

# Allegory and symbol: Galicia in art

Żanna Komar

Kraków

What does Galicia look like? In what way can the structure of a society, a territory, an idea, be conveyed and expressed using artistic means? In the realm of the visual arts, examples of portrayals of Galicia are to be found in works by artists active in the pre-autonomy era, during the period of autonomy, and to this day. Such portrayals are nevertheless incomparably less numerous than literary portrayals of this theme, which is as interesting as it is unvaryingly popular and frequently tackled. “Galicianness” is even recognised as a trend in contemporary prose, which is today the domain of the Galician myth.

The visual form, however, is interesting firstly for the very reason that it is found less frequently. Secondly, through the directness of the way in which content is transferred to material, it synthesises and illustrates the functioning of the historical myth (or elements of that myth). In this line-up, alongside epics, works of fiction, those aspiring to documentary status, and yet others portraying scenes and incidents, a separate category comprises attempts at abstraction and isolation of an ideal, legendary mythical attribute of the province. Without underplaying the importance of other documents, one might say that allegories and symbols generated in this way testify to the changing attitude of public opinion toward Galicia in various periods. What is particularly interesting is the evolution of this subject since World War I (after the Treaty of Versailles).

The symbol, or identifying mark, that encompassed in an iconographic sense the concept of Galicia as it emerged towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the coat of arms

of the Kingdom of Halych and Lodomeria: three crowns and a jackdaw on a shield. A detailed representation of the numerous meanings, often distant from each other but all closely connected with the nascent myth of Galicia, was the allegory, or personification – an embodiment in symbolic human form. Among the important iconographic elements of an allegoric image are the attributes and devices with which the figure is equipped. Thus the three crowns and the jackdaw render the allegory of Galicia more legible.

The “ur-model” for later personifications of countries and territories within the European iconography was the allegory of Europe itself. In the description of its earliest representations in Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia*, Europe, as one of the foremost parts of the world, wears sumptuous regal attire. The crown on her head indicates that Europe dominates the world and is the queen of the whole earth. “She is painted sitting between two cornucopias brimming with fruits” because, Strabon argues, “she outclasses all the other parts [of the world] in her fertility.”<sup>1</sup> The pagan traditions established by antiquity became *de rigueur* for emulation from the Renaissance onwards. In the European art of the Early Modern period, too, there was a whole bevy of mythological figures that theoretically should not have survived in the moral categories of the Christian reality, but nevertheless had not disappeared either from works of literature or from painting canvases. Pursuing the line of

1 C. Ripa, *Ikonomia*, trans. I. Kania, Kraków 1998, pp. 387–388.

emulation of antiquity, in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries countries were often represented using the Greco-Roman goddess Athena / Minerva, who symbolised the wisdom of the state community, as in representations of Britannia, Germania and Austria. It is in this convention that the allegory of Galicia develops proportionately. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century secularisation, and the almost complete departure from the static allegoric repertoire codified by iconology that had been the generally accepted norm in previous centuries, contributed to the emergence of the fundamental issue underlying 19<sup>th</sup>-century iconography – the conflict between the “realistic” representation of the motif and the deeper symbolic content it was designed to bear.

The objective factors and historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of Galicia also favoured the creation of mythical representation of it. Specifically, its ambivalence in time (the blurring of its beginnings somewhere in the depths of the Middle Ages) and space (the lack of definition and constant changes of its borders), the lack of clarity as to the derivation of its name – all this ensured a freedom of interpretation and the possibility of the existence of multiple interpretations, even including supernatural intervention or force majeure, which is one of the keys to the success of the idea of the myth.

