A
amsterdam university college
UC

AUC Undergraduate Journal of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Capstone Issue Vol. 19 2022

UNIVERSITY
OF AMSTERDAM

inprint.

VU UNIVERSITY
AMSTERDAM

AUC Undergraduate Journal of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Capstone Issue Vol. 19 2022

Published by
inprint.

Amsterdam University College

Humanities

Painting Post-War Poland

Exploring Polish-Jewish History through Wilhelm Sasnal’s *Such A Landscape*

Melania Miekus

Supervisor
Dr. Janna Schoenberger (AUC)
Reader
Dr. Angela Bartholomew (VU)

Abstract

This capstone focuses on Wilhelm Sasnal’s exhibition entitled *Such a Landscape* from 2021 at the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw (Polin), which presents the artist’s works engaging with the theme of Polish-Jewish history. I argue that Wilhelm Sasnal uses landscape as a tool to interrogate the traces of the Holocaust in Poland’s everyday life, asserting the inner links between Polish identity and Holocaust history. This will be achieved through a formal and content analysis of selected paintings as well as the exhibition spaces, enriched by an analysis of the political, historical, and cultural context of Poland’s relationship to the Holocaust. This study is significant as it offers a new perspective on Polish-Jewish history by understanding it through the lens of Sasnal’s landscapes. Furthermore, this analysis enriches the ongoing debate on the Holocaust’s position within Polish identity and offers new insight into a largely unprocessed strand of Polish history.

Keywords and phrases: *Wilhelm Sasnal, Holocaust, Polish-Jewish history, Landscape, Abstraction*

Suggested citation:
Miekus M. (2022). Painting Post-War Poland: Exploring Polish-Jewish History through Wilhelm Sasnal’s *Such A Landscape AUC Undergraduate Journal of Liberal Arts and Sciences*, 19(1) pp. 126-145

inprint.

Contents

1 Introduction 128

2 Research Context 128

3 Methodology 130

4 Chapter Outline 131

5 Chapter One: Situating *Such a Landscape*: Spatial and Historical Contexts 131
- 5.1 Polin: A Space for Remembering . . . 131
- 5.2 *Such a Landscape*: Curation and Design . . . 132
- 5.3 The Artist's Voice . . . 133

6 Chapter Two: Removing and Exposing: Analyzing Sasnal's Landscapes 134
- 6.1 *Kraków - Warszawa* and *Chlew*: Mislabeling . . . 134
- 6.2 *Kapusta*: Disturbing by Making Familiar . . . 135
- 6.3 *Pierwszy Stycznia*: Distancing . . . 137

7 Chapter Three: The Effects of Sasnal's Visual Language 139
- 7.1 Abstraction and Realism . . . 139
- 7.2 Depicting the Undepictable . . . 139
- 7.3 Narrative Enhancement . . . 140
- 7.4 A Mobilized Viewer . . . 141
- 7.5 Landscape: A Work of the Mind . . . 141
- 7.6 Imagining the Holocaust Landscape . . . 141
- 7.7 A Landscape of Polishness . . . 142

8 Conclusion 143

List of Figures

Fig.1: Zbigniew Libera, Lego. Concentration Camp, 1996 . . . 129
Fig.2: Joanna Rajkowska, *Oxygenator*, 2007 . . . 130
Fig.3: Exterior of Polin, Warsaw . . . 131
Fig.4: Interior of the large corridor entrance of Polin, Warsaw. . . . 132
Fig.5: Interior of Polin, Warsaw. . . . 132
Fig.6: View of *Such A Landscape*, Polin, Warsaw. . . . 133
Fig.7: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Murzynek Bambo], 2014.* . . . 133
Fig.8: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Kraków – Warszawa*, 2006. . . . 135
Fig.9: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Chlew*, 2011. . . . 135
Fig.10: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Kapusta*, 2013. . . . 136
Fig.11: View of the shoe piles in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, Oświęcim. . . . 136
Fig.12: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Pierwszy Stycznia* (side), 2021. . . . 137
Fig.13: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Pierwszy Stycznia* (back), 2021. . . . 137
Fig.14: Gerhard Richter, *Untitled (Grey)*, 1968. . . . 139
Fig.15: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Shoah (Forest)*, 2003. . . . 140
Fig.16: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Untitled*, 2016. . . . 141

1 Introduction

The Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal (born 1972), attempts to work through what it means to be Polish by addressing the problematic aspects of his nation's history in his art. Sasnal calls himself a realist in that he depicts what already exists before him, whether that be his wife driving a car, food items, or politicians on TV ("Conversation"). Polish-Jewish history emerges as one of such themes that was always in Sasnal's field of vision. He says he finds himself drawn to Holocaust history. However, at times, "against his own will," (Sasnal, "Oprowadzanie") he continuously works with the remnants of this complex past that persists in translating itself into the present. Moreover, Sasnal undertakes the questions of Jewish history from a non-Jewish Pole's perspective. His art, therefore, invokes a tension between an insider and an outsider position. This part of his oeuvre was exhibited in 2021 at the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw (Polin) in an exhibition entitled *Such a Landscape* (2021). The show sparked considerable media attention, being Sasnal's first exhibition in Poland after 14 years. The artist has become almost a mythical figure in Polish culture with his success abroad (Szabłowski). This time he returned to his homeland with a widely acclaimed exhibition curated by the internationally recognized Adam Szymczyk[1]. *Such a Landscape* contains Sasnal's works from the last twenty years: some engage directly with the subject of the Holocaust, while others subtly play with the memory, associations, and mainstream visual culture connected to the topic. Sasnal takes a unique approach by focusing on Polish mental and physical landscapes and challenging their supposed neutrality. This capstone shows how Sasnal uses landscape as a tool to interrogate the traces of the Holocaust in Poland's everyday life, asserting the inner links between Polish identity and Holocaust history.

Further, as explained by Tokarska-Bakir, the Holocaust history "re-visits its changing audiences like a recurring dream even though the actors have long left the theatre" (3). Indeed, the tragedy inscribes itself on the present Polish landscape, whether through contemporary artists working within this theme or through recent political discourse aimed at safeguarding certain WWII narratives (Belavusau 37). Therefore, a need for a working-through of this strand of Polish-Jewish history echoes through Poland's societal landscape, and Sasnal, among other artists, undertakes this enterprise. The relevance of my research lies in assessing whether Sasnal's *Such a Landscape* exhibition impacts the discourse on the Holocaust in Poland. Does Sasnal offer a different perspective on a story told and re-told so many times? How does his exhibition fit into Poland's cultural landscape? Is it disruptive? This analysis is significant because it facilitates a discussion of the current relationship between Polish and Jewish WWII histories through a new perspective: Sasnal's landscapes.

Furthermore, the current crisis on the Polish-Belarussian border originating from rapid and uncoordinated migration adds another level of significance to Sasnal's exhibition. The artist acknowledges that because *Such a Landscape* engages in the theme of the 'other' within the Polish context, it can also be universalized to think about the situation on the border; specifically looking at the mechanisms that reveal the ongoing 'othering' of non-Poles ("Oprowadzanie"). Nevertheless, this study's primary objective is to analyze Sasnal's visual language to understand the intricacies between Polish identity and Jewish history.

2 Research Context

Poland's World War II history comprises a significant part of the nation's institutionalized heritage. Moreover, as highlighted by Sienkiewicz, Poland "is fond of dwelling on its war history and insurgent martyrology". Nevertheless, discussions on Jewish-Polish relations within the WWII framework are not met with the same enthusiasm in the realm of public discourse. Poland's relationship to the Holocaust remains an area of historical taboo as its traces "are perceived as damaging 'for the psychological equilibrium or identity' of the nation," (Tokarska-Bakir: van den Braembussche 6). While the process can be observed in Polish state institutions, the 1990s have seen a proliferation in arts and literature aiming to violate this taboo.

Most famously, Jan T Gross's book *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, (2000) has brought to light common practices of Poles wilfully committing crimes against their Jewish neighbors during WWII (133)[2]. The writer brings forward the story of Jedwabne, where half of the town's population killed its other Jewish half in atrocious crimes, such as trapping Jews in a barn and burning it down (20)[3]. In addition, the book moves away from the "perpetrators-victims-bystanders" axis, revealing its insufficiency in understanding the Holocaust history in Poland (12). Hannah Maischein, in "The Historicity of the Witness: The Polish Relationship to Jews and Germans in the Polish Memory Discourse of the Holocaust" (2018), also visualizes this complexity. She writes, "Poles could have been victims themselves, could murder or harm the Jews and therefore be considered perpetrators, and they could also help the Jews and therefore be remembered as heroes" (225). Moreover, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir analyzes the public reaction to Gross's book in her piece "Poland as the sick man of Europe? Jedwabne,

---

[1] Recipient of the Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement.

[2] Gross also writes about other pogroms carried out by Poles. Among them, he focuses on the Radziłów Pogrom of 1941 where a documented 800 Jews were killed by Polish "hooligans" (Gross 57).

[3] Gross quotes Szmul Wasersztajn's witness testimony outlining what happened in Jedwabne.

'Post-memory' and Historians" from 2003. She views the success of Gross's book as a symptom of an "epidemic of post-traumatic neurosis"(3): the book unexpectedly sold out and entered most fields of public discourse in Poland, thereby revealing the ongoing vitality of Holocaust history.

The relevance of the Holocaust history can also be observed in Poland's contemporary political scene. Uladzislau Belavusau, in "The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland" (2018), examines the phenomenon with attention to Poland's political climate. In 2018, the ruling nationalist right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS)[4] implemented a 'memory law' officially aimed at "countering misinformation" (Belavusau 42) about the Polish involvement in the Holocaust. Memory laws seek to regulate the different collective memories into a structured cultural memory that is in line with the current politics and self-image of the nation[5]. Belavesau argues that in the Polish context, the law is a guise for reverting to "populist identity-formation" by "mainstreaming nationalist historiography" (38). He ties this specific event to the broader context of memory laws in Europe that originate from Germany's implementation of criminal laws against Holocaust denial in the 1980s (38). Further, he indicates the years from 2010 onwards as a moment when many European countries implemented memory laws ranging in forms – "punitive and declarative, constitutional and administrative, legislative and judicial" – aimed at "counteracting historical disinformation" (38). PiS implemented such a law in 2018, illustrating the significance of the Holocaust debate to contemporary Poland's identity formation. The inclusion of such a law sponsors a specific history that dismisses any wrongdoings of Poles during WWII and instead commits to investigating violence perpetrated solely on Polish citizens, thereby supporting martyrological narratives (42).

Moreover, the memory law was met with backlash from Ukraine and the USA and deteriorated Polish Israeli relations (28). In response to the criticism, PiS minister Mateusz Morawiecki issued a statement explaining that the law aims to hold accountable those who spread misinformation about Poles' involvement in Nazi crimes and to condemn the denial of Poles' suffering under Nazi rule (Morawiecki qtd. in Belavusau 28). The phenomenon illustrates Poland's effort to safeguard its victim status and discredit accounts that undermine it, thereby further reinstating the taboo status to incidents like Jedwabne.

Nevertheless, the visual arts rarely reflect the state's position and have long been a locus for alternative representations of Polish-Jewish relations. The artists that have lived through WWII represent the Shoah differently than later generations. As argued by Feinstein, the 1990s marked a shift from sanctification to "deconstruction and innovation." The rules of depicting this history loosened, and the lines between what kind of representation is appropriate or not blurred. The artists belonging to this wave can be understood as what Marianne Hirsch describes as the "generation of postmemory" (347). They come after those who "witnessed cultural or collective trauma" (Hirsch 347) and remember what happened through existing accounts. This mechanism typically concerns the families marked by a traumatic past; however, Tokarska-Bakir shows how this memory transcends its immediate recipients. She calls it a phenomenon of displacement: "it occurs in a surrogate, symbolic place and moment, in a location removed in space and time from the events to which it refers" (4). Tokarska-Bakir further argues that this post-traumatic culture is not looking for healing, but is obsessively staring into its wound (4). Several Polish artists are products of this moment in time.

