

painting of “proljetni salon” 1916-1928

From the death of Miroslav Kraljević in 1913 until the very end of that war-ridden second decade, there are very few strongholds for a developmental and historical reconstruction of Croatian art in the diluted cultural existence of the provincial milieu that belonged “neither to Europe nor to the Balkans”. In the physical and spiritual dissipation of the epoch, it is impossible to discern anything like a generation, a frontal range of individuals characterized by certain convictions and linked by some elementary affinity. There are only individuals, surrounded by a bunch of aged dilettantes and routiners, who adhered like leeches to that thin layer of bourgeois supply of insecure taste and which, at that moment, did not give any of the pioneers of Bukovac’s era in terms of true creativity.¹

Even without too much effort, one can distinguish several lines of art-related issues, mostly continuing from the immediately preceding years. Towards the end of the first decade and the beginning of the second, the ideology of “Medulić” and the stylistics of the “Munich Circle” were clearly opposed. With the former, the notion of the creative subject as an active and ideologically, i.e. nationalistically, and politically conscious individual resulted in the circumstance that the boundary between true and self-reliant artistic effort and programmed, ideological stylisation had become too thin, often even imperceptible. With the latter, the relative isolation made it possible for the group led by Račić to direct their forces and talents towards a

different treatment of the visual theme, in which that visual, plasticist element would become the true and only subject of interest — just like in the matrix of development of Western-European art, beginning with Manet. However, two things are barely visible: that “Medulić” had used up its potential chances before the war: all that occurred later, all those things painted or sculpted by Meštrović’s emulators — used abundantly at a number of international exhibitions for predetermined purposes of propaganda — might be of interest for a general analysis in terms of cultural history, but not for that concerning art development. The second issue regards the development of M. Kraljević: in his Požega and Paris phases, he twice made a clear step forward, towards his own, post-Fauvian interpretation of Cézannism; paintings from his last phase should be observed as a further, richer, and more complex stage within the current that had formed around Račić. Even though the role of Vladimir Becić was far more modest, one should keep in mind that he had also evolved on the basis of Cézanne’s method during his stay in Paris and also after that. Certainly, all that has nothing to do with impressionism, and neither does the basic stylistic problem of the first, Munich phase, indefatigably chewed over by the older generation of our art critics. Since the Central-European stylistic currency was still in circulation, the expressionist continuations of the Secession (with Klimt and Hodler, Kokoschka and Schiele) were finding a considerable echo; the examples of Jerolim

slikarstvo “proljetnog salona” 1916-1928.

Od smrti Miroslava Kraljevića godine 1913. do pod sam kraj toga ratnog drugog desetljeća, u razrijeđenosti kulturnog bivstvovanja provincijske sredine “ni u Evropi ni na Balkanu”, naći će se veoma malo uporišnih točaka za razvojno-historijsku rekonstrukciju hrvatske umjetnosti. U fizičkoj i duhovnoj razbijenosti epohe ne razabiremo ništa nalik na generaciju, na frontalnu širinu skupine pojedinaca, istaknutih po uvjerenju, povezanih elementarnim afinitetom. Postoje samo pojedinci, a oko njih šaka starmalih diletanata i rutinera, krpeljski prionula uz tanak sloj građanske narudžbe nesigurna ukusa i iz koje se, u tom času, na planu istinskog stvaranja ne izdvaja nijedan od pionira Bukovčeva vremena.¹

I bez prevelike pažljivosti moguće je povući nekolike niti stvaralačkih problema koji se uglavnom nastavljaju iz godina koje su neposredno prethodile. Pod konac prvog desetljeća i na početku drugog ideologija “Medulića” i stilistika “Minhenskog kruga” jasno su suprostavljene. Poimanje umjetničkog subjekta kao djelatne i ideološki, tj. nacionalistički, politički svjesne jedinice, kod prvih imalo je posljedice da je granica između iskrenog i sebesvjesnog umjetničkog napora i programiranog i propagandnog stiliziranja postala pretanka i, nerijetko, nezamjetljiva. Na drugoj strani relativna izoliranost omogućuje grupi koju je predvodio Račić da snage i talente usmjeri ka drugačijem tretmanu likovnog predmeta, u kojem će to likovno, plastično — kao i u matici razvoja zapadnoevropske umjetnosti

počev od Maneta — postati pravi i jedini predmet zanimanja. Međutim, premalo se zapažaju dvije stvari: da je “Medulić” svoju potencijalnu šansu iskoristio još prije rata; sve što se događalo kasnije, što su slikali i vajali Meštovići oponašatelji — i što je obilato iskorištavano na brojnim inozemnim izložbama u režirane propagandističke svrhe — može biti od interesa za opću kulturno-historijsku, ali ne i za razvojno-umjetničku analizu. Drugo predstavlja razvoj M. Kraljevića: on je u požeškom i pariskom razdoblju dvaput vrlo jasno zakoračio naprijed, u pravcu slobodne, svoje, post-fovističke interpretacije sezanzizma; djela iz posljednje faze njegova stvaranja valja gledati kao daljnju, bogatiju i složeniju etapu onoga pravca koji se uobličio oko Račića. Iako je uloga Vladimira Becića znatno skromnija, ne zaboravimo da je i on za vrijeme boravka u Parizu, i nakon toga, doživio evoluciju na osnovi Cézanneova načina. Sve to zajedno, naravno, neće imati nikakve veze s impresionizmom, kao što s impresionizmom nije povezan ni temeljni stilski problem prve, minhenske faze, čime se nabacivala naša starija kritika. Kako se i dalje nastavlja opticanje srednjoevropske stilske monete, ekspresionistička produženja secesije (uz Klimta i Hodlera, Kokoschka i Schiele) pobuđuju određen odjek; primjeri Jerolima Miše i Zlatka Šulentića² najbolje će pokazati koliko je uvjerenost i koliko uvjerljivo bio prihvaćen taj rani i mjestimični ekspresionistički poticaj. Riječ je uglavnom o portretima i još je uvijek ona secesionistička “snaga duše”

