

Starowieyski, posters : [exhibition], the Museum of Modern Art, New York, April 11-June 4, 1985 [i.e. 1985]

Author

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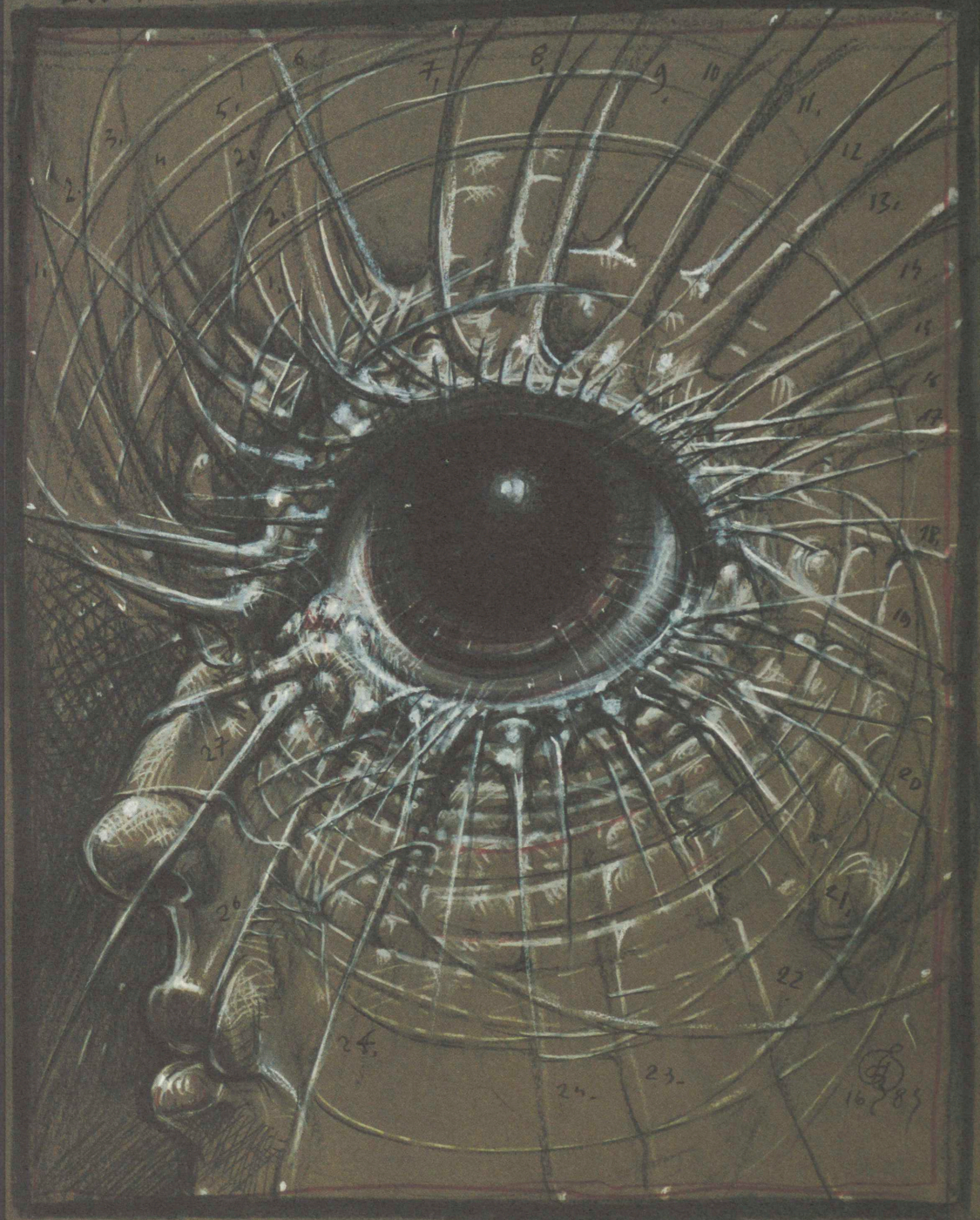
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from our founding in 1929 to the present—is
available online. It includes exhibition catalogues,
primary documents, installation views, and an
index of participating artists.

