

Coins

POLISH PAINTERS of the Turn of 19th and 20th CENTURIES



face value	20 zł
metal	925/1000 Ag and paints: red, yellow, green and blue
finish	proof
dimensions	width: 28.00 mm length: 40.00 mm;
weight	28.28 g
mintage	66,000 pcs

Obverse: A stylised image of fragments of Aleksander Gierymski's painting "Jewess with Lemons" of 1881. At the top, on the right side, an image of the Eagle established as the State Emblem of the Republic of Poland. Around the Eagle, an inscription, RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA, a notation of the year of issue, 2006 and an inscription, 20 zł. The Mint's mark, $\frac{m}{w}$, under the Eagle's left leg.

Reverse: An effigy of Aleksander Gierymski from the painting "Self-Portrait with a Palette" of 1891-1892. On the right side, a stylised image of a fragment of the painting "Feast of Trumpets" of 1890. On the left side, a vertical inscription, ALEKSANDER/GIERYMSKI/1850-1901. In the left bottom corner, a palette and three paintbrushes. On the palette, paints: red, yellow, green and blue.

Coin designer: *Roussanka Nowakowska*



face value	2 zł
metal	CuAl5Zn5Sn1 alloy
finish	standard
diameter	27.00 mm
weight	8.15 g
mintage	1,000,000 pcs

Obverse: An image of the Eagle established as the State Emblem of the Republic of Poland. On the left side, a palette and two paintbrushes. At the bottom, an inscription, 2 ZŁ, at the top, a semicircular inscription, RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA (Republic of Poland) and a notation of the year of issue, 2006. The Mint's mark, $\frac{m}{w}$, under the Eagle's left leg.

Reverse: An effigy of Aleksander Gierymski from the painting „Self-Portrait with a Palette” of 1891-1892. On the right, a stylised image of a fragment of the painting „Powiśle” of 1883. At the bottom, a semicircular inscription, ALEKSANDER GIERYMSKI 1850-1901.

On the edge: An inscription, NBP, eight times repeated, every second one inverted by 180 degrees, separated by stars.

Obverse designer: *Ewa Tyc-Karpińska*
Reverse designer: *Roussanka Nowakowska*

Coins struck by the Mint of Poland plc. in Warsaw.

Printed by NBP Printing Office



On 5 December 2006, the National Bank of Poland puts into circulation coins representing Aleksander Gierymski, with face value of:

- 20 zł – struck in proof finish in silver,
- 2 zł – struck in standard finish in Nordic Gold alloy.

Aleksander Gierymski was one of the greatest Polish painters of the 19th century. His paintings represent a personal journey towards impressionism and the avant-garde trends the representatives of which attempted to create a new painting synthesis, focusing on colour and light. Unwilling to compromise, he was stubbornly creating his own artistic vision, being his own the most severe critic. Already during Gierymski's life, in 1890, Wiktor Gomulicki wrote about him: „Whether he is by the Vistula, Tiber or Isar rivers, he is always himself; and he sheds a ray of his talent and his soul on everything he touches. (...) He never makes the smallest concessions for the sake of common tastes of the mob and seems to seek as little applause, as little he seeks profit from his paintings. He creates for the

mere pleasure of creation". Eligiusz Niewiadomski described his life as a „terrible, long drama, a drama arising from the conflict between the individual who cannot and who does not want to adapt to the society in which he grows out, and the society itself”.

Aleksander Gieryski was born in Warsaw on 30 January 1850. His artistic talent was accompanied by great intelligence supported by thorough education. After he finished State High School No 3, for a few months Gieryski attended painting courses under Rafał Hadziewicz. To continue his artistic education, in May 1868 he left for Munich where his brother Maksymilian, a painter of an already established artistic name, resided for several years. Maksymilian introduced Aleksander into the circles of Polish artists living in Munich. In 1870 they visited Warsaw; a year later they were in Venice and Verona; in 1873 they travelled to Meran and Bad Reichenhall health resorts in Tyrol and Italy. Aleksander did not part with his ill brother until Maksymilian's death in 1874.

