

# Summary of professional accomplishments

## **Agnieszka Zawadzka**

Faculty of Arts  
Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Lublin, 2017

A. Zawadzka

1. Name and surname

**Agnieszka Zawadzka**

2. Diplomas, academic/artistic degrees – place, year and title of doctoral thesis.

M.A. in Visual Arts Education, 1998, Faculty of Arts, Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland;

Doctor of Fine Arts in the discipline of fine arts conferred by a resolution of the Department Board of Faculty of Arts, Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin of 19.05.2016, based on the presented doctoral dissertation: "Figurativism – the record of nature and imagination. The set of graphic works made in linocut".

Thesis Supervisor: Professor, Ph.D. Maksymilian Snoch

Doctoral thesis reviewers: Professor, Ph.D. Zdzisław Niedźwiedź

Professor, Ph.D. Zygmunt Rafał Strent

3. Previous work in scientific/artistic units

1998 – 2000: assistant in the faculty of Fine Arts, Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

2006 – currently: assistant professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Indicating the achievements according to art. 16 pass. 2 of the act. of 14 March 2003 act on academic degrees and academic title and degrees and title in art (Journal of Laws 2016, item 882 with subsequent amendment in Journal of Laws 2016 item 1311):

According to formal requirements the set of works named: [Vessels – a set of graphic works 2014–2016](#) consisting of four cycles "Vessels for water", "Vessels for blood", "Vessels for light" and "Cosmic vessels" presented during the following exhibitions:

– Agnieszka Zawadzka, Graphic Art, Book, Illustration in At the Attavantich' Gallery in the Culture and Promotion Centre in Jarosław, 2015

– Agnieszka Zawadzka, "Vessels", LUBLAB Gallery, New Art Association in Warsaw, 2016

– Agnieszka Zawadzka, "Vessels", B. Słomka Gallery No. 1, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, 2017

as aspiring to meet the conditions specified in the act.

## Introduction

It is not easy to look from the distance at my own work of art and get a general overview of a great number of drawings, graphics, illustrations and writings, as well as sketches and projects, making up closed cycles or awaiting to be developed in "appropriate time". In spite of the continuity of work it is visible that it can be divided into certain stages. During the process of creation various possibilities of ideas and conceptions are being developed - some of which can be continued or rethought, while others should be abandoned forever.

In retrospect, which seems to be the most interesting aspect of creation, one can notice that the artist never knows where his/her intuition will lead them to. Since, the final work of art is never a result of any calculation, it is the sum of patient search, intuition and dreams. It is a discovery of form that tends to surprise the artist.

The author of the summary often recalls one's own childhood and teenage years to find the reasons and atmosphere that had created one's personality. In my specific case nothing had announced that I would be doing artistic work. As every child I liked drawing but I would get more interested in science at school. For that reason, I chose a class with extended curriculum in mathematics and physics as I had previously assumed my further education would have followed. Paradoxically, those were maths and physics that opened my eyes to the world which existence cannot be defined or proved. They also gave me the bases and tools how to move in this world. I grew up with a strong feeling of freedom and acceptance. Moreover, I was lucky to meet interesting and passionate people.

Probably it was no coincidence that I had started a drawing course at Secondary School of Fine Arts in Lublin and after that I was accepted for studies at Institute for Art Education, UMCS in Lublin. However, being a graduate of a comprehensive secondary school I was aware of my deficiencies and started artistic studies with the understanding that I would have to work a lot. During the studies at the Faculty of Arts, UMCS in Lublin I decided to choose graphics. The contact with two exceptional people from Lublin artistic community influenced my choice the most: professor Maksymilian Snoch and doctor Zbigniew Jóźwik - a graphic artist, naturalist and book lover whose work I value the most. I made my diploma in linocut. It was a cycle of black and white landscapes, reminding more of paintings drawn with a wide-base brush rather than cut with a chisel. I extended this topic in my doctoral dissertation. However, I did not concentrate on a direct studying of nature in a new cycle. The literalness of the presented landscape was gradually disappearing, as well as the limit between the observer and the observed reality. In the cycle called "Sights from ..." what is subjective and objective, internal and external, who perceives and is being perceived, blend into one. The understatement of the title is aimed to keep the secret where the observer is and what he/she is looking at. Is he/she looking out of the window in their studio? Or are they looking inside themselves?

Giving the works cycle name "Sights from ..." I wanted to refer to landscapes by Hiroshige - the master of patient observation of what is hidden below the visible skin of a matter. Thus, I also wanted to pay attention to the main source of my inspiration - Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints that have influenced my interests and artistic creation for years now. They became an impulse for creating the following graphic cycles and works that are basis for my habilitation thesis.

## My japanism, inspiration and context

Over a year and a half, the Japanese art, including *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, enchanted European artists and art lovers. That enthusiastic enchantment is commonly known as Japanese madness which had embraced western artistic community and changed the way of perceiving and illustrating the world.

The trend called japonism in Polish art at the turn of the XIXth and XXth centuries had a special character. The process of acquiring different esthetics began with literal, superficial iconographic borrowings. Through using new rules of composition and means of expression, synthesizing and simplifying of the forms it became a dialogue with another culture and spiritualism. Therefore, the inspirations by the Japanese culture were multi-level and reached further than an easy quotation – the artists developed artistic attitude of their masters illustrating their conviction about the substantive and spiritual structure of the world.

I cannot remember when I first came across the Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. Most probably it happened while I was studying works of art by Polish modernists and numerous studies on relief-printing when preparing to didactic duties at the university. An important source of knowledge was the research paper by Łukasz Kossowski "Inspirations from Japanese art in painting and graphics by Polish modernists" which is the first, wide study of the issue. Afterwards, I gathered much information about Japanese woodblock prints and its reception in Polish art during the conference "Art of Japan, japonism and Polish-Japanese art relations" in 2010. Another important source of inspiration was seeing the number of exhibitions in Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology in Cracow, presented within the framework of the project "Polish japonism" by Anna Król, as well as reading an extensive publication under the same title.

The Japanese *visions of the world that is disappearing* have spoken strongly to my sensitivity and imagination, touched me deeply with their form of conception, lack of chiaroscuro and, above all else, the vivid line that draws the contour, closes the colour and simplifies the shapes. Conciseness of means of expression, synthesis and tendency to generalization were initially seen in my original bookplates. [Illustration 1](#)

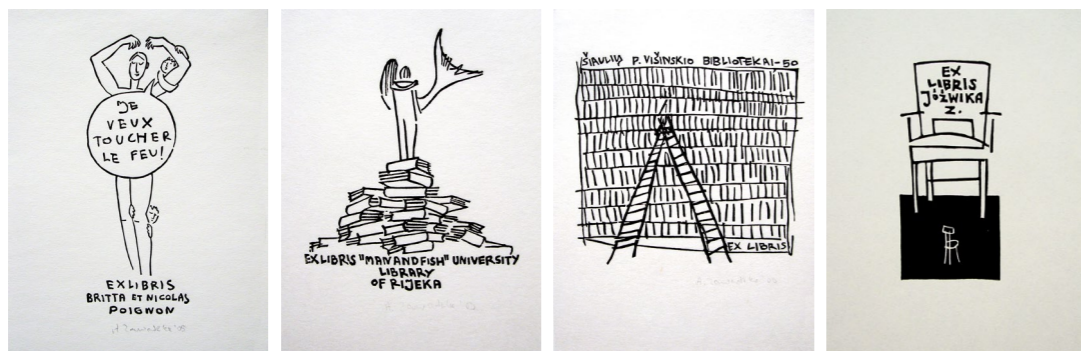


Illustration 1 from left: Ex libris Britta et Nicolas Poignon, 2005; Ex libris University Library of Rijeka, Man and Fish, 2003; Ex libris Šiaulių P. Višinskio Bibliotekai-50, 2000; Ex libris of Zbigniew Józwick, 2002.

