

Jan K. Ostrowski

Jagiellonian University, Kraków

Forgotten Baroque Borderland

Manuals on European modern art concentrate extensively on Italy, Flanders, Holland and France. Much less attention is paid to Spain, Germany, Austria, England and Russia. Poland receives at best one or two pages with a short and usually superficial description of arbitrarily chosen works from its largest centers, such as Krakow and Warsaw. The present article does not intend to question such a traditional artistic hierarchy. It is only an attempt to draw the attention of foreign art historians to certain artistic phenomena of high quality, or rather to a large artistic region about which one can find hardly any information in international literature on art.

First of all, I propose a few definitions and explanations. The notion of Poland of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century includes the present territories of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. Analogically, Lithuania embraced present tiny Lithuania, much greater Belarus and even some parts of Greater Russia. The Polish-Lithuanian union was dominated by a Polish-speaking and Roman Catholic population, while a large Eastern portion of the country preserved up to the end a majority which spoke Ruthenian (not Russian!) and belonged to the Eastern Church (not necessarily Orthodox). In a few words, the territory situated roughly between the present Eastern border of Poland and the Dneper–Dvina line presented in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries (and even later) an extremely complicated ethnic, religious and cultural picture. It was inhabited by Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Poles, whose number systematically grew, but also by Jews, Armenians and Tartars. Poles and Lithuanians were mostly Catholics and the minorities usually formed separate religious groups.

One more introductory remark. The art discussed in the present article is not only little known. Many of its important aspects simply do not exist any more. The process of the destruction began at the end of the eighteenth century, when most of the Eastern Polish territories fell under Russian rule. The Russian government was systematically closing Roman Catholic churches and monasteries. Later, the Soviet government acted in a way similar to the tsarist one, but did not differentiate between Catholics, Uniates and Orthodox. All churches (and of course, castles, palaces etc.), considered relics of non-proletarian culture, were literally decimated during the 1920s and 1930s.

The presented material is little known, even in Poland. Late Baroque came to the notice of art historians as late as in the 1930s. Polish scholars had only a few years to investigate the material of the territories which in 1939 were occupied by the Soviet Union. During the next fifty years Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine were in fact inaccessible to them, and local scholars have only recently begun to pay attention to phenomena long considered (except for Lithuania) foreign to their national culture.

In the last twenty years Polish art historians have undertaken an extensive effort aiming to fill the gap. The most important initiative has been a program of inventorying monuments of religious art in the territory of the former province of Lwów (17 volumes, 1993–2009). A similar program is being run in Warsaw (4 volumes concerning the present Belarus).

The main topics of the present article are two artistic phenomena: the so called Wilno school of late Baroque architecture and late Baroque and Rococo sculpture of the Lwów region.

Wilno (today Vilnius), the capital of Lithuania, is a relatively young city. Its history began in the fourteenth century. It has some amazing Late Gothic monuments and high quality seventeenth-century architecture. But the originality of its architectural physiognomy the city owes to its late Baroque churches. The quality and homogeneity of Wilno late Baroque architecture gave rise to the notion of a school which includes numerous edifices spread in a large territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which today paradoxically belongs to Belarus and even to Latvia rather than to Lithuania. Beside the relatively well known cities of Minsk, Polotsk, Vitebsk and Dynaburg (Daugavpils), we have to mention names that sound exotic even to the Polish ear: Berezwecz, Boruny, Dagda, Druja, Głębokie, Iłkuksza, Krasław, Miadzioł, Posiń, Rossienie, Słonim, Worniany, Zabiałły-Wołyńce, Zdzięcioł. All these places, some of them small villages, have or had late Baroque Roman Catholic and Uniate churches of a uniform style and in most cases of an amazingly high artistic quality. We are very far from knowing exactly the history of the construction of all of these edifices, but it is certain that the bulk of them date from three decades between 1735 and 1765.

