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EXPOSING WYSPIAŃSKI

Bartosz Haduch

Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Cracow University

Introduction

In 1901, Stanisław Wyspiański donated to the National Museum in Cracow three monumental pastels showing designs for stained glass windows for the Wawel Cathedral. This event can be regarded as a symbolic launch of the collection of his works at that Museusm, however also as a beginning of an intriguing story of different venues for and means of its display. Following the artist's death in 1907, many of the works executed in the last days of his life, both at home and in the Wegrzce studio, were bequeathed in his last will to the Museum. Other Wyspiański's works reached it in 1920 together with the collection of Feliks 'Manggha' Jasieński. In 1932, Cracow's City Council decided to establish the Stanisław Wyspiański Gallery within the National Museum. Furthermore, in the 1970s, the decision was made to found a separate branch of MNK dedicated to Wyspiański's oeuvre. In 1983–2002, the Branch was located in the building at 9 Kanoniczna Street. With the intention of displaying Wyspiański's works in the first years of the new millennium, the concept to extend the Main Building of the Cracow National Museum was designed by the architect Romuald Loegler PhD, Eng., however it was not implemented.² Later, in 2004–12, a substantial part of the MNK collection could be viewed in the Szołayski Tenement House in Szczepański Square, however cosy and low rooms hampered the perception of the large-scale works. After 2012, most of the works were taken to storage rooms, with only very few being presented as part of the Gallery of Polish 20th-Century Art at MNK. Furthermore, an impressive exhibition of the artist's accomplishments was held in late 2007 and early 2008, the venue being the ground floor of MNK's Main Building, yet it allowed to display but a fraction of the Museum's collection. At the same time the building of the Wyspiański Pavillion in Wszystkich Świętych Square was completed; in it the three stained glass windows by Wyspiański for the Wawel Cathedral, whose designs engendered the collection of his works at Cracow's National Museum, were executed after the designs.³ However, exactly ten more years were needed for another overall presentation of the artist to be mounted.

Wyspiański: known and unknown

On 28 November 2017, 110 years from Stanisław Wyspiański's death, in MNK's Main Building the long-awaited monographic display of this outstanding and versatile artist was inaugurated.4 The display 'Wyspiański. Unknown',5 launched slightly over a year later: on 15 January 2019, on the 150th anniversary of the artist's birth, as if supplemented the previous display. The exhibition trilogy was crowned with a small exhibition called 'Wyspiański. Afterword' (17 May-6 October 2019), to a great degree basing on the artist's works from private collections. 6 All the exhibitions, forming a cohesive whole, were designed by NArchitekTURA encompassing: Bartosz Haduch, Łukasz Marjański, and Michał Haduch, in cooperation with the curators: Magdalena Laskowska, Danuta Godyń, and Łucja Skoczeń-Rapała⁷ who contributed factually. The exhibitions were to constitute a sort of a prelude to the establishment of the new Stanisław Wyspiański Museum in Cracow. A competition for its design was announced, and in 2019 the Heinle, Wischer und Partner Studio were awarded the first prize. 8 Wyspiański's monographic Exhibition took over the majority of MNK' Main Building's second floor, where on the surface of 2.360 sq m in total over 1.000 art works were displayed. The amplest to-date presentation of the artist's works, it was at the same time the largest display in the history of the Cracow Museum, as well as a blockbuster as for the turnout: over 350.000 visitors.9 In February 2020, the project wont the first prize in the national contest 'SAW [Association of Interior Designers] Interior of the Year' in the category: public interior for 2015–2019; it was also broadly publicized both domestically and internationally.