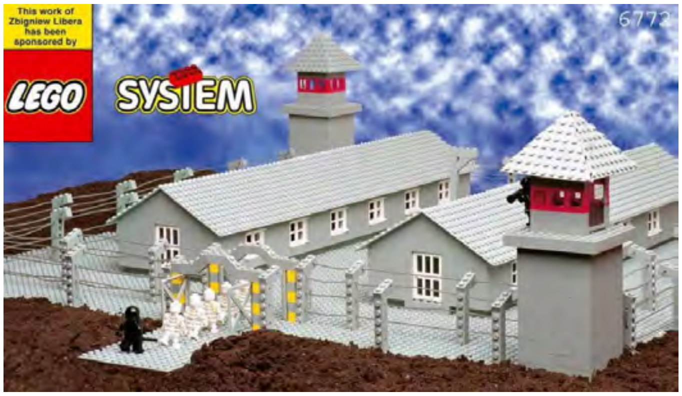
This work of Zbigniew Libera has been sponsored by
LEGO
SYSTEM
6772

Figure 1: Zbigniew Libera, *Lego. Concentration Camp*, 1996, a box with legos, image from Contemporary Art Museum of Warsaw.

Zbigniew Libera is among the most famous Polish names working with the Holocaust history, known for his controversial (Feinstein) "Lego concentration camps" (see figure 1). The artist's pop-art objects comment on processes of commodification that reach over most aspects of reality. The piece can be read as a comment on the naturalization of antisemitism within mainstream culture as well as a visual provocation that tests the limits of representation. Libera's project represents a more polarizing approach towards Holocaust depictions, visualizing one way of engagement. Nevertheless, other Polish artists choose a more subtle method.

Joanna Rajkowska has been in the spotlight for creating Warsaw's first counter-monuments[6]. Her work *Oxygenator* is situated in the former Warsaw Ghetto territory, a space she describes as too powerful to confront

---

[4] PiS is notoriously known for populist policies such as imposing severe bans on abortion and for attempts at centralizing free media ("The Observer View").

[5] For an alternative definition of memory law see Belavusau and Gliszczyńska-Grabias 1-3.

[6] Natalia Krzyżanowska defines counter-monuments as "new tools of commemoration in the urban environment" (110) that "often [depart] from sculptural, ornamental or figurative imagery in favour of 'non-standard' artistic pursuits" (116). They bring "to the fore all the marginal and marginalised discourses of memory, and of a discursive construction of collective identity" (110).

(Rajkowska). Her artwork gives the public a chance to reclaim the space by situating a pond within the greenery that provides a breath of fresh air - both literally and symbolically (see figure 2)[7]. In the words of Rajkowska, "[I] wanted people to feel that they have the right to public space, that they can determine its fate, that they have a voice as citizens. I gave them the right, as it were, to Plac Grzybowski." The state sponsors a heavy commemoration of specific war narratives that marks places like these as untouchable. In contrast, Rajkowska makes the idea of healing and moving past traumatic histories viable. The two examples by Libera and Rajkowska hint at the complexity of artistic responses to the Holocaust in Poland, Sasnal's landscapes being one of them.

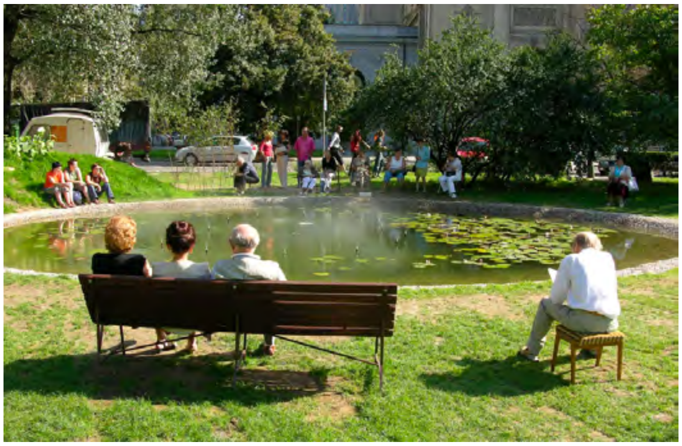

Figure 2: Joanna Rajkowska, *Oxygenator*, 2007, Grzybowski Square, Warsaw.

Sasnal's handling of the Holocaust history is unique as it dismisses Poland's efforts to separate the Holocaust from Polish history. Within that, it draws from Gross's enterprise in *Neighbors*. Gross writes that his book challenges "standard historiography of the Second World War,"(8) which splits its wartime history among two separate axes: "one pertaining to the Jews and the other to all the other citizens of a given European country subjected to Nazi rule" (8). He stresses the obsoleteness of this strategy in a Polish context, considering that Jewish people comprised one-third of Poland's urban population (8). He argues that Jewish history must be viewed as a central part of "Poland's modern history" (9). Sasnal's art carries out a similar objective by exposing its audience to traces of the Shoah in objects typical of every Polish landscape. The audience must then critically-assess their implication in this complex history.

Furthermore, Sasnal's interest in the landscape genre can be situated as a piece of a larger academic conversation. This capstone's analysis centers around understanding landscape as a tool that can reveal more significant societal and cultural phenomena. Simon Schama undertook this enterprise in his book *Landscape and Memory* (1995). Schama examines how landscapes construct and reflect cultural and national identities, thereby setting the framework for thinking about landscape as more than non-interfering nature. Another scholar working in this field, Martin Pollack, adds to the understanding of landscape specific to post-war Eastern Europe. His term "contaminated landscapes" that refers to sites of mass killings "perpetrated covertly" describes a large part of Poland's territory (qtd. in Tomczok 85). Sasnal depicts some of those areas in nuanced ways that aim to challenge the perceived innocence of landscapes.

Moreover, when situating Sasnal's works within the tradition of the Polish arts, one can see he is in conversation with the Romanticist visual language. In an interview with Banasiak, entitled "Przekleństwo Niepamięci," for *Szum* magazine (2021), Szymczyk expands on this argument, describing *Such a Landscape* as a progression from the heroic landscape genre typical of Polish Romanticism. He says he intended to "verify this great topos and to reduce it to something contemporary and specific."[8] Sasnal and Szymczyk are also interested in Poland's imaginary post-war landscape, often categorized in literature as empty, snow-covered, tragic, and beautiful (Szymczyk, "Przekleństwo"). The exhibition thus engages in a well-rounded analysis of what the Polish landscape came to represent. They invite the viewers to participate in this game of association and ambiguity, testing the limits of shared reading and understanding.

3 Methodology

The methodology of this capstone will include a formal analysis of selected oil paintings from Sasnal's *Such a Landscape* exhibition: *Kraków - Warszawa* (2006), *Chlew* (2011), *Kapusta* (2013), and *Pierwszy Stycznia* (2021). Any image I discuss in extent is included in the capstone. However, note that as information on dimensions was often missing, they were left out. Many of the canvases are around 55 x 70cm, while *Chlew* stands out; it is much larger, stretching out across the whole first wall of the exhibition. Further analysis will draw from Poland's political, historical, and cultural context to situate Sasnal's works within the environment from which they emerge and to examine the Holocaust's place, or lack thereof, within the Polish mental and physical landscape. I will utilize interviews given by the artist about this specific exhibition to enrich the discussion by bringing forward Sasnal's intentions with an awareness of his possible biases. I will additionally draw from an interview I conducted with Sasnal for this capstone entitled "Conversation". Adam Szymczyk was responsible for selecting all the pieces in the exhibition. I have reached out to him but did not receive a response. I will thus consult existing interviews where Szymczyk discusses his curatorial choices to further understand the narrative being told by *Such a Landscape*. Moreover, the exhibition has been widely covered by the Polish media, allowing me to look at exhibition reviews among other secondary materials, including articles from major Polish newspapers such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Zwierciadło* as well as smaller artistic magazines such as *Szum*. This capstone will also use an extensive list of online sources from Polin's website: recordings of debates about the exhibition's topics and guided tours provided by different experts. This approach will facilitate a well-rounded discussion of Sasnal's visual strategies and will help the viewer understand the landscape as a tool for revealing deeper social themes.

---

[7] Rajkowska created *Oxygenator* in 2007 to commemorate the Warsaw ghetto (1940 - 1943) that at its peak held 450 000 people, the majority of whom were Jewish (Grabski).

[8] Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

4 Chapter Outline

This capstone will be divided into three main chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of Sasnal's *Such a Landscape*. The first chapter will be dedicated to analyzing the exhibition itself. It will examine the space, the design, the specific context, and the curating strategies used by Adam Szymczyk. This section will aim to establish the narrative that is presented, and the means used to craft it. The consecutive chapter will then consist of a close reading of four selected paintings from the exhibition. These specific paintings were chosen because they are emblematic of Sasnal's varying approaches to depicting the post-war landscape. More precisely, *Kraków - Warszawa* and *Chlew* will visualize Sasnal's approach of mislabeling, while the analysis of *Kapusta* will expose how Sasnal disturbs the viewer by making the object familiar. Lastly, *Pierwszy Stycznia* will reveal the distancing approach used by the artist. Finally, the third chapter will connect the findings to their broader implications for Sasnal's art. Specifically, the treatment of abstraction and landscape will be assessed in more detail. This section will connect the arguments made throughout the paper and evaluate what they can add to the current discourse on the Holocaust history in Poland.

5 Chapter One: Situating *Such a Landscape*: Spatial and Historical Contexts

5.1 Polin: A Space for Remembering

In this chapter, I will present the history and context of the Polin museum to examine how it influenced Szymczyk's and Sasnal's approaches. I will then zoom in on *Such a Landscape's* exhibition space, assessing the effects created by the chosen design and curatorial choices. Creating a museum about the history of the Polish Jews was envisioned by the Jewish Historical Institute in 1995 and came into being in 2012. The museum is a public-private partnership institution formed together by the government, the local government of Warsaw, and the Jewish Historical Institute (Polin, "About"). The museum project has additionally received significant foreign funding from the USA, Great Britain, and Germany (Polin, "About").

The institution's name, Polin, originates from a legend about the arrival of Jews to the Polish lands in the Middle Ages. In Hebrew, "Polin" means Poland, whereas "PO lin" means "rest here" (Polin, "Legends"). The 15^{th}-century legend recounts that while the Jews entered Polish forests, they were greeted by birds chirping "PO lin" and saw a leaf from the Gemara hanging on the trees, and knew this would be their new home (Bader qtd. in Gliński). By using this legend, Polin expands its scope of interest beyond WWII history. The museum's mission is to deliver "1000 years of Jewish life on Polish lands," thereby moving away from solely focusing on martyrological narratives, and positioning itself as a museum that documents Jewish life rather than death (Polin, "About"; Polin, "Budynek"). Polin views itself as a space for dialogue where the past, present, and future of Jewish-Polish history can be understood and discussed. It aims to contribute "to the mutual understanding and respect among Poles and Jews" (Polin, "About").

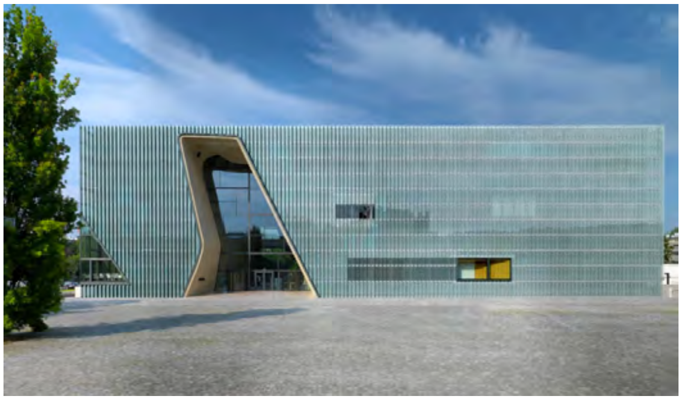
Figure 3: Exterior of Polin, Warsaw.

