

Classics of Polish Design. Polish avant-garde Bauhaus style furniture from the interwar period

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Abstract: *Classics of Polish Design. Polish avant-garde Bauhaus style furniture from the interwar period* presents a review of the best Polish furniture designs from the 1920s and 1930s. In spite of the inspirations with historicism popular in the interwar period and the references to folk culture (e.g., the "Ład" Artists' Cooperative), Polish designers also drew inspiration from the works of the following artists: Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe and Mart Stam, who designed avant-garde furniture made of metal pipes. The paper presents little known works of Polish artists from the groups "Praesens", "Atelier wnętrz i architektury" (The Atelier of Interiors and Architecture), "Studium wnętrz i sprzętu" (Studio of Interiors and Equipment), as well as furniture designs referring to the Bauhaus style for private and public interiors (including designs for transatlantics or the President's Castle in Wisła), among others, manufactured by the Thonet-Mundus company. The paper continues the series devoted to the "Classics of Polish Design", presenting the results of research on Polish furniture, carried out within the framework of dissertations in the Department of Wood Technology in the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW).

Keywords: Polish inter-war furniture, Polish inter-war avant-garde, Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, metal pipe furniture

1. INTRODUCTION

The two decades of the interwar period were a breakthrough stage in the history of global design. Under the influence of social transformations, a modern approach to interiors and furniture design started to develop [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. And although the dominant style at that time was Art Deco, making reference to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and other historical styles (such as classicism, empiricism and Biedermeier), or the art of faraway cultures (Africa, Mexico and the Far East), another modern style started to appear among them, which drew inspiration from ideas of the avant-garde (Fig. 1-3) [Benton 2010].



Fig. 1. Chair "ST12" designed by Mart Stam
[<https://cooperhewitt.org>]



Fig.2. "B33 Wassily", a chair with handrests designed by Marcel Breuer in 1925 [<https://knoll.com>]



Fig. 3. "Cesca Chair" manufactured based on Marcel Breuer's design from 1928 [<https://knoll.com>]

The key moment of development of the Art Deco style was the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925 [Sosnowska 2007] that provided a platform for the confrontation between unengaged decorative applied arts and more socially modern designs (e.g., Le Corbusier's "L'Esprit Nouveau" pavilion [Leśniakowska 2007], or the Soviet pavilion [Luba 2007]). The Polish pavilion for this exhibition was prepared by artists cooperating with the "Rytm" [Rhythm] group, created in 1922 by artists at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts. Members of the group included Zofia Stryjeńska (painter, illustrator, scenographer) and architects and painters: Stanisław Noakowski and Tadeusz Gronowski, who – *nota bene* – won an award at the Paris Exhibition [Nowakowska-Sito 2001].

After 1929, due to the Wall Street financial crash and the economic crisis, design started to be dominated by modernism, which prioritised the efficiency and functionality of the manufactured equipment. Art Deco proved to be a passing phase due to, mostly, the high price of materials and production costs [Fiell, Fiell 2015]. The artists reached back to the avant-garde aesthetics of the first quarter of the 20th century and started to use new materials such as steel pipes or Bakelite. An important input into the development of modern furniture style came from the De Stijl group as well as the German School of Arts and Crafts – the Bauhaus [Naylor 1977] (Fig.1-3). This modern style, stemming from avant-garde, is currently considered to be one of the variants of Art Deco.

After Poland regained independence in 1918, the State had to not only rebuild its autonomy, but also create a uniform system of visual identification and rebuild the artistic identity of Poland. Therefore, the most eminent artists were asked to prepare designs for money bills and coins, postal stamps and financial bonds, that were aimed at popularizing the symbols of Polish state [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. They were searching for a national style. In general, the Polish Art Deco was a domestic variant of the American style that was created on the basis of inspirations similar to those in European art [Chlewiński 2006]. However (just like in other countries), the creation of a new style should be linked to the activity of associations that operated in Poland at the beginning of the 20th century [Huml 1978], so the Polish variant of Art Deco was aimed at developing a national style based on folk tradition and art. A special source of inspiration was provided by the Zakopane style of Stanisław Witkiewicz – the first actual national style created in the last quarter of the 19th century as the foundation for Polish national character related to Polish state, and in opposition to the international health resorts style (from the Alps and Russia) introduced by the partitioning states for the sake of cultural domination [Tondos 2004]). The Polish Art Deco style in its national version, defined for the first time in the Polish Pavilion at the Paris Expo in 1925, until the beginning of World War 2 was continued by the Artist's Cooperative Ład created in 1926, by lecturers and students from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. At the beginning, "Ład" included artists such as Józef Czajkowski, Wojciech Jastrzębowski, Karol Tichy, Karol Stryjeński or Eleonora Plutyńska. The Art Deco style was perfectly suitable for applied arts, but not so much in architecture. During the entire interwar period, government edifices and other public buildings were constructed in the aesthetics of modernised classicism. Nonetheless, external decorations such as bands of recesses, and the interior design made reference to Art Deco [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. Characteristic interiors of the Polish variant of Art Deco were designed by Wojciech Jastrzębowski for the building of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, such as: office of the Minister, clerk offices and a conference room. The second building entirely designed in this style, was the Ateneum theatre in Warsaw. Romuald Miller was responsible for the architecture of this building, while interiors were designed in cooperation with: Wojciech Jastrzębowski, Edward Trojanowski and Jan Szczepkowski. Moreover, between 1928-1931, new interiors were designed for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the Parliament (Sejm) got an entire new building together with interior equipment.

