

Dialógy s Hanulom

Dialogues
with Hanula

Andrej Bacsa, Jul Blaas, Andor Borúth, Jozef Hanula, Eduard Hriňák, János Istók, Ferdinand Katona, Ladislav Medňanský, August Meissl, Emil Alexay-Olexák, Viktor Olgyai, Wünsche R. Streliský, Eugen Szepesi-Kuszcza, Július Štetka

The exhibition *Dialogues with Hanula* is loosely inspired by the *Reminiscences* exhibition project which itself interprets the work of Jozef Hanula in a wider context. The exhibition presents works by artists from the late 19th to mid 20th centuries found in the collection of the Gallery of Spiš Artists, and the artworks are placed in dialogue with other pieces by Hanula drawn from the collections of the Liptov Gallery of Peter Michal Bohúň in Liptovský Mikuláš and the East Slovak Gallery in Košice. The exhibition draws attention to the diversity in terms of genre, with an emphasis on contemporary inter-sections and the provenance of the artists. Presented as part of the *Collection in Dialogue* dramaturgical cycle, the exhibition is comprised of three thematic areas: portraits and figural compositions, the animal motif of horses and landscapes.

Realistic portraits and preparatory sketches for figural works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries are represented by the works by **Jozef Hanula**, Andrej Bacsa, Andor Borúth, **Ladislav Medňanský**, János Istók, Július Štetka and **Wünsche R. Streliský**. The range of Hanula's oeuvre is extensive, encompassing figural studies, portraits, works in the folk genre, landscape scenes and sacral works. **Andrej Bacsa** produced official portraits of the Hungarian nobility and upper middle classes which feature all the attributes of illusory naturalism (*Portrait of Countess Csákyová*, oils, ca 1900, M 471), but he also created genre pieces in which the inspiration of the rural environment is apparent. Bacsa worked in the studio which he had built in Bijacovce, and as a fledgling artist he had known Jozef Hanula personally, having visited the artist during his time at Chrást nad Hornádom together with the writer Kornel Diváld. **Andor Borúth** was a Hungarian artist based in Slovakia whose works included numerous portraits, genre and sacral themes and scenes from social environments. There is an interesting correlation between Borúth's work and that of Hanula, with the year 1896 being significant for the creative development of both artists through their participation in the Hungarian Millennial Exhibition which was held to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the entry of the Hungarian tribes to the Carpathian basin. Borúth was awarded a prize for his work *Evening in the Studio* which he had painted during his time in Paris. In 1895, Hanula had created a large-scale figural composition titled *The Death of Tomori at the Battle against the Turks at Mohács*, and he completed the large-format painting for the Exhibition the following year. The painting was well received by the general public but is now lost, surviving only in preparatory sketches and smaller paintings. The two artists also died on the same date, August 22nd, with Borúth outliving Hanula by 11 years. The collection of works also features two depictions of the lawyer and patron of the arts Aurél Münnich: a portrait by the painter **Július Štetka** and a bust by the Budapest sculptor **János Istók**.

The theme of horses appears in the work of several artists, either in military compositions or in scenes with working or agricultural motifs. The motif of the horse was the primary focus of the work of the Italian painter **Július von Blaas**, but his interest in Hungarian folk costumes is also apparent in his portraits of farmers and peasants. He also painted landscape works and documented the Austro-Prussian War and the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Military themes were also the domain of **August Meissl**, a painter and illustrator born into a Hungarian noble family in Pezinok, but he also painted compositions featuring zoomorphic motifs.

Landscape paintings from this period are represented by the Tatra panoramas of Ferdinand Katona, the majestic prospects depicted by Eugen Szepesi-Kuszcza and Jozef Hanula, and the winter scenes of Viktor Olgyai and Emil Alexay-Olexák. **Ferdinand Katona** (original name Nathan Kleinberger) was a classmate of Hanula's in Budapest where they studied together under Professors Imre Greguss, Bertalan Székely and Károly Lotz. Hanula recalled his times with Katona in his memoirs: *"My closest friends were Nathan Kleinberger from Kežmarok and Juló Löw from Liptovský Mikuláš. We were all in the same class, and in contrast to Löw who wanted to be a professor of drawing, Kleinberger and I had the same ambition: to become artists. But this was not the only thing that brought us together; we were both as poor as church mice. Kleinberger couldn't speak Hungarian, but he spoke German well; I had only the little that I had learned from Dabert. Although Kleinberger also spoke some Spiš Slovak, we didn't dare speak a word in Slovak at school in case we were branded as traitors, and therefore we did everything we could to crack this emancipatory Hungarian language. Although he never took sides, Kleinberger was a good and fair person. It was at his place that I first met Baron Alojz Medňanský. He was a very humble person in every respect who paid no regard to his noble origins; indeed, he didn't even mention it. He was a renowned landscape painter who had first introduced Kleinberger to painting. Born in Beckov, Medňanský had inherited the manor in Strážky near Kežmarok from his mother; he spent much of his time at the estate, and it was there that he came across Kleinberger."* (In: Hanula, J.: *Spomienky slovenského maliara* [Memoirs of a Slovak Painter], Bratislava, 1940, pp. 146 – 147). In 1898, **Eugen Szepesi-Kuszcza** had also met Medňanský, and it was under his influence that he began to focus on landscapes, depicting scenes for the Tatras and the Spiš region. The influence of Medňanský was also felt by **Viktor Olgyai**; during his holidays, Medňanský taught him to draw and paint landscapes, and this had a major impact on his personal style. Olgyai concentrated on depictions of wintry landscapes in which he perceived the light effects of snow and ice on forest panoramas. The countryside around Pravcovce was the focal point of the art of **Emil Alexay-Olexák**, an artist whose talent was supported not only by his immediate family but also by his uncle **Eduard Hriňák**. In 1920, Alexay-Olexák emigrated to America where he worked as a painter and teacher. Hriňák painted landscape scenes which he enlivened with genre motifs, including depictions of fairs, markets and figural and zoomorphic decorative elements.

Mgr. Kamila Paceková – GSA,
Exhibition curator

zbierka
v dialógu
collection
in dialogue

  **Galéria umelcov Spiša | www.gus.sk**

Curator: Mgr. Kamila Paceková – GSA
Production: Mgr. Mária Šabľová – GSA
Graphic design: Mgr. art. Ivana Babejová, ArtD. – GSA
Translations: Bc. Gavin Cowper
Production: Gallery of Spiš Artists
– a cultural facility of the Košice Self-governing Region



About exhibition