During his studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Aleksander received an award for the best composition of a painting on a given subject *Scene of Judgement in „The Merchant of Venice”*, for which he plumbed the mysteries of the 15th century Venetian art, since he wanted the painting to convey the true spirit of the age of Shakespeare's drama. In 1873 Gieryski was in Rome; it was at that time that he started working on his two paintings: *A Roman Inn* and *A Game of Mora*. Before he decided on the final version of his paintings, he made numerous drafts painted from nature, took pictures of the adequately dressed and positioned models; those pictures were later used for finishing the composition. These paintings, presented in Munich (1874), Warsaw and St. Petersburg (1875) and in Philadelphia (1876), established Gieryski's artistic position. Critics, in particular Polish ones, however questioned the plebeian themes undertaken by the artist, emphasised his talent and technical skills of painter. During his few months stay in Warsaw, Gieryski renewed acquaintance with Stanisław Witkiewicz, met Henryk Sienkiewicz and for a short period of time he was in a close relation with Helena Modjeska. In the mid 1875 Gieryski returned to Rome, where he lived for four years, excluding short intervals. At that time he initiated the work on the outdoor studies of light and colour for the first version of *The Bower* (1874-1880). The painting was to present a group of people dressed in Rococo style, sitting in the sunlit bower (the artist attempted to achieve unity between the group and the setting). However, in a moment of rage, the artist cut the painting into pieces, therefore only fragments remained from the first version of *The Bower*. The second version, improved and repainted for a number of times (currently property of the National Museum in Warsaw), was created in 1882. In *The Bower*, a composition filled with sunlight, the artist considered the light as the main issue of his painter's experiments. A few years later, Bolesław Prus wrote in his *Chronicles*: „(...) only Gieryski does not limit his art to representations of objects and attempts to paint the light. There are no small or large, beautiful or ugly objects on his paintings; instead, there are objects that are illuminated in diverse ways. With such a care

for lighting he produces his amazing effects; the lighting is the „idea” of his paintings”.

With both *The Bower* and *The Siesta* – painted at the same time (two versions of the theme), where a group of Renaissance patricians was presented, Gieryski closed the period when he were deliberately referring to historical periods.

Tired with solitary work in Rome, he returned to Warsaw in 1879 and stayed there for four years. At the end of this stay he intensified his contacts with a group of artists and journalists associated with „Wędrowiec” („The Wanderer”) magazine, who favoured a realistic presentation of the reality. Gieryski participated in edition works, created illustrations, prepared the magazine covers for 1884-1886 editions. His paintings reflected at that time genre scenes connected with the city. After Gieryski's death, Eligiusz Niewiadomski wrote: „In the previous period, our artists painted mainly horses with or without riders, images of the saints or scenes from Ancient Greece of Ancient Rome. No one but Gieryski, a true child of Warsaw, first discovered the original nature of Polish towns and suburbs and artistic interest in them. Powiśle, city warrens, crooked and lumpy Jewish houses, old, crumbling, pole-supported fences, all that weird, accidental architecture of poor districts of a Polish city, so original in its poverty, all this world that is dying today, all this, Polish art owes to Gieryski”. He painted at the time a number of important pictures, preceded by numerous preparatory studies, e. g. *A Jewess with Oranges* (1880-1881, lost during the II world war), *A Jewess with Lemons* (1881), *The Old Town Gate* (1883). In his subsequent „Warsaw” paintings people become the staffage for landscape, they do not attract the viewer's attention, they are only one of elements of a city or riverbank setting. These mainly include studies of variable arrangements of colour and light at sunset or dusk. Such an intimate character can be observed with respect to *Powiśle, A River Port in the Solec District of Warsaw* and the atmospheric painting representing Jewish prayers, i. e. three versions of the *Feast of Trumpets* (1883 – the so-called small format, 1888 – the so-called large format, 1890).