In spite of the remarkable development of the national Art Deco variant in Poland, many Polish artists – influenced by European avant-garde groups – broke their links with historicism, classicism, and folk tradition. This trend got fully visible at the end of 1920s, when artists started to avoid ornaments (which had been an indispensable element of furniture pieces for ages). It became prevalent to design furniture in the spirit of functionality and structure purity. Inspirations with Bauhaus were clearly visible in Polish furniture designs, with the characteristic steel pipes used as structural elements. In the first half of the 1920s, many public buildings were refurbished, such as: government and diplomatic buildings, restaurants, and hotels. In many of them, the style of interiors followed the rules of the European avant-garde variant of Art Deco. The cold sophistication of steel in the interiors of the Prudential skyscraper was highlighted by effective furniture veneers. Office rooms in this building featured steel furniture designed by Marcin Weinfeld and Nina Jankowska [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. More and more often, in the cities, frames of shop showcases and mirrors were finished with refined materials such as chromium, marble, nickel; and interiors were decorated with glass and chrome-plated steel, in the typical functional style of the Bauhaus school.

At the end of the 1930s, furniture built with metal was still perceived by the society as more suitable for public building interiors, such as hospitals, government edifices or stores. Furniture made in that style, based on Bauhaus originals, found their place in such interiors as the Adria Cafeteria in Warsaw, the "Majestic" cinema, the "Bufet Automatyczny" bar, as well as the shoe store "Bata" [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].

Avant-garde furniture made of metal pipes was designed by renowned Polish designers and produced by the Thonet-Mundus concern in its production plants in Poland [Swiryda 1989]. The furniture can be admired until today in the Presidential Residence Castle in Wisła, which suggests they were prestigious in spite of their niche character. Nonetheless, the aesthetics of furniture made of metal pipes was too modern for those times, so we will encounter them more often in stores, cafeterias or transatlantics than in private interiors. Unfortunately, these wonderful artefacts of Polish design from the interwar period are not very well known by the general public. Therefore, the main goal of the hereby paper is to remind people about them by gathering information about their characteristics, analysis and identification.

The paper tracks different manifestations of artistic avant-garde in Poland, searching for them in the area of modern style furniture designs. It presents the works of several Polish avant-garde groups, as well as individual artists, and interiors containing furniture created according to the style of functionalism.

Due to the rare and random character of information about Polish furniture made of steel pipes in reference literature on the subject, the analysis of specific pieces was based on queries of iconographic materials obtained mainly from online sources.

2. AVANT-GARDE ART GROUPS IN POLAND IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

In the interwar period in Poland, there were three groups of constructivist avant-garde: "Blok", "Praesens" and "a.r." [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005; <https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/polskie-wzornictwo-xx-wieku>], that combined functional forms with social radicalism. The members of those groups were more interested in perceiving the interior as a coherent spatial whole rather than designing separate, individual pieces of furniture. The avant-garde concept initiated by Le Corbusier, viewing furniture as machines supposed to efficiently satisfy all the needs of their users, led to the creation of multifunctional interiors and furniture pieces (for instance, a bed that could be folded and hidden in the wall), as well as the reduction of average apartment size. Avant-garde artists opposed the use of ornaments, focusing on balance, coherent proportions, consistent colour palette and textures of the materials used [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005]. In spite of generally similar assumptions, the individual groups were different from one another.

The "**Blok**" group was the first one, created already in 1924 by eminent sculptors and painters inspired by the activity of Bauhaus, the De Stijl group, and Soviet constructivism. Members of "Blok" included the following artists: Katarzyna Kobro, Edmund Miller, Aleksander Rafałowski, Henryk Stażewski, Władysław Strzemiński, Mieczysław Szczuka and Teresa Żarnowerówna. Their goal consisted in improving human surroundings by the means of architecture, interior design, and industrial design. One of the matters they focused on was the need to create a modern formula for industrial design. The formula consisted in clear links between art and production, as well as between the artist and the engineer, in line with the concept of combining art with technology. Unfortunately, members of "Blok" were sculptors and painters and did not have much technical knowledge. As a result, they had to limit themselves to the aesthetic architectural design of furniture and interiors, and after two years of existence, the group was dissolved [<https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/blok>].

The "**Praesens**" group (1926-1930) was founded by architects (Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Bohdan Lachert, Józef Szanajca, Helena and Szymon Syrkus) and also accepted young visual artists as its members. Initially, the group cooperated with Kobro, Stażewski and Strzemiński from the "Blok" group, but after three years, the cooperation ended. It happened because of a completely different approach to technology, as well as to other artistic communities. Architects treated technology as a means to carry out their goals – not only artistic, but also social and economical. As to design, they were keen on the concepts of Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius or Mies van der Rohe. "Praesens" drew inspiration from functionalism, which cut all ties with traditionalism. In their designs, the artists used modern materials and constructions, and the interior designs had neutral colours and a small amount of furniture. In 1929 in Frankfurt am Mein, the second International Congress of Modern Architecture took place. Under its influence, "Praesens" initiated the programme "The Smallest Apartment" in Poland, basing it on the postulations expressed during the Congress. The Programme consisted in the idea of architects designing buildings and interior furnishing for the poorest social classes. In 1930, the final version of the Programme was presented at an exhibition. The exhibition also featured the design of an apartment equipped with furniture made of bent steel pipes. The design was created by Helena and Szymon Syrkus. When designing the apartment, the artists copied some Bauhaus solutions. On the other hand, a design by Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski featured wooden furniture with tabletops and seats covered with grey lino [<https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/praesens>], with the seat and backrest structures made of bent plywood (Fig.5) [A. Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005]. Barbara Brukalska was able to combine functionality of the objects designed by her with low production costs. Due to the above-mentioned social Programme, it was important to design interesting forms, whose production would be cheap. This trend continued throughout the decade of the 1930s. Unfortunately, also due to the global economic crisis, the Programme did not significantly influence the residential status of the poorest Polish citizens [<https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/praesens>].

