Monika Luft: Is the abode that you set up in Maćkowa Ruda on the Czarna Hańcza River, where you have bred Arabians for more than 20 years, still your place on Earth?

Andrzej Strumiłło: I am an amateur breeder – a chronic amateur, an enthusiast of the breed and its huge fan, but I can’t call myself a specialist. My duties in Warsaw don’t allow me to be present at Maćkowa Ruda the entire time. But the horses are there, my son, the groom. So that place is very much alive – but how long and in what form it will survive, that I don’t know. I would still like to have some foals... I have left four broodmares that have some genetic value. Czarina, my oldest mare, who is currently twenty something years old and still in great condition, had a foal not so long ago. Czarina is a daughter of Etogram and Czara by Banat, from the line of Czapelka. Czara was sold to England, while Etogram, an El Paso son, lived to the end of his days in Janów Podlaski. Czarina’s daughter, the chestnut Czadra by Perlik, a large, strong mare of a very gentle nature, also resides at Maćkowa Ruda. She is stronger than her sire, because Perlik was a pleasant, handsome horse, but of small size. I trained Czadra to drive in harness – she was even presented at Janów in front of Polish and foreign public. The next mare, whose name also begins with “Cz”, is Czarina’s youngest daughter, by HS Etiquette, a stallion bred by Mr. and Mrs. Watts. As a nod towards Charlie Watts she received the name Czarna. I also have a brown mare named Czarna, who I left at the stud due to her coat color and beautiful conformation, though her head is more the French than Polish type. Her sire Epejos by Pilot, a black Janów Podlaski stallion, was sold to France and was quite successful there on the show arena. There was a time when I had 15 horses, among them some notable ones, such as the stallion Czakamar (by Elden), on his time one of the best racing horses at the track. “Kamar” means “moon” in Arabic, so “Czakamar” is simply a Moon out of Czarina.

M.L.: Did any of your ancestors or close relatives breed or ride horses?

A.S.: My family descends from the lands near Minsk, so my ancestors probably had something to do with horses, because at that time all people associated with land had them in that area. But my grandfather and father escaped from there during the October Revolution. My father fought against the Bolsheviks and later settled down in Vilnius. He had no land, no farm, so horses were not an option. My mother was a girl from the Sudaty village. The land of my grandfather bordered from the north on Zułów, an estate which in the 19th century was leased by the Piłsudski family. It was here that Marshal Józef Piłsudski was born.

M.L.: Despite having to flee and being forced to move as a result of the war, you became a traveler as an adult. And that was not easy in Poland in the 50s, not many people were let out of the country. Yet you managed to do it.

A.S.: The mechanism was very complicated. At first it was a matter of luck – somebody had to do it! My first serious foreign trip was to Beijing, in 1954, on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China. A delegation from the department of culture travelled there at the time. We had the opportunity to visit all of China in
space. But you can get a taste of them and that’s why every
time I had a chance to travel there, I took it. Even in rather
risky times. Poland had a cultural cooperation agreement
with Vietnam – in a default way, like a socialist country
with a socialist country. However during the time of war it
was very difficult to find someone in the Ministry of Culture
who would agree to go there. For one, the risk of amoeba
infection, and two, no chance of selling any works, trading or
establishing business contacts. It was an exotic country, wild,
rare. But I wanted to see with my own eyes the lists of these
people, see how it looked like not only in the paper, which was
manipulated, but in reality. So I went. I saw the war, I was
at the 17th parallel, on the Vietnamese-American front, the
Chinese-Vietnamese front, I had an exhibition in Hanoi, I
made a Vietnamese exhibition in Poland. I never regretted
that decision.

M.L.: You strongly emphasize that your travels greatly
influenced your views on the world and opinions about
people.
A.S.: My interest in the East and its matters greatly deepened
at the time, though it existed before, as my grandfather was
born in Vitebsk and my grandfather came from Minsk. The
East is very attractive in terms of philosophy and richness
of art. Even if I only had the chance to get to know it
from the surface – because it is very hard to get to know it really
thoroughly, you would have to go in deeper, become one of the
people of the East, leaving yourself elsewhere. It is impossible
to get to know China or India, they are enormous empires
both in terms of time, number of people, philosophy and
space. But you can get a taste of them and that’s why every
time I had a chance to travel there, I took it. Even in rather
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M.L.: When did Arabian horses appear in your life?
A.S.: In the 80s I was the head of the UN Graphic Presentation
Unit in New York, where I hired Ewa Stanisławska, a
very hard working person, who quickly mastered the newly
supplied computers and who knew Russian and the Cyrillic
alphabet, which was one of the conditions of getting the job,
because we also worked in Russian. Her husband was a
Polish businessman, he dealt in meat and also horse trade.
At the time the government had a monopoly on the export
of Arabian horses. Later came a second horse, then a third,
fourth, and so on.

