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**JAN BUK AND THE WESTERN AND
NORTHERN POLISH LANDS. CONTRIBUTION
TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SORBIAN-POLISH CONTACTS**

Keywords: Jan Buk, Painting, Sorbs, Poland, Germany

Słowa kluczowe: Jan Buk, Malarstwo, Serbołużycanie, Polska, Niemcy

Introduction

The representatives of the Polish sorabistic take up research and scientific issues from political, sociological, linguistic and historical perspectives. These are activities that are located in broader contexts of the research being carried out. Over the last several decades, there has been a visible continuity of undertaking the sorabistic issues by researchers from Poznań, Cracow, Wrocław, Szczecin, Zielona Góra or Warsaw. Thanks to this, the knowledge about the contemporary condition of the Sorbian nation is updated and expanded, and the Polish-German borderland is a meeting place for representatives of both nations and a beneficiary of these relations. Open lectures, exhibitions, meetings with writers enable direct contact with the Sorbian culture. The cultural policy implemented in this field allows for a better understanding and understanding of the historical fate of the Sorbian nation over the centuries.

The fate of Jan Buk is a natural part of the little-known and popularised Sorbian-Polish relations in the second half of the 20th century. As an artist and Sorbian, he was noticed and appreciated by Polish cultural institutions on the

Polish-German border. The correlation between the pro-Polish attitudes and actions of the painter was a derivative of his post-war years in Poland. The author of the article concentrates on two research aspects: the position of the Polish authorities towards the Sorbs after 1945 and the exemplification of the far-reaching effects of these actions on the representatives of the Sorbian nation, and Jan Buk in particular. The article presents the process of building Sorbian-Polish relations and against this background a description of an individual's fate in the process of socio-political transformation is placed. So far, no monograph presenting the contemporary achievements of Sorbian artists has been published in Poland.

Sorbs in the modern history of Europe

In the Federal Republic of Germany (Germany), the Sorben is located in the two federal states of Brandenburg (Lower Lusatia) and Saxony (Upper Lusatia). They are an indigenous national minority with Slavic roots and an estimated 60,000 people. Over the centuries, the Upper Lusatia area has been part of various state organisms: Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany. The territorial regulations of the Congress of Vienna in 1815 led to a breakdown in the cohesion of the Sorbian settlement. From then on, the Saxon and Prussian governments pursued a dual policy of tolerance and assimilation towards the Sorbian people, which led in 1912 to the creation of the national organisation Domowina (Home-land) to coordinate the work of the Sorbian associations in Upper and Lower Lusatia. The First World War revitalised the Sorbian national movement, emphasising the demand for political equality of minorities. After 1937, the situation of the Sorbs changed drastically, all institutions and minority organizations were banned. The hostility of the Nazi system towards German citizens of Sorbian nationality was reflected in the persecution and repression they experienced as representatives of the Slavic nation.

After the Soviet troops entered Lusatia, the Sorbs took a number of administrative and political measures to obtain political sovereignty with the support of the Soviet bloc countries, or to obtain territorial and political autonomy to meet their national needs. Initially, the Soviet side was quite sympathetic to these demands, but with the tightening of relations around the problem of the political shape of post-war Germany they were rejected. Józef Stalin decided that with the formation of the communist government and the reforms of the nationalisation of land and factories, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) would become

the patron of minorities. Slavic states involved in Sorbian affairs, such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, were forced to stop working for the Sorbian minority. It was not possible for the Sorbian people to submit the issue of independent political existence to the United Nations (UN), with the demand to obtain neutral status. It was blocked by the Soviet Union.

In the 20th century, this was the second attempt to exclude the Lusatian and Sorbian areas from the German state administration. The first one took place after the end of World War I. At the Paris Conference, the Czechoslovakian delegation took up the issue and the Sorbs presented their own arguments based on the right to self-determination of nations. The Entente States did not approve of such territorial and political solutions. The European movement that was initiated at that time in support of the Sorbian demands gave rise to the consolidation of the sorabistic and scientific circles. Thanks to it, also after 1945, Europe took an interest in the post-war fate of the Sorbs and demanded the creation of appropriate conditions for the preservation of national identity. Until the establishment of the GDR, Sorbs had the opportunity to study in the neighboring countries within the framework of the activities postulated by local Slavic committee agendas. Slavic solidarity had real dimensions. After 1949, the political narrative changed, and it was recognised that the Sorbian actions were destructive to the unity of the bloc of states of popular democracy, and were contrary to the political interest of the GDR. From the perspective of evaluating the post-war fate of the Sorbs, they treat the years 1945–1989 as a time of support and adjustment. In March 1948, the Saxony Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Serbian Population was adopted. It laid the foundations for the institutionalization of the cultural and scientific life of minorities as fully-fledged citizens of the state. In return, the Sorbs became part of the political system, constructed by the Socialist Party for German Unity (SED). The party's political and ideological monopoly led to the rejection of national values by the post-war Domowina in favour of building socialist Lusatia. The development of the country's energy sector at the expense of the liquidation of Sorbian villages contributed to irreversible cultural and ecological losses in the Lusatian region.

