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## BETWEEN ART, INDUSTRY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP: ARTISTIC, DESIGN, AND MANAGERIAL ACTIVITY OF PROFESSOR ZBIGNIEW HORBOWY IN 1959–1989

**Abstract:** Zbigniew Horbowy (1935–2019), a graduate of the Faculty of Glass of the State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław, conducted from the end of the 1950s, throughout the next several decades, exceptionally fruitful and original artistic, academic, design and managerial activities on the intersection of art and industry. His artistic achievements quickly found recognition in the national art circles and in the international arena. At the same time, as the only glass designer in the times of the Polish People’s Republic, he managed to combine artistic and commercial success. The utility glasses designed by him and mass-produced and sold on a mass scale were a symbol of Polish glass in general in the public awareness. He carried out his entrepreneurial activity with amazing efficiency in spite of the conditions of the industry in the People’s Republic of Poland. And this, in principle, was extremely difficult to effectively use innovation or design. As a lecturer at the PWSSP (State Higher School of Fine Arts), then a member of the university’s management and at the same time the head of design units of the leading Lower Silesian glassworks, he played an extremely important role in educating design staff and development directions of Polish industrial design.

**Keywords:** artistic glass, design, socialist economy, industry, entrepreneurship

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### INTRODUCTION

In 1959, Zbigniew Horbowy, born in the former Stanisławów Province, was among the first graduates of the Faculty of Glass of the then State Higher School of Fine Arts in Wrocław. His diploma thesis was a beginning of an artistic activity noticed and appreciated in the country

and abroad, which lasted for several consecutive decades. However, his achievements in the field of art, as well as his academic career, were not what distinguished him most in the times of the People's Republic of Poland from other Polish artists. Due to his design specialization, while still being a student, Horbowy started cooperation with the glass industry. And in this he was no exception, because, like in the case of other Polish designers in the times of the Polish People's Republic, it conditioned the possibility of realizing his artistic works. At that time, PWSSP (State Higher School of Fine Arts) did not have glass melting furnaces with the desired parameters. Such existed only in glassworks. Apart from them, legal access to raw materials, other materials and the necessary equipment was then very difficult, and in practice even impossible. Moreover, as understood by the ministerial authorities, the main purpose of the existence of the PWSSP in Wrocław was to educate design staff for the Polish glass and ceramics industry. Thus, graduates of this university, completing their studies, were required to work in units that calibrate glassworks or ceramic plants. Moreover, a large concentration of these enterprises, mostly of former German provenance, was present in Lower Silesia. After graduation, the graduates of the PWSSP took up employment in industry, because on the one hand they were forced to do so by a work order taking into account their qualifications, and because otherwise they would not be able to pursue their artistic activity for technical reasons. However, most designers were quite quickly disappointed with the crude reality of the functioning of state-owned enterprises. Working in calibrating units did not allow for the development of creative processes in the conditions of that time. To a large extent, it was not necessary for the then Polish enterprises, including glassworks, to operate. An attempt to implement more ambitious projects due to insufficient technical equipment was usually doomed to failure, and in addition it threatened the implementation of top-down imposed production plans. In general, therefore, they were satisfied with the production of previously mastered patterns, without paying much attention to their functional and aesthetic values or global design trends. In enterprises, young designers were considered detached from reality. Most of them were unable to establish good relations with their employees. They were poorly paid and had problems finding flats for themselves, especially in small towns. Not wanting to participate in the simulation of activities, the effects of which rarely entered production, they often gave up further (see: Dawski, 1996; Zworska-Raziuk, 2004: 274; 'Kalendarium', 2019: 187-191;

ODSASPW mps, no sygn., R. Kominek: 1–6). As it was estimated in 1971, during the first 22 years of its existence, the Department of Glass of the PWSSP educated 81 artists in the specialization of glass, and less than 30 of them accepted permanent employment in the industry (AASPW mps, no sygn.: 2–3).