We know several names of architects active in Wilno and in the region. Some of them were Poles, such as Antoni Osikiewicz, Ludwik Hryniewicz, Błażej Kosiński and Tomasz Żebrowski, other were Italians: Antonio Paracca and Abramo Antonio Genu, or Germans: Johann Christoph Glaubitz and Franz Hoffer. Only a few attributions are precisely documented by sources, partly due to the disastrous gaps in the archives, but partly also because of the Baroque practice of collective work. Many important works remain anonymous.

Antoni Osikiewicz was responsible for the Uniate church in Boruny (1747–1757). He is also said to have reconstructed the church at Zdzięcioł (1751) and the slim towers of the Uniate Holy Trinity Church in Wilno (about 1750).

The Dominican monk, Father Ludwik Hryniewicz (1717–1783) worked mostly for his own order. He constructed several churches and monasteries and is also considered one of the creators of the Missionaries' Church (1750–1753) and of the splendid interior decoration of the Dominican Holy Ghost Church, both in Wilno (about 1749–1760).

Antonio Paracca or Paracco, a Genoese (noted in sources from 1762 to 1777), was Hryniewicz's collaborator at Druja, Zabiałły-Wołyńce and probably at the Missionary Church in Wilno. He also erected the town hall and church at Krasław (1755–1767).

The leading personality among the architects of the Wilno school was without any doubt Johann Christoph Glaubitz. We know nothing about his origins or early career, except for a notice about his apprenticeship in Gdańsk (Danzig). He was probably



1. Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries



2. Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania. Missionaries church. Photo K. Czyżewski



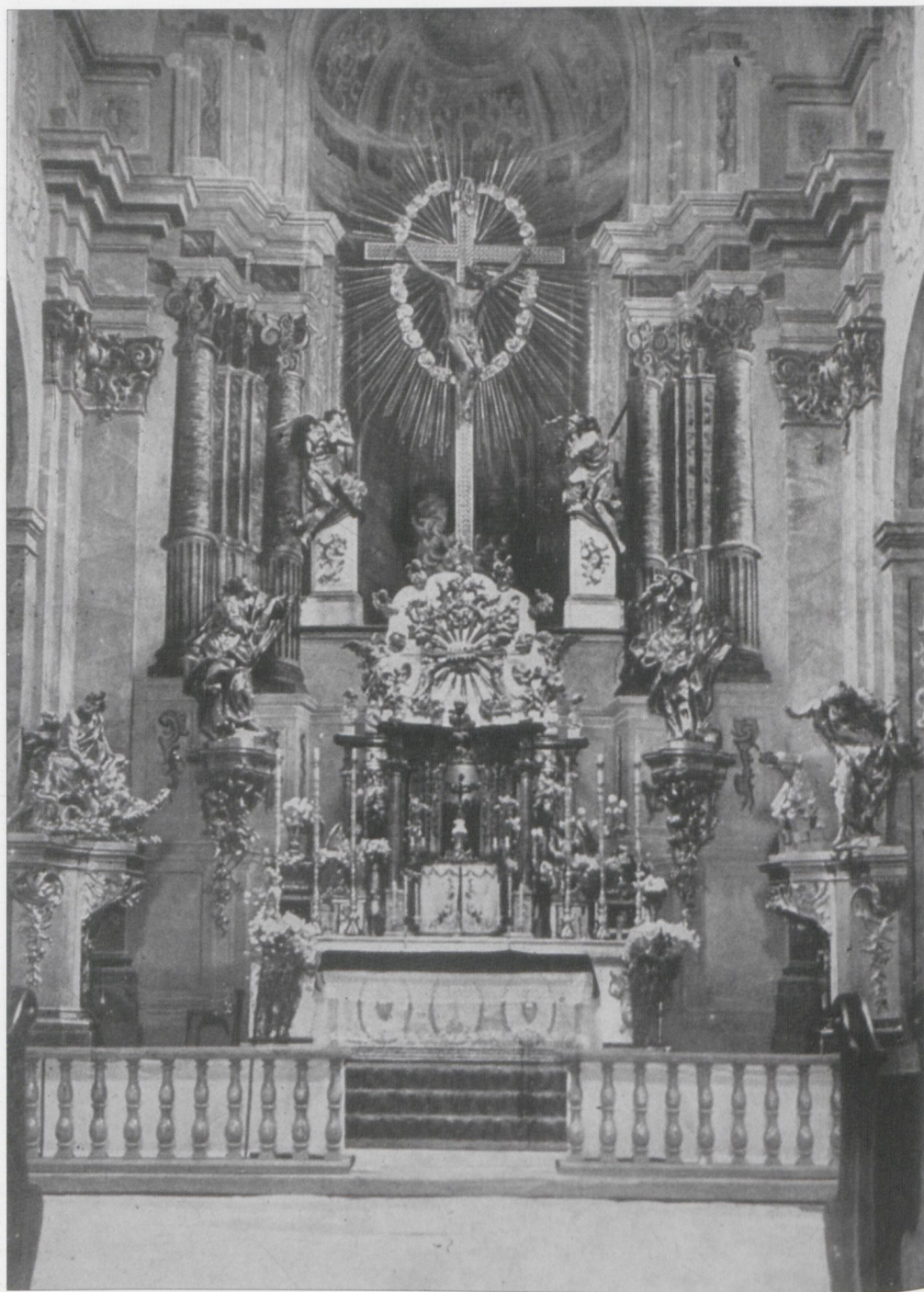
3. Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania. St John church. Photo K. Czyżewski