Miša and Zlatko Šulentić² demonstrate well that this early and sporadic expressionist impulse was accepted with conviction. It mostly consisted of portraits, while that Secessionist “power of the soul” was still present as a motif. Ljubo Babić, whom the contemporary critics (Lunaček, Strajnić) consider the greatest talent of all beside Maksimilijan Vanka, was led to embrace expressionism through Munich, after he had made his own considerable contribution to the themes of “Medulić”. Not through the Munich of the “Blue Rider” though, but rather the orthodox, Jugendstil one, which was affected only externally by a flicker of expressionism. Between his sketches of Matoš (1913) over the “Self-Portrait” (1914) to the portrait of Miroslav Krleža (1919), Babić certainly revealed great interest in psychological introspection, or rather — I should say — in the psychological construction of characters, concentrating on the “inner life” of the person, though he felt no inclination whatsoever towards more liberal metaphors; wherever one can notice an effort of stylisation, it is a mere addition, attached out of feeling for cultivated and fashionable taste rather than a result of emotional conflict or his own agitated conviction. The “intellectualism” of Lj. Babić is relative; from the retrospective of his later development, starting with his confession of “purely artistic” values, the redness of his “Building Site” (1917), the cosmic character of his “Golgotha” (1917), and the symbolist reduction of his “Red Flags” (1921) — all of them masterpieces of *mise-en-scène* — are only a passing phase in the transformations of that lively and noble spirit. Nevertheless, the artistic and intellectual culture of Lj. Babić meant — at the time when the conflict around artistic ideas was mostly reduced to the basest scuffling about art as such — direct or indirect encouragement to all new efforts to shift the goal further or raise it higher.

If looking more closely, one may notice a sequence of important historical circumstances that brought about almost inevitably the appearance of a new, young generation. First of all, in the minds of the people, the war had divided like a blade the world of the past from the anticipations of the new, that vague and exciting space of one’s own action, one’s own existential chance. Critical distance from the compromised reality is bound to take the veil off people’s eyes.

The renewed tends to tear down the idols, see through the fallacies, change the

value relations. The unaccustomed eyes now desires to see something else, something different. The result is some sort of apparent lack of concentration, the loss of systematic discipline — a “stir”, as someone has called it; in fact, it is the most precious, the first preparation for the availability of minds and talents, the organic disponibility of a germ.

The very appearance of “Hrvatski Proljetni Salon” (Croatian Spring Salon) in 1916, with its general and insecure prologue and a list of participants that was not too promising,³ nevertheless announced the maturing of critical self-awareness. And precisely that manifestation would become the one to absorb for more than a decade all outspoken longing, searching, and stumbling of younger and young artists. In fact, Proljetni Salon was the only form of organized and continued collective activity in the field of visual arts in its time, which was the first and the most important reason why it imposed itself upon all historical approaches as the only possible unit of synthesis. On the other hand, “Proljetni Salon” was not a unified and defined notion, constructed on the internally coherent basis of unified and consistent aspirations and consistently developed ideas. “Proljetni Salon” had entered art history as a synonym - in terms of development and chronology - of those contradictory, complex, and extremely restless times, in which the generation of our second Modernist movement, however heterogeneous, torn, aged, inarticulate, and perhaps modest in terms of its end results in the field of painting, emerged as one of the most talented generations in the Croatian culture. If we view Modernism as the cyclical opening of the culture of this region towards European and world models — which has been rhythmically alternating with the periods of gathering forces of the soil and tradition during the past 70 years — it should be merited for having established creatively and profoundly, and partly overcoming it as well, the very problem of that rhythmical repetition in its foremost representatives (A. B. Šimić, Krleža, Ujević) — although it would reappear once more in the last, fifth decade of our century.

In order to define more precisely its critical relationship towards various phenomena and accomplishments, one should keep in mind the euphoric and almost chaotic situation of the previous, typically youthful period. For example, the figure of Milan Steiner (1894-1918) would remain, with-

out its spatial and temporal context, just a vague trace of an undeveloped talent, with a few oils on canvas and drawings that testify of the fact that he had quickly and aptly grasped the message of Račić’s and Kraljević’s Munich beginnings, and that he had, in terms of development, found the best position for a future step forward, which unfortunately remained unrealised. In order to determine Steiner’s significance, one should also know with what authority and enthusiasm he was expressing his own disponibility: “That young man, completely unknown not only to the so-called public, but also to all our critics (which dedicated a few lines to him at most when writing on the exhibitions of Art School students), that student of Art School has played, along with Uzelac, Šumanović, Trepše, Gecan, and others, a role in the development of our youngest painters that these critics do not even dream of, with the exception of a few initiated. He was not only among the first who spoke of Cézanne, expressionism, cubism, etc., but also painted in such a way that his pieces from those times can be compared to the best contemporary achievements of those painters.”

At the time when A. B. Šimić published the above-cited lines in “Savremenik” in 1921, it seemed, and not only to him, that the new situation in our art was a ready fact and that the young artists he was mentioning — and their list could be complemented with the names of Tartaglia and Varlaj, or those of our frequent guests, Serbian painters Dobrović and Bijelić, who were present at the Salon exhibitions from 1919 onwards — were introducing a “new spirit” and raising the provincial art of sentimental anecdotes and dazzling phrases to the level of modern visual expression. These were literally the words of Iljko Gorenčević, who has disappeared from the scene too early,⁴ but can still be considered the most significant critic of the time, from his preface to the VII Exhibition of “Proljetni Salon”, which took place in Osijek in 1920.

