

NEW REALISMS

MODERN REALIST APPROACHES ON THE CZECHOSLOVAK SCENE 1918–1945

27 Mar – 25 Aug 2024

Prague City Gallery
Municipal Library, 2nd floor

Mariánské náměstí 1, Prague 1
Tue–Wed, Fri–Sun 10 am–6 pm, Thu 10 am–8 pm

Curatorial team, concept of the exhibition: Anna Habánová, Ivo Habán, Helena Musilová

"The Metropolitan Gallery is launching an important project that offers a new perspective on the art of the multinational space of interwar Czechoslovakia. I am convinced that today such an objective return to the past is more than important."
Jiří Pospíšil, Deputy Mayor of the City of Prague

The exhibition *New Realisms Modern Realist Approaches on the Czechoslovak Scene 1918-1945* on the premises of the Municipal Library in Prague City Gallery opens up a new perspective on art culture in the former Czechoslovakia. The joint project by curators Anna Habánová, Ivo Habán and Helena Musilová builds on several years of research by a team of scholars and juxtaposes the works of established Czech artists such as Karel Čapek, Josef Sudek and Milada Marešová with those of their Slovak, German and Hungarian-speaking contemporaries who were lesser-known in Prague.

"The cubist era can now be considered definitively closed. The present artistic development, having abandoned Cubism, progresses towards tomorrow along three paths [...]: the path of classicism, the path of realism and the path of primitivism. None of them returns to the past in any way: it is worth emphasising the ancient truth that neither the history of the world nor the history of art repeats itself. That is why the terms: classicism, realism, primitivism should always be accompanied by the adjective: new."
Karel Teige, Tsigouharu Foujita, *Kmen* magazine 5, 1922, p. 47

What we mean by *New Realisms* is a broader spectrum of the realist approaches of the period. They include the areas of work traditionally referred to as Neoclassicism, Verism, New Objectivity, social art, magic realism and primitivism and, in photography, especially the New Vision.

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"The New Realisms exhibition adds a new perspective to our understanding of interwar visual culture and art, offering an only recently comprehensively mapped body of visual art and photography from the period 1918 to 1945. The selection of individual works goes across traditional ethnic, group, gender and territorial divisions and its criteria are both substantive and formal: a programmatic focus on modern life and its actual problems ('as they really are') and an attempt to capture reality in a penetrating, but not simply descriptive, manner".

Helena Musilová, curator of the exhibition

Within the Czechoslovak art scene, the manifestations of modern realisms were rather scattered and not dominant. In the spirit of the idea of the New Man, New Realism sought to become a modern interpretive approach that would bring art closer to people and capture their everyday lives. The works did not seek a mimetic depiction of the present, but a sophisticated reflection of its appearance through overstatement, reduction, denial of perspective and a focus on detail. To do this, they used new principles and media, including the tools of mass communication, i.e. photography and film. The dividing line between reality and the manipulation of reality often became very thin, as we can witness even today.

The emancipation of women, jazz and everyday drudgery

Through realistic approaches, the art responded sensitively to current stimuli. In terms of content, these are often depictions of modern life and its transformation through the development of technology, the emancipation of women, the possibilities of travel, communication, and entertainment. The exhibited works, whether they are paintings, prints, photographs or films, respond both to the social success of the newly emerging middle class and to the pressing social problems of an economically divided society. The lived reality of the interwar period encompassed not only entertainment, cafés, jazz, cinema, cars, bars and beautiful women. The second, no less numerous group is represented by socially critical works that faithfully reflect the reality of everyday life in the ordinary, majority society. The capture of seemingly banal everyday routine and its elevation to the subject of a work of art is one of the moments characteristic of modern realist approaches. The diversity of this reality is illustrated by works from both the centres and the regions.

Dášeňka: the lesser-known archive of Karel Čapek

Special attention is paid in the exhibition to film and photography, which are integrally linked with paintings, sculptures, drawings and graphics. On display are not only a collection of works by Josef Sudek, but also, for example, the lesser-known archive of Karel Čapek. In his book *Dášeňka*, Čapek capitalised on his knowledge of various approaches to modern photography, such as working with sharpness, unusual perspectives, detail, movement or alternating contrasting surfaces.

The practical application of many of these aspects was very quickly adopted by advertising and commercial photography. Sharpness, a fresh perspective, concentration on the subject, on its unique characteristics, were (and still are) absolutely essential for the promotion of products of all kinds. Modern typography was added to the mix, and the result of its combination with the contemporary (often functionalist) design was advertising that contributed to the creation of a certain lifestyle. There were several artists who worked on advertising photography in



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Czechoslovakia. Josef Sudek's photographs of Ladislav Sutnar's beverage services are famous. Jiří Lehovec, Jaroslav Rössler and others also devoted themselves to advertising.

