

Title

# Kazimierz Libin (1904–1944). A Painter from Tadeusz Pruszkowski's Circle—Life and Work

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Abstract

In studies and research on Polish artists of Jewish origin—victims of the Holocaust, hardly ever do we have a possibility to access archives, art pieces, source materials or testimonies given by the direct witnesses of their lives—sufficient to fully reconstruct life trajectories and artistic output of particular individuals. In case of Kazimierz Libin (1904–1944), a forgotten portraitist and landscapist, associated with Tadeusz Pruszkowski's circles, we deal with an exceptional situation. Due to the painter's son's, Jan Krzysztof Libin's (born 1933) memoir, with the use of very limited number of source materials from the Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, press, and exhibition catalogues, as well as photographic documentation and two paintings from the collection of the National Museum, it is possible to at least partially describe the artist's life—his youth, education, artistic career, family and social life, wartime exile, stay in the Warsaw Ghetto and on the so-called "Aryan side," and finally, his tragic death. In addition, based on the gathered materials, the article constitutes an attempt to analyze Libin's artistic approach, and therefore, a contribution to studies on the subject of the national identity of artists of Jewish origin, conveyed both through their activity in the field of art and their everyday lives. The article might also initiate a discussion on a new, multicultural perspective of Polish art.

In the area of research on Polish art of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, subjects such as the life and work of artists of Jewish origin, and thus also Holocaust victims, constitute a specific problem. Due to the historical events and the lapse of time, rarely do we have the possibility to access art pieces, source materials, or testimonies provided by direct witnesses to an artist's life and death. Yet another equally important factor which makes research on this topic difficult is the cultural policy of the Polish People's Republic which promoted the idea of a homogenous state and blurred the ethnic and cultural diversity of the interwar period. As a result, most of the representatives of the abovementioned group, as numerous as over six hundred people before 1939, have been forgotten and to some extent excluded from the history of Polish art. In spite of the increased efforts to delineate and describe the art of Polish Jews that have been undertaken since the 1990's, these paucities make bringing the memory of their contribution back to the cultural heritage

of the country a real challenge for later generations of researchers.<sup>1</sup>

This article is an attempt to describe the life and artistic path of Kazimierz Libin, today a forgotten portraitist and a landscape painter associated with the circle of the Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych, SSP [Warsaw School of Fine Arts]. This research was possible primarily due to contact with the painter's son, Jan Krzysztof Libin (born 1933), and specifically his recollections about his father and the family home, photographs of the artist's works and memories described in a typescript entitled *Pamiętniki Krzysztofa* [Krzysztof's Memoir]<sup>2</sup> that I was facilitated with in June 2018. This material was complemented by the artist's biographical entry from *Słownik Artystów Polskich* [The Dictionary of Polish Artists], documents preserved in the Archive of the Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie, ASP [Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw], two oil landscape paintings from the collection of the National Museum, a few press reviews and catalogues from exhibitions held in the Instytut Propagandy Sztuki, IPS [Art Propagation Institute], including a catalogue from the artist's solo exhibition from 1935.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the analysis of the gathered materials might serve as the starting point for a discussion on the extremely interesting subject of the national identity of artists of Jewish origin, evinced both in the area of their professional activity and their private lives.



Kazimierz Libin, 1930s, photograph from the collection of Jan Krzysztof Libin, Cracow.

Kazimierz Libin was born to a well-off family of merchants with progressive views who came from Mogilev in Lithuania (presently in Belarus).<sup>4</sup> In 1876, his grandfather Ber (Bertrand, Beer, Berek, 1840-1913, son of Zalman) settled in Warsaw. Together with his family, he lived on Ceglana Street in Grzybów District.<sup>5</sup> He was married to Ludwika (Lea) Warszawska and they had five children: Adela, Celina, Helena, Mateusz (Matias), and Henryk (Hersz).<sup>6</sup> Ber ensured that they would receive good education. In 1886, Adela graduated from the Warszawski Instytut Muzyczny [Warsaw Institute of Music], she was a pianist and a music teacher.<sup>7</sup> Mateusz worked as an accountant, and his son—Zdzisław Libin Libera (1913-1998)—was a professor and Dean of the University of Warsaw. Henryk (1873-1943), Kazimierz's father and the youngest of the five siblings, was a commission merchant doing business in the Kingdom of Poland and Russia, in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. He traded luxury products such as wine, coffee, tea, and caviar. He married Eugenia Tom (1882-1943), an affluent lady from the intelligentsia. They had three children: Kazimierz, Zygmunt (1905-1971), and Ludwika (Czerska, 1912-1979). They also brought up Henryka Lipińska (Szczodrowska, died in 1976), Henryk's illegitimate daughter.

The Libin's family strongly inclined towards assimilation into Polish culture. They followed patriotic traditions and advocated active participation in the country's intellectual and cultural life.<sup>8</sup> Jan Krzysztof remembered his grandfather as a well-educated, charming man who loved classical music and theatre. His apartment would serve as a place of regular meetings held to listen to radio concerts. At home, there were three languages in use: Polish, Russian, and French. Kazimierz's contact with Tom family members also had a great influence on him. His grandmother's brother, Alfred Tom—a professor of the Wolna Wszechnica Polska [Free University of Poland] was a frequent guest in their house.<sup>9</sup>

The Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw preserved Kazimierz Libin's files from the period of when he was a student.<sup>10</sup> They include over twenty documents that include information on his life, education, places of residence, and trips abroad. Photographs from school and student ID cards, depicting a handsome young man with slightly gloomy eyes, give some idea about his emotional and stern character. Both the duplicate of the secondary school graduation diploma of June 20, 1924, and the two versions of his biographical note suggest that his school years were full of changes associated with the frequent relocations of his family.<sup>11</sup> He started his education in 1915, in Mińsk Litewski [Minsk of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania], where his family settled after the outbreak of World War I. He was sent to the Polskie Gimnazjum Męskie [Polish Middle School for Boys] supervised by Marian Massonius.<sup>12</sup> In 1918 the Libins moved to Warsaw to come back to Minsk just after one year; there Kazimierz would continue his education in the Władysław Jagiełło Public Middle School until the outbreak of the Polish-Soviet War in 1920. According to accounts provided by family members, he traveled to the capital on his own and in the autumn of 1921, he

Do Rady Główniej  
Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie

TP

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sawie w charakterze studenta wyemigracyjnego.