In the search for the appropriate shapes and colours, the artist repainted his works several times. „He simply wrestled with his paintings, for a long time he did not let them out of his studio, he improved them, remade, in order to get as close as possible to his vision of light, to his dream of some nature of light, he struggled undoubtedly, he was tormented, he was actually martyred, just like any of those few who strive to the highest things that cannot be entirely seized”. This „martyred” nature, as Zenon Przesmycki put it, together with oversensitivity, the feeling of being not understood and alienated from the society contributed to Gieryski's nervous breakdowns. Being in such state he left Warsaw in 1884 to undergo a medical treatment in Vienna and since then he lived abroad until his death. His longest stays were in Rome, Munich and Paris.

In Munich and, later, in Paris, Gieryski worked on the studies of atmospheric city nocturnes: nocturnal views of streets lit with a flickering artificial light produced by gas lanterns that were installed at that time in the streets of European capitals. Wiktor

Gomulicki, who visited Gieryski's studio in Munich, wrote: „The atelier appeared to be an alchemist's laboratory, all hung with carton spotlights plastered with golden and silver paper, used for reminding diverse light combinations observed in nature”. In Munich, Gieryski painted e. g. *Wittelsbachplatz in Munich at Night*, awarded a 2nd class gold medal at the 1890 International Exhibition of Fine Arts in Munich and *Max-Josephplatz in Munich at Night* purchased for the New Pinakothek collections, or *A Bridge in Munich*. In Paris, he painted *Paris Opera House at Night* (1891), *Louvre at Night* (1892) and *Evening by the Seine* (1893), paintings considered masterpieces of Polish art. He described them in the following words: „Night motif, opera house and electricity. How difficult it is”.

In 1893 Gieryski came to Krakow, probably in connection with Henryk Rodakowski's offer Gieryski to take over the chair painting at the Academy of Fine Arts. Rodakowski's death and Julian Fałat's appointment for the chair of Academy chancellor shattered those plans. The embittered artist returned to Italy and to Munich in 1894. During his stay in Krakow, Gieryski painted his last composition with figurative representation, i. e. *Peasant Coffin*, where he fused the discipline of drawing and the form with sensed impressions of colour and light.

He spent his last years between Italy and Paris. In his letter to Antoni Sygietyński, Gieryski wrote: „(...) the longer I was out of Poland, the weaker, the more miserable I felt: since some time now, I've been in a more fortunate position, yet this results solely from my changing of artistic views. This is the effect of Paris. How healthy for me is the Paris air. For me, a man of anxious, nervous nature, Paris is appeasing... It is important to work among those whom one considers the bravest, beyond whom either nothing, or nearly nothing, exists: one feels that one competes with the strongest and this brings pleasure and peace (...)”. A lonely, suffering-driven artist painted at that time mainly landscapes, architecture without people. In 1899 he created the tragic *Self-Portrait*. He died in a Roman asylum between 6 and 8 March 1901. He was buried at Campo Verano and the news of his death echoed around Poland.

Gieryski did not favour any art theory; his aim was to explore the visible reality and to convey it as faithfully as possible using all available painting methods and technics, in accordance with the logic of facts and phenomena observed in the nature. After Gieryski's death, Eligiusz Niewiadomski wrote: „Gieryski devoted his talent not to the patrons and *kunsthändler*s, not to the strive for money, publicity, fame or fortune of any kind, but solely to the art. And he devoted it entirely, exhausted to the ultimate extent, left all of which he was capable. One can demand nothing more from the artist”. In 1930s, Gieryski's painting inspired the generation of artists connected with Polish Colourist movement. It was of their inspiration that the Aleksander Gieryski Free Painting School in Katowice was opened in 1936 and that Warsaw witnessed a great exhibition of his works in 1938.

Irena Bal