

KATARZYNA NOWAKOWSKA-SITO

LUDOMIR SLEŃDZIŃSKI'S TRIPS TO ITALY 1923–1925

THE ORIGIN AND RIPENING OF CLASSICISM

Two trips to Italy in 1923/1924 and 1924/1925 made by Ludomir Sleńdziński, a co-founder and leader of the so-called “Vilnius school” and the main representative of classicism in interwar Polish art,¹ culminated in the monumental work, *Portrait of My Wife at the Forum Romanum* (1925, fig. 1), showing Irena née Dobrowolski, whom Sleńdziński married in Rome, against the background of the Arch of Septimius Severus. An enthusiastic reviewer of the *La Tribuna* magazine saw it as, *amabile allegoria del viaggio d'Italia*.²

Sleńdziński's Italian itinerary can be easily reconstructed based on preserved photographs and correspondence, as well as images from the *My Diary* series (1965–1966), now in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (“MNW”), where the artist immortalized most of the visited historic monuments and sights.³ They will not, however, be the subject of my exploration.

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The Polish version of the article was published in *Roczniki Humanistyczne* vol. 60, issue 4 (2012).

¹ This paper was presented during the session, *A Pole in Italy, An Italian in Poland*, organized by the Institute of Art History, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University at the Italian Cultural Institute in Warsaw on 17 November 2011. I would like to express my thanks to The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok for their assistance in my research of the topic. I am particularly grateful to Izabela Suchocka for sharing albums with a photo documentation of the artist's travels.

² *La Tribuna*, 7 Apr 1925. This and other opinions of the Italian press quoted after: Ludomir SLEŃDZIŃSKI, *Wspomnienia* (1950), Special Collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, typescript, ref. 31.

³ The *My Diary* series consists of 17 boards covering subsequent periods of artist's life and creative work. The entire series is nine double-sided diptychs (oil on board) measuring 68 x 92 cm, ref. no. MPW 3231-3239. See Irena KOŁOSZYŃSKA, “Pamiętnik Ludomira Sleńdzińskiego. Lata 1889–1962,” *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* 16 (1972), 455–505; “Śladami ‘Pamiętnika’,” *Exhibition Catalogue* (Białystok: Galeria im. Sleńdzińskich, 1997).

I am more interested here in the impact of the tour on Sleńdziński in the context of his Italian meetings and trends in European art of the 1920s that he followed and in which he sought answers to his artistic dilemmas.⁴

Italy had been a popular destination for centuries; it had been seen as an initiation into the realm the artistic past and great masterpieces. The tradition of the *Grand Tour*, initially serving as an educational rite of passage for upper-class young Europeans, was continued by art academies which would send their graduates to Rome. The practice, just like the custom of classical education, basically declined in the 20th century along with the advent of modernity and the avant-garde.⁵ Paradoxically, however, it was the decline of the academy that facilitated a new attitude towards the artistic past which, when freed from the academic canons, unveiled its unknown face that the early 20th-century artists found attractive (fig. 2).

The turbulent time of political and social transformation coincided not only with artistic revolutions. At the time, artists started to experience fatigue with chasing a constant change and began to articulate a desire of return to classical sources: to achieve development by taking a step back. That process was named “return to order” (*retour à l'ordre, richiamo all'ordine*), which means a retreat from innovative “-isms” and moving towards “eternal” and proven values.⁶ The style born out of that pursuit was called classicism and the prefix “new” was intended to distinguish it from academic art. The turn to tradition at that time was not seen as passéism but rather as an attempt to re-discover old art, as if extracting values attractive to contemporary people from old works to

⁴ On Italian impacts on Polish artists of the interwar period, see Katarzyna NOWAKOWSKA-SITO, “Polonia-Italia: Artistic Relations and Reception of Contemporary Italian Art in Poland between-the-two-wars,” in *Reinterpreting the Past. Traditionalist Artistic Trends in Central and Eastern Europe of the 1920s and 1930s* (Proceedings of an international conference, Warsaw–Kraków 21–23 September 2006), ed. Irena Kossowska (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 2010), 169–182.

⁵ More on this subject in Francis HASKELL, Nicholas PENNY, *Taste and the Antique* (London: Yale University Press, 1981); *Grand Tour. The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century*. Exhibition Catalogue, Tate Gallery, London 1996/1997.