The most persistent remained in the glassworks, able to find themselves in the realities of a socialist workplace. Those, generally accepting the lack of a greater influence on the quality of mass production, learned to use their employment in glassworks to implement their personal artistic goals, rarely of greater practical importance. Only a very few were able to successfully adapt to this reality by reconciling the realization of their own artistic ambitions with design activities for the industry of greater practical importance, shaping the aesthetics of mass production, and even stimulating its size. To achieve this, it was necessary to have a conglomerate of features that were extremely rare at that time. It was necessary to be a talented artist, consistently developing his work, a designer who was able to translate his artistic visions into an attractive and possible to be implemented in the conditions of the industrial product, and also to have a large dose of pragmatism and entrepreneurship.

One of such people was Professor Zbigniew Horbowy – the protagonist of the text below. In this contribution to the history of Polish design in the times of the People's Republic of Poland, an attempt was made to characterize the manifestations and effects of his artistic, pedagogical, designer and managerial activity.

## STUDIES AT THE STATE HIGHER SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS IN WROCŁAW

In 1953, Zbigniew Horbowy, after graduating from a secondary school in Wolsztyn, enrolled in the PWSSP in Wrocław, which had been operating since 1946. From the end of the 1940s, the main task of this small art school was to educate design staff for the domestic glass and ceramics industry. However, the ambition of its staff has always been to reconcile this task imposed by ministerial authorities with a comprehensive artistic education and the possibility of realizing one's own artistic ambitions. Students of the PWSSP, regardless of their professional specialization and various limitations related to the realities of the functioning of the People's



Photo 1. Zbigniew Horbowy during the defense of his diploma thesis, 1959  
Source: photo credits: Zdzisław Holuka, owned by: Center for Documentation of Arts at the  
Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

Republic of Poland, had the opportunity during their studies to encounter the current achievements of fine arts in the country and in the world (Makarewicz, 2006: 83; Banaś, 2009: 120).

Professor Stanisław Dawski, one of the founders of the university, is considered to be the “father” of Wrocław artistic glass. In the years 1957–1964, a separate Faculty of Glass functioned within the structure of the university, which then co-founded the Faculty of Ceramics and Glass. The organizational and program framework created by Dawski and his associates was conducive to the comprehensive education of the artist, who, after graduation, could undertake any work in the field of “pure art” as well as applied art. Interestingly, the issues of the glass artist’s workshop



Photo 2. Stanisław Dawski and Zbigniew Horbowy, c. 1960  
Source: Center for Documentation of Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

were not at the center of Dawski's interests. He developed a training program in a glass studio based on design associated with graphics that were close to him as an artist. After all, the school did not have its own furnace, and the internships in the glassworks did not include attempts to shape the hot glass on one's own. The designers relied on the execution of glass masters employed in the serial production processes. Despite these limitations, already in the 1950s, the artists who later decided about the level of Polish design in this field left the PWSSP, although, as mentioned, they did not necessarily have an impact on mass production at the same time. At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, Zbigniew Horbowy was among the debutants establishing cooperation with the glass industry, who obtained his diploma in the studio of prof. Stanisław Dawski (Zworska-Raziuk, 2004: 262–268).



At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, a specific, separate style of Wrocław art glass gradually emerged. At that time, vessel forms with simple shapes and precisely outlined internal profiles were usually designed individually or in sets. Glass with a limited color scale was used, but attempts were also made to cloud the glass mass. Creolite glaze suspensions and thin embedded glass threads were used. The young Wrocław glass was influenced by Italian, Czech and Scandinavian patterns. The artists from Wrocław quickly began their independent experiments. In place of the glasses blown in the mold, hand-formed vessels appeared. Polished, decorative vases, so typical of the second half of the 1950s, gave way to more modest but functional decorative and utility sets in the next decade (Banaś, 1992: 12–13).

