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KOREA, ASIA, AND BEYOND

DAEJIN UNIVERSITY, 5 JULY–10 JULY 2016

***TREATISES OF ROMANTIC
GEOMETRY
IN THE MAGICAL ART
OF ZBIGNIEW MAKOWSKI***

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Zbigniew Makowski



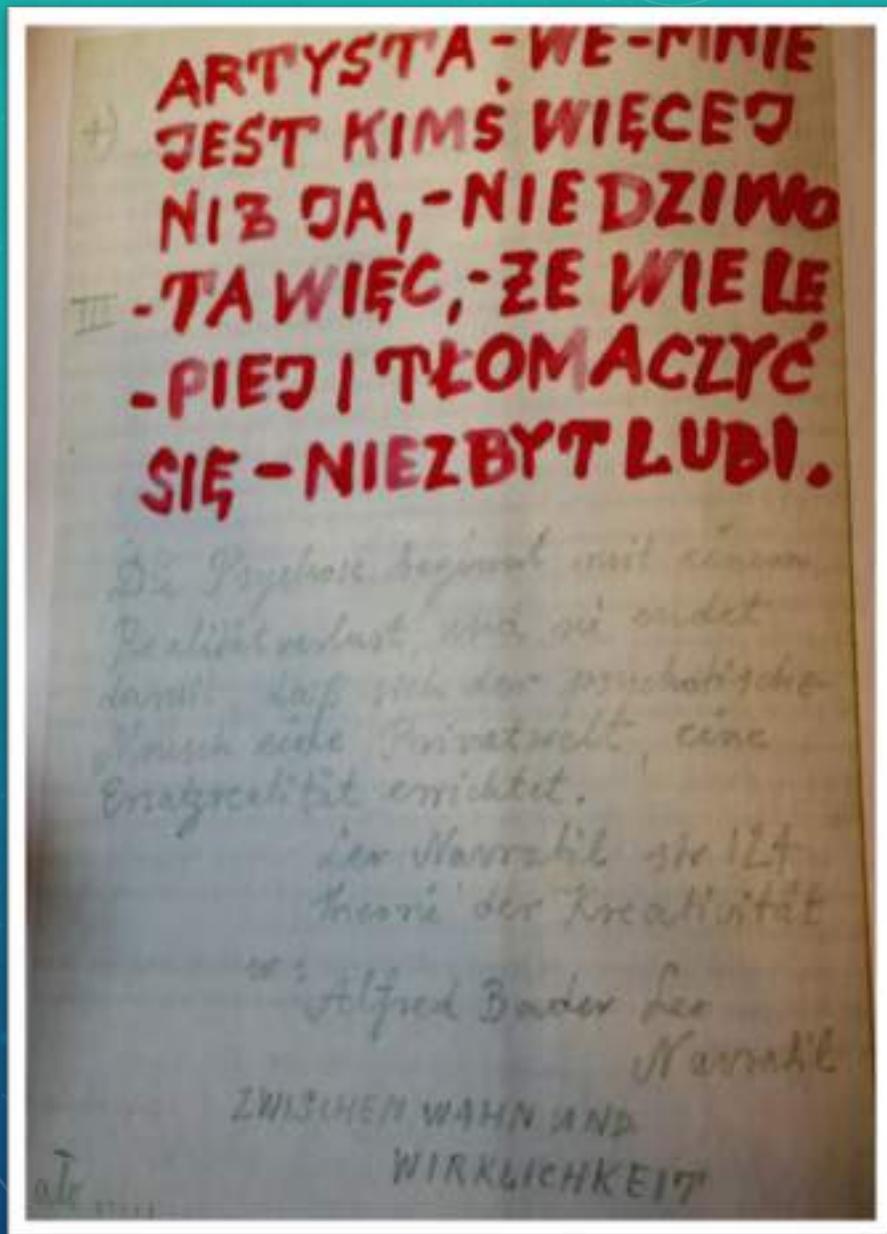
is a Polish contemporary artist. His works are very interesting in both artistic and esoteric aspects, but they have not so far been widely analyzed from the perspective of his interests in Western Esotericism, especially currents related to magic. Zbigniew Makowski built his own esoteric worldview and through his paintings and a series of magical books reveals it to his audience.



About himself he says:

“People wrote and still write that I am an expert on Kabbalah and magic (...) Yes, in my shelves I have a few dozen books on Kabbalah and magic. But I have several thousand books about art, and yet no one has written that I am an expert on art...”

Zbigniew Makowski



Both his interest in art and in esotericism seems very complex, even eclectic when encountered for the first time. Explanation of which inspirations exactly can be found in Makowski's art – as well as other painters' – of course is neither obvious, nor easy. Makowski himself sometimes explains the meanings of parts of his work, but he also states:

“The artist in me knows better, the artist in me is someone more than I am, no wonder then, that he knows better and doesn't like to explain himself.”

Zbigniew Makowski

Zbigniew Makowski was born in 1930 in Warsaw. In 1950-1956 he has studied painting at the **Academy of the Fine Arts in Warsaw**. He completed his diploma in the workshop of professor **Kazimierz Tomorowicz**, 1897-1961 (Tomorowicz was a painter, whose style was similar to Polish Formists, in 1957-1959 he was a Rector of the Academy of the Fine Arts in Warsaw; he painted mostly still lifes).

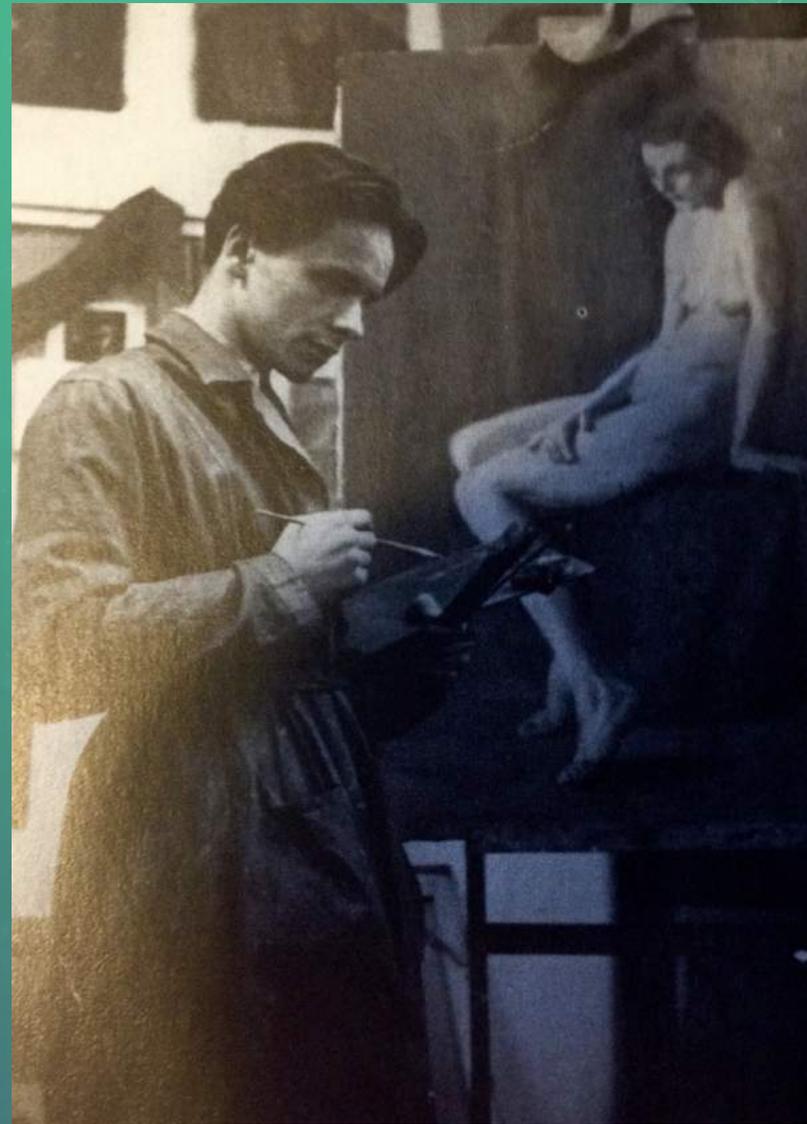
Makowski's works were presented in around 100 individual exhibitions and 217 group exhibitions in Poland and abroad.



