

# Polish Poster Design

and its evolution  
throughout the  
20th century

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# 1898 Sztuka Theodor Azentowicz

1. The 20th century started with the Young Poland movement. The Young Poland movement was influenced by other trends such as neo-romanticism and art nouveau. You can see art nouveau's influence in the line quality and the flat colors. The line quality can also show influence of Expressionism. The line is thick and expressive, but in the face it is delicate and refined.

Early Polish poster art had high artistic quality. This poster was advertising the Society of Polish Artists, or Sztuka. It was an exclusive society of Polish visual artists that celebrated Polish visual art. Their events featured art from the Young Poland movement.



# 1903 Poster for Polish Paintings, Jozef Mehoffer

2. This 1903 poster is also considered a part of the Young Poland movement. Despite the stylistic influence from other countries, folk art was a central subject, as it was a symbol of Polish national identity.

This poster created for a Polish art exhibition shows influence from woodcut illustrations of traditional Polish folktales. Mehoffer altered his style to better suit the subject. Like other posters during this time, it had a high artistic quality.

Poster designers were artists, and did not see poster art as its own medium. Rather, they created art that could be displayed on the poster format. The emphasis and effort was placed on the art, not the layout or typography.



# 1914 First Spring Salon, Jan Rembowski

3. This 1914 advertisement for a salon combines the aspects of the Polish poster we have seen so far with Vienna Secessionist style. There is a classical influence and more space given to the text.

Jan Rembowski was also a part of the art nouveau movement, which we can see in the diagonal composition, the expressive line work, and the thick border. However, Rembowski drawing is incredibly detailed, giving shading and depth. This is uncommon to see in art nouveau with flat planes of colors.



# 1920 Artistic Lithography, Tadeusz Gronowski

4. Polish gained independence in 1918 and with it, explosive industry growth. The market needed posters for advertising. These advertising posters were simpler, and had more direct visual language.

Tadeusz Gronowski was one of the first artists to specialize in poster design. He was specifically influenced by the French Art Deco movement, as he traveled to Paris often. He utilized the airbrush to create soft forms.

Cubism also freed artists from the rigid rules of naturalism, and allowed them to experiment stylistically. Gronowski was also the first to begin incorporating typography into his illustrations.



# 1925 Upper Silesia, Stefan Norblin

5. The 20's was the beginning of Social Realism, influenced by socialist ideology. It was used by Russia and many other Slavic countries to inspire national and ethnic pride. (Note: This is different than Socialist Realism, which we will see in Post World War II Poland.)

Tourism was at it's highest between the two World Wars. Stefan Norblin created this set of tourism posters in the social realism style. There are three posters: one featuring a worker, one featuring a hunter, and one featuring an old wooden church.

Norblin uses 'neon' colors that create a slightly surreal atmosphere behind a recognizable silhouette.

