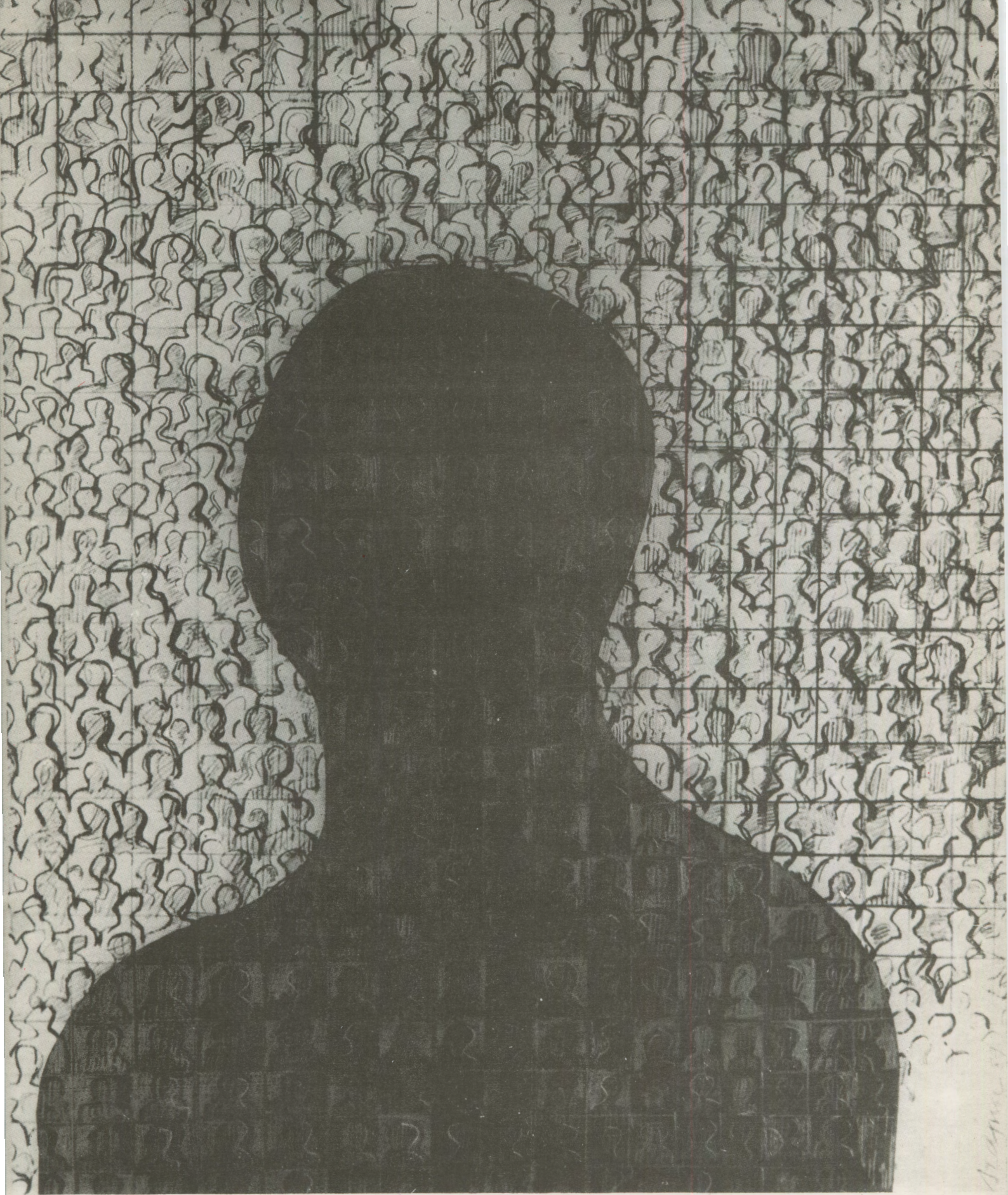
