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[Zdzisław Beksiński](#)

Timeline

Timeline – chronological order

1929

Zdzisław Beksiński was born on 24 February in Sanok.

The Beksiński family hailed from Koprzywnica near Sandomierz, from where the ancestor of the future

artist – Mateusz Beksiński – having been pursued by the Tsarist police following the fall of the

November Uprising, had travelled to Galicia; there he married the daughter of the local representative

Michalski and, on land purchased in Sanok, set up a coppersmith's workshop together with his friend

the insurgent Lipiński. This workshop was later expanded

by Lipiński's descendants into an industrial plant, which became the seed

of the Sanok Bus Factory.

1939–45

Zdzisław, then a teenager, spent the war in Sanok, continuing

his education at a commercial secondary school, whilst at the same time completing the first years

of lower secondary school through clandestine tuition. It was then that his fascination with

classical music began, listened to on a radio hidden under the floor and on records featuring excerpts from operas in

Russian, originating from areas occupied by the Wehrmacht on the other

side of the San River, which had been under

1939

under Soviet occupation. He detested the piano lessons arranged for him at his parents' request.

1947–52

Beksiński passed his A-levels in the mathematics and physics stream at the Boys' Grammar School in Sanok.

“I never actually studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, apart from the and being admitted to the course. I sat the entrance exams in Kraków for both the Academy of Fine Arts and architecture; I

was accepted into both, so, largely at my father's insistence, I chose architecture, and

my father promised me that if I completed the course, he would pay for me to study at film school and

I would become a director, which was my dream. [...] At architecture school, I learnt drawing.

And I never achieved more than a 'satisfactory plus' in that subject.

We had twelve hours of life drawing. I'd finish in three quarters of an hour, and then I'd rush to the cinema.

I never studied painting; in fact, I didn't

put much effort into art history either – Professor Wiktor Zin failed me in the exam; I remember that

I didn't know that David's painting *The Death of Marat* had been commissioned by the Convention.”

1951

Married Zofia Stankiewicz.

1952

After graduating, he worked in the construction industry.

“Unfortunately, when I finished my architecture degree, there were compulsory work assignments; my father had died,

I had to earn a living, and socialist realism meant I’d lost my enthusiasm for working on films. It wasn’t worth making them. [...] That’s when I started drawing. I had this notebook and would draw in it even during working hours. Artistic work gave me, I suppose, a way to escape reality. It allowed me to create my own world, independent of the one in which I organised teams of three bricklayers, broke records and so on.

[...] My work assignment was for Szczecin. I managed to wriggle out of it and work in my home town of Sanok. Then I was sent to Rzeszów, and just as I arrived there Stalin had just died.” (1953)

Beksiński began to take an interest in photography. “I was living in a workers’ hostel, where there was no room for a darkroom, so I couldn’t pursue photography, which interested me most. And I started drawing a lot. And since construction and building work—because architecture was out of the question, after all—didn’t appeal to me at all, I started painting. At first, my mother and my wife supported me. Then that changed.” (1954)

1955

Return to Sanok, where Beksiński lives in his family home on Świerczewskiego Street.

A break from architecture. He would later comment on this decision: “I cannot work in a collective. If I could build solely for myself, I could be an architect, just as I am a painter...”

In the second half of the 1950s, Beksiński was associated mainly with photography.

He becomes a member of the Association of Polish Art Photographers and exhibits his work, provoking

widely divergent opinions amongst the critics. At the same time, he produces his pastels – highly

expressionistic, full of distorted, semi-abstract human figures, in

which mechanical elements are often incorporated into the silhouettes.

1958

Tomasz, the artist's son, is born.

- July, group photography exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art – Old Town in Warsaw

- September, photography exhibition 'Closed Show' ('Anti-Photography') (a presentation of photographs by Zdzisław Beksiński, Jerzy Lewczyński and Bolesław Schlabs), ZPF Club in Gliwice.

The unconventional nature of these works (Beksiński presents a free-form, associative collage of photographs and slogans pasted onto large boards) leads Alfred Ligocki to call them "anti-photography", and this term supplants the original title of the exhibition.

At the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, he created abstract reliefs made from plastic, sheet metal and wire, as well as plaster sculptures and bas-reliefs.

- December: his first solo exhibition of reliefs, held at the premises of the Association of Polish Architects (SARP) in Poznań (the artist is still regarded by the artistic community as an architect).