4. Wilno (now Vilnius), Lithuania. Dominican church, interior. Photo K. Czyżewski



5. Cytowiany (Tituvenai), Lithuania. Parish church, interior. Photo K. Czyżewski



6. Hodowica, Ukraine. Parish church, high altar. Photo c. 1930



7. J.J. Pinsel, Samson with the Lion from the church in Hodowica. Lwow, Art Gallery. Photo J.K. Ostrowski



8. J.J. Pinsel, Mother of Sorrow from the church in Hodowica. Lwow, Art Gallery.
Photo J.K. Ostrowski

invited to Wilno about 1738 to reconstruct the Protestant Church, destroyed in a fire of 1737, disastrous for the whole city. He settled in Wilno for good and died there in 1767. He was a Protestant, but he often worked for Roman Catholic, Uniate and Orthodox patrons. Among his most important works are the reconstruction of St John's Church (1738/1739–1748) and St Catherine's Church (1741–1746), the iconostasis of the Orthodox Church (1753) and the reconstruction of the Uniate Basilian Monastery (1761), all in Wilno. He is also considered the author of the jewel of the Wilno school – the Basilian Church at Berezwezc (1753–1756).

The architecture of the Wilno circle has some technical and stylistic features which contribute to its quality, but also to certain gaps in the integrity of its artistic expression. All Lithuanian churches were built of brick covered with plaster, with stucco decoration of the interiors. Stone, rare in the area, was hardly used. The frequent fires that damaged Wilno in 1737 and 1748 resulted in a tendency to do without wood in either construction or decoration. The decorative crowns to the towers, in most of the country constructed of wood covered with copper, here were built of bricks. Similarly, certain churches even have their roof construction of brickwork. Altar structures and sculptures were exclusively in stucco, once again in contrast to the practice prevailing in other regions.

Ground plans of most of the churches are simple – single naves or three-aisled basilicas predominate. Spatial experiments were rare; there are only a few churches with centralized ground plans and with dome vaulting. Many of the important examples of late Baroque Wilno architecture were in fact reconstructions of older, seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century edifices.

