

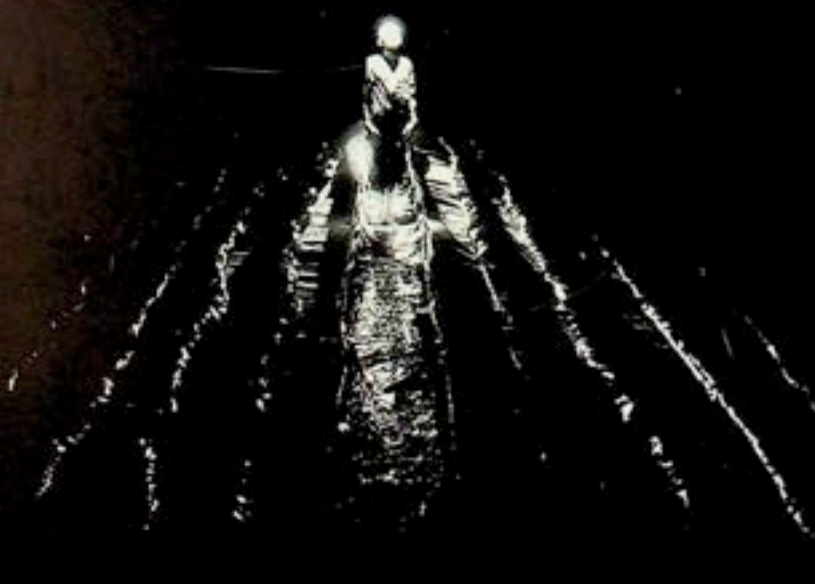
7th INTERNATIONAL ART TRIENNALE

EXHIBITION

LESZEK MAZIK AND HIS THEATRE

FROM THE DARK

BARRACKS No. 56



Majdanek State Museum in Lublin

MAJDANEK 2004



Leszek Mądzik is a famous Polish scenographer, photographer, artist, the founder of the Scena Plastyczna KUL theatre, the creator of its seventeen author's performances, author of numerous stage designs in theatres of Poland, Portugal, France and Germany, lecturer at numerous fine art schools, participant of dozens of festivals on six continents, and the laureate of many of them. He is a creator of "visual" theatre.

Since the very beginning, Mądzik has opted for a theatre devoid of words and stories. According to him, the reason for silence in his performances is a deep conviction that there exist spheres of human reality which do not succumb to the spoken word. In talking about them, we constantly mutilate and distort them. Their real depth and truth, however, can be rendered when the suitable means of artistic expression are applied.

Mądzik tries to articulate this unpronounceable human reality by means of light, rhythm and mood as well as of sequences of pictures (scenes) and music effects. For what is most painstakingly hidden deepest with us - the ultimate passions and existential states - never fully reach the consciousness and can never be rationally comprehended. "Love, faith, sacredness, terror, the feeling of finites, death - that is what fills the space of these performances" - wrote Mądzik when he was forced to write an "authors" account of his own creativity. In his "cosmic" theatre, the Lublin artist enlivens and rehabilitates archetypes buried in oblivion, he gives spectators a renewed opportunity for a pre-rational perception of the world. The eerie, fragile universe of his performances is created by shadows and movements of elaborate artistic form subdued to the rhythm marked by music. The spectator remains "alone in the crowd", since darkness separates him from the other spectators as well as from the stage. With his imagination he wades through other dimensions of reality seized by the power of good and evil. He strives to communicate with the world - the one on the stage as well as the one apart of it.

There is a direct proportion between the scarcity of my verbal expression and the number of words used in my productions. I am aware that the relation has a common root, which is I think both biographical and objective. In my third production mounted for the Scena Plastyzna KUL ("Supper 1972") words disappeared. I had been maturing to silence like others are coming to full eloquence.

All of my sarcastic declarations aimed at words, spoken or written, refer also to this text. Perhaps, I am the least competent person to talk about my art. The most essential thing I can say about a spectacle is one word only: its title. The rest should be seen and experienced.