Polish-Sorbian relations in the context of border change

The western lands became part of the territory of the Polish state after World War II.¹ The shifting of the state borders to the west gave an impulse to renew the Polish-Sorbian-Serbian contacts after the establishment of new Polish state borders. The period of 1945–1950 was exceptional in this matter. The question of the independent political existence of Lusatia and the Sorbs was not only articulated but also addressed by the political authorities and Polish public opinion of the time. So far, Lusatia and the Sorbs have mainly enjoyed the interest of Polish literary and scientific circles. These relations had a special, individualised dimension built up on the level of scientific contacts. A characteristic formula of Polish activities was an emotional narrative of the historical fate of the Sorbs. In the interwar period, there was a consolidation of cooperation between Poles and Sorbs as a minority against the assimilation activities of the German state.² The experiences of 1937–1945 confirmed and consolidated them.³

The change in geopolitical conditions after 1945 made Lusatia part of the narrative of the policy of retaliation against Germany and a buffer protecting the Polish border in the west. At that time, territorial illusions were created, and Lusatia's incorporation into Poland was promoted until 1949. These were promoted until 1949, when the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was founded. After 1949, the Polish political elite ceased to be interested in Lusatia on a political level and the subject matter was silenced. It was much more difficult for the authorities to bring about the elimination of authentic and lasting social ties developed within the grassroots social movement, the pro-Lusatian movement. Scientific centres in Poznań, Cracow, Wrocław, and Warsaw became agencies supporting these activities.

¹ During the Second World War, the activities of the Polish resistance movement were engaged by Sorbs – Yuri Ješki, Wojciech Kóčka. The magazine “Sprawy Łużyckie”, edited by Bohdan Gębarski, was distributed in the Polish underground. The Government Delegation for Poland assumed that Lusatia would be included in the discussion on the shape of the Polish state borders.

² The Association of National Minorities in Germany and its press body “Kulturwehr” supported the rights of national minorities, including Poles, living in Germany. Sorbian Jan Skala was then the editor of the magazine.

³ After the banning of national organizations, they fled to Poland to study and study until the outbreak of war. In turn, during the war, many Polish prisoners of war and forced laborers experienced support from the Sorbs, despite the threatening penalties for carrying it.

Pro-Lusatian movement in Poland after 1945

The intensification of pro-Slavic propaganda was connected with two issues: the German problem and the legitimacy of new political structures on the Polish ground.⁴ The view promoted by the political propaganda that the defeated Germany would be forced to accept any change of border generated suggestions for further territorial⁵ claims. In this context, the idea of excluding Lusatia from the territory of Germany, a zone occupied by Soviet troops, seemed justified and realistic. It was treated as a symbol of historical justice, a bill for the historical wrongs not only of the Second World War, but of the entire Elbe region in the past. The case of free Lusatia and “saving the Sorbs” became an example and an illustration of the revival of Slavic solidarity.⁶ Then the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) promoted the Slavic alliance in the form of an alliance of Slavic states. The main aim of the agreements was to create an effective anti-German and anti-war dam where the dominant argument was a widespread conviction of the continuity of centuries-old German aggression. In 1945, after the end of the war, this stance was perpetuated through the PPR by promoting anti-German attitudes: “The whole society is overwhelmed by hatred for the Germans, everywhere the Poles’ thought is uniform: the German is our enemy, we must defend ourselves together and fight the enemy together.”⁷ The Slavic Sorbs confirmed with their presence the credibility of the claims of the Poles to the newly acquired lands in the west and the north in accordance with the slogan: “We were, we are, we will”.⁸

The second half of the 1940s saw a significant intensification of Polish-Serbian relations. The political and social changes in Lusatia activated the Sorbs to fight for national rights, which found support and understanding on the Polish side. The search for their political place in the post-war world, the revitalization of the slogans of Slavic unity, the closeness of languages, the hope for a better future,

⁴ Mieczysław Tomala, *Patrząc na Niemcy. Od wrogości do porozumienia 1945–1991* (Warszawa: Polska Fundacja Spraw Międzynarodowych, 1997), 22–23.