M.L.: Director Andrzej Krzyżtałowicz influenced your
choices also later on. Acting on his advice you later took the
stage Enpara (Pamir – Engara/Gwarny). How do you
remember him?
A.S.: I am full of the highest recognition for his heart, full of
respect for his knowledge, passion, expertise on the subject.
He was an exceptional person, who knew if not epoch-
making when it comes to saving the concept of Arabian horse
breeding in Poland. In difficult conditions in terms of politics,
when the Arabian was not a privileged horse, he saved it,
bred it. Luckily the foreign markets helped him out. He was
a phenomenon of the Janów stud, he devoted his entire life to
it. He had what was needed in breeding, not just knowledge,
but also intuition, instinct and luck.

M.L.: Your large hearted gesture, the gifting of the
watercolor of the mare Mlecha by Juliusz Kossak dated
1845 to Janów Stud, was greatly talked about in the community. The watercolor hung in your home for
several years, what is the story behind it? Did the gesture
result from the mentioned above friendship?
A.S.: Yes. I actually felt that I owed this to Kossak himself.
There is an extremely touching story behind this, proof
that people are capable of beautiful acts. I was collecting
material for the "34 Jarczowce" book – which title means "noble, generous"
– about the history of the Arabian horse in Poland. I was
searching for images of the first horses brought to Janów
by Juliusz Dzieduszycki – Mlecha, Sahara and Gazella.
In Bialowieza I found Joanna, a descendant of the Kossak
clan. She was the one who had that watercolor. I asked
for a copy to place it in the book, but the reproduction that I
got was of very poor quality. I thanked her and said that I
would try to work with it, though the copy is poor. Imagine
that for Christmas she sent me the original! For several
years the work hung in my living room in the countryside.
But I worried about its safety and also thought that
it should hang where the benefactor would also be honored. I
think that Janów is the best place for this work. I must also
mention that there was a problem with the identification

Mlecha, painted by Juliusz Kossak (1845),
a gift from Professor Andrzej Strumiłło
in Janów Podlaski Stud
M.L.: You rode horses for many years. What kind of mount is an Arabian horse in your opinion?

A.S.: Yes, I used to ride. In my opinion the Arabian makes a good mount. People are afraid of their spirited nature or restlessness. But if the human is calm, then the horse is also calm. The horse understands the human so well that – I presume – he reads his mind. Man simply thinks about turning right and the horse turns.

M.L.: When you observed horses out on the pasture in the Arabian horse world? For example the successes of Polish breeding in the results of the World Championships in Paris?

A.S.: I don't really follow it, but I do hear something from time to time. I'm happy that Polish breeding is doing so well. State breeding has had, has and will have great successes. But private breeding is also progressing and is becoming a serious competition for the state stud. Private bred horses are receiving high marks on the show arena.

M.L.: Do you keep track of what currently goes on in the Arabian horse world? For example the successes of Polish breeding, the results of the World Championships in Paris?

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M.L.: Director Jerzy Białobok mentioned you once in an interview when speaking about private breeders. "I like the view presented by Professor Strumiłło: he draws colourful pleasure from his breeding! Due to organizational issues he always leaves a stallion, doesn't bring in semen to his stud and yet he has managed to breed some rather decent foals.

He is deeply affected by the performances of his graduates. He has made himself comfortable in this breeding and feels no discomfort just because he is not using the most trendiest stallions of the moment", he said. Is this correct?

M.L.: When you observed horses out on the pasture in the Arabian horse world? For example the successes of Polish breeding in the results of the World Championships in Paris?

A.S.: Indeed so. I could not always afford the trendiest stallions, but Janów was kind enough to let me try out some of the moment”, he said. Is this correct?

M.L.: You focused on performance traits of the Arabian horse in your breeding. On the other hand, as an artist, you are sensitive to beauty. Measurable charisma and impressive beauty are the traits of show horses.

A.S.: I praise Polish breeding very much. Polish breeding is complete, pays attention to conformation traits. That's very important to me! Beauty is the fundamental wealth of the Arabian, apart from the strictly physical traits, such as resistance, health, metabolism that guarantees stamina, adaptation to every kind of feed, in all conditions. That's why those Arabians that descend from Terek or France, athletic, strong, fast, are not as subtle as Polish ones and don't bring me joy.

M.L.: But you also said: "When I am tired with the troubles of life, I go to the stable, cuddle up to the horses and I feel a lot better".

A.S.: Yes, and the horses also cuddle up to me. A horse has the same need of friendship and closeness.

M.L.: You have the Midas touch. Those horses of mine are in many places today. I want them to have a good life, to have a pasture so that they can gallop and to have a chance at a sports career. I know people that derive pleasure from my horses. Some have built small studs basing on my produce. I exported a mare and stallion to Lithuania and even one mare to Belarus.

M.L.: You wrote that we owe a lot to the horse, that we received more from it than we could give. Do you feel you owe your horses something?

A.S.: I feel like I owe something to horses in general. The horse has played a great role in our civilization, as a work animal, a means of transport, our companion in battle and life. Horses simply deserve respect.

M.L.: You claimed that the Arabian horse is a beautiful, cultural relic. And today we see an increasing interest in Arabians, which have become fashionable, especially in the Middle East.

