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Proof of Identity?

All adults living in Poland (or nearly all) wield their own "personal identity cards": a bit of plastic bearing our name, date of birth, parents' names, place of residence, height, eye color, and personal identity number. In earlier decades such IDs were actually little green booklets, with the names of one's children and official place of employment also written into them. All this information is meant to specify our identity, to pin down the distinguishing characteristics that mark a given person out among the country's millions of other citizens.

Passports, in turn, are meant to distinguish us among the billions of people in the world. Polish passports, for instance, declare our Polish nationality in several languages: Polish, English, and French. An inscription on the red cover, under a crowned eagle, states that we are from Poland, but also that we are citizens of the EU.

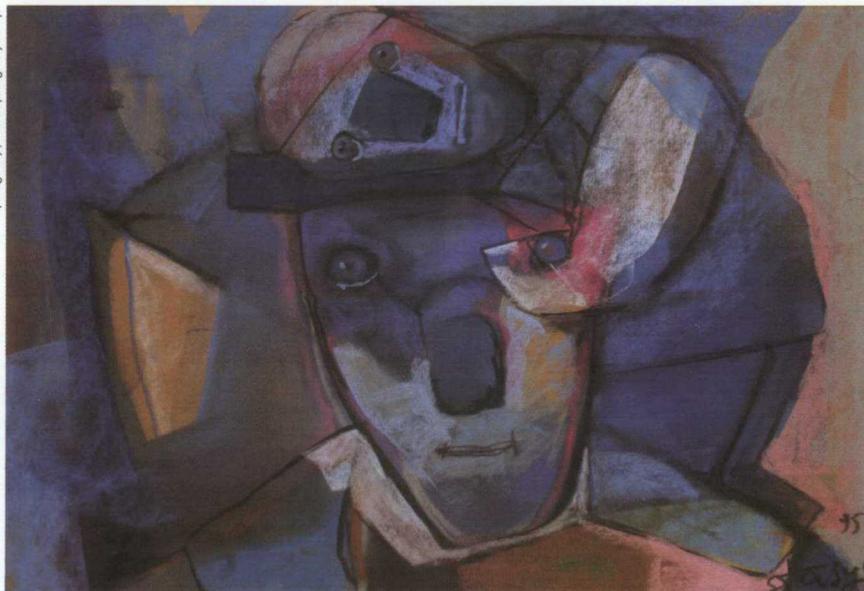
But irrespective of what's officially written down in such documents, people may define their own identity in myriad ways. For some, their religion might be the most important factor, while for others it might be gender, nationality, family, or the particular social role they play. When we ask our Polish friends what most strongly defines their identity, they will likely respond: the Polish language. For many, language is a sign of being rooted in a particular culture, history, space. As "New Wave" poet Ryszard Krynicki once wrote about Communist-era Poland:

... whispers a crippled word of a forgotten language,
which is my only homeland;
what are you concealing under the guise of your trip,
they ask, and even my ID card can and will be used against me

We are proud to present you with this issue of "Academia", exploring numerous facets and dimensions of the complex phenomenon of identities.

ACADEMIA staff

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Composition

Stasys Eidrigevičius (b. 1949) - a graphic artist originating from Lithuania, living in Poland since 1980. He makes prints, designs posters, illustrates books, and produces paintings, photographs, stage designs and performance art. He has won many international prizes, including the IBBY award for his children's book illustrations. Sad faces are a recurring motif in his work - masks that tell stories about playing various characters