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2) metodykę urodzenia,  
3) egzaminów,  
4) 4 fotokopie (tytuły z powyższej wnioskowanej),  
5) 2 deklaracje,  
6) 11 przebiegów i 5 olejnych.  
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Warszawa, dn. 28 września 1925 r.

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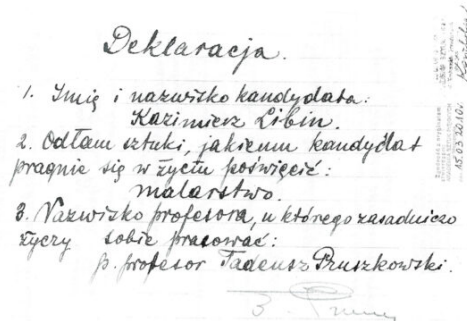
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Strona 4 z 25

Guerin (1875-1939), and the history of art at the Sorbonne. The crisis of the 1920s terminated his stay in France. The Libins' business fell into decline, they moved to Pruszków and settled on Cedrowa Street. Zygmunt, then an employee of the Sickness Fund in Warsaw, took care of providing for the entire family.



Kazimierz Libin's declaration of admittance into the studio of Tadeusz Pruszkowski, 1925, photograph from the collection of the Archiwum Akademii Sztuki Pięknych w Warszawie [Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw].

In 1925, Kazimierz was accepted into the Warsaw School of Fine Arts. Based on the graduation exam diploma complemented by eleven works of painting and drawing, he joined the group of regular students learning at Tadeusz Pruszkowski's<sup>16</sup> studio. In 1925-26, he resided at 60/26 Marszałkowska Street, then at 11/1 Zielna Street.<sup>17</sup> At Pruszkowski's studio, he would study portrait and genre painting, as well as composition. He was a good student, which is proved by his diplomas from 1925-1927 and 1928-1929. He received very good grades in painting, drawing, and the history of art, and good in the design of solids and surfaces. However, it seems that he did not belong to the closest circle of the famous professor. From the period when he was a student, two of his works have been preserved: a photograph of his self-portrait and a design for an anti-alcohol poster from 1930, both being a part of the collection of the Ethnography and Artistic Crafts Museum in Lviv.<sup>18</sup> When he was a student, excluding the first year of his education, he often struggled with financial problems. This assumption is based on his regular applications to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts to exempt him from tuition fees.<sup>19</sup> According to those documents, he made his living teaching drawing in a middle school. He earned 30, and then 36 PLN per month. Following family recollections, he was troubled by anti-Semitic occurrences.<sup>20</sup> His friend and future wife, Danuta Stępniewska (1903-1986), became his faithful defender. They married in the All Saints Church in Warsaw in 1928. Before the ceremony, he was christened. They lived at 11 Zielna Street, in Danuta's family house. Marriage greatly influenced his private and professional life. Danuta was the daughter of Tadeusz Emilian Stępniewski (1873-1953), an independence activist and "Sybirak" (someone exiled to Siberia), who returned in 1918 and became a famous Warsaw doctor and the co-owner and director of the Instytut Szczepienia Ospy,

ISO [Institute of Smallpox Vaccination], located at 15 Zielna Street, and then from 1911, the owner of the new ISO at 11 Zielna Street. The Stępniewski family supported the young couple financially, and thanks to their help, Kazimierz could dedicate his time and energy to artistic work. He and Danuta had two sons—Jacek (1930-1931) and Jan Krzysztof.



Group photograph of professors and graduates of the Pedagogy Department at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, 04/1931. From the left: Professor Karol Tichy, Professor Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Professor Karol Stryjeński, Ł. Obermanówna, Professor Wojciech Jastrzębowski, Professor Józef Czajkowski, W. Taczanowska, J. Mieszkowski, K. Rzepkowski, S. Tobolczyk. On the grass, from the left: Danuta Libinowa, M. Miłoszeńska. Collection of the Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, NAC [National Digital Archive]: <https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/110523/>

Libin studied until June 1930. In the autumn, having received sabbatical for 1930/1931, together with his family, he left for France in order to continue his education.<sup>21</sup> It can be only assumed that some financial and family problems (his first son died of a disease in 1931) had had an impact on that decision. Danuta and Kazimierz stayed in France—with short breaks—for almost four years. At the beginning, Libin unsuccessfully applied for a scholarship granted to Poles by the Foreign Governments.<sup>22</sup> From October 1930-32, they rented a studio on Rue d'Alesia in Paris. They also lived in Provence and in 1933 in Nice, where their second son was born. This was the time the painter created several landscapes and portrait studies. However, in 1934, for lack of possibilities to earn money and because of the serious illness of Jan Krzysztof, the couple came back to Poland, traveling through Italy, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. They moved to the district of Ochota in Warsaw and settled at 8 Andrychowska Street.<sup>23</sup> They resided on the first floor of the tenement house, in a vast, modern apartment equipped with such conveniences as electricity, a phone, running water, and a sewerage system. It consisted of a hall, a kitchen, a bathroom, the parents' bedroom, the son's room, a living room, and a big painting atelier. They employed a housekeeper and nanny, Leokadia (Lodzian) Ziółkowska. Art and literature were omnipresent in the atmosphere of the house. In the atelier, there were a lot of oil paintings and sketches leaned against the walls, and the child's room was decorated with colorful paintings created especially for Krzys. In the



bedroom, there was a massive library with books and albums related to art. The living room regularly hosted meetings, to which the couple invited representatives of the intelligentsia such as Andrzej Boleski (Ludwik Baumfeld, 1877-1965), professor of Polish Philology teaching at the Wolna Wszechnica Polska [Free Polish University], as well as the aforementioned Alfred Tom, Tadeusz Emilian Stępniewski, and Zdzisław Libin Libera. Perhaps Kazimierz also maintained relations with the literary and artistic circles concentrated around “Ziemiańska” café located at 12 Mazowiecka Street, or was a frequent guest at the IPS café. This might be assumed based on one of his paintings—a portrait of a regular at both cafés, the famous Franc (Franciszek) Fiszer.<sup>24</sup> The additional arena of the Libins' intellectual life constituted the already mentioned meetings at Kazimierz's parents' home in Pruszków.



Kazimierz Libin, “Portret Franka Fiszera” [Portrait of Franc Fiszer], photograph from the collection of Jan Krzysztof Libin, Cracow.