Having concluded that the “new art-related needs of modern man... make us feel more acutely than ever the crucial need to renew our visual arts as a whole,” he said that “the youngest generation is laying foundations for this revolution. Whereas all of our yesterday’s art was an art of sentimental moods and historical anecdotes, an art of literary abstracts and sugary dispositions, the most recent art has placed on the

prisutna kao portretni motiv. Ljubu Babića, koji se suvremenim kritičarima (Lunaček, Strajnić) čini, uz Maksimilijana Vanku, najvećom darovitošću, put k ekspresionizmu, nakon što je platio vlastiti i ne najmanji obol medulicevskoj tematici, vodi preko Münchena. Ne preko Münchena "Plavog jahača"; preko onog Münchena pravovjernog i jugendstilskog, koji je ekspresionistički drhat zahvatio samo izvana. Između krokija Matoševa lika (1913), preko "Autoportreta" (1914) do portreta Miroslava Krleže (1919) Babić, istina, pokazuje naglašen interes za psihološku introspekciju, ili — rekao bih čak — za psihološku konstrukciju lika, za usredsređivanje na "unutarnji život" osobe, ali i nikakvu sklonost za slobodniju metaforičnost; stilizatorski je napor, ondje gdje se pojavljuje, dodan, više nakalemljen po osjećanju kultivirana i ažurna ukusa, manje proistekao iz konflikta osjećaja, iz povišene temperature vlastitog uvjerenja. "Intelektualizam" Lj. Babića relativan je; iz retrospektive njegova kasnijeg razvoja, polazeći od njegova ispovijedanja "čisto slikarskih" vrednota, crvenilo njegova "Gradilišta" (1917), kozmičnost "Golgot" (1917), ili pak simbolistička redukcija "Crvenih zastava" (1921) — majstorska djela mizanscene — predstavljaju samo prolaznu etapu u preobražavanjima toga živog i gospodstvenog duha. Slikarska i intelektualna kultura Lj. Babića predstavljala je ipak — u vremenu kada se borba oko umjetničkih poimanja najčešće svodila na najprizemnije gušanje za umjetnost općenito — izravno ili neizravno ohrabrenje svim novim pokušajima da se cilj pomakne dalje ili izdigne više.

Tko god gleda, naći će niz veoma važnih povijesnih okolnosti koje su na tako reći neizbježan način pretpostavljale pojavu mladog naraštaja. Rat je, prije svega, oštrinom sječiva razdvojio u glavama svijet prošlosti od predosjećanja novog, od onog nejasnog i uzbuđujućeg prostora vlastitog djelovanja, vlastite egzistencijalne šanse. Kritički razmak od kompromitirane stvarnosti skida mrene s očiju.

Obnovljeni pogled obara fetiš, prozire patvorine, izmjenjuje odnose vrijednosti. Nenaviklim očima zagleda se u drugo, u različito. Rezultat je neka vrsta prividne dekoncentracije, gubitak sistematske discipline — "komešanje", reče netko; u stvari, to je najdragocjenija, pripremna, početna raspoloživost duhova i talenata, organska dostupnost zametka.

Već i sama pojava "Hrvatskog proljetnog salona" g. 1916, s općenitim i nesigurnim proslavom, s imenima sudionika koja mnogo ne garantiraju,³ ipak daje naslutiti da kritička samosvijest dozrijeva. I upravo to će manifestaciji pripasti uloga da u trajanju duljem od jednog desetljeća apsorpira sve izrazitije težnje, traženja i posrtanja mladih i mladih umjetnika. Proljetni je salon u stvari i jedini oblik organiziranog i kontinuiranog kolektivnog djelovanja na području plastičkih umjetnosti u svom vremenu, pa se na taj način, prije svega ostalog, nameće svakom historijskom pristupu kao jedino moguća sintetska jedinica. No, s druge strane, "Proljetni salon" ne predstavlja cjelovit i određen pojam koji gradi iz nutrine kohezija jedinstvene i uobličene težnje i dosljedno razvijane misli. "Proljetni salon" ulazi u povijest umjetnosti kao razvojni i vremenski sinonim protuslovnost, složena i nemirom nadasve bogata vremena, u kojem je izrastala, makar koliko neujednačena, rastrgana, starmala, nedorečena i po krajnjim rezultatima u slikarstvu može biti i skromna — jedna od najtalentiranijih generacija hrvatske kulture — generacija druge naše moderne. Gledajući u modernoj cikličko otvaranje kulture ove sredine evropskim i svjetskim primjerima — koje se posljednjih sedamdeset godina ritmično smjenjuje s razdobljima pribiranja snaga tla i tradicije — njoj treba pripisati u zaslugu što je u najboljim predstavnicima (A. B. Šimić, Krleža, Ujević) kreativno i dubokomisleno postavila, a djelomično i prevladala sam problem tog ritmičkog opetovanja — kojeg ćemo, inače, biti svjedoci još jednom u protekloj, petoj deceniji našeg stoljeća.

Da bi se točnije odredile kritičke relacije prema pojavama i ostvarenjima, valja imati pred očima euforičnu i do kaotičnosti pokrenutu situaciju tipično mladalačkog, prethodničkog perioda. Jer, pojava Milana Steinera (1894-1918) npr., bez vlastite prostorne i vremenske odredbe, ostaje samo nejasan trag nerazvijene darovitosti, kojeg nekoliko ulja i crteža svjedoči kako je brzo i sretno intuirao poruku Račićeva i Kraljevićeva minhenskog početka, kako se, gledajući s razvojne perspektive, postavio najbolje za jedno buduće, ali, na žalost, neostvareno, kretanje naprijed. Za utvrđivanje značenja ličnosti valja znati i to s koliko je autoriteta i s kakvim poletom Steiner ispoljavao vlastitu raspoloživost: "Taj mladi čovjek potpuno nepoznat ne samo tzv. publici nego gotovo i svekolikoj našoj kritici (koja mu je u

najboljem slučaju posvetila po koji redak kad bi pisala o izložbi đaka Umjetničke škole), taj učenik Umjetničke škole imao je kao drug Uzelca, Šumanovića, Trepšea, Gecana i dr. pri nastajanju tih naših najmlađih slikara udjela za koji i ne slute, osim nekoliko rijetkih koji su u to upućeni. On ne samo da je jedan od prvih koji su govorili o Cézanneu, ekspresionizmu, kubizmu, itd. nego je slikao i crtao tako da se njegovi ondašnji radovi mogu uporediti s najboljim današnjim radovima ovih slikara".