⁵ Tadeusz Marczak, *Granica zachodnia w polskiej polityce zagranicznej w latach 1944–1959* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995), 170–197.

⁶ About those changes, see Mirosław Cygański, Rafał Leszczyński, *Zarys dziejów narodowych Łużyczanowych, vol. II lata 1919–1997* (Opole: Instytut Śląski, 1997), 73–106; Tadeusz Marczak, *Granica Zachodnia w polskiej polityki zagranicznej w latach 1944–1950* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1995), 170–197.

⁷ Quoted from Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Od Poczdamu do Szklarskiej Poręby. Polska w stosunkach międzynarodowych 1945–1947* (Londyn: Aneks, 1990), 262.

⁸ Tomala, *Patrząc*, 42.

and the recovery of war times brought Poles and Sorbs together. These actions were overlapped by an action related to securing the Polish state of border possession in confrontation with Czechoslovakia, which actively joined the process of promoting the interests of the Sorbian nation on the international arena⁹.

The Polish side's involvement in Sorbian affairs was confirmed by the creation of a number of organizational entities and information facilities in the form of publications about Sorbs. Spiritus movens creating the image of Sorbs in Poland became at that time: Academic Association of the Friends of Lusatia "Prołuż" in Poznań (among others, A.S. Matyniak),¹⁰ the Lusatian Paper of the Polish Western Association (T. Powidzki, A. Nawka), Society of the Friends of Lusatia (Prof. W. Taszycki, Prof. H. Batowski, Prof. T. Grabowski, Prof. T. Lehr Splawiński),¹¹ Association of Sorbs Students "Lusatia" in Wrocław.¹² "Lusatia" was recognized in May 1948 by the authorities of the University of Wrocław and Wrocław University of Technology. In June 1948, the Sorbs received a house on Stanisławski Street as their own dormitory, they also received state and private scholarships funded by "Prołuż". Of the eighteen founding members of the association, eight more Sorbs were still studying in Poland in 1950, and only two in 1953.

Polish pro-Lusatian organizations and associations were particularly active in the first years after the war. The instrumental treatment of Sorbian affairs was reflected in the foreign policy of the Polish state, their aim being to include the Sorbian area in Poland. The GDR uprising reversed Poland's aspirations in this

⁹ See Timo Meškank, *Kultur besteht- Reich vergeht. Tschechen und Sorben (Wenden) 1914–1945* (Berlin: Mensch&Buch Verlag, 2000).

¹⁰ "Prołuż" had field branches in Warsaw, Krotoszyn, Jarocin, Szczecin and Wrocław, among others.

¹¹ See, among other things: Stanisław Marciniak, „Z dziejów łużyckiego ruchu narodowego w latach 1945–1947”, *Zeszyty Łużyckie* 6 (1993); Małgorzata Mieczkowska, „Łużyce a polska opinia publiczna w latach 1945–1949”, *Létopis* 1 (1993); Małgorzata Mieczkowska, Janusz Mieczkowski, „Problematyka łużycka w pracach Polskiego Związku Zachodniego i Akademickiego Związku Przyjaciół Łużyc „Prołuż” (1945–1950)”, *Zeszyty Łużyckie* 4 (1992); Krzysztof Mazurski, „Łużyce w polskiej opinii lat czterdziestych”, in: *Łużyce w nowożytnych i najnowszych dziejach Europy Środkowej*, ed. Tomasz Jaworski, Mieczysław Ostrowski (Zielona Góra: Verbum, 1995); Piotr Pałys, „Kwestia serbołużycka w prasie Polskiego Związku Zachodniego w latach 1945–1947”, *Létopis* 1 (1996); Piotr Pałys, „Pierwszy ogólnopolski zjazd łużycoznawczy w Poznaniu 5–6 października 1946 r.”, *Zeszyty Łużyckie* 17 (1996); Jakub Brodacki, „Prołuż” – *Akademicki Związek Przyjaciół Łużyc: historia wewnętrzna organizacji (1945–1949)* (Warszawa: Polska Grupa Marketingowa, 2006).