The weakness of spatial concept is compensated for by an extremely picturesque use of volume. A typical Wilno church has a façade with two high towers. Their upper parts are perforated with decoratively cut windows and topped with equally decorative crownings and high iron crosses. The whole has slender, almost Gothic proportions. Certain façades are undulated or, at least, their course of cornices suggests the undulation. Copulas have decorative, complicated forms, deriving from the ideas of Francesco Borromini and Guarino Guarini. Between the towers and over the walls closing the choirs are elaborate gables. Some of them follow the semicircular or polygonal line of the apses and assume three-dimensional form. White, high and tattered outlines of the churches are important accents in the rather flat Lithuanian and Belarussian landscape, often visible from a distance of several kilometers.

The interiors only exceptionally have more elaborate spatial effects. Rare also are fresco decorations. The strength of Wilno interiors lies in their stucco altars which in some cases create extremely dynamic, typically late Baroque effects out of a much older or uninteresting architecture. Thus, the late Gothic presbytery of St John's Church in Wilno, redecorated by Glaubitz, received a set of ten altars that allow an infinity of extremely picturesque views. The inner architecture of the seventeenth-century Dominican Church in Wilno was almost entirely covered with altars which fully masked its original simplicity.

The cultural background, history and style of Wilno architecture are epitomized by the church at Berezwezc. As it has been already mentioned, it was erected, probably by

Glaubitz, in the years 1753–1756, for the Uniate Order of Basilians. The church of Berezwezc had a centralized ground plan which reflected to a certain extent the Eastern Church tradition. The presbytery and transept were closed with semicircular apses. Its iconostasis was a compromise with the scheme of a Roman Catholic high altar. The façade and the whole volume of the church were probably the highest achievements of the Wilno school. Slender proportions, elegantly undulated lines and delicate detailing gave to the church an almost insubstantial character, so typical of the Rococo phase of late Baroque art. Nowadays, we can enjoy the beauty of Berezwezc architecture only thanks to prewar photographs. The fate of the monument in recent times was tragic. After 1939 it was used as a Soviet prison and in the early 1950s was blown up.

Wilno school of architecture belongs to the most interesting aspects of the Baroque art of Eastern Europe, but it also has clear limitations. Its most original features were picturesque façades and scenographic altar structures, but it brought no original solutions to the main architectural problem – the composition of space. Wilno late Baroque obviously belonged to the current of European architecture established by Francesco Borromini and later developed in Piedmont, South Germany, Austria and Bohemia. The church of Berezwezc could perfectly well have been built in Bavaria or Franconia. The origin of most of the architectural forms used in Wilno region is clear, but the details of the historical process of their adaptation are much less known. We do not know where Glaubitz studied before he appeared in Gdańsk, where he certainly could not have learned his ultra-Baroque style. We have no details concerning Paracca and Genu. We know very little about the studies and travels of the architects of Polish origin. There is little hope of filling these gaps in the future. The architecture of the Wilno circle deserves to be known more widely, but many of its aspects will probably remain enveloped in mystery for ever.

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The second part of the article moves us some five hundred kilometers to the south, to the present territory of Ukraine. This part of former Poland produced many fine late Baroque edifices, but the main object of our interest will now be the late Baroque sculpture of Lwow and the surrounding region.

The city of Lwow (Polish proper spelling: Lwów, Russian: Lvov, Ukrainian: L'viv, Latin: Leopolis, German: Lemberg) was founded about the mid-thirteenth century by the Ruthenian dukes of Halicz (Halych). A hundred years later, after the extinction of the local dynasty, the duchy of Halicz was incorporated into the kingdom of Poland and remained its part until 1772. The earlier part of the period (to c. 1650) was extremely prosperous for the city as a result of highly profitable trade with the East. These circumstances made Lwow a truly international metropolis, with its population composed of Poles, Germans, Ruthenians, Armenians, Jews, Italians, Greeks, as well as French, English and Scots.

The second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century brought wars and an economic crisis, but also important cultural developments and artistic achieve-

ments of surprisingly high quality. Most of its Baroque monuments are stylistically related to Austrian and Bohemian architecture. High artistic merit places some of them among the most outstanding examples of the Central and East European late Baroque and Rococo. These numerous new churches became the main framework of a splendid development of sculpture.