Janina Saffarini writes in the preface to the catalogue from my individual exhibition "Bookplates by Agnieszka Zawadzka":

*The artist has revolutionized a bookplate – she has given it the easiest of possible forms: several graphic lines expressing the content in an easy to read statement. Agnieszka's style is recognizable. Despite her young age, she has already defined her artistic per-*

*sonality and given her graphic works innovative, different to commonly used in the art of bookplate, form. This is a very interesting phenomenon and can even be shocking for some receivers. The artist had to show a lot of courage to break the standards in such a traditional field as the art of bookplates, causing contrary feelings among viewers – from acceptance to criticism. Yet, Agnieszka realizes her artistic programme with a great consequence, concentrating on an uncomplicated form and a simple in understanding transfer, observing at the same time all the requirements of graphic form to become a bookplate.<sup>1</sup>*

The mentioned requirements – rules that describe the size of graphics, the balance between typographic elements and must of describing the addressee, have never tied me up. I have accepted apparent difficulties and taken Zbigniew Józwick's advice that this *graphic form must be treated separately and with humbleness*.

I think that while creating the bookplates I taught myself to operate with line and spot as well as appreciate the role of empty space in composition. Moreover, I started to synthesize figures to linear and laconic forms. The thing that seemed to be the most interesting for me was introducing writings into the sign (many of my bookplates were filled with a rhyming inscription). These experiences have been developed both in the following graphic works and independent projects of graphic books. Before I made works that make up my habilitation thesis called "Vessels" I had realized a few different cycles inspired by the presence of woman in Japanese woodblock prints. Those were: linocuts from "Eroskop" cycle, pastels from "Ama" cycle and three digital graphic cycles – "Ama", "Women from the sea" and "Sea tales". Simultaneously my new illustrated books were being created, distinct in form but in reality very closely related to the mainstream of my artistic research.

Another important project was called "Eve looks for dodo". I made it together with artists from Poland and Lithuania. It appeared to be my artistic credo where I described the attitude towards myself, others and surrounding world. I wrote in the invitation sent to the artist who took part in the project:

*The story of Eve says that the inner curiosity of a man is the beginning of a lifetime journey. We may not be sure what we look for but the questions that are constantly nagging us, Who am I? What do I live for?, make us start the journey. Until we do not make an effort and set off, we are like an extinct species, we are dead as a dodo. There is no us. Our journey does not require to walk long distances given in kilometers. However, there are people who need to travel around the world, rich the highest mountains or set a new record. The journey is rather made inside the spiritual, inner space and this is where we hear the answer. Our journey is inscribed with meeting others. They become the inspiration, the indication and the mirror for us.<sup>2</sup>*

Katarzyna Rączka adds in the preface to the exhibition catalogue:

*(...) the final destination is always the same. You have to get under the eggshell, look around among all the creatures in this world, study number of books and dark nights in order to see yourself in a mirror. This is a fundamental discovery: the search for treasure ends the closest to ourselves. Eve has Dodo inside, Dodo has Eve inside. All*

<sup>1</sup> Janina Saffarini, Introduction to the Exhibition Catalogue Agnieszka Zawadzka's Bookplates, The Ochota District Public Library ST. Warszawy, The Warsaw Bookplate Gallery, 2007, no page numbers

<sup>2</sup> Agnieszka Zawadzka, Introduction to the Exhibition Catalogue Ewa Looks Dodo, Stalowa Wola, 2014, no page numbers

*the journeys end where we have started. Yet, we are never the same again.*<sup>3</sup>

I described the project "Eve looks for Dodo" as a journey to the inner self during the lecture presented in 2014 as a part of the conference "Everyday creativity as a man's lifetime activity". The superior aim of my creativity was, and still is, the urge to experience deeply myself and to preserve this feeling in my following works. Creativity is a way of communication with the world which gives the ability to make life more intensive. The work of art is a place where we meet ourselves and give the proof of our existence. [Illustration 2](#)

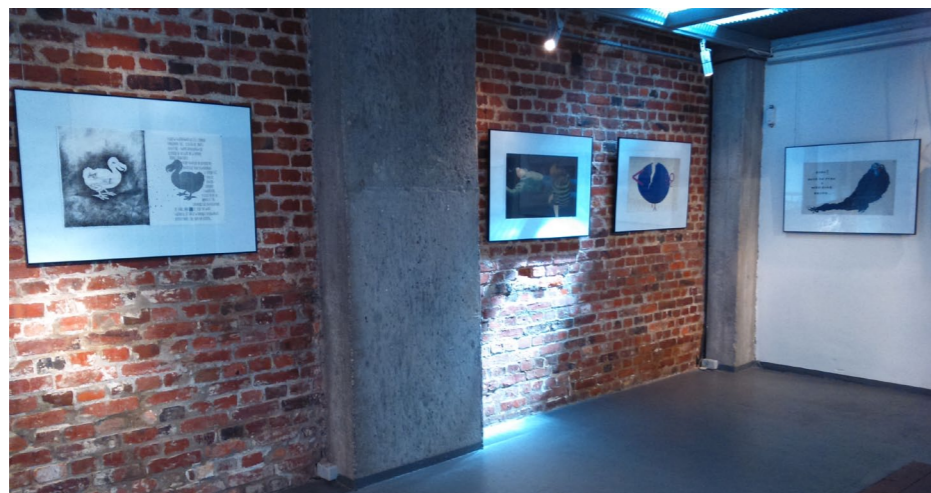


Illustration 2: *Eva seeks dodo*, Nad Brdą Gallery, Bydgoszcz 2015

The works that are included into "Vessels" cycle arise from previous works. They are another attempt to look at myself from other perspective, finding a new, maybe better and simpler form. I am a kind of an artist who consequently looks for their own truth. I choose different techniques, from traditional graphics, through pastels, to illustrations made on a tablet. Experimenting and searching for suitable techniques to have the work done, results from my constant effort to match the form with the content. Workshop is a tool, so when I get the impression that the hitherto technique is not sufficient enough, I try out another one. Mixing picture with text is a way of expanding the field of creation where two narrations entwine and supplement each other.