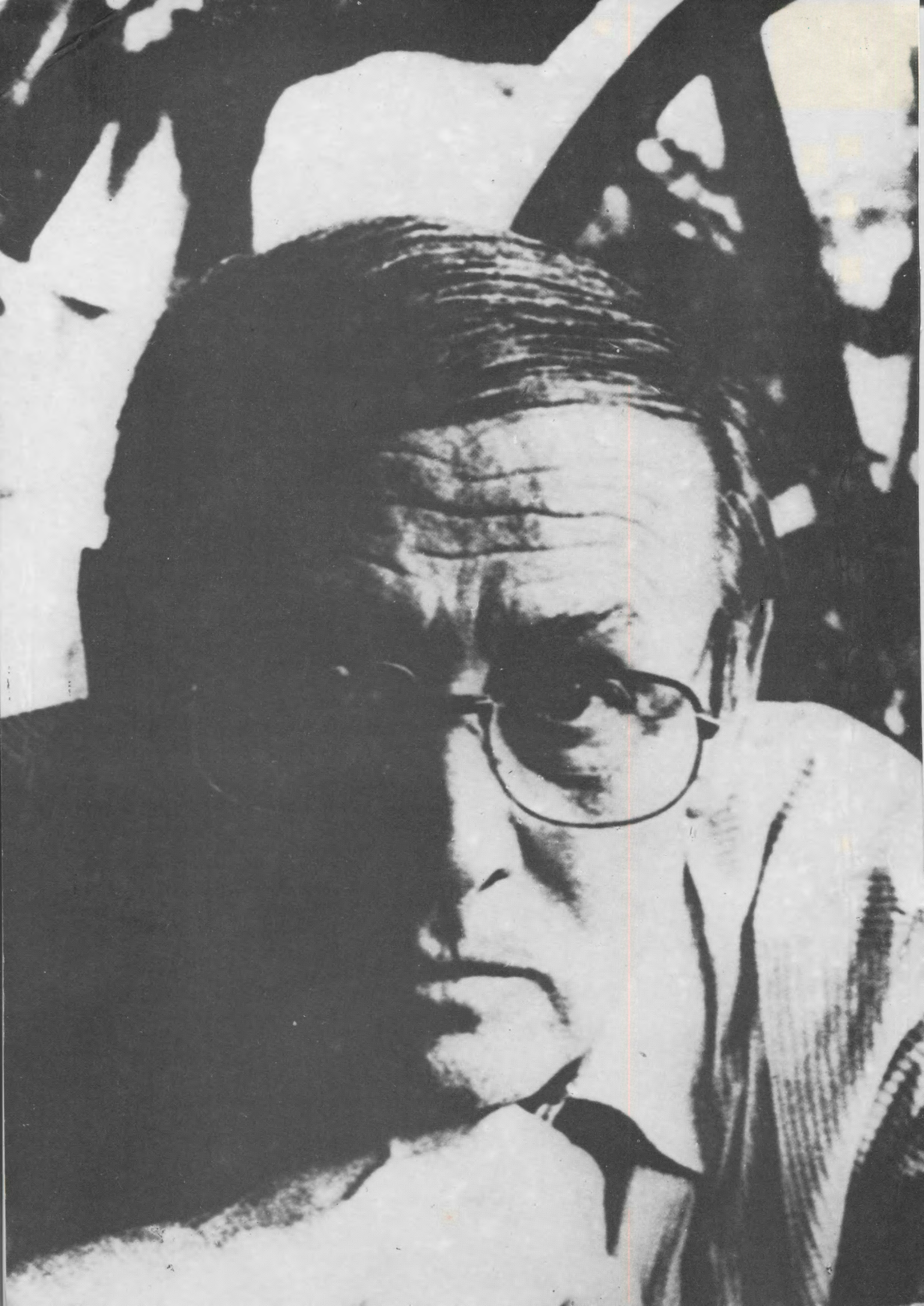


