

## 5: Julia Keilowa

The main protagonist of our exhibition, Julia Keilowa, was born in 1902 in Stryj, a town in today's Ukraine. As a young woman, she was educated in Lviv, then she came with her husband and a young child to Warsaw where she started her studies in sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts, or more precisely, at the State School of Fine Arts which was later to become the Academy. We can see the objects that Julia made after completing her studies, both in metalwork and sculpture, as Julia Keilowa was first and foremost a sculptor. Unfortunately, her works are almost completely gone. We can see two sculptures that survived to this day, namely one of Cyprian Kamil Norwid and the portrait of Elżbieta Barszczewska.

At the exhibition, we can see some of the documents related to Julia Keilowa and her studies. These are the only few traces left of Julia, apart from her works, since her artistic output, as well as her private life—the things that accompanied her daily—were virtually all lost during the Second World War. So let me draw your attention, for instance, to the statement written in her own hand that she submitted to the school, in which she asked for an exam to be postponed due to an illness of her young son, because as a student she was already a young mother. Equally noteworthy is the newspaper that we display here: “Bohemaz”, a one-off occasional newspaper that Keilowa edited. She was the editor, but also the author of articles, she included her own photo montages and a poem describing her approach to creating. It follows that she was a thriving, young, dynamic woman capable of boldly entering the domains that had previously not been accessible to women.

At the exhibition, we can see both the metalwork pieces created by Julia Keilowa in her atelier, and those she did for the industry, for major Warsaw metalwork companies, like Fraget, Henneberg brothers and Norblin. These items are serving platters, objects made of metal and plated with a thin layer of silver. They were reproduced in a particular quantity, which is why they were able to survive to this day. Julia Keilowa studied sculpture, but her adventure in metalwork has begun already during her studies. Throughout the entire period she was creating art—it was a short

one, around 7 years in the 1930s—she treated both these areas very equally. She kept on making new sculptures that she would show at exhibitions, and she kept creating designs for everyday objects that she treated the same way as she did her sculpted portraits.

We know how important an area of creativity design was for her because she took care to sign her designs with her name. On metal objects we can find her signature resembling a handwritten one. Please, take a closer look at a “triple crescent” ashtray, with the designer’s signature embossed on the collar. In the case of items designed for the industry, the designer’s name was present in press advertisements. That was quite unusual. She was the only one to consistently sign her designs.

Keilowa very systematically documented her works and she did it in great style, as her designs were photographed by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, one of the most remarkable photographers of the time, famous as the photographer of the elite, as well as an excellent advertising photographer. The Dorys atelier produced several dozen images of Keilowa’s work. They are great photographs that wonderfully convey all the aspects of these designs. They are priceless for us today, as they often depict works that did not survive. Thanks to them, we are able to fully appreciate the designer’s artistic output.