After the groups dissolved in 1929, another avant-garde group was created under the name "**a.r.**" (short for "revolutionary artists"), which associated the ex-members of the two previous groups. The idea came from Strzemiński, Kobro and Stażewski. In the interwar period, it was one of the most active and most radical communities in Poland. The main goal of the "a.r." group was to shape and develop modern art and implement their solutions in practice. They openly criticised traditionalism, as well as the practice of blindly copying modernism (with its cultural, intellectual and artistic standards). Their practical activity consisted mainly in giving talks and publishing the "Komunikaty" and the editorial series "Biblioteka a.r." ["The a.r. Library"]. The biggest success of the group was the creation of the International Collection of Modern Art in the municipal Museum of History and Art of the City of Łódź, including artworks of the most eminent artists from the global and Polish avant-garde. Around 1932, the

group became less active and the last edition of "Biblioteka a.r." was published in 1936 [<https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/grupa-ar>].

In the very same year when "a.r." was created, the group "**Artes**" was founded in Lviv. Among its founders, there was Aleksander Krzywobłocki – a Polish architect, photographer and antique restorer. The name of the group symbolised the idea of unification of all artistic disciplines. In 1930 in Lviv, the first exhibition of the group took place at the seat of the Society of Friends of Fine Arts. The show included paintings alongside with architectural designs. One could notice in them some decorative stylisation, but also mild constructivism, inspirations with African and children's art, as well as Polish folk crafts, trying to tap into some Polish sources that had not been previously used by culture [<https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/artes>].

In the second half of the 1930s, another trend that developed in Poland (and in other countries) was the so-called **regionalism**. Thanks to regionalism (which allowed the ideas of "Ład" to connect with the "Praesens" group) artists such as Jan Kurzątkowski and Marian Sigmund started to make use of forms inspired by constructivism. Barbara Brukalska also rejected the "international style" of functionalism in the end. At the Paris exhibition in 1937, she presented a sitting room of her design, equipped with leather, a column-tree, a chimney made of brick and stone, an ash wood bench, a coffee table made of glass and aluminium, a sofa upholstered with raspberry-coloured glossy leather, and an armchair shaped as a nest and finished with sheep fur [<https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/polskie-wzornictwo-xx-wieku>].

3. REVIEW OF POLISH AVANT-GARDE FURNITURE DESIGNS FROM THE 1920s AND 1930s

3.1. A shift in the Polish Art Deco aesthetics in late 1920s and early 1930s

The first attempts to break with the dominant trend of the 1920s – the national furniture style aesthetics followed by the members of the "Ład" Cooperative of Artists and Craftsmen – appeared in the 1930s. The first signs of a change in aesthetics could be observed during the National Exposition in Poznań in 1929. At that show, artists from the "Ład" association presented several modernist proposals for the interior design of residential spaces. They were related to the fact that the group invited designers from the younger generation to cooperate with them [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. Nonetheless, although furniture designed by "Ład" was devoid of any ornaments, the artists still used motifs based on squares and triangles in their designs [Kozina 2015].

At the above-mentioned 1929 National Exposition in Poznań, the design works by members of the avant-garde Praesens group stood out for their light appearance and transparent structure, achieved by materials such as steel and glass. The main motif consisted in shiny chrome-plated steel pipes, that went hand in hand with universal trends forming part of the international style [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. An equally important success of the modern trend in the second half of the 1930s consisted in inviting these artists to design representational rooms and equipment for the transatlantic ships m/s Piłsudski and m/s Batory.

The need to search for new forms for industrial production led to the creation of Studium Wnętrz i Sprzętu (Studio of Interiors and Equipment) headed by Stefan Sienicki – a renowned architect and furniture designer. The objective of the Studio was to prepare designs for mass production and for craftsmen, and also to create a style for Polish furniture and interiors coordinated with contemporary architecture. The Studio's style combined "Ład's" decorative character with the puristic avant-garde functionalism typical of the "Praesens" group. In 1937, the Studio and the Chamber of Crafts organised an exhibition entitled "Interior Architecture – Residential Interiors". Most pieces of furniture that were presented by architects from the Studio (Kazimierz Prószyński, Marek Leykam, Jan Bogusławski) had very limited decorations [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. A completely different trend had been presented by Ład a year before at the Institute for Art Propaganda, with designs bringing back the historicising Art Deco,

characterised by decorative, sophisticated forms. Designs prepared by members of "Ład" were criticised for their visible conservatism and inspirations with designs from the past, especially when compared to designs proposed by "Praesens".

Furniture with very modern forms was designed by creators who cooperated with avant-garde Polish groups: "Blok", "Praesens", and "a.r.", whose main concept consisted in a consistency between art and social ideas. They postulated that furniture structures should be linked with their functions, adapted to specific needs, and all the designs should become more uniform and comply with a set of specific characteristics. Moreover, avant-garde artists cared about making the furniture available not only for the bourgeoisie, but also for lower social classes [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005]. Furniture was still made of the traditional material – wood – but their forms were more modern, had uniform appearance and economical structure geometry, with colourful surfaces and solid shapes. As an example of this kind of design we can mention the wardrobe, armchair and bed designed by Maria Nicz-Borowiakowa in 1924, the design of a children's room by Aleksander Rafałowski from 1926, and designs by Henryk Stażewski from 1925-1926.

