

POP GOES POLAND?

A conversation about the work of Jerzy "Jurry" Zieliński between exhibition curator Alison M. Ginergas and Adam Szymczyk, director of the Kunsthalle Basel.

ALISON M. GINGERAS: I discovered the work of Jerzy "Jurry" Zieliński quite by chance. About two years ago I was in a bookstore in Warsaw and came across the publication *Jurry. Powrót Artysty* (2010) that had just been published.¹ I became instantly obsessed with this artist I had never heard of before. I found the work to be visually and conceptually compelling, and was surprised that many acquaintances from the Polish art world had not really heard about his work until the publication of this book and since his work began to be included in shows, such as at Galeria Zderzak and the Muzeum Narodowe in Krakow in 2010.² How did you learn about Jurry's work? Were you aware of him before his recent 'rediscovery'? Was he part of the Foksal history that you were involved with?³

ADAM SZYMCHYK: Yes, I was aware of his work and I think so were many of my contemporaries in Poland in the 1990s. Neo-Neo-Neo, a loosely collaborative project, rather than an artist group, that he brought to life together with Jan "Dobson" Dobkowski in 1967 at the age of 24, was among the few standard examples of Polish pop art whenever it was mentioned in the few available publications on Polish contemporary art at the time. In 1994 there was a Neo-Neo-Neo show that took place at Zachęta National Gallery, Warsaw, so the work was not at all forgotten. However it was in no way an important reference during my formative years. The fact that Jurry and Dobson formalised their collaboration by giving it a name helped them to establish a visibility and made their practice more tangible and comprehensible to audiences and critics. It was a strategy that I think had to do with inventing a brand name, before someone else coined one for them. It helped them to pitch their work as something youthful and distinctly different to what other artists were doing, yet the name was a perfect empty signifier and, as such, did not circumscribe the work within fixed formal or ideological parameters. The tripled 'novelty' that the name loudly declares is tautological; it's a kind of mechanical incantation, a worn repetition, an anonymous open call directed to no one addressee. After their first public appearances in Warsaw, Jurry and Dobson were invited as Neo-Neo-Neo to organise a show at Galeria Foksal in 1968. However, the invitation was soon after withdrawn without explanation and the show never materialised, I suppose to the bitter disappointment of the two young artists.

AG: It is tempting to read well known iconographic references from the pop universe of the 1960s into Jurry's imagery, particularly the trope of the mouth or lips, which figures in the work of Jurry's more famous North American and Western European contemporaries, such as Tom Wesselmann and John Pasche. Beyond these obvious affinities

1. *Jurry. Powrót Artysty: Jerzy Ryszard "Jurry" Zieliński (1943–1980)*, ed. by Marta Tarabuła, Galeria Zderzak, Krakow, 2010.

2. *Powrót Jurry'ego* was an exhibition held in Krakow at Galeria Zderzak, 8 October 2010–10 December 2010 and the Muzeum Narodowe, 8 October 2010–30 October 2010.

3. Galeria Foksal is a non-commercial art gallery in Warsaw that was established in 1966.

Klubu U Medyka,
Warsaw,
1967

A coffin bound
by art styles and
movements is
suspended from
the ceiling
above a young
audience
anticipating
the further
events during
the first
manifestation of
Neo-Neo-Neo
at the club
U Medyka.



(even if they are coincidental), are there other visual antecedents that you see in Jurry's pantheon of symbols and tropes? I am wondering if there are some connections to the very vibrant graphic art scene in Poland in the 1960s. I can detect some superficial connections with contemporary poster design but I was hoping you could elucidate these links.

AS: His paintings are definitely wedded to a visual vocabulary that was specific to communist Poland in the 1970s. Although it is true that he also borrowed from international artists, I would say that the subject matter of his work was by and large defined by the immediate circumstances of his existence, and by the political context in Poland. The so-called *Polska Szkoła Plakatu* (Polish Poster School), which emerged in the 1960s and led to the creation of the International Poster Biennial and the Poster Museum in Warsaw, was comprised of a number of artists who did not aim to create a common style but developed highly idiosyncratic visual languages, including Jan Lenica, Henryk Tomaszewski and Roman Cieśliewicz. I would not say that Jurry was more influenced by Polish poster art than by any other visual art; indeed in one statement he dismisses artists who end up designing magazine covers, and it is striking how few graphic design works he made, despite the strong graphic and typographic qualities of his paintings. He wanted to paint against the post-impressionist (or post-Bonnard) tradition that dominated (and has continued to dominate) art academies in Poland. Therefore he chose clear-cut, simplified shapes with clear symbolic references and used strong, poster-like colours instead of dabbling in shades of green, brown and grey, painting unsexy still lives and equally unsexy nudes. He wanted to be hot but to keep cool at the same time. That's how I think he understood tragedy and that's how he used irony to express tragic feelings.