¹² Krzysztof Radosław Mazurski, „Łużycanie po II wojnie światowej we Wrocławiu i Polsce”, in: *Łużyce. Bogactwo kultur pogranicza. Materiały z Ogólnopolskiego Sejmiku Krajoznawczego*, ed. Jerzy Tomasz Nowiński (Żary: PTTK. Oddział Powiatu Żarskiego, 2000), 25–29.

regard, Lusatia became part of eastern socialist Germany. This political solution automatically disavowed the existence of pro-Lusatian organisations and influenced the negative position of the Polish authorities towards them. Gradually, but consistently, their liquidation was ordered.¹³ The political separation was made from the ideas of independent, free Lusatia, in return for which cooperation on a scientific and cultural level within the states of popular democracy was proposed.

An interpretation was formulated that the Sorbian state is the exclusive patron of the East German Sorbs. Whilst at the same time, the state administration of the GDR did not agree to the continued presence of the Sorbs in Poland. 'Domowina' who sent them to Poland to study did not extend their departure cards where they were ordered to study in the country, if they were studying humanities or philology. As the last Sorbes, Jan Korjeńk and Yuri Cuška graduated in 1953.

Education of Sorbs in Poland

The western lands have become centres and facilities for building Sorbian-Polish relations. Wrocław, Opole, Zielona Góra, Szczecin have actively joined the mainstream of activities aimed at bringing the two nations together. A special role was played by the proximity of the Lusatian territory to Wrocław. The involvement of state structures in creating a good atmosphere for the Sorbs was evident. In June 1946, the Government Plenipotentiary for the Administrative District of Lower Silesia issued a circular to treat the Sorbs living in the area as indigenous peoples and to protect them. The next stage was to establish a boarding school in Zgorzelec. This educational institution, thanks to the initiative of the Slavic Committee, with the support of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Regained Territories (MZO), was supported by financial subsidies, which allowed for the training of 50 people. Unexpectedly, the problem of crossing the border appeared, the Soviet authorities applied a policy of obstruction, and formal requirements were increased. The opening of the gymnasium in Budziszyn in 1947 closed this topic. In view of the complex political and economic situation of the Sorbs after the liberation, Domowina activists decided that academic education

¹³ In December 1948, the Ministry of Education forbade the establishment of "Prołuż" circles on the premises of secondary schools, and in 1949 it did not agree to the registration of the "Prołuże" Society of Friends of Lusatia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied the legitimacy of continuing the pro-Lusatian action in Poland, which was considered undesirable, secessionist in relation to the democratic changes implemented in the Soviet occupation zone of Germany.

abroad was a desirable solution. Apart from Wrocław, Poznań and Kraków were actively involved in this task. In 1947, the Ministry of Education issued a regulation on this issue and preferential treatment of Wrocław was conditioned by two reasons, the proximity of the Lusatian territory and the versatility of secondary and higher education opportunities. These advantages made it possible to consolidate the Sorbian learning environment in Wrocław.

Jan Buk's contribution to the development of Sorbian-Polish contacts in the Western and Northern Territories

The Wrocław stage of shaping the Sorbian-Polish references and relations has contributed to the creation of a background for the Polonophilic attitudes of the Sorbs. In a number of Sorbian institutions and scientific institutions they created a positive image of Poles and Poland, regardless of official GDR propaganda.¹⁴ This group includes Jan Buk as one of the most prominent contemporary Sorbian visual artists. His work has been appreciated in Poland thanks to exhibitions organized in Szczecin, Opole, Brzeg, Jelenia Góra. Jan Buk began his artistic development in post-war Wrocław, in the Regained Territories. He was a frequent guest in post-war Poland and received Poles in his home and he eagerly remembered his time in Poland, during interviews for the Sorbian cultural monthly *Rozhlad*. As a well-known artist in the seventies of the twentieth century, he participated in organized open-air workshops, exhibiting his works in Western Pomerania in the National Museum in Szczecin.¹⁵ Thanks to the cooperation of the Museums from Szczecin¹⁶ and Budziszyn, Jan Buk's paintings were presented in Szczecin in 2003.¹⁷ This event was recorded by Jan Buk in an interview: "I am glad that my

¹⁴ This trend was reflected in the Sorbian side's statements and actions also after 1990, when Polish-Sorbian contacts intensified. For example, Bożena Nawka-Kunysz (b. 1946), who received her artistic education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. After graduation she lived in Katowice and created works for Sorbian institutions. Having a family home in Budziszyn, she often stayed in Lusatia. Her father Anton Nawka, who before and after the war studied in Poland, translated Polish literature into the Upper Sorbian language many times. He also was a declared Polonophile.

