

Beksinski remains - and oh! how much so - a true son of his times.

First Of all it is his demand for an artistic expression free of any external constraints. In fact according to the traditional conception, art was ancillary to patrons. Works of art were commissioned and paid for by them, and they were supposed to glorify the object of their workmanship, if not themselves. A commissioned work was something natural which bore no pejorative connotation. Only as late as the 20th century did the problem of totally autonomous artistic creation reach such a scale. Of course the independent gesture of the artist has been known for a long time, but it was raised to the level of a consecrated principle only in the century that we live in. Beksinski refuses all commissions and even rejects simple suggestions: "For me it is enough to know that someone expects a picture from me and I find it impossible to work. As long as I am relaxed, as long as I feel that I can afford to spoil my painting, to stop halfway, to do what I want .. / I find this activity agreeable and I could spend the rest of my life daubing away at my paintings. When I work on a commission -painting becomes a real burden," he declares in another interview.

This attitude is worth underlining since it constitutes part of a larger, more important whole, in which egotism, autonomy and spiritual exploration are interwoven. These three principles concern practically everything which in any way relates to the painting of Beksinski: the artist's attitude towards the world, towards art, towards his own activity, as well as towards what he paints and how he paints.

In most cases the notion of isolation goes hand in hand with the choice of a road, of an existential and artistic program. Anchoretism has many different sources and manifests itself in diverse forms. The anchoretism of Beksinski is complete, since it has nothing to do with making a conscious choice or adopting a form of behaviour. It is a solitude in the midst of people and in the centre of art, a solitude which does not derive from any circumstances, but from the deepest structure of his soul. He is solitary in the middle of a great city, in his family, surrounded by the noises of the street and by the sounds of modern electro-acoustic devices. He is alone among his friends, among the buyers of his paintings and the journalists who ask him questions. And yet the person who knows only his legend would be surprised to meet the real man: this modern anchorite is not a voluntary hermit. His lifestyle, apparently very ordinary, is in no way a gesture of abandon and rejection, except perhaps for the meaningful fact that he keeps up no contact with the artistic milieu. For his solitude is of a totally different nature.

When in 1977 Beksinski left Sanok to settle in Warsaw it was generally felt as a break with his former voluntary seclusion. That is how, in full view of thousands of spectators accustomed to certain standards of behaviour, the "lone wolf of Sanok" entered the racket of a European metropolis. For those who willingly see in the behaviour of artists a tendency towards ritual, this change of residence meant treason. The social code of 'savoir-vivre' gladly presents the artist as a touchy individualist taking refuge in his own universe, inaccessible to others, far-off and provincial. The great tumultuous cities seem reserved for modern avant-garde creators who are as boisterous and superficial as the places where they live. Warsaw in the life of Beksinski meant for many people the end of an anchorite.

To think like that however was to misunderstand the essence of his solitude. A solitude which was by no means attached to the reality of a small town or of a metropolis: "The centre of the world is in the place where I stand," he says. In the mouth of another it would sound like a terribly presumptuous declaration. When Beksinski says it, it is only a statement of fact: wherever he goes his solitude goes with him. Settling in Warsaw changed nothing in his life or his creation. His artistic inversion proved a true attitude, unlike those people to whom every new circumstance in life inevitably constitutes a source of fresh inspiration. Beksinski's decision to live in the capital did not proceed from any ideological reasons, nor did he break off with his interior seclusion. It was a simple fact which resulted from