Kazimierz Tomorowicz (1897-1961)



Young Zbigniew Makowski



Zbigniew Makowski in the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw



His own individual style was formed around 1960.

In 1962 Makowski stayed in Paris, where he was involved with a group connected to Andre Breton and the international movement PHASES, with which he later organized his exhibitions a few times.

He lives and works in Warsaw.

Andre Breton (1896-1966)

In 1991 a painting of the artist titled *Mirabilitas secundum diversos modos exire a rebus* was donated as a gift of Polish Government to the Office of the United Nations in Geneva.

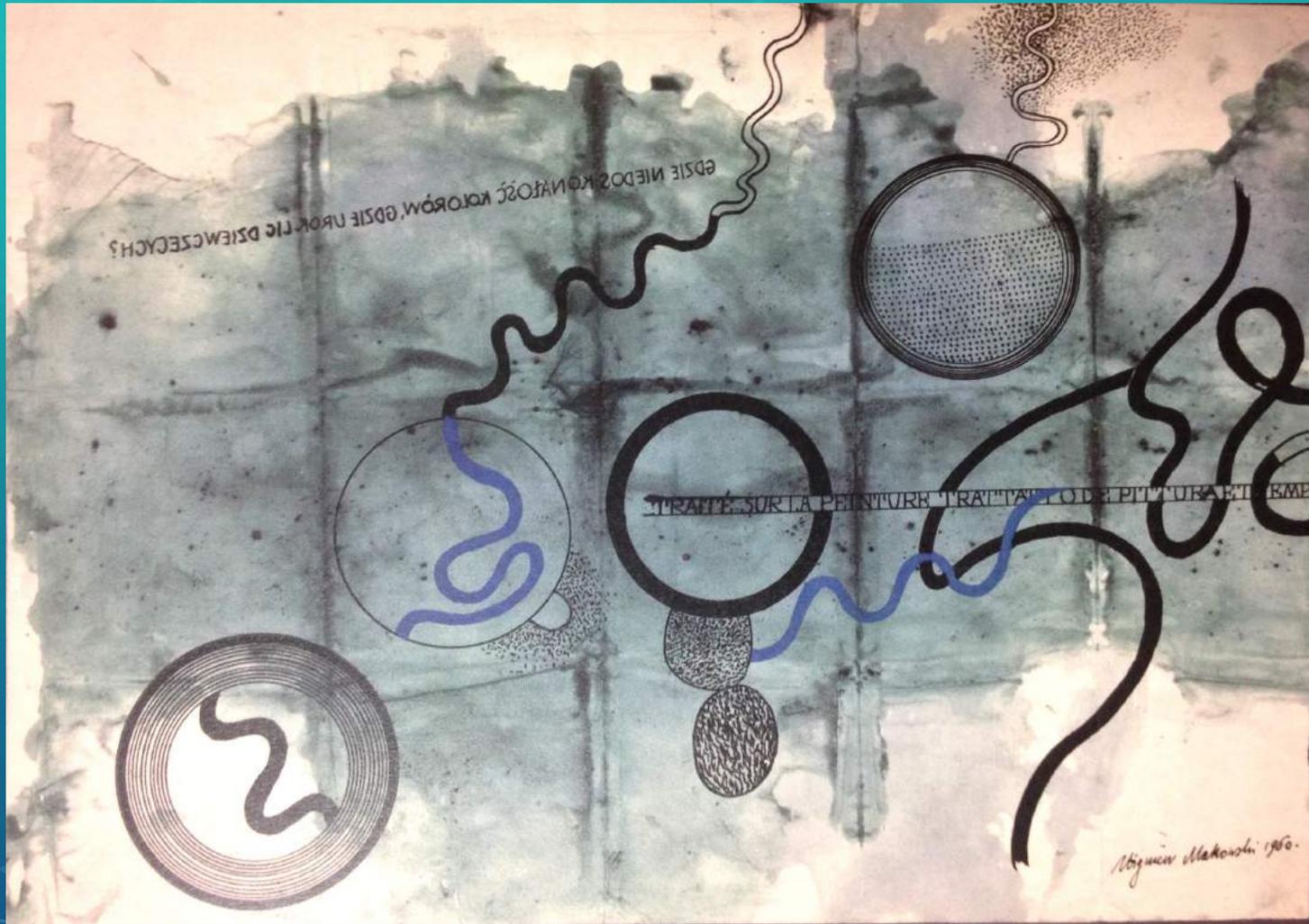


Mirabilitas secundum diversos modos exire a rebus, 1973-80

ARTISTIC WORK

- In his work Makowski uses a language of symbols, archetypic allusions, metaphors, references to literature, philosophy, mysticism, but also to the art of various cultures. He exploits everyday experiences in his art, as well as his personal way of understanding of the here-and-now reality. Makowski's generation of artists in Poland, which debuted in the late 50s, was focused on Avant-garde, modern art, which was also promoted by the after-war political climate. Figurative art was criticized at the time. He wrote: „all art that reached for an object more directly, and sustained Figurativism, was received (with few exceptions) as *passéism*. When the iron curtain loosened up, it made it easier to import current ideas from the world. Paris and New York confirmed that we were following the right direction”. Makowski's search for his own style crossed boundaries, he was an out-of-scheme kind of artist. His style changed many times, although a few distinctive stages of his artistic peregrinations can be determined.

- In the first stage, when his artistic road began, that is in 1956-1960, he painted mostly still lives, landscapes and portraits. Those were in most cases realistic works, with strong influence of expressionism and existentialism. His interests quickly shifted to surrealism and Informalism. In the early 60s he created compositions close to structural abstraction.
- In his oil paintings he presented simple, often geometrical shapes. The colors he was using most often were black, white and shades of gray. At this time his paintings are dominated by vertical and horizontal lines, sometimes they are round or parabolic, the compositions are static and tight. The lines cross signs and symbols, letters and whole sentences, as at the end of the 50s the first examples of Lettrism appeared.



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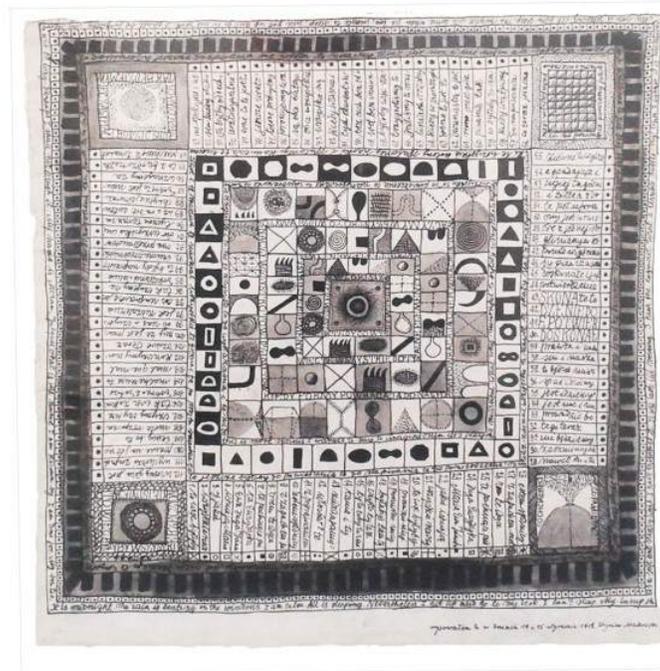
Zbigniew Makowski