In the assumption of its authors, the design layout was to be an attempt at preserving the balance between a neutral backdrop to the exhibits, and a unique scenography emphasizing the artist's genius. The differentiated character of each of he seven rooms: 'At Home': the beginning and the end; 'Polycolourfulness of the Franciscan Church. Painterly Decoration', Polycolourfulness of the Franciscan Church. Stained Glass Windows', 'Stories and Mementoes', 'Nation's



1. Exhibition's Vestibule

Theatre', 'Not Paris, but Cracow', and 'Ars-Apollo' (the latter later turned into the Library in the 'Wyspiański. Unknown' Exhibition), reflected the chronological and thematic narrative of the display, following the concept of 'suspense gradation': as if in a film script or a theatre play. Cosy spaces corresponding with the artist's home life contrasted with spacious halls dedicated to the display of sacral art. Instead of literal quotations from Wyspiański's oeuvre, its contemporary interpretations achieved with advanced technologies (in designing and execution) as well as with modern materials were proposed. The best example of it can be seen in the Exhibition's 'Vestibule' with the circumference made of perforated plywood panels. The digitally cut out patterns in modular elements were based on the artist's sketches, however their accumulation and multiplication in the form of a three-layer structure could also yield associations with contemporary art. In the broader context of the current designing and artistic tendencies this can demonstrate the timeless character of Wyspiański's vision. Moreover, the interior introducing the public into the Exhibition's space was also an attempt at transferring Wyspiański's unaccomplished visions into the architectural scale, but could also be perceived as an autonomous work of art; it was actually, just like an exhibit, completed with a plaque providing the author's detailed description.

The subsequent rooms were kept in the toned down white cube stylistics: each was characterized, however, by a different arrangement, adjusted to the peculiar character of the respective Exhibition elements. In the majority of the display spaces the suggestion was to remove unnecessary

partitioning walls, like this trying to restore the genuine arrangement of the interiors, resembling that from the first half of the past century. The selected artworks climaxing numerous vistas crossing the suite of connecting rooms emphasized the impressive scale of the display, at the same time directing the visitors further on. Beginning with the first room: 'At Home', special attention was paid to the minimalist character of all the Exhibition's parts.

Polycolourfulnesses

The aspect that much attention was paid to during the designing was the varied ways of Wyspiański's works' perception. The main assumption was for the public to be able to see the majority of art works in the same way in which the artist saw them in the creation process. Hence the decision to place the designs of stained glass windows for the Franciscan Church in Cracow (1897–1904) on free-standing plinths in one of the initial Exhibition rooms. This composition of seven art works placed horizontally allowed the public to wander among them, spotting such details as Wyspiański's hand-written notes, or the numbering of respective window panels. The whole could also be viewed from an elevated platform placed at the end of the hall.

In two subsequent spaces sharing the name 'Polycolour-fullnesse of the Franciscan Church' not only the final effect of Wyspiański's work was shown, but also the whole creative process. In display cabinets on the ground floor and the mezzanine we could see so-called spolveros, which lit-up directly showed the intricate composition on hand-pierced

tracing paper. The main wall of that room also featured a monumental mosaic made up of several dozen sketches of the polychrome for the Franciscan church, which can be admired from various levels. Within this impressive 'collage' of the total dimensions amounting to $15.0 \times 5.0 \text{ m}$, the historical paintings created a surprisingly modern composition, yielding some associations with the works of Andy Warhol, which often based on the multiplication of smaller paintings.

'Cathedrals'

In further rooms there appeared yet other characteristic elements of the Exhibition, namely so-called cathedrals. They were three free-standing cuboids meant to display large-format works that Wyspiański executed for churches in Cracow and Lvov. Regrettably, the majority were not executed at their destination, so an attempt was made



2. Room: 'Polycolours of the Franciscan Church. Stained-Glass Windows'



3. Room: 'Polycolours of the Franciscan Church. Painterly Decoration'

to design contemporary space for these definite works. The three 'cathedrals' were meant as an original interpretation of the idea of *sacrum* in architecture, yet at the same time as unique examples of interiors dedicated exclusively to the display of single works of art.

The first 'cathedral' in the 'History and Mementoes' Room constituted the setting for the designs of the panels of the western window in Cracow's St Mary's Church (1891) by Stanisław Wyspiański and Józef Mehoffer. A secluded red space narrowing inside, enhanced concentration and contemplation of the elaborate composition. Thanks to its fluid shapes, the applied scheme of 'sucking' the beholder inside the monochromatic sculptural form could be seen to echo works of the contemporary artist Anish Kapoor. The outside of the monolithic mass featured Wyspiański's drawn copies from the Holy Cross Church in Cracow, while on the surrounding walls his art was juxtaposed with Jan Matejko's works.