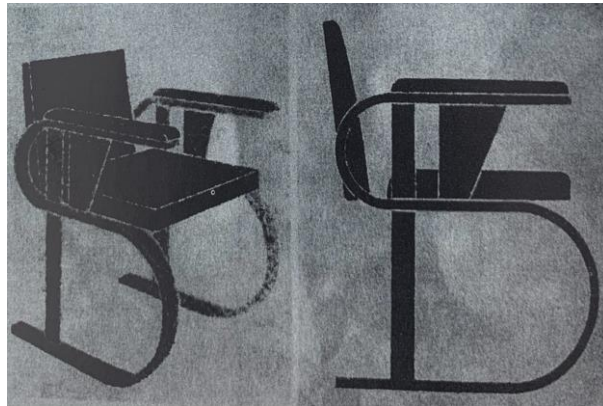


Fig.4. Armchair designed by Karol Kryński
[Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005]

Designs by Karol Kryński (Fig.4) and the Brukalski spouses (Fig.5) stood out thanks to their light shapes achieved by the use of bent materials. The armchair by Kryński had legs that in their cross-section created the letter "S" with the armrest (Fig.4). On the other hand, the backrests of armchairs from the set designed by the Brukalski for the exhibition *Mieszkanie Najmniejsze* [The Smallest Apartment] were made of bent fibreboard (Fig.5) [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].



Fig.5. A room designed by the Brukalski spouses for the exhibition "Mieszkanie Najmniejsze [The Smallest Apartment]" ["Dom Osiedle Mieszkanie" 1930 vol. 4]

An interesting piece of furniture made of steel pipes was the lounge designed by Bohdan Lachert and manufactured in 1928 (Fig.6) [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].



Fig.6. Bohdan Lachert's lounge ["Wnętrze" 1933/34 vol 8]

3.2. Universal National Exposition in Poznań

In 1929, a Universal National Exposition took place in Poznań [Wachowiak 1930]. Several stands at that exhibition featured light furniture made of woven wicker, which at that time in Poland was referred to as the "basket" furniture or "bent" furniture. The woven furniture was part of, among others, the stand of the Kuźniczanki cafeteria in the Women's Work Pavilion, the "Latarnia [Lighthouse]" stand, and the "Udyna" stand in the agricultural section.

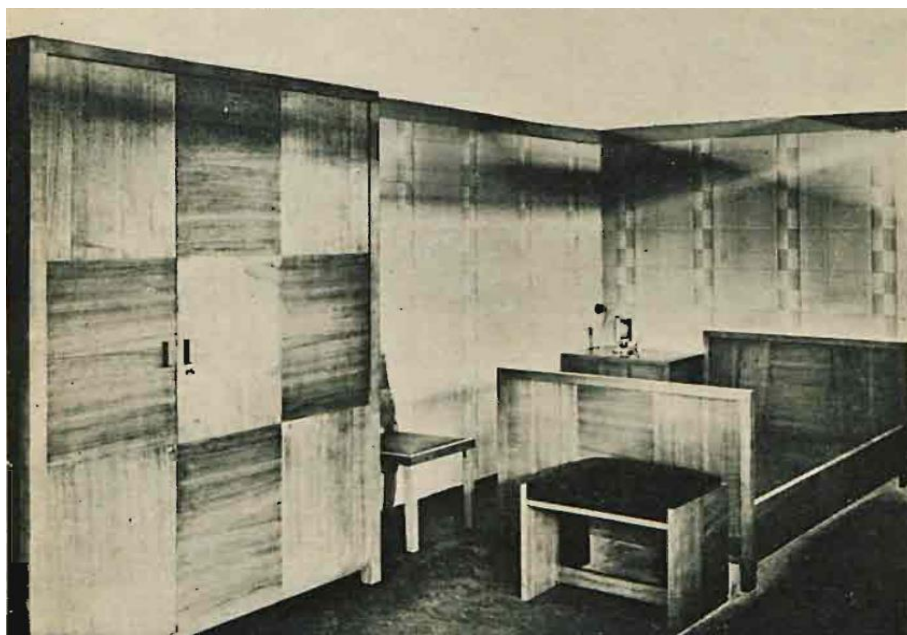


Fig.7. A bedroom designed by Stefan Sienicki [“Dom Osiedle Mieszkanie” 1929 vol 4]

Some companies that presented bent furniture at the exhibition in Poznań were the "Tuliszki" manufacture plant from Bielsko and Towarzystwo Akcyjne Wojciechów. On the other hand, the "Thonet-Mundus" enterprise from Radomsko presented bedrooms and dining rooms designed by Stefan Sienicki (Fig.7). They featured furniture with simple structures, which encouraged their mass production, with the additional advantage of low cost that made them available for less affluent buyers.

The "Meko" company (whose name comes from the first letters of "Meble Kolorowe" – Colourful Furniture) designed furniture with modern shapes, free from the influence of historicism. As the name of the company suggested, the furniture pieces stood out thanks to their colour palette, and their forms resembled geometrical figures (Fig.8) [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].



Fig.8. Bookshelf of the "Meko" company, designed by Janina Grossman and Irena Reicherówna [“Architektura i Budownictwo” 1929 vol 11-12]

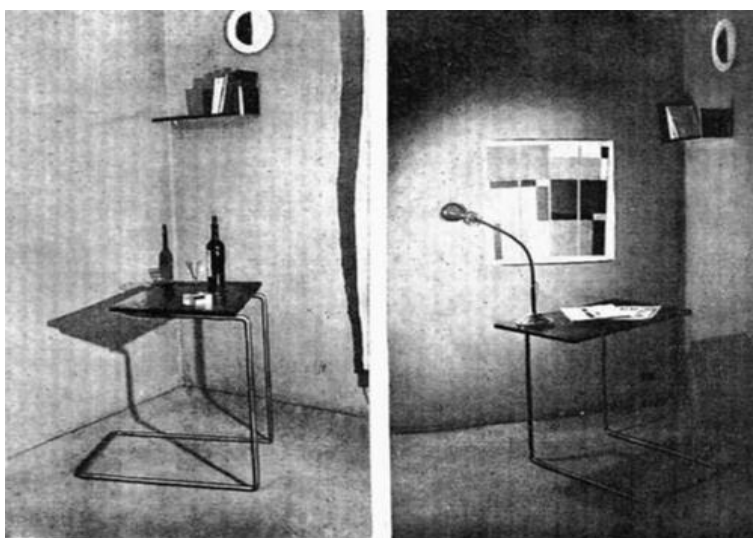


Fig.9. Bedside table for use both in daytime and nighttime, designed by Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski [“Architektura i Budownictwo” 1931 vol 1]

