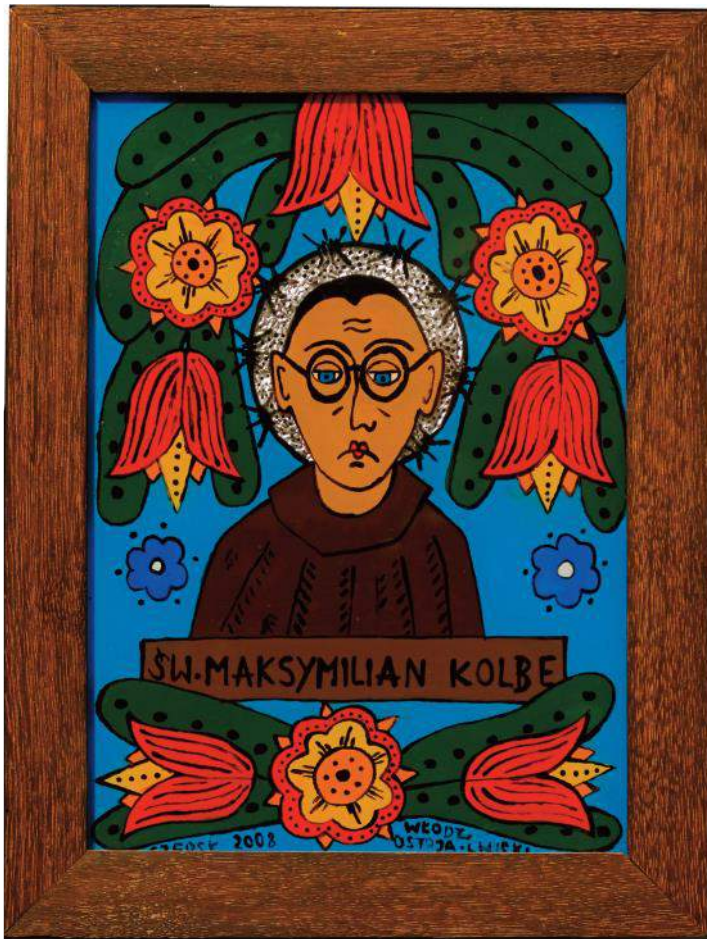
In the Camp at Amtitz

Jan Kowalczyk 2015

polychromed wood
roof tiles, barbed wire, 37 cm

As Guardian of the Niepokalanów Monastery at the time, Father Kolbe was arrested on 19 September together with several confreres and taken to the Amtitz camp. Today this place is called Gębice and is located near Krosno-Odrzańskie in the Lubuskie Voivodeship. There is a church there from the 15th century. The artist used two roof tiles from this church to make the cross.





Kashubian Reverse Painting on glass

Włodzimierz Ostoja-Lniski 2008

reverse glass painting, 38 x 20 cm

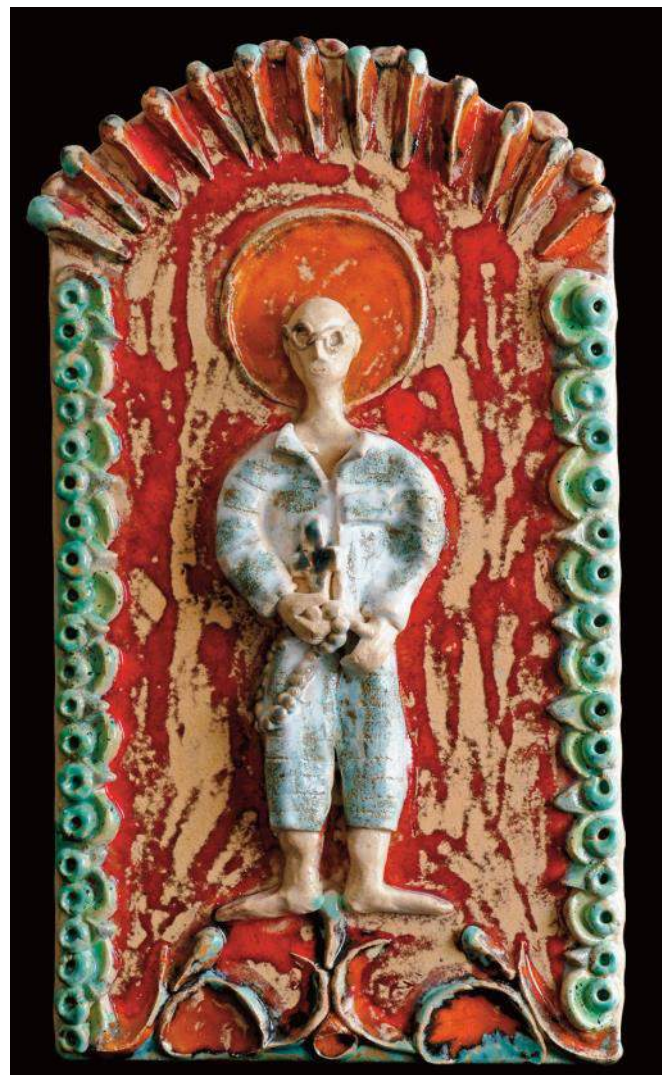
Non-professional art includes not only sculpture but also reverse painting on glass. The Kashubian creator of this painting depicting Maximilian Kolbe is additionally significant as a sculptor. Floral ornaments are typical of the painting of this region and reflect the colourfulness of Kashubian nature.

