



The Poetics of Form

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Bronisław Krzysztof's oeuvre to date has evolved from the artist's sustained concern for the human figure – which, *per se*, some may consider as traditional, conservative or even anti-modernist sculpture. However, Krzysztof's figurative creations cannot that simply be labelled or even fashionably discounted. Though they are realist in their principle intention they do not sit that easily in a (historically shifting) category like that. Krzysztof's sculptures, which encompass the full spectrum of figurative genres and sizes, are full of tension – often discordant. They are ambiguous and charged, and always invite a close encounter.

His series 'Angel', for instance, consists of female figures that are defined by a pointed idealised tectonic. At first sight, there is a tension between the stress on stereometric architecture and stretched, light-absorbent surface across much of the fragmented body, and its intensely modulated 'skin', where it remains intact. Conflict comes into play through the potent ruptures of the organic body and its juxtaposition to abstracted corporeal elements, which conjure up associations in keeping with the series title and beyond. These calculated incisions and measured fissures are highlighted by wilful changes of the surface texture, which is freed from the traces of its making, and given a patina that reflects the light and emphasises the different metrics of those corporeal elements. The apparent contradiction between the 'organic' and the 'constructed', between volume and surface, mass and void, between earthboundness and ascension belong to different, often conflicting paradigms of sensibility and beauty. They can be interpreted in terms of dichotomous relationships: matter and spirit, nature and culture, male and female, reality and myth.

For centuries, sculpture as a self-contained, corporeal object generated its potential meaning in and through the human body within a defined range of material such as marble or other stone, bronze and wood. The anatomic structure of the figurative image along with its posture, gestures and mimics was identified with and linearly translated into the mood and spiritual state, character traits and intellectual predispositions of the respective real or ideal(ised) model. In addition, contemplation as the normalised appropriate mode of aesthetic reception implies a fixed relationship between the art object and the subject/holder, thus allowing the subject/holder to position themselves in a given space and time, i.e. momentarily and historically, identified and defined as self, that is, in opposition to the other, the sculptural configuration. This notion, however, assumes that both subject and object possess a fixed and stable core-identity.

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It was Auguste Rodin, above all, who, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, challenged the concept of mimesis as a normative function of sculpture: 'The surface of the body, that boundary between what we think of as internal and private, and what we acknowledge as external and public, is the locus of meaning in Rodin's sculpture. And it is the surface that expresses equally the results of internal and external forces. The internal forces that condition the surface of the figure are, of course, anatomical musculature. The forces that shape the figure from the outside come from the artist: the act of manipulation, artifice, his process of making.'¹

Once the dialogue between the anatomical facts and the skin was undermined and ruptured, the medium of sculpture was freed to undergo a radical transformation. Its structure, condition and concepts were literally uncovered and radically altered. Its generic boundaries became permeable and blurred. Yet, although the development of sculpture in the twentieth century has been widely described as a movement towards abstraction, that is towards the non-representational object, one could argue that the human figure always remained present, if not within the art of the avant-garde, then as humus on which aesthetic innovation could thrive. In the twentieth century, the figurative interest within the framework of established techniques and formats spans from Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol to Wilhelm Lehmbruck and Henri Laurens, from Henry Moore and Germaine Richier to contemporary artists including Jean-Robert Ipousteguy, Maria Abakanowicz, Georg Baselitz and Michael Sandle.

Over recent times, a renewed interest in the figurative image could be observed, in sculpture as well as in painting, motivated perhaps by the rapid and radical societal changes. Amongst the younger generation of artists with a pronounced interest in the potential of the human form are Katsura Funakoshi, Stefan Balkenhol, Charles Ray or Ron Mueck. They deal with what seems common, familiar and known and, at the same time, is threatened in its essential make-up and intactness as never before: the human body. Bronisław Krzysztof shares this conviction. He concentrates on the human figure because he regards it as the most effective means to communicate his ideas and beliefs to a wider audience. As for his contemporaries, the explicit reference to the human figure as a conscious aesthetic strategy takes on an almost political dimension for the reason that within western (and increasingly global) culture and epistemology wo-man's body, which was considered as the last bastion of objectivity and universality, a shared point of reference, has finally fallen. The 'fatal attacks' have come from genetics and medicine, feminism and philosophy, and above all, from the emergent communication and information technologies, from the manipulative force of digitisation. The skeleton of historical and cultural constructedness of what is considered human and natural has been laid bare. With the conquest of the body, the dominant Western notions of selfhood and oneness are being eroded. The body, taken in a metaphorical sense as social body, is falling

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to pieces too, into increasingly fragmented, heterogeneous and nomadic entities. (On the other hand, the forces of globalisation and digitisation progressively act as homogeniser that levels individual and collective differences.)

