

COMPARATIVE STUDY

PORTRAYALS OF MADONNA

I have chosen the below pieces on the basis of my interest in the intersection between religious imagery and cultural influences – they way that religious imagery can be affected when created through the lens of the artists' cultures.

All the works that I have chosen share the main subject – they portray the Madonna – not only one of the most popular motifs in religious art, but also one of the most beloved religious figures in the whole world. The artists have chosen the same subject despite coming from different countries and living in different times – thus, this recurrent motif can be used to investigate the way a culture influences the artists' portrayal of religious imagery and how they use their own experiences with folk or contemporary to them art to enrich their versions of the Madonna.



Fig.1. Kazimierz Sichulski, „Matka Boska Leśna”, tempera on paper, 1926, 120 x 317 cm, Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu



Fig.2. Philipp Otto Runge, „The Small Morning”, oil on canvas, 1809-10, 109 x 86 cm, Kunsthalle, Hamburg



Fig.3. Alphonse Mucha, „Madonna of the Lilies”, tempera on canvas, 1905, 247 x 182 cm, Alphonse Mucha Foundation, Prague

A – IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF FORMAL QUALITIES

Overall composition:

In this artwork, a **balanced**, yet slightly **asymmetrical**, **vertical composition** can be noticed. Although all the elements on the left and right side **balance** each other, they are not the same (e.g. Mary leaning slightly to the left and Jesus leaning slightly to the right; two figures on the bottom leaning outward but portrayed in slightly different positions and angles). The composition is created from a **worm's eye view** – the viewer is looking up at the characters – this is even more visible due to the use of **one point perspective**, which is visible in the positioning of the trees, whereas they are slightly slanted towards the middle line of the artwork. Additionally, the **focal point is created through both location and compositional lines** – Mary and Jesus are located at the center of the composition, but their bodies create a pyramidal composition leading towards Mary's face.



Rhythms and movement:

The whole piece is very **dynamic**, mostly due to the rhythms it incorporates. Firstly,

the most accentuated is the **radiating rhythm** – it is visible in the triangular shapes encircling Mary and Jesus, as well as in the shapes coming from the characters praying below and even in the shapes creating an additional **alternating rhythm** starting at their feet. All of these rhythms come together to portray very directional **outward movement**. Additionally, the random rhythm created by the trees and the aforementioned pyramidal composition of Mary and Jesus add to the movement becoming **upward**. **Random rhythm** can also be observed in many parts of the painting – mostly in the garments, both of the praying people (there is a repeating oval shape all over their clothes), as well as in the clothes of Jesus.



Random rhythm is also observed in the foliage of the trees, as it consists of repeating circles in different hues of green.

Volume and depth:

Depth in this piece is created mostly by **overlapping** elements. Elements closer to the viewer obstruct at least a small amount of the elements behind them. However, **one point perspective** is implemented to underline that the higher on the image an element is, the farther it is

from the viewer. Color **values** are used only marginally to create **volume** – this is mostly visible in the sleeve of Mary's dress and the barks of the trees (they are darker right behind Mary and Jesus – as if they were creating shade) – the human figure itself is treated rather flatly, with a slight **variation in value** near chins.

Light and color:

Although there is no discernible single **light source** in this artwork, it is visible that the light is orangish, as visible on the trees' barks. It can additionally be mentioned that it seems to be scattered through the foliage, basing on the planes of warmer color it creates. Thus, it could be speculated that the light is created either by a sunrise or a sunset.

The color palette itself is **analogous** – it consists mostly of warm yellows, greens and blues, paired with **near-neutral** browns – yet, it is important to note that the author uses a lot of **hue variation**.



Medium Characteristics:

Thanks to the use of tempera, the artist was able to achieve the uneven color plains – on the other hand, use of tempera on paper resulted in a quite grainy **texture**, and slightly visible scratchy **brushstrokes**.



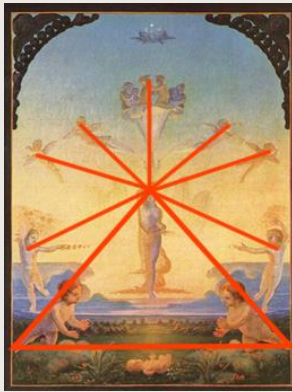
A – IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF FORMAL QUALITIES

Overall composition:

This artwork uses a **vertical, symmetrically balanced composition** – although there are very small differences between the left and right side (e.g. the central figure of Mary's pose is not symmetrical), they are minor enough to conclude that this composition is symmetrical. The composition is created with a rather **low horizon**, emphasizing the dramatic scene happening in the sky.

The composition is divided into two parts – one inside the painted border, and one outside of it. While the one inside has quite a lot of **negative space**, the outside composition is **tightly cropped** and has little negative space.

The focal point is created through location – the figure of Mary is in the center of the artwork – but also through **compositional lines**, as she creates a pyramidal composition together with the cherubs – as well as all of them create a **radiating rhythm** which has its center at her silhouette – or, when viewed differently, create a circle around her.



Additionally, the composition follows the **rule of odds** – as all of the angels come in pairs, with Mary at the center. That is excluding Jesus, which is the only figure in the inner composition which placed horizontally.

Rhythms and movement:

This artwork mainly relies on radiating and flowing rhythms. The **radiating rhythm** is created, as stated before, through the angels surrounding Mary, but can also be seen in rays of sunshine above the painted frame, as well as surrounding the dark orb below the frame. **Flowing rhythm** is mostly visible in the outer composition, through the combination of floral motifs and angels' bodies. Both of these rhythms create **upward movement**, which in the outer part is undulating, while in the inner part is also outward.

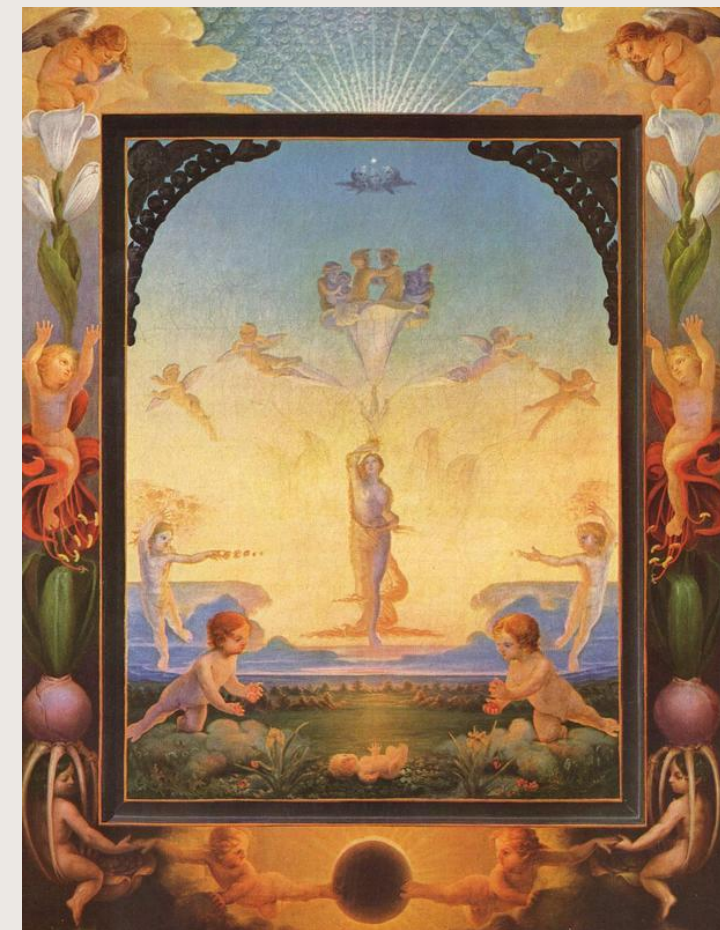
Light and volume:

As the title suggests, the **light source** in this artwork is the rising sun – which seems to be replaced with Mary. The light is orangish, while the shadows created are mostly blue. The artist used **chiaroscuro** in a Academist manner – it is realistic, not too exaggerated – in case of some angels, the glow makes them almost blend in with the sky.