Furthermore, the museum is situated in a space of cultural and historical complexity. The building stands on what used to be the territory of the Warsaw Ghetto that enclosed the Muranów district, stretching across 18km in length. This region was one of 600 ghettos located on Polish territory during WWII (Grabski). Moreover, Polin is located across from the *Monument to the Ghetto Heroes* from 1946, which pays tribute to the victims. The museum's architecture is in conversation with the emotional charge of the square. The building was designed by Finnish architect Rainer Mahlamäki whose concept won over the jury that looked at 100 different projects for the Polin building, including designs by

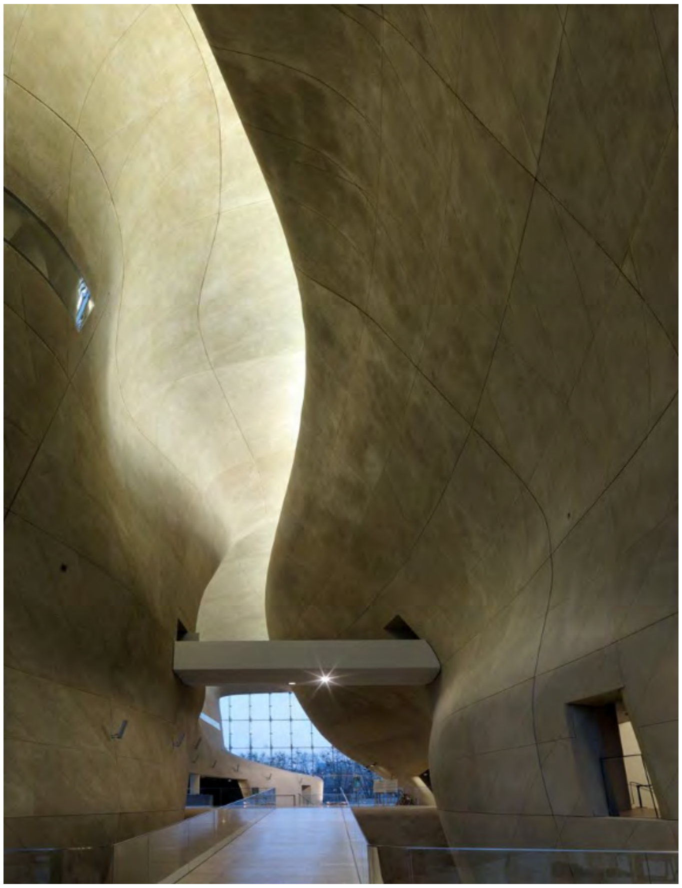

Figure 4: Interior of the large corridor entrance of Polin, Warsaw.

Daniel Libeskind (Polin, "Budynek"). Mahlamäki's concept speaks to Polin's mission of being a museum of life. The outside layer is a cube-like space covered in glass with inscriptions saying "Polin" (see figure 3).

The interior contains distorted walls that add dynamism and a feeling of flow to the space. These walls divide the museum among two axes and include a bridge that connects them, alluding to combining the past and the present (see figure 4). Windows cover the ceiling and walls to remind the spectators of the outside context (see figure 5). They add openness to the museum and remind the audience that the history being told here is not yet closed (Polin, "Budynek"). This design appropriately communicates the dynamism and the complexity of Jewish-Polish history.

Polin grants the space for temporary exhibitions to speak about different strands of Jewish history and culture. Their invitation of Sasnal is unique as it is Polishness rather than Jewishness that lies at the forefront of his art. Indeed, Sasnal is not mainly known for the part of his oeuvre that engages with Jewish history. Nevertheless, he has produced hundreds of paintings that speak to this topic (Szymczyk, "Przekleństwo"). What's more, in a debate with Szymczyk and Borchardt-Hume "Rozliczenie z Historią" (2021), Sasnal argues that Polin is perfect for displaying his paintings. He explains that, while he has avoided the term "political artist," he acknowledges that he becomes political by choosing to live in Poland and thus participating in political discussions and protests. When given a chance to say something through his art, he takes it ("Rozliczenie"). As a result, his art speaks to several political debates, although in subtle ways.

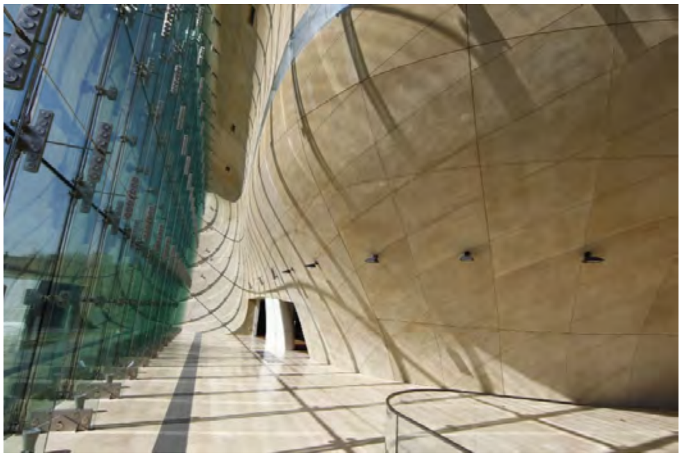

Figure 5: Interior of Polin, Warsaw.

5.2 *Such a Landscape*: Curation and Design

The context of the museum dictated Szymczyk's curatorial approach. He stresses that Polin is not a Holocaust museum, and thus *Such a Landscape* also refrains from focusing solely on this theme. He says that "these works are not only dealing with Jewish history but also addressing larger issues of hate of the others, xenophobia, and antisemitism today" ("Rozliczenie"). The selection includes 60 works from the span of 20 years of Sasnal's body of work which, together with the space's design, invite a nuanced viewing experience.

Szymczyk invited Johanna Meyer-Grohbrügge to design the interior of *Such a Landscape*. The visitors are led through a large room with small corridors that look like dead ends as they enter the exhibition. The white museum walls are covered in a thin tin layer for this show, allowing specific shapes and lights to be reflected (see figure 6). Sasnal admits he was worried about this exhibition design: "I was afraid this architecture was too present and too competitive for the paintings" ("Rozliczenie"). Nevertheless, Szymczyk was certain Meyer-Grohbrügge's design would intensify the viewing experience (Szymczyk "Rozliczenie"). The purpose of the tin material was to defamiliarize the viewers (Szymczyk "Rozliczenie"). When walking through these corridors, viewers see distorted reflections of their own body being forced to acknowledge their positionality within this space and this history. The walls also partially reflect other paintings in deformed ways, distorting the displayed content. The visitors are thus kept on their toes, constantly carrying out plays of memory and association to decode the paintings. Further, all the corners are smoothed out, creating a gliding effect for the spectators. One flows from one room to the other without being confronted by any sharp turns or divisions. The space communicates that all these works, although different in form and content, belong to one whole. The space thus becomes a distinct landscape that leads you through the exhibition's narrative.

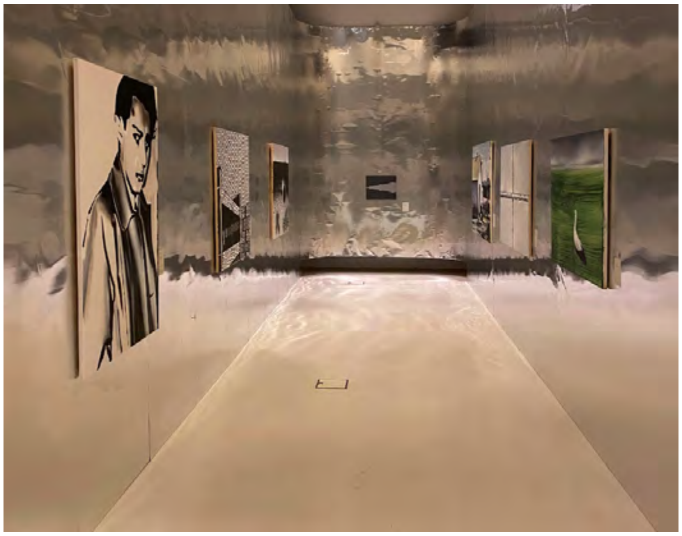

Figure 6: View of *Such A Landscape*, Polin, Warsaw.

Viewers must analyze the narrative of *Such a Landscape* in regard to Sasnal's and Sczymczyk's sensibilities. Both men explain their interest in landscape in the interview with Banasiak. They have personal stories that they view as moments emblematic of their critical re-evaluation of landscapes. These stories concern realizing that they live near Jewish graveyards - spaces of mass killings - whose existence has been normalized (Banasiak "Przekleństwo"). Szymczyk would walk by one such graveyard most days; it was right next to the supermarket, separated from the street by a stone wall. Sasnal strolled through a forest near his home and stumbled upon a space where hundreds of Jews had been killed. These stories inform the exhibition. Moreover, Szymczyk's approach also complicates the term "landscape." He plays with it by including paintings in the show that have nothing to do with this genre. The viewer's idea of what a landscape is becomes disturbed in the exhibition. Disruption of points of view and expectations, therefore, reappears as a prevalent theme in the exhibition.

5.3 The Artist's Voice

Moreover, a key characteristic of Sasnal's artworks is ambiguity. It is reflected in his hazy brushstrokes as much as in his politics. The artist strays away from revealing his political stance in direct ways. Instead, he opens up debates for viewers to engage with. One of the paintings that visualize this point is *Murzynek Bambo* from 2014 (see figure 7). The painting's title refers to a children's poem written by Julian Tuwim (1894-1953), a writer who occupies an important place in Poland's cultural memory. Tuwim's children's stories are read in most Polish households. *Murzynek Bambo* is one of such tales. In it, Tuwim invents the character of a young African boy who studies diligently at school, but when he returns home, he likes to frolic and cause his mom trouble. Tuwim himself, a Pole of Jewish descent, wrote the story in 1935 - a period when there were few people of color in Poland. Although the story is sympathetic towards its protagonist, it contains blatant racial stereotypes. Sasnal depicts this character in his 2014 painting, as indicated by the title. The piece contains abstract forms, floral motifs, and a small black figure standing towards the bottom of the canvas.

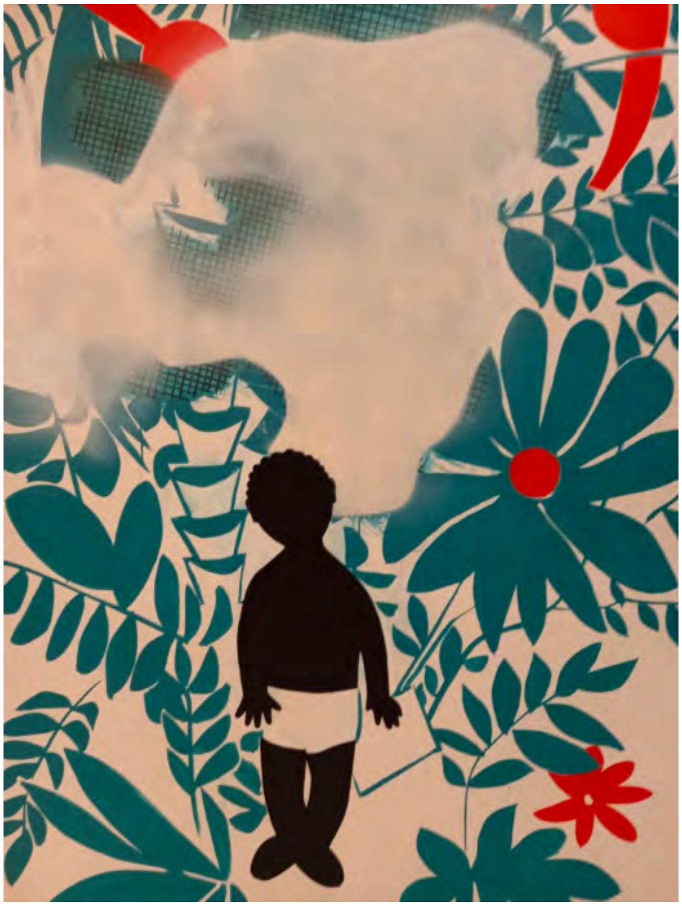

Figure 7: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Murzynek Bambo*, oil on canvas, enamel spray, 2014, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

One point of controversy has been surrounding Sasnal's choice to keep the original title. Art historian Małgorzata Baka, specializing in Sub Saharan art, took part in a debate entitled "The Other in Art" (2021), organized and hosted by Polin in conjunction with Sasnal's exhibition. She outlines the origin of the word "murzynek" stemming from “Maurus,” which means dirt, highlighting that the word always existed as a pejorative term. Nevertheless, this word has been widely naturalized due to its inclusion in casual vocabulary and literature, as exemplified by Tuwim’s poem. Moreover, while there has been some growth in debates on race in Poland in the last few years, they do not yet translate into mainstream public beliefs. Sasnal, like many Poles, did not see the need to remove the phrase from his dictionary when he painted the work (Sasnal “Cztery Oczy”). However, the artist shares that after many debates with his son, he now understands the effort of moving away from such stereotypically charged phrases (“Cztery Oczy”). Despite this belief, he did not change the work’s title for the exhibition.

