

Zdzisław Beksiński, Self-Portrait, 1955, reproduction from the album Photo Beksiński published by the BOSZ Publishing House

Zdzisław Beksiński

24.02.1929—21.02.2005
#photography & visual arts

Author: [Culture.pl](#)

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Photographer, graphic artist, painter. Born in 1929 in Sanok, died on the 21st of February 2005 in Warsaw. Known for his surrealist-expressionist works.

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Early Career

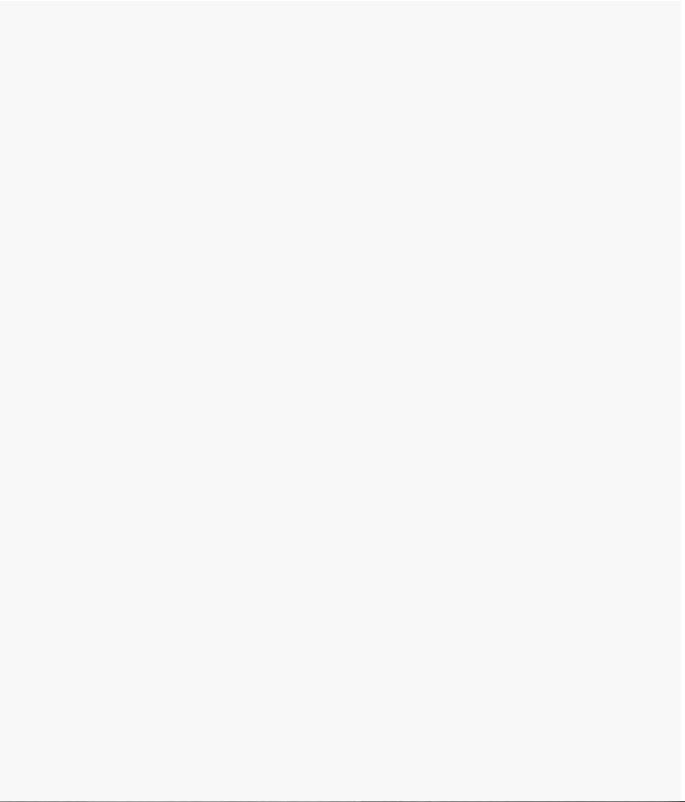
Zdzisław Beksiński started out as a photographer (1953-1960), later he became a draughtsman, graphic artist and a painter. In the years 1955-1959 he worked as a photographer and a painter. At the beginning of the sixties, for a certain time, he successfully took up sculpting. He was a member of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers, and in the years 1957-1963 he was a member of the Union of Polish Art Photographers.

After finishing his studies at the Kraków University of Technology Beksiński returned to his hometown of Sanok. Already in the first half of the fifties he created mature photographic works, only to become interested in painting later. In 1957 Beksiński together with [Lewczyński](#) and Schlabs formed an informal group which was active until 1959. The group's last exhibition was organized by Otto Steinert and took place in Cologne at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fotografie. Beksiński was the group's most theory-oriented artist. His surrealistic-expressionist works were among the most radical pieces created by the trio.

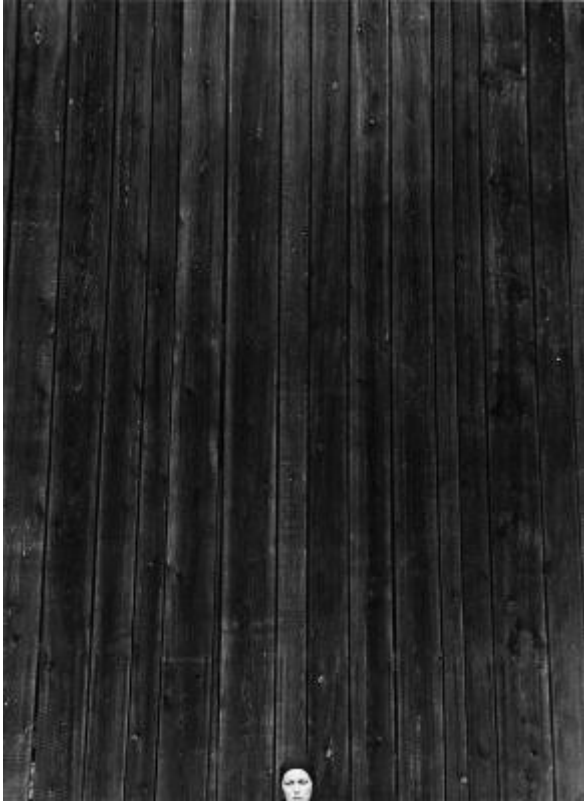
Selected Photographic Works by Zdzisław Beksiński – Image Gallery