The two remaining 'cathedrals' were placed in the largest hall called 'Nation's Theatre'. The first displayed the design of the stained glass window *Polonia* (1893–1894). The seven-metre-long canvas was placed on a low plinth, while its mirror reflection could be seen on the surface placed at an appropriate angle. The application of optical illusion in this interior created interesting relations between the reflected and real image, being at the same time a conscious reference to Op-art experiments.

Immediately adjacent was the last 'cathedral' displaying three designs of the stained glass windows for the chancel of the Wawel Cathedral (1900): the very same which initiated the collection of Wyspiański's works at MNK. This interior's layout was circular, while the ceiling was crowned with an oculus illuminated with delicate diffused light. Originally, this interior derived inspiration from the Roman Pantheon; interestingly enough, only later it turned out that in the first plan of the National Museum in the 1930s, Wyspiański's stained glass windows were to be displayed in a rotunda of a similar form and location. This coincidence bestowed a contextual dimension on the interior. What is more, during a single artistic action performed within the Exhibition space by a vocal ensemble run by Mariusz Laudański, the circular interior of the last cathedral manifested its acoustic potential acting like a sound box.

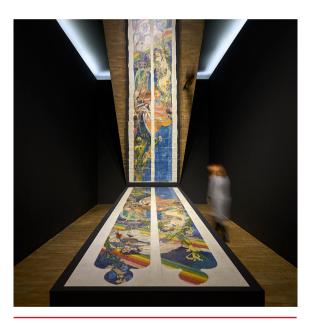
Interestingly, the colour-range of all the described 'cathedrals' was based on the averaging of the hues of the churches in Cracow and Lvov for which Wyspiański prepared these definite works. Additionally, ornaments derived from their interiors were applied.

Quotations

The 'Nation's Theatre' Room also contained a contemplative space emphasized with the only window in the Exhibition. A vertical narrow crack crowned the compositional axis between 'the cathedrals', not far from the *Acropolis* (1907) model and an elongated bench which also served as an elevated viewing platform. At this point, the visitor was surrounded by projections of fragments of Wyspiański's dramas: *Liberation* (1902) and *The Wedding* (1901). The non-material part of the display pointed to the ephemeral character of word, but on the other hand

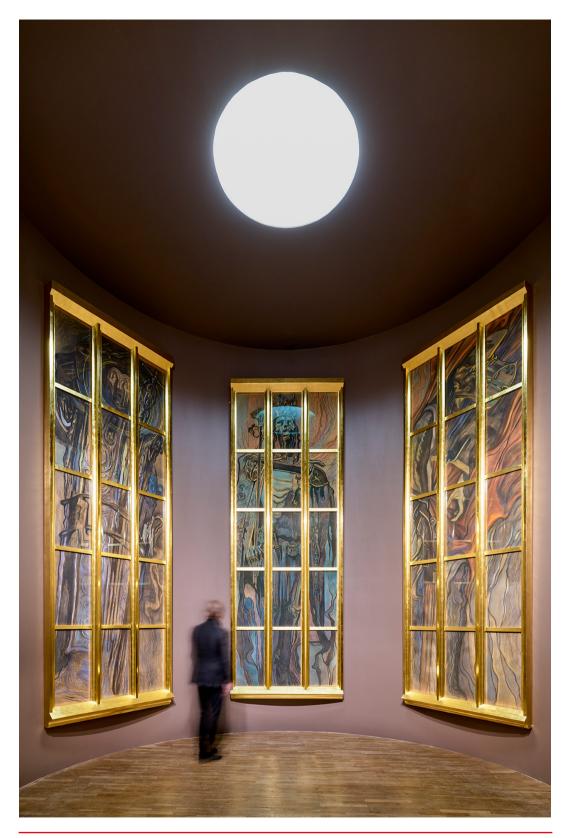


4. 'The Cathedral' with the designs for the panels of the western window of St Mary's Church in Cracow in the 'History and Mementoes' Room



5. 'The Cathedral' with the design of the *Polonia* stained-glass window in the 'Theatre of the Nation' Room

also to the timeless message of the plays. This very room also contained other quotations from Wyspiański's literary output, pasted onto the walls, often resorting to the Antiqua typeface class the artist so eagerly applied. The majority of them used optical correction: the font size increased in proportion to the height of the room, however from the beholder's level the size of respective verses seemed the same. The graphic layout also implemented one of Wyspiański's unaccomplished concepts. By the end of his life, he was thinking of introducing a new typeface: a synthesis of the characteristic handwriting of his contemporary artists. The motif appeared partially in the texts on the Exhibition walls.



