

Leszek Bartkiewicz's painting – a balance of opposites

Leszek Bartkiewicz is an artist whose works are notably distinct among the Lodz painters' circle. He does not follow fashionable trends and movements, but consistently realizes his own vision of art.

His work is an interplay of spontaneity and order. Although expression is the main purpose of the paintings, space is constructed by clear geometrical divisions. The artist draws from various, often contrary conventions of the 20th century art. He combines the inspiration with geometrical art manifest in clear divisions of the paintings' structure with the techniques of dripping and hot abstraction relying on spontaneity and randomness. What is characteristic, neither of the tendencies dominates Bartkiewicz's paintings. The formula of *action painting* has its precisely defined place, its „chaoticness“ does not destroy the clear geometrical structure of the paintings. The artist skilfully utilises the developments of modernist painting, which submit to his concept of art.

Combining contrary conventions, treating art history as a source of ready formulas is one of the strategies characteristic of postmodern painters. Although Bartkiewicz's paintings are constructed in a similar way, they are clearly different. The artist does not create „cultural junk“ which is so characteristic of this movement, he does not cross the boundary between „high“ and „low“ art. This is because he is not interested in „consuming“ formulas of imagery in his painting, but rather in using them fully consciously within his own vision of painting.

Texture is important in his paintings – smooth, fleshy, rough, sometimes enriched with pieces of canvas, which resembles matter painting. Apart from texture, colour also plays an important role in constructing the paintings. In the early works its role is limited; with white dominating, the compositions are close to drawings. Later works are full of colour nuances, it is colour that constructs the space in them.

Bartkiewicz's art is an interplay between painting conventions, between order and chaos, between abstract and figurative art. In each painting there is a human figure – a humanoid being of unspecified identity, whose form is halfway between caricature and grotesque. It is, as Krzysztof Jurecki notices, a synthesis of inspiration by the works of Lebenstein, Wojtkiewicz and Toulouse-Lautrec. The human form sometimes grows organically into the painting (*Drawn Human I, Drawn Human II, Drawn Human XVII*), sometimes its shape outlined with a black contour contrasts with the abstract background and overrides its internal divisions (*Drawn Figure No.17, Drawn Figure No.19, Drawn Figure No.20, Drawn Figure No.21*). The figures seem to take part in a spectacle, tell a story. What story it is, the artist leaves the viewer free to decide, not giving clues or hinting at the proper interpretation. The starting point for work on a painting is always the reality. It does not appear directly in Bartkiewicz's paintings. Transformed by the artist's sensitivity and knowledge, translated into the language of painting, it may be only hinted at with a line, a symbol resembling e.g. the Sun. It is always subordinate to the main purpose of the painting, which is expression.

Bartkiewicz's paintings are intriguing, surprising, they fascinate with colour, texture and unique symmetry – a balance of opposites. In the individual cycles, the main emphasis slightly changes. The latest works, unlike earlier ones, are dark, but upon closer examination they reveal their richness of colour. They talk of the human, his entanglement in the world and the surrounding reality, the limits of his own possibilities and psyche. In contrast to many contemporary artists Bartkiewicz does not place the protagonists of his paintings in the present moment, he does not confront them with the world of today. He creates a panchronic portrait of the human, his hopes, fears and expectations.