Thus, it is not enough to say that I have turned to silence since the dreary and sham pomposity of my childhood days and equal pretence of the later times had oppressed and terrified me, although, it is undoubtedly a part of that which determines me. I think, however, that the most important reason of my successive "reductions" (word-actor-concrete) in my spectacles is a strong conviction that there are some spheres of reality, especially of human reality, which are hurt when spoken about. What is more, I maintain, that with reference to the spheres, there are some appropriate means of artistic expression to reveal their truth. As one of art theories states, the opera singers who want to render the opera substance adequately cannot utter the words but must sing them. Much the same, that reality of prime concert to the productions of the Scena Plastyzna KUL becomes manifest in its peculiar scenic space constructed of light, rhythm and atmosphere. This reality is a deeply human one consisting of simplicity based on "great religious and cultural symbols". The idea of the spectacles refers to some ultimate passions and existential states which man is not always aware of and which mind not always can cope with. Love, faith, sanctity, fright, a sense of finiteness and death fill the space of those productions and, actually, I have been making one spectacle since the beginning of 1970.

Leszek Mądzik



European theatre originated from literary tradition, words are the most important element. This is true of the times of Sophocles, of Shakespeare and of Chekov. Today it is not so obvious at all. When I was filming "Dead Class" in 1976, I remember Tadeusz Kantor telling me that he was fed up with the dialogues taken from Witkacy and he would write what was necessary himself. And he did it. It was a consequence of his theatre being a protest against what was happening in other theatres at that time.

I am writing this not only to make the readers of this book realize, but also to realize myself, what a difficult road it was, and how different from a typical conception of theatre, that led to Leszek Mądzik's Scena Plastyczna - Theatre which renounced not only words, but also a language of gestures used in pantomime theatre. It also renounced dramaturgy based on the characters and the anecdotes of theatre.

HERBARIUM, MOISTURE, WANDERING, FIBRES

These are not subjects for the theatre. They include neither action nor events that can bring to life theatrical characters. So where do the power, beauty and originality of Leszek Mądzik's theatre come from?

I am frequently asked the following question. Since I am in a position to make films which will survive years and years, why do I work for theatre, where creations disappear as soon as a performance leaves the stage? My answer is always the same. The most beautiful thing in the theatre is that a performance dies along with its spectator. It is a natural process, just like real life, whereas in the cinema, a director leaves behind too much rubbish, lying uselessly on the shelves of film stores and archives.

From the very beginning, when work for a new performance starts, Leszek Mądzik's theatre is already under the shadow of death. And, most beautiful of all, this sense of death penetrates everything. Looking at these phenomenal images and taking part in these extraordinary spectacles, we experience mortality as intensely as we do precisely because we know that this theatre lives just as long as we live.

Andrzej Wajda



The Scena Plastyczna was founded by Leszek Mądzik in 1970 in Lublin and from its beginnings has functioned as the author's theater. Its performances constitute an original form of visual theater, without word or story, created by the dramatic continuity of scenes and musical sequences.

The Theater's inspiration are the fundamental problems of existence: birth, death, eroticism, transience, suffering, the search for God. By its very nature, the Scena Plastyczna is a philosophical theater, operating with those qualities encountered by every person without regard to culture or history. Of particular importance is the placement of the actor as "universal man" in the performances of the Scena Plastyczna, something found in no other theater.

The Scena Plastyczna has performed in many places throughout Poland and the world. By 2004 the Theater had taken part in hundreds of international theater festivals and artistic/cultural exhibitions. It has received various awards and honors, including the St. Bro. Albert Award for religious elements in art, the Critics' Award at the International Festival of Experimental Theaters in Cairo, and awards for scenography, direction and technique at the World Theater Festival in Toyama, Japan, and the Special Award at the International Theater Festival "A World Class Act" in Racine, Wisconsin (USA).

The Scena Plastyczna collaborates with other theater companies in Poland and abroad, producing shows in international theater workshops like the Center for Theater Research in Scheersberg and in arts academies in Amsterdam, Berlin and Helsinki and universities in San Francisco and Buffalo.



In all his spectacles, Mądzik shows a man in extreme life situation such as: birth, death, encounter with God, the experience of love and of fear.