The light in the bottom part of the outer composition comes from a source hidden behind the dark orb, creating an orange glow, turning the figures near it almost red. However, the middle and upper parts of the outer composition seem to be affected mostly by the same light source as the inner part.

Depth and color:

The illusion of space in this artwork is accomplished through **aerial perspective** – although the progression of colors in this case is not as visible (as the light source is the furthest object, making farther elements warmer), the progression of focus is easily discernible: the objects closer to the horizon become more blended and are less detailed. Additionally, **linear perspective** is used in the decreasing size of shrubs covering the meadow. Depth in the outer composition is created through overlapping. The color palette is very



harmonious, featuring warm, **analogous hues**.



Medium characteristics and texture:

Due to the medium being oil paint, the **brushwork** is near not visible, with all the gradients being expertly blended. There is a slight grain visible in the **texture**, most probably due to the painting's age and the texture of the canvas

A – IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF FORMAL QUALITIES

Overall composition:

Mucha creates a **vertical, asymmetrical and imbalanced composition**. The left side of the painting is much more packed – with **darker values** and more saturated colors – especially red, which is an eye-catching color. This leads to a compositional imbalance, making the left part seem closer to the viewer (also due to warmer colors). The horizon and viewpoint are **eye-level**.

The **focal point** is created through **contrast of hues** – while most of the artwork is kept in unsaturated, **near-neutral** tones, the girl on the left (and especially her face) are painted in warmer, saturated reds, pinks and oranges. Additionally, a secondary focal point is created through **compositional lines** - the face of the Madonna is the top of a pyramidal composition made from the flowing fabrics and lilies, as well as the girl on the left leaning towards her.

Rhythm and movement:

The rhythm most important to this piece is the **flowing rhythm**, created by the fabrics worn by the Madonna – the fluid, slow and graceful movement it creates makes the fabrics look light and ethereal, underlining her status as a religious figure. Additionally, the fabrics of Mary's dress create a

radiating rhythm, with her as the central point, leading the viewer directly from the girl on the left to her.

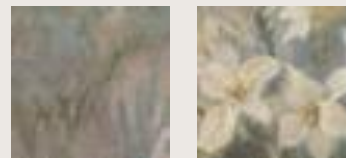


Secondly, the **random rhythm** created by the lily flowers allows for the background to be seen as **positive space**, instead of negative, as well as creates **inward movement** towards the two main figures.

Depth and color:

The illusion of space in this artwork is created through **aerial perspective** and differences in focus. The main focal point – the girl on the left – is achieved by aerial perspective as well. She is painted in warmer, more **saturated hues** as compared to the rest of the painting. According to the aerial perspective, the objects further away become gradually cooler (the Madonna is yellowish, while the lilies are blueish), as well as have less details – the lilies in the background are more blurred as compared to

those near.



The **color palette** is very harmonious and delicate – although it uses mostly cool, **analogous blues, greens and yellows**, they are very washed out, and many of them could be said to be near-neutral beiges or grays. The only color not fitting that description is the red used for the girl on the left .



Light and volume:

There is no single definite **light source** in this painting – the light is more so diffused. However, it can be speculated that the light comes from the front, closer to the viewer's right – as right parts of both the figures' clothes have lighter **tonal values**, while the left parts are slightly shaded. Despite the light not being very directional, the artist has created quite a lot of **volume** through discrete chiaroscuro – mostly in the fabrics, which, due to not too heavy differences in tonal value, keep their lightness.



Medium characteristics and texture:

Thanks to the usage of tempera on canvas, the washed-out, whitened quality of the painting could be achieved more easily. However, due to the use of tempera, planes of color can be more easily distinguished from each other, and despite meticulous blending, some scratchy **brushwork** can be seen along the grainy **texture** of the canvas.

B – ANALYSIS AND UNDERSTANDING OF FUNCTION AND PURPOSE WITHIN SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Intended Use:

Sichulski was known for his talent for creating pieces intended to decorate interiors – one of his breakthrough pieces was a commission for a decorative panneau from the famous Zalewski bakery in Lwów. Later on he gained more experience designing pavilions and churches in a folk style (Śladowski, 2015). Thus, he naturally progressed to envisioning a whole building designed by him to the tiniest detail - “Matka Boska Leśna” was initially intentioned to become a stained-glass piece in a church – in creating it, Sichulski was most probably inspired by his teacher, Stanisław Wyspiański, hence the arch shape of the canvas and the quite big size of the artwork. In the end, Sichulski did not succeed in creating a space like that for “Matka Boska Leśna”, yet managed to design the Saint Hubert chapel in Lwów in its entirety (Zaucha, 2021).



Fig.4. Stanisław Wyspiański, Stained Glass in Bazylika Franciszkańów

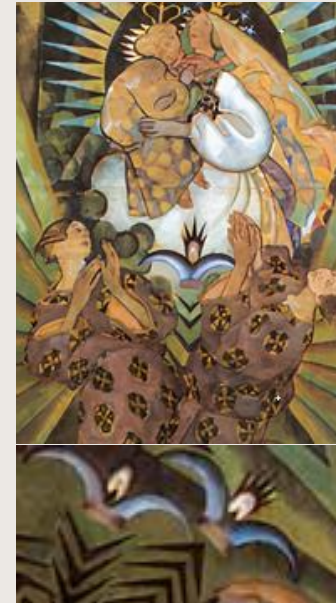
Pantheism and symbolism of forests:

Polish modernists were known for their pantheistic view on nature – this could be seen as one of the reasons for portraying the Holy Virgin as a forest goddess, especially when featuring coniferous forests, beloved by most Poles. However, it is not the first time that the idea has been brought up – Matka Boska Leśna (The Blessed Lady of the Forest) is a folk legend originating in Komańcza in an old fir forest, in which a Hutsul lumberman was visited by Mary in a dream (keeping in mind that Sichulski was fascinated by Hutsul culture). The Holy Virgin told him to build a statue in her honor – and since then, the place was sometimes graced with miracles, such as a man surviving the bite of a viper without the help of a doctor, as he was absent (Marszałek, 2017). This connection can suggest that the presence of such a stained-glass piece could provide protection to the parishioners of the church designed by Sichulski. Additionally, fir trees are recognized as symbols of manifestation and perceptiveness, as well as honesty, longevity, resilience and progress.



