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Colors of old age – passions of Crakow centenarians

As long as you paint,
you are always young...
youth has no end.²

Henryk Kozubski (106 years)

Key words: centenarians, education for old age, passion, painting

Abstract

The article presents the profiles of two Crakow centenarians whose passion is painting.

Since 2016, a team from Department of Andragogy and Social Pedagogy (editors of the Polish Social Gerontology Journal) has been conducting qualitative research among centenarians living in Krakow and its surroundings. In 2015, there were more than 4 thousand centenarians living in Poland (Ministry of the Interior and Administration 2015), and in 2016 Cracow district had 99 residents aged 100 years and more (ZUS 2017). The vast majority of this group were women. It is not easy to reach these respondents. Health condition and barriers keeping them from independent functioning limit their visible social activity, that is, all the activities people undertake outside their homes (Szukalski 2013, p. 35). The interview-based studies were conducted in a group of over a dozen of seniors. Each of these encounters was a unique experience, letting the researchers get to know a piece of “living” history of human-

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2 Quoted from the interview with Henryk Kozubski on 11 May 2017.

kind, and an opportunity to gain unique knowledge in the area of widely understood education for old age (Szarota 2015, pp. 22–35).

Among the respondents, there were two 100 year old artists who share an amazing passion for painting. Why is it so amazing? Because it has managed to overcome all limitations and difficulties. First of the artists, 101-year-old Stanisław Jakubczyk, was born in 1916 in Lubatowa, in Subcarpathia region. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, in the Center for Pedagogical Studies and the Film School in Łódź. He is a member of Association of Polish Artists and Designers. He designed about 150 stained-glass windows and is the author of mosaics, altar sculptures and paintings in over a hundred churches in Poland and several ones abroad. His portfolio also includes many short movies awarded at national and foreign festivals and 12 poetry and prose publications (Jakubczyk, Dzieszyński 2003). Painter almost since his birth, he has been faithful to this art despite severe sight problems. As he himself says: “What kind of painting is that... magnifier must be huge, my nose on it and I put the brush under it (...) because I can’t see, the center of my vision if completely blurred, I can only see the edges. But I am stubborn. Once I start something, I do all I can to complete it, even if it costs me a lot of effort”³ (Jakubczyk 2017). The “fruit” of this tedious work are series of paintings that will be exhibited in November 2017 in the Krakow Palace of Arts. The exhibition of Stanisław’s works will be unique, as he notices, because: “I thought it would be good to show only the things I made when I was over a hundred years old” (ibidem). The series of abstract paintings titled “Fluencje” (*Fluencies*) will be presented. It is an attempt to capture the phenomenon of dispersion and mixing of dyes in spinning water. Another cycle, “Oratoria” (*Oratories*), is a symbolic presentation of selected Lord’s Prayer verses in a different prayer settings. A motive connecting four paintings are Latin word of the prayer, that refer to men: *Thy will be done, give us our daily bread, forgive our trespasses, do not lead us into temptation* and a white figure representing humanity. The oratories are: a basement, a temple, a prison cell and a theatre.

Another of the two seniors, 106-year-old Henryk Kozubski, was born in 1911 in Biecz where he spent his childhood and early adolescence. In 1926, his family moved to Wieliczka. He graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. He had worked in agriculture his whole life. When he retired, he engaged in social activities. He began to paint watercolors when he was 94. He explains his artistic and cultural activity with a belief: “If you [a senior] still have strength, you must work, and you have to work to have strength”⁴. During 12 years he has taken part in over 60 exhibitions, created more than 600 paintings, has been an active member of Art-Klub in Wieliczka and at present, he and a photographer Paweł Jędo work on a movie about his life, titled “The Painter of Life”. He speaks with humility about his own artistic work: “I have never thought that as an amateur, I would be showing my

3 Quoted from the interview with Stanisław Jakubczyk on 24 May 2017.

4 Quoted from the interview with Henryk Kozubski on 11 May 2017.

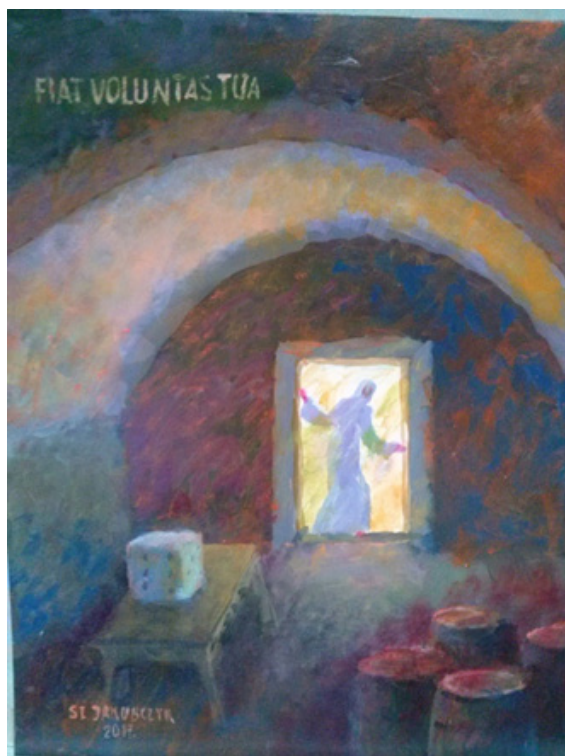
works. This is my life's biggest surprise" (Krzywda 2016). Henryk owes his success to hard work. Constructive critical evaluation he received one day from a professional artist, did not discouraged him. "I decided to improve my skills. And I began to paint professionally" (Kozubski 2017). And next review was exceeded his expectations: "I was called a unique Chagall from Wieliczka" (ibidem). Paintings by Henryk Kozubski present watercolor landscapes, still nature and monuments of architecture. His works are displayed on the walls of his family house and shown in different public places, for example, in a mine, old tower or train carriages. He also organized exhibitions in neighboring villages. He wanted to give as many people as possible a free access to art. Henryk does not want to waste even a moment of his life, therefore he has precise plans: "I am not going to accept that I am old and frail, I am going to paint till the last day of my life" (ibidem).

The noble respondents, Stanisław and Henryk, every day paint they old age with new shades from a multi-color palette of life and do not give up on their dreams. Stanisław would like to finish his last book. He emphasizes: "Writing is another thing I am still able to do... Now, when I do not have many laps left until the finish line, I have to hurry up. Our present reality provokes, it does not let me stay silent, it forces me to speak" (Jakubczyk 2016, p. 10). Henryk has still many ideas. As he notices, there are still empty pages in his family chronicle. Both gentlemen, since they heard about each other, would like to meet in person. The University of the Third Age of Pedagogical University of Cracow will take all efforts to organize a meeting of both nestors with a wider audience.



Stanisław Jakubczyk with one of his paintings from "Oratories" series⁵.

⁵ Picture taken by the author during the interview with Stanisław Jakubczyk on 24 May 2017.



First painting from “Oratories” series by Stanisław Jakubczyk⁶.



Henryk Kozubski in his house presenting his family chronicle⁷

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Picture taken by the author during the interview with Henryk Kozubski on 11 May 2017.



Henryk Kozubski presenting his watercolor paintings⁸

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⁸ Picture taken by Gabriela Mruszczak during the interview in July 2017.