

The Museum of Modern Art

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POSTERS BY STAROWIEYSKI ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The haunting poster imagery of one of Poland's foremost artists will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art between April 11 and June 4, 1985. Thirty-one posters by Franciszek Starowieyski have been selected for the exhibition by Robert Coates, supervisor of the Museum's Architecture and Design Study Center.

Starowieyski, who began his career in the mid-fifties, has been commissioned to design posters to promote plays, films, and other cultural events. The works on view at the Museum range in date from 1965 to the present and include a poster designed especially for this exhibition. Although the posters vary widely in subject matter, the selection is unified by a "preoccupation with monstrosity," according to Coates. Drawn largely from the Museum's collection of Starowieyski's work, the exhibition will be augmented by a number of the artist's preparatory drawings.

Posters are an important and popular art form in Poland, where the city of Warsaw boasts a museum devoted exclusively to the poster image. In the sixties, Poland's whimsical circus posters drew international admiration. Starowieyski, on the other hand, prefers to express the darker side of life in his work in a style that owes much to Renaissance drawing.

The artist has explained that he searches for inspiration in nature. The human body, fallen leaves, bones, clouds, insects, even shadows find their way into his highly idiosyncratic vocabulary. Often grotesquely distorted,

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his images are particularly disconcerting because of the intricate detail in which they are rendered.

Starowieyski integrates the poster's text with its overall composition, opting for hand-lettering over mechanical type. The calligraphic ornament of the hand-painted text "enhances the central theme while remaining separate from it," writes Coates in the exhibition catalogue.

The vivid, often bizarre detail which characterizes the artist's work has become increasingly dense over the years. Yet his nightmarish distortions of the human figure, seen for example in posters for the film "Mademoiselle" (1970) and Molière's "Don Giovanni" (1976), are not without a certain grim humor. In this regard Starowieyski compares his imagination to that of Heironymus Bosch and Arcimboldo.

Starowieyski has written, "I deeply admire the past. In my opinion the aptitude of contemporary man for the fine arts is dying out and it is the task of the avant-garde to preserve as much as possible from the past." Since the seventies he has maintained the curious practice of predating his work by 300 years, allowing him to preserve the fiction of viewing the twentieth century from a seventeenth-century vantage point. "His retreat into the past is not entirely escapist," writes Coates, "for he has chosen a time when the seeds of the present are recognizable. Starowieyski's work measures the distortions in our progress."

In conjunction with the exhibition, a fourteen-minute film about the artist, produced in 1970, will be shown continuously in the Museum's John R. Noble Education Center.

For further information, please contact the Public Information Department, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019. (212)708-9750