The "Praesens" group also presented their house designs, interior designs and furniture designs, created with simple forms. In most cases, the objects used in them were made of bent metal pipes. Steel pipes formed part, among others, of the bedside table design, and they were used as furniture legs in the designs by the Brukalski spouses (Fig.9). Furniture made of metal pipes presented by "Praesens" during the Universal National Exposition in Poznań could be seen in the exhibition rooms of the Mint, the Ministry of Treasury and National Monopolies.

The more conservative "Ład" cooperative, using forms of the national style, also participated in the exposition and presented their designs in the Arts Pavilion [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].

3.3. Cafeteria "Adria" and other furniture designs by Edward Seydenbeutel

The "Adria" cafeteria opened in 1931 in Warsaw and was designed by Grzegorz and Roman Sigalin in cooperation with Edward Seydenbeutel and Edward Eber. The interior, arranged by Edward Seydenbeutel, was a breakthrough for Polish design. It was equipped with simple forms and materials similar to those used by Bauhaus, as well as furniture made of chrome-plated steel pipes. It featured an American bar (Fig.10) and a golden bar with a dance floor.



Fig.10. The American bar "Adria" designed by Edward Seydenbeutel [Woźnicki 1931]

The interiors of the American bar did not contain any decorative elements, pure modernity reigned inside them with simple, light and aesthetic furniture structures. The metal pipe furniture for the cafeteria was produced by Thonet-Mundus abroad.



Fig.11. The Room of the Man of the House by Edward Seydenbeutel [“Wnętrze” 1933 vol 5]

Apart from furniture for the cafeteria, Edward Seydenbeutel was also the author of the Man of the House Room design, and a store belonging to Wanda Golińska. The lounge furniture set in the Room of the Man of the House (Fig.11) consisted of a sofa and an armchair with armrests with shapes resembling the *streamline moderne*. When designing the store for Wanda Golińska (Fig.12), the designer used some avant-garde solutions. He equipped the store with a desk counter bent in the shape of a wave, that suggested the way for people to move around the store, as well as low, upholstered stools; and the whole interior was maintained in the spirit of functionalism [Kozina 2015].



Fig.12 Interior of Wanda Golińska's store designed by Edward Seydenbeutel [“Wnętrze” 1933 vol 6]

3.4. Kazimierz Prószyński's Atelier of Interiors and Architecture



Fig. 13. Interiors of the propaganda centre of the League of Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Gas Defense: an armchair designed on the basis of "Wassily" by Kazimierz Prószyński ["Wnętrze" 1933 vol 4]

Kazimierz Prószyński was one of the most eminent Polish architects and designers in the 1930s. As a creator, he criticised artists who promoted patriotism in their designs by using decorations and forms from the folk culture. He also condemned constructivists, whose designs contradicted both comfort and style [Kozina 2015]. In 1935, together with Tadeusz Magnuski, he founded the Atelier of Interiors and Architecture P&M in Warsaw, to design furniture with more universal forms, making reference to modern European furniture styles (such as Bauhaus and Le Corbusier). Prószyński intended to give transparent, geometrical shapes to his furniture pieces. His works were influenced by the Soviet constructivism, which can be appreciated in the interiors of the propaganda centre of the League of Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Gas Defense in Poznań. One of the armchairs (Fig.13) located there was designed on the basis of the well-known "Wassily" armchair by Marcel Breuer (Fig.2) [Kozina 2015]. Constructivist features can be observed in the dressing table with mirror and stool (Fig.14a). The artist's design was manufactured by the W. Puchalska i S-ka company. The mirror was supported by a bent pipe attached to the wall. The stool was made of steel pipes.

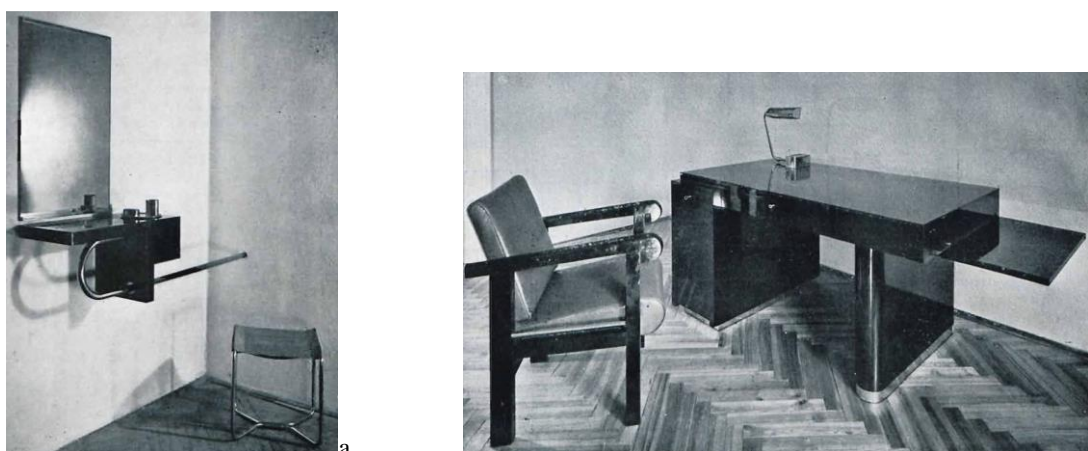


Fig. 14. Furniture designed by Kazimierz Prószyński: dressing table with mirror and stool (a) and desk with armchair (b) ["Wnętrze" 1933 vol 4]

For his desk design (Fig.14b), Prószyński also drew inspiration from constructivism. The tabletop was shifted in relation to the base, which included a closed cupboard. This layout created an oblique shape in the left part of the desk. On the right side, the recess for the armchair was separated by a support, whose front part was finished as a rounded shape. A unique element (and prolongation of the desk's tabletop) consisted in a shelf placed on the side. The armchair, designed specifically for the desk, had an armrest that could be moved forward. The avant-garde form of this piece of furniture was achieved by reclining the backrest towards the back, placing armchair legs at an oblique angle, and also thanks to the armrests mentioned above.