 $6.\ 'The\ Cathedral'\ with\ the\ designs\ for\ the\ stained-glass\ windows\ of\ the\ Wawel\ Cathedral\ in\ the\ 'Theatre\ of\ the\ Nation'\ Room$

Cracow and Paris

The next room: 'Not Paris, but Cracow' juxtaposed the artist's works created at the turn of he 20th century during his stay in Paris and in his native city. The characteristic element of this space was a free-standing wall suspended above the floor level. It served to display two paintings only: *Dawn over the Castle* (1894) on its one side and *the Winter Motif* (1905) on the other.

The elongated room called 'Ars-Apollo' showed, in turn, Wyspiański's extensive accomplishments in applied arts and cabinetmaking. The majority of the artifacts were presented on thematically grouped plinths in the central part of the interior. The walls served to display textiles: curtains, kelims, tapestries from the Cracow Medical Society House. Their uniformized bases were painted claret (the actual colour from the House's interior), while the whole of the geometric composition could be admired from a mezzanine across.

The last exhibit shown in the first Exhibition was Wyspiański's genuine easel displayed in a separate alcove just before the exit. The alcove's walls were painted blue, this referring to the artist's 'blue studio' in Krowoderska Street.

The arrangement design of the first Exhibition took nearly a year (from November 2016); as its result, almost the whole of the top floor in MNK's Main Building was altered. New display cabinets, pedestals, and frames for the exhibits, as well as even non-conventional stands for exhibit labels were designed. The stylistics of those elements were inspired by the sculptural works of Donald Judd, a representative of minimal art. The whole was completed with carefully selected lighting: direct and indirect. The dimmed light in the majority of the rooms resulted from strict conservation requirements, but it also favoured the creation of the atmosphere similar to certain spatial installations or interiors designed by the American James Turrell.

The Library

The first discussions related to the new Exhibition's part, this time built around Wyspiański's literary legacy, started in early 2018. Three different concepts were conceived, out of which the most spectacular one of a two-storeyd library was chosen. The new display opened on 15 January 2019 was called 'Wyspiański. Unknown'. The Library, including almost 600 books of Stanisław Wyspiański's collection, was located in the last room, in the earlier setting called 'Ars-Apollo'. Its shape descended from the earlier-described idea of so-called cathedrals. As part of the 'Wyspiański. Unknown' Exhibition, the Library, too, was hidden inside a white elongated tube, yet both in view of the form and colour-range it can be regarded as the most spectacular interpretation of the 'cathedrals' from the previous display. What helped create it was a rich compendium of references to and echoes of chosen examples derived from the history of architecture and art, while its complicated implementation proved possible thanks to the application of designing and execution technologies. Among the formal and material inspirations for this space mention has to be made of Renaissance, Baroque, or Neoclassical masterpieces, but also some more contemporary implementations, e.g. Stockholm Public Library raised in 1924-27 after the design of Gunnar Asplund.

The fluid walls of Wyspiański's new Library were meant as the spatial continuation of the pastel Apollo. (System Copernicus) suspended along the main vista, the 1904 design of the stained glass window for the Cracow Medical Society House. Ellipsoidal orbits marked out by Wyspiański around the Sun-God seemed to seamlessly continue onto the forms of the undulating bookshelves. The combination of two colours in the two interconnected interiors: blue and yellow, were also meant to echo the design of the famous stained glass window crowning the whole composition, emphasizing the universal symbolism connected with the colours of the sky and the sun. What mattered was a relative monochromacity of the interiors, whose genesis can be found in the historical examples of the Mafra Palace Library or of the Trinity College in Dublin. 12 More importantly, blue used in the oval part of the display with Wyspiański's book collection has for centuries been applied in libraries for its alleged quality to repel insects. In the direct vicinity of books it was used e.g. in the Vatican Library, 13 and also in smaller, but equally interesting institutions, such as at Bad Schussenried¹⁴ or in Prague.¹⁵