1960

Beksiński gives up photography. “I realised that I did not possess the sort of imagination a photographer ought to have. A photographer must be open to reality and adapt their perspective to what exists. I, on the other hand, was open only to my inner world. I would devise every shot using props and people, and only then would I reach for the camera.”

- Autumn: took part in a private exhibition organised by Janusz Bogucki featuring five young artists to mark the AICA Congress (International Association of Art Critics) in Kraków.

1964

– May/June, the first major exhibition organised by Janusz Bogucki (31 paintings, 22 sculptures, 33 heliographs and as many as 116 drawings), at the Old Orangery in Łazienki Park, Warsaw.

Critics emphasised his “passion for solid craftsmanship” but, above all, the richness of form, imagination and expressiveness of his art, though there were also some negative voices.

1967

– July/August, an exhibition of drawings organised by Janusz Bogucki (together with Adolf Ryszka), at the MPiK Contemporary Art Gallery in Warsaw

The figurative compositions

—mostly executed in pen or black ballpoint pen—took the place of the abstract works of the 1950s and early 1960s. Viewers were shocked by

the stark eroticism of the scenes, combined with a distinctive treatment of the human figures – on the one hand, they bear the mark of physical decay; on the other, they are rendered surreal through the multiplication of facial features or their likeness to fantastic creatures.

“I went through a sort of

‘erotic’ phase in the 1960s. It was mainly about drawings. Back then, the Polish conception of eroticism was a plump blonde and half a litre, whereas I was drawing erotic works from the realm of

sadomasochism. They were somewhat disingenuous, as I was too ashamed to bare all.

They even organised an exhibition for me with one section open to the public and another closed section for specialists, which the public wanted to visit out of sheer defiance, because they weren’t allowed in there. It was the 1960s, and it was classified as a form of martyrdom. Even the Museum of the History of the Revolutionary Movement bought some of the works.”

1968

- April, exhibition of drawings, the ‘Arsenał’ Gallery in Poznań
- May, solo exhibition, Contemporary Art Salon in Łódź
- November, exhibition of drawings, PSP-ZPAP Gallery in Katowice
- November/December, exhibition of drawings, BWA Gallery in Rzeszów

A year later

1970

his drawings were exhibited exclusively in group exhibitions, alongside his paintings.

The 1960s were a period of fascination with esotericism, the occult and the writings of the Holy Men.

In an interview from

1987

, Beksinski somewhat wryly recalls that this knowledge served to shock those he spoke to who wished to discuss contemporary topics.

1970

– April, solo exhibition, Galeria Współczesna in Warsaw.

The Boguccy, discoverers and enthusiasts of Beksinski's art, organised an exhibition, at which – alongside drawings – the artist decided for the first time to show a series of paintings.

From the early 1970s, painting began to dominate the artist's work, a medium which had previously played no significant role. The subject matter also gradually changed – from around

1972

onwards, there were noticeably fewer skulls, ghosts and decaying bodies on his canvases, replaced instead by vast, atmospheric landscapes, full of mysterious structures and ruins overgrown with grass. Critics write of pastiche and playful experiments with styles – particularly 19th-century painting of Romantic pathos and 20th-century Surrealism.

1971

– February, solo exhibition of paintings and drawings, the ‘Pryzmat’ in Kraków

- February/March, group exhibition, the 5th February Salon and the 6th March Salon in Zakopane

1972

– March/April, group exhibition ‘Creators of Our Culture’ in Budapest (Hungary)

– December, solo exhibition, Współczesna Gallery in Warsaw

“I decided on low prices and sold all the paintings on display. It was fantastical art; the public interpreted it from a slightly different angle than I had intended, but that’s how our symbiosis began.”

He is now regarded by the critical community as a “genuine”, albeit still highly controversial, artist.

1973

- participation in a group exhibition of museum acquisitions at the Historical Museum in Sanok

- August, solo exhibition (drawings, heliographs, oil paintings, patinated plaster), PSP-ZPAP Gallery in Katowice

1974

– April/May, exhibition “Dreams, Myths, Initiations”, BWA Gallery in Kłodzko

- solo exhibition, BWA Gallery in Wałbrzych

- October/November, Kartstadt-Haus Gallery, Cologne (Germany)

Beksiński was awarded a state prize. His final drawings were created, very different from those of the 1960s. In form and content, they were identical to his paintings – executed in black chalk on relatively large canvases (averaging 100 x 70 cm)

1975

– May/June, solo exhibition, Historical Museum in Sanok.