Although controversial, the work reveals a more prominent characteristic of *Such a Landscape*. That is, asking the viewer to practice a critical gaze to evaluate Polishness through revisiting things that quietly exist in its cultural identity. What interests Sasnal is that Tuwim, who was himself an ‘other’ in Polish society, wrote about a character that was even more ‘othered’ within that context. Now, as this issue offers complex insight into the practice of imposing hierarchies of people perceived as foreign to a particular nation or society, it also reinforces problematic assumptions. Sasnal said that he does not think Tuwim was trying to be racist, as he was Jewish and thus was himself an outsider (“Cztery Oczy”). Sasnal is thus led by the assumption that Tuwim’s ethnicity clears him from having racist intentions when writing the story. This naive belief is a fallacy: anyone can be racist regardless of ethnicity. While Sasnal’s sympathy towards Tuwim can be symptomatic of his environment where antisemitism is prevalent, we must critically assess his approach. Sasnal redeems Tuwim due to his outsider position, but *Bambo’s* depiction remains a dark unindividualized figure that represents a stereotype but does little to dismantle it. In that sense, the viewer is left with ambiguity when trying to decipher the politics behind this painting. Nevertheless, the inclusion of *Bambo* in *Such a Landscape* is significant in exposing complicated strands of Polish culture. By removing the image of *Bambo* from its usual context - a children’s poem book - Sasnal invites the audience to critically assess it, undermining its neutrality.

It is, therefore, evident that *Such a Landscape* does not purely focus on Holocaust history. The point of contact between all the works is Sasnal’s interrogation of Poland’s cultural and historical landscape. Ruchel-Stockmans illustrates this strategy well. She writes that Sasnal is “attracted to themes and figures from his country’s past because he wants to know what it means to be Polish and at the same time needs to disengage himself from that legacy and identity” (218). Entering into conversation with materials silently existing within Polish culture and making them yet again visible through his art is one of Sasnal’s forms of engagement with his Polishness.

6 Chapter Two: Removing and Exposing: Analyzing Sasnal’s Landscapes

How does one depict a landscape that has witnessed war and horror? Schama describes Poland as a “haunted land where greatcoat buttons from six generations of fallen soldiers can be discovered lying amidst the woodland ferns” (24). It is a place with, “raw, chafing histories torn from decades of official silence yet still imperfectly recovered; markers freshly dug or posted” (25). Sasnal engages with precisely these complex historical elements within his works; he reads through them and faces them, yet never in direct ways. Indeed, the Polish-Jewish history that Sasnal addresses in his art is heavy and dark, and he, therefore, sets strict boundaries for ways in which he can depict it. He views direct and bare representations of the Holocaust landscape as “perverse and banal” and thus always places distance between himself and this history (Sasnal, “Cztery Oczy”). This distance is created by placing objects between him and the landscape and employing abstraction. The discussion that follows will expose the artistic choices that keep Sasnal, “protected from the landscape” and that keep “the landscape protected from [him]” (Sasnal, “Cztery Oczy”).

6.1 *Kraków - Warszawa* and *Chlew*: Mislabeling

Kraków - Warszawa (2006) and *Chlew* (2011) are emblematic of Sasnal’s mislabeling approach. *Kraków - Warszawa* depicts a field with a single figure, an electrical tower, and a cloud of smoke (see figure 8). The oil paint exhibits expressive strokes to construct horizontal and diagonal lines that make up the green field. There are different shades of green with a white foreground peeking from underneath. The field takes up most of the canvas and transitions into a gray sky. The centrally positioned cloud of smoke emerges as the focal point of the painting. The cloud is dense in paint and brushstrokes, making it appear dynamic; one can perceive its motion through the wind. The figure resembles a human shape but maintains anonymity. We do not see an individual.

Chlew is a long, rectangular canvas that stretches along the first wall of the exhibition (see figure 9). The oil painting displays two large industrial buildings with white walls, gray roofs, and small black windows. The two structures are long and flat, unmarked, and lacking any individualizing characteristics. They look empty and dull, creating a cold and eerie atmosphere around them. A bright green field surrounds the buildings with some black vegetation and a muted blue sky. The grass field is similar to an ocean with its wave-like brushstrokes and hints of lighter color. The black bushes around the buildings add a disturbing feel to the painting; there is dark paint spilling out from under them, reminiscing flows of blood.

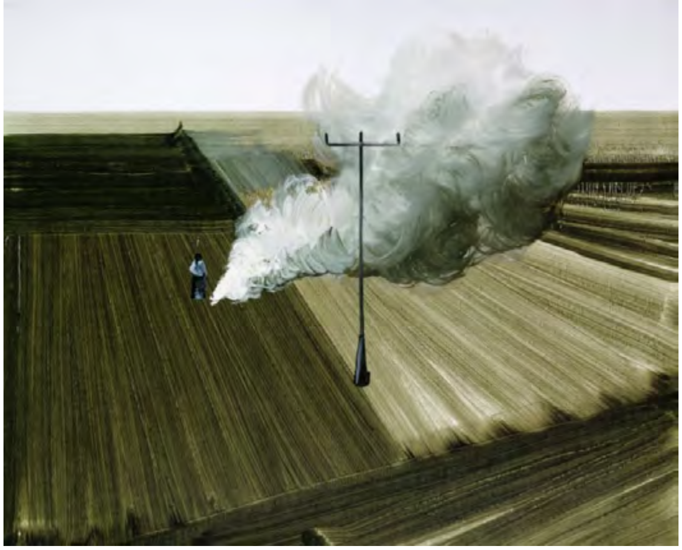

Figure 8: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Kraków – Warszawa*, 2006, oil on canvas, Zachęta collection, Warsaw.

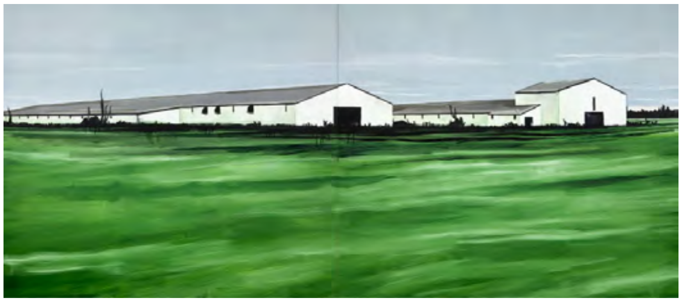

Figure 9: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Chlew*, 2011, oil on canvas, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

Schama writes that, “we are accustomed to think of the Holocaust as having no landscape - or at best one emptied of features and color (. . .)” (26). When the Holocaust does not have a recognizable and stable landscape in our minds, it can appear and reappear in many different places. Sasnal shows that the perception of the Holocaust landscape rests on specific symbols that our minds associate with this strand of history. The two different settings depicted in these paintings have no direct connotation with the Shoah. *Kraków - Warszawa* and *Chlew* represents Sasnal’s train journey from Kraków to Warsaw, during which he took a picture of the view exhibited in the painting. The view depicted is a figure burning some old leaves, but the viewer’s mind infers different meanings when first glancing at the image. Similarly, *Chlew* portrays an industrial pork slaughterhouse, yet is reminiscent of concentration camps’ barracks. Sasnal, therefore, invites the audience to participate in a play of mislabeling that exposes their expectations of the exhibition.

What I call ‘Sasnal’s mislabeling approach’ is a process that occurs in the viewer as an effect of Sasnal’s work. Sasnal makes space for the audience to project their expectations onto the canvas, causing a mislabeling of the depicted objects. The artist invites this process as it exposes and contradicts the viewer’s preconceived assumptions. One enters the museum of the history of the Polish Jews and sees *Chlew* as the first painting of Such a Landscape. Immediately the viewer begins inferring meanings. The two slaughterhouses look like barracks, and the dense smoke from *Kraków - Warszawa* and *Chlew* echoes the smoke from the gas chambers. Nevertheless, Sasnal deceives the audience. Indeed, it would be against his artistic sensibility to depict actual barracks and smoke clouds from the concentration camps. Instead, one sees everyday occurrences that gain new meanings when placed in this specific context. Sasnal thus makes the audience hyper-aware of their surroundings and how those affect their readings of his works. The setting, the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews, makes the viewers search for symbols and markers of the Holocaust. Sasnal plays with these assumptions by inviting the audience to see these markers in his paintings.

The most potent effect of Sasnal’s mislabeling approach is that it reveals more about the audience than about the artist: the viewer does the mislabeling. By including these two artworks in the Polin exhibition, which dives into post-war Poland’s mental and physical landscapes, Sasnal and Szymczyk dissect the audience’s expectation of the Holocaust landscape. This landscape lacks constant physical representation but disappears and reappears in the viewer’s mind throughout the exhibition. It is engraved in the Polish collective memory in the form of particular images. Sasnal plays with these expected visuals to unsettle the viewer’s preconceptions. What is revealed is that the Holocaust landscape is nowhere and thus simultaneously is everywhere. One sees it in the smoke clouds, industrial buildings, and everyday settings. Sasnal’s works invoke a paranoia captured by the re-emerging question: Is what I am seeing what I think it is? One suddenly sees the Polish-Jewish history lurking in every painting. The result of this enterprise is exposure to the Shoah through Poland’s everyday landscapes, thereby revealing they are not innocent.

6.2 *Kapusta*: Disturbing by Making Familiar

Kapusta (2013) is a medium-sized canvas depicting cabbage heads (see figure 10). The cabbage heads are stacked on top of each other and form one large pile. They are alike, however, they have some individualized traits. The insides of the cabbages are painted in light green shades with darker green contours, some more persistent than others. Sasnal adds depth to the cabbages by using visible brushstrokes in shades of green with white shading in the centers. Their shapes and colors are imprecise, with some of the heads blending into each other and others having some loose paint strokes. The depiction keeps its realist character in the figurative treatment of cabbage but is painted with a degree of abstraction. The background emerges from behind the vegetable pile and suggests a dark sky. This sky contains hues of grays and blues, and has some white strokes peeking from under the dark clouds. There is a dark shadow behind the pile, which dramatically brings out the color contrast between its dark hue and the light cabbages.

