

figures - their aggressiveness, their suffering, their erotic activity - gained an additional dimension through contact with the accessories of decomposing bodies, rottenness and wasting away.

In this metaphor Beksinski expressed, perhaps unconsciously, the most concise definition of life: birth is the beginning of death. For the rapture of the sexual act is very near to the final ghastly grin.

However, this explanation does not exhaust the hidden meanings of his drawings: their eroticism offered Beksinski a special chance to express his hidden dreams and to openly brand the psychological barriers of every man brought up in the Polish morality of the fifties, a morality which bordered on puritanism. The deformation of the figures, their "unreality" was no doubt meant to turn the attention of the spectator away from the painter himself and to prevent the identification of his anxieties and his obsessions with those of the main figures of his drawings. Their sometimes strongly marked grotesque elements were supposed to create an additional distance and to place the more shocking thoughts and gestures "in inverted commas".

The same functions probably devolved on that peeling of the skin, on the uncovering of the body's structure, on those ropes, spider webs, those limbs that embrace and wrap themselves around the silhouettes of men and women. Exposed in the foreground, they were to turn the attention away from the subjects they concealed behaviour which is quite natural in extreme or simply awkward situations. We all know such situations: someone makes an intimate confession in public - confused, he tries to cover his tracks by talking more loudly, pitching his voice higher, with a fixed, artificial smile.

Beksinski ascribes some other meanings to those dense works filled with veins, bones or spider webs: he claims that a flat, smooth surface simply irritates and bores him. This is supposed to be the cause of the drawings' density, of the laborious filling up of every bit of free space with something concrete, something visually attractive. What is more, he was to apply this principle to his entire creation, hence also to his painting. One day he admitted to one of his interlocutors during an interview: "... it is quite simply a need to paint something in every part of the picture, an impulse which is certainly common to many modern and past creative artists ... When I paint a nude I feel an overwhelming need to cover it either with writing, or with little veins, or various details which are pictorially interesting, among which you can also find that skin-drapery. When I paint a wall, I want the roughcast to peel off; when I paint an interior I want it to be covered with spider webs, I want a floor strewn with waste, rags, garbage and filth of all sorts. To my eyes a nice body, a smooth wall, a row of straight windows, a clean interior, a shining floor are and will remain the synonyms of BOREDOM."

This self-definition deserves to be reread. It gives the lie to, or at least tries to clear up a number of misunderstandings that have accumulated around more than one motif of this art of his, which has become smothered by the passions of interpretation. Motifs which could be thought intellectual or artistic, and which are at times the result of coincidence. More than one figure, more than one accessory is the fruit of an accident in the game which the artist plays to fill up the space in his paintings.

The year 1970 was the last year of exhibitions devoted exclusively to his drawings. In the following years Beksinski organised a few mixed exhibitions, composed of paintings and drawings, but henceforward a growing place devolved to paintings. His last drawings date from 1973-74. * They barely resemble the first ones which, until 1968, were of modest dimensions and executed in pen and ballpoint. Since 1968 they have been large, averaging 40 in X 28 in, and are executed in charcoal. Strictly speaking they are paintings in black and white - works which differ from painting neither in form nor in subject. The charcoal technique allowed him an extended use of soft chiaroscuro in a "natureëst" manner. The charcoal pictures of Beksinski constitute one of the highest achievements of modern drawing. They show his rare skill in means of expression, which few artists

*Beksinski began drawing again in 1988.