STAROWIEYSKI

POSTERS

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

NEW YORK APRIL 11 - JUNE 4 1985



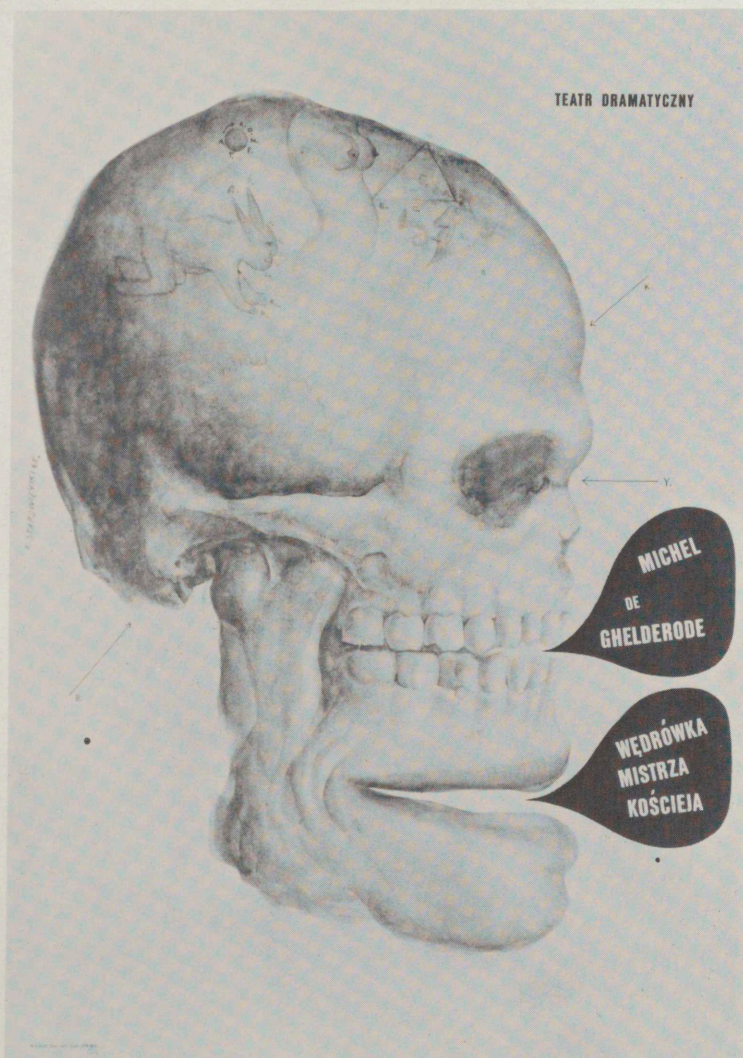
Introduction

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Franciszek Starowieyski (born 1930) is today one of the most interesting artists in Poland. Unlike artists of comparable stature in the West, Starowieyski is known for his posters. This art form is so important in Poland that there is a museum devoted exclusively to posters in Warsaw. Cultural events—theatre, film, music, and the circus—account for the majority of posters produced, and both the graphic artist and the fine artist belong to the same professional association.

When Starowieyski began his career in 1955, the dominant socialist-realist style was in decline. By the early sixties Poland's gentle and good-humored circus posters were beginning to be noticed in the outside world, but of the many amusing posters done for the circus Starowieyski contributed only one. He is, for the most part, occupied with making posters that reflect the darker side of life.

Despite the variety of films and plays for which they were commis-



1 Wędrowka Mistrza Kościeja
(Wandering Mister Kosciej)
1965

sioned, Starowieyski's posters exhibit a singularity of theme. Their unity stems from a preoccupation with monstrosity and from a style owing its main features to Renaissance drawing. His renditions of the grotesque are all the more disconcerting in view of the skill and care with which they are executed.

In the art of our day science rivals politics and religion in inspiring images of suffering and torture. Even life-sustaining practices are sometimes bizarre: medical science now transplants vital organs, like interchangeable parts, from one individual to another, and bionic machines may replace living tissue altogether.