**JOZEF SZAJNA**



**Venice Biennale  
P o l a n d**







A number of theoreticians have already tried to define Józef Szajna: is he a painter, playwright, sculptor, graphic or may be an architect of real, stage space or conventional space of a painting? No one found an adequate answer, as Szajna's exceptional talent and individuality are indefinable. Being a great painter, playwright, scenographer, sculptor and architect Szajna is above all an artist – an individual striving to express his emotions by means of visual media, no matter whatever field of art they belong to. He obeys the one precedent law: his own imagination, emotions and experiences. They form a material to give it a shape the artist needs, they inspired Szajna to tear and burn surfaces of his paintings long before Burri did it; they make the artist indifferent towards any particular style or convention.

General, elementary ideas and emotions in a very broad sense are the field of artistic interest of Józef Szajna. In his interpretation every personal experience becomes a general problem, embracing the whole of mankind constantly imperilled by evil forces that emerge from chaos, continuous struggle, pressing inertia of clashing forces. Out of such chaos overflowed by crying the act of Szajna emerges. By elimination and submission the shape becomes softly delineated, more clear and this gives the upper hand to the contents, somehow sublimates them and release from the ballast of form.

Szajna's works are not produced to be beautiful or decorative. They are not even to be displayed in museums or galleries as the works of art. The one and only role of Szajna's compositions is to record and express emotions of their creator, then they can disappear, break up as the artist does not need them any more, whereas the audience still want to look at them to find their own troubles and worries. Józef Szajna was born on 13 March 1922 in Rzeszów; also he was 17 when the Second World War broke out – too less to fight in the regular army, enough to join the resistance movement. Captured and taken to Auschwitz he arrived there so early, that he got a very low, five-figure number 18 729.

Everybody knows what was Auschwitz and the extermination camp, but only those who survived that horror are aware of what it really meant, therefore they never talk about it except with other former camp inmates, as no words can express the nightmare of it. The ex-prisoner number 18 729 also assumes the same attitude. His works do not express the horrible past, but they warn us against evil, which may always revive.

Yes, Szajna gives us a warning, but first of all he observes a man in extremely untypical situations like living in a concentration camp. The artist's eye is bitter and sharp, he reveals the truth and puts questions concerning an ultimate fate of a human being.

In his spatial composition „Reminiscences” – an epitaph dedicated to the Cracovian artists taken to Auschwitz in 1942, Szajna definitively deals with the past. First time displayed in Cracow on the occasion of 150 anniversary of the Cracovian Academy of Fine Arts, then at Venice Biennale in 1970 and at Ruhrfestspiele (1971) „Reminiscences” were later purchased by the Museum in Bochum and presented at the jubilee „Bilder von Menschen in der Kunst des Abendlandes” exhibition in West Berlin among masterpieces created

since Roman times up to Picasso, Leger and Holder.

About Szajna's „Reminiscences” Dino Buzatti writes as follows: „...everyone who saw the work of Józef Szajna gets very much impressed by it... His thrilling composition „Reminiscences”, devoted to the martyrology of Auschwitz looks like a stock-still, paralysed theatre performance in which there is on border between a stage and audience and whoever enters the exposition becomes a part of it. The way Szajna depicts those terrible days of war is a great value of his art. He presents only bare facts, withholding his feeling of hatred...”

Szajna's next artistic achievement – „Replica” cycle carries a timeless message. Movement and sound, playing a big part in it at first, are gradually limited, thus the work turns out to be a synthesis of the contents and form, still very presentative. In his artistic performance „Dante” Szajna took up the motif of Dante's „Hell” to remind us that the hell has always existed and it is only up to us if we would let it come out upon the surface of earth and conquer the world once again with its hideous, totalitarian system.

It was written about Szajna that he carries his art around the world as a message. It is true. Indeed, Szajna treats his own artistic activity as a mission, therefore he never defines himself as a representative of any particular trend or abides any standing rules of an artistic play. He was always indifferent towards such basic problems as the questions of the vanguard art in their theoretical and formal aspect. What counts is only the expression and he tries to find the most adequate forms and materials to express himself... This characteristic of his art caused that he was recognized as a precursor of a number of achievements of the expressive trends. Moreover: due to its power of expression, Szajna's art is always up-to date, it strikes our imagination. Such it was 20 years ago in Venice, where he displayed for the first time and now, when Szajna is an artist known all over the world. Today we pay him homage on the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Second World War's outbreak.

This celebration does not include writing any theoretical treatises, as is customary. Szajna rejects the theory, he derides it since he is no doubt a vanguard artist and his art is really unique. It is neither a form based on the ex-post philosophy nor a philosophy closed in a formally perfect shape.

The vanguard art of Szajna is a question of morality, therefore it survived the crisis of the vanguard art movement as a formation.

*Jerzy Madeyski*





#### Director's and scenographic productions:

Stanisław Wyspiański, „Acropolis”, cooperation with Jerzy Grotowski, Opole, Theatre 13 Rzędów (Theatre of 13 Rows), 1962

Mikołaj Gogol, „Rewizor” („Revisor”), Nowa Huta, Ludowy Theatre, 1963

Miguel de Cervantes, „Don Kichot”, Nowa Huta, Ludowy Theatre, 1963

Witold Wandurwski, „Śmierć na gruszy” („The Death on the pear-tree”), scen. Daniel Mróz, Nowa Huta, Ludowy Theatre, repeated: Warsaw, Theatre Ateneum 1966, Wrocław, Współczesny Theatre, 1968

