**The National Museum in Wrocław**

**The Big Four and Others. Ceramic Trinkets in Socialist Interiors.**

**8 October 2024 – 2 February 2025**

Exhibition of works collected by Tomasz Dziewicki accompanied by artefacts from the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and the National Museum in Wrocław

Curator: Dr Barbara Banaś

**A vulture, marabou stork, bison, baboon, many cats and dogs, as well as human figurines arrive in October at the National Museum in Wrocław, as part of another exhibition dedicated to Polish post-war design, showcasing around 340 porcelain figurines created by leading Polish artists. The exhibits originate from the private collection of Tomasz Dziewicki, and also artefacts from the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and the National Museum in Wrocław.**

The exhibition is dedicated to one of the most interesting design trends of the late 1950s and the early 1960s in Poland. It emerged as a result of a programme introduced at that time by the Institute of Industrial Design in Warsaw, aimed, among others, at preparing new models for the state-owned ceramic factories. Designers working for the Institute were inspired by the idea of revolutionising the interiors of Polish homes in the spirit of modernity, and eliminating the so-called ‘bourgeois tawdriness’.

The ‘Big Four’ in the title of the exhibition refers to sculptors working for the Department of Ceramics and Glass at the Institute, who were employed around 1956 in order to create new sculptural designs produced by the ceramic factories to provide decorative elements for domestic interiors. The team, led by Henryk Jędrasiak, a sculpture graduate of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, included Lubomir Tomaszewski, Hanna Orthwein and Mieczysław Naruszewicz. Their task was to create a collection of ceramic figurines, trinkets which would satisfy the contemporary tastes and aesthetic expectations regarding interior design, as small works of art accessible to all.

Over the period 1956–1965, the artists created numerous designs which were then produced in all ceramic factories in Poland, from Ćmielów to Wałbrzych.

The fashion trend triggered by the designers of the Warsaw Institute meant that managers of all the factories expected that industrial designers employed in these factories would also be able to provide their own models. Hence, besides the designs by the Big Four, the exhibition also showcases figurines designed by Henryk Baran, Paweł Karasek, Stanisław Olszamowski, Eryka Trzewik-Drost and Zbigniewa Śliwowska-Wawrzyniak.

The presented collection of Tomasz Dziewicki is accompanied by other exhibits from museum collections. Dziewicki started his adventure as a collector being a complete novice without any prior knowledge about Polish ceramics, and his interest in small sculptural objects d’art had purely sentimental roots. The first figurine found at a Sunday antiques market attracted his attention not just as a decorative item of an interesting form, but also because it reminded him of a similar piece on display in his family home. Today, his collection comprising over 350 exhibits represents the majority of the contemporarily manufactured designs.

”Tomek’s collection includes many interesting and rare items which are his pride and joy, such as »Dziewczyna siedząca w spodniach« [Seated Girl in Trousers] by Tomaszewski, »Gazela«[Gazelle] by Jędrasiak, and also figurines designed by Paweł Karasek for the factory in Bogucice” – says Dr Barbara Banaś, curator of the exhibition. “Undoubtedly, the star of the show is the sculpture entitled »Pielgrzym« [Pilgrim] by Lubomir Tomaszewski, created around 1963. It was probably merely a prototype design, so far the only example found in the collectors market, which became part of this collection”.

The collection belonging to Tomasz Drzewiecki is accompanied in this exhibition by some highly valuable artefacts from other collections, such as exhibits lent by the National Museum in Warszawa, which arrived there directly from the Institute of Industrial Design in 1979.

”The rarest exhibits are two figurines by Lubomir Tomaszewski, »Jak«[Yak] and »Sęp«[Vulture] dated 1960” – says Dr Barbara Banaś. ”Both were only created as the prototypes, just as »Ryba płaszczka«[Stingray Fish] by Henryk Jędrasiak. The designs on display include a walrus created by Hanna Orthwein, and »Czajka« [Peewit] by Mieczysław Naruszewicz, a very rare piece, even though factory-produced.   
Among the exhibits from the collection of the National Museum in Wrocław, one should mention »Pocałunek«[Kiss] by Tomaszewski, and an equally rare piece by Henryk Jędrasiak, »Ichtiozaurus« [Ichthyosaurus]” – notably, both were purchased by the Museum in 1958 directly from the Institute”.

**Piotr Oszczanowski, Director of the MNWr:**

The museum activity of Dr Barbara Banaś could be described as a positive version of the law of series. Soon after the recent showing in the National Museum in Wrocław of her excellent exhibition “Szklane życiorysy”, dedicated to Polish female glass designers (1945-2020), the curator invited us to another ‘museum feast’ – the latest exhibition entitled “Wielka czwórka i inni. Ceramiczna rzeźba kameralna w PRL-u” [The Big Four and Others. Ceramic Trinkets in Socialist Interiors]. However, when looking closer at the dictionary definition of the law of series, referring to the subsequent occurrence of two or more similar events, purely by chance, and unexplainable by the cause-effect relations, one can see that this ‘ceramics show’ is not the case. Instead, this exhibition is a tribute to the dedication, persistence, passion, and, above all, great knowledge of the curator, as well as a continuation of her exploration in this fragile and spectacular artistic domain – modern glass and ceramics. We can only wish for further exploits, and today we are grateful for the opportunity to admire this glass Noah’s Ark, and a charming menagerie of human types reflected in these small sculptures. This is a great opportunity to admire both the private collection of Tomasz Dziewicki and the curating skills of Dr Barbara Banaś.