- September, group exhibition, 'Art Critics Propose', Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw

In the AICA (International Association of Art Critics) survey '30

Masterpieces in the 30th Anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland', conducted amongst Polish critics, the name

of Beksiński appeared in first place.

1976

- July, exhibition, STU Theatre in Kraków
- September, solo exhibition, MPiK Club in Bytom
- October/November, exhibition of photographs from

1955–59

at the National Museum in Wrocław

- autumn, exhibition, Kartstadt-Haus Gallery, Cologne (Germany)
- autumn, exhibition of drawings, Simone von Dormael Gallery, Brussels (Belgium)
- December, exhibition, BWA Gallery in Łódź

1977

The artist's family home in Sanok – as part of the town modernisation programme – was earmarked for demolition, which hastened to move to Warsaw. “I like to get lost in the crowd, because then I don't stand out and I feel at ease. [...] I'd most like to live in Hamburg or New York, in such a seething hellish cauldron, a monstrous cluster of people. [..] Besides, for a lover of artificiality, who hates the sounds of dogs, small children, birds – most of the sounds that Warsaw makes, such as cars, trams, aeroplanes, etc. – these are sounds that are essentially neutral, or even pleasant, when compared to perfect silence”.

1978

– October, solo exhibition,
“BAFOMET” Cultural Centre in Florence (Italy)

1979

– solo exhibition, Kartstadt-Haus Gallery in Cologne
(Germany)

1980

Beksiński's works appear in over a dozen exhibitions of Polish art organised abroad by the Łódź Office of Art Exhibitions (including in Paris, London, Berlin, Budapest, Stockholm, Vienna and Bratislava)

- December, group exhibition, 'Sanok December Salon', the Historical Museum in Sanok

1981

- July/September, solo exhibition, the Wahl Gallery in Warsaw

- December, group exhibition, 'Sanok December Salon', the Historical Museum in Sanok

A circle of admirers begins to form around Beksiński's work, seeing in it – contrary to the artist's intentions – metaphysical generalisations and symbolic meanings

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1982

Martial law is in force – Beksinski's works are often perceived as a reflection of the situation in the country at the time.

The artist himself would comment on this in

1984

: "I suppose I am rather insensitive to

political reality. [...] Perhaps it is because I live on the sidelines, I do not work in an institution,

I do not have to attend meetings; I do not harbour that immense aversion

to the system which has built up in 90 per cent of my acquaintances. I am

simply indifferent. I sit in my own little world, look out of the window, and see that the bison are fighting the bears. I myself am neither a bison nor a bear.

Most likely I'd like to help in some way, because it's rather sad to see someone bleeding from the nose, but what on earth am I supposed to do...?".

Beksinski's paintings from private and museum collections are on display in

Moda (the 'II Torchio' Gallery)

and Sanok (the Historical Museum).

1983

– November, an exhibition of works from Aleksander Szydła's collection,
the PSP-ZPAP Gallery in Katowice

- December, exhibition of works from Aleksander Szydło's collection, MPiK Club in Gliwice

1984

- 'One Painting' Exhibition, 'Inny Świat' Gallery in Kraków

Around the mid-1980s, the artist's painting began to evolve towards asceticism

in both subject and form, accompanied by a sharpening of his artistic techniques. The work is dominated by

subdued colours and monochromatic palettes – cool greys, delicately

broken up by blues or yellows, and lightened shades of ochre, sienna and umber.

“As if weary of accusations of an excess of content, he began to paint almost

exclusively form,” reads an article by Tadeusz Nyczek. And the artist himself recalls that he painted his very last series of works “in the old style” solely at the request of Piotr Dmochowski. “But I soon said: enough, I’ll only paint what I want to paint.”