⁶ The phrase *le rappel à l'ordre* was first used by Andre Lhote in 1919 in his review of Georges Braque's exhibition at Léonce Rosenberg's gallery in Paris. The term was popularized by Jean Cocteau in his 1926 collection of critical texts titled, *Le Rappel à l'ordre*. A variety of the expression can be found in literature as “return to order” or “call for order.” More on this subject in Jean Laude, “Retour et/ou rappel a l'ordre,” in *Le Retour a l'ordre dans les arts plastiques et l'architecture 1919-1925*. Travaux de l'Universite de Saint-Etienne, VIII, C.I.E.R.E.C., 1975. In Polish, see Dorota SZCZUKA, “Wołanie o ład. Krytyka artystyczna wobec klasycyzujących tendencji w sztuce lat 20. i 30. XX wieku,” *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 46, book 4 (1998): 123–135.

achieve the eureka effect. Italian influences played an important role in the rise of the new style. Much of that effect was attributed to the *Valori Plastici* magazine published in Rome in the years 1918–1922.⁷ The magazine published some key texts for the ideology of the new classicism challenging the avant-garde cult of novelty, despite the fact that the greatest advocates of the new artistic language (Carrà, Chirico, Casorati, Severini, Sironi) had just been the leading figures of the avant-garde.⁸

Contrary to the above, Sleńdziński was not an innovator “converted” into new classicism. In the years 1909–1916, he received a well-rounded education at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in Sankt Petersburg. His development was significantly influenced by the atmosphere of the classes held by Prof. Dmitry Kardovsky who cultivated the old masters and pushed towards mastery in crafts. The basis of the course was to master drawing perfectly, which was a characteristic attribute of his students (fig. 3). In a review of the first exhibition of Vilnius artists in Warsaw’s Łazienki Park in 1922,⁹ Władysław Skoczylas emphasized that Kardowski’s students, regardless of their nationality:

In the drawing course, they all...use sanguine sharply emphasizing the plasticity of the human body and its anatomical structure. These sanguine drawings, almost like pure and accurate sculptures, are merely the initial, yet perhaps the only, path leading out of the impressionist chaos into the world of forms and structures... These paintings and portraits allude to the 15th-century Florentine school in their texture.¹⁰

Kardovsky’s teaching methods, surfacing from Sleńdziński’s works and the output of some of his older Russian colleagues, Alexander Yakovlev and

⁷ Dariusz Konstantynów, in his monograph work on the Vilnius Society of Visual Artists (WTAP) (*Wileńskie Towarzystwo Artystów Plastyków 1920–1939*, Warszawa 2006, s. 37), also points out apparent similarities between the programme ideas of the WTAP and texts published in *Valori Plastici*.

⁸ For more on the magazine, see, especially Paolo FOSSATI, *Valori Plastici 1918–1922* (Torino: G. Einaud, 1981); in the Polish literature on the subject, see Justyna WESOŁOWSKA, “*Valori Plastici*.” *Kształtowanie się teorii nowego klasycyzmu w sztuce europejskiej*, w: *Sztuka lat 1905–1923: malarstwo, rzeźba, grafika, krytyka artystyczna*. Conference Proceedings, ed. Małgorzata Geron, Jerzy Malinowski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Interdyscyplinarnego Koła Naukowego Doktorantów UMK, 2006), 178–182.

⁹ The Cadets’ Building in Łazienki Park was made available to the WTAP for an individual exhibition, probably thanks to the support of Józef Piłsudski who hoped for the artistic revival of Vilnius. At that time, architects linked to the WTAP, Jan Dąbrowski and Marian Lalewicz, worked on the reconstruction of some government buildings. Perhaps thanks to Lalewicz who was the main architect in the project, in 1922 Sleńdziński was commissioned to make a plafond on the ceiling of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers in Krakowskie Przedmieście. (*Polonia Sheltered from Storms*, today in the library of the Presidential Palace).

¹⁰ Władysław SKOCZYLAS, “Sleńdziński,” *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 11 Dec 1922, 737.

Vasili Shukhaev, interacted with the aforesaid currents seeking a new dialogue with tradition, as was the case with the trends that came to the fore in Western Europe from the late 19th century and found expression in the sculptures of Atistide Maillol and Antoine Bourdelle or in the theoretical writings of Maurice Denis. They can also be traced in the Russian artistic magazines of the 1910s, such as *Riecz* or, above all, *Apollo*.