According to his son's account, the artist did not maintain any close social relations with the SSP circles, apart from a friendship with two famous painters, Efraim and Menasze Seidenbeutel.<sup>25</sup> It seems that after returning to Poland, he did not take up further education. In his files, there are no documents proving that he continued his studies. Nevertheless, he quite regularly participated in exhibitions organized by the IPS. Unfortunately these did not improve his financial situation. The family expenditures were financed mostly by his wife, probably still supported by her parents. After she had graduated from the Faculty of Pedagogy at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1931, Danuta Libin was mostly involved in graphic design (posters, illustrations) and industrial design—jewelry, textiles, and kilims. In the 1930s, she collaborated with the Spółdzielnia Artystów “Ład” [Artists Co-operative “Ład”] and the “Bluszcz” weekly magazine as the author of illustrations, columnist, and the editor of a section dedicated to knitting.

The Libins survived the September Campaign of 1939, staying in Danuta's family mansion in Kobyla Wola near Garwolin. From there, Kazimierz and his brother-in-law, Tadeusz, headed towards East. On the way, they were joined by Zygmunt Libin. Together they reached Kovel, where Tadeusz was employed at the hospital. Then, they transferred to Lutsk. Kazimierz, like many other resettled artists, made his living by painting portraits of the Soviet leaders with the use of frottage technique.<sup>26</sup> He presented his works in exhibitions in Lutsk, Kiev and Lviv. The artist's stay in Lutsk was confirmed by Józef Sandel in his book.<sup>27</sup> Danuta and their son came back to Warsaw and moved in with her family at 11 Zielna Street. She tried to rescue her husband's works left behind in their abandoned and plundered apartment. She commuted there and back, transporting paintings that had been mostly destroyed by looters. Fixed and renovated works covered the walls of another apartment which belonged to her parents and was located on Moniuszki Street.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, they all burnt down along with the entire apartment in the fire during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. According to Jan Krzysztof's testimony, his mother was harassed by *shmaltsowniks* a number of times.<sup>29</sup> Luckily, she managed to avoid tragedy by bribing them with petty cash.

Danuta with her son and the Stępniewski family survived the occupation. After the fall of the Warsaw Uprising, they went through the temporary camp in Pruszków and found refuge in Kielecczyzna (Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship). In 1945, they settled in Cracow. Danuta worked as a textile and jewelry designer (she also produced the latter), she was also involved in ceramics and graphic design. She was a member of the Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków, ZPAP [Association of Polish Artists and Designers], between 1952-55, she was its Board Member for the borough. She also became a co-founder of the Artists Co-operative in Cracow, she collaborated with the Instytut Wzornictwa Przemysłowego [Institute of Industrial Design] and the Centrala Przemysłu Ludowego i Artystycznego "Cepelia" [Centre for Folk Art and Craft "Cepelia"]. She participated in several exhibitions.

Kazimierz was not that lucky, his fate turned out tragic. After the German invasion on the USSR in June 1941, he tried to get to Warsaw. However, recognized as a Jew, he was sent to the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>30</sup> His family and Lodzia Ziółkowska supported him financially and psychologically. He would meet his wife in the Court building on Leszno Street. He managed to see his son only once—through the barbed wire entanglement on Sienna Street. In the summer of 1942 he succeeded in leaving the Ghetto and getting to the "Arian side" thanks to the help of his brother-in-law, Tadeusz Jan Stępniewski, who was an activist of "Żegota" the Polish Council to Aid Jews. He was smuggled from the Ghetto by Marian Żebrowski, a "Blue Police" officer and a member of the underground resistance movement.



Libin hid in an apartment at 25 Marszałkowska Street under the forged surname Lipiński. There he would meet his wife and son, with whom he would talk about his origins and Jewish traditions. He also helped to produce haberdashery for sale. He painted brooches with zodiac signs. From May 1944, he stayed in the attic of Piotr Rudnicki's villa at 13 Ikara Street. He met his family for the last time on August 1, 1944, in the apartment at Moniuszki Street, from where he came back to 25 Marszałkowska Street. He most probably perished in the first days of the Warsaw Uprising. According to his son, there are at least a few possible versions of his death. He could have been killed by a random bullet when Marszałkowska Street was under fire, or he might have been murdered during the execution of the tenement house residents, or killed on Bagatela Street.

Kazimierz's siblings survived the Holocaust. His parents were hiding in a village called Bojm, in its administrator Kukus's house, and then, from 1942, in the abandoned house in Niechnabrz. In 1943, Henryk died of a stroke, Eugenia was shot dead by the "Blue Police."<sup>31</sup>

Ludwika and Henryka took part in the September Campaign, serving as medical help. From 1942 to the fall of the Warsaw Uprising, Ludwika was hiding in Warsaw, in the apartment of Maria Flukowska-Leszczyńska (1904-1977), under the forged surname Czerska.<sup>32</sup> Henryka was taken captive by the Soviets at Tarnopol. From there, she came back to the capital.<sup>33</sup> After the war both of them worked in the health service. Zygmunt survived the occupation in the USSR, he was an officer of the Polish First Army. In 1945, he settled in Łódź. He worked for the local Wytwórnia Filmów Polskich [Polish Film Studios].<sup>34</sup> He took care of his nephew with great devotion.

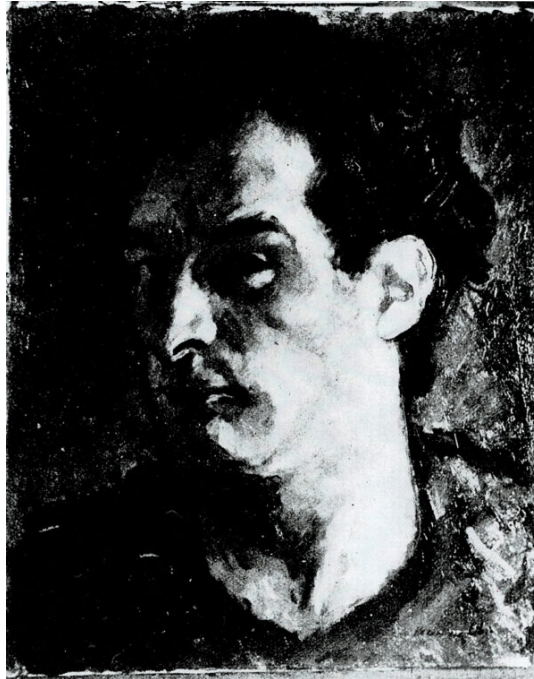
In the area of studies on national identity in the context of art, artists' biographies and their works both constitute inherent elements. In Kazimierz Libin's case, almost the entire scope of the artist's work, as he himself, fell victim to the Holocaust. Nevertheless, by studying archival materials, catalogues from exhibitions, press reviews, and information provided by his son, it is possible to make an attempt to describe his attitudes and artistic approach. Apart from the previously mentioned two landscapes dated back to 1938 and being part of collections, the family possesses photographs of three oil painted portraits depicting Franciszek Fiszer, little Francois, and a self-portrait, as well as a drawing of Krzyś sleeping. Libin had already started his artistic journey in search of his own expression in middle school. As a student of Teodor Ziomek, the established and recognized landscape painter from Wyczółkowski's and Stanisławski's school, he acquired a great love for depicting phenomena of nature as well as capturing the correlation of light, color, and form.