I usually work on number of projects at the same time. This method of work is difficult and does not bring prompt effects but it teaches patience and inner discipline that brings the state of increased concentration and attention. Even during the moments seemingly not connected with work, I am concentrated on observing the reality so that nothing important could escape my notice. In a way it reminds of developing a state of attention heaving its roots in the Far Eastern philosophy and ability of deep nature observation that ukiyo-e woodblock prints artists were close to. Vincent van Gogh talks about that in one of his letters:

*When you study Japanese art, you can see how does a wise, intelligent man, a philosopher, spends his time? On researching the distance from the Earth to the Moon? On deeper understanding the politics of Bismarck? No, he studies a blade of grass. But that blade of grass lets him draw all plants and then seasons of the year, landscapes, animals, finally a man. That is how he spends his life, yet it's too short to do*

<sup>3</sup> Katarzyna Rączka, *Ewa Has Many Faces*, The Exhibition Catalogue *Ewa Looks for Dodo*, Stalowa Wola 2014, no page numbers

*everything. This, what these simple Japanese people teach us, who live with nature, as if they were flowers, isn't it almost a religion?*<sup>4</sup>

The masters of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints studied the image of woman with a great insight. For this reason they managed to present such a beautiful portrait of her, grasp the fullness of feminine grace and express what is hidden below the visible skin of a matter. The woman in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints is mainly a delicate *oiran*, colourful like a butterfly. Her beauty is expressed in a subtle gesture of clasped hands, a slender bent neck reflected in a mirror, a naked breast hidden behind the transparent curtain – actually in a lack of any visibly seen expression. This is also a woman – lover. Her body entwines with a male body in spring pictures of *shunga*, expressing physical spontaneity, joy of body and life the ability of using these gifts. This beautiful, however idealized image of a woman in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints is completed and contrasted with the image of *ama* – pearl divers. In these presentations woman is a half-naked siren, submerged in the sea or brushing her hair at the shore. She is – contrary to a delicate geisha – a true-born, strong woman, even resembling a kind of a sea animal.

I have looked through hundreds, maybe thousands of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints over the years. I have been unceasingly going back to them, researching the presence of "Her" in my life, her individuality and uniqueness, I have come closer to the mystery – recognized myself. I have read different stories behind the pictures as if I *had been collecting the missing parts of the mirror, looking through them to cross on the other side*. I have put the women form *the floating world* in the context of my own, personal experience.

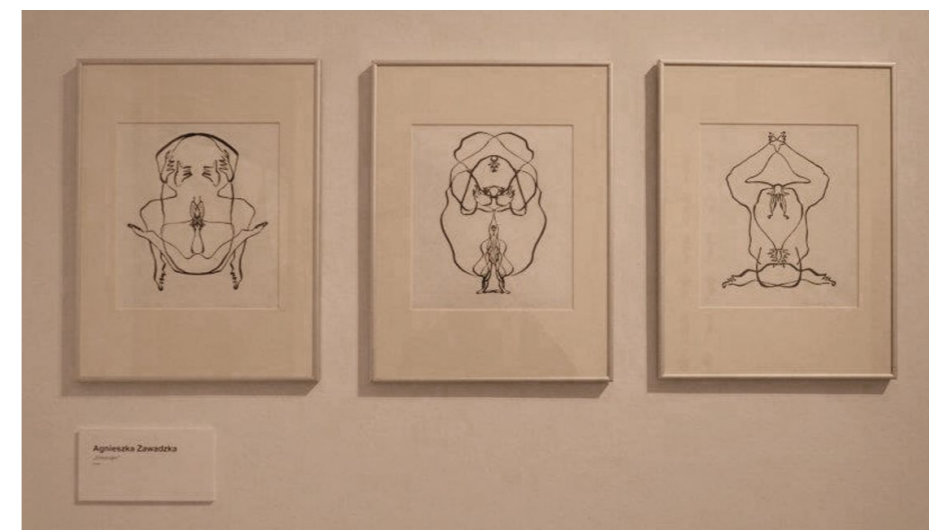


Illustration 3: *Różowa Wystawa*, Sos Sztuki Gallery, Lublin 2011.

The first was the cycle of linocuts called "Eroskop". [Illustration 3](#) It includes small graphic forms, laconic in their expression, drawn in calligraphic line, determining the contour of the figure. They stick with the elements of figurativism but due to the simplification and deformation are not an unambiguous message. Those presentations could be seen as esthetic sensations caused by their form or perceived as a kind of Rorschach test and interpreted according to own experience and sensitivity.

Arunas Uoginats writes in the preface to the exhibition catalogue:

<sup>4</sup> Anna Król, *Polish Japonism*, Kraków 2011, pp. 21

In the cycle of linocuts called "Eroskop" the artist shows her passion for line that entwines the bodies of a man and a woman in a loving embrace. Through emphasizing the symmetry and the effect of mirror reflection, she pays the most attention to the centre of composition, that reflects the culmination of sexual act in minimal graphic form. The blooming flower with a fruit and physical attributes of love join unbelievably in the mystical game of symmetry.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequently large-sized digital graphics and pastels called "Ama" and "Women from the sea" were created. [Illustration 4](#) I have presented woman's body as an element of sea landscape here. The bodies are made as black silhouettes, with no contour but still as elements of figurativism, which expression and movement is underlined by the scheme of circles, strips and triangles made in one colour, suggesting at the same time that everything is happening in one space.



Illustration 4: *Dancing on the rock*, pastel 2013; *Dark night*, pastel 2013.

Women's bodies are somehow suspended in that space, floating in geometrical depth which soothing immensity suggests silence of their inner life. I refer in those works of art to the symbol of a sea as a source of experiences and sensations that belong to the sphere of spirit and the power of nature, space and eternity.

The works from the cycle were presented during the exhibition made with Robert Rabiej in Youth Promotion Centre in Częstochowa Museum, 2013.

The exhibition was titled "Ama. The mythologies of unity" and its main idea was described in the preface to the catalogue:

*For us Ama is a metaphor of state in which we can reach the unity and fulfillment as artists and humans. Referring to Japanese pearl divers we want to create audiovisual space where the questions about the possibility of existence integrity can be asked. On the basis of sea women lives we are wandering what the inner and outer sensations are. Can we possibly reach the full sense of harmony to fulfil oneself in creative work? Will the revealed mystery occur to be a tragic ending or will it lead us to self-realization?*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Arunas Uogintas, And let it always be nice weather in Šiauliai, The Exhibition Catalogue Šiauliai The Suncity – Always Good Weather, The Third Plein-Air Graphics, Šiauliai, 2014, no page numbers

<sup>6</sup> Agnieszka Zawadzka, Robert Rabiej, Introduction to the Exhibition Catalogue Ama. The Mythologies of Unity, The Youth Promotion Centre, The Częstochowa Museum, 2013, no page numbers

## Vessels

Presenting woman in a sea space and later comparing her body to a vessel in my works of art I mainly wanted to pay attention to the problem that a woman's body should not be only perceived in terms of its beauty and looks, although it is undeniably beautiful.

Clarissa Pincola Estes best describes the idea:

*Body is not the statue of marble. It was not meant for. Body is to be the shelter for spirit, its vessel, support and fire, it has to preserve the memory, and fill us up with sensations and feelings – be the most perfect food for our psyche. Body has to lift us up, move us, fill us up with sensations to prove that we exist, that we are here; it has to give us support, weight, feeling of materiality. It is a mistake to think that, in order to reach the realm of spirit, we have to abandon our bodies. Body is the springboard for spiritual experiences. Without body there would be no experience of crossing thresholds, no feeling of ecstasy, height, weightlessness.*

*(...) Body is not a numb cover that we want to set us free. In the right perspective it is a space rocket, a cluster of microscopic leaves of clover, a universal umbilical cord joining with other worlds and unusual experiences.*

And she adds:

*I have understood that my body is a vessel that has to contain a lot.<sup>7</sup>*

A vessel is probably the most "capacious" symbol of woman's body.

While looking at a ceramic vessel and touching its roundness this comparison seems to be obvious. It is not important if we are admiring an old Greek vase that used to serve practical purposes or a modern work of art in a popular gallery.

The symbolism of the vessels can be various, depending on their material, form, content and destination but regardless of its material value, the vessel can hide precious content. They can be delicate, fragile, transparent, small, big, ornamented, heavy or cracked but at the same time the essence of a beautiful smell or mysterious, poisonous mixture can be hidden inside. Sometimes something evaporates, sometimes something hardens inside, other time the vessels crack into small pieces.