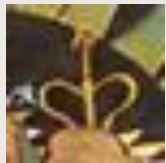
Use of folk clothing and motifs:

Mary, Jesus and the praying figures wear folk garments. The intersection of Christianity and folk culture was a popular theme in Poland in Sichulski's times, but in itself it suggests a type of blurring of lines between the divine and human. It can be read as a reference to Polish or Slavic cultural roots, but also a way of making Christian religion more relatable and easier to connect with for parishioners from small towns – especially when, despite all wearing folk clothing, the garments donned by Mary and Jesus are visibly brighter and more distinguished, as compared to the ones in which the praying figures are clothed. Lastly, the geometrical shapes used in the artwork are typical of folk art – this was again a typical, and very popular, motif in art at the time – this could have been used to appeal to the general public or a potential patron.



Symbolism of a crown:

In the artwork both the Madonna and Jesus wear crowns. Obviously, crowns symbolize monarchy and lordship. This, in the case of Jesus, references the concept of *Christus Rex*, which recognizes Jesus as the King of the Kingdom of Heaven (Wikipedia, 2021) – it could also be a nod towards Mickiewicz's “Dziady” (a piece of Polish Romantic literature, tremendously popular, especially among folklorists like Sichulski), in which Poland is recognized as the “Chrystus narodów” (“Christ of all the nationalities”). In such a case, Mary holding Jesus here could be recognized as her cradling the whole of Poland. The case of Mary is slightly different, since she is recognized as “Najświętsza Maryja Panna Królowa Polski” (“The Holiest Mary Queen of Poland”) by the Catholic church of Poland since around the 16th century (Brewiarz, 2014). The crown she wears could symbolize her status in Poland – and thus it is more decorative than that of Jesus.



„MATKA BOSKA LEŚNA”, KAZIMIERZ SICHULSKI

Symbolism of Lilies

In “The Small Morning”, Runge includes not only one, but two types of lilies. The first one is the Madonna Lily, *Lilium candidum* – it is white, and as the name suggests, it is most commonly associated with the Holy Virgin, symbolizing purity of soul and chastity. It is also recognized as the most important and popular type of Lily, originating in Palestine and Lebanon, and spread long ago all over the eastern Mediterranean by Phoenicians (Kandeler, Ullrich, 2009). Aside from Madonna Lilies, Runge included *L. chalcedonicum* in “The Small Morning” – although it is less known now, during the Middle Ages red lilies were actually a symbol of the Virgin Mary. The idea that flowers can symbolize different human states Runge owes to mystic Jacob Boehme, who saw their cycle from flower bulb to death as analogous to humans’. Additionally, Boehme maintained that each daybreak symbolically heralds the Last Day – and that a lily’s growth towards light symbolizes the soul’s reunion with God. Runge agreed with that view, seeing flowers as the most revealing of all natural forms (Schiff, Waetzoldt, 1981). The lily shown above Madonna is sometimes regarded as the “cosmic lily of light”, with its location near the morning star.

Fig.5. *Lilium candidum*Fig.6. *Lilium chalcedonicum*

Fig.7. Philipp Otto Runge, “The Great Morning”, 1810

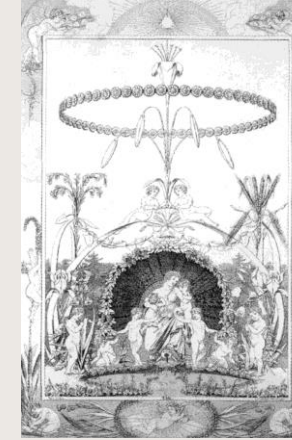


Fig.8. Philipp Otto Runge, “Times of Day: Day”, 1805



Fig.9. Philipp Otto Runge, “Times of Day: Evening”, 1805

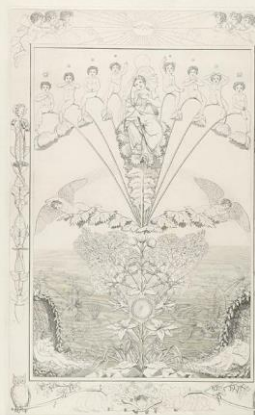


Fig.10. Philipp Otto Runge, “Times of Day: Night”, 1805

Intended Use

“The Small Morning” was first intended only as a plan for a single part of a tetraptych, which Runge titled “Four Times of Day”. In his very short career, the artist was devoted almost exclusively to this project. It was intended to become four monumental oil paintings, exhibited in a neo-gothic temple, where they would be contemplated to the accompaniment of choral hymns and poetry by his friend, writer and composer Ludwig Tieck. Sadly, this plan never succeeded as, beside “The Small Morning”, none of the other three times of day were ever completed beyond an engraving of a sketch (published in 1806 and 1807) (Kren, Marx, 1996). As “The Small Morning” was only a plan, “The Great Morning” has afterwards been painted by Runge. However, as he was not satisfied with the results, he asked his brother to destroy it – it was divided into sections and later on reassembled on a plain gray background. Of all the four compositions, “Morning” was the one with most symbolic elements, hinting at the meaning of the cyclical renewal of the universe and ascent of the soul into heaven that he whole tetraptych conveyed. Runge’s dream was for this kind of design to become a collective style, present of the walls of private and public interiors. Additionally, he hoped to establish an academy where he could employ artists to carry out his ideas (Schiff, Waetzoldt, 1981).

Symbolism of Roses

Although the rose featured in “The Small Morning” is harder to identify than the lilies and was never confirmed to be of any certain type, it is most possibly *Rosa centifolia*, the Hundred-Petaled Rose, as almost every other rose has its pistil (core) visible. Its symbolic meaning is that of graces and gentleness (Dietz, 2020) – given by the Genii to Jesus, it is a fitting choice. Aside from the lily, it is the second most common flower to be portrayed with the Madonna.



B – ANALYSIS AND UNDERSTANDING OF FUNCTION AND PURPOSE WITHIN SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Symbolism of red hair

Red hair has fascinated artists for a long time – the reason why is speculated by scientists, but the quality of “otherness” is definitely a factor. One of the first figures in Christianity consistently portrayed with red hair is Mary Magdalene – thought to be a reformed prostitute. This lays the basis for the symbolic meaning of red hair in women – simultaneously embodying sin, virtue, lust and chastity (Dotson, 2019). Mucha was also undoubtedly taken by that hair color (as were many other Art Nouveau artists: Eugene Grasset, Elisabeth Sonrel, Edward Okuň, to name a few), and in the case of “Madonna of the Lilies”, this authorial choice cannot go unnoticed. The redheaded girl is portrayed near, and in connection to, the Madonna – the girl can be read as the whole of humanity, or all the Slavs (as Mucha has previously used red headed girls as representatives of Slavs in his works). The red hair then can symbolize how despite the flaws of humans (the sin), they are still under the protection of Mary. Alternatively, it could be a reference to Mary Magdalene, for which red hair symbolizes leaving her “ungraceful” past behind and stepping towards God. Either way, it is sure that the hair color, along with the girl’s serious expression and strong physical presence, are a contrast to the ethereal figure of the Virgin.

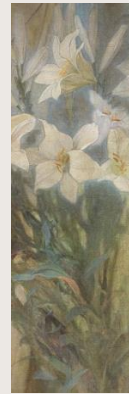
Intended Use

“Madonna of the Lilies” was commissioned in 1902 by a church in Jerusalem dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It was intended to become a mural decorating the walls – Mucha was commissioned to design a couple of murals for the church, as well as a stained-glass piece (titled “Harmony”). However, the project was cancelled for unknown reasons, so that only “Madonna of the Lilies” remained, along with its earlier versions and the design for stained glass (Alphonsemucha.org). This purpose explains the artist's choice as far as the size of the painting – it is big enough to be easily transferred to a wall.