Despite numerous declarations by party, ministerial and university authorities made since the late 1940s about the need for PWSSP's cooperation with industry, the first manifestations of it on a larger scale date back to the 1960s. They were still precursive and often clumsy in nature. The reasons for this state of affairs were varied and resulted generally from the formal, legal, financial, economic, and political conditions in which both higher education and the economy of the People's Republic of Poland functioned. On the one hand, the theoretical one, the necessity to develop cooperation between universities and industry was declared, appropriate programs and plans were prepared; on the other, practical, initiatives were hampered by bureaucratic obstacles and conflicting actions of various organs of state administration. Of course, this does not mean that there was no such cooperation at all, although it was limited to the 1960s, mainly to educating human resources for industry by universities. Agreements with specific industrial plants appeared first, then with higher-level units and with ministries. The first agreement of this type between the Wrocław PWSSP and the Union of Glass Industry in Sosnowiec, which governed the Lower Silesian glassworks, was concluded only in 1968. Further agreements of this type were concluded in the 1970s. However, they remained largely on paper. The insufficient technical equipment of art universities, including the PWSSP in Wrocław, which often differed significantly from what the industry had at its disposal, was the reason for the poor practical preparation of the graduates. The glassworks were not able to use their design potential (AMKiS sygn. 1276/126: 26–28; AASPW mps, no sygn.: 1–2; APW sygn. 82-1199-0-01-18-1700).

Noticing these problems, professor Stanisław Dawski saw the necessity to undertake such cooperation that would bring benefits to both parties:

Plants and glassworks benefit greatly from designers, whom they on the other hand do not fully use, while designers who would like to continue their individual creativity face colossal difficulties. Because there is still no place for an artist, despite the creation of a small artistic glassworks in Szczytna, which was supposed to be a glassworks only for artists, and had a production plan imposed on it. Poland has a good position in the world when it comes to artistic glass, but perhaps the greatest difficulties are encountered by artists who want to practice this work. Because if they got permission to make their own personal program, at least 20–50 pieces of something from their own work, there is no time for it. The glassworker who works with them has to do it after hours, when he is tired, when the glass mass is already of poor quality and there are remains of it, and besides, he also wants to earn. There are no designer positions in glassworks. And this is the method of cutting the wings of the entire production of Polish art glass. If a designer has no possibility of experimenting, there is no room for artistic experimentation, his design possibilities become smaller and smaller. It cannot develop. [...] The possibility of an artist's experiment in a glasswork gives enormous opportunities to the plant, gives benefits, but is not understood by the plants. When our students went to the glassworks, there were no glassworkers to carry out our projects. And after a dozen or so years, we educated glassworkers who learned from our projects and were treated as high-class specialists. Thus, the glassworks has had multiple benefits from cooperation with the university, although this cooperation is not raised to a higher level. Now many things have gotten worse. There are big difficulties and there is no favorable atmosphere as it used to be (Dawski, 1996: 33–34).

While in the 1970s, with all these reservations, the cooperation of the PWSSP with industry was carried out quite intensively, in the decade of the 1980s, the growing economic crisis limited it very severely. At that time, the pressure of the central authorities on industrial enterprises, which had previously forced them to cooperate with universities in the field of staff education as well as carrying out design and research and development works, decreased. The state-owned enterprises that were moving on their own considered the implementation of current plans or the maintenance of peace among the crews as more important than activities stimulating the development of technology or design (AMKiS sygn. 1739/23: 26–28).

## ARTISTIC, DESIGN, MANAGERIAL AND ACADEMIC ACTIVITY

Zbigniew Horbowy did not seem to accept the problems described above at all. They did not stop him from engaging on a large scale in the design and managerial activities which he combined so effectively with his own artistic development. It was distinguished by efficiency and energy. His entrepreneurship seemed to be ahead of its time. Already while realizing