According to Christianity a clay vessel symbolizes human's body – a container for soul.

A clay vessel is an image of a human because of the fragility of his bodily nature and total dependence on the Maker who created the human out of clay.

Christianity often compares Our Lady, who accepted the Holy Spirit, to a valuable vessel. The Angel greets Saint Mary as full of grace. In the Litany of Loreto Mary is called out as Spiritual vessel, Vessel of honor and Singular vessel of devotion.

The rich symbolism of the idea of a vessel have developed over the years and undoubtedly

<sup>7</sup> Clarisa Pinkola Estés, *Women who Run with the Wolves*, Poznań 2001, pp. 226

influenced its forms in different periods of time and within various cultures around the world. However, it must be remembered that the shape of a vessel arises directly from its function and depends on the technology and material used for manufacturing. The form must be subordinated to its function.

While creating the graphics from the “Vessels” cycle I did not have to stick to that rule as my graphic vessels do not serve any practical function. The symbolism and shape of ceramic vessels were only an inspiration. They let me find the reference to woman’s body in the repeated motive as well as express it in a simple, synthetic, graphic form.

It is difficult to see specific forms of vases, jugs or bowls. Their proportions and construction prevent the possibility of their usage in a real world. It is true that the symmetry dominates here and they have a delusion of volume but they are rather containers suspended in or emerging out of empty, undefined space.

The vessels from each cycle differ a little - as if the following emerged from the previous ones. They hold a sort of universal shape, suggesting the permanent element which remains unchanged, no matter of time and place, which is further transmitted. The subtle differences in graphics slip by as we watch the works from further perspective. They may seem to be similar as snowflakes. But as you reach closer, it becomes obvious that there are no two identical ones. In my opinion the works are very minimalistic on purpose because they cause a kind of spiritual quiescence.

Small graphic forms in a general outline resemble flowers or schemes of inflorescences or pericarps drawn in herbariums or encyclopedias. They are very simple in expression and the “transparency” of colour brings out the fragility and evanescence of their form, as well as the similarity and unity among different elements in the world of nature. Woman’s body is right from this world. It has a time of youth, beauty and life, and, as time flows, it fades and dies. However, through comparison to a flower, the vessel opens and blooms, against the evanescence, as it is the most perfect symbol of fulfillment.

#### Vessels for water

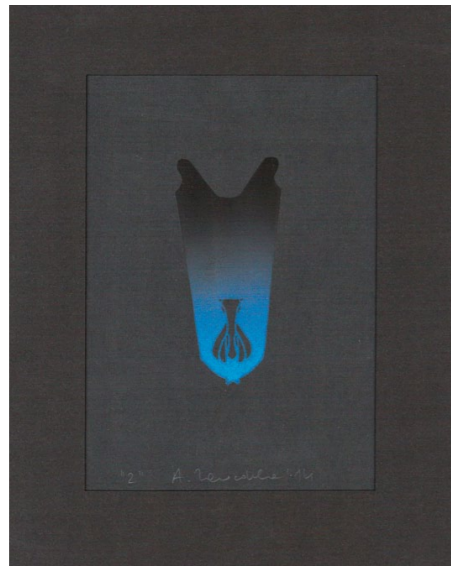


Illustration 5: Vessels for water II, 2014

Human’s body consist mainly of water and there would be no exaggeration to say that we exist

as water. In many cultures and religions water is a symbol of carnal, mental and spiritual power of purification and revival, as well as the earliest beginnings of any existence. It is present in numerous creation myths. According to Thales of Miletus, the Jonian philosopher, water is the originating principle of nature and the nature of matter. Water is a feminine element and is connected with fertility. It also symbolizes the world of feelings – it fills our bodies up with sensations, remembers, gives us the ability to experience emotions. [Illustration 5](#)

It is also a great element which power is fully understood by contemporary pearl divers. In the world where most of us have lost contact with nature and been cut off from its rhythms, ama live in balance and harmony with nature and society. The water, where they spend a few hours every day in search for seafood, has been *a place of inner concentration* for them. They find the right perspective of existence here that results in self-confidence, sense of humor and distance from everyday troubles onshore.

A woman’s body as a vessel for water is mainly a metaphoric world of silence of concentration and contemplation to me.

#### Vessels for blood

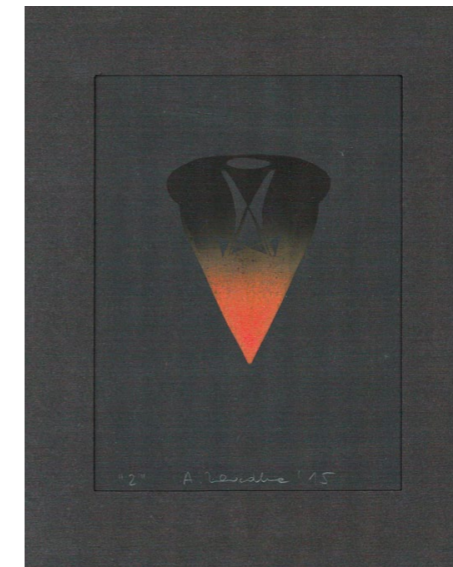


Illustration 6: Vessels for blood II, 2015

Blood, as well as water, symbolizes life and divine elements that fill up human body. It was also perceived as *a special juice, suffused with donor’s aura*. Circulating constantly around human body, nourishes and keeps it alive. [Illustration 6](#)

Regardless of scientific knowledge about its functions and circulation in human’s body, my personal experiences seem to confirm its symbolic meaning as energy of life. It was moment when, due to modern technology, I could see my child for the very first time. My daughter Tamara was a six week embryo, resembling more of a pea grain. But it was the blood that was pulsating inside that grain, and the doctor said: “The heart is beating – there is a man”.

A woman’s body, especially when a new life is developing inside, becomes a kind of a vessel for transformation: both physical and psychological. What is happening inside in on one hand subtle and spiritual, while on the other very exact in its physicality.

It can remind of an exceptional fable-like vessel – Baba Yaga’s cauldron that also had a transformational character. A scary witch, a guardian of life and death, a minder of transformation, stirring in cauldron would change one forms into others: some would die, some would be born

along with her.

Vessels for blood could be a kind of alchemic retorts where complicated process of transformation takes place in, filling up with *rubedo* and revived with *the redness of life*.

#### Vessels for light

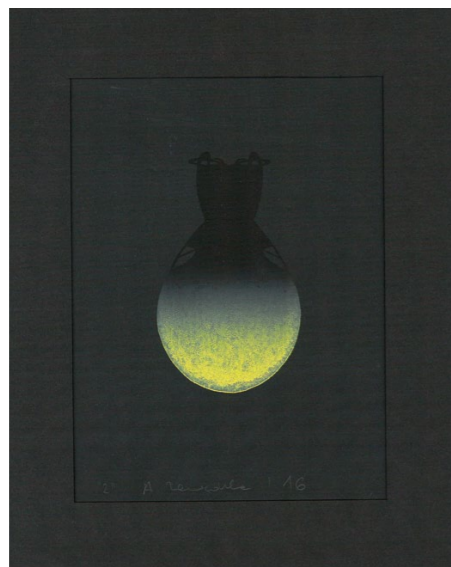


Illustration 7: Vessels for light II, 2016

Anyone, who has seen glow-worms during one of June nights, dispersed like stars on the river bank, will understand why Utagawa Hiroshige made hunting for glow-worms a theme of one of his woodblock prints. Lightning insects are like flowers we want to pick up and put in a vase. We desire to close those little lights inside a vessel, where, paraphrasing Alina Kalczyńska: *The pure beauty is the light – maybe the light is something superior for us, something we cannot even express.* [Illustration 7](#)

Sunlight symbolizes divinity, spirit, purity and truth. This symbolism has been reflected in art around the world, in Europe mostly in a gothic concept of cathedral, based on the idea that God is the light (eternal light).

