

Flowers and other Worlds

Insights into the Collections of the Olomouc Museum of Art

Olomouc Museum of Modern Art | Gallery

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EXHIBITION CONCEPT | Anežka Šimková

CURATORS | Anežka Šimková, Klára Jenišťová

EXHIBITION DESIGN | Marek Novák

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INSTALLATION | Vlastimil Sedláček, Filip Šindelář

PUBLIC RELATIONS | Petr Bieleš

In the cycle of minor exhibitions Views of Collections, the Olomouc museum of Art presents the exhibition Flowers and Other Worlds as a specific collection of marginal art usually ranked with art brut. Due to these rather bold acquisitions, the Museum now owns the only public collection of this kind. It gradually developed as a subgroup in the collection of drawings (and partly paintings as well) through purchases and gifts, starting in 1997, and later was often exhibited jointly with works of „high art“, both in this country and abroad. One of the most valuable sets are the works of Anna Zemánková, a native of Olomouc and a world-famous representative of art brut.

The present collection is not large, it is necessarily selective and no less selective is its character, which is focused on flowers, because of the prevalence of this motif in the collection. A lot of the works are published on the first time. Flowers are symbols of the soul and mysteries of other worlds. The world of this authentic work, in Museum collection mainly linked with the tradition of drawing in the spiritistic movement, has fascinated many major artists, such as J. Čapek, J. Zrzavý, F. Bílek, B. Kubišta, J. Váchal. They regarded it as a source of inspiration, as impulses invigorating professional art. This legacy has not changed since.

The flowers are in blossom here as calls of the miraculous from the guileful space and from the range of human perception. They emerge silently from the secret or unknown imagination of their creators, in biomorphic forms hardly classifiable in botany. Because they are not a direct reflection of nature, of reality, they are primarily a projection of the “nature of the soul”. They are deeply intimate, they are metaphors, signals and symbols, they should also be messengers of “other worlds” and projections of different levels of cognition. These visual metamorphoses of the spiritual world assume unusual, often bizarre forms, a genuine expression, and are distinguished by a special inner “motion”. Their creators were not interested in becoming known, they did not think themselves to be the main authors, they created their works in a special state of inspiration, under the pressure of a strong creative impulse. They were mainly interested in the process of creation itself, in the mediumist link to “spiritual” sources, often mediated by names denoting a spirit or a ghost, sometimes registering known or unknown planets. Often part of the drawings are texts, usually containing data

on the length of the creation of the work and the names of the spiritual beings which provided the inspiration. Reality here mingles with imagination, with eros, an effort at capturing the reproduction of the hidden world.

On display here is a selection of works by thirty artists, men and women, already known but largely unexplored anonymous artists from between the beginning and the end of the 20th century. As the collection grew, several discoveries were made and some previously unknown artists were identified. The classification in the exhibition is roughly based on territorial distribution, the regions below the Giant Mountains, in South Moravia, Silesia, Bohemia. The exhibition aims at showing the outcome of the acquisition efforts and presents several specific themes. Dominating are the flowers, which have always been one of the strongest archetypal symbols in art. In the collection of art brut, mediumist drawings made with pencils and crayons prevail. They were produced on a large scale by the spiritistic movement which in this country in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century was remarkably active. This phenomenon seems to be unparalleled in Europe, whereas in the whole of Czechoslovakia until 1938 scores of exhibitions of mediumist drawings were held by spiritistic circles. In both totalitarian regimes, the nazi and the communist, this tradition was gradually suppressed. The innumerable fascinating works by Moravian and Silesian mediumists were in time lost or destroyed and so we can say that this exhibition also commemorates a disappearing or vanished world.

A major initiative in this interest in this kind of art comes from Alena Nádvořníková, an art theoretician and artist, who in 2008–2009 collaborated with the Olomouc Museum of Art in staging important exhibitions of Art brut in the Bohemian Lands in Olomouc, Cheb and Brussels.

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