SLOVANSKÁ EPOPEJ
HISTORIE SLOVANSTVA V OBRAZÍCH
~ALFONS MUCHA~
VYSTAVENO OD 23. ZÁŘÍ DO 31. ŘÍJNA 1928
VE VELIKÉ DVORANĚ I. VELETRŽNÍHO PALÁCE
V PRAZE
POD PROTEKTORÁTEM MINISTRA SOUVISLÉ A NÁRODNÍ OTČEVY
DR. MILANA BODŽÍ.
DENNĚ OTEVŘENO OD 8.-17. HOD.

Fig.11. Alphonse Mucha, “Poster for ‘The Slav Epic Exhibition, Brno, 1930’”, 1928-1930



Symbolism of Ivy

The young girl next to the Madonna holds a wreath of *Hedera helix* – Common Ivy. A wreath of ivy symbolizes remembrance – showing that the Slavic people will always remember the Holy Virgin, but also that there is a bond between the girl and Mary. In general, *Hedera helix* symbolizes healing and protection, as well as marriage and happy love – all appropriate meanings for a piece intended to decorate a church. Additionally, it was thought that if a woman carried Common Ivy, it would bring her luck. In pagan (to which the traditional Slavic clothes allude) as well as Christian communities, ivy was seen as a symbol of eternal life Dietz, 2020).



Symbolism of Lilies

According to his letter to his wife Maruska, Mucha considered the theme of “Madonna of the Lilies” as “Virgo purissima” – “the purest virgin” (Alphonsemucha.org). Thus, he chose to surround her with a mass of lilies, which are the symbol of purity and chastity. *Lilium candidum*, the Madonna lily used here, according to the name, has been seen as the symbol of the Holy Virgin for a long time. At first, in the ancient times, the lily was seen as a symbol of power, being used as a decorative motif in homes of influential members of the societies (for example in the Knossos Palace). Since the Assyrian and Egyptian empires, they have also been seen as symbol of the sovereignty of kings, as well as a symbol of virginal innocence and the bridal state (the symbolism which has prevailed until now). Later on, in Greek and Roman Times, they were considered a symbol of sublime love, procreation, and glory, while in Jewish tradition they symbolized youth and, again, the virginal state. Although in the Middle Ages a red lily was more commonly considered the symbol of the Madonna, the white lily has become her particular flower in the end (Kandeler, Ullrich, 2009).



Fig.12. Alphonse Mucha, “Harmony”, 1908

„MADONNA OF THE LILIES”, ALPHONSE MUCHA

Chłopomania

During Sichulski's time, concepts such as Chłopomania (Peasant-mania) and Folklorist tendencies in general were on the rise, a trend started a long time prior by the Romanticists, first fascinated with Orientalism, and later on exploring their own roots. This concept could be seen in works such as Adam Mickiewicz's aforementioned "Dziady", dealing with Pagan rituals and resulting in the Polish intelligentsia becoming fascinated with all things rural and folk. These trends became even more prominent after Poland regained its independence, especially in Cracow, the art capital of Poland in Sichulski's times – where he studied under Wyspiański (Śladowski, 2015). Additionally, Sichulski was interested in Hutsul folk culture due to his own experiences: in the winter of 1904, he and his friends visited Hutsulshchyna, which started his lifelong fascination with that culture (Zaucha, 2021). Thanks to that, in "Matka Boska Leśna", Sichulski creates an intersection between his religious theme and the folk aesthetics. The clothes portrayed in the artwork are not representative of any particular traditional costume but can be identified as such due to the usage of popular elements such as a women's headscarf, a dress with a vest and brightly colored, patterned textiles.

Cubist and Futurist Influence

During Sichulski's time, being influenced by Cubism and Futurism was almost a trend – such that a movement called the Formists was created in Poland in Kraków, where Sichulski used to study. Formism focused modernist artists interested in Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism and folk art. Although Sichulski himself never joined the group, the change in his style towards these styles overlapped with the years in which Formism was established as before around 1920, he used to lean more towards Neoclassicism and slightly Art Nouveaux (Zaucha, 2021). The Futurist influences are very visible in "Matka Boska Leśna": they are implemented in the rhythms, especially the radiating one, which makes the piece highly dynamic with outward movement. Cubism is less visible in this particular piece: it shows in the geometrization of plants. The figures that Sichulski creates here – especially the Virgin with her child – with their simplification, stylization and slight deformation are more characteristic of primitivism, often associated with folk art.



Fig.13. Adam Międzybłocki, "Krakowianka", 1912

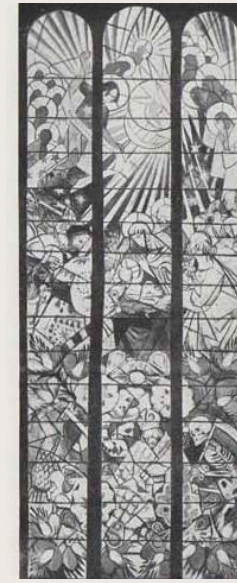


Fig.14. Kazimierz Sichulski, "Boże Narodzenie", 1922



Fig.15. Emilio Pettoruti, "Dinámica del viento", 1915



Popularization of use of stained glass

The art of making stained glass has been present since the Middle Ages, yet in Poland it has had its own kind of Renaissance at the turn of the 20th century – a big part in this played the founding of the "S.G. Żeleński" stained glass workshop in Cracow in 1902, which worked with Stanisław Wyspiański and Józef Mehoffer – now considered the most famous stained-glass artists in Poland, and both teachers of Sichulski in Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts (Wikipedia, 2021). The popularization of this medium and most probably the influence of his teachers resulted in Sichulski creating many projects for stained glass, one of them being "Matka Boska Leśna".

Madonna and forests in Poland

Sichulski was not the first to combine the imagery of the Holy Virgin and forests in Poland – not only as it was a legend in some parts of Poland, but also because forests are typically associated with peace and quiet, a perfect place for religious



Fig.16. Piotr Stachiewicz, "Cisza Leśna", c. 1900

contemplation. These two elements were combined for example in "Cisza Leśna" ("Forest Quiet") by Piotr Stachiewicz – a postcard which circulated Poland at the very beginning of the 20th century. (Galeria u Adama, 2020). These kind of depictions could have been an inspiration for Sichulski.

„MATKA BOSKA LEŚNA”, KAZIMIERZ SICHULSKI

Influence of Goethe and color theory:

Runge got to know Goethe through repeatedly participating in his annual competition for artists (1799-1805), which was designed to try to uphold the standards of Neoclassicism in young artists. Despite abandoning his efforts after failing to catch the judges' eyes, he kept in contact with Goethe, corresponding about his profound studies of the theory of color (Schiff, Waetzoldt, 1981). In these studies, he combined scientific observation with mystical speculation of the meaning of color. In a letter, he wrote: *"Light is the sun which we cannot look upon, but when it bends down to the earth, or to man, the sky becomes red. Blue keeps us in a certain awe, that is the Father, and red is properly the Mediator between earth and Heaven; when both disappear, then fire comes in the night; that is yellow and the Comforter who is sent to us – the moon also is only yellow"*. Thus, in "The Small Morning" Runge included all the three primary colors with a white lily, their matrix, being the place from which they emerge – in his studies of color, he concluded that using all these colors will bring a filling of roundness and completion to his painting (Schiff, Waetzoldt, 1981).