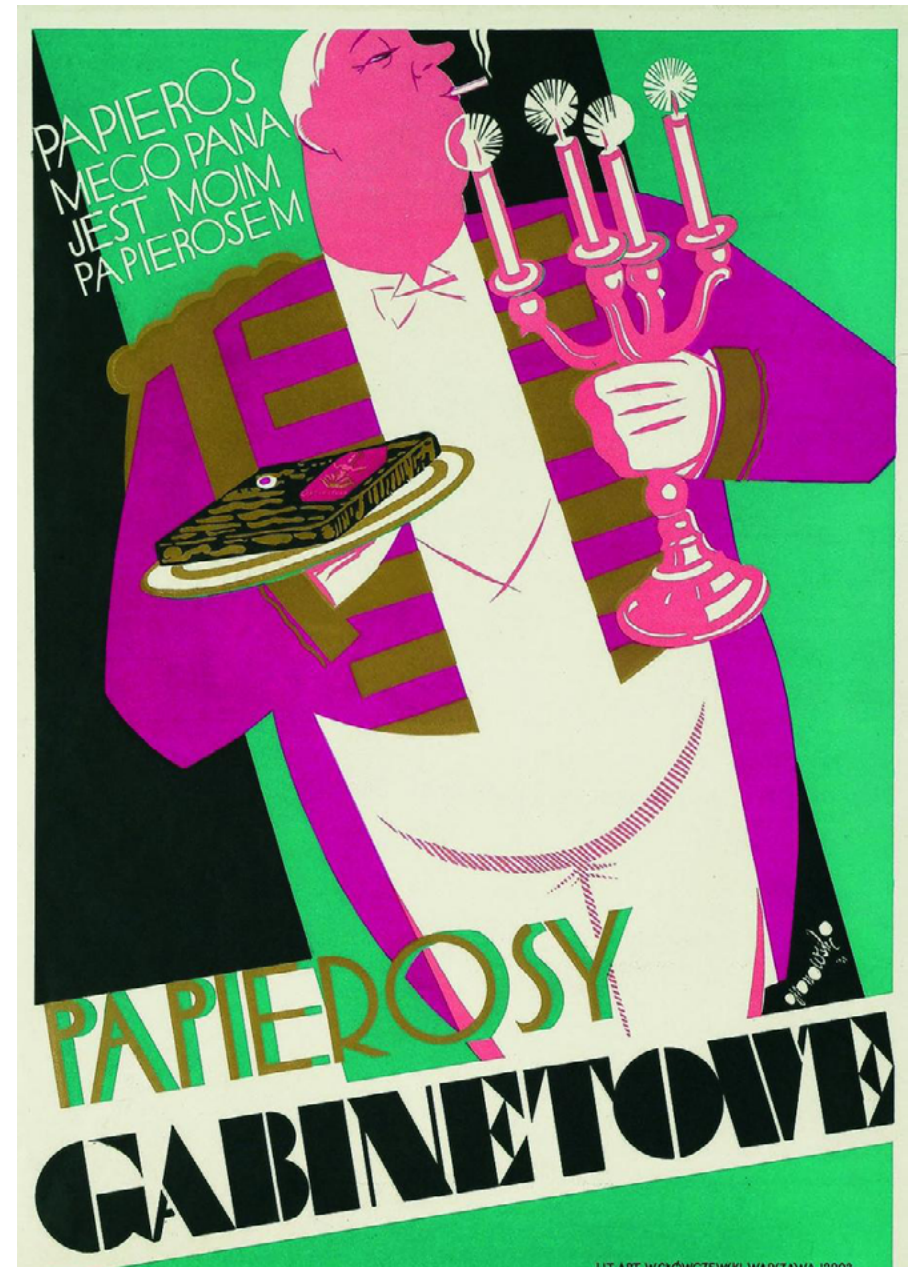


# 1932 Gabinetowe Cigarettes, Tadeusz Gronowski

6. Here is another poster from Tadeusz Gronowski. Unlike his 1920 poster, his shapes have become more defined. His color choice is inspired by post-impressionism. The text is integrated into the poster, the gold used in 'papierosy' matches the gold details of the man's jacket.

In the 30s, there was a trend in advertising posters to use a simple, direct symbol. After the first World War, Poland industrialized rapidly. There was a demand for advertisers and designers.

Many architect students from Warsaw University stepped up to fill the role as designers, despite their architecture education. Their approach to the poster was different from fine artists. They usually utilized geometry.



# 1944 To Arms in Defense of the Home Army! Edmund Burke

7. Edmund Burke was a member of the Propaganda of the Polish Resistance. Although many resistance groups had been stamped out in the beginning of the war, some remained. Burke also participated in the Warsaw uprising against Nazi forces.

Despite the hardships of the war, there was an underground press called 'Polish Underground Press of World War II'. They used improvised methods to hastily print posters. The 'Do Broni' slogan was found on many different posters.

In this poster, you can see that it is not as refined as some of the social/socialist realism in the past. There are limited colors, a simplistic yet impactful image, and simple bold type.