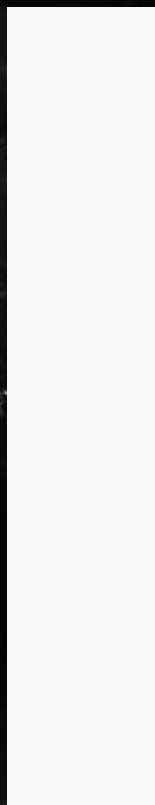


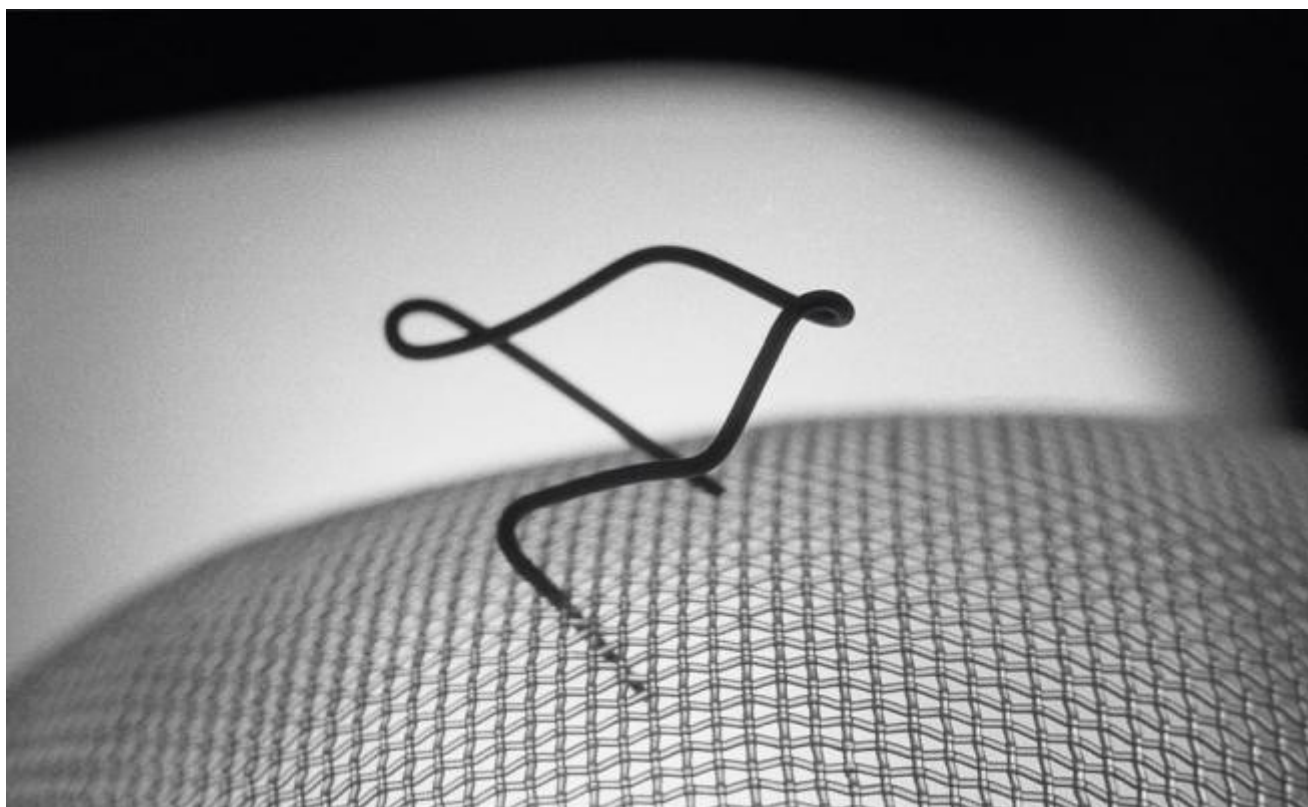


