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**Large Format Valtice symposium
in the Context of Life of the Czech Art Community**

It seems strange, but now, when writing this essay, I am thinking about last twenty years. It is not a very long period in the life of a society and it also does not represent a long period in art development or changes in art community and artists as well. But it is a long time in one's life and it has been a long period in which the whole generation of artists has been growing up, first during the final years of the communist regime and later entering a productive life period hoping to live in a different regime, unlike those who preceded them. They dreamed about the change coming, whether through their active or passive attitudes, but they surely expected a fundamental change for the better.

In the second half of the 80s of the last (but for "us" the 20th) century, the conditions allowing independent creative work were beginning to change and for most creative personalities they even started to get better. Instead of harsh non artistic (political) criteria when creative art was being assessed (typical after 1968 when the Czechoslovakia had been invaded by the Warsaw Treaty armies and then in the period of so-called normalization), the Association of Visual Artists began applying expert artistic criteria, which enabled an independent art production to secure the artist financially (the artist were noted down on the Czech Art Fund list). That's why the art community started to differentiate within the Association, not only in individual branches (as was usual for the whole period of its existence) but also into different generations (e.g. various activities of young artists) and according to regions (e.g. regional groups) or interests.

All this also resulted into artists meetings at the state owned castle in the town of Valtice (before WW II owned by the Lichtenstein family). The castle is located in a beautiful Lednice-Valtice area which has been listed on UNESCO Heritage Trust.

Various art symposia and meetings had been held in the Czechoslovakia before, e.g. the sculpture symposium at the Secondary Stonework School in the town of Hořice. In 1968, a famous symposium "Sculpture and Town" was held in the town of Liberec. The end of 80s is linked with a regularly held ceramics symposium in the town of Bechyně (south of Bohemia). But the aim of this essay lies elsewhere.

These meetings were not officially supported, especially for their informal character and contacts with foreign artists who always represented a threat for communist ideology.

When the management of the Valtice castle offered a place to be used for art events, the regional board of the Association of Visual Artists welcome this as a great opportunity to organize some artists meetings there. The leading personality was Mr. Radek Nepraš, the head of the restoring department in Valtice. His firm looked after a replacement of the original baroque sculptures by ones made of artificial stone. In 1988, Mr. Nepraš together with Prague artists initiated and organized a festival of baroque music following a tradition of musical and interpretation courses which were held in Valtice at the beginning of summer holiday. The festival of baroque music was a unique event of its time and it brought to life the castle and the park around it with a lot of fireworks. This cultural life was enriched by two sculpture symposia specialized in artificial stone. All the works of art were installed in the area of the castle. One of them became a kind of unwanted ones, it is a part of the remains of the baroque water fountain in the castle yard. Many great plans

have been left and some of them mean a great loss for us (e.g. an investment of the Czech Art Fund to build loft studios in the right wing of the castle; the end of sculpture symposia due to the privatization of workshops and lost of interest at the National Heritage Trust).

But the special atmosphere of the place was already known and recognized by artists and painters organized in one of the Association of Union of Visual Artists. Mr. Jan Pospíšil, a painter, and PhDr. Jaroslav Pelikán, an art theorist plus their colleagues, art teachers at the Secondary School of Applied Art in the town of Uherské Hradiště, all of them members of the Association of Visual Artists and Theoreticians of South-Eastern Moravia followed the tradition of the baroque music festivals and interpretation courses and in 1990 they organized the first international painting symposium Valtice '90. Participants were: Martha Griebler (born 1948, Austria), Miroslav Malina (1956, Czech Republic), Norbert Maringer (1948, Austria), Jan Pospíšil (1952, Czech Republic), Herbert Pasiiecznyk (1942, Austria), Zdeněk Strouhal (1939, Czech Republic). The symposium was held between 8th-28th October, artists were inspired by the area, they made a lot of sketches and drawings so it was a kind of drawing in the open air and the participants were not obliged to finish their works during the symposium. Thus the following year an exhibition was held to show what was created not only straight in Valtice but back at home at artist studios. This might be the reason why the Valtice symposium is said to be divided into two parts.

The truth is that the organizers got so interested in the unique space of the Valtice horse riding hall that they started thinking about a different kind of a painting symposium aimed at monumental paintings.

In 1990, it was evident that artists here in the Czech Republic and abroad as well are eager to participate in some international creative meetings here. For those who do not have an experience of living here under the communist regime, where it was very difficult if not impossible to travel abroad to the western countries, it could have been difficult to understand a desperate desire to travel abroad especially for middle age or older artists. And it is also not very easy to explain this to our children. However, there was a rule saying that if an artist was invited abroad to a symposium or an artists meeting, foreign artists were expected to be invited here to take part in a similar event. The Union of Visual Artists (and its member organizations) financed by the Czech Fund of Fine Art, state (Ministry of Culture) and later also by sponsors, who were very difficult to find, organized quite a large number of symposia and open air drawing meetings between 1991-1994. Unfortunately, most of them ended shortly afterwards. Meetings with foreign artists and invitations to foreign symposia represented one and more pleasant side of symposia. However the organizers were exhausted and discouraged by the fact that it was a time consuming work, often with no financial impact and they often felt overloaded. If you are interested in all art symposia and meetings, though short lived, you can find a survey at the web page www.uvucr.cz. But the Valtice symposium has survived.