Romanticism:

Although first leaning towards Neoclassicism, Runge was unquestionably influenced by the ideas of Romanticism – especially pantheism and mysticism. Runge's artwork mostly focuses on the subject of unity of nature, God and man – as he writes himself *"Morning is the boundless illumination of the Universe. Day is the boundless figuration of the creatures which fill the Universe. Evening is the boundless annihilation of existence into the origin of the Universe. Night is the boundless depth of the knowledge of the indestructible existence in God. These are the four dimensions of the created spirit"* (Schiff, Waetzoldt, 1981). "The Four Times of the Day" represent the nature mysticism associated with the Romantic movement (Wikipedia, 2022). "The Small Morning" is in part a landscape painting, a subject typical for Romantics. yet, Runge is original in his treatment of this, as he never painted pure landscapes, but only allegorical ones – in which Genii appear in the form of children, representing the forces of nature.

Academism and the influence of John Flaxman:

In his style, Runge was heavily influenced by his time studying at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – during that time, almost all European academies of art taught their students a style named Academism – which relied on the careful study and observation of real life objects and models, trying to achieve the greatest possible level of realism (Wikipedia, 2022). This is visible in the individual plants in "The Small Morning", painted with botanical precision, as well as the realistic figures of the characters and the amount of preliminary sketches and studies that Runge has conducted before painting the artwork (which in itself is a preliminary study to "The Great Morning"). Runge was especially influenced by Neoclassicist artists, thanks to Goethe – initially, he was a believer of Goethe's classical ideal and worked hard to win a prize in one of the contests organized by Weimarer Kunstfreunde. It is most probably in that period that he was influenced by the Neoclassicist John Flaxman (Schiff, Waetzoldt, 1981) which is most visible in his sketches for 'The Four Times of the Day' – the quality of line is the same, as is the style of line drawing with scant shading.

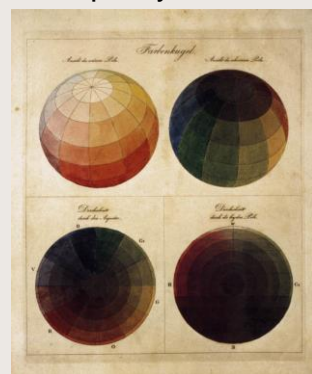


Fig.17. Philipp Otto Runge, "Color Spheres", 1809



Fig.18. Philipp Otto Runge, "Study to the Morning", c.1809



Fig.19. Philipp Otto Runge, "Times of the Day: Morning", 1807



Fig.20. John Flaxman, "The Oath of the Seven Chiefs", 1795

„THE SMALL MORNING“, PHILIPP OTTO RUNGE

Art Nouveau

In his time, Mucha was considered the “King of Art Nouveau” – despite that, he rejected any ties to the movement, stating that “*art is eternal, it cannot be new*”. Yet, his art was always typically Art Nouveau – especially as he developed his talents as a designer, expanding his work to a wide range of everyday use objects such as utensils, packaging and interior decoration, as well as jewelry (Kren, Marx, 1996). As such, the “Madonna of the Lilies” shows many elements typical for Art Nouveau pieces, such as a very prominent flowing rhythm (seen in the fabrics of Madonna’s dress), floral patterns (included through the multitude of Lilies) as well as organic shapes and curves. Despite that, this particular work is not as typical for the movement as most of Mucha’s other works, lacking a linear contour over the color and geometrical shapes. That is most probably due to Mucha’s growth as an artist – most of his later works (especially including „The Slav Epic”) lack the extremely typical Art Nouveau look that his earlier works (especially posters) had. However, the influence of this particular movement is still very visible in the choice of a red headed girl to accompany the Madonna – red hair was a fixture in Art Nouveau artworks, many of the artists being fascinated with the sensuality and “otherness” of it, as in the example of Elisabeth Sonrel’s 1903 “Fleurs des Eaux”.



Fig.21. Elisabeth Sonrel, “Fleurs des Eaux”, c.1903

Pan Slavism

Pan Slavism is a movement which concerns itself with the unity of Slavic communities and the elevation of Slavic culture. It was on the rise after the mid-19th century, with the first ever Pan Slavic convention taking place in Prague, Czech Republic in 1848. Pan Slavism was especially prominent in the Czech Republic as a way of implementing anti-Austrian attitudes, and thus it is logical that Mucha was severely affected by the movement, having grown up during its height. After gaining fame as an Art Nouveau poster designer in Paris, Mucha left France and returned to the Czech Republic, hoping to create art mostly focused on conveying the Pan Slavic ideas of unification of the Slavs; in fact, he could never properly assimilate into French culture, never joining any art movements or groups and always declaring himself a proud Czech (Dusza, 2014). He showed his support for the movement (and the belief in it) by creating Slavic-themed art, keeping traditions alive – for example, by featuring traditional Slavic garments in his artworks. This is visible in “Madonna of the Lilies” in the clothing of the girl accompanying Mary. From this political conviction also comes his aversion towards being called a member of the Art Nouveau movement – he insisted on calling the style uniquely “Slavonic” (Dusza, 2014).

„MADONNA OF THE LILIES”, ALPHONSE MUCHA

Lilies in other periods

Lilies have been used as a motif in art for a long time. One of the first documented uses of lilies was in a Minoan fresco, c. 1600 BC in Amnisos, Crete. In that very same place, another lily (*L. candidum* – the Madonna lily) was portrayed in a high-class villa – showing how it was a symbol of power and influence. This is portrayed also by the lilies present in the throne hall of the Knossos Palace, originating around the same time as the previous ones (Kandeler, Ullrich, 2009). Since then, lilies have been used frequently in art, in the Middle Ages and early renaissance often with Mary and other saints as well – one of the most well known examples is Leonardo da Vinci’s “The Annunciation”, painted at the height of the Renaissance, portraying the Holy Virgin with Archangel Gabriel, who hands her a Madonna Lily. The concept of “Madonna of the Lilies” was not first created by Mucha either – a painting of the same name was created by William Adolphe Bouguereau in 1899 in the Realism style, although in that painting the Madonna is holding baby Jesus, unlike Mucha’s “Madonna of the Lilies” (Alphonsemucha.org). This shows that in Mucha’s contemporary cultural context, his use of the lily symbolism was mostly repetitive – the conceptual originality of the piece came mostly from his inclusion of the anonymous Slavic girl.