Georges Duby writes:

*The universe drawn out of light sends streams of light itself and the light that emanates from the First Being determines invariable place for everything, what is created. But it also unites everything. As a tie of love it penetrates the world, it is its order and bond, because anything, more or less, is this world's reflection. This irradiation, from the depth of darkness, is climbing up with the continued chain of reflections, leading towards the source of its creation. In this way the luminous process of creation appoints the return movement, which leads through the steps to the invisible and inexpressible Being, that it is derived from. Everything goes back to It as through visible things, which, the higher in the hierarchy, the better reflects Its light.*<sup>8</sup>

Theological interpretation of light influenced how divine persons and saints have been pre-

<sup>8</sup> Georges Duby, *Times of Cathedrals. The Art and the Society 980-1420*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 95

sented in art surrounded by luminous aura. To me one of the most interesting presentations of this type is an image of Assunta – clothed in sun Apocalyptic Woman. I deeply explored the symbolism of the image while writing my master thesis about the representation of Assunta in European art. According to the symbolic interpretation of Apocalyptic Woman in luminous glory, she could be also compared to a vessel that is being filtered by light. The metaphysics of light has gained even a stronger basis together with the development of science. Contemporary physics enables us to perceive a man literally as a vessel for light/from light, as matter is a form of energy existence.

#### Cosmic vessels

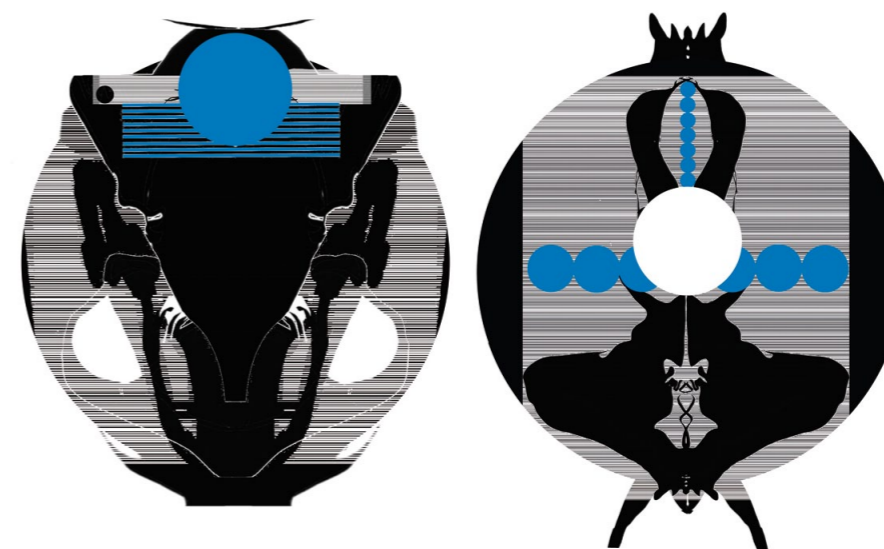


Illustration 8 from left: Cosmic vessels I-II, 2015

In the cycle of big, digital graphics, the vessels are almost immaterial, reminding spherical, cut object that have retained their physical cover only partially. They stop being tangible, concrete. If seeking a feminine motive here, this body is an universal one – the universe shut inside the vessels. [Illustration 8](#)

The affirmation that a man has a universe inside has been repeated over the years. Many centuries ago Saint Hildegard of Bingen presented the idea of a man as a microcosm:

*Human has the resemblance of heaven and earth inside. How? One has a circle where the understanding, refreshing breath and judiciousness are, as the lights can be seen on the sky; one also has the spirit that moves around any senses like bird in the air: one also has the container where humidity, budding and breeding can be seen, as plants, fruit and animals are seen in the world.*<sup>9</sup>

A beautiful, poetical disquisition of Saint Hildegard, that came from a vision, finds the confirmation in the light of contemporary scientific theories which state that a man has a universe inside and, at the same time, is an exact reflection of its harmony. There is no difference today which perspective we set when discovering the undeniable and amazing unity of macro – and

<sup>9</sup> Błażej Matusiak OP, *Hildegarda from Bingen, Theology of Music*, Kraków 2012, pp. 50



microcosm.

The vessels for water, blood and light, despite their distinct scale, are the same as the cosmic vessels. Do they give the feeling of unity with the world, the unity between the body and the cosmos, or do they uncover the illusion of set boundaries?

It may be art that sets the appropriate perspective of what we see and describe, what we consist of and are surrounded by – far to the edge of distant galaxies.

No scientific truths are being discovered or answers are being found due to art. But perhaps we become *a patient blade of grass observers*, attentive world eyewitnesses, being more respectful and becoming a part of it. The art makes us practice *the sense of participation*, as Wisława Szymborska wrote, not to get to know the truth, but in order to be here and now.

The choice of technique is intuitive in my case. It is difficult to say unambiguously why I chose a small format and a colour linocut in the cycles “Vessels for water”, “Vessels for blood” and “Vessels for light”, while a computer print and a big scale in the cycle “Cosmic vessels”.

It may be a symbolic attempt to make an alliance between the two: micro – and macrocosm. Subtlety of small graphic form, delicacy in cutting, hand print, lack of contrast underlined with iris transition on a dark piece of paper (not traditional one), say something about the longing for inner authenticity of the work of art, often mentioned by those who see the threat for art in using modern computer methods.

On the other hand, entering a big format, giving up sensitization for details, leaving precision, contrasting spots of different sharpness, using coincidence and a specific collage based on matching elements created in various ways (drawn, scanned, scaled, filled with colour, applied one on the another), is a great way of creative expression.

Workshop and digital techniques have existed and developed simultaneously for many years. In the wide field of graphics art we can rather talk about their coexistence and literal penetration, which lead to limiting boundaries and perceiving the technique as a means of carrying out the specified idea (project).

5. Description of other accomplishments.

#### Original books for children as a continuation of graphic cycles

Along with the above mentioned cycles three picture books for children came into being. They were designed for two main reasons: for the reader and in order to use them later during various animation and workshop activities. Thereby, I have entered a new area of my interests and artistic experiments, which is no doubt, a natural consequence of my previous experiences connected with graphics, book graphics and bookplates. Original books became the biggest challenge for me as they required to combine abilities taken from different fields of artistic creativity. They made me realize that I am a very open-minded artist and that I have been gradually developing and maturing. Working on books for children I once again found a courage of a child inside myself that consequently enables me to express the truth about art.

A beautifully design book has always been my companion. I remember fairy-tales illustrated by Jan Marcin Szancer, Janusz Stanny, Józef Wilkoń oraz Bohdan Butenko, as well as luxury editions of poetry books ornamented with original graphics. I am interested in modern picture books for children and original artistic books. And that is an original artistic book I find an exceptional work of art because it joins two narrations together: the word and the picture. Moreover, those two narrations have been developing throughout time. The harmonious coexistence of word and picture is an imminent feature of the Eastern art where the division of those two elements have never been so vivid comparing to Western art.

