

# BLOOD OF A POET

## BIENNALE ALBUM INTRODUCTION

BLOOD OF A POET — a unique cycle of interrelated video art features — opened last year’s retrospective of Lech Majewski films and videos at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The elaborate project, which originally began as a cycle of seven short films, continued to grow throughout the process of realization, eventually coming to comprise thirty-three films and a series of photographs that are all original and autonomous pieces.

Majewski’s work tells the story of a young poet at odds with himself and the world. Rejecting dialogue and chronology, “Blood of a Poet” marks an innovative approach to traditional narration; the collected short films overlap and communicate visually with one another, continually inviting the viewer to rely on his own creative capacities in order to find a way through the labyrinthine structure.

Majewski depicts human phobias, obsessions and fascinations in a quite masterly way. His iconography is a profoundly, personally experienced variation on the theme of the imagination. The countless allusions to images, literature, and film are plain to see (e.g. Cocteau’s “Blood of a Poet”), yet all of them function in a sense that is more painterly than cinematographic. Nor, in the final analysis, do their transcendental ideas and hermeneutic references seem any less important. For instance, the mystical inclinations here point towards the painterly heritage of Böcklin (and especially his “Isle of the Dead”).

Many artists today draw on the resources of the Library of Babel, as exemplified most clearly by the master of video art, Bill Viola; much of his recent work, notably “The Quintet of Remembrance,” is inspired by medieval and renaissance art, not to mention the whole range of aquatic and lunar motifs that figure in both artists’ work. Majewski, like Viola, is not a member of the generation of ironists who have sought to distance themselves from the meanings immanent within these topoi and to treat them instead as mere superficial emotions. He may indeed play with their negative afterimages, but does so while placing his trust in the archetypes and symbols as expressions of the transpersonal continuity of human consciousness.

On the linguistic level, Majewski’s visual poems are constructed from an intertextual game of anamnesis and prognosis. He reactivates a pre-existing domain of myth and image that summons up an aesthetic world which seems

somehow familiar and yet, thanks to the perceiver, emerges in *statu nascendi*, as it were. Thus understood, his work constitutes a natural continuation of the work of the medieval illuminators.

Majewski deconstructs the myth of the Book, which arose and became fixed in the collective unconscious, and whose visual inscriptions may be incunabula. This is connected with the fact that no idea or ideology can usurp the right to expropriate language and establish the dictatorship of a single meaning. Therefore he turns, in his video work as in his photography, in the direction of universal, archetypal problems in which the fears, ghosts, passions, and torments written into every human biography play a part.

Today, Majewski is exorcising his childhood fears and youthful fascinations. These tropes, built into the game of archetypes and the dreamlike aura that radiates with particular intensity in the video art work "The Forest," make an enormous impact on the viewer's subconscious. Here, the quasi-erotic motifs and quasi-biographical procedures are nevertheless only a few of the many elements of replaying and recalling the discourse of memory. There are also other, metalinguistic operations.

The hyperrealistic diction that appears in "Blood of a Poet" engages in a dialogue with the culture of quotation and metaphor. The surrealistic topos acquires overriding importance here (just as, for instance, Eija-Liisa Ahtilla's "The House" or Pipilotti Rist in "Sip My Ocean"), with the somnambulistic rhythm and "abducted" grammar of reference coming next. Here, Lech Majewski is as agile and uncompromising as Matthew Barney.

Attention to every detail of the frame is characteristic of Majewski's style, from lighting, through the composition of the image, to the slow, hallucinogenic narrative and consummate audio accompaniment, which at certain times subjects sound to the rules of minimalism and ambience and at others creates a collage of operatic quotations.

There is also something about Majewski's work that recalls the practices of Jeff Wall, who spends long months preparing the staging of a single photograph, which, in turn, frequently alludes to the classical discourse of painting. Majewski's work, too, is characterized by the long, labor-intensive production of each video, involving a large crew and followed by a no less intensive phase in the post-production laboratory. In contrast to Wall, however, Majewski places more emphasis on the visualization of archetypal and quasi-biographical motifs.

"Blood of a Poet" demonstrates a belief in language that is rare today, as well as a non-linguistic tension enacted at the margins. Faith in images, symbols, and

archetypes, even stripped of their innocence and transparency, is far from widespread at present. There is something in Majewski's art that works by means of a peculiar alchemy. There is a trust in epiphanies that possess the power of transformation. At the antipodes are night and day, light and darkness, the sense of guilt and the aura of innocence. Emerging from these antimonies, Lech Majewski commands us to remain silent, becoming a mysterious island of bedazzlement.

Roman Lewandowski

Lech Majewski is a poet, filmmaker and video artist.

His video works have been shown in a variety of galleries and museums, including:

Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris,  
Whitechapel Art Gallery, London,  
Seattle Art Museum,  
Palagraziussi, Venice,  
High Museum of Art, Atlanta,  
Museo des Belles Artes, Buenos Aires,  
Zak and Kunstagenten Galleries, Berlin,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

His films have been presented in festivals at Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, Rome, New York, Rio de Janeiro, Chicago, London, Mar del Plata, Barcelona, Miami, Jerusalem, Moscow, Houston, and Montreal, receiving numerous prizes.

Currently the Lech Majewski Retrospective that originated in New York at MoMA is touring the United States and in July/August 2007 will travel to The National Gallery in Washington D.C.  
(find more on [www.lechmajewski.com](http://www.lechmajewski.com))

written, directed and shot by Lech Majewski  
starring Patryk Czajka, Joanna Litwin, Grzegorz Przybył  
production design Joanna Macha, Leon Herlig  
costume design Dorota Lis  
music Lech Majewski & Józef Skrzek  
sound design Zbigniew Malecki, Lech Majewski  
editor Norbert Rudzik, Eliot Ems  
produced by Angelus Silesius: Lech Majewski, Michał Tatarek  
co-produced by Telewizja Polska S. A. – Kanał Kultura  
Polski Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, Silesia Film, Atlas Sztuki  
associate producers Supra Film, Opus Film, Ars Cameralis  
Camera Assistant/Lights Michał Żuberek  
Stills/photographic collaboration Piotr Muschalik  
special thanks to Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator,  
Department of Film and Media Museum of Modern Art, New York

## THE CAST

Sebastian Patryk Czajka

Father Grzegorz Przybył

Mother Joanna Litwin

Mother, older Ryszarda Celińska

Sebastian as a boy Leonard Brzoza

Sebastian as a child Werner Widera

Doris Dorota Lis

Maid Michalina Rutkowska

Wolf Tadeusz Pławecki

Bluebeard Marian Makula

Midwife Anna Wesołowska

presented at the

52nd International Art Exhibition

La Biennale di Venezia 2007

by Ars Cameralis Silesiae Superioris

and The Polish Film Institute

the work can be seen in

Teatro Junghans on Giudecca

some of the video art features are shown on

Campo San Pantalon

(June 6th through September 30th).

design

Lech Majewski

Aleksander Orzechowski, AWR Edytor

production director

Mirosław Żabierek

ISBN 83-912556-4-6

Publisher: Angelus Silesius / AWR Edytor

tel. (+48) 322 033 719; (+48) 322 062 951

fax: (+48) 322 013 769

e-mail: [studio@edytor.pl](mailto:studio@edytor.pl)

© Lech Majewski, 2007