



Bronisław Krzysztof

HUON MALLALIEU

Shortly before his death Henry Moore attended his opening of a retrospective exhibition of his sculpture at the Serpentine Gallery in London's Hyde Park. During the course of the reception and speeches, it was noticed that a number of children were chasing each other around the bronze figures, climbing on the plinths and clambering through the inviting holes. The assembled eminences of the art establishment were horrified, but the sculptor begged them to let the children be; there could be no better way of coming to an understanding of his work, he said, than through uninhibited tactile enjoyment.

Although, unfortunately, some insensitive critics and curators do manage the trick, no true sculptor can ever forget that he is producing the most tactile of all art works. The spectator should feel a tingle in the hands as they long to touch and caress. The monumental forms of Bronisław Krzysztof have this quality in abundance, and his awareness of the importance of tactility is surely indicated by the extraordinary beauty of his sculpture hands, and the importance he gives them in his compositions.

The urge to touch may not be merely a response to perfection of outward form, but sometimes also a reaction to the attractive power of the life within a person or a created object. The artist strives to produce the illusion of that inner life in his creations. This, I feel, is one of the most important elements in Krzysztof's work. Other contemporary sculptors, including Anthony Gormley and David Mach, also deal with the human figure in their different ways, but they rarely penetrate so far below the surface.

He shares with his compatriots Magdalena Abakanowicz and Igor Mitoraj a starting point in their reverence for classical Greek and Roman sculpture. However, to the eye of a non-Polish observer, Krzysztof's work, even more than that of the others, is given light and life by what appears to be a particularly Polish spirituality. Also, it is not only fragments of actual classical carvings which come to mind: some pieces provoke thoughts of the sculptural forms of petrified bodies from Pompeii.

Concentration on the inner life of his subjects is implicit in his technique of building up sculptures in layers, which can be removed, as a surgeon peels away skin, flesh and muscle in a dissection. Here his work can be compared to the split and fragmented heads of Eduardo Paolozzi, and especially to the powerful figure of Newton outside the new British Library. This progress towards an inner, perhaps spiritual, truth is sometimes emphasized by contrasting dull exterior surfaces with highly burnished inner layers, and sometimes by 'windows of the soul' cut into torsos, or light which seems to come from behind eye-sockets. Krzysztof is not afraid to use colour, but he does so with immense sensitivity, using bronzes, greys and reds which strike natural harmonies with the metal.

He is able to move seamlessly from the classical to modern, blurring the distinction between abstraction and representational art, while never departing from the theme of humanity. Like many of the greatest Renaissance sculptors he is able to work both on a monumental scale and in miniature, as a most effective medallist. Often,

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especially in medals and plaques, the image seems to be struggling to emerge from the metal, just as Michelangelo's great *Slaves* struggle to be born from their stone. The artist's reverence for his material is one of the key elements of sculpture. A great African sculptor once said to me 'The stone tells me what it wants to be', and this can be true of metal as well as of stone, clay or wood. Krzysztof's reverence for his materials is always evident, and it is the reason that he is able to conjure metal into the illusion of flesh, and in so doing provoke deep emotions in the beholder.