From a different angle

The Municipal Library will exhibit over 300 works, borrowed from institutions ranging from Berlin to Košice. *"Instead of the traditionally francophone interpretation of the development of art history, we offer an alternative view of the multi-ethnic space of interwar Czechoslovakia, influenced by the stream of modern realist approaches from Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the USA. The uniqueness of the New Realisms exhibition lies in the presentation of Czech, Slovak, German and Hungarian-speaking artists side by side. Although separated by language and hundreds of kilometres, their parallel responses to everyday stimuli were often similar."* explain the exhibition curators Anna Habánová and Ivo Habán.

The exhibition features more than a hundred artists, including: Karel Čapek, Jan Zrzavý, Otto Gutfreund, František Muzika, Miloslav Holý, Pravoslav Kotík, Milada Marešová, Zdenek Rykr, Sándor Bortnyik, Ferdiš Duša, František Foltýn, Jaromír Funke, Paul Gebauer, Edmund Gwerk, Karel Holan, Běla Kašparová, Alfred Kunft, Ladislav Majerský, Erwin Müller, Ernest Neuschul, Jaroslav Rössler, Gejza Schiller, Ilona Singer, Erika Streit, Imro Weiner, Eugen Wiškovský and others.

The *New Realisms* exhibition is open at the GHMP from 27 March to 25 August. Starting from October 2024, the project will be presented in a modified version in a double exhibition at the East Slovak Gallery in Košice and at the Peter Michal Bohúň Gallery in Liptovský Mikuláš.

Curatorial team, concept of the exhibition: Anna Habánová, Ivo Habán, Helena Musilová

Architectural treatment: Richard Loskot

Graphic Design: Jan Havel

The exhibition is held under the auspices of Mgr. Martin Baxa, Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic, and JUDr. Jiří Pospíšil, Deputy Mayor of the City of Prague for Culture, Tourism, National Heritage Protection, the Exhibitions Sector and Animal Care.

The exhibition programme of the Prague City Gallery is supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

Media partners: Art&Antiques, ArtMap, Artalk, Flash Art, A2Iarm, Artiki

Entrance fee: CZK 200 full (adults) / CZK 90 reduced (students and seniors)

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More information:

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www.instagram.com/ghmp.cz

ACCOMPANYING PROGRAMME

Thu 4 Apr 2024, 6 p.m.

A guided tour with the authors of the project

Wed 10 Apr 2024, 6 p.m.

Richard Gregor: Slovak Participation in the Venice Biennale in 1942

The exhibition of Slovak artists at the 1942 Venice Biennale is part of a broader theme of the joint participation of eleven countries in the traditional multinational event, which was dominated in that year by the Fascist Axis countries: Germany, Italy, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Spain, Denmark and Romania, alongside which neutral Switzerland and Sweden also participated. The selection process for each national project was quite unique. In many cases, it was an attempt to find a presentational compromise between war-influenced and ideologically demanded expression and wanting to preserve a much longer-articulated national integrity. In some cases, it was also an attempt to use the presentation to achieve certain political objectives. Slovakia, through the Union of Slovak Artists and also through diplomatic channels (the Embassy in Rome), had been trying to secure its participation in the Biennale from the end of 1940 or at the latest from the beginning of 1941. However, the path to organising the exhibition was opened de facto only less than two months before the official opening of the Biennale, after it was finally confirmed by the German ambassador in Italy that the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia would not be presented in the Biennale, leaving the former Czechoslovak Pavilion unused. In a curiously short time, the Slovak side set up a very solid painting and sculpture exhibition with a nationalistic flavour, practically without any ideological bias. Interestingly, it was curated by two of the lyricists of František Křištof Veselý's popular songs (Vojtech/Adalbert Hudec and Ján Ebringer Devínsky). Progressive personalities of our art scene (e.g. Ľudovít Fulla, Janko Alexy, Ján Koniarek, Ján Mudroch and others) took part in the exhibition, among them also four artists born in Bohemia (Jan Hála, Jaroslav Votruba, Julie Kováčiková Horová and František Kudláč) and, for example, Koloman Sokol, who was then living in the USA.



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Thu 16 May 2024, 6 p.m.

Alena Pomajzlová: The Italian Influence

The German magical realism of the early 1920s was stimulated, among other things, by the metaphysical painting of Giorgio de Chirico in which new relationships were discovered between things placed in still space and suspended time. What was our country's relationship to this artistic expression, which was traditionally directed towards France? Can we trace any direct or mediated traces of metaphysical painting in Czech painters of the 1920s and 1930s? The lecture will focus on this rather neglected area of Czech art.