These elements were also characteristic of other armchair designs by Prószyński. The "Zebra" armchair (Fig.15) was made of wood, and the armrests were made of leather straps fixed to the armchair with metal clamps [Kozina 2015].

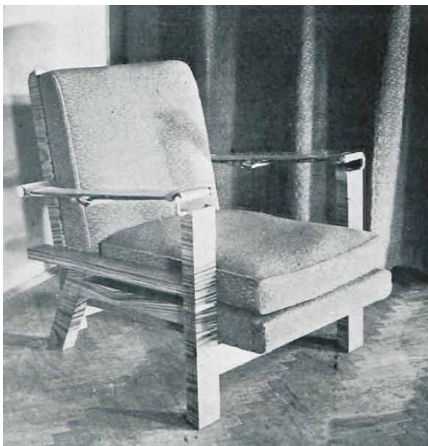


Fig. 15. The "Zebra" armchair designed by Kazimierz Prószyński ["Wnętrze" 1933/34 vol 8]



Fig. 16. Small armchair for the hall designed by Kazimierz Prószyński ["Wnętrze" 1936 vol 1]

Moreover, Prószyński designed a hall armchair (Fig.16), with backrest and seat made of bands of cow leather stretched on wooden structural elements. This piece of furniture had four legs of equal height and with rounded, cylindrical shape. The armrests, just like the seat, were also made of leather, which – in this case – had a uniform colour [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].

3.5. Furniture designed by Helena and Szymon Syrkus

The spouses Helena and Szymon Syrkus designed interiors with minimalistic furniture that looked light and simple. Helena and Szymon Syrkus were the authors of the interior design for the house of doctor Nelken. Among others, they designed a bed made of chrome- and nickel-plated flat steel bars, as well as plywood veneered with mahogany. Moreover, the house featured a set of table and chairs manufactured according to their design. Nonetheless, the piece of furniture that deserves special attention is the living room armchair, whose design was co-created by all the architects from the "Praesens" group. It was made of metal pipes and – similar to the bed – flat steel bars with nickel and chrome plating (fig.17). To maintain a uniform appearance with the bed and chair upholstery, the armchair was upholstered with a buttoned mattress. Clearly, the authors drew inspiration from steel pipe chair designs by Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe [Kozina 2015].



Fig.11. The Villa of dr Nelken designed by Helen and Szymon Syrkus, view of the ground floor ["Wnętrze", 1933/34 vol 7]

3.6. Furniture designed by Lucjan Korngold and Henryk Blum

Lucjan Korngold and Henryk Blum designed numerous modern interiors and furniture pieces. Among their designs, we can mention large kitchen cupboards made of segments (providing housing for the fridge), kitchen countertops, living room sets, a cuboidal bar sideboard, and bathroom interiors. The bar sideboard (Fig.18) was made of high-quality wood species: ebony and walnut, combined with steel, chrome-plated metal fittings. The furniture piece was complemented by a cupboard hanging above it, designed in the style of abstract minimalism. Additionally, the designers prepared a design of a lounge set (Fig.19), including two club armchairs with a couch upholstered with yellow suede. The armchair and sofa backrests were rounded in shape, which was a characteristic feature of interwar furniture, included also in Prószyński's furniture.



Fig.18. Bar sideboard and hanging cupboard by Lucjan Korngold and Henryk Blum ["Wnętrze" 1933 vol 5]



Fig. 19. Living room. Armchairs and sofa upholstered with dark-yellow suede, designed by Lucjan Korngold and Henryk Blum ["Wnętrze" 1933 vol 5]



Fig.20. Dressing table and armchair designed by Lucjan Korngold and Henryk Blum ["Wnętrze" 1933 vol 5]

Korngold and Blum designed a dressing table (Fig.20), whose manufacture was commissioned to the company Konrad Jarnuszkiewicz i Spółka. The load-bearing structure was made of chrome and nickel-plated metal, while the tabletop was made of black, non-transparent glass. The armchair complementing the dressing table was made of chrome-plated pipes used as the bearing structure. The way in which the pipes were bent created a suspended seat, just like in the "Cesca" chair by Marcel Breuer and similar to the "LC7" chair by Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand and Pierre Jeanneret (Fig.21). The simplicity of the structural part of the chair was tweaked by adding a seat cushion and a roll used as backrest. The next design, the food trolley, made use of similar materials as the dressing table [Kozina 2015].



Fig.21. Chair LC7. Le Corbusier [<https://smow.com>]

3.7. Transatlantic Cruisers

Polish transatlantic cruisers are other luxurious and representational interiors that the country can be proud of. Each room in the cruisers was designed by a different artist: functionalist furniture with structures made of metal pipes was designed by avant-garde architects, while furniture with wooden structures was created by artists associated with "Ład" [Hubner-Wojciechowska 2008]. The M/S Piłsudski transatlantic (1935-1939) had living room armchairs designed by Niemojewski in a sophisticated style (Fig.22). Between the rear legs, the armchairs had a system to regulate backrest position, while the armrests were profiled, slightly oblique and smoothly transitioned into the wider spanning front legs. They were upholstered with a bright green fabric with square pattern.