U vrijeme kada je A. B. Šimić u "Savremeniku" g. 1921. napisao navedene retke činilo se, i ne samo njemu, da je nova situacija naše umjetnosti gotova činjenica, da su mladi stvaraoci koje je on citirao — a imenima kojih bi se mogla dodati i imena Tartaglie, Varlaja, ili pak imena čestih gostiju srpskih slikara Dobrovića i Bijelića koji se javljaju na izložbama salona počev od 1919. — unijeli "novi duh", podigli provincijsku umjetnost sentimentalne anegdote i zanosne fraze na razinu modernog likovnog izražavanja. Doslovno tako izražavao se i Iljko Gorenčević, prerano nestali,⁴ ali još uvijek najznačajniji kritičar toga vremena, u predgovoru VIII izložbe "Proljetnog salona" u Osijeku, godine 1920.

Nakon što je ustanovio da zbog "novih umetničkih potreba današnjeg čoveka... danas osećamo jače no ikada značajnu potrebu obnove celokupne naše likovne umetnosti", reći će kako "najmlađa generacija udara temelje ovoj revoluciji. Dok je cela naša jučerašnja umetnost bila umetnost sentimentalnog raspoloženja i historijske anegdote, umetnost literarnog sižeja i slatunjavih dispozicija, najmlađa je umetnost u prvom redu na pijedestal postavila nepovredivi princip likovnog izražavanja".

Međutim, ono što je Gorenčević samo naslućivao — govoreći kako tu mladu umjetnost "u njenom borbenom vrenju ne možemo u celosti da vidimo", jer ipak "živimo isuviše u vremenu koje je i njeno vreme" — mi danas, prilazeći analitički čitavom tom kompleksu pobuda koje se pletu, nerijetko u potpunoj protuslovnosti i koje do općeg cilja — novosti modernosti — nastoje doprijeti i naprečac sagledanim putovima,⁵ i bezmalo nepomirljivim sredstvima, vidimo nešto jasnije. Pokušavajući se držati onog što ipak gradi razvojnu liniju, a ne zapliće je na sporednim zalijetanjima, morat ćemo utvrditi, u cjelini, da se jezgro ove mlade generacije, s izuzetkom Tartaglie koji će ostati do kraja samo "tangenta"

pedestal the unassailable principle of visual expression before anything else.”

However, what Gorenčević was only anticipating — saying that this young art was “impossible to see in its entirety,” since we were, after all, “still living too much in the time that is its time also” — we can today, by approaching analytically this whole complex of intertwined motivations, which are often contradictory and seek to reach the general goal — the novelty of modernity — even on ill-considered paths⁵ and with the help of practically relentless means, see the whole thing somewhat more clearly. Nevertheless, if we remain with what constructs the line of development rather than muddling it up with marginal digressions, we must conclude that, all in all, the core of this young generation, with the exception of Tartaglia, who will always remain just a “tangent” to “Proljetni Salon”, was formed on the basis of paintings by Miroslav Kraljević on the one side and by assimilating a series of mixed stylistic tendencies on the other, in which Cézanne’s manner, at one moment certainly the most outstanding common feature, was combined with hints of expressionism or even second-hand cubism. While studying at Zagreb Art School enabled Uzelac and his companions to get into a closer contact with the unfinished style (in terms of process) of Miroslav Kraljević, with his topics and his colourism, studying at the Prague Academy gave them an opportunity to get a glimpse of the broad field of stylistic orientations in contemporary art through the paintings of Czech vanguardists, inspired by the most recent currents of the Paris school.⁶ It is a fact that their convictions were not always based on the most stable grounds: being a “Cézannist” in landscape, painting portraits on the borderline between Račić and the expressionists, and always running the risk of that damned sinking into the decorative fashion of the nameless, but tangible bourgeois taste, of certain “local” phrases, always raises that frequent and well-known question related to the development of Croatian art: to what extent can it be reduced to the uniform and, whether we want it or not, affirmative labels of various -isms?

When asking that question, we should beware of neglecting - because of that analytical meticulousness, which necessarily makes us commit certain violence over artistic phenomena, for they resist it practically in proportion to their authenticity - the

fact that irreducibility can mean something initially positive in the new constellation of ideas! Even the art of Kraljević himself — for which it is difficult to prove that it is anything else than “good painting” — does not fit easily in the synthetic blocks of -isms. Leaning upon Kraljević and continuing his ideas about painting, which was in young painters sometimes taking the form of awareness about their roots, meant in fact the continuity of an attitude, an attempt to construct one’s own view at an equal distance from opposite conceptions. Cézannism, or even mere Cézannist stylisation, was the most conspicuous common feature of another, perhaps the most important period of “Proljetni Salon”, that between 1919 and 1922. Regardless of how foreign that manner would appear to Uzelac, Gecan, Varlaj, or Trepše later on, it is undeniable that their early beginnings — as well as the early work of Šumanović and Bijelić and the contemporary (Blažuj) phase of Vladimir Becić - were oriented, be it profoundly or superficially, for a shorter or longer period of time, towards the tonal construction and the colourism of Cézanne’s painting. Certainly, one could rarely speak of pure patterns of adopted style. That common denominator denotes a relatively brief interim period, which is most easily definable as common in the vocabulary of modern artistic phenomena. Although it did not leave any direct or obvious traces in the later development of Croatian art, it remained a basis of experience (even in the negative sense), localized in its own time and space and carried by a few attested talents, for what would follow in the near future and later on.

