

A Plein Air Painting Event as a Liminal Experience Building the Artists' Community

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Abstract: The subject of the article is a plein air painting event, considered as a liminal experience that is widely practiced by traditional artists to create and maintain communities in the local and supra-local art fields. The interest in organizing this kind of meetings among artists, modern art galleries, and art schools is not decreasing, and one can talk about the exceptionally long duration of the phenomenon. This article discusses the experience of participants for whom these joint meetings have a metaphysical dimension. The descriptions and expressions used by the artists have become the inspiration to use Victor W. Turner's concept in the analysis. That is why this practice is discussed as a *liminal* experience and a rite of passage, whereas the relations between its participants are understood in terms of a specific type of community that is called by Turner 'spontaneous *communitas*'. All the considerations and conclusions included in this text are based on qualitative research conducted among visual artists.

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Introduction

Plein air painting events have a two-hundred-year tradition in art history. A phrase *en plein air* (from French) describes the process of painting a landscape directly from nature in an open space. In the beginning, it was an outdoor creation, outside the studio, based on studying objects in their natural conditions. The very first practices in the 19th century were artists' romantic escape from the cities into the bosom of idealized nature. Plein air painting in modern art, initially associated with the Impressionists, was one of the ways of searching for truth in painting, the opposite of which were the rules created by academism. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, these searches were supported by scientific discoveries in the field of optics, chromatics, and visual perception. Although later modern art groups and movements made the expression of the artist's inner states the main task of art and abstraction its main language, painting remained the most common medium. Nature and landscape continued to inspire modern artists. A key change in thinking about painting was caused by the appearance of the contemporary paradigm in visual arts in the 1950s, which replaced the modern one as the main trend.

For art it meant the end of the domination of esthetics as the main evaluation criterion; a shift of interest from the form to the content, from the material artwork to the concept itself. In the contemporary paradigm, there are no boundaries in art or applicable rules to be followed. Art annexes more and more areas, such as politics, religion, or social issues. Artists create in alternative spaces, abandoning the framework of traditional institutions. An emphasis is put by them on the process-oriented nature of projects, which means resignation from a material art work. This change in thinking about art places painting, especially realistic painting such as landscape, beyond the scope of interest of contemporary avant-garde artists and institutions. In Poland, mainstream artists in the 1960s maintained the tradition of joint outdoor work, but they adopted the formula of artistic and scientific symposia. To create art works they used non-traditional media or materials, and very often they were more conceptual in nature. The practice of organizing plein air painting events has not been abandoned along with the emergence of new avant-garde trends, because the specificity of plein air events in Poland is their social character; they are neither competitions nor painting shows. They are rarely organized for commercial purposes. For most traditional artists, they are an important part of their artistic practice because of being perceived as something that particularly enriches life and work, and builds bonds in artistic communities. Contact with nature and other artists is key for the participants, more important even than artistic quality of artworks they would create. Artist Marek Olszyński (2018: 3) in a catalog, answering the question he posed – What is an artistic plein air event? – defines it as “a form of artists' actions that has been proven over the years”; these actions, according to the author, primarily include: “creative confrontation with nature and various artistic activities, combined with the undoubted pleasure of being in ‘beautiful natural circumstances’ together with other artists.”

Therefore, groups of more traditional artists and members of some art associations (such as Związek Polskich Artystów Plastyków – ZPAP) regularly met and still meet at such events. The popularity of plein air painting formula is also maintained owing to traditional artistic education provided at most academies of fine arts and art faculties in Poland. It should also be mentioned that an open air

painting event is attractive to young artists, because traditional art institutions are hermetic, just like highly hierarchical artists' communities. Against this background, it seems to be a very inclusive formula, facilitating artistic debut.

The situation looks different if one looks at the trends dominating in the mainstream of the contemporary art world. Nowadays, the interest in the tradition of plein air painting among the major players of the professional art world and art history researchers in Europe is small, if any. Contemporary art institutions have moved away from the plein air formula in favor of artist-in-residence programs (A-i-R). The confirmation of the current interest is the fact that in 2014, the European Union, in cooperation with the Working Group of EU Member States Experts on Artists' Residencies, published the *Policy handbook on artists' residencies*. The publication contains not only a detailed analysis of what artists' residencies are and the dominant trends, but also specific recommendations for institutions and artists.