Starowieyski's distortions and reconstructions are not without a certain grim humor. The male and female figures in "Don Giovanni" (page 10) and "Wojna Chlopska" (page 11) maintain their composure through incredible transformations. Lest we be reassured by their endurance through difficulty,

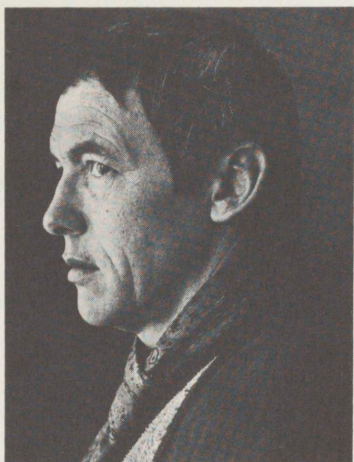
imagine the offspring they would produce: the fetus in "Biale Malzenstwo" (page 12) will not evolve into something better.

Over the years Starowieyski's images have become denser, rewarding the viewer who takes the time to study them, with details more intricate than we normally think appropriate for posters. He avoids mechanical type and makes good use of lettering of his own workmanship, painting it into the composition so that it often enhances the central theme while remaining separate from it.

Since the 1970s, Starowieyski has initiated the curious practice of predating his work by 300 years. In this way he entertains the convenient fiction that he is viewing the 20th century from a 17th-century vantage point. His retreat into the past is not entirely escapist, for he has chosen a time when the seeds of the present are recognizable. Starowieyski's work measures the distortions in our progress.

Robert Coates

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I WORK IN A VERY CHAOTIC WAY.* Most of my illustrations, posters and theatrical settings are conceived in the form of sketches which I make on the pages of an ordinary school drawing pad. They are all there, one design after another, interspersed sometimes with a calligraphic ornament, or a new type of signature, or calculations con-

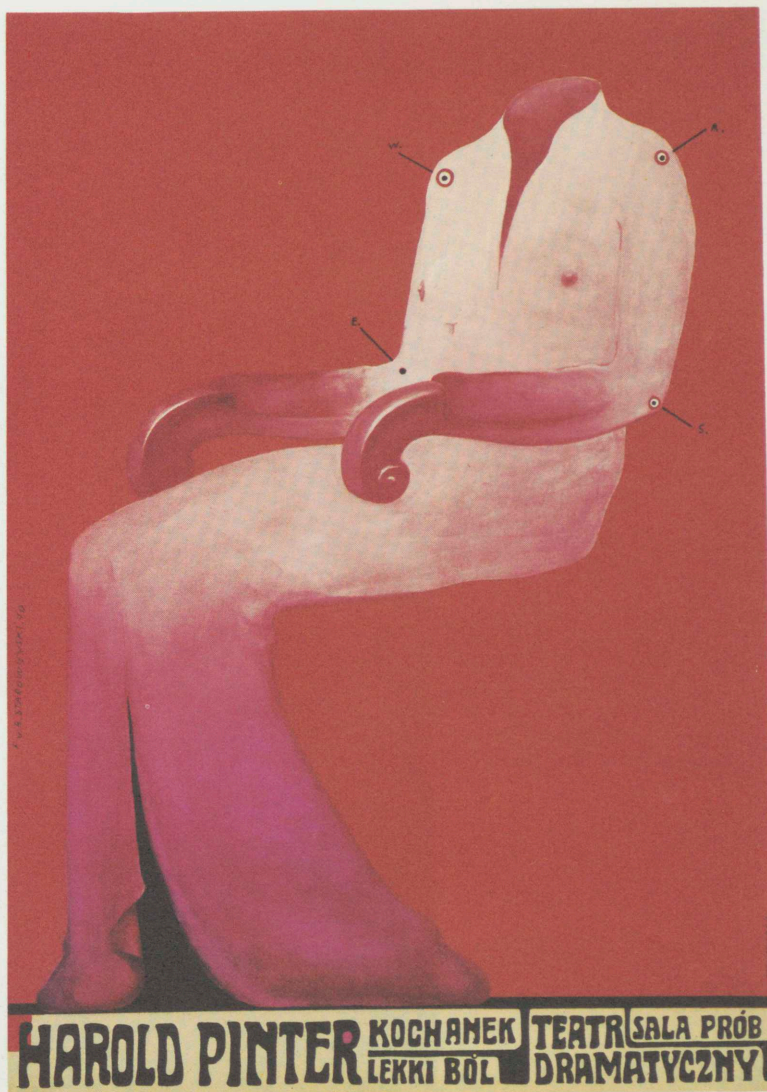
cerning the clock cogs and designs of its hands, or the ideogram of an objet d'art of which I dream and the summing up of my income showing whether I can afford it. In the middle of all this there may be a design of Eve, either naked or tied with ropes. These pages I value most of all that I do, since here is everything that comes straight from my heart unhampered by any technical necessities or the demands of my customers. However, I shall now try to define the general scheme of my working process.