With his temperament, manner, lightness of improvisation, and his masterful ability to slide along the surface of things, Milivoj Uzelac could easily impose himself as the central figure of the group; between Bukovac and Murtić, he continued the line of gifted improvisers in the history of Croatian painting. His facilities, naturally, did not help him to appropriate or overcome more deeply or permanently the teachings of Cézanne and the expressionists. His “Landscape with a Bridge” (1919) can be considered the most absolute confirmation of Cézannism. However, in his “Self-Portrait in a Bar” (1921), which is in all respects a valuable and beautiful piece of art, one encounters elements of cubism. This fact testifies not only of his intimate references

to Kraljević, visible in a number of other paintings, but also of the provisory character of his orientation; although it did not prevent him from creating a few complete and significant paintings, which speak of the complexity of the times we are discussing, he considered it inevitable and urgent to find a way out. After moving to Paris in 1923, Uzelac developed into a trendy painter of masterful ability. Kraljević was also well received by Marijan Trepše, who was, one could say, under his influence more than any other painter in the group. His “Self-Portrait with a Pipe,” which is very solid in terms of tone, imposes another comparison, that with Račić. Later, around 1925, Trepše discovered his talent for decorative arts and engaged in that new interest with joy and without reserve.

The year of 1921 was perhaps the most significant year for the generation of “Proljetni Salon”. Rather than indicating its beginning or end, it marks a breaking point in the period, a pinnacle or “zenith” of inventive restlessness; it is only in the 1950s, the years of the just completed cycle of modernization fever, that one could find an appropriate parallel. Apart from the fact that it was a year of numerous important art exhibitions, both individual and collective — which helped promote a close and planned cooperation of Yugoslav centres — it was the year of Krleža’s “Marginal Remarks on Paintings by Petar Dobrović”; the essay was published in the afore-mentioned “Savremenik” annual — in the most important year in the history of all Croatian journals — which included contributions by A. B. Šimić, I. Gorenčević, J. Matasović, R. Petrović, and S. Šumanović, as well as topical texts in translation (Loos, “Ornament and Crime”); it was the year of the “Zenit Manifesto” and Vinaver’s “Lightning Rod of the Universe”...

It was the year of speaking about expressionism. And still, verbal exaltation was not equally present in the actual works of art. Expressionism may also be considered as merely one of the factors in shaping the physiognomies of individual artists, as a sort of atmosphere in which their hybrid expression was formed, so that the features of their style were only partially, sporadically, and almost regularly insufficiently covered by the term “expressionism” as referring to some well-known phenomena in German and Central-European art. To what extent are Uzelac’s “Lovers” or his “Suburban

“Proljetnog salona”, formiralo oslanjajući se na slikarstvo Miroslava Kraljevića s jedne strane, a s druge strane asimilirajući niz pomiješanih stilskih tendencija, u kojima će se Cézanneov način, u jednom trenutku svakako najizrazitije zajedničko obilježje, dodirivati s natruhama ekspresionizma, ili čak kubizma iz druge ruke. Dok je studij na zagrebačkoj Umjetničkoj školi pružio Uzelcu i drugovima priliku da se prisnije povežu s nedovršenim stilom (u razvojnom smislu) Miroslava Kraljevića, s njegovim temama i njegovim koloritom, studij na praškoj akademiji omogućit će im da kroz djela čeških avangardista, inspiriranih najnovijim strujanjima pariske škole, naslute široko područje stilskih orijentacija suvremene umjetnosti.⁶ “injenica je i to da njihova uvjerenja nisu uvijek bila sazdana na najčvršćoj osnovi: biti “sezanist” u pejzažu, slikati portrete na granici između Račića i ekspresionista, s tom uvijek prokletom opasnošću potonuća u dekorativnost bezimenog ali opipljivog građanskog ukusa, nekih “domaćih” fraza, otvara pitanje tako često i tako nam poznato iz razvoja naše umjetnosti: koliko je to svodivo pod jednoznačne, tê, i ne hoteći, afirmativne etikete izama?”

Postavljajući to pitanje, ne bi nam se smjelo dogoditi da radi analitičke akribije, koja nas nužno navodi na određeno nasilje nad umjetničkim pojavama — jer one se upravo srazmjerno vlastitoj autentičnosti tome opiru, izgubimo iz vida da i ta nesvodivost u novoj konstelaciji pojmova može značiti početni plus! I slikarstvo samog Kraljevića — za koje je teško kazati da nije “dobro slikarstvo” — ne ulazi lako u sintetske cjeline izama. Oslanjanje na Kraljevića, kontinuitet njegovih slikarskih ideja, koji se kod mladih slikara javlja i kao svijest o ukorijenjenosti, označava u stvari i kontinuitet jednog stava, pokušaj da se na jednakoj udaljenosti od oprečnih koncepcija izgradi vlastito gledanje. Sezanim ili u krajnjoj liniji samo sezaniistička stilizacija najuočljivije je zajedničko obilježje drugoga, možda najvažnijeg razdoblja “Proljetnog salona”, od 1919. do 1922. g. Bez obzira na to koliko će se taj način u budućnosti pokazati stranim i Uzelcu, i Gecanu, i Varlaju, i Trepšeu, nepobitno je da su svi njihovi počeci — kao i rani radovi Šumanovića i Bijelića — i istovremena (blažujaska) faza Vladimira Beca, dublje ili površnije, kraće ili trajnije, usmjereni tonskoj konstrukciji i koloritu Cézanneova slikarstva. Naravno, rijetko je kada riječ o čistim obras-

cima usvojenog stila. Taj zajednički nazivnik označava relativno kratku, rječnikom suvremenih razvojnih pojava u slikarstvu najlakše određivu zajedničku međufazu, koja neće ostaviti izravnog, neposrednog traga u kasnijem razvoju slikarstva u našoj sredini, ali će zato, lokalizirana u svom vlastitom vremenu, u vlastitom prostoru, nošena od nekoliko osvjedočenih nadarenosti, ostati iskustvenim temeljem (dapače i u negativnom smislu) onoga što će nadoći u bližoj i daljoj budućnosti.