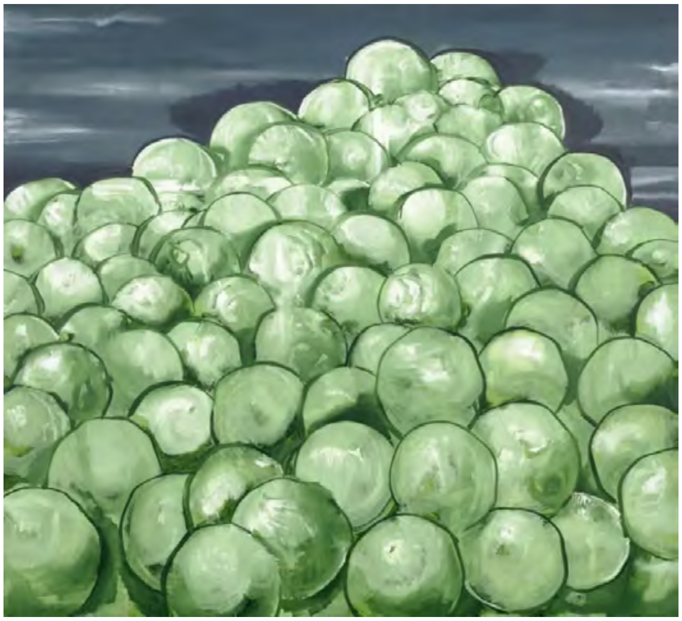

Figure 10: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Kapusta*, 2013, oil on canvas, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

The story of cabbage coming to Poland is one of the country's favorite myths that many children are taught in primary school. The tale goes that in the sixteenth century, the beautiful queen Bona Sforza, the Italian wife of Polish king Zygmunt the Old, had brought with her to Poland all kinds of wonderful vegetables, among those cabbages (Kucia). The vegetable has a sacred place in Polish history. It is also a very cheap and common vegetable found in most Polish households. Specifically, it is widely harvested in the countryside and fermented to become a staple food eaten all year round. It also has a prominent place on the Christmas table: it is used for "pierogi" (Polish dumpling), bread stuffing, and a "bigos" stew. It is also the main ingredient of the most traditional Polish soup, "kapuśniak" (cabbage soup), and a staple meat dish "gołąbki," which translates into "pigeon" but is actually pork wrapped in cabbage. Cabbage is also associated with life in communist Poland. It was one of the few readily available vegetables and was the star of the most typical dishes from that period, such as "łazanki" (small square pasta). Cabbage is thus embedded into Polish culture simultaneously as a symbol of poverty under the Polish People's Republic [9] as well as prosperity in rural Poland (Tymchowicz). Its cultural symbolism and importance in Polish cuisine thus foster its status as a symbol of Polishness. Within that, Sasnal depicts a typically Polish theme in his painting and disturbs its meaning.

Szymczyk discusses how the paintings included in Polin display a "withdrawal of content" ("Rozliczenie"): what you see is blurred, and what you know appears foreign. Indeed, the pile of cabbage is a familiar image, typical of walking past most street vegetable stands. However, Sasnal's depiction robs the vegetable of its familiarity, inviting new readings to be drawn by the audience. The round objects no longer suggest cabbages but human heads piled on top of each other. The depiction references the imagery of piles of items found in Holocaust museums.

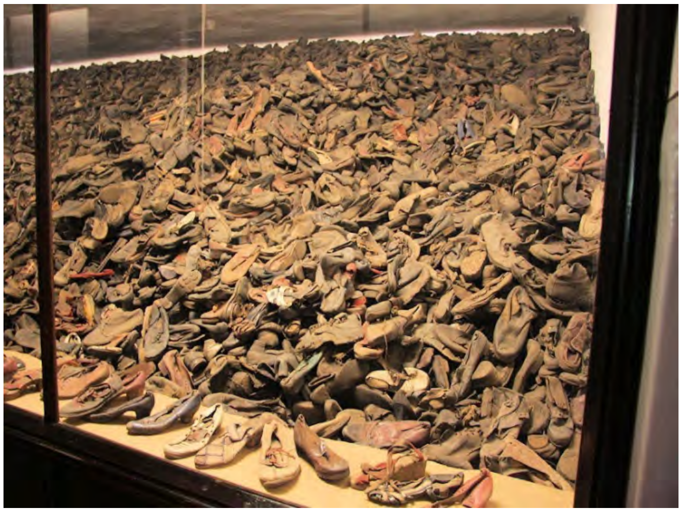

Figure 11: View of the shoe piles in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, Oświęcim.

Poland's Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum displays massive shoe piles behind a glass wall and a pile of hair of the concentration camp's prisoners (see figure 11). Sasnal shares that in his city, children went to see the Auschwitz Museum at the age of 13 ("Conversation"). He considers this age too young to be confronted with such imagery. The impact of the piles is straightforward and disturbing; I remember being horrified by these rooms when I first came to Auschwitz as part of a school trip. The pile imagery, thus, comes to haunt the viewer when facing *Kapusta*. The everyday landscape quickly acquires a dark and twisted connotation. The cabbage ceases to be a simple vegetable and is transformed to remind the audience of the victims of the Holocaust. Sasnal shows that even the most everyday objects have this history inscribed in them. The paranoia returns, forcing the viewer to rethink what appears before their eyes.

---

[9] Polish People's Republic was the official name of Poland in the years 1952 to 1989 when it was a communist state under USSR's political control.

Furthermore, Sasnal's *Kapusta* plays with Polish imagery to assert a connection between Polish identity and Holocaust history. The state-sponsored and institutionalized WWII history is categorized by narratives of heroes and bravery rather than by the nation's implication in Nazi crimes. As put by Gross, "the memory, indeed the symbolism, of collective, national martyrology during the Second World War is paramount for the self-understanding of Polish society in the twentieth century" (143). By connecting the typical Polish vegetable with the victims of the Holocaust, Sasnal is questioning the state-sponsored martyrological discourse of innocence around WWII. Poland's effort to safeguard its victim-status is further exemplified by the debate sparked by Gross's book *Neighbors*. Tokarksa-Bakir analyzes the public reactions to the book and systemizes the various responses into specific denial mechanisms. She views this, "mythological-type suppression,"(6) as the most prominent denial mechanism that attempted to segregate the perpetrators of Jedwabne's crimes into social outcasts. She shows how this attitude allows the nation to uphold its mythical moral purity. The implication is, "that whoever commits such a crime becomes an outcast by definition, and thus the nation that has issued him remains untarnished" (Tokarska-Bakir 6). The spokespeople of this denial mechanism imply that it was not ordinary Poles who murdered the Jews but rather troubled hoodlums. This strategy inscribes itself into the broader effort of the Polish government to separate Holocaust history from Polish history. Sasnal's painting complicates this effort.

In the painting, the Polish symbol of the cabbage is inherently connected to the dead bodies of Holocaust victims. The result is powerful in that the audience starts mistrusting everyday objects and begins scrutinizing Polish-Jewish history through them. The Polish cabbage loses its innocence, simultaneously causing a fracture in Poland's self-image relating to its Holocaust history. Moreover, the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were, in many cases, fully assimilated Poles; nevertheless, the post-war narratives tend to minimize their belonging to Polish society. In that sense, Sasnal's use of a very Polish object to allude to Holocaust victims can be read as the artist's attempt at safeguarding the Jews' position within Polish culture. Sasnal asserts the internal links between Poland's post-war identity and the Holocaust history by using these visual strategies. The artist refuses to separate the two histories into foreign strands, thereby disrupting the institutionalized WWII history's portrayal.

6.3 *Pierwszy Stycznia*: Distancing

Pierwszy Stycznia (2021) is one of the two most direct representations of the Holocaust in the exhibition, as it shows the gate of Auschwitz-Birkenau (see figures 12 and 13). The piece is a diptych based on a photograph Sasnal took while he and his wife, Anka, drove back from a New Year's Eve party in January 2021. The artist chose to take the route that passes by the Birkenau gate. In the interview, Sasnal told me he was shocked that he could stop his car on top of the train tracks that were used by Nazis to transport prisoners during WWII ("Conversation"). He felt the need to paint this experience ("Conversation").

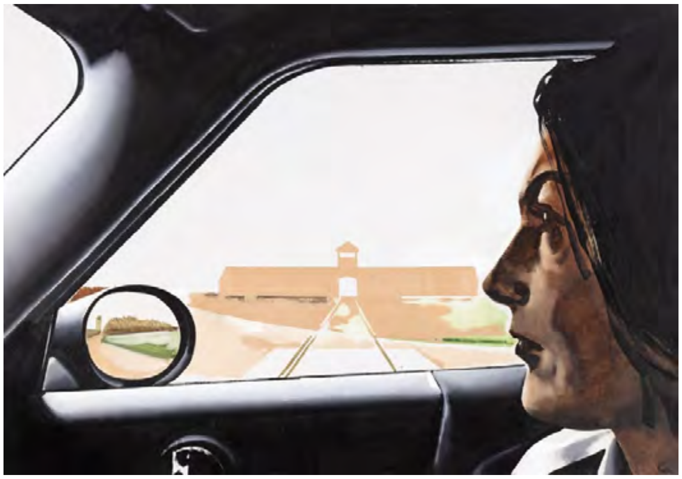

Figure 12: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Pierwszy Stycznia* (side), 2021, oil on canvas, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

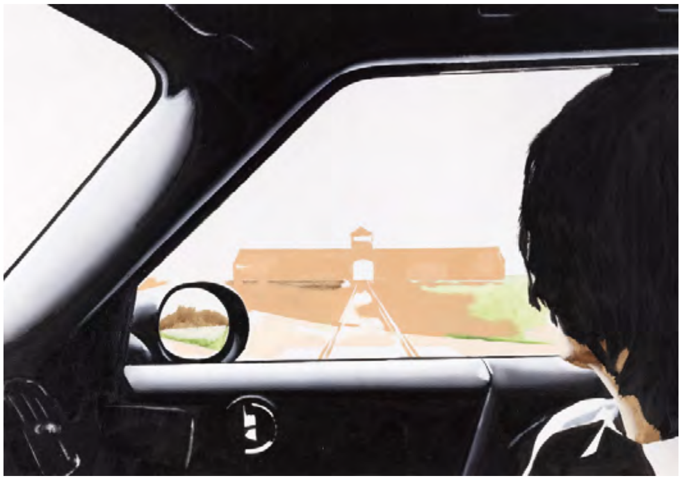

Figure 13: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Pierwszy Stycznia* (back), 2021, oil on canvas, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

Anka's face emerges in the foreground of the canvas. Her features are treated with detail: a shadow falls on the side of her face, and there are light spots on her eyelids, chin, and forehead. Anka's frowned eyebrows communicate a sense of focus or worry. In the side painting, she is looking towards the front, and in the back image, she is looking out the window towards the Birkenau gate. One can see Sasnal's characteristic meandering brushstrokes in the depiction of her hair.

The inside of the vehicle takes up the second layer of space within the painting. It is treated with a similar level of realism. There is light entering the car from the windows, which appear to be completely transparent, and they open into an abstract external world. The dark colors from the inside of the car contrast with the light hues of the outside view. The treatment of the gate is symmetrical and geometric but at the same time imprecise and blurred. The train track reaches from the couple's car until the opening of the gate; it is placed in the middle of the painting, inviting the viewer to follow it with their gaze.

While the car's interior is depicted quite realistically, the outside world is constructed with abstraction. The background is entirely white, and the gate and parts of the ground are painted in a shade of pink, with light green grass peeking through from the side. The structure appears to have no weight to it: an effect created by the lack of detail and light hues that merge into the ground. Thus, while Sasnal paints the Birkenau gate, he refuses to depict the structure accurately and directly.

Pierwszy Stycznia is almost an inverse of the processes at work in *Chlew*, *Kraków - Warszawa*, and *Kapusta*. While in the previous paintings, I have shown how Sasnal takes a neutral site and charges it, here he takes a charged site and neutralizes it. The gate's representation does not spark the horror it stands for. It is rather subdued to the point of loss of its identity. For Sasnal, painting is a "space for trial: what can be represented?" ("Cztery Oczy"). Here, he concluded that he could not directly represent the site's charged history ("Conversation").

