

BEKSINSKI-PAINTING BEYOND MEANING

by Piotr Dmochowski

These are not the ruins of Warsaw, neither did the artist live through the Auschwitz experience. It would be a mistake to associate Beksinski's painting with the apocalyptic vision of the turn of our century. No philosophical message, no morbid tales lie hidden in his paintings which, on the other hand, are full of an ineffable beauty springing from Beksinski's way with colour, composition and atmosphere. And that's all. The rest, like the circles, squares and rectangles used by other painters, are just accessories which some people choose to use as an allegorical illustration of their own torments.

"... when I paint my pictures (as I've so often stressed during our conversations) I paint them in the same way as one would an abstract composition. The objects depicted in them are only relatively important. Of course, I'm fully aware of their conventional meaning, long since petrified over the centuries: crucifixions, tombstones, a mother bending over a cradle. But I put them in rather as accessories to make the decor complete; this makes it possible for me to substitute other objects for them without detracting from the picture in any way. What is really important is the relationship between these objects, their form and the lines going to make them up, as well as the way they harmonize, not only with other shapes and lines, but also with the framework and proportions (length and width) of the picture as a whole.

So if I've begun by painting a figure carrying an unlit torch and then I change my mind and decide on a burning torch instead, I therefore have to make a change in the form of the trees on the horizon or the clouds in the sky. Or I might choose not to alter either of them and add another object in a suitable place so as to counterbalance the light coming from the torch. And if I take it into my head to replace the torch by a cane or a stick, this may well mean that I have to add a second figure or maybe a dog, or again I might modify the clothes that the person holding the stick is wearing. If, furthermore, I make a too detailed change in the clouds, it could so happen that I have to get rid of the stick and the torch -and eventually the figure itself-and end up by just keeping the dog. I've explained this countless times already. Obviously the painting has a 'central theme', but it's far from being as important as the term suggests. But the PRIME importance is the way that direction, line, tension, form and colour meld and complement each other. If, for example, one were to cut out part of the folds in a dress, or part of

the ocean waves (...already figuring in the picture...), this might not only lessen the painting's 'identifying' content (which could remain 'itself when the fragment in question were to be taken away). On the contrary, the whole composition would be totally destroyed. It's just as if one cut out some of the final notes or any other part of a symphony, leaving the rest of it incomprehensible, and in any case seriously mutilated." (Letter to Piotr Dmochowski, 2 June 1985.)

Anyone trying to 'read' Beksinski's work and seeking symbols or hidden meanings in them would be well advised to give up. Those who let themselves 'breathe it in', with no narrative to intervene, those who marvel at the sheer harmony of curve and colour, those who feel their hearts beat, moved by the pathos and grandeur of Beksinski's symphonically-constructed visions-they and only they will achieve real insight into the truth of his painting.

And how many of them are there? Just a handful, maybe. Others will still see only morbid details, horror, death and a message of anguish... perhaps their own. Until now, every attempt to persuade them otherwise has proved useless. Neither the master's own often-repeated statements nor the efforts of those close to him have had the slightest success.

However this painting is beyond meaning. Beksinski seeks only to express BEAUTY at its most immediate - beauty that has no need of narrative, for it springs straight from the painting, dazzling the eyes.

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