Kazimierz Libin, "Śpiący Krzys" [Sleeping Krzysztof], 1933/34, photograph from the collection of Jan Krzysztof Libin, Cracow.

Krzyżanowski's expressive art had an unquestionable impact on his body of work. It is visible in Libin's interest in the human figure as an art object and in his passionate brushstrokes. Studies under the mentorship of Pruszkowski, the great proponent of achieving perfection in craft, following the pattern of the "Old Masters," resulted in broadening the limits of the artist's formal search, as well as in diversity of subjects, he would take up.<sup>35</sup> The influence of his mentor is especially visible in his early works described by his son.<sup>36</sup> These were *Zmartwychwstanie Piotrowina* [The Resurrection of Piotrowin] and *Autoportret w Pięciu postaciach* [Self-portrait in Five Forms]. The first was inspired by a legend from the 11th century about the resurrection of Piotr Strzemieńczyk from Janiszew (Piotrowin) by a bishop from Cracow, St. Stanisław Szczepanowski.<sup>37</sup> The historical theme and the method of painting indicated the influence of the Bractwo Świętego Łukasza [the St. Luke Fraternity] circle.<sup>38</sup> It is said that an art critic, Jan Kleczyński (1875-1939), in one of his reviews, ascribed the work to Pruszkowski.<sup>39</sup> *Autoportret w Pięciu postaciach* depicted Libin as a strongman, a knight in armor, and an artist and a dreamer resting on the meadow among flowers. The fairytale-like, nostalgic atmosphere of the composition was a hallmark of the "Warsaw School."<sup>40</sup> Paintings known from photographs: *Portret Malej Francois* [Portrait of Little Francois], *Autoportret* [Self-Portrait], and *Portret Franca Fiszera* [Portrait of Franc Fiszera] exhibited around 1935, can also be ascribed to this group. They are characteristic for their liberty of brushstrokes and the masterful perfection of the form, signaling Libin's artistic maturity. In 1935 Waław Husarski wrote in his review of a group exhibition at the Art Propagation Institute, IPS, where Libin also presented his work: "During one of the latest exhibitions organized by the Art Propagation Institute, Libin, the young student of Pruszkowski's studio, drew the critics' attention with his portrait of Franciszek Fiszera—a truly eye-catching piece— both for its witty

depiction and a great technical skills.”<sup>41</sup>



Kazimierz Libin, “Autoportret” [Self-portrait], photograph from the collection of Jan Krzysztof Libin, Cracow.



Kazimierz Libin, “Portret malej Francois” [Portrait of Little Francois], photograph from the collection of Jan Krzysztof Libin, Cracow.

It is worth paying attention to the similarity of the artist’s composition to the portraits and cartoons presenting Fiszer that were published in the press. Some of which were authored by the well-

known architect Jerzy Gelbard.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1930s social motifs started to appear in Libin's works; they resulted from the artist's need to find his own artistic path that would match his personality and his leftist views. At the turn of 1931–32, at the Winter Salon of the Art Propagation Institute (IPS), he showcased three etchings entitled *Bezrobotni* [The Unemployed].<sup>43</sup> According to his son's testimony, in his atelier, among numerous landscapes, portraits, self-portraits, and still lifes, there was a painting called *Praca* [Work] which depicted a crowd of workers using ropes to pull the stone blocks used to raise a building. It might be assumed that Libin's interest in social issues was the reason for which he kept distance from Pruszkowski's circle. The artist's application for the university in Paris included his credo: "Being in the center and oscillating between the culture of the past and the explorations of the contemporaries, I will do my best to oppose the current trends and theories that focus entirely on form and reject what is really important in life. (...) Therefore, I wholeheartedly ask you to enable me to realize what is the purpose of my existence."<sup>44</sup>

It is hard to say if upon his return to Poland he developed this concept in his art. Starting in 1935, in the Art Propagation Institute exhibition catalogues, there appeared only landscapes, studies of the human figures, and portraits. At the Winter Salon of the Art Propagation Institute in 1935, Libin exhibited an oil painting called *Studium Głowy* [Head Study].<sup>45</sup> In September that year the only exhibition presenting his works that took place was "Wystawa Zbiorowa Leokadii Bielskiej, Kazimierza Libina, Józefa Toma" [The Group Exhibition of Leokadia Bielska, Kazimierz Libin, Józef Tom].<sup>46</sup> Among fifty-two oil paintings, tempera, and drawings, the exposition showcased thirty landscapes from Provence, the French Riviera, Nice, Venice, and the other works involved studies of the human figure, heads, portraits—including two depicting Jan Krzysztof, and three still lifes.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately Libin's hopes for being appreciated by critics and the development of his career proved in vain. As much as Tom's cycle of autolithography works entitled *Z miast i miasteczek polskich* [From Polish Cities and Towns] and Bielska's generic paintings kept in the style of the Warsaw School received good reviews, Libin's works received definitively bad ones. They were criticized for the selection of topics, their striking realism—too literal and opposing the sense of aesthetics—and finally for their colors.