¹⁵ From this period there is a painting by Jan Buk in the collection of the National Museum in Szczecin entitled "The Shipyard", oil 65x54 cm, the author's donation to the museum.

¹⁶ The patron of these contacts was the long-standing director of the museum, Professor Władysław Filipowiak.

¹⁷ The last exhibition of Jan Buk's works in Szczecin took place in 2003 and was part of the Polish-Sorbian Days scientific contacts carried out at the University of Szczecin within the framework of the conference "Politics and minorities in the borderlands at the turn of the 20th and 21st century". The exhibition was curated by Marta Poszumska.

works can be seen in Szczecin... This is my second visit to this city. I was here for the first time outdoors in 1970.”¹⁸ Earlier, in 1996, during the Polish-Sorbian Days in Szczecin, his posters on ecological issues were presented. Klaus Hammer¹⁹ was a reviewer of the extensive artistic output presented in 2003 at the exhibition. The artist’s biography confirms how important the years of his stay in post-war Poland were for him and how Polish-Sorbian contacts were developing at that time.

“Every painting is a new beginning” was referred to by the director of the Sorbian Museum in Budziszyn Christina Boguszowa from Budziszyn in her article in *Rozhľad* about the most outstanding contemporary Sorbian painter.²⁰ Jan Buk was born on 2 August 1922 in Njebelčice,²¹ a small village in Upper Lusatia. He returned to his small family home in 1996 to continue his creative work there. For nearly forty years he lived with his family Budziszyn, the centre of Sorbian national and cultural life. As a child, he showed artistic interests and while observing the stages of renovation of the interior of the church where he lived decided to become a painter. Between 1937 and 1940, he was trained as a decorative²² painter, during World War II, like many representatives of his generation, he was called up for military service and sent to Friesland, where he served as a sailor in Flensburg.²³ After the end of the war, he returned home, remaining faithful to his passion for painting. An episode from 1947 turned out to be important from the perspective of the formation of his life and professional path. It was then that Jan Buk painted a painting for Jurij Handrik the parish priest from his village on the occasion of his 50th anniversary. The president of Domowina²⁴ Pavol Nedo and Dr. Jan Cyž, the district governor, who were present at the celebration of the jubilee, decided that since the Sorbs need educated artists, they should undertake

¹⁸ mhb, *Exhibition of paintings by Jan Buk*, accessed 3.02.2020, <http://www1.gazeta.pl/szczecin/1.34938.1684770.html>.

¹⁹ The text of the article has been accompanied by a fragment of the laudation of the artist’s output presented during the exhibition opening.

²⁰ A quote from Christina Boguszowa, „Kóždy wobraz je nowy započatk”, *Rozhľad. Serbski kulturny časopis* 6 (2019): 31–34.

²¹ Jan Hansky (b. 1925), the author of posters and paintings of post-war political commitment, also comes from the same village.

²² Alfred Krawc-Džěwinski, „Jan Buk”, in: *Kolo serbskich twarjacych wumělcow* (Budyšin: Nowa doba, b.d.).

²³ Besides, the first contacts with the Sorbs in Flensburg were made by the later Szczecin-based sorabophile Aleksander Walczak.

²⁴ An organization bringing together and representing the Sorbs, founded in 1912.