According to the definition cited in the *Policy handbook on artists' residencies* (European Union and Working Group of EU Member States Experts on Artists' Residencies, 2014: 9): "Artists' residencies provide artists and other creative professionals with time, space and resources to work, individually or collectively, on areas of their practice that reward heightened reflection or focus." Although the initial assumptions of a plein air event and A-i-R seem to be similar, the purposes for which they are carried out are different. In artists' residencies programs, it is crucial to act in the context of the place, which is usually the city, where the host art institution is located. During a residency, artists enter into a dialog with the place they are staying in and its history, and they talk about social and political issues by means of site-specific artworks or artistic interventions.

Summing up, one model assumes an escape from the problems of civilization to a place beyond structure and time, while the other encompasses close contact with a city and deep involvement in its issues. Although artists' residencies can also involve working together and building community through art, a detailed analysis of their specifics is beyond the scope of this article. The aim of the article is to focus on the plein air event and its importance for artists and artistic communities.

Theoretical framework

The concept of liminality was first developed in the early 20th century by ethnographer and researcher of rites of passage Arnold van Gennep, and was later continued by anthropologist Victor W. Turner, who additionally focused on a specific type of bond between the participants of the ritual called by him from Latin *communitas*.

As Turner (1991: 128) claims: "Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, 'edgemen' who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination.

In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure”.

According to Arnold van Gennep (2006) and Victor W. Turner (1974), rites of passage have three phases. The first one – the separation phase (*preliminal or separation rites*) starts with the moment of switching off; abandoning everyday life and setting off on a journey. It is followed by a transition period – liminal phase (*liminal or transition rites*), when a deep state of separation leads to cutting off from reality, immersing oneself in nature, finding oneself beyond time and space, structure, and status. The process ends with re-enablement, which consists in adapting to the new state (*postliminal rites or rites of incorporation*).

A specific condition of *communitas* appears in a liminal phase, it “breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or ‘holy’, possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency” (Turner, 1991: 128). Existential (spontaneous) *communitas* lasts only for the limited time of the liminal phase, but it can be continued by the participants of the ritual, transforming into a normative *communitas* (i.e., the feeling of bond, which was organized into a permanent social system due to control, a certain code of behavior applicable to participants of the community) or an ideological model (often applied to many utopian social models) (Turner, 1991).

I will try to show that the plein air event is one of those moments when artists become “people of the threshold”, liminal entities who “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner, 1991: 95). This new reality, the moment of being together in the “gap” of binding hierarchies and norms mobilizes them to act and think differently. Furthermore, based on the participants’ narratives, three phases of rites of passage can be clearly distinguished. Reading about the meaning and ways of experiencing pilgrimages (Turner, Turner, 1978), plein air events can be also considered as a type of secular pilgrimage undertaken by artists who are looking for deeper spirituality.

Methodology and data

In order to analyze the phenomenon of plein air meetings, I will refer to the results of my own empirical research conducted in the years 2017–2019 among the visual artists living and working in the Podkarpackie Province. It was qualitative research including over 60 one-to-one in-depth interviews with artists and over 100 hours of participant observation at art institutions and during plein air events. What was also an important source of data was the qualitative analysis of the content of the publications accompanying exhibitions during the closing ceremony of such events. Artists’ statements quoted in the article are marked with the code which contains information on the number of the interview (01–60), gender (W – woman, M – man), and information on the age of the research

participant (e.g., 02W53, 03W44). When I quote fragments of texts written for post-plein-air exhibition catalogs by artists, I provide the author's name and publication date.

All research participants were informed about the purpose of the project and how it would proceed. They consciously agreed to participate. Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed. At the transcription stage, they were anonymized by removing any names, surnames, names of towns, villages, or institutions if they could suggest who the research participants were. Some statements for which the respondents requested confidentiality were not quoted anywhere. During the observation of the plein air painting meeting, the participants were informed that I was a researcher who was collecting information about this kind of artistic practice. The acquired data has not been and will not be re-used in any other research in the future.