In a review published in *Pion* weekly, Janina Puciata-Pawłowska wrote:

... Libin's works are offensive with the brutality of red and dark brownish gravy. Allegedly strong realism of his art is based on a randomly chosen model with the repulsive physiognomy of the obese drunkard, whom the artist paints (...) repeatedly (...). In general, showcasing portrait studies of one and the same person who additionally does not represent any interesting art experiences is quite missed; (...). The composition study depicting a tastelessly fat woman strikes one with the

lack of coherence with the solid figure (the head is too flat, the body and limbs—too vivid). The long series of the crayon works from the Riviera bore with monotony of the dark brown and greyish colors without a single sunray. The series of oil paintings from Provence is correctly calm and pale. What is striking, is the omnipresent lack of composition that cannot be excused for by designating the work with the notation 'part' or 'study.'<sup>48</sup>

Mieczysław Sterling was more moderate in his assessment: "...the entire vigor of the drawing as well as the pep of brush wither in the gravy of dark ginger paint and we feel sorry for the effort of the artist who, at present, is clearly unaware of the importance of the question of what art and its purpose are. What a shame, especially that it is said that Libin had spent three years in Paris, where he could have surely got rid of the school-like approach if it had been wrong. Anyways, his works of today make an impression of heaviness at first, and then, after taking a closer look—of an enormous effort that was directed to the wrong track. I am saddened to realize that more and more often, we need to reproach young artists for such attitudes."<sup>49</sup>

The most favorable review was included in the already quoted text authored by Wacław Husarski: "The present exhibition (...) indicate both advantages and shortcomings characteristic for Pruszkowski's school: his technical bravado keeps appearances of more comprehensive knowledge than really is, and his wit in painting is often more of a joke than anything else. This indisputable talent, skillfully triggered by the demanding professor, still requires deepening and discipline to achieve mastery and reach the full spectrum of possibilities."<sup>50</sup>

The abovementioned opinions, although quite pejorative, provide some information about the young artist's explorations that focused on the expression of form and color combined with maintaining some sort of realism in figurative painting and on the sublimation of color solutions in landscapes.

There is no doubt that the critics' reviews did not improve his professional standing. Such a situation resulted in the artist's increasing frustration related to a lack of work and possibilities to make a living. It also affected his personal and family life. However, faithful to his passion, Libin did not give up, but continued his artistic work. In the winter of 1937 and in the spring of 1938, he took part in the salons of the Art Propagation Institute. During the 9<sup>th</sup> Painting Salon, he exhibited *Studium pejzażowe* [Landscape Study]. At the 10<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Art Propagation Institute in Lublin, he presented another two—*Studium pejzażowe I* [Landscape Study I] and *Studium pejzażowe II* [Landscape Study II].<sup>51</sup> These might be the two paintings from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, MNW, signed and dated: *Kazimierz Libin 38*. The first, *Studium pejzażowe—Krajobraz miejski* [Landscape Study—the Urban Landscape], is a winter landscape depicting fields covered with snow with some buildings in the background, painted with slight brush strokes, kept

within tones of various shades of white with cold blue, yellow, and brown accents. The second, *Las Jesieni* [Autumn Forest] is a part of a leafy grove painted in shades of warm, refined greens and yellows, with slight spots of color. Both works clearly indicate the artist's interest in post-impressionism.

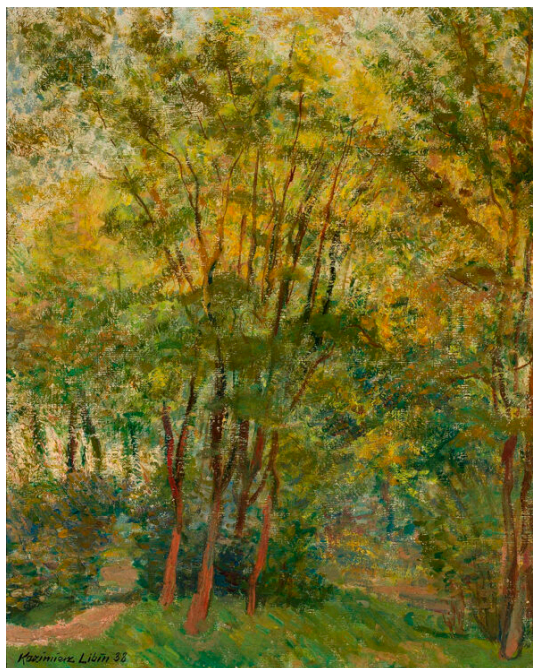


Kazimierz Libin, "Studium pejzażowe – Krajobraz miejski" [Landscape Study–Cityscape], 50 x 61 cm, oil on canvas, 1938, Collection of Instytut Propagandy Sztuki and Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie [Art Propagation Institute and National Museum in Warsaw].

World War II put an end to Kazimierz Libin's life and artistic work. As with many other artists of Jewish origin, members of Polish artistic circles, he was one of those who perished in the Holocaust.

The analysis of materials gathered so far indicates that Libin mostly focused on the search for his own artistic path. Staying in the circle of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts and its master, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Libin tried to use forms and techniques that were characteristic for Pruszkowski and his followers. He reached for historical themes and techniques applied by the "Old Masters" from the Łukaszowcy group, and the freedom of color and post-impressionist lightness of the "Warsaw School." His political views distanced him from Warsaw circles and directed him towards leftist and socially involved art that was far more expressive. Convinced of the universal values of culture, he intentionally participated in the activity of the circle around the Institute of Art Propagation—a modern institution open to artists representing various trends in art of the 1930s.





Kazimierz Libin, “Las jesienia” [Forest in the Autumn], 60 × 50 cm, oil on canvas, 1938, Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie [National Museum in Warsaw].

His identity was never a challenge for him. Possibly he did not take up any themes related to Jewish tradition or national/ethnic identity. Neither was he a member of any associations of Jewish artists. Only the Nazi policies in occupied Poland forced him to confront the issue of his identity and subsequently—the threat of losing life and cultural heritage. Hiding on the “Aryan side,” he decided to teach his then ten-year-old son about the origins of the Libins family, about Jewish religion and traditions. His hopes did not prove in vain. Jan Krzysztof has cultivated the memory of his father, his art, as well as closer and more distant family members.

I would therefore like to kindly thank Jan Krzysztof Libin for his efforts in re-constructing the story of his family as well as for his willingness to share the valuable materials and memories about his family home, his father, and finally, his father’s personality and artistic work.

