

The 1960s – The golden age of Polish animations

The prestigious and long-lived "Polish School of Animation" is celebrating its seventy years of activity. Born in the late 1950s, under the aegis of Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk, it is a true pole of experimentation and creativity in a country torn apart by the ravages of war and ripped politically. Mirosław Kijowicz, Witold Giersz, Julian Antoniszczak, Kazimierz Urbański, Ryszard Czekala and many others, coming to animation in roundabout ways from different backgrounds, make their debut during the 60s and reinforce the awareness of being the front of a world avant-garde. A gradual shift from animation depending largely on photographic effects captured in real time to stop-motion of two-dimensional objects coincided stylistically with both the incorporation of graphic design and the emergence of poster design. A colorful variety of expressive techniques, with puppets, cut outs, manipulation of light and pigments on the film, combinations of techniques and skilfully orchestrated styles, came in reverberation with the magnificent work of avant-garde music and sound composers such as Krzysztof Penderecki, Krzysztof Komeda, Andrzej Kurylewicz, Eugeniusz Rudnik, or peculiar scriptwriters such as Stanisław Lem. The cinematographic production of those years, rightfully called "the golden age of Polish animation", represents today an artistic heritage as specific as it is universal. In a recently restored version, Polish Cinema Classics present the treasures of the mind and human sensitivity, rich and strange, creative and fascinating.

Labirynt

Maze

Director: Jan Lenica
1962
16 min

A winged man in a bowler hat flies to the Art Nouveau metropolis. Tempted by its beauty, he wanders along the empty streets. He doesn't know he's being watched. The services will take care of his thoughts, and any attempt to escape will be thwarted by local birds.

The philosophical parable directed by Jan Lenica is an animated film for adult viewers. The film was made with the usage of the cut-out technique. It is a form of a collage that combines the drawings of a European city from the turn of the century with animated surreal characters, mainly male birds. The parable is an anti-utopia. It shows the beauty of the world of appearances that seems to be tempting, but it doesn't allow people to be individuals who are able to think by themselves. By analogy to Jan Lenica's film entitled 'New Janko Muzykant', you can perceive a man who wears a bowler hat as a New Icarus. The film won the Golden Dragon at the Polish National Short Film Festival in Cracow (1963), the 1st Prize at the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen, the Grand Prix at the International Film Festival in Buenos Aires (1964), and the FIPRESCI Award at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival (1963).



Tren na śmierć konia

Threnody for the Death of a Horse

Director: Jan Tkaczyk
1968
7 min

A viewer sees how a picture of a horse appears on a white sheet of paper. The horse emerges from successive traces of a black felt-tip pen. The animal has an abstract shape of a transparent huddled creature. It looks dead with its lack of limbs, visible ribs and deep eye sockets.

The animated film for adults directed by Jan Tkaczyk, the cinematographer of several dozen animated films. The director used drawings by Barbara Jonscher, a Polish painter and cartoonist, from the 'Arsenal' generation. The context of her works often refers to literary works. The series of horse drawings was inspired by Bertold Brecht's poems with anti-war meaning. Andrzej Kurylewicz is the author of jazz music in this film.



Fobia

Phobia

Director: Julian

Antoniszczak

1967

11 min

A bored painter wants to enjoy some plein air painting. He looks for inspiration. Unfortunately, he is distracted by civilization and his wife's mockery. The artist disappears without a trace.

The debut of Julian Antonisz (Antoniszczak, the brother of Ryszard), a cult animator, director, composer and inventor, the co-founder of the Cracow branch of Studio Miniatur Filmowych, which transformed into Studio Filmow Animowanych. Antonisz, a student of Kazimierz Urbanski, developed his own technique of non-camera animation, realized without a camera directly on the film tape by scratching and painting. Additionally, it is combined with actors, drawings, cutouts, and chemical reactions on the screen. He developed a recognizable style of pulsating, vibrating images, ostentatiously clumsy, enhanced by unpleasant murmurs and musical quotes. Their comic message is completed by a protagonist's parodic monologue or a voiceover's comment. In "Phobia", Antonisz mocks the stereotype of a neurotic artist, leaving the viewer amused and worried about the protagonist's fate. Kordula was dubbed by Irena Kwiatkowska. The music and sound were composed by Eugeniusz Rudnik from the Polish Radio Experimental Studio.



Słodkie rytmy

Sweet Rhythms

Director: Kazimierz

Urbański

1965

7 min

An old beekeeper and a little boy look into a hive. A brown-yellow shape and a black ball of a motile swarm begin to move on the surface of the screen. Physical reality turns into abstract forms.

An animated film for adults by Kazimierz Urbanski, an animation theorist and practitioner, an organizer of artistic education in the field of animated film. He used animations to study matter in terms of possible movement encoded in it and artistic effects. In Sweet Rhythms, he used thermal effects on the film stock on which he had recorded some live action. Urbanski's films were not devoid of content, but the development of the plot was based on mobile artistic elements, not the story itself.



Pułapka

The Trap

Director: Krzysztof

Dębowski

1962

10 min

Lion Tichy arrives in a new planet in a single-person spacecraft. His habits and fantasies are with him. The aliens recreate the sex bomb from the poster that could be found in the cabin of his spacecraft. Then, they present him a live dummy. A male-female evening in space with some pre-war music hits becomes possible...

