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SYMBOL AND SIGN IN MY POSTERS

RÉSUMÉ

Key words: symbol, sign, allegory, poster art

The issues related to the desire to express feelings and emotions, to present things and invisible but perceptible states, have been bothering artists since the earliest times. In each era, artists used a specific set of signs and symbols to convey a full content not always possible to express as a material being. They were symbols or signs commonly used, universal, used by the general public for communication, such as religious symbols, or individually created by artists for the use of a given work. Artists have often created their own "language", a kind of code, with which they defined what is elusive in their works, notions difficult to express by the image or the object itself. The concepts of sign and symbol are also related to the notion of allegory, with its most common variation - personification. It is a kind of imaging which, apart from presenting the subject itself, also has a conventional, figurative meaning. Allegory in a sense elaborates on different, sometimes quite distant meanings of symbols, so that their ambiguous character often becomes clearly legible to the recipient. Speaking of allegory, it should be noted that its both elements, i.e. the one depicting it and the one whose meaning is hidden, have their equivalents in reality. In the case of allegories, important elements of the presentation are also additional signs, the so-called attributes, in which the main character is equipped. A sign is an image of an object, an element of reality important not so much because of its own characteristics but for relations with other objects. Four types of characters can be distinguished in the European art: written signs, i.e. letters, numbers, ideograms and musical signs - notes. In the ancient times, symbols and signs were used to refer to the deities and to express the position and social role of rulers, priests and scholars. They were also used to denote states and non-empirical phenomena related to religion, e.g. the Egyptian Ankh - the symbol of eternal life, an artificial beard - the symbol of the majesty of power, or a scarab - the symbol of the creator of the deities. Signs and symbols have always been an inseparable element of Christian art. The most commonly used characters/symbols were: fish, orant, peacock, shepherd carrying a sheep, a ship, a candle light, a snake, an apple and a cross. The representations of vine and grape harvest, or the signs A and Ω were also widely used. In the Renaissance and Baroque eras, both a symbol and allegory were closely related to the real world, creating a deep bond with it. Symbols were eagerly used to provide additional content; at the same time, in addition to the typically religious symbolism, secular motives including mythological ones, were also widely used. In the era of classicism, ancient and mythological subjects were also used. They were often a pretext to present scenes with a moral message, but the rich symbolism, typical for example of Dutch painting, began to give way to the pursuit of technical perfection, studied anatomy and the most faithful depiction of painted motifs. In the 18th century, many artists made another turn towards the symbolic art. One of the most

interesting ones was William Blake, who in his works included very personal ideas of Heaven and Hell, Good and Evil or the Original Sin. Symbolists opposed the objectivity and reality in art in favour of presenting the world unknowable