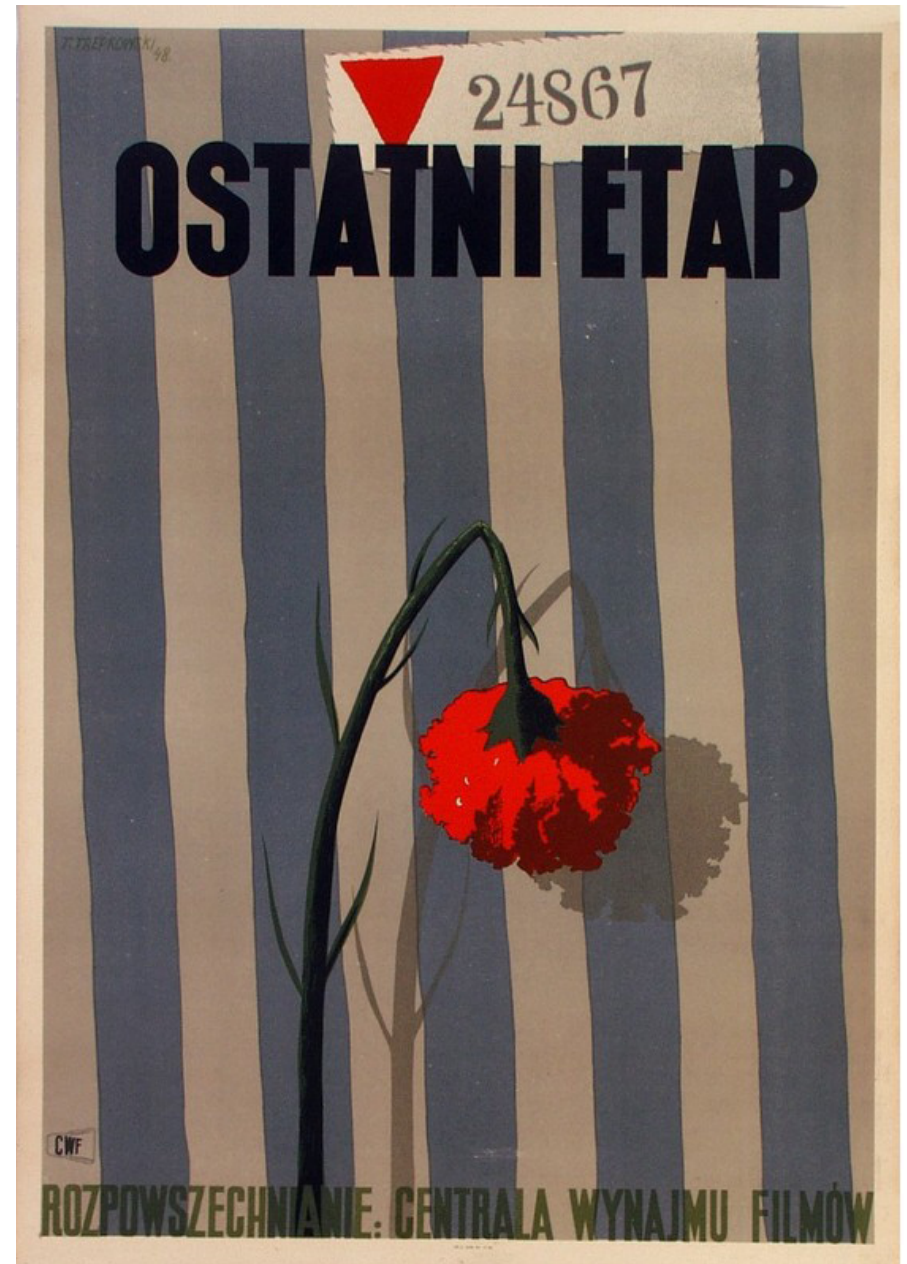


# 1948 The Last Stage Tadeusz Trepkowski

8. The film industry was controlled by the state. There were two institutions, Film Polski and Centrala Wynajmu Filmow (Movie Rentals Center), who commissioned posters. They worked with artists, not graphic designers.