When I start working on a poster, I first make a list of certain objects, feelings, moods, etc., concerning the given play or film. It is a difficult task since I must select them as if I were preparing a program for a computer. After having collected all the necessary information I go to sleep. Next day I first try to make separate designs of particular objects, symbols or signs. Then I set them all together, tossing away the things which do not appeal to me because of their vividness. I am not afraid of hackneyed symbols or elements, because one can always present them in a fresh manner by means of a new arrangement or design. Most often, after a few days of such work, I cast off everything and, knowing the subject matter fairly well, I make a completely new design as dictated by my feelings and

*"About himself" reprinted from *Projekt* #1/1972

mood. When I work on stage designs, I do not necessarily read the script; I even prefer to have been told the contents. But when I make the poster to a play, I read the script very carefully, often several times. My working process is long; it usually takes me about two weeks. However, regardless how much effort I put into it, I still do the most work on the very

5 Harold Pinter/
Kochanek Lekki Ból
(The Loved One)
1970



last night before the appointed time, often working until morning or even until the time I must hand in the completed work. Of course, it is not imperative to work that way. I think that it would be different if I could receive payment for my work immediately after delivering it (this is no joke about money; my point is that the anonymity of the payment which I get

after the lapse of several weeks does not encourage me to a more efficient way of working).

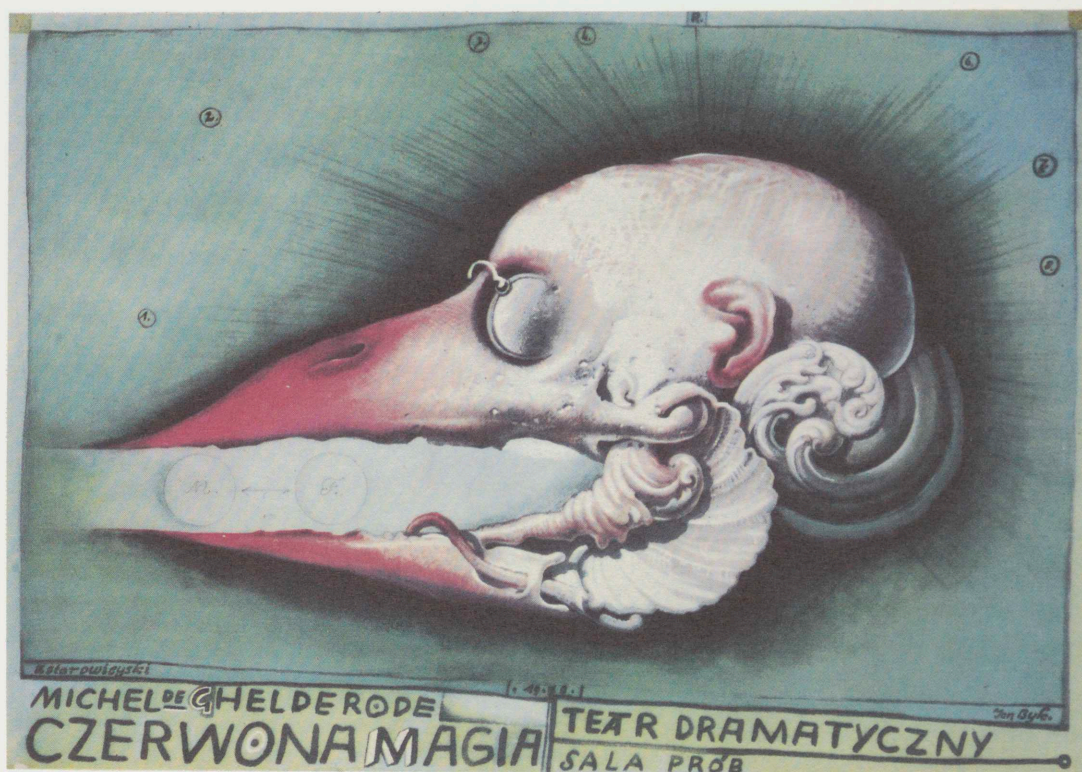
The process which I have just described illustrates my method of specifying the subject with which I deal. Apart from that I must look for inspiration. This is a continuous process which develops in the following three directions:



6 Mademoiselle
1970

1. I search for inspiration in nature—the human body, fallen leaves, bones, draperies, clouds, hair, damp patches, cracks in a surface, half-burnt beams, insects, the earth in dry weather, light and shade effects, etc.
2. One can interpret the works of others in a new way, discovering things which were not

intended by the artists. For example, if a 19th-century clerk in black demonstrates the interior of a brand new safe to a lady in lace, his act seems very mysterious. The same is true of a design depicting the killing of a bull by means of a special barbed axe, and supplied with a lot of intricate footnotes and subtitles. Or let us take the design by a Cracow



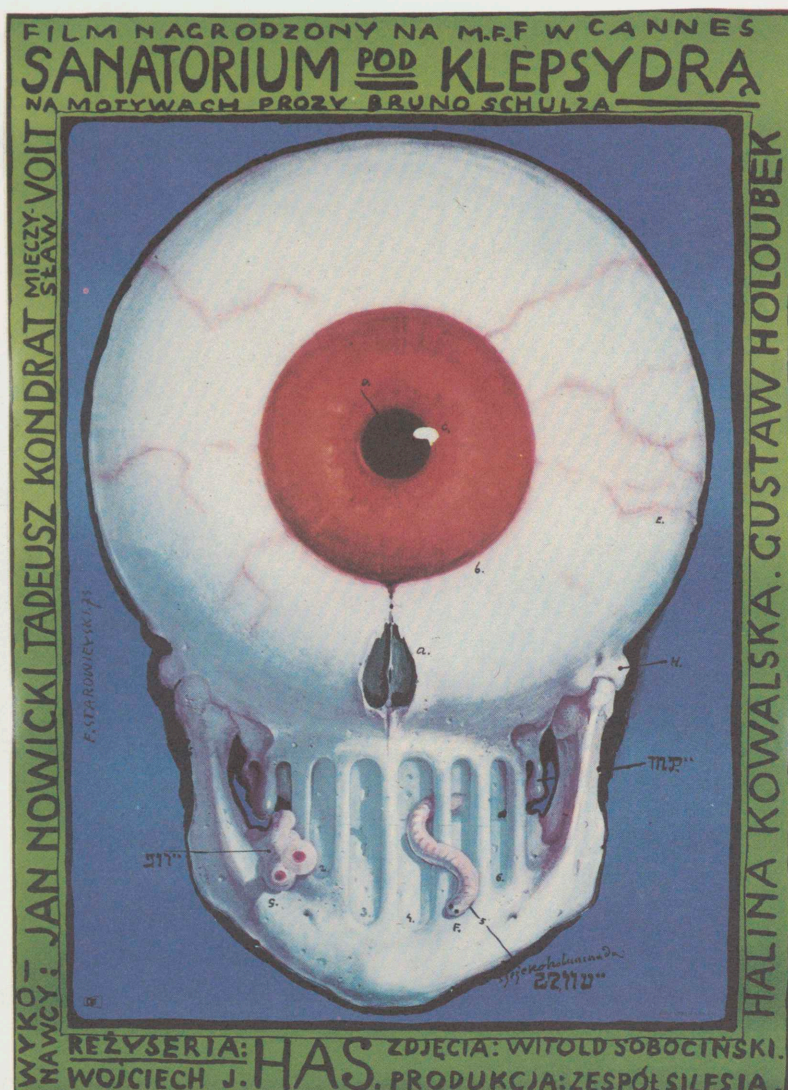
8 Czerwona Magia
(Red Magic)
1971

monk from the time of the Counter Reformation who tried to explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity by the picture of an elephant. And what about the pathos of the figure of a man in the 18th-century textbook on anatomy who demonstrates his intestines with the glee of an exhibitionist? I appreciate the forgotten abilities of the human hand like calligraphy, xylography, painting with a sparry brush, or siderography. And how interesting is the difference between graphic symbols and painting in various epochs! In the pile of my

schemes and notes I have a piece of paper on which I have been sketching human mouths and eyes from several centuries. These symbols have changed every quarter of a century with the changes in schools of art.

