



'How Beautiful He is'. Breathing Life into Matter: The Pain of Transformation and Metamorphoses

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The last few years of Bronisław Krzysztof's work has produced a series of sculptures consisting of the cycles *How Beautiful He Is* (2009-2010), *Cathedral* and *Model*. These cycles are in fact reminiscent of previous work by the artist in cycles such as *Star*, *Gesture* or *Dream*. This new series of work complements such sculptures as *Angel* (1989), *Fan Tango* (1994), *Ave* (1995) or *L'Art* (1999). It constitutes their artistic continuation as well as a creative discussion involving them, developing a series of formal and meaningful sequences. It should therefore be seen and considered in the context of the artist's entire creative achievement to date.

Bronisław Krzysztof's rich and diverse sculptural output develops simultaneously in a number of types of artistic creation. Since the beginning of his independent activity as an artist thirty years ago he has created among other works numerous portraits (*Self-Portrait*, 1982, 1992; *Portrait of Wife* 1982, 1985), busts (*Portrait of Julian Fałat*, 1996; and the realistic *Portrait of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki*, 1997; *Portrait of Fritz Haber*, 2003). These are portraits of real people as well as symbolic portraits (*Headache*, 1986; *Portrait of a Certain Situation*, 1990; *Portrait of a Head*, 1997), however the latter can sometimes concern specific people or be symbolic allusions to situations only known to the artist. In these works he actually gives a lot of freedom to interpretation and involvement of his own feelings, memories and associations.

An important part of Bronisław Krzysztof's works constitutes torsos related to antiquity – (bronzes from the cycle *Gesture*, starting in 1987, and *Signs*, 1988 – work carved in marble, material not very often used by the artist). In addition the artist also sculpts full figure statues, artistic medals, some remarkable tablets and commemorative plaques.

Another branch of Bronisław Krzysztof's artistic activity consists of - sometimes highly imaginative – designer objects, which can be considered as functional art. These objects are not appreciated much by the Artist himself but, nonetheless, constitute a highly unusual variety of privately commissioned works: chairs and heavy armchairs cast in bronze in forms evoking nature (birds, lobsters, crabs, leopards); amazingly shaped tables made with a mixed technique of bronze and specially cast, irregularly formed, fleshy, crystal glass which he integrates with either abstract or figurative sculptural elements. With the use of the same technique of bronze and crystal glass he has also made lamps and chandeliers. They astonish the viewer with the ingeniousness of their combined various materials, textures and colours. Although not appreciated so much by the artist himself as they are not 'art for art's sake', these at times revolutionary objects can capture and entrance the viewer through the perfection of their workmanship and inventiveness often bordering on surrealist fantasies. They deserve to be mentioned, as they are not very often shown at Krzysztof's exhibitions; they can only be appreciated by the chosen few - those invited to the artist's studio, or private clients who derive aesthetical pleasure from them in what are mostly inaccessible residences and gardens.

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Generally speaking, these objects and most of the portraits and tablets are privately commissioned.

The artist attaches a lot of weight to his self-contained, independent sculptures, which are the result of his own inspirations and artistic reflections. They predominantly orbit around the human body, its splendour and imperfections, its grandeur and fragility.

The sculptures from the recent cycles *How Beautiful He Is*, *Cathedral* and *Model* present single, lonely human figures, life-size at times, sometimes male, sometimes female and sometimes of undefined shapes, simply of human forms which are characterized by their intrinsic energy, dynamism and internal tension.

For example *Cathedral III* is a half-figure, half-object coated with green patina, covered in blemishes, with a coarse and rough surface. The bottom half of the sculpture is a beautiful pair of female legs, firmly standing on the ground, confidently resting on Mother Earth. The upper part of the body, bust and torso evolve into a geometrical, pointed form pushing upwards. A biological form turns into an abstraction, which resembles the shape of hands folded in prayer directed towards the sky. They look like they were taken from Albrecht Dürer's drawing *Praying Hands* (1508). At the same time the whole figure looks like a broken trunk, a tree split by lightning, a crack transforming itself into a geometrical zigzag over a woman's bosom. A vertical scar, a cut pierced in a human body, the agony of existence. Pain inflicted on a human being in the loneliness of his existence, a wound that does not want to heal which simultaneously is a prayer to God. In vain? What is the source of the pain? Or are these just wounds inflicted on a person by another person? A cathedral. A woman. An object of contemplation. The cause of pain.