Hannah Maischein writes that,

> "(...) witnesses are media themselves because they transmit what they have seen. Thus, they seem to allow a very auratic relationship to the historical event for others who come in contact with them: the trace of the event is inscribed in the witness' memory like the light on a photograph" (Maischein 216).

Maischein's argument can be expanded to think about landscape as a witness. Indeed, the Holocaust is inscribed in Birkenau's identity to the point of total domination of its history. Auschwitz acts as a space crucial to the cultural memory of European Jews and attracts millions of tourists yearly ("Aktualności"). For Poland, the place occupies a problematic space within the country's national identity. Its striking traumatic charge alienates the site from its surroundings; Auschwitz becomes an almost alien figure in Polish history used to tell stories of individuals, some of whom had little in common with this country. Indeed, there is a visible process of disavowal of these lands illustrated by the 2018 memory law discussed above. It condemns the discursive linking of Poland and the Holocaust through terms like "Polish concentration camps" (Belavesau). Thus, spaces of Nazi crimes are not seen as belonging to Polish towns but rather as foreign objects that happen to be there.

Nevertheless, Birkenau used to be like every other Polish town. In 1941 most of the citizens of Birkenau got forcibly reallocated to make space for the camp construction ("Mieszkańcy"). Some of the town's inhabitants came back to what was their home after the war. Today, Birkenau hosts around 2,500 people living around the remnants of the concentration camp ("Wieś Brzezinka").

Sasnal's *Pierwszy Stycznia* is in conversation with the history of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The interaction between the landscape and the drivers is simultaneously casual and extremely tense. The couple is on their way back from a party and passes Birkenau on their way home: this view is someone's everyday reality. It is not hidden away in a corner somewhere, but it merges with the roads of the Wisła region. On the other hand, there is an undeniable distance between the couple and the gate. Sasnal says, when asked about this painting, that he "always need[s] to have a prop that will cover me, distance me, from this landscape" ("Przekleństwo"). Here, the car and Anka act as such elements that put a literal and figurative distance between Sasnal and the gate. By depicting the image from within the vehicle, "the gate is not exposed to our presence which can be vulgar for both sides," says Sasnal ("Conversation"). To him, painting the direct realist image of Auschwitz would be a perversion (Sasnal, "Cztery Oczy"). He thus undertakes several strategies to distance himself from the landscape.

Anka acts as the most visible shield for the artist. She is closer to the view, Sasnal is behind her. He pays a lot of detail to her depiction, emphasizing her as an essential part of the artwork. Moreover, a perceived closeness to her figure creates a feeling of familiarity and protection. In that sense, the painting is a site of an interplay between intimacy and distance. Anka represents the former, while the Birkenau gate represents the latter. Sasnal uses this strategy to communicate the complexity of viewing Auschwitz in a casual setting. Bypassers are exposed to this view and the impossibility of grasping the crimes it stands for. The crimes deprive the place of its familiarity and its status of just another Polish town. Anka is thus a strong contrast to this setting.

The car is another tool that distances Sasnal and the audience from the landscape. On the one hand, it has a similar role to Anka in that it is a shield of familiarity for Sasnal. On the other hand, the materials that appear in the car have another significance. The window separates the couple from the Birkenau gate. It is through the see-through glass that we glance at this landscape. Sasnal depicted the window to be completely transparent, making it seemingly connected to the view while at the same time using it as a point of division. Moreover, looking through the window is an act of spectatorship. One can compare it to watching a film. It becomes easy to become a passive spectator separated from the image by being inside of the comfortable car. Yet, Sasnal took a photo of the view and painted it, thereby actively implicating himself in creating this landscape.

Finally, another critical element of the vehicle is the side mirror. Sasnal says that he leaves the meaning behind this element open to the audience (“Cztery Oczy”). While the mirror reflects what is already behind the car, it can invoke intentions of looking into the past. The modern interior of the car reminds the viewer that we are in the present, but the past is following us. This reading connects the dots between then and now to show that this history is imprinted on the present. Tokarska-Bakir refers to this phenomenon when stating the following question about the Shoah, “[w]hat is the mystery buried in the sixty-year-old tragedy that refuses to be dismissed (...)?”(3). Indeed, the Holocaust history comes back to haunt the generations who come after, among many ways, in the form of the contaminated landscapes. Sasnal, like many Poles, keeps staring into this past but constantly interrogates it through the present context.

7 Chapter Three: The Effects of Sasnal’s Visual Language

7.1 Abstraction and Realism

This section will consider the broader reasoning and effect behind Sasnal’s use of abstraction and will consecutively lead into a discussion of Sasnal’s use of landscape. Abstract forms reappear throughout the exhibition in different artworks. They are often invoked by Sasnal’s use of thick, expressive brushstrokes that stray away from figurative shapes. The viewer follows these strokes on a quest to decode the meaning behind the paintings and often discovers atrocities when piecing the components together. Further, as outlined by Redzisz, abstraction is felt in Sasnal’s works where, “objects [are] isolated from their original contexts, or enlarged to the point of losing their identity.” The objects are dramatized to distort their realist character and removed from their usual setting to denaturalize their innocence. Sasnal consciously meanders between styles to create specific effects. Hauser & Wirth’s exhibition catalog states that Sasnal, “navigate[s] between figuration and abstraction, eschewing a definitive narrative or agenda”. Indeed, such abstraction allows Sasnal to maintain a level of ambiguity, which is perhaps necessary when depicting histories that are so heavily charged.

7.2 Depicting the Undepictable

More generally, abstraction is one way to represent the Shoah visually.[10] Mark Godfrey explains the line of thought favoring this approach in *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (2007). He writes, “abstraction, as a non-representational art, is the most appropriate kind of art to respond to an event that is beyond representation” (6).[11] Godfrey, however, brings nuance to this approach by arguing that thinking about abstraction as art, which “refuses” meaning, is problematic as, “abstract art works can signify; can make meaning in so many different ways” (6). Sasnal’s paintings exemplify Godfrey’s argument: Sasnal’s abstract forms do not deprive the objects of their meaning but are used to create ambiguity, enhance narrative, and activate the audience’s readings. Further, Sasnal resorts to these forms specifically when directly referencing the Holocaust.

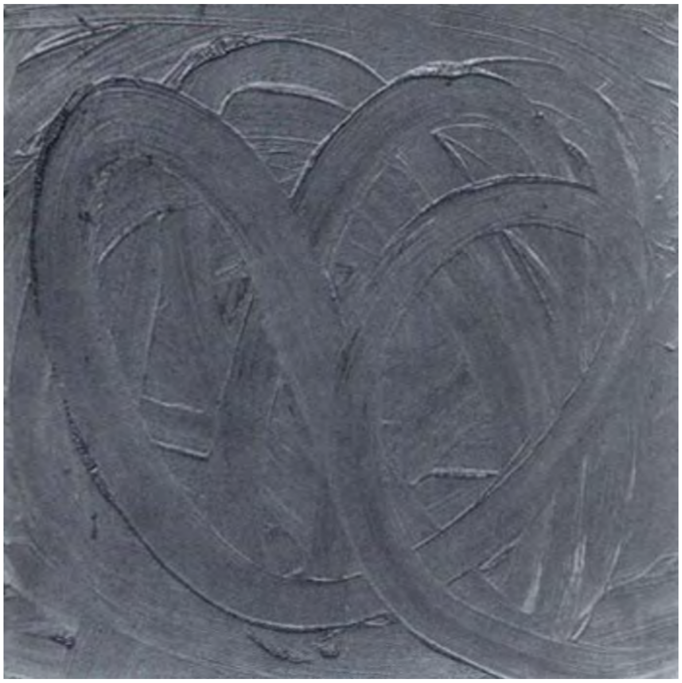

Figure 14: Gerhard Richter, *Untitled (Grey)*, oil on canvas, 1968.

The way in which the artist uses abstraction alludes to the art of Gerhard Richter, who also works with the Holocaust theme. The point of contact between the two artists is that they both aim to work through their position towards Shoah history. However, they come from different contexts. Richter, a German who has lived through WWII and whose family was involved in Nazism, directly relates to this history. Sasnal's case is more ambiguous. He belongs to the generation of postmemory and only "remembers" the Holocaust through existing accounts and images. It is yet evident that both artists resort to a similar abstract language when aiming to depict the Shoah. Godfrey and Redzisz, in their Polin lecture held in conjunction with Sasnal's show, "Uses and Abuses of Abstraction" (2022), visualize the internal links between their art using the works *Shoah (Forest)*, 2003, (see figure 15) and *Untitled (Grey)*, 1968, (see figure 14).

---

[10] The discourse on Holocaust representations has a rich historiography. Adorno, in *Cultural Criticism and Society* (1983), wrote, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” (34) setting the framework for looking for means of engagement that do not redeem the crimes by offering aesthetic pleasure (Godfrey 11).

[11] Readers can think about Anselm Kiefer’s art that hovers between abstraction and figuration when alluding to the Holocaust history and German post-war identity.

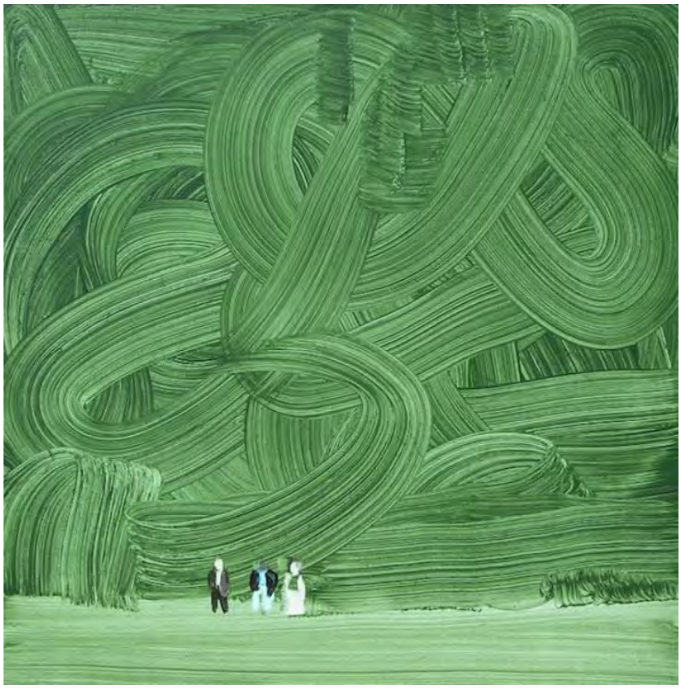

Figure 15: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Shoah (Forest)*, 2003, oil on canvas, Boros Collection, Berlin.

Sasnal's *Shoah (Forest)* shows a still from Claude Lanzmann's film "Shoah" (1985), where the filmmaker, a Holocaust witness, and the translator, Barbara Janicka, are walking through Poland's landscapes. Lanzmann's work is vital for Sasnal as it was one of the first objects that disrupted Poland's uncontested narrative of innocence during WWII. For Sasnal, "Shoah" completely revised his understanding of the scale of the destruction committed by Polish citizens, which he realized was vastly larger than he had thought (Sasnal, "Oprowadzenie"). These forests, which before the war were seen as innocent nature, became a space of execution, resistance, and Nazi crimes (Godfrey, "Uses"). Sasnal strays away from figuration and realism in their representation.

Richter's *Untitled (Grey)* is part of a series of paintings he produced in the 60s and 70s, which were displayed in Tate Modern's exhibition "Gerhard Richter - Panorama" in 2011. While the series was widely understood as a rejection of the photographic image (Godfrey, "Uses"), the exhibition's catalog states that

> "[Richter] suggested another dimension to these works: 'grey monochrome paintings [were] the only way for me to paint concentration camps. It is impossible to paint the misery of life, except maybe in grey, to cover it'" (Richter qtd. in Godfrey, "Gerhard Richter").