Praying Person in the 20th century

Małgorzata Boksa 2008

glazed ceramics, 41 x 23 cm

In this ceramic relief, we once again we come across Maximilian Kolbe. Father Kolbe wears a blue-grey camp uniform and is immersed in the prayer of the rosary. The central figure of his life of faith was the "Immaculata". Through the prayer of the rosary he gained access to her Son, Jesus Christ.



Counted out

Włodzimierz Ostoja-Lniski 2013

polychromed wood

relief, 46 x 30 cm

The prisoners standing in the background have been sentenced to death by shooting. They have been "counted out" of a group by random decision. The death sentences have been passed and there is no turning back. A closer look at the facial expressions reveals a strange mixture of fear of death and astonishment at the "prisoner exchange" — Father Kolbe for Franciszek Gajowniczek — that has just been witnessed.

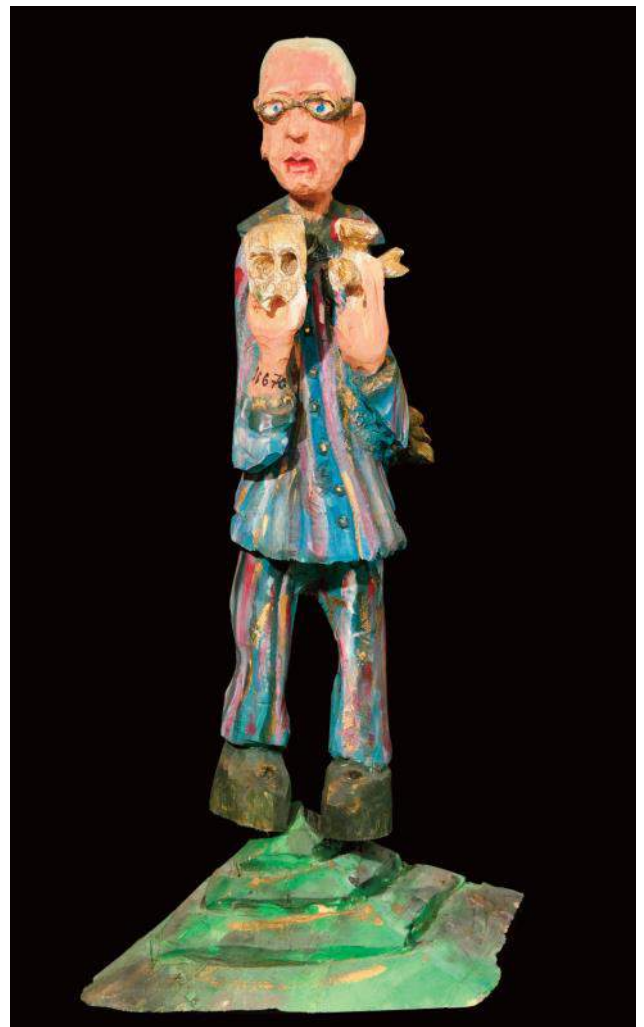


In the Starvation Bunker

Krzysztof Grodzicki 2011

polychromed wood, 83 cm

Just like Jesus Christ, Father Kolbe also chose voluntary sacrificial death so that his neighbour could live. In both cases, redemption comes through martyrdom. In the darkness of Auschwitz suddenly there was light and this light was the living bread that Father Kolbe carried with him.





