

Summary

MONIKA BRAUN (Akademia Sztuk Pięknych we Wrocławiu) / Let's talk seriously about the seriousness of the scoffer

Wojciech Kaniowski is a creator of ironic assemblages, which have much in common with severe journalistic commentary or cabaret; a creator whose *raison d'être* is to have an opinion on social, political and cultural reality and to express it emphatically, often mockingly, not only to look for sensations or aesthetic experiments. For over four decades of his creative work, started in 1972 at the Faculty of Painting, Graphic Arts and Sculpture of the State Higher School of Fine Arts (today's Academy of Fine Arts) in Wrocław, the artist has been creating paintings similar to small stories and filling them with peculiar pieces of strange devices, scraps of newspapers, fabrics and old letters, pieces of wood and metal, which may well be parts of machines, toys or furniture. The peculiarity of this conglomerate leads the viewer, looking for a key to it, into confusion. In his visual narratives, Kaniowski uses the contemporary literary paradigm: the changeability of expressive textures, alinear composition, fragmentation and focus on the physical aspect of reality. Equipped with the experience of 20th-century artists – happeners, performers, eccentric painters, or designers – he treats self-creation as a work of art. He himself becomes a work of art, built according to Marshall McLuhan's "The medium is the message" formula, but above all, according to Tadeusz Kantor's model, he enters the stage of his visual performances in order to stage their happening and at the same time build his own role as a master of ceremony. In this respect, he reaches quite freely to the Romantic tradition, modernist tradition, and even to the concept of "post-" (although his art, with a clear historical consciousness, places him in modernism). As a protagonist and *spritus movens* of his assemblages, he dresses in a variety of costumes, ranging from a coat and a dark hat, similar to the ones he uses every day, to colourful T-shirts, gallabiyas, baseball caps and dark glasses. The latter seems so necessary in his image generated for artistic narration as the stock tie was once, without which the romantic ancestors of the painter did not dare to leave home. The artist's compositions are designed as something between a comics, a living image and a role-playing game, i.e. forms in which the literalness of things and people has a great power of impact. Kaniowski fills them with objects from the past and allows them to play a role in the *buffo* convention once again. And all this within frames constructed spatially or quasi-spatially. They take on the shape of windows, doors or wardrobes, shop windows, TV screens or tombstones. They often become something similar to a box scene, and sometimes they are also medieval altars, whose open wings show a miniature but full world of beings and objects. They intensify the impression that an extraordinary, surprising reality reveals itself in front of us, a fragment of a ritual to which we have been allowed with special rights by a demiurgeon artist.