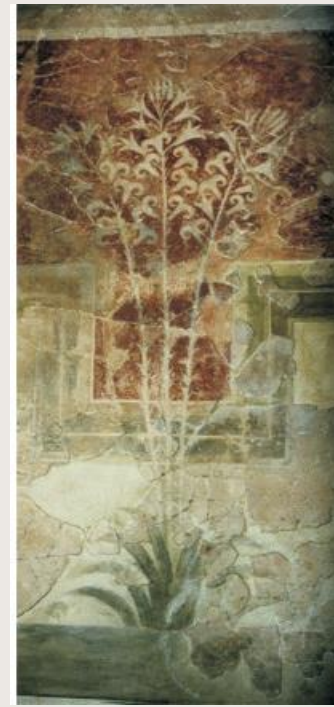


Fig.22. Minoan Lily Fresco, Amnisos, c. 1600 BC



Fig.23. William Adolphe-Bouguereau, “Madonna of the Lilies”, 1899

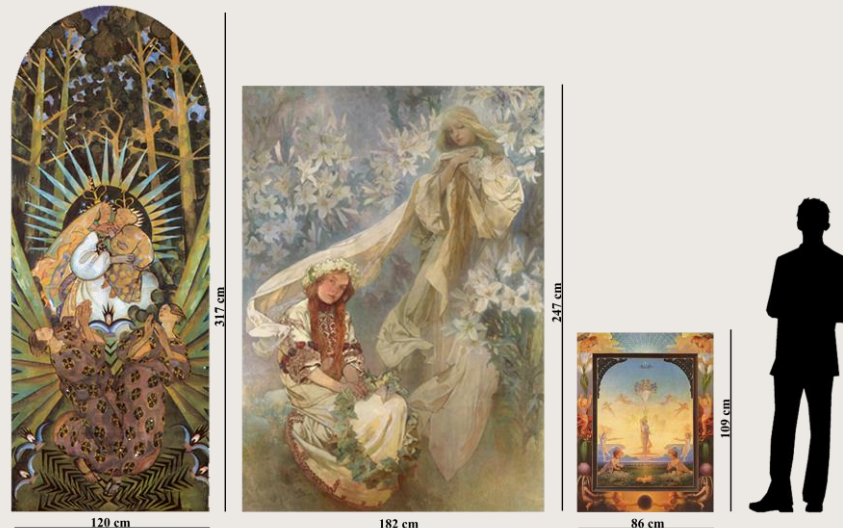
D – MAKING COMPARISONS AND CONNECTIONS

Intended Use:

All three of the works were destined to become objects of worship, parts of interior design for temples. Sichulski's "Matka Boska Leśna" was intended as a stained-glass window for a small-town church. "The Small Morning" was to be only a part of four monumental canvases decorating a Protestant temple, to be experienced with choir music and poetry. "Madonna of the Lilies" was commissioned as a mural for a church in Jerusalem dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The intended use is connected to the theme of the artworks – as Catholic art throughout history (portraying differing biblical figures) was mostly commissioned by churches or church officials. Yet, as opposed to "Madonna of the Lilies" which fits this narrative, "Matka Boska Leśna" and "The Small Morning" were made out of the artists' own volition – they were not commissioned for the work but had their own ideas for a religious space they wanted to create – this kind of initiative is, although not completely unprecedented, rather unusual in the historical perspective, especially in the case of Runge and the ambitious monumentalism of his vision.

Role of the size:

All of the artworks are quite big when compared to an average person; however, it is very noticeable that „The Small Morning” is incomparably smaller to the other two works. "Matka Boska Leśna" is very large, with the height of over three meters – it was created that way for it to be comfortable to transfer the design to stained glass afterwards, but also for the artist to be able to better envision how he wanted it to look. "Madonna of the Lilies" is lightly shorter, yet still significantly taller than an average person – additionally, its overall surface is bigger than that of Sichulski's artwork. It is also visible that besides the artwork being big due to its function as a mural, it was painted with the intention of the Madonna and the girl being life-sized. This authorial choice, when used in a church, would result in the parishioners having an easier time analysing and contemplating the work, as well as feeling more immersed in it, due to it feeling realistic. In that way, both Sichulski and Mucha used the size for the work to become more awe-inspiring. "The Small Morning" is of course smaller, but despite that, it is important to note that it was also planned to later on become a monumental painting – thus showing the same intention of using size as a tool for eliciting wonder.



Reception:

One of the most important factors unifying all the works is the fact that their true purpose has never been fulfilled – all of them are plans for bigger works: "Matka Boska Leśna" is a design for a stained-glass window, "The Small Morning" is a preliminary study for a bigger oil painting and "Madonna of the Lilies" is a design for a mural. The reasons for them not reaching their full potential are however different: Sichulski made many designs for stained glass, yet only one of them was carried out due to a lack of patrons willing to fulfill his visions of interiors designed entirely by him. Runge never managed to reach the full potential of "The Four Times of the Morning" most probably due to his short time in the art industry – he started quite late and died at the early age of thirty-three. Additionally, his vision was most probably too ambitious for an artist not very well known. In the case of Mucha, although he was directly commissioned to create the design for a mural, the project was cancelled due to unknown circumstances. All these reasons explain why these artworks are not as well known as they could have been: "Matka Boska Leśna" is almost unheard of even in Poland (there is only a single picture of it in the whole internet, and most of the information about it had to be acquired directly by mail from the museum storing it); Runge, despite the conceptual genius of "Morning" is not well known even among Romantic painters, not even being considered amongst famous alumni of his alma mater; "Madonna of the Lilies" is somewhat more popular, mostly due to Mucha being a vastly popular artist himself – yet, when compared to his other works, it is also rather obscure.

FUNCTION AND PURPOSE

D – MAKING COMPARISONS AND CONNECTIONS

Impact of contemporary artists:

Both Runge and Sichulski were greatly influenced by the institutions in which they studied and their teachers. In the case of Sichulski, his teachers Wyspiański and Mehoffer, who are considered the best Polish stained-glass design makers, played a big part in him taking an interest in the medium – for which “Matka Boska Leśna” was made. Both these teachers and the contemporary to him artistic group Formists had an impact on the theme of “Matka Boska Leśna” – especially on Sichulski including in it the folk-inspired elements. For Runge, he was taught in the Academism style, which gave him the technical foundation he needed to carry out projects as advanced as “The Four Times of the Day”. His understanding of color and its symbolical meaning was also influenced by his correspondence with Goethe about the color theory. As far as subject, it is sure that the contemporary to him movements such as Romanticism and Mysticism had a great impact on the conceptual ideas he wanted to portray in his work.

Impact of past artists:

Of all these artists, Runge is the one on whom past artists had the most impact – mostly through Neoclassicist ideals and the Renaissance. In his portrayal of Mary, he was inspired by the Sistine Madonna, while in the very beginning of creating “The Four Times of the Day”, in the sketches, the influence of Neoclassicist John Flaxman is visible. For Mucha, the Neoclassicist influence is also visible in the clothes, as are the remains of Academism in his realistic portrayals of humans. However, he has no direct relations to the styles and was more so influenced by Japonisme – in

“Madonna of the Lilies” mostly in the imbalanced composition of the piece, as compared to his earlier pieces which borrowed a lot from Japanese woodblock print.

Folk inspirations:

Both Mucha and Sichulski were influenced by the ideas of Pan Slavism. For Mucha it was much more direct – he grew up with the ideas and had a uncomplicated relation with the movement; for Sichulski, however, as for most Polish artists of his days, the connection was more diluted: Pan Slavism did not hold the same appeal, as it symbolized Russia’s efforts to take over Poland. The ideas of Pan Slavism became more appealing only after the weakening of USSR and Poland regaining its independence in 1918. However, the need for elevation and popularization of Slavic culture is visible in both “Matka Boska Leśna” and „Madonna of the Lilies”, especially in the featuring of traditional folk clothes in the artworks. However, putting Pan Slavism aside, this type of search for cultural roots is mostly seen in Western European art and thus makes both the artworks typical in their respective cultures, but rather distinct in a global perspective.

