

Fine visual
theatre
from Poland:

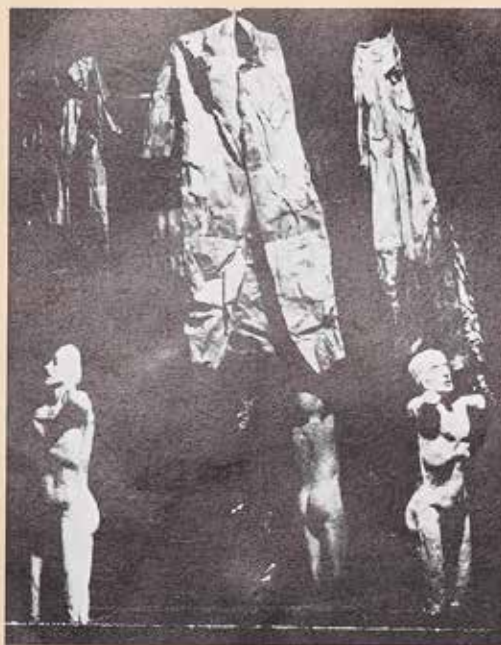
The word may lie, but the emotions never

One sensation at the 3rd Puppet Theatre Festival in Vaasa in June was the first visit to Finland of Poland's *Scena Plastyczna* (Visual Arts Studio, Lublin).

Their performance of *Herbario* was a completely new kind of theatre of light, space and sound whose only equivalent in Western art might be found in 'performance art'. The Poles, however, had worked their performance into such an intensive and precisely tuned whole that certainly this writer has never been fortunate enough to see the like. (On the other hand, critic Jukka Kajava referred, in writing of Vaasa Summer in the daily *Helsingin Sanomat*, to the huge performances put on by the American Robert Wilson, saying, "Herbario was a kind of poor-man's Wilson, but no lesser in depth for all that.")

At Vaasa Summer, at least, *Scena Plastyczna's* highly polished work so overwhelmed the audience that at the end of the first performance they held their breath for eight minutes, gazing in total silence at the final scene, a tattered landscape of lost souls, before bursting into thunderous applause.

The guiding spirit of *Scena Plastyczna* is director and script-writer Leszek Madzik. He energetically denies the influence of any Western model, from Wilson to 'performance art'. He says he is not even interested in such



things, as he wants to produce visual theatre entirely on his own terms. "I want to share my own feelings with others," he says. There are no visual references or borrowed ideas in Madzik's theatre (something he seems actually to fear), but

neither are there any words. "There are moments in human life when the word is too limited an instrument of expression. The word may lie, but the emotions never." *Herbario* takes place in a kind of timeless landscape of

the mind, achieved using lights and white fabrics. As the lighting changes the dimensions are also rapidly shifted and altered. The human actor and the puppet are interlaced, the scales of the figures changing from natural to gigantic.

Archetypes

In the drama, the forces of life and death fight in a kind of metaphysical space and time. Love, passion and violence are interwoven into themes of fear, death and redemption. The director handles his visions with fine instinct. The rhythms of image, sound and movement are precisely balanced.

The final scene was charged to the utmost. Tattered puppets fall from the sky to the sound of shots. A graveyard of the dead and lost souls? A picture of the world under the threat of nuclear war? The interpretation is left to you. Nobody thinks for you in this theatre, which releases the audience from the domination of words.

Director Leszek Madzik does not aim to amuse or delight. He wants to give people back their own emotions, these archetypal visions whose roots go far back into the mists of human history.

When I asked Leszek Madzik why there is so much death in Polish theatre, he replied, "That's true. Since 1969 we have done altogether 11 productions and they all involve death. I want to show life from the perspective of death."

Is it this perspective that gives Madzik's theatre its enormous depth and many dimensions? It seems Madzik's wordless visions take the viewer back to some forgotten basic questions. His productions seek a way to the other side of consciousness, to some other shore.

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