Ostatni Romantyk
(The Last Romantic)

1969

Oil on canvas, 199.5 x 131.5 cm.

AG: I also wanted to discuss how in a post-Cold War context the iconography of Jurry's work is not very legible to a broad public audience. When we showed the three paintings at *Oko* in New York, there was a genuine enthusiasm for the work that came from its graphic sharpness and visuality. In other words, it did not matter that the average viewer did not see that the eye in *Ironia* (Irony), 1970, was the Polish eagle, or that the subject matter of *Zaspokajanie* (Meeting or Satisfying), 1969, would probably have been politically provocative at the time it was made. I'd like to hear your thoughts about this deracinated political symbolism in Jurry's work. Do you think that this symbolic and political play is legible to a younger generation in Poland? Does it matter? It also seems to me that there is some nostalgia for the time of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) that has also contributed to the way in which

Jurry's work is being received today. Here I am thinking about how *Nowy Dziennik*, the New York Polish language newspaper, chose to frame the exhibition in the two articles they published on the occasion of the *Oko* exhibition. They spoke of his work as 'traffic signs of existence during the PRL time' and described Jurry as the 'James Dean' of the communist art scene. I am hoping we can discuss specific works such as *Uśmiech, Czyli "Trzydziesci" – lac*, "*Cha Cha Cha*" (The Smile, or 'Thirty Years', 'Ha Ha Ha'), 1974, and *Gorący* (Hot), 1968.

AS: Perhaps Jurry was the first one to anticipate the nostalgia for the PRL that would come in the future, and the role that nostalgia and romantic imagery would play in the actual ideological construction of the symbolic sphere. His attitude to socialism and romanticism was complex and ambivalent, as it was to pathos and utopia. I think the fact that he dealt a lot with irony, and even painted it, might be the key to understanding his approach: a rhetorical trope that posits a sort of concrete abstraction and embodies contradiction. In 1969 he painted a pair of red pincers that come down from the sky and pull up a green leaf in the shape of the peace dove, and titled the work *Ostatni Romantyk* (The Last Romantic). He read into the iconosphere of real existing socialism while experiencing it. He explored, with remarkable intelligence and great wit, the unconscious or underbelly of official iconography, toying with the sexual connotations of the word *zaspokajanie* (satisfying), for instance, which was commonly used in persuasive propaganda phrases such as *zaspokajanie potrzeb* (satisfying the needs) in order to show that socialism and consumerism were not mutually exclusive. Similarly, in *Uśmiech, Czyli "Trzydziesci" – lac*, "*Cha Cha Cha*" he painted the XXX symbol – which stood for the thirtieth anniversary of the PRL in 1974 and which was reproduced on postage



Still taken from archival footage of Ryszard Siwiec, who set himself on fire in protest against the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia.

stamps, coins, posters, exercise books, public monuments and in newspapers – as three stitches sewing two lips together, the lips of a speechless smile, or rather those of an ironic grin, despite the laughter implied by the title. The painting *Gorący* you asked about represents a burning man. The flames and the face become one, dissolving into ornament. The painting is rich and mannerist but the title dryly states 'Hot'. What or who is hot here? Is there enough to connect this work with Ryszard Siwiec's self-immolation during the official National Harvest celebration at the Tenth Anniver-



A 1974 commemorative stamp, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland.

sary Stadium in Warsaw on 8 September 1968, which was a protest against the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia? Sure, it is useful to know the context. But this event constitutes just half of the work, the other half lies in Jury's originality as a thinker and his ability to produce images that abound with meanings. Perhaps Bruce Nauman's text and photo-based work, with its focus on the materiality of language, slips of the tongue and visual-textual puns, is closer to Jury's work than, say, Robert Indiana's or Polish soft-psychedelic magazine and poster designs, as exemplified by *Ty i Ja* magazine covers and Polish record covers from the period.

AG: Could you contextualise the late 1960s and 1970s in Poland? It seems that most people in the West are unaware of the shifting tides of politics and the social ferment that characterised this critical juncture in Polish history.