After leaving the academy and settling in independent Poland, Sleńdziński's work remained faithful to Kardovsky's principles: it featured precise drawing and combined the language of modern art with elements drawn directly from old painting, mainly the Italian Renaissance. This is seen in works created at the beginning of the 1920s. For example, *Portrait of Halina Dąbrowska (Lady with Beads, 1923, fig. 4)*. Of similar nature was the artistic creation of the members of the Vilnius Society of Visual Arts (WTAP) founded in 1920. They were consolidated not only due to sharing the same place of residence after World War I but also by a shared past and studies at Sankt Petersburg's art schools.¹¹

In 1921 the WTAP began issuing their own magazine, *Południe* (Eng. South). The title of the magazine was interpreted as an incentive to re-bear Polish art and drive it towards the long-awaited apogee. No researcher has attempted to interpret the title differently to date. The word "south" in Polish has a double meaning, just as the French *midi*, meaning both the astronomical noon and one of the cardinal directions. Consequently, can the title be understood as a conscious emphasis laid on the origin of classicism promoted by the magazine and the orientation of north-set Vilnius towards the South, towards the Mediterranean area?

This option is suggested in a statement of the founder of *Południe*, Stanisław Woźnicki, who, in his programme article from 1924, outlined the nature of the artistic changes of the time and linked it to the ongoing struggle of two artistic traditions. He wrote, "In our eyes, from the impressionist chaos and Art Nouveau spirituality...a vision is emerging of a beautiful and finished shape, closed in a strict and vivid line. The spirit of structure of the South of Europe prevails over the metaphysical aorganic North."¹²

¹¹ The basic study on the group's history is the monograph work by Dariusz Konstantynów (see note 8). According to the author, Sleńdziński was the president of the Society almost for its entire operation. Only in the years 1923–1925, he was substituted by Waław Czechowicz during his travels.

¹² Stanisław WOŹNICKI, "Od malowniczości do linearyzmu (Sztuka i Rytm)," *Południe* 1 (1924), 13. This text, next to Woźnicki's programme statement of 1922, *U progu syntezy*, is the main text

In Vilnius, a northern city with strong classicist traditions, of the early 19th century it was much more challenging to proclaim the renewal of this style than in Italy where the proposal of turning to tradition was simply seen as a return to the roots. For Ludomir Sleńdziński, a trip to Italy was a deliberate denial of the fashion for “modern” Paris. In his *Wspomnienia* compiled in 1950, the artist wrote:

The date of 22 October 1923 was to play an important role in the development of my artistic creation because it was the date of my first trip abroad. ...I did not want to follow artists driven almost exclusively to Paris. I thought that you should first discover the wealth of Italian art, study it at the source and form a clear opinion of its value.¹³

Having arrived in Rome, Sleńdziński started to explore the Polish artistic colony. His impression was negative due to the dominance of the older generation whose work did not awaken his vivid interest. Despite relatively meagre resources, he managed to go on for several months visiting historic monuments and museums. This was possible thanks to the sculptor Antoni Madeyski who helped Sleńdziński make some money on portraits and drawings.

Despite his poor Italian, Sleńdziński established extensive contacts, and, surprisingly, the group of artists that he socialized with were former futurists. We know that he visited their studios thanks to Ruggero Vasari, a poet and playwright, editor of the *Noi* magazine and friend of Enrico Prampolini.¹⁴ Sleńdziński did not share the subversive ideology of futurism, yet he admired how strong and vivid their movement was. They had excellent contacts with the press and effective propaganda spread through their branch offices in Milan and Paris. Perhaps, it was the futurists’ methods that made Sleńdziński entertain the idea of organizing an international exhibition during his next trip in 1924.

While he deliberately skipped Paris on his first trip to Italy, the capital of France was his important stopover the following year. The artist that he met in Paris were Shukhaev (at that time, Yakovlev was taking part in the Citroen expedition to Africa), his colleagues from the WTAP (Jerzy Hoppen, Kazimiera

defining the *credo* of the Vilnius school. In Konstantynów’s opinion, in the 1930s, Sleńdziński assumed the role of the group’s main ideologist.

¹³ SLEŃDZIŃSKI, *Wspomnienia*, 23. He stayed at St Stanislaus’ Hospice at via delle Botteghe Oscure. Among the artists that he met, he listed Kazimierz Stabrowski, Stefan Bakałowicz and Michał Siemiradzki (Henryk’s son).

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 24.

Adamska-Roubina) and Eugeniusz Żak and Roman Kramsztyk from the Warsaw-based Rhythm group (Sleńdziński had been a member since 1922).¹⁵ With the exception of breathtaking museums, Paris made a negative impression on Sleńdziński. He was particularly disappointed with the showcases of latest art (such as the Autumn Salon), which seemed to reinforce his conviction of crisis in contemporary painting. Consequently, his primary goal gained in importance, “to organize an international exhibition in the West, covering all artists currently falling within our trend. There are not too many of them (who can participate); therefore, we must hurry to make it happen to develop a programme for our artistic life. To my satisfaction, first steps have already been taken and have produced expected results,” Sleńdziński reported to his fiancée from Paris, “The plan has already been underway, and now we must push forward.” He also wrote that he had visited a Mr Chmieliński, “on matters related to our publishing house and to the organization of information and other departments here.”¹⁶ For unknown reasons, the exhibition did not materialize, but the experience gained soon encouraged Sleńdziński to double his efforts in Rome.