his thesis – the first full set of glass utensils in the history of the Wrocław university – he found his way to the Glassworks “Sudety” in Szczytna Śląska, with which he was associated for the next several years. While still a student in 1959, he assumed the positions of the manager of the newly created calibration unit of this large plant, employing nearly 1,200 employees, and its technical director. As a designer and manager, he was able to learn from experienced glass makers, he maintained good relations with both production managers and regular glassworkers. He successfully established contacts with political decision-makers, which was probably also helped by his long-term membership in the Polish United Workers’ Party. He has never performed any more important functions in party organizations. It seems that motivated by pragmatism, he treated his party ID as a necessary condition for the effective implementation of his professional plans, a gateway to decision-making circles important to him. In Szczytna at that time, technically simple, simple-in-form utility glass was produced, which did not seem to bode well for a designer with ambitions. However, Zbigniew Horbowski succeeded in his projects based on simplicity, color restraint and care for the contour of the vessel and its proportions to combine the artistic value with its functional purpose. Such minimalism, emphasized as the main feature of the Wrocław school, on the one hand reflected the trends in art of that time, and on the other hand – corresponded to the need to strive for relatively easy work in serial production: blowing vessels in wooden molds (Wierzchoś, 2010; ‘Wywiad...’, 2019).

In the 1970s, thanks to the investments made, the product range of the Glassworks “Sudety” in Szczytna Śląska was significantly enriched. It produced all types of the highest quality glass: table, crystal, artistic and technical, which were exported to many countries around the world. At that time, this small plant consisted of plants in Szczytna, Polanica Zdrój, Batorów and Duszniki Zdrój. Glass products of the Glassworks “Sudety” were characterized by originality of shapes and a wide range of colors. They were produced by various techniques, from the most valued – manual – to automatic (Huml, 2004: 31; Horbowy, 1985: introductory text). Generally, however, as Zbigniew Horbowy himself assessed many years later, the “Sudety” Glassworks was constantly based on old technologies and the newest world achievements. The technical staff was recruited mostly from the University of Science and Technology in Kraków, and designers from the PWSSP in Wrocław. The dynamic development of the glass industry at that time created relatively good working conditions for





Photo 3. Vase by Z. Horbowy, 1960s, Glassworks "Sudety" in Szczytna Śląska  
Source: photo credits: Krzysztof Pachurka, photo owned by: Center for Documentation of Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

artists who created design studios, as well as enabled the employed artists from outside the industry to implement their own creative plans. The initiator and patron of many activities in this field was Zbigniew Horbowy, in which he was helped by his work at PWSSP and Glassworks "Sudety". He was a natural link between these two environments. In the 1970s, as part of new investments, two small glass factories were established, which were to act as research and development centers. One of them was founded in 1974 on the initiative of Zbigniew Horbowy, with the support of the glassworks in Szczytno, in Polanica Zdrój, the "Barbara" Artistic Glassworks. The staff of this small, technically well-equipped plant were employees from Szczytna, as well as young graduates of the Faculty of Glass of



Photo 4. Signing of a cooperation agreement between PWSSP and Glassworks “Barbara” in Polanica, 1974; in the group of designers, in the center: Z. Horbowy  
Source: photo owned by: Center for Documentation of Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

PWSSP in Wrocław. The plant was focused on the production of unique glasses in short series. The local designers were not subject to restrictions resulting from the requirements of large-scale production, so they could conduct artistic experiments without worrying about the cost of materials (Banaś, 2009: 71–72, 92–94).

Unfortunately, as a design studio, “Barbara” operated only until 1978. Initially accepted with enthusiasm, supported by Production, Trade and Service Enterprise “Vitropol”, which was in charge of Polish glassworks at the time, it was considered too expensive in the conditions of the growing economic crisis (Wierzchoś, 2010; Horbowy, 2019: 106).

Zbigniew Horbowy found the reasons for the failure of the Barbara design studio in the 1990s in the political and economic conditions of the People’s Republic of Poland:

It was, as we remember, a different system. [...] The economy was politically conditioned. And we had underestimated energy prices, a false dollar exchange rate; it was all made up; it couldn’t go on forever. At the same time, there was no problem



Photo 5. Vase by Zbigniew Horbowy, 1970s, Glassworks "Barbara" in Polanica Zdrój  
Source: photo credits: Krzysztof Pachurka, photo owned by: Center for Documentation of Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

of selling, when foreign customers came, they could use take this glass in great numbers. And in the country, empty shelves, so every more attractive commodity would sell immediately. [...] But how comfortable it was for the factory directors! He wasn't worried; neither for sales, nor for raw materials, nor for investments, nor for exports. Everything for him was arranged by the union. The union balanced the nationwide needs: you will make so many regular glasses, you will make so many wine glasses, you this, you that. There was no problem. [...] The lack of such basic concepts as that market is more important than production! (Horbowy, 1997: 14).

