

Konstanty Brandel - born in 1883 in Warsaw, the son of Józef, a clerk on the Warsaw-Vienna Railway, and Aniela née Karnkowska. He studied privately at home and at a secondary school; he took his baccalauréat at the Philological Gymnasium in Praga. In 1900, he began his studies at the Kraków School of Fine Arts; he studied drawing under Józef Unierzycki - Jan Matejko's son-in-law, and under Leon Wyczółkowski, and painting under Jan Stanisławski and Józef Mehoffer. In 1902 and 1903, he received the silver medal of the Academy of Fine Arts for drawing and painting. In 1903 he left for Paris, did not speak French and lived in an atelier on Boulevard Raspail. He was a recluse, not drawn to the Poles or the Parisian bohemians. He was friends with a small group of artists - O. Boznanska, F. Frankowska, H. Ciechanowska, T. Makowski, K. Mondral, F. Prochaska, A. Ozenfant, J. Buhot, C. Serveau and F. Cacan. After arriving in Paris, he enrolled at the Vitti Academy; he changed environments and teachers; after the academy came the club "La Palette", where he was influenced by J. E. Blanche. He painted oils, watercolours and gouaches - many commissioned portraits. He also experimented with ceramics. The ease of painting did not give him satisfaction, so he took up printmaking. However, he continued to paint in watercolours - between 1909 and 1940 he produced over 70 works in this technique and hundreds of sketches from his travels in Poland, Italy, France and Brazil. In 1907, he enrolled at the Ecole Nationale et Speciale des Beaux-Arts to study woodcuts. He learned etching independently from a textbook and by watching the old masters at the Louvre. He developed a liking for etching, aquatint, mezzotint and drypoint. In the 1920s/30s, briefly and on commission, he also worked in woodcuts. Brandel's woodcuts decorated the prints of the Polish Society of Friends of Books in Paris: books, magazines and advertising prints. The artist also collaborated with French publishers, mainly with the publishing house Le Livre Moderne Illustre and the legal periodical La France Judiciaire. Between 1917 and 1935, Konstanty Brandel cut more than a hundred woodcuts in wood. After the Second World War, due to his experiences and war losses, he abandoned printmaking and returned to painting and drawing. Brandel had few individual exhibitions, only a dozen or so in Geneva, Poznań, Rio de Janeiro, Warsaw, London, Nogent sur Marne and Paris. The group exhibitions in which he participated, however, were more than 130, in almost all of Europe, the United States and Brazil. He received a medal from the Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratifs (1925) for his designs of eight stained glass windows for the church in Transloy; the Grand Prix at the International Exhibition of Art and Technology in Paris (1937); and the title of honorary president of the Association of Polish Graphic Artists obtained just before the war. Brandel never came to Poland, for fear that, having no French citizenship but only a refugee travel document, he would have trouble returning to Paris. He had negligible contacts with émigré institutions, although in 1960 he received the Art Prize of the Parisian "Kultura". A few years after the painter's death, Czapski wrote that Brandel was widely known among artists in Paris and was always said to be living on the verge of great deprivation. He added, however, that Brandel not only did not complain about his fate, but seemed to regard this state as the only proper one for a painter.

Brandel's graphic works can be found in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, the Neue Pinakothek in Munich, the Vatican Museum, the British Museum in London and public collections in Vienna, Geneva, Brussels, New York. Driven by the stubborn idea that everything he created could return to Poland after his death, even in the most difficult material conditions he was reluctant to sell his paintings and prints. Konstanty Brandel spent the last ten years of his life without a care in the Nursing Home for Painters and Sculptors near Paris, to which, thanks to the help of French friends, he was the only foreigner. By this time, he was almost out of work, but was busily improving his earlier paintings. He died in the Saint Anthony Hospital in Paris on 5 November 1970. Two years later, an urn with his ashes was placed in his father's grave at the Powązki cemetery in Warsaw. Shortly after Brandel's death, his nephew Witold Leitgeber, fulfilling the painter's last wish, donated the major part of his artistic legacy to Poland. Among the endowed institutions were: The National Museum in Warsaw, the state museums in Kraków, Poznań and Toruń, and the drawing cabinets at the University of Warsaw and the Ossolineum. In 1978 the National Museum held a posthumous exhibition of Konstanty Brandel's artistic output, exhibiting in seven rooms some of the more than 3,000 donated oil paintings, watercolours, gouaches, drawings and prints, and published an extensive catalogue recording all the works.