This was the beginning of conceptual poster design, which became the common approach to poster design in the 50's. Designers used symbols, metaphors, and other tools to communicate ideas. It used association and semiology to create personal meaning and create an emotional reaction.

This poster uses a carnation, symbolizing remembrance, against the signature blue and white stripes of a holocaust camp uniform. Polish artists rarely used movie stars of film stills as subjects for their poster.



# 1950

## We Are Entering the Six Year Plan Włodzimierz Zakrzewski

9. During post World War II, you could see the beginning of socialist realism (not to be confused with social realism you saw in 1925). Socialist realism used a realistic style to promote the soviet agenda. These posters were very patriotic in nature, and they honored both the soldier and the worker.

After WWII, Poland was under Communist rule, a totalitarian rule that had many Soviet ideals. The state opened up the Propoganda Poster School, which Zakrzewski himself helped run.

The six year plan was a socialist plan to economically develop Poland as well as establish a strong socialist regime.



# 1952 United, We Build the Strength and Future of Poland Włodzimierz Zakrzewski

*10. Despite the totalitarian state, the poster flourished. There was little to no advertising at the time, so it was some of the only art on the street, allowing it to take on the role of public art. It was accessible and attractive.*

*At the time, commissions only came from the state, as private galleries were banned. Since poster art was some of the only art, it helped boost the popularity of the poster.*

*The Propaganda Poster School was the foundation for the Polish School of Posters.*



# 1955 Kordzik Włodzimierz Zakrzewski

**11. The 50's is known as the 'Golden Age' of Polish poster design. Although the state controlled the film industry, they did not place much control on the posters themselves. 1955 was two years after Stalin's death, leading to more liberal Polish communists in government. Many artists were drawn to the poster industry because of the artistic freedom.**

**Tadeusz Gronowski was originally a painter, and you can see his painting skills reflected in the painted quality of the faces. You can also see a change in style compared to his previous posters – he has more artistic freedom. Although he still does realism, it is more detailed, and he plays with colorful lighting.**

