

BEKSINSKI BY HIMSELF (1987)

The older we grow, the more we lose the value of our own ideas. Along with these values, we also lose our desire to share them with others. So much so that most of the time, we discover that we think the same way anyhow. If in addition, our desires are identical, our ideas simply become a reproduction of a common schema. Making art or simply painting pictures is one of those miserable occupations that would probably have no significance of its own were it not for the efforts of tradition and cultural petrification to confer such significance on it. Who really believes in this importance, even when, under pressure from our traditions and our education, we pretend to believe in it? Whilst being already imbued with these traditions, what else can we do in life, knowing that the most elementary extrapolation indicates that, outside the area of our tamed, day-today madness, all we find are other, identical areas; even though when observed from afar, they would seem to promise us something that we don't already have? Thus, it's because I am obliged and forced to reveal these few 'observations' about my work that I do so, because I doubt their utility. As I doubt the utility of everything I do.

I never write down the subjects of my paintings. However, I do quite a few sketches. Nevertheless, these sketches are only used for seizing the shapes and arranging them on the surface of the painting. From a semantic point of view, I couldn't say what is "represented" in these sketches. On the other hand, I know "how" it should be represented, and often what the overall atmosphere should be like. I try to stay close to my original idea when painting. But I don't do it come what may. I consider the process of a creation as the continuation of the work on a shape, from just an outline. Sometimes I progress in my work, sometimes I don't. But it is impossible for me to specify why, during a given period (or simply at one precise moment), I am satisfied with my work, and at another, not at all. Clearly, there is no rational explanation for this. Generally speaking, I work best when I'm not thinking about what I'm doing or how I should do it, but when I'm thinking about something else or just listening to music. Then the picture comes on its own, like a doodle made during a boring lecture.

I think that the content of my paintings is too easily interpreted. It is true that I'm not master of the unconsciousness that is in me, that only others can see. I myself can feel an inexplicable attraction or repulsion for other people's paintings, which cannot be explained by either the painted scenes or their artistic quality. I should therefore humbly admit that in my

own paintings there is probably something attractive and something repulsive that I am unable to grasp. However, there is also the picture that I have consciously planned in a certain way, and also what is visible for me. In fact, without dramatising, I myself change (whilst treating the same subjects for many years) my attitude as regards my paintings and what they should signify. I differentiate, relatively distinctly, between the many contradictory tendencies in my paintings, one of these tendencies being my taste for an element of mockery, particularly dominant in the seventies, still obvious today, though to a lesser extent. I am hurt when the pictures painted under this influence are literally interpreted as "symbolic" pictures. I am hurt by this because nobody seems to realise the distance I put between myself and the subject, and how I proceed in a very obvious factitious way. Therefore, when the essence of the subject shouldn't be "literal" and is understood "literally", the painting begins to disturb because of its pathetic aspect, which was not deliberately programmed. At least, that's the way that I should imagine the viewer's reaction. My second tendency is to treat the subject in a "serious" way. I can distinguish the paintings that I voluntarily painted in a "serious" manner and those voluntarily painted in a "factitious", "off-side" manner, very easily. Maybe I'm asking too much from the viewer when I hope that he too will make this distinction.

Lastly, there is also a "formal" tendency in my paintings. In the latter, the objects represented are only a pretext for multiple variations on form. In fact, when I reached the age of creative maturity, the abstract element was dominant in art. Therefore, I will always be an abstract artist up to a certain extent, and so, very often, the person, the animal or the objects I represent are for me merely themes for variations on the same subject. In this case, the themes are, if not the unique reason, sufficient reason to work on the subject. These themes can go far. But they should stop where, for an ordinary spectator, the link between the painting and its subject disappears, that is to say when the latter begins to doubt if it's about a human being, a dog, a tree or a table. It's possible that in the pictures painted under this influence, an unintended (but also not systematically eliminated) atmosphere or expression can incidentally occur. Generally speaking though, this is not the point.

So here are the three principal tendencies that have dominated my paintings in a constant and unvaried way over the past years. As I have already said above, they inter-penetrate through time, because I'm used to changing or mixing these tendencies from one picture to another, or even in the same painting. However, any eventual valid analysis of this should relate to one particular painting. If I wanted to make myself clear, I should probably stamp my paintings with their corresponding

tendencies, i.e. by the use of the letters A, B, C, A + B etc.

On the "formal" level, I'm permanently swaying between the "Gothic" and "Baroque" forms of expression. I rarely mix them in a single painting. The "serious" subjects are treated more so by the "Gothic" form, and the "mocking" subjects by the "Baroque" form.

The fact that I'm rather traditionalist doesn't make me a propagator of traditionalism. It's more a question of choices and limits that I have imposed on myself, because I can only verify the result of my own action in the light of these limits that I have voluntarily accepted. The construction of a universe for my own use, along with the degree of perfection that I can attain, is what interests me. This is where my self-imposed limits come from and this is what they are for. The criteria of perfection disappear when no limits are laid down. As everything is the same as everything else when there are no criteria of perfection. Of course, "objectively" speaking, everything, in any case, is the same as everything else. But I consider the exercise of art as a kind of deceit that allows you to move within a measurable space. A voluntarily limited space, in which an element apparently of no significance can become significant and can conjure up some kind of a self-sufficient illusion. In other words, "vanitas vanitatum", i.e. the limits I set myself act as blinkers.

The fact that for me these limitations are nearer to traditional painting than to extra-pictorial experimentation results from my disbelief that anything essential changes just because the form changes. The psychic mechanism always remains the same.

When I ask myself the question as to what painters have influenced me, I discover many names and tendencies. However, I'm often told that these influences are imperceptible in my paintings. On the other hand, it would appear that altogether other influences are present; this, though, I cannot accept. In general, I have been influenced by excellent painters who have never stirred up either my jealousy or my admiration, because technically speaking, I am as efficient as they are. Naturally, my understanding of art and the history of art, as well as my knowledge of the names of contemporary artists, are very fragmentary. I never felt the need of a systematic study of the history of art. Plus the fact that my memory is far from brilliant. Nevertheless, I could draw up a list of names of those who have certainly influenced me, like Picasso, Moore, Matta, Bacon, Brzozowski and some earlier painters like Vermeer, Rembrandt, Turner, Klimt. I have also been influenced by "mannerism" and the "secession" in

general, as by the landscape painters of the 19th century. On the contrary, I most certainly have not been influenced by Bosch or Dali or Linke, even though these three names are often the ones quoted in conversations about my artistic roots. Lastly, there are those whose names are enough to make me shudder, like Boucher, David, Doesburg, Hartung...

Somebody once asked me why I don't teach in an art school. The easiest answer would be to say that I have never been asked to do so. However, this would just be dodging the issue, because even if I had been asked, I would have undoubtedly refused. To teach, you must firstly believe in the usefulness of this profession. This is not my case. You must also believe that you possess something worth teaching. I would think that I'm a man without much faith. In any case, I don't think that I possess that know-how. I have never believed and I still don't believe in anything anyway. The only knowledge that I have and that I could give to others is full of doubts. I'm overflowing with doubts. Is it reasonable to transmit only doubts? Every time I contemplate a conscious line of constructive thought, it automatically encounters its antithesis; after which there is nothing else. Instead of a dialectic movement that could progress, I rediscover in myself a situation that chess players qualify as "stale-mate". This kind of perpetual "Hamletism" doesn't only apply to my artistic preoccupations, but concerns absolutely everything. That's why my pictures look very much like works mass-produced by some of Dr. Jung's patients who have been 'cured'.

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