Sasnal's and Richter's oil paintings come together in their use of thick, spiraling strokes of paint layered on top of one another. The brushstrokes communicate a certain impossibility of representing these landscapes as they appear in real life. The abstract forms are used to remedy coming in direct contact with this history. In that sense, Richter and Sasnal maintain a strict distance between themselves and the depicted image. Situating Sasnal's use of abstraction in a broader artistic context enriches the current understanding of his creative choices. It helps to view them as part of a more comprehensive artistic response to painting images of the Shoah.

7.3 Narrative Enhancement

Redzisz argues that

> "Sasnal's paintings from the last two decades are strongly rooted in reality. A reality that is faulty, banal, and lacking. Abstraction as a metaphor can stand for this deficiency. But Sasnal's paintings are not allegorical, he employs abstraction as a method of representation, and in his work, it enhances the narrative aspect."

Indeed, as it functions in Sasnal's artworks, abstraction becomes a tool for narrative intensification. When looking at *Shoah (Forest)*, before considering the title, the viewer is not immediately led to believe that they are looking at a forest marked by Holocaust history. Nevertheless, the green spirals suggest one is looking at nature, and the three small figures suggest an exchange is happening. The viewer is thus invited to interpret the forms and is then confronted by the title. Rosa writes about the artwork, arguing that, "imagination can lead us to 'see' a forest, and the artist may merely point the way," which he does through the titling of the work. Rosa explains that, "[r]eferencing the Holocaust, 'Shoah' is a powerful word that immediately provokes the viewer to become alert, and rapid associations are drawn up." Sasnal's titling provokes the viewer to see a forest in the layers of paint and to quickly realize that they are looking at a crime scene. The green spirals become objects of the viewer's projection: one begins piecing the painting's elements together to create the narrative. We now see in the abstract forms a contaminated landscape that cannot be trusted. As put by Redzisz, "[t]he abstraction intensifies [Sasnal's] storytelling by making space for the act of seeing in the viewer's response." This act of seeing is met by a desire to impose and imagine narratives whose content is subtly led by Sasnal's titling and abstraction.

7.4 A Mobilized Viewer

The narrative enhancement carried out by Sasnal's abstraction is closely linked to another effect created by the artist's method: the mobilization of the audience. Because Sasnal's works leave so many questions unanswered and depictions unspecified, the viewer is left with the immense task of meaning-making. Godfrey further explains this phenomenon: "[i]n front of abstract art works, the lack of a depicted image tends to heighten our awareness of materials, of compositional (or anti-compositional) structures, of the process of looking itself" (*Abstraction*,4). In *Such a Landscape*, the viewer is made hyper-aware of their point of view. The reflective tin walls that line the galleries make it impossible for the viewers to ignore their position within the exhibition as it is constantly reflected at them. When glancing at the artworks that contain Sasnal's signature abstract gestures, the spectator is taken on a journey of seeing. Redzisz outlines this journey in the following way: "[the] visual testimony is hazy, but once the titles are deciphered, and the textual commentary added, the viewer is seduced by the masterful handling of the paint and begins to witness a catastrophe or its aftermath." Cabbage heads emerge as corpses, forests as crime scenes, abstract blocks as Birkenau gates. "To look away when confronting his paintings is ethically impossible, closing your eyes is pointless, the image will chase you (...)" adds Redzisz. The real subject of Sasnal's paintings often remains visually absent, and it is only once we, as viewers, manage to decipher it that we cannot turn away. This process is exemplified in *Kapusta*, where the direct view is the cabbage pile while the real subject is the relationship of the Holocaust victims to Polish culture. The audience is tasked with performing this deciphering process when confronting every painting. The result is an embodied and intense viewing experience that mobilizes the viewer and causes a strong emotional reaction.

7.5 Landscape: A Work of the Mind

Schama writes that,

> "[f]or although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (7).

The landscapes appearing in the Polin exhibition visualize Schama's argument. The display shows the Polish landscape, "treated critically and in an enlarged scope: seen in real life, also in films, photos, texts, poetry, memory, and imagination" (Szabłowski). Sasnal's paintings ask the viewer to activate a critical glance, and to see the narratives, myths, and histories embedded in the seemingly innocent nature. The realization that comes from looking at Sasnal's landscapes is that they are always seen through our memories and associations and thus are inseparable from society and culture. Schama outlines the need for an, "excavation below our conventional sight-level to recover the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface," (Schama 14) and *Such a Landscape* carries out this function. The result is a dissection of how one imagines the landscapes critical to Polish-Jewish history.

7.6 Imagining the Holocaust Landscape

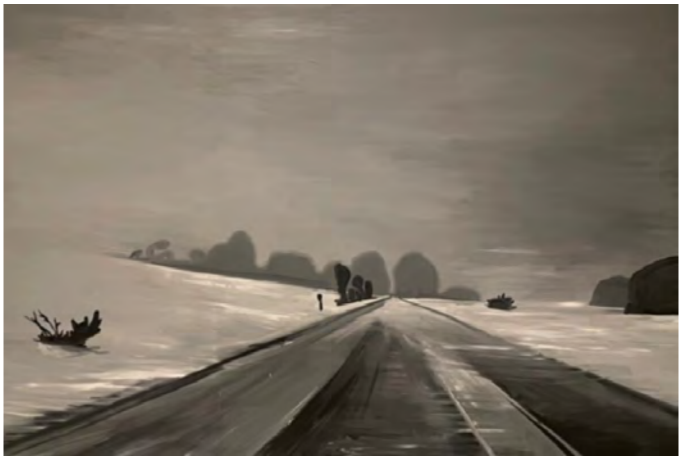

Figure 16: Wilhelm Sasnal, *Untitled*, 2016, oil on canvas.

As argued in the analyses of the previous chapter, there is an ingrained way of thinking about the Holocaust as having no landscape. The logic behind this view is discussed by Maischein, who writes that, "[f]rom a Western point of view, not only the sites of crime but also the sites of memory, seem even today to be located far away" (222). Additionally, the Nazis kept many camps hidden from view. She argues that, "[t]his makes the places of the annihilation of European Jews in Western memory seem like sites without location; they are imagined as unimaginable places" (222). To film "Shoah," Lanzmann traveled to Poland to see what he viewed as "spaces of non-memory" and a "no man's land," and to his surprise, found himself among real Polish towns (Maischein 222). The realization revealed that these were, "concrete places with concrete names" (Maischein 222). Schama writes about his own experience of viewing the Holocaust landscape as "emptied of features" and how, "[it] is shocking, then, to realize that Treblinka, too, belongs to a brilliantly vivid countryside" (26). One can observe a similar reaction in tourists who come to see the remnants of Auschwitz-Birkenau, located next to the towns of Oświęcim and Brzezinka, where everyday life continues. Sasnal is in conversation with these Holocaust landscape imaginaries, as exemplified by *Untitled* from 2016 (see figure 16).

The painting represents an undefined road that spreads into the distance. The sides are covered in snow with some trees and vegetation. The painting is disturbing: the white and black hazy shading creates an uneasy atmosphere. There is no life present in this scenery, marked by an overwhelming emptiness. Sasnal's painting, read through the exhibition's context, can speak to the vision of the Shoah landscape seen as a 'no man's land'. Schama describes the vision of this land as, "one emptied of (...) color, shrouded in night and fog, [and] blanketed by perpetual winter (...)" (26). Sasnal's painting showcases these features. Yet, this depiction is not grounded in reality but rather in the imagination. The lands of Treblinka and Oświęcim are not empty, nor are they perpetually gray and cold. What is depicted then is not the actual landscape but one that exists inside of the mind. There is an expectation for the post-war landscape to communicate horror, and Sasnal responds to what the audience expects to see.

Moreover, Sasnal's *Untitled* (2016) is also in conversation with the western imaginary of his country's landscape. The public viewed the Holocaust landscape as unimaginable, yet, as witnesses began sharing their accounts and as images of the concentration camps emerged, the imaginary of the Holocaust landscape began to shift. Lanzmann's documentary was crucial in sparking this new perspective. Maischein argues that the outsiders had to "integrate the location in [their] mental symbolic order," (222); the scenes had to be assigned to the crimes. Lanzmann's film achieved this goal by combining shots of the physical places of mass killings with witness statements (Maischein 222).

A new image of the Holocaust landscape had emerged in which Poland became, "a space of memory that seemed to 'speak' about the destruction of the Jews," argues Maischein (222). The process led to the naturalization of terms like "the Polish concentration camps" which the Polish state has been battling through the implementation of memory laws (Belavesau). While there has been a move away from this discursive framework, the western image of Poland remains marked by the WWII tales of deadly territories. Schama, Maischein, and Lanzmann show that this imaginary is characterized by the vision of a cold, relentless landscape that is distant. That is exactly what appears on Sasnal's canvas. He taps into the imagined hostility of the post-war Polish landscape, yet again confronting the viewers with their preconceived assumptions. This time, he explicitly targets the outsider's view of his nation and its implications for thinking about Polish identity.

7.7 A Landscape of Polishness

What is revealed by Sasnal's artworks is that, "[l]andscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" (Schama 61). Sasnal opens the door for the audience to project their assumptions and readings onto the nature depicted on the canvas before them. This argument can be enlarged to consider how these landscapes function for Polish identity. Schama argues that,

> "[n]ational identity (...) would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition: its topography mapped, elaborated, and enriched as homeland" (15).

Indeed, much of Poland's national identity is heavily intertwined with the Romanticist creation of Poland's heroic landscape, upheld by the literature of cultural heroes such as Mickiewicz[12] or Żeromski [13] (Szymczyk, "Przekleństwo"). When Mickiewicz famously writes, "Lithuania, my homeland," he designates the Polish gentry as the owners of the history that these landscapes symbolize.[14] Jews, although they've inhabited Polish lands for centuries, were seen as a caste rather than as equal neighbors (Schama 29). The heroic image of the Polish landscape is, therefore, discursively constructed to be for and created by Poles. Sasnal and Szymczyk disrupt this smooth imagery by questioning what these lands have seen and what they are a testament to.

"On the eve of the war, Poland was the second largest agglomeration of Jews, after the American Jewry," writes Gross (9). Thus, how can the extermination not be seen as having an immeasurable effect on the everyday lives of Polish society (9)? As argued by Gross, there must be a departure from the view that Jewish-Polish relations were solely, "mediated by outside forces - the Nazis and the Soviets" as it fails to see autonomous interactions between the Jews and Poles (Gross 9). The events of WWII must not be regarded as purely an effect of the two regimes but also of the ingrained antisemitism in Polish society (Gross 123).

Sasnal exposes these issues by interrogating Poland's landscapes. He distorts nationalist narratives that maintain a clear distinction between victim and perpetrator. In looking at his artworks, one must abandon these distinctions and assess their position within this history. Sasnal's art thus shakes the boundaries between passive and active as well as innocent and guilty.

---

[12] Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) was the most prominent Polish Romanticist poet and is remembered as one of Poland's greatest artists. He was also a political figure who fought for Polish independence, which gave him a hero status in Polish culture.

[13] Stefan Żeromski (1864-1925) was a Polish writer and a four-time nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature. He is known for his passionate writing on the Polish landscape.

[14] He refers to the then Polish-Lithuanian regions as "Lithuania" in a famous excerpt from his 1811 book *Pan Tadeusz*.

He refuses to minimize landscapes to non-intrusive nature. Instead, he emphasizes their capacity to test the intricacies between Polish and Jewish history that have failed to be worked through by Poland. *Such a Landscape* is thus a response to specific imaginaries of the Polish landscape in Polish and non-Polish society. Sasnal questions the perceptions rooted in his country's arts and literature while simultaneously interrogating the post-war foreign view of Poland. Through this, he shows that depictions of nature are never only pure reflections of what is in front of our eyes, but always produce and are products of their specific political, cultural, and societal contexts. The exhibition thus presents a landscape of Polishness and situates Jewish history at its core.