artistic studies. Initially, Jan Buk worked as a volunteer in the graphic design department of Domowina's Secretariat. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Jan Cyž, he was sent to Poland to develop his skills there. In Poland, in Wrocław, he first studied at the High School of Fine Arts under Prof. S. Kopystyński,²⁵ and after graduation he took up studies at the academy. Already then, he belonged to the group of promising students. His mentors at that time were Prof. E. Krcha and Prof. H. Krzetuska-Geppertowa.²⁶ The time of his studies in Poland had a great influence on his artistic path and life decisions.²⁷ Polish and European painters of the modern era became the inspiration for their own artistic experiments, hence Jan Cybis was particularly artistically close to him, which is visible in his works. While living in a boarding school in Wrocław, he not only found Polish friends and mastered the Polish language very well, but also realized how important mother tongue was for him. Years later, he assessed Wrocław's quality of education as very high, having already been on a scale comparable to the education in Dresden. He appreciated the fact that the Dresden period was a time of learning a reliable craft, however, he lost his friendly contacts with the student environment in Dresden during his studies in Poland. His stay in Wrocław was interrupted in 1950 because the GDR authorities did not grant him permission to continue his studies outside the East German state. An administrative order to return to the GDR was sent to all Sorbian students studying in their Slavic brother countries. Nevertheless, Jan Buk hoped that he would still be able to study in Kraków.²⁸ However, not having obtained permission to continue his studies in Poland, he took up studies in Dresden out of necessity. Jan Buk completed his studies in 1953 with a diploma under the supervision of Professors R. Bergander and F. Dähn.

Being an independent artist, Jan Buk as an artist rejected themes located in political and social contexts, focusing on the colours of his works and not on their main themes because he did not want to participate in promoting the ideological content of the socialist system. His years in Poland gave him a sense of openness

²⁵ He was the founder of the State High School of Visual Arts in Wrocław and co-founder of the State Higher School of Visual Arts.

²⁶ Maria Mirtschin, *Jan Buck. Malerei* (Pulsnitz: Herausgeber Ernst-Rietschel-Kulturring e.V., 2002), 73.

²⁷ „Za mnie je wuměłstwo nutřkowne duchowne rozestajenje z realitu. Interview z Janom Bukom”, Jěwa-Marja Čornakec, *Rozhlad. Serbski kulturny časopis* 6 (2002): 218.

²⁸ Ibidem.

to the world and the need to get to know it,²⁹ the dominant feature was the expression and realization of artistic freedom. The growing propaganda of the GDR promoting socialist values in the political and social space and the provincial treatment and understanding of the role of painting by political decision makers pushed him towards abstraction and nature. In one of the interviews, the painter addressed this issue in the following way: “Creativity is to be free. As a creator, you have to change yourself to be able to change your paintings. This is a goal that you will never achieve. Every painting is a new beginning.”³⁰ In the circle of GDR artists Jan Buk was noticed in 1967, at the sixth GDR artists’ exhibition in Dresden and was elected to the board of directors of the artists’ association in Dresden. At that time, he was also chairman of the association of Bucharest artists. In 1974 he was also included in the board of directors of the Sorbian artists’ circle. For many years he was a teacher of artistic subjects in schools in Bautzen, working with young people, he tried to present the world of art to them as a unique space for creating their own judgements. In the 1970s and 1980s he travelled a lot staying in Central Asia, the Dolomites, South Tyrol, the Balkans and Western Europe which was reflected in the colouring of his works and the creative transformation of the landscapes he learned³¹. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, as a recognised artist, he exhibited his paintings in many galleries, a large part of which were either in private hands or bought by foundations. The same year an exhibition was also held in Paris, where an exhibition presenting the artistic output of Sorbian artists was organized, in which Jan Buk also participated.

As a creator, he was classified as a “national artist” and his work was placed in the category of “national creativity”. Jan Buk himself stressed that the essence of his perception of the world were his Sorbian roots.³² “The credo of my work is Lusatia, with all its nuances. Every motif of my paintings I paint is perceived by me as Sorbian.”³³ However, this did not mean alienation from artistic trends. Thanks to the correlation of two worlds, local and European, in which he

²⁹ Maria Mirtschin, „Jan Buck und die Moderne. Dem sorbischen Maler zum 90. Geburtstag”, *Lětopis 2* (2012), 4–5.

³⁰ The quote from Christina Boguszowa, „Kóždy wobraz je nowy započatk”, *Rozhlad. Serbski kulturny časopis 6* (2019): 31–34.

³¹ Marija Měrcinowa, „Nieznaže samospokojnosć myslenja. K wosomdžesaćinam Jana Buka”, *Rozhlad. Serbski kulturny časopis 7–8* (2002): 295–297.

³² Among the few paintings left at the painter’s house, there is a painting of a Sorbian girl in green impressionistic tone.

