

Stan Cuba, *P. A. Kontny: A Modern Artist in Europe and America* (Denver: University Press of Colorado in association with Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art, 2022). 316 pp., illustration, bibliography, index. ISBN 9781646423453.

Stan Cuba, the associate consulting curator at the Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art in Denver, devoted his book to Paul Kontny, a self-taught Polish German artist whose career encompassed more than a half of the century and spanned two continents, Europe and North America. Born and raised in Upper Silesia, he pursued a successful art career in Germany that was continued in the United States, where he moved in the 1960s enchanted by the beauty of Colorado's landscapes. With his rich background, Kontny "brought a European orientation to Colorado through his teaching and the example of his art works" (p. 6). The author shows the life of Kontny through the prism of numerous historical events that took place in twentieth-century Europe and America, including the German-Polish conflict over Upper Silesia, Hitler's rise to power, World War II, and the Cold War.

Paul (Paweł) Kontny was born in 1923 in Siemianowice Śląskie (German Siemianowitz), a town in Upper Silesia situated in a newly reborn Poland known as the Second Republic. This old and ethnically diverse region has long been a bone of contention between German and Polish states through the centuries. Although Paul's parents were born in the Prussian Empire, they considered themselves Silesian first and, as the reader may conclude, their local Silesian identity always came before that of a national identity, be it German or Polish. However, Paul's father, August, who served in the Prussian Army during World War I, seemed to be more oriented toward Germanness than Paul's mother, Elizabeth, whose family ties included some Polish relatives such as the Obiaśases and the Krzysztaszkiwiczses. As Cuba points out, for Kontny, Upper Silesia's complex ethnic and cultural mosaic "became an integral part of his reference" (p. 13), and "Paul remained proud of his Silesian origins" (p. 14).

The book constitutes a detailed biography of Kontny starting with his youth when as a student Paul attended grammar school in Siemianowice in Piłsudski's Poland. However, it is worth noting that after Piłsudski's death, the Kontnys, mostly fearing anti-German sentiments promoted by the National Democrats (Endecja), decided to move to Germany (Gliwice), which maybe be perceived as a turning point for the entire family. That decision had long-term consequences for Paul, whose life now became associated with an entirely different country and culture. Continuing his education, he attended the Emperor Wilhelm State High School in Gliwice and, more by his own curiosity rather than the influence of Hitler's propaganda as well as "amid strong teenage peer pressure as new residents of Germany" (p. 22), he joined the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth) along with his brother. When he graduated from high school, Kontny started to study architecture in Technical College in Breslau (Wrocław) until he was drafted into the German army (the Wehrmacht) in 1941. Eventually, he found himself on the Eastern Front fighting against the Soviets during the years 1941–1943, where he was wounded.

As Cuba contends, Kontny began to show interest in art and painting during his boyhood. He devoted his free time to drawing, sketching, and painting, be it family portraits, landscapes, or Native Americans. During World War II, Kontny came into contact with the Don Cossacks and was able to capture “the Cossack’s pride and stalwart nature in a watercolor” (p. 51). After the war, however, he did not return to Gliwice, which was incorporated into Poland. Kontny did not have a choice but to find a new home for himself, which he did in southern Germany. The city of Nuremberg accepted him and enabled Kontny to develop his career as a professional architect, painter, and even sculptor. As the author argues, during the years 1946–1960, he became an active member of the Nuremberg art community, first as an architect connected to the Nuremberg Architects Association and then as an independent painter though associated with the Nuremberg Artists’ Guild. Over time, as his fame grew, Kontny was able to present his work, including oils and watercolors, at various art exhibitions in Nuremberg, Düsseldorf, and Munich. In the latter, he collaborated with Galerie Stenzel, whose “owner Kasimir Stenzel contributed to Kontny’s recognition in the mid-1950s” (p. 136).

