

# bulletin



Posters in Finance

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# Your own house

Radosław Milczarski

'Among the lupin and rye fields a few kilometres from the centre of Warsaw, at the point where the shabby buildings of the suburbs stretch to the west end, a nice contrast catches the eye: rows of new, planned houses on the Koło estate. This contrast reflects the social value of the housing problem, to which the Construction and Housing Exhibition in Koło estate was devoted', as a reporter from the Warsaw newspaper *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* described in 1935.

The exhibition was organised by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK, the Polish development bank). In the area which was back then the peripheral district of Koło (six kilometres from the city centre), a live-in-ready housing estate was built on rough terrain, consisting of a complex of twenty single-family houses, six semi-detached houses and two terraced houses. The apartments in them were fully furnished and fully equipped. Before the opening of the exhibition, the area was equipped with underground infrastructure—which is still not the norm nowadays—and connected to a tram line marked with the letter 'W'—as in the word for exhibition in Polish: *Wystawa*.

The designs for the houses and interiors came from two architecture competitions announced by BGK in 1933. Out of 1,000 submitted projects, 83 were awarded and purchased by BGK. They were included in the *Catalogue of typical houses for small residential development* published in 1934. All published proposals for prefabricated models were free of charge and ready to use. The catalogue also included drawings of various types of furniture, which after being cut out, were to be used to visualise various arrangement methods presented in the interior design drawings. There was also a place for tips on choosing tablecloths and bedding.

Three segments of the exhibition were left unfinished so that visitors could learn about the method of their construction. Modernist designs dominated the show houses, including terraced and semi-detached houses. Along with the exhibition there were free-standing local industry and handicraft stands as well as a large pavilion housing everything that fell 'within the concept of rational construction in terms of small houses', as stated in the *Catalogue*. After the exhibition, which lasted until September 1935, the first tenants moved into their homes. Favourable loans for the purchase of houses were granted by BGK.

In the 1920s and 1930s in Europe, housing exhibitions were a popular way of promoting new architectural trends and low-cost social housing, which was sorely needed after World War I. The BGK exhibition was the first comprehensive exhibition of its kind in Poland.

Proper advertising was not forgotten. The Association of Tourist Propaganda for the City of Warsaw published a poster designed by the Lewitt-Him company. This Warsaw-based designer partnership formed by the graphic designers Jan Le Witt and George Him, both poster artists and illustrators, was active in London from 1937 after they emigrated to the UK. Before that Jan Le Witt had created, among other things, the illustrations for the children's book *The Locomotive* by Julian Tuwim—illustrations that every Polish child knows to this day. In 1929 he designed the Hebrew font 'Chaim', corresponding to the Latin sans-serif fonts.

Why did the bank come up with the idea of a housing exhibition? Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego was established in 1924 to provide financial support for the emerging Polish economy shortly after Poland regained independence. Following the turbulent period of forming a new state and the consequences of the economic crisis, it became necessary for the economy to have an investor that would not be afraid of making major infrastructure investments and—as we say today—social investment. This is the reason why a Construction Fund, in addition to the Railway, Road and Drainage Funds, was established at BGK. Its funds were to be allocated to support the construction of housing, especially for the poorest and the middle class.

## References

Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego. 1934. *Katalog typowych domów dla drobnego budownictwa mieszkaniowego (Catalogue of typical houses for small residential development)*. Warsaw: BKG.

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Radosław Milczarski has been managing the heritage of Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego since 2019.

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Wystawa budowlano-mieszkaniowa Banku Gospodarstwa Krajowego (Construction and Housing Exhibition by Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego)

**Illustrator:** Jan Le Witt, Jerzy Him  
**Date:** 1934  
**Size:** 99.7x70 cm

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# WYSTAWA

BUDOWLANO-MIESZKANIOWA BANKU GOSPODARSTWA KRAJOWEGO



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