1985

– October, solo exhibition (over the course of the month it was seen by 15,000 people) of paintings and drawings from Piotr Dmochowski’s collection, at the Valmay Gallery in Paris

1986

– April, group exhibition, “Salon des Indépendants”, Grand Palais, Paris

– May, group exhibition, “Salon de Mai”, Grand Palais, Paris

– May, group exhibition, “Malmaison”, Cannes (France)

– June, group exhibition, ‘Salon Comparaisons’, Grand Palais, Paris

- July/August, group exhibition, ‘Figuration Critique’, Antwerp (France)
- October/November, solo exhibition, Valmay Gallery, Paris
- November, group exhibition, Town Hall, Bouffemont, (France)
- November, group exhibition, ‘Autumn Salon’, Grand Palais, Paris

1987

- January, exhibition, BWA Gallery, Krosno
- February / March, solo exhibition of drawings, Polish Institute, Paris
- February, exhibition, BWA Gallery, Gorzów
- April, exhibition, museum, Rzeszów
- May, group exhibition, ‘Salon des Indépendants’ and ‘Salon des Artistes Français’,
Grand Palais, Paris
- June, group exhibition ‘XXI International Award of Contemporary Art of

Monte Carlo' (UNESCO awards Beksinski the prize),

- July/August, group exhibition, Orly Airport, Paris

- November, group exhibition, 'Salon d'Automne', Grand Palais, Paris

- December, group exhibition, 'MAC 2000', Grand Palais, Paris

- December, exhibition, Wahl Gallery, Warsaw

1988

– February, solo exhibition, UNESCO, Paris

- May, group exhibition "XXII International Award of Contemporary Art of Monte Carlo"

- June, photography exhibition, Historical Museum in Sanok

- June, group exhibition, 'Salon Comparaisons', Grand Palais, Paris

- September / November, solo exhibition, Valmay Gallery, Paris

- September / October, solo exhibition, Cultural Centre, Metz (France)
- September / November, solo exhibition, “Ars Polona”, Düsseldorf (Germany)
- September, exhibition, Powszechny Theatre, Warsaw
- October, BWA Gallery, Poznań

1989

- October / November, “Galerie Dmochowski”, Paris

1990

- October, exhibition, “Toh-Ou Museum” (Museum of Eastern Europe) in Osaka (Japan)
- November, exhibition, Nowoczesna Gallery, Kołobrzeg
- December, exhibition, BWA Gallery in Słupsk

1993

– exhibition, ‘From the Avant-Garde to Postmodernism’,

Regional Museum in Kutno

– exhibition, ‘Anti-Photography and Beyond’, a presentation of photographs

by Zdzisław Beksiński, Jerzy Lewczyński and Bolesław Schlabs,

a reconstruction of the Gliwice exhibition ‘Anti-Photography’ from

1958

, National Museum in Wrocław

- exhibition, BWA Gallery in Olsztyn

1994

- February, exhibition, KUL Visual Arts Gallery in Lublin

- March, exhibition, reconstruction of the Gliwice exhibition “Anti-Photography”
from

1958

, Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle in
Warsaw

1995

- Retrospective exhibition at the Museum of the Archdiocese of Warsaw
- Beksiński’s paintings from the collection of Anna and Piotr Dmochowski
- September, exhibition, Centre for the Promotion of Art in Łódź
- November/December, exhibition, International Cultural Centre in Kraków

1996

- January/February, exhibition, BWA Contemporary Art Gallery in Katowice

- February, exhibition, Wahl Gallery in Warsaw

- March/April, exhibition, Abbots' Palace in Gdańsk-Oliwa

1999

- The European Science Fiction Association awards

Beksiński, as a graphic artist, the Eurocon Award

- April/May, first exhibition of computer photomontages, the 'ESTA' Contemporary Art Gallery in Gliwice

- August, solo exhibition, the Historical Museum in Sanok

- exhibition, 'Art and Fear', 'Format' Gallery in Kraków

- November/December, 6xBeksiński, an exhibition of computer photomontages in Gliwice, Poznań, Warsaw, Szczecin, Kluczbork and Miechów,

organised by the Renes and ESTA Galleries

2000

– March, group exhibition, ‘Osobni’, Silesian Museum in Katowice

- June/July, exhibition, ‘New Works’, ‘ESTA’ Contemporary Art Gallery in Gliwice

- July/August, exhibition of computer graphics, State Art Gallery in Sopot

- September, exhibition of computer graphics, “Format” Gallery in Kraków

- October, exhibition of computer graphics, Provincial Cultural Centre in Częstochowa

- October, group exhibition ‘Images of Death in 19th- and 20th-Century Polish Art’, National Museum in Kraków

- December, exhibition, painting, Lonty–Petry Gallery in Częstochowa

2001

- January, exhibition, painting, the Lonty–Petry Gallery in
Częstochowa

– February/March, exhibition, ‘Latest Paintings’, the ‘ESTA’ Contemporary Art Gallery
in Gliwice