Cover of *Ty i Ja (Me and You)*
Polish illustrated magazine,
1950-70.

AS: It is important to realise that all of Jury's work was made within a period marked by three dramatic turns in Polish political and symbolic history, in 1968, 1970 and 1980, the year of the artist's death. Jury and Dobson conceived Neo-Neo-Neo one year before a major political crisis took place in Poland in March 1968. That year the workers' militia was sent by Communist authorities to suppress student protests at Warsaw University, and then, as a result of competition between two factions in the Polish United Workers' Party,⁴ and following the Soviet Union's stance towards Israel and the Six-Day War, which Israel won in June,⁵ antisemitic resentment incited the population. Many of the remaining Polish Jews were forced to leave the country. In 1970 Edward Gierk became the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party following that year's social unrest, which ended in dozens of protesting shipyard workers being shot by the police. Gierk announced the economic opening of the country, Poland bought licenses for Western consumer goods such as Polski Fiat cars and Coca-Cola, and lived on generous loans from Western Europe, which remained unpaid when the economic crisis hit hard in the late 1970s. Then came the Solidarnosc movement in 1980, following massive strikes, again in Polish shipyards.

Jury's last major work – the series of twenty-two modestly sized *Helsinki Portraits*: ugly, realist depictions of politi-



Bruce Nauman
Waxing Hot
from Eleven Colour photographs
1966-67/1970/2007

cians who participated in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe which took place in Helsinki and Geneva between 1973 and 1975 – was in the most direct way political, but very Neo-Neo-Neo too in that it seems to plainly ascertain the political reality of the time instead of taking a clear critical stance. This series marked a transition in Jury's work, both in terms of style and subject matter. The *Helsinki Portraits* series is almost epic in its ambition to portray an era, and makes one think of Gerhard Richter's *48 Portraits* of 1971.⁶ Jury, however, used a very different selection process to that which Richter used to choose his subjects, limiting his representation to twenty-two politicians from different states. This series also marked a break from Jury's earlier concern with painting that was both abstract and representational, crass and eloquent, casually contemporary, erudite-symbolic and linguistic-sexual all at the same time.

AG: I was also thinking about how Jury's *Helsinki Portraits* are formally and conceptually similar to the political portraits that Otto Muehl was making at this time, and how they relate to the grids of small, deliberately de-skilled figurative paintings that Martin Kippenberger made in the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as *Uno di voi, un tedesco in Firenze (One of You, A German in Florence)*.



Helsinki
(*Helsinki*)
1979-1980
Oil on canvas, in 22 parts. Each 70 x 50 cm.

behind it are still far from being explained. But certainly these portraits can be seen in the realist tradition that continued into the 1970s and 1980s with artists such as Edward Dwurnik, and then into the 1990s by a group of younger painters from Krakow, of whom Wilhelm Sasnal is the best known. This realist tradition is heterogeneous;

AS: Yes, although on the other hand, in Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries this kind of work must have been seen as an ironic pastiche of official, socialist realist portraits of state figures and workers, similar, for instance, to the relatively little known portraits painted by Ion Grigorescu in Romania.⁷ In *Jury. Powrót Artysty*, Wojciech Szymanski suggests that Jury's portraits could have been officially commissioned for the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe that was scheduled to be held in Madrid in 1980.⁸ It is also not known if more than twenty-two portraits existed or were planned. So the origins of the work and the intentions

4. The Polish United Workers' Party was the Communist party that governed the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) from 1948 to 1989.

5. The Six-Day War was fought between Israel and the neighbouring states of Egypt, Syria and Jordan between 5 June and 10 June 1967.

6. Richter's *48 Portraits*, 1971, is a series of black and white paintings of famous men from nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and North American history, and includes portraits of notable scientists, philosophers and writers.

7. Ion Grigorescu's portraits are now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

8. Wojciech Szymański, 'Ambasadorowie', in *Jury. Powrót Artysty*, p.17.

9. See Jerzy "Jury" Zieliński, 'Świat NEO' ('The World of NEO'), 1967, reprinted in *Jury. Powrót Artysty*, pp.96-8.

the influences can be traced only conjecturally. It existed as a side-line in parallel to all kinds of abstract work considered to be more 'avant-garde', as well as conceptual art.

Jurry seems to have been relatively well informed about international developments in painting. In his texts and manifestos for Neo-Neo-Neo he refers to the likes of Martial Raysse and Ronald Bladen, and artists such as Robert Indiana and even Ellsworth Kelly quite obviously left a mark on his work at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s.⁹ But most of these influences came second-hand, from publications and from the international graphic art that he saw at the Warsaw Poster Festival, which was established in the late 1960s. He certainly did not have much chance to see a lot of international painting in the flesh.