It should be stressed that although classicism in the 1920s was mainly associated with the Vilnius and Sankt Petersburg school, new classicism in Polish art emerged as early as on the Seine. Going back to the Paris of the early 20th century, the popular attribution of the interwar classicism to the trauma of World War I, after which, apparently, people were seeking relief and support in more lasting values, can be *nota bene* easily challenged. There is also another, and well-documented, presumption as to the origin of this current which sets it back to the early 20th century, so before the war and avant-garde experiments that came to interrupt it later.¹⁷ In Polish art some early heralds of the change surfaced around 1910 in the Paris circle of the soon-to-be members of the Warsaw Rhythm group. It was then that the sculptures of Edward Wittig and Henryk Kuna revealed a transition to a synthetic, monumental form, while

¹⁵ For more on the Rhythm group, see Henryk ANDERS, *Rytm. W poszukiwaniu stylu narodowego* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1972); *Stowarzyszenie Artystów Polskich Rytm 1922–1932*. Exhibition Catalogue, National Museum in Warsaw, ed. Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito (Warszawa: Muzeum Narodowe, 2001).

¹⁶ Quoted after Ludomir SLEŃDZIŃSKI, *Listy do Ireny*, comp. and ed. Eugeniusz Szulborski (Białystok: Galeria im. Sleńdzińskich, 2002), 7, 13. Sleńdziński's letters to his fiancée, and later his wife, preserved in the collections of The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok span the period from 1924 to 1928 and contain valuable reports from his travels to France and Italy.

¹⁷ For more, see Elizabeth COWLING, Jennifer MUNDY, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Léger and the New Classicism*. Exhibition Catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1990), 200.

painters began to focus on drawing, which produced especially interesting results in the study of heads in crayon or sanguine. Żak referred to Cranach, Clouet, and Leonard; the latter inspired Kramsztyk who developed, like Żak, his own style at the intersection of pastiche and the individual processing of historical inspirations. The incoming waves of classicism, primarily in literature but also in visual arts, were prompted by the *Museion* magazine published by Ludwik Hieronim Morstin and Władysław Kościelski (1911–1913 Paris–Kraków), which attempted to instil a new classicist direction in Poland, increasingly visible in the then French art.¹⁸

Sleńdziński must have been aware of this, therefore he joined the Rhythm movement in reborn Poland. During his first stay in Rome, he came upon Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, Poland's military attaché to Italy, who became his *cicerone* in the Eternal City. The 1924 *Portrait of L.H. Morstin* (fig. 5) reveals a fusion of the contemporary and a historicizing style typical of the Italian artists associated in the *Novecento* group (1922), established at the same time as the Warsaw's Rhythm, and of other European painters "converted to the way of tradition." It becomes apparent when comparing it to *Portrait of an Englishman* by Christian Schad painted in Italy 2 years later.¹⁹ Direct links between the works should be excluded, but both indicate a surprising convergence of artistic search and a concerted attempt to "renew" the artistic language through references to old art.

That phenomenon must have confirmed Sleńdziński in his choice of artistic direction. During his second stay in Rome, owing to effective diplomatic efforts, Sleńdziński managed to organize a separate room and organize a showcase of Polish contemporary art during the 3rd Roman Biennale, which opened in spring 1925 in Via Nazionale (fig. 6).²⁰ The presentation of paintings and sculptures of 16 artists was titled, 5th Rhythm Exhibition,²¹ because the main exhibited artists were members of the Warsaw group and their associates from Vilnius.²² The exhibition disrupted the Young Poland image of

¹⁸ On the role of *Museion* in promoting classicism and French tradition, see Katarzyna NOWAKOWSKA-SITO, "Dlaczego Rytm?" in *W kręgu Rytmu. Sztuka polska lat dwudziestych*, ed. EADEM (Warszawa: Muzeum Narodowe, 2006).

¹⁹ Initially involved in the Dada movement and author of avant-garde photograms, Schad returned to tradition and classicizing realism in the 1920s under the influence of Italian art.

²⁰ Sleńdziński, *Wspomnienia*, 29. The exhibition commissioner was Stanisław Rzecki, who was designed the cover of the catalogue of the Polish section.

²¹ The title the exhibition, which—next to six members of the Rhythm group—also featured ten invited artists, 5th Rhythm Exhibition drew harsh criticism of other groups and non-associated artists.