Temperamentom, manirom, lakoćom improvizacije, suverenom sposobnošću da klizi po površini stvari — Milivoj Uzelac se lako nametao kao središnja točka skupine; između Bukovca i Murtića on u povijesti hrvatskog slikarstva održava vezu darovitih improvizatora. Te mu njegove sklonosti nisu, razumljivo, potpomagale da dublje i trajnije usvoji i prevlada bilo pouku Cézannea, bilo ekspresionista. Njegov “Pejzaž s mostom” (1919) možemo uzeti kao najpotpuniju potvrdu sezanimizma. Međutim u “Autoportretu u baru” (1921), koji inače predstavlja vrijedno i lijepo djelo, nailazimo na elemente kubizma. To će nam, uz intimno obaziranje za Kraljevićem vidljivo na nizu drugih slika, posvjedočiti o provizornosti slikareve orijentacije; koliko ga ona i nije sprečavala da stvori nekoliko dovršenih i značajnih slika, koje govore o složenosti trenutka što ga promatramo, učinit će mu neizbježnim i žurnim traženje izlaza. Nakon odlaska u Pariz g. 1923. Uzelac se razvio u mondenog slikara virtuoznih sposobnosti. Kraljevića je razumio veoma dobro i Marijan Trepše, tako da bi se moglo reći da je u cijeloj grupi bio najjače pod njegovim utjecajem. U tonski čvrsto građenom “Autoportretu s lulom” nameće se i usporedba s Račićem. Kada je kasnije, oko 1925, Trepše otkrio u sebi dekoraterske sposobnosti, odao im se s radošću i bez ustezanja.

Godina 1921, možda je najvažnija godina generacije “Proljetnog salona”. Prije nego što bi označavala početak ili kraj, ona označava prelomnu točku jednog vremena, kulminaciju, “zenit” otkrivalačkih nemira; jedino u godinama pedesetim, u netom završenom ciklusu modernizatorske groznice, mogli bismo potražiti odgovarajuću usporedbu. Pored toga što je to godina niza značajnih likovnih priredbi, individualnih i skupnih — kroz koje se počinje provoditi prisna i planirana suradnja jugoslavenskih središta — to je godina Krležinih “Marginalija uz slike Petra Dobrovića”; esej se pojavio u

već spomenutom godištu “Savremenika” — najvažnijem godištu u historiji svih naših časopisa — koje je donijelo i priloge A. B. Šimića, I. Gorenčevića, J. Matasovića, R. Petrovića, S. Šumanovića, zatim aktualne prevode (Loos, “Ornament i zločin”); godina “Zenitističkog manifesta” i Vinaverova “Gromobrana svemira”...

Godina govorenja o ekspresionizmu. Pa ipak verbalna egzaltacija nije u jednoj mjeri prisutna i u stvorenim djelima. Ekspresionizam se može uzeti, isto tako, tek kao jedan od faktora u oblikovanju fizionomija pojedinih umjetnika, kao određena atmosfera u kojoj sazrijeva hibridan izraz umjetnika, tako da su oznake stila samo djelimične, samo sporadične i gotovo u pravilu nepotpuno pokrivene pojmom ekspresionizma koji se odnosi na dobro poznate pojave njemačkog i srednjoevropskog slikarstva. Koliko su Uzelčevi “Ljubavnici”, ili “Venera iz predgrada” od istog slikara, ekspresionistički? “ak kada bi se i uklapali — po određenoj napetosti odnosa likova, po ironično-melankoličnoj situaciji u drugom primjeru — ili da se poslužimo primjerom još izrazitijim, “Crvenom kućom” V. Varlaja (1923), gdje je namjera ekspresivizacije bojom napadna — one nemaju jasne i trajne povezanosti u cjelokupnoj strukturi izraza, onoga, znači, što bi nam dalo pravo da pojedine oznake poopćimo u punovrijednom pojmu dotičnog stila.

U ranom ciklusu motiva “iz sužanjstva” Vilka Gecana ekspresionizam ćemo uglavnom protumačiti kao ekspresionistički literarni sadržaj, kojeg lica glume, ponekad čak i uz pomoć grimasa ili nasumičnih stilizacija; paleta je, doduše, stegnuta na zelenkaste i olovne tonove sa svijetlim akcentima, crtež pojednostavljen i nemiran, a faktura na mahove složena. Kad se Gecan, naprotiv, nađe pred intimnijim zadatkom, pokazat će znatno bogatiju paletu, a miran zahvat (“Portret žene”, “Autoportret”, 1922). Pokušaji ostvarenja cjelovitije plastičke sinteze, još uvijek uz pomoć mimičkog komponiranja figura (“Kod stola”, 1923), ili putem kubističke stilizacije (“U krčmi”, 1922), lijepe ilustracije njegovih napora, ostali su za njega samog, a i za sredinu bez značajnijih posljedica. Pod konac 3. decenija, smiren dugim putovanjima, Gecan će stvoriti drugi niz zaokruženih djela, uzbudljivo jednostavnih i svježih (“Tušika”, 1929). Na XVIII izložbi “Proljetnog salona”, godine 1923, zapaža se promjena. “Opet strasno posizanje za određenom formom, za kon-

Venus" expressionist paintings? Even if they fitted — in their specific tension between the characters or the ironically melancholy situation in the latter case — let us also mention a more outspoken example, the "Red House" by V. Varlaj (1923), where the intent of expressivization by colour is striking — they are not clearly or permanently linked in their overall structure of expression or in anything else that might authorize us to generalize their specific features as fully belonging to that particular style.