My inspirations reach to Far Eastern esthetics and the form of the books is based on the purity of means and the style of ukiyo-e woodblock prints.

Three picture books: “The Octopus”, “The Ballad of a Tiled Stove” and “A Neighbour from a Cottage” are short, written in poem fairy-tales that can be interpreted as symbolic ones. Nothing is obvious as it appears to be and a seemingly trivial plot becomes a secret language that enables to express what is hidden below the visible skin of a matter.

The picture books fulfill the three graphic cycles – “Vessels for water”, “Vessels for blood” and “Vessels for light” as they include similar figurative content. To underline the parallelism I have given the descriptions of fairy-tales names referring to particular graphic cycles.

#### The Water Woman

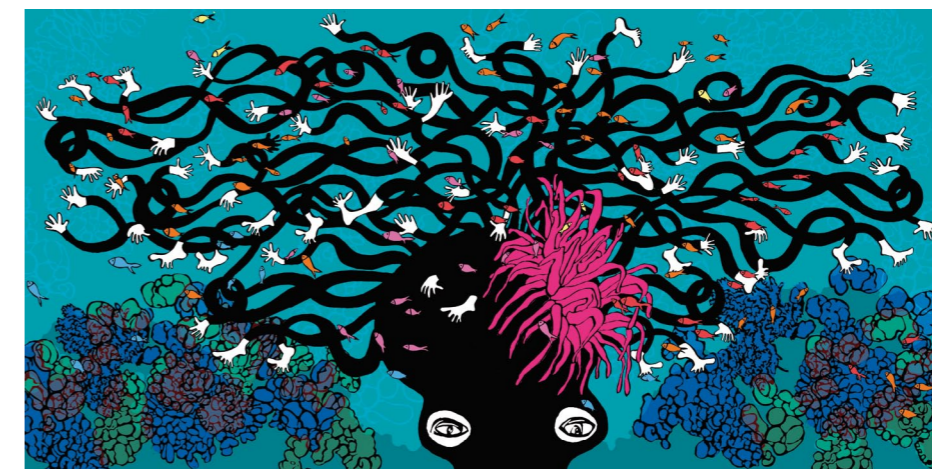


Illustration 9: Octopus, authorial book, 2012

“The Octopus” [Illustration 9](#) is a simple and funny story which main character reveals in a subtle way the secrets of her complicated female character and duality. The idea for the fairy-tale came as an inspiration from one of the most famous erotic ukiyo-e woodblock prints showing a pearl diver awabi and an octopus in an erotic embrace. Perversely, the duo of a woman and an octopus entwine in one in my book. The real character of the fairy-tale is a volatile, mysterious woman, full of feelings and often contradictory emotions, hidden inside the sea creature’s body. Where does the idea to use the metaphor and find the similarities between the woman and a scary creature come from? At first glance the octopus brings fear but those who have a courage to discover her true “self”, know that she is one of the most intelligent sea creatures. She has a great imagination and inquisitiveness. She can play and camouflage astonishingly. In order to avoid danger she may skillfully, like a mistress of illusion, match with the surroundings, changing her shape, colour and even patterns on her skin. Although she is quite slender and delicate, her body has the ability to regenerate.

Are we of this kind being a woman? Or do we want to be like that? And, in general, what are we like? What is our nature like? Is there a power of a sea creature inside us?

#### The Vessel of a mental transformation



Illustration 10: *The Ballad of a Tiled Stove*, authorial book, 2015

“The Ballad of a Tiled Stove” [Illustration 10](#) tells a story of an exceptional, magical stove that can change ordinary memories into fairy tales for a little girl called Basia. The text was based on the stories I had once heard from my close friends and family, whereas the illustrations refer to the tiles of Huculian stove that is situated in the house of Maria and Jerzy Kuncewicz in Kazimierz Dolny. The illustrations were also influenced by the contemporary original pottery made by Iwona and Jerzy Jarmołowicz that I saw while staying at their workshop. The fairy-tale of a tiled stove was created in the form of a poetic ballad, both in its content and image – it has a complicated, symbolic representation.

Monika Modrzejewska-Świągulska writes:

*The ballad can be read in various ways. Firstly, literally and traditionally, from the beginning till the end, as a fairy-tale of the stove telling the stories about the occurrences it has witnessed. Secondly, this ballad can be read at random, meeting new characters and stories, thus creating our own ballad. The author invites us not to read it explicitly and to discover the metaphorical side of the ballad. The reader is an adult who, while reading*

*the ballad to a child, tells in his mind the additional meanings, read between words and images. It is also a story about travelling, the real and metaphorical one, travelling to our inner self, discovering different aspects of the inner self. (...) The ballad of a stove read as a metaphor, becomes a story about the journey inside ourselves, about the inner change, about maturity.*<sup>10</sup>

The ballad seen as a trip inside one’s inner self touches crucial experiences and feelings. It inclines to ask questions: What does my own way through life look like? Is it similar to the one chosen by ballad’s characters? Is the trip a great adventure or a necessary risk?

A very strong accent has been also put on the need of artistic creativity as a factor that induces positive energy and leads to self-fulfillment.

Music and the ability of telling fairy-tales in ballads are the symbols of artistic creativity and, no doubts, an imminent part of every fulfilled person’s life.

#### The Light that has been found



Illustration 11: *A Neighbour from a Cottage*, authorial book, 2016

It is difficult to say that “A Neighbour from a Cottage” [Illustration 11](#) is a typical fairy-tale as its main character is a real woman who lives in a crumbled wooden house on the outskirts of the district. There aren’t many places in our concrete cities where we can find heroes, a bit from another world, who are trying to resist the civilization. They are usually treated with suspicion and reserve. Are they normal? – we tend to ask ourselves in minds.

However, we often attribute the openness and straightforwardness to kids (mostly the naughty ones), it turns out that, with a little effort, we can change our attitude towards the other man. We can see him in a different light – or see the light inside him. A this is what the fairy-tale is about.

Monika Modrzejewska-Świągulska writes in a publishing review:

*In the metaphorical aspect the text is about the problem of The Other in our everyday life. It is so up-to-date as The Others have been recently coming to Europe and we are not prepared to face their presence. (...) But exploring The Other’s otherness we can discover individuality and uniqueness. (...) The positive attitude towards The Other is expressed in our interest of what is new, the eagerness to recognize and come closer The Other.*

<sup>10</sup> Monika Modrzejewska-Świągulska, editorial review *Craving for a Stove Tile like Asking for the Moon*, Łódź 2014

*I mean the relation of mutual finding the differences and tangent points, where, our and The Other's world, meet. We can discover and see our different selves. In a fairy-tale by Agnieszka Zawadzka those who are brave enough and decide to make this kind of relation with the Neighbour from the cottage, experience the miracle of friendship and beauty (among others the music played by the Neighbour and her stories). They find themselves in a cottage that may symbolize the centre of the world, where, according to Mircea Eliade, in the central and transcendental point creation begins, as the source of life energy beats there. When the Neighbour leaves, her world leaves, and in the place of her cottage flowers bloom, as a symbol of mystery, love and change. That is why gradually and slowly the healing magic of soil, flowers and trees start to act (Jane Goodall) in minds and hearts of Those who were brave."*

The main character of the fairy-tale, the Neighbour from the cottage, is a kind of a symbolic vessel for light, that, for our own sake, we always have a chance to see.