*Translated by Aleksandra Szymczyk*

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photograph, signature “Kazimierz Libin,” 1925; Biogram, manuscript, 09/28/1925; Declaration of being admitted to the studio of Tadeusz Pruszkowski, manuscript, 1925; Certificate from I semester of the studies at the Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych, SSP [Warsaw School of Fine Arts], print, manuscript, 1925; Libin's applications to the Head of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts and the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts to exempt him from tuition fees, manuscript.: for 1926/27, 11/09/1926; for 1927/28, 11/10/1927; for 1929/30, 11/09/1929; Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for release of the debt related to the unpaid tuition fees for 1929/30 and admission in 1930/31, print, manuscript, 10/07/1930; Graduation certificates signed by T. Pruszkowski: No. 166, I and II semester, painting—very good, 1926; No. 46, III and IV semester, painting—very good, 1927; No. 581, I and II semester and No. 582, III and IV semester, solid and surface design—good, Jastrzębowski, 1929; No. 48 and 580, very good in the History of Ancient Art, part I and II, 1929; Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for absence in 1930/31 in order to study in France, print, manuscript, 11/12/1930; Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for the scholarship granted to Poles by the Foreign Governments, to cover the tuition in France, print, manuscript, 05/22/1931; Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for extending the leave for 1931/32, manuscript, 10/21/1931; Certificate for K. Libin on his leave related to six-month art studies, issued for him to apply for a concessionary passport, typescript, 01/20/1932.

1. The development of research on this subject is related to the activity of Professor Jerzy Malinowski and his associates, a circle of art historians collaborating with the Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma [The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute] (ŻIH), and also, in the following decades, with other centers. The first studies were published in the 1980s, and they included: Jerzy Malinowski, *Grupa “Jung Idysz” i żydowskie środowisko “Nowej Sztuki” w Polsce 1918–1923* [The “Jung Idysz” Group and the Jewish „New Art” Movement in Poland 1918–1923] (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk, Instytut Sztuki, 1987); Dorota Dec, Krystyna Moczulska, Marek Roztworowski and Janusz Wałek, eds., *Żydzi polscy. Wystawa, czerwiec–sierpień 1989* [Polish Jews. Exhibition, June–August 1989] (Cracow: Muzeum Narodowe, 1989); Jerzy Malinowski, *Malarstwo i rzeźba Żydów polskich w XIX i XX wieku* [Painting and Sculpture by Polish Jews in the 19th and 20th Centuries] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000). Starting in 2000, research on the subject has been continued by the Polish Institute of the World Art Studies in Warsaw within the series *Sztuka żydowska w Polsce i Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej, Studia i monografie* [Jewish Art in Poland and Central-Eastern Europe, Studies and Monographs]. On the Warsaw circles, see: Joanna Pollakówna, *Byli bracia malarze...* [There Were Brothers Painters...] (Warsaw: Hotel Sztuki, 2002); Renata Piątkowska, *Między “Ziemiańską”*

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2. Jan Krzysztof Libin, *Pamiętniki Krzysztofa* [Krzysztof's Memoir], typescript from the collection of the author. Jan Krzysztof Libin (born in 1933), public transport engineer and urbanist. In 1956, he graduated from the Cracow University of Technology. He lived in Crakow. He married Kalina Eugenia Bazańska in 1956, they had two daughters—Agnieszka and Ewa. ↵
  3. Biographical note: Maria Zakrzewska, “Libin Kazimierz,” in *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających (zmarłych przed 1966 r.). Malarze, rzeźbiarze, graficy* [“Libin Kazimierz,” in Dictionary of Polish and Foreign Artists Working in Poland (died before 1966). Painters, Sculptors, Graphic Designers], vol. V, (Warsaw: Krąg, 1993), 89-90. ↵
  4. All information related to family and kinship is based on *Pamiętniki Krzysztofa* [Krzysztof's Memoir] ↵
  5. Ber passed away in Łądek Zdrój, he was buried at the Jewish Cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw. ↵
  6. Mateusz Libin (died in 1936), married to Ludwika Zając, they had two sons: Antoni and Zdzisław. Ludwika and Antoni perished in 1942, in the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. ↵
  7. Ber's daughters died before 1933. Adela's daughter, Barbara Malwe (born in 1917) was a famous pianist. In 1945, she started working for Polish Radio. From 1957, she continued her music career in Israel. See: <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/biogramy/3227-malwe-barbara> (accessed: 05.25.2018). ↵
  8. Włodzimierz Libin, Ber's brother or his first cousin. He participated in the January Uprising and was a prisoner of the X. Pavilion of the Warsaw Citadel. Death sentence was changed into compulsory emigration. He left for France. ↵
  9. Alfred Tom (1879–1944), Germanist, translator of Yiddish literature and poetry, editor. See: Natalia Krynicka, “Manewry wokół ‘muru chińskiego.’ Tłumaczenia z literatury jidysz na polski przed pierwszą wojną światową” [Manoeuvres Around the ‘Chinese Wall.’ Translations of Yiddish Literature into Polish before World War I], “*Przekładaniec. Przekład żydowski żydowskość w przekładzie*, no. 29 (2014): 111. ↵
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11. Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts, Personal Files, *Kazimierz Libin File*: Duplicate of Middle School diploma, the Gimnazjum Męskie Władysława Giżyckiego w Warszawie [Władysław Giżycki Middle School for Boys in Warsaw], 06/20/1924, manuscript; Biography, 1925; Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for the scholarship granted to Poles by the Foreign Governments, to cover the tuition in France, print, manuscript, 05/22/1931. ↵