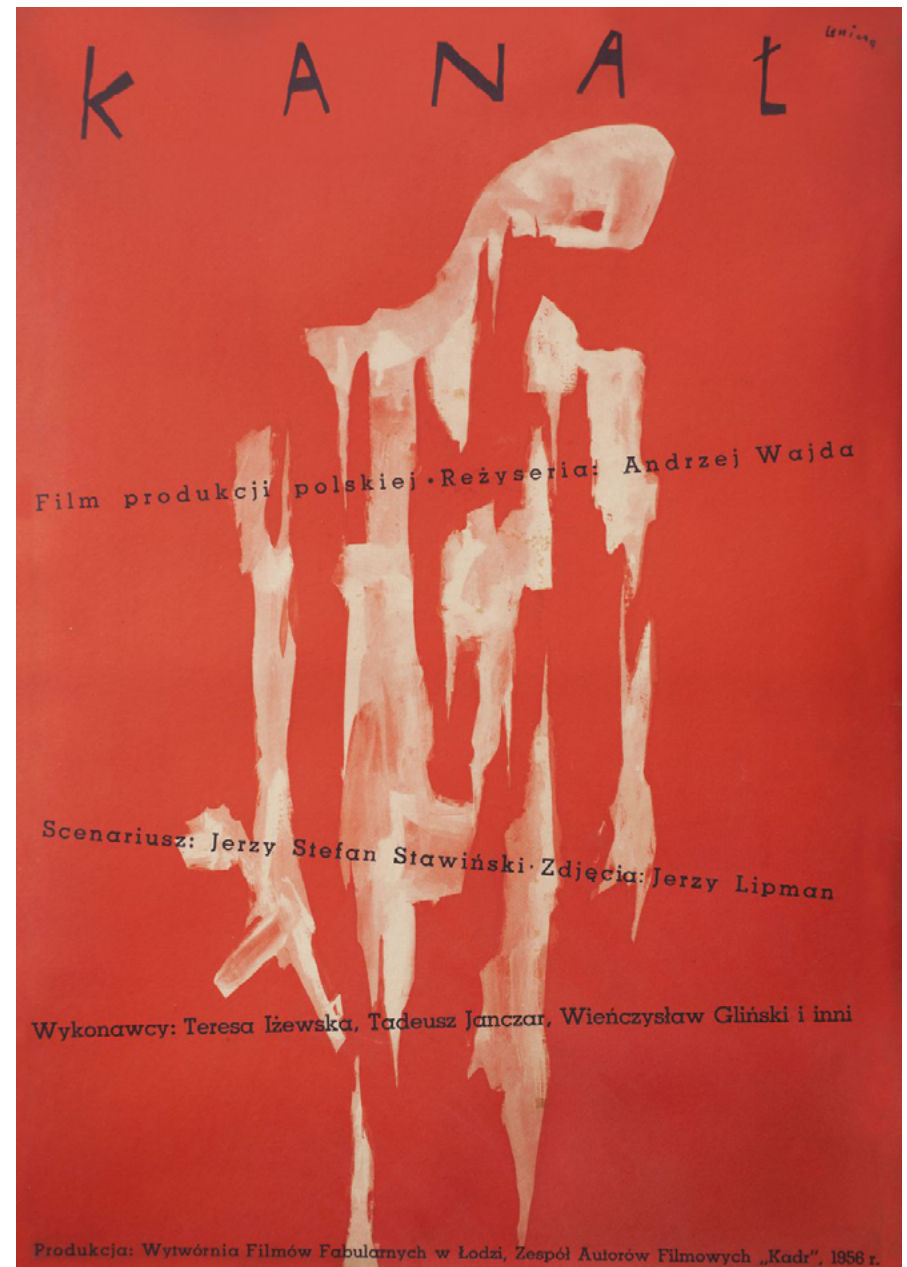
**The Socialist Realism style began to die around this time due to an explosion of influences in styles due to the Young Artists' Exhibit in 1955.**



# 1957 *Kanal* Jan Lenica

**12. *Kanal* is a film based on the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. This massacred figure reflects the bloodshed and overall pessimistic events of the film. The figures is slightly abstract, with Lenica integrating both visuals and typography. The title has a handwritten quality, common in Polish posters during this time.**

**Lenica was a graduate of the Warsaw Polytechnic University, and a member of the Polish School of Posters. Designers were allowed creative freedom on posters (including exploring styles of socialist realism) as long as they rejected western ideals and styles. Poland, which in the beginning of the 20th century had followed other European influences, finally began to develop a style of its own.**



# 1967

## CYRK Ball Balancing Bear, Bohdan Bocianowski

13. CYRK was the state sponsored circus advertisement. The Polish agency ZPR (or United Entertainment Enterprises) did not place many artistic restrictions, allowing artists to move away from realism. The style was similar to commercial illustration in Europe and the U.S, with abstractions and a collage-like texture. There was usually a single image accompanied by 'CYRK' in a fun type. Designers went back to their folk-art roots.

Each artists' style was different, and the subjects were whimsical and surreal. There were bright colors and simple compositions. Prior to illustrating posters, Bocianowski worked illustrating children and young adult book covers.



# 1969 Poor Cow, Jan Młodożeniec

14. 'Poor Cow' is a story of a eighteen year old who runs away from her abusive husband. She begins a life as a prostitute, and the movie features a psychedelic soundtrack. This conceptual movie poster reflects those parts of the story.

The poster reflects a handmade quality. The figure is asymmetrical, the right side of the dress curving out more. The psychedelic design is hand drawn, with an emphasis on the expression of it rather than perfection. His 'blobby' figures reflect his time working in Henryk Tomaszewski's poster studio. This is also one of the last times we see brightly colored posters.