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<sup>11</sup> Monika Modrzejewska Świgulska, editorial review A Neighbour from the Centre of the World , Łódź 2016

## Didactic work

For the artist, who is a teacher as well, teaching and original creativity are two penetrating areas. After having graduated from my studies, I started working at my parent university, at the Faculty of Arts. Since that moment, I have been linking the pedagogical work with realization of individual artistic projects which helps me to look for new, inspiring methods of work with students. I mostly value the cooperation with those, who are open to merits that arise from their own creativity. In my opinion the teacher is a partner in the process of expanding student's competences, an initiator of creative process, relying on his/her own artistic proposal. The relation between the teacher and the student is a very important and widely discussed issue nowadays, mainly among academic community. There is no place for routine or traditional ways of giving information. It depends a lot on teacher's openness to taking up activities towards personal development, creative attitude to life and the courage of questioning personal schemes of thinking and acting.

In artistic schools the methods of teaching have always been based on a dialogue and respect for young people's sensitivity and their growing creative personalities. In my view I am a follower of my previous teachers.

I have had an opportunity to work with people at different age during my pedagogical career. Except for lectures with students, I have done some workshops with children and elderly people. I also have some experience in doing various projects meant for people with different disabilities. Moreover, I have led courses with foreign students within the framework of Erasmus programme.

Irrespective of the type of lectures and the character of the group I work with, I always try to share my passion, knowledge and abilities. I truly value the work with people, as it is a great inspiration, brings satisfaction and opens to new experiences.

I always have the feeling that we teach each other, provided that we can make a platform for a mutual creative dialogue, build the trust and base the relation on respecting our differences, as well as on simple and clear rules.

As every academic teacher I realize the given programme where the number of elements are defined – at every faculty and during subsequent years it is adapted to specific educational outcomes. At the same time I understand that my personal character influences the form of my lectures and workshops, as well as their final effects. I am certainly not a strict and consequent teacher who enforces the students to do the assigned tasks. First, I try to listen to and observe the abilities of each new group of students in order to get to know them better. In my personal opinion art students are a very delicate material, resistant to any type of pressure.

The best effects can be achieved when they are allowed to use their time the way they want to and shown they can make their own decisions concerning the artistic process. We are very satisfied to watch annual reviews of their work presented in the form of exhibitions in Lublin galleries. Due to that form of presentation, they learn how to cooperate, confront their works with the public and find practical abilities of presenting their achievements. I usually let them prepare the exhibition, design prints and catalogues, organize the vernissage and promote it. I always encourage my students to organize their individual exhibitions and take part in both,

national and international competitions, from the very early stage of their artistic education.

I also emphasize that gaining workshop skills is only one element of their artistic development, as much important as everything that forms their character, broadens their knowledge, triggers their creativity and helps them to participate in the surrounding world more actively.

Between 2006 and 2016 I led various classes: graphics, graphic techniques, letterpress printing and graphics basics, within the framework of the following specializations: graphics, painting and art education, for I, II, III and IV year students.

I spent most of my time as a linocut workshop teacher for I year students. They could learn the basics of letterpress printing techniques and improve their workshop. I also presented them the elements of history of graphics, great graphic designers that influenced the development of graphic art the most, as well as the selected literature about graphics. On the grounds of numerous exhibition catalogues I had collected over the years, I discussed the most important graphic competitions in Poland and around the world. I also introduced practical workshops: bookbinding, typographical and papermaking organized in the cooperation with Printing Chamber in Lublin. The workshops became a great introduction to books, graphic design for books, bookplate or modern artistic book.

We made a number of exhibitions with my students during the past 10 years to summarize our work and which brought us a lot of satisfaction:

2006:

- Graphics basic workshop, Gallery on 111 Steps, 2 Youth Cultural Centre, Lublin
- Graphics, Board Club, Lublin

2007:

- Graphics, Gallery on 111 Steps, 2 Youth Cultural Centre, Lublin

2009:

- Graphics basic workshop, Gallery on 111 Steps, 2 Youth Cultural Centre, Lublin
- Ex Libris, Linocut, Students from UMCS in Lublin, Šiauliai University, Šiauliai, Lithuania
- International exhibition of students linocut, Šiauliai University, Šiauliai, Lithuania and UMCS, Lublin, Poland; Town Hall in Lublin

2011:

- In Black and White, District Culture Centre “Bronowice”, The Night of Culture, Lublin

2012:

- In Black and White 2, District Culture Centre “Bronowice”, Lublin
- Graphics basic workshop, Gallery on 111 Steps, Youth Cultural Centre Nr2, Lublin

2013:

- Gabriela Popovičová, My life in Lublin. Graphics and illustrations. Gallery on 111 Steps, Youth Cultural Centre No 2, Lublin
- In Black and White 3, District Culture Centre “Bronowice”, Lublin

2015:

- In Black and White. The Square Room, Youth Cultural Centre No 2, Lublin

2016:

- Linocuts, Gallery in the Passage, filia Dzielnicowego Domu Kultury “Bronowice”, Lublin

2017:

- Linocuts, Gallery in the Passage, filia Dzielnicowego Domu Kultury “Bronowice”, Lublin

I also gave lectures on illustration and practical classes on workshop techniques at post-graduate studies in graphic design for the publishing industry during 2013/2014 and 2016/2017 academic years. I could share my knowledge about Polish school of illustration, the role of graphic techniques in the development of illustration and modern illustration in books for children in Poland and around the world. I also presented practical skills connected with designing books

for children, ornamental elements of a book, bookplate and building up a coherent narration with word and image.

In 2013 two bachelor's diplomas were realized under my supervision: “Space” Anita Barczewska and „Vanitas” Olga Obrębalska.

Between 2006 and 2014 I led lectures and workshops in graphic techniques in French and English for students from France, Czech Republic and Turkey during the Erasmus programme.

#### Animation activities connected with picture books

Animation and workshop activities based on my original picture books have always played a crucial role in my pedagogical work. They are designed mostly for children, their parents as well as people with different disabilities. They broaden my pedagogical experience and, above all, confirm, beyond university, the sense of my scientific research. Thanks to those activities I can expand the group of my art viewers and the number of my didactic methods. In my opinion they significantly influence the popularization of research being done at the university. According to both, people who work with children at early stage of school education and the scientists who research the issue, picture books play a great part in shaping young man's character, support their personal development, sensitivity and creativity, they learn abstractive thinking and introduce various meanings, they help to name, get to know and familiarize them. A complicated structure of a book, its imagery, enables to read its content on different levels which makes the workshop activities based on picture books an interesting and enriching experience, both for participants and the teacher. The latter can formulate tasks and suggest different ways of their realization, depending on the needs and abilities of each group.

The most important projects I have carried out are:

- The cycle of workshops based on “The Octopus” fairy-tale, carried out in Youth Cultural Centre No 2 in Lublin, District Culture Centre “Bronowice” in Lublin, Municipal Culture Centre in Świdnik, Society for the Mentally Disabled in Częstochowa and Public Kindergarten No 48 in Lublin;
- The artistic-educational project “Dodo was here and left his footmark in Park 24” in 2014, in Stalowa Wola;
- The artistic-educational project in “You wanted a tile form a stove like a star from the sky” carried out in 2015 in Stalowa Wola, joined with creativity workshops in Youth Cultural Centre No 2 in Lublin and H. Łopaciński Municipal Public Library Local Office No 35 in Lublin.

