



A CONVERSATION WITH
THE ARTIST OF THE
SOLIDARITY LOGO AND
THE LOGO OF POLAND'S
EU PRESIDENCY:
JERZY JANISZEWSKI



Jerzy Janiszewski created the iconic Solidarity logo in 1980 when he was 28 years old. The image became a powerful symbol of freedom from Communist rule, first in Poland & then in other Warsaw Pact countries. Mr. Janiszewski is also the creator of the logo of Poland's presidency of the EU; Poland's government chose him not just for his talent, but also to correlate the presidency's symbol with the powerful historical tradition of the Solidarity movement.

Throughout his career, Mr. Janiszewski has created hundreds of logotypes, posters, & graphics for publishing houses, advertising agencies as well as cities & NGOs. He's worked with the BBC, Canal+, TF1, TVP, the Embassy of France in Warsaw, Pompidou Centre, UNESCO & Amnesty International, & is also the author of stage designs & open air installations.

This December, the first U.S. exhibit of Mr. Janiszewski's works opened in DC, in the *Charles Krause Reporting Fine Art Gallery* in cooperation with the Embassy of Poland. The exhibit includes a rare Solidarity poster from 1980 (top left photo), buried underground for 7 years from the prying eyes of the secret police, as well as collages & other fine art.

We interviewed Mr. Janiszewski at the Gallery on December 7.

Tell us about the process of creating the logo for Poland's EU presidency. Searching for an idea wasn't simple because of the importance of the subject matter: the logo was to represent Poland in Europe. I began by analyzing the logos of previous

EU presidencies; not to duplicate them but as a starting point. The idea was to show a Poland that for the first time in its history would take on the leadership of the EU. I thought about what imagery I could use, what it would mean, what materials I should use.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggested that the logo have some kind of tie to the Solidarity logo – that was to be one element of the logo, to root it in history but also to tie it to contemporary Poland.

So why arrows? I had many ideas. I have a 100-page notebook filled with sketches. At one point, I looked at a project where I'd designed a holiday card with "2011" on it. The 11 was arrows, reaching up – symbolizing positive energy. I thought, this is a good idea. So then: one arrow? An arrow to symbolize a house; Poland? But then I thought that there should be as many arrows as there are colors in the flags of the EU nations – 6. The next step was how to make them, & I thought it best to draw them manually, for that energy, strength, which is what I believe Poland is today. When I travel there I see that dynamism in its people. The arrows are linked, like people who are supporting each other, lifting each other up: the idea of unity, solidarity. The first red arrow with the flag represents Poland.

You're known throughout the world for your Solidarity logo. What are your memories from those times?

Those times remain in my heart to this day – so much time has passed, but they're always with me. The logo is connected with the warmth of that period, with what I witnessed. I was at the shipyard when the strikes began in August. Then I received a pass from a friend & was able to be in the shipyard, where I observed how the movement grew, how people helped one another, how people from the outside helped those inside – bringing food, money. I also wanted to do something, to help, & thought

that it could be through art. I didn't know what, exactly – I had ideas to create an image, a poster. I saw signs on the shipyard walls where the word "solidarity" was repeated. But there was no one image that came to my mind.

I began working on that word – "solidarity." One of the poets suggested this idea to me. The mottos are all so long, he said. Try just that one word.

That evening I thought about how that word emoted everything that was happening. Once I drew the logo I took it to the shipyard & within 3 days it was everywhere – on materials printed by the movement, foreign correspondents were also using it. I had such satisfaction because of that – I had no idea it would ever be seen outside the shipyard walls. At that time, we didn't know how the strike would end. Inside the shipyard, the atmosphere was almost that of a carnival because of this idea of freedom, which everyone wanted strongly – we didn't know then that what we were doing was known outside of Poland.

How did you create the logo?

Once I had the idea [of using the word "solidarity"] it was evident to me that I should create it with a brush & paint – red paint, to tie in with Poland's history, & the spilled blood of other protests. The third time I drew it, with my brush & paint, on a small sheet of paper... it came out, & the proportions worked.

And you knew that was the one?

Yes, & that's the one that I took to the shipyard.

What happened next?

When I brought it to the shipyard, I asked if I could reproduce it & distribute it. I gave it to Krzysztof Wyszowski, who at that time worked on the strike newsletter. He showed it to Bogdan Borusewicz. They liked it, but said they had no way of printing it. So I decided to do

it myself. No one asked me to do it – it was my own idea, to do this, to show solidarity with the strike, with the people.

Because of the censorship in Poland, it was difficult to print anything. But my friends & I put together a primitive printing machine & started printing the logo, one set at a time. We had difficulty getting paper, but found some through friends. We printed two formats: one small, an A5, & the other larger, A3.

The first day we made 50 copies. We had technical problems, the paint dried wrong, things got jammed. The next day, we made 100, then 150. We printed them through the end of the strike. I would take them to the shipyard & give them to the leadership. The very first day they plastered them all over the walls of their conference room.

Did you sign them?

No. Sometimes people would ask me to, & I would. The first one that I took to the shipyard, I asked for Lech Walesa's signature, Anna Walentynowicz, other leaders from the strike committee. I have that one to this day; I kept it for myself, a cherished memory.

After the strike ended, the movement kept going – I learned later that it had taken on the name "Solidarity" & was using my logo as its official logo. They found me, invited me to their new headquarters, & I worked with them daily on the visual elements & materials of the logo, because it was being reproduced everywhere.

Did you have any idea the logo would become as famous as it did?

Absolutely not. I didn't think it would ever be seen outside the walls of the shipyard.

– Justine Jablonska,
the Embassy's Press Advisor,
spoke with Mr. Janiszewski