

Please describe your artistic education.

I graduated from the Tadeusz Makowski High School of Art. After graduation I applied to the Faculty of Painting and Graphics at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz, but luckily I didn't get accepted. I applied there a little bit because most of my friends did, and a little bit because I was afraid I wouldn't get accepted at my dreamt-of Faculty of Textile... In effect, I got accepted at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun. High quality education and fantastic lectures on art history, a lot of really interesting theoretical lectures. The graduates of Nicolaus Copernicus University are very respected and very well educated conservators and restorers. However there was not enough emphasis on practical workshops... After the first year I transferred to Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz and my dream Faculty of Textiles and Fashion.

Did you also study painting?

Painting classes continued throughout all the semesters, so I studied textiles and painting at the same time. The subject of my specialisation was printing on fabric. I added an appendix in painting to the diploma.

Which painters were your main influences?

Oh, there are so many! Painting is my passion, I keep learning new things all the time, discover new artists. My fascinations change, evolve with time. I value the works of the masters of the past as much as the artists creating currently. However for many years now I appreciate the primitivists, naive and amateur painters. I am drawn to their world of limitless imagination. They command respect for the passion, with which they created. The paintings of Teofil Ociepka, Nikifor and the sculptures of self-taught artist Stanisław Zagajewski are especially dear to me... Their art is characterized by great sensitivity. By creating within a certain distance from the official culture, they had better contact with collective unconsciousness, expressed in dreams, legends and myths. Naive artists had a mission. Through their works they speak about the troubles of modern times, perhaps even foresee the future. There's also something very touching in their works...

I greatly appreciate the artworks of Henryk Płóciennik, who, without academic education, was blessed with extraordinary artistry and is without a doubt one of the most outstanding Polish graphic artists. I love the paintings of Henri Rousseau, Frida Kahlo, Augustin Lesage... Lately I discovered the works of Nick Cave, American artist – sculptor, dancer and performer. He combined his fascination with dance with African art and created incredible textile sculptures-costumes, intricately embroidered installations. So not only paintings stimulate my imagination, equally strong I am influenced by music, theatre and cinema. For example, the works of one of my favourite directors, Sergei Parajanov. After seeing his *The Colour of Pomegranates* I finally decided to apply to the Faculty of Textiles and Fashion. Parajanov was Armenian by origin, and in that culture the fabrics, carpets are much more than everyday utilitarian objects. They also carry a spiritual significance.

Which paints are you using?

All types of water-based paints. Acrylics, water-based enamels, pigments. I often combine them together. I used to work with water-based inks used in fabric printing, which I combined with pigments. As a result the paints became more flexible and durable. Earlier I experimented a lot, I made paints myself, unfortunately it gets more and more difficult to get some of the ingredients... Currently I use tried-and-tested paints.

I find many folk art influences and symbols in your paintings. Are these references to folk stories and traditions?

I was born in Lowicz, in a region that is famous for its very rich and long tradition, craftsmen, cut-out artists, fabulously colourful folk costumes, famous “spiders” (decorations hung from the ceiling) and striped fabrics (fabrics that were used to make distinctive folk costumes). When I was 15 I left for Lodz, these two cities are very different in every respect. Growing up in Lowicz I did not appreciate enough the local folklore. It was ordinary and natural for me. It was only when I left my home town, that I learned after a while to see the folk crafts in a new way. I began to appreciate the home folk art. Although I adored the industrial character of Lodz, with time I was more and more absorbed with painting and the noise of the big city was starting to disturb me. Return to Lowicz proved to be the right move. When I was living in Lodz, I painted images inspired by the landscapes of Lowicz and Slavic mythology. Returning to my home area only strengthened my passion for the native art, folk crafts and specific landscape. The beliefs of my ancestors have forever fascinated me. My grandmother Hania often read to me legends about the unruly Klobuczek, Smetek, the tales of Warmia, Mazury and Silesia. That world of our ancestors was inhabited by extraordinary, fantastic creatures and deities. Slavs treated nature with remarkable respect. In my paintings I often portray mysterious creatures and events from Slavic mythology. I gladly refer to the native folklore, which sometimes has a hypnotic effect on me. I need the contact with the folk art, it inspires me, helps me get in touch with my roots and improves my mood. By creating all those beautiful and richly decorated items, cut-outs, “spiders”, my ancestors made their world, often grey, more beautiful.

My impression is that your paintings combine traditional and surrealist elements. How would you describe your style?