According to Zbigniew Horbowy's assessment, the economic reforms implemented after 1982 ruthlessly exposed only the weakness of the former organizational structures of industrial design. Until now, they were introduced by the method of top-down orders, on the basis of abstract plans. Pushing designs was did not result from understanding its function. Neither were these orders a response to the real needs of the establishments. Now individual plants, misunderstanding the independence achieved under the reform, cared for the maximum profit, usually not perceiving the need to run additional, non-production activities. It also resulted from the lack of appropriate legal solutions. For this reason, the beginning of the 1980s was marked by a regression in the development of artistic glass, developing thanks to the symbiosis of universities and glassworks. The existing plants struggled with current difficulties, conducted mainly production activities and resigned from continuing research and development works. The number of collaborative projects, open-air events, exhibitions and other activities has decreased. Among many of them, in the mid-1980s only the open-air workshop at Glassworks "Sudety" in Polanica Zdrój, organized by Z. Horbowy under the auspices of the Department of Culture and Art of the Provincial Office in Wałbrzych, survived. This resulted in a situation in which the implementation of new art glass designs was possible only outside the industry, mainly through the State Enterprise "Art Studios". (Horbowy, 1985).

Meanwhile, in 1978, Zbigniew Horbowy assumed the position of artistic director of the INCO Artistic Glass Studio in Wrocław, founded on his initiative, where he carried out his design activities in the following years, including creating collections of utility glass in smoke glass. He also collaborated with the Plant "Polmos" in Wrocław and Zielona Góra, developing bottle designs for them, the Recykling Centrum company, and the Kłodzkie Spa Complex (Banaś, 2009: 92-94, 105).

Zbigniew Horbowy very quickly developed his own design style, close to both the "Wrocław school of glass", from which he originated, and the Scandinavian style. As one of the journalists wrote years later, discussing the achievements of Zbigniew Horbowy in retrospect, he elevated ordinary bottles, goblets and glasses to the rank of works of art:

Horbowy's glass was a fragile manifestation of modernity, for which queues of people hungry for color in the gray of the communist surroundings were lined up. A luxury available to every Pole's pocket. His vases, platters of unusual colors, were simple in shape, tasteful in proportions and elegant. They were produced on a mass scale, but they had a unique feature, because they were made by hand (Saraczyńska, 2009: 11).



He also undertook the design and implementation of large architectural forms in glass, including stained glass windows for the church. St. Jadwiga in Częstochowa, spatial compositions at Feature Film Production Studio in Wrocław, glass realizations at the companies Cuprum and Provent in Wrocław (Banaś, 2009: 103–107).

The artistic achievements of Zbigniew Horbowy were quickly recognized in the art circles. Just a few years after graduation, during the review of post-war art exhibitions in 1961–1963, including the exhibition on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of “Zachęta” Center in Warsaw, he was awarded and included among a small group of the most outstanding designers in the country. He presented his works at several dozen individual and collective exhibitions in Poland and abroad (ODSASPW mps, no sygn.; Banaś, 2009: 99, 107–108, 115–118; Han, 1986; Wierzchoś, 2010).