8 Conclusion

This capstone has studied Poland's uneasy relationship towards the strand of its WWII history through Sasnal's *Such a Landscape*. I have situated the exhibition in its spatial and cultural context to show how it adds valuable insight to the discourse of Polish-Jewish relations. The analysis of the specific artworks revealed how the image of the Holocaust landscape rests on the viewer's imaginaries and assumptions and, therefore, is vital to understanding society and culture even though it is manifested through nature. Further, I have shown how Sasnal breaks down the idea that landscapes are innocent by implicating them through symbols of Polishness in the Holocaust history. Herein, Sasnal demonstrates how landscape can be a crucial tool for interrogating the traces of the Holocaust in Poland's everyday life, affirming the inner links between Polish identity and Holocaust history.

This research emphasizes the significant role of the visual arts in addressing Poland's contemporary and historical relationship to the Holocaust. Studies by Tokarska-Bakir, Gross, and Redzisz highlighted the need for Poland to work through its complex war-time history. Sasnal emphasizes that his exhibition comes from this need ("Oprowadzanie"). As a Pole, he had to come to terms with his implication in WWII crimes and critically analyze his position within this history. Sasnal believes Poland should do the same ("Oprowadzanie"). Therefore, a deconstruction of traditional categories of implication is needed, moving beyond victims, perpetrators, and witnesses to include the unexplainable and unregulated public actions.

For there to be space for this rethinking, every Pole should assess their position in Polish-Jewish history, also concerning the WWII crimes. The hate against the 'other' that manifested itself in WWII and post-war antisemitic politics still inscribes itself onto the present Polish landscape. A country that used to house the second largest population of Jews is now devoid of their presence. This absence is a contemporary reminder of the antisemitism that, in different forms and extremes, on top of Nazi crimes, forced the Jews out of the country. And while the prescribed category of the 'other' has been dynamically changing over time in Polish politics – it has been the Jew, the woman, the immigrant, the non-heterosexual – it still manifests itself in Poland's contemporary politics. Therefore, it is urgent to work through Poland's difficult past to gain a richer perspective on what is happening in the present.

This research has shown that the arts prove to be a valid place to look towards when evaluating Polish history and identity. Art history can thus be a locus for alternative readings of the Polish-Jewish relations, one that moves away from standardized and state-imposed narratives. What can further enrich this approach is the inclusion of more voices. As my research focused on interrogating Polish-Jewish history from a non-Jewish Polish artist's perspective, the next step could be to engage with this history from a Jewish perspective. This could add to the already outlined complexity of the relationship and fill the possible gaps left by my research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Janna Schoenberger, who has provided pivotal support throughout this process. I am grateful for all the art history knowledge that I gained through our cooperation on this project and by taking many of her great courses over the last three years. I also want to extend a special thanks to Dr. Jonathan Gill at the writing center for his invaluable feedback. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Marco de Waard for introducing me to looking at art through a Cultural Memory Studies perspective that informed my capstone. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my reader, Dr. Angela Bartholomew, for participating in this process.

References

"About the Museum." *Polin Museum, Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN w Warszawie*, https://polin.pl/en/about-museum. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.

Adorno, Theodor W. "Cultural Criticism and Society." *Prisms*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1983, pp. 17–34.

Adorno, Theodor W. "Negative Dialectics." Continuum International Publishing Group, London and New York, 2005.

"Aktualności." *Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, www.auschwitz.org, 7 Jan. 2020, http://www.auschwitz.org/muzeum/aktualnosci/2-32-miliona-odwiedzajacych-miejsce-pamieci-auschwitz-w-2019-r-,2105.html. Accessed 9 May 2022.

Banasiak, Jakub. “W Cztery Oczy z Wilhelmem Sasnalem.” *Polin*, Sept. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmSOh71eb6U. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.

Belavusau, Uladzislau. “The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?” *Security and Human Rights*, vol. 29, no. 1–4, Dec. 2018, pp. 36–54. brill. com, https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02901011. Accessed 2 Mar. 2022.

Belavusau, Uladzislau, and Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias. "Introduction: Memory Laws: Mapping a New Subject in Comparative Law and Transitional Justice." *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Biro, Matthew. “Representation and Event: Anselm Kiefer, Joseph Beuys, and the Memory of the Holocaust.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Volume 16, Number 1, 2003, pp. 113-146.

Borchardt-Hume, Achim, et al. “Rozliczenie z Historią.” *Polin*, 24 Oct. 2021, https://polin.pl/pl/wydarzenie/debata-rozliczenie-z-historia. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.

“Budynek Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN,” *Polin*, https://polin.pl/pl/budynek-muzeum. Accessed 25 Mar. 2022.

Chruściel, M. “Procesualność postpamięci I Jej Reprezentacje W Literaturze Oraz Sztuce współczesnej.” *Politeja*, vol. 14, no. 2(47), May 2017, pp. 73-84, doi:10.12797/Politeja.14.2017.47.06. Accessed 2 Mar. 2022.

Feinstein, Stephen C. “Zbigniew Libera’s Lego Concentration Camp: Iconoclasm in Conceptual Art About the Shoah.” *The Journal of Cultural Criticism*, vol. 2, February 2000, http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/feinstein/auschwitz.php. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.

Gliński, Mikołaj. “Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich z Nową Nazwą.” *Culture.pl*, 4 Sept. 2014, https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/muzeum-historii-zydow-polskich-z-nowa-nazwa. Accessed 6 May 2022.

Godfrey, Mark. “Abstraction and the Holocaust.” *Yale University Press*, 2007.

Godfrey, Mark. “Gerhard Richter Panorama.” *Tate Modern*, London, 2011. Exhibition Catalog.

Grabski, August. “Getto Warszawskie.” *Muzeum Getta Warszawskiego*, 20 July 2021, https://1943.pl/historiagw/. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.

Gross, Jan Tomasz. “Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne.” *Princeton University Press*, 2001, New Jersey.

Hirsch, Marianne. “The Generation of Postmemory.” *The Collective Memory Reader*, edited by Jeffrey K Olick et al., Oxford University Press, 2011, New York, pp. 346–347.

“Kapusta, Radiowe Centrum Kultury Ludowej.” *Polskieradio.Pl*, 19 December 2021, https://www.polskieradio.pl/377/9553/Artykul/2871710,Kapusta-glowa-pusta. Accessed 6 May 2022.

Krzyzanowska, Natalia. “(Counter)Monuments and (Anti)Memory in the City. An Aesthetic and Socio-Theoretical Approach.” *Pjaesthetics*, The Polish Journal of Aesthetics , 2017, https://pjaesthetics.uj.edu.pl

Kucia, Monika. “Bona – Influencerka Mimo Woli.” *Culture*. pl, 6 Apr. 2021, https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/bona-influencerka-mimo-woli. Accessed 6 May 2022.

Maciudzińska-Kamczycka, Magdalena, et al. “The Other in Art.” *Polin*, 9 Dec. 2021, https://www.polin.pl/pl/cykl-dyskusji-nie-odwracamy-wzroku. Accessed 12 Apr. 2022.

Maischein, Hannah. “The Historicity of the Witness: The Polish Relationship to Jews and Germans in the Polish Memory Discourse of the Holocaust.” *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe*, vol. 8, 2018.

“Mieszkańcy Okolic Oświęcimia Upamiętnili 79. Rocznicę Wysiedlenia Polaków.” *Dzieje.pl*, Portal Historyczny, 22 Apr. 2020, https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/mieszkancy-okolic-oswiecimia-upamietnili-79-rocznice-wysiedlenia-polakow. Accessed 9 May 2022.

“Obecność Zagłady w Twórczości Polskich Artystów.” *Culture.pl*, 29 May 2007, https://culture.pl/pl/artykul/obecnosc-zaglady-w-tworczosci-polskich-artystow. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

“Polin Museum Resounded with Legends.” *Polin*, 10 June 2019, https://polin.pl/en/news/2014/09/08/polin-museum-resounded-with-legends.

Rajkowska, Joanna. Interview by Piotr Pazinski. “Oxygenator 2007, Joanna Rajkowka Talks to Piotr Pazinski,” 2007, https://www.rajkowska.com/en/rozmowa-z-joanna-rajkowska-midrasz-11-2007/. Accessed 12 May 2022.

Redzisz, Kasia, and Mark Benjamin Godfrey. “Images After: Wilhelm Sasnal’s Uses and Abuses of Abstraction .” *Polin*. Distinguished Lectures, 9 Jan. 2022, Warsaw.

Rosa, Federico. “Wilhelm Sasnal: Exploring the Image Through Painting.” *Culture Trip*, 11 July 2014, https://theculturetrip.com/europe/poland/articles/wilhelm-sasnal-exploring-the-image-through-painting/. Accessed 9 May 2022.

Rachel-Stockmans, Katarzyna. “Images Performing History: Photography and Respresentations of the Past in European Art After 1989.” Leuven University Press, vol. 20, 2015.

Sasnal, Wilhelm and Szymczyk, Adam. Interview by Jakub Banasiak. “Przekleństwo niepamięci. Rozmowa Z Wilhelmem Sasnalem I Adamem Szymczykiem.” *SZUM*, 2 July 2021, https://magazynszum.pl/przeklenstwo-niepamieci-rozmowa-z-wilhelmem-sasnalem-i-adamem-szymczykiem/. Accessed 2 Mar. 2022.

Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. First ed., A.A. Knopf, 1995.

Sienkiewicz, Karol. “Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue – Joanna Rajkowska.” *Culture.pl*, 2010, https://culture.pl/en/work/greetings-from-jerusalem-avenue-joanna-rajkowska. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

Sobczak, Krzysztof. “Wyrok W Sprawie Aborcji Opublikowany i Wchodzi W Życie.” *Prawo.pl*, 30 Jan. 2021, https://www.prawo.pl/prawo/wyrok-tk-ws-aborcji-jest-uzasadnienie-bedzie-publikacja,506088.html. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

Szabłowski, Stach. “Wilhelm Sasnal – Wystawa „Taki Pejzaż’ W Muzeum Polin.” *Zwierciadlo.pl*, Zwierciadło Sp. z O.o., 6 Aug. 2021, https://zwierciadlo.pl/kultura/522770,1,wilhelm-sasnal--wystawa-taki-pejzaz-w-muzeum-polin.read. Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

“The Observer View on Poland’s Draconian Abortion Ban | Observer Editorial.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 25 Oct. 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/25/the-observer-view-on-polands-draconian-abortion-ban.

Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna. “Poland as the Sick Man of Europe? Jedwabne, ‘Post-Memory’ and Historians.” *Eurozine*, 30 May 2003, pp. 1–19, https://www.eurozine.com/poland-as-the-sick-man-of-europe/?pdf. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.

Tomczok, Paweł. “The Essays of Contaminated Landscapes.” *Czytanie Literatury*. Łódzkie Studia Literaturoznawcze, no. 8, Dec. 2019, pp. 81–91. https://doi.org/10.18778/2299-7458.08.13. Accessed 5 Mar. 2022.

“Wieś Brzezinka (Małopolskie) .” *Polskawliczbach.pl*, 2011, https://www.polskawliczbach.pl/wies_Brzezinka_oswiecim_malopolskie. Accessed 9 May 2022.

“Wilhelm Sasnal: Oprowadzanie Autorskie Po Wystawie ‘Taki Pejzaż’.” *YouTube*, Polin, 24 July 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvXShJtYUCI&t=1s. Accessed 5 Mar. 2022.

Wilhelm Sasnal. Personal Interview. “Conversation with Wilhelm Sasnal.” 18 May 2022.

“Wilhelm Sasnal: Taki Pejzaż.” *Polin*, https://polin.pl/pl/wilhelm-sasnal. Accessed 24 Feb. 2022.

“Wilhelm Sasnal.” *Hauser & Wirth*, 2016, https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/5573-wilhelm-sasnal-10/. Accessed 9 May 2022.