Tantric Dream





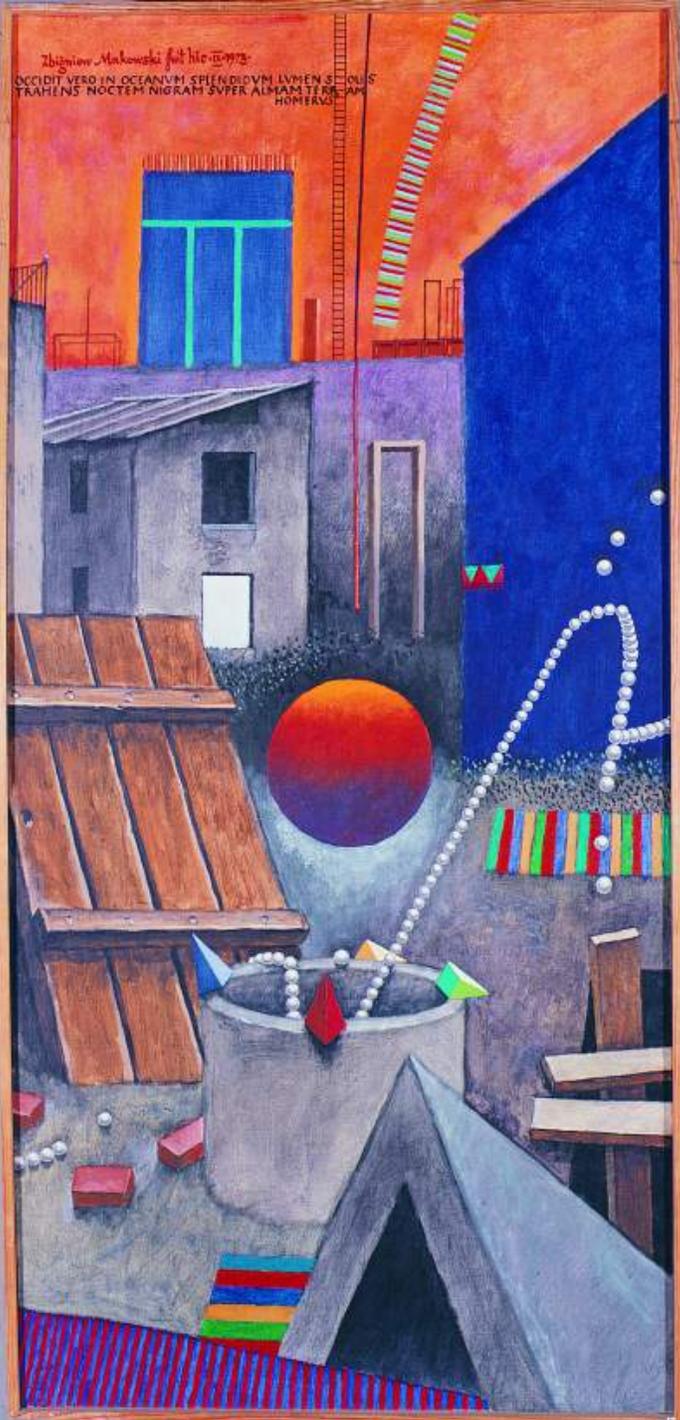
Feu, 1962



Untitled, 1962



- In the middle of the 60s, these signs find place in a space of the ground and air. It is a scenery in which Makowski hanged his favorite keys, ladders, geometric figures, letters, numerals, citations, buildings, labyrinths etc. Realistically portrayed, but out of their everyday context, hanging in unreal sphere, those objects are mediums of hidden meaning and secret knowledge. Their forms are dynamic, they seem to change places in relation to each other and the audience.



- In the 60s there were two recognizable tendencies in Makowski's art. The first one was decorative, and had one-plan composition. The background was divided into geometric shapes, filled with signs, lines, magical and alchemical symbols, ideograms of real and fantastic objects. The second tendency focused on using calligraphy, sometimes to make a complex ornament. In his paintings not only single letters or words can be found, but often also citations from philosophical treatises, the Bible, poems or novels. His works were called rather treatises than paintings. Paintings are filled with the ruins of secret labyrinths, necropolises, abandoned gardens.
- This esthetic was called "romantic geometry" by art critic Jan Oleszkiewicz; the label stayed with Makowski for years.



Asura, 1968



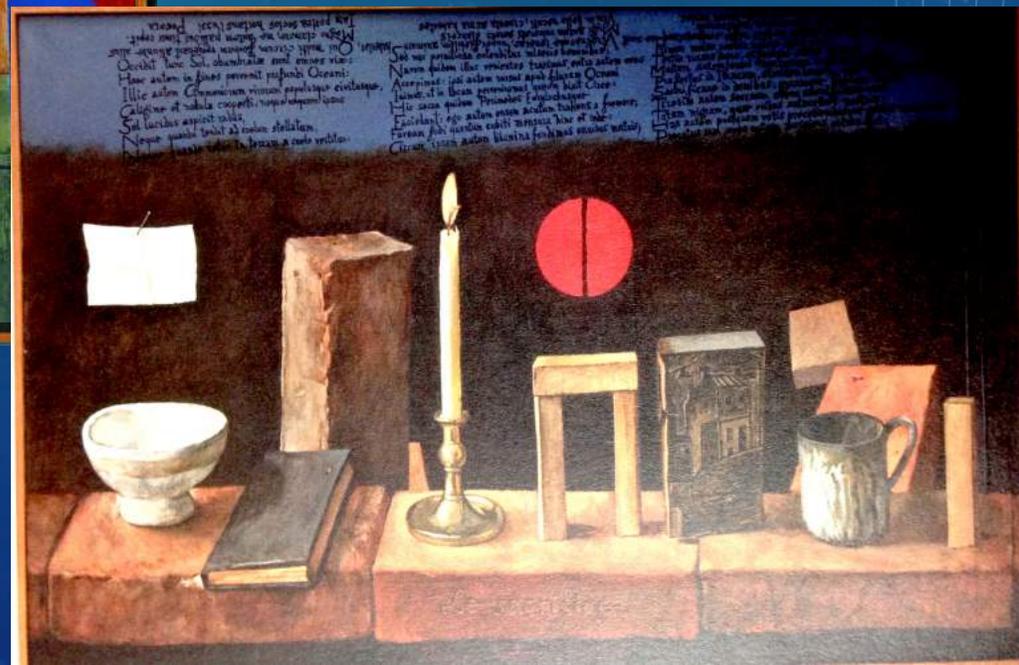
Porta Nigra, 1969

Zbigniew Makowski fec. 1975 · muzyka rzeczy początkiem.