From the very beginning Galicia was viewed by the centre of enlightened absolutism as a *tabula rasa*. Like the entire imported construction of the new Kronland (its political, administrative and legal system), the first representations of it were executed outside Galicia, in the imperial capital. The period that saw the Josephine reforms and relative stability under Emperor Francis, up to the Napoleonic expeditions, was a time of beginning, a heroic age of creation, of definition out of oblivion, of demarcation of borders. This approach is illustrated by one of the first allegoric representations entitled *Allegory of Halych and Lodomeria*, which was made within a few years of the annexation of these lands. This poetic and allegoric painting, by Franz Antoni Maulbertsch, an Austrian painter and printmaker of the Rococo and classicist periods, demonstrates his vague idea of a fairy-tale land that had once belonged to the crown, was lost, and was now returning to the fold. This is a kind of allusion to tales of a paradise lost.

The statue representing Galicia in the form of a monument to the governor of Galicia, Baron Franz von Hauer (1777–1822), in the Dominican church in Lviv was executed sometime between the Congress of Vienna and the Spring

of Nations. It symbolises the next stage, the transition to classicism in art, and references the movement towards a stabilisation of the province’s position within the policies of the monarchy. This image of Galicia drawn into the cultural orbit of Austria by the administrative apparatus was made in Galicia itself (1824). The author of the sculpture was Anton Schimser (1790–1838), an Austrian-born sculptor who in 1812 had settled in Lviv, where he founded a dynasty of well-known stonemasons. Schimser had been educated in Vienna and Paris, but when in 1822 he obtained a government commission to make a monument to the governor, he was already a respected Lviv sculptor with the reputation of an academician. His Galicia is a canonically classicist, cool, immensely majestic white marble sculpture supported by the contrasting black stele of the sarcophagus. On her head this Galicia wears a *corona muralis*-style crown, in antiquity an indication of a protective deity keeping watch over a city. Her designatory attribute is the heraldic symbol of Galicia in the form of the outline of three crowns on her crown. Another variation on a figure personifying Galicia was executed by Schimser in the Höcht casino hall for a ball during a visit of Archduke Francis Charles to Lviv in July 1823.<sup>2</sup> This means that in the early 1820s representative portrayals of Galicia were made for the needs of the local state administration.

The *corona muralis* style of allegory that was widespread in the European symbolic language of the day features again in one of the best-known personifications of Austria. A statue of this type, erected for the citizens of Vienna, was sited in the centre of Freyung Square as the main element of the “Austria” fountain designed in 1844–1846 by the monarchic sculptors Ludwig Schwanthaler and Ferdinand von Miller. In this composition we find a classic arrangement of the entire sculptural group, which is subsequently replicated for purposes including the representation of Galicia. At the feet of Austria are personifications of four rivers – the four major rivers in the monarchy: the Elbe, the Vistula, the Danube and the Po. These four currents flow into four seas: the North Sea, the Baltic, the Black Sea and the Adriatic, and are intended to symbolise the central place occupied by the Habsburg Empire in Europe. They also symbolise the four main language groups in the Habsburg Empire: Germanic, Slav, Hungarian and Italian.

2 Cited after: J. Biriulow, *Rzeźba lwowska*, p. 40, after: *Gazeta Lwowska*, 4 August 1823, no. 90, p. 373.

Galicia reappears in a mural crown in an important piece of pre-autonomy Lviv architecture built in the years 1855–1860: the Veterans' Home, by the Viennese architect Theophil Hansen. On the pillars flanking the main entrance portal of the building, Galicia and Austria sit facing each other. The sculptures were executed to a design by Cyprian Godebski (1835–1909), a young artist educated in Paris. At the design stage the artist was summoned to Vienna to discuss the details of the decoration.<sup>3</sup> On the other side of the building, from the courtyard, there is another sculpture group – Mars and Venus, allegories of war and peace.

In addition to individual representations, Galicia also features in “group portraits” representing the monarchy, as one of the crown lands (*Kronländer*). Galicia was executed alongside Bukovina and Transylvania, for instance, to a commission of Maria Theresa in a group of fountains in the Schönbrunn gardens in the empress's own lifetime. Galicia in collective compositions is identical to her neighbours: both in the fountain at Schönbrunn and in other settings where she is indistinguishable from them, she looks exactly like any other fairy-tale or mythological deity, and her presence is indicated only by the inscriptions.

