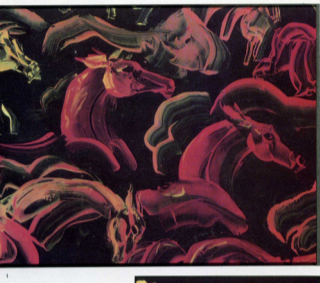
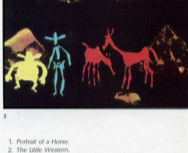


Art of WITOLD GIERSZ



"The qualities that are first noticed in Giersz's films are his mastery of graphic design, his brilliant colour sense and the richly textured painted surfaces. This is due to a reversal of the usual order of animated film production, which tends to begin with a plot which is then developed to put across a gag, a comic situation or to accentuate an animated character. The development in the case of Giersz's films is primarily graphic, its theme dependent solely upon a visual motif emerging from his brushwork. This approach is, in fact, typical of Poland, where graphic design dominates the artistic scene, which has a long tradition derived from posters, stage design and painting. Giersz introduces a fresh approach which delights the eye and heightens our aesthetic sense".

John Halas, *Masters of Animation*, 1967



1. *Portrait of a Horse*.
2. *The Little Western*.
3. Witold Giersz

WITOLD GIERSZ (b. 1927) began his professional career in the animated film industry in 1950 as an animator (with Cartoon Film Studio in Bielsko-Biala). In 1955 he organized in Warsaw a film studio (known today as Miniature Film Studio). Made his directorial debut in 1956 (*Secret of the Old Castle*). His subsequent work, *Little Western* (1960), brought him numerous awards at film festivals, ushering in many years of international successes and recognition.

A list of his films appears on page 18.

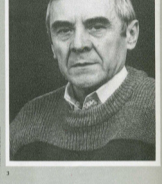
Since 1965 artistic manager of the animated film studio at Polish Television (in Poznań).

Graduate of economics and film directing. An international consultant in the field of animated film, he collaborates with a number of film festivals.

Member of ASIFA and of the Association of Polish Film-Makers.

Winner of state artistic awards.

Witold Giersz's film art, his innovative activities, his original style in the art of animation have been subject of extensive publications by numerous authors.



"Witold Giersz, the first Polish 'auteur' in animation"

RENZO KINOSHITA



PHOTO: PIŃKOWSKI

"In Giersz's films" — the plastic composition of the image is in the service of movement, frequently imparting to it dramatic dynamics of outstanding spectacular suggestiveness.

His *Little Western*, awarded at a number of festivals, is the best example of this impressionistic style in which form and colour dominate over narration, while dramatization of the story is born out of an appropriate rhythmicization of figurative elements; apart from that, this delectable satire upon the American cinema of adventure is not wanting in high-standard facetious ideas. But this animation of colourful splotches finds an even more suggestive application in *Red and Black*, a corrida imagined as a result of an encounter between two stains of colours — red and black — which becomes transformed into a bull and a toreador, and in *Portrait of a Horse*, where the relations between the horse and its rider-breaker are expressed in terms of painting in motion".

Gianni Rondolino,
Storia del cinema d'animazione,
1974, Einaudi.

"Portrait of a Horse was a wide-screen spectacle, it conveyed a never-ending energetic variation of galloping with constant changes of mobile brush strokes. The feeling of excitement in the dashing animals was immediately transmitted to the audience and the experience proved unforgettable."

John Halas, *Masters of Animation*,
1967, BBC.

16



2



17



PHOTO: PIŃKOWSKI

WITOLD GIERSZ
Has made the following animated films:
Secret of the Old Castle, 1956;
In the Jungle, 1957;
Adventures of a Sailor, 1958;
Paris in Spring, 1959;
Neon Tide, 1959;
Little Western, 1960 (awarded at BF, Cracow '61 — Golden Dragon, Leipzig '61, Ostera '61, Cork '61, San Francisco '61, Melbourne '62, Oberhausen '62);
Black Jack's Treasure, 1961;
Anating, 1962 — co-director Ludwik Pensi (a.);
Carnegie, 1962 — Silver Palm, Moscow '62, Edinburgh '62;
The Tom Book, 1962;
Dinosaur, 1962 (a. Alexandria '63, Cracow '63);
In the Sands of the Desert, 1962;
Red and Black, 1963 (a. Oberhausen '63) — Grand Prix, Bratislava '65 — Grand Prix, Cannes '65 — Grand Prix, Cracow '65, Santa Barbara '65, Montevideo '65, Cork '64, Edinburgh '64, Melbourne '66; *Madame Signora*, 1963;
Heat Can Be Troublesome, 1964 (a. La Fregata '66);
Ladies and Gentlemen, 1964 (a. La Fregata '66);
The River, 1966;
The Fire, 1966;
Portrait of a Horse, 1967 (a. Cracow '67 — Grand Prix, Marais '68 — Golden Pelican, Edinburgh '68, Adelaide '69 — Golden Cross of St. Hubert, Melbourne '70, Hiroshima '72);
The Admiral, 1968;
Domini's Moving Out, 1968;
Outing, 1968;
Catapults, 1969 — co-director Milan Ujčić, made in Yugoslavia;
That's Life, 1969 — co-director Milan Ujčić, made in Yugoslavia;
The Intellivual, 1969 (a. Paris '70, Wien '70);
Magical Parade, 1970;
Perfect Dancer, 1971;
The Star, 1972;
The Indonesian Family, 1973 (produced for Norway);
The Old Cowboy, 1973 (a. Poznań '75, Cork '75);
Traces, 1974;
Fox, 1975 (a. Cork '76, Teheran '76, Poznań '77, Oberhausen '76);
The Big Cats and How They Came to Be, 1976, commissioned by U.S.A. (a. Washington '77 — Golden Eagle);
Slavonic Folk Movements, 1978;
Be Good Mr. Elephant, 1978 — 2 episodes in full-length animated film (a. Poznań '79, Varna '79);
The River of Jonathan Kid, 1979 — coordinating director of series;
The Star, 1980;
The Resurrection, 1986 (part I — *Andante*, part II — *Finale*);
The Black Flash, 1987-89 (six 30-minute episodes in television series).