As a researcher, I must admit that at the beginning of the research, I was strongly prejudiced against the plein air formula. Such activities seemed to me outdated and contributed nothing to the discourse on contemporary art. Working as an art historian in BWA Galeria Sanocka, I curated several artist residencies and site-specific projects, which further increased my criticism¹. I have adopted the grounded theory methodology (Konecki, 2000; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, Strauss, 2009) as the main analytical strategy in my research, but not in a rigorous manner, in order to avoid projecting my biases onto the research results. Apart from the need to limit the projection of my own professional knowledge and experience on the subsequent analysis of data and the direction of the research, the choice of the grounded theory resulted from the fact that the research concerned the process and personal experience of the actors participating in it, and the above-mentioned theory focuses on the importance of an analysis of actions and processes.

According to Kathy Charmaz (2006: 2), "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves [...] Thus, data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct". She recommends adopting an insider's perspective; "being open to what is happening in the studied scenes and interview statements so that we might learn about our research participants' lives" (Charmaz, 2006: 3). Grounded theory "includes *reasoning* about experience for making theoretical conjectures and then checking them through further experience. Abductive reasoning about the data starts with the data and subsequently moves toward hypothesis formation" (Charmaz, 2006: 103). Furthermore, the constructivist grounded theory put forward by Charmaz makes one sensitive to the multi-faceted nature of constructivist practices.

In the interview scenario, one of the questions concerned the artistic practices in which the respondents participate, because they are crucial or important to them. In addition to creating artworks in their private

1 E.g., *Re-akcje plenerowe* – participants: Agata Biskup/P. Czepurko, Wojciech Gilewicz, Rafał Jakubowicz, Konrad Kuzyszyn, Kamil Stańczak, Julita Wójcik (2009), *To sztuka...* Galeria Rusz (2008), *Truth w Sanoku* Krystian Czaplicki (2007), *Rewitalizacje* Wojciech Gilewicz (2007).

ateliers and participating in exhibitions or art competitions, as many as 52 out of 60 interviewed artists mentioned taking part in plein air painting events. People who declared that they did not participate in plein air events explained it in different ways. Two of them had conflicts with the local community, two did not paint at all because they are printmakers, and the remaining four people considered plein air painting event to be a *passé* formula that contributed nothing to contemporary art and for them was close to kitsch. These people were involved in socially-engaged, public art, even if some of them were painters.

After the analysis had begun, fragments in which the respondents described their experiences related to this practice were isolated in the interview transcripts. Initial line-by-line coding was used to create provisional, working codes that would provide insight into how the respondents experience and interpret such events. It also allowed me to set directions for further data collection and generate some ideas for continuous comparison of new samples. Some of the codes from the preliminary stage were used during focused coding. An important decision in this phase of the analysis was to distinguish two central categories (cores) that corresponded to two dominant, but completely different attitudes toward participation in an plein air painting event. The first category was "metaphysical attitude" (there were codes such as: the feeling of being out of time, abandoning routine, immersion in nature, the feeling of a unique community, family relationships, giving up rules, the feeling of a unique understanding, the feeling of equality and lack of hierarchy, spiritual experiences, transformation, unprecedented freedom, unusual behavior, etc.), while the second one was "strategic career building" (the assigned codes were: making beneficial connections, the possibility of selling works, choices dictated by prestige, recreating academic hierarchies, searching for new contacts, self-promotion, the monopolization of resources for own group, and the division of participants according to positions, competition, elitism of the event, etc.) In the case of the first group of codes, I used the concepts of Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep to build the theory. The metaphysical attitude was most often declared by less recognized artists, with a weak position in the local field of art. Those with a high position most often used the meetings to strengthen it and further build their careers. In this case, I used the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu. The subject of the article is the analysis of the first attitude and I will focus on it later in the article.