Muzyka rzeczy początkiem, 1975

Le sacrifice, 1975

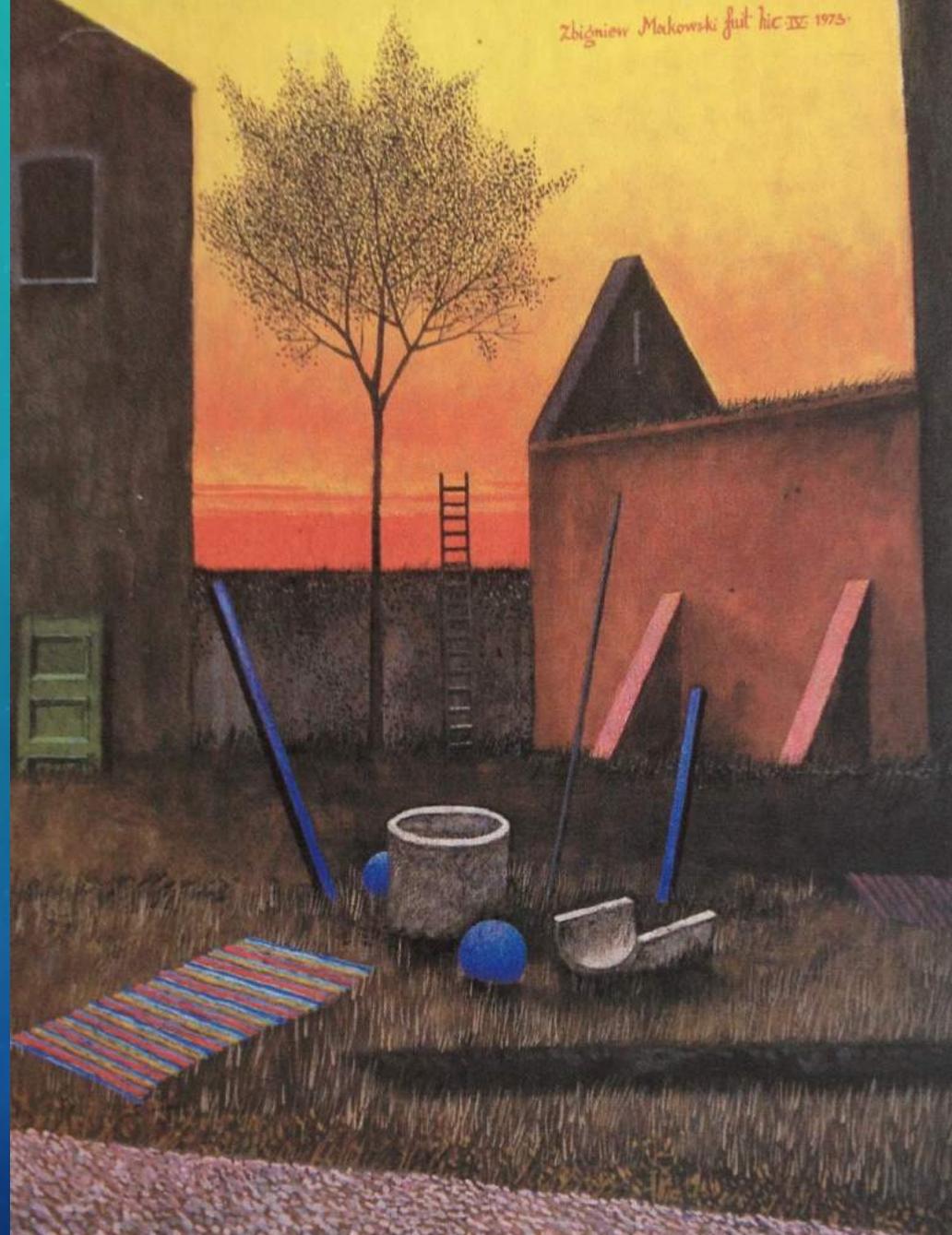


- At the turn of the 70s Makowski started to study old masters (mostly Renaissance but not only) intensively. In his art he was using fragments of paintings of other authors, disputing and engaging in a dialogue with the art of the past. In this time landscapes are most often the subject of his work. Makowski also started to use different colors than he was using in 60s. In 80s he came back to geometry.





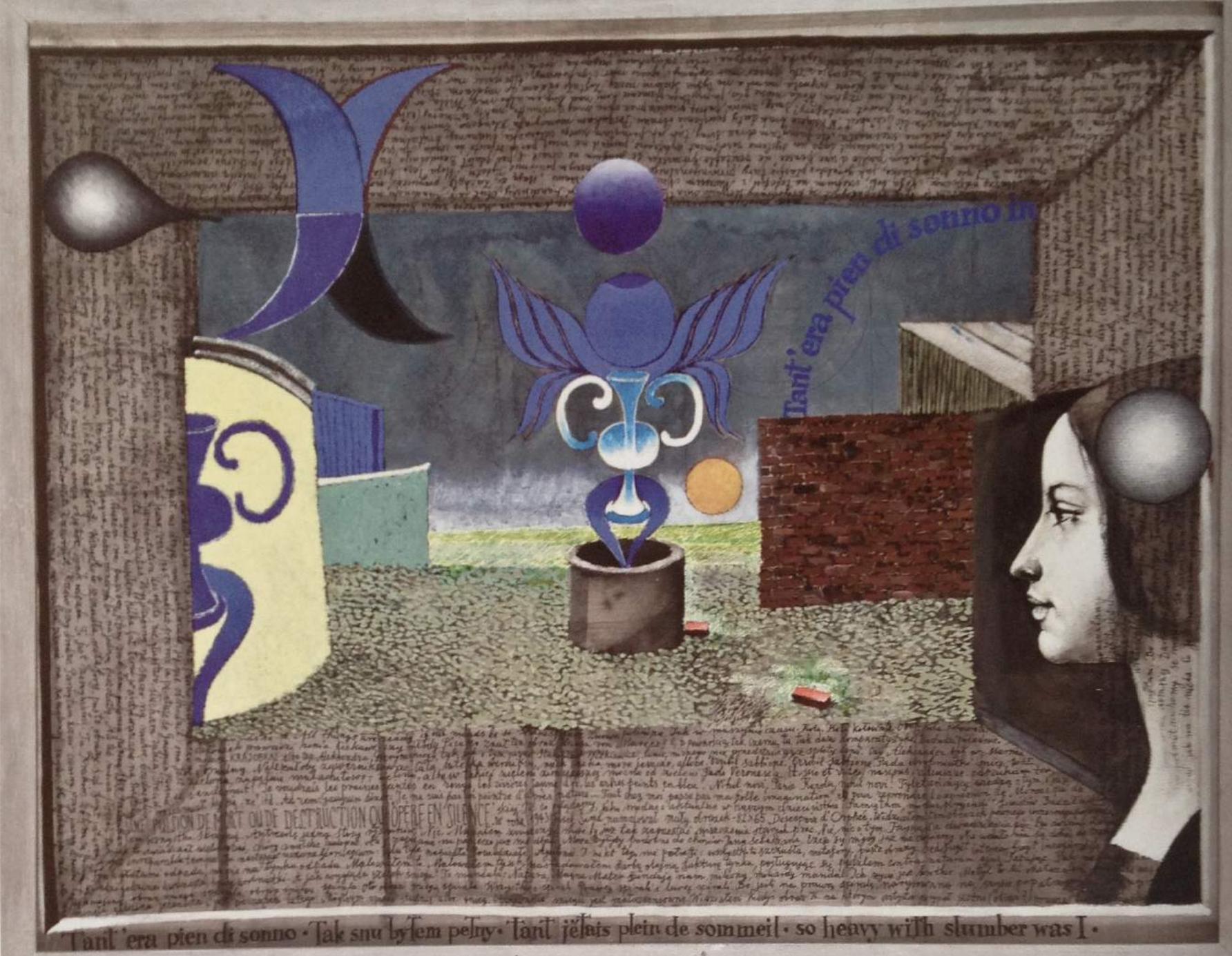
Amor janava vera, 1973



Wysokie drzewo, głęboki mrok, 1973

LETRISM

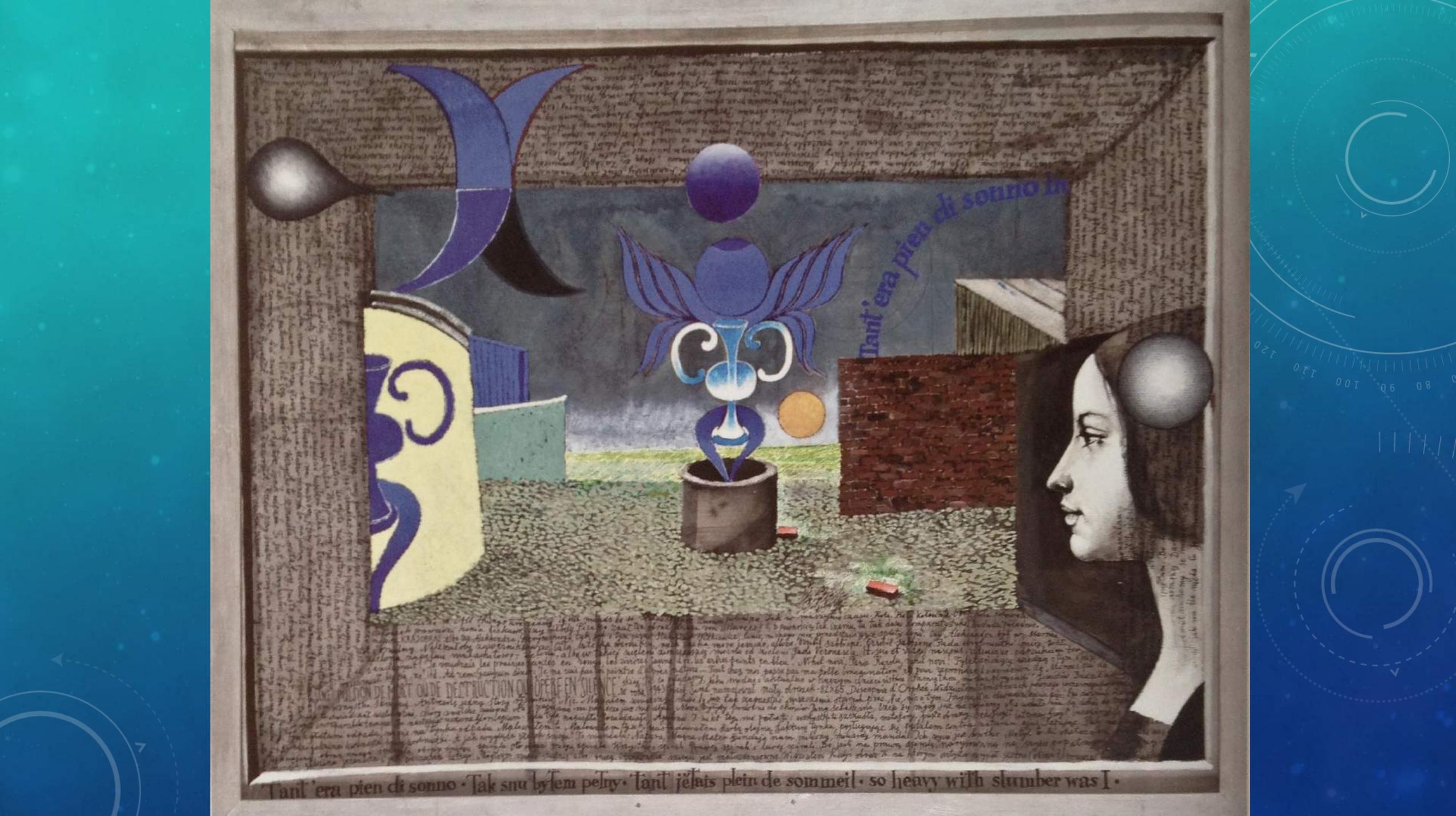
- Lettrism turned out to be very influential for the later artistic work of Makowski. He was using the ornaments of letters from all known alphabets of the world. Writing for Makowski was the never ending source of inspiration. In the same time, in early 60s, he encountered surrealism and identified with it strongly. He considered surrealism an instrument of self-knowledge and a way to ultimate cognition. Art and creativity are for Makowski synonyms of freedom.