3. I think that the most important thing in art is what comes directly from the artist's soul—

9 Sanatorium Pod Klepsydra
(Sanatorium Under the
Sign of the Hourglass)
1973



all those elusive images and dreams which one would like to impart somehow to others (I purposely use such terms as “soul” or “inspiration” though they are no longer used in the official language of art critics). However, it is impossible to impart everything. It is much if of all those images there remains a shadow or a direction, or a tendency. But one should

15

11



11

11

from my wife's stage design sketches. Other designs I make either on scraps of coated paper which I get from printers, or on sheets of a very beautiful paper produced in Jeziorna which I won from a chance acquaintance—an artist I met at the ZPAP Club (of the Polish Association of Art). I use Faber dry gouaches in large pellets. I like to wash my drawings. I

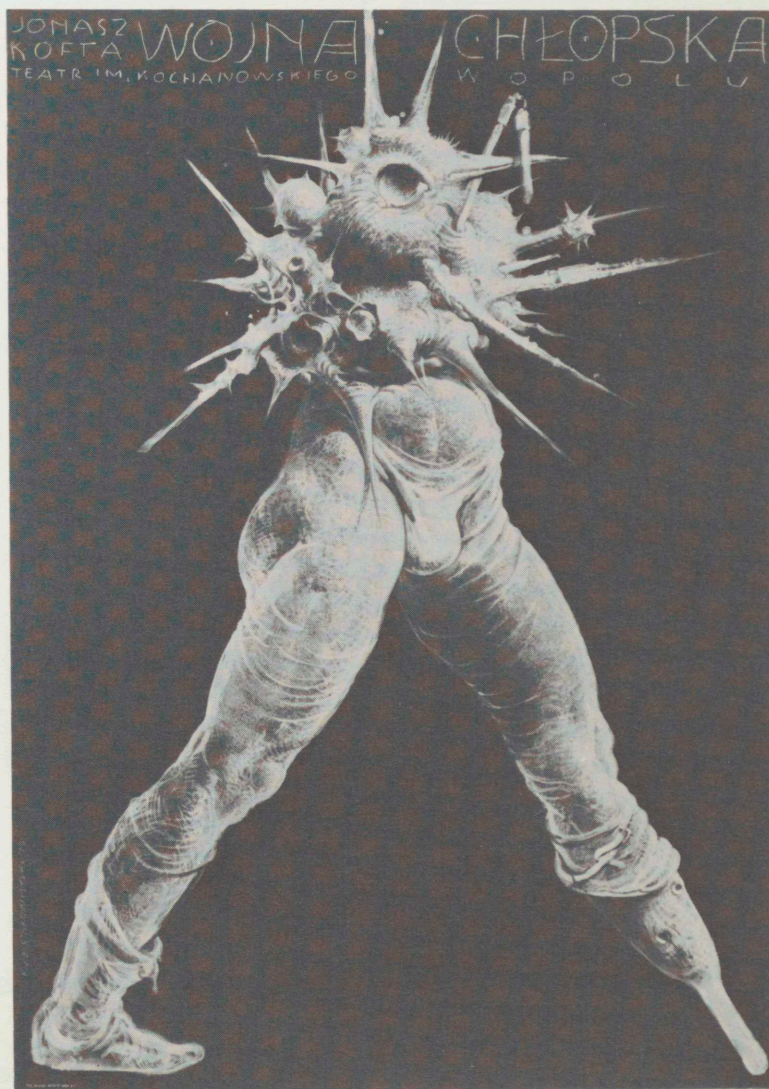
23 Don Giovanni
1976



seldom make several "final" versions of my work. Instead, I work for a long time on improving one version. My working desk must be prepared very carefully. Here are the objects which should be there: a piece of paper, the India ink placed on the 17th-century sun-shaped support of pure gold, some water in the 16th-century tin tankard, a shad-