12. Piotr Marian Massonius (1862–1945), aesthetician, historian, activist in the area of Polish and Belarussian culture. Moved to Warsaw in 1982. Editor of magazines such as: *Przegląd Filozoficzny*, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, *Ateneum* and *Gazeta Polska*. In 1915–1918, founder and principle of the Polskie Gimnazjum Męskie [Polish Middle School for Boys] in Minsk of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. 1920–1932, professor of the Department of Humanities at Stefan Bartory University in Vilnius. <http://www.pogon.lt/wilnianie-zasluzeni/197-massonius-marian> (accessed: 10.20.2019). ↵
13. School, at 113 Puławska Street, founded in 1920. ↵
14. Scouting for men under the Naczelna Komenda Skautowa [Main Headquarters of Scouting], in Warsaw, from 1916: The Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP [Polish Scouting and Guiding Association], see: Tomasz Lewandowicz, *Powstanie harcerstwa w Polsce w latach 1911–1920* [The Birth of Scouting in Poland in 1911–1920], <http://www.jpilsudski.org/artykuly-ii-rzeczpospolita-dwudziestolecie-miedzywojnie/spoleczenstwo/item/1713-powstanie-harcerstwa-w-polsce-w-latach-1911-1920> (accessed: 10.20.2019). ↵
15. Konrad Krzyżanowski (1872–1922), portrait and landscape painter, graphic designer, and pedagogue. He studied in Sankt Petersburg and Munich. From 1900, based in Warsaw. He established the Private School of Painting, in 1904–1909, he taught at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts (Szkola Sztuk Pięknych, SSP). 1914–1918, he stayed in Volhynia, Polesia and in Kiev. From 1918, he run his school in the capital. His students were such artists as Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Elias Kanarek, and Piotr Potworowski. He designed stained glass; his illustrations were published in *Chimera*. He exhibited in Poland, as well as in England, Rome, Munich, Amsterdam, Kiev.  
Teodor Ziomek (1874–1937), landscape and seascape painter. He studied in Warsaw and Cracow. From 1905, based in Warsaw. He was a member of the “Odłam” Artists Association (1908–1919). He collaborated with *Sfinks* monthly until 1917. ↵
16. Tadeusz Pruszkowski (1888–1942), painter, pedagogue, art critic, and filmmaker. He studied in Warsaw and Paris. He traveled in Europe and to Algeria. Soldier of the Polish Legions. From 1912, based in Warsaw. From 1918, he was associated with the Warsaw School of Fine Arts [Szkola Sztuk Pięknych, SSP], in 1922 he became professor, and in 1930, Dean. He took his students to paint en plein aire in Kazimierz Dolny on the Vistula River, he also founded an art colony there. He was a member of the Stowarzyszenie Artystów Polskich “Rytm” [“Rhythm” Association of Polish Artists], the Blok Zawodowych Artystów Plastyków [Professional Artists Block], the board of the Art Propagation Institute (IPS), and the Towarzystwo Szerzenia Sztuki Polskiej wśród Obcych [Association for the Promotion of Polish Art Abroad]. The initiator and co-founder of groups such as the Bractwo Świętego Łukasza [St. Luke Fraternity] (1925–1930), the Warsaw School (1929–1939), and in the

- 1930s, the Masonic Lodge and the Fourth Group. He published in *Gazeta Polska*. He exhibited in Warsaw (individual shows 1914, 1922, 1927), Poznań, and Venice. During World War II, he was arrested for helping Jews and executed on his way to Pawiak. ↵
17. These addresses appear in the documents from the Archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. According to Jan Krzysztof, he lived in his family home in Pruszków until 1928. ↵
  18. Libin's poster, *Zbrodnia, nędza, obłąd—oto skutki alkoholu* [Crime, Poverty, Insanity—the Effects of Alcohol], 1930, is reproduced in *Sztuka Wszędzie. Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 1904–1944* [Art Everywhere. Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw 1904–1944], eds. Jola Gola, Maryla Sitkowska and Agnieszka Szewczyk (Warsaw: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, 2012), 437. ↵
  19. In the academic years 1926/27 and 1927/28, he received a positive answer. He did not pay a tuition fee for 1929/30, as is confirmed by the application of 10/7/1930 requesting debt cancellation and re-admission to the university. Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts, Personal Files, *Kazimierz Libin File*. ↵
  20. Jan Krzysztof Libin states that this was a “bench ghetto,” however, these events took place in 1937. ↵
  21. Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts, Personal Files, *Kazimierz Libin File*—Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for absence in 1930/31 in order to study in France, print, manuscript, 11/12/1930. He extended it to 1931/32—Application of 10/21/1931. ↵
  22. Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts, Personal Files, *Kazimierz Libin File*—Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts for the scholarship, 10/07/1930. ↵
  23. No longer exists, it was located near Szczęśliwicka Street. ↵
  24. Franciszek (Franc) Fiszer (1860–1937), a philosopher and scholar, studied in Leipzig. A popular persona in the literary and artistic circles of the capital. He was a frequent visitor of cafés such as Ziemiańska, Astoria, Blikle, Simon, and the café of the Art Propagation Institute (IPS). He was friends with Antoni Słonimski, Jan Lechoń, Julian Tuwim, Antoni Lange. ↵
  25. Twin brothers (1902–1945), painters. From 1923, students of Tadeusz Pruszkowski. Members of the “Warsaw School” and the Association of Jewish Painters and Sculptors. They collaborated with groups such as “Artes” and “Ster.” They also participated in student visits to paint en plein aire in Kazimierz Dolny on the Vistula River. They exhibited at the Art Propagation Institute [IPS], (1935, individual show), the Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych, TZSP [Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts], as well as in Cracow, Geneva, Edinburgh, Riga, Moscow, Venice, and New York. In 1932, they visited France, Belgium, and Holland. During World War II, they stayed in Lviv (around 1940) and in Białystok. After the

Germans entered the city, they were transferred to the ghetto and then deported to the concentration camp in Stutthof. They were murdered during transportation to the camp in Flossenbürg. ↵

26. For more on the subject, see: Magdalena Tarnowska, *Artyści żydowscy w Warszawie 1939–1945* [Jewish Artists in Warsaw in 1939–1945] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2015), 41–63.

↵

27. Józef Sandel, *Umgekumene jidisze kinstler in Pojln* [Plastycy żydowscy zamordowani w Polsce w latach 1939–1945], vol. 2 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Idisz Buch, 1957), 64–66. Józef Sandel (1894–1962), an art historian, critic and art dealer. Between 1912–1936 he was a publisher of *Der Mob* and owner of “Galerie Junge Kunst Joseph Sandel” [Josef Sandel Gallery of Young Art], in Dresden. Based in Warsaw from 1936, he was active in the Jewish artistic circles. During World War II, he stayed in the USSR. From 1946, he was the head of the Centralny Komitet Żydów Polskich, CKŻP [the Central Committee of Polish Jews], as well as the founder and chairman of the Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krzewienia Sztuk Pięknych, ŻTKSP [Jewish Association of the Propagation of Fine Arts], he worked in the JHI until 1953. He published in: *Literarysże Bleter*, *Hajnt*, *Biuletyn ŻIH*, and *Nasze Słowo*. He was the author of *Jidysze motiwn in der pojliszer Kunst* [Jewish Motifs in Polish Art] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Idisz Buch, 1954); *Umgekumene jidisze kinstler in Pojln*, vol. 1–2 (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Idisz Buch, 1957). ↵

28. According to Jan Krzysztof Libin’s memoir, this apartment was a site of clandestine activity by underground groups. ↵

29. The reason was rumors about Krzysztof’s origins. To protect him, his mother taught him Catholic prayers. ↵

30. On the subject of the artists in the ghetto, see: Magdalena Tarnowska, *Artyści żydowscy w Warszawie...*, and Magdalena Tarnowska, “Tadeusz Bornstein (1919–1942). Life and Artistic Output during World War II,” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, Warsaw, no. 2 (2017): 47–62.