The oval forms in 'Wyspiański's Library', despite strongly complicated curvatures were characterized by symmetry and axiality, the two also important in the design of the previous Exhibitions. The blue room was based on an elliptical layout, the yellow was to feature a more complex shape based on sections of several circles of varied radiuses. The fluid forms of both interiors could be associated with natural landscapes, primordial human shelters, or some selected works of historical and contemporary architecture. The designers' inspirations included the libraries in St. Gallen¹⁶ and Vienna. ¹⁷ The fluid shaping of Wyspiański's Library can also inspire associations with the latest trends in contemporary architecture: from biomorphism and mimetism, up to folding. ¹⁸

The interiors of 'Wyspiański's Library' can also be seen as an interpretations of 'ideal libraries' described b Jorge Luis Borges (as a slightly more updated and 'fluidized' interpretations of the vision from the Library of Babel story ¹⁹) or that of Umberto Eco (expanded later in the novel The Name of the Rose). The space described by the Argentinian writer in 1941 is based on hexagonal forms, while the repeated rooms and shelved walls represent an allegory of the universe. In the two parts of 'Wyspiański's Library' sharp angles had been replaced by soft fluid lines, thus Borges's vision was reinterpreted and presented as if at the 'next evolution stage'.

In the arrangement of this part of the Exhibition what mattered were the aspects of he visibility of the artworks in different perspectives. The 'organic' interior of Wyspiański's Library was hidden inside a cuboidal block intersected from the outside by different display cabinets and single windows allowing the peeping inside from different levels. Those precisely planned perforations served to frame selected paintings and books. Thus, on the ground floor two works were highlighted: *Portrait of Maria Pareńska* (*later Raczyńska*) from 1902 and *the Engrossed in Reading* (1893). In the central part of the mezzanine a cosy darkened and painted claret interior was created; it served to display one artifact only: the 1905 diary. This last Wyspiański's diary placed inside a double glass display cabinet may have given the impression of 'levitating' above the floor level.

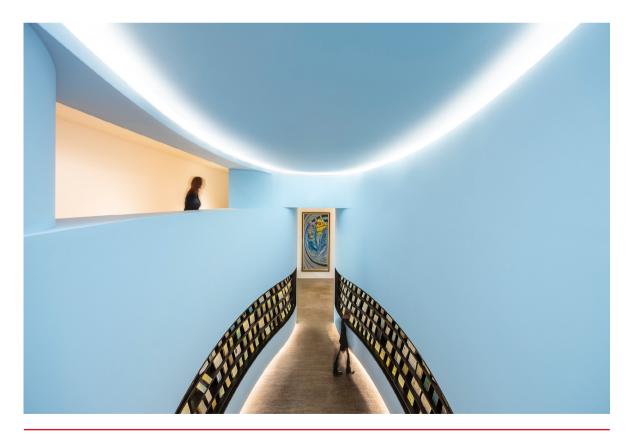
The spaces surrounding the Library were treated in a more synthetic way, continuing the minimalistic convention from the previous part of the Exhibition, adjusted to the neutral white cube display scheme. The main protagonists on the white wall were the paintings and pastels borrowed from other museums and private collections. During the 'Wyspiański. Unknown' Exhibition some of them were for the first time ever displayed in public, such as the pastel *Motherhood* (1904) sold at an auction on 14 December 2017 at the then record-breaking price of PLN 4.36 million.

The described vision of 'Wyspiański's Library' can be seen as a combination of historical library canons (architectural, but also theoretical) with today's aesthetics. This unique implementation was an attempt at crowning the artist's monographic display in a memorable, albeit adequate way. Moreover, it was an essay to have specific words clad in an appropriate space, and *vice versa*.