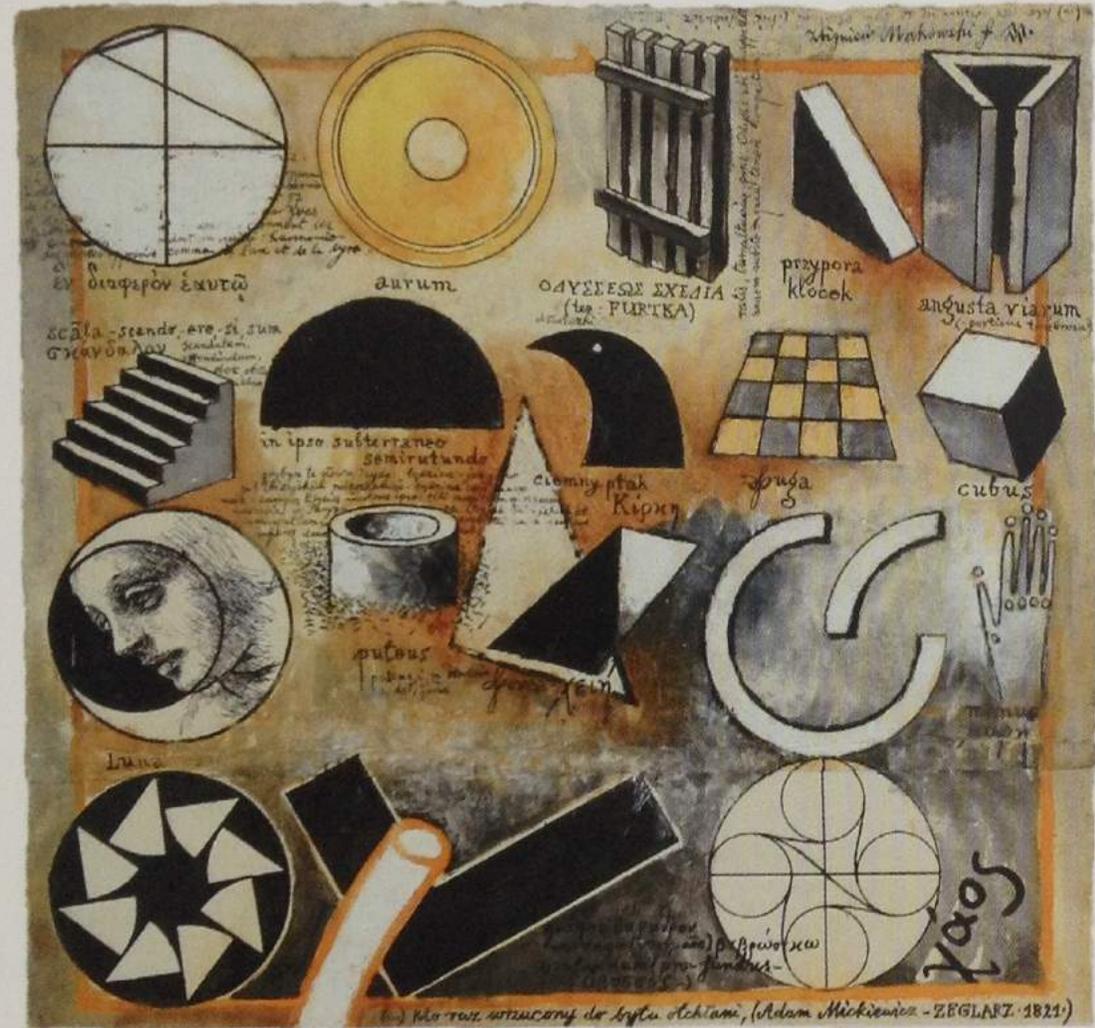
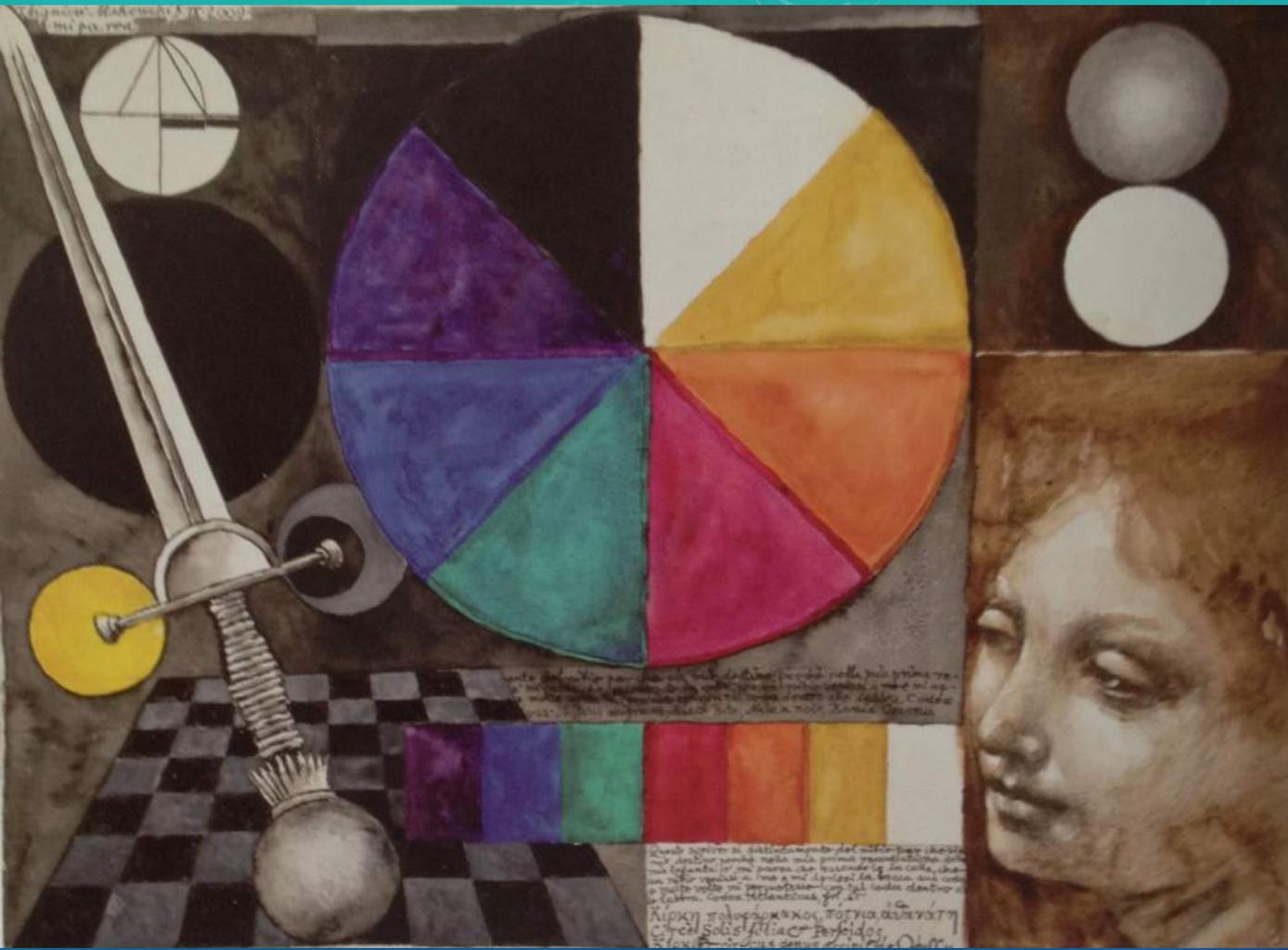
Tant'era pien di sonno in

