

ALINA SZAPOCZNIKOW

FROM DRAWING INTO SCULPTURE

27 FEBRUARY – 20 MAY 2013

The recent rediscovery of the work of Polish artist Alina Szapocznikow (1926-1973) reveals an output that is provocative, vulnerable, unclassifiable and infinitely personal all at once.

Szapocznikow, who produced most of her mature work in France during the Sixties and early Seventies, seems to have been forgotten since the exhibition devoted to her at the Paris Musée d'art moderne after her death in 1973. But during the last few years, a number of exhibitions throughout the world have made it possible to reassess the importance of her work. The Centre Pompidou puts the spotlight on her drawings with a completely new exhibition bringing together nearly 100 works on paper, together with a number of sculptures.

While Szapocznikow was an unusually inventive sculptor, trying out countless experiments with new materials, she also produced a profuse body of drawings, which should not be overshadowed by the originality of her sculptures. Her drawings and monotypes create a dialogue with the three-dimensional works, as sculptors often excel in doing. They evoke the human body, especially her own, the central subject of her work. The components of Szapocznikow's work on paper consist of a jumble of flesh, tumours, fragmentations and eroticism: an output that has been compared to that of Louise Bourgeois or the post-minimalist artist Eva Hesse.

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ON THE BORDERS

After Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, the Szapocznikow family, who were Jewish, were shut up in the ghetto at Pabianice, then in the one at Łódź, before being interned in Auschwitz and then Bergen-Belsen. As a teenager, Alina worked in the camp as a nurse alongside her mother, who was a doctor. At the end of the war she went to Prague, where she began studying sculpture with Josef Wagner. In 1947, she decided to continue her studies at the École des beaux-arts in Paris. Her return to Poland in 1951 marked the start of her official career as a sculptor, and she received some major commissions. After representing Poland at the Venice Biennial of 1962, Szapocznikow finally settled in France, and her work really began to blossom in Paris. Here the artist experimented with new materials like polyurethane foams and polyester resins. As Rodin did in his time, she dismembered the human body – her own, which became the focal subject of her work.

FOUR PERIODS

Szapocznikow's graphic work falls into four periods. The first is linked with her academic training and the study of the human body in Prague and at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts in Paris (1945-1951). This was followed by the Polish period (1951-1962), marked by official commissions and her first experiments with forms and materials (cement, resins, inlaid glass and stone). The contours of her bodies gradually became looser, and metamorphosed into anthropomorphic objects. The third period is characterised by what critic Pierre Restany, who championed her work after her participation in the 1959 Paris Biennial, called a "dislocation of form". The final sequence (1969-1973) saw the appearance of colour in a more dream-like world with sometimes Surrealist overtones.

PIECEMEAL BODIES

After the summer of 1963, Szapocznikow left Poland for good, accompanied by her son, Piotr, and her companion and future husband, Roman Cieslewicz. The three settled in Paris. This was the start of the artist's most fertile period of

creativity in terms of not only sculpture, but also drawings, which became fuller and more liberated. On paper, Szapocznikow developed ideas that sometimes ended up as sculptures, but the drawings possess such power that they assert themselves immediately as independent works in their own right. The artist made use of new techniques like felt-tip pens, but the drawings that predominate are those in ink, with their finely traced lines. They show abstract forms with an anthropomorphic feel to them, which touch and penetrate each other. Szapocznikow sometimes moved away from the small-scale format into bolder, more monumental territory, where she could evoke grotesque, deformed, monstrous bodies and explore a body piecemeal. Some of her large monotypes with ink highlights evoke X-rays of bodies: imagery it is tempting to associate with the tuberculosis from which the artist had suffered, but which she sublimated through this never-ending exploration of a body in pieces.

UNIMAGINABLE PARADE

As though she wanted to tame and exorcise the disease that struck her down in 1969, Szapocznikow began to feature tumours in her sculptures, and her drawings, where excrescences invade nude bodies, male and female alike. For the 1971 exhibition 'Instants et choses' ['moments and things'] at the Aurora gallery in Geneva, she produced a group of 27 large drawings. This series alone would have been enough to ensure Szapocznikow a place in the history of art of the second half of the 20th century. Here she used black ink, with her usual fine and fluid lines, to delineate monstrously grotesque, deformed bodies that are still identifiable as bodies. These figures form a parade of barely imaginable beings, as though hell has regurgitated its most abject creatures. Here the violence of these compositions, with their unrivalled graphic perfection and incomparable balance and harmony, express an intensity on a par with the work of Francis Bacon or Maryan.

EXHIBITION

CURATOR

Jonas Storsve

ARCHITECT/STAGE DESIGNER

Laurence Fontaine

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Bastien Morin

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Claire Blanchon

CATALOGUE

Alina Szapocznikow

From Drawing into Sculpture

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Jonas Storsve and Anne Tronche.

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INFORMATION

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www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

From 27 February to 20 May 2013

Musée, Galerie d'art graphique,
level 4

Every day except Tuesdays and
1 May, from 11.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.

Ticket offices close at 8.00 p.m.

PRICES

Admission with the "Museum
& exhibitions" ticket

Valid the same day for the
Museum, for all exhibitions and
the Panorama: one admission for
each area

€13; reduced rate: €10

Free with the annual Pass and
for those under 18

Online purchase and printing
(full price tickets only)

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TWITTER

You can find information and news
about the exhibition via Twitter with
the hashtag #Szapocznikow, or by
logging onto: [//www.twitter.com/
centrepompidou](http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou)

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