In 1963, Zbigniew Horbowy began working as a lecturer and tutor for students of the State Higher School of Fine Arts, carrying out their projects at the “Sudety” Glassworks in Szczytna Śląska. The ability to effectively support young artists in their contact with the industry, as well as use their potential for the needs of the enterprise, was characteristic are a feature of his pedagogical commitment. In 1976, after completing the second degree course, he was appointed an associate professor at the university. In the years 1981–1984 he was the dean of the main Faculty of Ceramics and Glass. In 1984–1987 he headed the Glass Department. He was a member of the PWSSP Senate. In the period 1978–1981 he was its vice-rector. At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, he represented the PWSSP in Wrocław in the art section of the Artistic Education Council for three terms. In 1989 he was awarded the title of full professor. His students were famous artists and educators, including Czesław Zuber, professor Małgorzata Dajewska, professor Kazimierz Pawlak, Janusz Robaszewski and Dr. Mariusz Łabiński (*‘Szkola szkła’*, 2005; Banaś, 2009: 10–13, 101, 120–122).

## SUMMARY

Zbigniew Horbowy was a distinguished figure among Polish designers during the communist era. Successfully finding himself in the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the time, he successfully developed his subsequent initiatives at the intersection of art and industry. His artistic achievements were accompanied by design and managerial achievements. As a glass artist, he was noticed and appreciated in Poland and abroad. The glasses of his design, which successfully combine artistic and



functional values, were mass-produced and sold in mass for several decades. They have become a symbol of Polish glass in general. His design activity was accompanied by managerial activity. He managed the calibration units of Lower Silesian glassworks. He was successively the technical director of the Glassworks "Sudety" in Szczytna, the artistic director of the Glassworks "Barbara" in Polanica Zdrój and the Studio of Artistic Glass INCO in Wrocław (Zworska-Raziuk, 2004: 272). As a teacher and representative of university authorities, he always presented himself as a supporter of comprehensive preparation of students for future professional work. Associated with both PWSSP and glassworks, he understood their diverse needs well. He was a link between the university and industry, a promoter of their cooperation. The activity of Zbigniew Horbowy in all the above-mentioned fields complemented each other. Its manifestations were united by the kind of entrepreneurship that characterized it. It was expressed in the ability to combine artistic, design and managerial skills conducive to achieving economic success by the enterprises he co-run. He showed a kind of business sense and the ability to obtain support from decision-makers from the party circles of the time for his projects. Although this pragmatism was sometimes perceived by some as conformism, it also made it possible to undertake projects that otherwise would not exist. In the political realities of the communist regime, he was definitely more a pragmatist than a conformist, and the effects of his activities were of high social utility. The financial successes of state-owned glassworks achieved thanks to him, which are difficult to estimate today, could not translate into his personal income, at least in an obvious way in the market economy. Often times, his commitment could only be compensated by satisfaction. Many anecdotes were told about his entrepreneurship and power of persuasion. One of them claims that in the 1980s professor Zbigniew Horbowy, as a consultant employed during the launch of the glass industry in Libya, was to persuade its dictator Muammar Gaddafi to buy 2 ships of Polish sand, which was to be a much better raw material for Libyan glassworks than the Saharan (!). Zbigniew Horbowy was a recognized and popular figure not only in the artistic environment, but also in wider social circles. Endowed with serenity, a great sense of humor and vitality, he gave numerous radio and TV interviews, and appeared in the press. He was able to win over interlocutors, listeners, readers, colleagues, officials, students, contractors and workers. He consciously used his position as a celebrity to oppose the anonymity prevailing in the Polish industry at the time, exposing the figure of the designer to a wider audience (Banaś, 2009: 3, 116–117).

## POSTSCRIPTUM



Photo 6. Inauguration of the academic year 2002/03; in the center, the rector of the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław, Zbigniew Horbowy.

Source: photo owned by: Center for Documentation of Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław.

After 1989, Zbigniew Horbowy, without resigning from his artistic and design activities, concentrated on teaching and organizational activities at the PWSSP. This university was transformed in 1996 into the Academy of Fine Arts in Wrocław. In the years 1999–2005 he held, among others, the function of the university rector. As its head, he revealed his entrepreneurship, effectively acquiring large extra-budgetary funds for the university, used to expand and modernize the Academy's buildings and its computerization (Banaś, 2009: 113; Saraczyńska, 2002: 12; 'Sztuka nie jest...', 2000).

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