Thu 23 May 2024, 6 p.m.

Lubomír Spurný: Neue Sachlichkeit. Brief History of a (Non-)musical Concept

The lecture focuses on the reflection of the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* in the context of Central European musical culture, with an emphasis on the German-speaking area. Its relevance for music is documented by a short history of its usage in combination with other stylistic terms, such as expressionism or neoclassicism.

Neue Sachlichkeit became a label used in Germany during the 1920s to describe a new lifestyle associated with the technicisation of everyday life, the rationalisation of work, changes in male and female roles, the proliferation of new technical media, and the Americanisation of entertainment culture. From a stylistic designation, it quickly became a commonly used term that was meant to express the spirit of the times.

Thu 20 June 2024

6 p.m. Guided tour with the authors of the project

8 p.m. Swing in the Gallery: DJ MACKIE MESSER and friends

23 Apr, 28 May, 18 June 2024, 10 a.m.

Dance Well (Ponec Theatre – Tanec Praha)

Prague City Gallery has offered its premises for the classes of the *Dance Well* project organised by Tanec Praha. Our paths crossed thanks to the international project *Dancing Museums*, which developed interdisciplinary cooperation and helped to create new partnerships and friendships.

Throughout the spring and summer, we hosted several classes of the *Dance Well* project at the GHMP, which is designed not only for those who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's

disease or have other movement limitations, but also for their loved ones and anyone concerned with self-care and social cohesion.

25 May, 8 June 2024, 3 p.m.

Journey to realism with the Pink Box platform

(a philosophical adventure for children and parents)

Join us on an exciting philosophical journey that takes us into the world of realism in art. This workshop is designed for children and parents and will focus on the concept of realism as a way of capturing reality. Together, we will discover how artists depict the world around us through realism and will question the meaning of objective reality. In addition, we will learn how realism has influenced not only art but also our everyday perception of the world. Through interactive activities, discussion, and viewing of the artworks in the exhibition, we will delve into the world of art and philosophy together. Join us on this journey of discovering realism in art and experience a shared philosophical adventure.

July-August

Period Summer with New Realisms

Additional planned programmes include summer outdoor dance parties on the waves of swing with DJ Mackie Messer and friends, dance classes, live music performances, open-air cinema, and short thematic commentaries on the artworks presented, addressing both period as well as very contemporary themes such as the development of technology, ethnic minority issues, and women's emancipation.

Festive outdoor summer swing.

SWING IN THE SQUARE

Stars from home and abroad will shine in a varied programme of open-air dancing. The Czech gypsy jazz sensation DJANGO ALWAYS, the captain of the Forman Brothers' swing cruises, DJ MACKIE MESSER, and the dance master of the ZIG ZAG TAP & SWING studio will perform on stage in the heart of Prague. There will be a dance mini-lecture, a retro fashion parade, a cabaret show and a welcome drink to get people dancing. And that's not all. We've thought of every last detail. You can find the full programme on the GHMP website in April.

PS: Don't worry, we swing in all weathers. In case of rain, the event will take place under the roof of the gallery. Our motto: Whoever keeps swinging, keeps their cool!

For up-to-date information on the accompanying programmes, please visit :

<https://www.ghmp.cz/vystavy/nove-realismy-na-ceskoslovenske-vytvarne-scene-1918-1945/>

Film Evenings at the Ponrepo Cinema

Thu 4 Apr 2024, 8:30 p.m.

Gustav Machatý: *From Saturday to Sunday* (1931), screening with an introduction by NFA Director General Michal Bregant

Direction: Gustav Machatý

Cast: L. H. Struna, Magda Maděrová, Jiřina Šejbalová

Czechoslovakia 1931 / 69 min. / English friendly

Machatý focused on the social, psychological and sexual realities of his time in his first sound film. The promise of love between a young typist (woman) and a shy printer (man) is framed by the pitfalls of social authority and stereotyping. Boldly told, the film exemplifies a modern visual and compositional style. Sound, as a new element of filmic expression, does not yet serve only to build emotions or to illustrate the plot but forms an active layer of the film; everyday sound effects create a distinct sound composition. The music for the film was composed by Jaroslav Ježek, and the lyrics to his songs were written by co-author Vítězslav Nezval.

Mon 20 May 2024, 6 p.m.