At the Academy I was interested primarily in abstraction, then figurative painting. Once I felt close to expressionism, then magic realism and finally the surrealism mentioned by you. In fact I think the ideas of surrealism are closest to me. They thought that a man is guided by forces independent from his conscious “I”. They were fascinated by what their subconsciousness concealed. That’s why they respected the

naive, folk and mentally ill artists. They paid attention to the creators of psychoanalysis. I am also interested in Carl Gustav Jung and his ideas, especially those concerning collective unconsciousness. When I paint I refer to my roots, this way I create a natural bond with people, who are very close to me, who have passed. When I paint I try not to limit myself, and attempts to classify your own work can be limiting. Sometimes I consciously refer to some trend in art, and sometimes I act instinctively. I think it's important that there's a mystery concealed in the painting. When I allow my imagination to lead me, my paintings tell me what they need from me.

You have graduated from the Faculty of Textile and Fashion Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz. You paint beautiful fabrics. Do you also design fabrics?

At the Academy I designed textiles, printed and jacquard. For several years now I primarily paint, but I do wish to - just for a moment - return to making unique textiles. Hopefully, I can do that really soon. Gradually I am getting ready for a big, individual exhibition, that is planned for 2018. By this time I want to complete installations, woven objects, in which I refer to folk fabrics and crafts. In a way, my paintings also refer to fabrics. Studies at the Printing on Fabric workshop really enriched my painting skills. I still sometimes use printing techniques, such as dying and staining fabrics, I use of paints that are used for printing on fabric. Sometimes I use screen painting and transfer printing. Sometimes I find myself composing a painting in a similar way to designing a fabric. I think about the pattern. I try to have the individual elements of the painting placed in a way that creates a consistent, repeated pattern.

On your website I saw that you also design ornaments, what material are they made of?

At the Academy I spent some time at the jewellery making workshop. After several years I decided to go back to my old passion and sometimes I design jewellery. But I do this mainly for myself and very rarely. Unfortunately I can't commit as much time to this as I would like to. The works presented on the site are made out of plexiglass.

Is it easier to make a living from painting than from textile design?

It depends how you look at it. Designing fabrics is a very broad term. You can do this commercially, design patterns for some company, you can weave decorative tapestries or utilitarian fabrics for crafts, or make typically artistic fabrics - unique pieces, textile art. During studies they tried to prepare us for every possible alternative, but the emphasis was on the area of design. Professionally, I've tried the first option and after three years I've had enough. Right after graduation I found a job in a company, where I designed the prints for clothing. While I was working there I had no chance to develop further, so I kept painting. After several years working for the industry has become very boring and I started feeling burned out. With time

painting occupied more and more of my time and finally became my primary occupation. I was worried - and I still am - If I will be able to make a living out of it, but I am consequently sticking to the chosen path. Painting makes me happy.

I think textile art is very underrated. What do you think? What might be the reason?

I agree, I also think that the fibre arts are omitted. Fabric is not one of the main trends in art. I was constantly surprised that even at my Academy you could feel, that textile students are treated a little bit like they were from outer space. And this is the faculty that is the oldest and with the richest traditions. The history of Lodz is intertwined with the history of textiles. For many years Lodz was the centre of textile production in Poland and one of the most important in Europe. In 19th century it was here that the textile industry booming, and in result Poland became one of the most important exporter of high quality linen and wool yarn and fabric. This was the case until the mid-90s of the twentieth century... Central Museum of Textiles in Lodz organizes the biggest and the oldest exhibition-competition of contemporary textiles in the world since 1972, International Triennial of Tapestry. However I get the feeling that this city does not use the full potential behind such a significant event. Several factors contribute to this state of affairs. Firstly, fibre art is associated by an average person with something archaic, obsolete. Secondly, everything that is associated with fabric, was associated with women. It was primarily women who were the spinners, dyers, weavers, seamstresses, embroiderers, etc. Hence, the fibre art, textile art are the areas considered typically female. I have the impression that textile is often overlooked and discriminated, exactly in the same way as women are discriminated. At the Faculty of Textile there are mostly female students, there were only few guys in my year. Only two chose one of the textile workshops as specialisation. The rest of the men who chose this faculty, did it with intention to become fashion designers. The professors are also mostly women. When I was studying there, only one of all the workshops specialising in fabric and fashion design, was led by a man, professor Andrzej Rajch. Men usually choose painting, sculpture, graphics, design. Sometimes guys from the other faculties said I was studying at the faculty of "rags". Seemingly such an innocent joke, but there was something hurtful and chauvinistic about it... Fabric is a unique medium. It requires a lot of time, patience and love. The art of weaving stands in opposition to what today's pop culture offers. The world is speeding, chasing new technologies, forgetting the old techniques. And at the same time handmade items and crafts are increasingly valuable. Therefore I hope, that everything, that is associated with the widely understood notion of artistic textiles, will be met with growing interest. All the more, there are examples, that fabric is capable of fantastically responding to the demands of today's world. It is a very flexible and graceful medium, it is a challenge to artists, designers and also latest

technologies. But for me personally the most captivating aspect is the symbolic dimension. Repeating certain moves and gestures during weaving or printing has its rhythm, that you have to subdue yourself to. When you are making fabric, you get into a state, that is quite similar to meditation.