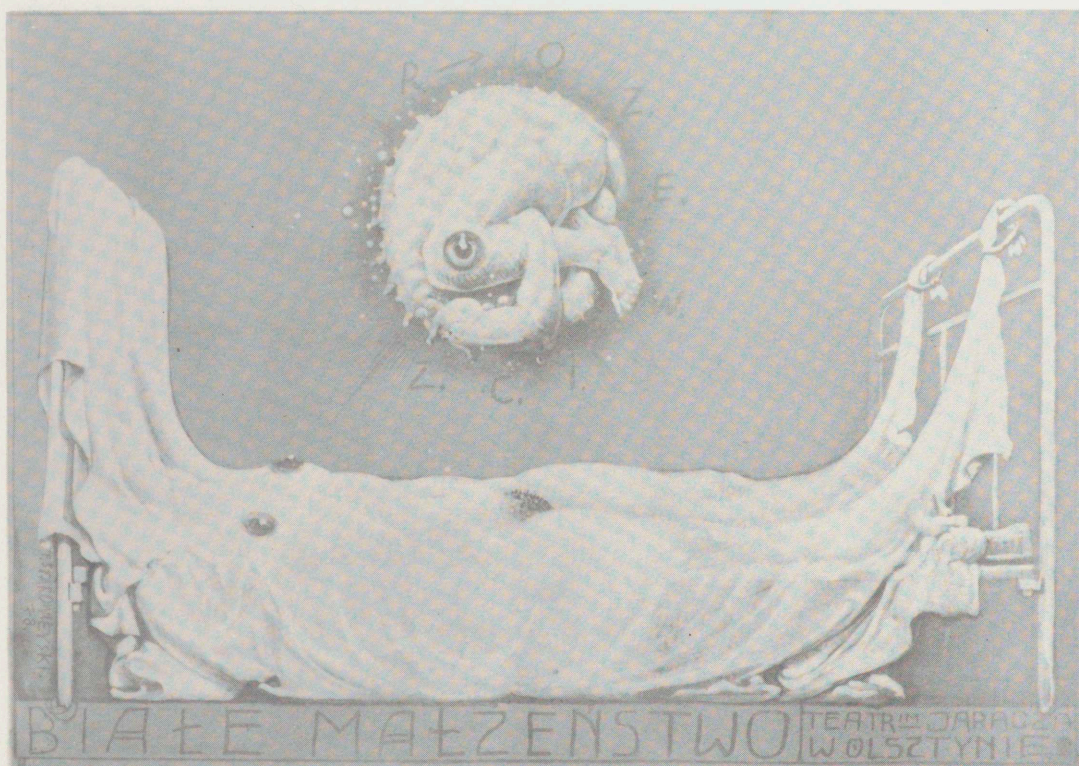
owless technical lamp, the 18th-century table clock striking the hours, several large old Sassanian coins which I got recently, and a pre-war box of matches. I deeply admire the past. In my opinion the aptitude of contemporary man for the fine arts is dying out and it is the task of the avant-garde to preserve as much as possible from the past. I think that we

24 Wojna Chłopska
(The War of the Peasants)
1979



have destroyed too much and begun too much. Over the past 90 years there was approximately one new predominant style in every decade. We have become too emancipated over that time. We have liberated everybody: workers, women, peasants, and colonial people. We enjoy sexual freedom and we are free from the power of religion; the

youngsters even try to get rid of all conventions. New consumers of art are full of good will, but they get lost in the intricacies of modern styles. That is why I look back to the past, admiring the magnificent gesture of Christ designed by Michelangelo, the divine elegance of figures created by El Greco, the absolute perfection of drawings by Meissonier, the



17 Białe Malzenstwo
(The White Wedding)
1978

incredible mastery of hand of the calligrapher Schwendner, the complicated geometric calculations done by a Madrid dressmaker or by an illiterate carpenter who by means of an ordinary chisel managed to carve faultless ornaments on a Baroque cupboard.