Monika Schwarzbach "Konradsblatt" 1979

In his spectacles Mądzik looks for the sense of life. Thus his expressive form delves deeply, probing into our psyche and our unconscious. His theatre is constituted by many metaphysical elements. It can be said that Mądzik creates a metaphysical world in the theatre. He describes a man liberated from quotidian concerns, a man facing afflictions of fate in various life situations

Mądzik's sources of inspiration are icons, mysteries, and baroque. He names Ingmar Bergman as one of his influences.

Christian Ahlbom "Vaasabladet", 1984

Mądzik introduces many mystical and religious elements to his works. His spectacles spring from the awareness of the opposition of day and night, and from respect for the spheres of "sacrum" and "profanum", but first and foremost from the awareness that our beings will reach another, better world through catharsis.

Andrzej Matynia "Projekt", 1989

Is it a cosmic theatre? For this also has been an attempt to define Scena Plastyczna, naturally not in the renaissance sense of the word. It is rather closer to the medieval stage on which a weak human being tossed between the powers of Good and Evil, is called for suffering but also for freedom.

Irena Sławińska "Life towards Death", 1991

The whole magic of this supernatural universe stems from contrasts of light. Transitions from blackness to full lighting, the use of filters, and precise control of the light's intensity here express the pain, meekness, restlessness or equanimity of their creator. "Only Mądzik can manipulate the lights in such a way", says Andrzej Wajda. The power of this unparalleled "manifestation" has its source in the extraordinary economy of the means of expression. What we enjoy, savour, and are delighted with is the exceptional volatility and fragility.

Stephanie Tesson "Le Quotidien de Paris", 1993



I could burrow through half a dozen dictionaries and still not find the words to describe Polish theatermaker Leszek Mądzik and his company. *Scena Plastyczna*: Mądzik's breathtaking, purely imagist work exists in a preconscious realm unapproachable through conventional language.

Justin Hayford „Chicago Reader”, 1994 (USA)

For many artists death is the greatest inspiration. It demands supreme courage from the artist and determination and never allows excessive fraternizing. According to Leszek Mądzik, he grew up between a hospital, mortuary, and cemetery. In the penumbra of dark light he seeks to know what is past all cognition, thus fulfilling the artist's sacred vocation.

Piotr Gruszczyński „Tygodnik Powszechny”, 1994

SCENA PLASTYCZNA of the Catholic University of Lublin does not attack the audience with an excess of content or of ornamentation. Mądzik, a creator of understatement, discloses only as much as he intends. A flash of light - never so sharp that it reveals details - momentarily illuminates some fragments of stage installations, which are often in motion. Their mysteries, however, cannot be wholly fathomed.

Janusz R. Kowalczyk „Rzeczpospolita”, 1995

There are spaces which look like roads or like open books. There are also spaces that remind nothing. They lead somewhere, they rise or fall. Perhaps, along with the shapes that appear in them, they evoke something. Something vague. They induce some unrecognizable emotions. They are wanderings to such states that maybe do not exist outside Mądzik's theatrical senses. The relations between all these elements are not always clear nor is the dramatic structure always intelligible. Probably such is the nature of these performances - indescribable, unrecognizable. And if one succeeded in describing them meaningfully, it would probably mean that they had in fact ceased to exist.

Andrzej Lis „Teatr”, 1995

Mądzik, by putting out the light and making the audience concentrate their eyes at landscapes sculptured in darkness, makes him absolutely lonely. Watching this theatre is the same as watching your own eyelids backside, where some shapes from the visible world remained: shape of figure, window, shining lamp. They stay for a second and then pass away. *Scena Plastyczna's* performances extend this second into eternity.

Roman Pawłowski „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 1998



Passing Away 1 X 2003

Shroud 20 X 2000

Pall 11 X 1997

Crevice 23 X 1994

Breath 13 XII 1992

Gateway 5 XI 1989

Fettering 30 XI 1986

Shore 13 XI 1983

Wandering 20 IV 1980

Moisture 23 IV 1978

Herbarium 11 V 1976

Stigma 23 III 1975

Icarus 24 IV 1974

Fibres 2 V 1973

Supper 23 III 1972

Births 2 IV 1971

Ecce Homo 24 III 1970



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