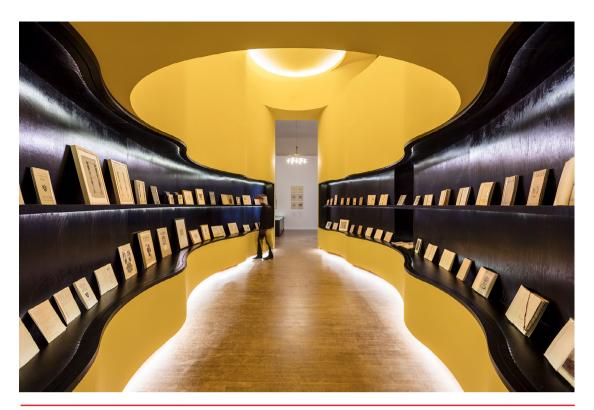
The design of the complementary Exhibitions: 'Wyspiański' and 'Wyspiański. Unknown' were an attempt at creating the space scenario in which secondary roles: arrangement, lighting or étalage, fully helped to expose the main protagonist, namely the multidisciplinary oeuvre of a genius artist. The architecture that was created for the purpose, although overshadowed by Stanisław Wyspiański's accomplishments, was, however, visible, stimulating the dialogues between the artworks together with their surroundings and

the beholders. The final effect reminded of slightly utopian, and regrettably only temporary 'Wyspiański's City' with avenues, city squares, tunnels, and different-scale edifices whose windows: looking onto the past, but also in a certain sense onto the present and the future, were found in paintings, etchings, and pastels; their interiors were furnished with books, pieces of furniture, textiles, and costumes, while the street names had been replaced by quotes from Wyspiański's timeless poems. The resident of that city was an outstanding artist whose oeuvre is still awaiting an appropriate, and this time 'permanent domicile' in Cracow.

The presented paper is a subjective attempt at showing, from the designer's perspective, the story and the context of the creation of the monographic exhibition dedicated to the oeuvre of Stanisław Wyspiański at the National Museum in Cracow. Such a complex author's explanation is, after all, a rare part of the display arrangement or publications related to it. Revealing the architect's inspirations, motivations, and assumptions seems in this case justified, and may shed new light on the project widely known within 'art-related' circles, to-date discussed mainly in the contexts of: museum curating, display, conservation, or art history. The above-provided information permits an insight into the background to the Exhibition's design and implementation, unknown to the wider public, but meant as contextual and conceptual explanation of the selection of definite display means. The paper also aims at documenting, supplementing,



7. A blue room as part of the 'Wyspiański. Unknown' Exhibition



8. A yellow room of 'Wyspiański's Library'



9. A separate interior with Wyspiański's diary

(Photos: 1-6, 9 – J. Certowicz; 7, 8 – B. Cygan)

and perpetuating the no-longer-extant design whose ambition was to subtly and adequately integrate art with architecture. The signalled motifs may provide inspiration

or reference points for designers of future exhibitions dedicated to the art of Stanisław Wyspiański, for example in the museum of his life and works planned in Cracow.

Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to show the designer's perspective on the story and a broader context of the creation of a monograph exhibition dedicated to the oeuvre of Stanisław Wyspiański at the National Museum in Cracow. Composed of two parts: 'Wyspiański' and 'Wyspiański. Unknown', the Exhibition held between 28 November 2017 and 5 May 2019 was the largest to-date presentation of the works of the versatile artist, while from the point of view of its arrangement, it served as an attempt at finding adequate contemporary expression means to

show the multiple and varied character of his oeuvre. A wide range of inspirations are presented: beginning with carefully selected motifs derived from Wyspiański's art, up to indirect echoing of the activity of some selected artists, mainly affiliated with minimal art. That temporary implementation is thus not analyzed merely in the local context, but also a broader, global one, taking into account carefully selected pieces of world art and architecture, while the paper itself can be regarded as a completion and perpetuation of the no longer existing Exhibition.

Keywords: Stanisław Wyspiański, National Museum in Cracow, display, architecture, art.