The crucial thing in the research was the experience of the participants and the way they make sense to their actions, not the specific features of this type of events themselves. The research aimed to show what being an artist means for the respondents and what activities it is necessarily associated with in their opinion. Observation of the participants during open air painting events was carried out after conducting the interviews and served to better understand the artists' experiences and to confirm data saturation.

Journey and place

The places where plein air events are most often organized are remote villages located in picturesque scenery. The meeting of artists is preceded by a shorter or longer journey, which takes them away from their daily routine with each kilometer.

Plein air events are usually organized in such places as the seaside or mountains, or you go to places that are unique in a given area. (02W53)

Circumstances of nature matter, that it must be beautiful, there must be some hills [...] In the morning sightseeing of narrow streets and nooks, walking in the forest and then painting. (09M33)

It is good when there is a mystery associated with the place, when both the organizers and the participants are surprised and intrigued:

We went to such exotic places as Ruciane Nida or Białowieża. We had an old, disused train station at our disposal. Those were fun, interesting meetings. Meeting people in an unfamiliar place. (21W50)

Sometimes the place is so picturesque that it seems to be taken from the paintings of old masters of painting:

After arriving at the place, a view reminiscent of Poussin's paintings appeared, and thus *invenimus nos in Arcadia*,² and the surroundings of the palace in Werynia became – for seven consecutive days – a place of creative work for twenty-nine young painters. (Balicki, 2013: 3)

At the moment of physically setting off on the journey, there is a cut-off from one's own community, well-known everyday life and duties:

Plein air events are very important, because it is painting outside the studio, outside your safe environment. When you go to a different place, there are absolutely different energies, because each time there is a different group of artists, each person carries something with them and it is reflected in what you do. (34W56)

It is something wonderful, you live in a different reality then. (03W44)

The physical change of the place for the participants has symbolic features; it is associated with a transfer to another dimension of time and space. That is why reality is experienced in a different way in the open air; the daily rhythm of classes changes, space and time are perceived differently:

The plein air meeting is such a special time where we live in a bubble. (26M56)

During this period of a week or two, you can immerse yourself in painting and forget about everyday life and focus on painting, talking with artists, creating in general, and living with art. (15M35)

Time flows differently when outdoors; it is not counted, no one is in a hurry, everyone has the right to their own rhythm. Even the traditional division between night and day may disappear:

² From Latin – we are in Arcadia.

If you want, you can paint day and night. You can eat or not eat. You paint day and night. (02W53)

People are humble, hard-working, you paint late at night, you forget about this hour, about the time... It was in [name of the town], imagine that I painted all day after breakfast, then there was lunch, after dinner I painted, we had dinner We made one in the kitchen so that we didn't have to go anywhere, ten, eleven, twelve, one, two, three, four o'clock in the morning and I look out the windows and it's dawn... time passes differently outdoors. These are places, these are people, these are thoughts – they revolve, they revolve only around creative work. (16M63)

A new-different space is, above all, nature, all-encompassing in its impact, which is experienced in an intimate way – alone or collectively – during joint hikes:

And when it comes to the outdoors, contact with nature is certainly important. When you go to such an open-air event, you already know that this is the time to commune alone with nature, and the impression of the act of creativity is completely different when you are there. (20W24)

During such trips, there are conversations about charm, about escapes, very often there are conversations of this type, about this reference to nature, even if you meet someone who makes abstractions, it is still very important and during such meetings there are such conversations. About beauty or the experience itself. (02W53)

In each of these cases, experiencing nature influences the creative act and gives it a new quality. For some participants, the very feeling of the power of nature or the power of its Creator is inspiring, which "is an epiphany that brings us closer to a state of grace and may be a prelude to a mystical trance" (Morawski, 1985: 204). Working in nature can be a struggle with the power of nature; it is associated with the feeling of one's own fragility and powerlessness:

Going outdoors is a kind of humble courage, standing face to face with nature, with its different, open space, its light and color. This is coping with its vagaries of weather, wind, rain, sun, this laborious Cézanne-esque winning of one's arguments, not against, but on nature. (Balicki, 2014: 3)