It was in this way that Galicia, in the company of all the other lands of the Habsburg Monarchy, was depicted in a propaganda watercolour of 1849. Like all the other lands (maidens), Galicia is gazing at Apollo – the young, recently crowned Francis Joseph. The whole retinue is sailing in a single boat, prow on into a stormy sea symbolising the shattering events of the Spring of Nations. (see Catalogue I.o.5)

On her inclusion into the retinue of the Habsburg lands, Galicia became an element in some of the most important objects of Austrian culture in Vienna, revealing different sides depending on the artistic objective of a given project. And thus, while in Schönbrunn Palace she is an element of a Rococo sculpture, in the neo-Gothic creation that was the Rathaus, Galicia featured as an early medieval special warrior holding a shield, a *Wappenträger*, which may in part be symbolic of the province's roles as borderland, limes and defender of the empire. (see Catalogue I.o.8)

At the time when the neo-Gothic Rathaus and the Parliament building, modelled on an ancient Greek temple, were under construction in Vienna, Galicia was enjoying her first years of autonomy. In Lviv the decision was taken to erect a building for the Galician diet. The architecture

of the Diet of the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria was the embodiment of its liberal ideas, and the history of its construction a classic example of Galician ambivalence and the proverbial Galician contriving and compromise. The construction of the Diet was preceded by a grand architectural competition: many different designs were made, and numerous architects submitted ideas, among them the eminent Otto Wagner. The design ultimately approved – in unexplained circumstances – was one by Juliusz Hochberger, the incumbent head of the Department of Construction in Lviv, which was a compilation of ideas from the works entered in the competition. The building itself was finally built in the years 1877–1881 in the Italian Renaissance style (the main façade in its late variant and the rear elevation in its early incarnation). This edifice is the best-known personification of Galicia, its most recognised incarnation.

Its sculptural decorations were the subject of another competition announced by the Diet executive (*Wydział Krajowy*), for the main figural ornaments, in which 14 works were entered. The competition rules listed the figures and allegoric motifs that were to feature on the building: “The façade is to be crowned with a group of three figures representing legislation taking Poland and Ruthenia into its care.”<sup>4</sup> On 30 May 1879 the *Wydział Krajowy*, jointly with a commission from the Krakow Academy, passed a resolution stating that the Sejm building was to be crowned by a “jenius [sic.] holding a shield bearing the coat of arms of Galicia, and either side of him are to be positioned figures representing the Vistula and the Dniester as the two main rivers feeding the Baltic and Black Seas”.<sup>5</sup> Below these, on the attic, there were also to be four allegoric figures symbolising freedom, unity, justice and valour, though these were never made. Only ethnic Polish and Ruthenian artists were allowed to enter the competition<sup>6</sup>, which precluded competition from Austrians and basically gave above all Poles a green light.

First prize in the competition for the crowning group went to Teodor Rygier (later the author of the monument to Adam Mickiewicz on the Main Square in Kraków), an artist with links to Warsaw, but at the time living in Florence.

4 “Kronika miejscowa i zamiejscowa”, *Gazeta Narodowa*, 9 January 1879, p. 2.

5 “Kronika miejscowa i zamiejscowa dnia 31 maja”, *Gazeta Narodowa*, 1 June 1879, no. 126.

