

# MASTERS OF ANIMATION

JOHN HALAS



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. Although a former painter, he is surprisingly versatile in film production, being able to adapt himself to the discipline and find new solutions for each film. Each production carries his trademark, his own particular visual ideas.

Giersz was born in Poraj, Poland,



WITOLD GIERSZ

in 1927 and he started work in the small town of Bielsko at the local Co-operative Studio. After six years of practice he graduated as a director with the film *The Mystery of the Old Castle* (1956). His major success was achieved with *The Little Western* (1960) which won prizes in many international festivals. The film's 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 His technique superseded the conventional 'hard' figures since the manipulation of the patches of colour diffused the outlines of the characters. In *Red and Black* (1963) he concentrated entirely on colour and chromatic visual transformations. *The Horse* (1967) 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. *The Fire* (1975) evoked the same level of excitement but with the animal power replaced by the force of the elements. Both *The Horse* and *The Fire* have dual themes: both progress through time and space and both have a situation and plot rooted in nature. However, they retain their pure character as animated paintings. *The Fire* is an especially touching film, showing the rebirth of nature after the dynamic destruction of the elements.

