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## Focus on Art History

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## Briefly Speaking

#### Cognitive Misers, Cognitive Spendthrifts

We talk to the cognitive psychologist Prof.
Edward Necka about mental laziness, the pitfalls of memory, and confusing technologies. **58** 

COVER PHOTO: JAKUB OSTAŁOWSKI PAGE 2: JAKUB OSTAŁOWSKI (1, 3) ARTUR KAMCZYCKI (2) FROM THE EDITORS

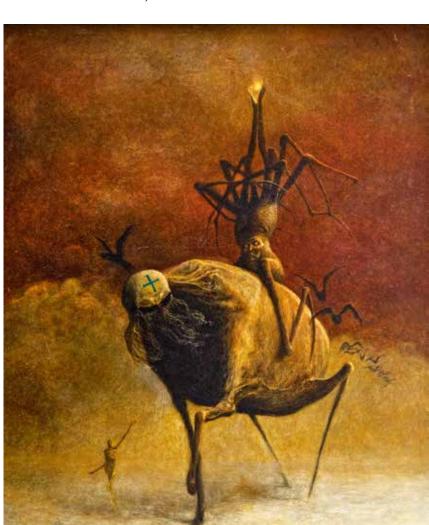
# PECULIARITIES, BIG AND SMALL

eatured on this issue's cover is Brutus, a human-created animal – a hybrid cross between a cow, American bison, and European bison (zubr). The breeders were curious about what the biology and behavior of such a three-way hybrid would be like, and also hoped it would supply large quantities of meat, combining the tastes of domesticated beef and wild game and offering a healthy, low-cholesterol option. However, Mother Nature did not indulge such a far-reaching intervention into her affairs: all the male hybrids proved to be infertile. Brutus is therefore the very last, singular animal of his type in the world.

Nature likes to thumb its nose at mankind, in various ways, often by sending one-of-a-kind phenomena our way. It tests us by creating things that can spread virtually uncontrollably, given a lapse of responsibility and common sense (like African swine fever). Or it sets unique challenges for us to solve: for instance by historically shaping a river valley in a complex way that makes it particularly tricky to identify how to protect against flooding.

We are even surprised by unique phenomena in our very own human nature. Our memory, for instance, seemingly so dependable and immutable, does indeed play trick on us. Researchers are exploring how the brain is capable of deleting, selecting, or transforming information from the past so as to fit current narratives – as Prof. Edward Necka tells us in an interview. And depending on context, we often judge other people all-too-quickly by invoking positive or negative stereotypes about those who differ, for instance, in terms of culture or origins.

The world of nature has many singular idiosyncrasies whose mechanisms are still being discovered by scientists. Some of them are truly the stuff of dreams.



Untitled (1971), Zdzisław Beksiński (1929 Sanok - 2005 Warsaw). Illustrator, printmaker. painter and photographer. His work has a surrealist, expressionistic character, and in the 1980s especially appealed to the fantastic method of "photographing dreams." In his latter life he also created collages using computer techniques. The largest collection of his work is held by the Historical Museum of the town of Sanok.



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