²² The exhibition was covered in the *Pani* magazine 4 (1925), 30. The Polish section consisted mainly of Rhythm members and artists associated with Sleńdziński. They were: Waclaw Borowski,

Polish art so far represented abroad by the Kraków's Art Society²³ and showed the work of the younger generation turning to a closed and tectonic form. It was pregnant with consequences since most references to Polish art in the Italian art criticism of the 1920s and 1930s revolved around the Rhythm movement (fig. 7). It was the only Polish group mentioned in *Storia della pittura moderna* (1930) by the famous promoter of the Italian Novecento group, Margarita Sarfatti. The description of the Polish section in the Biennale catalogue (prepared by Leon Chrzanowski) emphasized a shift towards tradition while rejecting the “dead” classicism of the previous era. It also reflected upon the 1920s debate in Italy regarding a new style highlighting the supremacy of human figure, drawing, and plastic and architectural values.²⁴

The exhibition, enjoying a warm reception of the Italian press, allowed Sleńdziński to exhibit his latest works made while in Rome and portraying his newly married wife Irena née Dobrowolski. The centre of the exhibition is occupied by the wife's full-scale portrait against the background of the Forum Romanum (fig. 6) and a smaller picture, *Portrait of My Wife with a Wedding Ring*, with Castel Sant'Angelo in the background. The preserved photographs from their stay in Rome confirm the painter's fidelity to clothing details, which had made any extra styling unnecessary. Irena wears a fashionable outfit holding a tourist guide in her hand. The meticulously captured modern accessories, such as the hat and skirt, vehicle or camera, are not conflicted with traditional patterns and add to the sense of play and tension (fig. 8). This is a new element in Sleńdziński's art, close to the principles of the Novecento group that aimed to create “modern classicism” by bringing together modernity and old artistic inspirations. They were briefly set out by Sarfatti in the 1924 Venetian Biennale catalogue where she wrote that, “painter's work is

Stanisław Gilewski, Jerzy Hoppen, Kazimierz Kwiatkowski, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, Władysław Roguski, Stanisław Rzecki, Władysław Skoczylas, Ludomir Sleńdziński (eight works), Zofia Trzcńska-Kamińska, Konstanty Brandel, Edward Czerwiński, Wanda Krzeniowska, Franciszek Siedlecki, Zofia Stankiewicz, Józef Tom and Leon Wyczółkowski.

²³ That art dominated, but not only, the Polish presentations at the Venice Biennale in 1920 and 1926; their commissioner was Władysław Jarocki. The differences between the character of the works of both generations were discussed by S. Woźnicki in his article, *Od malowniczości do linearyzmu — Sztuka i Rytm* (see footnote 12), in which the author, using Wolflin's categories, combined linearism with the new classicism and picturesqueness with the legacy of impressionism.

²⁴ On a return to classicism in Italian art after World War I, see Elana PONTIGGIA, “L'idea del classico. Il dibattito sulla classicità in Italia 1916–1932,” in EADEM, *L'idea del classico 1916–1932. Temi classici nell'arte italiana degli anni Venti*. Exhibition Catalogue. Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (Milano: P.A.C., 1992).

rested on three principles: be Italian, traditional, and contemporary.”²⁵ It is worth noting that on the occasion of the Warsaw WTAP exhibition in 1922 Władysław Skoczylas observed that the main downside of Sleńdziński’s paintings “is that they are not modern enough.”²⁶

Irena’s portrait is a modern work that is deeply immersed in artistic tradition. The painter seems to freely juggle various artistic styles: Irena wears a coat with metallic and silvery broken folds, as if blown out by a wind like late-Gothic or Baroque cloaks. He also includes secondary abstract and humorous elements, such as depicting a group of priests and a crypto-portrait in the background next to a dark-clothed figure in a Renaissance outfit.

Polish critics, who just labelled the artists “classicist,” failed to notice the unique character of his work. Only Mieczysław Wallis (after the exhibition at the Art Propaganda Institute in 1933) wrote that he liked Sleńdziński “because, as part of his programme based primarily on the full Renaissance Italian art, he never stops looking for new things... introducing... both elements of various ancient arts as well as the achievements of most recent artistic currents.”²⁷