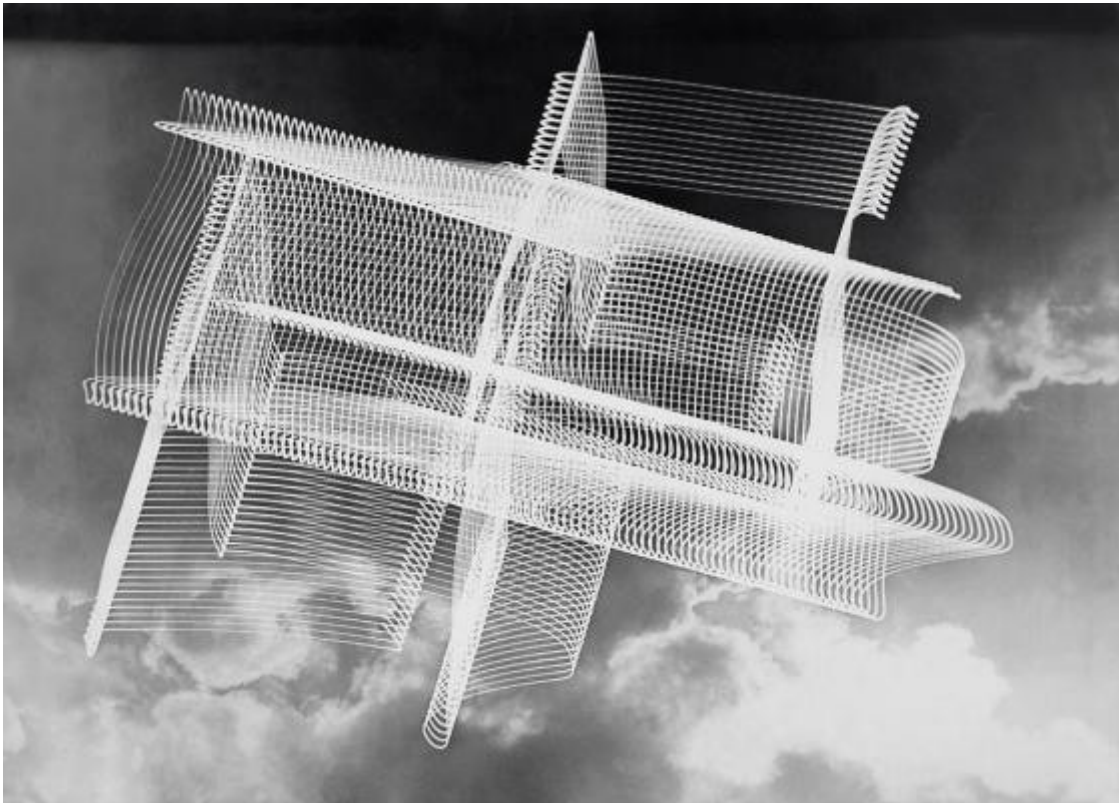






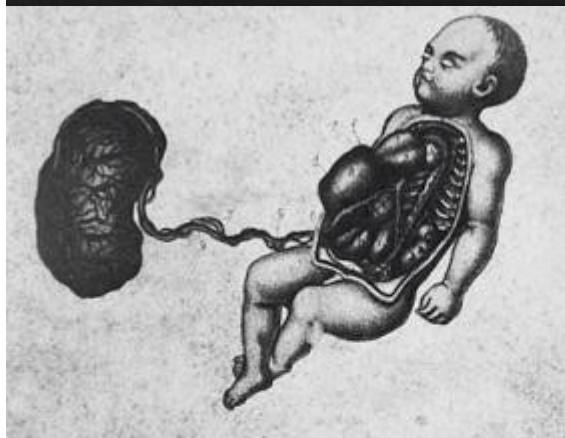








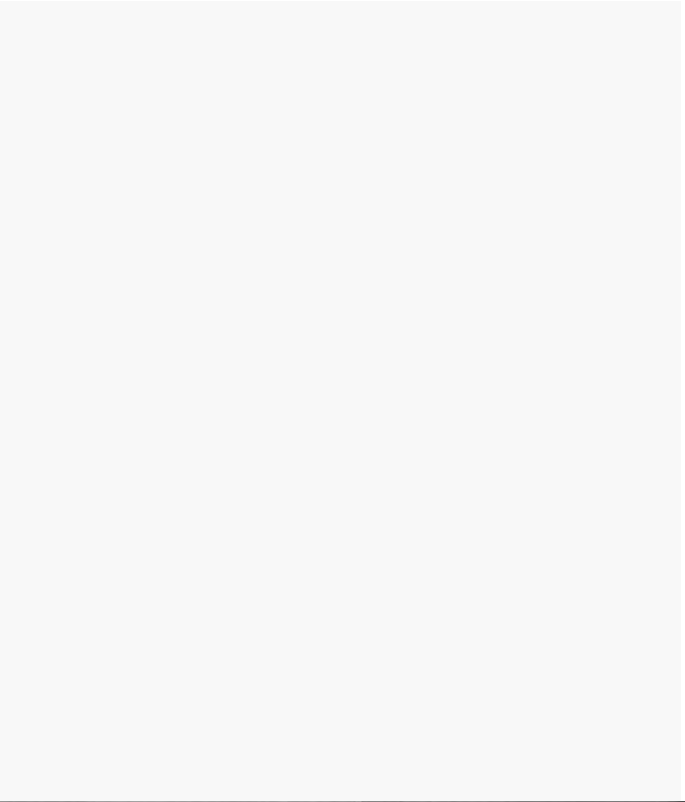