AG: I imagine that Jury's open embrace of these American and Western European influences might also have earned him some disdain from the Polish establishment and might explain why he was sidelined for so long.

AS: I believe he must have been seen negatively by Polish orthodox conceptual artists associated with Galeria Foksal, since he was a sort of colour field, cartoon pop painter and a bohemian with a sense of humour, and by Polish concrete poets, because he inscribed sexual imagery into linguistic signs, and saturated letters with colours. For the loose constellation of artists forming the Polish neo-avant-garde of the 1970s – including such different personalities as Zofia Kulik, Andrzej Partum, Wiktor Gutt, Marek Konieczny and many others – he must have been seen as too much of an ego-driven nihilist, as too committed to painting, his work too introverted and idiosyncratic, or perhaps just too fragile. Jury brought pleasure to text, and marrying the two seemed unthinkable to these artists at the time.

AG: There's so much to unpack in what you are saying. First, I would love to explore in more detail this idea of there being a prohibitive orthodoxy within so-called 'advanced art' scenes. The existence of exclusionary definitions that determine what forms and content are acceptable for avant-garde art is of course a phenomenon that has occurred in many different parts of the world and so I'd like to discuss the specifics of the Polish or Eastern European situation in this regard. But it seems telling that the timing of the present 'rediscovery' of Jury's work has something to do with a post-ideological shift in the art world in general. Now we operate in a more pluralistic environment – figurative painting can co-exist on an equal footing with, for example, de-materialised or performative art – but I sense too that there is still a divided art world in Poland. There is still some scepticism that lingers around Jury's work. Is the visual pop idiom something that is still looked down upon or with suspicion in Poland? Is visual pleasure something that is perceived as offensive in relation to the high seriousness of the Polish neo-avant-garde today?

AS: Between various art scenes and milieus in Poland there were significant differences and struggles for artistic as well as economic supremacy. Some artists could sell their work to Western clients through state-run enterprises that even participated at international art fairs. Who could sell and who couldn't was of course a matter of political skill and depended on the artist's ability to conform to the obscure rules governing the mafia-like power structures of state organisations that had all areas of life within their jurisdiction. Some project spaces, such as Galeria Foksal

which was established in 1966, did not represent artists commercially but rather created stables of artists in a different sense, and were important players that could set and change hierarchies in Polish art, directly affecting the lives of individual artists, hence why I imagine Jury and Dobson would have been so disappointed when their invitation to organise a show there in 1968 was withdrawn.

But I would like to go back to the notion of rediscovery. Rather than thinking about the resuscitation of a historical figure as a form of avenging or redeeming the individual – which I believe is deeply problematic both psychoanalytically and politically – I am for an idea that acknowledges all forms of parallel development – influences and conflicts – in the different strains and genres of art and between cultures that, despite political and cultural control, are not impermeable. This notion of parallelism, and the scattered, random, personal, and extremely intense and decisive mutual influences that spread between people, images and words seem to give a more accurate picture of how meanings are built up over generations and across cultures than when we focus on the event of discovery or rediscovery, usually after the artist's death or when the artist is in his or her later life, and which is usually instigated by, and has inevitable and almost immediate effects on the art market. There are countless examples of such 'discoveries' from all over the world, from Senegal to Brazil, Poland to France, Japan to the US. The idea of 'rediscovery' is actually hopelessly patronising and colonial in that it forgets that there have always been some people, even if only a few, who have been interested in the artist's work and in preserving its memory. It is these people – friends, aficionados, lovers – who make their personal memories and their knowledge available to the discoverers who come after and take the stock. The 'pluralistic environment' that you are talking about as the co-existence of different tendencies on an equal footing has always existed as a possibility. Sometimes it has been realised and sometimes it has not. I do not see it as something that has only come to the fore in recent years. What I am afraid of is that the quality of shock that is the only interesting thing about a 'rediscovery' is becoming subsumed by what you call the 'post-ideological' art world, and what I prefer to call simply a politically indifferent, truly disinterested environment, while the artist in question might have dared to live through the anguish of work, or wasted away while trying to reach for the impossible. Jury's last typewritten page, a sort of poetic last word, speaks about this experience of limits of which the art world is bluntly unaware. In this short visionary text, written just a month before his death, Jury addresses both death and money, as well as the cosmic and personal dimensions of life:

*I saw
death before my eyes
the money
(from afar)
the stars.
(Waking up under the bridge,
since there are no stars in stairwells
only the janitor's eyes
sometimes even nice)...¹⁰*

10. Extract from Jerzy "Jury" Zielirski, 'Widziałem śmierć' ('I Saw Death'), 1980, reprinted in Jury. *Powrót Artysty*, p.112.

