

June 16
July 28 2018Opening
Saturday June 16
from 11h to 21h

Roman Cieslewicz

Alongside the major exhibition devoted to Roman Cieslewicz at the Musée des Arts Decoratifs from 3 May to 23 September 2018, Semiose Gallery has the immense honor of presenting a collection of his works with the precious and friendly assistance of Chantal Petit-Cieslewicz

Roman Cieslewicz Visualiste

There's something of Roman Cieslewicz in all of us. Even if it's still possible not to recognize his name, we are all certainly aware of his images. As a major graphic artist of the second half of the twentieth century, Roman Cieslewicz (1933-1996), shaped our collective imagination and imprinted his style deep in the retina of every spectator with an eye on the French scene from the sixties onwards.

After playing an important role in the success of the Polish fashion magazine *Ty i ja*, on his arrival in France in 1963, he was given the task of modernizing the design of *Elle* by Peter Knapp, following this up with commissions for *Vogue*, *Editions 10/18* and subsequently *Libération*, *Le Monde* etc. In 1967, he assisted with the creation of a new contemporary art magazine, *Opus International*, whose iconic covers are still in circulation today. He designed the posters for the exhibitions "Paris/..." (Berlin in 1978, Moscow in 1979, Paris in 1981) on behalf of the Pompidou Center and published a book on Che Guevara, which is still considered a landmark today¹.

Roman Cieslewicz not only embodies the modernity of the sixties and seventies, he is of those who created and designed it, successfully synthesizing the times thanks to his keen sense of perception. His preference for elementary forms and his bold use of contrasts, the relationship between word and image given cardinal importance as well as his meticulous attention to typography forged his instantly recognizable, innovative and iconic style. The use of black and white enhanced by touches of red are recognized as his signature, while hiatus and stylistic disruption also form a distinctive feature of his oeuvre.

Above all, Roman Cieslewicz is known for his voracious appetite for images. A collector of every media imaginable, he was at once a collector of newspapers, images of the Mona Lisa, advertising images, postmarks and sugar-cube wrappers as his friend François Barré explains. This ardor can be observed for example in collages such as *Harem*, where at a glance the eye is able to embrace a vast collection. Originally the photomontage *Harem* was produced in 1969 as part of a promotional campaign for Prisunic by the M.A.F.I.A. agency, with which Cieslewicz was associated. At first restricted to promotional objects, *Harem*, with the usual versatility of Cieslewicz's images, rapidly contaminated other media. This natural porosity between commissions and studio work cemented Cieslewicz's position as an author, as a graphic artist, although he preferred to describe himself as a "visualist" or a fellow of the "brotherhood of craftsmen of the image". In the early seventies however, this bombardment overflowing with images gave way to a more frugal tendency to "guide the eye", with his famous visual "Zoom contre la pollution de l'oeil".

¹Roman Cieslewicz, CHE, Paris, Editions Jeune Afrique, 1968, 48 pages.

16 juin
28 juillet 2018

Roman Cieslewicz

This marked the beginning of a series of centered collages including Arturo, Acupuncture, Arribal, Ceres Franco and Bobby Fischer, cyclopean monsters, whose (too) unique eyes are simply disturbing. As an allusion to Dziga Vertov's "Ciné-oeil" manifesto, the eye is the central motif, either absent or on the contrary accentuated, as in the world-famous Che poster, where it is replaced by "CHE SI". Amélie Gastaut wrote that "Cieslewicz was above all an eye, an eye that strives to look reality in the face".²

Roman Cieslewicz was a diehard craftsman and even after the arrival of digital tools continued working with the simplest of means: scissors, brushes and glue and a certain joy encompassing accidents and imperfections, often caused by impatience; "A stroke of the pencil provides a faster response to my ideas than any mechanical tool." Mirror effects, symmetry, parallels, repetition, central cropping of the image, enlargement, reduction, flattening, cutting out, juxtaposition or multiplication, in one direction or another, grey leveling, contrast pushing, image de-rastering and re-rastering, accentuation, stylization, line work, blocks of color... Every kind of procedure is employed; the whole graphic suite is dismantled then reassembled.

If the reiteration of images is a constant in his work, photomontages such as Party or Gâteaux aux bas Dim constitute an important, more intimate, more personal and more committed aspect of it. Heir to the collages of masters such as Max Ernst and Kurt Schwitters, or the Constructivist photomontages of Alexander Rodchenko, Roman Cieslewicz renewed the genre by using the means of reproduction and the iconography of his own era. He is often associated with his older colleague Bruno Schultz – with whom he shares a certain poetic melancholy and whose oeuvre he defended – as well as in a completely different spirit with his contemporaries Roland Topor, Fernando Arrabal and Alessandro Jodorowski brought together within the group Panique, founded in 1960. In its wake, Cieslewicz created the magazine Kamikaze, la revue d'information Panique in 1976.³

As with the collage B.B. Phoques, dark humor and acerbic wit infuse each oeuvre. Dorothee, Garçon I, Party and Pied Panique are typical of French ribaldry, more fetishist than active and an eyeful for the voyeur. "I am a pirate," Roman Cieslewicz said "but a pirate involved in the creation of a new media language[...] an image that doesn't shock, isn't worth the effort." Like Cieslewicz's work in general, this exhibition is rich and profuse; symbols circulate, rebounding from one image to another, desires and fears burst forth and occasionally explode in your face. Of these "visual attacks" Jean-Christophe Bailly states: "What we see is not made to please, nor to be acceptable, but to remain, and the images caught in the trap that lays them out on the page and strips them naked make more and more sense." ⁴Attention, Panic!

² Amélie Gastaut, "L'itinéraire de Roman Cieslewicz", from a collective publication on the occasion an exhibition at the Musée de Grenoble in 2001 (Réunion des Musées Nationaux publishing).

³ Three issues published in 1976, 1991 and 1994.

⁴ Jean-Christophe Bailly, notes published by Editions Magik, Paris, 1987, on the occasion of Roman Cieslewicz's exhibition « Pas de nouvelles, bonne nouvelles » at the Jean Briance Gallery (Paris).