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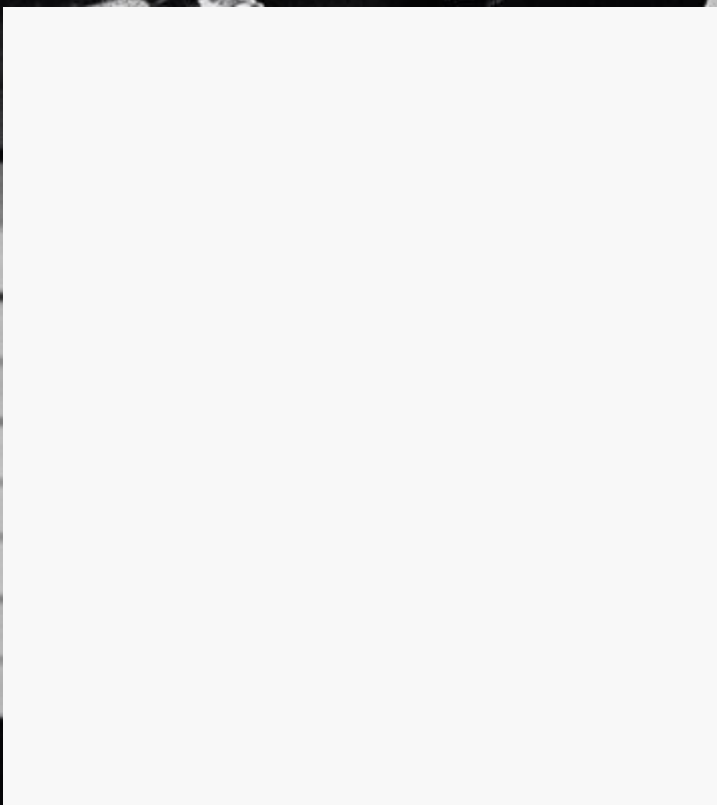


