

Jánuš Kubíček (5.12.1921-21.5.1993)

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(Catalogue text for the "Jánuš Kubíček" collective exhibition at the House of the Arts in Brno, 16 April - 21 May 1972)



This collective exhibition of Kubíček's art constitutes an attempt to cover, in 115 canvases and 128 graphic sheets, what might be termed a balancing overview of the artist's work and furthermore what (thanks to near-Einstein-like tricks, since a chronological line incorporated into an exhibition space is practically time transformed into space) painters themselves have forever considered an opportunity for a specific confrontation with their own world or, as psychologists would have it, with the optical isomorphic of the internal structure. Since it is also a time for art critics and an opportunity for art historians, they will again, this time to the best of their festive erudition, confirm that in Kubíček's work survives the best of the intuitive construct in modern art, from Cézanne through Braque, Kandinsky and Malevic, i.e. a precious balance between reason and emotion, the predominance of the deliberate over the incidental, the constructive over the impulsive, as well as "a questing and rationalist nature", offset by the fact that the constructive is supported by an intuitive base. Naturally, they will be right. This is

definitely how things are. But let us now add that they will be right only in the way that all slanderers are right (in their own fashion), for each act of theorising on art and utterance about it (on the path from defining to the definitive) is always, in the Czech language, just a slander (pomluva), in the sense of speaking (mluvit) after and past (po) something, with regressive validity but without feedback, thus always with a certain delay, i.e. always external the artistic achievement, as is the fate of all theories and each act of categorisation. The English might remark that hindsight is always 20/20.

Kubíček's work is, today more than ever before, far from a definitive and dignified consummation. And if there is something that particularly characterises it, it is the fact that the most interesting and open, the most exciting and least definitive, is found towards the end of the chronological collection exhibited. So, thirdly, such an exhibition is also an opportunity for the advocacy of living work from its 'slanderers', of an artistic feat in terms of the theory of ongoing art history. The continuity and stylistic unity of Kubíček's artistic approach cannot be grasped as shape and a changing object, but it is observable in rhythm and, if you like, in the varying motifs and structures. It is the rhythm and order of a unifying artistic style, in the sense of a firm line joining the first picture to the last one, so one can speak of an "internal composition" over and above individual pictures, their motifs and structures.

And as rhythm is a modification of time, the order, the "internal composition", opens up to us through the very chronological layout of the exhibition. Individual pictures at the exhibition and their motifs, tendencies and shapes are always visibly concentrated towards one central image, always to one brief outcome, while this image does not necessarily have to be sequential (and with some cycles the artist really did not feel the need to cover his discoveries totally, to demonstrate them, to push them all the way to a harmonious, quiescent position), but one can easily file it in the chronological composition. These central images, the "gravity centres" in the contour-line diagram of the composition, then make up final artistic metaphors for us, provided we understand the combinations of motif (a concrete impetus) and its structure (abstracting tendency) constructed in this way.

For example, in the very first cycles and in the first variation - in the happy period after the artist had brought his enchanted Cézannesque time into harmony, making his first, still highly original discoveries - the centre of gravity is a tiny still life, the first artistic metaphor. The artist himself would later feel that with each variation and each

brief metaphor, the motif was gradually disappearing from his paintings, and a pure structure was pushing through. This proves the rare honesty of an artist realising that no real art can be an imitation of reality but, on the other hand, it has to relate to it closely (and for Kubíček, in terms of motif as well).

So it is no coincidence that at the beginning there was an enchantment with Cézanne, with the moment at which art stopped imitating nature to become a fully accepted reality itself, accompanied from then on by fear of dead ends. For Kubíček, the relationship between art and reality is always paramount (without manifesting it in a cheap way). However, as stated above, artistic metaphor is always based on the combination of motif and structure, with construction derived from motif. It is a balance of both, and has therefore inevitably to be preceded by a gradual balancing, and followed by an off-balance deflection. It is simply a basic rhythmical procedure - perhaps with the distinctive difference that in the first periods and first variations (the cycle of "Cézannesque" landscapes and still lifes, the city, the cycle of nudes, the "blue-headed" obsession) the motif precedes, and shaping, structuring construction follows. Later, it is the other way round: the structure starts seeking the motif. This, however, does not mean that the motif is absent in the first picture of each sequence. Always, searching for a motif is only realising the motif, i.e. rationalisation. The previous search for structure started with the selection of a motif. Thus in any cycle and any picture, they are both co-existent. It is given and intuitive, if you like. And it is always followed by disclosing (realising) the "contact planes" of the mentioned connection. While structure can be reached through abstraction, motif appears in disquieting concretisations. For example, in the "nymph" colour compositions in one of the later cycles, the figurative motif literally shines through structure; anticipations of colour and light, intersections of colour and light, and flashes of motif. With other works, motif proceeds to appear in the growing tension between the composition and the picture title. But the relationship is never - and this is actually the most important thing - so simple that it can be reduced to any kind of schema.

The rhythm of a creative procedure should not be taken for the gist of the work. No theoretical formulation can fully capture the movement within a picture. As mentioned above, visual art can be considered only within the compass of its visual means. This applies to Kubíček's work all the more, as it is in itself a quest for an analogy of human thinking in painting. And the only sense of the previous lines is to make this basic fact obvious: to liken the rhythm of creating to the rhythm of thinking. The central picture represents balance, harmony and a quiescent position: peace between structure and motivation, idea and perception, reality and shape. But it is always a temporary harmony, since in the principle of a visual metaphor there is balance and a brief connection as well as the flash and energy such a connection generates. And all this proves that the balance and quiescent position was never crucial to Kubíček's work, that it was rather the energy and the flash, the impetus for other cycles and quests. And only in this very place is the comparison precise and fitting.

For his relation to reality, the intensive need to ponder both his work and the social function of art and, last but not least, for his relation to the painting craft, Jánuš Kubíček is a traditional artist, in the best sense of the word. Kubíček's friends talk about "alchemifying", an unheard-of obsession with painting techniques. And it is no coincidence that graphic art constitutes a significant part of his work. It has become one of the myths and superstitions of the modern art world that too keen an interest in craft and technique is liable to stir up suspicion about creative potency. Being a stimulating and inspiring artist and at the same time a thorough and skilful craftsman is the exception rather than the rule. And Kubíček's work demonstrates that the one does not exclude the other: on the contrary. For it is work in the original sense of the word, not reducible to ontological formulations, extracts and incantations. Thus Kubíček's intimate relationship with the techniques of art and craft is another testimony to the artist's wisdom. This relationship undoubtedly belongs in the category of thinking within artistic means.

Let us conclude that this wisdom is not only knowing. It is also wisdom of colour, as proved by the later cycles. All the better for those whom this wisdom concerns. If, of course, wisdom can have consumers.

Translation Timothy Stejskal