# 1973

## Cabaret, Wiktor Gorka

**15. Cabaret is Gorka's most recognizable and stunning posters. He designed hundreds of film posters. He worked for many major film distributors. The 70's was the decline of the Polish School of Posters. It was a transition from the golden age of posters to the darker tones and personal expression of the posters of the 80s and 90s. The postwar generation is described as having an aggressive and bold style.**

**Although the Polish economy had seen a boost in the first few years of the 70's, the 1973 oil crisis and the failure of the government led to opposition. This was in the form of trade unions and university groups.**



# 1974 Exodus, Jan Swaka

**16. Swaka was one of four emerging artists from Wroclaw. Their work shows understanding and provides commentary on contemporary issues. Wroclaw was also the center of avante-garde theatre and art.**

**This poster was designed for an experimental theatre group known as Teatr STU. 'Exodus' is a play that references both Polish history and the contemporary struggle. You could either leave into exile, or stay and be consumed by the blaze.**

**The theatre and art was a disguised form of protest. It reflects the rising tensions between the government and the people leading up to the 80s.**



# 1980

## Aliens and Aliens, Jakub Erol

17. By 1979, the opposition movement had gained more traction. Karol Jozef Wojtyla, or St. John Paul II, had just been elected as pope. He called for 'alternative Poland', and was one of the main activists of the Free Poland movement.

Jakub Erol had also worked in Henryk Tomaszewski's studio. Although his earlier work from the 70s was more similar to Tomaszewski's style, his work changed drastically in the 80s. His style became darker, with terrifying surreal imagery against dark backgrounds. Although we do not know his political beliefs, it may have been a veiled protest against the stifling communist government.



# 1989 Solidarity, Tomasz Sarnecki

**18. Solidarity was the name of the anti-communist trade union. Although formed in 1980, it had 9 million member in 1981. It only gained more support throughout the 80s.**

**The 'Solidarity' title has a handwritten quality to it, with the Polish flag emerging from the 'n'. Sarnecki based the poster off of the 1952 movie 'High Noon'. The caption translates to 'High Noon, June 4, 1989', encouraging people to vote. It shows the impact of film on Polish culture.**

**The Solidarity movement worked with the United People's Party and the Democratic Party. Together, they convinced the prime minister to appoint Poland's first non-communist Prime Minister since 1948. This was the beginning of the Third Polish Republic.**