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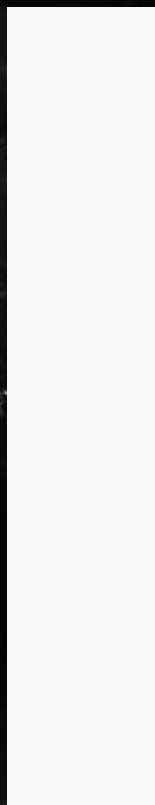


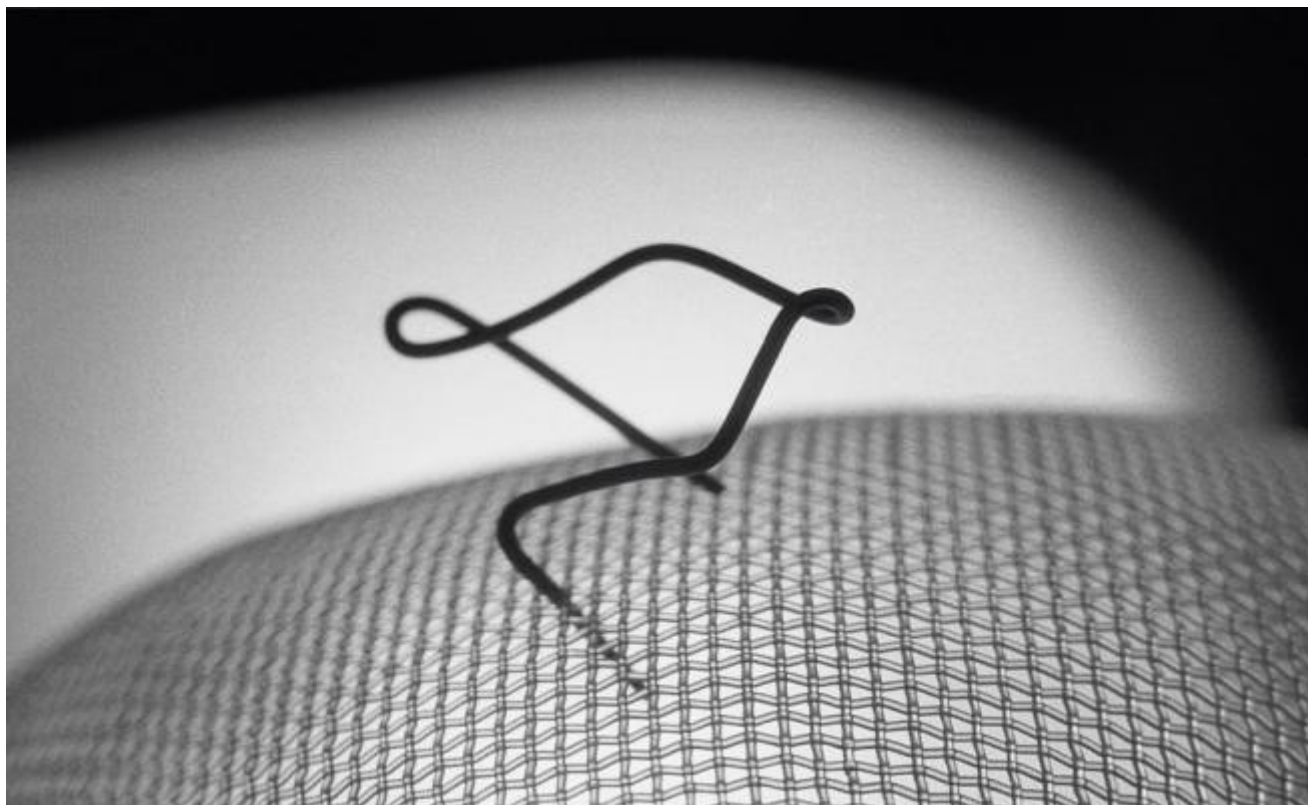


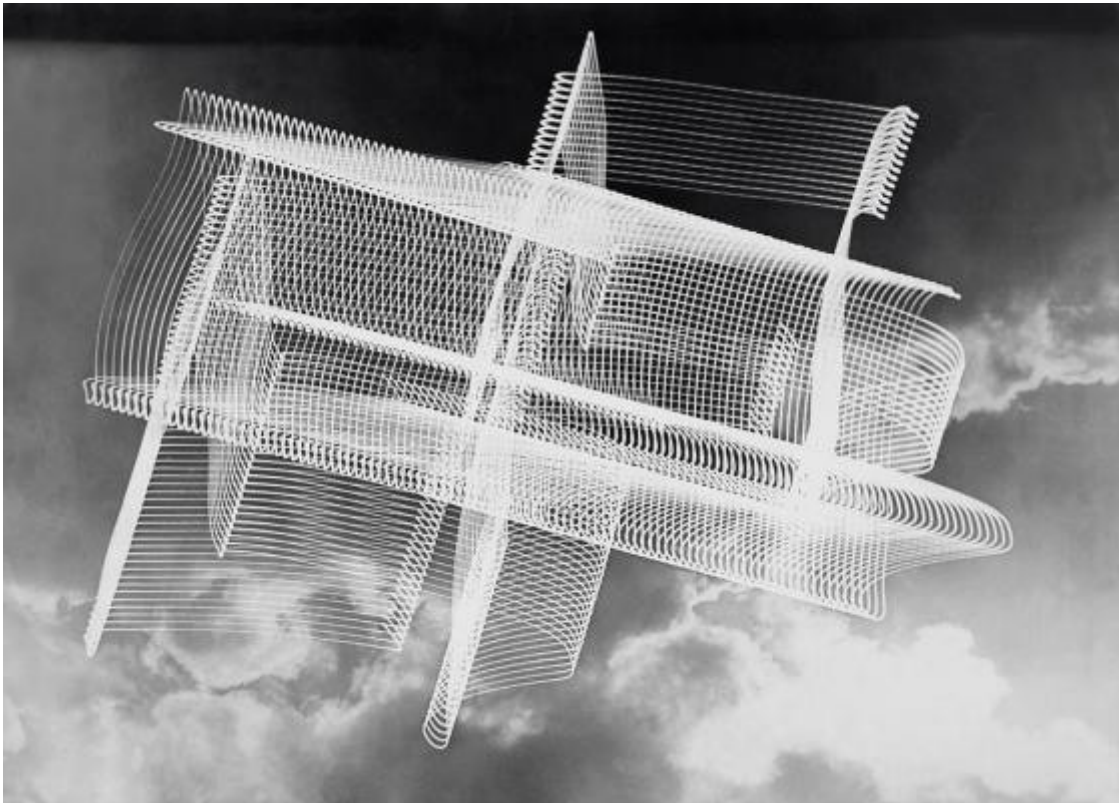






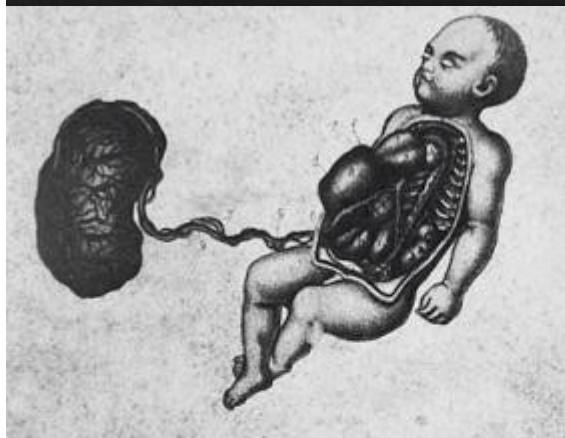




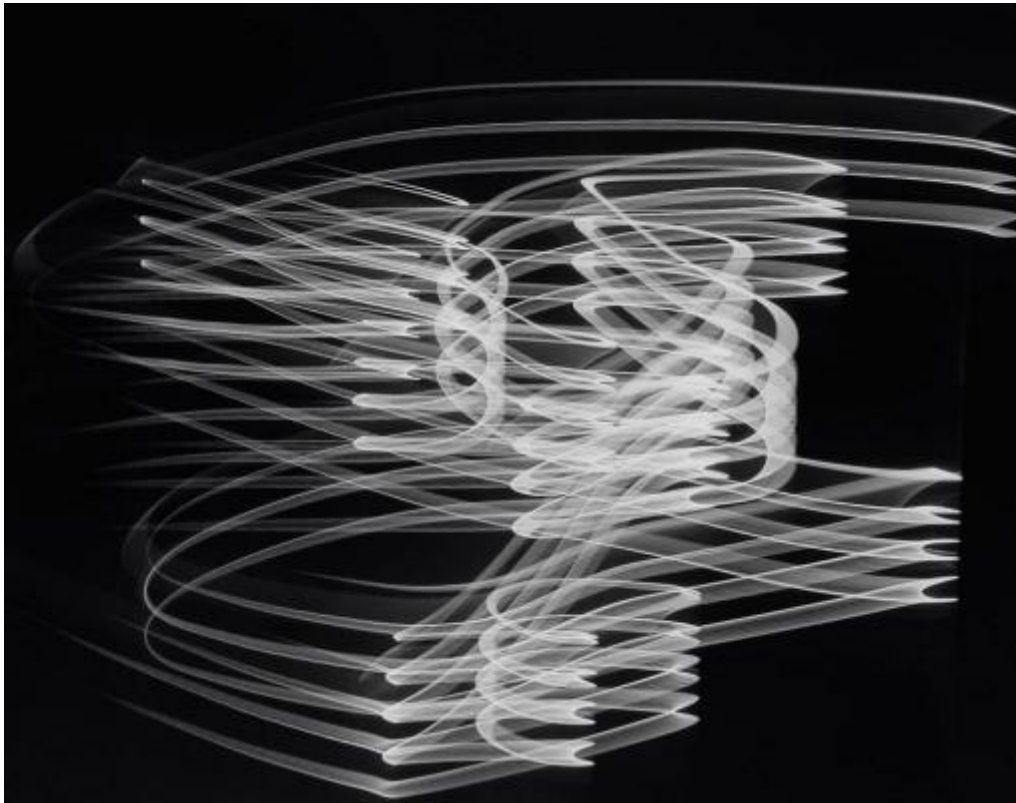




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An individual exhibition of his works was held at the Photographic Society in Gliwice in 1958. Beksiński wanted to continue the experiments of the interwar avant-garde and photographic modernism. He was inspired mainly by French surrealism, which manifested itself both in painting and photography. However he questioned all artistic values. Therefore he quickly exhausted and to a certain extent also ridiculed modernistic (avant-garde) tendencies, to which he tried to refer. He was convinced that all across the world modern art would come to an end, and that a period of 'new classics' which would use a synthesis of different, sometimes even considered contradictory artistic trends, would come.