The lesions and fractures, injuries and invasions of the body by external forces and objects that mark many of Krzysztof's fragmented figures including 'Star' (2002) and 'Madonna' (2003) manifest his modernist, object-oriented approach to sculpture, a sculpture that has emancipated itself from ostensible narrative demands. It is most pronounced in his series 'Sign' (1998) and 'Chess-Millennium' (2001), where he moves beyond the fragmented figure towards an operation with *details* of the human body that no longer function as an synecdoche, that is as a *pars pro toto* of wo-man' corporeality. These objects that may have been inspired by particular parts of the human anatomy, do no longer – unlike the figural fragment – enable the beholder to refer to or infer those bodily entities from which they (could) have derived. Thus, they are unable to function in any literal way but lend power to the works extensive associative potential. The objects become abstract, organoid signs, seductively elegant and unashamedly playful at the same time. At a deeper level, however, they stand to symbolise our diminishing purchase on an increasingly complex, differentiated and layered world, of which we can only gain momentary glimpses.

In and through all of his work the artist ceaselessly posits the question: What is reality and how can it be confronted and captured? Georg Simmel points out at the end of the nineteenth century that the sense of touch is the actual sense of reality. Only what can or could be physically grasped seems for us to be of actual existence². Yet, when software simulation takes over 'hardware' reality, it is human perception that changes most notably. People appear to lose touch with themselves, with each other and the object world. For centuries, the visual sense has predominated over all other senses and the progress of technology has in many ways accelerated the development and expansion of the visual image beyond imagination. From there arises an intensified craving for substance, a desire to get reassurance from a tangible reality, a longing to test the boundaries of existence here and now. Krzysztof's sculptural practice contributes to a stimulation of bodily experience and sensual pleasure. Through relating to the body, his figurative sculpture continues to touch the way we understand ourselves and our existence in the world, past, present and future. His free-standing, multi-aspect figures catalyse a dialogue of bodies that seeks to recover and affirm human measures in the object-world. His bronze statues and portraits sensitise for the complexities and subtleties of difference in an imaginative way, and provide points of reference and for identification.

Bronisław Krzysztof's statuary is motivated by continuity, which is evident in its robust allusions to the human body and the exclusive focus on the medium of

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bronze, which he casts himself. Within this set framework he continually searches for formal and conceptual innovations that enable him to vividly and persuasively express his view of the human condition. Articulations of vulnerability and threat of human existence, which are crystallised in his figurations, are counter-balanced by a sustained belief in the resilience and resistance of wo-man, in the power and beauty of life. The latter is conveyed not least through the choice of material – bronze – which has long held a key position for preserving and handing down images 'with ideal significance'. The metal alloy allows him to sensitively and meaningfully employ contrasts between different patinas, to create and exploit linear and painterly effects in his work. Yet, it also comes to the fore in the artist's tangible quest for beauty and poetics, which, overall, defines his formal repertoire and conceptual perspective. This quest is undertaken in the full knowledge of the difficulties to even momentarily achieve and maintain them in life in the face of an unrelenting reality. Thus his figurations are at once embedded in tradition and pointing toward the future. They provide continuity, stability and hope.

Bronisław Krzysztof's exquisitely executed compositions have come into being as the result of a happy marriage between talent, tireless effort and continuous experimentation with technique, format and formal solution. In that, his work is mark by the particular Polish predilection for exploiting the properties of the chosen material(s) to the object's best expressive advantage through an insistence on the value of sound skill, solid craftsmanship and the imperturbable exploration of new sensual and conceptual dimensions. It celebrates the genre of figurative sculpture through the creative integrity of its maker and the aesthetic and material quality of its making in the age of accelerated mass production and fugacious mass consumption.

¹ Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1977, p. 28.

² Georg Simmel, *Brücke und Tür. Essays des Philosophen zur Geschichte, Religion, Kunst und Gesellschaft*, ed. Michael Landsmann, Stuttgart, Koehler, 1957, p. 154.

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