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## ***They Were* or About a Photographer of Women**

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Borys Makary's cycle *They Were*, a point of departure for artistic explorations aimed at a broader presentation, reveals at least two characteristics. The first one is a recollection, a fragment of memory, but also an artistic-numerological reckoning with the women with whom the author has been in relationships. The other point of departure is constituted by an attempt at a reference to Man Ray's works, a photographer who praised female beauty like no other. Let us have a closer look at these assumptions and see where they lead us since photography, similarly to any other artistic discipline, should be more than registration of events or a reflection of reality.

### **1) Body topographer**

At first glance, the woman is the body, corporeality. Such an unsophisticated conclusion is drawn when one first sees fragmented chests, backs or a pubic mound. There are no faces to be seen. They are always portrayed differently, in an unreal, dreamy way. The artist could be a topographer who moves around a landscape of meanings. Photography through microphotography enables a more precise and closer look, however, as I have already highlighted, making reality less realistic at the same time. Naturally, there are numerous examples of such an approach to corporeality in the Polish photography. With surrealism as a starting point, Zdzisław Beksiński approached his model, i.e. his wife, perversely and obsessively in late 1950s. For the following generations, from 1960s, he became a point of departure for the search of self.

I would also like to recall here much more poetic explorations of the geometry of the female body carried out by *Grupa Trzech (The Group of Three)*: Zbigniew Łagocki, Wojciech Plewiński and Wacław Nowak in late 1960s and in the mid-1970s. Their eroticism was much more moderate compared to Beksiński's or Borys Makary's. In their poetic references they looked for a new kind of the Lesser Poland beauty. Such a type of photography was also popular in Czechoslovakia (Miroslav Stibor) and France (Jeanloup Sieff).

Another important reference is Zbigniew Dłubak's photography, for at least two reasons. Dłubak (1924 – 2004) as an avant-garde photographer, was fascinated by the female body. He devoted many of his cycles to it, including the conceptual ones (*Gestykulacje / Gestures*). In his last cycle *Asymetrie / Asymmetries* (1983 – 2004), which he took a long time to complete, he photographed the female body in various ways, intentionally making it inconspicuous. Masking the unambiguity of the message which resulted in his photographs being perceived as bordering on surrealism and abstraction, he obtained his characteristic metaphorical effect.

In Borys Makary's photographs on women's bodies there appears a geometric drawing, which is a performative method of describing a specific personality. This difficult to codify notation/sign reminds me of certain surrealist photographs of Brassai or even Eli Lotar (the *Abattoir* series) which make one aware of their entering another psychological dimension where something mysterious and cruel has happened, as in Antonin Artaud's theatre of cruelty.

What I find personally interesting is that in these post-modern times such photography with geometric structure interventions with regard to the body has also appeared in the feminist thought in Poland. I am familiar with and value Gabriela Huk's works *Re:shaped* (2010) which can be described as structuralist feminism, since her point of departure here was semiology.

## **2) Why did Man Ray photograph women?**

An answer to this trivial question can actually be quite complicated. We know that he loved them, wanted to capture in his quite often hedonistic works both the surrealist and fashion ideals (his photographs for "Vogue") as well as, which I find peculiar, classic beauty. But he was also capable of playing both with the act of photographing and women. His famous photograph *Le Violon d'Ingres / Ingres' Violin* from 1924 can be interpreted as paying homage to the ideal academic beauty represented by Jean-August-Dominique Ingres' *La Grande Baigneuse*. A violin painted by Man Ray directly on Kiki's body signifies that she is the "perfect" instrument to play. Surrealists loved women, they supported their fight for equal rights, but were also fascinated by transgressive sexuality.

## **3) Selected works from the cycle They Were**

When defining a given woman's character, the artist applies numerology and private symbolism arbitrarily. Works in various sizes are always in negative to make memories less realistic. The work *2, 3, triangle* adapts contrariwise the ideal of the triangle symbolism and a sign from the Christian iconography to a female belly button. This action has a surrealist meaning. Another very interesting photograph is *3, 6, 11, goblet* where the drawing on the body seems to be spatial. *9, 45* attracts attention by its mirror reflection and turning upside down which results in its becoming not only metaphoric and slightly ironic – as the female buttocks resemble shaven heads – but also formally interesting. In the middle of the composition there is a sign which may be associated with a coffin. The photograph *44, 22* is the culmination of the cycle as the body(-ies) has acquired an abstract form, irrelevant to physicality or femininity. In its middle an elongated rectangle has been placed as a sign of perfect balance. *0, 5, 66, reverse Y* is a surprising work – in a positive sense – where a private body part has been enigmatically compared to the sign Y. Both *7, 46* and *26* are very interesting where two crossing lines stretch between the hands and join in the number 26, a metaphor of the woman and her body – and all this originally framed.

## **Where does the photographer go?**

Is the Cracow photographer Borys Makary a Man Ray of our times? Yes, if, both in his approach and photography, he offers a creative continuation of Man Ray's style. Certainly, he is a photographer already on his way to... paradise. It should be emphasized that the cycle is both interesting and important. It does not seem to have either a beginning or an end. Neither does it reveal too much about the women's privacy, although it does interpret their characters in a personal way and exhibits parts of the body topography, usually in an ambiguous and poetic manner. What is the most important, his artistic expression varies absolutely from the works of the aforementioned photographers. It bodes well for the future.