Under the influence of the Italian tour, Sleńdziński began his painting experiments. He enlivened the plane of the image and its spatial relations by introducing precious metals, silver and gold, and relief-like elements in some works (especially in the background). The use of gold and silver paint is visible in the painting made in Rome *Self-portrait* (fig. 10). These colours are used somewhat perversely, i.e. not for decoration but to emphasize the moulding, as if to substitute cool and warm tones. As the artist explained himself, the idea of surface experiments came from the study of Renaissance painting, during which “while in the Borgia Apartments, he was struck by Pinturicchio’s use of reliefs in the background of his wall paintings, especially in architecture pieces; and the use of embossed rays in Rafael’s *Disputa* in Vatican’s Stanza della Segnatura.”²⁸ As a result, the artist sought ways to differentiate in-image planes. His first works with convex elements date to 1924, he showed them for the first time at the WTAP autumn exhibition in Warsaw’s Łazienki Park. As he wrote years later, “among the most successful works with

²⁵ Annette MALOCHET, “Novecento point d’ordre?,” in *Le Retour a l’ordre dans les arts plastiques*, 205.

²⁶ SKOCZYŁAS, “Sleńdziński,” 19.

²⁷ “Ludomir Sleńdziński,” in Mieczysław WALLIS, *Sztuka polska dwudziestolecia. Wybór pism z lat 1921–1957* (Warszawa: Arkady, 1959), 144.

²⁸ SLEŃDZIŃSKI, *Wspomnienia*, 25.

flattened relief, I put *Lady with a Cup*.”²⁹ The original painting has not survived; however, when juxtaposing its reproductions with some works from the Italian Novecento circle, such as *Portrait of a Woman* (1925) by Gisberto Cerracchini, the employed solutions and a surprising similarity are evident (fig. 9).

Some other innovations of the time include the use of an extensive landscape background in portraits that serves the introduction of a disturbing space. Rocky landscapes with unreal, geometrical rocks, like sculpted clouds, and phenomenal colouring (pink rocks, silver clouds) build a specific tension, just like the elevated or receding perspective used in interiors, which, apart from the illusion of depth, lends portraits a slightly unreal expression.

Due to the spatial tricks used, and despite the differences between the two images, the frontal and strictly symmetrical position of the model and the receding perspective creating an atmosphere of tension in the view of *Girl with a Box* (1927) (fig. 11) brings to mind one of the most famous Italian paintings of the 1920s, *Silvana Cenni* (1922) by Felice Casorati, known as the “disquieting muse of Novecento” (fig. 12).

While in Rome, Sleńdziński also created synthetic, sculptural views of the architecture. The artist carefully avoided the most popular sights and was fascinated by the Roman gates, Porta San Sebastiano or Porta Latina (fig. 14). Unfortunately, some of the city sketches did not make it into full-time paintings as the painter proved a very discerning observer sensitive to the nature and raw beauty of Rome’s narrow streets and empty alleys whose fragmentary frames, outlined with no more than several lines, convey an almost magical atmosphere. Even the drawing study *Via Santa Sabina* from the collections of the Sleńdziński Gallery seems to demonstrate that (fig. 13).

To conclude, Ludomir’s Italian tours and the intertwining of themes of ancient art with the inspirations collected in contemporary search completed his artistic path in an interesting way and determined its final shape. For this work, although born in the northern climate of Sankt Petersburg, and later Vilnius and Warsaw, needed mature sublimation, i.e. artistic stimuli and the southern sun, to ripe (fig. 15).

²⁹ Ibidem, 27. The painting is also known as *Portrait of Mrs N*. He wrote that he had used gilding and silvering for the first time in an oil painting in 1924 in *Portrait of the Wife of General Rydz-Śmigły* and in the portrait of Gustaw Pilecki’s wife.

LIST OF IMAGES

1. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Portrait of My Wife at the Forum Romanum*, 1925, MNW.
2. Ludomir and Irena Sleńdziński at the Forum Romanum, 1925, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok.
3. Dmitry Kardovsky's studio in Sankt Petersburg, ca. 1915. Kardovsky in the centre (with beard), Vasili Shukhaev and Alexander Yakovlev far left, Ludomir Sleńdziński second from the right, sitting, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok.
4. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Lady with Beads* (Portrait of Halina Dąbrowska), 1923, lost, archival photo.
5. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Portrait of L. H. Mostin*, 1924, The Podlaskie Museum in Białystok, Christian Schad, *Portrait of an Englishman*, 1926, private collection.
6. The Polish room at the 3rd Rome Biennale, 1925, repr. after *Pani 1925*.
7. Stanisław Rzecki, The cover of the catalogue of the Polish room at the 3rd Roman Biennale 1925.
8. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Portrait of My Wife against a Car*, 1925, lost, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystoku.
9. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Lady with a Cup*, 1924, archival photo. Gisberto Ceracchini, *Portrait of a Woman*, 1924, private collection.
10. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Self-portrait*, 1925, The Podlaskie Museum in Białystok.
11. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Girl with a Box*, 1927, Lietuvos Dajles Muziejus, Vilnius.
12. Felice Casorati, *Silvana Cenni*, 1922, private collection, Torino.
13. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Via S. Sabina in Rome*, 1925, The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok.
14. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Porta Latina in Rome*, 1925, MNW.
15. Ludomir Sleńdziński near Rome, 1925, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok.