↵

31. He was buried in Żeliszewo. The burial site of Eugenia remains unknown. ↵

32. Until 1942, she was in hiding together with her parents. After the war, she attained a diploma in Nursing in Kielce. ↵

33. She saved Tadeusz Stępniewski’s life. After the war, she was an expert in the area of handicrafts as well as a handicrafts collector. ↵

34. He was sent to Siberia (after arrest by the NKVD) and then to Tajikistan. He married Marianna. They had a son, Jan Kazimierz (born in 1948). ↵

35. See: *Sztuka wszędzie*. ↵

36. It is unknown when exactly they were created, but they were in his atelier in the mid-1930s.



37. The bishop resurrected him so that he could testify in the court that the village of Piotrowin had been rightfully purchased. Józef Szczypka, *Legendy polskie* [Polish Legends] (Warsaw: PAX, 1983), 48–53.
38. See: Jan Zamoyski, *Łukaszowcy. Malarze i malarstwo Bractwa św. Łukasza* [Lukecists. Painters and Paintings of the St. Luke Fraternity] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1989).
39. This information stems from the interview, I conducted with the artist's son in 2018. Kleczyński published in *Kurier Warszawski*, *Sztuki Piękne*, *Sztuka i Praca*.
40. "The Warsaw School:" E. Arct, W. Bartoszewicz, L. Bielska-Tworkowska, M. Bylina, W. Koch, A. Łyżwiński, W. Palessa, J. Przeradzka, A. Rak, T. Roszkowska, E. i M. Seidenbeutel.
41. Wacław Husarski, *Otwarcie sezonu wystawowego w IPS-ie* [Show Season Opens in the Art Propagation Institute], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, October 6, 1935, 784.
42. See: <https://natemat.pl/137837> (accessed: 01.20.2020). Fiszer was a friend of his wife, Izabela. Gelbard (1894-1944) in collaboration with Roman Sigalin designed, amongst others, the building of Adria, housed on Kielecka Street and Sienna Street. He also illustrated poetry books by "Skamandryci." Izabela (née Schwartz, under occupation Stefania Czajka, after the war, Czajka-Stachowicz, 1893/1897-1969), was an art historian and writer, and the muse of Mojżesz Kisling. During the war, she stayed in the Warsaw ghetto, she was also a partisan of the Armia Ludowa, AL [The People's Army]. She was the author of: *Pieśni żałobne getta* [The Ghetto Requiem] (1946), and *Ocalił mnie kowal* [A Blacksmith Saved My Life] (1956).
43. *Wystawa Dzieł Sztuki pod Nazwą Salon Zimowy, XII 1931–II 1932* [The Exhibition of Artworks Under the Title Winter Salon], exh. cat. (Warsaw: IPS, 1931): *Bezrobotni I–III* [The Unemployed I - III], etchings, cat. pos. 120–122, 19.
44. Archive of the Academy of Fine Arts, Personal Files, *Kazimierz Libin File*—Application to the General Council of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts of 10/07/1930.
45. *V Salon Zimowy, II 1935* [The 5th Winter Salon, II 1935], exh. cat. (Warsaw: Art Propagation Institute, 1935), cat. pos. 106, 21.
46. *Wystawa Leokadii Bielskiej, Kazimierza Libina, Józefa Toma, wrzesień 1935* [The Group Exhibition of Leokadia Bielska, Kazimierz Libin, Józef Tom, September 1935], exh. cat. (Warsaw: IPS, 1935), cat. pos. 28–79, 9–11.
47. These were: 25 oil works, 11 distempers, 15 chalk and coal drawings, including: 30 landscapes (9 from Provence, 17 from Riviera, 2 from Venice, 1 from Nice, 1 cityscape), 3 still lifes, 1 composition study, 6 portrait studies, 2 images of Krzyś, 10 studies of a head.
48. Janina Puciata-Pawłowska, "Wystawy w IPS" [Exhibitions at the Art Propagation Institute],

*Pion: Tygodnik Literacko-Społeczny*, September 28, 1935, 5. ↵

49. Mieczysław Sterling, *Wystawa sztuki w IPS* [The Art Exhibition at the Art Propagation Institute], *Świat*, October 19, 1935, 5. ↵
50. Wacław Husarski, *Otwarcie sezonu wystawowego w IPS-ie* [Opening of the Show Season in the Art Propagation Institute], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, October 6, 1935, 784. ↵
51. *IX Salon Malarski, XII 1937- I 1938* [IX Painting Salon, XII 1937–I 1938] (Warsaw: Art Propagation Institute, 1938): *Studium pejzażowe* [Landscape Study], oil, 61 x 50 cm, cat. pos. 78, 14; *X Salon IPS i Wystawa Zbiorowa Lucjana Adwentowicza, 19 II–15 III* [X Salon of the Art Propagation Institute and the Group Exhibition of Lucjan Adwentowicz, 19 II–15 III] (Lublin: The House of the Lublin Union of Cultural Activity, 1938): *Studium pejzażowe I* [Landscape Study I], 1938, oil, 50 x 61 cm, *Studium pejzażowe II* [Landscape Study II], 1938, oil, 61 x 50 cm, cat. pos. 49–50, 11. ↵

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ORCID

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In 1993–2008, she worked for the Museum of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and since 2012, as assistant professor at the History of Art Institute, The Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. The subjects of her research involve Jewish art in Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century in the context of European art—including iconography of national identity, art of the Holocaust and art from 1945–1956. She is also professionally interested in the 19<sup>th</sup> century painting in Warsaw and provenance research. In 2009–2011, she was a member of the *Board of Experts in Provenance Studies in Polish Museums in the Area of the Post-Jewish Property* of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. She is a member of the Polish Institute of World Art Studies, the Association of Art Historians, the Polish Association for Jewish Studies, and jury member in the Polish Contest on Knowledge of History and Culture of Polish Jews, organized by the Shalom Foundation.

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