

INTRODUCTION

by Tadeusz Nyczek

Like certain other great painters of our century 8eksinski is a trained architect-a profession he had always disliked and which he claims to have undertaken only under pressure from his father.

He was born on the 24th of February 1929 in Senok, a small town in the south east of Poland. He did not leave it until 1977, except to fulfill the demands of his profession: first he went to Cracow to complete his studies at the Institute of Technology from 1947 to 1952, then he spent three years in Szczecin and Rzeszow to comply with the work obligations imposed on graduates of higher education in the years when Poland was being reconstructed.

From that period of "architecture" he was to retain an unpleasant memory of a profession practiced against his will and exclusively in the so-called "field of execution".

"It's useless to talk about it," he was to say one day in an interview. "Once I finished my studies I worked for a few years in a building enterprise as a slave-whipper on the building lots."

Photography was the beginning of his artistic creation. 8eksinski started to photograph once his studies in architecture ended. Soon he gained renown and recognition in the professional milieu. He even became a member of the Union of Polish Artist Photographers - he who always declined any form of membership, which he felt to be recruitment. Several exhibitions of his photographic works earned him numerous articles and monographs. Like his paintings later on, his photographs aroused as much enthusiasm as criticism. The object was already no more than an excuse to which the artist preferred the "mental circumstances" by which it was accompanied. For example he once photographed a female nude where the body had been firmly tied with string, just like a joint of meat. Or he put side by side the face of a child and that of an old woman. Or else he sought the desired effect by combining various photos, one of which represented a little girl with flowers in her hair, another a broken doll, and yet another a stretched-out corpse.

A conclusion suggests itself in relation to the first period of his artistic creation, the end of which corresponds to the end of the nineteen-fifties. A conclusion which is essential for the understanding of the artist's personality: his tendency towards deforming reality. And yet due to the technique which he employed - photography- 8eksinski never came closer to reality than in that period. For as a device photography seems to provide a true representation of the real world. However it was precisely the real world that was unfamiliar to 8eksinski. What counted for him was the universe modified - to a very large extent - by "mental circumstances" and by his own vision of it. Deformation played a fundamental role in this, serving as an intermediary moment where the man and the artist could interfere with time and space to form his own world anew. Therefore even if 8eksinski was attracted by the artificial side of photography, it was precisely the necessity of referring to objective reality which constituted an inconvenience.

8eksinski simply and beyond any doubt hated things natural and things real. In an interview granted several years later he was to say: "I abhor everything which is "natural", everything which comes "directly from the cow", as the Poles say. I drink instant coffee and milk powder, I eat powdered soups and only canned meat."

So specific and so rare in our times when the majority of people and especially artists shun omnipresent artificiality, this mental feature was to determine, to a large extent, the qualities of 8eksinski's art.

During this time, 8eksinski was engaged in drawing as well as photography. This involved, for the most part, compositions executed in pastel. They contain elements of human figures deformed to such an extent that they give the impression of semi-abstract