

PHANTASMS

Whenever Zdzisław Beksiński and his stunning artwork turns up in my mind, I start to feel the impending sense of melancholy overwhelm me to the bones. Is it because of his life in general? Is it the tragic death of both him and his son? Or is it the well-known sense of chasing after a fleeting mare that cannot be fully grasped or comprehended? It is, possibly, all of the above.

Beksiński's art astounds me but not in the way it has usually been presented to the public for many years, even before his tragic death. What I see in his work is the attempt at immortalizing the real, the symbolic real to which no one has access to. It is as if Beksiński was aware of something we all are simply blind to (or, perhaps, we choose to stay blind). For me, the materiality of his phantasms, this focus on the fabric of life based on real craftsmanship, proves to be almost an evidence of chasing after the unspoken; trying to encapsulate the realness of that universe within the bounds of steel, stone, and web. What seems like an impossible task to us all, for Beksiński was a mission, a vision that needed to be materialized. In my mind, it is as if he was sharing gospel from an over-world, from a beyond-us, or straight from lovecraftian cosmic horror.

My most beloved painting of Beksiński is the pink-blue vision of a creature pushed against the floating cloth that emphasizes the being's body parts and features. The creature's hand comes in contact with many other hands of unknown personage. The scene screams "panic" to me, or "the calm before the storm". Maybe it is a disjuncture between a child and its family. The possibilities are truly endless and, thanks to the master, they stay endless, unnamed, and open. Every painting is interpreted by millions and every single interpretation is quite right, because that is what Beksiński has intended. Beksiński himself was never quite sure why he was creating whatever he was creating, whether it was a sculpture, a photograph, a sketch, or a painting; he simply felt the urge to craft specific aspects. And he never gave those aspects names.

In my opinion, the lack of titles is a pure blessing, especially to the audience. Some observers might find the notion incomplete and/or based on uncertainty of the author, but for some it is ingenious and freeing. The importance of interpretation seems to be often lost in amidst the overcomplicated symbolism of the fantastic where authors and creators tend to explain their point of view over and over in order to be seen, heard, and begging to be understood. Beksiński never begged for that.

The gallery of Zdzisław Beksiński in Kraków seems to collaborate with that idea. The walls are painted plain to not turn the attention away from the mastery of the artist; the artwork is stacked close together, so the audience keeps its focus on the "road" that is made out of the framed windows to the real: the art. When the lights go out and the portrayals are illuminated, the guests are entrapped within the corridors, persuaded to come closer and encouraged to leap through the windows straight into Beksiński's "motherland". The gallery's installation almost screams to the audience, conveying: "This is the real world. The outside doesn't exist," and this action taken by the originators of the exhibition helps the audience not only partake in the uncanny vision but, somehow, makes the observer wonder whether they can actually

(truly) belong with that world. The darkened, charmed space, with its split from the rest of the Earth, lets the guests comfortably ask themselves what is their place in universum, who are they truly, and what is exactly located within their unconscious that may be responding to the relentless phantasms.

Can parts of the soul freely celebrate sadomasochism, the web of a human body, the cracking walls of horrified faces, or the thin structures of broken crucifixes and flying crows?

I do think so myself.

And I believe Zdzisław Beksiński thought the same.