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by the senses. The Manifesto of Symbolism was proclaimed in 1886 by Jean Moréas. The "spiritual fathers" of the symbolists are: Gustave Moreau, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Arnold Böcklin. Among many representatives of this artistic trend one should mention, among others, Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Carlos Schwabe, Fernand Khnopf, Gustave Klimt, Mikhail Wrubl, Max Klinger and Edvard Munch, whose work was the foretaste of expressionism. Symbolism also found its way on the fertile ground in Poland. The most prominent representatives would include Stanisław Wyspiański, Jacek Malczewski, Witold Wojtkiewicz, Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Leon Wyczółkowski. The works of Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin were full of symbolic eloquence. The works of expressionists were characterized by extremely strong emotional impact. They perceived expressing feelings, often characterized by fear and terror, as their main goal. The symbolic contents and references also appeared in the works of avant-garde artists, who seemed to be extremely distant from the use of such means of expression. An example may be El Lissitzky's poster "Beat the White with a red wedge", in which the ideological content is represented by simple geometrical figures as well as the symbolic meaning of colours. 20th-century art did not reject the symbol or sign as the medium of the message. Pablo Picasso's Guernica, the intriguing symbolism of Marc Chagall's works and images of surrealists prove that symbolism in art was and is an important means of expression for many artists. Artists often used simple symbols as signs, just like the famous Picasso's peace dove or the more contemporary Lex Drewiński's "Lexicon". Although the artistic poster has been developing all over the world, the main source of my personal inspiration was the so-called "Polish school" poster, full of overt and hidden symbolism, often very poetic and metaphorical. The history of the Polish poster dates back to the end of the 19th century. At that time, exhibition posters were created by well-known artists: Teodor Axentowicz, Stanisław Wyspiański, Wojciech Weiss and others. During the interwar period, this discipline began to thrive, at the same time heading towards advertising. Even then, there were posters operating with symbolism and metaphor, carrying a much broader message than just informing about the product, e.g. the famous poster "Radion washes itself" by Tadeusz Gronowski. The political propaganda posters from the early period of the People's Republic of Poland, like "The Party" by Włodzimierz Zakrzewski, were full of symbolic message. The actual development of the poster in Poland took place in the second half of the 1950s, especially in the field of the film poster. The value of the films themselves created by outstanding directors: Wajda, Munk, Polański, Kawalerowicz, Kutz, Kieślowski and others, had a great impact on the artistic quality of the works. The young generation of creators educated after the war transposed the Polish painting experience onto the poster. The precursors of this trend include Jan Lenica and Wojciech Fangor. Posters carried deep humanistic content during this period, they were full of personal reflections and artistic vitality. It was then that the term "Polish poster school" was born, represented by Tadeusz Trepcowski, Henryk Tomaszewski, Józef Mrozczak, Wojciech Fangor, Julian Pałka, Waldemar Świerzy and Jan Młodożeniec. In this period, simplified symbolism, characteristic of the first post-war years, gave way to images of complex metaphorical content. At the beginning of the 1960s, the third post-war generation of poster artists, professionally prepared for their profession, came to the fore. Artists such as Franciszek Starowieyski, Maciej Urbaniec, Zenon Januszewski, Stanisław Zagórski, Maciej

Hibner, and Rostaw Szajbo as well as younger artists, e.g. Leszek Hołdanowicz, Onegin Dąbrowski and many others, took active part in the artistic activities. The following creatives were active in Katowice: Tadeusz Grabowski, Marek Mosiński and Tomasz Jura, in Krakow Janusz Bruchnalski, in Gdańsk Jerzy Krechowicz, and in Poznań Kazimierz Sławiński, Tadeusz Piskorski and Antoni Rzycki. Ever since the artistic poster has become the main form of my creative expression, the basic elements used in the message were simplified forms - signs - combined in a way that gave them a new meaning and made them multidimensional, giving the possibility of various interpretations. My works are almost exclusively proprietary and non-commercial and are a personal reflection on a range of topics, whether social, political or relating to film or culture. Individually selected and combined forms of objects make the motifs presented on them take on a new meaning. I often use commonly known symbols, which in a proper matching become the carrier of other content than usually attributed to. Although poetic metaphor is an important means of artistic expression for me, it does not appear in all works. An example of posters in which I solely relied on the sign in a minimalist form is a series presenting superheroes: Batman, Superman and Spiderman. The works that constitute a practical part of my dissertation continue and develop my current interest both in the subject and the role of the symbol and sign in the formulation of the ideological message. The works presented comprise of 24 posters, including two series: "Welcome to ..." (8 works) and "Art" (4 works). The set also includes posters that share the topic but were not made with the intention of creating a series and are, by definition, separate creations. These are posters devoted to the 11th International Linen Cloth Biennale "Z krosna do Krosna" (3 works) and personal creations reflecting on my own work (4 works). The other posters are also independent creations, inspired by the film ("Sami swoi"), ecology (NIE!), Art (Katarzyna Kobro) and cultural and social issues (Zbigniew Oprządek's second-hand bookshop "Hetta"). The use of symbols and signs in my works is largely due to the nature and objectives of the artistic field of a poster. The simplification of forms in order to achieve the most readable message is one of its characteristic features, especially in modern times, where a fast, accurate message is a prerequisite for the existence of a work of art amid the hustle and bustle of all the stimuli we are attacked by on a daily basis. I base my posters on the above formal assumptions. The form itself has become a method of artistic expression in my work, not necessarily fulfilling informational or advertising functions, but rather being a source of my own reflections and emotions and the need to share them with the recipient.