The Valtice symposium has several specific features. The sculpture symposia are supposed to make use of their "products" by installing them in public places. As for the painting symposia held in the Czech Republic, it happens very rarely that the pictures are kept to form a whole collection. But Valtice symposium is one of such. Valtice castle houses numerous paintings created in the years 1992-2005. There are more than 100 pieces.

Another typical feature is the fact that the symposium is held in five years cycles. The first one took place in the years 1992-1996, the second one between 2001-2005. The break between the cycles gives an opportunity to assess the symposia and think about their results and last but not least to prepare the next ones. The first cycle was closed by publishing a catalogue, the second one is represented by publishing this CD and at the same time the third five-year cycle is being prepared. All this will end by a permanent exhibition at the Valtice castle and chosen works are to be on display at important cultural centres in the Czech Republic.

The most typical feature of the symposium is the "large format", which is about 10 square metres and every artist is looking for his/her own way to deal with it. The artists can arrive with some idea of what to paint but it is not a must. They are influenced by the space of the horse riding hall itself (77 × 18,5 m). These days the large format of the painting is not as fascinating as it used to be when the event started. In that time artists were often limited by commissions with a certain topic, or by space or money. But the size of the pictures still fascinates in the context of the collection itself, the horse riding hall - a giant workshop, an amazing painting studio and exhibition hall, which „frightened“ only one participant so much that he left before he tried anything and never came back.

The basic idea of the symposium is a contact, a communication, a mutual influence and looking for one's own way of expressing him/herself. And here we come to another special feature of the symposium: the Valtice horse riding hall is a common huge studio, where each artist is given enough space, even abundance of it, and this is his/her private area. But at the same time they can walk freely around the hall as if it were a little art town, from "studio" to "studio", have a chat or come to a close door - a sign to leave and not to disturb. The final exhibition is the way how to open the door of all the hall studios to public and represent the works of art. This unique experience when the workshop is transformed into an exhibition hall also belongs among the special features of the symposium.

Valtice - it is the south Moravia, and the south Moravia is also a famous wine tradition. By the way, the only use of the Valtice horse riding hall in the second half of the 20th century was Valtice Wine Market in autumn. Wine is linked with the symposium and the art work. The whole area of Lednice-Valtice region including Lednice castle, tiny baroque buildings in the large woods, wine cellars and the wine makers are here to inspire the artists. The participants of the music courses perform at the opening night of the symposium, which is very impressive due to the beautiful acoustics of the room.

The Valtice symposium does not belong among those which are funded with a lot of money. Its main aim is not to offer comfort or socializing, the goal is to enable the artists a free, independent monumental painting, during the first two years on plywood, later on a canvas stretched on a frame, using mostly acrylic paints (in the first year also oil paints). The artists mostly paint the pictures but they have also used drawing, a graphic technique of monotype or combined techniques (textile, illumination).

Going through the art pieces kept in the collection might say something about the trends in monumental painting but also about the art work of the participants themselves. Jan Pospíšil has been present at all symposia as an organizer so the collection reflects his art work and development in the course of 15 years. Other painters have participated several times as well, Vladimír Popovič (1992, 2003), Vladimír Franz (1996, 2002-2005), Mikoláš Axmann (2001-2005), Jiří Surůvka (2003, 2004). The art work and life of two participants have come to an end (Miroslav

Adámek and Svatopluk Slovenčík). Some participants of the first runs might come again in the third cycle which will probably start in 2007.

So far, 74 painters have taken part, 45 from the Czech Republic, 11 from Slovakia and 18 from other foreign countries (Belgium 1, Finland 3, Ireland 1, Lithuania 1, Hungary 3, Germany 1, Poland 1, Austria 4, Sweden 1, Great Britain 1) and they have done more than 100 pieces of art works.

Valtice symposium has been funded regularly by the Czech Fund of Fine Art (now the Foundation Czech Art Fund), first year was also supported financially by the Ministry of Culture, later by the South Moravia region authorities and sometimes money came from other sources. As mentioned above, the symposium does not belong among those which enjoy a huge financial support or offer comfort and a lot of socializing. The biggest experience has always been a unique opportunity to work in the horse riding hall, to try large format painting, a modest accommodation which some of them (e.g. Vladimír Franz) exchanged for a permanent stay in the horse riding hall. As a curiosity I want to mention the fact, that in 1995 because of mosquitoes, nearly all participants decided to stay permanently in the horse riding hall overnight.

Permanent organizers of the symposium are: The Association of Visual Artists and Theoreticians of South-Eastern Moravia - Union of Visual Artists of the Czech Republic, The Management of the state castle Valtice, The regional department of National Heritage Trust in Brno, The Secondary School of Applied Art in Uherské Hradiště. Here the organizers would like to thank for help and support to: The Foundation Czech Art Fund, the representatives of Valtice town council, the South Moravia authorities and others mentioned above. It is also necessary to thank the art theorists, Mr. Jaroslav Pelikán, Mr. Radek Horáček and Mr. Jiří Bohdálék who all played an important role when the rules of the symposium were settled and thus helped Mr. Jan Pospíšil to develop the symposium. Mr. Josef Fantura has followed last years of the symposia and demonstrated its results by documentation.

Symposium Large Format Valtice ranks among the most significant art events, which the artist community in our country managed to produce. Devotedness and deep interests of the organizers gives it a chance to go on and cover a long period of time and a wide range of participants as well. The collection of works of art will have a permanent significant impact both on public and art connoisseurs.

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