AG: Your point about being a proponent of parallelism is great in theory, but I wonder if it is possible to actually practice it in real time. If I understand you correctly, it seems like quite a utopic notion that maybe only becomes clear in hindsight. I think that there is always a choice, an agency that decides what is allowed to take up space in the cultural sphere, in both the public and private sectors. Some artists and practices rise to prominence, others go unnoticed, and certain ideas or artistic tendencies are actively repressed. Even in the post-colonial, politically correct era that we now live in it is not a complete free-for-all where all cultural forms co-exist equally. For example, one could argue that in certain circles there is a desire to 'rediscover' previously repressed or marginalised artists and bring them almost seamlessly into the master narrative (for instance the global pop show, *The World Goes Pop*, that Tate is planning for 2015, or the *Global Conceptualism* exhibition that took place at the Queens Museum in 1999). Nowadays that circle of influence seems to be trying to outweigh the more commercially successful artists (the blue chip painters or auction stars) in order to make room for artists who have had very little visibility on a larger, so-called global stage. If anything, the whole notion of global art is a patronising construct in and of itself. My point is that there is always agency involved, and returning to the case of Jurry, that agency is not passive but active, and that activeness sometimes involves things that are problematic, such as revisionist histories or a certain kind of myth-making around an artist who is no longer here to represent themselves. I've encountered some grumbling among the Polish art establishment about the mythologising of Jurry as some kind of anti-communist hero, or even that he was killed by the secret police because of his anti-government attitudes. Do you care to comment on this?

AS: I do not believe that parallelism and the idea of scattered mutual inspirations are synonymous with the notion of global art, such as that put forward by *Global Conceptualism*. That often leads to the levelling of differences for the sake of common denominators, despite the sense of inclusiveness that lies behind seeing art from a global perspective. I think we are witnessing the process of replacing old master narratives with new ones, as museums and audiences adapt to shifts in art historical thinking and educational strategies that have been introduced by scholars, writers and curators over the last fifteen years. The forging of new master narratives is inevitable as long as the driving forces and the power structures behind institutions such as museums and the enterprises of the art market (which are actually becoming one superstructure now) are left intact. However, it is still possible to work with artists and research bodies of work that have not been the subject of much art historical attention and to use this research to undermine the orders that reproduce sameness. This favours marginal figures and draws attention to problematic issues that evade easy categorisations. One such example is the figurative, erotic and textual work of Jurry, which countered the black and white images and modest gestures of Polish (neo)-conceptual art of the 1970s. But, clearly, much of the work done to bring forgotten artists to light is still only taking place in a handful of museums and other institutions that could be said to impose a suffocating political correctness. Curiously, these are exactly the museums that show little interest in most of the commercially successful artists of today. Does it mean that these artists are 'repressed' today? I think it is the wrong word to use, especially when we consider what repression meant in places like South America, Africa or Eastern Europe not so long ago. I am not sure whether Jurry is the best example of an anti-communist hero among Polish artists, who still suffer from the complex of not being recognised as dissidents, contrary to their colleagues in the world of literature. He was more of a rebel against everything and everybody, including himself; a sensitive and terribly complicated individual whose idea of art as a

poetic expression of a totality of experience, as important as life itself, was not really understood during his lifetime. He dropped out – socially and in practical life – and like many before him lost control of his career in the process, deliberately or not.