Carl Junghans: *Such Is Life* (1929)

Director: Carl Junghans

Cast: Vera Baranovská, Theodor Pištěk, Máňa Ženíšková, Valeska Gertová

Czechoslovakia - Germany 1929 / 63 min. / English friendly

The St. Petersburg-born actress Vera Baranovská left perhaps the deepest mark on our cinema of all the Russian emigrants. After her roles in Moscow's MCHAT theatre, she acted in other Russian and Ukrainian theatres, and also worked in Tatarstan and Georgia. In 1922, she even founded her own theatre studio. She decided to leave her homeland in 1928. She then started to act in films in Czechoslovakia and Germany. In 1932, she went to France for medical treatment, and three years later - at the age of fifty - she died. In her role of the laundress in the social drama *Such Is Life* she is like a younger sister of Nilovna, the character that made her famous in the film *Mother* (1926) by Vsevolod Pudovkin. She is a toil-worn woman, whose unfaithful husband likes to drink alcohol and often beats her, and does not expect too much from life. What is important to her is a well-functioning household, which she can barely

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maintain in the given circumstances. Her daughter represents a certain hope for her, but even this hope will later fail... The film, which in content and form is based on Russian classics, was made by German director Carl Junghans. He received significant financial help from the male lead, Theodor Pištěk. The film was digitally restored in 2016.

Thu 30 May 2024, 6 p.m.

A selection of films with a commentary by NFA curator Sylva Poláková

Mon 17 June 2024, 7:30 p.m.

Otakar Vávra: *Virginity* (1937), screening with an introduction by NFA curator Marie Barešová

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

Saturday Art Workshops

Sat 13 Apr 2024, 1–6 p.m. *Manipulation of the Image*, Municipal Library, 2nd floor

Sat 11 May 2024, 1-6 p.m. *Things of Everyday Life*, Education Centre at the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Sat 29 June 2024, 1-6 p.m., *The Possibilities of Hyperrealism in Painting*, Education Centre at the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Sat 20 July 2024, 1-6 p.m., *The Infinity of the Imagination in Magical Realism*, Education Centre at the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

During our educational programmes and art workshops, we will present to visitors, in an interactive and creative way, the exhibition introducing modern realist approaches in fine art and photography between 1918-1945. We will explain what the terms new and modern realisms mean and what areas of artwork fall under them. We will be inspired by the exhibited works of artists whose aim was, among other things, to capture the life of that time and its changes in connection with the development of technology, the emancipation of women, and the possibilities of travel, communication and entertainment. We will focus on the issue of the manipulated image, disinformation, propaganda, reality vs. fiction and other topics. Through individual interaction with the works and their subsequent interpretation and discussion, we will confront and compare the many perspectives of the participants in the programme on each specific work. In addition to traditional techniques, such as drawing and painting portraits and still lifes, we will also use spatial art and a wide range of experimental approaches and combined techniques in our artistic responses. Using new media, we will try out digital drawing and painting and various image and photo manipulations using graphics software on iPads. The



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workshops will develop visual, information and media literacy and promote creative and critical thinking.

Art workshops for adults and seniors / integration and intergenerational programmes

Reality and Ideals, Education Centre at the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Thu 11 Apr 2024, 11 a.m.- 2 p.m., Thu 11. Apr 2024, 3-6 p.m., Sun 14. Apr 2024, 11 a.m.- 2 p.m., Sun 14. Apr 2024, 3-6 p.m.

Fact versus Fiction, Education Centre at the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace

Thu 18 Apr 2024, 11 a.m.- 2 p.m., Thu 18. Apr 2024, 3-6 p.m., Sun 21. Apr 2024, 11 a.m.- 2 p.m., Sun 21. Apr 2024, 3-6 p.m.

Within the framework of artistic reactions, we will pay attention to modern realist approaches on the Czechoslovak art scene in 1918-1945. The series of art workshops will range between drawing and painting techniques. The workshops entitled *Reality and Ideals* will focus on themes such as lived reality, everyday objects and the phenomenon of the still life. We will try to look at the chosen themes through the lens of new realisms. Through art making, we will create a new relationship to things and draw on each artist's own perceptual space. We will be drawing with pencil or natural charcoal on paper during the art reflections. During the *Fact versus Fiction* workshops, we will focus on two levels - the real world and the realm of illusion, fantasy and imagination. During the creative work, we will also apply the features of magical realism. We will focus on real life experience, supplemented with our own dreams, illusions and magical elements. The art work will focus on acrylic painting. The workshop will take place in the rear of the studio at the Education Centre of the GHMP, where we will create art using easels.

Interactive tours of the exhibition for all types of schools and other age and interest groups, with the possibility of a follow-up artistic response in the form of your own artistic creation. We adapt the events in terms of time, theme and level of difficulty to the specific requirements of each school.

Contact: edukace@ghmp.cz

For dates of workshops and a range of other educational activities aimed at other target groups, such as disadvantaged/disabled visitors or parents on parental leave with their children, please see ghmp.cz/edukace.