Contact with nature is always invigorating, even if instead of mystical experiences, it provides only sensual ones. When "delight comes from the lush green meadow and the multi-colored flowers scattered over it, the calm blackness and density of the forest enhanced by the singing of birds and the clear view above the trees, the sudden opening of the navy blue water with the reflections of the rising or setting sun" is such an experience from the "recovered freshness of sensual contact with nature" or – and sometimes also – from "energy regeneration", "relaxation of internal tensions" and "restoration of balance owing to the free expression of biological rhythms" (Morawski, 1985: 204). The regained freshness of contact can pay off immediately, during the outdoor session. In plein air, emotions are unlocked, actions are more instinctive, and courage and confidence rarely felt in the studio appear:

Artistic outdoor activities are very expressive, people are eager for new experiences and courage. (19W31)

[...] it certainly opens up a lot in terms of such possibilities, about some such experiments, about searches. (20W24)

Such flashes of consciousness happen. (08M42)

Immersion in a new reality and transferring this state to the created artworks is as important as building a community with other participants. This is also facilitated by a shared experience of the place, nature, and the creative processes:

Meeting people is more interesting than painting in the open air, because everyone is an individual and carries a story of their own. In the case of painters, it is often an interesting story, you can learn something interesting and get to know someone's work. (07M40)

There is a lot of emotion during such meetings. When the meetings are longer, there are more emotions [laughter]. These are usually unforgettable moments, and often those moments are more important than the artworks themselves. Often these paintings, effects of the work during the plein air event, are not so high-flying. This contact of artists is of great value. (26M56)

The relationships that prevail between the participants of the artistic plein air meetings are of a special kind. In order to describe them, the artists' statements most often include a comparison to a family, because it best reflects the exceptional closeness that develops in a group:

I have been going to plein air events for many years and we meet people from different countries and after so many years I can confidently say that we are a family. (03W44)

It was with painters from [names of cities] that we went to plein air meetings. There was also quite a strong group from Slovakia. We always felt like a family. We always went there with almost the same group. (33W53)

This closeness is the result of the processes that take place among the participants when sharing time and space together. The beginning of the event is the time of greetings and getting to know one another. Rules and restrictions which exist in professional life disappear. Who someone is on a daily basis, an amateur or a professor of art, ceases to matter. Hierarchies, titles, age barriers also disappear, and in their place a unique freedom appears which is confirmed already at the stage of greeting one another by automatically switching to "you" with everyone and the accompanying mutual hugs, kisses, and pats:

These professors are professors at the university, and here they are ordinary people. (02W53)

Then they began to introduce the participants, informing that he was such an important professor, and he replied: during the plein air meeting, I am Staszek, not a professor. (54M60)

For these days, everyone is equal and feels like an equal member of the same artistic community, even if in everyday life they have little in common:

I guess that's what being in this group is about, in the fact that no one really defines you there, that everyone is similar, it is known there that such people basically think alike, function and actually look alike. (08M42)

There is also an immediate – unprecedented in everyday life – understanding, taking place even despite language barriers, and the participants experience a sense of unity and that differences disappear:

During the international plein air event, it happened that, for example, with fourteen participants, there were people of five different nationalities [...] Despite such a peculiar Tower of Babel, because that's how it should be called, these people found a common language, and not after a week or two, after some adaptation, after some kind of a process of matching, without any preparation, so I believe that there is some superior feature in "artists", that is people who create or people of art. There is some superior value, hidden somewhere deep in them, which makes them understand one another in a flash and fly as if by magic [...] during plein air meetings there is a kind of communion, where what is most different and most distant from such a side perspective, merges into one. (11M60)

The perceived closeness also changes the nature of the conversations between the participants, creating a space for confessions and existential considerations. People stop keeping secrets from one another, pretending to be someone they are not, or hiding their weaknesses. They feel like they can talk about everything:

They talk about life and are incredibly honest and say everything. This is, I would say, a psychotherapist's couch. This is something amazing, that I don't experience in everyday life in interpersonal relationships, for people to demonstrate such openness. And there, I find out about everything... everything. About betrayals, if they happen [laughter], about skirmishes, mistakes, good things. And it's wonderful that people can talk about it so naturally. They are not camouflaged, they are not dishonest. It becomes evident and it's so ubiquitous. I am and do of course the same, it's not like I'm just absorbing it. (03W44)

The emerging closeness helps break down barriers and makes it easier to start romances, especially since the participants feel like they are suspending their daily obligations. Plein air events are also a time when kinship rights and obligations are suspended, as shown by the story of one married artist who took part in an event with his daughter, also a painter. At the very beginning, he told her

that “what happens during the plein air meeting stays there”; they are both artists here, not family, so his relationships with the other participants should remain a shared secret.