Pantheism:

Pantheism was a worldview typical of both Polish modernists, to which Sichulski belonged, as well as Romanticists, a part of which Runge was. The belief that a divine element is present in everything in the Universe, especially nature, is visible in both “Matka Boska Leśna” and “The Small Morning”. The title of Sichulski’s work shows that he considers the Madonna to be a part of the forest, the woods being just one of the aspects of her

divine being, which does not limit her, but more so expands her area of influence. On the other hand, Runge treats nature and the universe in a more holistic way, combining symbolism of plants, numbers, colors and allegorical figures to create a comprehensible whole symbolizing the Universe. As he says, he tries to create a sense of “roundness” – of having a conclusive portrait of the relations between God, man and nature. Despite the slight differences, the consciousness of the idea of pantheism brings much more to the interpretations of both those works, while that kind of knowledge does not apply to “Madonna of the Lilies”.

Symbolism of lilies

Both Runge and Mucha use the symbolism of lilies to enhance the meaning of their portrayals of the Madonna. Mucha made the lilies the main point of his artwork, while Runge used them only as an element (however important) of his dense composition. Both used *L. candidum*, the Madonna lily, but while Mucha limited himself to this single most well known lily associated with the Holy Virgin, Runge reached beyond that and also included *Lilium chalcidonicum*, the lily which used to be associated with Mary in the middle ages. Despite that, in both their cultural contexts, the inclusion of a lily resulted in the same connotation of purity and chastity, as it is a very old symbol, the meaning of which does not change easily. Additionally, both Runge and Mucha come from European cultures to which the meaning has spread in the first place – making it an integral one.

F – MAKING COMPARISONS TO OWN ART MAKING PRACTICES

Composition:

The shape of „Matka Boska Leśna” optimized for stained glass windows inspired the use of arches in my own work. In my work „Confessional”, I have used arches to create “windows” from the church into a forest – here obviously referencing the stained glass windows that are usually in churches.

Portrayal of parishioners:

The praying figures featured in “Matka Boska Leśna” inspired my repeated use of such characters in my own work, as I found the way Sichulski integrated those figures into the composition very appealing.

My work inspired by Sichulski:



Own work: „Confessional”, digital drawing, 2022

In “Confessional” it is in the form of female parishioners, representing women in the Catholic communities. However, the confessing figures are in a praying position – kneeling – while the characters at the front don’t assume a typical praying pose with hands clasped together, rather, I wanted it to look as if they were pleading very emotionally.

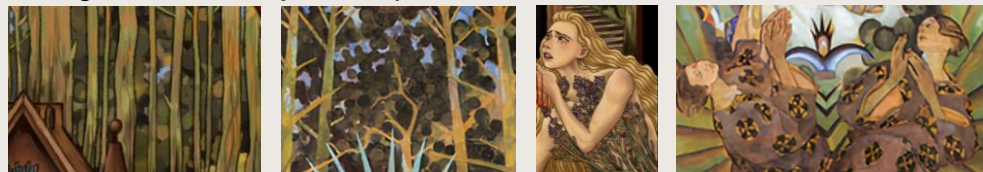


Pantheism, symbolism of forests:

I found the way that Sichulski combined the meaning of forests and religious themes very appealing to my own values, as I have always felt a deep connection to forest, having a house in one myself. Thus, in “Confessional” I wanted to portray the calmness and serenity that can be experienced in the woods, while keeping the pantheist meaning of a divine element being present in nature.

Color palette:

I have found the color that Sichulski used for his work – analogous, with very warm blues, greens and yellows – amazing, and wanted to incorporate it into my own work. However, I tried not to simply copy the colors, but rather study them and utilize for elements different than Sichulski did – thus, for example, the desaturated plum purple that he used for clothes of the parishioners I used for the lavender flowers. The only element I left the same was the forest, as I thought that it was just too perfect.



„MATKA BOSKA LEŚNA”,
KAZIMIERZ SICHULSKI

F – MAKING COMPARISONS TO OWN ART MAKING PRACTICES

My work inspired by Sichulski:



Own work: „Mother Mokosh with Humanity in Tow”, pyrography, 2022

General Idea:

Sichulski's portrayal of Virgin Mary with folklore elements made me want to create my own version of the Madonna – as I am an atheist, yet am almost everyday faced with the concept. Thus, I decided to draw an equation between Mary and the Slavic goddess Mokosh, who in legends created humanity – thus her status as a mother of humanity, just as the Holy Virgin is seen as a maternal presence.

Composition:

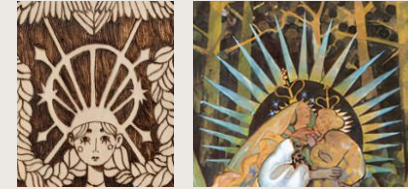
“Matka Boska Leśna” has greatly influenced the composition of some of my works, mostly in the portrayal of a central figure with elements creating a sort of radiating rhythms coming out from it, surrounding it – this is visible in my work “Mother Mokosh with Humanity in Town”, which is additionally a play on the theme of portrayals of Madonna.



Radiating rhythm

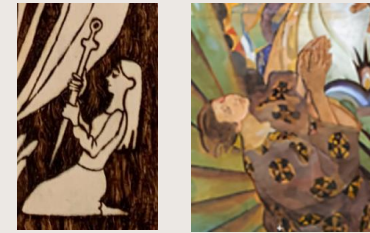
The radiating rhythms used by Sichulski in lieu of drawing the

viewer's attention to a certain place seemed quite interesting to me, so I used them myself in my portrayal of Madonna. I also used them as the goddess's halo to frame her face and to underline her divinity.



Portrayal of praying:

I really like the concept and aesthetic of praying that Sichulski created, thus I decided to recreate it.



Use of folk clothes:

Sichulski's way of portraying folk clothes – not representing any specific region's garments, but using them freely and creatively – gave me the courage to try to be less rigid in my own portrayals. Additionally, he inspired me to create a Madonna which would represent my Slavic heritage more accurately, in the form of Mokosh.



„MATKA BOSKA LEŚNA”,
KAZIMIERZ SICHULSKI

F – MAKING COMPARISONS TO OWN ART MAKING PRACTICES

My works inspired by Runge:



Own work: „Young Pole“, acrylic gouache on watercolor paper with painted store-bought frame, 2022



Own work: „The Holy Lamb“, pyrography, 2022

Symbolism of flowers:

I was so influenced by “The Small Morning’s” use of flower symbolism that I in fact started to use it in all of my works – the work portrayed here “Young Pole”, however, is the first one that I used that way. In it, I portrayed orange tulips, which symbolize understanding: I have shown the whole flower, from bulb to bloom, just as Runge did, in order to reference the cyclical ways of life and the Universe. In the other work, “The Holy Lamb” I portrayed Lilies of the Valley: symbolizing humility and rebirth, but also carrying the same symbolism as Madonna lilies: chastity and purity.

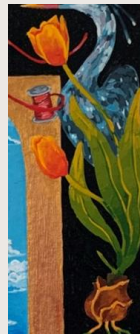
Composition:

“The Small Morning” awed me with its symmetrical composition the first time I saw it, and it had a great impact on my own way of creating compositions too. It is visible in both of the works shown here, as well as many others. However, what I found the most original in “The Small Morning’s” composition is the concept of a border within the artwork. I have used that concept in my work “Young Pole”, adding a store-bought frame painted the same gold hue to complete the look of a painting within a painting – I have also, as Runge did, surrounded the inner painted frame in symbolical elements such as flowers and animals. In “The Holy Lamb” I wanted to try and experiment with that

idea, creating the inner frame with a ribbon, surrounding the central figure and in a way cutting it off from the rest of the composition.

