

their permanent presence, they lose their outward appearance. With time the gaze of the spectators becomes more subtle and penetrates higher and deeper: "My efforts tend, or at least I think so, towards reaching the state where the object in a painting would not be identified or even noticed, just as one doesn't catch the sound of the wind outside the window. It would not be noticed, because in the consciousness of the spectator the object has - in a manner of speaking - melted into the picture during so many years, in such a great number of museums and reproductions that it has become an integral part of the picture. For example we are hardly ever capable of perceiving the true message of the Crucifixion. Of course I am speaking not of the mystic meaning, but of the exterior message, whose sheer horror would strike any European suddenlyrealising its full import," Beksinski was to say in a later interview.

Not to appal, q[it to paint beautiful paintings - that is the paradoxical desire of >> man whose works are filled with accessories of death, decomposition and destruction. His goal is to reproduce them endlessly, to infinitely represent them, until the spectator gets used to them and no longer notices them, in the same way as the 19th century painters succeeded in filling their works with men dying from their wounds on battlefields, slaves being put to death, blood and corpses which, however, no longer shock the spectator and are not an obstacle to his direct appreciation of a beautiful painting.

He goes even further - the artist dreams not only of making the spectator forget the horror of the accessories but of making him forget their very existence. For when he paints shapes, what he would really like to show are lines and hues. When he paints objects and human figures he is in fact interested only in the forms. Yet the concession towards figuration does not necessarily facilitate the dialogue of the painter with the public. Beksinski would like the people to "breathe" his paintings. To accept them as one accepts colours, air, and light. But people never stop asking questions: Why does the woman have green hair? Or why is the car covered with blood vessels? The public would above all like to know what the paintings of Beksinski "mean". For his part he demands something which is probably impossible in our times: that people contemplate his paintings in the way that a child absorbs the world when it sees it for the first time. Let them forget about objects, let them cease to follow the interaction of the accessories, and above all let them renounce the quest for a meaning at all costs. He would like us to preserve the spontaneity of a child who is able to seize a frog without disgust, and not be surprised to see in his paintings coffins soaring in the air and blazing cathedrals with sensual mouths and windows for eyes.

"There is an old Chinese paradox, r, Beksinski says in an interview, "according to which we do not know if it is morning or evening when we wake. A far more probable theory is that it is in the evening that we wake, and during the day, when we are asleep, we are simply trying to understand an infinitesimal part of the nocturnal universe which is so vast and magnificent that it completely escapes the attention of our lowly minds, so obstinately intent on classifying and arranging everything. We remain gaping and spellbound like a child before an avalanche of incomprehensible details. And when we fall asleep, in our slumber off we go to work and build cities of stereotyped homes where we find ourselves living - or so it seems - in the morning, \$till fast asleep. We try to put some order into all these wonderful details and assign them systems of meaning so that our insufficiently lively minds can perceive them. Hence the literature we append to visions is all created with hindsight. Man is too expert at naming things, which is why he labours under the fond illusion that he has acquired the knowledge of all things. He looks at a cloud and says that it is condensed water vapour. He looks at a painting and says that it is a symbol of environmental pollution for in that painting fishes thrown out of the sea are lying on the beach. However we should as far as possible look at that painting and above all at the world in a more direct manner, as a Martian would look at a cow: with a fresh eye."

But we live in the 20th century which seems so rational to us, and we insist on seeing meaningful objects in the paintings of Beksinski; we want to see the answers to current problems.