Cathedral IV depicts a less obviously female body. It is constructed over a stretched arch creating an internal dynamic, with an upward and downward thrust. The lower part consists of coarse, naked legs standing to attention. They are rough, unrefined and unpolished by the artist. A horizontal, spatial loincloth separates it from the upper part of the body, where the human torso transforms itself into a concave, negative abstract form. Its highly polished surface is in distinct contrast to the biological lower part. The higher one looks the more abstract the form becomes and the further it is from natural shapes. That is what connects both of the cathedral-women.

Similarly, *Model II* is built on contrasting the lower parts of the body and their natural female shapes with the upper parts and their deformed, abstract forms. The body is mauled; imperfection coexists with perfection in the same being. A woman without a head and with one hand missing while the other one assumes a rickety form. Again this sculpture has an evenly spread rough surface uniting the lower part with its beautiful legs and the coarseness of slashed and abstract forms in the upper part.

There is much in common between the cycles *Cathedral* and *Model* and the newest set of sculptures sarcastically and allusively entitled *How Beautiful He Is*. How beautiful is this world? The world in which we live, in which we suffer, where we try to find our own place, which we try to understand, where we are proud of ourselves, and yet how silly and trivial we are?

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How Beautiful He Is I (bronze, h. 110 cm, 2009) – a male figure tensing its supple body in a dynamic arch is similar in its concept and structure to *Cathedral IV* as well as *Model II*. The figure which is wearing crude high heel shoes imperceptibly evolves into the naked body of a man. Here again one can see a contrast between coarse legs standing slightly apart, but firmly on the ground and a shiny, smooth and muscular torso which bends strongly backwards. Similarly to *Cathedral IV* and *Model II* the figure has lost its arms and head.

In the same way *How Beautiful He Is V* (bronze, h. 117 cm, 2010) is a crouching figure curved into an arch. Here we can also see realistically portrayed legs in juxtaposition with the unrefined, armless and torn part of the torso. The part coarse and part polished upper body screams with pain pointing towards the sky; curved towards an unknown destiny which brings tragedy and wounds to people and causes pain. Similarly in some of the older works of Bronisław Krzysztof (e.g. from the cycle *Gesture*, 2000; *Star*, 2002; *Madonna*, 2003) a part of the torso seems to have been added on. It is different from the rest of the body because of its colour and shiny texture. It becomes extremely difficult to distinguish whether the body is male or female. Is it a human being or what is left of a human being? Pain is coming from the inside, however, paradoxically, as the title suggests, the whole figure is extolling the joy of life. It is cut in half like a trunk, split by lightning like *Cathedral III* and yet still it marches on proudly with its shining chest thrust out.

Krzysztof's newest work from the cycle *How Beautiful He Is* (bronze, h. 206, 2010) not only refers to the sculptures discussed above from the cycles *Cathedral* and *Model*, but relates closely to some older work like *Angel* (1989), *Gesture* (1991), *Fan Tango* (1994), or *Ave* (1995). The tall unnaturally tall, highly polished sculpture standing in *contrapposto* is neither a man, nor a woman. Its right hand is curved backwards and its head is turned towards the sun. While its left hand is missing almost like that of the *Venus de Milo*. Behind it is a rickety wing – but it is far from flying! – and a horizontal beam almost as if it was crucified. An angel? A crucified angel? The figure seems to want to march but unfortunately its legs are hindered by a joint, almost like a *perisonium* which makes walking or movement difficult. It is bound to impotence. It turns toward the sun, takes a deep breath, feels the joy of life. It stands firmly on the ground, but wants to fly. Is it Icarus? The pain of a wounded body; the inability to act; the will to fly like a bird or maybe like an angel; the pain of body and soul. A new identity emerges as a result of powerlessness and physical pain. Notwithstanding the impediments, these imperfections give rise to a will to break free into vast space. Similarly to the previously discussed works, here we have the pain of transformation and metamorphosis, liberation from the human body to rise upwards towards abstract forms and meanings into unknown space. So beautiful.

Bronisław Krzysztof's representation of the human body can express emotions and symbolical meanings. They represent a visual medium, which can make statements taking on at times completely defined meanings, but most often they allow the observer to raise himself in his own thoughts and associations, freeing through images their own contents, statements and dreams. These are artworks which release through images their own poetry, provoking or creating their own atmosphere, compelling the observer to make the effort of interpretation. At the

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same time they allow the observer to delight in the outstanding compositions of shapes, exquisite forms, the contrasts between the coarse and polished surface of the sculptures with their different shades of grey and colourful patinas. Delighting in shade, being caressed by the shade. Enjoying the touch of light. So beautiful is the world.

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