I enjoy my work, I do not feel at a disadvantage while comparing my own imagination with that of Bosch, Arcimboldo or Klinger. But I am struck with dismay and I see my deficiency when I put one of my most refined works, my seemingly masterly

display, beside the work of an anonymous engraver, or the intestines of a basilisk in an old atlas, or the popular portrait of a Hessian landlord. I feel then, with a pang of sadness, that I shall never be a real master.

27 Krzysztof Gieraltowski/
Polen Portraits
(Polish Portraits
by Krzysztof Gieraltowski)
1983



Checklist to the Exhibition

Posters are in the collection of
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, unless otherwise noted.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 1 Wedrowka Mistrza Koscieja
(Wandering Mister Kosciej)
1965
Theatre poster
Collection Richard Koszarski | 10 Iluminacja
(Illumination)
1973
Film poster
Gift of Peter Katz | 20 Trzema Krzyzykami
(The Three Crosses)
1978
Theatre poster
Collection Eva Pape |
| 2 Tragiczne Polowanie
(The Tragic Hunt)
1967
Film poster
Collection Richard Koszarski | 11 Mloda Polska & Boy
(Young Poland and Boy
[Boy Zielinski])
1973
Exhibition poster
Collection Eva Pape | 21 Trzema Krzyzykami
(The Three Crosses)
1979
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist |
| 3 Panna Mloda w Zalobie
(The Bride Wore Black)
1969
Film poster
Gift of the artist | 12 Taniec Smierci
(The Dance of Death)
1974
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist | 22 Nightmares
1979
Film poster
Gift of the artist |
| 4 Lokis
(Lokis, the Journal of
Professor Wittenbach)
1970
Film poster
Gift of the artist | 13 Kraksa
1974
Film poster
Gift of the artist | 23 Don Giovanni
1976
Opera poster
Gift of the artist |
| 5 Harold Pinter/
Kochanek Lekki Bol
(The Loved One)
1970
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist | 14 Operetka
(Operetta)
1977
Theatre poster
Collection Richard Koszarski | 24 Wojna Chlopska
(The War of the Peasants)
1979
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist |
| 6 Mademoiselle
1970
Film poster
Gift of the artist | 15 Bunuel: Dyskretny Urok Burzazji
(The Discreet Charm of
the Bourgeoisie)
1978
Film poster
Gift of the artist | 25 Lulu
1979
Opera poster
Gift of the artist |
| 7 Nie Do Obrony
(Inadmissible Evidence)
1970
Film poster
Collection Richard Koszarski | 16 Anatomia Czasu
(Anatomy of Time)
1978
Exhibition poster
Gift of the artist | 26 Zdziczenie Obyczajow
Posmiertnych
(Posthumous Customs Gone
Amok)
1983
Theatre poster
Purchase |
| 8 Czerwona Magia
(Red Magic)
1971
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist | 17 Biale Malzenstwo
(The White Wedding)
1978
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist | 27 Krzysztof Gieraltowski/
Polen Portrats
(Polish Portraits
by Krzysztof Gieraltowski)
1983
Exhibition poster
Gift of the artist |
| 9 Sanatorium Pod Klepsydra
(Sanatorium under the
Sign of the Hourglass)
1973
Film poster
Gift of the artist | 18 Biale Malzenstwo
(The White Wedding)
1978
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist | 28 Don Juan
1983
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist |
| | 19 Oni
(Them)
1978
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist | 29 Mickiewicz Dziady
(Forefathers Eve)
1984
Theatre poster
Gift of the artist |

Credits

30 Starowieyski Posters
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York
1985
Exhibition posters

Film on view in the
Edward John Noble Education
Center during the exhibition:
Bykowi chwala (Glory to the Bull)
Script and direction: Andrzej
Papuzinski
Photography: Stanislaw Sliskowski
Production: The Education Film
Studios in Lodz 1971

Lenders to the exhibition:
Richard Koszarski
Eva Pape

Special thanks to:
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Titles translated by:
Elizabeth Koszarski

Cover poster photographed by:
Wieslaw Stasiak

All other poster photography by:
James Welling

Photograph of Starowieyski by:
Krzysztof Gieraltowski

Shown on front cover:
30 Starowieyski Posters
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York
1985

Shown on back cover:
28 Don Juan
1983