³³ Boguszowa, „Kóždy”, 33.

functioned as a man and an artist, he raised the rank and significance of Sorbian painting. In 1986, Jan Buk was awarded the Myto Čišinsky Prize in recognition of his contribution to artistic creation and in 1988 he received the Hans-Grundig Medal. In the following years he was awarded the Budziszyn Art Prize (1994) and the Upper Lusatia Art Prize (1995). The creative years in Jan Buk's painting were particularly marked in the late eighties and nineties where time of political change is not directly articulated in his works, but there is a visible metamorphosis of expression and reference to the complexity of social and national life in Lusatia. The dynamics of political and social change surprised the Sorbs as the distinctness of origin and historical experiences did not fit into the narrative of the unification process "We are one nation" hence, concerns about the future of the Sorbian people accompanied the artist. At that time, he and his wife moved to their home town of Njebejlčica, where he created a number of mature, outstanding works promoting the beauty of Lusatia. His artistic workshop was versatile, from ink and oils to tempera and watercolour. He gained particular recognition in and outside of Lusatia for his series of works, which touched upon the ecological and national discourse of the areas left by opencast mines, devastated in the Middle and Lower Lusatia. This was the artist's contribution to defending the natural beauty of Lusatia and at the same time a warning of what Lusatia could become in the future.³⁴ Jan Buk's works are in the collections of cultural institutions in Japan, Italy, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary, among others, as well as in the Sorbian museums in Budziszyn and Chociebuż³⁵ and private collections. His oeuvre is impressive, with more than 1000 paintings, made in various painting techniques. In 2007, in recognition of his merits, the city of Budziszyn granted him the title of honorary citizen, where for the first time in his history he was honoured as a Sorbian. With his work, Jan Buk not only enriched contemporary European painting, but also left a rich, priceless legacy for the Sorbian nation. The painter died on 1 April 2019 at the age of 96.

³⁴ Měřínowa, „Niezraje”, 296.

³⁵ Titles of selected works by Jan Buk: *Uniwersitna cyrkej we Wrocławju*, 1949; *Burska snědaň*, 1954; *Koš z plodami*, 1967; *Zelene čišno ze sadowej škle a blešu*, 1970; *Čołmy I*, 1970; *Samarkand*, 1973; *Jutrowna nóc*, 1973; *Krušwy*, 1976; *Wopyt*, 1978; *Skala*, 1979; *Rozžohnowanje*, 1981; *Jama*, 1982; *So kupace žony*, 1983; *Wotkryta jama I*, 1984; *Nócne camprowanje*, 1989; *Zničena krajina*, 1990; *Spreewald*, 1999.

Completion

The Sorbian nation functions as one of four minorities enumerated in Germany. Its representatives are determined and committed to highlight their origins, language and history, but also actively participate in creating the present and future. Many Sorbian artists emphasise the conditions which influenced the choices of their attitudes and behaviour. One of them is Slavic contexts, among which there are pro-Polish attitudes. Their existence was influenced by many factors, such as politics, science, education, religion, institutional cooperation of cultural institutions and individualised social relations.³⁶ The space for their realization is the borderland, which has become a platform for Polish-Sorbian cultural cooperation in modern times.³⁷ Jan Buk was not only their beneficiary but also their continuator.

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³⁶ Małgorzata Mieczkowska, *Polska wobec Łużyc w drugiej połowie XX wieku. Wybrane problemy* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2006).

³⁷ Piotr Pałys, „Obrazy Jana Buka na Opolszczyźnie”, *Zeszyty Łużyckie* 37/38 (2004): 190–191.

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the issues of the relations between the Sorbs and Poles after 1945, with particular emphasis on the figure of the outstanding painter Jan Buk. It presents the conditions for the creation of the pro-Sorbian movement in Poland and assesses its consequences for contemporary Sorbian-Polish relations.

**JAN BUK A ZIEMIE ZACHODNIE I PÓLNOCNE POLSKI. WKŁAD W ROZWÓJ
KONTAKTÓW SERBOŁUŻYCKO-POLSKICH**

ABSTRAKT

W artykule podjęto zagadnienia kształtowania się relacji Serbołużyczan i Polaków po 1945 r. ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem postaci wybitnego malarza Jana Buka. Przedstawiono uwarunkowania powstania ruchu prołużyckiego w Polsce oraz dokonano oceny jego następstw dla współczesnych relacji serbołużycko-polskich.