The Lwow late Baroque and Rococo achieved their climax roughly between 1750 and 1775, and almost immediately afterwards a process of gradual destruction and oblivion began, as the new, neoclassical taste did not appreciate the monuments of the former epoch. The first notes on the eighteenth-century Lwow sculpture appeared in art history at the beginning of the twentieth century, and its full rediscovery took place in the 1930s. As mentioned above, Polish art historians had only few years to pursue their studies, before the whole region fell under Soviet rule. As a result, nearly seventy percent of the monuments were destroyed and their original context was almost totally dispersed. The remaining thirty percent of sculptures have survived almost exclusively thanks to the rescue action of museums, above all the Art Gallery of Lwow.

The distinctive Lwow school of sculpture did not appear until about 1750. In the second half of the 1730s Bernardine monks still had to employ Thomas Hutter from Jarosław, about hundred kilometers to the west, for the decoration of their church in Lwow. About ten or fifteen years later, however, Lwow appeared to be the main center of sculpture in the whole country and the only one to create a homogeneous stylistic idiom, while also producing a series of outstanding artists. At the same time we have to admit that we are unable to explain all the premises for this rapid and brilliant process. As it has already been mentioned, Lwow sculpture created its highest achievements in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, in the works of Sebastian Fesinger, Antoni Osiński, and, above all, of Johann Georg Pinsel. By the end of that period the independent activity of the second generation of artists began, represented at its best by Maciej Polejowski, Jan Obrocki and Franciszek Olędzki. They continued and developed the style of the Lwow school in the late 1770s, 1780s, and even in the 1790s. The geography of Lwow sculpture has been defined only in part. Its products were executed for churches scattered within a radius of about 200–300 kilometers around the city. To the east the Lwow masters have left their most important works at Beresteczko, Poczajów, Zbaraż, Buczacz, Horodenka and Monasterzyska. To the west, the Lwow sculptors explored a part of the present Polish territory and we may find their works, among other places, in Sandomierz, Opatów, Włodawa, Chełm, Leżajsk, Przemyśl and Dukla.

The social background of Lwow art in the eighteenth century is relatively well known. Sculptors, as well as master masons and painters, formed a populous and comparatively wealthy colony. They were interconnected through a dense network of professional, economic and family relations. They acquired their artistic skills through the traditional system of workshop and guild education, even if they often rebelled against the limitations imposed by the guild. They mastered perfectly the technical aspects of their art but obviously lacked the elements of academic education, such as a deep knowledge of arithmetical perspective, anatomy, the psychological science of the *affetti*, or of iconography. Etchings (mostly German) were an important source of inspiration for most of them.

Lwow sculpture of the eighteenth century belonged almost exclusively to the sphere of sacred art and concentrates particularly on decorating the façades and altars of churches with the figures of saints and angels. Wood was by far the most popular material, but we do find numerous works in sandstone and sometimes in stucco, too. In the main phase wooden figures were mostly painted and gilded; later they were covered with uniform white paint.

Thomas Hutter (1696–after 1743), a Bavarian, who spent several years in the Jesuit Order as a lay friar from 1718, and in the 1730s ran a workshop at Jarosław, is considered a forerunner of the Lwow school of sculpture. His main work is the decoration of the Bernardine Church in Lwow.

Sebastian Fesinger, a member of a local dynasty of sculptors and architects, was probably the oldest among the artists of the main phase of Lwow sculpture. His name was discovered relatively early and in the 1920s he was considered the leading master of the school. In fact, his personality is difficult to recognize, particularly because another sculptor bearing the same family name, Fabian Fesinger, was active at the same time. His surviving documented sculptures are exclusively in stone: two reliefs with St Andrew and St Ignatius Loyola, signed and dated 1747 (parish church at Boćki), three figures of saints in front of the façade of the Franciscan Church at Przemyśl (1758–1760), and another six figures (from 1762), on the top of the façade of the church at Podhorce. The only attempt to trace the origin of Fesinger (who wrote in German and was a member of a German religious confraternity) relates him to Moravia and particularly to Brno (Brünn).