AG: I was also wondering if you could speak about Jurry's self-identification with Polska B (Poland B), and whether you feel this construct is still meaningful in a contemporary context? ¹¹

AS: The testimonies of friends and contemporary photographs confirm that Jurry cultivated a sort of dandy-proletarian look, and sided with all kinds of low-life characters in bars and also in the notoriously dangerous Praga district of Warsaw, where the studio (which he was assigned by the state in recognition of his importance as artist) was located and where he eventually died after falling from a window. But the iconography of his paintings is more often connected to a romanticised (and ridiculed) Polish rural out-back than to modern city life. He preferred to paint open spaces. Roads, horizons, fields, skies, meadows, jungles and primeval forests provide backgrounds for iconic signs, letters, faces, mouths and other body parts that occupy what seems to be the foreground of his paintings. Having said that, he loved to conflate the foreground and the background, playing with positive and negative shapes and using bizarre contrasts of intense, almost fluorescent colours to further enhance the ambiguity of forms. For example, the red and white colours of the Polish flag become a couple having intercourse doggy style in the painting *Z Honorem (With Dignity)*, 1974, the title of which is borrowed from a phrase that is typical of patriotic poems or military songs. There's an almost Escherian deception in the way Jurry plays with optical perception, but it never becomes formulaic as it does with op art. It serves as a means to an end. Jurry's optical devices produce meaning by making us attentive to the way the subjects of his paintings are concealed and revealed through optical movement rather than fixed to one visible thing. He plays with distances and the sizes of objects in the same way that his titles consist of



Z Honorem
(With Dignity)
1974
Oil on canvas, 92 x 65 cm.

¹¹. Historically, the term Polska B (Poland B) referred to the areas that belonged to the Russian partition from the end of the eighteenth century until 1918. Poland B was anything east of Warsaw and east of the Vistula river. The term references the political and cultural distinctions between the nation's more favoured, developed and powerful west (Poland A), and its economically and socially downtrodden east (Poland B).

semantic shifts, pleonasm and elisions. His reality is liquid, polymorphous, and dreamlike. A face becomes a foot, a tongue in the mouth becomes a belt (a reference to vomiting as the final act of gluttony), a figure based on the photograph of a Soviet guerilla girl murdered by Nazis becomes akin to a Japanese bondage character, and so on. In *Zakres Trwogi* (*The Scope of Fear*), instead of housing a tongue and palate, a mouth opens into an aerial view of Poland as seen on a map, with dark bird-like shapes hovering above it. The painting was made in 1976, the year of another violent episode in the history of the PRL, when workers' protested in Radom and Ursus against the government's decision to increase the price of food. Similarly in the top right corner of *Ironia*, a stylised green eagle spans its wings across a red sun; together they become an eye in the pale face of the background 'sky', with a grinning mouth and a small moustache in the lower left corner. It is simultaneously a cropped portrait of a quarter of a face in close-up and a landscape with a setting sun.



Zakres Trwogi
(*The Scope of Fear*)
1976
Oil on canvas, 80 x 105 cm.

There was an article on Jury in 1978 in the Polish magazine *Nowa Wieś* (the title connoted the effort to modernise rural areas of Poland) in which the journalist remarked that although the nickname 'Jury' may sound international, the artist was still a true patriot, and always introduced himself as 'Jury Poland'.¹² To this Jury added the letter B, which he scribbled at the end of the sentence in ballpoint pen. For Jury, to identify with Poland B meant to reject the salons, the snobbery, and the pretence of au courant trends in literature, cinema, fashion and music followed by Warsaw's and Poland's youth at that time. It was partly self-deprecating and partly ironic in that it enabled an identification with a projection of Polishness consisting of contradictions: underdeveloped and ambitious, irratio-

nal and conservative, insane and inward looking, pious and wild, sentimental and dangerous. In *Tepota – Tesknota* (*Dullness – Yearning*), 1971, a profile of a man forming part of the outline of an axe (a farmer's tool) also becomes a window opening onto a pastoral landscape with a river and trees. The opening lines of Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* (*Sir Thaddeus*), the great romantic and quintessentially Polish epic poem of 1834 are: 'Lithuania, my country, thou / Art like good health; I never knew till now / How precious, till I lost thee. Now I see / Thy beauty whole, because I yearn for thee'.¹³ The location of the poem is a hamlet called Soplicowo that was in rural Lithuania in 1811 and 1812, a part of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The backdrop for Poland's national epic is right in the heart of what became Poland B, a remote, dull and ultimately lost place that is both yearned for and hated.



Tepota/Tesknota
(*Dullness/Yearning*)
1971
Oil on canvas, 73 x 100 cm.

12. Paweł Kwiatkowski, 'Patrzeć i Spostrzegać' ('Look and Perceived'), *Nowa Wieś*, 8 January 1978, pp.6–7, reprinted in *Jury. Powrót Artysty*, pp.408–9.

13. Adam Mickiewicz, *Pan Tadeusz*, trans. by Kenneth R. Mackenzie, in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe. Volume Two: National Romanticism – The Formation of National Movements*, ed. by Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2007, p.214.