A.S.: Those words of mine related to the past. As rich societies develop and the culture of the middle class increases, the Arabian horse ceases to be a relic, but is now a symbol of wealth, its value is reborn, it has achieved a new significance. It is the object of friendship, aesthetic satisfaction, is aid for sports.

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M.L.: I have a feeling that it can serve one more function – an excuse for different cultures to meet.
A.S.: We should find reasons to have more of such gatherings! Each path, each symbol that unites is valuable, each common passion draws people together. The love for the Arabian horse can unite Arabs, Israelis and other nations. There is definitely something like an “equine family”. I remember how Labeeb stood next to Gazal sons.

M.L.: The Arabian horse is also considered a symbol of freedom, space, they are called “drinkers of the wind”. Today Arabians don’t always have that wide space at their disposal, but we can still recall the words of Emir Wacław Rzewuski: “Who once has been a rider, will never be a slave”. Is that why this horse has such a warm place in your heart, because you were also very attached to freedom? You were ready to quit your job, classes, career – to only not be tied to anything.
A.S.: Sometimes I gave up very large amounts of money. After several years of work in New York I could have had a senatorial pension. But I chose my own plot of land, freedom and horses.

M.L.: Has the Arabian horse become a form of inspiration to you?
A.S.: First of all it brings me great satisfaction. To assist a mare in labor. To deliver a foal, rear it. Later break in and ride your own horses, which I often did myself. My Arabians were so easy to be broken in that I was surprised how people could have any problem with it. I just got on and rode. Perhaps I didn't ride well, because I don't consider myself a trainer or good rider. Working with a horse is very hard, it's like working with a child, which you have to lead into life in a proper way.

M.L.: Once again it turns out that you have the Midas touch.
A.S.: Yes, I guess so. I am inspired by historical personas, such as Wacław Rzewuski. I have reached some sources and painted an image of Rzewuski on a horse – Emir Złotobrody [Emir Goldenbeard]. He was the exponent of the spirit of freedom. I wrote many times about him in the mentioned above "Al Jawad". Not only did he spend several years among the Bedouin tribes, brought from Arabia the title of Emir and 137 desert horses, but he also left valuable notes in the "On Oriental Horses and Those Descended from Eastern Breeds", personally illustrated. And later he led the life of a free daredevil. As Słowacki wrote, "he built arbors for horses in the garden, gilded the mangers and provided crystal walls". A unique, restless figure. Another inspiration is Juliusz Kossak, a superb expert on the horse, its conformation, movement and nature, fascinated by Arabians since childhood, which is seen even in his earliest works, painted at the threshold of his career.

M.L.: “Evil spirits don’t enter a tent with a horse” – this saying is attributed to Mahomet. Horses are the good spirits of Maćkowa Ruda?
A.S.: For now – they are. Until they are there, so is Maćkowa Ruda. But I don't know what the future will hold. My life is quite complicated and is nearing its end. I don't know what the final years will bring. Perhaps I will change the stud’s address, maybe I will move it closer to Warsaw. But that would also mean a lack of everyday contact. These choices are extremely hard. Sometimes I wonder whether the biological potential of my mares is not wasted. This year I don’t have any foals, for the first time in many years. It’s a bit of a pity. I can’t afford to import semen of the highest world quality, but there are very promising Polish stallions. Who knows – maybe I will still bring a new life into this world?

1 Marshal Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935), was a Polish statesman; Chief of State (1918–1922), First Marshal of Poland (from 1920), and de facto dictator (1926–1935) of the Second Polish Republic. From mid-World War I he had a major influence in Poland’s politics, and was an important figure on the European political scene.
2 Kolyma – a region located in the Russian Far East. It is bounded by the East Siberian Sea and the Arctic Ocean in the north and the Sea of Okhotsk to the south. Under Joseph Stalin’s rule, Kolyma became the most notorious region for the Gulag labor camps. Described by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, author of The Gulag Archipelago, as “pole of cold and cruelty”.
3 Juliusz Kossak (1824–1899), a Polish painter specializing in battle and historical paintings. He most liked painting horses. His most important works include “Sobieski at Vienna”, “Stud of Mohort”, “Arrival of Emperor Franz Joseph to Cracow”, “A stud in the Podolia region”, “A portrait of Count Rzewuski”.
4 Count Juliusz Dzieduszycki (1817–1885), land owner, horseman. In 1840 he set off on a famous, full of adventures expedition to Lvov to acquire the stallion Bagdad and in 1845 to Arabia, from where he brought the mares Gazella, Mlecha and Sabara. Their significance for Polish Arabian horse breeding does not need to be emphasized. This stud, similar to the others, did not survive. The only ones to survive the extermination of the World War I and the Bolshevik invasion in the years 1917–1918 were the mares Pomponia 1902 and three fillies, which sent to Janów formed the foundations of the stud (Gazella II 1914, Mlecha 1914 and Zulejma 1914). Descending from Pomponia and Zulejma was the epochal Ofir.
5 Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), romantic poet, author (among others) of ballads referring to the Orient.