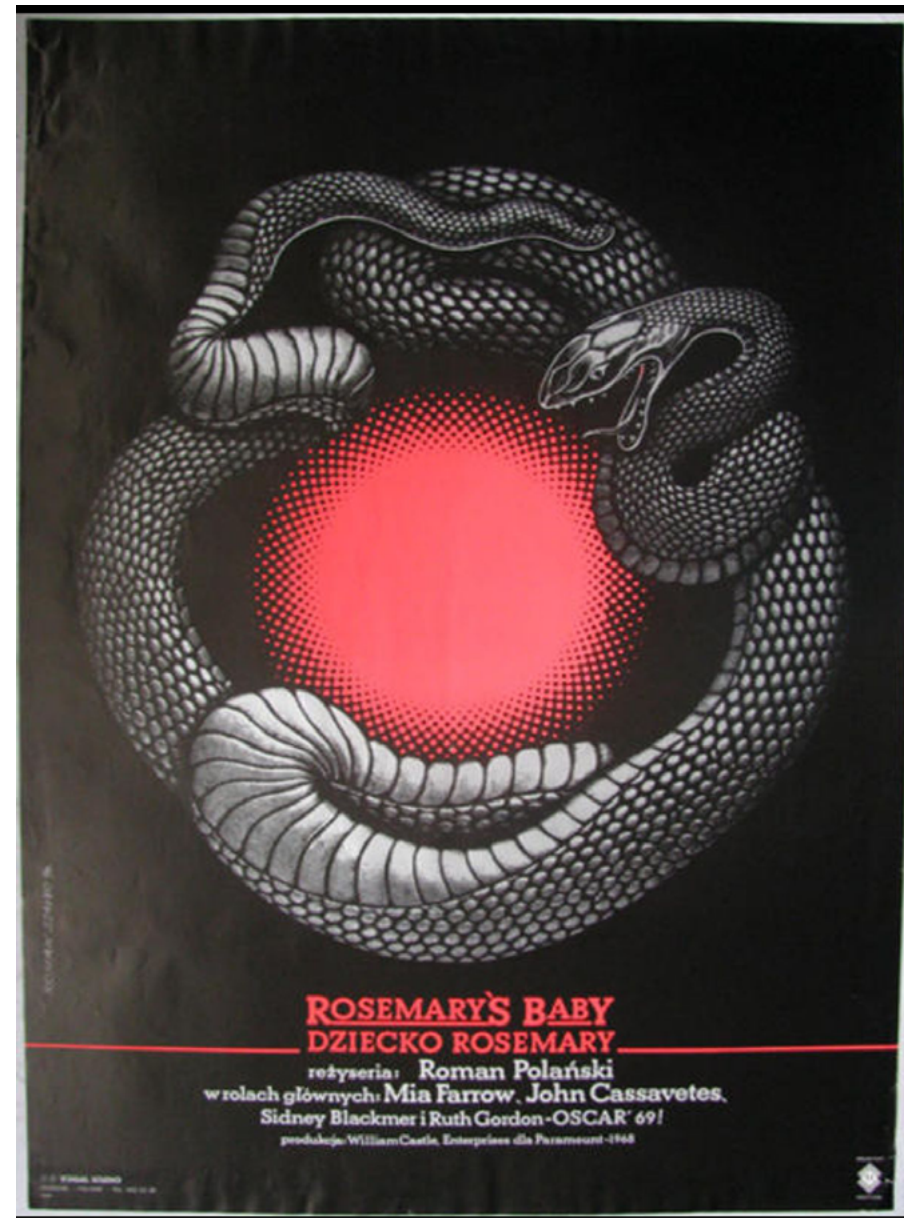


# 1990 Rosemary's Baby, Roslav Szaybo

19. Poland continued to create film posters into the 21st century. There is a variety of styles, especially within the horror and thriller genres.

Roslav Szaybo was a designer who worked on a variety of different projects, including film posters, book covers, logos, and more. His posters are bold and energetic. He also uses a lot of surrealism.

This conceptual poster reflects the story of *Rosemary's baby*, a woman who is impregnated by the devil. The red circle most likely represents the egg, with the serpent representing Satan.



# 1990

## Carvaggio, Wiesław Walkuski

**20. Wiesław Walkuski studied both painting and graphic design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. This is for the 1986 film Caravaggio, a film about the painter.**

**Although this style of poster does not reflect the grittiness of film posters of the 80s's and 90's, the style is a call back to the posters at the beginning of the 20th century. Walkuski, a talented realist painter, uses fine art as the center piece for this poster. The text and image are separated. It has a high artistic quality.**

**It reflects the approach to the poster that remains consistent throughout the decades. It rejects still and actors in favor of symbolic imagery, meant to interact with the viewer.**



# Conclusion

**In conclusion, the Polish style is vast and diverse. Polish artists were in a situation unlike any other during the 20th century. In the beginning, they had their style, but were very influenced by other European art movements. Although that is not inherently a bad thing, it was difficult to distinguish Polish artists from other European artists.**

**The Soviet Invasion completely turned the Polish art scene on its head. It rejected other European styles and influences in favor of the rigid socialist realism. However this period did not last very long. Artists were allowed artistic expression in the film industry with little to no restraints. Each artists was allowed to explore their own style, leading to some incredibly unique posters. They explored art free of other art movements that were happening at the time.**

**I think that is what drew me to picking the Polish poster category for this assignment. Polish posters had an aesthetic that I had never seen before, and that I could not assign to a previous art movement. Each artists was different; there is no 'Polish style'. It is mostly grim, but their use of conceptual posters leads to some incredible and interesting imagery. This assignment covers a mere twenty works, but there is so much more out there. The Polish portfolio is vast and beautiful.**

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