The atmosphere of freedom causes some people to lose self-control, which leads to simple drunkenness:

It also happens that they come for a plein air event and if it is longer, they don't sober up for three days and at the last minute, at the end of the event they paint. That's how it goes. (02W53)

Also the lack of inhibitions is combined with the spirit of fun and then the participants distance themselves from their permanent identities, take on the role of imaginary characters, and throw themselves into a whirlwind of unrestrained fun:

Various things happen during plein air meetings. There are 'theaters' and they dress up and get drunk, it's broad daylight, the water in a river is up to their knees and they go swimming naked. They play like children. The point is that the plein air is like throwing adults into a sandbox [...] They dress up and give concerts for themselves. It is then very lively and spontaneous. (02W53)

The plein air event ends with an exhibition, usually organized in the last evening before returning home. An exhibition is an act of incorporation. The participants are presented as people who have experienced a breakthrough in creativity, reached a new level of artistic maturity, gained a deeper way of perceiving the world, and become part of a new artistic family. Art pieces displayed at the exhibition are a material symbol of the experience collected during the liminal phase. Then, external reality again, physically and symbolically, enters the lives of the artists. Freedom, spontaneity, improvisation are replaced by coordinated actions leading to the preparation of this show. Invited guests arrive at the opening and they include representatives of the local authorities, residents of the town, the press, and sometimes the participants' friends and family members. After the opening, there is a party. The same or next day everyone goes home.

The power of plein air experience leads to internal transformations. It also allows artists to live with it for a long time after the end of the event; the energy accumulated during it is gradually released, the physical reality is perceived differently than before the journey, and the emotions associated with it are also different:

However, a person goes beyond this comfort zone and is somewhere else, in different conditions, with other people and does not have his/her own place. Well, this is very important and you have to participate in it, because even though these are also friendly meetings, there are some events taking place, is valuable experience in its own right when it comes to life and creativity in the future. Such a plein air event may result in such a breakthrough in oneself that will bear fruit later. (20W24)

What plays an important role in a new and fresh look at the world is memories of special relationships established at that time as well as a sense of lasting bond, which becomes the basis of common identity:

Most of these people, let's say a half, come every year, so we are very close friends, we have a kindred spirit. And it's fantastic that the years pass and it doesn't bother me in any way. (03W44)

Conclusion

The model of the plein air event described in the article, which emerges from the respondents' narratives, is more of Weber's "ideal type" rather than one that can be implemented each time with the same intensity. An escape from social structure, professional hierarchies, and personal benefits is not easy. Many plain air events have become exclusive, closed institutions reflecting the hierarchies of a given field of art. If some elements of the ideal model were actually implemented and thus someone experienced deep emotions, such memories are clearly separated in the statements in order to emphasize the unique nature of the particular event. The fact that only some of the respondents have participated in this type of a meeting – and usually these were single examples – is the best proof of the difficulty or even impossibility of implementing the assumptions of the ideal model. In most cases, it is a goal to be pursued rather than a common practice always guaranteed to its participants.

The participants usually declare the autotelic nature of mutual relations, because spontaneous *communitas* is an element of the tradition and convention in force at plein air events. In their statements, they express satisfaction with the unique community they feel, but at the same time they unconsciously reveal their instrumentality. The principles of functioning in the local field of art are so deeply rooted in their consciousness that the sense of community mobilizes them to joint actions that are to bring measurable benefits to everyone. It often happens that the artists primarily promote their own artworks and when establishing contacts, they expect future cooperation and benefits from other participants. What was initially a spontaneous bond becomes routine over time and develops a structure in which free relationships between individuals turn into normalized relationships between social persons. Friendship is used instrumentally to increase one's own social and symbolic capital as well as facilitate access to further resources.