MILION DE NART OUDE DESTRUCTION QU'OPERE EN SUANCE

Tant'era pien di sonno • Tak snu bytem peňny • Tant' j'etais plein de sommeil • so heavy with slumber was I •



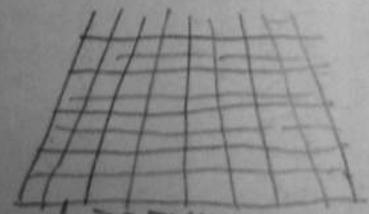
- Makowski stresses that his lettrism had an aesthetic ground. The alphabet proper to each language (or more precisely the letters that make it up) has a unique decorative function. In addition, the letters, whether they are Hebrew, Latin, Greek or Runic, hieroglyphs or cuneiform, play the role of a symbol, a transmitter of coded contents, which Makowski so often employs in his works.
- Another source of inspiration for Makowski's lettrism is graphology. With the use of graphological literature, he analyses his own works as well as those of the great masters. Graphology is for him an instrument of uncovering his own personality.



(c) Kłopoty z wycieczką do kręgu Archimedeusza, (Adam Mickiewicz - ZEGLARZ, 1821)

18.II.1993

Dein Wesen strebe nieder,
to radz Meph. untem na pranie:
aby POWROCIĆ - truba byto
szkoda schody i drabiny, isc
buntosci



po krajach, z biezem
po Turku, otwierac DRZWI, mis
to to wliczone jest w TWORCZOS
wyjadacnie drogowate kamie-
me, drzywac rozsypane
godnie na stronie chwie
MANEWROWANIA NAZWAMI,

+The Book of Signs+

which contains all manner of
symbols used from the earliest times to the middle
ages by primitive
peoples and Early Christians



Collected, drawn and explained
by Rudolf Koch

Translated from the German
by Dvyan Holland



ZBIGNIEW MAKOWSKI
PARIS 1962

mijomy kamieniami
(w zyciu let
e...), truba byto

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC.

PODECIAMI, w wymien l...
korzystaty na RZECZY (zahn SUKIEN
KA PARGOLEPTTY koloru KRWI [a
nie "skantatna" cy "aerona"]

- In the 60s Makowski shaped his individual style, which was based on his own artistic system of signs. It was modified since then but Makowski still uses it. The story behind the system is the artist's visit to Paris. He was searching for lexicons of symbols. Among others he found „The Book of Signs” by Rudolf Koch (translated from German). It inspired him to build his own symbolic system he uses in his paintings.

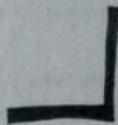
Q. X. - Kropka (punkt) jest początkiem z którego zaczynają się wszystkie znaki i ich dwumetrowa istota. W ten sposób istam wie masonskie wyrażają tajemne symboli i w płaszczyźnie i w przestrzeni. Ten problem wielości kropki w linii: i w płaszczyźnie, o którym baw, określają karuzelę a) bież, b) stan płaszczyzny, o którym baw.



Q. X. - linia pionowa wyobraża jedyności Boga albo Bóstwa, wyobraża moc wstępującą na ludzkość z góry - lub, w kierunku przeciwnym - tęsknotę ludzkości ku niebom wyżej.



Q. X. - Przekucie - w linii poziomej widzimy Ziemię na której żyje pty: nie równo i wszystko ponurza się na tej samej płaszczyźnie. (Tu manganerowy problem dotarcia pionowych, poziomych i kwadratowych)



Q. X. - Kąt - albo spotkanie niebiańskiego i ziemskiego. Nie mają te linie nic wspólnego - dotykają się ale nie przecinają. Znak ten wyobraża odzw: zemianie się, wymiary między Bogiem a Ziemią. W lożach masonskich wektor kretnich kąt prosty był znakiem sprawiedliwości i integralności. Zatem być może o elementarnym działaniu tych czterech znaków.



Q. X. - W znaku krzyża Bóg, Ziemia są połączone (połączeni) i znajdują się w stanie harmonii. Z boku krzyżyku boku wyrosł pętel znak. Krzyż jest najstarszym ze znaków i obajdujemy go wśrodku, zupełnie niezależnie od Chrystianizmu.



Q. X. - Kóło - nie mając początku ni końca - jest także symbolem Boga i wieczności. Węzy - w kontrastie ze znakiem następnym - jest znakiem spój: czy oka Boga. "J Bóg Bógki pomógł się nał wodatu". Niechta, miz wstąpiłose - czy mianac tu sprawę tego najpikniejszego ze zna: ków. Nawet ja jednak osobny materiał, sine explicatione Q. X.



Q. X. - Okrągłe oko Boga - powód objawienia: "J Bóg niek niech się stanie światłości."

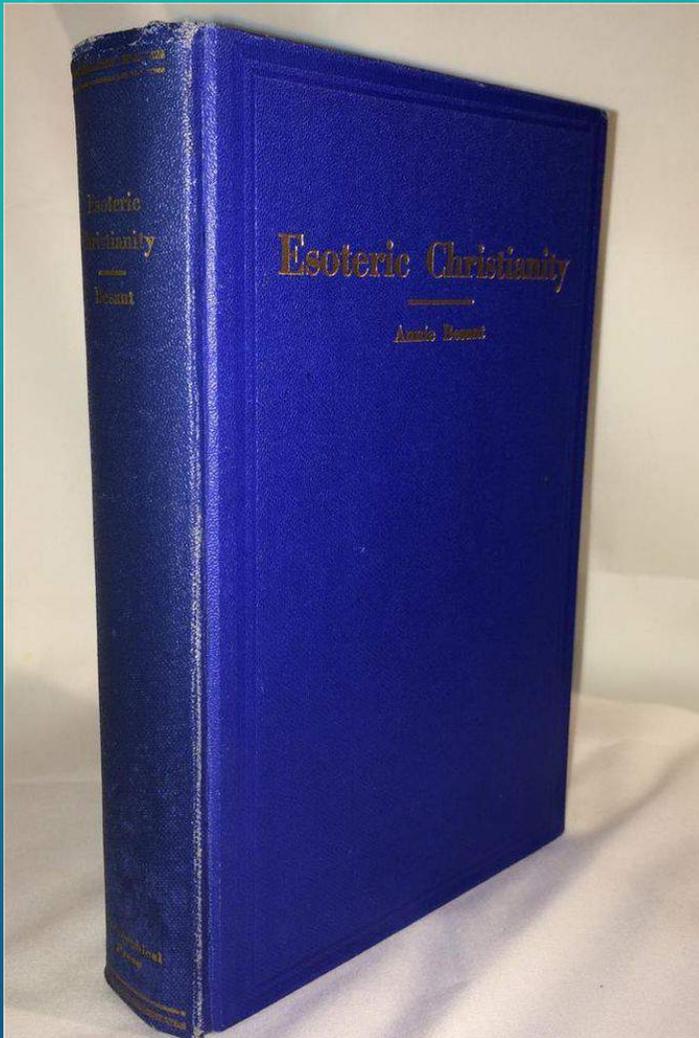


Q. X. - Poziomy element teniski - to co było ob początku wszystkich rzeczy. "J Bóg obdział woby które były pō fundamentem ob świat które były nał fundamentem."