6 L. Masłowski, “Wystawa modeli”, *Gazeta Narodowa*, 8 October 1879.

3 J. Biriulow, *Rzeźba lwowska*, op. cit., pp. 70–71.

Rygier's Galicia, a "comely girl" ("nadobna niewiasta"), as Henryk Struve described her in his description of the group in March 1881 during his trip to Italy, was clothed in "a sumptuous toga, from beneath whose wind-caressed edges and folds [her] charmingly graceful curves are intimated".<sup>7</sup> Her face "is radiant with the light of a star bursting on all side with rays brilliant with peace and hope, and the gesture of her arms indicates that she would draw the people lying at her feet to her, embrace them to her bosom and encircle with hands of maternal love and care. The lower figures are turned away from each other, as if to show that each is preoccupied only with himself and does not think of his neighbour."<sup>8</sup> (see Catalogue IV.2.1)

The iconography of this sculpture is a universal analogy of the overall idea of a country expressed using a female figure surrounded by the virtues and rivers as an element indicating the openness of Galicia (of the enlightened Habsburg Empire) and her (its) ambitious role as liaison between East and West. The most direct prototype for this representation in formal terms is the figure of Austria from the Vienna World Exposition in 1873. The sculptural decoration symbolising Austria that towered over the south gate of the Palace of Industry – the main rotunda – was created by famous Viennese artists and sculptors. It was designed by Ferdinand Laufberger (1829–1889), professor of decorative painting at the Vienna Academy of Art, and Edmund von Hellmer (1850–1935). The Austria above the main gate into the Exposition draws the nations to her in a protective gesture (analogous to that of Galicia) as she stands over the crowds visiting the exhibition. This representation emphasises the unifying character of the fair, and the themes of peace, prosperity and plenty illustrate the achievements of the liberal bourgeoisie, whose celebration of international success this was.

This liberal-progressive trend found its continuation in Lviv: the themes of the sculptural group by Leonardo Marconi crowning the Galicia Savings Bank (1890) are capitalism and liberal values. This, however, corresponded with the broader iconography of a newly emergent system of values that was manifested in Bertholdi's Statue of Liberty of 1886. Here, the allegoric image revolves in a broad orbital

path of symbols of universal modernity with a subtle semantic link to ancient mythology. These inspirations by antiquity reference Ancient Greece by evoking images of archaic deities such as Hecate, goddess of crossroads and connected with the sinister world of spells and phantoms, depicted as a *femme* with a burning torch rushing through the dark night.

Thus, to recap, attempts to mythologise political structures and bestow on them symbolic meanings were a widely used method in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in relation to Galicia as elsewhere.

From the formal angle, the prototype for creation of the image of Galicia was Austria herself and her representations in art. The distinguishing feature and to an extent the very purpose (vocation) of Galicia was the special role of eastern outpost of the civilisation of the West. The representations discussed in this article illustrate a range of methods of "allegorisation", for the most part various examples of iconographic transformations in an atmosphere of 19<sup>th</sup>-century historicism. Another deduction is that artistic representations of Galicia in terms of methods of theory and symbolism were constructed by external forces, imported, and grafted onto local soil, and bore fruit only in subsequent periods.

How does the myth of Galicia function in the artistic process thereafter, when towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> national ideas are dominant? At this point an entirely different mechanism kicks in (which, *nota bene*, demonstrates the effectiveness of the operations of the first). This involves attempts at creation or generalisation, attempts at identification and refinement of the concept of "Galician" through the prism of local, national and supranational identities. These were best reflected in the architecture of Lviv and in attempts to capture the essence of a Galician style. One proponent of the name "Galician style" was Edgar Kovács, a Hungarian by birth, the author of the interior design of the Galician Pavilion at the World Expo in Paris in 1900. As a regional, and at once supranational idea, this style attempted to operate in place of or alongside the (Polish) Zakopane style and the (Ukrainian) Hutsul style. But the idea for a Galician style could not compete with the expression of a stronger regional identity, whose foremost incarnation was the Zakopane style. This type of architecture and decorative art on the other side of the Carpathians, in the Hutsul region, was known as the East Galician

7 H. Struve (ps. Florian Gąsiorowski), "Kronika włoska", *Kłósy*, 9 April 1881, p. 252.

8 Ibidem.

style, and later as *Hutsul Sezession*, or the Ukrainian style.