Fig.22. Tourist class living room [<https://mspilsudski.pl>]

Most rooms in the 3rd class received some input from Stanisław Brukowski. He also designed the smoking room, the bar and the reading rooms in the tourist class (Fig.23). The smoking lounge had delicate, stylishly profiled armchairs with woven seats and backrests, modelled in line with the principles of ergonomics. Additionally, in the smoking room and in the tourist class bar, there were sleek cuboid armchairs and club sofas.



Fig.23. Reading room for tourist class passengers in M/S Piłsudski [<https://graptolite.net>]

Upholstered sofas and armchairs stood also in other parts of the ship. At the terrace of the rear board, there were wicker loungers mounted on skids (sledge-like structures with ellipsoidal cross-sections), profiled in relation to the *streamline moderne* style (Fig.24) [Kozina 2015].

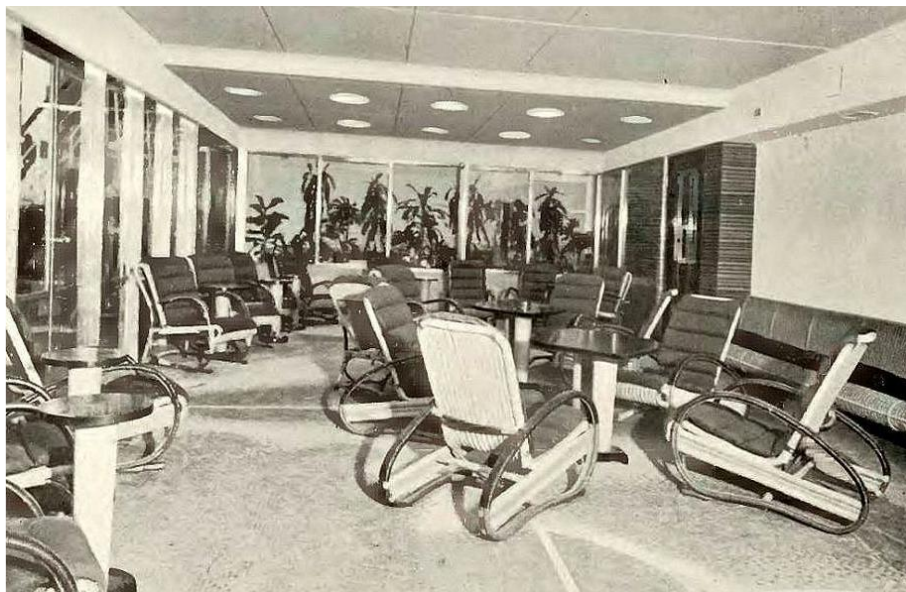


Fig.24. Winter garden for tourist class passengers in M/S Piłsudski transatlantic [<https://facta-nautica.com>]

As a result of the successful interior design of M/S Piłsudski, the same group of designers received another commission for a second transatlantic cruiser called M/S Batory (1935). Its interiors were maintained in the same style, complemented by luxurious sophistication characteristic of Italian design [Kozina 2015].

In general, the interiors of both transatlantic cruisers combined the two variants of Polish Art Deco: the style of soft avant-garde in the interiors, and the national style visible in the traditional forms of interior equipment elements and accessories. It was a compromise initiated in the Polish design by Andrzej Pronaszko and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, by designing and furnishing the Presidential Castle [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005].

3.8. Presidential Castle in Wisła

The interiors of the Castle in Wisła (Fig.25-27) are one of the most recognizable and iconic interiors from the interwar period, featuring Bauhaus style furniture, and designed by Polish artists. Already at that time, building interiors were considered to be the most important kind of artistic works in the interwar period [Kozina 2015; Purchla 2005].



Fig.25. Wisła Castle bedroom interior [“Wnętrze” 1931 vol 1]

The Castle was built between 1929-1931. The design was created by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, who also supervised the construction works in their architectural and artistic aspects, while Andrzej Pronaszko (one of the main avant-garde artists at that time) and Włodzimierz Padlewski were responsible for furniture. A set of metal furniture created for the living room, dining room, bedroom (Fig.25), smoking lounge, and residential apartments symbolised modernity and presented a revolutionary approach to the long tradition of wooden furniture. The residential apartments included such furniture as: a dressing table and a desk (Fig.26), an office table, chaise longue pieces, two types of beds, four kinds of armchairs, and two types of small tables, whose tabletops were initially made of glass.

Pronaszko's designs for the Castle in Wisła were inspired by the metal furniture of Bauhaus (Fig.27), designed by such authors as, among others: Mart Stam and Marcel Breuer (Fig.1-3). The chair model of the Dutch and German designers was created two years earlier, the "ST12" armchair (Fig.1) was produced by the Desta company, while the "B33 Wassily" (Fig.2) was manufactured by Thonet. The armchair, with trapezoid base making reference to Thonet's "B6" armchair model, has been more modified by the Polish designer. On the other hand, the lounge armchair with high backrest and rich upholstery was inspired by the "B25" armchair model that could be seen in 1930 in Paris at a Werkbund exhibition [Purchla 2005].



Fig.26. Wisła Castle interior ["Wnętrze" 1931 vol 1]

The construction of Polish furniture was based on the use of steel pipes, complemented with antelope leather, plush, or wood. Designs by Pronaszko did not significantly differ from other furniture made in other countries, but the chair shaped similar to the letter "S" included some modifications. One of the changes consisted in modifying the angles of vertical and horizontal pipes, to make the furniture lines smoother. Moreover, to achieve better furniture stability, Pronaszko created a different frame connection solution. What is more, the shape of armrests was also modified and made of rounded sycamore planks [Purchla 2005]. These modifications were supposed to make the armchair look more dynamic and elegant (Fig.27).



