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## **International Painting Symposium Valtice**

Since 1989 Valtice, a south Moravian town and its beautiful Lichtenstein castle have become the place where international symposia of fine artists have taken place. The first international meeting of artists was held as a sculpture symposium where plastic works of art were performed in artificial stone, a year later there was a subsequent one. Then two more symposia followed (September 1990 with Austrian fine artists taking part, and in July 1991), but there was no specific goal or topic, both symposia being aimed only at discovering local country and inspiration by the surroundings.

After gaining a sound experience in arranging this kind of event and remarkable artistic results, the organizers decided to look for new and more specific contents so in 1992 the first annual international painting symposium Large Format Valtice 92 was held. The tradition which came to life and lasted for following five years can hardly be doubted as the meaningfulness and informal contribution to fine art has been proved by each year's symposia results.

The coordinators supporting the symposia were: The Association of Visual Artists and Theoreticians of South-East Moravia; The National Heritage Trust, Brno; The Secondary School of Applied Art, Uherské Hradiště; The Union of Visual Artists in cooperation with the Czech Fund of Fine Art; The Ministry of Culture.

The preparation of the symposium itself rested on the shoulders of several active artists and art theorists and especially of Mr. Jan Pospíšil, a painter and the headmaster of the Secondary School of Applied Art, Uh. Hradiště, who not only proposed the new contents but was also responsible for making contacts, and guaranteed the choice of the participants. He had also procured necessary material and sponsorship before the symposia started and managed to give the symposia wide media coverage and later propagated them in galleries, which was a strenuous extra effort as he was also a participant expected to perform a work of art.

The specific nature of the symposia stemmed from the fact that painters had only few opportunities to perform large size paintings and experiment with monumental painting in their own studios and, what is even more important, to perform free art work without being limited by commissions.

One of the basic inspiring ideas to fulfill the task was J. Pospíšil's proposal to make use of the riding school in the Valtice castle and change it into a huge painting "studio".

The grand size of the riding school (77 × 18,5 m ) and its impressive height offered the artists not only space which enables the painters distance and the needful "detached point of view", but also space which made it possible to release psychic powers of creation letting the generous creative will flow out freely.

At first, the problem seemed to be a common work in one room, no matter how huge it was, and loss of privacy causing lack of concentration.

But the space of the riding school enabled the participants to mark off their own private territory at the same time offering opportunity to communicate.

According to the statute of the symposium, the participants were chosen by an expert committee well in advance, the prerequisites, such as an intensive interest in the event, having been taken into account. As for the Czech painters, their choice was also based on their artistic results (some of them were invited to participate),

as far as the foreign ones are concerned, the committee was usually contacted by a letter of recommendation and was sent a portfolio by the artists.

There were usually too many applicants to accept, so the criteria used during the decision assessed the creative level and also a kind of previous experience in making large size paintings including apparent broadmindedness in painting. There were no limits in terms of artistic view or generation affiliation. The original project of the symposium respected and preferred individual creative orientation of the artists relating to manifold forms and trends in contemporary fine art.

A numerous collection of paintings made during the symposia proves the range of the views. The creative activity itself was not limited by any strict topics or criteria concerning the used artistic techniques or technologies. All the participants were given boards or canvas later and they were free to choose a format limited by size (approximately 9 m<sup>2</sup>) and use it to their individual tastes. The short time given to the symposia made some participants do some preparatory work in advance so most of them arrived in the symposium with a more or less exact idea about their future work, especially about its formal arrangement.

Some participants brought many designs and sketches, others tried to start working on the spot. At the beginning, the organizers were skeptical about the given time to perform large size paintings, but, strangely enough, the limited time agitated increasing creative activity and prestige in the artists and helped them succeed in the friendly confrontation at the final exhibition held in the riding school on the last day of each symposium.

Most of the participants presented not only monumental paintings but also a set of other sketches, drawings and designed variations. Symposium Large Format Valtice was predominantly a working one enriched by positive human and artistic contacts. Each year there was a specific and unique atmosphere influenced by individual personalities meeting there, sharing their ideas, not to speak about visible efforts to overcome language barriers.

A common feature was a creative enthusiasm lasting throughout all the symposia. New working and personal relations, new friendships have also arisen. The results of all five annual symposia are very remarkable not only because of the quantity of work performed in such a short time but mainly because of the high and balanced artistic level and broad variety of views. They confirm a sound constellation of the factors which usually condition the success of symposia. The active creative effort was stimulated by a considerate choice of individual artistic personalities with manifold, however different, views, by arranging for maybe not very comfortable but moderate space and material conditions but mainly by creating the atmosphere where unselfish cooperation, friendship, and mutual understanding together with opinions generate creative bustle.

This catalogue sums up the results of five annually held symposia Large Format Valtice. This year's pause does not mean closing the whole project but is necessary for organizers to find time to search for new sufficient resources and new possibilities, which would secure other successful meetings of artists keen on making large size painting.