

Vladimír POPOVIČ

S. P. I. Š.

Presented here for the first time, the exhibition showcases a selection of works by Vladimír Popovič which are defined by their artistic connection to the Spiš region, an environment which had a fundamental influence on the formation of the artist's iconography. The main themes of the exhibition are outlined through works from the artist's archives, private collections and the collections of Slovak galleries. The exhibition is presented as part of the Profiles dramaturgical cycle of exhibitions. The project is supported with public funds from the Slovak Arts Council.

Vladimír Popovič's relationship to the Spiš region is truly unique and is thus deserving of more than just a fleeting retrospective. For Popovič, the Spiš landscape was not just his distant homeland, a subject on which he might muse sentimentally from time to time. Indeed, he had no need to think back in this way, as the Spiš region remained an intrinsic part of his sensibility, thinking and creativity throughout his life. A much-cultivated sensation, ever-present in his very essence, the region was manifested in his work through the full gamut of possible effects – from irrational subconsciousness to conscious identification.

Vladimír Popovič spent all of his childhood in the Spiš region, in the landscapes of his father and grandfather. The family first settled in Hniezdne in the postwar years, and the village shop there became the centre of a fascinating universe for the curious young boy. Yet there was more to it than that alone. The genius loci of this local "vaterland" in which the social and cultural life of the community played out through weddings and funerals, from political meetings to film and theatre performances; Popovič absorbed this atmosphere, and it would greatly influence his perception of the world for the rest of his life. The house in Kežmarok to which the family later moved offered him one of the world's most enchanting vistas: the monumental peaks of the Tatra Mountains, a landscape that seemed to transform itself endlessly, from day to day, especially at sunset when the fading sun cast its most mesmerising light on the craggy peaks. The theatrical set of the Tatras was complemented by other magical locations such as Spišská Kapitula, Spiš Castle, Sivá brada, Strážky, Kežmarok, the crater at Vyšné Ružbachy or the more distant monastery of Červený kláštor with its legend of Cyprian, the flying monk. All of these places and others play a part in the work of Vladimír Popovič, forming a topographical network of his "Spiš paintings".

An equally important role in the creation of these paintings is taken by the creation of the narratives themselves. Here too, the symbolic visual iconography is formed and developed gradually, oftentimes featuring the motifs of the egg, ladders, tables, gateways, barns, hills with terraced fields, winding roads –lined with milestones, blossoming flowers, howling dogs, walking crucifixes, shooting stars or craters and cosmic wormholes. He carefully selects what he wants from the iconography and instils them into the narratives, into a framework rich in his memories. He consciously evokes the image of an imaginative boy and the vivid imagery of childhood as a precious tool that he would continue to wield regardless of the experience and wisdom he has acquired over the passing years.

The last but by no means least significant element determining the form of the visual narrative is the "voice" of the storyteller himself. Vladimír Popovič found his own distinctive style in the overlap and transitions between drawing and painting, an approach that allows him shift, animate or integrate each and every symbol, to vanish them with a painterly gesture or fix them into bold and striking text. He either paints or draws using various tools: paints, pencils, tempera, oils, latex, ink, pastels and India ink. Along with pens and brushes, he enjoyed using sprays, stamps, even paint rollers. "I fell in love with painting", he related in an interview, "because it listens to me. The canvas lets me come inside. The paint doesn't contradict me. The ones who reject me tell me, 'Don't touch us...'"

The S. P. I. Š. exhibition represents the return of Vladimír Popovič to Spišská Nová Ves after more than thirty years. It was exactly then and there, in the early 1990s, that he, together with Iva Mojžišová, the curator of his solo exhibition that toured several Slovak galleries, emerged from the isolation of the Orwellian decade of the 1980s and began to fulfil the post-revolutionary potential of his work. Nonetheless, today's return can only ever be only a symbolic one, although with Vladimír Popovič, one never really knows. In the decorations he painted in the Church of St Bartholemew in the nearby village of Vojtkovce, he added a rainbow on an arch, tilted like Noah's Ark. In his diary, he noted that "I have released a rainbow on its journey around the world. 1992 – 1993".

Mgr. Beata Jablonská, PhD.,
exhibition curator

Curator: Mgr. Beata Jablonská, PhD.
Professional cooperation: Katarína Šujanová
Production: Mgr. Mária Šabl'ová – GUS
Graphic design: Mgr. art. Ivana Babejová, ArtD. – GUS
Translations: Bc. Gavin Cowper
Production: Gallery of Spiš Artist – a cultural facility of the Košice Self-governing Region