During the first of the above mentioned projects the work with children enabled them to show their thoughts and emotions using the image as a way of artistic expression. Their artistic works were later presented during the final exhibition of the project in the Regional Museum in Stalowa Wola, in 2013. Moreover, illustrative materials and scripts of the workshops were issued in a form of multimedia presentation, with the introduction written by PhD Anna Boguszcwska. A starting point for another project was an international exhibition “Eva looks for dodo”, presented in outdoor locations. This quite untypical place of works presentation and carrying out the workshops – Park 24 in Stalowa Wola – turned out to be a very inspirational one. It became a place for integration for all the workshops participants. Various outdoor artistic activities and actions, learning sign language, dancing with the music and time spent together proved how important it is to have a direct contact with art and come out of the typical presentation: the artist and his work of art.

The third project, connected with the “The Ballad of a Tiled Stove” was staggered and included numerous activities – lectures and workshops led by a few teacher from various fields. During the first part an exhibition of book illustrations and a meeting with the author of the book were organized at the Interacademic Library in Stalowa Wola.

I also gave the lectures about books illustrations and art workshops translated into sign

language. The participants could gain some knowledge about the history of art. They became acquainted with the issue of modern picture book and illustrative techniques. They could analyze the inspirations referring to the tradition of folk art. Looking at original, old ceramic products, they were trying to find out the individual character of works of art made in Hucul style. They also got to know more about dying out jobs like a stove fitter or a potter.

During the practical part they perfect their manual skills. They made their works using different techniques (drawing, pastels, linocut, pottery), experimenting with form, colour and texture at the same time they were free to choose the means of composition. At this stage of work a very strong accent was put on formulating their own statement – the participants had to present the concept of their work and sources of their inspiration. The workshops were a great training for their imagination. New illustrations for the text, ceramic tiles, the following plots of the ballad based on personal memories and attempts of creating a new book were made.

All the animation activities confirmed that a picture book is a great medium, giving the power to develop the creative reception of the surrounding world. What is most important, the participants of the project could work in a wider context and confront different statements, keeping their autonomy and originality. In my point of view, due to those workshops, old Hucul ceramic and Japanese woodblock prints once again arose in viewers' awareness. Regardless of the elapse of time and the changing values of this art, they remain the same though could be read with different meanings.

The fundamental element of all animation events based on picture books was the presence and integration of people with different disabilities (intellectual, motor or auditory ones). Edyta Lisek-Lubaś, the main initiator of the events, says:

*The projects were to be an answer to educational negligence, discrimination and the lack of methodology and didactic base within the range of teaching and making the culture and art accessible to people with auditory disabilities. Activation through creative workshops enabled both, hearing-impaired and with mental disabilities people, to "open the doors to culture, art and business", which is hermetically closed for them in an everyday life. It is an idea for a world that is a bit better, where people with passion, regardless of their limitations, act for themselves and for the others.*

### International cooperation

Confronting my own artistic achievements in an international field has always been a very important and strongly motivating for further development element of my artistic work. I have actively taken part in international competitions and exhibitions. I have also made contact with artists from other universities and freelance artists from abroad. The most fruitful cooperation has been established with artists from Lithuania. Its beginnings reach year 2000 when I was awarded the main prize in competition Ex Libris. Šiaulų P. Višinskio bibliotekai – 50. Two years later, in 2002, I took part in the International Conference Ex Libris in Baltic Countries organized in Šiauliai, Lithuania where I presented the paper "Ex Libris in Lublin" as well as an individual exhibition of bookplates. I also established contact with artists who work at the Faculty of Arts, Šiauliai University. For the following 14 years regular exhibitions were organized, both individual and collective, together with didactic and scientific visits of workers from both universities in Poland and Lithuania.

I took part in the following exhibitions, both as an organizer and a co-organizer:

2004

– Vaidotas Janulis, Bookplates, Museum of UMCS in Lublin, curator

– Meda, Drawings, Gallery on 111 Steps, Youth Cultural Centre No 2 in Lublin, curator  
2009

– Ex Libris, Linocut, students from Maria Curie Skłodowska University in Lublin and Šiauliai University in Lithuania, curator

2010

– International Exhibition of Sketches, Sketch 2010, Laiptali Gallery, Šiauliai, Lithuania, participant; Modern Lithuanian Art, Gallery on 111 Steps, Youth Cultural Centre No 2 in Lublin, curator (with Robert Rabiej)

2014

– Status Inversus. Dialogues of Identity, Zajezdnia Gallery in Lublin, curator (with Robert Rabiej); International exhibition of illustration "Eve looks for dodo", Šiauliai University in Lithuania, participant and curator

On the paper. Without boundaries, Artistic and Media Incubator UMCS in Lublin, participant;  
2015

– Vaiva Kovieraite, Immanent Portraits, Aquarium Gallery, Academic Culture Centre "Chatka Žaka" in Lublin, curator

I stayed five times at Šiauliai University in Lithuania as part of the Erasmus programme "Staff Mobility for Teachers": 20–24.04.2009, 5–9.05.2014, 4–8.05.2015, 17–22.01.2016. I gave lectures and led workshops with the group of students during the stay at the university in Šiauliai. I also presented my works of art in the Graphic Centre at Šiauliai University in Lithuania (twice, in 2015 and 2016).

I carried out the meetings in Polish, English and French. I gained new, very important, didactic experience and developed my language skills. I also got accustomed with the specific character and methods of work, assessment system and teaching programme at other university. I had an opportunity to talk with students and teachers about ongoing changes in the system of art education connected with matching it to new standards in education and job market expectations.

In 2014 I took part in a conference as a part of Erasmus Mobility Week, summing up the international cooperation of Šiauliai University. During the conference I presented the material promoting UMCS in Lublin and the Faculty of Arts, where I work.

Within the framework of that cooperation I took part in two week International Graphics Plain-air organized in Šiauliai by professor Vaidas Janulis.

Due to the contacts with Lithuanian artists I established cooperation with Daugavpils University in Latvia and Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre in Daugavpils. This resulted in three conferences in Latvia I participated in:

2013

– 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference Person. Colour. Nature. Music, Rothko and Abstract Expressionism, Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre, Daugavpils, Latvia

2016

– 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference Person. Colour. Nature. Music, Daugavpils, Art Martinsons, Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre, Daugavpils, Latvia

– 5<sup>th</sup> International Latgale Art Symposium, Daugavpils Mark Rothko Art Centre, Daugavpils, Latvia

### Organizational activity for the University

– 2010–2016: year tutor at the specialization of art education

since 2012: year tutor at the specialization of graphics

– Every year I took part in organizing entrance exams. In 2008 I was a member of the examination board at the Faculty of Arts

2014–2016

– promotion coordinator at the Faculty of Arts; preparing open days at Maria Curie University in Lublin;

2013

– Art and Education conference secretary, organized at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Faculty of Arts, UMCS in Lublin;

2012-2013

– appointed by the dean of the Faculty of Arts, UMCS in Lublin, I was a member of the Faculty Programme Board for graphics studies;

2011-2015

– organizer of graphic workshops: “Linocut today: traditional graphics in the world of modern printing technologies” during Lublin Science Festival; the participants: schoolchildren from Lublin and region, a big group of art education and culture managers, amateurs who wanted to broaden their knowledge in the field of graphics, hearing-impaired people;

– I was also invited to carry out the graphics and illustration workshops in:

Youth Cultural Centre No 2 in Lublin, “Under Acacia” Youth Cultural Centre in Lublin, H. Łopaciński Municipal Public Library in Lublin.