

**'working title' open art magazine, bimonthly, 11-12 (010) 2005, Klara Kopcińska and Józef Żuk Piwkowski interview Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański  
'The second life of wood - Jan de Weryha-Wysoczański'**

**KK.** *Who are you?*

**JWW.** I am probably a searching man, always looking for something in life; this pursuit concentrates on the sphere of art.

**KK.** *And what are you looking for?*

**JWW.** A certain peace, certain rhythm, which I cannot find in everyday life; I want to make my life easier thanks to art. The aim of art is making people better. Making them more sensitive - thus better.

**KK.** *Is there any work of art that has impressed you specially, that thrilled your sensitivity?*

**JWW.** Eisenmann's sculpture, which I have seen recently in Berlin, the sculpture that stands in the centre of the city. In my opinion- the most beautiful sculpture I have ever seen with such incredible impact. I stood there stunned and I could not feel but envy that somebody got such a wonderful commission, was given such space, so many possibilities in the heart of a huge city - it is as if a city within a city, a square, I don't know how large, covered with concrete pillars which wave, and when you have made a few steps, they keep changing as if they were in motion.

**KK.** *It is a structural work - we could say, in your style, but what attracts attention in your works, is the material. What is the origin of your fascination with this material, was it a sudden discovery or rather a process of reaching a decision to work only with wood?*

**JWW.** We have had the material for millions of years; I am fifty and for as long as I remember, forests have been for me a most beautiful place, where I found relief, where I felt simply good and I 'fuelled up' for the next time. As each artist I tried everything. I tried not only sculpting, but also painting and drawing, I went through all the possible materials. And I think it was a most ordinary evolution; at one point man starts to wonder what the point is. All the materials tried and there comes a moment of reflection. I took a decision that I would work with the material because I felt best with it in those trials. I threw away all the burdens and tried to work only with this material. So all the figurative work, which had interested me before, and the abstract art - all these I dismissed and I turned my attention to wood alone. This is a material which fascinates in many ways and aspects; it's a material that smells nice, that has a colour and that lives. It is known that after its first death, wood enters another act when it lives too, but lives in the man-made architecture and it assumes a different role. I look a little as if I was trying to take the wood from nature to a certain room, this is simulation; I am trying to recreate the forest in the room, but I allow myself for a certain interference. Using the experiences which I gathered through all the years, by introducing certain rhythms, by opening up the wood, I'm trying to build certain formations and after completing certain processes you can say that the forest still exists - only in a slightly different dimension. This is in fact a game, an adventure, I am simply playing with it - but not only because I'm taking it very seriously.

**KK.** *Can you say something more about your working techniques? I often ask about techniques because it seems to me that getting to know one's way of working brings the artist and the viewer much closer together. When you see how something is done and that it is not any ephemeral activity in a folly or wave of passion, but usually hard work.....*

**JWW.** This is material which cannot be brought up in full relief by the touch of your fingers, like clay. I respect it very much and it seems to me that I should not hurt it, and although I do

use an axe and I do use a chainsaw- I do it only when it is really necessary. If I need a particular height in these modules, I cut the wood without any problems and that's it. I'm not trying to look for some new possibilities at a moment when the saw is sharpened and when it's switched on. I'm not trying to destroy the wood in any way. The whole process of arriving at a decision what is to be created, takes place mainly before the machine even touches the wood. My role consists in presenting the material in such a way that it remains wood, that is keeps all its properties. This causes the use of tools in such minimal dimension. Besides I do not leave any waste - after the use of any tool, when an object appears - a positive, on the other side remains a negative, all that I reject. Even if I immediately don't have any idea how to use it, I leave it and finally I always find some form for it. This blood circulation closes itself, but you must approach it, in my view, with great respect. At a given time there comes a moment when you start to understand this material. But you need some time and some sensitivity. It seems to me that I am a part of this configuration.

**KK.** *And tell us something about the scale - your works are very large. It is noticeable here at the Museum of Contemporary Sculptures in Orońsko, where the exhibition hall is about 700 metres square and you managed to 'furnish' this space without any problems.*

**JWW.** I seem to think that my sculptures are still quite small, I would like to make something really big. Of course when I have a large space to fill, I would not try to fill it with some tiny objects. But as you know, when a man is 170 cm tall and when he stands in front of an object whose size is three by four metres, then the relation that arises is such that you start feeling great respect for this object. It affects a man differently than when he's standing before a small sculpture that is 50 by 50 centimetres. For me art is a play with proportions; if they are appropriate - art really thrills the viewer. Here in Orońsko the proportions of the room are so large that you could run wild. At first I felt like packing the room with bits of wood, so that someone who came could only see it from the doorway. That would have been an ideal situation. But then, I was supposed to show a sort of review of my artistic output. It has always been my dream to have an exhibition in which I could only show one work that would fill the interior completely and entirely.

Orońsko, 14 January 2006

Translation from Polish to English by Maria Apanowicz