The second part of the "Pamiętniki gwiazdne" series based on a screenplay by Stanislaw Lem. It was based on his short stories titled "Dzienniki Gwiazdowe" - a science-fiction series published from the 1950s to the 1990s, describing the adventures of lion Tichy, a space traveller. The first part of the film series was created one year earlier, entitled "Wycieczka w kosmos". Krzysztof Debowski created films for children ("Dziwne Dziwy, czyli Basn o korsarzu Palemonie" Jana Brzechwy, 1986), film posters ("Jak hartowała się stal", 1967) and satirical films for adults ("Boks", 1976).



Bazyliżek

Bazilisk

Director: Wojciech

Wieczorkiewicz,

Leokadia Serafinowicz

1962

9 min

At midnight in the old town, ornament figures that decorate historic buildings come to life. A girl and a boy run away from Basilisk's gaze to the dungeons. As it is known, either a mirror or a morning will put an end to that.

An animated tale for children, realized in a puppet technique, in black and white. It was directed by Leokadia Serafinowicz and Wojciech Wieczorkiewicz, directors of puppet theatres and managers of the Poznan 'Marcinek' Puppet and Actor Theatre. An original musical composition, demanding for a young viewer, was created by Krzysztof Penderecki.



Wiklinowy kosz

Wicker Basket

Director: Mirosław Kijowicz

1967

9 min

An animated story by Mirosław Kijowicz, a director, scriptwriter of animated films, set designer and educator. An ordinary man was usually the protagonist of Kijowicz's philosophical short films. The situations presented in the films were rather general, they were supposed to provide food for thought. In "Wicker Basket", the old creator is annihilated by his own creatures. The classicist gate symbolizes the development of civilization and culture, which are opposed by nature on the sandy ground. The story is accompanied by a jazz composition by Krzysztof Komeda Trzcinski, Kijowicz's associate in the second half of the 1960s.

An old man puts together boy figures using things from a wicker basket. He teaches them how to walk and cooperate. When the man demands some more challenging things, the figures rebel against him. They disassemble their creator and place him in the wicker basket.



Klatki

Cages

Director: Mirosław

Kijowicz

1966

8 min

In a room divided by bars, two men are kept in isolation: a guard and a prisoner. The guard takes all tools and thoughts from the prisoner. Then it turns out that the guard is also someone else's prisoner.

The film shows the relativity of the relationship between the executioner and the victim. They both need some contact, they need something to do, they need thoughts. The possibility of taking away the freedom of thought and becoming a cog in the machine is the pessimistic message of the film. The film won the Crystal Award, the Grand Prix of the 7th International Animated Film Festival in Annecy, the Honorary Diploma at the 20th International Film Festival in Locarno, and the Third Prize at the 7th Cracow Film Festival (1967).



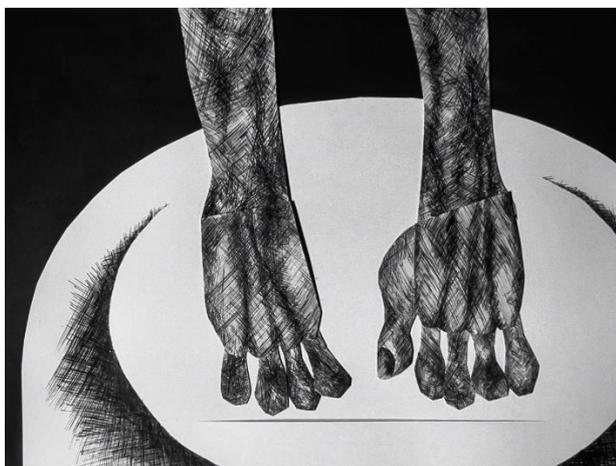
Ptak

The Bird

Director: Ryszard
Czekala
1968
10 min

A public toilet cleaner dreams of a bird seen in a cage at the exhibition. She lives a modest, austere life and saves money obsessively. On the day of the purchase, she takes the bird outside in a box and sets it free.

The animated debut of Ryszard Czekala, a creator of animated and feature films, realized under the artistic direction of Kazimierz Urbanski. The formally refined animations were always subordinated to the story and the protagonist, as it happens in feature films. The titular bird symbolizes the dream of freedom of the protagonist, who is a slave of her own material limitations. The film was realized in the cut-out technique, in grayscale, with dominant geometric shapes with acute vertices, in the style of expressionist paintings.



Admirał

Admiral

Director: Witold Giersz
1968
6 min

Beautiful ships sail towards each other across the blue ocean. The admiral observes them with a spyglass. Actually, all the things take place in his mind.

An animated film for adults by Witold Giersz, a classic of Polish animations, a creator of films for children ("Please, Mr. Elephant", 1968, 1978) and adults. He created a recognizable style of handling a colored spot without an outline – directly on a celluloid tape ("Little Western", "Red and Black"). What's more, he began to form ideas out of artistic concepts. The film has a nostalgic tone, like a later one titled "Old Cowboy" (1973), and stylistically follows the convention of maritime romanticism. The shocking ending definitely indicates that "Admiral" is aimed at an adult viewer.