Q. X. - Aktywny element męski. "J Bóg obdział światło ob ciemności."

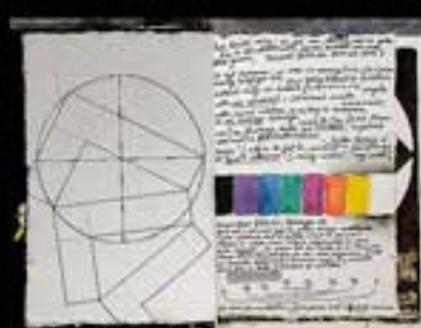
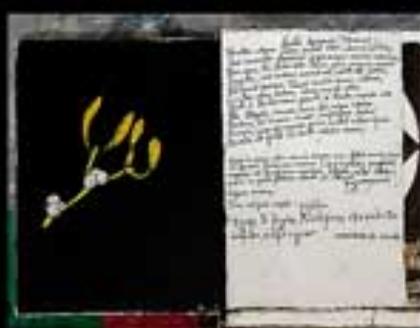
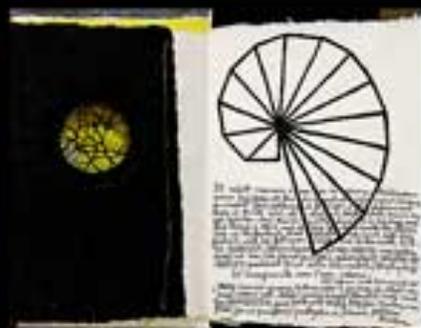
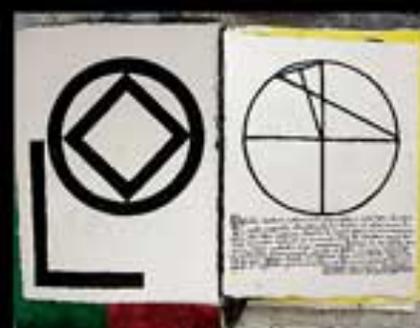
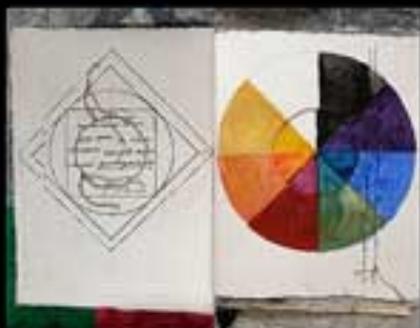
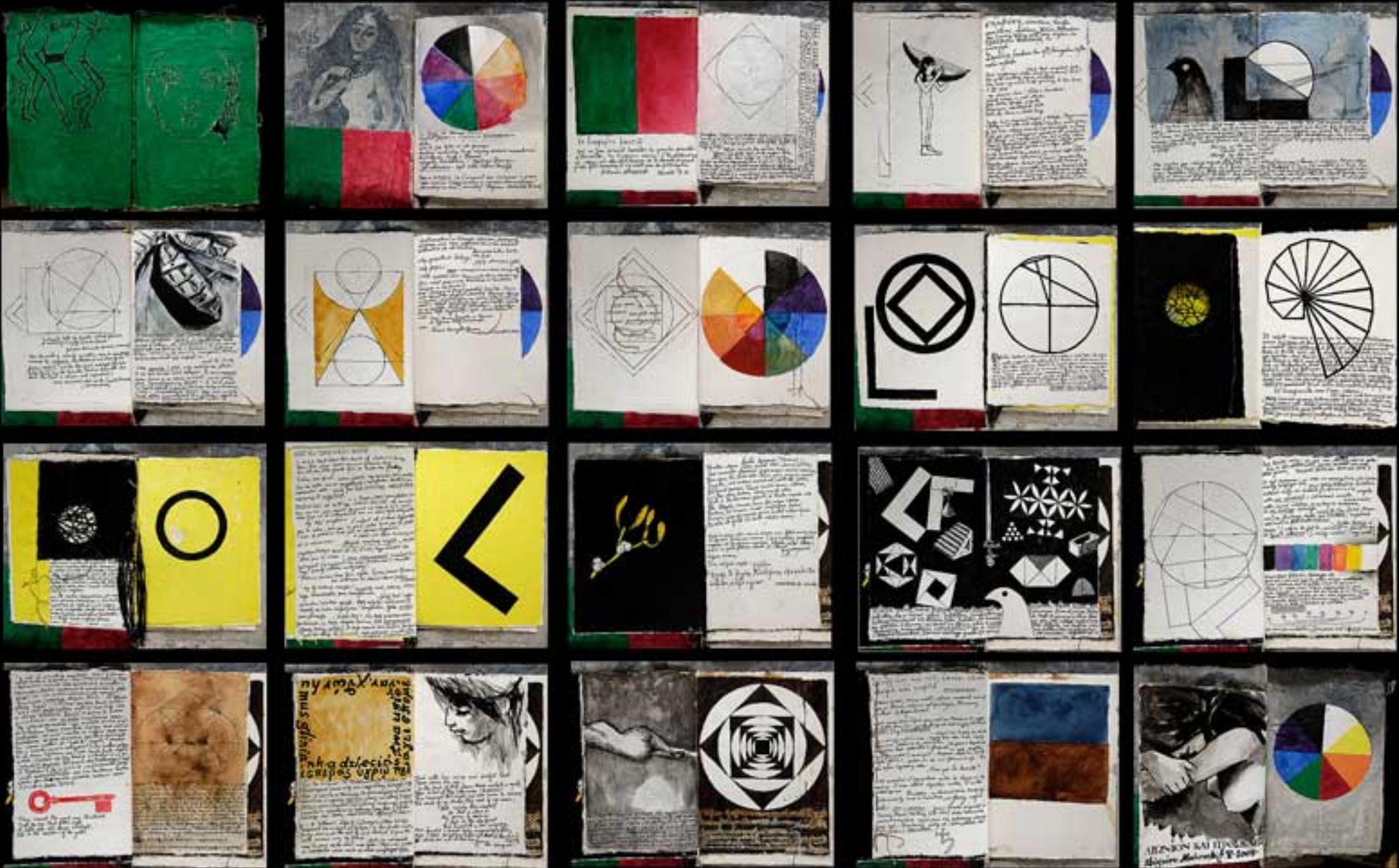
ARTISTIC BOOKS

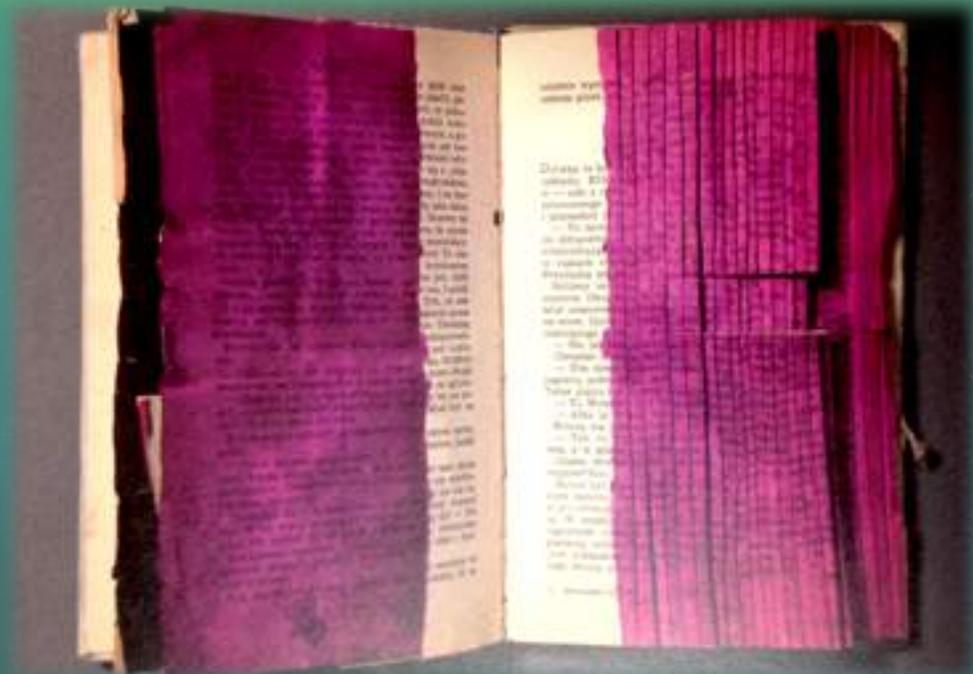


- Makowski created his first artistic book in the 50s.
- “[...] In 1958 or 59 I was supposed to draw the wall of a cemetery and I didn’t want the modernists to catch me, and find out that I’m drawing from nature, you know – a landscape painter. So I thought, I’ll take **Annie Besant’s** book with me, she took over **the Theosophical Society** after **Blavatsky**. A wonderful book, on Japanese parchment, blue letters, a beautiful typeface. Actually once I took the book, I did not go to the cemetery, but to a completely different place. I added some drawings to the book. It was the first one.”
- Makowski knows the workds of Blavatsky and Besant very well.