Quoting Turner (1991: 127), the real *communitas*, having an existential quality, "involving the whole man in his relations to other whole men", is often reduced in memories by the interlocutors to social capital easily exchangeable for other capitals, and disconnected elements of social bond are incorporated into a variety of structural relationships and re-organized in terms of positions in the social hierarchy.

Similarly to the *rites of passage*, each artists' meeting ends with a return to the structure – reborn and strengthened by the experience of *communitas*. The optimistic thing is that the bond established is an impulse to break the monopoly of the institution by taking actions beneficial for the group, and what is the test of its strength and sincerity is the successive joint exhibitions and future plein air events.

The plein air event gives traditional artists a sense of belonging to a tradition recognized by art historians as important (a two-hundred-year-old plein air movement), but also, as the research participants repeatedly pointed out, to a certain community that thinks and feels similarly.

In the case when such event is treated instrumentally for strategic career-building, as was mentioned above, plein airs are most often organized in cooperation with municipal or city offices seeking promotion, as well as owners of hotels or holiday resorts, or local entrepreneurs. In such cases, the place where the event takes place is less important considering the conditions offered by the organizer or the selected group of invited guests.

Cooperation with sponsors and institutions means that there is no freedom to create and experience nature in the open space. Time flows according to the rules set by the organizers, because the goal is to fulfill mutual obligations. Some events are even typically commercial in nature and end with a meeting with potential buyers of the works. This creates competition between the participants instead of community.

The artists primarily promote their own work. Moreover, when establishing contacts, they count on future cooperation and benefits from other participants. At some events, evening presentations are organized by the participants, so the artists take printed Curriculum Vita, catalogs of their works, and business cards to be ready for such self-promotion.

The “strategic” plein air painting event ends with a joint exhibition presenting the best artworks that are representative of the participants (paradoxically, these are often ready-made pictures brought from home). The basic assumption of the exhibition is to create a show of works of high artistic value, painted by authors with a high status (academic titles, recognition in the community, supra-local fame), and, therefore, a creation of prestigious event. Guests invited to this type of exhibitions belong to local elites (higher-level officials, entrepreneurs, directors of institutions), which makes them potential buyers of works or sponsors of subsequent ventures. Presence at the opening allows them to feel that they are among the elite group of “the best” artists.

Artists also strive for exclusive reception of their activities in the texts of open-air catalogs, emphasizing the artistic position of the participants and their achievements.

After returning home, the artists themselves are enriched not with metaphysical feelings, but with new professional contacts, acquaintances and friendships, proposals for further exhibitions, and sometimes even financially richer after selling the works.

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Cytowanie

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Plener malarski jako doświadczenie liminalne budujące wspólnotę artystów

Abstrakt: Przedmiotem artykułu jest plener malarski rozważany jako doświadczenie liminalne szeroko praktykowane przez tradycyjnych artystów i artystki, by tworzyć i podtrzymywać wspólnoty w lokalnym i ponadlokalnym polu sztuki. Zainteresowanie artystów, galerii sztuki nowoczesnej i szkół artystycznych tego rodzaju spotkaniami nie maleje i można mówić o długim trwaniu tego zjawiska. Tekst omawia doświadczenie uczestników, dla których wspólne spotkania mają metafizyczny wymiar. Opisy plenerów i sformułowania stosowane przez uczestników stały się inspiracją do wykorzystania w ich analizie koncepcji Victora W. Turnera. Dlatego praktyki artystów są rozważane w kategoriach doświadczenia liminalnego i rytuału przejścia, natomiast relacje między uczestnikami w kategoriach specyficznego rodzaju wspólnoty, nazwanego przez Turnera „spontaniczną *communitas*”. Wszystkie przemyślenia i wnioski opierają się na badaniach jakościowych przeprowadzonych wśród artystek i artystów wizualnych.

Słowa kluczowe: wspólnota artystów, plener malarski, doświadczenie liminalne, *communitas*