Annex

Klaus Hammer

SPEECH ON THE OPENING OF THE JAN BUK EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM IN SZCZECIN (extracts)³⁸

Dear Janie Buck, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Jan Buk's paintings are unusual and disturbing, but at the same time disturbingly beautiful. I don't think anyone can resist their magical radiation. In a grey, discoloured and formless thing that seems to be understandable by itself and inspiring confidence, in a zone that overturns habits, Jan Buk allows us to create dimensions of imagination with mysterious energy, created to evoke in the viewer those unusual experiences brought out of the shallow zone of everyday visual habits. The Sorbian painter, who only a few years ago moved from Budziszyn – the Sorbian centre – to his family home in Nebelschütz near Kamenz, where Lessing was born, works on the verge of a growing and increasingly transient objectivity, whose remains suggest a metamorphosis and enchantment, a dream and longing.

³⁸ Extract from the opening speech of the exhibition on 22 September 2003.

Only the process of painting triggers associations that circulate between the initial and final matters of life. The layers of paint form – one could say – the ground under one's feet, from where the artist gains extraordinary perspectives bordering on the unimaginative. He has put a spot by a spot, a form by a form, a tissue jumping from one imagination to another from spring shining and transparent spots, such as peculiarly dark broken colours, texture fields interrupted by stenographic signs. Although the objectivity is obscured by the interplay of pink, carmine, azure, emerald and dark violet, and the forms almost sink in colour, they can still be deciphered. Layer by layer, plastered with the colours of the region's earth, the reds of the sienna and pink, ochre shades, yellows. This is a painting with a great variety of references, forms, colours and a special way of treating them.

Jan Buk finds his artistic and pictorial starting point in the landscape. It is the landscape of Lusatia, where he spent his whole life, but also the Central Asian landscape, the landscape of Bulgaria, the Dolomites, the southern landscape, which inspired him during his occasional short trips. Nature allows you to reach the maximum personal distance that is necessary to get closer to it. In this way, Cezanne's principle works in Bucharest, not to reproduce nature but to work in a natural way, just as nature does. His landscapes rise up to the horizon, their elements are dense, plane or in motion textures dissolving in colour surfaces. Focusing the individual elements and a free-wandering gaze sets the whole picture in constant motion, in constant transformation. Everything that is provincial, local, and wall-mounted is foreign to these works. The artist consciously opposes all the doctrines of the art of the past, but also any contemporary commercialization, the marketization of today.

It enters into magical and emotional contact with inconspicuous still life objects (fruits, dishes, bottles, fish), astonishes them with their nobly sparkling but also delicate colours, their structures and components, brings out to the surface both the "miracle of creation" as well as the tense object and its negative environment. They could be called in the spirit of Morandis and his magical images of things-metaphysical still life's. But the aspect of *memento mori* and *vanitas* doesn't make Buk's artistic admonitions. On the contrary, from the respectful and loving contemplation of these objects, he gains energy for creative activity.

In this way, his ink drawings were created, which in the 1970s freed him from the hitherto rawness of still life and from the static property of the image elements. In the phase of the first movements of the image, a delicate grid of

vibrations appears. Then the brushstrokes, spots, blobs like stenographic signs overwhelm the same Informal working method – the basic structure, without covering it. The tendency to forms is getting bigger and bigger, after a lack of orientation, there is a thickening, emphasizing, defining. The shape is separated from the texture – rhythm and space are created. The planes will join together, clamp together, at the same time, the brushstrokes penetrate into the yarns, they are explained, defined or interrupted. Everything remains visible, nothing is lost. A kind of an inverted fugue is gone. The topic appears only in the final phase of the drawing, in the state of density and joining of all planes. In the case of Jan Buk, the case meets the inexorable rules of painting. “The known result of unknown reasons, as defined by the Voltaire case, is always surprising. To see what comes and not to do what one already knows. To see what is possible in the world of painting. The objects that emerge here and there and disappear again like objects in his still life’s are often as if the painter had never seen them before, as if he had a vague idea of them. After all, he has to make them from scratch, i.e. make them into a pictorial form, because there is nothing in a painting that is not painting. The old master is sceptical about the art where there is a suspicion of the pictorial art, i.e. about the possibility of exact differentiation, recreation. The approach to the world of things avoids all indications of their actual existence and essence. Only such objects appear in the paintings by Jan Buk. (...)