Sadist's Corset



Zdzisław Beksiński, Sadist's Corset, 1957, National Museum in Wrocław, Bosz Publishing House

In 1959 at the Photographic Society in Gliwice an exhibition of the informal group, which went down in the history of Polish photography under the name Antiphotography, was held. It was then that Beksiński presented his famous work Sadist's Corset alongside a set of fourteen untitled works, which were inspired by surrealistic photography and the theory of film editing created by the famed Soviet constructivist Vsevolod Pudovkin. In his sets Beksiński used amateur photographs, reproductions from magazines (including pornographic ones), worn out negatives and

also reproductions of dictionary texts, which he presented in a form referring to film narration. He gave his works shocking and surprising titles, which interacted with the juxtaposed photographs. In 1958, in the eleventh issue of the periodical *Photography*, he published the text *Crisis in Photography and the Perspectives of Overcoming It*, one of the most important theoretical texts on photography written in Poland during the 20th century.

His photographic oeuvre boasts over a hundred photographs, today in the collection of the National Museum in Wrocław. His photographic works are among the most important achievements of Polish 20th-century photography. These works are a precursor to body-art, conceptualism and photo-media art as the artist worked on an assumption of transgressing existing canons of artistic photography.

Beksiński eventually grew disappointed with the limitations of photography and the impossibility of interfering with the obtained positive image. Around 1960 he pinned his last hopes on photomontage, but the projects never made it past the experimental phases.