Fig.27. Wisła Castle interior["Wnętrze" 1931 vol 1]

It was equally important that furniture for the Castle was the first furniture made of steel pipes that were made entirely in Poland, from design to production [Kozina 2015]. Their manufacture was entrusted to the Konrad Jarnuszkiewicz i S-ka company. The company enjoyed high esteem as the first Warsaw production plant that produced metal furniture for hospitals. The interior design was complemented by lamps designed by Edmund Bartłomiejczyk in the more traditional Polish Art Deco style.

The fact of introducing modern furniture to the residence of the Head of State was almost an ideological statement that influenced the way this type of furniture was perceived by the Polish society.

3.9. Thonet-Mundus bent furniture

Bent furniture was produced in Poland since the 1870s, and was colloquially referred to as the "thonets". The name came from the surname of a well-known chair manufacturer, Michael Thonet, who had several production plants in the Polish territory. After 1921, as a result of syndicate, the company's name changed into Thonet-Mundus. Bent furniture gained popularity in the interwar period, and especially in the 1930s, due to their low price and fashion trends that came from Austria and Germany. What is more, in the 1930s this was the only kind of furniture that was mass-produced at such a large scale, as the continuation of furniture made of bent wood [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005]. In Europe, this type of furniture was popularised thanks to Bauhaus, and in Poland it was related to the activities of the avant-garde. The first European concepts of furniture made with the use of metal pipes as construction parts existed since 1924. The key moment was when the Thonet-Mundus company, in 1926, started the mass-production of the "Wassily" armchair designed by Breuer [Purchla 2005]. Many of the authors of metal furniture in Poland were architects who belonged to the "Praesens" group, and promoted functionalism in Polish furniture-making. Using the Thonet-Mundus bent furniture, in 1930, Andrzej Pronaszko and Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, in cooperation with Włodzimierz Padlewski, created furniture for residential interiors in the residence of President Ignacy Mościcki at the Wisła Castle [Kostrzyńska-Miłosz 2005]. Moreover, Thonet-Mundus factories in Buczkowice, Jasienica and Radomsko manufactured the furnishings designed by Stefan Sienicki for the Parliament building – Sejm of the Republic of Poland. They also produced furniture for such places as: the Senate Presidium, the Theological Seminary of the Częstochowa Diocese in Cracow, the National Teletechnical School in Warsaw, the Warsaw Bank of National Economy, or the Okęcie Civil Airport [Kozina 2015].

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the avant-garde artists from the interwar period, who were active in the De Stijl group, the Bauhaus school and other artistic groups, a new approach to furniture design gained popularity, with a social ideology that went together with it.

Furniture with different kinds of aesthetics was designed in Poland during the interwar period. Some designers opted for heavy furniture, entirely made of wood (for example: the "Ład" group making reference to historicism). Other trends included lighter and more delicate furniture pieces (like the hall armchair designed by Kazimierz Prószyński), as well as modern furniture in the style of functionalism.

Many Polish artists of the interwar period created under the influence of the most eminent European artists from the avant-garde circles: the members of Bauhaus, and other creators such as Le Corbusier, sometimes borrowing certain solutions almost literally.

In the area of modern furniture, the most noticeable was the activity of Polish designers from the "Praesens" group. Their furniture stood out for their clean aesthetics, raw forms and the new materials used in their manufacture.

The designs of modern Polish furniture in the style of functionalism were made partially of wood, with the use of other materials perceived as typical for modernity. Those modern materials included plastic masses (mostly Bakelite), glass (that started to be used for structural furniture elements) and metal.

Metal furniture was an interesting group of designs of modern furniture, and provided an alternative for the style of traditionalism that was based on folk inspirations (especially the Zakopane style).

Modern furniture designs were something completely new in the Polish market at that time.

The new style that was created during that period was not just a temporary trend. This is proven by the fact that certain furniture designs are coming back to mass production nowadays, like armchairs based on the "Cesca Chair" or "Wassily", as well as other designs from that time.

Taking into account the rich creativity of Polish artists from that period in the area of furniture design, as well as the fact that information about them is scattered around different sources, it is reasonable to expect that there are designs from those times that the authors of this paper have not managed to reach. Therefore, there is a need to continue research on this topic. Another stage should consist in finding and analysing the Polish companies from the interwar period that produced bent furniture made of wood and metal.

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Streszczenie: *Klasyka polskiego designu. Polskie meble awangardowe okresu międzywojennego utrzymane w stylistyce Bauhausu* prezentuje przegląd najlepszych polskich nowoczesnych projektów meblowych lat 20. i 30. Pomimo powszechnej w okresie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego inspiracji historyzmem oraz odwołaniami do tradycji ludowej (np. spółdzielnia „Ład”), polscy projektanci inspirowali się dziełami takich artystów jak: Le Corbusier, Marcel Breuer, Mies van der Rohe czy Mart Stam, projektujących awangardowe meble z metalowych rurek. Artykuł przedstawia mało znaną twórczość polskich artystów należących do ugrupowań „Praesens”, „Atelier wnętrz i architektury”, „Studium wnętrz i sprzętu” oraz projekty mebli nawiązujących do stylistyki Bauhausu dla wnętrz prywatnych i publicznych (w tym polskich Transatlantyków czy dla Zameczku Prezydenta w Wiśle), m.in. wykonywane przez firmę Thonet-Mundus. Artykuł kontynuuje cykl „Klasyka polskiego designu”, prezentujący wyniki badań nad polskim meblarstwem i ikonami polskiego designu, prowadzonych w ramach prac dyplomowych na WTD SGGW.

Słowa kluczowe: polskie meble powojenne, polskie meble awangardowe, Bauhaus, Le Corbusier, meble z metalowych rurek

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