

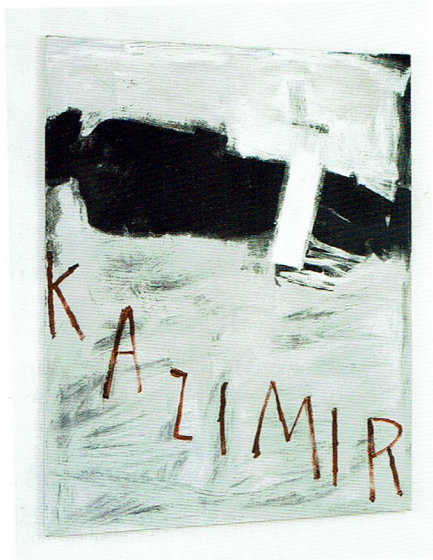
BEYOND THE FRAME

Mark Westall has been working in, and writing about contemporary art on and off for almost 20 years. Each month, he introduces an artist on the cusp of greatness

THIS MONTH: MAREK SZCZĘSNY



Untitled, 2014, oil on canvas, cardboard, 210 x 170 cm



Kazimir, 2014, oil on canvas, 162 x 130 cm



White Powder on Glass, 2013, oil on canvas, 195 x 130 cm

What's so interesting? No one would doubt that we live in busy times – constantly required to give our attention to new flows of information and with little time to consider what's been happening to and around us. It can be a bit overwhelming.

From Shakespeare's plays to Picasso's cubism, we have always looked to artists to help us find ways to think that will enable us to find meaning out of what can sometimes feel like chaos. In our current, hectic era we increasingly looking to our artists to help us find ways to slow down and reflect on our experiences and ourselves.

It seems almost inevitable therefore that the art world should be busily reappraising and reintroducing the work of an older generation of artist for whom personal

experience is as much a material as paint and canvas. Into this environment comes 75-year-old painter Marek Szczęśny, whose large scale paintings and paper works use his own biography, as well as layers of paint to trace the contours of the painter's life.

Born in Poland, and with a career spanning more than 40 years, Szczęśny's personal history takes in a life in art that began with the young artist gate-crashing lectures at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk in the late 1950s and continues to this day in the artist's adopted city, Paris. This story is depicted through an almost topographical technique, mapping history, myth and recollection in a physical way, piling up layers of paint, to create an uncertain yet fascinating terrain from which figures and forms are

simultaneously exposed and obscured. There are hints of smoke, of jazz, the smell of oil paints, turpentine and traffic.

Works are made on canvas, or, intriguingly, on paper, where, layering, ripping, tearing and drawing, the pieces physically break the two-dimensional frame and expand into 'real', non-painterly space. Geometric forms jut out and extend beyond the frame, deliberately dissolving painterly and topographical borders and instilling a sense of motion and movement to static pieces.

With a long list of exhibitions in his adopted France, across Europe and in the US, a show at new London gallery L'Étrangère will see Szczęśny's work shown in the UK for the first time. It comes, perhaps, just at the time we need it most. ©