Back to Painting



Painting by Zdzisław Beksiński, image courtesy of Znak publishing house

Later he devoted himself to painting. In 1959 he took part in the prestigious 3rd Exhibition of modern art at the [Zachęta National Gallery](#) in Warsaw. In 1960 he participated in a very important showing which accompanied the AICA Congress in Cracow (together with Zbigniew Makowski, Marek Piasecki and Bronisław Schlabs). At the end of the

fifties and in the beginning of the sixties Beksiński was one of the most interesting Polish painters. He referred to Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry (in such works as **Malte**) and existential philosophy. Around 1960 he created graphic works in an expressionist, anti-aesthetic style using the heliotype technique. At the same time he made sculptures from plaster and metal, which referred to Henry Moore's works. In the second half of the sixties he devoted himself to graphic art and drawing. His works from this period were filled with perverse erotic obsessions, which were permeated by symbols of death.

The exhibition held in 1964 at the Old Orangery in Warsaw, which was organized by Janusz Bogucki, had a significant impact on Beksiński's artistic career. It resulted in the artist becoming popular and fashionable. In the exhibition catalogue Bogucki pointed out to Beksiński's characteristic style based on contradictory aesthetic assumptions.

This involves the coexistence of two other, seemingly contradictory tendencies in Beksiński's works. One might simply say that it is a coexistence of extremely radical innovation with a deeply rooted traditionalism.

From the end of the sixties until the beginning of the seventies, motifs from Far East religions appeared in Beksiński's works. This was a result of the influence his friend from Katowice, the artist Andrzej Urbanowicz, had on him. [Jerzy Lewczyński](#) was also closely acquainted with Urbanowicz. Beksiński's works from the eighties show references to the method of "photographing dreams" (the artist's term) and also to baroque painting, 19th-century painting and non-geometrical abstractions. As a result the artist created a unique style, which in his erotic works, landscapes and portraits, came close to apocalyptic visions and teetered on the brink of kitsch. From the end of the nineties Beksiński also made digital graphics, both coloured and black and white. In them he often used his photographs.

The Photography of Zdzisław Beksiński - Video Collage

The artist's photographic output as well as his early sculpting and painting works from the sixties and seventies were also very significant as he was one of the few artists who, at the beginning of the sixties, consciously abandoned the avant-garde heritage to search for a synthesis of various styles. This might have been a portent of the upcoming postmodern breakthrough, which occurred in world art in the sixties and seventies and later in Polish art in the nineties. Zdzisław Beksiński's photographic works

have been displayed at several exhibitions in recent years, including Zdzisław Beksiński. From Avant-Garde to Postmodernism, Regional Museum in Kutno, 1993; Antiphotography and Beyond. Beksiński, Lewczyński, Schlabs, National Museum in Wrocław, 1993; Zdzisław Beksiński. Photographs 1953-1959, National Museum in Gdańsk, 2001/2002. His works are in the collections of the [National Museum in Wrocław](#), The National Museum in Warsaw, The Historical Museum in Sanok.



The Photography of Zdzisław Beksiński – Video

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The Cursed Paintings of Zdzisław Beksiński

A decade after his brutal murder, Zdzisław Beksiński' paintings hold the world spellbound. Is the universal fascination they evoke the result of their author's own gruesome tragedies, or did Beksiński simply succeed at capturing the unsettling underside of human consciousness?

[go to the#visual artstopic page](#)[go to the#photographytopic page](#)[go to the#photography & visual artstopic page](#)



Triptych Found in the Attic — Jerzy Lewczyński

“Tryptyk znaleziony na strychu” (“Triptych Found in the Attic”) from 1971 may be considered part of the archaeology of photography programme which has been realized since 1970. The said work started the series “Negatywy” (“Negatives”) which was being realized until the 90s.

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Author: Krzysztof Jurecki, Museum of Art in Łódź, August 2004. Updated in 2005. Translated by Marek Kępa, February 2012.

Works



Sadist's Corset - Zdzisław Beksiński



The Last Family – Jan P. Matuszyński

2016