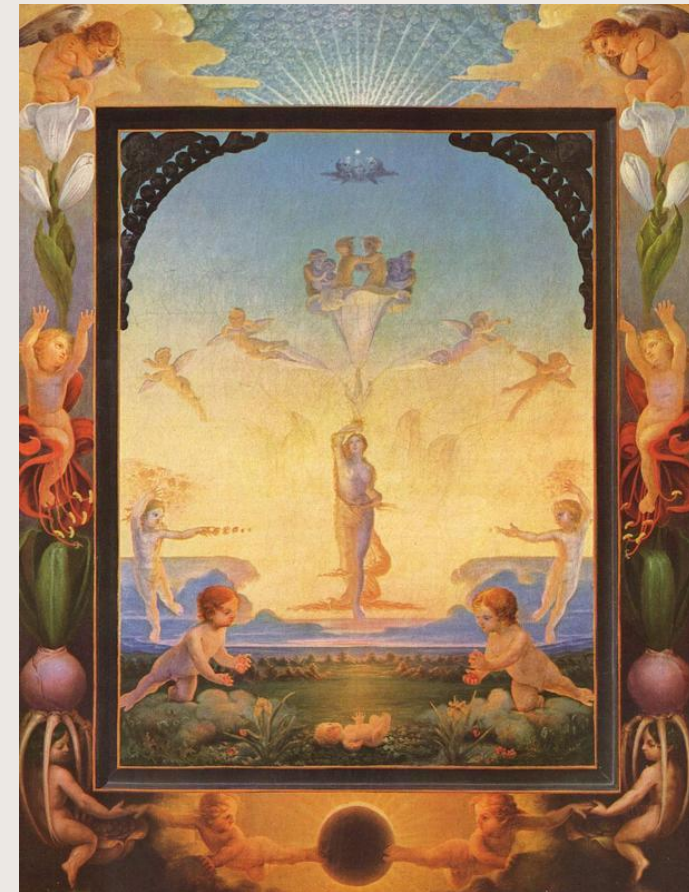
Flowing rhythm:

Runge uses flowing rhythm in his stylization of plants – I found it very appealing and since seeing the artwork have been influenced by it greatly. Plants in “The Small Morning” retain their flowing rhythm and organic forms despite being fitted into very small spaces – they fill those spaces perfectly. In “Young Pole”, I used tulips the same way Runge did lilies, trying to create a flowing upward movement with them, although I did not keep them as limited to the space which was chosen for them – I used overlapping of them with other elements to create space. On the other hand, in “The Holy Lamb”, I chose Lilies of the Valley to create a radiating rhythm, as the space I left for theme there was more square, and in that way I could, just as Runge did, fit them well into their assigned space.



Allegorical elements:

The abundance of meaning and symbolic elements in Runge’s work inspired me to try and create pieces just as densely woven with meaning. Thus, I included allegorical elements, such as the contrast of an Adidas jacket and a traditional Drab hat in “Young Pole”, or the three hearts symbolizing Jesus, Mary and Joseph in “The Holy Lamb”.



„THE SMALL MORNING“, PHILIPP OTTO RUNGE

F – MAKING COMPARISONS TO OWN ART MAKING PRACTICES

Christianity and Slavic paganism:

The intersection of Christianity and Slavic paganism shown in “Madonna of the Lilies” inspired me to create my own pieces dealing with this subject, as it is a close one to me, being a Polish atheist (being faced with Christian imagery almost everyday), who is not very confident in their own affiliation to their heritage. In one of my works, the tetraptych “Archangels”, I portrayed the archangels in traditional Polish clothes. Just as Mucha, I wanted to create a version of these religious figures that would be easier to relate to for Slavic people, which would let them feel like these figures truly belong to them, even if they are not Christians.

Role of attributes:

Just as in the case of Mucha’s Madonna, she is represented by the Madonna lilies – even if a person were to see this piece

without being aware that it is a portrayal of the Madonna, the lilies would give it away. In that way, I wanted for each of my archangels to carry an object which would signalize their identity. The research I carried out told me that these symbols would be: a sword killing the devil for Michael, a fiery sword for Uriel, a white lily for Gabriel (which he later on gives to Mary) and a caduceus for Raphael.

Folk clothing:

Although Mucha dressed the red headed girl in Slavic traditional clothing, not the Madonna, I wanted for my work’s relation to the Slavs to be even closer – thus, each of the archangels is dressed in a different folk costume. However, none of them depict any particular region’s costume, as I did not want to create an exclusion – thus, I have myself created designs which can be recognized as vaguely Slavic.

Role of size:

The size of Mucha’s „Madonna of the Lilies” makes the figures become life-size, allowing for the viewer to view them from farther away. Knowing this, I wanted to create an opposite effect – my portraits are only 5 x 7 centimeters, forcing the viewer to study them very closely.



„MADONNA OF THE LILIES”, ALPHONSE MUCHA

My works inspired by Mucha:



Own work: „Archangels”, acrylic gouache on watercolor paper with painted store-bought frame, 2022

F – MAKING COMPARISONS TO OWN ART MAKING PRACTICES

Christianity and Slavic paganism:

In “Pieta”, I took the theme of connecting Christianity and Slavic paganism more literally, portraying Madonna with Slavs, just as Mucha did. I wanted to create my own version of the Pieta that would focus more not only on Slavs, but also on gender norms, and just as Mucha portrayed Mary with an anonymous girl, I changed the figure of Jesus to an anonymous girl as well. Additionally, I included dancing Slavic people, showing joy, in contrast to the grief that pieta normally symbolizes.

Flowing rhythm of clothes:

After seeing “Madonna of the Lilies” I fell in love with the way that Mucha creates fabrics. They are very flowy and at the same time almost unreal, adding a sense of movement to the whole piece which is otherwise rather static. I have tried to

My works inspired by Mucha:



Own work: „Pieta”, digital drawing, 2022

incorporate this flowing quality of fabrics in my piece “Pieta”, making the garments that Mary wears look almost as if they were flowing off of her – though in my case, the very silhouette of the clothes is still rather static, to mimic a sculpture. On the other hand, I made the fabrics of the garments that the humans wear much more tangible, and weighty, in order to introduce a contrast between them

Use of Flowers:

Mucha uses the Madonna lilies to introduce meaning to “Madonna of the Lilies”, but also to make the composition more interesting. If not for them, the piece would look rather empty, with too much negative space – the flowers help change that negative space into a positive one. I wanted to use that tactic as well, including the poppy flowers in my piece “Pieta”. By featuring poppies, I was able to show their meaning as symbols of Poland (they are Poland’s national flower), but also their universal symbolic meaning of remembrance – this being analogous to the Common Ivy wreath that the girl holds in Mucha’s piece – but also consolation.

Color palette:

In my work “Pieta” I was inspired by the color palette Mucha figures in his painting – while Mary is almost blending into the background with the unsaturated, washed-out colors, she looks ethereal in comparison to the girl for which warmer reds were used. They contrast each other a lot, the girl’s very strong physical

presence and the apparition-like one of Mary. I used a similar color palette to color the Madonna and the humans dancing around her in my own work – it is not as striking, however, as I have also used red for poppies, as well as a much darker, vivid background as compared to the one that Mucha created.



„MADONNA OF THE LILIES”, ALPHONSE MUCHA