Tadeusz Hołuj, „Puste pole” (The deserted field), Florence, Ressegna Internazionale dei Teatri Stabili, 1965

Włodzimierz Majakowski, „Misterium-buffo” („Mystery-buffo”), Nowa Huta, Ludowy Theatre, 1965

Franz Kafka, „Das Schlo” („The Castle”), Nowa Huta, Ludowy Theatre, 1966

S. I. Witkiewicz, „Oni” („They”). „Nowe wyzwolenie” („The New Liberation”), Cracow, Stary Theatre, Belgrad, International Theatre Festival „Bitef 212”, 1967

Charles Gounod, „Faust”, Cracow, Theatre J. Słowacki, 1967

Sean O'Casey, „The Scarlett Dust”, Katowice, Śląski Theatre, 1968

Ernest Bryll, „Rzecz Listopadowa” („November event”), Katowice, Śląski Theatre, 1969





A puppet (Theatre of Panic), spatial composition



Apotheosis, 1967, mixed technic  
property of the Studio Gallery in Warsaw



Without a title, 1985, assemblage



A sitting person, 1967, mixed technic



Two people, 1966, mixed technic  
property of the National Museum in Warsaw





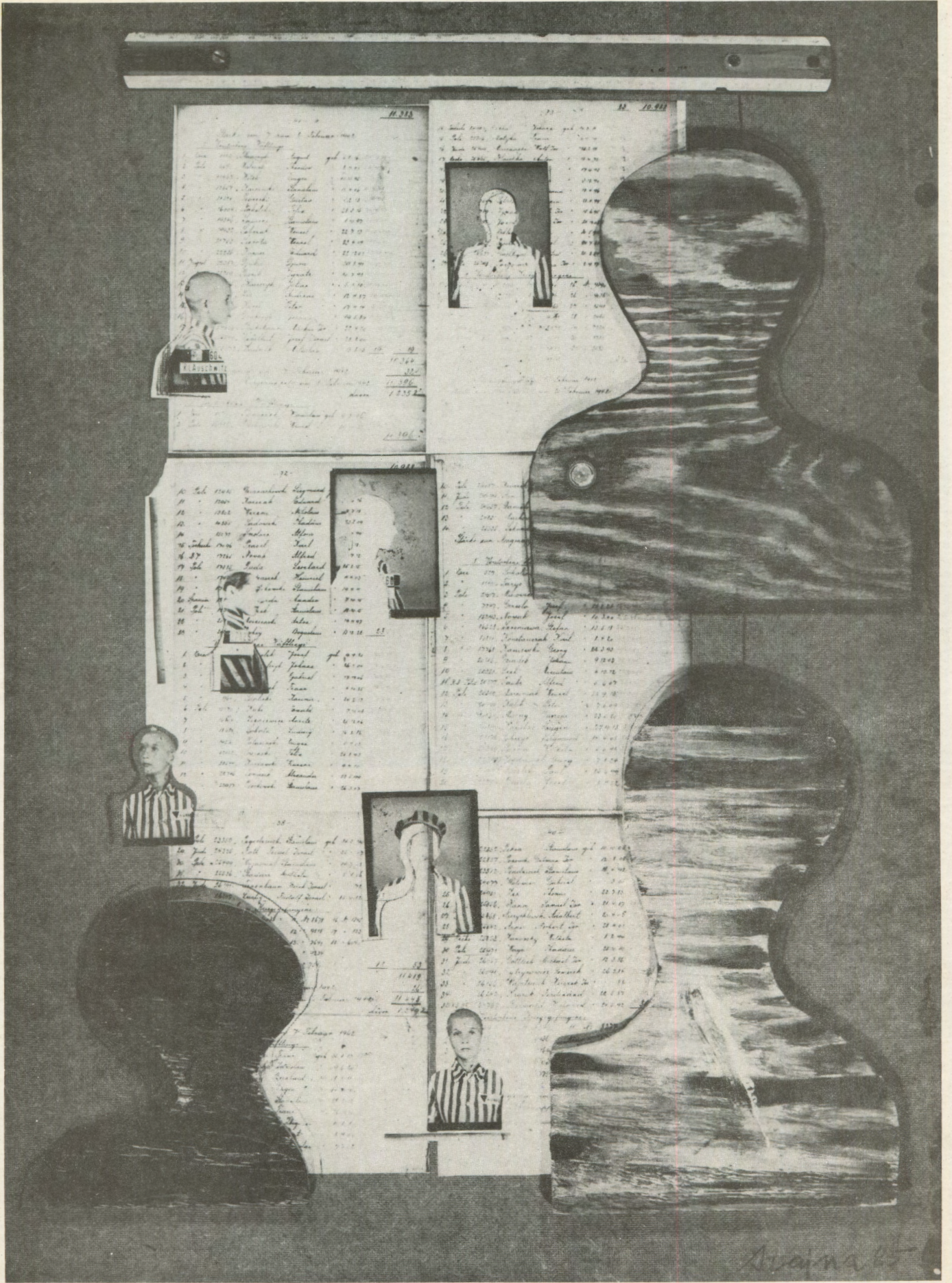
Reminiscences (fragment), 1969, environment  
property of G. K. Johnssen family (Essen)  
displayed in the Museum of Art in Bochum  
composition dedicated to the artists murdered in the  
extermination camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau (frag-  
ment)