* (a) = awards (abbreviated list) at International Film Festivals.

"Among the Polish animators a special place of honour is due to Witold Giersz, an artist who was one of the first to break the ice of the conventional style. After several years of apprenticeship and a quiet debut (*Secret of the Old Castle*, 1956), in 1960 he presented *Little Western*, a picture which marked a point of departure for the development of Polish animated film. In the picture Giersz experimented with oilpaints as a material for animation, where the very splotch of colour would become a character or an occasion for comical gags even.

Since that time his creative output has been large and varied, sometimes offering auteur works, sometimes strictly professional films".

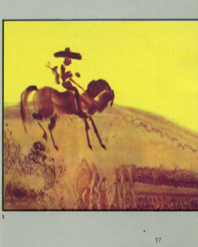
Gianfranco Bendazzi, *Cartoons*,
1968, Marsilio Editor.

"The film's (*The Little Western*) originality lies in its strong graphical effects: he did the drawings with a paintbrush and introduced areas of colour in patches with brush strokes, straight onto the celluloid. His technique superseded the conventional 'hard' figures since the manipulation of the patches of colour diffused the outlines of the characters."

John Halas, *Masters of Animation*.

His 'dynamic painting' as seen in his classic film *The Little Western* moved animation away from traditional cel painting to a freer style. Made in 1960, this film had a tremendous influence on Polish animators as well as those abroad."

Renzo Kinoshita, *Best of Polish Animation*,
BF Hiroshima 1985.



1

WITOLD GIERSZ ANIMATED FILM DIRECTOR

For the first time Giersz presented himself as a painter of the screen in the film *A Neon Tide* (1959); the following year saw the release of his *Little Western*, an animated pastiche of the most popular film genre of them all. *Little Western* is the first Polish animated auteur film. Giersz is the author of its script, designs, and scenography; he also himself painted up the thousands of celluloid sheets with characters and sets. This all-embracing versatility of Giersz's talents offered an absolute guarantee of the harmony of idea and technical perfection of the film.

His subsequent picture, *The Red and the Black*, was also inspired by a legend — this time that of bullfighting. Considered a classic of animation today, the film presents high artistic qualities, although the colourful splash of his character or object continues to remind of a drawing whose outlines are clearly marked contours resulting from the contrasting choice of paints. The painting on the cels of each phase of movement separately produced effects which are most charming. But the technique was incredibly time-consuming and it was soon replaced by more efficient ones.

It should be mentioned here that in the late 1950s and in the early 1960s Poland could boast of a friendly attitude towards filmmaking. It was conducive to the emergence of not just the "Polish school" (the term embracing a specific thematic field in feature films). The artistic ferment was also making inroads into Polish documentary film. The critics would speak of Polish school of animation, too, although the term was far from being precise; this "school" did not embrace either thematic or artistic tendencies, or even technical ones. The leaders of the school — Jan Lenica, Walerian Borowczyk, Miroslaw Kijowicz, Daniel Szczechura, and Witold Giersz — differed from one another in all spheres — both in the ways of viewing the world and in the modes of interpreting it. And Giersz, unlike his colleagues, abstained from declaring any programmatic assumptions. He

was just happy to tell simple, uncomplicated anecdotes and stories. At the stage of script-writing his story did not have to be necessarily funny. The fun emerged only at the stage of transforming the story into the language of his brushwork.

At the turn of the decade Giersz begins to apply a new technique of painting, developing yet another form of his style. He no longer paints on cels but directly on the board under the camera, and not with a brush but with a specially-designed putty. Frame-by-frame shots were taken after the spreading of the paint and smearing it about with the putty, following each phase of movement. The movement would leave behind its shadow; a speeding horse would land its hooves on the solid ground, while its legs were still seen moving through the air.

This method, so rich in the elements of improvisation, contained an inherent danger of unwitting effects, but the Giersz films always displayed form of utmost discipline. He applied to describe, for such a term could be aptly to describe this fascinating vibration, never tended to obscure the story itself which was told by colours, texture, shapes and movement. Among the films made in this style are: *Portrait of a Horse*, *The Admiral*, *The Intellectual*, and others. The top-notch achievement of this method appears to be *The Fire*. The film showed the disaster of a forest fire, the flight of animals, the annihilation and rebirth of life on the smouldering site. Giersz created here an exceptionally harmonious composition of image, sound, movement and climate of tragedy and hope.

Witold Giersz is inexhaustible in his endeavours as a scriptwriter, scenographer, painter and director. Bursting with new ideas, projects and robust enthusiasm, he frequently reaches back to earlier episodes of film series for children in order to re-make them into full-length cinema films. Applying his arduous technique, he turns out extraordinary films which never fail to mesmerize festival audiences.

ANIMATED FILM? — ... "it is a plastic art created not only with the help of brush and canvas, but also camera, projector and screen."

WITOLD GIERSZ in *Animafilm* (1/1980)