

Mieczyslaw JAKIMOWICZ (1881-1917)

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Summary

The new edition of a monograph of Mieczyslaw Jakimowicz (1881-1917), Polish Khnopff, as he has been called by his contemporary Viennese art critics, is the first ever attempt to present the oeuvre of this brilliant and original painter, almost completely forgotten today. In this edition there is a fascination with the extraordinary personality and also deep sensibility for the ambassador of the Polish "Mood Symbolism".

True genius reveals its greatness in the way he treats the things: maximum in minimis, John Ruskin's words distinctly explain the character of Jakimowicz's work. The painter limited to the utmost the role of color in his paintings, by choosing instead - pencil, pen, black or dark Indian ink, gouache, or white chalk. The artist, quiet and modest, uncommonly hardworking, spent long hours in the Parisienne studio at Champagne Premiere. In his final years he lived in Zakopane, in the shadow of the Tatra Mountains. One could easily call him a poet of drawing, since his paperboards were filled with imaginary figures, coming straight from the deepest layers of his soul. His quiet, fantasy figures made an impression as they were concentrated and frozen. They seemed as they were in a state of melancholy and endless sadness. His visions and appearances seem as they came from other dimensions, separated from the viewer by eternal mists. In his self-portraits he wore clear or black eyeglasses, behind which he looked at the world as a man who suffered a lot and conscious of his upcoming death (tuberculosis).

Jakimowicz worked with unique technique, using thousands of subtle, plainly microscopic lines and dots, using the black India ink. In result he achieved the infinite spectrum of grays which gave him an ability to create an aura of mystery. The impression of light, which he was able to achieve reminds Leonardo da Vinci's famous sfumato, or the style of his contemporary painter Eugene Carriere. Jakimowicz's technique ideally served in creation of dream-like, ghost-like, illusionary worlds. The artist wanted to show the mood and the emotion he observed, rather than to render the figure in realistic manner with actual shape and color.

W. S. Reymont, Polish writer and Noble Prize winner, was Mieczyslaw's uncle. In 1909, he wrote to his nephew: *The first condition of the good artist is not to take the line of least resistance, not to mock oneself, not to do anything, not to crumble one's soul and talent to pieces, and, of course, not to believe in oneself geniality. The artist could be great for the world, but not for oneself. Only boors and hinds could be self-contented in the arts. There is a huge gap between an intend and an outcome, and even though it would be a masterpiece, it is still nothing more than a shadow of what the artist wanted. Even the genius accomplishes only vaguely his goals, since there is no way to express wholly one's feelings and dreams.*

Jakimowicz's technical virtuosity combined with apparent means of expression revealed in the case of his composition, something very unusual, one of a kind, that would be lost and flattened in any other technique.

Through works of Mieczyslaw Jakimowicz weaves the strange kind of light which enhances essential human experiences as love, yearning, loneliness, fear, and death wrote Stefan Zeromski, Polish writer and artist's friend, who expressed this beautifully in the posthumous memoirs. Those feelings were not strange to Jakimowicz, an outstanding painter of the Young Poland movement, who in his short life created works, which have no comparison in the history of Polish painting.

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