Johann Georg Pinsel (died in 1761 or 1762), who was by far the most outstanding figure among the Lwow sculptors, is known only from rare documentary references. Pinsel was a regular collaborator of the architect Bernard Meretyn (Merettini, Merd-erer) in the service of Mikołaj Potocki, an extremely rich and capricious art patron. The artist ran a large workshop based at Buczac, and never settled in Lwow for a long time. Whole sets of his sculptures decorate or decorated Meretyn's constructions: the city hall at Buczac (1750–1751), the Uniate Cathedral in Lwow (about 1759–1761), churches at Horodenka (1752–1755?), Hodowica (about 1758) and Monasterzyska (1761). Pinsel worked wood and stone with the same extraordinary deftness. His figures are permeated with movement and spiritual power. He was almost certainly the teacher of Maciej Polejowski and maybe also of Obrocki, whose art reveals his strong influence. The discovery of Pinsel's place of origin would be of crucial importance for the definition of the stylistic provenance of Lwow sculpture.

Antoni Osiński (recorded 1754–1764) was considered by Hornung, the author of a monograph on him, as the leading Lwow master. His documented works are indeed limited to sculptures in the Bernardine churches at Leszniów (1754; destroyed), Leżajsk (1755–1758) and Zbaraż (1756–1759). Overestimation of Osiński's artistic value resulted from an illegitimate attribution to him of a series of Pinsel's masterpieces. He seems to have been the master of an extremely dynamic but sometimes mannered and almost abstract composition of volumes and draperies, with characteristic, sharply-cut folds. His ability to render the psychology of his heroes and to create the religious drama in which they take part lies, however, far behind Pinsel's expressive power.

Maciej Polejowski (recorded 1762–1794) belonged to a well known family of Lwów sculptors and master masons. He was a very mobile and prolific artist. In his letter of 1786, he names no less than thirteen localities in which he had worked. He certainly started under Pinsel. His extremely slender white painted figures, shown in sophisticated, dancing attitudes, are to be seen in the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Lwów (1766–1773) and in the churches in Nawaria, Sandomierz (1770–1773), Włodawa (1781–1783) and Opatów. His activity in the region of Sandomierz marked the western limit of the range of Lwów sculpture and gave birth to a local, rather provincial development that continued the Rococo tradition even after 1800.

The few documented works of Jan Obrocki (recorded 1764–1794), the only Lwów sculptor noticed by nineteenth-century lexicons, were executed for the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Lwów (1772–1775) and for the church at Busk (1779). Obrocki seems to have learned a lot from Pinsel. His works show a Rococo tendency to split volumes and draperies into tiny geometrical forms, and some of them contain elements of Neoclassicism.

Franciszek Olędzki (recorded from 1773, died 1792) filled the Trinitarian Church at Beresteczko with a crowd of wooden figures (after 1780), executed the splendid “dancing” Madonna from the Dominican Church at Tarnopol (now in Warsaw) and decorated the façades of at least two houses in the Lwów Market Square (1772, 1786). A lot of further attributions have been proposed, for example, for the sculptures in the parish churches at Dukla and Łopatyn. Olędzki, together with Polejowski, were the most prolific sculptors of the younger generation of the Lwów school, but his heritage is still far from being authoritatively defined.