- So far he has created over 200 of works of this kind. The books Makowski makes are experimental both in their form and their content. The artist begins the whole process of book-making with choosing the appropriate kind of paper, which he often prepares in a special way and then sews up. The covers are made from painting canvass. Makowski does not only paint and draw in his books – they are something of a secret diary of the artist, full of notes, quotations, written down memories and experiences, often in several languages at the same time.







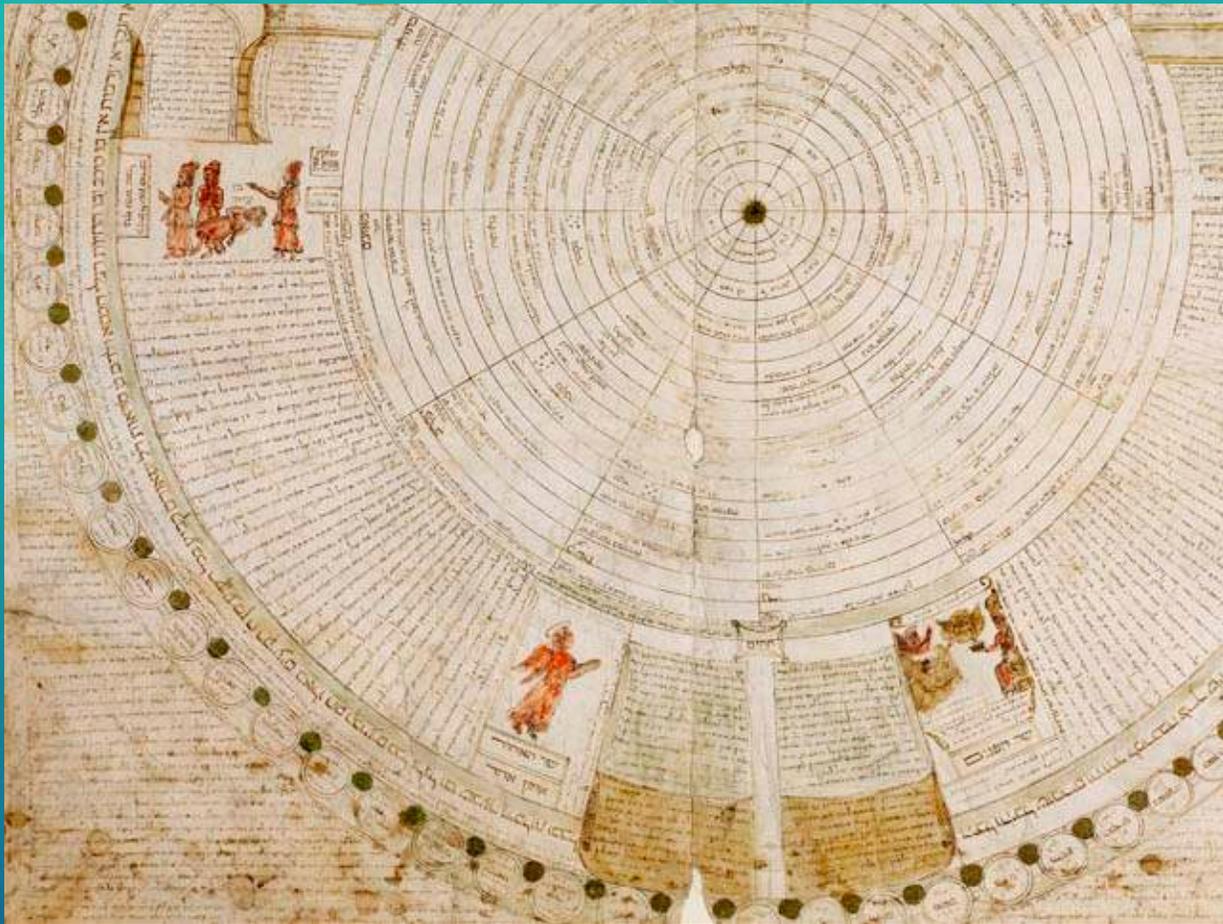
SPIRITUAL AND ESOTERIC MEANING



- For Makowski, like other esoterically inspired artists, art may be understood as a vehicle that brings the audience to the different reality. Does the style of the art have a meaning? Makowski wrote:

“All such cubisms, fauvisms, all that is a trifle. In the face of Gods, in the face of this great truth that Breton grasped, whether someone is a cubist, a fauvist, or a formalist has no meaning. One must play a very different game”

- Makowski recalls that as a 15-year old boy he read Rudolf Steiner, Helena P. Blavatska, John Ruskin, Gustav Meynrik, as well Polish messianistic philosophers such as Józef Hoene-Wroński (although Makowski admits he was not enthusiastic about his work), Cieszkowski, Berent, Mereżowski. He particularly admired the poet Juliusz Słowacki.
- He also mentions books such as *The Great Initiates* by Edward Schure, and the „Books of the Living God“ by Bo Yin Ra. Further inspirations came from William Blake and C. G. Jung.
- The inspiration for experimenting with letters was found by Makowski in the works of Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia, whom he encountered when reading Robert Lull – whom in turn he found through Giordano Bruno. Bruno is especially important for Makowski; as he says, he owes to Bruno „[...] the fact that I live and have the courage to think“.



Makowski in one of his interviews said:

„The alphabet gives one a feeling of control over the whole. Let's listen how Pascal describes the state of Abraham Abulafia, before he found his Archimedean point in the twenty two Hebrew letters:

The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me. Close to the end of my autobiography, as a metaphor, I could use the ancient metaphor of the NET. Abulafia would untie its knots. I do not know what he would do with a rope so long. Maybe he would tie its ends together. All the same – up or down: the unfathomable creative force, which is in the deepest inside of ourselves, the font which gushes in the dark, the flame which bursts between hands whitened with ash”.



Makowski admits his interests in the Kabbalah. However, he says that his ignorance of Hebrew makes it impossible for him to explore it in depth. But the kabbalistic vision of the universe is close to him, and the schema of the tree of life stimulates his imagination. He wrote once:

„Already in the moment of my knowledge I feel that I am flooded with the madness of the tree of sephirot, the crown of which is the universe, the roots of which is my heart. If the metaphor is cheap, let's reverse it: the roots of which is the universe, the crown of which is my heart. 'O, sancta simplicitas' Jan Hus was supposed to say, at the sight of a man adding his own fagot to the martyr's stake”.

Kabbalah is important for the painter also in the perspective of the use of symbols in art. See how Makowski reflects on the symbolism of the „green line“:

“The kabbalists claim that the green line signifies the universe – this can be cited as the ultimate conclusion that one can draw from Porphyry. Look, here are all the sephirot, and here is the green line that surrounds them. And furthermore, that green is the color of light as seen through mist. I suspect that it is not green, and the observations that one can find in the Zohar concerning the rainbow indicate that at least some kabbalists were insensitive to color. It is true that one rabbi Simeon ben-Yohai – I bought a book about him in Paris – writes that this *linea viridis*, green line, is a young moon. Do you understand that this makes sense to me? The green line surrounds the universe. These are the talmudists. [...] I have seriously studied the Kabbalah.”

Zbigniew Makowski



GIORDA-
NO BRVNO
Nolano.
DE GL' HEROCI
FVRORI.
Al molto Illustre et eccellẽte Ca-
ualliere, Signor Philippe
Sidneo.
PARIGI,
Apouesso Antonio Baio
P. Nolano 1585.



- His interest in this kind of topics began with readings of Pico Della Mirandola, Eliphas Levi and Arthur Edward White.



THE ART OF ZBIGNIEW MAKOWSKI IS A CONTEMPORARY INSTANCE OF AN INFLUENCE OF IDEAS OF AN ESOTERIC NATURE ON ART, AND OF HOW ART CAN BECOME A MEDIUM OF TRANSMISSION OF SUCH IDEAS.





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