And in this sense, in this process, Galicia is revealed to us as nothing other than a local, provincial version of the Habsburg myth. Such a view of Galicia is a faithful reflection of the nature of the fundamental conflict in the monarchy on the Danube – the conflict between the supranational, universal empire based on order and loyalty, which could not produce any model of “imperial nationalism” of its own, and the national aspirations of its many subjects.

Though Galicia left the stage a hundred years ago, its image made a spectacular comeback towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the interim period of mental obsolescence, the territory of Galicia had become bisected, producing two Galicias – the Polish and the Ukrainian. There were also various notions, which essentially concurred, but ultimately formed two different concepts – that of Galicia and that of Halych. In art there is a marked difference in role, significance and conceptual scope of the myth of Galicia in Galicia and in Halych.

The Polish part is a multifaceted revision of the mythology surrounding the imperial and royal tradition. Nostalgic generalisation, private stories and family traditions are far more common as subjects in literature and language than in static representative art. Contemporary art in relation to Galicia focuses on narrative and operates using the meta-language of memory, often in the fantasy convention. Its central tendencies are regional curiosity and, more broadly, Galicia as a locus of co-existence of many cultures and nations, sometimes seen from an angle befitting a European Union country. One of the more important events in the relationship between contemporary art and Galicia was the project mounted by the BWA Sokół gallery in Nowy Sącz as a cycle of five international artistic presentations on Galicia. These were representations of the stories of the various nations in the former empire. The exhibition, conceived as a means of showcasing a mythical portrait of the mythical Galicia as a lost “private homeland”, and her status of “being outside of history”<sup>9</sup>, also showed the role

it befell Galicia to play, that of myth, of being a pretext, an attribute to a ritual, and in no way an object of literal artistic activity.

In its Ukrainian part, Galicia formally became Halychyna. Here, her myth is connected above all with the Ukrainian history of striving for independence, with aspirations towards the European Union; this is a highly politically charged myth. Aside from the fact that there is a narrative strand, Galicia itself is treated as a subject of art, and this is a significant difference compared to the Polish and wider Western part. Galicia has become an *objet d'art*, a demonstration.

Transformations and representations of Galicia both literal and metaphoric begin to appear in the paintings of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk artists from the beginning of the 1990s. The leading proponent of Galicia as a theme in Ukrainian art is the Lviv artist Vlodko Kostyrko (b. 1967), one of the ideologists of Galician separatism, which he treats as an artistic project. His paintings, made in a Baroque manner à la Caravaggio and furnished with captions in Ukrainian but in the Latin alphabet, combine to form a Halych gallery with a pro-West European orientation. Kostyrko revives the image of Galicia created by Rygier and subsequently relegated to the boxroom of history, brings it back into the forum of public discourse, and hands Galicia a sword of victory. Galicia assumes a diverse array of figures, is shown in various ways based on blending ingredients of history with a touch of irony and eroticism, beginning with a gallery of the kings and elites from the time of the Principality of Halych, through the current of nostalgia and romanticism, a picture of the city of Lviv and its tradition as a capital city, to the former Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria, the times “under Our Respectful Mother Austria” and above all the much-loved Emperor Franz Joseph. In place of the irritatingly two-dimensional official “peasant” version of Ukraine’s past – the reactivated myth of Galicia permits the creation of a proprietary Ukrainian “chivalric and royal” history.

*Translated from the Polish by Jessica Taylor-Kucia*

9 A. Budak, “Dyskurs nostalgii”, [in:] *Pasja ornitologa. Tworzenie mitu / Passion of an Ornithologist. On Myth Making*, exh. cat. at Galeria Sztuki

Współczesnej BWA Sokół, ed. M. Skowrońska, trans. J. Curran Davis, A. Chwastowicz, Nowy Sącz 2011, pp. 12–13.