The six artists presented here form the core of the Lwów school of sculpture, but the authorship and chronology of many outstanding monuments remain uncertain (for example, the splendid decoration of the Dominican Church in Lwów). In spite of a variety of individual traits, it is possible to recognize certain characteristic features common to the whole group. All Lwów sculptors of the eighteenth century conceive a statue as a strongly expressive, sometimes almost abstract, composition, realized mostly by means of an autonomous drapery. The drapery defines the volume of the sculpture and its expression. It seems to be stirred by an invisible wind, and often splits into geometric forms with sharply cut edges. The anatomy of the figure, reduced to a kind of internal framework, is sometimes hard to discern. The proportions are extremely elongated. The exposed parts of the body reveal the predominance of technical ability and of an expressive tendency over knowledge of anatomy. The heads (except for the dramatic physiognomies of Pinsel’s sculptures) are uniform and deprived of deeper expression. The exaggerated movement of figures, their dramatic gestures, and particularly their dancing attitudes, are only rarely justified by the iconographic context. Nevertheless, the expressive values of Lwów sculptures are highly diversified: from the mystical ardor of Pinsel, through the extremely mobile but to some extent superficial theater of Osiński, to the cool, secular elegance of Polejowski.

The Lwów school of sculpture has nothing to do with any kind of academism; the first and faint traits of Neoclassicism appear only in its later examples. It belongs to the great formation of the late Baroque and is usually referred to as Rococo. If we wanted

to use these stylistic terms more precisely, we should trace a line between the late Baroque of Pinsel and Osiński, full of irrepressible movement and religious zeal, and the Rococo of Fesinger, more reserved and delicate in the decorative concept of his figures and in their expression. The term Rococo also matches very well the generation of Polejowski, whose sophisticated art perfectly renders the decadent atmosphere of the ancient regime.

Many technical and formal features of Lwow sculpture find their close analogies in northern late Gothic and Mannerist art. It shares this tendency with a large portion of the eighteenth-century art of a considerable Central European region, whose central area coincides with the triangle: Vienna–Munich–Prague. The works by Fesinger, Pinsel, Osiński and other Lwow sculptors can at first glance be associated with those by the Prague masters, such as Ferdinand Maximilian Brokoff and Matthias Bernhard Braun, and even more with those by the Bavarians, above all of Ignaz Günther and Johann Baptist Straub. In Prague, Munich and Lwow we find a very similar approach to a majority of technical and stylistic problems, based on a common tradition, educational system and examples, reinforced by a universal use of graphic models.

All these similarities are partially due to direct contacts between Poland and other Central European countries. We have to remember the documented Bavarian origin of Hutter and the hypotheses concerning Fesinger and Pinsel as immigrants from the present territory of the Czech Republic. On the other hand, we must point out the limits of such affinities and emphasize the original achievements of Lwow sculptors. No direct imitations of any Bohemian, Austrian or Bavarian sculptures have hitherto been discovered among the works of the Lwow masters. The characteristic manner of the sharply-cut edges of metal-like draperies, common to the works of Fesinger, Osiński, Polejowski, Obrocki and Ołędzki, seems to be a genuine local invention. South German Rococo, full of lightness and of a specific cheerful optimism, has never reached comparably acute degree of expression as the art of Pinsel. Similarly, superficiality in the treatment of sacral themes contrasts with religious zeal. Therefore it would be a mistake to see in Lwow sculpture only a peripheral reflection of South German and Bohemian art. The impulses brought by German immigrants gave birth to a local, original development of high quality. We have to remember that while Brokoff and Matthias Braun, the greatest Prague masters, were one generation older than Pinsel and Osiński, the highest period of Bavarian Rococo sculpture is exactly contemporary with the main phase of Lwow sculpture. The sculpture of the Polish borderland is not only a phenomenon chronologically parallel to the art of Günther, Straub and other Bavarian masters, but in many cases it matches the latter in quality. Had Pinsel not settled down in provincial Buczacz but worked in one of the Central European capitals instead, he would certainly have played a significant role there. It is probably not a great risk to assume that only lack of mechanisms for transmitting models and inspirations from the periphery towards the artistic centre deprived him of the glory of a great master of the European late Baroque.

Historical vicissitudes cruelly decimated the artistic heritage of the Polish Eastern territories, but even the existing remnants are important evidence that Western Eu-

ropean art and in consequence Europe itself reaches much farther to the east than is usually considered to be the case.

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