During his so-called German period, Kontny sought inspiration and tried to develop his own style. Being a young and self-taught artist without any professional training, he “derived inspiration from the German expressionists of the early twentieth century” (p. 75), especially a group of artists known as *Die Brücke* (The Bridge). During the 1950s, however, as many artists of his era who had experienced the ideology of Nazism, Kontny turned to abstract art feeling that abstraction meant unfettered freedom and unlimited possibilities. What is important to note is that during that time in Europe, abstraction as a form of art was very often associated with American liberal values, possessing even a pragmatic dimension “as an arm of American foreign policy during the Cold War” (p. 92).

The German period of Kontny’s life came to an end when he moved to Denver in 1961. Enchanted by the beauty of Colorado, he quickly became involved in its art life as “the possibility of creating and working beyond the confines of Europe opened for him a whole new world” (p. 154). In the US, Kontny came into contact with modern artists across the country and established a long-term affiliation with the Denver Art Galleries. Its owner, Lemon Saks, proved to be Kontny’s associate and good friend for many decades. Fascinated by the new country, Kontny began to pursue new themes in his artwork. One of them was his childhood fascination, namely, Native Americans, especially those living in the southwestern United States, including the Pueblo peoples. As a result, he devoted numerous sketches, watercolors and pastels to the life and culture of the Taos, Acoma, and Zuni peoples.

As Kontny’s American experience continued and his life stabilized, he decided to share his vast knowledge and skills with young talented people. Embarking on a new journey as a teacher, Kontny was able to coach a group of students who considered themselves “aspiring artists whom he felt could benefit from his professional training and advice” (p. 227). Later in life, after having earned respect and fame, he was still exploring new themes for his art, as for example, the cosmos during the

1970s and 1980s. Always curious about the surrounding reality, Kontny never ceased to rest but continued to expand his intellectual horizons. Undoubtedly, his death in 2002 constituted a great blow to the Denver arts community.

Although not designed as a typical scholarly biography, the book retains all aspects of the academic apparatus. It is equipped with notes, an index, and an extensive bibliography, including primary source interviews. Numerous illustrations enable the reader to immerse themselves in the world of Paul Kontny's work to contemplate his fascinating paintings and sculptures.

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John Guzłowski, *Suitcase Charlie* (St. Paul, MN: Kasva Press, 2018). 327 pp. ISBN 9781948403047.

John Guzłowski, *Little Altar Boy* (St. Paul, MN: Kasva Press, 2020). 323 pp. ISBN 9781948403153.

John Guzłowski, *Murdertown* (St. Paul, MN: Kasva Press, 2024). 335 pp. ISBN 9781948403214.

Last spring saw the release of the third of John Guzłowski's crime novels, titled *Murdertown*. The series Hank & Marvin—Chicago Detectives, featuring detectives Hank Purcell and Marvin Bondarowicz, is not envisioned as a trilogy, though. The author has already submitted two subsequent novels to the publisher and is currently working on his sixth, and presumably final, book in the series. The series was inaugurated in 2018 with the publication of the first novel, *Suitcase Charlie*, in which Guzłowski's detectives have already been cops for a decade or so and are now attempting to solve the mystery of the murders of young children after bodies chopped into pieces and stuffed into sturdy suitcases start cropping up in the Humboldt Park area in Chicago.

The series follows a certain pattern: the novels take place every decade or so, starting in the 1950s in *Suitcase Charlie*, through the 1960s in *Little Altar Boy*, to the 1970s in *Murdertown*. This decision allows the author to depict the changes that have occurred in the neighborhood where he grew up. What is more, apart from a captivating mystery, the narratives also offer some social critique, discussing a salient issue of the day. In the case of the first novel, the issue in question is that of anti-Semitism. All of the victims of the murderer the press calls "Suitcase Charlie" have isosceles triangles cut into the soles of their feet to resemble the Star of David; thus, the two detectives are positive that the killer is an anti-Semite wishing to incite hatred against Jews. Hank's sidekick, Marvin, is of Jewish descent himself, and it was actually his desire to counter anti-Semitism that made him a police officer. Interestingly, Marvin never refers to himself as white—even though currently over