In the early cycle of motifs "from the slavery" by Vilko Gecan, expressionism can mostly be interpreted as an expressionist literary content enacted by the characters, sometimes with the help of grimaces or random stylisations; to be sure, the spectrum of colours is here reduced to greenish and leaden hues with pale accents, the line of drawing is simple and restless, and the structure occasionally complex. However, when Gecan faces a more personal task, he tends to use a far richer palette and paint with a steady hand ("Portrait of a Woman", "Self-Portrait", 1922). Attempts at realizing a more thorough plasticist synthesis, still with the help of mimic composition of figures ("At the Table", 1923) or by means of cubist stylisation ("At the Inn", 1922), all of them fine illustrations of his efforts, remained without much consequence for him or his surrounding. Towards the end of the third decade, weary of his long travels, Gecan created a long series of well-rounded paintings, excitingly simple and fresh ("Tušika", 1929). At the XVIII Exhibition of "Proljetni Salon" in 1923, one can observe a change. "He is again reaching for a form, a construction; returning to the old Italian, German, and French neo-Classicist school" — as J. Miše wrote in "Savremenik" in 1923. In fact, what was happening was that, immediately after the war, European painting was experiencing an early reaction after its euphoria of analysis and destruc-

tion; Derain's and Picasso's classicism on the one hand, and the somewhat later "Neue Sachlichkeit" on the other, worked as a sudden blow of contrary wind into the still undeveloped sails of our modernism. Both Croatian and Serbian painters began at once to close the contours, accentuate the full line, and emphasize the three-dimensional compactness of objects and space; imitating the sketchy "cubicity" and "constructivity", they reduced their colours to dim and diffuse, earthy, dark green, and dark blue tones, seeking to underline as strongly as possible the tectonic quality of volume and space as such, brittle and crystalline. Krleža would wittily name this kind of painting "Euclidian".

Judging from the speed with which it was spreading and the depth and power with which it was permeating the procedures of individual painters, with almost no exception — from Becić to Tartaglia, from Miše to Varlaj, from Dobrović to Stanojević — the "Euclidian" painting of the third decade marked the recurrence of traditionalist subconsciousness in our painting and showed that the artistic and cognitive experiences with European movements in the first quarter of the century could not permanently or definitively shatter the faith in the relevance of the past.

This development was in full swing around 1925 and one could say that it lasted precisely as long as "Proljetni Salon", even though some began to emancipate themselves a year earlier, while others persisted as long as 1929. As for this last phase of "Proljetni Salon", its characteristic feature was the joint orientation of most significant artists of younger generation, with no individuals or groups that would stick out from the crowd. Among the "Četvorica" (Group of Four) from the beginning of the decade, Vladimir Varlaj was inclined from the first towards solid constructions of landscape volumes, so that this new situation

offered him a base that suited him best. The landscapes that he painted after 1924, characterized by the acrid sharpness of metal constructions, but still softened in fine dispersion of light, remain the most valuable part of his entire opus. The significance of this last phase of "Proljetni Salon" in terms of artistic development was mostly indirect: it neither started nor finished anything. In fact, it was a product of misunderstanding — a misunderstanding as to the letter and the spirit of artistic events from Cézanne until after cubism. In principle, the possible "fertility of misunderstanding" in the sense of naïve poeticism — since learning from Cézanne in such a way that his famous saying about the need of reducing all forms to elementary geometric bodies was appropriated as taking a normal, Euclidian space, unanalysed in Cézannic terms, and to begin coning, cylindricizing, and cubizing it all over certainly did not mean being a Cézannist, but it still gave birth to something new and even offered a short-lived sparkle of independent vision — was, after all, not strong enough to mark any individual line more permanently.

When observing with what relief the best among our artists — such as Job, Tartaglia, Becić, and others — did cast off that manner and with what directness the youngest generation — Junek, Plančić, Hegeđušić — was finding its expression in a broad range of orientations, it may occur to us that the greatest importance of this stage of development was precisely in its catartic significance: the quarantine, extremely narrow and unexpectedly all-encompassing in terms of artistic issues, allowed the spirits to calm down and the forces to gather, in order that the dark background of cylindric forms, stiff as a bone, should prepare for the Orphic or intimistic tones in the years to come. ×

PRIJEVOD: Marina Miladinov

strukcijom. Opet vraćanje staroj talijanskoj, njemačkoj i neoklasičnoj francuskoj školi.” — bilježi J. Miše u “Savremeniku” 1923. g. U stvari, dogodilo se to da je evropsko slikarstvo, nakon analitičke i destruktivne euforije, neposredno iza rata zabilježilo prve reakcije; Derainov i Picassoov klasicizam s jedne strane, a s druge nešto kasnije, “Neue Sachlichkeit”, djeluje kao nagao udarac suprotnog vjetra u još nerazvijena jedra našeg modernizma. I hrvatski i srpski slikari listom će početi sa zatvaranjem obrisa, s isticanjem pune linije, s naglašavanjem trodimenzionalne zbitosti predmeta i prostora, podražavajući ovlašnu “kubičnost” i “konstruktivnost”, svodit će boju na mukle zemljane, tamnozeleno i tamnoplavo ugašene tonove, u želji da što izravnije istaknu tektoniku volumena i prostora samog, krto i kristaliničnog. Krleža će ovo slikarstvo duhovito nazvati “euklidovskim”.

Sudeći po brzini kojom se proširilo, po dubini i snazi kojom je prošlo slikarske postupke pojedinaca gotovo ne ostavljajući izuzetka — od Becića do Tartaglie, od Mišea do Varlaja, od Dobrovića do Stanojevića — “euklidovsko” slikarstvo 3. decenija predstavlja recidiv tradicionalističke podsvijesti našeg slikarskog razvoja, kojem slikarska i

spoznajna iskustva evropskih pokreta prve četvrtine stoljeća nisu uspjela ni trajno ni definitivno poljuljati vjeru u primjerenost prošlosti.