Endnotes

- 1 Franciszek, the artist's father, once had a sculpting studio in the same street, while the Wyspiański family lived at the same location for over 11 years
- ² Rozbudowa Nowego Gmachu Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie [Extension of the New Building of the National Museum in Cracow], P. Kraus (ed.), Fundacja Twórców Architektury, RAM, Kraków 2004.
- ³ The project was implemented on the initiative of Andrzej Wajda, while the architectural design was authored by the Ingarden & Ewý Studio.
- ⁴ In the paper fragments of the author's description of the first Exhibition: 'Wyspiański' (28 Nov 2017–5 May 2019) were used; it was published as B. Haduch, Dialog sztuki i przestrzeni [Dialogue of Art and Space], in: Wyspiański. Katalog wystawy dzieł ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie [Wyspiański. Catalogue of the Works from the Collections of the National Museum in Cracow], MNK, Kraków 2017, pp. 439-41.
- ⁵ The 'Wyspiański. Unknown' Exhibition was on from 15 January 2019 to 5 May 2019.
- ⁶ In this case the arrangement was not substantially altered; the only thing added was the graphite colouring of the walls and ceiling in one of he last rooms.
- Magdalena Laskowska was responsible for all the parts of the Exhibition: 'Wyspiański', 'Wyspiański. Unknown', and 'Wyspiański. Afterword'. Danuta Godyń was involved with the first part: 'Wyspiański', while Łucja Skoczeń-Rąpała with the last one: 'Wyspiański. Afterword'.
- ⁸ The winning concept, similarly, as the majority of the awarded works presented only the display space outline in the neutral white cube arrangement. The detailed solutions with respect to the display arrangement were to be the subject of another competition.
- ⁹ In the material shared in the social media on 7 March 2020, MNK gave the total number of the public visiting Stanisław Wyspiański exhibitions in the Main Building as amounting to 372.564.
- ¹⁰ The construction of MNK's Main Building was launched in 1934, while the current facility state was defined following numerous planning modifications only in 1989. During WW II, the building (completed in merely around 60 per cent) was altered to serve as a mess for German soldiers. The genuine design authored by: Czesław Boratyński, Edward Kreisler, and Bolesław Schmidt, was created based on the competition design which had won the national competition in 1933 (that design's authors being: Bolesław Szmidt, Juliusz Dumnicki, and Janusz Juraszyński).
- ¹¹ The Mafra Palace Library founded in 1717, was completed in 1771 based on the design of Manuel Caetano de Sousa.
- ¹² The Trinity College Library in Dublin was founded in 1592; the construction of the so-called Old Library went on in 1712–30. The Long Room was completed in 1732 after the design of Thomas Burgh.
- 13 The Vatican Library founded in ca 1450, was raised in 1587–88 after Domenico Fontana's design.
- ¹⁴ The library of the Schussenried Monastery was founded in 1183; its main hall with the reading room was built in 1754–62 after the design of Dominikus Zimmermann.
- ¹⁵ The Strahov Monastery Library was founded in 1143; its Theological Hall was raised in 1671–9 after the design of Giovanni Domenic Orsi; while its Philosophical Hall (featuring blue bookshelves) was built in 1783–97 after the design of Jan Ignác Pallardi.
- ¹⁶ The Library of the Sankt Gallen Abbey was founded in 612; as of 747 within the Benedictine Monastery; as part of the royal abbey until 1805. The current library was created in 1758–67 after the designs of Peter Thumb.
- ¹⁷ Austrian National Library located at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna was founded in 1575.
- 18 The folding trend in architecture was formed in the mid-1990s; it is represented by e.g. Peter Eisenman, Greg Lynn, or Frank Gehry.
- ¹⁹ J.L. Borges [Polish edition], *Biblioteka Babel* [The Library of Babel], (1941), in: *Fikcje* [Fiction], Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 2003.

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Bartosz Haduch, PhD, Eng. of Architecture

Architect, university professor, columnist; following his studies and career experience in the Netherlands, Spain, and Austria, he started working as a designer in Cracow; (since 2007) he has been running the NArchitekTURA Group, combining the activities of urban planning, architecture, landscaping, design, and graphic art; winner of international and national architectural competitions, author of numerous publications popularizing science and monographs; e-mail: info@narchitektura.pl

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