The wall of shoes, 1987, spatial composition

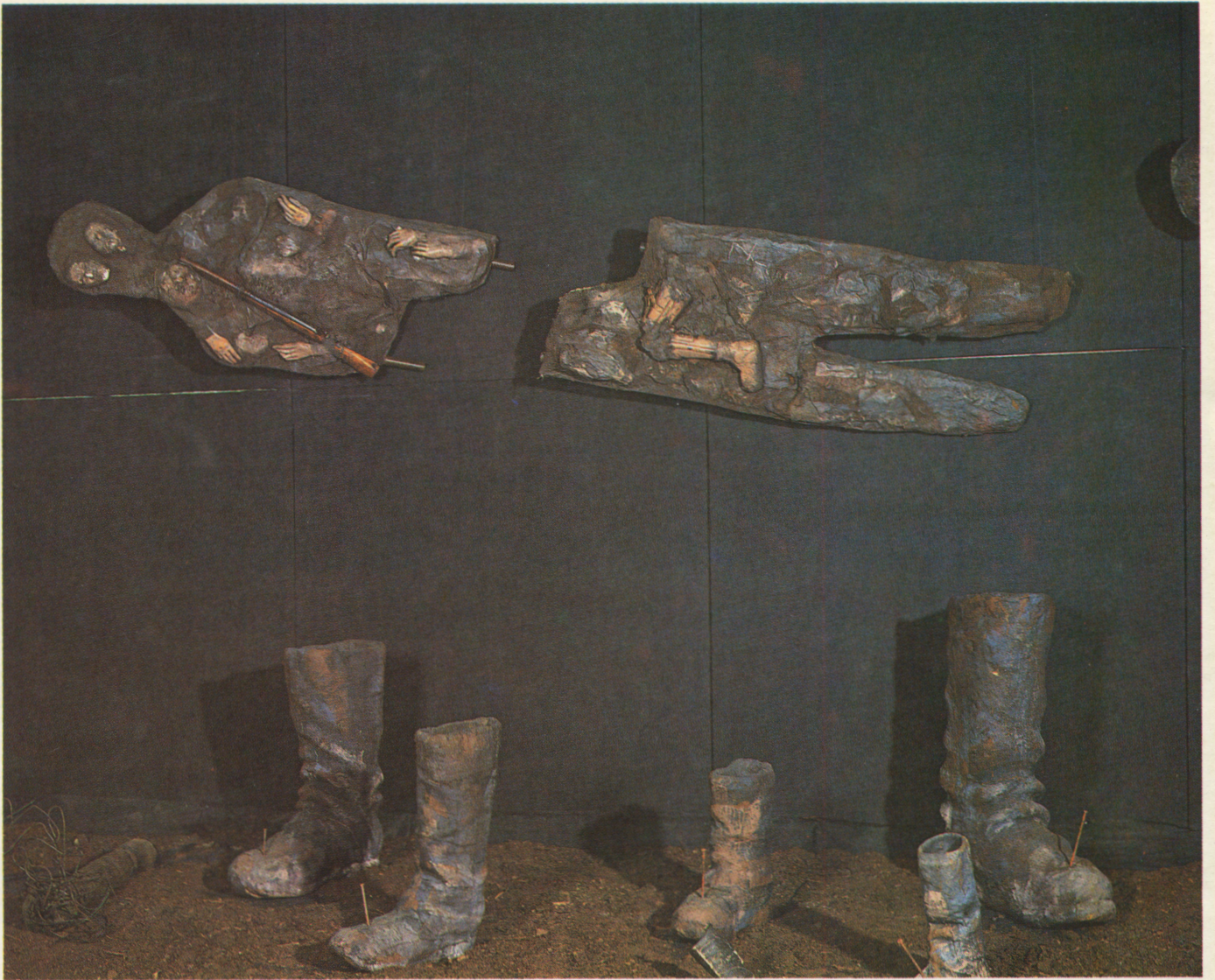




Numbers, 1985, collage

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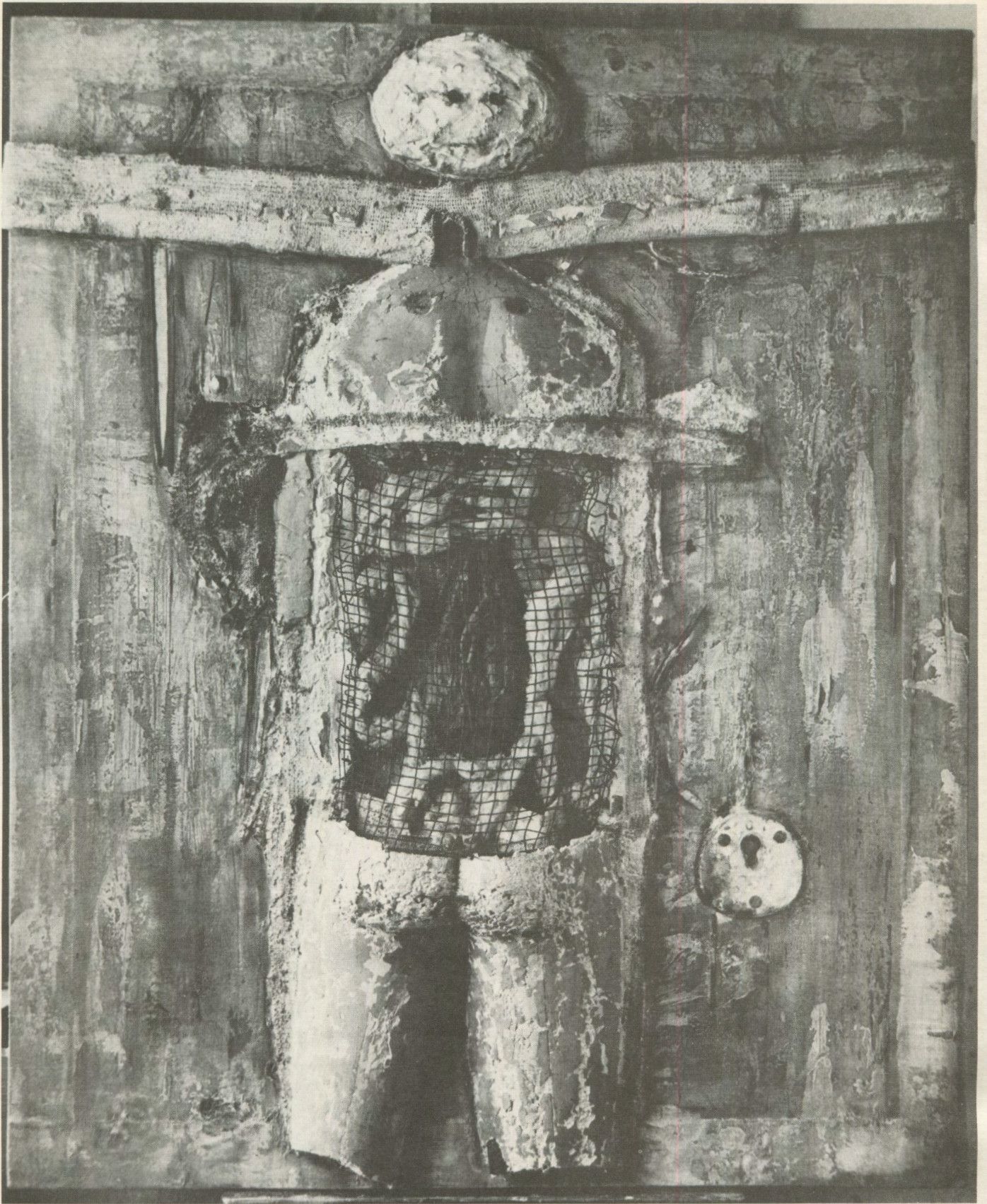


Drang nach Osten, Drang nach Westen (fragment),  
1987, composition









A soldier, 1969, mixed technic  
property of the Chelm Region Museum





Replica (fragment), 1972



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