U punom je jeku oko 1925. g., a moglo bi se kazati da traje upravo do onda do kada traje i “Proljetni salon”, iako se neki počinju oslobađati godinu dana ranije, dok će kod drugih trajati i do 1929. Za ovo posljednje razdoblje “Proljetnog salona” karakteristično je, s obzirom na zajedničku usmjerenost većine značajnijih mladih stvaralaca, da nema pojedinaca, niti skupina, koji bi se posebno izdvajali. Od “Četvorice” s početka decenija Vladimir Varlaj od početka je gajio sklonost ka čvršćim konstrukcijama pejzažnih masa, pa će on, zapravo, tek u novoj situaciji doći na tlo koje mu je najviše i odgovaralo. Pejzaži koje je slikao počev od 1924, s reskom oštrinom metalnih konstrukcija, ublaženih ipak finim razastiranjem svjetla, ostaju najvrednije što je uopće naslikao. Razvojno značenje ove posljednje faze “Proljetnog salona” uglavnom je posredno: niti se što u njoj započelo, niti dovršilo. Ona je u biti proizvod nesporazuma — nesporazuma sa slovom i duhom likovnih događaja od Cézannea do iza kubizma. Moguća načelno “plodnost nesporazuma”

u smislu naivne poetike — jer naučiti se u Cézannea na taj način što se poznata njegova izreka o potrebi svodenja svih oblika na elementarna geometrijska tijela usvoji tako da se u normalnom euklidovskom, sezanoski neizanaliziranom prostoru, sve počinje stožiti, valjkati, kubusiti, nikako ne znači biti sezani, ali može roditi nešto novo, može dati makar i kratkotrajnu iskrnu samosvojnog gledanja — nije ipak bila takva da bi trajnije bilje govala bilo koju individualnu liniju.

Promatrajući s kakvim se olakšanjem oslobađaju ove manire ponajbolji stvaralci — poput Joba, Tartaglie, Becića i dr. — s kakvom se neposrednošću najmladi opredjeljuju u širokom rasponu usmjerenja — Junek, Plančić, Hegedušić — dolazimo na pomisao da je najveće značenje ovog razvojnog trenutka njegovo kataraktičko značenje: po rasponu slikarskog problema veoma uska i neočekivano sveobuhvatna karantena dozvolila je da se primire duhovi i stalože snage, da se s tom tamnom pozadinom koštano tvrdih cilindričnih oblika pripremi orfički ili intimistički nastup boje godina koje će uslijediti. ×

Život umjetnosti, 2, 1966.

- ¹ Their merit is in the fact that they were sustaining institutions; Čikoš, Crnčić, Iveković, Krizman, Frangeš, Valdec, and others lectured at the School of Arts and Crafts.
- ² With Miše, expressionist stylisation appeared on portraits exhibited in Zagreb as early as 1914. With Šulentić, it was somewhat later, around 1917, as can be observed on the famous portrait of Doctor Peltz.
- ³ Ulrich Salon, 26 March — 15 April; the following artists participated: Lj. Babić, Z. Borelli-Vranska, F. Čus, H. Juhn, I. Kerdić, D. Kokotović, T. Krizman, A. Krizmanić, J. Miše, B. Petrović, I. Simonović, M. Strozzi, Z. Šulentić, and J. Turkalj. — “We do not come forth with any slogans... but our eyes are turned towards the future and we shall not stop... that is why we want to support those who see the curse of art in peaceful enjoyment of what has been achieved, we want to put an end to the isolation of the individual..., to tear down the wall, at least for ourselves, which divides even our generation from those that are coming or are yet to come...”
- ⁴ The real name of Iljko Gorenčević was Lav Grün (1896-1924). He studied law in Budapest and for a year art history in Vienna. He wrote a number of essays: on Studin, Meštrović, Kraljević, Dobrović, on the predetermination of experience in visual arts, etc., in which he revealed that he was well-informed and inclined towards critical interpretation, as well as that he was — maturing fast.
- ⁵ This circumstance moved M. Krleža to distance himself from these latest developments in “Plamen” as early as 1919, perhaps somewhat too quickly, by proclaiming them plagiary and superfluous.
- ⁶ The exhibition entitled Paris—Prague, which took place in the same year at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, showed that Prague was the most powerful relay of French modern art in Europe.

- 1 Njihova pak zasluga leći u održavanju institucija; na Višoj školi za umjetnost i umjetni obrt predaju: Čikoš, Crnčić, Iveković, Krizman, Frangeš, Valdec, i dr.
- 2 U Miše se ekspresionistička stilizacija pojavljuje na portretima izlaganim već 1914. u Zagrebu. U Šulentića nešto kasnije, oko 1917, kako se vidi na poznatom portretu dra Peltza.
- 3 Salon Ullrich, 26. III — 15. IV; sudjeluju: Lj. Babić, Z. Borelli-Vranska, F. Čus, H. Juhn, I. Kerdić, D. Kokotović, T. Krizman, A. Krizmanić, J. Miše, B. Petrović, I. Simonović, M. Strozzi, Z. Šulentić i J. Turkalj. — “Ne nastupamo ni s kakvim lozinkama... ali naš pogled gleda u budućnost, jer nećemo da stanemo... zato želimo da uzdržimo vezu svih onih koji kletvu umjetnosti vide u spokojnom uživanju onog što je postignuto, da učinimo kraj osamljenosti pojedinca..., da, za sebe barem, ukinemo zid kojim je već i naša generacija odijeljena od onih što dolaze i što još imaju doći...”
- 4 Pravo ime Iljka Gorenčevića je Lav Grün (1896-1924). Studirao je pravo u Budimpešti, a jednu godinu i povijest umjetnosti u Beču. Napisao je niz eseja: o Studinu, Meštroviću, Kraljeviću, Dobroviću, o predodređenju doživljaja likovne umjetnosti i dr., u kojima je pokazivao obaviještenost, sklonost ka problemat-skom interpretiranju i — brzo dozrijevanje.
- 5 Što će M. Krležu navesti da se još g. 1919. u “Plamenu” možda ipak nešto prebrzo ogradi od tih najnovijih pojava, proglašavajući ih plagijatskim i suvišnim.
- 6 Izložba Pariz—Prag održana početkom ove godine u Muzeju moderne umjetnosti u Parizu pokazala je da je Prag predstav-ljao najsnažniji relej moderne francuske umjetnosti u Evropi.