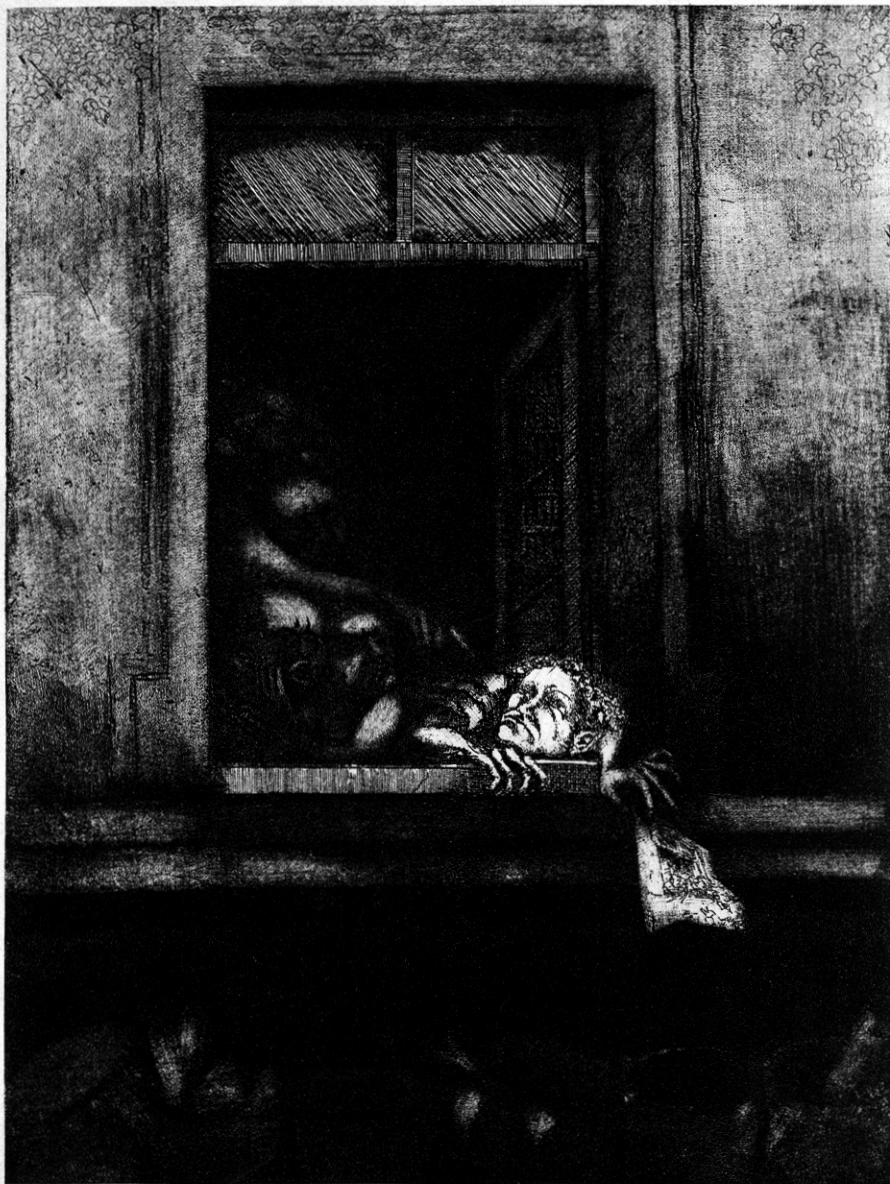


"WINDOW," MEZZOTINT, 1968. Marta Kremer is interested in existential problems. Irrespective of politics, geography and the progress made by science we all must eventually fall sick, grow old and die; we should get used to the idea in order to protect ourselves from fear and to avoid being caught by surprise



DEMONS OF DRAB REALITY

ANDRZEJ OSEKA

Marta Kremer's prints show interiors of ordinary provincial homes, neither very poor nor very rich, but clearly a bit old-fashioned. A large round table, high backed chairs and iron bedsteads. The furnishings are commonplace and unusual. In the half-light, the lusterless surfaces seem to be covered with a layer of dust. The people, too, are commonplace, to a disturbing degree. They have skinny shoulders atop a shapeless trunk, flaccid skin hanging on too visible bones. All the characters represent the rickety physical type that lives far from the sun in gloomy houses standing in narrow streets. We see here people with large heads on painfully thin necks; their terrifyingly expressive faces wear a look of fear and sadness. The same type of (a degraded — as the sociologists of the novel and art say) hero may be encountered in the drawings of Alfred Kubin, Bruno Schulz, Bronisław Linke and Jacek Gaj, in the novels of Kafka, Kubin, Canetti, Schulz and in the poetry of Leśmian, Tuwim and Białoszewski.

The enigmatic force of the pictures lies in their very commonness. The frail, sad little man was the great hero of many of the finest works of 20th-century art. Despite his tortured life and consciousness, despite his helplessness, in the face of the history of the world in which he lived he al-

ways mustered his courage. He lived and observed and by the force of his imagination imbued the most ordinary matters of ordinary reality with magic, with a most mysterious meaning.

The ordinary scenes of Marta Kremer's prints set the stage for most unusual and dire events. The artist uses props sparingly, restricting herself to pieces that establish the mood. She introduces symbols, dresses, flowers and fruit that hover in the air.

An oft repeated theme is that of a huge, monstrous fish. The figures gather around it and tear it apart with their fingers to gorge themselves in a compulsive debauchery and an orgy of eating. According to old medieval beliefs eating was a sin which stood for yielding to carnal pleasure.

This is a world pervaded with passion and nostalgia. The characters do not put on an act. The action does not bring to mind the theater, the Grand Guignol. There are too many heart-rending scenes of true despair, too often cruelty gives way to innocent and seemingly restrained revelry. Ugly naked lovers float through the air in a bouquet of flowers.

The frail little man surrounded by madness, misfortune and human malice is not a puppet but a rational and a sensitive creature.