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LUDOMIR SLEŃDZIŃSKI'S TRIPS TO ITALY 1923–1925 THE ORIGIN AND RIPENING OF CLASSICISM

Summary

Ludomir Sleńdziński was the main representative of classicism in Polish art in the period between the two World Wars. The article discusses his two trips to Italy in 1922/24 and 1924/25. They have not been yet researched in the context of the origin and character of his work, albeit impulses coming from Italy were thought to have been an important catalyst for the birth of the so-called "return to order."

Sleńdziński was Dmitry Kardovsky's student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sankt Petersburg, and it was in his class that he acquired a worship of the old masters and a perfect command of his trade, first of all perfect drawing skills. Apart from the Sankt Petersburg school, classicist trends came to Polish art from Paris where they were first noticed in the circles connected with the *Museion* magazine (1911-1913) and among artists belonging to the Polish colony, such as Henryk Kuna, Edward Wittig and Eugeniusz Żak.

In the article, I reconstruct Sleńdziński's tour of Italy, and I remind about the exhibition of Polish modern art that he staged in 1925 as part of the 3rd Roman Biennale. His personal contact with old and modern Italian art became an important moment in his artistic formation, stimulating his departure from academic towards modern classicism, in which the artist starts playing a game with the present day and with tradition, consciously using stylistic elements that belong to different epochs.

In conclusion it must be said that Ludomir's trips inclined him to introduce many new solutions (sometimes surprisingly close to works by well-known Italian artists of similar outlook) and determined the final shape of his mature work.

Key words: classicism; return to order; Italian art of the 1920s; classicism in Polish art of the 20th century; Polish-Italian artistic relations in 20th century.

Translated by Konrad Szulga



The preparation of the English version of *Roczniki Humanistyczne* and its publication in electronic databases was financed under contract no. 836/P–DUN/2018 from the resources of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the popularization of science.



1. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Portrait of My Wife at the Forum Romanum*, 1925, MNW



2. Ludomir and Irena Sleńdziński at the Forum Romanum, 1925, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok



3. Dmitry Kardovsky's studio in Sankt Petersburg, ca. 1915. Kardovsky in the centre (with beard), Vasili Shukhaev and Alexander Yakovlev far left, Ludomir Sleńdziński second from the right, sitting, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok



4. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Lady with Beads* (Portrait of Halina Dąbrowska), 1923, lost, archival photo



5. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Portrait of L. H. Mostin*, 1924, The Podlaskie Museum in Białystok, Christian Schad, *Portrait of an Englishman*, 1926, private collection



6. The Polish room at the 3rd Rome Biennale, 1925, repr. after *Pani* 1925



7. Stanisław Rzecki, The cover of the catalogue of the Polish room at the 3rd Roman Biennale 1925



8. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Portrait of My Wife against a Car*, 1925, lost, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok



9. Gisberto Ceracchini, *Portrait of a Woman*, 1924, private collection



Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Lady with a Cup*, 1924, archival photo