Father Kolbe in the Shine of the Aureole

Włodzimierz Ostoja-Lniski 2012

polychromed wood
relief, 45 x 26 cm

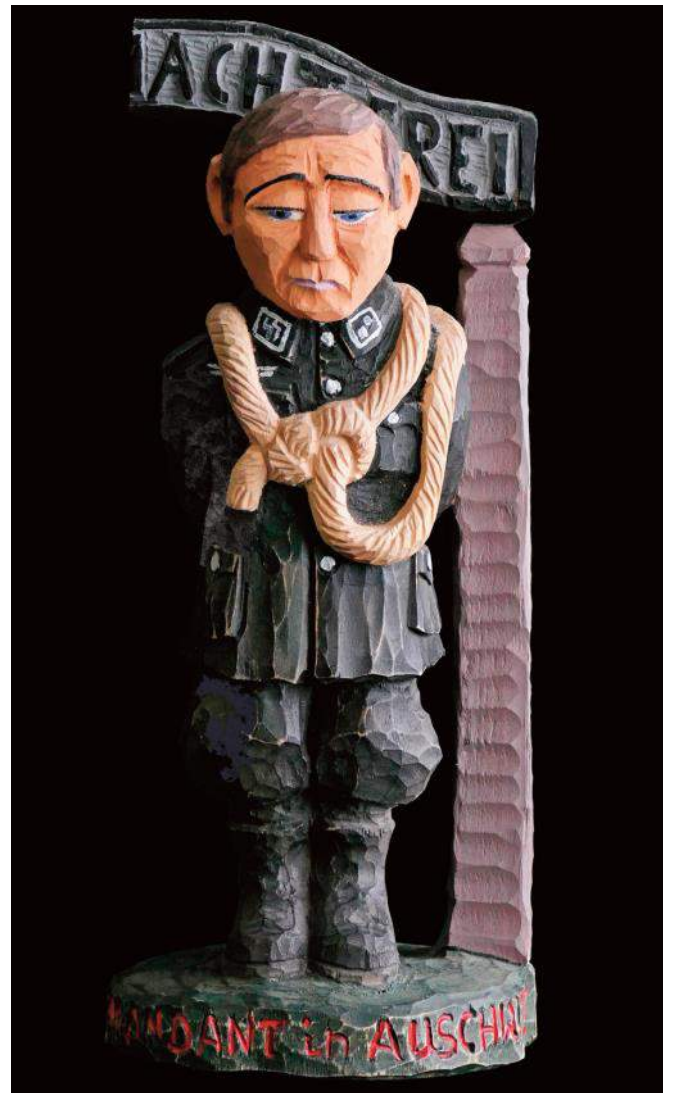
This relief shows Father Kolbe in striped uniform with the camp number against the background of an electrically charged barbed wire fence. The aureole in bright gold colour corresponds with the light background. In art history, the colour blue is considered a symbol of heaven, i.e. the divine abode.

Camp Commandant Rudolf Höss

Jan Kowalczyk 2009

polychromed wood, 36 cm

The sculpture shows the last minutes of the life of the commander of the largest extermination camp. Rudolf Höss was arrested on 11 March 1946 and handed over to the Polish authorities in Krakow on 25 May. After a preliminary investigation, the trial against him took place in Warsaw on 3 March 1947. The death sentence was pronounced there on 2 April 1947. Immediately afterwards Höss was transferred to Wadowice prison, from where he was taken to the Auschwitz I camp on 16 April to end up on the gallows. These gallows can be seen today in the museum in Auschwitz.





Escape

Jan Giejson 2018

polychromed wood, 47 cm

In concentration camps, any attempt to escape was punished by death. There was a macabre custom in the Gross-Rosen camp of dressing the failed escapee in a clown costume. In addition, a sign with the sarcastic inscription "Hurray, I'm back" was hung around his neck, and then he was led through the camp (like in a circus arena). After this terrifying spectacle, organized for SS-men who thirsted for entertainment, the prisoner was hanged on the gallows. The colour of the shirt used by the author of this work is not accidental. In the Middle Ages, yellow was a symbol of betrayal, ostracism and social isolation. That is why the artists of that time depicted Judas (the betrayer of Jesus) always in a yellow robe. The Nazis adopted this colour symbolism and ordered Jews to wear the inscription JUDE or the Star of David on a yellow background.