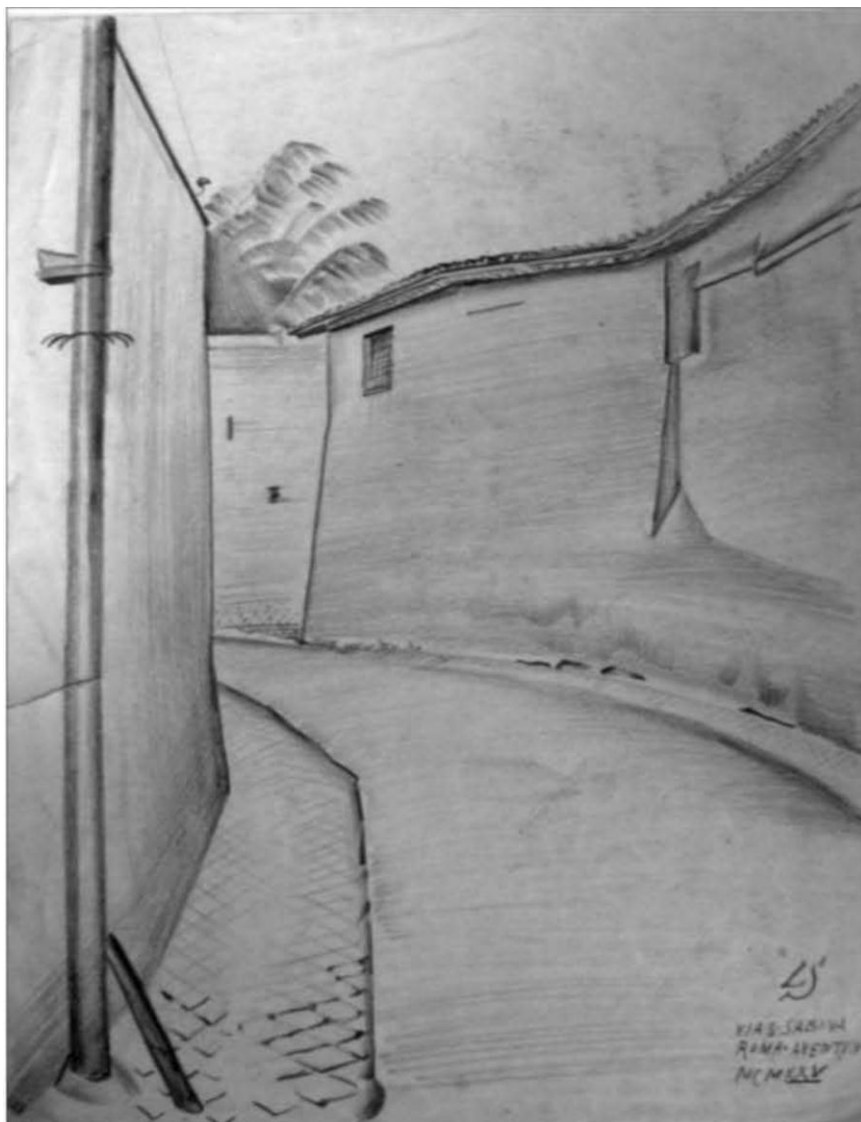
10. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Self-portrait*, 1925, The Podlaskie Museum in Białystok



11. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Girl with a Box*, 1927, Lietuvos Dajles Muziejus, Vilnius



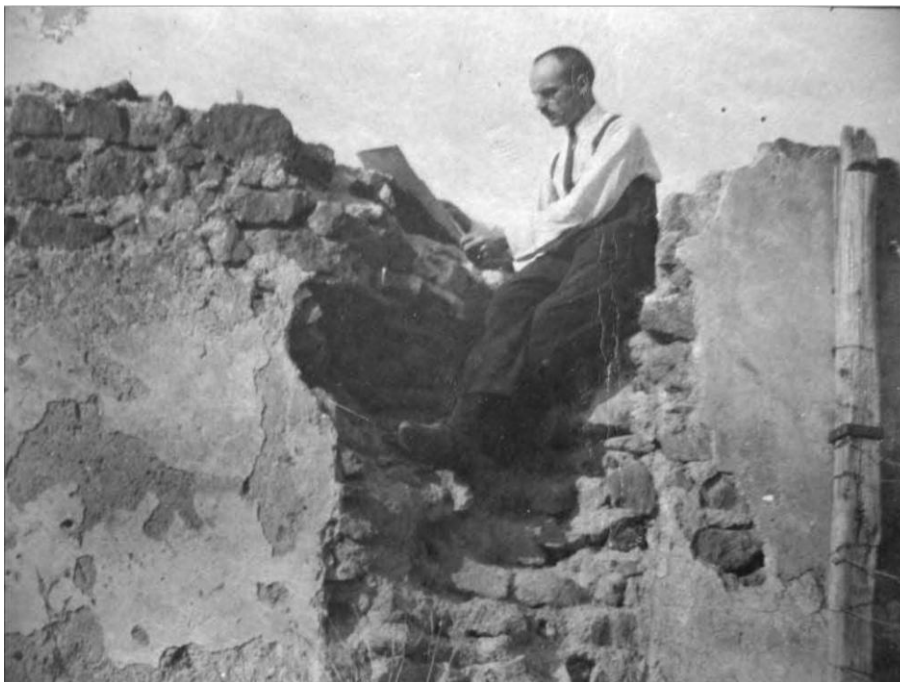
12. Felice Casorati, *Silvana Cenni*, 1922, private collection, Torino



13. Ludomir Sleńdziński, *Via S. Sabina in Rome*, 1925, The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok



14. Ludomir Sleńdziński,
Porta Latina in Rome, 1925,
MNW



15. Ludomir Sleńdziński near Rome, 1925, photo: The Sleńdziński Gallery in Białystok